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**Women and the American Dream: Subversion and Self-Discovery in Tennessee Williams's *the Glass Menagerie*: A Psychoanalytic Feminism Study**

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**Abstract**

The current study applies a psychoanalytic feminism approach to analyse Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) and explores the female psyche and the American Dream through the perspectives of four characters: Amanda Wingfield, Laura, Tom, and Jim O'Connor. The play focuses on the Wingfield family's everyday struggles, with Tom trying to break free from his mother's hardships. Laura, his lonely sister, shares her feelings with their mother and retreats into a fantasy world. Their struggle to discover themselves and rebuild their identities is a struggle that critically examines the complications of the American Dream. This study critiques Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie" through using Freud's psychoanalytic theories, Lacanian analysis, and insights on human behaviour, focusing on the characters and the American

Dream. The study concludes with an analysis of psychoanalytic feminism and the impact of the American Dream on women, challenging traditional gender roles and societal expectations, which leads to women's oppression. Utilising a psychoanalytic feminist lens, this study critiques entrenched social structures while highlighting the profound potential for self-discovery and resilience even in the face of overwhelming disillusionment.

**Keywords:** *American Dream, Subversion, Self-Discovery, The Glass Menagerie, Feminism, Psychoanalytic*

## 1. Introduction

This study applies the psychoanalytic feminist approach to analyse the description of women and the American dream in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) and explores how the subconscious mind, influenced by psychological theories from Freud and Jung, affects human behaviour and personality. By examining gender, guilt, and morality in relation to the American Dream, this study emphasises how the pursuit of individual freedom and social equality creates conflict within the communal and familial structure. The play challenges misconceptions about sex and highlights growth and acceptance through themes of despair and supernatural elements. "The Glass Menagerie" is considered one of Williams's most powerful works, drawing from his personal memories and relationships with his mother and sister. Williams's family issues, particularly regarding "the mental health of Williams's sister, Rose, the absence of his real-life father" (Bloom, 2007:15-16), were openly discussed in his work. This painful experience resonated with audiences, reflecting broader personal and societal struggles. *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) serves as a case study for psychoanalytic feminism, as its characters reflect Tennessee Williams's family pain, highlighting personal psyche, family trauma, and societal oppression. Tennessee Williams, a successful American playwright, received numerous awards, including Pulitzer Prizes and New York Critics Circle Awards. Indeed, "The Glass Menagerie" is Williams's autobiographical tragedy, widely acclaimed in American drama. (Bloom, 2007:13). Also, "The Glass Menagerie" is a play by Tennessee Williams that explores the disillusionment of the American Dream and its societal expectations.

The play "The Glass Menagerie" follows the characters Amanda and Laura as they navigate the complexities of their desires and the societal pressures they face. Amanda, a mother, clings to the ideal of a perfect past.

Amanda Wingfield romanticises her past as a Southern belle to escape the grim reality of poverty and abandonment; however, this distorted worldview dictates her actions and profoundly obscures her children's actual needs. She lives in a cramped apartment during the Great Depression, facing harsh realities, and she has a coping mechanism for her struggles. Laura, a shy daughter, struggles to find her identity and subverts expectations. The play critiques traditional roles for women and symbolises self-discovery. It reflects the American Dream through the Wingfield family's struggles, using Laura's glass collection to represent dreams and journeys to self-discovery.

## **2. Literature Review**

This study integrates psychoanalytic feminist theory to explore how women subvert the American Dream in "The Glass Menagerie." It specifically examines Amanda Wingfield's experiences and perceptions, arguing that her pursuit of the American Dream becomes a process of self-discovery, allowing her to recognise her desires and limitations. The American Dream, a recurrent theme in American literature since the 19th century, is depicted through Amanda's struggles for her family's success. Unlike previous studies that have prioritised illusion and memory, this research offers a unique focus on how gender intersects with the American Dream, arguing that gender has been an under-examined factor in past critical discussions.

In contrast, feminist critics have examined how women are excluded from the American Dream or struggle to achieve it (Gilbert, 1982; Hedges, 1983). For example, Ellen Rooney, in her book entitled *Sylvia Plath: A Biography for Beginners* (1986) argues that women are often relegated to subsidiary roles in American literature, highlighting their lack of agency and autonomy. Similarly, Ann Douglas, in her book entitled *The Feminization of American Culture*. (1995) contends that women's experiences are frequently erased from the American narrative, rendering them invisible. These studies provide a crucial foundation for this analysis, as they demonstrate the importance of considering gender in the American Dream. Psychoanalytic theory has also been applied to "The Glass Menagerie" to explore the characters' unconscious desires and conflicts. For example, Spengemann, W. C. (1980b), examines the play's use of symbolism and fantasy to reveal the characters' repressed desires. Likewise, Michael J. Meyer, in his research paper "The Glass Menagerie: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Family Dynamics" (1997), has applied

psychoanalytic theory to analyse Amanda's character, arguing that her attempts to recapture her past are driven by an unconscious desire for fulfilment.

Moreover, the theoretical framework for this study draws on psychoanalytic feminist theory, which posits that societal expectations and cultural norms shape women's experiences. Central to this viewpoint is the need to examine women's internal experiences and their capacity for independent action within the constraints of patriarchal systems (Brownmiller, 1975; Chodorow, 1978). Also, the study will engage with contemporary feminist theories on identity formation and subjectivity, highlighting the complex interplay between individual desire and societal expectations (Butler 1990; Foucault, 1972). Namitha's research paper, "Blue Mountain and Blue Roses: An Exploration of the Feminine Psyche in Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie" (2021), examines women's identity crises and the conflict between personal aspirations and societal expectations in Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie," focusing on Amanda and Laura Wingfield. Amanda retreats into fantasy following personal setbacks, while Laura isolates in her imagined world. Likewise, Zhang, in his paper "A Probe into the Fate of Women in the Evolution of Society—A Brief Analysis of Amanda in Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie" (2020), has seen women's embrace of traditional culture amid modern society, showcasing Amanda as a character who challenges stereotypes and represents the struggles of women in American drama. All studies above reveal the psychological complexities of these characters, illustrating their victimisation in the clash between traditional and modern cultures. Thus, the current study examines the psychological complexities of female characters affected by traditional and modern cultures, using the "American Dream" to explore societal expectations and male characters' struggles. It includes psychoanalytic themes of subversion and self-discovery.

### **3. Subversion of the American Dream**

The subversion of the American Dream in American literature and culture challenges the idea of achieving success and happiness. In "The Glass Menagerie," Amanda Wingfield's nostalgia, Tom Wingfield's rejection of societal expectations, and Laura Wingfield's struggle to find her own path further subvert the American Dream. These examples illustrate the limitations, exclusions, and unattainability of the American Dream as depicted in American literature. Furthermore, Tennessee Williams, in

*Suddenly Last Summer* (1957), explores the subversion and self-discovery of women in the context of the American Dream. A psychoanalytic feminist study reveals Mrs Violet Venable as a domineering figure, who perpetuates control and actively hinders self-realisation in those around her. It delves into the deep-rooted oppression of women and uncovers hidden identities within the narrative in other literary works, such as *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Orpheus Descending* (1957), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959) and *Portrait of a Girl in Glass* (1948), which drew inspiration from an autobiographical story for *The Glass Menagerie* (1944).

Individually, Williams's play, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), delves into women's struggles in achieving the American Dream, particularly through Amanda Wingfield's character. Amanda represents a subversion of the Southern Belle archetype, as she actively confronts the societal limitations placed upon women's desires and their personal agency. After her husband abandons her, she grapples with financial hardship as a single mother, trying to instil her values in her children while her dreams fade away. (Bhaduli, 2018:55). One can note that at the end of scene five Laura's extremely massive attitude is depicted when Amanda instructs her daughter that she should be wishing for "What shall I wish for, Mother? Happiness! Good Fortune!" (Williams, 2011:100). Amanda wants Tom to have a successful career to support his family, so he works in a shoe factory. However, Tom aspires to be a poet, while Amanda dreams of her children thriving and ignores their imperfections, which is clear in her words in scene four:

Try and you will succeed! [The notion makes her breathless.] Why, you — you're just full of natural endowments! Both of my children — they're unusual children! Don't you think I know it? I'm so — proud! Happy and — feel I've — so much to be thankful for but — promise me one thing, son! (Williams, 2011:82).

Whereas Laura in "The Glass Menagerie" is portrayed as a shy, introverted, and anti-social young woman. She finds solace in her collection of glass animals and music records, which serve as poignant symbols of her inherent fragility and her profound fear of the modern world. Her disability, which separates her from society, exacerbates her obsession with her own limitations. Despite reassurances from others, she sees herself as crippled and struggles to accept her condition. Tom, Jim and Amanda try to convince her several times that her case is just a little defect, especially when Amanda says:

Nonsense! Laura, I've told you never, never to use that word. Why, you're 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! (Williams, 2011:71).

Amanda prohibits her daughter from saying “crippled” and downplays Laura's defect, hoping it won't hinder her charm and vivacity. Laura feels a burden due to her condition. Amanda expects Laura to greet the gentleman caller, Jim, at dinner to show charm and attract Mr O'Connor. Laura is nervous about this, but Amanda insists she must participate as a young lady. Laura leaves high school and loses the opportunity to socialise, especially when Jim asks her, “You finished high school? Laura [with difficulty]: I didn't go back. JIM: You mean you dropped out? Laura: I made bad grades in my final examinations.” (Williams 2011:79). She develops an "inferiority complex" and becomes isolated. According to Jim's diagnosis of her case, he declares:

You know what I judge to be the trouble with you? Inferiority complex! Know what that is? That's what they call it when someone low-rates himself! I understand it because I had it, too. Although my case was not so aggravated as yours seems to be. ... I can sure guess a person's psychology, (Williams, 2011:137-138).

She spends time with glass animals, considering them her best friends. Jim, whom she has idolised since childhood, does not remember her. When Jim visits her apartment, she becomes nervous. However, her hopes and dreams are shattered when Jim reveals his relationship with another girl. She retreats to her world of glass animals to escape. Indeed, Laura does not follow her mother Amanda's traditional Southern belle ideals. Instead, she rejects them and struggles to socialise, showing panic and silence. Laura finds solace in her glass menagerie, valuing fragility over the harsh American Dream. Her retreat highlights the profound isolation experienced by gentle or disabled individuals, which makes it nearly impossible for her to integrate socially or gain confidence, ultimately leaving her confined within her own world.

Amanda's ineffective efforts to help Laura conform to social norms increase her distress. Laura is unable to fit into society as a successful secretary or a happily married wife. Her shyness prevents her from participating in social events, and Amanda's overprotectiveness hinders

her progress in maternal instincts. Amanda dreams of achieving the American dream, but she is unable to do so. In fact, the American Dream is a fundamental aspect of American identity, embodying the belief that anyone can achieve prosperity and success through hard work and determination, regardless of their social class or background, in a society that presents minimal systemic obstacles. (Samuel, 2012; Rank et al., 2014). Whereas Jim O'Connor symbolises hope and the American Dream, he represents the American Dream as a realistic figure of hope. In the opening scene, Tom states the following:

He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from. But since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a symbol; he is the long-delayed but always expected something that we live for. (Williams, 2011:59).

Amanda hopes he can be a suitable partner for her daughter, Laura, who admires him; admired by Laura and desired by Amanda, offering salvation to the Wingfield family but proving ordinary in the end. He also symbolises the triumph over reality that the other characters strive for. Jim enters the play in the sixth scene, and Tom describes him:

I had known Jim slightly in high school. In high school Jim was a hero. He had tremendous Irish good nature and vitality with the scrubbed and polished look of white chinaware. He seemed to move in a continual spotlight. He was a star in basketball, captain of the debating club, president of the senior class and the glee club and he sang the male lead in the annual light operas. He was always running or bounding, never just walking. He seemed always at the point of defeating the law of gravity (Williams, 2011:101).

At the high school, Jim was popular and had many accomplishments, but after graduation, his success slowed down, and he held a mediocre job. Despite his current setbacks, Jim remains determinedly ambitious, continuing his engineering studies at night to enhance his prospects and adapt to the rapid scientific advancements of the modern world. However, Amanda understands the dire consequences of being an unmarried and jobless woman. She tells Laura, "I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South —barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife!" (Williams, 2011:70). She sees the sad lives of unmarried women relying on family

support. Understanding Laura's struggles and Tom's leaving, she persuades him to find a suitor. The mother-daughter relationship is tense, and the play ends without change. Amanda wants a better life for Laura but is disappointed by Jim's engagement.

### 3.1. Self-Discovery and the Reconstruction of Identity

In Tennessee Williams's play "The Glass Menagerie," self-discovery and the reconstruction of identity are significant themes. Williams delves into the challenges of human identity amidst societal pressures. The characters navigate self-discovery and struggle to redefine themselves within their environment. In most of Williams's plays, the mother-father-son triangle reveals psychological conflicts. Renowned plays such as *The Glass Menagerie* depict the impact of absent fathers and dominating mothers, bringing critical issues of psychological boundaries and familial enmeshment to the forefront. (Rezaei et al., 2015:329). Amanda Wingfield reflects on her past and present, grappling with failed marriages, relationships with her children, and her own sense of identity. Her attempts to relive her past and recreate her lost youth lead to a reevaluation of her identity as she sees herself as more than just a mother and wife. She struggles to confront her present situation and mould her children, especially Laura, into her idealised version of femininity. Amanda, an energetic mother, nostalgically clings to the past. Her complex character should be uniquely portrayed, highlighting both admirable qualities and unintentional cruelty. "She is not paranoiac, but her life is paranoia". (Williams, 2011:51).

Contrariwise, De Beauvoir (2012) condemns psychoanalysis for defining women as men's "other", restricting their freedom. She believes women can reject Freud's view and advocates for gender equality with Anglo-American feminists. Still, Amanda clings to her memories of being a Southern belle, which affects her family's issues. Her denial and high expectations prevent her from truly understanding her daughter, Laura, and hinder Laura's self-discovery. Laura, who is naturally introverted and lives with a physical disability resulting from a childhood illness, finds sanctuary in her glass animal collection, which serves as a poignant reflection of her own fragile nature. A meeting with a gentleman caller makes her face her fears, pushing her toward self-awareness. Thus, the play displays female fragility through Laura's glass animals and represents different feminist ideals. (Sembiring & Helmita, 2019).

However, Tom Wingfield struggles to find a balance between his personal freedom and family duties. He seeks escape through movies to

understand his identity beyond his home life but ultimately decides to leave to create a new self. Tom confronts expectations from his family and society, especially during interactions with Jim O'Connor, which reveal his true self beyond being a disappointment. He grapples with an urgent need for freedom and artistic expression, yet remains profoundly trapped by the suffocating weight of his familial and financial responsibilities. Tom dreams of joining the Merchant Marine but feels guilt over leaving his family, especially his sister, Laura, and faces conflict between personal dreams and family support, especially when Tom says: "What can I do about it? AMANDA: Overcome selfishness! Self, self, self is all that you ever think of!" (Williams, 2011: 87). He seeks self-discovery, torn between family obligations and personal desires. Despite the emotional weight he carries, his decision to leave symbolises a crucial step in his journey towards finding himself, torn between personal dreams and family obligations.

These struggles highlight the challenge of balancing illusions with family loyalty. Laura Wingfield in "The Glass Menagerie" exhibits traits of a discriminated-against feminist, including obedience and low self-confidence. Her glass animals symbolise her escape. Laura's limitations create issues for her family, which in turn affect the dynamics between Tom and Amanda. Jim attempts to help Laura gain confidence; thus, Jim O'Connor says: "Yep — that's what I judge to be your principal trouble. A lack of confidence in yourself as a person. You don't have the proper amount of faith in yourself. I'm basing that fact on a number of your remarks and also on certain observations I've made" (Williams, 2011:74). At this juncture, it is evident that Laura begins to gain confidence in her abilities and desires, gradually challenging societal expectations and asserting her burgeoning autonomy. Interactions with Jim O'Connor reveal a more authentic sense of self as she sees herself as more than just a fragile, disabled woman. Jim O'Connor undergoes self-discovery through his connections with others, confronting his insecurities and vulnerabilities. Laura Wingfield's fragile identity is shaped by social anxiety, physical disability, and her overbearing mother's expectations, symbolised by her glass animal collection.

Laura seeks solace in her glass menagerie, a collection that serves as a poignant symbol of her inherent vulnerability and her desperate escape from reality. Her time with Jim brings some hope, but the breaking of her unicorn reveals her harsh truths. The play explores identity struggles, self-acceptance, and the importance of living in the present for personal

growth, portraying self-discovery as vital yet challenging (Mielke, 1986; Rezaei et al., 2015).

#### **4. Key Concepts in the Psychoanalytic Feminism Approach**

Psychoanalytic feminism delves into several key concepts that shed light on gender identity and the lived experiences of women. It highlights the symbolic and imaginary realms, showing that women are often limited to the imaginary while men can move between both. Jacques Lacan's mirror stage influences gender identity, with girls focusing on appearance and boys on independence. The imaginary father represents authority, shaping women's self-perceptions. Women face challenges balancing their desires and ambitions in the real and imaginary realms. The maternal symbolises care, while the symbolic represents power. Women strive to blend intimacy with autonomy. Phall-centrism maintains male dominance, and traditional psychoanalysis reduces feminine desire to "penis envy". Fantasy becomes a tool for women to resist and redefine their identities (Ramsey, 2004).

Psychoanalysis connects sexuality and personal identity, showing how hidden feelings impact us and our political views. Feminist theory engages with psychoanalysis, despite Freud's biases against women. Thus, this study aims to examine how feminist theory critiques Freud's ideas, particularly through the characters in "The Glass Menagerie," highlighting both its limitations and potential. Freud's psychoanalysis investigates the developmental trajectory of women from childhood, positing that femininity is inextricably linked to the Oedipal Complex and framing both sex and gender as inherently unstable rather than fixed constructs. Psychoanalytic feminism questions traditional views of feminism and womanhood, focusing on the notion of difference and the pursuit of equality. (Freud, 1933 [1968]:116). Whereas there are various positions within the framework of psychoanalytic feminism, they share a descent from Freudian accounts of the unconscious and some borrowing of his theoretical apparatus. Freud's reflections and hypotheses concerning hysteria, the Oedipal complex, female sexuality and femininity, and women's roles in civilisation have provided the groundwork for feminist re-articulation. To discuss psychoanalytic feminism, it is essential to establish its historical roots and the conceptual terrain on which it arises (Zakin& Leeb, 2011).

Freud's psychoanalysis focuses on the psychical structures that underlie individual experience, with sexuality as the nexus between language, society, drives, and socio-symbolic order. He distinguishes between

human drives and instincts and explains how sexuality influences psychic processes. Freud's early works on hysteria, based on the 'seduction hypothesis', suggest that hysterical symptoms arise from childhood trauma. In Freud's later writings on femininity, including "Femininity" (1933), "Female Sexuality" (1931), and "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes" (1925), Freud's Oedipal Complex explains the unconscious activity of the unconscious, emphasising that femininity cannot be understood from a biological perspective. Sexual difference is centred on physical reality, with both boys and girls starting in the same emotional place. Freud believes sexual identity is a form of individuation and differentiation realised through a complex interaction between bodily drives and familial others. Moreover, Freud's theories on sexuality and the unconscious are crucial for understanding individual psychology and social life. He maintains that infancy is profoundly shaped by group psychology, suggesting that both identification and love should be understood as inherently social phenomena rather than purely individual emotions. *Totem and Taboo* (1913) explore the origin of social life, focusing on a primitive pre-political society where brothers bond to overthrow a powerful father, mirroring Oedipal desires. This story serves as a paradigm for contemporary political relations. Freud's theory of the "super-ego," a self-assault that links pleasure with aggression, is a significant factor in social arrangements. The sons' attitude towards their father is ambivalence, with a shared bond maintained through the totem meal, a communal consumption of the father's body.

However, Carl Jung consists of conscious and subconscious thoughts and feelings according to personality. It is structured into three levels: the conscious, subconscious, and collective unconscious. The collective unconscious contains both the personal unconscious and universal existence. While the personal unconscious draws from an individual's own life, the collective unconscious houses universal archetypes. It is objective and open to the world, providing patterns for individual behaviour. Thus, Jung comments on this concept:

A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the personal unconscious. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the collective unconscious. I have chosen the term "collective" because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same

everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us. (1969: VIII).

Three main archetypes characterise personality: Persona, Anima/Animus, and Shadow. Persona, the outermost layer, acts as a mask enabling effective communication and social interaction. Individuals often require multiple personas to navigate diverse social contexts; however, an imbalance between these roles and the true self can precipitate significant psychological distress. Anima and animus represent the feminine and masculine aspects of the psyche, respectively, affecting interpersonal dynamics. The Shadow encompasses primal instincts and influences same-gender relationships, while personas aid social interactions. A strong ego is needed for balance with the Shadow; a weak ego can lead to spiritual conflicts and repressed traits that create tension. Personality is dynamic, driven by psychological energy, with Jung's libido concept linking it to the pursuit of perfection, influenced by past and future experiences. (Minghui, 2022).

This ceremony explores paternal bonds and kinship through themes of love, loss, guilt, and mourning, particularly focusing on the legal implications of a father's murder. It highlights women's roles as objects of law and examines Freud's influence on psychoanalytic feminism. Early psychoanalysts like Abraham, Jones, Horney, and De Beauvoir address women's sexuality and advocate for recognising a distinct feminine nature. De Beauvoir (2012) challenges Freud's idea of a singular masculine libido, linking women's envy to social dynamics and promoting sexual monism that confronts autonomy and bodily constraints. Additionally, she critiques psychoanalysis for defining women as the 'other' and encourages women to overcome this perspective. (Hekman, 2015). Björk (2010) highlights Beauvoir's belief in women's potential for emancipation through biological factors, family relations, and confronting societal injustices.

Likewise, psychoanalysis, known as the "talking cure," analyses the mind and body to treat illnesses. However, feminists critique it for favouring masculinity and devaluing femininity. To effectively integrate psychoanalysis with feminism, writers scrutinise childhood developmental stages and the complexities of mothering, examining how these early experiences construct gendered identities and power dynamics. This has given rise to two factions: The Anglo-American object-relations school and French feminist theory. Vice comments on the relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism: "How the relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism has functioned, and why, ..., particularly in

re-lation to the body; language, sexual difference and orientation, motherhood, and cultural production such as film.” (1996:162)

## **5. Textual Analysis of "The Glass Menagerie," According To the Psychoanalytic Feminism Approach**

The psychoanalytic feminist approach illuminates the profound themes of subversion and self-discovery for women within Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, revealing the hidden layers of their psychological resistance. Williams's own experiences and psyche are intricately woven into the play, showcasing the autobiographical elements that contribute to the portrayal of women's struggles and complexities. Psychoanalytic feminism is a theoretical approach that applies psychoanalytic theory to understand the experiences of women and their oppression. (Namitha, 2021). The psychoanalytic feminism approach focuses on the symbolic and imaginary aspects of reality, arguing that women are often trapped in the imaginary, while men can move between them. The mirror stage, where a child sees their reflection in a mirror, is crucial for shaping gender identity. The imaginary father, symbolising authority and power, is essential for women's self-identity. The split between the real and imaginary leads to feelings of fragmentation, where women must balance their desires and ambitions. The maternal and symbolic aspects of reality, representing nurturing and power, are also emphasised. Phallogentrism, the prioritisation of masculine values, is a fundamental aspect of patriarchy. The split between masculine and feminine desires is a key concept. Fantasy is seen as a site for resistance and subversion (Mciver, 2010).

Therefore, the textual analysis of "The Glass Menagerie" from a psychoanalytic feminist view examines female identity, societal expectations, and personal struggles. The narrative focuses on Amanda's anxieties regarding her daughter's marriage prospects and Tom's escalating alcoholism, thereby highlighting the strained mother-daughter dynamic and the crushing societal pressures regarding feminine beauty. Namitha (2021) examines the mother-daughter relationship in the Wingfield family, highlighting identity crises and psychological complexities. Psychoanalytic feminism suggests that men have a psychological need to dominate women, rooted deep in the human psyche. Women's resistance to subjugation is minimal due to the societal integration of this oppression, which reinforces and sustains the patriarchal structure. By studying differences between genders and how gender roles are formed,

psychoanalytic feminism aims to understand and address women's oppression. (Hui-Ming, 2022).

Amanda's overprotectiveness towards Laura stems from unresolved childhood traumas, according to her feminine identity. Her longing for lost youth and inability to accept reality illustrate the tension between desires and harsh realities. Laura, associated with the glass menagerie, symbolises fragility and isolation. Her struggles with disability and social isolation reveal the rigid societal constraints placed upon women with disabilities. Laura's feelings of invisibility highlight the marginalisation of women in patriarchal societies. Laura lacks diverse personas, confined to her simple one in a complex social environment. She adapts well to her environment but depends on it, unable to survive outside of it. In the play, Laura embodies two key roles - that of a sister and a daughter. Her character allows her to portray different aspects, serving as a mask to present a favourable public image. For instance, her relationship with her brother Tom is profoundly paradoxical; while her very existence and vulnerability serve as the primary anchors holding him back from his pursuit of freedom, she remains the only person capable of truly understanding his inner turmoil. Laura's fear of her brace making noise at school causes her to become increasingly timid and pessimistic, especially when she says, "I couldn't go back there. I threw up on the floor!" (Williams, 2011, p. 68). She stops attending school and instead visits museums and zoos, worried about being teased for her physical limitations. Her social isolation worsens her mental health issues, leading her to avoid social interactions and remain alone. Amanda states:

I put her in business college — a dismal failure! Frightened her so it made her sick at the stomach. I took her over to the Young People's League at the church. Another fiasco. She spoke to nobody, nobody spoke to her. Now all she does is fool with those pieces of glass and play those worn-out records. What kind of a life is that for a girl to lead? (Williams, 2011:87).

Others view Laura as shy and peculiar due to her isolated and disabled state. She struggles to communicate with anyone other than her family. When approached by Jim, she nervously sits up, unable to speak.

AMANDA: Now, Thomas, get into this apron!

[Jim comes into the dining room, carrying the candelabrum, its candles lighted, in one hand and a glass of wine in the other. The door of the kitchenette swings closed on Amanda's gay laughter; the flickering light approaches the portieres. Laura sits up nervously as Jim enters. She can hardly speak (Williams, 2011:129).

However, Laura listens to her mother Amanda's stories and tries to meet her traditional expectations, acting as the family's sole listener. When Tom accidentally shatters some of Laura's glass animals, the incident serves as a physical manifestation of his internal turmoil; however, Laura's reaction—one of quiet forgiveness rather than anger—reveals her deep-seated support for his peace and her unspoken endorsement of his aspirations. Despite Freud's criticisms of women, feminist theory engages with psychoanalysis to analyse concepts such as femininity according to Freud's views on female development and challenges traditional notions of sex and gender through the complexities of feminist perspectives, which faced the women in the drama. Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality posits that femininity is a fragile achievement rather than an innate trait, emerging from a complex developmental journey where children begin with a bisexual inclination before navigating the challenges of the Oedipal Complex. (Freud, 1933)

Tom symbolises freedom and rejection of responsibility as masculinity, reflecting societal expectations of men. His abandonment stems from fear of intimacy and commitment. The complex relationship between Amanda and Laura shows codependency. Amanda's traumas are passed down, perpetuating emotional pain. The play also addresses restrictive gender roles and the silencing of women by patriarchal power. This analysis exposes how societal expectations, trauma, and codependency shape women's lives, especially mother-daughter relationships in "The Glass Menagerie." The drama reflects the theme of abandonment, especially when Tom is driven by his father's memory to seek adventure in the South Sea Islands, leaving his mother and sister behind. He joins the Merchant Marine naval company, facing the conflict between his dreams and reality. Despite his attempt to escape, memories continue to haunt him. He says that:

Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger — anything that can blow your candles out! (Williams, 2011:146).

Through his eventual rejection of familial bonds and the abandonment of his domestic responsibilities, Tom critiques the suffocating societal pressures placed upon men, particularly the expectation to serve as the sole economic provider within relationships with women. The drama explores the disillusionment of the American Dream in a dysfunctional family.

Thus, psychoanalytic feminism has seen gender identity, women's experiences, and the symbolic realm. Women often feel bound to the imaginary realm, while men can move between both. The struggles of the Wingfield women in the play exemplify the gender dynamics of the patriarchal American Dream, where women exist in the imaginary realm while men access symbolic opportunities. According to the Lacanian conception, their conflicts stem from being trapped in a psychic limbo, with Laura's shyness representing societal constraints and Amanda's nagging demonstrating ineffective influence on an unreachable world, highlighting challenges rooted in structural limitations rather than individual flaws. While the critics have seen "Freud's psychoanalytic theory and its later adaptations helped psychoanalytic feminists expound much of the 'biologically based assumptions about femininity [...] found original and compelling new psychic models for feminine identity'" (Guerin et al., 2011: 261). However, femininity describes as a psychological construct shaped by childhood experiences, language, and societal influences, rather than being a biological characteristic. Theorists reference Freud's "psychic models" to support the idea that gender identity is formed internally, independent of physical traits. Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage serves as a foundational moment in the construction of gender identity, framing how individuals internalise societal expectations regarding appearance and the elusive pursuit of independence. (Lacan, 1957). Likewise, Tennessee Williams critiques traditional femininity through characters like Laura and Amanda and challenges societal expectations of women and relationships. The mother-daughter relationship in "The Glass Menagerie" is characterised by codependency, trauma, restrictive gender roles, and the silencing of women. Amanda seeks validation from Laura, who seeks protection from Amanda. The trauma experienced by Amanda was passed down to Laura. The play explores how societal expectations and codependency impact women's lives, particularly in mother-daughter relationships. Key concepts in psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud, such as the unconscious mind and repression, impact behaviour and emotions. Repression can lead to psychological symptoms and strained relationships, as shown in "The Glass Menagerie."

### **5.1. Repressed Desires and Frustrations**

Amanda Wingfield in Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie" is a character whose desires and frustrations are explored in depth. Her repressed desires include a need for attention and validation, stemming

from past abandonment, and a longing for romance and adventure. She consistently retreats into daydreams of a superior life, yet she is simultaneously paralysed by a profound fear of failure and the unforgiving, harsh realities of her present circumstances. (Levy, 1993). Amanda's frustrations directed at her son Tom, whose growing independence and disinterest in her mirror her husband's abandonment. She also feels frustrated with herself for not being able to provide for her children and with the unfulfilled promises of the American Dream. Amanda embodies Old South values but struggles to adapt. She is a strong yet pitiable character, torn between past and present. Williams highlights her Janus-faced nature:

A little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place. Her characterization must be carefully created, not copied from type. She is not paranoiac, but her life is paranoia. There is much to admire in Amanda, and as much to love and pity as there is to laugh at. Certainly she has endurance and a kind of heroism, and though her foolishness makes her unwittingly cruel at times, there is tenderness in her slight person. (Williams, 2011:51).

Indeed, these repressed emotions lead to manipulation, conflict with her children, and self-destructive behaviours. Williams employs the character of Amanda to underscore the corrosive impact of repression on both interpersonal bonds and mental health, ultimately suggesting that confronting one's true desires and frustrations is essential for personal growth and healing. Arliss has seen parents provide sanctions based on children's behaviour, with negative consequences for inappropriate behaviour and positive consequences for appropriate behaviour, including material rewards or praise. (1991:133). That is clear in the play in Scene 2 when Amanda gives Laura negative feedback instead of positive reinforcement, reflecting her domineering nature. She constantly criticises her children, especially Laura, making them feel inferior and incapable. Amanda's pessimism about Laura's future, pressuring her to find a husband, adds to the negative sanctions through her disapproving expressions. That is clear through the conversation below:

AMANDA: Why? Why? How old are you, Laura?

LAURA: Mother, you know my age.

AMANDA: I thought that you were an adult; it seems that I was mistaken.

[She crosses slowly to the sofa and sinks down and stares at Laura.]

LAURA: Please don't stare at me, Mother. (Williams, 2011:66).

At this juncture, Laura's nervousness escalates into visible distress, triggered by Amanda's manifest disappointment—a tension that reaches a breaking point when she is pointedly asked her age. This implies she did something inappropriate for her age, leading to guilt and inferiority. "Laura: Mother, when you're disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus' mother in the museum!" (Williams, 2011:21). Laura is burdened by intense guilt beneath the critical gaze of her mother, Amanda, as she perpetually struggles to satisfy the unrealistic and overbearing expectations placed upon her. Amanda imposes negative consequences for Laura's perceived flaws and is frustrated by Laura's nervousness during a dinner date. The text explores Amanda Wingfield's complex character, revealing her desires for attention, validation, and a better life. Her frustrations with Tom's independence and feelings of inadequacy as a mother lead to manipulation and conflict, highlighting the harmful effects of repressed feelings on relationships and personal growth.

### **5.1. Unconscious Motivations and Psychological Conflicts**

Amanda Wingfield's unconscious motivations and conflicts are key themes in Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie". Her fear of abandonment makes her cling to her son, Tom, as she tries to prevent him from leaving her as her husband did. Feelings of inadequacy and shame lead her to seek validation and attention. Amanda deals with guilt from her failed marriage, causing her to be critical and controlling. She struggles with wanting to hold onto the past while also seeking a better future. Her defence mechanisms, such as denial and repression, help her cope with pain and regrets related to her abandonment experiences. Amanda experiences emotional struggles, self-destructive actions, and stagnation due to unconscious motivations. Williams emphasises the need to face these issues for personal growth. Amanda's character in "The Glass Menagerie" showcases her attachment anxiety and hidden narcissism from fear of abandonment. Her control over her children is rooted in deep-seated insecurities, which ultimately precipitate an identity crisis; furthermore, the analysis examines how this domestic pressure exacerbates Laura's social anxiety. (Ramesh & Christopher, 2023).

Moreover, the psychoanalytic feminist approach in Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie" highlights key themes: subversion of gender norms – Amanda and Laura challenge traditional roles. Self-

Discovery and Autonomy – they seek independence from societal constraints on the one hand and trauma and the patriarchal family on the other. The play explores the psychological effects of gender norms, escapism and illusion; thus, characters use fantasy as a coping mechanism. (Sembiring & Helmita, 2019). Accordingly, Williams delves into Amanda Wingfield's unconscious motivations, such as fear of abandonment, desire for self-validation, and unconscious guilt for her failed marriage, causing her to be overly critical and controlling. Internal conflict in Amanda arises from conflicting desires to hold onto the past and move forward. External conflict with Tom mirrors her fears of abandonment. Fantasy clashes with reality, leading to disillusionment. Amanda's unconscious mind uses defence mechanisms like denial and repression to cope with painful emotions and memories, filled with fantasies and regrets. Amanda's character in Williams's work showcases the complexities of the human mind. Unconscious motivations and conflicts result in emotional turmoil, self-destructive behaviour, and stagnation.

## **6. Result and Discussion**

This study has examined the portrayal of the American Dream in Tennessee Williams's play "The Glass Menagerie" through a psychoanalytic feminist lens. It has focused on Amanda Wingfield, who struggles for the American Dream for herself and her family. The research challenges the notion that women are passive by demonstrating how Amanda navigates societal expectations. It explores her relationship with her daughter, Laura, emphasising women's agency. The study applies Freud's theories to clarify the characters' actions, highlighting Laura's struggles and Amanda's sacrifices for her family.

These psychological insights enhance appreciation of Wingfield family dynamics, making the play a timeless exploration of human psychology and relationships, valuable for literature and drama education research. Moreover, psychoanalytic feminism presents compelling opportunities for analysis in "The Glass Menagerie" despite certain challenges for feminine characters, such as Laura's character, which is revealed through limited textual evidence, with her silence requiring careful interpretation. Amanda Wingfield reflects on her past and present, dealing with a failed marriage, relationships with her children, and her identity. In an effort to transcend her domestic confinement, she seeks to revive her past and redefine herself, yet she remains entangled in a difficult struggle to shape her children's futures, especially that of the especially Laura.

Whereas Tom Wingfield grapples with balancing personal freedom and family duties, seeking identity through movies. Interactions with Jim O'Connor help him embrace his true self. Laura Wingfield also challenges societal norms, while Jim explores self-discovery. The play stresses self-acceptance, living in the moment, and embracing authenticity for personal development. Over-analysing feminine characters and applying modern psychoanalytic feminism can risk misrepresentation. Focusing excessively on her vulnerabilities may overshadow her strengths and resilience. Narrowly focusing on Laura alone can overlook the interconnectedness of characters and themes in the play. To address these challenges, broaden the analysis to include comparative studies with other characters in Tennessee Williams' works, thematic explorations like isolation or desire, and intersectional analyses of factors such as gender and class.

By considering these alternative approaches, the depth and impact of the analysis can be enhanced. The analysis of women and the American Dream in *The Glass Menagerie* lays a strong foundation for exploring the complex interplay of societal expectations. Additionally, to enrich the discussion further, consider exploring intersectionality and marginalisation, analysing the roles of male characters in reinforcing or subverting patriarchal norms, delving into the symbolism of "The Glass Menagerie", and examining different interpretations of the play. Anticipating potential counterarguments, such as focusing too much on the limitations of the American Dream for women, can strengthen the analysis by emphasising broader themes of isolation, desire, and the search for meaning. A more sophisticated appreciation of *The Glass Menagerie's* enduring impact is possible by integrating these components, allowing for a deeper exploration of how memory and illusion shape human experience. As a result, Amanda avoids harsh realities by reminiscing about her youth and seeking a suitable gentleman caller for her daughter, Laura, in "The Glass Menagerie". The play explores the theme of escapism through Amanda, Tom, and Laura, who all try to escape the challenges of their lives. Amanda's decision to let Tom leave reflects a complex dilemma between maternal love and her son's need for independence.

## 7. Conclusion

A psychoanalytic feminist of Tennessee Williams's play "The Glass Menagerie" reveals complex relationships within the Wingfield family, particularly between Amanda and Laura. The play explores themes of trauma, codependency, and societal expectations. Amanda's struggle with

her past mirrors Laura's experiences with disability and isolation, highlighting society's silencing of women. Tom represents the patriarchal society, abandoning his family and rejecting responsibility. The play suggests their troubles stem from an inability to escape societal constraints. Generally, "The Glass Menagerie" critiques patriarchal society and offers hope for transformation amid struggle. A psychoanalytic feminist analysis of Tennessee Williams's play "The Glass Menagerie" reveals the complex and troubled relationships between the Wingfield family members, particularly the mother-daughter duo of Amanda and Laura. Through their interactions, Amanda's struggles with her past and her desire to relive her youth were mirrored in her daughter Laura's experiences with her disability and social isolation. The play highlights how women are often silenced and marginalised, whether it be through societal expectations or personal traumas. Tom's character serves as a symbol of the patriarchal society, abandoning his family and rejecting his responsibilities.

The play ultimately suggests that Wingfield's troubles stem from their inability to escape the constraints of their societal roles and expectations. Through this analysis, we can see how "The Glass Menagerie" offers a powerful critique of patriarchal society and how it shapes the lives of women. The play reminds us that even during tragedy and struggle, there is always hope for transformation and change. This analysis demonstrates how a psychoanalytic feminist perspective can provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of "The Glass Menagerie". By examining the psychological and social pressures that shape the characters' experiences, we can gain a deeper understanding of the play's themes and messages.

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