



IVORY TOWERS AND SACRED FOUNTS: ARTISTIC ASPIRATION AND LIFE REALITIES IN THE SELECT WORKS OF JAMES JOYCE AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

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ABSTRACT

*Both James Augustine Aloysius Joyce (1882-1941) and Thomas Lanier "Tennessee" Williams III (1911-1983) occupy a unique place in world literature. As critical observer of life, they saw people's suffering as the product of inhuman struggle between person's religion, family, socio-political systems and his artistic aspirations. The present research paper attempts to delineate James Joyce's legendary novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Tennessee Williams' equally beautiful play *Glass Menagerie* in order to find out the parallels in themes, motifs and symbols used in them. Both the works are modern classics.*

*The select works belong to *Kunstlerroman* genre and deal with an artist's journey from adolescence to maturity both in his life and art. This gradual ascendance comes, many a times, with the difficulty of accepting reality, the need to develop individual consciousness, the pitfalls of religious extremism and the infinite desire to become a creator. Both Joyce and Williams built the protagonist based on their own character. Stephen Dedalus is Joyce's alter ego, whereas Tom Wingfield outlines Williams' artistic aspirations and his own struggle in its pursuit. Both Stephen and Tom aspire to become a literary artist. For fulfilling their artistic aspirations they show willingness to cross any boundary and make any sacrifices.*

Key Expressions: Artist, Aspiration, Life, Family, Literature.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Art' is developed widely in the philosophical, social and psychological premises. The terminology is also used in the religious and educational discourses, cultural and linguistic aspects of human existence. It cannot be excluded from any human enterprise and

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nor can be ignored in any academic discipline. Significance of Art in our life, our interpretation of Art and the relation between aesthetic response and all other forms of human behavior are some of the important aspects that are grappled upon in the process of answering the more important question.- ‘What role does Art play in the general behavior system of man?’ This brings us to the more important question about the role of an artist. An artist is a person who finds the best possible means to express his imagination, ideas, and feelings and creates a work of merit. When an artist tries to create something which has artistic values and life values as well, he finds himself traveling in a nebulous area, fighting against two opposite worlds, one that of life- the world of immediate experiences and the other that of art- the world of established and reoccurring truths.

Artistic Aspirations influence us and shapes our personality. It creates, modifies, destroys and re-creates inter-personal relations with each other. Art, be it fine art, performing art or visual art, always modifies human behaviour. Human being consciously, sub-consciously or unconsciously produces and arranges in a logical order sounds, images, colors, forms, words, movements and affects the sense of beauty which re-creates reality, accordingly. In art the artist invoke our feelings in ourselves and through the use of various mediums like lines, colors, words, movements; shapes etc... and transmit them to others. It is a human activity to make others aware of or even make to feel one’s feelings, in a way to experience them. In other words, it is this ability of the artist that separates us from others and makes him what he is, the creator. Art converses through the language of feelings. Thus it breaks all the linguistic, cultural and other man made barriers. It brings people together who belong to different castes, sexes, nationality, religion and ethnicity. An artist, at his root, is a human being living in society, with family with friends and other relations he creates in the process. Art, overtly or covertly, occupies pedestal place in human life. Every human finds himself related to art in one way or the other.

A Kunstlerroman novel serves as a psychological insight into the journey of an artist to the maturation of his art and life. While growing up children absorb different elements of life and society around them. This happens more effectively with those with artistic abilities and aspirations. A literary artist often poses to question the result of the moral battle fought between his appropriate standing and understanding as an objective artist and the physical and psychological growth of the people he knows. Maurice Beebe in his *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (1964) categorizes the budding artists into two groups. Those who isolate themselves from everything without make every possible sacrifice to attain what they seek and become, in many cases, self-made artists are called Ivory-Towers. And there are those who try to identify art with personal growth and experiences are called Sacred Founts by Beebe. This eternal conflict between self and art faced by every maturing artist determines the course the protagonist in the text and the artist in his real life takes.

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A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) is about Stephen Dedalus who is a fictional alter ego of James Joyce, the author himself, and the character is based on Daedalus, the Greek mythological artist, who suffers because of the artwork he creates. Stephen's slow and gradual maturation, the reconciliation of the problematic individual with the concrete social realities around him and the possibility of the individual and the society achieving a state of accordance, beneficial for both constitutes the core of the novel. It opens with fragmented lines from a nursery rhyme and their sensory perception in the form of feeling, touching, hearing and smelling in the mind of a child. James Joyce rests the character of Stephen on Gustav Flaubert's conception of writer who should stand aloof from his work. Joyce builds Stephen's character around the doctrine of impersonality in an attempt to write his own impersonal autobiography. At the very beginning Stephen tries to identify himself by pinpointing his location in this universe. He writes...

*Stephen Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins
County Kildare
Ireland
Europe
The World
The Universe...*

And as he stops to think what's beyond? Fleming, his friend, provides answer by bridging the gap between Ireland, his native place and Heaven, his expectation. These types of situations the artist faces in his own life serves as psychological help for the artist in his journey to maturation and exhilarate his creative abilities. Stephen and others represents what most of the adolescent artists face while growing up. The personal problems, economical satiations, puberty related issues, relations with family and friends happens to be the aspects that design the course the artist takes in his journey to the maturity of his mind and art. When the artist discovers his gift he finds himself in some kind of confinement. Situations like physical, moral and even psychological barriers try to keep him within the accepted borders of social upbringing and manhood.

Stephen muses over the existence of 'green Rose' somewhere in the world. Somewhere outside his family, school, college, church and even outside Ireland, his motherland. To find out about the possibility he is ready to break all the boundaries, both emotional and political. He is even ready to undergo seclusion and face loneliness. In Beebe's words he can be

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termed as 'Ivory Tower'. In fact, patterns of escape form a leitmotif that help structure the novel, as every character seeks flight; if not literary, then through the imagination. Stephen's ideas of femininity become more complex in the final sections of the novel and we find out that women are no longer guiding Stephen: his mother no longer pushes him, the Virgin Mary no longer shows him the way, and prostitutes no longer seduce him. Women are no longer in a superior or transcendent position in his life. He places himself in control of his life. This emotional, spiritual, and artistic development gives him the vision and confidence to show himself the way and he starts his voyage to become an independent, secular literary artist.

The Glass Menagerie (1944) a memory play by Tennessee Williams with strong autobiographical elements, featuring characters based on Williams himself, his histrionic mother, and his mentally fragile sister Rose. As a small child Williams suffered from a case of diphtheria which nearly ended his life, for the rest of his life he was weak and virtually confined to his house during a period of recuperation that lasted a year. As a result of his illness he was weak as a child which made his father very unhappy. For William's father his son's effeminacy was the reason of disdain and for his mother, locked in an unhappy marriage, he was the centre of her being. Throughout his life Williams remained close to his sister Rose who was diagnosed with schizophrenia. In the opening soliloquy, the protagonist Tom expresses Williams' theory of literature and creation. He says...

"Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion."

Art incurs emotional response and the artist, who knows that emotions are conceptual in nature, makes his artwork explore the artistic mode of its design and in the process make us capable of more complex responses to the work of art. When the artist let us in his emotional space by expressing his emotions he makes us aware of our own emotions by enabling us to express ours. In this way the artist either attempt to change his social environment by engaging himself in fantasy or create an emotional space that may appear as a micro-cosmos for him. Most of the artist protagonists of Kunstlerroman novels found themselves unable to establish the normal relations with the outer-world which in most cases is the sole reason of inner conflict.

Amanda is obsessed with finding a suitor for Laura and making Tom accept his duties towards his home and his sister. In the process she makes him ignore his artistic aspirations and fulfill his duty. Among the most prominent and urgent themes of The Glass Menagerie is the difficulty every characters faces in accepting and relating to reality. The Wingfield family is unable to overcome this difficulty, and each, as a result, withdraws into a private world of

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illusion. The private world in which they live is populated by the situations, problems, demands, sacrifices and distant dreams. Tom, the only member capable of surviving the world outside the Wingfield apartment comfort-zone, is constantly de-moralized, corrected and controlled either by situations or by Amanda.

This play marks Willisms' entry into an oeuvre of world literature body with his repeating symbols, motifs, and themes. One of the most repeated feature of his plays are the absent and dead gay male character. But, though Mr. Wingfield is absent, he is neither gay nor dead. It is his protagonist Tom, who fills the gap and emerges as a prototype character that is in reality semi-autobiographical character based on the writer himself. The concept of paradise dance hall, colored lights and fire escape compasses his persona that can be branded 'Sacred Fount' in Beebe's words. Every major character in the play seeks to escape the reality. Whereas fabricating an idealized past, presented through her memories only, becomes Amanda's compensation for the present ordeal, equally Jim's aspirations about normalcy in life and visions about his future frames his existence. In the case of Tom it is his escape to the movies and his artistic aspirations make his stay soothing whereas Laurs's glass animals collection provides her with the imaginative escape from the present, now and here.

Tom wishes to escape from his family life, just as the magician escapes from the coffin without destroying the box or removing a single nail. He struggles, the most, with his role as the breadwinner and caretaker of the family. To maintain balance between what he does and what he actually wishes to do seems to be his greatest concern. Responsibility and abandonment are the two common factors common in Wingfield family. They try to fulfill their duties towards the family but, in the process, abandon each other.

Jim, the supposed gentleman caller calls Laura with strange but symbolic name 'blue rose'. This marks her as special, delicate and beautiful but, at the same time as an impossible and outcast. It is interesting to refer here with Stephen Dedalus' wish to find out whether or not 'Green Rose' existed. It is for him the possibility of becoming an independent literary artist and produce secular literature. In Tom's case this existence of 'Blue Rose' means the responsibilities and abandonments. An obstacle in the path of his becoming an independent literary artist, a creator. This marks the impossibility of true escape. The way Stephen Dedalus escapes or wishes to escape. Tom understands that to escape means great harm to his family and to his artistic sensibility too.

In the closing monologue, Tom muses over what he did to his sister. He talks about following his father's footsteps, familiar music, transplant glass, companions, perfumes and shattered rainbows. He actually critically analyze his own life beyond the 'fire escape landing' and tries to judge himself as a brother, friend, man and a literary artist in the first place.

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Joyce in his masterpiece and Williams with his memory play transport us into private world where desire and artistic aspiration clashes with harsh reality. The normal loss and gain relation supplant hope, a primitive desire to be a creator. Both Joyce and Williams demonstrate how we could synthesize music, poetry, hope and aspirations with reality, acceptance and loneliness. Both the works unfolds the life lessons that haunt the receptive mind. It becomes apparent that human relations are controlled and shaped by the notion of art. These works appear as a philosophical articulation of the term art as both the writers use different social institutions to demonstrate the role played by art in human life.

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