

A Psychoanalytic Reading of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and Lord Byron's *Love Letter*.

By

Tareq Zuhair Sa'id Mahmood

Supervisor

Prof. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts in English Literature**

**Faculty of Graduate Studies
University of Jordan**

May, 2004

This thesis (A Psychoanalytic Reading of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and Lord Byron's *Love Letter*.) was successfully defended and approved on:.....

Examination Committee

Signature

Professor Ahmed Y. Majdoubeh,
Chairman.

.....

Prof. of American and Romantic
Literature.

Professor Abdul-Rahman Shaheen,
Member.

.....

Prof. of English Literature.

Professor Tawfiq Yousef, Member.

.....

Prof. of Modern English Literature.

Professor Mahmoud Al Shetawi, Member.

.....

Assoc. Prof. of English Literature.

C

To

My Father

*For supporting me in my choice to study English and
continue my studies and for the uncompromising
principles that guided his life*

My Mother

*For leading her children into good manners and
behavior*

My Teachers

*For showing me the excitement and joy of English
language and literature and for making everything
worthwhile*

My Family

*For their abundant support, for their patience and
understanding and for their love*

My Fellow Students

For their happy companionship throughout these years

D

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I gratefully give acknowledgment to my supervisor Dr. Ahmed Majdoubeh for his expert advice which inspired me to write this literary thesis.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to all my professors of English in my B.A or my M. A for their efforts to supply us with the best about our major in language and literature and for teaching me that the aim of true education is replacing closed minds with open ones ready and eager for everything innovative and new.

My sincere gratitude is also due to professors of literature at the University of Jordan who contributed to my genuine interest in literature and fiction and set me on the right path to enjoy humanity in fiction.

I am gratefully indebted to the staff of the library of the University of Jordan for their efforts in supplying students with all the references they need to develop their abilities and reinforce their sources of knowledge.

E

List of Contents

Examination Committee	II
Dedication	III
Acknowledgement	IV
List of Contents	V
Abstract in English	VI
Introduction: What is Psychoanalysis?	1
Chapter I: A Psychoanalytic Reading of <i>The Glass Menagerie</i>.	17
Chapter II: A Psychoanalytic Reading of <i>Lord Byron's Love Letter</i>.	49
Conclusion: Similarities and Differences between the Two Plays.	66
Bibliography	79
Abstract in Arabic	83

Introduction

From birth to death, one is exposed to encounters with people over a period of time or is involved in numerous events or activities. Such exposure compels the mind to formulate certain feelings and concepts about the people an individual deals with or the events experienced in life. Such feelings or concepts lead to positive or negative reactions depending on the situation. Human reactions are thus based on the judgements the mind forms in such situations, bad or good, since such judgments are the outcome of the experience stored in the human psyche from past or present confrontations. The more exposure there is to different events and people, the more reactions human beings have. When there are circumstances identified by the mind as similar, the reactions will be more or less the same and the past experience is repeated. Dealing with incongruous situations and events, some in the past and some in the present, however, changes the concepts about the past experiences on certain events or accentuates them.

The mind's experience becomes an integral part of a person's everyday life, leading to a change in the way of perceiving life. Some people may find life pleasing and gratifying, whereas others may find it distressing. This depends on the situation each individual experiences. Such experience plays a vital role in making up the human personality and the human behavior. "Similar conditions often find similar reflections in the behavior of the same individual or in the behavior of individuals who dynamically or structurally belong to the same character type. It is a matter of common knowledge" (Hartmann 20). Physicians do not panic when they see badly injured persons and mountaineers are not afraid of heights. These individuals react in this way not because they are brave but because there is no fear of severe wounds or

high places in their unconscious. What causes actions then is not bravery or cowardice but the underlying convictions in the human psyche.

Psychoanalysis arises as a result of the desire to find out how the human psyche works and why there are people of different personalities and different behavior. The leading theorist in this field is Freud who invented psychoanalysis between 1895 and 1900 on the basis of his clinical experience with hysterical patients. According to Freud, the causes of fear and hysteria for people are numerous and diverse. While studying many cases, Freud noticed that the past experiences form the true causes of fear or hysteria. "Freud traced the etiology of the disease from its mid-nineteenth century image as a disorder of the nerves to its twentieth century as a psychological condition, in a way which facilitated the discovery of the basic principles of psychoanalysis--the analytic method itself, the existence of the unconscious, repression, fantasy, infantile sexuality" (Williams 5). Freud's realization that the mind has its own system of thinking is the result of studying different people and the conflicts they face and how they behave and react to them. For him, the conscious memory is not convincing and does not justify the human reactions, since it gives contradictory and irrational explanations and interpretations to them. As a result of Freud's continuous search for logical causes of the human conduct, he discovered the unconscious which gives the convincing motives and makes human demeanor more rationally explained. There are other psychoanalysts who contribute to this science as Jacques Lacan and Carl Jung who read the theories of Freud and broadened his works. Since Freud is the founder of psychoanalysis, the thesis will mainly discuss and apply Freud's theories and refer to Lacan and Jung where needed.

Psychoanalysis has become a way of reading literature as literature is about human conduct and views about life. Many critics have written on *The Glass*

Menagerie, pointing out important dimensions of meaning and characters. Less have been written on *Lord Byron's Love Letter*. John Gassner in his book *Theatre at the Cross Roads* states that Williams' plays center on themes of defeat or stalemate that were economic as well as psychological. He distinguishes Williams from other American playwrights as a writer who has a sociological analysis regarding personal problems in the light of social conditioning and economic conflict (79). In his book, *20th-Century American Drama*, Warren French believes that Williams is always capable of writing a psychologically valid scene in the American realistic condition – the dinner scene in *the Glass Menagerie* (634). Gerald M. Berkowitz in his book, *American Drama of the Twentieth Century*, says that Williams *The Glass Menagerie* is written on the internal qualities of characters that created their shared adventure and on its effect on them (89). In his book, *Versions of Heroism in Modern American Drama*, Julie Adam focuses on Williams' ways of making his characters remember the past to suit their needs (100). This study focuses on psychoanalytic dimensions such as the conscious, and the unconscious and characters' types: the ego, the id and the superego and how such dimensions pinpoint new meanings and themes.

Since psychoanalysis is originally and essentially a modern science and its main concern is psychology not literature, fact not fiction, it is still controversial for some critics and readers to consider psychoanalysis as a reliable way of comprehending literature. "We sometimes see the rejection of psychoanalysis as a method of understanding human behavior. Some readers have objected to the use of psychoanalysis to understand the behavior of literary characters because literary characters are not real people and, therefore, they do not have psyches that can be analyzed" (Tyson 29).

Fiction, however, is an extension of reality and is one major means for perceiving reality and understanding facts. It is derived from the Latin word *fictio*, which means a shaping or counterfeiting. It denotes the word *imagination* and reality feeds imagination. Plato says in Book X of *The Republic* that every universal term (such as “bed” or “table”) must correspond to a form. Robinson Crusoe is a fictitious character but people believe that he is “real.” Daniel Defoe has the power to make us believe his imagination. A writer draws upon factual information in presenting scenes, events, and characters. Any fiction needs real forms to be based upon, especially characters.

Psychoanalysis certainly helps readers to understand texts which are about human behavior which is relevant to its counterpart in actual life. “Every fiction we make is a more nourishing substitute for reality, an alternative world in which we work out our quarrel with the reality principle” (Skura 62). Literature is not literature when it fails to portray and represent human feelings, emotions and beliefs about life. The main focus in psychoanalysis is on characters, not so much on events to bring to readers’ attention the ways individuals lead to achieve their inclinations.

Psychoanalysis centers on the ways characters think and goes beyond the superficial realms of the conscious to the deep true realm of the human psyche, the unconscious. It reveals the underlying true causes of all human conduct. “As critics, we cannot avoid talking about human behaviors, feelings, motivations, and conceptualizations. Psychoanalysis has something to say about how we think, feel, generalize, and act: why we feel tired and how we handle anxieties: how we love and what happens to us when we stop loving” (Wasiolek 155). Literature presents the character and psychoanalysis analyzes it, revealing the hidden causes of human cravings, making literature more appealing, rational and trustworthy. It makes those

who look at literature as only stories written for amusement reconsider literature as an efficacious human manifestation of mind and heart.

It is evident that Freud considers that literature is the true clinic where he can find all the types of personalities and characters he needs for his psychological tests and the application of his psychoanalytic theories. For example, "Freud treats Hamlet as a subject for psychoanalysis. He finds in him a conflict between impulse and repression. While Hamlet's instincts (his Oedipal feelings) are repressed, he remains normal. But once his drives are forced into consciousness, he is flung into a state of neurosis" (Selden 223). Freud discovered that Hamlet's neurosis is not that different from the neurosis his patients suffer from. He found out that literature shows clearly the underlying causes for the release of Hamlet's repressed unconscious desires for his mother because of his uncle's marriage to her. Such quick marriage after the death of his father makes him always in a severe state of neurosis, hysteria. "Is Hamlet mad or not?" is a question always under debate and discussion. Based on psychoanalysis, the question must be: "Is Hamlet neurotic (hysteric) or not?" Critics have different opinions and personal views about Hamlet's neurosis since they do not look at Hamlet from a psychoanalytic point of view. Hamlet for certain readers is neurotic, whereas he is not neurotic at all for others.

Psychoanalytically, Hamlet falls in a state of neurosis and a state of emotional instability when meeting his mother, Gertrude, his uncle, Claudius, and his potential wife, Ophelia since these characters release his unconscious desires towards his mother which in turn drive Hamlet to be neurotic. "Hamlet's mind attaches itself to one thing and to one thing alone: his mother's sexuality and his furious and frantic condemnation of her sexuality" (Wasiolek 163). We do not see Hamlet neurotic when he meets his friend, Horatio or his fellow students from the University of Wittenberg.

When joining his friends, he feels overjoyed since such occasions stir his conscious pleasurable feelings, which reminds him of his happiness as a scholar at college. “ If we take the time to understand some key concepts about human experience offered by psychoanalysis, we can begin to see the ways in which these concepts are operating in our daily lives in profound rather than superficial ways and we’ll begin to understand human behavior” (Tyson 14). After the psychoanalytic analysis of Hamlet’s neurosis, the conclusion will not center on whether Hamlet is neurotic or not. Hamlet passes through phases of neuroses as a result of certain circumstances activating his unconscious dismal experiences and this does not necessarily mean that he is insane.

Human beings react to real situations but when their reactions fail to change reality, their psyches drift them away to imagination. It is imagination that makes life possible in worlds or places where all wishes and inclinations are always fulfilled. Pleasurable feelings resulting from conceiving being rich, famous, great, etc. accentuate the false belief of becoming heroes or people of great importance. Willy Loman in *Death of A Salesman* or Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie* or the Old Woman in *Lord Byron’s Love Letter* think that they are ignored heroes. They bring to mind everything that makes them happy and joyous. They always resort to fantasy to experience the achievements of their suppressed cravings. “Freud originally called each impulse which motivates a specific act, fantasy, or a symptom, a wish” (Hendrick 22). Wishes and desires require fulfillment, and the inability to fulfill them means the failure to achieve happiness.

Life is harsh and distressing when its reality clashes with sweet expectations and dreams. Seeking pleasure and happiness and avoiding pain and grief is the aim of life. Pleasure can be achieved by doing what is passionately needed such as making or spending money, learning new things or meeting new people and many things that can

provide the pleasure one seeks. For Willy Loman in *Death of A Salesman* or Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*, life is pleasing when they can gain money. When failing to achieve what is eagerly sought after, they have to come to terms with the causes of the failure and try to overcome them and achieve their ultimate pleasing goals later.

“Freud states that harsh necessity means that we must repress some of our tendencies to pleasure and gratification” (Eagleton 151). Throughout the two plays, Willy Loman and Tom always pin their hopes on the future which they await desirously.

Repression can be resorted to if it is believed that it may not last long. In actual life, there is a myriad number of problems and causes of suppression to put up with, whether serious or not. As a result, the unconscious is stirred causing different feelings of disappointment, anxiety or pleasure. Literature helps critics and readers comprehend the causes of such contradictory feelings since it centers on certain problems and certain types of characters in each literary work. The artist is skilful to show readers how the unconscious defenses work to prevent characters from experiencing disappointment caused by not achieving the desired expectations. “The artist helps the world to soften the impact with ‘reality-principle’ because he is more skilful in the matter of averting the clash between desire and the harsh world” (Hoffman 97). If there is no interaction between the inside and the outside world of characters, there will be no suffering or reactions made. It is impossible to live without undergoing depression or suppression. Reality often governs at the end and beats human weakness in the attempt to change life the way every individual seeks.

Since human desires cannot be denied or avoided, the attempt to suppress them will lead to anxiety and physiological disturbances known as Neurosis. Neurosis is a mild psychiatric disorder characterized by anxiety, distress and depression. “We may have certain unconscious desires which will not be denied, but which dare not

find a practical outlet either, the desire forces its way in from the unconscious, the ego blocks it off defensively, and the result of this internal conflict is what we call neurosis” (Eagleton 158). Neurosis is a way of bringing to the surface the repressed desires, wishes, emotions and feelings in an effort to identify and relieve them as a result of the inability to requite them. Anger, distress, and frustration are caused by the suppression of desires and wishes. Freud’s long exploration of hysteria, a state of neurosis, has led to the birth of psychoanalysis as a science of analyzing and discovering one’s mental life. “Psychoanalysis was originally introduced as a method of treatment of neurotic disorders, and as a theory to explain the causation of disorders” (Eysenck 68). Psychoanalysis aims at finding ways of avoiding or bringing to an end what causes neurosis so that happiness can be achieved.

As Freud states, the experience which can be directly recalled is labeled as the “conscious.” The conscious experience follows the logic of rules, whereas the laws of logic do not apply to unconscious productions. In the conscious experience, one is fully awake and responsive to actions. Being conscious stimulates awareness and makes the mind record all events. The body is disturbed at this level by any stimuli the five senses can receive. “Freud equates consciousness with the perception system, the sensing and ordering of the external world” (Wright 10). Human beings judge their reactions to situations from their conscious knowledge, and this is not enough to justify them. Recalling the past or present experiences does not contribute to coming up with the true explanations and justifications since they are only taken from the conscious or the preconscious but not the unconscious. The unconscious remains that mysterious realm hiding the true causes of emotional fluctuations based on the forgotten experience in childhood and adulthood.

The preconscious is the part of the mind lying between the conscious and the unconscious. It contains information, thoughts, and feelings that are not present in the conscious but can readily be brought into the conscious. "Freud made the distinction between the preconscious, ideas and memories which an individual can bring to consciousness almost at will, and the unconscious thought which because of its disturbing nature, is not easily made conscious even though it may be still indirectly influencing behavior" (Stevens 28). The unconscious dismal memories make individuals resort to pleasurable memories in the preconscious to forget fears, traumas and psychological wounds.

For Freud, the inaccessible experiences which people cannot directly recall or remember are stored in the unconscious. Forgotten reminiscences are moved from the preconscious to the unconscious. The unconscious is the warehouse of those memories which cannot be recalled consciously. "The unconscious is the storehouse of these painful experiences and emotions, those wounds, fears, guilty desires, and unresolved conflicts we do not want to know because we feel we will be overwhelmed by them" (Tyson 15). The mind tends to forget more than to remember, since forgetting helps to surpass painful experiences. Unlike the conscious, the unconscious follows no logical rules or laws since it is not controlled by the rational part of the memory, the conscious. It is the unconscious that determines the true causes for motivating someone to do something or say something under a certain situation. What is forgotten is not lost or erased but stored and kept in the unconscious mind for later retrieval when facing any situation or event linked to that unconscious stored case. "The unconscious is a reservoir of that which we are not conscious of" (Hoffmann 29).

The unconscious experience influences behavior when it is stimulated by an event but the focus is made on the conscious experience. This is what causes failure to find a logical interpretation to certain manners in certain circumstances.

Psychoanalysis sheds light on the conscious experience of characters but centers on the characters' unconscious experience to show how human behavior is logical and rational and then to emphasize that literature is not merely made up of works of contradictions. The unconscious activities of the mind shape personalities since they contain hidden explanations about life stored while growing up

Although the main concern of psychoanalysis is the unconscious, it is not a mere science of the unconscious. The unconscious opens up the way for more findings about the interior work of the human psyche and shows how other human beings think or feel. As a critical approach and a way of reading literature, it aims at finding out the reasons that control each character's ways of thinking and feelings in any literary work. Books of criticism focus on characters' habits, dreams, ambitions, success or failure without going into the causes of such human needs and wishes.

Critics discuss the impact of conflict on characters and to what extent such impact is effective and influential. Psychoanalysis evinces what makes characters respond to such dilemmas and how their conscious and unconscious minds react to them.

Literary critics believe that it is the conflict that changes characters but psychoanalysts believe that it is the mind with its past experience that converts characters. In psychoanalysis, dilemmas, serious or not, cannot change characters if their minds are ready to face them. Conflicts have no power to control characters because characters are controlled by their unconscious convictions.

The aim of facing or evading a problem is gaining pleasure. In Freudian psychology, the pleasure principle is the principle that guides instinctive behavior,

demands of modern life. Throughout his life and experience, Williams met people who were totally dehumanized by the new modern America. Jim, the Matron and her husband accept life as it is since they have never experienced the true human relationships based on love. Williams has realized that those people's unconscious minds are alienated from humanity.

Williams' skilful way of making Amanda, the Old Woman and Tom reveal obviously their unconscious conflicts is Williams' success of understanding his unconscious mind. Jim is the new Williams who can get over his fears and traumas after understanding their underlying unconscious causes. He recognizes the causes that made his sister resort to her inner world skillfully. Throughout his life, Williams' major concern is his sister, Rose, who shares with him his depressing life as they live in a small dismal apartment in St. Louis. They are unable to deal with people in a dehumanized society. Laura shares her mother's experience about life the way Rose shares it with Williams:

While Williams was returning home from a movie along with his sister, he had what seems to have been a heart attack. It was an event which deepened his own sense of the fragility of life and was the cause of an almost neurotic fear which plainly invades his work. But if this was a serious event, what followed was catastrophic. His sister Rose, who had already been hospitalized twice for depression, was precipitated into a major collapse. She walked into Williams' room as he lay recovering and announced that they must die together. She was immediately committed to a mental hospital (Biggsby, Vol II, 24)

Williams has no doubt that life is devoid of the pleasure he seeks. The depression which affects him and his sister is the result of their inability to accept the

trivial shallow amusements of the real world which people enjoy. “One could take the biography of a writer, as illustrated by the external events of his life and by such things as letters and other confessional documents, and construct out of these a theory of the writer’s personality—his conflicts, frustrations, traumatic experiences, neuroses, or whatever they happened to be—and the use of this theory to illuminate each one of his works” (Daiches 334). While reading Williams’ biography, readers remember Williams’ characters who share with Williams the same conflicts.

Psychoanalysis does not ignore or marginalize the role of the writers of literary works and their effect on the psychology of their characters. It is logical that writers present in their literary works their personal experience in life and how they perceive it. “Psychoanalytic criticism has concerned itself with meaning, biography, and content” (Waisolek 150). Psychoanalysis is mainly concerned with the behavior of characters and their reactions to life and how they behave when facing conflicts away from the biography of the writer of the work. Such analysis applies to authors who make characters react to events and situations they experience in actual life.

Finally, the aim of psychoanalysis as a critical approach is to help readers better understand human behavior. Psychoanalysis, as a method of understanding the mental life of characters, shows how characters mentally react to conflicts. This means that psychoanalysis is not expected to heal wounds, make individuals perfect, or to help readers understand themselves after a psychoanalytic analysis of literary works. As a literary approach, it only looks for the causes of the reactions of characters to the dilemmas they face.

قراءة نفسية تحليلية لمسرحيتين لتينسي وليامز: معرض الحيوانات الزجاجية و رسالة حب
من اللورد بايرون

إعداد
طارق زهير سعيد محمود

المشرف
الأستاذ الدكتور أحمد يعقوب مجدوبة

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم قراءة نفسية لمسرحيتين كتبهما الكاتب المسرحي تينيسي وليامز. يعد التحليل النفسي أحد الوسائل التي يتم بواسطتها دراسة الشخصيات الأدبية و تحليل تصرفاتهم. عند قراءة أي مقالة نقدية عامة حول أي عمل مسرحي، نجد أن تحليل الشخصيات ينصب على مواقف الشخصيات تجاه بعضها البعض و تجاه الأحداث و الظروف التي تدفع الشخصيات للتصرف بطرق معينة لتلبية رغباتها و احتياجاتها الملموسة. بيد أن هذه الكتابات لا تنظر إلى الأسباب التي ولدت تلك الرغبات و الاحتياجات و ذلك لعدم الخوض في العقل اللاواعي لتلك الشخصيات. لقد ظهر النقد التحليلي النفسي نتيجة للحاجة لمعرفة ماهية الدوافع الكامنة وراء تصرفات الشخصيات في المواقف الحياتية.

إن الهدف من قراءة الأدب بطريقة نفسية تحليلية هو الوصول إلى تحليلات أعمق و أدق للعالمين الخارجي و الداخلي الذي تعيش فيهما الشخصية. في مسرحية معرض الحيوانات الزجاجية، يحلل وليامز التركيب النفسي لأماندا متمثلة بعلاقتها مع الشخصيات الأخرى. في مسرحيته رسالة حب من اللورد بايرون، وعلى نحو مشابه، يركز وليامز على نفسية المرأة العجوز و تأثيرها المباشر على حفيدتها العانس و الأناس ممن يزورهم. إن المسرحيتين تكشفان الأسباب الكامنة وراء المخاوف النفسية الشخصية و الغير مدركة من الموت و الشعور بالوحدة و الفشل و الدونية. إن تطبيق القراءة النفسية على هاتين المسرحيتين يظهر بجلاء الشبه بين أماندا و المرأة العجوز و تأثيرهما المتطابق على ابنة أماندا، لورا، و حفيدة المرأة العجوز العانس. إن التحليل النفسي لهاتين المسرحيتين يكشف أيضاً جزءاً من شخصية وليامز و المتمثلة في الشخصيات الرئيسية في المسرحيتين.

"The Glass Menagerie" Character and Plot Summary. Share. Flipboard. The Glass Menagerie play is a melancholy family drama written by Tennessee Williams. It was first performed on Broadway in 1945, meeting with astounding box-office success and a Drama Critics Circle Award. The Characters. In the introduction of The Glass Menagerie, the playwright describes the personalities of the drama's main characters. Amanda clearly loves her children. However, she constantly reprimands her son about his personality, his fledgling job, and even his eating habits. Tom: I haven't enjoyed one bite of this dinner because of your constant directions on how to eat it. It's you that makes me rush through meals with your hawk-like attention to every bite I take. The Glass Menagerie study guide contains a biography of Tennessee Williams, literature essays, quiz questions, major themes, characters, and a full summary and analysis. Amanda is a loving mother, but her meddling and nagging are hard to live with for Tom, who is a grown man and who earns the wages that support the entire family. Laura is a frightened and terribly shy girl, with unbelievably weak nerves. She is also slightly lame in one leg, and she seldom leaves the apartment of her own volition. She busies herself caring for her "glass menagerie," a collection of delicate little glass animals. Amanda dreams constantly of the long-ago days when she was a young Southern belle and the darling of her small town's social scene. Lord Byron's Love Letter. Jump to Section: Current Section Overview. Overview. Specifics. Materials. More. OVERVIEW. An old woman and a spinster who live in an old, dilapidated house claim to have a love letter from Lord Byron. A part of the collection 27 Wagons Full of Cotton and Other Plays. Considerations. Performing Groups. College Theatre / Student. Professional Theatre. Blackbox / Second Stage /Fringe Groups. License details.