



## Subversion of Patriarchal Norms in Tennessee Williams' Play's The Glass Menagerie

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**Abstract-** This study critically analyses the patriarchal norms in the play *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams (1911-1983). Patriarchy is lack of any of the gender or sexual identities that destabilize the heterosexual patriarchal power system. The main thrust of the study is to explore the subversive signs that uncover the dominant masculine ideology inherent in the structure of the play. The paper identifies the distinct and subtle ways in which the manifest inclination towards male dominance is sought, responsible for shaping patriarchal norms signified in the characters' speeches to project the acute sensitivity to the plight of women. Such worldviews shaped by language are explored in the play by applying Norman Fairclough's theory of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The study unravels factors that lead to the exploration of the hidden ideologies related to male superiority and female subordination in the selected play. This study is qualitative in nature that identifies factors delimiting down women's role in society. It will be a help, in particular, to the egalitarian society to overcome such barriers.

**Keywords:** CDA; Discourse, Dominance, Gender; Power

### I. INTRODUCTION

Studies on language, power and dominance are the growing fields of investigation in the recent years. The focus on dominance and inequality implies that unlike other domains or approaches in discourse analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) does not primarily aim to contribute to a specific discipline, paradigm, and school or discourse theory. It is primarily interested and motivated by pressing social issues, which it hopes to understand better through discourse analysis. The main concern of almost all CDA analysts is with the issue of power and the recurring practices of society which cause changes and unravel the hidden agenda implicit in the discourse. Different lines of analysis and approaches have been used since the interest in men's and women's language started (Heberle, 1997). Keeping in view this idea, *The Glass Menagerie* is chosen for analysis to unravel the implicit power relations in discourses of different characters by applying CDA. *The Glass Menagerie* is a memory play. In the play, Tom Wingfield is a character as well as the narrator of the play. The story is set in St. Louis in 1937. In order to support his family, Tom works in a shoe warehouse and his job is difficult and tiresome. In his family, he has mother Amanda and his sister Laura. He had a father, Mr. Wingfield who had left them an year ago. He is not heard except one post-card by him. His presence is pervasive because a picture of him is still hanging in the living room of the family.

### Statement of the Problem

This qualitative study explores the subversive signs inherent in Williams' *Glass Menagerie*. Patriarchy has become subtle issue in the world that can be addressed through a critique of the dominant discourse. The aim of the study is to explore the use of textual strategies which reflect patriarchal norms in discourses and the extent to which the ideology of male supremacy is reflected through the linguistic choices represented in the broader socio-cultural situations between male and female. Speeches of the characters are analyzed by applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It analyses whether vocabulary and structure in the socio-cultural context have ideological influences on the cognition of audience. This research adds to the previous knowledge by focusing and analyzing the dialogues on the basis of linguistic choices and identification of patriarchal norms in the play. The objective of discourse approach which consists of text, socio-cultural practices and discursive practices in a society is described by Fairclough (1989) to exploit social relations, through language.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This part of the paper is about the studies related to *The Glass Menagerie*. During the postmodern period of American literature, *The Glass Menagerie* was considered to be Tennessee Williams' first successful play. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams dramatizes the discourse among the characters through dramatic conflicts, and witty words to make it acceptable to the intellect and emotions of the readers. The

language of the dialogic-conversation among the characters shapes their identities and unravels their approach to different circumstances and situations. In an early study on *The Glass Menagerie* done by King (1973), aspects like characterization, the nature of narration, the autobiographical elements, and irony in soliloquies were analyzed. His focus is to illustrate the meaning and relevance of the various soliloquies in the play. Fernkorn (1999) focused her research on analyzing the relationship between each one of the characters in the play to the other. Friedrich (2010) discussed the topic of 'soft people' in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. According to Friedrich, a key to understand Williams' work is to explore how he related the themes and motifs, apparent in his plays, to his personal life. Weigand (2009) is of the opinion that the orthodox speech act theories that were used to analyze plays have ignored the concepts of the functional language that influence dialogic action game. In his research, Barnard (2007) selected dialogues, characterization, plot, and setting in *The Glass Menagerie* based on their potential to represent Williams' identity and experience to show the conflict between spirit and flesh. Barnard is of the opinion that the character of Laura is a symbolic representation of spirit while her brother, Tom, represents flesh. Chowdhury (2014) analyzes the dream, desire, and memory depicted in *The Glass Menagerie* and manifests them to the social and economic conditions of the middle-class people in the American society. Tabasum (2013) applied a deconstructive theoretical approach on the plays of Tennessee Williams to explore the idea of optimism. With reference to *The Glass Menagerie*, he argues that the whole plot of *The Glass Menagerie* focuses on Tom Wingfield's past memories. The linear incidents of the play, furthermore, show that Tom followed his father's steps of ignoring the family's responsibilities. Tabasum stated that the method of presenting the incidents in the play is that of storytelling. Islamiah (2012) used a pragmatic approach to analyze and interpret the dialogues of *The Glass Menagerie*. As far as the current study is concerned, it analyses the play to deconstruct the language used by the female and male characters and to focus on their asymmetrical relationship.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative in nature concerned with the assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior based on the insights and impressions. The study mainly focuses on the discourses where unequal relations are in vogue in the play, *The Glass Menagerie*. The study applied Fairclough's Three Dimensional Model to the text of the play which focuses on vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures, and situational context. The paper also uses Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a theoretical framework to unravel the hidden ideologies exercised in the social context. CDA is used to reveal the social practices like dominance, hegemony, exploitation, victimization of the oppressed ones. It is used as tool to investigate the patriarchal norms of society. The data is collected from the speeches of Tom, Jim, Amanda and Laura. The paper collects data from *The Glass Menagerie* (1944).

### IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This study brings forth unequal relationships among different social groups. It focuses text and successive events and then relates them with broader socio-cultural perspective of the discourse of people which reveals uneven and ideology shaped power relations. It explores how power is exercised in a society through hegemonic attitude and ideological text of the patriarchy in *The Glass Menagerie* (1944). The paper is divided into three stages for the analysis of a discourse. In first stage, it analyses the personal experience and knowledge of the reader by keeping in view his beliefs. Secondly, how social relations affect the discourse and thirdly, a reader realizes about the reality and identity. Moreover, the social background and identity of the characters are revealed from the lexical and syntactic selection. Fairclough (1992) argues that language shapes discourse and different socio-political views giving rise to the exertion of power relations. People belonging to a specific social setup with different relational and expressive norms are revealed through their speeches. This study reveals the strong tie between the social and linguistic variables demonstrated in the play.

#### **Text Analysis**

Text is central to the analysis of Fairclough's model, linked with the analysis of language used by people in social set up which focuses on realization of socially unequal relationships with special focus on language. Text analysis involves the analysis of lexical and syntactic choices on the subversion of patriarchy in the broader social perspective. This analysis is centered on the clauses or sentences that highlight the theme and the cohesion that amplifies the impression of the message and feelings by the characters. This gives a power to the speaker to have a deep impact on the audience. Question tags, interrogatives, ideologically loaded expression, and idioms function as a lodestone to hold the whole discourse together.

In the start of the play, Tom's use of words such as "shouting and confusion" create his mood toward a domestic life as he kept saying that in Spain there was revolution but here there was only shouting and confusion (p. 4), and again he cries "House, house! Who pays rent on it, who makes a slave of himself to" (p. 20), thinking himself as the sole financial provider and sustainer. Tom's dominance sustains even in the first part of the play when Amanda and the family members cannot say grace or Christian prayer before a meal until Tom comes to the dining table: "We can't say grace until you come to the table!" (p. 6). The abstract noun "grace" shows that he is the only awesome figure at home. In the next chapter, Laura sarcastically undermines her mother that her face looks like the picture of Jesus' mother in the museum, meaning that they were born to suffer as stated in the discourse how Amanda is conversing with her mother. The attributive phrases such as "awful suffering" and "crouching toward" carry a humiliating tone using with mother saying that he is "going to opium dens! Yes, opium dens, dens of vice and criminals' hang-out" (p. 22).

Tom's attitude with his wife is disgusting that can be observed when he utters an "outraged groan tearing the coat, splitting the shoulder of it, and hurls it across the room. It strikes against the shelf of Laura's glass collection; there is a tinkle of shattering glass. (p. 23). Amanda's apologetic way states that she won't talk until she apologizes. When Amanda and Laura appear on the stage, the adjectives used for them such as shadowy for the stage and their movements are mentioned as dance and ritual (p. 34). Tom was passing by Amanda; she asks for help formally that he takes against chauvinism. On other hand, it is the helplessness of women, that, initially, Amanda tries to hide, but later, she pours out her wishes for success, achievement, prosperity and happiness for her precious children. .

Moreover, Tom's claim that young man's position at the warehouse is that of a shipping clerk leads his mother to imagine this job as "responsible job" (p. 40). When his mother expresses her wish to have this job position, Tom makes fun of her and says, "how the tragic mistake of marrying his father happened" . Amanda mentions the executive job. He has visions of being advanced in the world! Any young man who studies public speaking is aiming to have an executive job some day!" (p. 42). Tom was talking to his mother and he uses words along with adjectives which show Laura as inferior or weak creature. Terribly shy, peculiar words are used and phrase: world of her own. When Laura and Amanda were getting ready for young gentleman caller, Amanda puts powder puffs in Laura's bosom and used word chest instead of breasts. "Because, to be painfully honest, your chest is flat" . (p. 47). While getting ready for the guest, Amanda used word trap for girls. Trap is a snare which is used to catch something or someone. In her opinion, girls have job or duty of deceiving, catching or attracting males. "All pretty girls are a trap, a pretty trap, and men expect them to be!" (47).

Male discourse is again shown as powerful in the scene when Jim and Tom reach home. Jim says that they have beaten the rain. "I think we just beat the rain" . (p. 51), which shows that they have competed with powers of nature. In the following scene Tom declares that he is tired of the movies because he wants real adventure. Here, the words are used to show males' decision-taking, vision and dominance. "It's our turn now, to go to the South Sea Islands - to make a safari - to be exotic, far-off!" (p. 55).

When Jim asks Tom where he will go if he leaves the house? Tom replies in an arrogant manner saying that that he is male and can take decision like his father (p. 56). Tom even shows that he does not care what his mother will feel if he will leave the house. Further, Amanda's praises Jim that "he is a paragon, and then Tom as "good gracious! - why don't you bring this paragon to supper?" (p. 57). However, Amanda's use of feminine words for Laura such as pretty, sweet and domestic for herself, and then gallantly for male, reflects her inner fear and dominance of male (p. 58) that can be further witnessed in the room when "Laura sits up nervously as Jim enters. She is breathless, utters nothing, the stranger's presence becomes intolerable of being alone with him in the room (p. 64). When Jim enters the room of Laura, she was alone in her room. Jim's lexes show that males' power and decision-taking is obvious in the play. To show his individuality, Jim repeatedly uses pronoun "I" in a brief starting conversation. "I'll spread a newspaper under to catch the drippings. I like to sit on the floor. Mind if I do?" (pp. 64-65)

Consequently, Jim judged Laura saying "I judge you to be an old-fashioned type of girl. Well, I think that's a pretty good type to be. Hope you don't think I'm being too personal do you?" (p. 66). Male and female discourse is settled when Jim says that he recognized her as she opened the door and as he saw her but still he was not sure. But on the other hand, Laura says that she had recognized him as she heard his name. Laura says that being a male character, Jim gives notion of beauty to Laura not once but thrice. He tells her twice that she is pretty, even "blue" roses is right for her because she is pretty. "It's right for you! - You're - pretty!" (p. 80).

Certain expressions used by Tom carry significance, in particular, in the sixth scene when he talks about movies and Hollywood. He says, due to movies' power, people are unable to move in their real life. "People go to the movies instead of moving!" (p. 55). Again, in sixth scene, Amanda says, "But man proposes and woman accepts the proposal!" (p. 58). In scene 6, when Laura faces Jim, she hurries toward her room like a frightened deer as stated "Then he catches her breath and darts through the portieres

like a frightened deer.” (p. 53). In the opening scene, when Amanda tells Tom about her gentleman callers, she used a metaphor while describing about a financial strong person, a businessman whose name was Fitzhugh. She called this wealthy person the wolf of Wall Street “ as the Wolf of Wall Street!” (p. 9). Tom, to his mother says that he is sure that he knew what she had wished while watching the moon. He says, “ You’ re not a sphinx” (p. 36).

### **Analysis of Discursive Practices**

According to Fairclough’ s (1992) model, discourse practices in socio-cultural perspective are of vital importance. Discourse practices refer to implementation of social practices through discourse which provide a complete summary of the circumstances in which discourses are being constructed. The stage of interpretation focuses participant’ s procedure of text production as well as interpretation. In the beginning of the play Tom delivers a speech. He presented a speech in which he claims the play as “ memory play” . Moreover, he represents himself as a magician. The purpose of mentioning himself as magician may be that he wanted to escape from the memories as magician did, without removing nail. Tom wanted to extricate from his life and memories without damaging the coffin which is his family. He created such discourse in the beginning to show his power and dominance thorough language. “ Yes, I have tricks in my pocket; I have things up my sleeve” . (Williams, 2002, p. 4)

Finance plays an important role in the play. Discourse regarding finance and money is used in a way that creates power and dominance. Amanda in the play was rebuking Tom for going to movies and reading the novels of D.H Lawrence. Tom created a discourse through language and showed his power due to financial support to family: “ House, house! Who pays rent on it, who makes a slave of himself to” (Williams, 2002; p. 20).

Power and dominance come with responsibilities. The more a person is responsible, the more s/he is powerful and dominant. Amanda asked Tom where he was going. He clearly said that he is going to movies. And after the objection of Amanda that he was going to the movies frequently, Tom said, “ I like a lot of adventure” (Williams, 2002, p. 30). The assertive statement of Tom shows that he finds adventure in the movies and he is escaping from the responsibilities of the family.

Judgment is linked with power and dominance when Laura argues “ I judge you to be an old-fashioned type of girl. Well, I think that's a pretty good type to be. Hope you don't think I'm being too personal - do you?” (Williams, 2002, p. 66). Interesting thing is the judgment of Jim about Laura “ to be old fashioned” was correct. It can be said that such discourse suggests that being female, she was not complex and mysterious who cannot be judged. Similarly, in the context of beauty and charm, Amanda creates the discourse which supports patriarchal society. Amanda narrated to Laura that she would marry a businessman. In order to be settled in her life and to marry a nice man, she must be beautiful, charming and attractive, “ Girls that aren't cut out for business careers usually wind up married to some nice man. [Gets up with a spark of revival.] Sister, that's what you'll do, develop charm - and vivacity and - charm! That's all you have to do” (p. 17). Discourse of Amanda shows that if Laura had any shortcoming, she could overcome by adding charm, vivacity and beauty in her personality in order to attract males. Discourse showed that Laura was supposed to be charming and to marry a nice man; else, she would have no life. The phrase which Amanda used “ that’ s all” indicates that discourse which was used is constructed by male and gives power and dominance to males.

In the play, whole discourse shows that it was only Amanda who used tag question. Tag question is used by the speaker to include listener in the conversation and let the listener give his/her opinion (Williams, 2002). Authoritative people use less tag questions and people with less or no authority use them more. Amanda used tag questions. In the discourse of the play using of tag question by Amanda shows that she has less or no authority at all. Even it is clear that Amanda’ s authority is absent in the play; she was there just to follow the authority and decisions of male members of the family. Amanda also complained to Tom that he did not share much about anything. By the time, she was asking about Jim she asked whether he had told him about Laura or not. She used an irony that he was eloquent as an oyster. As oysters do not speak and share similarly, Tom did not share anything to her as he might have thought that it was not necessary to share anything with her. Grammatical questions require lot of information to answer; they cannot be responded as yes/no. In the discourse of the play, all grammatical questions are asked by female characters. The phenomena may be described as Amanda and Laura’ s life filled with questions. They are also seeking the answers of the question as how they will survive in the life without male. Idioms are also used to express knowledge. Knowledge gives power and dominance. In the discourse of the play, idioms are used by male character Jim only, for dance and for telling that his engagement was secret and for this, it may be interpreted that as a male his discourse shows power. (William, 2002)



### Analysis of social practices

In this part, the analysis of text is related to the lexical and syntactic choices chiefly linked with relational values and expression of personal experiences and then with their worldviews of the characters in particular socio-cultural background of the play, *The Glass Menagerie*. In the stage of explanation, the statements of the key characters are closely analyzed to uncover the power, dominance and hidden ideologies in social context. In the play, there is interaction among different characters. They generate certain discourses in certain context to explain how these discourses are socially produced in terms of its production and consumption and how language socially shapes and is socially shaped. *Glass Menagerie* fulfills this criterion successfully by tapping into the very soul of the early 20th century society that Tennessee Williams was born in.

The first sign of patriarchy is observed when Amanda calls Tom for the dinner: " We can't say grace until you come to the table!" (Williams, 2002, p.6). Amanda is depicted as a dramatically distrustful woman in her late years, living with her two children named Laura and Tom in the 1930's US. She always seems to be bent on the reality of advancing the socio-financial standing of her children to a level of paranoia and in doing so she often ends up stressing out her children. Gender based social notions regarding power and dominance exists in the play. Throughout the play, the attitude of both males and females towards stress and confrontation is starkly different when under stress, Amanda or Laura begins to cry or sunk or down (p. 15) showing women to be irrational, and rather emotional. Moreover, by the same time, Amanda putting powder puffs in the bosom of Laura, and declaring her to be " gay deceivers" , paints the idea what society expects women to be; to be judged by beauty or by dint of mind. All of this representation of how the society goes around, reaches its peak when at the end of the play Tom states that he is leaving and upon hearing this, Amanda has nothing correcting to say except the display of reliance or dependence on Tom, the only male member of the house, and a try at pleading to his pity, which she expresses in words: " Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job!" (p. 88). It seems that females are completely dependent on males and the time when males abandon them, they are deserted and destroyed.

### V. CONCLUSION

The current study based a theoretical framework of Faircloughian idea of critical discourse analysis (1997) focusing on the subversion of patriarchy represented in language which is practiced at different places and occasions of the play *The Glass Menagerie*. The study identified the use of language in the social situations. Language used by the author shows patriarchal dominance. It explored that the text is syntactically well-organized emphasizing the patriarchal norms of socio-cultural setup. The choice of the lexemes is also distinct according to situation and background with the relational and expressive values of the characters. Williams is very imposing with the help of metaphors and other devices identifying the relationship between male and female. The vocabulary used in the text is either feminine or masculine that reveals how much space is given to patriarchy. Sex stereotypes are found in almost every discourse to underestimate woman' s role in society. Gender intolerance, a sort of subversion is vivid when Amanda is called as an " ugly witch" , where she is culturally bound to serve her children. Moreover, sexist and oppressive attitudes are visible in male characters. In the same way, subversion of patriarchy is identified at different occasions for diverse reasons. Judgment, responsibility and finance are the factors that subvert male dominance and supremacy.

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