



المجلة العلمية لجامعة الملك فيصل The Scientific Journal of King Faisal University

العلوم الإنسانية والإدارية
Humanities and Management Sciences



Fragile Women in Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie and Marina Carr's The Mai

Fathia Saleh Al-Ghoreibi

Department of European Languages, Faculty of Arts, King Abdul-Aziz University (Females' Branch),
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

نساء هشيات في مسرحيتي تنسي وليميز معرض الكائنات الزجاجة و مارينا كار ذاتمي

فتحية صالح الغربي

قسم اللغات الأوربية، كلية الآداب، جامعة الملك عبد العزيز (فرع البنات)، جدة، السعودية

KEYWORDS

الكلمات المفتاحية

Dysfunctional family, fragile women, illusion, marriage, memory, play, social criticism
عائلات مختلة، نساء هشيات، التوهم، الزواج، مسرحية التذکر، نقد اجتماعي

PUBLISHED

النشر

14/05/2020



<https://doi.org/10.37575/ksjmg/1648>

ABSTRACT

Both Tennessee Williams and Marina Carr are interested in female issues. Throughout his literary career, Williams expresses his feelings towards his mother and sister through the female characters that inhabit his plays. Mostly, they are fragile women in a hostile world devoid of sympathy and care. The Glass Menagerie, through the characters of Amanda Wingfield and her daughter Laura, offers exemplary figures of such characters whose only weapons against a cruel and severe present is retreat into illusionary worlds of beautiful memories or glass figurines. Similarly, Carr's females in The Mai are trapped women who cannot free themselves from imprisoning circumstances and eventually become destructive to themselves and those around them. Both Williams and Carr demonstrate common interest in treating issues such as the dysfunctional family, marriage and illusion. The treatment of the past is stressed in the two plays since both are memory plays.

المخلص

يبدى كلا من تنسي وليميز و مارينا كار اهتماما بقضايا المرأة. فقد عبر وليميز من خلال عمله الأدبي عن مشاعره تجاه أمه وأخته وذلك باستخدام الشخصيات النسوية الموجودة في مسرحياته. بشكل عام هذه الشخصيات عبارة عن نساء هشيات يعشن في عالم عدواني مجرد من العطف والرعاية. تقدم مسرحية معرض الكائنات الزجاجة أمثلة نموذجية لهذه الشخصيات من خلال أمندا ونجفيلد وأبتها لورا. ولا تملك هذه الشخصيات سلاحا تواجه به عالمها القاسي والصارم سوى اللجوء إلى عالم خيالي ممثلا في ذكريات الماضي الجميلة أو معرض التماثيل الزجاجة. وبالمثل فإن النساء في مسرحية كار ذاتمي قد وقعن في شرك ظروفهن الخائفة والتي لا يستطعن تخليص أنفسهن منها. ولذا فقد تحولن مدمرات لأنفسهن ولن حولهن. وقد أبدى كلا من وليميز و كار اهتماما مشتركا يتعلق بمعالجة موضوعات مثل العائلة المختلة والزواج والتوهم. ولقيت طريقة عرض الزمن الماضي اهتماما حيث أن كلا المسرحيتين هما من نوع "مسرحية التذکر".

1. Introduction

While talking about writers who have left a remarkable imprint on theater, in general, and on her literary career, in particular, Marina Carr (1964-) mentions the American playwright Tennessee Williams (1911 - 1983) among her favorites. In her 1998 lecture entitled "Dealing with the Dead", Carr contends that:

[i]n the theater too there are poets... and there are prose writers [...] The ones who interest me are the poets of the theater: Chekhov, Ibsen, Tennessee Williams, Wilde, Beckett and of course the king himself- Mr. Shakespeare. (Carr, 1998: 194, 195)

2. The Problem of the Study

The present paper deals with Williams' play The Glass Menagerie (1944) and Marina Carr's The Mai (1994) in an attempt to show the influence of the former writer on the latter. The choice of the two plays is stimulated by a number of factors. Both plays bring first recognition to their authors, both are memory plays peopled with troubled fragile women. Dysfunctional families and a particular treatment of the past are present in the two plays beside other common concerns that will be highlighted in the paper.

3. Objectives of the Study

The focal piece of the paper is to examine the female figures in

The Glass Menagerie and The Mai; plays written by two dramatists who belong to different backgrounds. The female figures, a vital common denominator, display certain characteristics due to marriage and family circumstances. The paper, therefore, will investigate marriage and family unit as causes of women's condition. The treatment of the past by the two playwrights will be examined.

4. Division of the Study and Methodology

The paper starts by giving a hint at the significance of each play to its author. The importance of female characters to both writers is then stressed. Fragile women who are the natural outcome of dysfunctional families are present in both plays. The study proceeds to examine these fragile women and the dysfunctional families in which they live. Then themes and issues shared in the two plays such as marriage, illusion and the treatment of the past are analyzed. The term "memory play" is then applied to the two plays in an attempt to show how far these plays fit in the category. The methodological approach this study takes is critical, comparative and analytical.

5. The Glass Menagerie and the Mai

The production of the Glass Menagerie marked a new phase in Williams' life in which he "was snatched out of virtual oblivion and thrust into sudden prominence," (Williams, 1978: 15) to which he reacted with a shock that drove him to re-evaluate

life and friends. As seen by critics, "this play transcended regionalism and brought to national attention Williams' rich understanding of the human psyche, his astute observation of character and behavior, and his unique sense of the theater and of storytelling" (Day, 1978: ix). Likewise, *The Mai* is considered the first play to bring Marina Carr to national and international recognition. Critics see the play as "her lightest, most humorous, and, within the limits of its tragedy, her happiest play" (Dhuibhne, 2003: 6)

Throughout his career, Williams has shown much interest in depicting female characters. When asked in an interview about this phenomenon in his plays, he asserts:

They are closer to life, it seems to me. I may be mistaken, it seems to me that men bury themselves in business and money making, competition and that sort of thing; women seem to me organically closer to love which is where life is, where it began, where it is. (Williams, 1986: 278)

At the center of most of his plays, there is a woman through whom Williams conveys his vision; we see Amanda Wingfield and her daughter Laura, Blanche BuBois, Serafina and Maggie, to mention some of his many female figures. Similarly, in Marina Carr's dramatic universe, females play an essential part to the extent that Carr is thought to be "writing 'women plays', and that the female characters should be the primary focus of her plays" (O'Brien, 2003: 201). Seen as the champion of the troubled woman, Carr uses her plays to articulate the female rage of the nation and focus on the crumbling ethos that drastically affect the Irish identity.

The Glass Menagerie is a memory play considered as Williams' most autobiographical and most often performed play. Amanda Wingfield, a faded Southern belle, lives with her daughter Laura; a hypersensitive crippled girl, and her son Tom who is dissatisfied with the dehumanizing environment of their St Louis tenement house. Being deserted by her husband, Amanda fights helplessly to keep her family going on; she insists that her daughter should prepare for secretarial work but when Laura fails her mother, the latter becomes obsessed with finding a husband for her. At the same time, Amanda's fear that Tom might follow in the footsteps of his father makes her nag at him to keep his job at the warehouse since it is the only source of income for the family. The mother's obsession to secure a gentleman caller for Laura urges her to ask Tom to find one at the warehouse. Unfortunately, the attempt proves a failure as the beau turns out to be engaged to another girl. Furious at her son, Amanda hurls insults at him forcing him to leave the house permanently while Laura retreats into her world of illusion.

The Mai records the ups and downs of a midland family that lives in the West of Ireland. It portrays four generations and depicts their lives over two summers; the summer of 1979 when The Mia's cellist husband returns home after five-year philandering absence, and also during the summer of 1980 when the husband- wife relationship has eventually and permanently disintegrated. In an attempt to lure back her estranged husband, Robert, *The Mai* has erected a new house in a beautiful site at Owl Lake. As in *The Glass Menagerie*, we meet here another dysfunctional family where four

generations of Irish women tell the tale of their lives' disappointment and frustration. At the head of this family, there is Grandma Fraochl n, a 100-year-old opium-smoking figure who constantly brags about the happy memory of her long deceased husband and thus unfortunately will set a bad example for her children to follow. The play focuses on Robert's unhappy return as seen through Millie's eyes, the narrator of the play, and offers Carr's comment on the current state of Ireland; a comment in which ancient stories and Irish folklore are mingled with tales of modern life (Talcott, 2006).

In the two plays that are the focal of the study, Williams and Carr treat fragile women who are natural products of dysfunctional families. The lives of the Wingfield family bear parallel with those of *The Mai* in a manner that suggests a sort of kinship between Tennessee Williams and Marina Carr who has expressed great esteem for the former playwright and acknowledged his influence. Amanda, the matriarch of the Wingfield family, is a faded Southern belle from a prominent family, after being deserted by her husband, Amanda lives with her children Laura and Tom. Together with the loss of her husband, there are "decisions made in both the present and the long-ago past" (Sexton, 2007) which all contribute to the family breakdown. Throughout the play, we see Amanda strive to control the lives of her children and is constantly haunted by the fear of their abandonment. In her belief, she loses her husband because she "has no control over that love life" (White, 2007) and consequently she tries to have power over her children and devotes all her life for them.

Unfortunately, much of the children's trouble stems from Amanda's devotion and she bemoans her sad fate: "My devotion has made me a witch and so I make myself hateful to my children" (Williams, 1977: 4, 257). Though Amanda is sincere and has good intentions for her children, she "engages in behavior that alienates her son and sends her daughter spiraling further and further into her dream world" (Sexton, 2007). All through the story, Amanda orders Tom about, giving him instructions about what to eat and drink, when to wake up and what to wear: "You've got ten minutes – don't gulp! Drinking hot liquids makes cancer of the stomach... put cream in" (Williams, 1977: 4, 258). Similarly, the mother is bent on securing a safe future for her daughter and thus enrolls her in a business school. Amanda knows where the school is, when Laura should go out and when she should be back. She even tries to control Laura's use of words: "Laura, I've told you never, never to use that word" (Williams, 1977: 2, 247). The result is that Laura "grows up to fulfill a social role that has [been] predetermined for her by" her mother and is never given the opportunity to "develop into [an] emotionally mature" (Sexton, 2007) adult.

In Marina Carr's play, the focal point is the turbulent marriage of *The Mai* and her wayward husband Robert. Again, we have another dysfunctional family but this time "the dysfunctionality of [the] family [is] over generations" (Andrews, 2008) Like Amanda, *The Mai* is abandoned by her husband. If Mr. Wingfield is in love with long distances, Robert is in love with his cello and philandering. *The Mai* is a forty-year school administrator who desperately struggles to save

her marriage and lure back her philandering husband by building a luxurious house at the banks of Owl Lake. During his absence, The Mai fights hard and nobly to support her four children. When Robert eventually returns home, The Mai receives him passionately thinking that all her troubles have come to an end. However, the reunion does not go well. Being the sole male character in the play, Robert becomes like a caged animal surrounded by various females who never stop meddling in the affairs of his life leading to the breakup of his marriage and the eventual tragedy of The Mai.

It is true that under life's painful pressure, one tends to escape and live in illusions. The correlation between Amanda and The Mai in this respect is obvious. After being deserted by Mr. Wingfield, Amanda finds herself alone in a harsh and merciless world which she has to fight. When life closes in upon her, the only retreat Amanda has is the world of her youth to which she clings for respite. Quite often, she reminisces the happy days of the past in Blue Mountain when she used to have seventeen gentlemen callers in one afternoon, go to balls and rides, and have loads of jonquils around her. In fact, Amanda is a living example of contradiction. Most of the time, she dreams of her vanishing past and relives its happy days to the extent that annoys her son Tom, but when she faces overwhelming odds, she hurls insults at Tom and scolds his inability to be more than a dreamer: "You don't know things anywhere! You live in a dream; you manufacture illusion!" (Williams, 1977: 7, 311).

Since her youth, the heroine in Carr's play, is brought up to believe strongly in a dream that will affect her whole life. In one occasion, The Mai tells her sister Connie:

I used to dream that a dark-haired prince would come across the waves on the wings of an albatross and he'd take me to a beautiful land never seen or heard of before and he'd love me as no girl had ever been loved. (Carr, 1999: 2, 162).

The Mai has spent all her life clinging to this dream that makes her morally dependent on her husband Robert, and turns her, together with her sisters who have similar dreams, into "some eejets" (163) for believing in fairy tales. When The Mai "realizes that Robert will never be the prince she wanted" (Hancock, 2003), she commits suicide.

Grandma Fraochlǒn is even worse than Amanda Wingfield and The Mai in her clinging to dreams and fantasies. Grandma's obsession with the story of her long deceased husband "is in many ways the root cause of her clan's insecurities" (Callaghan, 1997) and the start of all damage in the family. She brags continuously about her passionate marriage to the nine-fingered fisherman and bluntly professes that she felt more love to her late husband than she did for all her children: "I would gladly have hurled all seven of ye down the slope of hell for one more night with the nine-fingered fisherman" (Carr, 1999: 2, 182). It is her "wild stories" that have affected her children and grandchildren, as The Mai once complains:

She filled us with hope – too much hope maybe – in things to come. And Her stories made us long for something extraordinary to happen in our Lives" (Carr, 1999: 2, 163).

It is not only The Mai who is negatively affected by Grandma

Fraochlǒn's stories, but her sisters Beck and Connie blame her as well for making them "harbor unrealistic expectations" (Hancock, 2003) and thus filling their lives with frustration and disappointment. Likewise, Millie, The Mai's daughter, is repeating the cycle of her predecessors. Being the mother of an illegitimate five-year-old son, Millie assumes Grandma Fraochlǒn's function and fills her son's head with unrealistic stories about his father.

If Grandma Fraochlǒn has a bad influence on her daughters and granddaughters, Amanda Wingfield exerts a similar influence on her "fragile menagerie composed of two children" (Presley, 1990: 24): Laura and Tom. Much of Laura's dilemma stems from a slight physical disability enlarged and exaggerated to an extent that affects her whole being. Early in her life, Laura "never ha[s] much luck at – making friends" due to being self-conscious over having "to go clumping all the way up the aisle" with brace on her leg and "with everyone watching" (Williams, 1977: 7, 295, 294). Her sensitivity and shyness grow out of control and eventually lead her to withdraw into a world of glass figurines, delicate and fragile like herself. After dropping out of high school, her mother enrolls her in a business college to prepare her for a career, but in the middle of her speed test, "she broke down completely – was sick at the stomach and almost had to be carried into the wash-room!" (Williams, 1977: 2, 243). Being demanding and insensitive to her daughter's condition and need, Amanda "has never paused to find out who her daughter really is, nor what her aspirations might be, nor has she even considered modes of living other than her own" (Debuscher, 1997).

In a sense, Laura's self-consciousness is caused by her mother's treatment when she constantly "uses Laura's faults to exemplify her own attributes" (Calhoun, 2009). By turning her daughter into a mirror, the mother flatters her self-image, brags about her own appearance and stresses Laura's limitations. While getting ready to receive the gentleman caller, Amanda places Laura in front of the mirror and says, "Now look at yourself, young lady. This is the prettiest you will ever be! I've got to fix myself now! You're going to be surprised by your mother's appearance!" (Williams, 1977: 6, 275). Consequently, Laura withdraws from society and "creates a more flattering self-image, one of delicacy, and thus identifies with her glass figures" (Calhoun, 2009).

During her meeting with Jim O'Connor who boasts about his skill to "analyze people better than doctors" (Williams, 1977: 7, 298), Laura's problem is brought under focus. Jim explains to her: "Inferiority complex! Know what this is? That's what they call it when someone low-rates himself!" (Williams, 1977: 7, 298). Thus, Laura's imagination which has inflated her defect together with Amanda's incessant reference about her inability to be like her mother in her youth all contribute to Laura's fragility and her sense of being different. In fact, Laura is physically and emotionally different, and "like the lovely but easily broken creatures of her glass menagerie, seems physically unfit for, or unadapted to, an earthly life" (Cardullo, 2010).

It has been suggested that Laura represents "the kind of person for whom the Romantics of the early nineteenth century felt

increasing sympathy" (Cardullo, 2010). Being a fragile and delicate creature who lives in a materialistic and industrial society, Laura tries to isolate herself from this heartless depersonalized environment and seeks refuge in art and music represented through "the beauty of her glass menagerie and the records she plays on her victrola" (Cardullo, 2010). When she drops out of business school, Laura spends her time "in the art museum and the bird houses at the zoo...[and] in the Jewel-box, that big glass-house where they raise tropical flowers" (Williams, 1977: 2, 244). Thus, like a romantic, Laura develops a liking for nature and art, her only retreat against a harsh meaningless world. Even the characters to whom Laura is drawn to are, to certain degrees, romantic figures. First, Tom, Laura's brother, is a potential poet and is nicknamed Shakespeare "one of the heroes of the Romantic movement" (Cardullo, 2010). Then, there is Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller to whom Laura had once unrequited love since high school because he used to sing beautifully the baritone lead.

Amanda Wingfield follows the same destructive manner with her son Tom by forcing him to keep his hateful job at the warehouse since he is the breadwinner of the family: "What right have you got to jeopardize your job? Jeopardize the security of us all?" (Williams, 1977: 3, 251). Despite Tom's importance for the family and his right to be treated in a better way, Amanda deals with him as a little boy showing him how to eat and drink, what to read, and encroaching upon his privacy to the extent that makes Tom complain: "I've got nothing, no single thing -... In my life here that I can call my OWN!" (Williams, 1977: 3, 250). Amanda's behavior with her children is caused by her fear of being abandoned. It is this fear that drives her to engage "in destructive rituals, primarily neurotic nagging" in order to control her children, and by doing so, she displays her unwillingness "to allow her children to become adults" (Debuscher, 1997). Unfortunately, this fear of abandonment is responsible for Tom's going away and Laura's withdrawal into her world of fantasy.

The parent's responsibility for obstructing the normal growth of children found in *The Glass Menagerie* is also echoed in *The Mai* when Julie, the daughter of Grandma Fraochlón, expresses her resentment to her mother's stories which kill her sister Ellen and "reduce her to insignificance" (Hancock, 2003). Julie advises *The Mai* to beware the bad influence of Grandma and asks her to learn a lesson from her condition when she explains:

I'm seventy-five years of age, Mai, and I'm still not over my childhood. It's not fair they should teach us desperation so young or if they do they should never mention hope. (Carr, 1999: 1, 146)

The Glass Menagerie and *The Mai* treat certain common issues that concern family, marriage, man's illusion and retreat to the past. Like many of his Southern contemporaries, Williams explores "the breakdown of historic families during a time of social and cultural change" (Presley, 1990: 5) The family becomes focal in most of Williams' plays. Due to unsatisfactory man-woman relationship, Williams presents "a highly inoperable family situation" (Blades, 1971: 98). The father figure in *The Glass Menagerie* has completely deserted

his wife and children. All that remains of him is "this larger-than-life-size photograph over the mantle" (Williams, 1977: 1, 235). The mother, Amanda, is possessed by the fear of abandonment and by the idea that Tom, her son, will be like his father: "When I see you taking after his ways! Staying out late – and – well, you had been drinking the night you were in that- terrifying condition!" (Williams, 1977: 4, 259). In Amanda's opinion, alcoholic man is the worst kind of man a woman might be plagued with.

In this single-parent dysfunctional family, Tom is "forced to assume the responsibilities his father abandoned sixteen years ago" (Single, 1999) and he is assigned the role of "the parentified-child"; a role which he detests and tries to escape through writing poetry and going to the movies every night until, at the end of the play, he actually escapes and follows in his father's footsteps in order to preserve his identity and achieve his dreams. However, Tom's failure to "sacrifice himself for the family" is made a fault "punishable by eternal guilt" (Debuscher, 1997). Amanda, on the other hand, "becomes the rejected parent" who tries to make up for the damage this rejection caused her by retreating to her past "that is significantly populated by her younger self and her seventeen gentlemen callers" Finally, Laura performs the role of the "identified patient" whose little physical defect is exaggerated and "developed into a serious problem" (Single, 1999). However, she finds solace in her glass collection and dated victrola recordings, and she becomes totally absorbed in her fantasy. All through the play, Laura is seen as the individual whose "growth is forever arrested, as with the delicate creatures in her glass collection, she remains frozen in time" (Single, 1999)

Quite often, Marina Carr populates her plays "with mother figures, betrayed by their men" (McDonald, 2002). Like Williams, Carr treats in *The Mai* a single parent family imploded under grief and is inevitably moving towards destruction while at the same time, she explores, as she does in her other plays, the issue of women who reject the expectations of motherhood. The female characters in *The Mai* have been daughters to mothers with whom they have unhealthy relations. Grandma Fraochlón recounts her sad experience with her own mother:

I came into the world without a father-born to an absolute nut. . . . And she wouldn't let me call her Mother, no, The Duchess, that's what I had to call her. . . . And The Duchess told me me father was the Sultan of Spain and . . . in the summer he was goin' to come in a yacht and take us away to his palace in Spain. . . . [And] I believed her and watched on the cliffs every day for the Sultan of Spain. And at the end of every summer the Sultan would not have arrived and at the end of every summer The Duchess'd say, it must've been next summer he meant. . . . I don't know, but I'm not over the dismantlin' of that dream yet (Carr, 1999: 2, 169).

Since *The Duchess* had Grandma Fraochlón out of wedlock, she tried to compensate for the social stigma attached to her daughter by filling the child's head with fantastic stories about her father. Under the influence of this unhappy memory, Grandma forces her daughter Ellen "into a loveless marriage"

to save her from reliving "through the same scandal" and picks up the habit of telling stories about her husband in a way that cripples the ability of her daughters and granddaughters "to raise their children healthfully or to cope with the problems in their own lives" (Hancock, 2003) She is quite conscious of the fact that she is a bad mother when she confesses: " I know he was a useless father, Julie, I know, and I was a useless mother. It's the way we were made" and she always boasts about being one of those who put their lover first: " I would gladly have hurled all seven of ye down the slopes of hell for one night more with the nine-fingered fisherman and may I rot eternally for such unmotherly feelin" (Carr, 1999, 2, 182). That is why her daughter Julie resents her because of the bad influence she has on them and wishes to "mow [her] down" (Carr, 1999, 1, 139) for being responsible for Ellen' death.

The Mai too repeats a story similar to that of Grandma. She has an absent husband who has left her for five years to chase women and music. Despite her beauty and various talents, The Mai fails to keep her husband and manages to build an exquisite house on Owl Lake in a desperate hope to lure back her estranged husband. Her daughter Millie "loathes her ... patient tolerance of her philandering husband" (McDonald, 2002) and quite often urges her to leave him. But the bond between The Mai and Robert is strong and she cannot explain the nature of their relation:

Millie, I don't think anyone will ever understand, not you, not my family, not even Robert, no one will ever understand how completely and utterly Robert is mine and I am his, no one- People think I've no pride, no dignity, to stay in a situation like this, but I can't think of one reason for going on without him. (Carr, 1999: 2, 185)

Unfortunately, Robert's homecoming is unhappy and his relation with The Mai deteriorates beyond repair especially after the couple attends a big local ball where the husband leaves his wife in the middle of the dance to go with his mistress. Ironically after realizing that her marriage is perpetually destroyed and that she cannot live without Robert, The Mai commits suicide by drowning herself in the lake. The Mai's love and care for her husband are consuming and cause her to be a little bit negligent of her children. Millie alludes to this idea when she explains: "None of The Mai and Robert's children are very strong. We teeter along the fringe of the world with halting gait, reeking of Owl Lake at every turn" (Carr, 1999: 2, 184).

Millie herself appears to be "the next generation who is being handed on this weird legacy of neglect" (Mcbride, 2012). Similar to her predecessors, Millie has a son out of wedlock. Due to the child' s lack of a father figure to identify with, Millie, like The Duchess, fills the baby's head with remarkable stories about his father who actually does not answer Millie's letter in which she asks him to acknowledge paternity. It is clear that the female members of The Mai's family do what Grandma Fraochlón describes: " we can't help repeatin'... we repeat and repeat, the orchestration maybe different but the tune is always the same" (Carr, 1999: 1, 123). It is hereditary and these women "repeat the same mistakes over and over again, in hopes of a different outcome each time" (Chang, 2010)

without learning their lesson and thus deserve to be labeled "that house of proud mad women" (Carr,1999: 2, 170).

A closely related theme to the family issue is the institution of marriage. Both Williams and Carr give considerable attention to marriage in their plays. In view of what has been mentioned about the dysfunctional family in Williams' and Carr's plays, it is consistent that such a family is a natural product of an unhappy union. In Amanda Wingfield's opinion, marriage is the act of trapping a man. She explains to her daughter Laura that if a girl does not have a " pretty face and a graceful figure" and is perfect at "the art of conversation" (Williams, 1977: 1, 237, 238), she will end up as an "old maid". The poor daughter is aghast since her mother with all her fine qualities "could not hold her man" then how "is [she] supposed to have any hope of trapping and holding a man?" (Single,1999). Unfortunately, Amanda's marriage turns to be a trap for her. Despite his impressive appearance, Mr. Wingfield is not a family man. In one stage direction, Williams refers to him as " the faithless Mr. Wingfield" (Williams, 1977: 3, 250) who has become alcoholic, has relinquished any responsibility for his family and eventually has deserted them for good. Amanda is left with the burden of caring for her children: "I've had to put up a solitary battle all these years" (Williams, 1977: 4, 258) and follows every possible means to hold her family together, " all that we have to cling to is – each other" (Williams, 1977: 4, 258). But due to her false values and conceptions, she brings about the family tragedy. Her continuous nagging at Tom to keep his job and remain the bread winner of the family speeds up his flight and desertion of his family. Laura's problem, on the other hand, is aggravated. First when Amanda fails to secure a business career for Laura, she becomes obsessed with the idea of finding her a husband. She explains to Laura after discovering her deception:

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!- stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room... little birdlike women without any nest- eating the crust of humility all their life! (Williams, 1977: 2, 245)

But instead of saving her daughter from this depressing future, Amanda drives her more and more to retreat into her world of glass figurine of which she has become one.

The idea of marriage as a trap is also viewed in The Mai. While Grandma Fraochlón boasts of being "one of them lucky few" who was blessed with a husband, the nine-fingered fisherman, with whom she was able to " partake of that most rare and sublime love", we find out that this husband has abandoned her "penniless with seven offspring" (Carr, 1999: 1, 143). Depressed and disappointed, Grandma tried several times to commit suicide as her daughter Julie recounts the occasion:

I dragged her from the cliffs, goin' to throw herself in, howlin' she couldn't live without the nine-fingered fisherman, opiumed up to the eye ball. She was so unhappy, Mai, and she made our lives hell. (Carr, 1999: 1, 145).

As the play unfolds, we see Grandma's "descendants, on stage and off, have variously suffered in the shadows of her single-

minded, sex-driven life" (Klein, 1996). Due to Grandma's fairy tales about her passionate marriage, Beck, Connie and The Mai harbor unrealistic thoughts about marriage which only cause them disappointment and heartbreaks. Even Ellen, The Mai's mother, did not have a better fate. Although she was brilliant and outstanding, Grandma forced her to marry the father of her child who "wasn't Ellen's steam at all" and thus "he left her on Fraochl n to rot" (Carr, 1999: 1, 145). If Amanda Wingfield believes that marriage is the true vocation for a woman with no career, Grandma teaches her daughters and granddaughters "through story that they should privilege marriage over academics, over independence, and over art". The consequence is that they find through experience that "love- whether it is disastrous (Ellen, The Mai and Millie), elusive (Beck), mundane (Connie), or wonderful (Grandma Fraochl n)- never results in happiness" (Hancock, 2003).

Early in The Mai which opens with Robert's homecoming, Millie, as a narrator, steps forward and informs the audience that Robert's marriage to The Mai is a sham and the rest of the play is spent unmasking this sham with the help of the family members who do their best to wake The Mai of her pleasant dream and make her realize that Robert's return is only temporary. But she only sees one truth: " He's my husband and he's back and I love him" (Carr, 1999: 1,132). The Mai is so much infected by Grandma's fantastic ideas, and "after years of waiting for Robert and hoping for a better life", she realizes "that her better life will never come" and at the same time "she cannot move on and – be all right either" (Campos, 2008). When her sisters try to comfort her and lessen her anxiety, she confesses: "I'm on the downward slope I'm not drunk! I'm trapped" (Carr, 1999: 2, 162). When The Mai does not find a way out of her trapped life, she commits suicide.

Beck and Connie, the sisters of The Mai have not got a better luck. All the three sisters have "sought at least on some level, their own form of happiness through independence and/or education, but got lost somewhere along the way" (Johnson, 2007). Since failure is the lot of these women, they yearn to "the old days ... way back before [they] discovered men" (Carr, 1999: 2, 159). Similarly, Millie tries to avoid repeating the cycle of her predecessors, but she, as in Greek tragedy, meets the same destiny of these women; the destiny of "meeting a man, having his child and then being abandoned in different ways" (Johnson, 2007).

A thematic feature shared in The Glass Menagerie and The Mai is dealing with memories or the past. In The Glass Menagerie, Williams offers personal and public versions of the past. Amanda Wingfield reveals her attitude to the past when she explains to Tom how important the past is and how it affects the present and the future. She contends:

You are the only young man that I know of who ignores the fact that the future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns into everlasting regret if you don't plan for it! (Williams, 1977: 5, 269).

Williams presents the past as "a place" to which the characters "must flee"; it is their "haven from the present" (Adam, 1991: 3). That is why Amanda not only recalls the past but also relives it since she " wasn't prepared for what the future

brought [her]" (Williams, 1977: 6, 285). Clinging frantically to the illusionary world of her youth, Amanda tires her children all the time with her fruitless speech about the vanishing past: "Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living! Gone completely!" (Williams, 1977: 6, 285).

As a narrator, Tom becomes like his mother haunted by memories of the past. Everything around him reminds him of his betrayal of his sister Laura, whom he leaves trapped in the past, but he "atones for his guilt through the faithful perpetual return, in his memory, to crucial scenes of that past" (Adam, 1991: 116). Both Amanda and Tom are affected by the past which "constitutes not only the source of their fate but is also that already familiar, if somewhat haunting, territory where they think they can escape from a threatening present and an uncertain future" (Adam, 1991: 101). It should be noted that Amanda and Tom are not the only persons affected by the reminiscence of the past. In one of his monologues, Tom comments on the world of his time when he describes the neighborhood with its Paradise Dance Hall which becomes a retreat for couples who want to forget for a few hours their ugly present lives. Patrons who frequent the dance hall are like the Wingfields in their refusal to face reality and preference to live in illusions of the past.

In The Mai, the conflict between "the imperfect present and unattainable dream-past" (O'Brien, 2003: 203) is powerfully presented through Grandma Fraochl n who is almost totally preoccupied with the happy memories of her passionate marriage to the nine-fingered fisherman. The other characters are also haunted by their past. After Robert's homecoming, Grandma confronts him with the reason of his return: "I only think you came back because ya couldn't find anythin' better elsewhere and you'll be gone as soon as ya think you've found somethin' better-... People don't change, Robert, they don't change at all" (Carr,1999: 1, 122). Grandma is certain that Robert is repeating what his father did with his mother and thus she "sees no redeeming power against the inevitability of the past" (Jonson, 2007). Repetition of the past becomes the doom of the characters in The Mai especially the women as they cannot remember the mistakes of the past. Starting with The Duchess down to Millie, we see the females of The Mai repeat history and continue the tradition of creating stories to tell their children. They go on living with the hope that "we will have the best of lives" (Carr, 1999: 1, 110).

It is appropriate at this stage to throw some light on the term "memory play" since both The Glass Menagerie and The Mai are considered memory plays. The term refers to the kind of play in which the action moves through the narration of a certain character's memory about the events. This character "or narrator, was present and an active participant of the events seen in the play and is usually the only one remaining to tell the tale" (Maccionnaith, 2008). In his Production Notes, Williams classifies The Glass Menagerie as a "memory play" seen through the eyes of its narrator, Tom Wingfield, who tells the audience in his opening speech that he turns back time to " that quaint period, the thirties, when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind" (Williams, 1977: 1, 234). That period is the Great Depression and the play

"provides insight into the ways different members of the family cope with the forces of change" (Presley, 1990: 10) imposed by that economical calamity. The scenes of the play give the audience information about the life of the Wingfield family at a crucial stage and since Tom is the person who remembers these scenes, he acts a double role; he is the narrator and at the same time an actual participant in the events. Tom's memories of the past follow him as he journeys through life and he feels "pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise" (Williams, 1977: 7, 313).

If Tom Wingfield cannot get rid of his past memories, Marina Carr is considered "a writer haunted by memories she could not possibly possess, but they seem determined to possess her" (McGuinness, 1996: ix). Her play *The Mai* is set in the past and the dead seems to come "to life in the stories or talk of the living and the past appears on stage as real as the present" (Funahashi, 2003). The action centers around two periods when Robert returns home and when he leaves his family for good a year later. The events of the play are seen through the memory of Millie, the narrator who straddles both the past and her present narration. Like Tom Wingfield, Millie is present and an active participant in the events of the play; she is shown when she was sixteen and later after her mother's death when she is thirty.

In the first monologue in *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom, as a narrator, declares:

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. (Williams, 1977: 1, 234).

Tom invites the audience into his memory that is inhabited by people of his past. Since the play is memory, Tom uses a lot of "poetic license" (Williams, 1977: 1, 233) in narrating various events of his family life and offers his comment about certain truths in the guise of illusion. This structure throws an air of delicacy over the play turning it into a piece of poetry "set in playwriting form" and "creates a unity of fragility that never ceases to awe audiences" (Loewenberg et al., 1999).

The structure of *The Mai* requires Millie to remain on stage throughout most of the play to tell her story to the audience as a narrator, and to invite them to share her experience. This narrative technique which Carr adopts enables the narrator to introduce and link various episodes as well as telling "several short anecdotes or stories, as do some of the other characters, especially Grandma Fraochlòin" (Dhuibne, 2003: 68-9). These stories serve the purpose of "developing our understanding of the theme" as well as enhancing "the texture of the play" and giving it "a sparkling originality and a liveliness" (Dhuibne, 2003: 72).

6. Conclusion

A close investigation of Williams' female characters that appear in his plays reveals a combination of sympathetic and grotesque figures who mostly echo his mother and sister, that

are represented directly in *The Glass Menagerie*. The play is considered a product of Williams' own experience and it echoes a certain period of the author's life. Amanda and Laura present many of the traits of his mother and sister respectively. Tom's struggles and aspirations reflect those of Williams throughout his literary career. However, the play never loses its appeal to audiences and this is seen in the numerous revivals the play has ever since it was produced. One is tempted to agree with the opinion that the play "transforms autobiography into lucid, objective art" (qtd in Falk, 1988) through which Williams conveys his view "that there is a price for Amanda's brand of optimism". Williams warns the audience against living in the wrong dreams for it "can be dangerous" and "optimism can rot. Hope degenerates to delusion and bitterness. Denial of reality ultimately is a death factor like denial of air" (Sonnenschein, May 2005).

If the females in *The Glass Menagerie* are vulnerable through living in dreams and illusions, Carr's women do not fare well. Carr is interested in depicting trapped women who "seem unable to overcome or escape their circumstances". This inability results "in chaos and carnage, both for themselves and for those around them" (Campos, 2008). All of the women in *The Mai* go through this experience; *The Mai* drowns herself after she fails to win back Robert, the other women of the family are equally self-destructive and turn to be "proud mad women" due to the abandonment of their men and a haunting past they can never resist.

Bio

Fathia Saleh Al-Ghoreibi

Department of European Languages, Faculty of Arts, King Abul-Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 00966506665621, falthoraibi@kau.edu.sa

Fathia Alghoreibi is Associate Professor of English Literature. She has an MA in drama and a PhD in Comparative Literature (English and Arabic drama). She has taught different undergraduate courses as well as post graduate courses. She has supervised MA theses and examined MA candidates. She has also refereed post-doctoral research.

References

- Adam, J. (1991). *Versions of Heroism in Modern American Drama*. NY, NY: St Martin's Press.
- Andrews, D. B. (2008). *'The Mai' Offers an Irish Family to Laugh at and Cry Over*. Available at: www.milforddailynews.com/arts/x41089374 (accessed on 16/7/2012)
- Blades, L. T. (1971). *Williams, Miller and Albee: A Comparative Study*. PhD Thesis, St Louis University, Missouri, U.S.A.
- Calhoun, A. (2009). *The Importance of Mirrors and Glass in the Glass Menagerie*. Available at: <http://voices.yahoo.com/the-importance-mirrors-glass-glass-menagerie-3910460.html> (accessed on 22/6/2010)
- Callaghan, D. (1997). *The Mai*. Available at:

- http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theatre_journal/summary/v049/49.3pr_carr.html (accessed on 15/7/2012)
- Campos, H. J. (2008). *Marina Carr's Hauntings: Liminality and the Addictive Society on and off Stage*. Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University. Provo, U.S.A. Available at: <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ETD/id/1455ju7za> (accessed on 28/9/2011)
- Cardullo, R. J. (2010). *Liebestod, Romanticism, and Poetry in the Glass Menagerie*. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/vanq20/23/3>. Pdf (accessed on 29/9/2011)
- Carr, M. (1998). Dealing with the dead. *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies*, 28(1), 190–96.
- Carr, M. (1999). *Marina Carr Plays One: Low in the Dark, The Mai, Portia Coughlan, By the Bog of Cats...* London: Faber and Faber.
- Chang, H. (2010). *The Mai Mothers and Daughters Do Damage in a Gripping Play*. Available at: <http://www2.citypaper.com/story.asp?id=20169> (accessed on 16/7/2012)
- Day, R. C. (1978). 'Introduction'. In: C. R. Day, and B. Woods (eds.) *Where I Live: Selected Essays*. NY, NY: New Directions.
- Debusscher, G. (1997). *Tennessee Williams's Dramatic Charade Secrets and Lies in the Glass Menagerie*. Available at: <http://www.tennesseewilliamsstudies.org/archives/2000/4debusscher.pdf> (accessed on 5/6/2010)
- Dhuibhne, E. N. (2003). 'Playing the story narrative techniques in the Mai'. In: C. Leeney, and A. McMullan (eds.) *The Theater of Marina Carr: 'Before Rules Was Made'*. Kildare: Carysfort Press.
- Falk, S. (1988). 'The southern gentlewoman'. In: *Modern Critical Interpretations: Tennessee Williams' the Glass Menagerie*. Bloom, H. (ed) [Questia Version]. Available at: questia.com (accessed on 25/11/2011)
- Funahashi, M. (2003). *Theater of Possession a Discussion of Marina Carr's the Mai and the Theater of Legend Making*. Available at: <http://dspace.wul.waseda.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2065/26757/1/021.pdf> (accessed on 5/6/2010)
- Hancock, B. (2003). *The House of Proud Mad Women Diseased Legacy and Mythmaking in Marina Carr's the Mai*. Available at: <http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/JSW/number25/hancock.html> (accessed on 15/7/2012)
- Johnson, A. R. (2007). *Strangers in the Room: Illuminating Female Identity through Irish Drama*. MA Thesis, Indiana University, Indianapolis, U. S. A. Available at: <https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/bitstream/handle/1805/918/Johnson.thesis.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 10/7/2012)
- Klein, A. (1996). *Passion's Flash Point*. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/11/17/nyregion/passion-s-flash-point.html> (accessed on 16/7/2012)
- Loewenberg, S., Gutwillig, S. and Al-Aqeel, T. (1999). *The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams: Teacher's Study Guide*. Available at: <http://www.latw.org/EDU-latw/aliveandaloud/images/glass.pdf> (accessed on 9/7/2010)
- Maccionnaith, E. M. (2008). *Resurrections: The Use of Folklore Themes and Motifs in Marina Carr's Works*. PhD Thesis, University of Oregon, Eugene, U. S. A. Available at: https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/7490/Eric-Michael_MacCionnaith_doctoral_thesis_winter2008.pdf?sequence=1 (accessed on 7/7/2012)
- Mcbride, C. (2012). *The Mai, and 'a Fate You Can't Escape*. Available at: <http://www.advertiser.ie/galway/article/54128/the-mai-and-a-fate-you-cant-escape> (accessed on 7/9/2012)
- McDonald, M. (2002). *Marina Carr's Ariel*. Available at: http://www.didaskalia.net/reviews/2002_10_02_01.html (accessed on 16/9/2012)
- McGuinness, F. (1996). *The Dazzling Dark New Irish Plays*. London: Faber and Faber.
- O'Brien, M. (2003). 'Always the best man, never the groom the role of the fantasy male in Marina Carr's plays'. In: C. Leeney, and A. McMullan (eds.) *The Theater of Marina Carr: 'before rules was made'*. Kildare: Carysfort Press.
- Presley, D. E. (1990). *The Glass Menagerie an American Memory*. Poston: Twayne Publishers.
- Sexton, T. (2007). *Tennessee Williams and the Glass Menagerie the Dark Side of the American Family*. Available at: <http://voices.yahoo.com/tennessee-williams-glass-menagerie-d...> (accessed on 16/9/2012)
- Single, L. L. (1999). *Flying the Jolly Roger Images of Escape and Selfhood in Tennessee Williams' the Glass Menagerie*. Available at: <http://tennesseewilliamsstudies.org/archives/1999/5single.pdf> (accessed on 7/4/2010)
- Sonnenschein, E. (2005). *Review on the Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams*. Available at: <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/166797689> (accessed on 5/6/2010)
- Talcott, C. (2006). *Mai the Emerald Isle Now*. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/03/16/AR2006031600569.html> (accessed on 3/9/2012)
- White, L. (2007). *Piano Lesson and Glass Menagerie*. Available at: <http://voices.yahoo.com/piano-lesson-glass-menagerie-415460.html> (accessed on 3/9/2012)
- Williams, T. (1977). *The Glass Menagerie Three Plays*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Williams, T. (1978). *Where I Live Selected Essays*. C. R. Day, and B. Woods (eds.) NY, NY: New Directions.
- Williams, T. (1986). *Conversations with Williams*. Jackson Ms: UP of Mississippi.