

## PREFACE

Tennessee Williams, an extremely prolific playwright of his time, presented the American Theatre with a new play almost each year since his first Broadway success. Detailed studies of Tennessee Williams's early plays, his successes and failures have already been related to us. Even, the late plays (of course, a few) right from Period of Adjustment (1960), The Night of the Iguana (1961) to The Red Devil Battery Sign (1975) and Clothes for a Summer Hotel (1980) have been brilliantly dealt with by Foster Hirsch and a few scholars of eminence. But, none of any early work delves deep into the comparative aspects of the early and the late plays, from any specific angle (e.g. Black/Non-Black).

Based on an interview of Tennessee Williams,<sup>1</sup> I feel tempted to appellate his early plays as "Black" plays and the late plays as "Non-Black" plays. But mere labelling amounts to nothing unless clear definition of the same is marked out. Williams in the same interview does injustice to the terms stating the characteristics of "Black" and "Non-Black" plays merely as "destructive impulses" and "quieter elements of existence" respectively. Again the plays fall in a maze of confused nomenclature. In this dissertation, I have divided the plays into two halves, the plays written before 1960 (Black plays) and the plays written after 1960 (Non-Black plays). Of course, such a division derives its relevance from the above-mentioned interview. It might have been a pedestrian task if I had to take up one play at a time and comment on either "Black" or "Non-Black" elements contained in them. Instead I have taken the "elements" to be the yardstick of judgement and the plays automatically have been analysed, one after another.

Williams had been more interested in the "inner world" of a man than the society he had been placed in. "Most of his work, however, is free of so-called 'social content'. Tennessee Williams was to become the spokesman for the repressed individual rather than for the oppressed class".<sup>2</sup> Naturally, I have been interested in the "inner world" of the

playwright, the causes behind the change in attitude in 1960, and, I have accounted some causes — personal and professional, cultural and societal.

However, what are the “Black” and the “Non-Black” plays, according to the playwright ? “Sex”, “violence”, (rape, Cannibalism, Castration), “oppressor - oppressed motif”, “somasochism”, “lunacy”, “frustration”, “neurotic proclivity”, “awareness of the corrupt world”, “fear of loneliness”, “sense of insecurity”, “faithlessness”, “escapist penchant”, above all, a “negative view of life” are headed under “Black elements”, i.e. “destructive impulses”. The “quieter elements of existence” as “mirth”, “search for hope”, “acceptance of life” or “comeback attitude to life”, “optimism”, “practicality”, “realistic view of life”, “togetherness”, “sincere expression of man’s reaching towards perfection” are labelled as “Non-Black” elements.

While comparing the “Black” with the “Non-Black” plays, apart from the “Black” elements and the “Non-Black” elements, the point of theatricalism, too, figure prominently. The remarkable shift of emphasis in theatricalism (including use of “light” and “sound”) and language has been given a dekko into. As for example, in The Glass Menagerie, the “signifier” is the glow of light that centres upon the depressed countenance of Laura, while in The Two Character Play, the light gets focussed upon Felice’s and Clare’s faces, leaving their bodies in stygian darkness. Here the “signified” are the “Black” elements - “confusion of existence”, and “loneliness”. In the conclusion of the dissertation, the search for “a New Self” by the playwright finds consummation. Does he succeed to elevate the “old self” into a better, improved “New Self” or does the quest end up in a rehash of the old one? For that, a dabbling into philosophical definition of “self” as well as loss of self in modern literature and art has been resorted to.

The dissertation comprises the following six chapters :

Chapter I (The World of Tennessee Williams : A Journey) explores Tennessee

Williams, the man. Autobiographical snatches in some of his plays are not lost sight of. For example, which living character Laura has been modelled upon, or who has served as an original for Amanda Wingfield's husband has also been mentioned. An effort has been made to judge the influences of D.H. Lawrence, Hart Crane, Anton Chekhov, August Strindberg and a few others on Tennessee Williams.

Chapter II (Angel in Armour : A Study of the Black Plays), has spelt out the "Black" elements in different early plays written before 1960. The plays included in this study are : The Glass Menagerie (1945), A Street Car Named Desire (1947), Summer and Smoke (1948), The Rose Tattoo (1950), Camino Real (1953), Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955), Orpheus Descending (1957), Suddenly Last Summer (1958) and Sweet Bird of Youth (1959). The "Black" elements are written large on these plays.

Chapter III (The Sea Change : An Indepth Probe) dives deep into the soul of the playwright. The reasons behind the change in the dramatist's attitude towards life have been traced here. Why on earth does the playwright think of altering his notions about the plays themselves? The ground itself is refurnished, the selected views he cherished, undergo a reshuffle. We find plays of a different man (after 1960), though the shadows of the past are still lambent. Chapter IV (Quem Quæritis: An evaluation of Non-Black Plays) considers some selected "late" plays of Tennessee Williams. The points like definition of the "Non-Black" the impact of the Manichæan principle and judgement of the plays in the light of "Non-Black" elements have surfaced in this chapter. The chosen late plays are : - Period of Adjustment (1960), The Night of the Iguana ((1961), The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore (1963), Kingdom of Earth (1968), The Two-Character Play (1975), A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur (1979), and some plays from Dragon Country (1970). Perhaps all the late plays have not received elaborate analyses. But they have been discussed in keeping with the criteria of the "Non-Black" plays. The style of analysis remains the same as that in Chapter II.

In Chapter V (A Janus-Faced Personality unmasked : A comparison of the Black with the Non-Black plays) a comparative study of the early and the late plays serves as the staple. In Section I, the points that serve to be the criteria of comparison and contrast have been sequenced. In section II, comparison and contrast entail rigorous consideration of "Black" and "Non-Black" elements. The similarities and dissimilarities too, are based upon the concept of "Black" and "Non-Black" stigmata. The parallels drawn between The Glass Menagerie (Black Play) and The Two Character Play (Non-Black Play) and between Camino Real (Black Play) and The Red Devil Battery Sign (Non-Black play) have been compared and contrasted according to selected measures of judgement. The nuances in language, mood and expressions have also been taken note of.

Chapter VI (One Word More : A Quest for a New self) is an attempt to define "self" philosophically (Section I), and mull over a new self if ever evolved, in the process of journey from the "Black" to the "Non-Black". An interesting study of different responses of the characters of "Black" and "Non-Black" plays to similar situations makes Section II interesting. The acceptance or failure of the artist by the audience and theatre-reviewers, and emergence of a new self, if any, serve as staple of another prudent subsection (Section III), quite germane to the issue. MLA HANDBOOK FOR WRITERS OF RESEARCH PAPERS by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert (3rd edition) has been followed while preparing this dissertation.

Thus the dissertation winds up. All that I have tried to do in this dissertation, is to preserve some sort of balance between biography, exploration of the back-ground, the definition of the appellations "Black" and "Non-Black", judgement of the playwright's soul-searching effort to define "New Self" and reasoning for any transformation of old self whatsoever and an overall comparative study of the "Black" and the "Non-Black" plays. There is, of course, neither "sensational discovery", nor any "definitive solution". But I rarely do hesitate to express what my own heart and intellect speak, even if it deviates slightly from

the received authoritative point of view. Highlighting a new and interesting vista of information regarding Tennessee Williams is my sole aim in this work.

### WORKS CITED

1. Wenning, T.H : "Unbeastly Williams", Newsweek Vol.55, No. 26, June 27, 1960, p.96.
2. Tischler, Nancy M. : Tennessee Williams : Rebellious Puritan, The Citadel Press, New York 1961, p.39.