



Research Paper

Quest for Novelty in the Plays of Tennessee Williams: The Night of the Iguana

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ABSTRACT: In 20th century generation, it finds its soul and mind fettered and shackled in the dark dungeon of alienation. This sense of alienation creates nothing more than nostalgia for the days, which are no more. This study is an attempt to have deep journey into the disturbed and alienated worlds of the characters of Tennessee William's, "The Night of the Iguana", which are in constant quest for novelty. It is the protagonist who inspires others to achieve success, dreams of their life, brings peace to them, relieves tensions; solace worn nerves, spreads love and compassion around. She reads and senses what is in the surroundings and immediately begins to find expression. She surpasses her personal needs and lives for others. She performs all these from an inspiration of inner feminine novelty.

Keywords : Quest, Novelty, Feminine, Night and Iguana

I. INTRODUCTION

Thomas Lanier Williams (1911-1983) was a Pulitzer award winner in American playwright whose works bore a huge influence on American drama. He was popularly known as Tennessee Williams. Williams holds an important and undisputable position in the field of American drama as his works explored new and innovative themes as well as dramatic techniques. Williams worked on a play version of *Iguana* through the summer of 1960 and on into 1961. He assured his friend and producer Cheryl Crawford, founder of the Group Theatre, the American Repertory Theatre and the Actor's Studio in a letter dated January 8 that *The Night of the Iguana* would be his last play.

Wolff explains the Jungian concept of Novelty in the following words, " Novelty means: in between, neither this nor that, something intermediate, general, neutral, in the meddle, a means, agent, mediator, conveyor. The novelty is immersed in the psychic atmosphere of her environment and the spirit off her period, but above all in the collective unconscious." A novelty in other words, gets her name from her personality structure which is permeated by the unconscious of her society. She is feminine novelty because she becomes the mouthpiece of the emotions and inspirations of her society. Whereas 'the mother' responds to some individuals in a family, the feminine novelty is transpersonal. Her role requires her to transcend her own needs and desires, and enjoins upon her to voice whatever conceals in the psyche of her people at large.

An inspired feminine novelty may hear voices, have visions or be in contact with the mystical powers. A good example of a feminine novelty is that of Joan of Arc; a poor peasant girl impelled by the voices speaking to her in the pretext of invisible saints became the living spirit of nationhood in France. She rose to be a revolutionary and expressed in her own person the spirit of an era, invited the violence of the exasperated masters of the land and at the same time inspired the patriots to arms. Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Fry became instrumental in renovating the spirit of humanitarianism in the world. Florence Nightingale, nicknamed 'lady with the lamp' brought hope to several hundred dying soldiers, as also generalized to the world an idea that woman need not be treated as an object or a movable in the male super patriotic world. Mother Teresa had done a signal service to suffering humanity in Calcutta for several decades.

The feminine novelty is a god gifted ornaments, it's too hard get. She has distinctively shown her moral and philosophical maturity. She has acquired worldly wisdom. While she recognizes that the world in which she lives in full of sufferings, brutality, violence and unnecessary cruelty, she refuses to become monster

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in order to survive. Although she is incapable of eliminating evil from the world, she tries her best to reduce the pain and sufferings of her fellow humans. She has demonstrated the virtues of pity, tenderness, compassion and forgiveness. She is free from vanity, greed, extravagant passion and sensual passion. She tries to help those who are desperate and extend their love and understanding and therefore prove to be novelty woman among the cursed. She has mystic power, denied to ordinary mortals. She may receive messages in dreams or vision in the languages of images and symbols. Her power of revealing the shapes of things to come, make her immensely valued or sadly misunderstood. In the past she had a social function as predictor, oracle, medicine woman or priest. She retains her high position among some primitives even today. Because this woman lives passively, as a proxy, she may give herself to someone in bed if it can help relieve his tension. Irene Claremont de Castillejo goes a step further in distributing functions of the novelty: She may help people die peacefully. She may facilitate the transition from life into the folds of death. A woman may not know that she is capable of one or more of these roles. She may be unconscious or be surprised at the growth of this mediatory personality.

The feminine novelty inspires others to achieve success, dreams of their life, brings them peace, reliefs tensions, solace wear out nerves and spreads love and compassion around the world. She reads and senses what is in the atmosphere and is just beginning to find expression. She surpasses her personal needs and lives for others. She motivates them to become conscious of their own psychic satisfactions as also those of others. Erich Neumann describes her as "a pure Feminine spirit a spiritual whole in which all heaviness and materiality are transcended."

In framing of the Feminine, Jung harmonized a higher place to feminine novelty than to Virgin Mary. This was probably because Christianity had sought to make Mother Mary restrictive by alluding devotional, and spiritual terms. In numerous Christian prayers she is alluded to as an "immaculate," "spotless," "stainless," "blessed," feminine figure. The emphasis on her "perpetual virginity" on her venerable purity makes her into an exalted personage. In many Christian versions she is conceived as a compassionate saint to whom ordinary persons can pray for gifts of pardon and persistence. In the prayers she is saluted and hailed as a "protectress, a refuge of the sinful, a holy mother and intercessor with the father." She is thus a supreme transcendental being who is too pure, too saintly to involve herself emotionally in the mundane reality of ordinary persons. Feminine novelty in comparison lives and breathes the needs of others. Moral and religious dogmatic prescriptions and taboos do not contain and condition her response. She is always eager to relieve the miseries of others. Whereas Mary is virgin, feminine novelty is Aquarian flowing with the needs of others.

Hannah can be visualized as manifesting the feminine novelty principle in all its brilliance and mystics. I hope to demonstrate this perspective more fully in what follows.

Hannah Jelkes is the protagonist who dominates *The Night of the Iguana* in spite of the domineering presence of Maxine Faulk. Tennessee Williams has portrayed in them two parameters of the feminine novelty. Hannah, however, is finally more powerful than Maxine because of her spiritualistic qualities. Maxine is lascivious, harsh, crude and earthly whereas Hannah is the embodiment of the spiritual, the virtuous and the marvelous. If Maxine is a forceful woman who rejoices in her material possessions, Hannah on the other hand is what the Vedas would call Para - Shakty because her strength emanates from her taiga (renunciation) of worldly pleasures, her supreme endurance in the face of sufferings and struggle, and her solid resolution and firm ideas about life. For Maxine to whom the fulfillment of physical needs is the ultimate aim of life. Hannah has had no love life of her own. Instead, she has the capacity to relate deeply to God's creatures both Human and animal. She is the good daughter to her grandfather, the spiritual sister to Shannon, a well wisher of the ladies who have gone out in the storm. Even a cold - blooded animal the iguana, is the object of her love and concern.

She has no personal life because she lives entirely for others, but she seems contented within herself. She has helped numerous people like Shannon outlive their emotional crises because she herself has the gift of serenity. Shannon competently compares Maxine and Hannah in the following words to Maxine:

A bitch is no match for a lady except in a brass bed,
honey, and sometimes not even there.(p.63)

Hannah, the granddaughter of Jonathan Coffin "Nonno" is a New England spinster, pushing forty. Williams intended her to take on the role of a saint is evident from his adorning her with angelic and supernal looks. He writes in the stage directions to the play:

Hannah is remarkable - looking ethereal, almost ghostly. She suggests a Gothic cathedral image of a medieval saint, but animated. She could be thirty, she could be forty, she is totally feminine and yet androgynous looking - almost timeless. (p.18)

Later Williams describes her as a "painted figure." (p.88) Still later he writes: "She looks, again like a medieval sculpture of a saint." (p.91) The effect her appearance has on others, Williams describes carefully with imagistic details. The first time when she appears, Shannon is found pounding the wall with his fist making "a sobbing sound in his throat" (p.18) because of a bitter condemnation against him by the sexually repressed and jealous Miss Judith Fellowes. The sudden appearance of Hannah has a conciliatory effect on him. He stands "dazed..... Suddenly pacified by her appearance." (p.18) Her appearance later in the scene brings "a relief of tension almost like that of someone going under hypnosis." (p.30) In Act III, when the play is about to its end, Hannah convinced other people even in crumbling she is strong enough. It is obvious that she too is falling to pieces. Shannon shows her the iguana which is tied up beneath the Verandah of the hotel and points out the similar condition in which the human counterparts are facing themselves:

I'll get my flashlight, I'll show you. [He lurches rapidly into his cubicle and back out with a flashlight.] It's an iguana. I'll show you..... see? The iguana? At the end of its rope? Trying to go on past and end of its Goddam Rope? Like you! Like me! Like Grampa with his last poem!(p.73)

When asked by Hannah why the Mexican boys tied up the reptile, Shannon explains:

Because that's what they do, They tie them up and fatten them up and then eat them up, when they're ready for eating. They're a delicacy. Taste like white meat of chicken. At least the Mexicans think so. And also the kids, the Mexican kids, have a lot of fun with them, poking out their eyes with sticks and burning their tails with matches. You know? fun? Like that?(p.73)

Alike the iguana, Shannon, Hannah and her grandfather have experienced persecution and cruelty from their fellow human beings. Shannon was persecuted and humiliated by Miss Fellowes, one of his tourists, who goes after him like one of the turbulences. Ultimately, Shannon is tied down in the hammock when he has his breakdown after his tour is taken from him and he is dismissed by the tour company. Hannah is persecuted and threatened by Maxine. Due to her financial necessity, Hannah is forced "to kind of prostitute herself to sell her drawings to the type of person who represented everything, she really was against." The type of people that Hannah is against is here represented by the Germans who are crudely indifferent to Hannah's desperation. Grandpa is also mercilessly made fun of by Maxine and the Germans.

In the same act, Hannah has been described as looking at him with a "grave and compassionate gaze..... shaking her head with a slight restraining gesture," while her "softly luminous figure is seen as through a mist." (p.92) Shannon infers her identity as a feminine novelty when he calls her twice, "Miss Thin - Standing -Up-Female-Buddha." (P.98) Whose impassive peace and gentleness have radiated to calm down Shannon's turbulent soul. Quite a contrast to Maxine, the widow spider, Hannah is not only sexless but she is also a selfless person. She has devoted her whole life to take care of an old and incapacitated grandfather while managing to earn enough for their Subsistence and trips. And by doing so, Hannah has given up the chance of being "a wonderful wife and mother" that she might have been.

The job of taking care of a ninety-seven-year old grand-father whose strength, sight, hearing, and mind are decreasing everyday and speedily is rather strenuous, painful and restricting yet Hannah never considers leaving the old man. He is her tour leader, partner in business, her constant companion, and her pride - being "a minor leaque poet with a major leaque spirit," and "the oldest living and practicing poet on earth." Shannon cannot understand such a life and asks in complete sincerity, "Do you have any life of your own-- besides your

water colors and sketches and your travels with Grampa?" Hannah replies without hesitation and in a contended manner:

We make a home for each other, my grandfather and I. Do you know what I mean by a home? I don't mean a regular home. I don't mean what other people mean when they speak of a home, because I don't regard a home as a.... well, as a place, a building.... a home of wood, bricks, stone, I think of a home as being a thing that two people have between them in which each can.... well, nest.... rest.... live in, emotionally speaking. Does that make any sense to you, Mr. Shannon? (p.66)

But when Shannon, who makes comparison between man and bird, argues that a bird usually builds a nest "it builds it with an eye for the - the relative permanence of the location, and also for the purpose of mating and propagating its species...."(p.66) Hannah points out the Universal truth of the Buddhist philosophy---- the impermanence of things:

Nonno and I have been continually reminded of the impermanence of things lately... We go back to a hotel we've been many times before and it isn't there any more. It's been demolished and there's one of those glassy, brassy new ones: or if the old one's still there, the manager or the maitre D who always welcomed us back so cordially before has been replaced by someone new who looks at us with - suspicion.(p.67)

In reality, Hannah had experienced the impermanence of things early in life when both of her parents were killed in a car accident on the island of Nantucket, her hometown. Both Hannah and Nonno were made to realize then that a house without the ones they love meant nothing to them, and that is when their endless pilgrimage began.

Both Hannah and her grandpa earn enough for their journey and expenses. Hannah sells her drawings and does some quick sketches of people and Nonno makes a recitation of his poems at lunch and dinner tables in hotels where they stay. According to the oriental philosophy, which teaches one to accept whatever situation one cannot improve, that Hannah has adopted during her journeys in the East, enables Hannah to adjust herself to the life - style designed by her grandfather. She accepts her responsibility willingly, without malice. Hannah does not only accept calmly and bravely endurance, but she also accepts people as they are, as she tells Shannon, "Nothing human disgusts me unless it's unkind, violent!" and with that concept Hannah is truly a feminine novelty who has extended her compassion, understanding and platonic love to her fellow Humans, especially to the despondent.

While asked by Shannon about her love life, Hannah relates two experiences, one of which took place at the Nantucket movie- theater when she was only sixteen. A young Man sat beside her, pressed his knees against hers; then she changed her seat, the man followed and continued his pressure. The romance was then immediately cut short by Hannah's scream, which resulted in the arrest of the young man "for molesting a minor." But Hannah finally got him out of jail by telling the police that she was just over - excited by the movie. The other experience took place in a hotel in Singapore two years ago before she came to the Costa Verde. Hannah came across a lonely Australian ladies' undergarments salesman who was very gentle and generous with Hannah and Nonno. AT night, the man asked her to go out with him in a sampan where he politely and earnestly asked her to take off a piece of her clothes and let him hold it while she was not looking. And Hannah gratified his fetishistic desire. Although Hannah considers these incidents are parts of her love life, the experiences have more distinctively emphasized her feminine novelty nature.

Shannon is affected too much by Hannah's understanding, compassion and tolerance. He finds warm companionship and security while conversations with her because she accepts him as he is. Neither his heresy nor his promiscuity, or his undignified deeds have disgusted her. She understands him well because she had been through a similar experience before. While Shannon wildly fights against his spy to maintain his equilibrium and decency, she once had a battle with her "blue devil" over which she won. "I showed him that I

could endure him and I made him respect my endurance," she tells Shannon. When asked by the latter how she did it, Hannah answers :

Just by, Just by.... enduring. Endurance is something that spooks and blue devils respect. And they respect all the tricks that panicky people use to outlast and outwit their panic. (p.44)

In order to pacify her emotional disturbances, all Hannah needs are a few deep breaths or poppy seed tea. Hannah has seen and experienced life so much that she realizes that there is no use to be frustrated and be thrown off balance by the anarchic universe. Nor is there any use in questioning or rebelling against its creator the way Shannon does. Her patience and acceptance of life are gained through acquiescence to the mystery of God. The best the lost souls on earth can do is to accept it and do their best from the worst. And it can be achieved only through understanding and "wanting to help each other." She believes in "broken gates between people so they can reach each even if it's just for one night only".

II. CONCLUSION

Hannah, in *Iguana*, knows that Nonno's death is near. She describes to Shannon the bardo states of the dying in Shanghai (called the House for the dying), where she had gone to paint the faces of the penniless dying. She recalls the failing flicker of life in their eyes and says, "lately, my grandfather's eyes have looked up at me like that..." (P.108) She knows that the night is going to be very difficult for her grandfather, for herself, and for Shannon. There is a fourth creature also in the house - the Iguana, struggling with the rope "trying to go on past the end of its goddam rope? Like you! Like me! Like Grampa with his last poem!" (P.120) The struggle of the iguana with the rope is likely objective correlative of grandpa's miserable plight, close to death. Hannah requests Shannon' to release the Iguana while she herself sits down to take the dictation of Nonno's last and "Loveliest poem." Shortly after Shannon releases the struggling lizard, Nonno's soul receives great relief in the shape of a poem which signifies fulfillment of his life. By helping Nonno deliver his poem, she makes his end peaceful. Moreover, by taking her future loneliness with calm, Hannah fulfils her feminine novelty magnificently.

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