

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literary subjects are important to study since they become a part of education in humans' life. Little (1966:1) states, "Wherever there is education, there is the study of literature." This is because the literature of a people is the principal element of its culture. It is essential to be learned in schools and colleges since literature contains the record of peoples' whole way of life, their values, their thoughts, their problems and conflicts.

Some writers claim literature is just about anything written, while others say it is an imaginative writings that give a certain kind of pleasure for its readers. According to Roberts and Jacobs (1989: 1), literature refers to written (and also spoken) compositions designed to tell stories, dramatize situations, and reveal thoughts and emotions, and also, more importantly, to interest, entertain, stimulate, and broaden readers' mind. Literature can also be the tool for the writer to pass on his or her ideas. Williams (Biggsby 1992:34) says:

"My interest in social problems is as great as my interest in the theatre.....I try to write all my plays so that they carry some social message along with the story"

Whatever the form, all literature has much to offer. All readers can gain rich values in literature in the form of short stories, novels, poems and even drama. However, to analyze their works, an analyst needs to understand about the techniques to analyze literary works. For example in analyzing a short story, he should know more details about the plot, characters, and the theme. In studying poetry, he should have the ability to observe and comprehend the poet's sense, the tone and intention. Therefore, each of them requires a serious attention to study.

The ability in analyzing literary work itself can give great advantage to the students. Simon and Schuster (1966:7) say:

"By analyzing, you will develop intellectual and emotional skills, co-ordination, and reflexes to the point where you will be able to use them without stopping to think of what you are doing. You will become aware of many of the things that go on in fiction, in the hope that eventually this awareness will operate as you read rather than is a class-mortem".

The writer, in this study, chooses drama because, in fact, reading drama will not be time consuming. White and Whiting (1970:25) state that unlike novel, a play can be read in one sitting (a one-time-spot-method). Thus it can be read many times without spending too much time. Little states that

drama is subject to a time-limit (say 2 or 3 hours), this is because the plots of drama are generally more economical, more selective than the plots of any other literary works (1966:133).

Little (1966:112) also claims that there is probably no form of literature that is more popular than drama. It presents a story, as the novel and a short story do, in a different manner. A play presents characters which are shown in dialogues and action, thus it has dramatic characterization which often other fiction do not have. Moreover, a play has a quality to describe human characters and attitude in action since the language used in a play is more natural and put in the appropriate context which enables the reader to see the interaction of the characters through the dialogues and actions clearly. As it is described by Blair and Gerber (1959:80) that if the work is a drama, the author may allow some character to speak lifelike prose.

Until nowadays there are many of literary works which have been produced with high quality by the poets, novelists, and playwrights such as, Arthur Miller in his play Death of a Salesman, George Eliot in his great novel Mill on the Floss or Eugene O'Neill in Where the Cross is Made and many others including Tennessee Williams.

As one of the greatest modern playwrights, Williams likes to talk about human character that has a mysterious and confused life. Williams (in Francis Donahue, 1964:212) says:

"My chief aim in playwriting is the creation of character. I always had a deep feeling for the mystery of life, and essentially my plays have been an effort to explore the beauty and meaning in the confusion of living".

Most of Williams' plays are psychological tragedies and usually most of the central characters are women who become a victim of love. They are frustrated and do not dare to face reality or to enter their environment. Callow and Reilly (1977: 154) say about most of Williams' works:

"Williams' most typical characters are atoms whirling in avoid, intuiting the nothingness of human life, and therefore psychic mutes, unable to relate to other characters. Many of them long for love and understanding, but few of them find either physically or symbolically (or both) who have perceived their ultimate defeat"

Williams has entered the public world of literature with great success in his play such as, The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. However, there are some of Williams' plays that fail on the beginning of the show, yet in later revival become highly successful. One of those plays is Summer and Smoke.

In this play, Summer and Smoke, Williams introduces another tragic Southern heroine, Alma Winemiller, a minister daughter mired in the small-town life of Glorious Hill,

Mississippi. Shy and fretful, with a nervous heart condition, she pines for Dr. John Buchanan, Jr., the boy next door who pursues a life for gambling, drinking and womanizing.

Gassner (1952:667) mentions Summer and Smoke is a drama of vague longings for love and ineffective attempts at self-realization, and of ironies of fate dramatically noted. In this play, Williams has ruefully created ironic chronicle of two lives, Alma and Dr. Buchanan, crossing each other's orbit frequently yet somehow never actually touching, of two people that never being ready for each other at the same time.

Some experts argue that in Williams' work, his writing is also an autobiography. Williams uses his characters in the play as means to express his life experience, aspiration and wishes to his readers. Although not all of Williams' works represent his life, many of them are a testimony to his personal struggles, his family problems, and his fixation with Southern culture. Falk (1978:156) mentions that from the beginning, whatever Tennessee Williams wrote was a record of his own experience that was sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely stated. For example, in The Glass Menagerie Tom is representing Williams himself (Unger, 1974:378). The Southern situation in Summer and Smoke, as well as in most of his work, has been adapted by Williams into his work since he has

spent most of his childhood in the Southern area. In this same play, Summer and Smoke, Williams has also expressed his experience living with his grandfather who was a preacher during his childhood in Alma's characters.

The fact that Williams has his own way in creating his work by adapting from things he experiences in his life not to mention his mastery in presenting complex female characters as well as creative dialogue makes him different from other playwrights which interest the writer to analyze his work especially his play, Summer and Smoke.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study is intended to analyze the main character in Williams' play, Summer and Smoke, that is Alma Winemiller. Alma is the daughter of a preacher who lives in a small town in Glorious Hill, Mississippi. Alma grows up in a strong religious background family surrounded with the stagnant Southern society. In the play she falls in love deeply with the young doctor who happens to be her neighbor and her lifetime childhood mate, Dr. John Buchanan. However, her character seems to fall into a decline. She used to keep her manner as a decent lady

but at the end of the play she degrades herself by having promiscuity with the stranger.

Since the writer is interested in analyzing the main character, the writer in this study would like to analyze the phenomenon occurred to the main character, Alma Winemiller, as factors that leads her to the downfall. Some questions are raised in this study, they are:

- Is loving John a cause to Alma's downfall?
- Do her parents and the society also take part in her downfall?

1.3 Objective of the Study

In this study the writer wants to find out the causing factors of Alma Winemiller's tragic life in Tennessee Williams' play, Summer and Smoke: (1) Whether Alma's love towards John is a cause to face her downfall and (2) whether Alma's parents and the society also take part to her downfall.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The results of this study are expected to be helpful for students of English language department to explore the deep meaning and develop their understanding on a character in a play which can

introduce them to a much greater appreciation of language and literature.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

There are some more elements of drama. Since the time is limited, the writer narrows and limits the elements to the basic elements of drama: characters, plots, and setting.

In this study the writer only focuses her research on characters. Character has an important role in every story of literary works, including drama. If there is no character there will be no story. Burroways (1992:98) states that characters are the foreground of all fictions, including drama. Potter (1967:22) also says that characters are the cores of the content of a literary work and the basic subject matters.

The writer, based on the opinion above, feels interested in making study of the characters in Tennessee Williams' play, Summer and Smoke. She analyzes Alma's feeling toward her life and the man that she loves, and her relationship with the other characters, that is, how far the people around her have influenced her.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Before coming to the further discussion of the thesis, it is necessary to define some key terms used in this study to avoid misinterpretation. They are:

1. A play is a work of story-telling in which the characters are represented by actors (Kennedy X.J., 1978:833).
2. A Character is a person in a literary work who generally refers to his whole nature, such as his personality, his attitude toward life, his spiritual qualities, as well as his moral attributes (Potter, 1967:3).
3. Plot is an ordered chain of physical, emotional, or intellectual events that ties the actions together (Robert and Jacobs, 1989:1009).
4. Setting is the time and the place and is related to the exposition of the play (Knickerbocker, 1960:437).
5. The protagonist is one who takes the principal part in a play and becomes the central character in the conflict and the action (Perrine, 1966:59).
6. Dialogue is an important form of conversation which presents the ideas of the writer (Roby and Ulanov, 1962:xiv).
7. Tragedy is a type of play which describes the development of a conflict between the protagonist

and the superior force (destiny, circumstances, or society) and finally ends with sorrow or death (Roberts and Jacobs, 1989:1064).

8. Downfall is a sudden fall from power, reputation or happiness. In another way, this is the fact that causes someone's destruction or ruin (Webster Dictionary 1986).

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

Chapter I deals with the introduction including the background of the study, statement of the problem, the objective of the study, the significance of the study, limitation of the study, definition of key terms, and the organization of the thesis. Chapter II is concerning with the review of related literature that discusses the related theories. Chapter III deals with the methodology of the study. Chapter IV deals with findings and discussion and Chapter V is the conclusion of this study.