

A Marxist analysis of disability in Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*

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Abstract

Drawing on Karl Marx's theory of Marxism and Kirsty Johnston's Theory of disability, this paper attempts to read Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* by examining how Laura, the disabled protagonist, struggles to uncage herself from the shackles of disability at the time of the Great Depression. In the 1930s, American society was divided into many strata by the Great Depression which drove every family to take action. The Wingfields, likewise, decided to fix Laura in an arranged marriage with the help of her brother Tom but to no avail. Laura is the center of attention here and her setbacks, loneliness, and excessive shyness due to her disability are investigated through the lens of Kirsty Johnston's disability theory, as expounded in her book *Disability Theatre and Modern Drama: Recasting Modernism*. The paper attempts to find answers to the questions: How did the economic recession become the main motivator of the action in the play? What did Laura do to resist the materialistic conditions and uncage herself from the shackles of disability? In addition, the paper examines how the techniques used to magnify the harsh economic conditions and the numerous attempts by Tom and Amanda to get Laura out of her psychological cage.

Keywords: Disability theatre, Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, the Great Depression, Kirsty Johnston

1. Introduction

This paper proposes a reading of *The Glass Menagerie* through the lens of Marxist theory to fathom how the disabled Laura attempts to free herself from the shackles of disability. It also explores the harsh economic conditions of the 1930s due to the Great Depression and illustrates its effects that wreaked havoc on the dreams and ambitions of Laura. In the following paragraphs, the paper provides a glimpse of Tennessee Williams, his oeuvre, and his position among his contemporaries. It also discusses the childhood of Tennessee Williams in the south of the US, explores the great wealth of this area, and investigates how badly it was hit by the Great Depression.

Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) was an American dramatist who won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for his play *The Glass Menagerie*. He had other successful plays such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961). He won Pulitzer Prize Award for his play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which was numbered on the list of the American plays of the twentieth century alongside Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949). Moreover, he won his second Pulitzer Prize Award for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Along with his contemporaries Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) and Arthur Miller (1915-2005), Williams is considered among the three foremost twentieth-century American playwrights.

Tennessee Williams was haunted by memories and images of his childhood in the Southern states of America--the states which witnessed the glorious past, plantations, and the luxurious and easy life of many Americans. When he was young, he moved with his family from Columbus, Ohio to other southern locations like Nashville, Tennessee, Canton, Ohio, and finally Columbus, Mississippi, and New Orleans. He spent his childhood in the rectory of his grandfather, Reverend Dakin, in a southern environment where life was glorious, as he wrote:

My first eight years in Mississippi were the most joyful and innocent of my life thanks to the beneficial home life provided to us by my beloved grandparents, the Dakin, with whom we lived, and the silly semi-imaginary world in which we moved with my sister Rose and Ozzie, our beautiful black nanny, a world apart

and almost invisible to others, except for our little cabalistic circle of three. That world, that enchanted time, ended with the abrupt transfer of our family to St. Louis. (2007, p. 31)

In Missouri, he knew the social differences and the poor working condition of the people. As a result of this move, Williams expected that he would miss the special qualities of the Southern society, such as pride of race, respect for the past, or cultural enrichment. Unlike what he expected to find in the north, the economic condition in St. Louis was hard, as the city suffered the Great Depression. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams describes the economic situation at the outset of the play, as he writes:

To begin with, I turn back time. I reverse it to that quaint period, the thirties, when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them or they had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy. (Williams, 1945, 1.2)

In this quotation, Tom describes how hard the economic condition is and how it affects the middle class in a bad way. Moreover, he resembles how the middle class struggles to have a normal life.

2. Methodology

A Framework of analysis has been made to help analyze disability of Laura at the time of the economic recession. Therefore, I combined terms from the Marxist theory and the disability theatre to conduct a thorough analysis of the play. From the Marxist theory, I used the terms “aristocracy,” “bourgeoisie,” “proletariat,” and “commodity.” From the disability theory, I select the terms “normate,” “abnormal,” and “cripple.”

Marxist theory has a long and complicated history. It is a nineteenth-century ideology, originated by Karl Marx, who introduces the term of “dialectical materialism,” which he defines as “the means of production which control a society's institutions and beliefs” (as cited in Dobie, 2011, p. 80). These means of production compel the society--with all its strata whether they are bourgeoisie or proletariat--to work and dream to be promoted to the elevated class. Only the aristocrats are at the top of the social pyramid. Society is divided into three strata: aristocracy, bourgeoisie, and proletariat. The aristocratic class is “a governing body or upper class usually made up of a hereditary nobility” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). According to Louise Hitchcock's *Theory for Classics*, the

bourgeoisie and proletariat are defined as follows:

The proletariat--workers who sell their labor power for a wage in order to make a living--enables the capitalists who own and control the means of production (i.e., natural resources, factories, machines, and other material resources) to recover a profit at the expense of the workers. A third class, the bourgeoisie, are neither owners nor workers, but service providers such as doctors and teachers. Although they provide services to both other classes, they are usually identified as having the same class interests as capitalists. (2008, p. 16)

While the aristocratic are defined as the wealthy people by inheritance who own the means of production, the bourgeoisie are those who provide services, and the proletariat are the laborers who attempt to make their living through work. These strata interact with one another through the means of production. Furthermore, the way in which society provides food, clothing, and other necessities creates social relations among the people that become the foundation of society. Therefore, the means of production control society.

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels assert that "commodity is sold in the market for its intrinsic value" (1967, p. 17). The commodity, which is expected to be wanted and sold, must have value. The value of a commodity depends on its intrinsic characteristics. Therefore, the laborer has to work on the commodity to make it valuable for the customers. Moreover, each commodity has an expiration date for its value.

Before defining the terms of the disability theory, I found that it is imperative to give a notion about the history of disability theatre. It has a long and complex cultural history that raises fundamental questions about identity, definitions of normalcy, and the social conditions of everyday life. Disability theatre is now an independent form of study that dates back to the time of the Greek Theatre. The disability theory started in 429 BC with Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. The play has two blind characters: Teiresias and Oedipus; the latter is lame with pierced feet. Shakespeare has many plays with disabled characters. His purpose is to make the audience accept disabled people in real life. Many Shakespearean plays such as *The Taming of the Shrew* (1594), *The Merchant of Venice* (1599), *Henry VI* (1623), and *Richard III* (1633) have disabled characters, and it was ordinary for crippled, lame, blind, deformed, or monstrous bodies to

occupy center stage in many plays in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

The terms of the theory constitute the framework that will be used to analyze the play. These terms are derived from Kirsty Johnston's *Disability Theatre and Modern Drama: Recasting Modernism*. Johnston uses "abnormal" or disabled as a binary to "normal" bodies: "It renders visible the ways in which societies have used disabled people as that against which so-called normal bodies" (2016, p. 141). Moreover, Johnston adds that "as the idea of a normal person emerged, degrees of abnormality could also be considered, even measured" (2016, p. 27).

An important keyword that has also emerged from disability studies is "normate". Kirsty Johnston quoted from Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* a definition for the term. According to Garland-Thomson, "normate" is defined as "the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings" (2017, p. 52). "Normate" is the way disabled people merge into society as normal bodies. Moreover, the term "cripple" is included in the theory, which is the physically impaired leg or foot.

3. Literature Review

Several studies have shown significant interest in tackling Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* from different perspectives. In *The Disabled Family Dynamic in Drama: The Glass Menagerie, A Day in the Death of Jeo Egg and Time for Ben*, Herman (2008) discusses that it is not only the disabled person who suffers, also his family. Herman (2008) examines how the entire family suffers from stress, which is caused by the intense care of the disabled person. As a result, the family becomes isolated from social activities and even gets no time for themselves. Nevertheless, Herman (2008) does not tackle how the suffering is worsened through hard economic conditions.

Moreover, in *Tom Wingfield's Alienation in Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie: A Marxist Approach*, Fomeshi (2013) tackles *The Glass Menagerie* from the idea of alienation based on Marx's definition and how it is applied in the play. According to the capitalist system, which prevents

Tom from getting the life he wants, Tom is alienated from his work, society, and family. However, Fomeshi (2013) does not examine Laura's disabling condition and how the Great Depression affects her as a disabled girl.

In *The Dominance of the Past in the Plays of Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill: A Comparative Study*, Attia (2021) is concerned with the idea of the effects of the past on the character generally, and the playwrights specifically. Attia (2021) investigates how the past can affect the interactions between the present and the future of the person, as well as the inability to cope with them. Attia (2021) also explores how the good past can affect the present in a bad way, and that is when the person's expectations get too high, so they become unable to cope with the present. However, she does not tackle Laura's disability from a Marxist perspective.

In *Metaphorical Disability in Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie*, Yu (2022) analyses disability at cultural and social levels in addition to the physical one. Yu (2022) illustrates different kinds of disabilities in the characters Amanda, Tom, and Laura. For Amanda, as a neurotic parent, she seeks perfection in every aspect of her life. As for Tom, as a gay person, it examines his spiritual struggle. Considering Laura, it highlights her physical disability. However, Yu (2022) fails to link the struggle of the physical and mental disabilities of the family members to the economic condition.

From the above review, it is obvious that there is a lack of research on disability from a Marxist perspective in *The Glass Menagerie*. Thus, this paper contributes to discuss and investigate the struggles that a disabled girl like Laura encounters at the time of the Great Depression in the South.

4. Plot

The Glass Menagerie starts with Tom Wingfield, who takes the role of the first narrator. Dramatic events begin to unfold before the audience as the bad news of the economic slump breaks. Tom works at a shoe factory to support his family. Tom is the only man in the family who supports the family financially through a job that he hates. Tom hates his reality and has the hope of joining the Merchant Marines. Therefore, he keeps going

to the movies and smoking as a way to escape his miserable reality. Laura, his sister, is a young girl with partial paralysis in her leg, which is not that noticeable to her peers, but it torments Laura and annoys her mother, Amanda. Amanda, a dominant nagging mother, used to be a southern belle who once belonged to an aristocratic family. Now, she is old and grumpy and always suffers from the abandonment of her husband. She is always reminiscing about her glorious past in the south and before her marriage, when she used to have fourteen suitors waiting in a long queue to propose to her. Nostalgic and disillusioned, Amanda ignores the reality of her present situation and prefers to recite sweet stories from her memory.

Amanda is attached to her past with all her many suitors and her aristocratic family and their servants, while ignoring the facts of her present life in a middle-class family. Therefore, she insists that Tom can support them financially through his job in the shoe factory, and she ignores the fact that he hates this job. Further, Amanda treats Laura like a normal girl and forces her to study at a Business College and attend activities at the church. While Laura, whose disabled condition makes her suffer more than Amanda and Tom, is attached to her glass menagerie in an attempt to detach from her disabled and poor condition. Laura fails her mother's attempts to make her have a regular life. Laura fails to think of her real life because of her frustration as a crippled girl. Laura's disability is augmented by her, not even sensed by the others. Therefore, she feels shy and insecure about her life. However, she gives herself a chance to meet Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller. For a few moments, Laura thinks that she is uncaged from her miserable life, but after Jim's revelation about his engagement, all her hopes are failed. In the end, Laura gives Jim her broken glass unicorn as a souvenir. Tom loses his hope to join the Merchant Marines, gets fired from his job, and leaves his mother and sister.

5. Discussion

“But, Mother – I’m crippled” (Williams, 1945, 1.14) Laura is fully conscious of her disability and she always augments her colleagues' reaction to her lameness. Her negative feelings are intensified by her awkwardness and shyness. She is unable to feel positive about herself. In her dialogue with Jim, Laura says:

JIM. Now I remember-you always came in late.

LAURA. Yes, it was so hard for me, getting upstairs, I had that brace on my leg--it clumped so loud.

JIM. I never heard any clumping.

LAURA. To me, it sounded like thunder! (*The Glass Menagerie*, 1945, 6.78).

The sound of her “brace” is deafening “like thunder.” Nevertheless, Jim does not hear anything. Hence, the realization of disability is exaggerated by Laura rather than being felt or sensed by any of her peers.

Laura is not able to accept herself because her augmented self-consciousness lowers her self-esteem. She does not realize that her disability is only one facet of her character and she still has good qualities that she can use. Therefore, Laura’s exaggeration of her lameness makes her regard her body as “abnormal.” Consequently, she prevents herself from joining social activities, loses touch with reality, and considers herself unsuitable for society.

But there is still to come even worse than she has yet experienced. The Great Depression struck the markets and caused great unemployment in American society. Thus, American society, at the time of recession, placed a great emphasis on physical and mental nimbleness. Being pretty and healthy were the required assets to find a job or to secure a well-off gentleman caller. Consequently, this adds additional pressure on people with disabilities who are already struggling to meet society’s standards.

At this crucial time, Amanda, who witnessed the glorious and luxurious days of the south, extends her hands to help Laura. She comes up with a plan to help. First, she pretends that disability does not exist, as she says “You’re not crippled, you just have a little defect--hardly noticeable, even!” (Williams, 1945, 2. 27). Second, she lures Laura to join Rubicam’s Business College to learn to typewrite. Unfortunately, Amanda regrets her decision as she says “I put her in business college--a dismal failure! Frightened her so it made her sick at the stomach” (Williams, 1945, 2.31). Laura’s augmented self-consciousness of her disability triggered an abdominal symptom which is a psychosomatic disorder. Amanda resorts to finding a career for Laura as her third strategy: She wants Laura to learn to typewrite to secure a job for her. Yet, Laura fails and drops out of the class. Fourth, Amanda thinks of socialization as a remedy to Laura’s

extreme shyness: she places her in a social-religious activity at the church. Nevertheless, Laura sits mutely in a corner, as Amanda says “I took her over to the Young Peoples League at the church. She spoke to nobody, nobody spoke to her” (Williams, 1945, 2.31). As the last refuge, Amanda thinks of marriage. She strikes a deal with Tom: Amanda stipulates that Tom must find a suitor for his sister and he can leave afterward, as she argues “I mean that as soon as Laura has got somebody to take care of her, married, a home of her own, independent--why, then you'll be free to go wherever you please, on land, on sea, whichever way the wind blows you ! But until that time you've got to look out for your sister" (Williams, 1945, 2.31).

This deal is not only about securing a gentleman caller for Laura but also about securing financial support for the family after Tom's departure. During the economic recession, everything is fixed to a materialistic deal. Amanda decides to make a fixed marriage for Laura in order to secure the family financially. She imposes a strict condition on Tom, as she says, “But not till there's somebody to take your place” (Williams, 1945, 2.31).

Amanda regards Laura as a good bargain as she effaces Laura's disability completely as if it does not exist. Out of disillusionment, Amanda insists that the word "crippled" must never be spoken, refusing to let Laura use this word. Rather, Amanda commends Laura as being “domestic,” as she says: “It's rare for a girl as sweet an' pretty as Laura to be domestic! But Laura is, thank heavens, not only pretty but also very domestic" (Williams, 1945, 4.70). Therefore, Amanda considers Laura a suitable girl for any suitor. Tom fulfills the deal and brings Jim O'Connor as a gentleman caller.

LAURA. In what respect am I pretty?

JIM. In all respects - believe me! Your eyes--your hair are (*Sic*) pretty!

Your hands are pretty!

(Williams, 1945, 6.104).

At this moment, Laura feels hope that she is an “abled” girl and has a high hope, like other girls, to fall in love with a suitor. Jim O'Connor is the only intruder into this illusory world. Laura offers Jim a rare chance to see her collection of glass animals for the first time. While Jim talks and dances with her, he accidentally knocks over the unicorn, causing its horn to break.

Laura states that now the unicorn is just like the other horses and is such a blessing:

LAURA. Now it is just like all the other horses.

JIM. It's lost its -

LAURA. Horn! It doesn't matter. Maybe it's a blessing in disguise.

(Williams, 1945, 6.89)

Laura, just like the unicorn, is transformed into a normal girl. During her brief encounter with Jim, her world has changed and she does not feel "abnormal" anymore. She begins to realize that her disability is a blessing in disguise. It is the power of love that transforms her and removes all her inhibitions and anxiety. However, her hope fades away as Jim tells her that he has a fiancée.

The news comes as a shock to Laura who escapes again to her illusory world: the glass menagerie. Whenever she does not feel well, she goes to the glass menagerie. She even develops a bond with one item of this menagerie: the unicorn. She says, "he stays on a shelf with some horses that don't have horns and all of them seem to get along nicely together" (Williams, 1945, 6.97). She compares the glass unicorn's horn to her brace as the former differentiates the unicorn from the other horses meanwhile the latter differentiates her from the "abled" normal people.

Fixing Laura in marriage turns out to be a nightmare for the Wingfields since the deal between Amanda and Tom is a materialistic one. At the time of the Great Depression, everything is liable to the rules of the market. The finest products are sold first, but Laura is a disabled girl. She needs a miracle to survive at these times. As a disabled girl raised at the time of the Great Depression, Laura witnesses how the "abled" normal people started to feel the pinch. Yet, disabled people are by far the worst: they have to fight disability and poverty at a time when finding employment is a cut-throat competition. That explains how Laura's marriage is regarded as the panacea for all the Wingfields' problems. Amanda and Tom commodify Laura: Amanda disregards her disability, thinking that it does not exist, whereas Tom thinks that fixing his sister in a marriage will let him go and pursue his American Dream.

6. Technique

Techniques such as light, music, symbolism, euphemism, conceptual

metaphors, and body language contribute to the elucidation of the disability analysis in *The Glass Menagerie*. The first technique is light which contributes to the understanding of Laura's disabled condition in the play. In his production notes, Williams asserts that the light should be "gloomy gray" (1945, 2.26), "turgid smoky red glow" (1.18), and a "deep blue dusk" (4.71). Such a mood alludes to a sense of hopelessness that Laura experiences. Besides, Williams insists that the spotlights on Laura make her appear with a halo around her head, just like saints or nuns, as Williams stipulates that Laura should be "given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting" (4.51).

The second technique is the music which conveys the true feelings of the characters. "Ave Maria" (Williams, 1945, 3.26), which is "funeral music" and is related to "lived religion" (Bruin-Mollenhorst, 2019, p. 7), plays softly in the background to symbolize how Amanda becomes the guardian angel or The Virgin Mary who protects her children. It shows Amanda as a holy mother taking care of her children. Further, it highlights how Laura's disability crucifies her on the cross of false hope to redeem her mom and brother from their sins. Throughout the play, the music grows in a crescendo and drowns in a diminuendo depending on the characters' emotions, for example, when Tom confronts his mother with the reality of Laura's disability: "The Dance-Hall music changes to a tango that has a minor and somewhat ominous tone" (Williams, 1945, 4.49). In this quotation, the music becomes ominous and grim to illustrate how bad it is for Amanda to face the truth of her daughter's disability.

The third technique is symbolism which elucidates the disabled condition of Laura by comparing her to the glass menagerie. The glass menagerie symbolizes Laura herself because both are fragile and transparent. Laura's high consciousness of disability makes her feel that she is transparent and unnoticed. The unicorn in her glass menagerie symbolizes Laura's crippled leg. In this way, the unicorn is marked for its horn, much as Laura is for her brace.

Euphemistic style of Amanda comes as the fourth technique. Amanda insists on the erasure of the word "crippled" from the speech of the family. Rather, Amanda downplays Laura's disability as "hardly noticeable".

Regarding the conceptual metaphors as the fifth technique, Amanda's famous sentence "Rise and Shine" is originally borrowed from the Bible: "Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you" (King James Bible, 1769/2008, Isaiah 60:1-6). It was also used in military camps in the late nineteenth century. At the time of the Great Depression, "Rise and Shine" was used as a call to wake the soldiers. However, in *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda asks her children to "Rise and Shine" as a kind of motivation, as she yells every morning, "The church bell is heard striking six. At the sixth stroke the alarm clock goes off in Amanda's room, and after a few moments we hear her calling 'Rise and Shine! Rise and Shine! Laura, go tell your brother to rise and shine!'" (Williams, 1945, 2.24). Even Tom, who hates his job, motivates himself with "Rise and Shine" on his way to the warehouse: "Rise and Shine! I say to myself, 'How lucky dead people are! 'But I get up. I go! For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being ever!'" (Williams, 1945, 2.20).

Body language is considered the sixth technique which contributes to highlighting Laura's weak personality. Laura's low voice and gestures illustrate her inferiority complex because of her high consciousness of disability. When Laura and Amanda talk about the gentleman caller, Laura becomes nervous and afraid, as she says:

It isn't a flood, it's not a tornado, Mother. I'm just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain.... [Tom utters another groan. LAURA glances at him with a faint, apologetic smile. Her voice catching a little.] Mother's afraid I'm going to be an old maid. (Williams, 1945, 1.6).

Moreover, when Laura reminds her mother of the miserable reality: "[in a tone of frightened apology]: I'm--crippled!" (Williams, 1945, 1.14). Through examining the above techniques, it is clear how light, music, symbolism, euphemism, conceptual metaphors, and body language highlight the disability in the play.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper draws on the Marxist Theory as a methodology for reading Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. The Wingfields suffer from the economic recession, and the one who suffers the most is Laura. Amanda and Tom attempt to uncage Laura from her condition;

however, Laura fails due to several factors. The first factor is the economic recession, which worsens the situation for the “abled” family members generally and the crippled Laura specifically. Being a middle-class family during the Great Depression, they struggle with the severe economic conditions, which make it hard for a class to be elevated to another class. Therefore, all of Amanda’s old-fashioned ways to uncage Laura and elevate her to another class failed. In addition, this economic slump not only stratifies society but also the family. The Wingfields are stratified into many classes: Tom becomes a proletariat; Amanda used to be an aristocrat; Laura is the most vulnerable one. She is poor and unmarried, and her situation is exacerbated by her augmented rather than noticed disability. On the other side, had there been no economic recession, Laura’s situation would have been much better: she would have found a job easily. Moreover, she would have found many suitable suitors rather than burdening the family to find one for her.

The second factor is that Laura’s high awareness of her crippled leg leads her to an inner struggle. Laura’s lameness is augmented by her, rather than sensed by others. She exaggerates her disability, whether the sound of her brace or the look of her colleagues who do not even notice it. Therefore, she becomes unable to socialize with others in school and church or to regard herself as a suitable girl for marriage.

The third factor is that Laura is commodified. The older she gets, the fewer of opportunity she has for marriage. Therefore, Amanda ignores Laura’s condition and focuses on elevating Laura’s value before getting older. Amanda attempts to enhance Laura’s valuable characteristics to get married. Therefore, Amanda seeks to get Laura educated in university. In addition, she makes Laura practise to be a typewriter. Furthermore, Amanda endeavors to make Laura socialize with others in order to have a chance to meet someone. However, Laura feels that she is stressed to accomplish a target which she is unable to do. As a result, she surrenders to her life with its miserable conditions.

After analyzing the play, it turns out that disability is not only physical. Rather, it is also mental. If Laura is disabled physically, everyone around her is disabled in their own rights. Amanda is disabled by the illusions of

the glorious south: she used to have servants and suitors. Tom is disillusioned by the American Dream: he wants to travel to the north and join the Merchant Marine. In my opinion, physical disability is less than disillusionment. The latter is crippling, hindering, and imprisoning the “body” in dark dungeons of despair and self-flagellation.

For further studies, we can study other disabilities during different economic slumps. Some plays have the potential to be studied from the lens of Disability Theatre. Lenin El-Ramly's *Viewpoint* (1989) revolves around a group of blind people who live in an institution during the former President Sadat's open-door policy in Egypt in the 1970s. In Suzan Lori Parks' *Venus* (1996), Sarah Baartman, a deformed South-African woman, struggles to survive at the time of the British colonization and exploitation of South Africa in the late nineteenth century.

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