The Glass Menagerie Study Guide

The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

The Glass Menagerie was originally produced in Chicago in 1944 and then staged m New York on Broadway in 1945. The text was also published in 1945. This play was the first of Williams's to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, an honor he was given four times. Although *The Glass Menagerie* also received much popular acclaim, some critics believe that the thematic devices that Williams relies on, such as the legends on the screen, are too heavy-handed.

The Glass Menagerie is autobiographical in its sources. In some ways, this is a coming of age story, with both Tom Wingfield and Laura Wingfield negotiating their roles as young adults. Like many coming of age stories, the major conflicts in this play are both internal and external; Tom cannot choose both the future he desires for himself and the future his mother, Amanda Wingfield, desires for him and for Laura. Emerging through this major conflict between Tom and Amanda are the themes of alienation and loneliness, duty and responsibility, and appearances and reality.

Through its poetic structure and reliance on stage technology, *The Glass Menagerie* has had a significant impact on later twentieth century drama. Tom serves as both narrator and character, dissolving the present into the past; Williams signals this by exploiting lighting and sound, especially music technologies that were less available to earlier playwrights. In this sense, the themes of the play are inseparable from its production values.

Author Biography

Tennessee Williams was born in Mississippi in 1911. His given name was Thomas Lanier Williams. His family lived in Mississippi and Tennessee until 1918, when they moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where Williams's father, Cornelius, worked as a shoe salesman. This move to a metropolitan area was difficult for both Williams and his sister, Rose. Williams's family was Episcopalian and his grandfather a minister, although Williams himself converted to Roman Catholicism in 1969. As an adult, he moved frequently, living in such cities as St. Louis and New York. Many critics base their interpretation of *The Glass Menagerie* as autobiographical in part because of the similarities between the Wingfield family and Williams's own. Williams's mother, Edwina, was a Southern belle, and his older sister, Rose, to whom Williams was close, suffered from schizophrenia as an adult.

Williams attended the University of Missouri from 1931 until 1933 and Washington University in St. Louis from 1936 until 1937 before earning his A.B. degree from the University of Iowa in 1938. He began publishing his work in magazines when he was only twelve years old and decided to become a playwright at the age of twenty, although he also wrote short stories, poems, novels, and memoirs. As a young man, he supported himself with various jobs, including waiter, Teletype operator, and theater usher.

After *The Glass Menagerie* was produced on Broadway in 1945, however, Williams consistently had his new work produced in various New York theaters, often averaging one play every other year. He was not only prolific but also successful. His plays won many honors, beginning with the Group Theatre Award in 1939. This was followed by a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship. He won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award four times, and he won the Puhtizer Prize for *A Streetcar Named Desire*, his other most well-known play, in 1948. Williams was the first recipient of the centennial medal from New York's Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in 1973. During the last decade of his life, he received a Kennedy Honors Award and was elected to the Theatre Hall of Fame.

Williams's most popular plays were also produced as movies, and he frequently served as screenwriter, sometimes with a collaborator. His later work continues the themes of his early plays, and he is sometimes accused of failing to develop further. In part because of this, his audience began to drift away near the end of his life.

Tennessee Williams died by choking in a hotel in New York City in 1983

Plot Summary

Scene I

The Glass Menagerie opens with some fairly elaborate stage directions which serve both to describe the setting and to introduce themes and symbols through their tone. For example, the apartments in the Wingfields' neighborhood are described as "warty growths" and the people as "one interfused mass of automatism." Tom Wingfield is the first character on stage, and he functions here as both narrator and interpreter. In this role, Tom exists several years after the primary action of the play. He introduces the other characters, and his presence in this role guides the audience in the direction of the play.

The action begins with Amanda, Tom's mother, calling him to the supper table. Throughout the meal, Amanda instructs and criticizes Tom in his eating habits, until Tom responds with disgust. At once, the audience realizes that Tom and Amanda live in a state of tension. The other character present at this meal is Laura, Tom's sister, who wears a brace on her leg. When Laura offers to serve the dessert, Amanda says that she wishes Laura to "stay fresh and pretty for gentlemen callers!" Amanda will remain concerned with the possibility of "gentlemen callers" for Laura throughout the play, and here she reminisces about her own youthful days. When Laura indicates that she's not expecting any gentlemen callers, Amanda appears to be astonished, although this conversation seems to be a frequent one. Laura explains that "I'm not popular like you [Amanda] were."

Scene II

As this scene begins, Laura is sitting alone in the living room, washing the animals in her glass collection. Amanda enters, clearly upset. Their conversation reveals that although Laura has been enrolled in a typing course, and although she has left the apartment every day as if to attend her class, she has in fact not been going. Amanda had stopped by to speak with Laura's teacher, who revealed that Laura had become ill during a typing test and had not returned. Laura admits thai she simpjy goes to the zoo nearly every day.

Amanda is concerned about Laura's future because she has no prospective husband, nor does she have any skills by which she could make a living. Laura says that she had liked a boy once, while she was in high school, although she is now twenty-three years old. This boy's name was Jim, and he was very popular then and predicted to be very successful. Jim had called Laura by the nickname "Blue Roses" because he had misunderstood her when she had said she'd been sick with pleurosis.

Scene III

This scene opens with Tom again functioning as narrator and describing the changes that occurred in the family over the next several weeks. Amanda becomes even more concerned with "gentlemen callers." Because she believes that the apartment will have to be redecorated if gentlemen callers begin to arrive, she takes a job selling magazine subscriptions.

The major portion of this scene consists of an argument between Tom and Amanda. Amanda has thrown away some of Tom's books because they were written by D. H. Lawrence, a British writer that some people consider to be scandalous. The argument continues when Tom says he is going out to the movies, although Amanda replies that no one can go to as many movies as Tom claims to. She implies that Tom is lying, especially since he often comes home late and apparently drunk. She is worried that he will lose his job because he so frequently goes to work when he has had only three or four hours of sleep. She urges him to think of the good of the family rather than only himself. Tom replies by emphasizing how much he hates his job and slams out of the apartment after calling Amanda an "ugly babbling old witch."

Scene IV

Tom arrives home much later. Laura lets him in, apparently believing that he really has been to the movies. Laura asks Tom to apologize to Amanda at breakfast, which he eventually does. Amanda sends Laura out to buy some butter so that she can have a few words alone with Tom. She explains that she is worried that Tom is becoming like his father, who had abandoned the family. Amanda assures Tom that he will be able to go wherever and do whatever he wants as soon as Laura is secure in a future. She asks Tom to bring home an acquaintance from the warehouse where he works to meet Laura, though Tom does not respond enthusiastically to the prospect.

Scene V

Tom and Amanda argue about whether he smokes too much. Eventually, Tom reveals that he has invited someone home to dinner, and that he's coming tomorrow. Amanda panics because of all of the preparations that will have to be made. Tom says that the man's name is James Delaney O'Connor and that he works as a shipping clerk, making approximately eighty-five dollars per month (Tom makes sixty-five dollars per month). Tom urges Amanda not to anticipate too much, since Laura is "crippled," a word she reprimands him for using, and "peculiar." The scene ends with Tom once again leaving for the movies.

Scene VI

The scene begins with Amanda and Laura preparing supper. Laura is extremely nervous and becomes even more upset when she discovers that the visitor's name is Jim O'Connor, since that was the name of the boy she liked in high school. Tom and Jim arrive, and Jim discusses his future in public speaking that he hopes for . Tom reveals that he has joined The Union of Merchant Seamen and has paid his dues with the money he was supposed to use for the electric bill. Amanda enters wearing an old dress from her youth and acting extremely coy. Amanda claims that Laura has prepared the supper, but when it is time to eat, Laura is so nervous that she becomes ill. She rests on the sofa throughout dinner.

Scene VII

As Tom, Amanda, and Jim are eating, the lights go out. Amanda assumes they have blown a fuse, though Jim says none of the fuses look faulty. Amanda urges Jim to keep Laura company in the living room. Laura reveals that she had known Jim in high school, and he eventually remembers who she is. She says that she had always felt conspicuous because of her brace, but Jim assures her that it was hardly noticeable. Laura has kept a program from a play Jim had starred in, and he autographs it for her. He reveals that he broke up with his high school girlfriend. When he asks Laura what she has done since high school, she states that her glass collection keeps her very busy.

Jim suggests that she simply needs more self confidence and begins talking about inferiority complexes. Laura shows him her favorite glass animal, a unicorn. Because music is audible from the dance hall across the alley, Jim asks Laura to dance. While they dance, they bump the table; the unicorn falls off and breaks its horn, though Laura says now he's like the other horses rather than being "feakish." Telling Laura that she is pretty, Jim kisses her. A few minutes later, though, he confesses that he is engaged, and that he hadn't realized Tom had invited him home in order to meet Laura. She gives him the broken unicorn. Amanda serves lemonade, and Jim tells her also that he is engaged. Embarrassed, Amanda assumes that Tom had been playing a mean-spirited joke on them. Tom leaves again, though this time his departure is permanent. The play concludes with Laura blowing out the candles.

Scene 1

Scene 1 Summary

Tom appears, dressed in the uniform of the merchant marines. He introduces the play, which he describes as a memory play and therefore dimly lit, sentimental, and unrealistic. He also introduces the characters - himself, his mother Amanda, his sister Laura, and a Gentleman Caller. He explains that the Gentleman Caller is a symbol of the "long delayed but always expected something that we long for." Tom goes on to say that there is a fifth character in the play who never actually appears - his father, who disappeared when he and Laura were children but whose picture is prominently displayed.

Amanda calls Tom to sit down for dinner. He disappears but soon reappears, no longer in his merchant marine clothes, at the table with Laura and Amanda. As he eats, Amanda criticizes his table manners. Tom says he can't enjoy his meal because of her constant criticism, and gets up to have a cigarette. She tells him he smokes too much. Laura gets up to get dessert, but Amanda insists that she stay at the table and stay fresh for "gentleman callers." Laura replies that she's not expecting any callers, but Amanda says you never know. She then goes into a story that Tom and Laura both know all too well, about how one afternoon back home in the South, Amanda had seventeen unexpected gentlemen callers. As she comes back in with dessert and dishes it out, she goes into detail about those callers, talks about how she was able to make good conversation with all of them, and finishes by saying that instead of picking one of them she married Tom and Laura's father.

Amanda says she'll clean up, and tells Laura to go into the living room to practice her shorthand and keep fresh for callers. As Amanda clears the dishes, Laura says again that she's not expecting any. Amanda can't believe her ears. Laura tells Tom that Amanda's afraid she's going to become an old maid.

Scene 1 Analysis

Tom's opening speech establishes several important elements of the play. Aside from the things he specifically details - that the play isn't necessarily going to be realistic, that one of the characters is a symbol, and that another of the principal characters (his father) is important because of his absence - the lyricism of the language he uses suggests that what is being played out is as much a kind of poem as it is a play. This means that language and symbolism will reveal what the play is about as much as the action and characters will. This idea is supported by his description of the Gentleman Caller, who embodies the play's secondary theme: the nature of hope and whether it's based on truth or illusion.

Another important element of the play, both thematically and dramatically, is also established in this scene. There is the very clear sense that Amanda is reliving her life through Laura, and that all her talk about keeping Laura fresh and tidy for callers is really an expression of her own belief that she's still young, pretty, and popular. It seems that somewhere inside herself, Amanda still believes she's the girl who received all those unexpected callers. This foreshadows her choices later in the play when she fusses over her own appearance as much as she fusses over Laura's in preparation for the Gentleman Caller's arrival. It also illuminates the theme embodied by the Gentleman Caller by suggesting that for her, hope is based on illusion.

Tom's eruption of resentment at Amanda foreshadows his increasingly intense eruptions throughout the play, as well as his final angry departure.

Scene 2

Scene 2 Summary

Laura, who moves with a heavy limp because of a disabled foot, sits in the living room gently polishing her collection of glass animals. She sees Amanda coming home from an afternoon out, quickly puts away her glass, and picks up her shorthand textbook. Amanda comes in, angry and upset. When Laura asks what's wrong, Amanda tells her that she stopped in at the school where she (Laura) is supposed to be studying shorthand and discovered that Laura hasn't attended classes since a few days after the course started. She talks about how the fifty dollars in tuition and all her hopes for Laura's eventual success have gone to waste and then asks Laura where she's been going and what she's been doing instead.

Laura explains that she got so nervous at the secretarial school that she threw up, couldn't face going back, and that all the time she's supposed to have been at the school she's been out walking, going to the park or visiting the zoo. Amanda asks what she plans to do with her life and suggests that spending her time with the glass menagerie and playing her father's old records will only lead to her becoming an unwanted spinster relative. She hints that Laura could still get married and asks whether she ever liked a boy. Laura answers that there was a boy in high school who she had been in the choir with He had sung the lead in the school musical and given her the nickname "blue roses" after learning that Laura had been ill with pleurosis and mishearing the name. She reveals that she saw an ad in the newspaper announcing his engagement, but Amanda doesn't seem to be listening. She tells Laura that she's going to be married, and when Laura protests that she's crippled, Amanda tells her that she's never to use that word. She tells Laura she must cultivate other qualities, like charm - the kind her father had plenty of.

Scene 2 Analysis

Two more symbols that are important are referred to for the first time in this scene. The first is Laura's disability, which represents not only her own fears of facing the world but is a physical manifestation of the way that she, Amanda and Tom are all spiritually and emotionally disabled. Amanda is disabled by her obsession with the past, Laura by her intense shyness and self-consciousness, and Tom by his guilt-ridden sense of duty towards his mother and sister which plays an important role in later scenes.

The second symbol is the glass menagerie, the collection of miniature animals made of glass, referred to in the title. Not much of it is seen at this point, except that Laura cares about it deeply. The menagerie, and specifically the unicorn that gets broken later in the play, represents the dreams held by all the characters; it reveals how precious they are, and how easily destroyed. These include Amanda's dreams for Laura and her own dreams about her past, Laura's dreams for love, the Gentleman Caller's dreams of a

prosperous future, and Tom's dreams of freedom from the nagging restrictions on his physical and spiritual life imposed by both his mother and his work. The menagerie also relates to the symbol of the Gentleman Caller, in that both symbols represent aspects of hope.

Scene 3

Scene 3 Summary

In narration, Tom says that the idea of getting Laura married became an obsession with Amanda, that she talked about it all the time and that she started getting money together so she could dress up both Laura and the apartment. The focus of the scene changes, and Amanda is revealed talking on the telephone to one of her friends, whom she's trying to convince to buy a magazine subscription. She refers repeatedly to a short story series in the magazine, and is very surprised when her friend hangs up on her.

A light focuses attention on Laura as Tom and Amanda are having a loud argument. Amanda has thrown out some of Tom's books because she considered them immoral and dangerous. This has made Tom furious, and his resentment at having no life of his own explodes into anger as he rants at Amanda about how much he hates his job at the shoe warehouse and how much both she and the job are keeping him from being who and what he wants to be. He starts to leave, saying he's going to the movies, but Amanda shouts that she believes Tom doesn't go to the movies as much as he says he does. She talks about how he comes in late, stumbling and mumbling, then goes out after three hours sleep and probably dozes his way through work. Tom loudly and sarcastically goes through a list of his activities, drugs, gambling, and mob violence. As he struggles to pull on his coat he suggests that he's such a bad character that people are going to come and firebomb the house. He can't get his coat on and flings it across the room, where it accidentally flies into Laura's glass collection and breaks a few of the pieces. Laura cries out, and Amanda tells him she won't speak to him until he apologizes. She leaves while Tom goes to Laura and helps her pick up the pieces.

Scene 3 Analysis

Because of what's been revealed of Amanda's character, and because it's already clear that she's desperate for a Gentleman Caller for herself, Tom's story about Amanda's obsession with getting ready for a Caller for Laura becomes both ironic and poignant, since it illustrates how desperate and deluded Amanda is. It would be quite possible to believe at this point that Tom already knows the truth about Amanda's obsession, and that Amanda is completely blinded to the realities of who she is and how she acts. This is represented by her surprise when her friend hangs up during her very pushy phone call, and by the utter lack of awareness and understanding she shows Tom in the second part of the scene. Amanda does perceive accurately that he's not spending as much time at the movies as he says he is, but she has no inkling as to why, and more importantly doesn't care.

Tom's explosion in response to this is the next step toward his eventual departure. His accidental destruction of some of Laura's glass animals also represents the danger of his temper, and how it creates the very real risk that his, Laura's and Amanda's dreams

could be shattered. In Amanda's case the destruction of her dreams might finally shake her out of her denial of reality and into a more realistic perception of the world around her, but Laura's and Tom's dreams, as represented by the glass, are far too fragile. Tom's silence as he helps Laura, and his apology to his mother in the next scene, are both manifestations of his knowledge of that fragility.

Scene 4

Scene 4 Summary

Late that night, Tom comes home drunk, loud, and clumsy. Laura helps him to bed, urging him to keep quiet and apologize to Amanda. He tells her how he went to a magic show, and how the magician's best trick was escaping from a nailed-shut coffin without removing a single nail. He says that would be a handy trick for him, as it might get him out of the awful situation he's in. He passes out on the couch and the next morning has great difficulty getting out of bed. Amanda tells Laura to tell Tom that his coffee's ready, and then sends her out to get butter. She tells Laura to have the grocer put it on their account, and when Laura mentions that the grocer always looks unhappy when she does that, Amanda says it doesn't matter.

When Laura is gone, Tom sips his coffee and Amanda looks out the window; they are both silent. Tom finally apologizes for all of the things he said, and Amanda starts talking in a rush. She says that she's always so worried about him and Laura that she can't sleep and that she believes her children have potential for great success. She urges Tom to eat something, but he says he just wants coffee and starts to leave for work. Before he goes, though, Amanda insists upon talking about Laura.

Amanda tells Tom how worried Laura is about him, about how he goes to the movies all the time and how unhappy he is. Tom tells her he goes to the movies for adventure and that he goes so often because he needs a lot of adventure in his life. They start to fall into their old antagonistic routines. Tom tries again to leave for work, but Amanda pushes him into his chair and says again that she needs to talk about Laura. She says that she sees in Tom a lot of the things she saw in his father, including a need for freedom. He can go ahead and pursue all the freedom and adventure he wants, Amanda tells him, but not until he has finished taking care of Laura and passed her on to someone who will marry her and take over caring for her. Tom throws on his coat and gets ready to go, but Amanda catches his arm, telling him to find someone at work to whom they can introduce Laura. Tom clearly thinks it's a bad idea, but Amanda insists. Finally, halfway down the street, Tom says he'll find someone. Relieved, Amanda goes back to the phone and calls another friend to remind her about a magazine subscription.

Scene 4 Analysis

At the beginning of this scene, the idea that Tom is the poetic and thematic voice of the play is reinforced. In his description of the magic act and of the escaping-the-coffin trick, he explains most of the meaning of his own symbol, saying that he feels as though he is dead and trapped and wishes he could escape. The part he doesn't explain is his meaning when he says that he doesn't know how to escape from the coffin without destroying it. This aspect of the image suggests that he realizes that Amanda, and to some degree Laura, are keeping him trapped but doesn't know how to escape from the

coffin (his life) without destroying them. His apology is the inevitable result of this self-questioning and analysis, and clearly shows that he's not able to break out of the coffin of his life. Not yet.

It is doubtful that Amanda actually had the conversation with Laura that she says she did. From what has been seen of their relationship, it's apparent that Laura is tongue tied and shy, especially around her mother. This suggests that Amanda is lying in order to manipulate Tom into doing what she wants. The manipulation extends to her mention of Tom's father in order to make him feel guilty about the possibility of abandoning Laura to lonely spinsterhood if he goes off and pursues his dreams. In all likelihood, Tom recognizes this manipulation for what it is, but for reasons including fatigue, hangover, and love for Laura, he doesn't become angry about it. The real reason for his anger when Amanda suggests he find someone for Laura to meet is that he knows this would really be helping Amanda achieve her own dream, which isn't necessarily the same as Laura's. To keep the peace, however, he agrees.

Scene 5

Scene 5 Summary

Some time later, on a beautiful spring evening, Amanda and Laura clear the table after dinner, while Tom smokes a cigarette and talks about the Paradise Dance Hall across the way. He describes how the hall is lit by a spinning glass ball that fragments the light into dancing rainbows on the walls, how lovers come out the back doors to hold and kiss each other, and how adventure and change are ahead for them.

As Laura goes into the kitchen to do dishes, Amanda joins Tom, and together they look up at the new moon. Amanda makes a wish and tells Tom to do the same, saying that she wished for happiness and success for her children. Tom says he imagined that she wished for a Gentleman Caller, and adds that he's made arrangements for one to visit. Amanda becomes extremely excited, and when Tom tells her he's coming the next day flies into a panic about all of the things she has to do to get ready. She hustles Tom back into the house and asks him questions about the man's name, his job at the warehouse, how much money he makes, and whether he drinks, saying that it's necessary to ask all these questions to make sure the man is all right. She adds that they did it all the time back home, and Tom asks why she made such a mistake with his father. Amanda replies that she, like the rest of the world, fell under the spell of his charming smile. She says she hopes the Gentleman Caller isn't too attractive, adding that it's character that counts. Tom tells her that the fellow he's asked is taking courses in public speaking at night school, which Amanda takes to mean that he's got real ambition to get ahead.

Tom warns her that he didn't tell his friend about Laura and isn't planning to. Amanda says it doesn't matter, that once he gets there he'll see how lovely and sweet and pretty Laura is. Tom gently tries to make Amanda see that Laura is those things to them because they know and love her, but that with strangers she seems shy and almost peculiar, with her glass menagerie and constant listening to records. Amanda doesn't want to hear it, and Tom storms out, saying again that he's going to the movies. After he leaves, Amanda calls Laura to come out from the kitchen. Laura does, and Amanda tells her to wish on the moon. When Laura asks what she should wish for, Amanda tells her to wish for happiness and good fortune.

Scene 5 Analysis

The romantic elements of Tom's description of the dance hall, particularly the intimacy of the young lovers there, foreshadow the romance that immediately enlivens Amanda as he tells her about the Gentleman Caller. It foreshadows later scenes in the play as well, when the Caller not only arrives but seems to enjoy talking with Laura. The adventure and change he talks about echo his own desire for adventure that he talked about earlier and the change that awaits him at the end of the play.

The possibility of Amanda wanting a Gentleman Caller for herself more than for Laura becomes even more likely in this scene, when her descriptions of Laura start sounding more like a description of how she sees herself. The likelihood that Amanda is talking about herself increases even more when Tom's attempts to get Amanda to see the truth about Laura fall on deaf ears yet again. His doubts are ironic, however, given that later in the play the Gentleman Caller actually does find Laura to be all of the things that Amanda says she is.

Memories and invocations of Tom's father show up throughout the play but are particularly vivid in this scene. In spite of the fact that the actual mention of him is quite brief, it's easy to understand that Amanda's questioning is the result of having been desperately hurt by him. This is also true of her eagerness for a caller; she is desperate to prove to herself, to her son, to the world, and to her long-absent husband that he was wrong to leave, that she's an attractive and desirable woman, and that her missing husband is missing out. This gives her illusions about herself and about the Gentleman Caller a more dramatic and thematic reason for existing, and makes her ultimate disappointment at the Gentleman Caller's early departure even more tragic for her than it is for Laura.

Scene 6, Part 1

Scene 6, Part 1 Summary

The scene begins with Tom explaining that the next night the Gentleman Caller (Jim) came to dinner. He describes Jim's high school successes in debating, sports, and the annual musical and explains that since that time Jim has become less successful. Tom reveals that Jim's job at the warehouse is only slightly better than his own and says that the reason he and Jim are friends is that he still remembers some of Jim's former glory, which is something that Jim counts on. He mentions that Laura and Jim knew each other, but that he doubts that Jim remembers Laura at all.

As Tom finishes speaking, the light comes up on the living room, where Amanda is hemming a dress for Laura. The room is clean and tidy, there is a new lamp, and Laura's hair has been re-styled into something prettier and softer. She fidgets nervously as Amanda works and protests when Amanda offers a pair of powder puffs for her to put into her bra to increase the size of her bosom. Laura says she feels like they're setting a trap, and Amanda responds that all pretty young women are traps. She then goes off to put on her own dress. Laura looks at herself in the mirror.

Amanda quickly returns, wearing one of the dresses that she wore as a girl and carrying a small bouquet of jonquils. She tells Laura how she wore that dress every Sunday to receive her gentleman callers and how she loved jonquils so much that she became known for carrying them with her all the time. As she puts the jonquils in a vase, she mentions that she gave Tom some extra money so that he and "Mr. O'Connor" could take a taxi home rather than the bus. When she hears the name O'Connor, Laura panics and asks what the man's first name is. When Amanda says that it's Jim, Laura tells her she remembers a boy named Jim O'Connor from school and that if it's the same man she won't come to the table. When Amanda asks why, all Laura can say is that if it's the same person she'll be too nervous. Amanda says it can't possibly be the same person and that even if it is Laura is not excused. She tells Laura that when Tom and Jim come to the door it will be her job to let them in. Laura pleads with her to do it, but Amanda says she'll be busy and goes into the kitchen to make the dressing for her salmon loaf.

Scene 6, Part 1 Analysis

Tom's speech suggests that Jim, like the other characters in the play, is haunted by the past. There is some question as to whether this is actually true, because Jim's relationship with his past is different in two significant ways. The first is that Jim's past was happy, and he remembers it that way. This raises the question of whether his need to be reminded of that past by Tom is real, or whether Tom has invented it in order to explain to himself why they're friends.

The second difference is that Jim is making efforts to make his future as successful as his past. This is indicated by Tom's earlier mention of the night classes Jim is taking, and is a clear contrast with Tom, who knows what he wants to do but isn't taking action; with Amanda, whose excitement is based on recapturing her past rather than improving her future; and with Laura, who is terrified of the future - that is, until she talks with Jim in the next scene.

Amanda's appearance in one of her old dresses and carrying a bouquet of jonquils shows more clearly than ever how much she sees this dinner as a recapturing of her youth, and how much she sees Jim as a caller for her. The jonquils, miniature daffodils that grow in the spring, represent the youth, beauty, and hope that Amanda still believes she has. Because jonquils don't bloom for long, their presence in both Amanda's memory and the present implies that youth is fleeting, something that Amanda clearly has yet to grasp.

Scene 6, Part 2

Scene 6, Part 2 Summary

Tom and Jim appear outside the door and ring the bell. Laura panics, unable to go to the door because she's so nervous. She calls again to Amanda, who refuses to open the door. Tom and Jim wait, then ring again. Amanda comes in from the kitchen and sternly orders Laura to go to the door. Laura, barely able to speak, finally agrees. As Amanda goes back into the kitchen, Laura opens the door and admits Tom and Jim. Tom introduces Jim and Laura, but before they can have much of a conversation, Laura runs into the kitchen.

Tom takes the newspaper and a cigarette outside. Jim follows and takes the opportunity of their being alone to tell Tom that unless he shapes up at work, he's going to be fired. Tom tells him he's going to make some changes, saying that too many people substitute the false adventure of movies and dance halls for real adventure and real life. He shows Jim his membership in the Merchant Marines and explains that he paid his dues with money that was supposed to be put on the electricity bill.

Amanda appears and calls Tom and Jim into the living room. When they go in, she talks to them flirtatiously and non-stop, about what a pleasure it is to meet Jim, about how warm it is, how old her dress is, how many callers she used to have, how domestic Laura is, how many servants they had back home in the South, and how she married a telephone man "who fell in love with long distance" and who is out traveling who knows where. She calls Laura to come out of the kitchen, and when Laura doesn't appear calls again. Laura finally comes out, barely able to stand from nerves and holding on to a chair for support. As the others move into the dining room, Laura falls to the floor. Tom helps her onto the sofa and leaves her there. Amanda, Tom, and Jim sit at the table, and Amanda tells Tom to say grace.

Scene 6, Part 2 Analysis

As Jim comes in, it seems that he doesn't remember Laura but that she remembers him and is deeply embarrassed, even terrified, about seeing him again. Amanda says that she's refusing to give in to Laura's nerves, but she's actually refusing to let Laura interfere with this one chance she's been given to relive her youth.

The conversation between Tom and Jim foreshadows two things. Tom's revelation that he's joined the Merchant Marines foreshadows his final departure, while the mention of the power bill foreshadows what happens in the following scene when the power goes out. On a symbolic level, both the foreshadowing and the power failure work to represent what will happen to the family once Tom leaves. Since he's providing most of the income, a source of hope for Amanda in spite of her resentment of him and a source

of support for Laura, his departure will take light, literal and metaphorical, out of their lives.

Amanda's chattering and flirting with Jim illuminates her past, revealing the sort of girl she was and thinks she still is. Her previously revealed capacities for self-delusion and invention are reinforced by the way she shapes the stories she tells, all of which have been told before in different ways. In other words, few if any of the things she says can be taken completely seriously. The irony is that it works. Even though Laura and Tom find Amanda embarrassing, Jim is completely taken in. This is doubtlessly very reassuring and exciting to Amanda, something that will be explored further in the next, and climactic, scene.

Scene 7, Part 1

Scene 7, Part 1 Summary

Half an hour later, Amanda, Tom, and Jim are just finishing dinner when the lights go out. Amanda takes Jim into the kitchen to look at the fuses. When he says the fuses look fine, Amanda calls to Tom and asks whether he paid the electric bill. He doesn't answer right away, and Amanda assumes he didn't. Jim jokes that Tom probably wrote a poem on the back of the bill and that the poem might win a prize. Amanda says that as punishment, Tom can help her with the dishes while Jim talks with Laura. Amanda gives Jim a candelabra and a glass of wine which he takes to Laura in the front room.

Scene 7, Part 1 Analysis

The power outage in this brief scene follows through on the foreshadowing in the previous scene, but also acts as foreshadowing itself, of the darkness that is about to descend on almost all the characters. Amanda's and Laura's hopes will be ended by Jim's eventual revelation that he's engaged, while Jim's sudden attraction to Laura will be nipped in the bud when he realizes he has to honor his commitment to his fiancé. Tom is the only one whose hopes survive, which is ironic because it is the achievement of his hopes that will, as discussed earlier, leave his mother and sister even more in the dark.

Scene 7, Part 2

Scene 7, Part 2 Summary

Jim comes into the living room, speaks gently to Laura, and offers her the wine. She sits up on the sofa, takes the wine, and sips lightly. He talks her into sitting on the floor with him, gets her to sit closer to the candlelight so he can see her better, and tells her that Tom told him she's shy. Laura asks him whether he's kept up with his singing and reminds him that they used to sit next to each other in the school choir. Jim admits that Laura looked familiar to him as soon as he came in the door but that he couldn't figure out from where. Laura tells him that she knew who he was the minute he came in, reminds him that he once gave her the nickname "Blue Roses," and confesses that she always felt self-conscious about her limp. He remembers the Blue Roses nickname, reassures her that he never noticed her limp, and tells her that just about everybody gets disappointed with their lives after high school. He says he's one of those people and reminds her that in his yearbook it said that he was most likely to succeed. Laura fetches out the yearbook and they look at it together.

Laura points out the pictures of Jim singing in the school musical and confesses that she was too shy to ask him to sign her program. Jim asks whether she's still got it, and when she shyly pulls it out, he signs it for her. As she's becoming more relaxed around him, she asks how his fiancé is and refers to seeing the announcement that they were engaged. Jim tells her that he is engaged only in the girl's opinion, and as he lights a cigarette asks Laura what she's been doing since high school.

Suddenly shy again, Laura tells him about the secretarial course and about having to drop out. Jim then talks at length about how he sees Laura's problem as being an inferiority complex, saying that he had that problem too until he started his night classes. He adds that everyone is superior at something but that sometimes people don't ever realize what their own strengths are. He tells Laura that he's interested in electronics and that he has plans to get in on the ground floor of the broadcasting business. He follows up by asking Laura what she is good at, and she mentions her glass collection, saying it takes a lot of time and effort to take care of it. When he doesn't quite understand what she means, she gets up and shows him, saying that it's a collection of little glass animals that Amanda calls her "glass menagerie."

Laura shows Jim her favorite glass figure, a tiny sculpture that he recognizes as a unicorn. When he says that unicorns are extinct and suggests that he must be lonely on the shelf with the horses, Laura says that they all get along fine and tells him to put the unicorn on the table to give it a change of scene. At this point, Jim says he can hear the music from the dance hall and asks Laura to dance with him. She refuses at first, but he takes her into his arms, and they slowly and carefully dance together, eventually becoming a little more enthusiastic until they bump into the table and knock the unicorn off.

Laura picks it up and tells Jim that now it's just like all the other horses, meaning that the horn has been knocked off. Jim apologizes, but Laura tells him she'll just pretend that the unicorn had an operation to make him feel less freakish. He laughs, telling her he appreciates her sense of humor and likes the fact that she's different from most girls. He tells her she's pretty and kisses her. Suddenly he breaks away and lights a cigarette.

As Laura looks down at the broken glass ornament in her hand, Jim says he shouldn't have kissed her and apologizes for having to tell her that he can't telephone her in a few days the way he'd like to. He confesses that he's in love with another girl, and tells her how love has changed his life. Laura, in a daze, offers him the unicorn/horse as a souvenir. At just that moment, Amanda runs in to the room.

Scene 7, Part 2 Analysis

This scene between Jim and Laura is the longest in the play, and is almost a miniature play in its own right. It has its own story, its own beginning, middle and end, its own themes, its own symbols, and its own narrative style. All of these elements have echoes and resonance with the rest of the play, but for the most part this scene is like the unicorn that plays such an important role in its action: unique and beautiful and fragile.

Jim is unique in this play in that he simply is who he is, says what he says, feels what he feels, and acts without agenda or plan. This is true of all his actions in this scene, from his invitation to Laura to sit on the floor, to his eagerness to help her, to his impulse to kiss her, to his pained honesty in revealing the truth. He's an honest, simple, open soul and is a very effective contrast to the other characters who are all inhibited by one thing or another. Tom is inhibited by his frustration, Amanda by her illusions and denial of reality, and Laura by what Jim calls her inferiority complex. Jim is like the breeze that Amanda had mentioned in an earlier scene, blowing freshness into the dinginess of all their lives. The size of his shadow represents the power of his confidence and the way in which it seems overwhelming to Laura.

The unicorn, of course, represents Laura herself. Jim's discovery of the unicorn's beauty parallels his discovery of Laura's beauty, while his accidental breaking of the unicorn parallels his breaking of Laura's heart. There are occasions during this scene when stage directions indicate that Amanda's laughter can be heard at times when Laura refers to the unicorn and menagerie. This suggests that on some level, Amanda is also like the unicorn, although it's doubtful that her self-image is as fragile as either the unicorn or Laura's hopes. She may be delusional, but she's not weak. Finally, the unicorn, along with the rest of the glass menagerie, represents the play's principal theme, which concerns the conflict between living a life of illusion or false hope, as symbolized by Jim, and living a life in the real world. In short, for all its gentleness and beauty, this scene is still a confrontation between those two ways of viewing life, and as such is the first part of the climax of the play. The second part is the confrontation between Amanda and Tom in the following scene.

Scene 7, Part 3

Scene 7, Part 3 Summary

Amanda hurries into the room with a pitcher of lemonade and two glasses. She comments on how serious Jim and Laura look, and Jim says uneasily that they've been having a serious conversation. Amanda pours them some lemonade and tells Jim that she'll go back into the kitchen and leave them to their conversation. Jim, however, tells her that he's got to leave, explaining that he's got to pick up his fiancé. He goes to Laura, thanks her again for the souvenir, reminds her to take his advice about finding something superior about herself, and leaves.

Amanda calls Tom into the room and tells him that Jim is engaged. When Tom says he didn't know, Amanda says she doesn't believe him and accuses him of living in a dream, of "manufacturing illusions." Tom grabs his coat and goes to the door, saying he's going to the movies. Amanda shouts that he's selfish, Tom shouts back that the more she calls him selfish the further he's going to go, and Amanda shouts that he can go to the moon for all she cares. Tom slams out the door and Laura screams in fright.

Outside, Tom becomes the narrator again, describing how soon after that night he was fired from the warehouse, left home, and started traveling the world. He says that in all of his travels and in all the cities he visited, he has felt as though he were being followed by something he caught only glimpses of. It's in those moments, he says, that his memories of Laura catch up with him.

As he talks, Amanda silently comforts Laura and then goes back into the kitchen. Laura goes to the candles, and as Tom finishes his speech by saying that he's more faithful and devoted to her than he meant to be, Laura blows out the candles in the candelabra.

Scene 7, Part 3 Analysis

During the conversation between Amanda and Jim, and in fact for most of this last scene, Laura is almost entirely silent. All she says is one word, "Yes," when Amanda asks her whether she wishes Jim happiness and success. This silence suggests that Laura is drawing back into herself, although there is no indication as to whether she's in despair about Jim leaving or happy that he was attracted to her. Either is possible. Neither is there any indication of whether she's going to keep this night as a cherished memory or turn into her mother, perverting a past joy into a memory that will constantly undermine the pleasures of the present and hope for the future.

The confrontation between Tom and Amanda is the second part of the play's climax. The explosion of their mutual frustration, bitterness, and resentment represents another thematic confrontation between illusion and reality. Amanda's loss of control, in fact, is so extreme that she refers to Laura as crippled, a word she told both of her children never to use. Her comment that Tom manufactures illusions is extremely ironic, given

that she's done nothing but manufacture illusions throughout the entire play and indeed for her entire life. Tom's departure represents the necessity of leaving illusion behind and facing whatever truth may lie ahead, however difficult it may be.

Tom's final speech illustrates just how difficult that is. His words suggest that he's been guiltily haunted by thoughts and memories of Laura, and imply that he worried about her the whole while he was gone. It is not revealed whether he sent money home, and neither is it revealed what happened to Laura or Amanda afterwards, but this isn't the kind of play where such information is necessary. Part of the reason this story is told is to explore the theme of life versus illusion, but as both Tom's first and final speeches make clear, albeit in different ways, this story is also told to explore memory and the way it works in an individual's life. This becomes a sub-theme for the play and is clearly dramatized by Amanda and the way her memory affects her choices and attitudes. Life and art alike, the drama implies, are less about things that happened than they are about the way things is remembered.

Bibliography

Williams, Tennessee. "The Glass Menagerie." Penguin Books. New York. 1945.

Characters

Blue Roses

See Laura Wingfield

Jim O'Connor

Jim is the gentleman caller Tom invites home for dinner. Although he also works at the warehouse, he makes more money than Tom and has greater aspirations even if they are somewhat conventional ones. Yet, his situation reveals that dreams are often not achieved, for in high school Jim had been predicted to become very successful. He treats Laura kindly, but during their conversation he reveals that he too is not entirely realistic, for he discounts the severity of Laura's problem and assures her that all she needs is more confidence.

Amanda Wingfield

Amanda is the mother of Tom and Laura. She has difficulty facing reality, though by the end of the play she does acknowledge Tom's desire to leave and Laura's uncertain future. She frequently fantacizes about the past, probably exaggerating her own popularity Ihen. Her relationship with Tom is conflicted, most prominently when she criticizes his minor habits.

Laura Wingfield

Laura is the daughter of Amanda and sister of Tom. She is extremely shy, even emotionally disturbed, and she wears a brace on her leg which makes her feel conspicuous. Her collection of glass animals gives the play its title. She does not work, and she has been unable to complete a typing class because of her nervousness. Although she says she had once liked a boy in high school, she has never had and is unlikely to have any kind of romantic relationship.

Tom Wingfield

Amanda's son and Laura's brother, Tom is the protagonist of the play. He dreams of abandoning (he family, as his father had done. He feels trapped in his job, where he often neglects his duties in order to write poetry, and in his home, where he is reprimanded for reading some modern literature which was considered scandalous at me time. Although he claims to go to the movies every night, he also probably goes to a bar, since he sometimes comes home drunk. Eventually, he agrees to bnng a "gentleman caller" home to meet Laura, but he leaves the family that night. Although

Tom appears to genuinely care for Laura, his greater desire is to relieve his frustration at his confining situation. When he functions as narrator at a time several years after the action of the play, readers understand that he has escaped physically but not emotionally.

Themes

Appearances and Reality

Throughout this play, emerging in every scene and through the actions of every character is the theme of Appearances vs. Reality. Characters believe in a future and a past which are not realistic, and these beliefs affect the decisions they make regarding their relationships with each other. For example, Amanda frequently describes the days of her youth, when she claims she received "seventeen! gentlemen callers!" during one Sunday afternoon. Although she describes these men as if they either are wealthy or have died a tragic/heroic death, the man she married was apparently both unsuccessful and irresponsible. And despite all evidence to the contrary, Amanda seems to believe that Laura, too, will one day be visited by similar gentlemen callers.

Rather than fantasizing about his past, Tom believes that his future holds excitement, if he can only escape his family. Yet he fails to escape completely even though he does leave. In his last monologue, Tom reveals that he is not running toward something but away from his past: "I was pursued by something." And although he travels continually, he fails to find the excitement he longs for, as the "cities swept about me like dead leaves."

Even Jim O'Connor, the most conventional character, continues to believe in unattainable dreams. Although he apparently is talented, he has been unable to make choices that will guarantee him professional success. He refers enthusiastically to his public speaking class, but readers understand that Jim is attributing more significance to this course than it perhaps deserves.

Laura, however, is the character who is most obviously detached from reality. She cannot have normal interactions with other people without becoming ill. Her emotional energy is invested in her collection of glass animals, which may be exotic and delicate but are nevertheless "unreal," especially the unicorn she claims is her favorite. For the unicorn doesn't even represent a realistic animal. Even the nickname Jim once gave her, Blue Roses, is a flower that doesn't exist. By the time the play ends, Laura seems to be more detached from reality rather than able to adjust.

Coming of Age

Although most pieces of literature, which have coming of age as a major theme, discuss younger characters, in some ways *The Glass Menagerie* also considers this theme. While all of the characters are technically adults, they do not relate to each other as adults. Amanda instructs Tom about his eating habits as if he is still a child, and he reacts to her with the resentment of an adolescent. In this regard, Tom is in a double bind, for he cannot simultaneously exercise all of the qualities of an adult in his situation. If he is to fulfill his family obligations, obligations Amanda has thrust upon him

rather than ones, which he has voluntarily assumed, he will have to relinquish his independence. If he is to act independently, he will have to forsake his family responsibilities. Although Tom does eventually assert his independence, he does not seem to ever become fully mature. Rather, he is compared to his father, who also abandoned the family, though he had presumably chosen that responsibility by getting married. It is his father's desertion, which places Tom into such an oppressive situation. Because Tom is so clearly compared to his father, readers can easily forget this primary difference between them.

Duty and Responsibility

Woven into the coming of age theme is the issue of duty and responsibility. While Amanda insists that Tom's primary duty is to her and Laura, Tom resents this responsibility because it presents him with so few options. On the other hand, Tom also has a responsibility to himself, one he might say he exercises precisely by attempting to abandon his family. By the end of the play, however, we see that Tom is both irresponsible and a failure in attaining his goals. Yet, the responsibilities of a son are different from those of a father. Although Amanda, in some ways, wants Tom to be a surrogate husband she holds him responsible for supporting the family although she does not permit him the authority of a head of a household Tom's action, while being objectively similar to his father's, might not be identical morally.

Style

Conflict

Although the action in *The Glass Menagerie* occurs over only a couple of days, nearly every scene is laden with overt conflict. The most obvious conflict occurs between Tom and Amanda, since Tom needs to remove himself from the family in order to achieve his goals, while Amanda needs him to stay. This conflict is most evident during their frequent bickering about the way Tom chews his food or the number of cigarettes he smokes. A more significant conflict, however, occurs within Tom's character. In order to follow his dream, vague as it is, he will have to abandon not only Amanda but also Laura.

Narrator

Although most plays do not rely on a narrator, *The Glass Menagerie* is structured so that Tom can fulfill two roles. He is both a character in the play and the person who, at times, tells the story directly to the audience. This occurs particularly at the beginning of the play, when Tom summarizes the events that have preceded the action and describes the setting, and at the end of the play, when Tom reveals what has happened to him during the intervening years.

Protagonist

The protagonist of a literary work is the main character, who must change in some way during the course of the events, even if the change is entirely internal. Tom is clearly the protagonist of *The Glass Menagerie*. Although he is not heroic and will probably never triumph over his obstacles, he does take action by the end of the play.

Setting

The broad setting of *The Glass Menagerie* as described in Williams's stage directions is "one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower middle-class population." In other words, it is a fairly large apartment house in a comparatively poor neighborhood. The specific city is unnamed, as if details are unnecessary since these neighborhoods so closely resemble each other. All of the action occurs within the living room and dining room of the Wingfield's apartment; the primary importance of the setting is to reinforce the cramped feeling the characters struggle against. The time is also vague. Obviously, the play is set several decades ago, since Tom can support (although inadequately) a family of three on sixty-five dollars a month; yet, were it not for details such as these, the play could easily be set in the current generation.

Symbolism

The Glass Menagerie achieves part of its effect through the prominent display of symbols. The father's portrait looms above the family on their wall, although he has been absent for years; obviously, he remains psychologically present and significantly affects the attitudes of the other characters. The candles also function symbolically. When Tom fails to pay the light bill, Amanda lights the apartment with candles, suggesting that this will lend a more romantic atmosphere to their home. The last action of the play is when Laura blows the candles out, as if this will erase her from Tom's memory in a death-like moment. The primary symbol in this play, however, is Laura's glass menagerie, particularly the unicorn. The glass animals are fragile, as Laura is both emotionally and physically. Although they might imitate reality, they are not in themselves real, and their primary value lies in Laura's imagination. When the unicorn's horn breaks off, Laura describes him as now like the other horses, as if one must be broken in order to be normal. Laura is already "broken," however, and has never had the mythic status of a unicorn; she will never attain normalcy.

Historical Context

World War II

Although the setting of *The Glass Menagerie* is the 1930s, during the Great Depression and slightly before the beginning of World War II, Williams wrote the play after America had entered the war but before a decisive victory had been achieved. After being produced in Chicago in 1944, the play arrived in New York in 1945, the year the war ended. For Americans, the most significant historical event of the first half of the 1940s was the entry of the United States into World War H. Although the United States had not been eager to enter this war, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7,1941, making U.S. participation inevitable on the side of the Allies primarily England, France, and Russia. In addition to Japan, the Allies fought against Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, and Italy, led by Benito Mussolini. Through most of the war, Franklin Roosevelt was President of the United States, until he died on April 12, 1945; he was succeeded by his vice president, Harry S. Truman. The European phase of the war ended in May 1945, and the Pacific phase ended with the dropping of nuclear bombs on Japan (in Hiroshima and Nagasaki) in August of 1945.

Women in the Workforce

Among the American ramifications of World War II was the sudden increase of women in the workplace. Primarily because so many men were serving in the armed forces, women began performing jobs that had not previously been open to them, in factories for example; such work was now considered patriotic. "Rosy the Riveter" is a famous character who represents this trend. When the war ended and men returned home, however, women were expected to leave their jobs so that the men might find employment. Women did not enter the workforce in significant numbers again until the 1970's.

The Boom Years

Another effect of returning soldiers was the passage of the G.I. Bill of Rights which provided education benefits and home loans for many veterans. As a result, college enrollment increased substantially and began to become more available to middle and lower class students. New home construction and suburban development also expanded. This meant that many middle-class people moved out of major cities. On the other hand, because of work available in factories, this decade also saw mass migration from rural areas into cities.

Technological innovations also occurred, although contemporary standards make them seem decidedly dated. In 1944, the first general-purpose digital computer began to operate at Harvard University although it needed four seconds to perform multiplication problems and eleven seconds to perform division! This computer had been built with

760,000 parts and 500 miles of wire clearly neither a desktop nor a laptop version. Although its inventors might not have anticipated the electronic age of the late twentieth century, they clearly initiated a technological revolution.

More pertinent to average Americans was the development of Kodacolor, a color film marketed by Eastman Kodak. This film permitted individuals to take color pictures with inexpensive cameras.

The Growth of Post-War Arts

Within the arts, Tennessee Williams worked in a rich context. Other plays performed in New York or major European cities included *The Searching Wind* by Lillian Hellman, *No Exit* by Jean-Paul Sartre, and *I Remember Mama* by John Van Druten, which included Marlon Brando in its cast. W. Somerset Maugham published his novel, *The Razor's Edge*, in 1944. Stephen Vincent Benet won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry that year, and T. S. Eliot published his *Four Quartets*. Such well-known and talented painters as Pablo Picasso, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Frida Kahlo produced much of their work during this period. Cole Porter, Judy Garland, Rita Hayworth, and Gene Kelly were popular entertainers. On a more humorous note, 1944 also saw the introduction of the Chiquita Banana song, which encouraged consumers to identify the fruit with a particular brand name-a trend that reached mammoth proportions by the late twentieth century.

Critical Overview

When *The Glass Menagerie* reached the New York stage in 1945, it was a resounding success. A year earlier, it had also been successful in Chicago, despite poor weather which initially deterred the audience. According to Felicia Hardison Londre, writing in *American Playwrights since 1945*, "a crusade by the warmly enthusiastic Chicago critics" was launched to keep the play in production. It has remained popular, with staged as well as filmed versions appearing frequently, and it is considered to be one of Williams's most successful works. Indeed, writing in *The Christian Century* in 1964 while Williams was still alive, critic William R. Mueller stated that Williams "is the greatest living American playwright and ranks next to [Eugene] O'Neill in the history of American theater."

Critics almost inevitably remark on the poetic structure and language of *The Glass Menagerie*. As evidenced by the success with which his plays have been filmed, Williams brought a "cinematic concept of dramatic action to the American stage," according to Londre. She continued, descnbmg Williams's work as characterized by "a harmonious blending and mutual reinforcement of dialogue, character, symbols, scenic environment, music, sound effects, and lighting." In his article Mueller stated that a "common denominator of Williams's plays is the quality of their poetry." Mueller defined this "poetry" not in terms of conventional poetic devices such as rhyme and meter, but as language "suffused with imagery and so phrased as to create a dreamlike state." In *Tennessee Williams: A Tribute*, S. Alan Chesler credited Williams with creating "a new poetic drama-----Williams has employed visual and auditory effects to previously unattempted extents by emphasizing color, music and scenic devices."

Yet poetry is far from the only characteristic for which critics have praised Williams and his plays. Although many of the stage directions in this play are almost novelistic in their detail, his work is also discussed in terms of its theatricality. Contrasting Williams with William Shakespeare, Mueller argued that "Shakespeare can be played without setting, lighting, costume, music; Williams cannot. He makes fullest use of the craft of the stage: scenic effects, lighting, color, music are of vast importance in evoking from the audience the desired emotional response." The use of a scrim between the audience and the actors at the beginning of the play would be one example of this. Another would be the frequency with which scene changes are signaled through fading music.

Critics also frequently comment on the psychological complexity of Williams's work, especially addressing the autobiographical roots of *The Glass Menagerie*. In part because of his success m creating characters who evoke empathy, even if they are not entirely typical, *The Glass Menagerie* and plays which soon followed appealed to an exceptionally broad audience, from high school students to professional critics. In the words of Foster Hirsch in *A Portrait of the Artist: The Plays of Tennessee Williams*, "Williams creates driven characters who are unlike anyone most of us are ever likely to meet and yet they are almost all convincing and recognizable." In an article published in *Players*, Gerald Berkowitz analyzed these characters in terms of the setting Williams has created for them: "as we discover each aberration or peculiarity in their [the

Wingfields'] characters, we also discover that it is benign or even appropriate to their setting. Laura's pathological shyness does not stifle her at home; she is even able to overcome her fear of Jim when talking of her glass animals. Her lameness, which so embarrassed her in high school, becomes irrelevant when she is sitting in the apartment."

In addition to the number of awards Williams won during his lifetime, another way to measure his critical success, and the critical success of *The Glass Menagerie*, is through the professional attention he continues to receive. Books and articles continue to be written about this play as the thematic, literary, and theatrical issues it raises continue to be debated. Within the last generation, these publications include not only a wide range of American and Canadian periodicals but also journals published in Brussels, France, Brazil, The Netherlands, Germany, and South Africa. This play, in other words, has achieved not only significant popular success but international critical success.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Domina is an author and educator. This essay examines William's use of modem theatrical technology as an essential element of his drama.

Tennessee Williams is admired for the theatricality of his plays and for introducing literary, specifically poetic, devices into the theater. In *The Glass Menagerie* particularly, he relies on the craft of modern theater on such devices as lighting and sound techniques to enhance the effectiveness of his themes, themes which are not difficult to recognize

Throughout this play, the characters are tempted toward illusion when they find reality too painful. Although the illusions of some characters are more socially acceptable, even typical, than others, Williams suggests that the "American dream" is as illusory as more overt psychological illnesses and that any given anifestation of illusion is as understandable, even acceptable, as any other one. Even Jim O'Connor, the character an audience would likely describe as closest to "normal," in other words, does not distinguish between reality and fantasy. Jarka M. Burian, writing in *International Dictionary ofTheatre-1: Plays*, stated that each of the Wingfields "has a secret life and dream that inherently has little likelihood of actualization." Furthermore, in this play Williams suggests that the most specific arena of confinement, the family, is also the primary motivation for fantasy. Freedom equals freedom from familial responsibilities; yet since each character either attempts to achieve conventional family relations or obsessively to deny them, Williams indicates that such freedom is at best a vain hope.

This tendency to resist reality is most obvious in the female characters. Amanda Wingfield, the mother of Tom and Laura, is an abandoned wife who longs for a stable family structure, that is, a stable means of support, for her daughter. Amanda does not rely on her own experience as a cautionary device or her experience cautions her toward conservatism. Her husband, who had left the family years ago, remains present in the "warty growth" of the Wingfield apartment; his photograph, "the face of a very handsome young man in a doughboy's First World War cap... gallantly smiling, ineluctably smiling," dominates the living room. Rather than suggest that Laura should not depend on a husband to support her (as difficult as this choice would have been during the 1930s), Amanda desires instead that Laura find a suitable husband, one who will not drink excessively, who will find excitement enough in a conventional career and family.

Yet although she has kept her husband's photograph on her wall, Amanda sometimes seems to forget that she chose to marry a less-than-ideal man. She speaks frequently, almost obsessively, of the Sunday afternoon when she received "*seventeen!* gentlemen callers! Why, sometimes there weren't chairs enough to accommodate them all." And each of these men was special: "Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters on the Mississippi Delta planters and sons of planters! ... There was young Champ Laughlin who later became vice president of the Delta Planters Bank. Hadley Stevenson who was drowned m Moon Lake and left his widow one hundred and

fifty thousand m Government bonds. That Fitzhugh boy went North and made a fortune came to be known as the Wolf of Wall Street! He had the Midas touch." In continually reliving this Sunday afternoon, Amanda is able to retain a sense of her own popularity, a sense of success rather than of the failure that accompanies the marriage she did make. The unstated question is, of course, why she married the man "who fell in love with long distances" rather than one of these other implausibly successful beaux.

Simultaneously, however, because she lives more energetically in the past than in the present, she appears rather foolish when a gentleman caller does accompany Tom home for dinner. Although she does desire that Laura find a suitable husband, Amanda dresses and acts as if the gentleman is calling for her: "She wears a girlish frock of yellowed voile with a blue silk sash. She carries a bunch of jonquils the legend of her youth is nearly revived." This dress is not only "girlish," but is precisely the one "in which I led the cotillion" over twenty years earlier. But the intervening time has collapsed; Amanda's girlhood merges with her middle age.

Although Laura remembers liking only one boy rather than receiving seventeen gentlemen callers and although she knew this boy approximately five rather than twenty-five years ago, Laura's romantic life initially seems as decidedly over as Amanda's. While Amanda's illusions lead her to act foolishly, to become coyly extraverted, Laura's function with opposite results. Laura's fantasies are not simply a preference but a need; they incapacitate her. Laura's fantasies, that is, don't merely supplement reality but *become* reality. More specifically, her glass menagerie which gives the play its title resembles Laura in disturbingly accurate detail. Even the stage directions instruct us to interpret Laura as more similar to these delicate glass objects than to any of the other human characters: "A fragile, unearthly prettiness has come out in Laura: she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting." Laura describes the unicorn with similar language: "he loves the light! You see how the light shines through him?" In the *Reference Guide to American Literature*, Christian H. Moe supported this view. Laura, he argued, "reveals herself as loo fragile ... to pursue outside reality and thus becomes instead its victim retreating into her own fantasy world." This glass collection constitutes Laura's community, for she indicates that she devotes most of her lime, and implicitly her emotional energy, to it. She personifies the animals, creating lives for them thai reflect her own. When the unicorn's horn breaks, for example, Laura speculates that "The horn was removed to make him feel less freakish! . .. Now he will feel more at home with the other horses."

By this point, Laura has revealed why she also feels "freakish." The brace on her leg "clumped so loud" according to her memory, drawing everyone's attention, she believes, to her disability. Yet the one time Tom uses the word "crippled" to describe Laura, Amanda reprimands him demanding that her fantasy take precedence over the family's reality. One could argue that when the unicorn's horn breaks, he becomes "crippled" rather than "less freakish." For it is his horn that grants him individuality. Laura, of course, longs to be more similar to others rather than so distinct from them.

In his willingness to be honest about Laura, Tom is perhaps the only character who can see Laura simultaneously as "peculiar" and as beautiful; a person so delicate that light can shine through her. Because he acknowledges that his life is frus-tratingly dull and confining, Tom fantasizes about the future. If he can leave the family, he believes, if he can imitate his father and simply follow his desires for long distance, he will have opportunity rather than responsibility. He will be able to write poetry rather than sell shoes. Tom does leave, of course, after he loses his job selling shoes because he was writing poetry. But though he does join the merchant marine and though he does abandon the family physically, he discovers that memory can haunt him. He can never leave them emotionally. The future becomes as oppressive as the past, for the "cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches." Rather than live merrily in the past as Amanda does, Tom is haunted by il. "I was pursued by something," he says. Try as he might to escape, "all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!"

Even Jim O'Connor, the most conventional of these characters, is nagged by his past. In an article published in *Players*, Gerald Berkowitz critiqued Jim for his own fantasies: "His dreams and values, as practical and, realistic as they may be, sound shallower and more comical than Amanda's .. . and his disquisitions on the art and etiquette of its [a pack of chewing gum] use sound far more odd and foolish than Laura's fantasies about the animals' feelings." While he may not be as obsessed as any of the others, he has discovered that the present has not lived up to his hopes. In high school, he had been extremely popular and had been expected to succeed at whatever he attempted. Yel, even if he makes somewhat more money, he nevertheless works in the same warehouse as Tom. Rather than surrender to disappointment, however, Jim continues to invest his hope in the future. Although he acknowledges that he had "hoped when I was going to high school that I would be further along at this time," he is currently studying public speaking because he believes it will suit him for "executive positions." It will give him "social poise," the one characteristic that will make him more successful, although the image he presents of himself in high school would indicate that he had been poised then. Like Tom, Jim continues to believe that the life he desires is possible. He lives with the illusion that if he simply tries harder, if he alters the details of his circumstances without altering their substance, then his search for excitement will be validated. Jim claims that "being in love has made a new man of me!" but he provides no evidence for this outside of rhetoric.

Although we don't discover what occurs to Jim in the future, the desolation of the play's conclusion indicates that disappointment is the inevitable outcome. In the words of Benjamin Nelson in his book, *Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work*, these characters are "doomed to failure because of their inability to do more than dream." Whether these characters attempt to achieve freedom through a family or detached from one, the play indicates that such freedom is the stuff of which dreams are made.

Source: L. M. Domina, in an essay for *Drama for Students*, Gale, 1997

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Brown offers a mixed assessment of The Glass Menagerie, maintaining that while the play is "blessed with imagination" and "is the work of a mind both original and sensitive... .Mr. Williams's drama sometimes proves empty." Brown also speculates that the play suffers from a plot that is too loosely constructed and dialogue that provides little action and thus fails to hold the audience's interest.

A lady, obviously no psychologist, once encountered William Lyon Phelps on the street in New Haven. "I hope you won't mind my telling you how much I enjoyed your lecture yesterday?" she asked. "Madam," beamed Professor Phelps, "you misunderstand me entirely. I am glutton for praise."

All of us are. Praise has never made anyone unhappy. We like it even when we do not believe it. We tire of it only when it is bestowed too long on other people. It is a music we do not object to having played off-stage. Although it may shame our consciences and insult our minds, it does no damage to our ears. So long as we remember that it sings the song not of what we are but of what we wish we were, it probably does not hurt us.

But the advance praise we hear of a book we have not read or a play we have not seen is another matter. Genuine and well meant as it is, if too unstinted it can do harm. Not to us, but to what it has been lavished upon. We take such praise seriously. It sends our hopes skyrocketing. It prepares us for a miracle in a world where miracles are infrequent.

To the book or play in question it presents a challenge few works can survive. Critics (and what playgoer or reader is not one?) are never more gluttonous than when it comes to *giving* praise. When disappointed because of the praise bestowed by others, we forget our own guilt in anticipating reactions or, worse still, raising expectations. We remember only our present disappointment. At such moments we are tempted to understand why managers employ, ungratefully, though not unreasonably, the word "raves" to describe reviews which find hats tossed so far in the air diat their owners' heads are lost sight of.

I raise these general questions with a specific instance in mind. Recently I had the good fortune to see *The Glass Menagerie* but the bad fortune to see it after reading the reviews and hearing ecstatic reports about it from Chicago, Although Tennessee Williams's fantasy is a play I would not have missed, I wish I had missed both the reviews and the advance reports. At least until later. I wish I had missed them because Mr. Williams's play was forced to live them down. It was compelled to struggle against them much as a joke, however good, is condemned to a harder hearing when introduced by some witless fellow who insists upon laughing first, and then saying, "Oh, that reminds me of a very funny story."

A play would have to be a master piece indeed to compete with what has been said about *The Glass Menagerie* both in Chicago and New York. Mr. Williams's script, I am afraid, is not that masterpiece.

It has its high, its shimmering virtues. It is blessed with imagination. It has its many lovely moments. It is the kind of play one is proud to have the theatre produce, and pleased to sit before even when disappointed in this scene or in that. In any season it would be uncommon; in this season it is outstanding. It is the work of a mind both original and sensitive. Although it follows trails blazed by Thornton Wilder and William Saroyan, it manages to walk down them with a gait of its own.

It is as promising a first play as has been seen hereabouts in many a year.

Mr. Williams's is a play of moods; a study in frustration. Its plot is nonexistent, at least so far as plotting is ordinarily understood. It is too close to the heart of life to bother about story-telling merely for the sake of telling a story. To attempt to suggest its qualifies by outlining its actions would be as unfair to *The Glass Menagerie* as it would be to try to suggest the qualities, say, of *The Three Sisters* in terms of a synopsis. No one can deny that *The Three Sisters* is about three Russian women who want to go to Moscow and never get there. Yet to say this and only this is to omit the wit, wisdom, perception, and autumnal radiance which make Chekhov's play one of the wonders of the modern stage.

Mr. Williams bases his drama upon an incident rather than a plot. The only story he tells is how an impoverished Southern mother has her hopes dashed when she learns that the Gentleman Caller, who has at last come to see her crippled daughter, is already engaged. But Mr. William's interest does not stop with this story. His concern is what lies under the surface of events. He deals with those small happenings which can loom so large in the lives of unhappy people. He shows us the hopes such happenings can quicken, the memories they stir, the transformations they are able to effect, and the despair they often evoke.

His drama is projected as a memory, seen at moments not only through the actual gauzes provided by set designer Mr. Mielziner, but in flashes through the thicker curtain of time itself. Mr. Williams's is the simplest kind of make believe. The narrator he employs is the crippled girl's brother. The scenes we are invited to share are this brother's recollections. They are recalled to him when, as a merchant sailor in a foreign port, he sees objects in a store window which remind him of his sister's glass menagerie at home.

We move back in the sailor's life until we encounter the nagging the dulness which drove him to seek the release of die sea. We learn of his hatred of the factory in which he worked; of his need for escape; of his incessant movie-going when (as Mr. Williams puts it), in the company of millions of other Americans sitting in darkened theatres in the pre-war years, he let a few Hollywood actors have all his adventures for him.

With this sailor brother we enter the poor home his memory has recreated. We inhale the honeysuckle of his mother's Southern recollections. We overhear her steady, soft-voiced scoldings, and understand her exasperation. We meet the crippled sister too. She is a girl who lives in the dreams summoned by the music of her Victrola records and the small glass animals in her collection to which she has given her heart. This sister is painfully shy. She is denied life by the selfconsciousness her braces have forced upon her. In an overstressed moment of symbolism Mr. Williams insists that, because of her deformity, she is as out of place among her healthy contemporaries as is the glass unicorn in her menagerie among the commoner animals.

We learn how this girl blooms under the attentions of a happy extrovert who cannot marry her. We also eavesdrop on her when, at last, she consents to face the boy her brother has asked home from the factory for a humbler version of the "Alice Adams" dinner party. Above all, we understand the decision of the brother, being what he was, to go to sea.

Mr. Williams writes about his characters warmly, with a sympathy that is constant and yet probing. He knows how to etch them in line by line, so that before the evening is over we know them well. We are on intimate terms even with the hard-drinking father who has deserted them and is represented only by a shoddy photograph on the wall. But, in spite of Mr. Williams's perceptions and the quality of his play, his writing lacks the impact of Clifford Odets's phrasing and the ultimate radiance of William Saroyan's feeling.

Full though his heart is, Mr. Williams's drama sometimes proves empty. I found that it lost my interest even while it held my admiration. Fascinated as I remained by the way in which its lines were spoken, it became difficult for me to keep my mind (in the second act) on every line that was being spoken. I was certain of my respect for the play in general, but increasingly aware of Mr. Williams's uncertainties.

Perhaps this was because, unlike Chekhov, Mr. Williams permits us to become uncomfortably conscious of how slight is the incident upon which he has based his play. Perhaps it is because his dialogue is not always active enough to compensate for the lack of action in his story. Perhaps it is because he allows us to know too much too early about all his characters except the charmingly written and played Gentleman Caller. Perhaps it is because Miss Taylor is off-stage for so long a scene in the second act. Or Perhaps, as I have hinted, it is because the praise the play had won in advance had led me to expect that miracle which is every critic's hope.

Source: John Mason Brown, "Miss Taylor's Return" in the *Saturday Review,* Vol. 28, no 15, April 14,1945, pp. 34-36

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt from a review that originally appeared in the New York Times on April 2,1945, Nichols assesses a production of The Glass Menagerie, praising the actors' performances and noting that while the play has some flaws, "Mr. Williams has a real ear for faintly sardonic dialogue, unexpected phrases and an affection for his characters."

The theatre opened its Easter basket the night before and found it a particularly rich one. Preceded by warm and tender reports from Chicago, *The Glass Menagerie* opened at the Playhouse on Saturday, and immediately it was clear that for once the advance notes were not in error. Tennessee Williams' simple play forms the framework for some of the finest acting to be seen in many a day, "Memorable" is an overworked word, but that is the only one to describe Laurette Taylor" s performance. March left the theatre like a lioness.

Miss Taylor's picture of a blowsy, impoverished woman who is living on memories of a flower-scented Southern past is completely perfect. It combines qualities of humor and human understanding. The Mother of the play is an amusing figure and a pathetic one. Aged, with two children, living in an apartment off an alley in St. Louis, she recalls her past glories, her seventeen suitors, the old and better life. She is a bit of a scold, a bit of a snob; her finery has worn threadbare, but she has kept it for occasions of state. Miss Taylor makes her a person known by any other name to everyone in her audience. That is art.

In the story the Mother is trying to do the best she can for her children. The son works in a warehouse, although he wants to go to far places. The daughter, a cripple, never has been able to finish school. She is shy, she spends her time collecting glass animals the title comes from this and playing old phonograph records. The Mother thinks it is time she is getting married, but there has never been a Gentleman Caller at the house. Finally the son brings home another man from the warehouse and out comes the finery and the heavy if bent candlestick. Even the Gentleman Caller fails. He is engaged to another girl.

Mr. Williams' play is not all of the same caliber. A strict perfectionist could easily find a good many flaws. There are some unconnected odds and ends which have little to do with the story: Snatches of talk about the war, bits of psychology, occasional moments of rather flowery writing. But Mr. Williams has a real ear for faintly sardonic dialogue, unexpected phrases and an affection for his characters. Miss Taylor takes these many good passages and makes them sing....

Source: Lewis Nichols, in a review of *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) m *On Stage: Selected Theater Reviews from The New York Times*, 1920-1970, edited by Bernard Beckerman and Howard Siegman, Arno Press, 1973, p 260.

Adaptations

The Glass Menagerie was released as a film by Warner Brothers in 1950. This black and white version was produced by Jerry Wald and Charles K. Feldman and directed by Irving Rapper. It starred Jane Wyman as Laura Wingfield, Kirk Douglas as Jim O'Connor, Gertrude Lawrence as Amanda Wingfield, and Arthur Kennedy as Tom Wingfield. It also included roles for several characters who are only referred to in the play.

Another version of *The Glass Menagerie* was filmed by Cineplex Odeon and released in 1987. It was produced by Burtt Harris and directed by Paul Newman. Newman's wife, Joanne Woodward played Amanda; John Malkovich played Tom; Karen Allen played Laura; and James Naughton played the gentleman caller. It is available on video through MCA/Universal Home Video.

A television adaptation also aired on CBS in 1966. This version starred Shirley Booth as Amanda, Hal Holbrook as Tom, Barbara Loden as Laura, and Pat Hingle as Jim. David Susskind was the producer and Michael Elliott the director.

Another television version was broadcast on ABC in 1984.

A sound recording has also been produced by Caedmon. This two-cassette version was released in 1973; the cast consists of Montgomery Clift, Julie Hams, Jessica Tandy, and David Wayne.

Topics for Further Study

Although *The Glass Menagerie* is set in the 1930s, many critics describe it as timeless. Describe the historical changes you would have to make if you were to set the play today.

Research the financial situation of single mothers today and compare their options to those of Amanda.

Examine the catalogs of several business or technical schools in your area and compare their curricula to the apparent curriculum of Rubicam's Business College, where Laura has been attending typing classes.

Interview someone in your school who has worked on the production of a play. Focus your questions especially on the technical aspects of stage craft so that you can discover how the screens, lighting, etc. would work in *The Glass Menagerie*.

Compare and Contrast

1930s: Adolf Hitler begins to achieve power in Germany. Some Americans fought in the Spanish Civil War, although the United States did not officially participate. World War II began in Europe in 1939, but the United States declared its neutrality.

1940s: During World War II, most men served in the military, unless they were exempt for health or other reasons. Because so many people were affected, this war received prominent attention both in politics and in individual daily lives.

Today: Although The United States has engaged in comparatively minor military engagements during the last generation, no given war has become a cultural obsession since the Vietnam War ended in the mid-1970s. While men must register for the draft when they reach die age of 18, no one is currently drafted, and the military consistently speaks of "down sizing."

1930s: The major economic event was the Great Depression, which lasted most of the decade. Unemployment reached 13,7 million in the United States in 1932. Although men were considered the family's primary breadwinner when possible, women were also grateful for and sought out work.

1940s: During the war women entered the workforce but returned to homemaking when the war ended. They worked in factories and other places formerly identified with men in order to patriotically support the men who were overseas fighting.

Today: Many women work outside the home, even those with young children. They often do so in part because one salary can no longer adequately support a family. Another factor is the women's movement which has argued for equal treatment of men and women in politics and business and which has provided more diverse opportunities for women.

1930s and 1940s: Works of literature could be easily censored when they were considered obscene, even if the material was subtle. Writers such as James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence often received a scandalized response from the general public.

Today: Artistic merit and censorship remain an issue today. Although the works that were considered pornographic in the 1940s are frequently taught in high schools today, other works continue to be attacked. This is most evident when Congress considers the budget for the National Endowment for the Arts.

1930s and 1940s: Romantic interactions between men and women were often formal and constrained. Men were expected to initiate dating situations and were also expected to introduce themselves to the woman's parents. A woman generally lived with her parents until she got married.

Today: Although some relationships are "conventional," the range of acceptable behavior between men and women is quite broad. Gender roles are no longer as rigid, although women still do the vast majority of housework and child care. In part because the age of marriage has risen, women as well as men often live independently before they get married, and couples frequently live together before they get married. Simultaneously, women can remain single if they choose without being considered "old maids."

1930s and 1940s: Women seldom attended college or received any higher education (Even for men, college was generally restricted to those who were financially comfortable.) If women attended a business school, they studied such subjects as typing and shorthand and prepared to be secretaries for bosses who would not have such skills.

Today: The percentage of women and men attending college is nearly equal, although some fields, such as technology and engineering continue to be dominated by men. A person who aspires to work in an office, however, needs many more sophisticated skills. Shorthand, for example, is an outdated practice, and a person who can type is often not employable unless he or she also knows one or more computer programs.

What Do I Read Next?

Tennessee Williams wrote *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1947. It features another frustrated family, though here the interactions become violent.

Eugene O'Neill is also considered a major American playwright. He published *Long Day's Journey into Night* in 1956. It also features a family within which tensions are obvious, in part because of the alcohol abuse present in the characters.

A *Raisin in the Sun*, written by Lorraine Hansberry and first produced in 1959 presents the situation of a black family, each of whose members attempts to exercise choice for the good of the family and themselves indivually.

The Bluest Eye published by Toni Morrison in 1970 concerns a young African American girl who loses touch with reality because of her life circumstances.

Elizabeth Bishop's poem, "In the Waiting Room," (1976) tells the story of a young girl at the moment when she realizes she is both an individual and part of a community.

Further Study

Berkowitz, Gerald. "The 'Other World' of *The Glass Menagerie" in Players*, Vol 48, no 4, April-May, 1973, pp. 150-53

Berkowitz argues that the setting or "locus" of *The Glass Menagerie* as well as of other of Williams's plays influences perceptions of the characters to the extent that they seem "normal," while the "normal" people seem outsiders.

Bunan, Jarka M. "*The Glass Menagerie*" in *International Dictionary of Theatre-]: Plays*, edited by Mark Hawkins-Dady.St James Press, 1992, pp 187-89

Burian provides several character analyses, focusing especially on Tom.

Chesler, S. Alan. "Tennessee Williams: Reassessment and Assessment" in *Tennessee Williams- A Tribute*, edited by Jac Tharpe, University Press of Mississippi, 1977, pp. 848-80.

Chesler describes Williams's characteristics as a playwright and contextuahzes his career in terms of his affect on American drama.

Hirsch, Foster. *A Portrait of the Artist: The Plays of Tennessee Williams*, Kennikat Press, 1979.

Hirsch analyzes Williams's plays according to their autobiographical influences

Londre, Felicia Hardison "Tennessee Williams" in *American Playwrights since 1945- A Guide to Scholarship, Criticism, and Performance*, edited by Philip C Kolm, Greenwood, 1989, pp 488-517

Londre provides a thorough discussion of Williams's work and reputation, including a production history of several of his plays

Moe, Christian H. "*The Glass Menagerie*" in *Reference Guide to American Literature*, edited by James Kamp, third edition, St. James Press, 1994,

Moe traces the development of this play from a short story and describes the plot

Mueller, William R "Tennessee Williams: A New Direction"" in *The Christian Century*, Vol LXXXI, no. 42, October 14,1964, pp. 1271-72.

Mueller traces Wilhams's career, describing characteristics common to several plays. He suggests that Wilhams's earlier work was more successful, artistically, than his later plays

Nelson, Benjamin *Tennessee Williams: The Man and HisWork*, Ivan Obolensky, 1961.

Nelson critiques the body of Williams's work, evaluating the plays in terms of each other.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Drama for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535