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Symbolism In Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*

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Dedication

To our parents

CONTENTS

Title	Section
Dedication	I
CONTENTS	II
CHAPTER ONE: introduction and background	1-6
Tennessee Williams: The Writer and the Man	1-3
<i>The Glass Menagerie: Review</i>	4-6
Chapter TWO :Symbolism in Tennessee Williams' <i>The Glass Menagerie</i>	7-17
Conclusion	18
Bibliography	19

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Tennessee Williams: The Writer and the Man

Playwright Tennessee Williams was born Thomas Lanier Williams on March 26, 1911, in Columbus, Mississippi, the second of Cornelius and Edwina Williams' three children. Raised predominantly by his mother, Williams had a complicated relationship with his father, a demanding salesman who preferred work instead of parenting. Williams described his childhood in Mississippi as pleasant and happy. But life changed for him when his family moved to St. Louis, Missouri. The carefree nature of his boyhood was stripped in his new urban home, and as a result Williams turned inward and started to write. His parent's marriage certainly didn't help. Often strained, the Williams home could be a tense place to live. "It was just a wrong marriage," Williams later wrote. The family situation, however, did offer fuel for the playwright's art. His mother became the model for the foolish but strong Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*, while his father represented the aggressive, driving Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In 1929, Williams enrolled at the University of Missouri to study journalism. But he was soon withdrawn from the school by his father, who became incensed when he learned that his son's girlfriend was also attending the university.

Deeply despondent, Williams retreated home, and at his father's urging took a job as a sales clerk with a shoe company. The future playwright hated the position, and again he

turned to his writing, crafting poems and stories after work. Eventually, however, the depression took its toll and Williams suffered a nervous breakdown.

When he was 28, Williams moved to New Orleans, where he changed his name (he landed on Tennessee because his father hailed from there) and revamped his lifestyle, soaking up the city life that would inspire his work, most notably the later play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

He proved to be a prolific writer and one of his plays, earned him \$100 from the Group Theater writing contest. More importantly, it landed him an agent, Audrey Wood, who would become his friend and adviser. In 1940 Williams' play, *Battle of Angels*, debuted in Boston. It quickly flopped, but the hardworking Williams revised it and brought it back as *Orpheus Descending*, which later was made into the movie, *The Fugitive Kind*, starring Marlon Brando and Anna Manganic. Other work followed, including a gig writing scripts for. But Williams' mind was never far from the stage.

On March 31, 1945, a play he'd been working for some years, *The Glass Menagerie*, opened on Broadway. Critics and audiences alike lauded the play, about a declassed Southern family living in a tenement, forever changing Williams' life and fortunes. Two years later, *A Streetcar Named Desire* opened, surpassing his previous success and cementing his status as one of the country's best playwrights. The play also earned Williams a Drama Critics' Award and his first Pulitzer Prize. His subsequent work brought more praise. The hits from this period included *Camino Real*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

The 1960s were a difficult time for Williams. His work received poor reviews and increasingly the playwright turned to alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms. In 1969 his brother hospitalized him. Upon his release, Williams got right back to work. He churned out several new plays as well as *Memoirs* in 1975, which told the story of his life and his afflictions. But he never fully escaped his demons. Surrounded by bottles of wine and pills, Williams died in a New York City hotel room on February 25, 1983.

Tennessee Williams' works

Candles to the Sun (1936) , *Fugitive Kind* (1937) , *Spring Storm* (1937)

, *Me Vaysha* (1937) , *Not About Nightingales* (1938) , *Battle of Angels* (1940) , *Rise in Flame*,
Cried the Phoenix (1941) , *You Touched Me* (1945) , *Stairs to the Roof* (1947)

Major plays

The Glass Menagerie (1944) , *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) , *Summer and Smoke* (1948)
, *The Rose Tattoo* (1955) , *Camino Real* (1953) , *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) , *Orpheus*
Descending (1957) , *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1958) , *Meet Bird of Youth* (1959) , *Period of*
Adjustment (1960) , *The Night of the Iguana* (1961) , *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*
(1962, rewriting of *Summer and Smoke*) , *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1963)
, *The Mutilated* (1965) , *The Seven Descents of Myrtle* (1968, aka *Kingdom of Earth*) , *In the*
Bar of a Tokyo Hotel (1969) , *Will Mr. Merriweather Return from Memphis?* (1969) , *Small*
Craft Warnings (1972) , *Out Cry* (1973, rewriting of *The Two-Character Play*) , *The Red*
Devil Battery Sign (1975) , *This Is (An Entertainment)* (1976) , *Vieux Carre* (1977)

The Glass Menagerie (1950), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *The Rose Tattoo* (1955),
Baby Doll (1956) , *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958)

, *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959) , *The Fugitive Kind* (1959) , *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real*
(1966) , *5000 Feet Under* (1968) , *The Loss of a Teardrop* , *Diamond* (2009; screenplay from 1957)

(Internet, 2019)

The Glass Menagerie: Review

Glass Menagerie is a memory play, and its action is drawn from the narrator, Tom Wingfield. Tom is a character in the play, which is set in St. Louis in 1937. He is an aspiring poet who toils in a shoe warehouse to support his mother, Amanda, and sister, Laura. Mr. Wingfield, Tom and Laura's father, ran off years ago and, except for one postcard, has not been heard from since.

Amanda, originally from a genteel Southern family, regales her children frequently with tales of her idyllic youth and the scores of suitors who once pursued her. She is disappointed that Laura, who wears a brace on her leg and is painfully shy, does not attract any gentlemen callers. She enrolls Laura in a business college, hoping that she will make her own and the family's fortune through a business career. Weeks later, however, Amanda discovers that Laura's crippling shyness has led her to drop out of the class secretly and spend her days wandering the city alone. Amanda then decides that Laura's last hope must lie in marriage and begins selling magazine subscriptions to earn the extra money she believes will help to attract suitors for Laura. Meanwhile, Tom, who loathes his warehouse job, finds escape in liquor, movies, and literature, much to his mother's chagrin. During one of the frequent arguments between mother and son, Tom accidentally breaks several of the glass animal figurines that are Laura's most prized possessions.

Amanda and Tom discuss Laura's prospects, and Amanda asks Tom to keep an eye out for potential suitors at the warehouse. Tom selects Jim O'Connor, a casual friend, and invites

him to dinner. Amanda quizzes Tom about Jim and is delighted to learn that he is a driven young man with his mind set on career advancement. She prepares an elaborate dinner and insists that Laura wear a new dress. At the last minute, Laura learns the name of her caller; as it turns out, she had a devastating crush on Jim in high school. When Jim arrives, Laura answers the door, on Amanda's orders, and then quickly disappears, leaving Tom and Jim alone. Tom confides to Jim that he has used the money for his family's electric bill to join the merchant marine and plans to leave his job and family in search of adventure. Laura refuses to eat dinner with the others, feigning illness. Amanda, wearing an ostentatious dress from her glamorous youth, talks vivaciously with Jim throughout the meal.

As dinner is ending, the lights go out as a consequence of the unpaid electric bill. The characters light candles, and Amanda encourages Jim to entertain Laura in the living room while she and Tom clean up. Laura is at first paralyzed by Jim's presence, but his warm and open behavior soon draws her out of her shell. She confesses that she knew and liked him in high school but was too shy to approach him. They continue talking, and Laura reminds him of the nickname he had given her: "Blue Roses," an accidental corruption of pleurosis, an illness Laura had in high school. He reproaches her for her shyness and low self-esteem but praises her uniqueness. Laura then ventures to show him her favorite glass animal, a unicorn. Jim dances with her, but in the process, he accidentally knocks over the unicorn, breaking off its horn. Laura is forgiving, noting that now the unicorn is a normal horse. Jim then kisses her, but he quickly draws back and apologizes, explaining that he was carried away by the

moment and that he actually has a serious girlfriend. Resigned, Laura offers him the broken unicorn as a souvenir.

Amanda enters the living room, full of good cheer. Jim hastily explains that he must leave because of an appointment with his fiancée. Amanda sees him off warmly but, after he is gone, turns on Tom, who had not known that Jim was engaged. Amanda accuses Tom of being an inattentive, selfish dreamer and then throws herself into comforting Laura. From the fire escape outside of their apartment, Tom watches the two women and explains that, not long after Jim's visit, he gets fired from his job and leaves Amanda and Laura behind. Years later, though he travels far, he finds that he is unable to leave behind guilty memories of Laura. (Internet,2019).

CHAPTER TWO

SYMBOLISM IN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*

In Tennessee Williams' *Glass menagerie* the play being a "memory play" relies heavily on the suggestive strength of certain symbols which recur like leitmotif on the one hand, and certain other symbols that are used with poetic ingenuity. It is a compact play, with a structure that allows for no loose elements, each element having an appropriate function. In the very beginning, before Tom sets to deliver his introductory speech, the playwright in his fairly detailed stage note says, "the scene is memory and is, therefore nonrealistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; other are exaggerated."

Thus the mood is already prepared for the audience poetic is how its chief merit is indicated. The setting itself, as has been discussed elsewhere, has the expressionistic quality in which the use of unconventional devices assumes symbolic significance. The dark and claustrophobic mint is presented in the congested alley in which the building is located with "murky canyons of tangled clothes – lines garbage cans, and the sinister lattice work of neighboring fire – escapers" there are Two types of symbols used in this play (1) those that function as leitmotifs, recurring again and again in different places like the refrain of song; (2) and those provide density to the meaning of a statement or a situation or a mood.

A much talked about symbol in the first category is the 'fire – escape' suggesting that the people in the wing field apartment are burning "with the slow and implacable fire of human desperation" and the fire – escape provides an escape. Everyone is desperate and frantic for

his or her personal reason, and wishes to escape the inter-actable reality. For Tom the fire – escape is a route of escape to the external world where await the much-craved adventure and romance of unfettered existence. For Laura it is an escape route to her inner world away from the harsh outer world. Then Tom had a quarrel with his mother, he ran up the fire – escape and similar, when Laura is desperate she moves to it. Tom himself suggests the significance of the fire – escape in his life in these words, "I descended the steps of this fire – escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find motion what was lost in space (. 360).

Glass animals:-

The Glass plays a significant role in the life of Laura. She is fond of these small animals as they constitute her world and provide an element of interest and involvement. In some way Laura's fragile and "translucent" personality is seen to be identified with them, equally fragile and vulnerable.

The audience cannot miss the correlation established by the playwright between the two. The pain generated by the hurried and thoughtless action of Tom in scattering the glass animals is intentionally highlighted. He kneels and picks up the knocked-off pieces. The music "The glass menagerie" plays out. Another scene shows Laura being swept off her feet for a little while with Tom opening out a different world to her. But accidentally he knocks off the glass horse with one horn on the head, symbolically the horn is broken.

JIM: It's lost its

LAVRA: Horn! It doesn't matter maybe it's a blessing in disguise.

JIM: you'll never forgive me. I bet that was your favorite piece of glass.

LAVRA: I don't have favorites much. It's no tragedy, freckles. Glass breaks so easily. No matter how careful you are. The traffic hits the shelves and things fall off them.

JIM: still I'm awfully sorry that I was the cause.

LAVRA: (smiling) I'll just imagine he had an operation.

The horn was removed to make him feel less freakish! (They both laugh)

New he will feel more at home with the other horses , the ones that don't have horns
Her glass animals reflect the fluctuations of emotional level of Laura (Ramjiwale, 2009.100)

The principal symbol in the play is, as the title suggests, the glass menageries. It is specifically Laura's symbol, the objective correlative of her fragile, other – worldly beauty. Its stylized animal forms image her own immobilized animal or sexual nature, her arrested emotional development and her inability to cope with the demands of a flesh- and – blood world. Given broader implications, the separate pieces of the glass collection Reflect the fixed attitudes of all the members of the wing field family as well as their isolation from one another. Presented as crystallized forms Tom's memory, each character is shown to be psychologically encased in a world of his own, seeking escape , refuge , or rebirth , each

imagines different versions of a transcendent reality , themselves a collection of is solutes condemned to individual fragmentation and mutual misunderstanding. (GVIPES, 2007, 93)

The unicorn:-

Laura wing field is toms sister and the daughter of Amanda: she is based on Tennessee Williams real-life sister rose, Laura is not only physically handicapped, forced to wear a leg brace: she is emotionally crippled as well.

She is unable to hold a job or interact socially with other and retreats into a world of hypnotically winding the Victoria and playing with her collection of glass animals. There is a moment of hope for Laura when Jim, the gentleman caller, dances with her and follows this with a kiss, but Laura retreats back into her world upon the failure of this match due to Jim engagement to another. [guides. 2007. 18]

The unicorn is a mythological animal, another unearthly being, like Blue Roses, symbolizing the unique and wispy existence of Laura. When she understands that he is engaged she gives the glass unicorn to him as a souvenir, symbolizing her retreat into her own delicate and sequestered world. (Rajimwale. 2009.104).

Laura hides in her make – believe world, only once, during Jim O'Connor's

visit does she venture out of it into the world of reality. Jim has given Laura

it of self – confidence. He even convinces her to dance with him. During the dance, they bump the table, knocking the Unicorn to the floor and breaking off its single horn. Laura for a short time, feels like any other girl who has been swept off her feet by the boy of her

dreams. Unfortunately for Laura , though , the time of her life lasts no more than a few minutes.

The movies:-

The movies for Tom wing field movies are a way out of the present tangle in which he finds himself and wishes to run away from. They fill his mind with the ideas of adventure and romance, full-blooded. Action and expectancy, a sharp contrast with the present domestic routine and the humdrum course of coarse and dull job at the warehouse of the International shoe. Company movies are referred to more than once by Tom in this scene.

In scene 3 when his mother wants to know where he has been going Tom answer that the factory life is too mechanical, dispiriting and soul snuffing. He needs something that would a waken his imagination and Therefore he goes to movies. Amanda cannot understand it , " I don't believe that lie !" she says. Immediately in the next scene we see Tom arriving home stealthily while Laura looks amazed,

LAURA: where have you been all this time?

Tom: I have been to the movies.

LAURA: All this time at the movies?

Tom: There was a very long programmer. There was a Garb picture and a mickey mouse and travelogue and a new steel and a preview of coming attractions. In scene 4 Amanda wishes to know directly from Tom where he goes at nights:

AMAMNDA: But, why – why Tom – are you always So restless ? where do you go to , nights?

Tom: I----- go to the movies.

AMANDA: why do you go to the movies so much Tom?

Tom: I go to the movies because __ I like adventure. Adventure is something I don't have much of at work , so I go to the movies.

AMANDA: But, Tom you go to the movies entirely too mushroom: I like a lot of adventure.

Whenever Tom finds the present problems too difficult for him to be able to handle, he goes to the movies. In scene (5) he is too baffled by his mother's insistence on having Jim to dinner, telling him Frankly that it is for Laura that she is doing it all, ignoring the fact that Laura's physical handicap doesn't promise any fruitful romance for her. In extreme annoyance Tom rushes out.

AMANDA: (sharply) : where are you going?

Tom: I'm going to the movies. (He goes out the screen door)

A gain after the disastrous dinner part for Jim , Tom Knows that they are all arrived at an impasse. He gas decided his course of action.

(He comes to the door)

AMANDA: where are you going?

Tom: I'm going to the movies.

Movies thus form a kind of alternative world for Tom, promising the opposite of all that he dislike in his present life and surroundings. At critical moments the play wright shows him running to movies. (Rajimwale .2009.102)

Photograph of Mr. Wingfield:-

Mr. Wingfield is introduced by his son, tom, as “the fifth character in the play” Mr. .Wing field never actually appears in the play, but his absence is glaring. A large photograph of him is displayed on the wall of the living room and is illuminated throughout the play as a reminder of the part he has played in the dire situation the audience witnesses. He is generously descry bed by Tomas a telephone salesman who was “in love with long distances” (5).[Bloom . 2007.18]

Father of Laura and Tom, Mr. wing field is not present in the play , but he is constantly referred to as the one who followed his wild ambitions and left the family to its fate reducing the poor forlorn woman and children to utter destitution. While talking to Laura about her absence from the college .

Amanda " turns again to the photograph" and says " one thing your father had plenty of was charm "Amanda had great love for her husband , but sense of hurt and humiliation get expressed caustically.

In scene (4) Amanda's emotions well up too strongly for her to be able to keep them down " In fit a anger Tom says to Amanda " and you say self – self's all I ever think of. Why , listen , if self is what I thought of , mother , I'd be where he is _ GONE ! (He points to him father's picture).

As far as the system of transportation reaches (p.328). In his last speech Tom announces his plan to go out on adventure, his father's example upper most in his mind I left saint Louis. I descended the steps of this fire-escape for a last time and following from then on, in my father's footsteps attempting to find in motion what was last in space (p.366). Their father in his representation, in photograph, very much remains a potential influence in their emotional life, determining the course of events in his absence. (Ramjiwale . 2009 .102)

The Gentleman caller:-

Jim O' Connor is the gentleman caller who is brought to the wing field residence by Tom. He works with Tom at the shoe factory and formerly attended high school with both Tom and Laura. Jim is described by Williams as an "ordinary young man" (XVIII). He was popular in high school, successful in sports, drama, debating, and politics and indeed, Jim exudes the confidence of someone who has succeeded in all they have done. He possesses an optimism that the other characters do not. Ultimately, Jim's presence is not enough to resolve the problems that haunt the Winfield family. [Bloom . 2007 . 18].

He symbolizes a change in the life and destiny of Laura , " the most realistic character in the play being an emissary from a world of reality for the wing field family he represents hope and expectancy , a whiff of freshness in a world that is surrounded with stagnation , staleness and gloom. He is any gentleman caller –one of those whom Amanda used to receive in her youth for Amanda it is normal for a young maiden to expect them As she can choose one from amongst them as her future life – partner. But she is surprised when Laura tells her that she is not going to have any gentleman caller.

LAVRA: (alone in the dining room): I don't believe we're going to receive any, mother.

AMANDA: (reappearing airily) what? No one- not one ? you must be joking.

The import of the gentleman caller for Amanda is quite obvious, as when Tim's arrival is confirmed. She immediately plunges into preparations for a fitting reception. There is plenty of feverish activity with the hopes soaring high in her heart. Indeed one can say that

Jim or the gentleman caller is inseparably associated with the hopes of love and a well – settled life for the girl. But this proves to be an illusion and tragedy comes in the form of non-realization of this hope.(Rajimwale . 2009 .103)

Music:-

Williams uses music carefully throughout the play, whether it is in the repeated glass, menagerie theme at Laura’s appearance, Laura’s presence at the victoria playing her absentee father's records, or the sound of jazz coming from outdoors. You might contrast the use of music in these various contexts or compare them. What shred purpose does the employ mend of music serve, or alter natively, how does each distinct appearance of music create a distinct and contrasting atmosphere? You might consider Williams's own notes about music in the production notes that precede the play? Another idea would be to compare William’s use of music in the glass menagerie to his use of music in another play. Such as A Streetcar Named Desire. (BANACH . 2010 . 99)

Other Symbols:-

Besides the recurring symbols Tennessee Williams introduces certain other things in the play that assume the symbols dimension, suggesting their significance in the lives of character. Blue Mountain stands for the pleasant experience of Amanda when she was a girl when she received gentleman callers and counted Mrs. Wingfield. She love to lapse into the sweet distant memories of it and tries to create pleasant condition of similar type for Laura also. Blue Roses came to stick to Laura whom Jim O’Connor is Soldan School days used to

call by it. Blue Roses do not exist, they are unreal. By this association she is transported into the world of unreality causing her to be regarded as exotic and unearthly. There is a hidden irony about it, Laura came to be called 'Blue Roses' by default when Jim asked her what was the matter and she said 'pleurosis' "So that's what he always called me after that. Whenever he saw me he'd holler, 'Hello, Blue Roses' the use of candles in scene in which both Laura and find themselves all alone, when for the first time hopes germinate and sprout in the barren land of her existence is highly symbolic. It highlights her 'dignity and tragic beauty'. A peculiar religious- spiritual grace is given by the candles investing to the station of a martyr. For example, this small sentence: Jim lights a cigarette and leans indolently back on his elbows smiling at Laura with a warmth and charm which lights her inwardly with altar candles (p. 352).

She sits on the floor on the other side of the candelabrum'. When Laura is shown toward the end of the play blowing out her candle Laura bends over the candles, with Tom delivering his final words, "for nowadays the world is lit by lighting, Blow out your candle, Laura and so goodbye..... she blows out the candle out, the profound significance of candle is quite obvious.

Indeed it would not be beside the point to say that light in its various forms as suggested by such expressions as "lit", "Sunshine", "moonlight", "translucent glass touched by light", "incandescent marquees and signs", "the flickering light", "His eyes are starry", "the moon breaks through the storm clouds, illuminating his face....." makes the situations meaningful and suffuse them brilliant poetic light. (Ramjiwale, 2009 . 104)

Conclusion

As the title of the play informs us, *The glass menagerie*, or collection of animals, is the play's central symbol, Laura collection of glass animal. Figurines presents a number of facets of her personality. Like The Figurines, Laura is delicate, fanciful, and somehow old – fashioned. Glass is transparent, but, when light is shined upon it correctly it refracts an entire rainbow of colors similarly, Laura. Though quiet and bland around strangers, is a source of strange, multifaceted delight to those who choose to look at her in The right Light. The menagerie also represents the imaginative world to which Laura devotes herself – a world that is colorful and enticing but based on fragile illusions.

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