

**Ministry of Higher Education
And Scientific Research
University of Diyala
College of Education for Human Science
Department of English**

Zeena Salim
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Symbolism in Tennessee Williams
The Glass Menagerie

Submitted by
Sajaa Mutasher Zaidan
Hanan Tahseen Kareem

Supervised by
Inst. Zeena Salim Hammoodi
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In the Name of Allah

= Work (righteousness): soon will Allah observe your work, and His Messengers, and the Believers: soon will ye be brought back to the Knower of what is hidden and what is open: then will He show you the truth of all that ye did,

Allah Almighty has spoken the truth ..

[sura - AT-TAWBA 105]

Dedicative

All praise to Allah, today we fold the days' tiredness and the errand summing up between the cover of this humble work.

To the utmost knowledge lighthouse, to our greatest and most honoured prophet Mohamed - May peace and grace from Allah be upon him.

To the Spring that never stops giving, to my mother who weaves my happiness with strings from her merciful heart ... to my mother.

To whom he strives to bless comfort and welfare and never stints what he owns to push me in the success way who taught me to promote life stairs wisely and patiently, to my dearest father.

To whose love flows in my veins and my heart always remembers them, to my brothers and sisters.

To those who taught us letters of gold and words of jewel of the utmost and sweetest sentences in the whole knowledge, who rewarded to us their knowledge simply and from their thoughts made a lighthouse guides us through the knowledge and success path, to our honoured teachers and professors.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Tennessee Williams: the Writer and the Man

Thomas Lanier Williams was born on March 26, 1911. The name Tennessee is a pseudonym he adopted years later, and for the taking of which he has offered a variety of reasons! That he found his given name too formidable; that early writing under his real name had been poor and had compromised him so that he needed to start anew with a fresh name; and that the pseudonym was meant to honor his forebears who had fought Indians in Tennessee.

It was in Mississippi, however, that Tennessee Williams was born. His maternal grandfather was an Episcopal minister in the Mississippi town of Columbus, and it was there that Williams and his sister, Rose, were raised. Their father, a travelling salesman for The International Shoe Company, was often away from home, and their childhood was further marred by frequent illnesses.

Williams' sister, who is thought to be the model for many of the playwright's disturbed and withdrawn heroines, was slightly crippled and became a recluse. But for Williams, childhood sickness had one beneficial result: it provided him with abundant time for reading.

When Tennessee was about twelve, the family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where the rows of brick houses seemed to him to be the color of "dried blood and mustard." The South began to take on mythic proportions to Williams even then. But it was in St. Louis that Williams began to write, and he published his first literary endeavor, a short story, which was published in *Weird Tales* magazine in 1928. The following year he entered the University of Missouri, bent upon a writing career. He was an exceedingly shy youth, and took to drinking to counteract his shyness. He failed ROTC. He was more successful in the realm of writing and won a number of small prizes for both prose and poetry.

In 1931, financial pressures and poor grades made it necessary for Williams to leave the university. He spent the next two years working for a shoe company, "The two years I spent were indescribable to me as an individual but of immense value to me as a writer," he says, "for they gave me first-hand knowledge of what it means to be a small wage-earner in a hopelessly routine job."

His days passed in the warehouse, but at night he continued his efforts at writing. He would come home from work, drink innumerable cups of black coffee so that he could remain awake, and go to his room, where he turned out poems and stories. The frustrations of this type of day and night routine finally led to a nervous breakdown. Coming home from work one evening, Williams collapsed physically and was put in a hospital. Several weeks later he went to live with his grandparents in Memphis to recover.

In 1936, his grandparents financed his return to college, this time at Washington University in St. Louis, where he again distinguished himself at writing. He won first prize in a play contest and went on to write for the Mummies, a well-known little theater group in Missouri. His first work for them was written in response to the director's call for an antimilitaristic play to share the program with Irwin Shaw's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. Williams wrote a farce called *Cairo, Shanghai, Bombay*, and his playwrighting career was launched. Two of his other scripts - *Candor in the Sun* and *Fugitive Kind* - were produced by the Mummies.

In 1937, Williams left Washington University to enrol at the university in Iowa City. Here, he helped pay his way by working in the Iowa State Hospital cafeteria, tutoring freshmen in English, and selling tickets for university plays.

Here, too, he participated in a play writing seminar, where he polished his theatrical skills, and was finally granted his Bachelor of Arts degree. From Iowa, Williams went to Chicago, where he tried to join the Works Progress Administration Writer's Project but in this attempt he was unsuccessful. "I still had, in those days," he says, "a touch of refinement in my social behavior which made me seem frivolous and decadent to the conscientiously hewn pillars of the Chicago Project."

Leaving Chicago, Williams went back to his home in St. Louis, where he wrote his fourth long play, *Not About Nightingales*. This play was based on a newspaper item Williams had read that described the roasting alive of a group of rebellious prison convicts sent for correction to a hot room called "the Klondike." It was Williams' most macabre play. Years later he wrote: "I have never written anything since then that could compete with it in violence and horror."

During the winter of 1938-39, Williams lived in the French Quarter in New Orleans (the neighborhood so beautifully rendered in *A Streetcar Named Desire*). In New Orleans he made another attempt to join the Writer's Project, and was again unsuccessful. He went to work as a waiter in a restaurant that featured twenty-five-cent meals.

He worked during the day and wrote at night. He walked the streets of the Quarter and became familiar with the colorful characters of the old city. For the first time in his life, he found himself sharing a sense of loneliness with people he had never known in St. Louis: prostitutes and bums, sailors and tramps, rootless poets and gamblers. In later years Williams recalled these people: "There was a sampling of all who were too brave or too frightened, too pure or too corrupt, too angry or too gentle, too clear or too confused, to accept the peace and comfort of respectability."

The Glass Menagerie was an immediate success. Sensitive and original, it is to this day one of Williams' finest plays. It was produced in New York in 1945 and Williams' fame was established overnight. So successful was The Glass Menagerie that Williams was constantly courted by theater enthusiasts, producers, and actors. He began to lead a life that was entirely different from his former one. He moved out of the precarious tenancy of a furnished room and into an expensive eastside hotel. He dined on room service, and friends helped him with his wardrobe by selecting expensive suits. He did not want for money or encouragement, the very things which he had always desired. "The sort of life which I had had previous to this popular success," Williams said, "was one that required endurance, a life of clawing and scratching along a sheer surface and holding on tight with raw fingers to every inch of rock higher than the one caught hold of before ... I was not aware of how much vital energy had gone into this struggle until the struggle was removed. I was out on a level plateau with my arms still thrashing and my lungs still grabbing at air that no longer resisted ... I sat down and looked about me and was suddenly very depressed." With success from The Glass Menagerie came suspicion. Williams found he no longer trusted even his friends.

People seemed to be flattering him because of his fame, rather than giving him honest evaluations, and he began to doubt his skills as an artist. Partly in an attempt to escape from his newfound success, which seemed to be killing his spirit, Williams went into a hospital for an eye operation. For the past five years he had suffered with a cataract on his left eye, which required three needling operations. When the gauze mask was removed from his face in the hospital, he found himself in a readjusted world. "Well, the gauze mask served a purpose," he confessed.

"While I was resting in the hospital the friends whom I had neglected or affronted in one way or another began to call on me and now that I was in pain and darkness, their voices seemed to have changed ... once more they were sincere and kindly voices with the ring of truth in them and that quality of understanding for which I had originally sought them out."

Believing that he could write more successfully if he were not surrounded by wealth and flattery, Williams decided to leave New York. He withdrew to Mexico and began to work on *The Poker Night*, which later was retitled *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In 1947, *Streetcar* opened on Broadway, receiving ecstatic reviews and enormous popular acclaim. Williams could no longer find anonymity anywhere. The success of *The Glass Menagerie* and *Streetcar* established him as one of the country's leading playwrights, and his life (as well as his works) became public property.

The Glass Menagerie: Review

The Glass Menagerie is a "Memory play" in which Tom recalls scenes from his youth during the height of the depression. It shows his mother, Amanda, trying to maintain a lost gentility in the midst of over helping while the glass menagerie is one of Tennessee Williams' most popular plays, it is also one of his least characteristic are very vivid, there is a sense of unreality about the whole play, much like many of our memories Williams introduces a major recurring theme in this play, "What place can be found in the modern world for lost souls the artist, the natural man, the aristocrat, the non-conformist?" his protagonists are almost always out of tune with accepted norms and generally use something. Sex, drugs, alcohol to escape an unfriendly present or to recover a dead past. (Laura uses her glass animal collection). The action usually shows the protagonist forced to face the truth. Often after being subjected to physical or psychologically degradation.

Likenesses within the glass menagerie to Williams' life - TW's first name was Tom, tenement first, Louis, worked in a shoe factory, dreaming of being a writer, father was a telephone man who fell in love with long distance real father was traveling salesman (although he did not abandon TW's family, he was gone for long stretches of time).

9

Mother had come down in circumstances (Social Status, rose) Laura both fragile (rose mentally, Laura physically, Psychologically), glass menagerie (although rose only had 2 or 3 glass animals), Amanda based off TW's mother, Tom's guilt over not being able to save Laura.

CHAPTER TWO

SYMBOLISM IN WILLIAMS'

THE GLASS MENAGERIE

Symbols are concrete things which are first of all themselves, but which suggest something beyond their physical beings—often abstract and intangible ideas and qualities. Symbols to be effective, they must be fairly easily recognizable to the audience and must be natural in the context of the work. Symbols are highly subjective and artificial. For one poet a particular symbol may have an entirely different meaning than for another writer. The important thing is that the student be able to recognize the meaning of a symbol within its context.

The Glass Menagerie, by Tennessee Williams is a short play that uses a large variety of symbolization throughout to describe the emotional, physical and social state of each of its characters. Laura is a very fragile young woman that lives in a lower class, shabby apartment with her older brother Tom, and her eccentric mother Amanda. Laura feels as though she is an outcast in contrast to the rest of the world. Among the many recurrent themes of this play the fragility is shown in a little unicorn that safely exists within a glass menagerie. There are other less prominent symbols such as the colors of a rainbow, blue roses, and the exit, and entrance to the apartment.

The title of the play, and the play's most prominent symbol, the glass menagerie represents Laura's fragility, otherworldliness, and tragic beauty. The collection embodies Laura's imaginative world, her haven from society. The old-fashioned, somewhat childlike, timeless nature of the menagerie further highlights Tom's depiction of Laura as a figure who exists outside the traditional confines of time and space. The glass menagerie also represents the vulnerability of memory and of dream worlds: one false move and the entire shimmering universe can shatter. The idea of a "glass menagerie" becomes representative for anything that is too beautiful and too fragile to survive in harsh reality.

Like the glass animals Laura is fragile, a dreamer who doesn't face reality, and she, like the fiddle animals, is old-fashioned. Laura is extremely shy and very withdrawn around people she doesn't know. If people give her a chance, we get the idea that she can be very charming, but she just can't face the realities it would take to maintain a relationship. Laura's favorite animal is the unicorn. This is important because the unicorn is not a real animal. It stands to reason that someone like Laura would be drawn to the most fanciful animal in her collection. In the play the unicorn gets broken and in some way so does Laura. The collection symbolizes the same thing throughout the play, but the different animals in the collection take on different meanings.

The symbolism of the glass menagerie changes to parallel the changes in Laura. Laura herself is symbolized by her glass collection, as she is both beautiful and fragile. Like her glass pieces, Laura "shines" when the light of love or attention falls upon her. Of all her pieces, the unicorn symbolizes her most fully; like the unicorn, Laura is unique and not of the real world. At the play's conclusion, the unicorn's horn is broken, making it less exotic and unusual, just as Laura has been drawn momentarily into the real world by Jim O'Connor. By the end, the glass menagerie still symbolizes Laura, but with a new dimension. She is still beautiful and fragile, but like her collection, she is no longer inviolate. The damaged unicorn has been given to Jim, breaking up the collection of animals, just as Laura's emotional withdrawal (and her sense of self) has been broken by Jim's selfish behavior.

The glass collection also symbolizes escape, as do the father's records and the apartment's fire escape. Before Jim's arrival, Laura can lose herself in her glass and escape from the realities of her own life and circumstances. After Jim's visit, however, this escape will be denied her. In the future, looking at her glass figures and remembering the unicorn that used to be among them will remind her of Jim.

The basic symbolism of the glass menagerie does not change, as the glass collection consistently relates to Laura throughout the play, but the symbolism itself is dynamic, reflecting the changes that occur in her heart and her circumstances.

While the glass animals remain symbolic throughout the play, as does the fire escape which is the "bridge" between illusion and reality, and the portrait of the father as symbol of escape, there are other symbols that appear and disappear in "The Glass Menagerie", which is described by Tom as narrator as "a memory play". For instance, with the appearance of Jim comes the symbolic name "Blue Roses" which he recalls. This name symbolizes Laura's unusual allure. This also is significant in that it recalls Tennessee Williams sister, Rose, on whose character Laura is modeled.

Religious/spiritual symbolism is also present in last scenes. Laura is dressed in white by her mother since she is to be presented to the "gentleman caller", and Laura is described as having "an unearthly prettiness" as a light glows from behind her. There is a candelabrum that Jim, the gentleman caller, carries in one hand, and a glass of wine in the other as he comes into the dining room. After dinner, Jim talks with Laura with "a warmth and charm which lights her inwardly with altar candles", writes Williams. After they dance, Jim stumbles and knocks over the unicorn.

Laura's glass menagerie is an important symbol. Laura does not want to be involved with the world outside this "dark, grim" apartment that she lives in with her mother, a "proud, vivacious woman, Amanda" and her brother "Tom, an aspiring poet, and shoe warehouseman" (ebSCOhost.com). She prefers the comfort of her "transparent glass animals" (478). Laura would rather spend time with her tiny glass horses and unicorn figurine, listening to her old records. She would prefer to do this all day rather than having any contact with other people.

One of the clearest symbolic uses of the glass figurines happens at a point in the story when Laura and Jim are left by themselves. Laura makes the statement "You should always take good care of your glass." (510) Again, we see the symbolism of the glass unicorn and the fragility of Laura. Laura is very shy and innocent, very much like the glass figurines she cleans throughout the day. All though it is very fragile much like Laura herself, the glass shines and glistens, magnifying many colors of the rainbow in the light.

The glass unicorn is obviously the most symbolic of Laura! Reading between the lines as Jim and Laura are talking, it is easy to see that the unicorn represents Laura's unusually different, delicate, and uncomfortable in the normal world.

Jim makes the statement, "Poor little fellow, he must feel sort of lonesome". It is obvious that Laura has felt lonesome most of her life, and Laura replies "the unicorn sits on a shelf with some normal horses that do not have any horns, and they all seem to get along nicely together." (p512).

During Jim and Laura's short romantic encounter, for a moment, Laura is feeling more confidence. It's as if she is beginning to feel a little normal like her horses. When Jim accidentally knocks the glass unicorn to the floor, and breaks the horn off. "The unicorn has lost its horn. It doesn't really matter. It may be a blessing in disguise." Laura states, and "I will just imagine that it has had some kind of operation." And "with the horn removed he may feel less freakish! Now he might feel more like he is one of the horses, the ones without any horns". (p513)

For a moment Laura is happy and uplifted. She begins to smile and feel the tension of uniqueness lifting from her. Jim sees this and starts dancing around with her, and eventually kisses her. All of this gives us the slight impression that Laura may finally be escaping the illusive world in which she has lived for most of her life. Laura is for a moment, starting to feel more accepted, especially from Jim. For a moment she is feeling less conscious about her physical disabilities. She starts to open up just a little bit.

It's not long after all of this that Jim tells Laura of his engagement to another woman. Laura is broken. She is broken inside, and no longer feels the same uniqueness that she once felt with the glass unicorn. She looks at Jim, and tells him to take the unicorn. It's as if she has let go of something inside. Past dream like memories of love that she once had for Jim, have now been lost in the reality of Jim's words. Laura has spent many years polishing, and taking care of her glass menagerie, and keeping her unicorn safe from the outside world. But, now it has been exposed, and in turn it has been broken, just as Laura has been broken. The dream of maybe, some day having love from a man, and being normal has now been replaced with a broken heart, and a withdrawn sadness.

The glass unicorn is most obviously a symbol of Laura - delicate, sadly different, an anomaly in the modern world. The glass motif recurs throughout the whole play in many other forms, when Laura dropped out of college she constantly visited the zoo, a glass house of tropical flowers that are as vulnerable as she is. During Laura's and Jim's brief romantic encounter, Laura is gaining more confidence about herself. It seems as if she is starting to escape her world of illusions. When they started dancing together, Jim accidentally knocked the little glass horse over. Laura, who usually worships her glass collection more than anything else, replied to his excuse; "He's lost his horn. It doesn't matter. Maybe it's a blessing in disguise" and "I'll just imagine he had an operation. The horn was removed to make him feel less - Freakish! Now he will feel more at home with the other horses, the ones who don't have horns". These two quotes give an impression that Laura is finally escaping her illusive world. She thinks that she might have a chance to survive the real world.

What she doesn't know is that she is about to be wounded by the news of Jim's engagement. After Jim tells her the news, she gives him the unicorn as a souvenir and retreats into her land of the glass menagerie never to come out again.

In the play, Tom is the adventure seeking man trying to escape the prison Amanda is keeping him trapped in. To escape the real world, Tom constantly goes to the movies. The movies make him think about all the adventures he missing. It his little land of dreams. He is jealous of his father who left his family and achieved what Tom always wanted, "Freedom". Tom has never been comfortable with the way his mother treated him. She always disagreed with the way Tom behaved. When Amanda put him down after Jim left, saying that he didn't even know that his friend was engaged and that Jim broke Laura's heart, Tom finally had enough. He took the money that was meant to pay for the electric bill, left the family and finally pursued his dream of adventure. Still, when he crosses by a window with little perfume bottles made of glass or other small things made of this material, he thinks of Laura. Amanda, who is the domineering parent of Tom and Laura, lives in a fantasy world in which she was a young beautiful girl, living in an area called Blue Mountain.

She always told Laura and Tom about the many gentleman callers she received every day. Some times there were as many as seventeen a day, all prominent men on the Mississippi Delta.

To make some extra money she sells The Homemaker's Companion that features the serialized Sublimations of ladies of letters who think in terms of delicate Cup like breasts, slim, tapering waists, and rich and creamy thighs. These are all parts of her Fantasy world which make her think back to the time when she was a young and beautiful girl. She also is the domineering parent in the family. She treats Tom very harsh sometimes. She does that because she is scared that she is going to lose her children just like she did her husband. Jim is the most realistic character in the play. He is didn't live in any fantasy world like Tom and his family did. When he talked to Laura after they had dinner, he tried to make her more comfortable because he felt that Laura was very shy. He showed Laura how superior he is in order to impress her.

For example, he said, "Look how big my shadow is when I stretch?" He wanted to show Laura how manly he is. Jim's nickname for Laura, Blue Rose suggests a phenomenon that is contrary to nature. Blue also means sad. The symbolism in the play The Glass Menagerie made the story much more interesting. It gave the play a special point which made it more interesting to read. Tennessee Williams used a wide range of symbolic aspect to describe Laura, Amanda, Jim, and Tom who are four out of the five characters in the play. Symbolism is sometimes very important in plays, stories, etc. because it tells us about the secrets which are hidden inside.

As the introverted and shy Laura is lost even further into herself. We begin to see a glimpse of the symbolism in the use of the rainbow and its colors. But it is less obvious than that of the glass unicorn. The rainbow signifies that there may be some hope in the future. Tom gives Laura a glimpse of hope, "Laura is overwhelmed with emotions when Tom pulls out the rainbow-colored scarf and tells the story of how a magician changed a bowl of little fish into canaries. Towards the end of the play, Tom reflects on Laura as he gazes at some broken colored glass, and imagines his shattered sister Laura and her broken spirit." (ebSCOhost.com). Tom wishes in the symbolic sense that he could blow out the candles of his sister's despair. He also reflects on how Laura would spend hours polishing her glass animals, keeping them safe from the rest of the world.

There is sad irony in Tennessee Williams play when you think about the symbolism of the rainbow. Although rainbows seem to be positive, bright, and hopeful signs that a new day is coming soon, there is usually much pain that must be endured before that time, if it ever comes.

There is quite an array of symbolism that helps to form the character of Laura. Tennessee Williams uses the color of blue in Jim's nickname for Laura. Like the rose, Laura is fragile, and like the color blue, she is shy, innocent, and very sad.

The religious symbols particularly seem out of place and obtrusive in the play. Several times Amanda is referred to as the Madonna. "Ave Maria" is played and one of the screen legends is "Annunciation". Church candles are used to light the final scenes after the electricity is turned off because of Tom's failure to pay the light bill, and at the end of the play Laura holds the candles before her, blowing them out at the end of the play.

Obviously, Williams either sees religious significance within the play, or is trying to use the religious experience to symbolize similar but secular experience. At any rate, the religious symbolism is unsuccessful. At best, it is hazy. We cannot follow the religious symbolism that Williams presents to a logical conclusion. If we accept Amanda as Madonna and the music to "Ave Maria," then we must logically Tom in this case or one of the other characters is a Jesus figure, most logically Tom in this case, since he is her son. But the Annunciation legend comes in scenes when Tom announces that Laura will have a gentleman caller. Williams must then be equating the announcement that Mary will bear Jesus to the announcement that Laura

will receive Jim O'Connor, thus making Laura the Madonna and Jim the Jesus, or more properly Joseph.

Only the use of the candles is in any way valid. In liturgical churches, the candle is snuffed as a signal that the Mass is over. Thus, the blowing out of the candles signals the end of the play. The principal drawback to this is that the play is not a Mass; although Williams attempts to give the play religious significance, he does not succeed and the religious ending has not been prepared for. The use of the candles is, however, theatrical and very successful in that context. When Laura blows out the candles, Tom gains a degree of freedom from her. Thus, this play which has been a "confession" on the part of Tom ends with forgiveness on the part of Laura. This interpretation, it must be cautioned, cannot be accepted too readily since the religious symbolism is inconsistent.

While Williams fails in his use of religious symbolism, it would be unfair to conclude that he does not use symbols well. On the contrary, Williams generally uses symbols extremely well. Only in a few instances is he guilty of ineffective symbolism.

CONCLUSION

The Glass menagerie an extensive pattern of Symbolism that describes the characters of Tom, Amanda, Laura and Jim glass, light, color and music constitute the substance of the dominant symbols and motifs, serving to reveal deeper aspects of characters and underlying themes of the play. Tennessee Williams wrote the play so that each character had a special symbol which resembled their personality. add greatly to the is carefully developed throughout the play. Laura is the girl in glass whose world is infinitely more beautiful than the real one. She is overly shy, and this shyness is even more striking in contrast with Amanda's forcefulness, her role in the play is central. All the action centers around her, her destruction, her final retreat into a make-believe world, is the most touching - indeed, almost tragic element in the glass menagerie.

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