

THE S. MARK TAPER FOUNDATION PRESENTS
A NOISE WITHIN'S REPERTORY THEATRE SEASON

AUDIENCE **GUIDE**

Tennessee Williams'
**THE GLASS
MENAGERIE**

February 24–April 26, 2019



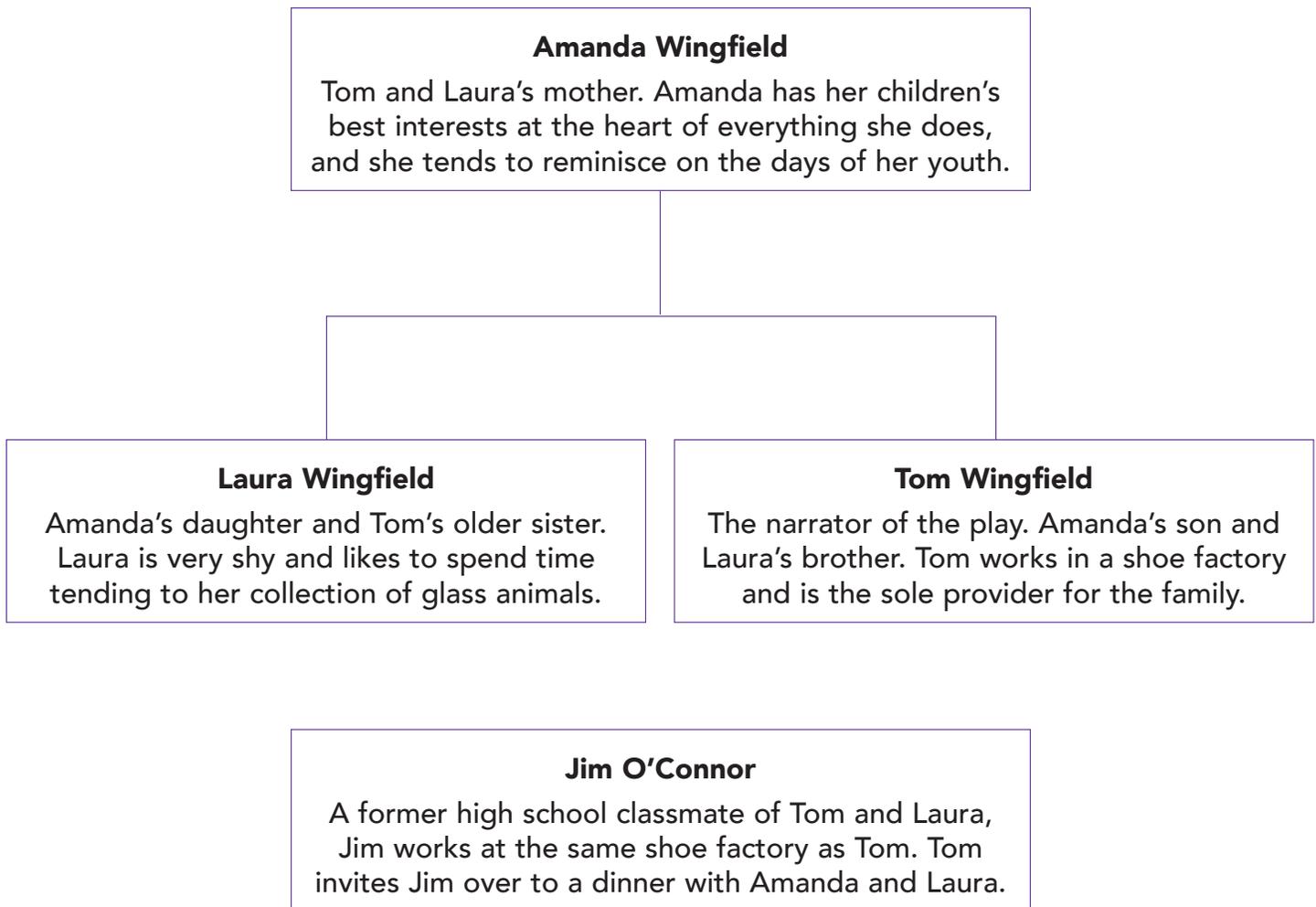
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Character Map	3
Synopsis	4
About the Author: Tennessee Williams	5
Timeline of Tennessee Williams' Life	6
Life on Stage: Autobiographical Influence in Williams' <i>The Glass Menagerie</i>	7
Expressionism and Realism	8
Poetic Realism: The Influence of Expressionism and Realism in <i>The Glass Menagerie</i>	10
Expectation Versus Reality: Social Media and the Relevance of <i>The Glass Menagerie</i>	11
<i>The Glass Menagerie</i> Themes	12
The Wingfields in 2018: Supporting & Leaving Your Family	14
Additional Resources	15

A NOISE WITHIN'S EDUCATION PROGRAMS MADE POSSIBLE IN PART BY:

Ann Peppers Foundation	The Jewish Community Foundation
Capital Group Companies	Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation
Michael J. Connell Foundation	Ralph M. Parsons Foundation
The Dick and Sally Roberts Coyote Foundation	Steinmetz Foundation
Edison International	Dwight Stuart Youth Fund
The Green Foundation	

CHARACTER MAP



SYNOPSIS

As the play begins, Tom Wingfield lets the audience know that the events about to unfold are events that live in his memory. The year the events occurred is 1937, and the place is St. Louis, Missouri. In his memory, Tom works a tedious job at a shoe factory to support his mother, Amanda, and his sister, Laura. Tom's father was a telephone man who "fell in love with long distance," as Tom and Amanda say, and left the family several years back.

As the family gathers for a meal one afternoon, Amanda begins, once again, to tell tales of her glamorous youth, recalling her many suitors and gentlemen callers. Laura has never received a gentleman caller, but Amanda is hopeful one will stop by. To Amanda's disappointment, no gentleman calls.

Sometime later, Amanda returns home after running a few errands. While she was out, she stopped by the business college where Laura is enrolled as a student, only to find out that Laura dropped out. Laura explains how her classes made her so nervous she felt ill.

After Laura's decision to drop out of business college, Amanda takes up work for *The Homemaker's Companion* magazine, following up with customers about subscription renewals. Her hope is that with the extra income from the magazine, she will be able to impress more potential gentlemen callers for Laura. Meanwhile, Tom has become restless with his job at the warehouse. He craves adventure, and often sneaks away from home late at night to see movies and drink. One night, Amanda questions where Tom really goes when he leaves at night. Tom maintains that he only goes to the movies, and the two fight. Amanda reminds Tom that both she and Laura depend on the money Tom makes working at the warehouse. The fight escalates, and Tom storms out of the apartment.

The next day, Tom grudgingly apologizes to Amanda for his behavior the previous night. Amanda forgives him and asks him to do her a favor: to look for any potential gentlemen callers for Laura at the warehouse. After some argument, Tom agrees to ask around among his co-workers.

Sometime later, Tom reveals to Amanda that his co-worker, Jim O'Connor, has agreed to come over for

dinner the next day. Amanda is thrilled to hear the news and frantically begins to prepare the apartment for a guest. However, Tom tells Amanda that Jim does not know the purpose of the dinner; in fact, Jim does not know about Laura at all. This does not deter Amanda from her excitement, as she is sure Jim will become interested in Laura over the course of the evening.

The next day, as Amanda is helping Laura get ready for the gentleman caller, Laura figures out that she knows the man coming over—she went to high school with him, and he is the only boy she has ever liked. When Tom and Jim arrive, Laura, paralyzed by her shyness, nearly faints out of nervousness. She spends the duration of the dinner recovering, sitting on the couch as Tom, Jim, and Amanda eat.

After dinner, all of the lights in the apartment go out. Tom has not paid the electric bill for the month and the electric company has shut the apartment's power off. Nevertheless, Amanda makes use of the situation by handing Jim a lit candelabrum and a bottle of dandelion wine and sending him to check on Laura as she and Tom clean the dishes.

As Jim and Laura talk, Jim slowly begins to remember Laura from high school, and Laura begins to come out of her shell. She even shows him her precious collection of glass animals—her glass menagerie. As their conversation progresses, music from the nearby dance hall becomes louder. Jim asks Laura to dance, and she obliges. However, as they move throughout the room, they knock over Laura's favorite glass animal—a unicorn—and break its horn. Laura gives the ornament to Jim as a souvenir of the night. In a moment of passion, Jim kisses Laura. He immediately catches himself and reveals, guiltily, that he is engaged. Flustered by the encounter, Jim gathers his belongings to leave and tells them that he cannot stop by again. This upsets Amanda, and she blames Tom for misleading her and Laura. Tom, outraged, grabs his coat, and heads to the movies; this time, he does not return.

The memory ends as Amanda consoles Laura. Tom, now looking back on the events that led to his departure, reveals that he remembers his family in pieces of music that he hears or pieces of transparent glass he sees. As the play ends, Tom says goodbye to his memory of Laura. ♦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: **TENNESSEE WILLIAMS**



Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams was born on May 26, 1911 as Thomas Lanier Williams in Columbus, Mississippi. He was the second of three children born to Cornelius and Edwina Williams. Cornelius Williams was a travelling salesman whose work

often kept him away from home. As a result, Williams was predominantly raised by his mother, who was the daughter of a strict minister and exemplified many aspects of a typical Southern Belle. Williams later described his childhood in Mississippi as a happy and carefree time.

In 1918, Williams and his family moved to Missouri when Cornelius Williams was offered an executive position at the International Shoe Company based in St. Louis. This move was difficult for Williams—life in St. Louis, as an urban city, differed greatly from life in Columbus, Mississippi. Beyond having to cope with the geographical relocation, it was in St. Louis that the fights between Williams' parents became more frequent. Many arguments centered on the facts that Cornelius felt too tied down by his family and considered Edwina to be overly protective and attached to their children. It was shortly after this move to St. Louis that Williams began to use writing as a coping mechanism for the change—“because I found life unsatisfactory,” he later said.

Williams struggled socially in elementary school, and he was often teased for his shyness. A few years later, Williams used his experience as inspiration for his writing when he published his first article, “Isolation,” in the Ben Blewett Junior High School newspaper. Throughout high school, Williams continued to write for his school newspaper and even had two of his articles published in national magazines.

In 1929, Williams began to study journalism at the University of Missouri in Columbia. While he was there, he began to write plays. The University of Missouri Dramatic Arts Club hosted an annual Dramatic Plays Prize contest. Williams' first plays *Beauty is the Word* and *Hot Milk at Three in the Morning* both received honorable mentions in the contest. After attending the University of Missouri for three years, Williams' father insisted he leave

school and work at the shoe factory where he worked to help provide for the family. Williams worked at the factory for two years before returning to his studies, this time at Washington University in St. Louis. After some time there, Williams transferred to the University of Iowa where he finally earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1938.

It was after graduating that Williams first began to publish his writing under the name Tennessee. From 1938 until 1944, Williams spent considerable time travelling throughout the country as he wrote. One of his travels took him to New Orleans, a place that later served as inspiration for *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It was also during this time that Williams began to discover his homosexuality. Williams was writing *Battle of Angels* in the midst of this discovery, a play that flopped in Massachusetts because of its controversial handling of the relationship between sexuality and religion. After the flop, Williams continued to travel, worked odd jobs, attempted to write screenplays, moved to New York City, and worked as a waiter in Greenwich Village. However, in December 1944, Williams play, *The Glass Menagerie* opened in Chicago, and Williams' life changed. The play, which is largely autobiographical, was a hit, and transferred to New York in March of 1945 where it earned the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award. The success of the play launched Tennessee Williams into stardom. Two years later, Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire* opened in New York to great success. Williams won both the Drama Critic's Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *A Streetcar Named Desire* and established himself as a major playwright.

Over the next fifteen years, Williams won numerous awards for his work including the Tony Award for Best Play for *The Rose Tattoo*, the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award for both *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Night of the Iguana*, and the Pulitzer Prize in Drama for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

In 1963, Williams' partner of fourteen years, Frank Merlo died of cancer, and Williams sank into a deep depression. During this time, Williams' writing career began a decline from which it never fully recovered. Williams was eventually admitted to a psychiatric ward in St. Louis for treatment.

In 1975, Williams published *Memoirs*, a tell-all account of his life in which he describes his sexuality as well as his struggles with substance abuse. Williams continued to write plays until 1983 when he accidentally suffocated on a medicine bottle cap at the age of 71. ♦

TIMELINE OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' LIFE

1911: Tennessee Williams is born on May 26th. His given name is Thomas Lanier Williams III.

1918: Williams' father, Cornelius, receives a job offer to work at a St. Louis-based shoe factory, and the Williams family moves to Missouri.

1924: Williams' first article, titled "Isolation," is published in the Ben Blewett Junior High School newspaper.

1927: Williams places third in a national essay writing contest hosted by *The Smart Set*.

1929: Williams attends the University of Missouri in Columbia and studies journalism.

1930: Williams writes his first play, *Beauty is the Word* and submits it to the Dramatic Plays Prize contest hosted by the University of Missouri Dramatic Arts Club. The play was produced for the contest and received an honorable mention.

1932: Williams leaves the University of Missouri to support his family by working at the shoe factory where his father works in St. Louis.

1936: Williams resumes his college education by attending Washington University in St. Louis.

1937: Williams transfers to the University of Iowa. Rose, Williams' older sister, suffers from a nervous breakdown.

1938: Williams graduates from the University of Iowa with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English.

1939: Williams receives grants for his writing including a \$1,000 Rockefeller grant.

1940: Williams writes *Battle of Angels*. The play flops and closes after a two-week run in Massachusetts. Because of the controversial themes the play presented, the Boston City Council banned the play from performance.

1942: Williams moves to New York City.

1944: Williams writes *The Glass Menagerie*. It premieres in Chicago in December.

1945: *The Glass Menagerie* transfers to New York City in March.

1946: Williams publishes a collection of eleven one-act plays entitled *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*.

1947: Williams writes *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

1948: Williams wins the Pulitzer Prize for drama for *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The same year, Williams' play, *Summer and Smoke*, opens on Broadway.

1951: Williams' play, *The Rose Tattoo*, premieres on Broadway. It wins the Tony Award for Best Play. The same year, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is adapted into a film directed by Elia Kazan and starring Marlon Brando and Vivien Leigh.

1953: Williams' play, *Camino Real*, opens on Broadway. While it closes after a short run, Williams considers this to be one of his best works.

1955: Williams' play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, premieres on Broadway. The original production is directed by Elia Kazan. It wins The New York Drama Critic's Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama Award the same year.

1956: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* wins the Tony Award for Best Play.

1957: Cornelius Coffin Williams, Williams' father, dies at the age of 77.

1961: Williams' play, *Night of the Iguana*, premieres in New York starring Bette Davis. The play wins the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award.

1963: Frank Merlo, Williams' partner of fourteen years, dies of cancer.

1969: Williams suffers from a nervous breakdown. His younger brother, Dakin, has him committed to a psychiatric hospital.

1975: Williams publishes *Memoirs*, a tell-all account of his life, his sexuality, and his substance abuse.

1980: Edwina Dakin Williams, Williams' mother, dies at the age of 90.

1983: Williams chokes on a plastic bottle cap and dies in his room at Hotel Elysée in New York on February 24th.

LIFE ON STAGE: **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCE** IN WILLIAMS' *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*

“Oh my God, yes. In my early plays I created from my family—my sister, mother, my father’s sister.”

— Tennessee Williams in an interview with the *The New York Times* in 1975

Early in his career, Tennessee Williams often looked to his family and his own life experience for writing inspiration. Indeed, Williams’ first major success, *The Glass Menagerie*, is considered to be his most transparently autobiographical work as it appears to mirror many aspects of his early adult life featuring characters based upon his mother, sister, and himself.

Edwina Dakin Williams, Tennessee’s mother, played a significant role in his upbringing. Because Williams’ father worked as a travelling salesman, and spent much time on the road, Edwina became primarily responsible for raising her children. The daughter of a strict minister, Edwina grew up in the south. When the Williams family moved to St. Louis, Edwina maintained traditional Southern values much like how Amanda hangs onto her past and Southern roots. While Williams spent a considerable amount of time with his mother as he grew up, his father, Cornelius Coffin Williams, remained relatively absent. Cornelius struggled with alcohol abuse much like Tom’s absent father in the play. As a travelling salesman, he often expressed his frustration at feeling too tied down to his family. While Tom’s father in the play, goes so far as to abandon the Amanda, Tom, and Laura, Cornelius never acted on his frustration to that extent.

Throughout his early life, Williams had a very close relationship with his sister, Rose. Unlike Laura, Rose was popular in school, at least for a time, as Williams recalls in his memoir. However, as Rose and Williams grew older, Rose began to exhibit anxious and erratic behavior. In St. Louis, Rose attended Soldan High, which is the name of the school Laura attends in *The Glass Menagerie*. Like Laura, Rose dropped out of school (high school, in her case). However, instead of staying home after dropping out, Edwina sent Rose to a boarding school. While away at school, Rose began to struggle with her mental health. Over the course of ten years, Rose suffered through a number of nervous breakdowns and was eventually diagnosed with schizophrenia. Before her official

diagnosis, though, Rose made her debut into society and fell in love with a man who did not reciprocate her feelings—

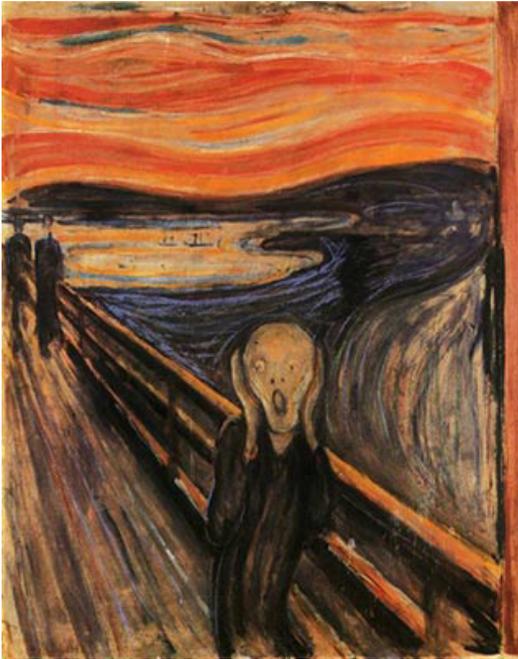
not unlike what happens to Laura in the play. After her debut, Rose’s mental health began to deteriorate. She was officially diagnosed as schizophrenic and was admitted to St. Vincent’s Catholic Sanitarium in St. Louis. In 1943, Rose received one of the first performed prefrontal lobotomies. A few months after the procedure, Williams began to write the first draft of what would become *The Glass Menagerie*. While Laura does not suffer from mental illness in the same way Rose did, Williams incorporated Rose’s struggle and sense of isolation from the world into the character through Laura’s paralyzing shyness and difficulty walking.

Tom is often considered to represent Williams himself. In fact, Tom and Williams even share a name as Tennessee Williams’ given name was Tom Lanier Williams. Tom is a frustrated writer who works long hours at a shoe factory in St. Louis to provide for his family, much like Williams did in his early twenties. In his spare time at the factory, Tom writes poetry where ever he can, including on the lid of a shoebox. Tom’s interest in writing and poetry leads to others calling him “Shakespeare” and parallels Williams’ own interest in poetic writing. Tom also has a yearning for adventure and travel, a yearning that Williams himself acted upon in his own life as he travelled the country in search of inspiration for his writing throughout his late twenties and early thirties. ♦



Edwina Dakin Williams reads to her children, Rose and Tom

EXPRESSIONISM AND REALISM



ARTWORK TOP TO BOTTOM: "The Scream" by Edvard Munch, 1893
 "Houses at Night" by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, 1912
 "Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat" by Oskar Kokoschka, 1909

Expressionism

Expressionism is an artistic movement that began in Germany in the early 20th century. The roots of the expressionist movement are in visual art, but expressionist ideals were quickly translated into other art forms, particularly by German playwrights and filmmakers. Expressionist art was considered an art form for the expression of emotions. In the years before World War I, industrialization, capitalism, and global tensions were on the rise and all played increasingly prominent roles in the lives of individuals. Expressionism was born out of an attempt to foreground individual experiences, perceptions, and emotions in an increasingly mechanized and uneasy world.

Expressionist art is art in which the artist does not depict an objective reality. Rather, artists strive to depict their subjective emotional impressions and responses to objects, people, or events. Because of the emphasis on subjective interpretations of the world in expressionist thought, expressionist works of art often feature vivid, exaggerated, distorted, or jarring images. One of the most famous expressionist paintings is Edvard Munch's "The Scream."

As the world was on the brink of World War I, the silent film industry was booming both in Hollywood and in Europe. However, during the war, the film industries in many European countries were decimated. Germany was one of the few European countries whose film industry actually grew during and immediately after the war; however, many German film studios eventually fell under the direct control of the government. Nevertheless, a few independent studios persisted, and in 1920, one released a film titled *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. This film was one of the first overtly expressionist films, using expressionism as the basis for its set, costume, and lighting designs as well as for its script.

Early 20th century playwrights incorporated expressionist principles into their work by creating dramatic worlds with blurred or indefinite rules. Often, expressionist playwrights set their stories against a dream-like landscape such as that in Swedish playwright August Strindberg's *A Dream Play*. To this end, expressionist plays are often not linear in terms of their narrative structure—time in expressionist plays does not always run one way. Additionally, locations of the action of expressionist plays are not always clear or consistent. There was a distinct shift in expressionist drama after World War I, as expressionist playwrights began to incorporate increasingly overt political statements into their works in response to the devastation of the war. In the United States, the expressionist movement persisted for some time, eventually morphing into a more abstract form of expressionism in the 1930s in response to the Great Depression. While the core of this abstract expressionism movement remained the same as that of the expressionist movement—to depict personal experience and emotions subjectively through art—the works created out of this movement lacked the same level of structure as works in the expressionist movement and instead featured splatter paint and swirling colors.

Realism

EXPRESSIONISM AND REALISM CONTINUED...

Realism in visual and dramatic art preceded expressionism. It began to emerge in the 1840s in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. The movement worked to replace the idealistic images of landscapes and portraits of romantic art with ones that accurately reflected the state of the world—chaotic, dirty, vulnerable. During the realist movement, everyday life became the subject of artistic work, and artists did not shy away from depictions of the “uglier” aspects of life. Much of the work to come out of the realist movement addressed social, economic, and political inequities and issues. In this sense, the movement was distinctly anti-institutional.

Two of the most prominent early realist playwrights included Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen who both used their work to shine lights on ruptures in society at the time. Realism dominated theatre from the late 1800s all the way through the 1960s. However, as the world changed over that course of time, so did realist theatre. In the 1950s, a subgenre of realism called “kitchen sink realism” became a popular form of writing. This subgenre of realism focused on depicting the gritty lives of working class characters and featured the characters performing mundane tasks on stage such as cleaning dishes at the sink. These plays tended to feature an angry young man’s struggle to succeed in a stifling society. Prominent writers during the kitchen sink realist movement in theatre include John Osborne and Arthur Miller. ♦



ARTWORK TOP TO BOTTOM:

“The Gleaners” by Jean-François Millet, 1857

“Symphony in White No. 1” by James Whistler, 1861-1862

POETIC REALISM: THE INFLUENCE OF EXPRESSIONISM AND REALISM IN *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*

“Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art: that truth, life or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance.”

—Tennessee Williams in his production notes for *The Glass Menagerie*

In his notes about the play, Tennessee Williams lays out his belief in the most effective way to achieve truth in art: to transform the reality of a moment into a new form. This is a relatively expressionistic artistic philosophy—expressionist art is art that does not present its audience with an objective reality. Rather, expressionist art approaches universal truths through the depiction of the personal, emotional, and subjective reality of the artist. This is exactly what Williams does in *The Glass Menagerie*, and he even has Tom explain the expressionistic tone of the work to come in the first scene:

“The play is memory. Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic. In memory everything seems to happen to music. That explains the fiddle in the wings. I am the narrator in the play, and also a character in it. The other characters are my mother, Amanda, my sister, Laura, and a gentleman caller who appears in the final scenes. He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from.” —Tom, Scene 1

In framing the work as a memory play and in openly stating that the play to come is not realistic, Williams primes the audience for an expressionistic theatrical experience. A common trope in expressionistic narratives is an unreliable narrator. Here, Tom admits that he is not entirely a reliable narrator for the events to come in that the story will not be realistic.

One way that the play proves to not be fully realistic is through the use of mime and the suggestion of props. Throughout the play, there are a number of scenes in which characters eat meals. However, it is written into the script that the actors should not have actual plates, utensils, or food when they eat, but should indicate that they are eating through physical gestures instead. These written sequences of mimed props serve as a visual reminder to the audience that the events in the play do not exist in a definite reality.

Williams transforms the truth and reality of his own personal experiences and relationships with his mother and sister by using memory as the foundation of the play. Memories are inherently unreliable, subject to embellishment—like the addition of background mood music Tom mentions will be prominent in the play—or change the longer they exist in a person’s mind.

As Tom is the narrator, it can be assumed that the memories presented throughout the play are his. However, as the play progresses, scenes in which Tom is not present become increasingly prominent. For example, Tom is not present for the entirety of Laura and Jim’s exchange. Because of the expressionistic tone of the play, it becomes difficult to discern whether the scene between Jim and Laura that plays out in Tom’s absence is an extrapolation of what Tom believes happened between his sister and Jim or if it is an accurate depiction of what occurred between the two. Because Tom is not a completely reliable narrator, the line between memory and imagination becomes blurred.

While *The Glass Menagerie* certainly exhibits aspects of expressionistic art, events of the play and the relationships between the characters as well as the setting of the memories mirror those that are common in works of realist theatre. The apartment in which the play takes place does not shy away from the grittiness that is common in realist plays. The fact that the only way to enter the apartment is through a fire escape emphasizes the claustrophobic stifling nature of the life of the working class in the late 1930s.

Additionally, *The Glass Menagerie* features the common trope in realist theatre of a young man frustrated with his lot in life as its leading character. Tom is not satisfied with his life working at the shoe factory. He wants adventure, he wants to write, he wants to experience more in life.

Like *The Glass Menagerie*, many of Williams’ other plays incorporate elements of both expressionist and realist styles. In blending expressionist and realist elements in his work, Williams’ is often considered to be a writer of poetic-realism. ♦

EXPECTATION VERSUS REALITY: **SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE RELEVANCE OF *THE GLASS MENAGERIE***

Since its Chicago premiere in 1944, Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* has captivated audiences. Williams' work examines the struggle individuals encounter when their hopes and their reality are in conflict. Tom's dream for an adventurous, if dangerous, life spurs his increasing frustration with his mundane work at the shoe warehouse. Amanda's expectation that Laura finds a husband and that Tom supports the family is complicated by Laura's crippling social anxieties and Tom's desire to find adventure. Laura's desire to fit in is hindered by her extreme shyness and isolation. The tragedy of the play lives in this clash of expectations and reality. Although Williams wrote *The Glass Menagerie* over 70 years ago, the advent of social media has become a platform where the same struggle between expectations and reality occurs regularly.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat provide users with opportunities to easily and instantly showcase and document everything from the travel adventures they embark on to the artisanal ice cream cones they eat. However, on another level, social media platforms provide users with tools to easily earn approval from and compare themselves to others.

Often, the pictures and videos individuals post online are carefully curated and edited before being posted. The selection process for photos as well as the process of editing photos can distort the visual elements of the photos along with the perceived context of the images.

The ability of social media users to distort the images and contexts of their posts online can have some serious social ramifications for individuals scrolling through feeds of perfectly composed, colorful, and "candid" images. The images that show up in feeds and stories, give off the impression that what is being depicted is a true slice of the poster's life, even if the images have been carefully selected, filtered, and edited. These images then contribute to the creation of false or impossible expectations for individuals. In this sense, social media can perpetuate anything from false ideas about healthy body weight to unrealistic expectations for brunch.

A recent study from the Center of Research on Media, Technology, and Health at the University of Pittsburgh found that heavy use of social media platforms is associated with increased feelings of social isolation. This seems counterintuitive as social media platforms are intended to provide people with opportunities to connect with others. The study does not pinpoint a

causation between social media use and feelings of isolation, but Brian Primack, one of the authors of the study, offers, "You might watch all these interactions where it seems like everyone else is connecting." Seeing these interactions and images could lead to feelings of exclusion. In an NPR article about the study, Katherine Hobson explains, "The images of other people's seemingly perfect vacations, homes and lives, even though those are not likely to represent reality, can make you feel like you're missing out."

This feeling of missing out prompted by stories in the media is present in *The Glass Menagerie*. In fact, it is Tom's experience seeing images of war and fighting at the movies that spurs his desire to seek out adventure. Even in 1937, when the play takes place, media and production companies curated the images and videos they broadcast much like how Instagram users curate their posts—to make things look exciting.

Amanda's constant retelling of stories from her glamorous glory days functions in a similar way for Laura. Amanda infuses her stories with excitement and intrigue in such a way that her stories might not represent the reality of her experiences as a young woman. These stories set a standard for Laura—they serve as unrealistic benchmarks for which Laura must strive. However, Laura is not like Amanda. Laura's social anxieties hold her back from pursuing an education and pursuing a career. While Amanda's stories may not be the cause of Laura's anxiety, they do appear to contribute. What is more, Amanda's rose-colored recollection of the past also feeds Amanda's expectations for Laura and, when Laura does not meet those expectations, prompts Amanda to become highly involved in her grown daughter's life.

There is no "fix" for the way unrealistic expectations function for members of society, especially now, in the age of social media. However, Holly Shakya, an assistant professor in the division of global public health at the University of California, San Diego, authored a recent study that tracked Facebook use and well-being over time and found the use of the social network was negatively associated with factors including physical health, mental health and life satisfaction. Offline interactions, meantime, had positive effects. ♦

Edited from: <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/03/06/518362255/feeling-lonely-too-much-time-on-social-media-may-be-why> and <http://time.com/4459153/social-media-body-image/>

THE GLASS MENAGERIE THEMES

MEMORY AND THE PAST

“The scene is memory and is therefore nonrealistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominantly in the heart.”—Act 1, Scene 1

Memory is the framework for the events that unfold in the play. Our narrator, Tom, takes us through his memory of the time before he decided to ultimately follow in his father’s footsteps and leave his mother and his sister. Tom’s memory of the time is slightly fantastical, embellished with music and prescribed spotlight moments. While the memories that play out are Tom’s, Tom is not the only character in the play to feel attached to or pine for the past.

Amanda finds joy in telling the stories of her youth in Blue Mountain. For her, the past was perfect. Early in the play, she describes a day in which, as a young woman, she received seventeen gentlemen callers. In telling the story, she describes all of the success some of those suitors had in the years following that afternoon—many were successful businessmen— but Amanda eventually chose to marry a telephone man. Amanda’s attachment for the past extends beyond her love of telling stories from her youth. When Tom brings Jim home for dinner, Amanda dresses in a gown that she wore to her cotillion and the Governor’s Ball as well as for afternoons in which she expected to receive gentlemen callers. In wearing the gown to dinner with Tom and Jim, Amanda embodies the glamour of her youth, even though her present circumstances somewhat lack the charm of the life she once led.

Laura also lives through her memories of the past. When Amanda asks Laura if she ever liked a boy, Laura says she has. She pulls out her high school yearbook and points to a picture of Jim, a man she has not seen in years, but remains the only boy for whom she has had feelings. For Laura, the past and the present meet when it turns out that the Jim she liked in high school is the same Jim that Tom has arranged to bring home for dinner. Throughout her conversation with Jim after dinner, Laura is able to live out, at least for a time, what she would have liked to live out in high school.

GLASS AND FRAGILITY

“She lives in a world of her own—a world of little glass ornaments” —Tom, Scene 5

Laura spends her days walking through the park, playing the Victrola, and tending to her collection of glass animals—her glass menagerie. Laura’s glass collection is

her most prized possession, and like the animals in her glass collection, Laura herself is fragile. Laura suffers from paralyzing shyness that leads her to drop out of both high school and business college. She gets so nervous in social interactions that she often feels ill. Laura’s fragility is also manifested physically as she suffers from a limp that is the source of severe self-consciousness. To cope with her self-consciousness and nervousness, Laura turns to caring for a collection of equally fragile glass animals.

When Jim comes over for dinner, Laura shows him her favorite animal in her collection—a small glass unicorn, a piece that is not only fragile, but unique among the animals in her collection. In showing him her favorite piece of glass, Laura begins to let Jim into her fragile, but beautiful world. Later, when Jim and Laura dance together to music coming from the Paradise Dance Hall across the street from the apartment, they bump into the table where Laura had placed her unicorn. The animal falls off of the table, and its horn—its unique defining feature—breaks off. Without its horn, the unicorn is just a horse, it has lost what made it exceptional. This break comes at a pivotal moment for Laura. She has just opened up to Jim in a way that she has not opened up to anyone else in the play. Over the course of her conversation with Jim, she has become socially confident in a way that her shyness, her emotional fragility, seems to all but disappear. The break seems to symbolize Laura’s departure from her own anxieties and fragility. However, the break also seems to symbolize that what makes Laura unique is her rare and profound sense of emotional sensitivity. Without her emotional sensitivity, Laura would fade in with other people just as the unicorn will now fade in with the horses. This break also lays the narrative groundwork for the break with the past and with the hope of a future with Jim, as not long after the unicorn loses its horn, Jim reveals that he is engaged to another woman.

HOPE

“I’ll tell you what I wished for on the moon. Success and happiness for my precious children! I wish for that whenever there’s a moon, and when there isn’t a moon, I wish for it too.” —Amanda, Scene 5

Amanda has high hopes for her children, especially Laura. In an effort to set Laura up for future success, Amanda enrolls Laura in business college. Her hope in doing so is that Laura will learn the skills to make her employable. However, after just a few days of classes at Rubicam’s Business College, Laura discovers that the school is not for her and quits.

THE GLASS MENAGERIE THEMES CONTINUED...

A great amount of the tension in the play comes from different characters' conflicting hopes and ideas of a successful future for themselves. Amanda sees success as her ability to send her children off into the world in happy marriages with prospects for stable, secure jobs. Tom, however, is not interested in stability—in fact, he finds it stifling. Instead, he craves adventure, and seeks whatever amount of it he can glean from his trips to the movies. He also dreams of being a writer, a profession in which success is not guaranteed and there is no true promise of security.

Beyond professional success, Amanda hopes that Laura will be able to find a successful and kind husband. She even begins working for a subscription-based magazine in order to bring in more money that she intends to use to buy clothes and furniture to impress any gentlemen callers that stop by to see Laura. However, Laura has trouble meeting potential gentlemen callers—her shyness and social anxiety often prevent her from interacting with new people. While Laura may hope to find a potential husband or hold a job, she does not actively seek out opportunities. Laura is often content to tend to her glass collection and play her Victrola. Her hopes for the future, at least on the surface, appear simpler.

MAGIC, ILLUSIONS, AND META-THEATRE

"Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion."—Tom, Scene 1

At the beginning of the play, Tom introduces himself as both the narrator of the story to unfold and a character within it. In his opening explanation, he does not shy away from using theatrical terms. He even calls the story that is about to unfold, a play. In this sense, Tom sets up a meta-theatrical frame for the play. Meta-theatre is theatre that is self-reflective—that is, it is theatre

that reminds the audience that they are watching a play. A common tool in meta-theatre is the use of a play-within-a-play. In a sense, Tom's memories are a

play within a larger play. As the crux of the action in the play comes from Tom's memory, he takes on the role of a quasi-playwright, recounting what has past, but also embellishing and omitting what he wants. As a quasi-playwright, Tom acts as somewhat of a magician, able to change reality how he would like.

It is important to consider that Tennessee Williams wrote this play as the United States was beginning to recover from the Great Depression. During the Great Depression, people looked to entertainment for opportunities to escape the hardships of their realities. Magicians, as they are able to appear to manipulate the rules of reality, became popular sources of entertainment. Tom even sees a magic show one of the nights he leaves to see the movies. He is particularly impressed by one of the tricks he sees in which the magician escapes from a nailed-up coffin without removing any of the nails. Tom wishes that he could use a similar trick to escape his present situation working at the shoe factory and living in an apartment with his overbearing mother.

Narrator Tom and the magician Tom sees are not the only ones able to produce and maintain illusions in the play. Amanda is also a master illusionist. Despite the family's obvious financial struggles, Amanda insists on stretching to buy nice furniture and clothing. She strives to maintain the appearance that everything with the family is fine. In this sense, Amanda escapes from the hardships of her circumstance by maintaining her pleasant illusion. ♦



Glass Unicorn by Joe Silver.

THE WINGFIELDS IN 2018: SUPPORTING & LEAVING YOUR FAMILY

ABSENTEE FATHERS & FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Tom and Laura's father is barely mentioned, yet remains a "fifth character" in the play with his portrait hanging in the Wingfield living room. Men, like the unseen Mr. Wingfield, are often viewed by their children as "deadbeat dads"—men who simply can't handle the responsibilities of family life and choose to run away rather than stick it out. In his absence, most of the household responsibility falls onto Tom, the youngest member of the Wingfield family.

The belief that men must provide for their families carries biblical roots:

"But if any man does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Timothy 5:8

In fatherless households like the Wingfields', sons are often told to "be the man of the house," and to take good care of the women in it. Amanda paraphrases this to Tom ("you're my right-hand bower"), who bears the brunt of financially providing for his mother and sister. Tom earns sixty-five dollars a month at the shoe factory, which would be about fourteen hundred dollars today. All of this money goes toward his family's rent and utility bills. Tom is left feeling unfulfilled and depressed in his role as sole provider, seeking beauty and adventure in writing poetry and going to the movies.

In 2015, TD Ameritrade conducted a survey that showed that 1 in 5 millennials are supporting their parents financially. Mothers received the most financial support, averaging \$13,000 a year. While most survey responders said that they were happy to provide monetary support, perhaps this is to their detriment—on average, these young financial supporters held almost \$100,000 in debt (credit card balances, student loans, and mortgage debt). Additionally, the financial support isn't always mutual; TD Ameritrade found that "financial supporters are 4 times as likely to support an aging parent over an adult child." Tom's situation in present-day would almost mirror that of his life in the 1930s.

DISORDERED FAMILIES & ESTRANGEMENT

The Glass Menagerie ends with Tom leaving behind St. Louis and his family in search of the adventure he craves. After examining just how dysfunctional his relationship with his mother is, this desertion feels understandable, if

not sympathetic.

In disordered families like the Wingfields, it is not uncommon for children to be assigned subconscious roles by their parent(s) as either the scapegoat or the golden child. While Laura isn't quite the golden child in Amanda's eyes, Tom is definitely the scapegoat. The scapegoat is the one who suffers the brunt of the consequences from the parents, and who is blamed for the family's dysfunction. The scapegoat is usually the only one who sees and points out the favoritism and disorder – an act that rarely goes well. Often, when the scapegoat realizes that they are alone, they walk away from the family.

Tom's goal with leaving home was to estrange himself from his mother, an act that is sadly still a prevalent problem for many families. In 2015, a study was conducted by Dr. Lucy Blake from the Centre of Family Research at the University of Cambridge in collaboration with Stand Alone, a charity focused on supporting adults who are estranged from their families. The data showed that Tom's plight is a tale as old as time:

- Out of the 607 participants, 77% reported emotional abuse from their mothers.
- It was far more common for adult children to cut ties with their parents than the other way around.
- Estrangement from parents most often began when the child was in their late 20s-early 30s.
- The biggest wishes among children who were estranged from their mothers included a relationship that was more positive and emotionally close, a more accepting and less critical attitude, and a greater recognition of hurt feelings and toxic behavior.
- It is more common for daughters or mothers to estrange themselves, but when sons or fathers estrange, it's more final.

In our last look at Tom, he seems happy to be free of Amanda's household, but he misses Laura. Seeing Laura in everything—be it a glass perfume bottle or a song played on a Victrola—it seems possible that Tom will ultimately reconcile with his family. ♦

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams. Published by New Directions Books in 1999.

Memoirs by Tennessee Williams. Published by Penguin Classics in 2007.

Student Companion to Tennessee Williams by Nancy M. Tischler. Published by Greenwood in 2000.

The World of Tennessee Williams by Richard Freeman Leavitt and Kenneth Holditch. Revised and updated edition published by Hansen Publishing Group in 2011.

ARTICLES

Blow Out Your Candles: An Elegy for Rose Williams by Susannah Jacob. Published in *The Paris Review* in 2013.

<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/12/05/blow-out-your-candles-an-elegy-for-rose-williams/>

Through the Looking Glass: The Role of Memory in The Glass Menagerie by Bert Cardullo. Published in *Notes on Contemporary Literature* in 2008.

Tennessee Williams: The Uses of Declarative Memory in The Glass Menagerie by Daniel Jacobs. Published in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* in 2002.

"An Interview with Tennessee Williams" by Robert Berkvist. Published by *The New York Times* in 1975.

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/12/31/specials/williams-interview75.html>

FILMS

The Glass Menagerie (1950) directed by Irving Rapper, screenplay by Tennessee Williams.

The Glass Menagerie (1966) directed by Michael Elliott and starring Shirley Booth.

The Glass Menagerie (1973) directed by Anthony Harvey and starring Katharine Hepburn

VIDEO CLIPS

Bill Boggs Interview with Tennessee Williams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FScWlr5qZUY>

German Expressionism: Course Film History #7

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6XDyth0qxc&vl=en>

ABOUT **A NOISE WITHIN**

A NOISE WITHIN A Noise Within produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists performing in rotating repertory immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue. Our plays will be performed in rotating repertory, sometimes simultaneously in multiple spaces, and buttressed by meaningful supporting programs to create a symphonic theatrical experience for artists and audience.

In its 27 year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 40,000 individuals attend productions at a Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 16,000 student participants to its arts education program, *Classics Live!* Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides. ♦

Guide Credits

Alicia Green	.....	<i>Education Director and Editor</i>
Rebecca Wilson	.....	<i>Education Associate</i>
Craig Schwartz	.....	<i>Production Photography</i>
Teresa English	.....	<i>Graphic Design</i>
Mimi RuthStiver	.....	<i>Education Intern</i>



Geoff Elliott & Julia Rodriguez-Elliott
Producing Artistic Directors

ADDRESS 3352 E Foothill Blvd
Pasadena, CA 91107

TEL 626.356.3100

FAX 626.356.3120

EMAIL info@anoisewithin.org

WEB anoisewithin.org