

## **Females: The survivors of corrupt societies in Tennessee Williams play ‘The Glass Menagerie’**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Tennessee Williams is perhaps the only genuine writer in the history of the American Theatre. He is a dramatist of lost souls. His work echoes an awareness of loneliness and loss, a sense of corruption and the physical violence which is an aspect of Southern romanticism. According to Kenneth Holditch and Richard Freeman Leavitt, William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams are the two American writers who have never denied their Southern heritage. They State: “No writer of the twentieth century more than Williams, has been as markedly Southern in his choice of Settings, characters, plots and themes. He was born on March 21, 1911 in Columbus in the State of Mississippi and died in February 25, 1983, at the age of 72. He gave American theatregoers unfergittable characters, an incredible vision of life in the South, and a series of powerful portraits of human condition. The playwright Tennessee William present before us the dark world of one dimensional Society of the modern civilization that survives in the midst of exploitation, violation of moral code of conduct, corruption and dehumanized passions of power and intimate relationship. In the play, Glass Menagerie, Williams use both male ad female characters which exhibit some forms of gender related issues particular in feminism perspective.

**Key words:** Corruption, Victimization, Violation, Dehumanized Passion of power, Human condition, rights of women.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The play, The Glass Menagerie, Catapulted Williams from obscurity to fame. The play has strong autobiographical elements, featuring characters based an Williams himself, his historic mother and his mentally fragile sister Rose.

The Glass Menagerie was William’s first successful play; he went on to become one of America’s most highly regarded playwrights (Tony Kusher, p. 23).

Amanda Wingfield a faded Southern belle, abandoned by her husband, who is trying to raise her two children under harsh financial conditions. Amanda Yearns for the comforts from her youth and also longs for her children to have the same comforts, but her devotion to them has made her – as she admits at one point – almost hateful towards them. Tom wingfield was Amanda’s son, he works at a Shoe warehouse to support his family but is frustrated by his job and aspires to be a poet. He struggles to write for he is sleep deprived and annoyed. His sister, Laura wingfield – A childhood illness has left hr with a limp, and she has a mental fragility and an inferiority complex that have isolated her from the outside world.

The Glass Menagerie opened on Broadway (New York) in the Playhouse Theatre on Mach 31,1945 and played there until June 29, 1946. It then moved to the Royale Theatre from July 1, 1946 until its closing on August 31, 1946. Williams production notes and stage directions emphasize his innovative theatrical vision. He felt that realism, which aimed to present life as it was without idealizing it, had outlived its usefulness. It offered, as Tom Puts it, “illusion that has the appearance oft truth”. Williams sought the opposite in the Glass Menagerie : truth disguised as illusion. The play won the New York Drama critics circle Award as Best American play. Williams gave credit to two Chicago Critics,. Claudia Cassidy and Ashton Stevens, for giving him a ‘Tart. . . . in a fashion’ . . . . . Cassidy wrote that the play had “the Stamina of Success. . . .” Stevens wrote that the play had “the courage of true poetry” . . . . . (Saddik, Annette J. p. 25). The play is introduced to the audience by Tom, the narrator and protagonist, as a memory play based on his recollection of his mother Amanda and his sister Laura. Although Amanda is a survivor and a pragmatist. She worries especially about the future of his daughter Laura. Tom is pressured by his mother to find a suitable caller for Laura, Tom invites Jim home for dinner Laura is so overcome by shyness that she is unable to join the others at dinner and she claims to be ill. After dinner, however Jim and Laura are left alone. Jim recognizes Laura’s feelings of inferiority and encourages her to think better of herself. He reveals that he is engaged and will not call again. Laura gives him the unicorn whose horn was broken while she and Jim were dancing and then he leaves.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The play shows how and why Amanda and Laura wingfield are victims of an absent alcoholic husband ad father in a male patriarchal system that leaves them destitute without a male provider. It is the purest work to come from the Pen of Tennessee Williams. The Glass Menagerie is an American tragedy on many levels, including father’s alcoholism and desertion, a mother’s unsuccessful lot in life as a single parent, and a sister’s growing helplessness as a victim; but the greatest tragedy

is that of a dysfunctional family : the Wingfields. Everyone in the play is a failure and in the course of their drama they all perish a little.

Tom's double role in *The Glass Menagerie* – as a character whose recollections the play documents and as a character who acts within those recollection – underlines the plays tension between objectively presented dramatic truth and memory's distortion of truth. It also shows how the nature of recollection is itself problematic : memory often involves confronting a past in which one was less virtuous than one is now. Tom's attitude towards Amanda and Laura has puzzled critics. Even though he clearly cares for them, he is frequently indifferent and even cruel towards them. His speech at the close of the play demonstrates his strong feelings for Laura.

“Oh Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be ! I reach for a Cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger – any thing that can blow your candles out ! ..... Blow out your candles, Laura – and so good – bye .....” (7.465) If there is a signature character type that marks William's dramatic work, it is undeniably that of the faded Southern Bella, Amanda is a clear representative of this type. She has suffered a reversal of economic and Social fortune at some point in her life. Like Amanda, these women all have a hard time coming to terms with their new status in Society. Amanda is the play's most extroverted and theatrical character, and one of modern American drama's most coveted female roles. Her flaws are centrally responsible for the tragedy, comedy and theatrical flair of her character. Like her children, she withdraws from reality into fantasy.

Feminism Theory is a diverse collection of several other theories such as Social, Political movements and oral Philosophies. The feminism theory revolves around gender and sexuality. Of particular interest here is the gender equality as pertaining to women rights and sexuality particular in areas of political, social, economic and law rights. The theory aims to understand the nature of inequality and pay close interest on how to enhance the same. Feminism theory will focus on how female characters are impacted by male characters, or how their interaction helps us to understand women's position; any sign of a patriarchal society; look for symbols, imagery or other literary elements related to the gender issues.

In the decades after the Civil War, many once-distinguished Southern families saw their economic futures decline. Daughters of these families, like Amanda, traditionally were raised to take pride in their social status. In a rapidly industrializing and modernizing America, however, that status was worthless and less. Now money was seen as far as more desirable than old but penniless family grandeur. The

promise of Amenda's past remains unfulfilled and always will remain so, but she refuses to accept this fact. She candidly confesses to Jim that she wasn't prepared for what the future brought her,

"I never could make a thing but angel food cake. Well, in the South we had so many servants. Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living! Hone completely! I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me.....I assumed that I would be married to (a planter) and raise my family on a large piece of land with plenty of servants" (6.442). Tennessee shows that woken are delicate just like objects and can easily break more so where their emotional feelings are involved. Men refer to women as attractive things and highly delicate. The glass unicorn is Laura's valuable collection but she gives it to Jim. This demonstrates the dependency of women especially when their hopes are shattered by their potential suitors. Williams shows that women are really concerned about snagging things and the society is male dominated. Women have to depend on men for their social, economical and emotional well being. The play reveals that women tend to escape their predicaments by resorting to nostalgia of childhood memories or escapism through of delicate things which they consider very much valuable. The feminist struggle has still much to achieve in quest for gender equality. The unequal treatment of women in society originates not in men, but from underneath the obvious surface, where social structure dwell. In the Glass Menagerie, the harsh reality of the fate of the remaining female victims serves as a stark contrast to the happier world of illusion that they were able to devise as a mode of self-preservation (Jackson, p. 137). Williams description of Amanda and Laura, with "their moving forms as Pale and Silent as moths", suggests that they already are victims and that the gentleman caller's visit is destined for failure.

## CONCLUSION

At the end, it is to be concluded that, Williams is regarded as one of the greatest American playwrights and a great innovator of his genre. He used his life experiences of alcoholism, homosexuality, family life and friends in his plays. Williams family served as an important influence throughout his life and works. He is quoted as saying, "the strongest influence in my life and my work are always whomever I love : whomever I love and am with most of the time, or whomever I remember most vividly". Williams frequently felt betrayed and isolated and this helped him empathize with the most visibly marginalized segment of American Society : Women. Although Williams does not openly champion the rights of Women in his plays, he presents strong cases against their social alienation in a harsh and brutal world governed by men. Williams identified with woken, and loved and admired them for their courage and their integrity (Nelson, p. 28-30).

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