

"how the glass  
menagerie illustrates  
the breakup of family  
structures."  
research ...

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



The glass menagerie is a play where Tennessee William, the author, creates a story where Amanda, who is the mother of Tom and Laura, confronts Tom who makes what can be called a grave mistake by attempting to match his sister and his engaged best friend.

All these events are seen happening in the vicinity of family comforts and they act as a precursor of things which are about to fall apart, and in Yeats' analysis, it is possible that the centre may not hold for long. This is evidenced by the family's ultimate failure to communicate or understand each other thus making the audience to identify with the happenings.

As we read the play and the events unfold, every character seems to seek sympathy and the family breaks up before our own eyes and we are surprised more when the characters are not able to bear it more, and they flee leaving the audience to be guided by stage directions and monologues.

In this paper, we are going to evaluate how the play illustrates the break up of family structures with special focus of Tom's endless struggles, Amanda's maternal struggles and Laura's unfulfilled expectations.

Tom Wingfield is a brother to Laura and the only man in the family after their father abandoned them. Although Tom has a feeling of obligation towards his family, he is burdened in a way. Tom depicts a dual character in the play as he plays as a son and as a father in a family whose head of house abandoned.

Debusscher, in this respect states that, the mention of " a double life," could be the mask that Tom Wingfield wears to meet the world, in particular the "

world of his mother and that of the factory, his diurnal personality; and finally a threat" (65). Unlike the other characters, Tom is acting in two places where; in one hand he addresses the audience directly and on the other hand takes part in the play's action.

Acting these two roles is representative of the kind of dilemma Tom has in life as he struggles to take the part of father and son simultaneously. In one of their conversations, Amanda faces him with anger when he tries to leave to the movies;

AMANDA: Don't think about us, a mother deserted, and unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure! Just go, go, go—to the movies!

TOM: All right, I will! The more you shout about my selfishness to me the quicker I'll go, and I won't go to the movies!

AMANDA: Go, then! Go to the moon—you selfish dreamer! (Williams 236)

This shows right away that there is a distance between these two related characters and that communication is poor in the family. There is also a revelation that his mother has been calling him a selfish person for some time. Through out the play, Tom has had contrasting interest with her mother and they seem not to agree in many issues as we would expect family members to do.

Tom is not only removed from the family issues but also human relation in general. In one of his remarks, we are left with no doubt that his family,

being a fundamental unit of the society, has failed to equip him with good relation outside and he is making little effort to change the situation. This is found in his lines where he says, " The warehouse is where I work, not where I know things about people!" (Williams 235).

This attitude against other people makes the audience to sympathize with him as he is caught up in his own world of dreams as also illustrated by the lines, " You don't know things anywhere! You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions!" (Williams 235).

In the normal circumstances, we expect family members to love one another and work towards a common goal. This is not the case with Tom and his family because his attitude towards Amanda and his sister Laura is puzzling.

Although he cares for his family, he has always remained indifferent and cruel on them. This is depicted clearly by his final speech in the play, which demonstrates his strong feeling for his sister but that feeling is contrasted by the way he treats her throughout the play. This kind of reaction towards, his family leaves a void in the family structures, which are supposed to be tightly bound by love and mutual understanding.

The relentless unconscious search for this unionization through careless means is the quest for the play. However the effort has ended up breaking the family structures, as in many families in our contemporary times. In this play the writer uses the character of Tom and the events to suspend the audience between reality and illusion.

Amanda has two children, Tom and Laura and she lives for them and loves them madly. However, her constant reference to her romantic stories about her girlhood, and her lack of courage to face reality, stifles her daughter and forces her son out of the family. In her motherly struggles, she is preoccupied with trying to assist Laura in finding a suitor because Laura is only stuck in her little glass animals.

We see her in scenes four and five requesting Tom to bring a nice boy named Jim for dinner in their house, hoping that Jim will be suitor for Laura. This is what Bruhm, a literary analyst called "a libidinal economy," where Amanda exchanges her daughter with sexual favors of starving young men (529-30).

However, after a long evening, Jim, to the chagrin of Laura, uncovers that he has a fiancé whom they are engaged and are about to marry. All this over expectation can be related to the fact that she did not enjoy fully her husband's love and she yawns to see the glory she accidentally lost being fulfilled in her daughter.

In scene one, we see Amanda being preoccupied with Laura's future and Laura's inability to take off by herself and for that case he always force Tom to be her watch as in this conversation,

AMANDA: I mean that as soon as Laura has got somebody to take care of her, married, a home of her own, independent— why, then you'll be free to go wherever you please, on land, on sea, whichever way the wind blows you! But until that time you've got to look out for your sister. I don't say we

because I'm old and don't matter! I say for your sister because she's young and dependent. (Williams 175)

This conversation shows the kind of mother Amanda is and the way she handled Tom as a child too. As we saw before, Amanda is not lucky in life and her quest to unite her family based on illusion turns tragic on her and the family heads to the doldrums. She always nags her son and has refused to appreciate her daughter and accept her as a grown up.

Although she makes all sacrifices for her loved ones, tragedy is not out to play sympathetic. She sometimes does humiliating drudgery of telemarket subscription sales with an aim of enhancing Laura's marriage prospects. Her efforts reaps poor communication, misunderstanding and ultimately we see Tom leaving her and her daughter.

Her flaws are actually the ones that maintain the play tragic events, comic outlook and theatrical flair, and like Tom she retreats from real life to fantasy by not allowing her children to grow up. Regardless of her maternal struggles, the family can be seen falling and the audience can do nothing about it.

Although Amanda tries as much as she can to hold it, every effort turns out to be a debacle and what we are left to do is stand aside and watch as the fragments of the broken family speed past our own heads.

Laura is the only character in the play with the most sensitive mental condition and has a slight disability. It is her mother who holds most of the

expectations for her. In her way of doing things, she does no hurt anybody in the play and she cries for her brother's unhappiness in scene four. It is her expectations, as also the expectations of the audience, that their family should be united and happy.

This act of expectations is contrasted by the selfishness and the hurting sacrifices that the other two family members have. It is therefore an unconscious desire for her to see a selfless family but this is not fulfilled in the play. This selflessness can also be seen where Laura talks less and does a lot of listening in the play.

Laura is however, the pivot on which the play is propelled and most symbols are used to represent her. She can be said to represent the rareness of a blue rose or a unicorn and her delicacy can be compared to that of a glass figurine. It is this delicateness that her mother reiterates and she always does everything in her reach to find her a suitor.

She has great expectations; like in scene five we see Jim whom she has had feelings for from the time they were schooling but he turns out to be an engaged man. It is also from this failed expectation that the family breaks as it tries to bring her back to the ideal world and there is no understanding. Her fragility makes her mother to keep nagging Tom, and Tom abhors her as she represents his source of problems.

Bruhm, Steven. "Blackmailed by Sex: Tennessee Williams and the Economics of Desire." *Modern Drama*, 34(1991): 529-30.

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