

The character of tom wingfield in the glass menagerie

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Tennessee Williams is a renowned playwright and theorist of America in the early 20th century. His famous works include *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *The Glass Menagerie*. His famous play *The Glass Menagerie* is attributed to be the work that catapulted him to literary notability. It has been titled a “memory play” in an unconventional move as Williams called for a new “plastic theatre which must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions”.

The play is spawned in the memory of its protagonist, Tom. Tom is the narrator of the play as well as a character in it. According to Payal Nagpal, William presents to us the narrator as “an undisguised convention of the play”-one who can take liberties with “dramatic convention”. Thus Tom presents himself as a counter to the “stage magician” who with his tricks projects “illusion as truth” as he presents “truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion”.

Tom Wingfield is an aspiring poet who works in the Continental Shoemakers warehouse. He is the narrator of the play and the action of the play is framed in Tom’s memory. Tom’s imagination is completely at odds with his mechanical job at the shoe company as he is unable to find “adventure” in his career. Although Tom loves his mother Amanda and sister Laura, he feels trapped in the confines of his home and his mother’s constant nagging and seeks an escape by watching movies and writing poetry. He resists the desire to follow in his father’s footsteps who abandoned them a long time ago and tries to remain in the family. For Tom, the claustrophobia is both physical and psychological. As C. W. E. Bigsby points out, “A poet in an

unpoetic world, he retreats into his writing because there he can abstract himself from the harsh truths of his existence in a down-at-heel St. Louis apartment”.

Tom works at the warehouse but he truly despises it, because in scene 3 he said, “ I’d rather somebody picked up a crowbar and batter out my brains than go back mornings”. He knows the fact that his family’s survival depends on him and he basically gives up his life so his family can live. When the father left, Tom apparently became “ the little man of the house”. What pushes Tom over the edge is Amanda’s failure to acknowledge the extent of his sacrifice.

At the end of the play, Tom chooses his personal dreams over the reality of his family’s need. He sees himself as both hero and villain for having left home. It has taken him a long time to muster the pirate-like sense of villainy and daring necessary for him to make his move. Therefore, according to Lori Leathers Single, “ Tom’s decision to leave becomes a matter of self-preservation, a necessary evil”. Tom repeatedly associated his role as the breadwinner with a living death, a nailed up coffin, because for him to remain was to commit psychic suicide.