

Literary analysis of the play the glass menagerie by tennessee williams



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Illusions of “Glass” Laura, Tom and Amanda and are the principle characters in Tennessee Williams’ play “The Glass Menagerie,” consisting of a small family abandoned and left impoverished by a wandering though charming father. Amanda, the mother, was brought up in the gentility of the Old South and finds it hard to accept her present conditions, both in terms of social position and age. Though Tom is the youngest of the children, he accepts most of the responsibility for his family. The play begins with him working at a job he despises while dreaming of being a writer and traveling. Tom expresses his frustrations through his drinking and attending the movies in the evenings in addition to writing and reading poetry at work. A good amount of the play centers on Laura, however. She is tremendously shy, to some extent due to her crippling disease (pleurosis). She wore a brace on her leg and walked with a limp spending a lot of her time fantasizing about her glass menagerie. One of the central concepts this story clearly projects is the notion that the memories of our youth influence our fantasies of the present which in turn protect us from the realities of the present.

Tom explicitly affirms that this is memory play in his first words, the first words of the play: “The play is a memory” (I, 145). To promote that effect, Williams continues to permit Tom to detach himself out from the play from every so often to narrate particular events or ideas, bring the audience up to speed on what has occurred in the period between two of the scenes or make other remarks. In reciting how the impression of memory is achieved, Richard Vowles (1958) describes its dreamlike characteristics, “One scene dissolves into another. There is, indeed, almost a submarine quality about the play, the kind of poetic slow motion that becomes ballet and a breathless repression of feeling that belongs to everyone but Amanda” (54). Williams <https://assignbuster.com/literary-analysis-of-the-play-the-glass-menagerie-by-tennessee-williams/>

illustrates the way memory has functioned to form Tom's impression of life, never allowing him the escape he sought after through the merchant marine by sustaining the concept that almost the entire play is a Tom's memory in clear focus by means of this otherworldly light.

Laura lives in possibly the most evident life of illusion as she drifts through her existence ostensibly in a cloud of detachment. She connects classical music with a happier time in her life while she connects her time in school with the 'thunder' of her leg brace while she struggles into her music room. She "takes refuge in her collection of glass animals" (Popkin, 1960: 58) and seems completely spellbound "in the jailhouse of her thwarted present – the past dominates as the present or future can never do. The past not only casts its shadow upon the present and the future, but actually determines the course that each of these shall take" (Bluefarb, 1963: 513). Amanda, the mother, is perhaps the character who most lives by way of the illusions created from her memory. "Amanda lives in the past and imposes unrealistic rules of conduct upon her children" (Popkin, 1960: 46). Amanda's expectations for the children also reveal her inability to exist in the present instead of the past.

These three characters experience a temporary clarity, to some extent, from the illusory worlds they exist in because of the influence of their memories. For Tom, the play becomes the freeing of his memory which allows him to discover a sense of at least short-term closure on his past. Laura was trapped in the steady haze of the present the realization of her frustrated hopes and dreams of the past allows her to think about new ideas introduced by the very hero she visualize, though not in the manner she imagined.

Amanda's wake-up call doesn't arrive until the end of the play. Only then she
<https://assignbuster.com/literary-analysis-of-the-play-the-glass-menagerie-by-tennessee-williams/>

finally recognizes the truths of the present, “ Don’t think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who’s crippled and has no job!” (VII, 236).

Though the extent of this dose of reality may not be considered in the play the abruptness of it, for all the characters in the final scene, serves as a wake-up call for play’s audience too, to begin examining the different areas where their nostalgic dreams of the past cloud their discernment of the present or future thus preventing them from effectively addressing present day issues.

Works Cited

Bluefarb, Sam. “ The Glass Menagerie: Three Visions of Time.” College English. Vol. 24, N. 7, (April 1963), pp. 513-518.

Popkin, Henry. “ The Plays of Tennessee Williams.” The Tulane Drama Review. Vol. 4, N. 3, (March 1960), pp. 45-64.

Vowles, Richard B. “ Tennessee Williams: The World of His Imagery.” The Tulane Drama Review. Vol. 3, N. 2, (December 1958), pp. 51-56.

Williams, Tennessee. “ The Glass Menagerie.” The Theatre of Tennessee Williams. Vol. 1. New York: New Directions Books: 1971.