

# The theme of escape in the glass menagerie

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



The Theme of Escape in The Glass Menagerie In The Glass Menagerie, Tennessee Williams uses the theme of escape to help drive the play forward. None of the characters are capable of living in the real world. Laura, Amanda, Tom and Jim use various methods to escape the brutalities of life. Laura retreats into a world of glass animals and old records. Amanda is obsessed with living in her past. Tom escapes into his world of poetry writing and movies. Jim also reverts to his past and remembers the days when he was a high school hero. Mr. Wingfield is referred to often throughout the play. He is the ultimate symbol of escape. This is because he has managed to remove himself from the desperate situation that the rest of the family is still living in. The fire escape helps develop the theme of the story. This entrance into the apartment provides a different purpose for each of the characters. The fire escape allows Tom the opportunity to escape the apartment and get away from his nagging mother. Amanda sees the fire escape as an opportunity for gentleman callers to enter their lives. Laura's view is different from her mother and her brother. Her escape seems to be hiding inside the apartment, not out. Laura finds herself escaping at every turn. She induces sickness in her typing class and even as a gentleman caller waits in the living room. Another escape for Laura is her glass menagerie. Her collection of glass represents her own private world set apart from reality, a place where she can hide and be safe. Even when it appears that Laura is finally overcoming her shyness with Jim, she instantly reverts back to playing the Victrola once he tells her he is engaged. She is unable to cope with reality and she escapes back into her fantasy world of old records and glass figurines. Amanda is obsessed with her past, and uses it to escape

reality, as she constantly reminds Tom and Laura of the time she received seventeen gentlemen callers. The reader cannot even be sure that this actually happened. However, it is clear despite its possible falseness, Amanda has come to believe it. She refuses to acknowledge that her daughter is crippled and refers to her handicap as " a little defect - hardly noticeable" (Williams 1648). Only for brief moments does she ever admit that her daughter is " crippled" and then resorts back to denial. Amanda doesn't perceive anything realistically. She believes that this gentleman caller, Jim is going to be the man to rescue Laura and she hasn't even met him yet. When Jim arrives, Amanda is dressed in a " girlish frock" she wore on the day that she met their father and she regresses to the childish, giddy days of entertaining gentleman callers. Amanda uses her past as a means to escape the reality she does not want to face. Tom escapes reality in many different ways. The first and most obvious is the fire escape that leads him away from his unhappy home. He also escapes into his world of poetry writing and movies. The more Amanda nags, the more Tom seems to need his movie escapes. They take him to another world, where mothers, sisters, and runaway father do not exist. As the strain of his real life gets worse, the movie watching becomes more frequent, as does Tom's drinking. It is getting harder and harder for Tom to escape real life. The time for a real departure is approaching. Amanda eventually pushes him over the edge and he leaves. But his going away is not the escape that he so desperately craved for so long. The guilt of abandoning Laura is overwhelming. He cannot seem to get over it. Tom is now truly following in the footsteps of his father. Unfortunately, Tom realizes that leaving home was not the true escape he

wanted all along. Jim uses his past as a means of escape. He reverts to his past as he looks through the high school yearbooks with Laura and remembers the days when he was a hero. When Jim reminisces about his lead in the operetta, Laura asks him to sign her program and he signs it "with a flourish" (Williams 1677). Only by entering into the Wingfield's world can Jim become this high school hero again. As the scene progresses, Jim regresses to his high school days of wooing women as he woos the innocent Laura by dancing and kissing her. But of course this isn't the real reality because the fact is Jim is engaged, which causes Laura to escape into her world of records and glass animals. Unlike the Wingfields, Jim lives only temporarily in the past, therefore he leaves the dream world of the Wingfields. Tennessee Williams uses the theme of escape throughout his play to demonstrate the hopelessness of each character. Tom, Laura, and Amanda all seem to think escape is possible. In the end however, no character can completely escape their illusionary world. Perhaps Williams is trying to send a message that running away is not the way to solve life's problems. The only escape in life is solving your problem, not avoiding them.