

Religious imagery in the glass menagerie



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Glass Menagerie Cite three religious images in the play. As a whole, what does the religious imagery suggest? Introduction The play "The Glass Menagerie" is replete with symbolism and imagery that highlight the characterizations presented and make them more powerful than the plot would ordinarily suggest. The moving theme of the play is that of escape – the father from his family, the wife to past memories, the daughter to a fantasy world of glass animals, and Tom to the life of a merchant seaman. Many of these symbols are conveyed through Christian imagery, and appear to suggest that religion is just another means of escape. Religious Imagery Act 1 Scene 4: Probably one of the strongest religious images in the play is the trivialized representation of Christ in the person of the magician named Malvolio (i. e., "hatred"). Malvolio changes water into wine, then to beer, and finally whiskey. By depicting one of the most popular miracles of Christ (The Wedding at Cana) as a mere trick or illusion, the image is a commentary on superficial religiosity, and Christ compared to a mere magician. Finally, Malvolio rises from a nailed coffin without any injury, quite apparently a farcical re-enactment of Christ's Resurrection. In a way, the Resurrection encapsulizes the theme that runs through the play, which is all about escape. Act 2 Scene 8: Another religious symbol is also that of Christ as Savior, in the person of Jim, the should-have-been suitor to Laura. Tom brings Jim home on the orders of Amanda, in the hope that romance would blossom and they would eventually get married. The dinner scene was quite suggestively called "Annunciation" in the stage direction, depicting Tom as the messenger who informs the virgin Laura of the coming of the Savior (Jim). The religious image is carried further when Laura is alone with Jim in the living room, and she is described as being "lit inwardly with altar

candles.” Aside from the allusion to altar candles, saints (the saved) are usually depicted with their head surrounded by an unearthly glow much as Laura’s face must have been in the play. The candles have much relation to hope of salvation (i. e. from poverty or a life of want). The lights go out and Jim takes a candelabra in to Laura in the living room. Her face glows in the candle light with the prospect of hope. At the end of the play, Tom tells Laura to blow out her candles – that is, to extinguish her hopes of being saved from her dismal future which marriage would have solved. Candles are used here as they would be used in prayer for something better. Act 1 Scene 2: A third symbolism has to do with Amanda, Tom’s & Laura’s mother. She is the character who adheres closely to religious trappings but only in a shallow way, as her manner of nagging her children suggests. At one point the music played for Amanda is “ Ave Maria”, and she evokes a martyred look when Laura tells her that she stopped going to business school. This suggests the long-suffering sacrifice of Amanda as saint, for the sake of her children who she was left to raise by herself. Also, during the play Amanda asked for grace to be said, but the prayer is interrupted both times, by Tom in Scene 1 and by Laura in Scene 6. Amanda’s religious devotion is apparently not shared by her children. Additionally, in Act 1, Scene 6, there is reference to the Paradise Dance Hall where young people go to dance to forget the impending war. Again, this is an allusion to religion as a means of escape from reality, much as the symbolism of the fire escape. Conclusion There are other small, religious implications in the play, pertaining to the promise of hope being dashed by the harshness of reality. If one were to take a pragmatic look at the situation, one may say that the dilemma they wish to escape from is one created by themselves. Tom may, in a sense, cast blame

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on his father for leaving them and prematurely making him the man of the family (and the brunt of his mother's constant nagging), but in the end he finds his own salvation by leaving himself, thus validating his father's action. The imagery points to a superficial reliance on religion - not really faith but the outward trappings of faith - as a means of escaping the painful reality of the present. In the end, the only plausible solution lay within themselves, which Tom has thus elected to take. Reference - The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams