

False hope



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

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Essay #1 False Hope The characters in *The Glass Menagerie* all hope for a better future which is filled with success and happiness. This hope flickers throughout the play and is finally put out all together in the closing actions of the play. In *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, this sense of hope is symbolized by light. It is shown in the very descriptive stage directions, the specific objects pertaining to light like candles and lamps, and by the colorful images of rainbows throughout the play.

While providing the characters with actions the very descriptive stage directions also provide a sense of emotions for them to act out. In scene six while Laura and Amanda are waiting excitedly for Jim to come over, Williams describes Laura as being "piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting" (1748). Williams uses this idea of light to describe Laura's emotions and feelings during this scene. By stating Laura was "given a momentary radiance" Williams illustrates Laura's hope of finding someone to love.

In scene seven, when Laura and Jim are talking, Williams uses descriptive stage directions to describe Laura's feeling of hope in regard to light. This happens right around the time that Jim attempts to being engaged. The directions say that Jim smiles at Laura "with a warmth and charm which lights her inwardly" (1762). Then, when she finds out that Jim is engaged, the stage directions describe how the "holy candles on the altar of Laura's face have been snuffed out" (1768). Both descriptions show hope in Laura, while one is her hope that Jim is single, and the other being her hope being destroyed when she finds out that he is not.

From the beginning, the directions, as well as the dialogue, directly tell the readers that the play is dimly lighted (1723). Then in the beginning of the final scene, all the lights go out (because Tom has not paid the electric bill), and the only lighting left on stage is candlelight. Through the use of light in the play, it is clear that the play does not leave the characters looking towards the bright hope of their future, but realizing their dim reality. For Amanda, her new floor lamp represents her hope for the future.

In the fifth scene, when Tom says that Jim is coming over, Amanda states that she has been paying for a brand new floor lamp that she will have sent out for the occasion (1744). By the sixth scene, before Jim arrives, the new lamp, " with its rose silk shade" is put in the living room (1747), symbolizing her hope for Jim to come back. This hope turns out to be pointless, which Amanda recognizes by stating that " all the expense" has basically been for nothing, and the first one she lists is " the new floor lamp" (1771).

The new lamp is a symbol of hope to Amanda, and its presence in her living room when Jim arrives makes her feel that there is hope for Laura and Jim. Like all other hope in the play, it was a useless, waste of time and energy. At the end of the play when Tom is finishing his dialogue, the symbol of hope turns to Laura's candles. Tom speaks as if to Laura, " I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger- anything that can blow your candles out! " (1772).

Tom interprets these candles as Laura's hope, which he can't seem to get out of his brain. He doesn't want the family to suffer dealing with false hope any longer. He sees the world as a dark and stormy place, by saying " For nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura- and so

goodbye..." (1772). Then Laura actually blows out the candles, extinguishing the final light and making the stage become dark and lonely. This symbolizes not only a goodbye to Tom, but also saying goodbye to the hope of love and a brighter future for the Wingfield family.

In an essay titled "Williams' The Glass Menagerie," Bert Cardullo comments that, when Laura blows the candles out, "The implication is that no gentleman caller will ever enter her life again" (11), which, truly means that hope will never again enter Amanda and Laura's lonely lives. The symbol of the rainbow in *The Glass Menagerie* shows the illusion of hope or false hope. Right when the characters almost reach what they hoped for it always seems to disappear. Laura's fragile glass animals are used to show this sense of false hope.

In the seventh scene, when Laura is talking to Jim, she shows Jim the glass unicorn and says, "Hold him over the light, he loves the light! You see how the light shines through him?" (1764). . As Jim holds the unicorn and comments "It sure does shine," one can imagine the rainbow ray that the unicorn creates. This unicorn comes to symbolize the love that Laura has been waiting all her life for. This love "comes to her, however fleetingly, in the person of Jim" (Cardullo 3). However, like the rainbow light of the glass unicorn, this hope of love is just an illusion.

Tom mentions rainbows again in his final words as he describes how he abandons Amanda and Laura, he says, "I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow." The image of a shattered rainbow fits perfectly with Tom's closing words due to

the fact that Tom's abandonment from the family seems to shatter any type of hope the Wingfield family had.

Williams' last directions to make the stage completely dark seem like a symbol of the future of the Wingfield family; dark and lonely. As far as Amanda sees it, without a man to take care of her and Laura they left with nothing but loneliness. Laura will never be able to work; Tom left his family behind, and it seems that no "suitor" will ever enter the women's lives again. Cardullo notes that, "The character of Tom is based in part on Tennessee Williams himself, and Laura is modeled after Williams' beloved sister, Rose" (12).

Since the play is autobiographical, it has the feeling that Williams is attempting to show us the readers something that happened in his past, implying that hope never did come to this family. When the lights go out at the end of the play, it is dark for good. Works Cited Cardullo, Bert. "Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*." *The Explicator*. 22 March 1997. . paragraphs 1-12. Williams, Tennessee. *The Glass Menagerie*. Ed. Robert DiYanni. *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. 6th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007. 1718-1773.