

The Glass Menagerie

Intro notes:

-Tennessee Williams:

- Southern playwright → *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *A Streetcar named Desire*
- written in 1940s
- intro document (info about play)

Dysfunctional Family: The Wingfields (inspiration from his own family)

- Rose Williams (sis) = Laura
- mom = Amanda
- Tennessee = Tom (& narrator)

*each struggling with his/her own issues and trying to hide it from the others....while also desperately seeking escape from his/her current life

Characters:

- Dad: left
- Tom: wants to leave, but feels guilty (especially worried about sis)
 - a dreamer/ romantic

Amanda (mom): lives in a dream of the past

- idealizes her past

→
-Emily Grierson + Gatsby
-fabricated stories

-Laura (daughter): isolated from outside world

- painfully shy, wounded (crippled)
- loves her glass animals (menagerie)

-Jim: the gentleman caller (normalcy)

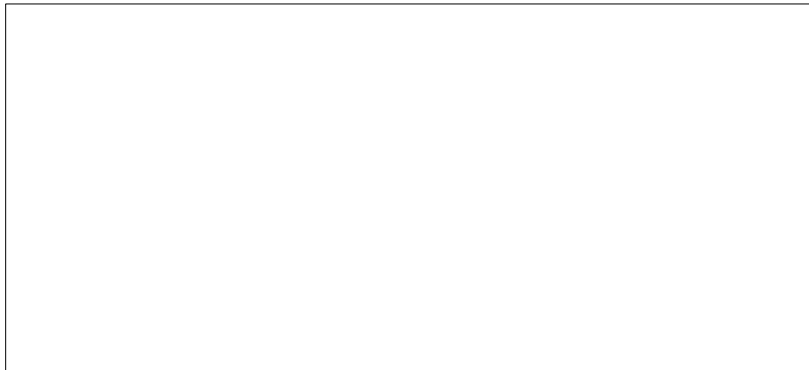
A “memory” play – Tom’s

- episodic structure: little episodes in the life of this family...each scene could be interchangeable

Scene 1: (Meet the Wingfields)

Setting: Wingfield Apt. (lower middle class) & fire escape

- “hive-like conglomerations” – undistinguishable masses
- 1930s (mid-depression era)
- Picture of stage



Tom – narrator – talks directly to us (breaking 4th wall)

-what do we learn?

- sailor now
- his feelings (remorse, anger?, pain, bitterness)

-social background

- “huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind” (5)
 - middle class dreams are dissolving in front of them due to economy (sound familiar?)

- isolation of family
- dad gone

Characterization of Amanda:

- Punctilious → manners/appearances imp. to her
- overbearing mother → need to feel relevant
- lives for the past → her escape from an unfulfilling reality
 - “17 gentleman callers”(8)
 - “ou sont les neiges d’antan?” (9)
 - “flounces girlishly” (10)
 - calls daughter “sister”
- hopeful (for daughter)? → wants their life to change

1st impression of Laura? Subservient, quiet, unpopular, kind

RJ: *What similarities do you see between this family and “Good Man” family?*

Scene 2: (Laura’s inadequacies)

Laura’s collection of glass (the glass menagerie)

- her reaction to mom returning suggests she gets in trouble for attending to the collection

Mood is darker → Amanda vs. Laura this time

- Amanda playing the victim [“Deception? Deception?” (11)]

DAR – Daughters of the American Revolution

- descendent of a patriot
- A’s belief in her impressive past...her life has not worked out as planned

Inadequacies:

#1: Laura lied about going to school and A. has found out

#2: -her nervousness and inability to function in real world

“Mother, when you’re disappointed...[you look]like the picture of Jesus’ mother” (15)

- Amanda as a **martyr** (gmom in “Good Man”)

“Blue Roses” – Jim’s nickname for her

#3: -pleurosis: Lung inflammation

- Jim doesn’t understand Laura

- Laura’s crush → prob. 1 of a very few # of social interactions

#4: “I’m crippled”(17)

- Laura sees herself as unfit for interaction (crippled physically, emotionally, mentally)

-Amanda’s response:

- Nonsense, don’t use that word
- hardly noticeable, a “little defect”
- you’ll just need to become more charming to offset your physical issue

RJ: *Is this a good or bad response? Why?*

Scene 3: (Tom vs. Amanda)

“the image of the gentleman caller haunted our small apartment” (19)

- symbolic** of: Amanda’s hope in a new life (dreams)

Laura’s fear and inadequacy (no callers...ever)

Dreams vs. reality

Fight:

-**A’s controlling nature** (Tom’s book)

-**Tom’s frustration** with his family and the life he has

RJ: -“I’ve got nothing, no single thing – in my life here that I can call my OWN!” (21)

- What does Tom mean? Compare his feelings to a time when you have felt like this. Be sure to give specific details of both in your comparison.

-feeling that mother doesn’t understand/care about his wants in life

-his sacrifice = working miserable job to support them

RJ: -“For sixty-five dollar a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being ever!” (23)

-Tom is talking about how he works in a job he hates to support his family. Make a connection to this moment by explaining how and why you have felt like him.

-“If self is what I thought of, Mother, I’d be where he is—GONE!” (23)

RJ: *Where do you think Tom actually goes? Why?*

In Tom's rage, he **breaks some of Laura's glass figurines**

- picks it up in silence (Guilt at having upset L)
- Laura as innocent and victim of family's volatility
- possible foreshadowing of the disaster/wreckage to come???

Scene Four: (apologies and plans for the future)

Tom is drunk

- compares his life to being stuck in a coffin (27) -an apt **metaphor**

Tom apologizes to Amanda → martyr again

"My devotion has made me a witch and so I make myself hateful to my children!" (30)

RJ: *Do you agree? Is her devotion the thing that makes her bad?*

Irony: "In these trying times we live in, all that we have to cling to is—each other" (31)

-A's words

-but that is what is making it so hard! Each would probably be better off without the rest

Amanda seems genuinely worried about her children

-redeeming quality

-"she has an idea that you're not happy here" (32) – L's worry over Tom...his issues is affecting more than just himself

-A is obtuse... "What gives her any idea? However, you do act strangely" (32)

A brief respite

Is Tom lying about why he goes to the movies?

-for adventure...what his life is missing (the need to feel alive)

Amanda goes back to criticizing his choices

-her elitist ideas on life (refusing to look @ reality)

-reality = Tom – "Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter" (34)

-dream = Amanda – "Only animals have to satisfy instincts! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs!" (34)

External
conflict

Amanda wants Tom to find someone for Laura – **the plan!**

A on L: "Now all she does is fool with those pieces of glass and play those worn-out records" (35)

-lack of human connection (and not even real animals)

-records = clings to past...or resistant to change? → Laura lives in a glass snow globe

Symbolism: Amanda's selling of magazines

-she sells a world of charm and interest...to others...and to herself and children

-her refusal to see reality

-WHY? Tom said "I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion." (4)

-sometimes reality is too hard to look at honestly

Scene Five: (A miracle!)

Annunciation – angels told Mary she would have Jesus → a miracle! → a boy is coming over!!

"I'd rather smoke" (39) – Tom's lack of desire to improve his life...on her terms

Tom's words about Dance Hall: distractions of life are "deceptive rainbows" (39) and we are all "waiting for bombardments" (39)

-we all go to our dream worlds when reality is not sufficient

-sense that all people are waiting for that big, critical moment to create change

Amanda wishes for "success and happiness for my precious children" (40)

Tom is bringing a gentleman caller!

-A's response: "...and did he—accept?" (41)

-hesitation/fear = A's own doubts about family's charm/amiability...deep down she realizes the truth

Amanda jumps ahead → putting all of her hope on this 1 thing...bad idea

-talking marriage

Amanda's internal conflict: p. 45 – future → present → past → regret
She is a fragile possession...like

a glass animal ←

Tom's feelings on Laura:

- “you musn’t expect too much of Laura...she’s ours and we love her” (47)
- “She’s terribly shy and lives in a world of her own” (47)
- “face facts. She is [peculiar]” (48)
- “a world of little glass ornaments” (48)

Tom’s Realism

-vs-

Amanda’s enthusiasm:

- “when he sees how lovely and sweet and pretty she is, he’ll thank his lucky stars” (47)

Amanda’s dream

RJ: *Amanda’s tears at end of scene – are these happy or sad tears?*

- happy – finally some bright light to keep them going
- sad – she knows Tom is right...the gap between dreams and reality becomes unavoidable in this scene

RJ: *Predict what will happen when O’Connor shows up.*

Scene 6: (the Gentleman Caller)

Gentleman caller = Laura’s Jim

- another case of a promising future that led nowhere
- Wingfields aren’t only ones dealing with the **gap between dreams and reality**

Tom’s Characterization: “only one at the warehouse with whom I was on friendly terms” (50)

- Tom is in outsider everywhere

Laura’s Description: “she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light” (51)

- she is one of her glass animals**....a piece in the family’s glass menagerie

“This is the prettiest you will ever be” (52) → A’s view on life (it’s all downhill from here)

Amanda’s dream world:

- puts on clothes of her youth
- “malaria fever and jonquils and then—this—boy” (54)
- a biased perspective of her youth...was it really that wonderful?
- her plans and future hopes....destroyed – reality

} Dream world vs.
reality

Laura tries to refuse social interaction → her fear of real world/**fear of being noticed**

- Irony: “fuss, fuss—silliness!—over a gentleman caller!” (56)
- Amanda puts her foot down → “I don’t intend to humor your silliness, Laura” (55)

→ (Laura will be forced to come out of her shell in these final scenes)

“Why can’t you and your brother be normal people?” (57)

- Amanda’s true feelings—harsh reality**

Jim and Tom’s convo:

What do we learn?

- social pose = charm (Jim echoes what A. says)
- Tom’s job in trouble
- “I am waking up [...]the signs are interior” (60)
- Tom has had an epiphany of sorts....things are changing in his head
- He is going to leave!
- “I know I seem dreamy, but inside—well, I’m boiling!” (62) - **internal conflict boiling over**
- Tom has joined the Merchant Sailors → **he IS leaving them!**

The Amanda Show:

- thick southern drawl
- charm! – takes over the convo....keeps it light, pleasant, amusing
- “I wasn’t prepared for what the future brought me” (64)
- Laura incapable of entertaining Jim....left alone and crying silently

RJ: *Follow one of the family members in this scene by summarizing his/her role and interactions. How does he/she seem to fail in this scene? What could Williams be telling us with this failure?*

Scene Seven: (Broken Unicorns)

Lights go out, Amanda has won over Jim → the other 2 are pretty much quiet.

Jim and Laura's Convo:

-Jim= nice, hopeful, positive

-hopeful – the future= “even more wonderful than the present time is!” (72) (Great Depression?)

-opposite of Amanda's future=regret

-Laura is actually talking! - sense that this is good for her (good job A.)

-**Laura's self-consciousness:**

-“To me it sounded like thunder” (75)

-L. thinks her handicap is more isolating than it really is (her inadequacies are in her mind)

-Jim “never even noticed” (75)...because it wasn't noticeable...or because she wasn't noticeable?

-L. admits that she let her leg hinder her (good!)

-“practically everybody has got some problems” (76)

-“I'm disappointed but I am not discouraged.” (78)

-Jim is realistic and hopeful → what makes him different from them

-no more Emily (gf)

-Jim tells L. she has an inferiority complex

Laura's **glass collection:**

-“Unicorns – aren't they extinct in the modern world?” (83)

-Laura's face...of course → it's her

-“He stays on the shelf with some horses that don't have horns and all of them seem to get along nicely together” (83)

-her dream → just stay here and get along

They dance → break glass unicorn

-“Now it's just like all the other horses” (86)

-make him feel less-freakish!” - Laura's feelings

-he's not listening to her (“I bet that was your favorite piece of glass” (86))

Jim compliments Laura's looks and then kisses her!

-Jim immediately feels regret - senses her feelings and realizes that was a mistake

-Laura in a daze

Reality destroying Laura's dream world/daze → Jim has a girlfriend, Betty

-internal “storm” (90)... “a look of almost infinite desolation” (90)

“**A souvenir**” (91) – symbol

-She knows he will not return...a brief trip to another world

-Laura is giving up...

Amanda finds out about Betty → they will be married

-accuses Tom of knowing

-“You live in a dream you manufacture illusions!” (95)

-they all do.

-Tom leaves on this comment.

-“A mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job” (96)

-real talk

-A. says **crippled** → Reality is unavoidable....harsh word emphasizes that A. has given up

Tom leaves.

-sailor uniform in the beginning

-travels but feels “pursued by something”

-“Oh Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!” (97)

-his guilt

RJ: -“**blow out your candles, Laura**” (97) *What does this ending suggest? Why does Tom say that?*

-her hopes are extinguished

- he's trying to leave that behind. Let go of internal conflict and live his own life (look at the memory and then get rid of it). (Tennessee Williams!)