

THE GLASS MENAGERIE

BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

DIRECTED BY CAROLYN RATTERAY



STUDY
GUIDE

ANTAEUS
Theatre Company

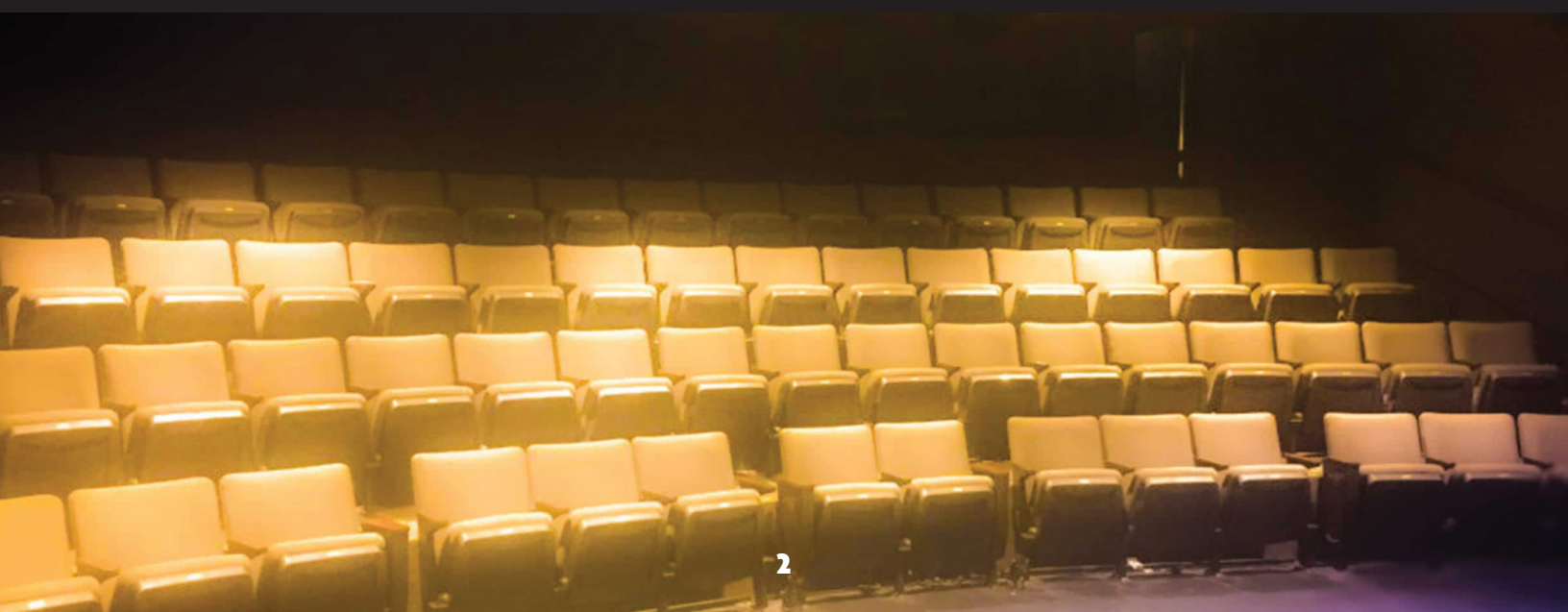
WELCOME TO **ANTAEUS**

We are excited to share with you this production of *The Glass Menagerie*, by Tennessee Williams. As you step into our home, we want to share a little bit about our history and values as a theater company.

Antaeus began in 1991 as a project of the prestigious Center Theatre Group. Founding Artistic Directors Dakin Matthews and Lillian Groag believed there could be a world-class classical ensemble in a city driven by the TV and film industry. They brought together a remarkable group of 30 members to embark on this ambitious project. The group came together every Monday night to read, study and rehearse great, classical plays. Over the next three decades, Antaeus grew into a professional, non-profit theater featuring an acting company comprised of some of the greatest artists that Los Angeles has to offer.

In 2017, we were thrilled to open the doors to our new, permanent home in Downtown Glendale, the Kiki & David Gindler Performing Arts Center. As Antaeus continues to grow and mature, we remain committed to producing full seasons of plays, providing professional training and arts education programs, and utilizing our home as much as possible.

We believe in the transformative power of live theater.



CHARACTERS

*Descriptions are taken from Williams' own descriptions of the characters

AMANDA WINGFIELD—THE MOTHER

"A little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place. Her characterization must be carefully created, not copied from type. She is not paranoiac, but her life is paranoia. There is much to admire in Amanda, and as much to love and pity as there is to laugh at. Certainly she has endurance and a kind of heroism, and though her foolishness makes her unwittingly cruel at times, there is tenderness in her slight person."

LAURA WINGFIELD—HER DAUGHTER

"Amanda, having failed to establish contact with reality, continues to live vitally in her illusions, but Laura's situation is even graver. A childhood illness has left her crippled, one leg slightly shorter than the other, and held in a brace. This defect need not be more than suggested on the stage. Stemming from this, Laura's separation increases till she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf."

TOM WINGFIELD—HER SON

"The narrator of the play. A poet with a job in a warehouse. His nature is not remorseless, but to escape from a trap he has to act without pity."

JIM O'CONNOR—THE GENTLEMAN CALLER

"A nice, ordinary young man."

THE GLASS MENAGERIE SYNOPSIS



The Glass Menagerie follows the Wingfield family, living in St. Louis during the 1930s. The story is narrated by Tom Wingfield, who reflects on his past and his relationships with his mother, Amanda, and his sister, Laura.

Amanda, a faded Southern belle, is deeply concerned for the future of her daughter, Laura, who is extremely shy and physically disabled. When Amanda finds out Laura has dropped out of typing classes, she becomes obsessed with finding her a suitor, which she believes may be their only chance at security. Amanda's desperation puts strain on the family, as she relentlessly pressures Tom to help find Laura a "gentleman caller."

Tom, who works at a warehouse to support the family, dreams of becoming a writer and going on adventures, and his only outlet is going to the movies. He fantasizes about escaping this confining life, much like his

absent father, who abandoned the family years ago.

In an attempt to fulfill his mother's wishes, Tom invites a coworker, Jim O'Connor, to dinner. Jim went to high school with both Tom and Laura, and Laura instantly recognizes him as her school crush. Though Laura is initially anxious, she and Jim start to connect and Laura becomes more confident. Her hopes are shattered, however, when it is revealed that Jim is already engaged to be married. Amanda angrily confronts Tom, accusing him of playing tricks on them.

Tom leaves the family, and Laura remains with Amanda. In the present day, Tom reflects on his guilt and his inability to escape the haunting memory of his sister.

LIFE BEFORE MENAGERIE

Tennessee Williams, born Thomas Lanier Williams on March 26, 1911, in Columbus, Mississippi, was one of the most influential American playwrights of the 20th century. His works, characterized by intense emotion, complex characters, and exploration of societal and psychological themes, continue to shape American theater.

Williams was the son of Edwina Dakin, a woman with Southern aristocratic roots, and Cornelius Williams, a traveling salesman. His father was often absent and emotionally distant, while his mother—though well-meaning—was emotionally fragile. The family's troubled dynamics profoundly impacted Williams's writing. He had a deeply complicated relationship with his mother, which is reflected in several of his plays. Williams also had an older brother, Dakin, and a sister, Rose, who suffered from mental illness and was later institutionalized.

Williams's early life was marked by hardship and personal struggles. He faced health problems as a child, including frequent bouts of pneumonia, and his family experienced financial difficulties. In 1929, Williams enrolled at the University of Missouri, where he began to write plays. He later attended Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Iowa, where he received a Master of Fine Arts degree. His early attempts at writing were not successful, and he worked various odd jobs to support himself.

Williams's breakthrough came in 1944 with the production of *The Glass Menagerie*, a memory play inspired by his own family. The play was an immediate success and marked the beginning of his rise to prominence in the theater world. *The Glass Menagerie* introduced his signature themes of isolation, desire, and emotional turmoil. It earned Williams his first New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and set the stage for his future success.

LIFE AFTER MENAGERIE

Following *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams wrote a series of iconic plays that cemented his reputation. *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and is considered one of the greatest plays in the American theater. The play was later adapted into a successful film, starring Marlon Brando and Vivien Leigh.

Williams continued to explore complex emotional landscapes in plays such as *The Rose Tattoo* (1951), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961). *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* won another Pulitzer Prize for Drama, distinguishing Williams as one of only a few playwrights to have won the award multiple times.

However, despite his success, Williams's personal life was tumultuous. He struggled with addiction, depression, and a deep sense of isolation. His relationships, particularly with men, were often fraught with tension, and he experienced numerous bouts of depression throughout his life. His sister Rose's mental health issues deeply affected him, and her eventual institutionalization became a major source of pain.

Williams's later years were marked by a decline in his professional success and personal stability. His later plays, which were increasingly experimental in nature, did not achieve the same widespread success as his earlier works. He died on February 25, 1983, in New York City from an overdose of barbiturates, which was ruled as a suicide.

Tennessee Williams's plays have been translated into numerous languages and continue to be performed worldwide. He is remembered as a master of capturing human vulnerability, poetical lyricism, and expressive and innovative staging techniques. His work is a classroom staple and remains a cornerstone of the American theater canon.



MENAGERIE AS BIOGRAPHY



Tennessee Williams, like his narrator Tom, called *The Glass Menagerie* a “memory play.” One could consider this Williams’s stylistic variation of a **memoir**, which is an autobiographical rendering of a particular time or event from a real person’s life. The characters, backstories, and events of *The Glass Menagerie* strongly resemble elements of Williams’s own life. However, there are creative differences.

In his opening stage directions, Williams writes, **“Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominately in the heart.”**

This is how we can understand the extent to which Williams has borrowed from his own life in the construction of this play. It is subjective, but in its emotional core lies truthfulness.

The Williams family did indeed spend a great deal of time in St. Louis. Tennessee lends his true given name, Thomas, to his narrator. Their surnames, *Williams and Wingfield*, also resemble each other. Tom writes poems on shoeboxes at the factory (a job Tennessee had) and his coworker Jim calls Tom “Shakespeare,” hinting at Williams’s literary aspirations. Tom is also a heavy drinker, as the real Williams was. Williams’ mother was, like Amanda, overbearing and at times emotionally unstable.

Laura is both similar to and different from Williams’s real sister, Rose. Rose suffered from mental illness; she was diagnosed with schizophrenia and institutionalized for much of her life. She underwent a prefrontal lobotomy, a devastating neurological procedure which forever changed her and riddled Williams with lifelong guilt. Though Laura clearly demonstrates anxiety, her disability is more obviously physicalized through her limp rather than being psychological.

Another significant deviation from fact is the treatment of Williams’s father. Though often away on business and both physically and emotionally absent, his father Cornelius never outright abandoned the family like the “grinning portrait” of Tom’s father suggests.

WRITING YOUR OWN STORY

Have you ever thought about telling your own life story? Do you know where you'd start? Turns out, it's hard to cram a whole life into just a few hours on stage. As a result, many biographical stories are focused on particular episodes from a person's life. A story needs a **beginning**, **middle**, and **end**, and it's often easier to find those things in a shorter episode of life. After all, we don't remember when we were born, and we don't know how life will end.

Your story can take many forms—it can be a short story, a play, a screenplay, or even an epic poem! Try it in whatever form speaks to you the most. Here are a few prompts to get you started.

THINK OF A MAJOR CHALLENGE YOU HAD TO OVERCOME.

When did that challenge present itself to you?
 How did you go about trying to resolve it?
 Did you succeed right away?
 (Hint: the story will be better if you failed a few times.)
 When did you know you had overcome it?
 How did this process change you/those around you?

Who do you think would make interesting characters from your life?
 Your family? Your friends? Your teachers?
 What do you think makes them interesting?

What does the story of your life look like if it's a comedy?
 What if it's a drama?
 A tragedy?

THINK OF A PLACE YOU'VE BEEN THAT MEANS OR MEANT A LOT TO YOU.

What happened there? What might happen if other people joined you there?
 (Think of people you might not expect!)

What does the "you" character sound like when they talk?
 Do they talk formally? Informally? Do they joke around a lot?
 Or are they stone cold serious? What do they like to talk about?

THE HISTORY AND SETTING



When analyzing a play and doing background research on it, it's important to consider at least two different time periods: when it was *written* and when the story *takes place*. With plays, sometimes one has to consider when the play *premiered*. In many cases, the premiere and the date written are roughly the same, as playwrights are often making revisions up until opening night. In other cases, the play may have been produced after the author's death, so the date written and the date premiered could be quite different. Sometimes, the playwright makes revisions *after* the original production—yet another date!

Luckily, in the case of *The Glass Menagerie*, it's rather simple. The play is set in the 1930s and the play was *written* and *premiered* in 1944. Context clues tell us the main action of the play is specifically set in 1937, though Tom narrates the story from an unspecified point in the future.

So what's the difference between 1937 and 1944? Well, when this play premiered,

World War II was well underway with US involvement. In fact, the play premiered in December, about six months after the Normandy landings. The Axis powers were crumbling and the war would soon end. However, the play is set *before* the outbreak of the war. To the audience at the time, that would have been an important detail!

In 1937, the world was still in the economic thrall of the Great Depression. This saw record unemployment, poverty, and civic unrest. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was combating the Depression in the U.S. with his New Deal initiatives. Fascism was globally on the rise. Benito Mussolini had been in power in Italy for a decade and a half, the Nazi party had taken over German politics in 1933, and the Spanish Civil War had broken out in 1936. In 1937, the Empire of Japan launched its full-scale invasion of China. It was a time of great political uncertainty, violence, and fear that would soon reach a fever pitch.

20TH CENTURY AMERICAN DRAMA

Before the Second World War, American drama was in its infancy but had started to solidify an international reputation. After all, the United States was a young country! In 1944, it was only about 168 years old. Compare that to over 2,000 years of theater in Europe, and it had a lot of catching up to do.

Most theater in the early United States was made up of productions of English plays, especially Shakespeare—a remnant of the recent colonial past. In the mid to late nineteenth century, American playwrights had some success with the **melodrama**, which was again borrowed from an English style. Melodramas were grand, romantic plays with daring heroes, mustache-twirling villains and big stage spectacle. They featured exaggerated acting and unbelievable plot twists.

Then two innovative European genres changed American theater—realism and expressionism. **Realism**, exemplified by playwrights like Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, and Anton Chekhov, was interested in showing the lives of everyday people. Today, we take realism for granted because it's the genre of most of our television, movies, and plays, but in the late 19th century it was innovative to think that a person's everyday, unremarkable struggles could hold an audience's attention.

The other innovative form was **expressionism**, which was just the opposite of realism. It focused on dreamlike states, physicalized emotional metaphors and a subjective, abstract point of view. This genre came from the experimental German theater.

In the early 20th century, American playwrights became famous for writing realistic plays, expressionistic plays, or both! Clifford Odets was known for realism and Sophie Treadwell for expressionism, while Eugene O'Neill and Thornton Wilder dabbled in both genres. Williams was inspired by this genre-bending and mixed styles in his plays.



The unrest caused by the Great Depression introduced a loud political and moral concern to American plays. Odets's *Waiting For Lefty* was a famous example of protest drama, while Lilian Hellman wrote plays about the decaying moral fabric of the country. Kaufman and Hart wrote popular comedies that included cleverly disguised social criticism.

One of Tennessee Williams's contemporaries was Arthur Miller, who continued this tradition of socially-conscious American plays. His *Death of a Salesman* famously captured the ways in which the individual spirit can be crushed by American capitalism, and *The Crucible* was an allegory for the political persecutions of the McCarthy Era. Miller, along with Williams and Midwestern dramatist William Inge, were some of the most popular writers of the 1950s.

Early Black American theater was pioneered by the NAACP, and in the 1940s the founding of the American Negro Theatre led to the training of a new generation of brilliant Black artists, including Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Isabel Sanford, Ossie Davis, and Ruby Dee. Black playwrights such as Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, and Amiri Baraka helped give Black theater in America its own voice.

The sociopolitical paradigm shift of the 1960s produced a new generation of experimental American playwrights. Though Williams and Miller continued to write, their success in this era began to be eclipsed by writers like Edward Albee. American **musicals**, long considered a staple of "popular" entertainment, also became more experimental with works like *Hair*, *Cabaret*, and the musicals of Stephen Sondheim.

Through the rest of the 20th century, American playwrights continued to be inspired by Williams's generation, but wrote plays that reflected the anxieties and challenges of new generations.



WILLIAMS AND “PLASTIC THEATRE”

As *The Glass Menagerie* was Williams’s first theatrical success, it also served as an introduction to his ideas about drama. He writes about his concept of **plastic theatre**, a theatrical technique that emphasizes visual and sensory elements to convey emotional and psychological states, rather than just relying on traditional realism and dialogue. He sought to break away from conventional realism in theater and create a more expressive and symbolic form of performance.

Williams often used elements like lighting, sound, set design, and movement to represent the inner worlds of his characters. For example, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the symbolic use of **light** (like the harsh light on Blanche) or the **distorted sounds** can reflect characters’ mental states and emotional turbulence. In the stage directions for *The Glass Menagerie*, he suggests utilizing a sheer screen to create a soft **fourth wall** that encloses the Wingfield apartment. He also considers using textual **projections** to help the audience keep track of running themes and plot developments in his subtle character drama. These ideas aren’t that abnormal in our time, but in 1944, they were revolutionary.

“Plastic theatre” is meant to create a more visceral and emotional experience for the audience, making them feel the characters’ struggles, desires, and conflicts on a deeper, more sensory level. It’s a blend of poetry, symbolism, and expressionism with an outward appearance that misleadingly resembles realism, the dominant genre of the era.

Williams writes:

“WHEN A PLAY EMPLOYS UNCONVENTIONAL TECHNIQUES, IT IS NOT, OR CERTAINLY SHOULDN’T BE, TRYING TO ESCAPE ITS RESPONSIBILITY OF DEALING WITH REALITY, OR INTERPRETING EXPERIENCE, BUT IS ACTUALLY OR SHOULD BE ATTEMPTING TO FIND A CLOSER APPROACH, A MORE PENETRATING AND VIVID EXPRESSION OF THINGS AS THEY ARE.”



POEMS BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

In addition to being a playwright, Williams was a poet, and in his plays we see the influence of his poetic sensibilities. Here are some examples:

CAN I FORGET THE NIGHT YOU
WAITED BESIDE YOUR DOOR—COULD IT
HAVE BEEN MORE PLAINLY STATED?
—FOR SOMETHING MORE.

YOU SPOKE A RHYME ABOUT
YOUNG LOVE WHILE WE STOOD
BREATHING THE RAIN-SWEET
FRAGRANCE OF THE WOOD.

I WAS A FOOL, NOT KNOWING WHAT
YOU WAITED FOR. AND THEN
YOU SMILED AND QUIETLY
SHUT THE DOOR.

WE HAVE NOT LONG TO LOVE.
LIGHT DOES NOT STAY. THE TENDER
THINGS ARE THOSE WE FOLD AWAY.
COARSE FABRICS ARE THE ONES
FOR COMMON WEAR. IN SILENCE
I HAVE WATCHED YOU COMB YOUR HAIR.
INTIMATE THE SILENCE,
DIM AND WARM. I COULD BUT DID NOT,
REACH TO TOUCH YOUR ARM.
I COULD, BUT DO NOT,
BREAK THAT WHICH IS STILL.
(ALMOST THE FAINTEST WHISPER
WOULD BE SHRILL.)
SO MOMENTS PASS AS THOUGH
THEY WISHED TO STAY.
WE HAVE NOT LONG TO LOVE.
A NIGHT. A DAY....

MY FEET TOOK A WALK IN HEAVENLY GRASS. ALL DAY WHILE THE SKY SHONE CLEAR
AS GLASS. MY FEET TOOK A WALK IN HEAVENLY GRASS, ALL NIGHT WHILE
THE LONESOME STARS ROLLED PAST. THEN MY FEET COME DOWN TO WALK ON EARTH,
AND MY MOTHER CRIED WHEN SHE GAVE ME BIRTH. NOW MY FEET WALK FAR
AND MY FEET WALK FAST, BUT THEY STILL GOT AN ITCH FOR HEAVENLY GRASS.
BUT THEY STILL GOT AN ITCH FOR HEAVENLY GRASS.

WILLIAMS'S DIALOGUE AS POETRY

Arthur Miller described William's work as "language flowing from the soul." Now that you've seen his poetry, compare that to his dialogue.

How does his background as a poet inform how he writes speech?



"Of course, you always had that detached quality as if you were playing a game without much concern over whether you won or lost, and now that you've lost the game, not lost but just quit playing, you have that rare sort of charm that usually only happens in very old or hopelessly sick people, the charm of the defeated."

—*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

"And, oh, God, the air isn't cold like ordinary cold but like the sort of cold there must be at the far, the farthest, the got-no-more last edge of space!"

—*The Two-Character Play*

"What on earth can you do on this earth but catch at whatever comes near you, with both your fingers, until your fingers are broken?"

—*Orpheus Descending*

"I didn't go to the moon, I went much further—for time is the longest distance between two places."

—*The Glass Menagerie*

"It goes tick-tick, it's quieter than your heartbeat, but it's slow dynamite, a gradual explosion, blasting the world we lived in to burnt-out pieces... Time—who could beat it, who could defeat it ever?"

—*Sweet Bird of Youth*

"When I was sixteen, I made the discovery—love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that's how it struck the world for me."

—*A Streetcar Named Desire*

THEMES IN WILLIAMS'S WORK

By looking at the quotes on the previous page, one can begin to see recurring themes—or dominant messages and patterns—throughout Williams's body of work. Here are a few of them!

Time: Williams often writes about the passage of time and the human sense of helplessness at not being able to stop it. *The Glass Menagerie* deals with time as Tom narrates from an uncertain point in the future, expressing regret at his past actions.

Illusion (and Delusion): At the beginning of *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom likens himself to a stage magician, commenting on the relationship between truth and illusion. Many of Williams's characters deliberately hide the truth from others or themselves. Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* famously has delusions of grandeur and fantasizes about being rescued from her circumstances.

Isolation: Most of Williams's protagonists are loners in some way, and many are on the outskirts of society. This can play out as emotional isolation, but also issues of **class** come up. Val, the hero of *Orpheus Descending*, is a wandering musician that others consider vagrant.

Violence: Though conspicuously absent from *The Glass Menagerie*, many of Williams's plays climax in extraordinary acts of violence.



Mental Illness: Many of Williams's characters, especially leading ladies, suffer from emotional instability or mental illness. This is thought to be inspired by the women in Williams's own family. Men often face alcoholism or abuse other substances, like Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Sexuality: Williams was openly gay, which was not easy in the 1940s and 50s. Many of his characters struggle with unfulfilled or unexpressed desires, often leading to devastating outcomes. Sexuality is often implied to conform with the censorship and social norms of the time in which he wrote.

WILLIAMS'S WRITING INFLUENCES

Williams was a widely read person, not only in theater, but in literature and poetry. As a result, a lot of different writers had influences on his writing style, but a handful of them particularly stand out.

“Williams so admired poet Hart Crane that he wrote in his will that he’d like to be buried at sea near where Crane died. Crane merged modernist experimentalism with a highly romantic sensibility, and his writing was highly stylized and complex. Crane was openly gay and was both a personal and artistic inspiration to Williams.”

—Hart Crane

“Lawrence is described by Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* as “insane” and his work as “grotesque.” Lawrence was radical in writing novels that depicted explicit sexuality and championed it as a powerful force, which reflects Williams’s attitudes toward sexuality.”

— D.H. Lawrence

“Strindberg’s most famous works vary widely in style. Early in his career he wrote naturalistic plays, and would later experiment radically with symbolism and dream plays.”

—August Strindberg

“Like Strindberg and Williams, O’Neill experimented with radically different styles and also incorporated elements of a deeply troubled and tumultuous family life in his drama.”

—Eugene O’Neill



“This Austrian poet and novelist played with subjectivity, mysticism, and lyrical intensity in his work.”

—Rainer Maria Rilke

“The Spanish-born poet and playwright was killed in the Spanish Civil War and wrote about intense emotions, passionate love, violence, and death with vivid atmospheric detail.”

—Frederico Garcia Lorca

“Chekhov was a short story writer and playwright from Russia who championed realistic style and complex character development, with his narratives chock full of subtle details. Despite this, he had a poetic sensibility and a penchant for symbolism.”

—Anton Chekhov

DIRECT ADDRESS

Tom Wingfield in the opening lines of *The Glass Menagerie* remarks:

“Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.”



This is an example of **direct address**, when a character talks directly to the audience rather than to other characters on stage. To some viewers this may seem like an odd or surprising device, but plays have featured direct address for thousands of years. In fact, the idea of the **fourth wall**, or an imaginary barrier between the audience and the world of the characters, is actually a fairly new theatrical concept.

In this opening, Tom establishes himself both as the narrator and the primary organizer of the story. One might say that the character of Tom is Tennessee Williams himself commenting on his role as author of the play. Later in the monologue he says about Jim:

“Since I have a poet’s weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a symbol; he is the long-delayed but always expected something that we hope for.”

Here, Tom is betraying *his* own subjectivity, admitting that we are seeing this story through his perspective and favoring *his* storytelling style.

Thus we must ask ourselves if Tom is a reliable narrator, presenting a story as it objectively happened. Or is he an unreliable narrator, telling their version of the story that might include lies, omissions, or distortions?

Do you think Tom is a reliable or unreliable narrator? Why or why not?

THE ART OF DIRECTING



Today it would be nearly unthinkable to stage a play without a director, but the role of the director isn't very old! In fact, the profession of the director really only started to take shape about 50 years before the premiere of *The Glass Menagerie*. Historically, the role of staging the play would usually be fulfilled by actor-managers, producers, or sometimes even playwrights. But with the development of more realistic acting techniques and more intricate stagecraft, plays needed a singular voice at the helm to tie it all together.

Two of the early pioneers of directing were Englishman Edward Gordon Craig and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko of the Moscow Art Theatre. Craig believed that the director's vision was the most important attribute of a play, and he was famous for his unique avant-garde staging of new and classic plays. On the other hand, Nemirovich-Danchenko believed the director was the "midwife" to a play, and that their primary function was to communicate the story as written and serve the playwright's intention.

These two differing approaches also speak to the "visibility" of the director. An "invisible" director, in the vein of Nemirovich-Danchenko, has the audience so focused on the content of the play that they may not consider the contribution of the director. Meanwhile a "visible" director, like Craig, makes bold stylistic contributions that put the director's vision out front.

The director not only stages the play, but also coaches the actors' performances. Actors strive to "exist in the same world" and "be in the same play," and a director helps ensure that different actors' choices are compatible. The director also leads the production team and works with designers on the aesthetic choices of the production. The director ultimately makes key decisions about what themes to emphasize in the text.

SCENIC DESIGN

One of the challenges of designing a set for a popular, canonical play is the balance of honoring the story and the playwright's intention while still presenting something new. Our scenic designer, Angela Balogh Calin, decided to lean into the subjective elements of *The Glass Menagerie*:

“BEING CONSIDERED A MEMORY PLAY, IT ALLOWED ME TO DELVE BEYOND THE CONFINES OF REALISM AND EXPLORE THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS THE MIND RECALLS PAST EVENTS. MY AIM WAS TO CREATE A WORLD FILLED WITH SHADOWS AND FADED, LAYERED IMAGES THAT APPEAR DISTORTED AND FRAGMENTED, AS THEY COEXIST ALONGSIDE THE TANGIBLE REALITY OF THE APARTMENT.”

From Calin's description, one can sense a tension between “reality” and “the mind.” The scenic concepts blends the mundane and recognizable with the intangible and unknowable.

But it is not different for the sake of being different. Williams himself said that the point of the avant-garde or the unconventional in drama is to more closely communicate reality. From Calin's point of view, this approach gets to the heart of the play:

“FOR ME AS A SCENIC DESIGNER, STYLE IS ABOUT CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT THAT SUPPORTS AND ENHANCES THE PRODUCTION. BY MAKING DELIBERATE CHOICES REGARDING COLOR, TEXTURE, MATERIALS, STYLE HELPS ESTABLISH THE MOOD, AND ATMOSPHERE OF THE SCENE, AND IT CAN INFLUENCE HOW THE AUDIENCE PERCEIVES THE STORY. STYLE SHOULD PUSH BOUNDARIES AND ENHANCE A PROJECT THROUGH IMAGINATION AND A CREATIVE APPROACH.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Do you think a semi-realistic set captures the tone of Williams's play better than a “kitchen sink” set? Why or why not?

How does the visual design draw your attention?



ACTING WILLIAMS

***A conversation
with actor
Josh Odsess-Rubin,
who plays Tom.***



Q: What are some of the first questions you like to ask about a character as you start to study a play?

A: The two most important things for me are their given circumstances and what they want. So, I'll do an investigation of the script to get all of my factual basics. Where am I living? What is my job? Who do I live with? Who is important to me? My family? My friends? Some of that will be in the text, some of it I will have to invent. Then it's always helpful to go through and make a list of every single thing said about my character in the play by other characters or myself or the author in the stage directions—keeping in mind that some of what characters say, myself or others, may not be true. Amanda may say, “Both my children are so unusual,” and I have to decide, “Is Tom really unusual? Or is that Amanda saying that for her we're unusual?”

Q: It seems there are three Toms represented in this play: Tennessee Williams's real first name was Tom, so there's the real Tennessee inside the character of Tom, then the Tom who narrates the play to us from the present about his past, and finally, Tom who exists in the world of the play. Is it a challenge to integrate those different points of view?

A: To me, there's definitely the two on stage. There's the narrator Tom, and then Tom who's living with Amanda and Laura. There have been productions done where Tom is

played by, like, a 50-year-old actor who's then inhabiting his 20-year-old self. We're not that. I'm not even that much older, it's been five years, maybe. So, in terms of finding a vocal and physical difference between narrator Tom and past Tom, it's not gonna be as dramatic, but I still think there will be subtle differences, because their given circumstances are different. One is wanting to break free, living trapped in this tenement with his family, his dreams out of reach. The other has broken free, for better or for worse.

Q: Is thinking about the real Tennessee Williams useful to you as an actor, or is it a distraction from what's actually in the text?

A: It's a bit of a blessing and a curse to have a character based on a real person. I love reading about Williams and learning odd, interesting details that are rich, and that I can use— things I might not have come up with in my imaginative dream ruminations about Tom. So, I do enjoy learning what I can. At the same time, you want to be careful because I don't think I'm playing Tennessee Williams. I'm playing Tom Wingfield. I don't want to ever feel constrained thinking, "Oh, well, the real Tennessee Williams was XYZ, and I have to be just like that," because there are differences that he wrote in. Someone should be able to see the play and take in this character, knowing nothing about Tennessee Williams, and just seeing what's presented. So I'm letting Tennessee haunt and inform narrator Tom and past Tom, but not worrying about strictly adhering to his real life.

Q: What about Tom do you resonate with personally?

A: I relate to the family dynamics and the way the people you love most can get under your skin the most. Tom reminds me of how when I was in my twenties I would come home to visit my parents, and I would turn into a teenager again. I would be a little snippy, a little impatient, think I knew better than them. There's certain dynamics with, in this case, a mother and a son that I just find so relatable. And I love Tom's passion. I'm an artist. As an actor, I love my art and I have sometimes made selfish or foolish decisions to continue my pursuit of my art. Tom is that way with his writing. He is so passionate about his writing and he also doesn't get to do it as much as he wants. He has a day job, essentially. I have had so many day jobs. I've never worked in a shoe factory, but I've been a paralegal in a law firm, I've done street promotional marketing, I've tutored, I've taught, I've edited, I've coached... When you don't like your day job and you want to be doing your art, that is such a tough dynamic. And then to narrator Tom, I mean, who amongst us of a certain age doesn't have some deep regret? Some situation where you maybe didn't make the right choice or wish you'd done something a little different? There's just so much regret suffusing the older Tom in the play doesn't regret not saying the right word. But pain. And nostalgia.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After the performance, take some time to reflect on a couple of these questions to help you digest the play:

Do you find Amanda Wingfield to be a sympathetic character? Why or why not? What specific actions or motivations can you use to support your opinion?

To what extent does Laura have a “visible” or “invisible” disability? How might that affect others’ perception of her?

The real Tennessee Williams was gay. Tom’s sexuality isn’t explicitly brought up in the play, but there may be implicit clues. Do you find Tom’s sexuality relevant to the story? Why or why not?

Do you find Jim’s actions thoughtless or well-intended? How do you feel about his character?

Do you find the family dynamics in the play realistic or relatable? Why or why not?

What imagery and metaphor stood out to you in the production? How does theatricality capture the play’s poetic sensibilities and themes?

How is seeing a family drama like this enacted on stage different from reading it in a book? What does live performance add?

To what extent is the play specific to the time in which it was written? To what extent is it universal or timeless?



A woman with dark hair, smiling, wearing a light pink dress with a ruffled neckline and sheer sleeves. She is holding a clear glass vase filled with yellow daffodils. The background is a dark blue curtain.

STUDENT MATINEES

Study Guide Dramaturg
RYAN MCREE

Lead Teaching Artist
ANN NOBLE

Producing Executive Director
ANA ROSE O'HALLORAN

Artistic Director
NIKE DOUKAS

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Theatre Company

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