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A kaleidoscope of fluctuating memories: Exploring Tennessee Williams 'The Glass Menagerie'

Abhik Maiti

M.A in English, University of Calcutta, Pursuing M.A in History, P.G Diploma in Tagore Literature, Diploma in Fine Arts,
Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Abstract

"Memory is the diary that we all carry about with us." - Oscar Wilde

Matthew Arnold once suggested that, "*the pursuit of perfection is a pursuit of sweetness and light.*" In many ways this is exactly what the characters of *The Glass Menagerie* seek in the play – perfection. They look for it in their future, as they search for a way to find security and hope. Although they find glimmers of hope throughout the story, each time it is extinguished like the candles at the end of the play. The Oxford English Dictionary states memory as, "*to commemorate; to preserve a record or memorial of; to record, mention,*" But even though Tom recollects "*that quaint period, the thirties*" to commemorate his family and their tragic existence, he does so with the "*appearance of truth*" and "*illusions*" that proves how fragile and deceitful memory can be. All the characters are unable to accept and relate to this reality. As a result each of them withdraws into a private world of illusion where they find the comfort and meaning that the real world fails to offer.

Keywords: modernist drama, memory play, naturalism, mnemonic structure, modern psychological theatre, domestic realism, sculptural drama

Introduction

Presented as a memory play, *The Glass Menagerie* complements the poet's lifelong perception of and fascination with illusion and reality and shows William's notion on the subjectivity of memory. In the post World War II backdrop of trauma and disillusionment and equipped with the heritage of Freud's psychoanalysis theory, the functioning of the memory became an important theme in theatre as well as in other arts. American theatre when compared to other art forms was slow to change and hand in hand with Kingsley Amis, Tennessee Williams embraced the post war genre of realism and horror. With Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* a significant breakthrough was attend in the dramatic technique and form: "*The play stood at the nexus of old melodramatic form and the modern psychological theatre.*" (Aronson, 2000) Theatre as a 'time art' is closely connected with the act of remembering for time arts try to capture the "*flowing character of all temporarily, order experience*" (Murphy and Kovach, Favorini, 2007) Favorini in *Memory in Play* (2008) tries to feel the gap by discussing the dramatic construction of memory throughout history and forms a notable contribution on the co-relation between drama and memory. Jacobs and Crasner 2006 deliberated upon the innovative staging in relation to the memory aspect and inspects the role of psychological dimension of memory in *The Glass Menagerie*. The visual and performing arts in America developed a unique American voice in the first half of 20th century during the modernist period as art trended to turn to abstraction for modernist artists perceived themselves in a world they failed to comprehend or depict in their art. In the words of critic Dwight McDonald (1946): "*Naturalism is no longer adequate either aesthetically to morally to cope with the modern*

horror." When most Avant-garde art supplanted the established art forms that preceded it American theatrical showed a less radical appearance. Theatre had maintained till then a much closer relation to a realistic dimension for it explored human emotions and interactions essentially communicated through its protagonist. Nevertheless post-world war II stagecraft perceived realistic drama becoming "*feeble and impotent*" (Aronson) As literature became increasingly concerned about exploring the darker dimensions of the human psyche and strove to examine through Freud's perception of psychoanalysis.

Although Williams believed in the in appropriation of naturalism in theatre, he chooses not to supersede it with anti-theatricality but odds for a combination of psychology and melodrama. The characters are anti-heroes, family dysfunctional and the narrative an exploration of the psychology of people living at the marginal fringes of society and champion the depictions of the breakdown of the American dreams.

The Glass Menagerie exists within the post-war form of "*domestic realism*" In which the family as the representative of the American society is portrayed as one disintegrated or even as a failed institution. On the other hand Williams reinvents the genre adding a poetic layer. Inform Williams' contrast "*an essentially melodramatic vocabulary of the lost past.*" (Aronson) With a revolutionary idea of the introduction of memory and the fluidity of its transition.

In the light of Williams' career and the tradition of American theatre, *The Glass Menagerie* expanded the boundaries of theatricality itself. In his career as a playwright, his combination of lyricism/ poetic language and experimentalism revolutionized American drama in the post World War II

scenario. The original nature of his theatrical imagination gives Williams a pivotal role on the American theatre and together with Edward Albee and Arthur Miller became the most prominent American dramatists of the second half of the 20th century.

Exploring the role of memory and narration, Mahlu Mertens comments, *“On one hand theatre’s fundamental mode of repetition makes it a child of memory for to perform a play is in itself an activity of remembering. On the other hand, the theatrical metaphor is used as an explanatory model for memory; remembering is described as an act of scenic imagination.”* In the production notes, the playwright Williams amuses *“unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth... The straight realistic play... has some virtue of a photographic likeness. Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art: that truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance”* In the play episodic memory takes the central stage.

Of the declarative memory which is *“the system that provides the basic for constant recollection of facts and events”* (Jacobs, 2002), the episodic memory is a subcategory of. Already in 1908 Freud observes in his article *Creative Writers and Daydreaming*, Freud observes that the episodic memory is not only bearer of objectively saved unalterable past events. It functions more like an amalgamation of impressions that transform together with the evolution in and the needs of the rememberer. A share characteristic of creative writing and the declarative memory is therefore the *“Past, present and future and stung together as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them”* (Freud, 1908)

Another important term described within the play is that of the *“Personal myth”* which the psychoanalyst Kris described *“(a) coherent of autobiographical memories, a picture of one’s course of life as part of the self representation (that) has attracted a particular investment, it is defensive inasmuch as it prevents certain experiences and groups of impulses from reaching consciousness. At the same time, the autobiographical self-image has taken place of a repressed fantasy...”* (Kris, 1956) He originally associated the term with behaviour observe in his patients but to a certain macrocosmic level everyone creates his personal myth for people are fond of their own experiences and infuses the personal memory into a narrative in an attempt to expound his being.

In *The Glass Menagerie* where the relation between the characters and their past attains the centre stage; Williams associated the term *“memory play”*. Although he does not provide a definite definition but ascribed the desired effects and implications: *“because of its considerably delicate or tenuous material, atmospheric touches and subtleties of direction play a particularly important part.”* It maybe related with Favorini’s definition *“One in which the intention to remember and/or forget comes prominently to the fore, with or without the aid of a remembering narrator; in which the phenomenon of memory is a distinct and central area of the drama’s attention... or in which memory or forgetting serves as a crucial factor in self-formation and/or self-*

deconstruction.” (2008)

Although the term *“memory play”* was coined by Williams, it was not completely a new genre. Indirectly the term referred to the connection between theatre and memory extend from the beginning of stagecraft. Theatre was defined by the Greeks being one of the arts as a daughter of Mnemosyni, the personification of memory. In Greek drama anagnorisis forms an integral part of the dramaturgy, and this tragic recognition can be defined as an *“existential repositioning of an individual vis-a-vis the past”* (Favorini, 2008) for the Greek plays perpetually dramatized the notion of memory and remembrance.

In medieval culture remembering also occupied an important position for the oral modality of the arts went hand in hand with the training of memory. A thematic remembering was important for plays open surface exemplum. During the Renaissance, Shakespearean plays also toyed with the theme of memory as in *Hamlet* for example the protagonist asks himself *“Must I remember?”* *The Glass Menagerie* reshapes the tradition by shifting attention from the simple recollection of memories to a reconstruction of them. In psychotherapy Freud has illustrated the fluid nature of characters and memory that can be adapted to fit the self image. The insight of psychotherapy is combined with the character construction based on memories by Williams to create an essentially subjective play with a protagonist struggling to reconcile in self image with his memories. The time is *“now and the past”* where memory and the act of its recollection is not only a theme but the very basis of the entire play: where the unreliability of the rememberer influences the construction of the plot.

On one level, can the play be read as the personal myth of Tom, the narrator- protagonist while on another; it serves as the personal myth constructed by Williams to deal with his own past. Through this, the playwright appears to argue that *“autobiography”*, or organised declarative memory is an elaborate fiction based on facts and that through the creative use of memory, *“fiction is at heart emotional autobiography”* (Jacobs, 2002) As Jacobs evaluates, the play is the narrative manifestation of a personal myth and transforms experiences in ways that are of psychological necessity. A *“coherent set of autobiographical memories, a picture of ones course of life”* builds up ones self image, for the preservation of which some experiences are oppressed or transformed.

This defence mechanism is, in the play, functional in various ways. Firstly, the recollections of memories originate in Tom’s justification for his leaving. Secondly, he attempts to create a space for his sister to be her old self again; paradoxically enabling memories to *“keep alive in the present what is dead and gone forever”* (Jacobs, 2012) And finally, he tries to create a story of his memories that makes them bearable and allows him to journey forward. Tom uses the plasticity of the memory to his advantage by creating a fictional space to store the bitter reality without forgetting them. The play thus inextricable entwined autobiography and autobiographical; memory to supplant Tom’s emotional needs, *“for memory is seated predominantly in the heart.”*

Autobiographical memories refer to memories *“specific, personal, long lasting and (usually) of significance to the self system”* (Nelson, 1993) The fact that *The Glass Menagerie* is

a presentation of autobiographical memory further complicates the dramatic construction through its point of view. While traditional theatre makes the spectators aware about the difference between showing and seeing, the desired viewpoint in *The Glass Menagerie* differs in this aspect for the viewer has to identify his viewpoint as the seeing eye of Tom, the narrator. It thus more resembles the cinematic technique of the camera choosing the viewer's viewpoint. "Cinema encourages a more direct perceptual identification with the seeing eye of the camera, theatre divides and disperse the possibilities of identification, in the process problematizing both identification and point of view" (Freedman, 1991) Tom is, as Crandell puts it, "not only the cinematic I who sees and speaks within the fictive narrative, but also the cinematic eye."

As a critic in the essay *The Fragility of Memory in The Glass Menagerie* comments, "From the writer himself, full of misery, memory and dark dreamy lighting and music, *The Glass Menagerie*, is one of America's most brave, and yet poignant plays. Memory is by far the most dominating theme in the seven-scene play. Followed by fragility and the result of turmoil on the Wingfield family, the play shows the damage of American culture as well as a dramatic interpretation with the "only valid aim" of getting "closer to the truth". The narrative stars the narrator-protagonist Tom, the rebellious son and daydreamer, staying out late and going to the movies, but fails to abandon his sense of guilt, and supports his sister Laura, his mother Amanda, neurotic, but always meaning well; controlling, but always desiring more for her children after the abandonment of her husband. Tom's sister Laura, a recluse who spends most of her time cleaning and admiring her glass animals provides a perfect picture of her frail mind and vast imagination. Together these three characters sum up the epitome of broken, regretful, and forgotten Americans. "The lighting in the play is not realistic," writes Williams in the production notes. The lighting follows the trajectory of memory by laying emphasis upon certain objects or actors to focus shafts of light on while keeping others dim to single out and focus on whatever it permits to completely show the "pristine clarity" (Williams) that was used in "early religious saints or Madonnas" (Williams) The dim lighting was a product of Tom's mind and how dreamy it truly was. Williams who states about the music that "The tune is like circus music," (Williams) in actuality dwells upon the finality of circus music on the viewer's brain that "weaves in and out of your preoccupied consciousness" (Williams xxi) even at a great distance or after leaving the show while being aware of the irony of his statement. The music is meant to be the "lightest, most delicate music in the world," and even the saddest. It becomes a reference point of nostalgia, but also provides a connection of allusion to the narrator. Williams compares the title song "*The Glass Menagerie*" to a person's thoughts which resembles pieces of gracefully spun glass, of its beauty and its complementary fragility. Williams also added a screen device for projecting images and titles throughout the play "to signify his admirations for a play navigated by memory and to prove that like most remembrances, the mind can view and find any image or text that it so desires. The screen is an allusion and completes what is already a pensive and dark play. His vague

interpretation of Tom's memory shows that like the actual human brain, it is indescribable and virtually undiscovered." Memory, like dreams, leaves one waking up in a sweat and a deep sickening feeling of nostalgia. *The Glass Menagerie* endeavours to trap into that feeling, and although it may not be the answer to all of life's plentiful questions, it is Williams's truth, and therefore legitimate. Conversely, in the book *The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams*, Francis Donahue states that Williams "meant more accurately 'reverie,' which implies that small events of small importance in themselves, are recalled, relived, and treasured because they serve to symbolize and heighten basic experiences" Benjamin Nelson, in his short essay *The Play is Memory* in the book titled *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Glass Menagerie*, signifies an even deeper fragility of memory. He writes that man has very little reason to live because of a fragmented universe (Parker). That nothing can be done about it and a man's life is an "atonement for the human condition" (Parker). This thought relates back to the stage setting of transparent walls and missing furniture. It shows how glass like and fragile the characters are. Laura, perhaps the most obvious example of atoning for the human condition, resorts back to her dreams and imagination. She devotes her life to the safe keeping of her precious glass animals, even claiming it as an accomplishment to her one and only Gentleman Caller, Jim corresponds to Donahue's statement of the Wingfield's being "trapped in a determined universe" (Parker) and that they were "doomed the minute they were born" (Parker) is closer to the truth Williams was so desperately searching to find. The memories of the past, even if they aren't happy, are always portrayed to reveal a happier, more relaxed time; much like the concept of American culture and the history of the country.

Bert Cadullo writes in his essay *Through the Looking Glass: the Role of Memory in The Glass Menagerie* that Tom's memories are "impressionistic" rather than "expressionistic." considering his memories to be in the fashion of old Hollywood movies and "flashback films." He writes on to say that the style of the flashbacks are set in a "representational world we all recognize and accept" perpetuating the propaganda of American culture and the happier times we all wish to still be living in. Cadullo feels that it is a non-realistic interpretation for even if it is a memory; it is but a fabricated one. Esther Merle Jackson in *The Broken World of Tennessee Williams*, agrees with Cadullo in the sense that *The Glass Menagerie* "is not a psychological account, but rather a synthetic image, a vision carefully composed by montage". Jackson believes "the story is a movie projected from an imaginary camera straight from the eye that has turned on itself and "backwards into the memory". She compares Williams to Proust and compares how Williams pieces the images of the past together from the fragments of a "shattered consciousness". Her most interesting point is stating that *The Glass Menagerie* is "made of diverse perspectives," for even though it seems to be one intrinsic conscience; it is more than it appears for much like a dream or a memory for Jackson believes the play to be a summary of a "poetic journey" or a journey to the truth.

"Yes I have tricks in my pocket, I have things in 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.” - The Glass Menagerie

The thrust of William’s theatre largely depends on the authorial contribution to the non-verbal elements to be realized in a stage performance. The non-verbal elements communicated through the secondary text are often overlooked. The conventional pedagogical method seems to have ignored the multidimensional nature of dramatic art and has concentrated chiefly on its literary aspects. But Williams’ emphasis on the definition of the nonverbal part of his plays demands that these elements should be started with meticulous attention. The deft touch with which William rewrote and restructures his private family history to create a more universally accessible narrative was mirrored, very importantly by the similarly free handed approach he took in rewriting the norms of theatrical conventions. As *The Glass Menagerie* revolutionised the stylistic innovation of plays. Clive Barnes, The New York Times critic commented when reviewing the 1975 Broadway Revival of the memory play, “*There was a new dawn for the American Theatre. And naturally dawns always survive.*”

Williams’ notebook for the period leading up his writing of the play includes an important meditation on his travel to find a new working method. Realistic theatre, he believed, was dull and prosaic and his concern was to create a kind of stage poetry. He had concluded, however, that he needed to seek “*apocalypse without delirium*”, by exploring muted understatements rather than elaborate spectacles. Something like the “*sculptural drama*”, where one visualizes reduced mobility on stage with the formation of statuesque attitudes or tableaux, resembling a restrained types of dance, with motion toned down to only the essential or significant. It was from this principle that Williams derived the episodic structure for *The Glass Menagerie* breaking his narrative into seven scenes, each of which could serve to depict a distilled, “*sculptural image*” of a situation, of a relational dynamic between characters. The scenes barely call for much physical action, and to prevent them becoming merely duly static, great precision is required from directors in creating on stage the kind of moving portraiture that William calls for, so as to encapsulate visually the emotional circumstances of each scene.

The charged stillness and deliberate understatement of the play helps to focus the audience’s attention on the subtleties of the immediate moment. “*The lack of action in The Glass Menagerie is a bit baffling at the first*” Noted the New York Herald Tribune, “*but it becomes of no consequence as one gets to know the family.*” Lightning and semi-transparent sets to create a heightened, even dream-like, new form of stage realism – which became known internationally, for a time as “*the American Style*”- was first seen in *The Glass Menagerie*, and then subsequently developed in other Williams’ plays such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and by other playwrights like Arthur Miller, who freely acknowledged the profound influence of Williams’ work on the development of own ideas for *Death of a Salesman*. One of the key staging devices in all these works was the use of gauze scenery, which when lit from the front can create the illusion of a solid wall, but can then vanish almost completely when lit from behind.

Williams made explicit use of this device in writing the stage

direction for *The Glass Menagerie*, so that scenes behind that gauze would appear or dissolve magically as they might in ones memory. Such devices as to Meilziner, the legendary set and lightning designer who work with both Williams and Miller, stressed “*were not just stage tricks*” when used by Williams, but “*A true reflection of the contemporary playwrights interest in- and at times obsession with – the exploration of the inner man – a phrase familiar among the artists of expressionism.*” *The Glass Menagerie* thus draws on an hybridises elements of realism, expressionism, and surrealism to create what it deals more than fifty years on- a highly original theatrical experience and a pioneer in the field of memory play.

Tennessee Williams uses the first scene of the play to introduce the mnemonic nature of the play. The desired perspective of the play remains the same for it does not present reality, but a subjective experience of it, focalised through the narrator Tom: “*(Tom) addresses the audience. To begin with, I turn back time... I am the narrator of the play, and also a character in it. The other characters are my mother, Amanda, My sister, Laura, and a gentleman caller... He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we are somehow set apart from. But since I have 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 live for*”

Once the audience recognises the play as Tom’s memory, the deft touch of Williams seduce the audience to adopt Tom’s point of view as its own. This process resembles the “*suture*” in cinema. Thus, Williams “*ascribes to a character within the drama, the control of the theatrical apparatus and at the same time, denies the existence of the playwright*” (Crandell, 1998)

“*Time is short and it doesn’t return again. It is slipping away while I write this and while you read it, and the monosyllable of the clock is loss, unless you denote your heart to its opposition.*” – Tennessee Williams.

Every literature is a memory play. Being a memory play, *The Glass Menagerie* can be presented with an unusual freedom of convention. Expressionism and all other unconventional technique dominates, having only one valid aim and that is a closer approach to truth. And as the play employs unconventional techniques, it is not trying to escape its responsibility of dealing with reality but it actually attempts to find a closer, more penetrating approach and vivid expression of things as they are.

The play opens with a scene setting narration from the story teller Tom, who comes out of the shadows as the stage magician, promising to explain the tricks in his pocket. Tom is dressed as a merchant sailor as if suggesting to us the idea of his being a merchant who deals in dreams, in whose bag we may find dreams and strangely recognize them as our own. Analysing the switching between monologue and scene, King comments in *Irony and Distance in The Glass Menagerie* that the playwright includes both non realistic and meta-theatrical elements in the opening scene to underline the mnemonic structure. Tom makes it clear that the play is a nostalgic portrayal of his “*emotions recollected in tranquillities*”. Tom is a creature of the shadows who never really admits what he has his tricks up his sleeves. He says that the play is memory and we know that it is also about forgetting. In another version

of *The Glass Menagerie*, a short story titled Portrait of a Girl in Glass, the narrator is more honest about what he remembers – “In five years time I have forgotten about home. I had forgotten. I couldn’t carry it with me.” This is what Tom would say to except that he is unable to shake his memory of home as he is never able to forget his sister – ‘Oh Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intend to be.’ Being a memory play, the narrator of the play, Tom also becomes a character in it. Tom, the narrator looks back with fond nostalgia and also with haunted guilt. Tom narrates the events recollected and reconstructed by his memory of them, memories which he remembers in order to forget. As his final speech makes particularly clear, Tom constantly reliving the past in his present. Tom tells us about the fifth character who doesn’t appear in the play, it is his father whose larger than life portrait looms over the living room setting. It seems to suggest that the size of the image has grown artificially large in his memory thereby reflecting the length of the shadow which the father’s memory still casts over the characters in the play. For Tom, Jim’s visits and the unfortunate incident that followed was the straw which finally broke his restraints. We thus understand that the entire play had been a general confession for Tom to relieve his guilt for leaving his family stranded to pursue his own dreams. Indeed he makes it tragically clear to us that escape didn’t mean freedom for him at all for he is relentlessly chain to his past the entire play it seems to the readers or audience that it has been an attempt on Tom’s part to exorcise the ghost of that night and now that the play is over the past reveals itself in the present as a painful pantomime and all that the audience is left with, his collapse of communication that the play has to communicate.

The timeless appeal of *The Glass Menagerie* lies in the fact that the play presents neither villains nor victims but characters who all are seeking in their own way “to do the right thing”. This is also what makes the play sentimental and moving for desperate for the desperate irony of the situation is that the individual seeking so often at cross purposes lead them inexorably to create their own individual tragedy. This concept is particularly true of Amanda Wingfield, mother to Tom and Laura. Amanda is a strong yet pathetic woman living in a world of sentimental illusions while stubbornly refusing to accept life with its drabness and absence of hope. She is the most obviously complex and multifaceted of all the characters and Williams acknowledges as much in his initial character notes. His description of “A little woman of great but confused vitality” immediately indicates some of her obvious contradictions as does he notes that “there is much to admire in Amanda as much there is to love and pity as to laugh at”

In Amanda, Williams presents us unapologetically, with a detailed portrait of his own mother Edwina Dabkin Williams. It is necessary for a play’s protagonist to go on an emotional journey and finally to be somehow changed by it but Amanda of all the characters in *The Glass Menagerie* is the one who changes least. She remains an unchangeable force rather than a dramatic subject capable of emotional evolution. Her concern for her children is often asphyxiating because of her fear of an uncertain future. Living in a world of sentimental illusion Amanda refuses to fully accept the apartment at St. Louis and its actual value with its drabness and absence of

hope. Like Blanche Dubois in A Streetcar Named Desire she is the aging southern belle, lamenting the loss of the old pre civil war days of debutante balls and gentlemen callers. This habit of recollecting the lost days is something which is highly satirical and ironic in Amanda for if she truly portrayed Edwina Williams who was born in 1884, Amanda would have been far too young to remember the pre-war days before 1861. Thus Williams makes it clear that Amanda’s memories are an inextricable mixture of fact and rose tinted fiction. In the play, Amanda regularly recalls how one Sunday afternoon, seventeen gentle man callers had called upon her in Mississippi. She talks of how she could have married anyone of those men. Instead she married a genial man working in a telephone factory who “fell in love with long distances. Far removed from the fertile cultivated soil of the south, Amanda and her family are transplanted to a northern urban area and left to eek a living. *The Glass Menagerie* is the most consciously autobiographical of Williams play and uncompromising tragic content of the author’s life blends into the literature of the play. Her character is also remarkable for the fact that in her Williams presents a detailed portrayal of his own mother whom he both adored and resented at the same time. In discarding the real father’s part – symbolized by the larger than life photograph on the wall – Williams found it necessary to endow the mother with some masculine practicality. She wants nothing more than to freeze time and in this, she mirrors a region whose mix of past grace and romantic fiction masks a sense of present decay. Indeed in the middle and late thirties, the myth of the antebellum south permeated the best selling novel by Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*. Hers is a mythology not of this world, but a mythology that only works on the fictional Tara. She betrays her deep understanding of their helplessness in a lost world: “I know your ambition do not lie in the warehouse... life’s not easy, it calls for Spartan endurance.” By the end of the play, “Now that we can not hear the mother’s speech” says Williams, “her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty”. The various roles that Amanda has been playing for so long the shrewish mother the coquettish belle (with Jim) and the ingratiating saleswoman – are also set aside, as if Amanda is most completely human as she lays aside her performance and allows simply humanity to determine her actions. We realize that Amanda is complex as she represents the extremely complex nature of human love as she comforts Laura with a depth of understanding known specially by those who has a capacity to love. The image lingers forever in Tom’s memory as he journeys through time.

In *The Glass Menagerie*, William presents a study of frustration narrated through the narrator-Tom’s recollections. Amanda Wingfield with her abandonment, Laura with her physically crippled self, Tom with his futile aspiration to be a poet, and Jim with his journey from being a somebody to anybody, are sentenced to solitary confinement inside their own lonely scheme as long as they live on the earth. The mother and the children oscillates between illusion and reality as Williams gives us “*Truth in the pleasant guise of illusion*”- truth that never spared by the illusion. The fragility of the human experiences is mirrored in the glass toy world in which Laura dwells and consoles her loneliness. Of the three Wingfields reality has by far the weakest grasp on Laura. The

private world in which she lives is comprised of glass animals- objects that, like Laura's inner life are fanciful and delicate. She is a dreamer, much like Walter in *A Raisin in the Sun* but unlike Walter, Laura does not dream of wealth and power, she simply dreams of beautiful things, not concrete things, but things that inspire feelings of freedom, joy and serenity. Jim used to call her "Blue Roses" and the audiences realize that it is an apt metaphor for her as it symbolizes both her unusualness and allure. Laura is presented as an extremely shy morbid and sensitive person, as fragile as the little glass animals and the old phonograph records which serves as an escape routes from the outside world. Her introvert self is in sharp contrast voluble, forceful and even brutal nature as she dwells in a world of candlelight and fantasy. Laura's encounter with the machine age is brief and useless. She could no more learn to type better than Tom could ever come to like his job in the warehouse. Yet, unlike Tom, Laura does not seem to feel the ugliness and entombment of their lives. She never steps into the world for fear of it being unbearable. Standing on the brink of it, with her own shell enclosing her, Laura catches the beauty of the world without, restraining herself to belong to it. Williams comments, "*Laura's separation increases till she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf.*" She takes her affliction as a dreadful predicament as her own self. This flaw, is symbol of the crippling a sensitive person thrust into a world unwilling to make allowances for sensitivity, becomes the cause of her separation from reality with the result that Laura is the furthest removed from the world. Although her physical handicapped appears to be slight, she has grown accustomed to her abnormality since childhood. Laura's withdrawal is severe enough to make her unable to cope with living beyond her phonograph and glass collection.

When Laura leaves the apartment to run an errand for her mother, she slips and falls on the fire escape. Even the steps connecting the apartment and the outside world proves dangerous for Laura – her complete vulnerability is something she has resigned to. When Amanda is lost in her own world of illusion – Blue Mountains and the seventeen gentlemen collars – Laura is slightly amused – "*mother's afraid I'm going to be an old maid.*" Although she is quite withdrawn, Laura knows that she is a problem both for her mother and her brother and this trouble is the result of what they believe and how they act and the view that they have of her rather than anything she consciously tries to impose on them. There is no desperation or nervous urgency in Laura's going to "*the art museum and the birdhouse at the zoo*" to the movies to the green house for tropical flowers. She would be content in her own world, willing to admit anyone such as the gentleman caller – Jim O' Connor whose interest in her glass collection results in a passionate reply – "*My glass collection takes of a good deal of time. Glass is something you have to take good care of... most of them are little animals made out of glass, the tiniest little animals in the world. Mother calls them a glass menagerie!*" Perceptive of others feelings, Laura senses her mother's need to romanticize her own past. When Amanda is about to talk of Blue Mountains and seventeen gentlemen callers, Tom is exasperated – "*I know what's coming!*" And Laura snubs him gently "*Yes, but let her tell it.*" She stands in between her mother and Tom and suffers in their ugly wrangling. Laura is

her own self with Jim and as he enters her world of glass, she journeys into his. Jim's response to her differences causes her to forget her disability. When the young man breaks the horn of the unicorn – the one element that had made it unique – she is not disturbed. Symbolically, her calmness represents her desires to be normal and not remain a unique individual – distinct from others. As Jim is about to leave, Amanda requests him to come back soon for other good times, but Jim turns down the suggestion, explaining his engagement to another girl whom he plans to marry soon. This dismantles Laura's newfound confidence, as she sends forth the broken unicorn with Jim before relapsing in her former dream world. Laura emerges pitiful in her failure brought about by the malignant and implacable fate. For her there is nothing to be done and there is only 'nothing' to be done. Wang Ning in *Memory Colour in The Glass Menagerie* comments, "*Although Laura put them out, the powerful memory would still haunt in Tom's mind and continued to exert some influence upon him. The Glass Menagerie, beginning with memory and ending with memory, leaves readers an abundant imagination.*" As Laura blows out the candles, the audience is left to recognize the sins of the world and the beauty of *The Glass Menagerie* in the realization offered that Everyman is doomed the day he is born and yet the struggle becomes the most significant episode of life as it has been for Laura.

Memory operates through transformation and selection and Williams, well aware of the schematics, uses non-verbal meta-theatrical elements to emphasise these operations. He takes the subjectivity of the process of remembering as the basis for the drama by taking the entire play as a reconstruction of the protagonist Tom's memories. Psychoanalyst Kris terms it a personal myth for the protagonist and narrator Tom presents the audience with his memories which are but plastic and may be reshaped in degrees of psychological necessity. The dramaturgy of the play reflects the workings of Tom's autobiographical memory in a variety of ways. On top of the subjectivity of the normal memories, Tom's subjectivity is demonstrated through the adoption of what Casey terms as "*schematicness*". In conclusion it may be said that by staging the process of founding a personal myth from memories, Williams on one hand invents a true "*memory play*" while on the other hand, creating for himself the possibility to expand the boundaries of theatricality for memories adhere not to the concrete laws of realism making the play, in the words of Jacobs, "*A brilliant, profound and intricate study of declarative memory and its psychological uses.*"

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