

✦ Reality and illusions leading to deeper meanings of life in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*

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Bearing in mind that reality and illusions are in fact two very important devices Tennessee Williams has always made use of, it is no wonder that these two devices play a vital role in the case of *The Glass Menagerie*, for a great number of reasons. These reasons may be said to range from the peculiarities of setting that the play requires, for example, to the characters' particular way of coping with their fantasies. Besides, the fierce reality of the 1930's can be said to have forced them to establish a very idiosyncratic manner to escape a world extremely frustrating for them to face.

Actually, the political economic and social effervescences America and the rest of the world were experiencing at that time were no doubt the foreshadowing of the onrushing conflicts irrevocably leading the world to the greatest world war in the twentieth century. Thus, some of the puzzling questions T. Williams posits in *The Glass Menagerie* are: how could individuals insert themselves in the disgusting turmoil of such a harsh reality? Should they face reality as it was or retreat into their comfortable illusionary world, of which they could keep perfect control?

T. Williams then shows the way his characters manage to cope with such hard questions as they look for protection against the outside destruction in their private glass menageries. Laura is the most radical example of this type of alienation. So, by also giving focus to other major themes, such as loneliness and family disintegration, T. Williams tactfully deals with the menacing scenery of a "world waiting for bombardments" as he goes on mixing reality and illusions on all levels to get closer to individual and universal truth.

The slow intermingling of reality and illusions which takes place in the play as it develops weaves a network of meaningful messages that bewilders the audience and readers at the play's conclusion, as well as points to deeper meanings of life, including both individual and social dimensions in their scope.

Given these preliminary notes, and before analyzing the importance of reality and illusions in *The Glass Menagerie*, it is a good idea to take into consideration T. Williams' desire to present his play with unusual freedom from convention so as to achieve truth in a more genuine way.

In this respect, he puts forth some words about the play's construction and production, in his "production notes" to the play: "Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth, (...) a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are" (WILLIAMS, 1962, p. 229).

In fact, T. Williams makes use of plenty of unconventional techniques, which gives the play an expressionist touch. Doing so, he uses a lot of "poetic license" to achieve reality and truth. One of these techniques is the use of a screen on which are projected magic lantern slides bearing images or titles. According to what T. Williams states in his "production notes", such a device, besides being full of "emotional appeal", is also relevant because: "The legend or image upon the screen will strengthen the effect of what is merely illusion in the writing and allow the primary point to be made more simply and lightly than if the entire responsibility were on the spoken lines" (p. 230).

Another extra-literary accent is provided by the use of music. A single recurring tune, "*The Glass Menagerie*", is used whenever there is the necessity to give emotional emphasis to suitable passages. In T. Williams' words, this tune that seems circus music "is the lightest, most delicate music in the world and perhaps the saddest. It expresses the surface vivacity of life with the underlying strain of immutable

and inexpressible sorrow”(p. 231).

"The Glass Menagerie" is, therefore, Laura's music, and come out most clearly when the play focuses upon her and the fragility of what is in fact her image, Laura's collection of glass figurines.

The use of lighting is another meaningful device to help establish the atmosphere of memory. The stage is dim, but in several scenes shafts of light are focused on selected areas or actors, sometimes in contradistinction to what is the apparent center. The quarrel scene between Tom and Amanda is a good example of that, because the clearest pool of light is on Laura's figure, and Laura does not take an active part in the scene. This was so because T. Williams believed that: "A free and imaginative use of light can be of enormous value in giving a mobile, plastic quality to the plays of a more or less static nature (p.231). "

Now, drawing attention to another remarkable device T. Williams uses in *The Glass Menagerie*, we must approach the characters themselves, their view of reality, and their use of illusions as a defense mechanism of escapism to protect themselves from a reality which is oppressive and ultimately destructive.

Before analyzing each character's behavior in relation to the way he/she deals with reality and illusions, it is indispensable to dedicate special attention to the role Tom performs in the play. Such a function will ultimately determine and even control the other characters' performance. Indeed, T. Williams' creation of a character who also performs the role of narrator attributes to Tom a sort of magic power not only over the other characters, but also over the audience.

The other characters in the play can be said to have been invoked from the depths of Tom's memory, so that the essence of their inner reality depends upon Tom's will. Tom's prominent role gives rise to such extreme interpretations as the following one, by Thomas L. King:

Tom is the only character in the play, for we see not the characters but Tom's memory of them - Amanda and the rest are merely aspects of Tom's consciousness. Tom's St. Louis is not an objective one, but a solipsist's created by Tom, the artist-magician, and containing Amanda, Laura, and the gentleman caller. Tom is the Prospero of *The Glass Menagerie*, and, its world is the world of Tom's mind (. ..) (KING, 1987, p. 76).

Although we may consider such an affirmation an exaggeration, it is true that references to magic and magician's tricks abound in the speeches of Tom. For instance, in his opening soliloquy in scene one, we have the first depiction of such a powerful capacity of manipulating reality and illusions, and even turning back time:

Tom: "Yes, I have tricks in my pocket. 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. To begin with, I turn back time. I reverse it to that quaint period, the thirties, when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind" (. ..) (WILLIAMS, 1962, p. 234).

In other words, we could say that Tom presents the audience "truth in the pleasant disguise of illusions", because, by means of recalling his own memories ("illusions"), he bestows a large vision of life's meaning on the audience and readers ("truth").

In this concern, it is also appropriate to quote what Eliane Borges Berutti says about Tom's capacity of maneuvering the audience: "In spite of Tom's twofold fragmentation he manages to organize his memories presenting himself and the other characters in such a coherent way that the audience accepts his "magic tricks" (BERUTTI, 1988-1989, p. 81).

So, it is equally coherent to state that Tom is in fact the great manipulator of his truth and illusions, interchanging them, before the audience, in order to make the audience aware of a reality far beyond the scope of the characters' individual dilemmas.

Interestingly, as a character, Tom is bound by constraints that do not affect him as the play's narrator. As such, Tom knows what will happen and has an opinion about the meaning of events onstage, just as Tom Wingfield, character, "(...) who is painfully aware of the illusionary lives of his sister and mother, is also aware that he leads one too", as Benjamin Nelson states (1965, p. 20).

Nevertheless, according to Delma E. Presley, "to appreciate the function of Tom as a character in the play, one must distinguish him from his role as a narrator" (1990, p. 49). She continues discussing the topic saying that, according to what T. Williams points out, the narrator in sailor's clothing "takes whatever license with dramatic convention as is convenient to his purposes" (p. 49). So, it is no wonder that Tom as narrator then happens to hold vivid memories of four people, one of whom is himself before he left home some years earlier.

Another fact worth noting here is that Tom, like the other three characters, needs illusions to make reality more bearable, whereas Tom, as narrator, does not seem to be so affected by the clash between his reality and his illusions, for he counts on an extra defense mechanism to protect himself: the use of irony and distance. In this respect, Thomas L. King says that:

The nature of the narrator's role as an artist figure is indicated by Tom's behavior in the scenes. He protects himself from the savage in-fighting in the apartment by maintaining distance between himself and the pain of the situation through irony (KING, 1987, p. 76- 77).

This revelation of Tom as an artist, I mean, the comparison of his role with the role of an artist in relation to what he creates is based on the commentaries which he provides while outside the scenes and speaking to the audience. Such a role also brings up the fact that Tom as narrator (like an artist) creates, using the raw material of his own life.

As to the manner the other characters cope with reality and illusions, it is interesting to quote Benjamin Nelson in this respect: "In *The Glass Menagerie*, each of the four characters manifest this theme. Each individual in the play uses illusions to protect himself from a reality which is oppressive and ultimately destructive (NELSON, 1965, p. 19).

Laura and her world of glass figurines represent the most obvious use of illusion, mainly because her glass menagerie world ends up becoming more "real" than the world outside, from which she isolates herself so much up to the point of finally becoming "a fragile piece of glass, lost forever in the illusionary world she has created", as Benjamin Nelson observes (1965, p. 19). T. Williams also puts forth some words about Laura's situation: "(...) Laura's separation increases till she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf " (WILLIAMS, 1962, p. 228).

However, Laura's routine goes a little beyond her caring for her glass menagerie.

She also listens to music, which is occasionally interrupted by domestic chores and conversation with her mother and brother.

Laura has given up trying to be "normal". After Jim tells her he is engaged, she offers him the symbol of

herself, the broken unicorn. Once more playing the role of victim, she closes the play by extinguishing light.

Delma E. Presley's opinion in this regard is that: "The act is Laura's bleak affirmation of truth -her ultimate withdrawal into the dark of the shadows of herself' (PRESLEY, 1990, p.43), while Bigsby considers that what happened to Laura (and, by extension, to most of Williams' and Arthur Miller's characters) is natural consequence of the fact "the individual is seen as the victim of forces beyond his or her control" (BIGSBY, 1989, p. 38).

Prior to finally retreating into her idealized world of unreality, Laura had already undergone a gradual process of isolation from the world outside. She did so by quitting Rubicam's Business College, and by developing an inferiority complex, not easy to overcome at all, according to "Jim's diagnosis" of her situation. But her problem is graver by far than those caused by a mere inferiority complex. Consequently, Jim's endeavor to bring Laura back into the real world in scene seven, by plausibly claiming that her physical defect was not a true obstacle to leading a normal life, proved to be completely useless:

Jim: (...) You dropped out of school, you gave up an education because of a clump, which as far as I know was practically non-existent! A little physical defect is what you have. Hardly noticeable even! Magnified thousands of times by imagination: (WILLIAMS, 1962, p. 299).

As Bigsby observes, Laura's limp was not really totally disabling, but it was a symbol of a more serious handicap; as he writes:

All of Williams' characters are crippled in one sense or another - emotionally, spiritually - and out of that imperfection there comes a need which generates the illusions with which they fill their world, the art which they set up against reality (BIGSBY, 1989, p. 49).

For the sake of illustration, then, we can appropriately apply Bigsby's affirmation to the situation of Blanche Dubois, in *A Streetcar Name Desire*, and Brick's, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, as both of them were undeniably emotionally crippled. Besides, Brick stands for an even more complete identification with Laura, for both of them are presented as physically handicapped, regardless of the fact that Brick was temporarily in such a condition, on account of an accident he had had. Anyway, Brick's illusionary way to escape his cruel reality was to stick to his drunkenness, just as Laura's way was to isolate herself in her illusionary world of glass animals.

As far as Amanda Wingfield is concerned, T. Williams' first words on her in his "production notes" establish an initial satisfactory parameter for one to insert her into the illusionary atmosphere of the play.

He affirms that she is "a woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place" (WILLIAMS, 1962, p. 227). She seems to be the character possessing the greatest capacity to bring the idealized elements of a once glorious South into a frustrating present. Whenever reality becomes too overpowering for her, she invokes her world of gracious living and gallant sentiments she says she has had in Blue Mountain, her homeland of memory. In a word, she recalls her illusionary world of gentlemen callers, rides in the country, jonquils, banquets and balls, which also reminds us of the Blanche Dubois's illusionary world, too.

However, if one tries to question the truthfulness of Amanda's reminiscences, his attempts will

irrevocably prove fruitless, because, as Delma E. Presley observes: "Amandas's version of the past is both a private and a public myth" (1990, p. 35). In fact, it is as well useless admitting that Amanda has lost her mental balance on account of the undeniable fact that her real past had not been exactly the way she used to depict it in her conversations with her offspring. In this regard, Delma E. Presley still points out an interesting view about Amanda's past: "One might think she grew up during the days of plantation slavery. In fact she is using the language of myth that had wide currency during her youth. She certainly did not invent the myth" (PRESLEY, 1990, p. 35).

In fact, she inherited a view of the world that inspired many Americans living in the Deep South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That is why the myth of the Antebellum South permeated people's minds in the middle and late 1930's, of which the striking success of Margaret Mitchell's best-selling novel *Gone With The Wind* was the most perfect example.

Amanda oscillates from her illusions to reality in a very natural way, without ever being wholly lost in her illusionary world. In scene one, Amanda pretends to be a servant, while Laura is supposed to keep herself "fresh and pretty" for gentlemen callers. Ignoring her daughter's comment that she did not expect any visitors, she starts out a familiar reverie, about "one Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain", in which she received seventeen gentlemen callers, in the attempt to influence her children's mood, using the radiance of her remembrances.

Another time, in scene six, Amanda suffers such a deep transformation in her own appearance that both audience and readers (and characters) get the clear impression that Amanda is impersonating another character. She is not then the same middle-aged woman, but a truly pretty and fresh Southern girl. Even the image that appears on the screen is that of "Amanda as a girl" (p. 284).

At this point, it is obvious that Amanda is trying to set up a trap for Jim, performing the role Laura is not able to, as can be seen in the following passage in scene six, when she springs up before Jim and Tom:

Tom is distinctly shocked at her appearance. Even Jim blinks a little. He is making his first contact with girlish Southern vivacity and in spite of the night-school course in public speaking is somewhat thrown off the beam by the unexpected outlay of social charm. Certain responses are attempted by Jim but are swept aside by Amanda's gay laughter and chatter. (...) Jim reacts very warmly. Grins and chuckles, is altogether won over (WILLIAMS, 1962, p. 284).

In a word, even though oscillating from reality to her fantasies, and vice-versa, Amanda's actions reveal a relatively pragmatic view of things. She aims at finding a way out of engulfment, and is really worried about her children's future. But all she reaps are the bitter consequences of deception. She was deceived by her husband, who deserted her with two children; she has also been the victim of deception by Laura, who pretended to attend school; and by Tom, who failed to pay the light bill and deserted her and Laura, just as her husband had done. Even Jim O'Connor deceives her when he says he is engaged, defeating her plans to marry off Laura.

Curiously, even when Amanda is overwhelmingly defeated at the end of the play, her endurance emphasizes her heroic nature, for she continues to give some emotional support to Laura. It also proves what Benjamin Nelson states in relation to Amanda's illusions: "Her illusions are never totally paralyzing" (1965, p. 20).

When it comes to Jim O'Connor, "a nice and ordinary man", as Tom defines him, it is easy to find that he shares with Amanda the belief in the American Dream. Living in the period of the dissolving economy of the 1930's, he still believes in his future and studies at night in order to invest in a promising career through television, as he justifies in scene seven, while talking to Laura about his professional plans:

JIM: (...) I believe in the future of television ! ...I wish to be ready to go up right along with it, Therefore I'm planning to get it on the ground floor. In fact, I've already made the right connexions and all that remains is for industry itself to get under way! Full steam - knowledge -Zzzzzp! Money -Zzzzzp! -Power! That is the cycle democracy is built on! (WILLIAMAS, 1962, p. 299-300).

Thus, at the same time he embodies some of the materialistic values of modern capitalism, he equally symbolizes millions of American middle-class citizens who "were matriculating in a school for the blind", in Tom's words (WILLIAMS, 1962, p. 234).

Consequently, he shows complete alienation from the essence of the reality of his social environment. In fact, Jim and the rest of the American population were sort of mesmerized by their illusions. Nevertheless, seen through the eyes of Amanda, Jim is fundamentally a potential husband for Laura. Besides, having a "heroic" past, he believes in his future career, does not drink, and attends school, where he pursues his interests in radio engineering and public speaking. But what is real and striking about him is that he has been working at a simple warehouse for years, in which he has a completely unimportant job, just as Tom does.

Because he fools himself with his beliefs in the American Dream, Jim is also one among millions of Americans who refused to face things as they really were: the American economy was collapsing, and the rest of the world was entering a serious crisis that would result in another world war. However, as Benjamin Nelson observes: "Jim O'Connor is spoken of by Tom as an emissary from a world of reality, and when compared to the members of the Wingfield family, he seems to possess a greater awareness and ability to cope with life than they do" (NELSON, 1965, p. 20).

In light of Jim's illusions, it may seem a little contradictory to admit Jim's role as "emissary from a world of reality" whose function is to bring Laura back to reality. Nevertheless, it makes sense if we keep in mind that Jim and the whole American society were trapped by the same illusions they all needed to make life bearable. So, they were not completely different from Laura. The difference between them was that the latter was much ahead of them in her process of isolation; she was almost crystallized in her world of glass figurines.

Tom's description of Jim as "the long delayed but always expected something that we live for" implies that Laura's brother and mother had a lot of hopes that Jim could save Laura, get married to her, and thus rid Amanda and Tom of the burden Laura represented to them. However, their hopes were short-lived, for destruction is almost always inevitably implied in T. William's universe.

Undoubtedly, the characters' illusions seem to be the only world which offers them refuge from the harsh reality they cannot face. It also seems that Tom's father was the only one who really managed to escape the determinism of frustration and fragmentation. Thus, Tom's fragmentation (represented by his double role as protagonist and narrator; his escapism from the engulfing atmosphere of their apartment by "experiencing" the adventures of actors in the movies; and, finally, by constantly being haunted by guilt for deserting a mother and an unmarried sister) extends to the other characters, according to Eliane B. Berutti:

Laura resorts to her glass animals and music to compensate for it, (...) Amanda compensates for her through her remembrances of the Old South and her idealized past. Likewise, Jim, the gentleman caller, tries to hide his own incompleteness through the memory of his glorious days in high school as well as through his belief in a brilliant future career (WILLIAMS, 1962, p. 81).

In a word, in *The Glass Menagerie*, as in some other plays by T. Williams, the characters manipulate their illusions as a useless attempt at escaping “a fundamental determinism –social, environmental and psychological”, as Bigsby points out (p.42). Not only does Laura have her glass menagerie, but all the other characters have their own versions of it, too. They symbolize then the sensitive, fragile human beings who either depend “on the kindness of strangers”, as uttered by Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, or rely on “the long delayed but always expected Jim O'Coonors”, as put forth by Tom Wingfield, to lead them out of their worlds of illusions. However, almost always, the warping of their ideals and the stultification of their aspirations are the common results of their efforts.

Lack of communication is another factor that reinforces the characters' isolation from one another. In the majority of the dialogues in the play, Amanda is either talking to her offspring about her nostalgic remembrances or uttering remarks about how Tom is supposed to behave at the table, for instance. Seemingly, Amanda's recurring pieces of advice to Laura on how to keep “fresh and pretty” in order “to trap” gentlemen callers cannot be neglected, for they all signal people's separation (and loneliness, by implication), even on the level of dialogue, in the 1930's, primarily speaking, as well as in any other historical period in which social crises bring about individual and social disturbances.

In spite of the great number of meaningless speeches abounding in the play, Laura's long conversation to Jim in scene seven actually represents a rare instance in which genuine communication could lead characters to awareness and then even to a way out of engulfment. Nevertheless, the vivacity of such a conversation fades away – for its final revelation is much too full of unbearable harsh reality -, and Laura retreats into her illusionary world of glass figurines. But a vital question remains unanswered: even though Jim tells Laura he is engaged to another girl, it is quite possible he may have invented that to escape the trap set up for him. So, whether that was the truth (“reality”) or a lie (“illusion”, to deceive the Wingfields), nobody will ever know. They had to rely on Jim's words, even though not even Tom nor anybody else at the warehouse had ever heard of Jim's fiancée. In addition, regardless of its truthfulness, such a fact brings up the poor level of communication between Tom and his best friend Jim, and between them and the people from the warehouse they work at.

Consequently, it appears that lack of communication is really one of the most appropriate devices for T. Williams to make use of, since it provides an efficient way to facilitate the character's detachment from reality, besides helping depict a phenomenon that also takes place in the real lives of individuals, causing pain and suffering: isolation.

The characters' movements to and fro between illusions and reality, and their final withdrawal to their unreal worlds, unquestionably represent their own psychological dilemmas. However, they also stand for a broader social dimension in *The Glass Menagerie*, with which Eliane Borges Berutti agrees when she compares the play's characters to the American society of the 1930's: “The play could also be considered a mirror reflecting the fragmentation of society and, in particular, the alienation of the American one” (p. 85). And that is precisely why the play does not only stand for the role of an American memory, but its universality goes far beyond the boundaries of America, as Delma E. Presley observes: “The play's universal human appeal transcends regions, cultures and nations” (p. 55) Such a universality of themes brings about the intermingling of reality and illusions, which ultimately determines transformations both in the lives of individuals and in society as a whole.

With reference to the way T. Williams approaches the individual's dilemmas, the question of autobiographical implications in *The Glass Menagerie* must not be neglected. In fact, T. Williams' masterly manipulation of illusions and reality conveys, in an accurate manner, the painful experiences of his characters, which are, ultimately, his own, in many cases.

This condition of taking the raw and painful material of the artist's life into art was long ago been registered by the great Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, in the first stanza of his poem “Autopsicografia”, as follows:

O poeta é um fingidor.

Finge tão completamente

Que chega a fingir que é dor

A dor que deveras sente. (...) (PESSOA, 1981, p.201)

In this respect, T. Williams once said: "I am Blanche Dubois", just as Flaubert had done in relation to his most famous female character, Madam Bovary. So, as far as *The Glass Menagerie* is concerned, we could also say that Thomas Lanier Williams (T. Williams' real name) was Tom Wingfield, for a number of reasons. Ruth Persice Nogueira, for instance, refers to such an identification between playwright and character in the part of her article giving an account of the long period of decadence experienced by T. Williams, before he died:

(...) Mas o jovem Tom Wingfield já não existia mais, e Williams não podia voltar a escrever como antes, como explicara certa vez: "All work is autobiographical if it's serious. Everything a writer produces is his inner history, transposed into another time. I am more personal in my writing than other people, and it may have gone against me" (NOGUEIRA, 1994, p. 131).

Thus, the so-called raw material of the artist's life (reality, truth) is transposed into the fictional world of his art (illusions -? -), in order to reach "a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are", as T. Williams himself observes (p.229). In light of this, the autobiographical implications are a common feature in his works as a whole, and are particularly striking in *The Glass Menagerie*. To begin with, Tom Wingfield's talent for writing poetry, his extreme fondness for adventure, and his final withdrawal from the engulfing atmosphere of the Wingfields' apartment in St. Louis, reveal a large identification between character and playwright. Besides giving Tom his own name, T. Williams also lived in St. Louis, and had a sister, Rose, of whom Laura is a clear representation.

Tennessee Williams had loved Rose so much that *The Glass Menagerie* is said to be his poignant and powerful testament to his sister's plight. In 1937, after her nervousness and anxiety became pronounced, Rose was placed in a mental institution. Some time afterwards, -and without T. Williams' knowledge and permission-, his parents allowed Rose's doctor to treat her with a new neurosurgical technique: the prefrontal lobotomy. As a result, she actually got calmer, though she was institutionalized for the rest of her life.

T. Williams never forgave himself for that and since then always felt guilty of his sister's irretrievable alienation. So, Laura is no doubt a tribute of love to his sister. Such a distressing memory continually haunted T. Williams throughout his life.

Besides Williams' evident signs of identification with Tom, it seems that we can see in Tom's obscure behavior some hints of T. Williams' personality traits. For instance, even though there is no clear reference to homosexuality in *The Glass Menagerie* (unlike the case of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, for example), Tom never refers to any relationship with girls, and his way to deal with affections is never mentioned. In addition, his joining the Merchant Marine stressed both his loneliness and his separation from women, besides suggesting the future compulsory male companionship Tom would be subjected to. That is why, within reason and limits, Tom's behavior may hint at T. Williams' homosexuality.

In spite of the many other autobiographical implications the character/playwright relation may offer, the characters/society relation also merit attention, because, as Benjamin Nelson points out, "the Wingfields become a microcosm for the entire country" (p. 20). In fact, the Depression, the sky-rocketing unemployment rates around the country, and the consequent onrushing, composed the harsh reality the

Wingfields and almost all American families were desperately trying to escape, through dance, music, sex, and alcohol. In a word, they were struggling to find their fragile glass menageries to run away from the meaningless harshness of the world outside.

Finally, T. Williams' manipulation of reality and illusions, which bewilders readers and audience, and conveys such rich psychological and social implications, is reinforced by the use of another device: the suspension of time. As Bigsby points out:

The suspension of time in a play, or perhaps its radical foreshortening, permits the writer and his audience to abstract the individual from the obscuring random occurrences of everyday life in order to detect meaning in the heart of chaos and to give value to those lives behind by the rush of history (BIGSBY, 1989, P. 46).

The suspension of time itself then reinforces the prominence of the psychological time, the magic time of memory, in which Tom's painful experiences didn't belong exclusively to his past, for they imposed their timeless reality on him. Consequently, by turning back time, he had to face the truth from which no form of escapism could protect him, because his past meant something stronger by far than simple remembrances, but acknowledged the essence of the human beings' deep-rooted emotions.

That was then the great achievement of T. Williams in *The Glass Menagerie*: using the screen device, special lighting, transparent walls, and music, he creates the perfect setting to give shape to the characters' fantasies and then offer us "truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion", as he himself puts forth in the opening soliloquy (p. 234). Therefore, giving life to Tom Wingfield's memories, he bestowed meaning not only on the life of the blind American middle class citizens of the 1930's, but on chaotic human existence as a whole.

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