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The Glass Menagerie
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf

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THE GLASS MENAGERIE

BY

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: THE AUTHOR AND HIS TIMES

The Glass Menagerie was Tennessee Williams' first successful play. It won the New York Critics' Circle Award as the best play of the 1944-45 Broadway season. Less than three years later, A Streetcar Named Desire opened. It, too, captured the Critics' Circle Award and also won the Pulitzer Prize.

With these achievements Tennessee Williams earned fame and lots of money. He was declared one of the best modern playwrights. Had he never written another word, his place on the roster of great artists would still be secure. Usually, he's named with Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller as one of the three leading American dramatists of the 20th century.

That's not a bad record for a man of thirty-six. At the time, however, Williams would gladly have given away his success. He liked his plays, but he hated being a celebrity. Success depressed him. As a young man who achieved great success, he suddenly missed the challenges of life. Perhaps you can understand his reaction. Many people who reach glory at an early age realize the emptiness of fame. Autograph seekers depressed him. Strangers who told him "I loved your play" annoyed him. Praise bothered him. He even suspected his friends of false affection. And he felt constant pressure for the rest of his life to write plays as good as Menagerie and Streetcar.

Williams found relief from the public in a hospital, of all places. He needed an eye operation. When the gauze mask was removed from his face, he viewed his life more clearly, both literally and figuratively. He checked out of his posh New York hotel and escaped to Mexico, where, as a stranger, he could be his former self again.

His former self was Thomas Lanier Williams of Columbus, Mississippi, where he was born in 1911. His maternal grandfather was Columbus' Episcopalian rector. His mother, Edwina, valued refinement and the good manners of Southern gentry. She made sure that Tom and his sister Rose grew up having both. His father, on the other hand, paid little attention to good breeding and culture. He was more fond of a game of poker and a tall glass of whiskey. A traveling salesman, he lived out of suitcases and had little time for his children. Returning from road trips, however, he often criticized his wife for turning young Tom into a sissy.

When Mr. Williams, known as C.C., got an office job with the International Shoe Company, the family settled in St. Louis. Rose and Tom became city children. They played in littered alleys where dogs and cats roamed at night. Or they holed up in a small dark bedroom to play with Rose's prized collection of small glass animals.

Having C.C. around the house strained everyone in the family. C.C. fought with Edwina, disparaged Rose, and sometimes beat Tom. Eventually, he deserted the family altogether, but not until Rose, Tom, and a younger brother, Dakin, had reached adulthood.

Of the three Williams children, Rose had the hardest time growing up. During the early years she and Tom were as close as a sister and brother can be, but in her teens she developed symptoms of insanity. She withdrew into a private mental world. Mrs. Williams could not accept her daughter's illness and tried repeatedly to force friends on her. She enrolled Rose in a secretarial course, but that didn't help Rose's condition either. Diagnosed as a schizophrenic, Rose was put in a mental institution. In 1937 brain surgery turned her into a harmless, childlike woman for the rest of her life.

Tom, who loved Rose dearly, heaped blame for Rose's madness on himself. Not even he understood why. But as he saw it, Rose's terrors started at about the

time when he began to feel the irresistible urges of homosexuality. At the time--long before the advent of gay rights--to be a homosexual meant being an outcast. You were scorned and abused, and you were made to feel excruciating guilt. Rose's condition had no bearing on Tom's self-realization, nor did his sexual preferences trigger Rose's breakdown. Yet, the two events became strangely interlocked in Tom's thinking.

In the agonies of his family Williams found the stuff of his plays. He hardly disguised his parents, his sister and himself when he cast them as characters on the stage. Places where he lived became settings, and he adapted plots from life's experiences. He relived the past as he wrote. ("The play is memory," says Tom, the character in The Glass Menagerie.) He wrote about what he knew best--himself. Perhaps that's why the plays, although considered dream-like and unreal, can nevertheless, like magic, give you illusion that has the appearance of truth. They often contain an intense passion that could come from only one source, the heart and soul of the playwright.

After high school, Williams went to the University of Missouri to study journalism. His father pulled him out after two years for making low grades and sent him to work at the shoe company. It was a dead-end job, but it gave Tom a chance to do what he loved best--to write. He pushed himself hard to master the art of writing. When the words came slowly, he grew tense. He ate little, smoked constantly and drank only black coffee. After two years his health broke. The doctor ordered him to quit the shoe company.

He enrolled in a play writing course at Washington University in St. Louis. He also started to read widely in world literature. From the Russian Chekhov, he discovered how to make dialogue reveal character. From plays by Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist, Williams learned the art of creating truth on the stage. Williams owed his fascination with uninhibited sexuality partly to the English writer D. H. Lawrence. He also studied the works of the master Swedish playwright August Strindberg for insights into dramatizing inner psychological

strife. Through a friend Williams discovered the American poet Hart Crane, whose lyrical lines and brief tragic life struck a responsive chord in Williams. In all, Williams' prolific reading gave his own writing a boost.

Tom finished his formal schooling at the University of Iowa. When he left there in 1938 he adopted the name "Tennessee." Over the years he offered varying explanations for the new name. It was distinctive. It was a college nickname. It expressed his desire to break away from the crowd, just as his father's pioneering ancestors had done when they helped to settle the state of Tennessee.

With his pen and pad he roamed the United States. Says Tom in The Glass Menagerie, "The cities swept about me like dead leaves"--New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Key West, Florida. Also New Orleans, the city of streetcars, including one named "Desire." He wrote stories, poems, even a first play that flopped in Boston. Eventually, he landed a job in California writing screenplays for MGM. But he despised taking others' stories and turning them into movies. He wanted to do originals. While in Hollywood, he wrote a movie script entitled The Gentleman Caller. When MGM rejected it, Williams quit his job, transformed the script into a play, and called it The Glass Menagerie. The play opened on Broadway in March, 1945, and altered Williams' life. The years of personal struggle to make it big were over.

After moving to Mexico, he turned out a second masterpiece--A Streetcar Named Desire--which reached Broadway in December, 1947. In Streetcar, as in The Glass Menagerie, he shaped the story from his own experience. If you combine Williams' mother, the genteel and prudish Southern lady, with Rose, the fragile sister, you get Blanche. Williams knew firsthand what happens when a brute like Stanley clashes with a refined lady like Blanche. He saw it almost daily in his parents' stormy marriage.

After Streetcar Williams turned out plays almost every other season for thirty-five years. According to critics, though, after the 1940's Williams never again reached the heights of Menagerie and Streetcar. He reused material and seemed continually preoccupied with the same themes and with characters trapped in their own private versions of hell. Although many later plays lacked freshness, others were smash hits and have since joined the ranks of the finest American plays. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof won drama prizes in 1955, and Night of the Iguana earned honors in 1961.

Because of movies, however, the titles of some of his plays, such as Suddenly Last Summer and The Fugitive Kind have become familiar, even to people who have never seen a Williams stage play. Some Williams plays (and movies) caused a sensation because they deal with homosexuality and incest, topics that had been more or less off limits on the stage and screen until Williams came along. People flocked to Williams movies to see stars like Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton and Paul Newman. In the film of A Streetcar Named Desire, Marlon Brando and Vivian Leigh gave magnificent performances as Stanley and Blanche.

All of Williams' plays illustrate a dark vision of life, a vision that grew dimmer as the years went by. During his last years Williams kept writing, but one play after the other failed. To ease his pain, Williams turned to drink and drugs. His eyes needed several operations for cataracts. The new plays received terrible notices, driving him deeper into addiction. He died in a New York hotel room in 1983. Police reports say that pills were found under his body.

Williams left behind an impressive collection of work. His plays continue to move people by their richness, intensity of feeling, and timelessness. He often transformed private experience into public drama. In doing so, he gave us glimpses into a world most of us have never seen before. Yet, the plays make Williams' fears, passions, and joys ours as well. Few artists will ever leave behind a more personal and intense legacy.

The Glass Menagerie

By Tennessee Williams, 1944

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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, and 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.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Being a ‘memory play’, The Glass Menagerie can be presented with unusual freedom from convention. Because of its considerably delicate or tenuous material, atmospheric touches and subtleties of direction play a particularly important part. Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth. 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. The straight realistic play with its genuine frigidaire and authentic icecubes, its characters that speak exactly as its audience speaks, corresponds to the academic landscape and has the same 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.

These remarks are not meant as a preface only to this particular play. They have to do with a conception of a new, plastic theatre which must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions if the theatre is to resume vitality as a part of our culture.

THE MUSIC

Another extra-literary accent in this play is provided by the use of music. A single recurring time, 'The Glass Menagerie', is used to give emotional emphasis to suitable passages. This time is like circus music, not when you are on the grounds or in the immediate vicinity of the parade, but when you are at some distance and very likely thinking of something else. It seems under those circumstances to continue almost interminably and it weaves in and out of your preoccupied consciousness; then it 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. When you look at a piece of delicately spun glass you think of two things: how beautiful it is and how easily it can be broken. Both of those ideas should be woven into the

recurring tune, which dips in and out of the play as if it were carried on a wind that changes. It serves as a thread of connection and allusion between the narrator with his separate point in time and space and the subject of his story. Between each episode it returns as reference to the emotion, nostalgia, which is the first condition of the play. It is primarily Laura's music and therefore comes out most clearly when the play focuses upon her and the lovely fragility of glass which is her image.

THE LIGHTING

The lighting in the play is not realistic. In keeping with the atmosphere of memory, the stage is dim. Shafts of light are focused on selected areas or actors, sometimes in contradistinction to what is the apparent centre. For instance, in the quarrel scene between Tom and Amanda in which Laura has no active part, the clearest pool of light is on her figure. This is also true of the supper scene, when her silent figure on the sofa should remain the visual centre. The light upon Laura should be distinct from the others, having a peculiar pristine clarity such as light used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas. A certain correspondence to light in religious paintings, such as El Greco's, where the figures are radiant in atmosphere that is relatively dusky, could be effectively used throughout the play. [It will also permit a more effective use of the screen.] A free, imaginative use of light can be of enormous value in giving a mobile, plastic quality to plays of a more or less static nature.

- *T.W.*

This play was first presented in London at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, on 28 July 1948 with the following cast:

AMANDA WINGFIELD – Helen Hayes

LAURA, her daughter – Frances Heflin

TOM, her son – Phil Brown

THE GENTLEMAN CALLER – Hugh McDermott

The play directed by John Gerlgud.
Setting by Jo Mielziner. Original music composed by Paul Bowles.
Dance music arranged by Leslie Bridgewater

Scene: An alley in St Louis

PART 1: Preparation for a Gentleman Caller

PART 2: The Gentleman Calls

Time: Now and the Past

SCENE ONE

The Wingfield apartment is in the rear of the building, one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centres of lower-middle-class population and are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation and to exist and function as one interfused mass of automatism.
The apartment faces an alley and is entered by a fire-escape, a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation. The fire-escape is included in the set - that is, the landing of it and steps descending from it.
The scene is memory and is therefore non-realistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic licence. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominantly in the heart. The interior is therefore rather dim and poetic.

[At the rise of the curtain, the audience is faced with the dark, grim rear wall of the Wingfield tenement. This building, which runs parallel to the footlights, is flanked on both sides by dark, narrow alleys which run into murky canyons of tangled clothes-lines, garbage cans, and the sinister lattice-work of neighbouring fire-escapes. It is up and down these alleys that exterior entrances and exits are made, during the play. At the end of Tom's opening commentary, the dark tenement wall slowly reveals (by means of a transparency) the interior of the ground floor Wingfield apartment.
Downstage is the living-room, which also serves as a sleeping-room for Laura, the sofa is unfolding to make her bed. Upstage, centre, and divided by a wide arch or second proscenium with transparent faded portières (or second curtain), is the dining-room. In an old fashioned what-not in the living-room are seen scores of transparent glass animals. A blown-up photograph of the father hangs on the wall of the living-room, facing the audience, to the left of the archway. It is the face of a very handsome young man in a doughboy's First World War cap. He is gallantly smiling, ineluctably smiling, as if to say 'I will be smiling forever'.
The audience hears and sees the opening scene in the dining-room through both

the transparent fourth wall of the building and the transparent gauze portières of the dining-room arch. It is during this revealing scene that the fourth wall slowly ascends out of sight. This transparent exterior wall is not brought down again until the very end of the play, during Tom' s final speech.
The narrator is an undisguised convention of the play. He takes whatever licence with dramatic convention is convenient to his purposes.
Tom enters dressed as a merchant sailor from alley, stage left, and strolls across the front of the stage to the fire-escape. There he stops and lights a cigarette. He addresses the audience.]

TOM: 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.
To begin with, I turn bark 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. Their eyes had failed them or they had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy.
In Spain there was revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion.
In Spain there was Guernica. Here there were disturbances of labour, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis....
This is the social background of the play.
[MUSIC]
The play is memory.
Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic.
In memory everything seems to happen to music. That explains the fiddle in the wings.
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 who appears in the final scenes.
He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from. But 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 live for. There is a fifth character in the play who doesn't appear except in this larger-than-life-size photograph over the mantel.
This is our father who left us a long time ago. He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances; he gave up his job with the telephone company and

skipped the light fantastic out of town....The last we heard of him was a picture postcard from Mazatlan, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, containing a message of two words—
'Hello—Good-bye!' and no address.
I think the rest of the play will explain itself...

[Amanda's voice becomes audible through the portieres.
Tom divides the portières and enters the upstage area.
Amanda and Laura are seated at a drop-leaf table. Eating is indicated by gestures without food or utensils. Amanda faces the audience. Tom and Laura are seated in profile.
The interior has lit up softly and through the scrim we see Amanda and Laura seated at the table in the upstage area.]

AMANDA *[calling]* Tom?

TOM: Yes, Mother.

AMANDA: We can't say grace until you come to the table!

TOM: Coming, Mother. *[He bows slightly and withdraws, reappearing a few moments later in his place at the table.]*

AMANDA *[to her son]*: Honey, don't *push* with your *fingers*. If you have to push with something, the thing to push with is a crust of bread. And chew!chew! Animals have sections in their stomachs which enable them to digest flood without mastication, but human beings are supposed to chew their food before they swallow it down. Eat food leisurely, son, and really enjoy it. A well-cooked meal has lots of delicate flavours that have to be held in the mouth for appreciation. So chew your food and give your salivary glands a chance to function!

[Tom deliberately lays his imaginary fork down and his chair back from the table.]

TOM: I haven't enjoyed one bite of this dinner because of your constant directions on how to eat it. It's you that makes me rush through meals with your hawk-like attention to every bite I take. Sickening - spoils my appetite - all this discussion of - animals' secretion - salivary glands -mastication!

AMANDA *[lightly]*: Temperament like a Metropolitan star! *[He rises and crosses downstage.]* You're not excused from the table.

TOM: I'm getting a cigarette.

AMANDA: You smoke too much.

[Laura rises.]

LAURA: I'll bring in the blancmangé.

[He remains standing with his cigarette by the portières during the following.]

AMANDA *[rising]*: No, sister, no, sister—you be the lady this time and I'll be the darkey.

LAURA: I'm already up.

AMANDA: Resume your seat, little sister—I want you to stay fresh and pretty—for gentleman callers!

LAURA: I'm not expecting any gentleman callers.

AMANDA *[crossing out to kitchenette. Airily]*: Sometimes they come when they are least expected! Why, I remember one Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain—*[Enters kitchenette.]*

TOM: I know what's coming!

LAURA: Yes. But let her tell it.

TOM: Again?

LAURA: She loves to tell it.

[Amanda returns with bowl of dessert.]

AMANDA: One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain, your mother received—

seventeen!—gentlemen callers! Why, sometimes there weren't chairs enough to accommodate them all. We had to send the nigger over to bring in folding chairs from the parish house.

TOM: *[remaining at portières]*: How did you entertain those gentleman callers?

AMANDA: I understood the art of conversation!

TOM: I bet you could talk.

AMANDA: Girls in those days *knew* how to talk, I can tell you.

TOM: Yes?

AMANDA: They knew how to entertain their gentlemen callers. It wasn't enough for a girl to be possessed of a pretty face and a graceful figure although I wasn't alighted in either respect. She also needed to have a nimble wit and a tongue to meet all occasions.

TOM: What did you talk about?

AMANDA: Things of importance going on in the world! Never anything coarse or common or vulgar.
[She addresses Tom as though he were seated in the vacant chair at the table though he remains by portieres. He plays this scene as though he held the book.]
My callers were gentleman—all! Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta—planters and sons of planters!
[Tom motions for music and a spot of light on Amanda. Her eyes lift, her face glows, her voice becomes rich and elegiac.]
There was young Champ Laughlin who later became vice-president of the Delta Planters Bank.
Hadley Stevenson who was drowned in Moon Lake and left his widow one hundred and fifty thousand in Government bonds.
There were the Cutrere brothers, Wesley and Bates. Bates was one of my bright particular beaux! He got in a quarrel with that wild Wainwright boy. They shot it out on the floor of Moon Lake Casino. Bates was shot through the stomach. Died in the ambulance on his way to Memphis. His widow was also well provided for, came into eight or ten thousand acres, that's all. She married him on the rebound

—never loved her—carried my picture on him the night he died!
And there was that boy that every girl in the Delta had set her cap for! That brilliant, brilliant young Fitzhugh boy from Greene County!

TOM: What did he leave his widow?

AMANDA: He never married! Gracious, you talk as though all of my old admirers had turned up their toes to the daisies!

TOM: Isn't this the first you've mentioned that still survives?

AMANDA: That Fitzhugh boy went North and made a fortune—came to be known as the Wolf of Wall Street! He had the Midas touch, whatever he touched turned to gold!
And I could have been Mrs Duncan J. Fitzhugh, mind you! But—I picked your *father!*

LAURA *[rising]*: Mother, let me clear the table.

AMANDA: No, dear, you go in front and study your typewriter chart. Or practice your shorthand a little. Stay fresh and pretty!—It's almost time for our gentlemen callers to start arriving. *[She flounces girlishly toward the kitchenette.]* How many do you suppose we're going to entertain this afternoon?

[Tom throws down the paper and jumps up with a groan.]

LAURA *[alone in the dining-room]*: I don't believe we're going to receive any, Mother.

AMANDA *[reappearing, airily]* What? No one—not one? You must be joking!
[Laura nervously echoes her laugh. She slips in a fugitive manner through the half-open portières and draws them in gently behind her. A shaft of very clear light is thrown on her face against the faded tapestry of the curtains.]
*[**MUSIC**: 'THE GLASS MENAGERIE' UNDER FAINTLY. Lightly.]*
Not one gentleman caller? It can't be true! There must be a flood, there must have been a tornado!

LAURA: It isn't a flood, it's not a tornado, Mother. I'm just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain... *[Tom utters another groan. Laura glances at him with*

a faint, apologetic smile. Her voice catching a little.] Mother's afraid I'm going to be an old maid.

[THE SCENE DIMS OUT WITH 'GLASS MENAGERIE']

SCENE TWO

*[**MUSIC**: 'Laura Haven't you Ever Liked Some Boy?'*
On the dark stage the screen is lighted with the image of blue roses.
Gradually Laura's figure becomes apparent and the screen goes out.
The music subsides.
Laura is seated in the delicate ivory chair at the small claw-foot table.
She wears a dress of soft violet material for a kimono - her hair tied back from her forehead with a ribbon.
She is washing and polishing her collection of glass.
Amanda appears on the fire-escape steps. At the sound of her ascent, Laura catches her breath, thrusts the bowl of ornaments away and seats herself stiffly before the diagram of the typewriter keyboard as though it held her spellbound.
Something has happened to Amanda. It is written in her face as she climbs to the landing: a look that is grim and hopeless and a little absurd.
She has on one of those cheap or imitation velvety-looking cloth coats with imitation fur collar. Her hat is five or six years old, one of those dreadful cloche hats that were worn in the late twenties and she is eloping an enormous black patent-leather pocketbook with nickel clasps and initials. This is her full-dress outfit, the one she usually wears to the D.A.R.
Before entering she looks through the door.
She purses her lips, opens her eyes very wide, rolls them upward, and shakes her head.
Then she slowly lets herself in the door. Seeing her mother's expression Laura touches her lips with a nervous gesture.]

LAURA: Hello, Mother, I was— *[She makes a nervous gesture toward the chart on the wall. Amanda leans against the shut door and stares at Laura with a martyred look.]*

AMANDA: Deception? Deception? *[She slowly removes her hat and gloves, continuing the sweet suffering stare. She lets the hat and gloves fall on the floor —a bit of acting.]*

LAURA *[shakily]*: How was the DAR. meeting? *[Amanda slowly opens her purse and removes a dainty white handkerchief which she shakes out delicately and delicately touches to her lips and nostrils.]* Didn't you go to the DAR.

meeting, Mother?

AMANDA *[faintly, almost inaudibly]*: —No.—No. *[Then more forcibly.]* I did not have the strength—to go to the DAR. In fact, I did not have the courage! I wanted to find a hole in the ground and hide myself in it for ever! *[She crosses slowly to the wall and removes the diagram of the typewriter keyboard. She holds it in front of her for a second, staring at it sweetly and sorrowfully—then bites her lips and tears it into two pieces.]*

LAURA *[faintly]*: Why did you do that, Mother? *[Amanda repeats the same procedure with the chart of the Gregg alphabet.]* Why are you—??

AMANDA: Why? Why? How old are you, Laura?

LAURA: Mother, you know my age.

AMANDA: I thought that you were an adult; it seems that I was mistaken. *[She crosses slowly to the sofa and sinks down and stares at Laura.]*

LAURA: Please don't stare at me, Mother.

*[**AMANDA** closes her eyes and lowers her head. Count ten.]*

AMANDA: What are we going to do, what is going to become of us, what is the future?

[Count ten.]

LAURA: Has something happened, Mother? *[Amanda draws a long breath and takes out the handkerchief again. Dabbing process.]* Mother, has—something happened?

AMANDA: I'll be all right in a minute, I'm just bewildered—*[Count five.]*—by life...

LAURA: Mother, I wish that you would tell me what's happened!

AMANDA: As you know, I was supposed to be inducted into my office at the D.A.R. this afternoon. But I stopped off at Rubicam's business college to speak

to your teachers about your having a cold and ask them what progress they thought you were making down there.

LAURA: Oh....

AMANDA: I went to the typing instructor and introduced myself as your mother. She didn't know who you were. Wingfield, she said. We don't have any such student enrolled at the school!
I assured her she did, that you had been going to classes since early in January.
'I wonder,' she said, 'if you could be talking about that terribly shy little girl who dropped out of school after only a few days' attendance?'
'No,' I said, 'Laura, my daughter, has been going to school every day for the past six weeks!'
'Excuse me,' she said. She took the attendance book out and there was your name, unmistakably printed, and all the dates you were absent until they decided that you had dropped out of school.
I still said, 'No, there must have been some mistake I There must have been some mix-up in the records!'
And she said, 'No—I remember her perfectly now. Her hands shook so that she couldn't hit the right keys! The first time we gave a speed-test, she broke down completely—was sick at the stomach and almost had to be carried into the wash-room! After that morning she never showed up any more. We phoned the house but never got any answer'—while I was working at Famous and Barr, I suppose, demonstrating those—Oh!
I felt so weak I could barely keep on my feet!
I had to sit down while they got me a glass of water!
Fifty dollars' tuition, all of our plans—my hopes and ambition for you—just gone up the spout, just gone up the spout like that. *[Laura draws a long breath and gets awkwardly to her feet. She crosses to the victrola and winds it up.]*
What are you doing?

LAURA: Oh! *[She releases the handle and returns to her seat.]*

AMANDA: Laura, where have you been going when you've gone on pretending that you were going to business college?

LAURA: I've just been going out walking.

AMANDA: That's not true.

LAURA: It is. I just went walking.

AMANDA: Walking? Walking? In winter? Deliberately courting pneumonia in that light coat? Where did you walk to, Laura?

LAURA: All sorts of places - mostly in the park.

AMANDA: Even after you'd started catching that cold?

LAURA: It was the lesser of two evils, Mother. I couldn't go back up. I—threw up—on the floor!

AMANDA: From half past seven till after five every day you mean to tell me you walked around in the park, because you wanted to make me think that you were still going to Rubicam's Business College?

LAURA: It wasn't as bad as it sounds. I went inside places to get warmed up.

AMANDA: Inside where?

LAURA: I went in the art museum and the bird-houses at the Zoo. I visited the penguins every day! Sometimes I did without lunch and went to the movies. Lately I've been spending most of my afternoons in the jewel-box, that big glass-house where they raise the tropical flowers.

AMANDA: You did all this to deceive me, just for deception? *[Laura looks down.]* Why?

LAURA: Mother, when you're disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus' mother in the museum!

AMANDA: Hush!

LAURA: I couldn't face it.

[Pause. A whisper of strings.]

AMANDA *[hopelessly fingering the huge pocketbook]*: So what are we going to

do the rest of our lives? Stay home and watch the parades go by? Amuse ourselves with the glass menagerie, darling? Eternally play those worn-out phonograph records your father left as a painful reminder of him? We won't have a business career—we've given that up because it gave us nervous indigestion! *[Laughs wearily.]* What is there left but dependency all our lives? I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South—barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife!—stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room—encouraged by one in-law to visit another—little birdlike women without any nest—eating the crust of humility all their life!
Is that the future that we've mapped out for ourselves? I swear it's the only alternative I can think of!
It isn't a very pleasant alternative, is it? Of course - some girls *do marry*.
[Laura twists her hands nervously.]
Haven't you ever liked some boy?

LAURA: Yes. I liked one once. *[Rises.]* I came across his picture a while ago.

AMANDA *[with some interest]*. He gave you his picture?

LAURA: No, it's in the year-book.

AMANDA: *[disappointed]*: Oh—a high-school boy.

LAURA: Yes. His name was Jim. *[Laura lifts the heavy year-book from the claw-foot table.]* Here he is in *The Pirates of Penzance.*

AMANDA *[absently]*: The what?

LAURA: The operetta the senior class put on. He had a wonderful voice and we sat across the aisle from each other Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in the Aud. Here he is with the silver cup for debating! See his grin?

AMANDA *[absently]*: He must have had a jolly disposition.

LAURA: He used to call me—Blue Roses.

AMANDA: Why did he call you such a name as that?

LAURA: When I had that attack of pleurosis—he asked me what was the matter when I came back. I said pleurosis—he thought that I said Blue Roses! So that's what he always called me after that. Whenever he saw me, he'd holler, 'Hello, Blue Roses!' I didn't care for the girl that he went out with. Emily Meisenbach. Emily was the best-dressed girl at Soldan. She never struck me, though, as being sincere.... It says in the Personal Section—they're engaged. That's—six years ago! They must be married by now.

AMANDA: Girls that aren't cut out for business careers usually wind up married to some nice man. *[Gets up with a spark of revival.]* Sister, that's what you'll do!

[Laura utters a startled, doubtful laugh. She reaches quickly for a piece of glass.]

LAURA: But, Mother—

AMANDA: Yes? *[Crossing to photograph.]*

LAURA *[in a tone of frightened apology]*: I'm—crippled!

AMANDA: Nonsense! Laura, I've told you never, never to use that word. Why, you're not crippled, you just have a little defect—hardly noticeable, even! When people have some slight disadvantage like that, they cultivate other things to make up for it—develop charm—and vivacity and—*charm!* That's all you have to do! *[She turns again to the photograph.]* One thing your father had *plenty of*—was *charm!*

[Tom motions to the fiddle in the wings.]

THE SCENE FADES OUT WITH MUSIC

SCENE THREE

[Tom speaks from the fire-escape landing.]

TOM: After the fiasco at Rubicam's Business College, the idea of getting a gentleman caller for Laura began to play a more and more important part in Mother's calculations. It became an obsession. Like some archetype of the universal unconscious, the image of the gentleman caller haunted our small apartment...
An evening at home rarely passed without some allusion to this image, this specter, this hope.
Even when he wasn't mentioned, his presence hung in Mother's preoccupied look and in my sister's frightened, apologetic manner—hung like a sentence passed upon the Wingfields!
Mother was a woman of action as well as words.
She began to take logical steps in the planned direction. Late that winter and in the early spring - realizing that extra money would be needed to properly feather the nest and plume the bird - she conducted a vigorous campaign on the telephone, roping in subscribers to one of those magazines for matrons called *The Home-maker's Companion*, the type of journal that features the serialized sublimations of ladies of letters who think in terms of delicate cup-like breasts, slim, tapering waists, rich, creamy thighs, eyes like wood-smoke in autumn, fingers that soothe and caress like strains of music, bodies as powerful as Etruscan sculpture.

[Amanda enters with phone on long extension cord. She is spotted in the dim stage.]

AMANDA: Ida Scott? This is Amanda Wingfield! We *missed* you at the D.A.R. last Monday! I said to myself: She's probably suffering with that sinus condition! How is that sinus condition?
Horrors! Heaven have mercy!—You're a Christian martyr, yes, that's what you are, a Christian martyr!
Well, I just have happened to notice that your subscription to the *Companion's* about to expire! Yes, it expires with the next issue, honey!—just when that wonderful new serial by Bessie Mae Hopper is getting off to such an exciting start. Oh, honey, it's something that you can't miss! You remember how '*Gone*

with the Wind' took everybody by storm? You simply couldn't go out if you hadn't read it. All everybody *talked* was Scarlet O'Hara. Well, this is a book that critics already compare to *Gone with the Wind.* It's the '*Gone with the Wind*' of the post-World War generation!—What?—Burning!—Oh, honey, don't let them burn, go take a look in the oven and I'll hold the wire! Heavens—I think she's hung up!

[DIM OUT]

[Before the stage is lighted, the violent voices of Tom and Amanda are heard. They are quarrelling behind the portières. In front of them stands Laura with clenched hands and panicky expression. A clear pool of light on her figure throughout this scene.]

TOM: What in Christ's name am I—

AMANDA *[shrilly]*: Don't you use that—

TOM: Supposed to do!

AMANDA: Expression! Not in my—

TOM: Ohhh!!

AMANDA: Presence! Have you gone out of your senses?

TOM: I have, that's true, *driven* out!

AMANDA: What is the matter with you, you—big—big IDIOT!

TOM: Look!—I've got *no thing*, no single thing—

AMANDA: Lower your voice!

TOM: In my life here that I can call my OWN! Everything is—

AMANDA: Stop that shouting!

TOM: Yesterday you confiscated my books! You had the nerve to—

AMANDA: I took that horrible novel back to the library—yes! That hideous book by that insane Mr. Lawrence. *[Tom laughs wildly.]* I cannot control the output of diseased minds or people who cater to them—*[Tom laughs still more wildly.]* BUT I WON'T ALLOW SUCH FILTH BROUGHT INTO MY HOUSE! NO, no, no, no, no!

TOM: House, house! Who pays rent on it, who makes a slave of himself to—

AMANDA *[fairly screeching]*: Don't you DARE to—

TOM: No, no, I mustn't say things! *I've* got to just—

AMANDA: Let me tell you—

TOM: I don't want to hear any more! *[He tears the portières open. The upstage area is lit with a turgid smoky red glow.]*

[Amanda's hair is in metal curlers and she wears a very old bathrobe much too large for her slight figure, a relic of the faithless Mr. Wingfield. An upright typewriter and a wild disarray of manuscripts are on the drop-leaf table. The quarrel was probably precipitated by his creative labour. A chair lying overthrown on the floor.
Their gesticulating shadows are cast on the ceiling by the fiery glow.]

AMANDA: You *will* hear more, you—

TOM: No, I won' t hear more, I'm going out!

AMANDA: You come right back in—

TOM: Out, out, out! Because I'm—

AMANDA: Come back here, Tom Wingfield! I'm not through talking to you!

TOM: Oh, go—

LAURA *[desperately]*: —Tom!

AMANDA: You're going to listen, and no more insolence from you! I'm at the end of my patience!

[He comes back toward her.]

TOM: What do you think I'm at? Aren't I supposed to have any patience to reach the end of, Mother? I know, I know. It seems unimportant to you, what I'm *doing* —what I *want* to do—having a little *difference* between them! You don't think that—

AMANDA: I think you've been doing things that you're ashamed of. That's why you act like this. I don't believe that you go every night to the movies. Nobody goes to the movies night after night. Nobody in their right mind goes to the movies as often as you pretend to. People don't go to the movies at nearly midnight, and movies don't let out at two a.m. Come in stumbling. Muttering to yourself like a maniac! You get three hours' sleep and then go to work. Oh, I can picture the way you're doing down there. Moping, doping, because you're in no condition.

TOM *[wildly]*: No, I'm in no condition!

AMANDA: What right have you got to jeopardize your job - jeopardize the security of us all? How do you think we'd manage if you were—

TOM: Listen! You think I'm crazy about the *warehouse? [He bends fiercely toward her slight figure.]* You think I'm in love with the Continental Shoemakers? You think I want to spend fifty-five years down there in that *—celotex interior!* with—*fluorescent—tubes!* Look! I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains—than go back mornings! I *go!* Every time you come in yelling that God damn *'Rise and Shine!' 'Rise and Shine!'* I say to myself, 'How *lucky dead* people are!' But I get up. I *go!* For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being *ever!* And you say self *—selfs'* all I ever think of. Why, listen, if self is what I thought of, Mother, I'd be where he is—GONE! *[Pointing to father's picture.]* As far as the system of transportation reaches! *[He starts past her. She grabs his arm.]* Don't grab at me, Mother!

AMANDA: Where are you going?

TOM: I'm going to the *movies!*

AMANDA: I don't believe that lie!

TOM *[crouching toward her, over-towering her tiny figure. She backs away, gasping]*: I'm going to opium dens! Yes, opium dens, dens of vice and criminals' hang-outs, Mother. I've joined the Hogan gang, I'm a hired assassin, I carry a tommy-gun in a violin case! I run a string of cat-houses in the Valley! They call me Killer, Killer Wingfield, I'm leading a double-life, a simple, honest warehouse worker by day, by night a dynamic *tsar* of the *underworld, Mother.* I go to gambling casinos, I spin away fortunes on the roulette table! I wear a patch over one eye and a false moustache, sometimes I put on green whiskers. On those occasions they call me—*El Diablo!* Oh, I could tell you things to make you sleepless! My enemies plan to dynamite this place. They're going to blow us all sky-high some night! I'll be glad, very happy, and so will you! You'll go up, up on a broomstick, over Blue Mountain with seventeen gentlemen callers! You ugly—babbling old—*witch*…. *[He goes through a series of violent, clumsy movements, seizing his overcoat, lunging to do door, pulling it fiercely open. The women watch him, aghast. His arm catches in the sleeve of the coat as he struggles to pull it on. For a moment he is pinioned by the bulky garment. With an outraged groan he tears the coat of again, splitting the shoulder of it, and hurls it across the room. It strikes against the shelf of Laura's glass collection, there is a tinkle of shattering glass. Laura cries out as if wounded.]*

*[**MUSIC**: 'The Glass Menagerie']*

LAURA *[shrilly]* : *My glass!*—menagerie.... *[She covers her face and turns away.]*

[But Amanda is still stunned and stupefied by the 'ugly witch' so that she barely notices this occurrence. Now she recovers her speech.]

AMANDA *[in an awful voice]*: I won't speak to you—until you apologize! *[She crosses through portières and draws them together behind her. Tom is left with Laura. Laura clings weakly to the mantel with her face averted. Tom stares at her stupidly for a moment. Then he crosses to shelf. Drops awkwardly on his knees to collect the fallen glass, glancing at Laura as if he would speak but couldn't.]*

'The Glass Menagerie' steals in as

THE SCENE DIMS OUT

SCENE FOUR

[The interior is dark. Faint light in the alley.
A deep-voiced bell in a church is tolling the hour of five as the scene commences.
Tom appears at the top of the alley. After each solemn boom of the bell in the tower, he shakes a little noise-maker or rattle as if to express the tiny spasm of man in contrast to the sustained power and dignity of the Almighty. This and the unsteadiness of his advance make it evident that he has been drinking.
As he climbs the few steps to the fire-escape landing light steals up inside. Laura appears in night-dress observing Tom's empty bed in the front room.
Tom fishes in his pockets for door-key removing a motley assortment of articles in the search, including a perfect shower of movie-ticket stubs and an empty bottle. At last he finds the key, but just as he is about to insert it, it slips from his fingers. He strikes a match and crouches below the door.]

TOM *[bitterly]*: One crack—and it falls through!

[Laura opens the door.]

LAURA: Tom! Tom, what are you doing?

TOM: Looking for a door-key.

LAURA: Where have you been all this time?

TOM: I have been to the movies.

LAURA: All this time at the movies?

TOM: There was a very long programme. There was a Garbo picture and a Mickey Mouse and a travelogue and a newsreel and a preview of coming attractions. And there was an organ solo and a collection for the milk-fund—simultaneously—which ended up in a terrible fight between a fat lady and an usher!

LAURA *[innocently]*: Did you have to stay through everything?

TOM: Of course! And, oh, I forgot! There was a big stage show! The headliner on this stage show was Malvolio the Magician. He performed wonderful tricks, many of them, such as pouring water back and forth between pitchers. First it turned to wine and then it turned to beer and then it turned to whisky. I knew it was whisky it finally turned into because he needed somebody to come up out of the audience to help him, and I came up - both shows! It was Kentucky Straight Bourbon. A very generous fellow, he gave souvenirs. *[He pulls from his back pocket a shimmering rainbow-coloured scarf.]* He gave me this. This is his magic scarf. You can have it, Laura. You wave it over a canary cage and you get a bowl of gold- fish. You wave it over the gold-fish bowl and they fly away canaries.... But the wonderfullest trick of all was the coffin trick. We nailed him into a coffin and he got out of the coffin without removing one nail, *[He has come inside.]* There is a trick that would come in handy for me—get me out of this 2 by 4 situation! *[Flops on to a bed and starts removing shoes.]*

LAURA: Tom—Shhh!

TOM: What're you shushing me for?

LAURA: You'll wake up mother.

TOM: Goody, goody! Pay 'er back for all those 'Rise an' Shines'. *[Lies down, groaning.]* You know it don't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail?

[As if in answer, the father's grinning photograph lights up.]

[SCENE DIMS OUT.]

[Immediately following: The church bell is heard striking six. At the sixth stroke the alarm clock goes off in Amanda's room, and after a few moments we hear her calling 'Rise and Shine! Rise and Shine! Laura, go tell your brother to rise and shine!']

TOM *[sitting up slowly]*: I'll rise—but I won't shine…

[The light increases.]

AMANDA: Laura, tell your brother his coffee is ready.

[Laura slips into front room.]

LAURA: Tom!—It's nearly seven. Don't make mother nervous. *[He stares at her stupidly. Beseechingly.]* Tom, speak to mother this morning. Make up with her, apologize, speak to her!

TOM: She won't to me. It's her that started not speaking.

LAURA: If you just say you're sorry she'll start speaking.

TOM: Her not speaking—is that such a tragedy?

LAURA: Please—please!

AMANDA *[calling from kitchenette]*: Laura, are you going to do what I asked you to do, or do I have to get dressed and go out myself?

LAURA: Going, going—soon as I get on my coat! *[She pulls on a shapeless felt hat with nervous, jerky movement, pleadingly glancing at Tom. Rushes awkwardly for coat. The coat is one of Amanda's, inaccurately made-over the sleeves too short for Laura.]* Butter and what else?

AMANDA *[entering upstage]*: Just butter. Tell them to charge it.

LAURA: Mother, they make such faces when I do that

AMANDA: Sticks and stones can break our bones, but the expression on Mr. Garfinkel's face won't harm us! Tell him your coffee is getting cold.

LAURA *[at door]*: Do what I asked you, will you, will you, Tom?

[He looks sullenly away.]

AMANDA: Laura, go now or just don't go at all!

LAURA *[rushing out]*: Going—going! *[A second later she cries out. Tom*

springs up and crosses to door. Amanda rushes anxiously in. Tom opens the door.]

TOM: Laura?

LAURA: I'm all right. I slipped, but I'm all right.

AMANDA *[peering anxiously after her]*: If anyone breaks a leg on those fire-escape steps, the landlord ought to be sued for every cent he possesses! *[She shuts door. Remembers she isn't speaking and returns to other room.]*

[As Tom enters listlessly for his coffee she turns her back to him and stands rigidly facing the window on the gloomy gray vault of the areaway. Its light on her face with its aged but childish features is cruelly sharp, satirical as a Daumier print.
***MUSIC UNDER**: 'AVE MARIA'.*
Tom glances sheepishly but sullenly at her averted figure and slumps at the table. The coffee is scalding hot; he sips it and gasps and spits it back in the cup. At his gasp, Amanda catches her breath and half turns. Then catches herself and turns back to window.
Tom blows on his coffee, glancing sidewise at his mother. She clears her throat. Tom clears his. He starts to rise. Sinks back down again, scratches his head, clears his throat again. Amanda coughs. Tom raises his cup in both hands to blow on it, his eyes staring over the rim of it at his mother for several moments. Then he slowly sets the cup down and awkwardly and hesitantly rises from the chair.]

TOM *[hoarsely]*: Mother! I—I apologize, Mother. *[Amanda draws a quick, shuddering breath. Her face works grotesquely. She breaks into childlike tears.]* I'm sorry for what I said, for everything that I said; I didn't mean it.

AMANDA *[sobbingly]*: My devotion has made me a witch and so I make myself hateful to my children!

TOM: *No*, you *don't*.

AMANDA: I worry so much, don't sleep, it makes me nervous!

TOM *[gently]*: I understand that.

AMANDA: I've had to put up a solitary battle all these years. But you're my right-hand bower! Don't fall down, don't fail!

TOM *[gently]*: I try, Mother.

AMANDA *[with great enthusiasm]*: Try and you will SUCCEED! *[The notion makes her breathless]* Why, you—you're just *full* of natural endowments! Both of my children—they're *unusual* children! Don't you think I know it? I'm so—*proud!* Happy and—feel I've—so much to be thankful for but—Promise me one thing, Son!

TOM: What, Mother?

AMANDA: Promise, Son, you'll—never be a drunkard!

TOM *[turns to her grinning]*: I will never be a drunkard, Mother.

AMANDA: That's what frightened me so, that you'd be drinking! Eat a bowl of Purina!

TOM: Just coffee, Mother.

AMANDA: Shredded wheat biscuit?

TOM: No. No, Mother, just coffee.

AMANDA: You can't put in a day's work on an empty stomach. You've got ten minutes—don't gulp! Drinking too hot liquids makes cancer of the stomach… Put cream in.

TOM: No, thank you.

AMANDA: To cool it.

TOM: No! No, thank you, I want it black.

AMANDA: I know, but it's not good for you. We have to do all that we can to build ourselves up. In these trying times we live in, all that we have to cling to is

—each other.... That's why it's so important to—Tom, I—I sent out your sister so I could discuss something with you. If you hadn't spoken I would have spoken to you. *[Sits down.]*

TOM *[gently]*: What is it, Mother, that you want to discuss?

AMANDA: *Laura!*

[Tom puts his cup down slowly.
***MUSIC**: 'THE GLASS MENAGERIE']*

TOM: —Oh.—Laura...

AMANDA *[touching his sleeve]*: You know how Laura is. So quiet but—still water runs deep! She notices things and I think she—broods about them. *[Tom looks up.]* A few days ago I came in and she was crying.

TOM: What about?

AMANDA: You.

TOM: Me?

AMANDA: She has an idea that you're not happy here.

TOM: What gave her that idea?

AMANDA: What gives her any idea? However, you do act strangely. I—I'm not criticizing, understand *that!* I know your ambitions do not lie in the warehouse, that like everybody in the whole wide world—you've had to—make sacrifices, but—Tom—Tom—life's not easy, it calls for—Spartan endurance! There's so many things in my heart that I cannot describe to you! I've never told you but I —*loved* your father....

TOM *[gently]*: I know that, Mother.

AMANDA: And you—when I see you taking after his ways! Staying out late—and—well, you *had* been drinking the night you were in that—terrifying condition! Laura says that you hate the apartment and that you go out nights to

get away from it! Is that true, Tom?

TOM: No. You say there's so much in your heart that you can't describe to me. That's true of me, too. There's so much in my heart that I can't describe to *you!* So let's respect each other's—

AMANDA: But, why—*why*, Tom—are you always so *restless?* Where do you *go* to, nights?

TOM: I—go to the movies.

AMANDA: Why do you go to the movies so much, Tom?

TOM: I go to the movies because—I like adventure. Adventure is something I don't have much of at work, so I go to the movies.

AMANDA: But, Tom, you go to the movies *entirely* too *much!*

TOM: I like a lot of adventure.

*[**AMANDA** looks baffled, then hurt. As the familiar inquisition resumes he becomes hard and impatient again. Amanda slips back into her querulous attitude towards him.]*

AMANDA: Most young men find adventure in their careers.

TOM: Then most young men are not employed in a warehouse.

AMANDA: The world is full of young men employed in warehouses and offices and factories.

TOM: Do all of them find adventure in their careers?

AMANDA: They do or they do without it! Not everybody has a craze for adventure.

TOM: Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse!

AMANDA: Man is by instinct! Don't quote instinct to me! Instinct is something that people have got away from! It belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it!

TOM: What do Christian adults want, then, Mother?

AMANDA: Superior things! Things of the mind and the spirit! Only animals have to satisfy instincts! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs! Than monkeys—pigs.

TOM: I reckon they're not.

AMANDA: You're joking. However, that isn't what I wanted to discuss.

TOM *[rising]*: I haven't much time.

AMANDA *[pushing his shoulders]*: Sit down.

TOM: You want me to punch in red at the warehouse, Mother?

AMANDA: You have five minutes. I want to talk about Laura.

TOM: All right! What about Laura?

AMANDA: We have to be making some plans and provisions for her. She's older than you, two years, and nothing has happened. She just drifts along doing nothing. It frightens me terribly how she just drifts along.

TOM: I guess she's the type that people call home girls.

AMANDA: There's no such type, and if there is, it's a pity! That is unless the home is hers, with a husband!

TOM: What?

AMANDA: Oh, I can see the handwriting on the wall as plain as I see the nose in front of my face! It's terrifying! More and more you remind me of your father! He was out all hours without explanation!—Then *left! Good-bye!* And me with the bag to hold. I saw that letter you got from the Merchant Marine. I know what

you're dreaming of. I'm not standing here blindfolded.
[She pauses.]
Very well, then. Then, *do* it! But not till there's somebody to take your place.

TOM: What do you mean?

AMANDA: I mean that as soon as Laura has got somebody to take care of her, married, a home of her own, independent—why, then you'll be free to go wherever you please, on land, on sea, whichever way the wind blows you! But until that time you've got to look out for your sister. I don't say me because I'm old and don't matter - I say for your sister because she's young and dependent.
I put her in business college—a dismal failure! Frightened her so it made her sick at the stomach. I took her over to the Young Peoples League at the church. Another fiasco. She spoke to nobody, nobody spoke to her. Now all she does is fool with those pieces of glass and play those worn-out records. What kind of a life is that for a girl to lead?

TOM: What can I do about it?

AMANDA: Overcome selfishness! Self, self, self is all that you ever think of!
[Tom springs up and crosses to get his coat. It is ugly and bulky. He pulls on a cap with earmuffs.]
Where is your muffler? Put your wool muffler on! *[He snatches it angrily from the closet and tosses it around his neck and pulls both ends tight.]* Tom! I haven't said what I had in mind to ask you.

TOM: I'm too late to—

AMANDA *[catching his arm—very importunately. Then shyly]*: Down at the warehouse, aren't there some—nice young men?

TOM: No!

AMANDA: There must be—*some*…

TOM: Mother— *[Gesture.]*

AMANDA: Find out one that's clean-living—doesn't drink and—ask him out for sister!

TOM: What?

AMANDA: For *sister!* To *meet!* Get *acquainted!*

TOM *[stamping to door]*: Oh, my *go-osh!*

AMANDA: Will you? *[He opens door. Imploringly.]* Will you? *[He starts down.]* Will you? *Will* you, dear?

TOM *[calling back]*: YES!

[Amanda closes the door hesitantly and with a troubled but faintly hopeful expression.
Spotlight on Amanda at phone.]

AMANDA: Ella Cartwright? This is Amanda Wingfield! How are you, honey? How is that kidney condition?
[Count Five]
Horrors!
[Count five.]
You're a Christian martyr, yes, honey, that's what you are, a Christian martyr!
Well, I just now happened to notice in my little red book that your subscription to the *Companion* has just run out! I knew that you wouldn't want to miss out on the wonderful serial starting in this issue. It's by Bessie Mae Hopper, the first thing she's written since *Honeymoon for Three*.
Wasn't that a strange and interesting story? Well, this one is even lovelier, I believe. It has a sophisticated, society background. It's all about the horsy set on Long Island!

FADE OUT

SCENE FIVE

[It is early dusk on a spring evening. Supper has just been finished in the Wingfield apartment. Amanda and Laura in light-coloured dresses are removing dishes from the table, in the upstage area, which is shadowy, their movements formalized almost as a dance or ritual their moving forms as pale and silent as moths.
Tom, in white shirt and trousers, rises from the table and crosses toward the fire-escape.]

AMANDA *[As he passes her]*: Son, will you do me a favour?

TOM: What?

AMANDA: Comb your hair! You look so pretty when your hair is combed! *[Tom slouches on the sofa with the evening paper. Its enormous headline reads: 'Franco Triumphs'.]* There is only one respect in which I would like you to emulate your father.

TOM: What respect is that?

AMANDA: The care he always took of his appearance. He never allowed himself to look untidy. *[He throws down the paper and crosses to fire-escape.]* Where are you going?

TOM: I'm going out to smoke.

AMANDA: You smoke too much. A pack a day at fifteen cents a pack. How much would that amount to in a month? Thirty times fifteen is how much, Tom? Figure it out and you will be astounded at what you could save. Enough to give you a night-school course in accounting at Washington U! Just think what a wonderful thing that would be for you, Son!

[Tom is unmoved by the thought.]

TOM: I'd rather smoke. *[He steps out on the landing letting the screen door*

slam.]

AMANDA *[sharply]*: I know! That's the tragedy of it…. *[Alone, she turns to look at her husband's picture.]*

*[**DANCE MUSIC**: 'ALL THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR THE SUNRISE!']*

TOM *[to the audience]*: Across the alley from us was the Paradise Dance Hall. On evenings in spring the windows and doors were open and the music came outdoors. Sometimes the lights were turned out except for a large glass sphere that hung from the ceiling. It would turn slowly about and filter the dusk with delicate rainbow colours. Then the orchestra played a waltz or a tango, something that had a slow and sensuous rhythm. Couples would come outside, to the relative privacy of the alley. You could see them kissing behind ash-pits and telegraph poles.
This was the compensation for lives that passed like mine, without any change or adventure.
Adventure and change were imminent in this year. They were waiting around the corner for all these kids. Suspended in the mist over Berchtesgaden, caught in the folds of Chamberlain's umbrella—
In Spain there was Guernica!
But here there was only hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, ban, and movies, and sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief, deceptive rainbows....
All the world was waiting for bombardments!

[Amanda turns from the picture and comes outside.]

AMANDA *[sighing]*: A fire-escape landing's a poor excuse for a porch. *[She spreads a newspaper on a step and sits down, gracefully and demurely as if she were settling into a swing on a Mississippi veranda.]* What are you looking at?

TOM: The moon.

AMANDA: Is there a moon this evening?

TOM: It's rising over Garfinkel's Delicatessen.

AMANDA: So it is! A little silver slipper of a moon. Have you made a wish on

it yet?

TOM: Um-hum.

AMANDA: What did you wish for?

TOM: That's a secret.

AMANDA: A secret, huh? Well, I won't tell mine either. I will be just as mysterious as you.

TOM: I bet I can guess what yours is.

AMANDA: Is my head so transparent?

TOM: You're not a sphinx.

AMANDA: No, I don't have secrets. I'll tell you what I wished for on the moon. Success and happiness for my precious children! I wish for that whenever there's a moon, and when there isn't a moon, I wish for it, too.

TOM: I thought perhaps you wished for a gentleman caller.

AMANDA: Why do you say that?

TOM: Don't you remember asking me to fetch one?

AMANDA: I remember suggesting that it would be nice for your sister if you brought home some nice young man from the warehouse. I think that I've made that suggestion more than once.

TOM: Yes, you have made it repeatedly.

AMANDA: Well?

TOM: We are going to have one.

AMANDA: *What?*

TOM: A gentleman caller!

[*THE ANNUNCIATION IS CELEBRATED WITH MUSIC. Amanda rises.]*

AMANDA: You mean you have asked some nice young man to come over?

TOM: Yep. I've asked him to dinner.

AMANDA: You really did?

TOM: I did!

AMANDA: You did, and did he—*accept?*

TOM: He did!

AMANDA: Well, well—well, well! That's—lovely!

TOM: I thought that you would be pleased.

AMANDA: It's definite, then?

TOM: Very definite.

AMANDA: Soon?

TOM: Very soon.

AMANDA: For heaven's sake, stop putting on and tell me some things, will you?

TOM: What things do you want me to tell you?

AMANDA: *Naturally* I would like to know when he's *coming!*

TOM: He's coming tomorrow.

AMANDA: *Tomorrow?*

TOM: Yep. Tomorrow.

AMANDA: But, Tom!

TOM: Yes, Mother?

AMANDA: Tomorrow gives me no time I

TOM: Time for what?

AMANDA: Preparations! Why didn't you phone me at once, as soon as you asked him, the minute that he accepted? Then, don't you see, I could have been getting ready!

TOM: You don't have to make any fuss.

AMANDA: Oh, Tom, Tom, Tom, of course I have to make a fuss! I want things nice, not sloppy! Not thrown together. I'll certainly have to do some fast thinking, won't I?

TOM: I don't see why you have to think at all.

AMANDA: You just don't know. We can't have a gentleman caller in a pigsty! All my wedding silver has to be polished, the monogrammed table linen ought to be laundered! The windows have to be washed and fresh curtains put up. And how about clothes? We have to *wear* something, don't we?

TOM: Mother, this boy is no one to make a fuss over!

AMANDA: Do you realize he's the first young man we've introduced to your sister? It's terrible, dreadful, disgraceful that poor little sister has never received a single gentleman caller! Tom, come inside! *[She opens the screen door.]*

TOM: What for?

AMANDA: I want to ask you some things.

TOM: If you're going to make such a fuss, I'll call it off, I'll tell him not to come!

AMANDA: You certainly won't do anything of the kind. Nothing offends people worse than broken engagements. It simply means I'll have to work like a Turk! We won't be brilliant, but we will pass inspection. Come on inside. *[Tom follows, groaning.]* Sit down.

TOM Any particular place you would like me to sit?

AMANDA: Thank heavens I've got that new sofa! I'm also making payments on a floor lamp I'll have sent out! And put the chintz covers on, they'll brighten things up! Of course I'd hoped to have these walls re-papered.... What is the young man's name?

TOM: His name is O'Connor.

AMANDA: That, of course, means fish—tomorrow is Friday! I'll have that salmon loaf—with Durkee's dressing! What does he do? He works at the warehouse?

TOM: Of course! How else would I—

AMANDA: Tom, he—doesn't drink?

TOM: Why do you ask me that?

AMANDA: Your father *did!*

TOM: Don't get started on that!

AMANDA: He *does* drink, then?

TOM: Not that I know of!

AMANDA: Make sure, be certain! The last thing I want for my daughter's a boy who drinks!

TOM: Aren't you being a little bit premature? Mr. O'Connor has not yet appeared on the scene!

AMANDA: But will tomorrow. To meet your sister, and what do I know about his character? Nothing! Old maids are better off than wives of drunkards!

TOM: Oh, my God!

AMANDA: Be still!

TOM *[leaning forward to whisper]*: Lots of fellows meet girls whom they don't marry!

AMANDA: Oh, talk sensibly, Tom—and don't be sarcastic!

[She has gotten a hairbrush.]

TOM: What are you doing?

AMANDA: I'm brushing that cow-lick down! What is this young man's position at the warehouse?

TOM *[submitting grimly to the brush and the interrogation]*: This young man's position is that of a shipping clerk, Mother.

AMANDA: Sounds to me like a fairly responsible job, the sort of a job *you* would be in if you just had more *get-up*.
What is his salary? Have you any idea?

TOM: I would judge it to be approximately eighty-five dollars a month.

AMANDA: Well—not princely, but—

TOM: Twenty more than I make.

AMANDA: Yes, how well I know! But for a family man, eighty-five dollars a month is not much more than you can just get by on....

TOM: Yes, but Mr. O'Connor is not a family man.

AMANDA: He might be, mightn't he? Some time in the future?

TOM: I see. Plans and provisions.

AMANDA: You are the only young man that I know of who ignores the fact that the future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns into everlasting regret if you don't plan for it!

TOM: I will think that over and see what I can make of it.

AMANDA: Don't be supercilious with your mother! Tell me some more about this—what do you call him?

TOM: James D. O'Connor. The D. is for Delaney.

AMANDA: Irish on *both* sides! *Gracious!* And doesn't drink?

TOM: Shall I call him up and ask him right this minute?

AMANDA: The only way to find out about those things is to make discreet inquiries at the proper moment. When I was a girl in Blue Mountain and it was suspected that a young man drank, the girl whose attentions he had been receiving, if any girl *was*, would sometimes speak to the minister of his church, or rather her father would if her father was living, and sort of feel him out on the young man's character. That is the way such things are discreetly handled to keep a young woman from making a tragic mistake!

TOM: Then how did you happen to make a tragic mistake?

AMANDA: That innocent look of your father's had everyone fooled! He *smiled*—the world was *enchanted!* No girl can do worse than put herself at the mercy of a handsome appearance! I hope that Mr. O'Connor is not too good-looking.

TOM: No, he's not too good-looking. He's covered with freckles and hasn't too much of a now.

AMANDA: He's not right-down homely, though?

TOM: Not right-down homely. Just medium homely, I'd say.

AMANDA: Character's what to look for in a man.

TOM: That's what I've always said, Mother.

AMANDA: You've never said anything of the kind and I suspect you would never give it a thought.

TOM: Don't be so suspicious of me.

AMANDA: At least I hope he's the type that's up and coming.

TOM: I think he really goes in for self-improvement.

AMANDA: What reason have you to think so?

TOM: He goes to night school.

AMANDA *[beaming]*: Splendid! What does he do, I mean study?

TOM: Radio engineering and public speaking!

AMANDA: Then he has visions of being advanced in the world! Any young man who studies public speaking is aiming to have an executive job some day! And radio engineering- A thing for the future! Both of these facts are very illuminating. Those are the sort of things that a mother should know concerning any young man who comes to call on her daughter. Seriously or—not.

TOM: One little warning. He doesn't know about Laura. I didn't let on that we had dark ulterior motives. I just said, why don't you come and have dinner with us? He said okay and that was the whole conversation.

AMANDA: I bet it was! You're eloquent as an oyster. However, he'll know about Laura when he gets here. When he sees how lovely and sweet and pretty she is, he'll thank his lucky stars be was asked to dinner.

TOM: Mother, you mustn't expect too much of Laura.

AMANDA: What do you mean?

TOM: Laura seems all those things to you and me because she's ours and we

love her. We don't even notice she's crippled any more.

AMANDA: Don't say crippled! You know that I never allow that word to be used!

TOM: But face facts, Mother. She is and—that's not all—

AMANDA: What do you mean "not all"?

TOM: Laura is very different from other girls

AMANDA: I think the difference is all to her advantage.

TOM: Not quite all—in the eyes of others—strangers—she's terribly shy and lives in a world of her own and those things make her seem a little peculiar to people outside the house.

AMANDA: Don't say peculiar.

TOM: Face the facts. She is.

[THE DANCE-HALL MUSIC CHANGES TO A TANGO THAT HAS A MINOR AND SOMEWHAT OMINOUS TONE.]

AMANDA: In what way is she peculiar—may I ask?

TOM *[gently]*: She lives in a world of her own—a world of—little glass ornaments, Mother.... *[He gets up. Amanda remains holding the brush, looking at him, troubled.]* She plays old phonograph records and—that's about all— *[He glances at himself in the mirror and crosses to the door.]*

AMANDA *[sharply]*: Where are you going?

TOM: I'm going to the movies. *[He goes out the screen door.]*

AMANDA: Not to the movies, every night to the movies! *[She follows quickly to screen door.]* I don't believe you always go to the movies! *[He is gone. Amanda looks worriedly after him for a moment. Then vitality and optimism return and she turns from the door, crossing to portières.]*

Laura! Laura!

[Laura answers from kitchenette.]

LAURA: Yes, Mother.

AMANDA: Let those dishes go and come in front! *[Laura appears with dish towel. Gaily.]* Laura, come here and make a wish on the moon!

LAURA *[entering]*: Moon—moon?

AMANDA: A little silver slipper of a moon. Look over your left shoulder, Laura, and make a wish!
[Laura looks faintly puzzled as if called out of sleep. Amanda seizes her shoulders and turns her at an angle by the door.] Now! Now, darling, *wish!*

LAURA: What shall I wish for, Mother?

AMANDA *[her voice trembling and her eyes suddenly filing with tears]*: Happiness! Good fortune!

[The violin rises and the stage dims out.]

CURTAIN

SCENE SIX

TOM: And so the following evening I brought Jim home to dinner. I had known Jim slightly in high school. In high school Jim was a hero. He had tremendous Irish good nature and vitality with the scrubbed and polished look of white chinaware. He seemed to move in a continual spotlight. He was a star in basketball, captain of the debating club, president of the senior class and the glee club and he sang the male lead in the annual light operas. He was always running or bounding, never just walking. He seemed always at the point of defeating the law of gravity. He was shooting with such velocity through his adolescence that you would logically expect him to arrive at nothing short of the White House by the time he was thirty. But Jim apparently ran into more interference after his graduation from Soldan. His speed had definitely slowed. Six years after he left high school he was holding a job that wasn't much better than mine.

He was the only one at the warehouse with whom I was on friendly terms. I was valuable to him as someone who could remember his former glory, who had seen him win basketball games and the silver cup in debating. He knew of my secret practice of retiring to a cabinet of the washroom to work on poems when business was slack in the warehouse. He called me Shakespeare. And while the other boys in the warehouse regarded me with suspicious hostility, Jim took a humorous attitude toward me. Gradually his attitude affected the others, their hostility wore off and they also began to smile at me as people smile at an oddly fashioned dog who trots across their path at some distance.

I knew that Jim and Laura had known each other at Soldan, and I had heard Laura speak admiringly of his voice. I didn't know if Jim remembered her or not. In high school Laura had been as unobtrusive as Jim had been astonishing. If he did remember Laura, it was not as my sister, for when I asked him to dinner, he grinned and said, 'You know, Shakespeare, I never thought of you as having folks!'

He was about to discover that I did….

[LIGHT UPSTAGE.

Friday evening. It is about five o'clock of a late spring evening which comes 'scattering poems in the sky.'

A delicate lemony light is in the Wingfield apartment.

Amanda has worked like a Turk in preparation for the gentleman caller. The results are astonishing. The new floor lamp with its rose-silk shade is in place, a

coloured paper lantern conceals the broken light fixture in the ceiling, new billowing white curtains are at the windows, chintz covers are on chairs and sofa, a pair of new sofa pillows make their initial appearance.
Open boxes and tissue paper are scattered on the floor.
Laura stands in the middle with lifted arms while Amanda crouches before her, adjusting the hem of the new dress, devout and ritualistic. The dress is coloured and designed by memory. The arrangement of Laura's hair is changed; it is softer and more becoming. A fragile, unearthly prettiness has come out in Laura: she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting.]

AMANDA *[impatiently]*: Why are you trembling?

LAURA: Mother, you've made me so nervous!

AMANDA: How have I made you nervous?

LAURA: By all this fuss! You make it seem so important!

AMANDA: I don't understand you, Laura. You couldn't be satisfied with just sitting home, and yet whenever I try to arrange something for you, you seem to resist it. *[She gets up.]* Now take a look at yourself. No, wait! Wait just a moment—I have an idea!

LAURA: What is it now?

[Amanda produces two powder puffs which she wraps in handkerchiefs and stuffs in Laura's bosom.]

LAURA: Mother, what are you doing?

AMANDA: They call them 'Gay Deceivers'!

LAURA: I won't wear them!

AMANDA: You will!

LAURA: Why should I?

AMANDA: Because, to be painfully honest, your chest is flat.

LAURA: You make it seem like we were setting a trap.

AMANDA: All pretty girls are a trap, a pretty trap, and men expect them to be! Now look at yourself, young lady. This is the prettiest you will ever be! I've got to fix myself now! You're going to be surprised by your mother's appearance! *[She crosses through portières, humming gaily.]*

[Laura moves slowly to the long mirror and stares solemnly at herself. A wind blows the white curtains inward in a slow, graceful motion and with a faint, sorrowful sighing.]

AMANDA *[off stage]*: It isn't dark enough yet. *[Laura turns slowly before the mirror with a troubled look.]*

AMANDA *[laughing, still not visible]*: I'm going to show you something. I'm going to make a spectacular appearance!

LAURA: What is it, Mother?

AMANDA: Possess your soul in patience—you will see! Something I've resurrected from that old trunk! Styles haven't changed so terribly much after all….
[She parts the portières.]
Now just look at your mother!
[She wears a girlish frock of yellowed voile with a blue silk sash. She carries a bunch of jonquils - the legend of her youth is nearly revived.]
[Feverishly]: This is the dress in which I led the cotillion, won the cakewalk twice at Sunset Hill, wore one spring to the Governor's ball in Jackson! See how I sashayed around the ballroom, Laura?
[She raises her skirt and does a mincing step around the room.]
I wore it on Sundays for my gentlemen callers! I had it on the day I met your father—
I had malaria fever all that spring. The change of climate from East Tennessee to the Delta—weakened resistance—I had a little temperature all the time—not enough to be serious—just enough to make me restless and giddy! Invitations poured in—parties all over the Delta! 'Stay in bed,' said mother, 'you have fever!'—but I just wouldn't. I took quinine but kept on going, going! Evenings,

dances! Afternoons, long, long rides! Picnics—lovely! So lovely, that country in May—all lacy with dogwood, literally flooded with jonquils! That was the spring I had the craze for jonquils. Jonquils became an absolute obsession. Mother said, 'Honey, there's no more room for jonquils.' And still I kept on bringing in more jonquils. Whenever, wherever I saw them, I'd say, ‘Stop! Stop! I see jonquils!’ I made the young men help me gather the jonquils! It was a joke, Amanda and her jonquils! Finally there were no more vases to hold them, every available space was filled with jonquils. No vases to hold them? All right, I'll hold them myself! And then I—*[She stops in front of the picture. Music plays.]* met your father! Malaria fever and jonquils and then—this—boy....
[She switches on the rose-coloured lamp.]
I hope they get here before it starts to rain.
[She crosses the room and places the jonquils in a bowl on the table.]
I gave your brother a little extra change so he and Mr. O'Connor could take the service car home.

LAURA *[with an altered look]*: What did you say his name was?

AMANDA: O'Connor.

LAURA: What is his first name?

AMANDA: I don't remember. Oh, yes, I do. It was—Jim!

[Laura sways slightly and catches hold of a chair.]

LAURA *[faintly]*: Not—Jim!

AMANDA: Yes, that was it, it was Jim! I've never known a Jim, that wasn't nice!

[The music becomes ominous.]

LAURA: Are you sure his name is Jim O'Connor?

AMANDA: Yes. Why?

LAURA: Is he the one that Tom used to know in high school?

AMANDA: He didn't say so. I think he just got to know him at the warehouse.

LAURA: There was a Jim O'Connor we both knew in high school—*[then, with effort]* If that is the one that Tom is bringing to dinner—you'll have to excuse me, I won't come to the table.

AMANDA: What sort of nonsense is this?

LAURA: You asked me once if I'd ever liked a boy. Don't you remember I showed you this boy's picture?

AMANDA: You mean the boy you showed me in the year book?

LAURA: Yes, that boy.

AMANDA: Laura, Laura, were you in love with that boy?

LAURA: I don't know, Mother. All I know is I couldn't sit at the table if it was him!

AMANDA: It won't be him! It isn't the least bit likely. But whether it is or not, you will come to the table. You will not be excused.

LAURA: I'll have to be, Mother.

AMANDA: I don't intend to humour your silliness, Laura. I've had too much from you and your brother, both! So just sit down and compose yourself till they come. Tom has forgotten his key so you'll have to let them in, when they arrive.

LAURA *[panicky]*: Oh, Mother—*you* answer the door!

AMANDA *[lightly]*: I'll be in the kitchen—busy!

LAURA: Oh, Mother, please answer the door, don't make me do it!

AMANDA *[crossing into kitchenette]*: I've got to fix the dressing for the salmon. Fuss, fuss—silliness!—over a gentleman caller!

[The door swings shut. Laura is left alone. She utters a low moan and turns off

the lamp—sits stiffly on the edge of the sofa, knotting her fingers together. Tom and Jim appear on the fire-escape steps and climb to landing. Hearing their approach, Laura rises with a panicky gesture. She retreats to the portières. The doorbell, Laura catches her breath and touches her throat. Low drums sound.]

AMANDA *[calling]*: Laura, sweetheart! The door!

[Laura stares at it without moving.]

JIM: I think we just beat the rain.

TOM: Uh-huh. *[He rings again, nervously. Jim whistles and fishes for a cigarette.]*

AMANDA *[very, very gaily]*: Laura, that is your brother and Mr. O'Connor! Will you let them in, darling?

[Laura crosses toward the kitchenette door.]

LAURA *[breathlessly]*: Mother—you go to the door!

[Amanda steps out of kitchenette and stares furiously at Laura. She points imperiously at the door.]

LAURA: Please, please!

AMANDA *[in a fierce whisper]*: What is the matter with you, you silly thing?

LAURA *[desperately]*: Please, you answer it, *please!*

AMANDA: I told you I wasn't going to humour you, Laura. Why have you chosen this moment to lose your mind?

LAURA: Please, please, please, you go!

AMANDA: You'll have to go to the door because I can't!

LAURA *[despairingly]*: I can't either!

AMANDA: *Why?*

LAURA: I'm *sick!*

AMANDA: I'm sick, too—of your nonsense! Why can't you and your brother be normal people? Fantastic whims and behaviour!
[Tom gives a long ring.]
Preposterous goings on! Can you give me one reason—*[Calls out lyrically]* COMING! JUST ONE SECOND!—why you should be afraid to open a door? Now you answer it, Laura!

LAURA: Oh, oh, oh... *[She returns through the portières. Darts to the victrola and winds it frantically and turns it on.]*

AMANDA: Laura Wingfield, you march right to that door!

LAURA: Yes—yes, Mother!

[A faraway, scratchy rendition of 'Dardanella' softens the air and gives her strength to move through it. She slips to the door and draws it cautiously open. Tom enters with the caller, Jim O'Connor.]

TOM: Laura, this is Jim. Jim, this is my sister, Laura.

JIM *[stepping inside]*: I didn't know that Shakespeare had a sister!

LAURA *[retreating stiff and trembling from the door]*: How—how do you do?

JIM *[heartily extending his hand]*: Okay!

[Laura touches it hesitantly with hers.]

JIM: Your hand's *cold*, Laura!

LAURA: Yes, well—I've been playing the victrola....

JIM: Must have been playing classical music on it! You ought to play a little hot swing music to warm you up!

LAURA: Excuse me—I haven't finished playing the victrola... *[She turns awkwardly and hurries into the front room. She pauses a second by the victrola. Then catches her breath and darts through the portières like a frightened deer.]*

JIM: *[grinning]*: What was the matter?

TOM: Oh—with Laura? Laura is—terribly shy.

JIM: Shy, huh? It's unusual to meet a shy girl nowadays. I don't believe you ever mentioned you had a sister.

TOM: Well, now you know. I have one. Here is the *Post Dispatch*. You want a piece of it?

JIM: Uh-huh.

TOM: What piece? The comics?

JIM: Sports! *[He glances at it.]* Ole Dizzy Dean is on his bad behaviour.

TOM *[disinterested]*: Yeah? *[He lights a cigarette and goes back to the fire-escape door.]*

JIM: Where are *you* going?

TOM: I'm going out on the terrace.

JIM *[goes after him]*: You know, Shakespeare—I'm going to sell you a bill of goods!

TOM: What goods?

JIM: A course I'm taking.

TOM: Huh?

JIM: In public speaking! You and me, we're not the warehouse type.

TOM: Thanks—that's good news. But what has public speaking got to do with

it?

JIM: It fits you for—executive positions!

TOM: Awww.

JIM: I tell you it's done a helluva lot for me.

TOM: In what respect?

JIM: In every! Ask yourself what is the difference between you an' me and men in the office down front? Brains?—No! –Ability?—No! Then what? Just one little thing—

TOM: What is that one little thing?

JIM Primarily it amounts to—social poise! Being able to square up to people and hold your own on any social level!

AMANDA *[from the kitchenette]*: Tom?

TOM: Yes, Mother?

AMANDA: Is that you and Mr. O'Connor?

AMANDA: Well, you just make yourselves comfortable in there.

TOM: Yes, Mother.

AMANDA: Ask Mr. O'Connor if he would like to wash his hands.

JIM Aw, no—no—thank you—I took care of that at the warehouse. Tom—

TOM: Yes?

JIM: Mr. Mendoza was speaking to me about you.

TOM: Favourably?

JIM: What do you think?

TOM: Well—

JIM: You're going to be out of a job if you don't wake up.

TOM: I am waking up—

JIM: You show no signs.

TOM: The signs are interior.

TOM: I' m planning to change. *[He leans over the rail speaking with quiet exhilaration. The incandescent marquees and signs of the first-run movie houses light his face from across the alley. He looks like a voyager.]* I'm right at the point of committing myself to a future that doesn't include the warehouse and Mr. Mendoza or even a night-school course in public speaking.

JIM: What are you gassing about?

TOM: I'm tired of the movies.

JIM: Movies!

TOM: Yes, movies! Look at them—*[A wave toward the marvels of Grand Avenue.]* All of those glamorous people—having adventures—hogging it all, gobbling the whole thing up! You know what happens? People go to the *movies* instead of *moving*! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them! Yes, until there's a war. That's when adventure becomes available to the masses! *Everyone's* dish, not only Gable's! Then the people in the dark room come out of the dark room to have some adventure themselves—goody, goody! - It's our turn now, to go to the South Sea Islands—to make a safari—to be exotic, far-off! But I'm not patient. I don't want to wait till then. I'm tired of the *movies* and I am about to *move*!

JIM *[incredulously]*: Move?

TOM: Yes.

JIM: When?

TOM: Soon!

JIM: Where? Where?

[The music seems to answer the question, while Tom thinks it over. He searches in his pockets.]

TOM: I'm starting to boil inside. I know I seem dreamy, but inside—well, I'm boiling! Whenever I pick up a shoe, I shudder a little thinking how short life is and what I am doing! Whatever that means, I know it doesn't mean shoes—except as something to wear on a traveler's feet! *[He finds what he has been searching for in his pockets and holds out a paper to Jim.]* Look—

JIM: What?

TOM: I'm a member.

JIM *[reading]*: The Union of Merchant Seamen.

TOM: I paid my dues this month, instead of the light bill.

JIM: You will regret it when they turn the lights off.

TOM: I won't be here.

JIM: How about your mother?

TOM: I'm like my father. The bastard son of a bastard! Did you notice how he's grinning in his picture in there? And he's been absent going on sixteen years!

JIM: You're just talking, you drip. How does your mother feel about it?

TOM: Shhh!—Here comes mother! Mother is not acquainted with my plans!

AMANDA *[coming through the portières]*: Where are you all?

TOM: On the terrace, Mother.

[They start inside. She advances to them. 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. Tom is embarrassed but after the first shock Jim reacts very warmly. He grins and chuckles, is altogether won over.]

AMANDA *[coyly smiling, shaking her girlish ringlets]*: Well, well, well, so this is Mr. O'Connor. Introductions entirely unnecessary. I've heard so much about you from my boy. I finally said to him, Tom—good gracious!—why don't you bring this paragon to supper? I'd like to meet this nice young man at the warehouse!—instead of just hearing you sing his praises so much! I don't know why my son is so stand-offish—that's not Southern behaviour!
Let's sit down and—I think we could stand a little more air in here! Tom, leave the door open. I felt a nice fresh breeze a moment ago. Where has it gone to? Mmm, so warm already! And not quite summer, even. We're going to burn up when summer really gets started. However, we're having—we're having a very light supper. I think light things are better fo' this time of year. The same as light clothes are. Light clothes an' light food are what warm weather calls fo'. You know our blood gets so thick during th' winter—it takes a while fo' us to *adjust* ou'selves!—when the season changes... It's come so quick this year. I wasn't prepared. All of a sudden—heavens! Already summer! I ran to the trunk an' pulled out this light dress—terribly old! Historical almost! But feels so good—so good an' co-ol, y' know....

TOM: Mother—

AMANDA: Yes, honey?

TOM: How about—supper?

AMANDA: Honey, you go ask Sister if supper is ready! You know that Sister is in full charge of supper! Tell her you hungry boys are waiting for it.
[To Jim]
Have you met Laura?

JIM: She—

AMANDA: Let you in? Oh, good, you've met already! It's rare for a girl as sweet an' pretty as Laura to be domestic! But Laura is, thank heavens, not only pretty but also very domestic. I'm not at all. I never was a bit. I never could make a thing but angel-food cake. Well, in the South we had so many servants. Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living! Gone completely! I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me. All of my gentlemen callers were sons of planters and so of course I assumed that I would be married to one and raise my family on a large piece of land with plenty of servants. But man proposes and woman accepts the proposal! —To vary that old, old saying a little bit - I married no planter! I married a man who worked for the telephone company! —That gallantly smiling gentleman over there! *[Points to the picture.]* A telephone man who fell in love with long distance I—Now he travels and I don't even know where!—But what am I going on for about my—tribulations?
Tell me yours? I hope you don't have any! Tom?

TOM *[returning]*: Yes, Mother?

AMANDA: Is supper nearly ready?

TOM: It looks to me like supper is on the table.

AMANDA: Let me look—*[She rises prettily and looks through portières.]* Oh, lovely!—But where is Sister?

TOM: Laura is not feeling well—and she says that she thinks she'd better not come to the table.

AMANDA: What?—Nonsense!—Laura? Oh, Laura!

LAURA *[off stage, faintly]*: Yes, Mother.

AMANDA: You really must come to the table. We won't be seated until you come to the table!
Come in, Mr. O'Connor. You sit over there, and I'll—Laura—Laura Wingfield! You're keeping us waiting, honey! We can't say grace until you come to the table!

[The back door is pushed weakly open and Laura comes in. She is obviously quite faint, her lips trembling, her eyes wide and staring. She moves unsteadily toward the table.
Outside a summer storm is coming abruptly. The white curtains billow inward at the windows and there is a sorrowful murmur and deep blue dusk.
Laura suddenly stumbles—she catches at a chair with a faint moan.]

TOM: Laura!

AMANDA: Laura!
[Despairingly] Why, Laura, you *are* sick, darling! Tom, help your sister into the living-room, dear!
Sit in the living-room, Laura—rest on the sofa. Well!
[To the gentleman caller.]
Standing over the hot stove made her ill! I told her that was just too warm this evening, but—
[Tom comes back in. Laura is on the sofa.]
Is Laura all right now?

TOM: Yes.

AMANDA: What *is* that? Rain? A nice cool rain has come up!
[She gives Jim a frightened look.]
I think we may—have grace—now...
[Tom looks at her stupidly.]
Tom, honey—you say grace!

TOM: Oh… 'For these and all thy mercies—'
[They bow their heads, Amanda stealing a nervous glance at Jim. In the living-room Laura, stretched on the sofa, clenches her hand to her lips, to hold back a shuddering sob.]
God's Holy Name be praised—

THE SCENE DIMS OUT

SCENE SEVEN

[It is half an hour later. Dinner is just being finished in the dining area. Laura is still huddled upon the sofa, her feet drawn under her, her head resting on a pale blue pillow, her eyes wide and mysteriously watchful. The new floor lamp with its shade of rose-coloured silk gives a soft, becoming light to her face, bringing out the fragile, unearthly prettiness which usually escapes attention. There is a steady murmur of rain, but it is slackening and soon stops; the air outside becomes pale and luminous as the moon breaks out through the clouds. A moment after the curtain rises, the lights in both rooms flicker and go out.]

JIM: Hey, there, Mr. Light Bulb!

[Amanda laughs nervously.]

AMANDA: Where was Moses when the lights went out? Ha-ha. Do you know the answer to that one, Mr. O'Connor?

JIM: No, Ma'am, what's the answer?

AMANDA: In the dark!
[Jim laughs appreciatively.]
Everybody sit still. I'll light the candles. Isn't it lucky we have them on the table? Where's a match? Which of you gentlemen can provide a match?

JIM: Here.

AMANDA: Thank you, Sir.

JIM: Not at all, Ma'am!

AMANDA: I guess the fuse has burnt out. Mr. O'Connor, can you tell a burnt-out fuse? I know I can't and Tom is a total loss when it comes to mechanics.
[Voices recede a little to kitchenette.]
Oh, be careful you don't bump into something. We don't want our gentleman caller to break his neck. Now wouldn't that be a fine howdy-do?

JIM: Ha-ha! Where is the fuse-box?

AMANDA: Right here next to the stove. Can you see anything?

JIM: Just a minute.

AMANDA: Isn't electricity a mysterious thing? Wasn't it Benjamin Franklin who tied a key to a kite?
We live in such a mysterious universe, don't we? Some people say that science clears up all the mysteries for us. In my opinion it only creates more!
Have you found it yet?

JIM: No, Ma'am. All these fuses look okay to me.

AMANDA: Tom!

TOM: Yes, Mother?

AMANDA: That light bill I gave you several days ago. The one I told you we got the notices about?

TOM: Oh.—Yeah.

AMANDA: You didn't neglect to pay it by any chance?

TOM: Why, I—

AMANDA: Didn't! I might have known it!

JIM: Shakespeare probably wrote a poem on that light bill, Mrs. Wingfield.

AMANDA: I might have known better than to trust him with it! There's such a high price for negligence in this world!

JIM: Maybe the poem will win a ten-dollar prize.

AMANDA: We'll just have to spend the remainder of the evening in the nineteenth century, before Mr. Edison made the Mazda lamp!

JIM: Candlelight is my favourite kind of light.

AMANDA: That shows you're romantic! But that's no excuse for Tom.
Well, we got through dinner. Very considerate of them to let us get through dinner before they plunged us into ever-lasting darkness, wasn't it, Mr. O'Connor?

JIM: Ha-ha!

AMANDA: Tom, as a penalty for your carelessness you can help me with the dishes.

JIM: Let me give you a hand.

AMANDA: Indeed you will not!

JIM: I ought to be good for something.

AMANDA: Good for something? *[Her tone is rhapsodic.] You?* Why, Mr. O'Connor, nobody, *nobody's* given me this much entertainment in years—as you have!

JIM: Aw, now, Mrs. Wingfield!

AMANDA: I'm not exaggerating, not one bit! But Sister is all by her lonesome. You go keep her company in the parlour! I'll give you this lovely old candelabrum that used to be on the altar at the church of the Heavenly Rest. It was melted a little out of shape when the church burnt down. Lightning struck it one spring. Gypsy Jones was holding a revival at the time and he intimated that the church was destroyed because the Episcopalians gave card parties.

JIM: Ha-ha.

AMANDA: And how about you coaxing Sister to drink a little wine? I think it would be good for her! Can you carry both at once?

JIM: Sure. I'm Superman!

AMANDA: Now, Thomas, get into this apron!

[Jim comes into the dining room, carrying the candelabrum, its candles lighted, in one hand and a glass of wine in the other. The door of the kitchenette swings closed on Amanda's gay laughter; the flickering light approaches the portières. Laura sits up nervously as Jim enters. She can hardly speak from the almost intolerable strain of being alone with a stranger.
At first, Jim's warmth overcomes her paralyzing shyness. Laura's voice is thin and breathless as though she has just run up a steep flight of stairs. Jim's attitude is gently humorous. In playing this scene it should be stressed that while the incident is apparently unimportant, it is to Laura the climax of her secret life.]

JIM: Hello, there, Laura.

LAURA *[faintly]*: Hello.

[She clears her throat.]

JIM: How are you feeling now? Better?

LAURA: Yes. Yes, thank you.

JIM: This is for you. A little dandelion wine. *[He extends the glass toward her with extravagant gallantry.]*

LAURA: Thank you.

JIM: Drink it—but don't get drunk!
[He laughs heartily. Laura takes the glass uncertainly; she laughs shyly.]
Where shall I set the candles?

LAURA: Oh—oh, anywhere...

JIM: How about here on the floor? Any objections?

LAURA: No.

JIM: I'll spread a newspaper under to catch the drippings. I like to sit on the floor. Mind if I do?

LAURA: Oh, no.

JIM: Give me a pillow?

LAURA: What?

JIM: A pillow!

LAURA: Oh... *[She hands him one quickly.]*

JIM: How about you? Don't you like to sit on the floor?

LAURA: Oh—yes.

JIM: Why don't you, then?

LAURA: I—will.

JIM: Take a pillow! *[Laura does. Sits on the other side of the candelabrum. Jim crosses his legs and smiles engagingly as her.]* I can't hardly see you sitting way over there.

LAURA: I can—see you.

JIM: I know, but that's not fair, I'm in the limelight. *[Laura moves her pillow closer.]* Good! Now I can see you! Comfortable?

LAURA: Yes.

JIM: So am I. Comfortable as a cow! Will you have some gum?

LAURA: No, thank you.

JIM: I think that I will indulge, with your permission. *[Musingly unwraps it and holds it up.]* Think of the fortune made by the guy that invented the first piece of chewing gum. Amazing, huh? The Wrigley Building is one of the sights of Chicago—I saw it summer before last when I went up to the Century of Progress. Did you take in the Century of Progress?

LAURA: No, I didn't.

JIM: Well, it was quite a wonderful exposition. What impressed me most was the Hall of Science. Gives you an idea of what the future will be in America, even more wonderful than the present time is! *[Pause. Smiling at her.]* Your brother tells me you're shy. Is that right, Laura?

LAURA: I—don't know.

JIM: I judge you to be an old-fashioned type of girl. Well, I think that's a pretty good type to be. Hope you don't think I'm being too personal—do you?

LAURA *[hastily, out of embarrassment]*: I believe I will take a piece of gum, if you—don't mind. *[clearing her throat.]* Mr. O'Connor, have you—kept up with your singing?

JIM: Singing? Me?

LAURA: Yes. I remember what a beautiful voice you had.

JIM: When did you hear me sing?

[Laura does not answer, and in the long pause which follows a man's voice is heard singing off-stage]

VOICE:
O blow, ye winds, heigh-ho,
A-roving I will go!
I'm off to my love
With a boxing glove—
Ten thousand miles away!

JIM: You say you've heard me sing?

LAURA: Oh, yes! Yes, very often… I—don't suppose—you remember me—at all?

JIM *[smiling doubtfully]*: You know I have an idea I've seen you before. I had

that idea soon as you opened the door. It seemed almost like I was about to remember your name. But the name that I started to call you - wasn't a' name! And so I stopped myself before I said it.

LAURA: Wasn't it—Blue Roses?

JIM: *[springs up, grinning]*: Blue Roses! My gosh, yes—Blue Roses! That's what I had on my tongue when you opened the door! Isn't it funny what tricks your memory plays? I didn't connect you with high school somehow or other. But that's where it was; it was high school. I didn't even know you were Shakespeare's sister! Gosh, I'm sorry.

LAURA: I didn't expect you to. You—barely knew me!

JIM: But we did have a speaking acquaintance, huh?

LAURA: Yes, we—spoke to each other.

JIM: When did you recognize me?

LAURA: Oh, right away!

JIM: Soon as I came in the door?

LAURA: When I heard your name I thought it was probably you. I knew that Tom used to know you a little in high school. So when you came in the door—Well, then I was—sure.

JIM: Why didn't you *say* something, then?

LAURA *[breathlessly]*: I didn't know what to say, I was—too surprised!

JIM: For goodness' sakes—I—You know, this sure is funny!

LAURA: Yes—I—Yes, isn't it, though...

JIM: Didn't we have a class in something together?

LAURA: Yes, we did.

JIM: What class was that?

LAURA: It was—singing—Chorus!

JIM: Aw!

LAURA: I sat across the aisle from you in the Aud.

JIM: Aw!

LAURA: Mondays, Wednesday, and Fridays.

JIM: Now I remember—you always came in late.

LAURA: Yes, it was so hard for me, getting upstairs. I had that brace on my leg —it clumped so loud—I—

JIM: I never heard any clumping.

LAURA *[wincing at the recollection]*: To me it sounded like thunder!

JIM: Well, well, well, I never even noticed.

LAURA: And everybody was seated before I came in. I had to walk in front of all those people. My seat was in the back row. I had to go clumping all the way up the aisle with everyone watching—

JIM: You shouldn't have been self-conscious.

LAURA: I know, but I was. It was always such a relief when the singing started.

JIM: Aw, yes, I've placed you now—I—I used to call you Blue Roses. How was it that I got started calling you that?

LAURA: I was out of school a little while with pleurosis. When I came back you asked me what was the matter. I said I had pleurosis—you thought I said Blue Roses—That's what you always called me after that…

JIM: I hope you didn't mind.

LAURA: Oh, no—I liked it. You see, I wasn't acquainted with many—people....

JIM: As I remember you sort of stuck by yourself.

LAURA: I—I—never have had much luck at—making friends.

JIM: I don't see why you wouldn't.

LAURA: Well, I—started out badly.

JIM: You mean being—

LAURA: Yes, it sort of—stood between me—

JIM: You shouldn't have let it!

LAURA: I know, but it did, and—

JIM: You were shy with people!

LAURA: I tried not to be but never could—

JIM: Overcome it?

LAURA: No, I—I never could!

JIM: I guess being shy is something you have to work out of kind of gradually.

LAURA *[sorrowfully]*: Yes—I guess it—

JIM: Takes time!

LAURA: Yes—

JIM: People are not so dreadful when you know them. That's what you have to remember! And everybody has problems, not just you, but practically everybody has got some problems. You think of yourself as having the only problems, as

being the only one who is disappointed. But just look around you and you will see lots of people as disappointed as you are. For instance, I hoped when I was going to high-school that I would be further along at this time, six years later, than I am now—You remember that wonderful write-up I had in *The Torch*?

LAURA: Yes! *[She rises and crosses to the table.]*

JIM: It said I was bound to succeed in anything I went into!
[Laura returns with the high school yearbook.]
Holy Jeez! *The Torch!*
[He accepts it reverently. They smile across it with mutual wonder. Laura crouches beside him and they begin to turn through it. Laura's shyness is dissolving in his warmth.]

LAURA: Here you are in *The Pirates of Penzance*!

JIM *[wistfully]*: I sang the baritone lead in that operetta.

LAURA *[raptly]*: So—*beautifully*!

JIM *[protesting]*: Aw—

LAURA: Yes, yes—beautifully—beautifully!

JIM: You heard me?

LAURA: All three times!

JIM: No!

LAURA: Yes!

JIM: All three performances?

LAURA *[looking down]*: Yes.

JIM: Why?

LAURA: I—wanted to ask you to—autograph my program.

[She takes the program from the back of the yearbook and shows it to him.]

JIM: Why didn't you ask me to?

LAURA: You were always surrounded by your own friends so much that I never had a chance to.

JIM: You should have just—

LAURA: Well, I—thought you might think I was—

JIM: Thought I might think you was—what?

LAURA: Oh—

JIM *[with reflective relish]*: I was beleaguered by females—In those days.

LAURA: You were terribly popular!

JIM: Yeah.

LAURA: You had such a—friendly way

JIM: I was spoiled in high school.

LAURA: Everybody—liked you!

JIM: Including you?

LAURA: I—yes, I—I did, too—*[She gently closes the book in her lap.]*

JIM: Well, well, well!—Give me that program, Laura. *[She hands it to him. He signs it with a flourish.]* There you are—better late than never!

LAURA: Oh, I—what a—surprise!

JIM: My signature isn't worth very much tight now. But some day—maybe—it will increase in value! Being disappointed is one thing and being discouraged is something else. I am disappointed but I am not discouraged. I'm twenty-three

years old. How old are you?

LAURA: I'll be twenty-four in June.

JIM: That's not old age!

LAURA: No, but—

JIM: You finished high school?

LAURA *[with difficulty]*: I didn't go back.

JIM: You mean you dropped out?

LAURA: I made bad grades in my final examinations. *[She rises and replaces the book and the program. Her voice strained.]* How is—Emily Meisenbach getting along?

JIM: Oh, that kraut-head!

LAURA: Why do you call her that?

JIM: That's what she was.

LAURA: You're not still—going with her?

JIM: I never see her.

LAURA: It said in the Personal Section that you were engaged!

JIM: I know, but I wasn't impressed by that—propaganda!

LAURA: It wasn't—the truth?

JIM: Only in Emily's optimistic opinion!

LAURA: Oh—

[Jim lights a cigarette and leans indolently back on his elbows smiling at Laura

with a warmth and charm which lights her inwardly. She remains by the table and turns in her hands a piece of glass to cover her tumult.]

JIM: *[after several reflective puffs on a cigarette]*: What have you done since high school? *[She seems not to hear him.]* Huh? *[Laura looks up.]* I said what have you done since high school, Laura?

LAURA: Nothing much.

JIM: You must have been doing something these six long years.

LAURA: Yes.

JIM: Well, then, such as what?

LAURA: I took a business course at business college—

JIM: How did that work out?

LAURA: Well, not very—well—I had to drop out, it gave me—indigestion—

JIM *[laughs gently]*: What are you doing now?

LAURA: I don't do anything—much. Oh, please don't think I sit around doing nothing! My glass collection takes up a good deal of time. Glass is something you have to take good care of.

JIM: What did you say—about glass?

LAURA: Collection I said—I have one—*[she clears her throat and turns away, acutely shy.]*

JIM *[abruptly]*: You know what I judge to be the trouble with you? Inferiority complex! Know what that is? That's what they call it when someone low-rates himself! I understand it because I had it, too. Although my case was not so aggravated as yours seems to be. I had it until I took up public speaking, developed my voice, and learned that I had an aptitude for science. Before that time I never thought of myself as being outstanding in any way whatsoever!
Now I've never made a regular study of it, but I have a friend who says I can

analyze people better than doctors that make a profession of it. I don't claim that to be necessarily true, but I can sure guess a person's psychology, Laura… *[Takes out his gum]* Excuse me, Laura. I always take it out when the flavour is gone. I'll use this scrap of paper to wrap it in. I know how it is to get it stuck on a shoe.
Yep—that's what I judge to be your principal trouble. A lack of amount of faith in yourself as a person. You don't have the proper amount of faith in yourself. I'm basing that fact on a number of your remarks and also on certain observations I've made. For instance that clumping you thought was so awful in high school. You say that you even dreaded to walk into class. You see what you did? 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!
You know what my strong advice to you is? Think of yourself as *superior* in some way!

LAURA: In what way would I think?

JIM: Why, man alive, Laura! Just look about you a little. What do you see? A world full of common people! All of 'em born and all of 'em going to die!
Which of them has one-tenth of your good points? Or mine! Or anyone else's, as far as that goes—Gosh!
Everybody excels in some one thing. Some in many!
[Unconsciously glances at himself in the mirror.]
All you've got to do is discover in *what!* Take me, for instance.
[He adjusts his tie at the mirror.]
My interest happens to lie in electro-dynamics. I'm taking a course in radio engineering at night school, Laura, on top of a fairly responsible job at the warehouse. I'm taking that course and studying public speaking.

LAURA: Ohhhh.

JIM: Because I believe in the future of television!
[Turning back to her.]
I wish to be ready to go up right along with it. Therefore I'm planning to get in on the ground floor. In fact I've already made the right connections and all that remains is for the industry itself to get under way! Full steam—*[His eyes are starry.] Knowledge*—Zzzzzp! *Money* – Zzzzzzp!—*Power!* That's the cycle

democracy is built on!
[His attitude is convincingly dynamic. Laura stares at him, even her shyness eclipsed in her absolute wonder. He suddenly grins.]
I guess you think I think a lot of myself!

LAURA: No—o-o-o, I—

JIM: Now how about you? Isn't there something you take more interest in than anything else?

LAURA: Well, I do—as I said—have my—glass collection—

[A peal of girlish laughter from the kitchenette.]

JIM: I'm not right sure I know what you're talking about—What kind of glass is it?

LAURA: Little articles of it, they're ornaments mostly! Most of them are little animals made out of glass, the tiniest little animals in the world. Mother calls them a glass menagerie! Here's an example of one, if you'd like to see it! This one is one of the oldest. It's nearly thirteen.
*[**MUSIC**: 'THE GLASS MENAGERIE'*
He stretches out his hand.]
Oh, be careful—if you breathe, it breaks!

JIM: I'd better not take it. I'm pretty clumsy with things.

LAURA: Go on, I trust you with him!
[She places the piece in his palm.]
There now—you're holding him gently!
Hold him over the light, he loves the light! You see how the light shines through him?

JIM: It sure does shine!

LAURA: I shouldn't be partial, but he is my favourite one.

JIM: What kind of a thing is this one supposed to be?

LAURA: Haven't you noticed the single horn on his forehead head?

JIM: A unicorn, huh?

LAURA: Mmmm-hmmm!

JIM: Unicorns—aren't they extinct in the modern world?

LAURA: I know!

JIM: Poor little fellow, he must feel sort of lonesome.

LAURA *[smiling]*: Well, if he does he doesn't complain about it. He stays on a shelf with some horses that don't have horns and all of them seem to get along nicely together.

JIM: How do you know?

LAURA *[lightly]*: I haven't heard any arguments among them!

JIM *[grinning]*: No arguments, huh? Well, that's a pretty good sign! Where shall I set him?

LAURA: Put him on the table. They all like a change of scenery once in a while!

JIM: Well, well, well, well—*[He places the glass piece on the table, then raises his arms and stretches.]* Look how big my shadow is when I stretch!

LAURA: Oh, oh, yes—it stretches across the ceiling!

JIM *[crossing to door]*: I think it's stopped raining. *[He opens the fire-escape door and the background music changes to dance music.]* Where does the music come from?

LAURA: From the Paradise Dance Hall across the alley.

JIM: How about cutting the rug a little, Miss Wingfield?

LAURA: Oh, I—

JIM: Or is your program filled up? Let me have a look at it. *[He grasps an imaginary card.]* Why, every dance is taken! I'll just have to scratch some out.
*[**WALTZ MUSIC**: 'LA GOLONDRINA'.]*
Ahhh, a waltz!
[He executes some sweeping turns by himself then holds his arms toward Laura.]

LAURA *[breathlessly]*: I—can't dance!

JIM: There you go, that inferiority stuff!

LAURA: I've never danced in my life!

JIM: Come on, try!

LAURA: Oh, but I'd step on you!

JIM: I'm not made out of glass.

LAURA: How—how—how do we start?

JIM: Just leave it to me. You hold your arms out a little.

LAURA: Like this?

JIM *[taking her in his arms]*: A little bit higher. Right. Now don't tighten up, that's the main thing about it—relax.

LAURA *[laughing breathlessly]*: It's hard not to. I'm afraid you can't budge me.

JIM: What do you bet I can't? *[He swings her into motion.]*

LAURA: Goodness, yes, you can!

JIM: Let yourself go, now, Laura, just let yourself go.

LAURA: I'm—

JIM: Come on!

LAURA: —trying!

JIM: Not so stiff—Easy does it!

LAURA: I know but I'm—

JIM: Loosen th' backbone! There now, that's a lot better.

LAURA: Am I?

JIM: Lots, lots better!

[He moves her about the room in a clumsy waltz.]

LAURA: Oh, my!

JIM: Ha-ha!

LAURA: Oh, my goodness!

JIM: Ha-ha-ha!
[They suddenly bump into the table, and the glass piece on it falls to the floor. Jim stops the dance.]
What did we hit on?

LAURA: Table.

JIM: Did something fall off it? I think—

LAURA: Yes.

JIM: I hope that it wasn't the little glass horse with the horn!

LAURA: Yes.

[She stoops to pick it up.]

JIM: Aw, aw, aw. Is it broken?

LAURA: Now it is just like all the other horses.

JIM: It's lost its—

LAURA: Horn! It doesn't matter. Maybe it's a blessing in disguise.

JIM: You'll never forgive me. I bet that that was your favourite piece of glass.

LAURA: I don't have favourites much. It's no tragedy, Freckles. Glass breaks so easily. No matter how careful you are. The traffic jars the shelves and things fall off them.

JIM: Still I'm awfully sorry that I was the cause.

LAURA *[smiling]*: I'll just imagine he had an operation. The horn was removed to make him feel less—freakish!
[They both laugh.]
Now he will feel more at home with the other horses, the ones that don't have horns...

JIM: Ha-ha, that's very funny!
[Suddenly serious]
I'm glad to see that you have a sense of humour. You know—you're—well—very different! Surprisingly different from anyone else I know!
[His voice becomes soft and hesitant with a genuine feeling.]
Do you mind me telling you that?
[Laura is abashed beyond speech]
I mean it in a nice way—
[Laura nods shyly, looking away.]
You make me feel sort of—I don't know how to put it! I'm usually pretty good at expressing things, but—This is something that I don't know how to say!
[Laura touches her throat and clears it—turns the unicorn in her hands. His voice becomes even softer.]
Has anyone ever told you that you were pretty?
[There is a pause, and the music rises slightly. Laura looks up slowly with wonder and shakes her head.]

Well, you are! In a very different way from anyone else. And all the nicer because of the difference, too.
[His voice becomes low and husky. Laura turns away, nearly faint with the novelty of her emotions.]
I wish that you were my sister. I'd teach you to have some confidence in yourself. The different people are not like other people, but being different is nothing to be ashamed of. Because other people are not such wonderful people. They're one hundred times one thousand. You're one times one! They walk all over the earth. You just stay here. They're common as—weeds, but—you—well, you're—*Blue Roses!*

[MUSIC changes.]

LAURA: But blue is wrong for—roses...

JIM: It's right for you! You're—pretty!

LAURA: In what respect am I pretty?

JIM: In all respects—believe me! Your eyes—your hair—are pretty! Your hands are pretty!
[He catches hold of her hand.]
You think I'm making this up because I'm invited to dinner and have to be nice. Oh, I could do that! I could put on an act for you, Laura, and say lots of things without being very sincere. But this time I am. I'm talking to you sincerely. I happened to notice you had this inferiority complex that keeps you from feeling comfortable with people. Somebody needs to build your confidence up and make you proud instead of shy and turning away and—blushing. Somebody—ought to —*kiss* you, Laura!
[His hand slips slowly up her arm to her shoulder as the music swells tumultuously. He suddenly turns her about and kisses her on the lips. When he releases her, Laura sinks on the sofa with a bright, dazed look. Jim backs away and fishes in his pocket for a cigarette.]
Stumble-john!
[He lights the cigarette, avoiding her look.
There is a peal of girlish laughter from Amanda in the kitchen.
Laura slowly raises and opens her hand. It still contains the little broken glass animal. She looks at it with a tender, bewildered expression.]
Stumble-john! I shouldn't have done that—That was way off the beam. You

don't smoke, do you?
[She looks up, smiling, not hearing the question.
He sits beside her a little gingerly. She looks at him speechlessly—waiting.
He coughs decorously and moves a little farther aside as he considers the situation and senses her feelings, dimly, with perturbation.
He speaks gently.]
Would you—care for a—mint?
[She doesn't seem to hear him but her look grows brighter even.]
Peppermint—Life-Saver? My pocket's a regular drug store—wherever I go...
[He pops a mint in his mouth. Then he gulps and decides to make a clean breast of it. He speaks slowly and gingerly.]
Laura, you know, if I had a sister like you, I'd do the same thing as Tom. I'd bring out fellows and—introduce her to them. The right type of boys of a type to—appreciate her.
Only—well—he made a mistake about me.
Maybe I've got no call to be saying this. That may not have been the idea in having me over. But what if it was? There's nothing wrong about that. The only trouble is that in my case—I'm not in a situation to—do the right thing.
I can't take down your number and say I'll phone. I can't call up next week and—ask for a date.
I thought I had better explain the situation in case you misunderstand it and—hurt your feelings…

[There is a pause. Slowly, very slowly, Laura's look changes, her eyes returning slowly from his to the ornament in her palm.
Amanda utters another gay laugh in the kitchenette.]

LAURA *[faintly]*: You—won't—call again?

JIM: No, Laura, I can't.
[He rises from the sofa.]
As I was just explaining, I've—got strings on me. Laura, I've—been going steady!
I go out all of the time with a girl named Betty. She's a home-girl like you, and Catholic, and Irish, and in a great many ways we—get along fine.
I met her last summer on a moonlight boat trip up the river to Alton, on the *Majestic*.
Well—right away from the start it was—love!
[Laura sways slightly forward and grips the arm of the sofa. He fails to notice,

now enrapt in his own comfortable being.]
Being in love has made -a new man of me!
[Leaning stiffly forward, clutching the arm of the sofa Laura struggles visibly with her storm. But Jim is oblivious; she is a long way off.]
The power of love is really pretty tremendous! Love is something that—changes the whole world, Laura!
[The storm abates a little and Laura leans back. He notices her again.]
It happened that Betty's aunt took sick, she got a wire and had to go to Centralia. So Tom—when he asked me to dinner—I naturally just accepted the invitation, not knowing that you—that he—that I— *[He stops awkwardly.]*
Huh—I'm a stumble-john!
[He flops back on the sofa.
The holy candles in the altar of Laura's face have been snuffed out. There is a look of almost infinite desolation.
Jim glances at her uneasily.]
I wish that you would—say something.
[She bites her lip which was trembling and then bravely smiles. She opens her hand again on the broken glass ornament. Then she gently takes his hand and raises it level with her own. She carefully places the unicorn in the palm of his hand, then pushes his fingers closed upon it.]
What are you—doing that for? You want me to have him? Laura?
[She nods.]
What for?

LAURA: A—souvenir....

[She rises unsteadily and crouches beside the victrola to wind it up.
At this moment Amanda rushes brightly back in the front room. She bears a pitcher of fruit punch in an old-fashioned cut-glass pitcher, and a plate of macaroons. The plate has a gold border and poppies painted on it.]

AMANDA: Well, well, well! Isn't the air delightful after the shower? I've made you children a little liquid refreshment.
[Turns gaily to Jim.]
Jim, do you know that song about lemonade?

'Lemonade, lemonade
Made in the shade and stirred with a spade—
Good enough for any old maid!'

JIM *[uneasily]*: Ha-ha! No—I never heard it.

AMANDA: Why, Laura! You look so serious!

JIM: We were having a serious conversation.

AMANDA: Good! Now you're better acquainted!

JIM *[uncertainly]*: Ha-ha! Yes.

AMANDA: You modern young people are much more serious-minded than my generation. I was so gay as a girl!

JIM: You haven't changed, Mrs. Wingfield—

AMANDA: Tonight I'm rejuvenated! The gaiety of the occasion, Mr. O'Connor!
[She tosses her head with a peal of laughter. Spills lemonade.]
Oooo! I'm baptizing myself!

JIM: Here—let me—

AMANDA *[Setting the pitcher down]*: There now. I discovered we had some maraschino cherries. I dumped them in, juice and all!

JIM: You shouldn't have gone to that trouble, Mrs. Wingfield.

AMANDA: Trouble, trouble? Why, it was loads of fun! Didn't you hear me cutting up in the kitchen? I bet your ears were burning! I told Tom how outdone with him I was for keeping you to himself so long a time! He should have brought you over much, much sooner! Well, now that you've found your way, I want you to be a very frequent caller! Not just occasional but all the time. Oh, we're going to have a lot of gay times together! I see them coming!
Mmm, just breathe that air! So fresh, and the moon's so pretty!
I'll skip back out—I know where my place is when young folks are having a—serious conversation!

JIM: Oh, don't go out, Mrs. Wingfield. The fact of the matter is I've got to be going.

AMANDA: Going, now? You're joking! Why, it's only the shank of the evening, Mr. O'Connor!

JIM: Well, you know how it is.

AMANDA: You mean you're a young working man and have to keep working men's hours. Well let you off early tonight. But only on the condition that next time you stay later. What's the best night for you? Isn't Saturday night the best night for you working men?

JIM: I have a couple of time-clocks to punch, Mrs. Wingfield. One at morning, another one at night!

AMANDA: My, but you *are* ambitious! You work at night, too?

JIM: No, Ma'am, not work but—Betty! *[He crosses deliberately to pick up his hat. The band at the Paradise Dance Hall goes into a tender waltz.]*

AMANDA: Betty? Betty? Who's—Betty!

[There is an ominous cracking sound in the sky.]

JIM: Oh, just a girl. The girl I go steady with—

[He smiles charmingly. The sky falls]

AMANDA *[a long-drawn exhalation]*: Ohhhh... Is it a serious romance, Mr. O'Connor?

JIM: We're going to be married the second Sunday in June.

AMANDA: Ohhhh—how nice! Tom didn't mention that you were engaged to be married.

JIM: The cat's not out of the bag at the warehouse yet. You know how they are. They call you Romeo and stuff like that.
[He stops at the oval mirror to put on his hat. He carefully shapes the brim and the crown to give a discreetly dashing effect.]
It's been a wonderful evening, Mrs. Wingfield. I guess this is what they mean by

Southern hospitality.

AMANDA: It really wasn't anything at all.

JIM: I hope it don't seem like I'm rushing off. But I promised Betty I'd pick her up at the Wabash depot, an' by the time I get my jalopy down there her train'll be in. Some women are pretty upset if you keep 'em waiting.

AMANDA: Yes, I know—The tyranny of women!
[She extends her hand.]
Good-bye, Mr. O'Connor. I wish you luck—and happiness—and success! All three of them, and so does Laura! Don't you, Laura?

LAURA: Yes!

JIM *[taking her hand]*: Good-bye, Laura. I'm certainly going to treasure that souvenir. And don't you forget the good advice I gave you.
[Raises his voice to a cheery shout.]
So long, Shakespeare! Thanks again, ladies.—Good night!
[He grins and ducks jauntily out.]

[Still bravely grimacing, Amanda closes the door on the gentleman caller. Then she turns back to the room with a puzzled expression. She and Laura don't dare face each other. Laura crouches beside the victrola to wind it.]

AMANDA *[faintly]*: Things have a way of turning out so badly. I don't believe that I would play the victrola. Well, well—well! Our gentleman caller was engaged to be married! TOM!

TOM *[from back]*: Yes, Mother?

AMANDA: Come in here a minute. I want to tell you something awfully funny.

TOM *[enters with a macaroon and a glass of lemonade]*: Has the gentleman caller gotten away already?

AMANDA: The gentleman caller has made an early departure. What a wonderful joke you played on us!

TOM: How do you mean?

AMANDA: You didn't mention that he was engaged to be married.

TOM: Jim? Engaged?

AMANDA: That's what he just informed us.

TOM: I'll be jiggered! I didn't know about that

AMANDA: That seems very peculiar.

TOM: 'What's peculiar about it?

AMANDA: Didn't you call him your best friend down at the warehouse?

TOM: He is, but how did I know?

AMANDA: It seems extremely peculiar that you wouldn't know your best friend was going to be married!

TOM: The warehouse is where I work, not where I know things about people!

AMANDA: You don't know things anywhere! You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions!
[He crosses to door.]
Where are you going?

TOM: I'm going to the movies.

AMANDA: That's right, now that you've had us make such fools of ourselves. The effort, the preparations, all the expense! The new floor lamp, the rug, the clothes for Laura! All for what? To entertain some other girl's fiancé! Go to the movies, go! Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure—I just—go, go, go—to the movies!

TOM: All right, I will! The more you shout about my selfishness to me the quicker I'll go, and I won't go to the movies!

AMANDA: Go, then! Then go to the moon—you selfish dreamer!

[Tom smashes his glass on the floor. He plunges out on the fire-escape, slamming the door. Laura screams in fright..
The Dance-hall music becomes louder.
Tom goes to the rail and grips it desperately, lifting his face in the chill white moonlight penetrating narrow abyss of the alley.
Tom's closing speech is timed with the interior pantomime.
The interior scene is played as though viewed through soundproof glass. Amanda appears to be making a comforting speech to Laura who is huddled upon the sofa. Now that we cannot hear the mother's speech, her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty.
Laura's dark hair hides her face until at the end of the speech she lifts it to smile at her Mother. Amanda's gestures are slow and graceful, almost dancelike as she comforts the daughter. At the end of her speech she glances a moment at the father's picture—then withdraws through the portières. At the close of Tom's speech, Laura blows out the candles, ending the play.]

TOM: I didn't go to the moon, I went much further—for time is the longest distance between places. Not long after that I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoebox.
I left Saint Louis. I descended the step of this fire-escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space—I travelled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly coloured but torn away from the branches.
I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise. Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass. Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of coloured glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colours, like bits of a shattered rainbow.
Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes...
Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!
I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a

drink, I speak to the nearest stranger—anything that can blow your candles out!
[Laura bends over the candles.]
—for nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura—and so good-bye.
[She blows the candles out.]

THE SCENE DISSOLVES

List of Characters

Tom Wingfield is a character in the play as well as the narrator, who both recounts and reenacts his memories of a difficult period in his life when he lived with his mother and sister in St. Louis. One of Tennessee Williams's most autobiographical characters, Tom is a self-anointed poet, forced to work in a shoe factory in order to support his family in the absence of his father. In an attempt to escape the problems of his life, he frequents the cinema.

Responding to the persistent requests of his mother, Tom brings home a gentleman caller for his sister. The match is a disaster, failing to resolve any of the issues that display themselves so prominently in the memory of Tom. Ultimately, in order to avoid a desperate future, Tom must choose to leave home, abandoning his mother and sister as his father once did. In Tennessee Williams's own description of the character, the author notes that this act does not come without remorse and is nothing less than the "escape from a trap" (*The Glass Menagerie*, XVIII).

Amanda Wingfield is the mother of Tom and Laura. Abandoned by her husband and forced to care for her children alone, Amanda takes comfort in her memories of the past, repeatedly recounting a time in her life defined by proper Southern manners and filled with endless visits from gentleman callers and vases overflowing with jonquils. Insistent that Laura should find herself a good husband, Amanda asks Tom to bring home a gentleman caller. Her persistence in attempting to orchestrate events that she believes will lead to a good, secure future creates tension and distance between her and her children. Despite Amanda's apparent infatuation with a romanticized past, she confesses to Tom that she cannot speak of all that is in her heart. Her tales of a better time are frequently punctuated with the remembrance of Tom and Laura's father, Mr. Wingfield. This demonstration that Amanda is all too aware of her situation lends support to the

notion that she is not purposely cruel or antagonistic. Rather, she is simply doing her best to endure, and wants her children to escape a fate that she cannot.

Laura Wingfield is Tom's sister and the daughter of Amanda; she is based on Tennessee Williams's real-life sister, Rose. Laura is not only physically handicapped, forced to wear a leg brace; she is emotionally crippled as well. She is unable to hold a job or interact socially with others and retreats into a world of illusion, hypnotically winding the Victrola and playing with her collection of glass animals. There is a moment of hope for Laura when Jim, the gentleman caller, dances with her and follows this with a kiss, but Laura retreats back into her world upon the failure of this match due to Jim's engagement to another.

Jim O'Connor is the gentleman caller who is brought to the Wingfield residence by Tom. He works with Tom at the shoe factory and formerly attended high school with both Tom and Laura. Jim is described by Williams as an "ordinary young man" (XVIII). He was popular in high school, successful in sports, drama, debating, and politics and indeed, Jim exudes the confidence of someone who has succeeded in all they have done. He possesses an optimism that the other characters do not. Ultimately, Jim's presence is not enough to resolve the problems that haunt the Wingfield family.

Mr. Wingfield is introduced by his son, Tom, as "the fifth character in the play" (XVIII). Mr. Wingfield never actually appears in the play, but his absence is glaring. A large photograph of him is displayed on the wall of the living room and is illuminated throughout the play as a reminder of the part he has played in the dire situation the audience witnesses. He is generously described by Tom as a telephone salesman who was "in love with long distances" (5).

Summary and Analysis

"The plot is slight stuff, as Williams himself knew." (Scanlan, 99) Equipped with the knowledge of the outstanding success of *The Glass Menagerie*, it might be shocking to encounter a scholar's reference to the meagerness of the plot. More shocking is the assertion that Tennessee Williams was fully aware of this lack of dramatic action in *The Glass Menagerie*. Scholar Tom Scanlan is brave enough to make this statement, and while it seems that this is a critical remark about a flaw in Williams's work, the opposite is in fact true. After all, Tennessee Williams repeatedly made references to the "plastic" element of the play. In fact, Scanlan backs his claim by including one of Williams's own comments from his **Production Notes** (Scanlan, 108); Williams states, "A free and imaginative use of light can be of enormous value in giving a mobile plastic quality to plays of a more or less static nature." Furthermore, Williams actually emphasized this static quality, speaking in favor of a new "sculptural drama" or "plastic theatre" to replace the dramatic realism that was dominant at the time. It was Williams's belief that realism was no longer adequate to convey the complexities of modern existence. The totality of experience could be better represented through symbolic implications, psychological action, and a lack of other distractions. In his Production Notes, he says:

> The straight play with its genuine Frigidaire and authentic ice-cubes, its characters who speak exactly as its audience speaks, corresponds to the academic landscape and has the same virtue of a photographic likeness. Everyone should know nowadays…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.

An abundant plot is therefore superfluous, and so, Williams adopts a more minimal approach. This pared-down concept flows throughout the play. *The Glass Menagerie* consists of only four characters: Tom Wingfield, Laura Wingfield, Amanda Wingfield, and Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller. The set consists of a living room, dining room, and an exterior portion of the Wingfields' apartment building; the props are almost non-existent (characters who are eating have no actual food or silverware); and the timeline accounts for a very brief period of time. Even the actions of the characters are minimal. Amanda, Tom, and Laura are seen performing basic, domestic tasks such as washing the dishes, clearing the table, or reading the newspaper. Robert Bray references a related note from Williams in his introduction to the play: "Arguing for the necessity of a sculptural drama, Williams wrote, 'I visualize it as a reduced mobility on stage, the forming of statuesque attitudes or tableaux, something resembling a restrained type of dance, with motions honed down to only the essential or significant.' " (Bray, ix)

As Tom Scanlan has already pointed out, the overall dramatic action is equally sparse. There are only two basic lines of thought touched on in *The Glass Menagerie*: Tom's desire to escape and Amanda's obsession with finding a husband for her daughter, Laura. (Scanlan, 99) Accordingly, the "major" dramatic actions of each character can be summarized as follows: Amanda and Tom clash; Laura plays with her collection of glass animals and winds the Victrola; Jim, the gentleman caller, comes to visit. In fact, the gentleman caller's visit is the only true dramatic action; the overall structure of the play is defined by this event. Williams divides the play into two parts: "Part I Preparation for the Gentleman Caller" and "Part II The Gentleman Calls." Tom's departure, which is perhaps the most drastic act of the play, is revealed passively in a monologue, rather than actively in a more traditional dramatic format. Appearing as Narrator, Tom says matter-of-factly, "I left St. Louis. I descended the steps of this fire escape for the last time…."

The general themes of *The Glass Menagerie* are no more original and dynamic than the actions in the play. The subjects

that the play approaches have appeared again and again in international theatre and the greater body of literature as well. *A family battles to stay afloat in the face of adversity and internal struggle ensues.* As Robert Bray points out later in his introduction to the play:

> It is no mere coincidence that many of our most memorable American plays, from *Long Day's Journey into Night*, through *Death of a Salesman* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* up to *Buried Child*, depict familial tensions and alienations, the give-and-take of domestic warfare. Indeed, the venerable tradition of dramatizing family strife…transcends all cultures and predates Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, even going back to the drama of *Aeschylus*. (Bray, x)

Working with another common subject, Williams creates a young protagonist, faced with the decision of whether or not to leave home and consequently, whether or not to begin an impending journey. As many existentialist philosophers have acknowledged, embracing one's freedom does not come without consequences, and so, the protagonist must choose whether or not to also leave his past and his loved ones behind. Such existential (and physical) journeys have been explored thoroughly in literature, as Delma Presley suggests when she says that "Tom's departure from home is like Mark Twain's Huck Finn, who seeks adventure in the West, Herman Melville's Ishmael who goes to sea, Dante who travels in the dark woods, Odysseus who sails towards home." (Presley, 55) Since Tom was abandoned by his own father, the difficulty of being faced with a decision that consequently requires becoming "that which one despises" is also represented.

Given these facts, what can account for *The Glass Menagerie*'s ultimate and lasting success?

Robert Bray makes a suggestion:

> With this first great artistic success … Williams demonstrated how he could synthesize music, poetry, and visual

> effects into compelling emotional situations, structurally underpinning them with symbolic moments so arresting that theatergoers depart the aisles—and readers turn the last page—enriched with an assortment of moments guaranteed to haunt the receptive mind. (Bray, xv)

Tennessee Williams's deceptively simple play is able to address the whole of the human experience by symbolically broaching opposing concepts such as self and other, the internal or interior and external or exterior, duty and freedom, domestic experience, and religious experience. This is accomplished through the interplay of several unique strategies, some of which are discussed in Tennessee Williams's Production Notes, which precede the text of the play in the reading version of *The Glass Menagerie*. While these notes are brief, they provide essential information about the dynamics of the play. In his essay "Entering *The Glass Menagerie*," C.W.E. Bigsby points out the relevance of this text:

> All the key words of Williams' work are to be found in these introductory notes: paranoia, tenderness, illusions, illness, fragile, delicate, poetic, transformation, emotion, nostalgia, desperation, trap. These defining elements are to be projected not merely through character and dialogue. He envisages a production in which all elements will serve his central concern with those who are victims of social circumstance, of imperious national myths, of fate and of time as the agent of that fate. (Bigsby, 33)

One of the most critical devices is the use of memory in *The Glass Menagerie*. *The Glass Menagerie* is described as a "memory play." The scenes that we witness are memories belonging to Tom Wingfield; he is therefore, given the unique job of serving as both narrator and character in the play. This format has distinct benefits for the audience. Rather than serve as voyeurs, watching an act as it happens (as an audience would have done at a realistic play of the time), Williams's audience is given direct access to Tom's most private, psychological place—his

memory. Not only is the audience subject to this internal realm, but they are also able to witness the original actions as if they had been there with Tom. And so, the memory becomes theirs as well. Tom Scanlan describes the dynamic balance of these forms, noting "even while we move into the bizarre or exaggerated situation emblematic of the gauzy mind of the protagonist, we are constantly aware that it approximates a realistic situation." (Scanlan, 97)

As was noted earlier, in addition to his original use of memory, Williams had called for another necessary new form in drama—the "sculptural drama" or "plastic theatre." Williams tells us that this new form uses expressionistic tools, not in an attempt to avoid reality, but rather, to approach experience more closely. He says, "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." In the production notes, Williams refers to three of the main expressionistic tools used in *The Glass Menagerie*—the screen device, music, and lighting. Williams's screen device is simply the projection of words or images onto a screen onstage. In *The Glass Menagerie*, projections appear on a part of the wall between two rooms that compose the interior portion of the set. For instance, when we learn that Jim was a "high school hero," an image of him holding a trophy appears onscreen. Williams explains that these devices are meant to highlight the "values" of scenes that are structurally important to the play. It was also Williams's intention that the devices remove some of the emphasis from traditional dialogue and action.

The atmosphere in the play is moderated through the manipulation of music and lighting. Rather than play the music of the time, a single piece of music is predominantly heard throughout *The Glass Menagerie*. Williams describes it as being "like circus music" heard from a distance. It functions as an auditory symbol of the emotional states of the characters, evoking a feeling of sadness. Its repetitive tune and consistent

presence throughout the play helps to accent the feeling of stasis. Other background music does occasionally manifest itself, changing with the events on stage. For instance, Jim and Laura hear a romantic piece of music like a waltz; when Amanda and Tom argue, the background music is heavy and ominous.

The lighting works in tandem with the music, mimicking the actions and emotions of the play. The overall lighting of the play is dim, another reminder that the play is about memory. Williams is able to use light to symbolize a character's critical traits. For example, he directs that the light on Laura be distinct from the light shone on the other characters. Hers should be reminiscent of the light of a church or the light one would associate with a saint. Felicia Hardison Lóndre generously states that the symbolism embodied in these techniques makes it nearly impossible to convey a sense of the play through mere description or summary. "So tightly written are the scenes in *The Glass Menagerie*, so full of musicality and suggestive power are the lines of dialogue, so integral are the effects of sound and lighting—that a summation of what is said and done on stage cannot nearly convey a sense of the play." (Lóndre, 47)

It is also worth mentioning that these three devices are not the only symbolic tools employed throughout the play. Williams also uses time and color as symbolic devices. For instance, transitional scenes such as Scenes Five and Six take place at dusk, a transitional time of day. In these scenes we shift from Part I of the play (preparation for the gentleman caller's visit) to Part II (the actual visit). When Williams wants to express that his characters feel hopeful, he might have Tom tell us that it is spring, a season of rebirth and growth. As Williams uses spring to convey optimism and hope, he uses color accordingly, dressing Amanda and Laura in light-colored dresses in these scenes. When he wants a more ambiguous feeling, he dresses his characters all in white. Even the lighting takes on varied tones: ebony darkness in Scene Four, pale white moonlight in Scene Five, lemony-yellow light in Scene Six, artificially warm and rosy lamplight in Scene Seven. The color

blue is introduced in Scene Two in the projection of blue roses onscreen. When associated with roses, the color is an oddity. It is also the color traditionally equated with sadness and with the Virgin Mary and is therefore, an appropriate color to correspond with Laura.

The structure of *The Glass Menagerie* might also be considered an expressionistic device. Lóndre suggests that the splitting of the play into multiple scenes is a reflection of the nature of memory. "This fragmented quality is justified by the selectivity of memory," she says (Lóndre, 47). Williams corroborates this in a statement that Lóndre has not failed to miss; in his Production Notes he says, "In an episodic play, such as this, the basic structure or narrative line may be obscured from the audience; the effect may seem fragmentary rather than architectural." This structure also brings to mind not only the fragmented nature of memory, but more literally, the image of shattered or fragmented glass—the central symbol of the play, and certainly an appropriate symbol for the shattered Wingfield family.

Furthermore, the play is broken down into seven scenes. The number is suggestive of an ordinary sense of time (seven days in a week), but this number has religious implications as well. There are seven sacraments, as there are seven deadly sins. This merging of the secular and the nonsecular is carried throughout the play. Williams employs typical cultural symbols as well as religious iconography and allusive language to demonstrate the whole of the human situation, or as Judith J. Thompson puts it, "two types of symbols, concrete and transcendent are used by Williams to evoke this communal response." (Thompson, 681) As the final seventh scene approaches, one might feel that the number seven is an indicator of luck; at the conclusion of this scene, we learn that it might rather have been a sarcastic or ironic nod to such an idea.

But even before the first scene begins, before the music is played and the lights are dimmed, there exists no trace of the play for the audience other than a small combination of words on the playbill—the title. Like the dynamic new tools of

sculptural drama that Tennessee Williams exalts in his production notes, the title is used for support, primarily, and emphasis, finally. It might allude to a key aspect of a climatic scene, or it might play a cruel trick as an ironic disguise. The title is a provocateur, a conjurer of images that precedes the language and action of the play. Because it is the first trace of the work that one encounters, it is the source of the ignition of internal experience for a theatergoer.

Seated in Chicago's Civic Theatre on the night of December 26, 1944, what might a theatergoer be thinking while examining the words "glass menagerie" on the playbill? The image of glass provides us with a nearly inexhaustible stream of associations. Glass is associated with fragility, an ability to break. In light of its susceptibility to external forces which might cause it to shatter, it has the potential to become fragmented. If one sought a psychological equivalent, we might think of emotional fragility, desperation, or confusion. In a different context, glass is also multifaceted and complex in a beautiful and positive way when illuminated by light, perhaps the symbolic equivalent of joy, spiritual ecstasy, or purity. Glass is reflective, and in this way, can be indicative of self-exploration, or, taken further, narcissism. It might be used as a barrier—or it might simply be admired for its decorative properties (something Amanda Wingfield would be prone to doing).

When it is placed between two sites, as a window might be, one might either assume the role of voyeur, observing an interior site as an outsider; or one might be on the inside, looking out to the world beyond as a dreamer or philosopher might (as many of Williams's 'poet' characters, such as Tom Wingfield, do). It functions as the link *and* the boundary between the internal and external. In the symbolic context of the play, it could be said that it provides voyeuristic access to internal experience beyond the self, simultaneously exposing the grander experience, drawing us outside of ourselves and into the realm of empathetic experience. The revelation of empathetic experience is perhaps the primary success of Williams's work. For, while realistic drama can succeed in

attaining a sympathetic response from its audience, Williams goes a step further, creating for his audience an umbilical link between the realms of self and other. As it turns out then, the title may be the most critical and forthright of the expressionistic devices used by Williams in *The Glass Menagerie*.

The word 'menagerie', thought to be derived from the Middle French word "ménage," translates to "management of a household or farm." More commonly, it is associated with a collection of animals. One might consider a zoo, a place where animals are trapped, or at least confined, and in many ways, exposed. It is a place where primal nature is made public. As **Scene One** begins, Williams uses this analogy to set the stage.

The play begins with a shot of the dark wall of the Wingfields' apartment building in St. Louis, Missouri. The external wall is transparent, encouraging the association of the characters to animals on display. The building is described as a "hivelike conglomeration," providing us with the image of drones, a comment on the dire economic situation of the people who live there. The building area is dark, dirty, and surrounded by alleys, a sinister dead-end frequently employed in Hollywood movies to indicate danger. Williams puts particular emphasis on the presence of the fire escape, a part of the building ironically attached. When in the role of narrator, Tom frequently appears here. The fire escape doesn't primarily or ultimately symbolize freedom or escape, but rather the opposite. Like the alleys, it indicates the potential for catastrophe.

The living room, because of the disparity of the Wingfields' economic status, is also Laura's bedroom; it is placed in closest proximity to the audience. The walls are decorated sparsely with a large photograph of Tom and Laura's absentee father, Mr. Wingfield, and with charts for typing and shorthand. An old-fashioned curio houses Laura's collection of glass animals.

The physical environment has been revealed, and it is at this time that we are introduced to Tom, the narrator, who will also take a place as a character in the play. As noted previously, Tom frequently appears outside of the building as narrator,

temporarily separating himself from the internal dynamics of the action on stage. Dressed as a sailor, he begins by setting up the social background of the play. Roger B. Stein elaborates:

> The time of the play is 1939, as the narrative frame makes explicit both at the beginning and the end…As Tom says, 'the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind'. What he calls the 'social background' of the play has an important role. The international backdrop is Guernica and the song America sings is 'The World Is Waiting for a Sunrise', for the sober truth is that America is still in the depression and on the brink of war. The note of social disaster runs throughout the drama, fixing the lines of individuals against the larger canvas. (Stein, 136-137)

The exterior wall is lifted away and not seen again until the end of the play; the play is now concerned with the interior or internal—the realm of memory, pain, and emotion. Music is heard for the first time, as any reference to the external falls away. Tom (on cue) reminds us that the play is about memory. He introduces himself as narrator and as a character in the re-enactments of his own memory, which will provide "truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion." He also introduces his mother, Amanda; his sister, Laura; Jim, the gentleman caller; and his father, who only appears in the form of the large photograph in the living room. Tom generously refers to his father, who has abandoned his family, as a telephone man "who fell in love with long distances." As if inextricably linked in Tom's memory, at the mention of Mr. Wingfield, we hear Amanda calling for Tom in the distance.

The first instance of the screen device occurs when we meet Amanda. The words "ou sont les neiges" appear on screen. They translate to "where are the snows?", words from a fifteenth-century French poem in praise of beautiful women. The text is puzzling, fragmented, and appropriately, it is foreign—projected in French rather than English. As our

understanding of Amanda is only partial, so is our comprehension of this phrase.

In the first scene we are immediately faced with two of the main dynamics of the play: the tension between Tom and his mother, and Amanda's obsessive desire for Laura to have a gentleman caller. The essential actions of the characters are to be repeated throughout the play in a kind of gestural merry-go-round. Stripped of any real variation, their recurrence in the next five scenes creates tension and encourages the audience in their hope that things might turn out differently in the final scenes.

There is no time to adjust or settle into the dialogue, as the primary moments of the play yield the first glimpses of a domestic battle. Amanda begins nagging Tom about the way he is eating. Tom makes his way to the door, as if to escape, indicating that this is not the first instance of his mother frustrating him in this way. Amanda calls for Tom to return, and when he informs her that, rather than leaving, he was going to get a cigarette, she replies with another criticism: "You smoke too much." Laura, who is also in the dining room, seems unaffected—or perhaps, resigned. She offers to get something from the kitchenette but Amanda instructs her that she needs to stay seated so she will be "fresh and pretty—for gentleman callers." Laura states plainly that she is not expecting any callers.

Amanda begins to reminisce about her own experiences with gentleman callers and again there are indications that this is not the first instance of their mother behaving this way. "I know what's coming!" and "She loves to tell it" are Tom and Laura's reactions. While it initially seems quite normal for a woman of Amanda's age to recount stories of better times which begin "When I was your age…," there seems to be something amiss when she recalls having seventeen gentleman callers in one afternoon. Despite Tom's sarcastic goading, Amanda continues on as if in another world. At this time, the second screen device appears. It is the image of Amanda as a young woman with her gentleman callers. The image draws further attention to the absurdity of Amanda's exaggerated tales and supports the audience's developing suspicions. Amanda harkens back to

another time, a better time when she was in the South at Blue Mountain. It is a time when men were gentleman and women knew how to make pleasant and clever conversation. To clear up any remaining doubts about the truth of Amanda's stories, Tom steps in as Narrator and directs that music be played and a spotlight shone on Amanda. Amanda continues and ceases only when the recollection of her absent husband surfaces. Alice Griffin suggests that this retreat "from the harsh reality of the Depression to the illusion of herself in the legendary South of elegant beaux and belles makes the present somehow more bearable for Amanda." (Griffin, 62) The full phrase "Ou sont les neiges d'antan?" now appears onscreen, translating to "Where are the snows of yesteryear?"

For the second time, Laura responds as if she is unaffected, asking to clear the table. Amanda reminds Laura again that she needs to stay so she will be "fresh and pretty" for any callers. The glass menagerie music can be heard in the background as Laura reminds her mother that there will likely be no callers.

Scene Two opens with an image of blue roses projected on the screen. Laura is seen cleaning her collection of glass animals, but when she hears her mother coming, she goes and sits at the typewriter. Amanda has discovered that Laura hasn't been going to business school classes as she thought. Her first word of the scene is "deception" and the scene will close with the same.

Laura had gotten sick the first week and hadn't returned. Instead, Laura confesses, she has been going to the museum to view the religious paintings, to the zoo, and to a glass greenhouse where tropical flowers are raised. The sites reinforce the portrayal of Laura as a fragile, unearthly flower. Amanda is sure that Laura's only hope of a future is in finding a good husband. When asked if she has ever liked a boy, Laura confesses that there was a boy named Jim that she liked in high school. An image of Jim, holding a large trophy, appears on the screen. Laura points out that Jim was supposedly engaged, and must be married by now.

It is later revealed that Jim had nicknamed Laura "blue roses" in high school. She had been ill with pleurosis, and when Jim questioned her about her absence, he had misheard her. This moment of social contact was clearly an important and treasured one for Laura. For the moment, the image of blue roses remains a curious one. It parallels the other references to flowers; these flowers, however, are different and point to Laura's difference. She is forced to wear a leg brace. Aware of her handicap, Laura is accepting of her current situation, which clearly doesn't allow for a boyfriend like Jim, but her mother is clearly unable to accept this. She refuses to allow Laura to use the word "crippled" and defines Laura's handicap as "a small defect" that can be hidden by charm. It is not the last time that Amanda makes such a claim—that charm, a variety of acceptable deceit, can hide that which one does not want to be revealed to others. The scene ends as Amanda recalls that charm was something Mr. Wingfield had plenty of, pointing out Amanda's own ability to be deceived.

Tom reappears as narrator outside of the apartment on the fire escape at the start of **Scene Three**. He notes that finding a gentleman caller for Laura has gotten to be an obsession for his mother. He tells us that in order to make more money so that their home will look nice when callers do arrive, Amanda sells subscriptions to *The Homemakers Companion* magazine.

As soon as Tom's monologue as narrator is finished and he reclaims his role as character, he and Amanda begin to quarrel. Tom, an aspiring poet, has left some of his books out. Amanda, disapproving of the subject matter written about by authors such as D.H. Lawrence, returns the book to the library. For Tom, this is clearly an indication that his mother doesn't understand him. More than a small act of motherly disapproval, it is for Tom an indication of his lack of freedom. Tom and Amanda's tension reaches an apex when Amanda accuses Tom of "saying he is going to the movies when he is elsewhere." Tom explodes at Amanda, throwing his overcoat, which hits the curio cabinet that houses Laura's glass

menagerie. There is the sound of breaking glass. Laura, like an animal, cries out "as if wounded."

The inside of the apartment is dark and a church bell can be heard in the distance as **Scene Four** begins. It is five o'clock a.m. and Tom is stumbling home. "A shower of movie ticket stubs" and a bottle fall from his pockets as proof of where he has been. (Scholars suggest that this is an autobiographical nod to Williams himself, who also frequently escaped to the movies.) Laura is inside when he arrives. She is concerned and gently disapproving, pointing out that their mother might wake up. Tom replies, describing a stage show that he claims to have seen, "It doesn't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail?" His thoughts, even after having been gone all night, are still on the pain of entrapment and the hope of escape. On cue, the photograph of Mr. Wingfield, the true escape artist, is illuminated. The church bell rings again and Amanda is heard calling Laura; she wants her daughter to go get groceries. It is made clear enough that Amanda always asks for credit, or rather it is Laura who is always sent for the groceries. With the brace on her leg, there is no doubt that Laura's "small defect" will ensure that they all remain satisfactorily fed.

When Laura departs, one hears "Ave Maria" in the background. After a long, awkward silence, Tom apologizes to Amanda. She begins to cry, claiming that it is her "devotion" that makes her children hate her. She confesses that she worries about her children and implores Tom never to be a drunkard. As if incapable of resisting, she begins to nag Tom again, this time for eating too fast and drinking black coffee. Amanda, who is accomplished at using her daughter for the sake of deceiving others, tells Tom that she believes Laura is concerned about him. After all, this might instill some guilt in him and he might possibly stop going out. She admits that, contrary to what Tom believes, she understands that he doesn't enjoy working at the warehouse.

The Christian symbols ("Ave Maria," the mother's tears, her choice of the word "devotion") reinforce the notion of Amanda as martyr (an image that is referred to throughout the play), but it also sets the stage for a critical moment in the play—Amanda's confession. She says to Tom, "There's so many things in my heart that I cannot describe to you!" It appears that Amanda is not purposefully cruel or antagonistic after all and her character becomes deeper after this admission.

In a moment of foreshadowing, Amanda says that she sees Tom taking after his father. Tom tries to explain his restlessness to his mother. "Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse," he says. Thomas Allen Greenfield notes that "Williams presents us with an irresolvable conflict between meaningless rationalized modern work and the passion and romance that are for Williams the life's blood of men who are intellectually and spiritually alive." (Greenfield, 74) Surely, Tom embodies this conflict.

As it turns out, Amanda has seen Tom's letter from the Merchant Marine. She understands his desire to escape as his father did, but she asks him not to go until Laura is taken care of, imploring Tom to bring home a gentleman caller for Laura. Tom reluctantly agrees.

Perpetuating the Christian motif, the projection of the word "Annunciation" is the first image of **Scene Five**. It is the foretelling of a hopeful event and the calling of someone to a higher purpose. Williams indicates that the sun is just about to set on a Spring day. The opening is therefore optimistic and a tense audience might have their first chance to relax. Amanda and Laura are performing the ordinary task of cleaning the table, but Williams refers to it as being like "a dance or ritual." They wear light-colored dresses and Tom wears a white shirt and pants. The atmosphere is lighter, almost ethereal, corresponding to the message on the screen. This is disrupted when Williams compares the characters to moths, colorless and silent. Tom is separate from the women and remains by the exterior portion of the set. We hear Amanda, and this time she

is nagging Tom about combing his hair and again about smoking. Tom, who had been reading a newspaper with international news, grows frustrated and steps outside to smoke. The door slams behind him and Amanda looks over to the photograph of her husband, perhaps considering the inevitable.

Across the alley, music is coming from a dance hall. Now that Tom is outdoors he resumes his position as Narrator and describes the source of the music. Clearly, he has been inside before. He describes "a large glass sphere that hung from the ceiling." He says, "It would turn slowly about and filter the dusk with delicate rainbows." The young men and women come outside on nice nights to kiss in the moonlight. For Tom, this image is interpreted as a repeated momentary deception, paralleling many other details of the play.

In the next part of Scene Five, Amanda and Tom come together. In a moment symbolic of Amanda's attempt to reach out to her son, she steps outside to an area that clearly has belonged to Tom up until this point. They both make wishes on the moon. Tom reveals that he has found a gentleman caller for Laura. Williams refers to this revelation as "the annunciation," and an ordinary event such as having a visitor is elevated to a level of spiritual significance. Like the Christian annunciation, this event is a reason for hope. With Mr. Wingfield absent and Tom's departure imminent, "it remains therefore for Jim to come as the Savior to the Friday night supper." (Stein, 115)

The two return inside and Amanda begins making preparations for the visit. Since the caller will be arriving on a Friday, Amanda decides they will dine on fish (another religious symbol, reminiscent not only of Jesus Christ himself, but also of his miracle of providing the desperate fisherman with plenty). Jim's coming is infused with the hope of providing a miraculous transformation for the Wingfield family.

Amanda questions Tom to see if Jim drinks. After all, she doesn't want Laura to be in the same situation she currently finds herself in. She can't help referring back to her time at

Blue Mountain and her own "tragic mistake" which interrupted those happier times.

Tom confesses that he didn't tell Jim about Laura, but Amanda is sure that when Jim encounters Laura he will be taken with her unique beauty. Tom is more realistic, pointing out that, while Laura's positive points are evident to them, someone else might notice her handicap first. But with every word that Tom uses to describe the way someone might see Laura (crippled, peculiar), Amanda counters it with her denial. The music coming from the dance hall now "has a minor and ominous tone." Frustrated, Tom announces that he is leaving to go to the movies. Unable to let him go, and perhaps anticipating his final departure, Amanda yells after him "I don't believe you always go to the movies!"

With Tom gone, Amanda calls Laura outside to wish on the moon. Scene Five is the first scene that finds all three characters on the exterior portion of the set and there is an indication that, perhaps, the characters are being drawn outside of their selves, but Laura, who is out of her element, isn't sure what to wish for. As Stephanie B. Hammer says, "Everyone else in Williams's drama has a clear wish to escape, to get somewhere, to have something. But Laura's desire is something and somewhere else." (Hammer, 43) Amanda, filled with new hope, enthusiastically instructs her to wish for "Happiness!" and "Good fortune!"

Scene Six begins with our narrator, Tom, in his usual place on the fire escape. Onscreen is an image of Jim, the gentleman caller, as a "high school hero." As it turns out, Jim has gone to high school with Tom and Laura; he is, of course, the same Jim that Laura once had a crush on. He was popular in school and successful at everything including sports, drama, and politics. Despite all of this, Jim now works at the warehouse with Tom, who he calls "Shakespeare."

The lighting in the apartment is described as a "lemony light." Again, it is nearly dusk, implying that a transition is about to take place. Amanda has transformed their home, hiding any flaws that might reveal their true situation to Jim,

and Laura and Amanda are seen together again, performing another domestic task. This time, Amanda is fixing Laura's dress. Williams describes it as "devout and ritualistic," with Laura standing with her arms outstretched as her mother kneels in front of her. Judith Thompson notes that "Williams' plays do not simply recall the old mythic images and religious rituals; they transform them in their reenactment." (Thompson, 684) Laura "is like a piece of translucent glass, touched by light." She is so nervous that she is visibly shaking. Her mother, who wants her daughter to wear "gay deceivers," instructs her that "all pretty women are a trap," perpetuating the notion that charm should be used to deceive. Perhaps on her own advice, Amanda leaves to dress herself and when she returns, she is holding jonquils and wearing one of her old dresses—a vision of her youth. Getting away with herself, she describes a day when she received so many jonquils from her callers that there weren't any more vases to hold them. As always, she promptly concludes this line of thought with a remembrance of Mr. Wingfield.

In another moment of foreshadowing, Amanda notes that it is about to rain. When Amanda says that she gave Tom money "so he and Mr. O'Connor could take the service car home," Laura realizes that her caller is the same Jim O'Connor that she went to school with, the same Jim that used to call her "Blue Roses." Laura says that she will be unable to come to the table knowing that it is him. She is left alone to panic as Amanda goes to check on dinner.

By this time, Tom and Jim have arrived and are standing on the fire escape. "A low drum sounds." Amanda calls to Laura to open the door, but she is frozen with fear and stares at the door without moving. Her instinct in this moment is to run to the Victrola and begin winding it. As if this act has given her strength, she finally goes to the door and lets the boys in. Tom introduces Laura to Jim and it is clear that Jim doesn't immediately remember her. Jim shakes her hand, boldly (or some might say rudely) noting that her hand is cold. Laura instinctively heads back towards the Victrola and then disappears from the room. When Tom explains that Laura is

very shy; Jim replies that he doesn't meet girls like this very often. He also notes that Tom never mentioned that he had a sister.

While they wait for dinner, Tom offers Jim the newspaper and Jim, the All-American boy, requests the sports page. Tom is clearly disinterested in the news that Jim shares from the page, and as if provoked by Tom's mood, Jim begins to try to sell Tom on the benefits of public speaking. Jim notes that the primary difference between him and Tom is their "social poise." He tells Tom that their boss had been speaking about him in a less than positive manner. He warns Tom that he could lose his job if he doesn't "wake up." Tom responds, "I am waking up." He is clearly not referring to his job, but to a more personal matter. An image of a ship with the Jolly Roger appears onscreen. Tom leans over the rail of the fire escape as if he is on the ship. He confesses to Jim that he is tired of the movies because movies simply portray people having adventure and Tom is interested in the real thing. He shows Jim his membership card for the Merchant Marines and confesses that he has paid his dues rather than his family's electric bill. When Jim asks what his mother will do, Tom responds, "I'm like my father," as if he has already resigned himself to the idea. His fate, he believes, depends on his ability to avoid the realm of empathy, simply disregarding his mother's feelings.

As if on cue, Amanda approaches. She is wearing one of her old ball gowns and, since charm is the best form of magic, she exaggerates her Southern manners for Jim's benefit. An image of a young Amanda appears onscreen. Amanda begins to talk about the weather and uses it as an opportunity to draw attention to her dress. Perhaps afraid that his mother will launch into one of her tales of the past, Tom interrupts, asking about dinner. In an effort to impress Jim, she claims that Laura is in charge of supper and begins to glorify Laura. As Tom anticipates, she can't help entering herself into the conversation, mentioning her gentleman callers and her subsequent marriage to the absent Mr. Wingfield. It is critical to note that Amanda's tales of the past always end with the thought of her husband. She is not sincerely stuck in the past;

rather, the charm of her memories is sufficient to temporarily—and only temporarily—deceive her. Scholar Benjamin Nelson points out that while Amanda does cling to the past, "she clings just as desperately to the present. She is attempting to hold two worlds together and realizes that both are crumbling beneath her fingers." (Nelson, 89) Catching herself, she apologizes and uses this as an opportunity to ask if Jim has any "tribulations" of his own. Before he can answer, Tom returns with the news that Laura is sick and cannot come to the table. Amanda demands that she come to the table and a faint Laura obediently appears, only to stumble to the table in near collapse. With the elements of nature mimicking the elements of the play, we hear the sound of thunder. Tom helps Laura back to the living room while Amanda suggests to Jim that her daughter is only sick from being in front of a hot stove for too long on a warm night. As if the façade can no longer be kept up, it begins to rain. Amanda, perhaps facing the reality of the situation, looks nervously at Jim. She insists that Tom say grace, and as he does, we see Laura lying on the sofa, holding back a "shuddering sob."

As noted previously, **Scene Seven** is the climax and the finale scene of the play. Accordingly, all hope rests in the actions of this scene. Williams punctuates this feeling with small details: the light is a warm rose color, the rain ceases, and the moon, the holder of the Wingfields' wishes, comes out from behind the clouds. The light, however, is artificial; coming from a new shade that Amanda has put on one of the lamps to hide its shabbiness and, as in Scene Five, this atmosphere quickly disintegrates. Since Tom didn't pay the electric bill, the lights have gone out. This draws attention to the disparity of the Wingfields' situation, but it also gives cause for a lighting change. Candles, typically associated with religious or romantic encounters, are lit.

Amanda sends Tom off to do the dishes and asks Jim to check on Laura in the meantime. Elevating this act to ritual status, she gives him a candelabrum "that used to be on the altar at the Church of Heavenly Rest," which burned down

after being struck by lightning. The implications are not positive. She also gives him some wine to offer her. The action that follows is described as "the climax of her secret life."

Jim invites Laura to sit on the floor with him. He offers her wine and later, a piece of gum, which makes him think aloud about the success of the Wrigley Company. Jim can't contain his optimism, telling Laura that "the future will be in America, even more wonderful than the present time is." Laura doesn't reply. After a kind smile from Jim, she regains herself, taking a stick of gum and starting a conversation. She asks if Jim has continued singing. Jim finally realizes that he has met Laura previously in high school; they shared a class together, to which Laura always arrived late. Not trying to hide or downplay her handicap, she confesses that it was because of her leg brace. While in Laura's mind the brace attracted attention with its loud clanking, Jim says that he hardly noticed and begins coaching her on how to gain self-confidence. He relates that all people have their own disappointments, even himself, who hoped he "would be further along" than he is.

After some discussion about high school, Laura gathers the courage to ask about Emily Meisenbach, Jim's high school sweetheart and presumed fiancée. Jim calls her a "krauthead" saying that the announcement of their engagement was "propaganda." Presumably unattached, Jim smiles at Laura and asks what she has been doing since high school. Williams says that this smile "lights her inwardly with altar candles." The question, however, has made her nervous and she picks up a piece from her glass collection while considering how to answer. After further prodding from Jim, Laura confesses that she did take a business course but dropped out because of her nervous stomach. Now, she says, she spends her time taking care of her glass collection. She "turns away again, acutely shy." Jim begins another speech about self-confidence, claiming that he was once lacking it too; as he said to Tom, he gained his confidence from public speaking. There is an implication that self-display in public can lead to confidence and a stronger sense of self, and the audience might consider it possible for the Wingfields to benefit accordingly from their own public

display, Jim does not consider that the public can also be a venue for humiliation.

In a pathetically humorous moment, Jim gloats, "Now I've never made a regular study of it, but I have a friend who says I can analyze people better than doctors that make a profession of it. I don't claim that to be necessarily true, but I can sure guess a person's psychology." Making new symbolic use of glass, Jim glances "unconsciously" (and narcissistically) in the mirror. Jim continues on—he is studying radio engineering because of his faith in the future of television. He believes that he is getting in "on the ground floor." "That's the cycle democracy is built on!" he says. The situation in America doesn't seem to have affected him the way it obviously affects the other characters, and Jim is able to retain his patriotic and optimistic opinion of America.

He turns the conversation back to Laura, asking again about her interests. Laura explains that she keeps a glass collection—"tiny animals made out of glass." Frank Durham explains that their significance lies in their symbolism. "Laura's glass animals, especially the unicorn, which is broken, symbolize the tenuousness of her hold on reality, the ease with which her illusion may be shattered." (Durham, 123) As the glass menagerie music resumes, Laura hands Jim a small glass unicorn. As if referring to herself, creating a link between herself and this creature, she says "Oh, be careful—if you breathe, it breaks!" In the line of conversation that follows, the unicorn continues to stand in symbolically for Laura. Jim, responding appropriately, says he'd better not touch it then because he is clumsy. Laura, however, has already given him her trust and places it in his hand. She confesses that the unicorn is her favorite piece. Like Laura, the unicorn is not like other animals of the "modern world." Both are almost like others with the exception of a "small defect" that keeps them apart. Jim says that the unicorn "must feel sort of lonesome." Laura doesn't deny that this position as an outsider isn't lonely; rather, she says that "he doesn't complain about it." The unicorn stays on the shelf with creatures without this defect and as Laura says, "They seem to get along nicely together."

Laura has also been able to get along satisfactorily among others.

Jim places the unicorn on a nearby table. Noticing that it isn't raining anymore, he opens the fire-escape door. A waltz can be heard coming from the dance hall and Jim invites Laura to dance. Laura is so caught off-guard by the invitation that she can barely breathe. "I'm not made of glass," Jim assures her. In a romantic moment, Jim teaches Laura to dance, but as the two move around the room they seem out of synch. Williams describes their dance as a "clumsy waltz." Jim suddenly bumps into the table and the glass unicorn crashes to the floor. Having finally experienced a romantic encounter like other girls her age, Laura says "Now it is just like all the other horses." In her most bold act yet, Laura gives Jim a nickname, saying, "It's no tragedy, Freckles." The horn has been broken off and the removal of this defect makes Laura and the unicorn "feel less—freakish." As if charmed by the transformation in Laura, Jim tells Laura that she is beautiful. While the tone is still romantic, something seems amiss when Jim says, "I wish you were my sister. I'd teach you to have some confidence in yourself."

Jim notes that "blue roses" is an appropriate nickname for Laura since she is not like everyone else, but Laura recognizes that blue is not the correct color for a rose. The most climatic scene of the play ensues. "Somebody needs to build your confidence up and make you proud instead of shy and turning away and—blushing," he says. "Somebody ought to kiss you, Laura!" He turns and kisses her.

Jim immediately apologizes to a dazed Laura. Despite his previous pronouncement of his ability to determine a person's psychological situation, Jim has no idea what he has done. Jim tells Laura that Tom may have made a mistake in bringing him here to call on Laura. He continues, "I can't take down your number and say I'll phone. I can't call up next week and ask for a date. I thought I had better explain the situation in case you—misunderstood it and—I hurt your feelings..." Laura begins to comprehend what has happened. Jim confesses that he is engaged to another girl. Since the elements of nature have

aptly paralleled the states of the characters throughout, this element is now made internal, metaphorically—Laura is experiencing an "emotional storm." In an attempt to complete the triangle of the private, natural, and spiritual experience, thereby presenting its indivisibility, Williams says, "The holy candles on the altar of Laura's face have been snuffed out." As she opens her hand, we see that she is still holding the broken glass unicorn. With her innocence and her faith shattered, she no longer has need for the childish glass animal. She gives it to Jim as a "souvenir" and returns to the Victrola.

Amanda enters the room with juice and a plate of macaroons. She notices the expression on Laura's face but doesn't comprehend what has happened. She says that she wants Jim to come over all of the time, but Jim says that he has to be going. Amanda assumes that he has to leave because of work, but Jim confesses that he is meeting Betty, the girl he goes steady with. "The Sky Falls" appears on the screen. Amanda notes that Tom never said anything about his engagement and Jim explains that "the cat's not out of the bag at the warehouse." In a final gesture representative of his inability to see beyond himself, he stops at the mirror on his way out.

When Amanda turns from the door, Laura is at the Victrola again. It seems that things are left as they were and the visit hasn't brought about the happy transformation that Amanda had hoped for. Amanda is unable to believe that her son didn't know anything about the engagement; after all, Jim is supposed to be his best friend at the warehouse. Ironically, she accuses Tom of living in a dream and manufacturing illusions. This accusation is particularly interesting as it draws attention to the universal escapism that all of the Wingfields practice. R.B. Parker elaborates:

> Such escapism is seen as a weakness, and in the case of Jim and Amanda is rendered comically, but we are also clearly meant to sympathize with it; and it is important to recognize that it encompasses not only young Tom, escaping into daydreams and the movies, but also the

> Tom who is remembering, the wandered forever trying to evade his past. Without such a balance, the play can easily degenerate into sentimentality. (Parker, 8)

The actions that ensue are unfortunately reminiscent of those of the first five scenes. Amanda and Tom argue and finally, Tom announces that he is leaving to go to the movies. In a final symbolic gesture, he "smashes his glass to the floor." While Jim has caused irreparable damage, it is implied that Tom is truly responsible for the shattered family's fate. He runs to the fire escape, again gripping the rail as if on a ship, a gestural indication of what is to come. Gilbert Debusscher suggests that "the short scene in which Tom leans on the railway may be a dramatic reconstruction of the last minute of the poet's life before he escaped, as Tom is planning to do, from a world that had become too oppressive to bear" (Debusscher, 35), but we cannot be certain because this line of action comes to a halt here. Tom resumes his position as narrator and as he delivers his final monologue, the action is turned back over to Laura and Amanda who are inside together. Amanda is now said to exude "dignity" and to possess a "tragic beauty." Their movements are again slow and "dancelike" as Amanda comforts her daughter. She stops to look one more time at the picture of Mr. Wingfield.

The audience is afforded with the unique opportunity of witnessing all three characters at once, one last time. "By typical use of his dramatic talents," Lester Beaurline says, "Williams makes the audience conscious of several characters' feelings at the same time, like a juggler keeping four balls in the air." (Beaurline, 50) Despite Williams's use of this technique, many critics have pointed out that the scenes with Laura and Amanda may be overemphasized. Benjamin Nelson says, "The story of Laura and Jim is simple and poignant, but it is neither the sole nor the central conflict in the play. Laura's personal dilemma is part of a greater dilemma: the destruction—slow and remorseless—of a family." (Nelson, 89) Thomas C. King describes a similar problem:

> Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, though it has achieved a firmly established position in the canon of American plays, is often distorted, if not misunderstood, by readers, directors and audiences. The distortion results from an over emphasis on the scenes involving Laura and Amanda and their plight, so that the play becomes a sentimental tract on the trapped misery of two women in St. Louis. This leads to the neglect of Tom's soliloquies—speeches that can be ignored or discounted only at great peril, since they occupy such a prominent position in the play. When not largely ignored, they are in danger of being treated as nostalgic yearnings for a former time." (King, 75)

Part of the trouble is that Tom's departure is revealed in a monologue rather than action on the set, since the departure of Tom has more to do with an emotional or existential journey than a physical one. We do not actually see Tom leave, but indeed, he leaves and never returns. "I didn't go to the moon," he says. "I went much farther—for time is the longest distance between two places. Not long after that I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe-box. I left Saint Louis. I descended the steps of this fire escape for a last time." Benjamin Nelson notes that "in part, the play is his attempt to overcome his fears, but we are left with no assurance at the conclusion that he has succeeded." (Nelson, 91) Tom's decision to leave has made him like his father, and there are additional consequences. He is unable to forget about his family, specifically, about his sister, Laura. "Oh, Laura, Laura," he cries, "I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger—anything that can blow your candles out!" Tom painfully recognizes that his sister is out of place in the world, "For nowadays the world is lit by lighting"—tragedy, desperation, and war. The last image we see is Laura extinguishing the candles with her breath and finally, darkness. R.B. Parker points out that this lack of light is reminiscent of a previous scene:

> 'Blow out your candles' repeats, within the play, his earlier plunging of the stage into darkness by selfishly misappropriating the family's electricity payment; and it can be argued that the uneasy jocularity of some of the projections and the element of overpoeticism in Tom's final soliloquies…reflect not only regret and remorse but also a self-lacerating awareness that by abandoning Laura he is repudiating an essential part of himself." (Parker, 12)

Tom's disregard for the empathetic experience, the most human of experiences, has left him fragmented and his family shattered. He has not, after all this, been made whole by his new freedom, but by the offering up of private experience, what Tom has lost, the audience has gained.

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THE GLASS MENAGERIE: THEMES

The following are themes of The Glass Menagerie.

1. ILLUSION

We all have illusions. You can hardly live without them. Usually, they are harmless thoughts about, say, last summer's vacation or that very attractive person you just met. Whenever you hold an opinion based on what you think is true, or should be true, rather than what actually is true, that's an illusion. Because illusions sometimes help you deal with painful facts, like good medicine they make you feel better. But when you are disillusioned, the pain returns.

The characters in The Glass Menagerie are hooked by their illusions. Without illusion, Amanda would realize the hopelessness of Laura's condition. In fact, it's because of her illusions that Amanda keeps her hopes alive for that "always expected something" to rescue Laura from a life of dependency. Initially, Amanda thinks that a good typing course will help Laura pull herself together. And later in the play, Amanda foolishly counts on Jim to be Laura's prince charming. Amanda, of course, also has illusions about herself. Whether she really entertained seventeen gentleman callers one Sunday afternoon is beside the point. What counts is that she believes it. Illusions, you see, can be very powerful.

Tom suffers from illusions, too, by expecting to find adventure in the movies. When he leaves home and joins the merchant navy he anticipates more adventure. Does that fire escape lead to romance and glamor? Study his final speech for an answer. Note that Tom is haunted by reminders of Laura. Is escape, in the end, an illusion, too?

The imaginary world of glass animals provides Laura's refuge from reality. But in her case, illusion may be perilous, for her menagerie serves as a substitute for life. How long can she go on playing with the glass collection before disillusion strikes?

Jim O'Connor, like the other young people Tom tells you about, is also living in an illusion. When success eludes him he places faith in the future. But the future he counts on is an illusion, for there's a terrible war just around the corner that's going to change the world forever.

2. ESCAPE

The theme of illusion is first cousin to the theme of escape in The Glass Menagerie, for all the play's characters believe incorrectly that escape from their present situation in life is possible. Tom tries repeatedly to escape from tedium and responsibility. Amanda indulges at times in reveries about her girlhood. The glass menagerie serves as Laura's means of escape from reality, and Jim tries desperately to escape from his dead-end job by taking public speaking and radio courses.

Observe that no character in the play makes a clean break from this situation. Correction: only Mr. Wingfield escapes--at the expense of his family's happiness, but that took place before the play begins.

A fire escape symbolically points the way out of the Wingfield apartment. But when Laura uses it, she stumbles. When Tom leaves for good he claims to follow in his father's footsteps, but he is pursued by "something." A powerful love? Guilt? He tried to leave Laura behind, but couldn't. His closing speech reveals how securely he is bound to the past.

What conclusion about escape can you draw from the situation in the play? Does the play advise you to make the best of what you've got, because change is impossible? Note Mr. Wingfield's smiling portrait. Does the grin tell you anything?

3. FRAGILITY

Can you think of anyone who embodies the idea of fragility better than Laura? Both physically and psychologically, she is fragile. A childhood disease left her with a slight limp. Under the everyday stresses of life, her composure shatters, and she can't complete her typing course. The thought of receiving a gentleman caller makes her sick. How fitting for Laura to keep a menagerie of delicate glass animals of which the unicorn--the "freakish" one--is her favorite.

The characters in The Glass Menagerie have built their lives on a fragile foundation of illusions. Take away their illusions and which of them would not break?

In 1939, the time of the play, world peace is in a fragile state. The lives of the young lovers who kiss in the alley will soon be shattered by big guns and heavy bombardments.

4. LIGHT

Because The Glass Menagerie is a memory play, the setting is dimly lighted. Dim lights keep details from being seen, for details fade from the memory first.

The electric company turns off the Wingfields' power. Then the characters must resort to candles, which soften the illumination and add the aura of romance to Jim's visit with Laura.

Light shining through little glass objects often gives off tiny spots of rainbow color. A rainbow, as you probably know from the old song, is something you chase. And in biblical myth, the rainbow is the symbol of a promise. But when you get close it vanishes. It's an illusion, a false promise, like so much else in the play. Tom recognizes the illusory quality of rainbows. He says the pleasures offered by the Paradise Dance Hall were "like a chandelier [which] flooded the world with brief deceptive rainbows." Notice also that the scarf given as a souvenir by Malvolio the Magician is rainbow-colored. In the end, what is it that keeps Laura embedded in Tom's memory? Shop windows, "filled with pieces of colored glass... like bits of shattered rainbow."

Tom associates images of Laura with candlelight. To rid himself of the haunting memories of his sister, he implores Laura to "blow out your candles." At the same time Tom may be urging Laura out of her dimly lit past. Her world of candlelight and little glass animals will no longer do, for "nowadays the world is lit by lightning."

5. FAILURE AND THE MYTH OF SUCCESS

Amanda believes in several common myths about money, success, and working hard. She thinks that money, for example, buys happiness. If she had only married one of those rich gentlemen callers....

Then, too, she admires sophisticated society, the "horsey set" portrayed in the magazine stories she sells.

Success, in her view, comes from hard work and from saving your money for the future. Amanda is convinced that Tom will be successful if he tries hard. Laura will also succeed if she learns to type. Plan for the future, Amanda advises. Make

provisions and save money. To Tom's dismay, she calculates how much money he could save if he stopped smoking. With his savings he could enroll in an accounting course at the university.

Jim O'Connor also chases a dream. He tries to sell Tom "a bill of goods" about success, for he's already bought one that says if you work hard, take the right courses, show self-assurance, and believe in the future of capitalism you'll make it big. But Jim has made little progress since high school, and with the war coming on, the path to success is likely to be detoured.

The personal failure of all the characters in the play in some ways parallels the larger social failure of America. The Depression turned millions of American dreams into nightmares. And the only way out was no better. It took a catastrophic war to release the country from poverty and fear.

Questions for discussion:

1. How does the fire escape function as a symbol to reveal something about each character's personality? (See commentary after the first scene.)

2. Why does Tom go so often to the movies? (See character analysis of Tom.)

3. What are the similarities between Tom and his father? (See commentary after Scene Four and the character analyses of Amanda and Tom.)

4. What is the significance of Laura's unicorn? (See commentary after Scene Seven.)

5. Why does Amanda nag at Tom so much? (See commentary after Scenes One, Three and Four.)

6. Why does Laura give the unicorn to Jim? (See commentary after Scene Seven.)

7. Why does it take Tom so long to decide to leave home? (See character analysis of Tom and commentary after Scene Five.)

Edward Albee's

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

by James L. Roberts, Ph.D.

LIFE AND BACKGROUND

There has been no official biography of Edward Albee and, therefore, such knowledge as is available to the reader might be subject to some distortions of fact. Edward Albee was born on March 12, 1928, in Washington, D.C. At the present time, his biological parentage is not public. He was adopted by very wealthy parents when he was two weeks old, and he carries the name of his adopted grandfather, Edward Franklin Albee, who was, among other things, part-owner of a chain of theaters. This fact, however, seemingly has little relation to Albee's later theatrical career even though, as a child, Albee often found himself in the presence of prominent theater people.

Albee showed an interest in creative endeavors very early in life. His first attempts were with poetry, and by the time he was twelve, he had written his first play, a three-act farce called Aliqueen. Since his wealthy parents summered and wintered in different places, Albee's education was, to say the least, erratic. He was dismissed from one prep school (Lawrenceville School) when he was fifteen, was sent to Valley Forge Military Academy, and subsequently dismissed from there and graduated from Choate School. While at the latter, he submitted and had his first poem published in a Texas literary magazine (Kaleidoscope) and also his first one-act play was published in the Choate Literary Magazine.

While in Trinity College briefly, he became familiar with another side of the theater when he acted in a Maxwell Anderson play. Leaving college in 1947, Albee moved to Greenwich Village, NY, and occupied himself with a variety of odd jobs even though he was reportedly the weekly recipient of a trust fund. He shared an apartment with a composer and through him met many people in the music world. He also wrote for a radio station. His other odd jobs included being a waiter, bartender, salesman, and a Western Union delivery messenger.

In 1958, just before his thirtieth birthday, Albee finished The Zoo Story, the long one-act drama that would launch him on his career. After sending it to various theatrical producers in New York, a friend sent it to an acquaintance in Europe and it was finally produced in Berlin on September 28, 1959. After being a success there and being staged in numerous other cities in Germany, it was then presented in New York at the Off-Broadway

Provincetown Playhouse in 1960. Albee attracted quite a bit of critical success with this play but not much popular success. Then in 1962, he achieved both critical and popular success with *Who's* Afraid of Virginia Woolf? The play won the coveted New York Drama Critics Award and every other major award except the Pulitzer Prize, and it was made into a very successful motion picture with slight, but sometimes important, changes from the dramatic script.

Although Albee has continued to write significant drama (A Delicate Balance in 1966 won the Pulitzer Prize), none of his later plays have won the critical and popular acclaim awarded to *Who's* Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Edward Albee and the Theater of the Absurd

Even though Albee's *Who's Afriaid of' Virginia Woolf* would not be strictly classified as belonging to the movement known as "The Theater of the Absurd," there are, however, a great many elements of this play which are closely aligned with or which grew out of the dramas which are classified as being a part of "The Theater of the Absurd." Furthermore, the movement emerged on the literary scene just prior to and during the beginning of Albee's formative, creative years. Also, his early plays—The Zoo Story, The American Dream, and Sand Box—which will be discussed later, do belong rather directly with the Absurdist movement and they employ most of the themes, motifs, ideas, and techniques found in the plays of "The Theater of the Absurd." Furthermore, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* also utilizes many of the techniques and ideas of his earlier plays—for example, the lost or non-existent child is a constant factor in many of Albee's plays of all periods. Consequently, in its simplest terms, Albee's early short dramas are essential studies to *Who's Afraid of* Virginia Woolf? his first full length drama. In addition to a knowledge of Albee's own early plays, an understanding of the entire movement of the Theater of the Absurd and the relationship of Albee's early plays to that movement will, in part, illuminate aspects of *Who's Afraid of Virginia* Woolf?

To begin, even though the movement known as the Theater of the Absurd was not a consciously conceived movement, and it has never had any clear cut philosophical doctrines, no organized attempt to win converts, and no meetings, it has characteristics which set it apart from other experiments in drama. Each of the main playwrights of the movement seemed to have developed independently of the other. The playwrights most often connected with the movement are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Arthur Adamov. The early plays of Edward Albee and Harold Pinter fit into this classification, but they have also written plays that move far away from the Theater of the Absurd.

In viewing the plays that comprise this movement, we must forsake the theater of coherently developed situations, we must forsake characterizations that are rooted in the logic of motivation and reaction, we must forget (sometimes) settings that bear anintrinsic, realistic or obvious relationship in the drama as a whole, we must forget the use of language as a tool of logical communication, and we must forget cause and effect relationships found in traditional drama. By their use of a number of puzzling devices, these playwrights have gradually accustomed audiences to a new kind of relationship between theme and presentation. In these seemingly queer and fantastic plays, the external world is often depicted as menacing, devouring, and unknown; the settings and situations often make us vaguely uncomfortable—the world itself seems incoherent and frightening and strange, but at the same time, hauntingly poetic and familiar.

These are some of the reasons which prompt the critic to classify them under the heading "Theater of the Absurd"—a title which comes not from a dictionary definition of the world "absurd," but rather from Martin Esslin's book The Theatre of the Absurd, in which he maintains that these dramatists write from a "sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition." But other writers such as Kafka, Camus, and Sartre have argued from the same philosophical position. The essential difference is that critics like Camus have presented their arguments in a highly formal discourse with logical and precise views which prove their thesis within the framework of traditional forms. On the contrary, the Theater of the Absurd seeks to wed form and content into an indissoluble whole, so as to gain a further unity of meaning and impact. This theater has, as Esslin has pointed out, "renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being—that is, in terms of concrete stage images of the absurdity of existence."

Too often, however, the viewer is tempted to note these basic similarities (and others to be later noted) and to dismiss an individual playwright as merely another absurdist writer. Also, too often, the critic fails to note the distinctive differences in each

dramatist. Since these writers (dramatists) do not belong to any deliberate or conscious movement, they should be evaluated for their individual concerns as well as their contributions to the total concept of the Theater of the Absurd. In fact, most of these playwrights consider themselves to be lonely rebels and outsiders, isolated in their own private world. As noted above, there have been no manifestos, no theses, no conferences and no collaborations. Each has developed along his own unique line; each in his own way is individually and distinctly different. Therefore it is important to see how Ionesco both belongs to the Theater of the Absurd and equally important, how he differs from the other writers. First let us note a few of the basic differences.

The Differences

One of Samuel Beckett's main concerns is with the polarity of existence. In Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and *Krapp's Last Tape,* we have such characteristic polarities as sight versus blindness, life–death, time present–time past, body–intellect, waiting–not waiting, going–not going, and literally dozens more. Beckett's main concern, then, seems to be to place man and characterize man's existence in terms of these polarities. To do this, Beckett groups his characters in pairs, such as Vladimir and Estragon, or Didi and Gogo, Hamm and Clov, Pozzo and Lucky, Nagg and Nell, and Krapp's present voice and past voice. Essentially, however, Beckett's characters remain a puzzle which each individual viewer must solve.

In contrast to Beckett, Eugene Ionesco's characters are seen in terms of singularity. Whereas Beckett's characters stand in pairs outside of society but converse with each other, Ionesco's characters are placed in the midst of society, but they stand alone in an alien world with no personal identity and no one to whom they can communicate. For example, the characters in The Bald Soprano are in society, but scream meaningless phrases at each other and there is no communication. And whereas Beckett's plays take place on strange and alien landscapes (some of his plays remind one of a world already transformed by some holocaust or created by some surrealist), Ionesco's plays are set against the most

traditional elements in our society—the standard English drawing room in The Bald Soprano, a typical street scene in Rhinoceros, an average study in The Lesson, and so on.

The language of the two playwrights also differs greatly. Beckett's dialogue recalls the disjointed phantasmagoria of a dream world; Ionesco's language is rooted in the banalities, cliches and platitudes of everyday speech; Beckett uses language to show man isolated in a world and unable to communicate because language is a barrier to communication. Ionesco, on the other hand, uses language to show the failure of communication because there is nothing to say; thus in The Bald Soprano, and other plays, the dialogue is filled with cliches and banalities.

In contrast to the basic sympathy we feel for both Beckett's and Ionesco's characters, especially characters like Berenger, Jean Genet's characters almost revile the audience from the moment that they appear on the stage. His theme is more openly stated. He is concerned with the hatred which exists in the world. In The Maids, each maid hates not just her employer and not just her own sister, but also her own self. Therefore, she plays the other roles so as to exhaust her own hatred of herself against herself. Basically, then, there is a great sense of repugnance in Genet's characters. This revulsion derives partially from the fact that Genet's interest, so different from Beckett's and Ionesco's, is in the psychological exploration of man's predilection to being trapped in his own egocentric world rather than facing the realities of existence. Man for Genet is trapped by his own fantastic illusions. Man's absurdity results partially from the fact that he prefers his own disjointed images to those of reality. Thus, in Genet's direction for the production of The Blacks, he writes that the play should never be played before a totally black audience. If there are no white people present, then one of the Negroes in the audience must wear a white mask; if the Negro refuses, then a white mannequin must be used and the actors must play the drama for this mannequin. Thus there must be a white audience, someone for the Negroes to revile. Since a Negro audience by its color would recognize and prefer the

identical images that the actors are creating, there must be the white person to note the distortion of reality.

In contrast to Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, in his themes, is more closely aligned to the Kafkaesque of the existentialist school, but his technique is that of the theater of the absurd. His interest is in establishing some proof that the individual does exist, and he shows how man becomes more alienated from his fellow man as he attempts to establish his own personal identity. For example, in Professor Tarrane, the central character, hoping to prove his innocence of a certain accusation, actually convicts himself through his own defense. For Adamov, man attempting to prove his own existence actually proves that he does not exist. Language, therefore, for Adamov serves as an inadequate system of communication and actually in some cases serves to the detriment of man, since by language and man's use of language, man often finds himself trapped in the circumstances he previously hoped to avoid. Ultimately, Adamov's characters fail to communicate because each is interested only in his own egocentric self. Each character propounds his own troubles and his own achievements, but the words reverberate as against a stone wall. They are heard only by the audience. Adamov's plays are often grounded in the dream-world atmosphere; and while they are presenting a series of outwardly confusing scenes of almost hallucinatory quality, they, at the same time, attack or denounce the confusion present in modern man.

Characteristic of all these writers is a notable absence of any excess concern over sex. Edward Albee, an American, differs significantly in his emphasis and concern with the sexual substructure of society. The overtones of homosexuality in The Zoo Story are carried further until the young man in The American Dream becomes the incarnation of the muscular and ideally handsome young homosexual who, since he has no inner feelings, passively allows anyone "to take pleasure from my groin." In The Sandbox, the angel of death is again seen as the muscle-bound young homosexual who spends his time scantily dressed and

performing calisthenics on a beach while preparing for a career in Hollywood.

Similarities

Although all of the writers have varying concerns, they also have much in common, because their works reflect a moral and philosophical climate in which most of our civilization finds itself today. Again, as noted above, even though there were no manifestos, no organized movements, there are still certain concerns that are basic to all of the writers and Ionesco's works are concerned with these basic ideas or concerns.

Beyond the technical and strange illusionary techniques which prompt the critic to group these plays into a category, there are larger and ultimately, more significant concerns by which each dramatist, in spite of his differences, is akin to the other. Aside from such similarities as violation of traditional beginning, middle, and end (or exposition, complication, and denouement) or the refusal to tell a straight-forward connected story with a nice plot, the disappearance of traditional dramatic forms and techniques, they are also concerned over the failure of communication in modern society which leaves man alienated, and they are concerned over a lack of individuality or an overemphasis on conformity in our society. They use time and place to imply important ideas, and finally they reject traditional logic for a type of nonlogic which ultimately implies something about the nature of the universe. Implicit in many of these concerns is an attack on a society or world which possesses no set standards of values or behavior.

First, let's examine the concern over the lack of communication. In Edward Albee's plays, each character is existing in his own private ego. Each makes a futile attempt to get another character to understand him, but as the attempt is contrived, there is more alienation. Thus, finally, because of a lack of communication, Peter, the conformist in The Zoo Story, is provoked into killing Jerry, the individualist; or in The Sandbox, a continuation of The American Dream, Mommy and Daddy bury Grandma because she talks incessantly but says nothing

significant. The irony is that Grandma is the only character who does say anything significant, but Mommy and Daddy, the people who discard her, are incapable of understanding her.

But in Ionesco's plays, this failure of communication leads often to even more drastic results. Like Albee's Zoo Story, the professor in The Lesson must kill the student partly because she doesn't understand his communication. Or Berenger, in The Killers, has uttered so many cliches that by the end of the play, he has even convinced himself that the killers should kill him. In The Chairs, the old people, needing to express their thoughts, address themselves to a mass of empty chairs which, as the play progresses, crowd all else off the stage. In Maid to Marry, communication is so bad that the maid, when she appears on the stage, turns out to be a rather homely man. And ultimately, in Ionesco's Rhinoceros, the inability to communicate causes an entire race of so-called rational human beings to be metamorphosed into a herd of rhinoceroses thereby abandoning all hopes of language as a means of communication. In Adamov's Professor Taranne, the professor, in spite of all his desperate attempts, is unable to get people to acknowledge his identity because there is no communication. Likewise, Pinter's plays show individuals grouped on the stage, but each person fails to achieve any degree of effective communication. The concern with communication is carried to its illogical extreme in two works: In Genet's The Blacks, one character says "We shall even have the decency—a decency learned from you—to make communication impossible." And in another, Beckett's Act Without Words, we have our first play in this movement to use absolutely no dialogue. And even without dialogue, all the action on the stage suggests the inability of man to communicate.

Beckett's characters are tied together by a fear of being left entirely alone and they therefore cling to that last hope of establishing some communication with another. His plays give the impression of man totally lost in a disintegrating society, or as in

Endgame, of man alone after society has already disintegrated. In Waiting for Godot, the two derelicts are seen conversing in repetitive, strangely fragmented dialogue that possesses an illusory, haunting effect, while they are waiting for Godot, a vague, neverdefined being who will bring them some communication about—what? Salvation? Death? A reason for living? The impetus for dying? No one knows and the safest thing to say is that the two are waiting for someone (something) which will give them the impetus to continue living and waiting or something which will give them meaning and direction to life. And as Beckett clearly demonstrates, those who rush hither and yon in search of meanings find it no quicker than those who sit and wait. But everyone leaves the theater with the realization that these tramps are strangely tied to one another; and yet, even though they bicker and fight, and even though they have exhausted all conversation—notice that the second act is repetitive and almost identical—the loneliness and weakness in each calls out to the others, and they are held by a mystical bond of interdependence. But in spite of this strange dependency, neither is able to communicate with the other. The other two characters, Pozzo and Lucky, are on a journey without any apparent goal, and are symbolically tied together. One talks, the other says nothing. The waiting of Vladimir and Estragon and the journeying of Pozzo and Lucky offer themselves as contrasts to various activities in the modern world each leading to no fruitful end; therefore, each pair is hopelessly alienated from the other pair. For example, when Pozzo falls and yells for help, Vladimir and Estragon continue their talk, but throughout their dialogue nothing is communicated; all is hopeless or as Vladimir aphoristically replies to one of Estragon's long discourses, "We are all born mad. Some remain so." In their attempts at conversation and communication, these two tramps have a fastidious correctness and a grave propriety that suggest that they could be socially accepted; but their fastidiousness and propriety are inordinately comic when contrasted with their ragged appearance.

Their fumbling ineffectuality in their attempts at conversation seems to represent the ineptness of all mankind in its attempt at

communication. And it rapidly becomes apparent that Vladimir and Estragon, as representatives of modern man, cannot formulate any cogent or useful play of action; and what is more pathetic, they cannot communicate their helpless longings to one another. While failing to possess enough individualism to go their separate ways, they nevertheless are different enough to embrace most of our society. In the final analysis, their one positive gesture lies in their strength to wait. And man is terribly alone in his waiting. Ionesco shows the same ideas in the end of Rhinoceros when we see Berenger totally alone as a result partly of a failure in communication.

Each dramatist has, therefore, presented a critique of modern society by showing the total collapse of communication. The technique used is that of evolving a theme about communication by presenting a series of seemingly disjointed speeches. The accumulative effect of these speeches is a devastating commentary on the failure of communication in modern society.

In conjunction with the general attack on communication, the second aspect common to the dramatists is the lack of individuality encountered in modern civilization. Generally, the point seems to be that man does not know himself. He has lost all sense of individualism and either functions isolated and alien or else finds himself lost amid repetition and conformity.

Jean Genet's play, The Maids, opens with the maid Claire playing the role of her employer while her sister Solange plays the role of Claire. Therefore, we have Claire calling or referring to Solange as Claire. By the time the audience realizes that the two sisters are imitating someone else, each character has lost her individualism; therefore, as Claire later portrays Solange, who portrays the employer, and vice versa, we gradually realize that part of Genet's intent was to illustrate the total lack of individuality and furthermore, to show that each character becomes vibrantly alive only when functioning in the image of another personality.

Other dramatists present their attack on society's destruction of individualism by different means, but the attack still has the same

thematic intent. In Albee's The American Dream, Mommy and Daddy are obviously generic names for any mommy and daddy. Albee is not concerned with individualizing his characters. They remain types and as types are seen at times in terms of extreme burlesque. So, unlike Beckett's tramps, and more like Ionesco's characters, Albee's people are seen as Babbitt-like caricatures and satires on the "American Dream" type, and the characters remain mannequins with no delineations. Thus in Ionesco's The Bald Soprano, the Martins can assume the roles of the Smith's and begin the play over because there is no distinction between the two sets of characters.

As emphasized elsewhere in this volume, Ionesco has written most extensively about the failure of individualism most effectively in his most famous play, Rhinoceros. To repeat, in this play, our society today has emphasized conformity to such an extent and has rejected individualism so completely that Ionesco demonstrates with inverse logic how stupid it is not to conform with all society and be metamorphosed into a rhinoceros. This play aptly illustrates how two concerns of the absurdists—lack of communication and the lack of individualism—are combined, each to support the other. Much of Ionesco's dialogue in this play seems to be the distilled essence of the commonplace. One cliche follows another. We are further startled because this dialogue is spoken within the framework of a wildly improbable situation. In a typically common street with the typical common cliches about weather and work being uttered, the morning calm is shattered by a rhinoceros as it charges through the streets. Then two rhinoceroses, then more. Ridiculous arguments then develop as to whether they are African or Asiatic rhinoceroses. We soon learn that there is an epidemic of metamorphoses; all are changing into rhinoceroses. Soon only three individuals are left. Then in the face of this absurd situation, we have the equally appalling justifications and reasons in favor of being metamorphosed advocated in such cliches as "We must join the crowd," "We must move with the times," "We've got to build our life on new foundations," and so on. Suddenly it almost seems foolish not to become a rhinoceros. In the end, Berenger's

sweetheart, Daisy, succumbs to the pressure of society, relinquishes her individualism, and joins the society of rhinoceroses—not because she wants to, but rather because she is afraid not to. She cannot revolt against society even to remain a human being. Berenger is left alone totally isolated, with his individualism. And what good is his humanity in a world of rhinoceroses?

At first glance it would seem obvious that Ionesco wishes to indicate the triumph of the individual, who, although caught in a society that has gone mad, refuses to surrender his sense of identity. But if we look more closely, we see that Ionesco has no intention of leaving us on this hopeful and comforting note.

In his last speech, Berenger makes it clear that his stand is rendered absurd. What does his humanity avail him in a world of beasts'? Finally, he wishes that he also had changed, only now he realizes that it is too late. All he can do is feebly reassert his joy in being human. His statement carries little conviction. Thus Ionesco has dealt with the haunting theme of the basic meaning and value of personal identity in relationship to society. If one depends entirely upon the society in which one lives for a sense of reality and identity, it is impossible to take a stand against that society without reducing oneself to nothingness in the process. Berenger instinctively felt repelled by the tyranny that had sprung up around him, but he had no sense of identity that would have enabled him to combat this evil with anything resembling a positive force. Probably any action he could have taken would have led to eventual defeat, but defeat would have been infinitely preferable to the limbo in which he is finally consigned. Thus, Ionesco has masterfully joined two themes: the lack of individualism and the failure of communication. But unlike Beckett who handles the same themes by presenting his characters as derelicts and outcasts from society, Ionesco's treatment seems even more devastating for having placed them in the very middle of the society from which they are estranged.

Ultimately, the absurdity of man's condition is partially a result of his being compelled to exist without his individualism and in a society which does not possess any degree of effective communication. Essentially, therefore, the Theater of the Absurd is not a positive drama. It does not try to prove that man is in a meaningless world as did Camus or Sartre: it does not offer any solutions: instead, it demonstrates the absurdity and illogicality of the world we live in. Nothing is ever settled: there are no positive statements; no conclusions are ever reached and what few actions there are have no meaning, particularly in relation to the action. That is, one action carries no more significance than does its opposite action. For example, the man tying his shoe in The Bald Soprano—a common event—is magnified into a fantastic act while the appearance of rhinoceroses in the middle of a calm afternoon is not at all memorable and evokes only the most trite and insignificant remarks. Also, Pozzo and Lucky's frantic running and searching are no more important than Vladimir and Estragon's sitting and waiting. And Genet presents his blacks as outcasts from and misfits in society but refrains from making any positive statement regarding the black person's role in our society—the question of whether society is to be integrated or segregated is to Genet a matter of perfect indifference. It would still be society and the individual would still be outside it.

No conclusions or resolutions can ever be offered because these plays are essentially circular and repetitive in nature. The Bald Soprano begins over again with a new set of characters, and other plays end at the same point at which they began, thus obviating any possible conclusions or positive statements. The American Dream ends with the coming of a second child, this time one that is fully grown and the twin to the other child who had years before entered the family as a baby and upset the static condition; thus, thematically, the play ends as it began. Therefore, in all of these playwrights and dramas, the sense of repetition, the circular structure, the static quality, the lack of cause and effect, and the lack of apparent progression all suggest the sterility and lack of values in the modern world.

Early critics referred to the Theater of the Absurd as a theater in transition, meaning that it was to lead to something different. So far this has not happened and moreover it is rapidly becoming accepted as a distinct genre in its own right. The themes utilized by these dramatists are not new: thus, the success of the plays must often depend upon the effectiveness of the technique and the new ways by which the dramatists illustrate their themes. But the techniques are still so new that many people are confused by a production of one of these plays. But more important, if the technique serves to emphasize the absurdity of man's position in the universe, then to present this concept by a series of ridiculous situations is only to render man's position more absurd; and in actuality, the techniques then reinforce that condition which the dramatists bewail. In other words, to present the failure of communication by a series of disjointed and seemingly incoherent utterances lends itself to the accusation that functionalism is carried to a ridiculous extreme. But this is what the absurdist wanted to do. He was tired of logical discourses pointing out step by step the absurdity of the universe: he began with the philosophical premise that the universe is absurd, and then created plays which illustrated conclusively that the universe is indeed absurd and that perhaps this play is an additional absurdity.

In conclusion, if the public can accept these unusual uses of technique to support thematic concerns, then do we have plays which present, dramatically, powerful and vivid views on the absurdity of the human condition—an absurdity which is the result of society's destruction of individualism, of the failure of communication, of being forced to conform to a world of mediocrity, where no action is meaningful? And as the tragic outcasts of these plays are presented in terms of Burlesque, man is reminded that his position and that of human existence in general is essentially absurd. Every play in the Theater of the Absurd mirrors the chaos and basic disorientation of modern man. Each laughs in anguish at the confusion that exists in contemporary society, hence, all share a basic point of view, while varying widely in scope and structure.

THE SETTING

The setting of the drama is in a university town which in itself gives a special aura to the play. The characters in the drama represent the types of people who have been given the most disciplined training in the best that has been thought and said throughout the history of civilization. Consequently, we are exposed to several very civilized people acting in a way that is at times uncivilized and barbaric.

The name of the town that George and Martha live in is called New Carthage. Carthage is the name of the ancient classical city which was the site of the great love story of Dido and Aeneas and was ultimately destroyed because it was a city of "unholy loves," as St. Augustine referred to it.

The stage setting itself is also significant. Even though the script does not call for it, George and Martha's living room (the only set for the play) usually has a picture of George and Martha Washington displayed somewhere in clear view of the audience. In addition, there is traditionally an American flag on a stand (or otherwise displayed) and/or an American eagle or coat of arms prominently displayed somewhere.

THE TITLE

On the most basic level, the title is the substitution of the name of the famous British novelist Virginia Woolf for the name of the Big Bad Wolf of the nursery rhyme. The obvious correlation is the homophonic relationship of the last names—Woolf and Wolf. The hilarity which the substitution causes can be accounted for most directly as the result of the drunkenness of the guest who, in a drunken stupor, finds the intellectualizing of a nursery rhyme to be unaccountably comic. The use of the nursery rhyme, however, becomes central to the "fun and games" which characterize so much of the drama.

Other than the obvious similarity of the last names, the title seems to make an oblique comment on the drama itself. In the nursery rhyme which deals with fear of the unknown or possible evil in the person of the big bad wolf, the first two pigs ignore the possibility of the evil of the wolf and, as a result, are destroyed. The third little pig, recognizing the danger of the wolf, makes provisions against destruction and consequently survives.

Characters in the novels of Virginia Woolf can often be characterized as being apprehensive about, if not terrified of, life, and, like the first two little pigs, fail to make (or are unable to make) the proper provisions to cope with life. Virginia Woolf's own life was characterized by periods of madness, and so it is not surprising that she should deal in her novels with the intolerability of life and subsequent madness. The reference, then, to Virginia Woolf could function as a portent because George and Martha are playing a dangerous game which could drive either or both of them into madness since both of their lives are intolerable.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

GEORGE—A forty-six-year-old professor of history in a small New England college who is married to the daughter of the president of the college.

MARTHA—George's fifty-two-year-old wife, a domineering, discontented woman who alternately loves and reviles her husband.

NICK—A new arrival on the faculty who is about thirty years old and interested in getting ahead.

HONEY—Nick's wife, a rather uninteresting woman whose relationship with Nick and fear of adult responsibility have kept her a child.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Fun and Games

Act I: Scene i

Since *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a very long play with each act being rather lengthy, for the sake of critical discussion and explication, each act will be divided into scenes even though this was not done in the original play. The scenic division will follow the classic method of scene division; that is, there is a new scene with either the entrance or exit of a character from the stage. Thus, scene i comprises the entrance of George and Martha and ends with the entrance of Honey and Nick. While the language of the play might be acceptable today, in 1962 the opening language was startling, if not shocking, to the audience. The play opens with George and Martha returning home from a party at her father's house. There is a loud crash followed by Martha variously swearing, cursing, shouting ("braying" as George calls it) and insulting her husband, George. (She calls him a "cluck" and a "dumbbell" and insults him continually in other ways.) As she looks about her home, she is reminded of a line from a Bette Davis film, and the line, "What a dump," delivered in imitation of Bette Davis, has since become one of the most famous lines from the play. The movie character that Martha is quoting is "discontent," and the scene shows that Martha is also discontent with her house, with her husband who never does anything ("You never do anything; you never mix . . . "), and most importantly with her own life.

Her discontentment is important because this will be one of the reasons that the couple has created the imaginary child.

Since it is 2 a.m. and neither of them is sober, George assumes that since they are home, one small nightcap would be alright, but suddenly Martha springs the news on him that company is coming. Martha's main justification for having invited guests over is that her "daddy," who is the President of the college where George

teaches, told her to be “nice” to this new couple. Martha’s repetition three times about her father’s instructions suggests already that her “daddy” has an influence on George and Martha’s lives that will figure significantly in later scenes.

After Martha informs him who the couple is, George tells

Martha that he wishes "you'd stop springing things on me all the time . . . you're always springing things on me." Beginning with this statement, we see that part of the play will deal with the concept of who is running or managing their lifestyle. During the first part of the drama, Martha seems to be in almost complete control of their lives, but a change will later occur and it will be George who will spring things on Martha.

Martha reminds George of the nursery rhyme that apparently was sung at the party at her father's house. Someone had substituted the name of the famous British novelist Virginia Woolf for the Big Bad Wolf. The mention of this nursery rhyme with its intellectual variation characterizes much of the first act with its fun and games, with the shifting from intellectual conversation to baby talk and to talk of babies (see note on the title in the preceding section).

The rest of the scene shows the extreme variance in the relationship between the two. When George fails to respond to the song, Martha will first tell him "You make me puke" and then will follow this insult by their both laughing, and her requesting more ice in her drink and wanting a "great big sloppy kiss" from George. Thus, their relationship moves from one of grand insults to one of open sexuality. We are now prepared to see both react on a variety of levels. Martha's age is also emphasized in this scene since she is six years older than George. This implies that she is, as she later says, the earth mother capable of controlling both George and men much younger than she is.

When the doorbell rings, she orders George to answer it. She forces George into the role of "houseboy" as she will later force Nick to answer the bell after he has been a failure in bed. But before George answers the doorbell, he warns Martha three times not to start in "on the bit about the kid." This ominous note creates an anticipation about the nature of "the kid" which will be resolved only in the last part of the play, and lets us know that the subject of "the kid" is one with which George and Martha are quite familiar and that it is also quite private between them.

As George is about to open the door, he says things that arouse Martha's anger to the point that she screams "SCREW YOU!" just as the door is opened so that it appears that she screams this invective at the newly arrived guests, Nick and Honey. This comment becomes the central metaphor for the rest of the drama. It becomes obvious that Martha invited Nick and Honey because she is physically attracted to Nick and constant allusions will be made about Nick's body which he keeps in good shape. The fact that she yells the comment to Nick conforms with her later attempts to seduce the young man.

Other than the term having sexual meaning, "screw" also carries a connotation of getting to someone or getting even with someone or confusing someone. Each of these meanings also applies to the play. After George has later been humiliated by Martha, he then initiates the game "Getting the Guests" in which he gets even with the guests and also gets them thoroughly confused before Nick understands the final truth about "the kid." Another meaning of screw is to tighten, to twist, to apply pressure or to coerce. George constantly applies pressure to Honey and twists her tipsy memory around to make her corroborate his story about the telegram. Then, of course, the term "to screw up" means to make a mess of things. Martha certainly did this when she revealed the "bit about the kid." In fact, by normal standards, George and Martha's lives have been all screwed up for years. Also, to be "screwed out of" means that one has been taken advantage of or cheated in some way. At one point or another in the play each character is taken advantage of by some other character. And, finally, a screw or a screwball refers to a very eccentric person. George and Martha's behavior or life style and their imaginary child could certainly be classified as eccentric or unusual behavior. Consequently, the two words hurled at George but hitting Nick and Honey become central to the rest of the drama.

Act I: Scene ii

Scene ii begins with the entrance of Nick and Honey and ends when Martha takes Honey to the bathroom, leaving George and Nick alone.

With the entrance of Nick and Honey, who have heard Martha scream her invective, "Screw You," Martha, Nick and Honey attempt some sort of diversionary conversations. George constantly shows his superior wit by his witty repartee. When Nick tries to make social conversation by commenting on an original oil painting, George responds that it was by "some Greek with a mustache Martha attacked one night. . . ." Thematically, this comment emphasizes Martha's aggressive nature and suggests her later attempts to seduce young Nick. The discussion shifts to a conversation about drinking, then to the rememberance of the ditty "*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*" and ends with the discussion of the party at Martha's father's house. All of these interchanges are characterized by some of the wittiest dialogue in modern drama. But the dramatic interest in these witticisms lies in the fact that undoubtedly Martha and George have been saying exactly the same witty things over and over, year after year to new faculty members. It is not the first time that George has described Martha's drinking habits or the nature of her mind or the basic characteristics of Martha's father's parties. Consequently, we should remember that each comment is somewhat "fed" to the newcomers and that Martha and George are staging a

"performance" for the young couple. It is important to establish that this "routine" exists in order to understand later on that the subject of their child has never been mentioned.

Just as Martha and Honey are leaving, George once again reminds Martha: "Just don't shoot your mouth off . . . about . . . you-know-what." This is another ominous warning, and we are further alerted when Martha threatens that she will "talk about any goddamn thing I want to." This now prepares the reader for the fact that when Martha does reveal something about "the kid" that drastic measures will have to be taken.

Act I: Scene iii

With the departure of Martha and Honey, we begin scene iii with George and Nick who talk of George's "dashed hopes," the

"musical beds" among the faculty, of their relative ages and ambitions, and of the differences between history and biology.

The conflict in this scene is between two approaches to life, epitomized by the major difference between history and biology. George accuses Nick of trying to rearrange mankind's "chromozones" (which he mistakes for chromosomes, thus showing his little knowledge about biology) and therefore to adjust the future of mankind, while Nick constantly fails to understand George's classical allusions (he does not know that "Parnassus" is the mountain where the great Greek poets and philosophers were supposed to live after death) and thus reveals that he (Nick) is not concerned with human history, and prefers the scientific approach to a humanistic approach. Early in the scene George sets up intellectual traps for Nick who falls into them; but when George calls for a response to his declension "Good, better, best, bested," Nick refuses to participate any longer in George's game. Since the title of the act is "Fun and Games" we are thus exposed to one of the themes basic to the play. Ultimately, as we will see when we learn about the imaginary child, George and Martha's entire marriage has been a type of "fun and games," deception and illusion. Their bantering and hurling of insults throughout this first act is also a type of game. If one were to read Eric Berne's Games People Play (1964), one would discover that games can become various types of substitutes for real emotions. The titles of other games played later in the drama include "Humiliate the Host," "Hump the Hostess," "Get the Guest," "Bringing Up Baby," "Peel the Label," "Houseboy," and "Kill the Kid." Each game will be seen to function on its own level. And as with all games, there are certain rules that must be observed. When Martha violates the rules of their game, George must, at the end of the drama, bring the game to an end and in such a way that the guests will never reveal the existence of the game to anyone.

When Nick refuses to play the game and threatens to leave immediately, George refuses to let him go because, by this time, George is aware that maybe Nick does have some ability to play in the various games—that suddenly Nick exhibits some liveliness

that wasn't apparent before. Thus by persuading Nick to stay, the games will continue for a while longer. George emphasizes that it is only a game by assuring Nick that Martha and he are not having an argument—instead, they are merely ". . . exercising . . . we're merely walking what's left of our wits." In actual life, this is another key to George and Martha's personal relationship: they enjoy witty repartee and a love/hate relationship that is expressed through their verbal violence. Ultimately it is amazing how much hostility and hatred they can throw at each other only to turn immediately to each other for emotional support.

This scene closes with the allusion to another game—or the same one. When Nick asks George if he has any children, George answers with a juvenile reply: "That's for me to know and you to find out"—a type of retort that is common among young children. The emphasis on childbearing is carried further when George inquires, in turn, about Nick's plans for a family, preparing us later for the revelation about Honey's alleged pregnancy.

When Nick implies that he might want to settle in this college town, George calls the place "Illyria . . . Penguin Island . . . Gomorrah. . . . You think you're going to be happy here in New Carthage, eh?" These allusions have varying significance. Illyria was the idealized seacoast in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night; Penguin Island is both an illusionary and realistic satire on civilization; Gomorrah was the most sinful city in the Old Testament and was completely destroyed by God because of the lustfulness of its people; and Carthage was the scene of the greatest of the "unholy love affairs" of ancient times—that of Dido and Aeneas. Thus each is, in some way, a reflection of various aspects of *Who's Afraid of* Virginia Woolf?

Act I: Scene iv

Scene iv is very short. Honey returns to tell the others that Martha is changing so as to be more comfortable. Honey wants to know more about George and Martha's twenty-one-year-old son, and George is stunned to hear this news and threatens to get even with Martha in some way.

While this scene is very short, it is also a turning point in the drama. George is aware, first, that if Martha is changing clothes, she is changing for the hunt, for the kill, the seduction. As George tells the young couple, "Martha hasn't changed for me in years" meaning not that she has not changed her clothes, but her basic lifestyle. Only at the end of the drama will Martha have to face the fact that she must change—she can no longer live as she has.

When George hears that Martha has mentioned their "son," he wheels around "as if struck from behind." His insistence upon hearing it again as though he were "nailing it down" (stage directions) indicates clearly that this is the first time that the son has been mentioned in front of others. His first reaction is an ominous warning with threatening overtones. The fact that an outsider now knows about this means that George cannot allow them to leave with the knowledge of their imaginary son—that he must keep the guests in his house until he can discover what to do.

Act I: Scene v

Martha returns in a "most voluptuous" dress and begins to openly admire Nick's body and to discuss it, and at the same time, to ridicule both George's position in the college and his physique. When Martha is about to begin on a boxing story after finding out that Nick was a boxer, George leaves.

Other than the wit involved, this scene mainly shows Martha as an aggressive, seductive female, who is also enjoying playing some type of game. She varies at one moment from baby talk to vituperative language. She cuddles up to George and then throws him off balance with her insults. She belittles his position in the History Department as well as his physical abilities. Then turning from George, she openly admires Nick's fine body and there "is a rapport of some unformed sort established" between them—a

rapport filled with double meanings. At this point and for some time to come, Martha has the upper hand over George: it will not be until much later in the drama that George will again gain control of the situation.

Act I: Scene vi

This very short scene involves Martha's narrating a story about how at the beginning of World War II, her father wanted everyone in good physical condition, so one day when people had boxing gloves on, she put on a pair and accidentally knocked George into a huckleberry bush.

The actual boxing scene between George and Martha corresponds to their constant verbal sparring. As with the first act of the drama, Martha wins the first round of the boxing match, but George will be the ultimate victor in the final contest. As Martha relates the story, she tells the young people that "It was funny, but it was awful." This phrase characterizes her attitude about their entire marital relationship.

Act I: Scenes vii–ix

These two short scenes begin with George continuing with the fun and games. He returns with the fake gun and pretends that he is going to shoot Martha. Since the arguments between George and Martha have been so vituperative and seemingly bitter, Nick and Honey are horrified. (In some productions, the gun explodes with an American flag rather than a Chinese parasol. While the American flag emphasizes rather lamely the underlying parody of American life and values, the Chinese parasol carries through more aptly the idea of the fun and games.) Furthermore, the gun is an obvious sexual symbol which delights Martha's sensuous self. In the same scene, she refers to George as "You . . . prick." At the end of the scene, she delights in using double meanings when she tells Nick that she bets he won't need a fake gun, or any other "props."

When Martha finds out that Nick is not in math but in biology, she continues her vulgar suggestiveness by maintaining that biology is closer "to the meat of things."

Scene ix opens with Martha telling Nick as he re-enters: "You're right at the meat of things, baby" a phrase she repeats until George tells her that she is obsessed with it. There is then the discussion, begun earlier in the third scene, concerning the sciences and the humanities. During this scene, as biological matters are discussed and as Martha becomes more and more attracted to young Nick, she increasingly degrades George. In a type of discussion reminiscent of science fiction, George defends the "glorious variety and unpredictability" of the human race against the scientist's idea of creating test-tube babies according to a certain pattern. George, the intellectual humanist, argues for "surprise, the multiplexity" found in natural birth. Nick, the scientist, stands for the creation of a "civilization of men, smooth, blond, and right at the middleweight limit." George's stand against Nick can also be seen as a defense against all the forces which are threatening the "sanctity" of his home.

As George defends the rights of humans, the subject of his "son" is brought up by Honey. At first, the imaginary son is referred to as an "it" which is quite appropriate. George, however, is the one who insists that Martha tell about their son because she is the one who brought it (him) up. And the subject of the son becomes the raison d'etre for the remainder of the play: that is, George must "get the guests" in order to preserve the sanctity of the hearth. The scene ends with George going to get more booze.

Act I: Scenes x and xi

In George's absence, Martha tells her guests (and thus the audience) how she met and married George. Earlier she had married a young gardener at a finishing school, but her father annulled the marriage immediately. Then she decided to marry someone in the college and "along came George" who in fact returns at this moment "bearing hooch." At first, George goes along with Martha's story, thinking that it concerns their courtship. When he realizes otherwise, he warns her to stop because he now sees that she is leading up to telling about his failures. He reminds her that she has already spilled the beans about their son and now, he says, "if you start in on this other business, I warn you, Martha, it's going

to make me angry." Even though he warns her again and again, she continues with the story of his failures.

She tells how it was assumed that George would be groomed to take over her father's place someday. But George wasn't ambitious—in fact he was " . . . a FLOP! A great . . . big . . . fat . . . FLOP!" At this point, George breaks a bottle on the portable bar, but Martha continues even though George is at the breaking point himself. As Martha continues her vicious recounting of George's failures and ineptitudes, he begins to sing "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" and is joined by the drunken Honey, who becomes sick and rushes down the hall to vomit. Nick and Martha follow her, leaving the crushed and semi-tragic figure of George standing entirely alone. George is at the depth of his existence now with his life laid bare. We have now finished the game of "Humiliating the Host." For the moment Martha has triumphed and George is defeated.

Walpurgisnacht

Act II: Scenes i–iii

The subject matter of scenes i–iii concerns George's and Nick's views of their respective wives and other matters. It is briefly interrupted (less than a page) by Martha's appearance to report on the state of Honey's relative sobriety or drunkenness; otherwise, without this brief interruption, this should be considered thematically as one scene.

Act II begins with Nick reporting that Honey is "all right." George then inquires about Martha. In a comic interchange, there is a confusion (deliberate on George's part) as to which wife is being talked about. The confusion begins logically when George asks Nick about the whereabouts of Martha. Nick answers that "she's making coffee" and then in the same sentence says that "She [meaning Honey] gets sick often." George, preoccupied with Martha, takes this opportunity to deliberately misunderstand Nick and therefore puts Nick on the defensive. Because Nick has just witnessed George's humiliation, George wants to make Nick uncomfortable. The hostility between the two men increases as each expresses his antagonism by attacking the other's wife. Nick refers to Martha's and George's abilities to flagellate each other as being very impressive. George retaliates by referring to Honey's tendency to "throw up a lot."

Suddenly there is a startling switch from hostility to confidentiality as the two men begin to reveal things about their respective wives. If we remember, as Nick will later point out, that they have been drinking since 9 p.m. and it is now in the early hours of the morning, then we realize that in such a drunken state, there can easily be a switch from hostility to congenial confidences.

In the course of the conversation, Nick reveals that he married Honey because she thought she was pregnant. It turned out, however, to have been a hysterical pregnancy: "She blew up and then she went down"; that is, she had all the symptoms of pregnancy without actually being pregnant and while she was in this state, they were married. Later on, however, we discover that

it was not a forced marriage—there had been many other factors influencing the marriage: they had known each other since early childhood, it was assumed by both families that they would marry, Honey's father had a great deal of money, and they did care for each other very much.

George then confides in Nick by telling a story about a boy who accidently shot his mother and some time later this boy was in a bar and ordered a "bergin and water," which caused the entire bar to begin laughing and ordering the same. Later the boy was driving a car with "his learner's permit in his pocket" and swerved to "avoid a porcupine and drove straight into a large tree" and killed his father. The boy had to be put into an asylum—"That was thirty years ago."

George's story of the boy who had accidentally shot his mother and then killed his father in an auto accident will be repeated twice again in the drama—it is the subject of George's novel which Martha's father refuses to allow George to publish and it is also the basis for the story of the death of George and Martha's imaginary child. Since the "narrated events" about this boy occurred about thirty years ago (at which time George would have been about sixteen, near the age of the "fictional" boy) and since the same is the subject of his first novel (most first novels are often thinly disguised autobiographies) we can assume that these events possibly happened to George himself. If so, we can use these events to explain George's silence (his refusal to publish), his general withdrawal from life, and his preference for an imaginary child—one who can't kill his parents—to a real child. We could further suggest that George tolerates Martha's disparagement of him because he feels he deserves it.

After the confidential talk, the conversation returns to the two wives. After George has mentioned again Honey's imaginary pregnancy, George casually asserts that "Martha doesn't have pregnancies at all." This statement should alert us (or Nick) that their son is an imaginary one. Yet, continuing in the line of "Fun and Games," George refers to their son as a "bean bag"—a type of

object children play with and thus it is an appropriate label for an imaginary child.

After a brief interruption by Martha (scene ii) which includes their hurling obscene French words at each other, George discovers that Nick does have very ambitious plans about "taking over" matters at the university and one way might be for Nick to start sleeping around with certain influential wives. At first, this was part of the "fun and games," but suddenly both George and Nick realize the seriousness of the idea and it frightens Nick more than George. George honestly tries to warn Nick that there is "quicksand here" and that Nick will "be dragged down, just as . . ." but he does not finish his sentence, which implies that George knows that he has been dragged down. Nick refuses to listen and responds with a vicious "UP YOURS!" which prompts George to make an absurd speech about a civilization based on moral principles being reduced to "UP YOURS." After this absurd speech, applauded by Nick, Martha reappears, leading Honey.

ACT II: Scene iv

This scene begins with the entrance of Martha and Honey, continues with the narration by Martha of George's attempts to publish a novel, and then shifts to George's narration which is a description of Honey and Nick's courtship and marriage, presented as though it were the subject of George's new novel. The scene ends when Honey runs off stage to throw up again.

The scene is one of the longest in the drama and is organized around two significant games. The first game is "Humiliate the Host," and the second is "Get the Guests." A third game, "Hump the Hostess," is mentioned but is postponed until a later time. The first game begins with a long discussion in which Martha attacks George and accuses him of causing Honey to throw up. Honey assures them that she has always had a tendency to throw up. Martha again violates her and George's private rules of the game by mentioning their "son." She maintains that "George makes everybody sick . . ." Then she carelessly mentions how George used to make their son sick. At first, George is again shocked that their

son is so openly discussed, but then he plunges into the discussion, using their son as the subject of his wit as he begins to make up stories of how their son was terribly upset because Martha would come in to him with her "kimono flying" and would attempt to corner him with an implied intent to commit incest. Martha retaliates by screaming that she "NEVER CORNERED THE SON OF A BITCH IN MY LIFE!" Clearly, she could not have as he did not exist, but ironically, as she is portrayed, the imaginary child is the son of a verbal bitch.

The first game, "Humiliate the Host," certainly is precipitated by Honey's request for more brandy, followed by George's comment that he used to drink brandy. This comment prompts Martha to remind him that he also used to drink "bergin." The mention of "bergin" then prompts Martha to begin her story of George's unpublished novel.

From George's pleading attempts to get Martha to refrain from telling the story, we can conclude that she has told the story to other people before, especially since Martha twice repeats that George usually tells his side of the story also. At this point George decides that he has to find "some new way to fight" against Martha's destructive impulses.

After Honey suggests dancing, the two couples pair off in a sort of symbolic parody of "partner swapping," and while Martha and Nick are dancing, with all sorts of suggestive body movements, Martha completes her humiliation of her husband by revealing the most personal and intimate details of her husband's failure in life, that is, she ridicules his professional ineptitude and his cowardice in the manner in which he yielded to her father's demands that he not publish his book. Her father's ordering George not to publish is the worse type of intellectual censorship and for George to yield to this is extreme intellectual cowardice. George has, however, learned to live with it until this night when Martha violates another of the basic rules of their game—she reveals publicly not only one of their personal failures, but also reveals illusions that they have used to avoid facing their failures.

The humiliation for George is so intense because in his previous conversations with Nick, he has presented himself (or has posed as) a champion of truth and intellectual freedom. Now Martha has exposed her husband as a fraud before a vigorous, handsome young man. Thus, Martha's expose of all of George's weaknesses and of the lies he tells to cover up his failures so profoundly humiliates him that he physically attacks Martha violently, trying to choke her into silence. Whereas the attack against Martha with the toy popgun was comic, this attack is no longer comic; it carries with it the true seeds of violence and the possibility of great physical harm. This scene thus becomes a significant turning point in the drama as we see that George "is hurt, but it is more a profound humiliation than a physical injury." Martha perceptively recognizes this potential danger and after Nick has stopped the attack, she calls George a "murderer." Thematically, in the next act he will become a murderer as he kills his own son, and may have been a murderer in his past.

Even though George is now at his lowest depths, he quickly recovers and announces that they have successfully completed the game of "Humiliate the Host" and now they must find another game. Since it is not time yet for "Hump the Hostess," George suggests a game of "Get the Guests" in which he proceeds to tell the plot of his second novel—a surprise to Martha. In a thinly disguised allegory, George proceeds to tell the story of Nick and Honey's engagement and marriage with all the appropriate background about Honey's father. At the climax of the story, Honey realizes that this is her story, and she realizes that Nick has betrayed the most personal details of their past. This betrayal makes her physically sick and she rushes again from the room.

In narrating the story, George is able to show Nick how it feels to be humiliated by placing Nick in such a position. He also directly exposes Nick as a person who cannot be trusted with a secret, so that the events of this night might not be safe with someone so untrustworthy. By exposing Nick, he is also able to show Martha that her new infatuation is for a person of questionable integrity.

ACT II: Scenes v and vi

In scene v, Nick tells of his resentment about the story George has revealed and threatens to get even with George and then exits to look after Honey. After he is gone, George and Martha argue about the events of the night.

In the conversation between George and Martha, George tells her of his resentment of the humiliating way she has treated him. Martha assumes that George is masochistic enough that he wants to be treated (or humiliated) the way he has been: "YOU CAN STAND IT!! YOU MARRIED ME FOR IT!!" She believes that George needs her to whip him so that he will not have to take any blame for his failures. Although George sees the truth in this, he feels she has gone too far and his future actions will allow him to try to correct this situation. The scene ends with both declaring "total war" against each other.

ACT II: Scenes vii–x

In scene vii, Nick re-enters to report that Honey is resting on the tiles of the bathroom floor. In scene viii, while George is out getting ice, Martha and Nick continue their sexual flirtation and Martha is the aggressor. George re-enters, notices their actions, and exits again without acknowledging them. He re-enters a moment later singing "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," delivers the ice, and then ignores them, sits in a chair and reads a book about history. This infuriates Martha because she does not know how to react to this new behavior. This scene has not been programmed and she has the sense that she is losing control of the situation. As George ignores them, pretending to be content with his book, Martha becomes "livid" with anger since she is

obviously using Nick to make George angry. She then sends Nick to the kitchen to wait.

In scene ix, George's pretended obliviousness to the sex play going on between Nick and Martha causes Martha to threaten that she will indeed go to bed with Nick if George doesn't stop her. Martha's frantic threats such as "I swear to God I'll do it," "I swear to God I'll follow that guy into the kitchen, and then I'll take him upstairs . . ." and "I'll make you regret. . . ." indicate that this is indeed the first time that she has ever gone this far. In spite of the fact that Martha has been presented otherwise, this night represents a new departure for George and Martha. It is the first time that their "son" has been mentioned to outsiders, and it is also the first time that Martha has gone so far in seducing another person.

ACT II: Scenes x and xi

In scene x, George is left alone and his reactions reveal his inner emotions. The passage from the book George is reading, *Spengler's* Decline of the West, is appropriate because it deals with "crippling alliances" and "a morality too rigid to accommodate itself . . ." After a pause, he violently hurls the book at the chimes. If this type of scene (between Martha and Nick) had been a frequent occurrence, George would be accustomed to it. Instead, however, he is hurt and bewildered. His desperation is expressed in his hurling the book.

In scene xi, the chiming awakens Honey who has been dreaming. In telling about her dream, Honey reveals that she does not want children—that she is afraid. George immediately perceives that Honey's headaches, nausea, and "whining" stem from something other than alcohol. The implication is either that she aborted her first pregnancy out of fear of childbirth or currently takes, and will continue, to take birth control pills to prevent the pregnancies that Nick might want or expect her to have. In addition, she remains "childlike" (sucking her thumb, sleeping in a fetal position) to avoid having to face the adult responsibility of pregnancy. In contrast to Martha, the "earth mother" who can't

have any children, Honey is the eternal child who refuses to have any children.

When a loud noise ("the crashing of dishes") is heard off stage, George tries to tell Honey what is going on between Martha and Nick, but she only wants to know who rang the chimes. George puns that the bang, bang of the bells announce the sexual bang, bang of Martha and Nick's affair, but Honey ignores this.

The query about the bells inspires George to conceive of a way to get back at Martha. He convinces Honey that the doorbell was rung by a messenger with the news that his and Martha's son is dead. Since the audience does not yet know that the son is an imaginary one, George's decision to tell Martha that their son is dead would appear to the audience to be an extremely cruel lie—a horrible, sick joke that goes beyond the boundaries of the other games that they have been playing.

The Exorcism

ACT III: Scene i

In scene i, Martha is alone, and her soliloquy reveals her sense of abandonment and a desire to make up with George. She imagines a scene where they admit that they would do anything for each other. After remembering the game, "Hump the Hostess," she prepares the audience for Nick's failure by repeating "Fat chance . . . Fat chance." She goes on to talk about her father, herself, and George and recognizes the sadness and bitterness that underscores her relationship with them both.

ACT III: Scene ii

In this scene between Nick and Martha, Nick reports that Honey is again lying curled up on the bathroom tiles and is peeling the label off the brandy bottle. This scene ends when George enters with the snapdragons.

The first significant revelation is that, for all of his youthfulness and acclaimed athletic prowess, Nick has been "a flop" in bed. "A flop" is used several times in this scene to emphasize Nick's failure. Even though Nick blames alcohol for his sexual failure in bed, the fact that he has failed causes Martha to look at her own failures and inadequacies and to realize that George is the only person who can fulfill her emotionally and physically. She realizes it is "George who is good to me, and whom I revile; who understands me and whom I push off; who can make me laugh, and I choke it back . . . who keeps learning the games we play as quickly as I can change the rules; who can make me happy and I do not wish to be happy . . ."

Nick, in his youthful vigor, finds it unbelievable that George can satisfy Martha. Martha, who now calls herself the "Earth Mother," comes to George's defense and relegates Nick to the position of "houseboy," which signals yet another game. In other words, if Nick can't perform in bed, then he can at least be a houseboy. As the doorbell rings, she orders him to answer it. When Nick resists being reduced to the level of a "flunky," Martha hurls at him an insulting remark about his impotence: ". . . Answer the door. There

must be something you can do well; or, are you too drunk to do that, too? Can't you get the latch up, either?" Then she reminds Nick of his ambitions and career: "You didn't chase me around the kitchen . . . out of mad, driven passion, did you now? You were thinking a little bit about your career, weren't you? Well, you can just houseboy your way up." Thus, because Nick, like all the men in Martha's life, has disappointed Martha, he is reduced by her to a houseservant.

ACT III: Scene iii

This scene between George, Martha, and Nick concerns the discussion of Nick as "stud" or "houseboy" and ends when George announces there is one more game to be played and sends Nick to bring Honey back onto the scene.

This scene corresponds to or parallels the earlier scene in Act I where George "flings open the door" for Nick and Honey. Whereas earlier George (as the houseboy) had opened the door for Nick to the accompaniment of Martha's "Screw You," now Nick opens the door for George yelling "Christ!" Ironically, George appears in the role of a reverse- or Anti-Christ. But instead of bringing the message of an everlasting life and hope as did Christ, George appears with flowers ("Flores; flores para los muertos.") for the dead and he will assume the omnipotent role of declaring their son to be dead. Thus, as Martha's original "Screw You" had become the central metaphor of the play, now George's assuming a Christ-like authority in deciding matters of the life and death of their son brings about the resolution of the drama.

From the audience's viewpoint, George's comic behavior must seem to be both grotesque and in extremely bad taste since the audience knows that George is here to announce the death of their son. All of his horseplay, his falsetto voice in using a line from Tennessee William's A Streetcar Named Desire ("Flores; flores para Jos muertos"), his choice of snapdragons (hardly an appropriate symbol for death), his comic pretense of mistaking Nick for their imaginary son, the derogatory innuendoes concerning their child, the mock-childlike bantering and imitation

of courtship—all of this buffoonery must seem terribly out of place in view of the recent "death" of their son.

With his entrance, George brings up the main concerns of the drama and more explicitly, the major concern of this act: the idea of "truth and illusion. Who knows the difference?"—a concern which prompts Nick to later utter his most significant line thus far: "Hell, I don't know when you people are lying, or what." Essentially, the discussion centers on whether or not the moon can come up again after it has gone down. This discussion is interspersed with comments about whether or not Nick could get it up with Martha. Is Nick now the "stud," one who could perform in bed—or is he the "houseboy," one who failed to make it in bed? After Martha lies (we, the audience, know from the preceding scene that Nick was a failure in bed) and says that Nick is "not a houseboy," George is now not certain what is truth and what is illusion. He becomes vindictive by throwing snapdragons at Nick and Martha as though they were spears.

As George tells us, the games that they play are getting more serious. The game of this scene, "Snap The Dragon," carries overtones of viciousness. While this game is being played by George, Nick, and Martha, Honey is off stage playing her slick "solo" game of "peel the label."

George's vindictiveness could be interpreted (as it has been by some critics) as a desire to take out his resentment against Martha and Nick because they have "cuckolded" him. However, in terms of the larger structure of the "games people play," George has already conceded to the idea of Martha and Nick's sexual encounter at the end of Act II. But if one is going to play a game, certain rules must be followed. Therefore if Nick "made it in the sack" with Martha, then the rules of the game make him a "stud." If he didn't, then he is a "houseboy." What ultimately disturbs George is that "Someone's lying around here; somebody isn't playing the game straight." The audience knows that Martha and Nick are not adhering to the rules of the new game. As George tells Nick: "If you're a houseboy, you can pick up after me; if you're a stud, you

can go protect your plow [i.e., Martha]." It is not that George has to know truth from illusion, but the game requires that "we must carry on as though we did." George then announces that there is one more game to play, "Bringing up Baby," and he sends Nick to "fetch" Honey.

ACT III: Scene iv

In this short scene, Martha pleads for no more games, but George has elaborate plans for the next game and the purpose of the scene is to get Martha primed and in a fighting mood: he wants Martha on her "feet and slugging . . . because . . . we're going to play this one to the death." And ironically, the game will end with the "death" of their son.

ACT III: Scene v

This scene, the longest and also the climactic scene, begins with all four characters on stage and ends with the death of the imaginary son. The principal game is "Bringing up Baby" an ironic twist because after he has been brought up the scene will end with the next game—"Kill the Kid."

With the appearance of Nick and Honey, George re-introduces the concern of the first act (fun and games), and he announces that during the evening that they have gotten "to know each other, and have had fun and games . . . [such as] curl up on the floor . . . peel the label." Honey's game introduces a new metaphor, peeling the label. This is introduced because in peeling the label, we get down to the bone and even "when you get down to bone, you haven't got all the way, yet. There's something inside the bone . . . the marrow" [ellipsis Albee's]. This new metaphor (new game) suggests that once we get to the marrow, there can be no more deeper probing; that is, this game will be the game that will cut through all illusion and confront one face to face with reality. For George and Martha, who have not faced reality for about twenty years, this will be a supreme test. Whereas earlier Martha seemingly had the "upper hand," now George realizes the necessity of distinguishing between illusion and reality: the only possible solution to their lives and the only solution to their marriage ties in complete honesty.

Consequently, whereas earlier George had tried to prevent Martha from bringing up the subject of their son, it is now George who insists that their son (the bouncy boy) be the subject of the next game, "Bringing Up Baby."

Since the audience knows that George is going to announce the death of their son, this "scene-a-faire" is necessary for the audience to see how complete George and Martha's illusion really is. That is, the illusion surrounding the birth is necessary so that the audience can see how completely this illusion has occupied George and Martha's lives. The illusion is not a small portion of their lives. Instead, it has occupied their lives to the minutest detail, as illustrated by whether it was an easy birth or whether Martha "labored to give birth." All of the details are carefully worked out between them—the toys, the child's furniture, the color of the eyes and hair, and other details.

Martha, who has never mentioned "the kid" before others, becomes almost transfigured into a Madonna as she becomes so completely immersed in her own illusion of their child. Martha's narration is both moving and convincing as she correlates her "son's" growth to the epitome of everything that is truth, beauty, wisdom, and earthly perfection. The effect of her narration is to evoke from Honey a desire to have a child of her own. Dramatically speaking, the audience should be constantly aware that George knows that the child does not exist. Yet before he reveals the death of their son, he too becomes, for the last time, caught up in the illusion. In a shift typical of the play, Martha changes from the Madonna-type figure recalling idyllic episodes about her son to a bitter critic of their sordid home life. George argues violently with Martha about whom the child loved more. Then in the form of a duet, Martha continues the narration about the child while George recites Latin phrases from the Requiem and Kyrie Eleison.

Martha and Honey are ready to put an end to the games, but George has one more surprise for Martha: "It's about sunny-Jim." He then announces the death of their son:

George: Martha . . . (Long pause) . . . our son is (Silence) He was . . . killed . . . late in the afternoon . . . (Silence) (A tiny chuckle) on a country road, with his learner's permit in his pocket, he swerved, to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a . . . .

Martha (Rigid fury): YOU . . . CANNOT . . . DO . . . THAT!

George: . . . large tree.

To the astonishment and confusion of both the audience and Nick, Martha repeatedly insists that she will not allow George to "decide these things," and she attempts to physically attack George. Nick pins Martha's arms behind her because he thinks that she is hysterically overcome with grief. While Nick is holding her, George flippantly and triumphantly tells her: "Now listen, Martha; listen carefully. We got a telegram; there was a car accident, and he's dead. POUF! Just like that! Now, how do you like it?"

Martha's response, (A howl which weakens into a moan) "NOOOOOOoooooo," is one of the high dramatic points in the drama and has been likened "to that tragic and awful moment of Sophocles's Oedipus, when Oedipus discovers he has not only unwittingly killed his own father but has also married his own mother and fathered her children." (See Richard Amacher, Edward Albee, p.106.) Martha continues to attack George's presumption that he can make such a decision by himself. The building of the illusion had been a joint effort; thus, she feels betrayed that the illusion is suddenly destroyed. Since the illusion had been so completely a part of her life, its destruction is a deathblow as strong as real physical death. As Martha demands proof of the death and as George becomes more flippant, Nick gradually begins to understand something that is almost too much for him. When George reminds Martha that she knew the rules and has broken them, Nick finally understands that the child has always been an imaginary one. Consequently, of all of the games that have been played during the course of the drama, this is the most involved and elaborate one. Upon further questioning, Nick realizes that George and Martha created this fantasy to compensate for the fact that they

could not have any children, and to give themselves the illusion of a normal home life.

George and Martha's imaginary world was complete and resplendent with every detail necessary to the natural birth and growth of a real child, but one essential rule had to be followed. The game had to be completely private between the two—it could never be mentioned to an outsider. As long as it remained a private game, there could be all kinds of variations within the framework. Once, however, the child had been mentioned to other people, everything changed. There could be ridicule stemming from public exposure with all sorts of unknown results. But more importantly George recognizes that the illusion has gone on too long, especially now that Martha cannot distinguish illusion from reality, as indicated in her plea:

"I FORGET! Sometimes . . . sometimes when it's night, when it's late, and . . . and everybody else is . . . talking . . . I forget and I . . . want to mention him . . . but I . . . HOLD ON . . . I HOLD ON . . . I hold on . . . but I've wanted to . . . so often . . . oh, George, you've pushed it . . . there was no need . . . there was no need for this. I mentioned him . . . all right . . . but you didn't have to push it over the EDGE. You didn't have to . . . kill him."

Also, George wants revenge, and he knows that the only way he can regain the upper hand in their relationship is to destroy Martha's belief in her most precious illusion. However, it is too simple to dismiss his motive as revenge alone. He has recognized the danger in believing in one's lies and it becomes necessary for George to kill the illusion to prevent Martha from becoming completely enslaved by her own fantasies.

George has penetrated past the bone and into the marrow. He has performed the complete exorcism and we must remember that an exorcism is performed for the benefit of the bedeviled—in this case, Martha.

ACT III: Scene vi

In this final, brief, but very moving scene between George and Martha, usually played in a very subdued, low-keyed manner, Martha is still hesitant to accept the death of their imaginary son. Even George falters for a moment when he says: "It will be better . . . maybe." George realizes that they have played with the imaginary child far too long, but he too seems to be afraid of facing reality.

When Martha says "I don't suppose, maybe we could . . ." the implication is that maybe they could find a new type of game for their escapism, but George, while fearful, will not agree.

Consequently, the two characters have divested themselves of their illusions and will now have to face reality completely alone. They are weakened, chastised, and subdued by the events of the evening, and they are now two very frightened and pitiable characters, but they are also two human beings who are communicating with each other with honesty and without illusion.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OR IMPLICATIONS OF THE TITLES OF THE ACTS

Most dramatists do not give titles to the individual acts within a drama. When we encounter a drama in which each act has an individual title, we must consider whether or not the dramatist is making a further statement about the nature of his drama. In Who*'s* Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, the titles of each of the three acts seem to reinforce the content of each act and also to call attention to some of the central motifs in the play itself.

Act I of any drama introduces the characters, themes, subjects, and ideas that will be prominent both in the first act and throughout the drama. The title of Act I, "Fun and Games," suggests part of the theme of the entire drama—George and Martha's complex game of avoiding reality and creating illusions. Therefore, the title of the first act introduces the use of games as a controlling idea for not only the first act, but also for the entire drama with the last game, "Killing the Kid," being the game that also ends the drama.

Even though it is not the first use of a game, the first mention of the word "game" comes from Nick. In fact, perhaps Nick's most astute perception of the entire night occurs immediately after his and Honey's arrival. After being "joshed" about the oil painting, and after being trapped in a semantic exchange about why Nick entered the teaching profession, George asks Nick if he likes the verb declension "Good, better, best, bested." Nick perceptively responds: " . . . what do you want me to say? Do you want me to say it's funny, so you can contradict me and say it's sad? Or do you want me to say it's sad so you can turn around and say no, it's funny. You can play that damn little game any way you want to, you know!" The use of the word "game" calls our attention to the concept of games in the play. In the game of "Good, better, best, bested", Nick realizes that the game is one in which one person manipulates another person. However, teasing, criticizing, ridiculing and humiliating another person is a onesided game, and

after a point, there is a revolt. Nick revolted early against George's teasing and toying with him. George will also later revolt against his own humiliation at the hands of Martha. In a later scene, Nick, in a moment of confusion, tells George and Martha that he can't tell any more when they are playing games

and when they are serious. Because of this, it is a long while before Nick "sees through the game" and realizes that George and Martha's child is imaginary. Thus in one way or another, most of the behavior of the evening can be classified as a game whether names and rules for the games are established or not.

Implicit also in the term "game" is the idea that a game must have a set of rules. When the rules are violated, then the game takes on other characteristics. George and Martha's life together has been one in which they have consistently played games, but the rules have often been changed. Martha's great reliance on George is that he "keeps learning the games we play as quickly as I can change the rules." Until this night, their game about their kid has been one in which there was only one rule—that is, that the entire game must remain completely private between them. Between themselves, they have often changed the rules (Was it an easy delivery or a difficult delivery? Were his eyes blue, grey, or green with brown specks?), but the rule of privacy has never been violated until now. Martha's violation of this rule, then, affects the remainder of the drama.

In addition to the above mentioned types of games, the following types of games illustrate how completely Albee has used the concept of "game-playing" as a controlling metaphor of his play.

1. The play opens with a guessing game in which Martha tries to get George to identify a line from a movie they have seen. Variations of guessing games or identification games are found in every echelon of American society from television to academic surroundings.

2. The early announcement of a party implies fun and games since a party is a type of game, especially since Martha screams with childish delight "party, party" with the doorbell chimes.

3. The use of the nursery rhyme or game of "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf" is first mentioned by George and Martha, mentioned again by Martha to Nick and Honey and then is used to close the act as a raucous duet by George and Honey amid crashing violence. The game is emphasized as a central motif

throughout the first act and, of course, the drama itself closes with George softly crooning "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" to Martha. It is a type of game when George, who has been forced to play the role of houseboy, has so manipulated Martha that as he opens the door, she screams "Screw You" toward Nick and Honey. The many attempts to "screw" one another in one way or another become a type of a game.

4. Fun and games are again the subject of conversation when each recalls the party at Martha's father's house where Nick and Honey "certainly had fun."

5. The incessant interplay or demonstration of wit, whether between Nick and George or between George and Martha pervades the entire act. The game of guessing who painted Martha's picture, or the game of "good, better, best, bested" are word games that are basic to the human personality. In the declension game, as with other games, the game itself implies other things since George himself has been somewhat "bested" by life and certainly by Martha. The various uses of wit throughout the act and especially the unintentionally comic comments by Honey continue throughout the act.

6. Throughout the act, from George's first warning Martha not to "start on the bit about the kid," George and Martha's most intimate and private game—that of their imaginary son—is significantly hinted at and becomes the central idea of the play. For example, when Nick asks George if they have any children, George answers as would a child in fun and games: "That's for me to know and you to find out."

7. The faculty sport "Musical Beds" is a satiric take-off on the old parlor game "Musical Chairs" and, as the name implies, becomes an adult game by way of the sexual allusions.

8. There are also frequent references to various types of sporting games or sporting events such as handball or football, but more importantly, there is Martha's narration of the boxing contest between her and George and much of the entire act can be

viewed as a verbal sparring match between George and Martha with Martha being the victor by the end of the first act.

9. George's trick with the toy pop gun which shoots out a Chinese parasol is a fun type of party game. It fits in with George's earlier comment when he finds out that Martha has invited someone over, in that Martha is always "springing things on me." The surprise of the pop gun, then, is George's

"springing something" on Martha.

10. Act I also introduces the various imaginative, alliteratively named games that will be played—"Humiliate the Host," "Hump the Hostess," "Bringing up Baby," "Get the Guest," "The Bouncey Boy," and "Kill the Kid." Later on, other games such as "Snap the Dragon" and "Peel the Label" will also be played.

11. Early in the act when Nick threatens to leave because he fears that he has intruded upon a private family argument, George tells him it's all a game—that we are "merely . . . exercising . . . we're merely walking what's left of our wits."

12. When Martha changes her clothes, it is so that she can make a deliberate play for Nick. As George points out, Martha hasn't changed for him for years, so her actions must have significance in that she "plays" on Nick's ambitions.

13. The entire first act and the entire drama "plays" before an audience as though it was one gigantic game in which no one really knows the rules.

The titles of the second and third acts make a rather direct comment on the action of each act. The title of Act II, "Walpurgisnacht," refers to the night of April 30 which is the time of the annual gathering of the witches and other spirits at the top of Brocken in the Harz Mountains located in Southern Central Germany. It is sometimes referred to as the Witches' Sabbath. During this night, witches and other demons dance, sing, drink, and become involved in all sorts of orgies. This is a night where any type of behavior can be found among the participants, and in literature, or in general language, the term "Walpurgis Night" has come to refer to any situation which possesses a nightmarish quality or which becomes wild and orgiastic. Thus, in Act II, as Honey proceeds to get extremely drunk, the others, especially Martha and Nick, dance in an obvious sensual, semi-orgastic manner. The scene ends in a bizarre manner—a fifty-two-year-old woman takes a twenty-eight-year-old man upstairs for a

seduction while her husband quietly reads a book with full knowledge of what is happening upstairs.

In Act III, "The Exorcism," we see the meaning of the term "exorcism" being applied to Martha. During the course of the act George eerily recites the Kyrie Elieson and uses incantations, adjurations, and other necessary devices in order to free Martha of the illusion that their "child" exists and to bring her back to a world free of fantasy.

CHARACTER ANALYSES

George

At the opening of the play, George is seen as Martha's "house boy"—someone who will open the door, mix her a drink, listen to her tirades, and be her companion and her "doormat." During the years since George has taught at the college, he has apparently made no effort to take over and run things. Instead, he has been seemingly content with his life as it is. In fact, at one point Martha tells him that he "married her for it—that is, to be treated exactly as she treats him.

The night depicted in the play is a crucial night for George. Even though there are numerous indications that these types of late parties have occurred for many years and even though the witty dialogue and sarcastic things that are said indicate a highly developed wit, this night is the climax of George's life. Because of the events of this night and after it is over, George (and Martha) will have to develop a different type of existence.

The exact nature of George's background is either conjectured or unknown. If we assume that the novel he wrote (if indeed, he did write one) was based on biographical fact, then George's earlier life could have been bizarre—that is, he could have been the young boy who "killed his mother with a shotgun" and then later, while driving along a country road with "a learner's permit in his pocket and his father on the front seat to his right, he swerved the car to avoid a porcupine and drove straight into a large tree." George told Nick the story of the boy as though it were a remembrance, and said that it took place thirty years earlier. Since George is forty-six years old, this could be evidence that points to George as the subject of the story, and it would suggest why George has never attempted to force himself into the forefront of activity.

Later, Martha reveals that George wrote a novel with the same plot, and she goes on to make a rhyme suggesting that George used his own past as the basis of his novel. She also says that George

told her father that the events described in the book really happened to George. Since Martha also refers to George's having at one time liked "bergin," there is convincing evidence for assuming that George and the boy in the story are one and the same.

Knowing this may shed some light on George's preference for the imaginary child over a real one. Certainly an imaginary child could never actually kill his own father, as George possibly did.

For years, George has gone along with and contributed to the myth that they have a child. This illusion is so completely developed between them that every aspect of the child's birth (from labor pains to the color of the eyes) can be described in detail. But until this crucial night, they have never told any outside person about their "kid." In the first act, George warns Martha three times "Just don't start in on the bit about the kid." At this point, George still sees the need of concealing their illusion—he is fully aware of the ridicule they would be subjected to. And since their life is bizarre enough as it is, George realizes the necessity of keeping their illusions to themselves.

After George has been thoroughly humiliated by Martha and after he is fully aware that Martha has talked about the "kid," he realizes that Martha is losing touch with reality, and that for their protection from public ridicule and, more importantly, to keep Martha from living completely in a world of fantasy, he must "kill" the child. On a superficial level, it would at first seem that he kills the child to get revenge on Martha for the humiliation she has subjected him to. If this were true, we would dismiss George as a petty, spiteful, revengeful person of no consequence. Instead, it is his attachment to Martha which prompts him to "kill" the child because he sees the necessity of destroying the illusions and fantasies which are controlling both of their lives and is about to destroy Martha's.

In the final scene, George realizes that they can't continue with their illusion, and even though he is also apprehensive, he realizes that they must attempt to create a new life for themselves. For

George and as well for Martha, this is to be a frightening new experience.

Martha

From the opening of the play until the final scenes and particularly until George "kills" their son, Martha dominates the action. Elizabeth Taylor, playing the role of Martha in the movie version of the play, won an Academy Award for her performance. This role is a choice part for an actress, demanding a great deal of versatility and ability.

As the daughter of the president of the college, Martha automatically carries a certain amount of clout that accounts for the arrival of the young guests at such a late hour.

Basically Martha is a domineering, forceful, and earthy person. She best characterizes herself, when she refers to herself as an "earth mother" who constantly wants to get at "the meat of the matter." She freely sprinkles her speeches with curse words and obscene words, remarks, and gestures. She openly makes known her sexual attraction toward the youthful Nick and delights in the concept of the game "Hump the Hostess." During the course of drama, Martha virtually ignores the presence of Honey.

Martha delights in letting people know that George is a "flop," that he has not taken over the history department as she had expected (in fact, Martha uses the word flop to also apply to Nick when he can't make it in bed). Martha uses the fact that George has not lived up to her expectations as a reason to demean him. She also believes that George desires her to castigate him—that he married her partly for that reason.

Martha knows that she can push George only so far, and she recognizes that George is the only person who can satisfy her physically and emotionally. Even though she has enjoyed the humor of "Hump the Hostess" and her assumed reputation of sexual liberation, it is ultimately seen that Martha has not been promiscuous (if for no other reason than because the daughter of the president of the university should not be so indiscreet). In the narration of the birth and life of their child, Martha takes on an indulgent, maternal aspect that is almost "Madonna-like." We

come to understand that she needs the illusion of being a mother. The illusion is so real now that she has revealed the "existence" of their child for the first time. In other words, she has allowed the world of illusion to intrude upon the world of reality.

Therefore, when George "Kills the Kid," Martha is truly frightened of the consequences, and she expresses her fear in terms of the nursery rhyme—she is afraid of the big bad wolf, or in other words, she is afraid of facing reality.

The abrasiveness, the domineering nature, and the strength that Martha had earlier demonstrated has now left her and we see her at the end of the drama as a person who needs pity and compassion.

Nick

To George, Nick represents the "new wave of the future." It is significant that he is teaching biology for two reasons. First, as a biologist, he becomes a representative of the scientists who experiment with chromosomes, genes, and by extension, our future. George accuses him of trying to readjust our "chromozones." Nick is the perfect foil for George because they represent the opposite extremes in scholarship—George, history, the past, and Nick, biology, the future. Second, it is emphasized that Nick is in good physical condition. This, coupled with Nick's field, concerned as it is with the physical, symbolizes his role in the play and Martha's physical attraction to him. She certainly does not invite him over because of his mental attributes.

Nick is best characterized by his ambitions. While it is true that he is genuinely fond of his wife (he and Honey had known each other since childhood and were expected to marry), he did marry her partly because of her money, which would abet his ambitions. Nick's ambition is attested to by the fact that he even bothers to come to George and Martha's after-the-party party. As Martha points out later, Nick is fully aware that Martha is the daughter of the president of the university, and he certainly did not chase her around the kitchen because of mad passionate desire.

Nick is, therefore, trapped by the events of the evening. He wants to please, but he finds it awkward to stay and watch two middle-aged people verbally cutting each other to pieces. He also wants to please (or satisfy) Martha sexually, but in agreeing to drink with the two of them, he has unwittingly rendered himself sexually impotent.

Nick is blind to the fact that his wife is frightened to have children. Basically, he treats her as a child. He is constantly concerned about the nature of George's language in front of Honey (ironically, he doesn't make any protestations about Martha's equally strong language). And whereas he will openly flirt with Martha and dance sensually with her, he is offended if George makes even the slightest reference to Honey's sexuality.

Nick, while slow in recognizing George and Martha's child as being a product of the imagination, does finally realize their plight, and, as a result, is horrified by the realization. He does not possess the perception to understand why George and Martha have created the child; instead, he is totally perplexed by the revelation. Ultimately, Nick, then is seen as a male conformist who is caught up in a non-conformist atmosphere (George and Martha's house and party) where even his physical attributes fail him and thus, he finds himself in an inferior position with which he cannot cope.

Honey

From the viewpoint of the actress playing the role, Honey is a choice part. The role has received accolades from the audiences of both theater and film. Sandy Dennis won an Academy Award as the best Supporting actress for her performance of Honey in the film version of the drama.

We know very little about Honey. We hear from Nick that her father was some type of minister (or evangelist) who amassed a considerable amount of money. We know that Honey and Nick were childhood "sweethearts" and that she apparently became pregnant before marriage. Whether or not it was a hysterical pregnancy which "went away" after her marriage or a real pregnancy which she had aborted, we can never be sure. George, in one scene, assumes that she aborted her pregnancy and that she has either continued to have abortions or else continually takes some type of birth control pill. From her own comments, we know that she is terribly afraid to have children because she is exceptionally afraid of the pain involved in childbirth.

Honey is either fey, childlike, or drunk in almost every scene. In view of the fact that she refuses to face the reality of childbearing, it therefore follows that her actions are those of an adult child, and her husband, Nick, will often treat her as one by trying to protect her from certain language, from sexual references, and by constantly overseeing her actions. Her childlikeness is further emphasized by her habit of gurgling, being obtuse to the reality of the situation around her, and ultimately, by curling up in a fetal position when she is drunk and peeling the labels off liquor bottles.

As a result of the activities of the night, Honey has apparently undergone some sort of change. Whether or not it is a permanent catharsis or a temporary change, we do not know. We are aware however, that Honey suddenly changes her mind and wants to have children. "I want a child," she cries as they leave. This is a complete change from the Honey who told George about an hour earlier that she wanted no children.

In the final analysis, we cannot be sure how much of the events of the evening Honey is aware of. Whereas Nick comes to a complete recognition that George and Martha have been talking about an imaginary child, we cannot be certain that Honey has understood this. Finally, we realize that Honey has stood outside the main stream of the action for the entire evening, inhabiting, essentially, her own private world of brandy, peeling labels, and solo dancing.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. The play takes place between 2 a.m. and dawn. Is the timesignificant, then, in terms of the events of the night?
2. How can you account for the lack of interaction between Martha andHoney?
3. Do you think most relationships are characterized by various types ofgame-playing? Why or why not? Are games always harmful?
4. What are the elements of a tragedy? Does this play qualify as a tragic drama?
5. Do you believe that personalities are “inherent” or that “events shape people?” Discuss each character in terms of how each is portrayed and whether or not there are reasons for each character’s present situation.
6. What does Honey learn from her exposure to George and Martha?
7. Do you approve of Nick’s ambition?
8. What does the title of the play mean?

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