

An Argumentative Essay on " The Glass Menagerie"

Thesis: Life is a balance of reality and withdrawal from reality; as seen in "The Glass Menagerie"

Summary:

"The Glass Menagerie" is a play by Tennessee Williams that premiered December 26, 1944 set in St. Louis, Missouri, United States. The play is about the recollection of a man named Tom Wingfield, brother and son of two other characters Amanda Wingfield, the aging, mother of Tom and Laura. Laura was a young woman who wore braces and had a slight limp. This handicap made her so self-conscious and feels inferior about herself to the point of dropping out of school.

Amanda, a hardworking mother in a department store that sells magazine subscription, herself had a kind of withdrawal from reality for having such a relished Southern youth, with several gentlemen callers visiting her. But her misfortune was to marry a telephone man who abandoned the family when Tom and Laura were still young as children.

Upon learning that Laura dropped out of school business college, Amanda felt disappointed. But Laura explained that she was frightened, cripplingly shy, and embarrassed for being physically ill in her first typing test. Amanda's hopes for Laura's employment are dashed. But Amanda resolved to find Laura a suitable companion.

Tom works long hours in a shoe warehouse although he did not like his job. But the job provided ample support for Amanda and Laura. Nevertheless, Tom was seen as “selfish dreamer” by Amanda for spending some of his time and earnings in movies, alcohol and obscene novels.

The mother and son relationship grew more strained to the point that when Amanda returned a D.H. Lawrence novel to the library as she saw it filthy, they had an argument. Tom hurled Amanda’s coat across the room and breaks some of Laura’s glass animal collection. These glass animals serve as Laura’s retreat so that she was pained, and cried at what happened.

Tom apologized for the fight. Then, Amanda asks Tom’s help to find Laura a decent man from the warehouse. They planned for her to meet a guy. Until in a scene, Tom announced he has found one Irish man named Jim O’Connor. After much fuss about the suitability of Jim, Amanda prepared for the dinner, keeping the house tidy and all. But when Laura learned she was to meet Jim, non other than her high school classmate whom she secretly admired, she got nervous and almost was not able to join them for dinner. But when left alone with Jim after dinner, Jim was able to convince Laura to come out of her shell.

Laura was somewhat convinced and she showed Jim her glass collection, showing pride of a unicorn as her favorite. She dances with him but Jim accidentally broke the unicorn. Laura downplayed the accident saying it was all right. They kissed, but Jim quickly admitted it was a mistake as he was already engaged to a girl named Betty. Crushed, Laura offered Jim the broken unicorn as a souvenir.

Amanda soon found out Jim's situation and puts the blame on Tom. The angered Tom leaves for good and becomes a sailor.

Towards the end of the play had Tom relating he never really left Amanda and Laura as he recalls about them. Amanda finally blew the candle and darkness enveloped the stage.

Discussion:

The theme of *The Glass Menagerie* is that of light and darkness, of hope and hopelessness, and reality against ideals or memories. For all its simplicity and directness, and shows movement, changes of human situation, progression, and back to square one once again.

Already, the trio seemed to have been doing fine despite all odds, of being abandoned by the father, of Laura having a handicap, of Tom being stuck in a somewhat thankless job, and Amanda having to keep up with all the challenges of bringing up and securing the future of her children.

King (1973) emphasized the distortion audience and directors put on the play as the travails of women Laura and Amanda, disregarding the storyteller himself who points out his perception of their situation in an understanding of depth. Tom himself had been quite objective in his recalling of his not-so-distant past. How he is haunted by it all despite the presentation of a somewhat calloused yet still strong Amanda.

Tom's representation is that of a soul so cramped and restricted under Amanda he had to leave, despite the heart-tugging Laura as Tom acknowledged,

“Not long after that I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a show-box.

I left Saint Louis. I descended the steps 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 traveled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored 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 ---” (Durham, 1971).

Tom was a dedicated brother, but a choking son. Although it was apparent he saw the dedication and strength of their mother Amanda, which had been played obviously in most adaptations, he was also able to discern a portion of his mother who has a past she cannot leave behind nor forget. A past she wanted to re-live, if not for herself, for her daughter, and for his deprived son.

In this instance, both the audience and the storyteller meet: Laura becomes a victim who was only able to escape from hash reality through her glass animal collections and music of the

victrola (records left by her father), which, obviously was not enough to make her stand up and meet the harsh reality of being a limp head on.

Tom, on the other hand, was able to escape through his books and movies, and at times, alcohol. Buffers he used effectively in order to maintain his balance, his sanity. The cramped apartment they stay on is itself full of symbolisms (Stein, 1964), which as acknowledged, could be debilitating, somewhat like a prison cell that limits the capacity of a person. The fire exit is itself an escape, the glass animals depicting the littleness, transparency, and fragility of its owner Laura, the unicorn a symbolism of sexual awakening, the broken glasses, unpaid light bills, candles, and lightning --- signs of hopes in various interpretations and meanings.

In fact, elsewhere, it was indicated that the play itself is a representation of Tennessee Williams' own. Amanda his strong-willed mother, Laura, her mentally handicapped sister Rose, and he, the artist. The play itself is an escape for Williams', an outlet which many artists use to escape and buffer the pain of reality.

Conclusion:

Despite the hatred of Amanda for Tom's apparent carefree attitude, Tom was able to go deeper the façade of a single parent and still present his family's entire situation as a reality that beseeches us all. A fact that reality and ideals go hand in hand to shape humanity.

The play has been considered classic and timeless, one of the most popular ever, as in its simplicity, it touches humans of various class and age. It depicts life per se: a mix of the real and unreal which has become basic ingredients to keep us all struggling, surviving, and finding our lost ways.

Delineating reality from that of fiction or ideals is a task for most of us, as Tom represented in the play. But nevertheless, as one famous quote goes, "truth is stranger than fiction." In fact, it seems people need fiction for their own protection, as a buffer for the harshness of truths, of facts, and of reality.

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