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THE PROBLEM OF ESCAPING REALITY AS SEEN IN
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS "THE GLASS MENAGERIE."

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To my husband for his help
and cooperation.

To my parents for their
encouragement and love.

To my sister.

To my professors.

To my friends.

LAMENT FOR THE MOTHS

A plague has stricken the moths, the moths are dying,
their bodies are flakes of bronze on the carpets lying.
Enemies of the delicate everywhere
have breathed a pestilent mist into the air.

Lament for the velvety moths, for the moths were lovely.
Often their tender thoughts, for they thought of me,
eased the neurotic ills that haunt the day.
Now an invisible evil takes them away.

I move through the shadowy rooms, I cannot be still,
I must find where the treacherous killer is concealed.
Feverishly I search and still they fall
as fragile as ashes broken against a wall.

Now that the plague has taken the moths away,
who will be cooler than curtains against the day,
who will come early and softly to ease my lot
as I move through the shadowy rooms with a troubled
heart?

Give them, O mother of moths and mother of men,
strength to enter the heavy world again,
for delicate were the moths and badly wanted
here in a world by mammoth figures haunted! (1)

INTRODUCTION

The Glass Menagerie is in a large sense an autobiographical play. Williams was born in 1914 in Columbus, Missouri. When he was twelve his father, who was a travelling salesman, moved with his family to St. Louis, and both he and his sister found it impossible to settle down to city life. He entered college during the depression and left after a couple of years to take a job in a shoe company. He stayed there for two years, spending the evenings writing. Williams identifies himself with Tom, a character he creates and who portrays the feelings and internal conflicts he went through in his youth, until he found in writing a way to escape from the monotony of his life in order to live it without the limitations that his family life and situations imposed on him. Tom's job, his poetry writing and his close relationship with his sister are all echoes of Williams' life. The play is, in Williams' own words, "a memory play", the memory of the past he tried to leave behind.

The problem of escaping reality is the main theme in this play. It is this that Williams wants us to feel in all its intensity. His characters, situations and their way of regarding life are all adapted to his theme. It is an attitude which we frequently find in everyday life among people that surround us, and one which we are very prone to fall into in certain occasions of our lives. People try to escape from conditions they cannot bear and face: the horror of routine, insecurity, fear and the many complexes they create.

To Williams, man is incomplete as a three walled room. He cannot be otherwise because the universe is fragmented. Man has nothing to cling to and this leads to frustration. The characters in The Glass Menagerie try to make up for their incompleteness by withdrawing from reality. This withdrawal is one of the recurring elements in some of Williams' plays. He wrote that: "His work dealt with the destructive impact of society on the sensitive non-conformist individual." (1)

In the case of the characters of this play, we will see, as they are analyzed, that escape is a basic element in Amanda, Laura and Tom from the very beginning. Amanda covers her unhappy present reality in which she lives, wrapping it up in remembrances of her past. Laura's escaping mechanism to her difficulties is her glass menagerie. Tom goes to the movies and writes poetry to forget his monotonous and frustrating life. In The Glass Menagerie there is a clash between opposing forces: tradition and spirit against body and instinct, idealism against materialism. The play suggests not only the disintegration of a family but it goes far beyond this: it shows a highly competitive society in which values such as delicacy and sensitivity are becoming obsolete.

In this essay I will attempt to demonstrate that Williams gives his characters no weapons to overcome their

(1) Williams' letter to Audrey Wood in Tennessee Williams The Man and his Work. Ivan Obolensky Inc. New York, 1961.

conflict, but he makes a final statement that I will disclose in the conclusion.

The first character that will be analyzed is Tom Wingfield. He is not satisfied with the life he leads, having to work in a warehouse where he thinks he is doomed to spend all his life; in his job he feels lonely, being teased by his fellow workers. He has to work here because he has to support his mother and sister who were abandoned by his father many years ago, so the three of them had to find a way of taking care of themselves; as both women are unable to do so he has the whole burden on himself. Consequently, we get an idea of Tom's conflict: he will have to leave Amanda and Laura in their dream world, following his father's footsteps in "attempting to find in motion what was lost in space"; in other words, he will go out into the world, meet new people, find himself in different situations in order to regain the time he has lost living under so many limitations. He realizes that if he remains with Amanda and Laura he will never fulfill his dearest dream: to lead an adventurous life. What he does not realize is that adventure is also an escape, and that escaping from responsibilities will not give him any kind of inner satisfaction, and this, he will not achieve by traveling or moving from one city to the other. But at the same time Tom knows that by leaving them they will be destitute; and he is not a remorseless man; nevertheless, if he wants to fulfill his desire he knows he will have to act without pity.

Tom is constantly quarreling with his mother. From the moment he wakes up he has to listen to words terribly irritating to him:

"Rise and shine! Rise and shine!
Laura go tell your brother to rise
and shine."

(1)

He gets disgusted, frustrated, in a bad mood and when he listens to these words he believes that dead people are luckier than him. His whole character clashes with his mother's because his points of view and aims are absolutely opposite to hers. He has a book written by D. H. Lawrence, whose ideas he has assimilated, such as considering Man "a fighter, a lover and a hunter". These are implicit in man's nature and are part of his survival: Man must have an aim in life and fight until he overcomes all the obstacles in order to achieve it. But before he finds this aim he must "hunt", he must look for it and love it in order to become a satisfied human being. A man that is satisfied will have no fears to hide; therefore he will never attack a fellow being and will live in peace with others and with himself. As long as there are horizons to explore and goals to achieve, Man will struggle to find his place in the world. If Tom had been able to follow these instincts his life would have been fulfilled. But here is a flaw in his vision because he thinks that to follow these instincts is to lead an adventurous life. He thinks that what he is missing is a greater variety of external experiences and he does not grasp the essence of these

(1) Williams Tennessee. Six Modern American Plays. The Modern Library, New York, 1945 p. 272

instincts nature.

Amanda the mother does not agree with Tom's ideas. It is here that we encounter the first clash between tradition-spirit and body instinct. When Tom looks for his book he finds that his mother has returned it to the library. For her, the book is filthy and a product of "a diseased mind". This is the first gap in their communication. Therefore the basic difference in their ways of regarding life leads them to the creation of a world of their own in which their imagination must supply what they lack in real life. But yet Tom dislikes Amanda's withdrawal from reality by her living in the past. He cannot accept his mother's failure, the failure of living in illusions clinging to a dead tradition, yet he, too, is unable to bear the reality of his life.

Another motive for quarreling is Tom's job. According to Amanda, working in a warehouse should not necessarily be so boring. He cannot have her understand how much he dislikes it, how awkward and out of place he feels there. He cannot make her realize that that is not what he wants. Although at times Tom tries to be patient and to cooperate with his mother, their points of view are much too opposing and he always ends up rebelling against her.

Tom's relationship with his sister Laura, is quite different. There are no quarrels between them and Tom has enough sensitivity to sense her charm and delicacy and love her for it.

They understand each other; however, he is very realistic in the way he regards his sister: He admits she is crippled even if this may bring suffering to her. He is not only able to see her qualities but also her defects. He trusts her. She is the only person that he speaks his mind to. He never actually tells her that he is planning to leave someday but he makes her feel that he is desperate and cannot stand the situation much longer. Since Tom's life is unfulfilled he finds a way of dealing with frustration through an escape mechanism. He escapes by going to the movies, because he finds adventure and contact with the outer world which he misses in his own life at home and in his job. He also finds refuge in writing poetry on the lids of the shoe boxes he works with at the warehouse, because when he writes, there are no limits to his imagination. Tom has definite plans for the future. Like his father, he will travel far away and has already taken positive steps in that direction: He has paid his dues for membership in "The Union of Merchant Seamen". The fact that he has paid these dues instead of paying the light bill reinforce his willingness to leave, and is the first step in disregarding his duties toward his family.

Tom does not achieve everything he wants. He leaves and gets rid of the physical presence of his family as he wanted to, he does not have to work in the warehouse any more and he is free to fulfill his dreams, but emotionally, he is never

able to break off and to feel completely free from Laura because he is part of the conflict of his family, so he is constantly haunted by the memory of his sister:

Tom: "I traveled a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead 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 - 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!"

(1)

In "The Glass Menagerie" Tom appears both as character and as the narrator, but between the character and the narrator there are some years of difference and of experience. As a character he possesses the soul of a dreamer who believes that his departure will enable him to place himself in the -- world. As a narrator he is more perceptive: He seems to have a better understanding of his mother's and his sister's incapacity to cope with reality as they live it. Throughout the whole play he wishes to be a poet. But it is in his role of narrator where he gives us beautiful poetical prose and it is here where we see his wish fulfilled:

Tom:..... " I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume"

(1) Williams Tennessee. Ibid p. 335.

is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow." (1)

In the course of the play, Tom as a character does not suffer radical changes, his repressed desire for freedom pervades through his personality all the time. He takes a definite step into the world of action becoming a mariner - and he is even able to do without one of his escaping mechanisms: the movies.

Tom: "People go to the movies instead of moving! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them!... It is our turn now to go to the South Sea Island - to make a safari to be exotic far off! But I'm not patient. I do not want to wait till then. I am tired of the movies and I am about to move!" (2)

To sum up, Tom is able to achieve a partial satisfaction. He leaves his home, he leaves his job, he is able to travel, to meet new people withdrawing from an undesired reality to another long dreamed for, but his happiness is never complete, for Laura's image haunts him forever; he is never able to be completely free, but he manages to find other means of forgetting her temporarily and at least he is the only character - who is able to live as he wants to.

Amanda Wingfield is a strong character in the play because she accepts the struggle that life has imposed on her.

(1) Williams Tennessee. Ibid p. 340.

(2) Williams Tennessee. Ibid p. 285.

Within the limitations of her personality, her fighting - spirit is one of her main characteristics. Amanda is economically helpless, she depends on Tom and is very uncertain about the future, so anyone may pity her, for her economical dependance seems to have no way out; and one of her main -- concerns is Laura's future.

Bearing in mind that there is such a huge gap -- between the world of gracious living of Amanda's youth and the harshness of the actual world, it is comprehensible -- that she should not be able to adjust herself: to her way of living:

"Amanda is a helpless survivor from the past, - feeble and pathetic, a clinger to a dead tradition" (1)

Part of Amanda's conflict lies in her husband's - abandonment. She realizes that she made a mistake in choos- ing the wrong man, one that just said "Good Bye" and left her with "the bag to hold". She sees herself as a deserted woman who has not been able to overcome her husband's depar- ture, due to the circumstances in which he left her. She was left alone with two children to bring up. The burden she had to bear was very difficult and she struggled to the very end. If things did not come out the way she wanted - them to, it was due to Tom's and Laura's obstinacy and not to her lacking of strength. It is highly commendable in

(1) Falk, Signi. Tennessee Williams. Twayne Publishers, Inc. New York, 1961. p. 79.

her that at the end she is able to accept her defeat with courage and dignity.

Regarding her relations with Tom, and considering the gap between their minds, she does not understand her son and feels that his sole concern should be to face his responsibilities toward them. She does not accept the way Tom regards life, she considers him a selfish dreamer. She wants him to be the image of a routinary business man that is what Tom hates most. It is curious to notice that Tom's escaping from reality annoys her, but she also escapes: She is the image of tradition and a person who is highly concerned with values such as gentility, delicacy and beauty; nevertheless, we see she is also materialistic: Money is important to her, she dreams of the money she would have had, had she married someone else. She belongs to the Southern tradition of belles, beaux and hundreds of servants, the life she was used to lead was full of conventionalisms which did not allow people to regard sex as something natural. She shows her narrow mind in the way she regards D. H. Lawrence, considering him "insane" because he offends her sense of propriety in writing about sex. Tom cannot make contact with her and she cannot accept her son's ideas. Mr. Signi Falk explains Amanda's relation with Tom in the following way:

"Amanda is insensitive to Tom's position. The conflict between body and spirit as it reflects the Southern

Puritanism of the early twentieth century is symbolized in the attitudes of these two people." (1)

"Body" in this case is Tom with his ideas about instinct,

"spirit" is Amanda who says:

"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!"

(2)

The reason why Amanda regards instinct this way is because instinct implies sex and this is what bothers her, it is her traditional upbringing which does not allow her even to think about it. It offends her puritan ideas but it is only natural to suppose that being still a young woman and having been without a husband for so many years she is sexually frustrated, and this is the cause of her being so aggressive. Amanda nags and scolds Tom all the time, and this bothers him a great deal. But it is not only her nagging what drives him out of his mind, but her desire to direct all his acts and attitudes: she wants him to face responsibilities, she dislikes the way he eats, she scolds him because he goes too much to the cinema, and does not understand that Tom finds in that a tranquilizer to be able to stand her.

Amanda's main concern in having Tom with her is

(1) Falk, Signi. Ibid p. 74.

(2) Williams Tennessee. Ibid p. 297.

to protect his sister. Amanda tells Tom that as soon as Laura is married and can lead her own life he will be able to go wherever he pleases. What we cannot understand is how she expects Tom to achieve this. Amanda knows what can happen to a girl without a home of her own. Her cry comes from experience: "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" (1) Amanda gets desperate - with Laura's negative reaction toward her effort to make her achieve a way of earning a living. She cannot conceive why her daughter is not even able to bear and accept the events of everyday life due to Laura's having one leg - slightly shorter than the other which for Amanda is insignificant. Amanda tries to hide Laura's physical defect instead of helping her to face the truth of her condition and make the best of it. Amanda sees a non-existent Laura and wants her to create a false image of herself:

"However, he'll know about Laura when he gets here. When he sees how lovely and pretty she is, he'll thank his - lucky stars he was asked to dinner." (2)

Amanda's perseverance is shown throughout her struggle to make something out of Laura, she does not understand her

(1) Williams Tennessee. Ibid p. 285.

(2) Williams Tennessee. Ibid p. 306.



daughter and therefore does not communicate with her. She does not understand Laura's fear and insecurity; she -- thinks her daughter should lead a normal life, so she -- forces Laura to church socials, to go into secretarial -- school and finally she imposes on her a gentleman caller. She refuses to surrender to Laura's lack of interest to struggle; it is only at the end, when Laura has retired definitely into her dream world, that Amanda finally realizes she has failed, so she accepts her failure, the end of the play suggests a complete understanding and communication between mother and daughter.

In the problem of escaping from reality. Amanda is the one of the three characters who is more aware of the present reality. She wants to find a solution, but she has an escaping mechanism. She often speaks of the world of -- her youth and looks at it as being definitely more pleasant than reality. She uses this as a refuge and as a shield to protect herself against her actual conditions of life. She talks about Moon Lake Casino, Blue Mountain and her seventeen gentleman callers; she puts on airs, and pictures herself as a southern belle. There is no indication in the play that could prove this to be false, but knowing her personality -- may lead us to suppose that even if part of this could have been true she could be exaggerating even if she is not conscious of it. People that are constantly imagining facts -- about themselves or others, frequently come to the point when

they are unable to distinguish the true from the imaginary, Because of this, she cannot adjust herself completely to her life. All her attitudes and gestures are out of time and place: "No sister, no sister you be the lady this time and I'll be the darky" (1) Amanda clings to the dead tradition of southern gentility which has already vanished; - the reason why Williams gives Amanda this background is that: "The existence of a decayed aristocracy was one of the inescapable facts of the society with which he was most familiar." (2) She who resents Tom's lack of interest in working, is not able to do it herself: In the telephone - scenes in which she tries to sell magazine subscriptions, she is a pathetic character, because her lack of ability to sell magazines and the way people ignore all her efforts are pitiable.

Even though Amanda is deeply concerned about Tom and Laura's lives we see that she does not give them any - freedom, she wants them to be happy but according to her own idea of happiness not of their own. Tom wants to stop -- working in the warehouse, Laura wants to live in her own - world and ignore reality. Amanda wants Tom to continue with his job and wants Laura to integrate to a normal life. But we cannot say that she is selfish or egotistical; she only lacks the perception that would make her realize that her son

(1) Williams Tennessee. Ibid p. 285.

(2) Falk Signi. Ibid p. 79.

and daughter will not achieve happiness in that way.

Throughout the whole play Amanda appears as a nagging and demanding woman; her delusions dominate her personality. However, sometimes she sees situations clearly: "I know your ambitions do not lie in the warehouse, that like everybody in the world - you've had to make sacrifices, but Tom-Tom life's not easy, it calls for Spartan endurance". (1) She applies her energy, "like a Turk", to achieve her goal. But in the last scenes Amanda tries again to revive her past for which one of the dresses she wore in her youth stands as a symbol; this is symptomatic of her regression to the world of make-believe from which she cannot sever herself.

Throughout most of the play Amanda, as a character, does not suffer any radical change. Her attitudes and her personality are always oscillating between reality and her escape from it. It is only at the end when Amanda undergoes a change. In the last pantomime scene we see an understanding mother who comforts her daughter. It is in this last scene that by being able to accept her defeat and suffer its consequences her stature as a character is elevated and she acquires "tragic beauty".

Laura Wingfield is a crippled girl. We know that a childhood illness has left her with one leg slight-

(1) Williams Tennessee. Ibid p. 272.

tly shorter than the other one. She is an insecure being due to her physical defect, and her crippledness is not - only physical but emotional, too. We know that during her childhood and adolescence she attended school as a normal child would, and although she led an everyday "normal life", she never achieved success. Later on in her life she attends . scretarial school and social meetings. It is not indicated in the play, but it is to be supposed that she was not happy in those days. We know that children are - cruel, and we know that a young girl wants to "belong". There are certain indications that she had some frustrations, mainly emotional that made her suffer intensely. All this would not have been important if she had had a strong - personality and if her familiar background had been a solid one. She is a very sensitive being, highly susceptible to being hurt, her familiar lack of stability and her physical defect made her a person unable to enjoy life. She cannot do anything that represents an effort toward achieving a realistic aim in life. She has withdrawn from reality and is not able to support herself. This is the Laura Wingfield we meet as the play opens. The world has not accepted her, why should she want to belong to it? Not everything is - weakness in Laura. She has decided to eliminate all her - participation in the outer world, she is strong in this - point and will not let Amanda interfere with it. She -- defends herself against Amanda's fantasies of trying to - make her realize that none of her illusions related with

gentlemen callers or anything that would make Laura's future be different are possible. When a person like Laura decides to withdraw from reality it is necessary, not only logical, for her to create a world that will substitute the one she rejects and this is the glass menagerie. She refuges in her glass collection which is her greatest interest in life. It is formed by tiny glass figures which she cleans and polishes and rearranges every day. Doing this she fulfills the desire to give herself to something. Her favorite piece of glass is a horse with a unicorn with which she identifies herself because it is different from the rest of the animals as she is different from other girls, but not only because of this, the animal is a symbol of a legendary past, it is non-existent - today. The glass figure is frail and translucent and she sees herself also as a delicate being out of place in the harshness of the contemporary world, the unicorn stands as a symbol of her uniqueness.

Laura understands her mother's need to find refuge in her remembrances of the past and very often stands between mother and son trying to protect her mother from Tom's outbursts of rage. As Laura is perceptive of Amanda's feelings she is also perceptive of Tom's. Although throughout the play Tom and Laura do not speak to each other frequently, we know through Amanda's words that Laura perceives Tom's suffering and unhappiness:

"You know how Laura is. So quiet but still water runs deep! She notices things, and I think she broods about them. A few days ago I came in and she was crying. She has an idea that you are not happy here."

(1)

She often tries to soften the friction and lack of understanding and communication between mother and son. She begs Tom to apologize to his mother for his roughness and she suffers because Amanda is insensitive to Tom's illusions. Her delicacy and her sensitivity do not allow her to be an indifferent witness to their quarrels. She cannot do much because as a character she is the direct motivation of many of these conflicts and she cannot function as a human being with definite aims and rights. A particular situation brings a radical, even when momentarily change: the appearance of Jim O'Connor. Laura had met him in high school and had been secretly in love with him. It is told by Laura in the play that she has been dreaming about him for the past six years, but she gets sick when she knows that the gentleman caller that Tom is bringing home is precisely Jim. Laura is older than Tom, we presume she is twenty-five or twenty-six years old, she does not feel capable of inspiring love in a man, let alone marrying one. That is why she does not want to see Jim, she knows that she will be hurt. By coming, Jim will be a contact with reality that she knows she cannot

(1) Williams Tennessee. Ibid. p. 296.

participate in. When Jim arrives she feels sick and runs to refuge herself in the old records and phonograph her father left, another of her escape mechanisms, because facing Jim would unconsciously imply a contact with a world of men which is unknown to her and therefore she fears. When Laura is with Jim he manages to make her feel completely at ease, she listens to him as in a trance and pretty soon she seems to be transformed into a perfectly normal individual, "She emerges from the glass menagerie". (1) and feels free to speak to him about her glass collection, and how it is her greatest interest in life. Jim is the only one to whom she tells her secret: she loves the unicorn because the animal is as lonely as she is. Laura continues talking to Jim and there is a transformation in her, from moment to moment she rises from her solitude until she gets to the point in which she does something that she would have never done under normal circumstances: she stands up and dances with Jim, it is as if a sudden hope had arisen in her. Suddenly we see her as a person that would be willing to try once more to incorporate herself to the world if Jim were with her. As they dance, Jim trips and the unicorn falls and is broken. Contrary to what could be supposed, Laura takes it lightly. The broken unicorn is "a blessing in disguise", a symbol for her --

(1) Nelson Benjamin. Tennessee Williams The Mand and his Work.

Ivan Obolensky, Inc. New York, 1961. p. 98

momentarily rupture with fantasy. For the first time she has been like any other girl, she has danced and she has been kissed. When Jim kisses her she emerges into the real world, but her emmersion is not lasting because Jim tells her in this climatic scene that he is engaged to be married soon. For her it is a painful regression to reality. Nothing has changed. She is the same lonely isolated Laura. But she bears no grudge against him, she realizes that it could not have been any other way. Before Jim's departure Laura gives him the broken unicorn as "a souvenir" of the happiest moment she has ever lived. Her joy vanishes and her loneliness is intensified and she makes a final irrevocable retreat into the security of the world of her glass figures. Her miraculous escape into reality lasted just a fleeting moment.

There are two aims that Laura accomplishes: she escapes from goig to school and achieves Amanda's understanding and acceptance. What she does not achieve is to escape from the origin of her conflict which is her physical and emotional crippledness because:

"the beauty and gentility of Laura only make her an anachronism who must either retreat or break in the face of the meaningless harshness of the world outside the glass menagerie". (1)

(1) Weales, Gerald Clifford. American Drama Since World War II
Harcourt, Brace and World. New York, 1962. p. 100

Jim O'Connor is described by Tom as: "an emissary from a world of reality that were somehow set apart from". (1) He is a nice ordinary young man who works in the same warehouse with Tom. He has a mediocre job, such as Tom's, but Jim is more adaptable because he lacks the sensitivity that would make him realize that he is, in a way, wasting his life. As a highschool student he was extremely active, popular and aggressive so that he was expected to be highly successful, but six years after he left highschool he is working as an insignificant shipping clerk because he has failed to excel in anything. However, he seems to be confident to have found a way "that will get him on the ground floor": He is taking a course in radio engineering at night school and studying public speaking at the same time, so he is able to cope with the world in which he lives, thinking that he will succeed in it. It is not sure that he will prosper. In six years he has not made a noticeable progress, still he is waiting for the day when the television industry gets on the way - sometime in the future - then he thinks he will be ready to get in it and be a success so he quiets his anxiety about his wasted years and his uncertain future. He is the type of person that always relies on the future: he tries not to give much importance to his wasted years and to convince himself that something will happen that will make him

(1) Weales, Gerald Clifford. Ibid p. 100

s successful man, as he has not succeeded in what he is doing now. In a different level which we could consider normal, he escapes from his present responsibilities and lives for the future.

Jim's immediate goals are power and money and an executive job. He thinks that his public speaking course will give him knowledge and the ability to become a business man, this clearly indicates that what is important for him is not the capacity or intelligence he may have, but to be able to impress by debating or convincing other people, but he is superficial and mediocre and does not base his success on talent or brains: He is an extrovert, ambitious, ordinary young man. There is a remarkable difference between Jim's and Tom's aims. Tom is a poet who longs for motion and adventure, who is concerned about people and about what goes on in the world, and who lives passionately, hating a monotonous way of living, on the other hand, Jim is the pursuer of trivial goals, he is unimaginative because he wants to live in the small world of an executive's office, yet, it is he whom society accepts, he is the image of the mediocre man, there is nothing to fear about him. Tom could be feared because he is not generally understood as he represents a danger to conformity.

Another interesting contrast may be traced between Jim's and Amanda's goals. Amanda is the product of a dead tradition, she is unable to place herself in the actual world

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ordinary man, is attracted by Laura - the symbol of delicacy, beauty and fragility: "him she is unique because she is different. He feels genuinely attracted to her and perhaps in a way he perceives that "democracy - the good old U. S. A. may leave him behind", (1) but he rejects the idea of a possible future with Laura. Laura is genuine, she has not learned what he has, he has learned what society expects of him - learn in order to be accepted: to pretend, because truth is painful. To accept Laura would mean that he would have to face other aspects of life, he would have to become a sensitive being and this could make him suffer and would bring along a radical change in his existence. He transfers his engagement to another girl, scarcely realizing Laura's feelings. His egotism and lack of sensitivity destroy all the confidence he has built in Laura. If he had kept in mind that he was engaged and that he could do nothing for Laura he would not have made her believe, even for a moment, that she would have some hope in him; in his personal desire to prove himself charming and comprehensive he rises her spirits only to let them fall afterwards.

John represents a threatening moment for each character: for John the failure with the gentleman caller hastens his departure and although it is not the sole motive, it is a) Nelson, Benjamin. Ibid p. 102.

increases his desire to leave his family. For Amanda, Jim is the last and only hope to solve Laura's conflict and her failure brings her back painfully to reality, making her face a truth that she had been blind to for a long time. As far as Laura is concerned, this confrontation with "an emissary from reality" has meant a momentary incursion into happiness never known to her before.

C O N C L U S I O N

In "Lament for the Moths", which is the epigraph of this essay, the poet expresses one of the main themes - that are present in The Glass Menagerie, his concern with people who cannot accept the world as it is or who, on the contrary, are not accepted by it. He speaks for the people who are too delicate to confront the ugliness of the world, the ones who are defeated because there is no opportunity for them to triumph against their seemingly unchangeable - fate. Amanda and Laura are the moths. No matter how much they struggle, they never seem to move forward because, - according to Williams, there is nothing in the universe to cling to:

Tom: "But here there was only hot music
and liquor, dance halls 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!"

(1)

In The Glass Menagerie, the point that Williams wants to prove is that sensitive people cannot adapt themselves to the harshness of the modern world. For him --

(1) Williams Tennessee. Ibid p. 301

values like beauty, frailty, delicacy, manners and gentility are obsolete and no longer have a place in everyday life.

Williams' characters give the impression that they have been created to adapt themselves to the theme. Williams does not give Amanda and Laura the weapons as they lack the strength to face their problem and come out victoriously and for him, a person that possesses these values is doomed to leave in exile: If they try to incorporate themselves to the world of the masses they will be destroyed by the cruelty and indifference of people but if they want to survive, they will have to withdraw into a media in which they will preserve their values. For me, these values have always existed and will always exist in humanity. We are conscious of the fact that with the advance of science the world is changing at great speed and man has become to a certain point more mechanic, but man, essentially, will never change, he has to adapt himself to circumstances and make the best out of them. The fact that a person may be a successful business man does not necessarily mean that he is mediocre or that he lacks spiritual values, he may combine his job with his idealism, but of course, he will have to adapt his ways of expressing his sensitivity to the world that surrounds him.

Life is difficult and throughout it one constantly



faces continue to find themselves that not
 always find ways to the happiness and -
 success of people and their own -
 people that provide a living practice of -
 this is as recur to optimism and to --
 bill of the and situations that will appeal -
 the spirit order to be able to overcome problems -
 struggle must be the most compelling force against indig -
 rily and in the world, not giving up the interest in
 life, in the world and in being married, but even when one
 must love life.

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