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The Glass Menagerie (New Directions Books)



Synopsis

No play in the modern theatre has so captured the imagination and heart of the American public as Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. *Menagerie* was Williams's first popular success and launched the brilliant, if somewhat controversial, career of our pre-eminent lyric playwright. Since its premiere in Chicago in 1944, with the legendary Laurette Taylor in the role of Amanda, the play has been the bravura piece for great actresses from Jessica Tandy to Joanne Woodward, and is studied and performed in classrooms and theatres around the world. *The Glass Menagerie* (in the reading text the author preferred) is now available only in its New Directions Paperbook edition. A new introduction by prominent Williams scholar Robert Bray, editor of *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review*, reappraises the play more than half a century after it won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award: "More than fifty years after telling his story of a family whose lives form a triangle of quiet desperation, Williams's mellifluous voice still resonates deeply and universally." This edition of *The Glass Menagerie* also includes Williams's essay on the impact of sudden fame on a struggling writer, "The Catastrophe of Success," as well as a short section of Williams's own "Production Notes." The cover features the classic line drawing by Alvin Lustig, originally done for the 1949 New Directions edition.

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Customer Reviews

Amanda Wingfield, the matriarch of "The Glass Menagerie," always tells her daughter, Laura, that she should look nice and pretty for gentleman callers, even though Laura has never had any callers at their St. Louis apartment. Laura, who limps because of a slight physical deformity, would rather spend her time playing with the animals in her glass menagerie and listening to old phonograph records instead of learning shorthand and typing so she can be employable. When she learns Laura has only been pretending to go to secretarial school, Amanda decides Laura must have a real gentleman caller and insists her son Tom, who works at a shoe factory, find one immediately. After a few days, Tom tells Amanda he has invited a young man named Jim O'Connor home for dinner and at long last Laura will have her first gentleman caller. The night of the dinner Amanda does every thing she can to make sure Laura looks more attractive. However, when Laura realizes that the Jim O'Connor who is visiting is possibly the same Jim on whom she had a crush in high school, she does not want to go through with the dinner. Although she has to be excused from the dinner because she has made herself physically ill, Laura is able to impress Jim with her quiet charm when the two of them keep company in the living room and she finally loses some of her shyness. When Jim gives Laura her first kiss, it looks as if Amanda's plans for Laura's happiness might actually come true. But no one has ever accused Tennessee Williams of being a romantic. "The Glass Menagerie" was the first big success in the long and storied career of playwright Tennessee Williams.

with honorable and not so honorable intentions. I first saw this play produced in Atlanta, in the 1970s, and fragments of it have rolled around in my brain ever since. First and foremost there was the character of Amanda Wingfield, firmly stuck in the past, recalling her glory days as Bruce Springsteen would phrase it, in his famous song about two people in their 20s, recalling how their life had peaked out in high school. For Amanda Wingfield, her glory days were from her teenage years also, in the Mississippi Delta, when she had 17 gentlemen callers seeking her hand and probably a bit more. She tells her daughter, Laura, that a girl had to be a conversationalist back then. All those possibilities, the 17, and always the hint of so many more, yet she makes a poor choice who would abandon her and the family, and send a post card from Mexico that said simply: Hello, Good-bye. Tennessee Williams sets this play in

America's heartland, St. Louis. It is the late 1930s, with news flashes involving the war in Spain, and Chamberlain. The Wingfield family is lower middle class, living in a tattered apartment, in a building with fire escapes, subsisting off the \$65 a month son Tom, who works in a shoe store warehouse, brings home every month. Williams play is straightforward, and so easily understood, and packs so much pathos and heart-break into two hours of viewing, or reading, which chronicles the poverty of human existence. Reading the play after some four decades helped me recall some of the tragic circumstances of the other two members in the Wingfield family. There is daughter Laura, a cripple, and even back then the mother admonishes Tom not to use that word. She has a physical challenge; that is all.

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