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# The Conversations Between Characters in The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams

## The Glass of Menagerie

Tennessee Williams' "The Glass of Menagerie" is a play set in an apartment in St. Louis. The play presents the narrator's memory of the life he went through in 1937. As a character in the play, Tom Wingfield, the play's narrator presents his memories from the time his father abandons the family to the time he leaves home to look for a job. Although Tom is an aspiring poet, he works in a shoe warehouse to support his mother Amanda and sister, Laura. His father, Wingfield, as Tom narrates, abandoned them at the time they were young. Tom's memories and his mother's contemplations reveal that the family misses their breadwinner. Amanda tells her children about the many suitors she had when she was the age of her daughter, Laura. She wonders why Laura does not attract suitors.

Amanda enrolls Laura in a business college so that she can provide for herself when she graduates. However, Amanda comes to learn that Laura dropped out of college and spent time polishing her glass menagerie. Disappointed, Amanda tells Tom to look for a suitor for his sister and he agrees to bring Jim who turns out to be engaged, thereby disappointing the family. The author's concentration on the events that take place in Wingfield's family has triggered criticism that the play only features the theme of family relations. Critics have argued that the book is not rich in thematic concerns. However, an in-depth review of the text reveals the author's success in presenting the themes of marriage and love, abandonment, freedom and confinement and dreams and aspirations.

The insistence that Amanda has on Laura to get herself a man reveals the theme of marriage in William's play. Although the writer does not explicitly show an intention of presenting the theme, it comes out clearly based on the conversation between Amanda and Laura. The mother asks her daughter; "haven't you ever liked some boy?" (Williams 35). The question opens a conversation that reveals the theme of marriage and love as one of the main ideas that Williams presents in the text. Amanda claims that failure to get married prepares women for lowliness and forces them to live sorrow lives. She claims that women that are not married are tossed from relative to another as they look for a place to end their loneliness (Williams 33). The author creatively packages Amanda's message to her daughter about marriage in a way that portrays marriage as a social fulfillment in the society. For instance, Amanda says that women that fail to get married in her society end up developing grudges with their brothers' wives or sister's husband. Interestingly, Amanda does not say anything concerning love in marriage. Williams

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may have omitted Amanda's views about love because she is a victim of abandonment.

Although Amanda asks about her daughter's love life, she does not experience love in her marriage given that her husband abandoned her and the children. Contrary to the reader's expectation, Williams portrays Laura as having fallen in love with one person. Laura remembers Jim and tells her mother that he is the only person that she has had love for in her life. Since Jim calls Laura "Blue Roses," she remembers him as a person that has recognized the uniqueness in her (Williams 37). Williams builds the theme of love as something that develops after a character is abandoned. For instance, Tom's family hangs a portrait of their father on the wall to remember him after he abandons them. Also, Laura remembers Jim at the time she cannot get him. Besides, she feels weak when she discovers that Jim is engaged.

The brief interaction between Laura and Jim when the latter comes visiting reveals the author's ability to package theme of love. Although Jim and Laura been out of touch for a long time, their interactions lead to a kiss that gets Laura out of her shell and confesses that she liked Jim from the time they were in school (Williams 57). By portraying Jim praising Laura for her uniqueness the author builds the theme of love in a way that suggests that the two characters may want to get married in future. Williams portrays Jim as the only man that has managed to trigger Laura's desire for love. For instance, the author reveals that Laura shows Jim her favorite artwork and he likes it. Although the play ends in suspense, the audience understands that Jim is interested in Laura even though he has a fiancé.

Tom's narration reveals that his father abandoned the family and he did not seem to regret his decision. Williams' presentation of Tom's memories reveals the theme of abandonment. Tom says that the last the family heard from their father was a note saying "hello-goodbye" (Williams 1). Tom's memories show that his father was a soldier who might have fought in the world war and he could have abandoned the family to continue fighting in the war. In his conversation with the mother, Tom expresses his displeasure with the five-dollar salary and claims that he can abandon the family just like the father did. He says to his mother, "...listen, if self is what I thought of, Mother, I'd be where he is-GONE" (Williams 34). Williams seems to suggest that in the play's setting, abandonment happens after a conflict between the characters. By showing Tom contemplating to abandon the family after his argument with his mother, Williams manages to connect the themes of dreams and aspirations with abandonment and family conflicts.

By saying "where he is gone," Tom points at his father's photograph and therefore, he suggests abandoning his sister and mother (Williams 34). The theme of abandonment is also seen when Tom quarrels with his mother and leaves home for unnamed location. Although Tom makes the final decision to abandon the family, Williams presents him thinking a lot about his sister. The thoughts indicate that Tom is haunted by his decision to abandon his sister and mother.

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Williams uses the experiences of Tom at the workplace and home to bring out the theme of freedom and confinement. For instance, Tom claims that he does not want to spend his years in the “celotex interior with-fluorescent-tubes” (Williams 33). The author uses the claim to show that Tom is confined to his workplace and he lacks freedom. As a poet, Tom feels that his talent is threatened by his continuous stay at the shoe factory. However, Williams portrays him as an individual with little options given that he has to take care of the family.

Regarding the theme of dreams and aspirations, Williams builds the play in a way that portrays Tom, Laura and their father as individuals that are constantly pursuing their dreams but fail in most of their attempts. For instance, Laura dreams of becoming a successful artist, but her mother interrupts her aspirations as she sends her to a business school and always reminds her to get a boyfriend. Amanda's hope for Laura fails to materialize when she abandons school and starts loitering in town. Amanda says that she hoped for "success and happiness" for her children, but she did not achieve it (Williams 23). Tom's aspirations for a better life, just like his father lead him to abandon the family. The author uses the conversation among the characters and their memories to show how the play explores the theme of failed dreams.

The critics of Williams' work, especially the aspect of themes argue that the play only reveals family conflicts that lead to the separation of characters. The argument is based on the setting of the play in that the acts revolve around one environment. However, the criticism fails to consider the author's use of conversations among characters to build other themes. For instance, the conversation between Laura and her mother brings out the theme of marriage while Tom's ranting and memories portray the theme of abandonment and confinement.

Therefore, contrary to the critics' assertion that Williams' “The Glass of Menagerie” fails to reveal its thematic concerns, the play reveals the author's main ideas in the form of the theme of marriage and love, confinement, freedom and abandonment. The author uses the character's conversations to portray these themes in a way that show the views of the protagonists. By using Tom's narrations and the confrontation between him and his mother, the author succeeds in showing how the aspect of family relationships in the play gives rise to the other themes. Thus, the book can be recommended for readers that want to be entertained as they read much about the American society during the 20th century.

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