

'The Glass Menagerie' Revisited: Catastrophe without Violence

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In an interview with *Newsweek* in the spring of 1960, Tennessee Williams made an announcement which was bound to be of interest to widespread audiences and critics of the drama alike. He declared that he was "through with what have been called my 'black' plays," that from then on his plays would be free from their earlier accent on the bestiality of man. While not denying that bestiality still existed, Williams declared, "I want to pass the rest of my life believing in other things. For years I was too preoccupied with the destructive impulses. From now on I want to be concerned with the kinder aspects of life" [*Newsweek*, 27 June 1960]. The sweeping quality of the remark was almost Tolstoyan in its rejection of Williams' earlier vision. By contrast to the violence and blackness of the earlier plays, the newer vision seemed to be one of sweetness and light. Williams' last phrase alone reverberates with William Dean Howells' injunction seventy years ago that our novelists "concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life, which are the more American" [*Criticism and Fiction*].

The turn in Williams' career should not have come as a complete shock (even putting aside the question of psychoanalysis). In the foreword to *Sweet Bird of Youth* several years ago, Williams marveled at his audiences' capacity to accept the violence which he was dealing out to them, and by this time violence—of rape, castration, and cannibalism—had become the hallmark of the Williams mode, his way of resolving, or avoiding the real resolution of, the conflicts between his lonely, haunted characters. In that same foreword Williams tried to indicate that violence was not his only dramatic weapon. He divided his dramas into two groups: the violent plays, those which emphasize man's bestiality, and the non-violent plays. Among the latter he included both *The Glass Menagerie* and the then uncompleted *Period of Adjustment*, because neither depends for its moral justification upon the Aristotelian idea that violence is purged by its poetic representation on a stage and neither play offers us violence as the way to "the release from the sense of meaninglessness and death," which Williams understands to be the object of a work of tragic intention.

The grouping is useful in showing Williams' earlier uneasiness with violence as his sole dramatic technique. Reaching back to his earliest successful drama, Williams grasped again at an approach built not upon the reduction of dramatic situation and motivation to a series of overcharged, sexually violent and symbolically loaded confrontations, where "release" comes from explosion, but upon a quieter pattern of lonely human beings who fail in a variety of ways to make contact with one another and with their universe.

Then, to strengthen one's conviction that Williams was searching for a way out of the pattern of violence which had become his trademark, the 1961 Broadway season gave us *The Night of the Iguana*. Despite the hints of violent action offstage and the explosive personality of its central character, the exminister Shannon, the new play offers us through its most sympathetic character Hannah Jelkes an ideal of endurance, of quiet strength facing the pain and loneliness of human existence. Her plea at the third act curtain is "Oh God! Can't we stop now? Finally? Please let us. It's so quiet here, now."

The attenuated nature of her cry suggests several observations regarding Williams' work. In the first place, the mood of the play is muffled and elegiac, reminding one, as several critics have noted, of *The Glass Menagerie*. Actually the similarity extends beyond mood to Williams' approach to the problem of the loneliness of defeated souls, his particular area of sensitivity and compassion as playwright. Furthermore, it may be noted that Hannah's cry is framed not solely in human terms, but in terms of man's relation to a God-centered universe. The importance of this has been largely overlooked by Williams' critics heretofore and certainly in their examination of *The Glass Menagerie*.

Finally, both Hannah's speech and *The Night of the Iguana* as a whole help to put *Period of Adjustment* into its very special place in the canon of Williams' work as a deviation from the pattern of his development, a deviation comparable in many ways to that nostalgic comedy, *Ah! Wilderness*, in the career of Eugene O'Neill. For though *Period of Adjustment* is, with *The Glass Menagerie* and *The Night of the Iguana*, a non-violent play, unlike them it is subtitled "A Serious Comedy," and whatever Williams may mean by "serious," it is clearly comic in its underlying belief in the essential health of society once certain adjustments have been made. This is not to say that the break with his earlier work is complete. Certainly *Period of Adjustment* bears the imprint of the earlier Williams: the concern with homosexuality behind Ralph's fear for his son; the heavy-handed and overinsistent symbolism of the Bates's home being built on a "high point over a cavern"; the parody of the American dream through the spoofing about longhorns and the wild West; and perhaps most important, Williams' tendency to see human conflict too exclusively in sexual terms, whether successfully resolved here, as it was in *The Rose Tattoo*, problematic, as in *Cat*

on a Hot Tin Roof, or unresolved and leading to catastrophe, as in *Suddenly Last Summer*. Yet these similarities should not blind us to the more basic shift which occurred and which is implied in the very title of the play. What set this play off from his earlier work, both "violent" and "non-violent," and from *The Night of the Iguana* was Williams' apparent belief that the lives of four individuals, the well-being of middle-class America, and even the happiness of the Christmas season could be preserved if one was only willing to go through a little "period of adjustment."

Williams' vision in *The Glass Menagerie* of 1945, by contrast, was not one of successful adjustment but of failure, the failure of any manipulation to piece together the fragmented lives of human beings. The essentially sanguine view of the "kinder aspects" which he adopted in 1960, that a little tinkering would set all to rights, was a real if perhaps temporary departure not only from the violent plays but from *The Glass Menagerie's* searching and poetic vision of catastrophe.

When *The Glass Menagerie* first appeared, it was hailed as a major dramatic event (Williams himself later spoke of the play's favorable reception as "The Catastrophe of Success"). In 1948 John Gassner dubbed Williams the "dramatist of frustration" because Williams had captured with such skill the truncated lives of his characters, caught in a world of their own illusions and unable to break out. Gassner was inclined to see the frustration as that of individuals, though he suggested briefly that the sketched background of the play was social. But the power of *The Glass Menagerie* is even greater than earlier critics have suggested. The full measure of its intensity has yet to be taken, and the contrast between the comic premise of *Period of Adjustment* and the note of endurance in *The Night of the Iguana* is one more reason why we should turn back to his early and perhaps his greatest play to examine not just the surface of frustration but the fullness of its catastrophic vision, a vision not only of individuals who fail to communicate with one another, nor of a society temporarily adrift in a depression, but of man abandoned in the universe.

The means which Williams has used to give form to this vision are symbolic rather than literal. His play about the man who came to dinner and failed to satisfy the expectations of two neurotic women depends not so much upon plot or characterization as upon an undercurrent of allusion, the range of secondary associations which, instead of being in the foreground of dramatic action, serve as a background of ironic commentary on the essentially static surface of this "memory play."

Williams has often asserted, sometimes at rather too great length, that he is the poet in the theater. Again and again he has stressed the inadequacy of the literal significance of words to convey meaning. In his early one-act verse drama, *The Purification*, the son says that "Truth is sometimes alluded to in music. / But words are too loosely woven to catch it in...." In the afterword to *Camino Real* he went so far as to condemn "words on paper, ... thoughts and ideas of an author, those shabby things snatched off basement counters at Gimbel's," and to insist that it was the natural symbol for which he was really reaching. In *The Glass Menagerie* this problem is expressed in the poignant interview between Tom and his mother, when Amanda says and Tom agrees that "There's so many things in my heart that I cannot describe to you!" Like his dramatic forebear Chekhov, Williams is constantly faced with the yawning gap between his characters' feelings and their ability to verbalize. In Williams' work this gap often threatens to become an abyss into which the play itself collapses. His critics have been quick to point out when the playwright has substituted strident symbolism for effective dramatic situation. The awkwardness of the screen device proposed for *The Glass Menagerie*, Val's snakeskin jacket and Lady's speech about fig trees and Christmas decorations in *Orpheus Descending*, perhaps the iguana itself in the title of his latest play, and the generally cluttered quality of *Camino Real* come immediately to mind as cases where Williams has failed to develop and then rely upon the dramatic situation and leans upon allusion to carry the meaning rather than dramatic conflict.

The particular excellence of *The Glass Menagerie*, by contrast, is that Williams was able at this one point to sustain both a credible dramatic situation of the anticipation and appearance of the Gentleman Caller at the same time that he developed with extraordinary skill the secondary level of allusion which gives to the drama its full symbolic significance. The pattern of allusion, the tightness of poetic texture, transforms the pathetic story of the Wingfield family into a calamity of immense proportions.

The structure of the play helped Williams to move away from realistic drama and too great a dependence upon only the literal significance of word or action. His development of *The Glass Menagerie* as a "memory play," organized around Tom's remembrances of things past, gave Williams the freedom to develop the "new plastic theatre" of which he spoke in the author's production notes to be published versions of the play. Lighting, music, and the device of the narrator who is both a commentator on and a part of the series of tableaux which he presents in his search for the meaning of the past all contribute to the play's fluidity, a quality and metaphor which one critic sees as central to Williams' art.

If we move from the play's poet, Tom, to the question of the play's poetry, certainly the clearest and most obvious organizing image is the glass menagerie itself, which embodies the fragility of Laura's world, registers so sensitively any changes in lighting, and stands in vivid contrast to the harshness of the outside world, the so-called world of

reality which can shatter it so easily. Dramatically the glass menagerie is the focus of much of the action of the play in much the same way that the garret is the focus of Ibsen's *Wild Duck*. Like the wild duck, the menagerie is almost too strident a symbol. Williams is almost too insistent at times on the parallel between Laura and her menagerie, between the glass unicorn's losing its horn and Jim's impotence when he tries to bring Laura into the "real world." But again like Ibsen, Williams does not hang the entire play upon his title symbol; instead he gives to the play as a whole a poetic texture and a wealth of ironic allusion.

This comes out clearly in his handling of Tom, the narrator, struggling poet, and embryonic Tennessee Williams, whose role has a value far exceeding the range of autobiographical reference which was undoubtedly its starting point. The world of literature is developed through more than the convention of the narrator alone. The play's numerous literary allusions serve both to give a sense of specific detail to the evanescent tableaux-scenes and to reinforce central dramatic issues.

Tom, the poet in the warehouse, is "Shakespeare" to Jim, the Gentleman Caller. Jim realizes dimly that his friend is that strange creature, the artist, set apart from his fellow men. In the Acting Version Williams inserted a few lines during which Amanda tries to adjust the lamp for Tom while he is writing. She chides him: "I know that Milton was blind, but that's not what made him a genius." Like the Shakespeare reference, this is Amanda's recognition of Tom's difference from other men and as such establishes one character's attitude toward another. It also underscores our sense of Amanda's well-meaning meddling in Tom's privacy. Furthermore it works ironically, for it should suggest to the audience Milton's sonnet on his blindness and add to our sense of the conflict between Tom's desire to escape from home and the warehouse and Amanda's belief that "they also serve who only stand and wait." And beyond this, there exists the even broader contrast, inherent in the Milton image, of sight and blindness, of light and darkness. This pattern of imagery is as important to *The Glass Menagerie* as it is to Ibsen's *Wild Duck*, where the conflict between illusion and reality is shaped in terms of visual imagery, of motion toward and away from light of various kinds.

Such an expansion of the range of reference of a single image is neither accidental on the author's part nor implanted there by the critic. It is part of the very texture of the play. The conflict between Tom and his mother is developed in a variety of ways and the world of literature is one battleground. Amanda is outraged at Tom's reading of D. H. Lawrence. When he makes a Lawrencian speech about man's being by instinct "a lover, a hunter, a fighter," she retorts that instinct "belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it!" (though it should be noted that she is not beyond stuffing Laura's bosom with "Gay Deceivers" before the Gentleman Caller appears). The barrier to literary communication works both ways. Tom sees the heroines of Amanda's "literary world" of the *Homemaker's Companion* in Lawrencian terms—"bodies as powerful as Etruscan sculpture"—but the appeal of this magazine to Amanda and those to whom she sells subscriptions is not the passion, but the fantasy world of romance of the horsy set on Long Island, a northern version of the fantasy South of her youth. Where Tom opposes the grim actuality of tenement life here by an appeal to the pagan and the primitive, Amanda sells the deceptive view of romance of Bessie May Harper, who "never lets you down" and "always leaves you with such an uplift." The heroines of Bessie May Harper are everything that Amanda hoped to be and that Laura is not, and even the magazine's title is ironic, for Amanda has failed as a homemaker and Laura will never be one.

In the Library Edition of the play, Amanda ranks Bessie May's latest effort with *Gone With the Wind*, compounding the irony. The universal desirability of the romantic Scarlett O'Hara makes Laura seem all the more neglected, and the fantasy of rebuilding Tara ironically underlines Amanda's loss of her Blue Mountain girlhood. Furthermore, Amanda Wingfield is not alone in the nostalgic backward glance to a lost Eden, a fantasy South that existed only in the American imagination. It is not coincidental that Margaret Mitchell's Southern romance should have been a best seller during the depression years. While the allusion to *Gone With the Wind* clearly sets Amanda apart from her son, it also broadens the context of Amanda's escape from reality. This escape was one which most Americans seemed to want to share, and thus her delusion takes on a larger social significance. Finally one may note that the title image itself of *Gone With the Wind* underlines the evanescent quality of this dream and all of the Wingfields' illusions. As such, it points directly to the last line of the play and Tom's injunction to "Blow out your candles, Laura."

On the level of plot, this widening circle of reference enhances the credibility of the dramatic situation. Given Amanda's sham version of idealized love and a fantasy past, how could the Gentleman Caller's visit be other than a failure? Despite Amanda's dress which is "historical almost," despite the attempt to live in the nineteenth century when the electric power goes off, Jim is not Rhett Butler but an "emissary from a world of reality," as Tom calls him, an engaged twentieth-century man on vacation. The flickering candlelight of Jim's scene with Laura is not enough to sustain the illusion; at the end of their scene this illusion collapses and we are left in darkness.

Williams weaves numerous patterns of imagery skillfully within the play. Many converge upon this last scene, and with a care he has not matched since, he directs all of the separate objects and fleeting images toward the central concerns of the drama. After Tom has announced the imminent visit of the Gentleman Caller, he tries to warn Amanda not to expect too much. He urges her to face the fact that Laura is crippled. Amanda refuses, not only

explicitly but also implicitly when she turns thereafter and asks Laura to make a wish on the moon, "A little silver slipper of a moon." The image suggests at once romance, reflected soft light, and (ironically) Laura's limp. The slipper itself foreshadows the later dancing scene between Laura and Jim. At this point Jim destroys the illusion by knocking against the glass menagerie. In the Library Edition there is a further verbal irony in this scene, when Jim kisses Laura, retreats, and then brands himself a "stumblejohn." The gesture of love which she needs so desperately does not heal the crippled Laura and release her from her bondage to her illusions. It shatters her. All the kiss seems to have done is to pass on to Jim, momentarily, Laura's crippled condition. As the ironic use of imagery helps to make clear, the failure of vision at the end of the play is everybody's failure. Even Tom, who thought he was being helpful by bringing Jim home, has illusions which blind him and doom the visit of the Gentleman Caller to failure. Tom can only escape, leaving Laura and Amanda to withdraw even further into their private worlds.

But *The Glass Menagerie* is built upon more than the poignant plot of illusion and frustration in the lives of little people. Williams has given the drama further significance by deepening the losses of individuals and pointing to social and even spiritual catastrophe. The time of the play is 1939, as the narrative frame makes explicit both at the beginning and the end. The life of illusion is not confined to the Wingfields alone. 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 tremendous importance. The international backdrop is Guernica and the song America sings is "The World is Waiting for the 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 lives of individuals against the larger canvas.

Amanda's anxieties are in large part economic and there is money behind many of her illusions: her mythical suitors were all wealthy men; she hopes to make money by selling subscriptions to the fantasy world of *The Homemaker's Companion*; she computes the money Tom would save by giving up smoking. When Tom complains of the grimness of life in the shoe factory, she replies, "Try and you will SUCCEED!" If this is another of Amanda's illusions, it is one shared by her fellow Americans, for "try and you will succeed" is the traditional motto of the American dream of success, the theme of confident self-reliance canonized in the romances of Horatio Alger.

It is not Amanda, however, but Jim, the emissary from reality, who is the chief spokesman for the American dream. To Jim the warehouse is not a prison but a rung on the ladder toward success. He believes in self-improvement through education, and the lecture on self-confidence which he reads to Laura is part of the equipment of the future executive. Jim is a booster in the American tradition. He is awed by the fortune made in chewing gum and rhapsodizes on the theme of the future material progress of America: "All that remains is for the industry to get itself under way! Full steam—*Knowledge*—Zzzzzp! *Money*—Zzzzzp! *Power!* That's the cycle democracy is built on!"

Yet when the strident theme of success is superimposed upon the lives of the characters, the social irony emerges. Father was not the successful businessman, but a telephone man who "fell in love with long distances." Tom, the substitute father, refuses to pay the light bill, plunges his family into darkness, and then runs out, and Amanda sells subscriptions and brassieres only at the loss of her dignity. Jim's own dream of success seems to have reached its peak in high school. (Williams later explored this theme more fully in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*). The trek upward through the depression years is disappointing, but the indomitable optimist is not discouraged.

The experience of the 1930s did not turn Williams into a proletarian writer or social realist, but it did open up for him a darker vision of American life which he suggests to his audience but which is denied to his characters, still "matriculating in a school for the blind": a belief that the American dream itself is a sham and a failure. In his essay "The Catastrophe of Success," Williams said that "the Cinderella story is our favorite national myth, the cornerstone of the film industry if not of the Democracy itself." The social catastrophe inherent in *The Glass Menagerie* lies precisely in the fact that Laura is *not* Cinderella: the silver slipper does not fit finally, and Jim is not Prince Charming but one of the innumerable Americans who would soon be moving overseas in troop ships. As Tom says at the end, "for nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura—and so goodbye...." The world which had been waiting for the sunrise burst with bombardments instead, and the lives of the Wingfields at the end are absorbed in the larger social tragedy.

Williams goes even further than this, however. The end of the play involves more than just the snuffing out of Laura's hope; it is even more than social tragedy. It is a *Gotterdammerung*. For the candles and the lightning which close the play have appeared together before. We are told by Amanda that the candelabrum "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." Amanda's comment opens up another whole dimension of the play, and points to a catastrophe which readers of *The Glass Menagerie* and Williams' dramas in general have hitherto neglected.

Williams said in 1948 that the dominating premise of his work was "the need for understanding and tenderness and fortitude among individuals trapped by circumstance." To read this statement exclusively in naturalistic terms, however, is to miss much of the force of Williams' dramas. Williams is the grandson of an Episcopal rector in whose house he spent his early years. He is also the inheritor of a Southern religious tradition which includes writers like

Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren . Again and again in his plays he comes back to the world of Christian symbolism to describe his individuals “trapped by circumstance.” What so often makes the trap horrifying is his recognition, explicit or implicit, that there is no release from it in a world to come. Christian imagery becomes a means of denying Christian belief. In its quieter forms the combination produces cosmic irony; in its most violent manifestations, grotesque parody. (pp. 141-49)

The religious overtones of *The Glass Menagerie* are ... pervasive. Though they never obscure the literal line of the story or seem self-conscious, as they do in some of the later plays, these overtones add a dimension to the play which reaches beyond individual pathos and social tragedy. Williams' stage directions clearly indicate his intention. As with Hannah in *The Night of the Iguana*, he tells us that the lighting for Laura should resemble that “used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas.” The scene where Tom tells his mother that a Gentleman Caller will appear Williams entitles “Annunciation.” The dressing of Laura for the Caller's appearance should be “devout and ritualistic.” During her scene with Jim she is lit “inwardly with altar candles,” and when Jim withdraws after kissing her Williams informs us that the “holy candles in the altar of Laura's face have been snuffed out. There is a look of almost infinite desolation.”

Those overtones extend beyond Williams' hints to the director and become a crucial part of the fabric of dramatic action. The first scene in both the Acting Version and the Library Edition of the play opens on this note. In the former, Amanda narrates her “funny experience” of being denied a seat in the Episcopal church because she has not rented a pew. The idea of the Wingfields' exclusion from Christian ceremony is established thus at the outset, and it is underlined by the ensuing talk of digesting food, mastication, and salivary glands. In the Wingfield apartment, eating is an animal process only; it lacks ritual significance. The Library Edition opens with Amanda's call to Tom, “We can't say grace until you come to the table,” and then moves on to the question of digestion. The lines are different, but their import is the same. When the Gentleman Caller comes, the scene is repeated, only this time it is Laura whose absence holds up “grace.”

Amanda, who condemns instinct and urges Tom to think in terms of the mind and spirit, as “Christian adults” do, is often characterized in Christian terms. Her music, in the Library Edition, is “Ave Maria.” As a girl she could only cook angel food cake. She urges Laura, “Possess your soul in patience,” and then speaks of her dress for the dinner scene as “resurrected” from a trunk. Her constant refrain to Tom is “Rise an' Shine,” and she sells subscriptions to her friends by waking them early in the morning and then sympathizing with them as “Christian martyrs.” Laura is afraid to tell her mother she has left the business school because “when you're disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus' mother in the museum!”

The next picture Laura mentions is the one of Jim in the yearbook; though the context seems secular enough at this point—Jim is a high school hero—his religious function emerges later on. In the “Annunciation” scene, when Amanda learns that the Gentleman Caller's name is O'Connor, she says, “that, of course, means fish—tomorrow is Friday!” The remark functions not only literally, since Jim is Irish Catholic, but also figuratively, for the fish is the traditional symbol of Christ. In a very real sense both Amanda and Laura are searching for a Savior who will come to help them, to save them, to give their drab lives meaning.

Tom is unable to play this role himself. Though he appears as the angel of the Annunciation, he denies the world of belief and in a bitter speech to his mother calls himself “El Diablo.” With him Christian terms appear only as imprecations: “what in Christ's name” or “that God damn Rise and Shine.” When Tom returns home drunk one night, he tells Laura of a stage show he has seen which is shot through with Christian symbolism, none of which he perceives. Here the magician, Malvolio, whose name suggests bad will, dislike, or even hate, plays the role of the modern Christ. He performs the miracle of turning water into wine and then goes on to blasphemy by turning the wine into beer and then whiskey. He also produces his proper symbol, the fish, but it is gold-fish, as if stained by modern materialism. Most important, perhaps, he escapes from a nailed coffin. But Tom reads the symbolism of this trick in personal terms only. When Laura tries to keep him from awakening Amanda, Tom retorts:

Goody goody! Pay 'er back for all those “Rise an' Shine's.” 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?

The illumination of the father's photograph at this point suggests one answer to this question, but the pattern of Christian imagery in the drama, especially when reinforced here by the “Rise an' Shine” refrain, should suggest to us another answer—the resurrection itself—which Tom's rejection of Christian belief prevents him from seeing.

It remains therefore for Jim to come as the Savior to this Friday night supper. The air of expectancy is great, with the ritualistic dressing of Laura, the tension, and the oppressive heat. Jim's arrival is marked by the coming of rain, but the hopes of fertility and renewal which this might suggest are soon dashed. Laura's attempt to come to the dinner table is a failure, signaled by a clap of thunder, and Tom's muttered grace, “For these and all thy mercies, God's Holy

Name be praised," is bitterly ironic, mocked by what follows. The only paradise within reach is Paradise Dance Hall, with its "Waste Land" mood of slow and sensuous rhythms and couples kissing behind ashpits and telephone poles, "the compensation for lives that passed ... without any change or adventure," as Tom remarks. The failure of electric power after dinner—previsioning the blackout of the world—leads to Amanda's joking question, "Where was Moses when the lights went off?" This suggests another savior who would lead his people from the desert into the promised land, but the answer to her question is "In the dark."

Jim's attempt to play the modern savior is an abysmal failure. In the after-dinner scene, he offers Laura the sacrament—wine and "life-savers," in this case—and a Dale Carnegie version of the Sermon on the Mount—self-help rather than divine help—but to no avail. At the end of the play Laura and Amanda are, as the joke bitterly reminds us, "in the dark," and Tom's last lines announce the final failure, the infinite desolation: "For nowadays the world is lit by lightning. Blow out your candles, Laura—and so goodbye.... "

Here as elsewhere in his plays Williams draws upon his frightened characters' preference for soft candlelight to harsh daylight or electric bulbs, not only because it serves him dramaturgically to establish his conception of a new plastic theater where evanescent characters and images flicker across the stage momentarily, but also because his characters so often want to withdraw from the blinding light of reality into the softer world of illusion. At the end of *The Glass Menagerie*, however, the blackout is even more catastrophic, for it not only develops the Laura of Tom's memory and serves as another reminder of the blackout of war which shrouds the world: it is also the denial of any final "Rise an' Shine" for these frail creatures. The church has been struck by lightning, and all hope of resurrection has been lost in this damned universe where belief turns into metaphor, where man seems abandoned by his God, and where the echoes of prayer are heard only in blasphemy or irony. The bleakness of Williams' vision in *The Glass Menagerie* is complete. If Tom is released finally, it is in the words of Job, "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee." It is as the author's surrogate, as writer and chronicler of catastrophe, that he emerges at the end. (pp. 150-53)

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