

The Glass Menagerie - Tennessee Williams

The action of [The Glass Menagerie](#) takes place in the Wingfield family's apartment in St. Louis, 1937. The events of the play are framed by memory - [Tom Wingfield](#) is the play's narrator, and usually smokes and stands on the fire escape as he delivers his monologues. The narrator addresses us from the undated and eternal present, although at the play's first production (1944-5), Tom's constant indirect references to the violence of the Second World War would have been powerfully current.

The action of the play centers on Tom, his mother Amanda, and his sister Laura. In 1937 they live together in a small apartment in St. Louis. Their father abandoned them years earlier, and Tom is now the family's breadwinner. He works at the Continental Shoemakers warehouse during the day, but he disappears nightly "to the movies." Amanda is a loving mother, but her meddling and nagging are hard to live with for Tom, who is a grown man and who earns the wages that support the entire family. Laura is a frightened and terribly shy

girl, with unbelievably weak nerves. She is also slightly lame in one leg, and she seldom leaves the apartment of her own volition. She busies herself caring for her "glass menagerie," a collection of delicate little glass animals.

Amanda dreams constantly of the long-ago days when she was a young Southern belle and the darling of her small town's social scene. She enrolled Laura in classes at Rubicam's Business College, hoping that a career in business would make Laura self-sufficient. She discovers that Laura stopped attending class a long time ago, because the speed tests on the typewriter terrified her. After the fiasco at Rubicam's Amanda gives up on a business career for Laura and puts all her hopes into finding a husband for her.

Amanda's relationship with Tom is difficult. Tom longs to be free - like his father - to abandon Amanda and Laura and set off into the world. He has stayed because of his responsibility for them, but his mother's nagging and his frail sister's idiosyncrasies make the apartment a depressing and oppressive place. Tom also hates his job. His only escape comes from his frequent visits to the movies, but his nightly disappearances anger and baffle Amanda. He fights with Amanda all the time, and the situation at home grows more unbearable.

Amanda, sensing that Tom wants to leave, tries to make a deal with him. If Tom and Amanda can find a husband for Laura, a man who can take care of her, then Tom will be free of his responsibility to them. Amanda asks Tom to bring home gentlemen callers to meet Laura. Tom brings home [Jim O'Connor](#), a fellow employee at the warehouse. He is an outgoing and enthusiastic man on whom Laura had a terrible crush in high school. Jim chats with Laura, growing increasingly flirtatious, until he finally kisses her. Then he admits that he has a fiancé and cannot

call again. For fragile Laura, the news is devastating.

Amanda is furious, and after Jim leaves she accuses Tom of playing a cruel joke on them. Amanda and Tom have one final fight, and not long afterward Tom leaves for good. In his closing monologue, he admits that he cannot escape the memory of his sister. Though he abandoned her years ago, Laura still haunts him.

The Hairy Ape - Eugene O' Neill

The Hairy Ape, a play by Eugene O'Neill, is about the negative effects of industrialization. A crew of firemen are drinking on the forecastle of a ship. Though they seem happy, there is tension between them, as though they might erupt into a brawl at any moment. The men sing—sometimes about alcohol and sometimes about home; Yank verbally attacks the idea of home, women, and emotional involvement. Long lays the blame for their miserable lot in life on those in first-class, which he identifies as the capitalist class. Yank says the workers are better than them.

Paddy launches into a bout of nostalgia for the days before engines, when, according to him, the ship, the sea, and man united as one. Yank tells him he is crazy—and dead. He thinks of Paddy as a relic of an age gone by, and says that he is steel.

Meanwhile, on the promenade deck, Mildred Douglas endures her aunt's chiding as they chat and recline in the deck chairs. Her aunt teases her about Mildred's attempts to help the poor through her efforts in social service. Despite the fact that Mildred enjoys the comforts and benefits of her family's fortune derived from their steel business, she wants to make her own positive impact on life.

Her aunt tells her that her efforts to improve the lives of the poor are anything but altruistic. Rather, she says they are poor attempts at boosting her own social credibility. Despite her aunt's recriminations, Mildred is determined to visit the stokehole below decks in hopes of meeting the workers there. She wants to experience their lifestyle. The captain of the ship has granted her permission, but only because she claimed that her father, the chairman of the ship line, had given her a letter asking her to inspect the ship. When the second engineer questions her choice in wearing a white dress when she is about to go somewhere dirty, she replies that she will just throw it away because she has plenty of clothes.

In the stokehole, the men are dirty and sweating. Paddy is tired, so Yank makes fun of him and boasts his own ability to work at the furnace without suffering exhaustion. His bragging rallies the other firemen, and they work harder to continue stoking the fire. When Mildred arrives, all the men notice except for Yank, who keeps working. When he does see her, he shoots a hateful look her way. Scared, she nearly faints. She asks to be taken away and calls him a filthy beast. Yank is angered by her insult and chucks his shovel at the door after she exits.

After their shift ends, most of the firemen clean up—except for Yank. He is out of sorts, and the other men tease him, saying he has fallen in love with her. He assures them that all he feels for her is hatred. The firemen determine that the engineer showed them off to Mildred like animals at a zoo, and call Yank “hairy ape,” which he likes because it allows him to imagine that their encounter led to violence directed at her. His temper rises, and the other men have to hold him down to keep him from acting on his fantasy.

After the ship makes port in New York, Long and Yank are walking the streets of the city. Long provides more political viewpoints, while Yank is angered by the exorbitant price of furs. He tries to start a fight with some wealthy churchgoers, claiming that it is people like him, with physical prowess, who make the world work. Before he can engage in any physical violence though, the police restrain and arrest him.

While in jail, Yank feels like an animal caged at a zoo. Initially, the other prisoners make fun of him, but after he mentions Mildred’s last name, they tell him about her father, who is the president of the Steel Trust. One of them recommends that Yank join the Wobblies, a group of labor activists. Through them, Yank decides

he will exact his revenge. As his temper continues to boil and he thinks of the steel bars restraining him, he manages to bend them so that the prison guards have to subdue him.

After he is let out of jail, Yank goes to the office of the Wobblies. Wobblies, he finds out, is a nickname for the labor union known as the International Workers of the World. He wants to join, but has to stop and think when he is asked for his legal name. At first, the labor union is excited to have Yank because they want to organize other workers on the ship line. But when they ask him whether he wants to achieve his goals through dynamite or legitimate direct action, he answers dynamite. They reject his application because they think he is dangerous. Outside, he repeats a complaint that he truly does not belong anywhere. Thinking he is a drunk, two policemen chastise him.

Yank decides to visit the zoo. There, he walks into the monkey house, where he tells the animals about his experiences in New York. When a gorilla pounds his chest, Yank decides they belong together and thinks of their “club” as the “Hairy Apes.” He opens the cage door, releasing the gorilla, which grabs him and pulls him into a bone-crushing hug. As he crumples to the ground and dies, Yank realizes that he does not belong with the Hairy Apes, either.