

A Salisbury Playhouse &  
Shared Experience production

SALISBURY  
PLAYHOUSE

SHARED  
EXPERIENCE

# THE GLASS MENAGERIE

by Tennessee Williams

## EDUCATION PACK

Compiled by Aisling Zambon with Hanna Osmolska

  
City of Westminster

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# THE GLASS MENAGERIE

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## Shared Experience

At the heart of our work is the **Power** and **Excitement** of the performer's physical presence and the unique collaboration between actor and audience – a **Shared Experience**. We are committed to creating theatre that goes beyond our everyday lives, giving form to the hidden world of emotion and imagination. We see the rehearsal process as a genuinely open forum for asking questions and taking risks that redefine the possibilities of performance.



Patrick Kennedy

## The Pack

This education pack is intended as an introduction and follow up to seeing our production of *The Glass Menagerie*.

We've included background material on the play and Tennessee Williams, Shared Experience's approach and information on our creative process and production, also interviews with the cast and creative team.

We hope that it is used as a resource to give insight to some of the ideas and approaches central to Shared Experience and this production. There are questions and exercises throughout to stimulate and provoke both discussion and practical work of your own.

**Aisling Zambon**

## Salisbury Playhouse

Salisbury Playhouse is one of Britain's leading producing theatres, with a national reputation for home-grown work of the highest quality that attracts audiences from across the South West and beyond. Our programme is wide-ranging – a deliberately eclectic but well-balanced mix of intelligent and entertaining work, which receives regular critical and audience acclaim for the choice and standard of work and the excellence of the acting.

The building comprises the 517-seat Main House, 149-seat Salberg Studio, purpose-built Rehearsal Room and Tesco Community & Education Space. There is also an on-site scenery workshop, wardrobe and props store.

Participation is central to the Playhouse's work. Our extensive Participation programme sees more than 14,000 people of all ages engaging with nearly 400 events each year. This includes the Stage '65 Youth Theatre, which has 275 members. In 2009, Salisbury Playhouse became the first appointed Arts Award Welcome Centre in the South West.

Many events are linked to our productions – both pre-show workshops, such as Theatre Days and Setting the Scene, and post-show discussions. There is also a wide range of other opportunities to make theatre and to extend your knowledge of how theatre is made at the Playhouse, through schools workshops, backstage tours, work placements and Plays in a Day.

To get involved and for further information, visit our website, [www.salisburyplayhouse.com](http://www.salisburyplayhouse.com), or contact Louise Dancy, Participation Co-ordinator, either on **01722 320117** or via email: [participation2@salisburyplayhouse.com](mailto:participation2@salisburyplayhouse.com)





## Interview with Polly Teale - Director

### How does *The Glass Menagerie* lend itself to Shared Experience's expressionistic style of working?

Because *The Glass Menagerie* is so autobiographical we are placing Tennessee, the writer, at the heart of his own creation. We are imagining we are inside Tennessee Williams' head and we are seeing everything through his eyes. For example, I don't think Amanda is an accurate portrait of his mother, but I think she expresses his experience of her, which is overwhelming and suffocating.

I'm interested in the possibility of seeing Amanda and Laura as embodying aspects of Tennessee himself. Amanda can be seen as the extrovert, charismatic, gregarious side of Tennessee and Laura is the introvert, reclusive, frightened side. I think that's a very expressionistic interpretation of the play, because you're seeing it as a type of psychodrama, where everything relates to Tom, to Tennessee and his psyche.

### What draws you to focus on the writer's process in your production?

Well I think some of the long narrator speeches in the play are tricky, they can feel a bit old fashioned and clunky, so by making it about the writers' process and his journey towards this painful piece of his history, it feels to me to be more alive, more psychologically interesting. One of the things Tennessee Williams was at great pains to explain is that he didn't want it to be done in a naturalistic way and I think this allows us to move into that territory.

### How will you treat Tennessee Williams' stage directions and his descriptions of screen projection?

I love the stage directions! I think they're almost like a poem, so I may get the character of Tennessee to speak some of the stage directions. We've also decided to use movie projection. We're told that Tom is constantly at the movies, Laura goes to the movies while bunking off college and Amanda's inner life is heavily influenced by the movies. So the idea of using projected imagery is in order to conjure up and make visible their inner lives which are influenced and affected by the movies. In terms of expressionism it's a way of getting inside their heads and experiencing their reality.



Polly Teale

### Themes in the Play

- Conflict between the Depression and the American Dream
- The Writer's Process
- Aspirations & Disappointment
- Family Responsibility
- Entrapment & Escapism

**In terms of the world of the play, how will you convey the conflict between the economic depression and the progression of the 'American Dream'?**

By using advertising billboards in the set design there is immediately a counterpoint between aspirational life and the reality of a rather grim apartment where they are all cooped up together. This conflict will also be conveyed through the use of the film footage in the production, which will show the idealised images that Amanda's carrying of a glamorous Southern plantation existence – very lavish in contrast to the reality of their everyday lives.

It's also obviously very much there in the play. Jim embodies that belief of the 'American Dream'; aspiring to be like the man who invented chewing gum and went on to become a multi-millionaire. Although there's something very appealing about Jim and his optimism, there's also something rather poignant, tragic even, about his faith in the future. The depression shut down opportunity and limited people's options, which is a big part of the story.

**What effect do you want the play to have on the audience?**

I hope the audience will empathise with everybody in it. It's one of those great plays where hopefully there's a part of you in each of the characters and so your sympathies will be pulled around. Although the play expresses the frustration and anger we can feel towards our family it also contains great love and tenderness.

**“The Glass Menagerie can be presented with unusual freedom from convention... Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth.”**

(Stage Directions, Scene One, The Glass Menagerie)

## Exercise

### Devising

In 4 small groups, each choose one of the characters from the play and devise 2 short scenes; one presenting that character in their ideal and fantasy life, what they truly desire, and the other their worst case scenario; what that character truly fears.

Consider the following:

- What is Tom's true ambition and what is stopping him from living the life he wants?
- When was Amanda happiest? Why does she push her children to succeed?
- How does Laura feel about Jim? Why does she lie to her mother about attending the business course at college?
- What are Jim's aspirations? How has Jim changed since High School?

## Questions

### The Writer

- Tennessee Williams' play is very autobiographical; what do you think he wanted to achieve, through writing about aspects of his own life and family?

### The Production

- What were your expectations of the play before you saw it and how did you feel at the end of the play?
- What image from the production has stayed in your mind and why?
- What line from the play has stayed in your mind and why?

## Background to Tennessee Williams

“I don't think I would have been the poet I am without that anguished familial situation.” Tennessee Williams, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1911 - 25<sup>th</sup> February 1983

Fittingly for the grandson of a minister, Tennessee Williams was born on Palm Sunday, 1911, and christened Thomas Lanier Williams. His father Cornelius Williams worked for a telephone company and then later an international shoe company in St Louis. Despite his considerable charms he turned out to be a heavy drinker, gambler and womaniser who was often absent. Due to this, his mother, Edwina, took her three young children to live with their grandparents, Reverend Walter and Rosetta Dakin. Tennessee, his older sister Rose and younger brother Dakin, lived a comfortable life in the southern states and although not rich, the family enjoyed the privileges of Reverend Dakin's status. Many years later, Dakin Williams described this period as having *“more than money, we had the status of being the minister's family.”* Williams derived inspiration from his upbringing and his family for much of his writing. The character of Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie* is based on his mother who, like Amanda, had a genteel southern upbringing.

Several illnesses as a child made Tennessee frail and delayed him starting school. Instead of playing sports with other young boys, Tennessee became very close to his sister Rose and they would spend lots of time together making up stories. Around this time Rose began to skip school to stay at home because of her nervous temperament. Rose was to be the inspiration for Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*.

Tennessee's mother, Edwina, noticed his unusual concentration and imagination from an early age and encouraged him to write stories. She noted that: *“other children would pick a flower, then carelessly throw it away, but Tom would stand peering into the heart of the flower as though trying to discover the secret of its life”*.

In 1918 when Tennessee was 7 he moved, with his mother and siblings, to live with his father in a tenement in the industrial city of St Louis. Over the next few years the family moved several times and by the time Tennessee was 15 he had lived in 16 different homes as his mother sought to improve their living conditions. This certainly contributed to his pattern of geographical instability in later life when a gypsylike temperament characterised even his most successful years.



Tennessee Williams

“Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated for memory is seated predominantly in the heart”

(Stage Directions, Scene One, *The Glass Menagerie*)

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Despite the constant upheavals, or perhaps because of them, Tennessee continued to write and his poems and short stories won him prizes and recognition throughout High School.

After High School, Tennessee enrolled at the University of Missouri, but poor grades in sport and a lack of funds meant his father withdrew him a few years later. Tennessee moved back home to attend secretarial college and work with his father at the shoe company. His sister Rose was becoming more reclusive and Edwina, anxious for her to marry, arranged for a series of callers. One of the callers was called Jim O'Connor and although not much is known about the visit it is thought to have provided inspiration for *The Glass Menagerie*. Rose was later admitted to a sanatorium where she became increasingly unstable. While Tennessee was writing *The Glass Menagerie*, Rose was given a lobotomy.

Tennessee returned to university, and in 1938 at the age of 27, received a degree from the University of Iowa. While there he studied hard and had a number of plays produced by the drama society including *Spring Storm*. The works of Chekhov, Ibsen and Strindberg were an inspiration and helped develop his style of writing. In 1939 he changed his name from Tom to Tennessee when his first short story was published.

The struggle for recognition as a writer took many years. In 1943, Tennessee Williams began to work for MGM as a screenwriter. He wrote an outline for a film called *The Gentleman Caller*, which would later become *The Glass Menagerie*. It was turned down by the studio who felt that since *Gone with the Wind* there were too many films about the south.

*The Glass Menagerie* opened as a play in Chicago in December 1944. It wasn't immediately popular at the box office, but was championed by the critics and subsequently received the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and the Sidney Howard Memorial Award. Tennessee gave half the royalties from the play to his mother so that she never lacked material support and was finally able to at last liberate herself from Cornelius Williams.

When speaking about his personal life, Tennessee Williams said that "*sexuality is a basic part of my nature, I never considered my homosexuality as anything to be disguised. Neither did I consider it a matter to be over-emphasized*". Despite this, Williams often referred to the loneliness he felt after sexual encounters. He often described himself as haunted by "the blue devils", a phrase that recurs again and again in his diaries, referring to his anxiety attacks and deep feelings of insecurity.



Edwina Estelle Dakin,  
about the time of her marriage



Cornelius Coffin Williams



Rose Isabel Williams



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In 1947, Tennessee Williams met and fell in love with Frank Merlo, a second generation Sicilian American who had served in the U.S. Navy during WWII. This was his only long-term relationship. Merlo proved to be a calming influence on Tennessee, and it was during this period that the playwright produced some of his greatest work. In 1961, Merlo died of lung cancer and Williams fell into a deep depression that would persist for nearly a decade.

Tennessee Williams wrote some of the landmark plays of the twentieth century, receiving huge acclaim and recognition, including Pulitzer Prizes in 1948 and 1955. Among his most recognised plays are *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Camino Real* (1953), *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Baby Doll* (1957) and *Orpheus Descending* (1957). In addition to this he wrote many short stories, poems and two novels. Through the 1970s and 1980s, Williams continued to write for the theatre, though he was unable to repeat the success of most of his early years and struggled with alcoholism and depression. He continued to travel widely throughout his life, living in New York, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Key West and Sicily.

“My loneliness  
makes me grow  
like a vine  
about people  
who are kind  
to me.”

Tennessee Williams, *Notebooks*



Edwina Williams reading to Rose and Tom

## Exercise

### Family Images

Each actor, playing one of the characters in the play, takes turns to create a still image of their family in the story. They should physically put the characters into the position they want them in, as if sculpting a statue. This should be done silently. The image should express their character's subjective experience of the family. So, for Amanda, she may see herself as the saviour in the picture, whilst for Tom, she may be a tyrant. The more personal the sculpture, the better.

The actor should then place themselves in character into the picture to complete it.

The group should discuss each image, saying what they see. Then the group must try to create an image of the 'ideal Wingfield family'.

Is it possible to reach a consensus of what this is?





Emma Lowndes

“Oh, God have pity  
on my poor little  
sister! - this I mean  
If nothing else -  
pity her and forgive  
us all.”

Tennessee Williams, *Notebooks*

## Exercise

### Monologue

In small groups, read through Amanda's speech below. And then try performing the speech using these 2 different objectives:

1. Amanda wants to prove to Tom that she is of value and importance (emphasise the status and wealth of her suitors)
2. Amanda wants to inspire Laura to become a Southern Belle in her own image (try to involve and excite Laura with the story)

#### *The Glass Menagerie, Scene 1*

##### **Amanda:**

*“...My callers were all gentlemen – all! Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta – planters and sons of planters!*

(Tom motions for music and a spot of light on Amanda. Her eyes lift, her face glows, her voice becomes rich and elegiac.)

*There was young champ Laughlin who later became vice-president of the Delta Planters Bank.*

*Hadley Stevenson who was drowned in Moon Lake and left his widow one hundred and fifty thousand in Government bonds.*

*There were the Cutrere brothers, Wesley and Bates. Bates was one of my bright particular beaux!*

*He got in a quarrel with that wild Wainwright boy. They shot it out on the floor of Moon Lake Casino. Bates was shot through the stomach. Died in the ambulance on his way to Memphis. His widow was also well provided for, came into eight or ten thousand acres, that's all. She married him on the rebound – never loved her – carried my picture on him the night he died!*

*And there was that boy that every girl in the Delta had set her cap for! That brilliant, brilliant young Fitzhugh boy from Greene County!”*

**Question:** Did the change in objectives bring out different aspects of the speech?

## Inside the Author's Mind

by Polly Teale

*The Glass Menagerie* is the most autobiographical of all Williams' plays. Tom, the central character, is given Tennessee's real name. Not only does much of the story come directly from Williams' own life and experience but he places the writer at the heart of his own creation. The writer tells us the story. In *The Glass Menagerie* we are taken inside the author's mind as he conjures up characters and places; as he returns to his past in order to face the guilt he feels about abandoning his family for another life.

Re-reading the play, I became fascinated by the process in which the writer inhabits his characters, hearing their voices, sensing their energy and inner life, their physical and emotional presence. This becomes all the more fascinating when the characters are members of the writer's own family, when they are so closely connected to the writer and the writer's evolution that they exist both as characters and as a part of the writer's self. Tennessee grew up suffused in his mother's idealised romantic stories of her youth in the Deep South. There was a part of him that adored and embodied that old world charm and vivacity. Tennessee was every bit the socialite, the charismatic entertainer and seducer. But there was also a part of him that identified with Rose, his sister and model for Laura. Perhaps it was this affinity that made them so close and sharpened his guilt at abandoning her to an unhappy fate. Rose became increasingly unstable in the years after Tennessee left home, and never recovered her sanity after a disastrous lobotomy. But even before this catastrophe Rose was a fragile young woman. And Tennessee knew Rose's fear and insecurity only too well. The recluse, the drinker, the man who wanted to hide away; the fragile spirit who withdrew into his writing, too afraid to face the world.

So Amanda and Laura can be seen as parts of Tennessee himself. They are the very stuff of which he is made. They are the past he cannot leave behind because it is himself. The writing of the play is perhaps an attempt to exorcise his past. To make it visible, to see it and face it instead of carrying it within.

A word about our use of projected movie footage. The thirties is often referred to as the "Golden Age of Cinema". While other industries floundered during the Depression, the movies thrived. For a relatively small price anyone could escape into another world: a world of adventure and glamour, of excitement and romance. The collective consciousness was changed forever as America went into "the dark room" to see its fantasies and fears made real



Emma Lowndes and Kyle Soller

on the screen. Both Tom's and Amanda's inner worlds are strongly influenced by the movies. When Tom explains why he has to leave St. Louis it is because he wants to experience the life he's seen in the movies. Amanda's life is only bearable because she escapes into fantastical memories of her charmed youth. The stories play out like scenes from old films, as if she were the star in her own movie.

So in order to conjure more vividly the characters' experience we have created our own cinema – the celluloid movie stars projected huge behind our flesh and blood characters, just as they exist in their minds.

Williams wrote in the introduction to *The Glass Menagerie* that productions of the play should be "Expressionistic" and free from the constraints of naturalism. "The scene is memory. Memory takes a lot of poetic licence. It omits some details and exaggerates others according to the emotional value of the articles it touches". In the pages of notes with which he prefixes the play he urges us to find a language that goes beyond the surface of life and expresses a deeper truth: "A more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are".

## Historical Background to The Glass Menagerie

When Tennessee Williams was Tom Wingfield's age in *The Glass Menagerie*, the United States of America was going through a period of great change and contradiction. The Wall Street Crash plunged the country into a depression and large numbers of people lived in poverty, yet individual entrepreneurs were still able to become millionaires if they had an enterprising idea. Most industries floundered yet the Cinema flourished. Mass unemployment meant that more people were out of work yet women were heading out into the workplace in greater numbers than ever before. This article looks at several cultural references made during the play and aims to set them into an historical context.

### Great Depression

The Great Depression began with the dramatic crash of the stock market on Black Thursday, 24 October, 1929 when 16 million shares of stock were quickly sold by panicking investors who had lost faith in the American economy. Businesses closed their doors, factories shut down, banks failed and many people lost their jobs and their savings. At the height of the Depression in 1933, nearly 25% of the nation's total work force, 12,830,000 people, were unemployed. Bread lines were a common sight in most cities. Hundreds of thousands roamed the country in search of food, work and shelter.

Wages for workers who were lucky enough to have kept their jobs fell almost 43% between 1929 and 1933. It was the worst economic disaster in American history. Farm prices fell so drastically that many farmers lost their homes and land. Within three months, President Roosevelt enacted a number of laws to help the economy recover. New jobs were created by building roads, bridges, airports, parks and public buildings. Despite all the President's efforts the Depression hung on until 1941, when America's involvement in the Second World War resulted in the drafting of young men into military service, and the creation of millions more jobs in defence and war industries.



Emma Lowndes

### Technological Advances

Jim O'Connor: *"Think of the fortune made by the guy that invented the first piece of chewing gum. Amazing, huh? The Wrigley Building is one of the sights of Chicago, I saw it the summer before last when I went up to the Century of Progress. Did you take in the Century of Progress?"*

The Century of Progress International Exposition was the name of the World Fair held in America in 1934 to celebrate technological innovation. Exhibits included cutting edge cars, limousines, trains and a 'Homes of Tomorrow' section. The exposition celebrated advancement and encouraged America to continue to be at the forefront of the developed world. Although the country was in the midst of a depression, entrepreneurs looking to become the next Wrigley or Rockefeller were still able to become millionaires if they could find the right product. The electric razor, nylon, photocopiers, magnetic recording, Polaroids and sticky tape were all invented in the 1930s and went on to have mass appeal and success.



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## Working Women

Traditional roles within the family changed in the 1930s. During the First World War and in the 1920s women had begun to go out and work in greater numbers and this trend continued in the 1930s. Many men found themselves out of work due to the Depression and it was often easier to find opportunities for female employment. This was partly due to the nature of the work undertaken and also because women could be paid less. By the 1940s, over one third of white American women were working in the clerical sector. Many women found their status enhanced by this newfound employment and this gave them a stronger voice and more financial power in domestic decisions.

As unemployment rose during the 1930s there was increasing resentment at women going out to work and taking jobs away from the 'male breadwinner'. This was particularly true for married women as it was felt they could be supported by their husband. There was more tolerance for single women or young women. It is interesting to note that Laura, as a young, single woman, gets sent to secretarial college where she can learn skills which will help her find employment in an office, whereas Amanda, who is a married woman with a husband who has a necessity to work and support her family, has to engage in a far more discreet form of employment.

## Tenement Buildings

In the United States, tenement is a label usually applied to the less expensive, more basic rental apartment buildings in older sections of large cities. The tenement building in *The Glass Menagerie* would have been familiar to many in the 1930s and is described by Tennessee Williams thus:

*"The Wingfield apartment is in the rear of the building, one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centres of lower-middle-class population. The apartment faces an alley and is entered by a fire-escape, a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation."*

## Travel

In order to combat the depression, President Roosevelt put money into public works and many people found themselves at work building new roads, railway lines and telephone communications. The highway Route 66 was completed in the 1930s and ran from Chicago to Los Angeles, creating connections between hundreds of small American towns. It carried thousands of Depression-era migrants to California hoping for jobs and a better life. Others earned a living on the road, or by its side, running businesses.



Patrick Kennedy, Polly Teale & Imogen Stubbs

Commercial air travel was also beginning in the early 1930s, although it was so expensive that only the very rich could afford to travel this way. Films regularly featured new forms of travel as a symbol of independence and freedom.

## Cinema

One-third of Americans were below the poverty line, yet some industries actually managed to make a profit at the beginning of the 1930s as the public looked towards entertainment as a form of escapism. If Americans couldn't find work, at least they could go for a drive, have a cigarette, or go to a movie. Correspondingly, sales of oil, gas, cigarettes, and movie tickets all went up.

The 1930s was "The Golden Age of Hollywood", it was the era in which the silent period ended, and Hollywood turned out movie after movie to entertain an audience looking for an evening of escapism. People of all classes now flocked to the grand movie palaces to see favourite celebrities such as Clark Gable, Greta Garbo, Shirley Temple and Errol Flynn.

## A Unified Production – Themes of the play in visual form

Polly Teale and the Designer, Naomi Dawson, discussed their responses to the play and began to evolve a shared vision of the production. Their ideas about the world of the play can be seen in the stage design. The giant billboards and movie images suggest travel, adventure and romance. These images of escape act to highlight the suffocation and claustrophobia the family feel at their unfulfilled dreams. In Scene 6, Tom says: *“I’m tired of the movies... all of those glamorous people – having adventures – hogging it all, gobbling the whole thing up. You know what happens? People go to the movies instead of moving. Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America.”*

The set will be *“primarily two rooms, with the feeling of being on the top floor of a large apartment block. Above them will be huge billboards; one depicting aeroplane travel and another of the ‘ideal family’, but they will have an old and worn look about them.”* The play is set in the 1930’s when there were dramatic advances in technology and the belief in the ‘American Dream’ where people are deemed to have infinite potential. This was in stark contrast to the grim reality of people’s daily lives during the depression. And these two forces are expressed in the set.

During the Depression, many industries struggled while the film industry flourished. It cost very little to see a film; escaping into a more glamorous, adventurous world of romance and excitement, where people’s fears and fantasies were projected on to the big screen. America’s collective consciousness was forever changed. Both Tom and Amanda’s inner worlds are strongly influenced by the movies; this is portrayed through the use of projected movie footage in the production; Polly accounts: *“When Tom explains why he has to leave St Louis, it’s because he wants to experience the life he’s seen in the movies. Amanda’s life is only bearable because she escapes into her fantastical memories of her charmed youth. The stories play out like scenes from old films, as if she was the star of her own movie. So, in order to conjure more vividly the characters experience, we have created our own cinema. The celluloid movie stars projected huge behind our flesh and blood characters, just as they exist in their minds.”* Tom’s images are to do with escape and adventure; *“Tom feels he’s under siege, being trapped and suffocated. In expressionistic terms, it describes his inner state, his psyche.”*



Kyle Soller

The decision to use huge images in the production was also partly inspired by the knowledge that at the point of writing *The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams was being employed at MGM Studios to write and rewrite movie scripts. From his published diaries, we know he would sometimes wander around the movie sets. Williams’ also wrote part of the play while staying at his family home.

## Interview with Naomi Dawson – Designer

### What main themes did you focus on in the set design?

One of the themes we were exploring in the set was memory; we wanted to make it clear that the play is seen through Tom, the writer's, eyes and that the characters are figments of his memory. We therefore created a space which is more expressionistic than naturalistic; so it is not a replica of the family home, but holds items and furniture which become symbolic for Tom and the story being told. Also to highlight this idea, we created a space which could be used differently by the different characters. Hence the space holds no rules for the writer, he can roam freely wherever he likes, it is his memory i.e. the other characters that are all confined by the imaginary walls of the apartment.



Another key theme was escape and fantasy. This is explored in a social context by placing advertising billboards around the home with images relating to the 'American Dream', and to have them in a derelict state lets us see the reality for most people at this time during the Depression. To convey the characters dreams of escape, their fantasies will be played out using projection of old film footage onto one of the billboards.



### How does the set express the lives of the characters living in it?

It has drab colours and shabby furniture, which will hopefully convey the harshness of their lives. This will be juxtaposed with the projection of their fantasies on the billboard. It also features a predominant fire escape, which can merge into the inside space. This is as Tennessee Williams wrote in his stage directions:

*'a structure whose name is a touch of accidental truth, for all these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation. The fire-escape is included in the set – that is the landing of it and steps descending from it'.*



## Design Questions

### Notes from the Script

*At the rise of the curtain, the audience is faced with the dark grim rear wall of the Wingfield tenement. This building, which runs parallel to the footlights, is flanked on both sides by dark, narrow alleys which run into murky canyons of tangled clothes-lines, garbage cans, and the sinister lattice-work of neighbouring fire-escapes. It is up and down these side alleys that exterior entrances and exits are made, during the play. At the end of Tom's opening commentary, the dark tenement wall slowly reveals (by means of a transparency) the interior of the ground floor Wingfield apartment.*

*Downstage is the living-room, which also serves as a sleeping-room for Laura, the sofa unfolding to make her bed. Upstage, centre, and divided by a wide arch or second proscenium with transparent faded portieres (or second curtain), is the dining-room. In an old-fashioned what-not in the living-room are seen scores of transparent glass animals. A blown-up photograph of the father hangs on the wall of the living-room, facing the audience, to the left of the archway. It is the face of a very handsome young man in a doughboy's First World War cap. He is gallantly smiling, ineluctably smiling, as if to say 'I will be smiling for ever'.*

*The audience hears and sees the opening scene in the dining-room through both the transparent fourth wall of the building and the transparent gauze portieres of the dining-room arch. It is during this revealing scene that the fourth wall slowly ascends out of sight. This transparent exterior wall is not brought down again until the very end of the play, during Tom's final speech.*

*The narrator is an undisguised convention of the play. He takes whatever license with dramatic convention is convenient to his purposes.*

*Tom enters dressed as a merchant sailor from alley, stage left, and strolls across the front of the stage to the fire-escape. There he stops and lights a cigarette. He addresses the audience.*

### Questions

#### Design

- How did the costumes in the play help to depict the characters?
- How did the lighting and sound design enhance the atmosphere of the play?
- How did the use of projected film help to tell the story?
- When in your opinion was the most effective use of music or sound in the production, and why?
- What was your favourite aspect of the design?
- If you were designing this production with an unlimited budget, would you use Tennessee Williams' notes on the set, and how would your design differ from ours?

## Expressionism at Shared Experience

In our everyday lives we hide much of what we think and feel, for fear we would be considered foolish or even mad. We believe there is a longing to see expressed in the theatre that which we conceal in life; to share our 'madness' and understand that we are not alone.

Central to Shared Experience's approach is the desire to go beyond naturalism and to see into the character's private world. There will be moments on stage when we literally enact whatever a character is secretly feeling or imagining. In more realistic scenes the social façade is a thin layer beneath which bubbles a river of suppressed emotion.



Emma Lowndes & Imogen Stubbs

During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to erupt and take over. In a scene where someone is secretly feeling very angry, when they allow the inner to erupt onto the surface they may viciously attack the other person; if the other character is feeling afraid they might crawl under the table. Having allowed the inner to erupt, the actor must return to the scene and struggle to conceal it. Although we may see two people drinking tea, we sense that underneath the social ritual it is as if murder is taking place.

**“The past keeps getting bigger and bigger at the future's expense.”**

Tennessee Williams, *Notebooks*

This emphasis on subjective experience runs through all areas of the production. For example, the setting of the play will be more expressive of what a place feels like than what it realistically looks like. In *Jane Eyre* everything on stage was grey or black to express the loneliness of Jane's inner world. In *War and Peace* the set was a hall of mirrors to suggest the vanity and narcissism of the aristocracy in Tolstoy's Russia. In *The House of Bernarda Alba* the house felt like a prison. We decided to make the door colossally large and encrusted it with locks and bolts. It is this emphasis on the 'inner' or the subjective experience which characterises expressionism and it is at the heart of Shared Experience's approach.

**“Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated... for memory is seated predominantly in the heart.”**

(Stage Directions, Scene One, *The Glass Menagerie*)

## Interview with Patrick Kennedy

### Have you done any research to prepare for your role?

I have done a lot of research on this because it's a very autobiographical play. *The Glass Menagerie* was Williams' first big success and he drew very much on his own life, although there are some differences. I've read his memoirs; it was a wonderful read at first and the closer it got to the present time at which he's writing, the more despairing and tragic it becomes, you can feel how many pills he's popping and how much booze he's swilling. I also read Williams' diary, and his frustrations were almost exactly the same as Tom's. Like Tom, he looked towards the Spanish Civil War and saw it as an opportunity for adventure.

### How much of his real life and personality have you applied to your role?

I'm using a lot of background from his biography, but I'm not trying to do an impersonation of Tennessee. The research I did was really helpful, because I've got this ready made back-story to the character. Immediately your imagination is filled in by the material facts of his and his family's life in St Louis.

### Can you tell us more about the rehearsal process so far?

The process is very honest; it's not just 'say your lines and try not to bump into the furniture'. The way we're approaching the play with Shared Experience is to really try to understand the characters motivations and to completely delve into the psychological and emotional aspects. The physical life of the characters is very important, so we're very aware of where we're situated, living in this small apartment. It's a very detailed rehearsal process. For every single reference in the play, Polly wants us to have an emotional or visual reference thought out, so the character is fleshed out, no stone is left unturned.

### What kinds of work have you done in rehearsal to physically embody your character?

I've never worked with a company that has this sort of depth of approach; it's often assumed you've done the preparation work yourself. Most of the morning we do improvisations and physical exercises. Sometimes when we're working on the text, Polly uses a technique where she will clap her hands during a specific moment of a scene and we have to express physically and vocally how the character is feeling inside at that moment, which can really make a scene take off, help you find the details and nuances in the text.



Patrick Kennedy

## Questions

### The Writer

- Tennessee Williams' play is very autobiographical; what do you think he wanted to achieve, through writing about aspects of his own life and family?

### The Production

- What were your expectations of the play before you saw it and how did you feel at the end of the play?
- What image from the production has stayed in your mind and why?
- What line from the play has stayed in your mind and why?





Emma Lowndes, Kyle Soller & Patrick Kennedy

## Exercise

### Chair exercise:

Two chairs are placed in the empty space and two actors (A and B) each sit on a chair. Each actor is given a 'want', which needs to work in opposition with their partners 'want'. For example:

**A: to punish B**

**B: to want forgiveness from A**

Using only the chairs and their position relating to the other person, each actor must try to change the emotional state of the other. No words or sound needed!

One actor 'speaks' by picking up their chair and moving it in relation to the other actor. Each person's physical 'sentence' is complete when he/she sits back on their chair. The second actor 'answers' by then moving his/her chair. The actors must stay in contact with his/her chair at all times. They pursue their 'want' in opposition to their partner.

**Notice how much more interesting the exercise becomes when the actors desire to change the other person and achieve their objective is very strong. Look to see what different strategies the person uses and what effect this has on the other actor.**

## Interview with Emma Lowndes

### What draws you to this play?

I was drawn to the project was because I knew of Shared Experience and Polly's work and was really keen to work with her. Also, Tennessee Williams is one of my favourite writers. It is an exciting challenge to play Laura in terms of her psychology and how to delve into her world. As an actor I get to explore the things which in life can be too difficult.

### What have you found most useful during rehearsals to explore and develop your character?

Shared Experience's rehearsal methods explore what's going inside a character emotionally and psychologically and what that character conceals and covers. We've done lots of improvisations about Laura's father leaving and improvised her first conversation with Jim O'Connor at High School. We've also explored the things that Tennessee Williams references about her life, but leaves out of the play. I found that really helpful.

### Why is Laura's glass menagerie so important to her?

It's a world she disappears into when she feels frightened and vulnerable; it makes her feel safe. Tennessee Williams describes her as being almost like a piece of glass; the idea of being transparent like glass is very comforting to her, because being looked at and seen is frightening to her. She has a very child-like quality and an inability to develop into an adult. The glass menagerie is a haven for her.

### What is it that holds Laura back from leading a full life?

Her overwhelming insecurity and anxiety, which I think in the main comes from her father abandoning her and her physical disability. The problem with her leg has become enormous in her mind and stops her from being a social person. St Louis is a frightening place to live for her and the Depression a frightening time. She also finds it impossible to live up to the woman her mother is, because Amanda's beautiful and really good at conversing, which makes Laura feel completely inept in comparison.

### How does Laura see her future?

She's resigned to a life of loneliness, seclusion and illusion. She doesn't ever expect her mothers' dreams for her to become a reality. She's a very intimidating role model.



Emma Lowndes

## Questions

### Acting

- Which character do you have most empathy for & why?
- Choose one character in the play: what is their Super Objective? or their driving want?
- And their over-arching objective in a particular scene?
- What do they fear most?

## Exercise

### Scene Study – Scene 7

In pairs, read through the excerpt of Scene 7 below, when Jim O'Connor and Laura are alone together.

Discuss and consider the following questions:

- How does Laura feel being alone with Jim?
- What are Jim's initial impressions of Laura?
- Jim says that he suffered from an inferiority complex like Laura. Does this surprise you? How do you think this has affected his ambitions? Do you think Jim will fulfil his dreams?
- How does Laura make Jim feel when she talks about his singing?

Decide what the crucial moments of the scene are. Create a sequence of images which when put together tell the story of the scene.

Give each image a title or a headline to describe the essence of it.

Run through the images in sequence and now for each action image, create another parallel image of this moment, which demonstrates how the characters are feeling inside, this can be abstract and expressionistic, rather than naturalistic.

Now go back to the script and read through again. Discuss how this exercise affected your understanding of the text: in terms of your understanding of the characters and how they feel, what they want and what their obstacles are in this scene.

### *The Glass Menagerie, Scene 7*

**Jim:** *Hello, there, Laura.*

**Laura [faintly]:** *Hello.* [She clears her throat.]

**Jim:** *How are you feeling now? Better?*

**Laura:** *Yes. Yes, thank you.*

**Jim:** *This is for you. A little dandelion wine.* [He extends it toward her with extravagant gallantry.]

**Laura:** *Thank you.*

**Jim:** *Drink it – but don't get drunk!* [He laughs heartily. Laura takes the glass uncertainly; laughs shyly.]  
*Where shall I set the candles?*

**Laura:** *Oh – oh, anywhere...*

**Jim:** *How about here on the floor? Any objections?*

**Laura:** *No*

**Jim:** *I'll spread a newspaper under to catch the drippings. I like to sit on the floor. Mind if I do?*

**Laura:** *Oh no.*

**Jim:** *Give me a pillow?*

**Laura:** *What?*

**Jim:** *A pillow!*

**Laura:** *Oh...* [Hands him one quickly.]

**Jim:** *How about you? Don't you like to sit on the floor?*

**Laura:** *Oh – yes.*

**Jim:** *Why don't you, then?*

**Laura:** *I – will.*

**Jim:** *Take a pillow!* [Laura does. Sits on the other side of the candelabrum. Jim crosses his legs and smiles encouragingly at her.]  
*I can't hardly see you sitting way over there.*

**Laura:** *I can – see you.*

**Jim:** *I know, but that's not fair, I'm in the limelight.*  
[Laura moves her pillow closer.] *Good! Now I can see you! Comfortable?*

**Laura:** *Yes.*

**Jim:** *So am I. Comfortable as a cow! Will you have some gum?*

**Laura:** *No, thank you.*

*Cont/*

# THE GLASS MENAGERIE

SALISBURY  
PLAYHOUSE

SHARED  
EXPERIENCE

**Jim:** *I think that I will indulge, with your permission.  
[Musingly unwraps it and holds it up.] Think of the fortune made  
by the guy that invested the first piece of chewing gum. Amazing,  
huh? The Wrigley Building is one of the sights of Chicago. I saw it  
the summer before last when I went up to the Century of Progress.  
Did you take in the Century of Progress?*

**Laura:** *No, I didn't.*

**Jim:** *Well, it was quite a wonderful exposition. What impressed me  
most was the Hall of Science. Gives you an idea of what the future  
will be in America, even more wonderful than the present time is!  
[Pauses. Smiling at her.] Your brother tells me you're shy. Is that  
right, Laura?*

**Laura:** *I – don't know.*

**Jim:** *I judge you to be an old-fashioned type of girl. Well, I think  
that's a pretty good type to be. Hope you don't think I'm being too  
personal – do you?*

**Laura [hastily, out of embarrassment]:** *I believe I will take a piece  
of gum, if you – don't mind. [Clearing her throat.] Mr O'Connor,  
have you – kept up with your singing?*

**Jim:** *Singing? Me?*

**Laura:** *Yes. I remember what a beautiful voice you had.*

**Jim:** *When did you hear me sing?*

**[Voice off stage in the pause]**

**Voice [off stage]:** *O blow, ye winds, heigh-ho,  
A-roving I will go!  
I'm off to my love  
With a boxing glove –  
Ten thousand miles away!*

**Jim:** *You say you've heard me sing?*

**Laura:** *Oh, yes! Yes, very often... I don't suppose – you remember  
me – at all?*

**Jim [smiling doubtfully]:** *You know I have an idea I've seen You  
before. I had that idea soon as you opened the door. It seemed  
almost like I was about to remember your name. But the name that  
I started to call you – wasn't a name! And so I stopped myself before  
I said it.*

**Laura:** *Wasn't it – blue roses?*

**Jim [springs up. Grinning]:** *Blue roses! – My gosh, yes – Blue roses!  
That's what I had on my tongue when you opened the door! Isn't it  
funny what tricks your memory plays? I didn't connect you with high  
school somehow or other. But that's where it was; it was high school.  
I didn't even know you were Shakespeare's sister! Gosh, I'm sorry.*

**Laura:** *I didn't expect you to. You – barely knew me!*

**Jim:** *But we did have a speaking acquaintance, huh?*

**Laura:** *Yes, we – spoke to each other.*

**Jim:** *When did you recognize me?*

**Laura:** *Oh, right away!*

**Jim:** *Soon as I came in the door?*

**Laura:** *When I heard your name I thought it was probably you.  
I knew that Tom used to know you a little in high school. So when  
you came out the door – Well, then I was – sure.*

**Jim:** *Why didn't you say something, then?*

**Laura [breathlessly]:** *I didn't know what to say, I was  
– too surprised!*

**Jim:** *For goodness'sakes! You know, this sure is funny!*

**Laura:** *Yes! Yes, isn't it, though...*

**Jim:** *Didn't we have a class in something together?*

**Laura:** *Yes, we did.*

**Jim:** *What class was that?*

**Laura:** *It was – singing – Chorus!*

**Jim:** *Aw.*

**Laura:** *Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.*

**Jim:** *Now I remember – you always came in late.*

**Laura:** *Yes, it was so hard for me, getting upstairs. I had  
that brace on my leg – it clumped so loud!*

**Jim:** *I never heard any clumping.*

**Laura [wincing at the recollection]:** *To me it sounded like  
– thunder!*

**Jim:** *Well, well, well, I never even noticed.*

**Laura:** *And everybody was seated before I came in. I had  
to walk in front of all those people. My seat was in the  
back row. I had to go clumping all the way up the aisle  
with everyone watching!*

**Jim:** *You shouldn't have been self-conscious.*

**Laura:** *I know, but I was. It was always such a relief when the  
singing started.*

**Jim:** *Aw, yes, I've placed you now! I used to call you Blue Roses.  
How was it that I got started calling you that?*

**Laura:** *I was out of school a little while with pleurosis. When I came  
back you asked me what was the matter. I said I had pleurosis – you  
thought I had said Blue Roses. That's what you always called me  
after that!*

**Jim:** *I hope you didn't mind.*

**Laura:** *Oh no – I liked it. You see I wasn't acquainted  
with many – people...*



## Writing a Review

Reviews help to communicate to others what a play is about and how the theatre company has chosen to tell the story. When writing a review you should consider who might be reading it and what will be important to them. You shouldn't spoil the plot for the reader, but make them feel as if they have a sense of the whole production.

### When writing a review you should:

- Say what you saw
- Say what you think
- Reflect on your responses
- Write freely from the heart
- Don't worry about given theories
- Describe the tiniest moment that remains vivid
- Say why it spoke to you

### Consider:

- The light, the sound, the movement, the colours and textures of the play
- The words, the music, the rhythms of the text
- The set, the costumes, the style of the production, the objects
- The Themes
- The Characters
- The Story
- The Ending

**Write a review for a national newspaper.** (Your review must be no longer than 500 words)

**Write a review for a specific online website.** (Your review must be no longer than 200 words)

**Tweet your review.** (Your review must be no longer than 140 characters)

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