The Glass Menagerie

by TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

directed by JOSEPH HAJ

PLAY GUIDE
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Guthrie Theater Play Guide
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This play guide is designed to fuel your curiosity and deepen your understanding of a show’s history, meaning and cultural relevance so you can make the most of your theatergoing experience. You might be reading this because you fell in love with a show you saw at the Guthrie. Maybe you want to read up on a play before you see it onstage. Or perhaps you’re a fellow theater company doing research for an upcoming production. We’re glad you found your way here, and we encourage you to dig in and mine the depths of this extraordinary story. 

“Glass breaks so easily. No matter how careful you are.”

– Laura to Jim in The Glass Menagerie

About This Guide

DIG DEEPER
If you are a theater company and would like more information about this production, contact dramaturg Carla Steen at carlas@guthrietheater.org.
SYNOPSIS
Tom Wingfield conjures from memory his family’s life in their St. Louis tenement apartment during the depths of the Depression. He holds a dead-end job at a shoe warehouse while nursing dreams of being a writer. His older sister Laura has retreated from life’s harsher realities to live in a world of old records and glass figurines. Their mother Amanda retains hope that her children will thrive in a world that doesn’t appear to have a place for them. Tension in the tiny apartment mounts as Tom grows restless and chafes under Amanda’s vigilant attention. The arrival of Jim, a gentleman caller for Laura, could be a door opening for all of them or a disturbance that finally shatters their fragile home.

SETTING
An apartment and alley in St. Louis. The near and distant past.

CHARACTERS
(as described by Tennessee Williams)

Amanda Wingfield, the mother
A woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place. Her characterization must be carefully created, not copied from type. She is not paranoiac, but her life is paranoia. There is much to admire in Amanda and as much to love and pity as there is to laugh at. Certainly she has endurance and a kind of heroism, and though her foolishness makes her unwittingly cruel at times, there is tenderness in her slight person.

Laura Wingfield, her daughter
Amanda, having failed to establish contact with reality, continues to live vitally in her illusions, but Laura’s situation is even graver. A childhood illness has left her crippled, one leg slightly shorter than the other and held in a brace. This defect need not be more than suggested on the stage. Stemming from this, Laura’s separation increases until she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf.

Tom Wingfield, her son
The narrator of the play and a poet with a job in a warehouse. His nature is not remorseless, but to escape from a trap, he has to act without pity.

Jim O’Connor, the gentleman caller
A nice, ordinary young man.

Being a “memory play,” The Glass Menagerie can be presented with unusual freedom from convention. Because of its considerably delicate or tenuous material, atmospheric touches and subtleties of direction play a particularly important part. Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth. When a play employs unconventional techniques, it is not, or certainly shouldn’t be, trying to escape its responsibility of dealing with reality, or interpreting experience, but is actually or should be attempting to find a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are. The straight realistic play with its genuine Frigidaire and authentic ice-cubes, its characters that speak exactly as its audience speaks, corresponds to the academic landscape and has the same virtue of a photographic likeness. Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art: that truth, life or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, though changing into other forms that those which were merely present in appearance.

These remarks are not meant as a preface only to this particular play. They have to do with a conception of a new, plastic theatre which must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions if the theatre is to resume vitality as a part of our culture.

Tennessee Williams, “Production Notes” to the Definitive Text, New York: New Directions, 1999
Responses to *The Glass Menagerie*

Too many theatrical bubbles burst in the blowing, but “The Glass Menagerie” holds in its shadowed fragility the stamina of success. This brand new play, which turned the Civic theater into a place of steadily increasing enchantment last night, is still fluid with change, but it is vividly written, and in the main superbly acted. Paradoxically, it is a dream in the dusk and a tough little play that knows people and how they tick. Etched in the shadows of a man’s memory, it comes alive in theater terms of words, motion, lighting and music. If it is your play, as it is mine, it reaches out tentacles, first tentative, then gripping, and you are caught in its spell.

Claudia Cassidy, “Fragile Drama Holds Theater in Tight Spell,” Chicago Tribune, December 27, 1944

In a beautiful and mystically vivid play, whose setting and lighting by Jo Mielziner is a new note in the poetics of the modern stagery, Laurette Taylor vouchsafes a characterization that is more than beautiful. It removed this first-nighter so far from this earth that the return to mundane desk and typewriter finds him unaccustomedly dizzy in the head, to say nothing of the heart. Fifty years of first-nighting have provided him with very few jolts so miraculously electrical as the jolt Laurette Taylor gave him last night.

Whether Mr. Williams’ play is as undebatably great as Miss Taylor’s performance, I have my just doubts. But it is a lovely thing and an original thing. It has the courage of true poetry couched in colloquial prose. It is eerie and earthy in the same breath. It is never glossy and glittering and Broadwise. Its unforced wit is as pure as its understated pathos. It glows most humanly in a sustained atmosphere of other-worldliness.

Ashton Stevens, “Great Actress Proves It in Fine Play,” Chicago Herald American, December 27, 1944

Preceded by warm and tender reports from Chicago, “The Glass Menagerie” opened at the Playhouse on Saturday, and immediately it was clear that for once the advance notes were not in error. Tennessee Williams’ simple play forms the framework for some of the finest acting to be seen in many a day. “Memorable” is an overworked word, but that is the only one to describe Laurette Taylor’s performance.


Even as an inexperienced young writer, Tennessee Williams revealed a strong instinct for the visual qualities of the theatre. If he had written plays in the days before the technical development of translucent and transparent scenery, I believe he would have invented it. This was the first Williams play to reach Broadway, and in the script he wrote, ‘Being a ‘memory play,’ *The Glass Menagerie* can be presented with unusual freedom of convention. Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth.” ...

My use of translucent and transparent scenic interior walls
was not just another trick. It was a true reflection of the contemporary playwright’s interest in — an at times obsession with — the exploration of the inner man. Williams was writing not only a memory play but a play of influences that were not confined within the walls of a room.

Jo Mielziner, Designing for the Theatre: A Memoir and a Portfolio, New York: Bramhall House, 1965

Despite extensive changes in American life since World War II, the social dramatists of the 1930s continue to exert an influence. Our most respected postwar playwrights, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, achieved their first successes with plays written under the shadow, so to speak, of the prewar years; Williams’ The Glass Menagerie and Miller’s All My Sons are plays of family tension in which the author champions the right of youth to rebel against the muddled world of their parents. ... For these writers, all of whom came of age in the 1930s, materialism is a permanent target. Although they have begun to give greater weight to psychological motivation than to more narrowly social issues, they refuse to take prosperity for granted. Like the Depression writers, they ask the biblical question: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” The difference in approach is that their characters have gained or forewore the world midway through the action and lost or saved their souls accordingly.


It all began for me in Chicago in 1944. I’ve had some of the happiest times of my life here. We were in Chicago for three and half months with The Glass Menagerie. We opened in late December and played until mid-March. And I had a lovely time. I knew a lot of university students, you know?

So I associate the success of Menagerie with the Chicago critics Claudia Cassidy and Ashton Stevens. They really put it over. The opening night audience had never seen this kind of theater before, and their response was puzzlement. And I suppose the play would have died here if Claudia Cassidy and Ashton Stevens hadn’t kept pushing and pushing and pushing. ... Before the success of Menagerie I’d reached the very, very bottom. I would have died without the money. I couldn’t have gone on with these hand-to-mouth jobs, these jobs for which I had no aptitude, like waiting on tables, running elevators and even being a teletype operator. None of this stuff was anything I could have held for long. ... So if I suddenly hadn’t had this dispensation from Providence with Menagerie, I couldn’t have made it for another year, I don’t think.

Tennessee Williams, interviewed by Dotson Rader in 1981 for Playwrights at Work, edited by George Plimpton

[Theater] was a pridefully tough profession in the forties. TIME magazine referred to playwrights who wrote hits as “crack,” implying something like target shooting, brisk and very technical, with big money prizes for hitting the bull’s-eye, no sissy literary nonsense in cranking a play together, but a job for cigar-chewing mechanics serving — according to the going myth of the time — the whole American people.

It was an audience impatient with long speeches, ignorant of any literary allusions whatever, as merciless to losers as the prizefight crowd and as craven to winners, an audience that heard the word culture and reached for its hat. Of course there were people of great sensibility among them, but a play had to be fundamental enough to grab anybody, regardless. One healthy consequence of this audience’s makeup, both actual and fancied, was a shift toward full-blown plays with characters and a story that asserted as little as possible verbally and dramatized as much as possible by action. This tended to keep speeches short and the stage active rather than reflective. Different as we were as writers, Tennessee Williams and I both thrived on these stringent demands. The time was far, far off when a character could be permitted to sit in one place indulging in pages of monologue while surrounding actors stood absolutely still and mute awaiting the end of his aria. (When O’Neill so indulged, his storytelling never stopped, and if it did he failed.) Even further off was the time when a certain span of sheer boredom was thought to be a signal that a culturally rare event was taking place on a stage. The revolutionary newness of The Glass Menagerie,
for example, was in its poetic lift, but an underlying hard dramatic structure was what earned the play its right to sing poetically. Poetry in the theatre is not, at least ought not be, a cause but a consequence, and that structure of storytelling and character made this very private play available to anyone capable of feeling at all.


Mother came up to Chicago for the opening there of *Menagerie* in late December of 1944. I don’t recall her precise reaction to the play but it was probably favorable, for Mother was very concerned with my long-delayed success. I do recall her coming backstage after the performance which she attended and paying her respects to Laurette.

“Well, Mrs. Williams,” said Laurette, briefly scrutinizing Edwina Williams in her dressing-room mirror, “how did you like yourself?”

“Myself?” said Mother innocently.

Laurette was as kind a person as I have known in a theatre mostly inhabited by jungle beasts, but even she, being Irish, was not one to pass by an opportunity to be mischievous.

“You notice these bangs I wear? I have to wear them playing this part because it’s the part of a fool and I have a high, intellectual forehead.”

Miss Edwina did not pick up on this either. She let it go by her without a sign of offense. She was probably bedazzled by Laurette’s somewhat supernatural quality on the stage.

Through the course of this [memoir] I may talk a lot about Miss Edwina. But right now I’ll only say that she was a lady and that she still is a lady at the age of eighty-nine or ninety. My dear friend, Marion Vaccaro, once said to me, speaking of my sister, “Miss Rose is a lady but your mother just misses.” I never quite knew what she meant about Miss Edwina. I think perhaps she sensed that Miss Edwina had not been quite so perceptive about Miss Rose as she might have been, but I feel that Mother always did what she thought was right and that she has always given herself due credit for it even though what she sometimes did was all but fatally wrong.


For *The Glass Menagerie* [at the Arcola in London], Elufowoju Jr has cast the Wingfield characters as African American. Why?

“Tennessee Williams grew up in east Mississippi, before the Great Migration,” he says. “If you look at all of Williams’ plays, he sets most of his stories in the south, [but] the African American presence within his plays is marginal. They’re not in any lead roles whatsoever. But his plays are amazing stories, completely and utterly accessible. They’re psychological thrillers, historical pieces, cultural masterpieces, and you just question: was he doing it deliberately?”


“I didn’t want it to be a gimmicky play. It was enough for me to go, yeah, I want to make the Wingfield family [African American] and just go: ‘How much have they allowed us to hear the text differently?’”
About Tennessee Williams

Thomas Lanier ("Tennessee") Williams was born in Columbus, Mississippi, on March 26, 1911. His mother, Edwina Dakin Williams, was born in Ohio and imagined herself to be a Southern belle. His father, Cornelius Coffin (C.C.) Williams, was a rough man with a fine Southern pedigree. The family included his older sister, Rose, and his younger brother, Dakin. C.C. was absent for long periods throughout their childhood and moved the family from town to town. Williams was a sickly child and Edwina insisted that he focus on Shakespeare rather than sports, which fostered his interest in literature and, eventually, writing.

The family moved from Clarksdale, Mississippi, to St. Louis, Missouri, in 1918. Although Williams wanted to be a writer, his father forced him to quit the University of Missouri and work in a shoe factory. He finally received his B.A. in 1938 from the University of Iowa. After graduation, he worked as a bellhop in New Orleans, a handyman in a shoe warehouse, a teletypist with a corps of engineers in Jacksonville, Florida, and a writer and reciter of verse in a Greenwich Village nightclub. While working these odd jobs, Williams was writing furiously, mostly for the stage.

His talents were recognized several years before he received a professional production. The Group Theatre awarded him a cash prize for four one-act pieces appropriately titled American Blues, as the young author was well acquainted with the pre-war depression and memorialized it. Theresa Helburn and John Gassner gave him a scholarship to their advanced playwrights' seminar at the New School for Social Research. In this class, he wrote his second full-length play, The Battle of Angels, which received a professional production after the instructors presented the script to the Theatre Guild. Angels was abandoned in Boston where it caused a minor scandal, and plans...
to revamp the play for New York failed to materialize. Williams also received a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship in 1940 and was awarded a $1,000 grant for work in drama by the American Academy and National Institute of Arts and Letters.

Williams’ work is best approached through his three most successful plays: *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). The first has a lyrical, sad gentleness that separates it from the savage cruelty of much of his later work. *Menagerie* shows his sympathetic insight into female psychology, which is distinctive of Williams’ dramas. Similarly, the use of the eponymous collection of fragile animal models in the play establishes the delight in symbolism that in later plays is often overworked.

He won a Pulitzer Prize for *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in which Blanche DuBois is driven mad by her brutal brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski, whom Williams modeled after a co-worker from his shoe factory days. The heroine is more ambivalently presented as partly the architect of her own destruction. Living dangerously near the edge of sanity and dependent on “the kindness of strangers,” Blanche is the first of a line of characters who protected themselves by “mendacity.”

Williams’ work resonated deeply with the performing arts community of the 1940s. His complex characterization and difficult subject matter appealed to a new generation of actors. The 1947 Broadway production of *Streetcar* featured then-unknown actors Marlon Brando, Jessica Tandy and Karl Malden, all of whom were trained in method acting — a new technique that stressed empathizing with one’s character to create a realistic, psychological portrayal. Actors trained in the method technique quickly discovered that Williams’ work stripped bare an American culture of repression and denial. A close-knit circle of performers, directors and writers gathered around the temperamental Southern playwright.

Comparisons and contrasts with the work of Arthur Miller, whose career coincides with and in many ways complements Williams’, are inevitable. Setting *Menagerie* so squarely in the Depression of the 1930s seemed to prefigure the emphasis on social context more characteristic of Miller, but this area was not developed further.

Before the success of *Cat* came three less successful works, *Summer and Smoke* (1947) has problems engaging a complete sympathy for, and comprehension of, its small-town misfits. *The...
Rose Tattoo (1951), a turbulently melodramatic celebration of the sexual vigor of Sicilian immigrants, has at least the dramatic robustness to give it a theatrical vitality. Camino Real (1953), which Williams thought to be his greatest achievement but flopped on Broadway, sustained his reputation for imaginatively exploring the possibilities of dramatic idioms, but its expressionism, labored symbolism, lack of realism and romanticism of loneliness bewildered or alienated audiences. Williams' most vivid excursion into the tensions of family life came with Cat, which is tightly and more conventionally constructed, displaying a lively, if bitter, sense of humor and a powerful vitality. The attention of high school football hero Brick to his deceased buddy, Skipper, poisons his relationship with his wife, Maggie (the cat), and his self-aggrandizing father, Big Daddy. Throughout his writing career, Williams nurtured a public persona that gradually shifted from shy to flamboyantly homosexual in an era reluctant to accept gay men. His fears of audience backlash against his personal life progressively proved groundless. Even late in life, Williams was reluctant to embrace a political agenda. In 1976, Gay Sunshine magazine declared that the playwright had never dealt openly with the politics of gay liberation, to which Williams immediately responded, “People so wish to latch onto something didactic; I do not deal with the didactic, ever. ... I wish to have a broad audience because the major thrust of my work is not sexual orientation, it’s social. I’m not about to limit myself to writing about gay people.” As is often the case with Williams, his statement is both true and untrue — his great midcareer plays focus on relationships rather than politics, but the figure of the gay male appears in his characters both explicitly (Charlius in Camino Real) and implicitly (Brick in Cat) throughout his works.

In 1943, Williams' mother authorized a frontal lobotomy on his sister, Rose, and Williams cared for Rose for the rest of her life. In New Orleans in 1947, he met Frank Merlo, a former sailor in the U.S. Navy, who became Williams' companion until Merlo died of lung cancer in 1961. Williams was depressed for much of the rest of his life and became addicted to prescription drugs and alcohol. In 1969, his brother placed him in a St. Louis psychiatric institution where Williams suffered two massive heart attacks before being released. He died in New York City on February 25, 1983.

A compulsive writer, Williams wrote more than 100 poems, more than 60 short stories, at least 25 full-length plays, many short plays, two novels (The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone and Moise and the World of Reason) and a memoir (Memoirs), from which his personality emerges as more ebullient than the blackness of his plays might lead one to expect.
Tom Is Tom

By Carla Steen
Dramaturg

“I’m very personal as a writer, yes. I don’t mean to be, I just am. Unavoidably.”

- Tennessee Williams, in an interview with David Frost, 1970

When pressed by interviewer David Frost, Tennessee Williams named Camino Real his most personal play, as it was an expression of his own philosophy. Almost anyone else would likely choose The Glass Menagerie because it is one of his most autobiographical works.

Born Thomas Lanier Williams in Mississippi in 1911 to Edwina and C.C. Williams, he arrived as a younger brother to their daughter, Rose. A second brother, Dakin, was born after the family moved to St. Louis when Tom was 7. The relocation was prompted by C.C. taking a management job for the St. Louis-based International Shoe Company, and the Midwestern city became Williams’ home for the next two decades. He loathed St. Louis yet found permanent escape impossible until his success as a playwright also brought his freedom. When he discovered he was too old to submit work to a Group Theatre contest, he adopted the pen name “Tennessee” to honor his father’s roots in the state and mask his identity.

Williams had developed a passion for writing as a child and pursued the craft at the University of Missouri. When C.C. was disappointed in Williams’ grades, he forced Williams to quit school and work as a clerk-typist at the shoe company, a job he held for almost three years. Edwina recalled in her memoir, Remember Me to Tom, that Williams persevered in his writing: “Every evening when he came home from the shoe company, Tom would go to his room with black coffee and cigarettes and I would hear the typewriter clicking away late at night in the silent house. Some mornings when I walked in to wake him for work, I would find him sprawled fully dressed across the bed, too tired to remove his clothes as he fell off to sleep at heaven knows what hour.” Williams left the shoe company only after he broke down from exhaustion.

Rose Williams was a looming presence in her brother’s life. She had a thin, fragile appearance and suffered from stomach trouble; in her late teens, she was diagnosed with schizophrenia and had difficulty holding a job. In 1937, Rose was admitted to the Farmington State Hospital, and six years later, she underwent a prefrontal lobotomy as treatment for her mental illness. By that time, Williams’ writing allowed him to travel, and he never forgave himself for being away from Rose.

Williams found his footing as a writer by transforming his lived experiences into fiction. As part writing exercise and part personal exorcism, Williams wrote multiple iterations of his family narrative,
including the short story “Portrait of a Girl in Glass” (1941) and the play The Gentleman Caller, which he adapted into a movie script during his short-lived stint as a writer for MGM Studios in 1943. Williams wrote to his agent, Audrey Wood, about his ideas for the film, saying that “the central and most interesting character is certainly Amanda, and in the writing, the focus would be on her mainly. A conventional woman, a little foolish and pathetic, but with an heroic fighting spirit concentrated blindly on trying to create a conventionally successful adjustment for two children who are totally unfitted for it. The stage play ends in defeat — which she rejects at the very end and prepares to continue beyond. The film story would have a softer ending, I think.”

His family’s story found its most complete and famous form in The Glass Menagerie, which premiered in Chicago in 1944 before its Broadway opening in March 1945. The play’s success at first left him disoriented, an experience he wrote about in the essay “The Catastrophe of Success.” When he regained his traction, he produced two more masterpieces in A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955), both honored with the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and wrote many other remarkable plays that are well loved within the American canon.

Aspects of Rose, Edwina and Tom appear as shadows, glints or glimmers in other characters from Williams’ work: Blanche DuBois, Brick Pollitt, Serafina Delle Rose, Mrs. Venable and Catherine Holly. Yet these characters are more abstracted and less directly connected to Williams’ own life. It is in The Glass Menagerie alone where Tennessee portrayed Tom and Tom created Tennessee.

“Every artist is born in jail and Tennessee Williams’ jail was called St. Louis. If you’re the creative type, the first thing you do when you’re born in jail is decorate your cell. The next thing you do is plan your breakout. Every major artist is full to bursting, looking for the mud and paint and music needed to execute an escape from the initial circumstances of his life. Some call this escape transcendence. When Tennessee decorated his cell, the play was entitled The Glass Menagerie.”

— Playwright John Patrick Shanley, 2010

“I am back in St. Louis, writing furiously with seven wild-cats under my skin, as I realize that completing this new play is my only apparent avenue of escape. ... My attack is purely emotional: under good direction could prove very effective but without it is in danger of spending itself in a lot of useless explosions. ... My whole life has been a series of escapes, physical or psychological, more miraculous than any of Houdini’s, but I do at the present moment seem to be hanging by that one thread: obtaining a fellowship and/or producing a successful play.”

— Tennessee Williams, in a letter to Molly Day Thacher at Group Theatre, 1939
I was at sixteen a student at University City High School in St. Louis and the family was living in a cramped apartment at 6254 Enright Avenue.

University City was not a fashionable suburb of St. Louis and our neighborhood, while a cut better than that of the Wingfields in *Menagerie*, was only a little cut better: it was an ugly region of hive-like apartment buildings, for the most part, and fire escapes and pathetic little patches of green among concrete driveways.

*From Memoirs*, started in 1972 and finished in 1975

When I left home a number of years later, it was [my sister’s] room that I recalled most vividly and poignantly when looking back on our home life in St. Louis. Particularly the little glass ornaments on the shelves. They were mostly little glass animals. By poetic association they came to represent, in my memory, all the softest emotions that belong to recollection of things past. They stood for all the small and tender things that relieve the austere pattern of life and make it endurable to the sensitive.

“The Author Tells Why It Is Called The Glass Menagerie”

I once saw a group of little girls on a Mississippi sidewalk, all dolled up in their mothers’ and sisters’ cast-off finery, old raggedy ball gowns and plumed hats and high-heeled slippers, enacting a meeting of ladies in a parlor with a perfect mimicry of polite Southern gush and simper. But one child was not satisfied with the attention paid her enraptured performance by the others, they were too involved in their own performances to suit her, so she stretched out her skinny arms and threw back her skinny neck and shrieked to the deaf heavens and her equally oblivious playmates, “Look at me, look at me, look at me!”

And then her mother’s high-heeled slippers threw her off balance and she fell to the sidewalk in a great howling tangle of soiled white satin and torn pink net, and still nobody looked at her.

I wonder if she is not, now, a Southern writer.

Of course it is not only Southern writers, of lyrical bent, who engage in such histrionics and shout, “Look at me!” Perhaps it is a parable of all artists. And not always do we topple over and land in a tangle of trappings that don’t fit us. However, it is well to be aware of that peril, and not to content yourself with a demand for attention, to know that out of your personal lyricism, your sidewalk histrionics, something has to be created that will not only attract observers but participants in the performance.

I try very hard to do that.


There is a horror in things, a horror at heart of the meaninglessness of existence. Some people cling to a certain philosophy that is handed down to them and which they accept. Life has a meaning if you’re bucking for heaven. But if heaven is a fantasy, we are in this jungle with whatever we can work out for
ourselves. It seems to me that the cards are stacked against us. The only victory is how we take it.


I don’t know why I find it much easier, much more interesting to write about women. My sister and my mother were both very articulate women. They talked with great charm. In most of my writings I try to recapture the charm of the way they talked.

In an interview with John Gruen, *Close-Up*, 1965

My own creativity, I believe, has tended to mirror reality. Certainly, the language used has always been realistic. For some people, back with the earlier productions, the lines were quite shocking. But compared to today, those lines were mild. Now, you see a play on Broadway and they’re saying things like motherfucker and cocksucker, and nobody arches an eyebrow.

And as far as my motivation is concerned, well, I suppose it has, of course, been a form of compensating for something else. When I was a very small child, my mother managed to alienate me from my father, who wanted me to play baseball. I loved him only after he was dead. A sad thing to say, maybe, but by that time I could at least try to understand him. My mother never wanted me to go out with the boys, so to speak; she wanted me only to have friends who were girls. Consequently, I grew up being a sissy.


The story of my sister Rose’s tragedy begins a few years before I commenced my three-year break from college to work for the Continental Shoemakers branch of the International Shoe Company.

I have mentioned that Rose suffered for several years from mysterious stomach trouble. She was several times hospitalized for this digestive trouble but no ulcer, no physical cause for the illness, could be determined. At last it was recommended that she have “an exploratory operation.”

Luckily our family doctor, a brilliant physician, intervened at this point and told my mother, much to her dismay, that it was his (quite accurate) opinion that Rose needed psychiatric attention, the mysterious digestive upset being due, he thought to psychic or psychosomatic reasons that could be determined only through the course of analysis.

You can imagine how this struck Miss Edwina. I am afraid that dear Mother has at times seemed to me to have been a moderately controlled hysterical all her life — and in her family tree (on both sides of it, Dakins and Ottes) have been alarming incidences of mental and nervous breakdowns.

From *Memoirs*, started in 1972 and finished in 1975

When I write I don’t aim to shock people, and I’m surprised when I do. But I don’t think that anything that occurs in life should be omitted from art, though the artist should present it in a fashion that is artistic and not ugly.

I set out to tell the truth, and sometimes the truth is shocking.

In an interview with Dotson Rader in fall 1981 for *Playwrights at Work*, edited by George Plimpton

The turbulent business of my nerves demanded something more animate than written language could be. It seemed to me that even the giants of literature, such as Chekhov, when writing narratives were only describing drama. And they were altogether dependent on the sensitivity of their readers. Nothing lived of what they had created unless the reader had the stage inside him, or the screen, on which their images could be visibly projected. However with a play, a play on the stage — let any fool come to it! It is there, it is really and truly there — whether the audience understands it or not!

On his transition to writing for the stage, quoted in John Lahr’s *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, 2014
Responses to Williams

Williams trades in nostalgia and hope, the past and the future, obsessions which we associate most strongly with the great female characters — Marguerite Gautier, Cleopatra, Hedda Gabler and Chekhov’s women, none of whom cares for today half as much as she cares for yesterday or tomorrow. His plays thus have the static quality of dream rather than the dynamic quality of fact; they bring the drama of mood to what may be its final hothouse flowering. ...

Perhaps when Quixote and Kilroy [in Camino Real] reach the snowy upper air of the unnamed mountains, they will become subjects for a play by Miller, whose artistic life is dedicated, like Shaw’s, to a belief in progress towards an attainable summit. Williams’ aspirations are imaginative and hence unattainable; and therein lies the difference between them.

Complementary, yet irreconcilable, Miller and Williams have produced the most powerful body of dramatic prose in modern English. They write with equal virtuosity, Williams about the violets, Miller about the rocks. The vegetable reinforces the mineral; and the animal, a dramatic element feared or ignored in the English theatre, triumphantly reinforces both.


Considering all its manifestations, Mr. Williams’ talent is one of the most singular of our time. You may not always be quite easy in its presence, but it is practically impossible to remain indifferent to it.


The fact is that Tennessee Williams, winner of two Pulitzer Prizes and three New York Drama Critics’ Circle Awards, is a consummate master of theater. His plays beat with the heart’s blood of the drama: passion. ...

Williams has peopled the U.S. stage with characters whose vibranty durable presences stalk the corridors of a playgoer’s memory: Amanda Wingfield, the fussy,
garrulous, gallant mother of *Glass Menagerie; Streetcar*’s Blanche DuBois, Southern gentlewoman turned nymphomaniac, and its Stanley Kowalski, the hairy ape in a T shirt; Maggie, the scrappy cat on a hot tin roof, and Big Daddy, the bull-roaring lord and master of “28,000 acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile.” Williams’ dialogue sings with a lilting eloquence far from the drab, disjunctive patterns of everyday talk. And for monologues, the theater has not seen his like since the god of playwrights, William Shakespeare.

Williams is an electrifying scenewright, because his people are the sort who make scenes, explosively and woundingly. … In an age that suppresses its tantrums as impolite, part of Williams’ cathartic appeal for an audience is to allow it to act out its hostilities vicariously. Above all, Williams is a master of mood. Sometimes it is hot, oppressive, simmering with catastrophe (*Streetcar, Cat*); at other times it is sad, autumnal, elegiac (*Menagerie, Iguana*). To achieve it, he uses the full orchestra of theatrical instruments: setting, lighting, music, plus the one impalpable, indispensable gift, the genius for making an audience forget that any other world exists except the one onstage.


When Tennessee Williams’ poetic drama *The Glass Menagerie* opened in New York in 1945, a new epoch in the history of the American theater began. As Eugene O’Neill had dominated the first quarter-century of the American drama’s life as an indigenous form, so Williams was to become the major figure in the second period of the theater’s growth. … The influence of his concept of drama, particularly that of his interpretation of character and plot, has materially affected the work of such recent playwrights as William Inge and Edward Albee. Of equal importance has been the impetus which Williams and his interpreters have given to the development of a singular dramaturgy, to the refinement of a distinctively American art of acting, staging and designing. …

One of the most important measures of his competence has been his ability to win and to sustain the artistic loyalty of the theatrical profession. Because of the exceptional effectiveness of his plays in performance, he has been able to attract artists of extraordinary skill. Moreover, because of his commitment to the principle of artistic collaboration between playwright, director, designer and performer, opportunities to interpret his plays are highly coveted by workers in the theater. The effect of this widespread professional admiration for Williams’ sense of theatricality has been that he has had the advantage of a consistently high level of production. This excellence in production has in turn enhanced his reputation as a popular artist.


The comic element is often the best part of plays that, as a whole, are not considered comedies. This is particularly true of American plays, and most particularly, of those of the two most prominent American playwrights of the present moment, Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee. Williams has often been admired for other, supposedly profounder elements, and when he has been condemned it has been on the grounds that the profundity was spurious. Those who do the condemning should, however, hasten to add that Williams has a fine comic sense and knows how to use it. The Father in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a comic figure in far more than the fact that he uses scandalous language. Comedy is here used for its classic purpose: to place people in their society, to define them as what Karl Marx said they are: the sum of their social relationships.

Is it not largely wit and humor that prevent both *Streetcar* and *The Glass Menagerie* from being unbearably sentimental? The confrontation of Blanche Dubois and Stanley Kowalsky [sic] is a brilliant comic idea, worked out, to be true, to a pathetic conclusion. Even so, the pathetic conclusion is, artistically speaking, the least valuable part of the story. Of the Mother in *The Glass Menagerie*, the same may be said as of the Father in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*: she constitutes a splendid social portrait. The same forthright method is used too — monologue, virtually — a torrent of characteristic words which define the character socially — by jokes. Conversely the bad plays of Williams have good passages, and these passages are all very funny.


For the next twenty years [after the success of *The Glass Menagerie*], Tennessee’s writing career would be marked by a steadily mounting series of triumphs, both in the theater and in his published works including fiction and poetry. ...
If there were difficult times for him along the way, and there were, the cause was no longer any economic stress. His health was often violently threatened, and he underwent serious bouts with various infections. But never once did this remarkably talented writer stop working for more than a brief time. Certainly, there would be dark periods in which he might give way to momentary depression, but invariably, wherever he might be, no matter what the cause of his problem, whether it be emotional involvements or whatever, the following morning would find Tennessee hard at work. No socializing, no telephone calls, nothing could intrude until he had done enough writing — or rewriting — he would never cease to find ways to improve his works — so that he could feel justified that day.


For a play to [change the world] it had to reach precisely those who accepted everything as it was; great drama is great questions or it is nothing but technique. I could not imagine a theatre worth my time that did not want to change the world, any more than a creative scientist could wish to prove the validity of everything that is already known. I knew only one other writer with the same approach, even if he surrounded his work with a far different aura. This was Tennessee Williams.


Though Williams learned much of his craft from Chekhov, his prime precursors were Hart Crane and D.H. Lawrence. Crane killed himself in 1932; Lawrence had died of tuberculosis in 1930. Williams, a young man when they died, fell in love with Crane’s poetry in 1936, and with Lawrence’s writing soon after; in 1939 he visited Frieda Lawrence in New Mexico. The influence of Crane and of Lawrence upon Williams was more than textual, indeed more than literary. It was personal, and in Crane’s instance approached total identification. As a poet, Williams was cancelled by Crane; as a writer of prose fiction, drowned out by Lawrence.

Fortunately, Williams was a lyrical dramatist, and free to find his own voice in his best plays: *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Summer and Smoke* (1948), and *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958). The plays of his remaining quarter-century represent a falling away, and while he did not outlive his genius, he seemed more and more alienated from it. Yet even in his later phase, Williams writes more memorably and eloquently than any other American dramatist. Crane’s rhetorical arc had a benign and invigorating effect upon Williams’s language. The taking of Crane’s identity into his own was so comprehensive on Williams’s part that I can think of no real parallel to it in all of literary history. Hart Crane himself, when intoxicated, would identify himself with Christopher Marlowe and with Rimbaud. Perhaps in that dangerous mode also he was Tennessee Williams’s paradigm.


Tennessee’s intention, avowed in his notebooks, his letters and essays, and manifest in his plays, stories and poems, was to bring the power of intense fragility center stage in the American theater to give it representation, to parse its essence and proclaim it as an essential component energy in the dynamics of human life. He also gave representation to the adversary of fragility, to the aggressive, steamrolling, bullying violence so familiar from life with his father, and which alone was recognizable to his country and his historical period as power and strength. He knew himself and the fugitive kind for whom he felt appointed to speak to be at odds with, even locked in battle against, implacable forces of history ascending, as he labored on *Menagerie*, to an apotheosis of savagery and barbarism. His championing of the power of intense fragility was as radical as his faith in the power of that intensely fragile thing, art. Frailty and art were, for Tennessee, intrinsic to one another. He was an aesthete, of sorts.

St. Louis, Missouri

A BRIEF HISTORY
St. Louis, Missouri, “the Gateway to the West,” stands at the junction of two great rivers, the Mississippi and the Missouri. Founded by a grant to Pierre Liguest Laclède by the French crown in 1764, he named it for the king’s patron saint, St. Louis. Although ownership of the city had changed hands, from French to Spanish, back to French and American (all superseding Native Americans), it has remained an important economic and cultural entity, the economic center of the Mississippi basin. ...

St. Louis was only a small town of about fifteen hundred when Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and their Corps of Discovery stopped on their way west in 1804 and upon their return in 1806. By 1860 it had a population of 160,000 and by early in the twentieth century the city held three-quarters of a million (in 2009 the population numbered 357,000 in the city proper). Immigrants poured into St. Louis and its surrounding areas because of economic opportunities. The city is set amid rich farmland on either side of the Mississippi River, the famous American and Missouri bottoms among them. Goods sent down the river to New Orleans were carried by very large numbers of steam boats: a young Samuel Clemens from Hannibal, just up the river, celebrated the traffic as the writer Mark Twain. St. Louis was also the point at which the smaller vessels of the upper river transshipped goods to the larger boats that went down the river. Well located, St. Louis developed industries that endured for more than a century and a half. Unfortunately, the city never fully developed its rail system, the famous Eads Bridge (1874) across the great river notwithstanding, and it lost out to Chicago as the Great Midwestern capital.

IMMIGRATION TO ST. LOUIS FROM THE 19TH CENTURY TO THE DEPRESSION
The town burgeoned into a full-blown city in the first half of the nineteenth century. The population of St. Louis increased 228 percent between 1810 and 1820. It doubled between 1835 and 1840, and again by 1845; in ten years St. Louis went from half to twice the size of Pittsburgh. Earliest arrivals were from farther east or England, followed by Irish and, soon after, Germans. They joined large numbers of transplants from other parts of the country. Some seventy percent of American-born St. Louisans in 1850 were from Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, or Virginia. On the eve of the Civil War, St. Louis led the United States in percentage of its population not born in the United States. ...

By 1850, 43 percent of all St. Louisans were born in either Ireland or Germany. Irish immigrants often brought limited skill levels, putting them into direct competition with free blacks in cities for lower level jobs. In this case, economics drove politics; Irish immigrants in cities tended to be strongly pro-slavery, out of fear that liberating African American slaves would create a glut of unskilled labor, driving wages even lower. ...

The first wave of Germans came in the mid-1830s. Only eighteen German families lived in St. Louis in 1833, but some 6,000 German souls lived here four years later. Most came looking for land to escape crowding, lured to Missouri by romanticized descriptions of the state through the Giessen Emigration Society which described it as the American Rhineland. Within two years, Saxony Germans started stepping off riverboats too. ...

A rising demand for factory workers and increased dissatisfaction at home attracted a great migration of Southeastern Europeans starting in the mid-1870s. They lived in crowded tenements, worked long hours in factories or sweatshops and clustered in large
cities such as St. Louis. Tenements on the near south side of St. Louis were filled with German and Czech immigrants who had jobs in nearby foundries, cotton factories and breweries. ...

A large influx of Italians came to St. Louis in the 1890s to work in clay mines in the Fairmount area. Factory expansion nationally increased demand for fire brick, including that made in St. Louis. Many of these Italians came to St. Louis via the Illinois coal fields, replacing German and African American clay miners.


REFERENCES TO ST. LOUIS IN THE GLASS MENAGERIE
(in order of reference)

Rubicam’s Business College
Rubicam Business School was founded in 1892 as Rubicam School of Secretarial & Accounting. Charles E. Rubicam financially supported his two sisters who ran the college. The school closed in 1963 when Charles Rubicam’s son Daniel died.

art museum
The St. Louis Art Museum has been in its current location in Forest Park since 1906. The museum currently has 34,000 objects with approximately 2,700 on view. Among the highlights Laura might have visited are Vincent van Gogh’s “Stairway at Auvers,” which the museum purchased in 1935; Missouri artist George Caleb Bingham’s “Raftsmen Playing Cards,” purchased in 1934; and “Commemorative Head” by an unidentified Edo artist, added to the collection in 1936 as the museum’s first sub-Saharan African artwork.

bird houses at the Zoo
The St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904 featured a flight cage that exhibited a number of bird species. Rather than see it dismantled at the end of the fair, the City of St. Louis purchased it from the Smithsonian (which commissioned its construction) for $3,500 (birds not included). The cage became the building block of a zoological garden established in the 1910s in Forest Park in St. Louis, now known as the St. Louis Zoo.

Jewel-box
Also in Forest Park, east of the St. Louis Zoo, the Jewel Box is a greenhouse that opened in 1936. Its art deco building is crafted from cantilevered glass panes and arches of steel beams that (when clean) are bright and glowing. In addition to permanent floral displays, it also features seasonal flowers.

Soldan
A high school in St. Louis approximately 20 blocks north of Forest Park. Tom and Rose Williams both briefly attended Soldan.

Continental Shoemakers
St. Louis was a major shoe-manufacturing city. For a long time, the International Shoe Company was the world’s largest shoe company and had its headquarters in St. Louis. Williams’ father moved the family to St. Louis in 1918 to take a management job at ISC after having been a traveling salesman for the company since 1914. Williams himself worked in the typing pool at Continental Shoemakers during the summer of 1931 when he was home from the University of Missouri after his sophomore year. After his junior year, his failure in ROTC so angered his father that he made Williams leave college and work again at ISC. He worked there from 1932 until 1935, when he had a breakdown.
Hogan gang
A St. Louis gang headed by Edward “Jelly Roll” Hogan that had a longstanding bootlegging rivalry with the Egan’s Rats gang (the largest and most ruthless of the St. Louis gangs) during the early years of Prohibition. Besides bootlegging, Hogan’s gang was connected to armed robbery and several murders. “Jelly Roll” moved on from gang life to politics: He was elected to the Missouri State Legislature in 1934 and the State Senate in 1942, and he remained in office until 1960.

Purina
An animal feed company founded in St. Louis in 1894 as the Robinson-Danforth Commission Company by George Robinson, Will Andrews and William Danforth. They figured the animal feed business could weather a bad economy. Two years later, a tornado destroyed its mill; Danforth borrowed $10,000 to build a new mill and became the company’s de facto leader. He diversified the company to include people food in 1898 after he met a miller who had a process of milling whole wheat that prevented it from become rancid. Danforth packaged and sold this wheat in St. Louis grocery stores as Ralston Purina’s Whole Wheat Cereal.

Paradise Dance Hall
There was a Paradise Dance Hall on the northeast corner of the Hodiamont tracks (north of Forest Park) in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but Williams may have based the Paradise on the Casa Loma Ballroom, which opened in the 1920s and was known at one point as the Cinderella Dance Palace. It had a 5,000-square-foot cushioned dance floor and a 35-cent admission.

Washington U
Washington University was founded in 1853 by a prominent merchant and his pastor, who were both concerned the Midwest didn’t have enough schools of higher learning. It started by providing evening classes and grew into a liberal arts college, eventually adding a law school, school of fine arts and medical school. After three years at the University of Missouri, Williams attended Washington U for his senior year, but because of unfulfilled credits in physical education and Greek, he didn’t graduate.

Dizzy Dean
Jay Hanna Dean (1910–1974), an American baseball player who was a pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals from 1930 to 1937. He was known for outrageous behavior, butchered English and incessant chatter while on the mound. He parlayed his personality into endorsement contracts, tours and more.

Alton
A small Illinois town along the Mississippi River approximately 25 miles north of St. Louis.

Centralia
A small Missouri town in the middle of the state, approximately 130 miles northwest of St. Louis.

Wabash depot
The Wabash Railroad connected many Midwestern cities, including Omaha, Kansas City, Des Moines, St. Louis, Chicago and Detroit, upward through Michigan to Frankfort and eastward to Buffalo, New York. Centralia is a stop along the route connecting St. Louis to Columbia, Missouri.
"The Play Is Memory"

Director Joseph Haj was particularly keen to investigate The Glass Menagerie as a memory play. “From the beginning, the creative team and I were interested in how memory works,” he told the staff and cast on the first day of rehearsal. “We talked about how we could creatively convey memory onstage using light, sound, blurred edges and areas of focus.”

Below are some ideas about memory that informed the production.

Every time we bring back an old memory, we run the risk of changing it. It’s more like opening a document on a computer — the old information enters a surprisingly vulnerable state when it can be edited, overwritten or even deleted. It takes a while for the memory to become strengthened anew, through a process called reconsolidation. Memories aren’t just written once, but every time we remember them.

This means, somewhat ironically, that the remembering something creates a critical window in which memories can be erased or manipulated. Many scientists have done this in rodents and humans using drugs or conflicting information. But these experiments usually manipulate single simple memories, such as a drug craving or a fearful association between a colour and an electric shock. …

It also fits with a growing body of evidence showing that, despite what people believe, eyewitness testimony is often seriously unreliable. “Say you’ve been questioned by an investigator and you recall the event,” says [researcher Jason] Chan. “In the next 15–20 minutes, you could run into another eyewitness or overhear investigators talking to each other. Some inaccurate information could update your memory.”
More positively, the study could have implications for treating conditions that involve unwanted memories, such as phobias or post-traumatic stress disorder. As Chan and [his colleague Jessica] LaPaglia say, “Humans are notoriously inept at suppressing unwanted thoughts.” If we try not to think about something, we usually end up thinking about it all the more. Instead, it may be more productive to actively remember what’s troubling us and reinterpret that in a new light, relying on reconsolidation to remake the old memories in a less disquieting way. Acceptance and commitment therapies for PTSD work along similar lines, but it’s often assumed that they help people to put the past behind them or to disconnect their experiences from negative feelings. But Chan and LaPaglia suggest that such techniques might actually be exploiting the reconsolidation effect to actually rewrite the past, rather than just severing our connections from it.


Time-travelling through our memories, we may find that some events stick out more than others. If we think about the characteristics that these memories have in common, we may notice that the most vivid are the most emotional, most important, most beautiful or most unexpected events of our lives. We may also notice that our memories cluster. And they often seem to cluster around particular periods in our lives.

This is a phenomenon called the reminiscence bump, and may help explain “the good old days” and the “when I was your age” comments. The reminiscence bump means that we do not remember all ages in our life equally. In 2005, a study involving 2,000 participants ... wanted to answer the question, “What remains in a lifetime of memories?”

Apparently what remains most are memories from between the ages of 10 and 30. The findings of the study supported what others had shown before them — that before the age of 5 most people report almost no memories. Then, between 5 and 10, the number of memories begins to increase, hitting a peak for both genders in the late teens. This period of increased reported memories stays quite high until the early twenties, when it begins to drop and then stabilize for the remaining decades. So we seem to retain the most memories of our teens and twenties. ...

One explanation for the reminiscence bump may be that it is related to our emergence of a real sense of self, which seems to be a largely universal phenomenon. ...

These are the memories that defined us. They are the memories that made us who we are. And whether or not they have been tainted by perceptual and memory biases, they are the memories we seem to cherish and remember most vividly.

People, Places and Things in the Play

PEOPLE

Chamberlain
Neville Chamberlain (1869–1940), prime minister of the U.K., met with Hitler at the Berghof in 1938 as part of the “appeasement” negotiations that led to the Munich Agreement and would hand over the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia, to Germany.

Episcopalians
Members of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, an independent church that succeeded the Church of England (aka Anglican Church) after U.S. colonies gained independence from England. ECUSA remains part of the Anglican Communion, a collection of religions derived from the Church of England that recognize the archbishop of Canterbury as the head.

Gable

Garbo
Greta Garbo (1905–1990), a Swedish American film actress. Her films in the 1930s included *Anna Karenina*, *Camille*, *Conquest* and *Ninotchka*. She retired from film in 1941.

Mr. Lawrence
D.H. Lawrence (1885–1930), an English author and influence on Williams. The likely “horrible novel” in Amanda’s opinion is *Sons and Lovers*, published in 1913, which is regarded as a semiautobiographical examination of a young man trying to detach himself from his mother. Edwina Williams was known to conduct book purges. Williams wrote to his agent, Audrey Wood, in 1939 as he was working on *Battle of Angels*: “If Mother doesn’t launch one of her literary purges during my infrequent absences from the attic I should be able to complete a presentable script in a few more weeks.”

Milton
John Milton (1608–1674), an English poet and historian, best known for his epic poem *Paradise Lost*. He had become completely blind by 1651, most likely from glaucoma.
PLACES

Berchtesgaden
A town in Bavaria in southeastern Germany. Near Berchtesgaden was Adolf Hitler’s residence, the Berghof, which he bought in 1933 and expanded in 1935–1936.

Blue Mountain
A town in Tippah County in northeastern Mississippi, approximately 340 miles from St. Louis, Missouri.

Greene County
A county in southeastern Mississippi along the Alabama border.

Guernica
A city in northern Spain near Bilbao that was heavily bombed by German planes in April 1937 during the Spanish Civil War.

Jackson
The capital city of Mississippi, located in Hinds and Madison counties in the southeastern part of the state.

Mississippi Delta
The Mississippi Delta is usually defined as the land north of Natchez, Mississippi, between the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers. It was formed by periodic flooding over thousands of years, creating a flat, incredibly fertile plain.

Moon Lake
A crescent-shaped lake in Mississippi north of Clarksdale, not far from the Mississippi River and Arkansas border. It’s an “oxbow lake,” fairly common in the area, which was created when the Mississippi River changed course. Moon Lake and/or Moon Lake Casino appear in several of Williams’ plays, including Summer and Smoke, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and A Streetcar Named Desire.

Sunset Hill
A Greek revival mansion in Aberdeen, Mississippi, built in 1847. It is also known as the Reuben Davis House, named after a prominent attorney who lived there.

THINGS

bower
A reference to the card game Euchre. The two highest cards are the right bower (the jack of the trump suit) and left bower (the other jack of the same color), so if diamonds are trumps, jack of diamonds is the right bower and jack of hearts is the left bower.

Celotex interior
The Celotex Corporation of America made construction materials. One of its subsidiary companies mined asbestos fiber, which could be woven into a fabric that was resistant to fire, heat and electricity and therefore prized and useful in manufacturing construction materials.

Century of Progress
A world’s fair hosted by Chicago during the summers of 1933 and 1934 and visited by almost 40 million people. Originally intended to run May - November 1933, President Roosevelt encouraged the exposition to run a second summer because it was so successful in promoting durable goods (and encouraging spending on said goods), which complemented the federal government’s own plans to stimulate the economy. The exposition’s theme was science and industrial development, in part to rebuild trust in science after the horror of chemical weapons used during World War I. The fair’s unofficial motto came from the Hall of Science: “Science Finds, Industry Applies, Man Conforms."

cotillion
A formal ball in which young women, usually ages 16 to 18, appear in society or before the public for the first time. Originally a young woman made her debut to indicate she was of marriageable age.

DAR
Daughters of the American Revolution, a women’s service organization founded in Washington, D.C., in 1890. Membership eligibility extends to any woman age 18 or older who can prove a direct line of descent from a patriot of the American Revolution.

dissolving economy
The Great Depression affected economies worldwide beginning in 1929. President Roosevelt’s New Deal programs that began in 1933 helped alleviate some unemployment and instituted banking and labor reforms. Yet by 1940, 15% of the U.S. was still unemployed.
fluorescent tubes
A type of lighting in which illumination is created via argon and mercury vapor enclosed in a glass tube with electrodes at either end.

jonquils
A species of daffodils (scientific name Narcissus) often characterized by clusters of several flowers, a strong scent and tube-like foliage. They are a spring-blooming perennial flower grown from a bulb.

labor disturbances
Among the labor activity and strikes in the late 1930s was the strike against General Motors by the year-old United Automobile Workers union in late 1936 that carried into 1937. It ultimately affected 69 GM plants. This was a sit-down strike in many of those plants, which was a new and very effective weapon on labor’s part. In the Cleveland plant, 700 sit-down strikers kept the whole plant from operating, affecting 7,000 employees. In Chicago, a strike against Republic Steel resulted in four killed and 83 injured when 1,000 CIO strikers fought with police. This was two days after an almost identical action resulted in 26 injured.

milk-fund
Charities that fundraise to provide clean milk to families and public schools had been around since 1889. St. Louis had a Pure Milk Fund by 1910.

Mazda lamp
A brand of electric light bulb manufactured by General Electric. (Ahura Mazda is the god of light in Persian mythology.)

Merchant Marine
A nation’s commercial ships. The ships may be publicly or privately owned and transport material, people and goods (as opposed to provide military support) via cargo ships, passenger ships or tankers.

pleurosis
Inflammation of the pleura — the membranes that surround the lungs and line the chest cavity. Also known as pleurisy, the condition usually results from an underlying respiratory infection or injury. Pleurisy’s primary symptom is sharp pain, especially during breathing. Treatment involves addressing the underlying condition and managing pain.

radio engineering
A field in which specialized electrical engineers work with and maintain equipment that emits and receives radio waves, often in broadcasting systems. An understanding of electrodynamics is part of a radio engineer’s training.

service car
Large cars for hire, like taxis, that followed specific routes on a specific schedule, like streetcars. According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 500 service cars were in operation before World War II and charged a nickel. They were disliked by both cabbies and streetcar drivers because they siphoned off their customers, clogged streets and weren’t regulated.

Shredded Wheat Biscuit
One of the first ready-to-eat cereals, invented in 1892 by Henry D. Perky.

Spanish Revolution
The Spanish revolution and subsequent civil war (1936–1939) resulted from a divided Spain and the rise of fascism in Europe. The Popular Front, a coalition of left-leaning, pro-democracy parties united against fascism, narrowly won the election in February 1936. But it quickly met with street protests, strikes and other turmoil. The military took action on July 17, 1936, with a rebellion that spread to many areas of Spain. It was intended to be a short coup with hopes of getting Spain under control quickly, but Spaniards in favor of a republic fought back. Soon the country was engulfed by civil war. In July, the Nationalists set up their own government, and in September, they chose Francisco Franco as their military and political leader. Franco based his government on fascist principles. In March 1939, Franco took Madrid, which prompted the surrender of Republican forces elsewhere. Franco declared the war over on April 1, 1939.

The Pirates of Penzance
An 1879 comic operetta by Gilbert and Sullivan.
For Further Reading and Understanding

**EDITIONS OF THE PLAY**


**BOOKS**


**FILMS**


