

AUTHOR'S LIFE AND BACKGROUND

More than with most authors, Tennessee Williams' personal life and experiences have been the direct subject matter for his dramas. He uses his experiences so as to universalize them through the means of the stage. Thus, his life is utilized over and over again in the creation of his dramas.

Tennessee Williams was born Thomas Lanier Williams in Columbus, Mississippi. Because his father was a traveling salesman and was often away from home, he lived the first ten years of his life in his maternal grandparents' home. His father was a loud, outgoing, hard drinking, boisterous man who bordered on the vulgar, at least as far as the young sensitive Tennessee Williams was concerned. In contrast to his father, his mother seemed to be rather quiet and possessive, demonstrating a tremendous attachment to her children. Tennessee was himself a rather delicate child who was plagued with several serious childhood diseases which kept him from attending regular school. Instead, he read profusely in his grandfather's library.

His maternal grandfather was an Episcopal rector, apparently a rather liberal and progressive individual. Even though there are several portraits of the clergy in Williams' later works, none seemed to be built on the personality of his real grandfather.

Perhaps because his early life was spent in an atmosphere of genteel culture, the greatest shock to Williams was the move his family made when he was about twelve. The father accepted a position in a shoe factory in St. Louis and moved the family from the expansive Episcopal home in the South to an ugly tenement building in St. Louis. Their cramped apartment and the ugliness of the city life seemed to make a lasting impression on the boy. Here in school he was often ridiculed for his southern accent, and he was never able to find acceptance. Likewise, his father who had been a traveling salesman, was suddenly at home most of the time.

It was here in St. Louis that Williams' slightly older sister, Rose, began to cease to develop as a person and failed to cross over

drunk *his* liquor, eaten *his* food, used *his* house, but still has belittled him and has opposed him. She has never conceded to him his right to be the "king" in his own house. Thus, he must sit idly by and see his marriage and home destroyed, and himself belittled, or else he must strike back. His attack is slow and calculated. He begins to compile information about Blanche's past life. He must present her past life to his wife so that she can determine who is the superior person. When he has his information accumulated, he is convinced that however common he is, his life and his past is far superior to Blanche's. Now that he feels his superiority again, he begins to act. He feels that having proved how degenerate Blanche actually is, he is now justified in punishing her directly for all the indirect insults he has had to suffer from her. Thus he buys her the bus ticket back to Laurel and reveals her past to Mitch.

Consequently, when we approach the rape scene, we must understand that Blanche has made Stanley endure quite a bit. She has never been sympathetic toward him. She has ridiculed him. Earlier she had even flirted with him but she has never been his. Thus, when Stanley finds out that she has slept so indiscriminately with so many people, he cannot understand why she should object to one more. Thus, he rapes her partly out of revenge, partly because one more man shouldn't make any difference, and finally, so that she will be his in the only way he fully understands.

Stanley, then, is the hard brutal man who does not understand the refinements of life. He is controlled by natural instincts untouched by the advances of civilization. Thus, when something threatens him, he must strike back in order to preserve his own threatened existence. If someone gets destroyed, that is the price that must be paid. It is the survival of the fittest, and Stanley is the strongest.

STELLA KOWALSKI

The glaring contrast and fierce struggle between the two worlds of Stanley Kowalski and Blanche DuBois are the main themes of Williams' play. These two worlds are so diametrically opposed

In the end Gatsby is destroyed by his illusions just as surely as the American landscape has been converted into a ghastly "valley of ashes."

DAISY BUCHANAN

Daisy is a portrait of the American woman of her class, and in some ways she is not unlike Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda. In fact her remark that she had hoped her daughter would be "a beautiful little fool" is almost precisely what Zelda said after giving birth to her own daughter, Scottie, and the parallels between the Daisy-Gatsby courtship and Fitzgerald's own have already been noted in the Introduction.

Like all of Fitzgerald's women, Daisy is beautiful, enchanting, and hollow; the emptiness of her character behind a facade of charm betrays Gatsby's dream and leads indirectly to his death. From the beginning it is clear that despite her outward contrast with her husband's hulking brutality, she and Tom are really partners in a "secret society" of established wealth, and that she could never leave Tom for Gatsby.

This is not to say she doesn't love Gatsby, or at least the grandiose gesture he has directed toward her. Both at the time of her marriage and her affair she is drawn toward him, but in both cases her lack of inner resources permits Tom to effectively overcome any attachment she has to her lover. Like Zelda's brief affair with the French aviator, Daisy's involvement with Gatsby ends abruptly when her husband steps in.

Her seeming emotion is only the illusion of love, just as her voice gives only the illusion of sincerity; behind it is a complacent smirk. Because of her wholly illusory quality she fits in perfectly as the incarnation of Gatsby's dream, which is built on the illusory premise that money alone can fulfill an ideal. This means to attaining the dream corrupt the goal, and in her actual emptiness Daisy represents the corrupted goal itself, entirely meretricious behind the beauty of its promise.

CHARACTER ANALYSES

AMANDA WINGFIELD

Amanda Wingfield lives in a world that fluctuates between illusion and reality. When it is convenient to her, she simply closes her eyes to the brutal realistic world. She uses various escape mechanisms in order to endure her present position in life. When life in this tenement world becomes unbearable, she recalls the days of her youth when she lived at Blue Mountain and had seventeen gentlemen callers in one Sunday afternoon. Indeed, this story has been told so often that it is no longer an illusion and instead has become a reality. She likewise indulges in playful games so as to escape the drudgery of everyday living. She tells Laura, "You be the lady this time and I'll be the darky." She refuses to acknowledge that Laura is crippled and instead refers to her as having only a slight physical defect. She refuses to accept the fact that Tom is quite different from her and that he, like his father, will someday leave in search of adventures. And finally, Amanda lives perpetually in the world of the gentlemen callers who will appear any day to sweep Laura off her feet.

But she is unable to live forever in this world of illusion. The pressures of everyday living force her to face many unpleasant facts. Chief among these is the position of Laura. As she tells Laura: "I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position." Even if she fails to acknowledge Laura's defects, she is realist enough to understand Laura's difficult position. Furthermore, she has seen the letter that Tom received from the Merchant Marine and knows that he will soon be leaving. Facing these brutal facts, she makes Tom arrange to have the gentleman caller arrive.

But Amanda is full of other paradoxes. She wants only the best for her children, but then she fails to understand that what they most want is quite different from what she wants for them. She does gear her whole life toward their happiness because she doesn't want them to make the same mistakes that she made and yet in devoting herself to them, she has made herself overbearing and nagging.