

## Short Research Article

# A Probe into the Fate of Women in the Evolution of Society—A Brief Analysis of Amanda in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*

Zhang Tiehu<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Foreign Languages, Xi'an Aeronautical University, Shaanxi Province, China

Received: August 16, 2020

Accepted: August 20, 2020

Online Published: August 25, 2020

doi:10.22158/selt.v8n3p153

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/selt.v8n3p153>

### Abstract

*Tennessee Williams is the most famous southern American playwright in twentieth century (Adler, 1994). He is known for his strong southern cultural background, especially southern women educated in a traditional gentlewoman style. The southern women of Tennessee believed that their traditional culture was the essence of human civilization and therefore of considerable value. However, such values could not be recognized in the modern industrial society. Most of these women were sensitive and tender, suffering from industrialized society, full of all sorts of evils, and they had turned to traditional culture to seek mental peace and shelter for the moment, so they again became a lonely and frustrated. While they refused to change their cultural identity, they had to live in a modern, industrialized society that did not belong to them. Therefore, they were regarded as people living in the cultural gap, and eventually became the victims of the confrontation between traditional southern culture and modern industrial culture. As one of the most contradictory and dramatic characters in the play, Amanda is also one of the unique images of women in American drama. As Tennessee said when introducing the characters in the play, "the portrayal of Amanda is by no means derived from a specific archetype".*

### Keywords

*Tennessee, southern women, Amanda*

### 1. Amanda in the Author's Eyes

Amanda Wingfield, the image of a mother, small but strong-willed, is confused always but infinitely dependent on the past. The character is carefully drawn, not evolved from a particular archetype. She is not paranoid, but her life is full of paranoia. Amanda has a lot to admire, a lot to love, a lot to

sympathize with, at the same time a lot to be helpless. She was very patient in a way there was something heroic about her. Though her stupidity had given her an unwise cruelty, sometimes there was something tender and loving in her. Tennessee's overview of Amanda reveals her complex personality. First of all, Amanda is defined as a mother, but more importantly, Amanda's mother image must be carefully portrayed. So, what is it about life that makes Amanda so unique?

## **2. Amanda: The Lost Southern Lady**

"On a Sunday afternoon in our hometown, blue mountains, on that day, 17 young men came to our home on the same day to make love to your mother, me". This remark is often taken as the opening part of Amanda's memorable happy story of being a southern lady. She never forgot her girlhood, a time of flowers and balls, a time when seventeen young men came to her house on the same day. The memory of this romantic time was in her blood, a part of herself.

Amanda, as the daughter of a southern planter who lived in the 1940s, had enjoyed the leisure and wealth of life, filled with romantic and hedonistic life concepts, and at the same time, she had been subjected to strict moral codes in her heart. Therefore, in her opinion, a woman must behave gracefully, speak properly, and have the demeanor of a great master. One of her duties was to make men pleasing to the eye, and to make her highly dependent on them. Although this era has gone forever, but Amanda refused to accept the fact, and even less willing to adapt themselves to the new life. She seemed to have forgotten her present straitened and embarrassed situation, yet she remained ladylike. She liked to talk in a formal way, and she despised Lawrence's works as vulgar and obscene.

## **3. The Influence of Good Old Memories**

Amanda deliberately denying the reality and escaping reality, she lived in a completely beautified illusion. To this end, her thoughts always wander in the past, present and future. Amanda's vision of the past is frozen in the romantic girlhood of flowers and balls. This kind of memory not only brings her pleasure, but also makes her more tolerant to the reality. "My two children -- they are extraordinary! Don't you think I knew that? I'm very proud of it!". She used memories and fantasies to fill the void in real life, the gap between the ideal and the reality, and the past and the reality. She tries to find the light and romance of the past in reality by pressing her children with her garbled words and unrealistic thoughts. However, she was unable to change or improve the reality. Her rambling, unrealistic and scolding eventually made her son run away from home, and her daughter shrink into a narrower unreal space, full of confusion and fear for the future. Therefore, living between the past and the reality, Amanda is suffering from the loss and confusion of no body, suffering from the misfortune and helplessness given to her by life, and becoming the victim of the past and the reality. As a middle-aged woman abandoned by her husband, Amanda is filled with a sense of crisis in her life, but she is not willing to admit defeat in the face of such crisis.

Under the pressure of life, Amanda got rid of the survival dilemma faced by people in the modern

society through the pursuit of the past life and the expectation of the future life, so as to achieve spiritual transcendence and endurance of the real life. In this sense, whether it is to recall the past or to look forward to the future, it is of positive significance for Amanda, and in essence, it is the affirmation of her own existence value.

#### **4. The Real Amanda**

Although hopelessly romantic, Amanda is also practical. In Amanda's view, despite the overwhelming frustration of real life, the future is full of hope if you seize the present moment. To this end, she often asked her children to be radiant, asked them to seize the time, said to them; "If you don't arrange your time carefully, the future will soon become the present". Although she often indulged in the memory of the past, she never forgot the harsh reality. She tried to earn a living by selling women magazines. On the other hand, she tried to fulfill her responsibilities as a mother, which put her in a state of independence rather than attachment to men. Although her husband had left home long ago, she still endured hardships to bring up the children. She wanted Tom to be the pillar of the family out of consideration for the reality of the family, rather than to find a man to rely on psychologically. What she is asking is for "everyone to pull together at this difficult time". She rebuked Tom for not having "the right to mess up his work" and thus "to harm everyone's interests". More importantly, she wanted to make him deeply aware of the sense of family responsibility, which is a social morality necessary for every normal person. She asked Tom to try to introduce a boyfriend for his sister Laura, not to prevent Tom from following in his father's footsteps after running away from home can have a man to support the family, but for the daughter can have a happy home, as a mother to the special character of the daughter should do the responsibility. In the midst of all her responsibilities, Amanda needed a space to let go.

#### **5. Amanda is Full of Contradictions**

Obviously, Amanda is full of contradictions, she is so contradictory that she is so eager to find any possible simple expression. Sometimes Amanda is hasty and frivolous, while at other times she is extremely capable of making decisions. The optimistic Amanda is attractive. She had both culture and talent, but she made that advantage go to waste. Amanda is complicated in this sense because she is separated from the southern culture but cannot accept the current culture.

Amanda is full of contradictions. She just wants her kids to be okay, but at the same time she can't figure out what they want, and she's worked her whole life to make them happy, because she doesn't want them to have the same kind of problems that she's had with her kids, and they think Amanda's unbearable and critical.

Amanda is a strong woman but she is also a victim of changing circumstances around her. Her fault was simply that she had married the wrong person, even though facing the truth might ruin her fond memories of the high society in the south. It was not her fault that her husband abandoned her because

“she could have married someone she didn’t really love”.

In short, Amanda drifted between fantasy and reality. This dissociation was the only thing she could do to combat the boredom and emptiness in her life. By turns fierce and combative, wise and gentle, brave and fearless, Amanda is arguably the most memorable character Tennessee Williams ever created.

## 6. The One and Only Amanda

Amanda is unique. She doesn’t belong today because she’s a person who lives in the good old days. To really fully understand Amanda’s character, we must always bear in mind that there are contradictions and conflicts in her. A careful reader will not find Amanda to be an ambivalent character: she is shrewd but muddle-headed at the same time. She is not paranoid but her life is full of paranoia. She has so many qualities to admire and love, but at the same time she has so many places to sigh and laugh at. On the one hand, she is strong-willed, brave and selfless; On the other hand, she is not lacking in stupidity. Although she sometimes has a kind of irrational cruelty, but we can find in her gentle and loving side.

Amanda’s memory of the south brought her pride and sadness, as well as her tolerance for the real world. The nostalgia did not blind her to reality. Despite her hopes for her daughter, who is still alone after her son leaves, Amanda is not crushed, but shows “a solemn and stirring beauty and human dignity” in soothing her. Wandering between reality and fantasy, Amanda actually has a clear understanding of herself, just as she knows Laura’s feet but doesn’t want to admit it. It’s not that she doesn’t know what life is really like, but her avoidance can give her breathing room in the survival dilemma. On the other hand, she can avoid the ugly and keep the good so that life is full of hope.

Outstanding drama can withstand the test of time and space. Amanda relies on the memories of the glory years of her teenage years to support herself, “spiritual victory” to maintain “her spiritual castle surrounded by embarrassed reality”. Tennessee Williams’ creation of this rich and memorable character will be engraved in the long history of human culture.

## References

- Adler, T. P. (1994). *American Drama, 1949-1960: A Critical History*. New York. Maxwell Macmillan International.
- Irigaray, Luce. (1985). *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Catherine Porter, & Carolyn Burke. Itacha, Trans.). Cornell UP.
- Jide Guo. (1994). *A History of American Drama*. Zheng Zhou. Henan People’s Publishing House.