

II. A GLANCE AT THE BACKGROUND

Tennessee Williams, born on the twenty-sixth of March, 1914 in Columbus, Mississippi was a contemporary American playwright. His christian name was Thomas Lanier Williams.

In his childhood Williams was plagued with several serious illnesses which kept him from attending regular school and this gave him extra time for books. He stayed at his maternal grandparents' house until he reached the age of ten. His maternal grandfather was an Episcopal rector in Columbus, so Williams' s early life was spent in an atmosphere of genteel culture. In 1926, his family moved to St. Louis when Williams was about twelve years of age. The movement from the expensive Episcopal home in the south to an ugly tenement building in St. Louis gave him a great shock. Likewise, his father who had been a traveling salesman for a shoe company was suddenly at home most of the time. His father, Cormelius Coffin Williams, was a practical, aggressive person while his mother, Edwina, was rather quiet and possessive.

In 1930 Williams' first published story was "Weird Tales". Then in 1931 until 1934 he entered the University of Missouri for three years. He got a small prize for writing prose and poetry. Williams worked in the shoe factory for two years and later on he classified it as his most miserable time of life. He wrote poetry, plays and short stories at night while he spent dreary times in the morning. No wonder after those hard works he got a nervous breakdown and went to Memphis.

Williams disliked the warehouse very much and this was reflected directly in the character of Tom Wingfield in "The Glass Menagerie". In fact, he gave this character his own first name, Tom. He wrote this play which was actually the reflection of his own wife from 1945 to 1946. Rose, Williams' elder sister was shy, quiet, and lovely. She failed to cross the barrier from childhood to adulthood and she began to live in her own world of glass ornaments. She was not able to cope with the modern world.

Williams was successful in his play "The Glass Menagerie" written in 1944. Since then, he has won the New York Critics Circle Award and The Pulitzer Prize for "A Streetcar Named Desire" in 1947. He wrote "The Fugitive Kind" in 1957 ("Orpheus Descending" was its original title), and "Period of Adjustment" in 1960. Williams' other plays include "Cat on A Hot Tin Roof", "Sweet Bird of Youth", "The Rose Tattoo", and "Suddenly Last Summer".

Tennessee Williams loves people who are underdogs and he expresses his feelings in his plays. He wants to show that the world is actually like that and that a

broken family is a bad thing. " Today Tennessee is
anxious to complete his life ' s work in the
shortest possible time ". 3

3. Francis Donahue , op cit. , p. 236.