

Biographical Information of Tennessee Williams

Many of Tennessee Williams' characters are individuals psychologically trapped in the myths, self-delusions, and pretensions of the "gentility" of the agrarian, "Cavalier" past. Some are of the Southern "wench" variety, passionate in behavior, sex-driven, in conflict with Puritan/Victorian mores. Some of his male characters are lusty, self-serving, "rednecks"; others are "poet realists" who try to find their way in the shifting economic profile, changed values, and altered morality of a new South. Yet others are dull, unimaginative types, representative of Williams' view of those who have bought into the "herd mentality" of the American "shoe-factory" world.

Williams' primary genius, however, is in his ability to develop compelling characters that transcend the Southern environment in which they are implanted. The obsessed mother, Amanda, and her overly-shy daughter Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*, the fragile, "displaced" Blanche of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the raw sexual energy of Stan in *Streetcar* and of Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the vulnerability of Tom in *The Glass Menagerie* and Mitch in *Streetcar* grow out of the embedded tensions of the post- Civil War South, but their problems and conflicts resonate deep chords of all human experience.

Williams' dramatic power comes not only from the content of his plays, but also from his non-linear structural patterns and the devices of technical support he integrates into his scripts. His use of symbols such as the animal figures in *The Glass Menagerie*, his use of music, lighting, and set design to move his narrator in and out of memory, his "destination" names for trolleys and the end- of- the- line location in *Streetcar*, and certainly the vibrant images in his play titles reinforce, through nuance and insinuation, his characterizations and basic themes and add a haunting third dimension to his plays.