Glass Menagerie: Contrasts Between Fantasy And Reality

Tennessee Williams explores the fantasy and reality in the play through dramatising memory of the characters. Each character in the play struggles to retreat from their illusions as it is a place for comfort when reality is daunting. This pushes the family away from one another. Williams shows that Tom tries to escape reality with literature and going to the movies although his family often try to bring him back home. Laura's fantasy is mirrored with her Glass Menagerie as both are vulnerable to shattering if they are not looked after with extra care. However Amanda escapes from bringing elements from the past into the present therefore Tennessee shows throughout the play that Amanda lives through her imagination rather than accepting reality.

In the play Tennessee Williams explores the way that Tom tries to escape from reality by using him as a narrator. 'To begin with, I turn back time'.In the play Tom is the narrator so the story is about his point of view on life. Tom's imagination plays a big part in his life as he has a tedious and demanding life so illusions and imagination is his way of escaping. One way that Tennesse Williams expresses how Tom escapes from reality is by going to the movies. In the play Tom says 'I'm going to the movies' where the cinema symbolically represents the fantasies and stories that occur there as 'There was a Garbo picture and a Mickey Mouse' The majority of the films in the movies are unreal .'Malvolio the magician' is one of the many shows Tom has watched.' Malvolio' is a Shakespearean name which links to Tom escaping from reality through poetry as later on Jim calls Tom 'Shakespeare'.However a magician is seen as someone who can make the impossible occur which Williams tries to show through Tom but he is unsuccessful and leaves the family, like his father, in order to follow his dreams. Tom says in the play 'but the wonderfullest trick of all was the coffin trick', This symbolises Tom's life as he wants to have a more adventurous job although he can not leave his home without causing chaos for Laura and his mother by leaving them aloneTom continues to pursue through his imagination after many times of saying he 'likes adventure'.At the end of the play Tennessee ends the play with Tom narrating which brings it back to reality although it contracts with fantasy as Tom is explaining how he did not return back home. 'I didn't go to the moon, I went much further'. This shows that Tom follows his father's footsteps and they allow illusions to make them drift away from people who care for them and love them in order to keep themselves happy.

Tennessee Williams often associates the glass menagerie with Laura which she uses as an escape from reality. There are different ways which Laura draws back from reality in order to feel in charge which contrasts with reality as she feels as if she is limited to what she is able to achieve due to feeling embarrassed: the glass menagerie, her thoughts and the freedom of walking through the park. The stage direction in the play says 'He pulls from his back pocket a shimmering ranbow-coloured scarf'. The 'rainbow-coloured scarf' is linked to Laura as it is similar to the rainbow coloured light refracted through her glass menagerie. In reality Laura is fragile, like her glass menageries, physically and mentally. Laura is 'crippled' as she has an illness called pleurosis which left one of her legs deformed therefore Laura became shy as it 'clumped so loud.' Mentally this caused her anxiety as she felt like people were judging her for the illness she had as in the play Laura says 'To me it sounded like thunder'.Laura's mother, Amanda, wants to find a companion for her daughter but due to her social anxiety Laura refuses 'Oh, Mother, please answer the door, don't make me do it'. Laura was psychologically

paralyzed by humiliation and feeling humble. As a result, Laura felt like she was able to be in comfort and be happy with her glass menageries. Fantasy allows Laura to be comfortable around Jim O'connor as she knows he is the one person who undertsants her feelings. Jim makes Laura forget about her physical state with her leg as they dance together, ‘Just let yourself go’ which is a big step for Laura since she has been avoiding interacting with people as much as possible. The moment they ‘suddenly bump into the table’ is when reality checks in for Laura. As one of her Glass Menageries broke it made her realise that it was all too good to be true. Although in particular the fact that the unicorns horn broke and Laura was not too upset about it could be a sign that she is accepting reality and that her condition with her leg should not stop her from succeeding to her goals.

As for Amanda, Tennessee Williams contrasts fantasy and reality by showing that she lives in her past. Amanda talks about her past ‘they knew how to entertain their gentlemen callers’ as it is her way of escaping from reality and trying not to acknowledge that her life is not as good as it was when she was younger so Amanda tries to relive her younger years. The illusion starts to become more of a reality to Amanda when Tom brings home ‘A gentleman caller!’ for Laura. In the past Amanda was influenced by gentlemen callers that if you had a ‘pretty face’ and a ‘graceful figure’ it was one of the aspects you needed to fall in love with them. Amanda still lives in a world of illusions so she does not see the dangers gentlemen callers could bring. When the gentleman caller that Tom brought, Jim O’Connor, announced that he is ’engaged to be married’ it immediately brings Amanda back to reality and that she no longer has gentleman callers waiting for her love. Amanda’s fantasy of Laura getting married is shattered by Jim O’Connor. As she is driven by imagination Williams show the audience that without her illusion to fall back on Amanda has to face reality.

Tennesee Williams uses different methods to show the contrasts between fantasy and reality through the characters in the play. As Tom being the narrator it shows that the story can be interpreted in different ways due to the memory of people and how they express their thoughts.