

THE GLASS MENAGERIE

Writtle Cards

at Writtle Village Hall

03.02.12

Reviewed by Michael Gray

For their hundredth production, Writtle chose Tennessee Williams' moody memory play, first staged in 1944.

A tough call, recreating the steamy world of St Louis just a stone's throw from Writtle's frozen duckpond, but Writtle Cards' production [directed by Laura Bennett and produced by Nick Caton] worked hard to establish atmosphere, with Tom's opening monologue, evocatively delivered by Caton, with the black stage [which really needed a more ambitious lighting plot] and with the soundtrack: the worn-out phonograph records on Laura's Victrola, The Swan and other animals, and cheap music from the Paradise Dance Hall across the street.

Two other devices added much to our appreciation of the piece: the "magic mirror" on the wall [though it should really have been bigger] and the key words ['legends'], revealed Brecht-style on costumes and furnishings. Not everything worked, but the production was full of real originality and inspiration.

Paulette Harris was a very convincing Amanda, the faded Southern Belle who is over-fond of her shy, disabled daughter [Megan Hill, in a touchingly simple performance]. Harris caught the martyred expression, the resignation, the tristesse, to perfection. She had the accent nailed too. Only occasional insecurity with the words prevented this from being a truly outstanding interpretation.

Ben Fraser's "scrubbed and polished" Gentleman Caller was a nice foil for Caton's tragic Tom, trapped in the stifling apartment and the dead-end warehouse, until he finally walks out, with "and so goodbye" on his valise.