

**The Glass Menagerie – Writtle Cards**  
**Performed February 3<sup>rd</sup> at Writtle Village Hall**  
**Director – Laura Bennett**

This was my debut as a reviewer of a Tennessee Williams play and in the absence of context it was hard to separate my reaction to the production from that towards the play. However, the fact that the Wingfields were stuck in a rut and that the whole memory flashback by Tom illuminated that rut so vividly was, I suppose, the point. This play seemed to be about family stereotypes and their reaction to circumstances not of their own making, the most important of which perhaps was the deliberate abandonment of the family by the father, whose photograph dominated centre stage. This left the mother, Amanda, played by Paulette Harris, rudderless, constantly harking back to earlier and better times and trying vainly to relive her early life of gentlemen callers vicariously through that of her daughter, Laura (Megan Hill). Paulette had a wonderfully fluent Southern drawl that was nevertheless easy on the ear and a larger than life bustling robustness that seemed to shrug off any and all criticisms from Tom. This was a very convincing performance and was perhaps the centre of gravity of the whole play.

Tom, moodily played by Nick Caton, alternately giving way to angry outbursts and prolonged periods of frustrated suppressed energy, manifesting itself in smoking and dreaming of escape, was the reluctant breadwinner. Trapped in a job he hated (this is clearly autobiographical) Tom found his escapism in movies, while Laura escaped within herself and her glass menagerie. Nick captured this frustration and anger very well while Megan personified the fragility of her glass animals. However, it seemed to me that the broken glass animals may have been sufficient signposts to the symbolism within the play without the addition of the written words and phrases on cushions and blankets (Brechtian devices, I am told) but this is the director's prerogative. Ben Fraser's Jim O'Connor was a very natural actor on stage and brought some normality and even optimism to the play before announcing he was already engaged. At this point I think we knew that this was the last straw and the Wingfields' last hope of a normal life. Tom left home to join the merchant navy but we never did find out what happened to Amanda and Laura. Women without choices and few chances.

The set was darkly lit which contributed to the mood of the play. The only well-lit spot was the central screen which showed Mr Wingfield or other photographs according to the script. Good use was made of the auditorium for Tom's long walks away from or towards home and the incidental music contributed to the moody ambience. Tennessee Williams may be an acquired taste but Writtle Cards made a very good fist of The Glass Menagerie.

Reviewer Stewart Adkins  
NODA East