

**Banias N. Yu.,***PhD, Associate Professor at the Department of Philology
Ferenc Rakoczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian University
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6974-0790>***Lizak K. M.,***Associate Professor at the Department of Philology
Ferenc Rakoczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian University
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7873-0535>***Tobiash V.***MA Student at the Department of Philology
Ferenc Rakoczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian University
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6505-6947>*

FROM MEMORY PLAY TO SCREEN: TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S *THE GLASS MENAGERIE* AND ITS 1950 FILM ADAPTATION

Summary. This article examines the transformation of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* from a theatrical play into its 1950 film adaptation, focusing on how narrative, stylistic, and emotional elements shift across media. As a memory play rooted in subjectivity, the original drama relies heavily on symbolic staging, lighting, and the narrator's retrospective voice. The study explores how these features are either preserved, altered, or diminished in the cinematic version.

Attention is focused on the role of Tom as both narrator and character, whose introspective commentary frames the story in the play but is partially restructured in the film. The article analyzes how the film attempts to translate theatrical conventions—such as expressionistic décor and direct audience address—into visual cinematic language, including camera movement, editing, and realism in set design.

The research also investigates character representation, especially Laura and Amanda, whose emotional depth is conveyed differently on screen. While the play emphasizes fragility and illusion through poetic dialogue and symbolic imagery, the film introduces more concrete realism, which affects audience perception. Additionally, the article discusses how censorship norms and commercial expectations of mid-20th-century cinema influenced narrative choices, including alterations to the ending.

Ultimately, the article argues that while the film adaptation broadens accessibility and visualizes the story world, it inevitably reduces some of the ambiguity and lyrical subtlety that define the original play. The transition from stage to screen thus becomes a negotiation between fidelity and reinterpretation.

Key words: adaptation, Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, theatre, memory play, characterization, symbolism.

Introduction. Tennessee Williams occupies a central position in twentieth-century American drama, renowned for his exploration of human vulnerability, social constraint, and the fragile boundary between illusion and reality. His plays frequently portray characters trapped between a romanticized past and an unbearable present.

“Indeed, this tendency to romanticize the world has been one of the key sources of the rich mythology produced by the South at various stages of its history” [1, p. 994].

Williams uses memory and psychological depth as key narrative devices. “The Old South is smashed into pieces in the Civil War, however, it has been in the memory of southerners... This cherishing of the ideal dream world of the past is one of the reasons why the southerners have been so reluctant to face the realities of the modern world” [1, p. 994]. Among these works, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) stands as one of Williams's most influential achievements, marking his first major critical success and earning him the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. “Tennessee Williams is one of the very few literary stalwarts who struck a chord with the post-World War generation and explored the “mindscape” and the “intra-psyche milieu, exposing the attachment anxieties, familial discordance, delusions, and disillusionment of fragmented individuals through his works” [2, p. 232].

Subtitled a “memory play,” *The Glass Menagerie* is structured around the subjective recollections of Tom Wingfield, whose narration reshapes events through emotional distortion and nostalgia rather than objective realism. “In the twentieth Century, Tennessee Williams was acknowledged for the diversity of genres he covered in his plays, most of which focused on the dark aspects of human experience, which lent significant technicalities to his plays, most notably, *The Glass Menagerie*... He was renowned for portraying realism, a feature that characterized 19th Century theatre” [3, p. 475].

The play's reliance on symbolism, non-linear temporality, and expressionistic theatrical devices makes it particularly resistant to straightforward adaptation. Nevertheless, in 1950, the play was adapted into a feature film directed by Irving Rapper, raising important questions about the transposition of a deeply theatrical and subjective work into a cinematic medium.

Theoretical background. The theoretical framework of the article is grounded on contemporary adaptation studies, intermediality, and narrative theory. Central to the analysis is the concept of adaptation as reinterpretation rather than mere

reproduction, as proposed by Linda Hutcheon [4], who defines adaptation as both a process and a product shaped by the conventions of different media. This perspective is further supported by Robert Stam [5], who challenges fidelity-based criticism and emphasizes the intertextual nature of film adaptations.

The study also draws on the work of Gérard Genette [6], whose concepts of narrative voice and focalization are essential for understanding the transformation of Tom's role as narrator in *The Glass Menagerie*.

Together, these theoretical perspectives allow for a comprehensive analysis of the transition from stage to screen, highlighting both the constraints and creative possibilities inherent in adapting *The Glass Menagerie* into film.

Aim. The aim of the article is to analyze how Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* is transformed in its 1950 film adaptation, with a focus on identifying the key differences in narrative structure, characterization, symbolism, and artistic techniques between the theatrical and cinematic forms. By comparing the play's theatrical strategies with the film's cinematic conventions, the analysis evaluates the extent to which the adaptation preserves or reshapes the emotional and thematic core of Williams's original work.

Results and discussion.

The Glass Menagerie as a Literary Work

The defining feature of *The Glass Menagerie* is its status as a memory play, a form that emphasises subjective experience over factual accuracy. Tom Wingfield's role as both narrator and participant establishes a narrative shaped by personal regret and emotional distance, resulting in a fluid sense of time and space. "Offered as a memory, the different elements of the play, both human and nonhuman, fight back or cave in not only against the outside forces of the period but also against the forces of narrativizing itself and of absorption into Tom's memory" [7, p. 387]. Rather than presenting events as they objectively occurred, the play reconstructs them through memory, emphasising emotional truth over realism. "...memory takes a lot of poetic licence" [8, p. 9].

Within this framework, Williams explores recurring themes such as escapism, illusion versus reality, and the oppressive weight of familial obligation. Amanda Wingfield embodies a desperate attachment to an idealised Southern past, using nostalgia as a defence against present hardship. "The tension that underlies the entire play comes from the different needs of Tom, Laura, and Amanda. Tom longs to be a poet and to be free of the constraints of responsibility toward his mother and sister. Amanda wants security. The only way to have it is for Tom to keep his place as head of the family and for Laura to be taken care of in some way. Of course Laura longs to escape the realities of her predicament by hiding from the world, convinced that she has nothing special to offer" [9, p. 39]. Laura, withdrawn and physically fragile, retreats into her collection of glass animals, while Tom seeks escape through movies and fantasies of adventure, each character adopting a different strategy to endure emotional confinement. "In the *Glass Menagerie* there are three characters who try to escape from reality but they have different psychological problem in life. Living in illusion is Amanda's way to escape, playing the glass figure is the way of Laura to escape from reality, while the way of Tom to escape is going to the movies" [10, p. 42].

Symbolism plays a crucial role in reinforcing these themes. The glass menagerie itself reflects Laura's vulnerability

and emotional transparency, while the fire escape operates as both a literal architectural feature and a metaphor for the desire to flee responsibility. The absent father, present only through a photograph, functions as a constant reminder of abandonment and unfulfilled escape. These symbols are inseparable from the play's theatrical form and are reinforced through Williams's extensive stage directions.

Williams places particular emphasis on lighting, music, and projected images to externalize inner psychological states. These elements are integral to the play's structure and meaning.

As Williams himself argued, such devices are intended to "accent certain values" and convey truths that cannot be articulated through dialogue alone. "Instead of realism...the playwright insisted on Plastic Theater, which combined all elements of production-dialogue, action, setting, and lighting, even props – in a unified and symbolic expression of truth. This approach, which can be absolutely considered innovative for that time, was explained by Williams himself in his Production Notes to *The Glass Menagerie* showing its validity through the play itself" [11, p. 336].

The frequent breaking of the fourth wall through Tom's direct address further highlights the play's metatheatrical nature, constantly reminding the audience that what they are witnessing is a constructed and subjective recollection. In this sense, *The Glass Menagerie* challenges conventional realism by presenting memory as unstable, selective, and emotionally charged.

Overview of the 1950 Film Adaptation

The 1950 film adaptation of *The Glass Menagerie*, directed by Irving Rapper and starring Gertrude Lawrence, Jane Wyman, Arthur Kennedy, and Kirk Douglas, represents a significant reinterpretation of Williams's play within the conventions of classical Hollywood cinema. While the film retains the basic narrative framework and characters, it necessarily modifies the play's theatrical strategies to suit a visual and narrative medium oriented toward realism and continuity.

Unlike the stage version, which openly foregrounds its status as a memory play, the film moderates this subjectivity by adopting more naturalistic settings and linear storytelling. Tom's narration is preserved through voice-over, yet it functions primarily as a framing device rather than as an ongoing commentary on the unreliability of memory. As a result, the film presents the Wingfield family's story as more cohesive and psychologically stable than in the original play.

At the same time, cinema offers expressive tools unavailable to the theatre. Close-ups, controlled lighting, and camera movement allow the film to convey emotional nuance, particularly in Laura's scenes. However, these techniques also risk clarifying elements that Williams deliberately left ambiguous. The adaptation thus occupies a complex position between fidelity and transformation, preserving the play's emotional surface while altering its formal and symbolic foundations.

One of the most significant changes in the 1950 adaptation lies in its treatment of narrative subjectivity. Whereas the play openly embraces emotional distortion as a defining feature of memory, the film translates this subjectivity into a more restrained cinematic form.

Expressionistic devices such as projected images and symbolic lighting are largely replaced by realistic interiors and conventional cinematography, aligning the narrative with Hollywood's preference for visual coherence and narrative clarity [12]. Characterization

is similarly reshaped through cinematic conventions. Amanda Wingfield's theatrical exaggeration is tempered into a more psychologically grounded portrayal, while Laura's fragility is emphasized through visual intimacy, particularly through close-ups that foreground her emotional vulnerability. Tom's role as a reflective narrator is reduced in prominence, shifting him closer to a conventional protagonist rather than a self-conscious mediator of memory.

Both, a play and a movie are full of symbols. But, symbolism also transforms. In the play, *The Glass Menagerie* functions as an extension of Laura's inner world, heavily loaded with metaphorical meaning. In the film, the glass figures remain visually present but are more firmly integrated into the realistic setting, reducing their symbolic abstraction.

The thematic adjustments evident in the 1950 film adaptation reflect the cultural and ideological constraints of mid-twentieth-century Hollywood. Operating under the Production Code, the film necessarily moderates elements of psychological distress, sexual ambiguity, and existential unease that are central to Williams's dramatic vision. "The playwright exploits the theme of sexual repression to its extreme with the basic intention to show its inherent ambiguity and confusion. For him it is the 'deeper necessity' in order to communicate his own confused sexual identity" [13, p. 25].

As a result, certain tensions present in the play are softened or rendered implicit. Tom's ambiguous sexuality, often interpreted by critics as an important subtext in the play, is largely neutralized in the film, aligning the character with dominant norms of masculinity prevalent in the era. "...the references to life as an outlaw, in particular life as a pirate, in *The Glass Menagerie* could be interpreted as one of these guises used by Williams to capture, reflect, and articulate (or even question) an experience (of sexuality, of masculinity, of gender) that many at the time deemed deviant and therefore illegal" [14, p. 4].

Similarly, Laura's inward withdrawal is framed sentimentally rather than symbolically, emphasizing emotional sadness over psychological complexity. These shifts contribute to a narrative that privileges moral clarity and emotional accessibility, potentially diminishing the play's critique of social repression and personal entrapment.

The adaptation's emphasis on conventional narrative resolution also affects its treatment of escapism and illusion. Whereas the play presents escape as incomplete and morally fraught, the film suggests a more emotionally reconciled perspective, consistent with mainstream cinematic expectations. In doing so, the adaptation reflects broader ideological tendencies of the period, reshaping Williams's unsettling exploration of memory into a more reassuring dramatic form.

Conclusions. The 1950 film adaptation of *The Glass Menagerie* illustrates both the possibilities and limitations inherent in adapting a deeply theatrical memory play to the screen. While the film succeeds in preserving the emotional core of Williams's work and introduces it to a broader audience, it significantly reshapes the play's formal strategies and symbolic complexity. The transition from expressionistic theatre to cinematic realism results in a narrative that is more accessible yet less ambiguous, prioritising visual coherence over subjective instability.

The adaptation demonstrates how cinematic conventions, censorship constraints, and audience expectations can influence the interpretation of a literary work. By moderating the play's

elements and psychological ambiguity, the film transforms *The Glass Menagerie* into a conventional domestic drama, revealing the challenges of preserving poetic subjectivity across media. This study contributes to adaptation studies by highlighting the tension between fidelity to artistic vision and the demands of a new medium, underscoring the complex relationship between memory, representation, and form.

There are differences between a play and a movie. A play is performed live on stage, relying on dialogue, acting, and minimalistic or symbolic scenography, while a film uses camera work, editing, and realistic settings to construct meaning. In theatre, the audience shares the same physical space and time as the actors, which creates immediacy and emotional intensity. In contrast, film allows for multiple locations, close-ups, and non-linear editing.

In *The Glass Menagerie*, the play emphasizes subjectivity, with Tom directly addressing the audience and guiding interpretation. The film reduces this theatrical device, replacing it with visual storytelling. Symbolism in the play (lighting, music, projections) becomes more literal in the film. Additionally, films often modify plots to meet audience expectations, whereas plays tend to preserve the playwright's original structure.

Bibliography:

1. Yu, J., Metaphorical Disability in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2022, Vol. 12, No. 5, pp. 990-995. URL: <https://tpls.academypublication.com/index.php/tpls/article/view/3303/2747>
2. Kumar, M. R., Christopher, G., Attachment Anxiety and Covert Narcissistic Pangs as Reflected in Tennessee William's *The Glass Menagerie*. *World Journal of English Languag.* 2023. № 13 (2). P. 232-241. URL: <https://www.sciedupress.com/journal/index.php/wjel/article/viewFile/23280/14487>
3. Romero, R. E., Tennessee Williams's Misunderstood 'memory play': ReImagining Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*. *Anglia – Zeitschrift Für Englische Philologie*, 2021. № 139(3). P. 475-493. URL: <https://www.sciencegate.app/document/10.1515/ang-2021-0039>
4. Hutcheon, L. *A Theory of Adaptation*, Routledge, 2006. 126 p. URL: https://filmadapter.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/linda_hutcheon_a_theory_of_adaptationbookfi-org1.pdf
5. Stam, R., *Film theory: an introduction*, Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2000, 396 p. URL: <https://archive.org/details/filmtheoryintro0000stam>
6. Genette, G., *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1980. 142 p. URL: <https://www.vestnik-philology.mgu.od.ua/archive/v76/49.pdf>
7. Krishna, Caring for/with Modernist Playthings: Fidgeting with Objects in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. *Journal of Medical Humanities*. Volume 46, 2025 p. 387-403. URL: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10912-024-09848-y>
8. Williams T., *The Glass Menagerie*, 2018, 36 p. URL: <https://ru.scribd.com/document/378173919/the-glass-menagerie-pdf>
9. Freeman, S., *The Eccentricities of a Fading Southern Belle: Personalizing the Iconic Role of Amanda Wingfield in Tennessee Williams' "The Glass Menagerie"*, West Virginia University, 2015, 73 p. URL: <https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6665&context=etd>
10. Natalina, S., Elfrida, R., An Analysis of Escapism in Tennessee Williams' "The Glass Menagerie." *Journal of English Linguistics and Language Teaching (JELLT)*. 2023. P. 42-46. URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/1552092>
11. Subashi, E., Tennessee Williams's lyrical drama. *IBAD Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 2021, 10, 331-339. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21733/ibad.873373>

12. Yang, Y., Qin, K., Script Analysis and Directorial Concept in the Realm of Drama and Film. SHS Web of Conferences, 2024, 183, 3017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202418303017>
13. Ahmad, M., Sexuality and Death of Desire in Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire., Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review. 2017. Vol. 1, No. 2. P. 24-34. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2017\(1-ii\)1.3](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2017(1-ii)1.3)
14. Gros, E., Tom Wingfield as a Southern Outlaw, HAL Open Science, Southern Outlaws Conference. The Eleventh Biennial Conference of the International Association for Robin Hood Studies, Auburn University, Montgomery, AL, USA, Montgomery, United States. (hal-01816162), 2017, 18 p. URL: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10912-024-09848-y>

Баняс Н., Лізак К., Тобіаш В. Від п'єси-спогаду до екранізації: «Скляний звіринець» Теннессі Вільямса та його екранізація 1950 року

Анотація. У статті розглядається трансформація п'єси Теннессі Вільямса «Скляний звіринець» з театральної п'єси в її екранізацію 1950 року, зосереджуючись на тому, як наративні, стилістичні та емоційні елементи змінюються в різних медіа. Як п'єса-спогад, що корениться в суб'єктивності, оригінальна драма значною мірою спирається на символічну постановку, освітлення та ретроспективний голос оповідача. Дослідження досліджує, як ці риси зберігаються, змінюються або применшуються в кінематографічній версії.

Увага зосереджена на ролі Тома як оповідача, так і персонажа, чий інтроспективний коментарі обрамляють історію у п'єсі, але частково перетворюються у фільмі. У статті аналізується, як фільм намагається перекласти

театральні умовності, такі як експресіоністський декор та пряме звернення до глядачів, на візуальну кінематографічну мову, включаючи рух камери, монтаж та реалізм у сценографії.

У статті також досліджується репрезентація персонажів, особливо Лаури та Аманди, чия емоційна глибина по-різному передається на екрані. Хоча п'єса підкреслює крихкість та ілюзію через поетичний діалог та символічні образи, фільм вводить більш конкретний реалізм, який впливає на сприйняття глядачами.

Зрештою, у статті стверджується, що хоча екранізація розширює доступність та візуалізує світ історії, вона неминуче зменшує деяку неоднозначність та ліричну тонкість, які визначають оригінальну п'єсу. Таким чином, перехід від сцени до екрану стає процесом діалогу між точністю та переосмисленням.

У висновку зазначається, що кіноверсія, розширюючи аудиторію, частково втрачає символічну багатозначність і ліризм першоджерела. Перехід від сцени до екрана розглядається як процес компромісу між збереженням авторського задуму та новою інтерпретацією.

Ключові слова: адаптація, Теннессі Вільямс, «Скляний звіринець», театр, п'єса-спогад, характеристика персонажів, символізм.

Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 13.04.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 30.04.2026

Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 26.05.2026