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Some secrets  
are not meant  
to be kept.

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'  
SUDDENLY  
LAST SUMMER

9 FEB – 21 MAR 2015  
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Photo James Green

# TROPEES OF TENNESSEE

A TROPE IS A RECURRENT THEME OR MOTIF IN BODIES OF LITERATURE. THERE ARE MANY TROPEES THAT CAN BE FOUND THROUGHOUT TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' CANON OF WORK. BELOW IS A BRIEF OUTLINE OF TROPEES FOUND IN *SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER*, *THE GLASS MENAGERIE* AND *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*.

## AGE AND BEAUTY

The older female characters in Tennessee Williams' works struggle to accept that they are aging and that beauty is evanescent. In *Suddenly Last Summer* Mrs Venable denies having suffered a stroke and instead describes it as an aneurysm. Her belief in staying young is summarised when she says, "Both of us were young, and stayed young..." (pg.246) In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche Dubois also has a fear of aging. She refuses to reveal her age or be caught in a harsh light that would expose her faded looks. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda Wingfield is a southern belle from a bygone era. She clings fervently to the days of her youth and constantly delivers long monologues to her children about her memories of glamorous balls and gentleman callers. In Act Two, she appears wearing her debutant dress which she proudly still fits in to.

## ESCAPING REALITY

In the work of Tennessee Williams many of the characters seek to escape their realities. In *Suddenly Last Summer* Mrs Venable's vicious determination to evade the reality of her son's sexuality and her own wrongdoings leads Mrs Venable to put Catharine in an asylum and order her to be lobotomised. Tom escapes reality in *The Glass Menagerie* by going to the movies and writing poems, while his sister Laura escapes the reality of her mother's unrealistic expectations by retreating in to the world of her glass menagerie. Blanche escapes her reality in *A Streetcar Named Desire* by concocting detailed lies about her luxurious life and lovers – "I don't want realism. I want magic! Yes, yes, magic. [...] I don't tell truths. I tell what ought to be truth."

## MEMORY PLAYS

Tennessee Williams plays are semi-autobiographical and reflect events of the past. Williams' relationship with his mother was strained, and her personality is reflected in the characters of Amanda and Mrs Venable. Both Laura and Catharine are modelled on Williams' sister Rose, who underwent a lobotomy. The most notable similarity is the character of Tom in *The Glass Menagerie* who represents Tennessee Williams himself. Many comparisons can be drawn between the two, as Williams, like Tom, worked in a shoe factory and also turned to movies and writing as a form of escape.