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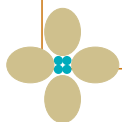
ISSN: 2087-1236

Volume 6 No. 3 Juli 2015



humaniora

Language, People, Art, and Communication Studies



humaniora	Vol. 6	No. 3	Hlm. 291-432	Jakarta Juli 2015	ISSN: 2087-1236
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HUMANIORA

Language, People, Art, and Communication Studies

Vol. 6 No. 3 Juli 2015

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Terbit & ISSN	Terbit 4 (empat) kali dalam setahun (Januari, April, Juli dan Oktober) ISSN: 2087-1236	

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SYMBOLS AND SEXUAL PERVERSION OF LAURA WINGFIELD IN TENNESSE WILLIMAS'S *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*

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ABSTRACT

The Glass Menagerie, a play written by Tennessee Williams, is full of symbols in which some of them refer to the sexual perversion in the character of the play such as Laura Wingfield. The research applied library research by taking data from the script of the play, then analysed based on the two theories, those were the theory of symbol and psychological theory called sexual perversions. The symbols in this play was analyzed, especially those related to Laura Wingfield. There were symbols like the glass collection, glass unicorn, blue roses, fire escape and Jim O'Connor which explained the sexual perversion of Laura Wingfield. These symbols were clues to understand the psychological problems suffered by Laura. It can be concluded that The cause of the strange sexual desire is because of her being abnormal because she is crippled and suffers from pleurosis.

Keywords: *symbol, sexual perversion, sexual desire, abnormal*

ABSTRAK

Glass Menagerie, sebuah drama yang ditulis oleh Tennessee William, adalah karya yang penuh simbol yang mengacu pada penyimpangan seksual yang dilakukan oleh Laura Wingfield, salah satu tokoh di dalam drama ini. Penelitian menggunakan studi pustaka dengan memilih naskah drama yang kemudian dianalisis dengan dua teori, yaitu teori simbol dan teori penyimpangan seksual. Kemudian, artikel menjelaskan simbol seperti koleksi pernak pernik dari gelas, patung unicorn dari gelas, mawar biru, tangga darurat and Jim O'Conor menjelaskan tentang penyimpangan secara seksual yang dialami Laura Wingfield. Simbol dalam drama ini merupakan petunjuk untuk mengetahui masalah psikologi yang dialami Laura. Disimpulkan, penyebab Laura mengalami penyimpangan seksual adalah karena dia pincang dan menderita penyakit paru-paru.

Kata kunci: *simbol, minat seksual, penyimpangan, abnormal*

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Lanier "Tennessee" Williams, an American dramatist of many stage classics plays, became famous of his play, *The Glass Menagerie*, in 1944. *The Glass Menagerie* itself was a reflection of his unhappy family background. The success of this work was followed by his other works such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Orpheus Descending*, and *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Although in his later works he presented his new style of drama, those works did not attract the audiences.

Williams wrote his best work based on cinema. Besides, he wrote short stories, poetry, essays and a volume of memoirs. Because of his works, he was enlisted into the American Theater Hall of Fame, in 1979, four years before he died

Williams's characters, either female or male show that their behavior is influenced by sex. The women who inhibit their sexual desires suffer from the feeling of anxiety; while the men who gratify their sexual urges can obtain sexual satisfaction. The behavior is parallel to Freud's view of sexual motives:

Like other motive systems, the sexual drives lead to varied activity, in part through its satisfaction, in part through the anxiety that rises from attempts to suppress it. (Hilgard, 1957:155)

The behavior of William's characters that are motivated by sex lead to an opinion that Williams is in a way influenced by Freud's view of sex.

Tennessee Williams conveys his view that sex is something natural and that man should not necessarily inhibit it or feel abashed to hear it. In presenting this particular theme, Williams employs literature element such as symbol.

The introduction of the play was when Tom Wingfield, the narrator and one to the characters in this play, described his family condition. The Wingfields, who were a lower-middle class were described to live in an apartment in St Louis. Beside Tom, there were Amanda, the mother, and Laura, the daughter. Their apartment was in front of the alley. Fire escape which gave access to the way to the ground was occasionally shown during the performance. Tom was a merchant sailor and as the narrator he told what happened in the play directly to the audiences. Firstly, he told about the background of the play, socially and historically. It was the effect of the Great Depression in the late 1930's which made the working class suffer economically. Mr Wingfield who was the father left the family for long time. He was never on the stage. His existence was only represented by his postcard from Mexico, and his picture hung in the living room. The family never received a message since he left home.

Tom came into the apartment when Amanda and Laura were eating. Seeing Tom, Amanda asked him to come to the dinner table, sat down and ate. She directed him to chew his food. She did it continuously. Knowing this, Laura tried to go and get something to do situation by leaving them, but her mother asked her just to sit still in order that she was still in a fresh condition in welcoming the gentleman callers. When both Laura and Tom were sitting, Amanda, who was very proud of her youth, told them what happened during the Sunday afternoon in her house in Blue Mountain. She told them how she entertained seventeen gentlemen callers, and how they idolized her. Tom was not interested in the story but Laura asked him to listen to her.

Laura replied that there were no gentleman callers coming for her because of her not being popular as her mother. Tom was producing sound showing an aggrieved complaint, but Laura explained to him that their mother was afraid of her being a spinster.

An image of blue roses was showed on the screen. Laura was taking care of her glass collection figures when she heard her mother, with a stricken face, stepping outside. Hearing her mother's step, she hid her ornaments and pretended to study the diagram of a keyboard. Amanda was upset of hearing that Laura did not attend Rubicam's business College for the first few days where she supposedly joined. Amanda got this information from the teacher. Amanda clarified this to Laura and she admitted that she did not attend the class, but spending her days by walking along the streets, going to the zoo, and sometimes watching movies.

Amanda was very worried when Laura ruined her chance to have a prospect in business career. The other alternative for her prospect, in Amanda's opinion, was to marry somebody. Related to this matter, Amanda asked Laura whether she had a boyfriend. The she explained to her mother that she had ever crushed on a boy. His name was Jim. He was the school hero who sat close to her in the chorus. When Jim asked her about her not coming to the class, she explained to him that she suffered from pleurosis, which was misheard by Jim as "Blue Roses". That was the only boy she was acquainted with. In her prediction, now he graduated, maybe engaged or married. Amanda told her to marry to a good person. Laura said to her mother that she was 'crippled' (that was because one leg was shorter than the other). Her mother insisted her not to worry about it and she asked her to develop acquaintance with somebody.

Knowing that her mother still had a hope for her future which was by getting married, Amanda sold some magazines she had already subscribed in order to get some extra money, which was going to be used to entertain the gentleman caller for Laura. On the other hand, Tom who was loaded with his job in the warehouse, tried to escape from it by drinking liquor, going to movies and reading some literary works. He did all the things which made Amanda angry and let her know them. Knowing this, Amanda was angry, and during the argument Tom accidentally broke several of the most prized glass collections of Laura.

In one occasion, Tom and Amanda discussed about the prospect of Laura. Amanda asked him to get gentleman callers for Laura from the warehouse he worked for Laura. The Tom chose Jim O'Connor, his casual friend. Then Jim was invited to his house to have dinner. Before the coming of Jim, Tom told Amanda that Jim was a man with a good prospect in business. Hearing this, Amanda was very happy, then she directly prepared the dinner and asked Laura to put on her new dress. Hearing the gentleman caller was Jim, a boy whom she had a crush with, Laura did not have courage to see him and hid herself in her room. But, unfortunately Amanda asked Laura to open the door for Jim. After opening the door, she quickly disappeared, leaving Tom and Jim alone. Tom said to Jim why he joined the merchant marine. It was because he had to pay his family electric bill to join the merchant marine. He also told Jim that he had a plan to quit his job and searched his own adventure. Laura, on the other hand, refused to eat dinner with them by giving some a reason that she was suffering an illness. Amanda, was the most perfect person during that day by wearing an extravagant dress from her glamorous youth. She was cheerfully talking with Jim during the dinner.

The lights went out when they were having dinner. This condition was the consequence because the electric bill was not paid. In order to get the light the owner of the house lighted the candles. Amanda asked Jim to accompany Laura in the livingroom, while she and Tom were cleaning up the dishes. Laura felt she could not move her body when Jim approached her. But with her charming behaviour and personality, Laura dared to speak with him. She told him that she knew him since high school. She also told him that she liked him but not have courage to approach him. While they were talking to each other, Laura reminded him about how he had called her 'Blue Roses'. Blue roses was actually misheard of pleurosis, an illness of Laura when she was in high school. Jim

criticized Laura's shyness and low self-esteem but he appreciated her uniqueness. Then she showed him her favorite animal glass collections. When they were dancing, Jim accidentally broke one of Laura's animal glass collections, the unicorn. The horn of the unicorn was broken off, but Laura forgave him for what he had done. The broken of the horn of the unicorn, made the creature become the normal horse. When Jim kissed Laura, she quickly drew her back and said sorry. She told him that he had already been engaged. When Jim left the house, Laura gave him the broken unicorn as the souvenir.

Entering the living room, Amanda's face was full of happiness. Meanwhile Jim said that he had to leave soon because he had an appointment with his fiancée. Amanda spoke nicely, and let him go warmly. After Jim left the house, Amanda became angry to Tom and said that he was a selfish dreamer and not attentive to the family matter. Then she went to cheer her daughter up.

Tom left the house, and from the fire escape outside the apartment, he watched Amanda and Laura. As the narrator he told them as if he were talking to them, saying that not long after Jim's visit, he was fired from the warehouse. Then he traveled far from the house. After a long time leaving both women, he said that he could not forget how guilty he was of Laura's memories.

Terms clarification shown in this article comprises the words symbol and sexual perversions. A symbol is, "Anything that hints at something else, usually something abstract, such as an idea or belief" (Gill, 2006:30–33). Symbol can be divided into literary, general and specific symbol. Literary symbol when an object, a person, a situation, or an action in a story which has the basic meaning but it also has the other meanings. A general symbol is universal in its meaning. Even if a general symbol were removed from a work of literature, it would still suggest a larger meaning. A specific symbol is different from universal meaning because it represents special meaning which relates to the content of the literary work created by the author.

According to Soble (2006) perversion means deviating from what is normal or desirable. Sexual perversion is sexual activity which implies deviance, psychological disorder or abnormality. Sexual perversion involves sexual desire or act which is not natural and contrary to nature.

Bennet (1933) gives more explanation about sexual perversion. There are six points that he noted. Firstly, the pervert's emotional relation with the other becomes the essential element in the condition of being pervert. Secondly, the physical aspect of the deviance becomes the second importance to the mental. Thirdly, the perversion represents unsuccessfully personal and social relationship, an attempt to make the alter to do something aggressive, implement behavior like a child, and distortion. Fourthly, perversions have many forms but has the same purpose. Sixthly, the course of the action of the pervert is to get satisfaction, in personal and social life. Lastly, the same strategy can also be found in the psychoneuroses.

METHOD

This paper is based on library research. The data are taken from the script of *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams. Then the data will be analysed based on two theories, the theory of symbol and psychological theory called sexual perversions. The symbols in this play will be analyzed especially which relate with Laura Wingfield.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are many symbols representing Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*. The glass menagerie means of collection of animals which becomes the central symbol in this play. The collections of animal glass figures of Laura represents a lot of her personality. Like her collection, Laura is fragile, out of the ordinary and not fashionable, just like her glass ornaments. The characteristic of glass is fragile and transparent. However, the glass can refract an entire rainbow of colors when the light correctly shines on it. This represents the personality of Laura. Although she looks quiet and weak when meeting strangers, she is actually complicated for those who look at her in the right way. The glass menagerie symbolizes Laura who dedicates herself to a world which is colorful and tempting but actually very fragile.

Laura's glass collection symbolizes her own private world. It becomes her escape from reality. Her collection becomes the safe place for her to hide. Any occasions related to her glass collection affect her emotion. Firstly, it happened when her mother told her practicing typing rather than playing with her ornaments. Hearing the step of her mother approaching, she quickly hid her collections, her secret world from her mother. Secondly, it happened when Tom was in a rush to leave the house in an angered condition in order to go to the movies, some of the collection were accidentally broken by him. The shattered glass symbolizes how Laura understands that Tom was responsible for her. Thirdly, it happened with the coming of Jim O'Connor. She showed her glass collection to him.

Laura : Little articles of it, they're ornaments mostly! Most of them are little animals made out of glass, the tiniest little animals in the world. Mother calls them a glass menagerie! Here's an example of one, if you'd like to see it! This one of the oldest. It's nearly thirteen. Oh, be careful—if you breathe, it breaks! (Kennedy, 2009:1240)

This is Laura's statement to Jim about her collections. She loved her collection very much because they were limited, very small and made of glass. Her mother called her glass ornaments as the glass menagerie. They were very tiny and fragile, even if someone took a breath, they were broken.

Her glass collection is something that is precious for her and it is her escape from reality, because if she plays with her ornaments, she can forget her sadness of being different. She retreats herself from the society. She was very shy and her being crippled makes her difficult to interact with others. She only pays attention and care about her glass collection and not trying to get acquainted with others. The glass menagerie, in its fragility and delicate beauty, is a symbol for Laura. She is oddly beautiful and, like her glass pieces, easy to destroy.

One of her collections, the glass unicorn represents her peculiarity. As what Jim said, unicorn was 'extinct' in the modern era. Unicorn is different from the normal horse. Unicorn symbolizes Laura's unusual, her being difficult to adapt to the normal world but she did not complain of her condition.

Laura : Haven't you noticed the single horn on his forehead?
Jim : Unicorn, huh?
Laura : Mmm-hmmm!
Jim : Unicorns, aren't they extinct in the modern world? (1240)

The unicorn is not a normal horse because it has a horn on its forehead. It is different from other horses and it is rare, only exists in fiction. Fiction is imagination, so as the unicorn which represents Laura, who created her own world. The broken horn of the unicorn makes this

creature as normal as the other horses. The horn of the unicorn was broke when it fell to the ground because during the dancing with Laura, Jim accidentally broke that unicorn.

Then Laura gave the broken unicorn to Jim as a souvenir as he had to leave her because he had promised to a girl. Jim confessed to Laura that he was engaged to another girl. The broken unicorn given to Jim represents Laura's broken heart because someone she liked had already been engaged to another girl.

Laura's being different is also symbolized through 'Blue Roses'. It is a misheard of what had been said by Laura about pleurosis. Blue Roses itself represents her personality which is peculiar and different from other girls. Like the characteristic of roses which are blue, this flower is rare but beautiful, Laura is someone different from other girl but still attractive, and Jim treated her specially through the name.

Laura : Wasn't it—Blue Roses?

Jim : Blue Roses! My gosh, yes—Blue Roses! That's what I had my tounge when you opened the door!..... (1235-6)

The word "Blue Roses" appears in the dialogues between Laura and Jim. Actually Laura told him that she suffered from pleurosis when they met at school, but he misheard it as "blue roses". Pleurosis is a kind of lung disease. Laura suffered from this disease which made her become weak.

Jim : but blue is wrong for—roses... (1242).

Then Jim said that the color of the rose which was blue was not right. Blue Roses were rare, and the colour of rose supposed not to be blue, and it was impossible to grow. Normal roses appear in many colours such as red, pink, yellow and white but it lacks the natural ability to produce blue pigment. This color represents Laura's being impossible to have relation with Jim as her lover because Jim had already been engaged to another girl.

Laura's personality is also symbolized through her slips on the fire escape. When she tried to step on the fire escape she slipped. Fire escape is an escape from the fire. Fire symbolizes frustration. In short, fire escape symbolizes Laura's frustration in the house of Wingfield but she could not escape. This shows her inability to escape from her problem.

Tom : Laura?

Laura : I'm all right. I slipped, but I'm all right.

Amand (*peering anxiously after her*): If anyone breaks on a leg on those fire-escape steps, the landlord ought to be sued for every cent he possesses! (1214)

Fire escape represents the "bridge" between the illusory world of the Wingfields and the world of reality. It seems that this bridge is the only way to pass. However, the direction are various based on each character. For Laura, this bridge seems a way into her world, her imaginative world which becomes her escape from reality. It is portrayed when Amanda asked Laura to the store, she was afraid of stepping on the fire escape. It symbolizes that she is afraid of facing reality. For Tom, it is more a real escape because finally he left the house through that bridge. Tom was illustrated as stading outside, smoking. He did not like to be inside.

Jim O'Connor is also a symbol which deals with Laura. He symbolizes Laura's fear of facing the reality.

Jim : Your hand's cold, Laura.

Laura : Yes, well—I've been playing the victrola.... (1228)

When Jim hold Laura's hand, he said that her hand was cold. This is actually the indication that she was nervous of being with Jim. Then she replied that her hand was cold because of playing victrola. She says that because she wants to cover what she feels to Jim.

On the other hand, Jim symbolizes 'the common man'. The common man is a person who has no special quality, not outstanding, just normal as other people. On the other hand, Jim was quite weird. It is illustrated when Jim and Laura were dancing.

Most of Tennessee William's works deal with the sexual behavior of man, a wide range of topics from weird sexual desires to the contrast of the inhibited and the perverted sexual behavior. The main characters are undergoing failure to achieve sexual gratification. Laura needs to get a husband and because she never associates with other people, Amanda, her mother, invites Tom's friend, Jim O'Connor to meet Laura. However, Jim O'Connor who is hoped to be Laura's partner is already engaged to another girl.

In each play, Williams creates two contrasting characters namely, the protagonist and the antagonist. Laura is abnormal, frigid, passive and shy. She is contrasted to Jim O'Connor who is bold and self-confident. In their meeting, Jim O'Connor succeeds in changing Laura's attitude towards life, which is shown in the willingness to speak comfortably and to dance with him. Laura's new experience with Jim O'Connor is the beginning of her wish to be a normal being.

So, it is obvious that through symbols, Williams asserts the significance of sex in life because sex is natural. Like belly, sex, sometimes feels hungry and needs to be nurtured. When a man has the need to satisfy his sexual desires and he cannot attain it or he finds no ways of sexual outlet, he will be confused or obsessed by it.

An account on the sexual confusion in the woman major characters, an implication of the inability to adjust themselves to the environment, has been introduced. An elaboration to them can be found in this chapter. Laura loves Jim O'Connor but no one knows until her mother, Amanda, asks her about it. In reality, she spends most of her time playing with her glass ornaments. The action Laura shows self-deception. She disguises her sexual motives. In view of Freud's psychoanalytic theory of motivation, the behavior of Laura indicates that the portion of the 'id' is repressed by the 'ego' and the 'super ego'. When observed more carefully, the sexual restraint brings about psychological implications such as frustration, defense-mechanism, sexual maladjustment and sexual deviation. The background of life and the environment in which they live are the factors that influence their sexual inhibition that causes the psychological problems.

Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* is a woman of twenty-four and she is suggested by her mother, Amanda, that she should get married; however, because Laura lacks friends, she cannot achieve her mother's inspiration. This situation leads her to the strange sexual behavior.

Laura restrains from sexual desires with her inability to adjust herself to the social environment. Laura's difficulty to associate with other people results from her being shy. Her inferiority complex leads her to live in isolation and enjoy solitary playing with her glass ornaments and listening to her old phonograph music records. When Amanda suggests that she should get a husband, Laura complains that she is 'crippled'. Because Amanda wants to see her daughter a good future, she invites Tom's friend, Jim O'Connor, to meet Laura. Even though Jim O'Connor succeeds in encouraging her, he leaves Laura because she is already engaged.

Laura is undergoing sexual confusion. An analogy can be represented to illustrate it. When a man has no money and he does not need it, having no money means nothing but it does make him confused when, for example, he needs it to prolong his stay in the lodging house. Similarly, having no man means nothing when a woman does not need him, but it does cause her confusion when, for

instance, she needs him to gratify her sexual desires. Her confusion is having to do with her need for a man. And her case, in other words, is called 'sexual confusion'. Having no man becomes her obstacle which interferes with her need to fulfill her sexual drives.

However, Laura is encouraged to accept the new need—a husband. Her obstacle is her being 'crippled', which may suggest her inability to play a satisfactory role in sexual intercourse.

It is obvious, thus, that Laura, is unable to gratify her sexual desires naturally. She restrains her sexual drives, which lead her to abnormal behavior. On the other hand, the behavior of both Jim O'Connor points out that he does not gratify his sexual desires with any woman he can approach because of the 'moral' that controls his sexual behavior. This kind of man belongs to the 'Saint'.

Laura's sexual restraint results from her physical defect and the environment where she lives. As a woman of twenty-four, Laura is not free from sexual drives and for the attainment of her sexual satisfaction, she needs the opposite sex. The strange thing is that, though she loves Jim O'Connor, she keeps it herself until her mother, Amanda, invites him to meet her. Instead of associating with the opposite sex, Laura spends most of her time at home because of her being 'crippled'.

Furthermore, her mother's behavior takes part in forming Laura's sexual inhibition. Though she is getting older, Amanda is still energetic and likes to brag about her past life when she was young and when she was admired by many gentleman callers. She is proud of her ability to charm men. To a certain extent, this conduct makes Laura stressed, discouraged and frustrated because she may think of her mother as an 'ideal' woman, whereas she is aware of her being 'crippled', of her imperfection and of her having no admirers as she helplessly tells her mother:

Laura : It isn't a flood, it's not a tornado, Mother. I'm just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain..... (1205)

An account of the frustrating situations, Laura withdraws from the 'normal' amorous relationship with the opposite sex. Laura's withdrawal in response to the frustrating situation is called 'apathy'. Therefore, in respect to the opposite sex, Laura is inactive, inattentive and dependent much on others.

As the result of her sexual restraint, she suffers from the feeling of anxiety and in respect to sex, she undergoes sexual maladjustment and sexual deviation. When Amanda asks Laura whether she loves Jim O'Connor, she says she does not know.

Laura : I don't know, Mother. All I know is I couldn't sit at the table if it was him!
(1227)

She was nervous of being near Jim, the man she loves. Laura's statement reflects her feeling of discomfort and anxiety in the presence of Jim O'Connor. Further, in regard to sex, it may suggest her obstacle to play sexual practices with men. Her fear of Jim O'Connor is probably caused by her awareness that she might not be able to play a satisfactory role in the sexual intercourse. The fact that Laura hardly makes friendship with men, implies that she is ignorant of sex. She may lack the knowledge of love relationship between the opposite sex and she does not know what she should do in response to the 'normal' love relationship. Therefore, she feels improper to be Jim O'Connor's real lover. Consequently, she avoids social contacts, which implies that she passifies her sexual desires as mirrored in Tom's remark:

Tom (*gently*) : She lives in a world of her own—a world—little glass ornaments, Mother..... (*Gets up. Amanda remains holding brush, looking at him, troubled*) she plays phonograph records and that's about all--(1223)

By preoccupying herself with her glass ornaments which her mother called 'The Glass Menagerie', Laura may forget the real nature of sexual relationship. This means that she puts aside her sexual motives since all her attentions are on the glass ornaments. The behavior that denies motives belong to 'mechanism of repression' In many cases, people who suffer anxiety over their motives seem simply to banish the motives altogether from their conscious thought; they cease to be aware of the motives. This process of pushing down motives (or conflict) from conscious into the unconscious is called repression, and its effects are frequently observed.

The awareness of her being 'crippled' causes Laura to feel anxious whenever she faces her lover and this leads her to avoid him. This means that she ignores her sexual motives. By means of repression, Laura can lessen the pressure of her anxiety.

Besides, Laura's preoccupation with her glass ornaments implies sexual deviation. The fact that Laura hardly pursues the bliss of love and that her little glass horse is equipped with a 'horn' on his forehead, leads to an opinion that Laura seeks sexual satisfaction in fantasy. The fact that Laura's little glass unicorn has a horn on his forehead implies that Laura is obsessed by sex as the horn has the resemblance with the male sexual organ. So, Laura is strange in the sense that she isolates herself from social life, avoiding the common happiness of life. In respect to sex, Laura is ignorant of the realistic nature of love relationship with men because she gratifies her sexual drives in her fantasy.

CONCLUSION

There are many symbols representing Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* such as the glass menagerie itself, the glass unicorn, the blue roses, the fire escape, and Jim O'Connor which are related to Laura's sexual perversion. Her strange sexual behavior is caused by her being not normal person, being crippled and suffering from pleurosis. Her sexual desire is put into her glass collections because she was very shy to show her desire as a normal person to Jim the person whom she loves. She did not dare to show her sexual desire because of her being abnormal.

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