**Symbols in *The Glass Menagerie***

**Glass Menagerie (the glass animals)**

The title of the play, and the play’s most prominent symbol, the glass menagerie represents Laura’s fragility, otherworldliness, and tragic beauty. The collection embodies Laura’s imaginative world, her haven from society. The old-fashioned, somewhat childlike, timeless nature of the menagerie further highlights Tom’s depiction of Laura as a figure who exists outside the traditional confines of time and space. The glass menagerie also represents the vulnerability of memory and of dream worlds: one false move and the entire shimmering universe can shatter. The idea of a “glass menagerie” becomes representative for anything that is too beautiful and too fragile to survive in harsh reality.

**Fire Escape**

Tom frequently stands on the apartment’s fire escape, a literal and figurative temporary release from the confines of his daily life. Tom smokes on the fire escape, removing himself from the metaphorical domestic fires by lighting his own flame, which also symbolizes his desire to control his destiny rather than be consumed by his family and his history. His frequent escape to the fire escape foreshadows his eventual departure from the apartment. In contrast, the one time Laura is forced onto the fire escape, she stumbles, emphasizing how inextricably she is bound to life in the Wingfield world.

**Glass Unicorn**

The glass unicorn, Laura’s favorite figurine, is particularly representative of how Tom envisions Laura: beautiful but magical and unique. When Jim breaks the glass unicorn, it becomes a normal horse, no longer a magical creature. The unicorn’s shattering occurs just before Jim kisses Laura, but it signals the impossibility for Jim and Laura to be together: she cannot exist in his world without breaking. Laura presents the broken unicorn to Jim as a souvenir. The figurine becomes a memory of Laura that Jim can bring with him when he leaves Laura and returns to his life, but it also signifies the normal woman that Laura will never become.

**BLUE ROSES**

Jim calls Laura “Blue Roses,” a mispronunciation of “pleurosis,” the childhood disease that left Laura crippled. The name “Blue Roses” turns Laura’s defect into an asset: her unusual, otherworldly qualities are seen as special rather than debilitating. Laura is closely based on Tennessee Williams’s sister, Rose, who underwent a lobotomy while Williams was writing the play, and the nickname is also likely in tribute to her

**Music**

Tennessee Williams's stage directions frequently call for music to underscore key moments in a scene. “The Glass Menagerie” theme repeats frequently throughout the play. Laura and Amanda associate music with the absent Mr. Wingfield, who left the family his Victrola. The Victrola player provides Laura an auditory escape and contrasts with the clickety-clack of the typewriter, which reminds her of her failed attempt to attend business college. Laura also associates music with Jim, whom she met in the school choir; Jim, we are told, has a beautiful voice.

**The Movies**

Tom escapes to the movies night after night, immersing himself in action-adventure films, envisioning himself as the hero of narratives other than the one in which he's stuck. Yet the movies can only provide a temporary, and therefore false, escape: Tom goes to the cinema to live alternate lives, but he must always return to his own. “The movies” themselves are also a code within the play: sometimes Tom does go to the cinema, but sometimes he uses “going to the movies” as a euphemism for drinking, a different sort of escape. The movies also provide a commentary on the nature of theater itself: just as the audience is escaping reality by watching a play, Tom escapes the reality of his play by watching a theatrical spectacle.

**Typewriter**

For Laura, the typewriter symbolizes the confines of the business world that she escapes by walking in the park or immersing herself in her glass menagerie. For Amanda, the typewriter comes to signify both Laura’s failure to finish her business course as well as Tom’s failure to commit himself more fully to his warehouse job. For Tom, however, the typewriter serves as a means of escape from the confines of his world, as he uses it to compose his manuscripts.