

A STUDY OF THE DICTION IN THE GLASS MENAGERIE

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A STUDY OF THE DICTION IN THE GLASS MENAGERIE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Signi Falk refers to Tennessee Williams as "the greatest poet-dramatist to have appeared on the American scene since Eugene O'Neill."¹ His plays have been eminently successful and widely acclaimed as the work of a poet and a craftsman.

Of all Williams' major plays, the one which stands out as having made his reputation as poet-dramatist is The Glass Menagerie. It was his first play to be produced in the commercial theatre and was a tremendous success. The following record of performances and awards attests to this remarkable success: It opened in Chicago on December 26, 1944, and was enthusiastically received. It ran in New York City for 561 performances. It won the New York Critics Circle Award (1944-45), the fourth annual award of Catholic Monthly, and the Sidney Howard Memorial Award of \$1500 given by Playwrights Company.² It has been widely performed by amateurs and made into a successful movie. With this impressive record, who can deny the importance of the play?

¹Signi Falk, Tennessee Williams (New York, 1961), p. 189.

²Ibid., p. 17.

Compared to Williams' later plays, The Glass Menagerie is, in spite of what some critics say, his best "poetic" work. The term "poetic" here refers to that quality in the play which Williams produces when he writes "sensitively and imaginatively without actually writing [his] dialogue in verse, and without actually relinquishing [his] hold on common reality."³ He achieves this sensitivity and imagination in his dialogue through the clever employment of figurative language and the extensive use of symbols.

It is this poetic quality in Williams' play that is being denounced severely by some critics. To some critics poetry in drama is an anachronism in the modern era: the use of poetic language and symbols is more of a fault than an asset. Joseph Wood Krutch, for example, in his criticism of The Glass Menagerie expresses himself strongly on this point: ". . . the hard core of shrewd observation and deft economical characterization is enveloped in a fuzzy haze of pretentious, sentimental, pseudo-poetic verbiage."⁴

Another critic, Kappo Phelan, says:

It seems to me the kindest comment . . . will be to call Mr. Williams a playwright in transition rather than an irresponsible artist
. . . random eclecticism in no way comprises poetry or drama. . . .⁵

³John Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times (New York, 1954), p. 353.

⁴Joseph Wood Krutch, "Drama," The Nation, CLX (April 14, 1945), 424.

⁵Kappo Phelan, "Glass Menagerie," Commonweal, XLII (April 20, 1945), 17.

Benjamin Nelson states that the use of excessive "poetical" passages which started with The Glass Menagerie is a fault of which Williams is guilty in his later works.⁶ Krutch, who thinks that this fault might harm his later works, suggests: "Whenever you have written a line you like especially well, strike it out."⁷

Richard B. Vowles and D. B. Isaac come to Williams' defense. Vowles says that "Williams' world is by and large, of Southern manners [which] . . . he conveys with heightened fidelity, right down to the raw nerve sheathed in translucent speech."⁸ "What Mr. Williams has to say is in essence repugnant . . . but he says it with poetic clarity and dramatic power,"⁹ D. B. Isaac adds. Benjamin Nelson, who thinks that the use of "poetical" passages is a fault, however, comments favorably on "the dialogue that is fresh, alive, and highly characteristic, particularly in the speech of Amanda,"¹⁰ without seeming to realize that much of the lyricism belongs to Amanda.

One wonders how accurately the critics have evaluated Williams' language. Is the poetry in his play a fault or an asset?

⁶Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work (New York, 1961), p. 109.

⁷Krutch, p. 425.

⁸Richard B. Vowles, "Tennessee Williams: The World of His Imagery," Tulane Drama Review, III (December, 1958), 52.

⁹D. B. Isaac, "In Defense of Tennessee Williams," Religious Education, LIII (September, 1958), 452.

¹⁰Nelson, p. 109.

This question brings us to the purpose of this thesis: to make a close analysis of the diction in The Glass Menagerie. What is the explanation for the poetic overtones and lyricism in this play? How does Williams achieve a fluid quality in his dialogues? Why are his "duologues" effective? What does he say of the speech of Southern women? How effectively does he use "strong language" in his dialogues? Why does he make extensive use of different kinds of symbols--verbal and visual, as well as symbolic actions and characters? Finally, to what degree does the language account for the success of The Glass Menagerie?

The term "diction" needs some clarification. Its meaning can best be understood in relation to other elements of a play as enumerated in Aristotle's Poetics--plot, character, thought, music, and spectacle. The diction of The Glass Menagerie will be analyzed in relation to these elements.

The backbone of a play is the plot. The other five elements are the materials out of which the plot is developed. Plot is the logical arrangement of episodes in a play. The episodes consist of those things which the characters do and say. They act and talk the way they do because of what they are. Therefore, "plot formally controls characterization, and character is the primary material out of which plot is constructed."¹¹

¹¹Hubert C. Heffner, The Nature of Drama (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1959), p. 348.

Elder Olson defines plot as a "system of actions of a determinate moral quality."¹² "Action" in this sense is any "actualization of a capacity for thought, emotion or action."¹³ "Action," says Moody Prior, with reference to order and selection,

determines what is to be included since the relevance of any given speech or episode may be judged by what it contributes to the progression of events as part of a beginning, middle and end continuum; it determines the order of the speeches and episodes since they must be introduced in such a way as not to confuse the progression.¹⁴

This "action" allows the characters to convey directly what they are, what they think, and how they feel.

The character is the agent of the dramatic action in a play. In portraying a character to us the playwright uses methods which are familiar: the character is revealed by what he says, by what he does, by how he looks and talks, and by what others think and say about him.

The playwright differentiates his characters one from the other by giving them certain physical characteristics, ascribing to them certain bents and dispositions, and stamping them with their own peculiarities and idiosyncracies, categorizing them principally in the way they talk.

¹²Elder Olson, Tragedy and The Theory of Drama (Detroit, Michigan, 1961), p. 37.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Moody Prior, The Language of Tragedy (New York, 1947), p. 6.

This leads to the next element of the play: thought. This element is shown through a character's speeches and actions. What a character does or says reveals his thoughts and feelings. A facial expression, an arching of the eyebrows, a gesture of the hand may impart to the audience the thought of a character as effectively as a speech. Thought includes emotions and feelings. There is an interplay of these feelings and emotions among the participants of the play.

Heffner defines diction as "simply the dialogue of a play--the combination of words into speeches."¹⁵ It is the primary material out of which the inner life of the characters is revealed to the audience. It is the vehicle through which the audience learn of the different events that are happening before their very eyes. It is a means through which the emotional intensity of a situation in the play is felt by the audience. Finally, it is the medium of drama and "since drama is in a major sense an art of language, it is a significant part of the play as a whole."¹⁶

The playwright would not be very effective in the portrayal of character without the help of dramatic dialogue. Hamlet and Mark Antony would not mean much without their eloquent and profound speeches. How would one know Othello,

¹⁵Heffner, p. 341.

¹⁶Ibid.

King Lear, and even Iago intimately if they expressed themselves only in gestures and actions or if they expressed themselves in inexpressive clichés and prosaic language?

Dialogue also exists to give the plot its quality and power.¹⁷ To achieve an intensely powerful appeal, a playwright should strive for good dramatic dialogue. A good dramatic dialogue arouses a greater emotional response than any other artistic medium in the theatre. It must have directness, conciseness, and clarity in keeping with the principle of economy. It should be vivid, arresting, colorful, and exciting.

The rhythm and melody given to a spoken word or combination of words is the "music" in dramatic action. A character can convey a multitude of emotions through the rhythm and melody of his speech. A sense of fluidity, tempo and tone is created in the way the words are delivered and the speeches related to each other in time. The diction determines the music, since it exists to give a pattern to music.

The last element is spectacle. Spectacle includes setting, costumes, and lighting. It also includes facial expressions, gestures, positions of actors relative to each other and to "stage space." Plot, character, thought, diction and music being what they are in a given play determine how spectacle will be used to seem appropriate.

¹⁷Olson, p. 89.

In Williams' plays spectacle is of paramount importance. Since most of his plays are highly expressionistic, "symbols tend to dominate the action."¹⁸ He makes use of grotesque exaggeration in setting, costume, make-up, lighting, each particular detail highly symbolical.¹⁹

With Aristotle's other elements of the play in mind, a close evaluation of the diction of the characters will be made.

¹⁸Alan S. Downer, Fifty Years of American Drama (Chicago, 1951), p. 93.

¹⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER II

A CONSIDERATION OF WILLIAMS' POETIC TECHNIQUE

The poetic overtones in The Glass Menagerie and Williams' later works are reminders of the fact that he started out as a poet. The poet is a recurring character in many of his plays. He sees himself in Tom Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie, Sebastian Venable in Suddenly Last Summer, Val Xavier in Orpheus Descending. In a short story "The Poet," he "describes a Christ-like figure, a wandering poet, who finds dignity on earth and salvation in heaven through his vagrant freedom, an existence closely akin to that of the ruminant beast."¹ To the poet he has given a keen sense of compassion for suffering humanity. He is the romantic who revolts against convention and who expects for himself a freedom that is not in consonance with society.²

As a poet, Williams confesses his weakness for symbols. In The Glass Menagerie, as well as in his later plays, symbols tend to dominate the action. Their presence in the later plays suggests that he still thinks of himself as a poet.³ "Symbols," Williams says in the "Foreword" to

¹Nancy Tischler, Tennessee Williams: The Rebellions Puritan (New York, 1961), p. 59.

²Falk, p. 164.

³Ibid.

Camino Real, "are nothing but the natural speech of drama."

To him

a symbol has only one legitimate purpose. This purpose is to say a thing more directly and simply and beautifully than it could be said in words. Symbols, when used respectfully, are the purest language of plays. Sometimes it would take page after page of exposition to put across an idea that can be said with an object or a gesture on a lighted stage.⁴

In considering his plays, one readily sees that Williams' techniques are poetic, but his poetry is far more than a matter of words or meter, for with the exception of a long one-act play, "The Purification," his plays are not in verse.⁵ To achieve the poetic quality in his plays, he uses figurative language, symbols, and "duologues." Williams uses a certain rhythm and cadence in his duologues which is effective in intensifying an emotional reaction in a given scene. His duologues, which are chanted like an antiphonal poem, give the necessary staccato beat to achieve this effect. Rhythm plays an important role in conveying a whole gamut of emotions experienced by the characters. Moody Prior says, "Rhythm of itself must certainly play an important part in the large currents of a poetic play."⁶ He illustrates this principle of rhythm in the tragedy, Othello. He observes that the measured cadences of Othello's speech before the

⁴Tischler, pp. 191-192.

⁵Paul Moor, "Mississippian Named Tennessee," Harper, CXCVII (July, 1948), 69.

⁶Prior, p. 5.

Senate are a mark of his self-assurance and the unbalanced rhythm of his speeches during Iago's undermining insinuations indicates a destruction of his peace of mind.⁷ In a similar fashion, Williams uses rhythm to convey the emotions of his characters.

The fusion of prose and poetry began as early as the one act plays, "Portrait of a Madonna" and "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion," which were written in 1940. It also appears in The Battle of Angels. The fusion is a necessary one in the colorful treatment of his characters.⁸ Amanda Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie, Blanche DuBois in A Street-car Named Desire, Alma Winemiller in Summer and Smoke are "necessitously poetic" in keeping with their respective backgrounds. These women have the gentility and refinement of a moribund Southern aristocracy which clashes with the cruel, everyday materialistic world of Stanley Kowalski in A Street-car Named Desire, Alvaro Mangiacavallo in The Rose Tattoo, and Kilroy in Camino Real. Williams says that Southern women are the only remaining members of our populace who can use lyrical dialogue without sounding high-flown.⁹

There is a recurrence of certain types of characters which are related to certain classes of speech in Williams'

⁷Ibid., p. 6.

⁸Gassner, p. 356.

⁹Moor, p. 71.

plays. Henry Popkin in Tulane Drama Review gives two categories of speech which have been repeated from play to play and from character to character. These two main patterns of speech are called the respectful and the disrespectful. The respectful speech in Williams' plays is definitely Southern. One hears this kind of speech from the oratory and verbosity of Big Daddy in Cat on the Hot Tin Roof. One hears it from Southern belles like Amanda Wingfield, Blanche DuBois, and Alma Winemiller and it is "affected, prissy, would-be literary, full of little jokes and self-conscious ha-has."¹⁰

The other category, the disrespectful speech, which is brutally frank and direct, characterizes Stanley Kowalski, Alvaro Mangiacavallo, and Kilroy. These men have the bluntness of Damon Runyon characters. Their language, uniquely their own, is characterized by avoiding the use of contractions and by using long unfamiliar words that surprise even themselves.¹¹ Popkin does not include Tom in this category but one sees in Tom the beginning of the disrespectful type of speech.

The fusion of prose and poetry in Williams' plays is also necessary in the development of conflict¹² between the

¹⁰Henry Popkin, "The Plays of Tennessee Williams," Tulane Drama Review, IV (March, 1960), 50.

¹¹Ibid., p. 51.

¹²Gassner, p. 356.

respectful and the disrespectful types of characters. The respectful style represents characters like Amanda and Blanche and their "bondage to the past." The disrespectful style corresponds to Stanley and Tom's freedom from convention and restraint.¹³ The meeting of these two types can cause conflict. To be free is to be happy, to be strong and "to act on instinct." He who deliberates and lives in the past is lost. This is one of the most important keys in understanding the world of Williams' meanings.¹⁴

¹³Ibid., p. 351.

¹⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER III

TOM'S DICTION

In analyzing Tom Wingfield's diction, one has to bear in mind the fact that there are two Toms: one, Tom the narrator; two, Tom the participant in the play. This chapter will deal with a close examination of the major speeches of Tom as a narrator and as a participant. The speeches of Tom as a narrator occur in Scenes I, III, V, VI, and VII; all but the latter provide background and exposition for succeeding scenes. However, only the speeches in Scenes I, V, and VII will be examined closely and will be discussed in their chronological order, interspersed with Tom's key speeches as a participant, also considered chronologically.

Tom the narrator evokes the memory of a dearly remembered past with poetic recollection. Such is the "memory play" The Glass Menagerie. "A memory play," says Tennessee Williams, "takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the article it touches, for memory is seated predominantly in the heart."¹ Tom "takes whatever license with dramatic convention as [sic] is convenient to suit

¹Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie (New York, 1945), p. 3. All subsequent references to the play are cited from this source.

his purpose." (p. 4) So, Tom the narrator addresses the audience talking about illusion and truth, thus setting the "poetic" mood of the play:

Yes, I have tricks up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion. (p. 4)

Talking about truth and illusion, Tom goes on to recall the grim, realistic happenings in America and the other parts of the world in the thirties. He mentions the huge middle class in America who were "blind" to the sufferings around them and whose eyes were "opened" by the dissolving economy.

In Spain there was a revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion. In Spain there was Guernica. Here there were disturbances of labor, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis . . . (p. 5)

As he states, he uses the world in general as the social background of the play.

Although a realist, Tom wishes to lessen the impact of this harsh reality of life that he will present, so he gives us reality (equated with truth) and softens it in an aura of illusion.

Next he introduces the characters: himself as participant, his mother, his sister, and a "gentleman caller." The fifth one, his father, does not appear except in his life-size photograph on the mantel. Having fallen in love with long distances, " he skipped the light fantastic

out of town . . ." (p. 6) With the mention of his father's departure this early in the play, Tom already foreshadows his own departure in the final scene.

Having thus provided a background, Tom is ready to proceed with the magical evocation of the remembered events.

The stage setting, to coincide with the poetic language and mood of Tom, makes use of darkness and shadows to give the Wingfield apartment a "poetic" atmosphere. As Williams points out in the stage directions, "the apartment . . . is entered by a fire-escape, a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth for all these huge buildings are burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation." (p. 3) It also makes use of transparent gauzes that effectively suggest time and distance and give the effect of illusion as Tom recalls the memory of a mother and a sister trapped hopelessly in a world of illusion that clashes terrifyingly with harsh reality.

As the memory sequence of the play unfolds, one comes to know more about Tom the participant. Like his mother, Amanda, who dwells in her own world of gentlemen callers, and his sister, Laura, who finds solace in her glass menagerie, Tom has his own means of escape from the stark reality of life--his poetry. His poetic talent has to find expression even at the expense of his job at the warehouse. He needs his poetry to sustain him or he will completely break down.

Besides his poetry, Tom seeks temporary refuge in the movies to forget the cares of the everyday world. Because of his frequent trips to the movies, his lack of ambition in his job, and his smoking, Tom finds himself at odds with his mother most of the time.

"What right have you got to jeopardize the security of us all?" his mother asks him in Scene III (p. 27). As the quarrel continues, shadows of Amanda's and Tom's gesticulations are cast on the ceiling by a "fiery glow." The red light implies the rising tension supercharging the atmosphere with emotional conflict. In a menacing attitude Tom bends savagely toward her small figure and shouts:

Listen! You think I'm crazy about the warehouse? . . .
 You think I'm in love with the Continental Shoemakers?
 You think I want to spend fifty-five years down there
 in that--celotex interior! With--fluorescent tubes!
 Look! I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and
 battered out my brains--than go back mornings!
I go! Every time you come in yelling that God damn
"Rise and Shine!" "Rise and Shine!" I say to myself,
"How lucky dead people are!" But I get up. I go!
 For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I
 dream of doing and being ever! And you say self--
self's all I ever think of. Why, listen, if self is
 what I thought of, Mother, I'd be where he is--GONE!
 (Pointing to father's picture) As far as the system of
 transportation reaches! (pp. 27-28)

This is a realistic speech of Tom the participant in the play. It expresses his vehement denunciation of and deep hatred for his job at the warehouse. He feels he is trapped by a "job designed for insanity" which is a "living death." To a sensitive soul like Tom, the job is unimaginative and uncreative; the routine is unbearable. It is hardly the job

that will give him opportunity for the expression of his poetic talents, but for sixty-five dollars a month he gives up all that he dreams of doing--to be able to support a mother and a sister. This vituperative language he uses is an expression of all the pent-up emotions seething within him and he explodes like a volcano. Amanda's persistent nagging--to "rise and shine," to chew his food well, not to smoke much, and not to go to the movies much--proves unendurable to a sensitive soul like Tom. This explosion is a part of a method in achieving rhythm, which is derived from "an alternation of explosion and silence; more precisely, there is preparation, explosion and subsiding."² This device is used again in the next speech as Tom explains his make-believe nocturnal activities to his mother.

"You think I'm crazy about the warehouse? . . . You think I'm in love with the Continental Shoemakers? . . . You think I want to spend fifty-five years down there . . . ?" are the statements of a man in desperation, a man who could not take any more "unjust" accusations hurled ruthlessly against him. They are also the statements of somebody whose sore spot has been pricked and the vehement denial only proves that the "unjust" accusations are after all true. They are effectively emphatic in expressing Tom's strong feelings against the shoe company and what it stands for. The emphasis stresses the

²Eric Bentley, What is Theatre? (Boston, 1956), p. 267.

mounting anger in Tom as he explains his innermost feelings to his mother.

There is a note of foreshadowing in this speech when Tom reasons out to his mother that if self were all he thought of, he would be gone like his father. Subconsciously he wants to get away and this is precisely what he does at the end of the play.

The quarrel continues. Tom announces that he is going to the movies. "I don't believe that lie," Amanda answers. This of course implies that Tom is a liar and has been feeding his mother lies and more lies those countless nights he has gone to the movies. Tom crouches toward her, towering over her small figure.

I'm going to opium dens, dens of vice and criminals' hang-outs, Mother. I've joined the Hogan gang, I'm a hired assassin, I carry a tommy-gun in a violin case! I run a string of cat-houses in the Valley! They call me Killer, Killer Wingfield, I am leading a double-life, a simple honest worker by day, by night a dynamic czar of the underworld, Mother. I go to gambling casinos, I spin away fortunes on the roulette table! I wear a patch over one eye and a false mustache, sometimes I put on green whiskers. On those occasions they call me--El Diablo! Oh, I could tell you things to make you sleepless! My enemies plan to dynamite this place. They're going to blow us all sky-high some night! I'll be glad, very happy, and so will you! You'll go up, up on a broomstick, over Blue Mountain with seventeen gentlemen callers! You ugly--babbling old-witch
 (p. 28)

This outburst from Tom is filled with biting sarcasm and contempt, not so much for his mother as for himself and the web he is caught in where escape seems impossible.

The style of using short sentences said rapidly one after the other as in, "I've joined the Hogan gang, I'm a hired assassin, I carry a tommy-gun in a violin case," provides a sense of heightened rhythm through the intensity of the emotions felt by the speaker. The same device is used in ". . . I'm leading a double life . . . I go to gambling casinos, I spin away fortunes on the roulette table! I wear a patch over one eye and a false mustache . . ." Williams uses this device over and over again. It is very effective; it produces a profound impact upon the audience as well as upon the different characters in the play.

The preceding speech has a touch of romanticism in it. One becomes aware of Tom's rich and vivid imagination as he pictures himself as an assassin, a killer, a dynamic czar, even El Diablo himself! This romantic element, together with its quality of rhythm, which is achieved by an explosion subsiding into silence, makes for the poetic quality of the speech.

As Tom makes this explosive speech, "he goes through a series of violent, clumsy movements, seizing his overcoat, lunging to the door, pulling it fiercely open" (pp. 28-29) while Amanda and Laura watch him, struck with amazement. Tom struggles with his coat as his arm catches in his sleeve. For a minute he is imprisoned in his overcoat. With impatience, he jerks it off and flings it across the room. This gesture is symbolic action. His overcoat stands for the

responsibility of taking care of a mother and a sister. In throwing it away, he expresses a desire to be rid of such responsibility so he can be free. But as he flings his coat across the room, there is a sound of shattering glass and Laura cries out as if wounded. This is symbolic too. If Tom escapes this two-by-four prison, Laura more than Amanda will be deeply affected. Tom looks at Laura bewilderedly and apologetically as he picks up the shattered bits of broken glass. Not a word is said at this particular moment between Tom and Laura, but the scene is pregnant with emotions--the feeling of hurt in Laura and remorse in Tom--while the tune "The Glass Menagerie" steals in and the scene fades out. The silence here is part of the explosion-silence method to achieve rhythm in the scene.

Some of the expressions Tom uses in these speeches fall under the category of the disrespectful type of speech. Stanley Kowalski, the antagonist in A Streetcar Named Desire, belongs to this type. His speech is blunt, direct, and brutally frank. Stanley does not have the eloquence of Tom. He does not need to depend on words because his "physical presence and the sensual Elysium he offers are more powerful than words. . ."³ But in the use of profanity and "strong language" and in their candor, these two belong under the same class.

³Edward F. Callahan, "Tennessee Williams' Two Worlds," North Dakota Quarterly, XXV (1957), 64.

One hears Tom use such language on many occasions. On one occasion he says, "What in Christ's name . . . ?" On another he explodes, "Everytime you come in yelling that God damn 'Rise and Shine!' . . . " And on still another, in the height of his anger he calls his mother an "ugly-babbling old witch." Tom does not spare even himself in his use of "strong language" when he calls himself "the bastard son of a bastard!"

In the early part of Scene IV, Tom's dialogue with Laura brings into focus the rainbow symbol, which assumes a very significant role in the drama. Tom tells Laura about a magician who gave away souvenirs. He pulls from his pocket a glimmering rainbow-colored scarf. "This is your magic scarf. You wave it over a canary cage and you get a bowl of gold-fish. You wave it over the gold-fish bowl and they fly away canaries. . . ." (p. 31) His giving the rainbow-colored scarf to Laura is symbolic; it is an expression of a desire on the part of Tom for Laura to find fulfillment of her dreams someday. If the scarf can change a bowl of gold-fish into canaries and vice-versa, perhaps it can perform magic too, in the life of Laura. The rainbow symbol reappears at the end of the play, where it is clear that Laura's dream will forever remain a dream.

Tom's speech about the magician's coffin trick is symbolic of his present predicament.

But the wonderfulest trick of all was the coffin trick. We nailed him into a coffin and he got out of the coffin without removing one nail. There is a trick that would come in handy for me--get me out of this 2 by 4 situation. . . . You know it don't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got out of one without removing one nail. (As if in answer, the father's grinning photograph lights up.) (p. 32)

The "coffin" is a figurative reference to his case. Like the man nailed inside the coffin, he finds himself trapped inside his own home. These lines indicate Tom's desperate longing to get out of his trap he calls "home"--a two by four affair--and search for adventure and self-fulfillment. Again, there is foreshadowing of what he will eventually do at the end of the play.

Tom's explosive speeches in Scene III followed by an apology to his mother in Scene IV are part of the explosion-silence technique which is exploited many times in the play. The morning following the quarrel, Laura pleads with Tom to make up with their mother. Tom goes through a series of clumsy motions--glancing at his mother, clearing his throat, scratching his head. As he awkwardly gropes for words to ask Amanda's forgiveness, the audience hears the strains of "Ave Maria" in the background. The music seems to intercede in his behalf to obtain his mother's pardon. "Mother. I--I apologize Mother. . . . I'm sorry for what I said, for everything that I said, I didn't mean it." (p. 35) There is a feeling of honesty and sincerity, even deep remorse, in his voice as he utters these words. One knows that Tom

did not really mean it when he called his mother an "ugly babbling old witch." But in the seeming hopelessness of his situation, he feels a strong resentment of the web he finds himself enmeshed in, and when the opportunity to give vent to his seething emotions presented itself, he took it.

As the reconciliation scene goes on, Tom's answers to Amanda's questions disclose his innermost thoughts and feelings.

While Tom is apologizing, Amanda, with her face contorted, draws a quick breath and breaks into tears. She exacts a promise from Tom not to be a drunkard and to make sacrifices although his ambitions do not lie in the warehouse. "There are so many things in my heart that I cannot describe to you! I've never told you but I--loved your father"

(p. 39) Tom's answer to Amanda's remark makes a counter-plea for understanding and reveals his sensitivity. "You say there's so much in your heart that you can't describe to me. That's true of me, too. There's so much in my heart that I can't describe to you! So let's respect each other's--"

(p. 39)

When Amanda asks him why he goes to the movies so much, he verbalizes his need for adventure: "I go to the movies because--I like adventure. Adventure is something I don't have much of at work, so I go to the movies. . . . I like a lot of adventure." (p. 39) This implies Tom's restlessness and his intense yearning to be "free" in order to achieve his

goals. Since "escape" is impossible at the moment, the movies provide a good substitute for his dreams. Amanda tells him that most men find adventure in their careers. But how can Tom find adventure in a job he despises with passion? To him the shoes he works on at the factory are symbols of travel and far-away places. In a later scene, he tells Jim O'Connor: "Whenever I pick up a shoe, I shudder a little thinking how short life is and what I am doing!-- Whatever that means, I know it doesn't mean shoes--except as something to wear on a traveler's feet!" (p. 77)

Tom's answer when Amanda tries to convince him that not everybody has a desire for adventure, is expressive of a romantic idea about men's insatiable thirst for a variety of experiences in life: "Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of these instincts are given much play at the warehouse." The word "instinct" offends Amanda's Puritan notions. She specifies that only animals have to satisfy their instincts. And surely Tom's aims are higher than monkeys and pigs! His answer is short, directly to the point: "I reckon they're not." He definitely is a normal human being with normal human desires. Like Jim, he does not belong to the Wingfield world of unexpressed desires.

In Scene V, just before the Jim O'Connor episode, Tom the narrator once again addresses the audience:

Across the alley from us was the Paradise Dance Hall. On evenings in spring the windows and doors were open and music came outdoors. . . . Couples would come outside, to the relative privacy of the alley. You could see them kissing behind ash-pits and telephone poles. (p. 46)

The name of the dance hall is symbolic. Here young couples seek a temporary "paradise" to forget momentarily the dreary monotony of their lives. They find in each other the refuge that Tom finds in his poetry and movies.

Then Tom reminds the audience that this play must be considered with the whole world as its background:

Adventure and change were imminent in this year. They were waiting around the corner for all these kids. Suspended in the mist over Berchtesgaden, caught in the folds of Chamberlain's umbrella-- In Spain there was Guernica! But here there was only hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief, deceptive rainbows. . . . All the world was waiting for bombardments. (p. 47)

With the whole world on the brink of another war, here people were only concerned with the pursuit of pleasure in the form of music, liquor, movies, and sex. Tom compares these pleasures to a chandelier that lights the world with "brief deceptive rainbows." But they are not the answer to a fruitful and meaningful existence. And so the whole world was waiting for bombardments--bombardments to make positive changes in the lives of the people. Tom displays a realistic and perceptive attitude toward life as he alludes to the major events that inexorably affect the lives of everybody.

Tom as a narrator concludes the play with a speech about his poignant remembrance of his sister, which is

his most poetic. It rounds out the most dramatic scene of the play, for Williams, a dramatic poet like Shakespeare, writes his "finest poetry in his most dramatic scene. . . . What makes it most dramatic is what makes it poetic."⁴

Tom first reveals that after being fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe-box, he left Saint Louis.

I didn't go to the moon, I went much further--
for time is the longest distance between two
places. . . . I descended the steps of this
fire-escape for a last time, and followed from
then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting
to find in motion what was lost in space-- . . .
(p. 23)

Tom's speech is highly condensed and poetic. He says that he did not go to the moon but went much farther--for he is separated from Laura and the remembered events of the past by time. In a vain attempt to find what he was searching for, he kept moving, hoping to find the fulfillment of his dreams. Unlike his mother and Laura, who were trapped hopelessly forever in their world of illusions, he managed to escape into a world of reality. Williams justifies this escape when he says that Tom's "nature is not remorseless, but to escape from a trap he has to act without pity."

(p. vii) John Gassner says that his escape, cruel though it may seem, was a "necessary and wholesome measure of self-preservation."⁵

⁴J. L. Styan, The Elements of the Drama (Cambridge, England, 1960), p. 27.

⁵Cited in Tischler, p. 98.

Having left home, Tom was haunted by memories and tormented by guilt wherever he went.

. . . I traveled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches. I would have stopped but I was pursued by something. . . . Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass-- . . . I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. . . . Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be. I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger--anything that can blow your candles out!--for nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura--and so goodbye. . . .

Tom pleads to Laura to blow out her candles of illusion which are inadequate or inappropriate to light this world of reality, for nowadays the world is "lit by lightning." Laura blows out the candles and is left alone in the darkness. And with this advice Tom says his final adieu. It is his sensitiveness and deep affection for his sister Laura that give him a certain stature⁶ and make him a sympathetic character.

✓ The style of using short sentences "I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger," said rapidly one after the other has also been noted in Tom's

⁶Falk, p. 75.

speeches in Scene III. This device, which Williams uses from one dramatic scene to another, suggests a heightened emotional rhythm which intensifies their meaning. One visualizes a person desperately trying to escape from himself--reaching for a cigarette, crossing the street, running into the movies, buying a drink, speaking to a stranger--doing anything--just anything to escape from being with himself and the memory of Laura.

The speech abounds in symbols and figurative language. Tom has announced at the start that since he is a poet, he has a poet's weakness for symbols. "The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches," echoes Tom's disillusionment in his dreams. He has traveled from city to city, but has he found what he is searching for? After descending from the fire escape--a symbol for Tom's exit out of a death trap--has he really "escaped" into a world of adventure and romance as he had hoped? Something always pursues him--painful reminders of a sister he has unintentionally hurt and left. A bit of music, hauntingly nostalgic, tiny transparent bottles with colors like bits of a shattered rainbow awaken in him the memory of a sister whose dream, like the shattered rainbow, will never be realized. So he pleads with Laura to blow out the candles, which represent her world of illusion. Tom has come to the realization that living in an illusion is not the answer to make life bearable.

He, in his illusory world of poetry, even in his world of romance and adventure, has become disillusioned and so he wants Laura to come to grips with reality because now the world is lit by lightning. Thus, with his mention again of the illusion--versus--reality theme, he ends his memory play.

The poetic language expresses and defines "patterns of thought and feeling otherwise inexpressible and undefinable."⁷ It conveys with fidelity the guilt-ridden torment, the poignant nostalgia, the aching loneliness and all the other delicate shades of emotions Tom feels for his home and his sister, Laura.

⁷Styan, p. 32.

CHAPTER IV

AMANDA'S DICTION

The most forceful character, who dominates almost all the important scenes in the play, is Amanda Wingfield. A typical Williams heroine, she is "unable to accept the twentieth century and . . . prefers living in the illusive and legendary world of something that never really was-- the mythically cavalier Old South."¹

A close analysis of Amanda's diction reveals a multi-faceted woman. By her speeches, she betrays many details about herself--her past, her frustrations, her dreams, and her hopes. One minute she is nostalgic and poetic, the next garrulous and nagging, and still the next coquettish and vivacious.

Amanda prattles endlessly about an aristocratic past-- when she was the toast of the Mississippi Delta--about suave and handsome gentlemen callers, about picnics and jonquils in Blue Mountsin. She talks in lofty, affected language, which coming from her, seems natural. She recalls one Sunday in Blue Mountain.

Your mother--your mother received seventeen gentlemen callers. . . . Girls in those days knew how to entertain their gentlemen callers.

¹Robert Emmet Jones, "Tennessee Williams' Early Heroines," Modern Drama, II (December, 1959), 211.

It wasn't enough for a girl to be possessed of a pretty face and a graceful figure--although I wasn't slighted in either respect. She also needed to have nimble wit and a tongue to meet all occasions. (p. 9)

Speeches like this exasperate Tom. He finds it hard to believe that Amanda had seventeen callers in one afternoon. To him his mother, who always boasts of a "glorious" past, sounds like a broken record. Sometimes Tom, at the urging of his sister, who understands their mother more than he does, listens to Amanda tolerantly. Once he asks, "What do you talk about?"

Things of importance going on in the world. Never anything coarse or common or vulgar. My callers were gentlemen--all. Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta--planters and sons of planters! (pp. 9-10)

At this point, Amanda's "face glows, her voice becomes rich and elegiac." The pleasant remembrance of the past inebriates her soul and she is transported into another world, which Tom and Laura cannot and perhaps will never comprehend. Strains of her Puritan upbringing and her wish to belong to the Southern aristocracy are evident in these lines. Nothing coarse or vulgar was talked about--for were all her callers not "gentlemen"? And they were not just ordinary callers but prominent planters--planters and sons of planters. The audience gets the message with Amanda's repetition of and emphasis on "planters."

There is a parade of beaux before our eyes as Amanda names them.

There was Champ Laughlin who later became vice-president of the Delta Planters Bank. . . . There were the Cutrere brothers, Wesley and Bates. Bates was one of my bright particular beaux! He got in a quarrel with that wild Wainright boy. Died in the ambulance. . . . His widow was well-provided for She married him on the rebound--never loved her--carried my picture on him the night he died! And there was that boy that every girl in the Delta had set her cap for! That beautiful, brilliant young Fitzhugh boy from Greene County! . . . That Fitzhugh boy went North and made a fortune--came to be known as the Wolf of Wall Street! He had the Midas touch, whatever he touched turned to gold! And I could have been Mrs. Duncan J. Fitzhugh, mind you! But I picked your father! (pp. 10-11)

In Amanda's refusal to perceive things as they are, she clings tenaciously to the belief that she could have married any of her wealthy admirers if she had not fallen in love with a young handsome soldier. This incessant talk about her girlish romances in lofty language is a cover-up for her own frustration and disillusionment in love, for has her own husband not "fallen in love with long distances"?

Betty Kindle, in her thesis on Williams, observes that apparently her husband had been an average, realistic man who found Amanda and her stories unbearable as well as incomprehensible for he had finally left her in search for a more down-to-earth existence.²

In her constant chatter about gentlemen callers, Amanda unconsciously hurts Laura deeply, making her intensely aware

²Betty Kindle, "Falsity in Men: Tennessee Williams' Vision of Tragedy," unpublished masters thesis, Department of English, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1956, p. 15.

of the lack of gentlemen callers in her life. This kind of unreliable speech about her many admirers and her pretentious claims to an aristocratic past make Amanda a pathetic yet an equally exasperating figure.

Amanda's clinging to her past is again evident on the fateful evening of the Jim O'Connor episode, when she announces she is "going to make a spectacular appearance . . . with something she has resurrected from that old trunk . . ."

(p. 65) She puts on a girlish frock of yellow voile with a silk sash. To complete her outfit she carries a bunch of jonquils. "The legend of her youth is nearly revived." (p. 65) Then excitedly, almost hysterically, she bursts into a high-flown, elevated speech as she recalls the picnics and the jonquils:

I wore it on Sundays for my gentlemen callers. I had it on the day I met your father--I had malaria fever all that spring. The change of climate from East Tennessee to the Delta--weakened my resistance-- . . . Invitations poured in--parties all over the Delta!-- "Stay in bed," said Mother, "You have fever!" . . . Evenings, dances!--afternoons, long, long rides! Picnics--lovely! So lovely! So lovely that country in May.--All lacy with dogwood, literally flooded with jonquils!--That was the spring I had a craze for jonquils. Jonquils became an absolute obsession. . . . I made the young men help me gather the jonquils. (pp. 65-66)

This speech shows Amanda's sensitivity. She becomes involved and impassioned with the remembrance of picnics and jonquils. In an effort to cling to the beauty of the past, she rejects the ugliness of the present. "Jonquils" suggest freshness and beauty--a contrast to the old and dingy

apartment which she now calls home. The word "jonquils" is repeated many times to achieve a sense of rhythm to suggest the rising feverish emotion as Amanda makes this ardent speech. The use of sentence fragments, single words, dashes, and exclamation points gives the speech a breathless quality, which makes also for the rhythm in the speech.

✕ Williams says of Amanda that "having failed to establish contact with reality [she] continues to live vitally in her illusions." (p. vii) This aspect of her character might as well be her strong point. Since the Wingfield family lives in "one of those hive-like conglomerations of cellular living units . . . in overcrowded urban centers [which] are symptomatic of the impulse of . . . this enslaved section of American society . . . to exist and function as one interfused mass of automation," (p. 3) Amanda displays a rare kind of courage in refusing "to be one with the mass by maintaining her illusions, for there is more hope in living in the past than being submerged in the present."³ Amanda lives in the past to sustain herself. If she accepted the poverty and squalor of her surroundings she would perish.

➤ Amanda's desire to live in the past to escape reality makes her refuse to admit the fact that Laura is a cripple. Her refusal to do so intensifies Laura's painful and conscious awareness of her physical defect. "Nonsense!! Laura, I've

³Dusenbury, p. 140.

told you never, never to use that word. Why, you're not crippled, you just have a little defect--hardly noticeable even!" (p. 21) Amanda continues to "push" Laura in spite of the leg. "Cultivate other things to make up for it--develop charm and vivacity and charm. . . . One thing your father had plenty of--was charm!" (p. 21) Amanda does not see the irony of her position. Although she lost her husband because of his charm, the cultivation of Laura's charm should be the goal in her life.⁴ Set apart from reality she is not without down-to-earth practicality. Although she has an unrealistic approach to life and its problems, her dreams for Tom and Laura are truly realistic.

~~X~~ Eager for Laura to meet a man, Amanda had made her attend church socials. When she failed to attract a future husband, she sent her to secretarial school where she might learn to be independent in the future. Laura broke down completely during a speed test and got so sick that she had to be carried into the washroom. Laura eventually dropped out of business school. This plan had ended in miserable failure too.

When Amanda discovers her dropping out of school, she hopelessly asks Laura:

So what are we going to do the rest of our lives?
 Stay home and watch the parades go by? Amuse ourselves with the glass menagerie, darling? Eternally play those worn-out phonograph records your father left as a painful reminder of him?

⁴Ibid., p. 138

We won't have a business career--we've given that up because it gave us nervous indigestion! . . . What is there left but dependency all our lives? I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South--barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife!--stuck away in a little mousetrap of a room--encouraged by one in-law to visit another--little bird-like women without any nest--eating the crust of humility all their life! Is that the future we've mapped out for ourselves?
(p. 19)

This scene, where Amanda gives her best speech, is one of the most dramatic scenes in the play. Amanda's speech is not "poetic" in the manner of Tom's speech at the end of the play. Yet it has a quality heightened by figurative language, rendering it eloquent and profound. She compares unmarried women, who flit from one relative's home to another, and who subsist on what relatives grudgingly give them, to birds without any nest that live on whatever left-overs they can find.

This revealing speech also gives a new insight into the many aspects of Amanda's personality. It gives her a new stature, a new look of dignity. One begins to see her from a different perspective. Certainly, this speech is not one that comes from the flighty and frivolous Amanda who is seen in the early part of the play. It comes from a realistic and sensible woman, who is keenly aware of the plight of unmarried women who cannot work and must be dependent on begrudging in-laws.

Amanda makes another desperate attempt to provide for Laura by asking Tom to find a nice "clean-living, non-drinking" man for her.

I mean that as soon as Laura has got somebody to take care of her, married, a home of her own, independent -- why, then you'll be free to go whichever way the wind blows you! But until that time you've got to look out for your sister. . . . Down at the warehouse aren't there some nice young men? (p. 42)

Again, this speech indicates Amanda's pet obsession: to marry Laura off. She mentions the word "free" to Tom, which again foreshadows his departure at the end of the play.

6 In Scene III Amanda is getting ready for a gentleman caller who might possibly arrive on the scene. To be ready for him, she needs extra money "to feather the nest and plume the bird." (p. 22) Watching her go through all her plans, Tom, who accuses his own mother of being a dreamer, describes her as a woman of action as well as of words. She begins to campaign vigorously for more subscriptions to the magazine she is selling. One hears her talking over the phone with a subscriber.

Ida Scott? This is Amanda Wingfield. We missed you at the D. A. R. last Monday!

I said, to myself: She's probably suffering with that sinus condition! How is that sinus condition?

Horrors! Heaven have mercy!--You're a Christian martyr, yes that's what you are, a Christian martyr. (p. 23)

One notices a certain amount of false pride in this speech. She is unwilling to admit that her reason for calling Ida Scott is to sell, not to inquire about her sinus condition.

Her oversolicitousness for Ida Scott's welfare is a delicate approach hiding her real motive. Somehow one feels the insincerity of her concern and get the impression that she is not really worried over Ida's condition as much as she is over her magazine subscription running out.

Well, I just now happened to notice that your subscription to the Companion is about to expire! Yes, it expires with the next issue, honey!-- just when that wonderful new serial by Bessie Mae Hopper is getting off to such an exciting start. What?--Burning?--Oh, honey, don't let them burn, go take a look in the oven and I'll hold the wire! Heavens--I think she's hung up! (p. 23)

Amanda's affectation is evident in this speech. It is the same affectation that irritates Tom to no end. Her "honeys" have overwhelmed Ida Scott to the point of annoyance. The audience shares with Tom and Ida Scott the feeling of irritation for this facet of her character; however, deep down in her, one senses a kind of a persistent courage that makes her want to go on even when the odds are almost insurmountable.

Amanda's practicality and maternal solicitude are again evident as she tries to trap a husband for Laura in a "web of Southern hospitality."⁵ This speech is "effectively ironic" because she has something to hide:⁶

It's rare for a girl as sweet and as pretty as Laura to be domestic! But Laura is, thank heavens, not only pretty but also very domestic.

⁵Popkin, p. 50.

⁶Ibid.

I'm not at all. I never was a bit. I never could make a thing but angel-food cake. Well, in the South we had so many servants. Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living! Gone completely! I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me. All of my gentlemen callers were sons of planters and so of course I assumed that I would be married to one and raise my family on a large piece of land with plenty of servants. But man proposes--and woman accepts the proposal!--To vary that saying a little bit--I married no planter! I married a man who worked for the telephone company!--that gallantly smiling gentleman over there! (p. 80)

The audience knows that Amanda is hiding the fact that Laura is not the domestic type. If she stays at home, it is because she is left without a choice. Being a cripple, she is afraid of the outside world. Strains of Amanda's clinging to the past are evident in these lines as she mentions gracious living and servants. Quoting clichés like "man proposes . . ." is characteristic of her. She intends for this quotation to be a joke, but the joke is on her.⁷

Amanda is concerned about Tom's eating habits, smoking, frequent trips to the movies, and even his job--to the point of being "suffocatingly maternal." Her well-meaning intentions, however, infuriate Tom and these lead to continuous nagging and bickering between them.

Don't push with your fingers. . . . Chew! . . .
Eat food leisurely and enjoy it. . . . Give
your salivary glands a chance to function! (p. 7)

You smoke too much. A pack a day at fifteen cents a pack. How much would that amount to in a month? Thirty times fifteen is how much, Tom? (p. 46)

⁷Ibid.

She continues her harrassments:

. . . Nobody goes to the movies night after night. People don't go to the movies at nearly midnight, and movies don't let out at two A. M. Come in stumbling. Muttering to yourself like a maniac! You get three hours and then go to work. . . . What right have you got to jeopardize your job? Jeopardize the security of us all? How do you think we'd manage if you were-- (p. 27)

These speeches do not sound anything like Amanda, the charming conversationalist, when she tries to impress people around her. A garrulous, nagging mother she is, but practical nonetheless. Although her concern for Tom involves some of her own selfish ends, still it gives an insight into her awareness of the needs of day-to-day living.

Amanda wants Tom also to be realistic and be content with his warehouse job. But Tom wants adventure in his career because "man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, and a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse!" (p. 40) This remark offends Amanda's finer sensibilities.

Man is by instinct! Don't quote instinct to me. Instinct is something that people have got away from! It belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it! . . . [They want] superior things! Things of the mind and the spirit! Only animals have to satisfy instincts! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs! Than monkeys--pigs-- (p. 40)

The preceding speech is a strong denunciation of all that does not have anything to do with the "superior things and of the mind and the spirit." It represents the conflict

between healthy emotions and the "repressive ideals of the Puritan tradition"⁸ in which she was brought up.

Toward the end of the play, after the gentleman caller has just left, Amanda berates Tom for the "wonderful joke" he played on them. "The effort, the preparations, all the expense! All for what? To entertain some other girl's fiancé! . . . Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job!" (p. 122) Amanda's practicality is again evident in these lines. For has she not worked "like a Turk" to get the extra money to entertain the gentleman caller? Has she not gone through a feverish preparation to welcome him? At this point, she also has come to grips with reality. For the first time in the course of the play, she has accepted the bitter fact of Laura's defect and called her "crippled," using a word which she refused to use before.

In spite of Tom's plea that he did not know of Jim's engagement, Amanda continues to blame him for the failure of the whole affair. "You don't know things anywhere! You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions . . . Go, go, go--to the movies!" (p. 122) She accuses him of living in a dream, of manufacturing illusions--the same sins she herself is guilty of. In making this accusation, Amanda has made the "most harsh and realistic" indictment against Tom, "who

⁸Falk, p. 36.

considers himself a realist," when in fact he is nothing but "an ineffectual dreamer."⁹

At the end of the play, Amanda bends over and silently comforts the bewildered Laura. "Now," Williams says, "that we cannot hear the mother's speech, her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty." (p. 123) Without her silly chatter and affected speech, Amanda assumes a nobility of character which even makes her a sympathetic figure. Her silence is part of the explosion-silence device which has been used many times to achieve rhythm. By this time one realizes that she is in greater need of sympathy than Laura. Here is shown the quality that the playwright suggests from the beginning of the play to be the key to her character--her heroism.¹⁰

It is the heroism which ultimately shows up in Amanda and leaves the audience the impression of a really noble woman. The audience does not form this impression after one specific scene or one particular speech. Throughout the play she rails, chides, nags, and abuses Tom; she acts prissy and affected. But at the end she emerges as a woman with stately "dignity and tragic beauty."

⁹Nelson, p. 167.

¹⁰Tischler, p. 98.

CHAPTER V

LAURA'S DICTION

Laura is the character in the play around whom the other characters revolve. She is not as forceful a character as Amanda, Tom, or Jim. She remains much in the background, but her presence is felt in every scene. She seems to be more of a spirit, an ethereal being, than a physical flesh and blood character. Yet her insistent influence on all the characters of the play is so powerful that her plight worries her mother, her "momentary radiance" visibly affects Jim, and the memory of her haunts and torments Tom.

In Laura, one sees a girl as delicate and as fragile as her collection of tiny animals. Like her mother, who lives in the past, she has a retreat of her own--a world of glass and music. Unlike her mother, who is brimming with Southern vivacity and charm, she is painfully shy and extremely quiet. While her mother refuses to accept the reality of her crippled leg, she is very conscious of it. Because of her magnification of her deformity, she remains in the background and "Laura's separation increases till she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf." (p. vii)

Laura's speech is not as sharply delineated as the speeches of Amanda, Tom, and Jim. In fact she does not say much. Since she stays in the background most of the time, her speeches do not have as much force as the speeches of the other characters. Her silences are eloquent. They are indicative of her shy and retiring nature. They have more impact on the other characters and on the audience than her speeches. Her silences are a part of a recurring Williams device, which is to alternate explosion with silence to achieve rhythm in the play.

It is almost impossible to discuss Laura's diction without mentioning the recurring theme song, "The Glass Menagerie," and the musical accompaniments to the different scenes where she is the center of attention. The theme song "expresses the surface vivacity of life with the underlying strain of immutable and inexpressible sorrow." (p. xi) It is Laura's music and is played clearly when the focus is upon her and the "lovely fragility of glass which is her image." (p. xi) The theme song and the musical accompaniments fortify Laura's speeches and gestures, even her silences.

One first hears the theme song in Scene I as Amanda asks Laura whether there are any gentlemen callers coming to visit. Laura does not believe that there are going to be any. Amanda, habitually evading reality, says, "Not one gentleman caller? It can't be true! There must be a flood, there must have been a tornado!" (p. 11)

Laura answers resignedly with her voice catching a little, "It isn't a flood, it's not a tornado, Mother. I'm just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain. . . . Mother's afraid I'm going to be an old maid." (p. 12)

Laura is more realistic about the impossibility of having a gentleman caller than her mother. Her mother's world of gentleman callers in Blue Mountain she will never experience. One notes her resignation as she expresses her mother's fears of her being an old maid.

In Scene II, as the theme song subsides, Laura is seen washing and polishing her figurines. Amanda arrives on the scene. Laura quickly puts them away and seats herself stiffly before the diagram of a typewriter keyboard. She senses that something is wrong. In this scene as in most scenes in the play, Amanda dominates the situation. Laura hardly speaks but one learns about her from Amanda's speeches. Amanda has found out that she dropped out of business school after getting sick during a speed-test in typing. She wants to know where she goes when she goes out pretending to attend business school.

"I went in the art museum and the birdhouses at the zoo. I visited the penguins everyday! . . . Lately I've been spending most of my afternoons in the Jewel-box, that big glass house where they raise the tropical flowers." (p. 18)

✓ Laura's escape from the world drives her to develop a deep attachment to things that are not human like her music and

glass, exhibitions in the art museum, penguins and tropical flowers. This is understandable. Being crippled, she feels ill at ease among her healthy contemporaries. She has magnified her deformity to such great proportions that she believes that she is a freak. "I couldn't face it," she cries pathetically when her mother discovered she dropped out of business school.

Like the music, the use of spot lights on Laura plays an important role in reinforcing her silences, which are part of her diction. This device is also used throughout the play. Spot lights draw attention to her and help convey the emotion she undergoes during her silences. Williams suggests that the "light upon Laura should be distinct from the others, having a peculiar pristine clarity such as lights used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas." (p. xii) In the quarrel between Tom and Amanda in Scene III a shaft of the "clearest pool of light" is focused on her. She does not have an active part in the conflict, yet the center of attention is on her while she sits quietly apart from Amanda and Tom. Her silent figure suggests the deep torment and the intense suffering she is undergoing while the two persons she cares for most are engaged in their usual bickerings.

After three scenes in the play where Laura stays in the background and does not actively participate in the dialogue comes the fateful evening of Jim O'Connor's visit. In the

beginning of Scene VI, a visual transformation takes place in Laura suggested by lighting. "A fragile, unearthly prettiness has come out in [her]: she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting." (p. 63)

"Mother, you've made me so nervous! By all this fuss! You make it seem so important!" (p. 63) Laura complains to Amanda as she prepares her feverishly for her gentleman caller. Her remarks show an interesting contrast to her mother's attitude toward the whole affair.

Tom and Jim arrive at the Wingfield apartment. Laura becomes panicky, and nervous at the prospect of meeting Jim again. When her mother pleads with her to answer the door, she says she is sick. She runs excitedly to her victrola and turns it on. As Amanda commands her to open the door, "a faraway, scratchy rendition of 'Dardanella'" is heard. This record is a painful remembrance of her father, who had nothing except charm. The music seems to "charm" and "soften" the air and gives her courage to face Jim. Again, the background music helps give emphasis to her action.

In the supper scene, during which Laura is not at the dinner table, a spotlight is on her quiet figure, apart from Jim, Amanda, and Tom. The audience feels agonizingly with her the emotions which she is experiencing, even if she does not utter a single word. Embarrassment, a painful sense of awkwardness stemming from her deformity, fear, lack of self-confidence--all these are eloquently conveyed by her silence.

In the dinner scene and from this point on until the end of the play, Williams abandons the use of spot lights and Laura's music. The focus is on her participation in the dialogue, which involves her in symbolic action as well.

Jim joins Laura in the parlor after dinner. Amanda gives him an old candelabrum with lighted candles for Laura and him to see by. She says that the candelabrum was melted out of shape when the church burned down when it was struck by lightning. The violence of the lightning has misshapen the candelabrum so that it will not be the same again. This foreshadows that Laura will not be the same again after her first contact with Jim O'Connor, a representative from the world of reality? So in the soft glow of candlelight, Jim offers Laura some dandelion wine with "extravagant gallantry." His warm personality helps Laura get over her extreme shyness. They reminisce together about their high school days. He asks her where her interest lies and she shows him her glass menagerie. She manifests the same enthusiasm for her figurines that Jim has for his interest in radio engineering.

Laura's best scene is the unicorn scene with Jim O'Connor. It is outstanding not only in its symbolism but also because of the tender and beautiful dialogue, which is some of the best Williams has written. Laura is showing her figurines to Jim.

Jim: I'd better not take it. I'm pretty clumsy with things.

Laura: Go on, I trust you with him. . . .
Hold him over the light, he loves the light!
You see how the light shines through him?

Jim: It sure does shine!

Laura: I shouldn't be partial, but he is my favorite one.

Jim: What kind of thing is this one supposed to be?

Laura: Haven't you noticed the single horn on his forehead?

Jim: A unicorn, huh?

Laura: Mmm-hmm!

Jim: Unicorns, aren't they extinct in the modern world?

Laura: I know!

Jim: Poor little fellow, he must feel sort of lonesome.

Laura: (Smiling) Well, if he does he doesn't complain about it. He stays on a shelf with some horses that don't have horns and all of them seem to get along nicely together.

Jim: How do you know?

Laura: (Lightly) I haven't heard any arguments among them! (pp. 104-106)

Williams uses the unicorn as a symbol for Laura. The unicorn, her favorite glass figurine, like her, is fragile and delicate. The unicorn, with its single horn, is conspicuously different from the other animals. Laura, with her limp, feels different from her healthy contemporaries. This identification of Laura with the unicorn makes her sense of separation from the outside world more explicit.

After showing her figurines to Jim, Laura feels more and more at ease around him. Soon they hear music coming from the Paradise Dance Hall across the alley--the same Paradise Hall mentioned earlier in the play, which is lighted by a large glass sphere whose delicate rainbow colors filter the dusk. Jim asks her to dance. She at first hesitates, then is overcome by Jim's infectious self-confidence. They dance, and Laura begins to fall victim, figuratively, to "brief deceptive rainbows" like the couples in the dance hall.

Then a minor catastrophe occurs.

Laura: Oh, my goodness!

Jim: Ha-ha-ha! (They suddenly bump into the table. Jim stops.) What did we hit on?

Laura: Table.

Jim: Did something fall off it? I think--

Laura: Yes.

Jim: Aw, aw, aw. Is it broken?

Laura: Now it is just like the other horses.

Jim: It's lost its--

Laura: Horn! It doesn't matter. Maybe it's a blessing in disguise.

Jim: You'll never forgive me. I bet that that was your favorite piece of glass.

Laura: I don't have favorites much. It's no tragedy, Freckles. Glass breaks so easily. No matter how careful you are. . . .

Jim: Still I'm awfully sorry that I was the cause.

Laura: (Smiling) I'll just imagine he had an operation. The horn was removed to make him feel less--freakish! (They both laugh) Now he will feel more at home with the other horses, the ones that don't have horns. . . (pp. 109-110)

Laura is saddened by the violence done to the unicorn, yet she looks at the accident optimistically. "Now he will feel more at home with the other horses. . ." echoes a subconscious wish on her part to be less "freakish" and be normal like the rest of the world around her.

Jim's magnetic personality has won Laura over to him completely. She glows in his presence and Jim's warmth and charm "lights her inwardly with altar candles." (p. 101) Jim begins to see her in a different light. For a fleeting moment he sees in her his need for tenderness and beauty. Without realizing it, he kisses her. Then he realizes what he has done. Laura, overcome with emotion, sinks on the sofa with a dazed, bewildered look. She looks at the broken unicorn in her hand with tenderness. Fearing that she might

have misinterpreted his action, Jim tells her that he cannot call her up next week. "You--won't--call again?" Laura asks haltingly, with the anguish and torment of someone whose whole world has just crumbled. Jim blurts out that he is already engaged. Back in his world of complacency, Jim continues to tell Laura in glowing terms about the transforming power of love, while she is fighting the storm raging within her. The candles of hope have been extinguished in the altar of her face. Her silent agony disturbs Jim. "I wish that you would--say something." In answer Laura smiles courageously and places the unicorn tenderly in the palm of his hand. "A--souvenir," she says softly. This symbolic gesture may be obvious but it is effective. The breaking of the unicorn in the earlier part of the scene foreshadows the hurt inflicted on her here.

The solemn atmosphere is disturbed by the intrusion of Amanda, who comes in with some refreshment, singing about lemonade and old maids, a "cruelly appropriate song" for the occasion. Amanda's gay banter is a contrast to Laura's solemn silence. In fact Laura does not utter a single word from this point on until the end of the play.

After Jim has left, one sees Laura seated on the sofa with Amanda comforting her. She lifts her face to smile at Amanda. And as Tom in his farewell speech commands her to blow her candles out, Laura does so. The smile she gives Amanda is promising. Perhaps, another gentleman caller

may chance upon the scene. So why not blow the candles of illusion out and face the real problems of a real world?

CHAPTER VI

JIM'S DICTION

Tom as narrator describes Jim as "the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from." (p. 5)

Williams, however, does not have much sympathy for a solid and substantial citizen like Jim¹ because he is a nagging reminder of the materialistic, grabbing, and eager businessmen he met at the shoe factory in St. Louis. Yet Jim seems also to represent the average insouciant young American--a contrast to the more involved and sensitive Tom.

Belonging to the modern mechanical and impersonal world of business, Jim naturally talks about radio engineering, power, knowledge, public speaking--subjects that are virtually unknown in the Wingfield household. As he mentions these in Scenes VI and VII, one learns of his one aim in life: to make a resounding success of himself in the business world.

Jim is first introduced by Laura in Scene II as she remembers him from their high school days. ". . . he had a wonderful voice. . . . Here he is with the silver cup for debating! See his grin?" (p. 20) Being the president of the senior class, a male lead in the annual operas, and the

¹Tischler, p. 101.

captain of the debating club, he has all the ingredients of a high school hero. With tremendous energy and ambition,

He was always running or bounding . . . was shooting with such velocity through his adolescence that you would logically expect him to arrive at nothing short of the White House by the time he was thirty. (p. 61)

But somehow something happened and interfered with his goals. Six years after he left high school, he was holding a job not much better than Tom's.

Having been introduced only as a subject for conversation between Amanda and Laura in Scene II, Jim makes his appearance as the dinner guest in Scene VI.

Jim and Tom are met by Amanda, who is wearing a girlish frock, a relic of the past. During his first encounter with Southern vivacity, Jim, in spite of his public speaking course, is caught off guard by Amanda's display of social graces. But he recovers soon after the initial shock and responds to her warmly.

The lights go out while they are at the dinner table. Amanda, embarrassed, laughs nervously. Jim saves the occasion with his gay banter--making little "cute" remarks and laughing appreciatively at Amanda's little jokes. Amanda finds out that Tom has not paid the light bill. Jim comes to the rescue again. "Shakespeare probably wrote a poem on that light bill, Mrs. Wingfield. Maybe the poem will win a ten-dollar prize." Anyway, he adds, candlelight is his favorite kind of light. His remarks show his tremendous ability to face embarrassing situations gracefully and tactfully.

Amanda asks Jim to join Laura in the parlor and coax her into drinking a little wine. And can he carry both the candelabrum and the wine? "Sure," Jim says, "I'm Superman!" revealing, seemingly, strong confidence in his own abilities.

He goes in the parlor. Jim's casual manners have put the nervous Laura at ease. An extrovert with a lot of Irish good nature, he finds Laura drawn to him. But it seems that Tom and Laura serve only as tools in his hands--spring boards to bolster his own ego. Tom has said, "I was valuable to him as someone who could remember his former glory, who had seen him win basketball games and the silver cup in debating." (p. 61) Laura, on the other hand, is the willing audience for him to practice his public speaking on. He speaks to her as if he were before a class in public speaking. Wrapped in his own bright world and impressed with his own eloquence, he is completely unaware of Laura listening to him with wide-eyed admiration. He brashly analyzes Laura's problem with confidence:

You know what I judge to be the problem with you?
 Inferiority complex! You know what that is? That's
 what they call it when someone low rates himself!
 . . . You don't have the proper amount of faith in
 yourself. . . . You know what my strong advice is?
 Think of yourself as superior in some way! (p. 103)

But Jim himself is not as confident as he sounds. Since he encounters a person with less confidence than himself, he feels that he has much of it. And he gives this advice to Laura, to boost his own insecurity--a piece of advice which

he might as well give to himself. As he tries to convince Laura that she should not feel inferior, he expresses his own fears and uncertainties of the future.

. . . And everybody has problems, not just you, but practically everybody has got some problems. You think of yourself as having the only problems, as being the only one disappointed as you are. For instance I hoped when I was going to high school that I would be further along at this time, six years later, than I am now-- . . . (p. 96)

As Jim points out to Laura her good points, he brags to her about his own.

. . . What do you see? A world full of common people! Which of them has one-tenth of your good points! Or mine! . . . Everybody excels in some one thing. Some in many! [At this point Jim surveys himself in the mirror.] All you've got to do is discover in what! Take me, for instance. [He looks at himself in the mirror again and adjusts his tie.] My interest happens to lie in electro-dynamics. . . . Zzzzzp!--Power! That's the cycle democracy is built on. (p. 104)

It is doubtful if Jim O'Connor fully believes what he says. But since he has made this persuasive speech, he even has led himself to believe that he has many good points.

Jim O'Connor's speeches about knowledge, money, power, and self-confidence are indicative of a practical, overly-ambitious young man. If he does not have all the good points he talks about, at least he is aware of the lack of some of them and would want to do something about the situation. This is why he is taking a course in public speaking. "A course in public speaking," he tells Tom earlier in the play,

. . . fits you for--executive positions?
 Ask yourself what is the difference between
 you an' me and men in the office down front?
 Brains?--No! Ability?--No! Then what?
 Just one little thing--. . . Social Poise!
 . . . (p. 74)

Jim feels that this course will give him the self-confidence he needs. To him self-confidence, with power, money, and knowledge, is a commodity one must have in this highly competitive world to be able to amount to anything. Obviously he is aiming to be an executive--no less! This is an indication of his grim determination to go after what he wants; he is willing to pay the cost.

In Jim's speeches, there is an eloquence all his own. It is not quite in the category of the eloquence of Big Daddy in a later play, Cat on the Hot Tin Roof, but it is eloquence nevertheless. His smooth talk and persuasiveness have made Laura respond to him warmly. And he begins to look at her in a different light. There is something about her that has stirred him. He finds himself being drawn irresistibly to her--against his better judgment..

You know--you're--well--very different!
 Surprisingly different from anyone else I
 know! (His voice becomes soft and hesitant
 with genuine feeling.) . . . I mean in a
 nice way . . . (Laura nods shyly, looking
 away.) You make me feel sort of--I don't
 know how to put it! I'm usually pretty good
 at expressing things, but--this is something
 that I don't know how to say! Has anyone
 ever told you that you were pretty? (p. 111)

Laura, at this time, has put on an unearthly prettiness--a fragile beauty that is illusive and ethereal. And Jim fumbles

and gropes for words to tell her so. This is how much Laura has affected him. One notices that Jim himself is overcome with emotion as he keeps talking to Laura about her being different from other people, obviously carried away.

The different people are not like other people, but being different is nothing to be ashamed of. Because other people are not such wonderful people. They're one hundred times one thousand. You're one times one! They walk all over the earth. You just stay here. They're common as--weeds, but--you--well--you're--Blue Roses! (p. 111)

Jim's little speech is very convincing--so convincing that he has convinced even himself.

Your eyes--your hair--are pretty. Your hands are pretty! Somebody needs to build your confidence and make you proud instead of shy, and turning away and--blushing--somebody ought to--ought to--kiss you, Laura! (p. 112)

He kisses her. For a moment he sees in Laura an answer to his need of tenderness and beauty.² In the Chekhovian manner his egotism causes him to do and say the wrong thing. But then he realizes what he has done and comes to his senses.

"Stumble John! I shouldn't have done that--that was way off the beam. You don't smoke, do you?" (p. 113) Jim asks, abruptly changing the subject. Jim is in control again.

Laura, you know if I had a sister like you, I'd do the same thing as Tom. I'd bring out fellows and--introduce her to them. The right type of boys of a type to--appreciate her. Only--well--he made a mistake about me. . . . I can't call up next week and--ask for a date. I thought I had better explain the situation in case you--misunderstood it and--hurt your feelings. . . . (p. 113)

²Nelson, p. 103.

Jim senses he has hurt Laura's feelings but he does not realize how deeply. He nonchalantly announces his engagement to another girl.

. . . As I was just explaining, I've got strings on me. Laura, I've been going steady! I go out all of the time with a girl named Betty. She's a home girl like you, and Catholic, and Irish, and in great many ways we--get along fine. . . . Well--right away from the start it was love!
(p. 114)

Jim has just crushed Laura's world which he has been building for an hour or so. Oblivious of the silent torment Laura is going through, "Stumble-John," back in his own world of complacency, rhapsodizes about love and what it has done for him. "Being in love has made a man of me! . . . The power of love is really tremendous! Love is something--that changes the whole world, Laura!" (pp. 114-115) Jim adds cruelly. By this time, the storm raging in Laura has subsided and "the holy candles in the altar of her face have been snuffed out. . . ." (p. 115)

Ironically enough Jim O'Connor does not prove to be "the long delayed but always expected something that we live for." (p. 5) Unsuspectingly, he breaks up the Wingfield dreams. Truly, he is an emissary from another world and "does not belong to the Wingfield world of dreams and fears and unexpressed desires."³

³Tischler, p. 101.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The Glass Menagerie, is, without doubt, Williams' best poetic drama. In this play Williams has manifested his qualities as a dramatic poet: one, his rare talent for characterization, which is unusual in contemporary drama; two, his ability "to make eloquent and expressive dialogue out of the real speech of men";¹ three, the ability to use words "to evoke the emotional reaction he wants to arouse-- sympathy for the unfortunate and frustrated and horror for the macabre";² and four, the mastery of the use of rhythm, which is achieved by the use of the silence-explosion technique and the "duologues." Even Joseph Wood Krutch, who harshly criticizes the play, admits to the "shrewd observation and deft economical characterization" found in the drama. Indeed, the play is a masterpiece in characterization. Since it is largely autobiographical, the author has created characters to whom he is attached to such an extent that they can move the audience profoundly. Amanda is a portrait of his own mother. The delineation of the

¹Eric Bentley, The Dramatic Event (New York, 1954), p. 23.

²Falk, p. 30.

different facets of her personality is a work of art. Her characterization is "both appalling and human, both cold and loving. No role could be more realistically written than this . . . it has the variety, suddenness, passion and freedom, almost unconscious freedom perhaps, of true realism."³ Laura's fragile beauty is a nostalgic picture of Rose, his sister, who represented to him all that was soft and tender. Tom is Williams himself, for whom "writing became not only an escape but a vital attempt to strike out against reality, to meet and deal with it with all the tools and anger at his command."⁴

This sensitive characterization is possible only because it is fortified by dialogue which belongs appropriately to the different characters. The dialogue is vivid, colorful, and arresting--highly characteristic of each of the participants in the drama. It gives the reader an insight into their personalities, their virtues and weaknesses, their peculiarities and idiosyncracies. The poetic Tom, the prissy Amanda, the braggart Jim O'Connor, even the shy Laura--all have a language uniquely their own. Tom's diction, both as a narrator and as a participant in the play, is poetic. He "poeticizes" considerably. It is this "poeticizing" that Williams has been denounced for. But "poetry" is relevant to

³Stark Young, Immortal Shadows (New York, 1948), p. 253.

⁴Nelson, p. 15.

Tom's role in the play. He has to be literary since he is a poet. His speeches make use of the explosion--silence pattern which helps achieve rhythm in the play. His most poetic speech at the end abounds in figurative and symbolic language.

Like the characterization of Amanda, her elevated speech is worthy of special mention. She is one of the few remaining members of society, who can use "lyrical dialogue without sounding highflown." Such speech is in keeping with her background of gentility and Southern aristocracy. Her refusal to face reality in the present is evident in her use of the language of her "glorious" past. This affected language is one of the vestiges of the tradition in which she was brought up, so she clings tenaciously to it and to all that represents this tradition. "Behind the Southern speech in [Amanda] is the echo of great literature, or at least a respect for it."⁵ Jim O'Connor's speeches about power, knowledge, money, and self-confidence are truly representative of an "emissary" from a materialistic world where such commodities are necessary for a tolerable existence. Laura's speech is not as sharply delineated as the speeches of Amanda, Tom, and Jim. Since she stays so much in the background, her speech does not have as much force as the speeches of the other characters. Her silences are more eloquent than her

⁵Young, p. 252.

speeches. They are fortified by music, spotlights, and screen legends.

To be able to make expressive dialogue out of the real speech of men, Williams does not hesitate to use "strong language" and "phrases involving the Holy Name."⁶ He depicts things the way he sees them. He observes that people in their moments of passion and anger use invective and vituperation, even language that is unprintable. Since he is an honest artist, he presents a representation of real life, with fidelity and accuracy. But a critic, Desmond Reid, who does approve of some of the "strong language" used to achieve realism nevertheless finds the use of phrases involving the Holy Name "objectionable on the stage, as they are in real life."⁷

The plot is presented in the best language Williams can offer. There is not much of a plot in the play in so far as "plot" is commonly understood. The whole drama is based on one main incident. This incident tells of how an impoverished mother of the South has her hopes blasted when she learns the bitter truth that the only "gentleman caller" who can be induced to visit her daughter is already engaged to another girl. This seemingly little incident has very serious, even tragic, consequences in the lives of

⁶Desmond Reid, "Tennessee Williams," in John D. Hurrell, Two Modern American Tragedies (New York, 1961), p. 107.

⁷Ibid.

those concerned. The author tells of hopes which such an incident can kindle, the memories it can evoke, the metamorphoses it is able to bring about and then, in the brief period of just one evening, the despair it can cause.⁸ As the story unfolds the revelation of characters takes place. As one hears them laugh and talk, argue and fight, and even reminisce about the past, the different characters distinguish themselves and their respective backgrounds, reveal what they feel and think, and what is going on in the innermost corners of their minds. Furthermore, one experiences, primarily through the language they speak, the intensity and complexity of their inner lives. One's emotions are aroused accordingly: compassion for the unfortunate, sympathy for the downtrodden, and fears and doubts for the uncertain.

For the trio--Tom, Amanda, and Laura, who are helplessly caught in a trap--one has pity and doubts for the uncertainty of their future. When Amanda acts affected and prissy, she is exasperating; when she is grimly realistic, she arouses sympathy. One feels nostalgic with Tom as he recalls the memory of his sister at the end of the play but feels antagonistic toward Jim because of his egotism and arrogance.

Williams achieves rhythm in his dialogues by the use of the explosion-silence technique as seen in Tom's speeches

⁸John Mason Brown, "Miss Taylor Returns," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVIII (April 14, 1945), 34.

and the use of the "duologue." This "duologue" has a fluid movement and as he puts it, has "the style of an antiphonal poem in which the cues are picked up so that there is scarcely a separation between speeches, and the tempo is quick, the voices edged."⁹ As early as Glass Menagerie, this quality has manifested itself in some of the significant scenes of the play. Tom announces to his mother that he has invited a gentleman caller:

Amanda: Why do you say that?
 Tom: Don't you remember asking me to fetch one? . . .
 Amanda: Well?
 Tom: We are going to have one.
 Amanda: What?
 Tom: A gentleman caller!
 Amanda: You mean you have asked some nice young man to come over?
 Tom: Yep, I've asked him to dinner.
 Amanda: You really did?
 Tom: I did.
 Amanda: You did, and did he--accept?
 Tom: He did!
 Amanda: Well, well--well, well! That's--lovely!
 Tom: I thought that you would be pleased.
 Amanda: It's definite, then?
 Tom: Very definite.
 Amanda: Soon?
 Tom: Very soon.
 Amanda: For heaven's sake stop putting on and tell me some things, will you?
 Tom: What things do you want me to tell you?
 Amanda: Naturally I would like to know when he's coming!
 Tom: He's coming tomorrow.
 Amanda: But, Tom!
 Tom: Yes, Mother?
 Amanda: Tomorrow gives me no time!
 Tom: Time for what?
 Amanda: Preparations! Why didn't you phone me at once, as soon as you asked him, the minute that he accepted? Then, don't you see, I could have been getting ready!

⁹Vowles, pp. 53-54.

Tom: You don't have to make any fuss.

Amanda: Oh, Tom, Tom, Tom, of course I have to make a fuss! I want things nice, not sloppy! Not thrown together. I'll certainly have to do some fast thinking, won't I?

As the dialogue shifts back and forth between Tom and Amanda, the reader becomes aware of a fluidity in the conversation as the tempo rises from the announcement of a gentleman caller to the discussion of the specific day he is expected. The fluid quality is responsible for the mounting verbal and emotional excitement in this particular scene. The audience becomes aware of the contrast between Tom's and Amanda's attitude toward a gentleman caller. Tom is nonchalantly unconcerned, almost bored; Amanda, reliving again her romantic girlhood, expectantly and feverishly eager.

Williams has applied a modern rhythm to an ancient classical device, stichomythia. Part of what is new is his concern with a principle of flow.¹⁰ This principle of flow is evident in Glass Menagerie, not only in the duologues but also in the characters, the way the scenes are handled, and the symbols used. In his notes to an early play, Battle of Angels, Williams recalls with fondness a lady named Laura Young, who had a high clear voice "like cataracts of water." Laura Young was, to a certain extent, the prototype of the fragile Laura in The Glass Menagerie.¹¹ Tom, another

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

character in the play, shifts in and out as narrator and participant. One scene silently dissolves into another.

There is, indeed almost a submarine quality about the play, the kind of poetic slow motion that becomes ballet . . . the very symbolic glass of the play is aqueous--arrested water. Form and content are thus fused with striking felicity.¹²

Even the theme song, "The Glass Menagerie," contributes to the fluid quality of the play. Williams suggests that the qualities of delicateness and beauty of glass "should be woven into the recurring tune, which dips in and out of the play as if it were carried on a wind that changes." (p. xi)

The principle of flow has its limitations, but it is responsible for releasing the play from the bonds of naturalism and creating some of the most original dramatic poetry of our time.¹³

After considering Williams' handling of poetic language, let us take a look at some of his general literary habits. There is a possibility that he has been influenced by the French poet, Rimbaud. He, like Rimbaud and the German expressionistic playwrights, makes use of "fragmentary bursts of rhetoric, expresses intense emotion in single words and exclamation points, phrases, ideas, and images in disconnected sequence, and leaves them as recorded in the first heat of composition."¹⁴

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Falk, p. 39.

As early as The Glass Menagerie, this style is evident. It is, however, more extensively used in his later plays. A closer look at this style will illustrate its effectiveness in producing the impact which Williams tries to achieve:

Tom: Listen! . . . You think I want to spend fifty-five years down there in that--celotex interior! With flourescent--tubes! . . . But I get up. I go! . . . Why, listen if self is what I thought of, Mother, I'd be where he is--Gone!

The following dialogue exhibits some outstanding similarities to Rimbaud's style:

Tom: I'm too late to--
 Amanda: (Catching his arm--very importantly. Then shyly.) Down at the warehouse, aren't there some--nice young men?
 Tom: No!
 Amanda: There must be--some . . .
 Tom: Mother-- [gesture]
 Amanda: Find out one that's clean living-- doesn't drink and--ask him out for your sister!
 Tom: What?
 Amanda: For sister! To meet! To get acquainted! (p. 43)

The use of fragments, single words, dashes, and exclamation points renders the dialogue not only rhythmical but also intensely emotional, thus creating a powerful impact upon the audience.

Besides the extensive use of symbols and lighting, The Glass Menagerie makes use of screen legends. To fortify a spoken word or phrase, Williams suggests the use of a screen device, which is projected on the screen for the duration of the scene. It emphasizes the most important phrase in the scene. For example, when Tom mentions Laura's dropping

out of Rubicam's Business College in Scene III which, to Amanda, is a major catastrophe, the legend "After the Fiasco" emphasizes his message. Tom's description of Jim O'Connor as an outstanding student during his high school days is reinforced with the legend "High School Hero." When Jim has just mentioned his engagement to another girl, the legend "Things Have a Way of Turning Out So Badly" anticipates Amanda's significant remark toward the end of the scene.

Eddie Dowling, who first produced the play at the Civic Theatre, Chicago, thought this device "superfluous" and did not use it in the stage production. Gassner also regarded the device as "redundant and rather precious."¹⁵ Williams, he adds, is "straining for effect not knowing that his simple tale, so hauntingly self-sufficient, needs no adornments."¹⁶ The screen legends are not only unnecessary as Dowling and Gassner observe, but they are also irritating reminders to the intelligent and perceptive theatre-goer who does not want the obvious pointed out.

The use of symbols and rhythm is exploited to the limit "to achieve a gossamer effect of compassion, fragility, and frustration, typical of Tennessee Williams at his most sensitive best."¹⁷ Although the play is not in meter it does bring poetry back to the theatre.¹⁸

¹⁵Tischler, p. 103.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁸Ibid.

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