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Mnemonic Dramaturgy in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*

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Introduction

In 1945 *The Glass Menagerie* premiered. It would become the first success of Tennessee Williams, who is considered to be one of the major twentieth-century American playwrights. The drama is presented as a memory play and fits within the poet's lifelong fascination with illusion and reality; it shows Williams playing with the subjectivity of memory (Bigsby, 1997, 33). Psychology had become a modern life science at the end of the nineteenth century and the idea that we are past-influenced was of great influence in modernism. As a consequence, the working of the memory is an important modernist theme, in theatre as well as in other arts (Favorini, 2007, 33). In comparison to other art forms however, American theatre was slow to change and it was only at the end of the Second World War that a genuine innovation took place. Theatre makers felt the pre-war genres of realism and melodrama were no longer suitable to depict the horrors of the world. At the same time the desire to understand "the darker recesses of the psyche" led dramatists to psychology. Williams was one of the dramatists that wanted to break with the conventions of realism and with *The Glass Menagerie* he made a significant contribution to the innovation of dramatic techniques and form: the play stood at the nexus of the old melodramatic form and the modern psychological theatre (Aronson, 2000, 93-95).

In studies about the representation of memory drama does not hold a prominent place (Favorini, 2008, 11). Yet theatre as a "time art" is closely connected with the act of remembering since time arts try to capture "the flowing character of all temporally ordered experience" (Murphy & Kovach 1972, 399 qtd in Favorini, 2007, 30). In *Memory in Play* (2008) Favorini tries to fill the gap by discussing the dramatic construction of memory throughout history. This is an important contribution to the debate on memory

and drama, but since it gives an overview it contains no in-depth analyses of Williams's play. Many scholars have studied *The Glass Menagerie*. Brandt (1967) and Crandell (1998), for example, have analyzed the cinematic techniques. Jacobs (2002) and Krasner (2006) have discussed the innovative staging in relation to the memory aspect and Jacobs (2002) has also looked into the psychological uses of memory in the play. So far no research has focused on the mnemonic dramaturgy: how does Williams build up the dramatic composition of the play so that it represents a memory? The closest to such an analysis is King's 1973 article "Irony and Distance in *The Glass Menagerie*" in which the scholar discusses the relationship between the soliloquies and the scenes they unfold. King argues that the humour and irony in the monologues serve as a way for the narrator to maintain a distance between himself and the pain of the memories. He does not analyse however in what ways Williams tries to represent the process of remembering on stage. That is nevertheless a very important aspect of the drama, because the desired point of view is counterintuitive for the theatre. Normally this viewpoint is the spectator's, but in *The Glass Menagerie* the adopted viewpoint is that of Tom, a character within the play. In this paper I will therefore try to fill that gap by analysing how Williams's construction of the play reflects the essentially subjective autobiographical memory of this narrator Tom. To accomplish this I will link insights from studies on memory to the dramaturgy of the play. The scholars to whom I will refer are specialists in the fields of philosophy, psychology or psychotherapy. I will start by sketching the necessary context: the backgrounds to which the play was written and insights about memory that are relevant for the analysis. After that I will describe the dramatic tradition of exploring memory, explain why *The Glass Menagerie* fits within this tradition and what this implicates for the dramaturgy. The rest of the essay consists of an analysis of the dramaturgy. First I will show how the mnemonic nature is introduced

in scene one. Then I will discuss the projections that ensure the maintenance of the mnemonic dramaturgy throughout the play. Finally I will analyse the stage directions in the scenes with reported events.

1. Tennessee Williams and American Modernist Drama

During the modernist period in the first half of the 20th century the visual and performing arts in America by and by developed a unique American voice. Especially after World War II, the American arts took an influential and pioneer position (Aronson, 2000, 91). In the development of an American drama tradition Tennessee Williams would play an important role. In this section I will first briefly sketch the problems modernist artists were confronted with especially after two World Wars. Then I will explain how Williams relates to the modernist tradition and how his plays are key instances in the innovation of modern American drama.

Modernist artists found themselves in a world they could not grasp or represent in their art and tended to turn to abstraction (Guilbaut & Repensek, 1980, 73). Realistic art forms were felt to be deficient. In 1946 the philosopher and critic Dwight MacDonald expressed this feeling as follows: "Naturalism is no longer adequate, either esthetically or morally, to cope with the modern horror" (qtd. in Guilbaut & Repensek, 1980, 72). Whereas most avant-garde art supplanted the established art forms that preceded it, American theatre avant-garde was far less radical. Aronson explains that this is partly due to the nature of this art form. Theatre has kept a much closer relation to a realistic framework, because it explores human interactions and emotions and is essentially communicated through human bodies. Nevertheless post-war dramatists too felt that the realistic drama had become "feeble and impotent" (Aronson, 2000, 91-92). At the

same time people became more and more interested in exploring the darker parts of the mind as a way to understand human behaviour, which explains the rising fascination with Freud's theories and psychology in theatre (Aronson, 2000, 94).

Within this context *The Glass Menagerie* premieres and the play signals a genuine shift in American drama. Although Williams shares the belief that naturalism is inapt, he does not supersede it with abstraction or anti-theatricality. Instead he opts for a combination of melodrama and psychology (Aronson, 2000, 95). The writer uses the classical melodramatic theme of the American home and family, but his tone is much darker in comparison to the pre-war melodramas. The characters are anti-heroes, the family is dysfunctional and the play explores the psychology of people living at the margins (Aronson, 2000, 95). It shows the audience the deception of the American Dream: for a lot of people it is nothing more than that, an unreachable ideal (Krasner, 2006, 29). Tom, the narrator of the play, goes back to his past. In 1937 during the Great Depression the aspiring poet Tom works in a warehouse to support his mother Amanda and his cripple sister Laura. The father left them years ago because he was "a telephone man who fell in love with long distances" (21). Tom finds escape from home and the fights with his mother in the movies and his dreams about joining the merchant marine. When Amanda finds out that Laura dropped out of the business college she enrolled her in, the mother decides that the only hope for the extremely shy girl is to get married. She asks Tom to look out for possible suitors and he invites Jim O'Connor, a colleague from the warehouse with whom he went to high school. Amanda is determined to pair off her daughter and the gentleman caller, but Jim turns out to be engaged, which leads to the mental breakdown of Laura. Because Tom did not know about the fiancée, Amanda accuses him of being a "selfish dreamer" (89).

The Glass Menagerie fits within the post-war form of “domestic realism”, in which the family as the corner stone of American society is exposed as a damaged or even as a failed institution. At the same time Williams reinvents the genre by adding a poetic layer. After World War II people longed for a return to an ordered and normal world, but were confronted with the inescapability of the horrible war experiences (Schlueter, 2000, 299). In the play this paradox is depicted both formally and thematically. In form Williams contrasts “an essentially melodramatic vocabulary of a lost past” (Aronson, 2000, 95) with a revolutionary staging that makes use of the newest technical innovations like projections and lighting. Within the play “a nostalgia for an older, less conflicted world competes for space with the insistence of a world that is faster, cruder, and crueller than the one remembered” (Schlueter, 2000, 299). In the closing speech Tom explains that he left home soon after the incident trying to leave his past behind, only to find out that no matter how much distance he travels his memories and his feelings of guilt towards Laura still pursue him. With this play Williams created the genre of poetic realism or American symbolism, which would become “the closest thing the US had to a national style for the next fifteen years” (Aronson, 2000, 96). According to Aronson, *The Glass Menagerie* can therefore be seen as a metaphor for the United States; “on the verge of something new, yet filled with doubts and insecurities and unwilling to let go of a romanticized past” (2000, 96).

In the light of Williams’s career and the tradition of American theatre, *The Glass Menagerie* also heralded something new. Before the war Williams was a political playwright. After the war however, from *The Glass Menagerie* onwards, he radically chose another path (Biggsby, 1984, 1). His attention for the non-literary aspects expanded the boundaries of theatricality itself. With his combination of lyricism/poetic language and experimentalism he revolutionized American drama after World War II.

The poetic theatre he invented opened up the possibilities for dramatists and gave way to new forms besides realism (Roudané, 1997, 1-3). This innovation also led to a change in the hierarchy of the production: his plastic theatre requires a collaborative effort of the writer and the director, the lighting and sound technicians and the set and costume designers (Roudané, 1997, 7). Regarding the topics he addressed, Williams's sexual frankness and "eroticized stage" would have a deep impact (Roudané, 1997, 6 and Wilmeth & Miller, 1993, 495). The original nature of his theatrical imagination gives him a central place within American theatre and together with Arthur Miller and Edward Albee he would become the most important American dramatist of the second half of the twentieth century. (Roudané, 1997, 1-3).

2. Memory and Narration

Theatre and memory are closely linked. On the one hand "theatre's fundamental mode of repetition makes it a child of memory": to perform a play is in itself an activity of remembering. On the other hand the theatrical metaphor is used as an explanatory model for memory; remembering is described as an act of scenic imagination (Favorini, 2007, 31-33). In this section I will first explain how Williams makes use of the relationship between memory and narration. After that I will discuss some important terminology and touch on scholars who have looked into the connection between the two.

Williams takes the close connection between memory and narration to his advantage by presenting *The Glass Menagerie* as a "memory play". It gives him the poetic license to breach conventions: memories do not respond to the rules of reality and traditional storytelling and can therefore "be presented with unusual freedom"

(Williams, 1979, 9).¹ Apart from that it also gives him the opportunity to investigate the human psyche and search for a truth that can no longer be found in realism. In the accompanying “Production Notes” the playwright explains this as follows:

[U]nconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth [...] The straight realistic play [...] has the same virtue of a photographic likeness. Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art: that truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance. (9)

In the play the episodic memory literally takes the centre stage. In science this memory is also referred to as the autobiographical memory. The first term is used to emphasize that this memory contains the events someone has experienced. The latter highlights the personal and individual character of the stored memories (Favorini 2008, 7). The episodic memory is a subcategory of the declarative memory which is “the system that provides the basis for conscious recollection of facts and events” (Jacobs, 2002, 1261). Already in 1908, in the article “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”, Freud observed that the episodic (or autobiographical) memory is not a container of objectively saved, unalterable past events. It is more like a collection of impressions that change together with the changes in and the needs of the rememberer. A shared characteristic of creative writing and the declarative memory is therefore that “past,

¹ All quotations from *The Glass Menagerie* are taken from *Tennessee Williams Eight Plays* (pp. 1-90). New York: Nelson Doubleday, 1979.

present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them” (Freud, 1908, 423-424). Freud also pointed out the distinction between observer and field memories. In observer memories, you are looking at yourself in the scene from a distance. In field memories you are in the scene and watch the memory from the perspective from which you originally saw it (Favorini, 2008, 140). This difference is especially stressed in scene one. For a discussion of this scene see section four.

Since Freud linked the act of storytelling to the act of remembering many scholars have studied the similarities between memory and narration. Similar to the two visual perspectives that Freud distinguished in memories, Goldie for example distinguishes a difference between internal and external emotional and evaluative perspectives in “Narrative Thinking About One’s Past” (2012). To explain this difference Goldie introduces the term “ironic gap”. In a narrative a gap can exist between an internal perspective of a character and an external perspective of the author or narrator (Goldie, 2012, 34). In an autobiographical narrative like *The Glass Menagerie*, the same structure can occur. However, the ironic gap does then not express the difference in perspective between two individuals, but between two perspectives of one individual, divided by time. Not every gap between the character then and the character now is ironic. There has to be a difference between the emotional or evaluative perspectives. In other words: the character then evaluated the situation differently from the character now, or the feeling when experiencing differs from the feeling when remembering the event (Goldie, 2012, 36-37). The ironic gap is a prominent feature of the soliloquies that connect the scenes, as King (1973) points out. Williams further represents this gap in the play by means of the projection device, which I will discuss in section five.

Another important term is “the personal myth”, which the psychoanalyst Kris described:

[a] coherent set of autobiographical memories, a picture of one’s course of life as part of the self-representation [that] has attracted a particular investment, it is defensive inasmuch as it prevents certain experiences and groups of impulses from reaching consciousness. At the same time, the autobiographical self-image has taken the place of a repressed fantasy... (Kris, 1956, 294 qtd in Jacobs, 2002, 1268)

Kris originally used the term for behaviour observed in his patients, but to a certain extent everyone creates his personal myth. Everyone is formed by one’s experiences and pours the personal memory into a narrative in an attempt to explain why one has become the person one is. When someone has had traumatic experiences or episodes he/she would rather forget, those can clash with the desired self-image. A way of dealing with this clash is trying to forget them. As I will discuss in section three of this essay, this idea is of central importance for *The Glass Menagerie*.

Of interest for the analysis of *The Glass Menagerie* are further the secondary characteristics of remembering which Casey describes in *Remembering, a Phenomenological Study* (2000). Those secondary features do not necessarily characterize remembering. They are very important for this essay however, since they are closely linked to the way memories can be structured and experienced. The first one Casey discusses is the “quasi-narrative structure”: memories often seem to “spontaneously [fall] into an ordered sequence of events”. They are only quasi-narrational, because they tell themselves and lack a narrative voice. A second trait is

“schematicalness”: memories are “abbreviated in such a way as to be sketchy or blurred – not fully presented.” The degree of schematicalness can of course vary. The last trait is what he calls “ruminescence”, a portmanteau of reminiscence and rumination. It captures “the special mood or emotional state that remembering may occasion” and “ranges from active nostalgia to tepid wistfulness” (Casey, 2000, 43-47). Those three features are all clearly linked to the reconstructive nature of remembering Freud already gave attention to. Williams makes use of those features to create the mnemonic nature of *The Glass Menagerie*. As the playwright states in the “Production Notes” nostalgia “is the first condition of the play” and the writer Tom shows the audience some of his memories, which he has obviously arranged into a narrative structure, namely the play. The schematicalness is most prominently in the first scene (see section four) and in the reported scenes (see section six).

3. The Memory Play

In this section I will explain what a memory play is and how the play fits within a theatrical tradition. Then I will link the autobiographical character of the play to the idea of the personal myth. I will end with discussing the problem of autobiographical memory and point of view in theatre, which is essential to understand the importance of the mnemonic dramaturgy. For *The Glass Menagerie*, in which the threads that connect a character to its past are so important, Williams invented the term “memory play”. Remarkably enough he does not provide a clear definition, but only describes the desired effects and implications: “Because of its considerably delicate or tenuous material, atmospheric touches and subtleties of direction play a particularly important part” (9). For this essay I will therefore use part of Favorini’s elaborate definition:

[O]ne in which the intention to remember and/or forget comes prominently to the fore, with or without the aid of a remembering narrator; in which the phenomenon of memory is a distinct and central area of the drama's attention[...]; or in which memory or forgetting serves as a crucial factor in self-formation and/or self-deconstruction.

(2008, 138)

Although Williams coined the term, it was not a completely new genre. By employing the term the playwright directly connected the play to *I Remember Mama*, a successful Broadway play that had opened six months before Williams's play premiered. This play also has a remembering protagonist who supposedly wrote the play, although here the truth of the remembered events is never questioned (Favorini, 2008, 139-140). Indirectly the term pointed towards the link between theatre and memory that had existed from the very beginning. The ancient Greeks mythologically defined theatre, being one of the arts, as a daughter of Mnemosyne, the personification of memory. In Greek drama the anagnorisis or recognition is an integral part of the dramaturgy. This tragic recognition can be defined as an "existential repositioning of an individual vis-à-vis the past" (Favorini, 2008, 4). The Greek plays thus already dramatize memory and forgetting (Favorini, 2007, 32). In medieval culture remembering also took a central place. Naturally the oral modality of the arts went hand in hand with the training of memory. Thematically remembering was important, because plays often served as exemplum: the audience had to recognize the shown situations and take a lesson from it (Favorini, 2008, 18). During Renaissance Shakespeare too explored the theme of memory. In *Hamlet* for example the theme is introduced in the first soliloquy where the protagonist asks himself: "Must I remember?" (1.2.143) (Favorini, 2008, 22-23). *The*

Glass Menagerie explicitly inscribes itself in this tradition by making the act of remembering its central theme. At the same time Williams reshapes the tradition by shifting attention from the simple recalling of memories to the reconstruction of memories (Favorini, 2008, 139-140). What makes his treatment of memory so interesting is his focus on the subjectivity of the remembered. The dramatic tradition in which memory was explored had often used memories as a feature of character construction (Favorini, 2007, 32). In psychotherapy Freud had shown that character is fluid and memories can be adapted to fit the self-image. Williams combines the insights of psychotherapy with the character construction based on memories to create an essentially subjective play with a protagonist that struggles to reconcile his self-image with his memories. The time is 'Now and the Past' (5). Tom is both the narrator of the play and a character in the play. He shows the audience and himself his youth memories in an attempt to come to terms with them and leave the past behind. In *The Glass Menagerie* memory is thus not only a theme, but the very basis of the entire play: the unreliability of the rememberer influences the construction. It can therefore be seen as the first real "memory play".

Tennessee (real name Tom) Williams deliberately blurs the line between fact and fiction to emphasize that memories are not objective. Memories are not simply recalled, but reconstructed according to one's needs, just like a story. Although the play is fiction, it contains a lot of autobiographical facts. Williams gives the protagonist the same name and profession as himself and presents this character as the architect of the play. Just like Laura in the play Williams's real sister Rose was mentally ill and Williams felt guilty for leaving her. On one level the play can thus be read as the personal myth of Tom the character, but at a higher level it is the personal myth Williams constructs to deal with his past. By doing this the playwright seems to argue that "autobiography – which is,

after all, organized declarative memory – is an elaborate fiction based on facts. And that fiction (the creative use of memory) is at its heart emotional autobiography” (Jacobs, 2002, 1261-1262). The play explores the emotional needs of the rememberer Tom. The ambiguous reference of the name in combination with the similarities between play and reality allows this remembering Tom to be the playwright, the character or both simultaneously (Jacobs, 2002, 1261). As Jacobs explains, the play is the construction of a personal myth and transforms the experiences in ways that are psychologically necessary. One’s self-image is built up around “a coherent set of autobiographical memories, a picture of one’s course of life”. To preserve this image, some experiences are oppressed or transformed (Kris, 1956, 294 qtd in. Jacobs, 2002, 1268). This defence mechanism is discernible in the play in various ways. Firstly the recollection of memories springs from a need to justify the leaving of Tom (2002, 1262). Secondly he tries to create a space where his sister, whom is forever lost, can be her old self again. Memory thus paradoxically “keeps alive in the present what is dead and gone forever” (Jacobs, 2002, 1263). Thirdly and most importantly Tom tries to create a story of his memories that makes them bearable and allows him to go forward. He tried to flee and forget his past, which failed. So now he uses the plasticity of the memory to his advantage by creating a fictional space to store the bitter reality without forgetting it (Jacobs, 2002, 1269). In the play autobiography and autobiographical memory are thus inextricably entwined with each other and with Tom’s emotional needs, “for memory is seated predominantly in the heart” (Williams, 1979, 19).

The fact that the play is a presentation of autobiographical memory complicates the dramatic construction because of the point of view. Autobiographical memory refers to memories that are “specific, personal, long-lasting and (usually) of significance to the self-system” (Nelson 1993, 8). The term emphasizes that one’s memories are highly

individual (Favorini 2008, 141). Traditionally theatre makes the spectator aware that there is a difference between showing and seeing (Freedman 1991, 68). The director can lead the gaze of the audience, but cannot force it to focus on a particular thing; in the end the point of view is the spectator's own. The desired viewpoint in *The Glass Menagerie* is different: the viewer has to identify his viewpoint as the seeing eye of Tom, the narrator. It thus more resembles the cinema, where the camera chooses the viewer's viewpoint (Freedman 1991, 68). For theatre however, this is a counterintuitive identification:

[C]inema encourages a more direct perceptual identification with the seeing eye of the camera, theatre divides and disperses the possibilities of identification, in the process problematizing both identification and point of view. (Freedman 1991, 68)

The spectators look at real life actors playing Amanda, Laura and Jim. This makes the characters seem autonomous, but in fact they are merely projections of Tom's memory (Crandell 1998, 3-4). Tom is, as Crandell puts it, not only the "cinematic 'I' who sees (and speaks) within the fictive narrative" but also the "cinematic 'eye'" (1998, 4). This is so counterintuitive that the audience has to be made and kept aware of this. In the rest of this essay I will analyse *The Glass Menagerie* and show how Williams makes use of a variety of techniques from different sources to create the needed mnemonic dramaturgy.

4. The Introduction of the Mnemonic Nature of the Play

Tennessee Williams uses the first scene of *The Glass Menagerie* to introduce the mnemonic nature of the play. As discussed earlier, the natural point of view in the

theatre is the spectator's own. In *The Glass Menagerie*, however, the desired viewpoint is that of the character Tom. In scene one the viewer is led into Tom's memories: he/she has to adopt Tom's point of view. In order to accomplish this, the playwright makes use of different elements, which he borrows from literary and cinematic conventions.

Firstly Williams has to install the desired point of view, for which he inserts a technique from the novel. In contrast with plays, novels often force a reader to adopt a character's viewpoint as his/her own: the homodiegetic first person narrator is a familiar literary device to the average reader. The desired perspective in the play is more or less the same: the play does not present reality, but a subjective experience of reality, focalized through the narrator Tom. In the opening soliloquy Tom explains that the play will make use of this device: he stages himself as the homodiegetic narrator and tells the audience that everything is focalized through him.

[Tom] addresses the audience. To begin with, I turn back time [...] I am the narrator of the play, and also a character in it. The other characters are my mother, Amanda, my sister, Laura, and a gentleman caller [...]. He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from. But since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a symbol; he is the long-delayed but always expected something that we live for. (20)

To ensure that the audience recognizes the desired viewpoint, Williams also lets Tom explicitly state that "[t]he play is memory" (20).

Once the audience has recognized the play as Tom's memory, it has to be seduced to adopt Tom's point of view as its own. This process resembles the process that is called

suture in cinema. Like drama, cinema is a visual art, but nevertheless there is a big difference: the point of view. In a movie the camera chooses what the viewer sees. However, in general moviemakers do not want the audience to be aware of this. They want to draw the viewers into the movie, “taking up positions as ‘subjects-within-the-film’”. This operation by which viewers are “stitched into” the story-world is called suture (Nowlan, n.d.). Often this is done by providing a stand-in for the viewer. According to Silverman the process of suture is successful when “the viewing subject says, ‘Yes, that’s me,’ or ‘That’s what I see.’” This “depends upon the subject’s willingness to become absent to itself by permitting a fictional character to ‘stand in’ for it, or by allowing a particular point of view to define what it sees” (Silverman, 1983, 205). In other words, a camera can capture a character’s viewpoint. The spectator’s viewpoint can coincide with this character’s perspective, but the viewer has to accept that the character defines what the viewer sees; he/she has to identify with the character. To replicate this effect of suture in theatre, Williams adapts cinematic techniques (Crandell, 1998, 2).

The first of those techniques is the shot/reverse shot formation. In *The Subject of Semiotics* Silverman explains this technique. In a movie shot one shows a viewpoint (e.g. the outside of an apartment). The viewer of the movie wonders who is looking at the apartment. Shot two “shows the field from which the first shot is assumed to have been taken” and reveals whose gaze it was: “[it] locates a spectator in the other 180° of the same circular field” and thereby implies that shot one was seen through this character’s eyes (1983, 201-202). This technique ascribes what is visible on the screen to a character within the cinematic narrative and denies the existence of the camera. Crandell notes that this technique can also be applied to *The Glass Menagerie*, because it has a narrator. At the very start of the play, the audience sees the outside of the

apartment where Tom used to live (shot one). Then Tom appears on stage and explains to the audience that what they see on stage is actually his memory: “The play is memory. Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, not realistic” (20). Thus Williams “ascribes to a character within the drama (the narrator) the control of the theatrical apparatus” and at the same time denies the existence of the playwright (Crandell, 1998, 5).

A second technique Williams adopts is the camera’s organizing point of view (Crandell, 1998, 2). This technique is closely connected with the device of the narrator: “the narrator and the camera both operate to provide the spectator with an orienting point of view, one with which the spectator is then compelled to identify” (Crandell, 1998, 3). In a movie the audience is forced to follow the motion of the camera. Likewise Williams forces the audience to follow the motion of Tom in scene one: it “enters” the apartment together with the narrator. After the opening monologue Tom goes into the dining room/the memory. The accompanying stage directions read: “*at the end of Tom’s opening commentary, the dark tenement wall slowly becomes transparent and reveals the interior of the ground-floor Wingfield apartment*” (19). In the rest of the scene, the audience is gradually led into the house:

The audience hears and sees the opening scene [...] through both the transparent fourth wall of the building and the transparent gauze portieres of the dining-room arch. It is during this revealing scene that the fourth wall slowly ascends, out of sight. This transparent exterior wall is not brought down again until the very end of the play, during Tom’s speech. (20)

With this technique Williams creates the feeling of a camera motion: it is almost like a camera follows Tom inside through the wall of the apartment and zooms out again at the end of the play when Tom exits his memory and therewith the apartment. Crandell explains that the playwright thus compels the audience to identify with Tom by “approximating the camera’s singular and authoritative point of view, [and] at the same time limiting the possibilities of identification and point of view generally characteristic of theatre” (1998, 4).

Although Tom is the “singular and authoritative” voice, he is not necessarily trustworthy, especially not when it comes to his memories. The spectators, however, could easily forget this once they have entered Tom’s memory. After all: they look at scenes happening in real time, played out by real people before their own eyes. Therefore the spectator must be reminded once in a while of the mnemonic nature of the presented scenes. Throughout the play Tom repeatedly steps out of the represented past to comment on it in the here and now. King analyzed this switching between monologue and scene, commenting and reliving in the article “Irony and Distance in *The Glass Menagerie*” (1973). Apart from those switches in later scenes, the playwright includes both non-realistic and meta-theatrical elements in the opening scene to underline the mnemonic structure. The non-realistic elements, described in the stage directions, represent the workings of memory. A first example is the distinction between observer and field memories. When Tom enters the apartment in scene one, this is a switch from observer to field memory: “[Tom divides the portieres and enters the dining room]” (21). This switch is extra emphasized, because in the actual past Tom did not enter the dining room until later. In contrast, the following stage direction is a representation of an observer memory: [*She addresses Tom as though he were seated in the vacant chair at the table though he remains by the portieres. He plays this scene as*

though reading from a script] (23). This stage direction also draws attention to another characteristic of a memory: the rememberer knows what is coming. After all: the recollection of a memory is to a large extent the repetition of a known scene with known lines. Thirdly the memory operates through transformation and selection (Debusscher, 1998, 57). Williams is well aware of this schematicalness that can characterize remembering: “memory [...] omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value it touches” (19). The playwright uses non-verbal theatrical elements to emphasize those operations. An example of omission is the stage direction “[*Eating is indicated by gestures without food or utensils*]” (21). It is quite normal to remember the act of eating, without remembering the utensils or the food. Another example is the stage direction [*Tom motions for music and a spot light on Amanda*] (23) which literally highlights certain details of the situation, according to what Tom remembers most vividly. Apart from that function, it also draws attention to the fact that he is the manipulator of the play because he is the one remembering.

Williams further highlights the mnemonic nature of the play by adding meta-theatrical comments in the text. A first example can be found in the following lines:

AMANDA (*calling*) Tom?

TOM Yes, Mother.

AMANDA We can't say grace until you come to the table

TOM Coming, Mother

[*He bows slightly and withdraws, reappearing a few moments later in his place at the table.*] (21)

In the play Tom now has already entered the dining room, but in the memory Tom was not yet present. On an anecdotic level Tom gives Amanda those lines, which she might actually have said then. But at the same time the lines are all too true on a meta-

theatrical level, because the memory scene cannot continue without Tom playing his part. A second example highlights that Tom is omniscient, because it is his memory. At the same time it already hints at the haunting effect the memories have on Tom.

TOM I know what's coming

LAURA Yes. But let her tell it.

TOM Again?

LAURA She loves to tell it.

(22)

In short: in the first scene the playwright introduces the mnemonic nature of the play and leads the audience into Tom's memories. To successfully achieve this, Williams first installs the point of view by making use of a narrator, Tom, who directly states that the audience will be looking at his memory. After that he seduces the viewers to allow Tom to act as their stand-in by adapting cinematic techniques: shot/reverse shot formation and the motion of the camera. Lastly he includes non-realistic elements and meta-theatrical comments as reminders of the autobiographical and highly subjective character of the play. In the following sections I will explain how the mnemonic nature is represented in the dramaturgy of the rest of the play.

5. The Importance of the Projections for the Mnemonic Structure

In the accompanying "Production Notes" Williams explains that his use of "unconventional techniques" is an attempt "to find a closer approach [to truth], a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are" (9). One of those techniques is a screen on which images and legends were to be projected. The device was omitted in the original production with his permission, but Williams included it in the published

manuscript. According to Williams its main purpose is structural, because it accents certain values or important points. He further clarifies this function as follows:

In an episodic play such as this, the basic structure of the narrative line may be obscured from the audience [...] The legend or image upon the screen will strengthen the effect of what is merely allusion in the writing and allow the primary point to be made more simply and lightly than if the entire responsibility were on the spoken line. (10)

Secondly he says it should have an emotional appeal (10). Maybe because of this explanation most critics reject this device as unnecessary and pretentious (Parker 1982, 416-417), but Parker (1982) and Brandt (1967) disagree. They argue that the legends provide an important sense of irony. I will argue that apart from that ironizing effect the projections are also important because they help create a mnemonic structure. To support this statement I will first look into the ironic detachment that Parker and Brandt point out and show how that can be linked to the mnemonic structure. After that I will discuss three other ways in which the projections help build the memory play.

Both Brandt and Parker argue that the screen is important because it provides ironic detachment. Williams claims “nostalgia” to be “the first condition of the play” (10) and the narrator Tom explicitly categorizes the play as “sentimental” (20). The danger, therefore, is that the play crosses the verge of sentimentality and becomes simply melodramatic. The extra layer provided by the projections prevents this, because it adds a sense of relativizing irony (Parker, 1982, 417). The device highlights that the nostalgic feeling comes with the memory and not with the play. Brandt focuses on the desired effect on the level of the audience: the irony prevents the nostalgia from becoming cloying (1967, 184-185). Parker highlights the importance on the level of the narrator.

He argues that the ironic distance not only balances the sentimentality, but also reveals something about Tom's character: with his ironic comments Tom-Now tries to maintain a distance between himself on the one hand and the experiencing Tom-Past on the other (1982, 417). Goldie explains that the style of a narrative can reveal more about the narrator than he intends. It can for example express aspects of the narrator's character. The narrative can even be expressive of feelings the narrator wanted to hide or reveal things of which he is not consciously aware (Goldie, 2012, 33). The ironic tone Tom uses in the projections unwillingly signals his feelings of guilt. This can also be linked to what Goldie calls "the ironic gap". In autobiographical narratives "the evaluation and emotion that is internal to the narrative" can differ from the "external evaluation and emotion as narrator" (2012, 38). Tom uses irony to maintain this gap between him now and him then. The irony detaches him from the original feelings linked to the events: it is his coping strategy to deal with painful memories. This is very important for the mnemonic dramaturgy, because Tom-Now is the narrator who supposedly turned his experience into the play *The Glass Menagerie*. It is through the eyes of this remembering and creating Tom that the audience sees the scenes. So whenever Tom-Now fears to be overtaken by his memories, the screen shows an ironic comment to restore the distance between Tom-Remembering and Tom-Experiencing. Most of those ironic comments appear in scene six and seven where Laura breaks down because of her meeting with Jim. Tom articulates Laura's thoughts with allusions to silent horror movies: "Terror!" (58), "The Opening of a Door!" (58), "Ah!" (65). Furthermore he provides ironic titles: "Suspension of a public service." (67), "Love!" (84), "The Sky Falls." (87) "And so goodbye..." (89). Tom's feelings of guilt are centred around this event, because he invited the gentleman caller. It is therefore logical that his need for irony is the biggest here.

Apart from this ironic detachment, the projections also highlight the fact that Tom projects thoughts onto Amanda and Laura. Tom did not witness all the scenes he presents to the audience. This raises the question of how Tom can have memories of them. Debusscher solves the problem by accepting the assumption that Tom gathered the information from remarks of his sister and mother (1998, 58). Tom would have created Amanda's conversation with Laura in scene two and the meeting of Laura and Jim in scene six and seven based on what he heard. As a consequence such scenes are even more fictionalized than his other memories. What Debusscher does not look into is how this is made visible in the considering scenes. Especially in scene two Williams's stage directions command a very specific acting style, which I will discuss in section six. Apart from those stage directions the projections are an aid in scene six and seven. As discussed above, some projected legends in those scenes quote Laure's thoughts. Or, more precisely: the thoughts that Tom projects onto his sister. They resemble silent film titles and are not realistic, but stylized and exaggerated: "Not Jim!" (57), "Terror!" (58, 65), "The Opening of a Door!" (58), "Ah!" (65), "I don't suppose you remember me at all!" (69). On the one hand this has an ironizing effect, but on the other hand it highlights that Tom made up the thoughts. One does not exclude the other: he feels guilty because he knows his sister must have had extreme feelings. To maintain an emotional distance he exaggerates those feelings until they become harmless, clichéd silent movie titles. That he draws upon films seems only appropriate. After all: he is a fan of the movies and he is the "cinematic 'eye'" (Crandell 1998, 4).

Furthermore the projections give insight into the way Tom's memories are stored; the legends often highlight a central phrase from the scene or show an image Tom's memory has connected with the occasion. This function is hardly ever noticed, probably because Williams's own justification for the projections is misleading. The

playwright explains their function in relation to the spectators: he fears they might not be able to see the basic structure, because it is an episodic play (10). Consequently critics rejected the device by pointing out that the structural sequence and scenic focus were also clear without technical aids (Parker 1982, 417). It is easy to miss the function in relationship to the narrator. As Williams notices, memory “omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value it touches” (1979, 19). The projections might therefore not primarily be attached to the scene to guide the audience, but to guide Tom through his memory. They seem to refer to the reason the scene is so vividly remembered and being recalled. Scene three for example starts with a monologue in which Tom tells about the time “[a]fter the fiasco at Rubicam’s Business College” (31). His mother became obsessed with the hope of finding a gentleman caller for Laura and Tom recalls: “An evening at home rarely passed without some allusion to this image, this spectre, this hope...Even when he wasn’t mentioned, his presence [...] hung like a sentence passed upon the Windfields” (31). To increase their income, Amanda started selling women magazines by telephone. Logically the screen shows two images that Tom strongly links with this period: “A young man at the door of a house with flowers” and “The cover of a glamour magazine” (31). In the dialogue that follows Tom and his mother have a fight about him being irresponsible and selfish. Tom calls Amanda a witch and accidentally breaks a piece of Laura’s glass menagerie. Although the word “witch” is what upsets Amanda the most, the projections point to what is central for Tom: his desperate outcry “You think I’m in love with Continental Shoemakers?” (32, 34) and “The Glass Menagerie” (35). In scene four and five there are legends with a similar central importance for Tom. “Annunciation” (45) refers to the moment Tom told Amanda he had arranged a caller. With hindsight Tom feels guilty that he went along with his mother’s “Plans and Provisions” (42) because those eventually led to

Laura's breakdown. That is why those three words are etched in his mind and prominently present on the screen.

Lastly Williams uses the projections to show Tom's (unconscious) associations at the time. Although almost all the projections with this function are images and are thus extra-literary they cannot be neglected. First and foremost because they are an integral part of the "plastic theatre" Williams strives for (9). In one of his letters he even reprimands a critic for "a lack of respect for the extra-verbal or non-literary aspects of the theatre [...] which are as much a native part of drama as words and ideas are" (Williams, qtd. in Kramer 2002, 2). A second reason is that memory often works visually rather than linguistically. The images therefore are an important aspect of the memory play and have to be included in the analysis. Some associations are symbolic, like the blue roses that stand for Laura (25, 83) and the picture of the sailing vessel with the Jolly Roger that symbolizes Tom's hope and desire to escape (41, 62). Some of the associations can be seen as comparisons in time. When Amanda reminisces about her past, or behaves as if she were young again, images of her as a girl are projected (23, 63) and the memory of Jim as the high school hero (29, 54) is contrasted with the image of Jim-Now as a clerk (54) and (for Tom) the nightmarish future of an executive at his desk (61). Additionally those pictures seem to ironically comment on the characters' current situation. Some projections can be seen as a representation of Tom's unconscious. For example when Tom talks about escaping from a coffin, the photograph of the father lights up (37). This may suggest an unconscious association between the house as a coffin and his father who escaped from it (Favorini 2008, 142). Favorini notes that the sentence "'This is my sister, celebrate her with strings'" (56) likewise provides a mocking tone, which is not present in the acted scene between Jim and Tom's sister, '[a]s if Tom was still working through his memories of Laura' (2008, 142). The visual

representation of the associations again emphasizes the individual and autobiographical character of the memories.

To conclude: the projection device in *The Glass Menagerie* has often been rejected as unnecessary. However, by simply omitting the device one neglects the importance of the projections for the mnemonic dramaturgy. In theatre seeing a play through a character's point of view is counterintuitive. As a consequence the audience of *The Glass Menagerie* has to be kept aware of the fact that it is looking at Tom's memories and not at reality. The projections are an important means to accomplish this. Firstly they provide the ironic detachment the narrator uses as a coping strategy to deal with his past. Secondly they emphasize that Tom projects thoughts onto the other characters. Thirdly they show how Tom's memories are stored by highlighting phrases or images that are of central importance to him. Lastly the device makes it possible to represent Tom's (unconscious) associations at the time. In these ways the projections draw attention to the fact that the narrator is also the manipulator and the eye of the play. Furthermore the device adds an extra layer that cannot be shown by the actors within the play, because it shows associations or symbolic connections that only exist in Tom's mind. The screen is therefore a very important device to achieve a mnemonic dramaturgy.

6. Stage Directions in the Reported Scenes

As I already mentioned in section five, there are events in the play Tom did not witness. He was not at home, for example, when the discussion between Amanda and Laura about the business college took place (scene two). Neither is he in the dining room when Jim flirts and talks to Laura (scene seven). Nevertheless Tom presents them to the

audience as a part of his memory. Apparently Tom reconstructed those events by combining what he heard from others with the memories and the images he already had. In the two scenes Williams gives form to this indirectness in different ways. In scene two he makes use of the schematicalness, in scene seven he uses the subjectivity of memories. I will argue that Williams thus tries to set those reported events apart from the witnessed events by giving very specific stage directions regarding the actions of the actors. Those stage directions consider the characters of respectively Amanda and Jim.

As Casey (2000) noted, memories are often characterised by a certain extent of schematicalness. It seems logical that the level of schematicalness is higher in indirect memories. This corresponds with the stage directions in scene two that prescribe an exaggerated acting style for the actress who plays Amanda. Amanda is a character that lives on the edge of poverty, but has known “a finer life” (Schlueter, 2000, 299). She deals with her situation “liv[ing] vitally in her illusions” (7). On the one hand she romanticizes her own past and is “clinging frantically to another time and place” (7). On the other hand she keeps her hopes up by projecting her own failed dreams onto her children. Amanda as a consequence is a very dominant matriarch in the Wingfield household. In scene two she has just found out that Laura dropped out of business school. Instead of asking for her daughter’s motives or paying attention to Laura’s problems, Amanda is suffering herself because again one of her dreams is shattered. The detailed stage directions for Amanda command a melodramatic acting style in this scene. When she enters the apartment, Amanda is demonstratively suffering:

[Amanda leans at the shut door and stares at Laura with a martyred look]

AMANDA Deception? Deception?

[She slowly removes her hat and gloves, continuing the sweet suffering stare. She lets the hat and gloves fall on the floor – a bit of acting. [...] Amanda slowly opens her purse and removes a dainty white handkerchief which she shakes out delicately and delicately touches to her lips and nostrils.]
(25)

The stage directions reflect the image Tom created of his mother: that of a drama queen. In Tom's view Amanda casts herself as the protagonist of a melodramatic movie. She dramatically repeats the one word question "Deception?" and although she is ostensibly in a state of shock, she manages to make very elegant dramatic moves. The lines Amanda speaks support the overdramatic performance, for example: "I did not have the strength – [...] I wanted to find a whole in the ground and hide myself forever!" (25). Williams explicitly says she is acting and this melodramatic performance continues throughout the scene. When Laura asks her mother what happened, for example, Amanda repeatedly refuses to reveal the cause to her daughter as if she cannot utter the words:

LAURA Has something happened, Mother?
[Amanda draws a long breath, takes out the handkerchief again, goes through the dabbing process.]
Mother, has - something happened?
AMANDA I'll be all right in a minute, I'm just
bewildered – *[She hesitates]* – by life..." (26)

The consciously placed pause between "bewildered" and "by life" has a dramatic effect and Williams emphasizes the cliché Amanda portrays here in the style he uses in the stage directions: the four dots after the word "life" and the description of the dabbing as

a “process”, combined with the returning of the handkerchief as a prop add a touch of irony.

Amanda’s behaviour is so overdone that it would be funny if it were not so passive aggressive. With her dramatic acting Amanda lengthens her martyrdom and at the same time increases her daughter’s worries. Before telling what is bothering her, she tears the diagram of the typewriter keyboard and the alphabet chart apart, then she “crosses slowly to the sofa and sinks down and stares at Laura”, after which she “closes her eyes and lowers her head”. The stage direction then prescribes “a ten second pause” followed by the lamentation “What are we going to do, what is going to become of us, what is the future?” followed by “another pause” (25-26). With her acting she literally and figuratively makes herself the suffering subject and the centre of the drama. The repeated use of the first person plural in this scene is very important. It reflects the disturbed relationship she has towards her children. She does not see them as persons having their own desires and wishes, but imposes her own dreams on them. In doing so, she denies her children an own identity. When she finds out Laura quit the typewriting course, she therefore utters: “[s]o what are *we* going to do with *our* lives?” (28, italics MM). Her contradictory thinking comes especially to the fore when she exclaims: “all of *our* plans – *my* hopes and ambition for you – just gone up the spout, just gone up the spout like that” (27, italics MM). Again, this is only how Tom imagines Amanda and it is impossible for the audience to know to what extent the presented behaviour is veracious.

The image Tom presents of Amanda in scene two is that of an overdramatic mother who makes everything about herself and is wallowing in self-pity. Or, as he lets Laura pregnantly exclaim: “Mother, when you’re disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus’ mother in the museum!” (28). By

contrasting this flat character with the round character of Amanda in the rest of the play, Williams draws attention to the extra high level of schematicalness of this scene. The scene is coloured by Tom's emotion and evaluation. However, the effectiveness of the contrast largely depends on the actress who plays Amanda: if the sketch is extended to the entire play, the play becomes far less layered. Williams is well-aware of this danger, because he explicitly states in "The Characters": "[Amanda's] characterization must be carefully created, not copied from type" (7).

In scene seven the acting style is not notably different from the rest of the play. Here Williams chooses a subtler approach to indicate the indirectness of the scene: he highlights the double evaluation of Jim. Laura presumably narrated her experience of the evening and Jim to Tom and Tom adds his evaluation of the gentleman caller to the narration he presents to the audience. Where Laura's view stops and Tom's begins is difficult and often impossible to define, therefore the most interesting moments in scene seven are those that are not noticed by Laura, because Tom must have added those to the narration. Levy (1993) discusses Williams's use of mirrors and glass and links it to the "preoccupation with self-image" (529). He draws attention to the fact that Jim repeatedly checks himself in the mirror during his flirting with Laura and argues that Jim does not act out of compassion, but out of narcissism (1993, 534). In the description of the characters, however, Williams describes Jim as "[a] nice, ordinary, young man" (7). Moreover, Laura does not seem to notice that Jim is looking at himself either. Therefore Tom must have added these moments and as a consequence the narcissism is a characteristic he ascribes to Jim. This leads to the paradoxical image of Jim being attentive and self-observed. This can, of course, be true to life, but I think it is more likely that it reflects the mix of Laura's experience and Tom's evaluation. By seeing Jim as egocentric and vain, Tom makes the gentleman caller an accessory to Laura's

breakdown. If this is the case, this is revealing for how Tom-Now sees (or needs to see) the gentleman caller and the role he played in the downfall of Laura. The symbolism of the mirror could then also be read as meta-theatrical: Jim looking at his reflection is merely a reflection of Tom's image of Jim.

To evaluate: the acting style of Amanda in scene two strongly contrasts with the rest of the play and thus draws attention to the reported nature. In scene seven the extra high level of subjectivity is made visible in the paradoxical behaviour of Jim. Whereas schematicalness is a clear feature in scene two, it is hardly present in scene seven. This might have to do with the different attitude Tom-Now has towards the two memories. He evaluates them differently and they evoke other emotions: regarding the situation with Amanda he feels angry and he blames his mother for pushing Laura. He feels she is partly responsible for what happened. Regarding the meeting of Jim and Laura he feels guilty, because he considers himself responsible. To fit the stories within his personal myth and to preserve his self-image, the two events require different images. Amanda must be undoubtedly bad, whereas Jim's behaviour needs to be open to interpretation. In the reconstruction Tom creates a schematic, flat image of Amanda that makes her clearly guilty whereas Jim's image is more ambivalent. He indeed seems a nice gentleman-caller and it is only with hindsight that Tom "remembers" the signs of vanity. By reconstructing the events this way, Tom reduces his own part in the downfall of Laura in an attempt to come to terms with his past.

Conclusion

In this essay I have analyzed the mnemonic dramaturgy of *The Glass Menagerie* by linking insights from studies on memory to the dramatic composition of the play.

Williams takes the subjectivity of the process of remembering as the basis for the drama, by presenting the entire play as a reconstruction of the protagonist Tom's memories. The drama can therefore be seen as a construction of what the psychoanalyst Kris called a personal myth: the protagonist and narrator Tom presents the audience his memories, but those memories are plastic and can be reshaped in ways that are psychologically necessary for Tom. For a mnemonic dramaturgy to work, the audience first has to accept that what they see on stage takes place in Tom's mind. In the first scene Williams introduces this point of view by adapting techniques from other art forms in which focalization through a character is not unusual: the device of the narrator from the novel and the cinematic techniques camera motion and shot/reverse shot formation. He also adds meta-theatrical comments and makes use of the difference between what Freud called observer and field memories. The dramaturgy of the rest of the play reflects the workings of Tom's autobiographical memory in various ways. The projection device is the most important means to achieve the feeling of a memory. It adds an extra layer to the acted scenes, which makes it possible to simultaneously show the memory and the influence or manipulation of the rememberer. It makes visible how Tom's memories are stored, shows thoughts Tom projects onto the other characters or exposes his own unconscious associations. Lastly it reveals the ironic gap that Goldie described, by showing Tom's ironic comments regarding the scenes. On top of the subjectivity of the normal memories, there are the reported memories with an extra high level of subjectivity. To represent this, Williams intuitively uses what Casey (2000) would call schematicalness. Especially scene two is set apart from the rest of the play by the overdramatic and flat acting style that the stage directions prescribe for Amanda. In scene seven the heightened subjectivity is subtly shown in the symbolism of mirrors and the paradoxical acting of Jim. To conclude: by staging the process of constructing a

personal myth from memories Williams is innovative in two ways. On the one hand he invents a true “memory play”: up until then plays did not investigate the reliability of the rememberer. On the other hand he creates for himself the possibility to push the boundaries of theatricality: memory scenes are not subject to the laws of realism. Williams’s composition of the play is multifaceted and layered and the playwright uses many characteristics of remembering in *The Glass Menagerie’s* construction. As a result the play is, to quote Jacobs: “a brilliant, profound, and intricate study of declarative memory and its psychological uses” (2002, 1261).

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