MACMILLAN MODERN DRAMATISTS
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MACMILLAN MODERN DRAMATISTS

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

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MACMILLAN

in the same year as the death of Williams's mother (1980), is a spoof at the expense of the playwright himself in the very act of remembering his past.

Williams's lonely death in the winter of 1983 was consistent with his life and art. He had lived as an exile from Eden in a fallen world where his only real solace lay in the power of his words. He died in a run-down hotel with a lobby the size of a kitchen but a name, the Elysée, that winks at paradise. The last address was fitting for the author whose heroine gets off a streetcar at Elysian Fields and resides as a transient in a city far from home until the hour of her final exit.

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Form, Theme and Character

> It is this continual rush of time, so violent that it appears to be screaming, that deprives our actual lives of so much dignity and meaning, and it is, perhaps more than anything else the *arrest of time* which has taken place in a completed work of art that gives to certain plays their feeling of depth and significance.
>
> ('The Timeless World of a Play')

Tennessee Williams is perhaps the only genuine *writer* in the history of the American theatre. He published two books of poetry, two novels, four books of short stories (one including a novella), a book of essays, and his *Memoirs*. During his lifetime, at least sixty-three of his plays and playlets (thirty-two are short, twenty-four full-length and seven mid-length) were published or given a major professional production or both. He wrote or collaborated upon seven of the fifteen film adaptations.

One reason for the great similarity in Williams's work is that he constantly recycled his material. *Sweet Bird of*

Youth, Small Craft Warnings and *Camino Real* all began as short plays. The revised version of *Battle of Angels* takes it title from a poem on the same theme, 'Orpheus Descending'. The film adaptation is renamed after an early unpublished play, *The Fugitive Kind. The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* is a revision of *Summer and Smoke*, which itself began as a short story, 'The Yellow Bird'. The screen play *Baby Doll* derives from two short plays, *The Unsatisfactory Supper* and *27 Wagons Full of Cotton. 27 Wagons* had begun as a short story, and *Baby Doll* was in turn rewritten as a stage play, *Tiger Tail*.

Perhaps the fact that most of the full-length plays are expansions of short works, at least half of them short stories, helps to explain why Williams has often been criticised for his weak dramatic structure. As Eric Bentley suggests in *What is Theatre?*, the structure comes out of the modern short story rather than out of the well-made play. The interest is not in plot so much as it is in character, mood and condition. *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), for example, has no Scribean intrigue. Based on the short story 'Portrait of a Girl in Glass', the play is a loosely connected series of scenes which conspire to create the narrator's nostalgic recollection of his family. The climax is not Laura's disappointment with her only gentleman caller but the recognition by Tom that for all the miles he has travelled he has never really broken the tender ties with his mother and his sister. By the same token, *The Two-Character Play* (1967) becomes accessible when seen not as an attempt to tell a sad tale on stage so much as a theatrical exploration of psychic pain. Williams's typical dramatic form, early and late, is not linear but exfoliative, not narrative but lyric, as indeed has been that of the modern short story – including his own – since Joyce's *Dubliners*.

What matters is the working-up to a climactic

illumination of character and circumstances, or as Joyce called it, an 'epiphany'. In Williams's short story 'The Field of Blue Children' a young woman acknowledges the absence of poetry and wonder in her life when she recalls a former relationship. In 'The Vine' an actor just beginning to age comes to recognise his failure and dependency. In the autobiographical 'Angel in the Alcove' the imaginary figure of Williams's grandmother witnesses his deepening loneliness, fear and shame (the story is the nucleus of *Vieux Carré*). In both the full-length play *The Night of the Iguana* and the short story of the same name from which it evolves, the main point is the revelation that comes through trial.

The drama of Tennessee Williams derives its lyric naturalism from the adaptation of the modern short story for the cinematic theatre. Throughout the canon, film techniques undermine the conventions of stage realism. Music comes out of nowhere. Lighting is symbolic. Fragmentary sets and transparent gauze scrims, as George Brandt has so aptly said, minimise the difference between interiors and exteriors, making scene transitions fluid and immediate.[1] Indeed the shooting-script is the idea behind Williams's production notes to *The Glass Menagerie*. The 'new plastic theatre' must make full use of all the resources of the contemporary stage – language, action, scenery, music, costume, sound, lighting – and bind them into an artistic unity conceived by the playwright.

To see a Williams play in performance is to be present at a drama of encounters among essentially naturalistic characters within a frankly evocative setting where reality is interfused with the stuff of dreams. On occasion there is a reasonable excuse for nonrealistic touches. The scenes of *The Glass Menagerie* are entitled to poetic licence because they represent the memories of the narrator. The mysterious voices that whisper from behind the walls

toward the end of *Streetcar* are projections of Blanche's insanity. But the fact is that Williams is never a realist in the photographic or journalistic sense, as his directions to the scene-designer indicate:

> The set represents in nonrealistic fashion a general dry-goods store and part of a connecting 'confectionary' in a small Southern town. . . . Merchandise is represented very sparsely and it is not realistic.
> (*Orpheus Descending*)

> The scene is a somewhat nonrealistic evocation of a bar on the beach-front in one of those coastal towns between Los Angeles and San Diego. (*Small Craft Warnings*)

> The set may be as unrealistic as the decor of a dramatic ballet. (*Suddenly Last Summer*)

> The set should be far less realistic than I have so far implied in this description of it. I think the walls below the ceiling should dissolve mysteriously into air; the set should be roofed by the sky; stars and moon suggested by traces of milky pallor, as if they were observed through a telescope lens out of focus. (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*)

Williams plans his sets, costumes, and lighting with a painter's eye. The poker-players in *Streetcar*, he writes, must be costumed in the lurid colours of Van Gogh. The lighting in *The Glass Menagerie* should take its cue, not from reality, but from El Greco. Allegorical names (Chance Wayne, Valentine Xavier, Flora Goforth) frequently match the non-realistic visual effects, and even the actors are sometimes directed to deliver their lines in a non-realistic way:

> The evenly cadenced lines of the dialogue between Baby Doll and Archie Lee may be given a singsong reading, somewhat like a grotesque choral incantation, and passages may be divided as strophe and antistrophe by Baby Doll's movements back and forth on the porch.
> (*The Unsatisfactory Supper*)

> Mandolin begins to fade in. The following monologue should be treated frankly as exposition, spoken to the audience, almost directly, with a force that commands attention. Dolly does not remain in the playing area, and after the first few sentences, there is no longer any pretense of a duologue. (*Orpheus Descending*)

Williams's lyricism is not simply a matter of words, as his comprehensive use of the non-verbal elements of playmaking shows. He is not a poet in the theatre but a theatre poet. His actual poetry, written for the most part in a loose and prosaic free verse, rarely exploits to advantage either the metaphoric or the musical resources of language. It is true, however, that the outstanding literary quality of his drama is in the dialogue that he creates out of the natural poetry of Southern American speech, an idiom that is at once rhythmical, imagistic and genuine. Still, it is painful to imagine how much would be lost in a radio version of *Streetcar*.[2]

Consider, for example, the most famous line in the play, if not in all Williams: 'Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers'. Torn from its theatrical context, it is hardly 'poetic'. But in performance it is unforgettable. Blanche DuBois – widowed, jobless, evicted, raped by her brother-in-law, committed by her sister, thinking that perhaps her old beau has come for her

but alarmed instead to see the grim nurse and the doctor from the asylum, the men in the next room at the table for poker, the pathetic paper lantern she had bought to cover the naked light bulb pulled off and thrust toward her by Kowalski as he had earlier thrust toward her a one-way ticket back to Laurel as a 'birthday present', admonitions echoing from the walls around her like threatening shadows – the deranged and frightened Blanche, despite her tears and screams, is now pinned to the floor by the nurse who asks the doctor whether to get a straitjacket. When out of this violence and torment the doctor calls her 'Miss DuBois', says the jacket is not necessary, makes the nurse let go, raises Blanche to her feet, removes his hat and offers his arm, she responds by smiling up at him as she would 'at a new beau', looking triumphantly at the nurse and back at the doctor again while the rest of the stage is still, and then, having crossed up centre and adjusted her hood, she turns to her escort in the doorway and says, 'Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers', and goes out with him to the car that will take her to the asylum, as Stanley comforts Stella, the closing music comes up, the poker game resumes, and the curtain slowly falls. The exit line, resonant with the plight of Blanche, hangs in the air for long afterwards.

It defines the essential Williams condition: that of a sensitive creature who has no home in an alien world. That is why evictions, banishments, or the loss of a cherished place of refuge – threatened or actual – are so frequent in Williams's plays (*Streetcar, Orpheus, Cat, Kingdom of Earth, Gnädiges Fräulein, This Property is Condemned*). They are a theatrical metaphor of alienation. The lost home may not always be a real one, like the ancestral estate of the DuBois family. In fact, more often it is simply the beautiful dream for which Belle Reve is primarily a symbol.

It is the enchanted time of youth, love, beauty, gentility and innocence.

Time seen in its elegiac aspect as a dimension of decay is the great Williams theme. The brief period of bloom exists only as a reverie. The scenic correlative of this point of view is in the frequent opposition of two areas in a Williams setting. The interior of the Wingfield apartment in *Menagerie*, and especially of the living-room where Laura plays her old records and polishes her glass figurines, contrasts with the grim exterior of the tenement with its adjacent alleys and fire escapes. In *Orpheus* the 'confectionary' that Lady Torrance has made to resurrect the lost wine garden of her father contrasts with the Gothic ugliness of the mercantile store and the town surrounding it. In *Kingdom of Earth* the parlour with its chandelier and golden chairs where Lot dies dressed in his dead mother's clothes contrasts with the farmhouse kitchen in which most of the action occurs. All three dim poetic interiors are characterised by fragile glass – animal figurines, chandelier pendants, tree ornaments and wind chimes.

Nearly all of Williams's plays are, like *Menagerie*, 'memory plays'. They look back with longing to a time that has been sweetened in the remembering. The pathos of life consists in the heedless trampling over precious moments by the blind rush of events. That is why the festive occasion so often occurs in Williams as a metaphor of the attempt to recapture in the present what has been lost in the past. Annual celebrations, which rest upon a cyclical rather than a linear sense of time, and seek to hold golden hours within a kind of magical parenthesis, are always ruined in Williams's plays: birthdays (*Streetcar, Cat*), Easter (*Sweet Bird, Orpheus*), Christmas (*Mutilated, Period of Adjustment, Moony's Kid*), Independence Day (*Summer and Smoke*). The ruined festive occasion is the abrupt

denial of the enchanted time of holiday by the brutal reality of everyday. It corresponds to the extinction of the poetic interior after Laura blows out her candles, Lot dies, or Lady's confectionary fails to open (significantly, on the day before Easter). It is like an interrupted performance or the early closing of a play. Indeed, the spoiled occasion is sometimes an unsatisfactory presentation (*Two-Character Play, The Gnädiges Fräulein, Lord Byron's Love Letter*) or simply an unsuccessful dinner (*Menagerie, Unsatisfactory Supper*). The hope and imagination that engender the special time, place or event suggest the artist's effort to create beauty in the face of inevitable change. But then art too in Williams is usually seen in pitiful terms: Val Xavier's book in *Battle*, Sebastian Venable's poem a year in *Suddenly*, Christopher Flanders's mobiles in *Milk Train*, Mark Conley's painting in *Tokyo Hotel*, Zelda Fitzgerald's dancing in *Clothes*.

The very titles of Williams's works, with their frequent reference to vehicles or journeys, warm seasons and passing days, suggest metaphors of transience: *Summer and Smoke, Suddenly Last Summer, Clothes for a Summer Hotel, The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone, A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur, The Night of the Iguana, Period of Adjustment, Small Craft Warnings, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, A Streetcar Named Desire, Camino Real*. The face of time is always that of the destroyer, never the healer. Hence, the elegiac strain runs through Williams in the continual re-enactment of loss. Life succumbs to death, youth to age, the yearning spirit to the waning flesh, gentility to brutality, beneficient nature to crass commercialism, goodness to corruption, and even the energy of art to the passion in the world for 'declivity'.

These themes dominate Williams's two collections of poems, *In the Winter of Cities* (1964) and *Androgyne, Mon*

Amour (1977). The elegiac strain is not only in the requiems themselves, such as 'Cortege' or 'A Wreath for Alexandra Molostvova'. It is also in 'The Harp of Wales', in which the poet pays tribute to the instrument made for keening 'the deaths of the wild gray kings'; and runs through all the poems about loneliness in age – 'Lonesome Man', 'Old Men with Sticks', 'Old Men are Fond', and 'Old Men Go Mad at Night'. It recurs in 'The Lady with No One at All' when, in an action reminiscent of *Streetcar* after Blanche has been stood up by Mitch, 'Milady' turns before a cracked pier mirror in a dim hallway to appraise the wisp of lilac chiffon she has just thrown over her shoulders, and then imagines that she is out in a boat on a pond large as a lake with the man she lost long ago. *Streetcar* also lurks behind the plaintive 'Lament for the Moths', which mourns the disappearance from a mammoth-haunted world of the fragile nocturnal creatures to which Williams likens his most famous heroine. 'Orpheus Descending' pictures the under kingdom as a place where light cannot enter and movement is barely possible. To this end the poet and singer must learn that for all his gifts he shall surely come. The theme of art's defeat is also in the references in 'Mornings on Bourbon Street' to the would-be writer who died at sea and the would-be painter who earned her living as a prostitute, two among the former companions for which the speaker weeps as he recalls the loss of his youth, of his innocence, and of his belief in the ability to love.

The elegiac persona of nearly all Williams's lyrics proliferates into the many characters throughout his fiction who are victims of time. It is because Williams sees life as a brief bloom and long decay that he specialises in portraits of men and women during their transition from the aspiration of youth to the disappointment of age. Death, failure and loneliness intermittently relieved by guilty sex

are the constants in the author's view of the human condition.

Four short stories from Williams's first collection, *One Arm and Other Stories* (1948), end in the suicide, execution or fatal exhaustion of men still young. The hero of 'One Arm' is Oliver Winemiller, an ex-navy boxer with the looks of Apollo who became an itinerant homosexual prostitute after losing his arm in a car accident. Now awaiting electrocution for the drunken murder of a wealthy broker who had wanted him to perform in a blue movie, he receives letters of gratitude and confession from former clients who regard him as their saviour. Even the young Lutheran minister who visits the prison leaves deeply shaken by his own repressed sexuality in the presence of the condemned Oliver. The title character of 'The Poet' is a tall blond man of sculpturesque good looks, a kind of evangelist, poet–prophet, story-teller and maker of spectacles, who is used sexually by grateful strangers as he sleeps in alleyways during his wanderings. He dies on a beach after a final creative effort among the young adolescents who make up his audience of followers.

The death of a very different kind of wanderer occurs in 'The Malediction'. The hero is a panicky little man with a prematurely old face (Lucio) who has been living as a transient in a Northern industrial city and submitting to sex with his aggressive landlady. A drunken beggar, declaring himself to be God, curses the sins of the world. Lucio, having lost his job at the factory, drowns himself with the wounded cat that had been his only solace. The story is dramatised as the early one-act *Strangest Kind of Romance*. The hero of 'Desire and the Black Masseur' is another painfully repressed little man (Anthony Burns), who at the age of thirty still has the unformed look of a child. He fulfils his sexual desire by being pummelled, broken and

devoured by a huge black masseur during the Lenten season while in a nearby church a preacher exhorts the congregation to atone.

Anthony Burns is only the most grotesque example of the hero-as-scapegoat in Williams's fiction. Oliver Winemiller is a 'saviour' to the many who bought and sold him, the evangelical 'poet' dies preaching the word, and even the unfortunate Lucio casts light on man's inhumanity by his love for the homeless cat with whom he drowns. A melancholy combination of death, desire and religiosity hangs over these four stories, whose sexually passive heroes are sacrificial figures in a fallen world and haunted fugitives from its brutal reality.

A gentler treatment of the destructive experience of human life occurs in Williams's first novel, *The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone* (1950), a work which provides the major example of the faded belle in his fiction. The 1961 screen adaptation was written by Gavin Lambert and directed by José Quintero with Vivien Leigh as Karen and Warren Beatty as Paolo. The rich, widowed, once beautiful Karen Stone, now in her menopause, having retired from the stage after bad reviews in a role for which she had grown too old, goes to Rome, where she forms an attachment with a vain and handsome gigolo (Paolo). When at the end he leaves her for another customer, she succumbs to the lewd advances of a young street Arab. The fall of Mrs Stone from fame to degradation is seen against the backdrop of the warm Italian spring. Born to privilege in the South, flattered in her prime, she is dependent in her age 'on the kindness of strangers'. Time's decay is again the subject of this typical Williams work whose easeful elegiac mood permeates its vision of youth lost and beauty faded within the ruined grandeur of the ancient capital of empire.

Rome as a metaphor of Williams's elegiac view of life is

continuous with New Orleans as well as with the Joy Rio, the once elegant opera house, now a third-rate cinema, which provides the setting for two stories from his second collection of short fiction, *Hard Candy: A Book of Stories* (1954). In both the title work and 'The Mysteries of the Joy Rio' a homosexual, one old and the other early middle-aged, succumbs to a fatal illness while in pursuit of a fleeting encounter in the upper reaches of the old theatre. The first is a retired candy merchant of seventy who is found dead of thrombosis between two chairs in one of the tiny boxes that still extend in tiers of golden chains from one side of the great proscenium to the other. The second is a forty-year-old watch-repairman who, in a delirium resulting from the final stage of terminal cancer, imagines that he meets his long-dead lover and benefactor on the great marble staircase that leads from the first balcony to the tiers above, roped off for the past twenty years, into whose Stygian blackness he has fled from an abusive usher. The sallow little moon-faced hero at forty looks no older than he suddenly did at twenty-five after the death of the older man from whom he had learned the mysteries of the place that became his secret pleasure.

The constant pursuit of furtive sex recurs in 'Two on a Party', a picaresque story from the same collection in which Bill and Cora, a homosexual Southern writer *manqué* and a disinherited Louisiana belle, both beginning to age, earn a living by working together as itinerant prostitutes. Fading appeal and artistic failure are also central to the portrait of Donald, the unemployed early middle-aged actor of 'The Vine', who spends his day wandering about town in the futile hope of finding someone to restore his ebbing confidence. Both stories focus on sorry fugitives from time.

Variations on the idea of a once-handsome drifter of about thirty with disappointed artistic or aesthetic

inclinations appear in Williams's third collection of short fiction, *The Knightly Quest: A Novella and Four Stories* (1966). In 'Man Bring This Up Road' a thirty-four-year-old failed poet and mobile sculptor, finding himself penniless abroad, appeals for help to a wealthy seventy-two-year-old woman who turns him down (the story is the basis of *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*). In 'Mama's Old Stucco House' a young failed painter returns from New York to Macon at the time of his mother's death and devotes his time to seeking homosexual encounters at the neighbouring air base. *The Knightly Quest* is a comic fantasy whose hero, the aesthetic homosexual son of an aristocratic Southern family (Gewinner Pearce), returns from abroad to find that the small town he grew up in has turned into an industrial city dedicated to manufacturing an ultimate weapon of destruction. He blows up his brother's factory and escapes from earth in a space ship. The novella's title refers to Gewinner's nocturnal cruising as well as to his quixotic crusade against war and commerce. Ultimately, it also alludes to his longing for a place, like the region of weightless ozone through which the space ship at the end is said to be flying, where there is neither day nor night, watches are set to light-years, and the sorrows of lost time are left far behind.

Analogous variations on the idea of the faded belle, ranging from the pathetic to the farcical, appear in William's fourth book of short stories. Its collection title, *Eight Mortal Ladies Possessed* (1974), defines the leading characters as well-bred, passionate women subject to time's decay. In 'Sabbatha and Solitude', a poetess, celebrated in her youth, would now die of loneliness without her young lover. In 'Completed', a painfully shy nineteen-year-old withdraws after her first experience of menstruation to spend the rest of her life as a recluse. In

'The Inventory at Fontana Bella', a 102-year-old *principessa*, five times married, has one last gaudy night before she expires. In 'Happy August the Tenth', a woman from an old Virginia family confronts the onslaught of middle age with her lesbian lover as she looks out from their New York apartment in early morning upon 'the illuminated tombstones' of 'the world's biggest necropolis'.

Williams's short stories are elegiac character sketches within narrative frames. Of the twenty-eight in his four collections, fourteen end in death, six in climactic self-discoveries, and two in both. Oliver Winemiller sees himself in a new light before his execution and Anthony Burns comes to realise that what he has been seeking is to die in just the way he does. Rosemary McCool could be added to this group, the heroine of 'Completed', who chooses a kind of death-in-life following the shocking realisation of her womanhood. Even among the remaining seven stories there is almost always an image of impending mortality as in 'Happy August the Tenth', an awareness of decline as in 'Man Bring This Up Road', or a sense, as in 'Two on a Party', that the flight from time is a loser's game.

Like his fiction, Williams's drama presents human beings as victims of time. The plays are filled with the outcasts of life: the old, the bereft, the mutilated, the tormented, the lovelorn, the homeless and the forgotten. As in the stories, two main character types – the faded belle and the wanderer – stand out from the rest as if to illustrate time's most pathetic casualties: the has-been and the might-have-been. The wanderer receives his definitive portrait as Valentine Xavier in *Orpheus*, the faded belle hers as Blanche DuBois in *Streetcar*. Both are present in Williams's essential and quasi-autobiographical play, *The Glass Menagerie*. Amanda and Laura Wingfield, mother and daughter, one an anachronism and the other a recluse,

are only two of the many incarnations of the faded belle which are Williams's hallmark – colourful butterflies transformed by cruel time into grey moths. Tom Wingfield, the son, an aspiring writer who joins the merchant marine, is only one in a long line of wanderers – handsome young men with 'the charm of the defeated', just past their youth, nursing disappointed ideals or fragile artistic hopes as they move aimlessly through dangerous country.

It may be useful at this point to step back from the two archetypal characters to see what their essential stories are. In the story of the wanderer, a good-looking young man (1) from the South and (2) of sensitive nature, (3) sometimes with a name that suggests his divine origin, (4) leaves home to become an itinerant artist of some sort, until, (5) just past his youth and (6) tainted with sexual corruption but still (7) pure of heart, (8) he attaches himself to an older woman (9) of property and station (10) to whom he brings comfort before he (11) submits to violent punishment (12) at the hands of a group of angry male figures. In the story of the faded belle, an attractive young woman (1) of sensitive nature, (2) born in the South (3) of good or even of aristocratic family, and having (4) a refinement of taste and sensibility and (5) a puritanical fastidiousness about sex, (6) is disappointed in love at an early age, and as a result (7) either ends her life as a recluse or (8) abandons herself to promiscuity, (9) especially with younger men, (10) but in either case probably becomes deranged, and, (11) after losing her youth, her looks, and sometimes even a home of her own, (12) is taken away to an institution.

These two remarkably similar stories, or versions of them, or bits and pieces of them, run through the dramatic canon from beginning to end. They also sometimes interweave. For example, the older woman to whom the wanderer attaches himself partakes of the unhappy faded

belle (Lady Torrance, Alexandra Del Lago, Violet Venable, Flora Goforth). Similarly, the younger man with whom the faded belle has a fleeting relationship late in her career bears a resemblance to the lonely, suppliant wanderer (the inexperienced travelling salesman at the end of *Summer and Smoke*, the needy street Arab in *Mrs Stone*, the Young Collector for the evening paper in *Streetcar*).

Both archetypes are masks of Tennessee Williams. The wanderer is the struggling author as a lonely young man with a classic Oedipal fixation. The violence he submits to after his relationship with an older woman shows his dread of paternal vengeance for having sex with his mother. The faded belle at first looks like Rose and Miss Edwina. Seen in perspective, however, she is the homosexual playwright as a neurasthenic female with a fear of losing out in middle age. There is usually something theatrical about the belle, a something whose day is passed, or that comes to naught, or that was never much to begin with. Alma Winemiller, Karen Stone, Alexandra Del Lago, Flora Goforth and the Gnädiges Fräulein are, or were, all performers. Lady Torrance shows her creativity in the design of a 'confectionary' that does not open. The production Amanda Wingfield makes of the evening Jim O'Connor calls is a flop. Nor does the eloquent Blanche DuBois, English-teacher and poet's widow, make a hit with the groundling, Kowalski, by playing the lady.

The frequent encounter of the belle and the wanderer as lovers within the same play appears to support Freud's notion that homosexuality proceeds from a narcissistic basis. Seen in this light, the plays are fantasies in which Williams, identifying with his mother, finds a partner resembling himself to love as his mother loved him. But sex rarely offers more than a temporary respite from loneliness in Williams. Nor does art have charm to soothe the savage

breast. Their failure in the face of time's inexorable decay is the common condition of his two personal myths. The artistic inadequacy of the archetypal figures is continuous with the 'poetry' of their speech. Their intellectual level is on a par with that of the culture club over which Alma Winemiller presides, the chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution to which Amanda Wingfield belongs, or the high-school English classes that Blanche DuBois has taught in rural Mississippi. Their stale imagery is analogous to the costume jewellery and summer furs that the one-time heiress of Belle Reve carries in her trunk, the paper lantern with which she covers the naked light bulb, or the slipcovers, pillows and fan with which she decorates the squalid Kowalski apartment. In *Dialogue in American Drama*, Ruby Cohn has shown that, despite its syntax and vocabulary, Blanche's language is marked by trite expressions and incongruous comparisons that reflect her weak imagination. When Stanley says, 'What poetry!' in response to Blanche's hope that the eyes of Stella's baby will be like two blue candles in a white cake, we can only agree. Williams gives his faded belles not a poetry, but a gushiness of speech. His wanderers, such as Val Xavier, Chance Wayne and Tom Wingfield, are even more poignant because they combine forced imagery with the quest for Significance.

Nevertheless, the haunting quality of Williams's best work is rooted in his poetic temperament. He was an essentially private man who fought hard to become a public one in order to achieve success in the collaborative enterprise of theatre. His struggle to overcome the fear of exposure is evident in the frequency with which his characters create spectacles of themselves. Their need of attention prompts them to choose words and to make scenes for which they are punished by contempt or

disregard. As figments of their author's paranoia, they are poor players whose script is no stronger than their performance in the hopeless contest of imagination with hard fact or of fond memory with present pain. As victims of time, they are sensitive creatures, trapped in the here and now, seeking escape into the there and then. One flees aimlessly across the face of earth, a homeless sojourner on a forever-alien planet. The other seeks refuge as a recluse or a mental patient within the secrecy of her own frightened heart. The vain effort to bring lasting beauty into a changing, heedless world enacts the playwright's own endeavour and reflects his sombre view. The faded belle and the wanderer, the has-been and the might-have-been, are elegiac characters of 'the fugitive kind' and still-born poets whose muffled outcries are destined to oblivion by the tyranny of time.

3
Early One-Act Plays (1939–46)

CHARLIE COLTON. My pockets are full of watches that tell me my time's just about over. (*The Last of my Solid Gold Watches*)

Tennessee Williams was an artist most at home in the short form. His poems are all short, nearly all his fiction is as well, and as a matter of fact most of his plays are too. But the short play is not a viable commercial length – a fact which makes the dating of the early one-act plays problematic. Of those discussed in this chapter, most were written by 1939 and all by 1946, but only a few have ever been seen either on or off Broadway. To meet the demands of convention for full-length plays, Williams had to adapt, or to combine, or to expand his short works. Yet, although he learned to broaden his canvas, he remained a quick-sketch artist at heart. That is why his early one-acters not only provide an index to his career but also include some of his finest achievements.[1]

They fall into two groups. The first group, cast in

Lotion, Bertha, Madonna and *Watches* are plays within plays or at any rate performances within performances. Since the performance is never more than an equivocal success and most often a pathetic failure, the action illustrates a variety of the spoiled occasion. In *Long Goodbye* and *Unsatisfactory Supper* the idea persists of a negative response to a kind of theatrical effort. Aunt Rose's eagerness to make a production of everyday life antagonises the mean-spirited Archie Lee. Nor can the tough-minded Silva countenance Joe's 'Elegy for an Empty Flat', to whose enactment we are witness. The eviction or loss of home then combines with the spoiled occasion to complete the drama of defeat and alienation. Joe, Lucretia, Bertha, Aunt Rose and Mrs Hardwicke-Moore must all give up their domiciles; it is doubtful that Irénée and Ariadne can keep theirs for long; and the once regal Charlie Colton, banished by time from his kingdom, is a stranger in a strange land. Within the canon of Tennessee Williams the early one-act plays are essential and seminal works.

4
'The Glass Menagerie' (1944)

TOM WINGFIELD. I didn't go to the moon, I went much further – for time is the longest distance between two places.

The first production of *The Glass Menagerie* opened in 1944 at the Civic Theatre in Chicago and in the following year at the Playhouse Theatre in New York. It was directed by Eddie Dowling and Margo Jones with Laurette Taylor as Amanda, Julie Haydon as Laura, Eddie Dowling as Tom and Anthony Ross as Jim. The music was by Paul Bowles and the set and lighting by Jo Mielziner. The 1948 London production was directed by John Gielgud with Helen Hayes as Amanda. The 1950 screen version was co-written by Williams and Peter Berneis, and directed by Irving Rapper with Gertrude Lawrence as Amanda, Jane Wyman as Laura, Arthur Kennedy as Tom and Kirk Douglas as Jim. In major revivals of *Menagerie*, Amanda has been played by Helen Hayes, Maureen Stapleton and Jessica Tandy. A television adaptation was produced in 1966 with

Shirley Booth, and another in 1973 with Katharine Hepburn.

In the play, a young merchant seaman (Tom Wingfield) looks back on his life before the outbreak of the Second World War. He had shared a small apartment in a poor section of St Louis with his sister (Laura), a painfully shy girl who spent most of the time polishing her glass collection, and his mother (Amanda), a minister's daughter from Mississippi whose husband, a telephone-company employee, had deserted her. Tom, who serves both as the narrator and as a participant in the enactment of his memories, was in those days a would-be poet working as a clerk in a warehouse to support the family. All that occurs in *Menagerie* is that the friend Tom brings home to meet Laura (Jim O'Connor), although he happens to be the boy she secretly admired in high school, turns out, unfortunately, to be already engaged.

The play is cradled in the playwright's recall of the Depression years when he worked in the warehouse of the International Shoe Company by day and wrote by night. The faded belle as doting mother derives from Miss Edwina. The absent father who fell in love with long distance alludes to C. C. during his happy days as a Delta drummer. Rose Williams's short-lived business studies, disappointing relationships and withdrawal from life inform the character of Laura as the predestined spinster with a lost love. Even the title refers to the collection of little glass animals that Rose and Tom kept in her room in St Louis, tiny figurines that came to represent for him all the softest emotions that belong to the remembrance of things past.

The theme of this gentle confessional work is aspiration and disappointment. The action is contained in the dashing of Laura's hope for romance, anticipated in the break-up of

Amanda's marriage, and echoed in the failure of Tom's effort to become a writer. The plot centres on Laura's non-Cinderella story. A shy, crippled girl encounters in the flesh the very man she loves, who leads her on and quickly lets her down. The exposition of Amanda's ideal girlhood in Blue Mountain and unfortunate middle age in St Louis is like an organ point that sounds the play's nostalgic note. She was once the belle of the ball, surrounded by suitors, and is now a deserted housewife, struggling for survival. As the disillusioned narrator, Tom looks back to a time when adventure and success seemed possible. Even Jim, although not discouraged, finds life after adolescence disappointing.

The historical setting provides an enveloping action that ironically reflects the play's theme. The economic recovery following the Great Depression came with the Second World War. The optimistic phrases in which Jim forecasts his future – '*Knowledge* – Zzzzp! *Money* – Zzzzp! – *Power*!' – hint at the sounds of battle. The customers of the Paradise Dance Hall across the alley from the Wingfield apartment house find an end to boredom in a hell on earth. Tom gets his wish to live the life of a hero in an adventure movie through his role as a merchant seaman in a world lit by lightning.

The full historical background extends from the Second World War, in which Tom serves, to the First World War, in which his father served before him, and even to the American Civil War, which ended in the fall of the Old South, to whose vestiges of gracious living his mother still so desperately clings. Amanda Wingfield is an anachronism in the St Louis of the 1930s and may even have been one in the Blue Mountain of her girlhood. Besides the story of her failed marriage, she brings to the play the sense of a world that, like herself, has long since faded. Her

expectation that she would marry a wealthy planter and settle down to raise her family on a large plantation with many servants is a *belle rêve* of Southern aristocratic life in antebellum times. Her reminiscences are a confusion of wish and reality consistent with the play's premise that memory is primarily seated in the heart.

The Glass Menagerie is a dramatic elegy that plays within three concentric spheres of time: the time of the Second World War, in which Tom speaks to the audience as a merchant seaman; the time of the Depression, in which Tom lived with his mother and his sister in St Louis; and the time that Amanda thinks of as a vanished golden age – her girlhood in the rural South before the Great War. Like Tom's, the memory of her cherished past is partly enacted when she appears for the evening of the dinner party with a bunch of jonquils on her arm and skips coquettishly around the living-room, dressed in the girlish frock of yellowed voile with blue silk sash in which she led the cotillion long ago, won the cakewalk twice at Sunset Hill, and went to the Governor's Ball in Jackson.

The primary conditions of Amanda's poignant resurrection of her youth – spring and courtship – conform to the conventions of pastoral romance. Invitations poured in from all over the Delta that enchanted season when she had her craze for jonquils. In the evenings there were dances, and in the afternoons picnics and long carriage rides through the countryside, lacy with dogwood in May, and flooded with the jonquils that she made her young men help gather for her. On a single Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain, she had seventeen gentleman callers, and extra chairs had to be brought in from the parish house to accommodate them. She could have become the wife of the brilliant Duncan J. Fitzhugh or of the dashing Bates Cutrere, who married another after Amanda refused him

but carried her picture on him until he died. Amanda's arias on the lost dreams of her youth echo spring rites and tall tales of princesses wooed by many suitors.[1] Tom's memory of his mother's memory modulates easily into legend because it is twice removed from reality, recessed within the play's innermost sphere of time.

The Christian symbolism with which *Menagerie* is filled suggests that the time of Amanda's youth, the time of the Depression and the time of the Second World War are analogues, respectively, of Paradise, Purgatory and Hell. From the midst of global conflagration Tom looks back to the years of trial in St Louis that followed the disappearance of the Edenic South his mother remembers. The idea of the gentleman caller as saviour is clear from the 'Annunciation' to Amanda by her son that Jim is coming to dinner. One night at the movies Tom sees a stage magician turn water into wine and escape from a coffin. Amanda exhorts her children to 'rise and shine' and calls her ailing magazine-subscribers 'Christian martyrs'. In an atmosphere that is relatively dusky, the light on Laura has a pristine clarity reminiscent of that on saints in medieval paintings. The qualities of intimacy and reverence combine in her scene with Jim, the only light for which is provided by a candelabrum that once stood on the altar of a church.

As the gentleman caller does not fulfil his role as redeemer, the altar candles in Laura's heart are soon extinguished. The play's central image – light playing on a broken surface – suggests the ephemeral nature of life, beauty and human feeling. Joyful moments flicker only for an instant within the surrounding darkness of eternity, as when Jim and Laura look at the little glass unicorn together by candlelight, Amanda wishes on the moon, or couples find brief comfort in fleeting intimacy at the nearby dance hall, whose glass sphere, revolving slowly at the ceiling,

filters the surrounding shadows with delicate rainbow colours. In the dim poetic interior of the Wingfield living-room, the picture of the absent father with smiling doughboy face is intermittently illuminated, while outside, beyond the dark alleyways and murky canyons of tangled clotheslines, garbage cans, and neighbouring fire escapes, the running lights of movie marquees blink and beckon in the distance. The movies themselves are no more than images of light that pass quickly into oblivion like cut jonquils or spring showers. For even art in *The Glass Menagerie* is presented as a feeble consolation for the sorry transience of life – fragile glass, scratchy phonograph records, scraps of poetry scribbled on shoe boxes.

Like the spotty, shadowy lighting, other extra-literary effects, drawn principally from film, emphasise the first condition of the play, which is nostalgia, and help to project the sense of an insubstantial world, wispy as memory itself. Transparent gauze scrims, one representing the outside wall of the tenement, another the portieres in the archway or second proscenium between the living-room and dining-room up stage, not only make scene transitions cinematic in their fluidity but also create a stage within a stage within a stage – a use of space which relates to the idea of containing time within time within time. After Tom's introductory speech, the grim wall of the building before which he has stood fades out as the Wingfield living-room fades in behind it. In turn, the portieres upstage dissolve and separate like a second curtain or inner veil of memory as soft lighting slowly reveals the family seated at the dining-table. The first scene is played without food or utensils. The last is played without words. During Tom's closing speech, Amanda appears to comfort Laura as if behind sound proof glass, her studied gestures reminiscent of the silent screen.

Music from three sources weaves through the scenes, bridging the spheres of time. On the on-stage Victrola Laura plays the music of her parents' youth, records her father left behind. The dance hall mixes the hot swing of the thirties with the slow tangos of the twenties and the tender waltzes of Amanda's girlhood. The music to which Jim and Laura dance, 'La Golondrina', is the same Mexican waltz that Alma Winemiller sings on Independence Day 1916 in *Summer and Smoke*. Most prominent is the recurring theme that comes out of nowhere and fades away again in accordance with film convention, like the images in a reverie. It is primarily Laura's *Leitmotiv* and suggests her fragile beauty as does the spun glass with which she is also identified. Williams's idea of barely audible circus music is consistent with his central image of light glimmering sporadically in the void. The immutable sorrow of life persists under the superficial gaiety of the passing moment. The distant calliope, with its associations of sad clowns, trapeze acts and performing animals, is an invitation occasionally to escape into a garish, itinerant world of make-believe. Human creativity is once more presented in the most pathetic terms. Indeed the circus animals are continuous with the figurines of Laura's menagerie, whose tiny size on stage correpsonds to the remoteness of the fairground.

In the course of this memory play, some forty projections of images, speeches or titles associate the graphic with the verbal in the sometimes whimsical manner of the mind when in the relatively free condition of sleep or reverie. Williams's explanation notwithstanding, the projections do not make structural points but instead spoof the sentiment of the scenes in which they appear. A pirate ship, a magazine cover, or the gentleman caller waving goodbye are pictures that undermine the pathos of the play like the

farcical moments in Chekhov. Since the first production, directors have almost without exception cut the device as an expressionist intrusion upon an essentially naturalistic work. Perhaps they are right. Yet the projections are indebted less to the German theatre than to the silent screen. Such lines as 'Ah!' or 'Not Jim!' and such titles as 'The Annunciation', 'The Accent of a Coming Foot' or 'The Sky Falls' appear to derive, like so much else in *Menagerie*, from the playwright's frequent movie-going in childhood.

The call in Williams's production notes for 'a new, plastic theatre' to replace the outworn theatre of conventional realism is essentially a manifesto of the cinematic stage. The writer is to become more visual. He is to use lighting to suggest mood and assert relationships – such as the clear pool of light in which the fragile and unearthly Laura sits while Jim, Tom and Amanda are having supper upstage. He is to bring in music from out of the blue or flash images on a screen in order to give a plastic, mobile quality to plays that are relatively actionless. The lyric naturalism of the twentieth-century play of sensibility depends for its theatrical expression upon the writer's imaginative use of the methods and resources with which motion pictures have enriched theatrical art.

This explains why the American theatre became more of a director's medium, like film, in the time of Williams. When Elia Kazan founded the Actors Studio in 1947, three years after *Menagerie*, it was for the purpose of training actors to give film-size performances. His successor, Lee Strasberg, would later train them in the requisite docility. Actors were to become more compliant, more 'plastic', like the scenery and the lighting through which the all-powerful director would express his predetermined 'concept'. The neo-Stanislavskyan American Method repudiates

'projection consciousness' as leading to oversized mannerisms put out of date by the microphone and camera.

It is partly the convention of film, although chiefly that of the short story, from which the episodic structure of *Menagerie* derives. The play is an adaptation of a film script (*The Gentleman Caller*) based on a short story ('Portrait of a Girl in Glass'). The seven scenes mingle with allusive narrative speeches to convey a casual sense of order that accords with the nature of memory. In neither the story nor the play is the tiny plot the point. It is the revelation of characters locked in time. This explains why nothing much happens in *Menagerie*. Its lyrical, non-linear form is rooted in the gently exfoliative 'Portrait of a Girl in Glass'. It is also rooted in a particular character's point of view, a technique common enough in fiction but atypical of drama. Since that character happens to be an aspiring poet in both the story and the play, an inclination to lyricism is obligatory.

'Portrait' is essentially a character sketch of Laura, as its title from the static art of sculpture implies. Her brother, Tom, remembers her from the time they lived in St Louis with their mother and he worked in a warehouse. Their father had long ago deserted them. Laura was a frightened, reclusive girl who appeared to exist in a world of make-believe. While decorating the tree one Christmas, she picked up the star that went on top and asked Tom if stars really had five points. She spent most of the time listening to her father's old records, polishing her collection of glass figurines, and rereading Gene Stratton Porter's *Freckles*, with whose hero, a young one-armed lumberjack, she carried on an imaginary relationship. He would drop by her room for an occasional visit just as her brother habitually did. When she was twenty, she was unable to face the demands of secretarial school. When she turned

twenty-three, her mother asked Tom to bring a friend home to dinner in order to meet her. He turned out to be a hearty and befreckled fellow employee (Jim Delaney), with whom Laura, much to her family's amazement, got along famously because she confused him in her mind with the hero of the much-read book. Unfortunately, he was already engaged. Not long after Jim's visit, Tom lost his job at the warehouse, left St Louis and took to wandering. He became independent and succeeded in forgetting his home, although from time to time he thinks of his sister.

The revelation that Jim is already engaged becomes more pathetic in the play because Williams makes the gentleman caller into Laura's real rather than her imaginary love. Her abnormality is less mental but more physical. Instead of the obsession to reread the same book, she has the more playable handicap of a slight limp. It is particularly effective when she and Jim dance together by candlelight (they are never alone in 'Portrait') and accidentally break the glass unicorn's horn – a piece of business, missing from the story, that uses the play's titular symbol and suggests, among other things, the sudden collapse of male ardour upon the removal of maidenly defence.

'Portrait' is a wistful memory, *Menagerie* a moving elegy. The play gains power from an intensification of theme and a strengthening of logic in the progression of events. The three years that pass in the story between the mother's discovery of her daughter's truancy and the appearance of the gentleman caller are reduced to three months in the play, long enough considering Amanda's determination to find Laura a husband if she is not to be a secretary. In the story, Tom's departure is peremptory because it is not preceded by a climactic quarrel with his mother. Jim Delaney makes no thematic contribution of his

own because he is not a former high-school hero like Jim O'Connor. The mother is a minor character with neither reminiscences nor a name. Nor are the Wingfields specifically from the South.

The Glass Menagerie combines Williams's two archetypal actions. The climax of the outer play is the spoiled occasion, the climax of the inner play the eviction or loss of home. Laura does not sit at table with Jim. The gentleman caller, having declined his hostess's offer of lemonade, leaves early to meet his fiancée. After all the preparation, Amanda's party is ruined. Tom's curtain speech reminds us that everything has happened within his memory, and we may be sure that it will do so again and again. Whether the two belles, one faded, one never having bloomed, manage to keep their home after his departure we can only guess; but it is clear that the wanderer has none apart from them.

In the play's last moments, Tom's two roles, narrator and participant, coalesce. Dressed as a merchant seaman, the one who broke free to seek adventure stands before the audience and admits that he is a haunted fugitive. He calls out to Laura that he has tried but not been able to forget her. The many cities to which he has sailed seem to sweep about him like dead leaves torn loose from their branches. A strain of familiar music, a display of perfumes in a store window, or simply a fragment of transparent glass is enough to remind him of what he has lost. Upstage, behind the gauze scrim which marks the outside wall of the St Louis tenement that was once his home, the mother and sister he left behind enact a scene without words, like silent ghosts, visible only to the eye of memory. Still facing the audience, he tells Laura to blow out the candles which light the dim interior. She does so, he says goodbye, but on his exit the elusive, nostalgic music that has dipped in and out

of the scenes from the beginning breaks off without resolution. Tom's climactic realisation that he will play out his 'memory play' for the rest of his days is like the 'epiphany' in a short story by Joyce. His confession throws all of the events that have preceded it into a different light; or, more precisely, it casts them into a greater elegiac darkness.

The problem of playing *The Glass Menagerie* arises from the fact that, whereas from a dramatic critic's point of view it is Tom's play, from an actor's it is Amanda's. The same distinction applies to Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part One*, which is Hal's play although Falstaff appropriates it in performance. While students are invited to see the work as the education of the Prince, actors ask to read for the fat knight or the fiery rebel. Similarly, although *Menagerie* is really the chronicle of the Son, its production record shows that it has nearly always been construed as a starring-vehicle for the Mother.

Laurette Taylor's legendary performance established the tradition. The first Amanda was a plump little woman of sixty with a bright, eager face, her grey hair cut into girlish bangs. From all accounts, her characterisation was a composite of vague, fluttery gestures, sudden pauses, and unexpected shifts in pace or stress. Her delivery was quiet. A good deal of the time she gave the impression of mumbling. Bit by bit, her subtle revelations of hope, sorrow, despair, decision, longing, annoyance, snobbery, playfulness, coquetry, fatigue and resignation merged into a stage portrait of such fidelity to truth that reviewers were at a loss to define its method. Garland of the *New York Journal-American* called it 'Duse-like in the poignancy of its serio-comic detail', Gibbs of the *New Yorker* said one hardly knew what to write, and Young of the *New Republic* confessed that its depth and spontaneity defied analysis.[2]

On the other hand, Eddie Dowling as the first Tom did not altogether succeed. The actor–director was a short man of nearly fifty with a still boyish face. His characterisation was evidently congenial and subdued. He read his narrative speeches straightforwardly, putting the house at ease with his off-hand manner and personal charm. Most reviewers praised his performance much as they did Julie Haydon's ethereal Laura and Anthony Ross's workmanlike Jim. But his double role made others uncomfortable. It seemed too derivative of the narrator–participant in John Van Druten's *I Remember Mama*, then running on Broadway, or of the narrator in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* before it. Krutch of the *Nation*, who disliked the cinematic effects created by Jo Mielziner's set and lighting, took even greater exception to what he called the 'pseudo-poetic verbiage' of the narrative speeches. Young, however, blamed Dowling rather than Williams. The narrations, he believed, only appeared to be a mistake on the playwright's part because the actor did not read them from character. If they had been delivered with the 'variety, impulse, and intensity' they needed, then the whole story would have been different.

It was thirty years before Young's thesis was put to the test. In 1956 the younger and more matter-of-fact Tom of James Daly appeared opposite the spirited Amanda of Helen Hayes (she played the role three times). In 1965 the gentle and disarmingly simple Tom of George Grizzard appeared opposite the earnest Amanda of Maureen Stapleton (she played it twice). But, according to Kerr of the *New York Herald-Tribune*, Daly's Tom made the narrations seem 'a trace heavy', and according to Watts of the *New York Post* Grizzard was less effective as the commentator than as the participant.[3] The narrations were largely cut from the 1950 screen adaptation, in which the

caustic Tom of Arthur Kennedy appeared opposite the musical-comedy Amanda of Gertrude Lawrence. A flashback showed Amanda as a young girl dancing with her many admirers. A close-up showed her as a giddy mother peeping through the curtain to see how Jim and Laura were getting on. The obligatory Happy Ending came when the lame daughter, accompanied by the gentlemen caller, went out to the Paradise Dance Hall and met a man of her own.

In 1973 Thomas L. King published a valuable article arguing that *Menagerie* belongs to Tom, who tricks the audience into shouldering the pain he exorcises by creating his memory play.[4] In 1975 Rip Torn, cast opposite Maureen Stapleton's second Amanda, made the only all-out effort to read the narrations from character. The curtain speech was the key to his portrait. The result was a wild, brooding, quirky, homosexual Tom who flung his words at the house like accusations. Torn's performance did not receive a unanimous welcome; but neither was it damned with faint praise. Those who attacked it were inclined to do so without reserve; others were as absolute in their esteem. Barnes of the *New York Times* was reminded of a Greek tragic hero, Kalem of *Time* thought it 'just right', and Watt of the *New York Daily News* made the telling observation that Torn was at his best in 'the beautifully written narrative sections'.[5]

At the end of 1983 Jessica Tandy, the original Blanche DuBois, played Amanda in a New York revival directed by John Dexter. She was seventy-four. It was a reserved, grandmotherly Amanda who, together with Amanda Plummer's far-gone Laura and John Heard's fidgety Jim, was at odds with the postcard prettiness of the production. No filmy gauze or dusky light made unclear for long the big, elegant set of Ming Cho Lee. The Wingfield apartment was a store window at Christmas exploiting our nostalgia for the

1930s. The menagerie itself was set on matching tables down right and left. Attractive bookshelves marked the exit, upstage of the telephone table. Lamps hung from the suspended ceiling, beyond which, in the distance, the abstract forms of buildings were visible. Paul Bowles's original music was used selectively. One soft roll of thunder announced the rain. Bruce Davison's blond, clean-cut Tom, although he occasionally imitated Williams's drawl, read most of his lines with swift precision. The decorative look of the whole extended from his handsome sweaters to the pink and yellow light in which the stage was swathed, and above it to the proscenium arch, where, for the first time in a major production, some of Williams's legends (and others not his) were periodically illuminated in a graceful script. Like one of Laura's statues, *The Glass Menagerie* had been handled like a little treasure and remounted for commemorative display following the death of the author at the beginning of the year.