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The Plastic Theater: Music and Lighting in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

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Abstract

Literary critics have generally agreed that Tennessee Williams was the pioneer of a movement in drama that sought to bring innovative aspects to the stage at a time when theater had become rather predictable. Following Williams' lead, Arthur Miller subsequently contributed to this revolution that occurred in the American theater during the mid-twentieth century. In *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949), respectively, the two playwrights introduced what can be termed 'plastic elements' as an intrinsic and interesting way of shaping the characters, emphasizing the themes, and enhancing the plot. These 'plastic elements' include, but are not limited to, music, light, noise, colors, and other props. Critics have, over the many years, frequently referred to their importance to the overall complexity of the two plays; however, no thorough study has emerged to show how these 'plastic elements', subtly incorporated into the two plays, serve to achieve dramatic objectives. This article offers a detailed study of the employment of music and lighting, demonstrating their significant contribution to characterization, themes, and action. Furthermore, it illustrates how the two playwrights each found his own technique to utilize music and lighting as he crafted his story and spectacle.

Keywords: Tennessee Williams; Arthur Miller; plastic elements; music; lighting.

Introduction

In the early 20thcentury, a group of American playwrights displayed an enthusiasm to restore the faded glory of the theater. Focusing on social, economic, and political problems, their aim was not to simply revive the genre, but also to imbue it with new ideas and steer it to new horizons, bringing a sense of realism to the stage. The 20th century itself was marked by dramatic changes and cataclysmic events, including an unprecedented revolution in technology, two World Wars, the Great Depression, and the spread of groundbreaking theories from thinkers such as Marx, Darwin, and Freud. Concerning technology, and in the field of communications in particular, Julia Walker observes how, in the span of 35 years, "the typewriter, wireless telegraph, telephone, phonograph, cinematograph, and radio" (Walker 2005, 1) became markers of American culture. Being herself a witness to the tremendous transformations of the century, Sister M. Agnes David (American author, b. 1931, d. 2018) rightly describes the

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20th century as a "time of turmoil and upheaval, of earth-shaking wars and uneasy peace, of tremendous scientific advances, of faith and lack of faith among our people" (David 1961, 3). Considering all this dizzying change in society, it was inevitable that drama would undergo a transformation of its own. In other words, the 20th century became the age of experimentation for American dramatists.

Evidently, this testing time, flooded by a plethora of innovations, had a significant impact on the playwrights, at the same time creating a fertile soil for a wide range of theatrical productions to flourish. Many of these productions assumed their power from "violation of theatrical convention" (Bigsby, Critical Intro.1985, 74). As a reaction to the many political ideologies that were in conflict in their milieu, dramatists drew on stances such as Capitalism, Socialism, and Communism in their endeavors to deal with reality. For instance, while the1920s and 30s witnessed plays that investigated "politics and sociology" the post-World War II playwrights transferred their interest to "psychology" when practicing their art (Bigsby, *Confrontation and Commitment* 26). With the status quo, the Freudian theories served as the primary source from which the dramatists of post-World War II drew when molding their characters. Even within the same domain of interest, we find dramatists who paid "realistic attention to the sense of place"(Murphy 1987, 173), and others who preferred to explore and even exploit the unconventional, both currents springing from the same common ground, regionalism. Talking specifically about the period between the two World Wars, Brenda Murphy states that "there were realistic playwrights . . . who discarded conventional dramatic structures altogether" (Murphy1987, 182).

Tennessee Williams can be considered the Odysseus of 20th century American theater. Just as the Greek Odysseus, who hatched the winning stratagem of building the wooden horse that brought an end to the Trojan Wars and changed the rules of the game, Williams purposefully went against the grain to pioneer the introduction of the unconventional plot and technique to revolutionize American theater. With his play *The Glass Menagerie*, it was Williams who introduced the notion of the 'plastic theater', an idea which encompasses the use of music, lighting, noise, colors, costumes, and other props. In a letter to Eric Bentley, Williams refers to these features as "the extra-verbal or non-literary elements of the theatre" (Kramer 2002, no p#). This idea, which Williams explains in the "Production Notes" to the play, sprang from his belief that "the theatre of realistic conventions," which hinged mainly on conventional dialogue, was "exhausted" (Williams 1968, 272) and it was high time to tackle the reconstruction of American theater. Consequently, according to Williams, to imbue drama with new radiance and depth, it was time to alter the way in which theatrical elements such as light, music, colors, and props, etc., were utilized, to give them a more prominent role in illuminating the meaning of the script. He also determined to bring totally unconventional elements to the stage, such as the screen he incorporates in this play. Williams asserted that "if the theater is to resume new vitality as a part of our culture" (272), he and his fellow playwrights saw the necessity to make theater productions more appealing to audiences by introducing unconventional techniques in drama. Innovative ideas were needed to draw audiences to the theater at a time when the powerful film studios were mesmerizing people with their extravagant movies on the big screen. Not only did Williams, Miller, and other playwrights need to answer to the complexities of life in the twentieth century (Sacchtti 2020, 13), they were also compelled to try to compete with the forcefully

emerging cinematic productions of the era. Pathan Mubarak maintains that Williams "tried to give cinematic effects on the stage" (Pathan 2021, 544). When *The Glass Menagerie* premiered in1944, it came as an embodiment of his vision of the new American theater. This play was followed by *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Summer and Smoke* (1948), both of which manifest the features of the new American theater. Incontrovertibly, Williams' project was far from the fiasco that some might have predicted; his plays were well received by the American audiences, for they combined the unconventional technique with "a true picture of the pathos and plight" of the American middle class family in that period (Kamalaveni 2021, 117). *The Glass Menagerie*, in particular, proved to be a great success (Banach 2010, 21). Furthermore, other American playwrights seem to have been persuaded that Williams' new vision of the theater was on point. Arthur Miller was probably the first American dramatist to follow Williams' footsteps in his play *Death of a Salesman*. Miller, however, was not in a rush to do that; it took him five years to plunge into the new terrain, evidently after he witnessed the success of three plays of this type by Williams. Like Williams, Miller relied heavily on 'plastic elements' and unconventional techniques in structuring the plot of *Death of a Salesman*, a play widely lauded as one of the "most interesting social dramas of the period" (Bentley1965, 196).

Although eighty years have now passed since *The Glass Menagerie* was first performed on stage, and critics have frequently referred to the significance of the 'plastic elements' employed in that play and then in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, thus far there has been no attempt to thoroughly examine the magnitude of the revolution brought about in American drama by the introduction of these innovative elements**.** This article is an endeavor to delve deeper into two major plastic elements, namely music and lighting, to fathom the depth of their contribution to the structure of the plot, characterization, and themes; ultimately to the complexity of the two plays. Moreover, the study sheds light on the unconventional technique each playwright adopts in utilizing these two important 'plastic elements'.

Music

The use of music in drama is probably as old as drama itself,since it was used in ancient Greek performances, particularly in comedies. For example, the kithara, lyre, and aulos were popular instruments in the comedies of Aristophanes where they accompanied songs and dances that encouraged the involvement of the audience.The use of music, however, in the American 'plastic theater' is significantly different; music is an essential constituent of the plot itself, the plot in its new perception.Tennessee Williams, in "Production Notes," which precedes the text of *The Glass Menagerie*, clearly states the importance of music to the structure of the play when he says that music "expresses the surface vivacity of life with underlying strain of immutable and inexpressible sorrow" (Williams1968, 272).In other words, it provides the audience with more feeling and sensation about what they are watching than the spoken words alone ever could. Historically, African Americans found solace in jazz music from the pain inflicted by slavery, the disappointing outcomes of Emancipation, and the Jim Crow era. Later rock and roll music was the medium through which Americans, both black and white, expounded upon the social injustices in the 1950s and 1960s. Therefore, by using music to reflect the

events, themes, and tones in the two plays, Williams, and subsequently Miller, present the American audience with what they can easily digest and even identify with.Music has long been a form of entertainment, but at a time when it was becoming an ever more popular form of expression, it was a natural progression for it to take on new responsibilities in stage drama.

From a very early stage of the performance of *The Glass Menagerie*, the audience is aware of the significance of music to the play. After Tom, as narrator, ends what he calls "the social background of the play" (Williams 1968, 276), the music, which Williams has asked for in his notes, plays.Right after viewers hear the music,Tom announces that what they are about to watch is "a memory play" (276), with music establishing memory as one of the major themes in the play. Practically, the first musical note has already tuned the audience to the mood appropriate for a memory play, for, as Tom observes, "In memory, everything seems to happen to music" (276).Undoubtedly, a memory play would not be coherent in plot, just like a dream.This incoherence can be attributed to the tendency of the human memory to allow some details to slip away, forgotten, while clinging on to others, possibly even exaggerating certain things when we recall them from the depths of our past. In*The Glass Menagerie*,music,along with other props,is used to create the sensation of the dreamlike memory (Subashi &Veliaj 2015, 79). Tom's memories seem to be overwhelmingly of his overbearing mother, Amanda, and fragile sister, Laura. His missing father clearly evokes only negative memories. Despite fleeing his stifling life in the apartment, he never managed to fully free himself, particularly from Laura and her glass menagerie.

A special piece of music, entitled "The Glass Menagerie", was written for the play by the composer Paul Bowles. This piano piece, soft and delicate, is specific to the character of Laura, playing when she or her glass collection is in the spotlight. The piece contributes to the characterization of Laura and serves to initiate the theme of fragility, a theme in the play mainly associated with Laura. The first time the tune is played is at the end of Scene 2 when Laura gets nervous as her mother expresses her astonishment at Laura's casual acceptance that she expects no gentlemen caller son that night, or any other night. Her mother's reaction, which Laura finds irritating, makes her so uneasy to the extent that "She slips in a fugitive manner through the half open portieres" (Williams 1968, 280). Williams directs that the "The Glass Menagerie" music be heard "faintly and lightly" (280), manifestly reflecting the hypersensitivity of Laura and delineating a major trait of her character. The second time the piece is played is when Tom angrily throws away his coat across the room, striking "against the shelf of Laura's glass collection" (292). For Laura, the collection is the most precious thing in her life. Asserting the strong bond that ties Laura to the collection, Thomas P. Adler remarks that the collection "serves as her central symbol" (138). The menagerie symbolizes Laura in her fragile beauty, as well as her inability to act of her own volition. Upon hearing the "tinkling" of the shattering glass, "Laura cries out as if wounded" (Williams 1968, 292) herself. As Tom starts to collect the fallen glass animals, the music of "'The Glass Menagerie' steals in" (293), as Williams directs. The music draws the attention of the audience to Laura's character, which, like the little glass ornaments, is extremely fragile. In Scene 4, after Amanda tells Tom that she wants to discuss a matter concerning Laura with him, the stage direction

reads: "Music: 'The Glass Menagerie'" (298). This time the music reflects Laura's concerns regarding her brother Tom; she fears that because he is dissatisfied with his life, he might abandon them. While Laura's concerns demonstrate her genuine attachment to her brother, they also highlight one of the major themes in the play, abandonment. Eventually, Laura's feeling proves to be true; Tom does abandon his mother and sister to pursue his own dreams. "The Glass Menagerie" music is played for the last time when Laura hands Jim, her gentleman caller, the favorite piece from her glass collection, the unicorn, asking him to "be careful", for if Jim breaths, as she says, "it breaks" (336).Symbolically, the unicorn represents Laura, as if Laura here is handing herself to Jim, imploring him to take care of her fragile heart. Nevertheless, when Jim accidentally knocks the unicorn off the table and it loses its horn, Laura interprets it positively; "Now he will feel more at home with the other horses, the ones that don't have horns" (338).The indication is that, after dancing with Jim, Laura feels that she is just like the other girls; she has got rid of her "inferiority complex" (334), as Jim diagnoses her condition; she has overcome what made her different— timidity. It is possible that one of the factors that led Laura to be so timid was being abandoned by her father at a very early age, which was exacerbated by her mother's overbearing nature and the slight physical disability that remained with her after an illness. Her brief encounter with Jim, although it ultimately ends in disappointment, does help her to step away from her timidity, at least momentarily. We can see that Laura's special tune goes far in developing her character, as well as helping the plot to unfold.

Arthur Miller's technique in tackling memory in *Death of a Salesman* is remarkably different from that of Williams who deals with the past as a manifest of flashbacks recalled by Tom, as narrator. Miller's technique is based on interweaving the past with the present, amalgamating the two to create a forceful plot, and hence giving the past a role in the events of the present. In Miller's play, the memories that are revealed to us on the stage represent "the act whereby, in the present, one recreates the past' (Davis 1994, 115). To fully comprehend the action, the audience must be allowed glimpses into the turbulent past that shaped the distressing reality of the present. Yet, as in *The Glass Menagerie*, Miller's audience is aware of the pivotal part music plays in reflecting Willy's emotions such as the nostalgia and fear of abandonment. The play opens with a melody "played upon a flute" (Miller 1987, 130) and, after all the tragic events have been played out, ends with "the music of the flute …left on the darkening stage" (222). This unequivocally institutes music as one of the cornerstones of the play. Whereas Williams in his "Production Notes" demands that the accompanying music be of "the lightest, most delicate"(Williams 1968, 272) in order to reflect Laura's vulnerability, Miller instructs that the opening melody of the play, which is played on a flute, be "small and fine, telling of grass and trees" (130). In so doing, Miller immediately reveals to his audience that Willy Loman is a man steeped in nostalgia, living in the past as an attempt to escape the very difficult present in which he finds himself. He feels weak and vulnerable in the present, whereas in the past he was strong and, at least in his own mind, successful. Alexander Jeffares observes: "The flute here is an 'expressionistic' device. . .a representation of life in the open, a life full of hope and peace" (Jeffares 2002, 148). Willy longs for those days and, in his present state of physical and mental exhaustion, his memory keeps transporting him back there.

Music and nostalgia are also frequent companions in *The Glass Menagerie*. During the play, Amanda often regales Tom and Laura with tales of how popular she was in her youth. Although obviously devoted to her children, Amanda regularly admonishes them, a combination that "contributes to her characterization" (Durmišević2018, 113).Amanda, like Willy Loman, is proud of her past, finding in it a retreat to escape her harsh present; as a matter of fact, escapism is an important theme in both plays. Amanda starts talking, evidently not for the first time, about the seventeen gentlemen callers whom she received one Sunday afternoon in her home town Blue Mountain, a name evidently "designed to imply that her story belongs to a realm of fairy tale" (Scaria 2021, 194). Ignoring Tom's sardonic remarks, Amanda relates to her son and daughter how her family had to bring folding chairs from the "parish house" to accommodate the seventeen suitors and how she, as a girl, mastered "the art of conversation" (Williams 1968, 279).At this juncture, and in an ironic move, "Tom motions for music and a spot of light on Amanda" (279). Standing thus, Amanda is transported back to her glory days and passionately gives a synopsis about the more interesting young men among the steady stream of suitors. The music speaks to her nostalgia at that moment, for Williams, in the stage directions, tells that in this scene Amanda's "eyes lift, her face glows, her voice becomes rich and elegiac" (279).Hence, the music itself becomes a powerful tool of characterization, a representation of Amanda's emotions as she tells what she perceives to be an uplifting story. Music and the nostalgic Amanda, in this scene, merge to present a profoundly powerful image of the pretty and charismatic young woman that she once was.

By way of comparison, Miller uses the same technique when a 'gay' melody of the flute accompanies Willy's first retreat, assumingly, to the 'glorious' past of the family. Again, Miller does not mean to draw stark borderlines between the past and the present, but to show, as he states in his introduction to *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays*, that "everything exists together and at the same time within us" (Miller 1987, 23). "Smiling faintly," Willy recalls how, in high school, the good-looking and athletic Biff was always surrounded by girls and how he would warn him not to"make any promises" (142) to any of them. Commenting on this scene, Jeffares remarks, "The flute is particularly suited to this, as it is an instrument which can be easily associated with nostalgia" (Jeffares 2002, 148). The optimistic music of the flute is played once more at the beginning of Act Two when Miller instructs, in the stage directions, that the music be "gay and bright" (Miller 1987, 173). Biff has already set out early from home to meet with Bill Oliver in the hope of acquiring a considerable loan to start a sporting goods business with his brother Happy. The lively, cheerful music that accompanies Willy's morning conversation with his wife, Linda, is inspired by the almost tangible hope that his two sons may soon achieve business success. Willy joyfully tells Linda that he, for the first time in months has slept until ten a.m. This optimism is likewise projected onto minor details such as his morning coffee, as he comments "Wonderful coffee. Meal in itself" (173).Willy's hopes are projected into what he dreams will be a bright future; he says: "on the way home tonight I'd like to buy some seeds" (173).The seeds here are symbolic; as Biff and Happy supposedly sow the seeds of the long-awaited prosperous future of the Loman family, Willy thinks he will plant vegetable seeds in the backyard. Tragically, everything falls on barren ground.

Miller's association of music with hope has its parallel in Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, in particular in the conversation between Laura and Amanda when the latter asks her daughter whether she has "ever liked some boy" (Williams 1968, 285). Unexpectedly, Laura reveals a number of memories about a boy she once admired in high school. She relates with a shy joy how she and Jim "sat across the aisle from each other . . . in the aud." (286).Laura's disclosure infuses Amanda with hope that her plan to find Laura a 'gentleman caller' may yet come to fruition. The hopeful music comes in this scene at the end of their dialogue: "The Scene Fades out with Music" (287), as Williams directs. It comes as a signature to enhance the hopeful atmosphere, that Laura will not be denied the chance to marry. As a matter of fact, Williams uses this technique several times in the play. For instance, Scene 5 ends with the "violin rises" (310) after Amanda calls Laura to come outside and make a wish on the moon. When Laura asks what to wish for, she receives a simple answer from her mother: "Happiness!" (310). Laura's wish is followed by the music of the violin. The correlation between the wish and the music coming after it is evident.

However, Williams' most ingenious musical addition to the play is that which emanates from the Paradise Dance Hall, located across the alley from the Wingfield apartment. Not only does he add source rich with different tunes, but also he creates a clever juxtaposition between the strife that exists inside the Wingfield apartment and the jolly dance tunes that drift over from the night club. Early in Scene 5, Tom imparts to his mother the happy news, the news that Amanda has long been waiting for, a prospective suitor is coming for his sister Laura. Tom's news is ushered in by the sound of the post-World War I dance song "The World is Waiting for the Sunrise," coming from the night club (Williams 1968, 307). With the lyrics of the song (which was very popular in the 1930s and 1940s)already present in the minds of the audience, they are left in no doubt that Tom has finally taken some action in response to Amanda's relentless efforts to convince him to invite a gentleman caller to visit and meet his sister. However, when the conversation gets tense between the mother and her son over Laura's physical defect and the possibility of her not fulfilling the expectations of her suitor, the "music changes to tango," which has a "somewhat ominous tone" (Williams 1968, 309). The selection of this music to accompany this portion of their conversation is indicative. The tango originated in working-class districts of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, the respective capitals of Argentina and Uruguay. As early as 1789, the music was associated with African slaves. It was later adopted as a popular dance among the huge numbers of European immigrants living in the slums of US cities. As stated by Denniston, the "tango sprang from the poor and the disadvantaged, in tenement blocks and on street corners, amongst people whose lives usually leave little trace in the history books" (Denniston no p. #). The music being heard in the Wingfield apartment can be viewed as a prediction of Laura's impending misfortune. Moreover, in Scene 7, Jim and Laura dance together to the waltz music coming from the same source and the music "swells tumultuously" to reflect the emotional agitation felt by both characters as Jim "suddenly turns her about and kisses her on the lips" (Williams1968, 340).Toward the end of the scene, Tom angrily smashes his glass of lemonade on the flooras a reaction to his mother's accusation of being a "selfish dreamer" (447). At this point, Williams give the direction "Dance-hall music up"; the rising music mirrors Tom's lack of

control in the face of the horrendous situation he finds himself in, Torn between fulfilling his duty to his mother and sister, and seeking to achieve his own ambitions. Noticeably, the music of the Dance Hall is generally integrated smoothly into the scene, or even dissolves into it, contributing to the emotional depth of the scene and adding to the characterization process as well. This sudden and intentional swelling of the music foretells the upcoming abandonment by Tom of his mother and sister, perhaps indicating that the pull of the outside world has finally become too great for Tom to resist.

In *Death of a Salesman* (1949), the melody of the flute is dominant since it speaks to Willy's nostalgia and aspirations. However, two other types of tunes are played on two separate occasions to contribute to the complexity of the action: the first as Willy betrays his wife with the Boston Woman and the second as he speeds off and crashes the car in the suicide scene. In the latter, Miller directs that "the music crashes down in a frenzy of sound" (Miller 1987, 220) to conjure up the experience of the car collision in the minds of the audience without actually seeing it, since performing the incident on the stage is not feasible. The deafening noise of the crash is executed by the frenzied music; thus, enhancing the plot. Furthermore, the somber quiet that follows is embedded in the "soft pulsation of single cello string" (220).In the former, the woman laughs and talks recklessly with Willy while Biff persistently knocks on the door of the hotel room. Their conversation, as Miller instructs, should be accompanied with "Raw, sensuous music"(205). The music here is more than sound effect played in the background, it tells that the "relationship between the two has been raw and sensuous" (Jeffares 2002, 148). Willy's feelings, at that moment, are obviously mixed: a sense of guilt and a feeling of sexual freedom he has never experienced with his wife. Saying to the woman that he feels "so lonely" (Miller 1987, 205) is apparently more of an attempt by Willy to justify his faithless actions to himself, rather than a complaint to the woman. Moreover, the woman's statement— "I'll see that you go right through to the buyers" (205)—emphasizes the business-like sexual relationship between the two, accentuating the transactional nature of the relationship. Thus, the raw and sensuous music that Miller demands here is meant to hint at a hidden trait of Willy's character, his inhibited sexuality.

It is noteworthy that the scene is an event from the past, stored in Willy's memory; it is being recalled fifteen years later, particularly in the restaurant where Willy is abandoned by his two sons. Willy claims that it was loneliness, perhaps coupled with a feeling of failure that led him to commit adultery (which metaphorically resulted in the assassination of Willy as a hero in Biff's eyes).Now, in the present time, he once again encounters feelings of isolation, weakness, and loneliness, which eventually compel him to commit suicide. Again, Miller indicates in his "Introduction" that Willy's recalling of the past is meant to show "that everything exists together and at the same time with us" (Miller 1987, 23). Williams must have held the same notion about the relationship between the past and the present time, for it is evident that Tom's memories have become inextricable from his present psyche; Thomas Adler labels *The Glass Menagerie* as an "elegiac memory play" (Adler 1994, 137).As a matter of fact, Willy's frequent recalling of past incidents makes *Death of a Salesman* (1949) a memory play as well. Walter A. Davis also considers the two plays to be memory plays, evidenced by his statement that the function of memory in them is the same; it is "analytically revelatory" (Davis 1994, 115).

In Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, music is used to add to the mood, whether that mood is one of foreboding or pure hope. Certain traits of characters are introduced and built upon through certain pieces of music, such as Laura's tune, which Williams described as the "lightest, most delicate music in the world" (Williams 1968, 273), and Willy's haunting flute melodies. As music is woven into both character and plot, it is clear that neither of these plays would have been such powerful productions without its presence.

Lighting

As the second major element of the 'plastic theater,' lighting goes hand in hand with music in developing the way plot is constructed and technique is engineered. Grounding the role of lighting, Williams asserts in his "Production Notes" that "A free, imaginative use of light can be of enormous value in giving a mobile, plastic quality to plays" (Williams 1968, 273).Both Williams and Miller, unequivocally, make great use of 20thcentury light technology in terms of color, focus, density, and flow. At the very beginning of *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams directs the audience's perception of happiness by giving stage directions demanding that "At the rise of the curtain," the audience be "faced with the dark grim rear wall of the Wingfield tenement" and the "dark narrow alleys" (274) on both sides of the building. These architectural features are actually ominous of the Wingfield's misfortunes and bleak life. Therefore, before any of the Wingfield family members is introduced on the stage, the audience is coaxed into making assumptions about the Wingfied family's circumstances and is hence psychologically prepared to be party to a story of acrimony, sacrifice, and unhappiness.

The opening of *Death of a Salesman* is significantly different; Miller uses a more complex and meticulous technique to convey to his audience the whereabouts as well as the predicament of the Loman family. As the spectators listen to a "fine" melody played upon the flute, their eyes are attracted to two lights; as instructed in the stage directions: "Only the blue light of the sky falls on the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry glow of orange" (Miller 1987, 130). The audience is made aware of the existence of tall buildings surrounding the little house on all sides. The blue light of the sky can only be seen by looking upward, creating a sensation of being trapped and being able to merely look toward the way of escape. This anticipates the prevailing mood inside the Loman house. The audience is thus inclined to understand Willy's frustration, a couple of minutes later, when he complains that the builders "boxed" them in with these tall apartment buildings. Adler attributes the selection of the color orange to Jo Mielziner, the designer of the performance, and views it as an indication of "the reality of an encroaching urbanized and mechanistic world" (Adler 1994, 67). Miller, however, describes it, in the stage directions, as "angry" (Miller 1987, 130). Jeffares explains the choice of this color as one that "represents the anger of people who fall in the city, who are deprived of promise, who, like Biff, are angered by the way of life" (Jeffares 2002, 148). Another plausible interpretation is that it represents Willy's anger, since he wastes no time in revealing it to the spectators, verbally lashing outat the builders of the apartment buildings who, he says, "massacred the neighborhood" (Miller 1987, 135). Shortly after, his anger at Biff becomes apparent as he labels him"a lazy bum" (134).The dim lighting has therefore set

the mood for Willy's dark state of mind, and the general perception of characters who are fumbling in the dark, trying to find themselves and break out into the light.

In accordance with the stage instructions, the interior of the Wingfield apartment in *The Glass Menagerie* is "dimly lighted", thus enabling light to maintain its role as a major component of the action throughout the play. It actually renders the performance its depth and complexity. With the first appearance of the family members, the apartment is "lit up softly"(Williams 1968, 277) to indicate the intricacy of the subject matter Amanda is about to open with Tom and Laura, which is finding Laura a gentleman caller. Williams describes the light as soft so as to add Laura's sensitivity to the overall tension that surrounds this topic. Due to the fact that the apartment is so dimly lit, an even greater contrast is made when "a spot of light" (279) is put on Amanda as she starts reminiscing about her old admirers. The coexistence of the general dimness and the illumination of Amanda as she expounds on this topic carries two meanings. Firstly, it brings into focus the tension between Amanda's illusions about her past and the bitter reality of her present. Her past, in her own recollection, was exceedingly bright, although one does wonder as she talks about all her old admirers, why, if she had her pick of them all, she chose the absent Mr. Wingfield. Undoubtedly, the present that she now finds herself in, due to his desertion, is dark and austere. Secondly, the intense light spot illuminates the fact that "The driving force [of the plot] is Amanda" (Krasner 2006, 30). Laura seems resigned to her fate, recognizing that, realistically, she is not likely to attract a husband. Tom is too absorbed with his own frustrations to really concern himself with finding a husband for his sister. Thus, it is Amanda who pushes on the plot with her major concern, securing Laura's future in a decent marriage. Thoroughly intent on achieving her goal, she works in the succeeding scenes on both Tom and Laura— Tom to convince him to invite a gentleman over to see his sister and Laura to accept the idea of matrimony. In Scene 3, Tom, as narrator, confirms this when he recalls that finding a gentleman caller for Laura "became an obsession" (Miller 1987, 287) to his mother.

Williams utilizes darkness and light to highlight the tension between reality and illusion one more time, but in the character of Tom. In Scene 4, returning home from the movies after midnight, Tom walks in a "Faint light in the alley" (Williams 1968, 293). Upon his arrival at the building, Williams instructs, "light steals up inside' (293). Laura, awakened by Tom's noise as he fumbles for his key, turns on the living room light and opens the door for her brother. Tom leaves the darkened environment of the cinema, a world where he vicariously lives out his aspirations of adventure and personal freedom. On the way home, he walks through the faintly lit alley, on his way back to the real world, full of stifling limitations and crushing responsibilities that seem all the more hateful in the electric light of the apartment. The tension between the two worlds is evident, where real life is accentuated by the light and his world of illusion is marked by darkness. He tells Laura about the "coffin trick" performed that night in a stage show by Malvolio the Magician. Astonished by the feat, he remarks that it is easy enough to find oneself in a nailed up coffin, and then, rhetorically, he asks Laura "who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail?" (295). Williams immediately provides the answer by illuminating "the father's grinning photograph," hanging on the wall (295).He was indeed somebody who managed to

extricate himself from confinement, apparently without any qualms about the devastation he left behind. Both Tom and Laura identify with the coffin image, for they feel trapped in their current lives in the apartment. Nevertheless, while Laura believes that there is no way out, Tom ponders his father's solution— to run away and leave his mother and sister to their own fate. When the father's photo lights up, the audience instantly draws the connection between Tom's question and his intention. Moving quickly into the scene next morning, Amanda is calling out for Tom to "Rise and shine" (295). The light increases right after he says "I'll rise" (295), signifying that Tom has found his way out. He makes clear his intention to rise out of the 'coffin' in which he is confined by following his father's footsteps, to pursue his illusions of a life full of adventures and free of obligations.

A more complex employment of light and darkness appears when Laura stands by while Tom quarrels with Amanda over her interference in the very particulars of his life. Laura watches her mother's abrasive assault on Tom "with clenched hands and panicky expression" (Williams 1968, 289). Unexpectedly, Williams directs that "A clear pool of light be on her figure throughout this scene" (289), not on Tom and Amanda who continue to quarrel in the dim area. The aim here is to show that Laura's welfare is at the center of the heated discussion and, aware of this, "Laura suffers immensely from their fighting" (Durmišević 2018, 111). Once again, Laura and her fragility are the focus, rather than her mother's domineering character, or Tom's desire to leave this life behind him. Amanda's characterization has already been established in her nostalgic ramblings about her past, as well as in the captions and images from her youth displayed on the screen. Moreover, Amanda's type of character had been depicted in many plays of the period. Brenda Murphy observes that "many realistic plays depicted the familial or social problems arising from the neurotic state of a single individual, most often the managing matron, castrating wife and a dominant mother" (Murphy 1987, 151). For Williams, the play hinges on Laura, her sensitivity and the peculiarity of her personality. Hence, Laura throughout the play is the deep concern of both mother and brother, with the plot virtually revolving around Laura and her misfortunes. Lincoln Barnet remarks that "Williams has always exhibited a deep sympathy for the outcasts or misfits in modern society, Like Laura Wingfield" (Barnet 968, 269).Consequently, the pool of light that falls on her functions as a magnetic field to attract the audience's attention to Laura. She remains silent and plays no part in the quarrel, but she is the one who is most impacted by it. Her mother says of herself, "I'm old and don't matter" (300), and Tom has the ability to leave when he determines to do so. Laura, however, is young and dependent, painfully shy, and has a slight physical disability. Her future needs to be secured.

Miller uses light and darkness to a similar purpose, but using a different technique. For instance, after Willy finishes his conversation with Linda and walks out of the bedroom, the bedroom is dimmed and "light has risen on the boys' room" (Miller 1987, 136). The eyes of the audience, at this moment, involuntarily leave the first floor and turn up to the second floor where Biff and Happy start to talk. The boys' room is not lit up while Willy and Linda are talking. Happy's exclaimed remark of "Jesus, maybe he smashed up the car again!" (136) is heard coming from their darkened room. Keeping the light only on Willy and Linda allows Millerto focus on informing the audience about the character of Willy as it

starts to unfold at this early stage in the play. Happy's voice comes out of the darkness as confirmation of the audience's emerging view of Willy. His remark is also a hint to future action, since Willy commits suicide by crashing the car the following night. Now comes the turn of Biff and Happy to be in the pool of light and talk. Their conversation sheds light not only on their own characters, but also those of their parents. Willy now becomes invisible in the kitchen and only his voice is heard, talking to himself and laughing. His words, "Eighty thousand miles" (136), reflect his pride in his past. The huge number of miles traveled represents Willy's hard work and dedication to his job as a salesman. Whereas Williams allows Amanda to play out her idealized memories of her past in the full beam of the spotlight, Miller reverses that technique. Willy stands, unseen and alone in the kitchen, pouring out his distorted memories of the past. Interestingly, both scenes convey the same message, the tension between illusion and reality.

Miller likewise uses light and darkness to move the audience in time and place to where they can best gain insights into the character of Willy Loman. Transported back fifteen years in time, the audience is shown what are, supposedly, Willy's golden days. Upstairs, "the light . . . begins to fade" (Miller 1987, 142) as they finish their conversation and go to bed. Simultaneously, "Willy's form is dimly seen below in the darkened kitchen" (142), immersed in his hallucinations about the past— complementing the high school Biff for giving the car such a professional cleaning, and then admonishing him on how he deals with girls. Darkening both the boys' room and the kitchen makes the apartment buildings surrounding the Lomans' house invisible to the audience, giving the effect of recreating the geographical past of the neighborhood, where trees used to cover the land instead of the current tall buildings. Using the appropriate lighting, "the entire house and surroundings become covered with leaves" (143), indicating that this is how the neighborhood was fifteen years ago. Hence, the audience is aware that what they see now is what Willy has been reminiscing on just a minute earlier. As the "Light rises on the kitchen" (143), Willy is once again revealed to the audience, and Miller infuses life into this scene recalled from the past. Willy addresses Biff and Happy offstage. They clean the car and they answer their father, entering into view "from the direction Willy was addressing" (143).This "expressionist dramaturgy," according to Walter Davis "engenders a complex process of self-revelation" (Davis 1994, 115). In other words, this rather extensive scene allows Willy to reveal a lot about his character, facilitating the audience's exploration into his psyche. Adler goes even farther, stating that Miller's intention in *Death of a Salesman*, as a whole, was to show "Willy Loman's way of thinking, his mind in disintegration . . . he assesses himself and moves toward his decision to commit suicide" (Adler 1994, 67).

Light and darkness are also used to show the dark side of Willy's character. In what is meant to be a moment of truth, and in the lightened kitchen, Willy opens his heart to his wife and admits that he loses customers because he is fat, and hence "very--- foolish to look at" (Miller 1987,149). He also worries that he is over-talkative. As Linda reassures Willy and tells him that he is to her "the handsomest man in the world," Willy's mistress, the Boston woman, is heard laughing "From the darkness" (149).Her laughter continues, creeping over Linda's speech, sabotaging her testimony of Willy. Apparently, Miller uses this technique to debunk Willy, indicating, through the laughter coming from the darkness, that Willy is not sincere; he hides this dark episode of his life from his wife. Feeling reassured, Willy expresses his love

for Linda, but his words are again mocked by the woman's laughter which gets even louder, indicating how Willy has failed to be fully honest in his relationship with his wife. Willy moves into the dimmed area, and is thus transferred in time and place. Willy flirts with the woman, kissing her a couple of times. Then, Miller instructs that the "woman disappears into the dark" (150). The disappearance of the woman into the dark is an explicit hint at the dark side of Willy's character, for as he goes back to his wife, "the area at the kitchen table brightens" (150). Obviously, Miller uses darkness and light in this scene to expose Willy's infidelity, and ultimately to mold the character of Willy in the mind of the spectator.

Williams differs from Miller in the sense that he allows outside sources to create the desired atmosphere in the Wingfield apartment. Similar to his employment of the night club's music to project the sensations of Laura and Jim in their meeting, he uses the early dusk light coming into the Wingfield apartment to show the fragility of both Amanda and Laura. Removing the dishes after supper in the "shadowy" area of the stage, they appear to the audience as "forms"(Williams 1968, 302). They are as in silhouette, indicating characters that the audience hitherto knows little about. The dusk light, that is not strong enough to lighten up the upstage area where they move, make them look, as Williams observes in the stage directions, "pale and silent as moths" (302), a clear indication of the fragility of both mother and daughter. Amanda's fragility springs from being an "impoverished gentlewoman" (Barnet 1968, 269) who fears for the future of the family, in general, and of Laura, in particular. Whereas Laura's fragility has to do with her limp, a physical defect has gone a long way to creating her "inferiority complex" (Williams1968, 334), as diagnosed by Jim. David Krasner labels Laura as "taciturn" and "somewhat agoraphobic" (Krasner 2006, 30), and Arthur Ganz describes her as a creature detached from the life around her (Ganz 1965, 206), all of which are symptoms of such a complex. As Miller did in the early scenes of Act I, Williams uses this scene to validate the notion of the audience regarding the mother and her daughter, where light and darkness are essential in instituting that notion.

Light takes on a very significant role during the final scene, where Jim, the gentleman caller, comes to supper. The scene starts with the light bulbs in the Wingfield apartment flickering and going out (Williams 1968, 324), leaving the family in total darkness. In a conversation between Tom and Jim, the former states that he has joined the Union of Merchant Seamen, using money intended for the light bill to pay his dues. Jim tells him, "You will regret it when they turn the lights off" (320).As it turns out, Jim doesn't wait long before the electricity to the apartment is cut off. Tom's actions show that he is close to abandoning his family. Not only is he prepared to leave them, but he will go leaving them in the dark.

Seemingly, the blackout coming at the start of the scene where the gentleman caller comes to visit foreshadows the result of this visit and ultimately the end of the play, thus establishing the theme of unfulfilled desires. The revelation that Jim is already engaged strikes Laura, and her mother, like a lethal thunderbolt, killing both of the ladies' hopes. Williams has already substantiated that hope to his audience in two ways. The first is the candle light, "since the lighted candles had been associated with a hope of a loving relationship with a man" (Adler1994, 139). The second is the "delicate lemony light" (Williams 1968, 311) in the apartment, prepared for Jim's reception. Lemony light itself is connotative of renewal, vivacity, and intimate relations. The flickering of light that accompanies Jim's meeting with Laura is also

indicative. After the power outage, Amanda provides Jim and Laura with a "candelabrum" to light up the living room. Candle flames are known to be sensitive, flickering in the slightest blow of air. Indeed, Williams alludes to this phenomenon, since he says, "the flickering light approaches the portieres" (327). Psychics associate flickering light mainly with positive things; one of which is "whatever you're doing at the moment is blessed" (The Symbolism of Shadows no p. #). In Jim's presence, Laura feels blessed and is transformed into an optimistic, life-loving person. Jim's eloquence and good nature make her feel secure enough for her to consent to dance with him. This leads to a kiss that leaves her "with a bright, dazed look" (Williams 1968, 340). From another perspective, the flickering light can be seen as a projection of Laura's confusion at being left alone with Jim, as well as a representation of her social anxiety. Durmišević remarks that "Laura's fragility is indicated through the use of specific light in a particular situation" (Durmišević 2018, 111). Discernibly, the existence of the flickering light during her meeting with Jim is one of these situations. Laura, markedly delicate and bashful, finds herself alone with the very young man on whom she had her one and only high school crush, now a sociable, attractive young man, which adds to her confusion. Williams is keen to emphasize Laura's state; he says in the stage directions "Laura sits up nervously as he enters. Her speech first is low and breathless from the almost intolerable strain of being alone with a stranger" (Williams1968, 237). The unsteadiness of the candle lightand its vulnerability to the lightest blow of air accentuates Laura's anxiousness and fragility. She is in danger of collapsing if Jim is not cautious in picking his words, just as the candle is in danger of being extinguished by a puff of wind.

However, the fact that Laura and Jim recognize each other from their high school days and share some warm memories, along with Jim's pleasant nature, helps Laura to transform from "taciturn" and "agoraphobic" (30), as Krasner describes her, to being a charming young woman. Unfortunately, this liberation does not last long. With no malice intended, Jim returns Laura to her "coffin," weaker and more vulnerable than before. Jim reveals to Laura that he is already engaged and currently working on preparations for the wedding. This bitter blow is also embodied in the employment of light. During their happy meeting, Laura's inner "altar candles" (Williams 1968, 333) were lit up. Now, after Jim's departure, "She blows the candles out" (349), signifying the snuffing out of the physical candles that were offering such a shaky source of light, along with the candle of hope that Jim had kindled in her heart. Adler maintains that Laura's blowing out of the candles shows her "acceptance of her final condition of aloneness" (Adler 1994, 139). Discussing Williams' plays, Barnet remarks that his female "characters often cannot meet and fulfill the demands of the world in which they live" (Barnet 1968, 269). Jim's behavior was unfortunate; he answered an invitation to supper without the knowledge of who he would find there, and totally unaware of her sorry circumstances. His warm and encouraging words brought Laura out of her shell, only to send her spiraling downwards again with the news of his upcoming wedding. This is not something unusual for Williams, "for, in the world of Williams's plays," Arthur Ganz argues, "good often has curious affinity with evil" (Ganz 1965, 205). In the case of *The Glass Menagerie*, the evil lies in the circumstances that the characters find themselves in, rather than any inherent evil to be found in individual characters.

The flickering light of the candles is not the only light employed in this scene. Another example that can be included under Durmišević's remark is the lamp in the living room; Amanda "switches on the rose-colored lamp," (Williams 1968, 324) before Jim's arrival to add a touch of romance to the many preparations already made for his reception. Laura's delicate nature is again emphasized by the softness of this light. Not being able to have dinner with the rest in the kitchenette, Laura lies on the sofa in the living room with the rose-colored lamp giving "light to her face, bringing out the fragile, unearthly prettiness" (324).The light of this lamp here conveys to the audience the physical beauty of Laura, which otherwise could not be noticed because of the dimness that characterizes the atmosphere of the Wingfield apartment. However, the power outage that happens right after they finish dinner results in the disappearance of this seductive image of Laura, as if foretelling the failure of Amanda's efforts to secure Jim as a husband for her daughter. After an angry outburst from Amanda, Tom abruptly leaves the apartment. The final scene between mother and daughter is tender and played out in silence. Meanwhile, Tom, as narrator, tells the audience how he traveled far and wide but never managed to escape his guilt of abandoning Laura. He describes how he would be reminded of her by "a familiar bit of music" or "a piece of "transparent glass" (348). Laura's last act is to blow out the candles, which is timed to coincide with Tom's last line in the play, recounting how he would try to evade her by drinking or going to the movies.

Conclusion

Both*The Glass Menagerie* and *Death of a Salesman* mirror middle class people in their pursuit of a better life, or more accurately their constant struggle between personal aspirations and dismal realities.Speaking about Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, Durmišević remarked that "the plastic elements such as the music [and] light . . . define the frame within which the play unrolls" (Durmišević2018, 110). This description is also applicable to Miller's *Death of a Salesman.*It is true that Miller was not a pioneer in introducing the 'plastic theater,' but he certainly was an "elucidator" (Bigsby 1985, 27) of the new genre, for in *Death of a Salesman* he makes clear strides in revolutionizing the American theater via theatrical elements and unconventional technique. In these two plays, music goes beyond its conventional role as an auditory backdrop to become one of the important elements of the plastic theater; it is employed by the two dramatists to deepen the emotional side of the play and emphasize the different layers of the themes. However, the prevalence of a nostalgic mood in *Death of a Salesman* gives the flute melody a dominant role, with only two exceptions where flute music is not appropriate to the action.By contrast, *The Glass Menagerie* is rich with a variety of moods which necessitates the employment of different musical instruments— the drum, violin, and piano are just a few of them. The traditional function of music and lighting in theatrical productions was to guide the audience's emotions as they watched a certain scene. Williams and Miller surpass this function, giving music and lighting a significant part in creating the action, and in the process of characterization itself, sometimes by showing the character's true self and other times by depicting the character's rising and falling emotions.Furthermore, these playwrights use these 'plastic elements' to emphasize themes,such as fragility, abandonment, escape, illusion, memory etc. By weaving music and lighting into the very fabric of the characters and

plot, Williams and Miller create multilayered narratives that reflect the struggle of their characters to strike a balance between their fantasies and their dismal realities. The ultimate result is an audience that is enabled to live an unconventional theatrical experience.

المسرح "البلاستيكي" : الموسيقى والإضاءة في مسرحيَّة تنيسي وليامز *(مجموعة الحيوانات الزجاجية)* ومسرحية آرثر ملر *(موت بائع متجول)*

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الملخص

يتفق النُقاد عامة، على أن تنيسي وليامز كان الرائد في الحركة الأدبيَّة التي سعت لاستحداث مكونات جديدة للعمل المسرحي في الوقت الذي كان ما يقدمه المسرح لا يخرج عن المتوقع والمألوف. وعلى خطى وليامز سار أرثر ملر وساهم في ثورة المسرح هذه التي ظهرت في منتصف القرن العشرين، ففي مسرحية وليامز *(مجموعة الحيوانات الزجاجيَّة)* التي عرضت عام 1944 ومسرحية ملر *(موت بائع متجول)* التي عرضت عام 1949 قدم الكاتبان "العناصر البلاستيكيَّة" كمكونات أساسيَّة للمسرحيتين وبطريقة مثيرة للاهتمام، إذ أخذت هذه العناصر دوراً أساسياً في بناء ملامح الشخصيات وتأكيد العبر المستقاة وتقوية السرديَّة في كل من المسرحيتين، و"العناصر البلاستيكيَّة" تشتمل على الموسيقى، والإضاءة، والألوان، والضجيج . . . الخ، وقد قام النقاد خلال السنوات الماضية بالتأكيد على أهمية هذه العناصر في البناء الكلي للمسرحيتين ولكن لا يوجد دراسة تظهر بشكل تفصيلي آلية عمل هذه العناصر في إثراء هاتين المسرحيتين، فهذا البحث محاولة لتقديم دراسة وافية لكيفية توظيف الموسيقى والإضاءة في عملية بناء الشخصيات وإعطاء عمق للدروس المستقاة وإثراء السرديَّة في كلتا المسرحيتين، كما أن الدراسة توضح بأن كلاً من الكاتبين تميز بأسلوب خاص به في توظيف هذين العنصرين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تنيسي وليامز، آرثر ملر، عناصر بلاستيكيَّة، موسيقى، إضاءة.

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