DRAMATIZING LIGHT: 
THE THEATRE OF 
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND JO MIELZINER 

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ABSTRACT

The partnership between Tennessee Williams and Jo Mielziner has been studied to reexamine the success of Williams's plays. Although there has been extensive scholarship on the works of Tennessee Williams, less attention has been paid to the performance aspect, in particular the design aspect of the productions. However, it is significant that the most successful plays of Williams emerged from his collaboration with Jo Mielziner, whose simultaneous set design and creative lighting effects not only contributed to bring out the drama within the plays, but also became classics in the history of theatre design. The partnership between Williams and Mielziner is more intriguing when viewed within the context of the following factors: Williams's symbolic description of light in his plays, Mielziner's design career as one of the pioneers of modern lighting design in America, the development in the lighting industry since the end of the nineteenth century, and the history and experimenting with dramaturgical light in the theatre that dates back to the end of nineteenth century. Although the partnership between a playwright and a designer is not a new phenomenon in the theatre history, the collaboration between Williams and Mielziner is unique in that with Williams's visual sensibility and Mielziner's fascination with the kinetic scenery and his understanding of literature, they both transcended their designated roles and merged their art on a higher level. In other words, Williams dramatized the image of light with his language, while
Mielziner used his design not only to visualize the image of light but also to create spatial and temporal order on the stage that dramatized the literature. A detailed study of their early works, *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* has been carried out in this context to demonstrate the meaning of light in the theatre of Tennessee Williams and Jo Mielziner.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most histories of twentieth century American Theatre, though identifying a number of successful playwrights, give priority to three of them. It is almost a consensus that prior to 1940, the American theatre was dominated by the works of one man, Eugene O’Neill, and in the post-war period, the 40’s and 50’s, it was Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller who brought American Drama to international prominence (Bigsby vii). Themes and motifs in their works have been extensively studied by scholars. However, far less attention has been given to the design and performance features of the works.¹ Since the charm and significance of drama is never complete without being viewed in its totality, it is crucial that we attend to the mise-en-scène of these productions, including the impact these productions had on the theatrical modernization in the twentieth century. In the case of Williams and Miller, it is important to notice that the most successful works of both of them emerged out of their collaboration with the director Elia Kazan and the designer Jo Mielziner. Different as their writing styles are, the works of Miller and Williams shared key artistic techniques, realized by Kazan’s directorial intuition and

¹ As Ronald H. Wainscott pointed out in his study of O’Neill’s productions: “When faced with book-length bibliographies of O’Neill studies, one is inclined to assume that the history of the production of O’Neill’s plays has been well documented and thoroughly explored. However...in these biographies and critical works accounts of the original productions, directors, designers, and actors of O’Neill’s theatrical experiments are often reduced to minor anecdotes. There is no historical survey of the stage direction of the O’Neill dramatic canon.”
Mielziner's ingenious simultaneous set design. Especially with Williams's works, such collaboration sustained and produced several stunningly successful productions, which truly defined "the American Style" for the era. Although the collaboration (and occasional disagreements) between Williams and Kazan has received much attention, the partnership between Williams and Mielziner is equally significant.²

In "Spatial Order and Meaning in the Theatre: The Case of Tennessee Williams," Thomas Postlewait pointed out that "while both theatre semiotics and literary study have produced significant developments in their analytical methods, they have either failed or refused to create a total system of description and analysis." He then offered an approach of blending the critical methods of theatre semiotics and literary analysis in his study of the theatre of Williams and Mielziner. He demonstrated how the simultaneous setting and the mise-en-scène converged to establish the spatial and temporal order, and how the design helped to define an appropriate locale for the dramatic action, and ultimately to establish thematically "a mental landscape of the characters' desires, needs, and fears" (postlewait, 49).

As also pointed out by Postlewait, Mielziner's simultaneous design was partly realized by means of "special light effects and the clever use of scrims." However, in Williams's works, light seems to have far more significance than mere scenic requirement. While Miller's sober observation of human struggle seeks answers more in

² Brenda Murphy in Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan stated that her original intention in writing the book was to discover what specific elements in the published texts of Williams actually originated with director Kazan or designer Mielziner. As she studied the evidence she found the collaboration between Williams and Kazan a more intriguing subject, for it does not fall into either of the two models that are currently employed in discussing the playwright-director relationship, i.e. the "symphony model" and the "cinema model." There was more dynamic interaction, more struggle, for control, for hegemony over the creative process which truly challenged their art and enhanced their productivity.
the external social context and the relationship between the individual and the society, Williams looks poignantly and sympathetically into human desires, which often burst forth into his characters’ rather Dionysian pursuit of life. In his sensitive delineation of the human desires, the constant reference to light metaphorically conjures up an image of the capricious and mysterious inner world.

In this sense, besides serving as the steering mechanism that orchestrates the transitions within the simultaneous set, light in Mielziner’s design operated dramaturgically to bring out the inner drama. In other words, in the light itself there exists a combined spatial and temporal order that is key to both the set and the meaning of the play. This achievement seems more intriguing when viewed within the context of not only Mielziner’s design career as one of the pioneers of modern lighting design in America, but also the history of searching for and experimenting with dramaturgical light that dates back to the end of the nineteenth century. The success of the collaboration between Williams and Mielziner proves to be a long anticipated moment in the theatre history where two trains of development, that of dramaturgy and that of lighting design found a way to converge.

To some extend, this thesis will carry on the approach that Thomas Postlewait offered in his study, but I want to look at the even less studied subject of lighting design in theatre scenography, and to take the ambitious step of bridging the seemingly even wider gap between lighting design and literary study. In doing this, I will first lay out the history of modern lighting design within the larger history of modern art, since the pioneers of modern lighting design were greatly influenced, challenged, and nourished by the aesthetic movements and discoveries of the early twentieth century. The experimental
work with light in turn made unique contributions to the new perspectives and ideas that shaped the whole modern art movement. I will also provide information concerning the advancement of the lighting industry which provided the necessary material base for the aesthetic principles of lighting art. Then I will look at two of the early collaborative works between Williams and Mielziner, *The Glass Menagerie*, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in order to locate the productions within the history of lighting design in the modern era.
2.1. A World in the New *Light*

From around 1880 to the outbreak of World War I, a series of technological innovations greatly challenged the older modes of human perception and understanding. With the appearance of the telegraph, cinema, x-ray, automobile, and airplane, etc. the concepts of time, space, speed and distance were provided with new material foundations for reorientation. These changes which led to a reexamination of the world, established new relationships between the human mind and the world. The result was a transformation of the dimension of life and thought.\(^3\)

In the world of literature, poets, novelists, and dramatists sought to describe and analyze the human condition in the modern world from new perspectives of seeing. Especially in the theatre, where ideas are directly connected with visual presentation, the search for a more authentic articulation of the reality generated new dramatic styles.

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\(^3\) Stephen Kern has provided, in *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, a thorough study of the changes brought about by the technological innovations, and the way Europeans and Americans came to conceive of and experience time and space in those years.
In Modern Drama in Theory and Practice, J.L. Styan noted:

It is axiomatic that each generation feels that its theatre is in some way more ‘real’ than the last—Euripides over Sophocles, Molière over the commedia dell’arte, Goldsmith over Steele, Ibsen over Schiller, Brecht over Ibsen. The claims seem to echo one another. It is, of course, the conception of dramatic reality which changes... (Styan, xi)

Styan also noted that the Realistic rebellion against the Romantic situation and characterization seemed to many people unpleasant and shocking. The Realists aimed to put on the stage only what they could verify by observing ordinary life. They try to show the powerful forces that governed human lives, forces of which we might not be fully aware and over which we might have little control. Zola’s theory, both of the novel and the drama, was one of absolute objectivity, with setting, characterization and dialogue rendered so close to actual life that an audience would be convinced by the illusion of its reality. A playwright had only to reproduce the human environment, endow it with human life and show that one produced the other, and what had seemed small and insignificant could be important and urgent. In this sense, what the realists try to present was a specially angled view of real life, carefully arranged for their articulation, under the convincing disguise of real life. Ibsen’s plays have been extensively studied for their themes, but as Styan notes, most critics have failed to recognize his technical achievement. Ibsen has done much to visualize the world of the play by providing not only character descriptions but also detailed set and costume requirements, such as the “blue woolen dress” of Nora (Styan, 19). To the realists, every material detail is directly related to the choices and the situations of an individual, and therefore carries an important message about the person’s life and fate. However thoroughly the realists and
the naturalists sought to visualize their world of theatre, their faithfulness to the
“observable” were soon challenged by new schools of writing.

As a technical and critical term, ‘symbolism’ came into specialized use with
reference to poetry, and it was first employed by Stéphen Mallarmé (1842-98). The style
has since been associated with the work of many other French poets writing in the second
half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century: Baudelaire (1821-67),
Verlaine (1844-96), Rimbaud (1854-91) and Valéry (1871-1945). These poets aimed to
discover the ‘secret’ of poetry as if it were some philosopher’s stone, and they built their
ideas upon a latter-day romantic theory of the mystical and the occult, the irrational and
the world of fantasy and dream. For them poetry was not to obey the laws of logic and
material science, but of hallucination and the surreal (Brocket, 67).

The notions of symbolism could be easily applied to the theatre since symbols on
the stage are not new (e.g. the thunder and storm in King Lear, the blowing sound of the
horn in Hernani). If the Realists sought to draw the audiences’ attention to the specific
material objects in order to show their connection to the characters’ lives, the Symbolists
wanted the objects to immediately suggest immaterial ideas or feelings greater than
objects. It is hard to limit the origin of modern symbolist drama to any single person or
work, but the aesthetic theory of Richard Wagner definitely had great influence on the
symbolic theatre. In his first influential book, The Art-work of the Future (1849), Wagner
argued that art was the vital expression of instinctive life, and music was the most pure
and sensuous form of art. In his next book, Opera and Drama (1851), Wagner began to
write about myth as the creation of the instinctive imagination.
Wagner’s ideas about music-drama inspired a host of theatre theorists and artists in the years that followed. Among them, Freidrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the German philosopher, was inspired to give an ingenious and quasi-historical account of the origins of Greek tragedy. Nietzsche published his *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* in 1872, an argument in anthropological and aesthetic theory which has become a landmark in modern western thought.

As it was for symbolist poetry, Paris became the center of the movement for symbolist drama. While Mallarmé became the spokesman for the new movement, his friend Villiers de L’Isle-Adam (1838-89) was among the first to achieve a dramatic embodiment of spiritual values in his plays. Likewise, the Belgium playwright Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) plunged his plays into mystery by his vaguely medieval subjects and his allegorical way of writing. The influence of French symbolist drama spread quickly.

As the poets and playwrights felt greatly challenged by the complexity of modern life to find a more effective way of writing, the tensions, doubts, and inquiries of modernism were most apparent perhaps in the search for a more articulate expression of the experimental schools of painting, which challenged the tradition of perspectivism, which the Florentine painter Leon Battista Alberti formulated in 1435. These rules of perspective that were to govern painting for four hundred and fifty years. When the Impressionists left their studios and went outside to paint, they discovered new points of view as well as new shades of color and light. They broke Alberti’s rule that the canvas should be placed precisely one meter from the ground, directly facing the subject, and instead positioned it up and down and at odd angles to create new compositions. They
moved in and out of the scene, and the frame ceased to be the proscenium of a cubed section of space that it had traditionally been. Nonetheless, however varied the scope and angle of Impressionist space, it was essentially one space as seen from one point of view. Cézanne was the first to introduce a truly heterogeneous space within a single canvas by providing multiple perspectives of the same subject. He “realized” objects in space as they took form, as the eye darts about the visual field and investigates things until they are identified in space and integrated into one’s world of experience. For Cézanne an object in space was a multitude of creations of the seeing eye that varied dramatically with the most minute shifts in point of view.

Influenced by Cézanne, the Cubists went further to break down objects geometrically into cubes, spheres, and cylinders and provided several views of the same object simultaneously. They gave space the same color, texture, and substantiality as material objects and made the space and objects all interpenetrate so as to be almost indistinguishable.

Space was no longer just a void through which one would look at the world. The Impressionists took a first step to give space its due with their depiction of atmosphere. They used coastal fog, steamy summer haze, diffused forest light, overcast winter twilight, the orange wash of a low sun, to fuse subject and background into a single composition of color and form. In some Impressionist paintings, space and light preempted the nominal subject as though it mattered less than the play of light around it. In turn, as George Braque explained, the main attraction of Cubism was “the materialization of that new space which [the artist] sensed (Kern, 161).” Braque
discovered a “tactile space” in nature, and he wanted to paint the sensation of moving
around objects, the feeling of the terrain, the distances between things.

While Cézanne and the French Cubists’ paintings were filled with spatial forms,
in Italy the Futurists depicted lines of space created by movement, light and sound. In
1909, Giacomo Balla filled a canvas with the radiance of a street lamp, and in 1912 he
painted another with scalloped and puff-ball formations of “atmospheric densities.”

It is within the context of these various artistic and technical developments that
we need to trace the development of modern scene and lighting design in the theatre.

2.2. New Voices in Theatre Design

In the late nineteenth century theatre, stage designers began to challenge the
traditional flat painted backdrop and to experiment with the use of space. In the 1890’s
Adolphe Appia created “rhythmic” spaces with sculptured architectural forms and
dramatic chiaroscuro lighting. In England, Gordon Craig carried Appia’s ideas further by
eliminating the deceptive orchards and arcades on painted backdrops and recomposing
the space with drapes, screens, and simple geometric forms. For both Appia and Craig,
the stage must be adorned only with light, shadow, and nonrepresentational sets that
merely accented the space in which actors moved.

The symbolist theatre in production drew inspiration largely from Appia, who in
turn, took his inspiration from Wagner and conceived his ideal theatre in terms of
‘musical’ form. Like Appia, Craig believed in the need to create a production as a whole,
where all its parts should be subordinated to the conception of the director-designer. Like
Appia and almost all theorists of the time, Craig began by denouncing realism. And Craig conceived the art of the theatre in terms of kinetic light and movement, not of words alone. All of these elements should "express" the essence of theatre.

The term "expressionism" was first applied to painting. In the 1900s it was used to distinguish the more energetic individualism of Van Gogh and Matisse from early impressionist painting. Whereas the impressionists tried to paint external reality, the expressionists insisted on conveying their subjective experiences, the inner ideas or visions of what they saw, the internal reality. The expressionists were not interested in objective reality, and therefore rejected any form of realism. They defiantly took subjective stances and projected their intense, often eccentric view of the world onto their work. "Expressionism" soon spread into other art forms, including music, architecture, poetry, fiction, film, and especially drama.

The setting of early expressionistic plays avoided reproducing the detail of naturalistic drama, and created only those starkly simplified images the theme of the play called for. They were also known for vividly dreamlike and nightmarish atmospheres which were created by special lighting effects. Since the suggestiveness and subjectiveness of an expressionist play leaves much unspoken and unseen behind the script, the directors and designers were afforded greater opportunities for creativity than they had known before. For example, in staging the plays by Oskar Kokoschka and Frank Wedekind, Max Reinhardt were credited for his mastery of comparatively new
techniques such as the revolving stage and the new electric spotlights. Reinhardt and his designers, in turn, owe much of their innovations to the theoretical writings of Appia and Craig.⁴

Along with the new treatment with stage space, several technological developments opened new possibilities. To some extent the modern stage design was born out of a total revolution of the ideas and treatment of the space. For example, the invention of the revolving stage in 1896 by Karl Lauterschlager literally revolutionized stage design and facilitated quick set change. And most pioneers came to realize that light was the most effective medium for defining the negative space.

2.3 Discoveries in the Lighting Industry

Of course the innovations of the theatre artists could not have been realized without the dramatic progress in the lighting industry at the time. In October 1879, an incandescent lamp with carbon filament burned quietly for over forty hours in Thomas Edison’s laboratory in the sleepy hamlet of Menlo Park, New Jersey, and the human search for electric light had ended. Yet, in other ways, the search had only begun.⁵

One day early in 1880, while viewing an experimental carbon filament, Edison noticed an old palm-leaf fan that his workers used. Surprisingly, the bamboo strip, when carbonized, turned out to be hard and strong and more efficient than those made of Bristol board. With funds available for research, Edison began a quest worthy of

⁴ John Willett in Expressionism lays out the theories, events, and important works related to the development of Expressionism. He paid some attention to the stage lighting in the expressionistic theatre as part of the exploration of the new concept of space.

⁵ James Cox in A Century of Light wrote about the invention of electric light in details.
comparison to the search for the Holy Grail. Among more than six thousand varieties of bamboo samples brought back from all over the world by Edison’s research team, the best sample turned out to be from Japan. For years, until the advent of the squirted cellulose filament discovered by the English experimenter, Leigh S. Powell in 1888, bamboo from a single grove adjacent to Iwashimizu-Hachiman-Gu, a Shinto shrine in Kyoto, made millions of horseshoe-shaped filaments for lamps, turned out by the Edison Lamp Company. Also in 1888, Arturo Malignani, a brilliant Italian engineer, improved the vacuum chamber inside the bulb, an invention that also further reduced the time required to exhaust a bulb from half an hour to less than a minute. The success of Malignani’s invention also gave rise in later years to extensive experiments with other chemical agents, called “getters,” which improved the vacuum and reduced the amount of blackening inside the globe caused by evaporated filament material being deposited on the walls of the bulb. In 1900, Willis Whitney, on the faculty of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, developed an electric resistance furnace which could produce very high temperatures up to 3,500°C. At such high temperature, the baked carbon filament developed a hard, tough shell of pure graphite around the basic core, and thus took on the characteristics of metal filaments. The new lamps first placed on the market in 1905 soon surpassed unmetallized lamps in sales volume, and remained popular until World War I.

With all these achievements of the experimenters, the real revolution of light in daily life began in 1910 when the tungsten filament lamp replaced the nineteenth century carbon filament lamp that produced a very limited luminous flux. With tungsten bulbs, the luminous efficiency reached 8-10 lm/W, almost three times more powerful than
before. The introduction of gas-filled lamps further opened up new possibilities in that they created a counter-pressure to the gasification of the filament, which made it possible to increase the filament temperature even further. The gas-filled lamps were launched onto the market in 1913, and produced an average luminous efficiency of 12-15 lm/W, four to five times as much light as the old carbon filament lamp. With the invention of the metal-filament lamps, electric light began to compete in earnest with gas lamps for street lighting. After the end of the WW I, an intense electrification of dwellings was begun. And the substantial increase in electrification between 1914 and 1924 coincided with the increasing utilization of a flexible system of spotlights with filaments instead of the old arc lamps in theatre lighting.

In the 1920’s, lighting techniques attracted increasing attention, the aim being to adjust light to the varying environments of man. Therefore, great progress was made within the field of electric fittings in order to avoid blinding effects. Detailed studies were done on the distribution and economy of light, as effected by the dimensions of rooms and the treatment of wall surfaces within rooms. Special organizations were founded in various countries for the further development of lighting techniques (e.g. the Lighting Institute in Nela Park, Cleveland, Ohio, the Lichttechnisches Institut attached to the Technische Hochschule in Karlsruhe). In Europe and America, the training of illuminating electrical engineers came more and more to the fore.

In the early 1930’s, “the fluorescent lamp” was introduced on the American market. It produced a luminous efficiency of 40-50 lm/W, 3 to 4 times that of the electric bulbs. But the cold glare, the flickering effects, and the degree of blinding caused much irritation before the electric industry constructed improved models. The special
fluorescent tubes with great light output are called neon tubes, which have been used for advertising signs for decades and have totally changed the appearance of the main streets of our towns and cities.

To a greater extent, though, it is the mercury and sodium lamps that have changed the human environment. The first lamps of this type were placed on the market in the early 1930’s. After the Second World War, the white mercury lamps with a luminous efficiency of ca. 70 lm/W were frequently used for street lighting and the lighting of industrial premises, etc. They were the forerunners to the high pressure sodium lamps that appeared in the latter half of the 1960’s with an improved light color of a warm, yellowish character, that produce a luminous efficiency of no less than 100-150 lm/W.

Simultaneous with the introduction on the market of gradually stronger lamps, an increasingly greater attention was paid to the adjustment of light to different purposes, “the choice of correct illumination” as Bergman notes (Bergman, 350). Studies show that the requirement of light is dependent on size of detail (optic angle), conditions of contrast, viewing distance and age. According to Bergman, “quite naturally, the theatre has joined in this development” (Bergman, 350).

2.4 Experiments with Light in the Theatre

During the twentieth century, the development of stage lighting has run parallel to the developments in daily life. Various companies, primarily in Germany, England and America, immediately utilized the technical progress for stage lighting. The new lighting techniques, along with the development of a three-dimensional stage with innovative
treatment of space and with more possible locations for the lighting sources, provided numerous possibilities for theatre productions.

With tungsten filaments, new and increasingly efficient spotlights and projector lamps were introduced for several purposes: for front-of-house illumination, for acting area illumination, and for special effect illumination. Since 1930, increased efficiency has been achieved by (1) a stronger concentration of the spiral-shaped filament system, (2) the use of low-voltage lamps of great intensity, and (3) the improvement of lens systems and reflectors. At the same time, the number of color filters grew from the nineteenth century scheme of three- or four-color hues into some 60 different hues, with a variety of shades and tints that allow more subtle color painting on the stage.

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, the birth of an open stage and the triumph of a three-dimensional stage, a cubic space, enabled the operation of light and shades, combined with scenic elements, to create various stage pictures. In this space, the light sources can be placed according to technical requirements and can be projected from different angles. The stage can be illuminated three-dimensionally, and fully covered by light point by point from in front, from behind, from the sides, from above and even from below. The most revolutionary change in the placing of the light sources was the introduction of the front-of-house lighting. In the eighteenth and the most part of the nineteenth century, the question of how to illuminate the front part of the stage was a much studied issue. During the first decades of the twentieth century the problem again became crucial with the moving of the stage forward into close contact with the audience, the discarding of the proscenium arch and the footlights, and the development of the intensely illuminated cyclorama, which made the actors appear as silhouettes if the acting
area was too faintly illumined. Starting with David Belasco, Gordon Craig and Max Reinhardt, who realized the importance of the spotlights from the auditorium, experiments were carried out in the theatre in Sweden, America, Britain, Germany, Russia and other countries. Although there were debates and aesthetic misgivings over the use of light from offstage above the heads of the spectators, front-of-house lighting emerged victorious, and audiences soon accepted the battery of auditorium spotlights as part of the theatre.

The emergence of the cyclorama with an extensive, curved and free surface in the background naturally opened up possibilities of projection, not only with colors but also with painted, drawn or photographic pictures. The projections could be produced in front of or from behind the cyclorama. In 1924, both Meyerhold and Piscator employed projections with documentary pictures and annotations as interim pieces between scenes. Projections onto translucent veils placed at different depths on the stage added amazing possibilities to the stage by presenting simultaneous events, dissolving the permanent stage into a magic space with great variability.

It is obvious that the development of lighting technology opened up enormous possibilities for the theatre artists, but it is hard to map cause and effect in this dynamic relation because the human imagination travels in a limitless space of its own, never inhibited by the actual technologies. Very often it is the human imagination that anticipates the birth of advanced technologies. For instance, at the beginning of the century, the English painter A. W. Rimington experimented with “color music” by “painting” with colored light from movable projectors. The light was choreographed into rhythms and moods appropriate to the chosen music. Rimington’s experiment embodied
the great innovation of moving lights that have just been perfected in the recent decades. Therefore, it is not surprising that some innovations with light actually started long before the lighting industry provided sufficient technologies.

According to Bergman, even before Appia expressed in systematic terms the central function of stage lighting, the experimentation with modern lighting had begun with Henry Irving, André Antoine and the Meiningen Players. As Bergman put it:

It may seem a paradox that, at the same time as the illusion theatre went the whole hog with intricately built-up scenery, some of its most prominent men discovered the unexploited possibilities of stage lighting, of creating a lyrical atmospheric painting which was beyond the scope of scenic illusion, pointing towards the function of light as a dramaturgical means, a creative light. (Bergman, 301)

Irving is generally credited for his masterful attention to light and his artistic sensibility in painting the stage with combinations of colored light as well as with shades and shadows. It is known that he even led the lighting rehearsals himself so as to make sure that light was orchestrated in perfect harmony with the production. It is important to note that what Irving worked with were transparent lacquers, limelight. Only towards the end of his career did he use electric light. Likewise, though we lack detailed information on the lighting practice of Antoine and the Meiningen Players, it is certain that they also applied lighting in their productions as a poetical element, giving it new functions.

In every sense, modern lighting design is greatly indebted to Appia’s theoretical writings on stage design. In his profound work Die Musik und die Inszenierung, Appia stated that the stage picture consists of three elements, the plastic design of the stage, painting, and lighting—or, form, color and light. Appia identified three kinds of stage lighting: the general acting light which gives “diffused light,” the creative light, which
creates light and shades; and the painted, illusory light. Appia was the first to ban the painted light by giving the real light the role of “visual music,” serving the expressive and poetic vision. Like the French symbolists, Appia had the same partiality to darkness, the twilight dusk, the soft fading. There is always a sky floating in light and shades, and the lighting follows the music. It is the inner drama that he wants to create in tune with the music: “Darkness and light have in the course of the drama the same importance as a musical motif.” In an article in 1911, Appia pointed out:

“Thus the all-powerful light, supple to the music, will be united with it; light without which there is no plasticity; light which fills the room with brightness and moving shadows; which falls in placid drops or which blazes forth in coloured, live beams. And the bodies, basking in its animating atmosphere, will find themselves in it and greet the Music of Space.” (Bergman, 329)

Appia paid great attention to the function of light in dramatizing the scenes. Likewise, the symbolists made a step forward by incorporating light into the meaning of their theatre as a narrative tool. In the symbolists’ dream of an all-embracing work of total art, light plays a central role by suggesting “the inner mental courses of events, the cursory and vague, and the rhythmic, the romantic musicality” (Bergman, 311).

In the twentieth century, with the advancement of lighting technologies, a range of new possibilities was opened up for the uses of light. As Bergman notes, the effect of the light sources is dependent on “the luminous intensity, the direction, the angle of the light beam, the color and the contrast” (Bergman, 350). With the growing luminous efficiency, the increasing types of spotlights, the multiple lighting locations in the theatre, and the variety of color filters, each of these aspects were significantly improved.

In America, David Belasco was a pioneer of modern lighting. He seemed to be at the front of every piece of experiment with new lighting techniques in the theatre. As a
director, Belasco used light in rehearsals because for him light served the scenic illusion, creating an atmosphere which, already during rehearsals, was to help the actors enter into a milieu and find the right expressions for naturalistic action. The actor “feels it [the light] instantly and responds to it, and then the audience just as quickly responds to him.” Belasco also notes:

Lights are to drama what music is to the lyrics of a song. No other factor that enters into the production of a play is so effective in conveying its mood and feeling. They are as essential to every work of dramatic art as blood is to life. (Bergman, 305)

Among all the innovations at the turn of the century, it was the introduction of cinema which had the greatest impact on every field of art and challenged almost all perspectives and concepts in seeing and understanding the world. Movies broke up motion into discrete parts, and played with the uniformity and irreversibility of time. With the special techniques developed, such as montage, double exposure and parallel editing, the cinema could appear to take the viewer from one place to another and achieve the effect of being here and there simultaneously. And the cinema could manipulate space in many ways. The frame could be changed by moving the camera or changing the angle of the lens. The point of view or distance from the action could be shifted with different camera positions, and the space in view could move continuously with a pan.

The appearance of cinema greatly challenged the theatre art and its limitation in manipulating space. However, the theatre artists were also inspired by cinematography and at times, the art of theatre enhanced the art of cinema as well. In the theatre, the editing techniques of cinema were soon adopted to achieve better visual emphasis on the stage. With the use of spotlights, the field of vision becomes smaller, the contrast
increases, and the face and gestures of the actor get "closer" to the audience like close-ups on the film screen. The fading in and out of different sections, usually also different locales on the stage, facilitates quick scene changes and variability for focal interest that very much resemble the montage technique in films. For instance, in the 1928 production of Die Verbrecher (The Criminals) by F. Bruckner, a section of a house with six different acting areas and with six different actions occurring were illuminated one after another by spotlights.

Perhaps no one illustrates the connection between the stage and the movie screen better than Orson Welles. Several of his theatre productions in the 1930's illustrate the ways he was developing the new modernist techniques of both stage and film.

Welles's "Voodoo" Macbeth (Lafayette Theatre, New York, April 14, 1936) was noted for the visual transition that was compared to a film dissolve and used to illustrate the influence of motion picture techniques on Welles's theatre. However the "influence" in fact went the other way (France, 54). In Macbeth, the jungle scenes were staged in front of a backdrop, behind which stood the permanent set—the castle. By the use of light on the various levels of the set, Welles achieved the movie techniques of dissolve to the stage and created numerous scene changes.

In Welles's theatre, the work of light is closely choreographed to dramatize the specific scenes that would in turn articulate the spirit of the drama. In Doctor Faustus (Maxine Elliott Theatre, New York, January 8, 1937), the stage was completely devoid of pictorial detail. Designer Abe Feder felt that his job, in the absence of scenery, was to find "other means of tying together time and space in the continuity of the script." Since the performance was run without intermission, "the entire burden of changes in tempo
and space was placed in the realm of the work of light.... He [Welles] wanted people to appear and disappear out of the black void” (France, 91).

In *Julius Caesar* (Mercury Theatre, New York, November 11, 1937), except for an arrangement of wooden platforms, the stage proper was bare. Columns of light picked out the actors, emphasizing the action and moods, and establishing the atmosphere of the various scenes. Following Caesar’s murder, the staging reached its climax. The development of the scene was described by Jean Rosenthal, the lighting designer, in her memoirs:

Orson dictated clearly and exactly the look he wanted...a very simple look based on the Nazi rallies at Nuremberg. The pattern implied in the Nuremberg “festivals” were in terms of platforms, which were the basis of the scenery, and lights which went up and down. The up light was taken entirely from the effect the Nazis achieved. (Rosenthal, 22)

When commenting on the work that he and Jean Rosenthal did every night for *Danton’s Death* (Mercury Theatre, New York, November 2, 1938), Walter Ash stated:

It was fantastically difficult, because the lights never stopped moving. Each time the platform rose to a different level there would be a lighting transition, as well. And I don’t mean just up and down either. There were all kinds of symbolic things: the cyc would go red, as if it were in flames; a low group of faces would be bordered, and then fade out; or a crowd would appear on another part of the cyc. All this was done with lights. Fade in, fade out, lap dissolves—just like a movie!” (France, 149)

It seems natural that Orson Welles should fall in love with filmmaking for the fascinating possibilities and control it provides for the director’s artistic vision. With film, the techniques that Welles had been experimenting in the theatre could finally transcend the limitation of the stage and grow into full articulation. It is thus appropriate that Welles’s art should culminate in “the best movie ever made,” *Citizen Kane*.
*Citizen Kane* has been much cited for its masterful manipulation of the narrative order and the spectators’ expectations. It is a good example of how the movie camera can lead the spectators’ perception and shape their judgment. It is indisputable that a large part of the movie’s effects were achieved through its visual images, besides the internal narrative order. The visual world of *Citizen Kane* is a seamless combination of realistic details and expressionistic techniques. The reality of the characters’ world was carefully arranged in a way the Realists would want their stage designed. A good example is the scene of Kane and Susan at breakfast in their luxurious palace. The juxtaposition of ketchup bottle and exquisite dishes suggests the deterioration of their marriage. By means of the carefully arranged details, the film techniques, montage, close-ups, dissolves, newsreel techniques, and much more, the narration gained great flexibility in moving beyond the limitation of time and space. Within each scene, the use of light, and more particularly the use of shadows, added to the mood of the situation. Welles’s use of light shows many similarities to his theatrical techniques, including strong visible beams of light, heavy shadows, and steeply angled light. These film techniques demonstrate the legacy that Welles derived from the theatre art.

VI. Twentieth Century American Stage Design.

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century was an era of directors. The European pioneers lead the series of theatrical innovations. The influence quickly spread to America and nourished its own directors such as David Belasco and Orson Welles. At the same time, designers in America, equally influenced
by their European colleagues, quickly matured and grew into a powerful and unique artistic force. Some of those designers made significant contributions to the twentieth-century American theatre.

On January 27, 1915 Robert Edmond Jones’s design for The Man who Married a Dumb Wife, a single formal setting in shades of gray, white and black, together with costumes in primary and secondary colors, not only introduced a new kind of stagecraft to Broadway, but opened up a whole new era in the history of American theatre. Jones is also acclaimed as the father figure of modern lighting design in America, the man who was the first American designer who wrote systematically about lighting.

In the sixth chapter of Dramatic Imagination, “Light and Shadow in the Theatre,” Jones wrote passionately about the nature of light and the intimate relationship that light has with the theatre.

As we gradually bring a scene out of the shadows, sending long rays slanting across a column, touching an outline with color, animating the scene moment by moment until it seems to breathe, our work becomes an incantation, We feel the presence of elemental energies. (Jones, 113)

Jones believed that the realization of the “livingness of light” is the most overwhelming moment in the long quiet hours of light-rehearsals, and is the most precious of all experiences that theatre can give us. Jones describes an ideal light in the theatre, a light that is altogether uncommon. It makes the performance exist in an ideal world of wisdom and understanding. He describes it as “lucid,” “penetrating,” and “aware.” It should contain an element of “surprise, a sense of discovery.” On lighting a drama, Jones states:

Lighting a scene consists not only in throwing light upon objects but in throwing light upon a subject. We have our choice of lighting a drama from the outside, as a spectator, or from the inside, as a part of the drama’s experience.... But the
subject which is to be lighted is the drama itself. We light the actors and the setting, it is true, but we illuminate the drama. We reveal the drama. We use light as we use words, to elucidate ideas and emotions. Light becomes a tool, an instrument of expression, like a paint-brush, or a sculptor’s chisel, or a phrase of music. (Jones, 118)

Jones recognizes that our greatest dramatists have woven light and shadow poetically into their creations and they see great revealing images in the moments of light. In visualizing such great moments in the drama, what we dream of is a light “that is tense and vivid and full of temperament, an impulsive, wayward, capricious light, a light ‘haunted with passion,’ … a light which draws its inspiration from the moods of light in Nature…” (Jones, 126).

Between the years 1921 and 1933, Jones designed nine O’Neill productions, starting with the three sets he did for Anna Christie. Jones’s designs of ethereal simplicity, strong contrasts in darks and lights, liberal use of open space as an important compositional element, and occasional splashes of vibrant colors did a wonderful job of bringing out the dramatic action in O’Neill’s plays. O’Neill once commented that “Jones’ settings were strikingly true to the atmosphere” (Wainscott, 84). The collaboration between O’Neill and Jones was an earlier example of the successful partnership between a playwright who has particular visual requirement for his plays and a designer who is able to understand and execute the visual world in an artistic way.

Born in the same year as Jones, Lee Simonson emerged as another significant designer of America out of a different background. Simonson grew up in a German-Jewish family with strong European ties, and soon distinguished himself as a writer and critic of early twentieth-century playwrights. Further education took Simonson to Europe where he studied painting and drawing and became a mural painter dedicated to “bring
more color into the world.” Simonson’s theatre career began when Philip Moeller invited him to design the set for a play he was directing. Simonson soon became the principle designer for The Theatre Guild of New York. Unlike Jones’s passionate writings of theatre and the art of design, Simonson’s writing was pragmatic and analytical. In The Stage is Set, he provided pragmatic guidelines on the importance of the floor plan, and he described the continuous and direct relationship between the design of the setting and the actor’s movement within it.

Lee Simonson’s first practical statement about scene design appeared in an article published in February 1924, in a periodical of the Nela Park division of General Electric Company called Light. The article was entitled “Light as a Scene Painter.” He stated:

...that until a designer has completed his light rehearsal he cannot be said to have really designed anything. Until he finds the particular lighting he needs, his setting, however accurately built from his drawings, will not bear the remotest relation to his conception and remain incapable of conveying the work of the play, whether it be peasant hut or magic forest. (Larson, 165)

Simonson was also the first to speak about the light plot.

The light plot of a play is akin to the score of an opera [Simonson’s own emphasis], except that the fact that it does not exist at the outset, but must be improvised by the designer as the movement of the actors are fixed by the director. A light rehearsal is really a problem in orchestration of timbres as distinct and varied as those of an orchestra. (Larson, 165)

Vii. Jo Mielziner and Tennessee Williams

Jo Mielziner joined the theatre as an actor, designer and stage manager. He attended the Pennsylvania Academy in Philadelphia, where he won two scholarships, which he used to study contemporary theatre in Europe. In 1924, Mielziner became a design apprentice to the Theatre Guild, where he worked under Lee Simonson and as
apprentice of Robert Edmond Jones. Mielziner was greatly influenced by their attention
to lighting as an important aspect of design, and in particular, Jones’s “sensitive control
of the power and beauty of dramatic lighting.” In Designing For The Theatre, Mielziner
also acknowledged that it was Edward Kook, the lighting executor (who became
president of Century Lighting Company) who made him realize the importance of
lighting in the creation of a stage setting, how lighting could reinforce the fundamental
qualities of the drama as well as enhance the appearance of the setting. During the season
of 1924-25, Mielziner was used as an extra or walk-on in Guild productions, which was
an experience that Mielziner welcomed since it allowed him to understand the theatrical
experience from an actor’s point of view.

As a designer, Mielziner made his Broadway debut with the design for Franz
Werfel’s comedy The Guardman which the Theatre Guild opened on October 13, 1924.
The production was a smash hit. Although Mielziner’s setting did not attract much
attention, he soon established himself as a journeyman designer on Broadway and was
soon recognized as a talented young designer. Mielziner received his first acclaim over
the setting for Elmer Rice’s realistic drama Street Scene produced by William A. Brady
in 1929. Orville Larson commented:

For all the critical acclaim Mielziner received for realism, critics failed to realize
that what he had presented was to become a predominant style of American scene
design—called suggestive or simplified realism—but it also employed a poetic
quality, especially in the lighting, that was to become a hallmark of his later
settings. (Larson, 85)

In the following years, his designs for Of Thee I Sing (1931), The Barrets of
Wimpole Street (1931) Biography (1932), The Emperor Jones (1933), a revival, High Tor
(1937), Knickerbocker Holiday (1938), Key Largo (1939), and Pal Joey (1940)
highlighted some of the most illustrious moments in American theatre history. His design for Maxwell Anderson's poetic drama *Winterset* in 1935 has been accepted as a masterpiece.

During an interview 1966, Mielziner remarked that he looked back on his first decade of designing as a kind of apprenticeship. He stated that it took him that long to learn to read a playscript with the kind of intelligence and understanding a director or producer ought to have. As his career progressed, he found that designing the setting, costume, and lighting was only a part of his greater participation in the planning of the whole production.

Before Mielziner closed his office to join the Air Force in 1942, he had his first opportunity to work on a design for the Ballet Theatre Company which invited him to provide the décor and lighting for Anthony Tudor's *Pillar of Fire*, which dealt with sex as a psychological rather than a romantic subject. Mielziner was intrigued by the plot. His lighting for *Pillar of Fire* reflected Hagar's every emotional nuance in one of the most complicated lighting plots ever conceived for a ballet. However, his lighting demanded more equipment and consideration that ordinarily used in ballet, and the light plot was curtailed when the company went on tour. *Pillar of Fire* remained one of Mielziner's favorite commissions.

In *Designing for the Theatre*, Mielziner summarized in retrospect his "sins of omission" in the process of learning the art of design—the failure of an artist to understand the real mission of his job. Among them:

My fifth sin of omission was a failure to recognize the scenic artist as one member of a collaborative team. All of us working on a production—designer, producer, actor, composer, lyricist, choreographer—are spokes in a wheel, The
hub is the dramatist. And the one who sees that each spoke does its share of the lift and the pull on behalf of the dramatist is the director (Mielziner, 9).

In Mielziner’s view, the playwright’s intentions sit in the center of a theatrical creation, while the director functions as the coordinator who makes sure that the team functions well as a whole. Also in *Designing for the Theatre*, Mielziner articulated his understanding of the twentieth-century playwriting:

The greatest change in the construction of plays in this century has resulted from the desire of the dramatist to be able to move his story along in an unlimited number of short scenes, and not to be held up by slow scenic changes... The second basic influence on playwriting that has directly affected stagecraft was the advent of Freud, and the resulting desire of dramatists to depict the inner man as well as the external one. The fundamental techniques that a designer uses to meet these demands are imaginative lighting and a variety of transparent scenery, including scenery covered with scrim and easily made transparent by careful use of dyes and lighting. (Mielziner, 12)

Shortly after Mielziner’s return to Broadway, Norris Houghton wrote an article about the season of 1945-46, stating that among the various settings of the season, none of the major designers had exceeded their previous standards. No new trends were visible. Contemporary designers, Houghton claimed, were firmly bound by the realistic traditions of playwrights (Larson, 139).

It was a mistake for Houghton to have dismissed the production of *The Glass Menagerie* as bounded by realistic traditions, for the play came from not only a young playwright who tried to challenge the traditional bounds of realism but also an experienced designer who sought opportunities of break the stasis in the theatre design.

In 1944, after several unsatisfactory provisions, Williams completed *The Gentleman Caller*, which was to be renamed *The Glass Menagerie*. Williams mailed his only copy of the script to his producer Audrey Woods with the hope that the play would be relegated to their “reservoir of noble efforts.” The play with its poetic sentiment,
poignant and sensitive delineation of characters and innovative stage directions attracted most people who had the first glimpse of it. Audrey Woods soon set her sights on precisely the right person who would give life to the play, Eddie Dowling, who had become something of a legend by the year. An acting team was soon assembled with Laurette Taylor, Julie Haydon, and Anthony Ross. Eddie Taylor was to both direct and play the brother. The scene and lighting designer chosen for this “memory play” was Jo Mielziner.

In the fall of 1944, Jo Mielziner was discharged as a major from the U.S. Army’s Office of Strategic Services. The forty-three-year-old designer had twenty years of experience as a designer of Broadway productions and had several impressive designs to his credit. Coming back from the war, Mielziner was looking for opportunities to break new ground in the postwar theatre, and it seemed that The Glass Menagerie offered him the right challenge that he needed. Mielziner recognized that Williams, even though a largely inexperienced playwright, revealed a strong instinct for the visual qualities of the theatre. In fact, from a very early stage of his career, Williams had come to realize the theatrical function of set design, especially the magic of light in realizing the transitions within the drama. In his stage directions for Fugitive Kind, he wrote:

...when lighted the set is realistic. But during the final scenes of the play, where the mood is predominantly lyrical, the stage is darkened, the realistic details are lost—the great window, the red light on the landing and the shadowy walls make an almost expressionistic background. (Biggsy, 29)

The same ideal of seamless transition between the realistic world of the play and the lyrical mood of the characters was apparent in The Glass Menagerie, or even more so, since the whole play had become a journey between the two worlds. “Williams,” Jo
Mieziner said, "was writing not only a memory play but a play of influences that were not confined within the walls of a room" (Leverich, 557).

As Norris Houghton observed, American theatre at the time was dominated by playwrights who would not go beyond the realistic tradition, and the designers who were bound by the realistic world of the plays. However, the partnership between Williams and Mielziner promised something new. This partnership was a perfect match of a playwright and designer who both understood the close relationship between drama and its visual world, in particular, the literature that dramatizes light and the light that dramatizes literature. Jones's masterful sensitivity toward color and shape helped him perfectly realize O'Neill's vision. With his fascination with motion and the kinetic quality in the scenery and his understanding of literature, Mielziner transcended the role of a designer and joined the production team as a wonderful dramaturgical force. In the next chapter, I am going to look at The Glass Menagerie in details, trying to reconstruct how the lighting design enhanced the drama. That is, I want to offer an interpretation of the play from the perspective of light.
CHAPTER 3

THE GLASS MENAGERIE

After an initial run in Chicago at the Civil Theatre (26 Dec. 1944 premiere), The Glass Menagerie opened on March 31, 1945, at the Playhouse Theatre, New York City. It was produced by Eddie Dowling and Louis J. Singer, staged by Dowling and Margo Jones, with set and lighting by Jo Mielziner, original music by Paul Bowles. The play enjoyed a brilliant cast with Laurette Taylor as the Mother, Eddie Dowling the narrator, the son, Julie Haydon the daughter, and Anthony Ross the gentleman caller. The production marked the first major success of Tennessee Williams, which he termed in “The Catastrophe of Success” as “an event that terminated one part of [his] life and began another about as different in all external circumstances as could well be imagined” (Williams, 135). The play was to have a run of 562 performances, and was enthusiastically acclaimed by critics and reviewers.

Most of the reviewers focused their praise on the brilliant performance of Laurette Taylor, whose poignant enactment of the nagging mother marked another peak in her career after a long absence from the stage. A review by Ward Morehouse in the New York Sun (April 2), commented: “Miss Taylor captures a Southern accent magically, and with her mumblings and pauses, her detached, half-completed sentences, she brings Amanda Wingfield to life…” Lewis Nicholas wrote in the New York Times (April 2):
Miss Taylor’s picture of a blowsy, impoverished woman who is living on memories of a flower-scented Southern past is completely perfect. It combines qualities of humor and human understanding. ... Miss Taylor makes her [Amanda] a person known by any other name to everyone in her audience. That is art.

New York Post’s Wilella Waldorf wrote in “The Glass Menagerie’ High Point of the Season So Far”:

Laurette Taylor’s haunting portrait of a dilapidated Southern belle, deserted by a charming but irresponsible husband, is a performance that no lover of the theatre will dare to miss. Miss Taylor never tries to assume a really alarming Southern accent, but all of her little vagaries and Tayloresque gestures are employed with telling effect.

Commenting on the play, Waldorf also wrote:

“The Glass Menagerie” is full of wonderful comedy, but it is not the sort of comedy encountered in gag-a-minute farces. Some of its most comical lines are spoken out of the deepest misery of its characters. This is a subtle play of constantly shifting mood and it is not easy for an audience benumbed by routine Broadway fare to keep up with the quicksilver darting from light into shade.

Apparently the play was a pleasant surprise on Broadway which had been dominated by conventional realistic productions and musicals. Its poetic quality, colloquial but articulate dialogues and its expressionistic dramaturgical style were immediately perceived by reviewers. The talent of Tennessee Williams, the young playwright who caught Broadway’s attention with such a smash hit, was also fully appreciated.

Otis L. Guernsey Jr. wrote in the New York Herald Tribune (April 2):

The Williams script is so full of gentle hints at atmosphere and character that it cannot be fully described in any space shorter than the play itself. The framework defies the conventions of play-writing; the author has simplified his drama to a searching, but almost always loving, examination of four ordinary people in hard times, giving it body by packing it with both visual and spoken commentary on this complicated business of living.
For Guernsey, the play was packed with “visual” commentary. Many reviewers noticed Mielziner’s brilliant design which contributed to the drama and made the production a stunning visual experience. Ward Morehouse wrote for the New York Sun on April 2, 1945, that “no revolving stage has been used; the scenes ‘dissolve’ as on the screen, and Mr. Mielziner’s design reveals the interior of the tenement and the exterior, with ‘St. Louis Blues’ forever droning from the dance hall just across the dreary alley.” Robert Garland wrote for the New York Journal-American on the same day: “Jo Mielziner has gone out of the way to supply a setting which, with the use of scrim, lights and imagination, is as fluid as a motion picture background.” Others recognized his design as “a work of fine imagination,” and they commented that the set and light “fit the play,” serving “to heighten dramatic effect without getting in the way.”

In order to achieve the magic of light, Mielziner seems to have exhausted all the resources theatre of his time could offer. During the rehearsal in Chicago before the show opened, Alex Yokel, the company manager, wrote to Ashton Stevens, his former boss and the drama critic of Chicago’s Herald-American, telling him how “22 guys called stage hands are struggling with “the Glass Menagerie” scenery, electrical equipment, props, furniture, and you name the rest.” He said that Jo Mielziner was doing “the lighting job of his luminous life. Jo doped out an electrical scheme that is tremendous because I can’t think of a bigger word. Where an ordinary show has one switchboard, Jo has seven. He has 57 sets of lines hanging from the fly gallery, 150 feet up, and is using every line to hang the electrical equipment.” Observing the technical difficulties of getting the lighting equipment in place, Yokel said: “Jo will get through that in about 24 hours, with coffee and sandwiches while he works, and then the real fun starts.” As it
turned out, Mielziner and his crew completed their work a mere three hours before the Christmas preview performance (Leverich, 558).

Without the light plot, it is hard to say how the seven switchboards actually worked together in the theatre, but it is possible to understand why Mielziner would need such a grand system of lighting control.

Mielziner's multiple set divided the stage into several acting areas. However, unlike most of the multiple set designs before, such as the one for Die Verbrecher, and Jones's design for O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms, in which the simultaneous locales are juxtaposed parallel to each other as if a screen were being dissected into several sections, Mielziner's set was an exploration of a multiple set in a cubic space. Instead of lining up the dining room, living room and fire-escape landing next to each other, Mielziner located the fire-escape is in one corner of the set, and the dining room was positioned in the depth of the stage so that we can see it through the living room (Fig.1).

Ever since Appia challenged the flatness of a stage framed with painted drops, theatre artists have been engaged in an exploration of the depth and dynamic potential of the stage. As I noted in the first chapter, the growing variety of locations for lighting fixtures facilitated this search. Besides more lighting locations, multiple sets generally require highly selective lighting that can illuminate part of the stage while leaving others in complete darkness. The lighting requirement became even more complicated with Mielziner's design since the acting areas are not lined up at the same depth of the stage, but integrated into an interacting whole. Since the transparent scrims are used to hide and reveal the acting areas, front and back light must be used with special care so as not to spill light onto the dark scrims. In this case, the best choice seems to be using sidelights
from comparatively steep angle located close to the target acting area. When there were not enough overhead pipes, all Mielziner could do was to hang lines from the fly gallery and to use every line to hang lighting fixtures. Even so, the effect was only possible to achieve because of such developments as a lighting filament with strong concentration, low-voltage lamps of great intensity, and the improvement of lens system and reflectors.

As the reviewers noticed, the scenes “dissolved” into each other like a movie. This effect demanded all that the advanced control system of the era. When the scenes changed, the several major acting areas—Tom’s fire-escape, the two rooms, the scrims, the two small pieces of far cyc that suggest the far end of the alley and the sky, plus the special spotlights for the picture, the glass menagerie, Amanda, and Laura—all required extremely exact intensity control. Today the computer-aided board can take care of hundreds, even thousands of lights itself, but Mielziner’s imagination far exceeded the technologies of the 1940’s. No wonder Mielziner needed seven switchboards for his fine and subtle images which amazed his fellow theatre practitioners.

With Mielziner’s extensive lighting equipment and careful orchestration, light could finally work smoothly like music. Thus it is possible for the play to achieve what Tom describes in his opening monologue: a memory scene that is dimly lighted, sentimental, not realistic, in which everything seems to happen to music. This reminds us of what Appia remarked on light and music:

Thus the all powerful light, supple to the music, will be united with it; light without which there is no plasticity; light which fills the room with brightness and moving shadows; which falls in placid drops or which blazes forth in colored, live beams. And the bodies, basking in its animating atmosphere, will find themselves in it and greet the Music of Space, and the bodies, basking in its animating atmosphere, will find themselves in it and greet the Music of Space. (Appia, 438)
This statement seems to predict the work of light and music in *The Glass Menagerie*, or we could say that, Mielziner’s achievement finally materialized Appia’s vision.

After the successful try-out in Chicago, *The Glass Menagerie* opened in New York city as Tennessee Williams’s Broadway debut. The production was a smash hit in the theatre. Since then it has also aroused much scholarly attention, especially from literary critics. Over the subsequent years, scholars have discussed the work from religious, social, and psychological points of view, recognizing it as a subtle and poetic analysis of the human condition. In discussing the rich imagery in Williams’s art, many critics have paid attention to the description of light.

Roger B. Stein recognizes Williams’s specification of light as closely related to his religious symbolism. In the stage direction, Williams tells us that the lighting for Laura should resemble that “used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas.” During the scene of Laura and Jim, Laura is lit “inwardly with altar candles,” and when Jim withdraws after kissing her, Williams informs us that the “holy candles in the altar of Laura’s face have been snuffed out. There is a look of almost infinite desolation.” To Stein, the religious overtones never obscure the literal, realistic story line but they add a dimension to the play which “reaches beyond individual pathos and social tragedy” (Stein, 18). Stein also notices that here in *The Glass Menagerie*, as elsewhere in his plays, Williams draws upon his frightened characters’ preference for soft candlelight to harsh daylight or electric bulbs, not only because “it serves him dramaturgically to establish his conception of a new plastic theater where evanescent characters and images flicker across the stage momentarily, but also because his characters so often want to
withdraw from the blinding light of reality into the softer world of illusion” (Stein, 20). At the end of the essay, Stein interpreted the final blackout of the play as not only enveloping the Laura of Tom’s memory and serving as another reminder of the blackout of the war which shrouds the time of the play, but also being the denial of any final “Rise an’ Shine” for these frail characters.

Nancy M. Tischler, while mapping out the biographical elements in Williams’s works, pointed out that, Williams’s sister Rose became a symbol for him of the sensitive and the outcast person, whose sensitivity invariably subjects her to mutilation. Laura, the girl with her glass menagerie, together with every other important character in Williams’s early fictions (e. g., the college students, the vagrant poet, the sallow little masochist, the perverted artist, the consumptive factory worker, the one-armed male prostitute), are all crippled in some way, and can be destroyed at one touch. The radiance of such people is like a “piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentarily radiance, not actual, not lasting” (Tischler, 37). To Tischler, Laura’s preference to candlelight suggests her inability to adapt to the modern scene of electrodynamics. She lives in a world of candlelight and fantasy. Her encounter with the machine age is brief and vain.

As the critics have observed, Williams’s sensitivity and lyricism seem to have found their articulation in the image of light. However, light as imagery, the symbolic light, therefore the static light, offers only one portion of the meaning of light in Williams’s theatre. Being a playwright, Williams is quite aware that drama is both literature and a script for the theatre, and light can be both a literary symbol and a stage device. In his theatre, light not only gives suggestive meaning by decorating the drama, but also functions and articulates the spatial and temporal movements of the play.
Tischler points out that William’s light, which changes with the character’s moods, constitutes an important part of his idea of expressionist theatre.

The stage is as dim as the participants’ lives. Shafts of light flicker onto selected areas or actors, “sometimes in contradiction to what is the apparent center.” When Tom and Amanda are quarreling, the light on them is low red, while Laura stands in a pool of light of that “peculiar pristine clarity such as light used in early religious portraits of saint of madonnas.” The tone, strength, and occurrence of the lights have the power of emotional emphasis. In a technique reminiscent of Chekhov’s, Williams heightens the emotional truths of the scenes and the reality of the internal action through unusual external effects. (Tischler, 39)

Frank Durham related Williams’s choreography of light to the cinematic camera shots. He particularly emphasized the use of cinematic close-up in act 1, scene 3, when Amanda tries to sell magazines subscriptions on the telephone. The light in the alley, where Tom stands, fades out, “and a head-spot falls on AMANDA, at phone in living-room.” The rest of the stage is dark, and Amanda stands alone in a circle of light revealing only her face. At the conclusion of her scene, “Dining-room and living-room lights dim in. Reading lamp lights up at the same time.” The close-up gives way to a longer shot of the whole room. He also comments that Williams employs light for reaction close-ups, so that the emphasis is often not on the action itself but on a character’s reaction to that action. In conclusion, Durham cited Williams’s own remark on lighting: “A free, imaginative use of light can be of enormous value in giving a mobile, plastic quality to plays of a more or less static nature.”

In his production note, Williams stated that being a “memory play” with considerably delicate or tenuous material, The Glass Menagerie should be presented with unusual freedom of convention. Atmospheric touches and subtleties of direction should play a particularly important role. For Williams, “Expressionism and all other
unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth.”

Both Tischler and Durham perceived the importance of light as a dramaturgical means which exists in the spatial and temporal dimension of the movement. However, besides citing the moments of light as mere instances of Williams’s own description of lighting in the production note and vaguely explaining their function and meaning, they failed to give an analysis of how Williams “heightens the emotional truths of the scenes and the reality of the internal action through unusual external effects” (Tischler, 39), and what the emotional truth and reality of the internal action really are. In other words, if for Williams, “the Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth,” what is the truth about these characters that he tried to express in this particular play?

Analyzing the spatial order and meaning in Williams’s theatre, Thomas Postlewait establishes that

...In *The Glass Menagerie*, with its shifting temporal and spatial relationships, the various locations are represented without any scene changes. ...Tom as narrator is located in the present; Tom as character is located in the past. ...The spatial axis that Tom travels—not only inside and outside of the tenement room as young Tom but also inside and outside of the set design itself as older Tom—serves as the throughline of the play, the analogue of its themes and character developments. (Postlewait, 54)

Along the spatial axis that Tom travels, it is the area lights that reveal the various locations, and it is the changes in the hue and intensity of the lights that establish the different moods of present and past, reality and memory. In other words, if the multiple set designates the locales, it is the light that truly defines them and gives “livingness” to the stage.
Every time when the interior lights fade in, we walk into Tom’s memory with him. We must be aware that this story from the past is tinted with his “light”, the light of memory, which allows for the poetic license. The interior light comes up slowly, like the human mind slowly indulging itself in a moment of recollection. When the lights slowly fade out, it is like the mind reluctantly coming back to reality. However, at the end of Act I, scene 3, when Tom in his fury knocks over Laura’s glass menagerie, the stage direction reads: “he stares at her stupidly for a moment. Then he crosses to shelf holding glass menagerie. Drops awkwardly on his knees to collect fallen glass, glancing at Laura as if he would speak, but couldn’t. Blackout.” The sudden blackout suggests that Tom, unable to bear watching and reliving the scene in his memory, suddenly wiped the picture out of his mind. The audience is left with a moment of unfathomable sorrow and emptiness.

Wrapped inside the frame of memory, the shifts of light again indicate the point of view that we are provided with. We see through Tom’ eyes, but the point of view becomes problematic here as the perspective of the young and older Tom necessarily intermingled. And at times, the older Tom, the narrator, also carries the playwright’s intention.

In Act I, scene 4, Tom says to Laura: “You know it don’t take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail.” The stage direction reads, “As if in answer, the father’s grinning photograph lights up.” We are witnessing the inner world of Tom as he looks at the father’s grinning photograph, a tempting and ridiculing image.

The spotlight techniques were developed in the nineteenth century and have been used for visual accent in stage scenes ever since. Typically a follow spot focused on the
star of a show. And Henry Irving developed techniques for a spotlight to highlight a key action or object on stage. Williams's play requires particular use of spotlight for visual emphases as he tries to highlight the situations of his characters; however, he has his own theory of its articulation. In his own production notes for *The Glass Menagerie*, he stated that

> Shafts of light are focused on selected areas or actors, sometimes in contradiction to what is the apparent center. For instance, in the quarrel scene between Tom and Amanda, in which Laura has no active part, the clearest pool of light is on her figure. This is also true of the supper scene, when her silent figure on the sofa should remain the visual center. (Williams, 8)

These directions seem to aim purely at establishing the visual focus for the audience. Like the movie camera which directs the audience's attention, Williams uses special light to point out the characters whose situations the spectators should pay attention to. However, with movies, there is usually only one screen and one image that the audience sees, while on the stage, while the spectators are given the highlighted visual center, they are also aware of the fact that this is not the center of the action and some meaning must be suggested by, even hidden in, the arrangement.

In Act I scene 4, when the portrait of the father lights up, we should understand that we are witnessing the growth of an idea inside Tom's mind. The portrait was lighted during his talk with Laura and Amanda, but this effect was only observable to Tom himself and the audience. When Tom asked: “But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail?” the father’s grinning photograph lights up as if in answer. And at the moment, *Laura exits up L, lights fade except for blue glow in dining room.* The idea of following in his father’s footsteps is a little secret that develops in Tom’s
mind. As the spectators witness Tom’s desire, they are also witnessing the fact that none of the other members in the family sees or understands his desires, not even Laura.

In Act I scene 3, the scene that Williams particularly pointed out in his productions notes, Laura is supposed to be in the center of the spotlight while Amanda and Tom are engaged in a heated fight. As usual, their quarrel starts over tiny matters but expands into the big issue of Tom’s own freedom and happiness in conflict with the family’s welfare, to which he has been bounded by his duties as the only man in the house. The quarrel seems to have jumped the track this time, exploding with Tom’s fury at Amanda. In uncontrollable rage and desperation, he clumsily throws his coat onto the shelf of Laura’s glass collection. Amanda leaves, declaring that she will never talk to Tom again as long as he lives unless he apologizes to her. Laura cries out, as if wounded. The stage direction reads, *Tom is left with Laura. He stares at her stupidly for a moment. Then he crosses to shelf holding glass menagerie. Drops awkwardly on his knees to collect fallen glass, glancing at Laura as if he would speak, but couldn’t.* The scene climaxes the conflicts between people who do care about each other, but at the same time are trapped in their own personal frustrations, therefore unable to accept one another’s needs and experiences.

In the case of Laura, when we see her lighted in her little confinement, feeling uneasy and panicked in the narrow shaft of light, we must be aware that (1) it is her own self-consciousness that makes her feel that she is always in the spotlight with every bit of her imperfection exposed; when Amanda and Tom quarrel over why Tom should give up his life and ideal to keep the family going, Laura must be more aware of the fact that she is not able to make any contributions to the household, and the fact that her disastrous
shyness has failed so many of Amanda’s plans for her and for the future of the family; (2) none of the other people engaged in the so-called center of action is seeing or truly understanding her innermost feeling, although they all try very hard to protect her; (3) since it is part of Tom’s memory scene, the spectators witness it as he realizes the fact that his selfishness blinded him to the true need of her dear sister, and therefore he is feeling deeply sorrowful and guilty.

In Act I, scene 5, the morning after the disastrous quarrel between Amanda and Tom, the house was filled with awkward silence. The stage direction says, “As Tom reenters R., listlessly for his coffee, she [Amanda] turns her back to him, as she sits in armchair. The light on her face with its aged but childish features is cruelly sharp, satirical as a Daumier print.” Again, as Tom only “glances sheepishly and sullenly at her averted figure and sits on the day-bed next to the food,” we are given a tragic image of Amanda who has lived through the ups and downs of life, weary yet always holding on to the dear image of the past. The older Tom probably sees her more that he did at the time, but still neither Tom nor Laura could really understand her reality. She is the one who has lived through the changes and knows what they need for life to carry on. Jim the outsider is the only one who is not given any spotlight. For he can be just anybody in Tom’s memory, an agent who bears the family’s hope of salvation but who turns out to be living in an unclear and unfulfilled dream himself.

Thus light in The Glass Menagerie has several levels of meanings, and it functions in several different ways. On the technical level, it facilitates the smooth transitions between scenes, realities and moods. On the literary level, light becomes the image of the inner world, the purity and vulnerability of the characters. Laura’s
innocence and softness of heart are symbolized by the warm candle light, and her fantasy and dreams are materialized by the light reflected through the vulnerable, transparent bodies of her glass animals. Tom’s confused ideals and frustrated situation are reflected by his world filled with the idealistic moonlight from the quiet night, a world that belongs to him; the warm and soft candle light from the house, his home; and the dazzling light from the dance hall, light from the others’ world. On the theatrical level, light serves as a dramaturgical tool that helps to define the point of view and direct the audience’s attention. The contrast between light and darkness also establish the relationships between characters. The spotlight on Laura highlights the isolation, neglect, and misunderstanding that she is experiencing from people who want to protect her and most deeply love her.

In *Designing for the Theatre*, Jo Mielziner said: “Only the theatre can offer the living, breathing exchange between artists with something to say and audiences eager to hear it” (Mielziner, 14). *The Glass Menagerie* is a good example of such intercommunication. With the shifting of lights and therefore the shifting of locales and realities, the characters talk to their past or talk to their inner selves. The spectators, in witnessing these multi layers of realities and meanings, must come to understand a world full of isolation and misunderstanding, where to love could be more difficult than they have imagined.

In a letter that Williams sent to Mielziner after the opening, he wrote:

Many thanks for your note—I guess you know by now that your lighting job is the first thing on everyone’s tongue in connection with this show. It is nothing less than sensational—and now that the crew is working smoothly, it is far more effective than when you saw it. Now it goes like clockwork and is inestimably and very integrally a part of the play. I want to thank you for your patience—endurance is a better word...
Hope I see you in New York soon, Jo—and that you’ll stick with us… … (Leverich, 571)

Jo Mielziner did stick with them. The success of *The Glass Menagerie* started a long partnership that lasted for another eight major plays of Williams that followed.
CHAPTER 4

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

During rehearsals of *The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams had begun to work on the play that was to become *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In 1947, a team started to be assembled with Irene Selznick as the producer. Deeply impressed by Elia Kazan’s direction of Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons*, Williams insisted on procuring Kazan as director of *Streetcar*, although at first Kazan was not attracted by the play at all. When Kazan finally signed his contract after a series of negotiations, the designers had already been engaged. In Mielziner, Kazan and Selznick both had deep faith.

The production opened on December 4, 1947, at the Barrymore Theatre in New York City with a brilliant cast. Jessica Tandy played the sensitive and tragic Blanche DuBois, Marlon Brando the brutal Stanley Kowalski, Kim Hunter was the earthly sister Stella Kowalski, and Karl Malden played the confused admirer Mitch who almost saved Blanche. Their performances were unanimously applauded. Howard Barnes wrote for the *New York Herald Tribune* on December 4th: “Miss Tandy is always equal to an enormously taxing role in the part of Blanche. Even in the long passages in which she describes the marriage to a degenerate back in Mississippi which threw her spiritually and mentally off the track, she brings a haunting and volatile quality to her portrayal which makes it unforgettable.” Williams Hawkins wrote for the *New York World-
Telegram: “Marlon Brando plays the blunt and passionate Stanley with an astonishing authenticity. His stilted speech and swift rages are ingeniously spontaneous, while his deep-rooted simplicity is sustained every second.” He also commented that “Kim Hunter is mellow and philosophical as the devoted Stella who tries to synchronize two impossible loyalties” and Karl Malden is “eloquently unrelaxed as the hesitant suitor.”

Tennessee Williams’s theatrical talent was again enthusiastically greeted. Brooks Atkinson wrote in the New York Times that “Tennessee Williams has brought us a superb drama.” He further commented: “Like ‘The Glass Menagerie,’ the new play is a quietly woven study of intangibles. But to this observer it shows deeper insight and represents a great step forward toward clarity. And it reveals Mr. Williams as a genuinely poetic playwright whose knowledge of people is honest and thorough and whose sympathy is profoundly human.” Most reviewers praised Jo Mielziner’s design and a few of them paid more detailed attention. Ward Morehouse wrote for the Sun: “Mielziner’s fine setting reveals the interior of the squalid flat in which the Kowalski have their brawling and blissful moments, and the device of a scrim curtain provides frequent glimpses of the street outside.” Atkinson noted: “Jo Mielziner has provided a beautifully-lighted single setting that lightly sketches the house and the neighborhood. In this shadowy environment the performance is a work of great beauty.”

Williams’s original plan for the staging was to use a scrim or transparent drop made of gauze, exactly as Jo Mielziner had used in The Glass Menagerie. The building would contain two flats, upstairs and downstairs, Faded white stairs were to approach the entrances of both. The face of the building would be painted on gauze, and when Blanche entered the apartment, the interior would be lit with blue light while the exterior light
would dim out, making the gauze transparent and allowing the audience to see the action inside the apartment. The scrim would be lifted into the wings during the first scene and it would descend at certain times exactly as had occurred in the earlier play.

Kazan and Mielziner met several times without the producer, discussing choices for the staging of the play. After they developed some ideas, Mielziner did several sketches, and they jointly presented them to Williams. Mielziner, who had promised that this was going to be the best job he had ever done, aimed at building upon his experiences and artistry rather than repeating himself. Brenda Murphy in *Tennessee Williams* and *Elia Kazan* gave a detailed description of the set:

The design of the play consisted of a back drop with a stylized view of the street behind the apartment and a series of walls made of gauze and black duck to produce varying degrees of opacity in front of the backdrop. The rear wall of the apartment was made of gauze with appliqués to represent windows, fanlights, and shutters. From a series of lights mounted behind the proscenium, this drop could be lighted from the front, displaying only the apartment’s interior wall. For an exterior scene such as Blanche’s departure at the end of the play, the lights were brought up behind the translucent scrim, revealing the actors who stood behind it “on the street” as well as the backdrop. (Murphy, 26)

In this more sophisticated design, Mielziner dispensed with the lifting and lowering of the screens so that all the scene changes were done by the change of lights alone. Again, the genius of Mielziner far exceeded the normal technological standard of his time. Shortly after the Broadway opening, *Variety* reported that the production required five large electrical switchboards and seven auxiliaries, five electricians, and five stage managers. On October 16, an article entitled “A Streetcar Runs on Electricity” in the *New York World-Telegram* reported the complexity involved in creating the scenic effects:
The back stage area looks like the cave of a black octopus family. From a half dozen huge instrument boards, the heavy dark cables wind in an endless maze up into the air and all over the set to provide the Mielziner aura... one of the electricians is gradually operating four separate dimmers with his hands and another one with one knee. The fact that the set is really three different scenes demands further light manipulation. The room's wall is visible when lighted from the front, but dissolves into the street outside under spots there. This, too, can disappear with different lights which bring up a railroad bridge in the far background.

Murphy also reported that for Streetcar, Mielziner used sixteen stationary Leko follow-spots to light several areas of the stage softly and precisely with blue light during the scenes in the bedroom and to create a soft play of light and shadow in the exterior scenes, as well as for specific effects such as the street light outside the building. In Designing for the Theatre, Mielziner stated his preference for the "Leko follow-spot," newly developed at the time by the Century Lighting Company. Mielziner used the Leko follow-spot for his set because its incandescent tungsten lamp "can be gently and smoothly dimmed from a good, strong, warm beam to a pale shadow of light. It has all the subtlety of control of the best stage lights. It can have a soft edge. It can be shaped to cover an actor's head and, by coming up on an individual dimmer, it can pick up an actor imperceptibly and, with reverse technique, lose him at the end of a scene" (Mielzier 41-42). One Leko was also used as a follow-spot on Blanche in either blue or amber, depending on whether the light supposedly derived from daylight, moonlight, or candlelight. Robert Downing, the production stage manager noted that the eleven scenes of Streetcar had more than sixty light cues, "many of them occurring simultaneously or in rapid succession, and all of them important to the spirit of the play" (Downing, 25).

Despite the extensive report on the lighting techniques used in the staging of Streetcar, in the acting version of the script, there are few stage directions of lighting
effects as distinct as those in *The Glass Menagerie*. What Mielziner achieved was a seamless multiple set and a more subtle orchestration of light with which the interior and exterior, fantasy and reality, were interwoven and inseparable. The scenes and atmospheres softly dissolved into each other, creating an enchanting and mesmeric effect, consistent with and also symbolic of Blanche’s beauty, vulnerability, and confused state of mind. In other words, if in *The Glass Menagerie*, the three levels of functions that light performs, the technical, the literary and the dramaturgical, are clearly discernable, in *The Streetcar Named Desire*, they are intertwined, coexist in a symbiosis manner.

Similar to Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* who has natural sensitivity toward light, Blanche Dubois has an intense obsession with the soft and beautiful light from candles or from the lamp that she has decorated with a Chinese lantern. For her, such light illuminates a protective, self-defensive world. It beautifies and disguises the world she sees and lights the image of her that other people *should* see. In *The Glass Menagerie*, light becomes the symbol of Laura. We see her softness and purity in the candlelight that illuminates her, and her world of fantasy in the mysterious light reflected through the glass animals. Similarly, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the delicate and enchanting light from candles or through the paper lantern becomes the symbol of Blanche, whose beauty and elegance distinguishes her from the earthly environment in which she is unable to survive. Like Laura who is always highlighted in a distinct spotlight which defines her loneliness and isolation from the rest of the family, Blanche is always enclosed in a spotlight whose color changes according to the time and mood. Besides the similar condition of loneliness and want of understanding that Laura goes through, the spotlight on Blanche highlights the discordance between Blanche’s appearance and the Kowalski
household. It is through her concerns with the glaring light from naked bulbs and her actions of refining the light and the surroundings that we come to realize the crudeness of Stanley’s world.

Unlike Laura who always stands still in the shaft of light, apart from the actions going on in the house, Blanche centers the actions, and always tries to control the light. From the time she arrives at the French quarter of New Orleans, she attempts to control the light in which she must appear. During her conversation with her sister she insisted: “And turn that over-light off! Turn that off! I won’t be looked at in this merciless glare.”

To Blanche, light has a temperament just like people do; therefore she crucially depends upon how she is lighted as well as how she is looked at. She clings desperately to this belief, and in the new environment in which she seeks salvation and a new start, she tries to create the right light and the right looks. During her encounter with Mitch, Blanche plays with light and creates the atmosphere that causes Mitch to become fascinated by her unique and poetic sensitivity toward light. Mitch immediately falls in love with her elegance and her artistic sensibility which are all rare in his world. Attempting to pull Mitch into her protective world, Blanche says: “I bought this adorable little colored paper lantern at a Chinese shop on Bourbon. Put it over the light bulb! Will you, please?...I can’t stand a naked bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action.” When Mitch was about to turn on the light, Blanche stops him: “No. Wait! I’ll turn on the radio! (She crosses to radio, turns it on, it plays “Wien! Wien!”) Turn on the light above now! (Mitch snaps on light.) Oh, look! We’ve made enchantment!” In her mind, the perfect world consists of beauty, nice dresses, kind admirers, and enchanting music, all bound together by the soft and beautiful light. However, the idea of creating the soft light is also
incredibly sad, since she is aware that she is growing out of the image of the perfect beauty, that the soft and beautiful light no longer belongs to her but is desperately needed by her. In her conversation with Stella, she reveals her innermost concerns:

BLANCHE. ...Soft people, soft people have got to shimmer and glow. They’ve got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings and put a paper lantern over the light. But it isn’t enough to be soft—you’ve got to be soft and attractive—and I’m fading now. I don’t know how much longer I can turn the trick...

Blanche is aware that soft light is a disguise now, but she has to hide in it, for deep in her memory she is terribly fearful of the moment of discovery, the moment a concealed truth is revealed, which she directly associates with the glaring and blinding light. Telling Mitch about her past, she recalls:

BLANCHE. He was a boy, just a boy, when I was a very young girl. When I was sixteen, I made the discovery—love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that’s how it struck the world for me...And then the search light which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light stronger than this kitchen candle...

After all that has happened, Blanche has come to the verge of total collapse. What she really needs is an opportunity to free herself from the past, to survive the present and therefore to be able to build a future. However, what actually happens is that all the pressure, desperation and cruelty from the environment have cornered her into a vulnerable and confused state of mind, where the past, present and future are curiously intermingled. The horrifying Polka tune lingers on her mind, reminding her of the past no matter how hard she struggles to escape from it. The fantasy of an impossible romantic encounter with a former beau who would kindly provides her with the life and courtesy that she deserves looms in the darkness like a tantalizing dream. In between she has to face the brutal sexuality and insensitivity of Stanley Kowalski. In order to achieve the
ideal of a soft lover and some beautiful moments in the soft light in the present world, which she believes will bring her salvation, Blanche has to create enchantment, to create the image of herself that fits the ideal world, the image that she believes is the true image within. However, it is this belief that leads to her final tragedy, for to people like Stanley, even Mitch, such acts are not called magic, but deception. In act III, scene three, Mitch finally smashes her fantasy.

MITCH. It’s dark in here!
BLANCHE. I like it dark. (*Apprehensively, moves away from him. Crossing around R. end of table, passing below it to C.*) The dark is comforting to me. (*D. R.*)
MITCH. I don’t think I ever seen you in the light. That’s a fact! (*Goes to light switch on pillar, U. R., turns on overhead light.*)
BLANCHE. Is it? (*She flies from MITCH and the light, into bedroom.*)
MITCH. (*Following, keeping close behind her.*) I’ve never seen you in the afternoon.
BLANCHE. (*Below dressing-table.*) Whose fault is that?
 (*Following.*) You never want to go out in the afternoon. (*Over L.*)
BLANCHE. (*Facing away from him, D. L., D. near bathroom door.*) Why, Mitch, you’re at the plant in the afternoon!
MITCH. (*Behind her.*) Not Sunday afternoon. You never want to go out till after six, and then it’s always some place that’s not lighted much.
BLANCHE. There is something obscure meaning in this, but I fail to catch it.
MITCH. (*Overlapping her speech. Turns her to him.*) What it means is, I’ve never had a real good look at you, Blanche. (*Leaves her, moves towards bracket which holds paper lantern above dressing-table.*) Let’s turn on the light here! (*Picks up dressing-table chair, shoves it upstage.*)
BLANCHE. (*D. L., fearfully*) Light? Which light? What for?
MITCH. This one, with the paper thing on it! (*Rips paper lantern off bulb, tosses lantern to floor in front of BLANCHE, D. L. she drops to her knees with a little cry, trying to rescue lantern.*)
BLANCHE. What did you do that for?
MITCH. (*Coming D. to R. of her*) So I can take a look at you, good and plain!
BLANCHE. Of course you don’t really mean to be insulting!
MITCH. No, just realistic.
BLANCHE. I don’t want realism. I want—magic!
MITCH. (*Laughing.*) Magic!
BLANCHE. (*Still on her knees.*) Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I do misrepresent things to them. I don’t tell the truth, I tell what *ought* to be the truth. And if that’s a sin, then let me be damned for it! *Don’t turn the light on!*
MITCH. (*Goes to light, snaps it on, comes back, pulls BLANCHE to her feet, shoves her back against dressing-table, pushing her face into harsh glare of the naked bulb...*)

Such is a struggle between people who are solely concerned with *what* they see and Blanche who is obsessed with *how* things are seen. In this fight, Mitch symbolically tears apart Blanche’s ideal and destroys her last and only self-protection.

In Jo Mielziner’s design, only the interior of the Kowalski house is highly realistic, indicating the brutal reality, the earthiness of the people that Blanche have to encounter at the French quarter of New Orleans. Within such interior, Blanche is enclosed and distinguished by her soft spotlight. Both the street and the far exterior are indicated by expressionistic paintings on the scrims, selective and a little distorted as if seen through Blanche’s mind. Light fades up and down, illuminating and concealing the exterior, and therefore achieving the “dissolving” effect consistent with Blanche’s state of mind, which wanders from place to place. Instead of having a narrator to explain and guide the changes of light and scenes, in *Streetcar*, Blanche becomes the sole control of the scenes without having to step outside of the story. On the one level, Blanche’s physical actions of decorating the light and her choices of time to leave the apartment control what the spectators see and how they see it. On the second level, her wandering mind reveals the different locales for the spectators as she sees them: the realistic environment of the Kowalski household, the immediate exterior, the street, where all the unknown threats exist that forbid her from escaping the known cruelty, and the far distance, symbolic of all that is obscurely beyond her present experiences, either something in the past or in the future. Thus, the various aspects of the play and production are unified: Mielziner’s design, Williams’s characterization, Blanche’s
attempts to control her light and her consciousness, and Mielziner’s control over the stage lights all converge and become a unified whole. Williams creates a character whose mind wanders around with an intense obsession with light. The design creates a world where reality and fantasy are intermingled, and dissolve seamlessly into each other with the change of light. When their two ends meet, the result was a perfect production in which the set, the light and the way the scenes change all become part of the characters and their stories.

When The Glass Menagerie opened, the theatre world was amazed at the new lighting techniques presented on the stage that created the almost magic multiple set. With A Streetcar Named Desire, although there were less sensational scene changes, it seems the spectators sensed the higher sophistication in the less intruding light changes and paid more attention to the actual mechanism that enabled the art. From Menagerie to Streetcar, Mielziner went a step further to merge the set and light more harmoniously with the drama. If in The Glass Menagerie, the playwright revealed his sensitivity to light and a desire for a new visual environment that attracted the designer, in A Streetcar Named Desire, what we have witnessed was how the designer, with his imagination, understanding and mastery of the tools, pushed at the image and carried the experiment on to a more subtle and artistic level.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

After the success of The Streetcar Named Desire, Tennessee Williams and Jo Mielziner continued their partnership and worked together on six more productions: Summer and Smoke (6th October, 1948, Music Box Theatre, 100 performances), Cat on the Hot Tin Roof (24th March, 1955, Morosco Theatre, 694 performances), Sweet Bird of Youth (10th March, 1959, Martin Beck Theatre, 383 performances), Period of Adjustment (10th November, 1960, Helen Hayes Theatre, 132 performances), The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore (16th January, 1963, Morosco Theatre, 65 performances), and Kingdom of Earth (27th March, 1968, Ethel Barrymore Theatre, 29 performances). Their partnership, based upon Williams's attention to the visual world of his plays, and Mielziner's masterful design that well articulates the drama, continued to draw praise from the theatre reviewers, theatre practitioners and literary critics.

Following Streetcar, they collaborated on Summer and Smoke. Williams seemed to have the assurance that when he asked for "a pure and intense blue like the sky of Italy as it is so faithfully represented in the religious paintings of the Renaissance in the day scenes" or for quick and smooth scene changes between the park, the office and the houses, Mielziner would create these effects for him. And he was right in assuming that.
An article entitled "Lighting Up for 'Summer and Smoke" in the *New York Times* of December 5th, 1948, commented that "few other practicing members of the Dramatists Guild have made such consistently heavy demands upon the electrical wizards as has Tennessee Williams, a writer who calls upon scenery, music, and costuming to heighten his sensitive characterizations and plots." The article went to report that there were no less than seven switchboards supplementing the normal control panel in the house of Music Box theatre, twenty-two sections of border lights, 105 individually hung spotlights and 50 star effects. According to Louis Popiel, chief electrician for Margo Jones, there were 20,000 feet of cable strung backstage and front. "Eighty cues in the course of the evening issued verbally over an intercommunication system to Mr. Popiel...Dimmer readings and written cues are incorporated in a loose-leaf binder, which is spread atop a switchboard much like a score for a symphony director."

After *Summer and Smoke*, *Cat on The Hot Tin Roof* was another smash hit.

In the published "Note for the Designer" on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Williams referred the designer to the reproduction of a faded photograph of the verandah of Robert Louis Stevenson's home in Samoa: "there was a quality of tender light on weathered wood, such as porch-furniture made of bamboo and wicker, exposed to tropical suns and tropical rains, which came to mind when I thought about the set for this play." He also wrote that the photograph brought to mind "the grace and comfort of light, the reassurance it gives, on a late and fair afternoon in summer, the way that no matter what, even dread of death, is gently touched and soothed by it. For the set is the background for a play that deals with human extremities of emotion and needs that softness behind it."
In Williams’s vision, light, atmosphere, and suggestiveness connected to the visual world of theatre are crucial to the meaning of his plays. As his views of nature and environment inspired his dramatic imagination, he articulated his theatre through visual images. When Williams wrote The Glass Menagerie he expected a designer who could understand his vision and visualize the world of the play, and therefore he wrote extensively about the exact visual effects he wanted. He even felt eager to insert heavy-handed projections to emphasize what he wanted to say. Up to the point when he wrote Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, he seemed to enjoy much confidence and freedom of expressing his poetic vision of a play in terms of its atmosphere and meaning rather than the actual scenic elements and therefore leaving the designer much space for their own imagination. In "Note for the Designer," he identified the slightly raked stage, the double bed, and the "entertainment center" as the most significant objects in the set. However, he also envisioned that the set should be far less realistic than what he had described and the designer should not feel confined to literal realism by his description.

In "From the Cat-Bird Seat," Robert Downing, the production stage manager of Cat described the set:

No house curtain was used but a transparent traveler closed in at the normal curtain line, concealing two thirds of the playing area. Lighted from front by special projections secured to the balcony rail, this curtain reveals the brooding patterns of shadowed jalousies. Whenever stage action commences, the projections fade away as back stage illumination from over head pipes and several booms of "tormentor" lamps fades in. Thus each scene blends gradually into the audience' consciousness as the transparent traveler slowly opens. (Downing, 47)

The seamless transition between scenes, artistic use of transparent scrims and the softness, almost vulnerable beauty of light that dissolves in and out of the space among
the threatening, bare architectural set conjured up the world of “human extremities of emotion” that Williams desired.

These emotional aspects of light and set have become the trademarks of the design of Jo Mielziner. Many of his traits have influenced the scenic artists of today. Jules Fisher, the celebrated lighting designer with more than 150 Broadway and off-Broadway shows as well as films to his credit, who has received fourteen Tony nominations and seven Tony awards for lighting design, commented on Mielziner's work: "All of Jo Mielziner's work: I never saw a production of his where I thought the lighting was poor. Because of his relationship with the scenery, it was all of a piece… His productions had a feeling he was trying to tell the story" (Pilbrow, 233).

In his article, Robert Downing also commented that:

While *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* reveals the advancement of contemporary design and direction, it also underscores the necessity of developing a dramaturgy equal to the achievement in other departments of stagecraft. It is possible, with a play of *Cat's* structure, for creative technicians to extend the playwright's scope even to the point of helpful collaboration. (Downing, 49)

In this study of the theatre of Williams and Mielziner, I have attempted to describe a process whereby technologies, dramaturgy, scenic techniques and artistry converged in the making of theatre. The discovery of electric light in the modern theatre was born out of the fundamental search for a new way of observation and expression at the end of the nineteenth century which linked the visual exploration with the articulation of meaning. As the advancement in the lighting technology provided the material base, the maturity of the lighting profession created designers with full mastery of the techniques as well as the art. Jo Mielziner, building upon the ideas of Appia and Craig and upon the artistry of such designers as Robert Edmond Jones and Lee Simonson,
developed the new techniques in lighting. Then, with the appearance of a unique playwright, Tennessee Williams, the collaborative artistry of theatre achieved a new level of accomplishment. In the theatre of Williams and Mielziner, light joined together the environment, the movement within time and space. If we insist that theatre is a unique synthesis of literature, design and performing art, there is no way that we could fully understand theatre without analyzing it with a full view of all these aspects. As this thesis has attempted to show by examining aspects of the theatre of Williams and Mielziner, it also opens up new possibilities of analyzing and appreciating the art of theatre in general.
Fig.1 Ground Plan
Bibliography


