

# The minimal magnified: Spain in *The Glass Menagerie*

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## SUMMARY

Critics have by and large ignored the role of Spain in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. At most, the few allusions to Spain and its Civil War in the play have traditionally been interpreted as simply designating a dramatic space and time that would contrast with the United States of the thirties. While this already implies a criticism due to said contrast between a complacent nation and one struggling for ideological survival, closer scrutiny of Williams' text reveals a concomitance between Spain and the Wingfield family which sharpens and deepens even more the criticism against the attitude and role assumed by the United States and the West in general with respect to the Spanish Civil War. This, in turn, revives the polemic of Williams as a social writer, rather than one merely and mostly interested in the plight of the individual.

**Key words:** Tennessee Williams, American drama, Spanish Civil War, *The Glass Menagerie*.

## Cuando lo mínimo se magnifica: España en *El zoo de cristal*

## RESUMEN

La crítica, en general, ha desdeñado el papel que representa España en *El zoo de cristal*, de Tennessee Williams. En el mejor de los casos, las pocas alusiones a España y a la Guerra Civil se han interpretado de forma tradicional como si, sencillamente, designaran un espacio dramático y un tiempo que contrastaran con los de los Estados Unidos en el decenio de 1930. Mientras que esto ya señala una crítica que diferencia entre una nación complacida consigo misma y otra que lucha por la supervivencia ideológica, un examen más cuidadoso de los textos de Tennessee Williams revela una relación entre España y la familia Wingfield que hace más intensa y profunda la crítica que manifiesta la reacción contra el papel de los Estados Unidos y el mundo occidental en general en lo relativo a la Guerra Civil. A su vez, esto renueva la polémica en torno a la consideración de Williams como un escritor comprometido con la sociedad o interesado principalmente en la condición del individuo.

**Palabras clave:** Tennessee Williams, Teatro americano, Guerra Civil española, *El zoo de cristal*.

**SUMARIO:** 1. Introduction 2. Spain as an integral part of *The Glass Menagerie* 3. El Greco's light as theatrical lightning 4. The role of literary allusions to the Spanish Civil War 5. Dramatic symbolism 6. Williams' knowledge of the Hispanic World as support for *Menagerie's* symbolism 7. Symbolism as complement of the play's dream, poetical nature 8. *Menagerie's* Spain as support of Williams as a social writer 9. Conclusion.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At first sight, the frequent exclusion of Spain from the term «Hispanic» as employed in the United States might have accounted for the absence of *The Glass Menagerie*, with its crucial Spanish context, in Philip C. Kolin's «Compañero Tenn: The Hispanic Presence in the Plays of Tennessee Williams.» However, when the reader finds out that Kolin there chose Spain as the most feasible dramatic space for *Suddenly Last Summer* (44), thus recognizing Spain within the category of the Hispanic, said absence becomes simply unexplainable. Curiously enough, in an uncanny coincidence of absences, in the same number of the same review, Lori Leathers Single, in a study focusing largely on the screen device utilized by Williams in this play, likewise bypasses the role of Spain, a role definitely present in the metatheatrical technique of the screen device, as we shall see later on. Such incidents as these in studies that are without a question serious, rigorous and exhaustive in their pretensions, turn out to be symptomatic of a limitation among critics when defining (or simply ignoring once again) the importance of Spain in *Menagerie*.

In general, critics have relegated the role of Spain in this play to that of providing the international historical background of the times, as well as affording a contrast to that United States which *Menagerie* describes. Thus, Presley (3-4), Stein (39) and Gómez García (32), to limit the list to three, all agree in one way or another on these same two functions achieved by allusions to the Spanish Civil War. To arrive at such a conclusion, however, one need not exercise much critical acumen: that Republican Spain in its struggle for survival serves as a sharp and shameful contrast to the American microcosm represented by the Wingfield apartment in Saint Louis is, after all, quite clear from the very first paragraph of the very first stage direction (12). But to leave it at that is to limit *Menagerie's* tremendously rich and suggestive symbolism to an obvious contrast, and to simultaneously limit its scope and message.

## 2. SPAIN AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE GLASS MENAGERIE

Given the swift and scarce character of the allusions to Spain in the play, it would seem as if certain critics have unwittingly confused quantity with quality. If it is true that the oral (as opposed to the written) element in theatre performance may require repetition and emphasis at certain moments (which can be achieved beyond language by gestures, voice tone, scenography, lighting shades, etc.), no less true is it that in the same way that silence, ellipsis and omission may serve to underline and intensify, so can brevity strategically placed achieve similar results. More specifically, and as will be recalled, four brief allusions to the Spanish Civil War form the Spanish context within the play proper, while an allusion to the Byzantine-born (Cretan), but fully Hispanized painter, El Greco, injects the Spanish element into the «Production Notes.»

### 3. EL GRECO'S LIGHT AS THEATRICAL LIGHTNING

To focus for now on this latter and more theatrical element, the «Production Notes» are obviously equivalent both to stage directions and to a theatrical manifesto of «a new plastic theatre which must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions» (8). While Laura is originally the intended target for this lightning technique, adapted more uniquely to her throughout the play with the same «peculiar pristine clarity such as light used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas», the directions go on to extend the lighting technique to the whole play: «A certain correspondence to light in religious paintings, such as El Greco's, where the figures are radiant in atmosphere that is relatively dusky, could be effectively used throughout the play. [It will also permit a more effective use of the screen]» (10).

If before it was recalled that El Greco ended up being an unmistakably Spanish painter, adapting Byzantine, Italian and Mannerist styles in order to create his unique work in and around Toledo, there is no need now to add that he is indeed the Spanish religious painter *par excellence*. To the extent that, in addition to his eerie light, the ascetic and elongated characteristics of his figures and perspective in general, progressively intensified upon his arrival in the Peninsula, have led some to classify him as a mystic painter, as Mann recalls (and qualifies, in xiii-xiv), imbued in the Counter Reformation atmosphere that pervaded his Spain. «A rooster cannot crow more clearly» (to translate the Spanish saying «más claro no canta un gallo» into English) when it comes to pointing out the importance of the Spanish painter's influence in the very lighting which indeed pervades the whole atmosphere of a theatre intent on shunning the realistic tradition, reproducing here a light identified with religious painting, and more specifically, Spanish religious painting. Needless to say, however, and without entering into the discussion of *Menagerie* as a religious (Stein 39-40) or morality play (Bluefarb 513), it is the supernatural, anti-realistic, dreamy, poetic, memory play quality that Williams basically pursues by the use of this specific lighting: «The scene is memory and it is therefore non-realistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominantly in the heart. The interior is rather dim and poetic» (12, part of the stage directions for scene one). The most direct result of this stage ambience is a sense of flexibility – even vagueness if one wills – when it comes to interpreting the play theatrically and textually. It goes without saying that if we lose sight of the non-concrete nature of *Menagerie's* words, props and quality in general, we in turn lose sight of the play's deeper meaning and possibilities.

### 4. THE ROLE OF LITERARY ALLUSIONS TO THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

To proceed from this general theatrical device to the direct textual allusions to the Spanish Republic and Civil War, seldom has such economy borne such rich fruit as the barely four direct allusions to Spain and its Civil War already mentioned (a mathematical figure that may even be reduced to three, if we consider the first of these,

consisting of two succeeding sentences, only one [13, 43, 44]). Furthermore, two of the four allusions, both recalling the Guernica bombing (13, 44), would be identical were it not for a slight, though meaningful, variation, i.e., the addition of an exclamation point (44). All, as can be seen, are crowded into a total of three pages, and each is limited to a single sentence. Yet the play's deepest meaning depends on this spatially-minimal Spanish connection. These allusions are so strategically placed and so stylistically elaborated as to reinforce their importance through sheer craft:

«In Spain there was revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion.»

«In Spain there was Guernica. Here there were disturbances of labour, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis.» (13-14).

At first, Spain here may seem to simply fulfill the already-mentioned functions of presenting the international atmosphere of the times and providing a comparison that better describes (by the resulting contrast) the United States, which is, after all, the action's space. However, the use of anaphora, and the implied opposition, both geographical («Spain»- «here») as well as ideological («revolution»-«confusion», etc.), immediately capture the public's attention, and should alert it to be on the lookout for other possible, more hidden meanings. Coming in the third and fourth paragraphs of Tom's initial discourse to the audience, these allusions to Spain are the first dealing with ominous international affairs. In reality there aren't many more such references, that to Chamberlain's ultimately frustrated negotiations (44), indeed, being the only other one. Immediately after this mention of Chamberlain (and his umbrella, of course, and there is no need to explain the addition of the exclamation point now), we find repeated «In Spain there was Guernica!» (44), appearing only one page after the «*Enormous* caption 'Franco Triumphs'» (43: emphasis added). This caption, followed by allusions to the two other international events just noted (the Spanish Civil War itself and Chamberlain's negotiations), seems to be as strategically placed as those mentioned earlier in Tom's address to the audience. Coming as it does at the beginning of scene five, the caption still falls close to the center, or middle, of the play's seven scenes (pagewise, it misses being situated in the exact center by three pages in the edition here used). Thus, surprise comes about also at Single's oblivion of a caption which, due to its size, was evidently destined for the screen, in addition to figuring in the newspaper which Tom handles at that moment (43). A surprise certainly greater than the previous one regarding El Greco, whom Single may have forgotten to relate to Spain, whereas in the case of the caption, the relation to Spain simply cannot be ignored.

Beyond mere background material, then, international history in *Menagerie* complements the Wingfield's family *dénouement*, and also, as we shall soon see, Williams' own personal history. The jump from a historical to a poetical (memory, religious lighting, etc.) frame of mind in turn complements the conversion of the Spanish Civil War into a sort of metaphor for the coming apocalypse. What he has done with international history, Williams will also do with his own personal history. There is no need to repeat now that it would be difficult to find another Williams' play as obviously autobiographical as *Menagerie*, so much so that anyone at all familiar – even vaguely – with Williams' biography cannot miss the play's evidently

autobiographical sources so much commented on, from the very initials of Tom Wingfield that coincide with those of the playwright, to his sister (Rose in real life, who in the play receives the nickname Blue Roses [72]), to his domineering mother, and to the neighborhood and Tom's job in a shoe warehouse (see *Memoirs* 21, 45-46). The term «memory play» is thus not limited to the narrator Tom: in the main, it also includes Williams, its author. And it seems to do so to a certain extent more in an autobiographically psychological than in an autobiographically literal way. Literally and repeatedly, Williams tells us in his *Memoirs* how he suffered and how he cared – both spiritually and materially – for his sister Rose (see, for example, ch. VII, 144-162, largely dedicated to Rose). Contrary to Tom in *Menagerie*, Williams never abandoned his sister in real life. If anything, the *Memoirs* are oftentimes excessively explicit, rather than the opposite, when it comes to intimate and family details. Nothing in them would lead one to believe that Williams falsified his feelings towards his sister. On the contrary, Rapper has more than sufficient proof to see in Rose's lobotomy the deepest trauma in Williams' life (40), a life, incidentally, not devoid by any means of trauma and crisis. The autobiographical conclusion from *The Glass Menagerie*, however, reveals something that the *Memoirs* don't project as intensely, i.e., Williams' sense of guilt concerning his sister's mental illness and lobotomy that Single (70), among others, has noted.

It does not matter much whether Williams' guilt is justified or not by his real life conduct, for as it is known guilt need not remit necessarily to a real cause rather than to one fabricated by the mind. Besides, readers are not here engaged in an autobiographical study *per se*. Interest in biography is subjugated to the possibilities it may hide and enlighten with respect to discovering any given work's aesthetics, in this case, *Menagerie*, of course. Tom's autobiographical character in *Menagerie* may lead others to scrutinize Williams' *Memoir* or other works of his to pinpoint guilt as a dramatic or literary motor, one, for example, that would explain why in his interview with Stang, Williams could state: «I have always been more interested in creating a character that contains something crippled» (110: it is interesting to note that here Williams goes on to specify that crippled need not necessarily mean weak [110-111]). What is necessary to know, however, is how Spain may or may not form a part of this autobiographical referential frame.

## 5. DRAMATIC SYMBOLISM

The answer depends on the symbolism established between Laura and the Spanish Republic due to their crippled situation, a symbolism that critics have traditionally ignored. In effect, the Spanish Republic was crippled by a military coup and by international Fascism. Correspondingly, Tom's fleeing and abandonment of his sister at the end represents the betrayal by the United States specifically, and by the Western democracies in general, of a sister democracy. «The play is memory» (14) and thus it begins with Tom somewhere recalling «that quaint period, the thirties» (13) from a present marked by guilt and repentance. On the historical plane or level, it is an «I told you so» play that confirms the prophecy of Hemingway, among others, who warned that if Fascism were

not stopped in Spain, it would have to be fought on a grander scale and with a more tragic scenario. Indeed, Williams himself would in time lay claim to his prophetic qualities, for as «rather prophetic» is the way he would later describe a short story written around 1936, though not published until 2003, the title of which is the same as the words of the first mention of Spain in *Menagerie*: «In Spain There Was Revolution» (Moschovakis 56). *Menagerie*'s message, however, goes beyond the West betrayal of a sister democracy. It delves deeper into the causes for that treason, using Tom and his relations with his family to illustrate it. A passive attitude (substituting movies for action), cowardice (fleeing from, rather than standing up to, Amanda, much like Chamberlain and the West with respect to Hitler) and betrayal (abandoning Rose) seems a good way to describe this dual process that mirrors the historical through the Wingfield personal or family plot.

If the tight synchronism of concurring elements between Laura and Spain - both victims, both crippled, both abandoned in the end - should guarantee that the reader or spectator should in turn experience no difficulty in accepting its dramatic reality and message, how far can other possible symbolic links be taken as dependent on that main link of Laura-Spain? Can it be assumed, for example, that Amanda's traditional (old South), religious, nagging nature might be interpreted as a reference to authoritarian, equally traditional Spain itself? How might Stein's acute observations related to a symbolic religious reading of the play (39-42) fit in here? Could Amanda represent authoritarian Fascist Spain, Tom the weak, lost Spanish Republic, and Laura the Spanish people, crippled by both factions (or represent as well and simultaneously the very Republic itself)? These are but a few of a number of possibilities that Williams' text may incline the reader to pursue further, but not here, for in order to exploit them convincingly, it would be necessary to expand the present work beyond the limits required to prove the main thesis of an essential synchronism between Laura and Spain that critics have ignored. The very flexible nature of literary symbolism (and, as I shall repeat, the *moreso* in a dream, poetic play such as *Menagerie*) is precisely what would complicate the issue and drive us to break boundaries. It would be well, however, to reflect on the implications that these possible allusions may hold as far as Williams' handling of the text's historical and cultural context is concerned. For while it is true that one must always be on guard against the danger - clearly present here - of falling into far-fetched interpretations, on the other hand the opposite danger of underestimating Williams' knowledge concerning Spain and Hispanic reality should also be borne in mind.

## 6. WILLIAMS' KNOWLEDGE OF THE HISPANIC WORLD AS SUPPORT FOR MENAGERIE'S SYMBOLISM

Even if his Spanish was faulty at times, there is no doubt that Williams familiarized himself with certain words, types and other Hispanic elements. In this respect, critics seem to have overlooked the significance of Williams' choice of «La golondrina» in *Camino Real* (210), *Summer and Smoke* (132, 154) and *The Glass Menagerie* (80). A popular Mexican song, «La golondrina» tells of the loneliness of a lost swallow. As can be appreciated, the choice of this particular song (though not properly Spanish, but still known in Spain, as in the whole Hispanic world) is not incidental at all now, to say the least,

returning the reader to the theme of restlessness and the wandering of a lost soul. The content of the song does not seem to have interested critics, even those who have noticed its intertextual presence in more than one of Williams' works, such as Boxill (67, though he forgets to mention *Camino Real*), who goes on to discuss rather «the recurring theme that comes out of nowhere and fades away again in accordance with film convention, like the images in a reverie», to focus later on in this same paragraph on «Williams' idea of barely audible circus music . . . consistent with his central image of light glimmering sporadically in the void.» The «recurring theme», of course, is the same «single recurring tune» of which the playwright himself speaks at the beginning under «The Music» in the «Production notes» of *Menagerie* (9-10). When he introduces «La golondrina», terming it a waltz (80), it is clear that Williams does not intend for this tune to be confused with that other circus-like music of «The Music» under «Production Notes» (9). Even the Spanish critic, Gómez García, focuses her attention on this same recurring circus melody (30-31), without pausing to consider the importance of the choice and lyrics of «La golondrina.» Not to do so, however, is to ignore the relevance of its content. The choice of this song, then, so relevant to the wanderer theme personified in *Menagerie* by Tom, affords another proof of Williams' mastery of the Hispanic world, at least at certain moments, and his conscious, deliberate use of the language, songs, sayings, etc. for dramatic, literary effects. There is no doubt that a scrutiny of those other possible symbolisms and allusions in support of our main thesis which must be left for a future work, will in turn reinforce this conviction of a Williams more familiarized with Spain than has at times been assumed.

No doubt also, however, that further study and analysis of the text will keep on raising questions. The danger of excessive vagueness in symbolic interpretation is admittedly present. It always is so, but even more in the case of a deliberately flexible process such as *Menagerie's* that tries to reproduce abstract, presumably subconscious feeling or emotion rather than conscious reasoning. Yet, the challenge to the reader-spectator in discovering the more hidden meanings, while at the same time setting limits to the symbolic process, is what precisely safeguards the play – or any work of literature, for that matter – from the trivial in registering its message and meaning. There is no need to recall that at its best, art, rather than answer questions, raises even deeper questions concerning life for which the recipient may or may not find his or her answer. The very fact that critics have bypassed the principal symbolism of Laura-Spain that may engender other symbolic elements dependent on this central symbolism in itself speaks for the subtleness with which Williams evades the danger of a simplistic social or political message. A danger common to all ideological literature (the moreso if it takes a political stance), and one, needless to recall, fostered even more by the Stalinist Social(ist) Realism school spawned precisely in the thirties with the consent of Maxim Gorky (old then, and presumably pressured by Stalin himself).

## 7. SYMBOLISM AS COMPLEMENT OF THE PLAY'S DREAM, POETICAL NATURE

Readers should be in a more favorable position now to understand how the play's «memory», poetical, emotional character leads it on the one hand to evade strict,

documentary, neatly-formulated textual «proofs», and on the other to substitute that realistic process with this other more vague and even «slippery» symbolism. The flexibility of the play's symbolism naturally broadens its levels of meaning, and the possible applications to these different levels are guaranteed by this malleable poetic, symbolic process. While, as it has been stated, the coincidences between Laura and Republican Spain establish a more than plausible symbolism, in other cases not so neat, it would be a mistake – indeed, a violation of the play's very symbolic network – to «lock» characters or events into one fixed interpretation. This is simply another way of recalling the basically emotional terrain upon which Williams constructs his stage and theatre, as Gómez García, among many other critics, has already pointed out (123). Gómez García also notes that this emotional element brings up anew Williams' highly personal, autobiographical, dramatic substratum. Evidently, from a psychological point of view, the Spanish Republic figured in Williams' early career as a symbol of the liberalism he was to maintain throughout his life.

## 8. *MENAGERIE'S* SPAIN AS SUPPORT OF WILLIAMS AS A SOCIAL WRITER

Perhaps the fairly widespread idea that Williams was not a social writer has had its share in explaining why critics have ignored this closely-knit symbolism between Spain and Laura that attributes to Spain the same importance on a social and ideological level that Laura has on a personal and family sphere. Perhaps also Muste's suspicion that the Cold War biased Western, and especially American, literary criticism against socially-committed interpretations or the idealistic leftist spirit of the thirties (7), has likewise exerted some influence in this respect. This may be especially true for the criticism written before the fall of the Berlin Wall, although it would be well to bear in mind that the Western World is not so far away in time from the end of the Cold War as to have fully revised the assumptions and conclusions that literary criticism tends to repeat almost mechanically time and again. Muste's suspicion comes up again in Williams' case. Gómez García, for example, is careful to point out immediately after quoting one of *Menagerie's* allusions to Guernica, followed by the world's passivity, that Williams «no es un escritor social» (32). For Williams, she goes on after this statement which excludes the playwright from the world of socially-committed writers, the individual, and more specifically the person on the margin of society, is what counts, and society enters his work only inasmuch as it is the scene which rejects or is rejected by that individual (34). Her view of the social in Williams is therefore very close to Bigsby's, for whom both Arthur Miller and Williams began as political playwrights formed in the 1930s to gradually shift the emphasis to the threat of individual liberties and the «erosion of private space» (1-6, and for the quote, 6). For Bluefarb, *The Glass Menagerie* «is a morality play in modern dress - [but in] the dress of the split personality» (513), its main problem or theme being that «none of the characters . . . can truly face the flow of time for any sustained span» (518), thus reducing the message to an individual one. Similarly, Boxill sees *Menagerie* as «the revelation of characters locked in time» (69). Williams himself in his autobiographical apologetic, confessional «On a Streetcar



Named Success» seems to contribute to this preoccupation of the individual with time. At the very end – always a strategic place in writing – Williams further snaps the reader into keener attention regarding this preoccupation by «jumping the clock» from the time of his writing to the time of the reader's reading: «It [time] is slipping away while I write this and while you read it, and the monosyllable of the clock is Loss, Loss, Loss, unless you devote your heart to its opposition» (67).

Passing on to another critic, Roger Stein seems to have had second thoughts in this respect. In a 1964 article he states that «The experience of the 1930s did not turn Williams into a proletarian writer or a social realist», though it did «open up for him a darker vision of American life . . .» (38). In a 1976 postscript Stein seems to go somewhat further. On the one hand, he denies that his religious interpretation of *Menagerie* supports the anti-Marxist interpretations to which others have submitted it; on the other, he adds that such an interpretation based on Marxist principles, though incapable of rendering a complete analysis, is nevertheless «both ideologically accurate and descriptively useful» (43). But then Stein goes on to insert Williams within a supposedly American tendency of avoiding «trenchant social drama» by shifting responsibility for the human condition to the divine, thus writing «metaphysical romances instead» (44). Nevertheless – and this is what most interests the reader today – «The greatness of *The Glass Menagerie*, as art and as human statement, still lies in Williams' ability at that point in his career to sustain a sense of the individual, the social, and the religious dimensions of our experience poised in delicate poetic balance» (44).

My interpretation of the play as an attack on the United States and other Western democracies for their lack of commitment to the Spanish Republic symbolized by Laura, certainly upholds Stein's view of the play as conveying a well-balanced message, and with a meaning functioning on both an individual, psychological, as well as on a social, ideological level. It likewise supports Tammaro's 1983 contention that: «Perhaps Williams is not as overtly critical of American values as, say, Arthur Miller, but much of what Williams does say about American society and its values is critical. This seems to be an area in need of a great deal of attention . . .» (69). Tammaro's conclusion is completely contrary to Berkowitz's whose insistence on Williams' «domestic realism» leads him to ignore «almost completely» the political aspect that inevitably incorporates the social context:

In contrast to Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams is an almost completely non-political writer. In fact, more than any other American dramatist, he helped move domestic realism beyond its accomplishment of reflecting large political and social issues through their effect on the domestic setting, and into the final stage of its evolution, the exploration of the emotional burden of ordinary life (86-87).

All this may very well be true in general terms, but not as far as *Menagerie* is concerned, as should be more than obvious by now. The Spanish Civil War supports and complements the tragedy of the Wingfield family, and more poignantly, that of Laura. Evidently, we are faced with the well-known technique of plot and subplot reinforcing one another. If anything, the Spanish subplot's minimal appearance in *Menagerie* paradoxically strengthens the Laura-Wingfield main plot precisely by the

subtleness implied in its very minimization. To ignore this welding together of plot and subplot that balances the individual and the social in *Menagerie's* message is tantamount to ignoring this poetical play's deepest poetical-symbolical nature.

## 9. CONCLUSION

In the end, and in a sense, this essay may be harping on the same thing, i.e., the autobiographical character of Williams' writings. If the social character of his work has produced some polemic, the autobiographical one definitely reveals a consensus among critics. That *The Glass Menagerie* was the play that definitely launched Williams' theatrical career also belongs to the realm of consensus. Whether the then still young playwright felt a greater social commitment that would later be revised or modified in view of more personal problems, despite his life-long liberalism and his statements to the contrary, does not really concern the reader today. In either case, the autobiographical exploitation of potential literary matter remains visible. Spain thus plays an essential role in one of the most personal pieces of Williams' personal, autobiographical theatre (and a play, furthermore, that not only launched him definitely upon his theatrical career, as just recalled, but also one whose tremendous success would haunt him throughout that career [Pagan 31], as it is also a play that, to put it in Falk's poetical terms, «came into the American theater like a fresh spring wind» [52]).

Paradoxically for Single, Williams' non-realistic techniques in *Menagerie* achieved «a realistic psychological portrait of a dysfunctional family», an interpretation of the play which only fairly recent psychological research has made possible (74). All well and good, but if the play is «more concerned with private tensions than public issues» (Single 73), then the role of Spain is crucial in mirroring and thus underlining those private tensions and tragedy with the public ones that the Spanish Republic duplicates in the text and in the performance. Beyond providing a historical background and atmosphere, Spain's minimal mention fulfills the essential role of symbolic, ideological complement of the *The Glass Menagerie's* individual and family *dénouement*. It supports as well thus the thesis of Williams as a writer interested in intertwining the social and the individual plights in his works, rather than limiting them basically to the latter perspective, as a considerable number of critics sustain.

To ignore this role, is to limit *The Glass Menagerie* both in its thematic as well as in its dramatic and theatrical range and achievement.

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