"THE PLEASANT DISGUISE OF ILLUSION": THE "AUTHOBIOGRAPHICAL" MEMORY PLAYS OF WILLIAMS, FRIEL, AND O'NEILL

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ABSTRACT

"THE PLEASANT DISGUISE OF ILLUSION": THE "AUTHOBIOGRAPHICAL" MEMORY PLAYS OF WILLIAMS, FRIEL, AND O’NEILL

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This thesis explores the nature of the "memory play" subgenre while specifically focusing on The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams, Dancing at Lughnasa by Brian Friel, and Long Day’s Journey into Night by Eugene O’Neill. These three plays stand out as memory plays because they all share one very important characteristic: they are also based on the playwright's lives. They are all, in a sense, "authobiographical" memory plays, and they establish a type of play that is different in nature and also in style from any other type of first-person narrative because the author exerts more control over the dramatic action by giving detailed character descriptions and stage directions. Because the memories are so personal and the subject matter so revelatory, the authors leave little room for
interpretation. This thesis establishes a connection between the autobiographies of Williams, O'Neill, and Friel and their respective dramas—a connection that informs not only the subject matter of the plays but also the stylistic choices of the authors.
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INTRODUCTION

Writers of great literature are interpreters, recorders, and seers: re-creators of the past, observers of the present, and, frequently, prophets of the future. Different writers approach these seemingly daunting tasks in different ways, but regardless of the approach, writers who create truly timeless works of literature often claim to be inspired by some special muse, a muse that aids the writer in his journey towards greatness. Just what that muse is and how it operates differ as much as the genres in which these writers specialize. Some writers are inspired by a painting or another artist’s work of art, some by history, still others by actual events which they transform—with the help of poetic license—into great stories.

On rare occasions, however, a writer is inspired or haunted by his own life and is willing to recreate his past in the name of literature. Most writers prefer to exercise their inspiration in anonymity—concealing any autobiographical elements so far within the work that finding them is like searching for buried treasure. Even when a critic claims to have discovered links between fiction and the “fact” of an author’s life, the links are often so obscure, they reduce such claims to mere
speculation. Many writers and critics actually denounce the practice of self-revelatory literature or the attempts of critics to find connections that are simply not there. Those who oppose autobiographical criticism argue that works of literature should stand on their own merit without references to the writers’ personal lives. Despite the protests of many in the literary world, however, the fact remains that some of the most celebrated and timeless pieces of literature are very much based on the life of the author. These works are great not merely because of their origins in the self, but also because they are great “stories” on their own merit; however, their verisimilitude only makes them more compelling.

Indeed, revealing such personal aspects of his life in his literature is risky for a writer. Not only is he taking the chance, professionally, that his critics and colleagues will regard his literature as “self-help” nonsense, but he is also taking the risks that come with self-revelation. The audience may not accept or care about the author’s vision of the past, in which case the author is not only injured professionally, but also rejected personally. Perhaps these risks keep most authors away from such literal autobiographical portrayals. The names are always changed to “protect the innocent” or, at least, to protect the author.
While such true-to-life portrayals in literature are risky for any writer, they are even more risky for writers of drama. While a poet or a novelist has the luxury of knowing that his work is the final product, a playwright always leaves his play in the hands of the producers and performers who bring the drama to life. Of course, poets and novelists expose themselves to the pitfalls of criticism and interpretation, but the work itself stands as a self-contained, complete entity in a way a play cannot. Playwrights know that the texts of their plays are only half of the formula that makes a play a play. Plays are meant to be performed, and, while that makes the genre fascinating and exciting, playwrights are under enormous pressure to make sure they convey the right message, not only to the audience, but also to the performers. When a playwright decides to make a play autobiographical, he always runs the risk of his life story’s being misinterpreted by the performers and director to whom he entrusts his work. Authorial control for a dramatist is never absolute. The finished product is often very different from what the author "intended." The truth of the genre is that many people become involved in creating a play—the author is just the conceiver of the idea.

Because productions are so unpredictable, revealing, autobiographical plays are not the norm in the world of
drama. Most playwrights prefer to stick with fiction or the true life stories of others. For authors brave enough to entrust their personal lives to their dramas, the struggle for control over their work becomes essential. One way many playwrights attempt to assert control is through vivid and extensive stage directions. Early playwrights, such as Sophocles and, later, Shakespeare, used stage directions as merely a tool to tell the actors when and where to enter and exit the stage. At most, stage directions existed to give the performers an idea of how to deliver certain lines; however, for the most part, the playwright left much of the work’s interpretation to chance. Perhaps that is why Shakespeare has been interpreted in so many different ways.

With the advent of modern drama, stage directions became more descriptive in terms of setting; however, they still remained relatively unobtrusive: the stage directions provided helpful insights into the setting and scenery of the play, the superficial elements that the audiences could see in the performances. The stage directions of Henrik Ibsen, a founder of modern, realistic drama, are fairly typical. While his directions contain more than the simple “enter” and “exit,” their primary function is to set the scene. In *The Wild Duck*, for instance, Ibsen opens the play with these directions: “The study, expensively and
comfortably appointed; bookcases and upholstered furniture; in the middle of the room a desk with papers and documents; subdued lighting from lamps with green lamps . . . “ (3). While these instructions for scenery and lighting indicate Ibsen’s desires concerning the look of the production, they do not give the actors any directions about the feel of the performance.

That shift occurred when American modern dramatists Tennessee Williams and Eugene O’Neill came on the scene. Their brand of unmistakably clear and uncharacteristically detailed stage directions left little room for interpretation. Williams’s opening stage directions for A Streetcar Named Desire are a perfect illustration of this new style:

It is first dark of an evening early in May. The sky that shows around the dim white building is a peculiarly tender blue, almost a turquoise, which invests the scene with a kind of lyricism and gracefully attenuates the atmosphere of decay. You can almost feel the warm breath of the brown river beyond the river warehouses with their faint redolences of bananas and coffee. . . . (13)

This brief excerpt offers just a small insight into the play’s wonderfully explicit stage directions, directions
which help paint the picture of not only the look of the scene, but also the feel of the scene. The directions give even inanimate objects, like the sky, the buildings, and the river, emotion and feeling. This personification helps to set both the scene (as other modern playwrights do) and the atmosphere surrounding the entire play as well.

Having established the emotional atmosphere of the play, the stage instructions also give equally descriptive insights into characters' motivations and emotions. While other playwrights of the time might give an actor a direction like "angrily" as motivation for a line of dialogue, Williams again breaks new ground. Later in A Streetcar Named Desire, for example, Williams says that Blanche, who has descended into madness "stands quite still for some moments--the silverbacked mirror in her hand and a look of sorrowful perplexity as though all human experience shows on her face" (134). For any actor the task of playing a character as tragic as Blanche is challenge enough; however, Williams makes it perfectly clear what Blanche must look like and how she must feel. An actor must find a way of depicting "sorrowful perplexity" in order to capture the moment the way Williams intended it. This type of detailed stage directions gives the playwright more control over the production of the play. While no playwright has the last
word on how his plays are performed, such explicit
directions leave less room for interpretation and thus
lessen the gap between the author's intentions and the play
in performance. For those playwrights who decide to write
plays based on their own lives, control is essential.

Another essential quality of an autobiographical play
is the form the work assumes. Over the years, the most
successful of these works have been structured as "memory
plays." "The play is memory. Being a memory play, it is
dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic."
These words spoken by Tom, the narrator in Williams' The
Glass Menagerie, define the subgenre of the memory play.
Characteristically, memory plays have a narrator, often a
central character upon whose memories the work revolves.
Most of the narrators will admit that their memories do not
represent truth, but illusion—the truth as they remember
it, rather than the truth as it actually occurred. In
addition to the presence of a narrator, memory plays tend to
take on a dreamlike quality, in both their prose and in
their performance. The suspension of disbelief is essential
in order for the audience to accept this illusive reality.
Three of the most significant autobiographical memory plays
are Williams' The Glass Menagerie, Brian Friel's Dancing at
Lughnasa, and Eugene O’Neill’s Long Days Journey Into Night.¹

The Glass Menagerie contains three essential features that characterize memory plays: a dreamlike quality to the staging, an autobiographical account of events in Williams’ tortured life, and the presence of a narrator, Tom, who represents and speaks for Williams. Along with the play, Williams provides detailed production notes engineered to provide the audience with a full understanding of the scenery, lighting, and music that give the play its atmosphere.

In addition to the dreamlike quality of the play, The Glass Menagerie is based on Williams’s life. The characters are not loosely based in reality—they are hauntingly close to the originals. In order to control the telling of his story, Williams employs a conventional narrator, Tom (who is Williams himself) and elaborate, specific stage directions.

Another well-known, more current memory play is Dancing at Lughnasa by Friel. Like The Glass Menagerie, Friel’s drama fulfills the criteria for a memory play because of the dreamlike atmosphere, the use of autobiography, and its use of a narrator around whose memories the play centers. The dreamlike quality is established in the stage directions, with Friel using the same techniques of lighting and tableau
as Williams employs in his play. Another aspect of the play that presents the memories as dreams is the absence of an actual little boy to represent Michael. Instead, Friel insists that the boy be imaginary, that all the characters talk to him as if he really exists, and that all of the boy's lines be delivered by the older Michael. The memories in this play belong to Michael, a young man looking back on the summer of 1936, when he was seven. Like Tom in The Glass Menagerie, Michael is a representation of Friel. Much like Tom, Michael admits that "memory . . . owes nothing to fact. In that memory atmosphere is more real than incident and everything is simultaneously actual and illusory" (Friel 71). Friel also uses memories of his own childhood to recreate the scene he portrays in his play. In much the same way as Williams, Friel's narrator speaks for the author, and the author also controls the drama with explicit stage directions.

Perhaps the seminal work of autobiographical drama, though, is Eugene O'Neill's Long Days Journey Into Night. Unlike Williams's or Friel's memory plays, O'Neill has no obvious narrator--there is no Tom or Michael--and the play's atmosphere is gritty and realistic, rather than dreamlike and distant. Also, in perhaps the most brilliant and provocative use of stage directions, O'Neill himself becomes
the narrator and the final judge of his tormented family and his tortured past. Of the three plays, *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* is the most autobiographical and the most realistic; it is also a memory play thanks to the stage directions and character descriptions that O’Neill employs.

All three of these plays—*The Glass Menagerie, Dancing at Lughnasa*, and *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*—exemplify a subgenre of drama in which the authors allow their own pasts and memories to become the center of their works. In a genre that allows the author so little control, these playwrights take an enormous risk that their memories will be misconstrued; however, all three playwrights exercise as much control as possible through detailed stage directions that are, in a sense, as much a part of the play as the dialogue. Without those words in italics, the plays’ meanings and the playwrights’ intentions are lost. These “authobiographical” dramas have been recognized as three of the finest plays of the modern era—plays that enjoy a magical longevity. There are several reasons for that longevity, but perhaps the most important contribution of these plays is their innovative use of stage directions.
CHAPTER 1

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND THE GLASS MENAGERIE

In the production notes which follow Tennessee Williams’s The Glass Menagerie, Williams insists that “Being a ‘memory play,’ The Glass Menagerie can be presented with unusual freedom of convention. Because of its considerably delicate or tenuous material, atmospheric touches and subtleties of direction play a particularly important part” (509). Indeed, Tennessee Williams’s The Glass Menagerie provides the blueprint for “memory plays.” In his attempt to find a suitable structure for this work, Williams developed a new subgenre. In his article “The Circle Closed: A Psychological Reading of The Glass Menagerie and The Two Character Play,” R. B. Parker states that “Williams’s . . . virtual invention of the ‘Memory Play’ form . . . differs from either a confessional format or the involuntary recall of stream-of-consciousness expressionism”; he goes on to say that the difference is that “we not only see exclusively what the narrator consciously wants us to see, but also see it only in the way he chooses that we should” (68).

There is little doubt that Williams pioneered this
dramatic subgenre—moving away from the well-made play that permeated most of the theatre of the 19th century and building on what other modern playwrights of the 20th century like Eugene O’Neill had started. The Glass Menagerie was Williams’s first “success” as a playwright, and, while it would not be his last, the play certainly made an impression on critics and theatre-goers at both its Chicago premiere in 1944 and its New York premiere in 1945. Although the play received some negative reviews, for the most part audiences were touched by the universal struggle of the four characters trying to make sense of their lives. To many, the characters’ struggles mirrored the struggles of many Americans during the post-war and post-Depression era. At the same time, the play reflected Tennessee Williams’s own fight against the prison of his past that threatened to suffocate his future.

But The Glass Menagerie was more than a therapeutic exercise for its author and more than an autobiographical look into the life of one of America’s most important playwrights. This play revolutionized the way people thought about theatre. The “memory play” form, the use of autobiography, and Williams’s descriptive and extensive stage directions combine to create a play that, as the
In order to create his own version of this "truth," Williams first had to develop a method for telling his story. Not a fan of the modern realism of playwrights such as Ibsen and O'Neill, Williams wanted to formulate a new type of drama, a form he would eventually call the "plastic theatre." In The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, Esther Merle Jackson argues that this new form of theatre was "concerned not only with the exposition of rational planes of experience but also with the connotation of the ambiguous world of meaning above and below accepted levels of reason" (89). The Glass Menagerie certainly fits that definition, for while it represents Williams's real-life experiences, it also contains an expressionistic, dreamlike quality that, as Jackson argues, moves away "from the concrete interests of the realists, and beyond the essentially lyric concerns of the romantics, to a language which strives to effect a reconciliation of all facets of reality" (107).

Certainly Williams concerned himself with the best way to uncover truth, and, in his mind, the best way to truth was through illusion. In the production notes for The Glass Menagerie, Williams states: "Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim,
and that is a closer approach to the truth" (509). In order to achieve this expressionistic quality, Williams employs many theatrical conventions, such as lighting, scenery, music, screens and legends, and a narrator in unconventional ways. Combined, these elements gave birth to the "memory play," a form of drama that would change theatre in America and influence theatre all over the world. As Jackson states, "... it may be possible that one of Williams's most lasting achievements may be his contribution to the development of this American dramaturgy, to the creation of this distinctive production form" (89).

To create a successful "memory play," Williams first insisted that the play be technically expressionistic. His detailed production notes which accompany most versions of the text explicitly outline the way the play should look. According to Williams, "the lighting of the play is not realistic. In keeping with the atmosphere of memory, the stage is dim. ... [F]ree, imaginative use of light can be of enormous value in giving a mobile, plastic quality" (512). The lighting is not supposed to look real because the play takes place in the memory of the narrator, Tom.

As well as nonrealistic lighting, the scenery also creates the illusion of memory. The set reveals both the interior of the Wingfield apartment and the exterior of the tenement building. After Tom's opening narration, the wall
of the tenement becomes transparent and reveals the inside of the apartment. As the first scene progresses, the wall is flown out and does not return until the end of the play. As Williams explains in the opening stage directions of the play:

The scene is memory and is therefore nonrealistic. 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 therefore rather dim and poetic.

(437)

Williams's insistence on non-realistic scenery helps to create an emotional and expressionistic atmosphere in which to stage this memory play.

Another element of this "plastic theatre" is Williams's use of music. Williams indicates that the music should give the play "another extra-literary accent" and an "emotional emphasis to suitable passages" (511). The "theme" song of the play, also entitled "The Glass Menagerie," is described as circus music; however, Williams emphasizes that the circus music is "not when you are on the grounds or in the immediate vicinity of the parade, but when you are at some distance and very likely thinking of something else" (511).
This is music that "weaves in and out of your preoccupied consciousness," and should, as Williams suggests, give the impression of how easily glass, like the figures in Laura's menagerie, can be broken (511).

Perhaps the most unusual technical element of The Glass Menagerie is Williams use of screens and legends. More often than not, this device is left out of the play in contemporary productions. Even the Chicago and New York premieres of the play operated without this element. Williams did not object to the director's choice, but he did insist on including the device in the published version of the play because he thought "it may be interesting to some readers to see how this device was conceived" (510). Williams uses the screen throughout the play "to give accent to certain values in each scene" (510). According to Williams's production notes, "each scene contains a particular point (or several) which is structurally the most important . . . the legend or image on the screen will strengthen the effect of what is merely allusion in the writing" (510). Williams continues that "These images and legends, projected from behind, were cast on a section of wall between the front-room and dining-room areas" (510). Throughout the play, the screen device projects legends, such as "THE GLASS MENAGERIE," and images, such as "AMANDA
AS A GIRL ON A PORCH, GREETING CALLERS.

The last, and perhaps the most effective, tool Williams uses to create his “memory play” is the narrator, Tom. In order to further establish that the play represents memory, Williams creates a narrator upon whose recollections the action of the play revolves. The play depicts Tom’s memories of his mother, sister, father, and friend, Jim. Tom breaks the “fourth wall” convention of modern realistic theatre when he talks directly to the audience, in fact announcing his exact function: “I am the narrator of the play, and also a character in it” (439). As Williams states, in the opening stage directions, “The narrator is an undisguised convention of the play. He takes whatever license with dramatic convention as is convenient to his purposes” (438). While Tom is also a character in the play, Tom the narrator can take whatever liberties he wishes. For example, in Scene One, as Amanda begins a speech about her old boyfriends, Tom, as narrator, “motions for music and a spot of light on AMANDA” (442). Like a conductor, the narrator orchestrates the play.

While Tom the character has no control over what happens to him, his mother, or his sister throughout the play, Tom the narrator can make his memories be and do whatever he wants. The narrator has the ability, as Tom
suggests to "turn back time" with the "tricks in [his] pocket" and the "things up [his] sleeve" (438). In his most profound observation, Tom, again as the narrator, explains to his audience at the end of the play that "time is the longest distance between two places" (508). Looking back, Tom realizes that he is only able to present these memories after a great deal of time has passed. Only after he gains distance from his past can he finally examine and make sense of it.

Not only is The Glass Menagerie a memory play, but it is also one of the most compelling autobiographical plays of the 20th century. The past that Tom is trying to make sense of is Tom "Tennessee" Williams's past. The narrator of the play is actually Tom Williams as he attempts to reconcile the tragic events of his own past. Like Friel and O'Neill, Williams created arguably his best work from the actual experiences of his life. In Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams, Lyle Leverich states:

From those myriad reflections of his childhood experiences, those deeply fissured, painful, and powerfully rooted impressions, emerged the man and his art. . . . For the first thirty years of his life, he was living The Glass Menagerie, and it was from that traumatic experience that his
masterpiece—this “little play,” as he disdainfully called it—evolved. (xxii-xxiii)

Truly, Tennessee Williams was deeply impacted and influenced by his past. His difficult family life provided him with the material to write his most touching story.

Thomas Lanier Williams III (Tom Wingfield) was born in Columbus, Tennessee, on March 26, 1911, to Cornelius (Mr. Wingfield) and Edwina Williams (Amanda Wingfield). Eventually, Williams would become the middle of three children, including his younger brother, Dakin, and his older sister, Rose (Laura Wingfield), the one person Williams most adored. Williams’s devotion and love for his sister began “from the moment he became aware of her . . . and as he grew older, [he] became enchanted with her vivacity and beauty” (Leverich 36). Unfortunately, Rose suffered a nervous breakdown and was committed to a state hospital in 1937; in 1943, she underwent a frontal lobotomy, an event that would haunt Williams all his life.

Tom’s mother was also an important figure in his life. Born in Ohio, Edwina and her family moved South; from that point on, she “thought of herself as southern and consummately played the role for the rest of her life” (Leverich 16). Edwina was an artificial southern belle. Just like her fictional counterpart, Amanda Wingfield, Edwina had her fair share of beaux, and she would often tell
Tom and Rose stories of her glorious past. Her devotion to her son, Tom, was so intense, it angered Edwina's husband. According to Williams, "my mother's overly solicitous attention painted in me the makings of a sissy, much to my father's discontent" (Memoirs 11-12).

From the beginning of his life, his father was jealous and resentful of his son because of Edwina's "doting affection for little Tommy" (Leverich 36). This resentment would never disappear in the father-son relationship and would continually be a source of great pain for Tom throughout his life and career as a playwright. Cornelius Williams was a man who intentionally cut himself off from his family. His own mother died when Cornelius was quite young, and because of the absence of a female influence, he grew up hard and insensitive. According to Leverich, "Cornelius had had his emotions sealed off, and any expression of love was difficult, if not impossible. . . . In all matters involving his innermost feelings, he remained beyond reach and outwardly taciturn" (29,34).

As a traveling salesman, Cornelius was away from home during the first years of Tom's life; however, in 1918, Cornelius got a job as a manager in a shoe company and he moved his family to St. Louis. Used to travel, "Cornelius grew increasingly resentful toward his family as his
confinement behind a desk entrapped him more and more” (Leverich 53). In Memoirs, however, Tom remembers his father in a more sympathetic light: “A catalogue of the unattractive aspects of his personality would be fairly extensive, but towering above them were . . . two great virtues which I hope are hereditary: total honesty and total truth, as he saw it, in his dealings with others” (13).

Just like Tom Wingfield, Williams worked for a time in a shoe factory. His father forced Williams to quit school and work in the factory because the family needed the money, but also because he thought Williams’s writing was a frivolous hobby. So, for a few years, Tom Williams was, like his fictional counterpart, a poet, writer, and dreamer who had no outlet for his creativity.

Another character from Williams’s life who would become important to the writing of The Glass Menagerie is his friend and co-worker, Jim Connor (Jim O’Connor). Jim and Williams, who went to school together at the University of Missouri, were fraternity brothers and friends, and Jim became the fictional “gentleman caller.” Actually, Edwina did suggest to Williams that he invite some of his male friends over for Rose. According to Leverich “Apparently, Connor did call—but only once. He had ‘strings’ on him” (142).
Knowing that his past was extremely traumatic, Williams sought to reveal the truth of his life in his fictional play; however, in order to impart forgiveness on his family members and on himself, Williams employs more than an autobiographical "memory play" to reconcile his demons. His descriptive and extensive stage directions also help to paint a sympathetic, forgiving portrait of his troubled family—even his father.

In the opening stage directions, Williams explains that, while the father is absent, his photograph remains on the wall for the entire audience to see: "A blown-up photograph of the father hangs on the wall of the living room. . . . It is the face of a very handsome young man . . . . He is gallantly smiling, ineluctably smiling, as if to say, 'I will be smiling forever'" (438). This handsome, young version of the father is worlds apart from the unattractive, cold, and unfeeling Cornelius Williams. Williams remembers in Memoirs that his mother used to say that Cornelius was a handsome man before he started drinking, but Williams insists he never knew the handsome version of his father (12-13). In his play, Williams tries to capture the face of the father he never knew, or, perhaps, the father that never really existed. Despite the harsh treatment that Williams suffered at the hands of his
father, his portrayal of Cornelius in his play is kind and forgiving. As Leverich states, "[The play] can also be looked upon as the artist's expression of a deeply frustrated love for his father" (564).

While Tom Wingfield explains to the audience that his father was "a telephone man who fell in love with long distances" and left his family years ago, Williams's own father never left his family. In fact, Cornelius Williams felt imprisoned by his life, trapped in a loveless marriage with children he resented. In the play, however, Williams is able to give his father the freedom Cornelius was never able to gain for himself. Williams releases his father from the prison of his life and allows him to abandon his family --something Cornelius Williams would never have done. In Scene Four, Tom says to Laura, "You know it don't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin, Laura. But who in the hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail?" Williams's stage directions then state "As if in answer, the father's grinning photograph lights up" (457). In many ways, the character of the father in The Glass Menagerie is portrayed as a hero of mythic proportions. According to Leverich, Mr. Wingfield "was a stage idealization of Williams's actual father" who turned out to be "the most profound disappointment in his son's
life" (8). Leverich continues: "But in The Glass Menagerie, Tom Wingfield's attitude toward his absent father [is] more one of envy of a heroic figure" (323).

Williams's portrayal of his mother in The Glass Menagerie, on the other hand, is not as forgiving because it does not need to be. Throughout Williams's life, Edwina was a caring, if somewhat overprotective, mother. She supported Williams in his writing career and was a close ally for her son. Unlike the father of the Wingfield family, the character of Amanda Wingfield is unbelievably close to the real-life Edwina Williams. Both women believed themselves to be the consummate southern belle, and both women had a penchant for telling stories of old boyfriends and glory days.

In fact, when Williams's brother Dakin went to see The Glass Menagerie, he explained that "the characterization was so accurate, Edwina could have sued Tom. 'Her fainting act and her "suffering Jesus" facial expressions were the most lethal . . . bits of her repertoire'" (Leverich 567). Edwina's own reaction to the play, when referred to in a newspaper article as "a still-recognizable Amanda," was to say, simply "Perhaps I am" (Leverich 567).

In truth, just like Amanda, Edwina tried to "cure" Rose of her mental handicap by trying to find her a suitable
husband. Edwina was devastated by her daughter’s deteriorating condition and tried whatever she could to help Rose. That concern is mirrored in the action of the play with Amanda’s concern for Laura because of Laura’s physical handicap.

Throughout the play, Tom, the character, fights constantly with his mother—continually annoyed by Amanda’s speeches and “Rise an’ shine” choruses. If Tom the character cannot understand Amanda’s love and concern, Tom the narrator (like Tennessee, the writer) can look back through memory and give Amanda the “tragic beauty” she deserves. While Amanda can seem, to the audience, like a talkative, nagging woman, stuck in the past, in the last scene of the play, Williams’s stage directions leave a powerful and lasting impression of not only Amanda Wingfield, but also Edwina Williams:

AMANDA appears to be making a comforting speech to LAURA. . . . Now that we cannot hear the mother’s speech, her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty. . . . [Her] gestures are slow and graceful, almost dancelike. . . .

(508)

Williams is not forgiving his mother for her indiscretions; he is trying to forgive himself for not understanding and
appreciating how truly beautiful and trapped she, too, was. As Leverich states, the scene at the end of the play "symbolizes what Tennessee Williams saw in his own mother" (584). The one person in Williams's life from whom he desired the most forgiveness, however, was his sister, Rose. Williams was devastated that his beautiful sister succumbed to a mental disorder. Next to writing, Rose was Williams's lifetime devotion. As Leverich states, "Throughout his life, Tennessee Williams had two overriding devotions: his career as a writer and his sister, Rose" (1). As a character in The Glass Menagerie, Rose becomes Laura Wingfield. Like Rose, Laura has a hard time adapting to the outside world and is much more content staying at home, looking after her glass menagerie. Laura, too, has a handicap; however, Laura's handicap is physical. Perhaps this difference stems from Williams's own fear of losing his mind, or, maybe he felt that in his memory he owed it to Rose to give her an obstacle that was visible and perhaps more surmountable. Certainly, a "limp" is easier to overcome than a lobotomy. The tragedy remains that both Rose and Laura are unable to overcome their respective disabilities.

Throughout the play, Williams uses stage directions to
portray Laura's nobility and beauty despite her handicap, constantly comparing Laura to a piece of glass. Just before Jim comes to call on the family, Williams describes Laura's transformation as Amanda hems Laura's new dress:

> The dress is colored and designed by memory. The arrangement of Laura's hair is changed; it is softer and more becoming. A fragile, unearthly prettiness has come out in LAURA: she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting.

(475)

Laura represents, like Rose, a delicate and fragile girl whose exterior is easily broken and destroyed.

This comparison continues throughout the play. At one point, Tom, in anger at his mother, accidentally breaks some of Laura's glass animals. As the stage directions state, "With an outraged groan he tears the coat off again . . . and hurls it across the room. It strikes against the shelf of LAURA'S glass collection, there is a tinkle of shattering glass. LAURA cries out as if wounded" (454). Laura is wounded because Laura is glass. When Jim and Laura dance, Jim also breaks a part of the menagerie--the unicorn--a foreshadowing of how Jim will soon break Laura's heart with his confession of love for another woman. Williams
describes this heartbreak in his stage directions: "The holy candles in the altar of LAURA'S face have been snuffed out" (503).

Williams felt as though he should have been able to save his sister. While he was able to deal with their troubled past by turning to a creative outlet, Rose never had any place else to go with her pain. As Leverich explains:

The more [her father] rejected her, the more Rose tried to win his acceptance, until finally, she was left defenseless and vulnerable in a way that her brother was not. Tom was growing remote, taking refuge in his own interior life of memories and fantasies, creating resources, while she had none. (60)

Throughout his life, Williams, like Tom, could never escape the guilt he felt over abandoning his sister. Just as Tom states at the end of The Glass Menagerie, "Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I wanted to be. . . . Blow-out your candles, Laura--and so good-bye . . . " (508-509). Neither Tom nor Williams could remove the haunting memories of their sisters. When Tom asks Laura to blow out her candles, he is asking her to leave his memory. Perhaps this desire to
forget about Rose represents what Williams most wanted—forgiveness. While Williams became a famous playwright and celebrity, he left his sister behind with no one to help her, a regret Williams could never get over. As Delma E. Presley suggests, in The Glass Menagerie: An American Memory, blowing out her candles is “Laura’s bleak affirmation of truth—her ultimate withdrawal into the dark of the shadows of herself” (43).

Because Williams has Tom tell Laura to blow out the candles, perhaps Williams feels responsible for Laura’s eventually descent into madness. In “Tennessee Williams’ Gallery of Feminine Characters,” Durant Da Ponte quotes a passage from Edwina Williams’s Remember Me to Tom in which Edwina states:

“I think Tom always felt as though he had failed Rose . . . that had he been on hand when the big decision was made, he might have been able to stop the lobotomy. . . . Tom’s sense of loss and loneliness . . . must have been devastating. . . . I think his was a grief beyond words, as he saw his beautiful, imaginative sister . . . partially destroyed. Fragile, lovely Rose to Tom must seem a broken creature.” (266)

Williams saw his sister as easily broken and felt as though
he was partially responsible for her eventually destruction. While Williams never spoke much of his guilt over his sister, The Glass Menagerie is a strong illustration of just how terrible he felt about his beloved Rose.

While there is no doubt that The Glass Menagerie is the primary illustration of a memory play, the work also belongs to the elite group of "authobiographical" memory plays. Williams incorporates into his work recollections of his often painful past to create a moving and forgiving portrayal of his father and himself. The person Williams most needed to forgive was his father, and the person whom Williams most needed forgiveness from was his sister. With his use of the "plastic theatre," a central narrator, and his stage directions, Williams creates a play that is both universal and personal. The invention of the memory play form helped give structure to O'Neill's work, if only in retrospect, and to future plays, like Friel's work, creating a new and exciting twist to Williams's subgenre.
CHAPTER 2

BRIAN FRIEL AND DANCING AT LUGHNASA

Tennessee Williams’s The Glass Menagerie, the seminal “memory play,” has influenced many contemporary playwrights including Brian Friel and his family drama Dancing at Lughnasa. As the most well-known contemporary Irish playwright, Friel often deals with the disappearance of the Irish identity, focusing on not only personal but also sociological concerns. As his most celebrated work, Dancing at Lughnasa follows the pattern of Williams and O’Neill by drawing on autobiography to create a play of universal importance. As a memory play, Dancing at Lughnasa is often compared to The Glass Menagerie. For example, in “Marking Time: From Making History to Dancing at Lughnasa,” Fintan O’Toole argues, “The connections between Lughnasa and The Glass Menagerie are reasonably obvious ones. The use of narrator as a device for the suspension and conflation of time, the elegiac tone of the narration . . .” (209).

Structurally, Dancing at Lughnasa fits the memory play pattern outlined by Williams. Like Williams, Friel employs music, setting, and lighting to create dreamlike “atmospheric touches” and structures the play around the
memories of a central narrator. Much like Tom Wingfield, Michael Mundy, Friel’s narrator, is a young man looking back on a past that haunts him. Michael’s recollections are presented on stage, but he readily admits that his memory “owes nothing to fact” (Friel 71). Just as Tom admits to his audience that he is a magician, weaving together his memories to create an illusion, Michael also plays the part of the illusionist.

While Williams’s memory play undoubtably provided the blueprint that Friel used to create Dancing at Lughnasa, the plays share more than a similar structure and style. Just like The Glass Menagerie, Dancing at Lughnasa was embraced and lauded by audiences because of its portrayal of the universal and, specifically, Irish, struggle for identity. The work won the Tony Award for Best Play in 1992, in addition to many other prestigious awards, because of its touching story of the five sisters, the Mundy women, whose lives get caught up in the winds of change. However, Dancing at Lughnasa serves a deeper, more personal purpose for Friel. Following in the paths of Williams and O’Neill, Friel bases his play on autobiography. The play is Friel’s tribute and apology to his own aunts and mother who, like many other Irish women, were broken by a changing society. As O’Toole suggests:
... since the play is at this level 'about' the dilemma of its author, it makes sense that the play should also work within the form of autobiography. ... The play is, for Friel, the same act of memory and tribute as the narrator's calling of that time to mind is to the narrator. This form of autobiographical memory play, this device of continual present in which history is replaced by memory is what Friel takes from The Glass Menagerie. (211)

In Dancing at Lughnasa, the memory play structure, the autobiographical implications of the work, and the descriptive stage directions all combine to create an "authobiographical" memory play that, like The Glass Menagerie, is "simultaneously actual and illusory" (Friel 71).

In order to create an appropriate venue for his memories, Friel had to first decide on the proper structure for his work. Influenced by Williams, Friel used the same conventions present in The Glass Menagerie to give Dancing at Lughnasa the look of memory. Like Williams, Friel bases his memory play on a tragic event and recreates it in almost dreamlike or magical form. As O'Toole suggests, Friel follows this pattern well: "Its brilliance lies in its
ability to structure the falling apart of things . . . within a form which is the opposite . . . full of ease and gentleness and apparent stasis, a form in which time is suspended” (211). Friel is not as detailed as Williams in explaining how to use lighting, setting, and music; he provides no production notes to accompany his play. Perhaps, though, he does not need to. Williams was establishing a new subgenre, while Friel was following in Williams’s footsteps; therefore, a style that seemed unconventional in 1945 (the publication year of The Glass Menagerie) had become quite conventional in 1990 (the publication year of Dancing at Lughnasa).

For instance, Friel uses expressionistic lighting, but not throughout the play. While Williams wanted the lighting to appear illusive from beginning to end, Friel takes a more realistic approach, calling for the “memory play lighting” at the beginning and end of the play only. After establishing that the play represents memory in the first stage directions, Friel does not return to the special lighting until the final speech by the narrator. Friel states at the beginning of the play:

When the play opens MICHAEL is standing downstage left in a pool of light. The rest of the stage is in darkness. Immediately MICHAEL begins speaking,
slowly bring up the lights on the rest of the stage. Around the stage . . . the other characters stand motionless in formal tableau.

(1).

This technique of tableau is also used by Williams throughout The Glass Menagerie. In Dancing at Lughnasa it also helps to establish that the characters are controlled by Michael: they stop and start when he wants them to. As the play’s action begins, however, the lighting becomes realistic and “the kitchen and garden are now lit as for a warm summer afternoon” (Friel 2). Friel only returns to expressionistic lighting at the end of the play. As Michael begins his final speech, “the stage is lit in a very soft, golden light so that the tableau we see is almost, but not quite, in a haze” (70).

This final tableau recreates the one presented at the opening of the play; however, there are noticeable differences. The changes represent the transformation of Irish society and the changing lives of the women in the play. In “‘Recording Tremors’: Friel’s Dancing at Lughnasa and the Uses of Tradition,” Christopher Murray argues that “The tableau formed at the end of the play deliberately recalls that at the beginning, with carefully stated differences . . . . it dramatizes disintegration” (37). The
characters are in disarray at the end. Once clean and pressed, the costumes are disheveled and shabby. Like in a photograph, Michael is able to freeze a moment in time and look back on the picture with wiser eyes.

Because Friel takes a more realistic approach to his play, he does not use the screens and legends Williams proposed, but he does emphasize the use of music and dancing in Dancing at Lughnasa. O’Toole explains that “Time cannot be stopped, history cannot be escaped. But it can be shaped, given the pleasurable if irrational form of music and dance” (213). In keeping with Williams’s notion of the “plastic theatre,” Friel establishes the importance of music through the “character” of the Marconi radio. Throughout the play, the Marconi provides the soundtrack for the play’s action, such as the traditional “The Mason’s Apron” that prompts the mesmerizing dance scene in Act One and other notable tunes, like “The British Grenadiers,” “Anything Goes,” and “It is Time to Say Goodnight.” In addition to the Marconi, several of the characters sing songs throughout the play. Maggie is always singing a tune even when the radio is not on. Michael describes this link between music and memory in his final speech: “In that memory, too, the air is nostalgic with the music of the thirties. It drifts in from somewhere far away—a mirage of sound—a dream music
that is both heard and imagined" (71).

As the title implies, dancing is a third important, expressionistic device employed in Friel’s play. The characters are often dancing around the house and dancing to the songs from the Marconi. One such instance is the powerful “pagan” dancing in Act One, when all of the sisters surrender to the control of the Irish music. As Friel describes this scene, he explains “the movements seem caricatured; and the sound is too loud; and the beat is too fast; and the almost recognizable dance is made grotesque. . . . With this too loud music, this pounding beat . . . there is a sense of order being consciously subverted” (21-22). For Friel, dancing represents a new, defiant language that transcends the spoken word.

Another example of dance as language occurs at the end of the play, when Michael gives his final speech. In the stage directions Friel states, “And as MICHAEL continues, everybody sways very slightly from side to side--even the grinning kites. The movement is so minimal that we cannot be quite certain if it is happening or if we imagine it" (71). As Michael explains in his final speech:

When I remember it, I think of it as dancing.
Dancing with eyes half-closed because to open them would break the spell. Dancing as if language had
surrendered to movement. . . . Dancing as if the very heart of life and all its hopes might be found in those assuaging notes . . . hushed rhythms . . . and hypnotic movements. Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary. . . . (71)

Michael’s memories are inexplicably tied to dancing, and, in this way, Friel establishes his own convention of the memory play—the use of movement and gesture.

Another element of memory plays that Friel establishes is the use of a central narrator. Like Tom in Glass Menagerie, Michael is remembering his past and recalling his memories to the audience. Michael is also a character in the play; however, Friel creates a new twist to Williams’s design. Michael the narrator does not step in and out of the action of the play; he speaks the lines of Michael the character from the side of the stage, but Michael the character is a seven-year-old boy. The boy is imaginary and the characters in the play speak to him as if he exists. The narrator answers for the boy from his place outside of the action. As Friel explains, “The convention must now be established that the (imaginary) BOY MICHAEL is working at the kite materials lying on the ground. No dialogue with the BOY MICHAEL must ever be addressed directly to adult
MICHAEL, the narrator . . . MICHAEL responds to [the other characters] in his ordinary narrator's voice" (7).

Although some directors have decided to use an actual actor to play Michael as a boy, Friel seems insistent that the boy remain imaginary. As the narrator, Michael controls the play. In The Art of Brian Friel, Elmer Andrews argues, "In Dancing at Lughnasa . . . the device of the boy/narrator allows memory to control and dominate the stage" (219). The play stops and starts with his narration, and the action that he presents is the action of the summer of 1936 as he remembers it. As he explains to the audience, "When I cast my mind back to that summer of 1936 different kinds of memories offer themselves to me. . . . And even though I was only a child of seven at the time I know I had a sense of unease, some awareness of a widening breach between what seemed to be and what was . . . ." (1-2). Like Tom in The Glass Menagerie, Michael is looking back at a time when his life changed and is trying to make sense of what happened. Through his childish eyes, Michael witnessed the destruction of his family--especially his mother and her sisters--and as an older man, he wants to understand why. In "The Engendered Space: Performing Friel's Women from Cass McGuire to Molly Sweeney," Claudia W. Harris writes, "Friel struggles to capture dramatically the brief time before life
changed utterly for them all at the end of that summer" (47).

Michael as narrator knows the fate of his aunts, his parents, and his uncle, and he does not hide the information from the audience. He explains how his family disintegrated after that summer because the disintegration is not the important part of his story. The important issue to Michael is how that one summer seemed to mark the beginning of the end for the women and family he loved. He captures one memory in time and tries to make sense of it. At the end of the play, Michael admits to the audience that his memories are, like Tom’s, based on illusions:

But there is one memory of that Lughnasa time that visits me most often; and what fascinates me about that memory is that it owes nothing to fact. In that memory atmosphere is more real than incident and everything is simultaneously actual and illusory... And what is so strange about that memory is that everybody seems to be floating on the sweet sounds... responding more to the mood of the music than to its beat. (71)

The use of illusion to reveal personal truths is important to Michael as well as Friel because Michael’s memories are also Friel’s.

Friel, like Williams and O’Neill, bases his work on
events from his own past. Friel is Michael. Harris explains that with most plays, the director is in control of the production. She points out, however, that "In Dancing at Lughnasa . . . the writer’s views take precedence because they are represented on stage by the character of Michael" (48). Like Williams, Friel employs a narrator to make certain that his memories are portrayed correctly.

Yet little is known about the extent to which Dancing at Lughnasa is autobiographical because Friel, who is still living, has kept quiet about his personal life. Like Williams and O’Neill, the real truths behind the play’s origins will most likely remain a mystery while Friel remains an active playwright. What is known, however, is that Friel was born in Ireland in 1929 in Omagh in County Tyrone. Friel, like Michael, was seven in 1936, the year in which the play takes place. The play is dedicated to the “memory of those five brave Glenties women,” Friel’s aunts who lived in Glenties, County Donegal (Ballybeg). Friel often spent holidays with his mother’s sisters, and these strong women influenced him greatly (Andrews 1). Murray cites a passage from an Irish Times article published when the play was staged in Glenties: “Visitors and locals crammed into the . . . school hall to see the play in its original setting. Mr. Friel . . . based the play on his
mother’s family, the MacLoones” (28). Murray goes on to note that the names and characters of the Mundy sisters, Kate, Maggie, Rose, Agnes, and Chris, are taken from the MacLoones. The portrayal of Fr. Barney (Fr. Jack), however, was not exact, and the presence of Michael’s British father, Gerry, is untrue because Friel’s own father was an Irish school teacher who was, in fact, married to Friel’s mother (28).

The discrepancies in truth, like those present in The Glass Menagerie, are important to examine. The play centers around the destruction of the lives of the five Mundy sisters, and those women seem to be the characters whom Friel is attempting to honor and understand. That Michael’s father is a British wanderer and Fr. Jack comes back to Ballybeg as a pagan, heavily influenced by the Ugandan culture, have strong political implications. In addition to resolving his own personal issues regarding his mother and her sisters, Friel uses his play to comment on the role of Britain and the growing tension between Catholicism and paganism in the lives of the Irish—a constant reminder of the disruptive outsiders polluting Irish identity.

The wandering spirit of the male characters in Dancing at Lughnasa also represents Ireland as a nation without a father. Irish writers have always written about strong
women characters, abandoned by the men who have gone off to war, abandoned the families, or become alcoholics. While the men are free to come and go as they please in and out of the lives of the Irish women, those women are left to adapt or be destroyed. Fr. Jack has gone off to Uganda as a missionary and Gerry has another family in Wales. Even Michael admits "when my time came to go away, in the selfish way of young men I was happy to escape" (71).

For the women of Ireland, and for the Mundy sisters, there is no escape, and Friel wants to find forgiveness for abandoning the women who raised him at a time when Ireland was on the brink of change these women could not withstand. Michael describes to the audience the fate of his aunts and mother after the summer of 1936. His mother "spent the rest of her life in the knitting factory--and hated every day of it" (70), Kate and Maggie continued on as if nothing had changed, and Agnes and Rose left the family, became homeless, and eventually died. Michael describes his search for Agnes and Rose, whom he did not find until 25 years later: "by the time I tracked them down . . . Agnes was dead and Rose was dying in a hospice" (60). Michael could not save them, and he never stayed around long enough to try. The sad, melancholy tone at the end of the play hints that Michael seeks forgiveness. Just as guilt compels the Ancient Mariner, it also prompts Michael to tell this story.
Not able to save these women in reality, Friel and Michael attempt to save something of their wonderful spirit and tragic beauty in memories. Even though the fate of the sisters is already sealed, some element of their spirit in that summer of 1936 captures the imagination of Michael and Friel—-that spirit must be remembered and revived in the retelling of the story. According to Andrews, “Even knowing the destiny of his aunts, Michael remains ‘fascinated’ . . . by the hypnotic, magical power of memory” (232). When Michael looks back, the most important part of the summer he remembers is the dancing, especially the powerful dance scene in Act One, with the sisters “suddenly catching hands and dancing a spontaneous step-dance and laughing—-screaming!—-like excited schoolgirls” in defiance of the changing world around them (Friel 2).

Throughout Dancing at Lughnasa, Friel attempts to capture this wordless essence of the five Mundy sisters in order to pay homage to their Irish spirit, a spirit that, unfortunately, disappears after the Lughnasa summer of 1936. Michael never fully understands why that summer remains so important in his memory, but he understands that even his memories cannot overcome the tragic fact that these women’s lives were altered forever.

By composing this memory play, Friel captures the
spirit of his aunts as well as the tragedy of their situations. Using the expressionistic lighting, the tableaux, the dancing and the music, Friel gives the impression of a dream—an illusive representation of the truth. Finally, Friel controls his work with the use of a narrator and explicit stage directions—making sure that his autobiographical account retains verisimilitude. In many ways, the similarities between Dancing at Lughnasa and The Glass Menagerie are striking; however, like O’Neill Friel opts for a more realistic portrayal of his story. Regardless of the differences, Friel creates perhaps the best contemporary “authobiographical” memory play.
CHAPTER 3

EUGENE O’NEILL AND LONG DAY’S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

Dearest: I give you the original script of this play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood. . . . I mean it as a tribute to your love and tenderness which gave me the faith in love that enabled me to face my dead at last and write this play--write it with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for all the four haunted Tyrones. (257)

In this letter to his wife, Carlotta, Eugene O’Neill eloquently explains why he wrote the hauntingly autobiographical Long Day’s Journey Into Night. This play offers a truly revealing look inside the life of O’Neill, a life filled with painful tormenting memories. In an act of therapy and in an attempt to make sense of his family’s past, O’Neill’s play comes frighteningly close to the actual events of his own life--the names have barely been changed. Traveling his own long journey, O’Neill wrote this play in an attempt to forgive his mother, father, and brother, a task so painful that O’Neill’s dying wish was that the manuscript not be published until twenty-five years after
his death. Just three years after O’Neill succumbed to Parkinson’s disease, however, his wife allowed the play to be published and produced. Perhaps O’Neill wanted to delay publication to remove his real life from the fictional life of the Tyrone family. Perhaps, after purging his own demons, he hoped that time would allow the play to be accepted on its emotional story alone. Whatever his reasons for wishing to delay its publication, the play is undeniably a masterwork. While it has impressed and touched audiences all over the world, knowing the story of O’Neill’s life somehow makes the play that much more of a wonder. Long Days Journey Into Night proves the old adage that truth is stranger than fiction, or, at least, just as intriguing.

The action of O’Neill’s play takes place on a summer’s day in August, 1912. The setting is the Tyrone family’s summer home in New England. The long day of the play mirrors a similar day O’Neill himself might have experienced at the age of 23. In fact, in 1912 Eugene O’Neill developed a serious case of tuberculosis which was not only an important event in his life, but also an important part of the play’s story. The life story of Eugene O’Neill (Edmund Tyrone) began on October 16, 1888, when he was born in New York City to James O’Neill (James Tyrone) and Ella Quinlan O’Neill (Mary Tyrone). James O’Neill, like his fictional
counterpart, was a famous Irish actor well known for his performances in The Count of Monte Cristo (his success in this melodrama caused many of his peers to consider him a sellout). Ella Quinlan O’Neill, like Mary Tyrone, had difficulty adjusting to her life as the wife of an actor and developed a drug addiction as a result of Eugene’s birth. Eugene had two brothers, James O’Neill, Jr. (Jamie Tyrone), and Edmund O’Neill (Eugene Tyrone), who died at the age of one-and-a-half after catching the measles from Jamie (Berlin 26-27).

Throughout his life, Eugene O’Neill was tormented by the guilt and anger he felt over his mother’s drug addiction. According to Normand Berlin, in Eugene O’Neill, many critics have attempted to explain why O’Neill so resented his father; he might have turned against his father because his mother was too helpless to take her son’s abuse, or he may have resented his father’s decision to sacrifice his talent as a Shakespearean actor for a career as the Count of Monte Cristo. Whatever the reason, O’Neill resented both of his parents, especially his father (28).

The angry 23-year-old Edmund is not, however, a representation of the 63-year-old Eugene. Much like Tom in The Glass Menagerie and Michael in Dancing at Lughnasa, Eugene O’Neill is remembering the past events of the play
through older and wiser eyes. Unlike Tom and Michael, though, O’Neill does not write himself a physical narrator—a character who speaks for the author. Instead, he takes a different but valid approach to narration in his memory play. While O’Neill resembles Williams and Friel in his use of explicit and extremely descriptive stage directions to help control his drama, O’Neill’s stage directions serve another purpose as well—they function as the author’s voice. Although Michael Hinden, like many other critics, argues in Native Eloquence that O’Neill’s drama “reaches into the past to illuminate that moment, and presents it without editorial comment” (93), the truth remains that O’Neill’s stage directions offer more than an editorial comment; they act as narration. In lieu of a narrator-character, O’Neill employs stage directions to tell the story behind the story.

For all appearances, the characters in Long Day’s Journey Into Night are brutal, harsh, and offensive, the way they treat one another, cruel and unfair. The one element of the play that redeems them, or at least makes them somewhat sympathetic, is O’Neill’s stage directions. Take away O’Neill’s omniscient viewpoint, and the characters are simply hateful and malicious; however, in light of O’Neill’s commentary—the commentary of an older, wiser son looking
back at a family he hated but, more importantly, loved—the characters gain depth, motivation, feelings, and sympathy. *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* is essentially a memory play without the memories of an on-stage narrator. O’Neill creates the feel of narration, of someone looking back at the events of this long day and reporting his observations to the audience, but he accomplishes all of this with the simple convention of stage directions.

O’Neill’s stage directions impart forgiveness on his family; arising from his “faith in love,” they enable him, as he confesses, to “face my dead.” In “Long Day’s Journey,” Doris V. Falk explains, “this is O’Neill’s own family, and their story was torn from the depths of his consciousness. With an effort compounded of ‘tears and blood,’ O’Neill forced himself to examine them honestly and objectively, from their points of view as well as his” (11). The way O’Neill chooses to be objective is through his stage directions. The forgiving nature of O’Neill’s stage directions emerges most clearly when he introduces each character and when he portrays certain horrible incidents that occur in the Tyrone family. While drafting this play, O’Neill “considerably softened the portrait of each family member as he revised” (Hinden 90). As O’Neill’s journey of writing the play wore on, his forgiveness for his family
grew. In *Final Acts: The Creation of Three Late O’Neill Plays*, Judith E. Barlow states "the playwright is gentler to his characters in the published text, and they show more understanding toward each other" while O’Neill makes it clear in his final version "that the Tyrone’s bitterness and even hatred grow out of the very bonds of need and love that hold the family together" (83).

The way readers and audience members look at and assess specific characters is greatly influenced by the way they are described or portrayed in the text of the play. Some playwrights leave out character descriptions altogether or spend little time on them—denoting, simply, their physical appearances. Many times readers or the production team of a play are left to figure out for themselves the characters’ motivations. O’Neill, however, leaves little to chance in his characterization. His character descriptions are thorough and insightful—filled with subtle nuances that help define the characters. For example, when introducing Mary Tyrone, O’Neill writes, "Her face is distinctly Irish in type. It must once have been extremely pretty, and is still striking now" (259). He goes on to describe her hands as "once beautiful" but now "rheumatism has knotted the joints... One avoids looking at them, the more so because one is conscious she is sensitive about their
appearance and humiliated by her inability to control the nervousness which draws attention to them" (259). O’Neill’s revelation is striking because he not only describes Mary’s physical features but also the way “one” might react to seeing her hands. O’Neill is commenting directly on his mother—his once beautiful, “sensitive” and “humiliated” mother. Perhaps the most kind and telling illustration of Mary is the last sentence of O’Neill’s characterization: “Her most appealing quality is the simple, unaffected charm of a shy convent-girl youthfulness she has never lost—an innate unworldly innocence” (259). In comments like these, O’Neill reveals to the reader the best aspects of characters who end up bitter drunks, drug addicts, and failures. In autobiographical terms, when O’Neill looks back on his family, the stage directions reveal what he sees.

O’Neill next introduces James Tyrone. O’Neill’s relationship with his own father, James O’Neill, was unhappy and difficult, yet his description of Tyrone is kind and unaccusing: “The stamp of his profession is unmistakably on him. Not that he indulges in any of the deliberate temperamental posturings of the stage star. He is by nature and preference a simple, unpretentious man” (259). James O’Neill’s work as an actor was his downfall, just as it is Tyrone’s, but O’Neill makes certain to point out the
humility and simplicity of this "star." Even though Tyrone could be a hard man and difficult to get along with, O'Neill explains "He has never really been sick a day in his life. He has no nerves. There is a lot of stolid, earthy peasant in him, mixed with streaks of sentimental melancholy and rare flashes of intuitive sensibility" (260). Again, looking back, O'Neill can point out the "rare," positive aspects of his father's character, aspects that may not have been so easily noticeable to a young and bitter son.

O'Neill's portrait of Jamie is also tempered by his stage directions. Jamie seems to be a bitter and jealous son and brother, and his lines are often cynical and filled with biting sarcasm. When O'Neill describes this "brother," however, he writes, "But on the rare occasions when he smiles without sneering his personality possesses the remnant of a humorous, romantic, irresponsible Irish charm--that of a beguiling ne'er-do-well, with a strain of the sentimentally poetic . . . " (263). With Jamie, as with all his characters, O'Neill is well aware of their faults, but he is clearly intent upon looking beyond these obvious flaws to find moments of love, sanity, and peace. Interestingly Edmund, the character based on O'Neill himself, gets little more than a physical description. Perhaps Edmund hit too close to home to warrant the forgiving insights O'Neill
grants to others through his stage directions. In his article "The Door and the Mirror," Travis Bogard suggests, "Although O’Neill has been at pains to show what the past has made of his parents and brother, it is unclear what the past has made of Edmund" (69). Bogard continues: "To seek for a reason why O’Neill drew such a suppressed self-portrait is to move toward areas of psychoanalysis . . ." (72-73). Certainly the hardest person to forgive is the self, and O’Neill struggles with this dilemma by diverting the reader’s attention to his family.

As part of that diversion, O’Neill tries to show the reader that James and Mary Tyrone, despite all of their problems, were truly in love. The words they speak to one another, however, are less telling than the stage directions that orchestrate their movements and motivations. For example, in the first few lines of the play, James and Mary are talking about breakfast and the weight Mary has gained:

TYRONE. You’re a fine armful now, Mary, with those twenty pounds you’ve gained.

MARY. . . . I’ve gotten too fat, you mean, dear.

I really ought to reduce. (260)

The exchange seems lifeless and boring without O’Neill’s stage directions. When the directions are added, the reader sees that before Tyrone says his line to his wife he “gives
her a playful hug" and before she responds, Mary "smiles affectionately" (260). These differences are small but important. Without the directions, one is left wondering if these two characters even like each other, but O'Neill makes it clear through his stage directions that they are very fond of one another. Later in the play, when Mary relapses into her morphine addiction, James is angry with her; however, O'Neill makes sure the reader understands that anger is not James's only motivation. In the moment where James realizes Mary has taken the drugs, O'Neill writes that he "suddenly looks a tired, bitterly sad old man" (287). Just moments later O'Neill continues, "TYRONE's eyes are on her, sad and condemning" (287). Knowing O'Neill's past can certainly explain the "condemning" part of the direction, but the word "sad" adds another dimension to James's character. Readers come to understand that he is sad because the woman he loves is lost once again to the drugs that are destroying her.

Even in the final scene of the play, when Mary is completely overcome by a morphine stupor, the telling stage directions paint a very sympathetic picture of James. Although he could be a hard and stubborn man, the vision of his love deteriorating into oblivion is too much for him to bear: "He gives up helplessly, shrinking into himself, even
his defensive drunkenness taken from him, leaving him sick and sober. He sinks back on his chair, holding the wedding gown in his arms with an unconscious clumsy, protective gentleness" (343). The simple line that precedes this touching picture is "Mary!" The word alone cannot tell of James's despair and hopelessness. O'Neill himself probably did not realize how small and weak his own father felt in the face of his mother's addiction until he relived the past years later during the creation of this play.

The last scene of the play is not only important in showing the love and despair James feels for Mary, but also in illustrating O'Neill's forgiveness at its best. The scene at the end of Act Four is horrifying; however, the way O'Neill handles the situation as the "narrator" gives the scene a poignantly tragic feel. For example, when Mary enters the scene, Jamie comments, "The Mad Scene. Enter Ophelia" (342). To James and Edmund the comment seems disrespectful and horribly rude, and they react accordingly. Both characters turn on Jamie, and Edmund hits him. The motivation for Jamie's comment remains unclear to his father and brother, but O'Neill clarifies it for the reader, commenting that Jamie "breaks the cracking silence--bitterly, self-defensively sardonic" (342). This motivation--self-defense--makes a difference in the
portrayal of the character. Jamie is angry and bitter at his mother for leaving him, and his defense mechanism is to lash out with cynicism. While Edmund does not understand the complexity of Jamie’s response, O’Neill does. In a sense he is forgiving his brother by understanding what drove him to behave the way he did.

As the scene continues, Jamie, reeling from his brother’s blow, can no longer take the pain and, as O’Neill directs, begins to sob. James’s verbal response to Jamie’s sobbing is to say, “I’ll kick you out in the gutter tomorrow, so help me God . . . Jamie, for the love of God, stop it!” (342). Without the stage directions, the statement seems cruel and angry. When O’Neill inserts the stage direction between the two statements, however, the words change in meaning: “I’ll kick you out in the gutter tomorrow, so help me God. [But JAMIE’S sobbing breaks his anger, and he turns and shakes his shoulder, pleading.] Jamie, for the love of God, stop it” (342). The meaning changes, as does the impression the reader gets of James’s character. He is not just a callous man who hates his son. The fact that he can take pity on Jamie and reach out his hand to him shows not hatred, but love.

During that same scene, O’Neill shows his greatest forgiveness toward his mother. The characters are
hopelessly destroyed by the vision of Mary, lost in a drug-induced haze, appearing in the doorway, but the narrator is taken by her innocence and beauty. O'Neill is almost mesmerized by his mother's appearance, despite what the incident means for his family. He writes, "The uncanny thing is that her face now appears so youthful. Experience seems ironed out of it. It is a marble mask of girlish innocence, the mouth caught in a shy smile" (342). O'Neill even lessens the blow of the terrible situation at the end of the play by describing Mary's state as that of a "sad dream" (346).

For O'Neill the autobiographical Long Day's Journey into Night is also a "sad dream." What was once cause for bitterness and anger, is now cause for sadness and reflection. As a young man he could hardly deal with or understand the reasons behind the situations that he encountered in his family; had O'Neill written a play about his family when he was a young man, it would not have been written with the love and forgiveness of Long Day's Journey Into Night. The characters would have been hateful and evil, and there would have been no redemption for any of them. As an older and wiser man, O'Neill finally recognizes his family for what they were--flawed human beings. Looking back, the terrible did not seem so terrible, and the hatred
seemed more like displaced love. The situations have not changed, only O'Neill's perceptions of them have changed. According to Falk, in Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension, "Long Day's Journey was penance, and in the penance itself lies the redemption" (191).

Through reflection, O'Neill was able to look back on his past with a more forgiving heart, and he wanted to make certain that his readers were aware of this new perspective. Because a play is meant to be performed, O'Neill's audience extends beyond the literary critics and literature students who will read and analyze his manuscript. For a theatre audience, the forgiving tone is indirect and less immediate; it must come through in the actors' performances. The challenge, then, for any actor or director of this play is to convey to the audience the feelings and ideas that O'Neill reveals in his stage directions through staging and characterization. Bogard agrees that O'Neill's directions give the actors insight and information that the audience only understands second-hand: "An actor should know [the information], but an audience will perceive such details only through the filter of performance" (63). The task of the performers is not easy, but it is necessary if O'Neill's drama is to be as successful on the stage as it is on the page.
This difficulty separates O'Neill's play from Williams's and Friel's. While both Williams and Friel also use their stage directions as an integral "invisible" character, they, unlike O'Neill, rely on a narrator to more completely ensure control over the personal memories driving the action of the play. O'Neill makes a braver and riskier choice in creating his own brand of memory play. To the reader, the authorial control and intention (for lack of a better word) are concrete and relatively obvious--one only needs to read the stage directions to understand the motivations of the characters in O'Neill's drama. Often, however, something is lost in the translation when the play is performed. The audience who "sees" the play must rely on the ability of the director and the actors to take O'Neill's "narration" and convey its messages to the audience. If the actors fail in that task, no narrator can step out onto the stage to clarify the memories.

Why O'Neill chose to leave the full interpretation of his greatest work up to the actors is a mystery. O'Neill was well known for his distrust of theatre to do his plays justice; however, he seemed to know that without being performed his plays would lose something. As Berlin states:

Although O'Neill distrusted the theatre in his later years and believed that no actual performance could match the perfect one which he
staged in his imagination, we . . . need performance to receive the full emotional effect . . . of O’Neill’s masterpiece. (24)

Another reason for O’Neill’s choice of structure could be his desire to make sure that the play remains realistic. While The Glass Menagerie and Dancing at Lughnasa are episodically realistic, the narrators and, in Williams’s case the legends, serve to interject a more dreamlike atmosphere. O’Neill’s play, on the other hand, is relentlessly gritty and real. In fact, Bogard calls the play “the highest achievement of the American realistic theatre” (62). For all of its realism, however, the play is not devoid of symbolic expressionism. Bogard argues that “for all [its] ‘faithful realism,’ it should be remarked that the [drama] more readily than many earlier works approach the abstraction and symbolism so characteristic of the expressionist mode” (64-65). A final explanation for O’Neill’s choice of form might be that Williams had yet to create his memory play; O’Neill may have been unaware of any other structural options. On the other hand, O’Neill seems to give his play some semblance of a dreamlike quality in the midst of all the realism. After all, the fog is not only symbolic, but also creates the illusion of a dream: “At [its] climactic moments, [Long Day’s Journey Into Night
conveys] the qualities of a dream. . . . The slow turning of memory is the play's only action. Life becomes a dream of pain" (Bogard 65-66). Even though the term "memory play" had yet to be coined, O'Neill inherently knew how to create control through abstraction.

In any event, O'Neill joins Williams, Friel, and other modern playwrights in making the convention of stage directions an integral part of the actual drama of their plays. With the subject matter as painful as it is for O'Neill, the directions provide him a sense of control over his memories. The play is a personal journey for O'Neill, but it is also a public play. Writing the play took him his entire life; he did not even want it published until he was long dead. Why would he ever trust such painful memories to the interpretation or, rather, misinterpretation of a theatre company? The family drama presented in the play is hateful and destructive, but O'Neill wanted to make sure that the characters had their redemption. Clearly, the stage directions O'Neill includes are more important for characterization than for stage movement and scenery. In *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, the stage directions serve as O'Neill's instrument of forgiveness. This play is truly "written in tears and blood" and O'Neill did "write it with
deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for all the four haunted Tyrones" (257).

While O'Neill's play is not a conventional memory play like *The Glass Menagerie* and *Dancing at Lughnasa*, it is still an "authobiographical" memory play. Although, for the most part, it forgoes the dreamlike illusion of reality for gritty realism, the play's unseen narrator still directs the memories that surround the play with the wisdom of an older man looking back on his past with forgiveness. In addition, the explicit, elaborate stage directions makes *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* an author-controlled drama.
CONCLUSION

In truth, Williams, Friel, and O’Neill are all attempting to face their dead--whatever form that dead represented in their lives. For Williams it was the dead relationship between a father and son and the destruction of his sister’s life. For Friel it is the death of the spirit of five strong Irish women who represent the identity of a changing nation. For O’Neill it is the death of anger and resentment toward his father, mother, and brother. All three playwrights purge their demons and do their penance in the shadows of their pasts.

By making their pasts the central focus of their dramas, the playwrights took an enormous risk--a risk that seems to have paid off. By exerting control through the structure of their memory plays and the extensive stage directions, they have created dramas that speak not only to and for them, but also to and for others. The universality of their stories is what saves the plays from becoming the “self-help” nonsense that critics of autobiographical criticism despise. Without knowing the pasts of Williams, Friel, and O’Neill, the plays still have resonance. Audiences who viewed the first performances of The Glass Menagerie did not necessarily know about Williams’s troubled
life. His Memoirs and the countless biographies about him did not surface until well after the play’s success. Friel, still an active playwright, remains tight-lipped about his past so few know that his work is autobiographical, and O’Neill’s past, while known by many at the time of the publication of Long Day’s Journey Into Night, was not common knowledge for his audiences then or even now. Regardless of their origins in personal truth, the universal truths that these plays voice mesmerize audiences.

Not only did these plays transcend their autobiographical origins, they also helped to pioneer a change in the way plays are written and produced. O’Neill and Williams began the movement with their use of extensive and descriptive stage directions, an aspect of drama unheard of before these two men started writing. Friel continued the movement by incorporating the same type of descriptiveness in his plays two decades later. Williams, perhaps building on the example of O’Neill, also created a new subgenre of drama—the memory play. This subgenre helped to move theatre away from the well-made plays of its past and opened up a whole new future for contemporary playwrights, such as Friel.

The pioneering efforts of Williams, Friel, and O’Neill have not only shown playwrights how to write
"authobiographical" memory plays, but they have shown contemporary dramatists that theatre can and must evolve. The forms must continually be tested and changed. No memory is too personal, no demon too fierce in the search for inspiration for theatrical works of art. In fact, the "authobiographical" memory play form has already taken new shape in the hands of some of the most promising contemporary writers. These new versions of the old form are not exact replicas. Playwrights such as Sam Shepard, August Wilson, Wendy Wasserstein, David Henry Hwang, and Tony Kushner have used the form to reveal personal truths in the face of oppressive political and social forces. Sometimes the plays have narrators, sometimes they do not, but ultimately the plays voice the desires and memories of their authors using many of the conventions established by Williams and O'Neill.

No matter what evolution the "authobiographical" memory play takes, the form is an established and effective subgenre. *The Glass Menagerie, Dancing at Lughnasa, and Long Day's Journey Into Night* are all masterpieces of drama because their playwrights took on established conventions and changed the face of an entire genre. Whether a play follows the blueprint of a memory play to the letter or follows the spirit behind the concept, ultimately these
types of plays attempt to present "truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion."
NOTES

Memory plays are not always autobiographical. As a type of drama, memory plays are very popular. Another famous playwright, Peter Shaffer, is well known for his use of the memory play. Two of his most famous plays, Amadeus and Equus, successfully use the conventions of the memory play. Both plays contain narrators who retell their stories in a dreamlike way. The memories of these narrators direct the action of the plays. The difference is that Shaffer’s plays, while loosely based on actual events, are not based on the author’s life. So while not all memory plays are autobiographical, the most successful vehicle for an autobiographical drama is as a memory play.

Many of the characters in Williams’s plays are named after real acquaintances of the author. Some of the most notable examples are family friends Blanche and Stella Cutrer, and Williams’s co-worker in the shoe factory, Stanley Kowalski—all of whom became characters in A Streetcar Named Desire (Leverich 55,130). Also, Williams encountered a bully in his youth, Brick Gotcher, who called Williams a sissy and beat him up. Years later, Williams retaliated by making Brick a latent homosexual and the main
character in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Leverich 55).

3Other Irish writers have characterized this absence of a father figure in Irish identity. For instance, J. M. Synge’s comic play, *The Playboy of the Western World*, contains an alcoholic father, Michael James, and a cowardly protagonist, Christy Mahon, who leaves Pegeen Mike in the end. His tragedy *Riders to the Sea* ends with only female characters lamenting the loss of their men to the sea. James Joyce has also dealt with this theme in his fiction, most notably in “The Boarding House” from *Dubliners* in which the strong-willed Mrs. Mooney runs a boarding house after being separated from her drunk and violent husband.
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