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TRADUCTION

Les traducteurs parlent aux lecteurs

Atelier «Traducteur d'un jour» – Traduire le théâtre

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Avec Isabelle Famchon

The Glass Menagerie, de Tennessee Williams

-  Indications / contexte
-  À traduire en atelier

SCÈNE 1

The Wingfield apartment is in the rear of the building, one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower-middle-class population and are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation and to exist and function as one interfused mass of automatism.

The apartment faces an alley and is entered by a fire-escape, a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation. The fire escape is included in the set - that is, the landing of it and steps descending from it.

The scene is memory and 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 therefore rather dim and poetic. (At the rise of the curtain, the audience is faced with the dark, grim rear wall of the Wingfield tenement. This building, which runs parallel to the footlights, is flanked on both sides by dark, narrow alleys which run into murky canyons of tangled clothes-lines, garbage cans, and the sinister lattice-work of neighboring fire-escapes. It is up and down these alleys that exterior entrances and exits are made, during the play. At the end of Tom's opening commentary, the dark tenement wall slowly reveals (by means of a transparency) the interior of the ground floor Wingfield apartment.

Downstage is the living room, which also serves as a sleeping-room for Laura, the sofa is unfolding to make her bed. Upstage, center, and divided by a wide arch or second proscenium with transparent faded portieres (or second curtain), is the dining room. In an old fashioned what-not in the living room are seen scores of transparent glass animals. A blown-up photograph of the father hangs on the wall of the living room, facing the audience, to the left of the archway. It is the face of a very handsome young man in a doughboy's First World War cap. He is gallantly smiling, ineluctably smiling, as if to say 'I will be smiling forever'.

The audience hears and sees the opening scene in the dining room through both the transparent fourth wall of the building and the transparent gauze portieres of the dining-room arch. It is during this revealing scene that the fourth wall slowly ascends out of sight. This transparent exterior wall is not brought down again until the very end of the play, during Tom's final speech.

The narrator is an undisguised convention of the play. He takes whatever license with dramatic convention is convenient to his purpose.

***Tom** enters dressed as a merchant sailor from alley, stage left, and strolls across the front of the stage to the fire-escape. There he stops and lights a cigarette. He addresses the audience.*

Tom : Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.

To begin with, I turn back time. I reverse it to that quaint period, the thirties, when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them or they had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy.

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...

This is the social background of the play.

MUSIC

The play is memory.

Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic. In memory everything seems to happen to music. That explains the fiddle in the wings.

I am the narrator of the play, and also a character in it. The other characters are my mother Amanda, my sister Laura and a gentleman caller who appears in the final scenes.

He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from. But since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a symbol; he is the long-delayed but always expected something that we live for. There is a fifth character in the play who doesn't appear except in this larger-than-life-size photograph over the mantel.

This is our father who left us a long time ago. He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances; he gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of town. . . .The last we heard of him was a picture postcard from Mazatlan, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, containing a message of two words - 'Hello - Good-bye!' and no address.

I think the rest of the play will explain itself ...

AMANDA's voice becomes audible through the portieres.

LEGEND ON SCREEN : 'Où SONT Les NEIGES'

He divides the portieres and enters the upstage area.

Amanda and **Laura** are seated at a drop-leaf table. Eating is indicated by gestures without food or utensils. **Amanda** faces the audience. **Tom** and **Laura** are seated in profile.

*The interior has lit up softly and through the scrim we see **Amanda** and **Laura** seated at the table in the upstage area*

Amanda (*calling*) : Tom?

Tom : Yes, Mother.

Amanda : We can't say grace until you come to the table!

Tom : Coming, Mother.

He bows slightly and withdraws, reappearing a few moments later in his place at the table.

Amanda (*to her son*) : Honey, don't push with your fingers. If you have to push with something, the thing to push with is a crust of bread. And chew ! Chew ! Animals have sections in their stomachs which enable them to digest food without mastication, but human beings are supposed to chew their food before they swallow it down. Eat food leisurely, son, and really enjoy it. A well-cooked meal has lots of delicate flavours that have to be held in the mouth for appreciation. So chew your food and give your salivary glands a chance to function !

Tom *deliberately lays his imaginary fork down and his chair back from the table.*

Tom : I haven't enjoyed one bite of this dinner because of your constant directions on how to eat it. It's you that makes me rush through meals with your hawk-like attention to every bite I take. Sickening - spoils my appetite - all this discussion of - animals' secretion - salivary glands -mastication !

Amanda (*lightly*) : Temperament like a Metropolitan star !

He rises and crosses downstage.

You're not excused from the table.

Tom : I'm getting a cigarette.

Amanda : You smoke too much.

Laura rises.

Laura : I'll bring in the blanc mange.

He remains standing with his cigarette by the portières during the following.

Amanda (*rising*) : No, sister, no, sister - you be the lady this time and I'll be the darky.

Laura : I'm already up.

Amanda : Resume your seat, little sister, I want you to stay fresh and pretty for gentleman callers!

Laura : I'm not expecting any gentleman callers.

Amanda (*crossing out to kitchenette. Airily*) : Sometimes they come when they are least expected! Why, I remember one Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain –

Enters kitchenette.

Tom : I know what's coming

Laura : Yes. But let her tell it.

Tom : Again?

Laura : She loves to tell it.

Amanda returns with bowl of dessert.

Amanda : One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain, your mother received seventeen! gentlemen callers! Why, sometimes there weren't chairs enough to accommodate them all. We had to send the nigger over to bring in folding chairs from the parish house.

Tom (*remaining at portieres*) : How did you entertain those gentleman callers?

Amanda : I understood the art of conversation !

Tom : I bet you could talk.

Amanda : Girls in those days knew how to talk, I can tell you.

Tom : Yes?

IMAGE : Amanda AS A GIRL ON A PORCH GREETING CALLERS.

Amanda : They knew how to entertain their gentlemen callers. It wasn't enough for a girl to be possessed of a pretty face and a graceful figure although I wasn't alighted in either respect. She also needed to have a nimble wit and a tongue to meet all occasions.

Tom : What did you talk about?

Amanda : Things of importance going on in the world ! Never anything coarse or common or vulgar.

She addresses Tom as though he were seated in the vacant chair at the table though he remains by portieres. He plays this scene as though he held the book.

My callers were gentleman -all! Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta - planters and sons of planters!

Tom motions for music and a spot of light on AMANDA. Her eyes lift, her face glows, her voice becomes rich and elegiac.

SCREEN LEGEND : 'Où SONT Les NEIGES'

There was young Champ Laughlin who later became vice-president of the Delta Planters Bank.

Hadley Stevenson who was drowned in Moon Lake and left his widow one hundred and fifty thousand in Government bonds.

There were the Cutrere brothers, Wesley and Bates. Bates was one of my bright particular beaux! He got in a quarrel with that wild Wainwright boy. They shot it out on the floor of Moon Lake Casino. Bates was shot through the stomach. Died in the ambulance on his way to Memphis. His widow was also well provided for, came into eight or ten thousand acres, that's all. She married him on the rebound - never loved her - carried my picture on him the night he died! And there was that boy that every girl in the Delta had set her cap for! That brilliant, brilliant young Fitzhugh boy from Greene County!

Tom : What did he leave his widow?

Amanda : He never married ! Gracious, you talk as though all of my old admirers had turned up their toes to the daisies !

Tom : Isn't this the first you've mentioned that still survives ?

Amanda : That Fitzhugh boy went North and made a fortune - came to be known as the Wolf of Wall Street! He had the Midas touch, whatever he touched turned to gold!

And I could have been Mrs. Duncan J. Fitzhugh, mind you! But - I picked your father !

Laura (*rising*): Mother, let me clear the table.

Amanda : No, dear, you go in front and study your typewriter chart. Or practise your shorthand a little. Stay fresh and pretty! It's almost time for our gentlemen callers to start arriving.

She flounces girlishly toward the kitchenette.

How many do you suppose we're going to entertain this afternoon?

Tom throws down the paper and jumps up with a groan.

Laura (*alone in the dining-room*): I don't believe we're going to receive any, Mother.

Amanda (*reappearing, airily*): What? Not one - not one? You must be joking!

Laura nervously echoes her laugh. She slips in a fugitive manner through the half-open portières and draws them in gently behind her. A shaft of very clear light is thrown on her face against the faded tapestry of the curtains.

MUSIC : 'THE GLASS MENAGERIE' UNDER FAINTLY. Lightly.

Not one gentleman caller? It can't be true ! There must be a flood, there must have been a tornado!

Laura : It isn't a flood, it's not a tornado, Mother. I'm just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain. ...

Tom utters another groan. Laura glances at him with a faint, apologetic smile. Her voice catching a little.

Mother's afraid I'm going to be an old maid.

THE SCENE DIMS OUT WITH 'GLASS MENAGERIE'

Music