Newman’s poor camerawork mars latest version of Glass Menagerie

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Reads out loud the famous opening monologue, rendering it a dull and listless speech without much conviction. His best moment comes while delivering the closing monologue, where he improves dramatically to match his poetic demands. It is unfortunate that John Sayles was not available for the role.

Similarly, it is unfortunate that Newman has no idea where to place his camera. He badly misuses close-ups, rapidly cutting from one character to another. This results in unnecessarily disorienting complications, although Newman does subtly work psychological distance through his placement of most of those characters within the frame. In other scenes, Newman excessively moves his camera around characters and even behind minor objects such as a lamp. This is given his own bedroom for what seems no other reason than to give Newman another room to shoot in. It seems as though Newman tries to deliberately emphasize the static nature of his version, and it undermines his goal to remain faithful to Williams.

The other technical aspects do work well, however. The mood of the film established by its set design and lighting is properly somber, with embellishments like fancy costumes and occasional lively music creating an aura of controlled yet appropriate elegance. These display a careful attention to detail worthy of a labor of love.

While the filmmakers’ intentions were true and sound, Newman’s poor camerawork and Malkovich’s generally less than stellar acting mar this otherwise well made film. Today’s audiences can enjoy its acting and other pleasures, but this 1987 version of The Glass Menagerie is not the definitive depiction of Williams’ brilliance the filmmakers set out to create.

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