

Study Guide

A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams

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Introduction

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A Streetcar Named Desire is the story of an emotionally-charged confrontation between characters embodying the traditional values of the American South and the aggressive, rapidly-changing world of modern America. The play, begun in 1945, went through several changes before reaching its final form. Although the scenario initially concerned an Italian family, to which was later added an Irish brother-in-law, Tennessee Williams changed the characters to two Southern American belles and a Polish American man in order to emphasize the clash between cultures and classes in this story of alcoholism, madness and sexual violence.

A Streetcar Named Desire was staged in the United States in 1947 in Boston and New York. A film version appeared in 1951, directed by Elia Kazan. The play, first published in book form in 1947 (New York: New Directions), was issued again with an introduction by the author in 1951. In 1953 an edition for actors was brought out by the Dramatists' Play Service. In England, editions appeared in 1949 (London: John Lehman) and 1956 (Seeker and Warburg). Penguin Books now incorporates *Streetcar* with two of Williams' other plays, *Sweet Bird of Youth* and *The Glass Menagerie*, in a volume of its Twentieth Century Classics Series.

Author Biography

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Tennessee Williams was born Thomas Lanier Williams on March 26, 1914, in Columbus, Mississippi, the son of Cornelius Coffin Williams and Edwina Dakin. The nickname Tennessee was not acquired until he was grown and attending college. Williams had an elder sister, Rose, who was later committed to a mental institution, and a younger brother, Walter Dakin. Because their father often worked away from home, Williams and his siblings were particularly close to their mother, a Southern belle and daughter of an Episcopal minister who enjoyed her status as a pillar of town society.

In 1918 the Williams family moved to St Louis. As Cornelius began to drink heavily and became increasingly moody, Edwina voiced her resentment at losing both her place in society and her close ties with her parents. In response to this unhappiness, and to the emotional pain of being bullied by children in the neighborhood, Williams began to read books and write his own stories; years later, in the foreword to *Sweet Bird of Youth* he commented that writing was "an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge."

Beginning in 1929 Williams studied at the University of Missouri at Columbia, at Washington University in St Louis, and at the University of Iowa, meanwhile making a name for himself as a writer. Although this period was a creative one, and one in which his personal life settled down (he seems to have come to terms with his homosexuality at this point), there were also difficult times to endure. In response to his sister Rose's extreme mental instability, Edwina Williams consented to having a pre-frontal lobotomy performed on Rose, from which the young woman emerged severely changed.

Williams' emergence as a major new force in American theater occurred with the debut performance of *The Glass Menagerie* in 1944. He soon moved to New Orleans, the city which later figured strongly in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and spent time in Europe and in Florida, where he bought a house. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was the playwright's next major commercial success in 1955 but by this time Williams' physical health was deteriorating and he was relying increasingly on alcohol and drugs. Numerous other plays followed, some of them successful, but his personal life remained in turmoil. In fits of paranoia, he quarreled with his agent, Audrey Wood, and his lover Frank Merlo. In 1966 his brother Dakin was contacted when Williams' health was particularly poor, and during the time he spent with Dakin he converted to Roman Catholicism. In the following years several unsuccessful plays were written and performed, and several of his earlier, acclaimed plays were revived. In 1983, after a spell of depression, Williams traveled to Sicily, remaining only a few days before returning to New York, where he died during the night of February 24 in the Elysee Hotel after choking on a barbiturate.

Plot Summary

Plot Summary

Scenes 1 and 2

The play opens in a shabby district of New Orleans where Stanley Kowalski lives with his wife Stella. After they leave for the bowling alley, where Stanley is to play with his friend Mitch, a well-dressed woman arrives carrying a suitcase. This is Blanche DuBois, Stella's sister. Hardly believing that this is Stella's home, Blanche ungraciously accepts the invitation of the landlady, Eunice, to wait inside. She appears nervous and highly strung and searches out a supply of alcohol, supposedly to calm her nerves. When Stella returns they greet each other fondly, but there is a hint of unease between them.

On his return home, Stanley meets Blanche and they talk amicably, but as the conversation develops and as details of Blanche's past come out--particularly her marriage to a husband who is now dead, and the loss of Belle Reve, the family's property-- we see Stanley beginning to distrust her. Blanche makes herself very much at home, taking long and frequent baths and drinking Stanley's alcohol, even whilst making disparaging comments about Stanley and Stella's standard of living.

Scene 3

The tension in the house continues in the next scene when the sisters return after an evening out to the house where Stanley is holding a poker party. Resenting the interest that Mitch, one of his friends, shows in Blanche, the now drunken Stanley shows his jealousy of Blanche and becomes violent with Stella, who we now know is pregnant. After retreating briefly upstairs to the Hubbells' apartment, Stella returns to Stanley and they go off to bed together.

Scene 4

Despite this brutality and Blanche's attempts to persuade her to leave him, Stella insists that she loves Stanley and will not leave him. Overhearing Blanche's hostile comments about him, Stanley determines to follow his suspicions about her and to find out more about her recent past. He discovers that she left Laurel, her home town, because of rumors about her promiscuity and her relationship with a young student.

Scene 5

When Stanley hints to Blanche about what he knows, she is clearly terrified that it will all come out and tries to present a glossed-over version to Stella, focusing on her fear of growing old alone and hinting at a possible future with Mitch. After Stella's departure, Blanche flirts with a young man who arrives to collect newspaper subscriptions.

Scene 6

Blanche and Mitch's date in the next scene is not a success, but when they return home they speak more openly and Blanche tells Mitch of her dead husband who, we gather, was homosexual, and shot himself when she discovered him in bed with another man. Mitch comforts her and they discuss marriage.

Scenes 7 and 8

Shortly afterwards there is a birthday dinner for Blanche, but Mitch, having been told by Stanley about Blanche's past, does not show up. The meal is awkwardly silent and, to make it worse, Stanley presents Blanche with a bus ticket back home as a supposed birthday gift. Stella complains at his cruelty, but then goes into labor. Stanley takes her to the hospital.

Scene 9

Mitch then visits Blanche, who is alone in the apartment. In a drunken state he tells her that he knows about her past and, when she tries to explain, dismisses her explanation as lies. He tries to force her to have sex but she resists and threatens to call for help. Left alone again, she drinks more alcohol and loses herself in delusions of a rich millionaire who will look after her.

Scene 10

Stanley returns from the hospital to find Blanche dressed up in a ball gown and tiara, trying to pack her suitcase. He mocks her, tells her what he thinks of her, and allows his anger to be transformed into sexual violence as he carries her off to bed to rape her.

Scene 11

A scene change denotes the passing of time at this point and we next see Stella, returned from the hospital, unwilling to believe her sister's story and in agreement with Stanley that Blanche should be certified as insane. Blanche packs her things, believing that she is to leave with a rich admirer. While she is taking another bath and Stanley and his friends are again playing poker, a doctor arrives with a nurse from a mental hospital. Realizing what is about to happen, Blanche tries to escape, but is calmed by the gentle doctor. She leaves on his arm, stating that she has always placed her trust in the kindness of strangers. Stanley's friends are horrified and Stella is almost hysterical with tears, but Stanley remains calm and soothes his wife into acquiescence. Life, it is suggested, will continue.

Scene 1

Scene 1 Summary

Tennessee Williams' most famous play opens outside 632 Elysian Fields. This two-story flat in the poor district of New Orleans is the home of Stanley and Stella Kowalski. It is dusk on a May evening and voices from the busy street and blues music from a nearby bar create a backdrop of noise. Additional background noise comes from an occasional train that rumbles through on the L & N tracks and stray cats that roam the street. Williams uses these noises, particularly the music, to establish and enhance the mood of each scene.

Stanley, a muscular, unrefined auto parts supplier, is headed to the bowling alley around the corner with his friend Steve, who lives upstairs. He stops near the flat and hollers at his wife, Stella. Stella, a far gentler creature than Stanley, comes outside and Stanley throws her a package of meat. This exchange amuses Steve's wife Eunice and a Negro woman who are sitting outside.

Stella decides to go watch Stanley bowl and while they are gone, a stranger arrives at Elysian Fields. Blanche DuBois is clearly out of place with her delicate features and dainty dress. She approaches the flat and explains to the two women sitting outside that she must be in the wrong place.

"They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at--Elysian Fields...they mustn't have--understood--what number I wanted."

It turns out that Blanche is in exactly the right place. The two-room flat between the railroad tracks and the river is indeed the home of Blanche's sister, Stella Dubois Kowalski. Eunice is the landlord of the flat and lets Blanche into the Kowalski's apartment. In a brief conversation with Eunice, we learn that Blanche is a teacher from Mississippi and that she and Stella grew up on a plantation known as Belle Reve.

While Blanche waits alone in the flat, she finds a bottle of whiskey and helps herself to a drink. She is careful to wash her glass, and she puts the bottle back exactly where she found it. Stella rushes in from the bowling alley and the two sisters grab each other in an affectionate embrace. Blanche begins speaking in an uncontrollable rush as she expresses her surprise and dismay at Stella's living conditions. At one point she says only Edgar Allan Poe could adequately describe the horror of Stella's situation.

Blanche asks Stella for a drink to calm her nerves. Stella can hardly get a word in edgewise as Blanche continues to talk in an agitated and nervous manner. Blanche is offended by her quietness. Blanche is nervous about meeting Stanley and concerned that it will not be proper to stay in such small quarters with a man. She says she will not consider staying in a hotel because she cannot be alone. In truth, Blanche cannot afford a hotel.

Stella's most talkative moment in the Scene I comes when she describes her relationship with Stanley. She tells Blanche that she cannot stand it when Stanley is away traveling for work and she cries on his lap like a baby when he returns. Blanche remarks ruefully that that must be the meaning of being in love.

Blanche continues to drink and to downplay the habit. As her agitation grows, she tells Stella a little more about why she has come to New Orleans. She says that she is on a leave of absence from teaching because of nerves. She then breaks the news to Stella that the DuBois family has lost Belle Reve. Blanche chastises Stella for leaving her alone at Belle Reve 10 years earlier to handle the deaths of the relatives and the loss of the estate. Stella retreats to the small bathroom in tears. While she is off stage, Stanley returns home and meets Blanche for the first time.

Stanley stares at Blanche and the two immediately size each other up. Blanche speaks first and introduces herself. Stanley grabs the whiskey bottle and notices its diminished volume. He offers Blanche a drink but she declines saying she rarely touches liquor.

Stanley removes his shirt, a gesture he openly declares as practical and unrefined. He interrogates the nervous Blanche and as the scene ends, we learn that as a young woman, she had been married to a boy who died.

Scene 1 Analysis

Williams introduces several conflicts in the opening scene of his tragedy. The first conflict is the class struggle. New Orleans is a city where race and class distinctions are blurred. Eunice chats easily with the Negro woman. Stanley plays poker with Pedro (a character who will be introduced in the next scene) and Stella, a former Southern debutante, marries a Polish blue-collar worker. All of these actions would have been unusual in other parts of the south during the 1940s. Choosing New Orleans as his setting allows Williams to draw a sharp contrast to the world of strict class distinctions and social mores; the world represented by Blanche.

Williams also introduces a sexual tension in the opening moments that will be carried through the play. Eunice and the Negro woman laugh as Stanley throws Stella a package of meat. The women find this scene filled with sexual overtones. It can also be interpreted as a base act that reveals Stanley's primitive nature. He is the man of the house who has gone on the hunt and brought the spoils home to his woman. Throughout the play, Williams will explore sexual desires and drive as well as woman's dependence on man.

The first scene also sets up the contentious relationship between Blanche and Stanley. Blanche is a frail, self-absorbed woman who is past her prime and knows it. Stanley is a powerful, virile character who relates to women through sexual conquest. His brutally honest, heterogeneous character represents the changing social landscape of America after World War II. Blanche is prim and proper, or at least works hard to appear so. She represents the crumbling social pillars of the old and genteel South. Their relationship will provide the major action in the play.

It is hard to identify clearly either Blanche or Stanley as the protagonist in the play. Certainly neither one is a heroic character. However, "Streetcar" is more Blanche's story than it is Stanley's. The play depicts the desperation and final downfall of the waning Southern belle.

Early on, Williams gives us an allegory for Blanche's life in the directions he has her follow to the Kowalski's home. As we will learn in later scenes, Blanche has ridden her desires (the streetcar named desire) as far as she can and is now experiencing a kind of death (the streetcar named Cemeteries). She ends up in Elysian Fields, a place in Greek mythology where blessed souls lived after death. The Kowalski's New Orleans neighborhood probably falls short of Blanche's idea of heaven.

Several of the themes that Williams will explore in "Streetcar" are drawn from his own life. Williams' father was an alcoholic and his mother, sister and he himself struggled with depression and nervous breakdowns. Williams was a sickly, effeminate child who was bullied at school. The rough, brutish character of Stanley may be a composite of these bullies and Williams' own father.

Scene 2

Scene 2 Summary

Scene 2 opens inside the Kowalski flat the night after Blanche arrives. Fancy clothes are strewn across the bed and Blanche is bathing. The girls are planning to go out to dinner and a show in the French Quarter while Stanley hosts poker night in the apartment. As they prepare for the evening, Stella tells Stanley that Belle Reve is lost. He becomes suspicious that Blanche has sold the plantation and is trying to cheat Stella out of money.

He questions Stella about papers relating to the sale. She tells him she has not seen any papers. He lectures her on the Napoleonic Code, a set of laws that give husbands the rights to their wives' property. Stanley explains to Stella that if Blanche has swindled her, then she has swindled him as well, and he does not like to be cheated.

Stanley tears through Blanche's trunk ranting that she has spent Stella's inheritance on expensive clothes and jewelry. Stella knows that the clothes are old and inexpensive and the jewelry is cheap costume pieces, but Stanley is unconvinced. Stella begs Stanley not to upset Blanche when she gets out of the bath. She asks him specifically to compliment Blanche on her appearance and not to mention the fact that Stella is pregnant. Blanche steps out on the porch and asks Stanley to do the same so Blanche can have some privacy while she dresses. Stanley refuses to be ordered around by a woman.

When Blanche emerges from her bath in a red satin robe, she tells Stanley she feels fresh and clean. She steps behind the curtain to dress and asks Stanley to help her with the buttons on the back of her dress. Stanley confronts Blanche about her array of clothes, furs and jewelry. She explains that they are gifts from past admirers as she fishes unashamedly and unsuccessfully for compliments from Stanley about her appearance.

Stanley becomes frustrated and yells at Blanche to cut the crap and lay her cards on the table. Stella rushes in when she hears Stanley holler. Blanche quickly sends Stella to the drugstore around the corner to buy a lemon coke with ice. With Stella out of the house, Blanche and Stanley confront each other.

The private conversation begins with Blanche telling Stanley she understands him better than Stella does and she is ready to answer any question he has. She admits that she often fibs, but never about important matters. Stanley launches into a description of the Napoleonic Code. Blanche responds with the flirtatious gesture of squirting him with jasmine perfume. Stanley is not amused and grabs the atomizer out of her hand.

Stanley wants to know what happened to Belle Reve. When Blanche goes to her trunk to get the legal papers, he snatches another bundle of papers, which turns out to be love letters from Blanche's late husband. Blanche is deeply offended by Stanley's rough handling of the letters.

Blanche gives Stanley a stack of legal papers that detail the history of how the DeBois men "exchanged the land for their epic fornications." Stanley realizes that the ancestral home has indeed been lost through a mortgage default. He backs down and tries to explain his need to know about Belle Reve on the account of the baby.

Blanche meets Stella on the porch as she returns with the lemon coke. Stella apologizes for Stanley's behavior and Blanche talks dreamily about the baby Stella is carrying. The two women set off for the French Quarter as a street vendor selling tamales shouts, "Red hot!"

Scene 2 Analysis

In Scene 2, Williams reveals more of Stanley's character. In the early dialogue, we see that Stella knows how to handle his tirades and roguish talk, though she cautions him to be gentle with Blanche. Stanley's view of women as men's property becomes clearer as he expounds on the Napoleonic Code. He also asserts his manhood by refusing to take orders from Stella.

Stanley shows his ignorance as he paws through Blanche's trunk and rants about the value of her clothes and jewelry. He is clearly a man who is often wrong, but never in doubt. We are reminded that Stella comes from a different class as she watches Stanley and tries to explain how ridiculous his behavior is.

Bathing is a constant metaphor in the play. Blanche takes numerous baths to try to wash away her past and give herself a clean start. She emerges from a hot bath in Scene 2 and declares herself "freshly bathed and scented, and feeling like a brand new human being." Stanley is not buying the clean act. He is suspicious of Blanche and wants to know what she is hiding, especially about Belle Reve.

As the two dance around each other like boxers in the ring, Blanche sends Stella on an errand. In a sense, Stella is the prize for which Stanley and Blanche are fighting. They both are trying to protect Stella from the power and influence of the other.

We learn several key facts as the contents of Blanche's trunk are revealed in this scene. First, we discover how destitute Blanche is. All of her worldly possessions are in her trunk and, despite Stanley's notions, all they really amount to are a pile of faded clothes and worthless rhinestone jewelry. We also learn that Blanche was telling the truth about Belle Reve. The plantation was lost, not sold. There is no inheritance for Stella or Stanley to claim.

The information that Belle Reve was lost through the fornications of past DuBois generations gives us some clues about Blanche's past. It also shows that the DuBois men may be more like Stanley Kowalski than Blanche could ever recognize.

We learn more about Blanche's deceased husband when Stanley finds the love letters and poems. Blanche tells Stanley that her husband was young and vulnerable and she hurt him. She also expresses the telling insight that she is aware Stanley wants to hurt her in the same way.

We also discover that Stella is pregnant. The presence of the unborn child heightens the conflict. There will be no easy escape. The DuBois and Kowalski families are now inextricably linked and must figure out how to blend their disparate pasts. Blanche acknowledges that perhaps the baby will need some of Stanley's survival instinct in the changing world.

Williams ends the scene with poignant symbolism. The street vendor yells, "Red hot." This phrase could refer to the sexual heat between Stella and Stanley or the escalating conflict. It could also foreshadow what we have yet to learn about Blanche's past.

Scene 3

Scene 3 Summary

It is poker night in the Kowalski's apartment. Stanley, Steve, Pedro Gonzales and Harold Mitchell, who goes by the nickname Mitch, sit around the kitchen table. They are dressed in colorful shirts and the table is strewn with empty beer bottles and watermelon rinds.

At 2:30 in the morning, Blanche and Stella return to the flat. As they approach and hear that the game is still in progress, Blanche nervously powders her nose and fusses over her appearance. When the women enter the kitchen, Stella introduces Pedro and Steve to Blanche. Mitch is in the bathroom. Stella suggests that the men might wrap up the game. Stanley quickly rebuffs her suggestion and slaps her on the rear. She is embarrassed by his gesture.

Stella and Blanche retreat to the bedroom where they meet Mitch as he comes out of the bathroom. Mitch is awkward and nervous around Blanche but there is an apparent spark of attraction. When Mitch returns to the poker table Blanche comments that he seems superior to the others. Stella explains that Mitch works at the auto parts plant and lives with his dying mother. He is more sensitive than the other men are, but Stella feels that Stanley is the only one of the bunch who is going anywhere.

Blanche is in an intoxicated, flirtatious mood and stands in the light as she removes her dress. She turns on the radio and begins to sway seductively to the music. The men can obviously see her shadow. Stanley is annoyed by the radio and turns it off.

Mitch leaves the poker table for another trip to the bathroom, which he blames on the amount of beer he has been drinking. When he realizes Stella is in the bathroom, he makes small talk with Blanche. Mitch offers Blanche a smoke and shows her the inscription on his silver cigarette case, which reads, "And if God choose, I shall love you better after death." Mitch explains that the case was a gift from a young girl who died.

Lost loves, dying parents and the Elizabeth Barrett Browning quote on the cigarette case draw Mitch and Blanche into a deeper conversation. Stanley continues to yell for Mitch to return to the poker table. Blanche flirts with Mitch and lies to him about her age and about why she has come to New Orleans. She asks him to hang a paper lantern over the bare light bulb that illuminates the room

As Stella comes out of the bathroom, Blanche turns on the radio and begins to waltz. Mitch moves uncomfortably to the music. The radio raises Stanley's ire and he storms into the bedroom and throws it out the window. Stella calls him a "drunk animal thing." He responds by chasing her off stage and beating her. The men move to pull Stanley off Stella who cries out, "I want to go away."

Blanche grabs some clothes for Stella and the women flee upstairs to Eunice's apartment. The men attempt to calm Stanley down with a cold shower. He fights them off and they grab their winnings and leave him alone in the apartment. As the realization of what has happened sets in, Stanley phones upstairs but Eunice will not allow him to talk to Stella. He eventually moves out to the porch and begins to bellow, "Stell-lahhhh!"

Stella eventually comes out on the balcony and looks down at her husband. They rush together with animal moans. Stanley caresses Stella's belly then carries her back into the flat. Blanche comes out of Eunice's apartment looking for her sister. She begins to go into the Kowalski's flat but stops short. Mitch has been waiting quietly in the shadows. He offers Blanche a cigarette and a listening ear as she bemoans the events of the evening.

Scene 3 Analysis

In the stage notes at the beginning of this scene, Williams expresses his desire that the setting resemble a Van Gogh painting. Van Gogh's style was brutal and honest. His colors were vibrant and violent. This is the feel Williams wants to create. The music from the bar around the corner rises and falls with the violence of Scene 3.

Williams uses Scene 3 to establish the primitive, animalistic qualities of Stanley's personality and of his relationship with Stella. He slaps Stella on the thigh, hurls a radio through the window and brutally beats his wife. Near the end of the scene, he is outside baying plaintively for his wife to return. We learn from the response of his friends that this behavior is nothing new. Mitch and Eunice both refer to past incidents of Stanley roughing Stella up. His behavior seems to be almost dismissed as business as usual.

Williams begins to explore the themes of bullying, abuse and reconciliation, loneliness and the influence of alcohol--themes he is personally intimately acquainted with. Around the poker table, we see the men, particularly Stanley, tease and bully the more sensitive Mitch who lives at home with his mother. It is this sensitivity that Blanche finds attractive.

Blanche and Mitch are clearly two lonely, desperate people who are drawn together by shared suffering and need. Both have lost loves and both have nursed sick parents. Their mutual needs will be further explored in Scene 4. Blanche explains her philosophy that sorrow makes people more sincere. Ironically, even as she says this, she lies to Mitch by saying she is younger than Stella is and has come to New Orleans because of Stella's frail health.

Williams is dropping clues about Blanche's past throughout the act. She is seductive and flirtatious and clearly interested in how men respond to her. Her description of youth discovering first love foreshadows her later encounter with a young newspaper collector and depicts her own longing for the past.

The theme of light plays a part in Scene 3. Blanche fears being exposed in direct light, both literally and figuratively. She asks Mitch to cover the bare bulb that hangs in the bedroom with a paper shade. She does not want the truth about her age or about her life to be revealed.

At the end of the scene, Blanche is horrified to realize her sister has returned to Stanley after the beating. Stella has not only forgiven her husband but is now involved in a passionate, sexual encounter with him. She turns to Mitch for comfort. On one level, Mitch seems to recognize that there is something unhealthy about the Kowalski's relationship but he tells Blanche not to worry: "They're crazy about each other."

Scene 4

Scene 4 Summary

The morning after the poker game finds Stella and Blanche in decidedly different states. Blanche, agitated and disheveled, returns to the apartment to find a serene Stella languishing in bed reading a comic book. Stanley is out getting the car greased and the radio repaired. Blanche cannot believe Stella's calmness and Stella does not understand her sister's consternation. Stella dismisses Stanley's behavior as simply what happens when men drink and play poker.

As Blanche questions Stella about Stanley's violent temperament, Stella confesses that on their wedding night, Stanley broke all the light bulbs in the room with her shoe. Blanche is horrified and says, "And you--you let him? Didn't run? Didn't scream?" Stella replies, "I was--sort of--thrilled by it."

Stella begins to clean up the apartment while Blanche tries to think of a way to get them both out of the situation. Stella points out that she is not in anything she necessarily wants to get out of. This does not deter Blanche from searching her addled brain for a solution. She remembers an old beau, Shep Huntleigh, who made his money in Texas oil. Blanche says she ran into Shep last Christmas in Miami. She is certain he will help the sisters out by setting them up in a shop, even though he is married.

Blanche is set on her plan and picks up the phone to contact Western Union. She does not know how to operate a dial phone and gives up in frustration. Stella laughs as Blanche begins to write out the message she intends to wire to Shep. Stella's laughter prompts Blanche to confess that she is broke. She has just sixty-five cents. Stella offers Blanche five dollars; half of the money Stanley gave her that morning as a peace offering. Blanche refuses the money.

Blanche begins another round of trying to convince Stella to leave Stanley. She appeals to her upbringing and her sense of propriety. Stella defends her love for Stanley and says the passion between them makes the other things unimportant. Blanche mocks her sister's desire by comparing it the streetcar that bangs up and down the narrow streets of the French Quarter. Stella reminds Blanche that she has also known passion and desire.

The conversation stops as a loud train passes by. During the noise, Stanley enters the apartment unnoticed. As the noise of the train fades away, Blanche attacks Stanley's character head on. She calls him common and bestial. She is unaware Stanley is listening to every word she says. She compares to him to a primitive ape that has failed to evolve and develop any tenderness or love of art or beauty. She begs Stella, "Don't hang back with the brutes!"

Another train passes, and under the cover of its noise, Stanley slips out the front door. Moments later, he enters and greets the women. Stella runs to him and grabs him in a fierce embrace. As he clutches Stella to his chest, Stanley peers over her head and smiles at Blanche.

Scene 4 Analysis

Psychologists will point out the typical cycle of abuse in the Kowalski's relationship. The abuse is followed by reconciliation, appeasement and promises. We learned enough about Stanley in Scene 3 to know that the cycle is likely to be repeated, but at the beginning of Scene 4, Stella is peaceful and content. She is basking in the afterglow of a passionate meeting with her husband. Blanche is furious that her sister can so easily dismiss Stanley's violent behavior.

Williams again uses the metaphor of the streetcar as Blanche begins to chastise Stella for living only for brutal desire.

She compares Stella's marriage to the streetcar named desire that "bangs through the Quarter, up one narrow street and down another." Stella counters by asking Blanche if she has not also taken a ride on that streetcar. Blanche's telling response: "It brought me here--Where I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be."

This is Blanche's most honest self-assessment of the entire play. Her desires have lead to her downfall and now she is dejected and ashamed. When Williams first wrote his play, he called it "Poker Night." It is evident now that "The Streetcar Named Desire" is a title that works better on many different levels.

We see a new side of Blanche as she tries to plot a way of escape for Stella and, more importantly, for herself. Blanche came to New Orleans to escape and it is now evident to her that there will be no escape for her in the home of Stanley Kowalski. She fights desperately with herself to think clearly and formulate a new plan. We see her calculating how to use men for money and security. Stanley's view of women may be sexist and primitive, but Blanche's view of men is no better. She reveals that she is more than willing to use them to get what she wants.

Because of Blanche's previous lies and her unstable mental condition, the audience is unsure how to interpret her relationship with Shep Huntleigh. Is he pure fantasy? Is Blanche overestimating her influence on men? As the play progresses, we see that Shep Huntleigh, be he real or imagined, becomes Blanche's last hope.

Blanche's inability to use a dial phone shows that she unprepared to deal with the changing world. Williams uses Blanche to express that the ways of the Old South are incongruous with the more heterogeneous post-war society. As Blanche compares Stanley to an ape that has failed to evolve, she reveals her fear that the world is becoming uncivilized and dangerous to her genteel ways. Blanche represents a dying way of life and finds little sympathy as she feels it slipping away.

At the end of the scene, we are reminded of the competition between Stanley and Blanche for Stella's affections. As Stanley smiles at Blanche, he is fully aware that Blanche has fought hard and lost this round.

Scene 5

Scene 5 Summary

It is now August. Blanche has been with the Kowalskis more than three months. Scene 5 opens with Blanche writing a letter to Shep Huntleigh. She is amused at the yarn she is spinning and laughs aloud. Stella does not share Blanche's pleasure in the tale of how the sisters are spending the summer attending teas and luncheons.

The letter writing is interrupted by a disturbance upstairs. Eunice is yelling at Steve and accusing him of infidelity. She threatens to call the police if he hits her. The sisters hear crashes and bangs, then silence. Blanche asks nervously, "Did he kill her?"

Stanley returns home. He has passed Eunice as she raced downstairs and around the corner threatening to call the police. Instead, she goes for a drink. Stella comments that this solution is more practical. Moments later Steve comes to the Kowalski's door looking for Eunice. He has a bump on his head. Stanley directs him to the Four Deuces, the bar around the corner where Eunice has gone. Later in the scene, the Hubbells (Steve and Eunice) return to their apartment wrapped in each other's arms.

The air between Stanley and Blanche is especially icy. He laughs at her assertion that she is learning new language from Steve and Eunice and mocks her again when she says she was born under the sign of Virgo (the virgin). He has a reason for his taunting. A man named Shaw, who travels through Laurel on auto parts business, has told Stanley some information about Blanche. Stanley moves in for the kill.

When he asks Blanche if she knows anyone named Shaw, she is visibly shaken. She allows that Shaw is a very common name. Stanley says that this Shaw often travels through Laurel and claims that Blanche was known to frequent a seedy hotel there. She says that Shaw must have her mixed up with someone else because she would never go to that sort of establishment. As she denies Stanley's veiled accusations, she pours perfume on her handkerchief and wipes her brow.

After Stanley leaves for the Four Deuces, Blanche nervously asks Stella what people have been saying about her. Stella has no idea what Blanche is talking about. Blanche begins to confess that she was not always so good when she was under the stress of losing Belle Reve. She begins to talk frantically of being soft and growing old and worrying that she no longer has what it takes to "turn the trick." She also promises to leave the Kowalski's before Stanley throws her out. Stella cannot keep up with or understand all that her sister is saying.

Stella gets Blanche a coke but Blanche wants a shot in it. As Stella begins to pour the drink, it foams over on Blanche's dress. Blanche lets out a shrill scream, which startles them both. After she calms Blanche down and helps her blot the coke from her dress, Stella asks Blanche why she screamed. Blanche says she is nervous about her date that night with Mitch.

Blanche confides in Stella that she is afraid Mitch will lose interest in her because of her age (which he does not know) or because she will not "put out." She tells Stella she needs Mitch to want her so he will take her away from Elysian Fields.

Stanley is hollering for Stella, Steve and Eunice to join him at the bar. Stella quickly reassures Blanche that everything with Mitch will work out. She gives Blanche a kiss and leaves to join Stanley. Steve and Eunice run playfully down the stairs and two couples head off happily.

Blanche is left alone in the apartment. A teenage boy comes to the door collecting for the newspaper. Blanche jokes and flirts with him. The boy is clearly uncomfortable with her seductive advances. Before he leaves, she kisses him fully on the lips. Then she reminds herself, "I've got to be good--and keep my hands off children." As the collector leaves, Mitch arrives carrying a bunch of roses.

Scene 5 Analysis

Blanche's carefully constructed façade as the prim and proper schoolteacher is beginning to crumble. Stanley, who has been suspicious of her since she arrived, has been checking into her past. Through a man named Shaw who works at his company, Stanley learns that Blanche was known for her liaisons at the Flamingo Hotel. If what Shaw says is true, Blanche's will be revealed as a hypocrite.

Though Blanche denies knowing Shaw or being a "guest" at the Flamingo, she is clearly unsettled. She begins to hint to Stella that she has not always been good. Her confession that she is not sure how much longer she can turn the trick is an obvious reference to a sordid sexual past.

Facing the fact that her ruse may soon unravel, Blanche becomes nervous about her relationship with Mitch. She is hoping that Mitch will prove to be her escape from the Kowalski's home. She has lied to Mitch and led him on. She is using him in the hope of gaining rest and security.

Throughout the play, Blanche has set herself up as the moral superior of Stanley, Stella and their friends. Now we begin to question if she herself is really the most depraved character. In the scene with the newspaper collector, we get to look into Blanche's past and see the behavior that led to her downfall. We are left to wonder how someone like Blanche can so easily condemn others for their passions and desires. The conflict of the play is now escalating as Stanley threatens to expose a past that Blanche is increasingly desperate to hide.

Scene 6

Scene 6 Summary

Scene 6 is the date between Mitch and Blanche that occurs immediately after Blanche's encounter with the young newspaper collector. The scene opens as they return to the flat about 2:30 in the morning. They have been to an amusement park. The Kowalskis are still out with the Hubbells from upstairs. Mitch and Blanche are both in a depressed mood. It has not been a fun evening. They both apologize for not being more entertaining.

As they stand at the doorway searching for the apartment key in Blanche's bag, Blanche tells Mitch she has overstayed her welcome with Stan and Stella and must soon pack up and leave. She then goes into a dreamy state as she looks at the stars. Mitch asks if he may kiss her. She replies that he does not have to ask permission. He is confused because Blanche had spurned his advances one night while they were parked near a lake. Blanche explains that a single girl must keep a firm hold on her emotions so she will not be lost.

Blanche invites Mitch inside the apartment for a drink. She begins to refer dramatically to this night "being the few last remaining moments of our lives together." She decides that they should pretend they are at a sidewalk café in Paris and celebrate the joy of life with candlelight. She begins speaking French, which Mitch does not understand. She teases him by saying in French, "Do you want to sleep with me tonight? You don't understand? That's a shame."

Mitch is embarrassed to remove his coat because of perspiration. Blanche takes it from him anyway. She admires Mitch's physique and he seems uncharacteristically proud and self-confident as he describes how he exercises at the New Orleans Athletic Club. He asks Blanche to guess his weight. He then asks her weight. When Blanche invites him to guess, he picks her up and declares she is as light as a feather. Blanche insists he put her down immediately, claiming that she has old-fashioned ideals. She rolls her eyes as she says this, but Mitch cannot see her expression in the dark room.

Blanche tells Mitch that Stanley does not like her and treats her rudely. She wants to know if Stanley has told Mitch anything about her. Mitch says he has not. He also says he cannot imagine anyone being rude to Blanche. She complains about Stanley's commonness and tells Mitch she is forced to spend the summer with the Kowalskis because she did not save any of her meager teaching salary.

Mitch then stuns Blanche by asking how old she is. He says that when his mother asked him Blanche's age, he did not know how to answer. Blanche deftly changes the subject to his mother's health and Mitch's devotion to her. She says she knows how Mitch will feel when his mother dies because she, too, has loved and lost. She then tells the story of Allan Grey, her young husband who died.

Blanche fell in love with Allan when she was just sixteen. Discovering love, she said, was like having a blinding light turned on something that had always been in the shadows. They eloped and soon after the marriage, Blanche began to sense that she was failing Allan somehow. It became clear to her when she found him in bed with an older man. One night at a dance, as they danced the Varsouviana, she taunted Allan about his homosexuality. He ran outside the dance hall and shot himself.

Mitch listens to Blanche tell the tragic tale then slowly embraces her and says, "You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be--you and me, Blanche?" Blanche begins to cry as he tenderly kisses her and says, "Sometimes--there's God--so quickly."

Scene 6 Analysis

Blanche has a lot on her mind and is not able to give her full attention to Mitch on their date. Her worries begin to spill out when they return to the apartment. She tells Mitch she must soon leave Stanley and Stella's because Stanley hates her. Her rantings and complaints about Stanley make Mitch uncomfortable, as he is one of Stanley's closest friends. Blanche seems oblivious and asks Mitch what Stanley has been saying about her. She is trying to find out if Stanley has told Mitch any of the information he learned from Shaw.

Blanche continues her coy act as the proper Southern lady, though she gives hints the act is wearing thin, even for her. As she tells Mitch she has old-fashioned ideals, she rolls her eyes. She cruelly teases Mitch in French after he says he does not understand the language.

As the play goes on, we see Blanche as more calculating and cynical. Her prim actions with Mitch contrast dramatically with her seductive actions toward the newspaper collector. She is a woman torn by desires she cannot deny but does not know how to fulfill legitimately. Her life is a double standard and she seems to be cruelest to those who care the most about her. She is more than willing to use Mitch but is not willing to be caught up in any desire for him or to pay attention to his desires.

When Mitch asks her age, her anxieties about being discovered as a fraud grow. Rather than answer the question, she reveals the truth about her young husband. We learn that his name was Allan Grey and that she discovered him in bed with a man. It is not surprising that Williams would explore the theme of homosexuality. He himself was a homosexual. Williams may have endured taunts just like the one from Blanche that led to Allan's suicide.

The theme of light comes up again in Scene 6. Blanche describes first love as a blinding spotlight that brought everything out of the shadows. Ironically what she thought was true, honest love was really an unsatisfactory relationship when a man who had hidden secrets. Perhaps the light of love is more blinding than revealing. After Allan killed himself, Blanche says the light went out and there has been no light stronger than a candle since. Blanche longs for light but fears it at the same time.

Mitch recognizes a practical solution to their situation. He needs to be settled before his mother dies. Blanche needs to escape from Stanley. He asks if they could be together. This is not a romantic moment. It is purely pragmatic. We assume that Blanche's tears and her mild praise of God indicate that she feels she has found a way out even if it is through the dark.

Music plays an important part in Scene 6. The Varsouviana polka begins to play as Blanche recalls her husband's suicide. The music is associated with the breaking point in her life as will play again in future scenes as she moves further and further from reality.

Scene 7

Scene 7 Summary

It is a mid-September afternoon and Stella is preparing a birthday dinner for Blanche. She is decorating the table when Stanley comes home. Blanche is taking another one of her long, hot baths. Stanley has news for Stella about Blanche's past. He has checked out the stories from Shaw and is now prepared to expose Blanche. As he begins to tell Stella the truth about her sister, Blanche is singing and laughing merrily in the bath.

Stanley tells Stella that Blanche was carrying on illicit affairs at the Flamingo Hotel in Laurel. Even the second-class hotel could not ignore her immoral behavior and asked her to leave. That is when she came to New Orleans. Stanley has also learned that Blanche is not on a leave of absence from her school as she claims. Rather, she lost her teaching job because she was involved in a relationship with a seventeen-year-old boy. Stella angrily accuses Shaw of making up lies.

In addition to her moral failings, Stanley says Blanche became known in Laurel as a crazy woman. Her home was off limits to soldiers stationed at a nearby army base. Stella defends her sister by saying that Blanche has always been flighty and was devastated by her marriage to a homosexual.

The table is set for four and Stanley asks who is coming to dinner. Stella says that Mitch has been invited for cake and ice cream. Stanley says he doubts Mitch will show up in light of the new revelations about Blanche. Stella is angry that Stanley has told Mitch what he has heard. Stanley claims he was obligated to tell his army buddy what he knew. Stella is afraid that Mitch will no longer want to marry Blanche.

Stanley also reveals that he has brought Blanche a one-way bus ticket back to Laurel. Stella protests. When Blanche finally emerges from the bathroom, she is happy and refreshed until she notices Stanley's anger and Stella's unease. She fears something has happened.

Scene 7 Analysis

This short scene is the beginning of the end for Blanche DeBois. She is once again in a hot bath trying to cleanse herself from her past. As Stanley comes home and begins to expose Blanche's lies to Stella, Blanche sings a popular song about the fantasy of being in love. The lyrics floating from the bathroom provide an ironic counterpoint to the cruel reality Stanley is describing in the kitchen.

Now we know the truth about Blanche. She is a perverse, crazy woman who has lost her job and her home and has come to New Orleans pretending to be all that she is not. The audience feels disdain for both Blanche and her hypocritical act and for Stanley and his ruthless exposure of her sins. There is little grace or sympathy shown by either party.

Stella is caught in the middle. She defends Blanche but at the same time admits that the reports of Shaw might have some truth in them. She is angry at Stanley for hounding her sister and especially for ruining Blanche's chances with Mitch. Yet even as the truth is laid out before her, Stella helps Blanche keep up the charade. She puts just 25 candles on the birthday cake.

Blanche's gay mood when she finishes her drink and her bath quickly evaporates when she realizes something is wrong. The action is building toward its climax.

Scene 8

Scene 8 Summary

Scene 8 opens during Blanche's birthday dinner. The place set for Mitch is empty and the atmosphere is tense. Blanche comments that they should not all be solemn because she has been stood up. She begs Stanley to tell a joke to lighten the mood. He declines. Blanche herself tells a joke about a parrot. Stella laughs politely when the joke is finished. Stanley responds by spearing a pork chop from the platter and eating it with his hands.

Stella chastises Stanley for his poor manners and greasy fingers. He erupts and throws his plate to the floor. He tells his wife he is tired of being looked down and called names by the two women. He smashes his cup and saucer on the floor and announces that his place is cleared. Stella begins to sob quietly as Stanley stalks out to the porch.

Blanche once again asks Stella what happened while she was in the bath. It is clear that Stella knows something about why Mitch did not show up but refuses to tell Blanche. Blanche decides to call Mitch herself even though Stella begs her not to. Mitch is out so Blanche leaves a message.

While Blanche is on the phone, Stella joins Stanley on the porch and confronts him about his rude behavior. She is still crying softly. Stanley embraces her and tells her things will be all right once Blanche leaves and the baby is born. Then, he says, they will be able to enjoy passionate nights together as they used to.

Back inside the kitchen, Stella begins to light the candles on Blanche's cake. Blanche tells her not to light the candles but to save them for the baby's birthdays. Stanley complains about the heat and humidity from Blanche's bath. Blanche bites back saying she has already apologized three times and she cannot expect a Polack without nerves to understand her need for a hot bath. Stanley responds to her slur by saying he is not a Polack. People from Poland are called Poles, he corrects her. He himself, however, is one hundred percent American.

One of Stanley's bowling buddies calls. While he is on the phone, Blanche snaps at Stella for her sympathetic, pitying gestures. Stanley yells at Blanche to be quiet. When he gets off the phone, he presents Blanche with a birthday gift. She seems flattered with the gesture until she opens the envelope and finds the one-way ticket to Laurel. Blanche runs from the room clutching her throat and gagging as the Varsouviana polka music begins to play.

Stella is angry with Stanley and chides him for his cruelty. She says people like him have abused the tender and trusting Blanche all of her life. Stanley prepares to go bowling but Stella grabs his shirt and demands to know why he has treated Blanche so harshly. He tells her that when he first met Stella, he pulled her down off the pillars of Belle Reve and they were happy being common together. When Blanche showed up, things changed. As Stanley is talking, Stella shuffles toward the kitchen. Stanley notices that her demeanor has changed. She has gone into labor and asks Stanley to take her to the hospital.

Scene 8 Analysis

Nerves are frayed as Stanley, Stella and Blanche finish up the birthday dinner. We are not surprised to see Stanley's anger in this scene, but we are surprised when each of the women has her own outburst. It is clear that the living situation has been stretched to its breaking point.

Stanley has lost all patience with Blanche and feels justified in forcing her out of his home. He asserts that he is the king

of the house, a position that Blanche has threatened by reminding his wife that she is of a different class than Stanley. He explains his contempt for Blanche in light of her influence over Stella. He implores Stella to remember the times when they enjoyed being common together. He has been humiliated and degraded by Blanche and he fears his wife is starting to see him as her sister does.

Stanley also expresses sexual frustration. Physical attraction is clearly the basis of the Kowalski's relationship. With Blanche in the house, they have had to cool their passionate lovemaking.

For the first time Blanche shows her anger directly to Stanley. She says she is done apologizing for the bath and calls him a Polack who lacks sensitivity or feeling. Stella watches both parties spar and eventually turns on Stanley herself. She is outraged by his cruelty.

The conflict between Stanley and Stella ends suddenly when she goes into labor. Just as she asserts some independence and begins to confront Stanley's violent and cruel behavior, her labor begins and she is powerfully reminded that she is inextricably linked to this man. In a touch of irony, the baby will be born near Blanche's birthday just as she herself is about to figuratively die. As Stanley presents Blanche with the bus ticket back to Laurel, the Varsouviana music begins to play signaling another breaking point in Blanche's life.

Scene 9

Scene 9 Summary

Stanley has taken Stella to the hospital and Blanche is alone in the flat. She is hunched up in her red satin robe on a chair in the bedroom. She has a glass and bottle of liquor beside her. She hears the Varsouviana polka in her head.

The doorbell rings and startles Blanche. She asks who it is and Mitch answers. She quickly hides the liquor bottle and dabs on some powder and perfume. She throws open the door and greets Mitch enthusiastically. She expects a kiss, but Mitch, who is unshaven and in his work clothes, ignores her and walks into the apartment.

Blanche chatters on about being upset with him for missing her birthday dinner and forgiving him all the same. She tells him about the music in her head. Mitch ignores her, sits down on the bed and lights a cigarette. Blanche offers him a drink, but he says he does not want any of Stan's liquor. Blanche says that not everything in the apartment belongs to Stan even as she pretends not to know what liquor might be on hand.

She rummages through the closet and finds a bottle of Southern Comfort. Blanche acts as if she does not know what it is. Mitch astutely replies, "If you don't know, it must belong to Stan." Mitch tells her that Stanley says that she has been drinking up his liquor all summer. Blanche takes umbrage at this accusation.

Mitch, who was drinking before he arrived, has now gathered enough courage to talk about the real reason he dropped by. He asks Blanche why he has never seen her in the light. She has refused to go out with him before six o'clock and only wants to go to dark places. Mitch says he wants to see her in the light. He tears the paper lantern off the bulb and prepares to switch on the light. Blanche is horrified. Mitch says he just wants to be realistic. Blanche cries that she does not want realism. She wants magic.

At this point, Blanche confesses that she often lies because she tries to give people magic. She says that she prefers what ought to be to what actually is. Despite her protests, Mitch turns the light on. He stares at her as she cowers and covers her face. He turns the light back off. In the dark, he tells her he does not mind her being older than he thought, but he thought she was straight.

Blanche asks just whom Mitch has been listening to. He tells her that he heard stories about Blanche from Stanley and from Shaw. He called a merchant in Laurel named Kiefaber to check on the stories himself. All three men told him the same things about Blanche. Blanche tries to discredit the witnesses but realizes it is a lost cause.

Between sobs and drinks, Blanche tells Mitch the sordid details of her past. She says she turned to strangers for comfort after Allan's suicide. She even confesses her liaison with the seventeen-year-old boy. She tells Mitch she had hoped that he would be her refuge but Kiefaber, Stanley and Shaw have ruined that for her.

There is a long pause after Blanche's confessions. Finally, Mitch says simply, "You lied to me, Blanche." Blanche defends herself by saying she never lied on the inside.

At this point, a blind Mexican vendor appears outside the apartment. She is selling flowers that are used to decorate graves. She is saying in Spanish, "Flowers. Flowers. Flowers for the dead." Blanche goes to the door and stares at the vendor as she offers the flowers. The woman's words seem to unhinge Blanche from reality. She begins talking to herself about bloodstained pillowslips and caring for her mother and how they cannot afford a maid.

Blanche also talks of death. She says death is close and death is the opposite of desire. She also talks about the soldiers lying drunk on her lawn and calling her name. She would sometimes go out to them knowing her deaf mother would never hear. The entire time Blanche is talking to herself, the vendor's cry of "Flowers. Flowers. Flowers for the dead," can be heard in the background.

Mitch has watched this whole scene dumbfounded. He now moves toward Blanche and puts his hands around her waist. She asks him what he wants and he says, "What I've been missing all summer." She tells him he must marry her first. Mitch says she is not clean enough to bring into his mother's house. Blanche tells him to go away. When he does not move, she screams, "Fire!" out the window. Mitch flees the apartment and Blanche crumbles in a heap on the floor.

Scene 9 Analysis

With a flick of a light switch, Blanche's life comes tumbling down. Scene 9 marks the end of her elaborate outward charade and begins her retreat into her own internal fantasy world. When Mitch turns on the bare light bulb, Blanche is literally and figuratively exposed for what she is. In the light, it is clear that she is older than she has claimed. In the light of the accusations from people in Laurel, it is also evident that she is not the old-fashioned, prim and proper Southern lady she has attempted to portray.

Once she has been exposed, Blanche gives up trying to pretend. The change in her attitude is evident when she sarcastically describes the hotel she lived as the Tarantula Arms and tells Mitch that is where she brought her victims. As she tells Mitch the truth about her past, she moves further and further away from reality. When the Mexican vendor appears selling flowers for the dead, the break is completed.

In Scene 9, Blanche expresses her desire to perceive the world as it ought to be rather than as it really is. Her longing for a magically world is incompatible with the reality of life on Elysian Fields. She lives in the fantasy of a dying way of life while those around her live in the reality of a changing world.

Blanche blames Stanley, Kiefaber and Shaw for dashing her hopes of happiness, or at least escape. The audience is left to decide who is responsible for the demise of Blanche DuBois. We learn at the opening of the scene that Blanche has descended into madness before. She talks of hearing the music in her head and of knowing it will end when she hears the gunshot. The Varsouviana is used to indicate her unstable mental condition.

Mitch shows genuine care for Blanche at the same time he is disgusted by her. He tells her several times that he could have lived with her age but not with her dishonesty. He even mercifully shuts off the light after exposing Blanche in it for just a few moments. Mitch does not force himself on Blanche sexually, but the situation foreshadows what is to come in Scene 10.

Scene 10

Scene 10 Summary

It is a few hours after Mitch leaves the apartment. Blanche has been drinking and has pulled her trunk into the center of the bedroom. Clothes hang out of the open trunk and she has changed into a crumpled white satin evening gown and a pair of silver shoes. She puts a rhinestone tiara on her head and fantasizes that she is at a party. She talks to imaginary admirers gathered around her about going for a late night swim. When she looks at herself in a hand mirror, she violently slams the mirror down on the dressing table, cracking the glass.

Stanley enters the flat in good spirits. Stella is doing fine. The baby probably will not arrive until morning so he has come home to sleep. He asks Blanche why she is dressed up. She tells him she has received a wire from Shep Huntleigh asking her to cruise the Caribbean on his yacht. She tells Stanley she has been going through her trunk to pack and see what she has to wear.

Stanley opens a beer and offers one to Blanche. He lets the foam pour over his head. He invites Blanche to bury the hatchet and celebrate his baby and her millionaire. She declines the offer.

Stanley goes to the bedroom and retrieves a pair of silk pajamas from the bureau. He says he wears these pajamas from his wedding night for special occasions. Blanche tells him more about Shep Huntleigh. She says he is a wealthy man who wants the companionship of a cultivated woman like her self. Shep, she says, appreciates her intelligence, her breeding and her spirit even though her physical beauty is fading. She becomes emotional as she recounts all she believes she has to offer men but has wasted as she foolishly cast her pearls before swine.

She explains her meaning by saying outright that Stanley and Mitch are swine. She tells Stanley that Mitch came by and tried to accuse her of lurid things. She sent him away but he came back later with roses to beg her forgiveness. She claims that she told Mitch she could not forgive deliberate cruelty. She also told them that their different backgrounds and attitudes make them incompatible.

Stanley asks if Mitch came back before or after she received her telegram. Blanche stumbles and says, "What telegram?" Stanley uses this opening to tear down her fantasy. He tells her there is no telegram and that he has seen Mitch and knows he did not return to ask for forgiveness. Stanley tells Blanche he has been on to her deceit and tricks from the moment she arrived in New Orleans.

Blanche becomes frightened. When Stanley goes into the bathroom, she attempts to reach Shep Huntleigh first by phone then by telegram. The telegram she starts to dictate says, "In desperate, desperate circumstances! Help me! Caught in a trap!" As she attempts the calls, a violent scene unfolds on the street outside. A drunkard struggles with a prostitute. A policeman breaks up the fight. The Negro woman from Scene 1 then appears and rifles through the purse that the prostitute has dropped.

Stanley emerges from the bathroom in his silk pajamas and Blanche gives up on the telegram. She does leave the phone off the hook. Stanley replaces it for her. He then corners her. Blanche grabs a bottle and breaks the end off. She threatens him with the jagged glass. He leers at her with his tongue between his teeth, grabs her wrist and tells her to drop the bottle. As he subdues her he says, "We've had this date with each other from the beginning." Blanche goes limp and Stanley carries her to the bed. The scene ends with frenetic, driving music that indicates Stanley has raped her.

Scene 10 Analysis

The play reaches its climax when Stanley rapes Blanche. The rape does not occur on stage, partly because the play was first performed in 1947 when such action would have been inappropriate and partly because it is not necessary to depict the action. The audience knows what happens through the dialogue and the skillful use of music.

When Scene 10 opens, we see that Blanche has descended further into her fantasy world. She has dressed up and is talking to imaginary party guests. Only a look in the mirror momentarily upsets her illusion.

Stanley comes home in a good mood. He laughs at Blanche but does not immediately mock her. He listens to her story about the telegram from Shep Huntleigh. It is not clear whether Blanche creates this story for Stanley or is fully convinced of it her self. In Stanley's jovial mood, he suggests that they bury the hatchet and celebrate their good fortune. His mood changes when Blanche begins to lament that she has cast her pearls before swine like Stanley and Mitch.

After Blanche tells the fanciful tale about Mitch coming back to beg forgiveness, Stanley systematically tears her fantasy apart. As he points out the falsehood of each claim, Blanche seems to shrink. When he is done, she is frightened and defenseless. She cannot even find her way back to her fantasy world to escape.

The words that Blanche claims she said to Mitch express her feelings about Stanley and Stella's relationship. Blanche says she would never forgive deliberate cruelty as Stella has. She also says, in veiled references, that Stanley and Stella's backgrounds and attitudes are incompatible. Stanley reads the lines and is angered by Blanche's remarks.

The violence in the street and the shadows on the wall symbolize Blanche's fear. Every seedy thing that goes on right outside the door represents reality intruding on her world. The drunkard, the prostitute and the thief represent Blanche as she really is, rather than who she wishes to be.

Stanley's brutal actions demonstrate again his view of women as property. He perceives women as objects of sexual conquest and he has obviously thought about Blanche this way since she arrived. His line, "We've had this date with each other from the beginning," shows that the rape is not a spur of the moment decision. Conquering Blanche has always been his aim and he uses sexual domination, the weapon he knows best, to deliver the final blows. The rape pushes Blanche completely into the dark world of her mind. She has feared the light, but in the end, it is the dark that consumes her. Symbolically, the rape represents the conquering of the old ways of life in the South by the new heterogeneous society.

Scene 11

Scene 11 Summary

Several weeks after the rape, Stella is tearfully packing Blanche's trunk. Blanche is in the bath. A poker game is underway in the kitchen. Stanley is bragging about his luck and skill at winning. Mitch reacts angrily to the boasting.

Eunice enters the apartment to help Stella. She tells Stella the baby is sound asleep and offers Stella some grapes. Stella tells Eunice that Blanche has refused to eat but did ask for a drink. Stella explains that they told Blanche she is going away to the country to rest. Blanche has mixed it up in her mind and believes she is leaving with Shep Huntleigh.

Blanche pokes her head out of the bathroom door and asks Stella to take a message if anyone calls while she is in the bath. She also asks Stella to get out her yellow suit and the jewelry that she wishes to wear. At this point, Stella confides in Eunice that she could not believe Blanche's story about the rape and continue to live with Stanley. Eunice comforts Stella and tells her never to believe it, but to keep going on with life.

Before Blanche exits the bathroom, she checks to make sure the coast is clear. Stella assures her the curtains are closed and it is safe to come out. The Varsouviana polka begins to play as Blanche emerges from the bathroom. Stella and Eunice fawn over Blanche complimenting her hair. Blanche asks if she got a call. Stella replies, "Why not yet, honey."

Blanche hears Stanley's voice from the other room and momentarily freezes. She then begins to panic and demands to know what is going on. At the sound of Blanche's voice, Mitch stares off into space and loses his concentration on the card game. The men restrain Stanley from interfering when Blanche cries out. The women settle her down and help her dress.

Blanche is concerned about eating unwashed grapes. She describes how she will live the rest of her life at sea and die from eating an unwashed grape. A young, attractive ship's doctor will hold her hand and the other passengers will feel sorry for her. She will be buried at sea in a clean white bag.

The doorbell interrupts her reverie. A doctor and matron from a state institution wait on the porch. Eunice answers the door and reports that someone is calling for Blanche. Blanche fearfully asks if it is the gentleman she has been expecting. Eunice says she believes it is. Blanche balks and says she not quite ready and she does not want to walk through the kitchen past the men. Stella tells Blanche she will walk with her.

Blanche asks Stella how she looks and the two women walk through the kitchen toward the door. Blanche says, "Please don't get up. I'm only passing through." The men, except Mitch, do rise. When the doctor greets Blanche, she says hysterically, "You are not the man I was expecting." She backs into the apartment. The matron follows her inside.

As Blanche heads for the bedroom, Stanley asks if she forgot something. She says yes and steps around him as he tries to block her way. The doctor tells the nurse to bring her out. Stanley asks what Blanche forgot and guesses it might be the paper lantern that covers the light bulb. He reaches up and tears it down. Blanche shrieks. As Blanche tries to run, the matron catches her and Blanche falls to her knees. When Mitch tries to enter the bedroom Stanley pushes him back. Mitch collapses in tears.

Stella runs outside to escape the scene. Eunice follows her friend. Stella begs Eunice not to let them hurt Blanche and asks, "What have I done to my sister?" Eunice holds her, part in comfort and part in restraint and reassures her again that she is doing the right thing.

The doctor enters the bedroom. He removes his hat and gets down on Blanche's level so he can look her in the eye. He tells the matron a straitjacket will not be necessary. At Blanche's request, he asks the matron to release her. He then offers Blanche his arm and lifts her from the floor. Blanche takes his arm and begins to walk toward the door with him. She says, "Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

As the doctor leads Blanche around the corner, Stella calls out her sister's name. Blanche does not look back. Eunice brings Stella her baby and she clutches the baby and breaks into deep sobs. Stanley leaves the poker game to go outside and comfort his wife. He seductively soothes her by caressing her breast and moaning, "Now, honey, now love..." Meanwhile, inside, Steve announces that the next game of poker will be seven-card stud.

Scene 11 Analysis

In the waning action of the play, we see a defeated Blanche and a proud and cocky Stanley. When the scene opens, Blanche is in the bath, but this bath is not like the ones earlier in the play. There is no singing. She does not emerge refreshed but tentative and scared. The bath symbolizes ritualistic cleansing. This time, Blanche is trying to cleanse herself from the emotional stains of the rape.

Blanche is now living in her fantasy world. She is expecting Shep Huntleigh, her knight in shining armor, to arrive any moment and rescue her. She awaits his calls and prepares for his expected arrival. She longs for the life aboard his yacht. She describes to Eunice and Stella how she will die at sea and be buried in a clean white bag. This description of death represents the ultimate ritualistic cleansing. She will at last be clean and submerged in the water she has always turned to for comfort.

Symbolically, she says she will die from eating an unwashed grape. Something unclean will kill her. She recognizes that on some level, her own lack of cleanliness has been her death.

Blanche's response to men in Scene 11 is a sharp contrast to her interactions earlier in the play. She had performed for them, teased them and sought their approval and affections. Now she cowers from them. The rape has clearly taken any remaining spirit and desire she possessed. Blanche repeats a line from Scene 3 when she tells the men not to get up from the poker table. Ironically, this time they do rise and show her a measure of respect.

Mitch shows that his feelings for Blanche were real as he struggles with watching her being taken away. He and Stella are the only characters who cry for Blanche and seem to recognize that there is something innately wrong and sorrowful in her defeat.

The theme of light makes a final appearance. When Stanley rips the paper lantern from the bulb, Blanche is finally and ultimately exposed. The emotional spotlight of the play switches to Stella in Scene 11. She tells Eunice that cannot believe Blanche's accusations about the rape if she is to go on living with Stanley. Eunice tells her twice that she must do whatever it takes to go on with life. Stella is now the one living a lie. She knows her husband and on some level, she must believe at least part of her sister's story. She makes her choice and stays with Stanley because she believes it is the only way to survive.

Stella is not so different from Blanche. Blanche has relied on men for her survival. Even in the end, she willingly puts her life in the hands of the doctor. The final line of the play is a symbolic reminder that the game of life goes on under whatever rules we choose to follow.

Characters

Characters

Doctor

The Doctor's role is to escort Blanche to the mental hospital. He is calm, professional, and treats Blanche respectfully in order for her to trust him.

Blanche du Bois

Blanche DuBois is a complex individual who provokes strong reactions from the other characters. We know that she has been a schoolteacher in Mississippi but was asked to leave her job because of an involvement with a student, that she was once a Southern belle from a wealthy family, and that she has a failed marriage and dubious past from which she has fled. Her complexity comes not from her history or background, but from the varied and often inconsistent facades she presents. At once strong in her desires and determined in her claims on the men who are around her, and yet weak and forever looking for someone to take care of her, she gives off a series of conflicting signals. She is neurotic, psychologically deluded about her beauty and attractiveness, and perhaps also an alcoholic. Her sexual desires come through clearly from behind her talk with Mitch about keeping her reputation: when we see her flirting with the young man who calls at the door, we realize just how split her desires are from her surface talk and behavior. This point is made visually in the opening scene where the dainty and beautifully dressed woman who appears leads us to expect quite a different character to emerge than the brittle woman running from her past who begins to display her neuroses and obsessions during the course of the following acts.

Underneath Blanche's quite calculating exterior, there is always a hint of hysteria. In her stories about Belle Reve or her tales of previous lovers, there is something edgy in her conversation, a threat of something that might erupt if she is not handled carefully. This disjunction between emotional surface and depth is brought out throughout the play in the way that Blanche cannot face up to her past, but only reveals glimpses of it through her neurotic behavior and occasional comments. For example, she is forever taking baths as if to clean her conscience, but continues to talk about her past actions in terms which suggest that she has no conception of their moral implications. Admitting, for example, that it is her affairs which have led to her losing her job and being ruined financially, she can only ask Stella, in a roundabout fashion, "Haven't you ever ridden on that streetcar [named Desire] ... It brought me here." In similarly oblique terms, she describes a passionate affair as "someone you go out with--once--twice--three times when the devil is in you." Her flirtation with Stanley and the man at the door also suggest that she does not have the self-awareness to realize that what she is doing here is no different from the things she has done in the past which she claims to regret so much.

Not only does Blanche lack self-awareness, she is also utterly self-centered. As a house-guest in a small apartment, her behavior is intensely irritating. (If David Mamet's play *Oleanna* could be described as a play about a man who needs an answering machine, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a play about a man who needs a guest room.) Not only must Blanche's presence disrupt Stanley and Stella's sexual intimacy, but it also spoils the routine of their everyday life, particularly because she is always in the bath when anyone else needs to use the bathroom. The fact that she freely (and dishonestly) drinks Stanley's whisky and that she sends the pregnant Stella off to run errands for her further emphasizes a selfish nature.

Yet, despite her contradictions, dishonesty, inconsistency, and selfishness, Blanche comes across as a sympathetic, if not entirely likeable, character. Williams himself commented that "... when I think about her, Blanche seems like the youth of our hearts which has to be put away for worldly considerations: poetry, music, the early soft feelings that we can't

afford to live with under a naked light bulb which is now." Even though her faults are plain to see, Blanche still commands pity. Williams thought that this pity was an important element of the play. In a letter to Elia Kazan, the first director of *Streetcar*, he answered a question which Kazan had put to him, saying, "I remember you asked me what should an audience feel for Blanche. Certainly pity. It is a tragedy with the classic aim of producing a catharsis of pity and terror and in order to do that, Blanche must finally have the understanding and compassion of the audience. This without creating a black-dyed villain in Stanley. It is a thing (Misunderstanding with a capital M) not a person (Stanley) that destroys her in the end. In the end you should feel 'If only they had known about each other.' Perhaps part of the reason for this pity is that Blanche's tragedy does not come about only because of her actions, but because of the flaws of society itself. As the old gentility of the South is threatened by modernization and industrialization, and as women's roles become uncertain as they are caught between old ideals of beauty and gentility and the modern toleration of sexual license, Blanche appears to be stranded at a crossroads, with each choice of path risking society's disapproval and her ultimate destruction.

Pablo Gonzales

Pablo Gonzales is the other player at poker along with Stanley, Mitch, and Steve. He is coarse and loud, a strong, physical character who is, according to the stage directions, "at the peak of [his] physical manhood." He also speaks Spanish.

Eunice and Steve Hubbell

Eunice and Steve Hubbell, the landlords who live upstairs from Stanley and Stella, are a vision of what Stanley and Stella could become. Eunice is overweight and run down from too many pregnancies while Steve is not particularly understanding or supportive of his wife. Domestic violence appears to be routine in their marriage. Despite their failings, however, Steve and Eunice are not unlikeable characters. They are hospitable and neighborly and take Stella in when she seeks refuge from Stanley. Their audible presence upstairs gives a sense of the cramped living conditions in which the play's actions occur.

Stanley Kowalski

Much of Stanley's character is seen through his relationship with Blanche. Stanley does not seem to have a life outside of the immediate action of the play, but when he is onstage he has a commanding presence, a quality underlined by Blanche's obvious sexual attraction to him. She even jokingly tells Stella that she has been flirting with Stanley to get him to see her side of the story about the loss of Belle Reve. While this may be her motivation, it's obvious that Blanche is genuinely attracted to Stanley and that flirting does not take too much effort on her part.

Blanche's response to Stanley's strong presence suggests that he is some kind of an animal. In earlier versions of the play, Stanley had a gentler, ineffectual side, but in the final writing of *Streetcar* Williams made him Blanche's complete opposite-- angry, animalistic, and reliant on his basest instincts. These qualities are seen most clearly in Blanche's rather patronizing, but highly revealing comment to Stanley that "You're simple, straightforward and honest, a little bit on the primitive side I should think. To interest you a woman would have to ..." The sentence is finished off for her by Stanley, but what we suspect she would have said is what she later says to Stella: that the only way to live with a man like Stanley is to go to bed with him. For Blanche, Stanley's sexual appeal and his primitive nature are closely bound up together. It is from the charge of such opposing feelings as attraction and disgust, expressed in this case through Blanche's eyes, that the play gains much of its energy.

Although Stanley responds in kind to Blanche's flirtations, telling her that "If I didn't know that you was my wife's sister

I'd get ideas about you," we know that actually he despises her and is enjoying the power that comes from being aware of the feelings she has for him. Stanley's actions are what would now be described as "macho." But not only is he violent in his masculinity, he also appears to lack any sense of moral order: his rape of Blanche does not strike him as betraying any moral code, it is simply the outcome of their strained relationship and what he deems to be her inappropriate behavior in the immediate and more distant past.

This action is consistent with his character in the rest of the play and in the events which are meant to have taken place before the play begins. Stanley has power despite his lower social class, but, as he is well aware, it lies in his physical actions. Talking of his wooing of Stella and the difference in then-social backgrounds, he comments, "I pulled you down off them columns and you loved it." The social significance of his physical action, like his later rape of Blanche, suggests that the sources of power have changed in American culture and that Stanley is willing to grasp at whatever power he can find in order to assert his place in the family and society around him.

Where Stanley does have an identity independent from that created by the events of the play, he could be said to represent the new social order of modern America as a contrast to the decayed gentility of Blanche's Southern manners. This is also seen in the fact that Williams makes him an immigrant who is proud to be part of the new society of a multi-cultural America. As such an immigrant, he is not concerned about traditions or old hierarchies of land ownership or the power and wealth brought by family positions in society (he appeals instead to the local law of the Napoleonic code to prove that he has been swindled by Blanche's loss of Belle Reve). Stanley's determination to belong to American society and to claim his place there is emphasized by his impassioned outburst in response to being called a "Polack." As he forcefully explains, "I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is one hundred percent American... so don't ever call me a Polack."

Stella Kowalski

Stella appears to be a simple character, but is actually more intriguing than her role as sister and wife to the play's two main protagonists would suggest. She acts as a foil to both characters, allowing their selfishness and emotional failings to be emphasized. She also acts as a measuring stick against which the audience can gauge society's reaction to the events portrayed on stage.

In relation to Stanley, Stella is sensitive and loving, practical and sometimes independent. She clearly loves Stanley, despite his many failings and his violence towards her, and she is willing to accept his temper as part of the passion they feel for each other: "But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark--that sort of make everything else seem--unimportant." She is carrying Stanley's baby, and indeed Stanley's rape of Blanche takes place while she is in the hospital giving birth. In her blinkered loyalty to Stanley at the end of the play and in her willingness to be reassured that what they have done for Blanche is right, her practical nature asserts itself: this is a marriage which she can convince herself she wants to save and will save for the benefit of herself and her child. Whether she is right or wrong to do this is not relevant: what is important to understanding the play is the knowledge that her action is not so unusual. Like many other people in society, Stella continues to function in her daily life despite considerable upheaval. Blanche draws attention to this stoical aspect of Stella's character when she comments, "I never had your beautiful self-control."

Stella's decision symbolizes a greater choice facing American society. She rejects Blanche's strategy of living in a glamorous past and chooses instead the rational, practical, sometimes flawed world which her marriage to Stanley represents.

Mexican woman

The Mexican woman appears briefly, speaks only Spanish, and is described as "An old Mexican crone."

Mitch

See Harold Mitchell

Harold Mitchell

Mitch is "207 pounds, six feet one and one-half inches" and lives with his sick mother. He is a foil to Stanley: he speaks in a more refined way, he is gentle and restrained while Stanley is rude and sexually forward. Blanche is aware of his kindness and even comments on it, saying, "I thanked God for you, because you seemed to be gentle." Mitch is concerned with proper behavior: in contrast to Stanley, who walks around in his T-shirt and speaks frankly (even proudly) of his sweaty body, Mitch refuses to take his jacket off because he fears he might be perspiring too much.

Mitch's attempted rape of Blanche therefore comes as a shock. The action suggests how male views of female behavior were so idealized that if a man discovered any deviation from accepted norms of virginity and chastity, his reaction would be extreme. Mitch's actions reveal him as a deluded and rather pathetic man who has not fully grasped how relationships work and who has closed his eyes to the fact that men and women can deceive one another.

It is, of course, Mitch's assault on Blanche which leaves her in such a genuinely forlorn state that she becomes vulnerable to Stanley's cruelty and unwanted sexual advances in the later scene. Although Mitch may be upstaged by his more powerful friend, his actions bring about the destructive ending of the play.

Negro woman

The Negro woman is a neighbor whose presence at the opening of the play reminds the audience of the cosmopolitan society in New Orleans. She is vulgar in her conversation, fun-loving and good-humored.

Nurse

The Nurse who accompanies the Doctor is cold and professional, severely dressed, and speaks in a voice which is "bold and toneless as a fire-bell."

Young collector

The Young Collector calls to collect newspaper subscriptions. He is polite, reserved, and surprised by Blanche's unexpected sexual advances.

Themes

Themes

A Streetcar Named Desire opens with the arrival of Blanche DuBois, a Southern belle who has lost her inheritance, at the New Orleans home of her sister Stella and Stella's husband Stanley. A conflict arises between Stanley and Blanche, and after several secrets about her past have been revealed, Stanley rapes Blanche while his wife is in the hospital giving birth. Stella, refusing to believe Blanche's accusations, gives consent for the increasingly hysterical Blanche to be placed in a mental hospital.

Class Conflict

A major theme explored symbolically in *Streetcar* is the decline of the aristocratic family traditionally associated with the American South. These families had lost their historical importance as the agricultural base of the Southern states were unable to compete with the new industrialization. A labor shortage of agricultural workers developed in the South during the First World War because so many of the area's men had to be employed either in the military or in defense-based industries. Many landowners, faced with large areas of land and no one to work on it, moved to urban areas. With the increasing industrialization which followed in the 1920s through the 1940s, the structure of the work force changed further: more women, immigrants, and black laborers entered the workforce and a growing urban middle class was created. Women gained the right to vote in 1920 and the old Southern tradition of an agrarian family aristocracy ruled by men began to come to an end.

In the context of this economic and cultural environment, Blanche represents the female aristocratic tradition of the Old South. Belle Reve, her family home, is typical of the plantations that were being sold off as the aristocracy bowed out to the new urbanization. Blanche's ultimate fate can be interpreted as the destruction of the Old South by the new, industrial America, represented by an immigrant to the U.S., Stanley Kowalski. Referring to his courtship of Stella, Stanley revealingly observes that, "When we first met, me and you, you thought I was common. How right you was, baby. I was common as dirt. You showed me the snapshot of the place with the columns [Belle Reve]. I pulled you down off them columns and how you loved it." By the end of the play, Stanley's aggression has triumphed over Blanche's inherited family superiority. As she departs for the mental hospital, her old-fashioned manners are still apparent when she says to the men, "Please don't get up." Their politeness in rising is a small gesture, however, considering their role in Blanche's destruction and in the fall of the Old South itself.

Sex Roles

Some of Blanche's difficulties can be traced to the narrow roles open to females during this period. Although she is an educated woman who has worked as a teacher, Blanche is nonetheless constrained by the expectations of Southern society. She knows that she needs men to lean on and to protect her, and she continues to depend on them throughout the play, right up to her conversation with the doctor from the mental hospital, where she remarks, "Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." She has clearly known sexual freedom in the past, but understands that sexual freedom does not fit the pattern of chaste behavior to which a Southern woman would be expected to conform. Her fear of rejection is realized when Mitch learns of her love affairs back home. By rejecting Blanche and claiming that she is not the ideal woman he naively thought she was, Mitch draws attention to the discrepancy between how women really behaved and what type of behavior was publicly expected of them by society at large.

Violence and Cruelty

Violence in this play is fraught with sexual passion. Trying to convince Blanche of her love for Stanley despite his occasional brutality, Stella explains, "But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark--that sort of make everything else seem--unimportant." Eunice and Steve Hubbell's relationship also has this element of violence, and there is the unnerving suggestion that violence is more common and more willingly accepted by the female partner in a marriage than one would like to believe.

Blanche translates Stella's comment into the context of sexual passion, claiming that, "What you are talking about is brutal desire--just-- Desire!--the name of that rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another." Stella asks, "Haven't you ever ridden on that street-car?" and Blanche responds, "It brought me here.--Where I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be." It appears that the connection in Blanche's past between violence and desire in some way contributes to the events within the time scale of the play. This is not to excuse Stanley's later act of violence or to suggest that Blanche brings it on herself--rather, Williams is demonstrating how a cycle of violence, combined with passion and desire, is hard to break.

Madness

Considering how Tennessee Williams' sister Rose was the recipient of a lobotomy, the theme of madness running through *Streetcar* in the form of Blanche's neurosis and self-delusion may reveal some of the playwright's fears about the instability of his own mental life. His lingering regrets and guilt about Rose's treatment may also be seen in Stella's anguished cry as Blanche is taken away: "What have I done to my sister? Oh, God, what have I done to my sister?"

Style

Style

Scene Structure

The most striking feature of Streetcar's dramatic structure is its division into scenes rather than acts. Each of the eleven scenes that make up the play ends in a dramatic climax, and the tension of each individual scene builds up to the tension of the final climax. This structure allows the audience to focus on the emotions and actions of Blanche--the only character to appear in every scene. The audience is sympathetic to Blanche because they see more of her inner thoughts and motivations than the other characters on stage. Note, for example, how only the audience is aware of how much alcohol she is drinking. The scene organization adds to the audience's sense of tragedy--Blanche's destruction is inevitable, signaling the inexorable passage of the drama and of her movement towards a final breakdown.

That Williams chose to organize his play this way may reveal his interest in film and the possibilities inherent in that medium for combining several visually dramatic incidents into a coherent experience. He also wrote a number of one-act plays during his career.

Motifs

In order to connect the separate incidents of Blanche's story, Williams provided dramatic motifs and details of setting which are repeated at significant moments during the play and which signal changes in mood and tone and highlight the reemergence of crucial themes.

As the title of the play suggests, the motif of the streetcar is a crucial one, pointing to the growth of the suburbs and the urbanization of the play as well as the unrelenting and unforgiving continuation of life itself. To arrive at Stella's apartment in New Orleans, Blanche must transfer from a streetcar called Desire to one called Cemeteries in order to get to the slum known as Elysian Fields. These were actual New Orleans names but their careful combination introduces the themes of death and desire that resonate through the play. Williams wrote that the streetcars' "indiscourageable progress up and down Royal Street struck me as having some symbolic bearing of a broad nature on the life in the Vieux Carre,--and everywhere else, for that matter." An element of the play which is always heard rather than seen, the streetcar nonetheless adds much to the mood of the play and is a continual but subtle reminder of the play's setting.

Music

Music plays a similarly important part in the stage craft of the play. Two kinds of music dominate: the first type is what Williams called "blue piano"--the blues music first associated with Southern Blacks. Later to develop into the music of New Orleans' bars and night clubs, it suggests unrestrained physical pleasure, animal strength and vitality and appears at significant emotional moments in the play--for example, when Blanche tells of the loss of Belle Reve and when she hears about Stella's pregnancy. It is also heard during moments of leisure, when people are drinking and having fun. But, in a darker mood, it appears at the moment of the rape in scene ten, signifying animal desires, and again at the very end of the play when Stanley is consoling Stella and enabling her to forget about Blanche.

In contrast to the recurring blue piano, which highlights the animal emotions of some characters, the polka known as the Varsouviana, heard only by Blanche, signals crucial moments in the development of the plot. Once the audience discovers that this music reminds Blanche of the scene on the ballroom floor when she renounced her husband, one

anticipates imminent disaster whenever the music appears and reappears--particularly in the last scene of the play. It also accompanies moments of cruelty, like Stanley's gift to Blanche of a bus-ticket back home.

Both kinds of music underline the nature of the situation which is being played out on stage and stress the location of the play's actions both in the past lives of its characters and in the cultural context of New Orleans.

The dramatic organization of the play into scenes which build, through recurring themes and motifs, on the ongoing tension of the play suggest the accuracy of Arthur Miller's description of Williams' "rhapsodic insistence that form serve his utterance rather than dominating and cramping it."

Historical Context

Historical Context

Many of the major themes of *A Streetcar Named Desire* are embodied in the history and culture of New Orleans. The lively setting of the French Quarter, with its streetcars, bars, entertainment, and jazz and blues music, provides a rich background for the emotional events of the play; the setting also draws symbolic attention to changes which were taking place in American society, especially in the South during the post-World War II years.

Napoleonic Code

When Stanley feels he is being swindled by Blanche's loss of Belle Reve, he appeals to the Napoleonic Code, a set of laws devised by the French and implemented when they ruled the region known now as Louisiana. The state of Louisiana continued to operate under some of the precepts of the Napoleonic Code, such as the Code's emphasis on inheritance law: any property belonging to a spouse prior to marriage becomes the property of both spouses once they are married. Stanley, therefore, is legally correct to claim that, by depriving Stella of her share of the family inheritance, Blanche has also deprived him.

The South

On a more general level, the play represents the decline of the aristocratic families traditionally associated with the South. These once-influential families had lost their historical importance when the South's agricultural base was unable to compete with the new industrialization. The region's agrarian economy, which had been in decline since the Confederate defeat in the Civil War, suffered further setbacks after the First World War. A labor shortage hindered Southern agriculture when large numbers of male laborers were absorbed by the military or defense-based industries. Many landowners, faced with large areas of land and no one to work on it, moved to urban areas. With the increasing industrialization that followed during the 1920s through the 1940s, the structure of the work force evolved more radically yet, incorporating large numbers of women, immigrants, and blacks. Women gained the right to vote in 1920 and the old Southern tradition of an agrarian family aristocracy ruled by men started to come to an end.

Women's Roles

Some of Blanche's difficulties can be traced to the narrow roles open to females during this period. Although she is an educated woman who has worked as a teacher, Blanche is nonetheless constrained by the expectations of Southern society. She knows that she needs men to lean on and to protect her. She has clearly known sexual freedom in the past, but understands that sexual freedom does not fit the pattern of chaste behavior to which a Southern woman would be expected to conform. Her fear of rejection is realized when Mitch learns of her love affairs back home. By rejecting Blanche and claiming that she is not the ideal woman he naively thought she was, Mitch draws attention to the discrepancy between how women really behaved and what type of behavior was publicly expected of them by society at large.

Writing of the play's setting, Williams noted that "I write out of love of the South ... (which) once had a way of life that I am just old enough to remember--a culture that had grace, elegance, an inbred culture, not a society based on money." Through the destruction of Blanche and her struggles with the contradictory demands of society, Williams expressed a lament for the destruction of the old South, making clear his understanding that such change was inevitable.

Critical Overview

Critical Overview

A Streetcar Named Desire premiered in Boston and Philadelphia, then in New York on December 4, 1947, to almost unanimously laudatory reviews. *The New Yorker* described *Streetcar* as "deeply disturbing--a brilliant, implacable play about the disintegration of a woman, or, if you like, of a society."

Streetcar was highly praised by its first director, Ella Kazan, who, from his knowledge of Williams' character, was one of the first to point out psychological similarities between Williams and Blanche. Kazan noted that "I keep linking Blanche and Tennessee... Blanche is attracted by the man who is going to destroy her.... I also noticed that at the end of the play--all was an author's essential statement--Stella, having witnessed her sister's being destroyed by her husband, then taken away to an institution with her mind split, felt grief and remorse but not an enduring alienation from her husband.... The implication at the end of the play is that Stella will very soon return to Stanley's arms--and to his bed. That night, in fact. Indifference? Callousness? No. Fidelity to life, Williams' goal. We go on with life, he was saying, the best we can. People get hurt, but you can't get through life without hurting people."

Other critics were not always so appreciative or understanding. The distinguished American critic Mary McCarthy summarized Blanche with considerably less sympathy, remarking that in her character Williams had "caught a flickering glimpse of the faded essence of the sister-in-law: thin, vapid, neurasthenic, romancing, genteel, pathetic ... a refined pushover and perennial and frigid spinster." McCarthy criticized Williams' for crafting Blanche's character with the trappings of "inconceivable" tragedy and melodrama, commenting that the playwright's work "reeks of literary ambition as the apartment reeks of cheap perfume: it is impossible to witness one of Mr. Williams' plays without being aware of the pervading smell of careerism."

Audiences clearly disagreed: *Streetcar* ran for eight hundred and fifty performances on Broadway. It also won the Pulitzer Prize, the Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Donaldson Award.

The 1951 film adaptation won the New York Critics' Film Award and several Academy Awards.

Criticism

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Woolway is an author, editor, and educator affiliated with Oriol College, Oxford, England. Her essay examines Williams's themes of sex and violence, as well as the way in which the two are linked.

Violence in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is fraught with sexual passion. Trying to convince Blanche of her love for Stanley despite his occasional brutality, Stella explains, "But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark--that sort of make everything else seem--unimportant." Eunice and Steve Hubbell's relationship also has this element of violence, and there is an unnerving suggestion that violence is more common and more willingly accepted by the female partner in a marriage than one would like to believe.

Blanche translates Stella's comment into the context of sexual passion, claiming that, "What you are talking about is brutal desire--just--Desire!-- the name of that rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another." Stella asks, "Haven't you ever ridden on that street-car?" and Blanche responds, "It brought me here.--Where I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be." It appears that the connection in Blanche's past between violence and desire in some way contributes to the events within the time scale of the play. This is not to excuse Stanley's later act of violence or to suggest that Blanche brings it on herself--rather, Williams is demonstrating how a cycle of violence, combined with passion and desire, is hard to break.

The attraction between Blanche and Stanley gains an interesting perspective when compared to a work of classical literature by the Latin poet Ovid. In *Metamorphoses*, Philomela is raped by her broth-er-in-law Tereus while visiting her sister Procne. He cuts out her tongue so that she cannot tell what he has done. Philomela, however, embroiders a story picture to convey to her sister the recent events and Procne, in revenge, kills their son and serves him up in a pie which she encourages Tereus to eat.

Similarly, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Stanley assaults his sister-in-law while his wife is away (in this case giving birth to their baby). But there are two substantial differences in the events which build up to the story's climax.

First, in Ovid's story there is no suggestion that Philomela associates sex with violence. There is no history of her previous lovers or any attraction between her and Tereus. In Williams's play, however, the issue of rape is confused because of Blanche's previous attraction for Stanley as well as her promiscuous past.

In a rape trial today, evidence of a woman's past sexual behavior would be discounted. If force was used by a man during sex, he has committed rape regardless of how the woman behaved in previous encounters. Williams was aware that mu-j Americans did not always sympathize with the victim--it was all too easy to condemn women for their "loose" behavior and claim that female victims of rape brought sexual violence upon themselves. An indication of the chauvinism that still thrived during the 1940s can be found in the reviews by certain critics who covered the premiere of *Streetcar*; they interpreted Blanche's fate as the punishment for a fallen woman.

The issue is further complicated by Blanche's complex psyche. When talking about the combination of passion and violence in love, she appears strangely fascinated and not entirely repulsed by the thought Speaking elliptically of the sexual arousal which violence can bring, Blanche comments, "Of course there is such a thing as the hostility of-- perhaps in some perverse kind of way he--No! To think of it makes me...." Violence is a phenomenon Blanche knows to be bound up with sex, even if she chooses to appear to Mitch as sexually naive.

A second important difference from Ovid's story is that Blanche's sister does not believe her story and, consequently, gives her no support. Whereas Procne concocts revenge on her unfaithful and violent husband, Stella is actually part of Blanche's downfall, supporting Stanley's cruel act of placing her in a mental institution. Not only is Stanley powerful, he is not checked in any way by the family structure that should provide some protection and support for Blanche. In this case, blood is most definitely not thicker than water.

Given that these two changes in focus appear to be deliberate, *Streetcar* paints a grim picture for women. Females in the play accept and perhaps even welcome sexual violence as part of life, and their family structures offer little protection from the predators.

Of course, there is more to it than that. It could be argued that *Streetcar* is only superficially about the roles and positions of women in society, Elia Kazan, *Streetcar's* first director, commented on the issues which hover beneath the play's surface: "I keep linking Blanche and Tennessee ... Blanche is attracted by the man who is going to destroy her. I understand the play by this formula of ambivalence. Only then, it seemed to me, would I think of it as Tennessee meant it to be understood: with fidelity to life as he--not us groundlings, that he--had experienced it. The reference to the kind of life Tennessee was leading at the time was clear. Williams was aware of the dangers he was inviting when he cruised; he knew that sooner or later he'd be beaten up. And he was. Still, I felt even this promise of violence exhilarated him."

While Blanche is often compared to Williams himself, Stanley--according to Williams's biographers--is based heavily on the playwright's brutal father, who taunted Williams about his effeminacy when he was a boy. In this light, the central issue in *Streetcar* is not necessarily violence towards women, but Williams's personal experience of brutality and the self-destructive enjoyment of fear which came out in the homosexual promiscuity he practiced as an adult.

Streetcar can be seen as an attempt to work through the purgatory of this fear and self-destruction. In addition to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Streetcar* has referenced other classical models of literature. It is from Virgil's *Aeneid* that Williams took the name of the slum in New Orleans, "Elysian Fields": in Virgil's poem this is the place where the dead were made to drink water from the river Lethe to forget all traces of their mortal past. Both Blanche's drinking and her endless hot baths suggest that she is attempting to wash away her past and emerge through a sort of watery purgatory. She is not successful and the playgoer is left with little hope for Blanche's future. Through Blanche's bleakness and hopelessness, Williams expressed his own struggles with depression, moments of mental illness, and the alcohol and drugs that finally cost him his life.

Williams also offered a clue to the desolation and loneliness he felt in his often anonymous homosexual life in the play's epigram: "And so it was I entered the broken world / To trace the visionary company of love, its voice / An instant in the wind [I know not whither hurled] / But not for long to hold each desperate choice." The lines are from "The Broken Tower," by the poet Hart Crane who lived from 1899 to 1932. Like Williams he was homosexual and much of his poetry conveys a sense of isolation and failure. This is one of the last poems Crane wrote before committing suicide by jumping off the ship he was traveling on. He, presumably, was buried at sea, just as Blanche wished to be. The epigram is appropriate for a tragic play that tells the story of a woman's destruction at the hands of a cruel society.

Source: Joanne Woolway, in an essay for *Drama for Students*. Gale 1997

Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #2

A contributor to numerous journals. Moodserved as an English professor at Ball State University. In this excerpt, he examines the symbolic nature of Blanche DuBois 's entrance dialogue in A Streetcar Named Desire.

One of the most provocative entrance speeches in drama is the well-known enigmatic statement by Blanche DuBois, the second of Williams' numerous compelling women, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*:

BLANCHE [*with faintly hysterical humor*]: They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemetenes and nde six blocks and then get off at--Elysian Fields!

These words have often been noted and discussed for both their realistic and symbolic significance. They have never been examined, however, as a clue to the structural development and design of the play itself and of the course of the life and fate of Blanche as portrayed in the drama.

The statement can be seen as having two parts, the first of which ("take a street-car named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries") deals with the events of Blanche's life before the play opens, and the second of which ("ride six blocks and then get off at--Elysian Fields") deals with the play itself.

During the course of the play, the audience learns the story of Blanche's life prior to the time of the drama. What is vividly unfolded to us is that Blanche had taken the streetcar named Desire, and had transferred to the one called Cemetenes. We learn of Blanche's youthful loving desire for Allan Grey, her young husband. It was indeed a loving desire, and Blanche was one who could love greatly:

When I was sixteen, I made the discovery-- love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that's how it struck the world for me (*A Streetcar Named Desire*, New American Library, 1963)

This was loving desire, the same loving desire that Stella has for Stanley--not that "brutal desire " of which Blanche speaks. This is the loving sensual desire which leads not to death but to life and wisdom. It is that loving desire, that Eros, which, as Blanche sees, lights up the world.

But her discovery of her young husband's homosexuality and her shocked brutal words to him ["I saw! I know! You disgust me. ..."] which result in his suicide--this traumatic event twists Blanche's loving desire into hate and self-loathing. And disgust and self-hate result in her life of destructive lust for young men. Thus her loving desire becomes brutal desire, unloving desire. It becomes that sheer lust which is a kind of real death. Blanche, in short, has transferred to the streetcar named Cemetenes. She is psychically dead, and cannot stand the light ["The dark is comforting tome."].

At that point in Blanche's life, the play begins. And "Cemeteries" takes on a subtly different meaning. Death can bring heaven or hell. Blanche can "ride six blocks and then get off at--Elysian Fields!" She can continue her course on the streetcar called Cemeteries toward the final death--or obtain heavenly bliss. And the latter will take six blocks. Another play by Williams, *Camino Real*, has no act divisions, only sixteen scenes (*just as Streetcar* has no acts, only eleven scenes. Blanche and Mitch have a moment of tenderness at the end of their first date. In response to this kindness, Blanche confesses to Mitch (and to the audience) the ugly story of how she destroyed her young husband. It is a remarkable moment of striking honesty. This moment of honesty elicits further kindness and even the beginning of love

from Mitch: "You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be--you and me, Blanche?" And Blanche, "*in long, grateful sobs*" replies: "Sometimes--there's God--so quickly!"

Thus, at the end of the sixth scene, the sixth block on her ride of death, Blanche indeed is on the threshold of finding "God," "Elysian Fields," loving desire. At that point, she has life within her grasp. It is the turning point of the play. But the opportunity passes. The very next scene quickly demonstrates that Blanche has resumed her illusions and games with Mitch, and thus her chance for life is lost. The final scenes portray this with an appalling inexorability. Had the incipient honesty and loving desire between Blanche and Mitch been nurtured with further openness and vulnerability, Stanley would never have raped her.

Near the end of the play, this fate is made explicit, The Mexican Woman appears, chanting her wares: "Flores? Flores para los muertos?" (Flowers? Flowers for the dead?) Blanche dimly realizes that she is dead, that she is still on the streetcar called Cemeteries, that she has missed the stop at Elysian Fields, that she is doomed to sterile dead lust, when, in a kind of real recognition, she observes in response to the old woman: "Death--.... The opposite is desire." She has dimly realized that desire is the opposite of death, that the desire which is the opposite of death is open, honest, forgiving, loving desire, the kind Stanley and Stella have for each other.

The most that Blanche can expect now is "Kindness. " All that remains for her is her final tragic collapse.

Source: John J. Mood, "The Structure of *A Streetcar Named Desire*" in *Ball State University Forum*, Vol. 14, no. 3, Summer, 1973, pp. 9-10.

Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #3

First published on December 4, 1947, this laudatory review by Atkinson appraises the play's debut and labels Williams's work as a "superb drama."

Tennessee Williams has brought us a superb drama, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which was acted at the Ethel Barrymore last evening. And Jessica Tandy gives a superb performance as rueful heroine whose misery Mr. Williams is tenderly recording. This must be one of the most perfect marriages of acting and play writing. For the acting and play writing are perfectly blended in a limpid performance, and it is impossible to tell where Miss Tandy begins to give form and warmth to the mood Mr. Williams has created.

Like *The Glass Menagerie*, the new play is a quietly woven study of intangibles. But to this observer it shows deeper insight and represents a great step forward toward clarity. And it reveals Mr. Williams as a genuinely poetic playwright whose knowledge of people is honest and thorough and whose sympathy is profoundly human.

A Streetcar Named Desire is history of a gently reared Mississippi young woman who invents an artificial world to mask the hideousness of the world she has to inhabit. She comes to live with her sister, who is married to a rough-and-ready mechanic and inhabits two dreary rooms in a squalid neighborhood. Blanche--for that is her name--has delusions of grandeur, talks like an intellectual snob, buoys herself up with gaudy dreams, spends most of her time primping, covers things that are dingy with things that are bright and flees reality.

To her brother-in-law she is an unforgivable liar. But it is soon apparent to the theatregoer that in Mr. Williams' eyes she is one of the dispossessed whose experience has unfitted her for reality; and although his attitude toward her is merciful, he does not spare her or the playgoer. For the events of *Streetcar* lead to a painful conclusion which he does not try to avoid. Although Blanche cannot face the truth, Mr. Williams does in the most imaginative and perceptive play he has written.

Since he is no literal dramatist and writes in none of the conventional forms, he presents the theatre with many problems. Under Elia Kazan's sensitive but concrete direction, the theatre has solved them admirably. Jo Mielziner has provided a beautifully lighted single setting that lightly sketches the house and the neighborhood. In this shadowy environment the performance is a work of great beauty.

Miss Tandy has a remarkably long part to play. She is hardly ever off the stage, and when she is on stage she is almost constantly talking -- chattering, dreaming aloud, wondering, building enchantments out of words. Miss Tandy is a trim, agile actress with a lovely voice and quick intelligence. Her performance is almost incredibly true. For it does seem almost incredible that she could understand such an elusive part so thoroughly and that she can convey it with so many shades and impulses that are accurate, revealing and true.

The rest of the acting is also of very high quality indeed. Marlon Brando as the quick-tempered, scornful, violent mechanic; Karl Maiden as a stupid but wondering suitor; Kim Hunter as the patient though troubled sister--all act not only with color and style but with insight.

By the usual Broadway standards, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is too long; not all those Words are essential. But Mr. Williams is entitled to his own independence. For he has not forgotten that human beings are the basic subject of art. Out of poetic imagination and ordinary compassion he has spun a poignant and luminous story.

Source: Brooks Atkinson, in a review of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) in *On Stage: Selected Theater Reviews from the New York Times, 1920-1970*, edited by Bernard Beckerman and Howard Siegman, Arno Press, 1973, pp 286-87.

Media Adaptations

Media Adaptations

In addition to its successful run on Broadway, *A Streetcar Named Desire* was made into a film by Warner Bros, and was released in 1951, Many of its original cast were retained, including Marlon Brando as Stanley, but Jessica Tandy, who played Blanche, was replaced with Vivien Leigh. The film, directed by Elia Kazan, received numerous Academy Award nominations and carried off four Awards, including Best Actress for Leigh and Best Supporting Actress for Kim Hunter (Stella).

A made-for-television version appeared in 1984 with Ann-Margret as Blanche. Although this production reinstated some of the material which the censors had objected to in the 1950s, critics found it lacking in the spark and chemistry of the earlier version.

An unrated television version of 1995 recreated the 1992 stage version which starred Jessica Lange and Alec Baldwin, Again, it is truer to the dialogue and actions of the original stage production than the censored 1951 film.

Two sound recordings are available: HarperCollins's 1991 version stars Rosemary Harris and James Farentino in a 1973 recording of a production at the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center. Caedmon's 1985 publication is from the same production.

The play was adapted by the Dance Theatre of Harlem featuring Virginia Johnson as Blanche.

Topics for Further Study

Topics for Further Study

Investigate the emergence of industrialization and the decline of the old Southern aristocracy in the USA and analyze what bearing this has on *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

With whom does the audience's sympathy lie in *A Streetcar Named Desire*^, Blanche? Stanley? Both? Neither?

Discuss the importance of New Orleans--its geography, its transport system, its laws, its music and culture--as a setting for *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Examine the scene structure of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, paying particular attention to the beginnings and endings of scenes and the dramatic climaxes that they create.

Compare & Contrast

Compare & Contrast

1947: Hungary becomes a Soviet satellite after Hungarian Communists, backed by the Red Army, seize power while Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy is on holiday. Anti-Communist sentiment builds in the U.S. The Truman Doctrine announces plans to aid Greece and Turkey and proposes economic aid to countries threatened by Communist takeover. The CIA is authorized by Congress to counter Moscow's attempts to establish governments through local Communist parties in Western Europe.

Today: Communism has all but broken down since the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Revolutions in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany, as well as the break-up of the Soviet Union have eliminated many of the barriers between East and West. Eastern European countries are now undergoing a slow and difficult transformation to a market economy.

1947: New technology: the first commercial microwave oven is introduced by the Raytheon Co. of Waltham, Massachusetts. Tubeless automobile tires, which seal themselves when punctured, are introduced by B.F. Goodrich. Howard Hughes' new seaplane, the Spruce Goose, the largest plane ever built, takes off for a one-mile flight across Long Beach Harbor before it is retired for good.

Today: Most American homes have a microwave, as well as toasters, coffee makers, freezers, and numerous other examples of electrical gadgetry. Cars are commonplace but their emissions, along with those from airplanes and heavy industry, contribute to the global problem of pollution.

1947: New consumable goods appear as America begins to recover from the effects of the Second World War. Frozen orange juice concentrate sales in the U.S. reach seven million cans. Reddi-Whip introduces whipped cream in aerosol cans. Sugar rationing ends on June 11. Monosodium glutamate (MSG) is marketed for the first time, and butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA) is introduced commercially to retard spoilage in foods.

Today: Annual sales of convenience food reach new heights every year. Processed and "fast" food is readily available to Americans; consumers who maintain unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles significantly increase their risk of contracting heart disease and cancer. Additives are common in food and new developments, such as genetically engineered foods, continue to make headlines.

What Do I Read Next?

What Do I Read Next?

Stanley Clisby Arthur's *Old New Orleans* (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1990) provides an insightful picture into the setting of Williams' play and a view of the American South in the first half of the twentieth century.

Williams' earlier play, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), also portrays a Southern belle, Amanda Wingfield, who represents the playwright's ambiguous feelings about his mother's pretensions, possessiveness, and insensitivity. She also shares some similarities with Blanche Du Bois.

The memoir of Williams' mother, *Remember Me to Tom* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), provides insight into the relationship between mother and son. This account was ghost-written by Lucy Freeman.

Margaret Mitchell's 1936 bestseller, *Gone With the Wind*, is set in the antebellum era in the American South on through the aftermath of the Civil War. Depicting the porticoed mansions of Southern planters, the suffering of black slaves, and the unspoiled glamour of Southern belles, this novel (and the more famous film, which, like *Streetcar*, starred Vivien Leigh) was one of the last popular works to idealize the South.

Further Reading

Further Reading

Arthur, Stanley Chsby. *Old New Orleans* Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1990.

A historical exploration of New Orleans that provides background to *Streetcar's* setting.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Tennessee Williams*, New York. Chelsea House, 1987

A collection of critical essays contextualizing Williams' work with that of other modern writers, drawing out psychological similarities between Williams, Hart Crane, and Arthur Rimbaud.

Falki, Signi *Tennessee Williams*. New York: Twayne, 1961.

An intelligent discussion of Williams' life and works in which the plays are organized into thematic groups and attention is drawn to recurring character types.

Hayraan, Ronald *Tennessee Williams' Everyone Else is an Audience*. New York: Yale University Press, 1993.

A biography which includes many quotations from Williams and opinions from his friends.

McCann, John S. *The Critical Reputation of Tennessee Williams*. Boston: G.K Hall, 1983.

Charts Williams' reception among the important critics and writers of this century

Spoto, Donald *The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1985.

A literary biography beginning with Williams' parents and moving through the playwright's life, his theatrical encounters, life in the homosexual and drug culture of Florida, and his death. With bibliographical sources for further study.

Stanton, Stephen, ed. *Tennessee Williams' A Collection of Critical Essays* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977

A varied discussion of the major themes in Williams' work

Tharpe, Jac, ed. *Tennessee Williams; A Tribute* Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1977

Includes essays by people who knew and worked with Williams and provides an interesting critical perspective on his work.

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Project Editor

David Galens

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Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research

Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture

Beverly Jendrowski

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Imaging and Multimedia

Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design

Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing

Stacy Melson

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's "For Students" Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members--educational professionals-- helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed--for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*--the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name.
 - o Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.

- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).
- **Sources:** an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- **Further Reading:** an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- **Media Adaptations:** a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- **Topics for Further Study:** a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- **Compare and Contrast Box:** an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- **What Do I Read Next?:** a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535