

Review of a streetcar named desire, based on the vision of blanche

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“ A Streetcar named Desire” is a play driven by the fantasy of Blanche and other prime characters. The characters in the play hide from their reality by acting as if the events they went through didn’t happen or were not important; insignificant. The prominent idea of illusion and fantasy versus reality seems to bring on the idea that these characters want to “ escape” their world.

Blanche DuBois is the central character in the play. She draws our attention with her sincere and fragile personality, which later on turns out to be an illusionistic image of her own mind. She lives in the world of illusions in order to protect herself against outside threats and against her own fears; however it becomes evident that she is trapped within her own mind; and the only thing she should fear is her own paranoia and ill mind. In the play Williams contrasts Blanche’s delusions with Stanley’s realism, whilst in the end, Stanley and his worldview wins. Blanche’s hope throughout the play is to salvage her life in the world of brutality where the inner anxiety clashes with the outside threats by using different coping mechanisms: delusions, alcoholism and illusions.

Williams shows deception to be a uniquely human trait in the drama, one that is used to keep consciousness sustaining and something that is used to deceive others and oneself. Blanche is one of the strongest examples of this element of self-deception. She is incapable of seeing herself in the most honest of lights. Blanche has difficulty confronting a pain-ridden past, and so deception is used to keep such a reality at bay. It is also this deception, to a great extent, that feeds the antagonism between her and Stanley, someone that she sees as a fundamental threat to the idea of her self- deception.

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Blanche comes to need this self-deception in an intense manner and Stanley's desire to take it from her shows one of the first examples of his savagery and her ultimate defenceless state. For the most part, Stanley is fairly open and direct about who he is and in what he believes, as there is little deception on this point. Yet, he is incapable of being honest in terms of what he did to Blanche. He uses deception to conceal the fact that he raped his wife's sister. Finally, Stella engages in self-deception to a great extent in order to survive with her husband and in the attempt to maintain control of her world when being pulled between Stanley and Stella. She ends up deceiving herself about the nature of her husband, if nothing else for her own welfare and for the welfare of her child; however this could be viewed as forgivable when reflecting upon the ideals of society at the time.

Upon first meeting Blanche, it is thoroughly evident that she is more cultured and sophisticated than the people who live in "Elysian Fields." Her surname of French origin, "DuBois," immediately reveals her as being from the upper class of society. She appears to be 'daintily dressed in a white suit' with 'white gloves', all of which suggests purity and innocence, but it doesn't take long to realise that Blanche is nearly always showing pretence. Her pathetic attempt at covering up her drinking problem and hiding her recent promiscuous activity all foreshadow the eventual destruction of her character as she is sent away to a mental asylum by the end of the play.

Blanche was subjected to a series of deaths in her family and the ultimate loss of the ancestral home. The deaths illustrated the ugliness and brutality of life. To escape from these brutalities and to escape from the lonely void

created by her young husband's death, Blanche turned to alcohol and sexual promiscuity. The alcohol helped her to forget, encouraging themes of fantasy and illusion; yet again we see another coping mechanism that allows Blanche to avoid the truth.

Blanche gives herself to men for a number of reasons. She feels that she had failed her young husband in some way. Therefore, she tries to alleviate her guilt by giving herself at random to other young men. And by sleeping with others, she is trying to fill the void left by Allan's death — “intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with.” And she was particularly drawn to very young men who would remind her of her young husband. During these years of promiscuity, Blanche has never been able to find anyone to fill the emptiness. Thus Blanche's imagined failure to her young husband and her constant encounter with the ugliness of death forced the delicate young girl to seek distraction by and forgetfulness through intimacies with strangers and through alcohol which could make the tune in her head stop. Blanche creates an illusion that she is still youthful and an eligible bachelorette; by doing so she allows herself to live in another fantasy and avoid the truth; that she is aging and slowly becoming unattractive to the opposing gender.

Stella comes to her sister's defence against her husband time and time again, starting with his accusation of a “swindle” in Scene Two, and continuing as he uncovers more and more information about Blanche's past in Laurel. Stella remains firmly on her sister's side, refusing to believe these stories even in the face of overwhelming evidence. “You didn't know

Blanche as a girl,” she argues. “ Nobody, nobody, was tender and trusting as she was.” This it makes it considerably more difficult for us to understand her decision at the end of the play to disbelieve her sister, send her off to a mental institution, and side with Stanley. “ I couldn’t believe her story and go on living with Stanley.” Stella suggests that she can’t believe the story if she wants to go on living with Stanley. She doesn’t say that she thinks Blanche is lying; rather she’s consciously choosing to think Blanche is lying so her life can continue without interruption.

Every action and every word out of Blanche’s mouth is based on illusion. Her story of why she’s staying with Stella is an illusion. The way she covers the harsh light of the bare bulb with a paper shade is an illusion. The lies she tells Mitch are an illusion. The only positive time in her life was when she was ‘ happily’ married to her first husband; she was young. Every action Blanche takes is aiming to recreate this time. But even that happiness was an illusion; her husband only married her in an attempt to deal with his homosexuality, another underlying theme of mistrust and deceit.

Illusion is hard work for Blanche. She is purposeful in her attempts to create illusion. Not only does she shroud the people around her in illusion, she attempts to shroud her own memories and her mind. But illusion is hard to keep up and Blanche is at the end of her strength. Fragments start seeping through, as particularly seen in scene 9. When Blanche’s strength wears out, there is no safe place for her; not out in the world, not in her mind. When reality comes crashing down on her, Blanche has no choice but to go insane.

As her polar opposite, Stanley is the representation of reality. Stanley has neither imagination nor use for living in an illusion. He has no patience for Blanche's desire to live in a shrouded world. As Blanche uses illusion to survive, Stanley uses brute force. His words are forceful, his moves are forceful, and his actions are decisive and forceful: ' She's not stayin' here after Tuesday. You know that, don't you? Just to make sure I bought her a ticket myself. A bus ticket! She'll go!'

Stanley does everything he can to unravel the illusion Blanche presents. He wants the papers to prove what happened to Belle Reve instead of believing Blanche's story. He goes out of his way to learn the facts regarding why Blanche left Laurel. And when he finds out the truth, he makes sure everyone knows it.

During the final scene of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the audience witnesses Stella adopting the delusion that her husband is trustworthy, that he did not in fact rape her sister. Eunice says, " No matter what happens, we've all got to keep going," she is preaching the virtues of self-deception. But apparently Blanche did not have the strength to go on living in spite of everything. She was too delicate to be able to withstand the pressures of living in a brutal, realistic world. Mitch adopts the delusion that Stanley is the only one responsible for Blanche's undoing, eschewing any moral responsibility.

Finally, even Stanley himself, the masculine character who prides himself on being down-to-earth, at facing life for what it is, falls prey to delusions. For one, he has always been paranoid about Blanche's intentions, believing that Blanche has been trying to de-throne him from his role as " king of his

castle.” Just before raping Blanche he declares, “ We’ve had this date with each other from the beginning,” implying that Blanche has complied in the sexual act – another delusion.

When Blanche refuses to go with the doctor and matron, she tells them that she has forgotten something. It is then that Stanley wonders what and takes off the “ magic” Chinese lantern from the light, leaving the naked light bulb glaring at Blanche. This is the final blow for Blanche who tries to escape and is trapped by the matron. Again the light symbolism emphasizes Blanche’s desire to live in a world of semi-illusion which contradicts Stanley’s world. She is faced with reality, and is no longer protected by her means of escapism.

The last line of the play puns on the man’s world as Steve announces that the game is “ seven-card stud,” a particularly wild poker game. This quotation is the very last line in the play. Within the house, as Blanche is taken away by the doctor to the mental asylum, the other men start another poker game. Firstly, Williams may be intending to reflect the truth of reality; life will continue on regardless of anything that happens or that may happen. But even more so, it reflects the unreliability and the gamble which is taken in life. Blanche could never rely on her family as she watched them all die and suddenly lost her dream-like home, life, and state of mind. In “ the game of life,” it is particularly Blanche, who is left to live a life of tragic illusions, and Stella, who has to live a lie, who have lost.