

# Death of a sales man and a streetcar named desire: comparative



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Delusion leads to complete loss of reality, resulting in one's ultimate downfall. The truth is consistently denied by allowing lies and deceit to surround a situation, leading to the false appearance of a positive and successful life. In the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams, the main character, Blanche, allows fantasy to overcome reality leading to complete insanity. Arthur Miller develops an analogous scenario throughout his play, *Death of a Salesman*. Conflict displays both characters' true emotions, revealing the truth behind their lies and deceit.

Symbolism helps the characters' to further express their outlook on life through the eyes of insanity. Theme ultimately reveals the characters' mental states through their personal desires, and lies which cast shadows upon their unsatisfying realities. Blanche and Willy are victims of insanity portrayed through theme, symbols, and conflict. Conflict allows Blanche and Willy to elude reality and express their allayed emotions towards themselves and their relatives. Both characters attempt to mask their insanity by blaming their families for their downfalls.

Blanche puts the blame of her lost dream on her sister, Stella, since "[she was] the one that abandoned Belle Reve, not [Blanche]! [Blanche] stayed for it, bled for it, almost died for it" (Williams 25). Willy raises great expectations of his son, Biff, through his unreachable illusions, and when failure approaches, Willy realizes "what a ridiculous lie [his] whole life has been" (Miller 104). Both Blanche and Willy put their own happiness and success before their families. Their illusions have led them to believe their loved ones are capable of being better, and when expectations are not met, many conflicts occur.

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These characters relieve their own wrongdoings by unknowingly blaming their loved ones for their failures, displaying their psychotic state of minds. Their obsessive attitudes towards illusions are significant of fantasy's capability of taking over one's mind. Blanche and Willy fool themselves into believing that their lies and illusions have become reality, leading to their innermost self-conflict. Blanche's deep fantasies have led her to believe that she " doesn't want realism. [She] wants magic" to block out her unsuccessful memories, although impossible (Williams 117).

Willy begins to realize that "[he] has such thoughts, [he] has such strange thoughts" but cannot evidently determine the truth compared to his delusions (Miller 14). Both characters' clearly prefer their fantasies of having successful lives, but conflict erupts once their inner frustration becomes an issue of their overall insanity. Neither of the two are angry towards their self-deceit, but ultimately cherish what they have come to believe is a perfect life. Their mental wonders continue to grow since they are preoccupied with their love for fantasy, which leads to complete insanity.

Blanche and Willy reveal their inability to differentiate between reality and fantasy signifying their obsession with their illusions. Therefore, the main characters' loss of sanity is directly affected by both self and family conflicts. While conflict reveals one's obsession with fantasy, symbolism reveals similar fate. In both plays, symbols are utilized to display deeper meanings of failure and the characters' attempts to mask reality, which they were unable to verbally express. Luxury items such as diamonds, pearls, and a treasure chest, are symbols that represents Blanche and Willy's inability to accomplish their unfulfilled dreams.

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While Blanche is bathing, her brother-in-law, Stanley, sneaks in her room and “jerks open a small drawer in the trunk and pulls up a fist-full of costume jewelry,” which are truly as fake as Blanche’s life (Williams 36). Willy realizes that a “diamond is hard and rough to the touch”, further symbolizing how “hard and rough” it is to be successful and live the American dream (Miller 126). Blanche and Willy prove their obsessive adulation with their “beautiful” and “American” dreams. They are unable to accept their own mistakes within the past, which the diamonds and jewelry clearly attempt to portray.

Blanche’s and Willy’s jewelry and diamonds are just imitations of success to allow themselves to believe that they have accomplished their dreams. The truth portrays how fake these symbols are, parallel to how fake their entire lives have become due to the characters’ consistent illusions. Luxury items, being symbols of failure, are significant of their incapability of accepting what fate has dealt to them, leading to complete insanity, and for Willy, suicide. Blanche and Willy, use different methods of intoxication as their ultimate escape of reality.

Liquor is Blanche’s main getaway from the truth since it “buzzes right through [her] and feels so good”, which allows her to live and rely on her lies (Williams 21). Willy’s wife, Linda, is aware of his illusions, suicide attempts, and “sure enough ... there’s a new little nibble on the gas pipe ... and behind the fuse box ... was a length of a rubber pipe” (Miller 59). Both liquor and the rubber pipe are symbols of Blanche and Willy’s attempts to escape reality, although it is impossible, leading to their loss of sanity.

These methods of intoxication ultimately imply both characters' struggle to emotionally and literally support themselves and their families, leaving them hopeless and psychotic. Therefore, in both plays, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Death of a Salesman*, the main characters' utilize symbolism to signify the importance of their failure to reach their desires and escape their unflattering lives. While symbolism portrays one's failure and attempts to mask reality, theme reveals a parallel fate. Theme ultimately exposes Blanche's and Willy's insanity through the ideas of fantasy's ability to overcome reality, and the American dream.

The main characters fail to allow reality to play its role in a sane mind, resulting in their utter loss of truth and their overall dependence on illusions. Blanche accepts her psychotic state of mind, and " knows [she] fibs a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion" (Williams 41). Willy's fantasies have led him to believe he is a successful and popular salesman and believes that " the man who creates personal interest is the man who gets ahead ... take [him] for instance" (Miller 33).

Both characters' have allowed their fantasy's to shine brighter than the truth of reality. Blanche and Willy attempt to live within their lies, eventually allowing them to believe it is the truth. The characters' not only allow their fantasies to shift their beliefs, but they also accept the fact that these illusions takeover a major portion of their lives. The power of delusion is evidently significant by the way Blanche and Willy have both surrounded their lives to please their dreams, only leading to downfall rather than success.

Blanche and Willy are both over consumed with the idea of the American dream, although it is far out of their reach. Blanche admits that “[she was not] so good the last two years or so, after Belle Reve had started to slip through [her] fingers” (Williams 29). Willy feels that he has “[worked] a lifetime to pay off a house. [He] finally own[s] it, and there [is] nobody to live in it” (Miller 15). The protagonists’ display their inability to reach their dreams, which is significant of the power in which illusions possess.

Blanche’s old home “ Belle Reve” literally translates to a “ beautiful dream” which is further significant of her lost hope of felicity. Blanche and Willy truly believe that their personal satisfaction could be achieved without the realization of them only being fantasies. Their ability to grasp the American dream is relevant to their grasp of sanity. They have become so assumed with the idea of success, although it is out of their reach and has only led them to their ultimate failure. Blanche and Willy’s attempts mask reality, and accomplish the American dream ultimately lead to their loss of sanity.

Conflict, symbolism, and theme emphasize a psychotic state in which Blanche and Willy have brought themselves to possess. Blanche and Willy’s insanity evokes the sense of conflict between themselves and their familial relationships. Symbolism helps the characters’ to expose deeper meanings and feelings that have led them to their loss of sanity. Theme suggests the ideas of the characters’ escape of reality through their excessive lies and fantasies. Delusion ultimately redirects an insane mind to rely on their dreams, fantasies, and overall illusions.