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In a Streetcar Named Desire, Blanche DuBois is a conflicted character who lives in a fantasy world to avoid the ugliness of her life. When she declares “ I don’t want realism, I want magic!”, she is being serious. She has rejected the real world in favor a place where her fantasies (magic) provide an escape from the ugly reality that is her own existence. At the beginning of the play, Blanche is unbalanced, lying and drunk. It is not until the end of the play, after being raped by Stanley, that Blanche goes completely insane, but it is obvious throughout the play that her mental illness is deteriorating. At the end, when she he is committed to an insane asylum, her character and story come into focus, and she is recognized for what she is: a dishonest alcoholic schizophrenic homeless sex offender. Somehow, despite all this, Tennessee William manages to portray Blanche in a sympathetic light, and you can only feel sorry for her.

Blanche DuBois arrives at her sister’s apartment she acts like a southern belle, straight out of Gone With the Wind. This is a contrived identity she uses to represent herself as a respectable and charming women. However, the details of her life turn out to be less than respectable. She tells Stella that she is taking a “ leave of absence” from teaching. We later learn that she has been fired from her teaching job for inappropriate sexual contact with a student. At the beginning of the play, she is just lying. She isn’t concocting crazy stories yet. This isn’t a fantasy or psychotic behavior, she is just hiding the unpleasant truth. Blanche has been having a hard time lately. Her husband turned out to be gay, and then he killed himself.

Sitting in her sister’s apartment, confronted with the down-to-earth and realistic Stanley, Blanche starts her descent into real madness. She starts

drinking heavily and thinking about what could have been. She convinces herself that an old boyfriend - the rich and glamorous Shep Huntleigh - is going to swoop in and take her away. This is when Tennessee Williams begins illustrating the insanity developing in her head. She is hallucinating and imagining hearing polka music. She is drunk, but these are classic signs of schizophrenia.

So this reality is pretty horrible for Blanche, which explains why she wants magic. But to Blanche, magic is actually lying, which is her specialty. " Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth, I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!" (9. 43). Because Blanche's identity is based on delusions of grandeur and lies, it is hard to understand when she telling the truth, lying or just living in the world of fantasy she has constructed to protect herself from the hard reality of her life. She goes on to defend herself to Mitch, telling him that she was only lying externally, but " Never inside, I didn't lie in my heart" (9. 59) She wanted to be a respectable southern belle. She wanted to be young. So it wasn't really a lie. . It's clear she is mentally ill, but at some point in her life, she much have been living in reality, because she was a teacher, which requires a certain amount of functionality. However, her lying and embellishing have been part of her personality the whole time.

Like many mentally ill people with delusions of grandeur, Blanche believes she is special and refined. She is arrogant, conceited and condescending. She is alone and broke, and is essentially living off Stella and Stanley. She considers Stanley poor and unsophisticated, and treats him badly, while expecting him to shower her with sexual attention. Stanley, however, is a

Take a look at yourself here in a worn-out Mardi Gras outfit, rented for 50 cents from some rag-picker. And with a crazy crown on. Now what kind of a queen do you think you are? Do you know that I've been on to you from the start, and not once did you pull the wool over this boy's eyes?

You come in here and you sprinkle the place with powder and you spray

perfume and you stick a paper lantern over the light bulb - and, lo and behold, the place has turned to Egypt and you are the Queen of the

Nile, sitting on your throne, swilling down my liquor. And do you know

what I say? Ha ha! Do you hear me? Ha ha ha! (9. 55)

For an unsophisticated blue-collar guy, Stanley is something of an amateur psychoanalyst, breaking down Blanche's psyche in just a few sentences. These are harsh words, but Stanley has a point. Blanche "loves to be waited on", soaks for hours in the bathtub and flaunts her sexuality to any man she encounters. For a woman who desperately wants to appear sophisticated and respectable, Blanche is obsessed with sex. She told Stella: "I called him a little boy and laughed and flirted. Yes, I was flirting with your husband!" (2. 155). She is sexually attracted and repulsed by Stanley at the same time, and the sexual tension between the two is what eventually cracks her. Stanley is portrayed as a raw sexual beast, so he understands that Blanche can only relate to men on a sexual level, so uses this to justify raping her. He tells Blanche that they've "had this date with each other from the beginning" (10. 81). Blanche may deal in the "magic" of sexual tension and nuances, but Stanley is all about actual intercourse.

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Blanche has always lived in a fantasy world, but when Blanche is raped by Stanley, it's the nail in the coffin of her insanity. Afterwards, she is no longer functional, and Stanley pressures Stella to lock her up in a mental institution. Her last words, " I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (11. 123). By strangers she means men, and by kindness she means sex. She admitted earlier, that despite her imagined respectability, she " had many intimacies with strangers. After the death of Allan - intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with" (9. 55).

Once we learn that Blanche is actually crazy, it helps us put her character and story in perspective. In context, we see she too is a rapist, who abused one of her students. Her husband probably killed himself because living with her was so horrible. Ultimately, despite being a sex-crazed delusional lying rapist, Blanche is a sympathetic character. She seems to have had a hard life. Looking back, we start to see that maybe Blanche is just a lost soul, who really did create some magic.

Work Cited

Williams, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire: A Play*. New York: New Directions, 1947. Print.