

A street car named desirequestions narrative



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ A Streetcar Named Desire” is a tragic play written and directed by Thomas “ Tennessee” Williams. The central focus of this play has been entirely constructed on the life of Blanche Dubois who plays the role of a desolated immigrant who has moved to New Orleans after a series of misfortunes back in Laurel. Blanche was brought up in the strong setup of an aristocratic tradition and enjoyed living elegantly in their family’s homestead. She was a trained English teacher married to a man she so much adored named Allan. According to Cohan (1997) the conflict in this play as well as the turning point of Blanche’s life comes when she discovers that her long term husband Allen Grey, was having a homosexual affair. Grey later on commits suicide after discovering that his wife knew he was a homosexual. As a result, Blanche resorts to finding consolation and emotional comfort in the arms of other men, something that she does so passionately. Her situation gets worse when she gets fired for having a relationship with one of her students. It is for this particular reason that she is chased from her town and decides to go to New Orleans. Meanwhile, her relatives died, she could not maintain the family home and as a result, creditors seized it (123HelpMe. com, 2011). As the curtains open, Blanche arrives in New Orleans where she has come to put up with her sister Stella who is married to Stanley Kowalski, a character described as crude and outspoken. As if her past is a long gone history, Blanche does not seem to care any bit about it as she is determined to do everything to her level best to lead the life of an elegant lady; she goes to the extent of lying when necessary so as to maintain her status. Talk of “ fake it until you make it”.

Illusion versus Reality

<https://assignbuster.com/a-street-car-named-desirequestions-narrative/>

From the title of this witty play, it is outright that Illusion and Reality is among the major themes highlighted by the playwright. An illusion in the literary sense is defined as an idea, thought or speculation that is not realistic. More often than not, it only exists in our subconscious; it can be compared to a fantasy, something that we only wish for (123HelpMe. com, 2011). “ A Street Named Desire” is an illusion to ambitions that the playwright intricately handles in the play. It is apparent that a major theme of this play is how human beings often undergo a fierce battle between these illusions.

Many examples where the characters hide in or behind illusions and where they try to protect or destroy their illusions have been addressed in this play (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). There are two major protagonists who are constantly fighting to prove their stands. Whereas Stanley is an ardent believer of realism, he does not go about beating around the bush, he is of the opinion that people should face life without fear, Blanche on the other hand has perfected the art of creating illusions to an extent that she can even lie to herself, she does not want any reality since according to her, truth hurts.

From the onset of this play, the main character Blanche is a troubled lady who throughout the play is defined by a life full of illusions. She arrives in New Orleans to stay with Stella and the husband and this is where illusions among characters begin. As a young girl, Blanche was carried away by love. She is quoted saying “...sixteen, I made the discovery – love. All at once and much, much too completely (William, 1995, p. 1368).” It was at this time that she met Allan Grey, who in her opinion was the perfect man –Blanche

<https://assignbuster.com/a-street-car-named-desirequestions-narrative/>

describes him stating that he had “ nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn’t like a man’s, although he wasn’t the least bit effeminate (William, 1995, p. 1368).” These two statements clearly explain the extent which Blanche had been swept of her feet by love, she has the illusion that love conquers all and she actually goes to the extent of giving her all for the sake of Allan (Sontag, 2010). In the early stages of the play, she is utterly in love; Blanche believes that there is nothing else in life that is greater than love. Blanche and Allan marry and she falls more and more for him.

However, as the play progresses, we come to learn that this feeling of love was never meant to last since it was just an illusion. one day “ coming into a room that I thought was empty (William, 1995, p. 1368),” Blanche was shocked to find her husband in the company of another man, this would mark the end of her illusions about love but serve as the genesis of another illusion which was whether or not what she had witnessed was indeed an illusion or it was a reality. However hard the reality was, Blanche realized that all along, Allan had tried hard to let her know with the hope that he would get “ the help he needed but couldn’t speak of! He was in the quick sands and clutching at me – but I wasn’t holding him out, I was slipping in with him! (William, 1995, p. 1368).”

By trying to appear straight before the eyes of everyone, Allan was an illusion to himself. The moment Allan discovers that Blanche knows about his homosexuality, he commits suicide in order to avoid the reality that she can’t be of any help to him. While they were dancing in the club, Blanche states “ I saw! I know! You disgust me... (William, 1995, p. 1369).” It is this particular statement that makes Allan commit suicide. In as much as they

had tried to hide this illusion, reality hit both of them hard like a hammer, Allan loses his life while Blanche loses her “ real love” (Cumming, 2004).

After losing her husband, Blanche falls into another illusion. She is optimistic that she would be happy again like she was with Allan if she were to be loved again. She states “...after the death of Allan – intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with... (William, 1995, p. 1380-1381).” Her illusion was that out of all the men that she would meet, at least one of them would be the right one for her. It was her desire to be happy again and to be loved unconditionally. This would however not be the case, but instead, it marked a new page of ethical dilemma following her professional misconduct with one of her student. “...she was kicked out before the spring term ended... A seventeen-year-old kid she got mixed up with... And there was practically a town ordinance passed against her... (William, 1995, p. 1398).” It was when the authorities knew about this case that she had to leave for New Orleans.

While in New Orleans, Blanche decides that she must create a very strong illusion of happiness and comfort in order to not reveal anything about her past. For instance, when she first arrives in New Orleans and meets with Stella, she keeps commenting about the quality of the apartment that Stella lives in; she is of the opinion that it does not befit Stella’s status “...such a mockery if you asked me...(William, 1995, p. 1267).

The playwright goes to the extent of using very subtle symbols to indicate the extent of how illusion and reality are constant antagonists in the entire play. For instance, the fact that Blanche is always having a bath is a symbol

used to create the illusion that she tries hard to hide her old age and dilemma "...Hey, toots! Canary bird, will you get out of the bathroom! [Pounds on the door] (William, 1995, p. 1381).

There is also the symbol of darkness which Blanche uses to hide her old age. A rather important aspect of realism and illusion is brought out by the fact that William constantly introduces Blanches to the stage under dim light. Blanche avoids appearing in bright and/or direct light especially when she comes face to face with Mitch, her suitor. The avoiding of light according to Cumming (2004) is meant to prevent Mitch from seeing the reality of Blanche's fading beauty. When her lies or illusions are eventually discovered, Blanche states:

" I don't want realism. I want magic! Yes, yes, magic!

I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them.

I don't tell truth, I tell what ought to be truth.

And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it (William, 1995, p. 1380)!"

Unlike Blanche, albeit with its shortcomings, Stanley is an ardent believer of reality. Literally speaking, he neither has imagination nor use for constantly living in an illusion. He lacks the patience for Blanche's desire of always living in an imaginary fake world. Stanley uses force in order to survive. When Blanche is in the bathroom, Stanley is quoted saying " Hey, toots! Canary bird, will you get out of the bathroom (William, 1995, p. 1365)!" His moves, words and actions are decisive and forceful. For instance in Chapter Seven when he gets into an argument with Stella over Blanche's stay, he

<https://assignbuster.com/a-street-car-named-desire-questions-narrative/>

states “ 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! Period... (William, 1995, p. 1381).” Stanley is determined to do everything possible in order to unravel the illusion that Blanche represents, he goes to the extent of finding out the facts regarding Blanche’s departure from Laurel, addressing Stella after finding out the truth “...Set down! I’ve got th’ dope on your big sister Stella... (William, 1995, p. 1365).” He is sure to let everybody know the truth about Blanche.

According to Cumming (2004), “ he is like a dog with a bone which refuses to let up”. It is because of Stanley’s gossip about Blanche that Mitch dumps her. Stanley states:

“...But even the management of the Flamingo was impressed by Dame Blanche...And after two or three dates, they quit and then she goes on to another one, the same old line, the same old act and the same old hooey. And as time went by, she became the town character...She was kicked out before the spring term ended... A seventeen-year-old kid she got mixed up with... And there was practically a town ordinance passed against her... (William, 1995, p. 1398).” Mitch eventually turns down the offer to marry Blanche stating “ No, I don’t think I want to marry you

anymore... No, you're not clean enough to bring into the house with my mother".

It is evident that it is important in life to at times have illusions. Whatever reason, it should be noted that having illusions is an innate human being characteristic. Basing on the evidence presented by this play, people may want to hide their bad sides like Allan did or to impress someone like in the case of Blanche or better still it could be a form of denial like in the case of Stella and Stanley. On the other hand however, reality acts as an eye opener to whatever things or issues that illusions hide. However hurting it may be, it is important for us to understand that appearance and reality are two different things the latter being the most important one since it creates a sense of acceptance (Sontag, 2010). As we reach the end of this play, both Stella and Mitch have to choose between Blanche and Stanley who symbolically represent illusions and reality respectively. They eventually choose reality or what they think is reality.