

# A street car named desire conflict essay



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In 'A streetcar named desire' Tennessee Williams uses stage directions, colour and symbolism to emphasize the point he is writing about.

This was written as a play, to be performed in front of an audience, so with using these techniques it enables Williams to direct his meaning in an almost sub-conscious fashion. The dialogue would primarily affect the audience, but using symbolism allows the audience to relate aspects of one part of the play to another and ultimately gain a better understanding of the message Williams is trying to get across. In this essay I will comment on the techniques that Williams uses and also how he uses them in the context of the play, to achieve greater effectiveness. We must first look at the opening of scene three and address the themes which are brought up in the long stage direction. The main focus is put on the poker game, and it is a game which really brings up symbolism and imagery found in other parts of the play. Firstly there is the poker game itself.

On the surface, poker is generally regarded to be a game played by people in a lower social status and often associated with a seedy and immoral atmosphere. It is widely used as a way of gambling, which brings up a number of symbolic representations. There is this idea of 'risk', that you go into the game knowing you could walk away with everything but also, walk away with nothing. Then there is the deceit that each player has to do to enable a better chance of winning. It is this suggestion of hiding from others, shielding the truth, which plays such a big part in the play.

Blanche is very much someone who doesn't like the truth (her truth) and predominantly lies to those closest to her in order to create a completely '

image' of herself. Finally the game poker builds tension. Not only does it a tension filled game (for the players/characters) but is also a way for Williams to build tension for the reader. It gives him the opportunity to slow things down a bit and use language which is short and sharp " Give me two cards" " You Mitch" " I'm out" " One". Throughout the book it is possible to describe the confrontation between Blanche and Stanley as a poker game. The importance of the poker game in the play is proven by the fact that Tennessee Williams was thinking of calling the play " The Poker Night".

In the first four scenes of the play, Blanche plays a good bluff. She tricks everyone into believing that she is a woman of country-girl manners and " high moral integrity". Stanley asks her to " lay her cards on the table", but she continues her bluff. However, Stanley then goes on a quest for the truth. He then discovers and reveals Blanche's true past.

Once he knows her true " cards" he then has the upper hand. Stanley caps his win by raping her. It is interesting to note that in the last scene of the play, when Blanche is being taken away, Stanley is winning every hand in a poker game he is playing with friends. This symbolises his victory over Blanche. Related postgame of thingsIn scene three's opening stage direction, Williams comments on the picture of Van Gogh's billiard-parlour (The picture of Van Gogh's emphasizes it's theatricality via art rather than it's crude realities), the " raw colours of childhood's spectrum" and the colours of the men's shirts, all of which are vivid and flamboyant.

These colours and imagery assert the male dominance which is present in the house at the time and also the dominance of men in the play as a whole-

primarily Stanley's dominance over Stella and Blanche. One critic suggests there is a kind of ambiguity in this direction- that there is a sign of "arrested development". On one hand there is the raw colours of childhoods spectrum, yet the men are depicted at the "peak of their physical manhood". This could be an attempt to weaken the male dominance on the house- an attribute that could be closely linked to Blanche's attempt to weaken the relationship between Stanley and Stella? Symbolism plays a major part in the play as it manages to indicate certain things in the play that are on a wider scale as opposed to the literal meaning. The title itself is a symbol for the way that Blanche (or society as a whole) have become degraded- possibly caused by their want of things that are forbidden, 'desire'.

In the very first stage direction it tells us that the streetcar ends at Elysian fields- a cemetery for heroes. This in itself brings death straight into the novel, that everyone comes to an end and ultimately dies. Although Blanche does not actually 'die' her whole demeanor and mental state practically ceases to exist as she is taken off to the mental institute. Williams uses props to symbolize certain things in the play. One of these includes a liquor bottle.

It appears throughout the play and has different meanings for different characters. For Blanche it is way to escape the 'real' world. She almost drowns her sorrows, sorrows that have escalated throughout her turbulent life. Blanche seeks refuge in alcohol, and this collapse into alcoholism meets the end in scene 10 when she brakes the bottle to attack Stanley. It shows how far Blanche has descended into a miserable state, that she has to rely on the bottle (alcohol) to protect herself.

The fact that Stanley dismisses this attack by grabbing the bottle might suggest that deep down Blanche knows that alcohol isn't going to save her but is merely an attempt to escape the real world. In Stanley's case, the alcohol is something that turns him into a more violent and aggressive person. He is under the influence when he attacks Stella " We've been drinking beer". In the penultimate scene, he opens up a beer and a ". . . geyser of foam...

" shoots up. This represents the male ejaculation and once again emphasizes the primitive sexual nature that Stanley is closely linked to. In raping Blanche he asserts his dominance and completes his ' victory'. Another prop that represents Blanche's breakdown is the mirror in the beginning of scene ten.

It starts off with the stage direction of Blanche has "... been drinking heavily" stressing how far she has ' fallen' in a mental and physical sense. It continues, to say that Blanche " slams down the mirror with such violence that it breaks". This represents how much Blanche dislikes the truth.

The stage itself represents a lot in the play. On a physical sense the stage cannot be escaped. The characters are confined in this small place, a place which resembles not simply the specific region, but perhaps is symbolic of the society as a whole. When ' Streetcar' was performed on stage the use of lighting enabled the director to " make walls appear by the skilled use of light" and this would focus attention on certain characters at points where they were at their most prominent.

But light didn't end at the physical sense, but in the novel 'light' reflected the truth. Blanche didn't like the light for many reasons. The first of which was that she didn't like the fact she was growing older (looking older) and so by obscuring the light obscured other characters sight of Blanche. (Here she used the paper lantern). Blanche takes regular baths.

These actions can be interpreted in all sorts of ways. In literal terms, the bath represents Blanche's desire to be clean. She has come from a privileged background and is none too pleased about boarding in the place that Stanley and Stella call 'home'. "This- can this be- her home?" But she also uses the bath to get rid of the 'dirt' that has plagued her all her life. We know that she has been a prostitute and has had a troubled past, so bathing allows her to get rid of some of the baggage that she has accumulated. Finally, the bath is a way of escaping the real world.

Blanche can lock herself in the bathroom, like protection from the others. She can lay back and forget about her past and dream about things that she would like- things that she desires. The bath is also a technique that allows Williams to get Blanche out of a scene. If he wanted to isolate Blanche so that the other characters could talk about her then this method would allow him to keep Blanche within the walls of the house yet away from what others have to say about her. Williams frequently uses sounds to emphasize his point. There are many sounds throughout the play that are symbolic of current situations in the play.

For instance, the screeching of a cat appears quite frequently in the opening scenes. This represents the start of Blanches descent into madness. There is

also the pounding of the trains and the crashing of thunder which represents Blanches past catching up with her. Both noises would start off quiet, in the distance but yet gradually the noise would become louder and eventually be ‘on top’ of you. This ended up true for Blanche.

Her past did catch up with her and there was nothing she could do. The force of these sounds also represented the dominance and brute force that Stanley had over Blanche. The fact that the trains ended up at ‘cemeteries’ reflects that society as a whole was running towards death at an unstoppable speed, the degeneration of civilization. There are various different pieces of music in the play that represent different moods that come up in the play. In the very first stage direction we are introduced to the Blue Piano.

This reflected how black-American culture has become integrated into white society. The actual style of music reflects the ambivalent nature of society. This type of music was known to be joyful and yet sorrowful at the same time. The fact that the Blue piano “..

. xpresses the spirit of the life which goes on here” shows how even in the dirtiest, run-down slums there is hope. It also signified, and used by Williams to symbolize, the primitive life force of Stanley. Another piece of music that arises in the play is the Varsouviana (a Polka tune). This again, like the thunder and trains, reminded Blanche of her past. It reminded her of a particular moment in her life; the death of her boyfriend Allan.

This death and recollection of events symbolizes Blanches attempts to get away from her past, but it is a past that always catches up with her. Allan’s

death also symbolizes the pain that Blanche has suffered, the fact that she has been let down so many times which (may) evoke a lot of sympathy for Blanche. Williams once said that, “ poetry doesn’t have to be words...

it can be situations. ” In ‘ A Streetcar Named Desire’ Williams explores the use of symbols, props, sounds to emphasis the points that he is trying to get across. The play itself is very much a metaphor for the degeneration of society as a whole and that brute force will always overcome ‘ fantasy’ and desire.