

The role of blance and mitch in a streetcar named desire

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In the 1947 play *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams, the relationship between Blanche and Mitch is a key subplot in the tale of Blanche's descent into madness and isolation. Whilst Williams initially presents Mitch as the answer to all Blanche's problems and as a viable male suitor, it soon becomes evident that Blanche and Mitch are not meant to be together. Mitch, in the broader progression of Williams' work, is merely another man who will ruin Blanche's life.

Williams first presents Mitch as Blanche's potential saviour, and indeed that is how Blanche also wishes to see him at the start. Not only might Mitch be able to provide for Blanche financially, but emotionally too. Blanche remarks that Mitch is "sensitive", and they share a tragic romantic past.

Furthermore, Mitch seems to fit Blanche's ideal of the Southern Beau when compared to other men, whom she regards as "apes". Mitch is formal and respectful, calling Blanche "Miss DuBois" and Blanche admits that she appreciates his "gallantry". It seems that Blanche and Mitch are in a way united by their shared loss, and are brought together by mutual experience. They both need to fill a vacuum in their lives and conveniently find each other as a means for emotional (and financial) security. Mitch hits upon this, stating: "you need somebody, and I need somebody - could it be you and me Blanche?". There is even a brief tenderness in their relationship and Blanche to find solace in Mitch; she "huddles" into him and gives "long grateful sobs" before exclaiming "sometimes, there's God, so quickly". We can see the closeness of the bond between the two of them as Mitch is the only character who Blanche tells the truth about "Alan", and it is after this outburst of emotion that they are united together.

However, Blanche and Mitch's relationship is doomed to fail by the nature of Mitch's incomplete, pseudo-masculinity. When recounting the story of Alan, Blanche reveals that she couldn't be with him because he wasn't "like a man" - obviously alluding to his homosexuality which was taboo and illegal at the time. Yet throughout the play we find that Mitch too isn't "like a man". From the very beginning we see that Mitch works in "the spare parts department", a possible reference to his incomplete masculinity according to Kolin; he seems never to have matured, still living with his "mother"; and when he dances with Blanche, it is "awkwardly". Similarly, his conversation is awkward and unromantic, as he remarks on how he "sweats" and how much he "weighs". It soon becomes apparent that Mitch is therefore not the "Rosenkavalier" or "Armand" that Blanche paints him to be. This is the problem. Blanche, who "doesn't want realism" but "magic", makes Mitch fit the mould of the Southern Beau which she desires by means of her literary allusions despite the fact that he belongs to the new order of men in the post-World War II era. She demands that he "bows" and commands him to "dance". Mitch becomes Blanche's pet man whom she moulds into her ideal of masculinity which is, like Blanche, "incongruous" to contemporary ideals of masculinity which promoted strong men who were war veterans and the defenders against tyranny after World War II. Blanche, as with everything, clouds the relationship with Mitch in illusion, which Williams symbolises with the scene when Blanche invites Mitch to place a "lantern" over the light in her room. She says "I can't stand a naked bulb", a metaphor for her refusal to accept reality, and placing the lantern over the light is symbolic of Blanche's masking the truth of her age and past from Mitch. Mitch's

masculinity is further questioned when compared with Stanley. Stanley is the ideal stereotypical man's man of the time: he is highly sexed; he brings home "meat" for his wife, symbolic of the hunter-gatherer dynamic; and he plays sport. Furthermore, when it comes to Blanche, Stanley is assertive and successfully has his way with her in the implied rape of scene 10, thus asserting his sexual dominance. Mitch however is unable to do so, and in his attempted rape he "fumbles to embrace her". It is therefore clear that, either due to Mitch's incomplete masculinity, or the veneer of chivalrous romanticism Blanche lives under, eventually will fail. In the end, Mitch yells that it was "lies, lies, lies!" that tore them apart and the relationship ends.

Yet Williams makes greater use of the relationship between Mitch and Blanche than as a mere subplot, doomed to fail. Thematically, Mitch, like Stella, becomes a battleground for the ideology clash between Stanley and Blanche, who represent the New and the Old World respectively. Stanley: the immigrant worker, "100% American", war veteran. Blanche: the upper class Southern Belle of the USA's French-colonial past. When Stanley and Blanche meet it is clear that their two ideologies cannot live side by side, and a battle ensues for dominance. Stanley wins the first battle, after convincing Stella to "come back" to him after hitting her, and the field of battle shifts to Mitch. Initially, by means of her deceptive seduction and emotional appeal, Mitch falls for Blanche, yet Stanley manages to convince Mitch to seek the truth from Blanche. Indeed, he does and Mitch adopts Stanley's speech patterns and physical movements in scene 9, a maneuver which is symbolic of Stanley having successfully exerted his influence over Mitch: he speaks

monosyllabically (“ Me. Mitch”) and with interrogative statements (“ Why?”, “ Are you out of your mind?” and “ Do we have to have that fan on?”). Eventually, Mitch “ rips” the “ lantern” off the lamp, symbolically violating Blanche and prefiguring the subsequent rape scene by shattering her illusions and pretences. After Stanley has taken Mitch from Blanche, she has lost everything and appears in clothes which are “ soiled” and “ crumpled”, symbolic of her stained purity and helplessness.

Ultimately, Williams creates Mitch as someone who means well concerning Blanche, and who is one of the few characters to empathise with her, however he never realistically does anything to help her. His well-meaning yet powerless position is epitomised by the end stage directions as he is “ sobbing” while Blanche leaves, and in his failed attempt to criticise Stanley (“ You...brag...brag...brag...bull!”) This criticism may well have carried some weight and helped Blanche, yet it is castrated by Mitch’s inability to even formulate a sentence. Mitch was Blanche’s last opportunity to detach herself from the Old World of the colonial South and attach herself to the modern, post-industrialist world in the aftermath of World War II, a world in which traditional gender roles had shifted. Once this opportunity is missed, Blanche is doomed to fade away into the abyss of obscurity and her institutionalisation becomes inevitable as she is left insane, alone, unstable, and unsupported.