

A streetcar named desire

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A Streetcar Named Desire A Streetcar Named Desire, by Tennessee Williams, is a thrilling depiction of a woman's fall from grace. Blanche DuBois, the protagonist of the story, is forced to move in with, or "visit," her sister in New Orleans. Throughout the play, Blanche struggles to accept her reality, and ultimately her fate. Blanche is misunderstood and driven to insanity by Stella's practical husband, Stanley. This play portrays her journey from a dream land to total insanity. The play also depicts many societal norms of the time, namely those in which Tennessee Williams wished to challenge. Overall, A Streetcar Named Desire portrays the harsh reality of life in the 1940's, and reality's timeless ability to become elusive as dreams and fantasies take control. Blanche Dubois visits her sister in New Orleans after "taking a break" from work, and eventually loses herself in her fantasies. At first people believe Blanche's royal disguise to resemble her person, as she covers herself in expensive clothes and deceitful lies. Blanche begins to believe her own façade, but soon enough Stanley sees through her fabricated narrative. From the start Stanley is apprehensive of Blanche and her alleged past. Shortly after Blanche's arrival, Stanley overhears her talking to Stella, regarding Stanley's animal-like behavior the night before. Stanley is disgruntled by Blanche's interference, and begins researching her true past. Stanley first confronts Blanche after he discovers her loss of Belle Reve. Stanley argues "In the state of Louisiana we have the Napoleonic code according to which what belongs to the wife belongs to the husband and vice versa," but Blanche simply ignores his banter (1. 3 36). Stanley's practical personality clashes with Blanche's quixotic ideals, and he constantly questions her intent. After arriving in New Orleans, Blanch

attempts to cover up her true appearance by hiding in the dark. In this play, the light symbolizes reality, a daunting idea in which Blanche runs from, she eventually finds her comfort in the dark, distorted shadows. Blanche believes by avoiding the light she will conceal her true age from Mitch and the rest of the cast. Once Blanche arrives at Stella and Stanley's house she covers the light bulb with a Chinese paper lantern, saying: " I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action" (1. 2 25). In a way Blanche is living in the past by covering up her true age. Blanche lives in a dream world, where she is still a young debutante and her first true love is still beside her. Blanche simply cannot accept " the hand fate has dealt" her (1. 8 102). After Blanche and Mitch date for several months, Mitch realizes he has never seen Blanche in the light. In scene nine, towards the end of the play, Mitch confronts Blanche about her avoidance of the light. He tells her he does not mind her being older than she said; only her lies bothered him. She replies " 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 the truth, I tell what ought to be the truth. And if that's sinful, then let me be damned for it! " (1. 9 134) Earlier in the play, Blanche had compared her young love, Allan, to " bright vivid light, " since her youth the light represents lost love and innocence for Blanche, while the dark only represents disillusionment (1. 6 57). Blanche's fear of the light keeps her from reality, while she is caught hiding in a blurry vision of the elusive past. In the play, Tennessee Williams points out a certain flaw of American society in the 1940's by accentuating women's dependence on men. Williams depicts Blanche and Stella in such a way to emphasize their reliance on men for support and identity. The ladies

in this play depend upon men to provide happiness, and to uphold their appearance and reputation. Although, Blanche points out Stella would be much happier without her abusive husband Stanley. Stella, however, relies on Stanley to fulfill her own American dream of having a family. Conversely, Blanche concocts the man of her dreams, Shep Huntleigh, and intends to rely on him for financial security. Eventually, the domestic home, where women are supposed to feel safe and comfortable begins to transform into a violent street. The set of the play allows a viewer to see the interior of the Kowalski's home while also seeing the street surrounding it. For example, before Stanley rapes Blanche the wall in the apartment becomes transparent and the violence taking place on the street is visible in the apartment, foreshadowing the vicious act about to take place. In Elliot's literary criticism of the play, she discusses the rape scene and how the violent transition of the street into the apartment could represent Blanche's mental breaking point. Scene Eleven exemplifies Williams's demonstration that the home is no longer a comfortable, safe place for women to reside and work, but is now a violent ground for men to take advantage of them. Williams portrays his animus towards the role women were forced to take on in society of the 1940's America, and he represents this dislike through Blanche and Stella, and the ridiculous roles they must take on. In the end, Blanche's inability to succumb to the harsh truth of reality, leads to her to live a life of disillusionment and fear. Stanley's realistic character cause him to conflict with Blanche's dreamlike state. The conflict between reality and fantasy is a timeless battle being fought throughout the ages. The female characters in this story believe they must rely on men for happiness and safety, even

though men seem to be the root of their problems. Blanche hides from life's realities in the comfort of darkness, until Mitch yanks her out of her dream world causing her to face the facts and fess up to her lies. Reality eventually becomes too much for Blanche to handle, while the rest of the cast is content in disregarding Blanche's violent encounter with Stanley, leaving them, where Blanche once stood, in the dark.

Works Cited

A Streetcar Named Desire. Dir. Elia Kazan. Prod. Charles K. Feldman. Screenplay by Tennessee Williams. Perf. Vivien Leigh, Marlon Brando, Kim Hunter. Warner Brothers, 1951. DVD. Williams, Tennessee. A Streetcar Named Desire. New York: New Directions, 1980. Print. Elliott, Debbie. "A Streetcar Named Desire." NPR. National Public Radio, 23 Sept. 2002. Web. 15 Jan. 2013. .

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