

How much is desire a
force for destruction
in the play a streetcar
named desire e...

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The play 'A Streetcar Named Desire' obviously has the theme of desire playing a key role in it, since the play is so named. However, due to it being only a title, it cannot distinguish the role of this emotion, the many different subtleties of this emotion, and even the diverse range of ways it can be taken as meaning. It is not merely an emotion, but a force of nature, even a rite of passage. Within the play itself, as this emotion runs through the various scenes, no one threatens it, or even particularly acknowledges its very existence; yet, if it is not mentioned, then it should be unable to affect the characters and the plot as a whole.

The actual depiction and reality of desire has not changed over time, but reactions are very different to it in the play to both what they are now, and what they were thousands of years ago. In this period, men were seen as being superior to women, but women had their place in the social order nevertheless. Stanley talks about the Napoleonic code; this is still used today, but only in principle. This is because for the most part, women and men are their own separate entities and have their own lives.

In this point of time, and primarily in this location (since one cannot definitively say this was the overall mood towards desire when one only reads about what is accepted in New Orleans), desire from men was widely accepted, but the same from women was scorned. However, in Londre's¹ opinion, nowadays audiences would sympathise with Stanley in many cases, for being the protagonist. Common opinion would suggest that he would be the more loathed character now, unlike then when such behaviour, albeit acceptable, was not liked by women.

If one was so bold as to reveal one's views in public, one could very well be shunned for such an appalling reputation, such infamy. However, solely lustful desire from women towards strangers, the sort that could lead to prostitution, was disdained. In the play, there are very clear types of desire. There is the lustful sort of desire that is felt by Stanley towards most women that he passed: ' He sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classification, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them. '

This man is what would now be known as chauvinist, but at the time, this was accepted amongst society. Men were allowed to have these feelings; indeed it was virtually their right, but women could not have such a thing. When Blanche meets the ' young man', you can tell she experiences overwhelming sexual attraction for him, although whether or not this is merely due to his lack of age cannot be ascertained. Blanche could also be thought to have some sort of attraction towards Stanley, at least at the start; it is only due to Stanley's character that this all goes horribly wrong.

She had invested so much time in spinning an illusion for herself and outsiders; so much time that she had begun to even believe it herself, and so when the desire finally catches up with her, both her carefully placed illusions are shattered, as is her mind. This is similar to how the ' Glass Menagerie' is meant to be performed, and how Stanislavski said Chekhov wrote²: destroy both the inner and outer falsity... ' Here he states that all illusions will be destroyed eventually; even if not by desire directly, then by some other powerful emotion. I agree; this point is partially proved by the

end of 'Streetcar'. One does feel very sorry for Blanche for losing her sanity, but you cannot help but ponder whether in some way she did bring it upon herself. Desire destroyed her, but she had almost destroyed others through it. Another way that Desire is used in the play is in the context of actual love.

Love is very important as a theme in the play, especially with its volatility and unpredictability. There is the typical, expected kind of love between Steve and Eunice, and a similar sort between Stella and Stanley, except with the latter, one cannot help but wonder whether this love only blossomed because Stella was trying to escape her overly privileged background into something more down to earth. You also cannot be sure what love is classified as; Stella believes with her heart that it is, but a modern audience would surely be more sceptical of this claim.

Her desirous love for Stanley has destroyed her chance of having a future as anything but a housewife in a small, cramped little flat in the middle of downtown New Orleans, since they create a child by the end of the play. Stella cannot leave without suffering prejudice and being stigmatised for the rest of her life; attitudes towards single mothers are very different to how they are now. In the modern day, the play is said to be an early example of women's rights improving.

Megan Terry³ also agrees this play would strike a chord with modern audiences, as well as those of the time. 'Streetcar was a necessary addition... emotionally. It is a feminist play. ' Not only has her future been destroyed by her desire for Stanley, but also her chance of having a peaceful

life; Stanley is an ‘ animal thing’ and occasionally strikes Stella. Nowadays this is unheard of, but then, according to Eunice, this happens often: ‘ There’s nothing to be scared of. They’re crazy about each other. ‘

Desire can lead to the destruction of safety, a future, but worst of all, it leads to Stella being stranded towards the end of the play; she does not know whether to believe her sister or her husband. She ends up letting her valuable and old, if sometimes awkward relationship with her sister be destroyed, and at the same time ends up damaging, but not destroying her relationship with her husband. Whether this can end up being made whole again is unsaid, but the audience would get the impression that she will never quite be able to have the same closeness with her husband, and will always be suspicious of what did happen.

The directors of the film version tried to show that the rapist ‘ would not go unpunished’⁴, but in the play, it is not clear as to what the future will yield. Desire, even when it is more moral, still proves itself a veritable force of destruction. There is also the symbolic use of the streetcar called ‘ Desire’ which delivered Blanche at the start of the play. Blanche has already been affected by the destruction of desire, but by moving (however temporarily), she has the chance to start afresh, and escape all the tales of her past misdoings.

Blanche gets hysterical when talking about her journey to Stella’s home; perhaps she was struck by the irony, or experiencing some form of a premonition of what was to come, or maybe just disbelieving of the place

she has ended up. ' They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at – Elysian Fields! ' With the power of hindsight, the reader can almost see this as the future for Blanche, but with more a dreamlike quality than what we suspect her future to actually be.

She only wants to be loved, to be desired; some way, anyway to repent for her past actions. Instead, desire again catches up with her, and both delivers her to and follows her along the path of destruction. Londre 5 here says that she desires "" rest! "" but, partially due to her meeting with the young man, I believe that is simply a desire for closeness and intimacy. If you interpret the word ' Desire' literally as in the title, as a noun, it can be clearly seen as a force for destruction that delivers Blanche to her sombre end.

Jealousy can also be seen as a type of desire; the desire for something which either someone possesses, or something that you yourself can never own. This desire piqued Stanley's interest in Blanche's past, and leads to him discovering not only her belongings and lack of significant riches (indeed, most of her possessions are simply part of her elaborate fantasy), but also her shadowy and shameful past. Stanley from this moment on suspects Blanche of everything named, but also leads him to the conclusion that if so many other men have had intimate encounters with her, then surely he should be allowed the same.

This jealousy and desire of what you cannot have caused Blanche to completely lose her sanity, and makes Stella's relationship with Stanley

become brittle. However, there is one other force of destruction that effects everyone on earth, not just these characters in this play. Death is the finality to life, and can be considered the exact opposite of desire. Whilst desire in the dictionary definition tries to create life and bring happiness on earth, death takes away life and can cause both unhappiness, and an end to being on earth.

Death can not only mean the literal sense as in towards animate life, but also towards imagined fantasies; Blanche's illusions are brutally destroyed before her eyes, hastening her final descent into what you hope is madness, not consciousness. Her whole persona and almost her entire being are gone while still living; she has lost her new love, her freedom, her friends, family, beauty and her life. This destruction cannot be dismissed because it is not desire, but it is not desire. Londre says that the move from desire to death is 'metaphorical', however I disagree; I think that in this play, the change is not metaphorical but physical.

Death and desire are the two main themes of the entire play. Both of them are destructive, but both are necessary in life to life. Desire has far many more ways in which it can destroy life, but death is the final way.

Nevertheless, desire is present from the beginning to the end of the play, and although it does not destroy everything, everything that it does touch is irreparably changed, so I believe that desire is the most destructive force in the play.