

Essay about a streetcar named desire essay



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“ Blanche will be destroyed unless she can reconcile herself to modern American values. Rather than face such a harsh reality, and unprepared to abandon her bond with a dying culture, she retreats into a fantasy world, surrounded by ‘ a group of spectral admirers’. Stella survives. Is the play’s final message adapt or perish? ” The opinion of the above critic discusses Blanche as a central character and several aspects of the play that may ultimately lead to Blanches downfall.

We must first observe the term ‘ American values’ and define what they meant to Williams, what they mean now and how important they were in 1950’s America. The typical American dream that can be considered today is of the typical nuclear family in the suburbs of modern day America. This view seems to adopt materialistic values and somewhat dissects the original conditions on which America was supposed to be built. The most predominant of these conditions was those of freedom and liberty.

When we relate this to A Streetcar Named Desire it can be argued that the families represent different aspects of the dream. Blanches character, the old world and the concept of her dying culture is that of the materialistic American values and the prejudices and arrogance that occurred as a consequence of the democracy. Stanley on the other hand is the personification in all that is morally and primitively representative of the American dream. He as a person who is free and considers himself a pure American.

He may also be a representation of liberty, he had already liberated Stella, now he wishes to liberate Blanche. The question also refers to Blanches bond with

a dying culture and her attempts to contain this within a fantasy world.

Evidence of this is shown throughout the play through Blanches excessive use of poetic language and French, but this French merely serves to further isolate Blanche in this drastically different environment. Another aspect of New Orleans Blanche has to come to terms with is the variety of music e. g.

the Blue Piano and the Varasouviana, which is a far cry from her previous experiences at the upper class ballrooms. The strongest link to the old-world that Blanche possesses are her clothes. These are often highly elaborate and distinct such as her rhinestone tiara. It is possible to view her attire as a form of protection from the changing world, a retreat to her youth and possibly either an act of defiance to the new-worlds conventions or an act of glorified suicide, in the sense that each time she wears them she drifts, unaware farther from the old-world and closer to cemeteries. It is obvious when we view this question it seems to place Blanche as the central role and the pivotal character, this is argued often between critics and a universal answer has still not been reached.

Critics such as Francis Gilbert, views *A Streetcar Named Desire* in a way which the characters become somewhat interstitial and the main aim of the play becomes its messages and overall themes. Such themes include sex and conflict, both prominent in Blanches stay in New Orleans. It is evident and Gilberts belief that both Blanche and Stanley have immensely strong sexual appetites and both enjoy being in control. This creates the conflict that could be considered the central theme. It is telling though the way in which each character chooses the way in which they wish to dominate and take control.

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While Stanley uses 'violent temper and impulsive manner' to establish power Blanche tries to persuade people to change using her 'looks and eloquence'. When viewing these two different approaches it clearly shows Blanches inability to change or adapt. It is not in her nature or experience to have to alter to suit others, it has been her experience that she could persuade people to fit her personal needs, but in this case the immense differences between the new and old-world are too much for Blanches powers of seduction. This element also gives the play a certain inevitability, and as well as inspiring pathos within the audience it seems Blanche is deemed to perish due to fate and no amount of adaptation or change will alter this fate. This is also highlighted in Gilberts review regarding the rape scene. As well as it being the climax of the play it also concludes the conflict through Stanleys display of dominance and Blanches helplessness, the ultimate act of repression of Blanche and her 'dying culture'.

Contrastingly it can also be argued that Blanche is the central character and the most influential aspect of the play. One such critic who debates such an opinion is Shirley Galloway. The title of Galloways critical review 'Last Stop: Blanches Breakdown' suggests her feeling of Blanches importance within the play. But contrastingly to this her opening line discusses the 'intricate web of complex themes and conflicted characters.

'In a review written by an unknown writer it suggests Blanches pivotal role in the play. In the essay Blanche can be associated with several themes and symbols that run throughout the play. Blanche is after all the epitome of the old-world and in stark contrast to all, thing that Stanley stands for. One major symbol associated with Blanche is that of the moth, attracted to bright

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light and often linked with the soul. The play could be arguably about the journey of Blanche and her search for love, happiness and redemption. In her search for redemption she often purges herself in boiling baths and in her longing to find somebody who could guide her through the coming years.

It is evident from the start of the play that Blanche does not fit into her physical and social surroundings, this is evident in scene 3 where Stella goes to Stanley after he beat her only minutes before. This is a distinct representation of the differences between the olds and new-worlds, Blanche is appalled while her sister (ex old-world) is once again stolen and liberated by Stanley and the new-world. This conflict between Stanley and Blanche would not have been so immense if it wasn't for Blanches inability to change or adapt. Instead it is Blanche that tries to alter her surroundings to suit her needs such as her addition of the lantern to the light bulb. This action would suit Blanche due to it covering the truth but it could, and evidently is viewed with hostility by Stanley. Blanches attempts to change the apartment and especially Stella (regarding opinions on Stanley and New Orleans) intensely angers Stanley and so fuels their conflict.

In this case Blanche could be considered a catalyst In evaluation of the two opinions or approaches used to try and answer the question I have come to an equal conclusion. In my view Blanche is a highly important character within the play, she represents many of Williams' ideals, fears and feelings about being an outcast within society. She seems to be a tool whereby Williams could purge himself, and when relating it to the whole play Blanche could be associated with Williams and his troubles with men and society. She

could be viewed as a catalyst to the plays themes and embodiment of them also e. g.

conflict (within). Although, I hold the opinion that A Streetcar Named Desire is a play, not about Blanche but the difficulties and differences in the face of modern society and it emphasises the changing American values. Although the second opinions theory of Blanches unwillingness to change is well backed up I don't think that it is the case about her refusal to adapt. I think that it is due to Blanches fragility as a character and bond held with the old-world that prevents her adaptation.

This is due to Stellas experience. Stella is quite evident as a stronger and central character who held fewer links with the old-world to break. Stanley was born into this new-world of liberty and holds the power which males of the day held and could excerpt this power as he wished. In conclusion although Blanche is a representation of many themes and symbols, she is not strong enough as a character to hold and take them through to the new-world. If we turn to Darwinian theory it holds the concepts of evolution and ' survival of the fittest'.

It is the case that the latter causes evolution but evolution does not occur without ' fitness' or strength in regards to Blanche. It is then, ' survival of the fittest' not ' adapt or perish' that is the final message within A Streetcar Named Desire.