

Essay on a streetcar named desire



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Tennessee Williams' 'Streetcar Named Desire', the character of the protagonist Blanche is created by Williams to be facing great change, and is facing the pull between her internal flaws and the external forces pushing this change .

By showing this change in accordance within the confines of a modern domestic tragedy, it becomes inherently clear that in the context of this play, what makes it truly tragic is this unstoppable external change that the protagonist is a victim of. The continual emphasis by Williams on Blanche's weaknesses in this time of continual change adds to the tragic portrayal of the character. As early on as the first scene Blanche's refusal to face reality is shown, and begins this irrefutable burden of reality in contrast to the illusory world she has become to indulge herself within. It is symbolised by her inability to face the light.

Blanche cries out in scene one to Stella to 'turn that over-light off... I won't be looked at in this merciless glare'. This loaded sentence suggests many connotations towards the character of Blanche.

As on one hand this light reflects her inability to face the truth, as the light represents the purity of truth, and shows a possible domestic tragedy area as a psychological element to this denial of reality. However this as a sole interpretation fails to understand the meaning of this 'merciless glare' she is witnessing. This merciless nature of the light seemingly represents the nature of this unstoppable change, overpowering and dominant, and in this sense the development as Blanche as the tragic victim of this erosion of the Old South starts to become increasingly evident. What this inability to

face light is to exploit one of her fatal flaws; her inability to face reality, and thus in this respect it shows that these changes are not an unstoppable external force, but something exacerbated by her own flaws. However, although this internal flaw is highlighted, this 'merciless glare' which symbolises the reality of these changes shows the unstoppable nature of these changes, which are purely external. Therefore, it shows a combination of her internal flaws and external forces, but pivotally the dominating nature of this external force makes it unstoppable.

The tragic consequences of these changes is further reiterated through Williams' stage directions, as he refers to Blanche as a 'moth'. What this metaphorical reference represents is the fragile, weak and vulnerable state of Blanche, and also naivety as she is helplessly drawn into the light, the unstoppable nature and reality of this change. Here Blanche becomes the epitome of the impossible battle against this change as the delicate manifestation of the old values of the south. Constance Drake supports this interpretation of Blanche as she calls her the 'representative of a sensitive, gentle love whose defeat is to be lamented' and in essence she is.

She becomes the archetypal antagonistic person against this ruthless New America whose helpless defeat will be lamented throughout the play. This metaphor used by Williams adds to the growing sense that it is external factors which lead to her downfall and not her own internal flaws. This ever present sense that Blanche and Stanley's conflict is a clash between two cultures, the New America versus the Old South, or as Jacob H. Adler calls it, the 'culture-power dichotomy' between these two contrasting cultures,

resonates throughout the plot, moving between the heroic resistance of the Old against the ruthless dominance by the New culture.

Throughout the play from the beginning Blanche makes repeated references about her alignment to the Old South's culture, ranging from explicit remarks about it from 'I have old-fashioned ideals' to the emotional, personal nature of the culture as she mentions 'Edgar Allan Poe' and other contemporary literary figures of the period. Blanche also values manners. What this does is not just provide the composition of the old Southern values, but to show just how delicate and personal this old culture is. This Modern America is built around the foundations of the industrial revolution that dominated the late 19th and early 20th century. This steep industrialisation proved the rise of the proletariat, symbolised with Stanley, and this pitiless indifference and lack of individuality which makes Blanche's demise so true, as well as tragic. This symbolic representation Stanley provides in this culture battle is shown throughout by Williams to show this unstoppable, dominant change.

Arguably Williams created this contrast in imagery to show the tragic nature of this destruction of what was, and how it was these external forces which were causing this. Those who disagree with this analysis argue upon social justifications that the worker supplanting the upper class woman from her aristocratic ledge was justified. Though such connotation is rightly founded, it fails to understand the mechanics of a domestic tragedy, which place this collapse of rational social order as an integral part of tragedy, and Williams uses to this to highlight the tragic nature of competing against such unstoppable external changes. This view is supported by Adler who says in response to this somewhat Marxist interpretation, that Blanche is a '

representative of the sensitive individual lost in the modern, impersonal world'. This analysis is rightly founded as Blanche is someone who loves poetry and literature, and is a delicate and emotional 'moth' in contrast to Stanley who is in many respects a throwback to prehistoric times as he is very primitive in the sense that he is the provider and this indifferent worker intent of succeeding in this 'American Dream'. This supports the idea of keeping in touch within the context of a domestic tragedy, and fully understanding the intricacies of developing a tragic figure through the means of changes.

This collapse for the protagonist lies in the decline of the 'Southern Belle' and other terms and styles associated with the old south's upper classes, and the fact this tragedy in part is due to societal changes, shows this power of external forces. This lack of control Williams creates with Blanche's character adds to this idea that the tragedy lies with the unstoppable external changes. This is reiterated throughout the play by the utilization of stage directions. For example, a particularly poignant repeated remark about the triumph of the New America is 'the locomotive is heard is approaching'.

This direction is shown repeatedly in places where Stanley triumphs over Blanche or the Old South being completely overrun by the New America. For example in Scene Six after Blanche opens up her heart to Mitch about her personal heartache, when you believe as the audience some hope for her as a character, the 'locomotive' stage direction is included, which all but demotes any chance of happiness for her behind the dominating nature of this new America. Throughout the domestic tragedy genre, this lack of control over external forces is what makes it truly tragic. However although

this sentiment of complete innocence and the total victim is arguably the main traits portrayed of Blanche, she is still a tragic heroine with a fatal flaw, therefore many see her as someone who adds to the changes by these own internal flaws such as her vanity. Many cite the early encounter between Blanche and Stanley where she attempts flirting with him, as she ' playfully sprays him with the atomizer.

... she throws back her head and laughs'. This attempt for many including Elia Kazan, shows the true manipulative side of Blanche. He argues that Blanche is ' dangerous.

. Stanley does not want things upset by a phoney, corrupt, sick, destructive woman'. Although it can be understood why this view would be taken, as Blanche does show a flirtatious side and vanity, similar to what is revealed at the ' Flamingo Hotel', but taking this stance does show a degree of ignorance. Blanche's heartfelt, emotional opening up to Stella in Scene five about the way she acts provides a just explanation for these types of actions.

She explains that ' soft people have got to shimmer and glow-put a- paper lantern over the light' as ' men don't acknowledge your existence unless your making love to them'. She ends with ' I'm fading now'. What this shows that these unstoppable changes have caused her to put up a facade, a false pretence to resist these changes, and in fact this sad attempt only reiterates the unstoppable changes as what makes a tragedy truly tragic in this play. The character of Blanche in Williams' play becomes the archetypal tragic anti-hero, as someone torn between her internal flaws and the external forces which arise in the events and circumstances of the play. But

ultimately these changes cause her downfall as they are an unstoppable external force, and not caused by her own internal flaws.