

Tennessee Williams' play "A Streetcar Named Desire" thesis

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In his chef-d'oeuvre play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams explores how reality works to counter the escapist illusions that people create and use to dodge the harsh realities of life. The majority of people resort to fantasy after life becomes unbearable; unfortunately, such illusions only lead to self-destruction as laws govern the universe as opposed to chance and luck. Blanche DuBois' illusions and her unrelenting quest to escape the reality as espoused by Stanley leads her to insanity.

Williams uses this opportunity to show that fantasy cannot overcome the reality irrespective of how one tries. Williams' view towards the ideas of illusion and reality works to highlight the fact that reality will always overcome fantasy and the two cannot coexist peacefully, and while we cannot completely admire Stanley in his totally honest and brutal state, we can align ourselves with Blanche and her web of manipulations and lies.

After Blanche loses everything in her life, she resorts to fantasy as an escapist attempt to avoid confronting the harsh realities of her new status. Just like Blanche, people resort to fantasies when faced with seemingly insurmountable situations. Busch posits, "The fear that good objects have been destroyed leads to a fantasy of being alone with bad objects, adding to depressive feelings" (272). Similarly, Blanche responds to her crisis in the same manner. After losing her husband and Belle Reve, she does not have anything left in her life, and thus she resorts to fantasies as a way of dealing with her loss (Berkman 251).

In scene nine she admits, "I don't want realism, I want magic" (Williams 117). Magic in this context can only be actualized through a fantasy, which

explains why and how Blanche survives. Throughout the human history, people yearn to live in a world of plenty, free of pain, and full of bliss coupled with happiness. Unfortunately, Williams sends an awakening call to humanity that inasmuch as people want to live in a world of their creation, they have to wake up from their dreams and face the vagaries of the real world (Hawkins 27). Unfortunately, people do not accept this fact and in most cases, they resort to self-justification.

In scene two Blanche consoles herself by noting, "I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion" (Williams 41). When individuals cannot realize their full potential, they settle for mediocrity. Gilbert adds that due to laziness and lack of proper tools, individuals settle for the 'available' instead of striving to get the best, thus spiraling into mediocrity (84). Williams understood this aspect perfectly, which explains why he designs Blanche in this manner. In most cases, the deluded person cannot understand the reality and thus s/he chides those that embrace the reality. For instance, Blanche cannot understand why Stella goes back to her husband after a fight (Hovis 178). She nags Stella to call Shep Huntleigh, the millionaire fantasy boyfriend.

Williams uses Stanley's realistic view of life as a contrast to Blanche's illusions to indicate that the two aspects, viz. fantasy and reality cannot coexist peacefully. Right from the beginning, Blanche is at loggerheads with Stanley (Vlasopolos 334). He starts by pointing to the possibility that Blanche conned Stella of her inheritance by selling the Belle Reve. Stanley works tirelessly to expose Blanche's lies and her dark past. As aforementioned,

Williams uses Stanley purposely as a symbol of reality and Blanche to represent illusions (Rogoff 81).

Therefore, the reality always haunts fantasies just as Stanley haunts Blanche. No matter how one tries to run away from the reality, it will always find him or her. Stanley succeeds in getting information concerning Blanche's past and he exposes her lies even to Mitch, the prospective boyfriend. Ultimately, in the battle between reality and fantasy, the former triumphs, just as Stanley conquers Blanche (Mood 10). At one point, Stanley is determined to get rid of Blanche. In scene seven Stanley asserts, "She's not stayin' here after Tuesday. You know that, don't you? Just to make sure I bought her a ticket myself.

A bus ticket! She'll go! Period. P. S. She'll go Tuesday!" (Williams 104). This assertion qualifies the argument that reality and fantasy cannot co-exist peacefully and for peace to prevail, one has to leave and given that reality is permanent, fantasy must leave. In the final move to assert his preeminence and authority, Stanley rapes Blanche. In her masterpiece book, *Recovering from Rape*, Ledray notes that rape "is the most undignified thing that can happen to a woman, it is the ultimate loss of a woman's battles" (103). Similarly, Stanley's rape signifies that reality will ultimately overcome fantasy and if need be, the end of the battle between the two will be undignified.

However, Williams insinuates that irrespective of the shortcomings of fantasy, it is an indispensable tool of dealing with the harsh realities of the

world. As the play ends, Blanche draws back to her fantasies and this aspect insulates her from the vagaries of reality (Dace 938). Even though Blanche seemingly loses her mind, her fantasies convince her that she is leaving to meet her millionaire boyfriend. In addition, she consoles herself by telling the doctor, "Whoever you are—I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (Williams 142).

This kind of approach towards life helps the majority of people to wade through the murky waters of the unkind world that they live in during their sojourn on earth. Instead of facing the reality and probably having a nervous breakdown, Williams uses Blanche's unrelenting fantasies to show that it helps to fantasize (Fleche 499). We can align ourselves with Blanche. We all have our misgivings in life and when a disaster strikes, we shrink back to our secret fantasies where we see life from the perspective of how it should be as opposed to how it is. In a recap, Williams is saying that fantasy is not an evil thing after all as it offers Blanche an escape route from the harsh realities of life. Even though Blanche is defeated in every dimension, she soldiers on and maybe she recovers from her defeats to face a better tomorrow.

In the play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Williams endeavors to prove that reality will always overcome fantasy. Blanche resorts to fantasies in a bid to escape from the reality that she had lost her husband and inheritance; however, Stanley as a representative of reality in the play, does not give her peace of mind. They two are always in conflict with Stanley working hard to expose Blanche's lies. Ultimately, the reality conquers fantasies and Williams

uses Blanche's rape ordeal to certify this assertion. However, given that Blanche does not give up at the end of the play, Williams wants the audience to know that fantasies offer a good way of dealing with the harsh realities of life. Given that the real life is cruel, the audience can align itself with Blanche and at least identify with her lies and fantasies as survival mechanism.

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