

Discuss the dramatic devices williams uses in the play to suggest

Literature



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Discuss the dramatic devices Williams uses in the play to suggest that Blanche is doomed. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a tragedy that is unlike a traditional tragedy in that the characters in it are not struck by some calamity or fall because of unwise choices on their part. Instead, we enter the play in the delayed aftershocks of a tragedy that has befallen the main character, Blanche, as she attempts to hold on to whatever remnants of her beautiful past she can, but ultimately fails due to a combination of her past that catches up to haunt her, and also because of the rough-handed, misogynistic, and brutally pragmatic Stanley.

Throughout the play, Williams hints and ultimately cements the idea that the audience will see Blanche fall. This is done through a blend of symbolism, character interaction, musical and auditory cues that foreshadow Blanche's ultimate fall from beautiful to insane. Blanche's tragic past is hinted by Williams to audiences even in Scene 1 by the analogy of the names of the streetcars and place that Stella and Stanley live in.

In Scene 1, Blanche tells Eunice about how she got to Stella and Stanley's place; "They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at - Elysian Fields" Blanche's journey on New Orleans' streetcars represents the journey of her own life up to now. The streetcar named desire is an allusion for the life she lived after her late husband, Allan, died. Blanche was a promiscuous woman who had sex with random men for the superficial attention she longed for.

After, she transferred to a streetcar named Cemeteries, a name for a place of the dead. This must've represented that part of her life where she has been ostracised by her hometown of Laurel for her various affairs, that <https://assignbuster.com/discuss-the-dramatic-devices-williams-uses-in-the-play-to-suggest/>

probably disrupted the social and marital affairs of those in the town. After all, that was the “ death” of her time of “ desire”. Finally, she arrives at Elysian Fields, Stella and Stanley’s place. Elysian Fields is a place of Greek Mythology, a transition area for the afterlife.

Just as Blanche as “ died”, she has gone to rest in Elysian Fields. In the myth, Elysian Fields was just an area for souls to go to before moving on to their next stage in the afterlife. This alone is enough to show that Williams hasn’t intended for Blanche’s story to end in Elysian Fields. Blanche’s tragic past has effectively “ killed” her, and just as she must move on from Elysian Fields as per myth, her past is due to catch up with her and continue to wreak havoc on her.

Furthermore, we see Williams’ use of the dark imagery of “ Cemeteries” and “ Elysian Fields”, as opposed to any more heavenly images (say, “ Heaven”) to suggest that Blanche’s journey after Elysian Fields to be anything rosy - which is ultimately the case. Another way Williams shows that Blanche is destined to doom is through her absolute juxtaposition to life in New Orleans. By showing her as not being able to adapt to and accept life in the seemingly balanced and progressing New Orleans, Blanche is ultimately doomed to be something forgotten and left behind, like an old obsolete symbol of the Old South.

From Scene 1, we see Blanche physically standing out in the rough and tumble world of New Orleans, from her striking white clothes in the colourful world of New Orleans, and her delicate description of being a “ moth”. As the play unravels, we see she is unable to adapt to any new situations New Orleans throws at her. She never changes her high register speech which <https://assignbuster.com/discuss-the-dramatic-devices-williams-uses-in-the-play-to-suggest/>

starkly contrasts Stanley and crew's pidgin English and she constantly ignores the spreading truth about her.

Even her sister, who is of same background as her, is able to accept the "rougher" life in New Orleans, and this difference is put across by when Stella tells Blanche about her and Stanley's wedding night. Stella is "thrilled" by Stanley's barbaric smashing of the lightbulbs, while Blanche is horrified by it. It is obvious that Stella has at least partially assimilated into New Orleans life, while Blanche never does so throughout the play. By holding on to her beautiful dream of her past life, we see that Blanche sets herself up for disaster by never being able to break away from the past and head forward into the future.

Her juxtaposition in New Orleans till the very end of the play serves as a reminder that she is a relic from the Old South and could never survive in the radically changing New Orleans, and is destined to die out with the old traditions. Auditory cues in the play also serve as a symbol as Blanche's imminent disaster. The Varsouviana Polka appears when Blanche is being confronted with her past and the truth, such as when Mitch confronts her about her true age and the truth about her past.

The polka symbolises disaster to Blanche, playing when she witness the traumatic death of her husband and whenever situations in the future bring these feelings of disaster to her. The Polka never goes away during the play, instead, we see that the polka is a recurring symbol in the play, showing that disaster has followed Blanche to New Orleans and is affecting her in every facet of her new life there. For example, in the scene where Mitch confronts

Blanche about her past, we see the Polka being distorted, coupled with what seem to be Blanche's hallucinations of the night Allan died.

When Stanley provides Blanche with the bus ticket to go back to Laurel, "The Varsouvianamusicsteals in softly and continues playing", which represents the disaster Blanche faces should she go back again. As such, we see the Polka (and hence, disaster) never leaving her, instead representing the disastrous past creeping out on her, as it becomes more distorted and skewed throughout the play, representing her confused and deteriorating state of mind and doomed destiny.

Ultimately, the polka is also there to play along with her downfall, : where, "The Varsouviana is filtered into weird distortion, accompanied by the cries and noises of the jungle" to symbolise the final destruction of her humanity (the jungle), and her deteriorated mental wellness (the distortion). Other notable examples of music used in the play to represent doom are songs like Paper Moon, that Blanche herself sings. Say it's only a cardboard moon, sailing over a paper sea, but it wouldn't be make believe, if you believed in me. Without your love

It's a honky-tonk parade Without your love It's a melody played in a penny arcade It's a Barnum and Bailey world Just as phony as it can be Paper Moon by Ella Fitzgerald, a song about make-believe and props for show, is quite fittingly sung by Blanche, who all this while has lived in her make-believe world of her former glory. Such songs surfacing in the play, especially by the perpetrator herself cements the idea to audiences that Blanche is in fact a phony in her own right, and thus cannot survive in the very "real" world of New Orleans.

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It is yet another indicator that Blanche cannot and has not accepted the harsh future and reality of this life. It is extremely befitting to Blanche that it is true that if someone believed and truly loved her, she need not live out a make-believe world, where she is as white and as beautiful and as false as a paper moon. As such, songs like Paper Moon show audiences that Blanche embodies the person who cannot move from fantasy out to reality, and is doomed to live out in her fantasy world where she is like a paper moon - a move that ultimately spells her insanity in the harsh real world of New Orleans.

The foreshadowing of Blanche's doomed destiny is also portrayed through other minor characters actions. The Mexican flower seller, an old lady close to death, sells flowers for the dead, as if to foreshadow Blanche's imminent "death" from reality, while Shep Huntleigh's continued absence as Blanche's "saviour" shows not only her disillusion about who she really is now as a woman, as well as serve as a reminder to audiences that it seems nothing can pluck Blanche out from her dire situation in New Orleans.

Blanche is stuck in New Orleans miserable with the increasingly abusive Stanley, and no former beau can offer escape. Williams hints from the very beginning of the play that Blanche is doomed, but it is events throughout the play that signal her refusal and inability to move from fantasy to reality, that cement with audiences that Blanche has little hope of being released from her predicament.

A Streetcar Named Desire is littered with small but extremely significant events to show that Blanche is still the paper moon she sings about, and thus leads to her ultimate fall from the pitiful facade of grace we were
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introduced to at the start of the play, to the hopeless state of delusion she ends up in after New Orleans and the people in it are unable to feed her fantasy anymore.