

Coping with a brutal  
world: tennessee  
williams's a streetcar  
named desire and  
rob...



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The postmodernist writers emerged after the Second World War, and their fierce critiques of human nature showed a race that was vile and heinous at best, with Tennessee Williams's depiction being no different. In his play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Williams explores the gruesome nature of humanity's weakness and its necessity of imagination in a world of reality filled with evil and nastiness at every corner. Blanche DuBois, a dainty Southern belle who depends on her fantasies to keep her motivated to live despite her growing age and increasing loneliness, is thrown into the unfamiliar jungle of New Orleans when her property is lost. She lives with her sister Stella and Stella's animalistic husband Stanley while she becomes involved in the less refined and civilized life of the New Orleanians. These characters all alter their reality to some degree in order to achieve some feeling of happiness or motivation in life that keeps them alive. Robert Lowell's poem "Water" was published in 1976 and its last three stanzas express themes supportive of those in *Streetcar*. Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* expresses similar themes with Robert Lowell's "Water," such as humanity's instinct to eliminate threat, the importance of a person's imagination in life, and the ultimate failure of fantasy when put against brutal reality.

Humans, as animals, follow the animalistic instinct to get rid of anything that potentially threatens their happiness, well being, or life. Desire is no different, and neither are the characters of *Streetcar*. Most prominent is Stanley's actions towards getting rid of Blanche: revealing her promiscuous past and nature to her sister and love interest, buying her a one-way ticket home, and raping her. These actions are all motivated by Blanche telling

Stella that “[Stanley] acts like an animal, has an animal’s habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There’s even something – subhuman” (Williams 72) about Stanley that repulses Blanche. In response to her crippling character critique, Stanley launches a plot to delegitimize Blanche and ultimately send her to a mental institution. This is indicative of the animalistic nature of protecting a person’s self when threatened, such as Stanley felt when Blanche was trying to take Stella away from him. Stanley’s happiness, self-esteem, and security hinge on his possession of Stella, and when that’s threatened, he bites back. In this way, Stanley completely proves Blanche’s point of him being an animal, following blindly his emotions without regard to the moral and reasonable consequences. However, Blanche is just as much guilty of this human trait. Her vanity and loss of self-esteem with the withering of her youth and beauty urges her to seduce a “young, young, young man! ... and kiss [him], just once, softly and sweetly on [his] mouth!” (Williams 84). Blanche tries to seduce a young and attractive newspaper boy to convince herself that she has not lost the beauty, tenderness, and shine that she needs to live with herself. This metaphor may further be applied to how “the sea drenched the rock at our feet all day, and kept tearing away flake after flake.” (Lowell 1-4). where the rock represents a threat to the sea, which is retaliating by destroying it. Water and sea are direct opposites and are in a state of constant equilibrium. The action of the sea scraping the rock away is reminiscent of humanity striking back at what threatens its existence, or what it thinks does so. In essence, this is the relationship between Blanche and Stanley, as well as between Blanche and herself. Destruction of threat is an inbred human reaction, particularly evident in these works.

<https://assignbuster.com/coping-with-a-brutal-world-tennessee-williamss-a-streetcar-named-desire-and-robert-lowells-water/>

Where humans begin to separate from animals is in their ability to think for themselves and imagine or fantasize, therein creating new realities for themselves, which may often be crucial for their well being in order to cope with reality. Truly, the world is a grim place full of death and misfortune, but the human tendency to alter one's own reality with their imagination proves to be necessary to give a person some feeling of purpose, intent, or motivation in a world otherwise hopeless, brutal and futile. Blanche is a prominent character living almost entirely in her own fantasies, in her world with "only a paper moon, Sailing over a cardboard sea/ - But it wouldn't be make-believe if you believed in me!" (Williams 99). In order to escape the brutality of the lives of her sister, Stanley, and herself, Blanche alters her reality by believing that the world she lives in is not as savage and animalistic as it truly is and seems, and she also convinces herself she is full of youth and beauty, which may have been true in the past but is certainly waning. When a person begins to rely too heavily on their fantasies as Blanche does, then those lies become the solid and blatant truth for a person, with the onset of lunacy. Blanche also feels the need to forget her past, in which her old boyfriend killed himself and she became known as "a town character. Regarded as not just different but downright loco - nuts" (Williams 100). While Blanche is a key portrayal of this mindset, it is further reciprocated in Stella's denial of Blanche's story of her rape. Emotionally, Stella needs to convince herself that Stanley did not rape Blanche because it poses a threat to her happiness, so creating her own reality in which Stanley did not rape Blanche is crucial for Stella's emotional well being. Sending Blanche to the mental institute was "the right thing, the only thing [she] could do" (Williams 141) when the possibility of Stanley's actions surfaced. <https://assignbuster.com/coping-with-a-brutal-world-tennessee-williamss-a-streetcar-named-desire-and-robert-lowells-water/>

This theme of changing a person's own sense of reality is reciprocated in the second stanza of Lowell's poem, in which "one night you dreamed you were a mermaid clinging to a wharf pile, / and trying to pull / off the barnacles with your hands" (Lowell 5-7). This is an example of how natural it is for humans to create more to reality than there truly is, in an effort to conceal the nastiness and lowness of humanity from their vision. While it is important to have a certain amount of imagination in one's life, it is crucial to be aware of the extent of those lies, since in reality, the brutal truths of the world triumph over artificially contrived fantasies. This is most clearly evident in Stella's reuniting with Stanley after him abusing her in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Following her animalistic desires of human nature, "Stella slips down the rickety stairs in her robe. ... Then they come together with low, animal moans. ... He snatches the screen door open and lifts her off her feet and bears her into the dark flat" (Williams 60). This displays how, despite Blanche and the audience have faith and hope in Stella to realise the nastiness of her abusive relationship with Stanley, the brutal reality of what truly happens in life always overpowers a person's imagined destiny of what should happen: Stella reunites with Stanley and they resume their abusive and unhealthy relationship motivated solely by sex and desire. This theme of reality defeating fantasy can further be seen in Blanche's attempted seduction of the newspaper boy and her failure therein. Blanche tries to prove to herself that she is young and beautiful by seducing a young boy who doesn't reciprocate her affection.

While Blanche fantasizes that she is timelessly beautiful and youthful, the brutal reality of her age and deteriorating good looks are exhibited in the

scene with the newspaper boy. This idea is conveyed in the third stanza of Lowell's poem "Water," in which "we wished our two souls might return like gulls, to the rock. In the end, the water was too cold for us." (Lowell 8-11). In this stanza, the cold water represents the brutal realities of life that prevent a person from living the way they want to, with fantasies and imagination to cover the sadness of existence - the shortness and the often futile feeling of hopelessness that accompanies it. After all, "a girl alone in the world has got to keep a firm hold on her emotions or she'll be lost" (Williams 87). Without having proper restraint on one's imagination, a person can be driven to lunacy with their lack of true understanding of the world around them. Humanity clings to the hope that there is a chance for redemption in life, but in brutally natural fashion, humans die with these dreams and aspirations crushed.

After a time of immense and unrivaled horror and misanthropy, *A Streetcar Named Desire* struck home with many audience members who felt disheartened with humanity after World War II. Those who had convinced themselves that the nastiness of the First World War would never repeat itself had their fantasies shattered with the fresh reminder of the millions of deaths in the 1940's. The war itself was largely a human reaction to threat, as America saw Germany and the Nazi movement as a threat to their democracy and order of being, and vice versa. After the war, television in America started to become even more popular because of the technological advances of the times, exhibiting humanity's need to be surrounded by fantastic lies in times of crises. Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as well as Robert Lowell's "Water" display these concepts of

humanity's response to threat, the importance of imagination, as well as the weakness of these fantasies. It's able to send a clear and concise message to the audience as a cautionary tale of having the perfect balance between fantasy and reality in a life marked by human horror and nastiness.