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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

My response is that I do not agree with this statement. Indeed there are points in Williams' theatrical piece where Blanche is perceived negatively by the audience.

However, it is through his clever dramatic structure, in which we learn about Blanche step by step, her character revealed as sometimes things are revealed against her will which allow the audience to sympathise with her. Perhaps it can be said that our sympathy as the audience is only fully engaged when Blanche finally meets her tragic fate and that that is where the tragedy lies. As Williams reveals the details of Blanche's life we feel that perhaps the events in her life were not all her own fault, perhaps beyond her control, and making us as the audience feel that even if we do not agree with her way of dealing with these tragedies, she deserves some sympathy. Overall I am of the view that we as the audience do sympathise with Blanche - more and more as the play goes on and fully at the end. To me 'A Streetcar Named Desire' is the ultimate tragedy as it follows Aristotle's conventions, that tragedy should be " an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of certain length.

...decorated with artistic embellishments like plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song.

" Streetcar is complete, in that Blanche's fate is finally sealed, but also it has many 'embellishments' of character, spectacle and song. It cannot be ignored that Williams' piece, although a more modern tragedy than some, may have been viewed differently at the time it was written. When 'A

Streetcar Named Desire' was first performed in England in 1949 it was met by harsh criticism, which saw it to be full of "...

excessive symbolism, violence, sexuality ..." amongst other things. These critics did not seem to be able to recognise the tragedy in the play and the fact that Blanche's sexuality is not supposed to be offensive, but a large part of her tragic personality. However, not all people would have seen it that way, including William's contemporary Arthur Miller commented that the need of a tragic hero is to "secure one thing - his sense of personal dignity".

There could hardly be a better way to describe Blanche's tragic last few months in New Orleans. At the beginning of the play we are introduced to the setting for the entire drama - a street corner in the French Quarter of New Orleans, mostly within the claustrophobic environment of the Kowalski's apartment, showing that it fits the tragic convention of having unity of place. When Blanche enters the stage for the first time we are presented with a protagonist who is not all that she seems. Her past is revealed through memories she reveals in conversations with Mitch and discoveries by Stanley.

Blanche enters the stage dressed all in white, with "dainty gloves" and a "fluffy white suit". All this white suggests purity - quite different to what we learn about her later on. The adjectives "dainty" and "fluffy" also suggest innocence, youth and also perhaps that the person they are describing has little depth. This also deceives the audience as Blanche is in reality. Her appearance means she doesn't fit in with her surroundings, perhaps arousing a little sympathy from the audience.

But it is when she begins to speak that we as the audience are provoked into disliking her. She arrives at her sister's house unexpected, being awkward as she is, and so is let into the house by the landlady Eunice. She meets all of Eunice's welcoming, open questions with mostly a "yes" or a "no", short, terse answers which show Blanche's views on Eunice. These unkind responses to Eunice make the audience see Blanche as snobbish and not very appealing.

This is not the only example of Blanche's rudeness. For instance, her drinking habits are shown up when she "tosses down" a tumbler with some whisky in it which suggests she may have a tendency to drink too much. Blanche also seems rude when talking about Stanley with Stella, saying Stella must have had to adjust to his "civilian background". It seems very pompous when she has not even met him yet.

But, of course, this is all a dramatic device Tennessee Williams uses to show the audience and everyone's personality is shaped by what life throws at them. We are soon made to realise that the way Blanche acts is simply a defence to the constant battle she has with the changing world around her. It is when Blanche describes her tragic existence back at the ranch that Stella left her in that we begin to see how Blanche may deserve some sympathy. She tells Stella of how their family home Belle Reve has been "lost".

This word is used a lot by Blanche and reflects how she, the character, feels. We come to realise that Blanche worked very hard to keep her ageing family going until their eventual deaths which she describes as "blows in my face and body". When her relatives died so did Blanche's dreams and her way of

life. The word “blows” suggests the great extent of the pressure Blanche has suffered from the tough times she has been through. The audience starts to feel some pity here as we see that Blanche has worked hard for others not just herself.

They also may find her slightly melodramatic and self-pitying with the length of her outburst. Blanche’s constant struggle to keep her form of society going, the white-ruled genteel Southern society means she gains support from the audience as they can now see why she struggles to fit in to this new, harsher American society full of ‘Stanley’s’ with materialistic views and aims. This struggle is shown by Williams through her reactions to events around her and her attitudes to the other characters in the play. Even more sympathy for Blanche comes when her short lived early marriage is brought up.

Stanley feels he has been tricked out of getting the money he feels Belle Reve should have brought him and so begins searching Blanche’s belongings. The tearing apart of Blanche’s trunk and destruction of her privacy is symbolic of the rape which occurs later on. Stanley finds the old love letters from her previous husband and grabs them. We can see Blanche still grieves for this lost love when she explains that the letters are “Poems a dead boy wrote.

I hurt him the way you want to hurt me”. The use of “boy” is interesting as it is an unusual name to give your husband. But Blanche uses it because the boy is a symbol of her idealised youth and she considers him innocent. By

the way she says “ hurt” we can see that she suffers a lot of guilt over this person’s death.

The audience feels most sympathy here as they begin to understand why Blanche acts the way she does - to cover her deep grief. As the play progresses the audience learns more and more about the fantasy world Blanche inhabits to hide her disillusionment with life. This helps the audience to learn more about how Blanche feels and what she thinks - a step towards understanding her which allows us to pity her later in the play. Of course some more cynical audience members may still find her silly and hysterical. We find out about it during her conversation with Mitch in Scene Six about the possibility of them being together.

They have a rather deep conversation where she tells Mitch she “ understands what” loneliness is and opens up properly for the first time in the play. She tells full story of her dead husband and how it felt to have the “ searchlight” of love “ turned off”. Suddenly we become aware of how Mitch could be her last chance to get out of this loneliness and give some light back to her like the candle she lights earlier in the scene. It would be hard for the audience not to sympathise with Blanche here as this admission of solitude makes us feel she needs our support. At this time Williams is trying to show how it is important to let go of some experiences from the past in order to start anew.

The audience are filled with hope for a second chance in life for Blanche, her own ‘ Hollywood ending’. This hope is unfortunately lost in the following scenes where the audience begins to realise the inevitability of Blanche’s

downfall. As Stanley starts to delve deep into Blanche's past and use her past experiences with men against her the audience's sympathy grows yet more. Blanche's last hope in Mitch is destroyed when he turns up at the house drunk and set on ending their relationship. He then says " Let's turn the light on here" and rips off the lantern Blanche covered the harsh light of the bare bulb with.

This sudden movement is highly symbolic as the lantern represents Blanche's attempts to cover the harsh realities of the world and the ripping of it shows how her imaginary world is gone. She no longer has anywhere to go. It marks the beginning of her final decline to insanity. In this event we can sympathise with Blanche as we see how a person can never escape from their past despite their best efforts. When the key tragic event of the rape in Scene 10 occurs it becomes clear to us that Blanche deserves sympathy. She is clearly ill-prepared for the realities of this new, harsh world where men like Stanley are King.

She begins to desperately shelter in her imaginary world again by claiming a rich man from her past, Shep Huntleigh, wants to see her again. The audience sympathises with her disillusionment and pity her for seeing men as her " salvation". The rape is a symbol for the destruction of Blanche's old Southern society to make way for the new Southern society. It is where instinct wins over romantic notions.

Blanche is a victim of society and that is how she gains the audience's sympathy. In the final scene sympathy for Blanche is great. Here the most tragic ending possible occurs when Stella ignores Blanche's pleas of rape

and watches her transported away to a mental institution. This sympathy is made even greater by the fact that Stella most probably did believe what Blanche said but realises she "...

couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley". She sacrifices her sister's life to preserve her own. Here Williams is showing the importance of illusions to keep people going, Stella's about her husband's fidelity and Blanche's about Shep Huntleigh. In conclusion I feel Tennessee Williams makes the audience prejudge Blanche as a way of highlighting the theme of illusions. It is when the illusions are destroyed that Blanche too is destroyed. This makes us understand Blanche as a character in a tragic play which leads to us sympathizing with her and fulfilling the play's role as a tragedy.

As well as seeing that the audiences will almost certainly sympathise with Blanche at some point I must also give space to the idea that the audience, due to circumstances and character development of the other characters, may perceive her very negatively. This is a deliberate strategy of Williams' which makes the play all the more engaging, as the play is most successful when the audience moves from being irritated and repelled by Blanche to having nothing but deep sympathy for her.