



A CRITICAL READING OF BLANCHE IN A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

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Abstract: Harold Bloom describes Williams as “the most literary of the dramatists” and streetcar as “virtually unique as stage piece that is both personal and social”. A Streetcar Named Desire is a narrative of a gently raised woman who outlines a fictitious world to mask the asperity of the world she has to inhabit. Blanche du Bois was the protagonist in the play. The conventional drama espouses dichotomy to compose female character, either vestal virgin or debauched woman. But William gave this part plurality and contradiction. The convolution and contradiction of her character led to the inexorability of her calamitous fate. “Blanche-for that in her name-has delusions of grandeur, talks like an intellectual snob, buoys herself up with gaudy dreams, spends most of the time primping, covers things that are dingy with things that are bright, and flees reality.” Tennessee William’s play A Streetcar Named Desire demonstrates an ambiguous moral puzzle to readers. Blanche Dubois is the anti-hero in the play. Tennessee Williams distinguishes her as a woman with a narcissistic personality disorder who uses alcoholism as a coping mechanism to forget the culpability she carries from her past. This paper aims to critically analyze the intricacies of her character with a vivid lens.

KEYWORDS: Anti-hero, Depression, Patriarchy, Realism, Woman psychology

INTRODUCTION: Drama, an intricately captivating slant of human expression, skillfully lace together narratives through powerful performances, invoking a myriad of emotions and profound thoughts. It offers a unique platform for navigating the human condition and shedding light on the multiple facets of the human experience. Dennis J. Reardon declares, “The search for the Great American Play can stop with A Streetcar Named Desire.” The author wrote the play in 1947 thinking that he is going to die within few months. With this assumption in mind, Tennessee Williams wanted to ledger what should be told about life. The play fetches his own unfulfilled desires of life and approaching death as the ultimate reality of life.

This paper examines the evolution of the central character Blanche Dubois in the play A Streetcar Named Desire who is insecure and sensitive about her ageing. She shies away from bright light and always goes out in night. Blanche is truly lonely and considered to be a manipulative and pathological liar. She constantly bends the truth to fit her stories. She is delusional in her flight from reality. She is stuck in her traumatic past with Allan and repeatedly hears the Polka and gunshots. She also states that she doesn’t want realism but magic. Blanche depicts a decaying Southern Belle, - the traditional Southern Belle was expected to be submissive and virtuous, playing very traditional social and symbolic gender role. The name Blanche is

derived from a French word “white”, which is a symbol of purity and innocence where as Dubois means wood which is durable and strong; her name stands ironic to her role in the play.

A Streetcar Named Desire is an account of a gently raised woman who designs a fictitious world to mask the grimness of the world she has to inhabit. Blanche du Bois was the protagonist in the play. The conventional drama espouses dichotomy to compose female character, either vestal virgin or debauched woman. But William gave this part plurality and contradiction. The convolution and contradiction of her character led to the inexorability of her calamitous fate. “Blanche- for that in her name-has delusions of grandeur, talks like an intellectual snob, buoys herself up with gaudy dreams, spend most of the time primping, covers things that are dingy with things that are bright, and flees reality.”

Blanche du Bois is a complex character who evokes strong responses from other characters. Her complexity comes not from her milieu, but from the diverse and often incongruous façade she presents. The character of dualism was her distinctive charm resonating nobility and hypocrisy in the American play. The very name Blanche du Bois advocates her duality. At once sturdy in her desires and adamant in her claims on the men around her, and yet fragile and forever gaping for someone to look at her, she gives off a succession of conflicting signals. Being confined in narrow gender roles Blanche knows the significance of male support; she has tasted the fruit of sexual freedom in the past, thus comprehends the idea that it won't fit in the spectrum of chaste conduct expected from a southern belle.

Much of Blanche's notion of how she functions in the world relies on her impression of herself as a commodity of male sexual desire. Her association with men always starts with flirtation. She dresses provocatively etching attention to her body and her femininity through her warily cultivated personality. She alone uses precise grammar and varied syntax. She induced cultural references into the French quarter dwelling just to emphasize her manor-born supremacy. Her desires come plainly from behind her conversation with Mitch about keeping her standing: when we see her toying with a young man who calls at the door we discern how to split her desires are from her pretentious talk and behavior. “Blanche's pursuit of sexual desire has led to the loss of Belle Reve, her expulsion from Laurel, and her eventual removal from society.” The rape by Stanley robbed Blanche of her individuality. The conflict between both the characters was evident from the beginning; Stanley was petulant while Blanche was preciousity, while Stanley was strong and Blanche was fragile, the tragedy happened at last.

Beneath Blanche's quite crafty exterior there always lies a cue of hysteria. In her recitals about Belle Reve or her account of previous lovers, there is something twitchy in her colloquy, a threat of something that might explode if not shafted carefully. This disjuncture between emotional facet and depth is projected in a way that Blanche can't face her past, but only discloses glances of it through her neurotic conduct and occasional comments. For example- She is perpetually taking baths as if to clear her conscience, but resumes talking about her past actions in terms that manifests that she has no perception of their moral connotations. As the play precedes the divide between Blanche's fantasy world becomes apparent to every character except Blanche, for whom the interior or exterior worlds become progressively blurred.

The strain between fantasy and reality focuses on Blanche's relationship with both characters and the world around her. Throughout the play she emerges in semi-darkness and shadows, consciously keeping herself out of the harsh glimpse of reality. She clutches to the fictitious, delusory world of paper lanterns and satin robes: to keep the air of chaste ingénue rather than face her motley past and destitute present. By preserving an illusory outer appearance, Blanche hopes to conceal her troubled interior from both herself and the world at large. “Behind her veneer of social snobbery and sexual propriety, Blanche is deeply insecure, an aging Southern Belle who lives in a state of perpetual panic about her fading beauty.” She sports the role of an ideal type of being she would like to be, she withholds to see herself as she is but instead fabricates the illusion of what ought to be. Blanche's desires have led her down the paths of sexual amorality and

drunkenness, and by coming to stay with Kowalski's she has outreached the edge of the line. Her desire to escape reality leads her to lose contact with the world around her. By the end of the play, she no longer can differentiate between fantasy and real life.

Blanche's last statement poignantly echoes her dilemma and predicament in life. She goes with the doctor because him being a stranger and a gentleman. While leaving she says, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." Blanche's susceptibility leaves her natively exposed before the cold unresponsiveness of the people who vouch her defeat and serves the society in which she has been engrossed. Blanche's misfortune is not the only result of her measures but flaws of society itself. "As the old gentility of the south is threatened by modernization and industrialization, and as women roles become uncertain as they are caught between old ideals of beauty and gentility and modern toleration of sexual license, Blanche appears to be stranded at a crossroads, with each choice of path risking society's disapproval and her ultimate destruction." At the end of the play, Blanche was taken to a mental asylum, permanently detached from the reality of her mind. She is forced to withdraw into the state of denial, her mental health all but fractured, to protect her brittle sense of self from Stanley's wicked truth.

CONCLUSION: Williams uses Blanche in this southern gothic tragedy to look into the impulse of masculinity and femininity where Stanley manages to get away with his imprudence, alcoholism and abusive behavior because he is a man; while she suffers for them because she is a woman. Through a Marxist lens, the play represents the socioeconomic and class struggles in 1940s America. Many critics also believe that Williams reclaims the idea of desire in the 20th century. Additionally the Freudian fundamental drives, death drive and sex drive are painted through Blanche's character. "There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggest a moth." William describes her as a moth. A moth is a fragile creature of the light, much like Blanche. She much like this insect fits around her "light" which can be men-Allan, Stanley and Mitch who eventually wreck her. Blanche's personal perception of reality leads to ambiguity and a metamorphosis of truth.

"I draw every character out of my very multiple split personality. My heroines always express the climate of my interior world at the time in which those characters were created"

Tennessee Williams

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