

## AO2 Key Terminology and Methods

- Light and darkness motif
  - Animalistic imagery/sounds
  - Consider the way the Southern Gothic is embedded
  - The use of Plastic Theatre and senses
  - The contrast in Stanley and Blanche's language, e.g. he's blunt and usually concrete, yet is capable of metaphorical phrases, while Blanche is full of poetic prose and links to her education
  - Audience reaction: consider for instance the audience's reaction when they're forced to watch Stanley staring "for the count of ten" or how many cheered when Stanley assaulted Blanche in earlier productions
  - Dialect and accent: consider the class divide and contextual relevance
- Music: consider its cultural and psychological relevance and what it signals to the audience
- Setting: consider why the majority of scenes are in the small apartment and how that affects the build up of tension (again, structure is important)
  - The recurring image of and preoccupation with death
  - The moth simile: consider how it's continued throughout as a motif
- The motif of light/the lantern: consider its metaphorical/symbolic relevance and how it's used, structurally, throughout
- Costumes & their colours/designs
  - Our first sight and encounter with each character
  - Humour
  - Dramatic irony
  - The Tragic Arc
  - Allusions

# A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

## AO3 Key Context

- The class divide: the old ways of the Southern cotton fields were fading, whilst the American Dream resulted in the working class achieving more respect and equality
- Domestic and sexual assault:
- Williams was inspired by his own time in the French Quarters of New Orleans; a culturally diverse place
- He shares many similarities to Blanche, for instance he once said "I discovered writing as an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge"
- His father was an alcoholic who he had a strong aversion to
- He became estranged from his sister, Rose, who suffered from mental illness, and felt intense guilt over this loss
- Elysian Fields is Greek for the final resting place of souls
- Stanley's Polish ancestry makes him part of the new diverse Post WW2 America
- Williams' mother was prone to hysterical attacks
- Elysian Fields is Greek for the final resting place of souls
- First staged in 1947. Film released in 1951
- Industrialisation was starting to happen more rapidly in cities after WW2. While the plantations of the old South were decaying, urban growth and capitalism were doing well. We can think of Stanley as symbolic of the new industry, and Blanche as symbolic of the decaying traditional plantations.
- Homosexuality was illegal, and you could be punished, for the greater part of Williams' life. However in some areas, such as New Orleans and the Key West in Florida, it was tolerated.

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|-------------------|------------------|
| Gas lighting      | Confrontation    |
| Desperation       | Patriarchy       |
| Irredeemable      | Hypocritical     |
| Menacing          | Reminiscent      |
| Sinister          | Forsake          |
| Fatal             | Seduce           |
| Irreversible      | Brutal           |
| Tragic            | Ruthless         |
| Catharism         | Harsh            |
| Plastic Theatre   | Sadistic         |
| Hubris            | Tyrannical       |
| Peripeteia        | Merciless        |
| Anagnorisis       | Betrayal         |
| Aposiopesis       | Domestic assault |
| Monologue         | Ferocity         |
| Foreboding        | Authority        |
| Anxiety           | Fragility        |
| Fourth wall       | Shame            |
| Unease            | Infamous         |
| Tension           | Grief            |
| Toxic masculinity | Mental health    |
| Blue collar       | Trauma           |
| Incongruous       | Explosive        |
| Psychoanalytical  | Pathos           |
| Postmodern        | Vulgar           |
| Euphemism         | Marginalised     |
| Neologism         | Marxism          |
| Expressionism     | Feminism         |
|                   | costume          |

## AO1 Key Quotations

- "They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and transfer to one called Cemeteries, and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields!" (Blanche Scene 1)
- "I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action." (Blanche, Scene 3)
- "I'm not in anything I want to get out of." (Stella, Scene 4)
- "But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark - that sort of make everything else seem - unimportant." (Stella, Scene 4)
- "When people are soft - soft people have got to shimmer and glow - they've got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and put a - paper lantern over the light... It isn't enough to be soft. You've got to be soft and attractive. And I - I'm fading now! I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick." (Blanche, Scene ?)
- "I don't want realism. I want magic!" (Blanche, Scene 9)
- "Deliberate cruelty is not forgivable. It is the one unforgivable thing in my opinion and it is the one thing of which I have never, never been guilty." (Blanche, Scene 10)
- "We've had this date with each other from the beginning." (Stanley, Scene 10) "I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley." (Stella, Scene 11)
- "Whoever you are—I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." (Blanche, Scene 11)

## AO5 Critical Readings

- The plot is set in the times of an expansive socioeconomic change in America when the great Old South was about to decline (Dusenbury).
  - New Orleans, became melting-pots of ideas where values of the Old South were dismissed and new attitudes and beliefs were introduced Porter.
  - Bigsby & Porter, argue that this arrival of Blanche to the city is a clash between Old and New South and therefore a death of a myth.
- According to Donahue, most of Williams's characters are emotionally displaced people who are unable to face reality or to come to terms with their environment. They use fantasy, alcohol or sexual promiscuity
- "Throughout his career he was haunted by a violence" (Bigsby)
- America was recovering from Great Depression, World War II and the Dust Bowl and Americans were already familiar with violence (Welsch)
- her relationship with young men a defense against destructive process of time" (Bigsby)
  - Blanche is classic... idealism, failure and dignity (Vogal)
  - She is almost a willing victim of a world that trapped her (Clurman)
- Feminist readings: consider the power play between the women and the patriarchy

<p>1. In early May, Blanche Dubois arrives unannounced at her younger sister Stella's apartment in Elysian Fields, New Orleans. On arrival she discovers that her sister, who is married to Stanley Kowalski- the son of a Polish immigrant, lives in a run-down and very small apartment. She is let in by Eunice (the owner of the apartment) and waits for her sister to return. She helps herself to a glass of whiskey. When Stella arrives, Blanche is pleased to see her but cannot conceal her shock at Stella's living conditions. Stella is happy and content in her life and relationship with Stanley. Blanche confesses to losing their family home, Belle Reve, in Mississippi due to debts and the deaths of the older generations. Stanley arrives home with two friends: Mitch (who lives with his invalid mother) and Steve (who lives upstairs with his wife Eunice). Stanley accepts Blanche's presence but is not particularly pleased about it. Blanche's unrefined character unnerves him. At the very end of the scene Blanche reveals she was once married very young but her husband died.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">AO1 Themes</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> Reality and fantasy  Society and Class  Power  Love  Sexuality  Family </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> Oppression and rebellion  Freedom and confinement  Identity and memory  Gender roles  Marriage  Madness </td> </tr> </table>	Reality and fantasy Society and Class Power Love Sexuality Family	Oppression and rebellion Freedom and confinement Identity and memory Gender roles Marriage Madness
Reality and fantasy Society and Class Power Love Sexuality Family	Oppression and rebellion Freedom and confinement Identity and memory Gender roles Marriage Madness		
<p>2. The next night, Stella tells Stanley about the loss of Belle Reve, while Blanche is in the bath. Stanley suspects Blanche is keeping money from the sale of the house- he considers himself to have a right to this money (stating the Napoleonic Code). He starts to rifle through her belongings looking for evidence. Blanche appears and Stanley demands to see a bill of sale for the house. He snatches a pile of papers, which turn out to be poems from her dead husband- which Blanche does not respond well to. She hands him the legal papers. He maintains his actions were justified. Stella and Blanche go out for the evening, leaving the apartment whilst Stanley hosts a poker game.</p>	<p>Genre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The play is, loosely speaking, a tragedy, with Blanche as its heroine, although she does not actually die at the end.</li> <li>• Part of what makes the play a tragedy is the sense of its action unfolding in a way that comes to seem inevitable.</li> <li>• The play could be said to be in the genre of Southern Gothic, focusing on death, violence, madness and decay.</li> <li>• In some ways the play is a melodrama, because of its exaggerated passions and sensational plot and action</li> </ul>		
<p>3. Stanley's poker night has not finished when Stella and Blanche arrive home at 2.30am. Blanche is taken by Mitch's gentle and polite nature. Stanley is drunk and becomes belligerent, throwing a radio out of the window before hitting Stella. Blanche takes Stella upstairs to Eunice's apartment. After a cold shower, Stanley calls for Stella to come home. Stella slowly makes her way downstairs, before Stanley carries her into their flat. Blanche is horrified by their reconciliation and is comforted by Mitch.</p>	<p>Structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The play observes the 'unity of space' in that all the action takes place in the Kowalski apartment.</li> <li>• The 'inciting incident' that 'triggers' the action of the play could be seen as Blanche being fired from her job, or as her husband's suicide.</li> <li>• The play's 'crisis' point could be seen as the moment in Scene Eight when Stanley gives Blanche the bus ticket.</li> </ul>		
<p>4. The next morning, Stella tries to explain why she is with Stanley. She discusses her acceptance of the violence because of the passion they share. Blanche hopes to persuade her sister to leave Stanley, planning a future financed by an old admirer who she says is a millionaire. Stanley overhears. When he enters the room, Stella embraces him, proving how dedicated she is to him</p>	<p>The 'climax' of the play is the fight between Stanley and Blanche, ending in the rape – while Stella is giving birth.</p>		
<p>5. Stanley frightens Blanche, asking about a man called Shaw and a hotel called 'The Flamingo' in Laurel (where Blanche worked as an English teacher). Blanche checks that Stella does not know anything unpleasant about her. She awaits Mitch's arrival to take her on a date. Whilst she waits, she flirts and kisses a young man who collects subscriptions for the newspaper.</p>	<p>Imagery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stanley uses imagery destructively, as in 'Take a look at yourself in that worn-out Mardi Gras outfit, rented for fifty cents from some rag-picker!' (Scene Ten,).</li> <li>• Stanley uses simple imagery, ironically and critically: 'What do you two think you are? A pair of queens?' (Scene Eight).</li> <li>• Blanche's imagery often idealises: 'I hope that his eyes are going to be like candles, like two blue candles lighted in a white cake!' (Scene Eight).</li> <li>• Blanche's imagery can be darkly gothic: 'The Tarantula Arms! ... Yes, a big spider! That's where I brought my victims' (Scene Nine).</li> </ul>		
<p>6. Blanche and Mitch return home late. Mitch tries to kiss Blanche. She complains to Mitch of Stanley's hostility. Blanche opens to Mitch about her short marriage, which ended when she found him (Allan) in bed with another man. After voicing her disgust, her husband shot himself. Mitch puts his arm around Blanche and kisses her.</p>			
<p>7. It's the 15th September and Blanche's birthday. She is in the bath. Stanley enters with evidence of Blanche's past promiscuity, slipping out to meet soldiers at night and living like a prostitute in a hotel. She lost her teaching job after trying to seduce a seventeen-year-old boy and was driven out of Laurel. Stella tries to defend her sister, referring to her unhappy marriage and early life. Stanley reveals that he has already shared with Mitch all he knows. Blanche emerges from the bathroom happy, but this quickly turns to terror when she senses the mood in the room.</p>			
<p>8. Mitch does not attend Blanche's birthday meal and the atmosphere is tense. Stanley loses his temper when Stella criticises his manners. He presents Blanche with a bus ticket back to Laurel as a birthday present. Blanche rushes to be sick. Stella attempts to reprimand Stanley, but goes into labour and asks Stanley to take her to the hospital, leaving Blanche alone</p>			
<p>9. Mitch arrives and has been drinking. He is angry and upset at Blanche for deceiving him. Blanche does not deny it but tries to explain away her behaviour as due to grief and guilt for the death of her husband. She asks Mitch for protection but he attempts to rape her. He leaves when Blanche begins shouting 'fire!'</p>			
<p>10. Stanley returns from the hospital. Blanche claims to have an invitation to a Caribbean cruise from a millionaire. Blanche lies about Mitch's attitude to her. Blanche uses a broken bottle to attempt to ward off Stanley's sexual advances. She fails, and Stanley carries her off to the bed to rape her</p>			
<p>11. It is some weeks later, Stanley is playing poker with his friends. Blanche is in the bathroom and Stella is packing her trunk. They are awaiting the arrival of a doctor and nurse from a state-run hospital for the mentally ill to take Blanche away. She is unaware of this. Stella has reluctantly agreed to this. She has chosen not to believe Blanche's claims of rape, siding with her husband for the sake of herself and her baby. Blanche imagines she is going on a holiday with an admirer, but is frightened by the nurse. She eventually leaves willingly, as Stella looks on holding her baby. Stanley attempts to comfort her....</p>			