



DESTRUCTION OF EMOTIONAL BEINGS IN A STREET CAR NAMED DESIRE

***DR. NEELAM HOODA**

**Associate Professor Dept. of English and Foreign Languages, MDU Rohtak*

INTRODUCTION:

A Streetcar Named Desire, as its title suggests, is concerned, like Shakespeare's epic tragedy, with love- with its devastations, with its triumphs. In it we see once again, as in *The Glass Menagerie*, the breakup of a social order and its effect on the women, bearers of life, who survive. Stella and Blanche Dubois are the last of a lost civilization.

Stella has found salvation in the arms of a man who is at the beginning and not the end of a cycle. Her husband Stanley is passionate, violent, primitive, a second- generation pole who is battling his way up from the bottom. Her older sister Blanche is a victim of the collapse of the old order. It is she who stayed at home on the family estate, nursed the old people, lived with death and decay, and suffered the anguish of seeing her world of refinement and elegance fall to pieces around her. At the last, her nerves give way, her mind cracks and she- like the world her forebears once lived in is brutally cast aside by the up-surgings, new life personified by Stanley.

Blanche states, "I, I, I took the blows in my face and my body! All of those death! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, Mother! Margaret, that dreadful way! So, big with it, it couldn't be put in a coffin! But had to be burned life rubbish! Funerals are quiet, but death- not always" (Williams 12).

Blanche, one of the leading characters of the play, is an extremely complicated character whom we see struggle with internal conflicts throughout the play. Upon first meeting her, we learn that she is more cultural and sophisticated than the people who live in 'Elysian Fields' and her surname of French origin, DUBOIS immediately reveals her as being from the upper class of society. She appears to be 'daintily dressed in a white suit' with 'white gloves', all of which suggests purity and innocence but it doesn't take long to realize that Blanche is nearly always

putting on pretence. However, we as audiences are meant to feel sympathy towards her. After having suffered the loss of her young homosexual husband to suicide and the failure of the final generation of the Dubois family to retain their ancestral property 'Belle Reve', it is no surprise that Blanche had been affected by these tragic events. She has tried to avoid the guilt she feels for her husband's death by having 'intimacies with strangers' to 'fill her empty heart' and attempts to avoid realism and prefers 'magic' by telling 'what ought to be the truth rather than the truth itself. Blanche arrived in New Orleans to find a place of safety with her sister Stella as she is her only living relation left.

"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!" (13).

The quotation above reinforces desire and death as two aspects that became important in the latter part of Blanche's life. The literal death of her husband along with the metaphorical death of her social life were both caused by her brawny carnal needs which caused her to be in the position she is in the play. This eventually leads to her downfall in Elysian Fields where she gets off the street car.

While Williams' central character in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is the passionate Blanche Dubois, the play is a work of social realism. Blanche elucidates to Mitch that she pretends because she declines to admit that hard fate has dealt her. Faking herself and others allows her to believe life is much more convincing than it is. Stanley is a realistic man who is firmly grounded in the material world, disregards Blanche's trumped-up story and does everything he can to unravel the truth.

The intimidating association between Blanche and Stanley is a fightback flanked by clear manifestations and authenticity. The most noteworthy case in point about this connection happens when Stanley rapes Blanche, when the background of the house apartment becomes transparent in a bid to show the struggles taking place on the street and hence foreshadowing the breach or violation that is just about to take place in the Kowalskis' home. The description about Blanche's manifestations is effectively given below:

Blanche's fear of death manifests itself in her fears of aging and of lost beauty. She refuses to tell anyone her true age or to appear in harsh light that will reveal her faded looks. She seems to believe that by continually asserting her sexuality, especially toward men younger than herself, she will be able to avoid death and return to the - a women inside Blanche's world require to sell themselves and when they are not sellable, their situation is much desperate indeed.

Blanche always tries to up the ante about her status but she somewhere maintains with Mitch the height she has reached by telling him about her affairs (a confession which parallels the undramatized scene in which Allan's homosexuality is revealed to Blanche, with the vital distinction that Allan is not strong enough to make the disclosure of his own accord) Stanley's persecution and exposure of Blanche to Mitch do not require this second confession from Blanche, we see proof elsewhere of Blanche's ability to persist in lying no matter what other may know. Blanche has an optimistic drive for revealing her past to Mitch finally, since her difficult admission can bind the two of them all the more deeply together.

For this precise investigation of the character of Blanche we will concentrate on scene 4 onwards where her past is revealed little by little and do this helps us to understand her present definition as 'evil, pervert' woman. The first clear signal of her happy past within the allegory of the southern belle is provided by her sister Stella. However, Stella indicates as well that the reasons for Blanche's change are going to be found in the rules of a society that 'force her to change':

STANLEY. Delicate piece she is

STELLA. She is, she was. You didn't know Blanche as a girl. Nobody, nobody was tender and trusting as she was. But people like you abused her and forced her to change.[VIII.81]

Stella tries to support the very idea about Blanche's blissful past by saying that those days were best of times and both sisters lived in the plantation house. They were both well-educated within the myth and fascination of Southern Belle. Blanche was a perfect example of such fascination being young, delicate, fragile and beautiful. She was in love with a young, good looking and talented poet Allan Grey, 'a boy who wrote poetry'. Blanche was so mad in his love that she worshiped and adored this man and his talent alike but soon her love turned into a profound disgust when she finds about husband that he was a homosexual. World of teenage bliss she experienced before her husband's suicide.(SparkNotes Editors)

Tennessee Williams feels lost in a typically horrible basement flat in New Orleans which indicates a flutter of downfall that shook the world. The play revolves around Blanche Dubois' flight from the South -a gentle way of life and her appearance in New Orleans -realistic, brutal new world that can no longer sustain her. With no sub plot to distract the reader as well as the audience, *A Streetcar Named Desire* produces a concentrated effect as it unfolds Blanche's tragedy. It is just a part of question of tragic stature that is mostly concerning here the conditions on which 'victory' may be considered within the heroine's grasp the course of her struggle towards victory, and the actual moment in which the whole of the struggle turns to defeat.

"I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action. (60)"

The line stated above is a key theme of illusion vs reality. The naked truth, the rude remark, the naked light bulb is taken up by Blanche and is dressed up beautifully so as to make everyone happier and things to be easier without any trouble. Her talk and action are analogous to a light bulb which shows her consideration of remedy for the rude behavior to be a paper lantern - an external cover, as a solution avoiding the change from within.

I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. 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. (92)"

This is the explanation of Blanche's difficulties in life through her philosophy. She presents herself objectified in soft and attractiveness without any will, which seems that she is a victim of demands expressed in words- soft be attractive. But the truth is something else. The ups and downs, abuse, harsh life is the force behind such a hardened up stance Blanche has taken. The word 'turn the trick' in her sentence is also noteworthy, as it is an old idiom for prostitution. The person living. A documentation of her (Blanche's) tragic destiny is so unerring that *A Streetcar named Desire* becomes one of the finest plays of many seasons. (88)

Despite what humorous irony exists in any view of Blanche Dubois as typical of the average United States citizen (particularly when that view is not reconciled with the likewise popular outcry that 'life is just not as awful' as Tennessee Williams paints it), a nothing of the terms according to which Blanche can be said to share in the common man's state of defeat is immediately worthwhile. A subsequent penetration into what such a view falls short of perceiving will then achieve even sharper focus.

Early in his writing career Williams spoke about his conception of a 'new plastic theatre which must take the place of "the exhausted heater of realistic conventions if the theatre was to resume vitality as a part of the American culture" This new concept, the theatre was concerned with an attempt to present the spiritual and emotional inner world of the characters.

Williams turns a sympathetic spotlight on the inner being of his characters, sometimes deforming or reforming that inner being in order to make it stand out in sharp relief and in marked contrast to the way in which we in ordinary life see these people. Their dreams, illusions, and bizarre reactions, normally coated over in sleep or internalized only, take shape and exert a dramatic effect on their characters on stage. We might say that, instead of the audience looking in through the fourth wall, the audience is encouraged to look out upon the world or the

action taking place on stage through the illusion-ridden, frustration-driven eyes of these sensitive, often neurotic characters. The playwright presents before us a dark world of one-dimensional society of the modern civilization that survives in the midst of exploitation, violation of moral code of conduct, corruption and dehumanized passions of power and intimate relationships. This makes us realize that such worldly circumstances of the tainted world drives the misfits, the rebels, the artist figures or the fugitive kinds to lead lives of depression, alienation and unhappy madness. The playwright, through his impulsive Allan Grey being an extremely talented person and artist, always treated Blanche with respect, delicacy but not as a wife for obvious reasons. He never fulfilled Blanche's sexual fantasies as her sister says gathering the opinion of the whole society, "this beautiful and talented young man was a degenerate. Allan Grey was a homosexual and so he was a degenerate, a pervert in the view of society and Blanche cannot tolerate this. "I don't want realism. I want magic (145)". These words are Blanche's cry the expression is about the magic which is that, it never matters to anyone if magic is real. It is irrelevant Blanche herself believes it or not. The option of fantasy is important for Blanche. The things are to be lovely and prettier and kind to her than the real world. It is the imagination of the world for her to be as beautiful as she imagines it.

Especially after the late 1940s, it became common place for critics to talk of the ubiquitous 'common man' of *Modern American Drama*, one who is already defeated at the outset of the play's action, who struggles at best passionately but always futilely, and who is always too low in mankind's moral (if not occupational) hierarchy to manage any semblance of downfall, let alone a downfall with tragic impact. Whereas Arthur Miller tried doggedly to develop a sense of tragedy within such dismal boundaries insisting upon the commonness of his protagonists while insisting too that 'victory' remained nevertheless possible for them, Tennessee Williams turned feverishly towards opposite aims. Enlisting the array of forces-temporal and eternal, comprehensible and beyond human ken- against which the heroic struggle must be waged.

According to Howard Barnes,

Tennessee Williams has written a savagely arresting tragedy in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. His dramatization of a woman's crack up is a work of rare discernment and craftsmanship. Although it is almost explosively theatrical, at times it is crowded with the understanding. Tenderness and humour of an artist achieving maturity. Williams has to do with very human beings in completely recognizable circumstances. The result is a somber and sometimes shocking account of gradual degradation, cruelty, kindness and sheer animal.

Blanche is somehow a weak character, and she feels mostly out of place in the established environment. She tries to revamp the environment, but she is unable to conquer her opponent. Stella is willing to comply with Blanche's wishes, but not Stanley. Blanche tries to read just the established environment but Stanley is not taken in by his sister-in-law's airs. The following words that he speaks to her clearly and bluntly express his reaction to her, "I've been on to you from the start! Not once did you pull any wool over this boy's eyes! You come in here and sprinkle the place with powder and spray perfumes and cover the light-bulb with a paper lantern, and to and behold the place has turned into Egypt and you are the Queen of the Nile" (94).

Although Blanche had fallen on evil days, she persists in her airs of superiority. She feels quite contemptuous of the locality in which she finds herself, and she feels contemptuous of the two bed-room apartment in which her sister is living. On meeting her sister, Stella she says, "You sit down, now, and explain to me! What are you doing in a place like this?" (16) She goes on to say that never in her worst dreams could she picture a place like this. Blanche's comments on Stella's house and to locality in which the house is situated proceed from her ingrained notions of respectability and gentility which she inherited from her ancestors at 'Belle Reve'.

It is true that 'Bella Reve' has been lost, and it is true also that the estate was lost as a consequence of the epic fornications of Blanche's father and forefather, but the family notions of respectability and gentility have not forsaken her. She cannot therefore reconcile herself to the sordid surroundings and the cramped accommodations in which she finds herself now. Here, then we have an incipient conflict between dream and reality.

Blanche has the feeling that, while she herself has remained loyal to the family traditions and family estate, Stella had proved disloyal to both. That is why she says to Stella, "I know, I know. But you are the one that abandoned Belle Reve, not I! I stayed and fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it!" (111). Clearly, then if an argument is to be put fourth that Blanche does not begin and proceed and end creative activity provides us with a basic premise to understand with tenderness and fortitude such individuals trapped in their own predicament.

The defenses offered by Blanche are always lame excuses which seem to suggest her weak, emotional personality. Stanley examines the showy pieces of clothes and costumes, classy jewellery, and a bundle of papers containing details of the property and Blanche's contempt becomes evident. She says that touch of his hand on her things has contaminated the past relics of their family. She gives the first hint of her personal grief when she identifies the papers as the poems of a dead husband whom she hurt in the similar way Stanley would hurt her. We should consider these strings of faulty defenses of the character before showing any sympathy or an attempt as such, towards the appraisal of her character. But at the bottom of this, the admiration of the artist by the author

reflects the audacity of the character. She is anyways an English teacher with her cultural values, being sensitive to the outer world. Above all, she is misunderstood by the people around her. It is always the guilt of her past which follows her and leads to the harsh degradation of her persona. Blanche does in-fact represents an artist of sorts. She is always optimistic, be it being there at Elysian Fields or starting from zero, with Mitch.

The critics give credit to the character of Blanche in the story of being artistic. It is the creativity of the society which has suffered bluntness of World War II. The play has the spontaneity and sensitivity of humane civilization. Being devastated with War and depression era looming large, the author suggests the evidence of education following the poetry and an aversion to vulgarity as his basis of distinguishing the marks of civilization from the marks of savagery.

Not all who claim Blanche to be an artist are her partisans, yet some of these critics make of Blanche an even greater symbol: that of Civilization write large, its survival severely threatened by Stanley, the Savage State. Streetcar bespeaks the askers' neglect of what concerns became crucial to Williams and to the United States after World War II. Has it not become apparent in our own time, as could never been as apparent to most people before, that widespread education no more diminishes man's inhumanity to man than it diminishes man's misunderstanding of Blanche as she of him at the same low point, that argument must hinge on a value that still remains to Williams and to his tragedy.

Scene V offers much of the same, with Blanche's quest for escape from reality played off against the fight between Steve and Eunice, which ends in a reconciliation of goat-like screeches while Blanche makes seductive gestures toward a bewildered newsboys under the illusion of medieval romance. And scene 6, after an interlude of Blanche's forced prudery to stave off Mitch and her own irrepressible desires, ends in a violent confession of her horror at the suicide of her homosexual husband. Confession here acts to release her momentarily in to the ecstasy of union with Mitch, which in turn leads only in the subsequent scene to guilt, ritualistic bathing, and the intense clash of Stanley's brute truths about her past and Blanche's 'make believe' rationalizations. The structure of these scenes is sound and predictable, if not sensational.

There is no act division in the play, perhaps because the theme disallows a syllogistic progression of human actions in time, while demanding a recurring pattern of conflict and reconciliation that accords with the natural rhythms of passion. Realistically viewed, Stanley's world is a dreadfully boring repetition of acts, but symbolically, it fulfills in timeless, ritualistic cycle. In a scene, the progressive action required by the play's realism is at odds with the archetypal inner action, which is no better revealed than in the contradictory function of the climax.

The rape that concludes scene 10 serves a double structural purpose of resolving that scene in a moment of passion and bringing the play to its climax. There is some confusion, however, between the rape as a plausible realistic act and as a symbolic ravishing of the Apollonian by the Dionysian self. For if the play's symbolic conflict is to be resolved, as is suggested by Stanley's cryptic statement to Blanche that "We've had this date with each other from the beginning", the final scene is not so clear in its implications.

Interestingly, it is Stan now who has to take upon himself the burden of a guilty lie. Whether or not we can wholly credit Stella's declaration that she could not continue to live with Stan if she believed Blanche's accusation of rape, it is obvious that Stan is not able to admit the truth to this wife, and that his lie drives him to compound his guilt by having Blanche committed to a mental institution. It is no longer from Stella, Stan can gain, and no longer from Stan that Stella can gain, has the forgiveness each in their lovemaking now required.

The irrevocable impossibility of intimacy in her life is the reality that Blanche must live with no less harshly and totally than Oedipus must live with the knowledge that he has slain his father and married his mother. A sentimentality that ignores what is basic to the turn of events in Blanche's life would have to be invoked for Blanche and for her audience to hope that there could ever still, some day after Blanche has suffered enough.

Blanche cannot at all, truthfully be seen as the weak hypocrite. The conscious drive towards modesty and improvement that her childhood and location have established within her are not less profoundly respected by her than the sexual and emotional longing which she had to forego propriety to satisfy. Eventually it is neither drive that Blanche would want to capitulate.

Blanche, in her psychologically ingrown virginity, is driven further into herself and her dream, not released, and is handed over to Williams' modern priest, the psychoanalyst, for care. There is an unclear mingling of themes here. Blanche at first withdraws from the doctor and matron-stereotyped, masculine symbols of the state institution only to capitulate to the doctor when he personalizes himself by removing his professional appearance. It is then, suggested that Blanche is to be returned to the world, the one outside Stanley's and Stella's Elysium of mystical 'love', where the necessity of illusion plays its ambiguous role. Stanley's act becomes in this context an egregious breach of morality yet the play's conclusion obscures moral judgment.

Scene X presents an exciting, startling and highly dramatic climax. This is the scene of the rape of Blanche by Stanley, a totally unexpected development. This scene presents the final confrontation between Blanche and Stanley, with Stanley emerging as the undisputed winner and her destroyer. There is evidently a twofold motive behind his resolve.

Firstly, despite his aversion to Blanche, he has been feeling sexually attracted to her. Secondly, he has been burning with hatred for this woman and seeks to teach her a lesson for all the contempt and scorn which she had been showing towards him. Raping Blanche would serve both purposes: it would satisfy his sexual desire and it would gratify his desire for revenge.

In light of this, one has to understand reality about the pathetic nakedness of psychosis which is demonstrated by Blanche when she allows herself to surrender towards the path which leads into an exile, such behavior as if she has no affection to the real world, a real blind person at the societal stage with no attempt to resist when doctor becomes acquaint. This shows the likelihood of her optimism even though hopes for her own future have been demolished and she is moving through an uncharted territory under siege of terror. She becomes calm at her last moments to demonstrate the ideals which she had once craved for.

The confrontation with the doctor leads to the decimation of Blanche's inner soul and she has to drop the pretense as it makes no sense now. But she tries to maintain the image she has carried throughout her life by mocking the cards players. She expected the similar courtesy which was never given to her and initially resists the medical imprisonment as forced upon her. Ultimately she realizes that this was in similar ways an obsession which she had settled for long after a mutually intimate relationship.

Blanche could have opted to persist in accusing Stanley of rape or she could have retraced the accusation in an attempt to avoid hospitalization but she opted for none. This demonstrates the trauma and dilemma she was carrying, the acknowledgment of a wider sense of her situation. Her acceptance of the doctor, comparing him with the people she had known not above acquaintances, her asking about him as a doctor of death fantasy, relying on him as considering it an act of 'kindness of stranger', is her assertion about the known situation. Her desire of intimacy seems to have come towards dead end. What she sees has only strangers around her and she has to choose best among them a kind stranger.

The tragic power is the acceptance of Blanche's character about the very future ahead of her for which she has always fought almost successfully with Mitch. She attains the acceptance with tragic dignity as the impact of her final statement tells us her mental picture. The last words below explain to much extent the tragic end.

"He springs towards her the table. She cries out and strikes at him with the bottle top but he catches her wrist."

"Tiger-tiger! Drop the bottle-top! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" (97)

Blanche's dismayed repugnance to sleeping with Stanley is not based on any morality as he represents the idea of life which she is not able to adjust with Stanley is a destroyer for her and raping her is the actual cause of her madness as she cannot defend herself against his hostile act being a weak character emotionally and physically. Here the actual rape might not be the only reason behind her breakdown but the idea of being raped by a man who represents a different world altogether, everything which Blanche resists. She is a victim of the hypocrisy, society of her time, a victim of the dual principles.

Making mistakes is in nature of every human being and we all hide behind a wall of secrets from the world but Blanche is robbed of this option. Her most appalling and tainted actions are exhibited in front of everybody. Every person has a right to defend himself in our society; Blanche has not been given any such right. A rape is the most vicious, sickening, painful, disgraceful crime be it the period of transition of societal norms or the present society, it is unjustifiable crime. Such obliteration of the self can never be let off and every such unlawful act should be brought to justice.

WORKS CITED

1. Abelson, Elanie S. "Women who have No Men to work for them: Gender and Homelessness in the Great Depression.: *Feminist Studies* 29.1.(2003): 104-127. JSTOR. Web. 25 March 2015,
2. Berkman, Leonard. "The Tragic Downfall of Blanche Dubois." *Modern Critical Interpretation*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York:Chelsea, 2007. 33-40. Print.
3. Jackson, Esther. *The Broken world of Tennessee William*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1965. Print.
4. Jones, Robert Emmet. "Tennessee Williams" Early Heroines." *Modern Drama* 2 (1959):211-19. Print.
5. Kleb, William. "Marginalia: Street car, Williams and Foucault." *Confronting Tennessee Williams A Streetcar Named Desire: Essays in Critical Pluralism*. Ed. Philip Kolin. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992. Print.
6. Miller, Jordan Y. ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire: A Collection of Essays*. Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice, 1971. Print.
7. Vlasopolos, Anca. "Authorizing History: Victimization in *A Streetcar Named Desire*." *Theatre Journal* 38.3(1986). 322-338. JSTOR. Web. 24 April.2015.
8. Williams, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Ed. E. Martin Browne. New York: Penguin, 2009.Print.