

# “Various Themes of “A Streetcar Named Desire”

(The Play by Tennessee Williams)

Dr. Asha G. Dhumal

Assistant Professor, English Department,

Lokmanaya College Sonkhed, Dist Nanded (MS-India).

**Abstract:** *Literature is the soul of nation which guides and suggests the culture, tradition, history and belief of the particular nation. English literature is universal as it is an international language of communication. Each nation has their own specific literature in English i.e. British literature, Indian English Literature, Russian Literature, American literature etc. An American playwright Thomas Lanier Williams III who is also known as Tennessee Williams. He was the contemporary of Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller. He is regarded among the three foremost playwrights of 20th-century American drama. He was a versatile literary figure. He has written plays, novels, stories, screenplays, teleplays, Short Stories, one act plays, poetry, and non-fiction. The Glass Menagerie (1944) in New York City, A Streetcar Named Desire (1947), Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955), Sweet Bird of Youth (1959), and the Night of the Iguana (1961) are some of his famous plays. His drama A Streetcar Named Desire is often numbered on short lists of the finest American plays of the 20th century with Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night and Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman. This paper aims to discuss in various themes that we come across in the drama 'A Streetcar Named Desire' written by Tennessee Williams who is known as one of the most acknowledged American dramatist.*

**Key Words:** *A Streetcar Named Desire, Tennessee Williams, American literature, Drama, character, orphan, Blanche, etc.*

**Introduction:** There are many genres of literature i.e. poetry, epic, novel, drama, one act play etc. Out of which Drama is the most popular genre of writing. It has written by many writers all over the world. Tennessee Williams is one of popular Dramatist of America. His most known work “A Streetcar Named Desire” is regarded as one of the best and most critically successful plays of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is still acclaimed among his most performed plays.

**The Film and the Play:** The plays are always as found as the theme Movies or sometime the theme of movie, we found in plays. This means we can say movie and play are the two sides of a coin. ‘A Streetcar Named Desire’ is opens on Broadway on December 3, 1947. A film which was adaptation of the ‘A Streetcar Named Desire’ was directed by Elia Kazan. Malden, Brando, and Hunter reprising their Broadway acted in it with Vivien Leigh from the London production for the part of Blanche. The movie won four Academy Awards, including three acting awards in 1951.

**The Theme of the Play ‘A Streetcar Named Desire’:** The life of Blanche DuBois, a Southern belle is dramatized in play. Blanche DuBois encountered. The Desire covers the span of 1920 to 1948, the peak period of the height of streetcar use in New Orleans. A Streetcar Named Desire was criticized for its subject matter of brutality. Its roots are most easily found in his earlier play The Glass Menagerie (1945). a theme is a word with other symbols shows us the basis for ideas in a literary work. It can be either stated or implied. Williams is known for using a vast network of themes to give his work the impression of real life. He skillfully weaves various conflicting themes together. It is notable that many of the characters in the play think in abstract or thematic ways.

**The Detail Discussion of the Play A Streetcar Named Desire:** There are many themes of the play A Streetcar Named Desire; few of them are given in detail as below:

- a. **Fantasy/Illusion:** Blanches feels Fantasy as is primary means of self-defense that Blanche dwells in illusion against outside threats and against her own demons. No trace of malice is carried by her deceptions. They emerge from her weakness and inability to confront the truth head-on. She is a quixotic figure that sees the world as it is but as it ought to be. She has a fantasy of liberating magic which protects her from the tragedies which she had to tolerate. Throughout the entire play, we can find Blanche's dependence on illusion which is totally contrasted with Stanley's steadfast realism. At the final scene of the play Stanley and his worldview wins.
- b. **The Old South and the New South:** Stella and Blanche belong to a world, which rapidly dying. The two sisters are the last living members of their family, Belle Reve, their family's ancestral plantation, has been lost of their old world of cavaliers and cotton fields symbolically. Their strain of Old south was conquered by the steady march of time and not by the march of General Sherman's army. As Blanche's beauty diminishes with age. Blanche attempts to linger in the past but it is not possible.
- c. **Cruelty:** The Third important theme of this drama is Cruelty. According to Blanche the only unforgivable crime is deliberate cruelty. Stanley's specialized in this sin. A merciless attack against an already-beaten foe was his final assault against Blanche. On the contrary Blanche though dishonest she never lies out of malice. Her cruelty is often without any intention. In a vain or misguided effort to please she lies. From Blanche's well-intentioned deceptions to Stella to deceive self treachery to Stanley's deliberate and unchecked malice we come across the full range of cruelty in the whole play. There are various ways to hurt someone in Williams' plays and it may be noticed that some are worse than others.
- d. **The Primitive and the Primal:** Blanche always blames Stanley as ape-like and primitive. Stanley represented a very crude manhood nature. On the contrary Romantic idea of man which was untouched by civilization. Further, he represented influence of challenge on civilized man of modern era. Blanche, though repulsed, is on some level attracted to him. A terrifying amorality is included in Stanley's unrefined nature. The main and central is his service of desire. He was very deeply hurt due to the driving his sister-in-law to madness,

or raping her. Stanley is pure id in Freudian terms, on the other hand Blanche represents the super-ego and Stella the ego – but the balance between the id and super-ego cannot be stressed either in Stella's mediation, or in the tension between these forces within Blanche herself. She finds Stanley's primitivism as terrifying as it is something she sees, and hides, within her Desire.

- e. Desire:** We found Desire as the central theme of this play. Though Blanche tries to deny it, we come to know later in the play that desire as one of her driving motivations; her desires compelled her to be driven out of town. The heart of Stella's and Stanley's relationship is Physical desire, and not intellectual or spiritual intimacy, but Williams makes clarifies that this does not impact their bond to be any weaker. There is another problem of Blanche i.e. her inability to find a healthy way to deal with her natural urges. She always tries to suppress her natural urge as well as pursue them with abandon.
- f. Loneliness:** This is the main companion theme to desire which Blanche lost between these two extremes. In the arms of strangers, she seeks companionship and protection desperately. On the other side, she has never overcome from her tragic and consuming love for her first husband. Blanche needs a defender but she could not find the predatory and merciless Stanley.
- g. Desire vs. Cemeteries / Romance vs. Realism:** The romantic and the realistic, exists in parallel with lust and death. Blanche like the French's "la petite mort," takes the streetcars - Desire and Cemeteries, those cars and the themes they symbolize goes with Blanche's final destination. This dichotomy is clearly visible in almost every action of the play. We can see the romantic couple in the nature of Blanche and Staley. Further, the readers come close with the reality of Blanche's previous sexual encounters which are tangled up with death, to the actual names of the streetcars.
- h. Sexual Desire:** Williams invented the idea of desire for the 20th century. The power of sexual desire is prominent in the play. Every character is madly driven by "that rattle-trap street-car" in different ways. Throughout the play, sexual desire leads to destruction. Sexual desire and violence are yoked even in supposedly loving relationships: Stanley hits Stella, and Steve beats Eunice. A chain reaction culminated in the loss of the family estate was created by The "epic fornications" of the DuBois . Blanche's pursuit of sexual desire resulted in the loss of Belle Reve, her expulsion from Laurel, and her eventual expel from society. Stanley's voracious carnal desire leads him to rape Blanche. The reason behind the suicide of Blanche's husband is his unacceptable desire homosexual.
- i. Appearance in Interior and Exterior Part of the Play:** The audience of Street car witnesses the inside of the Kowalskis' apartment and the street, stressing the tense relationship between what is outside and the inside in the play. The inside physical attention versus outside as symbolically focuses the in tic relationship between what goes on in the mind versus what happens in real life to play with the boundary between the interior and the exterior music is used. The blue Piano shown in this play appears as the supportive tool for fraught emotions.

Though the blue piano is a part of the exterior world, the feelings occurring inside the characters are also expressed by it. The audience is allowed by music to enter Blanche's head. The audience hears the polka, though it is only playing in her mind. Blanche's point of view and the perspective of the whole play become blurred just as Blanche's fantasy blurs into reality.

#### **j. Masculinity and Physicality:**

There is the brutality, aggressiveness, animal force and carnal lust of Masculinity which we can in Stanley as the part of Masculinity. His brute strength is stressed frequently. His comma dance dominance aggressively with his loud actions and violence. His clothing is even forceful as he dresses in bright, lurid colors. Stanley's masculinity is deeply connected to the "sub-human." Williams depicted him as a "richly feathered bird among hens" and a "gaudy seed-bearer much emphasis is placed on Stanley's physical body. Stanley is not a gentle man but he is with a prime specimen of manhood. The powerfully attractive but powerfully frightening threat of masculinity is represented by him. Here we found the male's enough radiate carnal attractiveness from the eyes of Blanche for Mitch. This is shown by the writer opposite character to Stanley who is physically or psychologically dangerous.

#### **Femininity and Dependence:**

Two different types of femininity in the play, yet both find themselves dependent on men are demonstrated by Blanche and Stella. Blanche and Stella mould themselves as the men in their lives wishes, and they notice relationships with men as the only avenue for happiness and fulfillment. Blanche, a fading Southern belle clings to coquettish trappings, preferring "magic" and the night to reality and the light of day. She demonstrates a delicate, innocent version of femininity as per her belief that this makes her most fascinating to men. Blanche wants Mitch as a refuge and a recreate her disturbed life. Stella's femininity is based on illusions and tricks and not on reality. She does not try to hide her real self or her present circumstances. The real, physical, unmasked nature of her conception of herself as a woman is asserted by Stella's pregnancy. Stella chooses her physical love for and dependence on Stanley instead of Blanche's schemes. A similar, practical reliance on men is demonstrated by Eunice also, as she convinces Stella that she has made the right decision by staying with Stanley rather than believing Blanche's story about the rape.

**Class Differences:** Characters in the play are attached with their social class and they believe as their social class. On being a refined Southern belle who appreciates the finer things in life, such as art and poetry Blanche bases her identity. But Blanche's upper-class sensibilities are contrast with the Kowalskis' working-class life in Elysian Fields.

We found one important feature her about Stella, the sister of Blanche who left to leave her upper-class background to join with Stanley. In fact Blanche though look as the part of a refined lady, she hides the fact of

her scandalous behavior in her hometown has damaged her social standing. Her assertion of representing a superior social class is a defensive mask she wears to hide her own loss of social status.

Blanche's insistence of being superior to Stanley as he is low-class motivates him to destroy her. When Stella describes him as a sub-human or something that he doesn't do as a human, Stanley overhears it considering himself as public avenger. He is the one who makes out to expose her hypocrisy and save men like Mitch from her snares. Stanley also feels Blanche as encouraging Stella to look down on him. Stanley got success to rip the mask of superiority by Blanche. In this process Blanche looks towards him as an animal, the animal that Williams emphasizes with using as "inhuman jungle voices" and "lurid reflections." This happens at the time when Stanley rapes her.

**Conclusion:** Thus, we can conclude that the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams is a beautiful and popular play of 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is skillfully interwoven with various conflicting themes. It has multiple issues discussed by the play writers.

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