
Streetcar Named Desire: Character Analysis Of Blanche DuBois

Analytical Essay

Look closely at Blanche's monologue in Scene One on page 12 from A Streetcar Named Desire, starting with 'I, I took the blows in my face and my body!' until the end of the scene.

Discuss in detail the way in which Tennessee Williams presents Blanche in this extract, considering how it reflects her characterisation in the play as a whole.

Throughout A Streetcar Named Desire Tennessee Williams characterisation of Blanche DuBois presents the audience with a complex and ambiguous character. The extract begins with her long monologue at the end of scene one, and ends with her fainting on an armchair after hearing the polka music "faint in the distance". This leaves the audience curious both about her character and what might happen after her encounter with Stanley Kowalski.

The opening of Blanche's monologue demonstrates her inability to express her thoughts as she repeatedly says: "I, I, I". The repetition of the pronoun "I" suggests how fragmented, stressed and almost manic she is at this moment which also displays her fragile state. Furthermore, this repetition demonstrates how Blanche purposely separates herself from Stella by victimising herself for the loss of Belle Reve. The division between Blanche and Stella presents how Blanche suppresses Stella with her authority in dialogue. The dominance Blanche has over her foreshadows her darker usage of this power further into the play.

The personification of death in the "Grim Reaper" emphasises the presence of death at Belle Reve. Blanche felt like she was being haunted and tormented by death who was vengeful for her past sins she committed in New Orleans, leaving her alone. "Belle Reve" means beautiful dream, this 'beautiful dream' which has now been taken away from her, her ultimate goal in life was to become the stereotypical Southern Belle but she is unable to achieve the dream of obtaining this life which demonstrates the last grasp of the Southern Belle.

The music of "blue piano" escalates as Blanche explains the loss of Belle Reve the more the audience hears the "blue piano", the more of Blanche's instability is revealed as it appears to be that she is the only one that can hear it. Williams's use of plastic theatre presents the battle between reality and Blanche's delusions increase. For example, when Blanche arrives at Elysian Fields and the sound of "blue piano" increases when informs tells Stella about the loss of Belle Reve. [footnoteRef:1]Kazan says: 'Blanche is dangerous, she is destructive' under his view, "Blanche was an unstable woman who has entered and threatened by the security of a different world, and who was finally cast out allowing the world to survive" which explains why

the loss of the family home and wealth forces Blanche to lower her standards. [1: Kazan]

Blanche's social class affects her character and her behaviour, as her social class is the source and the reason as to why she behaves in a particular way: "Yes, accuse me! Sit there and stare at me, thinking I let the place go! I let the place go? Where were you? In bed with your- Polack!" Rather than Blanche facing the consequences of her actions, she insults

Stella's sexual appetite as she sees Stella chose Polish Stanley over the DuBois family which she believes resulted in loss of Belle Reve. Blanche identifies that Stella has moved on and is focusing on new values and opportunities, Blanche now sees her as a 'one of them'. She feels that she is "superior" to the others which does reveals Blanche's judgemental attitude by making racist and offensive comments based on their status. In addition, this also presents how Blanche focuses on decay of the past whereas Stella focuses on present immigration. This moreover, displays the difference between the Dubois and Kowalski families.

Blanche only assumes that Stella is thinking all the worst of her: "telling me with your eyes" which highlights her low self-esteem and anxiety as she manipulates her into making her feel guilty, which foreshadows mental health issues that Blanche will struggle with more into the play. Williams presents Blanche as an unstable and dual personality woman that impacts her all relationships as she goes into conflict with Stanley further into the play. This was influenced by the Tennessee Williams' sister, Rose who was diagnosed with schizophrenia which could explain William's inspiration with Blanche's character in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and in *A Glass Menagerie*.

Blanche involuntarily draws back from Stanley as he stares indicates the tension between Stanley and Blanche, reaching its climax in scene ten. Stanley's physical presence dominates the apartment. This also reflects Blanche's sexual past which is revealed further into the play, in scene five, as Blanche waits for Mitch, the Young Man appears. As Blanche flirts with the boy and attempts to seduce him. Blanche's flirtatious exchange with the young boy reflects the affair, she had with the student in New Orleans this reveals her lack of self-control that Blanche tries to keep hidden, as she fails to in scene one.

When Stanley asks about Blanche's previous marriage there is a sudden play of polka music: 'The music of the polka rises up, faint in the distance.' Only Blanche can hear the music this represents her past. Williams use of polka music plays at various points in the play, when Blanche is feeling guilty for Allan's death. The suicide of her young husband was the event that activates her mental instability, Blanche is distressed and especially anxious. Williams gives Blanche a persona of a broken woman who is haunted by her past.

To conclude, *A Streetcar Named Desire* conveys the conflict between old values and new values. Blanche is a representation of the old typical Southern belle with old traditional values while Stella and Stanley being the representation of new values in the New Orleans that was welcome to immigrants of all races and religions to a new life of freedom and opportunity the differences of values. The differences of values reveal Blanche's true nature which creates tension within the Kowalski household.

Bibliography

Primary resource:

1. Williams, T. (1947) *A Streetcar Named Desire*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama.

Secondary resources:

1. Anonymous. 'It is impossible to feel sympathy for Blanche' (unknown) Available from: http://members.tripod.com/alevel_essays/asdn1.html [Accessed: 10th May 2019]
2. Rachel, Adrienne. "A Streetcar Named Desire Scene 1" LitCharts LLC, (September 16 2013) <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/a-streetcar-named-desire/scene-1> [Accessed: August 23rd 2019]

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