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A Streetcar Named Desire as a Brilliant Implacable Play about the Disintegration of a Woman

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ABSRTACT

Admired plays in twentieth century American dramaturgy. Although William's reputation had already grown considerably with the production of a *Glass Menagerie* in 1944, with *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he immediately gained world fame. Williams's milieu is the south, a tense and un-reconstructed locale typical only of an environment we all inhabit. His theme is the plight of an individual trapped by his environment, the loneliness and lack of communication between human beings unable to reconcile flesh with the spirit. Filling his play with copious American icons, Williams distinguishes *Streetcar* as a work of American literature by keeping his plays independent from past theatrical traditions. In essence, *Streetcar* is not a play driven by a Social agenda, a challenging of gender roles, or a well defined structure of tragedy; it is instead a story driven entirely by human nature and a distinctly American nature, no less.

Key words:

Status, disintegration, victimization, woman, Human sensibility, modern Life.

INTRODUCTION:

Tennessee Williams has achieved superior status in the realm of American theatre. Though, Williams was a prolific author of drama, essays, poems, short stories, novels and screen play, his status as an essential American dramatist seems inseparably linked with what is arguably his most famous play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It has the tragic overtones of grand opera, and is, indeed, the story of a New Orleans Camille – a wistful little trollop who shuns the reality of what she is and takes gallant and desperate refuge in a magical life she has invented for herself. (Chapman, p. 29). Philip Kolin makes a distinction between works of art that appeal to a general audience and those that appeal to what he calls "Sophisticated literary critics" (Kolin, p. 133). William's *A Street Car Named Desire*, perhaps no play in English since the time of Shakespeare, has won such praise from both the critics and the populace. (Kolin, p.134). Looking at *A Streetcar Named Desire* from a feminist perspective proves enormously complicated. This is a Woman's story, Blanche, the key character, whose point of view dominates the story; is a women; her problems are distinctly women's problems, her limitations and strategies are peculiar to powerless women. In addition, the character who is faced with deciding between the warring parties, Stella, is a another kind of woken. Yet her choices are also peculiarly female choices, she ignores the needs of others and eventually adopts her own illusion. Life (sex) with Stanley is her highest values. Her refusal to accept Blanche's story of the rape is a commitment to self preservation rather than love, and thus Stella contributes to Blanche's disintegration. Her final decision is a concession to the constraints on a woman, not only in twentieth century America, but in most of human history. Blanche refuses to accept the reality of her life and attempts to live under illusion. In *A Street Car Named Desire*, Stella and Blanche are portrayed as the weaker sex: Women who are overpowered by Stanley, the self

aggrandizing macho hero Williams Confronts Modern Society directly with the problem of female victimization, because inspite of the fact that we have made considerable progress over the last century, women still remain subordinate to men. Much of William's beliefs about marginalized women are rooted in his own life story.

DISCUSSION:

Williams's women characters are among some of the finest ever portrayed. They are also among the most complex and anti-stereotypical. Blanche is both a villain and a victim, the cause of her husband's suicide and the suffering widow as a result of it. William's sympathy, by and large, lies with the women: Furthermore, unlike traditional writers of romantic fiction, he is not fixated on nubile young virgins. His interesting women tend to be older, experienced and subtle. In addition, instead of seeing marriage as the end of a woman's life, he sees it as the beginning. He loved and admired many women for their courage and their integrity. Critics pay particular attention to Blanche's character and much less to Stella, who is every bit as much a victim of her gender and puts up with more than she needs or deserves to, Stella, the misplaced gentle lady, serves as a foil to Stanley, the brute, William's choice of names for these two characters is noteworthy in how it sets them apart.

A homeless woman in her thirties, Blanche arrives at her sister's house at the beginning of the play. She had been a school teacher, married Allan, a man she later discovered to be homosexual. His reactions to his sexual orientation cause him to commit suicide. Lonely and guilty, she becomes a prostitute, who loses her teaching position when her sexual relationship with a teenager is discovered. After the family plantation Belle Reve is lost, she turns to her sister Stella, who is sympathetic towards her older sister (Blanche) and is protective of her, especially when she observes Blanche's emotional instability. She pleads with Stanley to show kindness to her as well. He totally ignores Stella's request not to tell Blanche about the baby and overrides her feelings as he asserts his male dominance in his power struggle with Blanche. Blanche and Stella are portrayed as victims of traditional Southern Society in which females had few choices in life. Both sisters raised in Southern tradition, was to seek the security of marriage, but choose unsuitable husbands. At the end of the play, when Stella is faced with believing either Stanley or Blanche about the rape, she tells Eunice that she could not continue to live with Stanley if she were to believe Blanche. She follows Eunice's advice to believe her husband because "Life has got to go on." However this decision will ultimately cause her bad marriage to become worse. The ultimate act of violent male domination occurs when Stanley rapes Blanche. Rape is a very difficult problem to decipher, and most feminists agree that it represents the ultimate outrage of men's abusiveness towards women because women are particularly vulnerable to the invasion of their bodies. The setting for *A Street Car Named Desire* is Post World War II, when the American South was steeped in sexist views that were established during the mid-eighteenth century. Cash explains that Southern Society perceived the ideal woman as merely pure and innocent. Women were expected to attract and allure men, but they were also required to maintain their innocence and purity, which made their rules particularly challenging (Millett, P. 35) Blanche is totally right brain hemisphere dominant and Stanley is left: the world of "idealized romance versus the world of brute reality" (Thompson, P. 25). Kernn indicates that Stella balances the two perspective – "born kin to the 'romantic' and married to the 'realistic'".

Williams indicates that Stella is clearly a sad victim in relationship that she thinks is within the boundaries of normally. The most disgusting element in the play occurs at the end when mental health professionals take Blanche away and Stanley puts his hands in Stella's blouse to console her. This chauvinistic act is the ultimate degradation of a woman in the midst of a devastating family trauma and reduces her to a mindless animal.

Williams acknowledges his sensitivity to the status of women as powerless and defined as the "other" because he himself experienced sexual abuse and received his share of the marginalization as a homosexual. Frequently, Williams female characters become his mouthpiece, because both Psychologically and thematically women better expressed his romantic and poetic style. As mentioned earlier, Blanche is sometimes viewed as a spokesperson for Williams. Williams is sometimes viewed as an "androgynous artist leaning more towards feminine sensibilities" (Abler, P.77), because he presents

women as more sensitive, feeling and humane than their male counterparts. Williams identified with women and loved and admired them for their courage and their integrity. (Nelson, P. 28-30). Williams held that the two conflicting strains in his nature; the “Puritan” and the “Cavalier”, are also present in every human being. Harold Bloom indicates this dualism in Blanche who yearns for the values of the aesthetic but scarcely embodies them, might represent a “masochistic self – parody” on the part of Williams himself.

CONCLUSION:

Tennessee Williams masterfully presents women’s oppression in male Patriarchal Society in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. He relates to the male other through his own experience as a marginalized segment of Society as a homosexual. Williams also shows sensitivity towards the mentally ill, another victimized minority in a male dominated world. In *Streetcar Named Desire*, the dramatist is attacking those disruptive forces in Modern Life that disturbs the women.

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