

A Streetcar Named Desire: A Modern Tragedy**Mr. Dasaratha Mohanta**

Ph.D. Scholar (English)

Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo

University, Baripada, Odisha

India

Abstract

Tennessee Williams is One of the most prominent American writers of the 20th century. He has established himself as one of the major playwrights, alongside Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller. His writing career is well-documented, making him well-known. He wrote under the pen name "Tennessee". Williams wrote The Pulitzer Prize Winning Drama *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1947. It examines the mental and moral collapse of Blanche DuBois, a fellow Southern belle whose refined appearance is insufficient to the brutal reality represented by her violent brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski. The protagonist of the play meets a tragic end and, at the play's conclusion, is utterly ruined, rendering the drama tragic. By following the three unities of time, location, and action—which are derived from the Aristotelian guidelines for traditional Greek tragedy—*Streetcar* is also eligible to be classified as a tragic drama. The story follows a single plot—the growing tension between Stanley Kowalski and Blanche DuBois—and takes place in a single setting—the Kowalski apartment—over the course of a predetermined amount of time—roughly six months. Because of its issues that are relevant to modern culture, the play is regarded as a modern tragedy.

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Tragic stories tell what happened to the tragic hero or heroine and what might have happened, what he/she did or what others have done to him/her. However, from Aristotle's time to the modern era, many things have changed, including the meaning of tragedy—although the tragic end remained a must for any tragedy. "A representation of an action, which is serious, complete in itself, and of a certain length; It is expressed in speech made beautiful in different parts of the play; it is acted, not narrated; and by exciting pity and fear it gives a healthy relief to such emotions," according to Aristotle. In addition, tragedy presents people. Tragic heroes or heroines, according to Aristotle, have to be "good" or "fine"—which does not imply perfect—"appropriate" or "true to type," and "consistent" or "true to themselves." However, modern ethics define a "good" person as someone who "endures evils" as opposed to someone who "performs great deeds." Greek tragedy is idealistic, hence its tragic hero or heroine should be a nobleman or noblewoman of great rank, such as a king or queen, prince or princess of heroic or even divine descent, so that his downfall would inspire sympathy and dread while also elevating him.

However, modern tragedies typically centre around actual, everyday individuals who face the same issues as us, allowing us to sympathize and relate with them in an effort to better comprehend both the outside world and ourselves. It is true that some of the fundamental components of the Greek tragedy are absent from current tragedies, but this is hardly

surprising given how much life has changed since then. There are differences between Aristotle's era and present civilization, modern man, and modern challenges. Moral and spiritual values also underwent significant change in tandem with the centuries-long, dramatic transformations in every aspect of life. Something that was once regarded as a catastrophe or a spiritual demise may not be so today. For a modern guy, loneliness, despair, or even chilly relationships could seem more devastating than an earthquake. For example, polygamy, which was once considered a privilege but was outlawed in Christian societies, is now considered a sin. Numerous such significant and minor instances might be provided to illustrate the complete metamorphosis of modern man's life and, by extension, his viewpoints.

Furthermore, the spirituality that characterized the Greek calamities has been lost in the majority of modern tragedies. Most contemporary problems and difficulties are now mostly of a physical and worldly nature. Moreover, it appears that contemporary issues lack definitive solutions. We can therefore conclude that the majority of contemporary catastrophes do not provide definitive answers to the issues they raise. When it works best, the answer could provide a way out of the predicament. Tennessee Williams, among other modern people, confesses that he resorted to such a psychological defence mechanism during times of sorrow, to escape "from a world of reality in which (he) felt acutely uncomfortable." Considering all the profound changes that have occurred in man's existence and self-perception, it is logical to conclude that the current understanding and interpretation of tragedy could not continue to be the same as the Greek. As a result, the antiquated characteristics of tragedy have to be altered to accommodate modern man's changing goals, way of life, and set of values.

In order to apply the aforementioned observations on tragedy and the tragic heroine to Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Blanche DuBois, we would be better off first consulting the author. In addition to being a warning against societal regression, Williams characterizes *A Streetcar Named Desire* as a "tragedy of incomprehension" and "an attempt to discover (among the ruins of our tragic life) a means and a purpose for life in surroundings which seem to offer little ground for hope. "It is possible to interpret the play's premise as "if you don't watch out, the apes will take over" using Williams' own words. The tragic story of Blanche, the southern beauty, starts when she is young and marries a handsome man, only to discover later that her husband is gay. He kills himself after she finds out about his condition and starts to tease him! The aristocratic girl is not only shocked by the awful event, but it also causes her to feel guilty and regretful, which ultimately causes her to fall apart. Williams's blend of guilt and dread is undoubtedly one of his favourite topics. He firmly believes that shame is a universal emotion and that it has a profound effect on people's souls, ultimately leading to their destruction. She was regrettably unstable financially because the family's wealth had decreased. She was so badly damaged by all of these situations that she became a victim of neurosis. Her health worsened to the point where she was eventually in the public eye. When she gave in to the temptation of seducing one of her younger students, her deterioration reached its pinnacle. She was thus fired from her teaching job.

Her demise was caused by a combination of environmental and social pressures, as well as certain unconscious personal factors that hastened it. Her misery on a personal level stem from her incapacity to strike a balance between her tender feelings and the bodily hunger she must satiate.

She chooses to live in the present, which represents her new "desire" in particular as well as the new way she wants to live after losing the splendour and dream of her aristocratic past.

Blanche's clinging to desire may be explained by Williams's belief that the most important moral conundrum facing modern humanity is how to prevent extinction, or "to beat the game of being against non-being". She says to Mitch, "Death was as close as you are. I used to sit here, and she used to sit over there. We dared not even acknowledge that we had heard of it! Desire is the opposite." She understood that love was no longer achievable and resorted to want as a replacement because she wanted anything to fill the void in her life. However, death was her only option when she failed to grasp desire. Williams's works frequently explore the idea that passions are synonymous with life and that death is the antithesis of both. Blanche has experienced death numerous times; it seems as though something inside of her contracts, collapses, and eventually passes away each time a member of her family passes away. She says to Stella, her sister: "I, I, I took the hits on my body and face! So many deaths! Funerals are quiet, but sometimes death isn't. You would never know there was a breathing problem and bleeding until you were standing next to the bed and they called out, "Hold me!" Though you didn't dream, I saw! "Saw! Saw!" Blanche was driven by a fierce desire to live, regardless of the cost, after having to face death several times. Although it was a tremendous yearning, it served as a kind of continuity and preservation for her life. Isn't she adorable? Is there anything more terrible than a person seeking refuge in a harsh environment without even a respectable identity? She seeks sanctuary in Stella's home in "Elysian Fields," New Orleans, to hide her spiritual nakedness and get away from the brutality of her world. She travels via two streets to get there: "Desire" and "Cemetery," which signify the start and finish of her most recent trip, respectively. There, her appearance and accessories seem incredibly weird. She can learn everything about her brother-in-law Stanley's character from the way he hurls the meat at her. The whole scene—including the names—may be symbolic of a fallen nobleman on the run seeking solace and calm in a "pre-Christian Paradise, where passion and life are one and good." 'Desire' leads her to her ultimate destination, the 'cemetery' of hopes. The sensuous side of her nature that she used to refer to as "brutal desire" is what leads to her demise; these are the uncivilized, cruel forces that she has afraid to face her entire life. She states in her opening statement: "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 Field!" The term 'They' in the previous sentence could probably refer to the outside forces in society, the individuals and situations that came together to contribute to her downfall. Williams has long been referred to as the frustrated poet. In this play, he attempts to make the point that in today's society, alternative viewpoints, empathy, and desire are rejected, destroyed, and shamed. Thus, wearing a mask and creating an illusion in her mind, Blanche descends to the so-called "Elysian Fields," the last stop on her journey to hell, in a last, hopeless attempt to overcome her situation and find salvation. She feels better than everyone else there, haunted by the splendour of the past, and she wants acceptance on her own terms. She strives to avoid all reality since they make her blind. Because the brightness of bare truth is too much to bear, she covers the electric bulb with a piece of paper. She states, "I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action". She had a propensity to hide and obscure any bright reality, even her own, as part of her escape plan. "I like dark," she says in response to Mitch saying, "It is dark." I find comfort in the darkness. She reacts terrified, asking, "Light?" When he informs her, he has never seen her in the light. Which light? Why? Realism isn't what I want. I will tell you, my desires. Enchantment! Indeed, indeed, magic! That's what I try to give folks. I misrepresent things to them. I'm not being honest. And let me be damned for it if that is sinful." She tries to flee the real world and live in a lovely world of her creation where promises could come true by lying, drinking, dreaming, and loving praise and flattery.

She opens her first beverage as soon as she enters Stella's home. Then, in order to avoid her sister's return, she washes the glass while acting as though she's looking for alcohol. She says, uncompromising, "No, one's my limit" in response to her sister's question about if she wants another drink. She then calls Stanley a liar and a drinker, saying, "I rarely touch it." Although Stella is actually younger than her, she convinces Mitch that Stella is somewhat older than her. At the end, though, she admits to Stella that she laughs at herself "for being such a liar." She secretly harboured a burning desire for physical fulfilment in order to avoid dying. She needed the security of genuine love, but she was willing to wear a mask, cover up her physical cravings, and even engage in any kind of deviant behaviour to get what she wanted when she couldn't find it. By observing her behaviour toward Mitch, Stanley, and other men, one might discern the terrible predicament she finds herself in. Stella's comment to her husband, in which she states, "And admire her and tell her she's looking wonderful," validates Blanche's wish for recognition. That's crucial in regards to Blanche. Her tiny flaw!" Dreams of running away from unpleasant reality plagued her. She exclaims, "Look at how pretty the sky is! How pretty the journey to the unknown is to avoid facing life!" I should arrive there on an unstoppable rocket. She was "light as a feather," as Mitch puts it, but these fantasies were crushed beneath her each time. In her situation, being flighty and soft could mean entirely different things. Williams may be hinting at her often-agitated mood and her incapacity to maintain her ground! She speaks in an elegant, almost lyrical manner and continuously puts on a front of virtue in an attempt to hide her shame or win men's respect, which could lead to love and security in the end—or at the very least, to a reconciliation with the outside world and herself.

Says that love is "the closest we've come" and that relationships between individuals are "the only satisfying thing we are left with in this life" in a lecture about the post-war world. Put another way, he comes to the conclusion that love is the only thing that may alleviate humanity's suffering in the present era. This is what Blanche had been waiting for. Williams works truly to present in his plays the real world around us with all its modern issues and requirements. Williams, according to John Harrell, "is trying to drive home the screaming need of a world-wide human effort to know ourselves and each other a great deal better". Williams appears to be interested in human relationships in contemporary culture, particularly the need for love and the absence of empathy and understanding in all of his plays. He feels compassion for those in this community who are weak, alone, dejected, and misunderstood. In short, with the lost souls that travel aimlessly in this great wild globe without being of help to themselves or to others. For such unhappy creatures, the fact that no one in this heartless world seems to give a damn or empathize with their suffering exacerbates the situation. In Blanche's case, hard luck and social pressure were not the only forces that wove her tragedy. It is her responsibility to add the finishing touches to her mischievousness. She attempts to attract men and form intimate relationships even with complete strangers because she views desire as a means of escaping death. With frenzied tears, she seduces a young man who has come to collect money for a paper: "Young man! Young, young, young, young man! Has anyone ever told you That you look like a young prince out of the Arabian Nights? Please come over here like I instructed! I want to give you a single kiss." Stanley is tricked by her request for him to do "some buttons in back" of her dress. This explains what he says to her before raping her, "We've been on this date together since the beginning!" She even wants "to fool" Mitch "enough to make him-want (her)". In a dangerous world where she feels abandoned and alone, she looks for someone who can protect her from life's ups and downs and who needs her.

Stella hears her say, "I want to rest! I want my tranquil breathing back! Yes, I do want Mitch. awfully! Just consider! If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone's problem..." But Stanley, the "apes" of New Orleans society, complete the task that the Flamingo Hotel monsters started. Stanley loathed Blanche since the beginning; he intended to bring her down to the level of his animalistic ecstasy so that she will not feel superior anymore. She believed that her sister's home would be a fitting refuge for her deliverance, one in which she might not further degrade. However, she let loose the gates of hell rather than the doors of heaven. After hearing her criticize him, Stanley resolves to exact revenge on Blanche. By delving far into her background, he unearths her dark secrets and learns about her scandalous past before arriving at Elysian Fields. Some detractors defend his retaliation by saying that he did so to keep his marriage intact and to keep his house from collapsing. Because they think he was keeping his wife from experiencing the same superiority that Blanche does over him, they even justify his heinous act of raping her. We might find an explanation for his hatred, an excuse for revealing her secret to Mitch since he is his friend, but what reason could be offered to his act of raping her! Was the calamity caused by his foolish animalistic appetite stoked by his wife's absence that night, or was it just his desire to pull her down to his level and his inferiority complex that prompted him to punish a more civilized person? Choosing any of these factors as the triggering motive to his misbehaviour, we would deduce that Stanley had added the last straw to her sorrow. His heinous act represents the play's conclusion. In addition to being just another demeaning societal force, he also appears to have been the final blow that crushed all of her ambitions and dreams and precipitated her downfall.

Blanche's rape appears to represent, at least for Williams, the victory of barbaric social forces over delicate components in the contemporary world. In the final scene, Blanche is led by a doctor who has abandoned his formal attire. This could mean that only a gentleman who is sympathetic to her situation can help her resume a normal life, or it could mean that society's cruelty has driven Blanche into madness and prevented her from ever finding peace with herself and her life. The scene conveys the same message in both cases: modern women most need sympathy.

In summary, this study suggests that *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a modern tragedy that possesses numerous characteristics of the classical tragedy. It makes sympathy for the character by presenting a significant action that is fully realized and performed over a set amount of time. It also has a start, a middle, and an end. It is a quest for life, but it also sends a message to a modern audience about how a modern lady has behaved and how life has behaved upon her. Jordan Miller views the explanation of Blanche's struggle a manifestation of the simplicity and directness of moral allegory in Williams's world that informs of "good opposed to evil, spirituality to sensuality and the romantic to the brutally realistic."

Even though Williams gives Blanche a lot of sympathy, a close examination of her persona shows that, despite her good disposition, she cannot be a completely innocent victim. In no way can she be a spiritual symbol, the way, say, 'Tess' from Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* could. Throughout the play, her intentions, words, and deeds are far from pure heroism or innocence. She is a vulnerable creature, to be sure, who enters the enemy camp unarmed and is crushed mercilessly by a variety of evil forces, but she also bears some responsibility for the terrible circumstances that led to this. Blanche's tragedy is not woven by a flaw in her character, she does not appear to be fully innocent and guiltless, and above all, she does not gain any insight or spiritual uplift. For these reasons, Blanche could never be regarded as a tragic heroine in the Aristotelian sense.

We may safely conclude then, that *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a modern tragedy; since it contains many tragic elements, and because its author declares that he meant it to be a work of tragic intention. Nevertheless, Blanche does not qualify as a tragic heroine in the Aristotelian sense; but just a pathetic character who delivers the message that: in such a world of tragic emptiness and indifference, people like Blanche should expect nothing.

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