

“A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE” UNIT LECTURE NOTES: FIRST CLASS CYCLE (6 DAYS)

Unit Focuses:

- **What elements of William’s personal life are represented or mirrored in his work?**
- **What character do you think William’s would most identify or sympathize with?**
- **What ideological shift is William’s attempting to represent, venerate, or disvalue?**
- **Which characters represent these values, what does each character embody in general?**
- **What causes madness, specifically quixotic delusion? Is Blanche’s behavior a coping mechanism or a detrimental fracturing of her psyche?**
- **Blanche was intended to be the heroine of the play, but most audiences were thrilled with Stanley. Why? What does this possibly say about society?**
- **Why are Williams’ plays in general some of the most popularly remembered and appreciated?**
- **What was Williams’ intent in righting this play? (To say something real, to find the good in what is real, to explore the differences between dreams and reality, to find dreamlike qualities in reality, to bring POETIC REALISM to life, to say that success is not the same as value)**
 - **“Shake the Dust” by Anis Mojgani (Pair as a version of and demonstrating a modern type of poetic realism)**

Lesson 1

Williams:

-Alcoholic

-Depression

-Thomas Lanier Williams (Tennessee was a pen name)

-Early Life in Mississippi with Grandparents, mom, and sister

- “The contrast between leisurely small-town past and northern big-city present, between protective grandparents and the hard-drinking, gambling father with little patience for the sensitive son he saw as a "sissy," seriously affected both children.”

-“While Rose retreated into her own mind until finally beyond the reach even of her loving brother, Tom made use of that adversity. St. Louis remained for him "a city I loathe," but the South, despite his portrayal of its grotesque aspects, proved a rich source to which he returned literally and imaginatively for comfort and inspiration.”

-“That background, his homosexuality, and his relationships—painful and joyous—with members of his family, were the strongest personal factors shaping Williams's dramas.”

-“Yet a recurrent motif in his plays involves flight and the fugitive”

-“Williams fled not only uncongenial atmospheres but a turbulent family situation that had culminated in a decision for Rose to have a prefrontal lobotomy in an effort to alleviate her increasing psychological problems. (Williams's works often include absentee fathers, enduring—

if aggravating—mothers, and dependent relatives; and the memory of Rose appears in some character, situation, symbol or motif in almost every work after 1938.) He fled as well some part of himself, for he had created a new persona—Tennessee Williams the playwright—who shared the same body as the proper young gentleman named Thomas with whom Tennessee would always be to some degree at odds.”

Introduction:

-“an event which terminated one part of my life and began another about as different in all external circumstances as could well be imagined” (1)

-SUDDEN SHIFT:

- Obscurity to Prominence
- Clawing struggle to Success
- Determination to Depression
- Dreams to Disillusionment
- Positive relationships to Cynicism and Isolation
- Truth to Falsity
- Natural vs. Public Self
- Reality vs. World of invention
- Fulfillment vs. Complacency

-“success is a kind of death I think” (11)

- strive to be useful, to live, to never become content, to not base value and your life on the “success” of publication

Scene 1:

-Setting:

-POOR but CHARMING

-May, Evening

-New Orleans

-Elysian Field (Street Name)

-the turquoise sky “invests the scene with a kind of lyricism and gracefully accentuates the atmosphere of decay”

-What is the spirit of life in this area? (Expressed by the tinny blues piano played by “brown fingers”)

-Cosmopolitan town in which races intermingle easily

-Stella: simply described as non-Stanley-esque, super in-love

-Stanley: work clothes, gruff, blue-collar, “a different species than what Blanche is used too”, works as a sergeant in the engineer corps, returned vet, “animal joy is implicit in his movements and attitudes” (29)... “the power and pride of a brightly feathered rooster” (29), treats women as objects to be powered over,

-Mitch

-Blanche: dainty, white suit, pearl jewelry, older than Stella, uncertainty, shocked, LIKE A MOTH that must avoid a strong light, “... when I think about her, Blanche seems like the youth of our hearts which has to be put away for worldly considerations: poetry, music,

the early soft feelings that we can't afford to live with under a naked light bulb which is now." SUPERIOR, teacher, having a difficult time and has taken a leave of absence due to nerves, married young but her husband died”

- Streetcar named Desire then Cemeteries to get to the Elysian Fields
 - ELYSIAN FIELD=GREEK AFTERLIFE FOR HEROS AND VIRTUOUS
 - Blanche describes the neighborhood as Poe's Woodland of the Weir (where a lost soul searches for their dead love)
- Blanche and Stella are from a plantation (Belle Reve) in Mississippi
 - BELLE REVE = BEAUTIFUL DREAM
- Stella and Blanche's Relationship: speaks joyfully vs. speaks fearfully
 - Blanche acts protective and worried about Stella, but Stella is actually worried about Blanche
 - Stella is happy, but Blanche is horrified with her apartment and neighborhood (worthy of Poe)
 - quiet and constantly talking, Stella seems to have blossomed away from Blanche
 - BLANCHE IS CONSTANTLY HYPOCRITICAL and overly critical
 - Makes comments about Stanley's Polish heritage (like a high-brow Irish) incredibly demeaning at the time, alcoholic and criminal connotations
 - “not well” and frightened as a result, lonely, feels abandoned
 - Stella left and looked out for herself, Blanche had to look out for the family holdings and reputation
 - they lost the plantation: causes tension
- “ Funerals are pretty compared to deaths...” (26) ... “Death is expensive” (27)
- Men come home: RAUNCHY vs. DAINTY
- Blanche treats Stanley with the same uncertainty that she treats the environment

Questions:

- What is Williams trying to say in the introduction? What foundation or philosophy does he prepare for the coming text?**
- What pieces of William's life are represented in foundation of this play?**
 - “Williams drew from the experiences of his persona. He saw himself as a shy, sensitive, gifted man trapped in a world where "mendacity" replaced communication, brute violence replaced love, and loneliness was, all too often, the standard human condition. These tensions "at the core of his creation" were identified by Harold Clurman in his introduction to Tennessee Williams: Eight Plays as a terror at what Williams saw in himself and in America, a terror that he must "exorcise" with "his poetic vision."
- We discussed personal shifts for Williams', but what ideological shifts were occurring during this time in general?**
- What role does the setting play thus far? Why is New Orleans different not only from the local rural areas but also other cities? How does Williams romanticize this sort of life?**
- Williams is often called a poetic realist: What does this mean, how are his stage descriptions fulfilling of this classification?**

-“Poetic realism films are "recreated realism", stylised and studio bound, rather than approaching the "socio-realism of the documentary".[2] They usually have a fatalistic view of life with their characters living on the margins of society, either as unemployed members of the working class or as criminals. After a life of disappointment, the characters get a last chance at love, but are ultimately disappointed again and the films frequently end with disillusionment or death. The overall tone often resembles nostalgia and bitterness. They are "poetic" because of a heightened aestheticism that sometimes draws attention to the representational aspects of the films.”

-How is Blanche and Stella’s relationship defined or characterized?

-Why is Blanche so worried about Stanley liking her, when she considers herself superior to everyone else in the play?

-Thus far, what does each of these characters represent? Blanche: old values, Stanley: new values, Stella: the transition

“The name of the Kowalskis’ street underscores the extreme, opposing archetypes that Stanley and Blanche represent. Elysian Fields is the name for the ancient Greek version of the afterlife. Stanley, the primitive, pagan reveler who is in touch with his vital core, is at home in the Elysian Fields, but the Kowalskis’ home and neighborhood clearly are not Blanche’s idea of heaven. Blanche represents a society that has become too detached from its animal element. She is distinctly overcivilized and has repressed her vitality and her sexuality. Blanche’s health and her sanity are waning as a result.”

Activity: Answer your assigned question as a group. Using your conclusion or the new information, write a question we should possibly address or discuss regarding this scene or the rest of the play. Be prepared to answer your questions and brief the rest of the class on your conclusion or discoveries.

1. What comparisons or shifts does Williams discuss in the introduction to the play (in his own life or in society)? Using the introduction as a lens, what light or specific understanding and foundation does it give us regarding the first scene?
2. What is an ideological shift? What shifts were occurring in society at this time and why? Which characters, if any, can you identify with certain shifts or related archetypes?
3. “Despite increasingly adverse criticism, Williams continued his work for the theater for two more decades, during which he wrote more than a dozen additional plays containing evidence of his virtues as a **poetic realist**.” What is poetic realism? Where does the term originate? Where do we see this classification fulfilled or represented in Scene 1 of “A Streetcar Named Desire”? How does it affect the tone of the play? (Hint: Setting and stage directions)
4. Williams is renowned for using his personal history, circumstances, and beliefs to found or fuel his work. What similarities are seen specifically between William’s life and “A

Streetcar Named Desire” thus far? Using this information, which with character do you think Williams most likely identifies?

5. What are the significances of the names, places, and allusions in the play thus far? What insight do they provide?
6. Define or attempt to quantify Stella and Blanche’s relationship, Stella and Stanley’s relationship, and Blanche and Stanley’s relationship. What does Blanche’s uncertainty and Stanley’s confidence communicate?
7. What irony or hypocrisies are evident in the play or the introduction thus far? How is this utilized to build character or relationships?

At this point, who do we like the most as a class?

Lesson 2

*If you had to describe Stanley in one word, what would it be at this point?

-animalistic, primal, success-driven, money-driven, misogynist, ruffian, strong, unstable

*If you had to describe Mitch in one word, what would it be?

-weak, polite, mannered, moral, awkward

*In the play which man is venerated? Who is *worshipped* or held in the highest esteem?

Who’s the ring leader?

*Why do we hate Stanley and understand his immorality, yet still remain in awe of him?

*Where does his power come from?

*Who is in control or in charge during the encounters between Blanche and Stanley?

-She flirts with him, she plays to his ego, and Stanley is obviously ignorant or at least academically inferior

*Is Blanche really “adaptable to circumstance?” pg55

*There is so much confusion in the world, I needed this kindness.

*Fib is 50% of a women’s charm

*Why does Stella come back to Stanley, right after Eunice yells that she won’t?

*What is the nature of Stella and Stanley’s relationship? If you had to compare them to a famous couple or romance, who would you choose?

SOCIETY IS IN A STATE OF SOCIAL AND REFORMATIVE BACKLASH: Compare with the Jim Crow laws after the Civil War (Gender equality made leaps during World War II but are now experiencing a backlash)

Why do we like Stanley?

Where does Stanley’s power come from?

*Machiavelli states that power comes from autonomy: Women rely on men to make money, but when men sink to their animalistic instincts they then rely on women. Does this appropriately represent the comparison between Blanche and Stanley?

*Patriarchal society?

*Machiavellian theory that while in pursuit of the greater good, morals and social laws change radically, if survival is the new goal, is Stanley's behavior and Stella's return new morality?

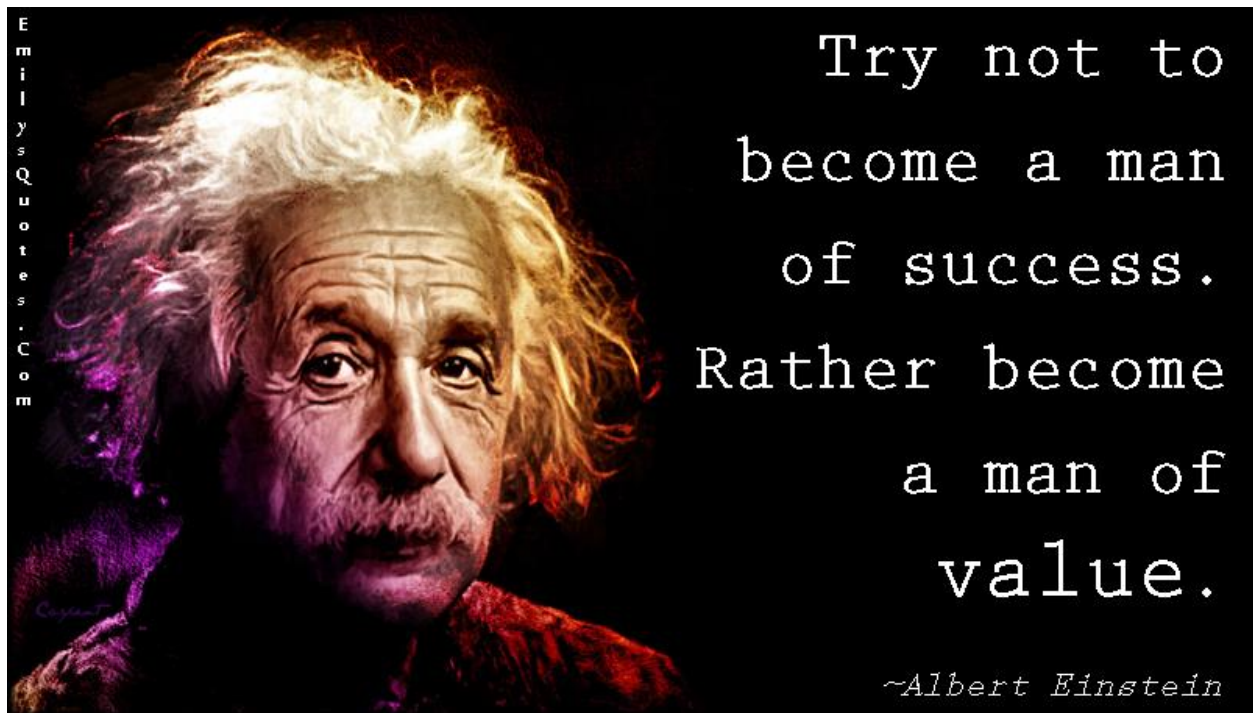
*Do morals depend on environment, are they relative?

What do these scenes say about the definition of worth or value in this environment? How we value men in society today? Have we undergone another ideological shift, or not?

*Does the nice guy always finish last?

*Women on rise as family breadwinners

“Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value.” –Einstein
How do the changed definitions of worth change the socially acceptable behaviors or rules?
What has caused these changes?



-1955

Power is the ability to influence other people: Quantifying power

(https://www.evernote.com/shard/s664/nl/124745793/9f4df2d4-6fb1-4f1e-96af-6ffdef3bcbf2/res/490007e7-4001-48ed-a090-a547a5602b39/Dahl_Power_1957.pdf)

Autonomy

Status?

Being valued?

The ability to bend the rules?

Abusive Relationships: <http://time.com/3309687/why-women-stay-in-abusive-relationships/>

Lesson 3

- *The streetcar Desire has become a metaphor for what?
 - Stanley and Stella's hollow and fading relationship, the foundation for the animalistic and primal ties to one another
 - *What does Blanche reveal about her feelings regarding love? (cynical)
 - *Blanche's speech on pg. 72
 - Expresses the notions that the evolving America was a primal and brutal place concerned with money and success rather than art and education
 - There are holes in Blanche's argument, she says don't hang back with the brutes, but progress is in reality the cause of the brutality.
 - *What are we to make of Blanche throwing herself at the young newspaper boy?
 - hypocrisy or morality
 - decries Stella's sexual relationship, but obviously has her own desires and urges to contend with.
 - *It is Blanche's heritage to long for inappropriate sexual relationships, just as her ancestors. In this way did she also have a hand in the destruction of her home?
 - *Does Eunice's and Steve's fight normalize violent relationships?
 - *Who is more screwed up? Stella and Steve or Blanche?
 - *Der Rosenkavalier: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_Rosenkavalier
 - *What is Blanche searching for?
 - *In the Bluest Eye Pecola builds a reality for herself due to stress and cruelty, her mind can't bear the weight and provides her with a safe place. What are the stresses placed on Blanche thus far in the play, can we safely say that she is delusional? She lives in a period in her head where the old South reigns.
- ****Delusions of grandeur: Quixotic characterization. She needs to put a Chinese lantern over the light, she needs to create a buffer for herself as a result of the harsh realities of life.
- http://www.online-literature.com/cervantes/don_quixote/12/

Definition:

: idealistic and utterly impractical; *especially* : marked by rash lofty romantic ideas or chivalrous action doomed to fail

About the Word:

The novel *Don Quixote de la Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes (published in 1605 and 1615), is widely regarded as one of the greatest works of literature ever. It also has given us a small, but useful, batch of words and phrases for describing that special kind of person who is unencumbered by common sense and the notion that grand gestures are often impractical.

The name of the hero of this work, *Don Quixote*, is used as a term for an impractical idealist. Used without the honorific Don, *quixote* by itself also refers to a quixotic person. And most common of all is that adjective, *quixotic*, used to refer to a person who is always "tilting at windmills" (a phrase denoting fighting imagined or illusory foes, taken from a scene in the book where Quixote attacks a windmill, thinking it a giant).

*Thor minus actually being Thor

Lesson 4

Poetic Realism: Using Poetic devices in other forms of text, usually engenders a romanticized view of things

*Metaphors:

Blues Piano: The life style of New Orleans or the neighborhood of the Elysian Fields

Polka Music: Represents death

Streetcar named Desire: *Stella and Stanley's romance, the shallow or hollow reality of lust, the hollow reality of love, Blanche's degradation

*fate

*progress, mechanical brutality

Moth: Blanche, flinching from light

Light/Lighting: truth vs. illusion (also art vs. ignorance)

Cave Man, Animalistic, Primal Nature: Stanley

A Streetcar Named Desire Poetic Devices Assignment

Due Friday 2/26

Metaphors are a type of imagery. Draw a character sketch, setting depiction, cartoon, or another various art form that depicts a type of metaphor or imagery in the play in relation to a main theme or character. Write a brief explanation of your image on the back of the drawing.

OR

Find a song that shares similar elements of metaphor, imagery, themes, or utilizes similar devices and thoroughly analyze your choice of song, the similarities or differences between the texts, the way that one text adds meaning to another, etc.) in a few loose paragraphs.

You may work with a partner or individually.

EXAMPLE: Stairs made from piano keys with something related to Stanley walking up them.

Lesson 5

Poetry Thursday

Lesson 6

In Class Reading and Team Comprehension Quiz