Tennessee Williams

A Streetcar Named Desire

Analysis Of Characters

Monarch Notes

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**Blanche Dubois**

Blanche DuBois is the culmination of many womanly characteristics in the repertoire of Tennessee Williams. She is first seen in a one‑act play written in 1939 called The Lady of Larkspur Lotion. The story is about an abandoned forty‑year‑old blonde, Southern ex‑belle who has degenerated into a prostitute. In order to defend herself against an insistent landlady and to cling to some shreds of respectability she invents a story about waiting for dividends from her rubber plantation in Brazil. Blanche Dubois is seen more clearly in Portrait of a Madonna, another one‑act play written during Williams' earlier period in New Orleans. It is a sympathetic study of the mental deterioration of a Southern spinster. She is lost in a world of her own delusions. She imagines that she has finally won the young man that left her many years ago and that she is expecting his child. Toward the end of the play a Doctor and Nurse, performing their duty wearily but efficiently, come to take her away. The play closes as she is being led to the asylum by the doctor, who treats her with kindness and gallantry. Myra Torrance and Cassandra Whiteside in Battle of Angels, Matilda Rockley in You Touched Me, Laura and Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie,* and Alma Winemiller in Summer and Smoke are all identifiable in the fusion of characteristics that make up Blanche DuBois.

When Blanche arrives at the end of the line of the streetcar named Desire she is a desperate woman. She is desperate because she is a fugitive from a society that is deteriorating also. Her background is the life at Belle Reve, one from which she cannot escape without serious consequences. Her tradition made her a woman of importance. She felt secure within the function of her own society. Today that tradition no longer exists. It no longer works in our present society. Blanche, however, must believe in it, for without the tradition of Belle Reve, she cannot live; her whole life has been for nothing. She holds on to these shreds of Southern respectability, and by so doing she thinks she is performing an act of heroism, rather than absurd romanticism. Even the romantic episode with her young husband, who was tender, gentle, and sensitive, and whose tragic flaw was his sexual perversion, gives stature to her heroic character. She becomes one who is more to be pitied than censured because of her juvenile misunderstanding of her husband's need. By believing in her traditional background, Blanche finds an excuse for a great deal of her behavior. The present society rejects her as an anachronism, and therefore, makes her feel alone and insecure. When the strength of her belief in tradition weakens, she looks for security in drink and the human warmth of contract with strangers. This is a sacrifice, however, for she must meet them on their terms and forget her own. Since she cannot fully accept her actions she begins to forget them. She creates a world of fantasy wherein she can rationalize her behavior as being the result of an unprotected, sensitive and delicate nature. In doing this she avoids facing the reality of her real physical and sensual desires. Her tradition will not allow her to accept such feelings as other than "brutal desire" and to give vent to them is sinful. Nevertheless, she does give vent to her feelings out of loneliness and an agonizing realization that her attraction for men is beginning to fade. She is on the brink of middle age and is desperately in a hurry to find a man. Like most women, Blanche is dependent upon a man for protection, for security, and for love. Because of her background, she also has a great need for someone to defend and maintain her honor. She is looking for someone who does not exist in the New Orleans environment to which she has come‑a gentleman. She wants an old‑fashioned wedding dressed in white with music, poetry, art and people with tender feelings, and not to be held back with the "brute desire" that make such things impossible. So she is constantly in conflict, and out of this comes frustration and a need for protection. That is what a woman of tradition needs, protection from an alien world that is passing her by and to which she is unable to adjust. That is why she comes to Stella and Stanley. She comes as a beaten individual who is drowning in a mire of degeneracy, but, because she is proud, she must make one last attempt. She, once again, draws upon an impotent tradition to make herself superior. Stanley, mistakenly, interprets her demeanor as a challenge to his basic existence as a man. Because of his strong connection with reality, he is able to destroy her. Blanche, therefore, destroys herself because of her foolish insistence of living with the illusions of the past. In the meantime, however, she has one stroke of luck. She finds someone who needs her as badly as she needs him, Mitch. For a short time she lives in happy anticipation, but her past catches up with her. With no one left to turn to for protection she takes refuge in fantasy. She becomes insane.

**Stanley Kowalski**

When the audience first sees Stanley Kowalski they see him as a personification of what Blanche later describes as a "sub‑human, ape‑likf survivor of the stone age." One who bears meat home from the kill in the jungle and throws it down in front of his mate, who is waiting for him at the entrance to their abode. He might strike her or he might kiss her, depending upon his whim. In the evening the rest of the apes gather and they have an ape poker party with "grunting and swilling and gnawing and hulking." Stanley is like an animal who operates on essentially one dimension‑the sensual. His life has been unpretentious and a matter of the survival of the fittest. His manners, speech, and appearance are all basic but sufficient to maintain life. However, he is different in the sense that he has a will and a desire to become more than just a common animal, he wants to become king, at least in his own home. If he can't become king, he will make sure that no one else gets ahead of him. Stanley can handle men because he believes in luck. He came out of the battle of Salerno with the odds four to five against him because he was lucky‑"to hold front position in this rat‑race, you've got to believe you are lucky." Stanley can handle women, too, although they are a little more complicated and, at times, little more difficult. He has sufficient physical potential to pull them down to his level and make them enjoy it, or to destroy them. Stanley takes pride in the domain he has built in his household and he also takes satisfaction in the security that it gives him. Pride and satisfaction are his two most prized possessions and when either is threatened he will fight with all of his animal instinct.

When Blanche first arrives at his apartment in New Orleans Stanley is suspicious of her. She comes from the same background as his wife and when Stella first saw Stanley she considered him common. Stanley was successful in toppling her from the white columns, which were symbolic of Belle Reve; will he be just as successful with Blanche? His main object, as Blanche first walks through the door, is to overcome her sexually for this is the way he won his wife. Regardless of what else might happen he will only truly be satisfied when he subdues her with his manly prowess. Blanche proves to be a more difficult adversary than Stanley had anticipated. Her formation in the depth of Belle Reve tradition was much more complete than Stella's. She insists upon the recognition of her time‑honored habits and manners so strenuously that Stanley becomes suspicious of her motives. Driven by the fear of Blanche as a potential menace to his home, as a danger to his relationship with his wife, and as an object of sensuality that he may not be able to seduce, he sets out on his plan of destruction. Although Stanley is crude and powerful, he is not a fool. He is an animal that is in tune with nature and he finds that he can survive well in his jungle of men because he is more instinctively an animal than they are. He is the king among apes as long as he knows what the rest of the apes are thinking, and what makes them tick. He digs into Blanche's background looking for dirt, because to him all people are dirty. He recognizes it when he finds it, and he wallows in it because it is so much a part of him. Under another circumstance the sordidness of Blanche's life would be taken in stride. But Stanley has been made to realize the importance of his information by Blanche's insistence on playing the perfect young lady. When he attacks, he does it with all the cunning of a bestial marauder. He stalks his prey by telling Stella his findings and making sure that she will not interfere with his final attack. Then to prove his capability and strike terror in the heart of his adversary, he confronts her directly. He tells Blanche that he is on to her tricks and that she is nothing but a liar and a phoney, and incapable of fighting with other animals, because she has never admitted to being a beast herself. He adds that he has cut off her only means of escape by telling Mitch about her past life. Not believing him she runs in the direction of this last avenue of hope only to find that escape is impossible. Trapped, defeated, and defenseless, Blanche becomes vulnerable to physical attack. Driven by his need to satisfy a desire that became evident the first moment he saw her, Stanley attacks viciously and devours every remaining morsel of respectability.

**Stella Kowalski**

Stella is Blanche's younger sister. She was brought up in the shadow of her older sister among the traditions of Belle Reve. Her parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts were part of a decaying Southern aristocracy and they spent all of their energies on trying to maintain their social position. The two sisters were very close and Blanche felt the responsibility of raising Stella. Together they learned to appreciate art, music, poetry, and the manners of Southern gentlemen. Being an older sister had its advantages: Blanche could command Stella to wait on her, to arrange her clothes when preparing for a ball or a carriage ride in the countryside. Because she felt the responsibilities of an older sister, Blanche affected a superior attitude, which caused an unconscious hostility in the mind of her sister. As Stella grew older she began to feel the pressures of her sister's domination and a lack of obligation to a disintegrating heritage. She looked for an escape and found one in the person of Stanley Kowalski. Because of a rebellious attitude fostered within her, she was willing to overlook any seeming appearance of outward respectability. Boredom and uncertainty gave way to happiness and womanhood without Stella really knowing why. She hesitated to investigate for fear that a world of pleasure would be taken from her. Stanley gives her joy and contentment in the world in which they live and this narcotic world will remain the same as long as neither one seeks to change it. The life that Stanley offers is completely satisfying to one who will live it according to his terms, and Stella has accepted these terms. She lives in a sensual stupor. She shuts out all challenge all day long. She loafs, does her hair, her nails, fixes a dress, doesn't eat much, but prepares Stanley's dinner and waits for Stanley. She hopes for no other meaning from life. Stanley has awakened her to her physical self as she never expected to be awakened; with him she realizes herself as a woman.

She is in a paradise, serenely limited paradise, when Blanche enters. Blanche immediately poses a threat to Stella's existence. She makes her consider Stanley in a different light, one that is reflective of the "gentlemen" they knew back in Mississippi. Stella is made to judge Stanley for the first time and, although she refuses to admit it, he is found wanting. Her reasons for marrying Stanley are now put on trial, because Blanche's presence causes her to revert to her former values. Her sympathies go out to Blanche because of her tragic marriage, and she tries to shield her from Stanley. Stella's doubts and fears erupt into open conflict for the first time on the evening of the poker party. Seeing Stanley drunk and disorderly disgusts her. Blanche's visions of apes and sub‑humans come vividly to mind, as she rushes out the door after Stanley's blows hurt more in her mind than on her body. However, Stella realizes that without Stanley, she too might become a pathetic caricature of a fading Southern aristocrat. So no matter what Stanley does she must cling to him, as to life itself. When Stanley cries out for her, Stella rushes back into his arms. Later, when Blanche tells her about the rape, she must pretend that Blanche is mad to avoid losing Stanley. However, Stella is doomed too. She had settled for a temporary solution. She has denied a great part of her life just to live for Stanley's pleasures, but she cannot live drugged forever. She is much more of a human being than that. Eventually her life with Stanley will wear thin and her only hope will be her children. Like so many women she will start living more and more for her children. Blanche, despite apparent failure, makes Stella realize certain things about Stanley. At the end of the play, her life is entirely different. It will never be the same with Stanley again.

**Harold (Mitch) Mitchell**

Mitch is the disappointing hero of the play. When his character first becomes realized the audience sees him as a big, tough, burly fellow with a rough Southern voice and the manner of a homespun, awkward, overgrown boy. He is gentle and kind and sees Blanche as a real person, one to be respected and listened to. He seems capable and willing to understand the loneliness of other people because he has known loneliness himself. He and Blanche seem to be made for each other because they both have a fidelity to the roots from which they sprang. Mitch has a true devotion to his mother, he provides and cares for her and she in turn sets the standards by which he lives. Blanche also has true devotion to her childhood, and it in turn sets the standards by which she must live. Mitch needs Blanche as an escape from the conflicts that have arisen because of his gentlemanliness in a hostile environment: he is embarrassed by his poker‑playing buddies who criticize him for being a momma's boy. Because he is no longer a boy he feels a need to prove his manliness, and a means by which he can satisfy his desires. Blanche is ideal for him. He can take her home and his mother will be proud of him and still she has the potential of satisfying his physical desires. In his relationship with Blanche he has finally found a girl who needs him, and he knows this is an important moment in his life to prevent a future of loneliness. Blanche needs Mitch, also, as an escape from the hostility of her environment. He is a caricature of a Southern gentleman, and yet, curiously, he is a gentleman. She needs Mitch for security, warmth, and protection of her honor. Mitch needs Blanche as desperately as she needs him. Then why did Mitch reject her in the end? There is a difference in the backgrounds of Mitch and Blanche, an important difference. By a quirk of fate, Blanche was cast out of her juvenile environment into a world that was alien to her. Although she found this world full of conflict and difficulty, she benefited by her exposure to reality. She understood the depths of sorrow and despair, and the degradation that can be caused by an inability to cope with such emotions. She had a keen awareness of the desperate fight a person must wage to prevent loneliness. However, she was unable to adjust to this type of reality and so she was destroyed. Mitch has never experienced life free from the protection of his mother. Neither by fate nor as the result of his own doing has he had the opportunity of facing up to reality. His responses to pity, sorrow, loneliness, are all conditioned by the tutoring of his mother. Although he can recognize the results of emotion in people he can never truly understand its cause. So when he was finally faced with the bawdy truth of reality his response was conditional, he ran to avoid confusion. Mitch will always be the big boy because he failed his test for manliness. In the environment of the New Orleans slums, Mitch's lack of manliness will eventually destroy him.

**Eunice And Steve Hubbell**

The Hubbells are the owners of the building in which the Kowalskis live. Steve is the prototype of Stanley. He lives his life and treats his wife in the same manner as does Stanley, only when he hits her she strikes back. Eunice is older than Stella and much wiser in the ways of living in the slums of New Orleans. She is content with her situation because she has learned to accept life for what it is and for whatever happens "life has got to go on."

Stella uses Eunice as a model of conformity to a life that was completely foreign to her. With Eunice's help and advice Stella not only endures the day by day existence with Stanley, but she also enjoys it. Unlike Blanche, Eunice offers no recognition of the better things in life and Stella can continue to live her narcotized existence with Stanley without the feelings of guilt.

Eunice and Steve have developed a harmony in their marital life that is envied by Stella and Stanley. They present an important example to follow if Stella and Stanley's marriage is to remain successful.

**Negro Woman And Pablo Gonzalez**

Tennessee Williams uses the characters of the Negro Woman and Pablo as a representation of the integrated neighborhood in which the Kowalskis live. New Orleans is a cosmopolitan city where there is a relatively warm and easy intermingling of races in the old section of the town.

**Young Man**

The Young Man is a symbolic image of one of Blanche's weaknesses. Her flirtation with him in scene five and the past history of Blanche's seduction of a seventeen‑year‑old boy are explained by her tragic marriage to a young man, Allan Grey.

**Mexican Woman:**

The Mexican Woman enters in scene nine as a flower vendor. Her cry is "flores para los muertos" (flowers for the dead). It is in scene nine that Blanche realizes that Mitch no longer wants her and that all hope is gone. The vendor's cry becomes a symbolic refrain for the play.

**Doctor And Nurse**

In the very last moment of the play the two solemn figures of the Doctor and the Nurse enter to take Blanche away to the asylum. Blanche's reaction to their individual approaches is indicative of her reaction to life. The Nurse approaches Blanche with harshness and physical cruelty and Blanche reacts vehemently, as she did to Stanley and the rest of the crudeness in the world. The Doctor approaches Blanche with tenderness and gentility and she responds favorably for she has "always depended on the kindness of strangers."

**Commentary**

"It said everything I had to say," was Tennessee Williams' comment on his play *A Streetcar Named Desire.* After undergoing an operation that resulted in the removal of three inches of small intestine, Williams was convinced that his next play would be his last. He set out to explore the far recesses of his mind to establish his main philosophy of life, "The apes shall inherit the earth." Williams was a very sickly and sensitive person in his youth and very easily subjected to the harshness and cruelty of others. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* it is obvious that he regards most men as savages and that his sympathies lie with the sensitive, gentle, unprotected recipient of the world's cruelty, who intends not to "hang back with the brutes!" Therefore, Randolph Goodman feels that the play can "thus be read as an allegorical representation of the author's view of the world he lives in."

Most critics felt *A Streetcar Named Desire* to be a superior play to *The Glass Menagerie,* which at the time of the opening of Streetcar was the only other notable play the playwright had written. They recognized a distinctive talent and were intrigued by the scope and the complexity of the play. Brooks Atkinson in his review of the stage production found the play "almost unbearably tragic." The audience, he reported, came away "profoundly moved. . . . For they have been sitting all evening in the presence of truth, and that is a rare and wonderful experience." However, he made a subtle exception in the case of Blanche when he said: "Since she is created on the stage as a distinct individual, experiences identical with hers can never be repeated. She and the play that is woven about her are unique." Severe criticism has been made of the sensational moments of the play; the beating of Stella and the violation of Blanche, but Joseph Wood Krutch feels that, in spite of the sensational quality of the story, "the author's perceptions remain subtle and delicate and he is amazingly aware of nuances even in situations where nuance might seem to be inevitably obliterated by violence." He believed Williams' stories "enable him to communicate emotions which have special, personal significance," and that "his plays will be immediately recognizable by their familiar themes and a sensibility as unique as that of a lyric poet." To substantiate Krutch's remarks one has only to consider the method by which Williams handles the poetic overtones in Streetcar. Elia Kazan, broadway director, identifies this play as "poetic tragedy" and yet a strong reality of character, environment and dialogue is undeniably evident. We see the justification of Kazan's statement in the character of Blanche. Her traditional background abounds in refinement of language, manners, and education. Her present conditions of alcoholism, incontinence, and common prostitution are a drastic departure from all of the righteousness of her youth. In order to live with the knowledge of this social and physical degradation, Blanche must conceal her outward appearance with the affectations of a Southern lady. "Her consuming need, moreover, is to make herself and others constantly aware of her refinements," Gassner states. The memories of her past, however, are just as unbearable as her present circumstances so she must create a dream world of delusion, which becomes apparent in her outward behavior. She becomes a caricature of stylized manners and speech which encompasses the poetic quality of the play.

Thus, it becomes apparent that the poetic behavior of her past life is in conflict with the reality of her present life and, therefore, John Gassner observes that "In Streetcar, poetic drama becomes psychological reality." This fusion of the world of fantasy with the world of reality is important in the development of the main conflict of the play.

Blanche's opposition to the situation in which she is involved, as pointed out by John Gassner, creates a series of ambiguities. When she first arrives in the Kowalski household she is looking for a means of escape. She needs protection from a world to which she will not adjust. In seeking this protection, however, she refuses to realize her incongruity and benefit by her past mistakes. She insists that her way of life is the only correct way to live and, thereby causes a threat to the relationship between Stanley and Stella. It becomes evident that her stubborn insistence will shatter the very protection she seeks. Also, her insistence on the correct way of living is based upon a myth. Her previous life is nothing but a representation of a decayed society, one that has become extinct because of its refusal to adjust to modern times. Stella, who was reared in a similar tradition, made an attempt to adjust to modern society. It was a faulty adjustment, however, caused by a desperate need to escape the destruction of a rapidly disintegrating family heritage. Blanche, on the other hand, made no attempt to adjust and the result has been the destruction of not only her own life, but the lives of those whom she needed most, Stanley, Stella, and Mitch. Thus it appears that Blanche is the villain of the piece. When she first arrives she does nothing to commend herself. She drinks, she quarrels, she is superficial, and we can hardly wait for Stanley to tell her off. However, her adversary seems to fare no better in the hands of the playwright; Stanley is portrayed as the personification of disgusting normality, or as one of the brutes who will eventually inherit the earth. Stella is also pictured as one of the weaknesses rather than the strengths of civilization in her acceptance of a husband who gives her satisfaction of physical desires in lieu of a healthy social relationship. Nancy Tischner suggests that "apparently Williams wants the audience to believe that Stella is wrong in loving Stanley but right in living with him." With whom does the sympathy of the audience lie? Joseph Wood Krutch tries to clarify this ambiguity by making reference to a statement by Blanche in scene two while speaking to Stella about Stanley: "he's just not the type that goes for jasmine perfume, but maybe he's what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve." Taking into consideration that Stella represents the decaying aristocracy and Stanley the natural man, Mr. Krutch answers that "virility, even orgiastic virility, is the proper answer to decadence." So the decaying aristocracy is rejuvenated by its union with a "representative of the people." Whereas part of the audience is in sympathy with Stella, the other part will share sympathy with Blanche in feeling "better decadence than this obscene surrender." Mr. Krutch, in appraising Blanche, insists, "Her instincts are right. She is on the side of civilization and refinement. But the age has placed her in a tragic dilemma. She looks about for a tradition according to which she may live and a civilization to which she can be loyal. She finds none. Ours is a society which has lost its shape." Behind Blanche lies a past which seems to have been civilized. "The culture of the Old South is dead, and she has good reason to know that it is. It is, however, the only culture about which she knows anything. The world of Stella and her husband is a barbarism‑perhaps, as its admirers would say, a vigorous barbarism‑but a barbarism nonetheless." In this dilemma, "Blanche chooses the dead past and becomes a victim of that impossible choice, but she does choose it rather than the 'adjustment' of her sister. At least she has not succumbed to barbarism." Thus we see the ambiguities are dramatically, indeed tragically, fruitful. The decision of the direction or division of sympathy lies entirely in the minds of the audience.

While Williams was successful in intensifying the dramatic interest in Streetcar with the use of ambiguity he, at the same time, caused confusion. John Gassner shows that he "reduced potential tragedy to psychopathology." Gassner diagnoses Blanche's psychological situation as "so untenable when she enters the home of Stanley and Stella that she should be receiving psychiatric care." Williams becomes improbable in his justification for the causes of many of Blanche's ills. Her background of the decline of an aristocratic family in the form of money, death, and morals and the tragic history of her marriage to a young sensitive homosexual hardly gives credibility to her own destruction. Despite the inefficiency of the stability of her early training, it is obvious that Blanche had received a good formal education. Her interest in the arts and her manner of conduct would warrant strong belief in her ability to make a reasonable living teaching school. The fact that a neurosis was caused by the suicide of her young maladjusted husband is a motivation found believable only in Williams' wild imagination. "Nor it is convincing," Mr. Gassner points out, "that the young husband's death should have led her to seduce school children and take up with soldiers in a neighboring camp. In Streetcar, in so far as Blanche's role is concerned, only her illness is believable‑and even that is suspect, in so far as its inevitability is questionable." Blanche, then, although she has the intelligence, idealism, and tragic vision necessary for the classic heroine, falls short because psychopathology substitutes for Fate.

Williams intention of expressing the ills of the world in the brutish character of Stanley also smacks of dramatic excessiveness. In order to prove the validity of Stella's final decision of remaining faithful to Stanley, the ultimate and most important decision of the play, the audience must see proof of the fact that Stanley will make a good provider and father for her children. Initially it is apparent that Stanley has a great deal of confidence in himself as a man and a husband and that Stella can find security in his confidence. He can be admired for defending his home against the treachery of Blanche's influence and, for the sake of his own peace, to send her packing. But to justify the deliberate and brutal violation of Blanche on the pretense of dramatic effectiveness shows a basic weakness in the unity of the play. The audience is faced with the decision of whether Blanche and Stella's destruction was caused by their inability to adjust to the modern world or whether it was the result of a process of evolution that has succeeded in creating a society of monsters. Stanley is decidedly an abnormal member of society. His brutal attack on Blanche lowered him to a realm of degenerates who are in no way fit for society, much less to father children. Therefore, Stella's decision to choose her degenerate husband over an infirm sister lacks true motivation. In the case of Blanche, Mr. Gassner argues that if "the point of the play is precisely that Blanche, who needs every consideration, is thrust into a brute world that gives her no consideration, then, I say, Williams has destroyed the tragic possibilities of Streetcar in another way: He has settled for pathos whereas the ambience of his characterization of Blanche suggests a play possessed of a sharper, more equitable, and harder insight‑namely, that of tragedy."

Was it Williams' intention to write "The Tragedy of Blanche DuBois," or was he more interested in proving man's inefficiency in obtaining completeness in our present‑day society. Benjamin Nelson theorizes that "Blanche's inability to tragically mature is the direct result of her incompletion, her fragmentation, if you will. It is a fragmentation which manifests a greater and encompassing uncompleteness in the universe itself." Here, Mr. Nelson alludes to a philosophy of the living as expressed by Tennessee Williams in his short story, "Desire and the Black Masseur."

In this tale Williams explains: "The nature of man is full of such makeshift arrangements, devised by himself to cover his incompletion. He feels a part of himself to be like a missing wall or a room left unfinished and he tries as well as he can to make up for it"; these are the sins of mankind. Mr. Nelson feels that Blanche is doomed because she cannot find complete satisfaction, precisely because Williams has not allowed the ingredients necessary to her satisfaction to exist in his created universe. Williams does not take into consideration that "tragedy depends to some extent upon individual responsibility, the realization of this responsibility and the inner growth evolving from this realization." What Mr. Nelson is saying is that people are responsible for their own doings provided their present situation has been truly motivated. Then, and only then, can a classic tragic character evolve. However, Nancy Tischner refutes the idea that Williams intended to write a classical tragedy: "He did not see Blanche as a Medea or an Electra. Her quality is pathetic softness, not tragic strength. Nor is there any catharsis to cleanse the audience of its distress when the action moves like a reversal of Darwin's vision‑back to the apes. Our sense of justice and our love of beauty are outraged: we leave the theatre troubled, not tranquil."

Where does the strength of Williams' artistry lie? Technically, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is an almost flawless work. The plot of the play is advanced rapidly and excites a great deal of interest. Each scene is coordinated to the next and the slow revelation of all of the jigsaw parts of Blanche's character is adroitly done to create continuous anticipation for the audience. Williams' ability to develop strong and interesting characters is evident in Blanche and Stanley. Despite the discrepancies in social moral conduct, his psychological exposure of the ruthlessness of people is dramatically sound. His use of symbolism helps immeasurably to make them vivid; Blanche's horror of unshaded light bulbs expresses her inability to face reality, as Stanley's devotion to poker games and undershirts announces his virility. Stella is commonplace and finds complete gratification in marriage; the other characters are small, mean, frustrated, and violent. It is an exciting and colorful gallery. Williams finds it difficult to put words on paper without making them conform to a strong poetic nature. He writes dialogue that not only depicts subtleties of characterization but wastes little time in furthering the action of the story. Blanche's speech is lyrical and imaginary but there is no pause for poetizing. She is constantly expressing her maladjustment to a more modern idiom. Stanley is more in tune with reality by using a short, terse, inarticulate mode of speaking that also contains imagism but on a coarser level. The colloquial expressions of the other characters are also molded and shaped into a sense and rhythm that are unique and vital to the play.

Williams has a feeling for the use of comedy which is not unlike the bard William Shakespeare. Shakespeare used the Porter in Macbeth and the Grave Digger in Hamlet to allay tragic eventuality and to build a feeling of anticipation in the audience. In Streetcar, while Stanley is engaged in divulging all his condemning evidence about Blanche to Stella he is at the same time concerned about using the bathroom, which is occupied by Blanche. Unaware of the incriminating danger that awaits her as she emerges from the bathroom, Blanche answers Stanley's blows on the door with "possess your soul in patience" to which Stanley retorts, "It's not my soul, it's my kidneys I'm worried about." This is just one of the several moments of comedy used by Williams to enhance the effect of the seriousness of his drama.

The importance of *A Streetcar Named Desire* lies in its effect upon an audience. Brooks Atkinson, drama critic for the New York Times at the time of Streetcar's premiere on Broadway, had good opportunity to witness this effect and he concluded that "they come away from it profoundly moved. . . . Out of nothing more esoteric than interest in human beings, Mr. Williams has looked steadily and wholly into the private agony of one lost person."