A Note on the Epigraph

The epigraph to *A Streecar Named Desire* is taken from a Hart Crane poem titled "The Broken Tower." Crane was one of Williams's icons. Williams's use of this quotation is apt, as Crane himself often employed epigraphs from his own icons, including Melville, Whitman, Dickinson, and Blake. Williams felt a personal affinity with Crane, who, like himself, had a bitter relationship with his parents and suffered from bouts of violent alcoholism. Most important, Williams identified with Crane as a homosexual writer trying to find a means of self-expression in a heterosexual world. Unlike Williams, Crane succumbed to his demons, drowning himself in 1932 at the age of thirty-three.

Williams was influenced by Crane's imagery and by his unusual attention to metaphor. The epigraph's description of love as only an "instant" and as a force that precipitates "each desperate choice" brings to mind Williams's character Blanche DuBois. Crane's speaker's line, "I know not whither [love's voice is] hurled," also suggests Blanche. With increasing desperation, Blanche "hurls" her continually denied love out into the world, only to have that love revisit her in the form of suffering

PREFACE

A Streetcar Named Desire, published in 1947, is one of the better known and much staged plays of Tennessee Williams. Williams turned to his personal life for Themes and subject matter for his plays, and yet there is certain universality about them, for his own life aptly depicted the shattering of the American Dream and its effect on the American people. These domestic dramas, therefore, depict the tragedy and despair of almost every household. This is what makes Williams' plays relevant to the reader. Studying them will, therefore, help the reader to learn more about himself and about the playwright.

THE TITLE OF THE PLAY

The reference to the streetcar or tram called Desire is highly ironic. Blanche has to travel on it to reach Elysian Fields, her sister's home. It also means that she has already indulged in Desire before reaching here. But this place will not bring her the rest and security which the name 'Elysian Fields' indicates; instead, Blanche will experience violence and brutality. In fact, she calls her sister's love for Stanley "brutal desire" and likens it to the streetcar that she snobbishly dubs as a "rattle-trap". Ironically, desire does become her trap. To escape her horrifying near-encounters with death through family members, she sought Desire. Her sorrow is that the pleasure brought from Desire was fleeting, just like the tram journey was short-lived. It could not give her security and stability, the things she wants from life. Yet, she cannot return on the Streetcar named Desire, because it is only a one way ticket; she has already ridden on Desire, and it has brought her nothing but sorrow and loneliness. Ironically, the Streetcar named Desire leads to the Streetcar named Cemetery. Blanche appropriately rides them both.

SETTING

A Streetcar Named Desire is set in the residence of the Kowalskis located in a poor, yet charming neighborhood of the French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana. At the Kowalskis, the reader is introduced to the characters that are of varied origins in their nationalities, in their backgrounds, and in their beliefs. Through the play, therefore, the reader is given a glimpse of the world in coexistence. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is set in the war-torn years of the forties.

Scene 1 - Notes

Tennessee Williams is a master of contrasts, and this opening scene of the play is filled with them. The protagonist, Blanche Dubois, is described as white, light, and airy with an aristocratic Old South heritage; in complete contrast to her, Stanley Kowalski, her antagonist, is dark, masculine, and solid with an unrefined Polish heritage. Blanche is shocked at the neighborhood where her sister Stella lives with her husband Stanley. Their apartment is in an old, cramped, and decaying section of the New Orleans French Quarter. It is a total contrast to the lovely and aristocratic neighborhood where Stella and Blanche were raised in the Old South.

Stanley Kowalski is introduced as a man who is strikingly coarse and loud. He enters wearing a loud-colored bowling jacket, shouts at the top of his voice to Stella, and crudely throws a packet of bloody meat at her. He is a man who is impressed with himself, demanding of others, and possessive of everything around him. (In fact, what bothers him most about Blanche is that he cannot possess her, even though many other men have.) In short, Stanley prepares the reader for the uncouth and brutal environment into which Blanche is about to enter. When Blanche arrives, she states that she first took a streetcar named Desire (hence the title of the play), then another one called Cemetery. Through the names of streetcars, the dramatist indicates that "desire" leads to "death". And in fact, the play will develop this theme. For the moment, however, the streetcars lead Blanche to the French Quarter and the apartment of her younger sister Stella. Ironically, Blanche enters, wearing white, the symbol of purity. She is described as moth-like and afraid of light; in reality, she does live in a world of darkness and sin that she cannot acknowledge. Although she drinks heavily, she tells Stanley she rarely touches liquor; although she is fired from her job, she tells her sister she has taken a leave of absence due to her nerves.

Tennessee Williams, in this opening scene, clearly shows his protagonist to be a liar - both to herself and to those around her. He also successfully captures her state of desperation; she takes refuge with her sister despite the shabby conditions. With her heavy drinking, shattered nerves, fear of being alone, and pitiful financial status, it is no small wonder, and an appropriate foreshadowing of things to come, that Blanche literally feels sick after her first encounter with Stanley, who crudely questions her about her marriage and offends her genteel sensibilities.

It is significant to note the playwright's ironic use of names. Stella means "Star", and Blanche Dubois means "White Woods". There is nothing shining or star-like about Stella, who sends her sister off to an asylum to please her crude husband; there is also nothing white (pure) or woodsy (solid) about Blanche. The name of the aristocratic family home was Belle Reve, meaning beautiful dream. But the dream turns into a nightmare for Blanche as she nurses the dying members of the family and loses her "beautiful dream" to pay off the funeral expenses of the dead family.

Scene 2 - Notes

The negative image of Stanley is further enhanced in this scene. When he learns that Stella and Blanche are going out to dinner, he thinks only of himself, asking what she has prepared him for dinner. When he learns it is only a cold plate, he voices his displeasure in a chauvinistic manner. He is also shown as being distrusting and demanding. He is fearful that his sister-in-law has cheated him out of money on Belle Reve and spent it on herself, buying furs and jewels. In a questioning and insulting manner, he demands to see the legal papers related to the sale. When Blanche is showing him the papers, he rudely and inappropriately snatches her love letters written by her husband and begins to read them. He then tells Blanche that Stella is going to have a baby, even though his wife has asked him not to share this information; but he does what he wants, when he wants, never thinking of others. At another point in the scene, he admits that he only likes people who are straightforward and honest, who "lay their cards on the table." Perhaps, this is why he has gotten off to a bad start with Blanche, for she immediately lied to him about not drinking when he had already realized she had been into his liquor bottle.

Tennessee Williams also gives more information about Blanche in this scene. In order to soothe her jagged nerves, she is constantly bathing; symbolically, the reader realizes that what she is trying to do is wash her sins away. But as soon as she emerges from the bath, she continues in her old ways and openly flirts with Stanley, asking him to button her dress and taking a puff of his cigarette, both having sexual innuendoes and foreshadowing the later rape scene. She also reveals that she truly loved her young and sensitive husband, treasuring the romantic letters he had written her. With her aristocratic sensibilities, she is appalled that her brother-in-law would snatch the letters and read them. She is visibly upset by his behavior and by his questioning of her about Belle Reve. At the end of the second scene, just as the end of the first, Stanley has totally unnerved Blanche.

Scene 3 - Notes

This scene revolving around a wild poker game further develops Stanley's coarseness and lack of decorum. As he loses, he grows impatient and hostile, drinks steadily, and ridicules Mitch, the winner of the game, for being "mama's boy." He also screams at the women and strikes his pregnant wife two different times.

Mitch is a sharp contrast to Stanley. Blanche at once spots his gentility, especially when compared to the manners of his companions. Mitch is also attracted to Blanche and seeks

to have a conversation with her. They briefly talk about their past lives and learn that both of them have lost a loved one to death.

Light is used in an interesting way in the Mitch/Blanche relationship. Blanches shies away from the naked glare of the lightbulb, as if it might reveal the truth of her lurid past. She asks Mitch to fit a paper lantern over it (so she will not feel so vulnerable). Ironically, in this same scene, she deliberately undresses in the light to attract the attention of Mitch. This act illustrates Blanche's willingness to use her body and also prepares the reader for the lurid details about her past that will be revealed as the play progresses.

A further insight into Blanche's character is made when she fabricates her age (making herself younger than her sister Stella) and her reason for visiting Stella (stating she took a leave of absence). Thus, her chronic lying borders on pathology. Also, her constant need to be reassured about her looks reveals her need to feel wanted by people. It also shows her fear of aging; she does not want to "die away" like the old aristocratic South.

Blanche's philosophical remarks about death are an outcome of her own close experiences with dying. She carefully avoids seeing herself as anything but young, thus her vain concern with her appearance and her age. She compares her name to "an orchard in spring"; but "white wood" really carries an image of snow-laden trees. It is a fair symbol of Blanche, the aging widow whose marriage prospects are nearing their autumnal phase; ironically, she sees herself dressed in the blossoms of springtime. Her misreading of the meaning of her name is not so much a deliberate lie as it is a desperate hope that Mitch will fulfill her marriage dreams and make her feel young again.

There is also some development in the interaction between Stanley and Blanche. In the first scene of the play, he ignores her good looks and refuses to compliment her on her appearance. In this scene, he is dazzled by her appearance and seems jealous of her attraction to Mitch. Stanley's increasing interest in Blanche foreshadows his brutal possession of her at the end of the play. Since he cannot have her emotionally, he resorts to taking her physically.

Scene 4 - Notes

In this scene, the character of Blanche is more fully developed. She is the typical elder sister, advising the younger when no advice is requested. Hence, in attempting to talk Stella out of her marriage and her present life style, Blanche only succeeds in distancing herself from her sister. Stella also ridicules Blanche's impractical approach towards life when she attempts to contact Shep to solve her problems.

Blanche's demeaning remarks about Stanley not only alienate her from Stella but create an intense resentment in Stanley, for he has overheard her conversation with his wife. Williams established Stanley's resentment early in the play and it builds until the rape scene near the end of the drama. That Stanley is ultimately going to be victorious over

Blanche is hinted at scene's end when Stanley gloats over Stella's physical dependence on him; he knows that Stella will never leave him.

This scene presents the sharp contrast between the two sisters. Stella has outgrown her way of life at Belle Reve and has made huge compromises in her decision to love and stay with Stanley. She had always taken second place to her older sister at Belle Reve and continues to do the same with her husband. But Blanche, being a widow and financially independent, is used to doing things her way. She has never felt the need to compromise like Stella. Though Blanche insists that she is not being superior in her judgments, she is, in fact, being her natural aristocratic self. Stella resents the attitude.

Scene 5 - Notes

Blanche's lie about leading a grand and social life in New Orleans reinforces her weakness for illusion. She seems to dream about happy things in order to alleviate the harshness of her everyday life.

The fight that breaks out at the Hubbell's apartment and their subsequent making up is a flashback to the closing of Scene 3. It also serves as a reminder of the kind of life considered normal between a married couple in this class of society; violence and physical passion dominate their lifestyle, and uncultured behavior is their creed. The reader realizes to what extent Blanche is a misfit here. (Remember that in Scene 1, Stella had warned that their friends were not refined.) It also indicates what a married life with Mitch may possibly be like and the amount of compromise she may have to make if she chooses a New Orleans husband.

The nervous gestures that Blanche begins to make upon Stanley's arrival and the fact that they continue until the end of the scene foreshadow the revelation of her tragic past. It is in this scene that Blanche drops the mask of respectability and confides in Stella of her promiscuous ways. Very aptly, Stanley as Capricorn the Goat emerges as the hunter; and Blanche, born under the sign of Virgo the Virgin, is the hunted. The dramatist uses these explicit sexual symbols to foreshadow the fact that Stanley will physically conquer Blanche. In this scene, his hunt has begun. Blanche's world shows further signs of disintegration under Stanley's ruthlessness.

Both, Blanche's rationalization of her promiscuous actions and her statement to Stella, "But honey, believe me, I feel things more than I tell you" are desperate appeals to be heard. Her liaisons with strangers were, in part, attempts to be recognized as an individual, to have her existence acknowledged. Now her youth and good looks are fading. She is faced with the harsh reality of her existence, and she does not like what she sees, just as she does not like the harsh brightness of the light bulb. She covers the light bulb with a paper lantern, just as she covers the truth about herself with lies.

As the play progresses, Stella ironically never believes Blanche when she speaks the truth, and she seems to avoid it in this chapter. Instead of listening to the details of her sister's past, Stella offers her a drink. When the coke spills on Blanche's white dress, it is

symbolic of the "stains" in her past. The fact that her dress does not show a spot indicates her skillful ability to conceal her past. But very soon this will no longer be possible.

With the row in the Hubbell's apartment as a grim reminder, the reader begins to question Blanche's wisdom in wishing to win Mitch for a husband. Though the most sensitive of the poker players, he is still very unrefined and awkward. Blanche, however, desperately wants stability in life, and Mitch is her last hope.

Blanche has learned by past experience that men "don't want anything they get too easy," yet, at the same time, they also lose interest quickly. That is why Blanche is torn between holding back and giving of herself freely to Mitch. This touching scene tells how, for all her aristocratic pretensions, Blanche's hopes for a good marriage are the same as any other middle-class woman; she wants Mitch's love and respect. For those rewards, she is willing to risk being labeled a liar, for she has concealed her actual age and her lurid past from Mitch.

Blanche's flirtation with the young man, at scene's end, indicates her disturbed psyche that is trying to relive her past; at a tender age, she was married to an equally young and handsome "boy". His suicide shattered her emotionally, and she has never recovered. She seeks to fill the void by giving herself physically to almost anyone, including the paperboy. Ironically, she withholds herself from Mitch, reasoning it will make her more attractive to him.

Tennessee Williams' skill as a dramatist is apparent in this scene. The puzzling self-reminder from Blanche, that she "should keep my hands off children" keeps the audience in suspense. At the end of almost every scene, Williams hints at some new fact of Blanche's past that will be unraveled later in the play. This mystery in Scene 5 will be answered in Scene 7.

Scene 6 - Notes

Halfway through the play, the dramatist brings Blanche closer to the fulfillment of the hope she has begun to nurture - marriage to Mitch. Only two characters are present in this entire scene, and for most of it, Blanche and Mitch sit and talk in darkness, symbolic of Blanche's moral darkness and Mitch's being in the dark about Blanche's true nature.

Blanche is a complex mix, an innocent girl, "a lady of the camellias" turned to womanhood by the suicide of her young, immoral husband; in response, Blanche herself begins to live an immoral life. Now, however, she wants find an anchor in life. She clings to Mitch, despite his lack of class, because she believes he will provide her with security and faithfulness.

Blanche's aversion to bright lights is explained in this scene. Her first love was like a "blinding light;" after her beloved's death, she has been unable to stand a light stronger than a kitchen candle. But also Blanche does not want to be in the bright light of scrutiny.

She already fears that Stanley is suspicious about her past; and she desperately needs to hide her past from Mitch, who thinks she is pure and innocent.

The stage direction about playing a Varsouviana as the background music explains itself when Blanche states that they had been dancing the Varsouviana when her husband shot himself. Now whenever she hears that piece played, she becomes nervous and often drinks until she hears the gunshot in her head.

In this scene, Mitch emerges as a simpleton in believing Blanche's pretense of modesty. When he asks to kiss her, she lies and says she does not give herself freely. Once inside, she asks him in French, which he cannot understand, if he would like to sleep with her. For him, however, she is more than he has ever hoped for, an impossible dream come true; she is a veritable goddess who has condescended to take serious interest in him. In truth, they are probably suited for one another and could help each other out of their terribly lonely existences.

Scene 7 - Notes

Stanley, the hunter begins to close in one his prey, Blanche. He has found out all the ugly details about her recent past and relates these to Stella. He is determined to get back at Blanche for the demeaning things she has said about him. He also wants to get rid of her, for he feels she is a threat to his marriage. To make sure that she leaves, Stanley has bought her a one-way bus ticket out of town.

The scene is filled with ironies. While Stanley is revealing the past that Blanche has been so desperate to conceal, she is in the bathroom, symbolically trying to wash away her sins and singing of a make-believe world. It is also ironic that this sad turn of events occurs on Blanche's birthday. Stella has planned a small party for her, and Mitch is expected to come and join in the celebration. Stanley has spoiled that plan -- and Blanche's prospects of marrying Mitch. He has cruelly told his friend everything about Blanche's past. The fact that Blanche should feel rested precisely at the moment when preparations for her departure have been made is also ironic. Blanche's period of rest at her sister's house is over.

Scene 8 - Notes

This scene again shows Stanley's violence. Ironically, the violence occurs at Blanche's birthday party, which should have been a celebration. Blanche anxiously awaits Mitch's arrival, but Stanley and Stella know he will not now show up; neither of them, however, is brave enough to explain his absence to Blanche. As a result, there is a great deal of tension between the three of them. When Stella calls Stanley a pig, he explodes, throwing his dishes on the floor and calling himself king of the household. In this scene, it becomes obvious that Blanche truly is a disruption to the marriage of Stella and Stanley. Stanley cannot tolerate her presence, and treats her cruelly, as evidenced by the presentation of the bus ticket for a birthday present. The more Stanley criticizes Blanche, the more Stella feels compelled to defend her sister. She tries to explain that Blanche was once tender

and trusting, but she changed because people abused her. She tries to evoke some sympathy in Stanley, but he has none.

The Varsouviana music highlights the entrapment that Blanche is feeling during the chapter. When Mitch fails to come to her birthday party, she senses something is terribly wrong and worries that she may not be able to obtain the future she so wants. When Blanche receives the bus tickets from Stanley, she realizes his cruelty and tries to laugh it off; instead, she feels totally nauseous. Appropriately, the polka music starts playing lightly in the background. By the end of the chapter when Stella is rushed to the hospital, the Varsouviana is playing loudly. The music is an indication that Blanche is on the verge of a total mental breakdown.

Scene 9 - Notes

The Varsouviana is playing in Blanche's head again. With Mitch's arrival, the polka music stops. As soon as Blanche senses that all is not well with Mitch, she chatters endlessly to postpone the moment of confrontation. That she prefers illusion and not realism is highlighted throughout the play. In this scene, she acknowledges that truth and says, "I don't want realism." She wants to live in a make-believe world because it is not so painful. That is why she does not always tell the truth. She only tells what ought to be the truth, and in her mind that is not really lying. Blanche wanted to retain her southern aristocratic lifestyle, but she was unable to accomplish that. She also wanted to remain a pure woman who lived and died for Allan, but that was not to be either.

She seeks her last refuge with Stella. In a society where youth and good looks hold great importance, Blanche is fighting a losing battle. She turns to drinking in order to blot out some of the misery. It is ironic that the liquor bottle she finds is called 'Southern Comfort'. Blanche has arrived in the southern part of America for some comfort, but neither the liquor nor the stay seem to be giving her that. Thus, Tenessee Williams' details reinforce Blanche's tragedy.

This scene the significance of the play's title is brought out. Surrounded by the memories of her dead husband and the dying members of the family at Belle Reve, Blanche had felt so afraid of Death's proximity that she sought the opposite: Desire. For her, Desire symbolized life, youth, and everything that is pleasant. She gave herself freely in order to experience life; ironically, Blanche dies inside as a result of her moral decay. When she loses her job and all respectability in Laurel, she comes to New Orleans seeking a new life. It is important to remember that upon her arrival, she first takes a streetcar named Desire, which leads to a streetcar named Cemetery (Death). Blanche's desires have led to her "death".

This scene shows Mitch as he really is and how different he is from Blanche. He lacks refinement. He hails from a different class in society. For all his sensitivity and earnestness, he has a limited understanding of the world. He, like Stanley, judges the world in simplistic terms; life is either black or white, a truth or a lie. After he learns the facts of Blanche's past from Stanley, he judges her as a lie; she is all black to him now.

He is incapable of understanding her gray areas. He fails to realize that she could easily surrender to strangers because they were strangers. In the eyes of the people she considers close, she wants to remain the pure and good Blanche.

More important, in Blanche's mind she is good, for she never lied in her heart. It is as if she has split herself into two different persons: the hussy for the stranger and the innocent for her friend. She has kept her inner-self at a distance when she has gone to bed with strangers. Therefore, in her mind, she has remained pure since she had not given of her soul. Mitch is unable to understand this finer difference; therefore, Blanche has lost him and her last chance for stability.

Scene 10 - Notes

The final showdown between Stanley and Blanche results in his victory over her; the hunter has grabbed his prey, and the climax of the play occurs. Since Stanley cannot master Blanche emotionally or intellectually, he resorts to the only thing he knows and understands -- sex and violence. As he physically overcomes her, Stanley is crushing more than her frail body. Her rape is symbolic of the fact that the older, more cultured and aristocratic way of life has been overcome by a crass, materialistic one, where the survival of the fittest is what counts.

The pathos of the scene is heightened further in light of Blanche's words about herself. She tells Stanley that "deliberate cruelty is unforgivable"; part of her problem stems from the fact that she feels she was cruel to her late husband and has never forgiven herself. Instead, she has repeatedly punished herself through cheap affairs and immoral behavior. In spite of her actions, she is aware of the good qualities she is endowed with, and she thinks it is a pity that she has squandered them on unrefined people like Stanley and Mitch (by flirting with Stanley and by pursuing Mitch). She knows that she is a cultivated and cultured woman who can enrich a man's life. It is a sad thing to her that nobody appreciates her invaluable qualities: beauty of mind, richness of spirit, and softness of heart, qualities that she believes increase as the years go by. It is even more pitiful that rich as she is in such qualities, she is still destitute; men have no use for her finer qualities. This is abundantly proven when Stanley assaults her.

Scene 11 - Notes

After the brutal climax of the last scene, only the loose ends need to be tied up. In this scene, another poker game is in progress, just as in Scene 3. But where Stanley was on the losing side in the earlier game, he is now the winner. This is symbolic of his superiority within the domain of his household and over his sister-in-law in the previous scene. How completely he has won the battle is soon displayed. Stella is packing Blanche's clothes, for she is being sent to a state institution. Stella tells Eunice that she is not certain she is doing the right thing. It is obvious that Stanley has convinced her to make this decision. He has wanted Blanche out of his house all along. And now that she is accusing him of rape, he has to remove her before the truth comes out. Eunice soothes Stella's guilt feelings by stating that life must go on.

Both Mitch and Blanche are still vulnerable to each other and extremely conscious of each other's presence. When Mitch hears her voice, his arm sags, and he is distracted from the poker game. When Blanche discovers Mitch's present, a look of sadness comes over her face. The reader realizes once again the possibilities that were there for these two sensitive souls if Stanley had not interfered.

Blanche's death wish indicates that she views her life as useless now. Without Mitch, a home, or a future, Blanche has nothing left. She wants to join Allan; the only person who she feels really loved her. In wishing for reunion with her dead husband, she is proving how much of a misfit she is in the present world. It also foreshadows her figurative death when she is taken to the state institution.

Understandably, Stanley's presence unnerves Blanche. When he roughly yanks the paper lantern off the bulb, it vividly reminds Blanche of his ruthless attack on her a few weeks before. With the bright light shining on her, Blanche grows hysterical. Throughout the play, the bright light has stood for truth; but Blanche always covers the bright bulb with a paper lantern, just like she covers the truth with her make-believe world.

At the end of the scene, Mitch breaks down and sobs; but his repentance has come too late to save Blanche. Although Stanley is directly guilty of the rape and Blanche's subsequent insanity, Mitch also shares some responsibility in what is happening to her. If Mitch had stood by her side, Stanley would not have attacked Blanche. He can fool Stella with his lies, but Mitch would have believed Blanche rather than Stanley. With Mitch by her side, Blanche would not be headed to a mental institution. But the past cannot be undone, and Blanche is made to submit to the inevitable. Williams has pointed out throughout the play that Blanche was moth-like and delicate, too delicate to endure the harshness of the brutal, new world that surrounds her. Ironically, the last remark that Blanche makes on stage is that the only kindness she has received has always been from strangers.

CONFLICT

Protagonist

Blanche Dubois, representative of the fallen aristocracy of the south, is a misfit who is trying to straighten out her life while taking refuge in New Orleans with her relatives, Stella and Stanley Kowalski.

Antagonist

Stanley, a domineering man with common ways, is set against Blanche and is ultimately responsible for her descent into insanity and placement in the state institution.

Climax

The climax of the play occurs when Stanley totally overcomes Blanche and rapes her, causing her to cross from tenuous sanity into insanity.

Outcome

The play ends in tragedy with Blanche being sent to live at the state mental institution.

Note:

The conflict also operates on a symbolic level with the protagonist as the aristocratic old South, represented by Blanche, being destroyed by the new Industrial Age, represented by Stanley. Tenessee Williams clearly reveals that the genteel tradition of the Old South cannot successfully survive in the new age.

SYMBOLISM, IMAGERY, and IRONY IN THE PLAY

The play is rich in symbols, vivid imagery, and irony. The symbols, images, and ironies often serve as a flashback, reinforcing what has already happened, or as foreshadowing, hinting of things to come. The key symbols, images, and irony are discussed below.

It is significant that the first names of the Dubois family members and the places they are associated with have ironic meanings. The name Elysian Fields, the area of the French Quarter where the Kowalskis live, is intentionally ironic. The name denotes a place of ideal happiness or the abode of the blessed after death. The existence of the Kowalskis and the Hubbells, characterized by coarseness, violence, and sex, is far from the typical image of Elysian Fields.

Both family and given names also have ironic meanings. Dubois means "from the woods". Stella means 'star', and Blanche means 'white'. Stella is, therefore, the star from the woods. Indeed, she has come out of her "woods", her small-town, aristocratic background, but she is no star. Instead, she is quite the opposite, giving up her personality to become the woman Stanley wants her to be; she is his puppet, servicing his needs. Blanche's name means the white one from the woods. Blanche is not pure and innocent even though she pretends to be and dresses in white as a symbol of how she views herself; by the end of the play, the truth about Blanche is known, and the image of her to others in the play is black rather than white. Like Stella, Blanche has physically left the woods of Laurel behind, but she is emotionally and permanently tied to them. Her unwillingness to give up the past and live in the present is one of the main reasons that she slips into insanity at the end of the play. Blanche's symbol of her aristocratic past is the old family mansion, "Belle Reve", which means beautiful dream. Unfortunately, Blanche looses all of her dreams in the play, just as she lost the mansion. Finally, Laurel, the name of the Dubois hometown, stands for victory. But for Stella and Blanche, there was no victory in Laurel.

It is important to note that the names of the men have no imagery or symbolism attached to them, because they are mundane and mediocre, existing only at a limited physical level.

Animal Imagery

Negative animal imagery is used to describe the men throughout the play. Mitch's clumsy attempt to waltz with Blanche is likened to a bear's movement. He has none of the refinements that Blanche wants or expects in a man. Stanley is even worse. In fact, the essence of Stanley is downright animalistic. Williams says of him that "animal joy....is implicit in all his movements and attitudes." His delight in sexual pleasure and his love of possessing things, like his wife, his home, his liquor, and his car, is similar to the bearing of the leader of a pack of animals. The verbs used reinforce this animal imagery; Stanley "prowled", "sprang", "crept stealthily", and "lunged" towards his goals. In fact, Stanley is portrayed as an animal hunting his prey, as he seeks to destroy Blanche. His bestial instinct is just below the surface throughout the play.

Games

The men in the play spend a lot of time entertaining themselves. Pastimes like poker and bowling are supplemented by alcohol and the use of abusive language. The games are strong sexual symbols of phallic power; in the lower class of working people portrayed in the play, it is a man's world. Bowling and poker are very much a part of it, and the men intentionally exclude the women. When Blanche asks if she can play cards, she is told "no" unequivocally. When Stella goes bowling with Stanley, she goes to watch him play not to participate.

Williams attaches special meaning to the poker games. At the first poker game, Stanley is losing; as a result he is at his worst, behaving violently. At the second game, the tables have turned and he is winning. The difference in the two poker games indicates the threat that Blanche presents to his marriage. Under her influence, Stella argues with Stanley during the first game of poker; his authority is being questioned, and he responds by striking her. By the second game, Stanley is winning and in control, both of poker and of Blanche. Stanley has had his revenge; he has physically taken his sister-in-law, and now he is seeing her sent away forever. He is the triumphant victor in the game of life. Ironically, the game of poker being played as Blanche departs is seven-card stud.

Colors

All the men in the play exist at a physical level. They are loud, boisterous, and vulgar. Appropriately, they all wear dark, loud colors. Stanley's bowling jacket is indicated to be a bright color, either vivid green or red. In contrast, the women, especially Blanche, wear pastel shades and muted colors, especially white.

With intentional irony, Williams always clothes his morally fallen characters in white, the color of purity. For Blanche, whose name means white in French, the whiteness is in

contrast to her lost innocence and purity. When Blanche spills coke on her white dress during the play, it is indicative that her past is spotted. She tries to blot out the coke stain, just as she tries to blot out the truth of her past.

Williams uses the color of white for things other than clothing in the play. It is noteworthy that Stanley's radio, which Blanche switches on time and again, is also white. When he flings its whiteness out of the house in anger, it foreshadows the fact that she will also be cast out of the house. The white cake, which Stella is decorating for Blanche, is filled with irony. While Stella is making plans to celebrate Blanche's life (her birthday), Stanley comes in and destroys Blanche's life by revealing the truth of her past. Just as the white cake will be cut or disfigured, Blanche, on this very evening, will also be disfigured with Mitch. He will pull her into the light to expose the truth and then toss her away, like leftover white crumbs from the cake. It is fitting that after Mitch leaves she dresses in a soiled and crumpled white satin evening gown. Symbolically, her dreams have been destroyed and she has been forced into the light to accept the truth of her soiled self. The pity is that Stanley's brutal hands will further soil it later that night.

Red is the color most often associated with Stanley. He wears a red jacket to go bowling. He also carries a stained red meat package, an obvious sexual symbol, which he tosses at Stella. Finally, he is portrayed as almost blood thirsty in his pursuit of destroying Blanche.

The Bath Motif

Blanche is constantly bathing. Hardly a scene goes by where she is not seen entering or emerging from the shower, or being heard from it. Her pre-occupation with washing herself is a symbolic attempt to cleanse herself of her past sins. The bath is never a quick and simple matter for Blanche. She spends hours, cleansing herself thoroughly, as if to make a fresh start in life, hopefully with Mitch. Ironically, when she emerges from the shower, Stanley is usually present, bringing her quickly back to the real world. The bathing angers Stanley because Blanche uses too much water and the steam from the shower adds to the heat in the cramped, tiny flat.

The Moth Motif

Williams describes Blanche as a moth, for she is flighty in movement and frail in appearance. Like a moth flitting around, Blanche makes senseless, nervous gestures, displaying the fact she is tense and high-strung. She also has delicate features and wears light, airy clothing. Like a moth, Blanche always avoids light bulbs. Just as the moth is scorched by contact with a bulb, her illusions are destroyed in the bright light of truth that Stanley and Mitch force her into.

Light

Light is used as a symbol by Williams to emphasize the differences in people's approaches to life. Being able to face a "naked light bulb" means the ability to confront

life directly and with honor. It shows an ability to face the truth, however bitter it may be. A desire to shun light indicates a desire for illusions, magic, and shadows. Dreams are only possible in semi-darkness.

Blanche who pursues dreams cannot stand bright light. She has made the mistake of being dazzled by Allan's entry into her life. But his suicide left her in desolation and darkness. Ever since his death, she has avoided light, the symbol of truth. Light is an enemy to her, for she knows it can destroy her illusions. In fact, when Mitch pulls her into the light to expose the truth of her appearance and age, Blanche's dream world is destroyed. She is left with no hope and no future and leaves her no past and no future. The headlight of the locomotive frequently passing outside, brings on the same fear of exposure. That is why she either crouches or shuts her ears, when she hears it approach. Blanche cannot face anything harsh and real. Hence she always gasps when she sees her reflection in a mirror.

Music

a) The Varsouviana, or polka music, runs off and on throughout the play. It is played in the background off stage in order to indicate that Blanche is hearing it in her head. Her response to hearing it is to drink heavily, in attempt to drown out the sound. The Varsouviana was the music being played at the time of Allan's death. So when Blanche hears the music in her head, she also hears a gunshot. Whenever she is particularly disturbed, the music starts up in her mind and continues to grow loud and pound. When Blanche has drunk enough to hear the gunshot that signaled Allan's suicide, the music stops. This polka music indicates Blanche's feeling of guilt.

b) The music of the Negro Entertainers can also be heard throughout the play. In a country bar opposite the Kowalski's apartment, different entertainers play a variety of instruments from time to time. These are like soulful comments on the action taking place in the play; for instance, whenever there is some reference to Blanche's past life, the 'blue' piano plays sad, depressing music. It is heard when Blanche tells Stella how Belle Reve was lost, when Stanley asks Blanche for the bill of sale on Belle Reve, and when Stella embraces Stanley fiercely in Blanche's presence to indicate that she has failed in her attempt to distance her from her husband. The trumpet and the drums also play at time when tragedy is about to strike Blanche. When Stella takes refuge with Eunice at the end of the third scene, the entertainers are playing "Paper Doll" in a slow and blue manner. At the same time, Stanley cries out, "My baby doll's left me!"

c) Blanches' singing: Another ironic high-point in the play centers on music. Blanche is in the shower singing, "it wouldn't be make- believe, if you believed in me!" At the same moment, Stanley is outside telling Stella about the horrid details of Blanche's past. Blanche seems to be unconsciously making an appeal for trust; she wants others to see the reality of events from her angle, for then it would not seem like make-believe or lies.