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Modern Drama  
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Drama Report One  
Drama: A Street Car Named Desire

**Author:**

Tennessee Williams: (born Thomas Lanier Williams in Columbus, Mississippi, on  
March 26, 1911)

Sickly and overly protected by his mother.

Closely attached to his sister, Rose.

Repelled by boys, and alienated from his father.

**Study:** University of Missouri, left after two years, worked in a shoe factory,  
writing feverishly at night, closest friend Stanley Kowalski.

Further study after a nervous breakdown, Washington University then the  
University of Iowa, graduated at 27.

New School in New York: study playwriting

Went to New Orleans, changed to Tennessee, actively entered  
the homosexual world.

**Career:** Plays produced in 1939 at local theater

First Success, *The Glass Menagerie* (1945)

Went to Mexico to work full time on an earlier play, *The Poker Night*,  
begun as *The Moth*.

Pulitzer Prize: *A Street Car & Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955)

Traveled and bought a home in Key West, Florida, did his later work, met  
Frank Merlo, his lover.

**Drug Addition:** help him sleep and awake to work

**Later work:** Rose was at the center of inspiration.

**Death:** choked on the lid of a pill bottle, February 23, 1983

**Influence:** Anton Chekhov, D. H. Lawrence, Hart Crane\* most influential

**Writing:** impatient over realistic theater convention

*The Glass Menagerie:* screen projections, lighting effects and  
music --- memory

*A Street Car:* music and lighting as reinforcement

Effect of language: colloquial southern speech

Symbolic repetition: naked light bulb, paper lantern, Mexican woman  
selling flowers for the dead.

**Themes:** desire and loneliness. “Desire is rooted in a longing for companionship, a release from the loneliness that haunts every individual.”

**Sister: Rose:** mental breakdown after one of Cornelius’s alcoholic rages (beating Edwina and insulting the daughter sexually), becalmed by prefrontal lobotomy 腦前額葉切斷術

**Mother:** Miss Edwina: the daughter of an Episcopalian (主教派教會, 聖公會) minister (an important person in small southern towns), repressed and genteel, the southern belle in her youth.

**Father:** Cornelius: a traveling salesman, often away and violent and drunk at home.

### Background Information:

Time and place written: Late 1940s, New Orleans

New Orleans: originally a catholic settlement, a mixture of races, no southern social distinctions,

Date of first publication (open): 1947

Setting:

Time: 1940s

Place: New Orleans, Louisiana

### The Epigraph 題詞:

Origin: poem, “The Broken Tower” by Hart Crane.

Blanche DuBois: She enters the scene with broken past.

She seeks a love to rescue herself

But love is illusive to her while she continuously throws herself

To these “desperate choice” in return of suffering

### The Stage:

The view of the street and the interior of the flat to be present at the same time on the stage may imply that the boundary of a family cannot prevent its members from bringing in the influence of the outside world.

### Main Characters:

#### Blanche DuBois:

1. Relic of the southern tradition managing to survive in a changing southern state in the post war years. Still thinks her self higher than “normal” people.
2. Because of her background she is unable to cope with her passion while her breeding ask her to be a belle. (unmarried women are looked down up in the old south.)

3. Constantly asking does she look good. Depend on admiration (esp. from men) in establishing self-esteem.
4. She lives in her imagination where her trauma of the past is neglected so that she can live in her created new world

**Stanley Kowalski:**

1. The contrast of Blanche, representing the new south and so to speak the new American with the American dream of independence and success with hard working.
2. Animal and Brutal, he wants to destroy Blanche who makes him inferior by representing the “high” and “traditional” part of the south while he is a Poland immigrant and a working class. He is dominant and could not tolerate a challenge from Blanche to deprive of his kingship in the family and over Stella.

**Stella Kowalski:**

1. She manages to turn her back to her background in marrying to a worker and is able to express her passion in the marriage though there are many things to adjust, even the abuse.
2. She relies also heavily upon man, her husband, to survive in the society.

**Scenes:**

1. Scene One: Stanley throws a package of meat to Stella. His animal qualities, sexual tie with Stella, connection with Stella (breathlessly delighted).
2. Scene Three: Blanche and Mitch are not matched because of their characters and breeding. However, they believe they need each other partly due to the same experience of losing beloved one, taking care of dying parents, partly their loneliness.
3. Scene eleven: the last line. Poker game.

**Quotations:**

1. They told me to take a street car named Desire, and transfer to one called Cemeteries, and ride six blocks and get off at --- Elysian Fields!  
     Elysian Fields: Greek Mythology: The home of the blessed in the afterlife.
  - a. It describes the journey of her life to the time she arrives in New Orleans. Her desire leads her to death in her hometown, laurel. Now she is into an imagined heaven for a new life.
  - b. Her heaven appears when she falls totally into her imagination in the end of the play after her full death in reality caused by Stanley.
2. Oh, I guess he’s just not the type that goes offr jasmine perfume, but maybe he’s what we need to mix with our blood now that we’ve lost Belle Reve.

Discussions:

**Fantasy:**

1. The reality triumphs over fantasy in the end when Blanche is committed to an asylum and Stanley secures his position as a good husband and a father.
2. Fantasy provides a final escape for Blanche.

**Dependence upon Men**

The drama criticizes the post war American state that forces women into domesticity and control of men by having its two female characters suffering tremendously by depending whole upon men for security, identity and survival

Though we notice the increasing power to assert independence in Stella's confronting her husband in protecting her sister, this power declines when Stella is giving birth to their child. She inevitably becomes dependent on Stanley and more so with the new bond created by the new born baby.

**The Final Scene:**

Stanley is the good husband comforting and protecting his family while Blanche is cast out of the society. The wrongness of the good to suffer and the bad to triumph induces our doubt of the society.

Stella resembles Blanche in her dependence on man. Ironically she knows that it is the man like Stanley that ruins her sister, she clings to him for happiness without worrying that she might as well be the next victim.

**Light:**

Blanche's living only under dim light reveals the problems:

1. She is obsessed and anxious with her fading beauty.
2. She wants to cover her past.
3. She lives in a dream-like world.
4. Her lies cannot be exposed to scrutiny.

**Bath:**

Bath is her attempt to lead a new life and clean only temporarily herself of the pathetic past.

**Death:**

Haunted Blanche, makes her worried about her own immortality, death of her beauty, the end of her chance to live decently. Therefore, her identity is lost with the death of the old south.

**Music:**

The Varsouvian Polka: The music they danced to when Blanche last saw her husband who committed suicide after her blaming him of homosexuality. This trauma

lasts in Blanche to the end. Whenever Blanche think of the haunting event or when she is in distress the music becomes her world of ordeal.

“It only a paper Moon”: a ballad telling that so long as both lovers believed in their imagined world, it would become a reality to them, which is the attitude Blanche holds firmly.

**Drunkenness:**

Stanley: Social behavior in bars and poker tables, bringing out his animal instinct (attack, abuse, rape)

Blanche: Taking her to her imaginary world, an escape from reality.

**Shadows and Sounds:**

These happens in the latter part of the drama and shows that Blanche has gradually falls into absolute fantasy and totally unable to perceive reality.

**Old and New American:**

While Blanche stands for the old American, Stanley represents for the new. In her criticism on Stanley in chapter four as being less cultivated and refined, the old society’s idea of a degenerate New American is illustrated. However, Williams did not confirm her view by making her hysterical in the accusation.

**Reference:**

**Belle Reve:** a beautiful dream

**Napoleonic Code:** The original **Napoleonic Code**, or *Code Napoléon* (originally called the *Code civil des français*, or civil code of the French), was the French civil code, established at the behest of Napoléon. It entered into force on March 21, 1804. Even though the Napoleonic code was not the first legal code to be established in a European country with a civil legal system — it was preceded by the Codex Maximilianeus bavaricus civilis (Bavaria, 1756), the Allgemeines Landrecht (Prussia, 1792) and the West Galician Code, (Galicia, then part of Austria, 1797) — it is considered the first successful codification and strongly influenced the law of many other countries.

Other countries soon copied this idea, and developed their own codes, of which the Swiss and German codes were the most influential. All of the countries of modern Europe with exception of Great Britain, Ireland, Russia and Scandinavian countries, base their civil law system on the Napoleonic Code. The code has thus been the most permanent inheritance of Napoleon.