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“The Game Is Still Going On” in A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams

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The first two titles for the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams were *The Poker Night* and *The Moth* which, to the point, illuminates the nature of the female protagonist Blanche DuBois. The symbol of the moth shows that Blanche, just like moths, seems unable to adapt to an ever-changing world where the ideals she was brought up to believe in now seem to have lost their value. Unable to acclimatise herself, Blanche instead insists to see and present reality as she believes it should be; she tells "what ought to be truth!"[1] (1731) which shows Blanche's essential attitude towards life, reality and illusion. In telling "what ought to be truth" (1731) Blanche embraces the power of appearance and illusion as the title *The Poker Night* suggests; she bluffs whenever she feels the need to and pulls hidden cards from her sleeve, she plays Stanley by using her aristocratic manners and upbringing; and Mitch believes her bluff that she is an honourable woman eligible for marriage. However, no matter how hard Blanche lies, conceits and tricks to prevent reality from invading her beautiful illusion, she eventually finds that the cards are not in her favour; unable to adapt to the world around her, Blanche is doomed to destruction and she seeks her refuge in insanity where she can finally live out her dream world, her belle reve.

Blanche's attitude towards illusion and reality is dramatically different to another one of Williams's protagonists, Maggie Pollitt in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. In an essay titled "Blanche DuBois and Maggie the Cat: Illusion and Reality in Tennessee Williams" Dianne Cafagna compares and contrasts the two protagonists, Maggie Pollitt and Blanche DuBois, and their different ways of handling the crises they are facing. Cafagna argues that the two protagonists both search for "a means of survival or escape" from the "caste society of the South" (119) and that their two options are to either face the reality or to flee into illusion, and where Maggie opts for reality Blanche instead chooses insanity.

Living in the borderland of reality and illusion, Blanche DuBois, desperately tries to escape this "caste society" (119) and her past life as a social outcast and abuser of a seventeen-year old boy in her hometown of Laurel. Having been forced out of town due to her inappropriate behaviour with the young boy, Blanche has nowhere to go but to New Orleans where her sister, Stella, now lives with her husband, Stanley Kowalski. Blanche seems determined to portray herself as a Southern belle, the image of a beautiful, hospitable woman from the upper class of the Old South. Cafagna states that "Blanche is a proud symbol of the doomed aristocratic South refusing to settle for the new industrial squalor" (120) which highlights Blanche's perception of herself as a noble, vulnerable woman in a hostile world. Stereotypical as it may be, the image of the well-bred Southern belle

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[1] Williams, Tennessee. A Streetcar Named Desire. 1947. The Norton Introduction to Literature – Shorter Eigth Edition.Ed. Jerome Beaty et al. New Work. W.W. Norton & Company. (2002) All subsequent references are to this edition.

represents the old Southern ways and ideals of chivalry, gallantry and virtuous women who will flirt and tease but never go all the way.

Blanche, this believed-to-be Southern belle, seems to be coming from a different time and age than the street of Elysian Fields in the French Quarter of the multi-ethnic city of New Orleans with its ideals and a moral contradicting to the ones a Southern belle would represent. Described as “incongruous” (1679) to the poor Elysian Fields, Blanche is “daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearls, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district” (1679). The physical appearance of Blanche’s connects qualities such as innocence and refinement to Blanche, emphasised by the whiteness of the pearl jewellery and her dress. The “shocked disbelief” (1679) with which she looks at the building in which her sister now lives, illuminates that Blanche DuBois comes from a world quite different from the roughness of the French Quarter.

The incongruity of Blanche’s to Elysian Fields seems to have an ironical twist because even though her physical appearance contrasts to the roughness of the French Quarter, Elysian Fields also refers to the Elysian Fields in Greek mythology. Elysian Fields, or Elysium, was one of the afterlife realms in which the blessed, heroic and virtuous would have their final rest. In this respect, the notion of Blanche being “incongruous” (1679) to Elysian Fields refers not only to her physical appearance but her former life in Laurel where she proved far from being either blessed or heroic and certainly not virtuous.

The name Laurel also has an ironic twist as laurels and laurel wreaths have been the emblem of victors and victories for thousands of years dating as far back as ancient Greece and Rome. Blanche’s life and departure from Laurel were far from victorious as she was “practically told by the mayor to get out of town” (1722) which emphasises Blanche’s perception of reality and illusion. Another name in *A Streetcar Named Desire* which seems ironical is Belle Reve where Blanche and her sister were brought up, a “great big place with white columns” (1680). According to Cafagna “Belle Reve, her family’s plantation, slightly corrupted over time in translation, means beautiful shore in French” (121). Cafagna cites Felicia Hardison Londré who asserts that: “Since ‘belle’ is the feminine form of the adjective ‘beautiful’ in French, whereas ‘reve’—‘dream’—is a masculine noun, it seems likely that the estate was originally called Belle Rive—‘beautiful shore’[2].” (qtd. In Cafagna 130) In the movie version of A Streetcar Named Desire, directed by Elia Kazan, “Belle Reve” is consistently pronounced /bel ri:v/ and not /bel rev/ which seems to support Londré’s and Cafagna’s claim, as a correct French pronunciation of the French world “rêve” would be /rev/

[2] Londré, Felicia Hardison. Tennessee Williams. New York. Ungar. (1979) p.85

and not /ri:v/[3]. There seems to be no evidence that supports the claim, made by Cafagna and Londré, other than the incorrectness of the grammar and the pronunciation in Elia Kazan's film.

Reve as in dream on the other hand, pinpoints that Blanche's perception of herself as a Southern belle is nothing more than an illusion. It does not matter that Blanche and Stella come from a family with a history going back centuries, as the DuBois are "French by extraction...[their] first American ancestors were French Huguenots" (1699), the aristocratic manners of Blanche are fake. Perhaps just as fake as the memory of Belle Reve as a plantation might be because as Mark Royden Winchell points out in "The Myth Is the Message, or Why Streetcar Keeps Running "there are no plantations in Laurel, Mississippi, which is in the heart of the Piney Woods" (3). However, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a fictional story and even though there have not been any plantations in Laurel, some artistic freedom must be allowed to Williams.

Cafagna and Londré are correct though, when they state that "rêve" is a masculine noun and that the adjective in the noun phrase should be masculine as well, as it is the head noun that decides the form of the adjectives within the noun phrase. Had the noun phrase been grammatically correct, the name would have been "Beau Reve". The name "Belle Reve" must therefore be considered just as romantic and false as Blanche's dreams, desires and illusions about herself. The flawless image Blanche wishes people to see holds up no better than the concept of Belle Reve does. Blanche's beauty, which "must avoid a strong light" (1679), is an indication that her desired image as a young Southern belle is beginning to disintegrate. And as Winchell points out, Blanche's "air of superiority" (3) is troublesome, as she has arrived in New Orleans "not from Belle Reve but from Tarantula Arms" (3) where she supported herself as a prostitute. Blanche's voyage from Tarantula Arms to Elysian Fields is certainly not a step down the social ladder as her "shocked disbelief " (1679) would let the audience assume, but a gigantic leap upwards.

Blanche is said to resemble a "moth" (1679) as she first appears on stage, predicting just as gruesome an ending for Blanche as for the moth. Moths, these creatures of the night, would seem to have a definite desire for death as they, with an almost unnatural determination, fly directly to strong lights such as fires and candles, ensuring their certain death. But moths are not driven by a death wish; they use the light from the moon to find their way in the world. The moth circles directly towards the light of the moon to determine its

[3] 3 In the Swedish production of A Streetcar Named Desire, Linje Lusta, "Belle Reve" is not translated into Swedish but kept as Belle Reve, and the cast, with actress Helena Bergström as Blanche DuBois, consistently pronounces the name according to the French pronunciation rules showing that the Swedish production has not embraced the idea of Belle Rive.

location by judging the strength from the light. Other light sources, such as hot light bulbs and candles cause moths to plummet themselves to a certain death as they, bewildered by the strong light, fly closer and closer to the light, trying to make sense of it, until the heat from the light ultimately kills them. Moths, just like the “incongruous” (1679) Blanche DuBois, do not function well in the new world, they are doomed to destruction. The imagery used in this initial scene foreshadows her upcoming tragedy later in the play; there is no happy ending in store for Blanche DuBois.

The road to destruction for Blanche seems clear; the seemingly weak and fragile Blanche will inevitably be destroyed by the brute force of Stanley’s. However weak and fragile she seems on the surface though, there is more to Blanche DuBois than first meets the eye, which casts serious doubts on the image of her being an innocent victim with Stanley as the villain. It seems that the simile of the moth with its almost eerie determination to fly toward the certain death of the light more concords with Blanche’s deliberate determination to use Stanley as her candle than the fragility of the moth’s wings. Blanche seems to know that only the brute force of Stanley’s has the capacity of functioning both as her executioner as well as her saviour. Although Blanche seems beyond any true salvation she seems, nevertheless, unable to win the game she is playing.

Card games play an important symbolic role in A Streetcar Named Desire as the first title of the play “The Poker Night[4]” suggests. Leonard Quirino argues in “The cards Indicate a Voyage on A Streetcar Named Desire” that “the tactics and ceremonial of games in general, and poker in particular, may be seen as constituting the informing structural principle of the play as a whole” (1) which emphasises the importance of the poker metaphor. Quirino furthermore states that depending “on the skilful manipulation of the hands that chance deals out, the card game is used by Williams throughout **Streetcar**[5] as a symbol of fate and of the skilful player’s ability to make its decrees perform in his own favour at the expense of his opponent’s misfortune, incompetence, and horror of the game itself” (1). Poker is a card game where the cards are of lesser importance; instead it is the game, the bluffing and betting, between the players that will determine whether they win or lose. It does not matter what cards you actually have, what matters is what cards your opponents think you have. Appearance is therefore crucial and as Stanley has the upper hand Blanche needs to play her role carefully to prevent him from calling her bluff. The possibility for Blanche to win at the game she is playing depends upon her ability to bluff not only Stanley but Mitch too.

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[4] Ruby Cohn claims that the first intended was The Poker Game (Cohn 51), however, since scene three in A Streetcar Named Desire is called “The Poker Night” it seems likely that Quirino is correct. The Norton Anthology refers to the play’s first title as The Poker Night (American Norton 2299) and adds that the second title was “The Moth” (American Norton 2299).

[5] Bold print is used in the original article.

Blanche says that she wants to “deceive him enough to make him—want me...” (1712) which shows that she believes that her only possibility to win Mitch is to bluff the hand she has.

Daniel Brooks argues in “Williams’s A Streetcar Named Desire” that not only is the game of poker a metaphor, but that the actual cards are connected to the characters. Brooks argues that the game of Spit in the Ocean symbolises” the threat that Blanche poses to Stanley’s dominant position and his cruel destruction of that threat” (1). Brooks connects the characteristics of the fifth card of the game to Blanche. The fifth card in Spit in the Ocean is not only an open card visible for all players, it is used by all and furthermore it is a wild card which renders immense opportunities, but also risks, for the players around the table. Brooks argues that like “the turned-up wild card, Blanche DuBois turns up at Elysian Fields and immediately impacts the lives of Stanley, Mitch and Stella” (1). Blanche, the wild card, threatens Stanley’s relationship with Stella and Stanley must therefore destroy her.

If Blanche is the wild card in Spit in the Ocean then Stanley is the “stud” of Seven Card Stud. A stud is an animal that is primarily used for breeding purposes. The virility and ability to cover are a stud’s only assets and the symbolic meaning of stud in *A Streetcar Named Desire* connects these qualities with Stanley showing him as a virile man with a strong sexual desire and appetite for women. The power of Stanley’s sexuality and sexual desire is what defines Stanley and it is also that power which has enthralled Stella and will ultimately destroy Blanche.

Poker is not the only game metaphor used in A Streetcar Named Desire; Bridge is also used metaphorically in the play as Quirino shows:

> *The presence of the Pleiades in the sky seems to comfort Blanche; her reference to them as bridge ladies not only aligns them with the imagery of existence as a game of chance, but the familiarity with which Blanche treats the seven nymphs, who even as stars, must constantly flee the mighty, devastating hunter, Orion, suggests mythically and cosmically, a parallel to her own danger, pursued as she is by Stanley’s vital lust for domination and destruction.” (4)*

In Greek mythology, the star cluster known as the Pleiades was thought of as the seven daughters of Atlas and Pleione. The young women had been pursued by Orion and turned to the Gods for help. According to one of the myths regarding the Pleiades in Greek mythology, Zeus initially turned them into doves and later into stars to help them flee the pursuing Orion. As Quirino shows, the seven sisters are doomed to an existence where they are forever to

be followed by Orion. Even though Zeus immortalised them into stars they are still not free, they are trapped in an eternal pursuit, chased by the brutality of Orion. Blanche, who must be familiar with the myth of the Pleiades, high-school teacher as she is, says that: “these girls are not out tonight. Oh, yes they are, there they are! God bless them! All in a bunch going home from their little bridge party...” (1715). As she refers to the Seven Sisters as going home from something as casual as a game of cards, and not fleeing from the violence of a potential killer as the myth says, suggests that Blanche only too well knows the game that can be played between men and women; the same game she is playing with Stanley and Mitch and that she is aware of the possible outcomes of that game.

Stanley, one of the men in Blanche’s hand, is everything that Blanche is not; where Blanche wears pretty floral dresses, Stanley wears “blue denim work clothes” (1678), goes bowling and plays poker. She is well-bred and refined, he is loud, an “unrefined type” (1687) a “different species” (1683) from the men in Laurel. He is “roughly dressed” (1678) which suggests a lifestyle far from the plantation life his wife and sister-in-law come from. Stanley, this “gaudy seed-bearer” (1686) is a he-man:

> *Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens...[he]sizes up women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them” (1686).*

With that, the image of Stanley is firmly established and consequently also the relationship between Stanley and Blanche. Stanley is the alpha-male in every sense of the word, and his physical, animal strength contrasts immensely to the perceived moth-like fragility of Blanche’s. As Blanche’s and Stanley’s physical appearances are juxtaposed on stage, their differences become enhanced and Stanley seems even stronger and more decisive next to Blanche’s petite figure, “light as a feather” (1717) as she is, than he perhaps would have been had she not been portrayed as delicate. The image of a muscular man with a petite and delicate woman on his side is such a common image in today’s world that it has become the picture of a perfect couple and, in a sense, Stanley and Blanche embody just that image. A size-zero woman seems to bring with her the promise of enduring power and potency to

the man escorting her; whilst she in turn seems to thrive on that image of power which she has brought him.

Stanley's power is recognised by Blanche who sees the "animal force" (1706) within him and declares to Stella that "the only way to live with such a man is to—go to bed with him!" (1706) which suggests that Stanley's only assets are his body and sexual desire. "He acts like an animal!" Blanche cries and continues to state that Stanley "has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something—sub-human—something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something ape-like about him...Stanley Kowalski—survivor of the Stone Age" (1707). Blanche's speech clearly suggests that Stanley lacks the qualities which she considers as superior and, in her eyes, this means that she is more evolved than Stanley the ape. This seems somewhat ironical as it is Blanche, and not Stanley, who seems unable to adapt, a quality which is fundamental if you are to survive in a fast-changing world.

Stanley, however does not seem to consider Blanche to be superior to him. "Every Man is a King!" (1726) he states and continues to assure Blanche and Stella that he is "the king around here, so don't forget it" (1726) and how right he is! As Winchell shows:

> *Stanley is unquestionably the king of his castle. As a travelling salesman, he enjoys the freedom of the road. As captain of his bowling team, he is at no loss for male camaraderie. These experiences, however, are not an evasion of domestic unhappiness. Stanley's loving and obedient wife is always waiting for him, eager to gratify and be gratified /.../ As politically incorrect as it may be, the Kowalski household embodies a patriarchal vision of home as Heaven. (3)*

Stanley and Stella had seemed quite content with their lives in Elysian Fields until Blanche showed up and Stanley's outburst, where he felt the need to proclaim himself king, is the result of Stella having commented his table manners by claiming that he was "making a pig of himself" (1726) and being "disgustingly greasy" (1726). Stella's comment is the result after a long time of Blanche having constantly been complaining about Stanley being "common" (1707) and beneath Stella who deserves something better than the life which he can offer her. Stella has resisted Blanche's remarks, explaining that she is not in anything she wants "to get out of" (1706). However, in the stressful situation of Blanche's birthday dinner where Blanche begins to realise that she is about to be exposed, Stella finally turns on Stanley, possibly as a way of releasing some of the built up pressure with having her older sister

there, constantly complaining and questioning the life Stella has chosen for herself. For Stella *has* chosen her life; and she is not at all unhappy with it, nor is she discontent with Stanley.

The coquettish ways of Blanche's fail to work their magic on Stanley however; instead he seems to see right through her from the very first time they meet and he what is more, he makes sure that she knows it; he calls her bluff. When Stanley offers Blanche a shot of whisky she declines, saying that she "rarely touch[es] it" (1686) although she has already served herself plenty of it. "Some people rarely touch it, but it touches them often" (1686) is Stanley's blunt reply. This indicates Stanley's unwillingness to actively participate in the game of deception that Blanche is playing. Instead, a woman who wants to attract Stanley would have to "[l]ay...her cards on the table" (1691) which suggests that Stanley, although he might be a willing player, prefers to know just what he is up against.

Blanche, however, continues to flirt with her brother-in-law using all of her Southern charm, asking him to help her with her dress, and she "playfully sprays him" (1692) with an atomizer of perfume. At this point, Stanley once again demonstrates that he recognises the game she is playing;

> STANLEY. If I didn't know that you was my wife's sister I'd get ideas
> about you!
> BLANCHE. Such as what!
> STANLEY. Don't play so dumb. You know what! (1692)

Her enticing behaviour continues despite that and when returning from a night out, Blanche undresses and "stands in her pink silk brassiere and white skirt in the light through the portieres" (1696) in front of Stanley and his friends as they play poker in the room next door. It is not until Stella points out directly to Blanche that she can be seen in the light that she moves out of the light. Moments after, however, she "moves back into the streak of light. She raises her arms and stretches, as she moves indolently back to the chair" (1697). Not getting the sought-after attention, Blanche raises the stakes and overtly challenges Stanley by turning on the radio, just shortly after he has asked them to keep their voices down, and returns Stanley's look "without flinching" (1697). The Blanche DuBois seen here is far from a fragile woman on the verge of a complete breakdown, instead she seems to be manipulative and in control of the game she is playing.

Stanley is not the only man being played by Blanche, Mitch Hubbell, a close friend of Stanley's, immediately becomes the centre of Blanche's attention just moments after her

daring encounter with Stanley. “That one seems—superior to the others” (1696) she says to Stella, recognising a “sensitive look” (1696) in Mitch. Without further delay, Blanche begins her quest for the man she thinks might be able to save her. Blanche is fully aware of the fact that if she is to win Mitch she needs to play her hand carefully.

Dressed in a “dark red satin wrapper” (1698) Blanche begins her pursuit for Mitch and in “The Garrulous Grotesques of Tennessee Williams”, Ruby Cohn shows Blanche’s agenda by suggesting that “her clothes reflect her divided nature-mothlike white for day and red satin robe for intimacy” (47). The colour of her satin dress certainly indicates that Blanche is a different woman than the woman who initially was described as “incongruous” to the French Quarter. The seemingly innocent and moth-like Blanche dressed in white has now transformed into a purposeful seductress in a daring red dress.

Knowing that a “woman’s charm is fifty per cent illusion” (1692) Blanche begins to enswathe Mitch into her web of lies. She asks Mitch to put a paper lantern over the naked light bulb as she “can’t stand a naked light bulb” (1699) anymore than she can a “rude remark or a vulgar action” (1699). The dimmed light will show Blanche in a more favourable light as she claims Stella to be her older sister. Knowing that this lie might be hard to swallow, she instantly adds: “Just slightly. Less than a year” (1699). She continues to say that the reason she is staying with her sister is that Stella has not “been so well lately” (1699) and that she is there to help her. This suggests to Mitch that Blanche is a kind-hearted, caring woman, too vulnerable for this harsh world as she even cannot stand any kind of rudeness and that she is in dire need of someone, preferably Mitch, to take care of her. Like him, she is no stranger to taking care of those in need for help, in Mitch’s case it is his mother and for Blanche it is her pregnant sister. The reference Blanche makes to vulgarity and rude remarks serves the purpose of showing Mitch that she, just like him is different and more refined than the ordinary people of Elysian Fields, a woman eligible for marriage, sharing many of the qualities that Mitch possesses. Mitch’s loneliness and kindness makes him an easy target for the seductive and manipulative Blanche.

Blanche’s true nature is revealed to the audience as Blanche “rolls her eyes, knowing [Mitch] cannot see her face” (1717) as she says to him that she does not want him to think of her as “severe and old-maid school-teacherish or anything like that” (1717). It is just that she has “old-fashioned ideals!” (1717). Blanche attempts to ensure Mitch that beneath the virtuous surface is a full-blooded woman with whom he will be able to spend passionate nights but not before they are married.

The ideals that Blanche actually has are in no way “old-fashioned” (1717) as her encounter with a young boy who has come to collect money for The Evening Star reveals.

Blanche, who is waiting for her wooer, Mitch, opens the door for the young boy. The conversation with the paper boy shows that Blanche's desire for young boys did not end with the seventeen-year old boy from Laurel. "You make my mouth water" (1713) she says to the paper boy, under the pretence that she is talking about the cherry soda he has just had and not of the boy himself. She refers to him as "a young Prince out of the Arabian Nights" (1713). "Come here" she says to the young boy, unable to contain herself, "I want to kiss you, just once, softly and sweetly on your mouth! [Without waiting for him to accept, she crosses quickly to him and presses her lips to his] Now run along, quickly! It would be nice to keep you, but I've got to be good—and keep my hands off children" (1713). This scene shows how Blanche takes advantage of not only Mitch, but the boy as well, for her own purposes, because Blanche does not love Mitch; in fact it seems questionable whether she even likes Mitch. One thing is for certain though she does not desire Mitch as she desires the paper boy. Blanche only needs Mitch to be her emergency exit from Elysian Fields.

Seemingly successful in her pursuit of Mitch, he proposes to her and it seems as if Blanche's dream may finally come true. However, the past from which Blanche desperately has tried to escape, does not loosen its grip of her. Blanche begins to realise that she is about to lose the game she has played so carefully, as she is stood up by Mitch on her birthday dinner. Frantically, she turns to Stella asking her what has happened, knowing just too well that there is no hope for her should Stanley finally have exposed her lies, revealing her past as a whore from Tarantula Arms to Mitch. A phone call from Mitch to Stanley reveals that her deepest fears have come true as Mitch does not ask for her, he only talks to Stanley. This indicates that Blanche is unworthy of even the simplest explanation to why he has stood her up. Stanley stares "insultingly" (1727) at Blanche as he talks to Mitch calling him by his nickname "Mac" (1727) to emphasise to Blanche that the friendship between the two men is far deeper than any relationship between Blanche and Mitch could ever have been. The phone call shows to Blanche that Mitch has chosen Stanley over her, leaving her without her intended escape route.

Blanche's destiny has been foreshadowed in the image of the myth which reveals the upcoming tragedy and moments before the attack by Stanley, Blanche sees a glimpse of what the future has in store for her. Stage instructions show that the walls on stage have become transparent revealing a:

> *prostitute [who] has rolled a drunkard. He pursues her along the walk, overtakes her and there is a struggle. A policeman's whistle breaks it up. The figures disappear. Some moments later the NEGRO WOMAN*

appears around the corner with a sequined bag which the prostitute has dropped on the walk. She is rooting excitedly through it" (1736)

This seems to send a clear message to Blanche of what the grim-looking future holds in store for her and she feels caught "in a trap" (1736) from which she cannot break away.

With her past life now exposed Blanche realises that there is nowhere to escape to as "Kiefaber, Stanley and Shaw have tied an old tin can to the tail of the kite" (1731). No matter where she goes in the world, the truth about her past life will forever follow her. Blanche has no longer any hopes of finding refuge in the arms of Mitch's, the gentleman who called her "Miss DuBois" (1696). Mitch has finally crushed her dreams and turned her down by saying that she is not "clean enough to bring in the house with my mother" (1733). The numerous baths Blanche has been taking throughout the play have not been able to cleanse her from her former life as a whore in Laurel, and Blanche now begins to show clear signs of madness as she has dressed in a "white satin evening gown and a pair of scuffed slippers with brilliants set in their heels" (1733). The white dress is "soiled and crumpled" (1733) and as she places a "rhinestone tiara" (1733) on her head, the imagery of her being just as soiled and crumpled as the white dress and just as fake as the rhinestones in the tiara, is completed. Blanche is a fallen woman, far from the image she wanted the world to see, an image of her being a woman with "old-fashioned" (1717) ideals.

Even though the truth about Blanche now is out there for the world to see, Blanche is still caught in her self-proclaimed image of Blanche DuBois, the Southern belle. It seems as if this image is so deeply rooted in her mind that she is unable to adapt to a world where she is seen as merely Blanche, and not Blanche DuBois, the Southern belle, mistress of Belle Reve, with a history dating back to the French Huguenots. As she is incapable of facing reality, let alone live in it, unlike Stella who successfully has managed to bring the two worlds of Belle Reve and Elysian Fields together, Blanche needs to reject reality and she begins her descent into madness. When Blanche's illusion has become her reality she will finally be able to live out her dream where she is a virtuous woman who will flirt and tease with courteous and respectful men appreciative of her Southern hospitality and in that illusion she will at last live life as it ought to be.

Still, Blanche has not yet fully retreated into the freedom of madness, and as Stanley returns to the apartment from the hospital where Stella is having their baby. Blanche pretends to have received a telegram from her former boyfriend, Shep Huntleigh, who has sent for her to come on a Caribbean cruise. Even though Blanche knows that the wire from Shep Huntleigh is just an illusion, she clutches to this fantasy as it would render her the

opportunity she needs to leave the Kowalski household with her head held high. But by now Stanley has lost any patience he has ever had with her and calls her bluff one last time. At first, however, he plays along and lets Blanche ramble on about her “millionaire from Dallas” (1735) hearing her say that she is a “cultivated woman, a woman of intelligence and breeding [with] treasures locked in her heart” (1735). However, when Blanche says that she has “been foolish—casting my pearls before swine...thinking not only of you but of your friend Mr. Mitchell” (1735) Stanley has had it with her and now he overtly confronts her illusion of her being whisked off into the Caribbean Sea; “There isn’t a goddam thing but imagination...lies and conceits and tricks...look at yourself in that Mardi Gras outfit...with the crazy crown on!”(1736) Stanley is not going to play any more games with Blanche and Blanche finds herself in “desperate, desperate circumstances...[c]aught in a trap” (1736)

The desperation of Blanche’s predicament is highlighted as Blanche is dressed in the rhinestone tiara and dirty white dress; the moth-like figure now close to its destruction. The notion of her having cast her “pearls before swine” (1735) shows clearly that Blanche is the one who has orchestrated the events up to this point. Furthermore it shows that this has been done quite deliberately which augments the image of Blanche as a manipulative seductress more than willing to come between Stella and Stanley and that Stanley has been right to regard Blanche as a threat to his marriage.

Blanche is now trapped, not only in the liminal space between reality and illusion, but also literally in the small two-room apartment of Elysian Fields as Stanley stands between her and the door. Stanley, the ape, the stud “grins at her...stares at her...his mouth curving into a grin as he weaves between [Blanche] and the outer door” (1736-37). Blanche the moth, bewildered and confused, “smashes a bottle on the table and faces him, clutching the broken top” (1737) in a feeble attempt to fight him off. But Stanley “[springs toward her, overturning the table. She cries out and strikes at him with the bottle top but he catches her wrist]” Stanley says: “Tiger—tiger! Drop the bottle-top! Drop it! We’ve had this date with each other from the beginning!” (1737). Faced with the physical strength of Stanley, Blanche “[moans. The bottle-top falls. She sinks to her knees: He picks up her inert figure and carries her to the bed. The hot trumpet and drums from the Four Deuces sound loudly]” (1737). This scene shows Blanche’s complete and ultimate capitulation to Stanley as she drops to the floor, however, as the scene ends here with the music from the Four Deuces playing, what really happens between Blanche and Stanley after her complete surrendering is left to the reader, or audience, to imagine. The music from the Four Deuces, where men can sneak upstairs, safe out of sight of their wives and the vice squad, certainly implies that Stanley does not leave Blanche alone on the bed, as he has carried her there, but that he will “enjoy

the favors of a notoriously promiscuous woman" (Winchell 5) whether she likes it or not, which would suggest that Stanley brutally rapes Blanche. However, Stanley's comment about them having had "this date with each other from the beginning" (1737) and the fact that he "carries her to the bed" (1737) suggests that he has taken Blanche's flirtatious behaviour as an invitation and that he has no reason to believe other than that she, just like Stella, in fact is "thrilled" (1704) by his violent behaviour. Blanche has already stated that the only way to live with such a man as Stanley is to "go to bed with him" (1706) and it is possible that she has done just that, under the pretence of a rape, which would render Blanche the status of a guilt-free victim with Stanley as the villain.

The ambiguity of this scene has intrigued the audience since the play first opened, on Broadway in December 1947, with Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski. It has continued to perplex and amaze its audience, not only in the film released in 1951, where Brando also starred as Stanley, but in most subsequent performances and readings of the play. Although Elia Kazan directed both the production on Broadway and the film, the two productions are fundamentally different as Stella, in the film version, ultimately leaves Stanley. The change to the film's finale was the effect of threats, made by the Catholic Legion of Decency[6], to condemn the film unless some of the more graphic sexual scenes were omitted. Williams refused to leave out the rape scene and instead agreed to punish Stanley by having Stella leave him in the end.

Different productions of A Streetcar Named Desire, whether on stage or on screen, will inevitably affect the audience's perception of the play as the director and cast will present their interpretations of the play and characters.

The ending in Kazan's film version for example, which suggests that Stanley is nothing more than a brutal savage who has attacked his vulnerable-sister-in-law, gives the audience a pre-packed answer to the question of it being rape or not. However, Marlon Brando's superb performance manages to uphold the ambiguity as his charisma and magnetic appearance makes the audience want to believe in him and not in Blanche.

The ending in the Broadway production did not deviate from the original text, however, and here Stella refuses to believe in Blanche as she reveals her version of what has happened. It does not seem to matter what Blanche does; she cannot win no matter what cards she has or whether she tells the truth or not; there is no place for her in this world. The descent into madness, which begun with Mitch refusing to marry her, seems now

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[6] The Catholic Legion of Decency was an organisation "dedicated to identifying and combating objectionable content in motion pictures" (Wikipedia). It was highly influential in the film industry and Williams and Kazan were therefore forced to change the ending to A Streetcar Named Desire.

to be the only option for Blanche if she is ever to escape her past and Blanche submerges herself into a beautiful illusion where she in fact is a Southern belle and Shep Huntleigh is to come and rescue her away from Elysian Fields.

Blanche still has a shred of sanity left, however, which is displayed as a doctor and nurse arrive to take her to the asylum. Blanche is “[retreating in panic]” (1742) back into the apartment as the doctor comes to take her away. The echoes of the nurse’s words “Now, Blanche—now, Blanche—now, Blanche!”(1742) shows Blanche’s perception of the situation and the echoes clearly display her desperation and panic. However, the doctor, an anonymous man, finally gives Blanche the way out she needs, and when he “takes off his hat...and speaks her name...MissDuBois”(1743), Blanche acknowledges his offer of believing in her as a Southern belle and she grasps this opportunity of once again becoming “Miss DuBois”(1743). As she gracefully accepts his offered hand and “extends her hands toward” him, her metamorphose into a true Southern belle is complete, and Blanche is no longer desperate or in panic. When the doctor “draws her up gently by supporting her with his arm” to escort her “through the portieres” (1743) away from Elysian Fields, he is escorting Blanche DuBois, mistress of Belle Reve, and not Blanche DuBois, mistress of The Tarantula Arms.

With Blanche’s hand having been called and her bluff exposed, Blanche has learned that she is as unwelcome in Elysian Fields as she was in Laurel, and is left with no other option but to embrace insanity which she does whole-heartedly. As the anonymous doctor escorts Blanche away to the asylum, he treats her with grace and dignity worthy of the mistress of Belle Reve, which renders her the promise of a life where values such as chivalry and gallantry once again will become appreciated. Watching Blanche leave Elysian Fields, Stella cries out for her sister, but Blanche “walks on without turning” (1744). Blanche turns her back on Stella just as she turns her back on reality; and with her head held high she can finally find the freedom in the “belle rêve” she so desperately has yearned for.

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