

AQA English Literature A-level

Drama: A Streetcar Named Desire Scene Analysis

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SCENE ONE

Scene Summary and Analysis:

<u>Colour key for the document</u>
Keyword
Analysis/ quotation
Main body

- The play opens with one of Williams' lengthy, poetic stage directions. He describes the street scene of **Elysian Fields**, in a poor area of **New Orleans**. New Orleans is established as an exciting **context, emblematic of a country in transience, in the midst of progression**. Despite the mention of poverty, Williams focuses on the **beauty** of the scene. **This kind of balance between the grotesque and the lyrical sets the tone for the poetic urban lyricism at the heart of the play**. He describes the "**blue piano**" that can be heard through **the streets as a symbol for the spirit of the area**. This **musical motif**, an example of **plastic theatre**, recurs throughout the play, usually during moments of passion.
- Williams associates the music at this point with "**Negro entertainers**". He also makes a point of highlighting the **racial diversity** of the city within this initial paragraph, claiming that it's a place "**where there is a relatively warm and easy intermingling of races**".
- Stanley and Mitch enter the scene, having a casual conversation. They're immediately visually coded as laid back, **working class** men. Stanley carries a red stained package from the butchers, **associating him from the start with a sense of primalism and animalism**. He calls up to Stella, who comes out, and is introduced as "**gentle**". Williams establishes immediately that Stella is "**of a background obviously quite different from her husband's**", **introducing the theme of social class**. **He heaves the package at her, again establishing this sense of primal masculinity**.
- We are then introduced to Blanche. She comes around the corner carrying a valise, in apparent confusion and "**shocked disbelief**" at where her sister has ended up.
- Eunice helps Blanche into Stella's apartment. They have a brief conversation in the apartment, wherein Eunice tries to get to know Blanche. She has a friendly demeanor, asking Blanche about her career as a **schoolteacher**, but Blanche asks to be left alone. It's worth noting yet another reference to **race**, with Eunice's casual mention of "the Mexicans", which she is clearly much more comfortable with than Blanche. Eunice mentions Belle Reve, **calling it the plantation and making the audience aware of the implications of Blanche and Stella's money**. **It is quickly established that it is old Southern money built on slavery**.
- Blanche is left visually **uncomfortable**, unsure what to do with herself in such an alien space. She spots a bottle of whiskey in the closet and takes a **shot**.



- Stella arrives, and we see our first interaction between the two sisters, with Blanche's anxious **rambling** leaving Stella relatively **quiet**. **Blanche says that she's going to look for some liquor. This is an important use of dramatic irony**, as the audience is aware that **Blanche knows where the liquor is, and has helped herself to some already**. The audience is therefore introduced to this theme of **deception**. The fantasy that Blanche lives in requires a glossy appearance, and her **alcoholism undermines the purity** she tries to put across. **The fact that her first lie is about drinking is incredibly important, as it establishes the idea that Blanche is ashamed of her mental distress**. This internal demonisation of her own **coping mechanisms**, reflect her adherence to a strict idea of what a woman should be, which has been **ingrained** in her by a **bourgeois** upbringing.
- Blanche heavily **criticises** the apartment, expressing her shock and worry that her sister "has to" live in these conditions. Stella is clearly slightly **offended**, saying it isn't that bad.
- They go on to talk about why Blanche decided to leave the school. She blames it on her '**nerves**' - we later learn this is a **lie**. The discussion about Stanley between the sisters occurs after this. This is a key moment, as it lets the audience know that Stanley is an immigrant, something which affects how we see his **social status**. **Moreover, Blanche's reaction establishes further differences between the two reinforcing that their ideologies are incompatible**. The fact that Stella laughs along with this is also worth noting - Stella is a **mediator**, she has a lot of love for both Stanley and Blanche, being unable to fully comply with either ideology. **Despite her love for Stanley, she is still shaped by her bourgeois upbringing, and will still mock his status as an immigrant when around a character that puts her back into that context**. This becomes a point of **tension** between Stella and Stanley later in the play.
- Blanche veers the conversation toward the loss of her family home, which descends into a nervous episode, where she expresses a level of **resentment** towards Stella. She accuses her of leaving Belle Reve behind, saying that she stayed and "**fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it**".
- The music from the blue piano grows louder, **expressing an increase in tension**. Talking about Belle Reve leads Blanche into an anxious speech about the deaths of her family. The conversation brings Stella to tears.
- When Stella goes into the bathroom to wash her face, there's a **tonal shift** as the men come jeering down the street, back from bowling. Stanley walks into the apartment.
- The interaction that follows is relatively **casual** and **awkward** at most. The two get acquainted. However, the tone shifts again when he mentions her past marriage. We find out that Blanche's husband died and this traumatic memory causes her to feel physically sick, reminding us again of Blanche's fear of death, **decay** and loss.



- At the end of this scene, we hear **polka music** for the first time. **This music will be continuously associated with Blanche's traumatic flashbacks and mental descent.**

Key Quotes:

“They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at- Elysian Fields!” - Blanche

- This is a key quotation because it **allegorically** expresses **Blanche's journey** through life so far. The streetcar named Desire introduces the theme of **sexuality**, and points to its relevance in Blanche's past. The reference to Cemeteries illustrates the **losses** she has endured, and the street where she has arrived, Elysian Fields, is named after the Greek mythological land of the dead. This suggests ambiguous afterlife for her in its simultaneous utopian diversity and seedy poverty, a mix which leaves Blanche feeling out of place in her present setting, clinging on to the past.

“She showed me a picture of your home-place, the plantation. A great big place with white columns.” - Eunice

- This is the first time we understand that the Dubois' wealth was built on **slavery**. It therefore links the fall of Blanche and her family to the fall of the Old South and the **exploitative nature of the bourgeois way of life.**

“What are you doing in a place like this?” -Blanche

- An expression of Blanche's **inability** to understand Stella's decision to leave the past behind and **embrace** progression. This quote is burdened with **classism**, and implies Blanche's fear of poverty, as expressed through her discomfort in her setting.

“You are the one that abandoned Belle Reve, not I! I stayed and fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it!” -Blanche

- This is one of the first examples we get of Blanche's **desperation** to cling on to the past, and the extent to which this has been a personal struggle for her.

“Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes” - Williams' stage direction

- This stage direction is key to keep in mind in relation to Stanley's character at all times- many of Stanley's stage directions from this point on take from this idea, using **animalistic lexicon** to imply his **primal masculine sexuality and force.**



SCENE TWO

Scene Summary and Analysis:

- It is later the same evening, and Blanche is bathing. **Her frequent bathing points to her obsessive attempts at cleansing herself from her trauma and rejuvenating.** The **blue piano** continues to play, as we can hear it coming in through the door.
- Stella tells Stanley that she's taking Blanche out on the town to get her away from his party, because she doesn't think Blanche will be able to take it. She then informs him that she hasn't told Blanche about the baby yet. This is also the moment when we find out about Stella's **pregnancy**, which has a big impact on how we view Stella and Stanley's relationship. **It shows us their commitment to each other, and informs us that Stella's affection for Stanley at this point is deeply intimate. It also establishes a sense of vulnerability in Stella which will be relevant later, during the poker night.**
- Stella tells Stanley that Blanche has been through a lot with the loss of Belle Reve, which he is unable to understand as a loss. She tries to encourage Stanley to be **kind** to Blanche and pamper her needs, but he's **dismissive** of it. He questions Stella more about the loss of their home, **demanding** the papers for the sale, even when Stella tells him it doesn't seem like it was sold, highlighting that Blanche is incredibly sensitive about it. He says he doesn't care if she hears. **Here, Williams is reinforcing Stanley's thrusting aggression as** he raises his voice so it penetrates the boundaries of the house. His body, voice, and demeanor all have this same forthcomingness about them. Stella tells him she doesn't care about papers, and Stanley points to the **Napoleonic code**, claiming that they are owed money by Blanche. **This reference to the Napoleonic code is important because it establishes Stanley's role as a hard working, individualistic working class man. He will fight to get what he feels he has a right to. It also reminds us of the implications of gender** as it relates to class. At this point in time, he has a right to everything Stella owns. **We are reminded of their dependence on each other as a married couple, financially and emotionally.** Stella then reacts more **feistily** than we've seen her before, telling him the home was lost, emphasising that he's being ridiculous if he thinks that her family owes him anything. She asserts that he will cause Blanche to unravel if he tries to confront her.
- Stanley "**stalks**" into Blanche's bedroom, going through her things and **questioning** Stella on where the money for all her expensive clothes came from. **Feathers and furs are an important aspect of Blanche's costuming as they simultaneously bring her forth as a moth-like, fragile, fluttering character and emphasise her wealth.** As Stanley questions Stella about the clothes, she claims that the jewellery is costume jewellery, and that the clothes are inexpensive. This is interesting because it **brings into question Blanche's wardrobe as an actual symbol of wealth. This implies that her wardrobe is part of her illusion of wealth and status, which**



has, in actuality, slipped away from her with the decline of her family and the old South.

- Blanche comes out of the bath in a red robe, **symbolising her sexuality**. Blanche and Stanley have a conversation wherein she is **flirtatiously** fishing for compliments, but he continues to **dismiss** her, claiming he doesn't care for **“this Hollywood glamour stuff”**. He sees himself as a man who won't fall for women's tricks and illusions. Stella comes by briefly, then goes to get Blanche a coke. Stella being at Blanche's service becomes a point of **contention** throughout the play, especially for Stanley, who sees their relationship as unfair. Blanche claims that she understands him better than Stella does. **This is odd, as this initial sense of flirtation towards Stanley gives us a sense of Blanche's need to impress men, due to her fear of being alone and unwanted.**
- Blanche says she will be forthright with him and has nothing to hide. Stanley begins to question her about the papers, mentioning again the **Napoleonic code** and accusing her of being flirtatious to trick him. However, she responds with an air of **mystery**, claiming there were papers, but refusing to give him a straight answer. This leads him to angrily go through her bag. **Again, we see Stanley as physically invasive in his demands.**
- This is especially the case when he tries to snatch up her **love letters**, which she claims are all from the same boy- presumably her dead husband- and **“yellowing with antiquity”**. This indicates both their connection to Blanche's past, which she is extremely sensitive about, and their physical **fragility**, which is being threatened by Stanley's strong **grasp**. **The tension in these kinds of physical encounters is key to note throughout the play. We see Blanche constantly afraid, her mentality fragile at the hands of Stanley's physical aggression.** She jumps angrily back at him, telling him now that he's touched them she'll have to burn them, **connoting how Stanley's impurity is intruding on her fantasy.**
- **At this point, we see Blanche unravelling with guilt at her husband's death. She is weighed down by the burden of the losses she has endured.** She claims that he was young and vulnerable but she ended up hurting him. **Blanche's husband is the epitome of sensitivity, as he represents all the fragility she feels in herself, being amplified in him. It was crushed out by the world,** and she feels it's partly her fault. She then quickly composes herself, but seems physically exhausted.
- She starts going through her papers, seemingly looking for the papers he is demanding. Whenever he asks direct questions, she **avoids** them, always answering **ambiguously**. She then lays out all the papers she has, claiming they illustrate the passing of the land between different individuals over hundreds of years, and explaining that over that time an increasing amount of land was lost. This is a **symbol for the descent of the old South.**
- Stanley says that he will have someone analyse them, bringing up, for a third time, the Napoleonic code. He reveals Stella's **pregnancy** to Blanche. There is a **shift** in



Blanche's demeanor as she's elated by this news. **The idea of new life, and new members of her family, seems to awaken a joy in her.**

- When Stella comes back she **embraces** her lovingly and excitedly, telling her that she argued as well as flirted with Stanley but laughs it off. The men arrive for Stanley's poker night, where Stella and Blanche disappear down the street, in the midst of a flurry of **urban dialogue** coming from street vendors and the **blue piano**.

Key Quotes:

“When she comes in be sure to say something nice about her appearance...and admire her dress and tell her she’s looking wonderful. That’s important to Blanche. Her little weakness!” -Stella

- This kind of attitude from Stella regarding Blanche tells us about both of them: it shows Stella's **gentle** personality and the ways she **appeases** Blanche's fantasies and **anxieties**. Hearing this phrase directly from Blanche's sister, who is closest to her, shows us how integral her need to appear a certain way is.

“I don’t understand what happened to Belle Reve but you don’t know how ridiculous you are being when you suggest that my sister or I or anyone of our family could have perpetrated a swindle on anyone else.” -Stella

- This line contains a sense of **irony**, because we are aware at this point that Williams is not aligning himself with the morality of the old South. We know that the Dubois family wealth was built on slavery, likely involving the **‘swindling’** and **exploitation** of many people. Therefore, the fact that this is one of the first times we see Stella being forthcoming and **confrontational** with Stanley shows that, to a certain degree, she too hangs on to the same **illusions** as Blanche when it comes to the meaning of their **upbringing**.

“Some men are took in by all this Hollywood glamour stuff and some are not.” -Stanley

- An example of Stanley's outright **refusal** to be fooled by Blanche's illusions. This line speaks heavily to how Stanley sees himself as a **realist** character above being tricked by lies. This line also implies Stanley's association between **women** and **falsehood**. He sees Blanche as the epitome of this.

“Poems a dead boy wrote. I hurt him the way you would like to hurt me, but you can’t! I’m not young and vulnerable anymore. But my young husband was and I—never mind about that! Just give them back to me!” -Blanche

- This small **breakdown** from Blanche is one of the first **revelations** we get of the **guilt** she feels regarding her husband's death, as it draws parallels between herself and her husband. She sees them equally as characters too sensitive for the



world around them. She is holding on to her sanity, despite what is thrown at her, as a sort of continuation of his life.

SCENE THREE

Scene Summary and Analysis:

- The scene opens with a description of Stanley's poker night. The focus is on the **bright** primary colours of the scene, using a Van Gogh painting in the background as reference. Green lighting, and the bright colours worn by the men themselves, echo their "**physical manhood**". **These bold colours are a foil for Blanche's association with white, the colour of feminine purity.**
- The men are drinking and eating watermelon, engaged in their poker game. There's a reference to going to "the Chinaman's" for some food, which is a reminder of the **cultural diversity** of the city. Mitch says he needs to go home soon, to care for his sick mother, and the other men mock him for it. **This is the first implication of Mitch's sensitivity in contrast with the other men. He is a carer, and the others, focused on their own individualistic paths, don't understand this premise.** As he deals, Mitch tells a **racially insensitive** joke. This is a reminder that, despite the diversity in New Orleans, there's still a heavy amount of brute racial insensitivity.
- The two sisters get home. Blanche is concerned about her appearance in front of the men, claiming she needs to freshen up before they go in as she feels all "**hot and frazzled**". Many of Blanche's concerns around her appearance tend to revolve around **uncleanliness**. **This can be linked to her desire to give off an air of purity.**
- They go in. Blanche tells the men not to get up, expecting **chivalry**, and Stanley assures her nobody is going to get up, throwing this expectation back in her face. When Stella tells the men it's getting late, asking them to break it up soon, to which Stanley reacts by whacking her thigh.
- Blanche says she's going to bathe, clearly feeling overwhelmed by the situation. When she goes into the bathroom, she runs into Mitch. The two are introduced, and Mitch is clumsily sweet, speaking to her with "awkward courtesy". This is an **imitation** of the very chivalry she's after. Blanche instantly shows interest, saying he seems "**superior to the others**". She picks up on a gentlemanliness and sensitivity in him.
- She speaks to Stella about him, finding out he's Stanley's colleague. When she asks if that's "**something much**", Stella responds by telling her that Stanley is the only one "**likely to get anywhere**". Blanche responds **confrontationally**, telling her she doesn't see it in Stanley. Here we see how much Stella truly believes in Stanley, as she sees something in him, being drawn in by his forceful **drive**.



- The two sisters start mocking the men and their wives, laughing together about the time when the ceiling cracked. Stanley shouts at them to keep it down. **Again, we are reminded of the lack of privacy in this enclosed space, and of the penetrative power of the voice through walls.** Blanche tells Stella not to start a row, but Stella is angry that Stanley is drunk.
- Blanche turns on the radio. Stanley demands that she turn off the radio, and, despite the other men telling him to let her leave it on, he jumps up and angrily turns it off. **His drinking has clearly set off his violent nature.** Stanley then accuses Mitch of being distracted from the poker game, looking at Blanche through the drapes, and **commands** him to sit down. **This is the first instance we see of Stanley's discomfort with the idea of Mitch and Blanche being involved. It's hard to distinguish at this point whether it stems from a jealous need to be the alpha male or general disdain towards Blanche.**
- Mitch runs into Blanche and he shows her the inscription on his case, a line from one of her favourite sonnets. **This interest in poetry is an indicator of Mitch's sensitivity, reminding Blanche of her deceased husband.** At this point, Blanche **sees her own story in Mitch, and starts to latch on to a sense of hope in him.** She then turns on the radio.
- There's a shift in **tone** as Stanley "**stalks**" angrily into the room. **Williams often refers to Stanley's actions directly as animalistic through these kinds of terms.** He **throws** the radio out of the window. Stella bursts in, calling him **an animal**, demanding that everyone goes home. Blanche is **frightened**, telling Stella to be careful. The other men try to calm Stanley down, but he **charges** after Stella and eventually **strikes** her.
- Blanche is terrified, running after Stella. The scene is **chaotic**, with the sound of indiscernible crashes and bangs. Blanche cries out that Stella is pregnant. We're reminded of the true **danger** of the situation. The men take Stanley away. When they "**lovingly**" try to calm him down, they have a surprising moment of **tenderness** with Stanley leaning his head on one of their shoulders. **It's interesting to note that the only time we see this kind of softness surrounding these men is after such a violent masculine outburst.** In a panic, Blanche takes Stella upstairs to Eunice's to protect her. She takes Stella's clothes with them, clearly assuming that Stella will never go back. She tells Stella not to be afraid.
- Once Stanley calms down, he immediately switches back into his state of affection and **dependence** on Stella, exclaiming that his baby doll's left him. He tries desperately to call Stella, eventually going out into the street and starts **bellowing** her name. Eunice tells him she won't come back to him. She yells at him for beating his wife, calling him a polack. **His status as an immigrant is associated with his brutality.**
- Stella, overcome by her love for Stanley, eventually comes down the stairs. The two embrace with "**low, animal moans**". **Here we see how their love is depicted as**



primal, inevitable, instinctive, similarly to his violent actions. Her eyes go “**blind with tenderness**” as she is **unable to see past her devotion for him.**

- Blanche comes downstairs, scared and looking for her sister. She can't understand why she would have gone back in with him. She runs into Mitch, who **reassures** her that there's nothing to be scared about because they're in love, so she shouldn't take what happened seriously. This dismissal of Stanley's violence comes from everywhere around him because everyone ultimately **forgives** his aggressive actions, except **Blanche**. **This can be seen to reflect the general American attitude towards this kind of masculinity. The heroisation of the family man who has returned from the war despite the aggressive demeanor that the war and economy ingrains in him.**
- Mitch and Blanche have a cigarette together. She is **overwhelmed** and thanks him for being so kind.

Key Quotes:

“You look fresh as a daisy” -Stella

“One that's been picked a few days” - Blanche

- This short interaction is a good example to establish Blanche's **anxiety** around **ageing**. This is important as it links her need to appear perfect and beautiful with her fear of her past and time slipping away from her.

“Stanley gives a loud whack of his hand on her thigh.” - stage direction

- This stage direction is the first example we get of Stanley's **non-consensual** physical aggression, setting grounds for his further aggression later in the scene. It shows us that he is drunk, which **catalyses** this sort of behaviour from him. Everyone around him allows actions such as these to go unnoticed enabling the **abuse of the** women around him later in the play.

“I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or vulgar action” - Blanche

- This line draws a blatant parallel between the motif of Blanche's **discomfort** in stark light and her sensitivity to Stanley's blunt **brutishness**. It shows us Blanche's fragility, and the fact that the way she fears being visually exposed to the world is directly linked to her fear of being emotionally **exposed**.

“They come together with low, animal moans” - stage direction

- This is an instance where Stanley's association with the **animalistic** stretches into our perception of his relationship with Stella, forcing us to see their relationship as



intuitive, inevitable and obsessive. Especially following from the **domestic abuse** we see earlier in the scene. It also depicts the **primitive** nature of sex and desire.

“There’s so much- so much confusion in the world....Thank you for being so kind! I need kindness now.” - Blanche

- This line is the first time we see Blanche latching on to Mitch as a **vessel of hope**, reaching out for a sense of comfort when she is frightened and feels incredibly vulnerable. This **reliance** on others’ kindness is important to Blanche’s character as it shows how she latches on to small things that allow her to **escape** from her reality. Mitch here is established as **different** from Stanley and the other men. She really trusts him at this point in the play, and trust is something she needs in order to stay sane.

SCENE FOUR

Scene Summary and Analysis:

- The scene opens with a description of Stella, which highlights her **serenity**, a **somewhat jarring transition from the previous scene**. She is laying directly in the sunlight. **There is no obscurity of truth here**, Stella’s calmness is genuine. The description highlights her **pregnancy**, **bringing attention to her connection to Stanley**, **her dependence on him and her determination to make it work between them, despite the violence she endured**. The description of her expression as one of **“somewhat narcotized tranquility”** is **notable as it creates a sense of delusion around her decision to stay with Stanley**.
- Blanche enters the room, looking shaken and sleepless. Her **neurotic** state contrasts heavily with Stella. Blanche **interrogates** Stella on how she could have possibly come back to Stanley, but Stella seems somewhat **irritated**, turning against Blanche and telling her she’s overreacting. She explains that Stanley’s tendency toward aggression, especially when he drinks, is something she is used to. It **“somewhat thrills her”**. **This enhances the primal depiction of their sexual relationship in the previous scene, and highlights the toxicity in their relationship. The fact that Stanley’s violence is so easily accepted brings forth the problematic nature of idealizing toxic masculinity**. In some ways, the two sisters’ roles are **inverted** here. **Despite her neurotic appearance, Blanche, who has had bad experiences with men in the past, takes on the practical, logical role, and Stella is deluded by her love for Stanley**.
- Despite Stella’s attitude, Blanche continues to be horrified, insisting that they have to get away from the situation. She insists that they need to get hold of some money, and mentions **Shep Huntleigh**, an old suitor of hers who has become rich through



the oil business, in hopes that he may be able to help them. In discussing money, Blanche refers to herself as “**indifferent to it**”, claiming she only cares for money “**in terms of what it does for you**”. **This is an interesting comment in light of Blanche’s dependence on social status. She only thinks of putting on the illusion of wealth. Coming from a privileged background, she doesn’t realise the extent to which money is necessary for the way she chooses to present herself to the world.**

- In a panic, she begins drafting a message for Shep. As she’s doing this, Stella continues to laugh her off and Blanche **admits** to Stella that she’s broke. Stella insists on **splitting** the ten dollars Stanley gave her that morning with Blanche, **another signal of Stella’s kindness and genuine care for her sister**. Blanche refuses to take it, continuing to **worry** about how she’s going to find enough money to get them away from Stanley, but Stella tells her she wishes she would **drop** it. Blanche tells her that she feels unsafe living with him. Stella tells her she has seen him at his worst, but Blanche **insists** that she saw him at his very peak. The peak of his “**animal force**”, which she sees as all a man like Stanley has to offer.
- While Stella **insists** that she doesn’t want to get out, Blanche’s attention turns away from Stanley’s violence. She reminisces their upbringing and differences in **social status**, unable to understand how someone who grew up in their beautiful bourgeois lifestyle could live in this poverty stricken context with such an ungentlemanly, **brutish man**. She says that she understands how Stella may have been attracted to him, having met him as a soldier. **This points to the idealisation of military masculinity and patriotism.**
- Stella explains that her sexual relationship with Stanley drowns out everything else, and the conversation turns to the **theme of desire**. **It becomes apparent that the extent to which Stanley’s violence ties into his sexual physicality makes it alluring to Stella**. Blanche refers to this as “brutal desire”, an **epithet for the way the play ties danger to sexuality**. **The allegory of the streetcar comes back up, with Blanche claiming that that’s what brought her to this place, where she is ashamed to be**. Again, this allegory gives away a little bit about Blanche’s complicated past with her sexuality.
- After this **allegory** of desire as a streetcar both sisters have ridden on before, Stella tells Blanche she’s being **patronising**, and if she understands these feelings she shouldn’t act above them. Blanche continues to tell her she cannot pursue a future with Stanley, but Stella says she loves him.
- A train roars past, coinciding with Stanley’s entrance. **This association between Stanley and the train can allegorise a few things, including the thrusting approach of a masculine presence and Stanley’s association with modernity**. It also acts **functionally** so that Stanley goes **unheard**, being able to listen in on the rest of the conversation.
- Blanche turns the conversation back to associating Stanley’s **violence** with his **social class**, calling him “**common**” and eventually “**bestial**”. She then goes into a



monologue which focuses on closely associating Stanley with an **ape** and an **animal**. This is a **lexical field we are accustomed to in relation to Stanley** at this point, but he isn't aware of. **There's an interesting engagement with the idea of progression. While we have become used to associating Stanley with modernity, Blanche clearly sees his primalism as being stuck in the past.**

- As another train passes, Stanley pretends to have just arrived. Him and Stella embrace passionately, and **he grins at Blanche over her shoulder. This is a menacing look to the audience, who knows what he just heard.**

Key Quotes:

“I was sort of- thrilled by it”- Stella

- This line is key in tying together Stanley's violence with his **sexuality**. Both are intrinsic to his animalistic **masculinity**. It therefore shows us the extent to which Stella is blinded by her desire for Stanley due to the strong masculine force he represents. It ties in thematically to the idea of the **danger of desire**.

“What you are talking about is brutal desire- just- Desire!- the name of that rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another....” - Blanche

- Bringing back the **allegory** of the streetcar and tying it to Stella's situation broadens the theme of desire and danger, showing us its **universality** amongst the female characters.

“In this dark march towards whatever it is we're approaching...don't- don't hang back with the brutes” - Blanche

- This picture of **progression** painted by Blanche, wherein Stanley represents **“hanging back”**, is **ironic** due to the context the play is set in as well as the wider ties between Stanley and modernity. It illustrates Blanche's **illusion**, as she is still attached to the values she was brought up in, and sees them as modern despite the fall of the **Old South**.

SCENE FIVE

Scene Summary and Analysis:

- The scene opens with Blanche fanning herself with a palm leaf. This is a humorously luxurious prop. She is seen laughing to herself as she writes a letter to Shep Huntleigh. Stella asks her what she's laughing at and Blanche explains she's



laughing at herself “for being such a liar”. This line utilises some dramatic irony due to our awareness of Blanche’s bigger lies and illusions. She reads out her letter to Shep, which is filled with the same over the top sensationalization of her life as many of her regular stories and references to her wealth.

- The conversation is interrupted by Eunice and Steve fighting over his alleged infidelity upstairs. The situation escalates until the sisters hear Eunice shouting that Steve hit her, along with a **chaotic** burst of violent noises. Blanche is terrified that he killed her. **This raw depiction of domestic violence so closely following the incident at the poker night implies the normalisation of aggression from men in this context. This depicts the extent to which it’s out in the open. This is something which leaves Blanche feeling disturbed, as she is accustomed to living through a facade.**
- Eunice runs out into the street, saying she’s going to call the police. Stanley returns from bowling, and when he asks what happened to Eunice Stella tells him she just had “a row” with Steve. This highlights how she is **living under the delusion that this kind of violence should be tolerated**. Stanley lets her know Eunice didn’t call the police, she’s just getting a drink, and Stella laughs that this is “**much more practical**”. **This reminds us of how many characters seek refuge in alcohol, but it also illustrates that the situation will ultimately get blown off, just like the poker night incident did.** Stanley and Stella are not a singular case. Steve goes after Eunice.
- Blanche makes light conversation with Stanley. She is clearly in a relatively good mood, but still winces at the **aggression** in each of his actions as he settles back into the home environment. She starts to ask him about his astrological sign, wondering if it’ll explain his brutishness, but he’s relatively **dismissive** of her. He mocks her when she tells him her own sign is associated with virginity.
- Stanley changes the conversation, asking Blanche if she knows somebody named Shaw and causing her to be visibly shocked. She tries to **dodge** the question in her usual airy manner, but, always **confrontational**, Stanley tells her he knows a Shaw who is convinced he knows her from the Hotel Flamingo in Laurel. Blanche is clearly **uncomfortable** at this delve into her past. The two have a tense conversation, as they both try to manipulate each other. Blanche tries to brush him off, but she is clearly filled with fear, her hands trembling. **Tension is high and escalating at this point in the play, as Blanche’s lies are slowly unraveling.**
- Steve and Eunice come back down the street in a loving embrace, **mirroring** the image of Stella and Stanley making up after the poker night a few scenes before. Stanley leaves.
- Blanche rises in a **nervous panic**, asking Stella what she’s heard about her. She demands to know if there’s been gossip going around about her, but Stella seems confused and assures her there isn’t. Blanche **admits** that the last few years, since she started losing Belle Reve, she acted badly. Stella seems confused again, and



tries to reassure her that everyone does things they aren't proud of, but Blanche interrupts her with a speech which reveals the extent to which she is burdened by **guilt and shame** over what happened during this time.

- Time passes. Stella tells Blanche she doesn't listen to her when she is being morbid. She brings Blanche a coke, and Blanche asks for a shot in it. They laugh that Stella doesn't mind waiting on Blanche, because it reminds her of their childhood together. In a sudden burst of **emotion**, Blanche tells Stella how good she is, and **hysterically** promises she won't overstay her welcome. She tries to stay calm, but shrieks when Stella accidentally spills coke on her white skirt. This is **a symbol and metaphor of her terror of impurity, especially within the context of this conversation about her past.**
- Blanche sits down, tries to calm herself, and dismisses her shakiness to nerves about meeting Mitch later. She then goes into **fragmented discourse**, which is usual when she is feeling on edge. She speaks about her relations with Mitch, saying she hasn't given him more than a kiss because she wants his respect. She **opens up** again about her difficult relationship with men and with her sexuality, claiming that Mitch won't want her if he sees her as "easy" or promiscuous, but that she doesn't want him to lose interest either. **This is a frank expression of the anxiety of being a woman with conflicting expectations constantly put on by men.** She worries about her age in relation to this, and tells Stella that Mitch doesn't know her real age. She explains that she feels she needs to deceive Mitch into wanting her. Stella kisses Blanche and **reassures** her. This is **a moment of frank tenderness between the two sisters, who, despite their differences, can both understand the difficulties of being a woman.** Stanley arrives, and Stella goes out to meet him.
- The blue piano plays, and Blanche sits alone in the apartment waiting for Mitch. A young man arrives collecting for the newspaper. He **triggers** her sexuality as well as her **loneliness**, leading Blanche to seduce him by flirting and offering him a drink. She calls him an Arabian prince and kisses him **without consent** before sending him away. The young man also appears **uncomfortable** throughout the debacle. The scene ends with Mitch arriving with flowers that Blanche accepts.

Key Quotes:

BLANCHE: I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft--soft people have got to shimmer and glow--they've got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and put a-- paper lantern over the light.... It isn't enough to be soft. You've got to be soft and attractive. And I--I'm fading now! I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick. [The afternoon has faded to dusk. Stella goes into the bedroom and turns on the light under the paper lantern. She holds a bottled soft drink in her hand.]



- This abstract, poetic speech continuously refers to the ideas of 'hardness' and 'softness', **alluding** thematically to the way Williams has been portraying **gender and sensitivity**. She accuses herself of always being too soft, having to put on an illusion to make "temporary magic" in order to get help from others, due to her lack of **self sufficiency**. She refers to men specifically, who she feels won't see or help you unless they can sexualise you. This explains her subsequent need to "glow" and attract men in order to get help. There are many references to the important **motifs** of light and paper lanterns which paint the picture of the "glow" Blanche is trying to cloak herself in. Finally, she worries that she is "fading now" due to her gradual ageing, suggesting that can't rely on this help from men anymore. This speech shows a **surprising** amount of **clarity** and openness from Blanche.

BLANCHE: 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.] Run along now! It would be nice to keep you, but I've got to be good and keep my hands off children! Adios!

- Blanche cannot seem to convalesce from the **obsession** of desire. She rejects the brutal physicality of her sister's relationship, but aches from **loneliness** and guilt, that **manifests** in inappropriate ways. The above instance is the first time the audience sees Blanche's past come to life. Her obsession for young men is a **visual stimulus** for the audience now and not just auditory. Being surrounded by happy couples leaves her to approach the first person she sees to find some comfort.

SCENE SIX

Scene Summary and Analysis:

- Blanche and Mitch return from a date at the carnival. Blanche is visibly exhausted from the evening out, Mitch seeming **dejected** as he believes Blanche did not have a good time. Blanche blames herself for the evening, putting him at ease. **Blanche is physically exhausted which reflects her mental state as well, as keeping up the facade is taking a toll on her.**
- Mitch requests Blanche for a kiss. Blanche asks him why he does not go ahead and kiss her without asking. This pushes Mitch to reveal that the last time he tried kissing her she pushed him away. Blanche tells Mitch that it was not the kiss but the "familiarity" she objected to as a girl must be cautious from getting "lost" on the first date. Mitch marvels at not knowing anyone like Blanche. **Blanche's deception is at work here, she is trying to portray herself as a "virgin" because she believes that is what is expected of her.**
- Blanche then invites him in for a drink, they proceed to flirt and Mitch shows off his physique that impresses Blanche as he lifts her. **This is a light moment in the play,**



an immature moment that is **comical**, a shift away from the darkness that is increasingly seeping into the play. She also speaks to him in French and pretends to be in France. **Blanche's fantasy and delusion makes an appearance here as well, the dull evening brightens when she takes Mitch into her fantastical world.**

- Blanche asks Mitch if Stanley has said anything to him about Blanche, claiming that Stanley hates her and her difficulties in living with her sister. **Blanche is anxious that her past will catch up to her and ruin the hope she has in her life with Mitch.** Mitch asks about Blanche's age but she maneuvers around it.
- They talk about Mitch's mother who is terminally ill, this leads to Mitch tearing up but controlling his emotions. **Mitch is a sensitive man, unlike the other men in the play. Williams frequently depicts this using Mitch's love and caring for his aged mother.**
- Blanche then speaks about Allan Grey, her husband who died by **suicide**. She reveals that they married young and she loved him dearly but felt like she was lacking in some way. She then describes when she walked in on him having **sex** with an **older man**. They pretended it didn't happen, carrying on with the night and going dancing. However, when they were dancing, Blanche expressed her **disgust** in Allan which led him to shoot himself in the head shortly after. **This part in the play is vital because the audience finds out the morose episode that affected Blanche so deeply, changing the course of her life. Blanche's guilt and loneliness after Allan's death was the catalyst to her downward spiral.**
- She begins to hear the Polka music again and sobs as Mitch holds her, telling her that they both need someone, suggesting that they could be there for each other. **The Polka music finally has an explicit context and reflects the horrible incident that broke the once innocent Blanche.**
- Mitch's comfort and touch aid in having the Polka fade away. **Blanche also recognizes this with the audience who now realize that Mitch is her hope for redemption.**

Key Quotes:

BLANCHE: But honey, you know as well as I do that a single girl, a girl alone in the world, has got to keep a firm hold on her emotions or she'll be lost

- Blanche is painting her picture of **innocence** and caution. Her **facade** is important to her because of the "old-fashioned" ideals she was raised with.

BLANCHE: I guess it is just that I have – old-fashioned ideals! [She rolls her eyes, knowing he cannot see her face].



- Her rolling her eyes is important because it shows that she **doesn't** believe in them and is tired of depicting them. Blanche carries **virility** in her true self. She asks to play poker, approaching the young man being outspoken and bold, something attributed to masculine energy. It is this energy that **unnerves** Stanley.

BLANCHE: He hates me. Or why would he insult me? Of course there is such a thing as hostility of – perhaps in some perverse kind of way he – No! To think of it makes me...[She makes a gesture of revulsion. Then finishes her drink. A pause follows.]

- Blanche here insists that Stanley feels a strong emotion towards her. She calls it hate but also considers...what? Something **perverse**? This reflects her considering that Stanley is attracted to her but she is also **repulsed** by it.

When I was sixteen, I made the discovery—love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned on a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that's how it struck the world for me.

- Blanche compares her love for Allan as a **“blinding light”**, something that **unpleasantly** strikes one's eyes leaving them unable to see for a moment. This **metaphor** is important because the blinding light held her back from seeing Allan's sexuality.

SCENE SEVEN

Scene Summary and Analysis:

- It's the afternoon of Blanche's **birthday**. Blanche is **bathing** while Stella is decorating. Stanley comes in and mocks Blanche's incessant bathing. Stella explains to him that they were raised differently, which Stanley dismisses as he asks Stella to sit down as he has news about Blanche.
- Blanche appears to be at peace, singing childishly in happiness in the bathroom. Williams uses **dramatic irony**, as in the other room, Stanley is divulging to Stella the morose details of Blanche's life and exile from Laurel. **There is a juxtaposition of the atmosphere here, Blanche sings “It's only a paper-moon”, which is a romantic song, while Stanley reveals her worst secrets.**
- Stanley's information comes from Shaw, a man who travels to Laurel often, and Stanley believes that everything he has heard is the truth. In particular, he recounts Blanche's relationship with a young boy, along with her deeds at the Flamingo Hotel, where she was asked to leave due to an array of relationships.
- Stanley makes it very clear that Blanche moved to Elysian Fields because she has lost her job, respect, reputation and life. She has nothing left, **which translates to his victory over her alleged superior status, rendering it empty and hypocritical.**



- Stella is **upset** by this and tells Stanley not to believe the rumours. However, he insists that they are true because he has multiple sources. **Stella's disbelief about rumours foreshadows her disbelief about the rape later. Stella, like Blanche, is also one to hide from the truth.**
- Stella tells him about Blanche as an innocent girl who was broken by her marriage to a **"degenerate"**, insinuating that she deserves some sympathy. **The contempt society held for the queer is evident by the term "degenerate"**. Stanley just drops the more sordid news saying that they shouldn't expect Mitch to redeem her because Mitch is his **"best friend"**. Stanley has told him everything he knows.
- Stanley drops the last bomb, by stating that he has Blanche's **"birthday present"**, which is a ticket to Laurel. Stanley's actions are proven to be selfish by this gesture, despite his claim that he is told Mitch to protect him. **His present is meant to taunt Blanche. His hatred for her and misogyny is escalating in this scene as he very plainly shows his enjoyment in causing her pain.**
- **The scene ends with Stanley slamming the door to the bathroom, while Blanche claims to be cool and rested. Blanche's bathing is a motif, a symbol of her need to "cleanse" herself from her past. She emerges feeling like a "brand new human"**.
- She notices Stella is upset, but Stella claims that she is fine.

Key Quotes:

Stella: I think Blanche didn't just love him but worshipped the ground he walked on! Adored him and thought him almost too fine to be human! But then she found out . . . This beautiful and talented young man was a degenerate.

- Stella provides context for Blanche's past. While we have heard Blanche's side of the story, we see here that Stella believes that Blanche did not just love Allan Grey but **"worshipped"** him, which tells the audience that Blanche could have been **obsessed** with Allan. This may have been **unhealthy**, which contributed to her meltdown after his death.
- The word "degenerate" portrays the **outlook** of 1940's America on homosexuality, something that does not fit into normalised ideas of sexuality.

Blanche: Yes, I do, so refreshed. [She tinkles her highball glass.] A hot bath and a long, cold drink always give me a new outlook on life!

- Blanche's need to bathe for a **"new outlook"** shows its functionality as a **cleansing ritual**.

STANLEY: That girl calls me common!

- Stanley's **hate** for Blanche is based on this attitude she has towards him.

[BLANCHE is singing in the bathroom a saccharine popular ballad which is used



contrapuntually with STANLEY'S speech]....

- Blanche's singing is present as the truth is revealed. It is ironic on many levels. **Dramatic irony** is used to show that she is unaware of her past being made common knowledge. Furthermore, **situational irony** is used because she sings of love under illusions, while her illusion has now been shattered.
- Below is an example of how **Williams** uses speech and song **contrapuntally** to create irony and meaning.

STELLA: I said, Is Mitch through with her?

[Blanche's voice is lifted again, serenely as a bell. She sings "But it wouldn't be make-believe if you believed in me."]

STANLEY: No, I don't think he's necessarily through with her--just wised up!

- Dramatic irony is used to increase the **tension** here. While Blanche sings about illusion and love, the audience realises that Mitch is no longer under her spell.

Assessment Objectives

AO4 and AO5:

"It is clear that Williams' outcast characters do not suffer because of the acts or situations that make them outcasts – in order words, because they are immoral or evil. They **suffer at the hands of individuals who represent conventional morality** because they [are] **a threat to social orthodoxy [...]** the **conflict between nonconformists and representatives of conventional morality is at the heart of all of Williams' major plays [...]** the violent and ultimately futile struggle [...is] unavoidable"

- Haley, D. E. (1999). "Certain Moral Values": A Rhetoric of Outcasts in the Plays of Tennessee Williams

SCENE EIGHT

Scene Summary and Analysis:

- The scene starts at the dinner table. There is an empty place at the table showing Mitch's **rejection** of Blanche on knowing the truth. Despite this, Blanche tries to look like she is happy while Stella seems embarrassed and Stanley is sullen. **The lighting and time of day is dark as well, adding to the morose mood symbolising hopelessness.**
- Desperate to save the mood, Blanche asks Stanley to tell a joke, but as he refuses, she tells one that flops. **The characters are also projecting negative emotions**



which adds to the **tension** and sadness. Mitch's absence and silence is also very evident **visually and aurally**.

- The situation worsens as Stella calls Stanley a “pig” and tells him to help her clear the table. Enlarged Stanley hurls his plate and other cutlery to the floor, reminding them that he is the “king” in the household. **Stanley reinforces his male dominance here, enraged that he has to do chores and is being criticised.**
- While Stanley stomps off to smoke, he tells Stella that he wants everything to return to what it used to be before Blanche came into their lives. He misses their freedom and privacy. **Stanley's jealousy of Blanche's place in Stella's life is very evident here. We see that he feels insecure with Blanche around as he regards her as a threat to his status as the patriarch.**
- The telephone rings and Stanley rudely tells Blanche it's unlikely to be for her, as he glares at her and speaks to his friend. **The telephone ringing is a dramatic moment as well, increasing the tension as it reminds the audience that Blanche is waiting for Mitch to call back.**
- After the call, he gives Blanche her birthday present - the ticket. Blanche has a coughing fit, despite trying to look happy, and leaves the room. **Blanche is presented with a ticket, which is an openly aggressive gesture of rejection from Stanley and a reminder of her exile from society.**
- Stella asks him about his cruelty but Stanley harshly tells her that he believes that Stella enjoyed him for being common but now doesn't because Blanche has changed everything. **By the end of the scene, the audience can clearly see what motivates Stanley's hate : it is his insecurity. Blanche challenges his way of life and he hates her for it. Hates her enough to be deliberately cruel to her when she is already very vulnerable and at an emotional low.**
- Stella gets distracted and tells him that she needs to go to the hospital.

Key Quotes:

STANLEY: Who do you two think you are? A pair of queens? Remember what Huey Long said – ‘Every Man is a King!’ And I am a king around here, so don't forget it!

- Stanley's aggression and stance as the **male dominant patriarch** is very evident as he quotes politician Huey Long and reinforces his status as the “king” of their household. With **rhetorical** and **sarcastic** questions, he mocks them as he shouts.

STANLEY: I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don't ever call me a Polack

- Stanley's **insecurity** on being called a “Polack” is evident. In the third scene of the



play, Eunice also calls him a “Polack” when he is drunk and disorderly. “Polack” is a **racial** slur associated with crudeness. Stanley is angered when he is reminded that he is of recent **immigrant** descent. He reinforces that he was born and raised in America, dismissing his Polish origin.

STELLA: ...You didn't know Blanche as a girl. Nobody, nobody was tender and trusting as she was. But people like you abused her, and forced her to change. Be.

- Stella gives us an **insight** into the **innocent and naive** Blanche that we never see, the girl who fell in love with Allan Grey and believed everything she was raised to believe in. Stella's words help us understand Blanche as a **victim** of the patriarchal society and its norms.

STANLEY: Ticket! Back to Laurel! On the Greyhound! Tuesday! [The 'Varsouviana' music steals in softly and continues playing].

- Stanley's cruelty speaks volumes of his intentions, while he wants Blanche out of their lives, he knows Laurel is not an option. This gesture is solely to hurt Blanche and cause her pain. This is his **revenge** for her hypocrisy.

SCENE NINE

Scene Summary and Analysis:

- It is later in the evening, where we see that Blanche has been drinking and the polka can be heard in the background. As Mitch enters, it stops. **The polka reflects Blanche's mental state or distress and chaos. It stops when Mitch enters, representing her only sense of hope in the harsh reality outside her mind.** Mitch also has been drinking and is in his work attire looking shabby. He treats Blanche with coldness and rejects the drink she offers him.
- Blanche hears the Polka again, and it ends with the gunshot. **On cue, an alleviation for stress levels in Blanche results in the Polka being heard.** When she insists that Mitch have a drink, he rudely informs her that he wants none and that Stanley has informed him that she has been drinking all of Stanley's alcohol all summer. Blanche **ignores** the comment.
- Mitch then presses further and asks to turn the light on, to which Blanche reacts in fear. Mitch goes on to tell her that he knew she was older than she let on. All her lies over the summer about her virtue, ideals and chastity have left him feeling betrayed. He tells her that while he heard them from Stanley, he cross-checked them from different sources and tried his best to disprove them. **Here, we see the other side of the coin. Mitch is visibly broken about Blanche's past, as he feels betrayed that she lied more than anything else. He clearly tried very hard to disprove the**



entire rumour, checking with many sources. The opposite of Stanley's intentions.

- Cornered, Blanche tells him the truth about her affairs as a result of her helplessness. Mitch reinforces that it is her lies that have him feeling betrayed, to which Blanche responds “**Never inside, I didn't lie in my heart...**”. **Blanche's mendacity stems from her emotional immaturity and trauma. It is not malicious in nature. She tries to project what life should be like, filled with magic, juxtaposed to her harsh and cruel reality.**
- The scene is interrotted by a Mexican Vendor selling flowers for the dead. This triggers Blanche, who regresses into her past and all the death and **morbidity**. This feeling surrounded her in Laurel as relatives died and passing soldiers gave her relief from it. **Blanche suffers from a terrible loneliness and has so for years together since Allen's death. Surrounded by death and decreasing wealth, Blanche looked for companionship desperately and unhealthily—as depicted by the incidents from Laurel. The theme of death is made visual and explicit in the scene, as it foreshadows Blanche's past and impending doom.**
- Mitch however, approaches her trying to embrace her wanting what he “missed out” on all summer. But Blanche asks him to marry her, to which he says she isn't “clean” enough to take home to his mother. **Mitch, who till now was the “decent” man, shows his misogynistic and sexist notions in this scene. He clearly believes he is entitled to sex, because Blanche has slept with other men. Additionally, while he looks to have sex outside of marriage wth Blanche, her indulgence taints her making her “dirty” while it does not affect him, as he is a man.**
- Blanche then asks him to leave and when he hesitates to leave, clearly contemplating forcing himself on her, she starts to scream, forcing him to leave immediately. **Mitch's hestiantion to leave is also critical as it shows his thoughts on forcing himself on Blanche. However he is unable to do it, leaving Stanley to finish what he started in the next scene. Mitch's entitled behaviour forshadows Stanley raping her.**

Key Quotes:

A while later, **BLANCHE** is seated in a tense hunched position [...] the rapid, feverish polka tune, the ‘Varsouviana’, is heard. The music is in her mind; she is drinking to escape it and the sense of disaster closing in on her...

- Blanche is in a hunched position, showing her **distress** and insecurity in the day's events. The Polka plays to reflect the same. It stops when Mitch shows up, as he is a symbol of **hope**.

BLANCHE: Something's the matter tonight, but never mind. I won't cross examine the witness. I'll just – [she touches her forehead vaguely. The polka tune starts up again.] – pretend I don't notice anything different about you! That – music again..



- Blanche is so removed from her reality, that she tries to ignore the anger and coldness **emitting** from Mitch, wanting to “**pretend**” everything is alright, but the polka starts up showing the audience that she is becoming increasingly **anxious**.

[He tears the paper lantern off the light-bulb. She utters a frightened gasp].

BLANCHE: I don't want realism.

MITCH: Naw, I guess not.

BLANCHE: I'll tell you what I want. Magic!

- Mitch **violently** tearing the lantern of the light, is a **symbol** of him throwing off the illusions she trapped him in. The **truth** is now exposed and the **light** represents this.
- Blanche, however, insists that she wants magic and not the morbid reality that is her life.

BLANCHE: Yes, a big spider! That's where I brought my victims...Yes I had many intimacies with strangers. After the death of Allan – intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with...I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection... *

- Williams uses the **metaphor** of a spider trapping “**victims**” in Blanche's words about herself. The words “**panic**” and “**hunting**” also are very **negative** words that show us that Blanche is **ashamed** of her behaviour while she knows it comes from her **helplessness**.

MITCH: You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother.”

- As established by Blanche's need to **cleanse** herself of her sins by increased bathing, her actions are reinforced as **dirty** by Mitch.

SCENE TEN

Scene Summary and Analysis:

- It is the same night. Time has passed since Mitch has left and Blanche is **inebriated**, having been drinking since he left, dressed in a “**crumpled and soiled**” white, satin, evening gown. She talks to herself and pretends to be surrounded by admirers, and breaks her mirror amidst her **fantasy**. The gown could be read as a **symbol of her purity and chastity being soiled or even a reflection of her mental state**. The shattered mirror can also be a reflection of her **broken spirit and sanity**.
- Stanley comes home stating the baby is due in the morning and has been sent him home to get rest. He inquires about her dress and Blanche states that a millionaire admirer of hers called when he was away, inviting her on a vacation. **Blanche has clearly reverted back to her coping mechanism of building illusions to repair her broken self-esteem**.



- Stanley plays along, as he takes out his wedding pyjamas, made of silk, something he wears on special occasions, wanting to wear them when he is told his son has arrived.
- They continue to discuss the millionaire admirer who has told Blanche she has **"beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart. I have all those things—aren't taken away, but grow! Increase with the years!.** Blanche is visibly upset and trying to **stifle** her **grief**, as she talks about considering herself rich. She sees herself **"casting her pearls in front of swine"**. Blanche is also trying to **convince** herself that her **ageing** is beneficial to her.
- Blanche goes on to **fabricate** her illusion, stating that Mitch begged for her forgiveness after she rejected him for repeating the slander. She insists that the only unforgivable sin is **"deliberate cruelty"**—something she is not guilty of. **Even in these moments, we see Blanche is linked to her cruelty towards Allan that drove him to kill himself. This is something she sees as unintentional cruelty. She juxtaposes her cruelty from that on Stanley and Mitch.**
- An angered Stanley then proceeds to advance on her, **verbally shattering** all her illusions one by one, Blanche breaks down in tears and tries to call Shep for help sensing the threat. **Stanley is triggered when she calls him "swine", something we have seen previously. He detests her associations of him with animal imagery. His verbal destruction of Blanche also foreshadows his physical destruction of her.**
- She never succeeds, as Stanley emerges from the ensuite bathroom, physically and verbally **intimidating** her as she pleads with him to stay back.
- In desperation, she smashes a bottle and threatens him, which proceeds to instigate him to give her the **"roughhouse"** that she wants. **The idea of the bottle smashing and pouring out its content is layered imagery in meaning-making. A woman's last hope for defense is a phallic object while Stanley uses his sex, the phallus, as the last weapon of offense. The imagery is also sexual in nature, foreshadowing the rape and ejaculation that follows but is unseen.**
- He wrestles the bottle out of her hands stating **"We've had this date with each other from the beginning"**. **Stanley's words suggest that he has always been attracted to her physically, despite his hatred, and her flirting with him also triggered this final act.**
- The rape can be seen as the final **victory** of the New South and American Dream over the Old South and its traditional ideals. Stanley, with his new son coming home, will continue his **legacy** versus Blanche, who is drowning in her **misery**.
- Blanche loses the man that she hoped would save her and is forcefully taken by the man that she despises. The **stage directions** play a very important role in establishing the **violence** of the scene with **"Lurid reflections appear on the**



walls around Blanche”; “The shadows are of a grotesque and menacing form”; and “inhuman jungle noises rise up”. The rape is defined as **primitive** and animalistic through stage directions.

Key Quotes:

[Blanche] has **decked** herself out in a somewhat soiled and crumpled white satin evening gown and a pair of scuffed silver slippers with brilliants set in their heels. [Now she is placing the **rhinestone tiara** on her head before the mirror of the dressing-table and murmuring **excitedly** as if to a group of spectral admirers].

- Blanche is seeking comfort from her harsh reality in fantasy and alcohol.

[The bottle cap **pops** off and a geyser of **foam shoots** up. STANLEY laughs happily...]

- Apparent sexual imagery **foreshadowing** the end.

STANLEY: There isn't a goddam thing but imagination!

BLANCHE: Oh!

STANLEY: And lies and conceit and tricks!

BLANCHE: Oh!

STANLEY: And look at yourself! Take a look at yourself in that wornout Mardi Gras outfit, rented for fifty cents from some ragpicker! And with the crazy crown on! What queen do you think you are?

BLANCHE: Oh--God...

STANLEY: I've been on to you from the start! Not once did you pull any wool over this boy's eyes! You come in here and sprinkle the place with powder and spray perfume and cover the light bulb with a paper lantern, and lo and behold the place has turned into Egypt and you are the Queen of the Nile! Sitting on your throne and swilling down my liquor! I say--Ha!--Ha! Do you hear me? Ha-- ha--ha!

- The mental destruction of Blanche begins with this **verbal assault** which **foreshadows** the **physical** one.

The bathroom door is thrown open and Stanley comes out in the brilliant silk pyjamas. He **grins at her** as he knots the tasseled sash about his waist....**he stares at her again**, his mouth **slowly curving into a grin**, as he **weaves** between Blanche and the outer door...[The "blue piano" goes softly. She turns confusedly and makes a faint gesture. The inhuman jungle voices rise up. He takes a step toward her, **biting** his tongue which **protrudes** between his lips.]

- Using the stage directions, Williams makes very clear that Stanley is meant to be **menacing** and **predator** like before he yells “**Tiger! Tiger!**”, raping Blanche. The highlighted words show this.

STANLEY [softly]: Come to think of it--maybe you wouldn't be bad to--interfere with.... [Blanche moves backward through the door into the bedroom.]

- Stanley makes his **intentions** very clear by **verbalizing** them before Blanche retreats to the bedroom and snatches the bottle for defence.



SCENE ELEVEN

Scene Summary and Analysis:

- Several weeks have passed since the last scene. Stella is upset, while Mitch seems to be heartbroken as the men play poker. **The atmosphere is tense**, and Eunice reinforces that she always felt men are **callous** in nature.
- Stella seems **hesitant** as she tells Eunice that she can't believe Blanche's story about the rape and continue to live with Stanley. Eunice **gives her practical advice** and firmly tells her to disbelieve the story in order to continue with life because life has to go on no matter what happens. **Stella here is also deceiving herself and creating an illusion, like Blanche, under which she will live.**
- Blanche is seen after a shower, while the **Polka** plays in the background. she seems to be cheerful and lost in her thoughts. **It is evident that after the rape, Blanche has completely given up on her reality as she seems sensitive and delirious throughout the scene.**
- Mitch is really **distressed** by Blanche's mental instability, and Stanley loudly tries to snap Mitch back to the game which scares Blanche. **Mitch seems like he is broken and regrets the role he has played in Blanche's helplessness. He is seen dejected and in tears.**
- **Frightened** Blanche inquires into what is happening but the women tell her that everything is fine and **distract** her telling her that she is going on a vacation. This triggers Blanche to **fantasize** about going away to live and die by the sea.
- The doctor and nurse arrive. Blanche thinks it is Shep. However, she retreats hastily insisting she has forgotten something when she sees them. The polka sound and **animal** noises are back as Blanche tries to avoid being captured by the nurse. Eunice **comforts** Stella as she cannot watch her sister go through the harsh treatment.
- Mitch is furious with Stanley and tries to beat him, as he blames Blanche's plight on Stanley's interference in the issue. He is however strained and insulted by Stanley who dismisses him rudely. **Mitch uncharacteristically gets physical, something Stanley, "the Alpha", is usually seen doing. However, this challenge comes to a quick end as Stanley reassumes his Alpha status by mocking Mitch for being a cry-baby.**
- As Mitch breaks down and sobs, the nurse manages to hold Blanche down. The doctor enters and asks the nurse to let go of Blanche. She is led out by the doctor as she says **"Whoever you are I have always depended on the kindness of strangers"**. **There is a bitter irony in these words, as the play has shown us. Despite Blanche relying on strangers, like Stanley and Mitch, for kindness,**



everyone has left her more **broken** and abused than before. A profound sadness echoes in her famous last words.

- Stella is left sobbing and shouting for her sister. **Blanche pays no mind to Stella as she hears Stella scream "What have I done to my sister?"**. Stella is aware of her **betrayal** and so is Blanche despite her instability. Eunice gives Stella her baby, a **symbol of her future with Stanley**, who is fondling her as he comforts her. Stanley is **deceptive** and a hypocrite. He is the source of all the pain in the last scene, yet he is seen trying to “comfort” in the only way he knows how to—sexually.
- Steve deals a new hand, and the game resumes. **The Old South has lost, and is almost immediately forgotten as life resumes.**

Key Quotes:

STELLA: I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley.

EUNICE: Don't ever believe it. Life got to go...

- Stella is choosing to live under this **illusion** that Eunice supports, as it is the most practical decision. She has given birth to Stanley's baby, there is no **easier option** for the single new-mother in this 1940s New America.

And I'll be buried at sea sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard—at noon—in the blaze of summer—and into an ocean as blue as my first lover's eyes!

- Blanche speaks about her death, the white to **symbolize** her purity, and she remembers Allen even at the very end. His **presence** is always felt by Blanche.

[Blanche] rushes past him into the bedroom. Lurid reflections appear on the wall in odd, sinuous shapes. The 'Varsouviana' is filtered into weird distortion, accompanied by the cries and noises of the jungle. Blanche seizes the back of a chair as if to defend herself.

- Even at the end, Blanche is **haunted** by the Polka and, of course, the **primitive** trauma she underwent at the hands of Stanley. They have all **amalgamated** in her mind to create the current state of **instability** and **chaos**. This is reflected by the accompanying music.

