

Edexcel English Literature A-level

A Streetcar Named Desire: Character Profiles
Harold 'Mitch' Mitchell

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Harold 'Mitch' Mitchell

THE BETA MALE

INTRODUCTION

Mitch is Blanche's **main romantic interest**. He is Stanley's **colleague** and poker-playing **friend**. While Mitch is initially introduced to us with Stanley under the same working-class light; he stands out from the rest, portrayed as a sensitive gentleman, as the play progresses.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Working-class man**

Mitch is introduced to us by Stanley “**they are about twenty-eight or thirty years old, roughly dressed in blue denim work clothes**” which tells the audience that he, like Stanley, is a working-class man. His **register** suggests that he is a **working-class** as well. Mitch is characterised mainly through dialogue—either his self-disparaging comments or other’s opinions about him.



Karl Malden as Mitch in the 1951 film adaptation

Image source:

<https://www.imdb.com/list/ls029726856/mediaviewer/rm2399434752/>

- **Gentle and sensitive**

Mitch is **well-mannered** and **gentlemanly**, unlike his friends, something Blanche notices immediately as she states “**That one seems-superior to the others.**”

Mitch repeatedly speaks of his sick mother and despite being mocked and **made fun of for his sensitivity**, he prioritizes leaving early from games to tend to his sick mother who he loves very much. He also treats Blanche with **respect** and is **sympathetic** towards her when she tells him about Allan, realizing that they are both lonely.

He is also aware that his friends and he are ‘being a pretty rough bunch.’ juxtaposed to what he assumes Blanche is used to.

- **Beta male**

Mitch is the **antithesis** of Stanley. When he first meets Blanche he says “**How do you do?**” juxtaposed to the strong, sexual, objectifying, male gaze Stanley sizes her up with. While Mitch is **masculine** in nature as well as **physically strong**, he is sensitive and this sensitivity is what Stanley uses to **dominate** him as the “Alpha”. Even at the end, we



see Mitch is a broken man when he is **mourning Blanche's treatment**, his **anger** appears as he lunges at Stanley with a challenge to, he is **thwarted** by Stanley as usual after which Mitch reverts to his sobbing state.

While Mitch is showcasing Alpha tendencies in physically challenging Stanley, it is still from his **deep-rooted sorrow** and sensitivity. Williams suggests in Scene 3, that Stanley begins to think about Blanche sexually after he notices Mitch's interest in her— as it makes him violent and verbally and physically abusive.

Assessment Objectives

AO4 and AO5:

According to Judith J. Thompson 'From the beginning of their relationship, Blanche attempts to elevate Mitch to the romanticized status of the idealised Allan Grey' She continues 'As Allan's analogue, Mitch shares his "softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's".

RELATIONSHIPS

Stanley

Mitch and Stanley are colleagues, bowling team players and friends who **play poker** together frequently. Mitch and Stanley get on well and are shown to be close friends. Stanley even calls him his **"best friend"** when he defends telling Mitch the truth about Blanche. However, whether Stanley cares for Mitch can be contested. He doesn't treat him well and is **verbally abusive** towards him on multiple occasions. He also mocks Mitch for taking care of his sick mother—which shows a **lack of care and concern** for Mitch's hardships.

Blanche

"You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be—you and me, Blanche?"

Scene six

Mitch and Blanche develop a potential relationship based on their common **loneliness** and **past sorrows**. Mitch seems to like Blanche more than she does, he is **shy and awkward** and Blanche keeps their conversations going. He seems to be **inexperienced** with women and is very **self-conscious** as well. His inexperience and **vulnerability** make it easier for Blanche to **manipulate** him.



When Stella asks Blanche if she wants Mitch, Blanche replies **“I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again! Yes—I want Mitch... very badly! Just think! If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone’s problem...”**

For Blanche, the idea of Mitch as an **escape** from her problems seems more appealing than him as an individual.

The relationship between Blanche and Mitch is ruined when Stanley exposes Blanches’ life. However, the larger evil here is the **social biases and pressures** placed on them. Mitch cannot marry her anymore because she is not “pure”; while Blanche has to cover her past from him as it is unacceptable in their society for women to engage in casual sex. Even at the end, Mitch seems to have deep regret and sorrow as he sobs at the harsh treatment Blanche receives and will endure.

SYMBOLISM

Beta Male

Williams presents us with Mitch **parallel** to Stanley, as **foil**, right from the start of the play. They are contrasting as characters as **discussed**, but there is more to Mitch. Williams uses Mitch to create the **non-hegemonic, beta-male** who is masculine with a touch of **sensitivity** and gentleness which are generally perceived as **feminine qualities**. This is, however, shattered briefly when Mitch shows his machismo, **entitlement** and sexism. When Stanley reveals to Mitch Blanche’s unbecoming past, Mitch **turns cruel**. He almost forces himself on Blanche demanding “what he missed out on”— assuming he is entitled to the sex she has had with other men. In his eyes, Blanche is now **“dirty”**, **“you’re not clean enough to bring in a house with my mother”** he states showcasing his **underlying misogyny**. Williams uses this moment to shatter the hope that he built with the presence of Mitch who represents “the decent man”. The **fall** of Mitch represents the depth of **toxic masculinity** and sexism in society that infiltrates even into the gentle souls. Mitch doesn’t mean to be cruel, he is drunk and heartbroken at this point, it is in his worst moment that his true colours are revealed. After this, we see him **subdued** and sorrowful showing **resentment towards Stanley** for everything that has happened.

Assessment Objectives

AO4 and AO5:

George-Claude Guilbert: ‘His (Mitch’s) boyish fragility, clearly is opposed to Stanley’s brutish strength’. Mitch throughout the play speaks about his appearances, clothes, and physiology which is not typical masculinity for the social context of the play. Hence, Mitch is like Allan in the sense that he harbours a sense of femininity.



Note:

Use the writer's name (Williams/ Tennessee Williams) in your answers to show that you are commenting on his use of devices. (A01 and A02)

Hope

'Blanche waltzes to the music with romantic gestures. Mitch is delighted and moves in awkward imitation like a dancing bear', the **clumsy**, polite, shy and gentle Mitch is as **endearing** to the audience as he is to Blanche. Mitch functions as the **last hope for absolution** for Blanche.

"I like you to be exactly the way you are, because in all my – experience – I have never known anyone like you" he states, ironically though he wants her to be herself, Blanche in within her desperation to keep a man who finally loves her lies to him to create an image of herself that she thinks is ideal. Mitch is a sensitive and respectful man, much like the **Allan** she loved. Blanche is tired of all the guilt she carries and sees Mitch as her **beacon** for hope.

"I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again! Yes – I want Mitch ... very badly! Just think! If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone's problem"

However, this potential happy ending is shattered when Stanley reveals the truth about her sexual past to Mitch.

Assessment Objectives**AO4 and AO5:**

George-Claude Guilbert: "...she is looking for Allan in herself, but she is also looking for Allan in others" something that Nancy C. Page agrees with in "A Self-psychology Analysis of Tennessee William's A Streetcar Named Desire"; she says 'Mitch, however, at least in the beginning, does offer Blanche a source of mirroring'.



Paper Lantern

In scene 9, Mitch rips the paper-lantern off the light bulb, this crude action is **uncharacteristic** of him and **unnerving**. Blanche lets out a frightened gasp and when he turns on the light, she cries out. These actions are **aggressive** symbolic of him **emerging out of the darkness** he was in about her real-self. He also proceeds to half-heartedly “fumble to embrace her”, showing her his **desire** and **force himself** on her, believing he is **entitled** to it; however, he fails to do it, despite considering it and later that night Stanley succeeds in finishing what Mitch started.

However, it must be noted that despite the way he acts in scene 9, Mitch is truly distressed in Scene eleven which shows that despite everything he genuinely loves and **cares** for Blanche as is **sympathetic** towards her tragic life.

KEY QUOTES

Note:

Textual analysis is imperative to uncover implicit meanings in a text.
Deconstructing important dialogues is vital for characterization.

Scene 3

MITCH [sadly but firmly]: Poker should not be played in a house with women.

- This quote gives the audience **insight** into Mitch's ideas about women. While it does not paint him as misogynistic, it shows him as **sexist**. As he believes that poker is a space where women have no place.

(Scene 6)

MITCH: Can I--uh--kiss you-goodnight?

BLANCHE: Why do you always ask me if you may?

MITCH: I don't know whether you want me to or not.

BLANCHE: Why should you be so doubtful?



MITCH: That night when we parked by the lake and I kissed you, you--

- Mitch here picks up on a previous experience and is **sensitive** towards Blanche, he asks for her consent and permission before he kisses. Mitch shows Blanche the **respect** he believes she deserves as he believes she is “innocent”, something he takes away when he finds out she has sex with other men.

(Scene 6)

“I am ashamed of the way I perspire. My shirt is sticking to me”

“Are you laughing at me?”

“You don't think I am?”

“MITCH [embarrassed]: My weight is not a very interesting subject to talk about [He hesitates for a moment] What's yours?”

- Mitch is a stark contrast to Stanley, he is shy and **insecure** about himself. Easily embarrassed and self-conscious.

(Scene 6)

“I talked to my mother about you and she said, "How old is Blanche?" And I wasn't able to tell her.”

“She wants me to be settled down before she-- [His voice is hoarse and he clears his throat twice, shuffling nervously around with his hands in and out of his pockets.]”

- Mitch frequently talks about his **mother**, cares and loves her very much. In the quote above, the stage directions clearly show him getting very **emotional** even thinking about her demise.

(Scene 1)

“No--not at my place. My mother's still sick!”

(Scene 3)

“I gotta sick mother. She don't go to sleep until I come in at night”

(Scene 9)

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



(Scene 9)

MITCH: What it means is I've never had a real good look at you, Blanche. Let's turn the light on here.

BLANCHE [fearfully]: Light? Which light? What for?

MITCH: This one with the paper thing on it. [He tears the paper lantern off the light bulb. She utters a frightened gasp.]

BLANCHE: What did you do that for?

MITCH: So I can take a look at you good and plain!

- Scene 9 brings out the worst of Mitch, we see him being **rude and aggressive** towards Blanche— as he feels **betrayed** that she lied to him constantly about everything.

Scene 9

“I called him a liar at first And then I checked on the story. First I asked our supply-man who travels through Laure. And then I talked directly over long-distance to this merchant..”

Three people, Kiefaber, Stanley and Shaw, swore to them!”

- Mitch was very distressed about everything Stanley said, and feels **helpless** as three people have confirmed everything about Blanche he doesn't want to believe. He tried hard to find someone to **disprove** the allegations but has failed at the task. This adds to his **frustration** and **betrayal**.

GLOSSARY

- **Foreshadowing:** A literary technique where a writer drops hints or warnings about what is to come in the plot.
- **Irony:** When an outcome is intentionally contrary to what would ideally be expected.
- **Register:** The degree of formality in speech.
- **Foil:** A character that contrasts the qualities of another character (usually a protagonist), therefore highlighting the qualities of the latter.



REFERENCES

1. Guilbert, Georges-Claude. "Queering And Dequeering The Text Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire." *Cercles*, 10 (2004), pp. 85-116, accessed on the 01.12.2017 <http://www.cercles.com/n10/guilbert.pdf>.
2. Page, Nancy C. "A Self-Psychology Analysis of Tennessee William's A Streetcar Named Desire." *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, Vol.23, No.5, 1997, pp.417-422. Elsevier Science Ltd

