

Edexcel English Literature A-level

A Streetcar Named Desire: Character Profiles

Blanche Dubois

Blanche Dubois THE ANTI-HEROINE

INTRODUCTION

Blanche Dubois is the **anti-hero** in the play. Tennessee Williams characterised her as a woman with a **narcissistic personality disorder** who uses alcoholism as a coping mechanism to forget the guilt she carries from her past.

Blanche Dubois grew up with Stella, her sister, on the family plantation, **Belle Reve**, which she eventually came to own. At the young age of sixteen, Blanche met **Allan Grey**, her first love, who she later insults and **belittles when she sees him having sex with another man**. Shortly after Blanche, his wife at this point angrily lashes at him during a ball, Allan runs outside and dies by shooting himself in the head. This **incident torments Blanche** throughout the rest of her life and turns her into the Blanche we see in the play.

Following the death of Allan Grey, Blanche's life turns for the worse, she spends the last of her youth watching the rest of her family die out and **loses Belle Reve** due to bankruptcy. She also **loses her job** as an English teacher at a local high school for sleeping with a seventeen-year-old student. Blanche **indulges in a string of affairs** with various men after which she finally decides to visit her sister in New Orleans which is her debut in the play.



Vivien Leigh as Blanche in the 1951 film adaptation

Image source:

<https://thevampireswife.com/blogs/stuff/delicate-beauty-must-avoid-strong-light-praise-blanch-e-dubois>

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Southern Belle and Aristocracy:**

Blanche and Stella are both from the **Old South with an aristocratic heritage**, from a lineage of plantation owners. They are both cultured in manner; Blanche in particular never fails to **flaunt her educated and knowledgeable self**, the way she speaks and her literature references further this idea of aristocracy.



Assessment Objectives

AO4 and AO5:

In 'The Mind of the South' W. J. Cash details the perception of the Old South's ideal woman who was 'morally pure and innocent.'— something Blanche struggled with and felt she needed to portray to be accepted.

- **Manipulative and a Pathological Liar:**

Blanche is labelled as **manipulative** as she constantly **bends the truth to fit her stories**, the main characters that are affected by this in the play are Stella and Mitch.

She manipulates Mitch into falling in love with the version of herself she portrays. She openly admits to Stella that she wants to **deceive Mitch into desiring her**. When caught fibbing **she claims "it is a part of womanhood"** and believes that the **lies help her confidence**.

Stella herself is belittled and manipulated by Blanche, **mainly for attention**. We see that Stella is also easily influenced by Blanche, often in the play we see her repeating things she heard about Stanley from Blanche, something she probably would not have said otherwise, like **"pig"** **"drunk animal thing"**.

- **Insecure and Sensitive:**

Blanche is very aware and **insecure about her ageing**. She shies away from bright light and only goes out at night. She also spends a lot of time **fixing her appearance** and frequently **fishes for compliments and attention**.

- **Lonely:**

Blanche is extremely lonely. In the first scene, this is established when Blanche states that **Stella is all she has in the world**. Additionally, she **cries out frightened to Stella that she cannot be on her own** in the first scene.

Even her relationship with Mitch is **built on their mutual loneliness** as Mitch points out while comforting her.

- **Flirtatious and seductive:**

As a result of her insecurity, we see Blanche fish for compliments very often, she also **flirts with Stanley** and asks him to button her dress, when she tries to **win him over**. She is often seen talking about bathing or **bathing**, which implies **images of nudity**.



Furthermore, she is **seen half-dressed** through the gap of the curtains, or changes in the light so that the silhouette of **her body is visible to Mitch**.

Blanche constantly tries to relive her youth—as it was when she was truly happy—and seems to **be stuck in the loop**, she slept with young soldiers and her young student in the past, and we see her kiss the young newspaper boy during the play which links back to **her need to feel young again**.

- **Delusional:**

Blanche is delusional in her flight from reality. She is stuck in her traumatic past with Allan and **constantly hears the Polka and gunshots**. She also states that **she doesn't want realism but wants magic**. She also gets lost in her thoughts often, **speaks to herself** and can hear voices in her head. Even on her date with Mitch, she states that they will pretend to be in France and she starts speaking in French as if she were there. Such instances showcase how **she can switch into her fantasy world with such ease**. Blanche's delusions and **illusions mirror her desires** and fantasies and help her **escape her past**.

RELATIONSHIPS

Stanley

Stanley is Blanche's brother-in-law and a **symbol of crude masculinity**. Characterized as **loud, vulgar, gaudy and straight-forward**, he is the antithesis of everything Blanche outwardly appreciates. To Blanche, Stanley is like **a savage, an uncivilized brute** who uses actions and grunts rather than words.

Stanley feels threatened by Blanche's presence from the start, as she represents a class and society he cannot fully comprehend. The threat becomes even larger when he realizes that Stella is easily influenced by her sister and he hears **Blanche's words from Stella's mouth when they fight**. Stanley's **masculinity is his pride**, and Blanche's influence over what is *his* threatens him. He resents her for living in *his* house, drinking *his* liquor, eating *his* food, fraternizing with *his* friend, and influencing *his* wife—all while belittling him. Stanley raping Blanche can be seen as **his brutal way of finally making her his as well**, it is his only way of overpowering her.

Stanley, who can be seen as the Darwinian "fittest", **suicide to be the Alpha male, when his position is threatened he strikes back, usually physically and violently, to assert dominance**. William portrays Stanley as primitive and instinctually driven using stage directions, sound and descriptions and dialogue.



“He hates me. Or why would he insult me? The first time I laid eyes on him I thought to myself, that man is my executioner! That man will destroy me, unless--” Blanche tells Mitch this about Stanley, **foreshadowing** the tragic climax in the play.

Assessment Objectives

AO4 and AO5:

A **Nietzschean interpretation** of Stanley and Blanche would look at how the **Apollonian Blanche (imagination, reason, purity and order)** and **Dionysian Stanley (pleasure and chaos)** disintegrate when they operate as extremes. Blanche who thrives on propriety gets lost in that illusion while Stanley is driven solely on instincts and is destructive as a result of this.

Stella

Stella is the younger sister of Blanche, who is **easily influenced and manipulated by Blanche**. She **cares very deeply** for Blanche and tries to **protect her** throughout the play: unfortunately, Stella is very submissive and cannot stand against Stanley, despite his recurrent abuse, as **she is dependent on him** and pregnant with his child. Stella, as Blanche claims is all that she has left in the world—and **Stella’s inability to stand up to her husband**, even when she suspects he raped Blanche, **leads to Blanche’s sealing fate**.

Allan

Allan Grey is **Blanche’s young husband who killed himself** when Blanche reacted in disgust after seeing him having homosexual sex. Allan’s presence, **represented as Blanche’s guilt, haunts the play** as she constantly hears the Polka and his killing gunshot whenever she is stressed. It is **his death that changed Blanche** into the woman that she is in the play **juxtaposed to the innocent belle Stella remembers**. Allan’s memory is almost the driving force of the play.

Assessment Objectives

AO4 and AO5:

In his article “The Tragic Downfall of Blanche Du Bois”, Leonard Berkman indicates that Blanche’s mental state is not a result of the trauma of Allan being a “degenerate” as the characters believe, but a result of Blanche’s guilt for causing his suicide.

John M Clum, professor and author of books on gay issues in film and theatre believes that Blanche is a “**camp**” character that represents homosexuality herself and she is the



next best thing to degenerate after she is exposed to the act herself— she is not “straight”, but obsessed with sex with young males.

Harold Mitchell (Mitch)

While Mitch is **amongst the poker players** that frequent the Kowalski residence, from the beginning, he is depicted as more **sensitive and well-mannered**, something Blanche quickly notices as well. Mitch develops through the play as **a chance for Blanche to redeem herself** from her past and start fresh. He is decent and a gentleman, showcasing virtues of **loyalty, kindness, love and honesty**. He **falls for Blanche’s act** and comforts her when she confides in him about Allan. Mitch is at his highest point when he reacts with **sympathy and compassion for Blanche’s trauma— however, this illusion is shattered by Stanley** when he exposes everything Blanche indulged in after Allan’s death. He **fails to understand her when all is revealed** and later we see him at the poker table when she is being led away. He is visibly upset and breaks down as **he blames Stanley** for meddling with his relationship with Blanche. In the end, Mitch is left alone and **lonely, much like Blanche**.

SYMBOLISM

The name Blanche is derived from the french word “**white**”; white is a common symbol of purity and innocence, which is ironic as it far from represents her character in the play. While Dubois means “**of wood**”. Wood associated with means a strong, hard and durable material—again **ironically, Blanche is characterised as fragile and unstable**. Her name, much like her character is **steeped in irony**, she drives the central conflict of the play, her being and what she portrays herself to be are complete opposites.

She describes to Mitch in scene three, “**It’s a French name. It means woods and Blanche means white, so the two together mean white woods**”. Blanche DuBois, however, can also be read as “*white and made of wood*”, which makes it simpler for the audience to detect that she **appears chaste and innocent**, but is **rather unyielding and manipulative regarding her persona and her prospects**, specifically about her pursuit for a husband. Blanche’s entire name is profoundly **symbolic as it mirrors her actual nature**. Blanche’s character is unravelled in the same way as her name is read. At the start, she seems to be pure, harmless and untainted, but eventually, her past indiscretions and the hard truth are uncovered.

Assessment Objectives:

AO1 and AO2

You will reach these objectives by understanding how Williams characterised Blanche with her name and nature using irony and symbolism.

AO5:

Blanche characterised as delusional and sinking into madness at a young age has



been said to be based on Tennessee Williams' sister Rose who was diagnosed with schizophrenia at a young age. Rose Isabel Williams has also been understood as the muse for the fragile character Laura Wingfield in "The Glass Menagerie" by Tennessee Williams.

The Trunk

Blanche's trunk **contains objects from her past and her entire life**, she says "**everything I own is in that trunk**" when asked about it. Despite wanting a fresh start, Blanche is very possessive about the trunk. It can be seen as **a symbol of Blanche's past both the good and bad moments in her life**, containing her clothes, cheap fur, costume jewellery, old love letters and the papers of Belle Reve. A symbol for not only Blanche's pretence and fake artefacts, but also her real lost home and love that haunts her above all else.

Stanley's treatment of her trunk cannot be passed unnoticed, **he treats it with the same violence that he later treats her with**. The words used for his treatment of her trunk throughout the play and its contents are: pulls, hurls, blows, jerks open, shoves, roughly opens, snatches, and kicks. At the start of the play, Stanley ruffles through her trunk, curious about her past and what occurred at Belle Reve; **this foreshadows the blunt and brutal revelation of her past**, when he finds out exactly what led to Blanche landing on their doorstep. When he inquires about said contents, Blanche insists that they are gifts from her admirers, and attempts to flirt with him, which fails as they end up being rude to each other, sparking the tense and bitter relationship that ensues throughout the play. Later, when he brings up the papers of Belle Reve with her, he once again treats her trunk and its contents roughly. At this point, we are introduced to what is left of Belle Reve and Allan Grey—papers. Stanley "rips" the ribbon wrapping love letters and old poems from her dead young husband, **Allan Gray, whose memory shadows the play**. But, he doesn't get to look at them as Blanche snatches it away, instead, he is presented with the **old papers that represent the lost Belle Reve**.



Stanley and Steve carrying Blanche's trunk in the 1951 film adaptation

Image source: <https://www.zanestein.com/streetcar.htm>

At the end of the play, when Blanche is ostracized from society, Stanley insists whatever is left behind will be sent along with her trunk, something that rings untrue and empty.



Assessment Objectives

AO1 and AO2:

You will reach these objectives by understanding how Williams uses Blanche's trunk and its objects to shape her true story juxtaposed to the delusions. Stanley's relationship with the trunk is of great significance as well as he represents the crude reality.

AO4 and AO5:

A feminist reading of the trunk would see it as a representation of how trapped or "boxed in" Blanche was by her past. In the movie (1951), the trunk follows Blanche and she doesn't carry it herself which can be read as her inescapable past following her.

Belle Reve

In the course of shielding herself from Stanley, Blanche discloses that **Belle Reve**, the name of the plantation that was lost to Blanche and Stella, was lost due to **a foreclosed mortgage**, a revelation that connotes the tragic state of **Blanche's economic situation**. This loss of Belle Reve was one of the last of Blanche's misfortunes that led to **her mental breakdown**.

Belle Reve, a name of French origin that translates into a 'beautiful dream', insinuates a beautiful fantasy, even though the plantation once existed and was theirs. The name's symbolic meaning became true as dreams are often forgotten or fade away. Unlike the other illusions that Blanche presents in the play, we see Belle Reve was one that truly existed at one point, and slowly **faded into nothing but scraps of paper**. Belle Reve is also a material connection between Blanche and Stella, as **it was the last of their inheritance**.

Blanche does show **some resentment toward Stella** for leaving her alone to deal with the last of Belle Reve. She recollects **the deaths and funerals** that she had to bear at Belle Reve, as she **tended to the dying relatives by herself**, as scarce funds left them with no servants. These deaths and memories **haunt her among others**, as she talks about it quite vividly, including horrific imagery, with both Stella and Mitch.

Assessment Objectives

AO5:

Williams uses the idea of Belle Reve to create a difference in class between the sisters and Stanley. Even if all we see of Belle Reve are "thousands of papers", it represents the Old Southern American privileged way of life making Stella and Blanche, the stereotypical Southern Belles. Belle Reve is the opposite of the culturally diverse New Orleans in the 1940s with its influx of the middle-classes and immigrants as a result of multiple industries setting base there.



The Repetitive Bathing

The **motif of bathing** is seen as a coping mechanism, Tennessee Williams portrays how humans try to cope with the subconscious guilt from past experiences and misdeeds to achieve a **sense of peace through cleansing**.

Blanche DuBois appears to have a **fixation with bathing**. She takes numerous baths a day saying, "**I take hot baths for my nerves. Hydro-therapy, they call it**". While Blanche suggests the excessive bathing is calming, it is a **symbol of cleansing**— symbolic of the need for Blanche to "**wash her sins away**". In many scenes, she is either present after a shower or decides to take one. Apart from the symbolic cleansing, she also uses it as an escape from reality,

Notable moments: When Stanley slaps Stella, Blanche decides to bathe; when Stanley is revealing Blanche's past to Stella, Blanche is bathing, and after one bath she says "**feeling like a brand new human being**".

Assessment Objectives

A04 and A05:

Stanley is seen under the shower as well after he beats Stella which furthers this idea of water cleansing sins. Blanche's constant need to wash to cleanse herself of her sins is akin to Lady Macbeth's "Out, damned spot!" and "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red", where she too is constantly washing and rubbing the invisible blood on her hands, something she hallucinates because of the guilt she harbours for the murder of Duncan. Both Williams and Shakespeare use water to symbolize the need to cleanse past sins, much like the Christian Baptism, where emerging from the water symbolises a new birth and forgiveness of past sins.

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)



The Varsouviana Polka

Blanche and her husband were dancing to the Varsouviana Polka when she told him that he disgusted her (as he had engaged in homosexual sex). This led him to leave the dance floor



and die by shooting himself. Hence, this song symbolizes the greatest traumatic event in Blanche's life. It **represents the guilt** she harbours for Allen's death which consequently **ended her innocence and sparked the descent of her mental and emotional stability**.

It plays more often as the play progresses to show the **growing instability** in Blanche's mind and always drives her to distraction. It plays inside her head whenever she panics or **is stressed as she loses her sense of reality** and sinks into the traumatic memory and pain—the episode only

stops when she hears **the gunshot**. **“A distant revolver shot is heard. Blanche seems relieved.”** The detail that the gunshot resounding in her mind is what eases her suggests that **she is imprisoned within the memory of Allen's death despite trying to escape** it in anyways

Assessment Objectives

AO4 and AO5:

The Varsouviana is played in a Major key at some points in the play while it is also played in a minor key at other points. Irene Selznick, the first producer of the play, called the song “memory music”, and believed it played in minor to reflect her unhappiness and in major when it reflected her nostalgia.

Vivien Leigh as Blanche in the 1951 film adaptation
image source: <https://www.pinterest.com/blog/difficult-beauty-must-avoid-strong-light-praise-blanch-dubois>

The Paper Lantern and Light

Throughout the play, **Blanche evades emerging in bright light**, specifically in front of Mitch, her suitor. She also evades talking about her age and it is evident that she avoids the strong light because **it will expose her and he will see her for who she truly is**. While this idea of light denotes Blanche trying to hide her age and fading beauty, it also **connotes her past**. She covers the lightbulb in the Kowalski apartment with a Chinese Paper lantern and declines dates with Mitch during the day and to brightly lit places. **Light symbolizes the reality of Blanche's past**. She is troubled by the ghosts of what she has lost—her first love, her purpose in life, her pride, and the courteous society (real or imagined) of her ancestors.

In Scene Six, Blanche tells Mitch that being in love with her husband, Allan Grey, was like having the world bare in bright light. Since Allan's death, Blanche says, the brilliant light has



been missing. This bright light can represent Blanche's youthful sexual innocence, while dim light represents her sexual experience and cynicism.

Mitch speaks of Blanche's evasion of light in Scene Nine when he challenges her with the stories Stanley has told him of her past affairs. Mitch then insists Blanche stand under the bright light. **Mitch "rips" the paper lantern off, symbolizing that he has broken from her spell of illusion** and wants to see the truth/light. When he expresses that he doesn't care for her age, but just her dishonesty, Blanche replies by saying that she **believes in magic, rather than realism, and tells life as it ought to be** instead of the truth because she doesn't want the truth. Blanche's failure to accept light means that her awareness of reality is diminishing.

Tennessee Williams **uses the paper lantern, a good example of plastic theatre, to directly reflect Blanche's attempts to cover the truth.** The last reference to the paper lantern is in Scene Eleven, the resolution of the plot when Stanley rudely mocks Blanche asking her if she wants to take the lantern with her, when he **"seizes and tears it off"** it is made evident that **Blanche's representational 'death'** or defeat as a tragic character has taken place by this **final reference to the paper lantern**—the stage directions read **'cries out as if the lantern was herself'**. In this way, the paper lantern is a central plastic theatre device prompting the audience to understand Blanche's frantic evasion of the truth that causes her ensuing irrationality.

Desire, Cemeteries and Elysian Fields

At the opening of the play, Williams presents three names that do not **disclose their symbolic and metaphorical meaning**, but the audience comes to realise their significance **later in the play.**

In scene one, Blanche explains to Eunice her trip to the Kowalski residence: **"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"**. This journey using the New Orleans' streetcars is **allegorical of the journey of Blanche's life.**

Desire is her first phase, just as it was the first phase of her life after the death of Allan. Struggling with accepting his loss, she was frantically yearning for love and company, which led to a life of sex with random men, who never cherished her: **"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..."**. **Desire consumed Blanche after Allan's death.**

Blanche states **"The opposite (of death) is desire"** The next stage of her journey is *Cemeteries*, a symbol for death. **Her unrestrained routine led to misfortune.** She lost her job as a teacher because she had had an affair with one of her young students, and was exiled from Laurel for her indiscretions. Her **cultural death** is her fall from the Southern upper-class Belle to one that is mentally unstable and her downgrade from a plantation to a cot in the lower-middle class, one-bedroom apartment.



Elysian Fields is the name of the street where the Kowalski residence is situated; this **is a mythical allusion** to Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Williams also **glamorizes this neighbourhood**: while it is poor, all races and classes are mixed, and the recurring upbeat music gives everything a somewhat otherworldly quality. In Roman and Greek mythology, *Elysium* (or *Elysian Fields*) is a part of the underworld and a place for the righteous dead, which is **ironic** as there seems to be a **lack of righteousness** in the street "Elysian Fields". *Elysian Fields*, according to the myth, was just **a temporary place of the souls' journey back to life**. At the end of the play, Blanche is sent to an asylum, an expulsion from society, which can be seen as her starting her new life.

Note:

When you are attempting an analysis of characterisation, it is important to indicate your understanding of the role other characters play in the character formation and development. (AO1 and AO2)

Sex and death seem to be intricately linked for Blanche: she states her ancestors "**epic fornications**" lead to their demises and loss of Belle Reve, her husband died because of her disgust at his sexuality and the Mexican woman, who sells "**flowers for the dead**" triggers her memories of all the death she has seen which then leads her to think of "**The opposite is desire**" and sex she had with young soldiers.

Blanche fears the process of ageing and mortality and **desperately tries to revert to youth**, by asserting her sexuality on young men (the young soldiers, her young student, the young boy collecting for the newspaper etc.,) as if she is trying to return to the innocent world she lived in before Allan's death.

Assessment Objectives

AO4 and AO5:

William represents Freud's theory of the Death Drive (Thanatos) that individuals have an innate drive for destruction; which Freud evidenced through the research of World War I trauma patients who would unconsciously subject themselves recurrently to nightmares about the terrors they had witnessed. From this standpoint, Blanche's recurrent self-destructive actions were a result of her succumbing to this drive. Her traumatic experience was witnessing her husband be unfaithful towards her with another man, and



his consequent suicide as a result of her disgust. This traumatic incident led to her self-destructive rampage that finally led to her expulsion from society.

Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe, is referred to twice by Blanche: **“Only Poe! Only Mr Edgar Allan Poe!—could do it justice!”** and **“with reverence for Hawthorne and Whitman and Poe!”**.

Additionally, she **speaks of death graphically and metaphorically**: **“Death--I used to sit here and she used to sit over there and death was as close as you are”**, **“the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep!”**

She had a deep respect for Edgar Allan Poe and his works, **works that Streetcar strongly reflect the theme of death** and its varied aspects. He looked at reanimating the dead, mourning them, premature burials, and the physicality of death and decomposition. Edgar Allan Poe at the age of 26, married his cousin who was 13 years at the time. He got a special license to marry her, but she died at a young age eleven years later. He became **increasingly mentally unstable** after the death of his **young wife** and became a **chronic alcoholic**.

Like Poe, Blanche lost her young spouse and became increasingly unstable, she was also **haunted by death and almost obsessed with death or dying**.

Assessment Objectives

AO4 and AO5:

You can achieve these objectives by commenting on how Williams uses allusions to Edgar Allan Poe to create depth in Blanche’s Character.



CHARACTER IN CONTEXT

Note:

Understanding the various contexts within which a text operates and comparing, connecting and contrasting these contexts will help you achieve AO4 and AO5—as it shows awareness of interpretation as a dynamic process.

Authorial Context

Tennessee Williams was very close to his **sister Rose, who suffered from mental illness** later in life and consequently underwent brain surgery which **left her institutionalized** for the entirety of her life. This traumatic experience affected Williams greatly, and this is reflected in many of his characters, including Blanche.

Tennessee's mother is also reflected in Blanche, as Edwina detested her husband's womanizing and alcoholic lifestyle—as **she believed it was unbecoming considering she was of “southern aristocratic descent”**. Additionally, **his mother also suffered from hysterical fits** when he was younger.

Tennessee **Williams' experience as a homosexual** when society was unaccepting of the LGBTQ+ community is reflected in this play. Allan Grey's homosexual experience is key to Blanche's character development.

"I draw every character out of my very multiple split personality. My heroines always express the climate of my interior world at the time in which those characters were created." — Tennessee Williams



Tennessee Williams

Image source:

<https://www.thisismysouth.com/tennessee-williams-house/>



Note:

Author's Context vs Reader's Context

The setting in which the writer creates their work is the author context. While the reader's setting when they consume said work, is the reader's context. In your essay, reflecting on the author's context and comparing it to yours as a reader will count for personal engagement with the text.
(A04 and A05)

Assessment Objectives

A04 and A05:

Elia Kazan, director of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) stated that **Blanche is Tennessee Williams, representing his desire, alcoholism, love for fantasy and his restlessness.**

Like Blanche, Tennessee Williams was also forced to leave his Southern home, though at a very young age, and lived in over ten houses by the age of sixteen. Even as an adult, **Tennessee Williams never had a stable home, he lived in hotels and compulsively travelled.** "I live like a gypsy, I am a fugitive," he stated in his memoirs (1975)

Social-Historical Context

As a southerner, Tennessee writes about **the socio-economic effects of the lost Civil War** (1861 - 1865) on the South, despite the World War that has just come to an end when he writes this play. America was **peaking with economic change, industries, capitalism; and the working class was on the rise** when Williams wrote. The great old families that relied on slavery and plantations were now replaced as powerhouses based on capitalism and the powerful working classes.

Many of Williams' plays either refer to or are set in the South, painting images of lost glory, immorality, debauchery and self-destruction. Williams **implied that the Southern assertion of nobility and aristocracy, aided by the viciousness of oppression, was constructed on deceit.** However, he was fascinated by this decline:



“I write out of love for the South ... once a way of life that I am just able to remember – not a society based on money ... I write about the South because I think the war between romanticism and the hostility to it is very sharp there.”

Blanche **represents a decaying Southern Belle**, — the **traditional Southern Belle was expected to be submissive and virtuous, playing very traditional social and symbolic gender roles**. The Blanche that Stella once knew, as she tells Stanley before she was corrupted was this ideal southern innocent belle. However, Blanche as we know her, like the Old South, is decaying as she struggles with what “she should be” and what she has become.

Stanley signifies the American Dream where all men are equal by birth and can prosper likewise, while **Blanche Dubois is the embodiment of the decline of the Old Southern agrarian economy, defined by race and class**.

Philosophical and Literary Context

Williams uses Blanche in this **southern gothic tragedy** to look into the **notions of Masculinity and Femininity**. We see that Blanche struggles with the ideal traits of femininity that were embraced by the Old South. He also juxtaposes Blanche and Stanley in this light. **Stanley manages to get away with his indiscretions, alcoholism and abusive behaviour because he is a man; while Blanche suffers for them because she is a woman**.

Looking at the play through **a feminist lens** would see how gender and identity, particularly of women are reflected along with notions of patriarchy. The play is set in the American 1940s, where **women played traditional home-maker roles** and patriarchal values were very prominent. Patriarchy is defined by male dominance over women and women’s dependence on men.

In the context of the play, Williams successfully portrays the patriarchy and its effects. In the Kowalski household, we see the perfect patriarchal mechanisms as Stanley dominates Stella to an extent where he uses **domestic violence** to **assert his role and subjugate Stella**. However, when Blanche arrives, we see Stanley feels threatened by her presence. Blanche reminds him that the sisters are more cultured than him and come from the aristocracy.

The rape of Blanche is the event where Stanley **asserts his power over Blanche, using sexual violence**. Stanley uses Blanche’s past against her, a past that is unacceptable because she is a woman. This event, in feminist discourse, portrays women as victims of the oppressive patriarchy. The patriarchy **constantly chipped at Blanche’s sanity** as she felt she needed to find a husband to be accepted by society.

Blanche’s birthday dinner is a very good example of Stanley feeling threatened by Blanche—mainly because of the sisters’ heritage— and he reminds them that **“Every Man is King”** and he is the king in the house. There was also a group of critics that looked at the play from **a primitive Darwinian Natural Selection lens**—believing that Stanley and Blanche were



two types of animals **striving for the survival of their kind** with Stella as the final accolade. This is backed by the recurring jungle sounds and animalistic motifs and symbols in the play.

Through a **Marxist lens**, the play depicts the socioeconomic and class struggles in 1940s America. A Marxist understanding might read the play as a power struggle between the rising working-class depicted by Stanley and the deteriorating bourgeois depicted by Blanche and Stella. Stella's submissive attitude to Stanley is seen as **her acceptance** of the new working class while the Stanley-Blanche disaster-prone conflict depicts the **power struggle between classes**.

Critics who stand behind this Marxist approach to the play, look at **Stanley as a hero** defending his life wife and unborn child from the bourgeois threat. Such criticism is often also further defended by the Darwinian 'survival of the fittest'— Stanley, **'the gaudy seed bearer** as Williams calls him emerges the survivor at the end ready to **pass his way of life down** to his unborn child as he defeats the final remnants of the **Bourgeois threat to his life**.

Albert Wertheim, professor and author considers the baby as a **representation of a Kowalski future** and not a DuBois one; Blanche is removed from the picture while Stanley stays back— his final win.

Many critics also believe that Tennessee **Williams reinvented** the idea of desire in the 20th century. The play revolves around **inherent sexual desires**. Psychoanalytic criticism (Freudian perspective) on the play would examine how Williams's homosexuality and **guilt are embedded** in his characters. Additionally, the Freudian fundamental drives, **death drive** (for destruction) and **sex drive** (life drive) are portrayed through Blanche's character. Identity construction is also reflected in Blanche as she is in an **identity crisis** where ironically, she struggles to be what she thinks should be and becomes the exact opposite.

The play also questions the ideas of **morality** in its time, Blanche is shamed for having multiple sexual partners because she is a woman, while Stanley gets away with rape and domestic violence as he is a man. Williams seems to be exposing the **injustice in patriarchal** notions of morality.

Critical Context

The play when first performed received mixed responses. Some were **repulsed by the bold portrayal** of desire and sexuality while it was also very popular amongst some audiences who felt the **crude realism was refreshing**. Robert J. Leeney, the editorial writer of the *Register*, called Williams an **"ultra-realist"** who was **blunt in his ideas** and did not overlook basic human needs behaviour. Many critics constantly compared his play to his *The Glass Menagerie*, but **unlike Laura Blanche's tragedy was deemed far graver**.

Some critics and audiences looked at **Stanley as a victim** of Blanche's madness and attack against his masculinity, class and heritage. The rape scene in this approach is **justified as an**



event initiated by Blanche through her flirting and exhibitionism. It was reported that some audiences actively cheered during Blanche's rape.

Performance is also given much importance in criticism, Susan Spector, in her "Alternative Visions of Blanche DuBois" discusses how Blanche under **Kazan's direction** was an image of a redundant dying culture and left audiences **accepting Stanley's aggressions** while **Clurman's** Blanche left Blanche as a victim of **Stanley's vicious patriarchy**. Spector believed that **the script was compliant** and left actors and directors with the power to construct and **influence interpretation**.

Much **contemporary criticism of the play surrounds the feminist reading of Blanche as a victim of the patriarchy**, something many older critics seemed to have missed.

Jacqueline O'Connor in the article "Babbling Lunatics: Language and Madness." argues that Blanche is a protagonist who is **silenced by the label of madness** when speaking a truth that society is not prepared to hear. The **objectionable aspect of her truth** is established by the responses to the play and within the plot itself. Nancy M. Tischler in "Tiger-Tiger!" Blanche's Rape on Screen," explains the modern-day debate that encircled the rape and the **subsequent reservations** of censorship. Lillian Hellman, the popular playwright, was hired to amend the original script to make the **rape more socially acceptable**—her consequent solutions to the issue included making the rape a **figment of imagination from Blanche's madness**. This was done because, much like Stella, it was presumed that the American audiences would find it easier to see Blanche **as a crazy, lying woman rather than accepting that a man could get away with raping his sister-law**. In this context, it must be noted that Williams refused to let the rape scene be removed, he asserted that the rape was **"the ravishment of the tender, the sensitive, the delicate, by the savage and brutal forces of modern society."**



KEY QUOTES

Note:

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

(Scene 1) “Never, never, never in my worst dreams could I picture – Only Poe! Only Mr Edgar Allan Poe! – could do it justice! Out there I suppose is the ghoulish woodlands of Weir!”

(Scene 3) “And if God chooses, I shall but love thee better--after--death!” Why, that’s from my favorite sonnet by Mrs Browning”

(Scene 3) “I attempt to instill a bunch of bobby-soxers and drug-store Romeos with reverence for Hawthorne and Whitman and Poe!”

(Scene 9) “I don’t want realism”

- All the above quotes show **Blanche as well-read, true to her upbringing**. What was the purpose for this? What significance did Whitman, Poe and Hawthorne play here? Williams ensures the audience knows that Blanche reveres Whitman, a [transcendentalist](#) and realist, Edgar Allan Poe and Hawthorne, dark romantics **whose works emphasized that humanity was prone to sin and self-destruction**.

(Scene 9) “I don’t want realism. I want magic! [Mitch laughs] Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don’t tell the truth, I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it! Don’t turn the light on!”



- This quote is Blanche's **admission of her deceit**. However, her tone plays a key role in understanding the lack of malice in her deceitfulness. "Yes, yes. Magic" suggests a **childish nature to her mischief**.
- There is **juxtaposition** in Blanche's ideas of realism and magic, and **irony in her belief that she is right in telling lies**.

(Scene 6) "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." -
Stella about Blanche

As an audience, we are presented with Blanche at the end of her gradual mental breakdown. Yet, Williams suggests an **innocence that once existed** within Blanche that was slowly buried over the years. Stella is a credible source for Blanche's character before she was traumatised by her husband's death—looking at her dialogue, we must notice Williams' choice of words. The repetition of "nobody" shows an insistence that **Blanche was once tender, trusting and pure** as her name suggests. Stella also states that it was people like "you" i.e. Stanley that "abused and forced her to change". What or rather **who does Stella mean by "people like you"**? Which part of Stanley's identity do you think she is referring to?

(Scene 10)

"BLANCHE: Yes, swine! Swine! And I'm thinking not only of you but of your friend, Mr Mitchell. He came to see me tonight. He dared to come here in his work-clothes! And to repeat slander to me, vicious stories that he had gotten from you! I gave him his walking papers..."

STANLEY: You did, huh?

BLANCHE: But then he came back. He returned with a box of roses to beg my forgiveness! He implored my forgiveness. But some things are not forgivable. Deliberate cruelty is not forgivable. It is the one unforgivable thing in my opinion and it is the one thing of which I have never, never been guilty..."

While Blanche **fabricates** the above scenario, in actuality, Mitch refuses to marry Blanche because of everything Stanley uncovered.

Blanche asserts that she has "never, never" been guilty of deliberate cruelty. The **repetition** of "never" is almost like Blanche is trying to **convince herself**. Additionally, she



repeats the idea of forgiveness constantly in her rant, something she struggles with when it comes to herself.

This event is very important as we see **Blanche's coping mechanism**— she is fabricating the **illusion to protect** herself from the reality of rejection. These lies are not for Stanley but for herself. Looking at the theme of deliberate cruelty and forgiveness— why does Blanche insist that she has never, never been deliberately cruel? Is it because she still harbours the guilt of **her cruelty towards her husband**? We know that Blanche reacted in disgust towards her husband's homosexuality; it was her words that drove him to kill himself. But, she insists that she has never been *deliberately* cruel, which could mean that while Blanche **regrets acting foolishly and impulsively** when she was young, at that point she never realized how deep her words would cut. The **recurring exclamations** show us the stress Blanche feels.

Blanche is so caught up in coping with the heavy guilt she carries that she has reached a point where she cannot distinguish between her truth and her lies— **her belief in her lies makes her delusional**.

Ironically, right after Blanche talks about deliberate cruelty, Stanley rapes her.

**(Scene 1) "Some buttons in back! You may enter!
[He crosses through drapes with a smouldering look.]
How do I look?"**

(Scene 1) "That was why, when you walked in here last night, I said to myself--"My sister has married a man!"

(Scene 1) "Oh, in my youth I excited some admiration. But look at me now! [She smiles at him radiantly] Would you think it possible that I was once considered to be—attractive?"

(Scene 2) "I called him a little boy and laughed and flirted. Yes, I was flirting with your husband!"

The above quotes from scene 1 and 2 suggest that Blanche in some ways could be **attracted to Stanley** as a man. She does fish for his attention and compliments and openly flirts with him, all while she is aware Stella is listening from the stairs. In scene 2, she openly admits flirting with Stanley to calm a fight down. All these instances are important as they play **a role in Stella's scepticism** about the rape at the end of the play.



Another phrase to be noticed is “**little boy**”, how is calling him a child flirting? She also calls Mitch a boy later in the play— this is a **glimpse into her obsession with young men**. The quote below, from Scene 5 where she kisses the young newspaper boy, is confirmation that Blanche enjoys intimacies with young boys but **understands that she shouldn't**.

(Scene 5) “Now run along, now, quickly! It would be nice to keep you, but I've got to be good--and keep my hands off children.”

Her obsession with the young boys could come from her love for Allan, this is her way of **reliving what she once had** and wants back— stuck in her loop. Being with the young probably also makes her feel young.

The quotes show Blanche constantly referring to Allan as a boy:

(Scene 1) “The boy--the boy died.”

(Scene 2) “Poems a dead boy wrote...But my young husband was and I...”

(Scene 6) “He was a boy, just a boy...the boy I had married and an older man...the boy I had married broke away from me and...”

(Scene 4) “What such a man has to offer is animal force [...]. But the only way to live with such a man is to – go to bed with him! And that’s your job – not mine!”

After Blanche sees Stanley’s violent and explosive nature, her attitude towards him changes; however, could Blanche in her loneliness **be jealous** of what Stella has? The above quote again reflects Blanche’s understanding that a relationship with Stanley is based on sex and she cannot have that.

(Scene 11) “I have always depended on the kindness of strangers”

Blanche's last line drips with **irony**. It tells us that Blanche has many a time depended on this kindness of strangers but was **left abused, battered and discarded**. Her state on arrival at Elysian fields is a testament to this. This last line, in its bitter irony, is still hopeful, she **still clings to the prospect of kindness**, something we haven't seen in the play. Apart from this last line, Blanche only mentions her dependency on strangers one other time—see the quote below:



(Scene 9) “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...”

Her state of dependency is triggered with the death of her husband, we see that she indulged in intimacies with strangers to find “protection” and fill the sense of **emptiness** she was left with; however, it is glaringly obvious that these strangers only were kind to her because they were **offered sex**.

Even during the play, apart from Stella, everyone else is a stranger to the penniless Blanche but she is **denied sympathy** from them much like the people who exiled her from Laurel.

The word **“protection”** should also be noted. What do you think Blanche needed to be protected from?

(Scene 11) “I can smell the sea air. The rest of my time I'm going to spend on the sea. And when I die, I'm going to die on the sea. Do you know what I shall die of? [She plucks a grape]

I shall die of eating an unwashed grape one day out on the ocean. I will die--with my hand in the hand of some nice-looking ship's doctor, a very young one with a small blond moustache and a big silver watch. "Poor lady," they'll say, "the quinine did her no good. That unwashed grape has transported her soul to heaven.”

[The cathedral chimes are heard]

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 [

Chimes again]

my first lover's eyes!”

Blanche's **reality is destructive** to her and so she sinks back into her coping mechanism. These lines foreshadow her immediate future, i.e., the **metaphorical death** of her character. Even in this final illusion, we are presented with, we see Blanche reflects her **obsession with death, young men (ship doctor), and Allan (first lover)**. The sea could be understood as a symbol of **freedom**, characterised by its openness, juxtaposed to the apartment, the hotel rooms or the death-stricken house she was **trapped** in. We see Blanche's obsession with **death interwoven with sex**. The **stage directions**, the chiming of church bells, can also be read as an extension of this interpretation. Apart from calls to worship, church bells are rung for weddings, funerals, and to ward off evil; in this context, does it symbolise a new beginning for her? Or the marking of her end?



(Scene 10)

“ [Improvising feverishly]

What he wants is my companionship. Having great wealth sometimes makes people lonely! A cultivated woman, a woman of intelligence and breeding, can enrich a man's life--immeasurably! I have those things to offer, and this doesn't take them away. Physical beauty is passing. A transitory possession. But the beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart--and I have all of those things--aren't taken away, but grow! Increase with the years! How strange that I should be called a destitute woman! When I have all of these treasures locked in my heart.

[A choked sob comes from her]

I think of myself as a very, very rich woman! But I have been foolish--casting my pearls before swine!”

Often, we see Blanche's rants are a **window to her psyche**. While she is speaking to Stanley, she seems to be trying to **convince herself** that she is who she wants to be. The above quote and stage directions reflect this. Blanche is overwhelmed with her emotions, she feels the guilt of her past indiscretions but is frantically convincing herself of **self-worth**. Her **insecurities are embedded** in the above quote— economic status, ageing, loneliness, etc.

Williams uses **light and dark** in the play to create meaning and add to Blanche's character depth. In scene 1, he introduces the idea, right at the start when Blanche is introduced, “...**Her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light.**”, and he also weaves it into Blanche's dialogue, in her introductory scene, “**Daylight never exposed so total a ruin!**” — **foreshadowing the importance of light** (or its lack thereof).

Throughout the play, we see multiple instances, as shown below, of Blanche commenting on the lighting, usually accompanied by a request or command to dim it.

(Scene 1) **And turn that over-light off! Turn that off! I won't be looked at in this merciless glare!**

(Scene 3) **I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action.**

(Scene 3) **Put it over the light bulb!**

(Scene 4) **and put a-- paper lantern over the light...**

(Scene 6) **We'll have a nightcap. Let's leave the lights off.**

(Scene 6) **[She lights a candle stub and puts it in a bottle.]**



(Scene 9) !--Don't turn the light on!

In the dialogues below, Williams adds stage directions to show that Blanche is **afraid of the light**.

(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?

Additionally, in scene 9, when Mitch comments on the room being dark, Blanche responds with:

"I like it dark. The dark is comforting to me."

From the above quotes, we can establish, with evidence, that Blanche **fears the light** and **prefers to be in darkness** or dim light. Below are a few dialogues in the play that help us understand her fear and her associations with light:

(Scene 6) "When I was sixteen, I made the discovery – love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that's how it struck the world for me. But I was unlucky. Deluded."

The quote above shows Blanche's understanding and metaphor of love as a **blinding light** that entered her otherwise dim life. This is not necessarily a positive association as Williams chooses **negative words** like "struck" "much too" "unlucky" "deluded" and the idea of "a sudden blinding light" which is usually uncomfortable for the eyes. Suitable **diction** as we know that this love that she felt for Allan ended in a violent tragedy. While "light" generally has a **positive** connotation and symbolises truth, particularly in Christianity, Williams seems to be **twisting this idea** to portray too much of light can blind a person thereafter— as this harsh reality of the world, the light, forces Blanche into a world of fantasies or to use her word, "delusions".

(Scene 6) It was because--on the dance-floor--unable to stop myself--I'd suddenly said--"I saw! I know! You disgust me..." And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this--kitchen-- candle...

The quote above reflects Allan's suicide, caused by her disgust, "turned off" the blinding light in her life. Allan was Blanche's first love, as Stella also says, Blanche loved him deeply and almost worshipped him. Light is used as a **multi-layered metaphor for love and truth**, after Allan's death, Blanche's life lacked love, thus lacked light.

In terms of truth, we look at "searchlight" as the strong harsh **light that also exposed the truth of her marriage**.



Blanche blames herself for the failure of the marriage: not only because of her **insensitivity** towards her discovery of his sexuality; but also, her **inadequacy** as a wife as reflected in the quote below:

(Scene 6) “all I knew was I'd failed him in some mysterious way and wasn't able to give the help he needed but couldn't speak of! He was in the quicksands and clutching at me--but I wasn't holding him out, I was slipping in with him! I didn't know that. I didn't know anything except I loved him unendurably but without being able to help him or help myself. Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways.”

Blanche, associating love with **blinding** light, was in the **dark** about Allan's sexuality during her marriage, something that was exposed too cruelly for her innocence and the addition of his violent suicide was too much for her sensitive mind to bear.

We see here that there was too much “blinding light” in her marriage and that led her to believe it was a perfect life, however, the same light exposed all the truths about her love. We see that after the shock of Allan's death the ‘blinding light’ (Symbolic of love and truth) is reduced to nothing more than candlelight.

The **extended metaphor** of the “searchlight” or “blinding light” is imperative to note—when a blinding light first hits our eyes, we are unable to see clearly as we have to squint and adjust our sight to accommodate the bright light. Once we have adjusted, we can see everything very clearly.

Similarly, her sudden, young, love for Allan was blinding, she could not see what was happening but felt the sense of failure, it was only later that she saw **reality** clearly and that **snuffed** out the light entirely. After having this light snuffed and replaced with dim lights, Blanche never goes near this reality exposing light...and prefers the darkness. This **symbolism** is key to understanding and **empathising** with Blanche.

The other reason for Blanche avoiding light is to keep her **physical reality hidden**, she cannot cope with **ageing** and hence believes that dim lights will hide the physical signs of ageing. As seen in the quote below:

(Scene 4) 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 colours, the colours 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.

“Fading” is also light imagery, Blanche uses this to signify her **deteriorating beauty, power and her hold on reality.**



Bathing and water in the play are symbols for **purification**, developed using Blanche. The quotes below denote how Blanche feels about bathing.

(Scene 2) Here I am, all freshly bathed and scented, and feeling like a brand new human being!

(Scene 3) I think I will bathe.

STELLA: Again?

BLANCHE: My nerves are in knots. Is the bathroom occupied?

(Scene 7) Oh, I feel so good after my long, hot bath, I feel so good and cool and--rested!

(Scene 7) A hot bath and a long, cold drink always give me a brand new outlook on life!

(Scene 8) I take hot baths for my nerves. Hydro-therapy, they call it.

She states that it helps “calm her nerves” and with the frequency with which she showers, the entire idea connotes that she is constantly **disturbed** by something. This can be interpreted as the **guilt** she feels for her past as she feels the need to be a “brand new human” or have a “brand new outlook”—connoting her need to **purify her past**.

See The Repetitive Bathing section under Symbolism.

(Scene 9)

BLANCHE: What do you want?

MITCH [fumbling to embrace her]: What I been missing all summer.

BLANCHE: Then marry me, Mitch!

MITCH: I don't think I want to marry you any more.

BLANCHE: No?

MITCH [dropping his hands from her waist]: You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother.



The above exchange shows Blanche's **desperation** to be married, even if it's Mitch, someone who just tried to force himself on her.

This exchange is very crucial from a feminist lens. Firstly, it shows how women were raised to be dependent on a **patriarch**. Secondly, Mitch has come to Blanche looking for casual sex he believes he is **entitled** to because Blanche has previously engaged in casual sex. He seems to be prepared to take it by force as well. The **gender discrimination** and **male entitlement** are very evident, as casual sex clearly makes Blanche, a woman, **dirty** something that doesn't apply to Mitch because he is a man. Furthermore, Mitch who forces himself on Blanche is still "clean" enough to go back to his mother.

(Scene 7)

"Say, it's only a paper moon, Sailing over a cardboard sea--But it wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me!"

"It's a Barnum and Bailey world. Just as phony as it can be--But it wouldn't be make-believe if you believed in me!"

"Without your love, It's a honky-tonk parade! Without your love, It's a melody played, In a penny arcade..."

"It's a Barnum and Bailey world, Just as phony as it can be--" [In the bathroom the water goes on loud; little breathless cries and peals of laughter are heard as if a child were frolicking in the tub.]

As guided by William's stage directions the above song is used "contrapuntally" with Stanley's spiteful revelation of Blanche's past indiscretions.

The song adds to the **tense dramatic irony**, as Blanche's song, about reality and illusions, can be symbolic of her developing relationship with Mitch, which, built on deceit and lies, will crumble when the truth is revealed. Williams uses this **juxtaposition** to **foreshadow** the bitter end of said relationship.

The "paper-moon" much like the "**paper-lantern**" symbolises Blanche's need to hide reality, but the paper is **fragile**, and Stanley manages to rip her paper moon and lantern very easily.



(Scene 1)

“There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth.”

William’s describes Blanche as a moth when he first introduces her. A moth is a fragile creature of the night, much like Blanche. A moth in nature flits around light and is eventually scorched and killed by it. Blanche, much like this insect, flits around her “light” which can be men—Allan, Stanley and Mitch who eventually destroy her.

GLOSSARY

- **Anti-hero:** An antihero or antiheroine is a protagonist who does not showcase any “heroic” qualities like honesty, courage, virtue, etc.
- **Narcissistic personality disorder:** is a type of personality disorder in which the person has an extreme need for attention and admiration and an inflated sense of self-importance. However, behind this mask is an extreme vulnerability to criticism and a fragile self-esteem.
- **Foreshadowing** A literary technique where a writer drops hints or warnings about what is to come in the plot.
- **Situational Irony:** When an outcome is intentionally contrary to what would ideally be expected.
- **Motif:** A recurring idea in artistic work and literature.
- **Realism:** Realism in the arts is representing the reality of life as it is, the truth of life without any additional qualities like stylisation, supernatural elements, fiction etc. Artists would choose to show the monotonous and mundane aspects of life.
- **Plastic Theatre** is the process of using props, noises or stage directions to relay an obvious parallel with the characters’ states of mind on stage.
- **Nietzschean:** Nietzsche philosophy believes that humanity cannot rely on absolutes. There is no absolute truth but only many interpretations. Nietzsche proposed two forces that operate, the Apollonian and the Dionysian: the former characterized by purity, order,



logic and a dreaming state of illusions while the latter is a celebration of chaos and instinctual pleasures.

- **Camp:** Camp aesthetics value something as intoxicating as it is characterized by being of bad taste and flamboyance.
- **Authorial context:** Also called biographical context. The life of an author can influence their works. Considering the author's past life-events and circumstances under which a work was created makes for the authorial context.
- **Socio-historical context:** Literary works tend to reflect the times and society in which they were created. Thinking about how a work criticizes society, and which social or political events are alluded to or recreated. The historical period in which a work was created and the societal norms at the point are a starting point for this context.
- **Philosophical context:** Most modern authors consciously or subconsciously tackle the recurring questions of ethics or existence. A work creates or represents reality in some form, questioning the nature of the works' universe can help understand the philosophical standpoint. For example: How are humanity and morality represented? How are God and death addressed? How is free-will presented as juxtaposed with fate?
- **Literary context:** While literary works reflect many aspects of life, they also respond and influence other literary works and fit into larger categories of literature. Understanding if a work fits into realism or modernism, or has aspects of both is looking at its literary context. What other works or authors influence it? Did the author create other works based on this work? Such questions look at a works' literary context.
- **Critical context:** All works that are published, if noticed are critiqued. From rating it generically to looking and reflecting on a work's deeper meaning, critics will judge work and talk about what they like and don't. Time plays a crucial role in a critical context, time reveals greater works as they survive other inferior works.
- **Transcendentalism:** A philosophy that believes that all people are instinctively good and pure and that society corrupts them.

