

Edexcel English Literature A-level

A Streetcar Named Desire: Character Profiles Minor Characters

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Minor characters tend to be more **static** than dynamic characters. Though they may not play a major role in the story, they can act as **catalysts** to further the plot or to shed more light on the main characters.

ALLAN GRAY

A complex absent character

Allan Gray is an **unseen**, yet **omnipresent** character. He is the late husband of Blanche Dubois and plays a vital role in her **back-story** rather than a main, physical character in the play. Allan dies by **suicide**, shooting himself in the head after Blanche tells him she saw him having sex with an older man and is disgusted.

This death ends the innocent and naive young Blanche and begins the **downward spiral** of her life as her **guilt haunts** her and changes her to what we see in the play.

Symbolism

Blanche searches for **Allan Gray**, who she cannot forget, in all the **young boys** she beds. The Young Man in the play also symbolises her obsession with finding Allan. Williams' employs **Plastic Theatre**, the use of props, sound and stage directions to relay obvious **parallels** with a character's state of mind, to symbolize Allan's omnipresence. The **Varsouviana Polka** is the song that was playing when Allan killed himself and Blanche hears this sound in her head till a gunshot sounds whenever she is feeling **stressed**. The audience and Blanche are the only ones who hear this song while the other characters cannot, **dramatic irony**, it serves as a reminder of her past and **deteriorating** state of mind. It is **situational irony**, that an upbeat polka serves as a reminder of a grim suicide.

Key Quotes

Scene 1:

BLANCHE: The boy--the boy died. [She sinks back down] I'm afraid I'm-going to be sick! [Her head falls on her arms.]

- Williams ends the first scene with this dialogue. Our introduction to Allan Gray, the most important non-character.

Scene 2:

BLANCHE: These are love-letters, yellowing with antiquity, all from one boy. [He snatches them up. She speaks fiercely] Give those back to me!... The touch of your hands **insults them! ...now that you've touched them I'll burn them!...Poems a dead boy wrote. I hurt him the way that you would like to hurt me, but you can't! I'm not young and vulnerable any more. But my young husband was and I--never mind about that! Just give them back to me!... Everyone has something he won't let others touch because of their--intimate nature...**



- Blanche is very **protective** and **attached** to her memory of Allan. The letters and poems he wrote her are wrapped with great care and revered by her.

Scene 6:

Blanche: He was a boy, just a boy when I was a very young girl. 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. There was something different about the boy, **a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate looking--still--that thing was there...** He came to me for help. I didn't know that. I didn't find out anything till after our marriage when we'd run away and come back and 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. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty--which wasn't empty, **but had two people in it... the boy I had married and an older man who had been his friend for years....** [A locomotive is heard approaching outside. She claps her hands to her ears and crouches over. The headlight of the locomotive glares into the room as it thunders past. As the noise recedes she straightens slowly and continues speaking.] Afterwards, we pretended that nothing had been discovered. Yes, the three of us drove out to Moon Lake Casino, very drunk and laughing all the way. [Polka music sounds. In a minor key faint with distance.] We danced the Varsouviana! Suddenly in the middle of the dance, the boy I had married **broke away from me and ran out** of the casino. A few moments later--a shot! [The polka stops abruptly.] [Blanche rises stiffly. Then, the polka resumes in a major key.] I ran out--all did!--all ran and gathered about the terrible thing at the edge of the lake! I couldn't get near to the crowding. Then somebody caught my arm. "Don't go any closer! Come back! You don't want to see it!" See? See what! Then I heard voices say--Allan! Allan! The Grey boy! He'd **stuck the revolver into his mouth**, and fired--so that the back of his head had been--**blown away!** [She sways and covers her face.] 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...**

- Allan is presented to us through **Blanche's eyes** as a nervous and tender boy who was not effeminate in any way. Williams here presents us with a gay boy who had masculine qualities as well. A larger section of society still associate homosexuality with effeminate men, something Williams subtly **rejects**.
- Allan is painted as a **struggling homosexual** who trusted and loved Blanche but did not get everything he needed from her.



- It is also interesting to note how Williams builds the **tension** and reveals only at the end of Blanche's monologue that Allan broke away from her and killed himself because she **rejected** his sexuality.

STELLA; But when she was young, very young, she married a boy who wrote poetry... He was extremely **good-looking. 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--**

STANLEY: What?

STELLA: This beautiful and talented young man was a **degenerate. Didn't your supply-man give you that information?**

- Allan through the eyes of Stella is an extremely good-looking "degenerate", a **harsh** and **derogatory** word for homosexuals. The use of this word reflects the **1940's** American attitude towards homosexuality.
- Stella points out that Blanche "worshipped" him, this gives us insight into Blanche's **obsession** as well—Allan was like a God to her. The realization and loss of Allan struck her harder because of this **absolute devotion** to him.

Assessment Objectives

AO4:

J.M. Clum states that in Williams "invisible homosexuals" tend to have "grotesque deaths" and are usually a "victim of rejection by those closest to them". In this context, Allan shoots himself in the head because Blanche reacts in disgust to his homosexual acts.

Clum in his book 'Acting Gay' criticizes Williams for ostracizing the one gay character by choosing to keep him offstage and dead by grim death— he insisted that Williams "dramatises the closet".

EUNICE HUBBELL

A representation of the New America or the New South

Eunice is the upstairs **neighbour** and **landlady** of the Kowalski family; she is also a **close friend** of Stella and offers them **refuge** after Stably physically abuses Stella. Eunice is also in a physically abusive relationship with her husband, Steve and understands the dynamic between Stella and Stanley and tries to reassure Blanche that they do love each other despite the aggression and violence.



Symbolism

Eunice, like Stella, is in an **abusive relationship**; only she **beats** her husband back. Much like Stella's, her abusive episodes end with **loving** gestures and intimacy.

She is older than Stella and can be a **symbol** for the life Stella has chosen to live forsaking the Old South— a **window** into Stella's future.

Key Quotes

Scene 4:

EUNICE [defensively, noticing Blanche's look]: It's sort of messed up right now but when it's clean it's really sweet.

BLANCHE: Is it?

EUNICE: Uh, huh, I think so. So you're Stella's sister?

- While Eunice **defends** domestic violence, her words show that she feels that it is still “dirty”. Additionally, her “ I think so” shows her acquiescence over the moral issues of domestic violence.

Scene 11:

“I always did say that men are callous things with no feelings, but this does beat anything. Making pigs of yourselves.”

- Eunice is **older**, bolder and wiser in her words— she has an **honest and practical** outlook on life. Her words below are for Stella when Stella discusses believing that Stanley did rape, Blanche.

“Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going.”

- This is also Eunice being practical— she understands that Stella, a new mother, cannot fight Stanley about the rape as it will not bode well for Stella's future. She knows that society is not kind towards unwed women and jobs are also not easily available, let alone for a new mother. There is no practical scenario in which Stella can confront Stanley.

Scene 11:

“[She tries to break from Eunice's arms.] EUNICE: No, **honey**, no, no, honey. Stay here. Don't go back in there. Stay with me and don't look.

STELLA: What have I done to my sister? Oh, God, what have I done to my sister?

EUNICE: You done the **right thing**, the **only** thing you could do. She couldn't stay here; there wasn't no other place for her to go.”

“As soon as her sister goes past her, Stella closes her eyes and clenches her hands. Eunice throws her arms comforting about her.”

“Stella runs out to the porch, with Eunice following to comfort her, simultaneously with



the confused voices of the men in the kitchen. **Stella rushes into Eunice's embrace on the porch.]**"

"Eunice descends to Stella and places the child in her arms. It is wrapped in a pale blue blanket. Stella accepts the child, sobbingly."

- Eunice plays a vital role at the end of the play, she is Stella's **emotional support** and also helps take care of the newborn child. Ironically, while Stella's real sister is removed from her life, she has Eunice to step in as the **sister-figure** she needs. We see that they are physically close as well, something that Stella and Blanche, despite being kin, **lacked**.

STEVE HUBBELL

A representation of the New America or the New South

While Eunice is the **prototype** for Stella, Steve is Stanley's— he's a **seasoned version** of Stanley. Stanley and Stella are newer to marriage than Steve and Eunice, who have more harmony in their marriage, a **"bite back"** approach to domestic violence and its consequential increased love and affection.

Key Quotes

Scene 11:

Mitch ducks his head lower but Stanley shoves back his chair as if about to rise. Steve places a restraining hand on his arm.

- Steve restraining Stanley, shows the relationship between the two. Steve has some **influence** over Stanley and seems more level headed than the explosive Stanley even though they are cut from the same cloth.

Scene 5:

[Steve and Eunice come around the corner. Steve's arm is around Eunice's shoulder and she is sobbing luxuriously and he is cooing love-words. There is a murmur of thunder as they go slowly upstairs in a tight embrace.]

- Steve and Eunice's domestic abuse is a direct reflection of the relationship Stanley and Stella have— violence followed by passion. The thunder here **symbolizes** this sexual passion and gratification to follow.

Scene 8:

God, honey, it's gonna be sweet when we can make noise in the night the way that we used to and get the coloured lights going with nobody's sister behind the curtains to hear us! [Their upstairs neighbors are heard in bellowing laughter at something. Stanley chuckles.] Steve an' Eunice...



- The above dialogue is Stanley's, but Williams places the interruption from Steve and Eunice to throw light on what Stanley and Stella's marriage will revert to and to show the wedded bliss that Stanley and Stella envision for themselves.

SHEP HUNTLEIGH

A representation of Old America and of Blanche's mental deterioration

Shep Huntleigh is a **past suitor** of Blanche, who she ran into a year before the play begins in Miami. During the play, we see Blanche referring to Shep as someone who can give Stella and her **monetary assistance** and help them leave Elysian Fields. While Shep never appears on stage. Blanche refers to him increasingly as the play progresses.

Symbolism

Shep is a symbol of Blanche's **mental instability**. He represents her **hope** for a better life, and as her saviour, he became progressively real to her reflecting her loss of control on reality. The more Stanley comes closer to destroying Blanche, the worse her mental stability becomes and this **deterioration** is reflected in her mentions of Shep Huntleigh

YOUNG MAN

A representation of Blanche's sexual past, fixations and desires

Introduction

The young man is a collector for the newspaper, he is stopped by Blanche who steals a kiss from him.

Symbolism

The young man embodies Blanche's **obsession** with young boys, which in turn originates from her obsession with **Allan Grey**. Blanche's attitude and approach toward this young man reflect all her past affairs with young soldiers and boys, including the 17-year-old student in her school.

Key Quotes

Scene 5:

BLANCHE: **You make my mouth water.** [She touches his cheek lightly, and smiles. Then she goes to the trunk.]

YOUNG MAN: Well, I'd better be going--

BLANCHE [stopping him]: Young man! [He turns. She takes a large, gossamer scarf



from the trunk and drapes it about her shoulders.] [In the ensuing pause, the "blue piano" is heard. It continues through the rest of this scene and the opening of the next. The young man clears his throat and looks **yearningly** at the door.]

- We see that the young man is slightly **uncomfortable** with the entire fiasco as he looks at the door wanting to leave, Blanche on the other hand seems to be having an episode where she is regressing into the past.

Scene 5:

Well, you do, honey lamb! Come here. I want to kiss you, just once, softly and sweetly on your mouth! [Without waiting for him to accept, she crosses quickly to him and presses her lips to his.] Now run along, quickly! It would be nice to keep you, but I've got to be good--and keep my hands off children. [He stares at her a moment. She opens the door for him and blows a kiss at him as he goes down the steps with a dazed look.

- Blanche cares not for his **consent** and sends him off stating she has been told that she cannot touch children— again, showcasing her past and obsessions.

MEXICAN WOMAN

A foretaste of Blanche's impending doom

The Mexican flower-seller appears on Blanche's doorstep saying "Flores para los Muertos," which translates to "**Flowers for the dead**." This **frightens** Blanche who slams the door and then sinks into her **disturbed** mind, reliving her grim past.

The Mexican Woman **foreshadows** Blanche's future and acts as a trigger for Blanche's mental breakdown. This **breakdown reveals** to the audience more about Blanche's past.

Key Quotes

Scene 9:

Legacies! Huh... And other things such as **bloodstained** pillow-slips--"Her linen needs changing"--"Yes Mother." But couldn't we get a colored girl to do it?" No, we couldn't of course. **Everything gone** but the--
MEXICAN WOMAN: **Flores,**

BLANCHE: **Death--I used to sit here** and she used to sit over there and **death** was as close as you are... We didn't dare even admit we had ever heard of it!

- Blanche reflects on all the death she has witnessed in **flashes** of memory..almost like a stream of consciousness.





Scene 9:

Flores para los muertos, flores--flores...

BLANCHE: The opposite is **desire**. So do you wonder? How could you possibly wonder! Not far from Belle Reve, before we had lost Belle Reve, was a camp where they trained **young soldiers**. On Saturday nights they would go in town to get drunk--

MEXICAN WOMAN [softly]: Coronas...

BLANCHE: --and on the way back they would stagger onto my lawn and call--"Blanche! Blanche!"--The deaf old lady remaining suspected nothing. But sometimes I slipped outside to **answer their calls**... Later the paddy-wagon would gather them up like daisies... the long way home...

- Williams introduces desire as the opposite of death, using this incident. The Freudian understanding of the **sex drive and death drive** as opposites is alluded to here.
- This monologue also sheds light on Blanche's **casual sex** with young and drunk soldiers, hearing it from her mouth makes it more true.

