

JUST A PAPER MOON: A NATURALIST READING OF A *STREETCAR NAMED*

*DESIRE*

A Thesis

by

DANIEL ALEXANDER GONZALEZ

Submitted to Texas A&M International University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

August 2017

Major Subject: English

Just a Paper Moon:  
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**ABSTRACT**

Just a Paper Moon: A Naturalist Reading of *A Streetcar Named Desire*  
(August 2017)

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Tennessee Williams' work *A Streetcar Named Desire* presents a complicated but rich text that does not fit in smoothly to any category of literature. I argue that while this complexity and difficulty of placement is true, the text is best seen through the lens of Naturalism due to the determined lives of the main characters, their attempts to escape these determined lives, and the tragic endings of these characters because of said attempts. This theory is explored in this thesis primarily through an analysis of the main characters of Blanche DuBois, Harold "Mitch" Mitchell, Stanley Kowalski, and Stella Kowalski. This thesis also explores the connection Williams' own life had to the text for the sake of showing a deeper connection to the theme of Naturalism with Williams himself attempting to break from the self-believed determined life he was living.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) is considered his seminal work. The play tells the story of a young woman who makes her way to her sister's home in the French Quarter of New Orleans. There, she meets her sister's husband who provides the conflict for the plot. The issue becomes that Blanche, the main character, has created a false reality for herself to live by, and the husband (Stanley) cannot stand the lies that Blanche tells and lives by. The fact that she lives by more lies than she tells is a very important point to take note of in this text. The play is a modern work and is so dense because of the additions the characters make to the play and the situations they work through that there are many ways to look at the work. The focus that I will be taking in this thesis is a Naturalist reading of the text. I believe that the characters of the play are less human and more symbols of larger concepts than humanity. While "larger than life" symbols are present in other genres of literature, such as Romanticism, these specific symbols within the play relate directly towards the genre and message of Naturalism. It should also be noted that aspects of Romanticism (as well as Realism and Determinism) are found within the genre of Naturalism, so the idea of symbols or other aspects of Naturalism being shared amongst other literary genres makes sense. Moving on, the symbols in the play represent the Naturalistic battle between fantasy and reality and show the harsh Truth of a Naturalist world that is determined through genetics; social conditioning; and fate, is animalistic and primitive, and is more about survival than the success of dreams. As such, the main character of Blanche is a symbol for lies and deceit, and the character of Stanley is a symbol of frankness,

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This Thesis follows the style of *Publications of Modern Language Association*.

genuineness, or authenticity and represents the Naturalistic world they all inhabit. That is to say that the character of Blanche is one who depends on lies and fantasies to continue her existence and symbolizes such ideas while Stanley uses and craves honesty throughout the work and symbolizes those said traits. In this work, I will defend the notion that Naturalism is a central theme in the text, that said theme is displayed through the characters of the text, and that Williams' personal life was also a factor in the prevalence of Naturalism within the work. Kenneth Holditch writes, "Viewed in relation to Literary Naturalism, *Streetcar* represents perhaps the plight of any Romantic in the real world...the plight of the poet-playwright Tennessee Williams as well as his most famous creation, Blanche Dubois" (165). The Naturalist reading of the text provides understanding not only into what is happening in the work by why it is happening—why Blanche has to suffer as she does. Another significance of understanding Naturalism in this work is that it not only provides and arguably better understand the text but it also provides an understanding of Williams himself and how his life affected *Streetcar* and his other works.

## **THEORY OF NATURALISM**

Within this work, we will be referring to the literary movement known as Naturalism. As such, I will take some time to explain the movement and some key points that separate it from other literary movements. To be more specific, I will be focused on the American literary movement of Naturalism, but I will still refer to it as Naturalism. While there are many different themes and components to Naturalism, I believe they all connect towards a larger theme that I would define as "destruction of fantasy." While this is my own term, I take the core of the meaning of said term from C.W.E Bigsby and Donald Pizer who, together, explain that Naturalism was a tool used to show the reality of the world and the

destruction of the dreams for society, specifically the American society and Dream. Pizer writes in his work entitled *Twentieth Century American Literary Naturalism: An Interpretation*, “Man's faith in his innate moral sense and thus his responsibility for his actions, and his belief in the semi divine nature of the American experience and in the healing and preserving roles of family and love—these and many other traditional values appear to be under attack in the naturalistic novel” (ix). Man had been losing faith in himself and in his country, and this loss of faith had been occurring in Americans (specifically Americans for this argument) since the Civil War. This is where the start of Naturalism in the Americas truly begins — at the realization that the American Dream is fictitious. Pizer says on the subject, “The realization by the generation coming of age in the 1890s that American life had changed radically since the Civil War helped compromise a key aspect of the American Dream—the faith that America guaranteed all men the free and just pursuit of self-fulfillment and of the good life” (3). This change in life and realization of reality by Americans gave birth to the literary genre of Realism, which focused on providing factual retellings of events and moments rather than fictitious or more entertaining ones. Realism, however, is later combined with Romanticism, Regionalism, and even Determinism to bring about the literary genre of Naturalism. While it is safe to say that Naturalism is not any one of these other genres completely, it holds a strong connection towards Realism and the desire to show life as it is and not as it fantasied about.

Before I continue forward, I would like to define the term “American Dream” that I will be using in this discussion. Harold Bloom, in his work entitled *The American Dream*, explains that the “American Dream” is “devoid of clear meaning, whether in journalistic accounts or in academic analysis” (xv). He continues on to say though that authors such as

Twain, Frost, and Hemingway have all in their own writings “affirmed, however ambivalently, that it must be possible to have a nation in which all of us are free to develop our singularities into health, prosperity, and some measure of happiness in self-development and personal achievement” (xv). As such, there is no clean explanation as to what the American Dream is, but the before mentioned traits written by Bloom are what I will be focusing on and referring to within this work when mentioning the American Dream. I will, however, expound on the notion of self-development, as I believe that self-development indicates an aspect of freedom from the individual in America to become or grow as far as the individual would like. I believe that to be a deeper understanding of what Bloom is discussing, and I believe that to be a part of what authors of the twentieth century believed died after the Civil War, World War I, and World War II, and the rest of the tragedies in America. The idea that man could be anything he wanted in America was just not true. This explanation by Pizer, continued later by Bigsby, of the destruction of the American Dream brings me to my idea of the overarching theme in Naturalism of “destruction of fantasy.” The idea of America and the freedom to be what one would like, to work hard and become something, began to die after man saw the horrors of what reality was truly like.

Naturalism attempts to show a reality of life that differs from the fantasies told in existence. While this explanation sounds like the literary genre of Realism, the genre of Realism is more of a chronicling of life while Naturalism is a telling of despair through predetermined lives who meet a tragic end. That being said, I will discuss the underlying features of the theme of Naturalism. One of the key components of Naturalism is that the movement believes that man is socially and biologically determined in this existence. What this means is that man is or can be determined in two primary ways within the genre. The

first way, socially, refers to a form of caste system that the main character is placed into. Man is determined by the society or culture of people he is surrounded by. By caste system, I am referring to the placement and social rankings of an individual in cultures and society based on both the financial standings of the character (how much money they or their family make) and to the profession of said character or their family. This can also be related towards the personal strengths and weaknesses of the character and how said character relates to their surrounding society (i.e. an unintelligent man surrounded by intellectuals). I am also referring to their social standings within their respective communities. I use the example of a caste system to refer to the rigidity typically found within a caste system. One cannot typically move up or down the ladder of a caste. In societies and cultures that use caste systems still, such as in India, your family name, profession, and social standing determine where and if you are accepted in societies. That is why I am using it in reference towards understanding Naturalism— one is determined in a caste system based on heredity and social standings as one is determined in Naturalism. For example, the character of Blanche in *Streetcar* is one that is kicked out of her societies because of her love of sexuality that causes her to sleep with many men, both young and old. That is to say that she is removed from the social environments she is living in within the towns in New Orleans. Her sexual traits and practices are not accepted by society, so Blanche must leave towards another town/society. The reality of the character of Blanche is that she is a very sexually charged woman, and that trait does not fit in with the societies that she was living in. That is what takes her to Elysian Fields in the first place. Secondly, Blanche has no money at the start of the play. As such, Blanche is rejected by certain cultures and social groups because of her financial standings. Coupled together, Blanche is a sexual addict that is also poor. Neither of those two traits

allowed her to be accepted in her surrounding culture of New Orleans. The second way to be determined in Naturalism is biologically. One is born a certain race or color and said race or color (even nationality) either allows them to be accepted in society (again referring to the culture or group of people the character is interacting with and surrounded by) or rejected. This second manner also relates back to the caste system. In Naturalism, characters are accepted or rejected in their social environments based on their professions, passions, heredity, and color of skin. All of these factors cause a character to be determined towards a success or failure (usually failure) regardless of what they want. It should be noted that this determinism is also affected by the region and culture the character is within. For example, Blanche would not meet a tragic end in the play if she ended up in a hyper sexual culture or environment instead of the ones she lived in. Thus, her determined existence also changes based on the society she lives in, but we will see later that Blanche has no option in leaving New Orleans at all.

Another example of this can be seen through Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1922) where the main character of Yank, who is a large muscular worker on a ship, attempts to win over a delicate woman from the city even though he is warned and told by his crewmates that he cannot be with her because he is nothing but a brutish male — a hairy ape. Yank then leaves his society where he is successful through his brutish strength (the group on the boat) to enter into another society to try to be with the woman. By the end, Yank scares and accidentally kills the woman during a struggle and wanders into a zoo where he screams at the top of his lungs that he is nothing more than “a hairy ape.” Yank is determined by society as something beneath and different from the woman, and he is not allowed to escape that

“caste level” no matter how badly he desires. Robert Brustein also talks about the determined life of Yank. Brustein writes,

Ever since Eugene O’Neill created Yank... American playwrights have been trying to find dramatic expression for the man of lower birth—of northern urban or southern rural origin— who was denied the language and manners of his more cultured countrymen. Quite often, in spite of superior strength, this man was pictured a victim. O’Neill’s stoker Yank has the power to make the ship go, but once on land, in the clutch of the cold concrete city, he is overcome by pushing crowds, political complexity, and the ridicule of a high-born woman, and finally is crushed to death while trying to embrace an ape, the only animal with whom he finds intellectual communion. (8)

Yank has no hope in the big city. He was determined to live his life in a society that is more brawn than brain, which is why he did so well on the ship as a stoker. When Yank tries to break from that determined existence, which was determined for him by his genetics (being so strong and simple minded), he comes to a tragic end. What I do appreciate is that Brustein highlights the environment that Yank is in. If Yank stays on the ship, he is perfectly fine. It is only when he leaves the ship in search of that which is outside of his caste level that Yank meets his end. The question then becomes what draws Yank to a life that is different than his? While that is entirely another subject, it should be questioned with every character in a Naturalist world as to why and how they meet their tragic end. More often than not, the characters seek something outside of their determined world and meet tragedy. This is also something to consider when looking at the tragic end of Blanche Dubois.

This leads me to my next point on the movement which is the outside force in Naturalism. Characters often attempt to escape their titles or caste levels in Naturalist works, but they are always met with a horrible realization that such a thing is impossible. The reason why this is impossible is because a large trait of Naturalism is the tragic ending. Characters must suffer in the work. Pizer comments on this idea by saying,

Naturalistic fiction also attracts many readers (while repelling others) because of its sensationalism. "Terrible things must happen to the characters of the naturalistic tale," Frank Norris wrote in 1896, and so it has been ever since. The sensationalism of naturalistic fiction, however—its violence and sexuality, for example—has an appeal which strikes deeper than the popular taste for the prurient and titillating. The extraordinariness of character and event in the naturalistic novel creates a potential for symbolism and allegory, since the combination of the concrete and the exceptional immediately implies meanings beyond the surface. Naturalism is thus closely related to the romance in its reliance on a sensationalistic symbolism and allegory. And if, as Richard Chase and others have argued, the romance—as in the fiction of Hawthorne and Melville—is the form most native to the distinctive American experience, then naturalism is a form which continues to fulfill this need in American life. (x-xi)

So, because of the suffering of a character (in the hyper manner that Naturalism does so), we are given symbolism and allegories in Naturalist works. By proxy, that would mean that the authors of Naturalism would be trying to teach a lesson with their works rather than writing them for pure entertainment. As such, Naturalist works are didactic and seek to teach with symbols and allegories, but what is the author trying to say? Pizer also comments on this by stating that the authors of Naturalist works know that “We live in a biologically and socially conditioned world, and it is the function of the novelist to demonstrate this truth (x). Pizer uses a strong word of truth in his explanation. He explains that Naturalist see the world as conditioned and determined, but he also believes that it is up to the Naturalist to display this reality for others to see. Again, we see a connection to Realism as Naturalism attempts to display reality as it truly is, but it does so by including symbolism and allegories provided by the tragic endings that are more Romantic than Realism. Continuing on, Pizer believes there is a truth that must be taught through Naturalism. I, however, would argue that this “truth” is not merely a “truth” to a Naturalist— as this would mean that said truth is only relative to them— but “Truth” which is absolute and universal. The Naturalist believed, as we have seen, that the world is conditioned by one’s biology and social conditioning, and while we

may not agree that said truth is “Truth,” there is no question that Naturalist writers saw it as such. Even Williams saw it in this manner as well. Alvin B. Kernan writes, “In each of his plays, Williams poises the human need for belief in human value and dignity against a brutal, naturalist reality...But where the earlier playwrights were able to concentrate on human values, Williams has been unable to do so because of his conviction that there is a “real” world outside and inside each of us which is actively hostile to any belief in the goodness of man and the validity of moral values” (17). Williams shows through all of his works that the fantasy that man had for life, the idea of innate goodness, values, and (as we discussed earlier) the American Dream were false and unrealistic. As such, his works, including *Streetcar*, attempt to show Truth to his viewers of what truly is within man and what is prevalent on this Earth. And what is prevalent on Earth and within man? This, as well is explained by Kernan and through the narrative of *Streetcar*. Kernan writes,

As Stanley destroys each of Blanche’s pretensions, pointing out that she didn’t “pull any wool over this boy’s eyes,” Blanche tries desperately to telephone for help, but doesn’t know the address. She turns to the window, still looking for help, and looks at the *facts*: “A prostitute has rolled a drunkard. He pursues her along the walk, overtakes her and there is a struggle. A policeman’s whistle breaks it up...Some moments later the Negro woman appears around the corner with a sequined bag which the prostitute had dropped on the walk. She rooting excitedly through it.” Here is reality, “raw and lurid,” the animal struggle for existence which has replaced the bourgeois drawing room in the modern theater. (18-19)

This is the reality that Williams and other Naturalist writers saw when they looked at the world. There was no truth to them —existence was not relative. Existence was a primitive place filled with animalistic struggle to be near the top of the food chain (caste system). Williams saw this reality as Truth. This was the world that we all inhabited, and his plays were written to describe that reality to all of his viewers. In a sense, his works are a guiding post for all to see reality and how it really is. They are calls to throw away fantasies and

accept the circle of life that is existence. While Williams saw this reality as Truth, he could never put it into words. Hence, he used the stage to display it. Kernan writes, For Williams...the “truth” of Nature is undefinable. He only knows that the face it turns toward us is brutal and savage, the “real camino,” not the “Camino Real” (19). While the idea of “Truth” can be argued in many ways, there is no question that Williams (and other Naturalist) saw the primal and savage reality of the twentieth century as “Truth,” and that is how I will be using the term as well in this work. Reality is a competitive and primal existence, and Truth refers to said reality.

Returning to my earlier statement, I believe there to be an outside force that acts upon the characters within Naturalism. This force or forces also happen to be a part of the main criticism of Naturalism. Pizer writes, “Whether damned for degrading man beyond recognition by depicting him as a creature at the mercy of “forces” (“Not Men;” in Malcolm Cowley's well-known phrase) or attacked for inconsistency because of the presence of characteristics which fail to debase him, the naturalist has seldom lacked detractors” (x). Clearly, the notion of forces at work in Naturalism have bothered people for some time. This is also difficult to understand because of the connection Naturalism has with Realism. However, Naturalism also has a very strong connection to Determinism and Romanticism. This idea is brought up by Frank Norris in his work “Zola as a Romantic Writer” as he explains “that Naturalism, as understood by Zola, is but a form of romanticism after all” (168). Norris explains that Realism is fixated on the ordinary, but Naturalism connects with Romanticism as it is focused on the extraordinary. Norris writes,

To be noted of M. Zola we must leave the rank and the file, either run to the forefront of the marching world, or fall by the roadway; we must separate ourselves; we must become individual, unique. The naturalist takes no note of common people, common in so far as their interests, their lives, and the things

that occur in them are common, are ordinary. Terrible things must happen to the characters of the naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched out from the quiet, uneventful round of everyday life, and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death. The world of M. Zola is a world of big things; the enormous, the formidable, the terrible, is what counts; no teacup tragedies here. (168)

Norris here is speaking about Emile Zola and his views on Naturalism. This is important as Zola is considered by many a pioneer of the Naturalist genre. What is interesting here is that Norris provides a strong connection to Romanticism through his explanation of extraordinary versus ordinary. Realism cares about the ordinary and the mundane—the moment to moments of life. Romanticism, and Naturalism of course, loves the inverse. They seek to skip past the ordinary for greater moments that take the ordinary to extraordinary. This explanation also provides another reason for why the characters must suffer as they do. In their sufferings, the characters are taken from their mundane lives to eventful tragedies. While this may be painful and fatal for the character, they are no longer just another individual in a Realist existence—they are the star of their brief and tragic show. Naturalism is neither Romanticism nor Realism. Naturalism “is a school by itself, unique, somber, powerful beyond words” (Norris 169).

While we now understand the connection to Romanticism, we do not understand Naturalism’s connection to Determinism. Firstly, the Determinism that I am speaking of in Naturalism is the general idea that humans or human action is determined by external forces. The individual has no real free will. All of their actions have been determined for them by outside forces. Being more specific, their actions are determined primarily through their connections with society and through their genetics, which we have already spoken about previously. However, I do not believe this is the only way that a character is determined in

Naturalism and, more specifically, *Streetcar*. I believe that while we see the majority of actions and results of said actions being connected to social and genetic Determinism, there is an aspect (albeit a small one) of Fatalism in *Streetcar*. Fatalism is a branch of Determinism and refers to the notion that events and individuals are destined towards an ending without their choice, and this fate is brought about by an arbitrary power. The reason why I believe the specific Determinism that is connected to Naturalism and *Streetcar* is Fatalism is that Blanche is never shown in the play to have upset a god or cosmic power. It seems as though she is at odds with reality. This understanding does not personify reality into a being or creature that can physically chase her down — no, it simply means she is fated to meet a tragic end in conflict with reality. Reality is no god. It is simply the Truth of existence from the standpoint of Naturalism. As such, Blanche is determined in three ways. She is determined because of her genetics in the play. She is growing older and showing wrinkles. Her beauty is fleeting, and while she fantasizes about always have a youthful exterior, this cannot happen. She is growing older and will be looked past in the animalistic reality that she inhabits for younger women. Blanche cannot escape this fate. This her determined ending biologically. While aging is something that some might think is irrelevant towards the notion of being determined, Blanche does not want to age, and she tries as hard as she can to create a fantasy to change that reality. Blanche is seeking to change her determined end biologically.

Secondly, Blanche is determined socially. She does not mix in well with the group of people that live in Elysian Fields or the rest of the world for that matter. Blanche is a Romantic. She fantasizes about how reality should be instead of how it truly is, but that is not how Stanley or Stella or any of the other inhabitants of the Elysian Fields function. They

accept reality as is and move along with it. Stanley is the primary individual who determines Blanche's life. He will not allow her to fantasize at all about reality and tears down every single fantasy of hers as the play goes on. He is the "brutal resident and representative of a Naturalistic universe" (Holditch 155). Kenneth Holditch writes, "Blanche's five-month stay in the Kowalski apartment on Elysian Fields can be charted as a steady decline from the transcendent poetic vision that was part (though certainly not all) of her past through a destructive descent during which she is forced by the animalistic Stanley, aided consciously or unconsciously by Stella and Mitch, to face reality and then the brutal facts of a Naturalistic world" (157). The people surrounding Blanche will not allow her to dream. She cannot exist in their world and not live the way they do. She must become as all the others in the society. She must accept the horrible truth of the Naturalistic world she is living. Holditch continues by saying,

Every action of Stanley's in relation to her is violent: the touch of his hands fouls Allan's love letters; he forces her to relive the loss of Belle Reve; he investigates her past in Laurel and discovers the sordid liaisons to which she has stopped in her attempt to ease the pain of her husband's death; and his birthday gift to her is a ticket to return her to the scene of her disgrace. Each act forces Blanche to acknowledge more and more of reality and brings her further down into the depths of the broken world. The decent culminates in the indignity of her rape—a kind of symbolic death, which occurs, ironically, on her birthday—and the subsequent mental collapse. (157)

Stanley goes bit by bit, tearing way at every single fantasy and lie that Blanche comes up with to cope and change reality. There will be no lies in his house, his neighborhood, and so forth. Blanche may want to have "magic" and fantasy in life, she may want to create a new existence for herself, but Stanley will not allow it and determines her existence by destroying every illusion she fabricates, forcing her to accept reality. Blanche has no choice in the matter. She is determined by the people around her to not only see reality but accept it.

The final way that Blanche is determined is through fate. Now, this aspect of Determinism is much smaller when compared to the other ways that Blanche, but it is still present in the play. No matter what Blanche tries to do, she cannot create a fantasy that lasts too long. One example of these fantasies is Blanche's relationship with Mitch (or her attempt at one). She is only interested in him because he represents to her a "cleft in the rock of the world that [she] could hide in" (*Desire* 546). Blanche has no interest in Mitch. She only wants him because he represents hope to her that her fantasies could be believed by others. Well, this fantasy is destroyed quickly when Mitch finds out the truth about her from Stanley. This hope is not only manifested in Mitch but in another character, one that is made up by Blanche, entitled Shep Hundleigh. The reality is she is searching for a savior—one who will deliver her into her dreams, but there are no saviors in a Williams' work. Delma Eugene Presly writes, "The second major theological issue in the plays of Williams is the absence of God or a savior...Blanche Dubois keeps hoping up until the that her messiah...will appear out of nowhere and rescue her from Stanley and his crude world" (278). The idea of a messiah is one of the larger fantasies Blanche has in the work and, instead of waiting for one, tries to create one (Shep) or place that image onto a person (Mitch). That is why Mitch is that "cleft in the rock" to Blanche. The real Mitch is gone in her mind and all that is left is the silhouette of a savior—a deliverer, but she is not allowed to have that either. She is fated to meet reality. She is not allowed to escape that, which is why Mitch inevitably realizes the truth about Blanche and tries to push himself upon her. That image of a savior is destroyed and all that is left of Mitch is the harsh reality of the real Mitch. Blanche's fantasies are never allowed to stand. Her past, as well, can never be avoided. Her fantasy of starting a new life after the suicide of her husband is stopped at every turn. Holditch writes, "Reality, however,

is not denied for long, and all her painful losses— deaths of numerous relatives, her part in Allan’s suicide, financial collapse, her own ostracism from the community—return to haunt her, as in the almost surreal scene in which the Mexican woman in the street is selling ‘flores para los muertos’” (157). The Mexican woman scene is a very powerful moment that we will be visiting later on in this work, but it represents the most determined moment that happens to Blanche through and arbitrary power. She is not allowed to leave the city or the neighborhood. Another example of this idea of fate are the final words that Stanley utters to Blanche right before the rape begins. Stanley tells her that “[they] had this date with each other from the beginning” (*Desire* 555). While this can be seen as merely a sexual comment, the statement refers to the notion that Blanche has been destined to this moment ever since she arrived in Elysian Fields and before. She was destined for this moment. We understand this by seeing Stanley as a symbol and representative for Naturalism there in Elysian Fields, an idea that Holditch as well agrees with. Blanche is not only determined by her genetics, or the people around, but by fate itself. These are the forces that affect Blanche and everyone else in the Naturalism and in *Streetcar*.

The question then becomes whether or not Williams himself believed in Determinism. The truth is he did. John Kundtz writes,

To begin with, the playwright does not believe in free will. During press and TV interviews on March 3rd, 1957, he was quoted as saying: I don't believe in 'original sin.' I don't believe in 'guilt.' I don't believe in villains and heroes— only right and wrong ways that individuals have taken, not by choice, but by necessity or by still uncomprehend influences in themselves, their circumstances and their antecedents. Mr. Williams also states that his belief in determinism is not just theory, but that it is part of a basic premise that pervades his whole life, a premise which provides the impulse to all that he creates. He declares that the dominating principle in all his writing has been "the need for understanding and tenderness and fortitude among individuals trapped by circumstance." A further confirmation of Mr. Williams' interest in determinism, especially environmental determinism, was brought out in a

recent interview with Mike Wallace. During this interview Mr. Williams stated that the primary cause of juvenile delinquency was the raising of children under circumstances which would not give them a fair chance in the world. (2-3)

I agree with Kundtz on the idea that Williams did believe in a determined existence. His idea that there was no “original sin” is a large statement referring to the idea that Adam and Eve never made the choice to sin in the Garden of Eden—it was chosen for them. People make choices based on the circumstances that affect and determine them. There is no real choice of good or bad, according to Williams. People simply act in response to that which has affected them. They are determined in life by forces outside of their control. Williams believed in a determined existence, and he also believed in a primal and competitive world. Putting all of these beliefs and ideas together helped Williams create the text of *Streetcar*, which is clearly Naturalistic.

### **SYMBOLISM IN A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE**

The characters within *Streetcar* are very deep and complicated. This, again, is a credit to Williams as his characters are not easily placed in a category. However, for this argument, I will be placing the characters into a form of category. In my argument, I will be using and seeing the characters as more of symbols of larger concepts and ideas rather than just people. One of the main reasons I have for viewing the characters as symbols is because of the connection theater and Williams have to symbolistic characters, and support of this idea is also mentioned by Adler. “... as Tom Driver remarks, it has always been a natural tendency of the stage to turn things into symbols. And symbols are, as Williams makes abundantly clear in his essays over the years, an integral part of his dramatic technique; he ventures to say... ‘without my symbols I might still be employed by the International Shoe Co. in St. Louis’” (qtd. in Adler 29). The theater and symbols go hand and hand together. Williams, as

well, loved symbols, and it is obvious when seeing his work that he gravitates towards the use of symbols. One of the major symbols he uses within the work is his use of light and its ability to expose that which is in the dark or the shadows. He pushes this through a lantern that Blanche places in her room when she arrives in the Elysian Fields to provide shade and cloak her aging physical features from the world and herself. This connects towards the theme of reality versus fantasy in the play. Adler also touches on the use of light by Williams in the play. Adler writes, “When Mitch and, later, Stanley tear the lantern off the bulb, it is as if they are attacking Blanche herself and destroying her world of illusion/art” (30). Adler supports the idea of the lantern and light being symbols and parallels towards reality versus fantasy in the text. Blanche’s need for shade from the light is just another symbol that Williams uses to explain the fight within the character between reality and fantasy. While this is a material symbol in the play, Williams, as well, uses people as symbols.

Seeing the characters as symbols creates the notion of a social argument rather just one that is specific for just the characters within the play. If the characters represent ideas such as society, family, or truth, it can be argued that Williams’ work is making a social criticism, which connects it even more so with the notion of Naturalism and its ability to display the horrific realities of the twentieth century. Bigsby, as well as Williams himself, supports this notion of a social criticism in the plays: “The social and political seldom disappear entirely from William’s work. As he himself remarked, ‘I’m not sure I want to be well-adjusted to things as they are. I would prefer to be racked by desire for things better than they are, even for things unattainable than to be satisfied with things as they are... I am not satisfied with the present state of things in this country and I’m afraid of complacency about it’” (Bigsby 33). The use of the characters as larger concepts is not wrong in any analysis of

this work. It is rather the inverse. It is important to see the depth that is within the characters and how they combine to create the complex and captivating tale of *Streetcar*. To see the characters as just single layered individuals or without depth is a mistake. They stand for so much more and represent a criticism that Williams was trying to put forward that reality, or Truth, will not tolerate a life lived in fantasy. Bigsby also comments on the complexity of the characters themselves:

This sense of incompleteness applies equally to his [Williams'] characters who resist being too fully known. As he has suggested, 'Some mystery should be left in the revelation of character in a play, just as a great deal is always left in the revelation of character in life, even in one's own character to himself.' To define too closely is to accept 'facile definitions which make a play just a play, not a snare for the truth of human experience.' That incompleteness is vital to his work. At its best it moves him away from metaphor and towards the symbolic whose essence lies in its inexhaustible significations. And the truth of human experience he sets himself to capture? That has to do with a particular kind of desperate dignity in defeat. (34)

While I agree with the majority of what Bigsby has to say on the subject, there must be some form of classification and definition of the characters in order to provide some form of understanding of the text. I believe the notion of seeing the characters as symbols for larger concepts, however, creates a middle ground where there is a lens to see the text through while not stripping the characters of their mystery and complexity by labeling them as something that has no room for other interpretations. If a character is a symbol of society, it does not mean the character does not have goals or aspirations. It simply means that these things are all layered on top of the main point of the characters, which is the symbol they represent. The use of them as symbols does not diminish or take away from their complexities but adds to them. It takes all that the character does within the text and melds it together to provide a larger meaning. Everything that they do or say is now a part of a larger concept. This is why and how I will be analyzing the characters of the play. I will be using

and seeing them as symbols of larger concepts that support the notion of the Naturalist view of the text and the social criticism that goes with it by proxy. That is to say that the characters support the notion that Blanche Dubois is determined in her existence by her genetics; her surrounding society; and by fate, that she exists within a world that is primal and without concern of man, and that fantasies of existences are not allowed to stand.

## **WILLIAMS AND NATURALISM**

Now, while I have used C.W.E Bigsby as support for my argument (and will continue to throughout), he does not believe that Williams' works were supportive of Naturalism. In fact, he believes that Williams was against the movement as he was against the Realist movement. Bigsby writes, "Tennessee Williams' play are not naturalistic. The determinism which his characters resist is not primarily the product of a physical environment or heredity. They are built into the structure of existence" (38). While Bigsby does make valid points throughout his examination of Williams and his work, I disagree on this notion that his work — specifically in *Streetcar*— is not Naturalistic. His comment that the determinism present in William's characters is simply built in existence is a statement that Bigsby moves past very quickly. Regardless of where it may come from, the characters, more specifically Blanche, are unarguably determined towards something that cannot be avoided. The characters seek to escape this determined life and suffer because of such. To say that the works of Williams are not Naturalistic is to play semantics with the definition of Naturalism and narcissistically attempt to create something that is without a title — a genre without name. Pizer also states that the core of Naturalism is "a sense of man more circumscribed than conventionally acknowledged" (6). I truly believe that Williams simply

did not like to join the masses and wanted to stand out with his writing by deviating from the genre that his work clearly fell into. Holditch writes,

When he wrote *Streetcar*, the playwright seemed to have believed that the modern world is antagonistic to the ideal as to the dreamer, a tenet he continued to espouse in varying degrees for the rest of his life. Yet there is no doubt that he believed that the human being, while accepting the limitations of the physical, must cling to some vestige of hope in something beyond the Naturalistic world represented by Stanley, must “look at the stars,” must not “hold back with the brutes.” (165)

Yes, Williams was a diverse writer that while believing in the primal reality of this world had hope that said world could change, but that hope does not change the reality of the worlds that are within his work. William’s characters are determined by their environment, their surrounding societies, and their genetics and meet their ends in hyper tragic ways, and all of these traits connect his works, at the very least *Streetcar*, to the literary genre of Naturalism. While I do not believe that Bigsby is after such an end game with his thoughts, I do believe he is being too specific with his definitions. I also believe that Williams did not like to be classified as something that already existed in reality. He was one to try and break away from the standards and definitions of existence as his characters attempt. Bigsby writes, “Theatrically, he set himself to dissolve the surface of Naturalism whose propositions he denied. What he was after, he insisted, was a plastic theater, fluid, evanescent, undefined and undefining. His was to be an attempt to find in the style of his theatre an equivalent to that resistance to the given which characterized his protagonists” (39). While Williams does make strides to create something that is not one genre or another completely, we cannot say that his work is without the touch or portion of genres that are so wide and encompassing that they will inevitably gather everything that is written. This is where the argument of narcissism and individuality comes about. Williams had been defined by others his entire life (of which I

touch on later), so it would make sense that he would like to define himself and his work as separate from that which exists, but just as his characters experience, Williams and his work face the reality of Truth and the idea that there is nothing new under the sun. His work falls into the category of Naturalism. Is it purely Naturalist— no. Does a work have to be simply one genre? — No. Masterpieces of literature do not simply fall into one genre, but they may lean towards one side more than others. This is the case with *Streetcar*. It may not be 100% Naturalism, but it so full of determinism and characters that seek to escape it that we would be foolish to not call it Naturalism. This definition does not discredit all other portions of the work, but its existence is stating that there must be a definition and classification of the work regardless. To say that a reader does not do so naturally is being foolish. The reader may not have the title of the classification of the text that they are reading in their knowledge, but they have classified it as something. While Bigsby and Williams both would like to escape the term of Naturalism to define the work of Williams, this too is a foolish belief that is confronted by the truth of reality. Williams did not create a new genre. He did not escape all genres. He created a masterpiece. A masterpiece that falls into the definition and classification of Naturalism regardless of the semantics played in order to escape it.

## CHAPTER II

### LIFE OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons I am using the Naturalist reading of *Streetcar* is because said reading connects with the actual life of Williams. Williams placed much of his own life into the plays that he wrote. As such, the characters, the relationships of those characters, and their respective endings should be looked at very closely so as to see what Williams was trying to say. *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) was based heavily on the relation Williams had with his own parents and his emerging homosexuality that was forced down. As such, the character of Brick is a window supplied by Williams himself into his own life for us to see and, quite possibly, for Williams to finally deal with the baggage and weight he had carried for so many years. Due to issues in the home, Tennessee Williams (known as Tom during his childhood) turned to books and writing as his comfort. C.W.E Bigsby touches on this connection Williams had with his works:

Williams had the romantic fascination with the extreme situations, with the imagination's power to challenge facticity, with the capacity of language to reshape experience, with the self's ability to people the world with visions of itself. He deployed the iconography of the romantic: fading beauty, the death of the young, a dark violence, a redeeming love. Like the romantic he was inclined to blur the edge of the divide between his life and his art. It would be tempting to see his fondness for drink and drugs as yet another aspect of the romantic's twin quest for vision and self-destruction except that in his case had more to do with terror and despair. It was certainly as a romantic in an unromantic world that he wished to present himself, transfiguring the failed enterprise that is life with nothing more than language and the imagination. (32)

Bigsby's analysis of Williams is one that I agree with. Looking at Williams' life, it can be easy to see that he did not want to accept what was given to him as reality. Whether it be from the problems in his own family or the ones that were happening around the world, Williams didn't want the truth. Williams wanted magic. He wanted to transform that which

was around him to be more like what he thought life could be. This is why Williams took to the stage. The theater was a place where Williams could augment reality as he saw fit. In a sense, Williams played the role of Blanche Dubois (his main character in *Streetcar*) in his own life. Bigsby also comments on this idea as well.

Tennessee Williams' explanation for his career as a dramatist was that he was "creating imaginary worlds into which I can retreat from the real world because... I've never made any kind of adjustment to the real world". It was an honest remark and one that could be applied with equal force to his characters. In one direction, such a failure of adjustment may generate neurosis and psychosis; in another, art. And if his characters are indeed pulled toward mental instability they also tend to be artists, literal and symbolic. Blanche turns her life into an art work. Her trunk is full of clothes for the various roles she plays while she transforms the Kowalski apartment with the eye of a theater director. (33)

Bigsby, as well as I, believes that Williams did not like the world he was living in, and just as his character of Blanche, if he could not live in his dream world, he would make for himself. While Blanche only had an apartment to work with, Williams had the stage of a theater to change life as he saw fit. As such, he had another avenue to escape the life he was living and, even for an evening, live a life in the world of his characters, even as a bystander. Williams, himself, also provides support to this idea through his own words in his short essay "Notes to Readers" which is found in his collection of essays entitled *New Selected Essays: Where I Live*. Williams writes,

The world is a section of space and life a section of time in which things happen over which the individual... has very little influence and virtually no control. That is what makes the stage such an infinitely desirable section of space: it is the section of space in which the individual can play the lord and master and somehow, somehow make up for his helpless bewilderment in the affairs of the cosmos. If the playwright creates a tragedy he takes hold of the abundant raw material of earthly sorrow, which in reality has no form and seldom any poetry... Then he arranges these pieces in a new order that is congruous to that mysterious sense of design which we have in our hearts... The result is a transfiguration. The tragic event may be materially the same as

it was in reality, but now, in art, on the stage, it is invested with those properties which give it poetry and meaning. (25)

The stage was everything for Williams. It was a place where he could take all of the pain of life, that which made no sense to him while he was growing up, and make into something beautiful. To Williams, there was no God. The pains that he experienced in life were just mistakes he had to endure. There was no reason for them. But when Williams took to the stage, he realized that he could take the pains of existence and use them to bring beauty and meaning to the world. In a sense, Williams wanted to play the role of God. He saw no order with the travesties of life, so he would create them on the stage; he had to. It was the only way he would survive and accept the upbringing he endured.

Williams faced a dysfunctional childhood due to the issues between his mother and his father. His father, a bombastic drunk, would often demean his wife and children when he would return home from the road. His mother, however, turned her pain inside, ignoring her husband and giving her focus and affections to her children. Williams was very ill as a child and couldn't walk due to his contraction of the disease Diphtheria. His brother, Dakin Williams, discusses seeing Williams' legs as nothing but skin and bones. As such, Williams was bedridden for some time, which allowed his mother to read to him the classics such as Shakespeare and Dickens. Donald Spoto, one of the numerous biographers Williams had after he died, comments on the upbringing Williams had at home in Edward Herrmann's documentary *Tennessee Williams: Wounded Genius*. Spoto says, "For a boy who was shy to the point of pain and sensitive to what then might have been called effeminacy, he was almost brutalized by school boys, and this was reinforced at home because his father couldn't stand the fact that he didn't turn into a football hero. The boy preferred to read poetry" (Herrmann). While this was the relation that Williams had with his father, things weren't

better with his mother. Her utter dislike of her husband led her to drive the children away from him, and her puritanical views confused the children even more. On the one end, the Williams children had their drunk, loose, and loud father pulling them towards a life of debauchery with his example, and on the other end, the children's mother forced them to be as closed off from the liberal world as she was. Needless to say, it was a very confusing, loud, and painful upbringing for Williams' to go through. His only solace was with his sister, Rose, but even this area of comfort was taken away from him at a young age. While Rose was a place of solace for Williams at an early age, as she grew, Rose became mentally unstable, having violent mood swings which added more problems in the Williams' home. Lyle Leverich, author of the biographical novel *Tom*, comments on the importance Rose had on Williams in his life. Leverich says, "Rose was his one really great love. It was one to whom he was an all-time faithful as he was to his writing. They were the two major forces in his life" (Herrmann). Rose was taken away to a mental institution when Williams was still young, but the largest blow to Williams was when Rose was lobotomized. This not only removed one of the largest sources of love and support from Williams' life; it terrorized the man. Williams, for the rest of his life, believed he himself was only steps away from a mental institution. This all led to heavy drinking and wild sexual behavior. Williams was attempting to run away from his past. While this is all important to know from the premise of understanding the plays that Williams wrote, it is important to note something else from the life of Williams: his attempt to run away from the reality of his life. Williams couldn't handle the truth of his past, so he spent hours behind a typewriter and always had liquor. Sources close to Williams say that his day was not a day without sex or writing. Williams did have a single long relationship in his life, but even this was not enough to take him away from

alcohol and sexuality. Williams, very much like his character of Brick from *Cat*, couldn't stand the mendacity of his own telling. Williams knew he wasn't dealing with his past, so he turned to his pleasures of writing, liquor, and sex to cope - the only healthy of the one being writing. Specifically looking at *Cat*, the image of a broken and lonely Williams comes into view, and this was a man that finished off the rest of his life in the same manner: broken.

Williams was never able to win over his critics ever again as he descended further and further down the hole that was started by his own family but continued by himself. Towards the latter half of his life, Williams was placed under house arrest by his brother for three months to try and sober him up, but upon release, Williams returned to his old ways. Nothing, not religion, family, relations, sex, or even his writing, was enough to deal with the damage that was suffered by Williams in his life.

#### **WILLIAMS IN A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE**

Continuing on with the connection of Williams to his work of *Streetcar*, the key to understanding this work comes from the words of Kim Hunter, the actress who played Stella in the film version. Hunter had asked for the meaning or theme of the play from Williams, and this was his response to her: 'Well, I think it's a plea for the understanding of the delicate people', and I think the plea was also to understand him" (Herrmann). Williams was a very sensitive person, and Blanche, as well, was "sensitive" according to the play (*Desire* 529). Williams was trying to explain that the delicate people of life often times have their whole world thrown upside down, as he did with his family and the loss of Rose (which we could compare, to a degree, to the loss of Blanche's husband), and he wanted to explain that said delicate people often cannot continue on with life truly after they have such traumatic

experiences. The connection between Williams and Blanche is solidified even more so by the lines of Stella in the play.

STELLA. She is. She was. 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. (*Desire* 540)

Stella is referring to Stanley as the type of people that changed Blanche forever, and what is the personality of Stanley: strong and brutish. These were the exact qualities that neither Blanche nor Williams were. They were not the survivors. They were the manipulated and weak. This is why we can see Williams in the character of Blanche. Williams himself wrote a connection in the play that would show not only his resemblance to Blanche but to the pain of the story. This is why Williams believed people hide from the truth in existence. Williams said on the matter in a letter to Donald Windham, "We all bob only momentarily above the bubbling surface of the torrent of lies and distortions we are borne along. We are submarine creatures, for beneath that surface is the world we live in, with its names and labels and its accepted ideas. And over it only is the oxygen unadulterated which we can only breathe in spasms now and again, and the only vision which is pure at all" (qtd. in *Drama Vol.2* 67). Williams believed that we all hid along our ways through life. The sensitive people, the delicate ones, however, cannot keep up the game and facade for so long. Williams was in no way vindicating the wearing masks or having a double life to avoid reality. We can understand this completely by the ending of his plays alone. They always show tragedy for those who do such things, and Williams was not one that enjoyed the existence of masks. This is why Williams wrote tragedies: to tell real stories. While the stories and trappings of

Naturalism are a bit exaggerated, Williams used those tragedies to open the doors for truth and sincerity in people. We understand this from the lines he wrote.

BLANCHE. She must have been fond of you. Sick people have such deep, sincere attachments.

MITCH. That's right, they certainly do.

BLANCHE. Sorrow makes for sincerity, I think.

MITCH. It sure brings it out in people.

BLANCHE. The little there is belongs to people who have experienced some sorrow.

MITCH. I believe you are right about that. (*Desire* 498)

Williams wrote tragedies not to depress those who would watch his plays but to invite them to a form of honesty through tragedy. Williams believed that those who suffered deserved a bit of reparation for what they have suffered through. They deserved to be able to live in their fantasies. Adler, as well, sees the connection between Blanche and Williams.

Adler writes,

Blanche's actions as artist keep before the audience the presence of Williams the artist as well; and her credo of truth through illusion and of the moral imperative of art to raise humankind beyond what it is by showing "what ought to be true" is William's credo, too... The peculiar travail of the artist—both the Blanches and Williamses of this world—is that the "magic" of the art work is never sufficient unto itself and must be renewed through continued creative activity. (86)

The connection of Williams to Blanche is one that is seen on multiple levels. We see that both characters disagree with the realities of their worlds, both believe that art or fantasy is a means of dealing with it (with both modifying existence through theatrical expressions and creation), and both are stuck in a loop consistently needing to create more "magic" to deal

with existence, as if existence is constantly dragging them both back to the light of reality.

Bigsby as well believes there is a connection from Williams to his characters. Bigsby writes,

For he [Williams] has hardly written a single play which in not obliquely concerned with his own plight as a writer in a world which values only material things. When Cervantes was asked whom he intended to represent through the figure of Don Quixote he is said to have replied, "Myself." Williams might well give the same reply with regard to any of a dozen characters. So it is that in the persons of Laura Wingfield, Blanche Dubois, Alma Winemiller, we have a series of portraits of those characters for whom Williams has the greatest sympathy; those who, like himself, have been unable fully to adjust to a world in which honor, sexual passion, integrity, and compassion no longer have a place. (Glory 42)

It is not just Blanche Dubois but countless other characters that are the reflection of Williams in his works, and those characters are there to show the pain of the author who cannot acclimate or accept the world as it is— the primal reality or Truth of existence. Williams is within his characters and so is his pain, but as we understand from earlier, his works were a cry for others to see reality as it is. On one level, we can see his plays as a warning of the Truth of reality, but on another level entirely, we can see his works as pleads for others to see life as he saw it. They were his pleas for the world to become more "sensitive."

Williams' answer to this work, and to himself, is from his minor character of Eunice in *Streetcar*. Eunice's line is the key to understanding the lesson of the entire play. It comes during a discussion Stella is having with Eunice after Stella finally believes Stanley and agrees, we believe, to having her sister committed.

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

EUNICE. Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep going on. (*Desire* 556-57)

Eunice is the hard truth for the characters in modern Naturalist works such as Blanche or Willy Loman from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Robert Cohn and Jake

Barnes from Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun also Rises* (1926), Larry Slade and the entire bar from Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (1946), Brick from Tennessee Williams' own *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), and even Stella herself. Stella wants to believe her sister because to not do so was to ruin the reality that she preferred for her life. The reality where her childhood sister was still the same individual she grew up with. This lesson from Eunice is the key to breaking down the lesson from Naturalism about accepting life as it is, and it was a lesson that Williams himself needed to hear from his own characters' mouths. I believe this to be true because of Williams' own words. "If the writing is honest it cannot be separated from the man who wrote it. It isn't so much his mirror as it is the distillation, the essence, of what is strongest and purest in his nature... This makes it deeper than the surface likeness of a mirror and that much more truthful" (*Where I Live* 90). Eunice was talking to Williams and not even the reflection of the man. The character spoke to the very pain and sorrow, the very essence of the man that was distilled into the pages he wrote.

### CHAPTER III

#### ANALYSIS OF A *STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*

Moving on now to the actual story of *Streetcar*, the narrative focuses on the main character of Blanche Dubois, her sister Stella, Stella's husband Stanley, and Stanley's friend (and Blanche's love interest) Mitch as they live their lives in the French Quarter of New Orleans. While there are others in the play, these four stand out as the main instruments for moving the play forward. Blanche moves to New Orleans to be with Stella and Stanley for reasons unknown to the audience at the time of her first appearance. She quickly moves in with the Kowalskis and begins to change the dynamics of the house completely. Blanche begins to tell stories to her sister of what has happened to their childhood home, her losses in life, and her perspectives altogether on living, and Stella believes every word of it. Her husband Stanley, however, does not believe anything that Blanche says, and this leads to all of the tension in the play. We then find out that Blanche is hiding a dark past involving the death of her husband, but she cannot admit to this or even accept it. This causes the character to have a double life where on the one hand she is an upstanding and conservative woman, and on the other hand, she is a very sexually charged, alcohol addicted woman. The character of Mitch then falls in love with the false image of Blanche, and Blanche believes that she can now live a life in her false identity altogether. Continuing from the beginning of the play, Stanley plays an instrument of conflict and truth in the narrative, constantly pestering Blanche for the truth of her life until her secret comes out. Blanche then has a horrible breakdown after she loses the respect of everyone, the love and faith of Mitch, and her own body to the hands of Stanley in a rape. Blanche is then committed to a psychiatric institute, and the play ends.

As mentioned above in the portion of text that analyzed the theory behind Naturalism, there are certain elements that are a part of theme of Naturalism, and each character represents certain elements that work together to create the Naturalistic theme. Blanche plays the tragic protagonist that must suffer in the work and who represents lies or fantasies; Stanley represents both the “survival of the fittest” theme in Naturalism and the larger concept of Truth; Stella represents the inverse family that does more harm than good in Naturalism; and Mitch represents society as a whole and the response society has to individuals who try to live out their fantasies instead of their realities. As mentioned prior, each character is a symbol for a larger concept, and, again, all of these symbols work together to provide the Naturalist theme in the book that neither Bigsby nor Williams believe is there. As Kenneth Holditch says, “*A Streetcar Named Desire* is, among other things, a classic study of the destruction of a Romantic protagonist committed to the ideal but living in the modern age, a broken world, a wasteland growing progressively more pragmatic and animalistic as the twentieth century advances” (147). Blanche is a romantic character trapped in a Naturalist world, and the inhabitants of that world will not allow her to dream.

### **BLANCHE**

The character of Blanche is by far the most interesting of the play because of her complexity. Blanche cannot cope with the suicide of her husband, so she creates a second personality for herself to live through. This second Blanche is a woman who adores literature, is very aristocratic, and is very puritanical. An example of this dual character is when Blanche is speaking to Stanley before a poker scene in the play. At this point we see the original sexual Blanche tempting Stanley.

BLANCHE: Where's Stella?

STANLEY: Out on the porch.

BLANCHE: I'm going to ask a favor of you in a moment.

STANLEY: What could that be, I wonder?

BLANCHE: Some buttons in back! You may enter! [He crosses through drapes with a smoldering look.] How do I look?

STANLEY: You look all right.

BLANCHE: Many thanks! Now the buttons!

STANLEY: I can't do nothing with them.

BLANCHE: You men with your big clumsy fingers. May I have a drag on your cig?

STANLEY: Have one for yourself.

BLANCHE: Why, thanks! ... It looks like my trunk has exploded.

STANLEY: Me and Stella were helping you unpack.

BLANCHE: Well, you certainly did a fast and thorough job of it!

STANLEY: It looks like you raided some stylish shops in Paris.

BLANCHE: Ha-ha! Yes--clothes are my passion!

STANLEY: What does it cost for a string of fur-pieces like that?

BLANCHE: Why, those were a tribute from an admirer of mine!

STANLEY: He must have had a lot of--admiration!

BLANCHE: 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?

STANLEY: Your looks are okay.

BLANCHE: I was fishing for a compliment, Stanley.

STANLEY: I don't go in for that stuff. (487)

One point that should be noted is the flirtation that comes through the lines in this portion of text. If we analyze this small portion of scene, we see that there are many cues that Williams has left for us to believe Blanche is flirting with Stanley—the husband of her sister. One point to notice is she asks him to help her with her dress. This means that Stanley would have to draw near to her, touch her, and even smell her. There is also something to be said about the connection this moment has with a husband or boyfriend helping his partner out with her dress. Blanche also asks to smoke from the same cigarette as Stanley. She also continues to ask him about the way she looks, even going so far as to admit that she is “fishing for a compliment” (487). There is also something interesting about Williams stating that Blanche should be smiling at Stanley “radiantly” while fishing for compliments. All of this scene shows us that Blanche is not viewing Stanley as a passerby or even as someone she detests. Blanche is showing signs of interest and even flirting. What should be noted is the mixing of character here in Blanche. Blanche is flirting and revealing the sexual side of herself, but she masks this behind a proper facade still. This is the game Blanche plays throughout the drama. Blanche is two characters at the same time. She is hyper sexual and plays a proper woman who would never be interested in such things.

Continuing on, we see the flirting continue to a dangerous point.

BLANCHE. I cannot imagine any witch of a woman casting a spell over you.

STANLEY. That's right.

BLANCHE. You're simple, straightforward and honest, a little bit on the primitive side I should think. To interest you a woman would have to--[She pauses with an indefinite gesture.]

STANLEY. [Slowly]: Lay... her cards on the table.

BLANCHE. [Smiling]: Well, I never cared for wishy-washy people. That was why, when you walked in here last night, I said to myself--"My sister has married a man!"--Of course that was all that I could tell about you. (488)

Immediately, we see a flirtatious side of Blanche that we know nothing about. The interesting point here is that this side of Blanche is shown in secrecy - behind closed doors. Stella is not present for this. Stella remains charmed by Blanche's deceit. The only person that would know this side — this flirtatious and sexual side of Blanche— would be the man she is flirting with: Stanley. However, Stanley does not take the bait and notices something off with Blanche.

STANLEY. [Booming]: Now let's cut the re-bop?

BLANCHE. [Pressing hands to her ears]: Ouuuuu!

STELLA. [Calling from the steps]: Stanley! You come out here and let Blanche finish dressing!

BLANCHE. I'm through dressing, honey.

STELLA. Well, you come out, then.

STANLEY. Your sister and I are having a little talk.

BLANCHE [lightly]. Honey, do me a favor. Run to the drugstore and get me a lemon-coke with plenty of chipped ice in it!--Will you do that for me, Sweetie?

STELLA [uncertainly]. Yes.

[She goes around the corner of the building.]

BLANCHE. The poor little thing was out there listening to us, and I have an idea she doesn't understand you as well as I do.... All right; now, Mr. Kowalski, let us proceed without any more double-talk. I'm ready to answer all questions. I've nothing to hide. What is it? (488)

Blanche not only hides the truth of the discussion from Stella — she gets rid of her! Blanche is completely aware of who her real self is, and she is ready to indulge in that sexual nature with her sister's own husband! The scene continues:

STANLEY. There is such a thing in this state of Louisiana as the Napoleonic code, according to which whatever belongs to my wife is also mine--and vice versa.

BLANCHE. My, but you have an impressive judicial air! [She sprays herself with her atomizer; then playfully sprays him with it. He seizes the atomizer and slams it down on the dresser. She throws back her head and laughs.]

STANLEY. If I didn't know that you was my wife's sister I'd get ideas about you!

BLANCHE. Such as what!

STANLEY. Don't play so dumb. You know what!

BLANCHE [she puts the atomizer on the table]. All right. Cards on the table. That suits me. (488)

Even Stanley sees it at this point! There is no question at all about Blanche. She is a hyper sexual character playing a fantasy game. Blanche is so deep in her desire for sexuality that

nothing is sacred to her, not even the husband of her sister. In reality, Blanche is a primal woman who loves sex and is an alcoholic.

Blanche leads her husband to his death because she tells him that he is not a man at all, and this death caused her fracture and led to the multiple personalities within Blanche. The reason we know this is that Blanche runs from anything that has a connection to her past, and Williams makes sure the audience is aware of this. In the same scene that was previously analyzed, Blanche has a connection to her past and a moment where the truth of her life is about to come out, and she cannot deal with the situation.

STANLEY. What's them underneath? [He indicates another sheaf of papers.

BLANCHE. These are love-letters, yellowing with antiquity, all from one boy. [He snatches them up. She speaks fiercely] Give those back to me!

STANLEY. I'll have a look at them first!

BLANCHE. The touch of your hands insults them!

STANLEY. Don't pull that stuff! [He rips off the ribbon and starts to examine them. Blanche snatches them from him, and they cascade to the floor.]

BLANCHE. Now that you've touched them I'll burn them!

STANLEY [staring, baffled]. What in hell are they?

BLANCHE [on the floor gathering them up]. 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!

STANLEY. What do you mean by saying you'll have to burn them?

BLANCHE. I'm sorry, I must have lost my head for a moment. Everyone has something he won't let others touch because of their--intimate nature.... [She now seems faint with exhaustion and she sits down with the strong box and puts on a pair of glasses and goes methodically through a large stack of papers.] Ambler & Ambler. Hmmmmm.... Crabtree.... More Ambler & Ambler.

STANLEY. What is Ambler & Ambler?

BLANCHE. A firm that made loans on the place.

STANLEY. Then it was lost on a mortgage?

BLANCHE [touching her forehead]. That must've been what happened. (489-90)

The very second that the letters from her husband are found, Blanche begins to panic. The moment Stanley touches the letters, which is the moment interaction happens between her past and her present, Blanche becomes erratic. She does not know what to do, opts to burn the letters as a means of losing the evidence of her past life, but when she regains control of the letters and, by proxy, her past, she calms down again. She then begins to construct her lie again. By the end of this moment, we see Blanche building the lie before our eyes as she confirms Stanley's question of mortgage issues and uses the question as material for the ruse. Blanche loves her lie more than her life itself, and her desire is that others will buy in it too. She is aware that it's a lie she is living, but her belief is the lie is better than reality. We see this through the song she sings throughout the play as she bathes. "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!" (531). This song that Blanche sings throughout the play is "It's Only a Paper Moon" (1933).

The song itself is very short, having only a few simple lines in its entirety. What is noteworthy is what Williams has left us to find by examining this song. What Blanche sings in the play is merely the end of the song. The rest of the lines, however, follow suit with the theme that we gain from the final lines. The song speaks about two individuals and an imaginary existence that is known to both the person creating it and the person in their company viewing this existence from reality. Here is a portion of the lyrics that Blanche recites: “It is only a paper moon — Sailing over a cardboard sea — But it wouldn’t be make-believe — If you believe in me” (Arlen, Harold & E.Y Harburg). Each line continues this plea from the imaginer of the existence to the other to believe. They are both aware of the reality they are looking at, but the imaginer — the creator— wants to believe that said reality is something else. The thought is that if someone else believes in the reality they are fabricating, it will become reality, at least for those two individuals. This is the mindset of Blanche. Blanche knows the truth of her existence, she knows who she is on the inside, and she knows that she is attempting to create a new reality for herself, but she needs others to believe in it as well for it to become real. Blanche clings to her alternate reality as she cannot accept the one she currently lives in. To Blanche, her remedy is someone who will join the “circus” with her, but this too would never work as her fantasy life would also conflict with her sexual life. Blanche can never have her fantasy.

Blanche desires exactly what her sister has: a brute of a man. Another point to take note of is when Blanche is speaking during the play. While normally we can trust many of our characters to tell the truth even to themselves, we must question everything that comes out of Blanche DuBois’s mouth because she must lie even to herself. This is what makes the character so interesting. When it comes to Blanche, you are actually dealing with multiple

characters at once. You have the original sexual Blanche that we have glimpses of throughout the play, we see portions of the broken Blanche when she is questioned about her past, and then we see the made-up Blanche that wins over the heart of Mitch. Another interesting point to take note of is the character's consistent need to bathe. Blanche Dubois takes multiple baths throughout the play, and all of them are done for the sake of coping. Throughout the play, people remind Blanche of her past through questions on her age, her past romances, and so forth. Whenever these moments happen, Blanche has a form of breakdown during her remembrance of the truth and the scene ends. When the next scene begins, Blanche is heard taking a bath. This is always directly after the moment of remembrance and confrontation by her past. Blanche says that she bathes because it refreshes her, but her real reasoning lies in the connection water has towards spiritually cleansing an individual. Joseph N. Riddel writes, "Blanche's obsessive bathing is a nominal gesture of guilt and wished-for redemption, which becomes one of the play's recurrent symbols..." (26). Every time Blanche bathes, she attempts to wash away the past with the water. In a manner, every bath to Blanche is a form of baptism to the character. She enters the water a sinner and exits a new person. For Blanche, she enters the water with the shame and memories of killing her husband, and when she exits, she is the other Blanche Dubois with no past at all. Blanche is the sinner and the minister at the same time. However, when she returns to the world, Blanche dirties herself again through sex or her past being brought up again, so she bathes again.

BLANCHE. [Snatching up a hairbrush]. Oh, I feel so good after my long, hot bath, I feel so good and cool and--rested!

STELLA. [Sadly and doubtfully from the kitchen]: Do you, Blanche?

BLANCHE. [Brushing her hair vigorously] Yes, I do, so refreshed! [She tickles her highball glass.] A hot bath and a long, cold drink always give me a brand-new outlook on life! (535)

Bathing is the coping method Blanche uses to survive each and every day. Each time she bathes, as well, she makes sure that the water is extremely hot. Blanche enters the tremendously hot water in an attempt to cleanse herself completely of the horrible things that she has done, but her past is never washed away completely.

The issue with Blanche is the fact that she can never cope with reality. The shooting is so impactful on her that she cannot ever move on from that point at all. In fact, whenever Blanche looks into her past, she often stops in memory right at the point of hearing the gunshot. The way we know her life stops at the gun shot is by the clue that Williams leaves for us to find in the play. Every time that Blanche is questioned or reverts back to the past, music plays in her head.

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

MITCH. What music?

BLANCHE. The "Varsouviana"! The polka tune they were playing when Allan--Wait!

[A distant revolver shot is heard. Blanche seems relieved.]

There now, the shot! It always stops after that.

[The polka music dies out again.]

Yes, now it's stopped.

MITCH. Are you boxed out of your mind? (543)

This moment is from a later scene with Blanche and her love interest Mitch, but it reveals the reasoning behind the music and the connected gun shot that echoes in her head along with the music. The music is the same that played the night Blanche's husband shot himself. That also explains the gun shot. When Blanche reverts to the past, this is the moment that she must revert to. It is the moment her life stops and the need for a fantasy life begins. Blanche cannot cope with life because she has never accepted this moment. Recalling anything at all of her true life or past always leads her to this moment in her head. It is as if she is damned to repeat the moment until she finally accepts it. As such, she creates another Blanche to cope. This second persona, however, leads her into problems. Blanche is banned from a town for her promiscuity and lies, banned from a hotel for the same reason, and then banned from the school for sleeping with a seventeen-year-old boy. Now, many— not all— of these issues wouldn't be issues if Blanche was a prostitute, as this would be expected of such a character. However, it is the lies in the story that are the center of problems for everyone that comes to know Blanche. Dianne Cafagna writes about the multiple personalities Blanche has and the complexity of her existence because of them: "Because of the contrast between her Victorian upbringing and constant romanticizing, because she paints illusion upon the reality of her broken world, she must paradoxically escape farther into the recesses of a lonely isolation that makes it more and more impossible for her to survive, or to know kindness, the great cherished gesture of illusion" (122-23). Blanche is in a vicious cycle, and the more she lives in her false realities, the more difficult it is for her to return to real life.

Blanche is never able to find comfort and continues her lies until it drives her literally insane. Each time the truth is brought up to her, another portion of herself breaks off until she is completely fractured. By the end, Mitch only sees her as a sexual object because her true past shows up, and this fractures Blanche even more, as Mitch represented hope for her. If Mitch believed her and married her, she would have gone on with her lie for the rest of her life as she finally had the support she needed to continue the facade. This falls away and her fall to the ground from the sky is a tragic one that greatly affects her. This, however, isn't the end as her rape by Stanley, who also only sees her as a sexual object now, breaks her completely. When Stanley finds Blanche, she is so lost in her lie trying to cope with her secrets being brought out to nearly everyone in town that she believes she received a phone call from a millionaire. Stanley finds her in this moment, confronts her with the truth, and then rapes her after he accepts what she truly is as a primitive sexual creature. This rape completely breaks Blanche and she is never able to recover. She is taken away by a doctor to an asylum, and the play ends for the character of Blanche. What is interesting, though, in this ending is that the mental breakdown that Blanche has in the play causes her to lose complete grasp of reality, and that lost grasp on reality allows Blanche to live in her fantasies completely. Blanche can no longer jump between her fantasies and reality. She is forced to only know a broken existence alone filled with her fantasies. Blanche's "... final madness becomes a saving grace that renders permanent the life created by the imagination" (Adler 4).

The key to understanding the meaning of the ending through the lens of Blanche is through her downfall. Blanche is broken further and further because she can never accept the truth of the death of husband being on her hands. Her false reality creates problem after problem for her and it ultimately leads to her complete breakdown. No matter what city she

goes to, Blanche faces her true self every day, and this causes her to have to move again and again. One would think that Blanche would eventually die from all the moving because she would never find a place where she is at peace, people believe her lie, and she believes it herself. Her made-up future with Mitch would never happen. Her determined existence in the Naturalist world she lives in would find her. This idea is shown perfectly as well through Elia Kazan's rendition of the play in film. At the end of the work, Blanche is forced to either stay in the house with Stanley, who is aware of all of her lies at this point, or run into the street where she would be confronted by an old woman selling flowers for the dead, which symbolically would mean that Blanche would have to finally accept that she was the cause of the death of her husband and take the flowers to his gravesite and face the reality that she has attempted to avoid since the night of the suicide. Blanche is literally surrounded by the truth in the film, and this image exemplifies the chase that Naturalism brings to the characters in modern literature. Blanche is the tragic protagonist that must suffer. Not only is she not allowed to live in her fantasies but she has been destined to suffer as she tries to fight against her identity and desires. This how we see the first bits of Naturalism through the character of Blanche. Blanche is a tragic protagonist that must suffer as she has been predestined to tragedy. She is the symbol of "a civilized world that cannot face its essential and necessary primitive self, and thus exists in a constant state of internecine anxiety" (Riddel 29). While Blanche is just one character, her ending provides ample amounts of teachings through the lens of Naturalism.

## **STANLEY**

The character of Stanley represents the rough and physical in the play. He is the Darwinian theme of "survival of the fittest" that is also a part of Naturalism. Stanley rules his

group of friends, his wife, and everything else because he is the strongest of the bunch. He is the winner of the physical competition of life. He is a brutish man who is literally introduced in the play during a fight. However, I do not believe this should be the main focus of Stanley. The most important aspect of Stanley is his use in the play as instrument and agent of Truth in the theme of Naturalism. Stanley does not believe a word that Blanche says at all. In the beginning, Stanley talks to Stella about a law entitled the “Napoleonic Code” to which all assets belonging to a married couple belong to each other in a shared agreement. Stanley then uses this to claim that he is being used when Stella is being used: “All right, I’ll wait till she gets through soaking in a hot tub and then I’ll inquire if she is acquainted with the Napoleonic code. It looks to me like you have been swindled, baby, and when you’re swindled under the Napoleonic Code I’m swindled too. And I don’t like to be swindled” (*Desire* 485). While this is a bit ridiculous, this a form of marking of territory for Stanley. This is his manner of claiming his wife as an extension of himself. As such, anything that harms his wife harms Stanley, and Stanley will not allow such a thing. How is this connected to Naturalism? The Darwinian presentation here connects to the destruction of the fantasy that is a tenant of Naturalism. It doesn’t matter who is the kindest or most good-willed of the people in Naturalism. What matters is who is the strongest. That is the connection of the Darwinian Theory to Naturalism. The fantasy beliefs that everything will work out even for the smallest or weakest is a lie in the theme. Those that survive or win are the strongest physically or mentally.

Stanley will not be lied to. His family will not be lied to, and he cannot stand those that are not honest. Stanley may be using this code in a strange way, but he uses it to protect his family and his household. That is why he takes such issue with Blanche who is shrouded

in deceit, lies, and ambiguity. Adler writes on the subject, “For Blanche there exists an order higher than what is merely factually true, whereas for Stanley the merciless light of unvarnished reality, exposing everything for what it is, is the only truth he can or will recognized” (30). Stanley and Blanche are direct opposites in this work. As we have seen, Blanche is shrouded in fantasy, lies, and literal shade from her lanterns while Stanley is the exact opposite with his belief in life that Truth outweighs lies every time.

The idea of seeing him as an instrument comes from the actual surroundings that Williams gives to the cast compiled with the attitude of Stanley. Let us say, for example, that Stanley and Stella lived in a large home in a very cool environment. Stanley would never have to see Blanche nor deal with her problems, but this isn't the case for the characters. They all three live in a very small run-down home in New Orleans where it is very warm and humid. Take this environment and compile it with Stanley's views and attitude toward life, and you get the powder keg that Williams lit at the beginning of the play that is slowly inching its way to burst. Seeing all of this, we understand that Stanley is so much more than just a brute as Blanche refers to him. He is a ticking time bomb of reality that Williams sets up at the beginning of the play to trap Blanche from running away ever again. As such, Stanley is the instrument that Williams uses to bring about the tragic ending for Blanche. An example of this is later on in the play when Stanley has finally pieced all of Blanche's past together and is explaining to Stella. His lines are the foreshadowing of the destined tragic end Blanche is to face.

STELLA. And she hasn't got her job? Well, what will she do!

STANLEY. She's not stayin' here after Tuesday. You know that, don't you?

Just to make sure I bought her ticket myself. A bus ticket!

STELLA. In the first place, Blanche wouldn't go on a bus.

STANLEY. She'll go on a bus and like it.

STELLA. No, she won't, no, she won't, Stanley!

STANLEY. She'll go! Period. P.S. She'll go Tuesday!

STELLA [slowly]. What'll--she--do? What on earth will she--do!

STANLEY. Her future is mapped out for her.

STELLA. What do you mean? (534-35)

The final lines of this section are crucial as they are the indicator that Blanche's life is circumscribed, and what is even more important is that Stanley is seeing to it that it happens. Once again, Stanley is the helper and tool for Truth in this story. He sees the lies of Blanche, shows them to the world, and then assists in the progression of Blanche towards her tragic fate by buying the ticket that would remove her from their world. Blanche is not allowed to stay in her fantasy, and Stanley is the tool that makes sure that happens. He is the chasing messenger of Naturalism that traps Blanche until reality arrives to confront or is presented to her by Stanley himself. Stanley, by far, is the most important tool of progression in the entire drama.

Stanley's ending is one where he achieves exactly what he wants: the truth. At this point in the play, Stanley is alone with Blanche who has now begun to spin the story of a millionaire who is interested in her.

STANLEY. Was this before or after the telegram came from the Texas oil millionaire?

BLANCHE. What telegram! No! No, after! As a matter of fact, the wire came just as--

STANLEY. As a matter of fact there wasn't no wire at all!

BLANCHE. Oh, oh!

STANLEY. There isn't no millionaire! And Mitch didn't come back; with roses 'because I know where he is--

BLANCHE. Oh!

STANLEY. There isn't a goddam thing but imagination! (552)

The key point to take note of here is Stanley's use of the term "imagination." Williams is tying the word and Stanley's accusation not only back to the song Blanche sings to help her return to her imagined life but to the imagined life itself. Her ruse is over, Blanche has been placed into the light, and she is being forced to face reality.

BLANCHE. Oh!

STANLEY. And lies and conceit and tricks!

BLANCHE. Oh

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

BLANCHE. Oh--God...

STANLEY. I've been on to you from the start! Not once did you pull any wool over this boy's eyes! You come in here and sprinkle the place with powder and spray perfume and cover the light bulb with a paper lantern, and lo and behold the place has turned into Egypt and you are the Queen of the Nile! Sitting on your throne and swilling down my liquor! I say--Ha! --Ha! Do you hear me? Ha-- ha--ha! (552)

This portion of the text is the beginning of the end for Blanche. She has nowhere else to go as she is stuck in the home with Stanley, and Stanley is finally getting what he wants. He is so joyous because of the birth of his son that is happening soon, and this birth is a foreshadowing of joy in the life of Stanley. It is as if Williams is informing the reader that things are heading well for the character of Stanley and all he stands for. While Blanche and her fantasy life is getting worse by the day, Stanley's life is slowly becoming better and better as people are believing him more and more about his views of Blanche and his acceptance of the Truth of existence. What happens next is the powerful rape scene that is arguably the strongest example of Naturalism in the text.

[The bathroom door is thrown open and Stanley comes out in the brilliant silk pyjamas. He grins at her as he knots the tasseled sash about his waist. She gasps and backs away from the phone. He stares at her for a count of ten. Then a clicking becomes audible from the telephone, steady and rasping.]  
STANLEY. You left th' phone off th' hook.

[He crosses to it deliberately and sets it back on the hook. After he has replaced it, he stares at her again, his mouth slowly curving into a grin, as he weaves between Blanche and the outer door.]

[The barely audible "blue piano" begins to drum up louder. The sound of it turns into the roar of an approaching locomotive. Blanche crouches, pressing her fists to her ears until it has gone by.]

BLANCHE. [Finally straightening]: Let me--let me get by you!

STANLEY. Get by me! Sure. Go ahead.

[He moves back a pace in the doorway.]

BLANCHE. You--you stand over there!

[She indicates a further position.]

STANLEY. [Grinning]: You got plenty of room to walk by me now.

BLANCHE. Not with you there! But I've got to get out somehow!

STANLEY. You think I'll interfere with you? Ha-ha!

[The "blue piano" goes softly. She turns confusedly and makes a faint gesture.

The inhuman jungle voices rise up. He takes a step toward her, biting his tongue which protrudes between his lips.]

STANLEY. [Softly]: Come to think of it--maybe you wouldn't be bad to-- interfere with.... [Blanche moves backward through the door into the bedroom.] (554-55)

Now, there are two different elements at work in this scene in regards to Stanley. One is the notion of Stanley being a symbol of reality that has come to face Blanche once and for all. Blanche may want to leave the home, but Stanley will not let her. It is as if Blanche is now trapped to face reality — to come to grips with that which she has been running from since the suicide. The other element is the very primal nature of Stanley at work here, and it is not so much sexual as it is domination. Stanley finally has the individual who has been complicating his life, the individual who has been lying (which he hates), and the individual that has begun to turn his wife against him — she that has brought question to his rulings in his kingdom — alone and without help. What follows next is the culmination of both elements:

BLANCHE. Stay back! Don't you come toward me another step or I'll--

STANLEY. What?

BLANCHE. Some awful thing will happen! It will!

STANLEY. What are you putting on now?

[They are now both inside the bedroom.]

BLANCHE. I warn you, don't, I'm in danger!

[He takes another step. She smashes a bottle on the table and faces him, clutching the broken top.]

STANLEY. What did you do that for?

BLANCHE. So I could twist the broken end in your face!

STANLEY. I bet you would do that!

BLANCHE. I would! I will if you--

STANLEY. Oh! So you want some rough-house! All right, let's have some rough-house! [He springs toward her, overturning the table. She cries out and strikes at him with the bottle top but he catches her wrist.] Tiger--tiger! Drop the bottle top! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!

[She moans. The bottle top falls. She sinks to her knees. He picks up her inert figure and carries her to the bed. The hot trumpet and drums from the Four Deuces sound loudly.] (554-55)

That moment is a primal meeting of reality and lies where the character of Stanley strips the false identity of Blanche from all lies and comfort. It is as if that moment is hidden from the world forever with it becoming a horrible truth for Blanche to have to deal with on top of the death of her husband, possibly as punishment or another charge at the character to finally live a true life. As such, Stanley's ending becomes a horrific reality check for the character of

Blanche. The moment that Williams creates becomes so powerful that Stanley becomes a symbol or entity for Naturalism together. Holditch comments, “[Stanley’s] powerful physical presence, intruding into the next-to-last sanctuary of illusion to which she flees (insanity being her final sanctuary), and the threat of his sexuality that charges the scene force Blanche into confrontation with Naturalistic truth of life” (163). Stanley’s life is thrown away for a brief period and he becomes a vessel for the entity of the Truth in existence to confront Blanche. It is a horrific moment, but it is an ending that causes us to see the character as something else completely. We cannot assume that Stanley is just a character in the narrative. Williams takes the black and white idea of a character and creates a supernatural, almost spiritual, presence in the play to find and confront Blanche.

### **STELLA**

Stella is the wife of Stanley and the sister to Blanche. She is also the representation of the failing family in Naturalism. That is, the family that harms the tragic protagonist rather than helps them. They are not there to support the main character; rather they provide more conflict and pain for the main character. This is seen through Stella as she teeters back and forth between devotion to Stanley and Blanche. As she moves towards devotion to Blanche, this angers Stanley and causes him to want to expose Blanche even more to his wife. When this happens, Stanley becomes enraged and brings more conflict to Blanche who then must dive deeper into her fantasies to survive the “light” that Stanley is shining onto her past. This then leads Stella to feel remorse for her sister and devote herself to Blanche again, which then creates the vicious cycle over again. It is because Stella continues to believe the lies that Blanche tells that Stanley becomes so fixated on revealing the truth of her past so that Stella will trust and follow Stanley again. While this is Blanche’s family, this family creates

nothing but stress and pain, and Stella is at the heart of this. It is her attention and affection that causes the cycle to begin and continue until the tragic ending of Blanche. An example of this is seen during Blanche's birthday where Stella clearly has moved her trust, affection, and focus on Blanche and her fantasies.

BLANCHE. Apparently Mr. Kowalski was not amused.

STELLA. Mr. Kowalski is too busy making a pig of himself to think of anything else!

STANLEY. That's right, baby.

STELLA. Your face and your fingers are disgustingly greasy. Go and wash up and then help me clear the table.

[He hurls a plate to the floor.]

STANLEY. That's how I'll clear the table! [He seizes her arm]

Don't ever talk that way to me! "Pig--Polack--disgusting--vulgar--greasy!"--them kind of words have been on your tongue and your sister's too much around here! What do you two think you are? A pair of queens? Remember what Huey Long said--"Every Man is a King!" And I am the king around here, so don't forget it! (537)

These consistent outbursts of Stanley always bring Stella back towards his side of trust and belief. This is not necessarily because Stella completely believes that Stanley is correct. Her following of Stanley is more connected towards sexuality than anything else. The following scene is after Stanley smacks Stella during the poker scene, and Stella returns to him. In this scene, we see the inverse of what had happened with Stanley.

STELLA. What do you want me to do?

BLANCHE. Pull yourself together and face the facts.

STELLA. What are they, in your opinion?

BLANCHE. In my opinion? You're married to a madman!

STELLA. No!

BLANCHE. Yes, you are, your fix is worse than mine is! Only you're not being sensible about it. I'm going to do something. Get hold of myself and make myself a new life!

STELLA. Yes?

BLANCHE. But you've given in. And that isn't right, you're not old! You can get out.

STELLA [slowly and emphatically]. I'm not in anything I want to get out of.

BLANCHE [incredulously]. What--Stella?

STELLA. I said I am not in anything that I have a desire to get out of. Look at the mess in this room! And those empty bottles! They went through two cases last night! He promised this morning that he was going to quit having these poker parties, but you know how long such a promise is going to keep. Oh, well, it's his pleasure, like mine is movies and bridge. People have got to tolerate each other's habits, I guess.

BLANCHE. I don't understand you. (506)

Blanche is attempting to win over Stella with her logic, but the truth is that Blanche desires exactly what Stella has. The conversation comes from the facade that Blanche puts up to seem better than her true self. Regardless, Stella loves the primal just as her sister does. The only difference between the women is that Stella embraces it while Blanche runs away from

such a reality. While the scenario isn't necessarily healthy for Stella, it allows her to survive the "jungles of existence" while Blanche perishes in her fantasy.

It isn't that Stella is naive but that she is choosing to be ignorant to the lies and fantasies of Blanche. The problem within Stella is that she attempts to protect Blanche, even though protecting her is allowing her to go deeper and deeper into her lies. Stella is aware that something is amiss. This always a present fact for her as she never has the answers that Stanley is seeking throughout the play, and her response to not knowing is defensive shooing away and attempted changing of subjects at every prod of Stanley. A key manner to understanding that Stella is aware that something is amiss is the conversation that she has with Eunice following the climax of the play.

STELLA. I don't know if I did the right thing.

EUNICE. What else could you do?

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

EUNICE. Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going. (556-57)

As mentioned earlier, these lines are very dense with meaning for the play. On the one hand, they explain that the notion of living in a fantasy is incorrect. Real life must go on, and to even believe in another individual's fantasy— to allow them to go deeper into their own fantasy— is just as bad as living a personal fantasy of one's own. On another level, we see the choice that Stella makes here between Blanche and Stanley. If Stella were to believe Blanche, she would have to leave Stanley, which, after everything we know about Stanley, would mean to leave the truth of life. Blanche would be dragging Stella into a fantasy world and away from Truth. The danger of this is that Stella would one day meet the same type of

fate as Blanche herself. Stella, at the very least, has been aware that something has been off with her sister since the prodding of Stanley began, but she has allowed these moments to continue in mercy to her delicate sister.

There is also one specific point where Stella is told by Blanche that Blanche is lying to Mitch.

BLANCHE. I don't know why I screamed!

[Continuing nervously]

Mitch--Mitch is coming at seven. I guess I am just feeling nervous about our relations.

[She begins to talk rapidly and breathlessly]

He hasn't gotten a thing but a goodnight kiss, that's all I have given him, Stella. I want his respect. And men don't want anything they get too easy. But on the other hand men lose interest quickly. Especially when the girl is over--thirty. They think a girl over thirty ought to--the vulgar term is--"put out."... And I--I'm not "putting out." Of course he--he doesn't know--I mean I haven't informed him--of my real age!

STELLA. Why are you sensitive about your age?

BLANCHE. Because of hard knocks my vanity's been given. What I mean is--he thinks I'm sort of--prim and proper, you know!

[She laughs out sharply] I want to deceive him enough to make him--want me... (517)

The admission to lying here is important to note as it is a clear confession from Blanche that her wants — her desires — are more important than the truth of the situation. It does not

matter if Mitch knows the truth of her life. To Blanche, the only thing that matters is for her to achieve what she desires — her false life that allows escape from reality. Stella also hears this confession of lies from Blanche, but does not respond with chastisement. Instead, she intends to support her sensitive sister no matter what.

STELLA. Blanche, do you want him?

BLANCHE. 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....

[Stanley comes around the corner with a drink under his belt.]

STANLEY [bawling]. Hey, Steve! Hey, Eunice! Hey, Stella!

[There are joyous calls from above. Trumpet and drums are heard from around the corner.]

STELLA [kissing Blanche impulsively]. It will happen!

BLANCHE [doubtfully]. It will?

STELLA. It will!

[She goes across into the kitchen, looking back at Blanche.]

It will, honey, it will.... But don't take another drink! (517)

On a small side note, this moment allows us to understand that Blanche sees Mitch as a key to her fantasy becoming reality. If she can lie to the man enough and cause him to believe her lie, then she has succeeded in her plans that have failed time and time again. Refocusing on Stella, there is an admitting of lies here by Blanche to her sister. She admits that she wants the man for selfish reasons, in the sense that she does not want the man but rather everything the man can give her. She admits that she will lie to him about not just her age but about how

proper she really is. Mitch already believes so much, so Blanche will continue the ruse. The key is that Stella is aware that there is deceit in this scenario. She is aware that Blanche is lying about her age, and by slip of the tongue, how proper Blanche really is, but Stella looks past this. She becomes the supportive sister and tells Blanche that she will obtain the man.

Stella is aware that Mitch is nothing but a tool for Blanche to achieve what she wants, but this doesn't matter to her. Stella wants to support her delicate sister. This support, however, is what provides the positive reinforcement for Blanche to continue on with her fantasies and go deeper and deeper into them. Stella has given Blanche the permission and encouragement to take Mitch into the fantasy. While Stella may not be aware of all that is going on inside Blanche, this conversation is enough for Stella to understand that Blanche is lying to a man— a man she knows and likes— and she allows this to happen to support her sister. This is the detrimental and dangerous family that was mentioned earlier in the themes of Naturalism. Stella tries to help her sister, but this is only making the scenario that much worse for Blanche. As mentioned earlier, Blanche is going deeper and deeper into her fantasies, and Stella, attempting to help, has encouraged her to go deeper. Even at the end, Stella cannot accept the truth of reality and wants to let her sister live in her fantasy.

STELLA. Oh, my God, Eunice help me! Don't let them do that to her, don't let them hurt her! Oh, God, oh, please God, don't hurt her! What are they doing to her? What are they doing?

[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. (562)

This scene is when Blanche is being taken away to a psychiatric ward, and Stella still cannot accept the truth of reality. Blanche cannot go on living the way she is. Stella, Eunice, and almost all of the rest of the cast knows this as well, but knowing and accepting are two different things in Naturalism. Stella cannot accept the truth of existence, so Eunice and Stanley forcibly take her along. Stella is literally dragged away from fantasy by those that love her and have already accepted the world as it is. While Stella is not doing it on purpose, Stella plays into the Naturalist family theme and brings on more suffering to her sister by pitying the weak and fantasies instead of confronting with Truth. Blanche clings to the notion of having someone around to believe her lies because she has “always depended upon the kindness of strangers” (563), and Stella is the kindness that damns Blanche further into tragedy.

## **MITCH**

Moving on to our final character analysis, Mitch represents the people in *Streetcar*. To be more specific, he represents society in Naturalism. What that means is that the actions and interactions he has with all the characters is a symbol and example of how an entire society would react. As such, his symbol of society is crucial to be taken note of as he interacts with the other symbols in the play, particularly Stanley and Blanche. The way we can decipher that Mitch is a symbol for society is by his interactions with Blanche and the rest of the cast. When Mitch first meets Blanche, he is enchanted by her.

STANLEY [bellowing]. Mitch!

MITCH. Coming!

BLANCHE. Gracious, what lung-power!... I teach high school. In Laurel.

MITCH. What do you teach? What subject?

BLANCHE. Guess!

MITCH. I bet you teach art or music?

[Blanche laughs delicately]

Of course I could be wrong. You might teach arithmetic.

BLANCHE. Never arithmetic, sir, never arithmetic! [With a laugh]

(499-500)

This is Mitch's first meeting with Blanche, and he becomes completely entranced in her. Rather, Mitch becomes entranced of the fantasy of Blanche. This is the proper and false Blanche, and Mitch is none the wiser. This is how every character first meets Blanche, including Stanley. People adore the fantasy of Blanche. Moving on, Mitch then becomes curious about Blanche during his date with her.

MITCH. Blanche--

BLANCHE. Yes, honey?

MITCH. Can I ask you a question?

BLANCHE. Yes. What?

MITCH. How old are you?

[She makes a nervous gesture.]

BLANCHE. Why do you want to know?

MITCH. I talked to my mother about you and she said, "How old is Blanche?"

And I wasn't able to tell her.

[There is another pause.]

BLANCHE. You talked to your mother about me?

MITCH. Yes.

BLANCHE. Why?

MITCH. I told my mother how nice you were, and I liked you.

BLANCHE. Were you sincere about that?

MITCH. You know I was. (526)

This conversation represents the inquisitive nature of the public in regards to Blanche's past and her avoidance of direct answers and the truth about her life. After the enchantment has worn off from Blanche, society then becomes curious about her. They question her age, her past, and so forth. They become curious about Blanche. We see this in Stanley, Stella, Mitch, and all of the past places that Blanche has left because the truth of her existence has come out. Society wants to know the truth about Blanche. What follows next is what happens when society does not gain the answers they are asking about and realize the truth about Blanche.

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!

BLANCHE. Of course you don't really mean to be insulting!

MITCH. No, just realistic.

BLANCHE. 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 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!

[Mitch crosses to the switch. He turns the light on and stares at her. She cries out and covers her face. He turns the light off again.]

MITCH [slowly and bitterly]. I don't mind you being older than what I thought. But all the rest of it--Christ! That pitch about your ideals being so old-fashioned and all the malarkey that you've dished out all summer. Oh, I knew you weren't sixteen any more. But I was a fool enough to believe you was straight. (544-45)

This scene is important as it not only solidifies Mitch as being a representation of society but it shows us the animosity that the false reality of Blanche brings up in those who attempt to connect with her. Mitch has dipped his feet in the pool that is Blanche's fantasy, and he was willing to dive completely in. This was prior to knowing the truth. At his attempts to know the truth, however, Blanche has stopped him— even going so far as to never be with him in a well-lit area. The lack of truth from Blanche then becomes gunpowder which is then lit by Truth. The more Blanche lies, the larger the stack becomes until Truth appears on the scene and causes an explosion of anger and emotion from the people Blanche has been lying to. In

this scenario, Stanley and the men from the plant are the ones that enlighten Mitch and cause this explosion, but the same instance happened in the other places that Blanche has gone to.

STANLEY. Honey, I told you I thoroughly checked on these stories! Now wait till I finish. The trouble with Dame Blanche was that she couldn't put on her act any more in Laurel! They got wised up after two or three dates with her and then they quit, and she goes on to another, the same old line, same old act, same old hooley! But the town was too small for this to go on forever! And as time went by she became a town character. Regarded as not just different but downright loco--nuts.

[Stella draws back.]

And for the last year or two she has been washed up like poison. That's why she's here this summer, visiting royalty, putting on all this act--because she's practically told by the mayor to get out of town! Yes, did you know there was an army camp near Laurel and your sister's was one of the places called "Out-of-Bounds"? (531)

Blanche creates the same instance that she did with Mitch in every area that she goes. This is why Mitch should be seen as the symbol of society in the book. It is through Mitch that we get an up-close and personal look at what Blanche has been doing throughout her time before reaching the French Quarter. She may not have slept with Mitch as she did with the other men from the other cities, but she lied to him as she did to the civilians of Laurel. Mitch is the symbol of society in the play, and when Mitch interacts with Blanche, he is first enchanted, then curious, then upset, and finally, Mitch and society both accept Blanche for what she is: dirty and primal.

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.

BLANCHE. Go away, then. (547)

This moment between Mitch and Blanche tells the viewer what the destined reality is for Blanche. Her fantasy will never pan out, and she will never be able to live it out and escape reality. Her reality will always be tagged to her, and she must accept this because society will never accept her false existence. They will only see her, inevitably, as what she is: dirty and primal.

When Mitch interacts with Stanley, he becomes more defensive and aggressive. He is adapting to the Darwinian setting that Stanley carries along with him. Society adapts to the strong that dictate what is right and wrong. His final moment with Stanley in the play, however, shows how society deals with the Naturalist theme of Truth.

[Mitch has started toward the bedroom. Stanley crosses to block him.]

MITCH. You! You done this, all o' your God damn rutting with things you—

STANLEY. Quit the blubber! (He pushes him aside.)

MITCH. I'll kill you! (He lunges and strikes at Stanley.)

STANLEY. Hold this bone-headed cry-baby!

STEVE. (Grasping Mitch). Stop it, Mitch.

PABLO. Yeah, yeah, take it easy!

(Mitch collapses at the table sobbing) (563)

This scene is a return to when Blanche is being taken away to the psychiatric hospital. Mitch at this point knows the entire truth about Blanche, knows that Stanley was looking out for him by telling him the truth about Blanche, but he cannot accept this. This moment is shared between him and Stella. They know the truth of existence, and they know Blanche can't be in such an existence, but it doesn't make it easier for the characters, and since Mitch represents society in the play, this moment is the example of how society deals with such matter of Truth in Naturalism. They may not like it, and they may go kicking and screaming, but society must accept Truth in Naturalism or pay the price that Blanche did.

### **MINOR CHARACTERS**

Now that we have analyzed the main characters and their connections to Naturalism, I would like to bring up two minor characters that add to the theme of Naturalism in the play. One is the character of Eunice who lives above Stanley and Stella with her husband. The other character is simply titled "Mexican woman," and she gives out flowers for the dead. Both characters add to the theme of Naturalism and solidify the play as Naturalistic.

The minor character of Eunice plays an important role in the work. As we have seen through her interactions with Stella, Eunice is an individual that has accepted the truth of the Naturalist reality that both she and the rest of the cast live in, and she supports Stella throughout the work to accept this too. Her lines are of acceptance of the reality of Blanche, and she joins in with Mitch as a portion of the society sees the truth of Blanche and knows that fantasies cannot exist in their existence. The final character is the Mexican woman. This woman interacts primarily with Blanche and tries to give her flowers. The significance of

these flowers and the woman herself (and the connection she has towards Naturalism) is found in the type of flowers she gives. They are for the dead.

[A Vendor comes around the corner. She is a blind Mexican woman in a dark shawl, carrying bunches of those gaudy tin flowers that lower class Mexicans display at funerals and other festive occasions. She is calling barely audibly. Her figure is only faintly visible outside the building.]

MEXICAN WOMAN. Flores. Flores. Flores para los muertos. Flores. Flores.

BLANCHE. What? Oh! Somebody outside...

[She goes to the door. opens it and stares at the Mexican Woman.]

MEXICAN WOMAN [she is at the door and offers Blanche some of her flowers]. Flores? Flores para los muertos?

BLANCHE [frightened]: No, no! Not now! Not now!

[She darts back into the apartment, slamming the door.]

MEXICAN WOMAN [she turns away and starts to move down the street].

Flores para los muertos.

[The polka tune fades in.] (546-47)

Blanche hears the callings from the street, but then is forced to face something that she is not ready for: reality. The peddler is selling flowers for the dead — flowers for the grave.

Blanche sees these flowers, reverts back to the shooting in her mind, and flees from the call to reality. Blanche is not ready to give up her false life and identity. Williams uses the polka tune to also help us know that Blanche is returning back to the shooting in her mind.

BLANCHE [as if to herself]. Crumble and fade and--regrets--recriminations...

"If you'd done this, it wouldn't've cost me that!"

MEXICAN WOMAN. Coronas para los muertos. Coronas...

BLANCHE. 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!

(546-47)

Blanche is reverting to her past, and she is twisting reality with her emotions, memories, and imagination. At this point, Williams is showing us that psyche of Blanche is nearing the fracturing point. She cannot hold up the ruse for long. She is beginning to remember, but her memories are fractured — not complete. She cannot think clearly. It is here that we see that every moment where Blanche has been called to face reality and the past has taken a toll on her mind. The moment is also a clear foreshadowing of the future complete destruction of Blanche's mind altogether.

MEXICAN WOMAN. 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....

[The Mexican Woman turns slowly and drifts back off with her soft mournful cries. Blanche goes to the dresser and leans forward on it. After a moment, Mitch rises and follows her purposefully. The polka music fades away. He places his hands on her waist and tries to turn her about.] (546-47)

Firstly, this interaction with the Mexican woman provides us the reasoning behind why Blanche is sexually charged. Blanche uses sex and desire as means of coping with death. Blanche does love primal sexuality, but she loves it because it is the farthest from her reality of death. Said reality is what is being presented by the Mexican woman who brings flowers for the dead. The flowers do not symbolize that Blanche is dead, rather they are the reminder of the past that Blanche is trying to cover up, even for herself. Blanche runs toward desire to run away from death, but Truth orchestrates a meeting of reality and fantasy for Blanche again. While not as bombastic and intrusive as Stanley, the flowers from the Mexican woman are another call back to Blanche's past. We know this from the inclusion of the polka music that Williams wrote into the scene. Blanche is never allowed to forget the past, and the Mexican woman and her flowers are just another tool that Truth uses to remind Blanche of reality and attempt to force her into confronting it.

## CHAPTER IV

### IMPACT OF NATURALIST READING

Looking back, it is very arguable that the text of *Streetcar* is found in the genre of Naturalism, but what is the significance of this? Firstly, it augments how we interact with the text and places more emphasis on the majority of the text. The lens of Naturalism augments our eyes to focus on the relation a character has to society. If we were reading this text primarily through the lens of Determinism, we would not care about the relation and impact Stanley, or any of the other cast for that matter, has on Blanche as much as we would care about Blanche's relation and interaction with herself and the outside forces that affect her. To be even more specific, the woman selling flowers has the most spiritual or supernatural impact on Blanche in the entire tale. A Determinist reading would put primary focus on this relation above all else. This reading, however, leaves out the majority of the text as the play primarily moves along and climaxes through interactions with society more than anything else. The characters' backgrounds are of absolute importance as well in the Naturalist reading. Blanche is extremely sensitive. We know this from the text. As such, the suicide breaks her psyche past the point of repair, and Blanche looks to sex to mend the pieces. We see though the dialogue she has with herself after her first interaction with the flower peddler as she explains that she began to meet the soldiers as they passed by her home. Williams put many lines in the play to give us an understanding as to how Blanche got to the point where she needs to create a separate personality to cope with life, but this would all be thrown to the wayside under a reading in Determinism. We are supposed to understand that Blanche is heavily impacted by her society. All the changes in Blanche's life happen through

interactions with people — society — and not through an animal, nature, or a spirit. Blanche, and the rest of the cast, are products of their environment.

The Naturalist reading also helps us better understand the tremendous rape scene. Whether you see Stanley as an agent of something larger than himself or just a primal creature asserting his dominance to regain control of his home, there is purpose in the rape scene through the lens of Naturalism. Realism would simply claim that the rape happened in the text because rape is something that happens in reality, but we understand through the words of Williams that there is purpose to the great sufferings he makes his characters undertake. My argument as to the significance of the rape is one that Mary Ann Corrigan believes in as well, which is the rape stands for something much larger than what it is on the surface. Corrigan writes,

The conflict between Blanche and Stanley is an externalization of the conflict that goes on within Blanche between illusion and reality. The illusion sustaining her is her image of herself as a Southern belle, a fine, cultured, young lady. The reality is a lonely woman, desperately seeking human contact, indulging “brutal desire” as an affirmation of life. Blanche’s “schizoid personality is a drama of man’s irreconcilable split between animal reality and moral appearance.” This drama is played out not only in Blanche’s mind, but between Stanley and Blanche as well. Stanley strips away Blanche’s illusions and forces her to face animal reality. In doing so, he demonstrates that reality is as brutal as she feared. She has no choice but to retreat totally into illusion. Thus, the external events of the play, while actually occurring, serve as a metaphor for Blanche’s internal conflict. (90)

So not only do the characters stand as metaphors and symbols of larger ideas but the events of the play do as well. This interpretation of the play also goes hand in hand with the understanding of symbolism in drama and how Williams approached the theater. That being said, such an interpretation means that the rape cannot simply be an occurrence in the play for the sake of merely happening—it must mean something.

Earlier, I presented two different interpretations of the rape scene, but I now would like to present a final interpretation that focuses on the theory of Naturalism, which I believe is the strongest interpretation of this scene. We have already discussed the idea that the characters in the play are ones that are less human and more symbolic. They are more like hollow bodies filled with the entities of larger concepts such as Truth than they are human. In the case of Stanley, we find that he embodies the Truth of the Naturalist existence. He cannot stand lies, and he will fight aggressively for the truth to be revealed. Blanche; on the other hand, is the embodiment of lies. She carries through the whole play lying and even deceiving herself. She is not as absolute as Stanley is, but it is not a stretch in the slightest to view her as the image and symbol of lies. This is why the characters are always in conflict: their very core natures are at odds with each other. It is then that we are provided with the rape scene. Now, if we view it at face value, we find that a man has raped a woman, and this is due to sexual desire, but this is not the case. Brustein also believes this reading to be possible. Brustein writes, "As a psychological or sexual figure, however, Stanley exists on a somewhat more heroic moral plane. He is akin to those silent, sullen gamekeepers and grooms of D. H. Lawrence (an early influence on Williams) whose sexuality, though violent, is unmental, unspiritual, and therefore, in some way free from taint. The between Blanche and Stanley allegorizes the struggle between effeminate culture and masculine libido" (9). While I can understand the physical connection that Brustein is making here between the rape and the character of Stanley, I highly disagree that this is related towards issues with femininity and male libido. There is never a problem brought up within the play over femininity or lack of masculinity. The problems of the play arise over the swing of power and control from Stanley to Blanche. Blanche has entered the kingdom of Stanley, has questioned his

rulership, and has caused those who follow him (the civilians of the Elysian Fields) to question him as well. Stanley is losing his control over his wife, his neighborhood— his primal life. A believer in the idea of Stanley asserting dominance is Alvin B. Kernan. Kernan writes, “But Stanley hates her, has to prove his dominance, and after analyzing her in his own “realistic” terms, rapes her. Reality has forced itself on her, and she has no way left to travel except madness and death. She cannot live with what Williams and most men of our time unhappily regard as reality” (19). Dominance is what Stanley wants, and that is why he rapes Blanche. The rape is a power move to completely demoralize and subdue Blanche to the rule of Stanley. Not only does Kernan include the notion of the rape being about dominance, but he also includes the point that there is nowhere for Blanche to go— reality has found her, and her fantasies are being stripped from her.

Referred to as both Feminist Theory of Rape and Sociological Theory of Rape, modern psychology suggests that one of the prime reasonings behind rape is the domination of the individual by another individual. I use the term individual because while the feminist theory focuses on the control men exert on women, this is not accounting for the control men have on other men, women on men, or women on women. Dr. Lee Ellis reports in his book *Theories of Rape* “that rape is, most immediately, the result of a... decision to behave... in a possessive, dominating, and demeaning manner. Thus, sexual gratification is not considered a prime motive... rape is seen as the use of sexuality to establish or maintain dominance and control...” (Ellis 11). That which has been raped is subservient and lesser to that which is raping. In this case, Blanche is subservient to Stanley. This is the perspective under the idea that the characters are just regular people. Under my reading, the characters have transcended flesh and are vessels for Truth and Lies. If this is the case, the entire rape scene has changed

in its meaning. What fits the narrative — incredibly well — is the notion of Truth raping Lies. The rapes scene is not between a man and a woman. It is between the Truth of existence and the lies of existence, and under the understanding we have from modern psychology, Truth sought to dominate Lies after a time of rivalry between the two entities. The rape scene is now a domination of the Truth over Lies. It is a battle that is larger than the life in New Orleans, and the domination of Truth in the matter reflects the Naturalist concept that what has been decided prior will come about. Kenneth Holditch also agrees with this reading and states,

The vicious final clash between Blanche and Stanley is inevitable, as indicated by her earlier recognition that he is my “executioner” and by Stanley’s affirmation, just prior to her raping her, that their encounter has been inevitable from “the beginning.” The final triumph of the Naturalistic view of life is acted out in no uncertain terms in the rape. This scene is a capsule version of the movement in the play from the Ideal to the Naturalistic view of human existence. Blanche’s Romanticism is reduced by this point to to falsehoods and fantasies, her powerful imagination now employed in the creation of lies to preserve herself in an animalistic environment. (163)

The lies and fantasies in the Naturalistic existence will not be allowed to pass. Blanche’s life was decided for her, and her deviation from it would not be allowed to transpire any longer. The rape scene is the powerful example of the Naturalist perspective that found in all modern works of the Truth of reality superseding and dominating all Lies and ambitions we may have. If we are destined to be a retired salesman, a town whore, or a hairy ape, that is what we will be. This is reality under Naturalism, and it is the picture that Williams — and all other modern playwrights — provided for us in existence.

Secondly, the lens of Naturalism helps us understand that the life of Williams is unquestionably connected to his work. Williams placed his emotions, thoughts, and own life into his work, so each time we read or watch one of his plays, we are gaining an

understanding of the man himself. Williams was just as complicated as his characters, even to himself, and it is primarily through the texts he wrote that we see the pain and questions that Williams had of his own life. As such, if the text of *Streetcar* (and his other works such as *Cat*) follows the tenets of Naturalism, this would mean that Williams himself saw the reality of Naturalism as one that he had to live in real life. This then explains his constant indulgences in drinking and sex and his search for religion in the later part of his life. The text of Williams is a lens into his very life and our analysis provides not only an understanding of the work but of the mind of Williams. The Naturalist reading of *Streetcar* displays the lack of hope that Williams had in his own life and his fight to overcome his believed determined life by his genetics, family, critics — society.

Lastly, I believe that the text has to be placed into a category. Earlier, I made mention of Bigsby's analysis of how Williams saw the work. While Williams wanted the work to escape the categories of the literature, the genres are far too expansive for his work to not fall into a single category. Alone in this work, I have discussed how *Streetcar* falls into both Naturalism and Determinism but heavily favors a Naturalist reading because of its focus on interactions between society, the individual, the individual's dream, and said individual's tragic end. While *Streetcar* is a masterpiece and definitely complex, it is not without patterns and elements that place it somewhere. Williams' views and aspirations of the text were admirable, but the work is a Naturalist work, and there is nothing wrong with that placement. The fact remains that Tennessee Williams created a Naturalist masterpiece that deserves to be in the discussion with the works of Thomas Hardy or Theodore Dreiser. Does the text follow the same patterns as the other works of the named writers do? — No. It twists and turns and maneuvers itself into something that must be read again and again to understand it,

but it is a Naturalist piece as the others are. One only has to take notice of how Blanche descends into madness scene by scene to see this. To do so would reveal not only the Naturalist reading and its impact on Blanche but on the rest of the cast as well. Tennessee Williams was a Naturalist writer as much as any other author. He just hid it behind shadows, songs, and lamp shades.

## CONCLUSION

It is unquestionable that Williams' work in *Streetcar* is nothing short of a masterpiece. His rich and complex characters elevate the text far past something that can be easily summed up and placed into a literary genre. While this is true, I do believe that after analyzing the characters and their interactions with one another, there is an apparent connection to the literary genre of Naturalism. Blanche is a character determined by her genetics, her surrounding society, and her fate to face the realities of a Naturalist world and to lose all of her fantasies. When she attempts to break from this Truth through a false life that she has created, that is when her life begins to break at the seams, and she desperately tries to hold onto her false reality so as to not face her determined life, both in regards to her personal and social life. Stanley accepts this reality, as does Stella and Mitch, and they survive through the "jungles of life" because they have no real reason as Blanche does to avoid this reality. Blanche is the sensitive character, as said by the text, that cannot handle reality—the rest of the cast can. Walter Meserve comments on this by saying, "Stanley Kowalski represents that strong-grained individual whose resistance to the polish of sophisticated culture suggests his acceptance of the coarse reality he lives. He is not unthinking, however, nor is he without sensitivity to the problems or machinations of others. His strength is simply that he knows what wants and will survive" (253). While Meserve

attributes this survival to specifically Stanley, I believe this trait of survival is also within all the other characters that live within Elysian Fields. They are those that have thrown away their childish fantasies and accepted the world as it truly is, and that is the message of the Naturalist text: acceptance of a cruel reality. With that in consideration, Williams' *Streetcar* is unquestionably a Naturalist work.

The goal of this thesis was to provide an overview of the entire text that shows the strong connection towards the literary genre of Naturalism. The next step would be at the connection the environment plays in the narrative of *Streetcar*. Most of the settings in the play do not have generic names such as casino or streetcar. Williams gives each environment a name that bears significance to the play overall. The name of the street that Stella and Stanley live on, for example, is named Elysian Fields. This name comes from Greek mythology and serves as the final resting place for those that are either related to the gods or are chosen by the gods because of their heroics or their virtuous lives. This name is also the name of an actual street in New Orleans. This is just one of the many locations in the play that Williams gives a name to, and the question becomes "do these names matter to the overall understanding of the play or to the reading of it as a Naturalist work?" I believe they do as symbolism is so heavy not only in theater but also in this play and in Williams' works in general. In a Williams' work, everything from characters to locations and events have symbolism (as Corrigan stated). I believe an understanding of the names used in the play, ranging from the characters to the settings, should be the next step to breaking down the complex work of *Streetcar*.

As far as the Naturalist reading I present here is concerned, I believe that the work has been visited primarily as a Modernist text more so than anything else. This is not wrong,

but I believe the text should primarily be seen through the lens of Naturalism. To do so, in my belief, would not only provide a new view of the work but a broader more complex definition of Naturalism. Williams' own beliefs of the power of the stage helped me come to my description of Naturalism as a "destruction of fantasy." As such, I believe Williams' work adds a new angle to view the genre of Naturalism and causes us to question the very limitations of the genre all together.

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### VITA

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