

~~as it portrays the unfolding of Fago's evil scheme and its consequences, as well as further making the audience complicit in the tragic villain's game of manipulation.~~

Part Two

Tennessee Williams: A Streetcar Named Desire

In 'A Streetcar Named Desire', Tennessee Williams explores the ^{complex} theme of ^{multi-faceted} identity during a period of transition between Old America and New America. I believe that the playwright depicts characters who constantly attempt to follow gender stereotypes as a means to show their suffering due to this, and thus challenge gender stereotypes. With the characters of Stanley, Mitch, Allan Grey and Shep Huntleigh, Williams explores the difficult ~~positive~~ embodiment of masculinity and with Blanche and Stella, the difficult embodiment of femininity.

In his play, Tennessee Williams creates different personas who each embody masculinity and what they believe to be the perfect model of a man differently, but they all share a certain suffering from trying to comply to this. Stanley, a working man of #1

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New America from polish descent appears to embody the model of the 'alpha male'. He is pragmatic, he uses one-word phrases such as "Meat!" and "Catch!" and works for ~~what he has in "work clothes"~~ (in "denim" clothes) to achieve what he has. He believes he needs to be the strongest and is constantly attempting to assert his dominance. For example, in his relationship with Stella, ~~he hits her in scene 3~~ a constant cycle of violence enables him to stay in a dominant position. Blanche described Stanley as a "feathered bird" in the middle of "hens", highlighting his need to stand out by being stronger than those around him, as he believes that is how he should embody masculinity. However, when Blanche arrives, she threatens Stanley's dominance in the Kowalski household and Stanley is unable to handle this. The questioning of his strength leads him to reveal all of Blanche's secrets, buy her a ticket for her ^{birthday} to go back to Laurel and ultimately rape her in scene 10.

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This incessant tormenting of Blanche stems for his lack of confidence in his own identity; he suffers from the possibility of him not following a certain gender stereotype. Williams' Mitch, who first appears ~~very different~~ ^{to be} a complete opposite to Stanley, is similarly not confident in his embodiment of masculinity. The stage directions portray him as "awkward" and hesitant highlighted through the "uh" and dashes in "Can - I - uh - kiss you?". He enjoys literature and is attached to his mother which could give the impression that he does not feel the need to comply with the model of the 'alpha-male'. However in scene 9, Mitch tries to rape Blanche after telling her she is "not clean enough" to bring to his mother, revealing to be like Stanley or trying to be like Stanley; he attempts to be sexually assertive, in this case, forceful, as he believes that is how he should be which shows the audience the limits to his confidence in his own masculinity. Allan Gray, Blanche's deceased husband, reinforces this pattern of suffering due to wanting to follow a certain gender stereotype and not being capable of doing so. Not

being comfortable with his sexuality, Allan commits suicide, ultimately highlighting the dangers of gender stereotypes. This ~~perhaps~~ ^{certainly} mirrors Williams' own suffering as a gay man. Perhaps the only positive embodiment of masculinity is Shep Huntleigh who does not suffer from wanting to follow a certain ~~male~~ ^{masculine} model. However, he does not exist, is ~~a mere~~ one of Blanche's mere fantasies: is a confident embodiment of masculinity even possible in the real world?

The playwright further challenges gender stereotypes through the exploration of femininity. Blanche, a relic of the old Planter Class, reminisces on her days as a Southern Belle. She is aware that she no longer complies with what she believes to be the model of the perfect woman and this makes her deeply suffer. This thus leads to her dangerous obsession with beauty and youth. In scene 1, she reproachfully tells her sister "You have not said a thing about my appearance", expecting a compliment. She constantly seeks attention to feel a glimpse of the beauty she felt as a Southern Belle. Thus in scene 3, she "stands in a silk pink brassiere in the light through the portieres" so that the men can see her. This obsession with her appearance acts as her hamartia which will make her suffer and ultimately

lead to her downfall. Her sister, Stella, believes she should follow the model of the housewife, the female stereotype of the time. This causes suffering as she forces herself to stay with Stanley despite the violence he inflicts on her, in scene 3 when he hits her for example, Stella sees staying with Stanley as a necessity, as it enables her to embody femininity, a supposed perfect female model and thus chooses Stanley over Blanche. In scene 11, she tells Eunice "I could not believe her and go on living with Stanley"; she chooses Stanley as she cannot follow Blanche in her world of fantasy but perhaps Stella is in a world of illusion too by ~~staying~~ convincing herself she is happy with Stanley as a way to comply with the housewife model.

In conclusion, by depicting characters who suffer from desperately trying to comply with a certain model of masculinity or femininity, Williams challenges gender stereotypes. The fact that each character has to even try to be a certain person reveals it is not natural: every character's identity is complex and multi-faceted.