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CRITICISM ON A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE A Bibliographic Survey, 1947-2003

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When *A Streetcar Named Desire* opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theater on 3 December 1947, it stirred up controversy overnight. The play met with rave reviews in the following morning's papers, like that from Brooks Atkinson who called it "a quietly woven study of intangibles" and Tennessee Williams "a genuinely poetic playwright whose knowledge of people is honest and thorough" [*First Night*, 42]. In the days ahead, Joseph Wood Krutch in *Nation*, Kappo Phelan in *Commonweal*, John Chapman in the *New York Daily News*, John Mason Brown in *The Saturday Review*, and Irwin Shaw in *The New Republic* all sounded similar praise for Williams and for *Streetcar*. The play was not impervious to negative reviews, however, as Thomas Adler points out in his monograph *The Moth and the Lantern*,

What criticisms the early reviewers did register centered on three issues: the potentially shocking nature of Williams's material, the seemingly loose way in which he structured it, and the apparently pessimistic stance he took toward human existence. [Adler, 11]

George Jean Nathan, for instance, complained of the play's "unpleasant" nature, calling it "*The Glands Menagerie*" [Nathan, 14], and Mary McCarthy, satirizing Williams's use of symbolism and flowery rhetoric, said Williams would have been better off writing "a wonderful little comic epic, *The Struggle for the Bathroom*" [McCarthy, 358]. For the most part, though, author and play were critically acclaimed and commercially successful. *Streetcar* remains the most intriguing and the most frequently analyzed of Williams' plays.

The following is a bibliographic essay digesting much of that theatric and academic criticism devoted to *Streetcar* since its debut. Working in tandem with, and not opposition to, other bibliographic essays of its kind on *Streetcar*,¹ this essay attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the main issues that have bothered, troubled, or stumped critics over the years, issues whose own evolutions should be understood specifically as a byproduct of the changing needs of the academic community itself over the years. To make the abundant and varied criticism on the play more accessible, I have tried to classify these different studies into groups which, I

¹ See especially S. Alan CHESLER, "A *Streetcar Named Desire*: Twenty-Five Years of Criticism," *Notes on Mississippi Writers*, 7 (1973), 44-53; Thomas P. ADLER, *A Streetcar Named Desire: The Moth and the Lantern*, Boston: Twayne, 1990, 10-15; and Philip C. KOLIN, *Tennessee Williams: A Guide to Research and Performance*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998, 51-79. For contemporary condensations of the various critical renderings, see also Felicia Hardison LONDRE, "A *Streetcar* Running Fifty Years," 45-66, in Matthew C. ROUDANÉ (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Tennessee Williams*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

feel, draw the essential lines of demarcation between how the play has been variously interpreted in the last half century. Beginning first with a comparison of the formalist social/psychological readings that interrogate the problematic of “meaning” in the play, the essay next explores the competing interpretations of that resultant ambiguity, concluding with a brief survey of the recent trend to import feminist, queer, and Cultural Studies paradigms to the play’s analysis. Though most of the books and articles cited within this essay cannot be entirely reduced to just one particular idea, I have tried to remain as faithful as possible to the authors’ defining theses, even if those theses tend to place them in more than one particular camp or school of critical thought.

Williams’s journeyman plays, those he wrote for the Mummies in St. Louis or for Professor E.C. Mabie at the University of Iowa in the 1930s, readily fluctuated between social agitprops, like those he had hoped would win him favor with Chicago’s WPA Federal Writers’ Project, and expressionistic dreamplays, which fed his poetic needs for a plastic theater. Because the early Williams could easily be categorized as both a social dramatist and a Freudian one—the playwright of both *Not about Nightingales* and *Battle of Angels*—critics who were at first confused by *Streetcar*’s hermeneutics sought to classify the play either as Williams’s social commentary on a post-FDR America (or a post-Reconstructionist one, for that matter) or as a psychological study of a fragile mind’s struggle to negotiate nostalgia with reality (one not too distant from his experiences with the dementia of his sister Rose).

Streetcar as Social Drama

Though a substantial number of critics believe *Streetcar* to be essentially a social drama, few have found themselves in concert in defining what kind of social drama Williams’s play most resembles. The first school argues that Blanche and Stanley represent archetypes of cultures or species. From this perspective, Eric Bentley and Roger Boxill call *Streetcar* a “social-historical drama” [Bentley, 402; Boxill, 79]. Thus Stanley and Blanche’s clash is not human against human but rather species against species. Three branches of this critical school of social dramatization find *Streetcar* to be a textbook representation of Strindbergian and Chekhovian Naturalism, of Nietzschean Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy, or of Darwinian natural selection. A second school, however, focuses on Blanche and Stanley as unique individuals and not as types, with the audience acting as voyeurs of their personal war. This school can similarly be divided into three branches: those who see *Streetcar* as a study of Lawrentian blood knowledge, of hero versus antihero, and of villain versus victim.

Joseph Wood Krutch has made the claim in both *The American Drama Since 1918* and “*Modernism*” in *Modern Drama* that he had heard third-hand what Williams said about the meaning of *Streetcar*: “You had better look out or the apes will take over” [*American Drama*, 331; *Modernism*, 129]. Krutch finds in this naturalistic determinism the thesis of most modern (pre-1950) American drama. He sums up half a century’s dramatic fiction thus,

The thesis which from the very beginning I have been attempting to expound might be summed up in such a way as to include a phrase from Williams's alleged comment. That is, a break with the past as radical as that which much modern thought and much modern drama seems to advocate unintentionally prepares the way for the apes to take over. ["*Modernism*," 129-130]

From this understanding, Krutch argues that *Streetcar* is "a sort of semi-surrealist version of the Strindbergian submission to destructive obsessions" ["*Modernism*," 124].

Several critics have also alluded to this naturalistic struggle for cultural hegemony, though dropping the Strindberg label at times. Weeks after the first performance, for instance, Irwin Shaw said *Streetcar* was written with "a triumphantly heightened naturalism" [Miller, 45]. Equally, John Gassner, in his landmark *College English* essay of 1948 "Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration," calls *Streetcar* a "naturalistic drama" [Gassner, 6]. Joan Templeton, like Thomas E. Porter, Pnina Rafailovich, Joseph K. Davis, and Durant da Ponte, also writes about the cultural clashes between Stanley and Blanche. Building upon W.J. Cash's "Cavalier thesis," Templeton argues that Blanche, through her own "epic fornications," is just as responsible for her fall as the Old South is for its own demise. Although the Strindberg label is missing in Templeton, as it is in all of these arguments here, its essence is still present.

Kenneth Bernard in Philip Kolin's "*A Streetcar Named Desire: A Playwrights' Forum*" describes an identical naturalism in *Streetcar*, not in Strindbergian but in Chekhovian terms. Bernard finds *Streetcar*, as John Gassner did earlier in his "A Study in Ambiguity" [Bogard & Oliver, 377], similar to *The Cherry Orchard*. Both plays portray the decline of one culture and the subsequent rise of another. Here, the serf Lopahin's rise to economic power presages Stanley Kowalski's ascension in the New South; and in Blanche, the aristocratic but bourgeois Old South has fallen victim to the natural evolution (some say revolution) of the rise of the proletariat. Jacob H. Adler defends this Chekhovian view in his "Tennessee Williams's South: The Culture and the Power" (revised from his earlier essay, "The Rose and the Fox"), where he argues that all of Williams's plays set in the South deal with the confrontation between culture and power, though in *Streetcar* that is not all that is at work,

What is primary is story and people as they are, as they inevitably are; what is secondary is Blanche and the others as representative of the culture-power dichotomy and the southern dilemma; what is tertiary [...] is Blanche as representative of the sensitive individual lost in the complex, impersonal modern world. [Tharpe, 40]

Constance Drake, in "Blanche Dubois: A Re-Evaluation," agrees with Jacob Adler's assessment (the Chekhovian connection) and finds Williams "presenting the pessimistic view of modern man destroying the tender aspects of love. [...] And, in Blanche's refusal to submit, she is being portrayed as the last representative of a sensitive, gentle love whose defeat is to be lamented" [Drake, 59].

None, though, has had as much influence on this naturalistic theory as Elia Kazan, *Streetcar's* first, and arguably most influential, director. From his private director's notebook, published for the first time in 1976, Kazan informs us as to where his sympathies lay. Although he identifies with Blanche's plight, his support is with Stanley. In his Stanislavskian reading of *Streetcar*, looking for the "spine" of each character, he concludes that Stanley's "spine" is to keep things his way, that he must fight off the destructive intrusions of Blanche who "would wreck his home,"

Blanche is dangerous. She is destructive. She would soon have him and Stella fighting. He's got things the way he wants them around there and he does not want them upset by a phony, corrupt, sick, destructive woman. *This makes Stanley right!* Are we going into the era of Stanley? He may be practical and right. [...] but what the hell does it leave us? [Cole & Chinoy, 375]

Kazan's direction heavily favored making Stanley the victim of Blanche's onslaughts against his name, his heritage, his masculinity, and ultimately his family. (Some audiences, it was reported, actually cheered during the rape scene of Kazan's production.) It was not until Harold Clurman took over as director of the road version of the play that a shift to Blanche as victim took place, a shift which would inaugurate the timeless debate over *Streetcar's* meaning. Under Clurman's direction, Blanche and Stanley became real persons, not representations of a moribund culture and a thriving socioeconomic middle class.

Nevertheless, while many critics have suggested strains of Strindbergian Naturalism in *Streetcar*, making specific comparisons between it and *Miss Julie*, Richard Vowles offers the most in-depth study of these two playwrights in his "Tennessee Williams and Strindberg." Vowles concludes that while there are indeed traces of Strindberg's influence on Williams in both of their treatments of human misery, sexual and social conflicts, and theatrics, the number of differences between the two far outweighs any similarities. At best, only in his theatrics does Williams become a Strindberg student. Poncho Savery concurs with Vowles's anti-naturalistic reasoning, writing that Williams cannot be labeled a naturalistic writer because "a writer of naturalism believes in scientific determinism and tends to create one-dimensional characters who are the living embodiments of natural laws" [Savery, 4035A]. Such a writer believes in didactic morality and not, as Williams does, in psychological realism.

Thomas P. Adler in *The Moth and the Lantern* suggests that the Strindberg/Chekhov labels are both valid, if *Streetcar* is viewed from altered perspectives. If, for instance, one were to find Stella and Stanley's relationship as the play's locus, then Strindberg's *Miss Julie* would seem *Streetcar's* literary progenitor with their similarities in a lower-class male pulling an upper-class female down from her aristocratic tower [Adler, 65]. If, however, one reads *Streetcar* as Blanche's struggle with Stanley, then the Chekhov label would seem justifiable; for *The Cherry Orchard* and *Streetcar* are both about the proletariat supplanting the effete bourgeoisie [Adler, 39]. *Streetcar* is, in the least, a blending of these two matrices.

With essays like Gassner's in *College English* and Harry Taylor's "The Dilemma of Tennessee Williams" in *Masses and Mainstream* (both in 1948), Williams's and *Streetcar*'s place in the American literary pantheon seemed in jeopardy. Critics knew they had witnessed in *Streetcar* something dreadful but were not sure what was so tragic about it. Taylor intimates that the reason for this uncertainty lies in *Streetcar*'s immature artistry: Williams creates opposition in Blanche and Stanley but not true tragic conflict [Taylor, 54-55]. Yet it is this same opposition that other critics see as successful in *Streetcar*. The opposition between Blanche and Stanley is not, they argue, between cultural types, but between human types. Thus, whereas one side argues that Williams is creating a Blakean chiaroscuro as embodied in Nietzsche's Apollonian/Dionysian personality types, the other side finds in *Streetcar* the simple display of Darwinian natural selection which Tennessee Williams himself emphasizes. While the second group finds some justification for the conflict—the survival of the family unit is at stake—the former group sees romantic sensitivity crushed by realistic brutality, and nothing more.

In his *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes an archetypal struggle between restraint (Apollonian) and passion (Dionysian). In his analysis of *Streetcar*, subtitled "Nietzsche Descending," Joseph Riddel asserts that Williams borrowed from Nietzsche "in great chunks, often undigested" [Riddel, 421]. Although Williams, like many American artists who borrowed from European ideologies, took liberties in his philosophy, the essence is still there. Riddel writes,

But even in *Streetcar* one must begin with a contradiction between his intellectual design and the militant primitivism of the theme; or to use a philosophical gloss, one must begin with Nietzsche's Apollonian-Dionysian conflict, in an almost literal sense. [Riddel, 421]

The Apollonian figure is characterized by restraint and order, the Dionysian by passion and metaphysics. Nietzsche accepts the dialectic, finding a tragic but necessary beauty to the bond. Riddel points out that Blanche is Apollonian and Stanley Dionysian, but the reason *Streetcar* fails is because Williams misinterpreted Nietzsche. By suggesting that Dionysian behavior often dominates the Apollonian, Nietzsche did not mean that passion defeats restraint, as Williams thought, but that order moves inevitably toward chaos.

Joseph Riddel is not the only critic to make the Nietzschean connection. Judith J. Thompson describes *Streetcar*'s mythos as a "dramatic *agon*" between Stanley (Dionysus) and Blanche (Pentheus), based on Euripides' *The Bacchae* [38 ff.]. Britton J. Harwood in his "Tragedy as Habit: *A Streetcar Named Desire*" also finds the Apollonian/Dionysian dialectic in the Blanche-Stanley conflict, but Harwood sees the struggle better described in Rudolf Otto's terminology: Self versus Other. Harwood sees the crux of *Streetcar* as a code of loyalty both upheld and betrayed. Whereas Stella remains loyal to Stanley by the end (as Stanley is to Mitch in protecting him from Blanche), Blanche betrays her loyalty to Allan by exposing his homosexuality, just as Stanley does her promiscuity. By recognizing the Wholly Other in each other, that which is "both dreadful and fascinating"

[Tharpe, 107], Stanley and Blanche battle in order to preserve the Self, whose dominion is in peril.

Many others describe this same phenomenon, this social confrontation with opposing human types, though not in Nietzschean terms. Harold Clurman, for example, writes in *Nation* that *Streetcar* is a "dramatization of sensibility crushed by [...] brutishness" [Clurman, 635]. And Henry Popkin traces the classical Adonis-Gargoyle myth in Williams, where the healthy young man (Stanley) is pitted against the older neurotic woman (Blanche) [Popkin, 48]. But Signi Falk in her 1958 *Modern Drama* essay, "The Profitable World of Tennessee Williams," provides one of the better insights into Williams's technique of juxtaposing character types onstage. Falk, in short, vilifies Williams as a careerist for creating plays not with real people but with stock characters such as the dreamer, the animal, and the Mamma's boy for his men, and the neurotic southern belle and the mother figure for his women. So, while some critics find Williams successful in his drama of human types at odds, others, like Falk, find this form of drama deplorable [Falk, 180].

The other group who argues for *Streetcar* as a dramatization of human nature types sees it as a play not of ideologies but of sexual aggression for protection and propagation. These critics find Williams writing a play based on Darwinian natural selection: Blanche and Stanley are two opposing animals of the same species striving for the survival of their kind, with Stella as the prize. Deborah Burks, for instance, calls the conflict "less [...] a struggle between Good and Evil" and more a "Social Darwinist struggle for survival between two 'species' of human beings" [Burks, 37]. Blanche, in trying to save Stella from the bestial Vieux Carré with her "Don't hang back with the brutes" speech, solicits open warfare from Stanley, who must in turn destroy Blanche before she damages his and Stella's life in the Elysian Fields. As do Anca Vlasopolos and Sarah Boyd Johns [Schlueter, *Feminist Rereadings*, 158-159 & 143], Leonard Casper sees this triangle of opposition with Stella at the apex as Williams's "cellular structure of a proper community [...] composed of diverse elements (opposition), but without divisiveness (opposition)" [Tharpe, 752]. In this community, Casper believes, "all men are intermediaries to one another's missions" [Tharpe, 752]. For Blanche, that mission is to revitalize an effete southern culture; for Stanley, it is to assure the continued evolution of the efficient Napoleonic code, symbolized in the birth of his son at the end of the play. Both fight over Stella, for in her choosing one species means the death of the other.

Edward F. Callahan and Thomas P. Adler both describe this same scenario, though with a twist. Since *Streetcar* recalls a medieval dialogue between flesh and spirit, Callahan argues in "Tennessee Williams's Two Worlds," it is a morality play, and Stella, the third member of this triptych, must choose between the two ethical values represented by Blanche (spirit) and Stanley (flesh) [Callahan, 62-63]. Adler concurs, finding *Streetcar* "a modern variation on the medieval morality play" [Adler, *Moth*, 75]. Like *The Castle of Perseverance*, Adler writes, *Streetcar* "follows humankind from birth to death, dramatizing the conflict of the Virtues and Vices, as they struggle for the soul of a universalized, everyman figure" [Adler, *Moth*, 75].

John T. von Szeliski also comments on the Darwinian selection at work in *Streetcar*. In "Tennessee Williams and the Tragedy of Sensitivity," von Szeliski writes that Williams's heroes strive for but cannot

make successful adjustments to this kind of life-problem without becoming animals themselves. Failing this, they are destroyed. Finding most men savage, Williams's sympathy is on the side of the delicately built person whose soul is revolted by crass life. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is his allegorical demonstration of this "pitiful" situation. [Miller, 66]

Louise Blackwell and K. Balachandran, on the other hand, argue for a harmony of cohabitation, bestial or not. Blackwell sees Williams as "making a commentary on Western culture by dramatizing his belief that men and women find reality and meaning in life through satisfactory sexual relationships." [Stanton, 101]. Of the four types of women Blackwell finds in Williams's plays, Blanche belongs to the category where women have "learned to be maladjusted through adjustment to abnormal family relationships and [...] strive to break through their bondage in order to find a mate" [Stanton, 101]. Although Balachandran never transcends the romantic concepts of "true love" and "happy marriage" in "Marriage and Family Life in Tennessee Williams," the essence of natural selection is still there, for "Sex is pivotal to life" [Balachandran, 69]. Bliss between opposite sexes is only reached when the female sex is assured security from extinction. Thus, when Stella's safety is threatened by the intruding Blanche, Stanley must combat the infectious sister-in-law or succumb to the stronger species. Likewise, Blanche must win Stella back to Belle Reve or face extinction herself.

In *Rebellious Puritan*, Nancy Tischler espouses a view similar to Balachandran's, although twenty-five years earlier. Tischler sees *Streetcar* not as a drama of natural selection but rather as "a reversal of Darwin's vision—back to the apes" [Tischler, 146]. This certainly echoes what Krutch reported Williams had said about the apes taking over. To be sure, as Emily Mann remembers what Williams had said to her about the audience's early siding with Stanley, "the animals always cheer their own..." [quoted in Kolin, "Forum," 190].

This first school of critics who argue that *Streetcar* is a social drama of naturalistic determinism and Blanche and Stanley cultural or human nature types may seem often at either ends of a philosophical continuum. Indeed, scholars cannot seem to agree if Williams is interpreting Strindberg, Chekhov, Nietzsche, or Darwin. But all have the common denominator that *Streetcar* is essentially a social drama with its characters representing some philosophical or political credo. The second school, who views *Streetcar* as a sociodramatic study of victimology, eschews this philosophical base, stressing instead that Blanche and Stanley are unique individuals and we are witnessing a private battle between them. Unfortunately, this school, too, cannot agree upon what it is that we are in fact witnessing. The neutral party finds Williams unbiased, supplying us simply with a study of Lawrentian blood knowledge or the Eros/Thanatos life/death drive. The other two factions, though, believe Williams indeed has a bias. But as fervent as the one side of the two is in arguing that Stanley is the hero and Blanche the

antihero, the other side is equally adamant in finding Blanche the victim of Stanley's callousness.

It has long been established that D.H. Lawrence greatly influenced the young Williams. Therefore, several studies, including a book-length one by Norman Fedder, have focused on the Lawrentian elements in Williams's plays. It is not surprising, then, to find several references to the Blanche-Stanley conflict as Williams's study of the Eros/Thanatos instinct made famous in Lawrence's fiction. Peggy Prenshaw and Nancy Tischler, for instance, see remnants of Lawrence in several of Williams's plays [Tharpe, 20; Stanton, 161-162]. And while Jack von Dornum sees Stanley as "D.H. Lawrence's natural man" [Dornum, 65], Robert Brustein perceives Stanley as the Lawrence hero "whose sexuality, though violent, is unmental, unspiritual, and, therefore, in some way free from taint." [Bloom, *Streetcar*, 19]. Brustein also sees the conflict between Stanley and Blanche as an allegory of the struggle between "effeminate culture and masculine libido." [Bloom, *Streetcar*, 9]. Tatsumi Funatsu even goes so far as to call Williams himself a Lawrentian [Funatsu, 41]. But it is Christopher Bigsby in "Tennessee Williams: *Streetcar* to Glory" and Arthur Ganz in "The Desperate Morality of the Plays of Tennessee Williams" who offer the most cogent analyses along these lines: Bigsby, in discussing Williams's Promethean Man in characters like John Buchanan and Stanley Kowalski, both of whom survive at the expense of the delicate, romantic people; and Ganz, in tracing the "neo-Lawrentian" elements in Williams's plays prior to 1962.

Bigsby argues that of all of Williams's earlier plays which preach "the Lawrentian sermon on the dominance of the physical over the spiritual" [Bloom, *Streetcar*, 44], it is not until *Streetcar* that Williams "managed fully to digest his Lawrentian lessons and incorporate them into his own perception of an American caught in transition from genteel sterility to brutal indifference" [Bloom, 45]. Ganz, too, finds Williams a Lawrence disciple but concludes that since Williams is a Puritan by nature, hence intrinsically opposed to the Cavalier values his master held, he becomes more the moralist than Lawrence: those who reject life (e.g., sex) are punished unless they atone for this sin; those who nurture life are innocent and good but often become corrupt. All of this, however, presupposes one question that Leonard Berkman in "The Tragic Downfall of Blanche DuBois" finally asks: "is Williams making as much a 'Lawrentian' plea for primitive, spontaneous passion to return to dominance in his audiences' lives as he is, simultaneously, making a plea for the safeguarding of torn, sophisticated souls?" [Berkman, 251].

Yet, while Berkman ultimately finds the question irrelevant, several others have argued to no end where they believe Williams directed his sympathies. Already discussed was the Elia Kazan/Harold Clurman debate where both directors chose to showcase Stanley and Blanche, respectively, with equal success. In *Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work*, Benjamin Nelson discusses at length this issue of Williams's intent. Nelson argues a good case for both sides, concluding rather ambivalently, though: "the overriding feeling at the conclusion of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is that something terrible has happened, but nothing has been gained, no one has quite realized what the catastrophe was for or about" [Nelson, 152-153].

Many critics, however, disagree. For them, Williams knew what he was creating. The problem here, something Nelson has laid claim to, is that a case can be made for both Stanley and Blanche as heroes.

Those who see Stanley as the hero make Blanche the antihero. In *The Broken World of Tennessee Williams*, for example, Esther M. Jackson traces Blanche as antihero back to Greek drama [Jackson, 74-75, 80-81]. Although Jackson is sympathetic to Blanche's plight in this role, several critics are not. Ruby Cohn sides with Stanley as protector of the family, stating polemically that Stanley's "cruellest gesture in the play is to tear the paper lantern off the light bulb" [Stanton, 50]. She points out that we never actually see "Stanley hit Stella" or "rape Blanche" [Stanton, 50]. In fact, she argues, the rape itself results from Blanche's licentious provocation. Stanley, on the other hand, is faithful and loyal; "his cruelty defends his world" [Stanton, 50]. Richard Law agrees with Cohn, positing that the ambiguity of *Streetcar* arises from attempts to read it as Blanche's tragedy. If, however, we read this as Stanley's story, then the play becomes a successful melodrama [Law, 4]. Law too can only gloss over the rape scene by suggesting that Blanche initiated it through her combination of flirting and exhibitionism [Law, 6].

Susan Spector's "Alternative Visions of Blanche DuBois" reexamines the Kazan/Clurman issue, claiming how the two directors' productions helped to initiate the debate over authorial intent. With Jessica Tandy under Kazan's direction, Blanche became a symbol of a dying tradition, and we welcome Stanley's hostilities. With Clurman as director, Uta Hagen made Blanche the victim of Stanley's destructive society,

Hagen's Blanche under Clurman's direction left audiences feeling they had watched a delicate woman driven insane by a brutish environment epitomized by Stanley Kowalski. Tandy's Blanche under Kazan's direction left audiences feeling that a madwoman had entered an alien world and after shaking that world had been successfully exorcised. [Spector, 558]

Spector concludes by saying that the play accommodates both interpretation, and the actors' and director's talents should dictate which version should be stressed.

Not everyone sees things as balanced, however. John Buell in "The Evil Imagery of Tennessee Williams," for instance, traces the recurrent Victim image in Williams's plays, particularly with Blanche in *Streetcar* [Buell, 183]. And Anca Vlasopolos's "Authorizing History: Victimization in *A Streetcar Named Desire*," reprinted in June Schlueter's *Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama*, provides a feminist reading to Blanche's victimology. Vlasopolos claims, and rightly so, that critics over the years have alluded to Blanche's "death" at the end. She points out adamantly that Blanche does not die, that she is still alive and must suffer the consequences of Stanley's brutal rape. She finds these attempts to "domesticate the violence" appalling [Vlasopolos, 150]. From this stance, Vlasopolos concentrates on "the conflict between two versions of history struggling for authority" [Vlasopolos, 151]. She argues that Blanche's victimization has "less to do with the history of the South as we now have it than with gender-determined exclusion from the larger historical discourse" [Vlasopolos, 152].

In his raping Blanche, then, Stanley is not eliminating an insurgent and reestablishing order but victimizing a woman; and we need to recognize this as viewers, she posits, and see Stanley not as a hero but as a villain.

Streetcar as Psychological Drama

All of the above studies have primarily addressed *Streetcar* as a social drama, focusing on the conflict between Blanche and Stanley, or discussing Blanche as one of Williams's "fugitive kind" in a Kowalskiesque world. Whereas some see Williams giving us an allegory, pitting two cultures against one another, others have argued that *Streetcar* is a study of two species of animals vying for dominance in one environment. Still others have defended Blanche and Stanley as unique individuals and *Streetcar* as Williams's display of unconscious warfare between two opposing forces. Some critics, however, do not see *Streetcar* primarily as a social drama at all.

Williams Sharp, for instance, defending Williams from early critical onslaughts, argues that, though partly a social dramatist, Williams is concerned more with "how man gets on with the world inside him" [Sharp, 171]. Or, as Mary Ann Corrigan later puts it [as does Judith J. Thompson, 38], the Blanche-Stanley struggle is purely an external dramatization of what is going on inside Blanche's head: "the external events of the play, while actually occurring, serve as a metaphor for Blanche's internal conflict" [Corrigan, 392]. Critics who share Sharp's and Corrigan's views feel that *Streetcar* is essentially a psychological drama about Blanche's internal struggle with herself. There are two branches of this school of thought: those who see the play as a study of Freudian psychosis, and those who see it as Williams working out the dialectic of his Puritan-Cavalier heritage through Blanche's struggle between flesh and spirit, past and present, illusion and reality, and death and desire.

Kappo Phelan, in his 1947 review of *Streetcar* for *Commonweal*, supplies the first reference to Freud in context of all its characters, writing, "At first glance, it seems that Mr. Williams has conjured nothing more (nor less) than a melodrama, an especial Freudian case-history with all on stage only more or less diseased, the conflict being one of degree." [Phelan, 254]. Jack von Dornum agrees, claiming in his dissertation that *Streetcar* is a Freudian study of mental disintegration [Dornum, 54, 61-63]. And W. David Sievers's "Most Famous of *Streetcars*" (excerpted by Jordan Miller from Sievers's *Freud on Broadway*) focuses primarily on the Freudian sexual psychology in *Streetcar*. Sievers believes that Williams "arranges in a compelling theatrical pattern the agonized sexual anxiety of a girl caught between *id* and *ego-ideal*" [Miller, 90]. The *ego-ideal* became the *superego*, the governing conscience of the passion-driven *id*. Although Sievers seems to be describing a social struggle in Freudian terms—the *id* being Stanley, raw, animal passion; the *ego-ideal* being Blanche, tempered, cultured reason—he is not. He does acknowledge this comparison but insists that the *id-superego* binary is, more appropriately, within Blanche herself: "She has met her match, and the play becomes an unconscious sexual battle between the two—although the principal battlefield is within Blanche herself" [Miller, 91].

Philip Weissman and Constantine Stavrou also ground Blanche's problems in Freudian terminology. Weissman attempts to psychoanalyze Blanche, her repressed wishes and struggles with her conscience, by psychoanalyzing Williams himself through three of his other characters: each shares with Blanche traits of homelessness, promiscuity, and abandonment and is a sketch of Blanche at different stages of her life. Weissman arrives at the conclusion that

Blanche DuBois' fear of loneliness and abandonment is probably based on a disturbance of early object relationship, in which she differs intensely from her sister Stella. This accounts for her incapacity to establish a permanent object relationship; for that matter, every relationship is but a transient negation in her search for an unattainable reunion with the preœdipal mother. [Miller, 62-63]

Stavrou reaches a similar conclusion but with different female characters from different plays, finding that they are all "obviously portraits of the same woman observed at different stages of her regressive neurosis" [Stavrou, 26]. Stavrou goes one step further than Weissman, however, suggesting that Williams puts these neurotic women purposefully in his plays as "a reflection of our disordered society and cosmos" [Stavrou, 33]. *Streetcar*, then, becomes a study of Blanche's postlapsarian condition.

Whereas some scholars have sought to uncover the Freudian source of Blanche's neurosis, or, like Gulshan Rai Kataria, her Jungian ones (here the "negative hetaira woman" [Kataria, 84], the *femme fatale*), most highlight her internal conflict without the clinical appellations and, instead, with simple binary oppositions: Puritan idealism against Cavalier materialism. Referring to Williams's plays in general, Joseph Golden calls this his Puritan-Cavalier split, the first of Williams's "double dilemma" [Golden, 124]; and to *Streetcar* specifically, Susan Yankowitz calls it his flesh-spirit schism, an "inner tug-of-war" where "Blanche ends up tragically divided from herself" [Kolin, "Forum," 201-202]. Most articles written on *Streetcar*, to be sure, cannot avoid mentioning this dichotomy of flesh and spirit.²

Peggy Prenshaw also discusses this flesh-spirit dialectic at length in "The Paradoxical Southern World of Tennessee Williams" [Tharpe, 27], but her main concern is with a different conflict. She posits that Williams's "characters and themes are built upon paradox" [Tharpe, 9], for which there are primarily three, one having a greater importance for *Streetcar*: the struggle between past and present. To be sure, Blanche cannot seem to leave behind her the moribund past of Belle Reve and accept the sterile, modern New South of the Elysian Fields. Yet Prenshaw is quick to add that Stanley is not in opposition to Blanche. Although Stanley has a "frontier rawness" [Tharpe, 15], it can be tamed. Ironically, it is the past that Blanche so reveres that has created the Stanley Kowalskis, "The expense of will that built Belle Reve and the profligacy that lost it are in fact reborn in Stanley's vitality and assertiveness" [Tharpe, 15]. Her ancestors' "epic fornications," which Blanche denigrates but cannot release herself from, were responsible for the

² See also, Hedwig Bock's "Tennessee Williams, Southern Playwright," Edward Callahan's "Tennessee Williams's Two Worlds," and Delma E. Presley's "The Search for Hope in the Plays of Tennessee Williams."

loss of the old southern gentility, and Blanche cannot come to terms with this. Williams just makes her struggle more acute when he makes her promiscuous. What is sad for Blanche, Prenshaw notes, is that this "tragic lesson" is lost on her, just as it is lost on Stanley.

The past-present dialectic is also the focus of Ana Lucia Almeida Gazolla's "Myth, Ritual and Ideology" in *Streetcar*, although she calls this conflict the "Southern contradiction" [Harkness, 25]. She examines the "mythical substratum" of *Streetcar* in relation to the "ideology of the southern United States" in order to prove her thesis that

the play is structured on the basis of the oppositions past/present and paradise lost/present chaos; the characters are defined in terms of the way they relate to time, or, in other words, by their ability or lack of ability to accept or adapt to the historical process. [Harkness, 24]

The purpose for Williams's dilemma, Gazolla concludes, is to show that Blanche's "fragmentation is that of modern man and is also a reflection of the crisis of values in the south" [Harkness, 27].

Like Jacqueline O'Connor in *Dramatizing Dementia: Madness in the Plays of Tennessee Williams*, Jeanne M. McGlinn addresses the third dialectic taking hold of Blanche: illusion versus reality. McGlinn points out that, like all the women in Williams's plays between 1940 and 1950, Blanche "refuses to accept the reality of her life and attempts to live under illusion." [Tharpe, 513]. Although McGlinn is accurate in noting Blanche's conflict between gentility and promiscuity, the result of which is "self-defeat instead of survival" [Tharpe, 513], she fails to see that Blanche lives in both illusion and reality simultaneously, and it is this dialectic that is the slow poison which destroys her. This death-instinct gives us the fourth and last dialectic in Blanche: her struggle between death and desire.

Blanche says the opposite of death is desire, and since desire for her is life-affirming sex, critics have argued that she staves off death, like the deaths which nearly consume her at Belle Reve, with sex. Put in different terms, Blanche's dialectic is between intimacy and entrapment. As Williams had said in a letter to his literary agent Audrey Wood (dated 29 August 1947), *Streetcar* is a tragedy of Stanley's incomprehension of Blanche's needs; Bert Cardullo's article on intimacy and tragedy of incomprehension attempts to trace the source of this misunderstanding.

After defending Stanley's rape and exonerating him of causing Blanche's demise, Cardullo posits that critics who have argued for a Stanley versus Blanche perspective have been misreading the play altogether. He writes, "Blanche's struggle in *Streetcar* is not so much with Stanley as with herself in her efforts to achieve lasting intimacy" [Tharpe, 146]. Cardullo sees *Streetcar*, then, as a Christian tragedy, the impetus of Blanche's destruction coming not from Stanley nor from her denial of her husband's homosexuality, but from his suicide, which she feels was the result of her denial. In coming to the Elysian Fields, Blanche searches for the intimacy she has lost with Allan, seeking it first with Stella and then with Mitch. Stanley fails to comprehend the complexity of Blanche's character and needs, thereby making him just as much a victim of this tragedy as Blanche, since he too does not win but merely survives [Tharpe, 144].

Leonard Berkman proffers a view similar to Cardullo's lack-of-intimacy thesis but draws a different conclusion. Blanche's need for intimacy, Berkman argues, is persistently denied, first by Mitch, then by Stanley. But Berkman finds her victorious by the end because she has at least found intimacy with the doctor: "she remains free, up through her last moment on stage, to affirm that ideal toward which she has always striven" [Berkman, 256]. Her tragedy, Berkman insists, comes from her acceptance of her situation by either not retracting her cry of rape or insisting upon its validity; for her long-term future is without intimacy, and she fails to combat it.

If intimacy is desire, then death is certainly entrapment. And as she has run from death all her life, Blanche must also run from entrapment. Lindy Melman describes in "A Captive Maid: Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*" this dilemma she faces: "Blanche Dubois [*sic*], then, is both externally and internally confined" [Melman, 126]. Blanche's tragedy is her failure to free herself from this entrapment, remaining as attached to the Kowalski home as she is to her internal confinement, the inescapable past of Belle Reve forever tethering her to its "moribund and impotent tradition" [Melman, 142]. Therefore, although Blanche "grasps at desire as a means of escaping death, her passion can only lead her closer to the grave, for it fuels an attempt not to reach out to the future, but to deny it" [Melman, 144].

Alan Ehrlich, in pointing out similarities in O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* and *Streetcar* other than the shared interest in the word "desire," also finds Blanche a caged animal, suffocating in the small Kowalski apartment [Tharpe, 133]. Ehrlich discovers an irony in Blanche's desire for privacy, for everything she does is antithetical to her drive for solitude. When she is with Mitch, for instance, Blanche comments about the sky, even though she always returns inside the flat [Tharpe, 134]. Williams helps to accentuate this claustrophobic environment through his seemingly unprivate, suffocating stage. This visually heightens for the audience the internal suffocation and entrapment Blanche is experiencing.

Whereas most critics attempt to show Blanche's entrapment and drive toward desire as a way to free herself, Kathleen Hulley in "Fate of the Symbolic in *A Streetcar Named Desire*" argues for just the opposite: to show that *Streetcar* is not a story about desire but rather desire's destruction. With Derridian deconstruction as her analytical tool, Hulley establishes three points to support her thesis: 1) Williams transforms reality onstage into illusion, 2) he makes a chorus of the other characters whose roles are determined by the audience, and 3) he makes Stella's decision the crux of the ending. Hulley concludes that the ending of *Streetcar* is not ambivalent as others have argued, nor is Stanley victorious, but rather that Stella's decision is responsible for the outcome. Williams creates ambiguity only in the multiple renderings of abstract words like "reality," "desire," and "illusion" that have various sign/signifier gaps. Thus, by "representing the either/or categories of contextual control through the death of desire, Williams surpasses the issues of "sane" or "insane," "truth" or "illusion" to expose the ambivalent social law which makes those terms significant" [Bloom, *Streetcar*, 122]. What Williams achieves in his ending is to draw "analogies between the social control of desire and the conventional functioning of

theatre in order to represent the death of desire" [Bloom, 121]. While Hulley brings the discussion about the desire-death dialectic full circle, she also serves as a point of departure to a second issue—the concern over ambiguity and Williams's artistic intentions.

What Did Williams Intend in Streetcar?

The Dialogue

As with the debate over *Streetcar's* genre or meaning, there is no consensus on the second issue concerning *Streetcar's* ambiguity. In Dan Isaac's recent words on the play, "Who Wins in *A Streetcar Named Desire?*", whereas one group of critics feels the play is a failure because it is ambiguous, arguing that Williams did not achieve an "objective correlative" for the emotions he wished to evoke, the other side extols Williams's richness of ambiguity or synthesis in what he ultimately constructs. In "The First Critical Assessments of *A Streetcar Named Desire: The Streetcar Tryouts and the Reviewers*," Philip C. Kolin traces this debate over Williams's apparent structural flaw back to the pre-Broadway reviewers. As Kolin asserts, "these early critical assessments of *Streetcar* [...] play a major part in the history of the criticism of Williams's script and in the overall history of how that script was changed and interpreted" [Kolin, 46]. While exposing the ambiguities surrounding the play's hero or heroine, these early critics also grappled with Williams's rather novel approach to plot development and structure [Kolin, 53-54, 58, 62]. It is no accident that their words on both issues should correspond directly to the concerns raised by the Broadway critics months later.

Simply put, there is little coincidence to the fact that, except for a few anomalies, the majority of critics who argue that *Streetcar* is ambiguous and structurally flawed were writing the first twenty years after the play's inaugural performance in 1947. Influential drama critics like J.W. Krutch, Harold Clurman, Walter Kerr, John Gassner, Charles Brooks, and Eric Bentley have all argued that *Streetcar's* primary flaw is in its unsatisfactory ending. In *Lies Like Truth*, Clurman claims that there are elements in *Streetcar* that "make for a certain ambiguity and confusion" [Clurman, 74]. Kerr addresses Williams's failures, citing his "escape-hatch endings" of which *Streetcar* is one [Kerr, 127]. Even Gassner feels that these ambiguities both enrich and infect the play, but, overall, *Streetcar's* "illumination flickers" [Bogard & Oliver, 378]. Brooks, though, takes the harshest stance, calling *Streetcar* Williams's "most regrettable failure" [Brooks, 279]. Brooks finds Williams a failed playwright in all of his early works because he does not know what he is writing, dark comedy or tragedy. As a result, the ending is both unbelievable and unsatisfying. Brooks concludes that he wished Williams wrote wholly comedy because in that he is least maudlin.

By 1953, critics were still acknowledging the play's ambiguity but seeing it now as less of an artistic liability. Krutch, for instance, in "Modernism" in *Modern Drama* contends that *Streetcar* reflects the uncertainty that all modern drama exhibits, the reason being that we are entering the

post-Renaissance civilization and with that we are unsure of our future. Williams captures this heightened anticipation well in the Blanche-Stanley conflict. In a world where our future is unclear, Williams is just instilling uncertainty in our perception of who is right and who is wrong. Thomas Porter shares similar sentiments in *Myth and Modern American Drama*, suggesting that Williams creates ambiguity because he is writing from inside the southern myth which will not allow him to decide whether his allegiances lie with the past or with the present [Porter, 169].

Streetcar criticism by the 1980s finally argues in favor of this ambiguity. In "Blanche: A Complexity of Attitudes," Klára Bódis cites George Brandt's and Bamber Gascoigne's separate discussions of *Streetcar*'s ambiguity, then concludes with her own attempt to resolve the issue, "as we cannot fully accept or reject Blanche, when she is eliminated we don't fully sympathize nor do we rejoice fully" [Bódis, 149]. Ellen Dowling and Nancy Pride echo this same sentiment and suggest that directors should use the ambiguity evident in the play to their advantage: they can alter the performance to match the strengths and weaknesses of their actors. Dowling and Pride outline three distinct approaches to directing *Streetcar* where Blanche and Stanley alternate roles of protagonist and antagonist. And John Timpane, also in Schlueter's *Feminist Rereadings*, posits that reading *Streetcar* from a feminist perspective actually heightens the ambiguity, for Williams is simply playing with his audience's gender expectations—in short, deconstructing their responses. Thus the ambiguity is actually "a form of control" [Schlueter, 177]. As Timpane notes, ambiguity is not necessarily an artistic failure and may even be intentional: "in a way, ambiguity is a hedge against annihilation" [Schlueter, 178].

Although there is a handful of critics who share Law's and Kazan's pro-Stanley or Drake's pro-Blanche views, most who argue that *Streetcar* is unambiguous do so from their belief that Williams creates a unity in bringing together these antinomies. Like Joseph Golden, with his discussion of Williams's "double dilemma" of "puritan instinct in conflict with human corruption" [Golden, 124-125], Benjamin Nelson and Leonard Quirino argue that Williams searches for an objective stance toward the inevitable confrontation between two negating forces [Nelson, 133, 148; Tharpe, 86-87]. John M. Roderick even takes the position that the reason for the ambiguity lies in our persistent misreading of *Streetcar* as a tragedy. If we see the play a tragicomedy, something he says we have overlooked, then the uncertainties about the prior troubling comic scenes will become clearer [Tharpe, 116]. If the play were wholly tragic, then Blanche would be the heroine. As we have already seen, this causes problems since she is not consistently sympathetic. If the play were wholly melodramatic, then Stanley would be the hero. And as also noted, Stanley's actions are not those of a typical hero. The tragic and comic elements, then, form the paradox of human existence.

Normand Berlin echoes Roderick's sentiments in his "Complementarity in *A Streetcar Named Desire*" where he dismisses Bentley and others' views that Williams created a flawed, ambiguous play. Instead, Berlin argues, *Streetcar* has "balanced sides built in" [Tharpe, 98]. The sides are so balanced that when "Stanley condemns Blanche for her sexual looseness and Blanche condemns Stanley for his apishness, each seems *both*

right and wrong, right in the light of truth, wrong in the light of understanding" [Tharpe, 99]. (Berlin does not, however, trace the complementarity within Blanche herself.)

Two other articles in the Tharpe collection, *Tennessee Williams: A Tribute*, trace this synthesis in many of Williams's works, focusing at times on the Blanche-Stanley issue at hand. In addition to William J. Scheick's excellent essay on "talk" and "touch" in Williams, Robert Emmet Jones finds the later Williams characters to be unisexual. If we swap their genders, we can gain a more lucid understanding to the ambiguity surrounding their natures. For instance, the sexual but ambivalent Blanche would be more understandable if she were a man. As a homosexual man, "he" would be attracted to the "brute masculinity" of "his" brother-in-law, who must in turn defeat the male Blanche to quell any similar homosexual tendencies in himself [Tharpe, 554]. In this analysis, Jones feels that as a man Blanche "married a heterosexual girl in an attempt to achieve 'normalcy,' and who had then discovered his true sexual bent" [Tharpe, 554]. This is not Williams's play, Jones assures us, "but it might have been [...] [as] it demonstrates the sexual ambivalence of the characters of Blanche and Stanley" [Tharpe, 554].

The Proposed Solutions

As we have seen with the debate over *Streetcar's* genre—is it a social or psychological drama?—a consensus as to what its ultimate meaning is, if any, has also been unattainable. Arguments have been made for its ambiguity, some seeing this as an artistic failure in the play, some seeing this as its most lasting attribute. In direct response to this, other critics have called *Streetcar* an unambiguous play, again some viewing this as a liability, some as an asset. So, we have once again reached an impasse. In an attempt to resolve the two problems explored above, various scholars have examined the issue from angles other than the seemingly exhausted Blanche-Stanley conflict. These critics believe that external evidence, either in the symbolism imposed on the play or in the evolution of the play's story, themes, and characters, could help illuminate *Streetcar's* literary shadow.

The starting point for most studies on symbolism in *Streetcar* is the play's epigraph, taken from Hart Crane's last great poem, "The Broken Tower,"

and so it was I entered the broken world
To trace the visionary company of love...

Esther M. Jackson builds her entire book on Williams's expressionistic heritage from this quotation. And Delma E. Presley and Hari Singh's "Epigraphs to the Plays of Tennessee Williams" makes so bold a claim as to finally resolve *Streetcar's* ambiguity based on the role Crane's poem plays in its overall meaning [Presley & Singh, 5]. Even in 1990, James Schevill in Philip Kolin's "A Playwrights' Forum" refers again to the epigraph, suggesting that the answer to *Streetcar's* mystery could be deduced from the Crane poem, making the play "a visionary journey" [Kolin, 196]. Where this journey leads us, or where it departed from, Schevill never says. Still others,

however indirectly, find the symbols and imagery in *Streetcar* as providing clues to this mysterious sojourn.

Joan Wylie Hall, for example, traces the roots of *Streetcar*'s main symbol back to Shakespeare and Pater. To better understand Stanley's motivation, Hall feels, the "gaudy seed-bearer" must be seen as the villainous counterpart of Lucio in Williams's contemporary rendition of *Measure for Measure*. Hall argues that since one of Stanley's early names was Lucio (the namesake of the lecher in *Measure for Measure*), and Walter Pater describes all the Shakespearean characters in this dark comedy as "full of desire" and "vessels of the genial seed-bearing powers of nature [...] [and] gaudy existence," then we can deduce that Stanley was modeled after Shakespeare's villain. Thus the answer to *Streetcar* could lie in its dark comedy, except that there is as much debate about Shakespeare's problem play as there is about Williams's.

Again, although the discussion on symbols illuminates some of the dark pall of *Streetcar*'s meaning, the varying conclusions can only add to the existing penumbra. Given Williams's "plastic language" of symbols (which I explore elsewhere as an example of Williams's debt to Wagner in his use of interwebbing musical leitmotifs to establish a symbolic metalanguage in the play), one image may share several interpretations. Therefore, those critics who seek to explain *Streetcar* in terms of its symbols do little more than to further muddle the issue at hand—namely, the understanding of *Streetcar*'s troublesome ending. The last major critical school thought a resolution to this problem could be reached in an analysis of the play's evolution, in either its story, its themes, or its characters.

These critics read the several drafts of *Streetcar* and its one-act predecessors, the private letters of Williams to his agent and friends, or the private journals of the directors and actors who produced *Streetcar* as panaceas necessary to cure the play of its ambiguity ills. They compare Blanche and other characters to the lesser-known plays and stories Williams wrote prior to *Streetcar* to show a conscious rendering in these minor works the theme and characters of the major one. They interview key players in the various productions of *Streetcar*—for instance, Uta Hagen and Peggy Rea, Blanche and Eunice in the Clurman production—hoping for that gem of a response that never made it to the printed page. In short, they exhume all the fragments that had in some fashion contributed to the development of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in the hope of uncovering anything that would help resolve the issue of ambiguity and, by implication, genre.

The problem was first addressed by the literary historians who traced Blanche through several early one-act plays: she definitely has a heritage, but the conclusions to these plays are as ambiguous as *Streetcar*'s ending. Philip Weissman provides the first attempt to trace Blanche's roots to these early Williams plays. In "psychoanalyzing Blanche," he searches her predecessors, Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore from *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* and Willie from *This Property Is Condemned*, for evidence which could help to solve the Blanche riddle [Miller, 62]. Weissman suggests that the three women are "derivatives of a single image in the author's unconscious" [Miller, 61], and are thereby the same woman in each play but at different stages of her life—a thirteen-year-old child, a middle-aged woman, and an

aged spinster. More can be learned about Blanche, hence *Streetcar* in general, Weissman adds, “by studying her characteristics and problems in common with those of Willie [...] and Mrs. Hardwick-Moore [*sic*]” [Miller, 62]. From such a study, we will be able “to conclude that Blanche DuBois’ fear of loneliness and abandonment is probably based on a disturbance of early object relationship” [Miller, 62]. The story of *Streetcar*, therefore, “is but the vehicle for the poetic, dramatic, and deeper unconscious communication” [Miller, 63]

Antithetical to these studies is Deborah Burks’s “‘Treatment Is Everything’: The Creation and Casting of Blanche and Stanley,” which focuses mainly on the development not of Blanche but of Stanley. Burks says that during the play’s preparation for the Broadway stage, Williams had known the type Stanley was but did not know how Stanley was to function in opposition to Blanche. Burks reprints Williams’s 29 August 1947 letter to Audrey Wood where he praises the discovery of Marlon Brando. In Brando’s reading for the part, Williams found what had been lacking all along in his vision of Stanley—humanism. Williams articulates this newly-discovered balance thus, “I don’t want to focus guilt or blame on any one character but to have it a tragedy of misunderstanding and insensitivity to others” [Burks, 32]. From this statement, Burks believes to have found the missing piece to the puzzle, the answer to what *Streetcar* means; but what we get from this letter is more ambiguity, a response that perpetuates the uncertainty which has shrouded the play in mystery and conjecture for nearly half a century: a misunderstanding of what? and why?

As did Burks, Vivienne Dickson and Sarah Boyd Johns looked to the manuscripts housed at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Dickson was the first to sort through the several hundred leaves of manuscripts Williams had written for *Streetcar*. By examining the various titles and epigraphs to the play, the changes in its location and its characters’ nationalities and names, and the numerous failed attempts at the play’s last scene, Dickson contends that the play evolved from a romance to a tragedy. Yet Dickson’s study is more holistic in its approach and never poses, as does Johns’, an order to the play’s many undated and often unfinished drafts, which does bring into question her romance-to-tragedy theory.

In cataloguing and analyzing these pre-production manuscripts, Johns refrains from offering any conclusions as to Williams’s creative writing process and instead chronicles the changes Williams imposed as he saw his own purposes develop. In her conclusion, after posing astute observations in the drafts and promulgating sound hypotheses about their chronological placing, Johns writes,

the recreation of the evolution of *A Streetcar Named Desire* clearly demonstrates that its composition process involved far more than a simple compulsion to put words on paper. The journey from the very early drafts through the various experimentations and alterations to the final script reveals the tenacity and judgment that Williams combined with his innate talent to produce a work of such high artistic merit. [Johns, 141]

As she notes throughout in the many global changes in the characters' traits, dialogue, and motivations, Williams was uncertain himself what it was he was creating. Such an observation lends little credence to Williams's earlier comment about the "tragedy of misunderstanding" when he was not completely cognizant himself of *Streetcar's* evolutionary process.

As with the other critics, however, the research presented by these literary archeologists and historians only further blurs the lines: their evidence is at times apocryphal, as with Susan Spector's interviews (taken thirty years after the original Broadway run), and their individual conclusions contradictory, as with Philip Weissman's intimation that Blanche remained the focus of the play, and Deborah Burks's insistence that Williams switched allegiance from Blanche to Stanley when Blanche began representing for Williams "a vanished way of life" [Burks, 18]. The state of criticism on *Streetcar* to date, then, is in a quagmire best summed up by S. Alan Chesler in "A *Streetcar* Named *Desire*: Twenty-Five Years of Criticism,"

Scholars do not agree about a precise meaning, a single idea that informs the thematic framework of *Streetcar*. They do, nevertheless, see the play as dramatizing basic human conflicts—struggles not peculiar to twentieth-century man [or woman], but common to all humanity. [Chesler, 49]

For all of its attention, *Streetcar* remains a riddle no closer to being solved today than it was nearly a half-century ago.

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