

Character sketch of Blanche Du Bois

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Blanche Du Bois is one of the most popular characters of Tennessee Williams' 'A Street Car Named Desire'. She is insecure and sensitive about her ageing. She shies away from bright light and always goes out in night. Blanche is truly lonely and considered to be manipulative and pathological liar. She constantly bends the truth to fit her stories. She is delusional in her flight from reality. She is stuck in her traumatic past with Allan and repeatedly hears the Polka and gunshots. She also states that she doesn't want realism but magic. Blanche depicts a decaying Southern Belle - the traditional Southern Belle was expected to be submissive and virtuous, playing very traditional social and symbolic gender role. The name Blanche is derived from a French word "white", which is a symbol of purity and innocence whereas Du Bois means wood which is durable and strong; her name stands ironic to her role in the play.

A Street Car Named Desire is an account of a gently raised woman who designs a fictitious world to mask the grimness of the world she has to inhabit. Blanche du Bois was the protagonist in the play. The conventional drama espouses dichotomy to compose female character, either vestal virgin or debauched woman. But William gave this part plurality and contradiction. The convolution and contradiction of her character led to the inexorability of her calamitous fate.

Blanche Du Bois appears in the first scene dressed in white, the symbol of purity and innocence. She is seen as a mothlike creature - dignified, refined and sensitive. She can't stand a vulgar remark or action, and she would never hurt willingly someone. Blanche lives in a world of her own; she doesn't want realism. She prefers "magic". She doesn't always tell the truth, but she tells "what ought to be the truth." Yet Blanche had lived a life that would make the most degenerate person seem timid. Stanley tells us that she was declared "out of bounds" at the army camp in Laurel and the seedy hotel Flamingo, where she had camped and which did not interfere too much with the guests, had asked her to quit the

premises. That explains why Blanche has landed up at the two room apartment of the Kowalskis in the French Quarter at New Orleans. She has travelled on a street car named Desire, then through the Cemeteries before landing in the Elysian Fields, the building in which Stella, her sister, lives with her husband Stanley. Blanche is one of William Characters who do not belong in this world. She is at the mercy of the brutal, realistic world.

Early in her life, Blanche had married a young poet who had a softness and tenderness "which wasn't like a man's" even though he wasn't the least bit effeminate looking." But he had homosexual tendencies. Unexpectedly entering a room once, Blanche discovered him in a compromising situation with an older man. The three of them went that night to a dance where a polka was playing. In the middle of the dance Blanche told her young husband that he disgusted her. This "deliberate act of cruelty" on her part caused him to shoot himself on the dance floor. Earlier her love had been like a "blinding light", but ever since that fateful night Blanche can not stand light; she has never had any light stronger than a dim ~~and~~ candle. She covers the naked light bulb in Stella's apartment with a paper Chinese lantern. She has always thought that she failed her young husband when he most needed her.

She was cruel to him in a way that Stanley would like to be cruel to her. Blanche's entire life has been affected by this early tragic event.

Immediately following this tragedy, Blanche faced a series of deaths in her family and the ultimate loss of Belle Reve, the ancestral home. Blanche turned to alcohol and sexual promiscuity in order to escape from these brutalities and the lonely void created by her young husband's death. The alcohol helped her to forget. When troubled, the dance tune that was playing when Allan committed suicide haunts her until she drinks enough so as to hear the shot which, then, signals the

end of music.

Blanche indulges in sex and gives herself to men for other reasons. She feels that she had failed her young husband in some way. She, therefore, tries to alleviate her guilt by giving herself at random to other young men, the last in the line being the seventeen year old student in the school where Blanche taught and "gotten mixed up with" and which led to her dismissal from there. "Intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my heart with" in trying to fill the void left by Allan's death. But she wasn't able to find anyone to fill that void.

But throughout Blanche has still retained a degree of innocence and purity. She continues to play the role of the ideal type of person she would like to be. She refuses to see herself as she is, but instead creates the illusion of what ought to be. Thus, in her first encounter, she fails with Stanley because she attempts to be what she thinks a lady should be rather than being frank and open and honest as Stanley would have liked it.

Blanche also realizes that she must attract men with her body. She, therefore, draws Mitch's attention by undressing in the light so that he can see and admire the outline of her body. She realizes on meeting Mitch that here is a strong harbour where she can rest - a man who can give her the sense of belonging, a man who is captivated by her girlish charms. She deceives him in to thinking that she is prim and proper. When Mitch discovers everything about her recent past and accuses her of lying to him, Blanche tells him, "But inside, I never lied," meaning thereby, that her essential being and nature have never been changed by her sexual promiscuity.

Blanche's last remarks in the play seem to echo pathetically her plight and predicament in life. She goes with the doctor because he is a stranger and he seems to be a gentleman. As she leaves for the mental institution she says, "I have always depended

on the kindness of strangers." Her life, thus, ends in the hands of a strange doctor. She is too delicate, too refined, too sensitive and too beautiful to live in the realistic world. Her illusions have no place in the Kowalski world and when her illusions are destroyed, Blanche is also destroyed.

In some ways, Blanche may be compared to Abbie in Eugene O'Neill's play *Desire Under the Elms*. She comes from outside to disturb the domestic environment of the Cabots, although in that case it can not be said that Abbie disturbs the family peace because there was no peace in the Cabot family even before Abbie's arrival. The desire which threatens to destroy the marital peace of the Kowalskis is Blanche's desire for a home, a feeling of stability and for a feeling of intimacy or understanding with someone. But Blanche feels out of place in her new environment.