



## Script 10 – Question 24: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Chosen question number:

Question 17 ☒

Question 18 ☒

Question 19 ☒

Question 20 ☒

Question 21 ☒

Question 22 ☒

Question 23 ☒

Question 24 ☒

Question 25 ☒

Question 26 ☒

Question 27 ☒

Question 28 ☒

Question 29 ☒

Question 30 ☒

Question 31 ☒

Question 32 ☒

Plan

- Blanche's neurotic personality successfully portrays the tensions between the past and the present as she is constantly forced to divide her mind between the two. - 'Alas, Southern Belle image, Varsouviana, paper lantern'

- Stanley - new world, 'Polack', 'Proud to be American' - 'nicely feathered male bird among hens', 'Meat'

- Description of New Orleans - blue piano, symbolic of the beautiful, if somewhat decaying atmosphere of its culture. Role of modern world in Blanche's life, New World vs Old World

- 'a peculiarly tender blue, almost turquoise, which invests the scene with a kind of lyricism and gracefully attenuates the atmosphere of decay.'

- 'But I have been foolish - casting my pearls before swine!'

'The shadows and dimid reflections move sinuously as flames along the wall spaces.'

Essay - 7



The tensions between the past and the present in *A Streetcar Named Desire* are fascinatingly portrayed by Williams through a variety of factors. He first uses the culture and vibrant realism of New Orleans to portray the vitality of the present and the New World that is dawning for post-war America. Yet, he starkly contrasts these endless opportunities with the image of Blanche and her spiralling neurosis; all that she embodies is a remnant of the faded Antebellum era which she still restlessly hovers in, unable to escape the past. Stanley is one of the greatest threats to the past and all that embodies it, seen when he forcibly inflicts the harshness of <sup>the</sup> New World on to her in Scene ten. Yet in their contrast, the past and the present, the New World and the Old, both share a passion for their <sup>and beliefs</sup> morals, which is explicit in both Stanley and Blanche.

Williams firstly portrays the tensions between the past and the present through <sup>the</sup> dominating influence of post-war America, and specifically melting pots such as New Orleans. In the opening stage directions of scene one it is described as: '[the sky] is a peculiarly tender blue, almost turquoise, which invests the scene with a kind of lyricism and gracefully attenuates the atmosphere of decay.' Immediately, a direct reference is made to the very last scene when Blanche is being taken away; <sup>idea of the</sup> 'the building is framed by the sky of turquoise'. This enforces the never-fading influence and power of the New World over the old, which is representative of 'epic fornication', according to Blanche. Its presence during Blanche's downfall is ominous, almost as though it is witnessing Stanley ~~just~~ destroying the past and the old world. The colour turquoise simultaneously resembles a milder, more complex colour in contrast to the 'solid blues,'



and 'primary colours' seen at the poker night in scene three, which is <sup>and the present.</sup> undoubtably symbolic of life in the New World. These colour connotations are greatly symbolic of the tension between the past and the present, which are constantly contrasted by Williams. The musical effect he uses to describe New Orleans with the noun 'lynchism' creates a visual interpretation for both the audience and the reader of the play, and sensual elements are further added with the description of 'bananas and coffee'. Williams is emphasising the realism of the present, which, even if decaying, is very much alive and intensely characteristic and unique. The very fact that Williams changed his name to 'Tennessee' clearly expresses the passion that he had for <sup>this</sup> New America, a world in which he was free from the judgement he received in the past. Therefore, the strong presence of the present clearly creates conflict and tension for embodiments of the past such as Blanche.

Williams then uses Blanche, a microcosm of all that has passed and long been both outdated and rejected, to act as competition to the present, New World, and the psychological elements of this are constantly portrayed through her approaching insanity. Her appearance upon <sup>the</sup> arriving in 'spirit of life' of New Orleans, is described as: 'Incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice', yet, 'her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light... that suggests a moth'. Immediately a new, tense atmosphere is created as Blanche is starkly placed in the world that is unfamiliar to her, foreign descriptions such as the fragile adjective 'daintily' and the <sup>occupying the page</sup> somewhat materialistic adjective 'fluffy'. Of course, she is representative



of the antebellum era which was obliterated following the protest against slavery and the loss of the slave trade business. We later discover that she has 'ropes of pearls' - 'the treasure chest of a pirate' according to Stanley. But we also discover that these gems are in fact rhinestones and portray Blanche as a fraud, and thus emphasise that the past, no matter how hard it is attempted to be reinforced, will always be replaced by the present, new and changing world. The 'pale blue blanket' that Stella's baby is wrapped in at the end of the play is symbolic of this, the stereotypically male colour 'blue' potentially representing a new heir to Stanley and another generation like his heir passed down to help obliterate the past. Yet Williams's portrayal of Blanche being emblematic of the old world is resonant to his own personal life, since, just as with Blanche, his sister was mentally unwell and sent to a mental institution following a lobotomy. The idea that Williams portrays his sister's story through Blanche, who is stuck in the past, is perhaps resonant of his own conflicts and tensions with the past and the present, which he cleverly portrays in this play.

Williams finally explores the tensions between the past and the present through the keening presence of Stanley throughout the play, who, upon his very first appearance, exerts dominating influence upon all who surround him, just like the present new world. For instance, the monosyllabic communication Stanley shares with Stella emphasises this: 'Catch! What? Meat!'. This communication is most definitely somewhat prohibitive, specifically because the phrase of the 'raw meat' can have both sexual and masculine connotations. This links back to the tension between the past and the present because Stanley represents an





immediate, bad presence, and a highly imperfect presence at that. The present world during the time that Williams <sup>set</sup> ~~wrote~~ *Streetcar* in 1940s post-war America, despite the slowly increasing acceptance of other cultures in the melting pot areas, domestic violence was more present and widespread than it had ever been, and this can be seen through both Stanley and Stella's relationship as well as Steve and Eve's. There is something worryingly casual about both Stanley and the New World in its treatment of people, which was parallel with the past as well. This reiterates the idea that 'there is a Blanche side to Stanley too'. His appearance is described by Williams as 'a richly feathered male bird among hens.' The zoomorphic description of Stanley being a 'bird' amongst 'hens' has mating connotations, and the idea of him being adorned with the embellishing image of 'feathered' exerts his influence upon women who are drawn to him. This emphasises the toxicity of domestic abuse in post-war America, thus revealing a darker side to the present, New World that Stanley represents. Therefore, both Stanley and Blanche create tension between the past and the present which is threaded through the play, and represent the prominent flaws of each of them.

Therefore in conclusion, Williams cleverly portrays the differences and the tensions between the past and the present, emphasising that despite their stark differences, they share some similarities, as do the personalities of Blanche and Stanley. Blanche's neurosis portrays the constant tension of the transition from the past to the present, and Stanley portrays the impatience of the process. Williams cleverly interweaves the culture of New Orleans to create a stigmatising background for this tension,



and thus makes the theme of the past and the present crucial in the  
play