

Desire Kills Dreams: How Blanche and Stanley Destroy Each Other in A Streetcar Named Desire

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Tennessee Williams uses the big fight between Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski to show three main things:

How desire (wanting love, sex, passion) can destroy people.

The battle between dreams/illusions (pretending things are nice) and harsh reality (truth that hurts).

The sad end of the old Southern way of life (polite, fancy old South dying out).

You also have to talk about important symbols (things that stand for bigger ideas) like light, the paper lantern, and the Varsouviana polka music. Finally, decide if the play is a modern tragedy (a sad story where a person falls apart because of their own weaknesses and the cruel world).

Blanche's famous line: "The opposite of death is desire"

Blanche says this to Mitch.

After her young husband killed himself (because she found out he was gay and she was mean about it), Blanche felt very empty and scared of death.

She started sleeping with many men to feel alive again.

For her, desire = life and no desire = death.

But this chase for desire actually hurts her more — it makes her lose control and destroys her life.

The big fight: Blanche vs. Stanley

Blanche = old Southern lady. She is delicate, polite, likes beauty, magic, and dreams. She lies to herself and others to feel better. She covers ugly truths with pretty stories.

Stanley = strong, rough, working-class man from the new America. He believes only in facts, sex, power, and animal-like instincts. He hates lies and fake things.

Their clash shows:

Desire is destructive → Stanley's raw sexual power wins. He rapes Blanche — this is the ultimate way desire destroys her dreams and mind.

Illusion vs. reality → Blanche lives in fantasy (she pretends she is still young and pure). Stanley rips away her lies (he finds out her bad past and tells everyone). Reality wins — Blanche breaks down.

Old South falls → Blanche stands for the dying old Southern world (elegant, aristocratic, but weak). Stanley stands for the new, strong, modern world (brutal, practical, no mercy). The old way loses and disappears.

Key symbols explained simply

Light = truth and reality. Blanche hates bright light because it shows her real age, her wrinkles, and her ugly past. She says, "I can't stand a naked light bulb."

Paper lantern = Blanche's illusions and lies. She puts this pretty paper cover over the bulb to make light soft and hide the truth. When Stanley or Mitch tears it off, her fake world breaks — she is exposed and helpless.

Varsouviana polka = sad memory music. It plays in Blanche's head whenever she remembers her husband's suicide. It shows her guilt, trauma, and how her past haunts her until she goes crazy.

Is it a modern tragedy?

Yes, but in a modern way (not like old Greek kings falling).

Blanche is the tragic hero. Her big weakness (flaw) = she cannot face reality; she chooses lies and desire instead.

She falls slowly: loses her home, her mind, her dignity.

At the end she is taken to a mental hospital — broken forever.

It's modern because it shows ordinary people (not kings) destroyed by society, mental pain, changing times, and their own bad choices. Williams shows no happy ending — just cruelty and loss.

In short

Blanche wants desire to escape death and sadness, but it destroys her. She lives in pretty dreams, but Stanley forces ugly truth on her. Symbols like the paper lantern and scary polka music show her hiding and breaking. The play is a sad modern tragedy because a fragile woman is crushed by a harsh new world — and there is no escape.