

(Symbols)

Tennessee Williams tried to communicate circumstances not only by the acting of the protagonists, but also through symbols and various effects. "The setting, lighting, props, costumes, sound effects, and music, along with the play's dominant symbols, the bath and the light bulb, provide direct access to the private lives of the characters" (Corrigan 50).

Blanche bathes very often in this play. She obviously wants to clean herself from her past. After the bathing, she feels all freshly "like a brand new human being" (Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire* 35). Every time she is confronted with the real, brutal world, she wants to escape in her dream world, which is strongly connected with bathing. In Scene Three when the men have a Poker Night and Stanley "gives a loud whack of his hand" on Stella's thigh, she instantly says "I think I will bathe" (Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire* 49). In Scene Seven, she bathes again, "little breathless cries and peals of laughter are heard as if a child were frolicking in the tub" (Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire* 110), while Stanley tells Stella about Blanche's past and her affairs with a seventeen-year-old boy and many other men. The title of the song Blanche sings while bathing is *It's Only a Paper Moon* and it is described as a "saccharine popular ballad which is used with Stanley's speech" (Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire* 106). Especially the verse "- But it wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me!" (Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire* 107) is very ironic, because Blanche does not seem very trustworthy at all, and so the song even accentuates her disreputable past. After the rape, she bathes again in Scene Eleven and is very worried about her hair, as if the soap would not be completely washed out. The many baths in the play show that Blanche will never be done with bathing, because she is always confronted with the real world and could not clean herself from her past. It gives her "a brand new outlook on life" (Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire* 115), but cannot change her life really.

The use of music and sounds is also very theatrical in the play. The Blue Piano "expresses the spirit of the life which goes on" (Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire* 6) and is always heard when the conflict between real world and Blanche's fantasy world seems to increase. It is heard, for example, when Blanche arrives at Elysian Fields and grows louder when she informs Stella about the loss of Belle Reve as well as when Stanley tells her that Stella is going to have a baby. It also suggests the fall of Blanche as it is swelling when Stanley rapes Blanche and afterwards when he consoles Stella, who cries because of Blanche's leaving.

Another music, which is strongly connected with Blanche's past, is the polka music. It is always heard when Blanche talks about her dead husband. It emerges for the first time when Stanley mentions that Blanche was married once (Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire* 28). She tells Mitch the story about her husband's death, he shot himself after dancing with Blanche in a casino. He was homosexual and she discovered him with another man and said while dancing he disgusted her (Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire* 103) and therefore he shot himself. It also appears when Stanley gives Blanche a ticket back to Laurel where she lived and when he takes Stella to the hospital and Blanche remains in the flat. So the song predicts Blanche's downfall, as it is always heard when she is haunted by her past.

There are various telling names in Williams play. Blanche's name itself is quite telling, as "blanche" is French and means "white", which is very fitting when looking at her

character. The name of her plantation, "Belle Reve" is also French, meaning "beautiful dream". Blanche behaves like she would still live in this dream, refusing to face the truth and the real world. The name Belle Reve translates to "**Beautiful Dream**," which in *A Streetcar Named Desire* represents the DuBois family's flawed dream of the Antebellum South. Belle Reve is a memory seen through rose-colored glasses, beautiful on the surface, but built on unacknowledged pain and suffering. There are many more telling names. "*A Streetcar Named Desire*" as it is the title of the play. Blanche takes the "streetcar named Desire" to get to the apartment of the Kowalskis. This is very telling itself, as the audience finds out more and more about her past and that she leaved Laurel as a broken woman somehow, but her desire to live her life as an elegant, trustworthy and honest woman is still present. So she tries to live a desirable life, and she hopes to find that in New Orleans.

"To express his universal truths Williams created what he termed plastic theatre, a distinctive new style of drama. He insisted that setting, properties, music, sound, and visual effects – all the elements of staging – must combine to reflect and enhance the action, theme, characters, and language" (Griffin 22). Tennessee Williams was so fond of this method, that he named it himself, Plastic Theatre. He utilised it in his play "*A Streetcar Named Desire*", and it is perhaps one of the main reasons that the play was so popular, making Williams a world-renowned playwright. Plastic theatre utilises props, sound, stage direction, and costume to present poetic truths through symbolism. It is not intended to be realistic, but symbolic. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, one of the ways Williams uses plastic theatre is to represent the way the world of Stanley (as a figure of 'New America') is gradually closing in on Blanche, to devastating effect. Stanley's perpetual presence is conveyed as '*A locomotive is heard approaching outside*'. Williams crafts this stage direction to foreshadow the ending of the play, as the locomotive is symbolic not only of Stanley's troublesome omnipresence in Blanche's life, but also represents the future- a future that Blanche cannot fit into because she is tethered to her past glory as a 'Southern Belle' in the 'Old South'. It is important that the locomotive is '*heard approaching*', as this sound is a convention of plastic theatre. The sudden approach of the locomotive interrupts Blanche's rare moment of candour, so this loud noise symbolises the end of her age of innocence, and the beginning of her pretences.