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Psychological Analysis of Blanche from "A Streetcar Named Desire" Essay

New patient Blanche Dubois is originally from Laurel, Mississippi, and released into our care by her sister Stella Dubois Kowalski, who resides in Elysian Fields, New Orleans. Blanche lived in a beautiful estate known as the Belle Reve in Laurel, and worked as a school teacher of English at the local high school. From observations, she appears to present herself as a prim, proper, and prudent person. Her past is unknown to us for now. We doubt she can understand her past either, most likely because it is clouded by so many lies and deceptions. It is necessary to reveal how Miss Dubois arrived at this mental instability, and what precautions are needed in order for her to tell the truth. Also, it is essential to divulge the steps in order to bring her to mental stability.

We know for a fact that Blanche is mentally unstable. She has fallen so deep into her lies that she believes the stories herself. However, there must be a main reason or many reasons that led her to this state. Beginning when she was just sixteen, she had married to "just a boy." But this was no ordinary boy. He happened to be not entirely straight. She noticed this from the beginning, but she also saw he wasn't completely effeminate. She thought she could help his situation by marrying him. But obviously, this doesn't work, but instead makes matters much worse. Blanche had caught her husband in the act with an older man, most likely an act of sexual intercourse. However, Blanche had never revealed what she had learned. Instead, they went on a vacation, and, while intoxicated, Blanche harshly told Allan (her husband) he disgusted her. Allan, running out of the casino in complete disgust of himself, committed suicide. According to Blanche, she never recovered from this experience, never to experience true love again:

"And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than
As time progressed, it seems Blanche did forget what has happened. She took a profession as an English teacher at a high school to teach "teenage" boys, and tried to earn an honest living.

As time went on, Blanche's loved ones never stopped slipping away from her. Roughly at age twenty-two, her father died, and her sister, Stella, chose to move away from the Belle Reve estate to where she resides now. As more family members passed away, she claims (to Stella) she couldn't handle the financial depression. She had to let the Belle Reve go to pay for the funerals and processions that followed. However, she told Stanley a different story. She tells him that it was her male ancestors that caused the lost of the plantation.

..our improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications--to put it plainly! The four-letter word deprived us of our plantation."

Blanche's explanation situates her as the last in a long line of ancestors who cannot express their sexual desire in a healthy fashion. Unfortunately, she is forced to deal with the bankruptcy that is the result of her ancestors' reckless ways. By running away to New Orleans and marrying Stanley, Stella removed herself from the elite social stratum to which her family belonged, thereby abandoning all its pretentions, codes of behavior, sexual mores, and problems. Blanche resents Stella's departure and subsequent happiness. In Blanche's eyes, Stella irresponsibly left Blanche alone to deal with their family in its time of distress. Of course, this is just another one of Blanche's ways to put fault on somebody else. Stella had every right to pack up and leave; everyone has their own choice in their life. Stella just chose to live a different, even happier life, while Blanche was stuck living in the past. Blanche is also very self-conscious about her looks and appearance to others. She craves to be the center of attention, and takes every step to be perfect in the presence of others. Her appearance is so important to her, mainly because of her status. She is supposedly from a wealthy
class, so she tries to present herself as a prim and proper lady. However, characters like Stanley can see right past the pretty clothes and fancy jewelry. In a quote in scene two, Blanche makes a comment that shows that she knows she and her sister have lost their social status.

"Oh I guess he's just not the type that goes for jasmine perfume, but maybe he's what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve."3

But Blanche is still intent on always preparing herself for everyone to see. She needs to be in control of what people see. This is important because Blanche feels that the secrets of her past is in her hands, and when people see what a perfect lady she is, they won't think differently about her. The list continues, as Blanche reveals more about her past, mostly from the pressure of Stanley. He found out that she had stayed at the Flamingo Hotel, which basically is a whore-house. There, Blanche admits that she has had many relations, but she only did it to try to heal a broken heart.

"Yes, I had many intimacies with strangers. After the death of Allan--intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill with my empty heart with. I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection--here and there, in the most--unlikely places--even, at last, in a seventeen-year old boy..."4

It sounds as if she was seeking protection and comfort; she had dealt with death for too long. But when was the last time someone sought comfort and protection by sleeping with all the hungry men in town? This deed cannot be condoned. Being physically and emotionally taken by men is not only immoral, but insane. Also, instead of taking a vacation from school like Blanche claimed, she was fired for having sexual relations with a 17-year old boy at the high school. She cannot seem to release her hold from the connection with teenage boys.

"Come here. I want to kiss you, just once, softly and sweetly on your mouth...It would be nice to keep you, but I've got to be good--and keep my hands off children."5
Even after losing her husband and her job, she still cannot let go the memories of being young and being with a teenage boy.

Before we went to take her away, her sister had detailed us on what was happening. It looks as if Blanche believes her own fairy tale.

"I--just told her that--we'd made arrangements for her to rest in the country. She's got it mixed in her mind with Shep Huntleigh." 6

Even though Stella never mentioned anything about Shep or even going on a cruise, Blanche still believes that her ex-boyfriend will come and rescue her from this misery. Other reasons include Blanche's anti-social way of drinking. She only drinks in private to once again escape reality, and cloud her thoughts with imaginative stories. This ultimately leads to Blanche's downfall.

The only reason that we were called in the first place was because Blanche's sister could not believe Blanche. Blanche had claimed that Stanley had raped her, but nobody believed her. Given her track record in honesty, nobody should believe her. Lastly, the final words that Blanche speaks reveal that she has finally lost all sense of reality.

"Whoever you are--I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."8

She thinks the doctor is the gentleman "rescuer" that she has been waiting for ever since arriving at New Orleans. These final words are very ironic and also prove Blanche's insanity. First, the doctor is definitely not Shep Huntleigh. Secondly, Blanche's dependence "on the kindness of strangers" rather than on herself is the reason why she has had so much trouble. She has depended on protection and comfort from strangers, but truthfully, these strangers have been kind only in exchange for sexual pleasures. Other strangers like Stanley, Mitch, and the residents of Laurel have denied Blanche of the sympathy she thinks she deserves. These final remarks indicate her complete detachment from reality and her decision to see life only as she wishes to
perceive it. Given these facts, she must be put away, before she physically and emotionally hurts herself (and the people around her).

There are steps that must be taken in order for Blanche to become mentally healthy again. The first is to try to bring her away from all her lies. She has been eluded by her own stories. In order for her to think straight and tell it like it is, the truth and reality needs to be brought to her attention and stuck to her head. Also, her mindset on the importance of appearance, and her status in society, has to be fixed. No longer can she protect herself with her fancy clothing and false presentation of being a prim and proper lady. She has to realize that she is what she is. She has to know when to act like a lady and when to adjust to fit in. If not, the people will think she's crazy. The fear of light and being seen in it has to be corrected too. Whenever she comes in contact with bright lights, she will always be reminded of certain events that happened in Stella's household. However, it is impossible for her to ever confront Stanley and not be haunted of what she believes happened (or maybe actually happened). If what she claims is true, then she ultimately will need a long time to physically and emotionally recover from the wounds of rape. This detaches her even further from society though, and forces her to have a larger gap from reality.

"Yes it will do! I'm anxious to get out of here--this place is a trap!"9

Blanche is most likely afraid of men now. She has seen what they are capable of doing, and believes she has had the worst of the deeds done to her. The best way to heal her is to make her comfortable with her past, but not tell it so that other people will be afraid of her. Since we basically know all the facts, we can let her tell us her side of the story, and correct her until it is right. That way, she will know what to tell other people. However, events like being at the Flamingo Hotel and her encounter with the teenage boys can be hidden. It is better for her to not remember those bad memories.

A Streetcar Named Desire is a very tragic play that shows that lies and deceptions will not get you anywhere. Tennessee Williams shows that fantasy, illusion, and "magic"
will usually lose in the struggle with reality. However, this struggle is what propelled the story forward and kept the reader in suspense. Ultimately, reality did overcome illusion (Stanley rapes Blanche). Though reality won, Williams doesn't take sides. He also shows that fantasy can sometimes shield a wounded person from the harsh reality. Blanche almost fully submerges herself in fictional stories in order to cover up the pains of the truth. Also, men seem to play a major factor in the story. Stella and Blanche, the two main female characters, seem to not be able to survive without males. Stella relies on the sexual attraction between her and Stanley to keep the relationship alive. Blanche resorts to men for protection and comfort. Blanche contacts Shep for financial support, and retreats to Mitch when she sees she can only have a future with him. Also, this play reminds me of the old tale of "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." Just like the boy, Blanche continues to tell lies on and on until one day, when she really needed help, and was telling the truth, nobody listened. This is the major lesson in the book; it is much better to tell the truth and have people accept you for who you are then to tell a lie and have people see you as something else.