



Psychological conflicts of Blanche Dubois in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams

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ABSTRACT

When humans drift themselves from reality, they indulge themselves into a fantasy world which leads to psychological conflicts which can be internal or external, due to these conflicts persons become incapable to accept the real world and find solace in their imaginary world, they avoid the problems with which they are surrounded and this leads to dualism, delusion, and mistrustfulness. In this paper we shall be discussing all these aspects with respect to the character Blanche Dubois from the play *The Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams. Blanche Dubois is a character who pretends to be an intellectual, loves to dress herself as an aristocrat and free herself from reality and finds difficulty in adjusting with the societal norms and its reality which lead to her own psychological conflicts and dichotomy as a character.

Key Words: Psychological conflicts, Internal, External, dualism, Delusion, Mistrustful.

Introduction

Tennessee Williams is a prolific American playwright of the 20th century known for his famous plays like, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) *The Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and many more. He is known for his poetic expressionism dealing with themes like mental illness, sexuality, desire and the decline of the old south. Born in Mississippi, his upbringing in a strained family reflected a lot in his writing. Most of his protagonists are fragile as characters and unable to hold themselves with the ongoing of the society and had to face psychological conflicts which traumatized the characters in many ways.

Psychological Conflicts

When an individual faces inner turmoil through conscience, feeling or their guilt and having difficulty in decision making is known as psychological conflicts, it is an internal mental struggle arising from opposing needs, desire or emotions leading to tension and discomfort. Due to this internal struggle the person also goes through external conflicts where the individual finds difficulty in adjusting with the societal norms and reality of the world. In many cases the person loses their individuality and sinks into complete madness.

Psychological Conflicts in American Literature and Drama

The portrayal of the psychological aspects began in American literature in the late 19th century and the reason for this shift in the writings were American civil war, unacceptability of romanticism and the influence of European literature. The social upheaval in America led to American civil war and this civil war changed the cultural status quo of America. The role of the women were not the same in the society and workplace it got uplifted; the country started to witness psychological drift in people after the surge of industrialization and

urbanization. These changes in the society brought changes in the American literature and its writer. The American writers & playwrights of the 19th century were no longer fascinated with the ideas of romanticism, the idealized portrayal of the human nature started to bore them, they wanted to have their focal point on realistic depiction of their characters, they wanted to emphasize more on psychological complexity over moral absolute or grand narratives. The European literature also played a significant role in this American literary movement, the American playwrights were highly inspired by the European realistic authors like *Gustave Flaubert*, *Leo Tolstoy* and many more. The American writers not only incorporated techniques of psychological analysis but also adapted the European literary innovation to explore the uniquely American themes and experiences.

Salient Features Psychological Conflict in American Literature and Drama

In American drama, especially during the 20th century internal conflicts were often depicted through surreal setting, distorted or symbolic set designs which reflected upon the character's mental state. To Showcase the inner turmoil of the character the playwrights used inner monologs which directly exposed the character's internal thoughts. Subtext were used as hint to state deeper, unstated anxiety or desires. To display the inner fragmentation of individuals within dysfunctional society grotesque characters were developed, characters whose physical or behavioural distortions represented inner, psychosocial breakdown. *Tennessee Williams* utilized southern Gothic setting to depict characters trapped by their environment, desires and shattered dream he depicted his characters as delusional nonconformist and fragile for instant in his work like *Streetcar Named Desire* the Character *Blanche* a misfit to the society and dependent on others mercy and a disoriented person ,the same thing is depicted in his other work *The Glass Menagerie* through the character *Laura* who is a shy , fragile, indecisive and loves to live in an illusion. Another prominent playwright *Eugene O'Neil* threw light upon the dysfunction and deep psychological pain in his works, for example in his play *Long Day's Journey into Night* where he showcased his characters struggling with addiction and harsh reality. Guilt, Responsibility and the Breakdown of The American Family unit these themes were brought into lime light by another profound playwright *Athur Miller*, his dramas discussed the psychological impact on the social moral and economic pressure.

Tennessee Williams's Blanche Dubois: Victim of Psychological Conflict

The world has always been dominated by Patriarchy where men decide and the women obeys, in this structure of society when the woman tries to do the other way round, she need to have strength to fight the odds she need to build her own identity, form her own principles and values and make herself independent , surly the society will try their best to break her down but she has to confront it all with confidence and make her position in the society. In this journey of building herself identity if she fails to be independent and have her own principles and value system she will end up in a whirlpool of psychological conflicts and this is what exactly happened with *Blanche Dubois*. *Tennessee Williams* has portrayed *Blanche's* character as dual, fragile, and delusional to create the psychological conflict in herself.

Blanche Dubois as a Dual Personality

Blanche Dubois is a character who love to present herself as a polished aristocratic intellectual woman, she loves to dress herself in an extravagant way, she adores luxurious lifestyle, she is a woman who likes to grab attentions from other, she craves for constant appreciation however in reality she is the most vulnerable character, she is jobless, promiscuous and fragile, she wants to live a free life where other people will carry her burden, and when others fails to do so she judges them. She proclaims to be self-content but demands care from others. "Blanche Dubois is a complex character who evokes strong responses from other character. Her complexity comes not from her milieu, but from the diverse and often incongruous façade she presents. The character of dualism was her distinctive charm resonating nobility and hypocrisy in the American play. The very name *Blanche Dubois* advocates her duality. At once sturdy in her desire and adamant in her claims on conflicting signals. Being confined in narrow gender roles *Blanche* knows the significance of male support. She tasted the fruit of sexual freedom in the past, thus comprehends the idea that won't fit the spectrum of chaste conduct expected from a southern belle." (Mamuna). *Blanche* abhors the idea of male dominance but at the same time wants to be dependent on them this can be seen when *Stanly* dominates on *Stella*, she hates it but she shows dependency on mitch for her financial security.

Blanche Dubois a Delusional Character

Blanche a person who has created her own world especially after the death of her husband in Belle Reve. The suicide of her husband has affected her so badly that she has drifted herself from the reality, she despises the fact of her aging and fears death. She thinks that she is still young and beautiful therefore she pines for young men. She keeps her away from bright and harsh lights and prefer dim this symbolizes how she escapes herself from reality and creates illusions for herself not only this she fabricates reality by crafting her own idealized world to cope with the guilt and trauma which she cannot bear. *Blanche* loves to cover light bulbs with paper lanterns to create a softer, more romantic atmosphere symbolizing to hide truth behind a fragile illusion. “I don’t want realism, I want magic” this statement of hers proves her escapism for the reality. “The most fundamental obstacle in *Blanche*’s discovery of herself is her temporal fixation. She finds herself to be fixed to an ideal world of the past, which has been lost and which can never be reality again.” (Noorbakhsht Hooti). Due to her constant escape from reality and delusional behaviours people around her starts having trust issues with her. *Mitch* is who initially charmed by *Blanche* is completely broken and loses trust when *Stanley* reveals her past not only that her own sister *Stella* who use to support her stops trusting her stories particularly when *Blanche* reveals the rape. Her illusionary world made her so vulnerable that when *Stanley* actually rapes her the society and her sister afraid to believe her.

Blanche Dubois’s Internal Psychological Conflict

Blanche Dubois is scuffled between reality and illusion, reality which she cannot condone but can’t forego it either, it is the illusion where she finds solace, this tussle between truth and fantasy leads her to psychological conflict. The insecurity, instability and the guilt of her husband’s death that she holds within herself is masked by her youthful refined elite behaviour, this behaviours of hers shows her internal conflicts. In her mind she is constantly thinking about her financial instability, her husband’s self-inflicted death keeps on ringing in her head and to avoid all these thoughts she glamourizes herself and flirts with men and soothes her nerves. All these behaviours refers her internal conflicts.

Blanche Dubois’s External Psychological Conflicts

Blanche Dubois brought up in an aristocratic southern Belle with a refined education and time suddenly brings her to New Orleans where she witnesses the stark reality of the world.

“Eunice (Finally): What’s the matter, honey? Are you Lost?”

Blanche (with faintly hysterical humour) : They told me to take a streetcar named Desire , and the transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at – Elysian fields!

Eunice : That’s where you are right now.

Blanche : At Elysian Fields?

Eunice : This here is Elysian Fields .

Blanche : They mustn’t have – understood-what number I was wanted...

Eunice : What number you are lookin’ for?

[Blanche wearily refers to a slip of paper]

Blanche : Six thirty-two.

Eunice : You don’t have to look no further

Blanche(Uncomprehendingly):I’m looking for my sister ,stella Dubois .I mean Mrs Stanley Kowalski.

Eunice: That’s the party- You just did miss her, though.

Blanche : This-can this be- her home?”

This above conversation from scene one shows how terrified *Blanche* must have felt after acknowledging the place where her sister lived, a place full of crowd and boisterous conners, this change of venue caused external conflicts in *Blanche's* life. In these external conflicts of *Blanche*, *Stanley's* character works as a catalysis for her. He sees her as a threat to his dominance and to his marriage to *Stella*. He is a brutal, harsh industrial man who is contradict to *Blanche's* Character. He is the one who exposes her past life and ruins her relation to *Mitch*. Her only lifeline not only that he also takes advantage of her illusion and rapes her and project her as a liar and mentally disabled in front of the society and her sister. *Blanche's* fragile elite behaviour breaks in front of *Stanley*, she finds it difficult to coexist with him. *Blanche's* way of living is judged by the society she lives in, the society from where she seeks attention, love and admiration is reluctant to accept her the way she is. The society and *Blanche* are not on the same page, the trust that society once had on *Blanche* started to lose with her hallucinating behaviour, and these situations & mistrust fuelled the external conflicts.

Conclusion

We can conclude by saying that *Blanche Dubois* by her delusional behaviour, Duality didn't only create a mistrust among her people but also created a sense of vagueness in her life which led to psychological conflicts and self- destruction. All these could have been avoided only if she accepted the reality and faced it with confidence and determination, instead of being fragile and dependent on the mercy of other she should have made herself strong and independent however she failed to do so and ended up in misery.

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