

**Tribhuvan University**

**Symbolic Collision in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire***

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Master of Arts in English**

**By**

**Hom Prasad Bhattarai**

**Central Department of English**

**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

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**Tribhuvan University**  
**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

This thesis entitled "Symbolic Collision in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Hom Prasad Bhattarai has been approved by the undersigned members of the thesis committee.

Members of Research Committee:

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Internal Examiner

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External Examiner

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Head

Central Department of English

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

***Dedicated***  
***to***  
***My Parents***

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**Hom Prasad Bhattarai**

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### **Abstract**

The focus of my research is on the tacit dramatization of a symbolic collision between idealism and realism, which is based on the employment of a variety of private symbols in Tennessee Williams's one of the masterpieces *A Streetcar Named Desire*. This collision is not visible in the superficial ordinariness of the play as it is completely covert. However, this research work makes an effort to do a thorough excavation, interpretation and analysis of major private symbols exploited in the play so as to aptly externalize the symbolic collision on the solid foundation of a sturdy clash between Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski, the representatives of idealism and realism respectively, in the play.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### 1.1 General Introduction

A playwright, novelist and poetic realist, Tennessee Williams was born in March 1911, Mississippi, America. He is basically known as an explorer of issues such as alienation and loneliness of modern man, disturbed emotions and unresolved sexuality within families, and immorality and brutality in the southern families along with their disfigurements. His reputation as a dramatist stands on the firm foundation of realistic clarity, unforgettable characters, especially women, based on his keen perception and exploration of human nature, dialogue at once credible but symbolic and poetic, weird Gothic settings, Freudian exploration of sexual desire and a pervasive sense of humour that distinguished him from Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller. As he had some revolutionary tendency from his early years as a dramatist, he subverted the rigid convention of drama that had preceded him, explored new domain in the process of finding distinctive forms and style, created characters as unforgettable as those of Charles Dickens, William Faulkner, D. H. Lawrence or Nathaniel Hawthorne, and lifted the language of the modern stage to a poetic level quite unmatched in his own time. He deliberately broke away from the language – bound realistic drama of the nineteenth century and produced dramas in which language, symbols and scenic images speak simultaneously to the audience as powerfully as the characters themselves do.

Tennessee Williams's one of the masterpieces, *A Streetcar Named Desire* explores the issues such as disturbed emotions and unresolved sexuality within families, degradation of southern culture and tradition and moreover a clash between the idealistic and the realistic people of the post World War II America. As the

publication of the book dates the post war period i.e. 1947, the Americans then were the eyes of the human carnage and the debris caused by the bloody and devastating war. In such a critical scenario, the Americans were between the devil and the deep sea. Some of them were fed-up with the then embarrassing and torturing reality like Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and sought for solace in some ideal and fantastical place. On the other hand, there existed some like Stanley Kowalski in the same play, who enjoyed the bitter reality with a unique celebration. In other words, the former were, therefore, afraid of reality whereas the latter were anathema to the former and enjoyed the full-fledged life in its real and practical form having no sense of fear to inhabit in it. So, this is a play about the clash between these two kinds of people. This can be logically inferred if we appropriately interpret and analyze the private symbols exploited by the playwright such as "a paper lantern" (117) and "a package" (14) of fresh meat in the play which is done in the third chapter of this research work. And it is here where we can locate the symbolic collision – collision between idealism and realism based on the use of private symbols – which is displayed in the play on its superficial ordinariness dramatizing a clash between Blanche DuBois (a female) and Stanley Kowalski (a male). And beyond all questions, this is the dominant concern of my study.

Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* was first produced in 1947 as merely a play but later in 1989, its first film version was produced. Its success and fame as a play and a film can be assessed on the basis of its winning the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, the Pulitzer Prize and the Donaldson Award, the three major awards in the field of theatre. Behind the scene of such tremendous success of the play, there lies the fact that it appropriately probes into the post World War II America along with her people who were the eyes of the very war. In addition to it, a



group of critical voices speak the different discourses of *Streetcar* : love, hate, woman, man, law, politics, fantasy or idealism, reality, sanity, insanity etc.

Commenting on the play, Felicia Hardison Londre states:

A *Streetcar Named Desire* might be read as a compendium of his characteristic dramaturgy, verbal and visual language and thematic preoccupation. Such elements include the episodic structure; the lyricism of dialogue; ...; and the focus on characters who are psychically wounded or otherwise marginalized by mainstream society; characters seeking lost purity, or escape from the ravages of time, or refuge from the harshness of an uncomprehending world, or simple human contact. (45-47)

Similarly, in *A Theatre Divided* (1967), Martin Gattfried ranks *Streetcar* along with Miller's *Death of a Salesman* "as one of the two American masterpieces of the post war years ... perhaps romantic, poetic and sensitive play ever written for the American stage" (qtd. In Adler 10). It is said that in Williams's cosmology, imagination is of great significance; it is the source of both strength and weakness. Strength because the imagination creates, for Blanche DuBois in *Streetcar*, a heroic resistance against a contingent, bewildering and practically threatening universe. Weakness because, for Chance Wayne in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, the human imagination finds itself consumed by those whose sensibilities annihilate the heroic, the romantic and the creative. Backed with such power, Williams succeeded in expanding the boundaries of theatricality itself, combining a lyricism and experimentalism that revolutionized American drama after World War II. Williams is considered to be a child of both World War I and the Great Depression; as a result, he was wary of the social dimensions of his theatre which tacitly inspired him to give a

realistic touch to his plays. Regarding this issue, an influential literary critic of the 1990s, Felicia Hardison Londre views that "Although Williams's protagonist in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is the romantic Blanche DuBois, the play is a work of social realism" (45).

Williams celebrates language; his is a poetic language. Through such poetic language, he forces the readers and even spectators to go for some metaphoric possibilities. He compels his characters to suffer a lot with the help of the skill to handle such poetic language. His characters often express a fear of reality, and of the destructive power of time. He is concerned with the dream-mechanisms of his unfortunate characters who try to create and preserve ideal images of themselves. But he regards their delusions with compassionate interest as pathetic defences against the frustration or shipwreck of their lives. In other words, he is successful to create a tracery of fantasy (for Blanche DuBois in *Streetcar*) for them with a great subtlety and grace. Moreover, his portraits of women who can not face reality and want to dwell in the world of timelessness, like Blanche DuBois, are masterful. His characters are often victimized by both natural and human malevolence. He deliberately talks about the painful existence of his characters showing some compassionate interest along with the inevitability of the agony of human existence. Having been touched by the victimization of his characters and the compassion created by it, Tennessee Williams himself comments on the main issue of the play as "*Streetcar* is about the ravishment of the tender, the delicate, the sensitive by the savage and brutal force of modern society" (qtd. In Adler 86).

Williams, having a genuine dramatic imagination, frequently strips his symbolic regalia off. He shows a genius for realism, an ear perfectly attuned to conversational speech and an eye keenly perceptive to human idiosyncrasies. He is

then unsurpassed in achieving living characters and pouring deep emotional realities down through them. However, the influence of both the American and the European writers of his time and also of the earlier generation is behind the scene of his tremendous success in his long dramatic career. In this context, Anton Chekhov's – a Russian short story writer and playwright – influence is worth mentioning here. Chekhov's influence appears to be instrumental for Williams for it is agreed that *A Streetcar Named Desire* is completely modelled on Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). In *Streetcar*, Blanche is both an individual and a representative of her society, an emblem of a lost tradition. She stands for the dying civilization of the southern Belle. Blanche explains the meaning of her name to Mitch, "DuBois" means 'woods' and Blanche means 'white', so the two together mean "white wood". Like an orchard in spring !" (59). In addition to it, both the plays are patterned on the arrival of and then departure in defeat of a powerless, hypersensitive woman with a sexual past, and both include a family estate falling into disuse. He shares with Chekhov his elegiac, lyrical tone as well as his sense of history and sorrow over a disintegrating anachronistic tradition. From Chekhov, thus, he learned the importance of setting and emblem, replicating the particular milieu of Belle Reve, New Orleans, or St. Louis while simultaneously transforming those localized settings to the level of symbol. So, it is not incredible to conclude that Williams is a literary heir of the influential Russian literatuer Anton Chekhov.

For all acclaim Williams as a dramatic innovator, he is plainly indebted to some other literary forebears as well. From Hart Crane and D.H. Lawrence, he took the imagery of the repressed desires, of an inscribed sexuality that is at once visible and thinly veiled. From Eugene O'Neill he inherited the imagery of the tragic, of a sense of personal betrayal born out of characters who seem increasingly unable to

communicate with self or the other. From Strindberg he inherited the imagery of the expressionist, which helped him to restructure the modern stage. In addition to these literary forebears, he himself commented that he was highly influenced by Brecht, Sartre, Rimbaud and van Gogh.

In many of his plays, Williams employs expressionism as an unconventional technique so as to approach truth more closely and accurately. With the help of this technique, he endeavours to objectify the inner experiences of his characters. In *Streetcar*, he studies the psychic condition and ideal images of Blanche carefully handling this dramatic technique. In this respect, we find his identicalness to Arthur Miller and Eugene O'Neill. Even if there exists a difference between Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* with respect to artistry, one can not easily overlook and surpass the identicalness in their theme and method. In *Death of a Salesman*, the death of Willy Loman stands for the passing of an American dream whereas in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the confinement and the degradation of Blanche DuBois is a legend about the passing of the old south. Both the characters are extremists who live intensely rather than wisely and well. They create certain ideal images of themselves and throughout their life, they keep on struggling to dwell in the world of timelessness, world that gives an escape from bitter and torturing reality. Both Willy and Blanche represent types, and they express certain cultural attitudes that generated their types. Both the dramatists aptly explore the typical attitude of the then people and the society they inhabited. The audiences recognize Willy and Blanche and sympathize with their pathetic plight or predicament. So, what we can say, for sure, is that both Williams and Miller were influenced by each other. By filtering the essential dramatic substance or issue from the common man and from the raw experience of their own society, these two American playwrights displayed a

unique and considerable vigor and aptitude on the one hand and subverted the Aristotalian conventions and principles of a great tragedy. They combined realistic techniques with expressionistic and symbolic techniques giving an important outlet to a unique theatrical imagination. So, the mingling of symbolism and naturalism and even the fusion of realism and imagination are the dominant concerns of these two theatrical giants of American theatre after World War II. Commenting upon the dramatic skills and methodologies of these two playwrights John Gassner states:

Miller represents the social realism that has characterized a large percentage of modern playwriting since Ibsen's middle period; Williams, the effort to transcend realism that started in Europe with the neo-romantic and symbolist reaction against Naturalism. Miller uses lean colloquial prose; Williams writes musically, poetically, and imaginatively charged dialogue. Miller exemplifies the theatre of the common man and of more or less collective issues; Williams, the perennial avant-garde theatre of subjectivity and private sensibility. (343-344)

My fundamental focus in this research will be upon the dramatic conflict of the play that creates an open territory for the symbolic collision of idealism and realism which is shown through the dramatic clash between Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski, two dominant characters of the play who tacitly represent idealism and realism respectively. This symbolic collision, beyond all questions, will be displayed by interpreting and analyzing the dominant symbols exploited by the playwright warily employing "Symbolism" as a fundamental theoretical tool. Besides, I will not focus on the methodological aspects of the play, let alone the setting, performance and cultural aspects of the play. And I will be using the terms idealism

and realism not as literary movements, but as beliefs. In this sense, idealism stands for unreal, fantastical, dreamy, timeless, imaginative, illusive and even idealistic concept or world whereas realism stands for day-to-day, real, social, fact-based, legal and practical concept or world. In other words, idealism and realism in my research will be anathema to each other.

This research work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter basically deals with an introductory aspect of the study. It incorporates the title clarification, hypothesis elaboration, introduction to the playwright's background, his works and respective themes, various critics on the playwright and his works particularly *A Streetcar Named Desire*, various influences on the dramatist-especially some American and European literatuers' – and the last but not the least 'Delimitation'.

The second chapter is primarily meant to develop a theoretical modality which is to be effectively applied in the study in order to make the symbolic collision sail across the dramatic surface confronting the possible challenges. It, therefore, provides a brief introduction of the tool drawing ideas from various available sources. This part of the study defines the terminologies such as 'symbol' and 'symbolism', and presents an elaborate history or background of French Symbolist Movement. Besides, it also presents a detailed discussion on Symbolism in American Literature – especially in the fields of novel and drama in the light of the main subject of the study.

The third chapter of the study presents an analysis of the dramatic text at a considerable length on the basis of the theoretical modality defined and developed in the second chapter. Of course, it consists of the necessary extracts from the text so as to prove the hypothesis of the study. And moreover, this chapter will serve as the core of my research work.

The fourth chapter is entirely related to the conclusion of the research work. Standing on the firm foundation of the analysis of the text done extensively in the third chapter, it will conclude the explanations, elaborations and arguments put forward in the preceding chapters on the basis of textual evidences and make the symbolic collision between idealism and realism float on the dramatic surface.

## Chapter Two

### Symbolism

#### 2.1 Symbol, Its Origin and Meaning

In its simplest sense, a symbol is something that signifies something else. In this sense, all words that have existed so far are symbols. But, in literature a symbol is fundamentally a concrete object that stands for an abstract idea. In this sense, symbols are basically words which are not merely denotative but also connotative, expressive and emotive. For example, the word "water" is the symbol of "life" or "regeneration".

As far as the origin of it is concerned, the term 'symbol' has been derived from the Greek word "symballein", which means "to throw together". This term in literary usage is a sign that stands for or suggests something else by its arbitrary association rather than its intrinsic resemblance. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "a symbol is a communication element intended to simply represent or stand for a complex of person, object or idea" (458).

To trace the origin, development and differentiation of a symbol is really an intricate task as there exist various opinions regarding the first appearance of a symbol. But it can be said, for sure, that at some point in the evolution of mankind, human species distinguished themselves from other creatures by forming conceptions of the cosmos that made the environment, to some degree, comprehensible and communicable. Such conceptions might have served to order the external world in terms of symbols. Regarding the history of its origin, Father Herds says, "the early Indians, as has been revealed by inscriptions, were the discoverers of the movement" (qtd. in Cirlot XIX). Almost each and every symbol and sign in religion and art is at first connected directly or indirectly with the sense, impression and object of



nature. Many symbols are derived from natural objects, and others are artificially constructed in a process of intuitive perception or emotional experience.

Literary symbols do not have any identicalness in their definitions as they are defined by diverse people in a diverse manner. But if we endeavour to derive a commonality, what we can say is (that) symbols combine an image and an idea or a concept strongly. M.H. Abrams broadly defines a symbol as:

Anything which signifies something; in this sense all words are symbols. In discussing literature, however, the term "symbol" is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something, or has a range of reference beyond itself. (311)

Thus, a literary symbol blends an image and a concept. It is an extension of the metaphor that represents or evokes a coherent greater whole by means of the part. In addition, symbols call up or express the range of reference beyond themselves. For example, the word "lion" – a wild animal – is the symbol of "strength" and "courage". Through the use of symbols, thus, a writer can express much more than what can be expressed through the use of an ordinary language. In other words, the concepts or ideas which are inexpressible in ordinary language can be expressed through the use of symbols.

Some symbols have more than one suggestiveness. The word "moon", for example, may represent "peace", "romantic love", "chastity" or even "inaccessibility". The word "water" may have the symbolic references to "life", "regeneration", "purity" etc. A "diverse path" can be the symbol of "dilemma" or "confusion" and even "choice of life". So, it is impossible to read and comprehend any work of literature in its depth unless we warily remain alert to the pregnant symbols exploited in the work.

Generally, there exist two sorts of symbols—public and private. The symbols that are always associated with the definite meanings are called public or conventional symbols such as "the red" symbolizing "violence", "a rose flower" symbolizing "love". Likewise, there exist other symbols which have special meanings in special uses. The meanings of such symbols depend upon the intention of the writer, so it's quite intricate to unravel the symbolic meanings of such symbols. That's why such symbols are called private symbols. For example, "a peacock" may be the symbol of "pride or vanity" and "an eagle" may be the symbol of "heroic endeavour". The "rising sun" may be the symbol of "birth" and the "setting sun" may be the symbol of "death".

Besides all these, there are many societies which may use same symbols but with utterly different symbolic meanings. In many countries, for example, "the red colour" symbolizes 'war' and 'violence'. But the same colour in China symbolizes 'marriage' and it symbolizes the same thing for the Native Americans or American – Indians.

Symbols open a wide ground for many readers to make diverse interpretations. Because of their multiple suggestiveness, symbols have been of particular interest and significance for almost all the scholars of various disciplines. For formalists, they have been instrumental to find a complex, coherent pattern of any literary work along with images present in the text. For psychologists, the symbols exist almost wholly in the mind and are then projected outward upon nature. Psychoanalytic criticism considers the use of symbol as a means of psychic exploration, and it is interested in how an individual author and the larger culture both disguise themselves and reveal unconscious fears and desires through the exploitation of certain symbols. In Mathematics, symbols are a kind of short hand for concepts, which otherwise have to

be explained each time. In Science too, symbolic systems have been developed that are far more precise than language.

To sum up, through various definitions, interpretations and exploitations, a symbol has become a literary term which has not any fixed meaning. Instead of saying A is B, the writer presents the reader with half of the analogy only, and the reader is invited to supply the missing part. Therefore, symbols are signs for rendering the invisible by the visible and sensuous representation.

## 2.2 Symbolism

Symbolism is a term specially applied to the works of late 19<sup>th</sup> century French writers who reacted against Naturalism and Realism of the period. It is said that it was first used in this sense by Jean Moreas in *Le Figard* in 1886. Baudelaire's sonnet *Correspondences* and the work of Edgar Allan Poe were supposed to be important precursors of the movement, which emerged with Verlaine's *Romances Sans Paroles* and Mallarme's *L'Après-midi d'un faune*. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains symbolism as :

Symbolism, the basis and often complex artistic form and gestures used as a kind of key to convey religious concepts, and iconography, the visual, auditory and kinetic representation of religious ideas and events, has been utilized by all the religions of the world since the time immemorial. (900)

The field of symbolism shows that everything can be assumed as symbolically significant as of natural objects like stones, plants, animals, men, mountains, sun and moon or even abstract forms like numbers, triangles and squares. In fact, the whole cosmos is the potential symbol.

Similarly, the *Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature* defines symbolism as:

Symbolism as a general term, and particularly with reference to prose writings, should not be confused with symbolist poetry, which refers to a particular literary movement characterized by the desire to express a state of mind by purely sensuous images, and to suggest rather than describe. Symbolism, in general, may refer to any one thing being made to stand for another, a literary technique that is fairly widespread. (1108)

Symbolism, thus, is one of the greatest artistic and literary techniques to represent emotions and feelings of the artist in art and literature. Every feeling or emotion of the writer is impossible to express through the conventional and universal language of literature. Symbolism is an attempt in which the writer has to find the special language or medium, which will alone be capable of expressing his/her emotions or feelings. In this case, symbolism plays a vital role in art and literature. In symbolism, everything has some meaning, everything has a purpose, and everything leaves some trace or signature which is open to investigation and interpretation. Edmund Wilson in his book *Axel's Castle* defines symbolism as "an attempt by carefully studied means - a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors to communicate unique personal feelings" (21-22).

Actually, symbolism is the use of symbols to signify something else in art and literature. Symbolism may be of various kinds. It may be public or private, major or minor. Public symbolism includes symbols drawn from established religion or religious texts. A public symbol consciously occurs throughout history or the work of art. The "cross" in Christianity can be taken as the best example of public symbolism.

Private symbolism consists of symbols developed by a writer in his works. It combines an image with a concept. One often finds that an author recruits public symbols and orders them to his own private symbols. For example, Robert Burns uses "rose" as a conventional symbol of love in his most celebrated love poem *Red, Red, Rose*, but William Blake, in his poem *The Sick Rose*, uses it as a private symbol.

The field of symbolism shows a strong relation between religions and other branches of culture. The social structure under the influence of religion develops its own symbolism for expressing its own values and dogmas. Similarly, religion draws its symbols from the socio-economic and political domains and literature is a reflection of all those areas. Religious symbolism may be similar to the pictorial expression in literature. They are mostly found in allegory, parable, fairy tales and legends. Transcendental symbolism – another type of symbolism – uses concrete images as symbols to represent an ideal world of which the real world is a shadow. J.A. Cuddon in his book *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* states:

The 'transcendental' concept is Platonic in origin, but was given considerable vogue in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Swedenberg – Baudelaire and his followers created the image of the poet as a kind of seer or voyant, who could be seen through and beyond the real world to the world of ideal forms and essence. Thus, the task of the poet was to create this other world by suggestion and symbolism, by transforming reality into a greater and more permanent reality. (656)

Thus, it is obvious that poets and artists prefer to speak on particular issues through the use of symbols creating images from various domains and sometimes borrowing them from the religion. The main aim of symbolism is to intimate things rather than state them plainly. So, it is quite complicated for the readers to reach the

feelings and sensations of a particular writer. That's why, the best way to get the writer's intended meaning, for a reader, is to read the work itself by bringing imaginative association.

### 2.3 Symbolist Movement

Symbolist movement was first identified by the poet Jean Mores in the Paris journal *Le Figaro* on September 18, 1886. Publishing the symbolist manifesto in the journal, he declared war on the descriptive realism and the impersonal, diadactic methods of Parnassian poetry. The Parnassians were the group of French poets of the mid-century of the Victorian period, who used traditional forms and wrote on historical, scientific, natural and traditional morals, and they worshipped 'Art' as Gospel truth. This monotonous didacticism impaired a group of French poets to start the symbolist movement as an utter reaction. The group of the literary artists who launched the movement were Charles Baudelaire, Stephen Mallarme, Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud. This movement was designed to convey impression by suggestion rather than by direct statement. It found its first expression in poetry, but was later extended to other literary genres i.e. novel, drama and essay. Cecil Maurice Bowra writes, in his book *The Heritage of Symbolism*, "Baudelaire was the first to exact the value of symbolism, Verlaine used them instinctively, and Mallarme erected a metaphysics to explain and justify them" (1).

The symbolists wished to liberate the technique of verification and were equally hostile to realistic and scientific view of art. They stressed on the evocative power of language. They believed that the theme of a poem could be expanded by the choice of words having colour, harmony and evocative power of their own. Their philosophy was based on a conviction that the transient objective world is not true reality, but a reflection of the invisible Absolute.

One of the dominant events of prime significance in the history of symbolist movement was the discovery of American literatuer Edgar Allan Poe by Charles Baudelaire in 1852. Baudelaire published a volume of translation of Poe's tales and the influence of Poe played an important role in Symbolism. In his sonnet *Correspondences*, Baudelaire saw nature as a symbol of another reality. For him, the visible and sensible world was full of symbols which fill man's heart with joy and sorrow and convey him through scent, colour and sound. Mallarme believed that poetry should not inform but suggest and evoke, not name things but create their atmosphere.

There is no doubt that French poets began the symbolist movement but the use of symbols in English literature developed as a movement basically from the Romantic period. Putting forward his views on the movement, M.H. Abrams writes:

Various poets of the Romantic period including Novalis and Holderlin in Germany and Shelley in England, often used private symbols in their poetry; Shelley, for example, made a symbolic use of objects such as morning star, evening star, a boat making upstream, winding caves. William Blake, however, exceeded all his romantic contemporaries in his recourse to a persistent and sustained symbolism – that is a system of symbolic elements – both in his lyric poems and his long prophetic or epic poems. (314)

Romanticism was an extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility. It was a revolt of the individual. It was an attack on the domain of politics, moral aspects of the society and art – an ideal form of objectivity. To some extent, symbolists share certain views with Romantics. Regarding this similarity, Lee Ellimann writes :

Though not all Romantics are symbolists, the symbolist is a kind of Romantic, one who singles out and develops the romantic doctrine of creative imagination. Whatever else he may affirm, the symbolist holds that human imagination actively constructs the world we perceive or at least meets it more than half way, and does not merely reflect the given form of external object. (7)

The use of symbol is one of the most striking features of Blake's poetry. He was the first romantic poet to emphasize the need of symbols in the domains of art and literature. There is hardly any poem in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* which does not possess a symbolic meaning. Blake has used both private and public symbols. Lamb, rose, tree, lily etc. are the symbols that occur frequently in his poems.

T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Dylan Thomas have been regarded as the chief representatives of the English symbolist movement. Yeats is not supposed to be the strict follower of the French symbolists. His symbols are emotional and he was interested in the occulticism and mythical symbolism. As C.M. Bowra writes, "Yeats, for instance, has created an almost new kind of poetry about his friends by making them at once entirely real yet symbolical of various destinies" (224). "Helen" is a frequently used symbol in his poetry to symbolize destructive beauty.

Eliot uses symbolist techniques to express not only personal sensations, but a complex and decadent civilization with all its meaningless routine of modern people. His symbols are drawn from the mythologies of the past. In his poem *The Waste Land*, Eliot has used symbols to clarify the horror of modern civilization because of the degradation in culture. Dry bones, rats, dry grass, rocks, fire, water etc. are the recurring symbols that Eliot has used in the poem. Dylan Thomas makes an extensive



use of symbols to convey his complex, psychological states. Most of the symbols are private and are derived from different sources – from Bible, Freud and so on.

Thus, the French symbolist movement had a strong and lasting influence on much British and American literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their experimental techniques greatly enriched not only the technical repertoire of modern poetry but also of modern novel, drama and essay. Many British and American poets like W.B. Yeats, William Blake, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Dylan Thomas, Hart Crane, e.e. cummings, Wallace Stevens etc. were highly influenced by the movement. However, the symbolist movement fell into disfavour after 1900 as a decadent – an excessively ornamental form of art.

#### **2.4 Symbolism in American Literature**

The symbolist movement in literature though originated in America was identified and developed in France in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was being flourished there before it got its name in the eighties. This fact should not be forgotten that Baudelaire imported the seed of symbolism from America, especially from the poetic theory and practices of Poe. Then he exported its fruits to the different parts of Europe and America along with his friends. However, apart from Poe, Hawthorne, Whitman, Melville were developing their writings in the direction of symbolism. Regarding the American symbolist movement, Feidelson writes:

The unified phase of American literature began with the tales of Hawthorne and Poe and ended with Melville and Whitman. Melville and Whitman were not recognized as such by the men who made it. Certainly none would have described it as a symbolist movement; indeed, none would have called himself a symbolist, yet today the

family likeness can be discerned, and the pattern is that of symbolism.

(1)

One of the prime important events in the early history of symbolist movement was the discovery of Poe by Baudelaire. In 1852, Baudelaire published a volume of translation of Poe's tales, which played an important part in French literature. In the Romantic period in America, a procedure was prominent in the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, in the prose of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and in the poetic theory and practice of Edgar Allan Poe. This period is also known as American Renaissance in literature. Many of the writers of this era were influenced by the French symbolist movement. Emerson and Melville were the polar figures of the American symbolist movement. Emerson says that the perception of symbols enables man to see both the poetic construction of things and that primary relation of mind to matter and the perception normally creates the whole apparatus of poetic expression. He identified poetry with symbolism, symbolism with a mode of perception and symbolic perception with the vision of a symbolic structure in the real world and of a symbolic relationship between nature and mind.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was another prominent figure in the American literature that extensively used symbols in his romances, especially to convey complex moral, spiritual and psychological truths. He used both public and private symbols to work out continual correspondences between external events and inner significance. Although he did not show sympathy towards Transcendentalism, he was close to it for the point that every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Thus, he shared his view literally with Emerson and Thoreau, in terms of using symbols. In his famous novel *The Scarlet Letter*, the letter 'A' is an evocative symbol which can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Hawthorne himself writes in terms of the letter, "My eyes

fastened themselves upon the old scarlet letter, and would not be turned aside. Certainly there was some deep meaning in it, most worthy of interpretation [...] but evading the analysis of my mind" (451).

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is also called Realistic period. The major writers of this period were Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Emily Dickenson and so on. They also continued the symbolic tradition of the Romantic period of America. Melville's *Moby – Dick* is a complex work of art which can be read on many levels. Superficially, it can be read as an adventure story in which real men fight with a whale, but symbolically the fight with a whale is the fight of Good against Evil. Walt Whitman is another notable symbolic poet of the period whose poetry is highly symbolic for he believed that true art is suggestive and evocative. It requires great painstaking on the part of the reader, if s/he wants really to appreciate it. For example, 'the road' in Whitman's poetry is not merely the physical path on which the poet travels, rather it symbolizes the process by which the soul achieves its identity with the divine. His *The Leaves of Grass* is regarded as the epic of modern America whose very title is symbolic, that stands for democracy. Mark Twain and Emily Dickenson were other prominent figures of the era who adopted symbolism as a literary device in their literary works. The events and the characters of Twain's *Hucklebery Finn* are symbolic in which Huck's journey symbolizes the soul's journey to heaven.

The period between the two world wars, which is known as the modern period, was a significant period of symbolism in American literature. The major writers of the period exploited symbols, which were in part drawn from religions and esoteric traditions and in part drawn from their own invention. Some of the works of the age are symbolistic in their settings, their agents, their actions as well as in the

objects they refer to. Earnest Hemingway was one of the most distinguished symbolists among the modern American novelists. His famous novel *The Old Man and the Sea* can be regarded as the highly suggestive work. In the novel, Santiago, the old man can be taken to be a symbolic representation of the novelist himself and the old man's struggle to catch the great fish signifies the novelist's own struggle to create a great work of art. Among the other worth mentioning men of letters who contributed to symbolism in the modern period in American literature were Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, e.e. cummings, Robert Frost, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and so on.

As far as the exploitation of symbolism in the American theatre is concerned, we hardly find any use of symbols in the American theatre before Eugene O'Neill. It does not mean that there did not exist any plays before O'Neill. Certainly there did. But what for sure is he brought American drama into a developed form of literature. He actually liberated it from the character types of melodrama. He, through his many plays, introduced a wide range of new themes and styles to the stage. Before him, there were many fine actors/actresses but not any great playwright because the American public did not have any zeal and enthusiasm for real work of art and literature but for entertainment and recreation. To this end, the theatres such as the Independnet Theatre, Broadway Theatre, Little Theatre were used extensively. Except the little theatres, other theatres were mainly in existence to make money. Among the little theatres, Washington Square Players in New York and Provincetown Players in Massachusetts are very important in the history of American theatre because they introduced the world to O'Neill.

O'Neill's each play explores the human condition through the use of symbols. He opines that there are certain forces behind human life to push it into a certain

situation. So, the theme of his play goes beyond the surfaces of life to study the forces behind life. He regards 'Fate' and 'Psychology' as two of such forces behind life. In his *Anna Christie*, fate is symbolized by "sea". In *The Hairy Ape*, he uses caged animals, prisoners and robots to represent the real life lived by the sailors. Likewise, in his play entitled *Long Day's Journey into Night*, the terms 'journey' and 'night' have been used symbolically. 'Night' symbolizes human soul which is very intricate to travel through. Similarly, 'journey' symbolizes a hot discussion between the father and the son to reach an agreement in the play. Thus, we can say that the credit of using symbols in the American theatres goes primarily to Eugene O'Neill. After O'Neill, Tennessee Williams comes in the forefront pushing Susan Glaspell, Thornton Wilder etc. aside regarding the use of symbolistic techniques in the American theatres.

## Chapter Three

### Textual Analysis

#### 3.1 A Critical Synopsis of the Play

Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* has been divided into eleven scenes – divisions of the play smaller than dramatic acts. The story of the play in general moves around the four prime characters: Blanche DuBois, Harold Mitch, Stella and Stanley Kowalski. Blanche DuBois, a young woman but one of the two major characters of the play, bred on a rich plantation that had gone to seed, arrives at a disreputable quarter of New Orleans to stay with her sister, Stella, who has married the rough – hewn Polish labourer, Stanley Kowalski. Blanche is not well; she is strongly nervous and hears some strange music when distressed. Her distress increases when she surveys the sordid and disgusting surroundings, when she observes that she will be sleeping next to her sister's bedroom with only a curtain between the rooms, and when she meets her strange and gruff brother-in-law. She has been a school teacher as well as a belle. She exudes the spirit of refinement in her speech and compartment, and clings pathetically to her clothing and furs, mementoes of a life to which her present environment makes a garish contrast. Her sister Stella has an earthly simplicity and sound animal instincts; she is happy with her exuberant and violently virile Pole. But, she, poor Blanche, who is in such need of quiet and comfort has entered the strange precincts of the uninhabited, uncomfortably hearty proletariat. Her delicate scorn and wincing aristocratic superiority can not be mistaken. One can not help pitying her, and also laughing at her because the life she affects to despise seems invincibly alive while her eyes seem fixated on a decadent past. But pity claims priority because her helplessness is so palpable, and because she is so evidently concealing a wounded past. Pity, however, is precisely what she can

not incite in Kowalski, to whom her refinement is both comic and affronting, in whom curiosity about this strange woman becomes an obsession, and for whom her presence is a disturbing element. He had been happy with Stella in a rough and tumble manner, and now he must defer to Blanche's delicacy, her nerves and her disdain of his too practical conduct.

He begins to unravel her past, thread by thread, from the suspiciousness of her conduct and from chance bits of information. It is not long before he discovers that she had been compelled to her home town after seducing one of her boy students, and that subsequently she had spent some time in a disreputable house. This is the woman for whom the slightest indelicacy is a torment. Her pathetic story unrolls before the audience, which the omniscient author involves in an understanding and sympathy that must remain a sealed book to the elemental and lively fellow who is her brother-in-law. In her golden girlhood Blanche had deeply loved and then married a lovable young man who turned out to be a homosexual and who killed himself when his sense of guilt became unbearable.

Blanche is pretty far gone after the shipwreck of her ego, but she finds one unexpected straw to cling to – that is, in addition to the delusion or pretence that a wealthy man in Florida is ready to leave his wife for her. The straw is Harold Mitchell, one of Stanley Kowalski's the most intimate friends who is strongly attracted to the fey creature. After a few affecting encounters, he is even ready to marry her with his mother's permission, and Blanche is eagerly awaiting him on the evening of her birthday, an occasion that is being observed with cake and candles by her pitying sister. But the suitor does not arrive, and Kowalski bluntly admits that he had revealed Blanche's past to his friend; he was not going to let his best friend marry a tart. This is the crisis, and therefore every event contributes torments to unsettle an

already badly jolted mind. Valiantly Blanche continues to spin threads of romantic illusion as an anchor to life, but the last threads are severed when her brother-in-law, whom she has been vaguely enticing, violates her, and Stella reluctantly consents to committing her sister to an asylum. The concluding scene is a heartrending as any one of a half a dozen other preceding scenes. The matron from the asylum knocks her down on the floor when she struggles; the physician from the asylum takes one quick look at her and resolves to salvage her self-respect. He removes his hat, speaks to her in courtly accents, and raises her from the floor. Instantly she radiates pleasure and walks out with him, her head high as if she were following a gentleman who has shown her the extreme courtesy which befits a lady. Blanche, then, gets ready to leave Kowalski's apartment.

### **3.2 Dominant Dramatic Symbols and their Analysis**

*A Streetcar Named Desire* is very rich in exploiting an abundant number of symbols especially the private ones. Through such an use, Williams is successful to objectify the inner experiences of his tormented characters. His handling of symbols in his plays is so masterly and skilful that John Gassner, a dramatic critic, does not hesitate to call him a symbolist poet. He states, "... he tends towards the symbolist school of writing, .... Had he devoted himself solely to poetry, he would have been a symbolist" (351). Therefore, I want to interpret and analyze the dominant symbols employed by the playwright in the play.

#### **a. A Paper Lantern**

In Scene Three, when Blanche DuBois and Harold Mitch talk about different things such as Blanche's nationality, the true meaning behind her name at around 2:00 a.m. of the Poker night, there exists this dramatic symbol. Blanche asks Mitch if he can do her a favour by fixing the paper lantern "over the light bulb" (55). He, then,



open-heartedly does it as he knows that Blanche can not face the coloured light. She says that she "can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action" (55). It signifies that she opposes or shuns reality; she is fearful of bitter reality. That's why she wants a paper lantern to be set over the real light bulb so that she may get relief from the torturing reality. But in Scene Nine, when Mitch "tears the paper lantern off the light bulb, she utters a frightened gasp" (117). She feels as if her illusive, timeless and idealistic world is shattered into pieces. So, the reference of this symbol helps to dramatize the idealistic principles of Blanche DuBois in the play.

**b. The Varsouviana Polka**

The polka music/tune plays at various points in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, when Blanche is feeling remorse for Allan's death. It is "the polka " (31)tune to which Blanche and her young husband Allan Gray, were dancing when she last saw him alive. Earlier that day, she had walked in on him in bed with an older male friend. The three of them went out dancing "the Varsouviana !" (96) together, pretending that nothing had happened. In the middle of the dance, Blanche turned to Allan and told him that he "disgust[ed]" (96) her. He ran away and shot himself in the head.

Regarding the occurrence of it, we can , for the first time, hear it in Scene One, when Stanley meets Blanche and asks her about her husband. Its second appearance occurs when Blanche tells Mitch the story of Allan Gray. From this point on, the polka plays increasingly often, and it always drives Blanche to memories i.e. dimness that leads the way to the world of illusion. She clearly tells Mitch that it ends only after she hears the sound of a gunshot in her head. The polka and the moment it evokes represent Blanche's loss of reality. The suicide of the young husband Blanche

loved dearly was the event that triggered her mental decline. Since then, Blanche hears the varsouviana whenever she panics and loses her grip on reality.

**c. A Paper Moon/A Ballad**

In Scene Seven, Blanche sings a ballad "it's only a paper moon" (100) when she bathes. This song's lyrics describe the way love turns the world into a "phony" (101) fantasy. The speaker in the song says that if both lovers believe in their imagined reality i.e. world of illusion, then it's no longer "make-believe" (100). These lyrics sum up Blanche's approach to life. In other words, it refers to her idealistic principles of life. As Blanche sits in the tub singing "It's only a paper moon", Stanley tells Stella the details of Blanche's corrupt past. Williams ironically juxtaposes Blanche's fantastical understanding of herself with description of Blanche's real nature. In reality, Blanche is a sham and once Mitch learns the truth about Blanche, he can no longer believe in Blanche's tricks and lies. In short, this symbol indicates that Blanche wishes to live in the romantic and idealistic world of a paper moon or a ballad.

**d. Shadows and Cries**

In Scene Ten, when Blanche and Stanley begin to quarrel, various oddly shaped "shadows" (128) begin to appear on the wall behind her. Discordant noises and "cries in a jungle" (128) also occur as Blanche begins to descend into madness i.e. an escape from reality. All of these effects combine to dramatize Blanche's final breakdown and a complete departure from reality. When she loses her sanity in her final struggle against Stanley, Blanche retreats entirely into her own world i.e. fantastical world. She originally colours her perception of reality according to her wishes, at this point in the play, she ignores reality altogether. She shuns it from the core of her heart.

**e. A Bathroom**

This is one of the most occurring symbols in the play exploited by the playwright. In almost all the scenes of the play, there is a reference of "the bathroom" (98). It functions as a place where Blanche goes for a refuge when she confronts with any obstacles in the real world. For her, it is a place of relief; it is a place where her disturbed nerves are calmed down. She thinks that it is a place of timelessness as it gives her a way to escape from reality. As soon as she visits it, she gets refreshed as she says it in Scene Seven. She even opines that it gives her "a brand new outlook on life" (105). It distinctly indicates that the real world tortures her, as a result, she wants an escape from the clutches of reality and wants to live in the world of fantasy.

**f. A Candle**

In Scene Six, in the absence of Stanley and Stella at home, Blanche and Mitch decide to "have a night-cap" (87). But Blanche proposes to leave the lights off and instead of it, she lights "a candle" (88). It indicates that she does not like bright reality; she likes only the mild and dim reality which is almost invisible and full of joyous moments of life. It once more reminds us of her real attitude to life.

**g. A Joke/Funny Little Story**

In Scene Eight, the three people – Blanche, Stella and Stanley – are about to complete the "dismal birthday supper" (106) remaining silent. In the absence of Mitch, the fourth chair is vacant. Blanche suddenly asks Stanley either to "tell a joke or a funny story" (106). It clearly signifies that her would be "beau" (106) i.e. Mitch has tortured her in the real world as he did not present himself in the birthday party. That's why, she wants an escape from reality and wishes to disappear in the imagined world of a joke or a funny little story. So, this symbol is used to dramatize Blanche's desire to enter the world of imagined reality i.e. illusive world.

#### **h. A Palm Leaf**

In Scene Five, at first night after the Poker night, Blanche is quite restless as she surmises that both Stanley and Stella have known about her corrupt past life. She even screams as she is fearful that Mitch may know her real age and abandon her. This feeling gives her fear of her own reality and to evaporate this fear, she uses a "palm leaf fan" (82). This object symbolizes a source of energy for her to forget the bitter reality. It has, therefore, been used to dramatize Blanche's wish to forget the fearful reality.

#### **i. Cathedral Bells**

In Scene Eleven, as Blanche is preparing to leave, this dramatic symbol happens to exist. Here, as Eunice offers her some unwashed "grapes" (135), Blanche opines that only the "cathedral bells" (136) are clean as they belong to the domain of God i.e. an ideal and perfect place. It indicates that she is in the state of loving religious things which are very ideal and divine. She no longer likes the profane things of the mundane world as she is fed up with the reality. This attitude reminds us that she stands as an anathema to reality.

#### **j. Blanche DuBois**

One of the two dominant characters of the play, Blanche DuBois has got this name very symbolically. As she herself makes its meaning clear in Scene Three, Blanche means "white" and DuBois means "woods". To put it in other words, Blanche DuBois as a whole means "white woods" (54-55). It represents an idea that such 'white woods' are impossible in the real world. They may be in the existence in the world of imagination. That's why, it indicates that the real and practical world does not have any space for Blanche DuBois, rather the imaginative and fantastical world is for her. Thus, the playwright has given such a lovely name to Blanche DuBois so as

to dramatize her activities in the play with the meaning that they are suitable only in the world of fantasy.

**k. A Radio**

In Scene Three, when Stella comes out of the bathroom, Blanche perpetuates gossiping with Mitch. At this moment, Blanche "turns the knobs on the radio" (57) and begins to dance with "romantic gestures" (57). Here, this object works as a symbol that helps Blanche to forget reality and to enter the imagined domain of music. As she waltzes, she is seen to be in a rapturous mutability. It signifies that she shuns reality and gets limitless bliss in the world of imagination. Thus, the playwright has deliberately used this symbol to dramatize the illusive tendency of Blanche.

**l. Blanche's Belongings**

The play consists of various things which basically belong to Blanche DuBois, one of the prime characters of the play. All these belongings are directly or indirectly related to Blanche's hankering to hide reality; with their ownership, she is able to create a "make-believe" (99) world. The things such as a "trunk/box, white gloves, powder, feathers, furs, atomizer, love-letters" (40-42), "white-skirts, flowery dresses, silver toilet articles, silver slippers, jewels, diamonds" (123-27), "hair-brush, scent, pearls" (137) etc. all intensify the fact that she always dreams of an ideal or perfect place. She wants to be one of the inhabitants of a fantastical world; she wants to remain in a rapturous world of timelessness; she does not want to face the reality which is very torturing and disgusting. As a result, she has a never fulfilling long for an absolutely perfect world of illusion and fantasy. All these things are mentioned in the play so as to dramatize her illusive and very ideal principles of life which rampantly contrast with Stanley's principles based on real and practical life.

Having analyzed and interpreted the aforementioned symbols, we come to have an understanding that these symbols carry the concept of idealism which is opposite to realism. And moreover, the concept of idealism seems to have attached with Blanche DuBois. She seems to be an appendage of it. Besides, most of the symbols analyzed and interpreted above are implicitly or explicitly associated with her and her dreamy world, the world of timelessness.

**m. A Package of Fresh Meat**

As far as the use of private symbols in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is concerned, this is the most powerful and thought-provoking symbol. In Scene One, as the play opens, Stanley Kowalski hurls "a package" (14) of fresh meat at Stella, his dear sweetheart. Besides, he is seen to be wearing a "red-stained" (13) and tattered dress. First, the package reminds the audience of the bloody World War II and its human carnage. His throwing the package indicates that he is familiar with such fresh postwar scenario and confronts it happily and joyously. Second, the blood-stained dress signifies that he is accustomed to be in such bloody and disheartening reality. In other words, he is used to living in such blood-stained society or reality. He is seen to be stuck with the then naked reality and has a kind of love to keep on inhabiting in it. So, this symbol is used to dramatize the bloody and disgusting reality of postwar America. Moreover, Stella takes a hold of it which signifies that because of Stanley, she is also capable to enjoy and respond to the then reality being a part of it enthusiastically.

**n. A Hand Mirror**

In Scene Ten, when Mitch abandons Blanche accusing her of being unclean to keep in his house with his old mother as his wife, Blanche gets hysterical and begins to talk to herself doing some eccentric activities. She tremblingly lifts "a hand mirror

for a closer inspection" (122) of her physical beauty and the age it would reflect. She catches her breath and "slams the mirror face down with such violence that the glass cracks" (122). It indicates that she fears reality and whoever or whatever comes to her searching for her reality has to bear a slab from her. It also signifies that she wishes to disfigure the reality as it is very cruel and bitter. In place of it, she wants a place where time is controlled or a place where everything is perfect and timeless. So, here, the mirror works as a powerful symbol to symbolize realism which is not endured by Blanche who attempts to demolish it completely. This symbol is seen to have been used to dramatize a clash between Blanche's ideal principles of life and the realistic principles of life possessed by Stanley as the mirror belongs to him.

**o. Colored Lights**

This is one of the most occurring symbols in the play. It is very important to see its occurrence in Scene Three and Scene Eight. In the former scene, Blanche wants Mitch to cover it with a "Chinese bulb cover" (55) meaning that it functions as a symbol of realism which is not endurable for her, so she wants to cover it with a bulb cover. This action indicates that she can not face the naked reality rather the softened reality. In Scene Eight, Stanley talks with Stella about "the coloured lights" (109) which they want compulsorily to be in their bedroom. It represents the idea that they enjoy the naked reality, they have the cultivated habit of facing reality without any ounce of hesitation; they do not shun the coloured lights rather the lights covered to soften their strong effects. So, this symbol is included in the play to dramatize the conflicting principles of life possessed by Blanche and Stanley.

**p. A Cat**

In Scene One, there is a reference of "a cat" (18) in two places. When Blanche arrives at Stella's house, she is led to her room by Eunice, a white woman. In Stella

and Stanley's absence, Blanche enters the room and starts searching for some whiskey, but notices a cat that makes her catch "her breath with a startled gesture" (18). She is seen to be fearful of it. In the same scene, when Blanche and Stanley start to talk about her visit and its duration, "a cat" (31) is shown screeching "near the window" (31). This frightens her and she springs up instantly. It indicates that a cat, for her, is as frightening as reality since both are dangerous and risky to face. Naturally, the physique of a cat is dangerous and terrifying to look at, so is the face of reality. That's why, this symbol is parallelly used to indicate the danger and risk which the real world consists of. Moreover, the cat can not terrify Stanley and Stella, which means that they are used to playing with the risk and danger of the real world.

**q. Coloured Shirts**

In Scene Three, Stanley, Steve, Mitch and Pablo are shown in "coloured shirts" (45). They are "men at the peak of their physical manhood, as coarse and direct and powerful as the primary colours" (45). Their coloured shirts rampantly contrast with Blanche's flowery silver clothes. The coarseness and roughness of the coloured shirts indicate that the people who wear them are fit to live in harsh and cruel reality. Their harshness and unevenness indicate the torturing and troubling nature of reality which Stanley adopts wearing such clothes. So, these items are used in the play so as to dramatize the realistic and cruel nature of men especially Stanley's.

**r. Napoleonic Code**

In Scene One, when Blanche informs Stella and Stanley about the sale of their Belle Reve Plantation, Stanley continues mentioning the term. He opines that "in the state of Louisiana we have the Napoleonic code" (34). According to it, whatever "belongs to the wife belongs to the husband and vice-versa" (35). It is nothing more than a statute i.e. it is the right of a husband to get the property of his wife and vice-



versa guaranteed by the law. In other words, this is a symbol related to legality which is very fact-based. As he runs after it, we can surmise that Stanley is a very practical person. This has been used in the play to dramatize his realistic principles of life.

s. **A Bus Ticket**

In Scene Seven, when Blanche enjoys in the ideal world of bathroom, Stella and Stanley have a hot discussion about her true past. Stanley, on the basis of the stories received from his friends and acquaintances, insists that Blanche has a hollow character; whatever she attempts to maintain appearing to be noble and honest is just showy and pretentious. She is good ostentatiously. He says that she worked for a "Flamingo hotel in Laurel" (99) as a whore. This is flatly unbelievable and incredible for Stella. Amidst their discussion, Blanche comes out of the bathroom drying her hair. She does not understand the fact that they were talking about "a bus ticket" (104) which, later on, would be gifted to Blanche on the occasion of her auspicious birthday. In Scene Eight, all these three characters are seen to be at the dining table enjoying "a dismal birthday supper" (106). In the absence of Mitch, Blanche gets fed-up and starts discussing with Stanley calling him a Polack. This really infuriates Stanley, so he calls her "a noisy woman" (110) and wishes to get rid of her. As a result, he presents Blanche with an "envelope" (111) containing a bus-ticket. This envelope or particularly the bus ticket works as a symbol to dramatize the real practicality which Stanley possesses. This functions as powerfully and cruelly as reality itself because it gets success to hurt Blanche's spirit being as torturing as naked reality for her. Moreover it helps Stanley to frighten Blanche so that she may go to her own dreamy place leaving the place where the real and practical people like Stanley and Mitch live.

**t. A Chair**

In Scene One, and in many places in the play, there is a reference of "a chair" (18) and "a soft bed" (18). Blanche mostly wants to sit on the bed which is very delicate and cosy and comforting. It is shown that as soon as she sits on the chair, she feels restless and tries to scream which means that the chair is as hard and uncomfortable as reality itself. It gives her a kind of anguish that tortures her. On the other hand, when she sits on the bed she feels comfortable which means that the bed is as soft and delicate and comforting as the ideal world of her fantasy. It gives her a great relief which satiates her. So, she always makes an effort to avoid the use of the chair. This symbol is used to dramatize her fear of reality in the play.

**u. Fire**

At the end of Scene Nine, when Mitch declares that Blanche is not clean enough to be his wife, Blanche screams with a particular word i.e. "Fire" (121). This word functions as a powerful symbol that represents the scorching reality. She takes Mitch's presence as the presence of fire which has the potential to swallow anything including her turning it into ash. It is as dangerous, risky and self-turned as the reality itself. Moreover, fire is as intricate to deal with as the reality itself. So, this symbol has been used to dramatize the contrast between reality (like fire) and fantasy (like paper moon).

**v. A Matron and a Doctor**

Almost at the end of the play, in Scene Eleven, "a matron and a doctor" (36) come to take Blanche to an asylum. In its simplicity, an asylum is a place where the people who have lost their control over real world are treated. So, they take Blanche, after Kowalski's permission, as a mad lady and wish to take her to an asylum. At this moment of the play, Blanche turns wildly and "scratches the matron" (141) thinking

that the matron and the doctor were there to bring her down to the real world from her illusive world. She takes them as the representatives of reality and does not hesitate to scratch the matron. This scratching indicates that she is completely hostile to reality and can not bear the presence of its appearance. Moreover, the pulling and pushing game between Blanche, and the matron and the doctor represents the clash between realism and fantasy.

After interpreting and analyzing the aforementioned symbols, it is clear that they are implicitly or explicitly associated with the concept of reality which in general is very harsh and intricate to tackle with. They carry the sense of practicality, reality and legality along with some kind of association with facts and day-to-day life. Moreover, these symbols are deeply rooted on the realistic ground. In addition to it, these symbols are associated either with Stanley or Mitch in the play. In this sense, Stanley and Mitch to some extent are the representatives of the realistic concept or world prevalent in the post World War II America.

Besides the symbols analyzed above, there are many others which can be counted for. But as they do not fall on the periphery of my research study, they are not analyzed in detail. But, it is really relevant to analyze the title of the play in this context. The title *A Streetcar Named Desire* signals the importance of theatrical metaphor in the work. In addition to it, the mundane concreteness of "streetcar" and the abstract quality of aspiration evoked in "desire" display various antinomies – thematic, symbolic and imagistic oppositions – imbedded throughout the play. The title of the play also ties the action of the play to a specific local. This locale refers to the French Quarter in New Orleans which was actually served by streetcars named "Desire" and "Cemeteries". It also plants the notion of movement from one place to another, from one state of mind to another, from the real world to the unreal and

illusive one, from normality to abnormality and even from life to death represented by "Desire" and "Cemeteries" respectively. This movement related to Blanche's various states of mind is further represented by the use of the term "streetcar" in the title itself. Hence, the title itself suggests that the play captures Blanche's movement from the real world to the ideal one and vice-versa in many crucial events of the play.

### **3.3 Blanche Vs Stanley: A Sturdy Antagonism**

Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* oscillates between Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski – two major characters of the play. It is a poetic, brutal and thrilling play in which he lets his demons and angels dance with every ounce of truth he is able to know. From the very beginning of the play, we clearly notice that there exists a vehement antagonism between Blanche and Stanley. Stanley's assertion in the beginning of the play "The Kowalskis and the DuBois have different notions" (37) finds its full expression in the play reaching the symbolic or connotative level. This notion of difference plays a very important role in the play as it is the basis on which the surface ordinariness is shown in the play. But under this superficial simplicity, there exists a symbolic collision. Although Stanley proclaims that they possess different principles of life, this attitude becomes an open secret only when Blanche vehemently puts forward her rival opinions towards Stanley while seriously talking to Stella in Scene Four of the play. But the interesting thing is that Stanley overhears what the so-called queens talk about i.e. his true nature and behaviour. But, both of the women are quite unaware of Stanley's presence and his overhearing.

But, the opposition of Blanche and Stanley is foreshadowed even before they meet. It becomes partially apparent in Scene Two when Stanley handles Allan Grey's letters. She responds to this exclaiming "The touch of your hands insults them !" (42). She further exclaims, "Now that you've touched them I'll burn them !" (42). This

exclamation compels them to see each other as a real threat. The gossip in Scene Four between the so-called queens about Stanley strongly functions as an "inciting force" in the play. It creates a sense of vigorous resentment in Stanley against Blanche. In other words, it makes Stanley go berserk to give birth to hatred and rage against Blanche. The epithets to describe him used by Blanche are really disgusting and irritating for him. She states:

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits ! ... and there he is – Stanley Kowalski – survivor of the stone age ! ... Night falls and the other apes gather ! There in the front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking ! His poker night ! – you call it – this party of apes ! (72)

Beyond all questions, Blanche's such expressions precipitate Stanley to possess the sense of hostility towards her, and this enmity is well maintained till the climax of the play.

From this dramatic moment of the play, both Stanley and Blanche start to look at each other contemptuously. Stanley now knows beyond a doubt that he is engaged in a war with Blanche for Stella's heart and mind. This defines Stanley and Blanche's true hostile relationship. They are completely opposing camps and Stella is caught in no-man's land. Now, Stanley incessantly probes into the past life lived by Blanche so as to uproot her pure and idealistic life. He, as a very cruel and practical man, keeps on running after facts and information related to her. In Scene Five, Blanche's past begins to catch up with her making her situation complicated. As Blanche converses with Stella and Stanley, Stanley hints that he has been hearing from "somebody named Shaw" (77) about her reputation back in Laurel. After Stanley leaves, Blanche tells Stella : "I wasn't so good the last two years or so, after Belle Reve had started to

slip through my fingers" (79). She, then, immediately begins to express her nervousness. She appears to be full of fear and panic; she is seen to be in a series of memories of the past which she attempts to transcend and escape. On the contrary, Stanley – the realist – relentlessly pursues Blanche's corrupt facts about her faded past until she descends into the world of madness i.e. an escape from reality.

Along with the movement of the plot, the conflict increasingly perpetuates between the two. In Scene Seven, when Blanche warbles in the bathroom to purify herself on her birthday, Stanley tells Stella what he has learned about her sister's past life i.e. the life she lived as a whore in Laurel. He mentions that Blanche was a pretty liar and was a disreputable resident of the Flamingo Hotel in Laurel. She was also fired from her teaching position at the high school for getting "mixed up with" (101) a seventeen-year-old boy. He, thus, enumerates her lies as "Lie Number One", "Lie Number Two" (98-100). But, what astounds the audience most is that the louder Stanley gets on insisting on the undeniable facts about Blanche, the louder Blanche sings some fabulous songs in the bathroom. Of course, this is a clash of their philosophy of life. Stella, a link between the two, is compelled to listen to the facts given to her by Stanley and the virtues of idealism given to her by Blanche. So, Stella, here, appears to be between the devil and the deep blue sea.

In Scene Eight, after the candles on the cake are lit, Stanley gives Blanche a birthday present : a bus ticket back to Laurel. It signifies that Stanley treats Blanche as his opponent, so he desperately wants her to leave his house. At that, Stella reproaches him but he just thinks of regaining sovereignty in his house, of recapturing nights with Stella with "the coloured lights going with nobody's sister behind the curtains to hear" (109) them. Suddenly, Stella apparently begins going into labour and asks to be taken to the hospital.

In Scene Ten, when Stella is in the hospital, only Blanche and Stanley happen to remain at home. At this dramatic moment in the play, we see that Blanche is highly panicked and wants to get in touch with Mr Shep Huntleigh of Dallas – a millionaire and a former admirer of her beauty and honesty. The sole motive behind such desire was to feel safe and secure at home. She nervously says to Stanley that Huntleigh was a rich gentleman and wanted to marry her desperately. She further states that he wanted a civilized, cultivated and intelligent woman like her. At this crucial juncture of the play, Stanley looks at her derisively. Now focused on reconstructing her self image – an ideal of womanhood that depends not upon transitory "physical beauty" (126), but upon "beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart" (126) – she mentions "casting my pearls before swine !" (126).

Here, Blanche makes the mistake of echoing the same theme she had developed in Scene Three, when Stanley overheard her likening him to an ape. And "swine" is the word Stanley hears. Like the "ape" in the speech of Scene Three, this speech turns him into an adversary. This terminology intensifies the conflict between the two and swiftly slings them to the summit of climax. Stanley then taunts her for her "lies and conceit and tricks" (127). He slowly advances towards her into the bedroom as he is provoked by such an ignominious word which finally leads him to physical aggression.

Blanche, then, is completely nervous and vainly makes an effort to make a call to Mr Huntleigh of Dallas for safety. She then orders him not to go towards her but Stanley turns his deaf ears to her order and keeps on proceeding towards her. It is the dramatic moment at which we see that both the characters are in the extremity of their resentment against each other. But, as her irrational fear mounts, the scene moves into an expressionistic mode; that is, reality becomes distorted by Blanche's subjective

vision of it. Lurid reflections and grotesque shadows appear on the walls around her, while "the night is filled with inhuman voices like cries in a jungle" (128). Significantly, it is during her futile attempt to telephone for help that the walls become transparent, so that the sordid life on the street (an encounter between a drunkard and a prostitute) can be seen simultaneously. As interior and exterior menaces mingle in her perception, so is the distinction blurred between subjective and objective reality. She latches onto the telephone as her lifeline to illusion, but she can not escape the reality of her entrapment in the same flat with Stanley. She suddenly smashes a wine bottle on the table in order to "twist the broken end in your face !" (130). This is a very dangerous challenge for him posed by Blanche, so he can neither tolerate it nor ignore. He, therefore, gets extremely infuriated and makes an order as she gets ready to bounce at him with the broken end of the bottle. But, his order to drop the bottle top is wittingly neglected by her. So, he catches her wrist to force her to drop the bottle and angrily utters, "Tiger-tiger ! Drop the bottle top ! Drop it" (130). It is the most intensified dramatic moment at which the climax of the play happens to exist. At this very moment, Stanley's hostility towards Blanche is so uncontrollable and devastating that he forgets the familial and social taboos and can not help raping her.

His ravishment of Blanche in such a merciless manner brings an end to their long-existed conflict and enmity giving a way to "denouement" of the play. The resolution of the dramatic conflict forces Blanche to leave Kowalski's apartment whereas Stanley and Stella remain at their home as before. We also see that a doctor and a matron show their faces to fetch Blanche to an asylum. Although Blanche forcefully resists for some time, she finally succumbs to the doctor's power bringing a halt to the play.



The play, thus, comes to an end establishing an equilibrium of power between Blanche and Stanley. It helps to prove the fact that both are complex figures whose wants and behaviours should be understood in the context of what is at stake for them. The action of the play proceeds through clashes of these two opposites to the inevitable showdown by which one seemingly wins and the other, too, seemingly loses. And yet, Scene Eleven hints at the fact that Stanley – the seemingly winner – has also lost. It is, because his relationships with his wife Stella and his best friend Mitch will never again be quite the same. On the other hand, Blanche – the seemingly loser – has also won. It is because she has found a way to salvage her dignity and ideals in spite of everything and to be the lady she has been striving to be throughout the play.

This is how the surface antagonism between Blanche and Stanley is dramatized in the play. To put it in another way, this is the distinctly visible conflict between these two characters. But, beneath this sort of clash between the two, there exists a symbolic collision between idealism and realism. These two contradictory beliefs are tacitly represented by Stanley and Blanche respectively. Now I want to make this symbolic collision sail across the dramatic surface on the basis of the interpretation and analysis of the private symbols done earlier in the very chapter.

### **3.4 Idealism Vs Realism : A Symbolic Collision**

William's *A Streetcar Named Desire* is one of the most remarkable and popular plays in the field of theatre. Behind the scene of its tremendous success, there lies the playwright's dexterity to cast the characters as the representatives of the then society, and exploitation of the private symbols that implicitly advocate for the contemporary people's philosophy of life. Blanche and Stanley are the dominant characters among such representatives of the society. These characters are the pivot

around whom the major conflict of the play oscillates. The playwright has employed a variety of private symbols in order to express the philosophy of life of these two characters. Their attitudes to look at life distinctly vary and at times collide as if they are explosives. But, this collision is quite covert i.e. it is in an underlying level. However, the interpretive excavation and analysis of the prime private symbols done earlier in the same chapter immensely help us to bring forth the collision.

Williams has made a use of a number of private symbols to connote the philosophy of life adopted by Blanche DuBois in the play. Among such symbols, a paper lantern, a paper moon, a ballad, a bathroom, a candle, shadows and cries, Varsouviana polka music, a joke or a funny little story, a palm leaf, a radio, cathedral bells etc. interpreted and subsequently analyzed earlier in the very chapter are the dominant ones in this direction. In addition, the name Blanche DuBois itself and almost all her belongings are symbolically employed in the play. All these symbols hint at the world which is above the level of the world where we – the realists – are destined to inhabit. In other words, they represent the world which is imaginative, illusive, unreal, dreamy, fantastical, timeless and idealistic as a whole.

Blanche, in Scene One, when she talks to Stella, does not allow Stella to look at her. She says, "Don't look at me, Stella, no, no, no, not till later, not till I've bathed and rested ! And turn that over-light off !" (19). It clues that she is fearful of reality and wants to cover the bitter reality by turning the light off. In Scene Two, when she talks to Stanley, she says, "After all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion" (41) by using an atomizer. It hints at the fact that she accepts the illusive charm a woman owns. In Scene Three, she says to Stella, "How do I look ?" (47) when they appear before the poker players. It suggests that she does not believe in what she really is but in what she falsely looks like. In the same scene, when Stella says to her, "You're

standing in the light, Blanche !" (50), she promptly avoids the naked light. Likewise, when she talks to Mitch about the paper lantern, she says, "I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark ..." (55). It indicates that she is afraid of naked reality and wants to avoid it wishing to live in an ideal state. In Scene Five, when she talks to Stella about her past life in nervousness, she says, "I never was hard or self sufficient. When people are soft ... they have got to put on soft colours, the colours of butterfly wings, and put a – paper lantern over the light ..." (79).

It signifies that she is very soft and delicate, so the real world is not an appropriate place for her to live. Consequently, she wants soft colours and paper lantern over the light. In the same scene, when Blanche talks about Mitch with Stella, she says, "Of course, he – he doesn't know ... my real age !" (81). It indicates that she is quite illusive and wishes to live in the world of timelessness. Likewise, in Scene Six, when Mitch is with her at the apartment in the Kowalskis' absence, she says to him, "we'll have a night-cap. Let's leave the lights off. Shall we ? (87) indicating that she wants to be in a state where bitter reality is invisible. Similarly, in Scene Seven, when Blanche is taking a shower in the bathroom to cleanse herself on her birthday, she constantly sings a ballad. She is clearly heard singing, "Say it's only a paper moon, sailing over a cardboard sea – But it wouldn't be make believe if you believed in me !" (99).

Her singing a ballad in a jolly mood signifies that she desperately wants to remain in the timeless world of feelings and emotions sailing in the space. In Scene Eight, while Blanche, Stella and Stanley are completing a dismal birthday supper, she asks Stanley to tell a joke or a funny little story. She says, "Stanley, tell us a joke, tell us a funny story to make us all laugh ... to help us out" (106) indicating that she is eager to escape from reality and to enter the imagined world of a joke or a story. In

Scene Nine, Blanche enjoys with Mitch, her possible husband. While talking to him, she says, "I like it dark. The dark is comforting to me" (116) which cues to the fact that she is fed-up with the day time i.e. reality. Mitch, then, makes a complaint that he has never seen her in the afternoon, so he wants to have a real look at her. Hence, he says, "Let's turn the light on here" (116) but she is completely scared and says, "I don't want realism. I want magic ! ... yes, yes, magic ! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell truth, I tell what ought to be truth" (117).

This textual excerpt distinctly indicates that Blanche shuns realism and wants to hug magic i.e. fantasy or illusion. She doesn't want truth i.e. reality but the imagined reality i.e. illusion. In Scene Ten, Blanche is preoccupied with the sense of past memories. She perpetually recollects Shep Huntleigh – a millionaire of Dallas and says that this place is a unique place "where gold spouts out of the ground !" (124). It suggests that she wants to dwell in dreamy world which is perfect or completely idealistic. Similarly, in Scene Eleven, when Blanche is preparing to leave, she calls Kowalskis' apartment a trap. She says, "I'm anxious to get out of here – this place is a trap !" (135) indicating that it was a very realistic, torturing and even scorching place for an idealistic woman. She hates reality so much that in the last scene, when she is about to have a departure from Kowalskis' apartment, she says, "I don't want to pass in front of those men" (136). She, thus, cues that Stanley, Mitch and other poker players are realistic and exist to torture the people like her. So, she denies to walk in front of them. In short, she wants to dwell more on magic and illusion than on truth or reality.

Thus, on the basis of such textual evidences and their thorough analysis, Blanche DuBois has the idealistic philosophy of life which vehemently collides with

the realistic one. She, thus, represents the idealistic world and concept i.e. idealism in the play.

On the contrary, the playwright has also made a use of a number of private symbols to suggest the philosophy of life carried by Stanley Kowalski in the play. Among such symbols, a package of fresh meat, a hand mirror, coloured lights, a cat, coloured shirts, a bus ticket, Napoleonic code, a chair, fire, a matron and a doctor etc. interpreted and subsequently analyzed earlier in the very chapter are the dominant ones in this direction. All these symbols hint at the world which is completely identical to the world where we – the realists – are destined to inhabit. In short, they represent the world which is fact-based, practical, legal, day-to-day, social and realistic as a whole.

Stanley, when Stella informs him of the loss of their Belle Reve, immediately gets curious to know much about it in Scene Two. He, then, keeps on running after facts and true information. He says to Stella, "Now, let's have a gander at the bill of sale" (34). He, then, asks her, "She didn't show you no paper, no deed of sale or nothing like that, huh ?" (34). It signifies that he is keen to know about Blanche's reality and the Belle Reve. He continuously asks for papers of deal without caring the real fragile condition of Blanche. In the same scene, he talks of some legal statute as well. He says :

In the state of Louisiana, we have Napoleonic code, according to which what belongs to the wife belongs to the husband and vice-versa. For instance, if I had a piece of property or you had a piece of property —. (35)

This represents his realistic tendency and the interest he has regarding property and legal matters. He keeps on probing into the issue and informs Stella that

he has "an acquaintance" (36) who may help him to know about the market price of the flowery dresses and jewels Blanche has bought. He even says that he can show all the papers to "a lawyer acquaintance" (43) who may help him to get some fortune from Blanche. In Scene Seven, when he talks to Stella who is preparing for Blanche's birthday, he says that "the cat's out of the bag ! I found out some things !" (98) about her past life. It signifies that he believes in facts i.e. reality. In the same scene, when he wants redemption from Blanche, he says to Stella that "She's not staying here after Tuesday" (104). He further informs Stella that "to make sure I bought her ticket myself. A bus ticket !" (104) which suggests that he is a practical man, or he believes in deeds, not in words alone.

In Scene Eight, when they are enjoying a dismal birthday party, he reaches way over the table to spear his fork into the remaining chop and "eats with his fingers" (107). This signals that he is a real and practical man who uses his natural fingers to eat food instead of forks or spoons. After that, he lights a cigarette and stalks out on the porch, which cues that like some laymen in our real life, he smokes as it may be a means of removing tensions. Later, he says to Stella that after Blanche leaves, they will have "coloured lights" (109) in the bedroom that make their conjugal life again sweet. This, in contrast to Blanche's desire to have dim lights, proves that he loves reality, hugs it and gets ready to confront it at any cost. In Scene Ten, when he has a discussion with Blanche, he says, "As a matter of fact there wasn't no wire at all !" (127) which hints at the point that he does not like any created story or a story based on memories but a factual one. He means to say that there was no any call or telegram for Blanche; it was only Blanche's fantasy.

Thus, on the basis of all aforementioned textual excerpts and their thorough analysis, Stanley Kowalski has the realistic philosophy of life which is absolutely an

anathema to the idealistic one. He, thus, represents the realistic world or concept i.e. realism in the play.

On the close inspection of the play, we come to have an understanding that there exists a sturdy clash between these two philosophies of life i.e. idealism and realism represented by the clash between either Blanche and Stanley or Blanche and Mitch. The conflict between Blanche and Stanley is an externalization of the collision between idealism and realism based on private symbols beneath the surface of the play. Commenting on the characteristic attributes these two characters possess, Joseph Wood Krutch states, "Blanche is associated with verbal and physical symbols with whiteness, soft colours, illusions, a lost and romanticised past ... Stanley is essentially physical and sexual" (90-91).

In Scene Two, Stanley pulls open Blanche's wardrobe looking for legal papers and pulling out clothes and jewellery that to him represent a fortune. His crude violation of Blanche's possessions is an invasion on her privacy i.e. ideal world. In other words, it is an attack of realism on idealism. In the same scene, Blanche forbids Stanley to touch her love-letters. She says that his "hands insult them !" (42). This suggests that his realism contaminates her ideal world. In other words, she shuns realism taking it as vulgar, so it is not supposed to touch her idealism. In Scene Three, Blanche indulges in listening to music on the radio forgetting the real world with romantic gestures. Here, the radio galvanizes Stanley into aggressive action. In his own house, where he is cock of the roost and host of the poker party, the intruder Blanche has lured both his wife and his best friend into her orbit. She has appropriated his radio for her kind of music. In a drunken rage, he throws "the radio out of the window" (57). This is a symbolic attack on Blanche's idealism by Stanley's realism. He is so mad with Blanche's idealistic world that he intends to bring an end to it.

Similarly, in Scene Seven, when Stanley appraises Stella of Blanche's prostitution in Flamingo hotel, he says, "they requested her to turn in her room-key – for permanently !" (99). It is a symbolic effort of realism to uproot Blanche's ideal world. At this dramatic moment, the louder Stanley gets on insisting on the incredible facts about Blanche's past life, the louder Blanche hums in the bathroom. It is a sturdy symbolic clash of their philosophies of life. In Scene Eight, after the candles on the cake are lit to commemorate Blanche's birthday, Stanley presents her with "a little envelope" (111) containing "a ticket back to Laurel" (111). This occasional action represents a realistic effort to avoid the possible contamination of Stanley's real world at the apartment by an idealistic intruder, Blanche. So, again, it is a symbolic clash between idealism and realism.

In Scene Nine, when Mitch is determined to know the real thing about Blanche, he tears the paper lantern off the light bulb and turns the light on. She instantly utters "a frightened gasp" (117) and "cries out" (117). This dramatizes a symbolic clash in which realism appears to dominate idealism which is very fragile and delicate. In Scene Ten, when Blanche is preoccupied with her past memories and unreal things, Stanley scolds her saying, "There wasn't no wire at all !" (127). He further says, "There isn't no millonarie ! And Mitch didn't come back with roses ... " (127). What it signifies here is that realism makes an effort to dominate and completely capture idealism. Realism makes an order to idealism to descend to its cosmos. The climax of such symbolic collision happens to occur in the same scene of the play. As Blanche gets ready to invade Stanley with the help of a broken end of a wine bottle, he overcomes her and makes an angry order, "Drop the bottle top ! Drop it !" (130). This is the extremity of the collision. To put it in another way, idealism is so mad with realism that it wishes to finish it with the broken end of the bottle



whereas realism is happily ready to defame and insult idealism by raping it forgetting the familial and social taboos. In Scene Eleven again, we see that Stanley tears the paper lantern that had been put back on the light bulb. At this dramatic moment, Blanche "cries out as if the lantern was herself" (140). In symbolic terms, this may pinpoint Blanche's definitive retreat from reality into her own world of illusion. Moreover, it suggests that realism seemingly becomes a victor whereas idealism a loser. Such tearing of the paper lantern symbolizes the dilapidation of the idealistic world or the world of timelessness, a true habitat for Blanche. Likewise, in the same scene, the matron attempts to fetch Blanche to an asylum. At that, Blanche "scratches" (141) her which in its symbolic level means that she wishes to disfigure and demolish realism as her hatred and resentment towards it increases boundlessly. In other words, it is the final symbolic invasion of idealism on realism.

Thus, the play tacitly dramatizes a symbolic collision between idealism and realism in the underlying level though there exists a sturdy clash between Blanche and Stanley superficially. They are two hemispheres of *Streetcar* and can never exist alongside; they are two ships which can not be anchored simultaneously. In this sense, Stanley seems to be a masculine sun to evaporate Blanche's feminine mists but at times, Blanche seems to be an executioner of Stanley and his real world. It helps us infer that *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a stage piece that is both personal and social as it encompasses Scene Three and Scene Eleven about poker games that bring together the men, who fought in the war. Not only this, Blanche frequently carries the memories of her encounters with off-duty soldiers at Belle Reve and Laurel. In addition, all the characters are endeavouring to build their own unique lives for themselves in the changing post war America.

## Chapter Four

### Conclusion

Tennessee Williams's masterpiece *A Streetcar Named Desire*, both a play and a film, dramatizes a sturdy clash between Blanche and Stanley on its superficial ordinariness. Williams, in the play, has employed a variety of private symbols so as to give a unique suggestiveness to it. He has, perhaps deliberately, even categorized them into two territories i.e. idealistic and realistic but it is not explicit. He has made a number of symbols exist in order to connote the philosophy of life possessed by Blanche DuBois i.e. idealistic one. Among such symbols, a paper moon, a paper lantern, a ballad, a candle, a bathroom, shadows and cries, a joke or a funny little story, Varsouviana polka music, a palm leaf, a radio, cathedral bells etc. are the prime ones. Besides, Blanche DuBois herself and all her possessions are symbolically presented in the play. Having interpreted and analyzed them in the third chapter, I have reached a conclusion that they refer to the world which is above the level of the real world where we are destined to live. In other words, they represent the world which is imaginative, illusive, unreal, dreamy, timeless, fantastical and idealistic on the whole. Beyond all questions, all these symbols have either implicit or explicit association with Blanche. So, she possesses the idealistic philosophy of life which vigorously clashes with the realistic one. In short, she stands for idealism in the play.

On the contrary, Williams has also made a number of symbols exist in order to connote the philosophy of life adopted by Stanley Kowalski i.e. realistic one. Among such symbols, a package of fresh meat, a hand mirror, coloured lights, a cat, coloured shirts, a bus ticket, Napoleonic code, a chair, fire, a matron and a doctor etc. are the major ones. Having interpreted and analyzed them in the third chapter, I have drawn an inference that they refer to the world which is completely identical to the world

where human beings are destined to live. In other words, they represent the world which is fact-based, practical, legal, day-to-day, social and realistic on the whole. Beyond all questions, all these symbols have either implicit or explicit association with Stanley. So, he possesses the realistic philosophy of life which vigorously collides with the idealistic one. It is undoubtedly an anathema to Blanche's idealistic philosophy of life. In short, he stands for realism in the play.

The play, on its superficial ordinariness, oscillates on the dramatic conflict between Blanche and Stanley. It is merely an external clash which is distinctly visible even on the first reading of the play. This clash establishes an equilibrium of power between Blanche and Stanley proving them to be complex figures in the post World War II America. On re-reading and close inspection of it, readers find a completely diverse issue in the play. This, beyond a doubt, is an underlying symbolic collision between idealism and realism solely based on the employment of a number of private symbols. Such a logical conclusion can be reached on the basis of the excavation, interpretation and thorough analysis of the dominant private symbols done earlier in the preceding chapters. In addition to it, the employment of my theoretical tool "Symbolism" provided me with a crystal clear idea and immense support to make the symbolic collision of the play sail on the dramatic surface.

To put it in a nutshell, Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* dramatizes a surfacial conflict between Blanche Dubois and Stanley Kowalski throughout the play. This conflict, beyond all questions, is an externalization of the underlying symbolic collision between idealism and realism completely based on the extensive exploitation of the private symbols.

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