

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

A
STREETCAR
NAMED
Desire





• **Thomas Lanier "Tennessee" Williams III** (March 26, 1911 – February 25, 1983) was an American playwright and author of many stage classics.

He was born in Columbus, Mississippi of English, Welsh, and Huguenot ancestry, the second child of Edwina Dakin and Cornelius Coffin Williams.

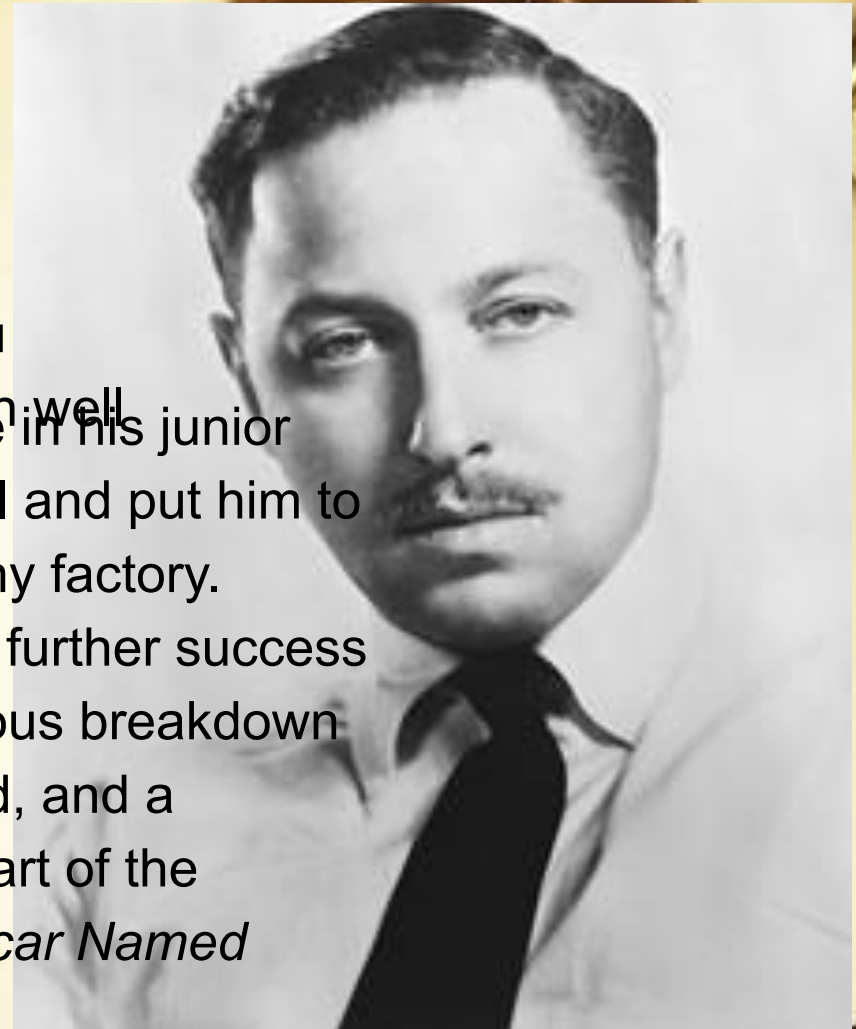
His father was an alcoholic traveling shoe salesman. His mother, Edwina, was the daughter of a music teacher and the Episcopal priest.

Williams had two siblings, sister Rose Isabel Williams and brother Walter Dakin Williams.

Throughout his life Williams remained close to his sister Rose who was diagnosed with schizophrenia_as a

Education and career

- From 1929 to 1931, he attended the University of Missouri, in Columbia where he enrolled in journalism classes.
- There Williams joined the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity, but he did not fit in well with his fraternity brothers.
- After he failed a military training course in his junior year, his father pulled him out of school and put him to work at the International Shoe Company factory. Overworked, unhappy and lacking any further success with his writing he had suffered a nervous breakdown and left his job. Memories of this period, and a particular factory co-worker, became part of the character Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
- In 1936 Williams enrolled at Washington University in St. Louis where he wrote the play *Me, Vashya* (1937).
- By 1938 he had moved on to University of Iowa, where



- In the late 1930s, after years of obscurity, he became suddenly famous with **The Glass Menagerie** (1944), closely reflecting his own unhappy family background. This heralded a string of successes, including **A Streetcar Named Desire** (1947), **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** (1955), and **Sweet Bird of Youth** (1959).
- His drama **A Streetcar Named Desire** is often numbered on the short list of the finest American plays of the 20th century alongside *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Death of a Salesman*.
- Much of Williams' most acclaimed work was adapted for the cinema. He also wrote short stories, poetry, essays and a volume of memoirs.
- In 1979, four years before his death, Williams was inducted into the American Theater Hall of Fame.
- On February 25, 1983, Williams was found dead in his suite at the Elysee Hotel in New York at age 71.

Literary influences

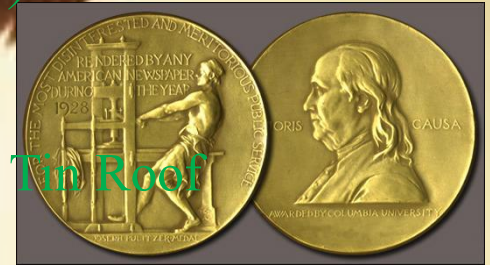
- Williams had three styles of settings. The first, evident in *The Glass Menagerie*, is poetic expressionism; the second is theatricality as in the naturalistic *A Streetcar Named Desire*; the third, as seen in *Suddenly Last Summer*, is symbolic, like Sebastian's lushly symbolic environment.
- Williams' writings include mention of some of the poets and writers he most admired in his early years: Hart Crane, Arthur Rimbaud, Anton Chekhov, William Shakespeare, D. H. Lawrence, August Strindberg, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and Emily Dickinson. In later years the list grew to include William Inge, James Joyce, and Ernest Hemingway.
- Also many critics and historians note that Williams found inspiration for much of his writing in his own dysfunctional family.

Main Literary Awards

Donaldson Award, *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1948)

New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1948), *The Night of the Iguana* (1961)

Pulitzer Prize, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1948), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955)



Tony Award, *The Rose Tattoo* (1952), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *The Night of the Iguana* (1961)



Presidential Medal of Freedom (1980)



A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE



A Streetcar Named Desire was written in 1947 and received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1948. The play opened on Broadway on December 3, 1947, and closed on December 17, 1949, in the Ethel Barrymore Theatre.

A Streetcar Named Desire is often regarded as among the finest plays of the 20th century, and is generally considered to be Williams' greatest.

MAIN CHARACTERS

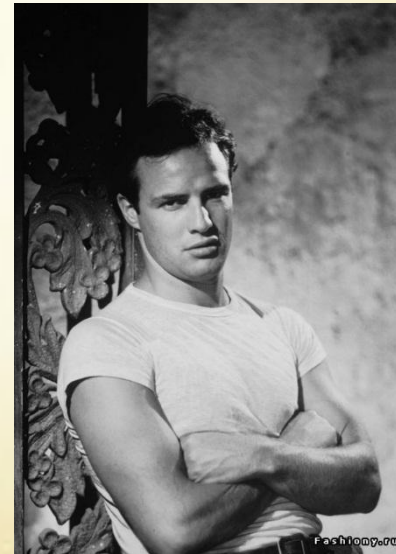
Blanche DuBois

Blanche is an insecure, dislocated individual. She is an aging Southern belle who lives in a state of perpetual panic about her fading beauty. Her manner is dainty and frail, and she sports a wardrobe of showy but cheap evening clothes. Stanley quickly sees through Blanche's act and seeks out information about her past.



Stanley Kowalski

Stanley possesses an animalistic physical vigor that is evident in his love of work, of fighting, and of sex. Stanley represents the new, heterogeneous America to which Blanche doesn't



Harold “Mitch” Mitchell

Mitch doesn't fit the bill of the chivalric hero of whom Blanche dreams. He is clumsy, sweaty, and has unrefined interests like muscle building. Though sensitive, he lacks Blanche's romantic perspective and spirituality.



Stella Kowalski

Stella possesses the same timeworn aristocratic heritage as Blanche, but she jumped the sinking ship in her late teens and left Mississippi for New Orleans. There, Stella married lower-class Stanley, with whom she shares a robust sexual relationship. While she loves and pities



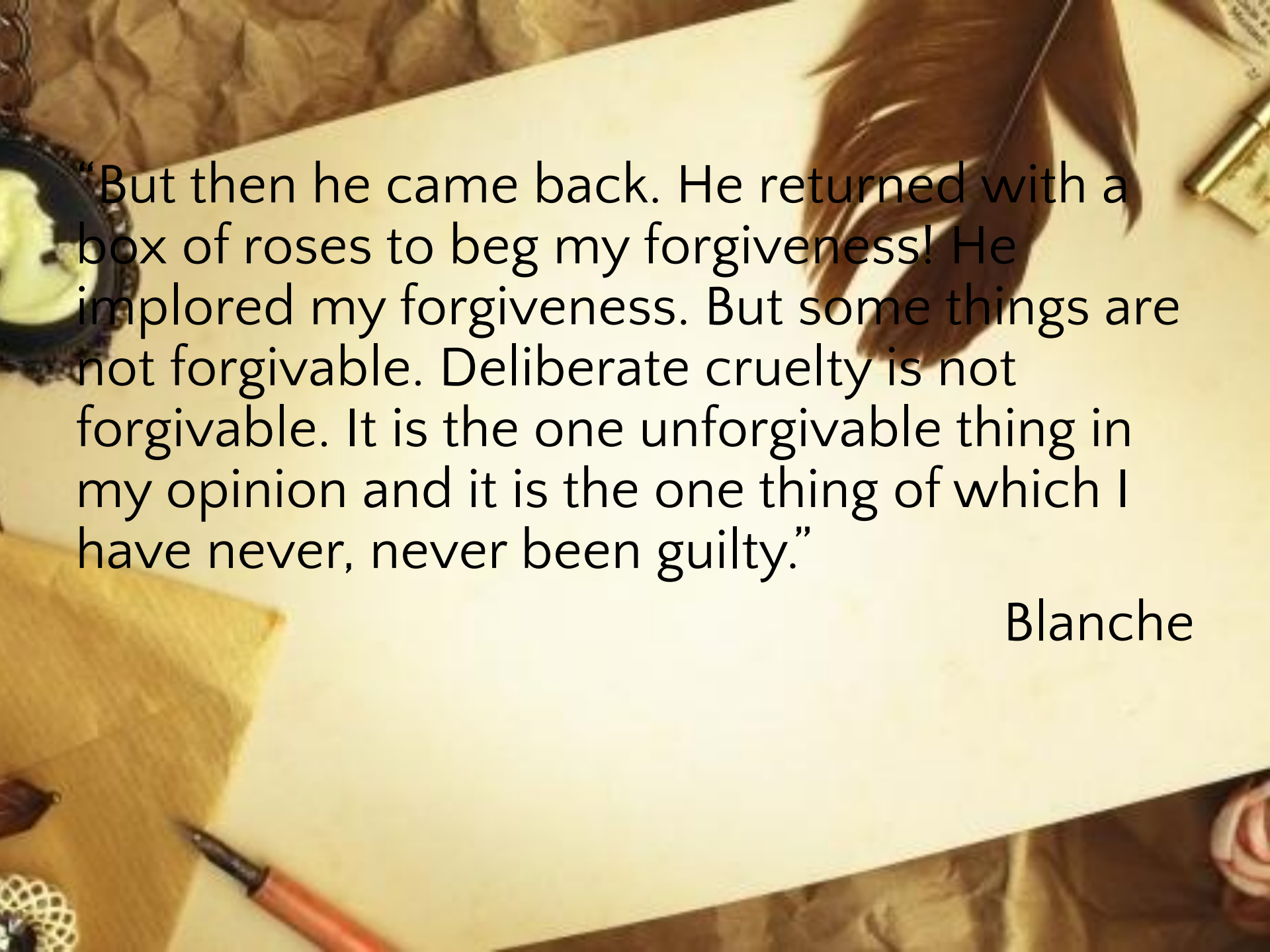
PLOT

Blanche DuBois, a schoolteacher from Laurel, Mississippi, arrives at the New Orleans apartment of her sister, Stella Kowalski, and her husband Stanley on the streetcar called "Desire", hoping to get a respite and to forget about her past though for some period of time. With bad nerves and almost broken with life after the chain of great failures, she falls in love with Mitch, Stanley's army friend and co-worker. Things could go better but there she finds not only friends, but enemies. Stanley hates Blanche, because she's from another world: intelligent, well-dressed and fragile. Blanche thinks the same way of Stanley – her antipode: rude, tough, with a sleeping soul. Stanley tries to unmask her and reveal her failures. He finds them: Blanche has a disreputable past: after her former husband committed suicide, she slid down: started to drink a lot, slept with a lot of strangers and even lost their with Stella ancestral home. When Mitch learns this stuff, he rejects Blanche, despite several days ago he was firm to propose her. At the end of

QUOTES

“I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft—soft people have got to shimmer and glow—they've got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and put a—paper lantern over the light.... It isn't enough to be soft. You've got to be soft and attractive. And I—I'm fading now! I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick.”

Blanche

A close-up photograph of a desk with a white sheet of paper. On the desk, there is a pen with an orange and black barrel, a brown feather, and a small black dish containing a dollop of yellow butter. The background is a textured, brown surface.

“But then he came back. He returned with a box of roses to beg my forgiveness! He implored my forgiveness. But some things are not forgivable. Deliberate cruelty is not forgivable. It is the one unforgivable thing in my opinion and it is the one thing of which I have never, never been guilty.”

Blanche

FORM & STRUCTURE

- *A Streetcar Named Desire* is episodic. A drawing of the play's structure traces the conflict between Blanche and Stanley and also parallels the state of Blanche's emotional and mental health
- 11 scenes occurring in chronological order and taking place between May and September.
- Intermissions at natural breaks in the action. A second break sometimes occurs when Scene Six concludes.
- A rhythm in the action of the play, a pulsing series of episodes, which may explain why Williams chose to build the play using several short scenes instead of a few longer acts. A rhythm of conflict and reconciliation: Stanley and Stella have a row, then make up. Eunice and Steve fight, then make up.

STYLE

In his play, Tennessee Williams employs several theatrical techniques in the work which blur the lines between reality and fantasy. These include lighting shifts, the introduction of musical scoring, and distorted voices which arise from Blanche's mind. The effect of these techniques is that it gives the audience the perception of viewing the world through the characters' eyes as opposed to remaining completely objective spectators.

GENRE PECULIARITIES

- Tennessee Williams' play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, is both a mixture of *drama and melodrama*.
- The fact that Blanche was a character recognized for her dramatic sighs, overly emotional outbursts, and inappropriate flirtatious nature can support the melodramatic characteristics of the play.
- Some critics have identified it as one which belongs to the genre of *dramatic naturalism*. Naturalistic writers were ones who wrote about the power of nature over mankind. Regardless of what mankind would do, nature would always win.
- *A Streetcar Named Desire* has no narrator to tell you the story. The story is presented as it is in most plays-by characters simply playing their parts. What the characters represent, how they interact, how they resolve conflicts all help to establish the playwright's point of view.

SYMBOLS

The Streetcar

Williams called the streetcar the “ideal metaphor for the human condition.” The play’s title refers not only to a real streetcar line in New Orleans but also symbolically to the power of desire as the driving force behind the characters’ actions.

Varsouviana Polka

Blanche associates the polka with her young husband’s suicide. Blanche and her husband were dancing the polka when she lashed out at him for his homosexual behavior, and he left the dance floor and shot himself.

Bathing

Blanche takes frequent baths throughout the play to “soothe her nerves.” Bathing is an escape from the sweaty apartment: rather than confront her physical body in the light of day, Blanche retreats to the water to attempt to cleanse herself and forget reality

*The **spilt coke** on Blanche’s skirt is another symbol, recalling the blood spilt by her husband’s suicide.*

On another level **Stanley and Blanche** are the symbols of two Americas: the new America of the immigrants, urban, egalitarian, ruthless, vibrantly alive, against the decadent old plantation culture rooted in the slavery system.

The "blue piano" is a symbol of the callous vitality of the Vieux Carré of New Orleans, while the "Varsouviana" polka represents the tragedy in Blanche's past.

Paper Lantern and Paper Moon

The paper lantern over the light bulb represents **Blanche's** attempt to mask both her sordid past and her present appearance. A paper world cloaking reality also appears in the song "Paper Moon."

Alcohol and Drunkenness

Both **Stanley** and **Blanche** drink frequently throughout the play. When Stanley gets drunk, his masculinity becomes exaggerated: he grows increasingly physical, violent, and brutal. Blanche uses drinking as an escape mechanism

Shadows

Shadows represent the dream-world and the escape from the light of day. Initially, **Blanche** seeks the refuge of shadows and half-light to hide from the harsh facts of the real world

MAIN THEMES

- **Fantasy and Delusion**

The tension between fantasy and reality centers on Blanche's relationship with both other characters and the world around her. Blanche doesn't want realism—she wants magic—but magic must yield to the light of day.

- **Sexual Desire**

Many critics believe that Williams invented the idea of desire for the 20th century. The power of sexual desire is the engine propelling *A Streetcar Named Desire*: all of the characters are driven by “that rattle-trap street-car” in various ways.

- **Interior and Exterior Appearance**

The audience of *Streetcar* sees both the inside of the **Kowalskis'** apartment as well as the street, which emphasizes the tense relationship between what is on the outside and what is on the inside throughout the play.

- **Masculinity and Physicality**

Masculinity, particularly in **Stanley**, is linked to the idea of a brute, aggressive, animal force as well as carnal lust. His brute strength is emphasized frequently throughout, and he asserts dominance aggressively through loud actions and violence.

- **Femininity and Dependence**

Blanche and **Stella** demonstrate two different types of femininity in the play, yet both find themselves dependent on men. Both Blanche and Stella define themselves in terms of the men in their lives, and they see relationships with men as the only avenue for happiness and fulfillment.

A top-down view of a vintage-style desk. The desk is covered with a light-colored, textured paper. In the top left corner, there is a small, dark, ornate frame containing a portrait of a woman. To the right of the frame, a quill pen lies horizontally. In the bottom left corner, a fountain pen with a dark barrel and a silver nib is visible. The background is a textured, brownish surface, possibly a corkboard or a piece of paper. The text "Thank you for attention" is written in a large, black, cursive font across the center of the page.

*Thank you for
attention*