



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE IMAGES OF LIGHT, DARKNESS AND THE MOTH IN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*

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Abstract

Objectives of the study: This study aims to present a critical analysis of the significance of the images of light and darkness in association with the image of the moth in Tennessee Williams' most famous play: *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It also showcases the tremendous contribution of these images to the vigour and depth of many aspects of the play.

Methodology: The article presents a close analysis of textual evidence from the play, following a comparative approach in the study of these images, and is constructed around discussions of their contribution to the thematic and structural aspects of the play. Juxtaposing these images as part of the binary oppositions in the play reveals its richness and depth.

Main Findings: The images of light, darkness, and the moth serve a variety of purposes. They are strongly related to the thematic structure of and characterization in the play. They are also important for demonstrating the poetic touch characteristic of the play. The combination of the images illuminates Blanche's dilemma as a broken Southern belle, her frustration, inevitable deterioration, and eventual downfall.

Application of the study: This article contributes to the body of the critical study of Williams' drama, in particular, and the study of literature, in general. Given the variety of imagery in the literary canon in all genres, this study can be useful to students and researchers alike in their analyses and appreciation of the significance of imagery in literature.

The novelty of this study: This study opens up new venues for the discussion of the play. It also illuminates some aspects of the character of Blanche DuBois which cannot otherwise be illuminated and, at the same time, gives a deep insight into the play as a whole.

Keywords: *Streetcar, Blanche, Stanley, the South, Imagery.*

INTRODUCTION

In his dramatization of the tragedy of Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*¹, Tennessee Williams, one of the most prominent American dramatists in the twentieth century, presents his view about and commentary on the deterioration and destruction of the Old South along with its traditional values and institutions. Blanche, the heroine of the play, is presented as a faded Southern belle who was traditionally regarded as the symbol of honor and the emblem of purity and chastity – she thinks of herself as one who tries to cling tenaciously to the values of the Old South and wants others to treat her as such. In other words, she desperately seeks love and attention from people around her (Gencheva, 2016). She is representative of Southern society in her pretentiousness, anachronism, and in the conflict and dichotomy within her between chastity and debauchery. Hence, her downfall is symbolic of that of her society.

Images of light and darkness in *A Streetcar Named Desire* are of paramount importance not only because they are closely associated with its thematic structure and linked to almost every single theme the play deals with, but also because they are skillfully used in invigorating the poetic aspect of the play. They are at the heart of Blanche's tragedy in all its manifestations and are an integral part of her experience from the moment she fell in love with Allan Grey, her late husband, to the moment she is taken to the mental asylum. They are also related to the conflict between Blanche and Stanley, to the relationship between Stanley and Stella, to the relationship between Blanche and Mitch, to sexuality, and Williams' presentation of it. At the same time, they are inexorably linked to the image of the moth, which is of crucial significance for delineating the character of Blanche and dramatizing her tragedy.

So here in this study author is intended to present a critical analysis of the significance of the images of light and darkness in association with the image of the moth in Tennessee Williams' most famous play: *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It also showcases the tremendous contribution of these images to the vigour and depth of many aspects of the play.

LITERATURE REVIEW

IMAGERY

According to [The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics \(1993\)](#), imagery can be described as "images produced in mind by language, whose words may refer either to experiences which could produce physical perceptions, where the reader actually to have those experiences or to the sense impressions themselves". In general, the use of images makes

¹Further references to this edition are cited parenthetically: Williams, T. (1982). *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Beirut: Librairie Du Liban Paperbacks.

abstract concepts more concrete and easier to communicate (Llorens, 2003). Eliot (1974), for instance, utilizes the image of the "The Waste Land" which suggests aridity, drought, barrenness, or heat to clarify the abstract notions about the place where he lived, such as hopelessness, materialism, and shock after a devastating war.

Although an image means a picture, it doesn't have to be only visual. Generally, images have been classified into a number of subcategories that either refer to bodily processes and movements (i.e. organic imagery of breathing and heartbeat or kinaesthetic imagery) or appeal to the five senses (i.e. visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory).

Imagery is significant to literature, as, without it, literature would be dry and distasteful; as DiYanni (2007, p. 793) puts it, "it is through our senses that we perceive the world." The use of imagery has proved its significance in colouring the language in works of art and making them more imaginative and expressive. For example, back in time, William Shakespeare gained a huge reputation as a "great literary author" since the First Folio edition of his plays; they were not only acted but also published for interested readers and critics who only had to visualize the plays in their minds in 1623 when attention had shifted into imagery (Llorens, 2003).

This very study focuses on discussing imagery, specifically the images of light, darkness, and the moth, in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Hence, the scope of this study will be re-shifted to be concerned only with Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The next subheading discusses previous studies on Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and presents the research gap that the current study aims to bridge.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

One study looks at *A Streetcar Named Desire* from a psychological and medical point of view. For instance, Carmichael (2017) discusses in detail the initial onset of trauma and the symptoms of PTSD (Post-traumatic demoralization syndrome) of Blanche, the heroine of the play. Carmichael (2017) describes Blanche's failed attempts to recover, and that although she survives PTSD, she is unable to forgive herself for the suicide of Allan which she witnessed, and, finally, she becomes a victim of withdrawal from reality.

Interestingly, another study focuses on Tennessee Williams's heavy reliance on music, an auditory image, in a way to make the audience understand the way Blanche collapsed in his play (Maiman, 2004).

Additionally, Bak (2004) focuses on the issues that bothered critics of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Specifically, he comprehensively explains the main issues whose evolutions occurred as a result to the changing needs of the academic community over the years.

From a social point of view, Gros (2010) discusses the way Southern writers deal with Southern elite masculinity in their works deriving much evidence from Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire* for the insights it offers of the Southern elite masculinity. The study attempts at examining how the masculine ideals of the Old South were preserved, even in times of crisis, and how southern elite men maintained a distinctive Southern model of masculinity at the time other men rejected and resisted those ideals.

Foster (2007) explains why William's play is a tragicomedy integrating both weeping and laughing which leave the audience with both a less tensed and a more disturbing experience than what a tragedy alone might offer, all in addition to an experience that meets the preferences of all audiences in mid- to late-twentieth-century America.

Thompson (2002) discusses the tragic symbols of isolation, madness, and death along with the romantic images of rescue and redemption and the comic images of reunion and rebirth through different scenes of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and further explains how the play's romance, myth, and tragedy all become ironic.

As it can be noticed, several studies have viewed Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire* from different perspectives and to meet different ends. However, seldom have studies concentrated on imagery, especially the images of light and darkness in association with the image of the moth in the analysis of the play. Given the recurrence of these images and their tremendous contribution to the thematic, structural, and stylistic aspects of the play, they merit a thorough investigation, and the current study serves a good purpose in seeking to bridge this important gap and to give the play a broader perspective and a new approach for better understanding of these elements that have not been duly considered and their impact on the overall meaning of the play.

METHODOLOGY

The secondary data has been used for a close analysis of textual evidence from the play, following a comparative approach in the study of these images, and is constructed around discussions of their contribution to the thematic and structural aspects of the play. Juxtaposing these images as part of the binary oppositions in the play reveals its richness and depth.

DISCUSSION

THE TRAGEDY OF BLANCHE DUBOIS

Although the play is basically concerned with the tragedy of Blanche DuBois as representative of the decay of the Old South, critical attention is mostly focused on the conflict between Blanche and Stanley Kowalski which represents the conflict between two entirely different mentalities and contradictory ways of life: between traditional culture and values and the thrusting materialism of the new world. The various dimensions of this conflict: the ideological, social, economic, and literary, have been thoroughly investigated -- a reference to [Tharpe's \(1977\)](#) huge collection of essays on Williams' canon, in general, and on *A Streetcar*, in particular: Tennessee Williams: A Tribute ([Tharpe, 1977](#)) shows the great critical attention the play has received, let alone the great number of books and essays. While those studies demonstrate the play's dramatic depth and strength, they have ignored the more comprehensive view of the plight of Blanche which the conflict with Stanley is only part of. The play dramatizes only the last stages of Blanche's perdition, and, therefore, her conflict with Stanley and his so-called victory over her cannot be regarded as being the only factor behind her destruction, nor are they the most important ones. Viewed in the light of her promiscuity and her admiration for Stanley's virility, the rape in Scene Ten is not uninvited—carrying her to the bed, Stanley reminds her: "We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" (103) Stanley perhaps reminds her of her attempt to lure him as early as Scene Two when leaving the bathroom, she shouts to him: "Hello, Stanley! Here I am, all freshly bathed and scented, and feeling like a brand-new human being!" (23). [Adams \(2014\)](#) focusses on the intended impact of Blanche's perfume on Stanley: "Her perfume later in Scene Two demonstrates itself to have a power of its own, having an ability to influence even the behavior and temperament of Stanley". [Roderick \(1977, p. 118\)](#) confirms this point when he says: "Blanche as much as Stanley is to blame for the rape". Her tragedy started a long time ago with the catastrophic death of her young husband, Allan Grey. The play can, therefore, be regarded as consisting of two plays – a play within a play. In other words, *A Streetcar*, in its dramatization of the final stages of Blanche's destruction, is part of a larger play that can be conveniently called: The Tragedy of Blanche DuBois. For, through this perspective, many important elements in the play, including the images of light and darkness, acquire the totality necessary for a comprehensive view and full understanding of the play.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

It is noteworthy that one of the salient structural features of the play is that it is presented in terms of binary oppositions and a long series of differences and contradictions. Underscoring this point, [Griffin \(1995, p. 45\)](#) says: "The dramatic tensions of *A Streetcar Named Desire* are built on contrasts—in theme, in setting, in characters, in language, in action." Standing in sharp contrast with each other, the images of light and those of darkness are only one pair out of the many elements that form the polarity on which almost the whole structure of the play is built: past/present; traditional society/modern society; culture/power; values/vulgarity; fact/fiction; fancy/reality; innocence/experience; body/soul; kindness/brutality, not to mention the list of oppositions made by [Panda \(2016\)](#).

The relationship with Allan Grey is the single event that sums up both her beautiful and tragic experiences in life at the same time. It represents the apogee, the climax, and the catastrophic conclusion of her life simultaneously despite the fact that it is not dramatized in the play -- indeed, with the exception of a single statement by Blanche in the course of a conversation with Mitch in Scene Six in which each remembers the tragic loss of their dearest, there is only a fleeting reference to it in the whole play. Yet, it is the essence of the play, and any attempt to fully understand the play will only be reductive if it does not start from this point and try to assimilate its full dimensions and implications. For, what is particularly unique about this play is that the climax and the catastrophic conclusion precede the denouement — the whole play, then, is a slow and gradual presentation and the unravelling of the denouement, the long and painful process of the deterioration and eventual destruction of Blanche DuBois. In this context, it is possible to see the play as an animated representation and magnification of the moral, psychological, and even mental destruction of Blanche the moment her husband shot himself dead immediately after she tainted him of homosexuality and moral corruption: "I know! I know! You disgust me ..." (6. p.72). Commenting on this point, [Bertens and D'haen \(2014, p. 202\)](#), in their book *American Literature: A History*, say: "In *Streetcar* ... Williams plays with the theatrical conventions — we repeatedly hear the gunshot that killed Blanche's husband", a gunshot that triggered a chain of catastrophes for Blanche.

THE IMAGES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS AND BLANCHE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ALLAN

In Scene Six, Blanche describes the happiest period in her life – that is, her romance with Allan Grey, the young and tender poet whose sudden emergence in the life of the young Blanche changed it dramatically:

When I was sixteen, I made the discovery – love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that's how it struck the world for me. (p. 70)

What is particularly significant about this statement is not only the fact that it is highly suggestive of the great change Allan's love made in Blanche's personality but also its undeniably economical presentation of such a turning point in her life. Clearly, this is possible only because Blanche, a high-school teacher of English, who possesses poetic sensibility, skilfully uses images of light and darkness to describe the most important moment in her life when Allan Grey captured

her heart. In other words, Blanche's happiest moment is encapsulated in merely one image of light and darkness. No words can better describe the depth of this experience than this recurrent image which constitutes an important pattern of Williams' poetic language.

These images are instrumental for delineating Blanche's personality, mapping her psychology, and bringing to light her inner world. By juxtaposing the images of light and darkness, we learn a lot about the character of Blanche. Before she met Allan, she led a normal life characterized by its ups and downs, bloom and gloom, and by light and darkness. The appearance of Allan made a radical change in the pattern of her life – blissful happiness prevailed, and gloom and darkness receded to the point of no existence. The light of Allan's love illuminated the dark side of Blanche's life and personality.

In her account of an equally important turning point in her life, that is, the tragic death of her husband, Allan Grey, Blanche again resorts to the images of light and darkness to describe her tragedy and the catastrophic consequences of Allan's suicide. Again, in Scene Six, she tells Mitch:

And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again
and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this –
kitchen – candle. (p. 72)

Ever since that tragedy, Blanche's life has turned into a series of calamities -- misfortunes have befallen her one after the other. They have played havoc with her life until it has become terribly unbearable. In fact, Blanche has suffered from almost every kind of adversity and disaster. The suicide of her husband seems to have opened the door for every possible catastrophe. The death of the members of her family, one after the other, was tragic not only because of its familial and social overtones and repercussions but also for its psychological consequences on her. Blanche witnessed the pain, the suffering, and the death of her dearest and nearest alone -- Stella had already run away with Stanley Kowalski, looking after her own interests and leaving Blanche alone to deal with that terrible succession of deaths. In one of the longest passages in the play, she describes her painful experience:

I, I, I took the blows in my face and my body! All of those deaths! The long parade
to the graveyard! Father, mother! Margaret, that dreadful way! ... Unless you were
there at the bed when they cried out, 'Hold me!' you'd never suspect there was the
struggle for breath and bleeding. You didn't dream, but I saw! Saw! Saw! ... Why,
the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorsteps! Belle Reve was his
headquarters! (1. p. 14-15)

The loss of Belle Reve, the big plantation of the DuBois aristocratic family, as a result of various factors, has contributed immensely to the deterioration of Blanche's circumstances to the point of despair. In her book, *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams*, [Murphy \(2014, p. 77\)](#), describes Blanche's plight, saying that "The loss of the security represented by both the home place and the identity conferred by the tradition has sent Blanche on a desperate search for something to replace it". At this stage, Blanche has become bereft of everything – she has been spared nothing to depend on. She is now in the middle of nowhere after circumstances have closed in on her -- she is destroyed emotionally, psychologically, socially, and financially. She is beyond redemption as there is no glimpse of hope for salvation in the middle of the darkness she has found herself engulfed in. This is not untypical of the circumstances of Williams' heroes – in fact, almost all of his heroes find themselves in similar predicaments where they cannot depend on anything because there is simply nothing to depend on. This is a recurrent leitmotif in Williams' canon due, as [Falk \(1985, p. 155\)](#), in his book, *Tennessee Williams* puts it, to his "preoccupation with the ugly world in which monsters and hypocrites destroy the defeated, frustrated little people".

WILLIAMS' PERCEPTION AND PRESENTATION OF SEXUALITY

Sexuality is undeniably one of the central themes not only in this play but also in Williams' canon; for as [Sternlicht \(2002, p. 110\)](#), in his book *A Reader's Guide to Modern American Drama*, suggests, "sexuality is the primary force in human relations." Sexuality is also closely associated with almost every single issue the play deals with. The title of the play is indicative of its significance. It is at the heart not only of Blanche's tragedy from beginning to end but also of the personal concerns of the characters as well as of the thematic structure of the play as a whole. What characterizes Williams' view and presentation of sexuality, not only in this play but also in his canon, is ambivalence. Sexuality is presented in both negative and positive terms. It is, therefore, necessary at this stage to examine the ambivalence of the presentation of sexuality on two levels: in relation to Blanche's personal experience and tragedy, and the contradiction between her experience, on the one hand, and that of the other characters, particularly her sister Stella, on the other.

Right from the beginning of the play in Scene One, sexuality is presented in a dark image. It is greatly ironic and highly suggestive that in her first statement in the play, Blanche establishes the inexorable link between death and desire when she tells Eunice, her sister's neighbour: "They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at – Elysian Fields!" (1. P. 5). It is equally telling that the high-school superintendent who fired Blanche from her job for her involvement with one of her students is called Mr. Graves (1. p.

10). And nowhere is the link between death and sexuality expressed in stronger terms than in Scene Nine when Blanche makes a statement which is one of the hallmarks of the play – she tells Mitch: "Death -- ... The opposite is desire" (94).

So, in Blanche's experience, sexuality is synonymous with death and destruction and is, therefore, strongly associated with darkness. It is a subversive and destructive force that is primarily responsible for her collapse and eventual destruction. When the play opens, Blanche is at the end of her tether – she is on the verge of collapse. She comes to live with her only sister, Stella Kowalski after she has lost everything: her husband, her family, Belle Reve, and her job, and after she has been dismissed from the Flamingo Hotel in Laurel where she used to stay after the loss of Belle Reve. In other words, Blanche has lost, as [Murphy \(2014, p. 77\)](#), puts it, her "chosen identity" which "is rooted in the tradition of Southern gentility which is materially represented in Belle Reve". She has suffered from this long series of catastrophes behind every single one of which lurks sexuality. The death of Allan was due to his homosexuality; the loss of Belle Reve to what Blanche calls the "epic fornications" (2. p. 28) of the male members of the DuBois family; the loss of her job to her involvement with one of her students; and her dismissal from the Flamingo Hotel to her excessive sexuality. In this context, it is most fitting that her eventual destruction and removal to the mental asylum come after Stanley's rape of her at the end of Scene Ten. This is a horrible indication of the catastrophic consequences of sexuality in Williams' view – as [Embrey \(1980, p. 65\)](#) says "Most of TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' [sic] characters eventually discover there is no fate worse than sex; desire maims and kills, often in the most violent fashion".

Moreover, Blanche associates sexuality with darkness and bestiality. When, in Scene Four, after Stanley beats Stella up in front of her sister and his friends in Scene three, Stella justifies her strong attachment to him on the basis that "there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark – that sort of make everything else seem – unimportant" (50), Blanche immediately excoriates the basis of this relationship. She labels it "brutal desire" and associates it with bestiality and darkness that characterize the modern world Williams presents.

Stella is down-to-earth and realistic; she understands that life is hard, and survival requires compromise. Female characters in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, such as Stella and Eunice, as [Magdić \(2016, p. 9\)](#) says, ignore their husbands' brute side and accept only their affections: "They have to do that because they have no other choice. They are all depending on male characters and are driven by sexual desire. They all subordinate their lives to men and are unable to set themselves free in order to live more independently." In this context, it has to be said that this sense of security is not without a price; [Mavretić \(2019, p. 8\)](#) argues that their dependence on their husbands results in the loss of "their independence and identity." This, dependence on a male figure for protection is the very essence of the lesson that Blanche refuses to understand although she, later in Scene 5, uses it as an excuse for her ill reputation for her excessive sexuality: "soft people have got to court the favour of hard ones" (57). Yet, frustrated at her failure to convince Stella to leave Stanley, Blanche makes a final pathetic appeal to her sister to join her and to abandon her husband, who belongs to the forces of darkness, because they belong to two different and contradictory worlds: Blanche and Stella are on the side of light, whereas Stanley and his friends belong to the world of darkness that prevails over humanity: "In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching Don't hang back with the brutes!" (4. p. 52).

However, in Blanche's experience, sexuality assumes a positive role and is presented in images of light. She believes that throughout the different stages of her plight, she has found in sexuality the panacea she has been desperate for. The death of her husband destroyed her equilibrium and created too huge a vacuum in her life for anything to fill. Hence, she resorted to sexuality to fill that vacuum. In Scene Nine, she makes a shocking confession to Mitch:

After the death of Allan -- intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with. ... I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection – here and there, in the most – unlikely places – even, at last, in a seventeen-year-old boy. (p. 93)

Similarly, after the death of her family and the loss of Belle Reve with all the social and moral prestige that was associated with it, sexuality for Blanche has become a means of protection and a vehicle for survival in a brutal world. Sexuality seems to have offered her a light of hope at the end of the long tunnel of darkness she had been long lost in. In Scene Five, she makes a telling, albeit pathetic, confession to her sister, Stella, in which she tries to justify her resorting to sexuality, particularly after Stanley has questioned her about her connection with the Flamingo Hotel in Laurel:

I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft – soft people have got to court the favour of hard ones, Stella. Have got to be seductive -- ... just in order to pay for -- one night's shelter! That's why I've been—not so awf' ly good lately. I've run for protection, Stella, from under one leaky roof to another leaky roof – because it was a storm – all storm, and I was – caught in the center. ... People don't see you – men don't – don't even admit your existence unless they are making love to you. And you've got to have your existence admitted by someone, if you're going to have someone's protection. And so the soft people have got to -- shimmer and glow -- put a – paper lantern over the light. (p. 57)

This statement is particularly important; it underlines the overwhelming darkness and harsh circumstances that have driven Blanche to sexuality. She calls it "temporary magic" (p. 57), which she resorted to for protection and survival.

She seems convinced that it has so far paid off and been useful. Therefore, she is trying to play it again now with Mitch, on whom she pins her hopes of redemption through marriage. For what she desires so deeply is, as [Kolin \(1993, p. 110\)](#), in *Confronting Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire*, says,

lovemaking with a man who will care for and desire her, a man who will chase her into matrimony and give her safety". Hence, she tells Stella: "I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again! Yes – I want Mitch ... very badly! Just think! If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone's problem" ([5. p. 59](#)).

Sexuality plays, in Blanche's view, a positive and rather therapeutic role and, therefore, is presented in a bright image. And nowhere is it presented in more positive terms than at the end of Scene Six after Mitch offers Blanche the prospect of salvation through sexuality and marriage. Having been deeply moved by Blanche's story of the tragic death of her husband, Mitch, "drawing her slowly into his arms", proposes to her saying: "You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be – you and me, Blanche?" ([6. p.72](#)). Blanche's response reflects the value of such an offer and her desperate need for such a gesture at this critical moment in her life: "Sometimes – there's God – so quickly!" ([6. p. 72](#)). At this moment, Mitch assumes the role of the God of light that she hopes will deliver her from the darkness. And this is exactly what she tells him in their last meeting in Scene Nine: "I met you. You said you needed somebody. Well, I needed somebody, too. I thanked God for you because you seemed to be gentle – a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in!" ([p. 93](#)). By the same token, Mitch's desertion of her at the end of Scene Nine when he tells her: "You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother" ([p. 95](#)), blows out that light and leaves her in total darkness for Stanley to exercise his authority over her being the king of the world of darkness. In fact, Mitch's desertion of Blanche has devastated her beyond redemption -- it has been catastrophic and has driven her mad. Hence, the view held by almost all critics that Stanley's rape of Blanche is primarily responsible for her madness overlooks the fact that in Scene Ten when Stanley comes back home from the hospital, Blanche has already been hallucinating. She has already lost touch with the real world and started to live in a world of her imagination.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STELLA AND STANLEY

However, through the experience of the other characters in the play, sexuality is presented in images of light – it is positive, healthy, and fruitful. Sexual joy and satisfaction are the most obvious aspects of the relationships between the two couples the play features: Stanley and Stella, and Steve and Eunice. The play dramatizes many occasions which demonstrate that the relationship between Stanley and Stella is basically centered on sensual gratification, which is singled out as the most potent force behind the stability of that relationship that, after the arrival of Blanche, has sustained and survived devastating shocks: the Poker Night incident, Stanley's brutal treatment of Blanche at her birthday party, his brutal rape of her in Scene Ten, and his removal of her to the mental asylum at the end of the play. This is because Stella, who is supposed to take action against Stanley, abides by her motto which she bluntly states when Blanche barrages her with criticism for going back to Stanley after the Poker Night: "There are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark – that sort of make everything else seem – unimportant" ([4. p. 50](#)).

This statement is important for many reasons. First, it demonstrates that the relationship between Stella and Stanley is firmly established on sexual satisfaction, hence, sexuality takes on a positive dimension – it promotes tolerance and broadens the area of sympathy. It, therefore, seems to mean more than the physical union of bodies because it generates genuine and lasting love. This is further enhanced by the fact that, near the end of the play, Stella and Stanley have a new baby, the fruit of their sexuality, which is going to forge a stronger tie between them. Moreover, the connection between sexuality and darkness in this statement is particularly important for showing the difference between the views of the two sisters on sexuality and the significance of the images of light and darkness. Blanche uses the image of darkness to condemn sexuality and also her sister for succumbing to the lure of desire. But Blanche's pretentiousness and contradiction are soon to be exposed when, in Scene Five and later in Scene Nine, she admits that her sexual relationships were the only means of survival.

Concerning Stella's standpoint, this statement is extremely suggestive. For although she associates sexuality with darkness, Stella, in fact, though indirectly, underscores the bright image of sexuality and reinforces its role in vanquishing darkness – the joy of sexuality turns darkness into broad daylight. This point is emphasized at the end of Scene Three when Stella goes back to Stanley although he has humiliated her in front of her sister and his friends. At this moment, the stage directions suggest that:

STELLA slips down the rickety stairs in her robe. Her eyes are glistening with tears and her hair loose about her throat and shoulders. They stare at each other. Then they come together with low, animal moans. He falls on his knees on the steps and presses his face to her belly, curving a little with maternity. Her eyes go blind with tenderness as she catches his head and raises him level with her. He snatches the screech door open and lifts her off her feet and bears her into the dark flat. ([p. 42](#))

So, the Kowalskis' flat is described as being "dark", but its darkness is metaphorical. Its darkness is suggestive of the rift between Stanley and Stella, but their sexual intercourse soon turns that "darkness" into the light, and the small flat

sustains and survives the first menacing external threat posed by the outsider, Blanche. Hence, when early the following morning Blanche goes to see her sister, the stage directions suggest that:

STELLA is lying down in the bedroom. Her face is serene in the early morning sunlight. One hand rests on her belly, rounding slightly with maternity. ... Her eyes and lips have that almost narcotized tranquility that is in the faces of Eastern idols. (4. p. 44)

This point is again underlined in Scene Eight when Stanley's savage maltreatment of Blanche at her birthday party deeply antagonizes Stella to the point that she starts to have the first labor pains and is soon taken to hospital. Stanley reminds Stella how:

[w]hen we first met, me and you, you thought I was common. How right you was, baby. I was common as dirt. You showed me the snapshot of the place with the columns. I pulled you down off them columns and how you loved it, having them coloured lights going! And wasn't we happy together, wasn't it all okay till she showed here? (8. p. 86-87)

Stanley's statement is particularly significant; sexuality is associated with the "coloured lights" which suggest a rainbow that appears only during the daylight. This again reinforces the point that to Stanley and Stella the mutual sexual passion turns darkness into daylight. This statement also shows that sexuality demolishes social barriers – Stanley is level with Stella by virtue of his virility and the joy he gives to Stella. [Gencheva \(2016, p. 35\)](#) underlines this point when she says that Stella "removes herself from the insalubrious surroundings and allows herself to be brought down to earth by Stanley, accepting her raw sexuality and exploring it with him". So, while Stella's view of sexuality is clear, Blanche's is ambivalent and contradictory and is symptomatic of her confusion which is clear from the very beginning of the play. When Blanche first appears, the stage directions focus on her "uncertain manner" (1. p. 5). And at the end of Scene Three, she tells Mitch: "There's so much – so much confusion in the world" (p. 43). Hence her ambivalence towards light and darkness. And the great irony is that in Blanche's experience, light and darkness have become intermingled to the point that they are interchangeable in the sense that they have become synonymous with each other. After the catastrophes she experienced, Blanche has become engulfed in darkness. Each catastrophe had driven her further into darkness. Ironically, it is only through sexuality that she seems to have found a glimpse of light and hope through momentarily. And this is the biting irony not only of Blanche's fate but also in the play. Blanche has sought relief and redemption in the very fundamental and basic factor behind her tragedy which is her excessive sexuality. Darkness becomes the source of light for Blanche as much as its antithesis and the force that snuffs it out from her life.

LIGHT AND REALITY

Throughout the play, Blanche holds the flag of light and "art" (4. p. 52), and is "the representative of the cultural and ideal" ([Adler, 1977, p. 40](#)) in the face of the dark, savage, and primitive world of Stanley. Light is the symbol of reality. Yet, Blanche cannot bear it; throughout her experience, light has become associated with destruction and with reality, which has brought about her perdition. Therefore, soon after her arrival at her sister's flat, she asks Stella to "turn that over-light off! Turn it off! I won't be looked at in this merciless glare!" (1. p. 8). She is keen to seem attractive and beautiful, the Southern belle she once was. [Matos \(2015\)](#) confirms this point, saying that "[d]espite her financial problems, Blanche tries to be a glamorous woman." Moreover, Blanche is strongly sensitive to light, which reveals her real age; [Gencheva \(2016, p. 32\)](#) attributes that to the fact that "Being instructed that her essential trait is her physical beauty, she finds herself lost in a state of perpetual panic about her fading looks." Therefore, she later covers the light with a paper lantern, which, according to [Piccirillo \(2018\)](#) Williams uses "to symbolize truth", and the paper lantern that covers the light bulb to "symbolize illusions and selective truths." Light has become an instrument of torture for Blanche not only because it reveals the ravages of time on her face, which she is careful to hide particularly from Mitch, but also because it is the symbol of reality which she both hates and fears. In Scene Nine, she declares to Mitch: "I don't want realism" (9. p. 91). And when Mitch takes the paper lantern off the light bulb, Blanche "utters a frightened gasp" (9. p. 91). Again, at the end of the play when Blanche is to be taken to the mental hospital, Stanley brutally tears the paper lantern off the light bulb and extends it towards her. The stage directions focus on her reaction: "She cries out as if the lantern was herself" (11. p. 111). This clearly demonstrates Blanche's sensitivity to and fear of light and at the same time shows the significance of the images of light and darkness in mapping out her inner psychology and revealing aspects of her character which cannot otherwise be so effectively revealed.

THE MOTH

Images of light and darkness are also strongly associated with the image of the "moth" which Williams uses to describe his most celebrated heroine, Blanche DuBois. When she first appears at the beginning of the play, the stage directions suggest that "[h]er delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggest a moth" (1. p. 5). The importance of this image lies in the similarity between Blanche and the moth not only in appearance but also in nature. Blanche is as delicate, soft, and fragile as a moth. She is tender and sensitive, and has poetic sensibility. In Scene Five, she describes herself as belonging to the "soft people" (p. 57), and in Scene Eight, berating Stanley for his cruel behaviour with Blanche at her birthday party, Stella tells him: "You didn't

know Blanche as a girl. Nobody, nobody, was tender and trusting as she was. But people like you abused her, and forced her to change" (p. 86). Being moth-like and fragile, Blanche has for a long time led a terribly unbearable life due to her hard and harsh circumstances. For, as [Dutta \(2014, p. 441\)](#) puts it, "A moth-like life is terrorizing, agonizing and can be equated with living in an inferno where the inhabitants are under the constant 'fear of absolute stasis' and the speculation of "Death".

Moreover, given her aristocratic background, Blanche is shocked to find that her sister lives in this area in New Orleans. She does not hide her shock; immediately after she meets Stella, she tells her "What are you doing in a place like this? ... Never, never, never in my worst dreams could I picture – Only Poe! Only Mr. Edgar Allan Poe! – could do it justice! Out there I suppose is the ghoulish-woodland of Weir!" (1. p. 9) Blanche's disapproval of her sister's living in this squalid place is a rejection of her marriage to Stanley Kowalski because she, in [Van de Merwe-Lohn's \(2018, p. 25\)](#) words "feels that Stanley is socially inferior and her sister Stella seems sexually dependent on him." During her meeting with Stanley for the first time in Scene Two, Blanche confronts him with the fact that they are different; she bluntly tells him: "The Kowalskis and the DuBois have different notions." (p. 23) After the poker night, when Stanley beats Stella up in front of her sister and his friends, Blanche is utterly astounded, and when she meets her sister the next day, she has already made up her mind that Stella should not live with Stanley anymore. In Scene Four, she appeals to her sister not to be on the side of "the brutes" (p. 52); and in Scene Ten, she distances herself from them and baldly tells Stanley: "Yes, swine! Swine! And I'm thinking not only of you but of your friend, Mr. Mitchell" (p. 100). She also makes her position quite clear: "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" (p. 100). Delicate and fragile, Blanche is doomed from the beginning – she is out of time and out of place. Her dilemma is that she has appeared in both the wrong time and the wrong place. She holds the flag of honor and chastity traditionally associated with the Southern belle at a time nobody recognizes her, and she herself, under the pressure of circumstances, violates the very codes she claims to represent; she is not unaware of her shameful past and desperately tries to hide it. Her insistence on Stella not to look at her until she takes a bath is an attempt, as [Adams \(2014\)](#) puts it, "to figuratively wash and rid herself of her past so that she may have a new start." Blanche is keen to hide her past and give a good impression to the people around her. Hence, as [Lund \(2018\)](#) suggests, "[t]hese baths and her arriving in an all-white outfit are also suggesting a need for a clean and innocent appearance." (48)

The sun of Blanche's glory has irrecoverably set, and the darkness has engulfed the world. Moreover, she has appeared in a world controlled by what she calls "the apes", Stanley and his friends. The beautiful and delicate moth is fighting a losing battle against the brutes. Hence, it is most fitting that at the end of the play, when Blanche is to be taken to the mental asylum, the stage directions suggest that "[t]he night is filled with inhuman voices like cries in a jungle" (11. p. 101). It is, in fact, a jungle that Williams suggests we live in, and in which only the fittest survive. A moth, Blanche, surely, is not one of the fittest; she is relentlessly crushed and ruthlessly removed.

The similarity between Blanche and the moth goes beyond their appearance – it is at the heart of their nature and the essence of their experience. A moth is instinctively attracted to the light, but, ironically, is easily destroyed by its heat. Light is basically defined in terms of its contrast with darkness. Hence, the flight of the moth to light is also a flight from the darkness. The moth seeks refuge in light from the forces of darkness. Yet, the irony of its fate is that it is destroyed by the very shelter it seeks refuge in. And this is exactly the essence of Blanche's tragic experience. For, after the catastrophes that had befallen her, Blanche feverishly resorted to sexuality in a pathetic attempt to fill in the vacuum in her heart and life, and to find a shelter from the adversities she has undergone. She believes that sexuality was the only solution available to her in the face of the series of deaths and disasters that had befallen her. In Scene Nine, she makes no attempt to hide this fact; rather, she states it in no uncertain terms and in one of her most memorable statements when she confesses to Mitch that "Death -- ... The opposite is desire" (p. 94). Moreover, it is at the end of the play when the doctor from the asylum comes to take her that Blanche makes her most important and unforgettable statement. When the doctor approaches her gently and treats her as a respectable lady, she offers him her hand and tells him: "Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (11. p. 113). Commenting on the significance of this statement, [Boxill \(1987, p. 25-26\)](#) says that it is "the most famous line in the play, if not in all Williams" – one, which, "resonant with the plight of Blanche, hangs in the air for long afterwards". Poetic as it is, this statement acquires its importance from the irony it carries, one on which the whole play rests and without which the play collapses and loses its dramatic vigour and credibility.

The fundamental irony of Blanche's fate is that she believes she has found refuge in sexuality, or what she refers to as "intimacies with strangers" (9. p. 93), while the fact of the matter is that, like the moth, Blanche is destroyed by the very shelter she has sought refuge in, by the very strangers on whose kindness she claims to have depended. For, if Blanche does not believe in what she says, the play collapses because it loses its strength and appeal that are established on the important point that after the death of her husband and the calamities she had faced, Blanche has lost contact with the real world and has been living in the world of her imagination. The mounting pressure of reality on Blanche has forced her to create her own world of illusion. As [Kinoshita \(2016\)](#) puts it: "The illusion is not just about a relief from her difficulties. Williams used delusions to express Blanche's conflict within her mind. Blanche never thinks that she can overcome her problems with her fantasy world. Her efforts to survive in the real world create the illusion. It is the result of her struggle for existence." She has no illusions about that. In Scene Nine, she unhesitatingly tells Mitch: "I don't want realism" (p. 91) although she "suffers from illusions" ([O'Connor, 1997, p. 13](#)). She cannot live in the real world because

reality has dealt her fatal blows. Again, the biting irony is that the doctor is taking her to her destruction, while she believes that he is a gentleman caller, an admirer, or someone who has come to offer her redemption and salvation, and to take her from darkness to light.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the images of light and darkness, along with the image of the moth, immensely contribute to the dramatic effectiveness of the play. They illuminate and explicate many central issues, and give larger dimensions to the thematic concerns of the play, to the personal concerns and experiences of the main characters, and give deeper insight into the characters involved. They also help attract the attention of readers and make them more involved in the action by inviting them to lend themselves to flights of the imagination and to enjoy the aesthetic quality of the play. In a word, these images give strength and sharpness to the thematic structure, enhance characterization, and reinforce the poetic touch both the play and Williams are renowned for.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

It goes without saying that no study can be exhaustive of the topic it presents, nor can it claim to have all the truth about it. Every study highlights a point from the perspective of the writer and paves the way for other writers to try their own. This truly applies to the current study; it only ushers a different perspective for a new reading and fruitful analysis this outstanding play deserves. Finally, it is recommended that further research focus on other types of imagery abundant in the play.

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