



RAPTURE THEATRE
presents

A Streetcar

directed by Michael Emans

named **DESIRE**

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

EDUCATION RESOURCE

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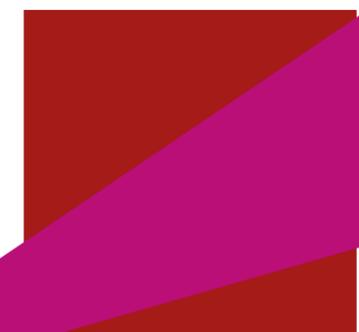
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Introduction from The Artistic Director

Rapture Theatre, in association with Kilmarnock's Palace Theatre, is bringing its new production of ***A Streetcar Named Desire*** to venues across Scotland from 1 Sep – 7 Oct 2017.

Rapture is one of Scotland's premier touring theatre companies and is uniquely placed within the Scottish theatre sector. We produce an eclectic body of work with a focus on text-based contemporary and classical theatre, working with scripts that have an existing provenance.

Rapture's productions tour to a range of large, medium and small-scale venues. In this way, we ensure that audiences living outside Scotland's major conurbations have the same access to great quality theatre as those living in cities.

The Creative Learning and Education aspect of our work has been developing in recent years and we have seen a significant growth in our creative learning collaborations with venues, specialist agencies, education establishments and local authorities.

A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams is one of the most significant plays ever written. It has a powerful narrative, which explores the impact of class, gender and cultural heritage on the individual but it is also influential because it had the effect of changing the focus of modern theatre, emphasising the importance of character and language, creating a style which is poetic, yet naturalistic.

The power and complexity of the play is the focus of the workshop we have developed to accompany this production.

We hope to see you there.

Many thanks,



MICHAEL EMANS
Rapture Theatre Artistic Director

"We are always very keen to stage the work of Rapture Theatre as not only can we be assured of the high quality but they also stage titles that enhance our diary and ensure good audience numbers, particularly from school groups."

James Haworth, General Manager
King's Theatre & Theatre Royal, Glasgow

THE PRODUCTION

Experience the excitement of live theatre in Rapture's vibrant production of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Join us for a dazzling trip to the whirlwind world of New Orleans with this sultry and sophisticated new production of a timeless American masterpiece. Fading southern belle, Blanche DuBois, seeks solace with her sister, Stella, after her world starts to crumble. But her downward spiral brings her face-to-face with Stella's husband, the brutal, unforgiving Stanley Kowalski. As temperatures soar and passions rise, Blanche and Stanley battle for Stella's soul.

THE WORKSHOP*

By attending the workshop, your students will be able to have an in-depth look at how a director takes a script and makes it into a performance. What clues do you look for? How do you treat dialogue and stage directions? How important is style?

Emans will look at moments within the play and not only explain the process he went through from reading the script to finding the right actors to opening night, but will also show students how they can take scripts and turn them into dramatic action.

Suitable for pupils studying Higher and Advance Higher Drama or English.

A Streetcar Named Desire

Script analysis with director Michael Emans.



A Streetcar Named Desire



All My Sons Workshop

PLOT

A Streetcar Named Desire

The plot of *Streetcar* revolves around the arrival of Blanche DuBois, a genteel lady from Laurel, Mississippi, in New Orleans to join her sister, Stella, who has married a Polish immigrant, Stanley Kowalski. Conflict ensues when it is revealed that the women's family home in Laurel, Belle Reve (in French, "beautiful dream") has been remortgaged and ultimately lost to lenders to pay debts accrued during the time Blanche was living there. Blanche explains that the money was used to pay for a series of funerals; Stanley is not convinced and believes that Blanche has squandered the money on herself.

The encounters between Stanley, a rough and brusque man who represents the harsh, ruthless new era of capitalist America, and Blanche, a fragile woman, still clinging on to a class status she can no longer simply assume while desperately trying to preserve the culture and way of life of the old South: a society which is essentially mythical (a beautiful dream) by the 1940s, when the story is set.

Stanley's suspicions about Blanche's motives, lead to him exposing unpleasant truths about Blanche's past – that she worked as a prostitute after being sacked from the school where she was an English teacher for having a relationship with a young student – a fact which contradicts Blanche's original version of events. Towards the end of the play, Stanley demonstrates that physical strength and harsh realism are dominant qualities in modern America, debunking what he now regards as Blanche's flimsy façade, by raping her - a brutally aggressive act which damages her both physically and psychologically - and which reminds us symbolically that the old American culture, based on class and privilege to which Blanche clung, is now dead.

Ironically, Stella chooses to stay with her violent husband at the end of the play, refusing to believe Blanche's version of events and Blanche, now broken and ill is taken away to a psychiatric institution.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Characterisation in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, by Tennessee Williams

One of the greatest strengths of the play lies in the complexity of its characters. The nature of characters like Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski have been the subject of great debate since the play was written. The fact that there is no easy way of interpreting either of these characters is what makes them so fascinating. The fact that audiences frequently come to diametrically opposed conclusions about them demonstrates Williams' powerful insight into the human condition, as well as highlighting his sophistication as a writer.

Please now read the Plot description (p07)

BLANCHE DUBOIS

Consider the following interpretations of Blanche's character. Is she:

1. Pathetically Pretentious

Critics like John Mason Brown despise Blanche, mocking her "pathetic pretensions to gentility even when she is known as a prostitute in the little town in which she was brought up" and "her love of the refined, when her life is devoted to coarseness" (1). False, stuck up, with an inflated opinion of herself – is this Blanche?

2. Misunderstood

Others, like Leonard Berkman, pity Blanche and view her as "misunderstood" (1). These people see her as a tragic character, simply trying to rebuild her life in New Orleans after a series of shattering events, including the suicide of her young husband. Is she someone who just doesn't fit in with her society and who is unfairly judged by others?

3. Overly Ambitious

Judith Thompson argues that Blanche's "fall" is the result of "mythically elevated expectations, followed by inevitable disillusionment and the physical corruption of the soul's transcendent dreams" (2). In other words, Blanche is destroyed by her own aspirations. Self-destruction is the inevitable consequence of becoming attached to overly ambitious, unattainable dreams. Is she simply a fantasist?

4. Immoral

Blanche's blatant racism and overt pretentiousness suggest that she may simply take pleasure in hurting and demeaning others. Moreover, if Stanley is right, she has swindled her sister out of her birthright and has selfishly used the funds for her own benefit. She has also abused her position as a teacher by taking advantage of her power and authority in order to abuse a young student. Does Blanche have no conscience?

5. Mentally Ill

Williams' own first-hand knowledge of mental illness may also have played a major part in his construction of her character: Blanche's narcissism, self-delusion, fantasies, lies, manipulation, promiscuity and wild mood swings, all point to a wide range of psychiatric conditions and suggest someone struggling to cope with the horrific events life has thrown at her.

What is clear is that the more she tries to present herself as a "lady", the more she attempts to hold on to the pretense, the more obvious her façade becomes. Do you think she's ill?

One way or another, the conflicts in her identity undoubtedly play a major part in Blanche's ultimate demise.

References

(1) Berkman, Leonard "The Tragic Fall of Blanche DuBois" *Modern Critical Interpretations: Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire* Ed. Harold Bloom, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988

(2) Thompson, Judith J. "Tennessee Williams Plays: Memory, Myth and Symbol" New York, Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2002

EXERCISE I (Suggested time: 1.5 - 2 hours)

Have the titles of the interpretations above – **Pathetically Pretentious, Misunderstood, Overly Ambitious, Immoral, Mentally Ill** - printed (preferably using different colours) onto pieces of card so that students can handle, order and reorder them. Have extra pieces of card available, so that students may add their own words to describe Blanche's character.

(Timings given are approximate.)

1. Whole class teacher-led introduction to establish the five interpretations outlined above. (15 mins, assuming that students already have a good working knowledge of Blanche's character. Also consider other descriptions that might be used of Blanche: loyal, devoted, kind, fake, deceitful, fragile, flirtatious and so on...)
2. In groups of around 5 discuss each of the five different interpretations of Blanche's character described above (and any others your group might come up with) and find two or three examples of each characteristic from the play. (20 - 25 mins)
3. Choose someone to be a spokesperson and have that person share the examples you have come up with in your group with the rest of the class. Remember to write down any good examples other groups have come up with that your group didn't consider. (10 - 15 mins)
4. Go back into your original groups of 5 and, this time put the 5 (or more) interpretations (above) in the order your group thinks is most significant for Blanche's character, with the most important one first. Remember you must give a reason for your choices. There are no right or wrong answers to this task but you must be able to justify your choices. (20 - 25 mins)
5. Share the results of your discussion with the rest of the class through a different spokesperson, giving reasons for your choices. Discuss as a class. (10 - 15 mins)
6. Go back into your group and decide if you want to stick with your group's original interpretation or change it in the light of the class discussion. (10 mins)
7. What have you learned about yourself by discussing Blanche? (2 mins)

Through this exercise, it should become clear that Blanche is a complex character who is impossible to define in simple terms. Discussing Blanche's character reveals as much about our own attitudes towards people like Blanche as it does about the character herself. Such a multi-faceted characterisation contributes to the realism of the character as well as to the overall depth of the play's themes.

STANLEY KOLWALSKI

Stanley is brutal, angry, violent and aggressive, but it is worth considering whether Tennessee Williams has given us any rationale for his behavior in order to make him a more believable character.

Now consider the following interpretations of Stanley's character. Is he:
(Complete the same exercise as above.)

1. A Provider

Stanley sees himself as taking a stereotypically male role as provider for the household. We see him at the beginning bringing home meat for Stella to cook. However, Stella does not seem to question this role and seems happy at this point in the play. Before Blanche's arrival, they seem to be contented and accepting of their gender roles. He also shows great tenderness for Stella when he thinks she has left him. Only when Stella displays Blanche's patronising attitude towards Stanley do we see friction between them. Perhaps Stanley is just protecting his immediate family's interests in his confrontations with Blanche?

2. One of the Boys

Stanley seems to have close friends and appears to like a structured, stable life - not unlike aspects of the army life he would have experienced - something upset by the arrival of Blanche. At the beginning of the play we see him going bowling with his friends and having fun. However, Blanche causes changes to his normal routine. She flirts with, and lies to, his "buddy", Mitch, and distracts his friends during the poker game. Is it fair to blame Stanley for being annoyed when it was Blanche who arrived and caused disruption in his house? His loss of status, after returning from the war to civilian life must also have been a difficult transition for him, don't you think?

3. A Victim

Stanley is criticised and demeaned mercilessly by Blanche throughout the play. She compares him to an animal, in particular an "ape", and accuses him of having no manners or refinement, less "High-brow" than the "Irish". Eunice calls him a "Polack" - an offensive name for a Polish person. As a Polish immigrant in America in the 1940s he would have undoubtedly been the victim of numerous racial slurs and prejudice as the Poles were the victims of much discrimination. Legislation to prevent the use of racially offensive language (known as "Hate Speak") was not fully introduced into the USA until 1969. As a victim of racial discrimination, should we have some pity for him? Does it explain, if not excuse some of his anger?

4. Mentally Ill

Stanley was a soldier in the army and had recently returned from the war where he worked diffusing explosives: very stressful work. He was also in a promoted position in the army, in contrast to the low status and discrimination he faced on return. He earned several medals too, which underlines his bravery despite the constant danger he must have been in. His rages, mood-swings, apparent vulnerability and anxiety all point to the possibility that he was suffering from a form of what we now call Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which causes sufferers to experience uncontrollable "flashbacks" to dangerous situations and to have uncontrolled emotional outbursts. This condition was often triggered by loud noises (like the sound of the radio perhaps?). Consider how Stanley is confused when he "comes round" after losing his temper - "What happened?" - that could be a sign of PTSD. There is clear evidence that Tennessee Williams wanted to give a true account of soldiers' psychological struggle after returning from war and that he studied their psychiatric problems. Could mental illness explain, if not justify some of Stanley's behavior?

5. Hard Working

Stanley represents the new wave of immigrants to the USA who had to work hard in order to survive. His achievements are the results of his own efforts. He does not have the sense of entitlement which Blanche displays throughout the play. She has been brought up to assume that she should have privilege simply as a birthright. Stanley considers himself to have no more rights than anyone else. Blanche's social system of "aristocrats and the working class" is dying out; Stanley represents a more modern America where there are equal opportunities for all.

Of course, Williams does not mean that we should just accept Stanley's violence, particularly towards Stella - hitting her, particularly when she is pregnant - and raping Blanche. These are impossible acts to either accept or forgive. However, Williams' cleverness as a writer makes even a character like Stanley sympathetic, mainly by making him human, having a range of qualities: good and bad. We cannot totally hate him, that would be too simple. He, too, is a fascinating, complex character who raises questions in our mind about what happens to the human mind under severe stress and extreme circumstances.





Kazzem Tosin Amore plays Mitch in Rapture's production of Streetcar.

The following essay was written as a short exercise from a student studying Higher English.

Who's your favourite character in Streetcar?

My favourite character is Mitch because I think he gets a bit of a raw deal in the play and I can't help feeling sorry for him.

Mitch is a decent human being who is constantly trying to please his mother and is accused by Stanley of being a mummy's boy because of it. He maybe resents his mum because he's been away in the army and travelled a lot but now he's stuck at home looking after her. If he does resent her though, he doesn't really show it. He just does it because it's his duty which makes me like him because he cares enough to put his own feelings to one side.

Mitch is kind and sensitive and falls in love with Blanche, even though she kind of looks down on him as being "lesser" than she is. She just tolerates him and tries to use him as an escape route from her problems which is not fair. He is a gentleman but she is not a lady, even if she seems to act like one. She manipulates Mitch and toys with him to get what she wants.

Mitch is not the hero Blanche thinks she deserves. He's a bit awkward and worries about being "sweaty" but that makes me like him even more – he puts himself down too much. He is polite and well liked by his friends and by Stella, but Blanche just takes advantage of his good nature.

His interests, like playing poker and working out at the gym are rough and common to Blanche. He was a soldier and now does manual work and she thinks she is superior to him. However, he is really impressed by her glamorous good looks and her classiness. Cruelly, Blanche uses the fact that Mitch is in awe of her to play games with him – she tricks him into flattering her and insults his lack of education by teasing him in French. Again this makes me feel sorry for him. He is the victim of her nastiness but he is so decent that he continues to be impressed by her. His honest affection for her makes me like him even more.

Blanche and Mitch are drawn together because they are both lonely and have both experienced the death of someone they loved. I think, because he has lost another girlfriend it makes Mitch's affection for Blanche seem more honest and straight-forward, but Blanche is false with him. She acts as if she is prim and proper trying to trick him into marrying her. She hides the truth about her many sexual partners from him and makes herself out to be more innocent than she is. In a way she makes Mitch feel like a fool but I don't think he is. It's not his fault that she is a fantasist. It's because he is so nice that he can't see through her.

Mitch's reaction when Stanley tells him the truth about Blanche's past is really sad. I can't help feeling that Stanley was so determined to reveal the truth about Blanche that he doesn't care at all about his "buddy" Mitch's feelings at all. It shows Stanley is much nastier than his friend. Mitch is really upset by what Stanley says and even cries showing that he must have really cared for Blanche.

If only Blanche had appreciated that Mitch was a good and decent person, he could have loved her with the devotion she was looking for. If she had given him a chance, she could have been happy. On the other hand, I'm glad Mitch finds out the truth because probably Blanche would not have been a reliable partner for him. She didn't see the goodness in him that I see and she didn't appreciate his decency so, really, he deserved better. I hope he goes on to be happy in life.

E. F. Lee

TOUR DATES

PALACE THEATRE KILMARNOCK FRI 1 - SAT 2 SEP

eastayrshireleisure.com 01563 554900

THEATRE ROYAL GLASGOW TUE 5 - SAT 9 SEP

atgtickets.com/glasgow* 0844 871 7647**

MACROBERT ARTS CENTRE STIRLING WED 13 SEP

macrobertartscentre.org 01786 466666

HOWDEN PARK CENTRE LIVINGSTON THU 14 SEP

howdenparkcentre.co.uk 01506 777666

THE GAIETY AYR SAT 16 SEP

thegaiety.co.uk 01292 288235

VILLAGE THEATRE EAST KILBRIDE MON 18 SEP

sllcboxoffice.co.uk 01355 261000

FTH THEATRE FALKIRK WED 20 SEP

falkirkcommunitytrust.org 01324 506850

BYRE THEATRE ST ANDREW'S THU 21 - SAT 23 SEP

byretheatre.com 01334 475000

BEACON ARTS CENTRE GREENOCK TUE 26 SEP

beaconartscentre.co.uk 01475 723 723

ADAM SMITH THEATRE KIRKCALDY THU 28 SEP

onfife.com 01592 583302

MOTHERWELL THEATRE MOTHERWELL FRI 29 SEP

culturenl.co.uk 01698 403120

EASTWOOD PARK THEATRE GIFFNOCK MON 2 OCT

eastwoodparktheatreco.uk 0141 577 4956

KING'S THEATRE EDINBURGH TUE 3 - SAT 7 OCT

edtheatres.com 0131 529 6000

*bkg fees may apply

**calls cost up to 7p per min, plus your phone company's access charge



Reviews for Rapture's last show *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

"Rich feast of world-class drama"

"Explosive"

"Sparkling revival"

The Scotsman ★★★★★

The Herald ★★★★★

The Stage