

Worksheet 10 – Scene Nine

Review: Lecture 9

In the previous lecture of the unit, Prof McRae explored Scene Eight, in which Stella helps Blanche to celebrate her birthday.

- ✓ What happens to Stella at the end of Scene Eight?

Recall: Lecture 10

Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember. You can also take the “Module Quiz” online.

1. What can Blanche hear at the start of Scene Nine?
 - a) Blues music
 - b) The radio
 - c) Eunice and Steve fighting
 - d) A polka
2. What is the Mexican woman selling at the end of the scene?
 - a) Tin flowers
 - b) Watermelon slices
 - c) Tamales
 - d) Paper lanterns
3. Why does Mitch say he cannot take Blanche to meet his mother?
 - a) She dresses too wildly
 - b) She is not clean enough
 - c) She has lied to him
 - d) She was already married

Bonus point: Why is this ironic?

Analysis

4. Rewatch 0:53 to 2:18 where Prof. McRae discusses the dialogue between Mitch and Blanche in Scene Nine. Annotate the lines in **bold**, explaining their significance within the wider play:

MITCH: I've never had a real good look at you, Blanche. Let's turn the light on here.

BLANCHE [*fearfully*]: Light? Which light? What for?

MITCH: This one with the paper thing on it.

[He tears the paper lantern off the light bulb. She utters a frightened gasp.]

BLANCHE: What did you do that for?

MITCH: So I can take a look at you good and plain!

BLANCHE: Of course you don't really mean to be insulting!

MITCH: No, just realistic.

BLANCHE: **I don't want realism. I want magic!** [*Mitch laughs*] 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.** And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it-Don't turn the light on!

[Mitch crosses to the switch. He turns the light on and stares at her. She cries out and covers her face. He turns the light off again.]

MITCH [*slowly and bitterly*]: I don't mind you being older than what I thought. But all the rest of it-Christ! That pitch about your ideals being so old-fashioned and all the malarkey that you've dished out all summer. Oh, I knew you weren't sixteen any more. But **I was a fool enough to believe you was straight.**

5. Scene Nine highlights several of the key thematic oppositions that run throughout the play:
- Death and desire
 - Reality and Illusion
 - Sanity and Madness
 - Truth and lies
 - Youth and age

Choose **one** of these contrasts and create a mind map tracking how it has developed across the play.

Evaluation

6. To what extent do you think Blanche demonstrates self-awareness as a character throughout the play? *Answer in two evaluative paragraphs.*
7. This theme explores the tension between 'realism' and 'magic'. Theatre critic, Mary Ann Corrigan, has explored Williams's own interest in the interaction between realism and artifice in the theatre:

'In order to gain sympathy for a character who is in the process of an emotional breakdown, Williams depicts the character from without and within; both the objectivity and the subjectivity of Blanche are present to the audience. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* Williams synthesizes depth characterization, typical of drama that strives to be an illusion of reality, with symbolic theatrics, which imply an acceptance of the stage as artifice. In short, realism and theatricalism, often viewed as stage rivals, complement each other in this play.'

-- 'Realism and Theatricalism in *A Streetcar Named Desire*', *Modern Drama*, 19.4 (1976), p. 385.

- a) In your own words, explain what you think Corrigan means when she says 'realism and theatricalism... complement each other in this play'.
- b) Do you believe Williams wants the audience to sympathise with Blanche's desire for magic over realism?

Glossary

- **Realism** – (n.) the quality or fact of representing a person or thing in a way that is accurate and true to life; the attitude of accepting a situation as it is and being prepared to deal with it.
e.g. Dutch still-lives are noted for their realism: the painted fruit and vegetables look almost like photographs.
e.g. I try to deal with difficult situations by taking a realistic approach and planning for likely challenges.
- **Theatrical** – (adj.) relating to actors or the theatre; behaving in a way intended to attract attention.
e.g. She always likes to make a theatrical entrance at parties.
- **Theatricalism** – (n.) in 20th-century Western theatre, the general movement away from the dominant turn-of-the-century techniques of naturalism (e.g. the illusion of reality) in acting, staging, and playwriting.
e.g. Bertolt Brecht embraced theatricalism in his use of direct address.

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