

Worksheet 7 – Scene Six

Review: Lecture 6

In the previous lecture of the unit, Prof. McRae explored the developing tensions between Stanley and Blanche, as well as Blanche’s encounter with a stranger, the Young Man.

- ✓ What is the name of the opera Blanche references at the end of Scene Five? What is the connection between this opera and *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

Recall: Lecture 7

Complete this task to check how much you remember about the Scene Six. You can also take the “Module Quiz” online.

1. Which constellation does Blanche look at before entering the flat with Mitch?

a) Virgo	c) Orion
b) Pleiades	d) Aries

Bonus point: Why is this significant?
2. How did Blanche’s first husband die?

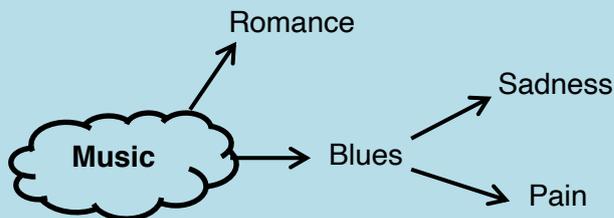
a) Consumption	c) Suicide
b) Car crash	d) Drowning
3. What music did Blanche and her first husband dance to before he died?

a) Waltz	c) Tango
b) Polka	d) Foxtrot

Analysis

4. The **motif** of music recurs throughout *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and has particular significance in Scene Six as Blanche recounts the moments before her ex-husband’s death.

Create a mind map of the different connotations **music** might have in the play.



5. Look at the key quotations below relating to the **motif of music** and write an analysis of their significance. The first one has been done for you as an example.

Quotation/ Scene	Analysis
<p><i>‘A corresponding air is evoked by the music of negro entertainers at a bar-room just around the corner....from a tinny piano being</i></p>	<p>Music features in the opening setting of the play. African American musical traditions were strong in New Orleans,</p>

<p><i>played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers. This “blue piano” expresses the spirit of life which goes on here’ (Scene One)</i></p>	<p>and this city was partly where new forms of jazz music emerged. The music portrays the vibrancy and cultural mixing of the city of New Orleans. It emphasises its vitality and this contrasts with the use of classical European music later in the play, often relating to memories of Blanche’s past and an older American social system.</p>
<p><i>The music of the polka rises up, faint in the distance. (end of Scene One)</i></p>	
<p>‘The “blue piano” and the hot trumpet sound louder’ (end of Scene Two)</p>	
<p>‘The negro entertainers around the bar play “Paper Doll” slow and blue’ (after Stanley and Stella fight in Scene Three)</p>	
<p>‘then the polka resumes in a major key’ and ‘the polka tune fades out’ (Scene Six)</p>	

Evaluation

6. Williams includes many **intertextual** references in the play, often through Blanche quoting literature, reflecting her background as an English teacher.
- Read the context box below and highlight key points.
 - Discuss with a partner, or write notes for yourself: Why do think Williams includes these references? How do they add to the tragic effect of the play?

In Scene Six, Blanche refers to the novel *La Dame aux camélias* (1848) by Alexandre Dumas the Younger, later adapted by Dumas for the stage. It tells the tragic love story between Marguerite Gautier, a high-class Parisian sex worker, and Armand Duval, an idealistic young gentleman. Marguerite isolates herself from Armand to protect him from the scandal of being associated with a courtesan, and later dies of consumption. The story was later adapted into an opera by Giuseppe Verdi, entitled *La Traviata* (1853).

The association between Blanche and Marguerite is continued with the words ‘*Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir?*’ meaning ‘Would you like to sleep with me tonight?’ – the standard invitation of a French prostitute to a passing man.

7. In his lecture, McRae says that Williams is ‘**bringing love and death together**’.
- Read the two context boxes on critical interpretations of the play that explore the themes of love and death. In your own words, explain what each interpretation is saying.
 - To what extent do you agree that Williams is ‘bringing love and death together’ in *A Streetcar Named Desire*? Write an essay play in response to this question, ensuring you include the two critical interpretations below.

Interpretation A: Leslie A. Fiedler

Literary critic Leslie A. Fiedler wrote a controversial analysis of American fiction, titled *Love*

and Death in the American Novel (1966). In it, Fiedler claims that American literature is literature is incapable of dealing with adult sexuality and is obsessed with death as the outcome of romantic relationships. He proposes that American writers 'ask over and over' if there can be 'a sentimental relationship at once erotic and immaculate, a union which commits its participants neither to society nor sin'. Fiedler suggests that American writers are interested in exploring relationships that don't end with social norms, such as marriage, or supposedly sinful relationships, such as lasting affairs. Instead there is a recurrent theme of sexual relationships that lead to the death or destruction of the parties included.

Interpretation B: *Liebestod*

Streetcar was one of the first post-war dramas to present a range of characters for whom sex was of huge importance as a factor influencing their lives and relationships. One of the text's defining images – that of the streetcar – explicitly links sex and death, making it possible to see the play within the context of the *Liebestod* tradition.

At first glance it might seem a struggle to position *Streetcar* within this literary framework (after all, nobody dies at the end) but in fact the *Liebestod* theme may be seen to enhance (or parody) the romantic and tragic grandeur of Blanche's downfall, depending on your point of view.

(Source: Hodder Education, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 22)

Glossary

- **Intertextual** – (adj.) relating to or involving a relationship between texts, especially literary ones.
e.g. Williams creates intertextual links by having his character, Blanche, reference Edgar Allan Poe.
- **Liebestod** – (n.) (from the German meaning 'love death') an erotic union achieved by lovers only through or after death.
e.g. Romeo and Juliet is an example of the Liebestod tradition.
- **Motif** – a dominant recurring idea or image in an artwork.
e.g. The motif of bathing is central to 'A Streetcar Named Desire'.