

Worksheet 4 – Scene Three

Review: Lecture 3

In the previous lecture of the unit, Prof McRae explored Scene 2 of the play, and the emerging relationship between Stanley and Blanche.

- ✓ What was Stanley referring to when he threatened Blanche with the Napoleonic Code?

Recall: Lecture 4

Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.

1. What game do the men play in Scene 3?
 - a) Bowling
 - b) Poker
 - c) Whist
 - d) Chess
2. Where does Mitch live?
 - a) Next door to Stanley
 - b) With his mother
 - c) In the garden district
 - d) With Eunice
3. What causes the men's game to end?
 - a) Stanley hits Stella
 - b) Stanley loses money
 - c) Blanche faints
 - d) Stella goes into labour

Analysis

1. Read the stage directions from the opening of Scene 3.
 - a) What is the dramatic effect of these stage directions? What atmosphere do they suggest?
 - b) How does Williams present the theme of masculinity through this description of setting?

There is a picture of Van Gogh's of a billiard-parlor at night. The kitchen now suggests that sort of lurid nocturnal brilliance, the raw colors of childhood's spectrum. Over the yellow linoleum of the kitchen table hangs an electric bulb with a vivid green glass shade. The poker players--Stanley, Steve, Mitch and Pablo--wear colored shirts, solid blues, a purple, a red-and-white check, a light green, and they are men at the peak of their physical manhood, as coarse and direct and powerful as the primary colors. There are vivid slices of watermelon on the table, whiskey bottles and glasses.

- c) Challenge: Williams references an oil painting by Dutch artists Vincent van Gogh entitled *The Night Café* (1888). Van Gogh painted the parlour of a café where sex workers and homeless men would drink during the night. Van Gogh described his painting in a letter to his brother:

I have tried to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green. The room is blood red and dark yellow with a green billiard table in the middle; there are four lemon-yellow lamps with a glow of orange and green. Everywhere there is a clash and contrast of the most alien reds and greens, in the figures of little sleeping hooligans, in the empty dreary room, in violet and blue.

Why do you think Williams features this painting in his setting for Scene 3? What connections do you think it might suggest between Van Gogh's subject and his own?



2. Reread the dialogue below between Mitch and Blanche and answer the questions below:
 - a) What does this exchange reveal about the developing relationship between Blanche and Mitch?
 - b) How does their dialogue foreshadow future events in the play?
 - c) **Challenge:** research and read the sonnet referenced in this scene by Elizabeth Barrett Browning 'How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)'. Why do you think Williams chose to reference this sonnet in this scene? In what ways might this reference be ironic?

[Mitch laughs uncomfortably and continues through the portieres. He stops just inside.]

BLANCHE *[softly]*: Hello! The Little Boys' Room is busy right now.

MITCH: We've--been drinking beer.

BLANCHE: I hate beer.

MITCH: It's--a hot weather drink.

BLANCHE: Oh, I don't think so; it always makes me warmer. Have you got any cigs?

[She has slipped on the dark red satin wrapper.]

MITCH: Sure.

BLANCHE: What kind are they?

MITCH: Luckies.

BLANCHE: Oh, good. What a pretty case. Silver?

MITCH: Yes. Yes; read the inscription.

BLANCHE: Oh, is there an inscription? I can't make it out. *[He strikes a match and moves closer]* Oh! *[reading with feigned difficulty]*: "And if God choose, I shall but love thee better--after--death!" Why, that's from my favorite sonnet by Mrs. Browning!

MITCH: You know it?

BLANCHE: Certainly I do!

MITCH: There's a story connected with that inscription.

BLANCHE: It sounds like a romance.

MITCH: A pretty sad one.

BLANCHE: Oh?

MITCH: The girl's dead now.

BLANCHE *[in a tone of deep sympathy]*: Oh!

Evaluation

3. McRae references the influence that the film *Gone with the Wind* (1939) may have had on Williams when writing *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
 - a) Watch the trailer for the film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X94oZgJis4>
 - b) Research a synopsis of the plot: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gone_with_the_Wind_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gone_with_the_Wind_(film))
 - c) Based on your research above, note down three connections can you see between the play and the film.
4. Make an essay plan for the following question.

'*A Streetcar Named Desire* is a play about America growing up'. To what extent do you agree?

You might include:

- ✓ Historical context (e.g. Louisiana Purchase; legacies of slavery; American Civil War; immigration to America; post-World War Two industrial growth).
- ✓ Textual details from the play.
- ✓ Discussion of characterisation.
- ✓ Analysis of the dramatic effect of stage directions.

Glossary

- **Courtship**– (n.) a period during which a couple develop a romantic relationship, traditionally before getting married.
e.g. It was in the early days of their courtship and they had rose-tinted glasses.
- **Gallantry** – (n.) courageous behaviour; polite attention or respect given by men to women.
e.g. He always behaves with great gallantry.