

Symbols and Symbolism in Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire

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The most obvious symbol used in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is its title and the actual reference, in the play, to the streetcars named *Desire* and *Cemeteries*. They are the means by which Blanche was brought to the home of Stanley and Stella and, as the play unfolds, we realize the names of the streetcars have a greater significance. [Blanche's](#) instructions were to "take a streetcar named *Desire*, and then transfer to one called *Cemeteries*." When Blanche first arrives she is possessed by a desire for love and understanding, but always in the background lurks the fear of death and destruction. If the one cannot be obtained, a transfer to the other will be the inevitable alternative. Blanche indicates this in her speech to Mitch in scene nine: "Death-I used to sit here and she used to sit over there and death was as close as you are. . . . We didn't dare even admit we had ever [heard](#) of it. The opposite is desire." A subtle use of the symbol makes scene six very poignant: Mitch and Blanche have just returned from the amusement park and Blanche, concerned about transportation to take Mitch home, is surprised to hear that *Desire* runs all night long. The two basic drives, desire and death, are persistent throughout the play in determining Blanche's total behavior.

The destination for Blanche's streetcar travels is Elysian Fields, which also has a symbolic significance to the play. It is the section of New Orleans in which Stanley and Stella live as well as a reference to Greek mythology meaning paradise. In *Streetcar*, Stanley and Stella have created their own type of paradise in the sensual and blissful existence in which they live. Ironically, the location has an opposite effect on Blanche. Instead of finding happiness and conten...

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...han the flicker of a candle. She intends to keep it that way for she is prepared to protect herself from the harsh light of reality with the use of a paper lantern. The paper lantern becomes a symbol of Blanche. She covers every bare light bulb for fear that her life of illusion will be discovered. Mitch finds the real Blanche by tearing the lantern from the light, and Stanley hands her the remains of her torn illusion in the very last moment of the play, as she is being led away to an asylum.

Works Cited

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