



## A Streetcar Named Desire

by Melinda Varga | July 6, 2017 | Irodalmi Jelen

Damaged personalities, people at the periphery of the society, alienation, hunger for love, cruel and torturing dreams, carnival of reality and illusion, psychological and physical violence which is alleviated by the carnal pleasure but the next day all comes around, feelings, sick sexual desires, damaged human personalities, right on the brink of normality and madness - Tom Dugdale undertook a rather brave endeavor: He directed Tennessee Williams' cult work, A Streetcar Named Desire, at the Hungarian State Theatre at Kolozsvár, with the cooperation of excellent artists such as Kezdi Imola (Blanche), Petho Aniko (Stella), Farkas Lorand (Stanley), Orban Attila (Mitch), Varga Csilla (Eunice), Sinko Ferenc (Steve) and Marosan Csaba in the role of the young man and the doctor.

Before we talk about the extremely successful and ground-breaking end of the season production, we shall tell a few things about the life and work of the author, as these may help us to interpret the opus, because it has parallels in the real, tragic life of the writer and his family.

Tennessee Williams wrote about 30 theatre pieces, and left behind an important body of work as a novelist, poet and esthete. His most important works are the Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, The Night of the Iguana, The Rose Tattoo, and Sweet Bird of Youth.

Most of the pieces draw inspiration from the personal life of the writer, who often includes Rose, his sister, who was treated for schizophrenia and had a lobotomy when treatment proved to be unsuccessful, which made her incapacitated for the rest of her life. Blanche, the main character of A Streetcar Named Desire and the heroine from Glass Menagerie are formed in it.

Tennessee Williams' poem Elegy for Rose shows this affectionate relationship between the siblings (Hungarian translation by: Koros-Fekete Sandor)

*She is a metal forged by love Too  
volatile, too fiery thin  
So that her substance will be lost As  
sudden lightning or as wind And yet  
the ghost of her remain Reflected with  
the metal gone*

*A shadow as of shifting leaves At  
moonrise or at early dawn. A  
kind of rapture never quite  
Possessed again, however long The  
heart lays siege upon a ghost  
Recaptured in a web of song.*

The author stated in an interview about the work and thought process of the Glass Menagerie as follows:

*"I could never describe the procedure during which the idea of a piece is born. The play simply comes into existence like an apparition which becomes more clear and tangible gradually. At the beginning it's a fading thought, as was A Streetcar Named Desire, which I wrote after the Glass Menagerie. I just had a vision about a woman who is approaching the end of her youth. She sits on a chair, alone, the moonlight shines on her unhappy face. She would have had a date, but she waited for the man whom she wanted to marry in vain.*

*I suppose I was thinking about my sister who fell madly in love with a young man who was working in a shoe shop and was courting her. He was very handsome, and my sister fell in love with him. Whenever the telephone was ringing, Rose almost fainted, she always thought the lad was calling to ask her out. They met every second evening, but the calls stopped. This is when Rose become ill. This was the vision which later became A Streetcar Named Desire. At first it was called Blanche's Chair in the Moonlight, which was a miserable title -anyway A Streetcar Named Desire was born from that idea, the picture of a woman sitting at a window." (www.theparisreview.org)*

Due to Williams' alcohol and drug addiction, at the end of his life he could only work for few hours a day; irritable, depressed and fearful of his sister's fate, and that one day she would go crazy. His situation was worsened by the fact that, as a homosexual, contemporary society didn't take lightly his non-conformist lifestyle, and condemned homoerotic love. His intimate relationship with Frank Merlo played a significant role, it pushed him to establish some stability, and the labile and the unstable and deeply depressed author was most productive during this time, until the death of Merlo, in 1963.

He started to write A Streetcar Named Desire in 1939, the character of Blanche DuBois was inspired by Rose, simultaneously a few character traits of the writer are also apparent: his alcoholism and sexual frustration. He was awarded a Pulitzer-prize for the play in 1947.

Glass Menagerie, which was a very successful play and foreshadowed A Streetcar Named Desire, is also very personal and includes a similar character similar in Rosa. The personality of his family members and their tragic fate is also tangible in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof which brought him a second Pulitzer.

In the performance of Kolozsvár, the stage scenery is rather minimalist, empty spaces with barely any furnishings. In the empty space, the brick painted red is the only unmovable object in the one-room flat where Stella and Stanley live. The armchair, the bed, the table, the wash-

room, guest bed and mattress, can be all cleared away easily. The arrangement suggests to us that nothing is permanent in this world, that society changes from one minute to the next, and everything can be re-evaluated.

The play is built around Blanche, who has lost her mind, so the scenery is just a barren tool. The role of the character in the performance in Kolozsvár has never been such a powerful and central factor. The acting of Kezdi Imola is flawless, not only the actress' gestures and movement spot-on, but her eyes tell the story too, they enchant us, we turn into Blanche ourselves. The main actor enters through the red brick door, she holds a suitcase and a bouquet in her hands which is meant for her baby sister Stella. The door symbolizes passion, dominance of feelings.

The dame from the French Quarter arrives into the circles of the working class, she is a sight to behold, refined, which reminds us the charm and elegance from the beginning of the century, but quickly becomes clear that this world is over, and it is self-evident even

at her first appearance that something is not exactly right about Blanche, she reaches after a bottle of Cognac, she wants to hide her nervousness as she waits for her sister. The life of this woman travels on a streetcar of dreams and sick obsessions. Her fiancé commits suicide when people learn about his homosexuality - the personality of Blanche becomes damaged, she seeks refuge in dreams and visions. The family heirloom, the big house vanishes, the hunger for love, her vulnerability drives her into the embrace of strange men, but it doesn't make her happy, the house of cards is made of dreams, passions collapse, and she is committed to an asylum.

She can hide this side of the story from Stella for a while, pretending to be a lady of high society, she is appalled by the savage behavior of Stanley who beats his young and pregnant wife, who returns to him with a hug. Her life is even more horrifying.

Stanley sees what is going on and the tension between them is felt at all times.

Farkas Lorand plays a machista of epic proportions who often abuses his wife, neither the man nor the woman can escape this toxic and sick relationship. Stella wants to run away from the familiar surroundings, she travels away, tries her luck in other places, her marriage is still unhappy but she cannot come to terms with that. There's nowhere to run any more, she tolerates the beatings, aggressions and the emotional blackmail, she thinks that it is only a passing episode, and her husband is a good man after all. Stella's thoughts revolve around sex day and night, the man uses it to his advantage, by blackmailing her when things go sour between them. Petho Aniko plays the naive, young, lascivious girl impressively and with authenticity.

Another couple appears in the background -Eunice and Steve- which is a prototype of a similar relationship, which proves that in this world the truth is relative, the border between emotion and reality is almost non-existent, and that daydreaming is not only acceptable but the only way of salvation.

The character of Mitch, played Orban Attila is also very interesting, because it focuses on the important problems of the current society. The aging man who lives with his mother is also ill and suffers with the emotional relationship, the obedience and unwillingness to leave his home,

frustration and clinginess and the same hunger for love which is observed in all characters makes Williams' personage even more close and understandable to us.

Special interest shall be given regarding the directing that demonstrate certain parallels between the film adaptation of Elia Kazan and the theater piece. We see the toolset of the cinematic adaptations in the characters, scene and costumes.

The uniqueness of the costumes and scenery are the work of Carmencita Brojboiu, who has been a regular at the theater of Kolozsvár, her ideas and craftsmanship add a lot to the performances.

In the empty space, simple accessories may refer to generations living together, the conflicts arising from it, an aging lady over thirty and a younger, a little bit naive girl all living under the same roof, while their relationship is strong, there are pronounced cracks on its facade which shows us what is happening between the working class and the gentry.

Blanche's character is also a symbol, an outsider, the epitome of the foreigner, alien which may refer to the mixing of societies and cultures and the judgmental attitude towards differing cultural and religious norms, hardships of inclusion of minorities.

Allan, Blanche's fiancé proves this point, he is the one who never appears, but always has a say in the fate of this woman.

Tennessee Williams' approach was a taboo until 1947, it was totally outside the comfort zone of the public at that time, nevertheless he had the boldness to use these themes in his plays. Domestic violence is another segment which wasn't publicize, the abused women and children didn't get much help in the 40's America, even the European society wasn't very open about it.

The social instability, brutal reactions, manipulations of history, interconnection between the past and present makes Tennessee Williams' play translate into the present. Don't doubt that someone with a psychological illness doesn't get humiliated or a homosexual won't be judged. Domestic violence and assaults against women works around the same prototype as in America in the forties. These are permanent things, just as the red brick door in the play.

Human nature doesn't change, only time changes up the scenery.

We are balancing on the border between normality and madness, in a society with too much media, full of loneliness and hunger for love.