



Mitch: The forgotten hero of T. Williams's a streetcar named desire

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Abstract

This study aims to demonstrate the significant role Mitch (Harold Mitchel) assumes in Tennessee Williams' most prominent play: A Streetcar Named Desire. It focuses on Mitch's outstanding contribution to the development of the play, to its thematic concerns, and to its depth and richness. It also highlights the crucial part he plays, which has always been underestimated in favour of Stanley Kowalski, in the tragic conclusion of the play and the fate of its heroine, Blanche DuBois. In juxtaposing the characters of both Mitch and Stanley, the current article delineates their characters and brings to light Mitch's main personal attributes that qualify him to get from under the shadow of Stanley who, according to the mainstream critical view, enjoys critical acclaim as being the antagonist of Blanche, and who is responsible for her insanity. It is against this general view that this article tries to do justice to Mitch and show his personal traits that outweigh Stanley's in every aspect: in developing the actions in the play, in his relationship with the other characters, and more importantly in his relationship with Blanche that creates hope, expectation, suspense, and eventually in her mental collapse and gives the play its tragic dimension.

Keywords: Streetcar; Mitch; Blanche; Stanley; insanity; asylum

1. Introduction

A Streetcar Named Desire (Williams, 1978) dramatizes the final stages of the downfall and destruction of Blanche DuBois, a faded Southern belle. Her conflict with Stanley Kowalski, her sister Stella's husband, starts the moment she arrives at her house in New Orleans. A variety of reasons accounts for this conflict that intensifies gradually and steadily, culminating in Stanley's rape of Blanche and her eventual removal to the mental asylum. Critical attention is mainly focused on this conflict, the various aspects and dimensions of which have been thoroughly investigated. Blanche's gradual deterioration and final perdition represent a sad finale for the traditional South she stands for, and a victory for the emerging new world represented by Stanley Kowalski. The play is, therefore, looked at in terms of binary oppositions, which are only part of the oppositions the play is built on (Panda, 2016), between what each of Blanche and Stanley upholds. This polarity gives Stanley a focal position in the play at the expense of and, to some extent, to the exclusion of an important character in the play: Mitch.

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1.1. Literature review

The critical reception and interest Tennessee Williams' most prominent play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, has received is almost unrivaled. Given its significance, innumerable books and articles have been dedicated to the analysis and study of the play, offering deep insight into the scope and range of its profound meaning and dimensions. These studies have mainly focused on the various aspects and manifestations of the conflict, social, political, and psychological, etc., between Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski and the world each one represents. Mitch is relegated to a secondary position in the service of Stanley's wicked plans to get rid of Blanche and bring about her total demise by raping her and sending her to the mental asylum.

It is an arduous task to list all the studies that have investigated the play, so it is sufficient to refer to the most recent articles that have considered the critical value of the play.

Hooti (2011), for instance, views the play as a dramatization of the quest for identity from a blend of psychological and social perspectives. Blanche is imprisoned in her world of the glorious past of Belle Reve. Her conflict with her sister's husband, Stanley, is one between reality and illusion to which she finally resorts in her ironic quest for identity and in a pathetic attempt to avoid reality, which has dealt her heavy blows, and which she cannot cope with given the dichotomy within her between the real and the ideal.

Yoshimi (2009) presents an interesting study of the play focusing on both sisters, Blanche and Stella, as two Southern Belles. It underlines the autobiographical element in the play, which demonstrates Williams' attachment to the South. It showcases Blanche's dilemma and her relationship with Mitch, his attachment to her, and his final betrayal of her on account of the rumors Stanley gathers about her past promiscuity. The study also deals with Stella's betrayal of her sister in favor of Stanley and for the sake of her newborn baby. She is encouraged by her neighbor Eunice to disbelieve the rape story and to go on living with Stanley.

In his interesting article "Three's a crowd: Stella's pregnancy and the arrival of an "other" in *A Streetcar Named Desire*", Jacobs (2019) focuses on the difficulties pregnancy makes for the husband. The study also pertinently deals with the arrival of Blanche, the intrusive visitor, and the ensuing tensions between Blanche and Stanley. As usual, this conflict becomes the focal point of the study that deals with the different manifestations of the conflict, while Mitch's role is referred to in passing.

One recent study by Qiao and Miao (2019) investigates the role of off-stage characters in the development of some Williams' plays including *A Streetcar*. It underlines the significance of these characters and their impact on the on-stage ones. They perform in the thought of the on-stage characters and tremendously influence their present, for they play the role of a catalyst of plot development. The on-stage and off-stage characters are part of the binary oppositions in the play. The reference to Allan Gray is inevitable; his suicide has haunted Blanche until the last moment and has contributed to her hallucination and final insanity.

Sasani (2015) explores the "pathological interaction" among the characters of the play and argues that characters are nice when they are on their own, yet when they interact with others, they are entrapped in a position they are unable to get out of. They have to choose to be either "bad" or "mad". Blanche is one such example who is driven mad at the end of the play. The focus is on the conflict between Blanche and Stanley. Mitch's role is underestimated; he and Stella are considered as part of Stanley's "team members".

Mridha (2019) examines the connection between Blanche's sexuality and patriarchy, viewing it from the perspective of gender studies and arguing that it is not her sexuality that has brought about her downfall and insanity; rather, it is the direct result of the "plotting of patriarchy" on account of the

fact that her excessive sexuality has exceeded and violated the norms of her society and the limits set by patriarchy.

Most interestingly, Lund (2018) presents the closest study to the current article, focusing on Mitch's role in Blanche's demise. It underlines the crucial part Mitch plays in the final mental collapse of Blanche; Blanche's insanity is primarily the outcome of Mitch's awareness of her past promiscuity and his decision to abandon her since she is not as honest and clean as she has presented herself to him. Hence, she does not fit the standards his mother would accept. It also refers to the downplaying of Mitch's role in the play. However, notwithstanding its acknowledgement of Mitch's significant role, this study falls short of making a comprehensive comparison and contrast between the roles of Stanley and Mitch in relation to Blanche and to other thematic aspects of the play; it strongly argues in favor of attributing Blanche's madness to Mitch's rejection of Blanche rather than to Stanley's brutal rape.

In light of the above studies, it is clear that none of them, with the exception of Lund's, discusses the topic the current article deals with in detail. Lund's study focuses only on one part of the broad objectives of this article; contrary to the mainstream critical view, which attributes Blanche's downfall to Stanley's rape of her, Lund's article underlines Mitch's role in Blanche's final mental collapse. However, given that it does not deal with Mitch's attributes and his crucial role in terms of the development of the play, its thematic concerns, and the tragic conclusion of the play, this article serves a good purpose in bridging this gap, presenting a comprehensive critical analysis of all these issues, and making a significant comparison between the attributes of both Stanley and Mitch and their roles in the play.

2. Method

This article makes a critical comparative and contrastive analysis of the characters of both Mitch and Stanley and their impact on the progress of the events of the play and the characters, following close textual evidence. This method is crucial for juxtaposing the roles of both characters, evaluating them and reading the play from a different perspective. This approach brings to light the value of Mitch's role which has always been in the shadow of Stanley's.

3. Discussion

This paper addresses the crucial role Mitch assumes in the play as a whole and in the final destruction of Blanche, a role that has always been overlooked by critics; Lund (2018, p. 46) confirms this point, saying that "the role of Harold (Mitch) Mitchell ... is downplayed and underestimated." Undeniably, Stanley has spared no effort to destroy Blanche and get rid of her. Stanley's brutality against Blanche may, to some extent, be justified on the basis that he needs "to defeat what he sees as a threat to his home and his dominance of Stella" (Murphy, 2014, p. 84), a threat posed by the intrusion of Blanche who, particularly in Scene Four, incites Stella against her husband, describing him as "survivor of the Stone Age!" (p. 163) The argument to be presented here goes beyond these issues and focuses on the dimensions of the characters of both Stanley and Mitch and their roles in the overall tragic conclusion of the play and its heroine, Blanche.

The current study is based on a close textual analysis of the play and makes a comparative and contrastive analysis of the characters and roles of Stanley and Mitch. It adopts the two methods of organization: the block organization and the point-by-point organization. This paper also tries to shed an illuminating light on some crucial aspects of Mitch's role that have not been duly considered. The total focus by critics on Stanley as the antagonist of Blanche has resulted in understating Mitch's role and the tremendous contribution of his abandonment of Blanche, albeit being instigated by Stanley, to her final catastrophe. In other words, Mitch is given only a marginal role; all that he can do is walk in

the shadow of the towering figure of Stanley, the tough man, the virile husband, and the symbol of the thrusting forces of the new world.

A close textual analysis of the play shows in no uncertain terms that this single focus on the conflict between Blanche and Stanley divests the play from an equally important reading and interpretation and denies Mitch the chance to be treated on equal footing with Stanley. This does in no way mean that the conflict in the play is merely between Stanley and Blanche; other forms of conflict also exist between Stanley and Stella and among other characters. For, as Magdić (2016, p. 4) says, the play is “a critique of post-war American society that put a huge amount of restrictions on women’s lives. It criticizes the way women were treated during those years.” Yet, this is beyond the scope of this paper, which tries to offer the play a new reading and a different approach that delineate Mitch’s personality and bring to light new dimensions of his character and his significant role. This assumption necessitates changing the angle of approach and viewing the whole play from a new perspective.

The role of a character in a literary work is evaluated on the basis of his/her influence on the main events in that work. This, in turn, depends on how significant these events are. To begin with, Blanche comes to her sister’s house as a fugitive, hoping to catch breath and put an end to the process of deterioration triggered by the tragic death of her young husband, Allan Grey, the death of the members of her family, the loss of Belle Reve, the aristocratic family’s plantation, and finally the loss of her job as a high school teacher and her dismissal from Laurel because of her indiscrete sexual behavior. It is noteworthy that the suicide of Blanche’s young husband has destroyed her equilibrium and been the most devastating event in her life as she was, due to her “constrictive upbringing” (Gencheva, 2016, p. 35) partly responsible for. Hence, Blanche “lives her life as a penance for this sin”, which “plunges her into dark depths of self-denial, guilt, revulsion and antipathy, leading her to a sagittal path of nymphomania and prostitution.” (Gencheva, 2016, p. 34-35) It is against this background that Stanley’s and Mitch’s attitudes toward and treatment of Blanche are to be compared and analyzed, for the play is about the demise of Blanche Dubois and the South she represents.

3.1. Stanley's role in the play

Blanche meets Stanley at the end of Scene One. From the beginning, she does not feel at ease in his presence because of his sarcastic and rude attitude toward her. And despite her admiration of his powerful physique, "when you walked in here last night, I said to myself- 'My sister has married a man!'" (2. p. 137), he does not change his attitude. That is why she later admits that he is "just not the sort that goes for jasmine perfume!" (2. p. 141). In other words, he is not the kind of man who reveres a belle, and whom she and her sister used to go out within those old days at Belle Reve. It does not take Blanche long to start feeling deeply apprehensive of him, particularly when he opens her luggage searching for documents pertinent to the loss of Belle Reve. She is even infuriated when he snatches the love letters to check them. She does not hesitate to tell him: "The touch of your hands insults them!" (2. p. 139) Stanley shows no respect for Blanche, and after he learns of the loss of Belle Reve, he starts looking at Blanche with great suspicion. The tension between the two intensifies scene by scene, and Stanley starts plotting to get rid of her, particularly after he overhears her harsh criticism of him at the end of scene four. Bertens, H., & D'haen, T. (2014, 202) confirm this point, saying that “The ever-mounting tension between them, the complex product of class prejudice, mutual dislike and physical chemistry, leads in a breath-taking scene to a terrifying explosion.”

Stanley understands the threat Blanche’s presence poses to the stability and continuity of his relationship with Stella. Therefore, “He cannot stand his sister-in-law's social pretensions that accompany her disparaging remarks about him.” (Jacobs, 2019, p. 174) Stanley takes a number of calculated retaliatory actions against Blanche. Having noticed the promising relationship between

Blanche and his friend Mitch, Stanley digs deep into Blanche's past, revealing that it was notorious. Passing his findings to Mitch, Stanley incites him against Blanche and destroys her last real chance of survival through marriage to Mitch, who proposes to her at the end of Scene Six: "You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be -- you and me, Blanche?" (p. 184) Acting upon the new information received from Stanley, Mitch betrays Blanche and gives up the idea of marriage. Instead, as will be explained later, he comes to her, in Scene Nine, and tries to treat her as a prostitute, telling her: "I don't think I want to marry you anymore. ... You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother." (p. 207)

In Scene Eight, Stanley spoils Blanche's birthday party and even gives her a one-way bus ticket back to Laurel from which she had already been dismissed. Stanley's desire for revenge seems boundless; in Scene Ten, coming back from the hospital where Stella has given birth to their first baby, he brutally rapes Blanche, driving the final nail in her coffin. Hence, Stella's house, which Blanche has first thought of as a safe haven, eventually turns into a temporary stage on her way to irreversible destruction in the mental hospital.

This line of events that involves Blanche and Stanley reveals one, and perhaps the only, side of Stanley's character—he is tough and rough, capable only of harsh behavior with his friends, rude treatment of his visiting in-law, brutal treatment of his wife in beating her up in front of her sister and his friends, smashing the lights, and even of raping Blanche. In fact, Stanley's inclination to violence and abuse has no limits and takes a variety of forms: physical, verbal, and the threat of intimidation in order to establish his authority and have things his way. Even inanimate objects, like the radio and the "light-bulbs" (4. p. 157) do not escape his violence. (Delgado, 2019) It is not surprising, then, that Blanche "develops an attitude of arrogance and disgust against him" (Singh, 2009, p. 83) She tells her sister: "In my opinion? You're married to a madman!" (4. p. 158) Blanche goes on to describe him as an animal, an ape, "survivor of the Stone Age" (4. p. 163). In fact, from the beginning, Blanche disapproves of her sister's marriage to Stanley because she, in Van de Merwe-Lohn's words (2018, p. 25), "feels that Stanley is socially inferior and her sister Stella seems sexually dependent on him." Stanley's behavior throughout the play does not refute Blanche's somewhat exaggerated criticism of him; rather, he confirms every single point Blanche says to her sister against him although some aspects of his behavior may, to some extent, be understood on the basis that it is an aspect of the "continuing human need to secure a territory, a home, and defend it against intruders." (Williams, 2015, p. xxx). In short, Stanley is capable only of brutality and violence, and his attitude naturally and inevitably produces unfavorable reactions and creates an atmosphere of animosity and breeds hostility and hatred. Stanley's behavior towards Blanche and the impression it gives about him do not change; they take a linear line, culminating in ruthlessness towards a defenseless, broken lady who has sought refuge in his place.

Moreover, Stanley shows no degree of flexibility, no understanding or appreciation of Blanche's heart-breaking circumstances, no mercy on a broken human figure that has lost everything in this world, no reverence for a lady of her aristocratic background, and no respect for his wife. If the criterion of the greatness of a character is inflexibility, rudeness, and one-sidedness, Stanley does qualify to be the hero of the play. If the outcome of the conflict and final victory are what matters, it can be said that Stanley has won the battle over Stella and rid his house of the intrusion of Blanche, but he has definitely lost the moral battle. Notwithstanding her removal to the mental institution, it is Blanche who enjoys the sympathy with her exit line when she tells the doctor: "Whoever you are, I've always depended on the kindness of strangers" (11. p. 225), a statement that is, as Boxill (1987, p. 25-26) says, "the most famous line in the play, if not in all Williams"—one, which, "resonant with the plight of Blanche, hangs in the air for long afterwards." Mridha (2019, p. 16) emphasizes this point, saying that Blanche's final exit from the stage in the closing scene "still creates a strong resonance in

the readers and the viewers alike, evoking both questions and discussions.” It is noteworthy that this removal brings into question the morality of the society that excludes such a sensitive, broken soul; when Blanche is chased by the nurse, the poker players, with the exception of Mitch, who cries helplessly, stand remorselessly watching this brutal action.

3.2. *Mitch's role in the Play*

Mitch is the opposite of Stanley in almost every single trait. Mitch is a flexible character; he is capable of responding properly to different people on different occasions. Although he is a close friend of Stanley, Steve, and Pablo who always play poker together, they make fun of him for his close attachment to his old sick mother. The four meet in Stanley's flat at the poker night in Scene Three when Stella introduces Blanche to Mitch, “a lonesome man in search of a wife, whose refined behaviors and courteous manners set him apart from Stanley's other friends.” (Ismael, 2012, p. 99) Stella asks him about his mother, and he responds politely and conveys his mother's appreciation for Stella's sending custard to her. From the beginning, Mitch and Blanche are attracted to each other; the stage directions indicate that “he crosses slowly back into the kitchen, glancing back at Blanche and coughing a little shyly” (p. 146). Similarly, Blanche, the stage directions add, “looks after him with a certain interest” and tells Stella: “That one seems – more superior to the others” (p. 146).

Mitch is not only sensitive and sensible; he is also capable of eliciting the basic human feelings, such as love and passion, hope and expectation, and annoyance, fear, and frustration, in Blanche throughout their relationship. The play focuses on three occasions when Mitch and Blanche meet: in Scenes Three, Six, and Nine. These numbers are of crucial importance, and the line of the development of the relationship between them is equally suggestive of its significance for the play. The numbers form a triangle that represents this promising, if tragic, relationship through which natural human feelings are expressed, but finally thwarted and painfully and ruthlessly crushed. Again, the numbers of the three scenes form a triangle that corresponds to the three main elements of a plot: the initial incident, the climax, and the denouement. This pattern of relationship represents one of the main differences between Mitch's attitude to Blanche and Stanley's, although the former is a potential husband; the latter is an in-law.

Dramatizing the first encounter between Mitch and Blanche, Scene Three provides a unique occasion for the two to know each other and forge a promising relationship. After Stella introduces them to each other, they immediately show some mutual attraction. As has been suggested earlier, Blanche does not conceal her interest in him; she tells Stella that he has “a sort of sensitive look” (p. 146). In turn, Mitch quits the poker game and joins Blanche at the table in the kitchen. Though brief, this encounter offers the chance for both of them to know each other. Mitch shows considerable skill in revealing important aspects of Blanche's personality. When she asks him for a cigarette, he gives her the cigarette case and asks her to read the inscription. Romantic and touching, the inscription leads to a conversation that reveals similarity of experience, establishes a common ground for both, and paves the way for a promising relationship. Blanche finds out that Mitch loved a girl, who died, and the cigarette case was a gift from her that he still relishes; similarly, Blanche loved and was married to a boy who wrote romantic poems for her. Blanche's sympathy with him draws him nearer, and when she tells him that she is a teacher, he is impressed and guesses that she teaches “art or music” (p. 151). At this stage, Blanche and Mitch find out that they have something in common; they share loneliness and sensitivity.

Scene Three, or the poker scene, shows a lot of contrast and contradiction between Stanley and Mitch in their treatment of Blanche. Hence, the more distanced from Stanley Blanche is for his rough attitude, the nearer she gets to Mitch, who finds in Blanche a better company than his poker partners.

When Blanche turns on the radio and "waltzes to the music with romantic gestures", Mitch "is delighted and moves in awkward imitation like a dancing bear" (p. 151). Seeing the growing harmony between Blanche and Mitch, "Stanley stalks fiercely through the portieres into the bedroom. He crosses to the small white radio and snatches it off the table. With a shouted oath, he tosses the instrument out of the window" (p. 151). The contrast between Stanley's behavior with Blanche and Mitch's could not have been demonstrated more clearly than in this scene although the stage directions describe Mitch in unfavorable terms, depicting his movement as "awkward imitation like a dancing bear" (p. 151). Even if Mitch's behavior is merely a kind of amiable gesture to Blanche, it adds more credit to him than damage to his personality. By contrast, Stanley lacks this amiability, or perhaps he refuses to show any even at a time when it is necessary. In Scene Eight, for example, at the birthday party Stella makes for Blanche, when Stella lights the candles, Blanche says:

You ought to save them for the baby's birthdays. Oh, I hope candles are going to glow in his life and I hope that his eyes are going to be like candles, like two blue candles lighted in a white cake! (p. 196)

Instead of appreciating Blanche's feelings and thanking her for her sincere wishes for his coming baby, Stanley mockingly puts her off, saying: "What poetry!" (p. 196). Comparing the behavior of both Blanche and Stanley in this scene, Tischler (2000, 43) comes to the conclusion that this "remind[s] us that these people come from different worlds. Even when humiliated, Blanche endeavors to be polite and charming; even when victorious, he drives on for the kill."

Decency, respect, and kindness for ladies are another set of attributes added to Mitch's credit in evaluating his impact on Blanche, in particular, and on the outcome of the play, in general. In total contrast with Stanley, who beats up his wife in front of his friends and her sister, Mitch firmly declares: "Poker should not be played in a house with women" (p. 153). This gallant attitude surely earns him everybody's respect, including Blanche's. Near the end of Scene Three, "Blanche comes out of the upper landing in her robe and slips fearfully down the steps", asking "Where is my little sister? Stella? Stella?" (p. 154). Afterwards, Blanche "stops before the dark entrance of her sister's flat. Then she catches her breath as if struck" (p. 154). Blanche realizes that Stella is back with Stanley. The stage directions depict Blanche's pathetic condition, suggesting that she "rushes down to the walk before the house. She looks right and left as if for sanctuary" (p. 154). At this critical moment, when Blanche is deeply confused, Mitch "appears around the corner." (p. 155) He calms her down and tells her that this is normal between Stanley and Stella as they are "crazy about each other" (p. 155). He asks her to sit down on the steps and offers her a cigarette, a gesture she deeply appreciates when she tells him: "Thank you for being so kind! I need kindness now." (p. 155) So, this scene concludes with Blanche's heartfelt acknowledgement of Mitch's kindness at a moment she is profoundly depressed and desperately in need of some kind of moral support. It also paves the way for a closer understanding and attachment between them.

In Scene Six, Mitch and Blanche are back from an outing at the "amusement park on Lake Pontchartrain" (p. 175). They come into Stanley's flat while Stanley and Stella are still out. They talk about different topics. Mitch's question about her age unleashes a heart-to-heart conversation. He tells her that he has informed his mother of his attachment to her, and that she wants to know her age. He tells Blanche that his mother is sick and that "She won't live long. Maybe just a few months" (p. 182). He says that his mother wants to see him "settled down" (p. 182) before her death. Upon saying this, the stage directions suggest that his "voice is hoarse and he clears his throat twice, shuffling nervously around with his hands in and out of his pockets" (p. 182). Blanche is deeply moved by his love and compassion for his mother, the feelings that remind her of the typical attitude of members of the traditional Southern society. She sympathizes with him and makes a significant statement that adds to his noble attributes; she tells him: "I think you have a great capacity for devotion" (p. 182). At the same time, Blanche, who has suffered from the devastating consequences of loneliness, tells Mitch: "You will be lonely when she passes on, won't you? (p. 182). The stage directions suggest that Mitch "clears his throat and nods" (p. 182). It can be said here that even if Blanche wants to capitalize on the

occasion and attract Mitch further by showing her sympathy with him, she is not to blame for this as this is part of her sensitive nature and her aristocratic upbringing. Again, this can be seen as a clever way of evading his question about her age, a question that she is now sensitive to (Gencheva, 2016, p. 32) given that she sees Mitch a potential husband. That is why she uses the paper lantern that, according to Piccirillo (2018, p. 6), Williams uses to “symbolize illusions” to which she escap[es] [from] the harsh reality.” (Zhao, 2016, p. 467) Blanche is keen to look young and beautiful to attract Mitch further. That is why, as Matos (2015, p. 131) points out, “Despite her financial problems, Blanche tries to be a glamorous woman.”

Having identified with Mitch in scene three on the basis of the similarity of their experiences of the painful loss of a dear friend, Blanche now foretells the consequences of the loneliness he will suffer after the imminent loss of his dearest and nearest: his mother. Here, Mitch assumes the role of “a confidant of the opposite sex” to whom Blanche can “reveal her past” (Hooti, 2011, p. 28); he is the only one she informs about her relationship with her late husband, Allan, a fact that indicates the strong emotional tie between them. She tells him of her tragic loss of Allan, whom she loved wholeheartedly at a young age. In one of the most remembered passages in the play, Blanche recounts her romantic attachment to Allan Gray and his tragic suicide in the most eloquent manner, using images of light and darkness that make the description of the events lively and animated. Describing her romance with Allan Gray, she says:

When I was sixteen, I made the discovery – love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that’s how it struck the world for me. (p. 70)

Again, recounting the tragic consequences of his suicide, she says:

And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that’s stronger than this – kitchen – candle. (p. 72)

The sound effects and lights that accompany the images tremendously add to the vigor and effect of the scene. Having been deeply moved by Blanche's story, Mitch shows a high degree of gallantry and sensitivity, giving her hope of redemption at the most critical moment. “[D]rawing her slowly into his arms”, he proposes to her, saying: “You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be – you and me, Blanche?” (p. 184) Similarly, Blanche is not less noble in her appreciation of Mitch’s timely chivalric attitude. The stage directions focus on her heartfelt reaction to Mitch's kind gesture of proposing to her at this heartbreaking moment: “She stares at him vacantly for a moment. Then with a soft cry huddles in his embrace. She makes a sobbing effort to speak but the words won't come. He kisses her forehead and her eyes and finally her lips” (p. 184). The immediate impact of Mitch's gesture is not only soothing for Blanche but also therapeutic. The “polka tune” that Blanche and Allan danced to the evening he killed himself and that has accompanied Blanche's account of Allan's suicide now “fades out”, announcing the deep relief Mitch's proposal has given her (p. 184). Blanche's gratitude to Mitch is highly touching and expressive; she tells him: “Sometimes – there's God – so quickly!” (p. 184) To Blanche, Mitch is now the savior and the God of mercy who has given her assurance of survival and redemption.

By the same token, Mitch's proposal to Blanche at this moment is indicative of his utmost happiness as he has finally found such a sensitive person who possesses great traditional values he has not yet found in any lady, and that his mother appreciates. At one point in scene six, he strongly expresses his admiration for her personality: “I like you to be exactly the way that you are, because in all my – experience – I have never known anyone like you.” (p. 177) Mitch, in Tischler's (2000, 47)

words, is "dazzled by Blanche's Southern charm. ... [H]e envisions [her] as a reincarnation of his dying mother". That is why he deems this moment the most suitable for making such a proposal to Blanche who responds with such deep appreciation and gratitude. Again, the announcement of the proposal at this critically painful moment for Blanche reveals Mitch's wit and intelligence that are overlooked by critics. For, had he made the proposal at a time of serenity and peace of mind and in different circumstances for Blanche, this highly appreciative response on the part of Blanche would not have been prompt and immediate, given her aristocratic background, the cultural gap between them, her intelligence, and smartness. Hence, this timely proposal adds to the qualities Mitch possesses and that are overlooked by critics who focus mainly on Stanley's confrontation with Blanche. Mitch, in Tischler's words (2000, 47), "like the long-lost Allan, is more gentle than Stanley". Mitch is able to reveal the gentle and sympathetic nature of Blanche because he is sensitive, gentle and kind-hearted. Similarly, Blanche is a sensitive, sensible, and educated lady, possessing Southern charm and gentility despite her morally bleak and lurid past that her personal, familial, and financial circumstances created and that Stanley exploits in his endeavors to bring about her demise.

Another point of contrast between Mitch and Stanley is that Mitch, through his kind and gentle approach, is capable of revealing different facets of Blanche's personality and her past. On the one hand, Stanley adopts a tough approach toward Blanche. As early as scene two, he rudely cross-examines her on the loss of Belle Reve, the aristocratic family plantation. She tells him that all papers related to Belle Reve are kept in a box, which she opens for him. When he asks her about "another sheaf of paper" underneath, she tells him they "are love-letters, yellowing with antiquity, all from one boy" (p. 139). The ensuing debate between them shows his rudeness, tough attitude, and lack of respect for his wife's visiting sister, although he is armed with what he calls the "Napoleonic code" according to which "what belongs to the wife belongs to the husband and vice versa" (p. 133). Had he approached her gently, she would have given him a full account of the loss of the plantation as she has already done when Stella asks her. Yet, he insists on doing it his own way. Therefore, when he tells her "I'll have a look at them first", she responds, saying: "The touch of your hands insults them" (p. 139). She tries to pull them from him, and the stage directions indicate that he "rips off the ribbon and starts to examine them. Blanche snatches them from him, and they cascade to the floor" (p. 139). At this moment, Blanche defiantly tells him: "Now that you've touched them I'll burn them" (p. 139). Stanley is baffled by her determination to prevent him from reading the letters, so he asks: "What in hell are they?" (p. 139) She restates what she has already told him: "Poems a dead boy wrote." (p. 139)

By contrast, although Mitch is described as dull and foolish, the play shows him to be more sophisticated and more capable than Stanley in making Blanche "[Lay] ... her cards on the table" (2. p. 137). Stanley is direct in his aggression, does not know how to deal with Blanche; the only way that he understands is keeping "those red lights on", through sexuality. Mitch can be credited with revealing Blanche's character more than anybody else. While the relationship between Stanley and Blanche is linear; Mitch's represents a dramatic line, beginning slowly, moving to the climax and then going down to a tragic conclusion. It is true that he is used by Stanley, but his behavior is not intended to be a fulfillment of Stanley's instructions. He acts according to his own interest and out of his desperate need of a wife. Yet, Stanley finally succeeds in pushing him in the direction that serves Stanley's interest and fulfills his revenge on both Blanche and Mitch, as will be explained later.

Another point of contrast is that Stanley is interested in revealing only the dark side of Blanche's character, so he seeks the help of one of his friends who goes to Laurel, where she was a teacher, to probe into her past. He informs Stanley of Blanche's dismissal from school on account of her immoral behavior with one of her students. Moreover, Stanley challenges her on every issue, and despite her friendly approach to him at the beginning, he insists on giving her the impression that they are at loggerheads. The loss of Belle Reve, which Blanche is only partly responsible for, drains every drop of

respect or sympathy in Stanley for her although she gives him the documents, "thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years, affecting Belle Reve as, piece by piece, our improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications" (2. p. 140). Stanley tells her that he has "a lawyer acquaintance who will study these out" (2. p. 140). And instead of showing sympathy for what she has been through, he rudely suspects everything she says, establishing a relationship of mistrust from the beginning. The events in the following scenes in which Stanley beats Stella, and in which Blanche severely criticizes him, and his plans for revenge come as a natural outcome of this distrust. By contrast, through his respectful approach, Mitch succeeds in making her tell him about her past, both happy and sad, and in bringing out the bright side, the sensitive, sympathetic and compassionate, and the side that Stella stresses when she tells Stanley: "You didn't know Blanche as a girl. Nobody, nobody, was tender and trusting as she was. But people like you abused her, and forced her to change" (8. p. 198).

The third encounter between Mitch and Blanche is in Scene Nine, an encounter that tragically concludes Blanche's fate and sets her on the path of irrecoverable destruction. It comes after Scene Eight in which Stanley ruthlessly spoils the birthday party Stella makes for her sister; he gives Blanche a bus ticket back to Laurel from which she was dismissed. At the end of this scene, Stella starts to have the first pains of labor and is taken to the hospital to give birth to their first baby. Mitch comes directly from work to see Blanche; he is unclean, unshaven, and in "uncouth apparel" (p. 201). When he enters the flat, the stage directions suggest that Blanche "offers him her lips. He ignores it and pushes past her into the flat. She looks fearfully after him as he stalks into the bedroom." (p. 200) Blanche considers this as well as his absence from her birthday party as "uncavalier" (p. 200). She also feels that this attitude portends something wicked for her. Yet, she pretends that there is nothing serious and tells him: "But I forgive you. I forgive you because it's such a relief to see you. You've stopped that polka tune that I had caught in my head." (p. 201) For, although she is insulted by his behavior, she tenaciously clings to the hope of survival through her relationship with him. She does not want to confront him; she desperately needs him at this stage of her life for security and survival. She, in Yoshimi's (2009, p. 53) words, "depends on Mitch, as he is an unwavering admirer who idolizes her and boosts her currently low and fluctuating self-esteem." Jayachandran (2014, p. 118) pertinently points out that through marriage to Mitch, Blanche hopes to escape poverty and the bad reputation that haunts her." Earlier in Scene Five, she confesses to Stella: "I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again! Yes – I want Mitch ... very badly! Just think! If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone's problem." (p. 171) Therefore, she tries to change the subject and, knowing how much his mother means to him, she asks him about her: "How is your mother? Isn't your mother well?" (p. 201) When he rudely asks her: "Why", she dodges the question, but "The polka tune starts up again." (p. 201), indicating Blanche's anxiety and fear of what is to come.

Mitch comes with three things in his mind; first, he wants to know her real age and to see her under the light. He "tears the paper lantern off the light bulb", so Blanche "utters a frightened gasp." (p. 203) Blanche's efforts to hide her real age and, more importantly, her shameful past are lost; everything she has tried to conceal is now exposed, and the hope of getting married to Mitch is dashed. He is not impressed by her effort to justify her behavior by saying "I don't want realism. ... I tell you what I want. Magic!", an effort that makes Mitch "laugh". (p. 203-204) Now Blanche is cornered and driven into the world of her fantasy although she "suffers from illusions" (O'Connor, 1997, p. 13). At this point, Mitch shows considerable maturity and rationality that refute claims of being clumsy and awkward; he [slowly and bitterly] tells her:

I don't mind you being older than I thought. But all the rest of it
– God! That pitch about your ideals being so old-fashioned and
all the malarky that you've dished out all summer. Oh, I knew

you weren't sixteen anymore. But I was fool enough to believe
you were straight. (p. 204)

The bitterness that Mitch speaks with is indicative of his deep sadness to have to lose Blanche, and this is the second thing that Mitch comes to see Blanche for; he wants to tell her that she is not “clean enough to bring in the house with ... [his] mother.” (9. p. 207) So, his final decision now is to break up with Blanche. The other thing he has come to see Blanche for is to have, in his own words, “[w]hat I been missing all summer” (9. p. 207), that is, to sleep with her. Although Blanche is used to having sexual relationships with “strangers” (9. p. 204), she is infuriated because she knows that this request signifies the loss of “Mitch’s blind admiration for or devotion” (Yoshimi, 2009, p. 56) to her and, consequently, the ruin of her hope of survival through marriage to him: “Mitch’s ‘love’ for Blanche is subverted through his attempt to fornicate her.” (Panda, 2016, p. 51) Therefore, she does not hesitate to ask him to leave before she starts screaming “fire”. Mitch hesitates a little, thinking that she is not serious in her threat, and that she will give him what he has come for. When she sees that he is still waiting, she rushes to the window and cries: “Fire! Fire! Fire!” (9. p. 207) This cry, “Fire, fire”, is one of the landmarks of the play, not less important than Blanche’s famous line: “Death ... the opposite is desire” on account of its connotative significance. It is an expression of the ultimate sense of fear that Mitch has been able to cause. It is the fire of burning desire that has been burning Blanche from within and from without. She has been on the fire of desire and is desperate to quench it with sexual satisfaction. But at the same time, she is equally desperate to keep her desire in check because this is the last chance she has for salvation through Mitch.

Acting upon the information he got from Stanley, Mitch adds insult to injury by treating Blanche as a prostitute. This attitude represents a drastic change in his relationship with Blanche, a change of devastating proportions and consequences for both of them; for Blanche, it is an irreversible downfall; for Mitch, a loss of tragic overtones. Now both are losers, while prior to this encounter, they had been “prospective mutual saviours”, sharing “a more practical union, rather than one of romance.” (Lund, 2018, p. 49) Blanche knows only too well that her last chance of redemption and survival in this hostile world through marriage to Mitch are ruthlessly crushed; there is no light at the end of this dark tunnel that Mitch’s decision to abandon her has thrown her in. She is now on “Fire” since the person she has pinned her hopes of survival on has pitilessly abandoned her in a disgraceful manner. So, it is her disreputable past that has finally destroyed her desperate attempts for survival. Confirming this point, Sojtaric (2010, p. 64) says that “When the truth about Blanche’s promiscuous past is revealed, its repercussions leave her totally destitute.” Hence, her journey to the mental asylum is an inevitable outcome of this encounter with Mitch. The view, adopted by many, that Stanley’s rape of Blanche is behind her insanity is in line with the reading of the play that focuses on Stanley’s victory over Blanche and considers the rape, albeit cruel, an aspect of that victory. This can easily be refuted at least by his statement that “We’ve had this date with each other from the beginning!” (10. p. 215) Roderick (1977, p. 118) confirms this point when he says: “Blanche as much as Stanley is to blame for the rape.” Furthermore, when Stanley comes back home, she is already hallucinating and has lost touch with the real world. Now the pressure on Blanche is too much for her to bear, so she escapes to the world of her illusion, conjuring the image of Shep Huntleigh, a millionaire who, she claims, has invited her to join him on a “cruise of the Caribbean on a yacht!” (10. p. 209) This illusion, as Kinoshita (2016, p. 75-76) puts it, “is not just about a relief from her difficulties” but also an expression of the “conflict within her mind.” So, when “Stanley viciously rapes her ... Blanche has already mentally left this world, she is safe now, protected by the loss of reason.” (Lund, 2018, p. 52)

The third encounter in Scene Nine is a confrontation between Blanche and Mitch, who comes to challenge her on the rumors of her prostitution provided by Stanley. Having realized that her romance with Mitch is over and hopes of redemption are gone “[a]s a result of the cruel disclosure of her past

by Stanley, she is compelled to confess to Mitch” (Yoshimi, 2009, p. 3); she shows the moral courage to admit that

After the death of Allan — intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with. ... I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection – here and there, in the most – unlikely places. (p. 205)

This shows that “she has been devastated by her husband’s death, oscillating between sanity and madness from the very start. It is inevitable that she seeks dependence on others.” (Yoshimi, 2009, p. 6) Blanche tells Mitch of the grave circumstances that she went through: the suicide of her young husband, the sense of guilt for which paved the way for her insanity (Qiao and Miao, 2019; p. 19), and the rest of the disasters that she had experienced, which have been mentioned earlier. In one of the most remembered statements in the play, she tells him: “Death -- ... The opposite is desire.” (9. p. 206) In Blanche’s tragic experience, death and sexuality are fatally intertwined in the sense that each one leads to the other; her sexuality has been a direct result of her multi-faceted, heartbreaking experience most notably of which is the loss of her young husband the tragic ramifications and reverberations of which have drastically turned her life upside down and haunted her until the last moment. Seigle (2009/2010. p. 44) confirms that “Blanche’s heartbreak following her first love causes her to descend into the degeneration that becomes her ruin, a fact which lends empathetic justification and a sorrowful light to her actions.” Moreover, Blanche’s sexuality has been the only way for her to protect herself in this ruthless world. As Nawaz & Awan (2018, p. 80) confirm, “Blanche relies upon men for both the social and monetary security they can give.” For, as early as Scene One, and in one of the longest passages in the play, she tells Stella about her painful experience and the loss of the family plantation. (p. 126-7) She also, in scene five, admits to Stella that she was involved in sexual relationships in order to protect herself in this harsh world:

I’ve run for protection, Stella, from under one leaky roof to another leaky roof – because it was storm – all storm, and I was – caught in the centre. ... People don’t see you – men don’t – don’t even admit your existence unless they are making love to you. (p. 169)

Moreover, Blanche’s “[f]leeting intimacies with younger companions”, in Kataria’s (2009, p. 24) words “seemed to take the sting out of her loneliness, at least momentarily, and seemed to neutralise the feeling of guilt over having caused young Allan’s death.”

Having revealed her past circumstances that forced her to behave in a way incompatible with her aristocratic upbringing, Blanche accuses Mitch of betraying her at the most critical moment after he has raised her hopes of survival through marriage in Scene Six. With “sobbing laughter” (p. 205), she reminds him of his marriage proposal to her:

I met you. You said you needed somebody. Well, I needed somebody, too. I thanked God for you because you seemed to be gentle – a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in! The poor man’s Paradise – is a little peace. ... But I guess I was asking, hoping – too much! (p. 205)

She is now aware of the consequences of his decision to abandon her; Lund (2018, p. 46) argues that “when she realizes that he knows about her troubled past, she mentally collapses. While Stanley’s

final act certainly is cruel and devastating, Mitch's rejection of Blanche is what essentially sets off her final madness." Hence, when Stanley rapes her, she is already lost.

By the same token, Mitch is also a victim of the information Stanley gathers about Blanche and of his own behavior with her in this scene. In fact, the information Stanley passes to Mitch about Blanche is not intended to destroy Blanche only; rather, it is also meant to destroy the promising relationship between Blanche and Mitch. This raises a question about Stanley's attitude toward his close friend, Mitch, an attitude that "characterizes Stanley as a possessive, jealous friend" whose anger at Mitch in scene three is "fueled further by Mitch's interest on Blanche." (Delgado, 2019, p. 252) This explains Stanley's feverish efforts to put an end to Mitch's attachment to Blanche; he does not want him to marry a lady more refined and educated than his wife, Stella. Hence, Stanley's rape of Blanche can be seen as an attempt to destroy any possibility of rapprochement between Mitch and Blanche once and for all. At the same time, it is not out of his sexual desire as much as it is motivated by his desire for revenge. And he succeeds in doing so; at the end of the play, Blanche is led to the mental asylum, while Mitch is watching helplessly. Moreover, although the rape is not shown, Stanley does not plead for innocence; he wants Mitch to believe it and never think of going back to Blanche.

The damage Mitch causes to his relationship with Blanche in Scene Nine is irrecoverable and beyond redemption. The dream of getting married to a sensitive and sensible lady with a traditional background is now a nightmare that is going to haunt him for the rest of his life. At a moment of weakness, he acts in a way that serves Stanley's interest, bringing upon himself a tremendous loss and damage. For Mitch, the chance of meeting a lady of Blanche's attributes and aristocratic background comes only once in a lifetime; missing this rare chance will cost him a lot and produce drastic changes in his life and relationship with his close friend, Stanley.

In Scene Eleven, which dramatizes Blanche's tragic departure to the mental asylum, the poker players are sitting around the table in the kitchen. Stanley brags about his view: "I put that down as a rule. To hold front position in this rat-race you've got to believe you are lucky." (p. 216) Mitch is not impressed by this, so he tells him: "You ... you. ... Brag ... bull ... bull." (p. 216) This statement reflects Mitch's mood; he is to witness the departure of the lady he has wholeheartedly loved to her everlasting destruction. When Blanche comes out of the bathroom, announcing "I have just washed my hair." (p. 218), the stage directions focus on Mitch: "At the sound of Blanche's voice Mitch's arm supporting his cards has sagged and his gaze is dissolved into space." (p. 218) He is deeply moved by hearing her voice, which he will never hear again. At this moment, Stanley "slaps him on the shoulder", saying: "Hey, Mitch, come to!" (p. 218) Upon hearing Blanche's "rising voice [which] penetrates the concentration of the game", "Mitch ducks his head lower" (p. 218-219). Mitch is now grieved over Blanche, feeling the pangs of the trauma of the loss of a dream that was about to come true. The fact that he "keeps staring down at his hands on the table" (p. 222) suggests that he is ashamed of himself for his contribution to Blanche's tragic finale and is contemplating doing something. When the Doctor comes, and Stanley asks him to come in, the stage directions suggest that "Mitch has started towards the bedroom", and that "Stanley crosses to block him." (p. 224) Having now realized the enormity of his loss, the gravity of the consequences of abandoning her, and Stanley's role behind the loss of his dream, Mitch "wildly" bursts, saying: "You! You done this, all o' your God damn interfering with things you –" (p. 224). When Stanley pushes him aside, Mitch threatens him, saying: "I'll kill you!", and "He lunges and strikes at Stanley." (p. 224) After the other poker players interfered, Mitch "collapses at the table, sobbing." (p. 224) It is only now that Mitch realizes the enormity of his loss and the fact that he has been used by Stanley to destroy Blanche. Sasani (2015, p. 485) confirms this point, saying that "Mitch becomes aware of Stanley's game at the end of the play when Blanche is taken into the asylum."

The conclusion of the play is tragic not only for Blanche but also for both Stella and Mitch. Stella's loss is grave; Blanche's destruction represents the loss of the last memory of Belle Reve and the aristocratic past. She will go on living with Stanley for the sake of her baby; their relationship is not going to be the same again. Stanley has to kneel beside her [voluptuously, soothingly] (p. 226), trying to calm her down. There is a price that he is going to pay for what he has done; Stella is not expected to be the same submissive wife. Similarly, Mitch's loss is irrecoverable; his dream of marrying Blanche has now turned into a nightmare that is going to haunt him for the rest of his life.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the role Mitch plays in the development of the play and its thematic concerns is of tremendous proportions. Juxtaposing his role with that of Stanley, the possessive and domineering friend, demonstrates that despite his humble position among his poker friends who pick on him for his close attachment to his mother, the part he plays is more vital and multi-dimensional than Stanley's as far as Blanche's fate is concerned. The discussion shows that Stanley's impact is one-dimensional and limited; everything he does is geared toward humiliating Blanche, making life extremely difficult for her, and finally bringing about her demise. Given that she is a visiting-in-law at the end of her rope, seeking sanctuary at his place, it does not require much to make life unbearable for her. His attitude toward her is repulsive, and he does not give her any chance to be friendly with him. His relationship with Blanche takes a steady line of mistrust, hatred and animosity, callousness, heartlessness, culminating in brutal rape. With his friends, he is loud, exacting, tough, and jealous.

By contrast, Mitch possesses attributes that distinguish him from the other characters, especially Stanley. Mitch is polite and considerate as much as calm, cool, and collected. He is flexible and amiable, decent, respectable and kind. He speaks softly, and his actions are carefully considered. He does not show any of Stanley's fits of anger or violence. His relationship with Blanche follows an intricate dramatic line, giving the play depth and vigor and creating suspense, anticipation, apprehension, and tragic conclusion. His role gives the play what it needs to be a consummate and fully accomplished work worthy of consideration. The significance of Mitch's contribution to the play and its thematic concerns of sexuality, loneliness, alienation, and illusion are invaluable; without it, the play becomes dull and dreary, featureless and uninteresting. Moreover, the role Mitch takes up develops the play in theme and mood and gives the events reasonable dramatic progress; to Blanche, he is kind and has the capacity for devotion. He is also the God of mercy and the savior who gives her the hope for survival, demonstrating wit and intelligence in his timely proposal to her. Yet, when the time comes for decisive action, he shows that he is the man to do so; he is the god of wrath whose desertion drives her into hallucination and insanity. Nevertheless, his abandonment of Blanche is based on his sense of honor; he can compromise the issue of her age, but not her past promiscuity. This is indicative of his rationality and maturity that are overlooked. Besides, although he has a great desire for Blanche, he does not try to rape her as Stanley does. When Blanche cries "Fire", he runs away to avoid being involved in a scandalous affair.

Moreover, Mitch's sincerity and flexibility are crucial for delineating the character of Blanche; it is through the three encounters they have in the play that Blanche's past in all its manifestations is revealed. Little do we know from her encounters with Stanley about her past that proves vital for the development of the play and its tragic conclusion.

All in all, Mitch assumes an indispensable role in the play, a role that can never be described as "dull and clumsy", nor can it be underestimated in comparison with Stanley's. Mitch contributes so much to the development, vigor, and depth of the play that he deserves to be called: the forgotten hero of the play.

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