

CRISTIÁN RÉKA

...Named Desire

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Puskin és Baratinszkij

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A pestis mint metafora: Puskin és Wilson

SZELEI ILDIKÓ

A kultúra és a szabadság problémája

Blok és Puskin Don Juan ábrázolásában

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Pugacsov: egy csavargó,
aki individuummá akart válni

BAXÓ JUDIT

Az inkognitó játéka

KOVÁCS RITA

Ritter Gluck

BABUS ENIKŐ

Az egzisztencia romantikus megtapasztalása

Tyutcsjev költészetében

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...Named Desire

Many things in the world have not been named, and many things, even if they have been named, have never been described. One of these is the desire – unmistakably modern, a variant of sophistication but hardly identical with it – that goes with the personified name of Blanche Dubois. The desire is esoteric, something of a private code, a badge of identity. To talk about desire is to betray it. If the betrayal can be defended, it will be for the edification it provides, or the dignity of the conflict it resolves

For myself, I plead the goal of self-edification, and the goal of sharp conflict in my own desire. I am strongly drawn to Blanche, and almost as strongly offended by her. That is why I want to talk about something "named desire", and that is also why I can.

After Susan Sontag's AGAINST INTERPRETATION

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, the master of (com)passion, is extremely successful in dramatizing emotion and writing about people – bizarre though most of them may be – who are trying to live.

When THE STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE (1947) was produced in Europe (Austria), it was called LONELINESS, THE LAST STEP. Williams instinctively understood the loneliness of (wo)man¹ – the constant and desperate attempt to escape reality (that is, loneliness), and the failure to do so.

Violence and sensationalism have filled Williams' plays: rape in STREETCAR..., homosexuality in CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF, castration in SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH, a man torn apart by dogs in ORPHEUS DESCENDING, cannibalism in SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER, a comment on people eating undigested food particles in THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA

Violence and the victim, the realistic scene and the symbolic act are fused in the poignant portrait of Blanche Dubois, in STREETCAR..., Williams' masterpiece of contradiction.

BLANCHE DUBOIS – THE LABELLED VICTIM

There are preoccupations among literary scholars to label Blanche Dubois, the pathetic protagonist of *STREETCAR*... as 'a' or 'the' victim of the play.

A victim is a person suffering injury, pain or loss, because of circumstances, drives², or somebody's ill will. The victim is a functional device necessary for catharsis³, it is the redeeming character, the one who gives meaning and saves the story, the prototype of birth and death.

Ruby Cohn (1971, 97) victimizes Blanche Dubois by emphasizing the name itself: BLANCHE DUBOIS. In ancient times sacrifices were offered to gods in white immaculate clothes (human sacrifices)*. In the play, Cohn writes, the character herself "translates" the name for Mitch:

It's a French name. It means woods and Blanche means white, so the two together mean white woods. Like an orchard in spring! You can remember it by that.

(Williams: 1959, 150)

Even her translation is a fantasy, it resembles the purity valued as the highest form of sacrifice. More pointedly, the two streetcars, "Desire" and "Cemeteries", suggest the inexorable approach to Death, to sacrifice, whatever is its form.

During the most of the eleven scenes of the play, Blanche appears to continuously substitute herself from the vulnerable 'grande damme' (Scene 1) to the domination hunting 'sex-kitten' (Scene 2), and the 'refined lady' (Scene 3), 'the outraged aristocrat' (Scene 4), and 'lady' (Scene 9) to the 'tiger' (Scene 10). In the final scene Ruby Cohn depicts Blanche as the victim of her own fantasies -the lamb-like figure (Scene 11).

Probably to challenge Cohn et al. admit ex hypotesi that Blanche is trapped by "the poverty of her imagery which reflects the poverty of her dreams" (Cohn, 1969: Downer, 1965; Porter, 1969), that she is destroyed by a „strong antagonist, Stanley Kowalski, whom she correctly views as her executioner" /sic!/ (ibidem).

The hard consonants of Stanley Kowalski's name contrast with the openness of Blanche Dubois's name -as opposed to her moth-like whiteness-, Stanley vehiculates in a colourful world in motion:

Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the centre of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens.

(Williams: 1959, 128)

Visually and verbally, Meserve (1966) and Cohn claim, that Tennessee Williams opposes Stanley to Blanche, the executioner and the 'victim'. Both characters are summarized by their opening lines:

Stanley: Hey, there! Stella Baby! /.../ Catch! /.../ Meat!

(Williams: 1959, 116)

Blanche: They told me to take a streetcar named Desire and then to transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at Elysian Fields!

(Williams: 1959, 117)

Blanche as a 'conscious victim' has come to the end of the line named suggestively DESIRE, and the play itself traces her ride to CEMETERIES:

"DEATH... THE OPPOSITE IS DESIRE" (Blanche)

Blanche has to face the rough Kowalskian acts, the insults and the rape. Towards the end she seems helpless and defeated (one of the many readings one might picture) and Stanley acts with 'unforgivable, disgusting' cruelty⁵.

Blanche and Stanley are protagonist and antagonist, but the play itself is not a simple tableau of victim and villain. The play's eleventh scene gives the opportunity for some to victimize Blanche in a way that borders on sentimentality, both in reading the drama and seeing the film with the same title⁶.

It seems to me that Blanche Dubois' victimization can be viewed not only through the Kowalskian rough perspective, the aggressive response, a physical one, of an angered, greedy "animal", but also through the response of Allan, Blanche's young husband, who, dying, caused her a chain of pains and later failures. Allan started to be conscious of his homoeroticism but Blanche rejected and betrayed him at the ball scene (what she recollects in telling this to Mitch). Losing her young "effeminate" husband, Blanche realizes that the separation between her and Allan is the cause, the root of all her failures, all her multi-victimizations:

We danced the Varsouviana! Suddenly in the middle of the dance the boy I had married broke away from me and ran out of the casino. A few moments later - a shot! /.../ He'd stuck the revolver into his mouth, and fired. /.../ It was because, on the dance floor, unable to stop myself I'd suddenly said: 'I know! I know! You disgust me!... 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. ...

(Williams: 1959, 184)

Blanche's separation from the characters on the outside is repression⁷ on the inside - her separation is the fall into a division, into the original lie⁸.

In the multitude of the readings of the drama we might consider Blanche as the victim of her own gullible lies, of her hopes and desires for a true communion, whatever this term means⁹.

She loves only Allan, who left her in despair travelling on a streetcar "named Desire".

Blanche directly denies death and separateness ("Sometimes - there is God - so quickly!" / Scene 6/), and thus her own individuality as a desirable division. All her failed relationships seem to serve her further 'victimization' as a feedback masochism¹⁰.

Blanche's relation with other characters are exclusively constraining and oppressive (see Blanche-Stanley, Blanche-Eunice, Blanche-Mitch, etc.). They are intense and transferable and create anxiety about separateness¹¹, and thus are exclusively negative. The heroine, if we

call Blanche in a canonized manner, willingly or unwillingly falls into a state labelled as "victim". She cannot, in her given social and mental status, overcome the desire TO BE LOVED. She has the 'tidal wave of drive' (Lacan) with which she passes through conformity (normality, canon) to cultural-social settings. That is the price to be inscribed with Blanche's disappearance at the end, as the desire to be a 'signifier of a desire' (Lacan) through the 'lack'¹² as such, which as later will be presented, is the 'otherness', more exactly THE OTHER¹³ Blanche.

Otherness can be achieved not only by the split between what Blanche says, and what it is said in the drama about her by the actual characters, but also by the split of what is written (the drama as the subject of the statement)¹⁴ and of what might have been written¹⁵ (the subject of the reader's utterance). This 'otherness', the OTHER, is not the real interlocutor, not a real character but merely an intercharacter: the lack of Blanche as an object/subject¹⁶ called DESIRE.

To live by the drive of desire, that is an art, a form of art, enables the protagonist of the drama to a subversive and even liberatory communication with other characters, leading to sustained dialogues and even erotic relations, be those 'moral masochism, masochistic fantasies, feminine masochism' (Freud, 1986)¹⁷ or heterosexual intercourse (Scene 10 - the rape).

The desire is just a path leading to bliss (*jouissance*-Fr.), ecstasy, pleasure. Psychoanalytically, the joy -*jouissance*- is opposed to the LACK¹⁸. Blanche Dubois vehiculates her desires, allied to the Freudian 'death drive or wish' on a streetcar (*streetcar*-sic!) going from to.

Blanche's actions in the drama are interludes of the 'pleasure principle' as are enounced by Freud, the hunt for enjoyment, the 'fort-da game' (presence-and-absence-and-presence again), the game of a past *deja-vu* bliss. That is what we can conclude from her past failed relations.

The 'law of desire' as part of the 'Law of the Father' (Kristeva: Wood, 1991) leads Blanche to the borders of hysteria (*hysteros*=womb) in the in the land of character, and constraint - neurosis (Laplanche - Pontalis, 1994)/psychopathology/. Thus she escapes the bounds of the Oedipal laws and breaks the chain of the language corsettes (the drama generates this very efficiently: we know that she is a literature teacher who vehiculates with words). She acts, epitomizing a pseudo-neurotic transformation, from the bliss of identification (Blanche's clothes, the way she dresses, the colours she likes versus the colours she wears, the way she remodels her surroundings with pieces of coloured paper, etc.) to the depths of shared sense of guilt for her previous deeds: Allan's death, her past relations with men, etc. Her procession resembles the ritual of the Freudian horde in TOTEM AND TABOO.

I have discussed above the problem and the mode of Blanche's "victimization", canonized victimization, in certain literary analyses¹⁹. It appears to me that the question of victimization in large part turns to the question of IDENTITY.

If we suppose a character, another Blanche Dubois than the one imposed by the literary canon reading, which is completely divorced from and complementary to the 'Kowalskian' Blanche, then we are left with a rather narcissistic figure.

However, if we suppose that Blanche is a metafigure (or rather a dramatic metamorphose) of the mythologic Narcissus, we are left with either deductions of correspondence between the two: Blanche as the effeminate Narcissus (Narcissa), or with paradoxes which colour the

space between the individual as such (Blanche) and the surrounding society (dramatis personae) itself.

In what follows I would like to explore the relationship between Blanche and the other characters in *STREETCAR...*, in an attempt to discover how identity-construction as a model is possible in case of other interpretations of the drama.

STREETCAR AS A 'PLAY'

The drama can be viewed as an anthology of an ontology²⁰, or an anthology of ontogenesis, of a common-consciousness' shared, Desire.

Further, ontological security, or an ability to trust, is directly linked to the emergence of an attitude of 'practical consciousness' which if may claim, allows actors/characters to take for granted existential parameters of their activity, that are sustained but not grounded by the interactional conventions they observe. Trust in the continuity of external reality allows an individual, in this case Blanche, to risk experiencing the boundarilessness involved in 'play'. These experiences, in turn, reflexively enable individuals to meaningfully bound their lives, what Blanche achieves. In the 'play' an internal subjective sense of self²² originally emerges (or is found), and later, through play ('play's' opposite) that sense of self is continually reaffirmed and recreated.

Blanche: /.../ A hot bath and a long, cold drink always gives me a brand-new outlook on life! /.../

(Williams, 1959, 192)

Playing reflexively (id est the implied author + reader) reintegrates the dichotomy of internal and external reality and reaches its own saturation point, which refers to the capacity to contain Experience.

If a true ontological sense of self is incapable of cohering, false defense organizations of self-exhibiting personality characters of over-relating or instrumentalized people will emerge. This is the case of Miss Dubois, as we will see later.

If characters in a 'play' or in any text lack the ontological security of an internal, subjective sense of self, or possess a sense of self which is characterized by self-perception of omnipotence (that is certainly not Blanche's position), they are incapable of play, that is, of tolerating an arena of boundariness, where subjective and objective are merged in an undetermined, indirect, unresolvable paradox. That is what the traditional reading of this drama can offer us, that is why it was easy to label Blanche or Williams a paradox.

It has been claimed by critics that the victim as a character and viceversa, militates for a good dramatic structure. Is it the same if a character ceases to be victimized and transcends towards a dominating role? Does this imply that characters as individuals no longer appropriate and construct their victim-like figure when the drama reading, in this case, penetrates deeper into semanalysis²³?

It is my intention to argue that such questions begin to suggest the complexities involved in lending credence to the heralds of optative identity²³ as a reaction to victimization, or of clinging to a tattered canonized position.

Identity crises resulting in despairing ennui²⁴, both depict and conform precisely how meaningless choices (see Blanche's chain of choices) become in the absence of signified boundaries²⁵.

However, the counter-current of literature which alternatively encourages/admonishes individuals to take charge of their own lives, stands against this tide of referentless ennui - the character, or better the intercharacter - in search of an optative identity.

The drive, the desire to catch the streetcar named..... is to play in a 'play', that is a play within a play or a play for non-play's sake. Blanche's virtue is that she keeps playing while she is escaping her labellization. The possibility of escaping, the continued existence of a semblance of meaning through which identity is pursued inheres the active potential of the PLAY²⁶.

Further, play itself (the adjective of choice used by cultural theorists) is predicated upon, maintained through, and signals the continued existence of an inner, subjective versus an external, objective reality. Blanche's play can be interpreted as a potentially meaningful action, which is capable of mediating modernistic dichotomies in an arena which can be described as New Orleans, Elysian Fields (Scene 1), and which is characterized by an activity which transcends any deterministic attempt at resolution. Blanche's play is not only predicated on a dichotomous point of departure (is she 'good' or 'bad'?) but implicitly contains the potential to allow meaningful action and identity's 'semanalyzed' construction to occur through the unintegrated Belle Reve's ex-inhabitant.

At the end of the drama, the incapacity to play any more either through ever, does not destroy the dichotomies upon which the potential for 'play' is predicated. Blanche ceases to hunt desires and thus puts an end to the threats and anxieties which inherit the dialectic between her and the others (other characters) throughout the play called DESIRE TO CEMETERIES.

Mexican woman: Flores para los muertos, flores-flores... / "flowers for the dead, flowers-flowers...", free translation/

(ibidem, p. 206)

She is capable, finally, to refuse responsibility required of an internal 'I' (Je-Fr., Ich-Ger., etc.) and secures a sense of self under the aegis of over identification with an other (Allan, her young dead husband)²⁷.

The ability to assert a self, hunted throughout the drama, the intermediate arena in which play occurs, provides a way of recasting Blanche's identity.

The colourful and richly drawn set of dramatis personae (Stella and Stanley, Eunice and Steve, Nurse and Doctor, Pablo and Mitch) tend to overpower the events of the play: The flow of words, images and sounds ("Varsouviana", "the music of the blue piano") illumine the personalities in a way that they gloss over the events, like in a drama of ideas.

The dialogues are laced with 'primalities', remnants of primal scenes²⁸: exclamations and repetitions reminding of tribal rites. Also, incidents give the impression of belonging to specific archetypes, for instance the outburst of violence, the fight in the kitchen, smashing "the china", the rape, etc., are Stanley Kowalski's moments. Verbal fencing, clothing identity, the

'hot baths' and paranoïdo-schizophrenic dialogues belong to Blanche. Stella and Mitch move alternately in the auras of Blanche and Stanley. We might say that the characters are counterparts: Allan-Stanley-Mitch triad as ONE, versus Blanche-Stella diad as the OTHER

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Nonetheless beneath the flow of the dialogues and the colour of the personalities, identified as o/objects in play, there is a plot structure deserving attention. As I have come to expect, the action makes its own statement that goes deeper than any assertions in the dialogue to establish the skeleton of the play. The plot resembles an ironic reversal of the romance as such: the arrival of the 'invader' followed by a parade of forces and listing allies, than 'enemy' is recognised (in Blanche, who will gain an identity at the end), the climactic conflict, and the defeat of the 'intruder' into the Kowalskian family romance, provided at the end of the drama with a baby.

To say that *STREETCAR...* is confused or confusing in many of its readings (and implicitly the changes these readings provide) is to acknowledge the tensions that work in it because of its characters, and especially because of Blanche Dubois. To say why it is confusing is to describe the way these tensions are dramatized, inner and external, both.

In this paper I tried, shortly, to enlist the causes and the tensions within Blanche and among her and other characters. At the end of the drama another 'play' starts: "seven /I/-card stud.

Therefore the dilemma of a further play remains uncovered.

Tennessee Williams himself cannot resist underlining the implications of the title:

Blanche: What are you talking about is brutal desire- just-Desire!-the name of a rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another...

Stella: Haven't you ever ridden on that streetcar?

Blanche: It brought me here!

(Williams: 1959, 67)



LUSTSPIEL ON IDENTITY

Identification is not a process unique to the drama but because it concerns in large part the protagonist of the *STREETCAR...*, Blanche, I will direct attention to IDENTIFICATION AND IDENTITY as such.

Identification pervades all object relations, and it is inscribed in every interaction between the subject (protagonist) and object (the other character/s). Psychoanalysis describes identification as the central mechanism in the construction of identity, but does not offer a critique of its strategies or effects (see Chodorow, N., 1989). Identification has been treated as both innocent and assumed.

Identification is a process which commands the subject to be displaced by an other. It is a procedure which refuses and recuperates the separation between the self and the other, and in this way it replicates the very structure of patriarchy. (ibidem)

Identification demands sameness, necessitates similarity, disallows difference. Identification is a process with its own implicit ideology.

Identification with a protagonist (or a protagonist with the one s/he wants to be) does not entail a cognitive choice, but draws upon a repertoire of unconscious processes. Blanche is not a random object of desire, she is a human, rooted through a system of signs with exchange value.

In order to consider a set of unconscious processes which precede the acting, the play itself, it is worth concluding a brief survey of psychoanalytic accounts of the assimilative relations between the subject/protagonist of the drama and the object(s)/other characters, the series of interactions which construct identity. The dossier of descriptions provided by Freud, the rhetoricizations of Jacques Lacan in his description of the mirror phase³², are formulations which bear homologies drawn between the set of above mentioned object-relations which play in the construction of identity and the replication of this process in reading as such.

Pre-Freudian accounts made no mention of identification and its role in hysterical role-formation, the theoretization of hysteria depicted it as a process of DISPLACEMENT³³, the absences of hysteria were a mimicry of a psyché elsewhere. In fact Freud's attempt to map the various pathways of displacement, which deposit their psychic conversions in processes other than identification, became a central task for charting a psychic 'blank page'.

In INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS, Freud asserted the unconscious components of identification and insisted that identification was NOT AN IMITATION but an ASSIMILATION that expresses a common condition, which has remained in the unconscious (Freud, 1991). Freud also specified the bisexual components of the multiple identifications (multiple readings of the drama allow this), found in hysterics (Blanche is/might be considered hysteric). Yet, the gender components of identification are not specifically mentioned. Freud considers the identificatory process on the "spectator" (the viewer, the reader).

Identification was described as a functional mechanism in the development of a character, related to the oral (m-oral sic!) phase of libidinal organization (see Laplanche-Pontalis) in which the subject desires to incorporate in a bodily way, pleasurable external objects.

Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis describe the directions of identificatory relations as HETEROPATIC/CENTRIPETAL (the subject identifies self with the other) and IDIOPATIC/CENTRIFUGAL (the subject identifies other with self). Centripetal identification is introjective, incorporating the other as an external ego ideal, whereas the centrifugal identification

is projective, projecting a narcissistic self into an external object (in case of the drama, the reader).

The drama itself plays upon introjective identification while in the same time provides the illusion of a projective one.

THE CHARACTER AS ACTRESS

In a play a character is, above all, the player who concentrates in itself the reader-spectator with everything it implies, and the character-actor who bears the burden of interpreting the drama. From these categories the spectator is nonetheless the powerful trope for a particular mode of discursive authority.¹⁴

The spectacle, i. e. the drama, is what the spectator/the reader is not, but what it might become: "effeminate" stage entertainments, sexually ambiguous persons, all serve as visible foils for the supposedly rational, critical, and all-but-invisible observer. Players are important to this process of negation by which epistemological authority constitutes itself during the decoding/viewing process. The discourse about players often uses the language of difference/différance¹⁵: of class, gender, sexual object choice, and race to construct the player as "other" to the empirical, rational modernist observer. The trope of spectating in this context is seen as a symptomatic struggle for authority of the sexually and socially declassé actor, or the commodified, whorish actress (Straub, K.: 1992, p. 3.).

Blanche Dubois is more than a character in the drama, she is THE PLAYER of the story, THE ACTRESS of the symptomatic discourse of DESIRE¹⁶. She is minutely constructed as being a suspect of her exhibited gender, that is, of the whorish actress. The first meeting with her, either in the text, either on the stage shows Miss Dubois as the victim of the public's well taught male gaze. Her construction as a sexual suspect takes place, thus, in the context of acute consciousness, where the public's gaze¹⁷ is seen in theatrical discourse as powerful (cf. 'power-relations', Foucault) and problematic act of control over the body or/and embodiment of the actress, who is vulnerable and thus more likely to be victimized by the public scrutiny.

My readings of the STREETCAR... suggest that there is an important distinction between the dominant masculinity and femininity in the drama (apart from what I discussed in the LABELLED VICTIM part of the paper). While the obviously sexually ambiguous Allan may threaten the drama's stability of a certain dominant construct of masculinity, THE STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE says nothing to shake the theory of male dominance over women actors (see Stanley raping Blanche). Miss Dubois remains an object within the struggle between the versions of masculinity (cf. Laplanche-Pontalis on 'masculinity and femininity'), I would suggest here that the ambiguous sexuality of Blanche as the actress can be far more of a challenge to the male discourse. The narrative that circulates in the drama around the questioned actress turns on the struggle between male desires (Stanley Kowalski, Mitch) over a feminine object (Blanche as the widow/woman/lover/in-law/etc.). STREETCAR gives us a feminine 'aristocratic streetcar', whose desire does not fit into a heterosexual stage-world premised upon masculine control.

That is why Blanche refuses to play herself and plays the whorish 'blondie' who acts like living on a compulsory stage. She wants to distract people from her 'otherness', a strongly narcissistic being, by the desire to go "on the stage" on the stage:

Blanche: /.../ And turn that over light off! Turn that off! I won't be looked at in this merciless glare!

(Williams: 1959, 120)

The same thing happens to other 'Williamsick' characters, as Princess Kosmonopolis in SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH or to Laura in THE GLASS MENAGERIE:

Princess: /.../ the thing that you lived for is lost or abandoned, and then ... you die, or find something else. This is my something else.

(Williams: 1959, 35)

Amanda: Laura, where have you been going when you've gone on pretending that you were going to business college?

Laura: /.../ I just went walking /.../ It was the lesser of two evils, Mother.

(Williams: 1959, 244)

This desire to play alternatively an image of herself is represented as a refusal (or per-version) of normal feminine sexuality. More often Blanche's desire is couched in terms of sexual excess on the stage (her over-excessive dressing), as if desire in a woman could take no other form. This conflation of the excessive desire that takes on sexual overtones often seems uncomfortable for readers of Blanche's adventures in the world of the Pater.

Blanche's fault was a predominant love of pleasure, a desire turned into a conflation. The actress/woman dichotomy in Blanche shapes the representation of her as an actress, but the woman as such is often figured as corrupting the actress, that is why to many readers the heroine would rather resemble a Barbie-doll figure dressed in fluffy pink outfits than a woman struggling on the stage for an identity and thus for perfection. By this I would like to emphasize that the actual character of the actress-Blanche is not even so much the point as the simple fact of her physical display as Blanche-the victim of the play. The image of rape might be evoked here in constructing the actress in relation to her audience "on the stage", that is the relation with other characters, especially men players. The predation of the later upon Blanche as the one who struggles to play, is figured as rape, which becomes a metaphor for a specular relation that exceeds the boundaries placed on public sexual behaviour. I would suggest that we resist the playfulness of Blanche's image and concentrate on what it can tell us about the actress' sexuality as an object on public display (this-play, sic!)

The metaphor of rape on the stage, signifying what exceeds an acceptable specular relationship, marks the regulation of that relationship within certain violently 'civilized' limits.

Stanley: Oh! So you want some rough-house! All right, let's have some rough-house! (He springs towards her, overturning the table. She cries out and strikes at him with the bottle top but he catches her wrist) /.../ We've had this date with each other from the beginning!

(Williams: 1959, 215)

'Normal' sexual desire involves a regulated version of the violence overtly displayed in sadomasochism. However regulated and 'rational', this violence nonetheless inscribes domination and submission as terms within the economy of sexual desire /38/. In other words, describing the cultural phenomenon of the raping of/on the stage, means the more decorously the actress as Blanche (or viceversa) is raped, the more veiled the terms of domination and submission are within the specular economy.

Rape is, in a sense, an attempt to exclude the idea of feminine control from the spectacle of the feminine desire (if we accept the existence of feminine and masculine desire). Rape attempts to subject Blanche's feminine desire to the domination of a masculine one. Representations of the actress-Blanche's desire suggest that this subjection is incomplete because this desire exceeds the models for feminine sexuality. In *STREETCAR...* there is more than just Blanche's desire when Allan's transposed desire pre- and epi-ludes the 'Blanchic' desire. This can be seen implicitly in the discourses of her exhibitionism, pseudo-domesticity, and her professionalism of playing the other than her own self.

The spectacle of the Blanche's desire often dovetails with the spectacle of her sexual submission.

DESIRÉE

Blanche Dubois's stagic life and behaviour creates a particularly ritualistic individual culture within the law-making canonized culture as such, internalized by the society she lives in. The dramatis personae surrounding her are behind the borders of her understanding, and they misunderstand her, accordingly. The 'me' and 'not me' is strikingly showing off the stage. Blanche permits no one to meet her world, without being at least 'injured' by the words she uses, though she longs to be unconsciously loved by being finally understood in her real nature.

Her lies, her stories, her miss/miscarried letters are all part of a self-healing therapy, seen as a cunning defence mechanism. She uses uprooted, deformed, upside-down stories to explain her presence here and there, but these stories show the other end of her own psyché, shaped as a main road with small dead-ended side-streets, her 'must go on' trajectory with all her past failures.

From the beginning we are left with the fact that Blanche's way in the drama is arrow-like, not only in the motion it implies with all the strategic points necessary to make the plot of the desire, but mainly in its consistency as a straight Cupidic (cupido-Lat. = to desire) arrow, an o/object carrying love (but not sharing it), hitting and stinging others. Finally, she becomes the hunt of her own desires, a play of suicidal drives. Blanche might easily take the place of the scorpion in the scorpion-frog fable (see Neill Jordan's *CRYING GAME*). It is in her nature to sting even if she'll perish. So she does at the end.

But can she be, can she identify with her own desires or she is a mere instrument, a materialization of Allan's desire? Allan died young and betrayed, misunderstood in his nature, therefore it is not difficult to imagine Blanche, his widow (with owe -sic!) to be his continuation in a female body. The same process is visualized in ballet, where the man carries the woman and she seems to be a prolongation of the masculine body on the ground. Blanche is what Allan might have become while following his drive, the deadly drive of death on an arrow-like road. Blanche is the vehicle supporting and carrying all the mischief, all the unsaid and unwritten Allanesque poems, and misunderstood feelings. She is the one who follows the trail of tears on a highway to hell. Blanche is getting off herself when she first gets off the streetcar named Desire, and goes to the dead-end when she gets on it again at the end.

Blanche is not a victim.

Tentatively, if we are part of her outer world we might be easily entrapped in believing her artful lamb-like stratagem image. We do not need to read the story in the mirror, i.e. our image or how we want to see it, but rather look behind the silvery glance and see the virtual point, Blanche, who gives a false image to the external stimuli.

In examining Blanche we are only concerned with what we want to see rather with what she hides under what she wants to be. In this case it is rather difficult to confront/contrast virtual images of the two mentioned potential values. That is why, most probably, many 'I-awared' readers consider Blanche a victim. Then they are not more than victims of their own entrapment. Thus Blanche succeeds in telling another Shep Huntleigh story:

I tore my trunk to see what I have suitable for the t/r/otics!

(ibidem, 209)

This is what Blanche might have said tricking the gullibles.

Miss Dubois has the shape of her clustered age - the wild efflorescence of a fruitless trunk. She engenderes herself into an inestimable vehicle of desire. Such as fruitless plants grow in blossom but cannot bear a continuity of their lives, so Blanche exhibits herself in all her outfits (pink, fluffy dresses, she likes orchids, the rhinestone tiara, sophisticated evening dresses, and so on), tells and tells stories, knowing that her story will never be continued by a child. She continues the story of agony and ecstasy began by her most beloved and most betrayed Allan. Blanche is forced to reproduce, to dupli- and policate herself, she is the multiple facsimile of her own primal story, which coincides with the poems of a dead young poet.

Blanche: Poems that a young boy wrote. I hurt him the way that you would like to hurt me, but you can't! I'm not young and vulnerable any more. But my husband was and I - never mind about that!

(ibidem, 139)

Intrestingly all her stories are self reproducible like Andy Warhol pictures of Hollywood stars...

BLANCHERADE

Miss Dubois stays in the instant exposure of curious glances, exhibits words and fades away, eventually in the bathroom (to renew herself), to come back and do the same show again for her desire, for our pleasure. Her appearance resemble to those of the inter-plays, the intervals when a play (any play) becomes a satire of what was previously shown.

She is not a character that always stands in the highlight, or suggests from the background or behind the heavy theatrical curtains. She is herself an irony of her own repetitions, an 'I-clown' which appears to make audiences laugh in between the acts.

It is a well known fact that clowns are beings without gender or bi-gendered artifacts. In fact, they are not hermaphrodites because anatomically they, as creatures, do not count in any text. What counts is the **ROLE** they fill in/out the text or stage. Blanche is, in fact, a woman, but she plays the miscarried life of Allan. It is not unusual in the stage world for a woman to play a male role, or viceversa (see the Elisabethan actors). She carries Allan's letters with her while has an infantilized meticulousness about her appearance, and her love for extravagant finery are common subjects for humor. Blanche has the strong desire for exhibition, a pleasure which in Foucault's words "comes of exercising power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light". Ostentatively, she verbally exhibits her corporeal narcissism, being the *magistra* (Lat.) of a blunt instrumentalization of desire. The bathroom scenes incite on comments on Blanche being embarrassed of her self-display. These comments do nothing else but eroticize a non-transitional clownish figure, that is to ridicule the drama itself, and thus insult a playhouse beaux, Blanche, who is posing against such an antitheatrical discourse. The gaze of such commentators as spectators of a show of desire turns instinctively into the impertinence of staring (as opposed to gazing).

The clown, anywhere, anytime, is a sexual suspect by its cross-dressing, having a limited fluidity by its body. Blanche is the protagonist of the masquerade¹⁰ of desire, a carnival of her body in pain ("...women are body. More body, hence more writing," Helene Cixous). Her satiric virtuosity and her pain originates in a duplicitous pose of the literary self-castration (as wisely is inserted in *THE SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH*) Blanche, as a literature teacher finally becomes an ex-literature teacher, thus a creator of literature and a protuberance of Allan.

Her limitation is brought by a language that is not her own, the other characters who talk, but do not say. Astonishingly, we are surprized to recognise only one player of the play named *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*, the other persons do not and cannot play under such a title, which they consciously reject by taking away the **ONE** who mocks those who have no desires, just instincts for existence: Stanley and Stella will have a baby soon, thus they already materialized their lustspiel¹¹. Eunice and Steve quarrel as a metonymy of lovemaking (like the couple in *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOLF?*). Mitch is stuck to his primary object of love, his mother, and he is content. These people have no real desire, only instincts of something lost, and soon refound, a short fort-da game.

The centrality of Blanche's language in this context legalizes her as the only player who is entitled to play the/her drama. She is named desire. She is not considered any more the diseased whore, the victim for the other characters (which do not co-exist). She has the power, the phallus, to talk – she allies herself against the civilized restraint, law, order. In her ultimate and desperate attempt to cry out her desire she becomes phallo-ex-centric in her satiric virtuosity.

The ambiguity of a female version of a male hero reflects the ambiguity of Blanche's double identification with both the patriarchal pre-Oedipal sexual economy and the masculine narratorial voice, in control of re-presentation, as well as being represented in the text. The female Tristram Shandy is being linguistically sacrificed by being taken away at the end of her proto-linguistic performance.

Blanche: Please close the curtains before I come out /.../ You are both mistaken. It's Della Robbia blue. The blue of the robe in the old Madonna pictures /.../ The rest of my time I'm going to spend on the sea /.../ And I'll be buried at sea sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard – at noon – in the blaze of summer – and into an ocean as blue as /.../ my first lover's eyes!

(ibidem, pp. 219-220)

The curtains cannot shade the Mater Dolorosa blueness of Blanche in the end. She will finally return in that blueness. Allan's eyes, symbolized by the sea – the motherly oceanic feeling of unborn babies –, exactly at twelve – she as the one fold in 'blanche Fr. = white' sack, her other self. The sea is universalness, the eye (I – sic!) is mightiness. Blanche leaves the scene all powerful.

While reading the drama I both hated and adored Blanche, as I hate and adore clowns. Hating is for the painted, false face – the compromise job they make for survival, adoring is for the ability and cunning style they parody themselves and others as well. Clowns always tell the truth. Blanche tells the truth, not dressed in a 'conventional' clownish dress but in Hollywoodish 'big-blonde', 'femme fatale' outfit, and we are caught laughing. Clowns are not victims. Blanche is not a victim. She is responsible and is conscious of what she is doing. We are responsible and conscious of what we read, or of what we are able to read.

The Blanchic masquerade is, above a theory of betrayal, the desire to be seen as the other, the other who, eventually she is esteemed to be.

Blanche is a Mater Dolorosa with a lost motherhood. Her stories are miscarried progenitures and she continues to live through her magni nominis umbra (Lat.) and dies slowly in it.

Miss Dubois can be easily figured as a carrier of a certain mental disease, if we are to follow her entrepreneurship in the play. Her malady is a sexually rendered excessiveness. Blanche's extravagant manner of dealing with a disease is explicitly contagious, catching, and thus can contaminate others. The construction of Blanche as a mentally disturbed heroine is a part of a hegemonic process to express and contain the threat of feminine desire. The subtext of this construction is made to create repulsion, and thus a hatred towards the psychic o/object/person. Blanche, a discourse resembling the narratives of the twentieth-century people who live with the fatal HIV virus.

Blanche Dubois has the capacity of a sentimental heroine to represent a sexual transgression from the point of view that allows a voyeuristic pleasure for readers, and to a limited extent, identification or empathy with the transgressor as Blanche.

The transgression is a dangerous process in which Blanche can succeed only forgetting her gender. That is why Blanche's femininity appears mostly as a masquerade, a forced behavioural process, while she is only the interpreter as the protagonist (her sexual transgression is

figured as exotic, e.g. the yacht travel, South Africa, the oriental-like paper lantern). She is the clown who is not interested in the existence or lack of her/its reproductive organs. That is why all her liaisons with men fail, that is why she cannot bear children, that is why she can be the reincarnation of a wombless Allan.

Allan was a poet, Blanche is a rhetorician, and her rhetories have the power of sonnets or sonatas or psalms.

Thus the feminine sexual excess intrudes upon the territory of masculinity. Hence the guilty pleasures of drama-reading.

Significantly *STREETCAR*... indicates Blanche's credibility: she seems hesitating but surprisingly she defines her situation as one of virtue under siege.

Blanche's desire to possess and control her own image compromises the trope of the digestible sentimental heroine. She is more in love with herself, as Allan probably was, than with the possible object/s of her love (Mitch, etc.). She takes a pleasure in her self-display as a displaying of the Other. She delights more in the game of appearances than in what is culturally supposed to be its end for women: that of becoming the object of masculine desire.

Blanche Dubois takes delight in illuminating her 'transvestite' relationship to control over language, identify in her text with masculinity (cf. 'transference' in Freud, S.: 1986). Blanche does not identify with Allan, rather Allan identifies with Blanche². She assigns herself a position at a remote from masculine control – it is Allan who does the real gazing – but the timeless distance speaks a desire and a potential for the feminine subject to assume power. This relationship to masculine authority plays itself out on a more purely literary level as well. In Blanche's story telling, her desire to enter into the realm of the masculine literary authority is thwarted and translated into a feminine desire. Like Eve, or Pandora, she is sent to harvest and digest the real fruit, life, with all its vicissitudes, instead of the forbidden fruit of the literary converse. Blanche switches to another, masculinized object of desire, meanwhile accepting the trope of the feminine Eve, which can and will validate, and will not negate her. The Shandyeen mantle protects her.

Blanche lives in a masquerade, in a carnival. The carnival is the realm of desire unmasked, taken out of the Law of the Father, of the Law of the Culture, and involved in the economy of difference. Her carnivalized discourse, as a clown, renders invalid codes, conventions, or laws which govern or reduce her to an object of any kind of authorized, spectatorial or characterizing control.

She is the play, she is the drama, she is named: DESIRE. ... named desire...

BLANCHELOGUE

Before language there was desire. Desire was before Mother and Father was born. Then came a streetcar and brought some letters a dead boy wrote. About le plaisir du texte. Virginia Wolf enounced that "letters did not count". Blanche lit the paper lantern and played an entire theory of voice. *Récit* (telling) and *histoire* (the text) are complementary parts and converge. Telling (Blanche) becomes an integral part of the story, which is more than the message of the text (Allan). The second is included in the first.

In the knowledge of these we inherit the third reading. In the version of hypertextuality,

NOTES

- 1.2. Wright, E., FEMINISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS, *passim*
3. Greek 'purgation', Aristotle, POETICS, ch.VI.
4. Morford and Lenardon, 1985, *passim*
5. cf. Vivien Leigh and Marlon Brando in A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
6. *idem*
7. see Laplanche-Pontalis, 1994.
8. Brown, LOVE'S BODY in Chodorow, 1991.
9. The ritual, the sacramentum of sharing
10. in Laplanche-Pontalis, 1994, p.239.
11. Subject of the fragmentation of the drives.
12. see Spivak, G.C., 1988, pp.10-29.
13. see Morris, 1993.
14. Allusion to the Aristotelian "not the thing that happened but the thing that might happen"
15. *idem*
16. see Wood, 1991, ABJECTION, MELANCHOLIA AND LOVE.
17. Freud distinguishes three forms of masochism: erotogenic, feminine and moral
18. cf. Lacan, J., 1977
19. Here I refer to the traditional, canonized interpretation.
20. Ontology = the study of being, ontogenesis = the origin of being.
21. 'Play' is a postmodern cultural paradigm
22. Self, in this case differs from the Freudian 'ego'
23. cf. Iser, W., 1987: The 'implied reader' is passive or active, is a "model or role"
24. Julia Kristeva conceives Greek "semeion"-sign, not as a sign system but as a signifying but as a signifying process: semiotics + psychoanalysis = SEMANALYSIS.
25. see Chodorow, N., 1989.
26. Ennui = weariness of mind caused by lack of interesting occupation
27. Muses Eliade talks of "boundariness" as a motif of eternal return, Eliade, M., 1994.
28. see 21.
29. in case of self-love, gender is of no importance. see Chodorow, 1989.
30. A scene considered the origin of a conflict, a returning motif or a prolepsis (Gk. "anticipation")
31. see Simmel, G., 1990.
32. cf. 'mirror phase' in Laplanche-Pontalis, 1994.
33. *ibidem*
34. We can argue here on the "death of the author" (Barthes, R.)
35. see Spivak, G.C., 1988, *passim*
36. see Morris, P., 1993, p.196.
37. *idem*
38. see Freud, S., 1992.
39. see Laplanche-Pontalis, 1994.
40. *idem* and Cuddon, J.A., 1991, p.532.
41. The Jungian archetypes
42. 'figurability' in Laplanche-Pontalis, 1994

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