

TWO DOOMED MISSES: THE ASCENDANCY OF MASCULINITY

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RESUMEN

En este breve estudio se analizan y discuten los aspectos comunes de la personalidad de dos personajes literarios aparentemente muy diferentes y las circunstancias comparables que los rodean y conducen a un fatídico final. Se trata de la protagonista femenina de la obra del americano Tennessee Williams *Un tranvía llamado deseo*, escrita en 1947, y de la heroína de la obra del autor sueco August Strindberg *La señorita Julia*, escrita en 1888. A pesar de las distintas culturas y de los distintos entornos donde las dos tramas se desarrollan se puede demostrar que existen abundantes y significativos paralelismos.

ABSTRACT

In this brief study we have discussed the circumstances surrounding two apparently very different women characters: Tennessee Williams' Blanche DuBois, the heroine of a *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and August Strindberg's title character, daughter of a Swedish Count in his play *Miss Julie*. In spite of their differing cultures and social milieus we have tried to demonstrate their essential parallelism.

What possible relationship could there be established between a decaying American Southern belle suspected of being man-crazy, and the daughter of a Swedish count, thought to be a man-hater? Though the connection seems at first unlikely, a close perusal and contrast of both plays soon reveals its validity. Our purpose in this short paper is to compare the common circumstances and aspects shared between the personalities of the title character of *Miss Julie*, the naturalist play that August Strindberg wrote in 1888, and Blanche DuBois, the female heroine of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, written more than half a century later by Tennessee Williams.

Albeit in completely different environments, both female leading characters are fighting inevitably lost wars. Miss Julie has been widely viewed as the representative of a disintegrating aristocracy engaged in a doomed battle against the growing supremacy and power of the lower working classes, as embodied within the universe of the play in her father's servants, Jean and Christine. Miss DuBois, another woman with claims to aristocracy, has been regarded as a symbol of the vanishing traditions, beauty, and refinement of the American South engaged likewise in a fated battle against the ruthless energy of inevitable progress, as represented by the North and its myriads of newly arrived outlandishly named immigrants such as Kowalski.

The beginnings of both those women are somewhat rebellious. At odds with her environment Julie is trying to enforce social codes too advanced for the age and which cannot be understood or shared. Inversely, Blanche, unable to accept that she is no longer an aristocrat, clings stubbornly to codes and traditions which are no longer honoured or endured in her present environment.

Against such an assessment of the tensions in *A Streetcar Named Desire* it might be argued that the DuBois are, at the time of the action, no longer aristocrats and that Blanche is not a belle but a jaded woman obsessed with age. Still, in contrast to the unrefined, down to earth

dwellers of Elysian Fields, where the action takes place, she is meant to stand above as a superior being as much as the countess Julie stands out among her servants. Blanche's awareness of beauty and her speeches, often charged with lyricism and inner truth, testify to Williams' intention.

Both ladies, Miss Julie and Miss DuBois, are dominated by the all-sweeping, all powerful male life forces of which Jean and Stanley are the embodied emblematic figures. The superior social background and refinement of those women is sadly inadequate to efficiently protect them against what Strindberg sees as the aristocratic structure of the sexes. Their male opponents are successfully held back at first, but they ultimately cast a mesmerising, paralysing influence on their female victims which contributes to the male triumph. But this ascendancy of masculinity is effected exclusively at surface level and will at length prove to be ephemeral and hollow.

There have been recurrent attempts at new and differing interpretations of both plays. In the case of *Miss Julie* there is Anne Bogart's recent 1997 production in which this director presents Jean as a stupid, weak-minded man tossed and turned by the orchestration of two much cleverer women, struggling for dominance over him. Indeed, Strindberg often presents the world as a battle ground in which women are the victorious champions and the foes of men. However, he believes in a fundamental male superiority, and his women manage to prevail mostly by means of sheer wickedness or manipulation rather than by means of their superior accomplishments. Therefore Bogart's reading of *Miss Julie* seems to go beyond reasonable assessment. Even more there are textual indications that Strindberg ultimately intended Jean to be viewed as the indisputable master. The Swedish playwright made this point sufficiently clear in the preface to *Miss Julie* where he explains that Jean, in spite of being a valet, unequivocally has the upper hand with Miss Julie simply because he is a man, and therefore sexually he is "the aristocrat because of his virility, his keener senses and his capacity for taking the initiative."¹

Far fetched, distorted interpretations of *A Street Car Named Desire* have been written as well. For instance, some reviewers and commentators

of this play inaccurately have seen Blanche as an insensitive, half drunk prostitute who had “never spoken an honest word in her life”. Others have come close to seeing her as a nymphomaniac and have asserted that the merit of *A Streetcar Named Desire* has exclusively been in “making realistically dramatic such elements as sexual abnormality, harlotry, perversion, venality, rape, and lunacy”, while scarcely managing “to distil from them any elevation and purge.”² Those assertions are partial and biased. Looking beyond some of those obviously shocking vices one is compelled to agree with Harold Clurman who considers Williams to be poet of frustration, and *A Streetcar Named Desire* as his declaration and disapproval of the fact that in his time “aspiration, sensitivity, departure from the norm are battered, bruised, and disgraced in our world today.”³

In spite of different readings it seems indisputable that the central conflict in both plays is the one provoked by the confrontation of female heroines and male indomitable energies, against which they have no fair chance. Strindberg’s belief in men’s superiority, as expressed in the preface, has been quoted above, and even a superficial reading of *A Streetcar Named Desire* evidences the comparable status of Blanche in relation to her brother-in-law Stanley who is a metal worker of low social status but likewise portrayed as an “aristocrat” exclusively by reason of his sex. Williams’ intentions on this point are not to be mistaken, and the presentation of Stanley is revealing enough. He unquestionably presides over his social milieu where Blanche unexpectedly intrudes. He is said to be a man who, in his relation with women, displays “the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens” (128). Taking one more step it could be said that due to the unavoidably homosexual point of view of the author, men in the Elysian Fields neighbourhood seem to have been somewhat effeminate in their relationship with Stanley. His dominance is, for a time, unchallenged by both women and men until the episode with Blanche exposes his brutality and unconcern for the suffering of others.

If, as Aristotle conceives, character is revealed through choice, comparison and contrast of those two unhappy women characters is altogether justified by basing the association precisely on their inability to

choose. Their lack of decision seems to suggest a lack of maturity in their respective personalities. This flaw found in both literary characters is one of their most distinctive and disturbing features. Choices are, in fact, constantly made for them. They are unable to bring about the shaping of their own existence which is invariably conformed by the desires and interests of men. Julie's will has been completely annulled when she is driven to her death by Jean and so is Blanche's when she allows her brother-in-law's advances. Julie's suicide, induced by the valet, and Blanche's sexual interlude, induced by Stanley, are the ultimate proof that these women lack even the most basic capacity to make decisions. Moreover, their subjugation is exerted with the acquiescence and assistance of other women who had previously fallen under the spell of "masculinity", namely Kristin and Stella.

Julie and Blanche are cruelly and intentionally shut off from reality. There is no place in the real world where they can survive. In Strindberg's play it is Jean, the "male aristocrat", who foils Julie's attempts to enter what she deems to be a more authentic world. Significantly she wants to "descend" to the world of the servants, to meet and mingle with the kind of people who can express feelings freely. It is Jean who forces her out of his more substantial world and drives her to an early death. In much the same way it is Kowalski, the incarnation of male supremacy in the steamy rundown New Orleans quarter, who thwarts Blanche's last attempt to build a respectable life with some sort of hold on reality. However they differ in that Blanche, unlike Julie, acquires a near tragic dimension. The contemplation of Blanche's desperate strife to enter a world which, unknown to her, is as corrupt and insensitive as the one she had left behind, incite such intense feelings of pity that it could be said that a kind of catharsis is effected on the audience. Once Stanley has succeeded in forcing Blanche back to her fantasy world and to total alienation the world is in order again because, in spite of the compassion she awakens, a suspicion lingers in the audience that she is not any worse off for her exile. The expectation is that she will henceforth abide in an outer sphere where Stanley and his like cannot reach or hurt her any longer.

The misfortune of these two ladies is that being incapable of living in their own world, they are likewise unable to fit in any other. As remarked above Miss Julie, rejecting the role of master which she does not relish, repeatedly tries to find her place among the servants. Blanche, not having found her place among the gentility to which she claims to belong, desperately seeks some degree of integration and respectability among those she inwardly scorns as inferior, and overtly treats condescendingly. Deserted by the “Shep Huntleighs” (her own generic gentleman) of the world, she tries to console herself with an endless series of soldiers, merchants, etc. and finally with the good hearted, but hardly strong enough Mitch. He will eventually desert her too, because he cannot but yield to Kowalski’s and, through him, the male community’s will. Things as they are, madness is the only refuge that Julie and Blanche are capable of finding. Insanity partially becomes a shelter where they hide their utter loneliness and profound imbalance. For, though, to start with neither of them is adapted to their social sphere, it is men who eventually manage to corner them in confined psychotic zones whence return is not practicable.

In some ways Julie and Blanche mirror the social alienation of their creators, and the instability and conflicts of their early lives. Strindberg, for instance, being the offspring of an aristocrat and a servant, always felt he had been born against the will of his mother. Miss Julie, his fictional creature, perpetuates that circumstance in having the same background. Julie indeed voices her creator’s own misgivings when she reminds Jean: “My mother wasn’t well-born; she came of quite humble people” (97). Shortly afterwards she gets even more intimate and confesses to him: “I came into the world, as far as I can make out, against my mother’s will” (97). On his part Williams also had good reason to see himself reflected in the destitute and fragile Miss DuBois. His mother, a well-bred clergyman’s daughter, spent her whole married life struggling, like Blanche, to keep a genteel ambience in their home. Also like Blanche his sister Rose, whom he seemed to have loved dearly, had symptoms of neurosis. Thus, he was personally acquainted with Blanchets weaknesses. It is not coincidental that it is precisely in the foreword to *A Streetcar Named Desire* where he

openly states: "I can't expose a human weakness on the stage unless I know it through having it myself."

It is therefore no wonder that both artists show a distinct concern with ancestry. In *Miss Julie*, Strindberg emphasises the bearing, in particular the negative influences, of heritage and environmental circumstances upon a person's character. The title character of *Miss Julie* exemplifies this hypothesis through the narration of her family's story to the valet. The sins of both her mother and father are viewed as partially responsible for her peculiarities and for her lack of hold on life. Williams, likewise, has this somewhat Hawthornesque idea that children must pay for the sins of their fathers, and again it is reflected in *Miss DuBois*. She informs Stanley of how "[their] improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications" (140). This strongly suggests that Blanche and her sister Stella did not have the benefit of a stable, well established family life. It is implied that, most probably, as Williams did himself, the two sisters suffered the consequences of a disintegrated home. We know that Stella, early in her life, was compelled to run away from "Belle Reve", the DuBois mansion, and its state of affairs.

In both our heroines, sexual desire is welcome and sought as a palliative for loneliness and as a substitute for richer and more fulfilling affective relationships. In both also, mingled with their appetites, there is an uncontrollable loathing for their male counterparts. Julie avowedly despises men as a whole, and she admits to Jean: "I 'd learnt from her [her mother] to hate and distrust men-you know how she loathed the whole male sex." (99). She moreover also hates Jean in particular, and when the valet asks her: "Do you hate me?", her immediate answer is: "Beyond words. I'd gladly have you killed like an animal." (99). But, paradoxically, she also desires him. Soon after this declaration she proposes to him that they run away together "to enjoy ourselves for a day or two, for a week, for as long as enjoyment lasts, and then-to die" (99). Unmistakably, in the act of expressing her desire Julie recognises that it will likely last but a flitting moment, and that death is the only available alternative.

Blanche's feelings for her brother-in-law share some similarities with Julie's for Jean. At one level she detests Stanley, at another she is fascinated by his animal magnetism, as proved by her more or less willing forbearance of their sexual intercourse. Blanche echoes Julie's words above as she explains to Mitch in talking about the deaths in her family while trying to justify her course of action in the past: "The opposite [of death] is desire. So do you wonder? How could you possibly wonder?" (206). For Miss DuBois, as for her ancestors before her, the choices are either sex or death, and she alternatively finds both. This dilemma is dominant in Williams' work. In *Sweet Bird of Youth*, for instance, sex is for Princess the "only one way to forget these things I don't want to remember" (41). Fear of facing the alternative to desire permeates both plays.

It can reasonably be argued that Blanche's intercourse with Stanley is the result of a rape, and that she, at the conscious level, is confounded by his overwhelming sexuality and unable to decide. Yet many readers and viewers of the play have seen Blanche's "rape" as an action to which she has somehow consented. In order to establish the nature of Blanche's response to Stanley's sexuality it is important to consider whether or not she could have avoided the so called "rape". The question is what prevented Blanche from crying out for help. It is reasonable to note that the author meant to put a final word on this point by giving textual evidence that she was indeed capable of doing just that. Only a few hours earlier Blanche had foiled Mitch's attempts to gain her sexual favours by shouting: "Fire! Fire! Fire!". Therefore their intercourse is due to a combination of circumstances such as the numbing of her will, her dread of the alternative to sex, and Stanley's barbaric violence. Nevertheless, admitting that there are elements of acceptance in Blanche does not say that Stanley's action can in any way be justified. It simply shows that without her inaction caused by these forces including Stanley's stronger will, the "rape" might have been prevented.

Independently of Blanche's true inner desires, it is our contention that justifying Stanley's violence with her, to whatever degree it might have been, is tantamount to agreeing that any woman who is a coquette or uses

her body freely can be raped with impunity. Julie and Blanche end up falling into the arms of their destroyers also because their fragmented personalities do not supply them with the concerted strength they need to withdraw or to simply say "No!". Their sexual encounters are partially the result of a failure to choose a clear course of action which, as implied above, may be considered as a sort of choice. A choice between sex without love and death is difficult to make, and it is no wonder they hesitate.

Our protagonists collapse due to a combination of circumstances. Therefore Stanley should not be burdened with the full responsibility of Blanche's fatal destiny and neither should be Jean completely blamed for Miss Julie's death. Our heroines had begun an early process of self-destruction long before the visible clash with their male dominators takes place. Julie and Blanche seem to have had their paths marked by significantly determining events that took place much before the story in the play begins. Julie's destiny is somewhat melodramatically foreshadowed by the killing of her pet which is, she says, "the only living creature who cares for me" (106). The implication is that after the death of her little animal, she has no more reason to live. Blanche's ruin is also anticipated when at the onset of the play she meaningfully recalls the instructions she has followed to arrive at Elysian Fields: "They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then transfer to one named Cemeteries" (117). The Kowalskies' home at Elysian Fields is indeed the locus where Blanche meets first her "Desire" and then her symbolical "Cemetery".

As remarked above, both our heroines have sexual intercourse with men they loath while at the same time they secretly desire partially because they symbolise the alternative to death. The sex act by which they surrender to their men's and their own carnal desires seems to be the catalyst that hastens the fatal denouement that had been predicted all along. Once Julie has yielded to Jean's urges, she speedily becomes for him both a nuisance and a danger. Prior to their sexual interlude Julie had been the worshipped, unchallenged master for whom, as a child, the valet had gone as far as to be "determined to die". In relation to Jean, Julie holds the position of the sovereign while she is viewed by him as belonging in a

higher unreachable sphere where she represents, as he puts it, “a symbol of the hopelessness of ever getting out of the class I was born in” (88).

But Jean’s words are not to be lightly dismissed, for they intimate that even that early he was Julle’s potential enemy. His words give a clue that from his early childhood he had the seeds of scorn, hatred, and rebellion against the higher classes whom Julie represents. As a child, when Jean had watched Julie walking among the roses and had wished he could walk along with her, he had also wondered at the injustice of social classes exclaiming: “If it’s true that a thief can get to heaven and be with the angels, it’s pretty strange that a labourer’s child here on God’s earth mayn’t come in the park and play with the Count’s daughter” (87).

Coherently when Jean is finally permitted to approach the Goddess of his dream, the dreamlike quality that Julle had held for the valet abruptly vanishes. Once his demands have been met, hers are no longer considered and in truth Jean soon becomes impatient, responding to her requirements of love with contempt: “This is getting unboarable, but that is what comes of playing around with women” (101). Miss Julie no longer deserves even a valet’s deference due a mistress of the house, nor does she deserve the compliments due a lover. Jean openly refuses to admit even his questionable love for her, and he is all business when he recommends: “Above all let’s keep our feelings out of this, or we’ll make a mess of everything” (103). In addition Julie loses the respect of Kristin, who, after learning about the affair of her Mistress with Jean, exclaims: “I won’t stay here any longer now - in a place where one can’t respect one’s employers,” (104).

However, being considered a bore, a nuisance, and unworthy of respect is not the worst that Julie can expect after her fatal involvement with a servant. She has become an identifiable danger, inasmuch as she is in possession of some of the servants’ secrets which she can eventually turn into weapons against her lover. As the couple are in the midst of realising the implications of what they have done, Julie warns menacingly: “My father will come back ... find his desk broken ... his money gone. Then he’ll ring the bell- twice for the valet-and then he’ll send for the police ...

and I shall tell everything” (107). Julie, by thus speaking and allowing Jean knowledge that she has become aware of his real nature, and of the petty thefts that had steadily been perpetrated in her father’s kitchen, has signed her death warrant. At this point she becomes a threatening element in Jean’s life, so much so that if Julie can not be his ally, then she must die. After the outburst that shows her disgust and contempt for Jean and lays bare the probability of her betrayal, the only possible escape left to the ambitious valet is to get rid of her, the prime witness to his crime. Especially is this the case when he faces the compounding danger of an exposure of their act in the possibility of Julie’s pregnancy. For Julie has again been naive enough to remind Jean of the possible consequences. Commanding her to commit suicide, Jean remarks: “It’s horrible. But there is no other way to end it ... Go!” (114).

Blanche, of course, could not have been admired in her childhood by Stanley Kowalski the way Julie was admired by Jean. However, the fact that Kowalski is a metal worker, and Blanche a more refined teacher of literature, opens from the start the possibility of feelings of inferiority on the man’s side. In their very first meeting, after verifying with Blanche that she is an English teacher Stanley admits: “I never was a very good English student.” (129). A moment later, when Blanche fails to celebrate a rather crude and inappropriate joke, he exclaims: “I’m afraid I’ll strike you as being the unrefined type.” (130). This first exchange provides Blanche with an easy opportunity to slight Stanley and it establishes the basis of their future relationship.

In spite of himself Stanley perceives Blanche as having access to a world of beauty that he cannot ever reach and this fact places him in an uncomfortable position. However, until she stands in the way of his established supremacy in the neighbourhood, her supposed mendacity and promiscuity (pretexts he uses to free himself from her) deserve no harder punishment than a ticket back to Laurel. It is only after their intercourse that she becomes a serious threat to Stanley. He then responds to his strong instinct of self defence by cruelly and relentlessly destroying her. The impelling motivation for Stanley is that Blanche is now

jeopardising his position as “The King of Elysian Fields” and even as a husband and father.

Understandably, after Stanley has sex with Blanche he can no longer pretend that she is morally his inferior, as he had previously done. Her presence irritates him because it is a constant reminder of his immoral behaviour, and of his undermined authority to condemn her essentially innocuous lies. His victim has become for him the living proof and memento that he is in fact the ape she had from the start judged him to be. By giving her the final thrust towards insanity and towards a life of confinement Stanley unveils for the dwellers of Elysian Fields his own immoral nature and infirmity. When mere feelings of inferiority were at play Stanley’s favourite pastime, and his main weapon against Blanche, had been to expose her lies. Now that he has a more serious secret of his own to hide and serious incriminations to fear from her, only complete destruction can satisfy him. *Blanche’s insanity protects him, and it soon becomes obvious that he did not uncover Blanche’s past to watch over his friend Mitch, but to defend himself against her keener perception. His sister-in-law’s early assessment and identification of his brutish nature had to be avenged. How else could Stanley maintain his status as role definer among the males of the neighbourhood?*

But the triumph of the males is bound to be superficial and ephemeral. It is a fact that Julie and Blanche are easily done away with by their male rivals. But it is also a certainty that they can truly be said to have succeeded in casting a tangible influence on the characters around them. These women have indeed modified the essential dynamics by which their respective milieus were moved and governed. They have transformed their microcosms in a fundamental, irreversible manner. It is implied that, even if Julie were to survive her lover’s prompting to commit suicide, neither he nor his fiancée Kristin would be allowed to maintain their privileges among the servants of the household. Nor would they be able to continue benefiting from the bribes of the count’s kitchen suppliers. Julie’s impending death entails even more crucial consequences, for it is rendered impossible to imagine an unaffected continuation of the relationship

between Kristin and the valet. Due to Miss Julie's intervention Kristin has learned about her fiancée's hidden ambitions. She is now aware that she would be abandoned without a second thought should a better opportunity for Jean arise. He, in turn, knows that he can no longer trust Kristin to be his accomplice.

Crime traditionally isolates the doers, and Julie's induced suicide will necessarily have disastrous effects on the individual souls of the couple directly responsible. Jean is the primarily responsible party, but Kristin has denied her mistress the human sympathy that could have saved her. She has ignored the appeals of a human heart that was desperately seeking salvation. Kristin in addition has been the source that provided Jean with a good argument to use in achieving Julie's destruction. She makes the point that for God, "The last shall be first" (1 1 1), which is the operative incentive Jean uses with success to prompt Julie to follow his directive. As she leaves the stage for the last time those are the words lingering in her mind and on the audience's.

It is therefore aesthetically fitting that the cook should also suffer from pangs of guilt, especially if we bear in mind the importance of this feeling in the Strindbergian world. Nevertheless Kristin's more tangible retribution for her role in Julie's death is the loss of her fiancé. In their last conversation Jean declines her invitation to go to church with her, as he had previously promised. The refusal is meant to symbolise his more transcendental denial of their former commitment. The reader/spectator is allowed to surmise the impending collapse of their association when the servants are engaged in a discussion in which they accuse each other of their petty sins. Jean's affair with Julie has smitten their relationship and they have consequently ceased to be partners and allies.

In Elysian Fields the state of affairs is analogous. Contrary to Blanche's pronouncement that she "will soon be gone without a trace" there will likely be deep vestiges of her prolonged, unwanted stay. Stella had warranted Blanche's destruction with her silence, but she is bound to pay dearly for it. Only a few moments before her sister's last exit she is desperately asking herself: "What have I done to my sister? Oh, God, what

have I done to my sister?" (224). She has, indeed, sacrificed Blanche for the sake of her sexual urge, and her family life and, ironically, there is little hope that the relationship between Stella and Stauley can continue exactly as it was when Blanche first arrived at her sisters. Stella unequivocally proves that she is painfully aware of her lot, and of the necessity of a future life of self-deception. As Blanche is getting ready for her last "trip" Stella meaningfully explains to Eunice, in justification of her attitude in relation to her sister: "I could not believe her story and go on living with Stanley," (217). She thus acknowledges that she is deluding herself in a deeper way than Blanche, the official fraud and dreamer in the play world, ever did. Stella, in spite of herself, has been made fully conscious of her destiny by Blanche's visit. She is, after all, "hanging back with the brutes", as Blanche had cautioned her not to do.

Significantly, very few words are exchanged at the end between the Kowalskies. The audience is allowed to intimate that the couple, after the dramatic moment of Blanche's departure, will be communicating solely through sex. Williams' stage directions make this point quite clear. As Blanche leaves the scene forever, followed by the doctor and the matron, Stella and Stanley are left for a brief moment on the stage. Stella is sobbing "inhumanely" and at this highly dramatic moment the only way Stanley can find to soothe his wife is by means of sexuality.⁴ Furthermore, sexuality, strong as it is, seems hardly sufficient to keep Stella faithfully by Stanley's side. In this same last scene Eunice deems it find the opening of her blouse." necessary to plunge the Kowalskies' new-born baby into Stella's arms in order to prevent her leaving Stanley and running after her sister.

Blanche's sojourn at Elysian Fields has left a strong impression also on other members of the community. Eunice's recommendation to Stella when the latter expresses some doubts about Blanche's story, is transparent: "Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on no matter what happens, you've got to keep on going" (217). Eunice, the toughest of the females in the Kowalskies community, has undergone a substantial enlightenment. She is by this time conscious of the injustice done to

Blanche, and is capable of admitting: "I always did say that men are callous things with no feelings, but this does beat anything" (216). But the most dramatic transformation, one which can hurt a gregarious individual such as Stanley most, is the one that takes place among the members of his poker gang. They are not left unaffected by Stanley's treatment of Blanche and by her downfall. Pablo exclaims: "Cosa mala, muy, muy mala!", and Steve strongly believes that "This is not the way to do it" (224). But it is Mitch's angry accusation to Stanley: "You! You done this, all o' your God damn interfering with things you ... I'll kill you!" (224), which voices the view of that whole group. He challenges Stanley's course of action, and suggests that the community after all does not want Stanley's "truth", but instead they want to be told what "ought to be true", the way Blanche had justified her fabrications. Obviously since the moment of her arrival, Stanley's former status in the community has suffered a severe decline, and nothing will ever be the same. The change undergone by the card players should not be undervalued, Williams saw the camaraderie among them as central to the play, not without reason was its first title *The PoLer Night*.

So we can see that notwithstanding some important differences in these two plays, the central theme of sexual confrontation is clearly the common axis and pivot around which the plots unfold. Both plays also take similar standpoints, giving testimony of the never ending confrontation between the sexes in which women have long been defeated, as the comparable destruction of Blanche and Julie attests. But both plays also imply that the ascendancy of males is not without consequential repercussion on the community and on the lives of the individuals therein. Though the predominance and centrality of American subject matter in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is indisputable, both playwrights often find their heroes and heroines among the inadapted, the desperate and the frill of the world. Blanche, as much as Julie, is full of contradictions and incongruencies, both their personalities are composed in a typically Strinbergian way of discordant pieces which easily lend themselves to conflicting interpretations but however do not make the characters any the less real or interesting.⁵

NOTES

- 1 "Authorts Foreword", *Six Plays of Strindberg*, p. 67.
- 2 George Jean Nathan, "Review of A Streetcar Named Desire", in *Two American Tragedies*. p. 89.
- 3 Harold Clurman, "Review of A Streetcar Named Desired", in *Two Modern Tragedies*. pp. 92-93.
- 4 Williams' stage directions just before the curtains fall are: "He [Stanley] knceles beside her and his fingers

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