

Högskolan i Halmstad  
Sektionen för humaniora  
Engelska 61-90

Stereotypical Gender Roles and their Patriarchal Effects in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Christian Bauer  
C-uppsats  
Handledare: Joakim Jahlmar

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. THEORY</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>2.1 Feminist Literary Criticism</i>	3
<i>2.2 Definition of Stereotype</i>	4
<i>2.3 Gender Stereotypes in Feminist Literature</i>	5
<i>2.4 Patriarchy</i>	8
<b>3. DISCUSSION OF PORTRAYED GENDER STEREOTYPES</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>3.1 Blanche DuBois</i>	9
<i>3.2 Stella Kowalski</i>	15
<i>3.3 Stanley Kowalski</i>	19
<b>4. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>5. WORKS CITED</b>	<b>27</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Stereotypical gender roles have probably existed as long as human culture and are such a natural part of our lives that we barely take notice of them. Nevertheless, images of what we perceive as typically masculine and feminine in appearance and behavior depend on the individual's perception. Within each gender one can find different stereotypes. A commonly assumed idea is that men are hard and tough, while women are soft and vulnerable.

I find it interesting how stereotypes function and how they are preserved almost without our awareness. Once I started reading and researching the topic of stereotypes it became clear to me that literature contains many different stereotypes.

The intention of this essay is to critically examine the stereotypical gender roles in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, written by Tennessee Williams in 1947. It is remarkable how the author portrays the three main characters: Stanley, Stella and Blanche. The sharp contrasts and the dynamics between them are fascinating.

My thesis is that *A Streetcar Named Desire* presents stereotypical gender roles, consequently displaying and upholding patriarchic norms and beliefs. I plan to provide a definition of stereotypes and identify certain gender stereotypes defined in literature. Furthermore, I will point out and discuss the similarities and differences between the defined stereotypes of the three main characters in the play. Finally, the degree to which the investigated gender stereotypes together support patriarchy is examined.

## 2. THEORY

### *2.1 Feminist Literary Criticism*

According to Ellen Rooney, feminism changed the way in which “literary texts are read, taught and evaluated” (foreword). For a better understanding of how genders have been formed and represented, feminist literary theory has tried to contravene the limitations and

restrictions between literature, the social sciences and also philosophy (foreword). Feminists have examined literature as a tool for creating and keeping belief systems. They revealed that the majority of great works were almost exclusively male-authored, with some exceptions, such as Jane Austen, George Elliot and Charlotte Brontë (Tolan 325). One of the first undertakings of feminist criticism was to offer a reasonable cause for the absence of women from literature. Additionally, feminist literary criticism examines the representation of female characters in works by male writers. Jill Lebihan states that “this kind of criticism is now quite commonplace and often takes the form of hunting out stereotypes of women and using them as a means of identifying the ways in which these restricted cultural representations underpin women’s oppression” (103). Feminists have thus been looking for “victimized or stereotypically passive representations” (Lebihan 103) of characters and engaged in scrutinizing these images.

## *2.2 Definition of Stereotype*

According to Maas and Arcuri (194), a stereotype can be described as a form of thought process created in our own mind. It is an oversimplification, or categorization, of a certain group’s traits and behavior. This oversimplification is based on previous experiences with people belonging to the same group. When meeting a new person, it is easy to perceive him/her as belonging to an earlier created category, instead of seeing a unique individual with diverse characteristics. Stereotypes are not merely images in a single person’s mind; through language they are shared and maintained by many. Because language is culturally shared, “it provides an ideal means of collectively defining and preserving stereotypic beliefs” (194).

Moreover, Sarah Gamble remarks that “the stereotype can be seen as an ideological discursive strategy which demarcates an us/them binarity which functions to reinforce the dominant discourse” (323). She argues that patriarchy often uses stereotypes in order to

differentiate between the characteristics of women and men. By doing so, patriarchy sets the definition of what is stereotypically feminine and masculine (323).

### *2.3 Gender Stereotypes in Feminist Literature*

In literature there are many stereotypically female and male characters and feminists argue that these roles reproduce and maintain patriarchy. According to Elizabeth Langland, there are common stereotypes such as the mother, the wife and the southern belle (73). The stereotype the “submissive wife” is portrayed as an “obedient, passive, unassuming” (73) woman. Moreover, Gamble mentions that the submissive women are commonly portrayed as “nurturant wife, mother or muse” (323). Traditionally, the wife’s role was to stay at home and take care of the children, while her husband worked and brought money to the household (McElroy 102). Gale A. Yee claims that the role of the submissive housewife is partly a product of the wife’s lack of financial independence. Thus, by following norms and values in society, reinforced by ideology and religion, the traditional wife reflects the stereotypical role of the submissive wife (16). In contradiction, Louis Blackwell discusses sexuality as a part of the stereotypical submissive wife. She argues that women are described as subordinating themselves to dominant men because of a fulfilling sex life. According to this stereotype, these particular women also have a tendency to endure their men’s violent behavior and abuse (245).

Another common female stereotype, which in some ways stands in contrast to the submissive wife, is the “Southern belle”. According to Elizabeth Langland, the Southern belle is both a sex object and the woman on a pedestal (79). Carol S. Manning compares the younger and less experienced Southern belle to the more sophisticated and idealized “Southern lady” (95). Manning claims that the typical Southern belle has the chance to reach the status of a Southern Lady when she has received the right education (96). In addition, she depicts the Southern belle as “beautiful, graceful, charming and virtuous, loyal to family, yet

resourceful and brave when unusual circumstances called on her to be” (96). Further features of a typical Southern belle are specified by George Hovis, designating her as “strong, articulate, assertive – and yet often tender and vulnerable” (171).

Moreover, Southern belles are very sensitive and aware of how they are perceived by people around them. Due to their strict upbringing with many social rules, they are constantly alert to making mistakes that contradict the given social norms (Hovis 171). The Southern belle belongs to the upper class in society with its large mansions and colorful social life and partly embraces the way of life of the British aristocracy (Wei 103). Wei summarizes the desired and acceptable behavior for belles, stating that their behavior is bound to stringent social patterns based on manner (103). The belle’s admiration and idealization of chivalry, i.e. the concept of men courting and worshipping women, is one of the results of her upbringing (Wei 103).

The goal of a Southern belle in life is to get married and consequently become a Southern lady. In order to find a husband the belle uses her charms and looks extensively. She can be flirty, impulsive and provocative, but once she is married this kind of behavior ends (Manning 96). Hovis adds another point to the definition of the Southern belle, describing her as pure and noble (173).

The mother stereotype is described in detail by Elizabeth Langland. According to her, it originates in the Bible and myth. In Christian tradition for example, Eve is seen as the first and great mother that brings life to earth. However, the figure of the mother has another side since Eve also brings us mortality and death by eating the apple.

Another example of this ambivalent mother role is Pandora, from Greek mythology. She is created on Zeus’ order and seen as the first woman on earth. She is an evil figure and all men are very attracted to her extraordinary beauty. She is described as smart, well-

educated in the arts and very sly. A similarity to Eve is that she cannot resist temptations and opens the box, which is not to be opened (70).

In contrast to Eve, “the Virgin Mary embodies the opposite of the temptations of the flesh represented in Eve” (Langland 71). Mary is Jesus’s mother and stands for innocence, purity and redemption (71). Furthermore, Langland depicts Mary as a “model of obedience” (71), which stands in contrast to rebellious Eve. She refers to Mary as “having no own will” (71) and being “a servant in thought and deed to patriarchal authority” (71).

There are also typical male stereotypes described in literature. Crystal Smith argues that common male stereotypes are the ones of warriors and wimps. The warrior stereotype is also called alpha male. Smith argues this stereotypical male character is defined “by stoicism, a quick temper and a touch of rebelliousness. Moreover, the alpha male usually uses violence to solve problems and get through challenges, when trying to do what is right. She describes the alpha male furthermore as being “easy to spot” because of his good looks, his toughness and independent streak. The wimp stereotype is less masculine than the warrior. Often depicted as brainy and skinny, he can be seen as a counterpart to the warrior stereotype. The wimp can also be seen as a weakling. Usually, wimps have “the courage and confidence to follow their instincts” and often “face difficulties but ultimately triumph” (Smith).

Another male stereotype is the macho. According to the *Dictionary and Thesaurus — Merriam-Webster Online*, being macho is defined as being “aggressively virile”. Furthermore, the term macho originates from the word machismo, which means, “a strong sense of masculine pride: an exaggerated masculinity”. Being macho is also described as “having or showing qualities (such as very noticeable strength and aggression) that agree with traditional ideas about what men are like: manly or masculine in a very noticeable or exaggerated way” in *Merriam-Webster’s Learner’s Dictionary*.

In addition, Gordon Russell claims that there is a pattern of typical values and attitudes that motivate the performance and behavior of the macho male. According to Russell, a macho personality is based on several basic elements: Firstly, macho males have “sexually calloused attitudes” towards women (226). Secondly, macho males believe sexual intercourse with women establishes masculine power and female submission. This is realized without any attention and empathy for the female (Russell 226). The macho personality, according to Russell, is often involved in family violence, such as rape and forced sexual intercourse. He argues that the macho considers “verbal and physical aggression as manly behavior and the preferred means of expressing his dominance over other men” (226).

Closely related to male aggressive behavior is the term domestic violence. Susan Koprince remarks that the issue of domestic violence was overlooked in America until the 1970s (49). Wife beating was seen as a family matter instead of a misconduct or social issue. Women were supposed to take care of the problem themselves and keep it within the home (Koprince 49). She furthermore states that aggressive masculinity and desire for control is perfectly consistent with the profile of a “batterer” (49), who is violent towards his female partner. Koprince also observes an anxiety in the batterer’s character; he fears being left by his mate. Consequently, in contrast to their tough macho exterior these men are vulnerable and dependent (52).

#### 2.4 Patriarchy

The *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender* defines patriarchy as “an old general term for the disproportionate holding of power and authority by males” (xxix). According to the *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*, “most feminists would agree that patriarchy entails efforts by men to control women’s bodies” (1049). Furthermore, the *Women's Studies Encyclopedia* states that it is women’s task to raise children in patriarchy and that men use violence and rape to get control over women. Moreover, women are reduced to sex objects by men and as an effect



become the possessions men. In summary, “[n]ow feminists tend to take patriarchy as a general descriptor of male dominance” (1050).

In *The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology*, patriarchy is described as “originally used to describe autocratic rule by a male head of a family, patriarchy has been extended to describe a more general system in which power is secured in the hands of adult men” (441).

These definitions of patriarchy are needed to show that *A Streetcar Named Desire* depicts situations that can be interpreted as presenting patriarchal norms and values.

### 3. DISCUSSION OF PORTRAYED GENDER STEREOTYPES

#### 3.1 *Blanche DuBois*

One would stereotypically expect Blanche DuBois to be an elegant and sophisticated woman considering her upbringing. Born into the Southern upper-class she had the prerequisites to become a Southern lady. Ruby Cohn claims that it is primarily through her speech that Blanche emphasizes her “manor-born superiority” (81). Evidently, “Blanche alone uses correct grammar and varied syntax and her vocabulary contains Latinisms” (81). These remains of aristocratic education and upbringing support the assumption of Blanche being high-class and lady-like.

Nevertheless, according to George Hovis, the analysis of the character of Blanche DuBois reveals that she is more of a “faded Southern belle”, than a rich and mannered Southern lady (174). Since there is no wealth left in the DuBois family, Blanche tries to explain the situation by partly making her ancestors responsible: “our improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications – to put it plainly. Till finally all that was left . . . was the house and about twenty acres of ground, including a graveyard” (Williams 40). Blanche is financially ruined and as a result looking for accommodation at her sister’s apartment. Previously, Blanche was independent

and worked as an English teacher; she now has no material belongings left, except for the contents of her luggage. She confirms her negative financial situation in scene two:

“Everything I own is in that trunk” (Williams 40). Jacqueline O’Connor argues about Blanche’s financial situation upon her arrival at the Kowalskis’: “By coming to New Orleans and placing herself at the mercy of her relatives, admitting that she has lost Belle Reve, Blanche becomes economically vulnerable to Stanley” (107).

Blanche becomes “entrapped in the role of the belle” (Hovis 176), who usually has no own income, but relies on others, normally their partner. Generally, Hovis’ view of Blanche is consistent with O’Connor’s when he sees Blanche as “adopting the role [of the Southern belle] as a means of literal survival by securing economic and social stability” (171-2). Supporting Hovis’ claim about Blanche’s financial dependency on Stanley, O’Connor notes: “Single women who were forced to work to support themselves were often more liable to be committed if they became unable to work” (103).

Blanche was fired from her teacher position because of an affair with a young student. Furthermore, Blanche’s husband committed suicide, leaving her a widow. Nevertheless, after the loss of her husband Blanche had several one-night stands with soldiers from a military base near her home. Stanley tells Stella in scene seven about Blanche’s immoral business: “Yes, did you know there was an army camp near Laurel and your sister’s was one of the places called ‘Out-of-Bounds’?” (Williams 109). Consequently, Blanche’s reputation in her hometown Laurel became unbearable and finally the mayor told her to leave town. The depicted immorality of Blanche does not match Hovis’ account of purity defining a stereotypical Southern belle.

A further indication regarding the non-purity of Blanche is made when Nicholas Pagan decodes Blanche’s name and argues the name Blanche could be phonologically associated with the verb “blanch”. Consequently, Blanche might be “blanching”, which means she is

trying to make her world pure and innocent (108). Pagan's understanding of Blanche's name suggests that Blanche is not pure. Additional proof of Blanche trying to become "pure" are her numerous baths throughout the play. Harold Bloom states fittingly that "She [Blanche] disappears in the bathroom to be made pure again" ("Summary and Analysis" 33).

Hovis generally questions whether or not Blanche DuBois is acting out the role of the Southern Belle to protect herself in "a social milieu in which she is disempowered" (171). In my view, Blanche gives the answer to that question herself when saying in scene two that "[a]fter all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion" (Williams 40). Evidently, Blanche indicates she is well aware of the concepts of "blanching" and trying to "gloss over things". Her comment indicates the possibility of her playing the role of the Southern belle. In my opinion, she did not choose her character wisely, since the role of Southern belle turns out to be incompatible with Stanley's character.

Louise Blackwell observes additional details about Blanche's character. She categorizes her as a well-behaved child, living with her parents "long beyond the marrying age for most women". In addition, as further indication of her good will, she stays behind attempting to save the family property (Blackwell 244). Blanche herself illustrates her difficult life at the Belle Reve to Stella in a long speech in scene one. She mentions she had to take "all the blows in her face and her body" (Williams 22-3). She uses the negatively loaded word "blows" instead of a more neutral word like "setback" to emphasize her terror about seeing her family passing away one after one. Moreover, she had to pay for the funerals, which brought her into total bankruptcy. According to Blackwell's claim, Blanche fits the idea of being a stereotypical Southern belle in being loyal to her family, which is one typical and major characteristic of a Southern belle according to Manning (95). Also, Blackwell's comment gives rise to the idea that Blanche's loyalty to her parents stopped her from getting married again. Since the main goal of a Southern belle in life is to get married and Blanche

does not accomplish this, she fails to realize an important objective. Her wish of being received as belle-like remains unfulfilled in this specific matter.

However, an argument for Blanche being a Southern belle is her idealization of chivalry and good manners. All of a sudden, Blanche, who is used to gentility and order being characterized by courtesy and kindness, has to deal with Stanley and his friends. In contrast to Blanche, these men are all members of the working-class and not used to dealing with the “belle-like” Blanche. In various situations in the play she tries to educate the men she comes into contact with in terms of good, chivalric behavior, for example in scene three, when she and Mitch talk and Blanche explains her name: “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 55). Blanche even tries to teach Mitch to be more chivalric, for instance in scene three when she wants Mitch to put a colored paper lantern over the light bulb where they sit. Her reason for doing so is at the same time a hint for Mitch on how to behave towards her: “ I can’t stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action” (Williams 56). In addition, she appreciates Mitch’s compliment when he says, “You may teach school but you’re certainly not an old maid” (Williams 56) by exclaiming, “Thank you, sir! I appreciate your gallantry” (Williams 57)! Even though Blanche was fishing for compliments by having purposely mentioned that she is an “old maid school teacher” (Williams 56) and requesting a proper answer, she is still excited to get a compliment. This shows Blanche’s need for confirmation about her looks.

It furthermore supports the remark Hovis makes about Blanche’s behavior: “Rather than naively . . . and passively expecting the deference and protection of the men around them, Blanche relentlessly extracts the expected behaviors by constantly reminding the men of the social contract of chivalry in the South and demanding the appropriate ritualized behaviors” (176).

The dialogue between Mitch and Blanche reveals another typical characteristic of the Southern belle, which Blanche is trying to live up to — being beautiful and charming. Blanche constantly gives remarks and asks about her looks throughout the play. Clothes, powder and make-up dictate her life because she is “constantly and acutely aware of how she is being perceived by men” (Hovis 175). Evidence of Blanche’s pursuit of beauty can be found in the first scene, when Blanche meets Stella for the first time after years. With “feverish vivacity,” Blanche says (Williams 13): “Now, then, let me look at you [Stella]. But don’t you look at me, Stella, no, no, no, not till later, not till I’ve bathed and rested. And turn that over-light off! Turn that off! I won’t be looked at in this merciless glare” (Williams 13). Another good example of Blanche’s desire to be considered attractive is portrayed in scene two when Stanley searches through her luggage.

STANLEY. It looks like you raided some stylish shops in Paris.

BLANCHE. Ha-ha! Yes – clothes are my passion!

STANLEY. What does it cost for a string of fur-pieces like that?

BLANCHE. Why, those were a tribute from an admirer of mine!

STANLEY. He must have had a lot of – admiration!

BLANCHE. Oh, in my youth I excited some admiration! But look at me now! Would you think it possible that I was once considered to be – attractive?

STANLEY. Your looks are ok. (Williams 36)

In this situation two aspects of the character of Blanche become clear to the reader: firstly, Blanche likes shopping and her expensive-looking clothes; secondly, she blatantly fishes for compliments again by asking Stanley if he can imagine that she was once attractive. Both aspects underline that her exterior is of enormous importance to Blanche. This obsession with

her looks corresponds to the life goal of a stereotypical Southern belle, which is getting married. In Blanche's world, being attractive raises the chances for finding a partner and as a consequence also the chances for marriage.

In theory, the stereotypical Southern belle should also be virtuous and graceful. Blanche can be called these characteristics, for example, in scene three when Blanche talks to Mitch and then turns the radio on. The stage directions describe the situation as follows: "*She turns the knobs on the radio and it begins to play 'Wien, Wien, nur du allein'. Blanche waltzes to the music with romantic gestures. Mitch is delighted and moves in awkward imitation like a dancing bear*" (Williams 58). In general, Blanche shows some more notions of being graceful and virtuous throughout the play. For example, she does not interrupt people she talks to and she uses polite and formal language.

Even if the connection of Blanche to the stereotypical Southern belle seems to be strong and lasting, her character also shows a connection to another stereotype — Pandora. According to Langland, Pandora attracted men by her "extraordinary beauty" (70). She was also known for being smart and sly (70). Blanche, with all her efforts to stay fresh by taking baths and her taste for expensive clothes, tries hard to be seen as beautiful. In my view, the opening of Blanche's luggage, which reveal her luxurious furs and accessories and by that her lifestyle, can be related to the opening of Pandora's box. In mythology this meant that evil would be set free. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, it is almost as intense, since a whole chain of actions starts. Stanley becomes very angry when he sees the contents of Blanche's "boxes" and consequently contacts a friend whom he orders to check out Blanche's background. As a result, Stanley finds out about Blanche's awkward past and becomes even more furious. He wants to throw Blanche out of the apartment. In summary, Blanche is the first part of a patriarchal triangle relationship depicting a weakened version of the Southern belle. Also, the

other two persons in this triangle are to be described in the following two segments of this essay.

### 3.2 *Stella Kowalski*

In strong contrast to the stereotype of the Southern belle represented by Blanche stands her sister Stella. She embodies a lot of characteristics of the stereotypical submissive housewife throughout the play. Her major characteristic is mentioned by Tennessee Williams: “[h]e [Tennessee Williams] advised director Elia Kazan to tone down Stella’s vivacity, reminding him [Kazan] that her key quality is passivity” (Koprince 54).

It might be true and correct that “Stella loves Stanley . . . and is drawn to his vitality and sexual charms” (54), as Susan Koprince puts it, but to me the question arises how far one should go in being passive. Stella generally shows low self-esteem and one possible reason for that might be Blanche, who suppressed her in their childhood. In scene one we find proof that supports this claim.

STELLA. (*sincerely*) Why Blanche, you know that’s not true.

BLANCHE. No? I’d forgotten how quiet you were.

STELLA. You never did give me a chance to say much, Blanche. So I just got in the habit of being quiet around you.

BLANCHE. (*vaguely*) A good habit to get into . . . (Williams 15)

This excerpt shows clearly that it was not an easy childhood for Stella to have Blanche as her sister. Later in the same scene, Blanche is bossing Stella around, and has total command over her, which supports that Stella is a submissive character.

STELLA. Now, Blanche —

BLANCHE. Yes, it is, it is or I wouldn't say it! You just have to watch around the hips  
a little. Stand up.

STELLA. Not now.

BLANCHE. You hear me? I said stand up! (*Stella complies reluctantly.*)

You messy child, you, you've spilt something on that pretty white lace collar! About  
your hair – you ought to have it cut in feather bob with your dainty features. Stella,  
you have a maid, don't you? (Williams 17)

As the reader can see, Blanche controls Stella, who is passive and obedient. In scene five, Stella buys a bottle of Coca-Cola for Blanche. Koprince claims that “she [Stella] confirms her own position of inferiority by saying: ‘I like to wait on you, Blanche. It makes it seem more like home’” (54). Noticeably, Stella wants to make the setting “more like home”, but this can be understood in two ways. Either Stella is really controlled by her sister and somehow wants to create this old state from their youth again, or she intentionally wants Blanche to believe that everything “seems more like home”. In this case, it could be considered a clever move of Stella to make Blanche's stay more comfortable, both for herself and for Blanche. The submissiveness of Stella reaches the first of two climaxes after Stanley hits her in scene three.

BLANCHE. (*wildly.*) Stella, watch out, he's —

MEN. (*feebly.*) Take it easy, Stanley. Easy, fellow. – Let's all —

STELLA. You lay your hands on me I'll —

(*She backs out of sight. He advances and disappears. There is the sound of a blow.*)

*Stella cries out. Blanche screams and runs into the kitchen. The men rush forward*

*and there is grappling and cursing. Something is overturned with a crash.*) (Williams

58-9)



It is not explicitly said in the text that Stanley hits Stella, but it is clearly implied. After Stella and Blanche have rushed to their neighbor upstairs, Stanley cries and with “heaven-splitting violence” (Williams 62) begs Stella to return. She comes back to him and they disappear into their apartment. In my opinion, this depicts, on the one hand Stella’s forgiveness, but on the other hand also her submissiveness, since she could also have left him for such an incident and in this way show strength and firmness. Stella furthermore denies that there was or is a (violence) problem in her marriage, which can be concluded from the scene the morning after the poker night when Stella and Blanche talk.

BLANCHE. All right, Stella. I will repeat the question quietly now. How could you come back in this place last night? Why, you must have slept with him! (*Stella gets up in a calm and leisurely way.*)

STELLA. Blanche, I’d forgotten how excitable you are. You’re making much too much fuss about this.

BLANCHE. Am I?

STELLA. Yes, you are, Blanche. I know how it must have seemed to you and I’m awfully sorry it had to happen, but it wasn’t anything as serious as you seem to take it. In the first place, when men are drinking and playing poker anything can happen. It’s always a powder keg. He didn’t know what he was doing... . He was as good as a lamb when I came back and he’s really very, very ashamed of himself. (Williams 65-6)

This part of the text indicates that Stella justifies Stanley’s behavior and plays it down by saying it was not “as serious as it seemed.” Moreover, she explains, “it’s always a powder keg,” meaning it is not the first time such a situation has “exploded”. These aforementioned

characteristics of Stella connect her also to the gender stereotype of the Virgin Mary. Stella sacrifices her life to live with Stanley in passivity. She is obedient and lets Stanley rule over her. Her character is suppressed throughout the play.

Furthermore, Koprince classifies Stella as “battered woman” (53), living in symbiosis with her superior male complement “the batterer” (49). According to Koprince, battered wives usually share old-fashioned concepts about the home; “they believe that the man is in charge of the household, makes all the key decisions, and that their own role is to be nurturant and compliant” (54). This is the reality for the Kowalskis’: Stella is obedient and compliant and Stanley is in charge.

Blanche’s assumption that Stanley and Stella had sex after their fight leads to the idea that as long as Stella’s sexual attraction to Stanley does not weaken, she will be forgiving whatever he does to her and subsequently be inferior to him. Obviously, as Louise Blackwell notes, “she [Stella] subordinates herself to his [Stanley’s] way of life, because they have a satisfying sexual relationship” (245). Accordingly, Stella explains to Blanche in scene four that her sexual relationship to Stanley makes up for everything negative saying that “there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark — that sort of make everything else seem — unimportant” (Williams 72-3). In scene eleven, the second climax of Stella’s submissiveness can be found. Stella admits that she cannot believe the truth Blanche told her about being raped by Stanley: “I couldn’t believe her [Blanche’s] story and go on living with Stanley” (Williams 149).

Finally, Stella defends Stanley in the end, sending her sister Blanche to a mental institution. She would rather believe Stanley and stay with him than believe what Blanche told her and consequently end her marriage. Koprince summarizes the character of Stella arguing that “she [Stella] is essentially a submissive, self-deprecating wife who tolerates and excuses her husband’s behavior” (49).

Stella can also be seen as what Langland describes as the mother, in more detailed terms as Eve. According to Langland, this mother stereotype stands for bringing life to earth. Since Stella is pregnant in the play there is a strong connection to this image. Nevertheless, Langland also refers to the negative side of Eve, which is depicted in not being able to withstand the temptation of the apple. This characteristic matches also Stella's character, since she cannot resist Stanley, although he is often treating her badly.

In my view, the collected textual evidence supports the claim that Stella can be seen as the stereotypical "submissive wife", although with minor influences of other stereotypes. All in all, Stella is the second part in a patriarchal triangle constellation *A Streetcar Named Desire* depicts. She is obedient and passive, cannot refuse Stanley and tolerates him ruling over her. Despite the facts that she leaves Stanley once just to come back to him after some hours and that one reading of the open ending of the play suggests that she finally leaves him, she is to be regarded as underlying Stanley's rule and therefore patriarchy.

### 3.3 Stanley Kowalski

Stanley Kowalski, the male main character, can be identified as a stereotypical macho. He also matches the requirements of a batterer. According to Russell, a macho performs sexual intercourse to establish masculine power and create female submission (226). In scene eight Stanley talks to Stella about the sex life the couple had before Blanche intruded into their living space.

STANLEY: When we first met, me and you, you thought I was common. How right you was, baby. I was common as dirt. You showed me the snapshot of the place with the columns. I pulled you down off them columns and how you loved it, having them coloured lights going! And wasn't we happy together, wasn't it all okay till she [Blanche] showed here? (*Stella makes a slight movement. Her look goes suddenly*

*inward as if some interior voice had called her name. She begins a slow, shuffling progress from the bedroom to the kitchen, leaning and resting on the back of the chair and then on the edge of a table with a blind look and listening expression. Stanley, finishing with his shirt, is unaware of her reaction.)* And wasn't we happy together? Wasn't it all ok? Till she showed here. Hoity-toity, describing me as an ape. (Williams 123-4)

This text passage suggests not only that Stanley and Stella had a healthy and happy sex life before Blanche arrived, but also Stanley's awareness of their intense sexuality, which he calculatedly reminds Stella of to subdue her. Stella is affected by Stanley's notice as "her look goes suddenly inward as if some interior voice had called her name." Obviously, Stanley has spoken to her conscience, probably neither the first, nor the last time and clarified that sex is crucial to their relationship. Stella's reaction can in my view be interpreted as submissively agreeing, which in contrast shows Stanley's macho-like superiority in their marriage.

According to Russell, "[the macho] tolerates rape and family violence" (226). This is why Stanley rapes Blanche in the end of the play in scene ten and hits his wife during the poker-game in scene three. These two actions confirm the aforementioned stereotypical features of a macho and support the assumption that Stanley can be categorized as one. Stanley's behavior confirms additional aspects of a typical macho identified by Russell: "verbal and physical aggression seen as manly behavior and as means of expressing dominance over men" (226). Firstly, in scene three, Stanley, as a result of rage against Blanche listening to her favorite music on the radio, throws the radio out of the window. The stage directions describe the situation as follows: "*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*" (Williams 58). Secondly, in scene

eight, he destroys some plates after having been called a pig by his wife because he eats with his fingers instead of a fork.

STELLA. Mr. Kowalski is too busy making a pig of himself to think of anything else!

STANLEY. That's right, baby.

STELLA. Your face and your fingers are disgustingly greasy. Go and wash up and then help me clear the table. (*He hurls a plate to the floor.*)

STANLEY. That's how I'll clear the table! (*He seizes her arm.*) Don't ever talk that way to me! "Pig — Polack — disgusting — vulgar — greasy!" them kind of words have been on your tongue and your sister's too much around here! (Williams 118)

Not only is Stanley violent towards Stella again by seizing her arm, but he also ventilates his anger through destroying kitchen items. Those two scenes are clear examples of verbal and especially physical aggression towards women. This implies that Stanley is trying to express his dominance through violence in those two scenes — a further indication that he is a stereotypical macho.

Nevertheless, his violence is not only directed against women. In scene three, when Stanley's friends try to get him away from Stella, who just got hit by him, he is "*forced, pinioned by the two men, into the bedroom. He nearly throws them off*" (Williams 59). On the one hand this illustrates Stanley's enormous strength by almost winning a fight over two men, but on the other hand, the fact that he fights against his friends indicates that his aggressiveness and violence is directed towards everyone that comes in his way, both women and men.

The fight scene continues with Stanley "all at once subsiding and giving in" and some moments later he asks "dully": "What's the matter; what's happened" (Williams 59)? It can

be claimed here that he is just pretending to be unaware of the fact that he just hit his wife, but when the whole scene comes to the end, he bitterly cries for Stella, who has left the apartment looking for protection upstairs in her neighbor's apartment. Stereotypically, men who cry are often seen as weak. In fact, Stanley shows weakness and vulnerability in the end of scene three when he vigorously wants Stella back, which cannot be regarded as macho behavior.

Stanley's exterior strongly supports the idea that he is a macho. In scene one, when he enters the kitchen, the stage directions describe him as "strongly and compactly built" (Williams 25) and the description continues:

*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. [...] his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humour his love for good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. He seizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and the way he smiles at them. (Williams 25-6)*

However, for getting a full picture of the stereotypical character of Stanley it is important to not only understand that he is a macho. Koprince also categorizes Stanley as a batterer and claims that "Williams makes use of his personal knowledge of domestic violence, creating in the character of Stanley Kowalski the image of a prototypical batterer" (50). She summarizes the typical characteristics of the prototypical batterer as being "hyper masculine, using aggressive behavior as verification of manliness, believing in male superiority, seeing women as sexual objects to be dominated and being extremely jealous and possessive" (50).

In contrast, Koprince also identifies fears of a batterer when she states that “[t]he batterer’s greatest worry, in fact, is that his mate will ultimately leave him” (52). Koprince then refers to Dawn Berry, who states that violent men fear being left and become anxious when they get the impression they could lose their partner (qtd in Koprince 52). This “other, weak side” of a batterer can be recognized in Stanley Kowalski in the end of scene three when he cries and yells for Stella and then “falls to his knees on the steps and presses his face to her belly, curving a little with maternity” (Williams 62).

The discovered and acknowledged characteristics of Stanley are compatible with the description of him. According to the characteristics Russell lists, he can be seen as a macho and at the same time as a batterer as argued by Koprince. As described, the terms batterer and macho are closely related because their characteristics are almost interchangeable.

However, Stanley Kowalski can also be seen in the light of the warrior stereotype. His obvious violent and aggressive character traits and behavior have its origin in his hot temper, which is typical for the warrior stereotype. Moreover, Stanley can be regarded as rebellious, for example when he gets into a brawl with his friends while playing bowling and when he fights against them after the poker game. In general, using violence to solve problems, which Stanley does on a regular basis, is connected to the warrior stereotype. Alpha-male is another name for the warrior and Stanley really fills that image. He is the captain of the local bowling team and hosts poker nights. It is he who decides when a poker game ends and in general dominates his friends. Alpha-males are usually good-looking and tough. Stanley is described as well-built and attractive which is a further match with the stereotype. The general connotations the word warrior brings up are fighting and strength, and throughout the play Stanley shows these characteristics. I would categorize Stanley as violent macho, since he unites strength, aggressiveness and violence in his character and uses these features towards all persons he encounters in the play.

All in all, Stanley's appearance is based on patriarchy and its values and norms, which he strongly holds onto throughout the play. He wants to be, and at the same time sees himself as, leader of the household, which clearly supports this notion. He suppresses the women around him, shows no respect towards them and also uses force and violence when arguing with women – all clear signs of the attitude of a patriarch.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

*A Streetcar Named Desire* reproduces certain stereotypes through the main characters Blanche, Stella and Stanley. I could match three different main stereotypes, the “submissive wife”, the “Southern belle” and the “macho”, which also show minor features of other stereotypes and critically examine their appearance and performance considering whether or not these descriptions are appropriate. In the case of the “submissive wife” I have shown that this stereotype is fully covered by the character of Stella Kowalski. She can furthermore be seen as a minor version of Eve, because she cannot resist Stanley.

Also, I have come to the conclusion that the character of Stanley Kowalski fits the stereotypes “macho” and “warrior”. Additionally, he turns out to be a “batterer” as well, which fits as a subcategory into the macho stereotype and makes me brand him violent macho. He never shows a sense of domesticity and does not help his wife at home. He sees himself as leader of the household and if needed supports this with violence and aggressiveness towards both men and women. These characteristics support the notion of patriarchal structures in the Kowalski's household.

The result of my study for the Southern belle is not as clear as the result for the first two stereotypes: Blanche DuBois bears a lot of the characteristics of the Southern belle in her character, but in two major features, the purity and goal of a belle, she deviates from the stereotype and fits more to the stereotype of Pandora, who attracted and provoked men. This



slightly weakens Blanche's categorization as Southern belle in my view. Still, she can be seen as a destabilized version of the Southern Belle — the faded Southern Belle.

Through the presence of these three stereotypical characters an atmosphere is created, which reflects patriarchy: Stella, the submissive wife, and Stanley, the violent macho, warrior and provider, depict a clear patriarchal structure. The male is superior, the female inferior. Also, Stanley finally subdues Blanche, the intruding and questionable faded belle, by raping her. This depicts another symbolic and patriarchal situation. The overall mood of the play containing these three main characters represents men ruling over women and as a consequence patriarchic values and norms are displayed. An overall effect of reading the play could be that individuals who believe in a more traditional way of living might like the play more than people who have a more modern and equal view of gender and life. Especially women might dislike the play because women are suppressed and treated without respect.

From a different angle, the question arises whether or not Williams set the play up to reflect the three main characters' aforementioned stereotypes. First readings of *A Streetcar Named Desire* may lead to the quick reaction of seeing the play only depicting patriarchy because of its stereotypical main characters. Considering the fact that Williams once summarized the moral of his play by saying that “[i]f we don't watch out, the apes will take over” (qtd in Bedient 37), the assumption that Williams might have crafted Blanche, Stella and Stanley with a purpose is appealing. It is possible that Williams intentionally made these three characters fit the stereotypes of macho, submissive housewife and Southern belle to criticize their existence. Williams was homosexual and that could, in my view, support the idea that he might have been tired of the picture of the perfect male and female drawn by society at these times. He might have disliked the stereotypes of his generation so much that he used these in his plays. What people called “theater of realism” back then was maybe only

half of the truth with modern eyes, because what Williams really tried to do was criticizing this patriarchal reality.

## 5. WORKS CITED

- Blackwell, Louise. "Tennessee Williams and the Predicament of Women." *Critical Essays on Tennessee Williams*. Ed. Martin A, Robert. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1997. 243-58. Print.
- Bedient, Calvin. "There Are Lives that Desire Does Not Sustain: *A Streetcar Named Desire*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase, 2009. 35-48. Print.
- Bloom, Harold. "Summary and Analysis." *Bloom's Guides: Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005. 23-69. Print.
- Cohn, Ruby. "Ruby Cohn on Modes of Characterization." *Bloom's Guides: Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005. 80-84. Print.
- Ferguson, Kathy E. "Patriarchy." *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*. Ed. Helen Tierney. Vol. 2. Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1999. *Google Books*. Web.
- Gamble, Sarah. Ed. "Stereotyping" *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*. New York: Routledge, 2006. *Google Books*. 8 December 2011. Web.
- Hovis, George. "Fifty percent Illusion": *The Mask of the Southern Belle in Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire, The Glass Menagerie, and "Portrait of a Madonna"*. *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Tennessee Williams*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase, 2007. 171-186. Print.
- Koprince, Susan. "Domestic Violence in *A Streetcar Named Desire*". *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Tennessee William's A Streetcar Named Desire*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009. 49-60. Print.

- Langland, Elizabeth. "Images of Women: A Literature Perspective". *Foundations for a Feminist Restructuring of the Academic Disciplines*. Paludi, Michele and Steuernagel, Gertrude A. Eds. New York: Haworth Press, 1990. 69-98. *Google Books*. 8 December 2011. Web.
- Maas, Anne, and Arcuri Luciano. "Language and Stereotyping". *Stereotypes and Stereotyping*. eds. Macrae, Neil C. et al. New York: Guilford Press, 1996. *Google Books*. 8 December 2011. Web.
- "Macho." *Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary*. 30 November. 2011. Web.
- "Machismo." *Dictionary and Thesaurus — Merriam-Webster Online*. 30 November. 2011. Web.
- "Macho 1, adj." *Dictionary and Thesaurus — Merriam-Webster Online*. 30 November. 2011. Web.
- Manning, Carol S. "Belle". *The Companion to Southern Literature*. Flora, Joseph M. et al. ed. Louisiana State University Press, 2002. 95-97. *Google books*. 8 December 2011. Web.
- McElroy, Wendy. *Sexual Correctness: The Gender-Feminist Attack on Women*. Jefferson: McFarland, 1996. *Google Books*. 8 December 2011. Web.
- O'Connor, Jacqueline. "Jacqueline O'Connor on the Patriarchy and Commitment of Females." *Bloom's Guides: Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005. 103-106. Print.
- Pagan, Nicholas. "Nicholas Pagan on the Significance of Names." *Bloom's Guides: Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005. 107-114. Print.
- "Patriarchy." *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World's Cultures*. Vol. 1. New York: Springer Science and Business Media, 2003. *Google Books*. 3 January 2012. Web.

- “Patriarchy.” *The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Chichester: Blackwell, 2011. *Google Books*. 10 February 2012. Web.
- “Patriarchy.” *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*. 1999. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999. *Google Books*. 31 January 2012. Web.
- Rooney, Ellen. *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*. Ed. Ellen Rooney. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Foreword. Print.
- Russell, Gordon. “Athletes as Targets of Aggression”. *Targets of Violence and Aggression*. Baenninger, Ronald. Ed. *Advances in Psychology*, 76. Amsterdam: Elsevier/North-Holland, 1991. *Google Books*. 8 December 2011. Web.
- Smith, Crystal. *The Achilles Effect: What Pop Culture is Teaching Young Boys About Masculinity*. Bloomington: Thinkstock, 2011. *Google Books*. 8 December 2011. Web.
- Tolan, Fiona. “Feminisms” *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*. Ed. Patricia Waugh. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. 319-39. Print.
- Wei, Fang. “Blanche’s Destruction: Feminist analysis on A Streetcar Named Desire”. *Canadian Social Science Vol. 4 No. 3*. June, 2008: 103-105. Print.
- Williams, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2009. Print.
- Yee, Gale A. *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003. *Google Books*. 8 December 2011. Web.