**Brooks Atkinson, ‘First Night at the Theatre’, *NY Times*, 4 Dec 1947, 42.**

 ‘Like “The Glass Menagerie”, the new play is a quietly woven study of intangibles. . . . it reveals Mr. Williams as a genuinely poetic playwright whose knowledge of people is honest and thorough and whose sympathy is profoundly human.

 ‘“A Streetcar Named Desire” is history of a gently reared Mississippi young woman who invents an artificial world to mask the hideousness of the world she has to inhabit. . . .Blanche – for that is her name – has delusions of grandeur, talks like an intellectual snob, buoys herself up with gaudy dreams, spends most of her time primping, covers things that are dingy with things that are bright and flees reality.

 ‘To her brother-in-law she is an unforgiveable liar. But it is soon apparent to the theatregoer that in Mr. Williams’s eyes she is one of the dispossessed whose experience has unfitted her for reality; and although his attitude toward her is merciful, he does not spare her or the playgoer. For the events of “Streetcar” lead to a painful conclusion which he does not try to avoid. Although Blanche cannot face the truth, Mr. Williams does in the most imaginative, and perceptive play he has written.’

 ‘By the usual Broadway standards, “A Streetcar Named Desire” is too long; not all those words are essential. But Mr. Williams is entitled to his own independence. For he has not forgotten that human beings are the basic subject of art. Out of poetic imagination and ordinary compassion he has spun a poignant and luminous story.’

**N. S., *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Sept 1949 – Vivien Leigh, Opera House**

‘”A Streetcar Named Desire”, the play by Tennessee Williams which has aroused such interest in New York, came to the Opera House, Manchester, last night under Sir Laurence Olivier’s direction and with Miss Vivien Leigh in the part of a young woman who, like a sort of New Orleans Madame Bovary, destroys herself by self-dramatisation.

 ‘. . . Miss Du Bois, a dissolving beauty on her way to visit a happily married younger sister in the French quarter, is told to take this vehicle and get off at the cemetery. It is as simple as that; but already we suspect that there is a species of doom at the end of the line. We are right. Her earthy but ethical relatives cannot bear the facts of her past life which she attempts to glorify, and she escapes at last into madness. It is tragedy shot through with the quasi-poetical kind of sentimentality that has sustained so much American writing in recent years, and which we are in no position to scoff at or airily dismiss. We are not Greeks, nor were we meant to be. But many English playgoers will feel that we have still a long way to go before we can accept this as high tragedy.

 ‘It is excitingly staged, and when the emotions are not being violently bombarded there is an atmosphere of precarious playfulness, as in a cageful of lion cubs. Miss Leigh’s exacting performance, played at top speed on nerves deliberately tuned a full tone too high, will greatly please her admirers. Renee Asherson is admirable as the sister, and Manchester much enjoyed the harsh fundamental humour of Bonar Colleano as the brother-in-law with more morals (up to a point) than manners.’

**‘London Sees “Streetcar”’, NY Times, 13 Oct 1949**

Wild reception, queues for tickets, welcomed by newspapers, but they generally gave pride of place to Vivien Leigh.

‘One of the most critical reviews of the Tennessee Williams play was in The Daily Express which said “what had been reported from Across Atlantic as highflown drama turns out to be flyblown melodrama.”’

**‘Aldwych Theatre*, Times* 13 Oct 1949**

 ‘The purpose of this play is to reveal a prostitute’s past in her present. Clinging to the last shred of her beauty, stranded in the New Orleans home of her younger sister’s primitive but satisfactory husband, she makes pathetic and absurd pretences to the refinement which is a childhood memory. Only through such pretences can she hope for a husband, a last desperate hope. Almost she succeeds, but her sister’s husband has a certain brutal sense of fair play towards his friends. Her fading features are exposed to the merciless light of an unshaded bulb, she is raped, and crumbling reason giving way altogether, she is led away to an asylum.

 ‘The method of the author comes perilously close to soliloquy with rare interludes of action. Miss Vivien Leigh drifts to ruin on a tide of words many thousands strong. . . . . the impressiveness of the performance grows as the violence of the action deepens. She is hard put to it during the first half of the play, for rarely in the history of the drama can a heroine have been given so many words in which to say so very little. All that an eager audience can gather from the first act is that the preposterous lady of leisure has been a loose woman. In the second act there is, quite well written, the scene in which Mr. Williams develops the favourite illusion of nearly all dramatists: that hardened prostitutes are capable of a touching sentimental gesture. It is the third at – good strong “theatre” – which comes nearest to justifying the extreme readiness of the audience to be pleased by this famous American play.

 ‘Mr. Bonar Colleano can be depended on in all the play’s crises. Vibrant with power is his sketch of the husband who beats his wife and is unfaithful to her yet loves her with a primitive passion which is all she asks; and Miss Renee Anderson provides him with the right kind of wife.’

**‘Our London Correspondence’, Manchester Guardian, 14 Oct 1949, 6**

W/out whole tragic myth of the decayed South play seems much emptier than in NY.

 ‘Everyone works hard, but perhaps Sir Laurence Olivier is handicapped by inheriting the scenery and the portentous manner of Elia Kazan’s Broadway production; perhaps Miss Vivien Leigh, though excelling herself, has not the warmth or the variety for the long study of the hysterical come-down-in-the-world heroine whose ceaseless chattering makes up the verbal substance of the piece. It seems far less like tragedy than some long-drawn exercise in intellectual Grand Guignol, a little adolescent in its sentimental awe for the fallen woman.’

**J. C. Trewin, ‘Rough Riding’, *Observer* 16 Oct 1949, 6**

‘Blanche is a fading nymphomaniac. We watch her fading for a session (talkative-psychological) of nearly two hours, after which she is raped by her husky gorilla of a brother-in-law (whose wife is in child-bed), tossed into insanity, and escorted to an asylum. We are supposed at this point to move out purged and fortified by a major modern tragedy, whereas all we have heard and seen is a messy little anecdote that somehow took the fancy of New York and must therefore be fashionable in London.

 ‘For two acts Blanche talks incessantly. We gather at last that she and her sister had a rosy childhood in the deeper South, that the old mansion has gone with the wind, and that Blanche is now a schoolteacher-turned-prostitute. Meanwhile her amiable sister is happy enough to be alternately bullied and cuddled by one of those roaring, hot-blooded he-men who have battered their way through American drama. The evening wanes, Blanches exposes her pitiful, failing mind, and we wait with growing anxiety for a play. The third act rumbles at length into full-cannonading “theatre”; but its author confuses violence with power. Moreover, he has not persuaded us that Blanche’s genteel-murky past, muddled present, or dark future can matter a stick of gum to anybody but Blanche. No one, let me insist, can withhold admiration for Vivien Leigh: her performance in this long part is an astonishing exhibition of technique allied to stamina; the actress never wavers. She is aided by a loyal cast, and by a production in which Sir Laurence Olivier, working on the New York scale, has arranged for Blanche to decline and fall with theatrical panoply. There is nothing wrong with the contrivance, but it does seem to me alarming that so much accomplishment and ingenuity should be wasted on a piece that is intrinsically cheap. . . .

 ‘Back to the performance. Vivien Leigh amply deserved Wednesday night’s storming ovation – a fan-dance for her, I suspect, rather than for the piece. Throughout, she expressed the tumble of talk with uncommon subtlety. It is grim to imagine what Blanche would be life, poorly played: but here Tennessee Williams could ask for nothing better. Bonar Colleano, an attacking actor, uses a straight left as the brother-in-law who objects (on no very reasonable grounds) to being called sub-human and something left over from the Stone Age. As his wife, with her extraordinary powers of forgiveness, Renee Asherson is a refreshment whenever she appears. She knows how to listen, and for this part in this play the knowledge is essential.’

**Peter Fleming, ‘The Theatre’, *The Spectator*, 21 Oct 1949, 533**

 ‘Married in her teens to a young poet who, when she discovered him to be a pervert, blew the back of his head out: tethered thereafter by family duty to the untidy deathbeds of an unspecified number of old ladies: and made in due course heiress to an impoverished estate in Louisana whose dimensions have been progressively reduced by what she describes as the “epic fornications” of her forebears (the adjective must presumably be taken to have its usual Hollywood connotation of “expensive”), Blanche du Bois cannot be said to have made an auspicious start in life.

 ‘Her ultimate fate, of which we are the witnesses, is miserable in the extreme. “A very different kettle of fish from *Rookery Nook*,” remarked my neighbour at the Aldwych, and there is no disputing the justice of this observation. Expelled from her home town for too overt promiscuity, Miss du Bois migrates to the mean apartment in New Orleans where her younger sister lives with a husband of Polish-American extraction He is a very virile man, with exceptionally bad manners; and when he overhears Miss du Bois, in one of her rare passages of understatement, describe him as “common” he takes against her. The lady’s nerves are bad already, and we can see that her reason is, if not tottering, liable to do so at any moment. When her brother-in-law, while waiting for news of the birth of his first child, (a) does her out of a husband by revealing to the gentleman in question the details of her scabrous past, (b) put on the pyjamas he bought for his wedding night and (c) rapes her, Miss du Bois goes round the bend. One can hardly accuse her of making a fuss about nothing.

 ‘This synthetic and rather pretentious play is transfigured, as far as such a process is feasible, by the acting of Miss Vivien Leigh in the principal part. She does not, it is true, move us deeply; and the carnality which is such a feature of her past is almost too successfully concealed by her flimsy though elaborate façade of respectability. But her acting is wonderfully varied and perceptive and, although a certain hollowness in the play makes it impossible for us to be touched by the fact of her approaching madness we watch with a fascinated interest her portrayal of its approach. Mr. Bonar Colleano, called on to present a character almost as over-simplified and two-dimensional as those daemonic supermen whose exploits in strip cartoons make such a strong appeal to the imagination of the American male, does so to perfection; and Miss Renee Asherson brings truth as well as warmth to her portrait of his brutalized but ever-loving wife. Sir Laurence Olivier’s production is masterly; and if the play will hardly strike London as the *chef d’oeuvre* which it has long seemed to New York, this is not the first occasion on which a transatlantic passage has resulted in the disinflation of a dramatist, whichever side of the ocean he started from.’

**Ivor Brown, ‘Business and Desire’, *Observer*, 13 Nov 1949** – describes play as ‘this unedifying survey of sex in the Deep South’, and Leigh’s and colleagues’ excellent performances of ‘(to me) rather shoddy matter’.

**Brooks Atkinson, ‘Overseas Tornado: Tennessee Williams’ Play Agitates London’, *NY Times*, 11 Dec 1949**

Several monitors of public virtue in England shocked by what they regard as indecency of TW’s play. Anxious MPs have asked Chancellor of Exchequer to explain how abomination has been licensed.

 ‘If “A Streetcar Named Desire” were not a seriously motivated drama with a baleful insight into the whole tragic process of disintegration, the charge that it is shocking and immoral would not be surprising. From the moral point of view, Noel Coward’s “Private Lives” and “Design for Living” are shocking and indecent, but no one seems to have been perceptibly shocked because they are comedies. It is only the serious play with artistic pretentions that arouses anxious people against it. They feel insecure because they do not want to believe that it may be true. Nothing is so shocking as something uncomfortable that truly portrays an unpleasant aspect of life.’

‘. . . I am puzzled that so many London critics see nothing but sex squalor in “A Streetcar Named Desire.” Blanche’s sex preoccupation is merely the most conspicuous symptom of the harrowing disease of disintegration that is consuming her. Sex is not the theme of the play nor the basic element in her character. She is in a panicky flight from the catastrophe of a genteel life that no longer can sustain her in an animalized world.’

**Bosley Crowther, film premiere, *NY Times*, 20 Sept 1951**

‘a motion picture that throbs with passion and poignancy.’ Even finer than the play – ‘Inner torments are seldom projected with such sensitivity and clarity on the screen.’

 ‘Of course, the first factor in this triumph is Mr. Williams’ play, which embraces, among its many virtues, an essential human conflict in visual terms. The last brave, defiant, hopeless struggle of the lonely and decaying Blanche du Bois to hold on to her faded gentility against the heartless badgering of her rough-neck brother-in-law is a tangible cat-and-dog set-to, marked with manifold physical episodes as well as a wealth of fluctuations of verbally fashioned images and moods. And all of these graphic components have been fully preserved in Oscar Saul’s script and availed of by Mr. Kazan in his cinematic mounting of the same.

 ‘Mélees, titanic and degrading, within the filthy New Orleans slum where Blanche comes to live with her sister and her low-born brother-in-law have been staged by the prescient director with such tumultuous energy that the screen fairly throbs with angry violence, before settling sharply into spent and aching quiet. Hate-oozing personal encounters between the lost lady and the brutish man have been filmed with such shrewd manipulation of the close-up that one feels the heat of them. And with lights and the movement of his people and the conjunction of a brilliant musical score with dialogue of real poetic richness, Mr. Kazan has wrought heartache and despair.

 ‘In this dramatic illustration, which makes vivid, of course, a great deal more than a fundamental clash of natures, between a woman and a man – which transmits, indeed, a comprehension of a whole society’s slow decay and the pathos of vain escapism in a crude and dynamic world – we say, in this dramatic illustration Miss Leigh accomplishes more than a worthy repeat of the performance which Jessica Tandy gave on the stage.

 ‘Blessed with a beautifully molded and fluently expressive face, a pair of eyes that can flood with emotion and a body that moves with spirit and style, Miss Leigh has, indeed, created a new Blanche du Bois on the screen – a woman of even greater fullness, torment and tragedy. Although Mr. Williams’ writing never precisely makes clear the logic of her disintegration before the story begins – why anyone of her breeding would become an undisciplined tramp – Miss Leigh makes implicitly cogent every moment of the lady on the screen.

 ‘Her mental confusion, her self-deceptions, the agonies of her lacerated nerves and her final, unbearable madness, brought on by the brutal act of rape, are clearly conveyed by the actress with a tremendous concentration and economy of power. Likewise her fumblings for affections are beautifully and poignantly done. And since Miss Leigh is present in virtually every scene or sequence of the film, he demands upon her vitality and her flexibility are great.

 ‘No less brilliant, however, within his area is Marlon Brando in the role of the loud, lusty, brawling, brutal, amoral Polish brother-in-law. Mr. Brando created the role in the stage play and he carries over all the energy and the steel-spring characteristics that made him vivid on the stage. But here, where we’re so much closer to him, he seems that much more highly charged, his despairs seem that much more pathetic and his comic movements that much more slyly enjoyed.

 ‘Other from the cast of the stage play – Kim Hunter as the torn young sister and wife, Karl Malden as a timid, boorish suitor, Nick Dennis as a pal and all the rest – fill out the human pattern within a sleazy environment that is so fitly and graphically created that you can almost sense its sweatiness and smells.’

**Virginia Graham, ‘Cinema’, *Spectato*r, 29 Feb 1952, 260**

 ‘Mr. Tennessee Williams’s play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, with its melodramatic but to me, at any rate, acutely painful study of an ageing and demented woman, has been filmed by Mr. Elia Kazan; a powerful, brilliant bit of work of almost unbearable cruelty, with Miss Vivien Leigh and Mr. Marlon Brando as beauty and the beast. Miss Leigh’s performance appeals, as it did on the stage, more to the head than the heart. Technically perfect, with every fluttering gesture, every subtle intonation, every facial expression accurately laid to the building of a tragic edifice, yet she stays a little aloof from her suffering and wounds proportionately. The deeper wounds, the whole soul’s recoil, are made by Mr. Brando, whose portrait of brutal stupidity is painted with a magnificent wealth of detail in shocking colours. This handsome, thick-skinned thick-headed bully one can believe in and hate.

 ‘The sordid settings, the heat and confined spaces of the New Orlean slums, yoked to Mr. Brando’s and Miss Leigh’s diverging forms of mental anaemia are stirred into a fascinating but singularly bitter brew by magician Kazan. Choked by insanity, cruelty, pathos and squalor it is a relief to snatch at the two simpler ingredients in the cauldron, Miss Kim Hunter and Mr. Karl Malden, nice ordinary people with normal fixations. They are both excellent.’

**‘New Films in London’, *Manchester Guardian*, 1 March 1952**

 ‘When the film was performed in London there were those who considered Vivien Leigh miscast in the role of Blanche Dubois, whose miserable journey from gentility to lunacy by way of harlotry and self-deception is, in effect, the story told by the play. Perhaps in the film too, Miss Leigh might have given a little more force to this long and arduous role – it is certainly one which requires all that a virtuoso among actresses could give it. Yet, when all is said and done hers is a remarkably intelligent and effective performance, she has, in fact subtly reduced the role to the dimensions that she can manage.

 ‘True that her role and therefore the film as a whole fails to be quite the tragedy that its author appears to have intended, but that one would suggest, is the author’s own fault. Somewhere in this study of decline and fall of a society he has missed greatness – probably because, in the last resort, his viewpoint has a surgeon’s cold-bloodedness rather than the warmth of kindliness. Thus it is no accident that the most effective of all his skilfully written roles is that of Stanley Kowalski, a rugged, handsome specimen of sub-humanity whose dramatic purpose is to reduce all life (and especially the fluttering make-believe of poor, lost Blanche) to brutality. As Kowalski, Marlon Brando is terrifyingly good. Kim Hunter and Karl Madden – in roles representative of comparative decency in the awful world of the author’s devising – or as well as Mr Williams allowed and perhaps even a little better.’

**C. A. Lejeune, ‘Sacred and Profane’, *Observer*, 2 March 1952 (film)**

 ‘There is no doubt at all that *A Streetcar Named Desire* will attract, amass and sustain an enormous audience. Many of the people who come to see it will come from dubiously admirable motives: because the film has an X Certificate; because they want to be deliciously shocked; because they want to prove that they can’t be shocked by anything; because the subject of “Streetcar” is as widely known by now as the subject of “Hamlet”; because they anticipate the candid spectacle of a delicately bred young woman eventually driven out of her reason by shock, grief, loneliness, exaggerated sexual weakness, and a peculiarly brutal assault from an unexpected quarter.

 ‘They will not be disappointed. “Streetcar” is a miserably beastly picture, and one must keep a clear head to appreciate what is good out of so much that is nasty. That the acting is good there can be no question. One would have to be blind not to appreciate the brilliance of Vivien Leigh’s performance. It is possible not to be touched by her, inconceivable not to be impressed and dazzled. Her Blanche is a woman shimmering in a sheath of gold, never very clearly seen, but taking glint and radiance from every facet. Marlon Brando’s performance as the monstrous, mumbling, almost subhuman brother-in-law who effects her ruin is acting of a different sort. No sheath of gold for Brando, only the cave-man’s skins and the naked man beneath them. But his brute exacts the same sort of pity as Caliban, and is one of the strongest and most selfless performances I remember seeing in the cinema. “Streetcar” has one other quality that must strike the sensitive listener. That is the unutterable pity behind the writing: the rawness that streaks all Tennessee Williams’s work like a half-healed wound.’

**Harold Clurman, *Nation*, 14 May 1973, 635**

‘The play is appreciated as a sort of superior sob story, but it is more significantly an American parable.

 ‘It is not, as one reviewer has hastily summarized it, a conflict between the realist and the romantic but a dramatization of sensibility crushed by a brutishness so common among us that many people take Stanley Kowalski to be the play’s “hero”. For them, Kowalski is the ordinary down-to-earth guy, virile, hard-working, a devoted husband, only occasionally guilty of bouts of drinking and sudden aggressiveness without special malice, whose pastimes of poker or bowling are certainly harmlessly convivial. If he is coarse in speech and uncouth in manner, well, aren’t we all today a little like that? Kowalski is at least without pretensions.

 ‘His sister-in-law, a high school English teacher, prates about Poe, Hawthorne and other of our literary masters; she affects highflown speech and lofty ideals, while in fact she is part of a Southern pseudo-aristocracy gone to seed. She lies, she drinks, she has been sexually incontinent. Seeing the situation in this light, a good part of the audience laughs at Blanche and “sides” with Kowalski, whose idol is Huey Long and who is “100 per cent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it.” When Blanche speaks of trying to progress beyond our animal condition many are inclined to laugh at her, and indeed she *is* slightly absurd.

 ‘When in my review of the original production of the play I found Marlon Brando’s Kowalksi a magnificent piece of acting, but somewhat misleading, through its connotations of almost “Dostoevskian” suffering, many thought me wrong-headed. One person, close to the production, challenged me by citing Williams himself as having said “Kowalksi is America’s future.” Precisely so! He represents a thuggishness, a lack of imagination, a moral obtuseness which begins as brute innocence and ends in vicious destructiveness. Not long after my discussion with Kowalksi’s champion, I read that when an interviewer asked Williams the meaning of his play, he answered that if we were not vigilant our country would be taken over by gorillas.

 ‘Blanche’s intellectual background, like so much of our own, is shallow; the roots of her cultivation and idealism are weak and they are easily eroded, but she has true instincts and feelings; and she does aspire to a fullness of life, a recognition of something more than our gross needs for simple survival. Kowalksi resents the accusation implied by Blanche’s very presence; he is therefore bent on destroying her. He stands for the norm, the “compact majority,” the mass scornful of that dimension of affectivity and thought outside the area of vulgar use and creature comfort. Such as he are always suspicious and finally virulently embattled against the “highbrow,” the “eggheads,” the poets, the spiritually hungry. The latter in our society are rarely strong or immovably self-assured. They are not prepared or armed to withstand the weight of the adversary’s oppression. For the Kowalskis, people like Blanche are “troublemakers” disturbing the peace of their slothful habit. They must be gotten rid of as Stanley Kowalski, after raping her, gets rid of Blanche, who has “always depended on the kindness of strangers.” (635)

 ‘Rosemary Harris’s Blanche is on the picturesque and dreamy side and within that interpretive range very good. But as I see Blanche’s function in the play, Miss Harris is somewhat too broken from the outset, too fragile, too weepy, to the point of “splintering” the heartwarming velvet tone of her natural voice. Though Blanche is a highly vulnerable being, she ought to be given more substance in her reason – that is, she should be seen to be talking sense, not just airy “poetry” when she speaks of humanity’s high hopes. The performance overstresses the quivering and shaken Southern belle at the expense of the character’s dramatic will, her resistance to her sister Stella’s surrender and complaisance in Kowalksi’s orbit. We must never forget that, for all her flaws there is also something genuine and worthy in Blanche. Otherwise, there is no pathos in her defeat.’ (636)

**Robin Thorber, ‘A Streetcar Named Desire’, *Guardian* 6 Nov 1975, 8 – Liverpool Playhouse**

 ‘Admittedly Blanche Dubois lives in a state of suppressed hysteria. And who wouldn’t with problems like hers? Brought-up in a style of egocentric self indulgence which she never had a chance of being able to afford, with a code of manners rather than morality to sustain her, it’s not surprising that her appetites for the finer things of life, like booze and boys, caused her some embarrassment. (How did her sister ever manage to adjust so well?) . . .

 ‘At the same time it gives you a brother-in-law Kowalski (Tom Chadbron) who is not simply a gross bestial Pollack, but decent well meaning ordinary guy who reverts to brutality only because he can’t cope with Blanche’s individual approach to reality.’

***Financial Times*, George Oppenheimer (22 May 1983)**

**Rosemary Harris, Lincoln Centre**

‘She is filled with pretensions and deceits, carefully ignoring her past sordid life of nymphomania, seeking refuge with her married relative. Miss Harris started off on opening night rather tentatively but grew and grew until, in the scene when she succumbed to her brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski, partly through lust and partly through a desire to overpower him, she was altogether superb. Her artificial airs, her phoney gentility are torn to shreds at the end when she is taken off to an asylum, still trying to be the great lady and failing heartbreakingly.’

James Farentino does well in meeting ‘tremendous task of exorcising the presence of Marlon Brando, who played the part originally, and became a star and a sensation in his interpretation of lustful, animalistic and brutish man. That Mr Farentino succeeds as well as he does is a tribute to his skill.’

**Michael Billington, ‘A Streetcar Named Desire’, Guardian, 1 March 1984 (Mermaid)**

Alan Strachan’s production built on ground floor of naturalism so it ‘is entirely free from the hectic sensationalism that for me disfigured the Kazan movie.’

 ‘But the great thing is that Mr Strachan’s production, which goes for text rather than atmosphere, reminds us what the play is actually about. On one level, it is about the destruction of a fading Southern belle, Blanche Du Bois, by her sister’s brutish husband, Stanley Kowalski. But Blanche is much more than a nympho lush who is first raped and then incarcerated. She is a death-haunted figure who seeks escape from mortality through a life of sexual fulfilment. She also represents the “abnormal” world of poetry, grace, spiritual aspiration which, according to Williams, gets crushed and destroyed by the physical and mental fascism of men like Kowalski. The tragedy of the play is that she goes willingly to the asylum as if accepting that the world has no place for her deviant qualities.’

‘right from the start Sheila Gish establishes the duality of Blanche: her aristocratic instincts and her downright physicality.’

 ‘What Ms Gish vividly presents us with throughout is a woman who fights death with desire and who combines refinement with appetite.’

 ‘The hardest part to cast in England is probably Stanley Kowalski but Paul Herzberg gives a creditable portrayal of stocky, boorish, crockery-smashing animalism. Duncan Preston also plays Blanche’s wooer, Mitch, with the sandy-haired bewilderment of a man who in the end can only relate to mothers and whores.’

‘the highest compliment I can pay the production is that it full explains the explores the resonances of Williams’s title: that Blanche has, literally and metaphorically, taken a rattling old streetcar named desire that has delivered her straight to her spiritual graveyard.’

**Victoria Radin, ‘Streetcar’s Return’, Observer, 4 March 1984, 21**

 ‘Blanche is every woman’s – and men’s – nightmare of the female nature: a cross between a nymphomaniac and a prig, a vampire and a victim. Sheila Gish’s bold performance brings out the vampish side. Those years seducing soldiers and young boys in Laurel have paid their price, and it is written on her face and in gestures like the swift, vulgar movement with which she wipes her clandestine whisky glass on her petticoat. Her voice is not the appeasing croon of the Southern belle, but something much more raucous. This Blanche doesn’t believe for a moment her own lies about herself, and that makes her struggle and final defeat unbearably moving.

 ‘Marlon Brando’s luscious Stanley is embedded in everyone’s mind – and Paul Herzberg, without ascending to its heights of spivvy sensuality, can’t find anything new in it. The illicit sexual tension between the yob side and the precious side of Blanche never flows; but Clare Higgins’s touching Stella, all curves where her sister is angles, nearly makes up for it. She takes the stage with an unexpected force that shows her own tragedy to be almost as terrible as her sister’s.’

**Frank Rich, ‘Danner and Quinn in a New “Streetcar”’, *NY Times*, 11 March** 1988**, C3.**

 ‘“We’ve had this date with each other from the beginning,” says Stanley Kowalski to his sister-in-law, Blanche DuBois, just before he sweeps her away to bed in “A Streetcar Named Desire. That line – wholly in character for Stanley and yet a classic expression of tragedy’s inexorable pull – sets off what is still among the most shocking acts of human destruction the American stage has known. In the collision of Stanley, the working-class stiff, and Blanche, the frayed Southern belle, Tennessee Williams gave life to forces that run far deeper than his play’s specific place (New Orleans) and sociological context (the post war 1940’s). “A Streetcar Named Desire” is not a morality tale about a brutal man victimizing a frail woman but a terrifying plunge into the madness that afflicts anyone, male or female, brute or sensitive, who submits to his own personal executioner – the passion so incendiary that it consumes the self.

 ‘It says everything about Nikos Psacharopoulous’s new production at the Circle in the Square that when its Blanche and Stanley, Blythe Danner and Aidan Quinn, keep their “date,” we don’t witness the promised thunderclap of self-immolatino. Their date really looks more like a date than a rape. As the lights fade, Mr. Quinn leads Miss Danner into a necking session – in more ways than one an anticlimax. So it goes in a staging that may not deface Williams’s masterpiece but often sanitizes it.’

Describes production as intelligent, respectful but missing play. Sex and desire missing – makes play into domestic comedy – ‘the intrusive in-law irritating the macho king of his castle.’ Danner mostly playing Blanche w/ ‘fey eccentricity’ apart from suggestion of psychic collapse when describes husband’s suicide.

‘No wonder Miss Danner’s final exit to the insane asylum is so unmoving. This Blanche needn’t depend on the kindness of strangers because her illusions haven’t convincingly crumbled, she never actually has snapped.’

‘What we have here is a “Streetcar” without that magic, without the poetry. Though one can still find the play, not only are what the Kowalskis call the “colored lights” of passion missing, but so are the shadows of what Blanche identifies as the opposite of desire, death. What falls between those two poles of existence is the ordinary stuff of realism – a genteel theatrical evening in place of a tragedy forged to rip through the night.’

**Frank Rich, Alec Baldwin Does Battle with the Ghosts’, *NY Times*, 13 April 1992, C11**.

Alec Baldwin wins against ghosts.

 ‘Unsurprisingly, Mr. Baldwin imbues Stanley with an animalistic sexual energy that sends waves through the house every time he appears on stage. The audience responds with edgy delight from when he first removes his shirt and unselfconsciously uses it to wipe the New Orleans sweat from his armpits and torso. Yet the actor’s more important achievement is to bring a full palette to a man who is less than a hero but more than a brute. Cruel as Mr. Baldwin’s Stanley is, and must be, he comes across as an ingenuous, almost-innocent working stiff until Blanche provokes him to move in for the kill. His Stanley is funny in a post-adolescent, bowling buddy way as late as the rape scene, when he fondly emulates a cousin who was a “human bottle-opener.” Even the famous interlude in which he screams for his wife, Stella (Amy Madigan), becomes pitiful as well as harrowing when Mr. Baldwin, a fallen, baffled beast, deposits himself in a sobbing heap at the bottom of a tenement’s towering stairs.

 ‘Not the least of the actor’s achievement is to remind us why Williams’s play is so much more than the sum of its story of Stanley’s battle with the sister-in-law who invades his and Stella’s shabby French Quarter flat. “I am 100 percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth,” Stanley rightly bellows at one point, after Blanche has taunted him one time too many for being a “Polack”. He fills the play with the America of big-shouldered urban industrialism, of can-do pragmatism, of brute strength and vulgar humors: the swaggering America that believes, as Stanley paraphrases Huey Long, that “every man is a king.” Mr. Baldwin makes it easy to see how Blanche and the ambivalent, self-destructive author for whom she is a surrogate could find this simian, menacing man mesmerizing even as he embodies the very forces on a “dark march” to destroy them and their romantic old America of decaying plantations, kind strangers and “tenderer feelings.”

 ‘That destruction, which is the inexorable tragedy of “Streetcar,” remains untapped here because Ms. Lange’s Blanche leaves the play pretty much as she enters it: as a weepy, uncertain yet resourceful woman who has endured some hard knocks and rather than suffered a complete meltdown into madness.’

‘Ms. Lange insists on providing realism . . . . The diaphanous web of artifice that surrounds this heroine, the gauzy lies and fantasies that cloak her as surely as her paper Chinese lanterns disguises her room’s naked light bulb, never materializes.

 ‘Without them, there are no layers of personality for Mr. Baldwin’s Stanley to rip through and no chance for the audience to be shattered by the drama of a woman being stripped of illusion after illusion until there is nothing left but the faint, bruised memory of an existence torn between the poles of gentility and desire. ‘

**Thomas M. Disch, Nation, 8 June 1992, 798**

Revival of Streetcar at Ethyl Barrymore w/ Jessica Lange. Success despite challenge of audiences wanting version like film ‘with a Stanley Kowalksi who is a Neanderthal and a Blanche DuBois who is, despite the booze, a mimosa of sensitivity and refinement. It is greatly to director Gregory Mosher’s credit that he has discovered an entirely different polarity within the text, one that refuses to take Blanche’s (and Williams’s) “poetry” at face value. Mosher gives the play a naturalistic reading in which Stanley is a guy of average intelligence and Blanche’s lofty sentiments are noticeably tawdry and self-deceiving.’ Asserts that tho’ contrary to TW’s intentions, it is tribute to his genius that ‘the play works even better in this version’.

**Bernard Weintraub, ‘For a Less Restrained Era, a Restored “Streetcar”’, NYTimes 16 Sept 1993**

Announces re-release of film w/ dialogue and section that had been cut because of their sexual content.

 ‘Officials at the production-code office at first demanded that the studio remove the crucial rape scene, according to a Warner Brothers statement just released in connection with the revised film. At that point Mr. Kazan and Mr. Williams almost dissociated themselves from the picture.

 ‘Mr. Williams wrote an impassioned letter to Mr. Breen. In it, he said: “‘Streetcar’ is an extremely and peculiarly moral play, in the deepest and truest sense of the term. The rape of Blanche by Stanley is a pivotal, integral truth in the play, without which the play loses its meaning, which is the ravishment of the tender, the sensitive, the delicate, by the savage and brutal forces in modern society. It is a poetic plea for comprehension.” ‘

**John Gross, ‘A princess goes potty’, Daily Telegraph, 5 Jan 1997**

Blanche ‘is no princess, except in her own imagination’

 ‘Stanley, a crude character but a shrewd one, suspects that she has cheated Stella out of her legacy, and the tension between them is reinforced when he overhears her telling Stella what a mere ape she thinks he is. Such bad table manners too.

 ‘Determined to investigate, he uncovers the sordid truth about her life back home, and incidentally wrecks the prospect of her marrying his good-natured, diffident friend, Mitch. Yet she can’t help being fascinated by his rough masculinity, and she half provokes the scene in which he eventually rapes her.

 ‘A good deal of the surface detail of the play is realistic and even humorous. Whatever we think of Stanley, for instance, it is impossible not to sympathise with him (or at any rate with his kidneys) as Blanche, indifferent to his pleas, goes on luxuriating in the bathroom.’

TW remarkably objective about Blanche – ‘he also enters deeply into her feelings, maintaining a double vision – Blanche from the inside, Blanche from the outside – which is the greatest single source of the play’s strength.’

Gives reading of B as projection of TW’s own homosexual desire.

Re Jessica Lange as B –

 ‘The intimations of panic are beautifully handled; so are the denials of reality, the bruised sensitivity, the deviousness, the coquettishness (her last card, when the doctor come to take her away). And there are unforgettable individual moments, such as the sudden flare-up – half defiant, half self-hating – when she cries out that the hotel where she led a life of semi-prostitution wasn’t called the Flamingo but the Tarantula.

 ‘My one serious reservation is about the relative lack of sexual electricity in her scenes with Stanley (Toby Stephens). There is more genuine power in the brief episode where she makes the first moves towards seducing an anonymous delivery boy.’

**Michael Billington, ‘After 50 years we still don’t quite get him’, *Guardian* 21 June 2000, A12**

Billington on Britain’s love-hate relationship w/ Tennessee Williams –

‘. . . *A Streetcar Named Desire*, far from being a sensationalist story of an ex-prostitute raped by her brother-in-law, is actually about a confrontation of values. Blanche Du Bois may have her pretensions, but she represents poetic sensibility and feeling; Stanley Kowalski, on the other hand, embodies destructive animal force.

 ‘Harold Clurman, writing about the original Broadway production with Marlon Brando and Jessica Tandy, is the only critics I’ve come across who grasped the play’s social and political resonances. “Stanley,” he wrote, “is the unwitting Antichrist of our time, the little man who will break the back of every attempt to create a more comprehensive world in which thought and conscience are expected to evolve from the old Adam. His mentality provides the soil for fascism, viewed not as a political movement but as a state of being.’

**Michael Billington, ‘Glenn Close triumphs in a superb revival’ (NT), *Guardian* 9 Oct 2002**

‘You can see Tennessee Williams’s Blanche Du Bois in one of two ways: as an embodiment of the poetic spirit destroyed by crude reality or as a southern snob tragically forced to bite the dust. The greatness of Glenn Close’s performance in Trevor Nunn’s fine revival at the Lyttleton is that it embraces these, and many other, contradictions.

 ‘Like all first-rate actors, Close takes hair-raising risks; and in the first half, as she arrives to stay with sister Stella in a teeming sector of New Orleans knows as Elysian Fields, you can see why she would grate on the nerves of her brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski. Close oozes fluttery condescension and coy gentility. She minces through the cluttered two-room apartment as if on her way to a governor’s ball, and, when it is suggested she might do some cleaning, she reacts with a look of frozen horror. You wonder by what right this cracked southern belle dismisses Stanley as an “animal” and urges her sister “don’t hang back with the brutes”.

 ‘But, having established Blanche as a patronizing intruder, Close almost literally strips away the layers of affectation and pretense. And what she shows us is a woman who lies as a protection against solitude and desperation. You sense this in the episode where Close hungrily kisses the paper-boy and then tracks him through the maze of Bunny Christie’s revolving set. Even better is the classic scene where Blanche is forced to confront her crow’s feet and shady past by her onetime wooer, Mitch, who cruelly shines a naked light-bulb in her face: at this point Close, stripped of her warpaint and strangely blanched, becomes a figure of aching desolation as she cries “I don’t want realism, I want magic.” The trajectory of Close’s magnificent performance is to show a woman who finally acknowledges her limitless capacity for self-delusion.

 ‘After this, even her rape by Stanley and her final implied incarceration are merely a way of underscoring her doom.

 ‘To bring out the comedy and tragedy of Blanche, the fake grandeur and the genuine pain, is a great achievement. . . .

 ‘A great American play about the lies we all need to sustain our precarious existence has been well served. And, even if Iain Glen has a natural grace slightly at odds with Stanley cruel vigour, he brings out the character’s ultimate cruelty.’

**Benedict Nightingale, ‘Close rings true to belle’s soul’, *Times,* 9 Oct 2002 (NT)**

 ‘Williams agreed that Blanche, who has fallen on hard times and into bad ways after losing a great estate, represented a South in genteel decay. But she’s far more than that. He felt his way under her skin because, in a sense, he was Blanche DuBois himself: a Southerner with a nostalgia for the Eden he believed had been ruined by the crude and brutal, a gay man in whom a hankering for purity clashed with a taste for rough trade.’

 ‘In one corner is Stanley Kowalski: In Iain Glen’s fine fierce performance not a straightforward yob but a sexually besotted husband who, thanks to his limited imagination and quick temper, sees in Blanche only pretension, folly and a threat to his marriage. In the other is Close’s Blanche, who is a lot more than the cracked belle that, starting with Vivien Leigh in the movie, many actresses have made her.

 ‘Not that Close fails to embrace either the belle or the crackpot. When Blanche teeters nervously into the vividly evoked grot of the French Quarter, wearing a trim white suit, you feel some exotic moth is lost in the monkey-house. When she finally puts on a shimmering gown in a deluded effort to regain self-respect, it’s as if Miss Havisham has decided actually to wear her wedding cake.

 ‘But between those points Close also gives us a Blanche who, yes, can be arch, coy and embarrassingly flirtatious, but also has moments of surprising radiance, wry insight, defensive rage, and a pain and a wincing, palpitating desperation that leaves you, too, emotionally flattened. Southern magnolias seldom come as complex as this.’

**Susannah Clapp, ‘Theatre’, *Observer*, 13 Oct 2002**

 ‘The one thing everyone knows about Blanche Du Bois is that she always relied on the kindness of strangers. But would strangers have been kind to the evident fraud that Glenn Close makes of her?

 ‘Close wears her character’s artificiality as she wears her inappropriate Bo-Peep hat: with exaggerated coquettishness. Her voice throbs, her vowels warble, she dips her face away from interrogation like a sweet little kitten. You’re drawn to look at her while she unleashes the battery of her tics: she is a powerful presence. But until the closing moments of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, she misses the heart of her character.

 ‘Tennessee Williams’s play should be a long smoulder, and a delicate balance. Blanche – the high-flown woman who descends on her tenement-dwelling sister and brother-in-law – is both fanciful and valuable. She may have created a confection of lies, but she’s not simply absurd: Williams is on her side. Her antagonist, Stanley Kowalski – played by Brando in Elia Kazan’s movies as a sex brute so hot and heavy that he could hardly unglue one word from the next – is a bully, but he’s also the only person who sees the truth about Blanche.

 ‘Williams’s projection of heterosexuality – a damaged belle and a big bloke in a vest – always teeters on the brink of camp. It’s a teetering that should create tension. But there are moments here which are so overblown they might as well be played in drag. Iain Glen . . . is a sleek intelligent Stanley – but overwhelmed by Close. Only Essie Davis, natural and serious as sister Stella, is really affecting.’

**Guardian, 19 Oct 2002**

Critics divided on Streetcar – Sunday Times declared it ‘time for superlatives’; *Daily Mail* wrote ‘No one has managed the combination of genteel disintegration, skewed sexiness and gleaming vulnerability so well.’

On other side *Daily Telegraph* thought Close ‘offers little more than camp affectation . . . her performance is so mannered that she puts one more in mind of an exceptionally accomplished drag artiste than a real women [*sic*] suffering dreadfully’. *Independent* felt Glen had been miscast as Stanley: ‘The sense of primitive animal magnetism and intense physical threat is missing’ . . . Glenn ‘can’t obliterate his natural sensitivity’.

**Ben Brantley, ‘It’s “Streetcar”, But Blanche Has a Sly Side’, *NY Times*, 18 May 2004 (Kennedy** **Center, Washington, Patricia Clarkson as Blanche)**

Patricia Clarkson ‘casts an intriguingly harsh glare on a character usually presented as a creature of the twilight. Her Blanche is for much of the play less a lost, deluded soul than a cunning strategist.’

‘. . . the production’s cooler gaze also has the overpowering disadvantage of making the play itself appear cruder and clumsier than it usually does. A “Streetcar” without poetry becomes just another domestic melodrama, accessorized with frilly symbols, about what happens when irritating in-laws come to visit.’

 ‘Dressed in pale, pristine pinks, Ms. Clarkson’s Blanche initially registers as a tidy, composed woman of shrewd intelligence and barbed humor, leagues away from the fey, gossamer-spun Southern princess of Vivien Leigh in the 1951 film. This Blanche bears definite traces of the high school English teacher that she was. As she sneakily dips into the Kowalskis’ liquor or flirts brazenly with her brother-in-law, you sense the calculating mind behind the actions.’

Hysteria only marked when dead husband mentioned, so seems to draw straight line between Blanche’s erratic behaviour and her doomed early romance, making it resemble a more conventional, mustier psychological drama of the mid-C20.

‘Playing a character that will forever be associated with Marlon Brando in a T-shirt, Mr. Rothenberg makes Stanley conspicuously younger than usual, with a voice that slides bizarrely into goofy adenoidal squeakiness. His taunting of Blanche reads as instinctive rather in the manner of a child who dissects a live bug, and it makes his climactic acts of cruelty all the more unnerving.’

 ‘Still, any “Streetcar” needs at least a trace of the transporting magic that Blanche cries out for toward the play’s end. Williams saw something fine and poignant in his heroine’s anachronistic religion of aesthetics and gentility. To present it all as mere pretense is to turn Blanche into another self-serving struggler in a Darwinian world. She, too, to use her words, has come to “hang back with the brutes.”’

**Benedict Nightingale, ‘Cracked belle rings with warmth and radiance’, Times, 29 July 2009**

Rachel Weisz beautiful so why afraid of bright light? In flight from ‘her desperate nymphomania’ and from ‘the memory of her marriage to a suicidal gay man’.

‘Yet during the escalating agonies that ensure you’re never in doubt that there’s a toughness there, a pluck, a paradoxical inadequate instinct for survival, that has kept her afloat – and, until her last encounter with her brother-in-law, is still doing so.

 ‘That man is Stanley Kowalski and everything Williams hated and Blanche isn’t: coarse, insensitive, cruel, destructive. Marlon Brando took the role in the movie and found in it a slyness, a watchfulness, that Eliot Cowan missed last night. Maybe the vulnerability wasn’t wholly there either. But, boy, did Cowan exude danger and power. At times I felt he was overstating the boorish, crude manners – give him a beer bottle and he’ll virtually swallow it whole – but he’s riveting when he lolls, swaggers, flexes his biceps, lets rips with a violent gesture or a big, hoarse bellow. He’s the ferocious bull in the porcelain parlour that’s Blanche DuBois.

 ‘Both Glen Close and Jessica Lange recently played the role in London, but neither had the charisma of Weisz. Does she underplay Blanche’s preciosity and squeamish affectations? Maybe; but she has the intelligence, the wry humour, the yearning for love and the capacity to express it, the warmth and the radiance thwarted by circumstances: indeed, the key qualities that make her Williams’s most striking creation.

 ‘It doesn’t matter that the director, Rob Ashford, expands Williams’s stage directions by bringing onstage her dead husband, his lover and assorted figments of Blanche’s disintegrating mind, but it isn’t necessary. You can see the torment of the past in Weisz’s face – and the stress of the present that finally, movingly, horribly breaks her.’

**Sam Marlowe, ‘A Streetcar Back to Hollywood’, Times, 24 Feb 2012 (Liverpool Playhouse)**

‘…once Sam Troughton’s Stanley appears, the feverish passion between him and Stella bursts into bloom like a bright hothouse succulent; and the cracks begin to appear in the brittle artifice of Blanche’s delusion.

 ‘Troughton’s Stanley is compact, volatile, nimble as a boxer; when he bellows, it’s as much in pain as in rage. The play ends with him unbuttoning Stella’s dress as Blanche is led away to an asylum; here, the gesture is so desperate and childlike, it’s as if Stella, clutching her and Stanley’s newborn, has two babies at her breast.

 ‘Troughton’s first serious confrontation with [Amanda] Drew is a collision of their different varieties of fear, need and appetite; she meets his swagger with seductiveness, swinging her hips, daring him to go further.

 ‘What’s missing is Blanche’s vulnerability – and that diminishes the danger. But the climax is shockingly brutal, and in the end, the play’s cries of anguish still penetrate and reverberate.’

**Kate Bassett, ‘Anderson impresses, but this Streetcar is more than a star vehicle’, *Times*  30 July 2014**

‘Anderson plays down Blanche’s feverish mental fragility at the outset. She first appears looking like a suspiciously chic angel, a luminous blonde in haute-couture satin, designer shades and silver stilettos. But behind the supercilious cool, she is a closet alcoholic and lonely, compulsive seductress on the skids. Amid the primping vanity, there are flashes of panic. She darts for the whisky bottle as soon as she’s through the door of Stella and Stanley’s bedsit and, as she knocks back the booze, the place starts to spin.’

 ‘At three-and-a-half hours, this production is over-extended, slightly losing steam. However, the additional enacted scenes – the assaults and sex normally left off stage – invest this *Streetcar* with fresh, raw power, particularly exploring the disturbing fine line between ardour and domestic abuse in Stanley and Stella’s relationship.

 ‘[Vanessa] Kirby’s lissome Stella is strikingly libidinous with a masochistic streak. And swigging lager in military combats and Hawaiian shirt, [Ben] Foster’s Stanley is a scarily brutish ex-commando with his own kind of instability, wailing like a baby after his hair-raising fits of violence.’

**Harold Clurman, ‘Tennessee Williams’ (1948), in *Lies Like Truth: theatre reviews and essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 73-80.**

Plot summary includes –

‘She is even more shocked by her sister’s husband, an American of Polish origin, an ex-sergeant, a machine salesman, and a rather primitive, almost bestial person. Her brother-in-law resents and then suspects the girl’s pretentious airs, particularly her obvious disdain of him. Slowly he (and we) discover the girl’s “secret”: after her family’s loss of all its property, the death of the last member of the older generation, an unfortunate marriage at an early age to a boy how turned out to be a homosexual, and the boy’s suicide, Blanche has become a notorious person, whose squalid affairs have made it impossible for her to remain in her home town. She meets a friend of her brother-in-law whom she wants to marry because he is a decent fellow, but her brother-in-law by disclosing the facts of the girl’s life to her suitor wrecks her hopes. Drunk the night of his wife’s labor, the brother-in-law settles his account with Blanche by raping her.’ (73)

 ‘Some reviewers thought Blanche Du Bois a “boozy prostitute,” and other believed her a nymphomaniac. Such designations are not only inaccurate but reveal a total failure to understand the author’s intention and the theme of the play. Tennessee Williams is a poet of frustration, and what his play says is that aspiration, sensitivity, departure from the norm are battered, bruised, and disgraced in our world today.

 ‘It would be far truer to think of Blanche Du Bois as the potential artist in all of us than as a deteriorated Southern belle. Her amatory adventures, which her brother-in-law (like some of the critics) regards as the mark of her inferiority, are the unwholesome means she uses to maintain her connection with life, to fight the sense of death which her whole background has created in her. The play’s story show us Blanche’s seeking haven in a simple, healthy man and that in this, too, she is defeated because everything in her environment conspires to degrade the meaning of her tragic situation. . . . Her lies are part of her will-to-beauty; her wretched romanticism is a futile reaching toward a fullness of life. She is not a drunkard, and she is not insane when she is committed to an asylum. She is an almost willing victim of a world that has trapped her and in which she can find “peace” only by accepting the verdict of her unfitness for “normal” life.

 ‘The play is not specifically written as a symbolic drama or as a tract. What I have said is implicit in all the play’s details. The reason for the play’s success even with audiences who fail to understand it is that the characters and the scenes are written with a firm grasp on their naturalistic truth. Yet we shall waste the play and the author’s talent if we praise the play’s effects and disregard its core. Like most works of art the play’s significance cannot be isolated in a single passage. It is clear to the attentive and will elude the hasty.

 ‘Still, the audience is not entirely to blame if the play and its central character are not understood. There are elements in the production – chiefly in the acting – that make for a certain ambiguity and confusion. This is not to say that the acting and production are poor. On the contrary, they are both distinctly superior. The director, Elia Kazan, is a man of high theatrical (\*75) intelligence, a craftsman of genuine sensibility. . . . But there is a lack of balance and perspective in the production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* Due to the fact that the acting of the part is of unequal force, quality and stress.’ (74-5)

 ‘Jessica Tandy’s Blanche suffers from the actress’s narrow (\*77) emotional range. One of the greatest parts ever written for a woman in the American theatre, it demands the fullness and variety of an orchestra. Miss Tandy’s register is that of a violin’s A string. The part represents the essence of womanly feeling and wounded human sensibility. Blanche lies and pretends, but through it all the actress must make us perceive her truth. She is an aristocrat (regardless of the threadbare myth of Southern gentility); she is an aristocrat in the subtlety and depth of her feeling. She is a poet, even if we are dubious about her understanding of the writers she names; she is superior by the sheer intensity and realization of her experience, even if much of what she does is abject.

 ‘If she is not these things, she is too much of a fraud to be worthy of the author’s concern with her. If the latter is true, then the play would be saying something rather surprising – namely, that frank brutality and naked power are more admirable than the yearning for tenderness and the desire to reach beyond one’s personal appetites. When Blanche appeals to her sister in the name of these values, Miss Tandy is unable to make clear whether she means what she says and whether we are supposed to attach any importance to her speech or whether she is merely spinning another fantasy. It is essential to the play that we believe and are touched by what she says, that her emotion convinces us of the soundness of her values. All through the play, indeed, we must be captured by the music of the girl’s martyred soul. Without this there is either a play whose viewpoint we reject or no play at all – only a series of “good scenes”, a highly seasoned theatrical dish.

 ‘Marlon Brando, who plays Stanley Kowalski (Blanche’s brother-in-law), is an actor of genuine power. He has what someone once called “high visibility” on the stage. His silences, even more than his speech, are completely arresting. Through his own intense concentration on what he is thinking or doing at each moment he is on the stage all our attention focuses on him. Brando’s quality is one of acute sensitivity. None of the brutishness of his part is native to him: is it a characteristic he has to “invent.” The combination of an intense, introspective, and almost lyrical personality under the mask of a bully endows (\*78) the character with something almost touchingly painful. Because the elements of characterization are put on a face to which they are not altogether becoming, a certain crudeness mars our impression, while something in the nature of the actor’s very considerable talent makes us wonder whether he is not actually suffering deeply in a way that relates him to what is represented by Blanche rather than to what his own character represents in the play. When he beats his wife or throws the radio out the window, there is, aside from the ugliness of these acts, an element of agony that falsifies their color in relation to their meaning in the play: they take on an almost Dostoevskian aspect.

 ‘For what is Stanley Kowalski? He is the embodiment of animal force, of brute life unconcerned and even consciously scornful of every value that does not come within the scope of such life. He resents being called a Polack, and he quotes Huey Long, who assured him that “every man is a king.” He screams that he is a hundred per cent American, and breaks dishes and mistreats his women to prove it. He is all muscle, lumpish sensuality, and crude energy, given support by a society that hardly demands more of him. He is the unwitting antichrist of our time, the little man who will break the back of every effort to create a more comprehensive world in which thought and conscience, a broader humanity are expected to evolve from the old Adam. His mentality provides the soil for fascism, viewed not as a political movement but as a state of being.

 ‘Because the author does not preach about him but draws him without hate or ideological animus, the audience takes him at his face value. His face value on the stage is the face of Marlon Brando as contrasted with that of Jessica Tandy. For almost more than two-thirds of the pay, therefore, the audience identifies itself with Stanley Kowalski. His low jeering is seconded by the audience’s laughter, which seems to mock the feeble and hysterical decorativeness of the girl’s behavior. The play becomes the triumph of Stanley Kowalski with the collusion of the audience, which is no longer on the side of the angels. This is natural because Miss Tandy is fragile without being touching (except when the author is beyond being overpowered by an actress), and Mr. Brando is tough without being irredeemably coarse. (\* 79)

 ‘When Kowalski tells his wife to get rid of Blanche so that things can be as they were (the author is suggesting that the untoward presence of a new consciousness in Kowalski’s life – the appeal to forbearance and fineness – is a cruel disturbance and that he longs for a life without any spiritual qualms), the audience is all on Kowalski’s side. Miss Tandy speeches – which are lovely in themselves – sound phony, and her long words and noble appeals are as empty as a dilettante’s discourse because they do not flow from that spring of warm feeling which is the justification and essence of Blanche’s character.

 ‘One of the happiest pieces of staging and acting in the play is the moment when Kowalksi, having beaten his wife, calls for her to return from the neighbor’s apartment where she has taken momentary refuge. He whines like a hurt animal, shouts like a savage, and finally his wife descends the staircase to return to his loving arms. Brando has been directed to fall on his knees before his wife and thrust his head against her body in a gesture that connotes humility and passion. His wife with maternal and amorous touch caresses his head. He lifts her off her feet and takes her to bed. . . .

 ‘This, as I have noted, is done beautifully. Yet Brando’s innate quality and something unresolved in the director’s conception make the scene moving in a manner that is thematically disruptive. The pathos is too universally human (Kowalski at that moment is any man); it is not integrated with that attribute of the play which requires Kowalski at all times be somewhat vile.

 ‘If Karl Marden as Blanche’s suitor – a person without sufficient force to transcend the level of his environment – and Kim Hunter as Blanche’s sister – who has made her peace with Kowalski’s “normal life” – give performances that are easier to place than those of the two leading characters, it is not because of any intrinsic superiority to the other players. It is simply due to the fact that their parts are less complex. Miss Hunter is fairly good, Mr. Malden capital, but both appear to stand outside the play’s interpretive problem. They are not struggling with a consciousness of the dilemma that exists in the choice between Kowalski’s world and that of Blanche Du Bois. (\* 80)

 ‘As creative spectators, we cannot satisfy ourselves at a play like *A Streetcar Named Desire* with the knowledge that it is a wonderful show, a smash hit, a prize winner (it is and will be all of these). It is a play that ought to arouse in us as much feeling, thought, and even controversy as plays on semipolitical themes; for it is a play that speaks of a poet’s reaction to life in our country (not just the South), and what he has to say about it is much more far-reaching than what might be enunciated through any slogan.’ (76-80)

**ONLINE REVIEWS**

**Wolcott Gibbs, ‘Lower Depths, Southern Style’, *New Yorker*, 13 Dec 1947**

‘The set represents the two-room apartment occupied by Stanley Kowalski, a young Pole somehow cryptically connected with the automobile business, and his pregnant bride, Stella, a fine, highly sexed girl, though the daughter of that most exhausted of all aristocracies, an old Southern family. It is possible that some scenic artist somewhere has contrived a more gruesome interior than the decaying horror that Jo Mielziner has executed for the Kowalskis, but I doubt it. It is on the ground floor (outside, a circular iron staircase winds up to another apartment, containing perhaps the least inhibited married couple ever offered on the stage); there is no door between the two rooms, only a curtain; the furnishings are sparse and dreadful; the desolate street outside can be seen through the windows, or, rather, through the walls, since Mr. Mielziner’s design is by no means literal. It is a wonderful effect and, as the evening wears along, oppressive almost beyond words.

‘One spring morning, Stella’s older sister, Blanche, turns up at this hovel. She is a strange girl, but at first there is nothing visibly wrong with her except a slight hysteria, which she tries to fight down with frequent surreptitious drinks of whiskey, and that grotesque and terrible refinement that Mr. Williams has carried over from his portrait of the mother in “The Glass Menagerie.” She is fashionably appalled by the Kowalski apartment and the goings on in it, which include an incredibly seedy, brawling poker game, but this is nothing compared with the dismay she experiences at her first sight of her sister’s husband. This is understandable, since, thanks to a peculiar combination of script and casting, this character emerges as almost wholly subhuman—illiterate, dirty, violent, and even somehow with a suggestion of physical deformity, an apelike quality, about him. In addition to the personal disgust he inspires in her, Blanche is slowly forced to realize that her desperate pretending is no good with him; from the moment she comes in, he suspects the unbearable truth about her, and when she seems to be infecting her sister with her stylish ways, he drags it out into the light, with contemptuous brutality.

 ‘It is something of a tribute to Mr. Williams’ talent that the story of Blanche’s past can seem even momentarily credible. The two girls were brought up in an old house, apparently the conventional “decaying mansion,” which he has chosen to call Belle Rêve, though they pronounce It “Belle Reeve.” Like Stella, Blanche married, but it was a brief and tragic escape, since the boy was a homosexual who shot himself after his seventeen-year-old bride had discovered him in a situation that could hardly be misinterpreted. She went back to Belle Rêve, where she watched the awful, lingering deaths of three old women, and then, when the creditors had taken the house, went on to a town called Laurel, where she taught school and gradually, in a sick—or quite possibly, by this time, an insane—revulsion against death, took up with many men. The Laurel episode ended with her seduction of an adolescent boy (youth plus love, I gather, seemed to her the absolute antithesis of death, though, of course, some authorities might have diagnosed simple nymphomania) and with her expulsion from the town, where, in her brother-in-law’s sardonic phrase, she was getting to be somewhat better known than the President of the United States.

‘By the time Blanche comes to her sister’s apartment, she has manufactured a gaudy and pathetic substitute past for herself, full of rich and handsome suitors, who respectfully admire her mind, but Kowalski tears that down ruthlessly, without any special moral indignation but with a savage, obscene humor that is infinitely more torturing. He also gives her secret away to the one man—a poor specimen, but kind and honest—who might conceivably have saved her and then takes her, casually and contemptuously, himself. The end comes when she tries to tell this to her sister, who, unable to believe it and still go on with her marriage, consents to having her committed to an asylum. This is, I’m afraid, a pretty poor synopsis—there is no way, for instance, to convey the effect Mr. Williams achieves in his last act of a mind desperately retreating into the beautiful, crazy world it has built for itself—but perhaps it is enough to give you the general idea.’

‘Stella is written and played as a pretty, reasonably cultivated girl, in no sense unbalanced, and her abrupt and cheerful descent into the lower depths of New Orleans seems rather incredible. Mr. Williams attempts, though the evidence on the stage is against him, to portray Kowalski as a man of enormous sexual attraction, so that the very sight of him causes her to see colored pinwheels, but even that is scarcely enough. It is the same, to some extent, with Blanche; whatever the forces working against her may have been, her degradation is much too rapid and complete, her fall from whatever position she may have occupied in a top level of society to the bottom of the last level a good deal more picturesque than probable.’

Objects to strained symbolism of streetcars’ names –

‘“A Streetcar Named Desire” is a brilliant, implacable play about the disintegration of a woman, or, if you like, of a society; it has no possible need for the kind of pseudo-poetic decoration that more vacant authors so often employ to disguise their fundamental lack of thought.’

‘Jessica Tandy gives a superb, steadily rising performance as Blanche; Marlon Brando, as Kowalski, is, as hinted previously, almost pure ape (his sister-in-law’s description of him as “common” entertained me quite a lot, there in the dark), and though he undoubtedly emphasizes the horrors of the Vieux Carré as opposed to Belle Rêve, it is a brutally effective characterization; Karl Malden, as Blanche’s unhappy suitor, gets a queer, touching blend of dignity and pathos into what you might call one of those difficult, *listening* parts; and Kim Hunter, as Stella, is sympathetic and restrained and very decorative indeed.’

**Michael Coveney, *Independent*, 23 Oct 2011 (Donmar, Weisz)**

‘Weisz starts vague and wispy, with that glinting, cunning deceptiveness of the dedicated drinker, but she misses an awful lot of the role's cutting cruelty and sheer drag queen bitchiness. The line with the telephone – "I can't dial, honey" – is lost upstage. But she finds real pathos in her temporary berth with the dogged, domesticated Mitch (Barnaby Kay): "Sometimes, there's God, so quickly."

‘Blanche wants to deceive Mitch so much he wants her. And she at least finds a refuge in a more refined mind: she talks about a Mrs Browning sonnet over their Lucky Strikes and her past life flashes before her in the classroom. The family plantation in Belle Rêve has gone, the parents have died and she's landed in a world of drunken card players, the plaintive sounds of a hurdy-gurdy and intimacies with strangers.

‘Stunningly, the young boy who comes collecting for charity, whom she kisses full on the mouth, is played by the same actor (Jack Ashton) who materialises as her dead husband. You suddenly realise that in these episodes, Williams is really writing about homosexual promiscuity, and Blanche is much less of a woman than a sexual butterfly with severely clipped wings.’

‘…this isn't a great Streetcar, and its qualities lie not so much in performance as in the revelation of a still ground-breaking dramatic, almost filmic, deliquescent structure and poetry.’

**David Benedict, *Variety*, 29 July 2009**

Every actress capable of a Southern accent wants to play Blanche. But too many of those who do are cast late in their career. On this side of the pond, Jessica Lange was 47 when she played her, while Glenn Close was 55. Blanche is supposed to be no more than 38. This isn’t ungallant nit-picking, it’s crucial.

It’s not just that Blanche’s continued fatal attraction to young men is much less far-fetched with, as here, an actress of exactly the right age seducing the boy from the Evening Star paper. Blanche’s determination to start afresh makes real sense when she first arrives to stay with married sister Stella ([Ruth Wilson](https://variety.com/t/ruth-wilson/)). Shaky and in too much need of alcohol she may be but, for once, she really might overcome her demons. Thus, instead of merely reaching a foregone conclusion, the final collapse of hope renders her character genuinely tragic and upsetting.

Ashford’s casting also corrects the other mistake routinely made. Elliot Cowan’s prowling, seriously sexy Stanley may attack Blanche with the line “We’ve had this date since the beginning,” but they’ve only had one complete scene alone together, and this is it. What drives the play — and, in part, Stanley’s fury — is the interdependency of Blanche, Stella and Mitch (Barnaby Kay).

Blanche describes Stanley as an ape, but this production realizes that taking her at her (usually evasive) word can be misleading. Muscle-bound Cowan’s Stanley has the mocking, peacock strut of a man led entirely by his physical, sexual power. It’s abundantly clear not only why so sensuous a Stella as Wilson has married him, but why she is thrilled, and embarrassed, that she did.

But Cowan’s physical heft and vocal strength — even when he suddenly lets rip, he’s scarily in control — give high contrast to flashes of little-boy-lost in a world he fears to lose.

Ultimately, a similar sense of loss underpins Kay’s puzzled Mitch. Again, casting rebalances the difficult equation. A younger Blanche makes her affectation of virginity far more plausible, stops Mitch appearing less gullible and makes Stella’s keenness on their match a possibility genuinely worth entertaining.

The fact that Weisz and Wilson really do look and behave like sisters — their rhythms are touchingly similar — helps tether Blanche to the unwelcome (to her) reality of Stella’s New Orleans life.

Creating so vivid and compelling a world allows Weisz’s Blanche to rise in power. This is a woman whose self-deception makes her spiral frighteningly into believing her own lie.

Like a cannibal, Weisz feeds off the atmosphere she creates as she deliberately blurs abhorred reality by filling the bathroom with steam. But the more she ties herself up in her own equivocations, the more her mind unravels. Her very skin seems too tender. When Stella spills lemon Coke on her, her yelp is scalding. As she starts to drown in dissembling and danger, her throat seems to close and her breathing becomes terrifyingly shallow and rasping.

Ashford perhaps slightly overplays his hand by literally bringing on the ghosts of Blanche’s terrible past one too many times, but even that choice makes sense within the production as a whole.

The sustained emotional depth of this fearless Donmar revival reminds you not just that Williams was a master, but that this really is his masterpiece.

**Quentin Letts, Daily Mail, 29 July 2019 (Donmar, Rachel Weisz)**

Blanche totters about in high heels, pretending to be the grand dame, in truth a nervous wreck. Miss Weisz gives her occasional shafts of drink-fuelled confidence but the rest of the time she has a whinnying gasp on the in-breaths and an alabaster delicacy.

A sister-in-law like this Blanche would send any man round the twist, but with an ogre such as Stanley the only surprise is that he does not explode sooner and more frequently.

**Peter Bradshaw, *Guardian*, re-release of film, Guardian 6 Feb 2020**

What is the nature of this toxic chemistry between Stanley and Blanche? It is not all about sex: much of it is about class. Stanley resents Blanche’s condescension and snobbery and is also suspicious of her furs and jewels, and the way she has apparently abandoned her parents’ handsome family home. In their minds, it’s as legendary a place as Tara in *Gone With the Wind*, a film that featured Leigh at the age Blanche believes she still is now. But the house is now apparently worthless, hopelessly mortgaged for debts, perhaps due to Blanche’s mismanagement – so Stanley’s share of that supposed inheritance is zero. Is there some brutal part of Stanley that thinks maybe he is entitled to sex from Blanche in lieu of this legacy?

Maybe. But that doesn’t quite explain how simmeringly resentful and conflicted Stanley is around Blanche. My own view is that Williams has ventriloquised and heterosexualised his own sensibilities into Blanche: this is a fictional variant of a gay man doing the tense bickering and bantering with a half-naked Stanley and, perhaps, delicately kissing a young boy on the lips. Only in this context can you understand Stanley’s puzzled unease and contempt.

Brando tends to upstage and upend the whole picture in his way, and Karl Malden, although excellent as Blanche’s diffident suitor Mitch – a man whose feelings are trifled with by her – is obviously in Brando’s shade. Having said that, Mitch does get to say exactly what is on his mind in a way that Stanley perhaps doesn’t.

There is a dark genius in the final scene when poor Blanche is getting ready, expecting the gentleman caller and former beau who is going to take her away on a Caribbean cruise. For the first few minutes, we don’t understand quite why the mood is so tense and subdued and why Stella is so wretched. Kazan controls this sequence tremendously. And the famous kindness for which Blanche is so pathetically grateful: that is merely the world’s shrugging indifference or cruelty that Blanche, self-deluding to the last, tries to transmute into compassion.

**Roger Ebert, 12 Nov 1993 - https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/a-streetcar-named-desire-1993**

The 1951 cuts took out dialogue that suggested Blanche DuBois was promiscuous, perhaps a nymphomaniac attracted to young boys. It also cut much of the intensity from Stanley's final assault of Blanche. Other cuts were more subtle. Look at the early scene, for example, where Stanley plants himself on the street outside his apartment and screams, "[Stella](https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/stella-1990)!" In the censored version, she stands up inside, pauses, starts down the stairs, looks at him, continues down the stairs, and they embrace. In the uncut version, only a couple of shots are different - but what a difference they make! Stella's whole demeanor seems different, seems charged with lust. In the apartment, she responds more visibly to his voice. On the stairs, there are closeups as she descends, showing her face almost blank with desire. And the closing embrace, which looks in the cut version as if she is consoling him, looks in the uncut version as if she has abandoned herself to him.

Another scene lost crucial dialogue. Stella tells her sister, "Stanley's always smashed things. Why, on our wedding night, as soon as we came in here, he snatched off one of my slippers and rushed about the place smashing the light bulbs with it." After Blanche is suitably shocked, Stella, leaning back with a funny smile, says "I was sort of thrilled by it." All that dialogue was trimmed, perhaps because it provided a glimpse into psychic realms the censors were not prepared to acknowledge.

**Patrick Marmion, *Daily Mail*, 22 May 2020 (Gillian Anderson, NTat Home)**

‘Ever since Vivien Leigh and Marlon Brando appeared as heroine and anti-hero Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski in the 1951 film, this has struck me as a story that must be dripping with raunch, sweat and foreboding.’

‘But once you’ve adjusted the sound levels, she is an impressively manipulative survivor, batting eyelids and tossing back the bourbon. Her piece de resistance is her breakdown at the end, which is truly disturbed and disturbing.

‘Even so, at more than three hours long, I found Andrews’ production too clinical. Ben Foster, who plays Stanley, is the kind of seamy muscleman you might expect to find clearing your drains. But while it is important to condemn domestic violence, he needs some of Brando’s sex appeal to leaven the darker undercurrents.’