

UE 176 Littérature américaine

Brochure de textes

***A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947)**

**Tennessee Williams (1911-1983)**

*Enseignants :*

M. Dubois (CM et TD)

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**Excerpt from Scene One (p. 1-3)**

[*Two women, one white and one coloured, are taking the air on the steps of the building. The white woman is* EUNICE*, who occupies the upstairs flat; the coloured woman a neighbour, for New Orleans is a cosmopolitan city where there’s a relatively warm and easy intermingling of races in the old part of town.*

*Above the music of the ‘blue piano’ the voices of people on the street can be heard overlapping.*]

NEGRO WOMAN [*to* EUNICE]: . . . she says St Barnabas would send out his dog to lick her and when he did she’d feel an icy cold wave all up an’ down her. Well, that night when –

A MAN [*to a* SAILOR]: You keep right on going and you'll find it. You’ll hear them tapping on the shutters.

SAILOR [*to* NEGRO WOMAN *and* EUNICE]: Where’s the Four Deuces?

VENDOR: Red hot! Red hots!

NEGRO WOMAN: Don’t waste your money in that clip joint!

SAILOR: I’ve got a date there.

VENDOR: Re-e-ed h-o-o-t!

NEGRO WOMAN: Don’t let them sell you a Blue Moon cocktail or you won’t go out on your own feet!

[*Two men come round the corner,* STANLEY KOWALSKI *and* MITCH*. They are about twenty-eight or thirty years old, roughly dressed in blue denim work clothes.* STANLEY *carries his bowling jacket and a red-stained package from a butcher’s.*]

STANLEY [*to* MITCH]: Well, what did he say?

MITCH: He said he’d give us even money.

STANLEY: Naw! We gotta have odds!

[*They stop at the foot of the steps.*]

STANLEY [*bellowing*]: Hey, there! Stella, Baby!

[*STELLA comes out on the first-floor landing, a gentle young woman, about twenty-five, and of a background obviously quite different from her husband’s.*]

STELLA [*mildly*]: Don’t holler at me like that. Hi, Mitch.

STANLEY: Catch!

STELLA: What?

STANLEY: Meat!

[*He heaves the package at her. She cries out in protest but manages to catch it: then she laughs breathlessly. Her husband and his companion have already started back around the corner.*]

STELLA [*calling after him*]: Stanley! Where are you going?

STANLEY: Bowling!

STELLA: Can I come watch?

STANLEY: Come on. [*He goes out.*]

STELLA: Be over soon. [*To the white woman.*] Hello, Eunice. How are you?

EUNICE: I’m all right. Tell Steve to get him a poor boy’s sandwich ’cause nothing’s left here.

[*They all laugh; the* COLOURED WOMAN *does not stop.* STELLA *goes out.*]

COLOURED WOMAN: What was that package he th’ew at ’er? [*She rises from steps, laughing louder.*]

EUNICE: You hush, now!

NEGRO WOMAN: Catch what!

[*She continues to laugh.* BLANCHE *comes around the corner, carrying a valise. She looks at a slip of paper, then at the building, then again at the slip and again at the building. Her expression is one of shocked disbelief. Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and ear-rings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district. She is about five years older than* STELLA*. Her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth.*]

EUNICE [*finally*]: What’s the matter, honey? Are you lost?

BLANCHE [*with faintly hysterical humour*]: They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at – Elysian Fields!

EUNICE: That’s where you are now.

BLANCHE: At Elysian Fields?

EUNICE: This here is Elysian Fields.

BLANCHE: They mustn’t have – understood – what number I wanted . . .

EUNICE: What number you lookin’ for?

[BLANCHE *wearily refers to the slip of paper.*]

BLANCHE: Six thirty-two.

EUNICE: You don’t have to look no further.

**Excerpt from Scene Four (p. 41-43)**

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 awful 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.

BLANCHE: And that – that makes it all right?

STELLA: No, it isn’t all right for anybody to make such a terrible row, but – people do sometimes. Stanley’s always smashed things. Why, on our wedding night – soon as we came in here – he snatched off one of my slippers and rushed about the place smashing the light-bulbs with it.

BLANCHE: He did – what?

STELLA: He smashed all the light-bulbs with the heel of my slipper! [*She laughs.*]

BLANCHE: And you – you Jet him? Didn’t run, didn’t scream?

STELLA: I was – sort of – thrilled by it. [*She waits for a moment.*] Eunice and you had breakfast?

BLANCHE: Do you suppose I wanted any breakfast?

STELLA: There’s some coffee left on the stove.

BLANCHE: Yow’re so – matter of fact about it, Stella.

STELLA: What other can I be? He’s taken the radio to get it fixed. It didn’t land on the pavement so only one tube was smashed.

BLANCHE: And you are standing there smiling!

STELLA: What do you want me to do?

BLANCHE: Pull yourself together and face the facts.

STELLA: What are they, in your opinion?

BLANCHE: In my opinion? You’re married to a madman!

STELLA: No!

BLANCHE: Yes, you are, your fix is worse than mine is! Only you’re not being sensible about it. I’m going to do something. Get hold of myself and make myself a new life!

STELLA: Yes?

BLANCHE: But you’ve given in. And that isn’t right, you’re not old! You can get out.

STELLA [*slowly and emphatically*]: I’m not in anything I want to get out of.

BLANCHE [*incredulously*]: What – Stella?

STELLA: I said I am not in anything that I have a desire to get out of. Look at the mess in this room! And those empty bottles! They went through two cases last night! He promised this morning that he was going to quit having these poker parties, but you know how long such a promise is going to keep. Oh, well, it’s his pleasure, like mine is movies and bridge. People have got to tolerate each other’s habits, I guess.

BLANCHE: I don’t understand you. [STELLA *turns toward her.*] I don’t understand your indifference. Is this a Chinese philosophy you’ve – cultivated ?

STELLA: Is what – what?

BLANCHE: This – shuffling about and mumbling – ‘One tube smashed – beer-bottles – mess in the kitchen’ – as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened! [STELLA *laughs uncertainly and, picking up the broom, twirls it in her hands.*]

BLANCHE: Are you deliberately shaking that thing in my face?

STELLA: No.

BLANCHE: Stop it. Let go of that broom. I won’t have you cleaning up for him!

STELLA: Then who’s going to do it? Are you?

BLANCHE: I? I!

STELLA: No, I didn’t think so.

BLANCHE: Oh, let me think, if only my mind would function! We’ve got to get hold of some money, that’s the way out!

STELLA: I guess that money is always nice to get hold of.

**Excerpt from Scene Six (p. 65-68)**

BLANCHE: Why did your mother want to know my age?

MITCH: Mother is sick.

BLANCHE: I’m sorry to hear it. Badly?

MITCH: She won’t live long. Maybe just a few months.

BLANCHE: Oh.

MITCH: She worries because I’m not settled.

BLANCHE: Oh.

MITCH: She wants me to be settled down before she – [*His voice is hoarse and he clears his throat twice, shuffling nervously around with his hands in and out of his pockets.*]

BLANCHE: You love her very much, don’t you?

MITCH: Yes.

BLANCHE: I think you have a great capacity for devotion. You will be lonely when she passes on, won’t you? [MITCH *clears his throat and nods.*] I understand what that is.

MITCH: To be lonely?

BLANCHE: I loved someone, too, and the person I loved I lost.

MITCH: Dead? [*She crosses to the window and sits on the sill, looking out. She pours herself another drink.*] A man?

BLANCHE: He was a boy, just a boy, when I was a very young girl. When I was sixteen, I made the discovery – love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that’s how it struck the world for me. But I was unlucky, Deluded. There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn’t like a man’s, although he wasn’t the least bit effeminate-looking – still – that thing was there . . . He came to me for help. I didn’t know that. I didn’t find out anything till after our marriage when we’d run away and come back and all I knew was I’d failed him in some mysterious way and wasn’t able to give the help he needed but couldn’t speak of! He was in the quicksands and clutching at me – but I wasn’t holding him out, I was slipping in with him! I didn’t know that. I didn’t know anything except I loved him unendurably but without being able to help him or help myself. Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty – which wasn’t empty, but had two people in it . . .

[*A locomotive is heard approaching outside. She claps her hands to her ears and crouches over. The headlight of the locomotive glares into the room as it thunders past. As the noise recedes she straightens slowly and continues speaking.*]

Afterwards we pretended that nothing had been discovered, Yes, the three of us drove out to Moon Lake Casino, very drunk and laughing all the way.

[*Polka music sounds, in a minor key faint with distance.*]

We danced the Varsouviana! Suddenly in the middle of the dance the boy I had married broke away from me and ran out of the casino. A few moments later – a shot!

[*The polka stops abruptly.*

*BLANCHE rises stiffly. Then the polka resumes in a major key.*]

I ran out – all did – all ran and gathered about the terrible thing at the edge of the lake! I couldn’t get near for the crowding. Then somebody caught my arm. ‘Don’t go any closer! Come back! You don’t want to see!’ See? See what! Then I heard voices say – Allan! Allan! The Grey boy ! He’d stuck the revolver into his mouth, and fired – so that the back of his head had been – blown away!

[*She sways and covers her face.*]

It was because – on the dance-floor – unable to stop myself – I’d suddenly said – ‘I know! I know! You disgust me . . .’ And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that’s stronger than this – kitchen – candle . . .

[MITCH *gets up awkwardly and moves towards her a little. The polka music increases.* MITCH *stands beside her.*]

MITCH [*drawing her slowly into his arms*]: You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be – you and me, Blanche?

[*She stares at him vacantly for a moment. Then with a soft cry huddles in his embrace. She makes a sobbing effort to speak but the words won’t come. He kisses her forehead and her eyes and finally her lips. The polka tune fades out. Her breath is drawn and released in long, grateful sobs.*]

BLANCHE: Sometimes – there’s God – so quickly!

**Excerpt from Scene Eleven (p. 105-107)**

STELLA: What have I done to my sister? Oh, God, what have I done to my sister?

EUNICE: You done the right thing, the only thing you could do. She couldn’t stay here; there wasn’t no other place for her to go.

[*While* STELLA *and* EUNICE *are speaking on the porch the voices of the men in the kitchen overlap them.*]

STANLEY [*running in from the bedroom*]: Hey! Hey! Doctor! Doctor, you better go in!

DOCTOR: Too bad, too bad. I always like to avoid it.

PABLO: This is a very bad thing.

STEVE: This is no way to do it. She should’ve been told.

PABLO: *Madre de Dios! Cosa mala, muy, muy mala!*

[MITCH *has started towards the bedroom.* STANLEY *crosses to block him.*]

MITCH [*wildly*]: You! You done this, all o’ your God damn interfering with things you –

STANLEY: Quit the blubber! [*He pushes him aside.*]

MITCH: I’ll kill you! [*He lunges and strikes at* STANLEY*.*]

STANLEY: Hold this bone-headed cry-baby!

STEVE [*grasping* MITCH]: Stop it, Mitch.

PABLO: Yeah, yeah, take it easy!

[MITCH *collapses at the table, sobbing.*

*During the preceding scenes, the* MATRON *catches hold of* BLANCHE*’s arm and prevents her flight.* BLANCHE *turns wildly and scratches at the* MATRON*. The heavy woman pinions her arms.* BLANCHE *cries out hoarsely and slips to her knees.*]

MATRON: These fingernails have to be trimmed. [*The* DOCTOR *comes into the room and she looks at him.*] Jacket, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Not unless necessary.

[*He takes off his hat and now becomes personalized. The unhuman quality goes. His voice is gentle and reassuring as he crosses to* BLANCHE *and crouches in front of her. As he speaks her name, her terror subsides a little. The lurid reflections fade from the walls, the inhuman cries and noises die out and her own hoarse crying is calmed.*]

DOCTOR: Miss DuBois.

[*She turns her face to him and stares at him with desperate pleading. He smiles; then he speaks to the* MATRON*.*]

 It won’t be necessary.

BLANCHE [*faintly*]: Ask her to let go of me.

DOCTOR [*to the* MATRON]: Let go.

[*The* MATRON *releases her.* BLANCHE *extends her hands towards the* DOCTOR*. He draws her up gently and supports her with his arm and leads her through the portières.*]

BLANCHE [*holding tight to his arm*]: Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.

[*The poker players stand back as* BLANCHE *and the* DOCTOR *cross the kitchen to the front door. She allows him to lead her as if she were blind. As they go out on the porch,* STELLA *cries out her sister’s name from where she is crouched a few steps upon the stairs.*]

STELLA: Blanche! Blanche, Blanche!

[BLANCHE *walks on without turning, followed by the* DOCTOR *and the* MATRON*. They go around the corner of the building.*

EUNICE *descends to* STELLA *and places the child in her arms. It is wrapped in a pale blue blanket.* STELLA *accepts the child, sobbingly.* EUNICE *continues downstairs and enters the kitchen where the men, except for* STANLEY*, are returning silently to their places about the table.* STANLEY *has gone out on the porch and stands at the foot of the steps looking at* STELLA*.*]

STANLEY [*a bit uncertainly*]: Stella?

[*She sobs with inhuman abandon. There is something luxurious in her complete surrender to crying now that her sister is gone.*]

STANLEY [*voluptuously, soothingly*]: Now, honey. Now, love. Now, now love. [*He kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of her blouse.*] Now, now, love. Now, love . . .

[*The luxurious sobbing, the sensual murmur fade away under the swelling music of the ‘blue piano’ and the muted trumpet.*]

STEVE: This game is seven-card stud.

CURTAIN