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BACHELOR THESIS

Parallels between Woody Allen's film Blue Jasmine and Tennessee  
Williams' play A Streetcar Named Desire

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I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is completely my own work and that no other sources were used in the preparation of the thesis than those listed on the works cited page.

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## **Abstract**

This bachelor thesis aims to prove that Woody Allen can be considered a postmodernist author, a statement made based on the use of intertextuality in his writing. The subject of detailed analysis to support the statement is Allen's film *Blue Jasmine* which is being compared to Tennessee Williams' classic drama *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The thesis also focuses on the terms postmodernism and intertextuality and their use in literature and film.

## **Key words**

A Streetcar Named Desire, Williams, Blue Jasmine, Allen, comparison, postmodernism, intertextuality

## **Anotace**

Cílem této bakalářská práce je dokázat, že Woody Allen může být považován za postmoderního autora, především na základě použití intertextuality v jeho psaní. Jako předmět podrobného zkoumání je použit film Woodyho Allena *Jasmíniny slzy*, který je srovnáván s klasickým dramatem Tennesseeho Williamse *Tramvaj do stanice Touha*. Práce se věnuje také pojmům postmodernismus a intertextualita a jejich užití v literatuře a filmu.

## **Klíčová slova**

Tramvaj do stanice Touha, Williams, Jasmíniny slzy, Allen, porovnání, postmodernismus, intertextualita

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis aims to substantiate the notion that writer and director Woody Allen can be considered a postmodernist author by virtue of practising the technique of intertextuality. The theoretical part concentrates on explaining terms postmodernism and intertextuality. The third chapter of the theoretical part focuses on Woody Allen's cinematic work and the presence of intertextuality in his movies. The practical part of the thesis consists of a close up comparison of Allen's latest film *Blue Jasmine* and classic Tennessee Williams' American drama *A Streetcar Named Desire*. *Blue Jasmine* is in many ways similar to the drama, especially in its outline of the characters and storyline.

The similarities between the two pieces are very palpable yet not officially acknowledged by the author. Woody Allen said the following words about the genesis of his film: "I was having lunch with my wife at home and she happened to tell me the story that some woman told her about another woman who had undergone the same trauma. She had been rich, wealthy, luxuriously living for many years and suddenly the roof came in, the government came in, they took her jewellery, they took her home, they took her aeroplane, they took her everything and she found that she had to go to work in a story and the whole trauma was so difficult for her that she had a very, very hard emotional time adjusting. And I thought this was a tragic - makings of a tragic story for someone and then of course then I embellished it with other little details that I made up. But the fundamental story was an anecdote my wife told me." (Warner Bros. UK Trailers). This work examines how "the little details that Allen made up" correspond with the famous play. Many of the parallels are very obvious even at first sight, as many film critics mentioned in their reviews of the film.

The comparison part of our thesis tries to find as many parallels as possible and find out to what extent *Blue Jasmine* can be legitimately seen as an updated rendition of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

## 2. Theoretical Part

### 2.1. Postmodernism in Literature and Film

“I’m able to analyse [...] a text with the computer so that I have a list of all the words throughout the source that satisfy the mesostic rules, and then, through the use of chance operations, to write a text which comes first from here and then from there. And I find it very fascinating [...] because though it comes from ideas, it produces other ideas. There comes a kind of fertilization of ideas.” (Cage qtd. In Zurbrugg, 1).

Postmodernism came to prominence in 1970s and has lasted until now. It is generally characterized as something that builds on modernism or came chronologically after modernism. Postmodernism is indeed a follower of modernism in the sense that postmodernism continues experimenting with genres and formats. The main feature of postmodernism is epitomized by texts, as stated by Cage, that come “from here and then from there”. This shorthand statement can (and in fact needs to) be interpreted as a candid admission that postmodernism does not bring anything original but rather collects old or already manifested ideas and puts them in a new scheme or look at them from unusual point of view.

A very often used device in postmodernism is writing about writing. This practise can be observed in Fowles’ novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* or McEwan’s *Atonement*. Both novels contain a fictional intriguing story as well as a reflection on writing and its obstacles in the process of creating a fictional piece of work. In Fowles’ novel, it is a case of author’s polemics about the nature of writing a fiction, the possibilities the author faces when he is writing a piece of fiction. In *Atonement*, the very same issue is foregrounded by the main protagonist of the novel, who also happens to be the novel’s author. The author distances himself from the work. This procedure was also adapted in film. Fellini’s film *8 ½* and Kaufman’s *Adaptation* could be named as primary examples. Both of the films are based on the plot that director cannot find his new muse and ends up making a film about his own struggles. Postmodern film also makes use of a technique called breaking the fourth wall when the characters talk directly into the camera to the audience. By that they make it clear that they know they are a part of a film, of something that is being presented to an audience.

This technique was used in films *Alfie*, *Annie Hall* and in TV show *House of Cards* whose recent American remake made the technique very popular.

Another device developed (though not invented) by postmodernism is an unreliable narrator. That could be realized by multiple narrations or playfulness with reader which leaves the reader in uncertainty as to which version is the truthful one. A fine example is Kundera's *The Joke*. The story is narrated by three various characters (Ludvik, Helena and Kostka) and telling of their story is independent on the other versions. This procedure offers an extended look into the problem and also shows that one subjective narrator is not a reliable source of information. Some of the presented facts confirm each other while some could deny each other and cause a major hitch in the storytelling leaving the reader to decide which version is the right one. This approach was presented in films such as *Vantage Point*, *Flipped* or Kurosawa's famous *Rashomon*.

Similar to effect has the concept of open endings. Its result is again leaving the reader/watcher with the feeling of uncertainty what was real and what the resolution would be. It leaves space to various interpretations and discussions that strengthen the notion of relativity and difference in individual's points of view. Most often used conflict is between reality, dreams or illusions. Milan Kundera's next novel could be presented as an example – *The Identity*. The novel's leading character balances on the edge between reality and wishful thinking while considering the options as to who could be the author of love letters which are being delivered to her. She is so taken with the mystery she gets more and more wrapped up in various possibilities she stops being realistic and continues to live her life as a dream. Gradually the novel follows the heroine's path and leaves the reader wondering which parts are real and which are only a work of imagination of the hero of the story leaving the problem unresolved. This concept is even more often in film which, as an audiovisual medium, has more options how to work with the problem (editing, work with colours, music themes etc.). A shining example is Christopher Nolan's *Inception*. The film focuses on dreaming and the origins of human thoughts. The protagonists of the movie try to invade human's mind and plant a whole new idea into the mind by accessing and living in the mind and consciousness of the given person. The concept of the film is built on a play with reality and imagination and the ending of the film leaves the door open to either of the

potential conclusions – the mission was either real and therefore accomplished or it was not real in the first place. A true master of the reality/dream play is director David Lynch.

A very popular practise is to mix the reality with fiction, so-called historiographic fiction or metafiction. Most often this concept puts an individual hero into the main focus and uses historical events as a background and not as the main theme or even includes supernatural elements. The brilliant examples are the novels *Forrest Gump* by Winston Groom and *The Centenarian Who Climbed out the Window and Vanished* by Jonas Jonasson. The heroes of both novels go through real events (War in Vietnam, Cold war) and meet real famous people (Stalin, John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon etc.) but it is obvious that the novels are pieces of fiction only playing with the actual historic events. Another take on this concept resides in taking a real historical personage and write his or her fictional or semi-fictional biography, as did Peter Ackroyd in *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* or Anthony Burgess in his novel *Nothing Like the Sun* which recreates William Shakespeare. This concept is getting more and more popular, also due to the popularity of comic books and the animated film industry which adapted this concept with ease. An example from recent years would be the film *X-men: First Class* that worked with the topic of Caribbean crisis in 1962. The film, based on a comic book, showed the conflict that really occurred in October 1962 but added fictional characters and fictional plot which twisted the events and created new conflicts which were solved in the way that agreed with the real facts. A new trend in this field is that famous people are assigned supernatural powers, for example Abraham Lincoln is turned into a vampire hunter in the film *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire hunter* or Johann Sebastian Bach into a shadow hunter in *Mortal Instruments*.

Postmodernism also blurs the lines between so-called high and low genres. Postmodernist writers aspire to prove that even low genres could be written with enough sophistication to be considered valuable pieces of art. They often tend to mix high and low genres together as it is done nicely in John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* that is based on Victorian romance and features characteristics of a gothic novel. Film contributed its own method of mixing genres – it started combining real acting with cartoon action. The film *Mary Poppins* contained one sequence when the characters appeared in a cartoon while *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* put animated

characters into our real world. Other brilliant examples of this method are the music movie *Pink Floyd The Wall*, *Kill Bill* and, more recently, *The Congress*.

One of the most prominent devices used in postmodernist works is intertextuality.

## **2.2. Intertextuality**

Intertextuality is a device that is very often used in postmodernism but it is not anything new. Peter Plett traces it back to pre-modern era when he surmises that “[l]iterary texts have always referred to previous other texts and the various practices of alluding and quoting, of paraphrasing and translating, of continuation and adaptation, of parody and travesty flourished in periods long before postmodernism, for instance in the Renaissance, in Neoclassicism and, of course, in Modernism” (Plett, 210). Based on Plett’s quote, intertextuality can be defined as any kind of referring to any previously stated facts and it can have many various forms. This broad interpretation suggests that almost no text is original or devoid of the intertextuality element. This may be seemed as a brave statement but in fact most literary texts in human history have merely responded to certain stimuli. Especially in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century it would be extremely hard to find a text that is not by some means intertextual as our society is inextricably tied with its history and tradition.

Following this direction, we can say that any text free from any signs of intertextuality would be a text that would be comprehensible to every literate person in the world. It would be a text that would rely or refer to any other text or phenomenon ever expressed in any aspect. It would have to be a text free from any metaphors and other figurative expressions, using only basic words expressing the same meaning in every language. This concept is however so restricted that it can probably exist only in theory. As language itself is a concept created by people in many different versions - various nations use different languages - it is highly improbable to find or even develop a statement that would fulfil the task of not being intertextual.

However, the postmodernist use of intertextuality is something targeted and more specific. The postmodernist texts use intertextuality as another level to understanding the texts, meaning that the text refer to other literary works. Its purpose can be to parody the original, to expand on its thoughts or to add an optional expanded version of the story which would be understandable even without it. This point of view is somehow restricted but still suggests many options how to work with the concept. Very popular are sequels and prequels. Those are works that expand on an already created universe by adding stories that precede or follow the original story and share the same universe. J. K. Rowling’s additional books for the Harry Potter universe such as

*The Tales of Beedle the Bard* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* can be laid out as examples. As for films, *Prometheus*, a Ridley Scott film from 2012, can be named as it shares the same fantastic universe such as *Alien* and its sequels (*Aliens*, *Alien<sup>3</sup>*, and *Alien: Resurrection*). The master of aligning the universes of its comics and films is Marvel Worldwide Inc. which parents famous superheroes like *Iron Man*, *Thor*, *Captain America* and many others. Each of the superheroes has its own story, comic and film but all of them share the same universe and they often refer to each other's storylines. This kind of referring to other storylines is very popular with fans of the franchise and has become something akin a game where the authors try to insert as many references as possible into their work and the readers try to discover all of them. This play with references or inside jokes outgrew its own universes and many kinds of references can be found in various films – the jokes no longer refer only to scenes within its own universe but they can refer to other works of the involved filmmakers or authors and historical personalities or events. Jim Jarmusch last film *Only Lovers Left Alive* dealing with immortal vampires works with historical and mainly literary allusions that are not fundamental for the story itself but serve as a source of entertainment for the audience familiar with the involved topic (for example the two main characters use fake names – Stephen Dedalus and Daisy Buchanan – for travelling).

The reception of intertextuality is a very subjective matter. The reception and understanding is conditioned by many factors such as reader's age, education, experience and cultural background.

### 2.3. Woody Allen and Intertextuality

“I’ve always had a great love of heavy literature and heavy themes in general [...]” (Woody Allen: A Documentary, 42) these are Woody Allen’s own words. His first film which was based on literature was *Love and Death* that was hugely inspired by Russian literature. In this film Allen rephrased and re-enacted the most obvious clichés of the Russian literature and made jokes about them. He did not try to use the topic and made them his own. But since then, he continued to refer to literary or film masterpieces in various forms. He either drew parallels to famous works in the titles of his films or in the plot of his films; most of which were written by him as well. One of the grand examples is the film *Sleeper* which draws allusion to many masterpieces of modern art. In this film Allen drew allusions to the work of Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton and famous plays such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* when Allen’s character in the film pretends to be Blanche Dubois. This trick is something Allen uses even in his new films, most prominently in successful *Midnight in Paris* (2011) in which the main protagonist gets to travel back in time and meets Gertrude Stein, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway and Pablo Picasso. The film was one of the most popular in Allen’s career and it got him an Oscar for the best original screenplay.

One of the earliest Allen’s allusions to other films was *Play it again, Sam*, which is a quote from one of the most critically acclaimed films ever made – *Casablanca*. The film itself is inspired but the film as the main hero is led by the imagination of the Humphrey Bogart’s character in *Casablanca*, Rick, to get an attention and being able to seduce women. Another easily spotted allusion in titles in Allen’s film is *A Midsummer Night’s Sex comedy* from 1982. The film is neither a sex comedy nor is it a variation of Shakespeare’s play *Midsummer Night’s Comedy* in the basic sense of the word. It might be implied that the film is inspired by the play but there are not many similarities at all and the inspiration does not seem to go beyond the play on words used in the title.

“He had a great admiration for foreign directors and a lot of foreign movies. He’s never made a secret of that. You get blamed for copying other material or, you know. “You’re doing Bergman”, “You’re doing Fellini!” and “You’re doing 8 ½!”. But we never discussed anything at the level ever, anybody else’s movies [...]” (Woody

Allen, *A Documentary*, 61) are the words of Gordon Willis, the cinematographer of *Stardust Memories*. *Stardust Memories* is an exceptional film by Allen's standards. It is no longer a comedy as were his previous films (e.g. *Bananas*) but in *Stardust Memories* Allen challenged the question of existence, the meaning life and fame. It was something new and something unexpected from a comedian (though a very high-brow comedian), which had been the role in which Allen had presented himself to the audience until then. It could hardly go unnoticed that the film had been clearly inspired by Bergman and Fellini's work. The film was shot in black and white and its composition and shots reminded the work of the two directors. The shots were composed as if it were Bergman's film while the topic – an artistic crisis – was without a doubt inspired by Fellini's unforgettable *8 ½*. The film introduces a famous director on the edge of crisis, artistic as well as personal, and the film ends up as a "film about making a film". Allen's *Stardust Memories* are not be called a classic remake of *8 ½* though. That title would belong to Rob Marshall's film *Nine* (2009) which authentically copies the plot of *8 ½* while Allen takes a distinctive point of view of an artistic crisis in his film that does not lack his unique humour and perspective. Some parallels, tone and plot turns are identical but definitely the films in themselves are very different.

Allen balanced on the borderline between comedy and drama for many years. In 2005 he came with something entirely new – he started to indulge in the genre of thriller. His new film *Match Point* was something no one was expecting from a 70 year old comedian. Everyone thought Allen had already showed everything he got but with *Match Point* he proved his unpredictability. The story is about a handsome young man who is looking for his place among society and gets tempted by wealth and luxury. He starts to date a girl who comes from a very well established family and consequently he gains recognition, a good work position and a chance to be a part of a higher social circle. A hitch come in a form of an incredibly sensual girl who make the young man fall in love and start an affair with her. The dilemma is obvious – should the young man follow his ambitions, become a member of higher society and spend the rest of his life with a woman whom he is fond of but does not love, or should he follow his heart and be with a woman who captured his heart but face the struggle of having a family with her in uncertain conditions? What is the real luck? Does luck mean happiness? The film does not contain any specific allusions but it is fair to assume that it might have been inspired by Theodore Dreiser's classic novel *American Tragedy*. The film does contain

noticeably similar characters and plotline and challenges similar struggles. Allen shifted the story to 21<sup>st</sup> century which caused certain distinctions from the original but the main idea is nearly the same and it can be very well argued that *Match Point* is in fact a remake of Dreiser's novel, only set in different age period.

A very similar pattern can be spotted in the last Allen's film – *Blue Jasmine* (2013). The film does as well remind us of one of the most famous American literary works, in this case not a novel but a drama *A Streetcar Named Desire* written by Tennessee Williams.

### 3. Practical Part

#### 3.1. Parallels between *Blue Jasmine* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*

*Blue Jasmine* got compared to *A Streetcar Named Desire* right after its release. Many critics immediately spotted the similarity between *Blue Jasmine* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* and called *Blue Jasmine* Allen's homage to Williams. Anthony Quinn wrote that "In its basic situation can be heard the distant clang of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, though it's neither pastiche nor reprise, just a quietly respectful tribute." (Quinn). The critics almost never forget to mention the similarity of *Blue Jasmine* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* in their reviews but at the same time they also point out that *Blue Jasmine* is not a mere copy of the play. They highlight the facts that *Blue Jasmine*, unlike *A Streetcar Named Desire*, has the intention to be more satirical (Robey), and is "spinning hilarious but mostly harsh truths about love in the time of financial cholera." (Travers, Rolling Stone).

It did not go without a notice that Cate Blanchett played the famous Blanche DuBois, the leading heroine of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, on stage only a few years before filming *Blue Jasmine*. The play was directed by Liv Ullmann and performed in Sydney Theatre in 2009 and praised even worldwide because the production went on. Ed Pilkington praised Blanchette's performance after its premiere in New York: "A performance that began strongly and ended triumphantly earned Blanchett a standing ovation at the BAM Harvey theatre." (Pilkington). Blanchett's portrayal of Blanche got very popular and memorable and therefore was mentioned in several reviews on *Blue Jasmine* as the two characters – Blanche and Jasmine – seem to be very much akin and the most prominent similarity between *Blue Jasmine* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

### **3.2. Character analysis: comparing the presumed counterparts**

#### **3.2.1. Blanche Dubois**

Blanche Dubois is the main character of Tennessee Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It is one of the most celebrated female characters in the history of theatre. Blanche was portrayed by many famous and reputable actresses. Among the most memorable portrayals would be those by Vivien Leigh in a film version of the play from 1951 directed by Elia Kazan, Jessica Lange from 1995 TV version directed by Glenn Jordan, Glenn Close in Royal National Theatre in 2002 directed by Trevor Nunn (Wolf) and Cate Blanchett in Sydney Theatre in 2009 directed by Liv Ullmann (Pilkington).

Blanche is the older sister of Stella Kowalski. After losing her job and good reputation in her hometown Laurel, Mississippi, Blanche comes to live with her sister Stella who stays with her husband Stanley Kowalski in New Orleans. She has to admit that she lost her and Stella's inheritance, a mansion Belle Reve, and is completely out of money. As the play progresses, Stella reveals more of her secrets, such as she can be blamed for the suicide of her young husband Allan. The tension between her and Stella's husband Stanley grows as well and climaxes in Stanley raping Blanche which leads to her completely losing a grip on reality and being sent to a mental asylum.

If we need to find the Blanche Dubois equivalent in *Blue Jasmine* we can discover her in the main heroine Jasmine French. Both are major characters and the similarity between Blanche and Jasmine is obvious. They have similar life paths and experiences and are also comparable to each other in small details.

##### **3.2.1.1. Blanche Dubois and Jasmine French**

The first look at Jasmine French is during her flight by first class to San Francisco. She is wearing designer clothes and looks very well put together. She has blonde hair and her outfit is in light colours such as white or beige. She has a string of pearls around her neck. She is basically the image of Blanche Dubois as described by Williams "She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district." (Williams, 15).

Right in her first scene Jasmine reveals a few details about her past that are very similar to the details of Blanche's life. Jasmine reveals that her parents are already dead and that her attitude to sex is not averse. It is also clear that Jasmine is detached from reality in a certain way when she tries to impress her surroundings by telling people about her glorious past. As will eventually become clear, her versions of what happened are not truthful and she tends to exaggerate things, most likely in order to get in good graces of people, even those she does not know.

When Jasmine gets to the address she was given, her sister Ginger is not present. That is the same situation Blanche experienced when she arrived at Elysian Fields and Stella was out watching a bowling game (Williams, 15). There are many small details that correspond – Jasmine as well as Blanche was looking for the address with a little slip of paper, arrived with a fancy suitcase and experienced a mild shock at the conditions her sister was living in. Jasmine describes the place as “homey and with casual charm” (Blue Jasmine, 10) by which she obviously means confined, disorderly and by far below her standards of what she was used to as it is showed in a flashback where Jasmine is led in a new apartment which is spacious, modern and in a very exclusive neighbourhood in New York. In following conversation with her sister Jasmine admits she lost her beautiful home in Manhattan, was forced to move to a less grand apartment in Brooklyn and lost all her money (Blue Jasmine, 11) – just like Blanche did lost Belle Reve, stayed in a dubious hotel in Laurel and was out of cash which made her to go and find her sister. Jasmine states honestly that she needs to live with Ginger because she does not have a place she could go, unlike Blanche at first pretends she came only to visit her sister. What connects Jasmine and Blanche back together is Jasmine's statement “I can't be alone, Ginger. I really get some bad thoughts when I'm alone.” (Blue Jasmine, 11) that might be a little bit straightforward than Blanche's “I can't be alone! Because - as you must have noticed – I'm – not very well [...]” (Williams, 23) but expresses the same sentiment that both Jasmine and Blanche are having troubles, mainly of mental nature. Another problem they have in common is drinking. In *Streetcar Named Desire* we watch Blanche since her first step into Stella's home and it is showed explicitly that she is most likely an alcohol addict as the first thing she did when she was left alone in the apartment was to look for liquor and have a drink (Williams, 18). She had another when Stella came to greet her (Williams, 19), without admitting she had drunk already. The almost same thing occurs in *Blue Jasmine*

when Jasmine pours herself a drink while waiting for Ginger. Both Blanche and Jasmine pretend they do not have any drinking problem, Blanche blames the nerves, Jasmine claims her arrival is a reason to celebrate. In both cases the denial is there and their addiction to alcohol is showed all through the play and the film.

Next scene where Jasmine is reminiscent of Blanche is when she and Ginger visit Chili's, Ginger's boyfriend, home and the conversation turns to the topic of Jasmine's ex-husband. Clearly affected Jasmine progresses to describe how exactly her ex-husband Hal died. He committed suicide by hanging himself when he was doing his time in prison. Jasmine goes into details "When you hang yourself, your neck breaks. A lot of people are under the misapprehension you strangle but your neck snaps." (Blue Jasmine, 19-30). That speech reminds us of Blanche's speech when she was describing to Stella how their relatives were dying "Sometimes their breathing is hoarse, and sometimes it rattles, and sometimes they even cry out to you "Don't let me go!"[...] But funerals are quiet, with pretty flowers... You'd never suspect there was the struggle for breath and bleeding" (Williams, 26-27).

Hal's suicide and imprisonment is another similarity between Jasmine and Blanche. Especially when it is Jasmine's fault that Hal got arrested. Blanche used to have a husband Allan and she was very much in love with him. Unfortunately one day she discovered he was a homosexual and had a sexual relationship with one of his older friends. All three of them went dancing that night when Blanche expressed her disgust over Allan's infidelity and his sexual deviance. Her outburst caused Allan running out and killing himself. (Williams, 95-96) Jasmine was married to Hal and was in love with him as well as with the luxury he provided. But similarly to Blanche, Jasmine also found out that her husband was cheating on her and was planning on leaving her for a very young girl. That triggered a response from Jasmine and she called the FBI and pointed them to Hal and his dubious business which subsequently lead to the Hal arrest, imprisonment and eventually his suicide (Blue Jasmine, 85-90). In both cases the two men's suicide is the result of the women's actions took in the heat of the moment of betrayal. The unfortunate decisions did not lead only to the men's deaths but also meant the degradations of Jasmine's and Blanche's lives which gradually led them to live with their sisters.

What was crucial for William's play was the tension between Blanche and Stanley. This relationship is underplayed in *Blue Jasmine*; there is no sexual tension between Jasmine and Chili. What is highlighted instead is Jasmine's contempt for Ginger's general choices of life partners – Augie and Chili - and her urging Ginger that she can do better. That causes the biggest confrontation between Jasmine and Chili when Ginger starts a love affair with someone else. But here is not a single hint of Chili having any romantic interest in Jasmine. Their relationship is flattened to mere intolerance of each other.

Jasmine's relationship with her suitor Dwight is more like the one Blanche has with Mitch. Jasmine took real interest in Dwight only after Dwight showed knowledge of fashion designers and admitting of working in the State Department, which made him interesting to Jasmine as she sensed that Dwight might be doing well financially which is something very appealing to Jasmine. Jasmine starts a relationship with Dwight but, same as Blanche with Mitch, she is not honest with him. Jasmine tells Dwight about her husband and her life but as usually she makes it more romantic than it was in reality. She is aware that she is not being honest "I may have dressed up a few facts, omitted a few unpleasant details." (*Blue Jasmine*, 61) but is oblivious to the fact that by "omitting a few unpleasant facts" she is deceiving Dwight and making impossible for their relationship to become something real. Blanche first noticed Mitch when he was at Stanley's for poker night and immediately finds an interest in him as she saw Mitch as "superior to the others" (Williams, 49). She lets Mitch court her and is even thinking about marrying him in order to be saved and secured. However her dishonesty with him was a reason Mitch stopped seeing her and refused to be involved with her any longer after finding out about her true past.

The loss of the chosen partner hurts both characters fatally. Not only did it mean that they would not be saved by a man and find happiness again in marriage but it also proved that one cannot escape his or her past. Both Jasmine and Blanche believed that by moving to a distant place they could start a new life and forget the past. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* it was Stanley Kowalski who discovered Blanche's secrets and spread the information, causing Mitch to distance himself from Blanche. In *Blue Jasmine* the truth was revealed to Dwight by Augie, Ginger's first husband, who lost a great deal of money because of Hal and Jasmine. As a result of the break ups (and in

Blanche's case also the rape by Stanley) both heroines lose their grips on reality and become insane. What they hold on to is their notion that they are going to live a better life or at least they want to keep that impression on other people. Blanche has in her head that she is going to be picked up by a millionaire Shep Huntleigh but in reality she is being taken to a mental asylum. The destiny is not so clear for Jasmine French. Same as, Blanche she is unable to face the reality or to admit the truth to her sister. She claims that she will still marry Dwight and move out from Ginger's place the same day. The difference is that Stella, Stanley and Eunice knew about the mental asylum and were familiar with the truth of Blanche's destiny, while Ginger and Chili were not aware of the break up between Jasmine and Dwight and therefore believed that Jasmine would marry him. It is left unsaid what exactly will happen with Jasmine. It only becomes clear that her mental health is destroyed so it is possible that she might eventually end up in an institution as well.

All through the film there are more details and symbols that link Jasmine to Blanche, like Jasmine tendency to hide her face under heavy makeup and couture and Blanche's avoidance of light and a special meaning of music and specific songs (more in chapter 3.3.)

### 3.2.2. Stella Kowalski

Formerly Stella Dubois, she is a younger sister of Blanche Dubois. She left her home Belle Reve and married Stanley Kowalski. The marriage meant a social and financial degradation for Stella. She chose to give up her social status to live with a man she loved and moved in with Stanley to a small apartment in New Orleans. Stella gets pregnant just before Blanche arrives.

The Stella of *Blue Jasmine* would be Ginger, Jasmine's step sister. Stella and Ginger are not as similar to each other as Blanche and Jasmine are to each other. First of all Ginger is not Jasmine's real sister. They had different parents but were both abandoned and then adopted and raised by the same parents. The parents' names are not mentioned anywhere in *Blue Jasmine*. Another big difference is that Ginger is already divorced and has two kids. However there are some facts that can link Ginger to Stella quite nicely.

#### 3.2.2.1. Stella Kowalski and Ginger

Stella lives in modest conditions, just like Ginger does. She left her parents and went on to live by herself. Blanche retrospectively sums up her departure by saying that Stella "abandoned Belle Reve" (Williams, 25). There is no explicit reason why Stella did it, but it is probable that she left her home to live with Stanley Kowalski who her family did or would not approve of. Ginger on, the other hand, stated that she did not like her adoptive parents and in her own words "ran away from home as fast as [her] feet could carry [her]" (*Blue Jasmine*, 13).

A prominent feature of Stella's character is her decision to live with someone who is not of the same social status but someone who attracts Stella physically and sexually. A certain sexual freedom is present in Ginger character as well. Its extent is considerably wider but it is not to be forgotten that *A Streetcar Named Desire* was written in 1940s, more than 70 years before *Blue Jasmine*, and society changed considerably over those years. Stella's decision to follow her sexual desires would be a mildly scandalous act in 1940s while nowadays it is something that happens regularly. The sexual freedom on Ginger's character is mirrored not only in her choice of partners who are all earthy and unsophisticated but also in the fact that she got divorced (for no

apparent reason no less) and under Jasmine's influence was in no big stress to start an affair with a guy, Al, whom she barely knew. What is more, she was not wholeheartedly destroyed after finding out Al had a wife and would not participate in a proper relationship with her and got back together with Chili right away.

When Jasmine asked Ginger if she could stay with her, Ginger agreed to help despite the fact that she was not a real sister of Jasmine and had unpleasant memories of her and her husband Hal. Ginger even defended Jasmine in front of Chili which is the same thing Stella did for Blanche in front of Stanley. Ginger and Stella got into rough fights with their partners because of Jasmine/Blanche. The most significant fight between Stella and Stanley resulted from the situation when Stanley got drunk on a poker night and got provoked by Blanche playing a radio. Stella stepped into the conflict, which ended up by her being beaten up by drunken Stanley (Williams, 57). A parallel fight between Ginger and Chili happened in *Blue Jasmine* when Chili finds out about Ginger being friendly towards a strange guy at a party she went to with Jasmine. Chili gets very intense and violent as well and is apparently under the influence of alcohol too. This fight leads to a temporary breakup between Ginger and Chili.

When Jasmine/Blanche arrives to her sister, the sister is facing an important turn in her life. In Stella's case it is a pregnancy with a first child while Ginger was getting ready to move in with Chili and possibly get married. The time span when the sisters are living together is a trial for both Stella's and Ginger's relationship. However at the end of the play and the film it looks like everything returned to the state it was before Blanche/Jasmine arrived.

### **3.2.3. Stanley Kowalski**

Stanley Kowalski is the main male lead character in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Blanche's counterpart. Unlike Blanche he does not have a very detailed background described so the impression of him is could be made only based on his actions during the play. He is more dynamic than Blanche, more dominant and loud. The most famous portrayal of Stanley Kowalski is the one by Marlon Brando in Elia Kazan's film from 1951.

Stanley is Stella's husband. He fought in World War II and met Stella as an officer of US Army. Later he started to work as a salesman with auto-parts. He is a representative of lower working class but he does not feel any less worthy than Blanche or anyone from higher social circles. Stanley has many friends and is very well liked despite his flaws such as drunkenness. He has his roots in Poland but he considers himself rightful US citizen. He stands for traditional gender roles in a family and marriage and therefore he puts himself in a position of the head of his household. He also finds sexual part of a relationship very important. Blanche's arrival to New Orleans disrupts the order of his life which slowly makes him more and more aggressive and in the end he becomes a rapist.

Stanley's part is distributed between more characters in *Blue Jasmine*. There is Augie, Ginger's first husband, Chili, Ginger's current boyfriend and possibly Dr. Flicker who Jasmine worked for as a receptionist.

#### **3.2.3.1. Stanley Kowalski and Augie**

Augie is Ginger's first husband. Augie knew Jasmine only as the glamorous wife of a rich business man who lives in Park Avenue, New York. He won a lottery and wanted to start his own business but Jasmine, Hal and Ginger talked him into investing with Hal. Unfortunately that way Augie lost all his winnings and later on Ginger divorced him. The loss of money that belonged to Augie parallels with the Napoleonic code which Stanley Kowalski repeatedly invokes in reference to the profits which Stella must have (in his mildly paranoid mind) reaped by selling Belle Reve. Stanley claims that what is his wife's is also his and vice-versa (Williams, 40). And therefore Stanley blames Blanche for robbing him and Stella.

Augie plays a vital part also later when Dwight is just about to buy Jasmine an engagement ring. Augie appears out of nowhere and spills the details Jasmine tried to hide from Dwight – the existence of her step-son Danny or the fact that Hal committed suicide. The discovery of Jasmine’s lies leads Dwight to reconsider his offer to marry Jasmine. The same pattern occurs in *A Streetcar Named Desire* where Stanley finds out about Blanche’s reputation in Laurel and tells his friends about it, including Mitch who has been dating Blanche.

### **3.2.3.2. Stanley Kowalski and Chili**

Chili is a temperamental lover of Ginger, full of life and sexual energy. He is the Stanley Kowalski who could not stand Blanche living with them as it disturbed his life order. He is eager for Jasmine to move away so he can continue his relationship with Ginger without any disturbance. Chili reminds us of Stanley who is eager to get rid of Blanche; the Stanley who buys Blanche a bus ticket back to Laurel, Mississippi.

### **3.2.3.3. Stanley Kowalski and Dr. Flicker**

Dr. Flicker is an innocent guy who employs Jasmine but as time goes by he finds an interest in her and asks her on date. The date is more than awkward and it is clear that Jasmine has no interest in the potential relationship. Dr. Flicker tries to catch Jasmine’s interest and goes as far as sexually assaulting Jasmine. It is weak evidence but it is present nonetheless and it can legitimately be compared to Stanley’s rape of Blanche. Jasmine luckily escapes the assault but the scene between Jasmine and Dr. Flicker shows that women are still looked down on even in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **3.2.4. Mitch**

Mitch is a friend of Stanley's. His character is not described in detail. It is said that he has an ill mother who he takes care of. He used to have a wife/girlfriend who died and he has not started a new relationship since then. He starts courting Blanche but after learning about her past he finds her unfit to be his fiancée and abandons her.

Jasmine meets two men in San Francisco. The first one, Eddie, is only a blind date while the second one, Dwight, has a potential to become Jasmine's husband.

##### **3.2.4.1. Mitch and Dwight**

*Blue Jasmine's* Mitch is without a doubt Dwight. He finds an interest in Jasmine because she is pretty, presentable, and has a sense of fashion. He becomes smitten with her but is not hesitant to break up with her after meeting a guy whom he has not seen in his life and who claims something about his would-be fiancée that might not even be true. Yet another parallel with Mitch resides in the fact that there was a woman in Dwight's life but she died.

##### **3.2.4.2. Mitch and Eddie**

There is another character in *Blue Jasmine* who could be compared to Mitch and that character would be Chili's friend Eddie. Chili brings his friend Eddie as a blind date for Jasmine when he is supposed to meet her for the first time. That could be seen as analogical to Stanley and Mitch's friendship and the fact that Blanche first met Mitch when he was at Stanley's for a poker night. However Eddie is a common man who does not spark any interest in Jasmine, probably because of his simple manners and a lack of class.

### **3.2.5. Allan**

Allan was Blanche's young husband. The character itself is not present in the play; the audience gets to know Allan only through Blanche's memories. Blanche starts to talk about Allan to Mitch after one of their dates out. Blanche says that she was in love with him but did not know about the young man's homosexuality. She found out by an accident when she walked into a room where Allan was with one of his friends. Later that day all three of them went to a Casino pretending nothing has changed until Blanche suddenly burst out and expressed her disgust over Allan letting him know she saw him with the other man. Allan ran out of the casino and shot himself.

*Blue Jasmine's* equivalent of Allan would be Jasmine's former husband Hal, whose respective predicament has already been briefly outlined in the previous chapters.

#### **3.2.5.1. Allan and Hal**

Quite unlike Allan, Hal makes an appearance in *Blue Jasmine* by way of flashbacks that show Jasmine's life as Hal's wife, their life in New York or country houses.

Hal was a successful businessman pampering Jasmine with jewellery and luxury. On the other hand Hal, like Allan, also cheated on his wife. Hal was not a homosexual like Allan, yet the results of their respective infidelities, with man or woman, were basically the same. When Jasmine found out about the au-pair Hal was having an affair with, she panicked and called FBI to inform them about Hal's shady business. That phone call made in the heat of passion led to Hal's arrest and consequently to his suicide in jail.

### 3.3. Other parallels

There are other similarities between *Blue Jasmine* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* beside the similarities in characters and their features. The most prominent one is undoubtedly the use of music, specifically one theme song. In the case of *A Streetcar Named Desire* it would be The Varsouviana Polka. The tune reminds Blanche of the night her young husband Allan committed suicide. It was the song they were dancing to the night she told him he disgusted her, which led to his suicide. The tune appears several times in the play, basically every time Blanche is reminded of Allan. It is first heard right in the first scene when Stanley meets Blanche and asks her about her marriage (Williams, 31). The tune represents the fateful night as well as Blanche's remorse and it plays every time Blanche starts to panic or is feeling uncertain and confused. As the play progress the polka tune is heard increasingly often. *Blue Jasmine's* parallel to The Varsouviana Polka is the ballad Blue Moon. Jasmine claims that Blue Moon was the song that was playing when she and Hal, her husband, met (Allen, 2). She never forgets to mention that fact even though it is not very important in the major scheme of things. It is more of an indication that Jasmine is likely to romanticize things and see them more beautiful than they are in reality. Her marriage with Hal is the peak of Jasmine's life and she is obsessed with making an impression on other people so she tends to make things sounds better and more romantic.

It is not only the romantic song Jasmine mentions frequently. She also tends to mention various fashion designers she wears and how wonderful her life used to be and hopefully will be again. The obsession with luxury, wealth and good image is something that links *Blue Jasmine* to *A Streetcar Named Desire* as well. Blanche is anxious about her looks and therefore avoids light so no one can see what she really looks like. Jasmine uses make-up to conceal her real age. The real face of the main heroines is uncovered in the last scenes. There is another interesting parallel before the final shot – the use of a bath. The symbolic use of bath is more obvious in William's drama where it is used several times and stands for cleaning a character, a fresh start. After the bath both heroines come out without their masks and their real faces are seen. In a way both of them refuse to admit the loss of sanity and try to continue in their charades. Blanche still dwells on her looks while Jasmine still tries to impress a stranger by telling her about meeting her husband. The last scenes are similar and very different

at the same time. While Williams' Blanche is met with a definite end of her journey, Jasmine's destiny is uncertain and open to many options.

#### 4. Conclusion

This work is a reaction to critical assumptions that Woody Allen's latest film *Blue Jasmine* is an intertextual tribute to Tennessee Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Allen himself denied that he would intentionally write the film as a rendition of the play however the parallels are very obvious, even to Cate Blanchett who played the leading role of *Blue Jasmine* Jasmine French. Blanchett herself said in an interview that when she first read the script she thought that Allen might have had seen her playing Blanche Dubois on stage in New York before deciding to send her the script. Blanchett admits that there are "echoes of Streetcar and the setup is quite similar" but thinks that "the payoff is entirely allenesque" (Travers, ABC News).

The parallels between the two pieces are very hard to ignore and this work tried to point to as many parallels as possible. The most significant resemblance is in the two main characters – Blanche Dubois and Jasmine French. Other characters share many features as well and that is why this work concentrated mainly on the characters. All the main characters of *A Streetcar Named Desire* – Blanche, Stella, Stanley, Mitch and Allan – have a counterpart in *Blue Jasmine*, and the same can be claimed about many situations presented in the play. Sometimes the tone of the scenes might be different but they still at least loosely correspond and are comparable to the extent that *Blue Jasmine* can be called a creative rendition of Tennessee Williams' play.

The theoretical part of the work focuses on defining postmodernism and intertextuality and tries to find out whether it can be postulated that Allen has worked with literary allusions and intertextuality in his works. Allen's writing in general is very playful and experimental in many ways. This work focused mainly on the use of intertextuality in *Blue Jasmine* to support the notion that Woody Allen can be considered a legitimate representative of postmodernist writing. . It has been proved that Allen uses literary allusions and intertextuality constantly in his works and that *Blue Jasmine* is not the first of Allen's films that would be similar to a previously written classic. The most similar case of Allen's film being unadmittedly inspired by a literary work would be the film *Match Point* whose narrative curve, character typology and motivation are strongly reminiscent of *American Tragedy*, a novel by Theodore Dreiser, and therefore it can be claimed that Woody Allen is a postmodernist writer who has

repeatedly indulged in typical postmodern narrative devices, most obviously in intertextuality.

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