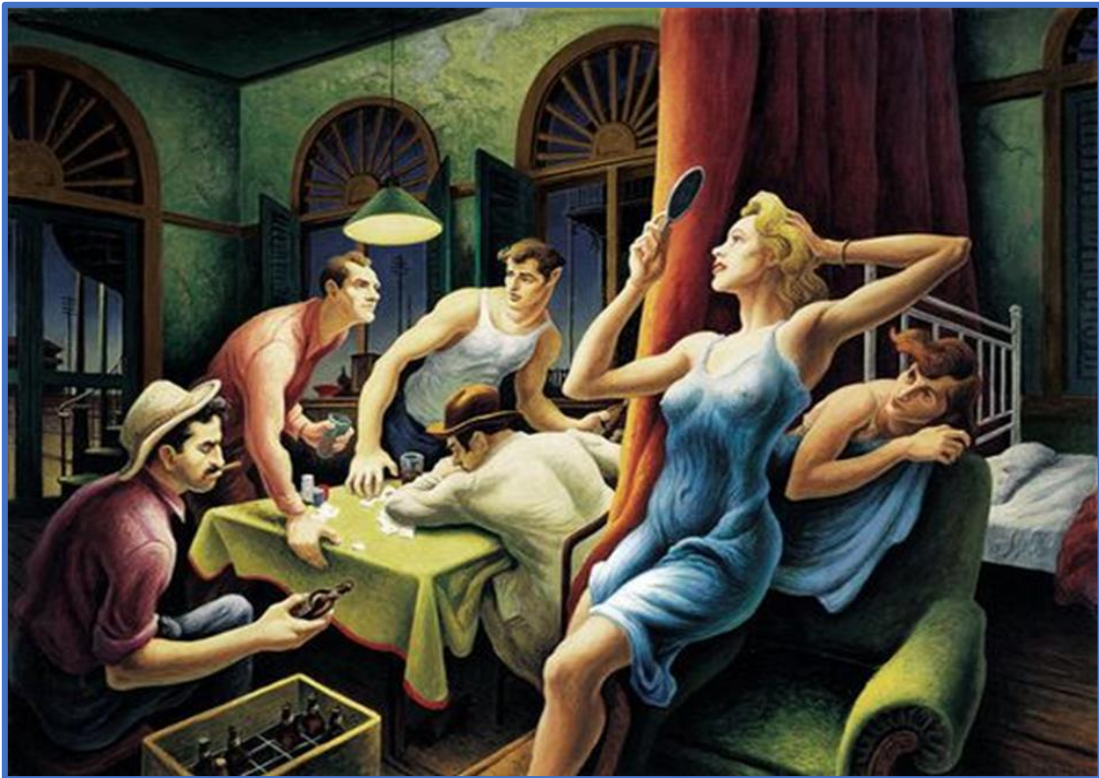


SJWMS English Literature Induction Series:
Part I



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Task 1: Rank the following attributes from most important (1) to least important (12) in a person and explain your view in a sentence.

- Loyalty
- Wealth
- Self-confidence
- Hope
- Power
- Honesty
- Self-respect
- Social skills
- Education
- Perseverance
- Kindness
- Appearance

Task 2: Do you agree or disagree with each of these statements? To what extent and why do you feel that way?

- We all have "skeletons in our closet."
- The man is the king of the household.
- You can know about a person by their astrological sign.
- The hardships of someone's past are often reflected in their future.
- Image is everything.
- We are products of our environment.
- Love is blind.

Challenge: Can you think of any historical and contemporary examples that support your viewpoint?

Task 3: Read the following information on the characteristics of a Tragedy

Greek Philosopher and Polymath Aristotle provides the following as key features (characteristics) of tragedy:

- A tragic hero – a term treated with suspicion by some critics who prefer the more neutral 'protagonist'.
- The protagonist is basically good.
- The protagonist is usually high-born or someone of significance in society ('one who is highly renowned and prosperous', says Aristotle) so that their actions have consequences for the community and not simply for themselves.
- A plot built around a downturn in the protagonist's fortunes often triggered by a tragic flaw or error of judgement on the protagonist's part.
- A progression from order to disorder, harmony to chaos.
- The action of a tragedy seems to unfold with a horrible inevitability.
- Unhappy endings – the tragic catastrophe.
- An antagonist, a figure who stands out against the protagonist.
- The protagonist often has some moment of self-knowledge near the end of the play after an existential crisis of sorts.
- The audience feel sorrow and pity at the end of a tragedy but leave the theatre morally enlightened and ennobled by their vicarious experience of tragic suffering.

Task 4: Engaging with Aristotle

Is it necessary to be rich and powerful in order to be a tragic protagonist? (Think about the main characters in films too e.g. *Harry Potter*, *Batman*).

As Williams' great contemporary Arthur Miller puts it:

'It matters not at all whether a modern play concerns itself with a grocer or a president if the intensity of the hero's commitment to his course is less than the maximum possible.'

To what extent is this true?

'We have to see not only that suffering is avoidable, but that it is not avoided. And not only that suffering breaks us but that it need not break us.' Raymond Williams

To what extent is this true in literature and film? What examples can you think of?

Task 5: Tragedy and Love

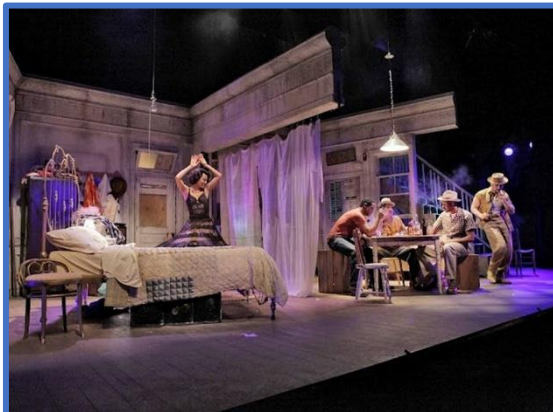
Consider the conventions of a tragic story and then a love story. Are there any elements that intersect or are the two types of story always starkly different?

Task 6: Picture Round - *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Based on the following pictures of a stage adaptation of the play:

What key themes will you study when reading *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

How do you know?





Task 7: The opening stage directions from *A Streetcar Named Desire*

SCENE ONE

The exterior of a two-story corner building on a street in New Orleans which is named Elysian Fields and runs between the L & N tracks and the river. The section is poor but, unlike corresponding sections in other American cities, it has a raffish charm. The houses are mostly white frame, weathered gray, with rickety outside stairs and galleries and quaintly ornamented gables. This building contains two flats, upstairs and down. Faded white stairs ascend to the entrances of both.

It is first dark of an evening early in May. The sky that shows around the dim white building is a peculiarly tender blue, almost a turquoise, which invests the scene with a kind of lyricism and gracefully attenuates the atmosphere of decay. You can almost feel the warm breath of the brown river beyond the river warehouses with their faint redolences of bananas and coffee. A corresponding air is evoked by the music of Negro entertainers at a barroom around the corner. In this part of New Orleans you are practically always just around the corner, or a few doors down the street, from a tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers. This "Blue Piano" expresses the spirit of the life which goes on here.

Two women, one white and one colored, are taking the air on the steps of the building. The white woman is Eunice, who occupies the upstairs flat; the colored woman a neighbor, for New Orleans is a cosmopolitan city where there is 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.

Task 8: Develop your annotations...

- The name Elysian Fields is to do with heaven/paradise which is ironic as the name is at odds with the down-at-heel, modern American urban setting.
- The neighbourhood is poor but not unappealing – 'raffish charm'.
- A sense of the in-between – it is early May and we're in 'the first dark of an evening'.
- Appeals to the senses: sights, sounds, smells, touch.
- The idea of life expressed through Afro-American culture, especially the music (the 'blue piano' becomes a key motif through the play) – is this at odds with the 'atmosphere of decay.'
- The play begins in medias res (in the middle of things).
- The negro woman's first line is probably a dirty joke which builds on the idea of sexuality as key theme, also developed by the sailor's date. The open references sex and alcohol.
- Slight hint that the Four Deuces may be a brothel; certainly, you might be expected to get ripped off there ('that clip joint').
- The vendor's cry 'Red hot!' suggests ideas of desire and hell fire, so both a complement to and an opposite of the spirit of life.

Task 9: Introducing Hamlet

How relevant is Shakespeare today?

Consider the relationships and themes he wrote about; can we apply them to modern day concerns?

Official Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8f39MD3mmzY>

What themes can you detect from the trailer?

Royal Shakespeare Company, Shakespeare Live Celebration:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEs8rK5Cqt8>

What is the argument here?

Task 10: Reflection

So, why do we write?

Why do we study literature?

What power does it have?