

A comparison of the
openings of a
streetcar named
desire and a view
from the brid...



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The opening of a play is naturally one of its most important parts, serving as an introduction to its setting, characters and themes; the best openings also encapsulate both the intentions and style of the playwright. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams describes the set in extreme details, using plastic theatre to create a vivid setting, while Arthur Miller displays a closer focus on characters, themes and dialogue in *A View From the Bridge*. Both of these approaches present the realism necessary for any domestic tragedy to have impact.

A Streetcar Named Desire opens with a lengthy description of the set.

Williams is evidently describing something more conceptual than actually feasible, as he includes detail of “ the L & N tracks and the river”, features of the landscape that would be difficult to capture on a stage, yet more abstractly juxtapose nature with industry, each out of place in this environment, and bear connotations of travel and movement. Both these ideas link to Blanche’s arrival at the Elysian Fields, out of place and finding that life has moved on without her, leaving her a relic of a previous age.

Williams furthermore uses techniques of plastic theatre, building up a soundscape of the “ perpetual blue piano” native to New Orleans, as well as the shouts of a tamale vendor and multiple simultaneous conversations, creating an image of a busy and vibrant community through sound alone.

By contrast, Miller gives a brief and more practical set design in *A View From the Bridge*, with its opening clearly more focused on the introduction of themes and characters. Alfieri’s initial soliloquy essentially gives away the “ bloody course” of the play, setting out the key ideas of justice, and how the Italian and Sicilian form of social justice often clashes with the law. Alfieri’s

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commentary throughout the play provides an outsider's outlook on the events with the benefit of hindsight, and the opening speech of foreshadowing is no different. By including this soliloquy, Miller alters the audience's perception of the events that follow and their opinions of the characters themselves through Alfieri's forgiving and understanding viewpoint.

The characters themselves are described initially, not necessarily in a greater level of detail than the set, but at a greater depth: Miller provides not only details of appearance, but also approximate age and mannerisms, with Alfieri described as “good-humoured and thoughtful”. While Miller's characters are no more or less realistic than Williams', this immediate focus on character and personality demonstrates how critical they are in *A View From the Bridge*. The importance of Eddie in particular is highlighted both figuratively and literally, being spotlighted by Alfieri but also being introduced first; the opening of the play follows Eddie through his relationships, first with his fellow workers and then with his wife and niece. It is in the latter interaction where his protectiveness of Catherine first becomes apparent, against introducing a major recurrent motif in the play – Eddie's inappropriate feelings towards Catherine. While his doubts over her skirt being “too short” could easily be interpreted as natural paternal concern (as he acts as her guardian), Alfieri's soliloquy lends an ominous air of foreboding to the scene.

Although Williams does not focus on character as immediately in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he still uses the opening to present the characters to a similar degree of depth. Stella and Stanley are introduced as indistinguishable from <https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-of-the-openings-of-a-streetcar-named-desire-and-a-view-from-the-bridge/>

the people around them; they are as likely to be main characters as Eunice and Mitch. Despite this, enough information is provided to intimate the nature of their relationship. Stanley is clearly the patriarchal head of the household and main provider, bringing the “meat” home to Stella, and his physicality is evident from the action of “heaving” the package of meat at her. It is less clear who the dominant character is, if any; while Stella is physically above Stanley on the upper floor, suggesting dominance, and tells him, “don’t holler at me” – the imperative command indicative of power – she does not hesitate to follow behind him to the bowling alley, a physical display of deference where she could have caught up to him or not followed at all. The degree to which Stella and Stanley appear unremarkable is in strong juxtaposition to Blanche’s introduction, dressed “as if she were arriving at a summer tea or garden party”, all in white and initially totally silent. From her first appearance she is a character incongruous with her surroundings, seeming lost and confused. She is also, like Eddie, the clear protagonist: the extent to which she stands out simply by her manner and appearance sets her apart from the characters introduced thus far, drawing the attention of the audience.

The openings of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *A View From the Bridge* are indeed presented very differently, yet ultimately have the same function. Williams chooses to create a vivid sensory image of his setting, with a semi-conceptual description of the set and opening dialogue that serves to bring about a specific atmosphere, while Miller immediately introduces his themes and characters, predominantly focusing on Eddie. Despite these contrasting styles, both openings serve as introductions to the complex personalities of

each play's main characters, and begin to guide the audience through the ideas and concepts explored through the following events, as well as crucially creating the realism needed for the audience to emotionally connect to the two tragedies.