

Streetcar named desire essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Compare and contrast the way the a struggle for power is presented in ‘ A Streetcar Named Desire’ by Tennessee Williams and ‘ Making History’ by Brain Friel. How far do you agree that the struggle for power has a more devastating effect on Friel’s O’Neill than Williams’ Blanche?

Power is definable as the ability of doing or accomplishing something, it is used as one of the main themes in each play in different ways. Both Friel and Williams use the theme of power to show the struggle in society and to define the main protagonists in the play.

Making History was set in Ireland in August 1591. The play extends over a period of 20 years, from 1591 to 1611, the Renaissance period in Ireland. This saw England become an unified state and gave England the task of moulding the world in its own image, using its new found power as a nation. During this time tensions between the Irish and English were high due to religion. These factors are shown throughout the play as we see the problems faced by the characters within the power struggle for religious identity. The way O’Neill acts shows his uncertainty of power with question after question suggesting weakness and reliance. On the other hand, A Streetcar Named Desire was set in New Orleans in the later 1940s. Many of the major themes of A Streetcar Named Desire are embodied in the history and culture of New Orleans. The play is set to begin after the Second World War and also after the American Civil War.

There was high recognition to class differences and also race differences during this time period. Blanche’s character being compared to a moth hint at Blanches fragility and also link to women’s vulnerability and the way they

were seen as lower in society in the eyes of power at the time. Other factors such as Blanche's mental state of mind, which is slowly unveiled throughout the course of the play, show how she has trouble dealing with the ugly reality of the outside world and how she is threatened when trying to deal with the recurring truth. Williams' chooses Blanche and Stanley as two opposing forces of power to illustrate a power struggle throughout the play. The power struggle between Stanley and Blanche conveys ideas about gender such as the primitive nature, aggression and brutality of the masculine and the vulnerability of the feminine.

The first time we meet Friel's O'Neill he is described as ' a private and sharp minded man'. His changeability as a character is both his strength and his weakness which is shown through his double sided identity which is presented through his change of accent when specifically scripted. He speaks in a Tyrone accent when he is asserting his Gaelic identity, that Ireland is ' my country'. O'Neill speaks in ' an upper class English accent in his public role and when he wanted to keep his feelings under control. His interchange of the two accents could indicate to the audience a sense of homelessness and a displacement from both Gaelic and English cultures. However, when we first meet Williams' Blanche she is perceived as an insecure, dislocated character and is already a broken woman in due to problems in her past. Throughout the play we see two sides to Blanche: the person who she wants people to think she is, and the person who she really is. Her appearance is incongruous to the setting and there is something uncertain about her manner, this shows how she might be identified as mysterious and out of place. In the first scene we are also made aware of

Blanche's drink problem which she inadequately covers up and it does not go unnoticed either by her sister or by her brother-in-law. She could be portrayed to the audience as rude, self-centered and socially awkward and it is easy to take an instant disliking to her character.

Symbolism is the use of something to represent a quality or concept on the basis of some similarity between the symbol and thing it represents. The planting of the seeds (Scene 1, p. 21) 'Don't plant the fennel near the dill or the two will cross-fertilize'. This line compares the plantation of the seeds to the mixing of the English and Irish. Symbolism in 'A Streetcar Named Desire' is one of the key factors which illustrates the character of Blanche. The Chinese paper lantern hiding the naked light bulb is a symbol of Blanche's longing for what she calls 'magic' (Scene 9, p. 72), the dressing up of the ugly reality which indicates the writer's intention to show Blanche as weak and powerless against the light. Williams' also uses music to convey a message. The Varsouviana polka recalls the tragedy in Blanches past and Williams' chooses to have the music ongoing through the play at selected points to mark a change of mood.

There are significant events that help us form a view of power struggle of O'Neill and help us, the audience, form an opinion on the character. A key scene is when O'Neill surrenders. The effect of the previous events has left O'Neill in an unhappy and unstable state of mind. There is also a key scene when O'Neill is forced to move which shows his lack of power as he backs down. In 'A Streetcar Named Desire', the rape scene is one of the main scenes that shows the ongoing power struggle between Blanche and Stanley. Blanche has been weakened by Stanley's dominance and is now the

powerless victim at this point in the play. The events throughout the play slowly draw the power away from Blanche; Stanley's revelations of Blanche's past which force her to admit to the truth, Mitch's rejection of her as a liar and his attempt of raping her and finally Stanley's violation of her. All these events push her to breaking point and her mind gives way and leads her to powerless insanity.

The audience are left with the perception and image that O'Neill has been defeated. He is visually seen as a sad old man but mentally he still has some dominance and still strongly believes that history should be told truthfully as he feels that otherwise his identity will be lost in history. Blanche could be seen as the victim of the play and the audience may sympathize her. By the end of the play she loses all power completely and because of this I feel the struggle for power has a much more devastating effect on Williams' Blanche than on Friel's O'Neill.