

A streetcar named desire and brooklyn: comparing ways toibin and williams portray...

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Toibin and Williams are writers of literary texts from two different periods of time, although they're set in similar eras, they were written decades apart; 'A Streetcar Named Desire' played and set in 1947 and 'Brooklyn' set in the early 1950s but published in 2009, respectively. Both writers highlight the concerns, issues, and attitudes towards women in society, with significance placed on how they exert power. However, there is no surprise that both female protagonists do this in different ways, as both writers are influenced by the society in which they are writing in – even if it's unintentional to an extent.

Toibin carefully sets 'Brooklyn' in 1950s Ireland, a time when society was beginning to develop. There was depletion in opportunities for women, following the war, and traditional societal expectations were still imposed on them, despite the various changes that had been implemented. Toibin's heroine, Eilis, is a metaphor of Ireland's gradual progress and her transformation foreshadows the growth of women in the future.

To illustrate this, Toibin begins his novel in the family home of Eilis with no male guardian figures mentioned: "As their mother's pension was small, they depended on Rose, who worked in the office" 1. Almost immediately readers admire Rose's strength, as she must work to make ends meet, despite having "two older brothers" 2 working in "Birmingham" – with the youngest following the two right after; especially because it was difficult to survive in a society that required women to be dependent on men, in which Rose becomes the breadwinner and supports her mother and sister despite the limited job opportunities for women.

It is apparent that the protagonist, Eilis, admires the women around her thus her own exertion of power later, possibly derives from this. Some critics, such as Dr. Jennifer Minter argue that " both Rose and her mother control her life" 3. This prevents Eilis to be powerful – as Toibin writes " Eilis felt like a child" 4 pre emigration, her decisions and actions are advised and observed by her mother and sister hence it remains difficult for Eilis to find her autonomy and power. However, this view seems reductive, as other contemporary critics point out: choice in " appearance exhibits mental capacity".

At the start of the novel, Eilis is " aware that she didn't make enough effort with her appearance" 5, the term " appearance" symbolises the treatment of individuals within society – women would dress beautifully to attract a potential partner or spouse, in order to stabilise their future. Therefore, the fact Eilis chose not to make " enough effort", suggests she's been transcending, and challenging barriers enforced on her, from the outset.

Similarly, in ' A Streetcar Named Desire' Williams' makes a " critical plea for society to address the predicament of marginalized women in a cruel and insensitive world" 6. Williams' characterises Blanche as the ' Southern Belle' – a name associated with power. Just being one elevated your status, as the roots of this name was cemented in the aristocratic wealth that people of the mid-20th century were hungry for. Aristocracy meant power and power meant security.

However, unlike Eilis' promised power in her future, Blanche holds power in the past. Due to the rise of industrialisation, Blanche loses almost everything, Belle Reve, her family, her wealth and her possessions, but struggles to accept that she no longer has power. Arguably, when Blanche states " You've got to be soft and attractive. And I - I'm fading now!" 7she's referring to her loss of power.

The adjective " soft" is metaphorically a depiction of her sensitivity and fragility as well as who she was in the past. The word " soft" may also be implied in its physical term; as she ages, her skin no longer looks youthful and she cannot capture the attention of men so easily. Furthermore, the verb " fading" may be symbolic of her temporary power. She can't have lasting power because beauty eventually fades and men are usually only attracted to young beautiful women.

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Tennessee William's protagonist, Blanche, shapes herself into a powerful independent woman despite the lack of support she receives from her own immediate family. Not only do the men abandon her, but also her sister Stella – through compulsion. The quotation, " our improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged epic fornications – to put it plainly!" 8illustrates the disinterest the men had for the women in their family.

The repetition of the word " and" shows the great amount of immorality they committed and how their family's decline in fortune was a result of the

debauchery committed by the male members over the generations. Her desperation and struggle are further highlighted in this quotation: " Which of them left us a fortune? Which of them left a cent of insurance even?"

9Blanche was left to survive alone, suffer the criticisms of society and pay for the expenses of the generation of immoral men before her.

She uses the negativity around her to keep pushing and tries to become stronger but fails to do so. She has no base to build on because it has been destroyed before she could even rise on her feet. In contrast, Eilis becomes empowered through the support of her family. Unlike Blanche, Eilis gets support from men such as her brothers and Father Flood as well as her sister Rose. The reason she progresses into a powerful woman is because of the opportunity Father Flood placed her with.

Toibin writes: " she had expected that she would find a job in the town, and then marry someone and give up the job and have children", Father Flood has already changed her future and this is evident from the past participle " expected". Eilis had no hope ordreamsas this was a result of the strict boundaries placed upon women. The phrasal verb " give up" reflects the issue women had: although they were able to secure a " job", the power they got wasn't promised for eternity.

Society, up until the late 20th century, had a ground-rule requiring women to get married to a man. In ' Brooklyn', Eilis disregards this ordinance by denying the idea of getting married – she has no intention of relying on a man and chooses to prioritise hereducationand futurecareer. Cotemporary '

Guardian' critic, Christopher Tayler, claims: " The word " love" is applied more often to Eilis's feelings about her room or her textbooks than to the men in her life." This view demonstrates progression from the ordinary preassigned domestic roles, to a shift towards male activities and interests.

This historical discriminatory is evident in the movie adaptation directed by John Crowley in which Eilis is the only female in her night-classes. Eilis " realized, in his mind, he was going to marry her and she was going to have his children", however " his aim to marry her, was a huge misunderstanding". The possessive past participle " was", signifies the lack of choice Eilis is presented with and how it was expected for a woman to accept a man's marriage proposal despite what the woman wanted.

It was seen as a ticket to elevate her social status and the respect and power she would be given. This opinion of Eilis derives from her powerful role model, her sister Rose, who " had a much better life than many of her former school mates who were seen to be pushing prams through the streets" 10.

On the other hand in Tennessee Williams ' A Street Car Named Desire', Blanche yearns for a stabilizing force in her life to protect her from a world that disregards a financially challenged, unmarried woman who is approaching middle age. The tactics Blanche uses, to attract her potential husband Mitch, signals doom for her relationship. Blanche's assertion " I want to deceive him enough to make him want me" 11 highlights her immoral ways of approaching and dealing with her problems.

She has already diminished her power because of her past, she chose to survive off temporary sexual power. Additionally, another contrasting view can be seen through Blanche's sister Stella. Despite fulfilling society's preconceptions of femininity, through her passive largely domestic role, she accepts the shift in power from the South to the North. Her obedience can be perceived as a form of power.

Both writers, Toibin and Williams, portray the protagonist with a goal of gaining power. However, the two characters are presented with obstacles that either forbid them from gaining power or only being able to achieve it for a short period of time.