

The clash of cultures in the play?

On the surface the play presents the inability of Blanche to come into terms with the changing reality around her, creating a clash between her and Stanley as well as the fast-changing New Orleans, which could be seen as an allegorical representation of the conflict between the decaying ideals of the Old South, overwhelmed by the emerging culture of the New America. Furthermore, one may argue that the triumph of the New America is symbolically represented in the death of Allan Grey and the tragic end to Blanche's character. Arthur Miller employs the genre of Social Realism to pass on a similar image of the emerging power of the capitalist values of 1950s America, leading to the death of Willy, who cannot cope with the changing values of his time.

The opening scene of "A Streetcar Named Desire", presents the power of the emerging New South- "atmosphere of decay" and "raffish charm", giving New Orleans a rough and lively spirit, further seen in the expressionist techniques- "overlapping of voices" and the intrusive "Red hots! Red hots!", symbolising passion, building tension within the setting to introduce the dominant character- Stanley. The emergence of Stanley and his macho presence is symbolised through "Meat!", which he throws at Stella, establishing the idea of the man being the provider as well as hinting his predatorial sexuality and dominance. Furthermore, the motif of red and its symbolical power to the play is intensified in the image of the "red-stained package", adding to Stanley's primitive nature and potentially foreshadowing his cruelty and his brutality. On the other hand, the "delicate beauty" of Blanche seems to not only be fragile in nature, implying its decaying state, but it is also a stark contrast with the setting, suggested by Williams himself- "incongruous to the setting", foreshadowing its fall, overwhelmed by the rough nature of working-class New Orleans. Furthermore, the colours associated with her- "white fluff, white" and "pearls" are ones of purity and innocence, images contrasting with those associated with Stanley, images that stand for the aristocracy of the Old South. However, the fatality of the clash between the past and the present is most explicitly seen in Blanche's hysterical monologue about "the loss, the loss" of Belle Reve, dominated by the pathetic fallacy of death. The death of the Old South is seen as a struggle, allegorically presented in the metaphor "long parade to the graveyard", presenting the journey of decay. Furthermore, one may see the voices of the dying DuBois- "Don't let me go! Don't let me go!" as Blanche's subconsciousness not being able to let go of the past, adding to her inability to adapt to the present, accelerating the clash of the two conflicting cultures. This is further seen in her emotive- "fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it", emphasising on the importance Belle Reve has for her existence. One may even argue that her trunk is an allegory of her past that she brings with her of as presented in the 1950s movie adaptation of the play- following her, which may hint that her past is always in her consciousness, which Stanley does a "thorough job" of uncovering, using the power of reality and the brutality of the New America. Furthermore, the idea of the Napoleonic code is rooted in the need of inheritance and power, used by the plantation owners to pass on their wealth in the family, and ironically used by Stanley to claim the "great place with the white columns" or the "place in the country", idolizing Belle Reve as a sign of power and something to be conquered. The emotive exchange between Stanley and Blanche presents this clash of the New America wanting to conquer and overpower the Old South, seen in Stanley's straightforward manners- "Where's the papers?" and "Don't pull that stuff", implying his desire to own Belle Reve, ultimately leading to the metaphorical and spatial sinking of Blanche under his power. Similarly, Willy also has ideas of conquering- "New England man", but they ultimately fail as his job as a salesman is decreasing in relevance, something to which Miller may be empathetic as he himself worked as a salesman during The Depression.