

Introduction

In both Marjane Satrapi's graphic memoir *Persepolis* and Tennessee Williams' modern tragedy *A Streetcar Named Desire*, power and authority are exercised through the enforcement of rigid social hierarchies and the manipulation of class disparities. While Satrapi documents the Iranian Revolution's shift from upper-middle-class stability to a state of vulnerability under authoritarian rule, Williams dramatizes the clash between a decaying Southern aristocracy and a burgeoning, aggressive working-class realism. Both authors suggest that authority is effectively exercised when it penetrates the private sphere—regulating not just the state, but domestic spaces and the very language individuals use to define themselves. Ultimately, these works reveal that the exercise of power leads to a profound "rift," where the individual's identity is either forcibly transformed through a "moral awakening" or tragically dismantled by "psychological unraveling".

The Domestic Exercise of Authority and Class Contempt

The authors first establish that authority is most effectively exercised when it is internalized within the home, creating "quiet" hierarchies that dictate human connection. In *Persepolis*, Satrapi explores how class divisions operate even within a family that ostensibly values equality. Through the **visual juxtaposition** of dining spaces in her graphic panels, she depicts the contrast between her family's table and the isolation of their maid, Mehri, who "was forbidden to eat with us". This visually heightens the "emotional and social distance" between classes, proving that authority is exercised through the normalization of inequality as a "moral order". **Building upon this idea of domestic hierarchy**, Williams illustrates in *Streetcar* how power is asserted through the **derogatory diction** Blanche uses to maintain her fading authority. By calling Stanley "sub-human," a "Polack," and "ape-like," she utilizes animalistic imagery to turn "social difference into moral superiority". While Marji's family exercises power through **spatial separation**, Blanche exercises it through **linguistic dehumanization**; however, both reflect a "class-based contempt" that serves as a psychological defense against a changing social order.

Systematic Oppression and Symbolic Control

Transitioning from the private sphere to broader institutional structures, both texts illustrate how authority uses symbols to manipulate the vulnerable and maintain control. In *Persepolis*, the theocratic regime exercises power through the **"plastic key painted gold,"** a repulsive symbol given to lower-class boys to "brainwash" them into enlisting for the war. Satrapi uses this as an **allusion** to the "key of life" in ancient Egypt, highlighting the "lengths to which the government will go" to weaponize religious significance for political gain. **In a comparable exercise of institutionalized dominance**, Stanley Kowalski asserts his patriarchal authority through raw physical presence and assertive rhetoric. His demand that "Every man is a king!" is reinforced by the **imperative command** "Don't forget it!", which leaves no room for female autonomy. While Satrapi's regime uses **symbolic allure** to exploit the poor, Williams' Stanley uses **assertive masculinity** to silence the women in his household. In both instances, the authors demonstrate that those in power demand submission as an inherent right, whether through the "plastic keys" of a state or the "colored lights" of a modern household.

The Fragility of Identity: The "Moth" vs. The "Rebel"

The effectiveness of such authority is further revealed through the contrasting ways the protagonists respond to being "crowded out" by their environments. Blanche is introduced as a "gentile, Southern Belle" described as a **"moth,"** a symbol of vulnerability attracted to a "destructive flame". Her resistance to Stanley's authority manifests as an "escape from reality" into a world of "magic" and "illusion". This is visually represented by the **paper lantern**, which acts as a "thin barrier" shielding her from the "harsh, male-dominated reality". **In stark contrast**, Satrapi presents Marji as a young girl who "pushes outward," challenging the strictures imposed on her. When Marji is told she must wear the veil, her narration—"We didn't really like to wear the veil... we didn't understand why we had to"—reflects a spirit of inquiry rather than submission. Satrapi's use of **stark black-and-white contrast** heightens the sense of "ideological rigidity" closing in on a child who refuses to internalize the state's imposed identity. Thus, while Blanche "collapses inward" under societal pressure, Marji asserts agency even within a repressive environment.

The "Breaking Point" and Final Displacement

Ultimately, the true effectiveness of power is seen in the total "displacement" of the individual at the climax of both works. In *Persepolis*, the regime's authority is so

total that it forces "internalized oppression," where Marji's mother instructs her to lie: "If anyone ever asks you... say you pray". This **imperative tone** underscores the loss of individual freedom, where citizens must "perform piety" for survival. **Equivalently**, Blanche's displacement in *Streetcar* is psychological; after her "aristocratic identity" is destroyed by Stanley, she is reduced to a state of "physical inertness". Her final line, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers," carries a **tragic irony**, revealing that her "kindness" is actually exploitation in a collapsing class system. For Satrapi, the exercise of power leads to a "moral awakening" where Marji realizes that "the difference between social classes" is the root of both personal shame and national revolution. For Williams, it leads to a "psychological unraveling" where the "collapse of aristocratic illusion" gives way to Stanley's "brutal honesty and dominance".

Conclusion

In conclusion, Satrapi and Williams demonstrate that power is a social "mores" that dictates the boundaries of human connection and personal dignity. Through **stark graphic panels** and **expressionistic dramatic techniques**, both authors show that authority is most effective when it strips individuals of their agency and replaces truth with either "state-mandated performance" or "delusional escapism". While Marji's recognition of class inequality leads to awareness, Blanche's sense of self-worth is "eroded" as her status slips away. Ultimately, both *Persepolis* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* serve as haunting reminders that when individual identity clashes with an entrenched social order, a tragic transformation is inevitable.