

'As the action of the play unfolds, dramatic tension is produced by the contrast between concealment and revelation.' Compare at least two plays you have studied in the light of this statement.

Within Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* dramatic tension is created through the contrast between concealment and revelation. The juxtaposition of concealment and revelation functions in a number of different ways in that dramatic irony is created through the revelation of facts to the audience, while they are concealed from the characters, equally the contrast between a fact being revealed to one character yet withheld from another is also frequently used to create tension. Moreover, the presence of self-concealment resulting in self-deception, in addition to the delayed disclosure of significant details to the audience by the characters serves to further increase the dramatic tension within the play.

Comment [K1]: This opening sentence, although clear, does little more than repeat the statement in the question. It would be best to get more quickly into the 'how' rather than just stop at 'it does'.

Comment [K2]: List of four clear points which are subsequently used to structure the essay.

Comment [K3]: The term 'self-concealment' is not very convincing as it sounds like too desperate an attempt to create a technical term that relates to the question. It would be better to use just 'self-deception' and point out that this is an example of both realisation and concealment: the character must at some level realise the truth but tries to live in some way as if the truth is still concealed from them.

Comment [K4]: Outstanding opening sentence which makes the topic for this paragraph exceedingly clear.

Comment [K5]: Clear reference back to the terms of the question.

Comment [K6]: Connectives used to join ideas together and develop points further.

Both Williams and Sophocles employ the contrast between the revelation of central facts to the audience and the ignorance of the characters as a tool to by which to produce dramatic tension. Within *A Streetcar Named Desire* Blanche's relationship with Mitch is seen to be marked by this contrast due to the presence of Blanche's statements such as, 'I guess it is just that I have... old-fashioned ideals!' before she proceeds to 'roll her eyes knowing that he cannot see her face'. The combination of this phrase and action serves to create dramatic tension in that the audience, aware of Blanche's true nature, may feel sympathy towards Mitch and fear that he is being manipulated by Blanche due to the fact that he remains ignorant of her lies and deception.

Comment [K7]: This complex explanation is much better than the hurried use of 'self-concealment' earlier.

Comment [K8]: Great smooth use of quotations.

Comment [K9]: Again good clear link back to the question using key terms.

In addition, Williams evokes dramatic tension among the audience through the use of concealment and revelation regarding Stanley's rape of Blanche. The conclusion of scene ten explicitly alludes to the rape through phrases such as 'All right, let's have some rough house' and 'We've had this date with each other from the beginning!' thus allowing the audience to ascertain reality. However, this is juxtaposed with Stella's denial of the rape in scene eleven when she states 'I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley!' Therefore, through self-deception, Stella effectively conceals the truth from herself thus enabling the contrast between revelation and concealment to emerge. This is seen to create dramatic tension in that it evokes fear among the audience as they realise that Stella will continue to return to Stanley thus creating an unbreakable and never-ending cycle in which the protagonists remain perpetually doomed as a result of their inability or lack of desire to see the truth.

Comment [K10]: Clear connectives used to indicate comparisons between the texts.

Comment [K11]: Good sense of personal evaluation.

Furthermore, Blanche's continual drinking is disclosed to the audience from the first scene of the play during which Blanche 'springs up to the closet after catching sight of a whisky bottle and after 'toss[ing] it down' she makes an effort to conceal the truth from Stella by 'carefully replac[ing] the bottle.' Throughout the play, Stella remains ignorant of Blanche's problem and this contrast between Stella's ignorance and the audience's as well as Stanley's awareness that 'some people rarely touch it, but it touches them often' creates dramatic tension. This is due to the fact that Blanche's secrecy and concealment of her drinking allude to her subsequent lies and concealment thus enabling the audience to witness the true nature of her character and become more wary of her actions.

Similarly, Sophocles employs the contrast between the revelation of information to the audience and its consequential concealment from the characters in order to create dramatic irony in addition to dramatic tension. It is apparent, however, that the dramatic irony utilised by Sophocles is on a much grander scale to that which is employed by Williams in that the traditional Greek audience would have been aware of the story prior to seeing the play. Therefore dramatic tension is created as the audience, as a result of their foreknowledge, is forced to watch the blissfully

ignorant characters such as Oedipus and Jocasta follow their fate. This dramatic tension is exacerbated by the fact that the audience is powerless to stop the events from unfolding and hence the inescapability of fate is emphasised. In addition, it could be argued that this contrast further created dramatic tension amongst Greek audience as they may have feared that they would succumb to the same fate.

Comment [K12]: While this is true, it would be better to have included quotations in this paragraph rather than introduce the whole point and then show the evidence later

This contrast between the revelation of facts to the audience and the concealment of those details from the characters is omnipresent and essential to the play. Within the first episode, upon hearing that the plague is a result of the failure to avenge Laius's murder, Oedipus vows to fight this fight, and follow out every clue, seeking to seize the author of this murder as for [his] own father. The dramatic irony that is present within these phrases, in that Laius is actually Oedipus's father, serves to create dramatic tension as the audience realise that through his rashness Oedipus is embarking upon a downward spiral which will lead to his downfall. In addition, his vow to dispel this plague-spot is marked with irony as the audience realises that his actions will result in his downfall as he will eventually be exiled by his own decree.

Comment [K13]: It should be made clear why they might have thought this and, indeed, that this fear is an essential part of Aristotle's definition of tragedy

Moreover, Jocasta and Oedipus's joy when it is revealed that Polybus is Death's subject in the grave serves to increase dramatic tension. As a result of this revelation both Jocasta and Oedipus believe that the prophecy that Oedipus would kill his father has been rendered false. However, the audience is aware that Laius was Oedipus's father and hence that the prophecy remains true. Therefore the contrast between the concealment of truth to the characters regarding Oedipus's father and the audience's awareness of reality serves to increase dramatic tension in that the audience realise that Oedipus's joy, expressed through phrases such as 'Heigh ho!' will be short lived. Furthermore, the fact that Oedipus believes that he is so close to breaking free of the prophecy increases the tragedy of the situations and hence the dramatic tension as the audience, in contrast, are fully aware of the inevitability of his fate.

Comment [K14]: Clear link back to the question. This should happen at least once a paragraph

In addition, both Williams and Sophocles explore the juxtaposition of a fact being revealed to one character, yet concealed from another, in order to create dramatic tension. Williams utilizes the door of the bathroom as a barrier to create different levels of concealment and revelation during scene seven of 'A Streetcar Named Desire'. During the scene Stanley enlightens the audience as well as Stella with regards to Blanche's lies and the fact that there was practically a town ordinance passed against her. This is in stark contrast to Blanche's blissful ignorance which the audience is aware of via her background singing of songs including phrases such as 'But it wouldn't be make-believe if you believe in me!' This contrast serves to increase dramatic tension in that the audience is made painfully aware of Blanche's ignorance of Stanley's attack on her character. Moreover, the audience is able to realise the consequences of Stanley's revelation on Blanche's relationship with Mitch and may, hence, feel sympathy towards her.

Comment [K15]: Nice detailed explanation of this complex point & clear link back to the question!

Comment [K16]: Clearing linking phrase to indicate that a new point is being introduced & note this is the second point raised in the introduction

Furthermore, the concealment of facts from other characters is emphasised during the last scene of 'A Streetcar Named Desire'. Within this scene, Stella says 'I just told her that we'd made arrangement for her to rest in the country. She's got it mixed up in her mind with Shep Huntleigh'. Stella is seen to encourage the concealment of these facts from Blanche through the emphasis that Blanche is going on vacation as opposed to the fact that she is going to an asylum. The revelation of this detail to Blanche is seen when she suddenly gasps. It is evident that the pathos created by the contrast between her realisation of the truth in opposition to its prior concealment from her creates dramatic tension as it evokes sympathy from the audience as they realise the fragile nature of Blanche and may feel that her fate is unjust.

Comment [K17]: Long detailed explanations that take care to link points carefully back to the question

Similarly, within *Oedipus Rex* the realisation of the truth by Jocasta, the Old Man and Tiresias is juxtaposed with their earlier obliviousness and the ignorance of Oedipus. After becoming aware of the truth Jocasta states 'For heaven's sake, if you care for your own life, don't seek it!' This is directly contrasted with her earlier attempts to deny the truth when she stated 'nothing in human life turns on the soothsayer's art' as well as Oedipus' continued desire for revelation which is evident as he 'will not hearken . . . not to know the whole.' This contrast creates dramatic tension due to the fact that the audience, due to their foreknowledge of the story, witness the characters unwittingly taking another step closer to fulfilling their destiny.

Comment [K18]: Within points simple one word connectives are used to link ideas together

Moreover, the Old Man's realisation of the truth is emphasised through the phrase, 'O, I am at the horror, now, to speak!' which contrasts with the fact that the truth continues to be concealed from Oedipus who maintains his desire to know everything stating 'And I to hear. But I must hear no less.' This increases the dramatic tension considerably in that the audience is once again powerless to stop Oedipus from discovering the truth and, hence, realizing the inevitability of his fate.

Comment [K19]: It is not entirely clear that this is the same kind of concealment as discussed above. Oedipus' ignorance is not the same as the truth being intentionally concealed from Blanche by Stella

In addition, both *Oedipus Rex* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* are seen to encapsulate elements of self-concealment which are contrasted with the audience's awareness and ability to ascertain the truth. Within *A Streetcar Named Desire* Blanche is seen to embark upon a path of self-deception and thus the concealment of the truth from the others as she attempts to 'misrepresent things' and 'tell what ought to be the truth' due to the fact that she 'does not want realism' and instead tries to create magic. This self-deception is further seen through the symbol of the paper lantern through which she attempts to conceal her true age and appearance. This self-deception is contrasted with the unraveling of the truth through the question of her lies by Stanley which eventually render her speechless during the rape scene when she can only say 'Oh!' This serves to increase and create dramatic tension due to the fact that it emphasises the fragile nature of Blanche. The pathos of this situation evokes sympathy for Blanche and indicates the fine line between Blanche's accepting reality and her succumbing to her fantasy world and thus becoming insane.

Comment [K20]: Again, this just seems to be a repetition of the earlier point about dramatic irony

Comment [K21]: Clear linking phrase to indicate the next main point to be considered. The use of 'Self concealment' as a quasi technical term is still dubious

Furthermore, self-concealment is also apparent within *Oedipus Rex* through the presence of the riddles. Through Tiresias' statement 'Yourself the abominable contamination' he reveals the truth, however, Oedipus fails to recognise it and through self-concealment hears without fully understanding. This creates dramatic tension as the audience realise that it was Oedipus who was responsible for Laius' death and, therefore, 'realises how close he is to preventing himself from discovering the truth.'

Comment [K22]: This is not true. He does recognise and understand what Tiresias is saying (that's why he is angered and accuses Tiresias and Creon of trying to overthrow him) he just doesn't believe that it's true.

Finally, Williams alone is seen to utilise the delayed revelation of details to the audience by the characters in order to create dramatic tension. Prior to Blanche's revelation that she felt responsible for her husband's death the audience were unaware of the truth and thus 'mystified by some of her actions'. Therefore the contrast between this revelation and the audience's prior ignorance regarding Blanche's husband serves to increase 'dramatic tension' due to the fact that the audience may now fully appreciate the fragility of Blanche as a character and may thus be more concerned about her well being.

Comment [K23]: Exactly why this would be tense needs to be made a little more clear

Comment [K24]: Which actions

Comment [K25]: Clear link back to the question

Ultimately, it is evident that the contrast between concealment and revelation plays a vital role in the creation of dramatic tension. It is apparent that this juxtaposition is evident at numerous levels and, despite its obvious role in *Oedipus Rex* as the audience have foreknowledge of the events, it is seen to also play a crucial role in *A Streetcar Named Desire* in that it creates sympathy and understanding for characters such as Blanche.

Comment [K26]: Good clear summing up, non repetitive conclusion