

CHAPTER II

LITERARY REVIEW

2.1 The era of *A Streetcar Named Desire*

A Streetcar Named Desire was written in the twentieth century. The setting takes place in New Orleans, Street Elysian Fields, 1947, a poorer section of the city. It can be seen that until the mid of twentieth century, the effect of Realism could still be felt. Realism itself began in the nineteenth century as the overturn from Romanticism age, which dealt the excessive use of with romantic aspects such as feeling and emotion in literature. The images of overwhelmed romanticism are shown by the imagery of fantasies such as those of adventure, love stories, heroes, and princes. They are all what realism opposed to. About realism, AS Kernodle (1967:7) states below:

Realism began in the nineteenth century as a turning away from the far away and long ago of the romantics to a concern with the here and now, from imagery fantasies of adventures to a journalistic study of how people live, from idealistic speculation to pragmatic concern with actual problem, from the glamour of princes and heroes to the struggles of ordinary people.

From the quotation above, we can get some of the characteristics of the literary work. The play was written in the twentieth century, where people are show to learn how to live and struggle by facing their live problems. In other words, it is a journalistic study of how people live. This means realism deals with the problem of the real life, it describes the struggles of ordinary people. It means that the realism is concerned with the fight to live and how people manage to live

and survive in the world. These are concerned with real struggles such as earning money to stay alive.

The realism age spread until the twentieth century where William (1948-1975) wrote his plays. When *A Streetcar Named Desire* was first released, it created a firestorm of controversy because it was immoral, decadent, vulgar, and sinful. (Downloaded from the Internet at March 29, 2004 <http://www.literatureclassic.com/essays/252>)

2.2. Gender

The term gender refers to a set of classes showing membership of a certain category related to the sex of a person. Fakhri (1996: 7) suggests that gender is a term used in relation to certain characteristics which are given and inherited in a cultural way. Selden (1985: 132) in a similar way, defines gender as a psychological concept which refers to culturally acquired sexual identity. The term is commonly used in combination with another concept. So in feminism, people can have gender identity, gender ambiguity, gender stereotypes, and so on. The term stereotype refers to a fixed, formalized or standardized phrase, idea, or belief used repeatedly without thought or change. Morris (1993: 14) for example, mention the fact that women are often described as “frail, not strong, emotional, not rational, yielding not virile.” The characteristics are given to women as fixed phrases which have been standardized by some group of people and used repeatedly to describe women. Thus there come to be some stereotypes of women.

When we hear the word gender, it usually remind us to the world of women but actually it is not. It can be about men. Gender is a fundamental aspect of personal and social identity and biological and psychological aspects for people everywhere. The major theory in gender studies addresses such varied issues as the biology of human reproduction, sex roles in the family and society, the psychology of gender identity and images of men and women in literature and art.

The word literature may mean different things to different people. According to Barnett (1961: 56) one can start defining by saying that literature is a 'performance in words'. It has an element of entertaining and one surely expects literature to be in some senses entertaining. It means that literature can, for a while, take one way to a new world in which one can explore the joy, sorrow, and greed, and some other feelings that may arouse entertainment. If the literature is good enough, it makes one's surrounding and takes one to wonder to another place instead. Thus, for a moment, can please and entertain people in which presented by literature.

There are some leading guides in analyzing *A Streetcar Named Desire* under the theme of stereotyping, Nelson (1997: 65). These guides can be listed below:

1. The negative representation of women as sexual seductresses requiring moral censure and punishment reflects men's fear of losing power and control in the sexual act.

2. Women's dominant and secure role in reproduction of creativity and knowledge as male and godlike and insistence on women's dependence on men.
3. A goodness for women, married or maids, is always chastity and submissive. These stereotypical terms cause men to never actually know women. Hence men's continual insecurity.
4. Perceptions of women as unattractive and unsubmitive are doubtly threatening; thus they must be perceived as really wanting a man and as deserving punishment.
5. 'Invalid' women cannot have a place in the world. There is no place for women who are not a perfect creature.

According to *Oxford Advanced Dictionary* which is written by Hornby (1989: 315), a broad meaning of feminism is a movement for recognition of the claims of women for rights (legal, political, etc) equal to those possessed by men.

According to Morris (1993: 56)

Feminism refers to a political perception based on two fundamental reasons; (1) the gender differences is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and (2) an inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultural act of gender differences.

Holman and Harmon (1986: 201) place feminism in literature and criticism in a general position, not necessarily confined to women, having to do with the advocacy and encouragement of equal rights and opportunities for women-politically, socially, psychologically, and personally .

According to the explanation above in literature and criticism, a general position, not necessarily confined to women, having to do with the support of equal rights and opportunities for women, politically, socially, psychologically, personally and aesthetically.

From the definition above, it can be seen that feminism is concerned with the opportunities of a position, especially women in having equality in political, social, and psychological matters. The differences make women unequal with the men in the term of gender. The differences in gender make a different social construction, which result in an inequality of the sexes. Therefore, it is not the biological necessities, which made an inequality, but the differences in gender, which is a social and cultural construct.

One can find several facts or actions related to the concerns of feminism such as a conflict about gender, the inequality between men and women, and the problems or sexual harassment.

The mid-twentieth century was a time of great social upheaval. The two World Wars had invested marginalized groups with sudden power, and for a short time, the balance of power between the genders had shifted. By the 1950s, men had taken the upper hand while women are in lower position. It was the setting that Tennessee Williams brought his dynamic drama, *A Streetcar Named Desire* into the world. These violent and brutal discuss the struggle between men and women within downtown American society. Tennessee Williams foregrounds this gender struggle, using different techniques to represent that truth of society's attitudes towards masculinity and femininity. (Morris, 1993 : 56)