

# A Psychofeminist Analysis of the Plays Chosen by Tennessee Williams: A Streetcar Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and The Glass Menagerie<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

A new way of thinking about societal issues might emerge among writers when social problems are taken into consideration as one of the most essential challenges facing everyone. Some western artists and playwrights subtly tackled this subject in their artistic works, such as plays, in light of the prevalence of combating oppression against women in western civilizations in the 20th century and the absence of social fairness in these nations. These elements contributed to the term "feminism" emerging, which has been used both implicitly and overtly in recent decades.

American playwright Tennessee Williams is credited with creating a number of theater classics. He is regarded as one of the three most important playwrights in American drama of the 20th century, together with Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller. Tennessee Williams' three major plays are referenced in this study. The Glass Menagerie, which debuted in 1944 and propelled Tennessee Williams from obscurity to stardom, is initially a four-character memory piece. Another Tennessee Williams play is Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. The Playwrights' Company staged it. One of Williams' most well-known pieces and a favorite of his own. The final play was written by American playwright Tennessee Williams in 1947 and was awarded the 1948 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The Ethel Barrymore Theatre hosted the play's Broadway debut on December 3, 1947, and it ran through December 17, 1949. This thesis discusses a topic that is very significant and of high importance in plays. The two feminism and psychology theories that emphasize social inequality are among the most important social themes that are prevalent in western plays. Through feminism and psychoanalytic theories, this essay will analyze Tennessee Williams' three chosen plays, Glass Menagerie, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and A Streetcar Named Desire.

**Keywords:** *Feminism; Psychoanalysis; Glass Menagerie; Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; Streetcar Named Desire; Tennessee Williams; Social inequality*

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS:

**1- Feminism:** The movements and ideologies that fought for equal rights for women are enumerated chronologically in the history of feminism. Most Western feminist historians contend that all movements that fight for women's rights should be regarded as feminist movements, even when they did not (or do not) apply the term to themselves. Feminist movements have varying causes, goals, and intentions depending on time, culture, and country. Some historians use the term only to refer to the modern feminist movement and its offspring, while others refer to earlier movements as "protofeminist."

Three time periods, or "waves," of modern Western feminist history can be distinguished, each with slightly different goals based on earlier achievements. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, first-wave feminism aimed to eliminate legal injustices, particularly the exclusion of women from voting. The 1960s–1980s second wave of feminism broadened the discussion to include gender roles, cultural disparities, and the place of women in society. The term "third-wave

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feminism" (the 1990s to the 2000s) is used to describe a variety of feminist movements that are both seen as a continuation of the second wave and a reaction to its perceived shortcomings.

Despite being frequently used to describe the history of feminism, the waves construct has also come under fire for omitting and erasing the history between the "waves" by concentrating only on a select few well-known individuals and well-known events.2013 (Margaret)

The term "feminism," which derives from French, refers to the 19th-century women's movement. According to Andrew Vincent, there are four theories about how the feminist concept first emerged:

1. The history of feminism goes back to the dawn of human consciousness. This is Griffin and Michel's point of view.
- 2- The history of feminism begins at the beginning of the 15th century. This point of view comes from Peasant's book Princesses.
- 3- The history of feminism begins in the 17th century. Afraben significantly influences how this perspective is formed.
- 4- The history of feminism began in the late 18th century, following the French Revolution. This is the most popular and well-known point of view. The most notable person who succeeded in introducing feminism during this time was Mrs. Marry Wellstone Craft (Vincent, 1999).

The term "feminism" was first used by socialist Charles Fourier in the 19th century to support the movement for women's rights. He later expanded its definition to include a broad range of social theories, philosophical insights, and political movements. He focused primarily on reducing gender inequality, spoke out for women's rights and issues, and fought to uphold and defend the rights of women. Feminism generally addresses patriarchy, objectification, framework behavior, and discrimination. Feminists believe that gender should not determine one's rights, advantages, position, or responsibilities. The main focus of feminist dialectic is on the epistemological society that views the world from a variety of perspectives rather than from a single point of view.

The class in which feminist definitions are developed has an impact on them. Radical feminism challenges masculinity in both the public and private spheres, and socialist feminism simultaneously criticizes capitalism and masculinity.

The development of a social society based on gender equality is a key component of feminist thought. Feminists share an equal belief in historical tyranny against women, which serves as their common ground. Different feminist tendencies for freeing women from oppression imply that this movement lacks a social or pragmatic outlook.

They hold that despite the fact that all feminists agree that women are oppressed and that someone should try to provide a solution, there is a fundamental difference of opinion regarding the causes of women's suffering and strategies for achieving freedom (Freidman, 2002).

## 2- Psychoanalysis

The psychotherapeutic application of psychoanalytic theory by analysts to treat emotional, mental, cognitive, and behavioral disorders that prevent the analysand from functioning satisfactorily is known as psychoanalysis. Further defined as "a specific form of individual psychotherapy that aims to bring unconscious mental elements and processes into awareness in order to expand an individual's self-understanding, enhance adaptation in multiple spheres of functioning, relieve symptoms of mental disorder, and facilitate character change and emotional growth," psychoanalysis is practiced frequently and intensely.

Psychoanalysis typically takes place in-person, several times a week, between the analysand and analyst and aims for intensity of engagement (compromise may be necessary if limitations are present, such as for physically disabled analysands or those who live and/or work far away from the analyst). The theoretical orientation of the analyst and the needs of the analysand influence psychoanalytic technique. Psychoanalysis is typically carried out with the analysand lying on a couch and conversing with an analyst seated away from the analysand. This aids in creating regressed transference states that support the analysand's "process" (verbal productions) and allow the analyst and analysand to access unconscious conflicts whose resolution can lessen the analysand's difficulties. Sometimes analysis is carried out while the analysand is sitting up. 2004 (ABECSW).

Psychoanalysis explores a person's private relationship with their dreams and past, which shape everything about how they live in this world. This question is neither imposed on the analyst by a psychoanalyst nor does it have a rational component. In a way, psychoanalysis is on a path. It implies that the analysand is the one who begins by speaking with

its past and narrating events that happened to it while it was awake or asleep. In doing so, it gradually confronts the unconscious mind, which is the most fundamental aspect of its existence (Moleli, 1999).

Psychoanalysis is first and foremost a human exchange that follows a path chosen by the analysand for getting to know himself. Such knowledge in psychoanalysis necessitates acceptance of restriction and dedication. Any attempt at integration or control goes against psychoanalytic principles and prevents the pursuit of such a path 2010's Moleli.

### **Social inequality**

Durkheim thought that if capitalistic collaboration could be improved and freed from class conflict and oppressive inequality, one could achieve the goal of social relations based on morality and justice. According to Rabani et al. (2010), Durkheim predicted that the evolution of collaboration would naturally reduce abnormalities.

By claiming that inequality is a societal norm, Davis & Moor hold the view that inequality is a business necessity. They contend that social inequality is an unintentional framework that ensures societies that the best jobs are carried out by the most qualified individuals. In a nutshell, the most important factor that determines the magnitude of social rewards for jobs, specifically different social positions, is the functional importance of professions and the relative rarity of people with the competence to pursue them.

The M. Webber methodology for describing social inequalities can be thought of as straightforward but challenging. According to M. Webber, work creates human beings, and work is embodied in the process of production. Class inequality is a result of some relationships formed within the framework of any production method. M. Webber recognized the conflict that exists between these relationships as a clear byproduct of any form of inequality. Perceiving fundamentals and forms of ownership serves as the foundation of M. Webber's methodology for identifying inequality that is addressed from a class conflict standpoint.

According to M. Webber, there is a process in human society that can be achieved through cooperation. The M. Webber class theory is significant not only for its novel sociological insights but also for the broad influence it has had on subsequent sociological viewpoints in this area (Zahedi, 2006).

According to M. Webber, social inequality manifests itself in interpersonal interactions. A social relation is a circumstance in which two or more people engage in a behavior and, within this framework, each of them values the other greatly, leading to the behavior being directed on the same basis. The most diverse conditions, including conflict, hostility, sexual desire, friendship, loyalty, or economic exchange can make up the content of this mutually beneficial direction (Weber, 1988).

### **Thesis statement and research main questions:**

Thomas Lainer Williams, also known as Tennessee Williams, was born in the United States in 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi. He was a hypochondriac, a compulsive worker, a swimmer, and an amateur painter. He was a multi-millionaire who adored to travel frequently and had aspirations to become a writer and traveler. He is regarded as one of the most important playwrights from the United States who lived in the twentieth century, which included the modernist movement, both World Wars, and the Vietnam War.

As Boxil notes, "the Vietnam War had exploded the illusion of American innocence, [and] in the tide of woman's Liberation and Gay Liberation, Williams's plays, which had derived much of their dramatic tension from female dependency and homosexual guilt, began to look dated" (Shakouri, 2008). Tennessee Williams was undoubtedly affected by the effects of war on American life style and culture.

In the 1950s, women were taught to value marriage and starting a stable family as ways to prove their worth. The women in Williams' play are portrayed as being very dependent beings with a variety of traits; each is very different from the other two, but all three are connected by social pressures. No matter how poorly they were treated, women were expected to marry and please their husbands. Additionally, because divorce was not encouraged by social norms, women tended to stay in pointless unions (Bak, 2001).

Tennessee Williams' works make clear the effects of the war on American society as well as the shifts in social class that led to dislocation and a loss of the national identity. Williams's characters in or after war who need to adjust to the present reality and find what they believe they have lost from their glorious past are Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*, and Chance in *The Sweet Bird of Youth* (Shakouri, 2008).

Three plays by Tennessee Williams have been chosen. We attempt to present a psycho-feminist interpretation of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *The Glass Menagerie*. *A Streetcar Named Desire* examines post-World War II America, and Adler notes that "Americans were still escaping reality through dance halls and bars, movies, and sex" (Shakouri, 2008). While the rest of the world was waiting for bombardments during the time of *Menagerie* to Chamberlain and the Munich Pact, the play was written.

In actuality, psychoanalysis is the primordial scene it seeks; it is the initial manifestation of what has been occurring repeatedly in the patient but never before. Psychoanalysis is not repetition of interpretation; rather, it is the repetition of a trauma of interpretation, such as "castration," "parental coitus," "the Oedipus complex," or even "sexuality," which is the traumatizing deferred interpretation of an event but as an event that never actually occurred. The "primal scene" is actually an interpretive infelicity that placed the interpreter in an impossible situation rather than a scene. Psychoanalysis is the reconstruction of that interpretive infelicity, not as its interpretation but rather as its first and last act. Only insofar as it perpetuates the discontent of things that never happened does psychoanalysis have any value. (Singh, 2014).

We want to concentrate on the critical theories of psychoanalysis and feminism in these works in accordance with the primary goal of the study. Williams' disturbed characters can best be understood through a psychoanalytic lens, as can the sex, gender, and cultural ideas that permeate each of his plays. The relationship between these ideas will be crucial to understanding *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) analyses (Kugler, 2006). The term "feminism" refers to a collection of movements and ideologies that aim to specify, uphold, and defend the equal political, economic, and social rights of women. Feminists support or advocate for women's civil liberties, equality, and the right to possess and exercise reproductive organs (Khalid et al., 2013).

Examining a piece of literature to see how it supports or undermines the oppression of women is a legitimate strategy in feminist literary criticism. Analyzing a piece of literature can be another useful strategy for figuring out how a society views women's roles in relation to gender issues. Understanding the writer's social environment and perspective on women is a third analytical strategy (Moi 42-4).

The study of William Shakespeare's plays can benefit from any of these methods. By educating his audience about female victimization in this way, Williams dramatizes the plight of women (Foley, 2013). The following research queries are listed;

#### **Main inquiries:**

- 1- Can the themes of the plays *Glass Menagerie*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* be seen as clear examples of feminist thinking?
- 2- Can the themes of the plays *Glass Menagerie*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* be seen as clear examples of psychoanalytical thinking?

#### **Optional questions:**

- 1- Can Williams' plays be clearly seen as feminism with social issues as a sub-variable?
- 2- Are politics issues, a feminism sub-variable, evident in Williams' plays?
- 3- Can Williams' plays be read as explicitly addressing cultural issues as a sub-variable of feminism?
- 4- Can Williams' plays be read as explicitly addressing economic issues as a sub-variable of feminism?
- 5- Can Williams' plays be clearly seen as a subvariable of human attitude in psychoanalysis?
- 6- Can Williams' plays clearly demonstrate Mannerism as a sub-variable of psychoanalysis?
- 7- Can Williams' plays clearly display fantasy as a sub-variable of psychoanalysis?
- 8- Can Williams' plays clearly demonstrate free association as a sub-variable of psychoanalysis?
- 9- Can Williams' plays clearly demonstrate dreams as a sub-variable of psychoanalysis?

#### **Hypothesis:**

##### **Main hypothesis:**

- 1- The plays *Glass Menagerie*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* all contain elements that are clearly indicative of feminist thinking.
- 2- The plays *Glass Menagerie*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* all contain elements of psychoanalytical thinking.

**Optional hypothesis:**

- 1- Social issues, a feminism subvariable, are prominent in Williams' plays.
- 2- Politics issues, a feminism subvariable, are prominent in Williams' plays.
- 3- Cultural issues can be seen in Williams' plays as a sub-variable of feminism.
- 4- The economic issues that are a part of feminism are evident in Williams' plays.
- 5- Williams' plays provide a clear example of how human attitude can be seen as a psychoanalytical subvariable.
- 6- Williams' plays are a great example of how Mannerism, a psychoanalytic sub-variable, can be seen.
- 7- Williams' plays make a strong case for the use of fantasy as a psychoanalytical subvariable.
- 8- Williams plays clearly display free association as a psychoanalytical sub-variable.
- 9- Williams plays clearly display dreams as a sub-variable of psychoanalysis.

**LITERATURE REVIEW AND NECESSITY OF RESEARCH:**

John S. Bak (2004) examined the streetcar as a psychological drama in his study titled "Criticism on a Streetcar Named Desire." He demonstrated how most analyses of Streetcar have focused on it as a social drama, on the altercation between Blanche and Stanley, or on Blanche as one of Williams's fugitives in a Kowalskian setting. Williams may be pitting two cultures against one another in an allegory, according to some, but according to others, Streetcar is a study of two species of animals vying for dominance in a single environment. Others have likewise defended Blanche and Stanley as distinct people and Streetcar as Williams' demonstration of an unconscious struggle between two opposing forces. However, some critics do not consider Streetcar to be primarily a social drama.

In the 1960s, as Elizabeth Osborne demonstrated in his article "teaching Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie from multiple critical perspectives" published in Prestwick House, the feminist movement started to pioneer a new method of literary criticism. Of course, women had been publishing and writing for centuries, but a feminist literary theory really began to take off in the 1960s. Prior to that, works by or about female authors were evaluated using the same criteria as those by or about male authors. Many women accepted the idea that women were less intelligent than men, at least in part because they typically did not receive as much formal education. Women didn't start analyzing old texts, reassessing how women are portrayed in literature, and creating new works to fit the emerging idea of the modern woman until the feminist movement was well underway.

In the study titled "Feminist Analysis of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," Niki Fellows expressed the opinion that feminists should thoroughly examine many of the situations in Tennessee Williams' play. The roles of Mae and Big Mama, Maggie's sexuality and Brick's lack of interest in her, her social standing in the 1950s, and other factors are all intricately carved for various reasons. It's important to take into account the historical context of the three female roles as we examine them. Williams, like many other writers of his era, based his descriptions of the era on his own experiences with women. His own stories about women were sensitive to the way his father had treated his mother and sister. Extreme hints of emotional, sexual, and spiritual need can be seen in his character "Maggie the Cat" in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. In his study "The Male and the Female in Tennessee Williams's Plays" published in 2006, Frederik Kugler attempted a psychoanalytic reading of the male and female characters in a number of Tennessee Williams' plays. He was the one who first defined the term "psychoanalysis." Since the time of Sigmund Freud, who is regarded as the founder of psychoanalysis, the field has advanced significantly, and despite its current reputation as a somewhat conservative field, psychoanalysis continues to disrupt the dominant discourse on gender and sexuality. Additionally, it has the power to challenge ideas of fixed identity, including sexual identity. For example, the author started the paper with an outline of Sigmund Freud's essays on the three stages of psychosexual development of the child and gave a brief introduction to psychoanalysis, which is still effective when it comes to analyzing the notion of sex, gender, and culture in literary texts.

Through his essays, Freud demonstrated how sexuality and contemporary Western society are inextricably linked and how sexual urges are suppressed to ensure a person's acceptance into society and culture. The feminist author Judith Butler and the poststructuralist author David Savran focus on the contribution of Lacanian thinking and inquire as to whether his work provides a more rigorous alternative to gender identity and sexual difference in terms of psychoanalytic theory. Given that culture has a significant influence on human sexuality, in the following section I will relate an individual's psychosexual development to the evolution of culture as a whole and demonstrate how, according to psychoanalysis, an individual's ontogeny is a scaled-down version of cultural phylogeny. This demonstrates that evolutionary processes as well as environmental influences play a role in the development of normative sexuality.

Williams challenges modern ideas of sex and gender while also demolishing the myth of the chaste Southern Lady as a cultural ideal through neurotic Amanda and hysterical Blanche. The mid-century American sex and gender system is also questioned in the second section. Williams's protagonists are all fugitives who are caught up in the harsh realities of contemporary life, and they are all failures to experience sexual development that Sigmund Freud, the father of

psychoanalysis, would have regarded as normal. Despite the fact that psychoanalysis as a theory primarily focuses on the male and ignores the female, a psychoanalytic reading of the male and female in Williams's plays gives us an illuminating theory and aids in our analysis of the plays' subversion of sex, gender, and culture.

The study "Quest for Identity in Tennessee Williams" by Hooti Noorbakhsh (2011) *The Streetcar Named Desire* observes that the 20th century generation, particularly the one that finds itself submerged in the murky waters of Second World War trauma, is reticent to demonstrate any sense of belonging to the current upended world. It discovers that its soul and mind are imprisoned in the gloomy prison of alienation. The only thing this sense of alienation produces is nostalgia for bygone eras.

This study makes an effort to take a deep dive into the disturbed and alienated worlds of Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire" characters, who are always on the hunt for their own identities. By contrasting Blanche's life with the tragic situation, the study aims to highlight the tragedy. She had once been a lady, but the play's action depicts her gradual breakdown into an aging destitute who has turned alcoholic and nymphomaniacal.

Through two worlds—Blanche's parents' house in Belle Reve and her sister's house in New Orleans—the study tries to achieve its goal. In a study titled "Object relation psychoanalytic criticism on selected works of Tennessee Williams," Shadi Shakouri used the object relation psychoanalytical theory to look into how the characters in Tennessee Williams's chosen plays, *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, evolved over time. It reveals how the characters interact with their surroundings and, when they don't, how they get rid of their anxiety and annihilation fears.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a descriptive-analytical methodology. The variables and the framework of the subject under study are both described using the descriptive aspect. This looks at societal social and public factors. In the analytical section, it is determined whether or not the aforementioned variables are present in the texts of three of Tennessee Williams' most well-known plays, including *Glass Menagerie*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, and *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In order to study the fundamental variables in the plays mentioned above, a set of components is then required.

### Presenting studied variables

Here, we want to talk about two crucial factors.

Feminism is the first variable. Feminism can be described as a movement that has existed since the beginning of human comprehension and perception, despite not having a literary name. However, the 20th century is when the term is most frequently used. This idea focuses on protesting against patriarchy and defending the rights of women, which have been abused and neglected throughout history. The goal of feminists is equality in all facets and dimensions of society, including the social, familial, economic, and political spheres.

The following table lists the crucial feminism-related factors that should be examined in the texts above.

Feminism Variables	Social	Politic	Cultural	Family	Economic
Rights					

  

Psychoanalysis Variables	Human attitude	Mannerism	Fantasy	Free association	Dreams
Rights					

One should investigate which texts in plays contain the aforementioned (social, political, etc.) parameters.

If we ascertain this and highlight the textual variables, we can then talk about the textual variables and confirm the thesis. The extent and impact of feminism within these plays can be investigated if we take into account the aforementioned variables, which are subsets of feminism. Similar to this, a relatively distinct and clear definition of each variable (such as social) can be of great assistance in having a more accurate perception of their extent and influence. Psychoanalysis should be addressed in the same way. We should first define psychoanalysis and explain its components. (O'Neil, 2008).

Psychoanalysis makes an effort to comprehend a person through their hidden personality. One does not only act with their conscious mind; a significant portion of their reactions also depend on their hidden, or unconscious mind. Perhaps a

person's facial expressions are not as telling. To reach a conclusion, one should delve into the deeply hidden layers of the mind. Numerous factors, such as a person's background, socioeconomic status, and demographics, have an impact on their psychoanalytic stance. One can determine the place and degree of psychoanalysis in the plays by looking at these factors. (2006) Hawkesworth

## CONCLUSION

This essay looked at social inequality in western societies through the lens of three plays by renowned American playwright Tennessee Williams. This social inequality has various components in each of its facets, but this paper focuses on two particular facets that have caught the attention of many researchers and experts. At the beginning of the paper, the first hypothesis is taken into consideration. The context of feminist thinking was covered in this. This point of view includes various social context factors, making the equality of these factors in the context of law enforcement the key factor in this discussion. For women, these are the social, legal, economic, cultural, private, and social aspects. Although the elements of feministic thought are not explicitly described in the aforementioned plays, critics and readers believe that he purposefully tried to imply some of these elements in his plays.

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