

PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: BLANCHE DUBOIS AND STELLA KOWALSKI: VICTIMIZED SISTERS IN A MALE DOMINATED WORLD DEPICTED IN A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

AUTHORS: Emine SONAL

PAGES: 329-341

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1510250>

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'IN A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE (ARZU TRAMVAYI) OYUNUNDA YANSITILAN ERKEK EGEMEN DÜNYASININ KURBANİ İKİ KIZ KARDEŞ: BLANCHE DUBOIS VE STELLA KOWALSKI

(Dr. Emine SONAL *, eminesonal@gau.edu.tr)

Özet

Bu çalışmada*, Raewyn Connell'in "Baskın Erkeklik" kavramı esas alınarak Tennessee Williams'ın *A Streetcar Named Desire* [*Arzu Tramvayı*] isimli eserindeki erkeğin kadınlara yaklaşımı irdelenecektir. Modern Amerikan drama öncülerinden olan Tennessee Williams, eserlerinde kendi yaşam öyküsünden esinlenmiştir. *Arzu Tramvayı* Williams'a Pulitzer Ödülü kazandırmıştır. Oyunlarında bütün karakterlerini ustalıkla çizmiş ve birçok eseri de beyaz perdeye uyarlanmıştır. Oyunda Blanche, maddi ve psikolojik olarak yıkıma uğrayarak her şeyini kaybeder. New Orleans'ta yaşayan kız kardeşi Stella'nın yanına gitmeye karar verir. Kız kardeşinin evine vardığında, kardeşinin şiddet içeren ve baskıcı olan kocası Stanley ile karşılaştıktan sonra hayatı daha karmaşık hale gelir. Bu çalışmada, Blanche ve Stella'nın yansıttığı toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve Stanley'in iki kız kardeş üzerindeki ataerkil gücü tartışılacak ve Stanley karakteri, Connell'in oluşturduğu "Baskın Erkeklik" kavramı açısından analiz edilecektir. Connell'in "Baskın Erkeklik" (1983:156) kavramı, Stanley'in kaba, şiddete yatkın ve zorba davranışının altında yatan nedenlerin anlaşılmasına ışık tutacaktır. Oyunda, Blanche DuBois ve Stella Kowalski'nin cinsiyet rolleri ve Connell'in görüşleri doğrultusunda Stanley Kowalski'de görülen "Baskın Erkeklik" kavramı alt başlıklar halinde verilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Roller, Baskın Erkeklik.

BLANCHE DUBOIS AND STELLA KOWALSKI: VICTIMIZED SISTERS IN A MALE DOMINATED WORLD DEPICTED IN A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS**Abstract**

This study examines the male attitudes towards the women in the play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams. This play will be examined based on Raewyn Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" (1983:156). Tennessee Williams, one of the most significant Pioneers of American drama, generally drew his inspiration from his own family members. His characters were portrayed eloquently in his plays and many of his plays were adapted for the screen. Williams was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his most read play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In the play, financially and psychologically deprived, Blanche decides to reunite with her sister Stella who lives in New Orleans. Upon her arrival at her sister's home, her life becomes more complicated after meeting her sister's husband, Stanley. In this study, the gender stereotypes that Blanche and Stella fit into and Stanley's patriarchal power over the two sisters will be discussed. The reasons for Stanley's rude, violent and bullying behavior will be analyzed from the point of view of Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" under the following subheadings: gender stereotypes of Blanche DuBois and Stella Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" in relation to the protagonist Stanley Kowalski.

Keywords: Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, gender stereotypes, hegemonic masculinity.

* Girne Amerikan Üniversitesi Beşeri Bilimler Fakültesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı, Girne/KK.T.C.

ORCID: 0000-0002-8713-118X

* This article is an expanded version of a conference paper presented at 2nd International Congress on Academic Studies in Philology (BICOASP), 2-5 September 2020- Bandırma/TURKEY.

Derleme Makale

Sayfa Sayısı: 329-341

Makale Geliş Tarihi: 14.01.2021

Makale Kabul Tarihi: 21.02.2021

I- Introduction

Tennessee Williams was the first playwright to receive the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and who also won the Donaldson Award and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for his play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. He is one of the most important playwrights in American literary history. The publication of this play in 1947 cemented Williams's reputation. Although Williams was admitted to the University of Missouri and Washington University, he could not obtain a degree here. He graduated from the University of Iowa and started to write his plays, which initiated his career as a playwright. His original name was Thomas Lanier Williams. Because his father was from Tennessee and Williams spoke with a southern accent, his college roommates called him Tennessee, hence the nom de plume, Tennessee Williams. *A Streetcar Named Desire* became part of the canon of realistic plays in the early Twentieth century.

It is known that writers usually draw upon their life experiences when they create their fictional works. For Williams, it is easy to depict real people whom he was accustomed to and represent his personal experiences in his work. In addition, he incorporates the setting of where he lived into his plays, bringing his work to life. Williams grew up in an unhappy and poor family as the second child of three. His life and relationship with his parents and siblings inspired him to write about his family members. His mother, Edwina, was a Southern woman who was well educated and aggressive. His sister named Rose was emotionally disturbed and resided in mental institutions. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the protagonist Blanche is a composite of the "fragility and vulnerability" of his mother and his elder sister. Another main character in this play is Stanley Kowalski who represents Williams' friend in real life. Williams and Stanley worked at the International Shoe Company for many years and became very good friends. The personalities and social status of Williams' characters create a historical document that throws light on his own familial relationships. After Williams' death, as stated by Elia Kazan, the director of most of the film adaptations of his plays: "Everything in his life is in his plays, and everything in his plays is in his life" (Sharma and Sharma, 2016: 605).

The play is set on the ground floor apartment of a two-floor building in Elysian Fields, a part of New Orleans, Louisiana. The play opens with the arrival of Blanche at a small apartment where Stanley and his wife Stella live on the outskirts of the city and ends at the same place, in the same building with the same characters, Stanley and Stella. *A Street Car Named Desire* is about the life of two sisters, Blanche and Stella, "Southern belles" from Mississippi. They represent the Southern aristocrat society. In Mississippi, they are used to live in a big mansion on the Belle Reve

plantation. Culturally, “southern belles” are the “model of virtue” educated as obedient wives and good mothers who cared for children and family.

This well-known play by Williams made the readers face the reality of life after World War II and realize the plight of victimized individuals in society. The play includes the themes of passion, betrayal, and domestic violence narrated with a great lyrical voice. Heidari and Mohammadi (2016), in their article titled, “On the Female Sexual Objectification in Tennessee William’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*”, state that for Williams the play is about “the ravishment of the tender, the sensitive, the delicate, by the savage and brutal forces of modern society” (p.229). *A Streetcar Named Desire* depicts the struggles of two southern sisters’ trial to adapt into a patriarchal society as well as how they survive in a modern world. In the reenactments of the play, directors use modern techniques such as light, sound, music and props to enhance the feelings and social setting of the times.

This paper will investigate the gender stereotypical of the “Southern belle” of the two sisters Blanche and Stella and the patriarchal power that Stanley holds over the two sisters in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Furthermore, Stanley’s character will be analyzed from the standpoint of the theory of masculinity known as “hegemonic masculinity” established by the Australian scholar and sociologist Raewyn Connell*. Connell uses the concept of ‘hegemony’ which is derived from Antonio Gramsci’s *Theory of Domination and Hegemony*. Gramsci is a Marxist theorist who analyses power relations in a society and explains how a dominant class, economically and politically, controls the society. Connell adopts Gramsci’s theory into “hegemonic masculinity” as gender practice, which refers to the male domination and female subordination in a cultural setting (Connell, 2005: pp. 9-10). Connell’s sociological concept of “hegemonic masculinity”, a part of gender order theory, will be used to structure an understanding of Stanley’s brutal behavior and add compelling support to her gender theory under the following subheadings: gender stereotypes of Blanche DuBois and Stella Kowalski and the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” in relation to the protagonist Stanley Kowalski.

2. Gender Stereotypes of Blanche DuBois and Stella Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Best and Puzio (2019) use the term gender “to distinguish the female and male members of the human species but with emphasis on sociocultural and psychological meaning that is assigned to

* Connell used the pen names “Bob Connell” and “R. W. Connell” in her earlier studies and recently she prefers to use the name “Raewyn Connell”. In the interview with Sveva Magaraggia, Connell states that she is a transsexual woman (p. 119).

biological differences between the sexes” (p.235). When we are born we acquire gender roles based on social norms. At early ages, girls and boys are taught how to act according to the social norms established through their parents’ practice. Gender roles that are transmitted within the society also refer to social roles of individuals in a society.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines stereotype as “a conventional, formulaic, and oversimplified conception, opinion, or image” that supports the traditional gender role. Best and Puzi (2019) also define gender stereotypes as a reference to the psychological traits and behaviors that are believed to occur with differential frequency in the two gender groups (p.235). Gender stereotypes are a generalized view or characteristic that is considered to be performed by women and men. For example, Stella’s nurturing role as a wife and mother and Stanley’s breadwinning role are common gender stereotypes portrayed in the play.

2.1. Blanche Dubois

Blanche Dubois is a Southern belle and a cultivated woman who grew up in an upper- class society in Laurel, Mississippi. After the death of her family members and losing her family’s assets and plantation, in order to secure shelter, Blanche becomes dependent on a man by getting married. After the fact, she discovers her husband’s homosexuality. She feels betrayed and she expresses her disgust for him. Following this confession, Blanche’s husband commits suicide and her life is ruined by feelings of guilt. In order to forget this tragedy, she falls into a life of prostitution. Eventually, she has to leave her hometown once the community discovers her unacceptable profession. Ribkoff and Tyndall (2011) state that “this event shatters her [Blanche] childhood and, with it, her idealized sense of self and the world” (p.328). After experiencing a nervous breakdown related to her husband’s suicide and losing her job, Blanche moves to New Orleans to reunite with her sister. Blanche’s sister, Stella, the only surviving member in her family, is married to Stanley and lives in poverty in the Elysian Fields in the city.

When Blanche sees the worn-out apartment where her sister lives, it is clear that she will be unable to adjust to the new environment in New Orleans. Her first responses are not positive: “This -can this be- her home?” (Williams, 1980: 6), and “Why that you had to live in these conditions?” (p. 12)*. Based on the previous quotation, Blanche reveals that her expectations shatter as she sees her sister’s life circumstances. She even asks Stella whether she has a maid or not (p.15). Despite the fact that Blanche is unemployed, she is conditioned in the traditional Southern lifestyle where she lived in “a great place with white columns plantation” (p.9). Blanche is used to wearing

* In order to avoid the repetition in the in-text citation, the page numbers in parentheses will refer to specific pages in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams, published by Penguin Books in 1980.

expensive dresses, “feathers and furs”, bracelets of solid gold”, and even a “rhinestone tiara” (p.34) providing the sense of royalty. Qiang (2014) in his article, “An Explanation on Blanche’s Tragedy *A Streetcar Named Desire*” states the following:

The rules and regulations in the plantation indicated the decisive role of men in the routine life and production. The women in the plantation had to make a living by relying on males and the asceticism which is a doctrine of puritan still exists in their minds. In brief, the gentle women were content with their current status in a society which is characterized by men (p.108).

Compared to Blanche, Stella, escapes from family and sets out to New Orleans to start a new life while Blanche clings to her Southern culture. Remaining in their hometown, Blanche takes care of the elders, and she tries to hold the family members together. Blanche reproaches Stella for not staying in Belle Reve to take care of their grandparents and parents:

You came to New Orleans and looked out for yourself! I stayed at Belle Reve and tried to hold it together! ... I stayed and fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it!”. “I took the blows in my face and my body! All those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, mother! Margaret, that dreadful way!” (pp.20- 21).

Blanche is tortured by the deaths in her family and this makes her miserable, gloomy and hopeless as indicated when she says to Stella, “I was so exhausted be all I’d through my-nerves broke. I was on the verge of –lunacy” (p.14). Blanche considers herself having “old fashioned ideals” (p.108). She is a sensitive and educated person. When compared with her sister, Blanche feels bound to her family and does not want to move away from her social status.

In the Southern culture, the older siblings usually have a higher status. For example; Stella respects her older sibling and serves her. Blanche approves of the social hierarchy, appreciates her manner and says “A good habit to get into” (p.13). To maintain her expectations of their social status, Blanche also criticizes Stella’s appearance by using impolite utterances: “But you-you’ve put on some weight, yes, you’re just as plump as a little partridge! And it is so becoming to you!” (p.14). For Blanche, protecting her beauty and remaining slender are proper etiquette for her survival in Patriarchal society.

Mitch is a male character in the play who is kind and sensitive. He is a lonesome man in search of a woman to get married and he lives with his sickly mother. When Blanche is introduced to him in Kowalski’s apartment during Stanley’s poker party, Mitch feels attracted to her. Blanche expects a marriage proposal from Mitch; she calls him “My Rosenkavalier!” (p.99). Der Rosenkavalier (The Cavalier of the Rose) is a comic opera that premiered in 1911. It tells the tale of a young girl and, the dashing young man that she falls in love with, and how he outwits the

pompous nobleman she is expected to marry. In order to gain Mitch's respect, Blanche tells Stella the following:

... [M]en don't want anything they get too easy. On the other hand men lose interest quickly. Especially when the girl is over-thirty. They think a girl over thirty ought to-the vulgar term is- "put out." And I - I'm not "putting out." "Of course he- he doesn't know- I mean I haven't informed him-- of my real age! (pp. 94-95).

Blanche is aware of the gender roles that serve the patriarchal system, and she knows that men want to marry younger women; therefore, she thinks that her real age should be hidden from Mitch. This is another subjugation found in this patriarchal society. When she talks to Mitch, she tries hard not to be seen under the bright light that will show the wrinkles on her face or her fading beauty. After Stanley's investigation to find out what Blanche did in Laurel and how she was dismissed from the school, Stanley informs Mitch about Blanche. In reaction to the news, Mitch says to Blanche, "You are not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother" (p. 150). Based on the previous quote, Mitch's reply is a harsh and traditional statement that dehumanizes and degrades her.

In Scene Two, Blanche appears in her red robe after having a bath. Her appearance and manner make Stanley suspicious about her intentions and manipulations which indicate that she is a fallen woman. He says, "If I didn't know that you were my wife's sister I'd get ideas about you!" (p.41). What Stanley asserts here is that although he is married, he would be disloyal to his wife.

2.2. Stella Kowalski

At first sight, Stella Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, is seen as independent and brave enough to move to New Orleans after her father's death; she tries her best to get used to the changes in her new life. She manages to transform her traditional southern habits into the expectations. At the same time, although Stella seems to be happy in her role as a wife and mother, she is an example of a female victim in a patriarchal society where she receives progressively increasing spousal abuse and betrayal. Stella is excited by Stanley's physicality and sexuality but he overpowers her at the same time. As a Southern belle, she does not consider the social class barrier between her and Stanley and accepts him as her husband, although he is a member of working class. For most Southern belle marriages, rich men were seen as an opportunity for security, a home, and a means for having children and carrying on the family lineage. At the same time, women were expected to satisfy the needs of their husbands.

It is interesting to see that the conflict between the two sisters stems from the patriarchal norms in the Southern culture. In this traditional society, the younger sibling receives orders from

the older siblings and the younger is required to be obedient and submissive to the elder. Blanche, the older sibling, following the death of her parents, decides to reunite with her married sister. When Blanche first meets her sister, she is puzzled with the quietness of her manner. Stella does not welcome Blanche properly, “You're all I've got in the world, and you're not glad to see me!” (p.13). In response to her elder sister, Stella says: “You never did give me a chance to say much, Blanche. So I just got in the habit of being quiet around you” (p.13). Based on the previous example, it is clear that their relationship is weak and there is no strong bond between the sisters as Stella erroneously assumes. Stella remains very quiet, says nothing but Blanche insists that Stella should respect her regardless of her behavior towards her simply because she is her elder sister:

You hear me? I said stand up! ... You messy child, you, you've spilt something on the pretty white lace collar! About your hair-you ought to have it cut in a feather bob with your dainty features ... (p.15).

In this context, Stella is reluctant to admit her maternal influence on her life and she does not intend to inform Blanche about her pregnancy. The first dialogue between two sisters shows that Blanche is an authoritarian elder sister, picking on Stella by using a psychological tactic. It is possible to say that their relationship lacks understanding and trust. Because Blanche does not have any employment possibilities and would have to live alone, Stella wants to take care of her.

Growing up in the South, raised as Southern belles of an aristocrat family, both sisters fail to achieve their expectations and choose wrong husbands. Blanche marries Allan, a man who identifies himself as homosexual and who commits suicide while Stella marries an abusive and dominating husband, Stanley.

3. The Concept of “Hegemonic Masculinity” in Relation to the Protagonist Stanley Kowalski

Australian scholar and sociologist Raewyn Connell uses the term “hegemonic masculinity” to refer to the pattern of practices that allow male dominance over women. In other words, masculinity is a structure of social practice which is associated with dominant position of men and subordination of women in a society as can be seen in the following quotation:

It [hegemonic masculinity] embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.(Connell & Messerschmidt, p.832).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) further argue that “men who received the benefits of patriarchy ... could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity” (832). It can be inferred that men have the primary power over women in the patriarchal system. As defined by Sultana (2011), “patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and

exploit women” (p.3). Accordingly, hegemonic masculinity appears in Williams’ play in terms of the female characters’ subordination.

In the light of Connell’s theory of “hegemonic masculinity”, Stanley Kowalski’s manner, behavior and personality, in short, his dominance over Blanche and Stella will be explained in the following section. Through Stanley’s hegemonic masculinity as portrayed in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, this paper will provide evidence on how women are dominated, and their lives are devastated.

3.1. Stanley’s Dominance over Blanche

Stanley is an auto part supplier and a “master sergeant in the engineers’ corps” (p.18) from a Polish origin; he claims to be “one hundred percent American” (p.134) by birth. He does not want to be called “a Polack”. The following stage direction describes Stanley:

He is of medium height, about five feet eight or nine, and strongly, compactly built. Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. Branching out from this complete and satisfying center are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humor, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. He sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them (pp.24-25).

Blanche believes that Stanley is a brutish man, unworthy of both Stella and Blanche. She wants to convince Stella to abandon him and start a new life together. At the same time, because Blanche lost the plantation, and since Stella cannot inherit any property, Stanley uses this as a means of exercising power over her and decides to ruin her life.

Stanley considers himself the master and ruler of his home and wife. He has the power to decide how things will play out and he makes decisions on her behalf. He does not like to be disturbed or challenged or lose. He is loud and messy, and allows no one to criticize his behavior. Stanley and Stella’s life together is a perfect example of a Southern patriarchal home: it is their flawed heaven.

Stanley is a physically strong and sexually attractive working-class man. He is an authoritarian and likes to control everything in his life. He enjoys being involved in cheap civil activities and is interested in simple hobbies. He declares his philosophical view by saying “Be comfortable is my motto” (p.26) which signifies his male superiority. In the play, he is a

stereotypical representative of patriarchy that ingrains and maintains a way to male domination in the Southern society.

At the beginning of the play, Stanley throws a packet of meat to Stella (p.4). Meat is a symbol of the animal instincts and symbolizes Stanley's sexuality and power. He is portrayed as an aggressive, cruel and "common" (p. 118) man.

The first question Stanley asks to Blanche is about the length of time of her visit. He says, "How long you here for, Blanche? (p. 27), and "You going to shack up here?" (p. 27). Furthermore, "You going to shack up here?" (p.27). With Stanley and Stella living together, the space that Blanche occupies in their small apartment creates a problem. In addition, the Kowalski is' two-room apartment is located in a noisy working-class neighborhood and Blanch feels unhappy with her uncomfortable situation and complains to Mitch, "there is no privacy" (p.111). Such discomfort creates trauma for Blanche and she looks forward to going somewhere else. She gets in contact with Mr. Shep Huntleigh of Dallas to secure a place for herself by sending him an urgent a message through a telephone operator, "In desperate, desperate circumstances! Help me! Caught in a trap" (p.160).

When Blanche sees Stanley for the first time, she is horrified by his rude behavior and calls him an animal. She realizes that Stanley is common and brutal, very different from the men with whom she had previous relations. Furthermore, when Blanche talks to Stella about Stanley, she focuses on his nature and culture. She tries to convince Stella that he is unworthy of both Stella and her when she says:

Suppose! You can't have forgotten that much of our bringing up, Stella, that you just suppose that any part of a gentleman's in his nature! Not one particle, no! Oh, if he was just-ordinary Just plain-but good and wholesome, but-no. There's something downright-bestial-about him! You're hating me saying this, aren't you? (p.82).

Moreover Blanche adds the following:

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! ... Yes, something ape-like about him. ... There he is, Stanley Kowalski, survivor of the Stone Age! (p.83).

Blanche thinks that Stanley is "simple, straightforward and honest, a little bit on the primitive side" (p.39) and she finds him "insufferably rude" (p.110). When Stella introduces Blanche to Stanley's poker friends, Mr. Gonzales and Mr. Hubbell, Blanche behaves very modestly and wants them not to stand up. Stanley instantly responds to Blanche by stating "Nobody's going

to get up, so don't be worried" (p. 50). Moreover, Blanch wants to be a kibitzer¹² so she is about to make comments during the poker party. Stanley does not accept this and commands: "You could not. Why don't you women go up and sit with Eunice? (p.50). It thereby becomes clear that Stanley cannot bear seeing Blanche when they are playing poker; thus he wants her out of his sight.

Blanche, horrified by Stanley's physical abuse by beating his wife, states to her sister: "Stella, I can't live with him! You can, he's your husband. But how could I stay here with him, after last night, with just those curtains between us?" (p.79).

When Blanche is talking to Mitch, she confesses that Stanley hates her and concludes "[t]he first time I laid eyes on him I thought to myself, that man is my executioner! That man will destroy me..." (p.111). Blanche's fear and anxiety in the beginning of the play comes true by the end of the play. The final words of Stanley echo in Blanche's ear, as he is bashing her on the head, dragging her into the bedroom and raping her: "Tiger'-tiger! Drop the bottle top! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" (p.162). It can be said that Stanley is a misogynist who treats his sister-in-law in such a violent manner. His hatred for women can be seen in the form of violence, which is the case when he rapes Blanche. By scene 10, Blanche's life and her chance for a marriage with Mitch are completely destroyed by Stanley and she is sent to a mental institution.

3.2. Stanley's Dominance over Stella

Stanley addresses his wife Stella as: "Baby" (p.32), "Baby Doll" (p.65), and for Blanche, he says, "canary bird" (p.137) and "Hens" (p.54) referring to both Stella and Blanche. These nicknames indicate Stanley's desire of power over them. The way he addresses his wife by not using her real name objectifies her identity. Stanley does not find Stella valuable and he commodifies her body by slapping her face whenever she crosses him, and beats her buttock in front of his male poker friends.

Stanley's male poker friends also support him in his approach towards Stella and Blanche. While Stanley plays poker with his friends, he wants Stella and Blanche to go upstairs to join their neighbor, Eunice. When Stella reminds him that "it is nearly two thirty" (p. 50) and wants him to quit playing "after one more hand" (p.50), Stanley stands up and "gives a loud whack of his hand on her thigh" (p. 50). His action makes Stella terrified, and she shares her frustration with Blanche: "It makes me so mad when he does that in front of people" (p.50).

Stanley is a boastful man and does not want to take orders from Stella. Stanley searches through Blanche's trunk without her knowledge; it is full of her dresses and belongings. When Stella wants

¹²A kibitzer is a person who watches the play at poker or bridge tables.

Stanley to close the trunk and get out of the room, he raises his voice angrily: “Since when do you give me orders? ... You're damn tootin' I'm going to stay here (pp.35-36).

Stanley is a dominant male character in the play. He is manipulative and aggressive. When Stella warns him to go and wash his greasy fingers, he intimidates her by shouting at her: That's how I'll clear the table!” Don't ever talk that way to me! “Pig-Polack-disgusting-vulgar-greasy!” -them kind of words have been on your tongue and your sister's too much around here! What do you two think you are? A pair of queens? (p.131).

Since Stanley is the breadwinner he takes the advantages of masculinity. Another study of R.W. Connell (1994) clarifies that “men’s overall social supremacy is embedded in face-to-face settings such as the family and workplace” (p.143). Based on Connell’s quotation, it can be stated that patriarchal power is men’s natural right, just like “divine right of kings” and the women are seen as inferior and should be suppressed under hegemony. Because Stanley is a man, he thinks that he is superior to women and shows his power through his posture, gesture and language. Stanley quotes what Huey Long says and, he declares his own kingdom in a threatening tone: “Every Man is a King!” And I am the king around here, so don't forget it!”(p.134).

Another issue that needs clarification is the Southern patriarchal societies portrayed in the play. Women are not allowed to work; they are kept indoors and not allowed appear in public places in the street; life is, like being in jail. Stella is not allowed to play poker, but can watch her husband play. In her declaration to Blanche about Stanley’s control of the budget Stella says: “Stanley doesn't give me a regular allowance, he likes to pay bills himself, but-this morning he gave me ten dollars to smooth things over” (p.78).Stella complains to Blanche about her economic dependence on her husband, which causes her to suffer and represents the female oppression portrayed in the play.

Stanley is the breadwinner of the house; therefore he wants everything to be under his control. He continually uses physical and emotional violence toward Stella and Blanche. He is resentful of anyone who thinks they are better than he is. He lacks a sense of toleration. It can be stated that all his manners and behaviors maintain his dominant social role over Stella and Blanche and he constructs the concept of hegemonic masculinity in the family and society. After Stanley’s cursing and the sounds of violence, Stella cries out and Blanche starts to scream. Hearing this, Eunice gets angry with Stanley and shouts at him:

You can't beat on a woman an' then call 'er back! She won't come! And her goin' t' have a baby! ... You stinker! You whelp of a Polack, you! I hope they do haul you in and turn the fire hose on you, same as the last time! (p.66).

Similar to the event inside Kowalski's apartment, Eunice and Steve also experience family violence. Sounds of domestic violence are also heard from their apartment upstairs: Steve hits Eunice and they fight with each other. Blanche's question to Stella is, "Did he kill her?" (p.86).

Connell (1987:183) argues that men establish and sustain their dominance over woman by propagating certain forms of masculinity that can be seen in different ways. In the play, Stanley shouts and yells at Stella and Blanche who are subservient under the authority of Stanley. Stanley uses these expressions to punish, humiliate, terrorize them and commodify their bodies. Stanley's hegemonic masculinity comes from the power he possesses as a product of a patriarchal system.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to show that Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is applicable to the play of Tennessee's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Connell adopts the concept of hegemony originated by Antonio Gramsci to analyze power relations among the social classes in the society. It is interesting to find out that there has been a parallel between the concept of hegemony and Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams, the two main female characters, Blanche and Stella are portrayed as gender stereotypes who are submissive in a male dominated Southern society in America. They are treated as inferior and dependent upon a man's control and authority. The male character Stanley is also portrayed as a gender stereotype; violent and brutal in his manner and behavior towards Blanche and Stella. As a undisputed master and the leader of the house, he imposes many restrictions on the sisters, and they experience domestic abuse and violence. Despite the fact that Blanche is superior in terms of her education, Stanley, as an uneducated working-class member, creates such trauma that causes his sister-in law to transform to become mentally ill. It can be stated that Stanley maintains his dominance by oppressing women, his wife and sister-in-law and creates the conflict in his family. As the research suggests, oppression is another form of hegemony that prevents equality between men and women. Men maintain their dominance through this construction by oppressing women. In the play, Stanley appears as a bearer of hegemonic masculinity by oppressing the two sisters. For one, his struggle to obtain his unique power creates tension that leads to his conflict with Blanche. On the other hand, Stella is rarely seen objecting to Stanley because of his sexual attraction or passion for her, she becomes an obedient wife and accepts a traditional and stereotypical gender role.

In conclusion, Blanche and Stella are the victims of a traditional Southern culture in which they have no freedom to do what they want in their lives. Blanche loses her childhood plantation and her prestigious job and feels guilty after her husband's death; in panic to continue her life and survive

on her own, Blanche, remains dependent upon her brother-in-law Stanley. Likewise, Stella is dependent on Stanley, her husband, since she has no opportunity to find a job and earn money. Most of the time, she is at home, busy with housework and cooking for her husband. In Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the Southern belles in the modern world of 1947 fail to fight against hegemonic masculinity and gain their independence to be free. Tennessee Williams portrays his female characters in subordinate roles to men and his male characters as dominant and patriarchal.

KAYNAKÇA

- American Heritage Dictionary. (1969). Stereotype. Online source.
[https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=stereotype\(01.01.2021\)](https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=stereotype(01.01.2021))
- Best, D. L., & Puzio, A. R. (2019). "Basic Processes: Gender and Culture". Eds. David Matsumoto, Hyisung C. Hwang. *The Handbook of Culture and Psychology*. U.S.A.:Oxford University Press, pp. 235-292.
- Connell, R.W. (1983). *Which Way Is Up?* London/Boston: Allen & Unwin.
- Connell, R.W. (1987). "Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasized Femininity". *Gender and Power*. London: Allan and Unwin, pp.183-188.
- Connell, R.W. (1994). "The State, Gender and Sexual Politics: Theory and Appraisal". Eds. H. L. Radtke & H. J. Stam. *Power / Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*. Canada: University of Calgary, pp.136-173.
- Connell, R. (2005). "The social Organization of Masculinity". *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. Oakland: CA: University of California Press, pp.30-50.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept". *Gender and Society*, 19 (6), pp. 829-859.
- Heidari, H., & Mohammadi, S. (2016). "On the Female Sexual Objectification in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*". *World Scientific News*, 56, pp. 229-238.
- Magaraggia, S., & Connell, R. (2012). "Gender in theory and practice: An Interview with Raewyn Connell". *Feminist Review*, (102), 116-124.
- Ribkoff, F., & Tyndall, P. (2011). "On the Dialectics of Trauma in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*". *The Journal of Medical Humanities*.32 (4), pp. 325-337.
- Sharma, A., & Sharma, H. (2016). "Tennessee Williams: Impact of His Life on His Work". *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies (IJELR)*, (3) 2, pp. 602-607.
- Sultana, A. (2011). "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis". *The Arts Faculty Journal*, 4, pp. 1-18.
- Qiang, Z. (2014). "An Explanation on Blanche's Tragedy in *A Streetcar Named Desire*". *Studies in Literature and Language*, (8) 3, pp. 106-110.
- Williams, T. (1980). *A Streetcar Named Desire*. U.S.A.: A New Directions Book.