

STAGING A *STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*, UNDERSTANDING ITS ELEMENTS

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Abstrak: Drama seperti genre sastra yang lainnya selalu identik dengan penggunaan bahasa kiasan dalam menyampaikan ekspresinya kepada pembaca. Khususnya drama, kalimat – kalimat dan kata – kata kias tersebut akan terefleksikan melalui dialog diantara para tokoh dalam cerita. Dari dialog yang dilakukan oleh para tokoh tersebut maka akan dapat dianalisis dan diobservasi elemen – elemen figuratif yang lain, semacam karakterisasi, struktur cerita, seting atau latar, tone, dan juga tema. Sayangnya, bagi sebagian besar mahasiswa, memahami elemen – elemen figuratif tersebut merupakan persoalan yang sulit, apalagi jika drama tersebut adalah drama klasik, seperti drama *A Streetcar Named Desire* karya Tennessee Williams. Dengan demikian salah satu solusi yang digunakan untuk membantu tingkat pemahaman para mahasiswa terhadap elemen – elemen figuratif ini adalah dengan cara memanggungkan atau menampilkannya dalam pentas drama di kelas. Makalah ini akan mengamati dan menganalisis strategi – strategi yang digunakan untuk memberikan tingkat pemahaman elemen – elemen figuratif dalam drama. Strategi – strategi yang digunakan tersebut terdiri dari beberapa tahap, yaitu: persiapan, diskusi, pengarahan, dan penampilan. Kemudian langkah selanjutnya, setelah penampilan, mahasiswa diberikan beberapa pertanyaan dalam bentuk kuesioner untuk mengukur tingkat pemahaman terhadap elemen – elemen figuratif mahasiswa setelah mereka menampilkan secara langsung drama tersebut.

Kata kunci: *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Elemen – elemen figuratif

Introduction

Drama is one of an interesting literary work to be analyzed. The readers can analyze it through its dialog among the characters. Like other literary works, drama has some poetic elements such as theme, plot, characterization, and completed with its figurative language. All of poetic elements in drama are played an important role in understanding the whole content of the story. Because it is impossible to understand and analyze the drama without analyzing all of poetic elements inside it. The development of plot, character, simile and metaphor usually are easily found in drama. Surely, all of these elements must be understood and analyzed to get the better understanding in drama. For example, to get the theme of the drama story, it needs to search the development of plot like the action, climax, and ending of the story and it needs to focus on the characterization, such as the main character, supporting character and its type like flat and round character.

A Streetcar Named Desire is one of the American outstanding drama that is very interesting to discuss. This drama is awarded Pulitzer prize and

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other awards and many times are performed on the stage and movie. It is one of Williams' masterpiece of drama and it includes the American greatest drama till today. Actually, *A Streetcar Named Desire* has been many times discussed in the paper, thesis, and dissertation and performed on the stage using different perspectives. But, because this drama is full of figurative language, symbol, and metaphorical elements, it is too hard for the learners in the literature class to understand it, and look for its literature elements which are formed this drama. Therefore, it needs several strategies to teach this drama in the class. In line with *A Streetcar Named Desire* Abbotson (2005) states that Its intriguing plot, fascinating characterizations, and excellent production made it a tremendous success, winning Williams his first Pulitzer, as well as Donaldson and New York Drama Critics' Circle awards. It made Marlon Brando, who played Stanley Kowalski, a household name, especially after the successful movie version, which followed in 1951. Although European critics were more skeptical, performances were well attended and the public declared it a hit, to establish Williams's reputation as a playwright on an international scale. It proves that this drama has sent Williams as an outstanding and great playwright not only in U.S. but also in the world.

Most of Williams' drama are reflected his past experiences in his life and the condition of the society in U.S. after the World War II. Therefore, his drama's themes tell about the past experiences of the main character and its influences to the character's life in the story. Bigsby (2004) states Williams acknowledges the impossibility of recovering the past. Indeed he accepts the equivocal nature of that past, stained, as it is, by cruelty and corruption. But the future is worse: power without charity, passion without tenderness. Williams had the romantic's fascination with extreme situations, with the imagination's power to challenge facticity, with the capacity of language to reshape experience, with the self's ability to people the world with visions of itself.

A Streetcar Named Desire is a drama that is full of conflict between two main characters since the beginning of story. Such conflicts are in relation with the main character, Blanche's past life. Then, like Williams' other dramas, *A Streetcar Named Desire* also tells the sexuality, romantic story, mental depression caused by modern life style, and destructive obsession. Regard with this drama, Bigsby states:

He deployed the iconography of the romantic: fading beauty, the death of the young, a dark violence, a redeeming love. Like the romantic he was inclined to blur the edge of the divide between his life and his art. It would be tempting to see his fondness for drink and drugs as yet another aspect of the romantic's twin quest for vision and self-destruction except that in his case it had more to do with terror and despair. It was certainly as a romantic in an unromantic world that he wished to present himself, transfiguring the failed enterprise that is life with nothing more than language and the imagination (2004:32).

The next, the dialog among the characters using informal utterances will contribute to make the learners facing the difficulties. Because in this drama, Tennessee Williams uses the styles of ordinary people dialog. These styles are ungrammatical, symbolic, and sometimes use French. The usage of French is caused by the setting of the story and the main character

background of life. Its setting is New Orleans and in this area lives many immigrants from France. Thus, to make the drama closes with the real condition, Williams uses several French words to ensure the reader that the setting is really in New Orleans. While, the french terms which is reflected in drama can be found in the names of several characters include main character of this drama, Blanche Dubois. This name means the “white wood”. The uses of several terms in French will show the cultural acculturation and will give the curiosity toward the readers to this drama, so that the learners will interest to discuss it.

The next, like Williams’ other plays, *A Streetcar Named Desire* theme focuses on unreality world of its main character, Blanche. She lives in her pseudo – world to hide her real age by using the powder and soft lightning of the lamp. Actually her attitude is caused by her past bad experiences. In line with telling about the complicated feeling of the past life is the characteristics of southern plays in United States at that time. High states that “we can clearly see elements of the Southern literary tradition...The past is usually looked upon with sadness, guilt or fear (1986:227). Therefore, such theme will be the focus of the discussion in this drama and function it as the way to discuss the other elements.

Drama’s story elements

Moreover, In line with the development of the story, Lavid (2008) considers the following elements of the story:

1)Action

Action occurs when a character is doing something. It is what you would see if the scene were on stage or at the movies. Action is external. Snippets of action, like the one above, orient the reader by anchoring the character in a place, time, and situation. Longer stretches of action, called dramatic action, heighten the tension.

2)Interior Thought.

Interior thought is what your POV (Point Of View) character thinks. Thoughts can be expressed in incomplete sentences, questions, or long paragraphs. Interior thought is the one element that is unique to written fiction. Thoughts play a critical role in the cause and effect sequence. Besides being used in sequel, thoughts are utilized throughout the narrative in linking all the other elements. Effective thoughts precipitate change.

3)Emotional Content

As I stated earlier, a character’s feelings should be known at all times so that you can play them with wild abandon. This goes for all the characters in the scene. When illustrating emotional content think of an approaching train. Begin with a distant rumbling that then builds as the scene continues. Emotional content can be shown by what a character does, says, senses or thinks. In this example it’s tucked inside a character’s action.

4) Description

Description is what is sensed (i.e., seen, smelled, touched, heard, tasted). Sensory detail brings vividness into the reader's mind. And the more specific the detail, the better. Again, when writing description, consider the emotional state of your characters. Then, description of place is called setting. When writing about a place try to go there. What are the sounds, smells? How does the light change? When choosing detail, make it unique.

5) Dialogue

Written dialogue is different from spoken dialogue. Normal communication is mundane, roundabout. Story dialogue is clipped and gets to the heart of the matter. Dialogue is the main vehicle used for expressing conflict. Some basic Do's:

- Do use contractions and sentence fragments.
- Do use punctuation instead of a tag. "Get out of here!"
- Do consider who's talking, i.e., a child should not sound like a university professor.
- Do use tags other than *said* sparingly, e.g., he demanded, she cooed.
- Do follow cause and effect:

6) Exposition

In fiction, exposition is background information that addresses underlying reasons for current actions, feelings, and thoughts. It's a form of telling that stops forward movement. In commercial fiction, it's best presented in snippets. If an event in a character's history is crucial to the story, consider starting the story from that particular event then move forward in time. Exposition can be paragraphed or woven into dialogue, description or interior thought. Exposition must have a purpose. If it's filler information – where your character was born –leave it out.

Utilizing these elements will keep the narrative moving along. When you're stuck, read your last written sentence then ask, in response what is the character doing (action), thinking (internal thought), feeling (emotional content), sensing (description), saying (dialogue)? And why (exposition)? When you think of writing this way, you will automatically do what writing books expound upon: showing, telling and following cause with effect.

There are two other concepts that will help make a scene interesting and seamless:

1) Pacing. Part of the magic with a good book is how the book is paced. Pacing, like many other aspects, occurs throughout the story in varying forms and levels. Alternating the main plot with a subplot can give an ebb and flow to the narrative. But there are other pacing tools. Scene speeds pace, sequel slows it down. Stretches of exposition, description, and interior thought decelerate the scene, but dialogue and dramatic summary revs it to breakneck speed. Short staccato sentences are fast. Long sentences are slow. Also, to prevent the rhythm from becoming

stilted, rearrange the placement of the subject, verb and object, and sandwich short sentences between longer ones.

2) Transitions. Sequels provide a transition from one scene to another, but there are times when you simply need to move along the story continuum without having a sequel. You'll often see a double drop space to denote a change of time or place, but seamless transitions can be applied by using *Emotion, Weather, Dialogue, Name, Time*.

Discussion

A. Pre - Stage

Before staging *A Streetcar Named Desire*, students must discuss about some elements of this drama. This discussion is aimed to explore the similar perception of the students to this drama. Because, among students have the different perception and understanding about this drama. Thus, to gain the similar perception, the students must be given the guidelines. Here the questions that will be given to measure the students understanding about *a Streetcar Named Desire*:

1. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Williams traces several styles of life, each to its poetic termination: that of Blanche, that of Stanley, and that of the indifferent Stella." In the light of this statement, discuss Williams' characterisation of these three figures in the play, show what "style of life" you think each of them embodies! And what kind of "poetic termination" Williams provides for each of them?
2. What do you believe Tennessee Williams is saying about human sexuality in *A Streetcar Named Desire*?
3. To what extent would you describe *A Streetcar Named Desire* as a tragedy?
4. To what extent can Blanche DuBois be described as a victim in *A Streetcar Named Desire*?
5. How effective a title do you think *A Streetcar Named Desire* is for this play?
6. Discuss the importance of the past in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
7. How far is Stanley's rape of Blanche a premeditated attack and how far was it precipitated by Blanche's own behaviour?
8. Blanche believes that the opposite of death is desire. How is this theme developed throughout the play?
9. Williams viewed the characters he created as my little company of the faded and frightened, the difficult, the odd, the lonely. Are any of the characters from *A Streetcar Named Desire* recognisable from this description?
10. Discuss the role of music and other sound effects in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
11. His plays deal consistently with a serious theme – self-pity, the persistence of memory that holds people in its grip and will not let them get on with their lives." Do you think that this statement can be applied to *A Streetcar Named Desire*?
12. How are the past and present intertwined in *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

13. Discuss the view that *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a play concerned with the conflict between the values of the old world and the new, and that this conflict is expressed through the battle between Stanley and Blanche.

14. Do you agree that the relationship of Blanche and Stanley, as it develops through the play, is simply one of villain and victim?

15. The play is less a lament to the world to which Blanche was born than it is a lament for the dream of it." To what extent do you agree with this view of the play?

16. How important are illusion and fantasy as themes in *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

B. Staging The Play

After the students discuss the questions that are given by the lecturer, the next, the students prepare to stage the play with their groups. The preparation covers the stage, decoration, costume, setting of the stage. Certainly, the students have practiced the drama before. The students with their own group have divided the roles and recreate the drama script. It is free for the students to modify *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The modification usually is to simplify the story, to change the genre like from the serious drama into comedy, and to shorten the dialog among the characters in the drama. Although the students change, recreate, and modify the drama, but *A Streetcar Named Desire* story's substance is not left. They have caught the main point of this drama, because based on the pre - stage discussion they have found the theme, plot, setting, and the development of the character in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Therefore there is no difficulties for the students to modify this drama according to their own creativity.

In staging the drama, students totally explore the characters of the drama, like Blanche Dubois, Stanley Kowalsky, Stella, Mitch and etc. They still use English in their dialog but they take only the important scenes in the story. There are the conflict between Stanley and Blanche because of the lost Belle Reve, fighting between Stanley and Stella caused by Stanley's drunk, the love story of Blanche and Mitch, the breaking of Mitch and Blanche relationship, the illusion and traumatic of Blanche because of her past experiences, the rape of Blanche, and the tragic ending of Blanche's life. The students limit the scene because the time is limited and if all of scenes are applied it is too difficult to act. The actions are selected by considering the culture and moral values.



Picture 1: The beginning of conflict between Blanche and Stanley

The ending and the characters sometimes are also modified. Such as, in this performance below (picture 2), the students try to modify the ending of this drama. Although in the drama text, Blanche Dubois ends in the tragic ending, she sends to the asylum after the raping but this group tries to show that this drama is only to entertain the audience. The scene is ended with the action between Stanley and Stella. They live peacefully in their house after the sending of Blanche into the asylum. The image that is caught by the audience is the happy ending of this drama because it is closed by the happy scene of Stanley's family.



Picture 2: the act of drama ending

Another drama modification performance is to change the genre. Actually, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is the serious play. The story is full of conflicts and it is very complicated problems among the characters. But, one group can modify it into the comedy drama. For example, the costume that are wore by the characters, it is very colorful, then the way of the dialog and the scene of the play. The dialogs are not serious and full of jokes. The next is the characterization, for this group, they change the drama pattern. Stella who is characterized as the pretty, kind, soft, and slim woman is changed into the fat, rough, and careless woman. Above all, this group can entertain the audiences with their dialog, actions, and the story.

C. Drama Evaluation

After performing the drama on the stage, the students will be given the feedback about *A Streetcar Named Desire* drama. The feedback is to measure and to compare the level of understanding before staging and after staging the drama. The feedback that are given to the students cover the whole scenes of this drama, from scene 1 till scene 11. The students are given the worksheet and they can discuss with their friends. The assignment will ask about the dramatic effects of drama, such as the fantasy/illusion, primitive/primal, cruelty, desire, and loneliness. Here the result of the worksheet that are done by the students after the drama performance:

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS*A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*

NABILA FIDIYANDINI – DRAMA 1
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Theme	Scene 1	Scene 2	Scene 3
Fantasy/ Illusion	"They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and transfer to one called Cemeteries, and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields!" (Blanche to Eunice and Negro woman)		
Cruelty	"But you are the one that abandoned Belle Reve, not I! I stayed and fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it!" (Blanche to Stella).	Stanley: "I'll have a look at them first!" Blanche: "The touch of your hand insults them!" Stanley: "Don't pull that stuff!"	Stanley: "You hens cut out that conversation in there!" Stanley: "Let the rut go of me, you sons of bitches!"
Primitive/ Primal		"In the state of Louisiana we have the Napoleonic code according to which what belongs to the wife belongs to the husband and vice versa." (Stanley to Stella).	Mitch: "I gotta sick mother. She don't go to sleep until I come in at night."
Desire			Mitch's stage direction: [He crosses slowly back into the kitchen, glancing back at Blanche and coughing a little shyly.] (the first time he meets Blanche Dubois)
Loneliness	"I want to be near you, got to be with somebody, I can't be alone!" (Blanche to Stella).		"Yes. There's so much confusion in the world. Thank you for being so kind! I need kindness now." (Blanche to Mitch)

Theme	Scene 4	Scene 5	Scene 6
Fantasy/ Illusion	<p>“Yes. I ran into Shep Huntleigh-I ran into him on Biyscane Boulevard, on Christmas Eve, about dusk...getting into his car-Cadillac convertible, must have been a block long!” (Blanche to Stella).</p>	<p>“Myself, myself, for being such a liar! I’m writing a letter to Shep. ‘Darling Shep, I am spending the summer on the wing, making flying visits here and there....” (Blanche to Stella).</p>	<p>“Sometimes-there’s God-so quickly!” (Blanche).</p>
Cruelty	<p>“Well, if you forgive me, he’s <i>common!</i>” “He acts like an animal, has an animal’s habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one!” (Blanche to Stella).</p>	<p>Steve: “Don’t you throw that at me!” Eunice [<i>shrieking</i>]: “You hit me! I’m gonna call the police!”</p>	<p>“The first time I laid eyes on him I thought to myself, that man is my executioner!” (Blanche to Mitch).</p>
Primitive/ Primal		<p>“And men don’t want anything they get too easy. But on the other hand, men lose interest quickly.” (Blanche to Stella).</p>	<p>“You know as well as I do that a single girl, a girl alone in the world, has got to keep a firm hold on her emotions or she’ll be lost!” (Blanche to Mitch).</p>
Desire	<p>“What are you talking about is brutal desire-just-desire! The name of that rattle-rap street-car that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street</p>	<p>“Come here. I want to kiss you, just once, softly and sweetly on your mouth.” [<i>Without waiting for him to accept, she crosses quickly to him and presses her lips to his.</i>]</p>	<p>“You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be — you and me, Blanche?” (Mitch to Blanche).</p>

	and down another..." (Blanche to Stella).		
Loneliness			

Theme	Scene 7	Scene 8	Scene 9
Fantasy/ Illusion			
Cruelty	<p>"The trouble with Dame Blanche was that she couldn't put on her act any more in Laure! They got wised up after two or three dates with her and then they quit, and she goes on to another, the same old line, same old act, same old hooley!" (Stanley to Stella).</p> <p>"Hey, canary bird! Toots! Get OUT of the BATHROOM! (Stanley to Blanche).</p>	<p>"That's how I'll clear the table! Don't you 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 think you are, a pair of queens? Remember what Huey Long said—"Every man's a King!" And I am the king around here, so don't forget it!" (Stanley to Stella).</p>	<p>Mitch: "You lied to me, Blanche." "Lies! Lies, inside and out, all lies." "You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother." (Mitch to Blanche). "Go away, then. Get out of here quick before I start screaming fire! Get out of here quick before I start screaming fire. Fire! Fire! Fire! (Blanche to Mitch).</p>
Primitive/Primal	<p>"But the town was too small for this to go on forever! And as time went by she became a town character. Regarded as not just different but downright loco-nuts." (Stanley to Stella).</p>	<p>"When we first met, me and you, you thought I was common. How right you was, baby. I was common as dirt. You showed me the snapshot of the place with the columns. I pulled you down off them columns and</p>	<p>"I don't mind you being older than what I thought. But all the rest of it-Christ! That pitch about your ideals being so old-fashioned and all the malarkey that you're dished out all summer. Oh, I knew you weren't sixteen anymore. But I</p>

		<p>how you loved it, having them colored lights going! And wasn't we happy together, wasn't it all okay till she showed here? And wasn't we happy together? Wasn't it all okay till she showed here, hoity-toity, describin' me like an ape?" (Stanley to Stella).</p>	<p>was fool enough to believe you was straight." (Mitch to Blanche).</p>
Desire			
Loneliness			

Theme	Scene 10	Scene 11
Fantasy/ Illusion	<p>"Mr. Shep Huntleigh. I wore his ATO pin my last year at college. I hadn't seen him again until last christmas. I ran into him on Biscayne Boulevard. Then-just-now-this wire-inviting me on a cruise of the Caribbean! The problem is clothes. I tore into my trunk to see what I have that's suitable for the tropics!"</p> <p>"But then he came back. He returned with a box of roses to beg my forgiveness. But some things are not forgivable. Deliberate cruelty is not forgivable! It is the one unforgivable thing, in my opinion, and the one thing of which I have never,</p>	<p>"I-just-told-her-that-we'd made arrangements for her to rest in the country. She's got it mixed in her mind with Shep Huntleigh." (Stella to Eunice).</p> <p>----</p> <p>Stella: "Who from, Blanche?"</p> <p>Blanche: " Shep Huntleigh."</p> <p>Stella: "Why, not yet, honey!"</p> <p>Blanche: "How strange! I...."</p>

	never been guilty..." (Blanche to Stanley).	
Cruelty	"I warn you, don't, I'm in danger!" [<i>He takes another step. Smashes a bottle on the table and faces him, clutching the broken top.</i>] "So I could twist the broken end in your face!" (Blanche to Stanley).	Stella: "Oh, my God, Eunice help me! Don't let them do that to her, don't let them hurt her! Oh God, oh, please God, don't hurt her! What are they doing to her? What are they doing to her? [<i>She tries to break from Eunice's arms.</i>]
Primitive/ Primal	"We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" (Stanley to Blanche).	"You know what luck is? Luck is believing you're lucky...To hold a front position in this rat-race you're got to believe you are lucky." (Stanley to Pablo).
Desire	"Oh! So you want some rough-house! All right, let's have some rough-house! Tiger-tiger! Drop the bottle-top! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" (Stanley to Blanche). [She moans. The bottle-top falls. She sinks to her knees. He picks up her inert figure and carries her to the bed...]	Stanley [to Stella, <i>voluptuously, soothingly</i>]: "Now, honey. Now, love. Now, now, love. [<i>He kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of her blouse.</i>] Now, now, love. Now, love... [<i>The luxurious sobbing, the sensual murmur fade away under the swelling music of the "blue piano"and the muffled trumpet.</i>]
Loneliness		"Whoever you are — I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." (Blanche to Doctor).

Conclusion

The effective way to understand the drama is not only to read it closely but also to perform it on the stage. Because not all students have the similar competence to understand the drama text. Therefore, to gain the similar understanding, it is better to perform it, and give the students the worksheet to measure their level of understanding. Besides, they can understand with the content, performing drama can be the media for the students to express their talent to act. They also can entertain their friends through their performance on the stage. They will understand the dramatic elements by performing art.

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