

Elia Kazan and Richard Brooks do Tennessee Williams: Melodramatizing *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* on Stage and Screen

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For those who would evaluate his influence on American culture, the film versions of the plays of Tennessee Williams hold more interest than is ordinarily supposed. Produced for mass audiences, the films presumably offer Williams's intentions only in a distorted or diluted form. Because the playwright did not oversee the productions, students of Williams consider them inauthentic as well. There is some truth in both these judgments. However, Williams's influence on Hollywood and Hollywood's importance for the playwright's career cannot be so easily dismissed. His dramatic texts played a key role as source material in the profitable development of "adult films" in the crisis-ridden Hollywood of the fifties, beginning a trend that would culminate during the late sixties in the institutionalization of the adult film and the ratings system that now defines it. As I have argued at length elsewhere, it would be difficult to imagine this crucial development without *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Baby Doll*, and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (Palmer 1997). No doubt, Williams influenced the history of Hollywood much more than the standard film histories acknowledge. Conversely, it is the popular films made from his plays that made Williams more central within American culture than playwrights of similar Broadway stature who were not so well served by Hollywood—Arthur Miller and William Inge especially. If film scholars have slighted Williams, it is only because they are predisposed to pay little attention to literary sources, to what is strictly "pre-textual" in terms of film production.

The Williams films, particularly the commercially and critically successful versions of *Cat* and *Sweet Bird* directed by Richard Brooks, are important in another way as well, one which I intend to explore in more depth here. These two Hollywood blockbusters help us understand how Williams's modernism was adapted to the more traditional tastes of his audiences; this adaptation was by turns both theatrical and cinematic. Paradoxically perhaps, such "melodramatization" was alternately furthered and resisted by the playwright; and so it was left to Elia Kazan and Richards Brooks, who mounted the stage and screen productions, to complete. In part because of these accommodations, Williams's place within American culture, both highbrow and middlebrow, became and has continued to be more central than those of similarly celebrated contemporaries: notably, Arthur Miller, William Inge, Lillian Hellman, and Edward Albee. For this reason, the interconnected contributions of Kazan and Brooks to the stage and cinematic versions of *Cat* and *Sweet Bird* merit the close attention of Williams scholars. I intend to

explore here how *Cat* was melodramatized, leaving the equally fascinating case of *Sweet Bird* for a later occasion.

To begin, a brief theoretical excursus is necessary. Traditionally, film adaptations have been evaluated in terms of their faithfulness. This approach necessarily marginalizes whatever cultural significance and aesthetic value adaptations might possess. So judged, they always fail to achieve their presumed and impossible goal: identity with the very text they displace. Thus adaptations are for many critics always, already defined by the fall into difference and, hence, into an easily derogated derivativeness. It is more useful, I would argue, to approach adaptations in an aesthetically neutral fashion. We should see them, in other words, as versions whose differences from their texts of origin mark the particular conditions of their production and reception. The cinematic adaptations of plays pose a further complexity. Plays involve no original text that could be, properly speaking, “adapted” for the screen. The playscript (though often designed for silent reading as well) is by definition a pre-text actualized only through its production. And this production is work that the cinema, also a performance art, manages as readily as the theater.

The work of production, theatrical or cinematic, is always a fall from the pre-textual order of words determined by the expressive urge of the playwright into a collaborative art form shaped by the economic protocols of exchange. In our culture, these protocols define the performance arts. The Broadway theater, it is useful to recall, is just as commercial as the Hollywood cinema, if, of course, in different ways. Brought to the screen, Williams’s plays did not suffer a fall from Art into Commerce, as many who have commented on the film versions, including Williams himself, routinely assume. Instead, the plays were simply produced in a different yet related medium.

Because he wished for success, Williams, moreover, was never during the early stages of his career unaffected by economic bottom lines. He was very conscious that he wrote within an institutional context that made the very “publication” of the artistic text dependent upon its demonstrable commercial appeal. Institutional pressures meant that Williams’s startlingly modernist dramatic ideas and themes were often (if not always) accommodated to the established tastes and conventions of both the Broadway theater and the Hollywood cinema. After the success of *Streetcar* in both its forms and the stage failure of less conventional works such as *Battle of Angels*, Williams had the opportunity to solidify his position within the American commercial theater. Yet he could do so only if he continued to offer theatrical audiences a playgoing experience that conformed in large measure to their expectations. Similarly, his texts could enjoy a second and popular life on the silver screen (something Williams ardently desired) only if he continued to write what Hollywood could adapt to its own purposes and requirements.

This is not to say, of course, that Williams was a hack eager to write whatever he thought might gain him acclaim and financial success. As a modernist firmly committed to postromantic notions of artistic autonomy and creative expressive-

ness, Williams inevitably resisted the accommodations he made, feeling that what he had to say would likely be altered for the worse. But as a professional writer eager for the popularity that would allow him to continue his career, Williams not only listened to what others with more commercial sense advised. After the failure on Broadway of *Camino Real* (undoubtedly his most complexly modernist text), he wrote *Cat* with more regard for mainstream tastes. Unlike *Camino*, *Cat* is Aristotelian (driven by plot), melodramatic (dominated by a rhetoric of affect), realist (dependent on credible illusion), and socially conservative (supportive, though not unambiguously, of traditional sexual politics). Here was a more accessible drama that would prove immensely successful in both its theatrical and cinematic forms.

When *Cat* was initially produced on stage, director Elia Kazan pushed Williams even further in the direction of middlebrow taste, reluctantly aided by the playwright, who skillfully rewrote Act III to his director's specifications. As we will see below, the film version by Richard Brooks takes these modifications several steps further, re-shaping the play in ways that caused Williams substantial distress even as the changes made possible a critical and box office success few playwrights have enjoyed on the silver screen. A similar development may be glimpsed in the case of *Sweet Bird*. Interestingly, it is Brooks who here played Kazan's role. Though at Williams's insistence Kazan oversaw the Broadway version, the director was perhaps more reticent to ask the playwright to rewrite after their collaboration on the third act of *Cat* had earned him a quite public, if respectful rebuke.

Williams was determined to include in the printed text of *Cat* his original alongside the Broadway version he had rewritten in response to Kazan's criticisms. In a brief introductory essay, Williams somewhat hesitatingly rejected the director's influence on his writing. Conceiving himself as an artist in the postromantic sense, Williams, though happy to be successful yet again, resented what he felt was the compromise that had made it possible. He confesses with some reluctance that playwriting involves the transformation of private feelings into public art:

It is sad and embarrassing and unattractive that those emotions that stir him deeply enough to demand expression . . . are nearly all rooted, however changed in their surface, in the particular and sometimes peculiar concerns of the artist himself. (3)

But if Williams, as an artist, feels driven to communicate personally and intimately, to his chagrin he must take into account the needs and desires of his audience:

Of course, I know that I have sometimes presumed too much upon corresponding sympathies and interest in those to whom I talk boldly, and this has led to rejections that were painful and

costly enough to inspire more prudence. But when I weigh one thing against another, an easy liking against a hard respect, the balance always tips the same way, and whatever the risk of being turned a cold shoulder, I still don't want to talk to people only about the surface aspects of their lives. (6)

Albert J. Devlin argues that the fictional cadre of *Cat* is meant to “obscure Williams’s skepticism for the theatre of ‘de-monstration’” (190). To put it somewhat differently, the fiction then is an Aristotelian form that enables yet denies the playwright’s controlling idea, which paradoxically is anti-Aristotelian. The drama, ostensibly committed to action and change, features a hero who refuses to engage in the agon that confronts him. Obviously, this is an anti-dramatic notion that, taken to its logical conclusion, would shift the work decisively to lyricism. But Williams was not willing to go this far in search of the audience’s “hard respect.” He devised instead a fiction that made more for an “easy liking,” even though he was unwilling at first to work his characters through to the conclusion their interaction implied. Lyricism and struggle were uneasily balanced in the play’s first version. Kazan and then Brooks, however, would help the playwright shift his conception decisively toward the dramatic, though the results were, ironically, not to Williams’s satisfaction in either case.

In any event, no similar controversy erupted during the initial production of *Sweet Bird* and the play’s subsequent publication. There are indications, however, that Kazan was not entirely satisfied with the final shape of the playtext. For he did not, even after the play proved a critical and popular success, refrain from declaring that, much like the original draft of *Cat*, the produced version of *Sweet Bird* was compromised by a major structural fault. It was more like two one-act plays, Kazan said, held together only by Williams’ verbal virtuosity. Perhaps diplomatically, he remained silent about what attempts, if any, he made to correct the problem (the issue is discussed in Phillips, 154-5).

In mounting the screen version of *Sweet Bird*, Brooks perhaps set out to finish the revision Kazan was reluctant to undertake. In any event, the changes Brooks made bear close comparison to those Kazan helped effect in *Cat*. The result is not only that the film versions are more similar than their corresponding plays. Interestingly, they also closely resemble the melodramatic structures Kazan created for his own films, especially *On the Waterfront*. The film versions, then, illustrate the accommodation of Williams’s ideas to more traditional dramatic structures and themes, to what might well prove popular and hence profitable. The playwright regretted the alterations in his original dramatic conceptions, even though he once said, perhaps tongue in cheek, that the film version of *Sweet Bird* is superior to the produced play. Neither film is by any measure a faithful adaptation. Yet, as we shall see here, *Cat* offers eloquent testimony about the continuing process of accommodation that brought Williams’s ideas and characters (as well

as the incomparable poetry that gave them life) to the wider audience he was always eager to reach.

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF: THE PLANTATION MYTH REDIVIVUS

For the Broadway career of Tennessee Williams, the initial production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* marked a crucial turning point. With this play, Williams rejected the demonstrated unprofitability of his brilliantly mythic *Camino Real*, a play that is the equal of the best postwar European dramas with which Williams was so taken. Reviews that were lukewarm at best and mediocre box office showed him that *Camino* was too marked by intertextual reference, self-reflexive anti-illusion, and allegorical rhetoric to satisfy the tastes of most theatergoers. And, it is hardly surprising, Williams soon turned back to the poetics of affect, illusion, and suspense that had made *A Streetcar Named Desire* such a success. As Brenda Murphy has demonstrated in convincing detail (Murphy 1992), director Elia Kazan helped Williams carefully modulate audience involvement with and sympathy for both Stanley and Blanche, characters whose differentiated humiliations at play's end are not only intellectually, but emotionally satisfying as well.

It is significant, I think, that Williams's triumph with *Streetcar* resulted substantially from collaboration with Kazan. At the time, Kazan was not only a Broadway giant. Arguably, he was also Hollywood's most skilled director of screen melodrama. Kazan had recently worked box office magic and received critical acclaim for *Pinky* (1949), *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945), and *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), all films dependent upon an affecting staging of family and cultural problems that are neatly resolved by characters who learn and grow from their dramatic interactions. This was not an aesthetic that Kazan in any sense discarded after working so successfully with more "literary" material on Broadway, as his film *On the Waterfront* (1954) clearly demonstrates. Here is yet another critical and popular triumph justly famed for its carefully developed and deeply affecting moments of recognition and reversal. Terry Malloy's anguished confession of failure to his brother prepares the way for his tortured perseverance in the final, penitential struggle with union thugs. Terry first colludes with, but then despises and defeats, the mendacity he's been forced to live with, embracing publicly the conventional virtues urged on him by a crusading priest and the girl he loves, who is the sister of a man he helped murder.

The film resembles closely the Broadway version of *Cat*, and this is perhaps the result of Kazan's involvement with both projects. Like Terry Malloy, *Cat's* Brick Pollitt is persuaded by the woman who loves him to face the guilty secret that prevents him from doing what would restore his integrity and position in society. Brick finds that he too has had enough of those lies (including his own) that isolate and destroy. In the end, he is moved to take action that is less public and heroic than Terry Malloy's, but equally effective. Brick endorses Maggie's decep-

tion, which, should he turn it into truth, will save him and his family from a perhaps fatal decline into mediocrity. The play ends ambiguously, but on the verge of a supremely melodramatic resolution. Through Brick's apparent transformation, *Cat* comes close to celebrating the social importance of heterosexual coupling. Williams writes large Brick's role within patriarchy since his fruitful union with Maggie would assure the dynastic succession of the aptly named Big Daddy. With *Cat*, Williams thus moves far from the thematics of his earlier stage triumph, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. For there the playwright thoroughly ironizes the heterosexual imperative through the mock triumph of Stanley's reconciliation with Stella at the end of *Streetcar*. The contrast between the two plays is thus startling, to say the least.

Interestingly, the original version of *Cat's* Act III proves that Kazan was not the one to introduce melodrama into Williams's conception. As first written, the play, paradoxically, is self-reflexively melodramatic in its ostentatious denial of melodrama. What I mean is that the dramatic action moves toward a conclusion it will not finally represent. Maggie's relentless battering and Big Daddy's empathetic interrogation push Brick toward the change of heart that should restore the family to itself. And this is nothing less than the softening of Brick's obdurate refusal to procreate, to mature in the terms demanded by an institutionalized heterosexuality with no concern for the vagaries of desire (as Big Daddy's proud report of passionless, dutiful lovemaking with Big Mama exemplifies). Brick's refusal is nothing less than the textual reflex of Williams's initial refusal to provide in Act III the dramatic structure that the first two acts build toward. That Big Daddy does not reappear is especially significant, for it robs the play's conclusion of its most powerful advocate of acceptance and resignation, even as it obscures the generational continuity and male common cause implied in the reconciliation of father and son that ends Act II. Devlin perceptively suggests that the double, contradictory turning of *Cat* should be traced to Williams's "practice of a deceptive realism that satisfied both the economic law of Broadway and the artistic prompting of Tennessee Williams's endangered career." He goes on to argue that to preserve the "poem of the play," Williams, perhaps with some cynicism, dusted off and made use of an obvious set of themes and characters, "the realistic conventions of the Southern literary plantation" (95).

The plantation myth, merely an undramatized allusion in *Streetcar* but the cultural cadre that provides the plot and characters of *Cat*, shows the imaginative and literary connection between the two plays. Williams invokes yet another form of it in *Sweet Bird*. His use of the plantation myth in *Cat* underlines the more conventional themes of that play. In *Streetcar*, the myth explains the social failure whose implications the play dramatizes in a working class New Orleans far from the aristocratic refinement of Belle Reeve. To account for her penury and rootlessness, Blanche describes the inability of the plantation, because of the family's weak and dissolute males, to sustain itself as an economic unit. For the estate must be sold to pay creditors, depriving Blanche of her home. What her precipitous arrival in New Orleans also signifies is that the plantation, a clear metonymy for

patriarchy, has failed to properly monitor sexual desire. The unattached and unsupervised widow of a homosexual driven to suicide by her rejection, Blanche cannot prevent her own slide into a self-destructive promiscuity. With no small poetic justice, she is ultimately punished by Stanley, a rough trade emissary of the lower social orders who scorns her aristocratic airs even as he is eager to share her "fortune." Blanche's demise repeats that of the feckless males in her family, who also managed to lose everything through a failure of self-control. Thus the desire that the play thematizes cannot be institutionalized; it motivates only predation and exploitation, not the building of society. As Stanley's pathetic bondage to Stella exemplifies, moreover, such a desire imparts a power defined most tellingly by the weakness at its very center.

These terms are reversed in *Cat*. Here it is the damaged and dissolute heir apparent whose rejection of his patrimony is deflected, perhaps forever, by a woman who insists, perhaps triumphantly, on the heterosexual imperative, that is, procreative marriage. During the turbulent course of Brick's regeneration, the justice of that imperative is called into question several times: by Maggie's liaison with Skipper, by Skipper's inability to perform, by the mediocre and obnoxious fertility of Gooper and Mae, by Brick's homosocial leanings, and by the aging young man's attachment to an adolescent world of self-satisfaction and boyish pleasure. However assaulted, a fecund heterosexuality defined by familial ties is re-established by the indomitable integrity of Big Daddy, a strong patriarch of the type whose absence from Blanche's family is not even lamented in *Streetcar*. Big Daddy models for his troubled son acceptance of the necessary lies and discontents of family relations. So thoroughly is his identity invested in the destiny of the family that he even manages to accept with equanimity his own approaching death. His hopes for a proper dynastic succession never dim.

Streetcar's engagement with patriarchy, in contrast, produces only the crass and selfish Stanley, whose bellowing and sexual violence inadequately mask his feminization and self doubts (hence his easily wounded pride, his endless theatrical posturing, his irrational, self-abasing possessiveness of Stella). Arriving in Stanley's home, Blanche leaves the plantation behind forever, but discovers no social order that might permit and encourage her rehabilitation, no space that could outside of death, real or symbolic, accommodate her desire. Cut adrift from the world of marital satisfaction Maggie seems able to reinstate, Blanche cannot become again the "right kind" of woman she must once have in some sense been. Her attempt to negotiate a proposal of marriage from Mitch has no chance of success in any case because he, like Stanley, is another feminized male, a mama's boy not yet married since he is hardly marriageable.

Because it deals with failure rather than refusal, *Streetcar* satisfies the average playgoer's need for engagement with both sympathetic characters and a narrative that takes them from ignorance, confusion, and conflict to a "moving" resolution. In contrast, *Cat's* initial working version, with its weak third act, did not deliver the tight dramatic structure of *Streetcar*. And so Kazan, who was eagerly

sought out by Williams to direct again, offered three suggestions for improvement. Each of these was very much in line with his characteristic concern for affect. Big Daddy, so powerfully developed in Act II, was to reappear in Act III; Maggie was to be made more sympathetic; and Brick's unyielding refusal to deviate from self-destruction and reconcile with her was to show some sign of weakening. With Kazan's ideas firmly in place, *Cat* became the playwright's greatest critical and popular success.

In fact, the money he earned from Richard Brooks's immensely profitable film version made Williams financially independent for the remainder of his life. Never again would he have to worry, as he did after the disastrously short run of *Camino Real*, about supporting himself through playwriting or having the opportunity to see what he wrote produced on stage. But the film version of *Cat* required further changes. Williams did not authorize them. Yet they were in some sense authentic and appropriate since they were very much in line with not only the positive version of the plantation myth he had decided to deploy in this play, but also with the significant changes he had effected himself at Kazan's gentle insistence.

Brooks's *Cat*, we could well say, offers more radical versions of the alterations that Kazan inspired. His Maggie is a much more sympathetic character. She cheerfully and readily accepts not only the authority of Big Daddy but also the leadership of her husband once he's made his peace with mendacity. The film's Brick not only endorses Maggie's lie; he finds in her trust of his renewed masculinity the strength to reassert his sexual control, summoning her to their bed at film's end. Brooks's Big Daddy not only helps Brick fight through to a healing understanding of the disgust that disables him. He comes to grips with rejection by his own father, whose failure bequeathed him an irrepressible desire for success, which Brick's unending quest for athletic success mirrors. As Big Daddy heals Brick's psychic wound, so Brick is able to heal his father's. In the film, a strongly emphasized element of Brick's disgust is his anger at Big Daddy for not having been a properly nurturing parent. But because he now learns *in extremis* of his father's similar dissatisfaction, Brick can accept the dying man's Abrahamian demand to be fruitful and multiply. The most important general point to make about Brooks's version is this. Rewriting preoccupied the film's director.

Brooks's approach to the adaptation, we might then say, was much more dramatic than cinematic. In other words, the director put more emphasis on rewriting and re-staging than on devising images that might substitute for dialogue and performance. His two Williams films offer not only little in the way of "opening out" beyond the stage set limitations, but also few silent sequences (except for the effective flashbacks in *Sweet Bird*). A more thoroughly cinematic approach to filming Williams is to be found, for example, in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's version of *Suddenly Last Summer*. Among other fundamental alterations, we might signal the

Brooks made in *Cat* (abbreviated dialogue, some new lines, excised expressionistic devices, more naturalistic acting, etc.), one is perhaps most significant. Wisely, the director re-stages the play so as to lessen the isolation of the characters from each other. That re-staging allows him to take one step further the changes initiated by Kazan.

In the original, the transition from Act I to Act II separates the dialogue between Maggie and Brick from Brick's talk with his father; those dialogues dominate the first two thirds of the play, but are not connected very effectively, either dramatically or thematically to Act III. The film version offers a more fluid dramatic structure that emphasizes the complex interactions of Brick, Maggie, and Big Daddy with the others in the family. The Pollitt house, inside and out, becomes a more plastic playing space, with the characters' restless movements through it indexing their turmoil and transformation. A brief summary will demonstrate.

Maggie and Brick's bedroom conversation is first interrupted by Maggie's departure to greet Big Daddy at the airport. He returns to the plantation alone in her car and chastises Maggie for not yet having three kids and a fourth "in the oven." Upon her return, the couple's quarrel is again interrupted, this time for a parental visit from Big Mama. She upbraids her daughter-in-law for failing to have children and, perhaps, not giving Brick "what he wants." While Maggie attends Big Daddy's birthday party downstairs, Brick learns the truth about his father's cancer from the family doctor. Brick and Maggie then resume their quarrel, which touches a painful nerve when Maggie mentions Brick's feelings ending with Maggie's resolution to do something about having Brick's baby when he can't stand being with her. The party then moves up to Brick's room, where, among other revelations, Big Daddy tells Big Mama how dissatisfied he has been with their marriage.

The others then leave the bedroom to Brick and Big Daddy, where the father's questions about Brick's coldness toward Maggie soon turn into a discussion of the son's self-destructiveness. The two move downstairs to the study; there Brick's refusal to answer his father's questions about Skipper prompts Big Daddy to summon Maggie. Much of the angry interchange between Brick and Maggie that occurs privately in the play's Act I here occurs in Big Daddy's benevolent presence. The father ascertains that nothing happened between Maggie and Brick's best friend; Brick, it turns out, thinks himself to blame for Skipper's death because he did not reassure him of his support and affection. The homosexual implications of Brick's attachment to Skipper, handled more directly if with delicacy in the original, are here effectively explained away. Brick, Big Daddy thinks, cannot embrace adult responsibility: "the truth is that you never grew up." Brick runs out into the rain to drive away (in a top down convertible awash with the storm) but gets stuck in the mud, a fitting image not only of his immaturity, but also of his inability to escape from the truth and his responsibilities.

Before his abortive flight, however, Brick, refusing to go along with the lie about his father's health, lets Big Daddy know that his condition is terminal.

Concerned for his father's pain, Brick slips by the rest of the family, who are squabbling over who should inherit the family business interests, to join his father in the mansion's basement. In this way, Brooks effectively integrates material from Acts II and III, adding to it by having Brick, whose self-imposed isolation from the family is disintegrating, seek out Big Daddy. In a basement full of unpacked art bought on a European junket and Brick's athletic memorabilia, father and son speak for the first time with no lies between them. Brick vents his self-loathing on his own trophies, accuses his father of having more interest in things than his sons, but then comes to understand how Big Daddy loves him when the old man speaks frankly of his own experience and discontent. Tiptoeing over to the basement stairs, Maggie listens in approvingly on their dialogue. Undisturbed because Big Mama prevents Gooper from going down to investigate, the pair are able to speak as they wish. Eventually, they ascend to the study, there to allay Big Mama's uncertainties about the family's future. Maggie's lie about being pregnant throws into question Gooper's claim to inherit the plantation. But Big Daddy reassumes control over the family. Endorsing her lie, Brick agrees to assume at his father's death the patriarch's responsibilities. He will be helped by his brother Gooper, with whom Brick reconciles. Brick and Maggie then climb together the stairs back to their bedroom, there to re-establish their sexual bond and produce the promised heir, with the husband indisputably at the head of his family.

The melodramatization begun with Kazan's modifications is thus carried through to its logical conclusion. The troubled family is restored to itself. The conspicuous metonymy of that dramatic process is the re-establishment of patriarchal hierarchies. Just as Brick re-asserts his control over Maggie, who is reduced to approving and obedient silence, so Big Daddy takes leadership of the family back from Big Mama, who has proven unable to decide among or properly discipline the disputing females—Mae and Maggie—who unofficially represent the interests of their respective husbands. Gooper accedes to Brick's "natural" possession of superiority and, as a sign of his re-integration, becomes once again the head of his household as he rudely but effectively silences his carping wife. For the first time, Mae is cowed by Gooper's forcefulness and obeys her husband's command.

In the service of a quite conservative agenda, the ambiguities of Williams's original are in these ways simplified. The accommodation involves no small irony. For the very quality that made this Williams property appealing to a mainstream film audience—the story's notorious engagement with a problematic, perhaps perverse sexuality—is thereby preserved in the only form that audience would unproblematically accept. Brick's puzzling and disturbing rejection of Maggie's obvious sexual charms (a reflex of his rejection of his patrimony) motors the narrative but is successfully explained away. For both Brick's "unnatural" connection to Skipper and Maggie's adultery are shown to be mirages, misunderstandings that can be settled, at the urging of a concerned patriarch, by the Pollitts's loving dialogue with one another. The film thus powerfully installs one of the key ele-

ments of 1950s ideology—the recuperative power of family solidarity. In the process, Williams’s “provocative” drama becomes instead appealingly “naughty.” Brooks’s *Cat* mounts a titillating but unconsummated and therefore unthreatening challenge to the regnant power of monogamous heterosexuality. Only in this form, as both Elia Kazan and Richard Brooks correctly surmised, could the powerful characters and themes of Williams’s most commercial play win favor with a cinema audience, whose ingrained taste for affecting melodrama would be nicely satisfied by a drama more innovative and radical in appearance than fact. Or, to put it differently, Brooks’s version of *Cat* became the ideal adult film, Hollywood style, and the model on which his equally successful version of *Sweet Bird* would eventually be based.

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