

## CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

### Compare and contrast how the play script and the film version position the audience to view the relationship between Brick and Maggie

Whether it be through the mitigation of homosexuality, the sugar coated ending, or the portrayal of power, the adaptations and transformations Brooks applies to Tennessee Williams' play 'Cat on a hot tin roof', or 'Cat' positions his audience to view the relationship between Brick and Maggie as something redeemable, unlike in the play. Williams attempted to create realism by commenting through individual characters and their situations about social issues and American society in general, using Maggie and Brick's relationship as a vehicle to do so. On a crusade against mendacity, Williams aimed to "catch the true quality of experience in a group of people...interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis." Due to Williams' wish to have "direct communication with people", much of the play's pathos is mined from his life, with autobiographical details enshrined into the novel. Williams sourced much of the emotional and sexual turmoil between Brick and Maggie from his own upbringing, with these undertones having a linear relationship to the dysfunctional relationship between William's own parents. This may also be where Brick's alcoholism, depression, thwarted desire, and loneliness is sourced, through living as a homosexual in a paradigm where it is not accepted. Antithetically, Brooks sought to be remembered as one who "told a good story," hence tailoring the portrayal of Brick and Maggie around pleasing an audience rather than writing about raw truth through the same lens as Williams. Kazan made the story more "acceptable to a theatre public which is so squeamish about a naked study of life", by showing Maggie more sympathetically, making Big Daddy re-appear, and allowing Brick to undergo a form of moral awakening. Brooks furthered this, filtering the story to be more acceptable for an even larger, presumably less artistic demographic.

The notion of the American dream, was expressed ubiquitously in the media during this epoch. The state of the Pollitt family wholly contradicts the formulaic illusion that obtaining the American dream equals unequivocal happiness. In the play and film alike, both Brick and Maggie are entrapped, as ideologues of the dream permeate into both their social sphere and internal essence. This is strengthened by the form of Williams' version as a 3 act play, where the Aristotelian unities of action, place and time are utilised, as their imprisonment is shown through metaphorical physical confinement. In the play the whole story is set in the one room, whereas in Brooks' film form, several other locations such as other parts of the house, the airport, and the hurdles field are used. In the film Maggie is confined to the bed, whereas Brick is trapped in a car, outside of the house, showing it is to a lesser degree. Big Daddy and Big Mama additionally are going to break out by leaving the house to go do a tour of the farm. This freedom shows that Maggie and Brick are less entrapped in the film, thereby having a more promising scope.

The influence of the south can be seen in both the play and the film. Williams changing his name to 'Tennessee' shows his affiliation with the South, projected into the story, for example with white-washed help not reflecting the reality of the 50s. The deep south, less progressive than the rest of America, was trying to hold onto traditional values, despite the country's progression, including the concept of a nuclear family. Due to the accompanying societal dictations, conditioning women to find their worth in marriage and motherhood, and not divorce under any circumstances, Brick and Maggie are forced to "occupy the same cage." Maggie is tethered to Brick by her unrequited love, and her only victory as a cat is "just staying on [the roof]," showing she is hopeless of doing anything but enduring. She is constantly tortured by Brick's lack of emotional and physical intimacy as he focuses on his own denial of life and sexual orientation, typified in the stage direction, "Margaret is alone completely alone, and she feels it. She draws in, hunches her shoulders, and raises her

arms with fists clenched," expressing her anguish through body language, due to being silenced as a woman. Opposing Maggie's coping method of intense devotion, Brick, the personification of an Aporia, impotently deals with his entrapment by "remaining aloof" as he "draws aside...from all physical contact," subverted in the play due to its dim prospects. The drastic reduction of allusions to homosexuality in the film, completely transform the dynamics of Maggie and Brick's relationship, positioning the audience to lament less for their prospects, and view their relationship as recoverable. Because of the strict censorship Production Codes in the late 1950s, the "sexual perversion" was significantly watered down from the original play, as there was no viable alternative from the traditional nuclear family. The play implies that Brick's greatest nemesis is his homosexuality, however this is wholly circumvented in the film.

Jack Straw and Peter Ochello are imbued into Williams' play as a proxy for the significance of homosexuality in the South, in this era. Straw and Ochello's relationship is described as haunting the room in the play, yet the film explicitly averts them from the narrative, by adapting the plot so Big Daddy supersedes them as builder of the plantation, saying, "I built this place myself with no help." The room Brick is staying in "must evoke some ghosts" of Straw and Ochello, implying that it is haunting Brick as he is attempting to come to terms with his own sexuality. When Straw died, "Ochello quit eatin' like a dog does when its master's dead, and died, too", demonstrating his undying love for Straw. Their relationship can be seen as akin to that of Brick and Skipper in the play, who shared a room on their football tour, so Ochello's reaction is comparable to Brick who "started drinkin' when [his] friend Skipper died." Big Mama accused, "some single men stop drinkin' when they git married and others start! Brick never touched liquor before," implying that Maggie is the root cause of the relationship, however as shown from Big Daddy, it is in fact Skipper. In the play, seduced by Maggie, "poor Skipper," went to bed with Maggie to "feel a little bit closer to [Brick]." In the film however, Maggie envied Skipper's friendship with Brick, and wished to "show that skipper would make love to the wife of his best friend" so that Brick would no longer wish to be friends with Skipper. In the play Skipper has the affair due to wanting to get closer to Brick, however in the film his motive is his desires and lust. This vilifies Skipper so the audience is less likely to sympathise with him, ensuring he does not intervene in the redemption of Maggie and Brick's relationship, and simultaneously victimizes Brick more, meaning the audience is likely to be more sympathetic to him, and therefore want his relationship with Maggie to succeed. Instead of not listening, as he does in the play, Brick ends up listening to Maggie about Skipper.

Brick is made to appear more virile in the film to avoid the stereotype of being gay, and along with Maggie fit into the archetypes that movies often set out for dynamic characters. He embodies archetypical masculinity, enhanced by the blue robe he wears, juxtaposing the femininity of Maggie's white clothing. That Brick plays football, is maintained in the film to accentuate his masculinity.

In the notes for the designer, Williams states that the "Victorian with a touch of Far East," room was Straw and Ochello's and has not changed since, so one would imagine that it is quite simplistic. The play's minimalist set creates a sense of Brick's alienation from Maggie, however in the film this feeling of anomie is less apparent as he is not homosexual, and therefore less alienated. The mis en scene compliments this by making the room far more opulent.

According to Sigmund Freud's analysis of the psyche, regression is the phenomenon a person undergoes in which they move back in psychological time in the face of stress. Brick encounters this throughout the play because he is repressing his sexuality, whereas the film removes this. When getting to the root of the discussion about mendacity, the high camera angle shows Brick to be in more power than Big Daddy, unlike in the play where Brick regresses to the complex of acting like a child, as shown when he is begging Big Daddy for

his crutch on his knees, and when Big Mama says, “tonight Brick looks like he used to look when he was a little boy.” All of these toning downs of homosexuality that Williams so detested makes the relationship between Brick and Maggie seem more plausibly fixable.

The way that power is redistributed in the film compared to the play positions the audience to view the relationship between Brick and Maggie as more harmonious and less caustic. In both, Brick’s crutch is a symbol of power, due to representing a phallic symbol in an androcentric era. Brick drops his crutch twice, symbolising his momentary loss of power, as both times Skipper has just been mentioned, evoking the “lightening in a fair sky” that flashes behind Brick’s “additional charm of that cool air of detachment.” On three different occasions Brick threatens to hit, attack and kill Maggie with the crutch, abusing his power. During his discussion about mendacity with Big Daddy, Big Daddy takes away his crutch, thus emasculating Brick, due to his castration complex of not being able to play sport and having to use a crutch. The film is adapted to make the power even out towards the end, when Brick’s crutch breaks, and he needs Maggie to help him from the car. She gets out of the bed, and he gets out of the car where they are respectively trapped, showing they are moving on due to the new balance of power. The crutch does not break in the play however, as Brick maintains the power.

Another display of the power imbalance is the difference between the way Maggie listens to Brick, and Brick listens to Maggie. In both the film and the play Maggie is utterly devoted to Brick, whereas he is reluctant, epitomized in the stage direction, “she [Maggie] kisses Brick on the mouth which he immediately wipes with the back of his hand.” Whilst Brick has “a tone of politely feigned interest, masking indifference, or worse” in both, it is hyperbolised more so in the play than the film. In the play he pointedly refuses to do anything Maggie begs for, refusing to get dressed, sign Big Daddy’s birthday card, and lean on her when he has dropped his crutch, saying, “I’m not going to get dressed, Maggie” and “are you going to give me my crutch or do I have to get down on my knees?” In the film this is not as extreme, and in certain instances he gets dressed when she asks him to, and uses her help when she offers her hand.

The use of camera angles throughout the film changes the perspective of power to the film audience, positioning them to view the relation between Maggie and Brick as more equal. Pervasive low angle camera shots make Brick appear bigger than Maggie to intensify his dominance, comparable to the way he is made to seem dominant in the play. At the cessation of the film however, the angle is straight forward removing this allusion of power. Furthermore, Brick’s head is tilted so they appear the same height, demonstrating their equality of power.

The restraints on plot and characterization imposed by the era’s conventionalities created the “pat conclusion” that William’s tried so hard to avoid. Brooks adapted aspects of the film to make it more morally uplifting, and redeeming, with Elizabeth Taylor and Paul Newman, two of the biggest movie stars of the time adding a certain glamorous appeal. Much of Cat’s cinematography is comprised of long focal lengths, exaggerating perspective thereby making subjects appear larger. Coupled with Brooks deliberately taking close up shots of Maggie and Brick, this helps make them appear less distant and stylized, and hence, more sympathetic to the audience. The three-point lighting used furthers this, as it makes the characters look more dimensional, accordingly evoking more emotional investment from the audience.

As a memory play, Brick’s past with skipper causes an arrest of time, a situation in which time literally loops around itself. However, in the film, being the archetypal good looking, lost hero, Brick is moulded to fit the role of a protagonist, undertaking Joseph Campbell’s philosophy of the hero’s journey, and so overcomes this arrest of time. In both, Brick has the potential to get dressed, stop drinking, and have a child with Maggie. All of this occurs in the

film, as he becomes a dynamic character. As stated by Brick, “A drinking man’s someone who wants to forget,” and this can be seen through his incessant alcoholism. At the end of the film by announcing, “I don’t want to drink anymore,” he is showing he does not need to forget as he is happy, whereas his last alcohol-related line in the play is, “How are you going to conceive a child by a man in love with his liquor,” showing a reluctance for both having children and quitting drinking, traits of a static character. Wide angle shots, exaggerate distance between performers, and the door frame as a literal bar in between Brick and Maggie visually demonstrates their conflict. At the end when they kiss, Brick walks towards her, showing he is choosing to resolve the visually-symbolised conflict.

Brick’s pillow, which Maggie holds “as if it were her only companion” symbolizes their disconnection as it remains on the couch, stressing that they sleep separately. In the play Maggie throws it on the bed, showing she is coercing Brick into sleeping with her, whereas in the film Brick throws it on the bed, showing that he is choosing to sleep with her.

Mendacity is omnipresent in both the play and the film, however it is seemingly resolved in the film to position the audience to believe that Maggie and Brick will have a trusting relationship. In the play, even the house is a façade, as it was built by Straw and Ochello, “a pair of bachelors” who were not going to have an extended family to use a house of its size. This is less mendacious in the film however, as Big Daddy built the house, so could have logically built it for his extended family. In the play Brick states, “Maggie, we are through with lies and liars in this house,” whereas in the play he says “wouldn’t it be funny if that were true” in reference to Maggie loving him, showing he still does not believe mendacity has ceased. Brick’s treatment for Maggie parallels Big Daddy’s treatment for Aida. By repeating this line, which Big Daddy initially states in the play, it is suggesting that he is going to grow up to be just like Big Daddy, treating Maggie just like Big Mama. In the film however, Big Daddy too becomes a dynamic, rather than static character, lastly heard posing the question, “Aida, do you wanna come along?” and taking her hand, showing he too has redeemed his relationship. In the film Big Daddy says that the odour of mendacity “smells like death,” connoting that the mendacity is dying, as he is dying. Williams’ stage directions instruct, “some mystery should be left in the revelation of character in a play, just as a great deal of mystery is always left in the revelation of character in life, even in one’s own character,” demonstrating that Williams is reflecting the truth of life, whereas Brooks is not.

Ergo, stemming from opposing intentions, Williams writes a play to write about the “destructive impact of society on the sensitive, non-conformist individual” by projecting his own turbulent experiences into the play. Brooks’ transformations and adaptations “tell a good story,” leading to a major contrast between the play and the film being the differentiation between truth and mendacity. Ironically through unrealistically extinguishing mendacity from the plot’s conclusion, the film adopts the mendacious “pat conclusion” that Williams wrote of so cynically, with the fake relationship portrayal of Brick and Maggie juxtaposing the truth Williams wrote. Brook’s substantial denudation of the film, subsequently positioned the audience to view the relationship of Brick and Maggie as much more redeemable.