

March 2016

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof: 60 Years of American Dialogue on Sex, Gender, and the Nuclear Family

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***CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF: 60 YEARS OF AMERICAN DIALOGUE ON SEX,
GENDER, AND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY***

A Thesis Presented

By

AMY BROOKS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

February 2016

Department of Theater
Dramaturgy

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DEDICATION

To the other six, with love and gratitude.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must acknowledge the guidance, expertise, and warmth of David Kaplan, Thomas Keith, Michael Paller, and my fellow artists of the Tennessee Williams Institute in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

Special thanks to my committee: chair Harley Erdman, whose thoughtful advising and editing have never failed to sharpen my writing; Talya Kingston, whose knowledge of gender politics has informed this work from its inception; and to Christopher Baker, whose contributions to Williams dramaturgy always mined the nuggets of truth I'd missed before. I hope this thesis is worth the wait.

Much gratitude to dynamic *Tennessee Williams: Gender Play in 2015 and Beyond* panelists Christopher Baker, David Kaplan, Ellen Kaplan, and Michael Wilson for engaging brilliantly on a February morning and for making my thesis event a success.

UMass Amherst Department of Theater General Manager Willow Cohen deserves all the recognition in the world for her tireless work on grad students' behalf, as does Carrie Ann Radigan, my Assistant Dramaturg.

I would never have graduated without the support of my UMass cohort: Paul "Pal" Adolphsen, Michael Blagys, Jared Culverhouse, James Horban, Glenn Proud III, and my dear Elizabeth Pangburn. Three extraordinary scholars also taught me—each in her way—the value of perseverance in tough times. Alison Bowie, Adewunmi Oke, and Carol Becker, I love you and look forward to a lifetime of collaboration.

To my beloved father, Fred Brooks, and my friends Jim, Cammy, Sarah, and Kim: thank you for saving my life.

ABSTRACT

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF: 60 YEARS OF AMERICAN DIALOGUE ON SEX, GENDER, AND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

FEBRUARY 2016

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This thesis is a two-part work. Its components, a written paper and a one-night symposium/film screening event entitled *Tennessee Williams: Gender Play in 2015 and Beyond*, have been closely coordinated with my dramaturgical research for the February 2015 University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Theater production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, produced in the Rand Theater and directed by Jared Culverhouse. The written inquiry is structured around a chronological, selected American production history of *Cat*; this history, rendered in a series of three case studies, will (1) synthesize preexisting analyses of *Cat*'s dramaturgical profile, its impact on American theater, and its position in Williams's oeuvre; and (2) examine the interplay between this body of scholarship's primary foci (*e.g.*, gender, sexual identity, and family dysfunction) and the evolving cultural climate in which its subject, *Cat*, is perennially reinterpreted and restaged. In other words, my thesis reframes *Cat* as a series of inherently American—and potentially unanswerable—questions posed by Williams to his viewers; it then investigates the artistic and critical responses generated by sixty years of public engagement, or “dialogue,” with those questions. Ultimately, each case study will

illustrate my central premise: that the value of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* lies in its ability to resonate, both in production design and reception, with the social, sexual, and domestic challenges of the period in which it is produced.

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INTRODUCTION

Cat in the American Canon: an Overview

“I don’t know what it is about that play—maybe you can tell me.” The voice of Thomas Keith, a Consulting Editor at New Directions Publishers, is bemused in a recent phone interview:

Because it’s never one that I think of if somebody says “What’s your favorite play?” . . . I never think of *Cat* . . . And then every time I see it, whether it’s a good production or a bad production, I’m in awe of it. How masterfully written it is. And also how difficult it is in some ways . . . It’s probably one of his toughest plays to stage (Keith 2015).

Keith’s remarks point to both the technical virtuosity and the unlovability of Tennessee Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Easy to misunderstand, tough to stage, yet impossible to ignore: what is it about this play that defies easy classification? It is an assemblage that commands respect rather than affection. Its three-act structure, consisting of two duologues and an ensemble scene, is classically simple yet places operatic demands on performers (critics have referred to the characters’ extended monologues as “arias”) (Murphy 49). Then there are the Pollitts themselves, a greedy provincial clan whose gestures of love are often indistinguishable from hate. “Good bastards and bitches,” Williams described them (Lahr 296), the phrase a nod to the paradox Thomas Keith recognizes at the play’s core. For all its rough pleasures, *Cat* is an exhaustive bitch to produce, to perform, to analyze, and to observe.

In several ways, *Cat*’s appeal is not mysterious at all. The story of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is the story of American theater writ small. The contradictions at its heart—

Brick's Puritanism versus Maggie's sensuality; vulgar laughs trailing Brick's moth-soft brushes of ontological despair and Big Daddy's terror of death—are American artistic contradictions. Moreover, *Cat's* message of perseverance in the face of financial and existential crises is one rooted in the free market vagaries of American commercial theater, where, as playwright Robert Anderson famously remarked, “[Y]ou can make a killing but not a living” (Mitgang). “*Vitality*,” Tennessee Williams wrote to *Cat* director Elia Kazan, “is the hero of the play!—The character you can ‘root for’ ... is not a person but a quality in people that makes them survive” (*Notebooks* 658). Survival instinct is what American theater has got in spades. The hurdles of cinema, television, digital media, and sporadic popular neglect have hobbled this outmoded, occasionally inspired commercial institution, but have not toppled it altogether. Similarly, *Cat* has absorbed critical blows (Harold Bloom, reflecting in 2002, deems the play “more a film script than an achieved drama” (3); essayist Roger Boxill disdains its “dated topic of homosexuality”) (28) but retained more than a little of its box-office draw. The relative success of the 2013 Broadway revival—which grossed over \$843,000 during previews alone (Healy)—hints at a popular appeal that may, despite Bloom's low estimate of its Cold War-era sexual “obscurantism” (2), withstand time's test.

To understand this longevity, consider shifts in American discourse on *Cat's* central concerns between the years of 1955 and 2015: towards sexual, economic, and domestic agency for women, which Maggie's struggles prefigure by a decade; towards tolerance of homosexual “outsiders” and a more inclusive view of them as full citizens entitled to equal civil partnerships, unimaginable to Brick in his Cold War cold sweat of denial; and towards a functional vocabulary for the treatment of substance

abuse and its attendant dysfunctions, including the words “alcoholism” and “codependency”—clinical terms for topics that were all but unspeakable within families like the Pollitts in 1955, yet which affected them profoundly nevertheless. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*’s dramatic engine is driven by its characters’ confrontation of these issues in the relative privacy of their house. That the forums for such once-private family confrontations are now public and explicit (it is difficult even to skim the surface of social media without encountering feminist critique of pop culture, debate over gay marriage legislation, or coverage of celebrities in “rehab”) argues for the continuing relevance of *Cat* as a play that not only anticipated current cultural conversations, but still encourages viewers—in Williams’s refusal to provide “‘pat’ conclusions” (*Cat* 1) or facile solutions to characters’ domestic quandaries—to address them in humanistic and investigative, rather than moralistic and conclusive, terms.

Yet, as of 2015, *Cat* has seldom been comprehensively evaluated as a gauge by which society questions or re-inscribes its own belief systems. Most analyses of the play are short-form, written by academic theorists in essays, journal articles, or single chapters in treatments of Williams’s oeuvre. Rarely do these scholars integrate the mechanics of textual analysis with those of theatrical practice. Elinor Fuchs cautions, “A play is not a flat work of literature, not a description in poetry of another world, but is in itself another world passing before you in time and space” (5). Time and space alone, in the form of productions, give physical dimension to the “worlds” of plays; and terrains evolve perforce. The dramaturgical imperative to keep plays in conversation with the social climates in which they are staged raises several questions: if Williams made a profound statement about sexuality and the behavior of families in crisis with *Cat on a Hot Tin*

Roof—and if the play has persisted in the American popular imagination since its premiere—have subsequent decades of interpretation, execution, and reception of the text altered perceptions of that statement? How has the text itself evolved since 1955, and why? At whose behest, and for whose benefit? More broadly, how have the artistic choices (namely directorial visions, textual editing, and casting) and critical receptions of seminal American productions of *Cat* reflected or interrogated national attitudes toward gender, sexuality, economy, and the nuclear family?

What, finally, is the potential dynamism of *Cat* to American theorists and practitioners today, particularly those who question its artistic or social relevance? Director Anne Bogart intimates a possible answer with her claim that "...the theater is the only art form that is always about social systems. Every play asks: Can we get along? Can we get along as a society? Can we get along in this room? How might we get along better?" (*WTS* 126) Bogart further asserts her interest "in remembering and celebrating the American spirit in all of its difficult, ambiguous, and distorted glory" (*ADP* 15). Whether one perceives *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*'s psychological riddles as frustratingly ambiguous or gloriously poetic, the play is a fixture of the modern American canon. It behooves the American dramaturg to define her aesthetic relationship to that canon, to familiarize herself and "get along" with it even as she observes its distortions with a clear critical eye. *Cat*'s perspectives on distorted sexual desire, marital equilibrium, legacy, and paternity are among 20th-century American theater's most compelling. Considered in conversation with the play's sixty-year production history and the progressive social backdrop against which it unfolded, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* may afford even the most skeptical reader of Williams surprising dramaturgical insight to match its aesthetic and

literary rewards.

Project Description and Goals

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof: 60 Years of American Dialogue on Sex, Gender and the Nuclear Family is a two-part work. Its components, a written thesis and a one-night symposium/film screening event entitled *Tennessee Williams: Gender Play in 2015 and Beyond*, have been closely coordinated with my dramaturgical research for the February 2015 University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Theater production of *Cat*, produced in the Rand Theater and directed by Jared Culverhouse.

The written inquiry is structured around a chronological, selected American production history of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. This history, rendered in a series of three case studies, will (1) synthesize preexisting analyses of *Cat*'s dramaturgical profile, its impact on American theater, and its position in Williams's oeuvre; and (2) examine the interplay between this body of scholarship's primary foci (e.g., gender, sexual identity, and family dysfunction) and the evolving cultural climate in which its subject, *Cat*, is perennially reinterpreted and restaged. In other words, my thesis reframes *Cat* as a series of inherently American—and potentially unanswerable—questions posed by Williams to his viewers; it then investigates the artistic and critical responses generated by sixty years of public engagement, or “dialogue,” with those questions. Ultimately, each case study will illustrate my central premise: that the value of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* lies in its ability to resonate, both in production design and reception, with the social, sexual, and domestic challenges of the period in which it is produced. I further argue that neither *Cat*'s academic nor production archive, read on its own, is fully revealing of 20th century

American attitudes towards sexual or familial dysfunction. Theorist Paul Hurley cites *Cat* as “an example of the way in which American social values pervades—and is even the basis of—[Williams’s] dramatic concerns” (Crandell 126); but his analysis focuses almost solely on the play as it exists on paper, and not as a functional mechanism to be rendered onstage. Likewise, a simple production inventory of *Cat* would illumine nothing of the historical contexts which render the piece relatable, surprising, outmoded, or topical. Only by examining the play’s critical and artistic interpretations *in concert* can its special utility be discerned. To this end, this thesis foregrounds historical details of productions, placing them in direct conversation with critical and popular responses of their times, as well as with broader narratives of mid-to-late 20th century American culture. In this way I hope to shift critical conversation away from *Cat*’s subjective literary “perfection” (or lack thereof) and towards its historical and future usefulness as an instrument of American self-examination.

CHAPTER 1

THE MOROSCO THEATRE, 1955

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof was presented at the Morosco Theatre in New York on March 24, 1955, by The Playwrights' Company. It was directed by Elia Kazan and featured sets and lighting by Jo Mielziner, with costumes by Lucinda Ballard. The cast was as follows:

LACEY	Maxwell Glanville
SOOKEY	Musa Williams
MARGARET	Barbara Bel Geddes
BRICK	Ben Gazzara
MAE	Madeleine Sherwood
GOOPER	Pat Hingle
BIG MAMA	Mildred Dunnock
DIXIE	Pauline Hahn
BUSTER	Darryl Richard
SONNY	Seth Edwards
TRIXIE	Janice Dunn
BIG DADDY	Burl Ives
REVEREND TOOKER	Fred Stewart
DOCTOR BAUGH	R.G. Armstrong
DAISY	Eva Vaughan Smith
BRIGHTIE	Brownie McGhee
SMALL	Sonny Terry

Table 1: Morosco Cast

Gender and Sexual Politics in Development and Production

The Williams play that would most often be referred to as an “opera” began as a modest variation on a theme. Brick and Margaret Pollitt first appeared in the playwright’s 1952 short story *Three Players of a Summer Game*. Its inverted gender roles are striking: Margaret is an assertive, physically mannish presence who ends the piece driving Brick through the streets of Meridian, Mississippi “exactly the way that some ancient conqueror, such as Caesar or Alexander the Great or Hannibal, might have led in chains through a capital city the prince of a state newly conquered” (*Three Players* 38).

The author, seizing on his vignette’s dramatic potential and smarting from a three play string of experimental flops—*Summer and Smoke* (1948), *The Rose Tattoo* (1951), and *Camino Real* (1953)—began drafting short stage adaptations of *Three Players*. His agent, Audrey Wood, set her sights for the piece higher. Williams needed a hit to restore the luster his reputation had lost since *The Glass Menagerie* electrified Broadway in 1945; Wood recognized in Brick, Maggie, and the dyspeptic Big Daddy star vehicles worthy of a full-length drama. She and Williams’s long-time collaborator, director Elia Kazan, urged the playwright to expand his drafts. By early 1954 Williams had sent them rough manuscripts of a three-act play, named *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* after a pet expression of his father’s (*WIL* xii).

Kazan issued three imperatives to Williams, hedging his commitment to direct as leverage: make Maggie more sympathetic to the audience, bring Big Daddy back to the stage in Act Three, and keep Brick an active participant in his search for truth rather than a passive observer. Williams capitulated to all of these, chafing only at the latter two. Though he was conscious of Big Daddy’s narrative impact, he did not think it

“dramatically proper” that the character should reappear (*Memoirs* 169). And the prospect of transforming Brick from static object to dynamic “hero gave the playwright serious misgivings. He had, according to Albert Devlin, “distilled into *Cat* the tensions of his apparently faltering career” (98). Those tensions—alcoholism, concern for material comfort, and an indistinct sexual shame—were meant to express themselves in Brick’s paralysis; to cure the golden boy’s malaise was, Williams insisted, too severe a compromise of the script’s integrity and a sanitized reflection of his own hobbled emotional state (98).

The contrasts between the two versions are clearest in their different endings. Williams’s original is bleak: following a long, harrowing Act Three in which Big Daddy disappears entirely and Brick withdraws to guzzle liquor while singing snatches of private melodies, Brick and Maggie reach no clear compromise. They face each other across the bed at an impasse: Maggie threatens, Brick refuses to surrender to her, and her protestation of love is met with his sad and empty final line: “Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?” (*Cat* 173). In the *Cat* Williams originally envisioned, the universe offers no comforting resolution—only the promise of continued struggle.

Brick's added line in Kazan’s “Broadway” version, “I admire you, Maggie” (1005), points to some of the biggest editorial changes made at the director’s request. Brick is grudgingly cooperative; a more “sympathetic” Maggie has the last word; and the suggestion of a return to marital harmony is planted in the viewer's mind with her amended final line, “...nothing's more determined than a cat on a hot tin roof — is there? Is there, Baby? [*She touches his cheek, gently*]” (1006). These changes—particularly the decision to align Brick more closely with the actions of an Aristotelian tragic hero—

would haunt Williams, even as they ensured *Cat's* critical and commercial success.

Dramaturg Chris Baker cites the three alterations as examples of legitimate artistic collaboration between the men, edits that were aesthetically justified, rather than socially or politically motivated. “Kazan seemed particularly interested in the storytelling and the action of each character,” Baker writes.

Particularly with Big Daddy, whom he felt needed to return after the second act because he is such an important character . . . Maggie it seems he wanted to have a bit more complexity in the beginning . . . the harshness and bitterness and the attractive vitality that keeps us rooting for her . . . [Kazan] was concerned that [Brick] had no real change in the play and so no real conflict . . . All of those are concerns of how the audience follows these characters and how they experience the plot (Baker 2014).

This is an accurate account of Kazan’s concern for “[w]hat the audience follows. What they are made to be interested in and what they want to follow,” as the director framed his suggestions in a letter to Williams (Lahr 292). But Kazan’s and Baker’s analyses share similar assumptions: that this white, male mode of interrogating a story need be the cultural default; that capitulating to this default is a guarantor of “dynamic” storytelling; and that any audience following that story is a homogeneous entity with a single perspective on what makes characters interesting, meaningful, or attractive, when audiences are diverse in terms of gender, culture, temperament, and taste. A dramaturg in 2015 is no more immune to cultural influences and assumptions than a director in the 1950s. Given the importance of positionality in aesthetic judgment, it quite possible that the changes Kazan prescribed are reflective not only of his creative acumen, but also of

his deeply-inscribed set of American values—values the Broadway veteran assumed audiences shared and expected to see validated onstage at the Morosco.

Qualities that comprise a “sympathetic” female character are perennially problematic; but the 1950s imposed an especially narrow physical and behavioral range on female likability. This range was typified by Barbara Bel Geddes, the actress (and former lover of Kazan’s) who originated the role of Maggie Pollitt. “Inadequate” was the playwright’s estimation of the actress in the role. The problem, however, wasn’t that no one would buy Bel Geddes as Maggie; it was that audiences might not buy Williams’s version of Maggie—spiky, pugnacious, and sexually aggressive—as a 1950s domestic ingénue. “Tennessee thought that Barbara . . . wasn’t enough of a cat,” Ben Gazzara recounts in his 2008 memoir. “[N]ot complex enough . . . He was looking for something more neurotic, but I’m sure that Kazan had cast Barbara precisely for that wholesome quality. Theatergoers loved Barbara and therefore she would be able to make audiences embrace this complicated and not always likable character” (73). Bel Geddes herself recalls:

I don't think anyone saw me as Maggie the Cat. Everyone saw Maggie as beautiful and slinky and seductive, and I'm a bit of a dumpling, well-meaning, the girl you marry but begrudgingly fuck . . . Kazan, however, told me I was attractive, maternal, and he could see why Brick, a homosexual who marries only to quiet the family, would find me amenable (Grissom).

Kazan’s casting and remarks to Bel Geddes betrayed a canny recognition of the era’s

beauty avatar, one Betty Friedan expounds in *The Feminine Mystique*:

The one “career woman” who was always welcome in pages of women’s magazines was the actress. But her image also underwent a remarkable change [in the 1950s]: from a complex individual of fiery temper, inner depth, and a mysterious blend of spirit and sexuality, to a sexual object, a babyface bride, or a housewife. Think of Greta Garbo, for instance, and Marlene Dietrich, Bette Davis, Rosalind Russell, Katherine Hepburn. Then think of Marilyn Monroe, Debbie Reynolds, Brigitte Bardot, and “I Love Lucy” (53).

There is no question which category Maggie the Cat belongs to. But it was the “wholesome” Bel Geddes, self-proclaimed “dumpling” and exemplar of Friedan’s second strata of mid-century womanhood, who would introduce Maggie Pollitt to the world. The character’s “bitchy” hard edges softened to the specifications of the decade, Bel Geddes helped secure the play’s popular and critical success. There was plenty of it: *Cat* won the 1955 Pulitzer Prize for Drama as well as the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, and ran for 694 performances before closing in November of 1956. Would its launch have succeeded if Maggie had been written and cast to Williams’s tastes rather than Kazan’s? One can only speculate on that point; what *is* demonstrable is which man’s tastes are more reflective of the 1950s feminine ideal.

Big Daddy’s return to the stage in Act Three is a similarly loaded proposition. As disinclined as some modern viewers may be to sympathize with a millionaire who advertises his greed, makes unapologetic reference to “nigger[s] in the fields” (*Cat* 79),

and abuses his doting wife at every opportunity, Kazan was dead on in his calculation of Big Daddy's appeal to fifties audiences—and to the male critical cadre of the decade. “[A] hard-bitten colossus of the Delta,” extolled Walter Kerr of Burl Ives in the role (1); William Hawkins raved: “A magnificent figure, like a rock mountain, he relates his earthy jokes and whips his family into line” (28). This was the intended effect of casting Ives, who by the early ‘50s had established a mythic public persona as a patriotic folk singer and balladeer. Like his contemporaries Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie, Ives embodied the hobo romance of Big Daddy's generation, having abandoned public education in a fit of pique and taken to the road with his guitar. He was enormous, both physically and artistically, in every sense the lusty and expansive self-made patriarch that defined American masculinity. It was no accident that the actor who originated the role of Big Daddy was famous primarily for his voice. In the cacophonous Pollitt house, Kazan was only too aware, some voices carried greater moral authority than others.

On the subject of the wife Big Daddy “whips into line,” the critics were less respectful. In the same review in which he lauded Big Daddy's monumental status, Kerr dismissed Big Mama as “rattle-brained” (1). William Hawkins, following suit, deemed the character “tasteless, rowdy, and feather-brained” (28). Brooks Atkinson alone seemed willing to concede the suffering of this woman at the hands of (as he euphemizes in his *New York Times* review) “the solid head of a family who fears no truth except his own and hates insincerity”; though Atkinson tarred Mildred Dunnock's Big Mama first as a “silly, empty-headed mother,” he at least acknowledged her “unexpected strength of character” (18). Dunnock, a small woman with no physical prettiness to speak of, had long made this unassuming appeal her stock-in-trade, most particularly in her origination

of the role of Linda Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* in 1949 (Pace). Her career strategy was the opposite of Ives's: typical of the era's plain Janes, Dunnock's public persona was smaller-than-life. She pronounced herself "not the least bit interesting" in an late-life interview; yet the Broadway and film veteran was among the most accomplished, well-regarded performers of her generation, parlaying her skill at playing "feather-brained" and frustrated housewives into an advanced degree from Columbia University and teaching positions at Harvard University and the Yale School of Drama (Pace). Dunnock's turn as Big Mama was lauded as "astonishing" (Hawkins 28) even as the character was targeted for critical contempt.

Kazan himself made no more concession to the agency of Big Mama—or her female counterparts—in the play's dramaturgy than he did in its casting. A late-1954 letter to Williams makes his rewriting priorities explicit: "I want to know what Big Daddy does, after he's been told . . . I don't give a shit in hell how Big Mama takes the fucking news. We know. It bores me to see Margaret and Mae squabble and bitch. It's beneath your play and we've had it. It's worth about a minute of action and not a second of act three..." (Lahr 294-295). When the men dispose of the estate by way of airing family laundry, this passage suggests, they are active; when the women follow suit, they "squabble." Kazan's double standard was echoed in a review by *The Journal-American's* John McClain, who attributed the dramatic friction of *Cat's* first act to an "unrequited relationship" and that of the second to "the hassle over inheritance" (20). Surely, though, Maggie and the other women are equally concerned with inheritance. Like Kazan, the critic ascribed Maggie's, Mae's, and Big Mama's stakes in the Pollitt fortune to female vapors, while the men are credited with more businesslike comportment. The action

between Brick and Big Daddy is no less emotionally volatile than the action between Brick and Maggie, the father's overtures of love no less "unrequited" than the wife's; and Maggie's financial pragmatism drives the plot more efficiently than the legal machinations of her brother-in-law. Big Daddy himself accuses Big Mama of "butting in" and attempting to take control of the household during his illness, and the Pollitts' apparent solvency suggests that she (like the masculine Margaret in *Three Players*, who assumes complete financial authority in the marriage) has some competence in this area. Neither McClain, Kazan, nor any other male critical voice of the mid-1950s made note of this; the era's approved feminine competencies remained filling dresses, wombs, and plates. With critical regard thus skewed towards the more "serious" Pollitt patriarchy and the men who portrayed it, Big Daddy's grandstanding in Act Three seems less an aesthetic improvement than a comment on Eisenhower-era male prerogative. Contemporary author Brian Parker's endorsement of the playwright's original female-driven Act Three is unequivocal: "[W]hat bringing back Big Daddy really catered to was the macho sensibility of Elia Kazan, and not Williams's own moving but austere compassion" (6).

Few characters in the American theater canon have found critical compassion thinner on the ground than Brick Pollitt. Bourbon-brained, tight-lipped, and maddeningly opaque, this prodigal son has baffled and frustrated playgoers since the role was originated by Ben Gazzara, an Actors Studio neophyte (McLellan) whose most striking quality in the role was his ability to project intelligence onto Brick's prolonged intervals of silent withdrawal. Dark, compact, and intense, Gazzara presented as utterly masculine,

his clear virility underlining the questions Williams had built into the character. What is the root of Brick's alcoholic retreat from reality? Why does he spurn the advances of his attractive, sexually available wife? What was the true nature of his feelings for his friend Skipper, and why did Brick allow him to commit slow suicide by liquor and pills? Most crucially, what must his family do—beg, threaten, cajole, seduce, bully, assault, or sexually blackmail—to compel the degraded young athlete to reengage with life and human interests? A 28,000 acre estate, the equivalent of a small agrarian kingdom in the rural South, must be bequeathed due to the illness of its king. Yet the play's prince refuses, despite the classical construction of his tale, to participate in his own salvation, in the ravishment of his pining princess, or in the search for the truth he claims to venerate.

Kazan would not be the only authority to identify Brick's inaction as a threat to both the dramatic unity and marketability of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*; he was merely the first and most influential. If Maggie's strength was potentially off-putting to audiences in the 1950s, Brick's passivity could, and did, incense them, beginning with the playwright's most trusted director and literary advisor. "God, Tenn, can't we bring that son of a bitch to life," Kazan railed at Williams late in the editorial process, and: "Brick all thru! That's the job! . . . Can't he be a lovable, bright, brilliant, funny drunk instead of a self-pitying, hopelessly immersed drunk?" (Lahr 305).

He could *not* be, Williams was at pains to explain, though Brick may have possessed those qualities before his world collapsed. Lost potential was precisely the point:

I think that Brick is doomed by the falsities and cruel prejudices of the world he comes out of, belongs to, the world of Big Daddy and Big Mama

. . . He's the living sacrifice, the victim of the play, and I don't want to part with that "Tragic elegance" about him. You know, paralysis in a character can be just as significant and just as dramatic as progress, and is also less shop-worn. How about Chekhov? (Devlin & Tischler 558)

Chekhov drew seriocomic portraits of the havoc that frustrated sexual and economic ambitions wreak on bourgeois country houses; superficially, it was an apt comparison for Williams to draw. But in the United States of that period—still flush with the victor's spoils of World War II, now the planet's leading atomic power—any reference to Russian culture in defense of sexual ambiguity risked drawing the attention of the House Un-American Activities Committee. For Kazan, who had nearly destroyed his reputation and career by naming names in HUAC testimony in 1952 (Navasky 202), Williams's Russian allusion would not have been a welcome one. Cold War America was not a "tragic," "elegant" Chekhovian seagull; it was, as John Bak writes, "a postwar predator in full sexual bloom" (206)—in other words, an aggressive cat in heat. Kazan found this scrappy feline quality in Maggie, but Maggie couldn't keep the tin roof warmed without her spouse. "I am not at all sure that this new ending is what I want," Williams confided to Audrey Wood before the show's premiere. "Here is another case of a woman giving a man back his manhood, while in the original conception it was about a vital, strong woman dominating a weak man and achieving her will" (Lahr 302). The reversal was no accident: what Kazan demanded was sexual impact in the form of a "hero" whose power was commensurate with his looks, and with the forcefulness of his wife's great will.

What he got instead—and what Williams's modified 1955 ending only partly mitigated—was an exercise in "dramatizing ambivalence" (Lahr 296). Brick never comes

fully clean about his true feelings for Skipper, never repents of his own self-destructive tendencies; even in the revised edition, his surrender to Maggie is melancholic rather than erotic. Like Brick, the play's original conclusion withholds even as it seems to capitulate; the character's arc—so far as he has one—suggests “a dramaturgy that reflects Williams's skepticism for Broadway and its commodified exchange of meaning between playwright and audience” (Devlin 105). “Things are not always explained,” Williams insisted. “Situations are not always resolved. Characters don't always ‘progress’” (*Notebooks* 663). Brick's failure to progress was more than frustrating. Devlin draws a bead on Kazan's disapproval of “the privacy of Brick Pollitt as hostile to his own flamboyant expressiveness” (105) as well as to the director's sense of male agency. That hostility was returned in spades by the commercial director and shortly would be echoed by the critics.

Walter Kerr spoke for the critical body of 1955 when he wrote: “If our interest in [Brick] wanes as the evening rages on, it is not because the tormented Brick cannot read his own heart: it is because we cannot read it . . . How deeply has [Williams] cut into the core of his own play?” He continued, tempering his praise with charges of coyness on the playwright's part. “Supposing that he has really unraveled its human mystery, why is he reluctant to give that mystery a name?” (1)

This piece prompted a swift reply from Williams, who courted controversy, not misunderstanding. “[Brick's] sexual nature was not innately ‘normal’,” he allowed in a letter to *The New York Herald-Tribune* in April, 1955, then qualified: “. . . Brick's overt sexual adjustment was, and must always remain, a heterosexual one. He will go back to Maggie for sheer animal comfort . . . He is her dependent” (*WIL* 72-73).

In place of children, Maggie has for a dependent her alcoholic and potentially homosexual spouse. No casting choice or script revision on Kazan's or Williams's parts could obscure this frightening fact altogether, and the resultant stage specter did more than titillate and pique theatergoers with dangerous sexual politics. It reflected an unsettling distortion of America's most idealized social unit, the newly-dubbed "nuclear" family.

"The same cage": the Pollitts' Nuclear Family Meltdown

The drama of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* derives from the conflict between a man (Brick) who has abandoned his role in a specific domestic contract, and the three intermarried families (Brick and Maggie, Big Daddy and Big Mama, and Gooper and Mae) whose contracts are agitated by his abandonment. Anthropologist George Peter Murdock, in his 1949 study *Social Structure*, was among the first to describe the shape of the Postwar American "nuclear" family which *Cat* observes:

The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It contains adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults (M. Coleman 958).

One can scarcely imagine an arrangement more opposite to Brick and Maggie Pollitts', unless it were this definition of marriage published in the Christmas 1956 edition of *Life* magazine:

[A] true partnership in which . . . men are men, women are women, and

both are quietly, pleasantly, securely confident of which they are—and absolutely delighted to find themselves married to someone of the opposite sex (Friedan 59).

Brick and Maggie fall wide of the first definition on most every count. The young couple's common residence is sham, since Williams makes clear that they "occupy the same cage" but no longer share a bed (*Cat* 35); this precludes both the socially approved sexual relationship and the reproduction. Only the criterion of economic cooperation is met, but the betrayals which propel the play's action—Maggie's infidelity, Brick's alcoholic fumbling of his sports career, his grief and suspected homosexual desire for Skipper—imperil their financial security, as Big Daddy will not subsidize a threat to the family holdings.

It is the second, more qualitative definition, however, that brings into focus the gulf between Brick and Maggie's marriage and the 1950s nuclear ideal. Their partnership has been reduced in spirit to a set of "conditions" (35), including enforced celibacy. Each seems more chagrined by the union than delighted, though neither seeks divorce. And though each spouse appears a physical paradigm of gender—Brick virile and athletic, "still slim and firm as a boy" (19), Maggie flaunting a fertile, curvaceous body—neither character is "securely confident" of their sexual worth or even of their true gender identity.

Kazan intended Gazzara and Bel Geddes, the "All-American girl in the Peter Pan collar" (cunytv75), to "take the danger off of" Williams's indictment of the nuclear unit (cunytv75). Yet the androgynous ghosts of *Three Players of a Summer Game* still hovered about the stage of the Morosco, troubling prescribed gender roles. In any version

of the story, Brick remains the cuckolded husband to a banished wife whose every seduction attempt short of blackmail he rebuffs; Maggie is the libidinous and childless custodian of a pliant, passive-aggressive drunk whose abandonment devalues her only social currency: her desirability. The nuclear paradigm as described in *Life* magazine is unattainable for such a couple. It is, Williams implies, unattainable even for couples who make life-defining sexual concessions (“I haven’t been able to stand the sight, sound, or smell of that woman for forty years now!—even when I *laid* her!—regular as a piston...” Big Daddy declares of Big Mama) (110) or subscribe wholeheartedly to Cold War-era propaganda which insisted, like *Life*, that “a woman can know fulfillment only at the moment of giving birth to a child” (Friedan 62), as do “monster of fertility” Mae (*Cat* 22) and doting Big Mama. What mattered in 1955—what passed, in fact, for happiness—was adherence to the social contract, as Hurley explains: “We come a step closer to Williams’s theme when we recognize that it seems to be a sense of social obligation rather than any real affection which has dictated the show of love between members of the Pollitt family” (132). Thus Brick’s and Maggie’s implied betrayals are not just intimate, but social. In failing to deliver a “show of love” equal to the other couples’, they have violated the heteronormative, gender-binariated nuclear model that served as contract and life map for American families—fictional and real—in 1955.

Whatever dynamic the youngest Pollitt couple enjoyed at the beginning of their marriage, Williams makes it clear that, by the top of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*’s first act, every male prerogative in the marriage is ceded to Maggie. Of the two spouses, she alone has agency to plot, coerce, cajole, initiate financial discussion, and make overt sexual

overtures. In *Three Players*, Margaret Pollitt's agency is made manifest in a masculine body, dirty fingernails and a "firm and rough-textured sort of handsomeness" (CS 306); within the confines of *Cat*'s bedroom set, Maggie the Cat uses exaggerated femininity to impose her will—a will that, in its focused efforts to secure the physical entitlements of her marriage (e.g., sex, inheritance, and a baby), violates every behavioral criterion of that same nuclear contract. She engages Brick loquaciously and angrily rather than "quietly" or "pleasantly." The physical and vocal athleticism of her stage business and text in Act One—not to mention her avowed sexual potency—underline the extent to which Maggie has supplanted former athlete Brick as the dominant partner. Bel Geddes's unassuming air mitigated, but could not wholly quash, the impact of a woman operating independently of the subordinate female marriage role.

Big Daddy viciously repels what he perceives as his wife's attempts to claim his own masculine prerogative, in particular her loudness and the space she claims with her "fat old body butting in here and there" (*Cat* 78). Brick, by contrast, desires only to escape via his alcoholic "click" (33) and uses Maggie's stridency as justification for his sexual, emotional, and spiritual withdrawal. This places Maggie in a double-bind, as her very "feminine" capitulation to Brick's demands (that they sleep separately and avoid reconciling) makes impossible the parenthood and sexual cohabitation that would define them as a nuclear family. She must emasculate him by violating his "laws of silence" (32) or risk the collapse of the social unit that defines her as a woman. Either way, the character of Maggie Pollitt is compelled by both nature and circumstance to trouble 1950s definitions of "wife."

Maggie's attitude towards motherhood is also suspect by the standards of the age.

Despite one unconvincing protest that she does “adore” children—“well brought up!” (44), Maggie’s loathing for Gooper and Mae’s “no-neck monsters” (17) suggests that conceiving a child with Brick is little more for her than an expedient. There was no coincidence in Kazan’s casting of the “maternal” (Grissom) Bel Geddes in a social climate which demanded elaborate maternal performances, nor in critics’ fondness for a portrayal that threatened their preconceptions of 1950s wives and mothers not one whit. Brooks Atkinson called Bel Geddes “vital, lovely, and frank” (18) before lavishing more fulsome praise on Ives, to whom the show unanimously belonged. Williams had fashioned sharp rhetorical claws for Maggie. But Bel Geddes’s kittenish presence, working in tandem with the play’s over-edited third act, seemed engineered to “insure the nice lady’s comment as the curtain fell, ‘. . .how sweet, they’ve gotten together again. . .’” (Magid 42). Bel Geddes earned a Tony Award nomination for Best Actress but did not win. Her portrayal of Maggie, though spirited, was not definitive; it has been largely eclipsed by those of subsequent actors in the role.

The demands imposed on Brick Pollitt within his fictional world—marriage, procreation, performance of masculinity, sobriety, decisive action, self-awareness—loomed large in Tennessee Williams’s consciousness; for him they were interrelated and inescapable in his own life. He could not entirely evade them as a Southern artist in Cold War-era America, but he could and did use characters like Brick to interrogate their meaning and consequences. Performed in concert with the character’s charisma, Brick’s violations make up what Williams called “the poem of the play—the poetry of a man who is not competing” (Devlin 109). Lack of competitiveness is not a profitable trait in a

male character, as Williams and Kazan were all-too-aware; nor were audiences and critics prepared to reckon with this dramatic problem half-dressed in silk pajamas. The burden of the problem fell squarely on the shoulders of Ben Gazzara, who, in performing Brick, was tasked with delivering the playwright's "secret, exulting reply to the stony marketplace of Broadway" (109) and the mendacious images of nuclear families it helped to peddle following World War II.

In her epilogue to *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan acknowledges the existence of a corollary to the title phenomenon and the process whereby younger members of Brick's generation resisted it: "I began to see that these young men, saying they didn't have to napalm all the children in Vietnam and Cambodia to prove they were men, were defying the masculine mystique as we were defying the feminine one" (391-392). Mass protests of the war in Vietnam still lay a decade ahead, and it is doubtful that Brick (no pacifist, and surely a social conservative of his family's stripe) would endorse such ideologies. Nevertheless, his apolitical act of dropping out—out of his obligations to family both nuclear and extended, of his sobriety, of his masculine sexual entitlements, and of his stake in his father's estate—carried very political consequences within the world of *Cat* and the culture in which it was first staged.

In 1955, a man who did not provide certain material proof of economic solvency could not be "securely confident" of his masculinity in relation to his spouse's, particularly when that spouse displayed so many of the acquisitive, ambitious traits that defined his own father. This is demonstrably the case with Brick and Maggie. The former, far from cooperating economically, drains their finances with drink and unemployment; more troubling, he shows no interest in protecting their inheritance by

performing acts of filial duty, such as signing birthday cards, that will propitiate Big Daddy (*Cat* 35). While Murdock's criterion of "economic cooperation" does not stipulate which partner must provide, the protocol of the era is implicit in his definition. The model of husband-as-provider is also reinforced by the presence of an enormous hi-fi stereo/bar/television console in Brick and Maggie's bedroom, a "shrine" (16) which literally broadcasts society's definition of a man: "Enormously expanding the reach of advertising's gendered imagery, television ads (like the shows they sponsored) presented the white, middle-class, breadwinner father as the ideal man, his success indicated and measured by his ability to provide consumer products for his children and his homemaker wife" (Carroll 11). Brick uses this fixture solely to refresh his bourbon. By contemporary ideals of a "masculine" work ethic, his behavior might be regarded with skepticism tempered with sympathy. By mid-20th century criteria Brick, both chemically and financially dependent, could hardly be classified as a man at all, much less the patriarch of a nuclear family.

Brick's refusal to maintain "a socially approved sexual relationship" with his wife, a form of conscientious objection made concrete by the specter of a vacant double bed, is the most controversial of his violations. This resistance torments Maggie, chagrins his parents and siblings, thwarts the propagation of an heir to the Pollitt estate, and exposes him to continued suspicion of a homosexual attachment to Skipper. Of this last mark against his reputation, if none of the others, Brick is conscious and outraged. The worshipful defense of his "clean" (59) friendship does little to dispel his own homosexual panic, however; the more impassioned Brick's defense of the men's platonic relationship, the less coherent or convincing he sounds. If something is revealed in the course of

Brick's railing against Maggie and Big Daddy "naming" his "great love . . . dirty" (59), it is neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality. What plagues Brick, complicating his relationship to sex and the nuclear group to whom he is accountable, is androgyny.

Southern historian John Howard unwittingly hits on the distinction between Brick's ostensible problem and his actual one. "Mississippi, of all places, seemed least receptive to homosexuality" (xi), he writes; yet "homosexuality flourished between close friends and distant relatives . . . *Androgyny, though doubly suspect, also thrived*" [emphasis added] (xiii). Though Brick has internalized society's homophobia, neither Maggie nor Big Daddy share his horror. Nor do they see his alleged inclinations as necessarily ruinous to their common interests. Howard's passage asserts a context in which homosexuals could discreetly connect; the "tender" (*Cat* 15), sheltered life of Straw and Ochello sets a precedent for the domestic potential of sexualized male bonds. Even Williams spares Brick the final indignity of conclusive evidence, citing "mystery" as sufficient cause to avoid resolving the question of homosexuality (Nicolay). Though critics, viewers, and theater makers have debated the "is-he-or-isn't-he" issue for nearly sixty years, the claim of Brick's homosexuality ultimately cannot be proven. Nor is it fruitful for production teams, whose work is to engage viewers in the dynamism of active questioning, to center efforts on establishing proof of Brick's homosexual desires. Androgyny, however, is clearly established. Defined less in the traditional sense of physical presentation of both male and female characteristics (e.g., the "butch" Margaret in *Three Players*) than of *behavioral androgyny* as described by Mary Vetterling-Braggin in 1982, which "distinguish[es] sharply between psychological traits and overt behavioral activities, applying 'masculine' and 'feminine' " principles to the latter (153), Brick's

androgyny is demonstrable, pervasive in his relationships, and actively threatening to the Pollitts' social and financial futures.

The *Life* magazine definition of a nuclear marriage imposes a binary: “men are men, women are women, and both are . . . confident of which they are” (59). Neither Brick nor Maggie fits comfortably into one compartment. Brick’s performance of gender, however, has become ruinously unstable. His bursts of physical violence are ineffectual, so that the only person whom he reliably injures is himself. And the character’s main act of defiance, withholding sexual access to his body, is an historically female prerogative; the playwright’s obsession with Brick as an object of desire reverses the conventional male gaze by making a woman his observer. Maggie inventories his charms, devouring the sight of his freshly-showered body emerging *dishabille* and manufacturing excuses to touch what she cannot possess. In the Broadway version’s final moments, scholar Mark Royden Winchell observes, “Maggie commits an act that Williams might have presented as marital rape. Instead, he encourages us to think that she is acting in Brick’s best interests as well as her own” (709). But even in his original ending, in which Brick’s consent remains dubious, Williams could not have framed the couple’s final exchange as rape; for the gender binaries intrinsic to marriage in 1955 made no allowance for sexual role-reversals. Wives were not considered capable of raping their husbands. Williams may have conceived the exchange as an instance of piratical ravishment, but Kazan gave audiences a reading of the finale they could comprehend: the restoration of Maleness to a “doubly suspect” person who—in his passive resistance and white silk costume—resembles a bride as closely as he does a groom.

For actors who undertake the role of this “beautiful” (*Cat* 156) football player, an

ability to embody some form of behavioral androgyny without presenting as traditionally feminine is paramount, since “Brick is the character who embodies difference. . . Both hyper-conventional *and* different, he sings a paean to ‘exceptional,’ ‘not normal’ friendship, at the same time as he is terrorized by the idea of transgression” (Sarotte 149-150). Gazzara—foursquare, earnest, and as unimpeachably masculine in affect as Bel Geddes was feminine—was a skilled actor, but one far better suited for Kazan’s purposes than Williams’s. There was an opacity in Gazzara’s alcoholic retreat from reality, a journey more inward and earthward than suited Williams’s Brick. The character’s defining trait is his power to evade the people and institutions who seek to tether him to earth; ultimately Gazzara, who wore his manhood more stolidly than Brick, could no more achieve this feat than could Skipper, Maggie, or Big Daddy.

Tennessee Williams, Howard writes, “crafted wily individuals challenging the precepts of heterosexual normalcy. Like these fictional characters, their real-life counterparts fashioned circumspect relationships . . . sheltered from destructive forces” (xiv). Are nuclear families as Williams depicts them in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* wholly “destructive forces,” or does he acknowledge their potential (as Maggie advocates when she begs her husband to “Lean on me”) (*Cat* 32) to provide “circumspect,” “sheltered” relationships in their own right? The text suggests that, though there is room for genuine affinity and even love in the family ideal, it cannot thrive under phobic, oppressive, or mercenary conditions. For adults of fluid or ambiguous gender and sexuality, the conditions for nuclear cohabitation in 1955 were frequently all three.

Critic John Bak argues, “At a time when evidence of an alternative family was

perhaps what America most needed, Cold War society (both Brick's and Williams's) privileged the recapitulation of the nuclear family, the backbone of consumerist American society" (245). Kazan's casting and his swift interventions in the writing process gave his production a redemptive touch of wholesome consumer appeal. But he could not spare viewers Williams's vision of the Pollitt clan, caught in its triple web of nuclear families, as basically unwholesome. Brick, Maggie, and their kin are less a family than a collection of mildewed spots along the hem of a homely embroidered sampler; the playwright drew this vision as a deliberate provocation to the sanitized nuclear ideal of the 1950s. Over-ripeness is a motif: it is evident in Maggie's salacious references to her own anatomy, in the grotesqueries of Mae and her brood, in Big Daddy's adulterous lechery and his anecdote about a child prostitute in Spain (*Cat* 90).

This final episode is not an arbitrary one. In it, a parent immolates her child's sexual health and integrity in order to survive. Though *Big Daddy* presents the story as evidence of European cultural depravity, the viewer—observing the character's hatred of his older son and his failure to relate to the younger—recognizes the hypocrisy of his judgment. In both families, the progeny's individual well-being has been sacrificed to the only god capable of sustaining the nuclear family in the industrial 20th century: money.

CHAPTER 2

STRATFORD/ANTA PLAYHOUSE, 1974

Williams's revised 1974 script for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was first staged as part of the American Shakespeare Theater's 20th anniversary season in Stratford, Connecticut. It was directed by Michael Kahn and featured sets by John Conklin, costumes by Jane Greenwood, and lighting by Marc B. Weiss. The cast was as follows:

MARGARET	Elizabeth Ashley
BRICK	Keir Dullea
DIXIE	Deborah Grove
MAE	Joan Pape
GOOPER	Charles Siebert
BIG MAMA	Kate Reid
SOOKEY	Sarallen
BIG DADDY	Fred Gwynne
REVEREND TOOKER	Wyman Pendleton
DR. BAUGH	William Larsen
LACEY	Thomas Anderson
CHILDREN	Jeb Brown, Chris Browning, Betsy Spivak, Susannah Brown

Table 2: American Shakespeare Theater Cast

The production subsequently transferred to Broadway's ANTA Playhouse, where it ran from September 24, 1974-February 8, 1975.

Recasting Gender and Sexual Roles in *Cat* and the U.S.

As early as November 1951, when Williams had barely conceived the characters who would become Brick and Margaret Pollitt in *Three Players of a Summer Game*, the corner banner of a *TIME* magazine cover advertised an exposé on “The Younger Generation.” No public figure could have been more comically at odds with such a slogan (or more congenial to *TIME*’s conservative readership) than that week’s cover subject, Sir Winston Churchill. His portrait was superimposed over a hazy, idealized white hand giving the “V for Victory” sign (Murray). The images together made the ultimate emblem of Big Daddy’s generation, mature adults astraddle two World Wars and already actively mythologizing their own grit.

A *TIME* corner banner in September 1972 echoed the youth theme: “BATTLE FOR THE YOUTH VOTE.” The cover text and photographs, however, bespoke a radically altered culture. “THE NEW TV SEASON,” it trumpeted, “TOPPLING OLD TABOOS.” Below were pictures of the characters Fred Sanford (Redd Foxx), Maude (Bea Arthur), and Archie Bunker (Carroll O’Connor): each the protagonist of a highly rated prime-time show (*Sanford and Son*, *Maude*, and *All in the Family*, respectively) that brought progressive racial, gender, and sexual critique into middle-class American dens. There was no “V” sign on the cover of *TIME* that week in 1972; there was no need for one. The once-hawkish gesture had been so thoroughly co-opted by hippie counterculture that its new meaning, *peace-and-love!*, was implicit in the issue’s groovy, Peter Max-inspired psychedelic backdrop and its visibly diverse celebrity lineup. These were the characters Americans wanted to follow now. Their stories openly acknowledged, even

celebrated, class differences and evolving gender roles within nuclear and non-nuclear families. Big Daddy's generation were present in these stories, but their bombast no longer freely dominated cultural conversations; they were just as liable to find themselves the objects of scathing social satire (e.g., O'Connor's Archie Bunker character on *All in the Family*, a reactionary clown forever addled by his liberal-minded cohort). There was much to satirize. In the real world, the nation's leading patriarch, U.S. President Richard Nixon, would shortly resign in response to the Watergate scandal.

Where in Williams's moody fifties drama was the appeal for jaded early seventies audiences? Homosexual innuendo, adultery, and substance abuse were no longer the stuff of cinematic and theatrical turpitude: Broadway, which had courted genteel scandal with *Cat*'s premiere, would soon see the 1975 East Coast debut of *The Rocky Horror Show* (<http://www.playbillvault.com>). Clearly, men and women were primed to receive more explicit material delivered in a tone harmonious with the "liberated" consciousness of the era. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* could still strike nerves, provoke discussion, and prove a successful commercial venture, but it would have to adapt in order to succeed. No longer equipped to shock sensibilities, a revised version of *Cat*—directed by Michael Kahn and overseen by Williams himself in 1974—would rouse viewers by centering the protagonist modern audiences could identify with: a tough, conflicted, sexually driven powerhouse of a woman.

In her 1981 study for the Rand Corporation's Population Research Center, Linda J. Waite identifies a steady upward trend for women in the workplace between the years 1950 and 1980. "During the 1950s and 1960s, women still tended to drop out of the labor

force while their children were young,” she writes; only 38 percent of women worked outside the home at all in 1960 (2). “But in the 1970s, the participation rate for women aged 25 to 34—the prime ages for childbearing and early childrearing—went up by more than half—from 43 percent in 1970 to 65 percent in 1980” (2-3). Waite’s summary charts the rise of U.S. women in the labor force from 18 million in 1950 to 45 million in 1980 (iv).

This trend—one of growing professional and domestic autonomy for women that would comprise Second-wave feminism—was made more profound by sweeping reproductive, cultural, and legal advances for women in the 1960s and 70s. Enovid, the first women’s oral contraceptive, became available in 1960. Two years later Betty Friedan published her landmark commentary on Mid-century America’s troubled gender roles, *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan would be instrumental in the founding of feminist advocacy group NOW (the National Organization for Women) in 1966. 1971 saw the publication of pioneering women’s media such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (a Boston Women’s Health Book Collective resource which urged women to take proactive control of their physical, emotional, and sexual health), as well as the Gloria Steinem-helmed feminist periodical *Ms. Magazine*. Shortly thereafter Richard Nixon signed Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, declaring that “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (<http://www.titleix.info/>); this piece of legislation’s effects on the economic security and education of women continue well into the 21st century. Erica Jong’s bestselling *Fear of Flying* (1973) reframed the essential female sexual fantasy as

an easy, reciprocal “zipless fuck,” defined by the novel’s narrator as an anonymous encounter “free of ulterior motives. There is no power game. The man is not ‘taking’ and the woman is not ‘giving.’ No one is attempting to cuckold a husband or humiliate a wife. No one is trying to prove anything or get anything out of anyone” (15)—a scenario in stark contrast to the contorted marital dynamics of *Cat*. A landmark 1973 decision by the United States Supreme Court, *Roe v. Wade*, largely abolished first and second-trimester abortion restrictions for women. And though the Equal Rights Amendment, a proposed Constitutional amendment for the equality of women in the workplace, was not ratified in 1972—thanks largely to mobilization of housewives by anti-feminist activist Phyllis Schlafly—another ERA, the Equal Rights Advocates, would be established in 1974. That organization actively enforces Title IX in schools and workplaces today, as well as advocating for the legal protection of marginalized students, women workers, and working families.

These historical events and entities were more radical, and effected broader social change, than mere fillips of fashion. Observed as a continuum of subversive statements drafted, cosigned, and actively embraced by millions of women for whom home-and-baby-making was no longer sufficient in itself, women’s liberation efforts of the sixties and seventies were a decided advance in troubling the facile gender models Williams’s characters had always defied. But the “victories” were far from comprehensive; and women’s new freedoms, while meaningful, often revealed conflicting obligations. Second wave feminist writer Fay Weldon summarizes this transition in her 40th anniversary introduction to *Fear of Flying*:

Women [in 1973] trembled between the old world and the new. Men still ruled the roost and women still wanted to please them. Women had won their sexual freedom, thanks to the Pill, and reveled in it, but were still dependent on men for their income. In spite of all the theories, guilt and grief remained. Female lust had a nasty habit of turning into love, as male lust did not...[a]nd what women knew about their own bodies, their own emotions, their own sexuality was still surprisingly little (Jong).

Weldon's references to female love/lust, self-knowledge, and identity recall the scene in *Cat* when Maggie, momentarily alone in the bedroom, looks into a mirror and asks her reflection, "Who are you?" (49) The question is not rhetorical. Her answer, "*I am Maggie the Cat!*," encompasses several facets of the character's identity—*I am Brick's wife, I am a woman who desires love, I am a poor person who is fighting for financial security*—but the revelation in this scene is her very choice to examine her reflection. On the day that she decides to reverse the disintegration of her marriage, Maggie first attempts to integrate the conflicting elements of her own personality: masculine and feminine, poor and privileged, forceful and yielding. The image of Maggie questioning her reflection is an apt metaphor for the movement towards self-awareness that American women undertook in the 1970s. It is also a clue to realizing the full potential of Maggie's character onstage, a challenge which Cold War-era American actresses—mired in what Friedan calls "The Happy Housewife Heroine" mode of performance, in which likeability trumps dynamism and no contradictions exist to reconcile—had never mastered prior to 1974.

Broadway and Hollywood veteran Elizabeth Ashley reflected in a 2008 television appearance that she played Maggie well because she “understood her viscerally” (cunytv75)—a claim Barbara Bel Geddes had not been able to make. Reviews of Ashley’s 1974 performance at the ANTA Playhouse confirm her affinity for the character: “[S]ensuous, wily, febrile, gallant, scorchingly Southern,” one critic effused (Kalem). Clive Barnes, who found her “withdrawn, composed, and determined” (26), further praised her ability to “stand outside a conversation like a cobra, or flutter in like a bird” (26) and pronounced her “[s]plendid” (26). Even acerbic *New York* critic John Simon was compelled by what he deemed “almost more of a juggling act than a performance, keeping grittiness and fragility, as sense of humor and an edge of desperation, sensual coquetry and sexless bitchiness . . . flying around her head like so many complaisant Indian clubs” (123). The serviceable but comparatively dull performances of stage veterans Fred Gwynne (as Big Daddy) and Kate Reid (as Big Mama) were eclipsed almost entirely. Suddenly, critical response to a woman’s representation of Maggie had shifted from gendered blandishments like “lovely” (Atkinson 18) to the sort of substantive, action-oriented praise (“wily,” “gallant”) more often afforded to heroic male characters than to Williams ingénues.

What accounted for this change in perception? Confidence, married with a striking lack of physical inhibition, was one factor: Ashley, more sinew than “dumpling,” brought a free, supple, and near-tomboyish embodiment of Maggie to bear. Production stills show an actor in total command of her physical range: one photo shows her kneeling at ease on a bed in her slip, arms stretched above head as she glances coyly off-camera (presumably to check whether Brick is watching her display her body) (Billy

Rose Collection). In another she is hanging backwards over the edge of the bed, long legs casually crossed, hair and fingers tickling the carpet as she speaks (Billy Rose Collection). Ashley's entire posture communicates feline composure as well as hunger—no surprise considering her unorthodox method of character-building. “I had about three cats,” she admitted, “and I *starved* ‘em for two weeks to see what they’d do if they were hungry” (cunytv75).

This detail bespeaks not only a most Maggie-ish ruthlessness, but also a sexually liberated personal background which bore more than passing resemblance to Williams's: “I was Southern! . . . [a] Southern girl from a shattered family, the first divorce ever in this old Southern family” (cunytv75). Ashley, born in Ocala, Florida and raised in Louisiana, was herself twice-divorced when she appeared in *Cat* at the 1974 American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut; shortly after the show's transfer to the ANTA Playhouse on Broadway, she would marry her third husband (Strachan). Her years as an itinerant and financially independent single mother whetted, rather than dulled, her sense of the ribald and grotesque. Like Maggie, Ashley could scarcely abide “an ass-aching Puritan” (*Cat* 23); like Big Daddy, she had “knocked around” in her time (117). Jeb Brown, who played one of Mae's “no-neck monsters” in the ANTA Theater production, recalls how Ashley's boldness aligned with the decade's zeitgeist: “*Cat* is a play that struts with a fairly frank sense of sexuality, and the ‘Free To Be You and Me’ ’70s were an era of letting it all hang out. So to have Liz Ashley lounging and lunging through the first hour of our play in her silk slip registered to me then as in tune with the times” (Brown).

Free To Be... You and Me, a landmark album released by Marlo Thomas and friends in 1972, “taught young people to resist prejudice and transcend prevailing norms of acceptable ‘boy’ or ‘girl’ behavior” (Rotskoff). This resistance spoke directly to the complex gender subversions of Elizabeth Ashley, who found a lifelong comrade and champion in Williams. Years later she would comment that, despite her admiration, in the course of the work “All that hero-specter-genius-artist stuff goes right out the window; you become gross-out drinking buddies in sort of toilet bars in third-world countries” (cunytv75). Playwright and actress enjoyed a sexless intimacy that found its outlet in a series of successful improvisational rewrites.

Here, twenty years after *Cat*’s premiere—in the midst of the most sweeping social reform for women since the 19th amendment granted them the right to vote—was a performer whose masculine/feminine cocktail activated Maggie the Cat’s essential contradictions and brought the character definitively to life. Another Elizabeth—Taylor, who (as Baker points out) “more people know [as] Maggie . . . than know Tennessee Williams wrote *Cat*” (2015)—had unleashed some of Maggie’s power in Richard Brooks’s 1958 film adaptation. But Taylor’s performance, for all its vividness, came in the context of a script so altered from its stage source that Williams famously exhorted a line of ticket-buyers to “Go home!” since the movie would “set the industry back fifty years!” (Billington 2012). Her Maggie could never be fully realized because the limits of her morality were never truly tested; screenwriter James Poe’s “Hollywood” ending, which finds Maggie secure in Brick’s passionate embrace, spared viewers the conundrum of screen darling Liz Taylor sexually blackmailing Paul Newman. Instead, Taylor’s performance offered a compromise between Barbara Bel Geddes’s guilelessness and the

spiky sass of Williams’s original vision. And though the actress (whom David Kaplan describes as “uber-feminine”) (2015) captured some of Maggie’s archness and her desperate love, she did not possess virtuosic vocal or physical technique; nor could she believably overpower Newman’s Brick by sheer intensity of will. I would argue that Taylor’s performance is considered iconic due more to its mass visibility, and to her own personal magnetism, than to any faithful interpretation of Williams’s character. Though Elizabeth Ashley would never be a household name and did not win the Tony Award for which she was nominated in the role (as of 2015, no actress has won a Tony or an Oscar for playing Maggie) her performance—not Taylor’s—may be the standard by which other Maggies should be measured.

If *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*’s intimations of latent homosexuality had managed to startle fifties audiences despite Kazan’s muting influence, this time they seemed, as scholar George W. Crandell notes, “not at all shocking. . . [T]he critical response in 1974 reflected changing attitudes toward homosexuality, such that some critics considered Williams’s treatment of the topic in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* somewhat dated” (xxxiii). Authors Greta Heintzelman and Alycia Smith-Howard concur that “[t]hough the 1955 premiere had shocked audiences, by 1974, audiences were no longer struck by the controversial themes” (62). And Clive Barnes, in his review, supposes that “even though a certain four-letter word has been restored where a euphemism once reigned stupidly supreme, I doubt whether anyone is going to be shocked now” (26).

The playwright by now was well-accustomed to being lobbed like a shuttlecock between critical and popular cries of “risqué” and “passé”—so well accustomed, in fact,

that he had spent the previous two decades in a haze of bourbon and Seconal (Lahr 249-250), drowning poison-pen reviews of commercial failures in which he tried desperately to minimize exposure of homosexual themes. Ironically, this desperation had found its parallel in the alcoholic fugue of Brick Pollitt, whose internalized homophobia now struck one journalist as “pretty tame stuff” with “an aura of dated quaintness” (Glover 10). The same circumspection that had insulated Williams from persecution in the 1950s exposed him to mockery two decades later.

Those two decades had indeed seen revolutionary movements towards visibility and acceptance for homosexual Americans. Dr. Alfred Kinsey’s controversial human sexuality tests, published between 1948 and 1963, made publically available data which said 37 percent of males had had “instances of at least one same-sex experience to orgasm” (650); and that 46 percent of the male population “had engaged in both heterosexual and homosexual activities, or ‘reacted to’ persons of both sexes, in the course of their adult lives” (kinseyinstitute.org). Poet Allen Ginsberg, observing gay men on New York’s Christopher Street in the wake of the 1969 Stonewall riots in response to brutal police raids on homosexual, transsexual, and drag citizens in private businesses, remarked: “They’ve lost that wounded look that fags all had ten years ago” (Rutledge 3). The American Psychological Association had even removed homosexuality from its list of mental disturbances in 1971 (Shackelford 104). Gay-related immune deficiency (GRID) would not become an official diagnosis until 1982; its eventual moniker, AIDS, loomed farther off in 1986 (<http://biotech.law.lsu.edu/>). Jeb Brown recalls 1974 as a curiously optimistic time for the discovery of gay culture in cosmopolitan settings:

... If the aspect of the play that dealt with the taboo of homosexuality in 1950s Mississippi blew unnoticed past me, the reality of a more modern attitude was all around us in the theater world of 1974. “What does gay mean?” I surprised my mother with the question one day. She responded in fairly plain terms, explaining that “some men and women want to love other men and women.” I quickly followed up: “So, do we know anyone who’s gay?” The answer was a resounding “Yes” and the examples of openly gay friends and colleagues were myriad, a number of them treasured elders working side by side with me nightly.

This familiarity, however, bred acceptance and contempt in turn. Brick Pollitt proved no more penetrable or comprehensible to critics in 1974 than he had to ones in 1955 (or, in most cases, the ones in intervening years). His basic androgyny—remote and airy where Maggie’s is earthy and hot—could not be explained away or “fixed” by mass-media bemusement with, or pathologization of, *The Homosexual*. Critics of the era seemed inclined to resolve the “is-he-or-isn’t-he” conundrum amongst themselves with a hasty “Well, of *course* he is!” followed by one of two responses: hearty self-congratulation for being urbane enough to recognize and “tolerate” this, à la Big Daddy; or—in the case of reviewers Clive Barnes and John Simon—faint distaste, as though an offensive odor were sniffed lingering overlong in a public toilet.

This barely-suppressed weariness with male transgression is evident in Barnes’s reference to “the magnolia-scented bedroom that used to belong to the old-maidish bachelors that once owned the plantation” (26), a description at once homophobic and misogynist. He offers more reserved praise for the actor portraying Brick, Keir Dullea,

than he does for Ashley; Barnes mentions his “charm of the defeated” and “alcoholic eyes staring into the mid-distance of half-forgotten memory” (26). His final comment on Dullea’s performance is that that he (like Ashley) is “oddly vulnerable” (26), a quality Ben Gazzara, rather *more* oddly and inappropriately to the specifications of Williams’s text, could *not* bring to the role. Barnes’s generally favorable account of “a glowing play” (26) gives the impression that the production succeeds in spite of Brick’s messy, unfathomable presence, and not because of it.

No amount of male vulnerability could persuade the witty-but-reductive John Simon of Brick’s value as a dramatic “poem.” His assessment of the work as a whole is more censure than praise: “[M]uch better than the plays of the dramatist’s long decline, and in need of reassessment”; and “Worthy commercial fare, but not art” (120). But the critic’s main volley is leveled at Dullea’s Brick, whom he dubs “a nonentity” (121). “Why,” he demands, “all this fuss about Brick, who seems to have nothing beyond his good looks to recommend him?” He further dismisses the character as “a fairly typical figure from the homosexual world: the beautiful but mediocre young man who coasts along on his looks, and drinks because he is beginning to lose them” (121). Simon’s suggestion that this type is somehow endemic to the “homosexual world”—that the heteronormative society of 1974 was a meritocracy in which older men did not routinely privilege the youth and beauty of the younger women they sexually objectified and treated as disposable—would be laughable if it did not constitute a fatal short-sightedness in an occasionally acute piece of criticism. For Simon goes on to note what few journalists before 1974 had discerned in Maggie’s character (and, by logical extension, in Brick’s): androgyny. Simon proposes that Maggie is “partly the disguised,

sentimentalized portrait of the gifted, worldly, passionate homosexual lover [i.e., Williams] frustrated by a shallow beloved; partly the . . . threatening female who pursues the homosexual with her legally sanctioned but unwanted, burdensome love” (49). That Williams’s female characters must be thinly-veiled drag versions of their author was a common presumption of critics in the seventies and eighties. Gore Vidal dismantles the charge in his introduction to Williams’s *Collected Stories*, and Gordon Rogoff refers to the accusation as yielding “a howling multitude of fallacies . . . [O]ne of those decoys invented by a critical fraternity which is itself in crisis” (Prosser 10). What matters more is the critical advance in Simon’s observation of Maggie’s male prerogative; there was no mention of this in critiques of Bel Geddes’s 1955 performance. But if the success of Ashley’s performance depends (as Simon suggests) on her embodiment of a woman who falls outside the spectrum of conventional, “fixed” gender and sexuality, and whose personality comprises elements of male and female, homo and heterosexuality, it follows that Dullea’s Brick—her complement and main catalyst for action in the play—exists somewhere off that grid as well.

Keir Dullea’s performance did not elicit critical consensus, which may in fact indicate his fitness for this most elusive and deeply ambiguous of roles. The actor was recognizable primarily for his turn in Stanley Kubrick’s 1968 science fiction film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. A re-viewing of that movie is persuasive of Dullea’s rightness for his role in *Cat*: as astronaut Dave Bowman, Dullea’s face is tightly-controlled, impassive under all but the most harrowing circumstances (e.g., the murder of his colleagues by supercomputer HAL 9000, whose logorrhea Dullea silences with a decisiveness to which Brick could only aspire), at which point it reveals a strain suggestive of banked fires

smoldering below its smooth and luminous surface. Dullea's grave, owl-eyed aspect ("Pre-Raphaelite," as Simon says) (122) has that special quality which allows viewers to project onto it the values they wish to see there. For Brick, who functions as a vessel for his family's ambitions, desires, and sexual idiosyncrasies rather than as a masculine being with a sense of self, this quality is all-important. It was the right one for an era in which men, also in a transitional phase, were compelled to adapt their social protocols alongside emerging feminists; they were also a cool foil to Ashley's fiery, bravura turn.

Re-construction and Reconciliation: the 1974 Text

For the American Shakespeare Theater in Stratford, Connecticut, 1974 was a season intimately concerned with memory, legacy, and the death of a wealthy patriarch. The Theater's long-time investor and patron, philanthropist Joseph Verner Reed, had died the previous November, casting the future of the organization into serious doubt. The 1974 season, which marked AST's 20th anniversary, "was to have been a time of celebration," writes Theater chronicler Roberta Krensky Cooper (179). Now, with the death of Reed, its production atmosphere was eerily reminiscent of Big Daddy's abortive birthday fête: "The issue was suddenly sheer survival" (178).

Luckily for the AST's Artistic Director, Michael Kahn, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was a play finely attuned (both in substance and in development history) to the struggle for survival. Kazan had grappled with Williams to ensure *Cat's* commercial viability in 1955; this time, the playwright himself would prove the financial ace up director Kahn's sleeve.

“The extraordinary blessing of that production,” Elizabeth Ashley recalls, “was that . . . Tennessee came and was on-site” (cunytv75). He had been on-site for the original production, too; but the climate this time was considerably more congenial to playwrights, a sign of the era’s shift away from auteur direction like Kazan’s in favor of more democratized creative play. “Gadg” had castigated Williams for interfering with actors in rehearsal (Kazan recounts whispering to Williams “that if he [gave vocal notes to Bel Geddes] again, I’d quit”) (Lahr 296). With director Kahn’s blessing, Williams now dispensed notes, alternate scene versions, and bits of dialogue from what Ashley describes as “twenty-five Brioni bags full of everything from old goddamned shirt-things he’d written on [presumably she refers to the cardboard inserts in packaged dress shirts] to typed pages” (75). Williams invited the actors to improvise, to rewrite, and to explore new readings of his lines, prompting (with typical deference): “You might find somethin’ you like a little better than that” and “I don’t wanna read it! Y’all just find what you like and then just do it for me” (75).

The results of these explorations have been minutely documented in scholarly text analyses and stemma; among the most useful are Brian Parker’s essay “Bringing Back Big Daddy” (2000) and Chapter Five of John Lahr’s biographical sequel to Lyle Leverich’s *Tom*, entitled *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh* (2014). Succinctly, the revised 1974 script combines what Williams believed to be the most beneficial of Kazan’s edits (namely, Big Daddy’s return to the stage in Act Three to tell a mildly pornographic elephant joke) while restoring several of his original, pre-Kazan details. These include the use of the word “fuck” in place of “rut;” but the most important restoration comes at the play’s final moment when Brick must choose whether to engage

with Maggie emotionally and sexually or to remain aloof. His capitulation in the 1955 “Broadway” version is clear:

MARGARET: . . . I told a lie to Big Daddy, but we can make that lie come true. And then I'll bring you liquor, and we'll get drunk together, here, tonight, in this place that death has come into! What do you say? What do you say, baby?

BRICK [*X to L side bed*]: I admire you, Maggie.

[*Brick sits on edge of bed. He looks up at the overhead light, then at Margaret. She reaches for the light, turns it out; then she kneels quickly beside Brick at foot of bed.*]

MARGARET: Oh, you weak, beautiful people who give up with such grace. What you need is someone to take hold of you—gently, with love, and hand your life back to you, like something gold you let go of— and I can! I'm determined to do it— and nothing's more determined than a cat on a hot tin roof— is there? Is there, baby? [*She touches his cheek, gently.*]

CURTAIN (*Cat NAL*)

In the “restored” 1974 version, ambiguity—with its lingering questions about the husband’s consent and the wife’s agenda—holds sway, particularly in Brick’s final words:

MARGARET: And so tonight we're going to make the lie true, and when that's done, I'll bring the liquor back here and we'll get drunk together, here, tonight, in this place that death has come into. . . . —What do you say?

BRICK: I don't say anything. I guess there's nothing to say.

MARGARET: Oh, you weak people, you weak, beautiful people!— who give up with such grace. What you want is someone to— [*She turns out the rose-silk lamp.*] —take hold of you.— Gently, gently with love hand your life back to you, like somethin' gold you let go of. I *do* love you, Brick, I *do*!

BRICK [*smiling with charming sadness*]: Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?

THE END (Cat 173)

William's restored version, for which scholars and artists have expressed decided preference since its first performance in 1974, enjoyed a successful run at the American Shakespeare Theater before its transfer to ANTA Playhouse in September of 1974. It ran there for 160 performances under Michael Kahn's direction, and was nominated for one Tony Award (Best Actress in a Play) and two Drama Desk Awards (Outstanding Actress in a Play and Outstanding Set Design).

Was this a victory for Williams, already in the midst of what Simon referred to as “the dramatist's long decline” (120) and desperately in need of creative integration? If so, it was a bittersweet and self-conscious one. In reasserting his creative control over the text that he had never entirely forgiven Kazan for compromising (“I was terribly distressed by *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. . . It seemed almost like a prostitution or a corruption”) (Lahr 313), he was reminded of the long-time and still much-loved collaborator from whom he had split; the aesthetic “prostitutions” he had made in order to maintain the fame that kept him in material luxury; and of his own inability to reverse the

cultural progress that exposed him to accusations of quaintness and irrelevance. All of this speaks to the pitch of the United States at the approach of its Bicentennial, a country which (for all its newly-evolved candor about sex and gender) still struggled mightily with the old questions of who was expected to surrender dominance in bed, in politics, and within the constraints of nuclear bonds.

Les Brookes describes the tension between “liberated” sexual identity and traditional definitions of the American family during this period: “[G]ay life and family life, representing the poles of the homo-heterosexual-divide, are often seen as essentially irreconcilable, and the conflict between them was perhaps most visible during the 1970s” (104). This tension applied equally to women who, like Maggie, encompassed more facets of gender than simply “woman”; and men who, like Brick, unsteadily straddled the homo-hetero divide. Novelist Edmund White considered sexual liberation from such unnecessary divides “a form of idealism,” an attempt for differently oriented, fluidly gendered, and newly self-aware Americans to “find new ways of relating” (104). Perhaps the “restored” edition of *Cat*, published by New Directions in 1975, was a form of idealism as well. In production, this script showed us men and women struggling to move beyond the gender and sexual labels that no longer adequately defined them; to reconcile the masculine and feminine components of their characters; and to find new ways of relating to spouses, parents, and children whom they knew, by now, could not guarantee their happiness or protect them from devouring time.

CHAPTER 3

UMASS AMHERST DEPARTMENT OF THEATER, 2015

The University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Theater's production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opened on February 28, 2015. It was directed by Jared Culverhouse and featured sets by Miguel Romero, costumes by Elizabeth Pangburn, sound design by Pamela McCaddin, and lighting design by Michael Blagys. Amy Brooks was the production dramaturg. The cast was as follows:

MARGARET	Ivy Croteau
BRICK	Cory Missildine
TRIXIE	Ruby Cain
BUSTER	Tristan Lewis-Schurter
MAE	Katelyn Vieira
GOOPER	Alex LaFreniere
BIG MAMA	Julie Nelson
SERVANT	Monica Henry
BIG DADDY	Milan Dragicevich
REVEREND TOOKER	Zachary Colton
DR. BAUGH	Marty Norden

Table 3: UMass Amherst Cast

Dramaturgical Overview

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof opened in the UMass Fine Arts Center Rand Theater fifty-nine years, eleven months, and five days following its Broadway premiere in 1955.

Williams had died nearly thirty-two years previous to the day, bequeathing a succession of published editions that render the play “almost as famous for its revisions as it is for its final text,” as Edward Albee observes in his 2004 introduction to *Cat* (8). My focus as production dramaturg was to help tease out these dual energies of death and creation—what Williams called “the shocking duality of the single heart” (Lahr 296)—in performance. Both are deeply inscribed in Williams’s script, and both must be accessed to capitalize on the play’s visceral, perhaps mysterious attraction for American viewers, scholars, and theater makers.

Cat was submitted to the UMass Department of Theater’s season selection committee as a potential thesis project by Jared Culverhouse, a third-year candidate in the MFA Directing program who needed a large ensemble drama to round out a portfolio defined by small-cast shows like Lisa D’Amour’s *Detroit* (2013). I endorsed the proposal with a belief in his affinity for Williams’s volatile material (Culverhouse once expressed his desire “to make theater that’s like a punch in the mouth”) and a plan to parlay production dramaturgy for the show into my own written thesis.

Tennessee Williams has been essential to every facet of my work in theater. I played Laura from *The Glass Menagerie* in extended scene work as an undergraduate acting major at West Virginia University; over a decade later I would play Stella in a fringe production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in Ohio. Most crucially, a reading of Williams’s *Notebooks* in 2012 startled me into new awareness of the artist’s compulsion to ease his unhappiness with manic productivity. Tom Lanier Williams, I saw, spent his life so terribly afraid, yet persevered so bravely in his sublimation of terror into poetry.

His was a miserable life well spent. Culverhouse and I understood the ways in which nasty childhoods drive damaged grownups to succeed; this made *Cat* an ideal subject for the culmination of our graduate studies.

After reviewing the various available acting editions, Culverhouse chose Williams's "definitive" 1974 edition of the play. I also felt that this was the best choice for UMass actors and audiences, citing contemporary critic Claire Nicolay's opinion that "[t]oday, the Broadway and film versions of the play are viewed by critics as bowdlerized" (1) and that the '74 version "restores the complexity and dark vision of the original" (1).

The production process was a challenging one, as befits the subject matter. A few faculty members expressed concerns about *Cat*'s selection, identifying the play as an oppressive text which re-inscribes colonial racism in an educational setting. Assistant Professor of Theater History and Criticism Megan Lewis focused her critique on the character of Big Daddy, whom she called "a racist, sexist bigot" (Lewis, 9 April 2015)—an accurate (if incomplete) description, despite his self-avowed "tolerance" (*Cat* 122). Assistant Professor of Performance and Theater for Social Change Judyie Al-Bilali and I conferred separately with Culverhouse over the inclusion of the word "nigger" in the UMass production. Al-Bilali voiced reservations about the use of the word in an academic community still shaken from a rash of racial violence on and off-campus throughout 2014, most notably the inscription of the phrase "*Kill This Nigger*" on the dorm door of the Secretary of Diversity of the UMass Student Government Association (Rentsch) and unrest following the shooting of unarmed black teen Michael Brown by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri in August (Healy A24). I advocated for the

word to be kept in the production script, citing Linda Holmes's article "In 'Huckleberry Finn,' A History In Echoes," which addresses the historical bowdlerization of offensive racial language in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* as both patronizing to readers and counterproductive to the cause of equality. *Huckleberry Finn*, cleansed of the racist epithet "nigger," no longer works as a gauge by which we may measure social evolution (or lack thereof) since the novel's publication in 1885 (Holmes); I made a similar case for the word in *Cat*. Culverhouse elected to keep it in the script, and it was ultimately spoken by actor Milan Dragicevich.

Shelley Orr's "Critical Proximity: A Case for Using the First Person as a Production Dramaturg" reminds us that dramaturgs have options when it comes to positioning ourselves in such ethical and creative dilemmas. We can maintain critical distance, adopting the mantra of Alliance Theatre's Celise Kalke: "I am not the director or writer of a play" (242) in order to surrender the potentially repressive illusion of control. Or we can defy dramaturgical convention and assert, with Brian Quirt of Nightswimming, "I don't really believe in critical distance . . . My approach to a work and my opinions about it are infused with my own preferences about theatre, storytelling, and form (among many other things)" (245).

Much of my production dramaturgy for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* challenged me to reconcile detachment and intervention in order to get work done and decisions made. Critical "objectivity" as an ethos seemed to me, after three years of work in graduate production dramaturgy at UMass, both bloodless and futile. What was the point of cultivating judgment, taste, and artistic agency if one's sole function was to be dipped into for data at collaborators' whims, passive as encyclopedias? I longed for an active

role at the core of Culverhouse's creative team. Yet, as design meetings progressed, I was forced to acknowledge that dramaturgs' peripheral positions equip us to make unique observations and to articulate these, particularly at times when the team is having a tough time reaching a unified production vision. The isolation I had long dreaded rendered me useful during times of creative stalemate between Culverhouse and his designers. At these times, asserting my opinions in proximity to my teammates'—including instances when I had to respectfully dissent—was more than a privilege; it was a dramaturgical imperative. I found that quality of timely assertiveness, which must concern itself with synthesizing ways rather than “getting your own way,” to be best expressed by Danielle Mages Amato, Literary Manager/Dramaturg at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre: “It's not as though I need to have objective vision, but more like multiple vision. As though I need to keep my own invested vision *and* the director's vision *and* a sense of what an audience member will need to have a path into this play—all at the same time” (Orr 240).

The following “production vignette” of my dramaturgical strategy for an early design meeting may serve as an illustration of Amato's multiple vision at work for a team at a pivotal creative moment.

The tone of our third design meeting on October 9th, 2014, is generally optimistic. Designers Miguel Romero (scenic) and Elizabeth Pangburn (costume) have already presented preliminary design concepts; last week I asked Culverhouse to work towards a response to the question “Why produce this play in 2015?,” which prompted a quick-but-fruitful conversation between us. Still, the group has yet to articulate a clear guiding vision for the show. Further, Romero's proposed set incorporates Williams's

recommendation that walls “should dissolve mysteriously into air” (*Cat* 16) and extrapolates the concept into removing *all* doors; this tricky conceit has polarized group opinion, with lighting designer Mike Blagys in favor of the doorless set, Pangburn opposed, and Culverhouse reluctant to commit. The single, controversial design element raises larger questions of abstraction, theatricality, and theme that our director—who remarked to me early in the process that “the problem with talking big picture stuff is that meanwhile, none of the actual mechanics get taken care of”—needs to address in order to make an informed decision and lead the group forward.

“I don’t want to hear about conceptual things,” is Culverhouse’s pointed preface to the meeting. When I stand to speak, half an hour later, it seems important to be just as unequivocal: “I’m here to talk about concepts.” I remind the group that now, early in process, is the time to talk big-picture and conceptual ideas that will lead us to a shared vocabulary for a specific, tangible world, something beyond the reheated Southern Gothic cliché poor Williams productions often serve audiences; Culverhouse has been clear in his desire to avoid this pitfall.

I begin by summarizing the concepts the design team has shared both privately and in meetings: Elizabeth Pangburn considers the play “a plea for tolerance,” to which I respond: Who is in a position to tolerate whom, in *Cat*? When the characters touch, are they angry or loving? Where is tolerance lacking? And what tolerance does the text ask of the viewer? Romero has referred to the script as “operatic” and “larger than the space containing the story”; I agree and point out the porosity of his design in order to ask, What elevates this above soap opera? What ideas or energies give the play scope? This leads me to Culverhouse’s comments on *Cat*: that he wants it, above all, to be both

aesthetically beautiful and to reflect the dynamics of the interlocked marriages within “a cage,” rather than just one couple’s struggle.

I project this painting:

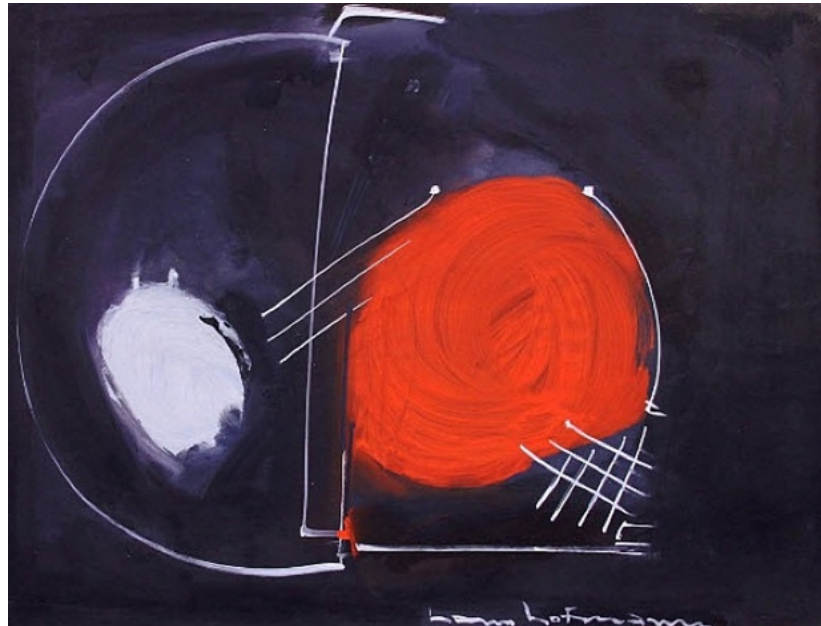


Figure 1: Hans Hofmann, "Untitled (Red, black, white)" 1946

Tennessee Williams, I explain, visited Provincetown, Massachusetts for four summers between 1940 and 1947 (Kaplan 3). The town was renowned then for its theatrical crowd, notably Eugene O’Neill—but Williams was never a part of this clique. Instead, he spent each summer in the company of avant-garde painters: Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, and, most importantly, Hans Hofmann, who painted this picture (5). Hofmann’s school of abstract expressionism made an indelible impression on a small group of American playwrights, including Williams and María Irene Fornés, who would later write: “Don’t you know that you can take a yes and a no and push them together, squeeze them together, compress them so they are one? That in fact that is what reality is? Opposites,

contradictions compressed so that you don't know where one stops and the other begins?" (Cummings 29)

I continue with a quick "guided exploration" of the painting, its strong opposing elements seemingly locked in space, the white lines suggestive of action and reaction. Neither figure holds meaning on its own; there is only the binary. Dynamism is the key element of Hofmann's paintings, as it would become the key element of Williams's plays, especially *Cat*: bodies in motion generating electrical conflict that creates a sensual experience for the audience.

After we consider the painting, I hand out copies of Fornés's quote and this excerpt from a 1954 letter from Williams to Elia Kazan:

"[T]he play was not just negative, since it was packed with rage, and rage is not a negative thing in life: it is positive, dynamic! I share your feeling about Brick, want to kick him . . . But he's got to be understood, too. he's one of the rich and lucky. Got everything without begging, was admired and loved by all. Hero! Beauty!—Two people fell in love with him beyond all bounds. Skipper and Maggie. He built one side of his life around Skipper, another around Maggie.—Conflict: Disaster!—One love ate up the other, naturally, humanly, without intention, just did! Hero is faced with truth and collapses before it . . . Maggie, the cat, has to give him some instruction in how to hold your place on a hot tin roof, which is human existence which you've got to accept on any terms whatsoever . . .
(*Notebooks* 658).

I conclude my presentation with a violation of the dramaturg's "critical

objectivity”: I take a creative position. I explain to the team that I think we should have doors; not because doing the play without is an unworkable idea per se, but because it doesn’t seem consistent with the fundamentally realistic tone of the production that Jared is moving towards. I also acknowledge that I could be persuaded otherwise, if Jared could be; but my real interest lies in the image of the missing door and how it relates to our understanding of the Pollitts’ world. It’s no coincidence, I point out, that this is the functional issue we’re discussing week after week. The script is filled with references to doors and business with doors—open, shut, locked, eavesdroppers lurking beyond, people hiding within. What does the door represent to this family? Who wants them in place; who wants them thrown open? And what is waiting behind those doors?

“I hate to say it,” Dramaturgy Advisor Chris Baker says at the end of the meeting, “but your points [about opposing forces and abstract painting] seem to argue *for* removing the doors” (2014).

Romero and Culverhouse will ultimately agree on two large sets of physical doors, louvered to admit sound and Blagys’s warm washes of light, a compromise announced several meetings later. I am not privy to these later discussions between Culverhouse and Romero; as is often the case for dramaturgs, my role in the process was peripheral. Still, I conclude that the conceptual questions I raised were useful ones. Multiple vision—weighing the priorities of the production team against your own and revealing the points at which they intersect—will likely generate a multitude of questions before the team arrives at answers. The questioning, like the dynamism of opposing energies, is what defines rigorous production work that takes creative risks and renders plays like *Cat* perennially fresh.

Context and Reception

[F]ar from the vocation of motherhood leading you away from the great issues of our day, it brings you back to their very center . . . This assignment for you, as wives and mothers, you can do in the living room with a baby in your lap or in the kitchen with a can opener in your hand . . . Maybe you can even practice your saving arts on that unsuspecting man while he's watching television. I think there is much you can do about our crisis in the humble role of housewife. I could wish you no better vocation than that (Friedan 60-61).

These lines are excerpted from an address delivered by statesman Adlai Stevenson in 1955, the year of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof's* premiere. The occasion was the Smith College commencement ceremony; Stevenson's audience, several hundred of the most ambitious and accomplished young women in America, among them Sylvia Plath. Gloria Steinem would be in the next year's graduating crowd.

Sixty years later and eight miles away, the UMass Amherst Department of Theater production of *Cat* would feature a Smith College senior, Ivy Croteau, as Maggie the Cat. Croteau—blonde, smoke-throated and button-featured, looking rather like a Tinker Bell who had abandoned Peter Pan for cigarettes and sex—made for a wry Maggie. With a brittle and tightly-coiled physical anger that often overtook any hint of softness, Croteau was a credible amalgam of privilege and hunger, the kind of debutante you suspect might beat you in a fight. In motion, her performance had athleticism and the requisite sense of play, the vitality of a woman who masters any space she enters—even unpleasant in-laws'—and is confident of a similar effect on the people in that space.

Nevertheless, in the play's moments of calm, Croteau found two qualities casual viewers seldom attribute to Maggie: humor and warmth. It was an intelligent performance and one which brought credence to critic Claire Nicolay's opinion that "although Brick is the focus (or, as Williams puts it, 'the mystery') of the play, the play's action belongs to Maggie" (10). And if critics like Kerr and Simon have complained that the conclusion of the play "lacks dramatic force," it is simply because they have incorrectly assumed that Brick was the protagonist (10). In the UMass production, Croteau was unmistakably the protagonist.

More than forty years had passed since Elizabeth Ashley and Keir Dullea, under Michael Kahn's direction, tested the boundaries of gender performance on the ANTA Playhouse stage. Gender and sexual politics had continued to comprise their own American drama: Tonie Nathan and Geraldine Ferraro won major political parties' vice presidential nominations in 1972 and 1984, respectively; a third nominee, Sarah Palin, would emerge in 2008. Yet second wave feminism had splintered by the end of the 1970s, due in part to the opposition of "old guard" leaders like Friedan to the radicalism of emerging voices like Gloria Steinem's (tvaana.org). Sexuality itself, especially pornography, had become a "hot tin roof" on which progressive women could not reach the comfort of consensus; feminism remained ambivalent—sometimes embracing, sometimes critical—in its relationship to men. Even as Helen Gurley Brown's 1982 manual *Having It All* reached bestseller status, the book's advertised talismans of "love, success, sex, and money" did not guarantee women's happiness at the turn of the millennium any more than they had ever guaranteed men's.

In Americans' pursuit of happiness, gender itself was increasingly subjective. The term "female impersonator" grew outmoded as transsexual "drag" actor, recording artist, and eventual reality television star RuPaul (born RuPaul Andre Charles) came into prominence in the 1990s. Ru's prettiness and lack of self-deprecation stood in contrast to the camp grotesquerie of contemporary queens such as Barry Humphries's Dame Edna Everage. They also paved the way for later male-to-female transgender performers of color like Laverne Cox, whose 2013 Netflix vehicle *Orange Is the New Black* has helped shift sexual difference from the stuff of sitcom and reality TV (e.g., gay-themed *Will and Grace* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* in the early 2000s) to subject matter for Emmy-winning prestige dramas. Today Cox is politically active, using her program's success as a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer (LGBTQ) advocacy platform: "You can define what it means to be a man or a woman on your own terms," her website advises, along with "moving beyond gender expectations to live more authentically" (lavernecox.com 2014).

The meaning of an "authentic" American life is central to recent history's most dramatic shift in the gender paradigm, former Olympic athlete Caitlyn Jenner. Jenner, christened William Bruce at birth, appeared as a *Track & Field News* cover model in 1974, the year *Cat* was revived in Stratford, Connecticut. In 1976 she became a U.S. men's decathlon gold medalist; by the early 1980s she graced countless breakfast tables as the face of Wheaties cereal. And in April 2015, Jenner—once seen as the quintessence of American sporting masculinity—revealed her identity as a transgender woman on the television news show *20/20*. By autumn of that year she had made official her new name, "Caitlyn," and legal gender (eonline.com 2015).

The most revealing detail of Jenner’s transition lies not in her similarity to RuPaul and Cox, but in her difference from them: as we approach the presidential election of 2016—an election in which First Lady-cum-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is poised to become America’s first female Democratic nominee for president—Caitlyn Jenner remains a registered Republican, a conservative Christian, and (with her own reality TV franchise and a net worth of an estimated \$100 million) (Tauber 2014) a vocal opponent of social programs designed to aid the poor (Zupkus 2015). The ascent of wealthy, establishmentarian Caitlyn Jenner reveals a new American order in which gender and sexual difference no longer mark “queer” people—that is, as defined by Berkeley’s Gender Equity Resource Center, people who embody “[a] political statement, as well as a sexual orientation, which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid” (geneq.berkeley.edu 2013)—as the unequivocal Other.

Williams, whose status as non-binary Other caused him emotional and physical distress until his death by overdose in 1983 (Lahr 586), mistrusted fluidity as deeply as he embodied it. He disapproved of drag, feeling (as Camille Paglia writes) that it “degraded women” (2012) even as he indulged in private cabarets with friends. By 2008, the term “TERF”—for trans-exclusionary radical feminist—would be applied in social media and activist circles to radical feminists who perpetuated this same argument against the representation of womanhood by those born biologically male (theterfs.com 2013). Nevertheless, such gender distinctions have ceased to elicit violent opposition from the majority of Americans, and 29 percent of the population now lives in states with transgender-inclusive legal protection; in 1995 the figure was 2 percent

(transgenderlawcenter.org). For practical purposes, the terms “woman” and “man” now apply, with growing public empathy and traction, to whomever elects to self-apply them.

Culverhouse’s production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, with Ivy Croteau as its mainstay (rivaled only by an expansive performance by Milan Drageceovich as Big Daddy), was reflective of a 21st century re-centering of critical and popular focus on the lives and experiences of its female characters, specifically Maggie. If *Cat* is viewed as “a parable of the changing American dream and its effects on masculinity, which in turn affects the structure of the family and the lives of women” (Nicolay 10), then *Cat* onstage today reminds us that the “American dream” has changed still further—away from the “oppressive state of patriarchy circa 1954” (1) and towards a more inclusive (if still unequal) understanding of gender roles and women’s social and sexual freedoms. If anything, the force of Croteau’s engagement with Cory Missildine, who played Brick, highlighted the lack of modesty and deference (Stevenson’s “saving arts”) with which women today are expected to encounter men; her rages and taunts—what playwright Williams and male critics since 1955 have regarded as “sexless bitchery” (Simon 122)—now read as far more human than gendered.

In rehearsal, the team used character-building questions that traditionally privileged the sexual status of Brick (“Is he a homosexual? Has he loved his wife? She describes him, in some detail, as a good lover because he was a disinterested lover.”) (Kerr 1) to plumb Maggie’s depth of experience. Croteau and I discussed the irony of Kerr’s questioning, in which he isolates Maggie’s claim solely as possible evidence of Brick’s homosexuality, centering the male experience of sex within marriage; its possible

implications for Maggie's character are of no interest to Kerr. Those implications—of Maggie's definition of pleasure and the emotional conditions that have shaped it—were central to Croteau's character development and to my study of Brick and Maggie's marital dynamic.

No vocabulary existed in 1955, or as late as 1974, to address the compulsion that Maggie exhibits to care for Brick, to regulate his drinking, and to maintain the myriad daily tasks he has abandoned in service to alcoholism. But the compulsion was always real: Williams, himself the adult child of an alcoholic and mentally ill family, understood the caretaking dynamic unconsciously.

A working knowledge of codependent sexual and family dynamics is one of several new skills that producers and analysts of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* might bring to bear today. In 1986 Melody Beattie, "part of a dawning realization that the problem was not solely the addict, but also the family and friends who constitute a network for the alcoholic" (Davis 178), published a book called *Codependent No More*. In it, she limns the long-neglected pathologies of people who organize their lives around the chemically dependent, transgressing healthy boundaries and focusing all energy, hawk-like, on maintaining the well-being of addicts and substance abusers.

In 2015, codependency is a recognized by many clinical psychiatrists as a legitimate personality disorder (though, as of 2013, the term remained controversial in psychiatric circles and was not been included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* of the American Psychiatric Association 5) (*DSM 5-25*). Codependents Anonymous, an offshoot of Alcoholics Anonymous (Davis 178), offers a list of behaviors to help visitors self-diagnose and seek treatment. Some criteria include: "I mask my pain

in various ways such as anger, humor, or isolation; I do not recognize the unavailability of those to whom I am attracted; I am extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long; I am hyper-vigilant regarding the feelings of others; I become resentful when others decline my help or reject my advice; I lavish gifts and favors on those I want to influence; I use charm and charisma to convince others of my capacity to be caring and compassionate; I use terms of recovery in an attempt to control the behavior of others.”

As important as it may be for artists to resist pathologizing every human foible or to turn a character, as Christopher Baker has said, “into a bundle of neuroses,” awareness of the scope and consequences of personality disorders can shed considerable light on a character’s motivations; it can also illuminate neglected themes in well-worn texts like *Cat*. The battery of behaviors listed on the CODA site bears a startling resemblance to Maggie, whose daddy, as she reminds Brick in Act One, “loved his liquor” (*Cat* 55). This detail points to the likelihood that Maggie entered their marriage prepared to care for an alcoholic, and even to the possibility that doing so validates a long-established need in her personality. This awareness does not lessen the material realities of Brick’s and Maggie’s circumstances (impending poverty, the need to perform filial devotion to Big Daddy, interpersonal conflict, sexual confusion); nor does it preclude genuine love on Maggie’s part. It is simply a potential tool for the actor playing Maggie—in this case, Ivy Croteau, with whom I shared this information—to use in differentiating between the female *desire* to win her husband’s affections and the human *compulsion* to do so.

Cory Missildine, as Brick, was charged with the difficult task of weathering Croteau’s high-energy vocal (and occasionally physical) assaults. If Ben Gazzara had

projected onto the character his own fifties stolidity, and Keir Dullea, a weird, protean seventies lightness, what essentially 21st-century qualities did Missildine bring to the role? Interestingly, it was not the specter of homosexuality that seemed to pique him as an actor, engaging his defenses or eliciting tacit disapproval in his character work. Queerness was no serious bugbear for a broad-minded college-age performer in 2015. But the role's passivity seemed to be more than he could bear.

From the beginning of rehearsals, Culverhouse and Missildine had agreed that committing to Brick's withdrawal from Maggie—to his inward stares, long silences, avoidance of eye contact and private musical fugues—was not a viable option. (Culverhouse, in a cheerful outburst that would have gratified Elia Kazan, pronounced it “boring as hell”). As a consequence, Missildine's Brick tended to actively engage Croteau; he made eye contact, questioned her directly, and allowed himself all the active listening and emotional volleys that well-trained young actors are taught to afford their fellows. In short, he made himself emotionally present in places where the text had clearly defined his absence.

I spoke against this choice then. Now, in reflection, I feel it developed into the production's major problem: the weakening of its central conflict. If Maggie has Brick's attention, what is there for her to fight for and work to provoke? What does it do to the stakes if Brick wears his emotions so close to the surface that Maggie scarcely must scratch him to draw blood? Missildine—who more closely resembles Croteau's twin than her physical foil—is an intense and forceful performer. His innate talent and charm (which is considerable, manifested here in slow laughs that recalled the magnetic personality whom so many supposedly adored) notwithstanding, Missildine, particularly

under Culverhouse's direction, may not have been temperamentally disposed for an ideal Brick. Or perhaps his objections to the character's passivity, which echo Kazan's and the critics' of sixty years ago, suggest that certain cultural conditions have remained static compared to our increased tolerance of sexual difference: our expectation of "activeness" in men and male characters, for instance; or the macho and action-obsessed Group Theatre school of performance in which Kazan's, Gazzara's, Missildine's, Culverhouse's, and my own training was steeped. Either way, Missildine's resistance confirms that the qualities which define Brick remain problematic for Millennial artists, at least in America. I wondered in rehearsals: might a survey of foreign portrayals of Brick and their cultural receptions yield new insights about the character's relationship to American definitions of "masculinity?"

Conversations surrounding Brick's sexuality, which the production team agreed to hold to a minimum (here I agreed with Culverhouse that too much speculation might tempt actors to reach definitive conclusions), were never fraught with the reticence that must have featured in the '55 and, to a lesser extent, the '74 production processes. In 2015 no one had any difficulty accepting that a complex, somehow androgynous young football player might present as generally masculine yet harbor unacknowledged homosexual desires. Social pressure to view these facets of identity as irreconcilable is rapidly disintegrating; evidence to the contrary is simply too abundant. During our November 2014 pre-production, a *USA Today* article profiled UMass Amherst student athlete Derrick Gordon, who recently became the first openly gay NCAA Division I men's basketball player "I'm done hiding," Gordon announced. "I don't have anything

hanging over my head. I'm playing the game how Derrick Gordon should play” (Gleeson).

Gordon’s shifting of responsibility--from internalization of homophobic shame to holding the Other responsible for their mores and prejudices--stands in stark contrast to Brick in the scene (played brilliantly by Missildine) where he demands, agonized, of Big Daddy: “Don’t you know how people *feel* about things like that? How, how *disgusted* they are by things like that?” (*Cat* 121). Today, shifting the locus of responsibility for non-judgment is an accepted dialectic, as shown by John Bak in his argument that “[i]f we do not understand Brick, then we simply do not understand ourselves . . . “The ambiguities are not in the play itself, Williams seems finally to be saying, but are imported by the prying audience, who, because of its own ambivalent attitudes toward male-male desire, is truthfully reflected in Brick” (249).

Ambivalence—both moral and visceral—is still present in audience reception of *Cat*’s gender and sexual issues. Student viewers and readers today, for instance, are far more likely to identify Maggie’s sexual blackmail as marital rape and to judge her harshly for it; in 2015, as opposed to 1955, we are able to acknowledge that males are also victims of sexual violence and coercion. Attitudes towards *ambivalence itself*, however, have palpably shifted within Millennial generations Y and Z.

In 2012, the online edition of the *Christian Science Monitor* reported the findings of Pew Research Center survey: “About 85 percent of Millennial [born between 1982 and 2003] men and women [polled] say that having a successful marriage is very important to

them. More than a third of Millennial women say marriage is one of their most important goals . . . And, a clear majority of women indicate that parenthood is at the top of the list among their values” (Winograd 2012). Clearly, the nuclear family as America’s core social institution has not been sabotaged by cautionary tales like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Yet, one year later, The Intelligence Group, “a youth-focused, research-based consumer insights company” (CR 1) which studies the intersection of gender and consumer behavior, conducted an online survey of 900 U.S. citizens ages 14 to 34. According to a publically released memo, the findings indicate that this age group believes that gender “is less of a definer of identity today than it was for prior generations. Rather than adhering to traditional gender roles, young people are interpreting what gender means to them personally” and “bending, blending, and flipping gender norms to meet their individual needs” (CR 1).

Six in 10 say that “men and women do not need to conform to traditional gender roles or behaviors anymore”; upwards of two-thirds “agree that gender does not define a person to the extent that it once did”; and 60 percent “think that gender lines have been blurred” (2). Most revealingly, “Nearly two-thirds say their generation is pushing the boundaries of what it means to be feminine and masculine . . . As a result, 42% feel that *gender roles are confusing today*” [emphasis added] (2).

Read in less clinical terms, these numbers suggest that Millennials possess an intuitive connection to what Tomoyuki Zettsu calls “a poetics of American androgyny, or . . . ‘the love of things irreconcilable,’ a subversive desire to embrace rather than resolve contradictions and paradoxes” (i). What is confusion, if not the acknowledgement of mystery? Where confusion is present—or seemingly conflicting impulses or precepts, as

the survey data suggests—possibility is open; answers cannot be definitive. In other words: contemporary Americans create, work, and marry in the presence of mystery. Mystery is alive in the hopes and contradictions of the young adults polled by the Cassandra Report, and it is alive in the art they consume. In fact, this receptiveness to mystery may allow them to see “in its true colours”—after sixty years of partial obscurement—*Cat*, a play with the power to “expose the twin illusions, especially prevalent in the America in which [Williams] wrote, that sexuality is some kind of rigidly predetermined absolute, and that possessions can protect you against death” (Billington). The fact that characters like Brick still, to some extent, challenge our perceptions of active or “masculine” behavior (as he challenged Missildine and Culverhouse) proves that illusions remain to be exposed. In 2015, *Cat* still has the power to push back against the sexual mores against which Williams pitted himself in work and in life.

Mysteries of gender and sexuality obsessed Tennessee Williams. Not merely mysteries on the page, but ones of the body: who we are attracted to; whether we define ourselves as male, or female, or something in between; and how we carry our nebulous self-identifications into our professional and familial commitments. These mysteries communicate themselves in Williams’s plays and are working on us still, in 2015, despite our attempts to kill, smother, distort, ignore, discredit, or subvert them into banal compartments such as *girl*, *boy*, *straight*, or *queer*.

Tennessee Williams: Gender Play in 2015 And Beyond

In his essay *Tennessee Williams Scholarship at the Turn of the Century*, George W. Crandell cites Williams as “the subject of a significant and continuously growing body of scholarly work” (8) and describes a recent surge in critical sensitivity to long-

neglected facets of Williams's creative identity, most particularly his willingness to address female agency, homosexuality, and androgyny as directly as the strictures of mid-century social politics allowed him (despite the playwright's skepticism for the utility of "gay plays") (29). It occurred to me that the gender subversion in the playwright's work might startle many Five College scholars who imagined Williams as a fusty relic of the past. I also recognized that the timeliness of UMass's own production of *Cat*, corresponding as it did with a 21st century upswing in political activism on the American feminist and LGBTQ fronts (particularly those addressing gender identity and civil liberties such as gay marriage) made for fertile soil in which to plant seeds of continued discourse on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Williams's canon.

I therefore decided to host and moderate a one-night symposium of Williams scholars, critics, and creative artists, entitled *Tennessee Williams: Gender Play in 2015 and Beyond*. Since authors are great only insofar as they retain their relevance to younger generations, it was important to me that this symposium—which aimed to mine Williams's work for the deposits of gender subversion, sexual quirk, and female agency with which student audiences connect so passionately—be accessible, free and open to the public. I cast a broad net of outreach and publicity to UMass and Five College organizations that serve the students I wished to attract; these included the Stonewall Center, the Five College Women and Gender Studies Research Center, and the UMass Center for Women & Community. Guests of all ages were invited, but my ideal audience member was the Five College student from a socially or artistically underrepresented community: the transgender student, the genderqueer or bisexual student, the developing feminist who is sick of surveying classics and finding, in a literary sea of cis white

heteronormativity, no author anywhere who reflects their own spectrum of experience. In our discussion of the tormented gender play of Tennessee Williams, this student would, I hoped, recognize a humanity that transcends sexual absolutism.

The symposium opened with a discussion panel comprised of stage and film director Michael Wilson; Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival Curator and Co-founder David Kaplan; former Hartford Stage Senior Dramaturg and Williams scholar Christopher Baker; and Smith College professor Ellen Kaplan, an authority on performing gender. Our primary aim was to address the broad question: What is Tennessee Williams's artistic relationship to gender, and how are these attitudes in conversation with contemporary American ones? Questioning focused on the importance of storytelling in our perceptions of gender, generational changes in audience's reception of gender roles in Williams's plays, and differences between Williams's portrayal of gender and his contemporaries'. Panelists also addressed changing perceptions of the playwright's female characters and the current "postgender" interpretations of his scripts (that is, understanding Williams's characters as human, as opposed to rigid "male" or "female" constructs). This panel broke for light refreshments, after which a small group returned for a screening of Richard Brooks's 1958 screen adaptation of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. We concluded with a brief follow-up discussion of the film's script, its direction and casting, and the social implications of its omitted material (notably its absence of reference to homosexuality).

The symposium was helpful to me on two levels. First, as a Williams scholar, it enabled me to observe and engage with expert opinions from a spectrum of academic and creative fields. But it also revealed to me that a public symposium is not primarily a

research exercise for its moderator, though it can (and often does) yield fresh insight. It is a knowledge-sharing forum at which attendees are given a sample of the panelists' pooled scholarship on a particular subject. In the case of my symposium, several decades of collective experience with Williams's treatment of gender and sexuality were represented in the voices of Wilson, Baker, David Kaplan, and Ellen Kaplan. Because my own area of research determined the line of questioning, I was already familiar with many of the sources they referenced (e.g., *Three Players of a Summer Game*, which David Kaplan quoted at length in order to illustrate Margaret Pollitt's "masculine" origins). My own reading, as well as my work at the Tennessee Williams Institute (a week-long scholars' symposium held at the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival), allowed me to hold my own in conversation with my panelists; rather than sorting and interpreting new information, I was free to direct discussion in the directions I knew might prove most revelatory for listeners. My metric for success, then, became the extent to which attendees and panelists were entertained and informed. Feedback from audience members was positive: conversation afterwards was lively and curious, with discussion of the symposium themes continuing well into the shared meal. Culverhouse, a skeptic when it comes to academic panels, declared it "one of the least boring ones I've ever been to" and assured me that he had not wanted to kill himself once in the entire hour (2015)—high praise indeed.

The director's remarks highlight the second way in which the process proved useful to me: in my role of dramaturg-as-event-planner. Every aspect of the symposium—its initial concept, its venue, its grant funding by the UMass Arts Council and the Lois E. Toko Fund, its buffet, the panelists in attendance and the transportation

that brought them to Amherst—demanded painstaking coordination for months in advance; though many people helped me with this process (the importance of delegation to this work cannot be overstated), responsibility for failure would be mine alone. To curate a public event that goes off with the appearance of effortless is one of the hardest jobs in the world. In this respect I feel I was partially successful. Though each element of the symposium technically went off as planned, attendance (at roughly 30 guests) was lower than I had hoped, due in part to the miserable weather that threatened to close the campus on that morning. Looking back, I can only wonder at the masochistic impulse that led me to plan an event in early February in Amherst, Massachusetts; the fact that all four panelists—two of whom (David Kaplan and Michael Wilson) had traveled in some discomfort from New York City—made it to the symposium speaks more to their professionalism than to my good sense. I also believe I might have planned a more dynamic “second half” than a movie screening. Only five attendees and one panelist stayed to watch the film, and the film itself (despite its production quality and its revealing “Hollywood” treatment of Williams’s story) would eventually be edited out of this thesis as extraneous; it was simply not the most fun or productive use of time at the event, or even as a focus of research. “Fun” and “productive” are the two most important qualities for any dramaturgical work. If the panel succeeded, it did so because its subject and scholars are both of these things; and, as Culverhouse reminds us with his judgment on academic panels, the world could do with far less tedium and waste in any form.

CONCLUSION

The future is called “perhaps,” which is the only possible thing to call the future. And the important thing is not to allow that to scare you.

—Tennessee Williams, *Orpheus Descending*

I end this thesis on a dual note of caution and encouragement.

For theater scholar-practitioners who discover in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (as I did) that shock of delighted recognition which compels artists to explore, to analyze, to teach and to produce: work cautiously with all works of Tennessee Williams, particularly this one. Several pitfalls are inherent there.

For one, Williams is a dead, white Southern man. His plays are therefore regarded with a certain amount of skepticism—even outright contempt—by some academic specialists whose work focuses on dismantling the systems of patriarchy, White supremacy, and colonial oppression with which Williams’s culture is associated, and which are highly evident in the text and imagery of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. *Cat*’s long popularity does not—and should not—automatically recommend it to collegiate or professional season selection committees who are making room for the voices of living, breathing authors, among whom several minority groups are still shockingly underrepresented. In 2014, *American Theater* estimated that only 24 percent of plays in production across the U.S. were written by women, living or dead—this despite the fact that 68 percent of Broadway audiences are female (Evans 2014). Similarly, a demographic breakdown of productions at 62 D.C. area theatres in the 2013–14 season revealed that 85 percent were written by white playwrights (Tran 2014). These exclusionary practices will not change unless artistic directors and literary managers

consciously prioritize the works of minority playwrights. I have written at length about the relevance and producibility of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*; its value notwithstanding, the play is this product of a deeply problematic American ethos. It might not, as such, remain a staple of university seasons programmed with diversity as a core value. This is beneficial for both *Cat* and for the theater industry. Repertoire is flexible by definition; far from forcing obsolescence on a classic American text, this helps assure that new productions of *Cat* are conceived with contemporary values and fresh perspectives at the fore, rather than performed by rote or interpreted at face value. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a demanding, potentially polarizing project that should be undertaken by a like-minded and passionately committed artistic team who bring to bear dramaturgical skill, performance technique, and sensitivity to nuance in design and direction. Like its “poem,” *Brick*, this play is seductive to contemplate but difficult to capture.

I do hope you’ll try, though. The ranks of contemporary Williams scholars are swelling with insight and optimism, yet many aspects of Williams scholarship are relatively unexplored. Critic Thomas Adler estimates that, as of 2013, “[n]o extensive stage histories of *Cat* have been published, and understandably so given the rarity of this kind of scholarly undertaking by American academics” (22). He goes on to predict that, unlike *Streetcar*, “[i]t appears more likely that academic writing about *Cat* will continue to remain firmly grounded in the literary text rather than in innovative, even daring, reconceptualization of the play in performance” (23). This paper may contribute to the foundations of that work by qualifying past reconceptualizations of *Cat*—e.g., the 1955 changes to Williams’s text and their subsequent restoration in 1974—as either “innovative” or capitulating within their productions’ cultural contexts; still, there is

much in the play's production history that I have omitted.

Perhaps future Williams scholars will use great reconceptualizations of our culture, as well as of the playwright's works, as their departure points for research. On Friday, June 26, 2015—sixty years after *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opened, indelibly queering images of family and identity on the American stage—the United States Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in favor of legalization of gay marriage in all 50 states. “It would misunderstand these men and women,” Justice Anthony Kennedy writes in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision, “to say they disrespect the idea of marriage.”

Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right. The judgment of the Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit is reversed.

It is so ordered. (SCOTUS ruling 28)

Could Williams have anticipated such an event in his long, hunted life as the homosexual and androgynous purveyor of characters like Brick Pollitt, whose very definitions of “family” hung on their performances of masculinity and procreation? Maggie, relegated by childlessness to a lower caste of womanhood in 1955, might be bemused to read the highest legal authority in the land decree:

That is not to say the right to marry is less meaningful for those who do not or cannot have children. An ability, desire, or promise to procreate is not and has not been a prerequisite for a valid marriage in any State. . . .

The constitutional marriage right has many aspects, of which childbearing is only one. (SCOTUS ruling 15-16)

The implications of this decision are staggering, viewed in context of the culture of fear in which *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* has been developed and performed for sixty years.

Yet in life, as in Williams's plays, contradictions abound. One wonders what the author of such lines as "Fuck the goddamn preacher!" (*Cat* 78) would say to the proposition that marriage—civilization's most bourgeois, grossly commercial, and hetero-centric affair—is the most delightful condition to which homosexuals could possibly aspire. Nor, conversely, have Brick, Maggie, Big Daddy or Big Mama escaped the fate of those who are "condemned to live in loneliness."

A queer contemporary of Williams wrote, "Marriage excuses no one the freaks' roll-call" (Orton 53) shortly before his long-time domestic partner bashed his head in with a hammer. This image is as apt expression of Williams's own ghoulish humor, an aesthete's taste for the grotesque he called "slapstick tragedy" (Tischler 299). The slapstick tragedy of 20th century greed, terror, and sexual confusion can still, in 2015 and beyond, be funny, compelling, and deeply disturbing to observe. It lives in *Cat in a Hot Tin Roof*, and will continue to illuminate America as long as *Cat* lives in American theaters.

APPENDIX A

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: GENDER PLAY IN 2015 AND BEYOND PROGRAM

THE UMASS AMHERST DEPARTMENT OF THEATER PRESENTS

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS:
GENDER PLAY
IN 2015 AND BEYOND

❖

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15 2015
THE UMASS AMHERST FINE ARTS CENTER
CURTAIN THEATER

2:00.....Welcome & Opening Remarks
Amy Brooks, Event Curator

2:05.....Panel Discussion
Michael Wilson, David Kaplan, Ellen Kaplan, Chris Baker
Amy Brooks (Moderator)

3:00.....Light Refreshments & Flirtation

3:45.....Film Screening
CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF, 1958

Amy Brooks and the Department of Theater wish to acknowledge the generous support of the
UMASS ARTS COUNCIL, upon whose kindness to strangers we have always depended.

Many thanks to Chair Penny Remsen, Willow Cohen, Harley Erdman, Talya Kingston, Chris
Baker, Amherst Books, The Stonewall Center, and most specially Carrie Radigan for their
contributions of time, energy, and inspiration to this event.

Figure 2: Gender Play program front

OUR PANELISTS

Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Award-winning director **MICHAEL WILSON** names Williams as “the reason I am in the theatre today,” having garnered critical praise for his production of *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* at Broadway's Roundabout Theatre Company and his ten-year retrospective of the known and neglected works of Tennessee Williams at Hartford Stage, including the *Eight By Tenn* festival.



DAVID KAPLAN is co-founder and curator of the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival, currently in its 10th season, which attracts some of world's most innovative and queer-positive stagings of Williams's plays to Massachusetts. He is also the author of seminal biography *Tennessee Williams in Provincetown* and editor of *Tenn at One Hundred*, a comprehensive look at the reputation of Tennessee Williams.

ELLEN KAPLAN is a Smith College Professor of Acting and Directing, a specialist in the performance of gender, a Fulbright Scholar and Fulbright Senior Specialist. Ellen performs and directs internationally; much of her work focuses on the intersections between expressive arts and social trauma. Kaplan works with incarcerated women, elders, adjudicated teens, and ABE students, using theatre as a tool for developing literacy and creativity.



CHRIS BAKER is an Assistant Professor of Dramaturgy at UMass and has worked as a production dramaturg Off-Broadway and at resident theatres across the country. As part of the artistic staff of Hartford Stage for fourteen years, his positions included Associate Artistic Director, Associate Producer and Senior Dramaturg. He has worked with such artists as Elizabeth Ashley, Anne Bogart, Ellen Burstyn, Olympia Dukakis, Eve Ensler, Horton Foote, Michael Kahn, and Michael Wilson.

"No living person doesn't contain both sexes. Mine could have been either one. Truly, I have two sides to my nature." Tennessee Williams, 1975

Figure 3: Gender Play program back

APPENDIX B

THE VISUAL WORLD OF *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF*

The following booklet was designed by Amy Brooks for the UMass Amherst Department of Theater's production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

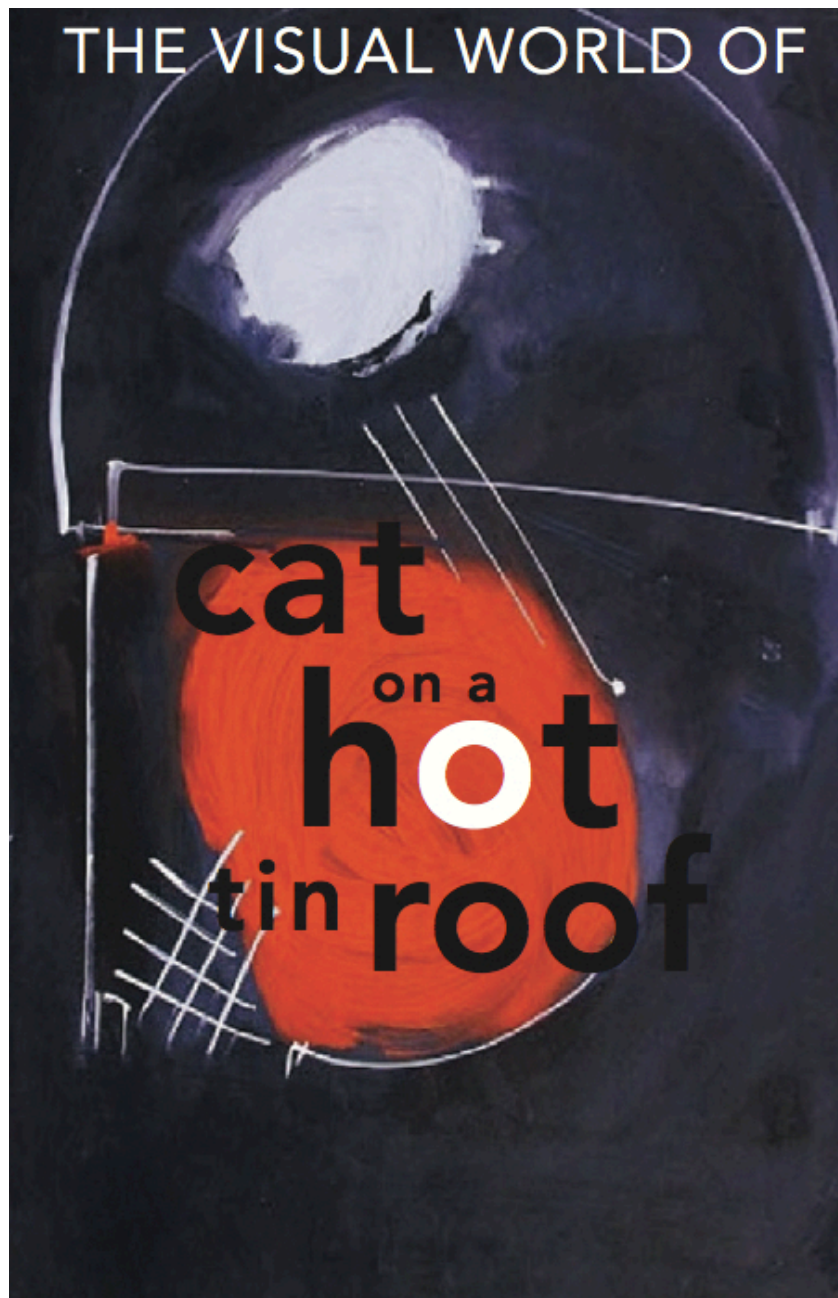


Figure 4: Visual World booklet front cover

Halfway through the first act of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Maggie looks into a mirror and says: "Who are you?". The question is not rhetorical. There are as many possible replies as there are facets to her identity—I am *Brick's wife*, I am a woman who desires love, I am a poor person who is fighting for financial security—and the one she chooses ("I am Maggie the Cat!") encompasses all of these facets. Perhaps it is not a definitive answer. But Tennessee Williams always resisted definitive answers to crises of identity, sexuality, and morality. What matters to the characters in *Cat*, and to the audiences who have witnessed their struggles since the play's 1955 premiere, are not pat conclusions, but the fact that they are actively engaged in questioning themselves, each other, and the privileged world that they compete to master.

Dramaturg Jayme Koszyn suggests that we ask two questions in order to mine meaning from period drama, laying "planks of the bridge we [are] building between then and now": What are the questions that the play asks, and how can we ask the same questions of ourselves? Just as Maggie poses both question and answer to her image in the mirror, the images in this booklet are designed to provoke our own questions about the mid-century industrial American world they describe—a world of men and women making choices that have determined the social realities of 2015. Neither the pictures nor Williams's story offer simple solutions. The mystery, they assure us, is enough.

Amy Brooks, Dramaturg

Front and back covers: Hans Hofmann, *Untitled (red, black, white)*, 1946; *Untitled Abstraction*, 1944. Below: Hans Hofmann art class, Provincetown, MA, c. 1945. Photographer unknown.



"Williams made friends among the avant-garde [in Provincetown]. These artists had as their headquarters the school of the German expressionist Hans Hofmann... Hofmann taught his students to extrapolate pure form from what they observed in nature... The avant-garde artists

were inspired by all the same things as the realists—the same light, the same town, the same sea—but the avant-garde artists depicted them in abstraction."

—David Kaplan, *Tennessee Williams in Provincetown*

Figure 5: Visual World booklet inner front

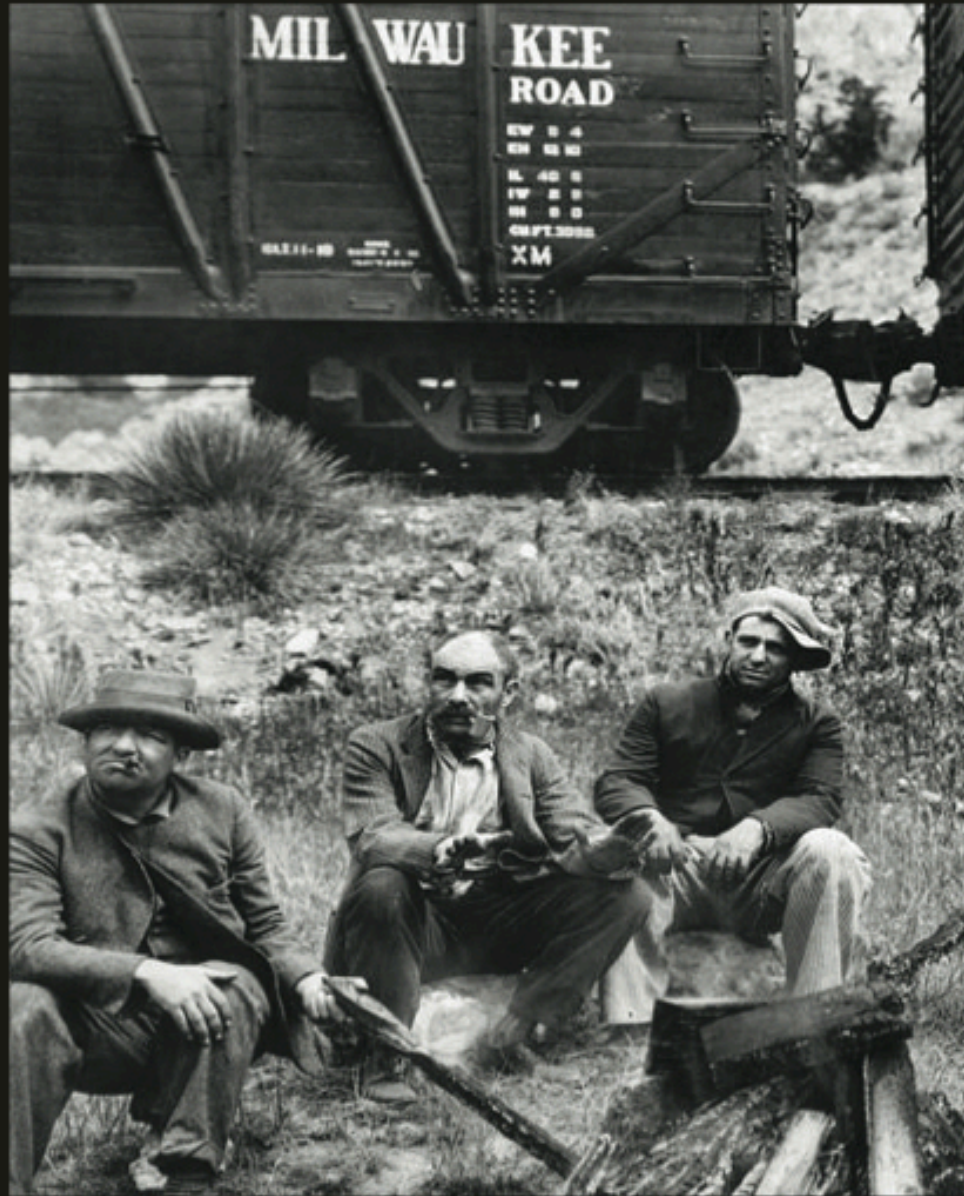
THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
DEPARTMENT OF THEATER
PRESENTS



Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

By Tennessee Williams
Directed by Jared Culverhouse
Dramaturgy booklet produced by Amy Brooks
February 26 - March 3, 2015
The Rand Theater

Figure 6: Visual World booklet title



**What are the origins of my
*family story?***

Figure 7: Visual World booklet 1

Where does my *father* come from?



Boxcar hobo community c. late 1920s, photographer unknown.

Figure 8: Visual World booklet 2



Does business consume me? Am I defined by my industry? By the possessions I've amassed? Has owning land impacted my family? How has life in **America** informed my relationship to **money**?



Figure 9: Visual World booklet 3



Above: Parade float representing a wedding between Agriculture and Industry, Mississippi, c. 1950s. Photographer unknown (University of Mississippi Digital Collections). Left: 1950s single-row cotton picker. Photographer unknown. Below: John Deere Farm Cotton Picker, Borg Warner, 1951. Artist unknown.

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Figure 10: Visual World booklet 4

Whose hands have
built the physical
world that I inhabit? In
a world defined by the
sense of sight, what
does it mean to be an
invisible person?



African-American maidservant, c. 1950s. Photographer unknown.

Figure 11: Visual World booklet 5

Mobile, Alabama department store during segregation, Gordon Parks, 1956



© The Gordon Parks Foundation

Figure 12: Visual World booklet 6

What is my chosen form
of escape from reality?
What facts do I consciously
avoid? What will happen to
me if I confront **the truth?**

Advertisement for Echo Spring bourbon, 1957. Artist unknown.



ECHO SPRING
ECHO SPRING
ECHO SPRING

More . . . and more . . . and more
ECHO SPRING answers the call
for truly smooth
Kentucky Straight Bourbon

No finer bourbon ever came out of Kentucky. And yet Echo Spring comes to you at a price lower than most other

Kentucky Bourbons. For a truly smooth bourbon call for Echo Spring again...and again...and again.

ECHO SPRING
Kentucky
STRAIGHT BOURBON WHISKEY
Natural Flavor, natural ferment
NATURALLY GOOD
BOTTLED BY
ECHO SPRING DISTILLING COMPANY
SMALL BATCHES & HANDMADE CARE

Figure 13: Visual World booklet 7

Everything that is casts a shadow.

Neil Gaiman

I have wrestled with the script of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* for years now, trying to identify *what it is* to me as a theatre practitioner. As artists we are often drawn to difficult subject matter that speaks to us on a personal level, and *Cat* was no exception to this dictum. At first, I jumped on the idea of mendacity—the lying and the liars—as it is so eloquently introduced in the text. On further exploration, it was obvious that the Pollitts are a family of liars. And in continuing down this path, I found it was the lies that were told “for” someone’s benefit that were the most familiar: the jokes about Brick’s serious addiction to alcohol, the laughter at the horrible treatment Big Daddy shows Big Mama in front of their children, and so on.

They reminded me of lies told in my own home, lies that covered up alcohol abuse, physical abuse of women and children, and sins so dark and buried it seemed like they never existed. The real heart of the matter is not the lies but the heinous crimes of a bloodline they conceal. Real truth is mined from the secrets that the lies protect, secrets that run deep and are a part of the fabric of the Pollitts’ house, their land, their family, and even their country. Williams sets his story on the old Ochello-Straw plantation, by definition a place that was built on the backs of slave labor, a fact we as a country are still trying to fully digest.

Wrestling with uncomfortable, unspoken truths is at the heart of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. This is a play that refuses to live in the black-and-white of right or wrong, but instead chooses to live in the gray. Tennessee Williams show us characters that are ugly and beautiful, powerful and weak, and outspoken while being deathly afraid to say what they mean.

Williams has been quoted as saying that Big Daddy is the best character he wrote because it was the only time he was able to capture “crude eloquence.” Like that crude and eloquent dying man, *Cat* truly celebrates the light and the shadow, which must both exist for us to be three dimensional humans, for us to be something that is.

Jared Culverhouse, Director

Figure 14: Visual World booklet inner back



What energy do I generate in my daily encounters with other people? Is it possible to feel both attracted to and repelled by another human being? What are the **contradictory impulses** that define me?

Figure 15: Visual World booklet back cover

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