

# Cat on a hot tin roof: film vs play comparison



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Tennessee Williams' 1955 play 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof', explores the avant-grade realities in which facades appear to dispel. Through his iconoclasm of the patriarchal normalities of 50s society, William's embellishes characters as catalysts for taboo reveals of isolation, sexuality, and femininity. Whilst Richard Brooks' adaptation of 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' holds overt similarities with Williams' play, the clandestine discussions prevalent in the original are sidestepped in a manner meant to appeal to the audiences of 50s film. Converting motifs to appear more socially acceptable, Brooks' representation of the play reverts the experimental ideas Williams' detailed and lyrical description brought forth to conservative viewers, notably changing the core values from one another.

From Act 1 all the way to Act 3, the location of Williams' play is never shifted; Maggie and Brick's bedroom is continuously showcased despite the abundance of characters. Being a common convention of plays, this typically allows the setting to become a catalyst for a theme or motif that the playwright has accounted for. The backdrop of Williams' play is not only the most personal room of a house, but also the most intimate, and it's this quality that constantly emits a feeling of isolation; of mendacity. Brick is initially unable to truly talk to his wife about the passing of his best friend, Skipper, instead leaving Maggie to have a one-sided conversation that "never materializes". However, Brooks' film forgoes this, and instead utilizes multiple exterior and interior locations to suit the conventions of film. Instead of beginning in the bedroom, Brooks' adaptation depicts Brick attempting to jump hurdles, an event that was only alluded to in the play, instantly dispelling the complexity of confinement that Williams' was insinuating.

Although she concedes that they “ occupy the same cage”, Maggie’s confession to Brick is perceived as less acerbic than when revealed in the play, in which the ever-present “ cage” setting causes the line to be difficult to digest. Albeit grandiose, the Mississippi Delta Plantation home allows for less emotional solitude, instead leaving each different room to hold a different emotional conclusion. With Brick and Big Daddy reconciling in the basement, Brooks’ detachment from isolation aligns the film with the protocols of 50s society, removing mendacity as a major theme. However, Brick also appeases with Maggie in their bedroom; an ending that draws no parallels with the original play. Forgoing a traditional resolution completely, Williams utilizes the essence of mendacity and isolation as much as he can, drawing out their presence until the last line of the film. With Brick remarking that it would be “ funny” if Maggie’s love was “ true”, Williams’ adoption of the bedroom setting elevates the significance of lies further through his exploitation of what should be an honest environment. By causing a character to still feel secluded in a typically intimate setting, the play circumvents conservative audiences’ expectations, instead highlighting communication as an avenue for mendacity. Removing this in favor of a ‘ storybook’ ending, Brooks’ resolution of Brick and Maggie exerting intimacy disregards Williams’ true intentions of exposing the facades of underlying taboos.

However, in Brooks’ adaptation the presentation of sexuality is also distorted, revoking the progressive movement that Williams set forth in his play. In the original text, sexual desire is highlighted as the forefront of exposition and motivation. Maggie longs for Brick’s intimacy, and Brick longs

for his best friend, Skipper. In the film Big Mamma asks Maggie if she “[makes] Brick happy?” rather than if she makes him “ happy in bed?” like she does in the play, illustrating the extent Brooks’ adaptation reaches to censor the overt displays of sexual affection headlined in Williams’ play. Capitalizing on the “ pure” friendship of Skipper and Brick, Williams alludes to the pair having homosexual tendencies. Although this avant-garde revelation provides pivotal moments in the play, the film omits homosexuality completely, instead focusing on marital issues between Brick and Maggie. When Brick and Big Daddy are reaching the crux of their conversation regarding Skipper, Maggie is asked to detail the truth. Instead of focusing on Brick and Skipper’s friendship; one that could be seen as exhibiting a “ tenderness which was uncommon”, she chronicles a difficult marriage, neglecting indications to anything other than heterosexuality. However, in William’s original play, the scene is reliant on the discussion of Brick and Skipper’s intimacy. Bringing up Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, both of who are left out of the film, Brick begins to accuse Big Daddy of drawing the same conclusions about him and Skipper that he does for the “ couple of ducking sissies”. Revealing the bedroom to be underlined with the passionate affection of its previous occupants, the motif of homosexuality appears to be absolute and authentic, with Big Daddy expressing genuine acceptance. Contrast this is the films absence of any such talk. Relying on marital and parietal difficulties as the main catalyst for mendacity, the film’s disregard for unfiltered dialogue about sexuality diminishes the ramifications of Williams’ play. To alter the film’s message of sexuality is a conscious directorial choice. Brooks’ conservative 50s film audience weren’t as

progressive as those of the theater and as a result the societal views of the time had to be more closely followed to avoid cinematic alienation.

Although sexuality is sidelined in favor of traditional qualities, the representations of masculinity and femininity are also considerably changed from each medium. Introducing her character through blunt dialogue being delivered “ shouting above the roar of water”, Maggie asserts masculine features not seen in women at the time. Respected by feminists for her brazen attitude and unrelenting devotion to her marriage with Brick, she maintains a power unlike her female peers. Contrast her constant attempts for full control is Brick, who holds a “ cool air of detachment”. Significantly more submissive and indecisive than his counterpart, his traits could be described as feminine, with a dependency aiding his every judgement. This is not replicated in Brooks’ adaptation. Rather than exert masculinity as she does in the play, Maggie is shown to be desperate, as though she’s scared of not being feminine. Her strength is no longer unwavering, she’s more reliant on Brick, who’s shown as less submissive, to help fix their marriage. In the film, Brick informs Maggie of the news regarding his father’s fate, stripping all power that she had in the same scene in the play. By being revoked of the information, Maggie isn’t depicted as being ahead of everyone, but is instead shown as trying to reach the masculine plateau she’d already achieved in Williams’ play. Comparatively, the conclusion of both the play and the film also contrast each other, exposing the opposite characters as being in power and being disenfranchised. Claiming Brick to be part of the “ weak people... who give up”, Williams finalizes “ Maggie the Cat” as the impetus of power, having absolute control over Brick by manipulating him through his

substance abuse. Brick's dependency renders him unable to resist, exploiting his undeniable weakness. However, in the film adaptation, Brick bursts into the room to rekindle their marriage, and embraces Maggie with a passion and desire not seen before. His dominance and control over Maggie reverses the power detailed in the play, falling more in line with the patriarchal acceptance of the 50s. Maggie's longing for Brick is finally appeased through his masculine initiation of their sexual desires, and she is ultimately seen as in his command. Significantly altering one of the central preoccupations of Williams' play, Brooks' adaption abolishes feminine power and instead aligns traits to genders, rather than to personalities.

Ultimately, Williams' play is drastically changed for a conservative film audience. Employing various cinematic tropes, Brooks neglects a multitude of themes and ideas essential to the original play, in turn dispelling many of the taboo topics Tennessee Williams was attempting to expose. Neglecting the avant-garde, the adaptation reverts the boldness of the text, allowing the experimental qualities brought forth to be discarded in favor of socially acceptable beliefs. However, by adjusting this, the film still exploits the difficulties underlying the facades of seemingly functional family dynamics.