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Abstract

The aim of this project is to analyze the topic of heteronormativity in Tennessee Williams' Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955). Theories from gender theorists such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault will be used to expose how heterosexuality is imposed and homosexuality restrained in the work, as well as different essays collected in Harold Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations in which scholars analyze the theme of homosexuality in the text. In addition, this paper will assemble a comparison between the two different third acts of the play: the one that was represented in 1955 after changes recommended by the Director of the play, and the one that Williams had written originally and published as his finished product in 1956. This paper will prove how heteronormativity is not only present within the story, concerning its queer characters, but it was also present in the adaptation of the text to the stage; and how it motivated changes in the creative process. The goal is to prove that the changes made the ending of the play more heteronormative.

Keywords: homosexuality, heteronormativity, gender, Tennessee Williams, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Elia Kazan.

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"Cat on a Het(eteronormative) Tin Roof"

0. Introduction

This paper aims to analyze the theme of homosexuality in Tennessee William's Play A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (premiered on stage on the year 1955). First, I will use Butler and Foucault's ideas to expose homosexual topics that appear in the text, as well as different essays from various scholars compiled in Harold Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations that deal with the subject in the play. I will start with the setting a room that belonged to a homosexual couple -described as loving a tender in one of the stage directions but never explicitly implying so in the character's speech-. I will reflect on how heteronormativity is reinforced in the play through methods such as punishing the homosexual characters: Brick is a tormented alcoholic after Skipper's death; and Big Daddy is diagnosed with a terminal illness. Brick's inner homophobia and the duality of his character will be discussed, as well as the ways in which he defies heteronormativity to some extent. An important topic on the play is the inheritance of the plantation that belongs to the family, and I will explain how it is deeply linked to heteronormativity. Williams' different portrait of homosexual and heterosexual characters will be compared. Besides, I will reflect on how their class can affect their tolerance for homosexuality. Finally, I will expose how the character of Maggie breaks traditional conventions in her personality and relationship with Brick. I will furthermore analyze the play's setting as a closet in which a family enters to disturb Brick's personal life. Then, I will closely read Williams' Note of Explanation, in which he justifies and explains the history of the changes made in the third act of the play, described by him in three points related to Big Daddy, Maggie and Brick's character development. I will include a comment on other texts in which the author reflects on audience reception and commercial success. In addition, I will provide with a scheme of the differences between the two versions of the final act, in order to display a better analysis of the changes explained by the author in his Note of Explanation. Finally, I will analyze how the changes made the ending of the play more heteronormative. I will focus on the addition of new dialogue spoken by the kids and Big Daddy, as well as the changes in Maggie and Brick's attitudes towards the end.

1. Heteronormativity in Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Even though the word "homosexual" is never pronounced through the play (Bos 39), the theme of masculine homosexuality is very present in most of the male characters. Brick is presented as a self-hating tormented man, and gradually the rest of the characters give information on his relationship with his college friend Skipper. Big Daddy is the patriarch of the family and the plantation, he is in a typical heterosexual marriage, but he reveals some past adventures that can be interpreted as homosexual relationships. Gooper, Big Daddy's son and Brick's older brother, is the only man out of the main characters that is not hinted to have homosexual tendencies. In fact, Gooper is presented as the perfect model of a heterosexual man.

The setting is also of extreme importance for the topic of homosexuality. The dramatic performance in its whole takes place in one of the rooms of the family house, the room that used

to belong to Jack Straw and Peter Ochello. It is remarkable how Williams describes the place in the Notes for the Designer:

> The original owners of the place, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, a pair of old bachelors who shared this room all their lives together. In other words, the room must evoke some ghosts; it is gently and poetically haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon. (Williams xv).

The fact that the room is described as "poetically haunted" and that it "must evoke some ghosts" is a symbol of Brick being tormented by his homosexuality, or at least by the other characters' suspicion of him being a homosexual (Bibler 384). Straw and Ochello were the previous owners of the plantation. Their relationship is described as a pure union, they shared their lifes and they shared the bed in which Brick and Maggie are supposed to sleep now. Straw and Ochello died without natural descendants, and that is why Big Daddy inherited the plantation. Through the play all the characters refer to their relationship with some respect, except for Brick. "The only negative value to their love comes from Brick" (Bibler 386). This has to do with Butler's theory of inner homophobia that will be discussed later. From the description of the room, their love is described as "uncommon", but not unnatural. Big Daddy compares their relationship to that of a dog and its master: "When Jack Straw died--why, old Peter Ochello quit eatin' like a dog does when its master's dead, and died, too!" (Williams 62). This, according to Bibler is because Big Daddy does not understand a love so pure and loyal as a human characteristic (394).

The description of the love between Straw and Ochello as "tender" –being in stage directions– is only present in the written text, not in the representation of the play. As John M. Clum states in his essay "'Something Cloudy, Something Clear': Homophobic Discourse in Tennessee Williams", that is included in the compilation Modern Critical Interpretations by Harold Bloom; "The only positive words used to describe the relationship are silent hints in the stage directions" (Clum, qtd. Bloom 39). This can be interpreted as another example of heteronormativity in the play. Mainstream audiences that went to watch the play when it first premiered did not get the positive description of homosexuality, but readers who bought the published script would know about this 'tenderness'.

And that particular stage direction at the very beginning certainly changes the way in which the reader perceives the rest of the text. As Clum observes: "In ways both financial and sexual, the legacy of these two lovers lies at the heart of the play, and the love of Jack Straw and Peter Ochello stands as a counter to the compromised heterosexual relationships we see played out." (qtd. in Bloom 36). When reading the play (not when watching it), the stage direction about Straw and Ochello not only describes the setting, also the tone of the play. All of the other couples will be unconsciously compared to their "pure love", and the idea of homosexuality is present from the very beginning, as well as the inheritance issue.

In his essay "Come Back to the Locker Room Ag'in, Brick Honey!" also compiled in Bloom's book,Mark Royden Winchell reflects on Straw and Ochello being the only homosexual characters in the play that fully defy heteronormativity by living more or less openly and "totally within the

confines of civilization" (Winchell,qtd. in Bloom 91). Nevertheless, this meaning is only available to those who read the written play.

Heteronormativity is defined by Laura Bos as "the belief that heterosexual behaviours and identities are the natural and normal state: heterosexuality is a given instead of one of many possibilities" (Bos 3). This means that heterosexual relationships are the norm and the default. One of its repercussions in literature is that often non- heterosexual characters are punished for morality reasons. Heteronormativity survives by punishing and prohibiting every identity that does not fall into the established. Judith Butler argues in Gender Trouble that "for heterosexuality to remain intact as a distinct social form, it requires an intelligible conception of homosexuality, and the prohibition of that conception" (77). Butler also quotes Foucault when explaining that the tool to make this prohibition and sanction effective is law (74). Punishment is present in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*: Brick is an alcoholic trapped in an unhappy marriage, Skipper has committed suicide and Big Daddy is diagnosed with a terminal bowel cancer (Bos 3). The last punishment can be found in other texts by Williams. In the 2011 New Edition of Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations, Robert J Corber explains in his essay "Tennessee Williams and the Politics of the Closet" that bowel cancer appears as gay punishment in two of Williams' short stories: Pablo Gonzales and Emiel Kroger, gay male characters, are both dying from bowel cancer in "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio", short story written in 1941 and published in 1954; as well as Mr Krupper from "Hard Candy" (1954), who suffers from "unhealthy intestines" (Corber, in Bloom's New Edition 53).

The character of Brick is unhappy in his marriage and refuses to follow what is expected of him. His family wants him to have offspring, but he does not engage in sexual intercourse with Maggie, his wife. Brick is undoubtedly masculine: he is physical, used to be a football player, and his own name indicates toughness and stubbornness, which is connected with how he acts. This could be an overcompensation for his homosexuality, a way of denying his identity. Ferenczi stated that "sometimes homosexual men exaggerate their heterosexuality as a 'defence'" (as quoted by Judith Butler in Gender Trouble 51). Butler explains how culturally, masculine homosexuality is linked to femininity and feminine homosexuality is linked to masculinity. Heterosexuals reinforce this idea because they reject the roles of the "other gender" in order to avoid looking homosexual and achieve their goal of being attractive to the opposite gender (Butler 57). This fits into Butler's idea of performativity applied to gender identity. Brick is all the play trying to deny his alleged homosexuality, and that is why he exaggerates masculine gender roles and even has some homophobic behaviours. Every time someone implies that his relationship with Skipper was more than a friendship, he gets defensive and aggressive. "Oh, you think so, too, you call me your son and a queer. Oh!! Maybe that's why you put Maggie and me in this room that was Jack Straw's and Peter Ochello's, in which that pair of old sisters slept in a double bed where both of 'em died!" (Williams 61).

The word "queer" has negative connotations, in the historical context of the play it was mostly used as an insult. And referring to Straw and Ochello in the feminine "sisters" is clearly intended to disrespect them. When Brick is homophobic towards Straw and Ochello, Big daddy defends them but is interrupted by the appearance of Reverend Tooker. Clum sees it as "an interruption that suggests that it is the pious conventional lie that forbids defence of Straw and

Ochello." (Clum, qtd. in Bloom 38). From this suggestion, we can infer from the text that society conventions, and institutions such as the Church, are the ones that do not allow the defence of homosexuality, thus, reinforcing heteronormativity in the play.

Brick does fit into the category of inner-homophobic gay man described by Butler, because he exaggerates masculinity, which can be read as a way of 'defence'. Winchell defines Brick and Skipper as "macho" (Winchell, in Bloom 84). Brick follows society's heteronormative roles; as analyzed by Shackelford in his essay "The Truth That Must Be Told: Gay Subjectivity, Homophobia, and Social History in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof", that is also included in the New Edition of Modern Critical Interpretations; in his mind a gay man cannot be masculine and a masculine man cannot be homosexual. That is why he denies Straw and Ochello's masculinity as well as Skipper's homosexuality (Shackelford, in Bloom's New Edition 76). Williams breaks this kind of conventions, as he never comes clear about Brick's (and Skipper's) sexuality but presents attraction between them, and sexual attraction from Maggie to both: "he hints strongly that heterosexual men may be attractive to gay men, that gay men may be both erotically appealing and masculine, and that masculinity/femininity, heterosexuality/homosexuality may merely be constructed norms—not realities." (Shackelford, in Bloom's New Edition 76). However, Brick's character does defy heteronormativity: he is indifferent to his wife (described as sexually attractive to other men), he is also an alcoholic and has abandoned his career. Douglas Arell explains in "Homosexual Panic in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" that anyone that "fails to conform" to society standards could be considered a homosexual (Arell 67).

Brick's sexuality is never confirmed to the reader. In fact, it remains a mystery in order to achieve an interesting open ending. All of the "plot questions" have to do with Brick's sexuality (Bibler 381). For Bilber, it is far more interesting if the audience is not sure if Brick is going to be able to impregnate Maggie and to ensure their inheritance of Big Daddy's plantation. The only moment in which Brick's sexuality would have been revealed is when Skipper calls him and admits that he has feelings for him. Brick does not give him an answer, he hangs up, which leaves both possibilities open (Bibler 391). And because Skipper commits suicide after the phone call, he is not in the play to speak for himself and let the audience know what really happened between them. For Poteet, as he explains in his essay included in Bloom's New Edition, the problematic dualism is that:

> Brick's goal is […] to be accepted by his father back into the heteronormative masculine sphere and to reconfigure and reclaim Skipper's memory—how to become/remain a masculine, heterosexual man and still be in love with the memory of his dead friend. (Poteet, qted. in Bloom's New Edition 155).

This duality makes Brick's sexuality remain "frozen, a mistery to us and to himself" (Arell 69). For Bibler, this unsolved doubt makes the ending more interesting, but for other authors it may result "dramatically unsatisfaying" (Arell 72).

Even if Brick is not homosexual, he does defy heteronormativity by refusing to do what everybody expects: have sex with his wife and conceive a child who would inherit the plantation after him. One of the (traditional) arguments for reasoning that heterosexuality should continue

being the norm is that it ensures the survival of the human species. The goal of traditional marriage is to form a family, to have children in order to continue a progeny. Especially in middle-high classes that are concerned with maintaining their patrimony for as many generations as possible. Heteronormativity is deeply linked with reproduction (Bibler 382), and an important topic of the play is that of Big Daddy's inheritance. He is going to die and Gooper, his older son, expects to be the main benefactor in the will. Gooper is interested in inheriting the plantation and he appears to be the best candidate. He works in the plantation's management, and he has many kids. His wife Mae is presented as a very fertile woman, they already have nine children, and she is pregnant in the moment of the play, which makes it clear that they will ensure the control of the family in the plantation for at least one more generation. However, Big Daddy does not want Gooper to inherit the land:

> Should I or should I not, if the jig was up, give you this place when I go--since I hate Gooper an' Mae an' know that they hate me, and since all five same monkeys are little Maes an' Goopers.-And I thought, No!--Then I thought, Yes!--I couldn't make up my mind. I hate Gooper and his five same monkeys and that bitch Mae! Why should I turn over twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile to not my kind? (Williams 58-59)

He wants Brick to inherit it. Big Daddy is already breaking one of the conventions of heteronormative inheritance. He does not choose his older son, changing established parent to child heritage system for an "equal to equal" one, as he refers to Gooper as "not my kind" (Bibler 397). Winchell states that Williams seems "heterophobic" in the way he ridicules traditional family. He presents the "Gooper-Clan" as ludicrous, very different to the "tenderness" of Straw and Ochello described in the very beginning (Winchell, in Bloom 84). This difference in the portray of both couples seems to correspond with Big Daddy's view of them. The patriarch has respect for Straw and Ochello, whom he considers his family and whom he inherited the plantation from. On the other hand, he hates his own son and his progeny. He does not want the plantation to be inherited by Gooper under any circumstance. In fact, his goal is to convince Brick to have progeny in order to make him the only heir of the plantation.

However, the inheritance issue is quite contradictory. Maggie's main obsession is to get pregnant to demonstrate Big Daddy she can ensure the progeny of the family, and her obsession affects tormented Brick, putting in him more pressure to adopt an identity that he does not want to have. Heteronormativity is deeply linked to reproduction, as explained earlier. However, the previous owners already broke that convention. They were two men that lived as a marriage, which would have to be hidden in the historical context of the play, but they managed to be more or less open in the plantation. Bibler explains that they were able to love each other openly because they were white male and rich, and they were the owners of the plantation (395), he also presents the possibility of Brick and Skipper being able to do the same, if Skipper had not died. Bibler also notes that male homosexual relationships are more accepted by heteronormative society if they are formed by two men of the same social class. As explained by Lisa Downing in The Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault, the French philosopher states in The History of

Sexuality that homosexual couples are not extent of cultural conventions: "Passive/active sexual roles follow social associations of heteronormative culture" (115). Butler also talks about "gay and lesbian cultures adapting the heterosexist framework binary": in same-gender couples, one is expected to take the role of the masculine and the other of the feminine (Butler 66).

Foucault gives the example of ancient Greek: homosexuality between men was socially accepted if a noble acquired the active role with a slave who had to acquire the passive. "For a Greek nobleman to make love to a passive male slave was natural, since the slave was by nature an inferior" (qted. in Downing 115). But if it was the opposite, it was not socially accepted because they were not reinforcing heteronormative roles. In the context of the play, Straw and Ochello were able to not hide their love because they were both the owners of the plantation, but if it had been a relationship between a landowner and one of the black men that worked in the fields, it would have been impossible to have a public liaison. Back to the inheritance problem, Straw and Ochello did not have descendents and it was not a problem for the inheritance of the plantation, as they gave it to Big Daddy. Big Daddy tries to explain to Brick that he can be homosexual and still own the plantation, like Straw and Ochello did. And this is when Big Daddy reveals some information that can be interpreted as homosexual tendencies.

Big Daddy says that after Straw died, he became "Ochello's partner", and even though nowadays "partner" is widely used by homosexual couples but not as much in the historical context of the play (Bibler 389); it is still ambiguous, and it could have been written as such intentionally by Williams. During this conversation with his son, Big Daddy also states explicitly that he tolerates homosexuality:

> BIG DADDY: Well, I have come back from further away than that, I have just now returned from the other side of the moon, death's country, son, and I'm not easy to shock by anything here. [He comes downstage and faces out.] Always, anyhow, lived with too much space around me to be infected by ideas of other people. One thing you can grow on a big place more important than cotton!--is tolerance!--I grown it. (Williams 64)

Big Daddy and Maggie's more tolerant approach to homosexuality may be connected to the fact that both of them come from a lower class. Big Daddy might even have had homosexual experiences due to this. I have already mentioned that heteronormativity is linked with society's expectations of a traditional family. If Big Daddy did not grow up in a middle-high class household, he was already outside heteronormativity, and it was easier for him to have sex with men because he did not have certain stereotypes and expectations from his education: "Unlike his son, he has not had the luxury of belonging to a fag-bashing fraternity at Ole Miss" (Winchell, qtd in Bloom 90). Another reason of Big Daddy having had homosexual experiences – "BIG DADDY [gently]: Now, hold on, hold on a minute, son. --I knocked around in my time." (Williams 61) – might be not that of education but economy. Being poor, he would be driven to do whatever it takes in order to improve his life; for example, sleeping with Straw and Ochello in order to inherit their plantation. Corber suggests that Big Daddy could be "gay for pay", considering the interpretation that he had sex with Straw and Ochello and inherited their plantation as a

consequence (Corber, in Bloom's New Edition 51). Maggie also comes from a lower-class background, and she also has this "would do what it takes" attitude (Corber, in Bloom's New Edition 60). She ends up lying and forcing her husband to have sex with her in order to inherit Big Daddy's plantation. And she also seems to be more tolerant than Brick and Gooper, whom have had a middle-high class upbringing and education.

In addition to being more or less "gay-friendly", Maggie also breaks other traditional conventions: she openly talks about women's sexual pleasure (Corber in Bloom 59), and she seems to hate kids, or at least Mae and Gooper's kids, whom she refers to as "no neck monsters" (qted. by Corber in Bloom 58). Corber also notes that Maggie and Brick's marriage is not the typical heteronormative marriage, for him, patriarchal roles are not that present because they do not have sex (Corber in Bloom's New Edition 57). Masculinity and femininity are blurred in their marriage, at the end of the play Maggie is the one that takes the lead in contrast to Brick's passivity. Some of Maggie's characteristics could be seen as typically masculine, at the end we could consider that she rapes her husband. In fact, in one of the stage directions her voice is described to "go low as a boy" (qted. by Poteet in Bloom's New Edition 154). However, Maggie's "masculinity" is more present in the original ending than in the revised version, these changes will be discussed later.

At the end of the play, Maggie and Brick are going to have sex in Straw and Ochello's bed, which can be interpreted in two very different ways: Is Brick accepting his heterosexuality or his homosexuality? (Winchell, qted. in Bloom's 90). One could consider that, moving from the sofa to a bed in which a gay couple slept can be seen as a symbolic coming out of the closet, even if he is going to that bed to have sex with his wife. Clum states that Brick himself is conscious of what having sex in that bed might symbolize: "Brick is obsessed, terrified of being called a "queer," and conscious of the irony of being expected to perform sexually in Straw and Ochello's bed" (Clum, qtd in Bloom 38) For Corber, Brick goes to bed with Maggie to remain in the closet (Corber, in Bloom's New Edition 56). As a matter of fact, he is not leaving her, he is accepting his place in the marriage and his duty of providing an heir, he is putting himself in a long-term situation that will make him unhappy; he is accepting heteronormativity.

David Savran establishes in his essay 'By Coming Suddenly into a Room That I Thought Was Empty': Mapping the Closet with Tennessee Williams", which is included in Bloom's first volume, that the room symbolizes private life, therefore, the room is the closet (Savran, in Bloom 56). He states that the main conflict in the play is that the rest of the family is constantly entering Maggie and Brick's room -Straw and Ochello's room-. As mentioned before, Brick never confirms nor denies being homosexual, is his family (and audience) the one that has to act as "spies" to reach a conclusion (Arell 72). Clum observes that many of Brick's fears about homosexuality have to do with it being seen by the rest of society, especially his family.For the author, "Homosexuality to Brick is terrifying because it is inevitably public" (Clum, qtd in Bloom 38); if he is truly a homosexual, he is terrified of coming out of the closet, that is, to make it public.

2. William's *Notes of Explanation*

In his Note of Explanation, Williams explains how he presented the script of the play to director Elia Kazan, who had previously adapted A Streetcar Named Desire to the stage. The director had some suggestions about the third act, which Williams summarizes in "three points":

> one, he felt that Big Daddy was too vivid and important a character to disappear … after the second act curtain; two, he felt that the character of Brick should undergo some apparent mutation as a result of the virtual vivisection that he undergoes in his interview with his father in Act Two. Three, he felt that the character of Margaret, …, should be, if possible, more clearly sympathetic to an audience. (Williams 92)

The playwright recounts how at the beginning he only embraced the latter suggestion. He was sure he wanted the character of Big Daddy to be absent from the third act, and he wanted Brick to appear as tragic as he had written him, as he did not feel that a "dramatic progression" would not be believable if done as immediate as Kazan suggested (Williams 93). However, he eventually accepted all three suggestions because he wanted Elia Kazan to direct his play. Clum cites Williams stating:

> "You still want to know why I don't write a gay play? I don't find it necessary. I could express what I wanted to express through other means. I would be narrowing my audience a great deal [if I wrote for a gay audience alone]. I wish to have a broad audience because the major thrust of my work is not sexual orientation, it's social. I'm not about to limit myself to writing about gay people." (Williams, qted. by Clum, in Bloom 31)

Tennessee Williams finishes this Note by reflecting on the commercial success of the play: "The reception of the playing-script has more than justified the adjustments made to that influence. A failure reaches fewer people, and touches fewer, than does a play that succeeds." (Williams 93). It could be interpreted that the writer saw the changes as price to pay for the play to be mainstream, as he preferred Brick's story to approach as many people as possible. These reservations about the changes made may be proven by his 1957 essay Author and Director published in Playbill, in which he wonders "if (Kazan's) genius was not requisite to making *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* acceptable to a theater public which is so squeamish about a naked study of life" (Williams 120). After reflecting on the author's possible goal with the play, I have developed the hypothesis that he rather had the play toned down and achieve his goal of reaching a higher number of people than it being more explicit but fall into obscureness, if we assume that the "naked study of life" he talks about has to do with Brick's defiance of heteronormativity. However, his need to show the world his original non-filtered version of the play made him publish the original third act just a year after the stage production premiered. "It may be that Cat number one would have done just as well, or nearly, as Cat number two; it's an interesting question. At

any rate, with the publication of both third acts in this volume, the reader can, if he wishes, make up his own mind about it" (Williams 93).

Arell considers that Williams published the two versions because he recognized problems in both (70). Even so, it is quite convenient that he published both third acts as it is extremely interesting to read the two versions of the end and compare them.

3. Comparison between the two third acts

In order to reach a better understanding of the changes made in the structure of the third act, I have roughly divided it into scenes, taking into account the characters' entrances and exits as well as the topics discussed. I have underlined the most importantchanges:

Original Act Three

- Big Mama, Gooper, Mae, Maggie, Doctor Baugh and Reverend Tooker talk about Brick's drinking problem.
- Enters Brick, Big Mama talks about Big Daddy's dinner and mentions Skipper.
- Doctor Baugh reveals that Big Daddy has a terminal cancer; Brick exits.
- The family starts arguing, Reverend Tooker and Doctor Baugh slip out. Big Mama rejects Gooper as the plantation's heir.
- Gooper and Mae defend themselves mentioning that Maggie has not children. Maggie defends Brick.
- Brick comes back, Big Mama imposes her power, Maggie announces she is pregnant. Big Mama leaves to tell Big Daddy the news.
- Gooper and Mae confront Maggie on the faked pregnancy, they leave.
- Maggie and Brick go to bed. Quick apparition of Big Mama.

Act Three as played in New York Production

- Gooper, Mae, Maggie, Doctor Baugh, Reverend Tooker, <u>Brick and the kids. They all look for Big Mama.</u>
- Big Mama comes in, she talks about Big Daddy's dinner and mentions Skipper.
- Doctor Baugh reveals that Big Daddy has a terminal cancer.
- The family starts arguing, Reverend Tooker and Doctor Baugh slip out. Big Mama rejects Gooper as the plantation's heir.
- Gooper and Mae defend themselves mentioning that Maggie has not children. Maggie defends Brick.
- Brick comes back (he was in the gallery), Big Mama imposes her power.
- <u>Big Daddy comes in</u> (the kids also appear here). He has a conversation with Brick and Maggie announces she is pregnant. Big Daddy and Big Mama exit.
- Gooper and Mae confront Maggie on the faked pregnancy, <u>Brick defends himself and his wife.</u> Gooper and Mae leave.
- Maggie and Brick go to bed.

The most notable modifications are the fact that Mae and Gooper kids are present in some scenes, that Big Daddy reappears, and that Brick has more lines of dialogue in the final moments of the play. Also, a new element is introduced: a storm takes place and can be heard during the third act of the New York Production, which adds up to the tumultuous and dramatic feeling of the plot Maggie does not refer to herself as "the cat" in the original third act, even though the concept of her being "a cat on a hot tin roof" is mentioned in the first and second acts. However, on the New York third act she does call herself a cat in three occasions, including the last sentence of the play: "and nothing's more determined than a cat on a tin roof" (Williams 119).

Going back to Williams' Note of Explanation, we do find the three main aspects suggested by Elia Kazan: Big Daddy appears again, and Brick seems to suffer some kind of development. Ironically, the one suggestion that Williams most agreed on – that of making Maggie more sympathetic to the audience – is probably the least obvious when reading the two versions.

2. Analysis of the changes focusing on heteronormativity

It can be argued that all of these revisions made the play end in a more heteronormative way than the original third act. The introduction of the kids, Big Daddy's joke and the relationship between Maggie and Brick in the final scene, all of these changes reinforce heteronormativity. For instance, the kids being present in the second version could be a way of showing the audience how a family should be, and to remind us that Maggie and Brick should have children in order to be a conventional marriage. It makes the have this in mind so that when Maggie announces she is pregnant it is easier to believe that she and Brick will end up having offspring.

The completely new scene with Big Daddy is also quite relevant to this topic. He appears in the gallery just after Big Mama asks Brick for an heir, and before he enters the room, he exchanges some words with his grandchildren which make them laugh. Big Daddy seems to be in a very good mood, which is a big contrast with the last time we saw him at the end of Act Two, very angry and insulting his family. He enters the room and proceeds to tell his sons a funny story about a married couple that visits a zoo, where they see a male elephant getting excited with another elephant's "excitin' odour of female fertility" (Williams 113). Big Daddy's joke does reinforce the heteronormative ending of the play. As Poteet states, the joke is hetero, masculine, aggressive and about reproduction; and it is meant only for Brick. (Poteet, in Bloom's New Edition 169). He is, again, reminding everyone the most important matter of the play: the inheritance of the plantation after his death. An interesting aspect is that Gooper already knows the story, but Brick does not:

> BIG DADDY: You know this story, Brick?
> [*Gooper nods*.]
> BRICK: No, sir, I don't know it. (Williams 113)

This not only shows Brick's disconnection from reality in general and his family in particular, as we deduce that Big Daddy has told the same story before from Gooper's reactions. But it is

also a symbol of heteronormativity: Gooper does know what it is to be in a fertile marriage, Brick does not.

But the most relevant scenes to show this heteronormative change are the last. When Maggie announces her pregnancy and Big Mama leaves – Big Daddy too in the Broadway Third Act, as he has come in to tell the elephant joke – in scene there stand only the two brothers and their wives. Mae and Gooper confront Maggie because they do not believe she is pregnant, but Brick's reaction is extremely different in the two versions.

On the original one, he is onstage, but he seems rather absent. He only has one line of dialogue, spoken right after Maggie says she is with child and Big Mama exits to tell Big Daddy: "BRICK [coolly]: Thank you, Maggie, that's a nice big shot." (Williams 88). This is cold statement is the only thing he says until Gooper and Mae leave, in fact, while the married couple recriminates and attacks Maggie, Brick remains silent. Maggie does tell him off when the other marriage leaves: "MARGARET: Thank you for-- keeping still... […] It was gallant of you to save my face!" (Williams 89). However, on the Broadway Act Three, he does intervene when Maggie is put in doubt. After Mae states that Maggie cannot be pregnant because she does not have sex with Brick, he defends her:

> BRICK: How d'y' know that we're not silent lovers? Even if y'got a peep-hole drilled in the wall, how can y'tell if sometime when Gooper's got business in Memphis an' you're playin' scrabble at the country club with other ex-queens of cotton, Maggie and I don't come to some temporary agreement? How do you know that--? (Williams 117)

In this new version, Brick defends Maggie's lie, "This girl has life in her body" (Williams 117), instead of remaining silent showing little interest in the confrontation against Maggie – as he does in the original script – he now stands with her wife:

> MAE: Brick, I never thought that you would stoop to her level, I just never dreamed that you would stoop to her level.
> GOOPER: I don't think Brick will stoop to her level.
> BRICK [sits with Margaret on couch]: What is your level? Tell me your level so I can sink or rise to it. (Williams 117)

Here, he physically puts himself next to Maggie, making them appear as a united couple, as a team against Mae and Gooper.

After this confrontation, Mae and Gooper leave. Maggie and Brick are left alone in the room to play the final scene, which is also quite different in both versions. In the two Third Acts, Maggie is seen taking out the alcohol bottles and convincing Brick to go to bed with her in order to make the lie (Maggie being pregnant) a truth, a reality.

Arell exposes that Kazan had previously directed a play, Tea and Sympathy (1953, just 2-3 years before Cat). In this play, a young boy is accused of being feminine, and an older woman helps him become more masculine by having sex with him. Again, femininity is

associated with being homosexual, and the protagonist is "cured" by sleeping with a woman (Arell 68). Arell also notes how in the Broadway version, Brick "loses passivity", he sees this as Maggie "giving him back his manhood" (Arell 69). Maggie is in fact "helping" Brick to deny the accusations made by his family, to demonstrate he is not a homosexual.

Bloom in his Introduction (2) summarizes: "As Williams noted, his Maggie augments in charm between the two versions; his Brick modulates subtly and is a touch more receptive to her." Maggie's actions at the very end are undoubtedly wrong. She acts without his husband's consent; she blackmails and forces him to have sex. However, in the Broadway version this is softened.

> In separating Brick from his liquor until he satisfies her desire, 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. (This is particularly true in the Broadway version of the third act.) (Winchell, qtd in Bloom 90).

In her essay "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof: The Uneasy Marriage of Success and Idealism", compilated in Bloom's first volume, Marian Price considers that Maggie's lie about being pregnant is presented in the Broadway version as a "desperate truth" rather than a manipulation, change that is emphasized by Maggie presenting the lie as a "birthday present to Big daddy". Price also observes the change in Bricks from static to joining Maggie in her battle for inheritance. Another omission she considers important is Big Daddy's groaning and Big Mama's coming back to the room to get the morphine for him, she describes them as "two grim reminders that death is in the Pollitt house" (Price, qtd in Bloom 99).

On the original Act Three, Maggie's actions seem more calculated and kinder of cruel towards her husband. He takes the pillow to the sofa because he wants to sleep there instead of in the bed with Maggie, but she imposes her power and puts it in the bed:

> MARGARET: I guess it's bad, but now I'm stronger than you and I can love you more truly! Don't move that pillow. I'll move it right back if you do!--Brick? [....] I really have been to a doctor and I know what to do and--Brick?--this is my time by the calendar to conceive! (Williams 90)

There is also a stage note that describes them both fighting for Brick's crutch: "[He reaches for his crutch, but she beats him to it and rushes out on the gallery, hurls the crutch over the rail and comes back in, panting.]" (Williams 91). Maggie is clearly shown taking advantage of Brick's physical and psychological weakness. Big Mama enters alarmed by the noise and she encourages –without knowing it– Brick to do what Maggie wants him to do. "BIG MAMA: My son, Big Daddy's boy! Little Father!" (Williams 91) These words, for me, add to the pressure that Brick is feeling to have sex with Maggie in order to impregnate her. After Big Mama leaves, they pronounce the very last words of the play:

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.--What you want is someone to-- [*She turns out the rose-silk lamp*.] --take hold of you.--Gently, gently, with love! And-- [*The curtain begins to fall slowly*.] I do love you, Brick, I do!
BRICK [smiling with charming sadness]: Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?
THE COURTAIN COMES DOWN
THE END" (Williams 91)

Brick is shown here as a defeated man, a tragic figure, there is nothing to say because he has lost his battle against conventionality, and his last quote, spoken "with charming sadness" makes it clear that he does not feel love for Maggie, nor he thinks she loves him.

On the revised Third Act, however, Brick shows some love for Maggie. After defending her in the argument against Gooper and Mae, he expresses his admiration for her: "I admire you, Maggie." (Williams 118). This feeling is also mentioned in the stage notes: "[Margaret seizes the pillow from his grasp, holding it close. Brick watches her with growing admiration.]" (Williams 118) This act, compared to the original, is much tenderer and less violent. The fight for the clutch and Big Mama's intervention were deleted and did not appear in the New York Production Third Act. In addition, this version ends with Maggie kneeling, for Poteet she is transforming the bed into "a sexual shrine of reproduction, an altar" (Poteet in Bloom's New Edition 167).

The final words spoken by Maggie are virtually the same, but Brick's last remark, the so ironic "Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?" was also eliminated. For Price, the elimination of the "skeptical line" in which the play originally ended does affect the understanding of the final moments (Price, qtd in Bloom 98). Without Brick expressing his doubt, Maggie's statement of love is more believable, even further accentuated with the new and softer Brick.

The revised Third Act presents Brick as a husband that follows Maggie's plan to become a family, that is, to follow conventionality. Rather than the tragic alcoholic abused by his wife that Tennessee Williams wrote originally. Thus, Elia Kazan's suggestions did transform the groundbreaking final scenes into a more heteronormative and mainstream-friendly ending.

3. Conclusion

To conclude, the theme of heteronormativity is clearly present in the play. From the very beginning, the setting in Straw and Ochello's room sets the tone for the homosexual topic of the play. The fact that Williams "hints" many homosexual subtexts in the stage directions so that the readers get that meaning but not the audience of the play is also a heteronormative aspect. However, the theme is present in the characters of Brick and Big Daddy, who subvert heteronormativity in some way, as well as Maggie.

From his Note of Explanation, we can infer that Williams was concerned with the economic and social success of the play, and that he made it more heteronormative consciously in order to approach mainstream audiences.

Finally, the changes proposed by Elia Kazan and executed by Williams do make the ending of the play more heteronormative. From the appearance of the kids to remind the audience of the inheritance issue to Big Daddy's sexual joke; all the characters construct a more heterosexual tone that culminates in the final scene with Maggie and Brick appearing as a united marriage and determined to have an heir.

The research results are that the original third act defied heteronormativity more clearly and that the Broadway version consciously changes that.

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