

***A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE* IN PERFORMANCE:
"I DON'T WANT REALISM"**

Nothing is more significant of our times
than following the course of a stage play.
(Jean Cocteau)

I don't want realism. [. . .] I'll tell you what
I want. Magic! Yes, yes magic! I try to give
that to people. I misrepresent things to
them. I don't tell the truth. I tell what ought
to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me
be damned for it! Don't turn the light on!!
(Blanche DuBois)

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Summary: This paper deals with the most famous theater performances of the well known Tennessee Williams 1947 play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The fact that the directors of this play in theater were Elia Kazan, Ingmar Bergman, Luchino Visconti, Laurence Olivier, Jean Cocteau, among others, proves it's attractiveness. It was the first American play to be staged at the house of Molière, the staid Comédie-Française, in its 330-year history! But, it was the movie, directed by Elia Kazan in 1951, that imposed future standards for actors. Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski and Vivien Leigh as Blanche DuBois remained as model performances. True to the play, the film is both lyrical and gritty, with complex and contradictory characters. The film, quickly distributed world-wide, "becomes as fine, if not finer, than the play," and may have exceeded the influence of the stage play.

Amid the world-wide attention paid to Tennessee Williams in 2011 is that from the land of Molière, which celebrated the centenary of one of the United States's most important playwrights with a new production of his most famous and oft produced play in a new French translation,

which supersedes the 1949 adaptation by Jean Cocteau and Paule de Beaumon, *Un tramway nommé desire* [*A Streetcar Named Desire*]. The 2011 French production directed by preeminent American director Lee Breuer, founder of the avant-garde group Mabou Mines, is the first American play to be staged at the house of Molière, the staid Comédie-Française, in its 330-year history, offered there from 5 February to 2 June, 2011. Much of the credit for so bold a move, particularly given the radical nature of the production, is given to the theatre's innovative Artistic Director, Muriel Mayette, herself a fan of the American director. In Breuer's hands *Un tramway nommé desire* is relocated from a seedy, post-War New Orleans of the mid-1940s to 16th century Japan and features dogugaeshi inspired sliding screens and Kurogu stagehands reminiscent of Bunraku puppeteers, "a metaphor for the antebellum South" (Carvajal 2011: 11) notes Breuer, adding another level of chronological pastiche, to the time where the kimono-clad Blanche's sensibility lay, or rather where it remains stuck.¹ Breuer theatrical conception seems much less *outré* once we consider Williams's description of Stella's putting on "a light² blue satin kimono" and Blanche having similarly "slipped into a dark red satin wrapper" [kimono?] (Williams 1951: 50, 53). One of the earliest international productions, we may recall, was Japanese-born, Stanislavskian-trained director Seki Sano and his staging of *Streetcar* in Mexico City in December of 1948 for nine, more or less amateur, performances, a production which garnered high praise from Mexican painter Diego Rivera, and the internationally inclined Breuer may have picked up that international thread. Sano's production went on to become a major hit in Mexico City as it was reprised in May of the following year and ran for 100 further performances in a larger theater (Kolin 1998: 42). For his celebratory, international, centenary production, while it may not have been designed to do so, Breuer was doubtless aware of the French premiere, the controversial 1949 Jean Cocteau adaptation. Williams was finally offended by Cocteau's radical departures and racialized adaptation in Raymond Rouleau's staging:

I don't understand why Cocteau filled my work with crudities. I don't think it's enough to put a refrigerator on the stage or to make the actors speak like the common public [that is, in a French street argot] so as to give a more vivid impression. Art is not a photograph. Truth and life cannot be expressed in their essence except when we transmute them (Dubois 1992:134)

Cocteau would feature Black dancers, naked from the waist up, gyrating in the background as Stanley raped Blanche, for example (Kolin 2000: 70-76), and his introduction to the play came close to justifying its sexual violence, or at least he placed the emphasis squarely on Blanche as seduc-

¹ Reviewer Carvajal, Doreen (or the caption writer for the *International Herald Tribune*) seemed confused by Breuer's comment on chronology since one caption suggests, "But the setting is Japan, not the antebellum south." Neither is *Streetcar* set in the antebellum south, we might add, except in Blanche's mind.

² In some editions misprint as "tight."

tress: “The press spoke much about rapes. Strange. Where did it see them? In a husband who reconciles himself with his wife? In

Stanley, who takes advantage of Blanche’s weakness in a scene when she *resists him only for form’s sake?*” (emphasis added; see Kontaxopoulos 2001: 3, and Appendix A). Cocteau, moreover, added a second, mimed rape in the background, suggesting, what, how common a feature sexual aggression is in this uncivilized part of the world, where animals rule? Wil-



liam’s would certainly have found Breuer’s stylized production decidedly less vulgar than Cocteau’s, and Breuer worked to evoke New Orleans for his French audience with an image of an olive green, New Orleans streetcar hanging above a jazz band, but whether or not Williams would have recognized the play as his own amid Breuer’s adaptations, remains an open question. For one, when the doctors come for her, Blanche (played by Anne Kessler to Éric Ruf’s Stanley in 2011) falls through a trap door, presumably to her death, and the sisters’ affection for each other borders on the incestuous.

The play has admittedly had more daring, transformative adaptations than Breuer’s--or Cocteau’s for that matter. A case in point is Frank Castorf’s notorious 2002 Berlin Volksbühne version entitled not *Endstation Sehnsucht*, with the sense of a “terminal” or a final stop already built into the original German translation, *Endstation Amerika*, [A Streetcar Named America, but also “End of the line America,” or America as the end of the line], a shortened form of *Endstation Amerika. Eine Bearbeitung von Frank Castorf von Endstation Sehnsucht – A Streetcar Named Desire von Tennessee Williams*. This awkward title resulted from the executors of the Williams Estate disallowing the use of Williams’s title for Castorf’s radical departures from the text. In his blog, Ivar Hagendoorf characterizes some of the alterations thus:

“In Castorf’s adaptation Stanley Kowalski is a Polish immigrant who used to stand on the barricades alongside Lech Walesa. Those were the days. He now earns a living handing



Photo: Cosimo Mirco Magliocca

people chewing gum samples on the street. He makes some extra money with the illegal export of liquor. In one scene Blanche compares him to a gorilla. A moment later Stanley enters in a gorilla costume. It is his working outfit. This scene perfectly illustrates Stanley Kowalski's personal tragedy and the subtle layers Frank Castorf has added to the piece." (Hagendoorf 2001)

Whether or not Castorf's addition of Stanley in a Gorilla suit is subtle by anyone's measure, or whether or not it "perfectly illustrates Stanley Kowalski's personal tragedy," is at least a debatable point. At very least something of Stanley's American patriotism and his status as a World-War II veteran get lost in making him a Pole rather than Polish-American, but it remains a measure of the play's power that critics saw such updating and Europeanization in positive terms, an enrichment of the play rather than a diminishment, even as much of what Brooks Atkinson calls a "genuinely poetic playwright" may get lost in the adaptation of the play to an East German setting, ironic in that the German translation was done in West Germany as a political example of liberal, uncensored, free expression as much as for the play's own aesthetic qualities. But such radical adaptations (if not a travesty in Castorf's case) may be inevitable in German productions since Berthold Viertel's original German translation *Endstation Sehnsucht*, still readily available, contains so many errors, having been done quickly in Post-War West Germany (Clericuzio 2009: 80-1).

Breuer's centenary production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, with which the Estate did not interfere, stands as testimony to the play's continuing power and resilience since its 1947 premier, after which it quickly attracted productions and performances from noted international artists. As international and transgressive as Breuer's 2011 French production was, that by the Sydney Theater Company which opened its production of *Streetcar* directed by Liv Ullmann at the Harvey Theater of the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York with Cate Blanchett as Blanche DuBois was traditional and displayed a play less in need of renovation than one which continues to attract the highest level of actors and devoted audiences. Its short run, between November 27 and December 20, sold out instantly, as soon as the notice appeared on line. Writing for *The New York Times* critic Ben Brantley gushed:

Ms. Ullmann and Ms. Blanchett have performed the play as if it had never been staged before, with the result that, as a friend of mine put it, 'you feel like you're hearing words you thought you knew pronounced correctly for the first time.'[...] how often do you get to watch an actress of such virtuosity pulling out every stop of her instrument and then some? (Brantley 2009)

For Brantley, such a production was "Blessed perhaps with an outsider's distance on an American cultural monument."

The almost instant internationalization of so deeply and personal an American play like *A Streetcar Named Desire* certainly capitalized on the United States's new-found international standing in the post-World War II era and the physical presence in Europe of the U. S. Military at the outset of the Cold War, but it also suggested a new world, a re-establishment of freedoms, a new set of liberal aesthetics, and, for many, new political

possibilities in the aftermath of Fascism's defeat. In Post-War Germany, for instance, Berthold Viertel's original German translation, *Endstation Sehnsucht*, was supported by the U. S. Office of Military Government for Germany, which gesture suggests something of the United States Military's attempts to reintroduce ideas of freedom of expression and democracy through contemporary American literature (see Clericuzio 2009: 80-1, citing Lange, 741). And in Italy, although poster design and production blossomed under Mussolini, artists absorbing influences of Cubism, Futurism, Art Deco, Novecento, but most were focused on political propaganda, growing decidedly racist during the war, and unsurprisingly most American films were banned under Fascism. But in the post-war period, American films flooded Italy, indeed all of Europe, and movie poster design flourished. (See particularly the Luigi Martinati design for *Streetcar* in Appendix B.)

But America exported more than its films and the idea of democracy through the work of a new playwright with a frank sense of human sexual conduct than Europe was yet accustomed to. Curiously, while forces of public morality in the United States were actively trying to restrict the freedom of expression celebrated in Williams's work, that very work was often featured as exemplary of a new sense of at least aesthetic and more broadly cultural freedom, both severely restricted under Fascism, in a Europe still recovering from the devastation of World War II. *Streetcar* also reintroduced to Europe an acting *method* focused on realism, fundamentally European in origin but heavily recast in its American incarnation: the deeply psychological Stanislavskian "method" of acting, or "the method," for short, to which the American director Elia Kazan was committed with the young actor Marlon Brando as its chief proponent. *Streetcar* was as much Kazin's play, as much Brando's play as it was Williams's, even as the play took on the coloration of the culture where it played, and it was to these powerful forces, the daring and forthright Williams script, Kazan's powerful psychological direction, and Brando's incomparable acting that European, and other international productions, were forced to come to grips. As Alesandro Clericuzio suggests

An element that would soon become a recurring feature of the play[']s adaptations was the exportation, together with the text, of the acting Method that had helped shape the play in its original North American success story. The Method was not yet as famous as it is today by its name: Stanislavski and Meyerhold were the masters that Japanese born director Seki Sano would follow in the Mexican version (Clericuzio 2009: 75)

and other European directors would follow--or struggle to resist.

***Streetcar* in Stockholm, 1949.**

Ms Ullmann's 2009 production may call to mind for some as well Igmarr Bergman's 1949 staging at the Göteborgs stadsteater Main Stage. (Ms Ullmann was admittedly only 11 years old at the time but she did go on to star in nine of Bergman's films.) The production was decidedly less



naturalistic than Cocteau's, but it too was an adaptation of Williams work to accord with the aesthetics of another strong, artistic personality in another cultural context. Bergman would say that "Tennessee Williams's play is full of poetry," but Bergman also suggests how his work is filtered through his own sensibility: "For me personally it arouses many memories of my own films and plays. Tennessee Williams has an interest in death and desire,

which I share." Bergman's *Streetcar* would thus be reminiscent of his films, set less in New Orleans than in the world of film, Swedish film in particular. Carl Johan Sröm's stage design was much praised at the time but may seem bludgeoning today with its real cars, a turning stage, and a neighborhood cinema, which dominated half of the stage, open 24 hours per day and which bore a neon sign that read "Desire" (Bergman web site). The title of the film presumably being shown in this Swedish/New Orleans cinema was, "A Night in Paradise," a commentary on the location of the Williams play amid the Elysian Fields, at least of New Orleans. In front of the cinema, moreover, stood an apple tree that signaled the change from spring to fall, losing its leaves entirely with Blanche's final fall and an overt allusion, perhaps, to Chechov's poetic drama, *The Cherry Orchard*, a play that suggests a formative connection to *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The revolving stage and the omnipresence of a movie theater gave the Bergman's staging an unmistakable cinematic quality, to which some critics objected, and the Swedish title, at least in Bergman's version suggested a voyage to the Lustgården or lust garden, *Spårvagn till Lustgården*.

***Streetcar* in Rome 1949**

"[T]he best European version of this play [*Streetcar*]" was, at least according to Williams, that staged by Luchino Visconti. *Un tran che si chiama desiderio* opened at Rome's Eliseo Teatro on 21 January 1949. Part of the critical attraction to Visconti's staging was his faithful rendering of New Orleans, reflected in the photographic reality of Franco Zeffirelli's sets, and Visconti's emphasis on a class warfare was central to at least his interpretation of the play. Blanche, played by the diminutive Rina Morelli, became more tragic victim than seductress (the latter as Cocteau saw her) and so Visconti devalued or underplayed her sexual promiscuity (Kolin 2000: 55). Vittorio Gassman was perhaps even more violent a Stanley Kowalski than Marlon Brando. According to one critic Gassman broke an average of five bottles per night on stage, and he and his poker pals smoked collectively 120 cigarettes per night. That is, what Visconti and his team presented to Rome in early 1949 was a version of an American *Lower Depths*, the world from which Blanche was fleeing. She has plumbed its depths, but her madness entails her total and perhaps permanent recoil from it.

The first of the great European productions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, was then *Un tram che si chiama desiderio* which opened at Rome's Eliseo Teatro on 29 January 1949 in a four hour production, a full hour longer than its New York counterpart. Luchino Visconti had successfully directed *The Glass Menagerie* two years earlier and so the opening of *Un tram che si chiama desiderio* was greeted with enormous anticipation, with Williams in attendance on opening night. The production did not disappoint, even as post-war Italians were shocked by its language and critics objected to what they saw as the shapelessness of Williams's script:

The debate in the press had much to do with the style of the play: some found it episodic and shapeless, others accused it of vulgarity. A journalist from *Il Corriere Lombardo* hit the mark, writing that "Ancora una volta, l'America ha scoperto l'Europa. Gli scrittori di laggiù sono arrivati al naturalismo di Emile Zola e attraverso le scoperte di Sigmund Freud, vanno avanzando ipoteche su Wedekind, con questo risultato, che, mano a mano che il verismo conquista l'espressionismo, per merito della 'rivoluzione dei tecnici' yankee, il melodramma riprende possesso della ribalta (Terron 1951: 22).

But it was Visconti's production that was most praised, critic M. C. Elio Talarico claiming that "Three-quarters of the success of the production should go to Visconti, and only one-quarter to the playwright" (Talarico cited by Kolin 2000: 49). Despite its close association with the New York production, Visconti politicized his staging in keeping with post-War Italian politics. Vito Pandolfi writing in *Il dramma* expressed a common sentiment: Visconti had abandoned the "raffish charm" and the "lyricism" of the Williams script (Williams 1971: 243), in favor of the sinister and dark side of New Orleans," where even the sheets of the Kowalski bed were noticeably filthy. Critic Alessandro Clericuzio went on to argue, moreover, that the Italian Stanley seized control play many consider Blanche's story:

Vittorio Gassman overwhelmed tiny and fragile Rina Morelli in the 1949 Viscontian version. During the summer of that year Williams was already a big Anna Magnani fan and was in Rome writing 'the Pepina play' (which would later become *The Rose Tattoo*), 'a type ideally suited,' he wrote in his notebooks, 'for the Italian actress Anna Magnani' (Williams 2006: 504-05). 'Nannarella' was considered as a first Italian Blanche, but according to Zeffirelli (107) she didn't sign the deal mainly out of personality clash with Count Luchino. Had she played the Southern belle, Blanche's "tiger" would have downscaled her "moth" identity and probably outstaged Gassman's Stanley (Clericuzio 2009: 76).

Rejecting Kazan's psychological interpretation, Visconti was guided "by a pervasive desire to present burning issues and existential content where political meaning was expressed through exaggerated realism." (Kolin 2000: 49) What Italian critics saw was a "class struggle and the disparities between a fading European elite and a primitive American culture," (ibid) themes which are tangential but not central to the lay, at least as Americans understand it. At least one reviewer found Visconti's and Williams's views compatible, however:

In *Streetcar* Williams wanted to portray that humiliated category of people standing between the middle class and working class." This was, in fact, the liminal space of the American middle class at the end of World War II. Visconti, for his art, overtly "embroiled Stanley in the maelstrom of class warfare as a symbol of the working class (Clericuzio 2009: 81; Kolin 2000: 49-50).

Visconti would reprise the Rome production in Milan at the Teatro San Babila in 1951, again with Rina Morelli as Blanche, but Marcello Mastroianni, who played Mitch in Rome, would replace Gassman as Stanley in Milan.

***Streetcar* in London 1949**

A Streetcar Named Desire with Vivien Leigh as Blanche opened in London's West End on October 11th, 1949 and ran at the Aldwych Theatre for 326 performances, Leigh performing in every one, but its route to the West End was contentious and fraught with obstacles, and the British premiere ran up against the remnants of Victorian prudery persistent amid the austerities of a Post War England re-asserting its identity. The play met with primarily moral resistance from newspapers like the *Sunday Pictorial* (5 million in circulation) which, on 2 October 1949, called the play "salacious and degrading" (cited in Kolin 2000: 62). Leigh was tapped to play Blanche. She agreed on condition that her husband, Lawrence Olivier, direct, a condition quickly agreed, after which Olivier became co-producer as well. And although the English production did not copy that in New York directly, some level of reproduction was inevitable since the New York production made so strong an international impact. Olivier had and used Kazan's prompt books, for example, and the production finally looked and sounded much like that in New York since Olivier also used Joseph "Jo" Mielziner's sets and Alex North's music, the billing finally acknowledging, "Directed by Lawrence Olivier from the New York production." The British production was however, much shortened and censored, British theater still subject to restrictions imposed by the Lord Chamberlain, Britain's official censor, which power was held until 1968. The license to perform was applied for in 1948, granted only, after protracted negotiation, in October 1949 with extensive cuts, including Stanley's reference to his "kidneys" (Williams 1951: 102) suffering from Blanche's extended use of the apartment's one toilet. Further Olivier was warned, "no suggestive business accompanying any undressing" (cited in Kolin 2000: 65). One suggestion was that in the effort to avoid any suggestion of homosexuality on the British stage, Blanche's husband, Allan Grey, would be caught in bed not with an older man but with a "Negress" instead. Olivier himself sent Williams a 16-page, hand-written letter with suggested cuts and changes for the London opening, many designed to deal with what some critics attending the Manchester Opera House try-outs, from 27 September to 7 October, 1949, considered the play's excessive length. He also offered a "new reading" of Stanley as "not the bruiser type," Olivier generally defending his new readings to the playwright as "a slightly subtler approach" adding vitality

to the play. But in some regards Olivier was rewriting Williams's Stanley for his male lead and his British audience. Looking back on the issues in 1974, Williams famously quipped that anyone who writes such a detailed letter deserves respect, so he acceded to Olivier's revisions, many of which were also mandated by the Lord Chamberlain, but other suggestions were based on Olivier's work with the play in its Manchester and his leading actors. The result was an overall reduction of the play's playing time by nearly an hour, from three hours (with two intervals) in Manchester to just over two hours in London, and so it was not until the 1970s that Britain's theatre audiences finally saw the complete play, although the American film had been available in the U. K. since 1952.

Streetcar in Paris 1949

The original French production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Un Tramway nommé Désir*, also attracted the country's major artistst. Jean Cocteau who collaborated on the translation and whose aesthetics infused the production noted that "We never made so much effort or spent so much money producing an American play in France before" (Cocteau cited in Kolin 2000: 70). But Cocteau's adaptation was made possible only with the help of a professional translator, for his English was poor, and when he met Tennessee Williams he could only communicate through Gore Vidal (Staggs 2006: 279). The Bordas Editeur edition, with drawings by Cocteau, acknowledges Cocteau's adaptation from the translation of Paule de Beaumont.

Un Tramway nommé Désir opened on 19 October 1949, eight days after the London premiere, and ran for a respectable 233 performances. French critics, perhaps predictably, lauded the French artists associated with the production while vilifying the play itself, the touring company banned in December of 1950 in Namur, for instance, as much for Cocteau's excesses as for Williams's explicitations (cited in Kolin 2000: 71). That is, such resistance was as much the result of the French staging of the play with well endowed dancing "negresses" naked from the waist up and where Blanche exuded a combination of "mythomaniac and nymphomaniac" (Claude Jamet cited in Kolin 2000: 72). Apparently, the gyrating Black dancers, presumably a reflection of the New Orleans semi-tropical climate but more an echo of André Gide's African films, was to play against the whiteness of Blanche, revealing her *désire noir* beneath. The production was thus not only sexualized but



racialized as well, as Stanley too was seen in terms approaching that of a “white nigger” (G. Jolly cited in Kolin 2000: 72). Much of Lila de Nobili’s set was diaphanous, translucent, gauze-like suggesting the moth’s wings that Williams associated with Blanche and against which images could be projected, including a pantomimed rape that anticipated Stanley’s climactic brutalizing of Blanche. Most of such dreamlike rendering would veil the southern roots of the drama, to which the French audience could not be expected to relate, and Arletty’s Blanche seemed to lack, not unexpectedly, that American dimension. For many it was Cocteau’s sensibility in the fore of the French production, set and staging supporting his vision, Williams’s reduced to something like Cocteau’s inspiration.

Clericuzio cites a curious political anecdote in relation to the French production: “Arletty was a beloved movie actress who had ‘betrayed her nation’ when she fell in love with a German officer during the Occupation. For this reason, she changed the translation of the final line ‘I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.’ At curtain call, had she said ‘J’ai toujours été à la merci des étrangers,’ she was sure ‘people would have thrown tomatoes at’ her, for the meaning of the French *étranger* was both ‘stranger’ and ‘foreigner.’” The line was changed in performance to, ‘J’ai toujours été à la merci des inconnus’ (Staggs cited in Clericuzio 2009: 78).

Streetcar’s Long Shadow

Without question Elia Kazan’s New York production of 1947 cast a long shadow for all future productions, national and international, all the more so after it was adapted to film in 1951 in Tennessee Williams and Oscar Saul’s script, with its, “Hate-oozing personal encounters between the lost lady and the brutish man [. . . and] which transmits, indeed, a comprehension of a whole society’s slow decay.” (Crowther 1951) For Bosley Crowther the film, quickly distributed world-wide, released in London the following year, “becomes as fine, if not finer, than the play.” (*New York Times*, 20 September 1951). Before the film’s release, however, the play had already been staged in 17 countries. The international influence of the Kazan production can be measured by subsequent stagings both in the U. S. and abroad, as actors and directors either adopted Kazan’s vision of the play or tried to resist its long, powerful reach. Critic Philip Kolin notes of the New York production of 1947, “The premiere saw one of the most powerful and collaborative teams in theater,” which went on to “establish the careers of many actors who played in it” (Kolin 2000: xv). But the film may have exceeded the influence of the stage play and established Vivien Leigh’s as the dominant voice of Blanche. Critic Ben Brantley in *The New York Times* discussing a revival in 2007 states the challenge for actors, “Watching [the many actresses he has seen and heard render Blanche DuBois], I always hear the voice of Vivien Leigh, the magnificent star of Elia Kazan’s 1951 movie, whispering Blanche’s lines along with the actress onstage.” (Brantley 2009) But originally it was Jessica Tandy’s voice that dominated our ears, the standard against which most international

productions were judged in 1949. *New York Times* theater critic Brooks Atkinson was effusive about Tandy's 1949 performance devoting half his opening night review to it:

And Jessica Tandy gives a superb performance as the rueful heroine whose misery Mr. Williams is tenderly recording. This must be one of the most perfect marriages of acting and playwriting. For the acting and playwriting are perfectly blended in a limpid performance, and it is impossible to tell where Miss Tandy begins to give form and warmth to the mood Mr. Williams has created (4 December 1947). (Atkinson 1947)

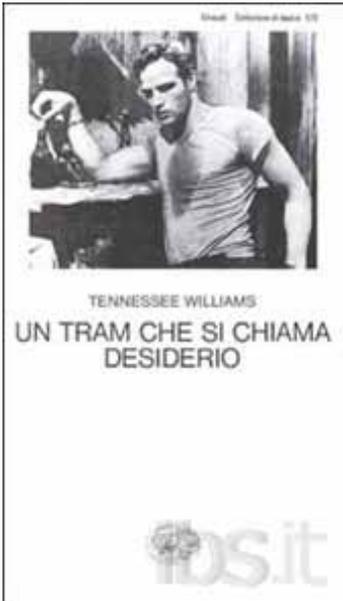
MGM, however, insisted on replacing Tandy, who was nominated for a Tony award for her stage performance, with the Blanche of Lawrence Olivier's British staging, Vivien Leigh, who thereafter set the standard for the role, as Crowther observed, "Miss Leigh has, indeed, created a new Blanche du Bois on the screen," (Crowther 1951) that standard in turn superseded, at least for one American critic, Ben Brantley, by Cate Blanchett's performance in 2007. But Crowther as well defined the central difficulties for actresses, that of filling in what seems absent in the Williams script, to present both

a woman of even greater fullness, torment, and tragedy. Although Mr. Williams's writing never precisely makes clear the logic of her disintegration before the story begins—why anyone of her breeding would become an undisciplined tramp—Miss Leigh makes implicitly cogent every moment of the lady on the screen. (Crowther 1951)

Crowther summarizes the drama succinctly in his praise:

Her mental confusions, her self-deceptions, the agonies of her lacerated nerves, and her final, unbearable madness, brought on by a brutal act of rape, are clearly conveyed by the actress with a tremendous concentration and economy of power. Likewise, her fumbings for affections are beautifully and poignantly done (Crowther 1951)

MGM may have sought to transpose Leigh's role as Scarlet O'Hara a decade earlier in *Gone with the Wind* to the Williams play, and the Italian poster for the film (which even in Italy was restricted to those over 16 years of age) designed by Luigi Martinati offers a visual representation more in keeping with Scarlet O'Hara's Tara rather than the Kowalski flat in New Orleans, especially in Visconti's production, but the poster does reflect an image in the film (see Appendix B). Leigh would finally win a second Oscar for her Blanche in the much honored film, with Oscars for all the principals save its director and male lead, a sting that Brando, at least, never forgot. The omission is all the more difficult to fathom now, since Brando's may have been the most influential performance in history. The role of Blanche, on the other hand, has allowed for a wider range of performances. The play's two year New York run, for instance, gave rise to a touring National Company with two separate casts to meet demand for performances of the play, the most important of which starred Uta Hagen (who had substituted for Jessica Tandy on Broadway on occasion) as Blanche and Anthony Quinn as Stanley, the National Company occasionally



returning to and playing in New York as well, and many a critic subsequently commented on how thoroughly Uta Hagen made the role her own. For the male lead, however, Marlon Brando, who was actually the third choice to play Stanley after John Garfield, who wanted a percentage of the play, and Burt Lancaster had turned down the role, at least according to Lancaster's autobiography. Brando went on to set the standard against which all future Stanley Kowalskis, if not all future male leads in any work, would be measured, since he dominated both Broadway and Hollywood renditions of the play. In Crowther's assessment, Brando's performance is even stronger on film "where we're so much closer to him, he seems that much more highly charged, his despairs seem that much more pathetic, and his comic moments that much more slyly enjoyed." (Crowther 1951) It is

Brando's words we most often hear along with those of whomever else is playing the part, and they are indelible. It is the measure of the strength of the original New York production that all subsequent productions were and are measured against it, all performances measured against those of the play's original cast. Even in the Italian text in Gerardo Guerrieri's translation from Einaudi, it is Brando, not Gassman, who dominates the cover. A recent review of a revival at the Donmar Warehouse in London in July 2009 opens thus:

Let's not make comparisons; Elliot Cowan is not Marlon Brando, nor should he be. He is, however, a sculpted, hulking powerhouse of a man whose bulging biceps, wide shoulders and emanating sense of unpredictable danger fill [. . .] this new production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, (Coveney 2009)

yet such comparisons are unavoidable, reasserted, as here, in their very denial. Michael Coveney of the *Independent* cannot resist the temptation either, even as his final judgment is replete with reservations:

The big shadow is cast by Marlon Brando in the film as Stanley, the greasy son of Polish immigrants. At the Donmar, Elliot Cowan goes down the wrong Olympian athlete route. [. . .] And Cowan is simply too English, too public school even, too Mr Darcy, a role he played on television in the Jane Austen send-up recently. (Coveney 2009)

Coveney then abandons at least explicit comparisons to fall back on the play itself and its enduring quality, "This *Streetcar's* qualities lie not so much in performance as in the revelation of a still ground-breaking dramatic, almost filmic, deliquescent structure and poetry" (Coveney 2009), but of course the citation of even the word "film" in the review re-introduces the comparison to its performances. Of the same production, the dean of British theatre criticism, Michael Billington too would rather

discuss the play than the performances. Writing in the *Guardian*, even as he notes his reservations about this revival, he extols the Williams script, since the “play is so inexhaustible that it is always worth seeing” even in a seriously flawed production and so, “One ends up marveling again at Williams’s play, with its delicate verbal echoes” (29 July 2009).

Most European productions, however, can’t quite master or even understand the sensibility of the American south, the melting pot that is Post-World War II New Orleans, so that any production is inevitably at least a cultural translation. This often poses a handicap to overcome, when it is, by localizing the play. Even more daunting is the collaboration of the original dramatic team, film and stage, that put an indelible mark on the future to suggest that the 1947 theater work and the 1951 film are the most powerful, the most influential, and finally the most intimidating work in the history of performance. It is that shadow, presumably, that stagings like that by Lee Breuer, even as a veteran American director, but not a disciple of “The Method” or of psychological dramaturgy, has tried to avoid in 2011, and perhaps it is the surest way to avoid the inevitable confusions of a play set in America’s most French city. For Breuer his aesthetics of estrangement might avoid the pitfalls of other European productions and instead open up the poetic, stylized, magical language that marks, that dominates the work of Tennessee Williams to new audiences.

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Стенли Е. Гонтарски

Позоришне изведбе **Трамваја званог жеља**: „Не желим реализам“

Резиме

Овај рад истражује неке од најпознатијих позоришних поставки познатог комада Тенеси Вилијамса из 1947, *Трамваја званог жеља*. Чињеница да су режисери овог комада у позоришту били Елија Казан, Ингмар Бергман, Лукино Висконти, Лоренс Оливије, Жан Кокто, међу осталима, доказ је његове привлачности. То је била прва америчка драма која је 2011. била постављена на сцену Молијерове куће, славне Комеди Франсез, у њеној триста тридесет година дугој историји! Али, ипак је филм у режији Елије Казана, из 1951, поставио будуће стандарде глумцима. Марлон Брандо као Стенли Ковалски и Вивијен Ли као Бланш Дибоа, остали су као модел глуме. Филм је, у односу на позоришни комад, омогућио испољавање више лиричности и сложености карактера. Филм, који је брзо обишао свет, „постао је једнако добар, ако не и бољи од комада,“ и превазишао утицај сценске поставке.

Кључне речи: Тенеси Вилијамс, *Трамвај звани жеља*, светске изведбе, позориште, Кокто, Бергман, Висконти, Казан, филм, глумци.

Appendix A: Introduction by Jean Cocteau

[French translation and adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (*Un Tramway nommé Désir*. Paris: Bordas, 1949. 7–9). Translated and previously published in English by Jean Kontaxopoulos.]

Nothing is more significant of our times than following the course of a stage play. The course of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is all the more interesting since I have followed it very closely, translating Tennessee Williams's work word for word. Contrary to what some critics imagine, Tennessee Williams is a writer searching the depths of existence and he does not achieve this with undisciplined writing. Further, he is very well acquainted with the literary world and is not unaware of the treasure of our most famous melodramas, from *Courrier de Lyon* to *Deux Gosses*. He likes this naïve art, which nurtured a Rimbaud in the theatre of Charlesville. What they reproach him for is an impeccable presentation. In New York, London or Paris, wherever the play enjoyed a triumph, its course was the same. Negative reviews. An enthusiastic public. Could one surmise that the theatrical intelligencia had lost all sensitivity and could not judge a spectacle other than on the basis of predetermined ideas and prejudices, this occurring not in one city only but in all three? The press spoke much about rapes. Strange. Where did it see them? In a husband who reconciles himself with his wife? In Stanley, who takes advantage of Blanche's weakness in a scene when she resists him only for form's sake? Must the conclusion be drawn that the individuals who have undertaken to inform us on matters of public spectacle see and hear such a work with closed eyes and inattentive ears? I would not now have written these few lines if the theatregoing public had to assume the role of a law court. However, the trial has already been won at the higher court of appeal, thanks to the

verdict of the crowd. It thus behoves Paris to be more careful! It often takes pleasure in making fun of Picasso. But Paris's face looks increasingly like the ones depicted in this painter's works, where a nose is put in place of the ears and a mouth in place of the eyes.

Appendix B: Marketing Williams

An entire study could be conducted on the marketing of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, particularly in terms of the imagery used to advertise the work--for stage productions, book jackets, and the film, especially but not exclusively in Europe--but suffice it to say here that the European posters below seem to have two, repeated marketing strategies among them, sex and the Antebellum South, and often at least two versions of the poster were issued in each language, one with each theme and both finally tangential or peripheral to the film and to the themes of the Williams play:

Pure passion between a man and a woman, who are not so easily identified in the poster. What the image depicts is not aggression, not violation, not rape, but consensual and perhaps glorious passion, as the female's suspended left leg suggests eager participation. The image may not be Marlon Brando (that is, Stanley Kowalski) and is almost certainly not Vivien Leigh (that is, Blanche DuBois) but that of the Kowalskis in a scene of reconciliation, even as Vivien Leigh is the poster's headliner. Kim Hunter (Stella Kowalski), presumably the subject of the image and who also won an Academy Award, is either not mentioned at all on the poster or mentioned in the smallest possible type.

Imagery of the Antebellum American South (1860s) with actors identifiable as Brando and Leigh in this rendition, but the imagery seems to evoke not post World-War II New Orleans, but Tara, the plantation outside of Atlanta, Georgia featured in *Gone with the Wind*. Both posters are, however, adapted from film images (see stills below), the latter generating said Antebellum imagery. With less exposed flesh, these later images emphasize the Oscars and seem geared to a broader, perhaps more family audiences.







