

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof – Response to Reviews and film

1. The film, directed by Richard Brooks, while different from the play particularly in the absence of the homosexuality conflict, more closely mirrors the Broadway Act Three than the original Act Three. Based on watching the film, was director Elia Kazan of the Broadway production right? Does Big Daddy need to return in the third act? Does Maggie need to be softened and Brick seen as more compliant? Which version of the end of the play do you prefer and why?
2. Respond to the appropriate prompt for audience, actor or director.

For Audience: All three critics allude to issues of communication being at the heart of this drama. It may not have a big “theme” like O’Neill or Miller, but is a “drama of people who refuse to face the truth of life.” Mendacity, truth and ugly little secrets abound. Using the critics as a starting point, explain what truths are revealed by the play/film and how they are revealed.

For Actors: All three critics allude to excellent acting occurring in the productions of the play or film. Atkinson gives credit to pretty much the whole cast, Puccio singles out Burl Ives as Big Daddy as the show stealer, and Brantley credits Anika Noni Rose for commanding the stage as Maggie in the 2008 Broadway production and Scarlett Johansson in the 2013 production. Choose any actor in the film and critique their performance. Be specific in what they do well, what left you wanting more or something different, what worked as character driven performance or what failed.

For Directors: All three critics allude to the fact that there is little plot in this play – it is driven by conversation and human interaction. How well does the director of the film, Richard Brooks, manage the dialogue? How does the pacing work? What does he demand of his performers to keep the audience focused on what is going on? Is Puccio right when he says “the dialogue is so absorbing and the acting so intense, we hardly notice that 108 minutes go by or that there is a whole lot less to the plot than meets the eye.” What can you say about the direction of the film that allows that to happen? Consider how and when the actors move, how they are lit, the sound design, the set design, etc.