



FOREWORD

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More than fifty years after it was first performed, Tennessee Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) continues to delight theatergoers and drama critics, not to mention teachers of literature throughout the Western world, who never tire of featuring it on their syllabi, from high school to the highest reaches of academe. Similarly, more than fifty years after its release, Elia Kazan's film *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) continues to fascinate moviegoers, film-buffs and cinephiles everywhere, inside and outside of academe.

Once Elia Kazan had accepted Tennessee Williams's rather pressing offer to direct the film, the director set to work. His first problems were actually technical ones: how to adapt for the cinema a play which he considered to be already "perfect"? His successive directorial choices—all of which he did not necessarily retain—summarize his various tactics of staging desire. Even though he did choose to shoot some scenes on location, such as the visually sumptuous opening at the New Orleans train station or the intimate sequence between Blanche and Mitch on Lake Ponchartrain, Kazan mostly decided to preserve the original medium's acute representation of a claustrophobic atmosphere. Belle Reve plantation would finally not be shown on screen. But the presence of Vivien Leigh, who had already started *Gone with the Wind* in 1939, contributed to keep vibrantly alive the Southern backdrop. Even the cuts imposed by the Breen Office—concerning mostly the play's direct allusions to Allan Grey's homosexuality and Blanche's rape by Stanley—could not dim the artful staging of the literally painful vitality of desire.

The movie came out in 1951 to overwhelming critical acclaim, it was also an enormous popular success which won British Miss Leigh a second Academy Award for portraying yet another problematic southern Belle. Today, Marlon Brando's strangely feline performance on screen proves to be as riveting as ever. Even the moral undertones of the altered final scene when the villain is supposedly punished eventually hark back to the first sensuous stairway scene. The circulation of desire between Stella and Stanley was then so intense that the spectator just could not believe in its sudden demise.

The play and the film have so much raw power that exegetes are always finding new and interesting angles of analysis to sink their teeth into. At least that is what the fourteen authors of these fourteen pieces humbly hope they have demonstrated in this tenth issue of *Cercles*. As the parentheses in our general title indicate, we believe that *A Streetcar Named Desire* is very much about desire—among a thousand other things—but by no means did we dictatorially impose the theme. Some of our collaborators

chose to concentrate on the play, others on the film, others still on the differences and similarities between the play and the film. There is also, of course, Andre Previn's opera *A Streetcar Named Desire* to consider. But all wondered about the exciting challenges brought by the *mises en scène* of Blanche, Stanley, Mitch, Stella, and so on, and about how the least directorial choice produces meaning.

In keeping with *Cercles's* increasingly international vocation, our critics come from both sides of the Channel and both sides of the Atlantic, and ten of our fourteen papers are in English; hence this untranslated foreword. We wish to offer our particular thanks to Robert F. Gross, Felicia Hardison Londré, and Jacqueline O'Connor who came to Rouen all the way from the United States to take part in the conference (held at Rouen University on 14 and 15 November 2003) these papers commemorate.