“What’s Opera, Doc?: André Previn’s Streetcar and the Specter of the Burlesque”

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Tennessee Williams’s concept of a “plastic theatre,” likened to Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk, or total theatre, resuscitated the Aristotelian precept that theatre is composed of more than just a script but also of a performance involving the artistic interplay of poetic cadence, thematic music, suggestive lighting, and extradiatgegetic stage effects. A revolutionary concept in American theatre at the time, which had up till then shared its allegiance between domestic realism and symbolic expressionism, Williams’s plastic theatre attempted to fill the divide, opening the American stage up to freer theatrical forms, so as to allow for the psychological mimesis that expressionism often took to its extremes, while continuing its love affair with sociofamilial issues to which audiences could more readily relate. To be sure, his plastic theatre was at the heart of his success both on Broadway, where it fused psychosocial representation and satisfied the needs of a play “to speak” to and for various American audiences, and in Hollywood, where its metalanguage of gesture, mood, and music adapted itself readily to the fluid expressionism of the celluloid eye.

Unlike similar experiments with dramatic representation in Williams’s predecessors, such as O’Neill, Wilder, or Anderson, whose experimental plays often sacrificed a recognizable social message for a psychologically esoteric one, Williams’s plastic theatre successfully democratized the stage. While many of these plays found new life on the big screen, as evidence of their mass public appeal, several also enjoyed a rejuvenated existence in media perhaps more discerning than Hollywood or Broadway. That Williams’s Summer and Smoke would find extended life in Lee Hoiby’s celebrated opera or his A Streetcar Named Desire in Valerie Bettis’s successful ballet certainly attests to this fact. It was precisely this plasticity in Williams’s theatre that attracted composer André Previn to adapt Streetcar recently for the operatic stage: “I always thought [Streetcar] was an opera that was just missing the music, with all the excesses of lust and madness in the plot.”

1 Streetcar, it seemed to him, was a universal story, successful no matter what the media.
The problem Previn and librettist Philip Littell confronted in transforming Williams's steamy play into an opera, however, was maintaining the play's social balance, for though *Streetcar* does indeed exude lust and foment madness, it established its place in the American canon principally by its democratic aesthetics: anyone in the play could be considered the tragic hero, even Stanley, depending on how the play was performed. Elia Kazan intuited this balance in the play from the start; and though he favored Stanley over Blanche, making her appear as a drunken, promiscuous home-wrecker whose rape in the penultimate scene was greeted at times with cheers from certain members of the audience, Kazan knew that Blanche also had to appear desperate enough to attenuate Stanley's claim to Napoleonic patriarchy. Attesting to this malleability, Harold Clurman's reinterpretation of the play for the National Company's road tour in 1948-50 restored Blanche to tragic hero status by making her the delicate victim of a callous and machiavellian Stanley, and whose machinations throughout the play do not warrant his raping of her in the end. In short, Williams's play is most rewarding for its flexibility: the tragic hero earns our sympathy because her/his tragic loss in the end (for Blanche, her sanity; for Stanley, potentially his marriage) is equally the fault of the other as well as of the self (for Blanche, her refusal to accept modernity; for Stanley, his undiscerning indulgence in it). And what modern audiences were offered through Blanche's nostalgic arias and Stanley's vulgar diatribes was precisely this dialectical voice of America and its struggle to balance its traditional agrarian principles with its modern industrialized desires.

First, there was the question of the libretto. In paring the play's 17,000 words down to 7,500, as Richard Dyer has noted, while attempting to remain faithful to the play's message, Littell was faced with an operatic conundrum: if Stanley's lines are to be cut down to their inarticulate essentials—losing in the process their powerful and hypnotic rhythms, which help afford Stanley his brutal attractiveness in the play—how could his lack of presence in the music maintain his vital opposition to Blanche on the stage? In other words, how could his powerfully illiterate lines in the play be pulled off in an opera without them somehow making him appear unintentionally comic or diminished? Next, in putting Williams's play and Littell's libretto to music, Previn was forced to make another difficult choice: who would be his hero, who his villain? While an actor can be directed into interpreting lines, making the performances of a play only partially limited by its script, an opera
singer’s accessibility to interpretation, though undeniably a possibility, is much more bound by the score since the music which vehicles the text is already itself an interpretation of it.

Though musical language is without question as open to hermeneutics via interpretive performance as is a sign-based one, a libretto (particularly one built upon a pre-existing source that enjoyed an interpretive life of its own) is potentially less so. Because Williams’s language carried such an important part of the play’s social message, and Littell was legally obliged by Williams’s estate not to alter the original dialogue beyond the necessities of the medium,⁵ Previn would have had to make Stanley’s musical voice as appealing as his dramatic one in order to maintain Williams’s characterization. Yet how was he to capture in music the modernist beauty of Stanley’s vernacular when contrasted with the dreamy voice of Blanche? To be sure, while Blanche’s arias in the play cried out for being set to music, Stanley’s grunts, snorts and grammatical blunders did not, preventing Previn from “selling” Stanley to the operatic audience who came for the music as much as for the story. By Blanche’s sheer musical dominance over Stanley onstage, both in the length of her arias and in the suggestive music that accompanies them, Stanley is thus reduced to foil, even burlesque status.⁶

I

When transforming a play into an opera, it is necessary to remove at least two-thirds of the dialogue, for it “takes far longer to sing a sentence than to speak it,” with operatic subtlety coming finally not from the words but from the music.⁷ For the most part, the cuts which librettist Philip Littell made do not drastically alter the plot, yet they do increase the proportion of text given to Blanche and reduce the strength of Stanley’s counterpoint to her aristocratic airs. And, as any opera lover knows, the character with the most speaking-time onstage will unconditionally earn the audience’s sympathies, even if that character is cast as the villain. How Previn and Littell accomplished this in the opera of Streetcar can be found in the text of the very first scene in which the audience finds Blanche and Stanley alone together. In Williams’s play, this action takes place in Scene Two, just after Stanley has discovered that Stella’s inheritance was squandered.

In Williams’s text, Stanley establishes the legitimacy of his distrust of Blanche with his famous “Napoleonic code” speech:
Stanley: In the state of Louisiana we have the Napoleonic code according to which what belongs to the wife belongs to the husband and vice versa. For instance, if I had a piece of property, or you had a piece of property—
Stella: My head is swimming!
Stanley: All right. I’ll wait till she gets through soaking in a hot tub and then I’ll inquire if she is acquainted with the Napoleonic code. It looks to me like you have been swindled, baby, and when you’re swindled under the Napoleonic code I’m swindled too. And I don’t like to be swindled.\(^8\)

Though the theatre audience might find Stanley grotesquely comic here (especially when Blanche’s “treasure chest of a pirate,” containing “Genuine fox fur-pieces,” “ropes” of pearls, and a “crown for an empress” (S 1:274-75) turns out to hold fake furs and costume jewelry) and would probably agree with Stella that he is being “stupid and horrid” (S 1:275), we are later led into sympathizing with his anger. For while he cannot blame Blanche for bleeding the family of its fortune, he certainly can equate her fake jewels with her false intentions, and Blanche does not help herself any when she shows us that she is intended on winning her sister’s favors at Stanley’s expense. Yet, when Blanche enters the room to find her trunk “has exploded” (S 1:277), we begin equally identifying with her sense of loss, of having her private things violated (a foreshadowing of her rape), especially her faded love letters, which the touch of Stanley’s “hands insults” (S 1:282). In short, the scene reveals Williams’s concern with the dynamics of social balance between the play’s two worlds, where both of his characters have something valuable to lose in the interests of the other; if altered, as it is in Previn’s opera, this precious balance would distort the audience’s perception of the scene’s dramatic message.

In Previn’s version of this scene, the dynamics of Blanche and Stanley’s relationship are modified from the start, even before Blanche’s entrance. We find, for instance, that the objective, legalistic language Stanley uses in explaining the Napoleonic code to Stella in the play becomes more informal and subjective in Littell’s libretto: “what belongs to you belongs to me... .”—no longer “to the wife” and “to the husband.”\(^9\) Similarly, Stanley’s original “vice versa” descends toward the more illiterate “vicey versa” (P 57), wrongly turning his legal language toward the ludicrous. What is most telling, however, is that Blanche even
prevents Stanley in the opera from repeating his Napoleonic code speech, thus diminishing the foundation of his intuitive distrust. While the opera’s audience can at least understand Stanley’s motivation for feeling “swindled,” his position vis. Blanche is greatly weakened, and his witty intelligence all but removed.

This imbalance is further exacerbated by the various cuts in the dialogue that favor Blanche and reduce Stanley’s language, both its presence and its signification, to minimalist levels. To be sure, Stanley’s language is important in establishing not just his character but also his voice, for though his words continually border on the vulgar, they ring truer than Blanche’s in their sincerity. And in a country that mixes the simplicity of Puritan plain-speak with the vulgarization of post-revolutionary English, Stanley’s “You’re damn tootin’ I’m going to stay here” (S 1:276) is simultaneously Separatist in its clarity and Republican in its sentiment. The driving force of his working-class vernacular is neutered by Littell’s more refined rendering: “You’re darn right, I am” (P 62). Furthermore, what audiences saw in Stanley and admired was precisely his ability to reduce Blanche’s rhetorical flourish to its bare bones, and this vital trait is equally diminished in the libretto. In Williams’s play, Blanche first addresses Stanley eloquently, with her “Hello, Stanley! Here I am, all freshly bathed and scented, and feeling like a brand new human being!” to which his only response is, “That’s good” (S 1:276). Then, when Blanche postulates that she “understand[s]” (and not “heard”) that “there’s to be a little card party to which we ladies are cordially not invited,” Stanley, refusing unconditionally to enter into her discourse with a reply of an equally elaborate nature, retorts with a simple “Yeah?” (S 1:276)—not “Yes” but rather its vulgarization; not in the affirmative but rather in the rhetorical. In the opera, the first exchange is reduced to “Hello Stanley. Do you mind?” with the stage direction “coyly” replacing all the initial, more complex subtext; and both of Stanley’s replies are cut (P 63). The loss of Stanley’s laconic yet dramatically-charged replies makes the operatic version of his character appear weaker.

Once Williams’s Blanche finally recognizes that her playful attempt to warm up to Stanley through a mixture of highfalutin phrasing and sexual flirtation will not work (Stanley refuses to button up her dress, for example), she tries another way, now speaking his language: “May I have a drag on your cig?” (S 1:277). While her lingo is Stanley’s (learned, perhaps, from such cinema vixens as Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, and Mae West, or from the bars she no doubt frequented in Laurel), her grammatical
modal is without doubt the English teacher’s; unlike Stanley, who will never be able to affect her discourse, Blanche can slum, but she cannot mask her breeding entirely.10 In the opera, she has no need to, for, despite Stanley’s sarcastic commentæ“What could that be, I wonder?” (P 64)æin response to Blanche’s saying that she will have a favor to ask of him, Stanley willingly buttons the dress, thus leading to a much earlier moment of their physical contact than the play calls for. Stanley, prompted by this new stage direction, docilely “fumbles with the buttons on her dress” (P 65), making Blanche’s comment, “Oh, you men, with your big hands” (P 65), all the bolder. In this episode, not only does Stanley lose his will to resist Blanche’s flirtatious machinations, but he even becomes uncharacteristically shy in her presence. The stage directions read: “He finishes. She turns around. They are too close. They turn away from each other” (P 65).

Though Williams’s Stanley speaks plainly, his speech is not without its literary merits. If Blanche describes Stanley as “simple, straightforward and honest, a little bit on the primitive side” (S 1:279), for him (and many American men in general) that is more a compliment than an insult. He speaks his mind and he speaks it clearly. Nothing gets lost in translation, even when he attempts to use figurative language. While it is true that Stanley could never counterfeit Blanche’s voice as she does his, there is still philosophical sentiment present, and even double-entendre, both of which help to identify his language as being free from Blanche’s Euro-pomp but without sacrificing its intelligence. When, for example, Blanche goes “fishing for a compliment” (S 1:278) in the play, Williams’s Stanley says bluntly,

I don’t go in for that stuff. [...] I never met a woman that didn’t know if she was good-looking or not without being told, and some of them give themselves credit for more than they’ve got. I once went out with a doll who said to me, “I am the glamorous type, I am the glamorous type!” I said, “So what?” (S 1:278)

Though surely not Shakespeare in expression, its sentiment has kernels of naked truth on par with those of Lear’s Fool—cold, callous, devoid of parsing, but arguably honest. Both his humor and his keen observations, however, are removed from this scene in the opera, again eliminating any sign of his countering wit and mental agility, for Littell unfortunately reduces this explanation to: “I don’t go in for stuff like that” (P 65). While Littell’s line still
conveys Stanley’s resistance to Blanche’s tactics, the bulk of Stanley’s power of observation is lost. In fact, rather than being a sparring partner, one who makes no secret of the fact that he sees Blanche for what she really is, the opera’s Stanley becomes considerably more passive, dominated by his sister-in-law’s far superior intellect.

Furthermore, though Stanley’s words in the play seemingly lack apparent subtext, they do not; and any cut made in the libretto which removes this subtext inevitably denudes Stanley’s dual role as victim and victimizer. In the play, even Blanche intuitively the liminal danger of his sexually-charged allusion to her statement, “To interest you, a woman would have to—”: “[slowly] Lay ... her cards on the table” (S 1:279). The colloquial expression becomes at once an echo of the determinism established by the earlier references to the poker night to come and a foreshadowing of the actual rape. All allusion and innuendo, and thus significance, in this phrase is lost in the opera, as Previn has Stanley cut Blanche off (she no longer trails off with a vaguely inviting gesture) and removes any hint of the ellipsis or of Williams’s stage direction “slowly” in his reply: “Lay her cards on the table” (P 65). In fact, Stanley sings this line rapidly, as two eighth-notes, followed by an eighth-note triplet, then two more eighth-notes in operatic terms, a throw-away line. Along these same lines, Stanley’s somewhat witty phrase about Blanche’s “admirer” who presented her with her furs: “He must have had a lot of—admiration!” (S 1:278) disappears entirely from the opera, once more leaving Stanley duller, in every sense of the term.

To be sure, Stanley speaks for a majority of Americans (and not just men) who despise affectation, who look upon language as a means to dupe, to swindle, to obfuscate. In theatrical terms, Stanley’s primitive language imports Republican idealism to Streetcar, tempering his purely villain status with winning jingoist comments like his being “one-hundred-per-cent American” (S 1:374), a line that appealed to many post-WW II veterans like Stanley. And yet, Blanche, in admitting that she “fib[s] a good deal” (S 1:281, card pun intended), also manages to avoid being the antagonist. In displaying human frailty behind her affected language, Blanche reveals herself to be as much the victim of social injustices as Stanley. While he must be the Cold Warrior, to borrow Suzanne Clark’s term, Blanche must be the coquette and the vamp simultaneously: “All right,” she says, “Cards on the table. That suits me [...]. After all, a woman’s charm is fifty per cent illusion, but when a thing is important I tell the truth [...].” (S
1:281; card pun intended again). Williams’s text gingerly balances the power struggle in the scene (and in the play) against our favoring one character over the other, and his language here plays a major role in establishing and maintaining that equilibrium. Were it ever to be altered, even slightly, the play would being teetering unfavorably in one direction. In the operatic version, where that alteration is made, that direction could only be toward Blanche.

II

Williams’s Stanley, then, is so greatly reduced in Littell’s libretto that he risks disappearing altogether. Even his longest line in the opera’s sceneawl “I have a lawyer acquaintance who will study these out. A man has to take an interest in his wife’s affairs specially now that she’s going to have a baby” (P 77)ã£ails to elicit from the audience more than the casual awareness that his presence onstage is needed essentially to feed Blanche her winning lines. Rodney Gilfry, the baritone who sang Stanley’s role in the first production, understood how he was to play second fiddle to Blanche: “Stanley speaks in utterances like an animal, so my part doesn’t have long lyrical passages. ... Blanche gets all the arias.” With all of his spoken interventions in this scene, save this last one, being no longer than one sentence, how could he be perceived as being anything but Blanche’s foil?

Such textual reductions themselves are not solely at fault in altering the play’s originally-constructed balance, however. Even Terry Teachout, despite his harsh criticism of the opera, lauds Littell’s libretto for remaining “impressively true to [the play’s] spirit.” Rather, it is the manner in which Previn scored the lines that Stanley’s presence onstage is finally diminished. With many of his lines here delivered in recitative, if Stanley has not entirely lost the war of words, then he most certainly loses the war of melodic domination, for as Teachout rightly notes, “... no normal listener, even in the age of supertitles, attends more than casually to the verbal music of an opera.” In a play like Streetcar, where the verbal music of both characters’ spoken lines vehicles the play’s social message, Previn’s transposition to aural music through an operatic score further reduced the play to a one-man, or more accurately, a one-woman show.

Blanche’s music in this scene makes use of a great range of expressive devices and contains some appealing, accessible
melodies, whereas Stanley’s is generally written to imitate natural, rapid speech rhythms—“tonal but tuneless *aria* so.” His vocal line in this scene remains mostly in the middle part of a baritone’s range. The tessitura in this excerpt is typical of the scene (P 67):

**Scene p. 67**

However, on two occasions, Stanley’s vocal line does branch out: he begins his question, “What’s them underneath?” (P 70), on a low B♭, and more strikingly, the second syllable of “baby” rises to the F♯ above the bass clef (sung in falsetto on the Decca recording, presumably, and logically, as Previn intended, making it more soft and touching than the rest of Stanley’s music in the scene) (P 77):

**Scene p. 77**

Despite these two brief exceptions, Stanley’s music remains unvaried. The combined lack of a sustainable melody in his interjections in this scene, coupled with the lack of vocal prowess he is permitted to display, contributes to making him largely forgettable to both Blanche and, it would seem, to the audience.19

Blanche’s music, on the other hand, is often in the higher part of a soprano’s tessitura (making it more spectacular), particularly when she is angry at Stanley for taking her letters, when she is emotionally moved in explaining how Belle Reve was lost, and also when she flirts openly with Stanley. (For examples from the score, please refer to Appendix A.) Her music is more varied, containing both more drawn out, melodious lines (e.g., her flirtation) and more rapid sections in which the orchestra plays chromatic, percussive chords (e.g., the loss of Belle Reve). Beyond the melodic line and tessitura, Previn also uses the music in more subtle ways to convey her personality and the relationship between the characters. As Blanche determines with her text the direction this scene takes, with Stanley rather meekly complying, she also directs the musical structure of the scene. The key signature for this scene is C-major. Blanche deviates from this straightforward tonality in nearly all of her interventions, introducing frequent alterations. Stanley, on the other hand, takes virtually no tonal initiatives. He either continues in whatever key Blanche has finished her previous statement in (she frequently returns to C-major in the final words of her interjections), or reverts on his own
back to C-major. His musical voice in this scene thus reflects the same docile lack of imagination and initiative as his actions. (Please see Appendix B for examples.)

Stanley’s rhythms reflect a similar lack of assertiveness. While Blanche’s line contains many drawn-out rhythms, adding emphasis and dramatic flair to her words, Stanley sings mostly eighth-notes, with only the final words of his lines being slightly elongated. His rhythms are close to those of speech, thus emphasizing the laconic and plain-spoken nature he demonstrates in the play, though without its verbal music. Only two minor exceptions break up Stanley’s rhythmical monotony in this scene. The first is when Blanche says that she will have a favor to ask of him, and he sarcastically comments, “What could that be, I wonder?” (P 64). The “be” here is slightly held on a dotted quarter note (and is further stressed by being a perfect fourth higher than the notes on either side of it), and the word “wonder” is highlighted with its two quarter-notes:

Scene p. 64

Again, this line distinguishes itself only slightly from the others as its setting emphasizes its sarcastic meaning.

The second example of rhythmic initiative on Stanley’s part in this scene coincides with his attempt to take charge of the course of the conversation. His line, “How about we cut the re-bop?” (P 68), is set as two eighth-note triplets followed by two standard eighth-notes. The more rapid first six notes are all on the same note, a C-sharp, and the first syllable of “re-bop” rises to an E. Previn has placed an accent above each note of the phrase, which is to be sung forte. These dynamics, combined with the fact that the line is set in the upper-middle section of a baritone’s tessitura, create the impression that Stanley is raising his voice. It is also worth noting that while Stanley’s C-sharp is borrowed from Blanche’s preceding line, his phrase is accompanied by great dissonance (even bitonality) in the orchestra; and for the first time in the scene, he introduces his own tonal alteration, as the second syllable of “re-bop” occurs on a C-natural:

Scene p. 68

Simply put, when Stanley breaks out of his docile mode in this scene, his music similarly shows more variation. Yet this assertiveness comes much later in the opera than in the play, and in
a much more brutal way so as to suggest that this Stanley, an
unthinking lout, only confronts Blanche when he realizes that she
has been playing games with him, and then only in sheer volume
of his voice, whereas the play’s Stanley not only sees through
Blanche’s game from the start but enjoys countering it with his
own version of the agon.

Conclusion

Williams, of course, knew the power of the libretto in an
opera, having written two himself, Heavenly Grass or the Miracles
at Granny’s21 and Lord Byron’s Love Letter.22 No small
aficionado of opera himself, Williams also understood the power of
music to vehicle a message; Streetcar’s “blue piano” and
Varsouviana are clear evidence of that. But he was also wary of
how the medium could alter the message of a text, having once
warned Kazan in a letter during the rehearsals of Streetcar not to
cast Stanley as the “black-dyed villain” because there “are no
‘good’ or ‘bad’ people,” just individuals “who are activated more
by misunderstanding than malice.”23 He professed a similar
sentiment when rebuffing Look magazine’s wish to have the play’s
cast reproduce for the camera Thomas Hart Benton’s celebrated
1948 painting of the “Poker Night” scene; though being all for
the publicity stunt at first, Williams quickly rescinded once Jessica
Tandy explained to him that she felt the painting favored Stanley’s
side of the play, disrupting its inherent balance. Perhaps for this
reason alone, Williams, too, would be critical of Previn’s opera, for
if Benton apotheosized Stanley, then Previn certainly does
Blanche.

Previn’s own acknowledgement of this fact is perhaps most
telling. As he told opera critic Barry Paris, “I looked at the [1951
Kazan] film before I wrote note one and not since, because it’s
dangerous. The emphasis got switched when everybody’s
consciousness became suffused with Brando’s performance. The
play is really about her, and she has an absolutely enormous part
in the opera.”24 Previn later echoed these sentiments to opera
critic Jesse Hamlin:

Some people think very critically about Blanche, but I don’t
... I find her a heartbreaking character ... There’s no way
for that girl to redeem her life ... In the movie, when she’s
led off by the doctor, Alex North’s score ... goes into really
triumphant music, and I never understood that ... it's a genuine tragedy, and I did my best to make it so.  

As a result, while Previn’s opera restores Blanche to her heroic status, it consequently diminishes Stanley’s role as potential victim, permanently casting Streetcar as a psychological case study. If Williams’s play were plastic enough to mold itself to match its era’s desires, then Previn’s opera is fixed as Blanche’s play, turning once-balanced social dialectics into one-sided personal didacticism.

In the final sum, the greatest risk Previn’s opera has is turning Stanley with his primitive language into the all-out villain or the bumbling clown. Though certainly not on par with the burlesque of The Simpsons’ musical parody, Oh, Streetcar!, the operatic version of Streetcar cannot entirely liberate itself of this cartoonish Stanley. As a result, even if Previn cannot directly be accused of lampooning Streetcar as Warner Bros. had done Wagner’s Die Walküre in their What’s Opera, Doc? (with Bugs Bunny introducing many a young Baby Boomer to Wagner’s music and the exploits of Brünnhilde), indirectly he cannot completely escape it either: for when the music is the message and when the aesthetics championed are already etched into the medium’s bourgeois genre, his Stanley will forever be marginalized and the play’s scales irreversibly tipped in Blanche’s favor.

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What could that be, I wonder?

p. 64

(My sister has married a man all right! Ooouu!)

Stanley:

(On furtive savor, Stanley bangs drum u-clair; Blancha plays mock-impressed.)

How a-boat we cut the re-hop?

p. 68
I don't go in for stuff like that.

(exasperated, feeling in the wrong, justifying himself)

A man has to take an interest in his wife's affairs, specially now that she's... 

(She opens her eyes. Stella is in the doorway with the lamp in her hand)

...going to have a baby.
Appendix B

Stanley reverts to C-major (p. 64)

Blanche initiates the return to C-major (p. 66)

Stanley remains in Blanche's key (p. 67)
NOTES

3 Kazan's interpretation, fossilized for us on the Hollywood screen, is considered the production of reference and has thus hindered the growth of Williams's play as much as it has deified it.
5 Philip C. Kolin, *Williams: A Streetcar Named Desire.* *Plays in Production* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 169: "While no musical restrictions were placed upon Previn, librettist Philip Littell had strict rules to follow from the Williams estate which prohibited his rewriting or extensively tampering with Williams's script."
6 As opera critic Daniel Webster noted, "In paring down the work for opera, the creators have subtly shifted the focus even more closely to Blanche. The [set] makes it all a reflection of her distorted vision, her dementia." Qtd. in Kolin, 171.
9 André Previn, *A Streetcar Named Desire: Opera in 3 Acts* (piano/vocal score), based on the play by Tennessee Williams, libretto by Philip Littell (Milwaukee, WI: Schirmer, 1999) 56-57, emphasis added. All further references to the text and music of the operatic version come from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as P.
10 As Stanley says, "Some men are took in by this Hollywood glamour stuff and some men are not" (S 1:279).
11 Perhaps not coincidentally, this line is also weakened in the operatic version (P 223).
13 This line is not in the Penguin edition of the play (p. 137); in the opera, it is reduced to, "All right now, Mister Kowalski. I've got nothing to hide. What is it?" (P 69).
14 Qtd. in Kolin, 173.
15 Gone entirely are such important lines as "If I didn't know that you was my wife's sister I'd get ideas about you! [...] Don't play so dumb. You know
what!” (§ 1:281); once removed, this line no longer informs us of the play’s balance inherent in his later comment, “We’ve had this date with each other from the beginning!” (§ 1:402).

16 Terry Teachout, 57.
17 Terry Teachout, 57.
18 Terry Teachout, 58.
19 Teachout comments at length about Previn’s “singular inability to come to grips, musically, with the character of Stanley Kowalski” whose “elegantly scored music fails to suggest the character’s crude sensibility” (58). While Stanley’s sensuality is weakened vis. Williams’s play, we would argue that Previn’s version of the character is not entirely devoid of personality. For example, the music in the love scenes between Stanley and Stella can be quite sensual (and, not coincidentally, more melodic than his duos with Blanche). In addition, while Stanley’s music does not exude animal charisma in his scenes with Blanche, it does, nevertheless, convey important aspects of his persona. The pattern of the more appealing, melodic music being attributed to Blanche established in the scene analyzed in this paper holds true for the entire opera. While Blanche often sings in a neo-romantic idiom, Stanley’s music is in the expressionist tradition of Alban Berg or of certain works by Igor Stravinsky. One might equate Blanche’s frequently more tuneful, retrospective idiom with her nostalgia for the past, whereas Stanley’s more modern and jarring style likewise helps portray him as the personification of the industrial age. Thus, if Stanley’s sensual appeal largely disappears in Previn’s score (giving Blanche a virtual monopoly over the music and the audience’s favor), Previn still preserves Stanley’s role as Blanche’s stylistic antithesis.

20 For instance, when she says “Enter!” (P 64) or “What’s in the back of that little boy’s mind of yours?” (P 70), and when she bursts into a tirade or flirts at the beginning of the scene.

21 Preserved at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, this “primitive libretto” remains unpublished. See Debusscher’s “Tennessee Williams’s Black Nativity: An Unpublished Libretto,” American Literature in Belgium, Gilbert Debusscher and Marc Maufort, eds. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988) 127-133.

You're puttin' me through HELL-AAAA! .... STELLL-AAAA!
For more of the cartoon's parodied song lyrics, see