

'Cats': The Proclamation of a Future Camp Classic

Featured in 'The Big Lads Film Zine: MUSICALS Edition'

In 1964, Susan Sontag, American writer/critic/bisexual, published her seminal essay, 'Notes on Camp'. In 2019, Oscar-winning director, Tom Hooper directed a film adaptation of the fifth-longest-running-Broadway-show in history: 'Cats'. In Sontag's piece, she lists 58 statements pertaining to the nature, reception and impact of what is 'Camp'. She explains what she believes to be its intricacies - what is and isn't 'camp', how a piece of media can embody the sensibility, and the rules/boundaries of the term. Unfortunately, I do not have time to relate 'Cats' (2019) to each and every one of these 58 points (and trust me, I could). Therefore, I will, instead, include the statements that I believe relate most closely to the Human/Cat/Cockroach-featuring, Taylor-Swift-cameo-having, Idris-Elba-starring future camp classic that is 'Cats'. Let's get started, fellow Jellicle Cats!

1. '(...) the way of Camp is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization.'

If ever a film could be labelled 'artificial', it's bloody 'Cats'. Stylised to such a degree that it was being tinkered with right 'til the last moment, 'Cats' is no Italian-Neo-Realism, 'back-to-its-roots', indie piece of cinema. It's human faces on CGI-furry-cat bodies, sequences of edited-in 'catnip' being sprinkled onto a hoard of felines, all set in a mystical and artificial version of London. It's not real, Big Lads. Cats (2019) did NOT happen. It's as artificial as a bottle of 'Squashies'-flavoured squash.

7. 'All Camp objects, and persons, contain a large element of artifice. Nothing in nature can be campy(...).'

There is no 'Nature', to speak of, in this film. Not a drop of it.

Whatever 'Cats' (2019) is, it is, for better or worse, completely against nature. I'm not saying it's against God, themselves, but, as mentioned, its as fake as the day is new. Mother Nature took the week off when this film got released. I'd be surprised if there's even a non-CGI tree thrown in there. If natural things cannot be camp, and 'Cats' (2019) features less nature than a rainforest destroyed by a teenager doing their maths homework using ChatGPT - well, you do the, er, maths, Big Lads.

18. 'One must distinguish between naive and deliberate Camp. Pure Camp is always naive. Camp which knows itself to be Camp is usually less satisfying.'

The fact that Universal rescinded its 'For your Consideration' for this film, well, doesn't that say it all? A complete lack of self-awareness for what this film is. A disconnect between what some of (but not all) those involved thought they were doing, and what they released. There is, in my opinion, almost a complete lack of what Sontag describes as 'camping' (deliberate campness). When Taylor Swift gets on that big, ol' suspended moon, cat-nip in hand, and sings about how much of a menace Macavity is, she thinks this will get her an Oscar. Or at least a nomination. I really do believe that, and, seemingly, so did Universal. The almost-childlike innocence of this misaligned confidence, well, isn't it just so satisfying?

41. The whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious. (...).'

What could be serious about this film? Judi Dench plays a pissin' Feline Judge/Jury/Executioner, for Christ's sake! It's fun, its free, it's silly! What could be funner than a magical human/cat named Mr. Mistoffelees? Fuck all, I'll tell ya'! Sure, 'Memory' is a bit

serious, a bit hard-hitting, but the whole time Jennifer Hudson is wearing a huge-ass fur coat on top of her already furry cat body. Fun.

53. 'Nevertheless, even though homosexuals have been its vanguard, Camp taste is much more than homosexual taste'.

'Cats' (2019) isn't just for the gays. It's for everyone. It calls to all. You can be any sexuality you want and still get a kick out of watching Idris Elba attempt to be menacing as a slutty (positive) and card-cheating human-cat. Even straight people are allowed to like it! 'Cats' (2019) transcends all taste, it doesn't care about who you love or what pronouns you use. It just cares about cats. Isn't that beautiful?

And to finish off:

58. 'The ultimate Camp statement: it's good because it's awful. (...)'

'Cats' (2019) has a 19% score on Rotten Tomatoes. It was hounded upon release, made a complete mockery of in the press. Those associated with the film were laughed at for their involvement in such a mess. Regarding the film itself, there is no plot (though that stems more from its source material than Mr Hooper) and almost a complete lack of characterisation. The dialogue is clunky and doesn't work. The whole film is pretty much just one transition after the next into the most ludicrous ballads and bops about life as a human-cat. It's truly awful - a film that makes you question the use and role of cinema in our society.

And I fucking love it. It's brilliant. All these massive flaws, every strange minute of its run-time. Every whisker on every human-cat's face. I adore it all. It is completely and utterly singular as a film, in its own genre and cannon. And it's good. It's good because it's oh so bad.