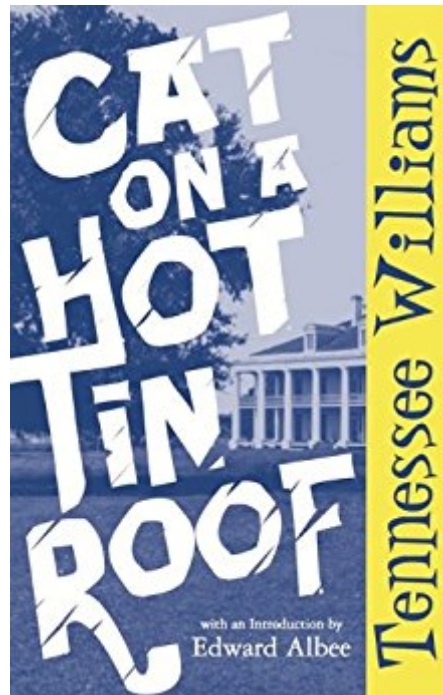


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Cat On A Hot Tin Roof (New Directions Paperbook)



Synopsis

The definitive text of this American classicâreissued with an introduction by Edward Albee (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *A Delicate Balance*) and Williams' essay "Person-to-Person." *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* first heated up Broadway in 1955 with its gothic American story of brothers vying for their dying father's inheritance amid a whirlwind of sexuality, untethered in the person of Maggie the Cat. The play also daringly showcased the burden of sexuality repressed in the agony of her husband, Brick Pollitt. In spite of the public controversy Cat stirred up, it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and the Drama Critics Circle Award for that year. Williams, as he so often did with his plays, rewrote *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* for many yearsâthe present version was originally produced at the American Shakespeare Festival in 1974 with all the changes that made Williams finally declare the text to be definitive, and was most recently produced on Broadway in the 2003-04 season. This definitive edition also includes Williams' essay "Person-to-Person," Williams' notes on the various endings, and a short chronology of the author's life. One of America's greatest living playwrights, as well as a friend and colleague of Williams, Edward Albee has written a concise introduction to the play from a playwright's perspective, examining the candor, sensuality, power, and impact of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* then and now.

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Customer Reviews

This is a superbly written play about that most basic of human issues, the desire to communicate honestly and openly with someone that you care about. At its core, Tennessee Williams' masterpiece is really about nothing more than that. Everyone wants and needs someone to listen to, and accept, you. All of Williams' plays are about lonely people when you come right down to it. However, "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" is unique in that these lonely characters are part of a large family, and at times are literally tripping over each other. What makes us lonely is our inability to communicate with those that we love. It is in that essential human drive that Williams creates the tragedy of this piece. A father knows his son is a closeted gay man; he loves him, but can't get the son to believe or accept that. A wife knows the truth about her husband, but can't make herself believe it. (Actually that last one applies to two wives in the play, for different reasons.) A man faces death, in essence alone, because he can't admit how terrified he is. And the list goes on. These are the stories of the Pollitt family of the Mississippi Delta. Those particulars are different for all of us, but the essential worries and fears of the members of this family are universal, and have been at the heart of a powerful drama for over 50 years. The writing of this play is luminous and gorgeous. In fact, at times it reads like poetry. However, the power in this piece is also due in large part to the structure of this three act play. The first act is almost a solo from the character of Maggie. The second act is a painful and terrifying duet from the characters of Brick and Big Daddy, and the final act is the ensemble number that builds, and then ends on a slow drawn out note.

I may throw the first stone, to paraphrase a Biblical injunction. I still remember the movie posters, featuring Elizabeth Taylor, when this play was first issued as a movie in the 1950s. I neither saw the movie, nor watched a production of the play. Thanks to a recent reading of *The Glass Menagerie* (New Directions Books) I decided that I needed to read more of this quintessential American (and Southern) playwright. "Cat" was first produced in 1955, and would win the Pulitzer Prize. The play is set in the largest mansion in the very heart of the rich farmland of the Mississippi delta, near Clarksville. There are three acts, but the time period is continuous. "Big Daddy" is now 65, and owner of the plantation. He is still rough-hewed, having once been the overseer of the plantation that was owned by two sisters (gays), Jack Straw and Peter Ochello. Homosexuality, a topic in the 1950s, is a theme throughout the play. "Big Daddy's" wife is, sure enough, "Big Mama." They have two sons, Brick

and Gooper, who are each married, respectively, to Maggie and Mae. Each of the women have societal pretenses, one raised in Memphis, and the other Nashville. Gooper is the oldest, and with Mae has five children, with a sixth on the way. Brick and Mae are childless. He is also a serious alcoholic, morose over his lost college athletic glory days, and his relationship with his buddy, Skipper, now dead. The reason for Brick and Maggie's childlessness is that he will not sleep with her and his probable homosexual relationship with Skipper is developed as the play progresses.

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