

# Cat on a Hot Tin Roof by Tennessee Williams

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demands of society in the last act because they are capable of seeing their religious beliefs in sufficient perspective. The intention was to pull certain ideas out of the realm of Taboo and set the average homosexual, who must find himself in one of the four groups represented on the stage, to thinking of his present situation and how it can be bettered.

I was also determined that the play should have a happy ending. It had to presage hope rather than horror because I believe the ultimate destination of homosexuality in this country, and the rest of the world, is hopeful rather than horrible.

A publication of *Game of Fools* (by ONE Magazine of Los Angeles) was favored over a production on the stage for, since its ideas are still somewhat unique on the American scene, it was felt that they could reach more people and remain within their grasp longer in a book than in a series of performances. Whether the book will be suppressed, as were my first two books, by the Post Office Department, our official censor in this country, remains to be seen. It was examined carefully by an attorney for lewd passages and cleared of such possibilities before printing. Because recently even the most reactionary pressure groups in this country have been pounding the propaganda drums heavily to call the attention of Communist countries to our much-touted Freedoms of Speech and the Press, the play's appearance has a world-wide, political timeliness, for with its suppression, these Freedoms of Speech and Press will be revealed as hollow boasts, and a mask shall have been ripped from a hypocrisy the rest of the world needs desperately to see if it exists. If, on the other hand, the book is allowed to circulate freely through the government mails, then even America's most dedicated enemies will be forced to nod admiringly to such a display of equality and preservation of individual rights, as is claimed in this country today. As to who will be the winner in this particular *Game of Fools*, we can only wait and see.

## CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

by Tennessee Williams

(New Directions, N. Y.)

At the dead center of a hurricane — and those of us living on the East Coast of the United States have become very hurricane conscious in recent years — all is still. At the dead center of this play by Tennessee Williams there stands a handsome, alcoholic, ex-football-hero for whom life lost all its savor when his best friend and former team-mate died a suicide, died because Brick — the central figure in the play — was unable to face and accept the nature of their love for each other. After the death of his friend Brick withdraws from the world of normal human contacts more and more, insulating himself from that world by means of alcohol, living within himself on the memory of athletic glories and the memory of a friendship which to him was the one great, good, true thing in his life, but with the corrosive knowledge in his soul that all that made

life meaningful for him is over and gone. Brick is the dead center about which the play's storm revolves.

Brick is married to a gallant young wife who adores him with frank passion. He scorns her quietly, will not touch her, she suffers the tortures of a cat on a hot tin roof. Maggie understands Brick's love for his dead friend very well. In the play's first act she says to him, 'It was one of those beautiful ideal things they tell about in the Greek Legends, it couldn't be anything else, you being you, and that's what made it so sad, that's what made it so awful, because it was love that never could be carried through to anything satisfying or even talked about plainly. Brick, I tell you, you got to believe me, Brick, I *do* understand all about it! I — I think it was *noble*! Can't you tell I'm sincere when I say I respect it? My only point, the only point that I'm making, is life has got to be allowed to continue even after the dream of life is — all — over.' To which Brick replies, 'Not love with you, Maggie, but friendship with Skipper was that one great true thing, and you are naming it dirty!« The ever-undaunted Maggie answers him, 'Then you haven't been listenin', not understood what I'm saying! I'm naming it so damn clean that it killed poor Skipper! — You two had something that had to be kept on ice, yes, incorruptible, yes! — and death was the only icebox where you could keep it . . .'

In the second act Brick's multi-millionaire, rough-diamond of a father attempts to force him to face the truth. Big Daddy, Brick's old man, had started life as a poor boy, had bummed around the country quite a bit, lived in flop houses and hobo jungles as a kid, until two well-to-do plantation owners who lived together as lovers gave him steady work on their place, soon promoted him to foreman and eventually made him a partner in their business enterprise, thus enabling him to lay the foundation of his fortune. Big Daddy knows all the facts of life and is not perturbed by any of them. He cannot understand his son's squeamishness about homosexuality. Nowhere in the play does the desperately juvenile quality of Brick's emotions and attitudes appear as clearly as in the scene with the father who idolizes him, who understands him, who accepts him wholly, and whose love, understanding and acceptance Brick viciously repulses. Nowhere in literature is the sickliness of the conventional reactions to homosexuality displayed so plainly in all their ugliness as in Brick's second act dialogue with his father, a talk which culminates with Brick's venomous revelation to his father of a fact which all the rest of the family has been trying to shield him from — that the old man is suffering from a cancer approaching its last stages.

Around the issue of Brick's unacknowledged homosexuality the rest of the play swirls. Brick has a younger brother, a lout, married to a loutess. These two are the parents of five loutlets. Although Brick is his father's favorite these devotees of Aphrodite Pandemos have arrived at Big Daddy's plantation determined to wrest from the dying man by hook or by crook the lion's share of the inheritance. Maggie and Brick are childless, Brick is a lush, the louts present themselves as models of devotion to their filial and biological duties. (A sixth little «no-neck monster' is on the way.) Brick's wife Maggie is a spirited young woman

of excellent family who, having grown up in poverty, is determined never to be poor again if she can help it. While Brick is utterly indifferent to the threat of disinheritance and possible commitment to an institution for alcoholics and drug addicts, Maggie is determined to fight. At the play's end, knowing that she is ripe for conception, Maggie arranges matters so that Brick is completely cut off from his supply of strong liquor until he has had intercourse with her. We are left with the impression that her stratagem will succeed, but it is also clear that it is only a temporary victory for Maggie in what is a tragic, hopeless emotional situation for both herself and Brick.

With the exception of Brick's brother, Gooper, and his repulsive horde all the characters are unsentimentally but sympathetically presented. The fattest and most appealing part is that of Maggie, the 'cat on the hot tin roof.'

Last night I watched on TV a popular comedian who brought the house down with the following 'gag': 'My wife is a fine girl . . . a little effeminate you know, but really a wonderful girl just the same.' Nothing in the comedian's 'routine' brought forth so loud and long a laugh from the audience as that rather subtle comment on the human female in these United States. Both the joke and the audience reaction seemed a good indication of the extent to which the Yang principle dominates American society — even our women strive for more and more virility. Yet, paradoxically enough, since the death of Colette I do not think that there is a writer anywhere in the world who loves and understands women as well as does Tennessee Williams, an American playwright. The homosexual reader will find Maggie irresistible, and a reminder that homosexuality and misogyny are two very different things, Brick to the contrary notwithstanding.

Since its publication in book form most of the parlor discussion of CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF has centered about the two different versions of the play's third act which the volume contains. We are first given the final act as the author originally wrote it. Then we are given a radically rewritten third act which Mr. Williams prepared for the Broadway audience at the insistence of his director, Kazan.

Understandably, but rather unfortunately, most of the conversation about the play has taken the form of a debate between those who prefer the original last act and those who prefer the Broadway version. But it seems to me that while the ending of the play is dramatic and packed with action most of its meat is contained in Acts One and Two. The final act does not involve at all deeply any of the major values and issues developed in the play, it seems to me.

If CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF has a message I suppose it is that it is braver and better to be a good fairy than to be a self-destroying and other-destroying lush engaged in a battle to the death against his own deepest and truest emotions. But mere self-acceptance is not enough. In order to be a good fairy one must grow up — none of us remains 'a thing of beauty and a boy forever'.

By many, including some of the good critics, CAT is regarded as Mr. Williams best play to date — which is saying a lot. It won both the

Pulitzer Prize and the Drama Critics Award for the season 1954—55, and these are the top honors in the United States. It has been playing to packed houses in New York since March and is still going strong. The general reaction of the public seems to be a rather odd combination of uneasiness with frank enthusiasm for the emotional wallop which the play packs. Mr. Williams has also been widely praised for the justice and honesty with which he has written.

Luther Allen.

## On James Barr's GAME OF FOOLS

It was a surprise on my first visit to a gathering of the 'Kreis' to witness the performance of a play, which although written in America, will in all probability never be produced there. The play in question was the last act (incidentally the only one which lends itself to a studio production and which also contains a theme complete in itself) of James Barr's GAME OF FOOLS. Due to Rudolf Jung's faithful translation, Rolf's excellent direction and acting as well as to the efforts of the entire cast and stage workers the 500 members and guests present from all over the world were able to see acted out on the stage a subject which concerns us all very deeply. It was quite striking here in friendly Switzerland to see depicted the harsh police-methods employed in the United States (and elsewhere) against homosexuals.

RYS.

## From the 'Mattachine Newsletter'

The existence of a homosexual minority, if it does exist, is probably the result of attitudes expressed over centuries by the dominant majority: stemming from religious, moral and legal codes.

These same attitudes and pressures, which sometimes cause homosexual individuals to cloak themselves with feelings of superiority based upon an actual condition of imposed inferiority, are the cause of the existence of minority characteristics among homosexuals, rather than the effect. In other words, if society as a whole had no special attitude about homosexuality, then no significant minority characteristics would develop, and most homosexual problems would not develop as such.