

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof: 60 Years of American Dialogue on Sex, Gender, and the Nuclear Family.

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Cat on a Hot Tin Roof: 60 Years of American Dialogue on Sex, Gender, and the Nuclear Family

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Abstract

This thesis is a two-part work. Its components, a written paper and a one-night symposium/film screening event entitled *Tennessee Williams: Gender Play in 2015 and Beyond*, have been closely coordinated with my dramaturgical research for the February 2015 University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Theater production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The written inquiry is structured around a chronological, selected American production history of *Cat*; this history, rendered in a series of three case studies, will (1) synthesize preexisting analyses of *Cat*'s dramaturgical profile, its impact on American theater, and its position in Williams's oeuvre; and (2) examine the interplay between this body of scholarship's primary foci (e.g., gender, sexual identity, and family dysfunction) and the evolving cultural climate in which its subject, *Cat*, is perennially reinterpreted and restaged. In other words, my thesis reframes *Cat* as a series of inherently American—and potentially unanswerable—questions posed by Williams to his viewers; it then investigates the artistic and critical responses generated by sixty years of public engagement, or “dialogue,” with those questions. Ultimately, each case study will illustrate my central premise: that the value of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* lies in its ability to resonate, both in production design and reception, with the social, sexual, and domestic challenges of the period in which it is produced.

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