

Theme of sexual  
repression in cat on a  
hot tin roof



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Theme of Sexual Repression in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof The play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, written by Tennessee Williams in 1955, portrays the homosexuality through the conversations Brick has with Maggie and Big Daddy. The film *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, by screenwriters Richard Brooks and James Poe released in 1958, removes the homosexuality in the movie. Brick does not know who he is or what his sexual orientation is, and is afraid of not being able to achieve the masculine ideal. Brick represents the American male and an American society unable to confront homosexuality and individuality. The readers of the original play see the homosexuality when Brick talks to Maggie and Big Daddy. Whenever Brick speaks to Maggie about their relationship, Brick distances himself with liquor. He looks for his "click" so he doesn't have to engage with Maggie when she wants sex. In one conversation Maggie has with Brick, she mentions accompanying Brick and Skipper for the public. Maggie and Skipper made love to each other, "dreaming it was you (Brick)." The conversation is started because dead Skipper intervenes in the relationship between husband and wife. This is the scene where Maggie seems to understand that there is potential for feelings toward Skipper in her husband, as her reference to legendary Greek friendship indicates. Maggie says, "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 himself is aware that an intimate friendship between men is rare and is interpreted as homosexual. This sparks Brick's denial of the homosexual elements with his relationship with Skipper. Brick says, "One great good thing which is true!-I had friendship with Skipper.-You

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are naming it dirty! " Maggie responds, " I'm not naming it dirty! I am naming it clean. " Brick thinks homosexuality is associated with disgust. Brick's homosexuality is implied in his love for Skipper. Maggie implies that Skipper is gay and in a sense wants Skipper to be gay because she confesses to Brick that she knows that his feelings for Skipper were " pure. " This can be seen as a way for Maggie to deny the fact that her husband might be gay. Maggie continues to imply Skipper was gay when she admits to Brick that the double dates were more " like a date between you and Skipper. " She also describes brick's lovemaking style as detached and apathetic. This detachment shows he plays his masculine role too well and doesn't understand himself. Tennessee Williams portrays Brick as conveying all the traits of a homosexual: attention to masculinity, indifference to Maggie, and internal feelings of homophobia. While talking to Brick, Maggie continues to imply Skipper's homosexuality. When Brick was hospitalized for a back injury, Maggie and Skipper met. Maggie demanded that Skipper either leave Brick alone with her or make him confess his desire. The two then sleep together. In the scene Maggie says, " In this way, I destroyed him, by telling him truth that he and his world which he was born and raised in, yours and his world, had told him could not be told? " When Big Daddy talks to Brick, Brick is forced to confront his love for Skipper. Big Daddy says, " Why did Skipper crack up? Why have you? " Brick says his relationship with Skipper is " pure" in the play. The term " queer" is used instead of " gay" or " homosexuality" in the play. Maggie also says, " You two had something that had to be kept on ice, yes, incorruptible, yes! " Maggie would like Brick to acknowledge his relationship and not just ignore it. The effect on the reader is to show the play's concern for the nature of the relationship between Brick

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and Skipper. In the movie, the homosexuality is completely removed. In Big Daddy's conversation with Brick any direct verbal acknowledgement of homosexuality was reduced to faint hints. In the film, Maggie denies her relationship with Skipper and convinces Big Daddy that it was a misunderstanding. In the scene where Brick and Big Daddy talk in the film, Big Daddy criticizes Brick for his marital problems and discusses his drinking and total disregard for the family's fortunes. Big Daddy takes his crutch from him so he can talk. Big Daddy says, " Now tell me, what are you disgusted with? " Brick answers, " Mendacity. You know what that is. It's lies and liars. " This is the scene where Big Daddy relates by living with lies during the time he was married to Big Mama. Later in the scene Big Daddy recalls that Brick started drinking when Skipper died. Big Daddy said, " You started drinking with your friend Skipper's death. A thunderbolt claps after his words. Brick while talking about Skipper says, " He was someone for me to lean on, in school and out of it. " Maggie eventually comes in the scene. She is asked to remember the role she played in her husband's relationship with Skipper when they played pro football together on the Dixie Stars team. According to Brick, the emotional relationship between Skipper and Brick aroused Maggie's jealousy. Maggie was seen as a jealous intruder in their close friendship. She tried to keep Skipper from coming between her and Brick. To end the strong affection between Skipper and Brick and question her suspicions about a homosexual relationship between them, Maggie thought she could lead Skipper to sleep with her to arouse her husband's anger at his best friend. This would prove that her suspicions were not true and that Skipper was heterosexual. Big Daddy learns from Maggie that Brick was the last person to speak to Skipper on the phone. Brick admits his responsibility

for Skipper's death because he rejected his friend by hanging up on him. Skipper depended on Brick, but Brick thwarted this dependence. With these changes to the adaptation the film is made more of a traditional love story. In both the film and the original play, the scenes are changed to play towards the goal of the work. The movie wanted to achieve a love story. For this reason, the homosexuality of Skipper and the possible homosexuality of Brick is played down in or taken out of the conversations between Brick, Maggie, and Big Daddy. In the play, Brick call his relationship " pure. " In the movie this is eliminated. What happened between Maggie and Skipper is also changed. Because of this Brick avoids facing the truth alienates himself from Maggie. The way Skipper dies in the movie is different from the way he dies in the play. In the play, Skipper drinks to death. In the film, Brick jumps out of a window because Brick doesn't answer his call. In the play Cat on a Hot Tin Roof sexuality is present when Brick talks angrily to Maggie and Big Daddy. The film removes this completely because Brick never defends his sexuality as " pure. " Brick ignores Maggie throughout the play, but at the end of the film Brick has sex with Maggie. Brick's actions at end of the movie in addition to the few changes remove any doubt in the audience's mind that brick is heterosexual. These changes include: taking out the homosexuality in Brick's conversations; changing the way Skipper dies; and changing Maggie's interaction with Skipper.