

personal english



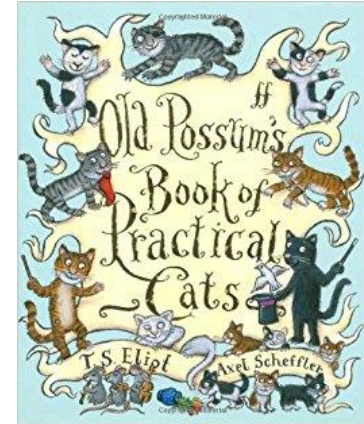
Book #30

Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats by T.S. Eliot

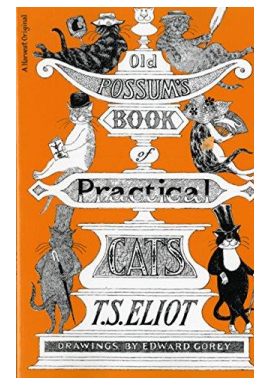
Few people probably know that **T.S. Eliot**, author to such solemn and committed works as *The Waste Land* (1922) and *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) also wrote in the 1930s a playful **poem collection for children**, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. Even fewer people probably know that this poem collection actually provided the basis for one of the best known musicals ever, **Cats**.

Before collecting and publishing them in **1939**, T.S. Eliot had written the poems to be enclosed in letters for his **godchildren**. In those letters, he would refer to himself as 'Old Possum' – hence the title of the book. T.S. Eliot himself illustrated the first edition, even though later the poems would be illustrated also by **Nicolas Bentley** (1940), **Edward Gorey** (1982) and **Axel Scheffler** (2009).

Eliot's verse was set to music in the 1970s by **Andrew Lloyd Webber** and, since the poet's widow, Valerie, immediately fell in love with Webber's work, she gave the blessing for the adaptation of the poems into a musical. This musical, entitled **Cats**, premiered at the **New London Theatre** in May **1981** before getting staged in **Broadway**. As of 2017, *Cats* is the fourth longest-running musical in Broadway history.



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