



OLD VIC  
NEW VOICES



TENNESSEE WILLIAMS  
**SWEET  
BIRD  
OF YOUTH**

**TEACHING RESOURCES**

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# SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH CAST

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**Charles Aitken**  
*Tom Junior*



**Michael Begley**  
*The Heckler*



**Daniel Betts**  
*George Scudder*



**Brid Brennan**  
*Aunt Nonnie*



**Ruari Cannon**  
*Stuff*



**Kim Cattrall**  
*Princess*  
*Kosmonopolis*



**Emily de Cosimo**  
*Woman in Bar*



**Louise Dylan**  
*Heavenly Finley*



**Kurt Kansley**  
*Jackie the Pianist*



**Sean McConaghy**  
*Scotty*



**Katie Meekison**  
*Edna*



**Seth Numrich**  
*Chance Wayne*



**Bryonie Pritchard**  
*Maid*



**Lucy Robinson**  
*Miss Lucy*



**Owen Roe**  
*Boss Finley*



**Violet Ryder**  
*Violet*



**Ryan Saunders**  
*Man in Bar*



**Alistair Scott**  
*Man in Bar*



**Anthony Taylor**  
*Fly*



**Joe Townley**  
*Hatcher*



**John Trindle**  
*Bud*



**David Webber**  
*Charles*

# TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

## HIS STORY

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Born 26 March 1911, Thomas Lanier Williams (later Tennessee) grew up in the southern part of the US; firstly Mississippi then Missouri. He lived with his Southern-Belle mother (Edwina), his overbearing, shoe salesman father (Cornelius), his older sister Rose and younger brother Dakin. Due to a childhood illness, Williams was never as strong as his father would have liked and was mollycoddled by his mother. Initially, Williams was content whilst living in Mississippi, but when they moved to Missouri, it became an unsettled time as the family moved frequently and his parents' marriage was far from happy. However, his upbringing would later provide inspiration for his writing, and his mother, father and sister would emerge as characters in his plays.

Williams had a passion for writing from an early age, being published and winning prizes for his work from 16 years old. At 18, Williams began attending the University of Missouri in Columbia, studying Journalism, where he continued to write poetry, essays, stories, and plays. He didn't complete his degree though as his father withdrew him from the course so he could take a job as a sales clerk with a shoe company. The move back home was detrimental to Williams' health and led to him suffering a nervous breakdown. After some time in hospital, he returned to studying, firstly at the Washington University in St Louis and then at the University of Iowa, where he finally received his degree in English.

During this time, Williams continued to write but struggled to achieve any real success. However, in 1939, he received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation which enabled him to move to New Orleans and work as a writer; he even spent some time working for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer as a screenwriter. It was in New Orleans that he found inspiration for a number of his plays, particularly *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and where he wrote his first commercially successful play, *The Glass Menagerie*. After premièring in Chicago in 1944, the play transferred to Broadway and won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. It is considered to be based closely on Williams' own life, with the main character of Tom representing Williams himself and Amanda (the overbearing mother) being Edwina, his own mother. The play also included a sickly sister, supposedly based on Rose (Williams' older sister) who by this time had been hospitalised after an ineffective frontal lobotomy. The success of his next play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, ensured that Williams was able to pay for Rose's full-time care for the rest of her life. The play also won Williams a second New York Critics Circle Award and a Pulitzer Prize.

Over the next 14 years, Williams moved regularly around the world with his partner, Frank Merlo, and wrote several more successful plays which garnered him an additional New York Critics Circle Award, Pulitzer Prize, three Donaldson Awards and a Tony Award; *Summer and Smoke* (1948), *The Rose Tattoo* (1951), *Camino Real* (1953), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Orpheus Descending* (1957), *Garden District* (1958), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959) and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961). A number of these plays were adapted into well-regarded films which bought his work to a wider audience and increased his popularity.

However, the 1960s saw a change in fortune for Williams. In 1963, his long-term partner, Frank, died from lung cancer; this caused Williams to become steadily more restless and self-destructive. In 1969, his brother had him hospitalised due to his state of health (both mental and physical). Although he wrote a number of literary works during this time (poems, a novel, short stories and his memoir), his dependency on drugs and alcohol meant that his plays never achieved the success they had previously. Often receiving harsh criticism and closing early due to lack of ticket sales, Williams eventually declared in the 1970s that he would never again allow a new play to open in New York.

On 24 February 1983, Tennessee Williams died in his hotel room in New York after choking on a bottle cap whilst in a drugged state. However, he is best remembered for his life's works for, 'Just as his plays launched so many actors and directors, so too were they responsible for young playwrights' entry into the theatre. Mr Williams's luxuriant delight in language, his ability to strip his characters of illusions, his curious alloy of lyricism and violence – these formed his legacy to another generation.' Michiko Kakutani, *New York Times* (6 March 1983)

# TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

## LIFE & WORKS

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- 1911 – Thomas Lanier Williams (later Tennessee Williams) born on March 26 in Columbus, Mississippi
- 1916 – Williams nearly dies of diphtheria
- 1918 – The Williams family move to Missouri
- 1927 – Aged 16, Williams comes third in a writing competition
- 1929 – Williams enrolls at the University of Missouri and is given the nickname Tennessee as it is his father's home state and due to his southern drawl
- 1931 – At his father's insistence, Williams drops out of university and starts working for his father's show company. Williams later enrolls at the Washington University, St Louis but drops out
- 1937 – Williams attend the University of Iowa. He writes a number of plays which are produced at the university including *The Fugitive Kind* and *Candles to the Sun*. Rose, Williams older sister, is hospitalised for schizophrenia
- 1938 – Williams graduates from the University of Iowa
- 1939 – After receiving a £1000 Rockefeller Grant, Williams moves to New Orleans and officially changes his name to Tennessee
- 1940 – *Battle of Angels* is produced unsuccessfully in Boston and New York but is later rewritten as *Orpheus Descending* (play) and *The Fugitive Kind* (film)
- 1943 – A prefrontal lobotomy is performed on Rose but isn't successful. She is left hospitalised for the remainder of her life
- 1944 – *A Glass Menagerie* premieres in Chicago
- 1945 – After transferring to Broadway, *The Glass Menagerie* wins Williams the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play
- 1947 – *A Streetcar Named Desire* opens on Broadway starring Marlon Brando and Jessica Tandy, winning Williams the Pulitzer. Williams begins a relationship with Frank Merlo
- 1948 – *Summer and Smoke* opens on Broadway
- 1951 – *The Rose Tattoo* opens on Broadway and wins Williams a Tony Award for Best Play  
The film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a huge success winning numerous Academy Awards
- 1953 – *Camino Real* opens on Broadway
- 1955 – *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opens on Broadway, winning Williams his second Pulitzer and a further Tony Award
- 1956 – Williams writes the screenplay for the film *Baby Doll* which is described by Time magazine as 'just possibly the dirtiest American-made motion picture that has ever been legally exhibited'
- 1957 – *Orpheus Descending* opens on Broadway but enjoys limited success which causes Williams to seek therapy for depression
- 1958 – The one act play *Suddenly, Last Summer* is performed off Broadway
- 1959 – *Sweet Bird of Youth* opens on Broadway
- 1960 – *Period of Adjustment* opens on Broadway
- 1961 – *The Night of the Iguana* opens on Broadway and wins Williams another Tony Award
- 1963 – *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* opens on Broadway  
Williams' long-term partner, Frank Merlo, dies of lung cancer
- 1968 – *The Seven Descents of Myrtle* opens on Broadway but closes after 29 performances
- 1969 – Williams suffers a nervous breakdown and his brother, Dakin, has him hospitalised for treatment
- 1971 – *Small Craft Warnings* opens off Broadway and is Williams' first commercially successful play for a decade
- 1973 – *Out Cry* opens on Broadway but closes after 12 performances
- 1975 – Williams publishes his memoirs
- 1976 – *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* opens on Broadway but closes after 24 performances
- 1977 – *Vieux Carré* opens on Broadway but closes after six performances
- 1978 – *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* opens on Broadway but closes after 14 performances
- 1983 – Williams dies in his room at Hotel Elysée in New York City on February 24 after choking on a bottle top. He is buried in St Louis, Missouri

# SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH SYNOPSIS

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## In brief:

Chance Wayne returns to his hometown in a last-ditch attempt to recapture the promise of his youth by proving to its inhabitants that he is a successful actor and is taking his childhood sweetheart to Hollywood. Travelling with the Princess Kosmonopolis, a faded movie star who has her own demons to contend with, it becomes clear that Chance is not only unwelcome in his hometown but it is actually a dangerous place for him to be.



*The play is set in St Cloud, Florida, during the late 1950s*

Chance Wayne and the Princess Kosmonopolis (actually the famous actress Alexandra Del Lago travelling incognito) are staying at the Royal Palms Hotel but neither of them want it known that they are there. Chance left St Cloud many years ago to become a successful actor but never quite made it and now earns his living by working as a gigolo. The Princess recently starred in her comeback film but was so shocked by how old she looked on screen that she fled the premiere and has been on the run ever since.

Chance has insinuated himself with the Princess in order to blackmail her into helping him become a film star and also win back his childhood sweetheart, Heavenly Finley. However, Chance doesn't know that on a previous visit, he infected Heavenly with an STD which meant that she had to have a hysterectomy. Heavenly's father (Boss Finley) and brother (Tom Junior) are determined to punish Chance for this. Chance is warned off by many people including an old friend George Scudder, who is now close with the Finleys, and also by Heavenly's Aunt Nonnie, but Chance refuses to leave town.

Eventually, though, Chance discovers what has happened to Heavenly; at the same time, the Princess finds out that her film is actually a huge success and she must return to Hollywood. Chance makes a last-ditch attempt to cash in on his relationship with the Princess but she is only focused on herself. Chance becomes resigned to his fate and although the Princess, before she leaves, does try to convince him to leave with her, he decides to stay and face his punishment.

Kim Cattrall as Princess  
Kosmonopolis and Seth  
Numrich as Chance Wayne  
Photo: Tristram Kenton

# SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH

## ACT BREAKDOWN

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The play is set in St Cloud, a small town in Florida, during the late 1950s.

The action takes place in three different locations; the Royal Palms Hotel bedroom; the terrace of Boss Finley's house; and the Royal Palms cocktail lounge (interior) and outside gallery (exterior).

### **Act I** A hotel bedroom of The Royal Palms Hotel

The play opens on Easter Sunday, in the hotel bedroom where the Princess is asleep and Chance has ordered morning coffee from room service. It becomes clear that Chance is from St Cloud but doesn't want it known that he is back, as he is recognised by Fly, a servant, who he bribes to say nothing about his return. However, George Scudder, the hospital Chief of Staff and old friend of Chance's, arrives having been told Chance is there by the hotel manager. Chance explains he's here to see his mother and his childhood sweetheart, Heavenly Finley. George tells him that his mother has died and that, because of Chance, Heavenly suffered 'a tragic ordeal'. George makes it clear that Chance isn't welcome and warns him to leave as soon as possible for his own safety. He also reveals that he is engaged to Heavenly.

After George leaves, The Princess wakes up. It's clear she has no idea who Chance is or where they are, and that she is not in a healthy state. She eventually recalls going to the premiere of her new film and being certain that everyone there was shocked by her appearance. Since then, she has taken drugs and been drinking heavily so can't remember much. It emerges that she met Chance while staying in Palm Beach and he persuaded her to put him under contract to a movie studio. To ensure that she doesn't back out, and also to get money from her, he tapes her talking about the illegal drugs that she has and blackmails her. She agrees to his terms but insists that they have sex which they do.

### **Act II, Scene i** The terrace of Boss Finley's house

Boss Finley is discussing the return of Chance with George Scudder. George is keen for Boss to call off a televised political rally that he is speaking at later in the day but Boss refuses. Tom Junior enters with more information regarding Chance. Boss makes it clear he wants Tom to get rid of Chance by any means necessary which Tom agrees to but George wants nothing to do with it, due to his position in town.

Whilst they're talking, Chance drives past (offstage) and can be heard calling for Aunt Nonnie (Boss' sister-in-law) who is walking up the driveway. She ignores him but is accosted by Boss as she reaches the house who questions her about Chance. It becomes clear from their conversation that Aunt Nonnie was once close to Chance and that Boss holds her partly responsible for what happened to Heavenly. Boss then sends Aunt Nonnie away to fetch Heavenly to see him. Boss talks to Tom Junior about his disappointment in him; he feels that Tom is useless and promiscuous, which Tom responds angrily to and accuses Boss of promiscuity by keeping a long-term mistress, Miss Lucy, at the Royal Palms Hotel. Boss absolutely denies knowledge of this and Tom backs down. Heavenly enters so both Tom and George leave.

Boss and Heavenly have an emotional talk and it is revealed what the 'tragic ordeal' is that happened to Heavenly; during one of Chance's visits to town, he passed on an STD to Heavenly which resulted in her having a hysterectomy (performed by George) and since then, Heavenly feels dead inside. She doesn't understand why her father didn't leave her alone to be with Chance when they first started dating as they were in love. It becomes clear that Boss has consistently tried to control Heavenly, even trying to marry her to men that he wanted to do business with. This continues as Boss tells Heavenly that he wants her to attend the rally, dressed in white and looking virginal, in order to quash the rumours about her. She refuses but he threatens Chance.

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## Act II, Scene ii A corner of cocktail lounge and outside gallery of the Royal Palms Hotel

In the cocktail lounge, Fly enters, looking for Chance. As he exits, Miss Lucy enters and she is obviously angry. She confronts Stuff, the barman, about the fact that Boss has heard that she's been telling everyone about their private relationship and she believes it was Stuff who told Boss. Stuff denies it but before they finish talking, they become aware of an unknown man who's entered the bar; it's the Heckler. He has been following Boss around and interrupting his rallies by asking about Heavenly. Miss Lucy realises who he is and helps to ensure that he can get into the rally happening at the hotel. She then asks Stuff about Chance Wayne and, once she's discovered he's back and travelling with Alexandra Del Lago, she leaves to investigate.



Chance enters and starts helping himself to the cocktails that Stuff has been making. Aunt Nonnie comes in and takes Chance to the side to talk with him privately. She begs him to leave St Cloud but he forces her to reminisce about when he was younger and the time he spent with Heavenly. However, his memories of the past are questioned by Aunt Nonnie and it becomes clear that he's rewritten his younger days to make them more favourable. She tells him clearly to go away before leaving the bar.

Above left: Charles Aitken as Tom Junior and Joe Townley as Hatcher

Photos: Manuel Harlan

Chance stays out of sight of the bar and hears Fly enter and call for him. He then hears one of the other customers recognise his name and be shocked that he's back in town. Chance enters, asks the pianist to play his favourite song and starts singing it. In the past, everyone would have joined in but now they don't and his voice slowly dies out. The two women sat in the bar, Edna and Violet, stand up abruptly and leave, so their husbands, Bud and Scotty, call for the bill. Chance knows them all so goes over to talk to them; Miss Lucy joins them. Scotty, Bud and Miss Lucy all mock Chance about his 'success' and reveal that he has been seen working as a beach-boy at a hotel. Chance laughs it off, uneasily. The conversation then moves to Boss Finley's rally; he's against rights for black people and is planning to comment on the castration of a random black man which was 'about white women's protection'. Chance gets worked up when he finds out that Heavenly will be there as he doesn't believe it. He gets louder and more agitated until he falls off his chair. He then takes another pill with some vodka.

Miss Lucy moves the conversation to Chance's travelling companion; he doesn't reveal who she is but explains about the contract. Scotty and Bud leave the table to speak to their wives, and Miss Lucy tells him to leave town. She tries to convince Chance to leave but he refuses. Fly comes in, calling for Chance but this time is accompanied by the Princess. She is dishevelled in appearance and in an agitated state; she is keen to talk to Chance but he doesn't want her around, especially when Hatcher and Tom Junior arrive wanting to talk to Chance. He refuses which causes Tom to lose his temper and he has to be restrained. Tom eventually calms down and talks to Chance quietly; it's at this point that he reveals what happened to Heavenly and Chance realises for the first time what the repercussions of his actions were. Tom tells Chance clearly that if he doesn't leave town, they plan to castrate him. Tom exits and Chance returns to the Princess who is trying to help him but he pushes her away and sends her back to the room.

After the Princess exits, Boss and Heavenly Finley's arrival is audible from inside the bar. Heavenly rushes

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in to avoid the press and sees Chance. They stare at each other for a moment before Boss enters and drags Heavenly away. The start of the rally in the ballroom is audible in the bar. Miss Lucy talks with the Heckler who is waiting for the right moment to enter the ballroom and Stuff turns on the television so everyone in the bar can watch. Chance is shocked to see that Heavenly has gone on stage with her father. As Boss begins to talk about the threat of 'blood pollution' from the black people, the Heckler enters the ballroom and questions him about his daughter's operation. The Heckler is punched out of the room and then beaten by a number of men; no one goes to his assistance. During this, Boss continues his speech and there are bursts of applause.

### **Act III** A hotel bedroom of the Royal Palms Hotel; as seen in Act I, Scene i

The Princess is in her room trying to organise a driver so she can leave St Cloud. Tom Junior, Dan Hatcher, Bud and Scotty come to her room to tell her to leave and to search for Chance, who isn't there. She is happy to leave and gets Tom to agree to provide her with a driver. After they have left the room, Chance enters from the balcony. The Princess tries to convince him to leave with her but he refuses; instead, he makes a call to a Hollywood journalist, Sally Powers, and forces the Princess to speak to her. When she does, the Princess discovers that her comeback film was actually a triumph. Throughout the conversation, Chance keeps pestering the Princess to tell Sally that she's discovered two new stars (Chance and Heavenly) but she ignores him, making Chance more and more irate.

She finishes talking to Sally and begins preparing for her return to Hollywood, whilst Chance tries to get her to go back on the phone. The Princess refuses and mocks him, confronting him with the truth that he will never be a success or get his girl back. The argument escalates and they strike each other. At once the tension dissipates and the Princess becomes sympathetic again, as she knows that this reprieve from Hollywood is only temporary and she too has lost the promise of her youth. Again, she tries to convince Chance to leave but her driver arrives and takes her away; and, as Tom, Scotty and Bug enter, Chance sits quietly, resigned to his fate.

Curtain.



Above left: Lucy Robinson as Miss Lucy and Michael Begley as the Heckler.  
Above right: Brid Brennan as Aunt Nonnie. Photos: Manuel Harlan

# SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

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## Chance Wayne

One of the central characters, Chance Wayne is originally from St Cloud, Florida (where the play is set). When Chance was young, he was the 'best-looking boy' in town and had dreams of being a famous actor but, despite a small part in Oklahoma on Broadway, it hasn't worked out for him. He now earns his living as a gigolo but still hopes to make it in Hollywood. Chance returns to his hometown to 'rescue' his childhood sweetheart, Heavenly, and to prove to everyone that he is a success. He considers himself faithful to Heavenly despite having slept with many other women and, although he has sympathy for the Princess, he is willing to use her to gain what he wants. Chance, like the Princess, fears ageing and becoming obsolete, so is determined to fight against it.

## The Princess Kosmonopolis (Alexandra Del Lago)

The Princess Kosmonopolis (real name Alexandra Del Lago) is an ageing movie star who is running away from the alleged failure of her comeback movie. She is a heavy drinker and drug user, and struggles to remember anything that has happened to her for much of the first scene. Although she knows that Chance is using her, she doesn't want to be alone and she craves the physical intimacy that he can provide. She is desperate not to grow old and be forgotten, and is thrown a lifeline towards the end of the play when she discovers that her movie has been well-received, though she is aware that this is only a brief respite from her inevitable decline. Despite his callous treatment of her, she recognises a kindred spirit in Chance and tries to help him right to the end.

## Fly

Fly is an African-American waiter working in the hotel where Chance and the Princess are staying.

## George Scudder

George Scudder is the town's doctor and the Chief of Staff at the local hospital. He is older than Chance by about seven years and is first to know that Chance has returned to St Cloud. George is first to see Chance and warn him to leave town, though he skirts round the issue, refusing to be straightforward with Chance and tell him exactly why he should leave. His associations with the Finleys seem to have made him cautious.

## Dan Hatcher

Assistant Manager of the Royal Palms Hotel, Hatcher is the first to contact the Finleys about Chance's arrival and he keeps them informed of his whereabouts.

## 'Boss' Thomas J Finley

Boss is the father of Heavenly and Tom Junior, and a leading political figure in town. Due to his position, he did not want Heavenly and Chance to be in a relationship so ensured that it ended. He is a typical politician in that he presents a respectable lifestyle; faithful husband (now widower) and doting father to two impeccably behaved children. However, he has a long-term mistress who lives in town, and uses his children in whatever way necessary to further his own career.

## Tom Junior

Tom is Boss Finley's son and is desperate to impress his father but behaves quite wildly which means that Boss has to get him out of trouble regularly. Tom helps with Boss' political campaigning but feels unappreciated by him. However, Tom is willing to use violence on behalf of his father when it comes to Chance.

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## **Aunt Nonnie**

Aunt Nonnie is sister to Boss Finley's dead wife, so Aunt to Tom Junior and Heavenly. She has always had a close relationship with Heavenly and previously was very fond of Chance; it was whilst she was meant to be supervising them that they had their first sexual encounter. Aunt Nonnie remains defensive of Chance but is bullied by Boss and scared of what he may do to Chance; she also knows that the time has passed for Chance and Heavenly to be together so is keen for him to leave.

## **Charles**

Servant in the Finley household.

## **Heavenly Finley**

Daughter to Boss Finley. Heavenly was 15 years old when she began a sexual relationship with Chance which continued over some years, though she was unaware of his lifestyle when he wasn't with her. Heavenly used to be bright, vivacious and full of promise but after contracting the STD from Chance and having a hysterectomy, she has lost her love of life. Heavenly blames her father for what happened to Chance and her; she doesn't understand why he didn't let them marry as they were in love. Although she is a changed person, Chance holds an idealised memory in his mind and it is that version that keeps his dream alive of recapturing their youth together.

## **Stuff**

Barman at the Royal Palms Hotel. He has taken over the job that Chance used to do, having previously admired Chance. He is a member of the 'Youth for Tom Finley' club and passes on the information that Miss Lucy has been indiscreet about her sex life with Boss Finley, which leads to her being punished.

## **Miss Lucy**

Boss Finley's long-term mistress; she has been with Boss since before his wife died. She lives in the hotel and has been open about their relationship, suggesting at one point that Boss is too old to be a good lover. Miss Lucy has very little power, as she is totally reliant on Boss, so when Boss punishes her for this, her only means of retaliation is to help the Heckler access the rally. Miss Lucy is fond of Chance and offers to help him leave town, as she is fully aware of what Boss is capable of doing.

## **Heckler**

Heckler is a hillbilly who attends Boss' political rallies to expose his hypocrisy by asking questions about Heavenly. Despite being attacked for this at previous rallies, he still comes along and is aided by Miss Lucy to get into this latest rally, where he suffers a severe beating.

## **Scotty & Bud**

Old school friends of Chance. They are part of the gang who 'settled down' by staying in town. They help Tom Junior deal with Chance at the end of the play.

## **Edna & Violet**

Wives of Scotty and Bud respectively and old school friends of Chance, though not his friends anymore.

# AMERICA IN THE 1950s

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During the 1950s, America was changing and growing. The repercussions of the Second World War were still being felt as people grew more fearful of Communism, leading to the McCarthy trials and the US involvement in the Korean War. As the decade progressed, the Cold War took hold and the USSR was an ever-present threat. It was also during this time that the 'Space Race' began, causing more tension between these countries.

In terms of other technology, televisions were becoming widespread and numerous important events were televised; many believe that it was due to the televised debates that charismatic John F Kennedy won the presidential race in 1960 against the more experienced, but less photogenic, Richard Nixon. During the play, the televising of Boss' political rally demonstrates this change and the importance of image.

The civil rights movement also began to gather momentum; the process of desegregation started in schools and on public transport during this decade. However, whereas the north of the country was more amenable to these changes, the southern states were resistant and did not make these changes until well into the 1960s. Certainly in Florida, in the late 1950s when the play is set, these racial tensions would have been pronounced and Williams presents an insight into this during the scene in the hotel bar.

## A TIMELINE

- 1950** – Current President is Harry S Truman
- 1945–53** Current Vice President Alben W Barkley
- 1949–53** Beginning of the Korean War which would last three years  
Population tops 150m people (UK population was less than 50m)  
Senator Joseph McCarthy begins communist witch hunt  
President Truman orders construction of hydrogen bomb
- 1951** – First live transcontinental television broadcast; shows President Truman signing a peace treaty with Japan along with 47 other nations  
Catcher in the Rye by JD Salinger is published; it speaks to the youth of the day  
The 22nd Amendment is introduced which limits a President to serving only two terms
- 1952** – The US tests the hydrogen bomb on an island in the Pacific  
Car seat belts are introduced  
First year since 1881 without a lynching (hanging of a black person)  
Arthur Miller writes *The Crucible* in response to the McCarthy trials
- 1953** – Dwight D Eisenhower is inaugurated as the United States 34th President, with Richard Nixon becoming Vice President  
The end of the Korean War  
Ethel and Julius Rosenberg are executed for espionage (assisting the Soviet Union with building their atomic bomb)
- 1954** – Major victory for the civil rights movement; the Supreme Court rules that segregation in schools (separating black people from white) is unconstitutional and therefore illegal
- 1954** – The final all-black units in the armed forces are disbanded  
The US economy is the strongest it has been since the Wall Street Crash of 1929
- 1955** – Rosa Parks is arrested for not giving up her seat to a white man on the bus; this led to a boycott of the buses until a change of law which banned segregation of passengers on buses  
Rock and Roll becomes more popular with Rock Around the Clock by Bill Haley and His Comets becoming the first record to top the Billboard magazine pop charts  
Disneyland opens in California
- 1956** – Presidential elections where Eisenhower and Nixon are re-elected  
Elvis Presley has his first number one hit with Heartbreak Hotel  
Marilyn Monroe marries playwright Arthur Miller
- 1957** – Civil Rights Act is passed; its aim is to increase the number of African American voters  
The Soviet Union launch satellite Sputnik I into space, ahead of the US, therefore beginning the 'Space Race'
- 1958** – The US launch Explorer into space and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is formed  
Jack Kilby and Robert Noyce invent the integrated circuit (also known as the microchip) which changes technology forever
- 1959** – The Cuban revolution takes place, making Fidel Castro Prime Minister and being the start of Communism in Cuba  
Alaska and Hawaii become the 49th and 50th United States; no other states have been admitted since

# UPHOLDING THE SOUTH

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Professor Sharon Monteith uncovers the social and political tensions that defined the southern states of 1950s America, providing a potent backdrop to *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

Tennessee Williams sets his play at a moment of change in a region in turmoil. The 1950s have often been injected with an infusion of nostalgia as an era of middle-class prosperity and conservative consensus (with the phrase 'One nation under God' added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954). Yet anti-communist 'witch hunts' conducted by Senator Joe McCarthy and a 'cold war' culture of containment created social pariahs of non-conformists – including homosexuals like Williams. The Korean War of 1950-53 made explicit the fear of an external communist threat and in the Deep South civil rights initiatives were equated to homegrown forms of communism, resulting in racial terrorism.

Williams observed that 'Reactionary opinion descends like a ton of bricks on the head of any artist who speaks out against the current of prescribed ideas. We are all under wraps of one kind or another, trembling before the spectre of investigation committees...' The playwright typically masked social problems with personal ones; in the case of *Sweet Bird of Youth*, those of a beautiful young man approaching 30 whose life choices are narrowing and who gives the lie to bland conformist images of white masculinity and nuclear family ideals. Chance Wayne is paired with a film actress whose star is fading, just as Hollywood's studio system was collapsing for real and revisions to the Production Code allowed movies to become more 'adult', with risqué scenes representing added anxiety for women struggling with ageing.

*Sweet Bird of Youth* is also textured by political struggles. One of what Williams called a 'cycle of violent plays,' it looks forward to the turbulence of the Civil Rights Movement just ahead in the 1960s while portraying the long history of racial tensions in the South, encoded in a drama of tortured love and myriad forms of corruption.



By the 1950s racial segregation was established in the South but white supremacy and purity was an ideological fiction that required constant political and rhetorical attention to maintain, especially once the legal framework known as 'Jim Crow' began to unravel. The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v Board of Education* on the 17 May 1954 declared it unconstitutional and 'inherently unequal' to teach black and white children separately and petitions were filed by the NAACP, the nation's oldest civil rights organisation, to desegregate schools across 17 states. White resistance to *Brown* was embodied in Citizens' Councils, first formed in Mississippi in July 1954. These were lodges of white professionals, a kind of white collar Ku Klux

Above left: Scotty, Fly and Bud at the Royal Palm Hotel

Above: David Webber as Charles

Photos: Manuel Harlan

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Klan, publishing broadsides such as 'Stop! Help Save the Youth of America' and warning white youth that 'race music' would pollute their minds. Response to Brown became hysterical with the volume of lynchings leading to Mississippi's reputation as 'the land of the tree and the home of the grave.' Lynching often involved castration and mutilation, brutal acts that were used to intimidate African Americans as a group and to warn anyone suspected of engaging in cross-racial sexual relationships. It was justified by those defenders of lynch mobs who inflamed the paranoid myth that the honour of white womanhood was under threat from the 'brute Negro'.

The backlash in the South rested on the twin ideologies of absolute patriarchy and total white supremacy. *Sweet Bird of Youth* explores demagogic politics at its worst, with Boss Finley believing he is 'all that stands between the South and the black days of Reconstruction.' Reconstruction followed the emancipation of slaves in 1863 with the federal government dispatching mandated officials to the region to protect the national reunion. Lasting until 1877, the Reconstruction era became the period in which the idea of a 'solid' white South was established as a monolithic bastion against black social progress. At the same time, the Lost Cause – a movement advocating that the white South had been unfairly defeated by federal forces in the Civil War – was made mythical.

Reconstruction was underpinned by amendments to the Constitution to ensure African Americans of citizenship, voting rights and civil rights, but it ended with their disenfranchisement. The Black Codes was the popular name for laws passed in the South to repeal voting and civil rights – trick by wily trick – in what segregationist politicians called Redemption, and these were reinforced each time African Americans tested their civil rights in the courts, as in *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) and *Williams v Mississippi* (1898). The former ruled that blacks and whites enjoyed 'separate but equal' facilities, underlining the segregation of public life, from schools and restaurants to rest rooms and water fountains. The latter case upheld the corrupt strategies segregationist politicians used to disbar black voters and maintain all-white juries. And in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Williams makes the ideology of white supremacy visible for audiences.

In the 1950s segregationists shaped images of the cold war to enforce 'massive resistance', recalling federal intervention during Reconstruction and underpinning the doctrine of states' rights, while portraying social progressives and racial reformers as outside agitators. In imagining a political boss for his play, Williams combines characteristics of populist politicians such as Huey and Earl Long in Louisiana. Huey, known as the Kingfish and assassinated in 1935, fascinated Williams who hoped his character would be 'pretty much my own creation with just as much of the Kingfish as I find theatrically enticing.' Huey's younger brother Earl was campaigning for Congress when *Sweet Bird of Youth* was performed and a scandal that surrounded his candidacy was his affair with the striptease artiste Blaze Starr. Williams' rabble-rousing character, Boss Finley, is more vicious and racist than the Longs though. He is a rabid segregationist, like Leander Perez, who controlled Plaquemines Parish where he assumed the power of a potentate, and Willie Rainach, with whom Perez championed Citizens' Councils in Louisiana, and Gerald L K Smith of Shreveport who was known as the minister of hate, with his protestant fundamentalism being the rock on which his brand of white supremacy was founded.

Southern demagogues used white ladies to symbolise a plantation myth, 'the cult of true womanhood,' in which the four cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity were asserted. After 1953, when sociologist Alfred Kinsey claimed women frequently enjoyed sexual relationships outside of marriage, its propaganda increased. Boss Finley relies on his daughter Heavenly to embody the white 'purity' that segregationists sought to protect from corruption and race mixing, based in deleterious stereotypes of a newly permissive age and fear of racial change. Never a writer to steer clear of racial or sexual taboos, Williams was in the vanguard of playwrights exploring social issues that ran much deeper than their surface melodrama.

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# A RECKLESS ADVENTURE

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*Dramaturg James Graham takes up the trail of Tennessee in the pursuit of his perfect draft*

Tennessee Williams spent the best part of 15 years chasing after his own play, trying to unleash its potential and nail the thing down. A modern DVD has nothing on *Sweet Bird of Youth* in terms of alternative endings, deleted scenes and possible versions. In a variety of published and produced texts, sometimes the lovers meet, sometimes they don't. Sometimes it ends with the characters alive, other times dead. There are happy and sad versions in different degrees. Some more violent and some less. Whole acts that had been cut from the first performance are resurrected in later publications, as the creator changed his mind.

As a playwright, I can associate with that agonising uncertainty. Delving into the Tennessee Williams collection at the Harry Ransom Center in Texas, I must admit to feeling a shameful sense of Schadenfreude as I discovered a playwright as masterful as Williams in the midst of a crisis. To quote one of the handwritten phrases he scrawled onto one of the many typed transcripts: 'Oh God, what is it? I don't understand what it is...'



For me, it is Williams' neglected masterpiece. It is the dramatist at his most emotionally exposed and vulnerable. He was writing from a point of deep personal pain, covering themes that stab away at us all; the parts of our human condition we don't mention at parties. Loneliness, for example. Real, paralysing loneliness. Grief over the loss of youth and the relentless passing of time. Regrets over choices, and the way they hurt the people we love. The way we emotionally manipulate those around us when we get scared. How we live in denial about our mistakes. How frightening it is to suspect we may have lost the one thing we wanted, rendering the future pointless.

So when Marianne Elliott approached me to come onboard as dramaturg and edit together a version of *Sweet Bird of Youth*, I never imagined how much the discovery of his tortuously painful writing process would affect me. I was a playwright chasing a playwright who didn't want to be caught, chasing a play he was almost too frightened to catch himself. 'A reckless adventure,' as he called it. This pursuit of the perfect draft.

'These last few months in my life are the worst I can remember,' Williams wrote to his friend Maria St Just as he was preparing the latest version for the play's Broadway premiere in 1959. Increasingly dependent on drugs and alcohol, he had recently begun a course of therapy. 'The doctors say I am passing through

Kim Cattrall and Seth Numrich in *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Photo: Manuel Harlan

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purgatory. I thought I had been going through that all my life.’ He was, as he acknowledged, in a ‘terrible state of depression.’ It’s not hard, then, to trace the roots of *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Initially appearing as a sketch in 1948, then a one-act play in 1952, the play revolves around a self-destructive young man returning to his past to rake through old mistakes and seek redemption, all during the course of Easter Sunday – a time of hope, and resurrection, if one only has faith...

Like the purgatory he places his characters in, Williams lived a transient lifestyle while writing, constantly on the move, alone, staying in grand old hotels along the coast. Many of the typed drafts are printed on hotel stationery – their respective logos adorning the paper. Miami, Louisiana, New Orleans. Was he hunting for something, or running from it? Either way, his paranoia during this time was palpable. He believed those closest to him hated him. Which wasn’t true. In fact, those around him suspected he was about to produce the greatest piece of his life.

His director Elia Kazan tentatively observed: ‘I think this is the most truly autobiographical play Williams ever wrote ... not a memory, softened and romanticised by time, of his youth, but Tennessee trying to describe his state of soul and state of being today.’ In *Chance Wayne*, Kazan saw the 20th-century Hamlet: ‘All the sickness of our time is contained in him.’ And all of Tennessee’s too.

Alas, neither Kazan, nor Williams, whose intense creative relationship endured from 1947 until 1960, felt like they cracked it. The writer could barely even call it a play at first – title pages where he apologetically crosses out ‘A play’ in favour of ‘A sketch,’ replacing that with ‘A sketch for a play,’ and so on. During the Broadway read-through, he fled halfway, retreating to his apartment and disappearing in a fog of pills and booze. And yet, even after Broadway, he returned again and again, unable to let go, making adjustments even after the film in 1962.

There are clues hidden in the archives, pointing the way. Some of these I’m sure only a writer would find exciting. Does blue ink symbolise something different to green? Or was it just the nearest pen he could find? Following his brain was an adventure – insertions, appendices and keys leave a trail. Seeing the names of his characters evolve, as Delphine became Valerie became Heavenly. And Phil Beam elevated to the more heroic-sounding *Chance Wayne*. I noted his coffee stains and allowed myself to imagine the smell of cigarette smoke wafting from the page.

With the support of Tom Erhardt, the agent to the Williams’ estate, we have made choices. Combining the strengths (as we see them) of all the different versions. For me, this is *Chance’s* story. He’s our way through all the strands. And amid all that classic Tennessee Williams’ poetry, symbolism, and romantic expression, we’ve not shied from the very gritty, very real emotions at its core. *Sweet Bird of Youth* is beautiful, yes. But it should hurt, too. Because these things do. They did for Tennessee.

*Thanks to the Harry Ransom Center, a humanities research library and museum at The University of Texas at Austin.*

Below left: Owen Roe as Boss Finley and Daniel Betts as George Scudder

Below: Kim Cattrall as Princess Kosmonopolis

Photos: Manuel Harlan



## THE THEATRE: 'SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH' A PORTRAIT OF CORRUPTION BY BROOKS ATKINSON

Still possessed of the demons, Tennessee Williams has written another vivid play. "Sweet Bird of Youth" he calls it with ironic pity. Under Elia Kazan's direction it is brilliantly acted at the Martin Beck, where it opened last evening.

It is a portrait of corruption and evil, which are Mr. Williams' familiar subjects. The two chief characters represent two aspects of civilized degeneracy- an aging motion-picture actress who is fleeing reality in drink, drugs and dissipation; a young gigolo who has cheap dreams of glory and means to fulfill them by cheap means.

Mr. Williams is not revenging himself on anyone this time. "Sweet Bird of Youth" is hardly a noble play. But it has overtones of pity for those who are damned. Although the old harridan from Hollywood is a monster, she is no fiend; she knows what she is doing and why. Although the young man is a monster, he represents the seamy side of the American dream. He means to take whatever he can snatch; he is the perpetual adolescent, steeped in gaudy illusions of success and grandeur.

At the end, in a corrosively humorous scene, the screen star is recalled from damnation by reports of success in Hollywood, and she starts pulling herself together with professional acumen. She is never so far gone that a box-office statement cannot restore her.

But the young man- his youth gone, his abominations overwhelming him- has lost the will to go on living. He makes no attempt to escape a posse of barbarians who have announced that they are going to castrate him because he has infected a local belle with disease. He has burned out his soul with lies and depravity. When the play concludes he is accepting the horrors that await him.

If "Sweet Bird of Youth" is less shocking than this resume suggests, it must be because of the nature of Mr. Williams' artistry as a writer. It is a play that ranges wide through the lower depths, touching on political violence, as well as diseases of mind and body. But it has spontaneity of an improvisation.

Nothing seems to be planned. It begins in comic squalor in a hotel room. In the second act, it moves into a private house and then a hotel lobby. But nothing seems to be arranged for theatrical sensation. Knowing his subject with chilling intimacy, Mr. Williams daintily peels off layer after layer of the skin, body and spirit of his characters and leaves their nature exposed in the hideous humor and pathos of the truth. As a writer of prose drama, Mr. Williams has the genius of a poet.

Under Mr. Kazan's limpid direction, it is beautifully performed in the mood of a black incantation. Jo Mielziner has prepared wide settings with luminous backgrounds and Paul Bowles has contributed spidery and tinkling music of exquisite texture.

In the central roles the acting is magnificent. Geraldine Page gives a fabulous performance as the decaying movie queen. Loose-jointed, gangling, raucous of voice, crumpled, shrewd, abandoned yet sensitive about some things that live in the heart, Miss Page is at the peak of form in this raffish characterization.

And Paul Newman's young man is the perfect companion-piece. Although he has a braggart, calculating exterior, he is as immature as an adolescent; brassy outside, terrified and remorseful when he stops strutting. As a political boss, Sidney Blackmer also gives a superb performance.

Despite the acrid nature of its material, "Sweet Bird of Youth" is Mr. Williams in a relaxed mood as a writer. He seems to have made some sort of peace with himself. "Sweet Bird of Youth" is one of his finest dramas.

# SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH THEMES

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## Preservation / Destruction

Throughout the play, the main characters are trying to preserve something of importance to them whether it is their reputation, their sense of self or an idealistic memory, and each of these are on the verge of destruction.

From the moment we meet Chance, it is clear that he is desperate to preserve his dream of success and a romantic future with Heavenly. He returns to St Cloud and attempts to blackmail the Princess to achieve this but as the play progresses, we see the slow destruction of everything he hopes for. In his mind, Heavenly is the person who can save him; 'After each disappointment, each failure at something, I'd come back to her like going to a hospital...' but he doesn't realise that by giving her an STD on a previous visit, he has caused her destruction and she will never again be the Heavenly of their youth. He also feels that St Cloud is his home to always return to but this isn't the case, as Stuff says to him 'You've been away too long, Chance'. It is only when he discovers what he has done to Heavenly that he realises that the hometown and his young love that he holds in his mind have actually been destroyed, and by him. It is at this point that Chance becomes resigned to his own destruction, the castration planned for him by the Finleys.

Boss Finley wishes to preserve his reputation regardless of the consequences and will go to any lengths to accomplish this. Even when Heavenly and Chance were young, Boss ensured that their relationship was destroyed, as he felt that Chance didn't fit with the ideal family that he needed to present for his political career. Furthermore, he brushes over the physical and emotional damage that Heavenly has suffered, trying to fix it with a shopping spree; his only concern is to preserve the image of being the perfect family and he is happy to resort to threats and extreme violence to do this. Politically, with regards to civil rights, he proclaims to be a 'colored man's best friend' but also 'can't and will not accept, tolerate, condone this threat of a blood pollution' therefore attempting to preserve the southern way of life, even though it leads to acts of destruction, such as the castration of the young black man which he doesn't condone but does 'understand'.

Finally, the Princess has escaped to St Cloud to hide from what she believes to be her destruction; the failure of her comeback film. She uses Chance to build herself up again, though it is a hollow method, and it is only when she contacts Hollywood and hears that her film was actually successful, that she starts planning her return and how to preserve what is left of her time in the spotlight. Whereas the other characters bring about destruction through their actions, the Princess actually has the opportunity to rise from her supposed destruction, albeit briefly.



Above: Louise Dylan as Heavenly Finley

Photos: Manuel Harlan

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## Lost Youth

*'What you want to go back to is your clean, unashamed youth. And you can't.'*

From the moment Chance returns to St Cloud, he is hoping he can become the Chance of his youth again; the young man who could have been anything and had the pure love of Heavenly. However, all of his experiences have culminated in taking him irrevocably away from the promise of his youth and he is unable to go back, regardless of his actions. Chance was always aware of how fleeting his opportunities were;

*'In a life like mine, you can't just stop, you know, can't take time out between steps, you've got to keep going right on up from one thing to the other, once you drop out, it leaves you and goes on without you and you're washed up.'*

His return to St Cloud is his final attempt to recapture his youth by proving he's a success and reuniting with Heavenly. But his dreams are unobtainable as his success is based on blackmailing a faded movie star who will ultimately let him down and Heavenly is no longer the idealised girl of his youth; she is, in fact, permanently damaged by his careless behaviour. It is only in the final moments of the play that Chance comes to the realisation that his time has passed. Although the Princess tries to persuade him to leave with her, she states, 'the age of some people can only be calculated by the level of – level of – rot in them. And by that nature, I'm ancient.'

Whereas Chance is trying to recapture his youth, Heavenly is resigned to it being lost forever. She had been young and in love with Chance, and they had the opportunity to find happiness but her father wouldn't allow it: 'there was a time you could have saved me, by letting me marry a boy that was still young and clean, but instead you drove him away'. Heavenly was unaware, until it was too late, that Chance had been sleeping with other women and had passed on an STD to her. The resulting hysterectomy causes her to view herself as, 'Dry, cold, empty, like an old woman' and means that she no longer feels young. This is something that is noticeable to everyone, that she is 'not young now, she's faded' (Aunt Nonnie) and even being with Chance again won't change it.

The Princess knows that she is past her prime but she also feels that she isn't old, 'If I had just been old but you see, I wasn't old... I just wasn't young, not young, young, I just wasn't young anymore', She is convinced to star in a comeback film but seeing her face on the big screen reminds her of her age and causes to run away. She is unable to face what she has become. Although Chance manipulates her into travelling together, he does give her the opportunity to create the fantasy of being young again; as Scene One closes and she has trapped him into making love with her, she wants to 'almost believe that we're a pair of young lovers without any shame'. However, Chance isn't enough for her to recapture her youth; it is only the news that she still has one more chance to shine in Hollywood, that motivates her to return to her public life. Even so, she knows that this is not an opportunity to be young again, merely a postponement of her inevitable decline: that 'sweet bird' has flown away.

Finally, we hear much of the 'Youth for Tom Finley' clubs that Boss' son, Tom Junior, manages. Most of the young people of the town are members and it is during one of their meetings that Boss is televised speaking about his beliefs. It is also when he parades Heavenly, dressed in white, to show the purity of the white southern women. However, we know of the truth of Heavenly's situation so the hypocrisy is clear and becomes heightened when Tom Junior and other members of the club leave the speech to violently attack the Heckler who is there to expose Boss' lies. The irony of Heavenly and Tom representing the 'Youth for Tom Finley' only highlights their lost youth and the emptiness of what Boss Finley symbolises.



Above: Kim Cattrall as Princess Kosmonopolis and Seth Numrich as Chance Wayne

Photos: Manuel Harlan

# IN CONVERSATION WITH SETH NUMRICH (Chance Wayne) & KIM CATTRALL (Princess Kosmonopolis)

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**[To Kim] Kevin made no secret of the fact that he wanted you for this role. What persuaded you to take it in the end?**

**Kim** I really wanted to do it with Marianne Elliot because I'd seen a little bit of her work and I was a big fan of hers. I thought it would be really interesting for this play to be directed by a woman – I don't think it's ever been directed by a woman before... so she and I met and both of us really got along and I said to her "I'm a little scared of this, am I a bit too young to play this?" and she said, well, let's think about this, and let's look at different versions and also let's look at other plays. She was in New York so we got together and talked more, and then finally she sent me an e-mail and said, "I can't find anything as good as this", so we said we'd do it. James Graham was assigned to find a new adaptation and he went to Texas. He went through all the manuscripts and notes and different editions and pieced together the version we play today.

**[To Seth] You met Kevin several years ago too and he has spoken of how impressed he was with you. Did you imagine at that point you would have been on this journey with your career?**

**Seth** No, working here in London at this theatre and the legacy of it had always been a dream. In my first or second year out of drama school, I auditioned for the Bridge Project when The Old Vic did *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Winter's Tale* in the USA. It was a big deal for me. I was pretty new out of school and I auditioned with Sam Mendes... and I totally blew it! I was really, really nervous. In my mind I knew the Bridge Project would be great – working with The Old Vic, doing Chekhov and Shakespeare, and I totally blew it. So then this coming around, being able to do this play here, is really huge for me. It's an amazing opportunity.

**What expectations did you have before starting rehearsals?**

**Kim** I think we were both scared, really scared. We both took separate trips to the South – when I went I thought, what should I do here? How should I approach this? I always feel that whenever I start a project I have to learn how to act again, because you're entering such a different world. You don't want to rely on things you've done before, you want to start fresh and recognize what's coming at you and the atmosphere around you. We were just really fortunate to have a fantastic experienced team, not just in the director, but we had that in the company she assembled creatively and the other actors. We are so fortunate with this play, I feel like every night we have this big ship we're launching out from the harbor and we go on this great voyage and we bring it home again. You never know what it's going to be like, you hope for the best. It could have been a disaster. You can only judge it by what it is to do it every night. It's a real thrill. It's a gift.

**Seth** My only real expectation was that it was going to be hard, real hard work. Reading the play and doing my own work on it before getting here, I thought, I have no idea how I'm going to do this! The task seemed very daunting to me. It's a huge play and it's confusing and difficult...

**Kim** His writing was not even the most coherent.

**Seth** It's a problematic play, and aside from the nature of the writing, the emotion and the themes being addressed. It's the thing you'd look at as an actor and think, wow, how amazing to get to experience that, but also wow, it's really scary and going to be hard, and so that was my only expectation coming in. The wonderful experience of coming into a group of people that were so supportive and so willing to put in the hard work all the way through, it's everything that you hope for when you start a process.

**How did you find the rehearsal process?**

**Seth** Very collaborative, which is a huge strength of Marianne's and a real testament to her and the way she works, to set up an environment where it feels like we're all an ensemble and we're all in it together; the creative team, the cast, her as the director, it feels like we're all really working together.

**Kim** Even the ushers! We play volleyball before every show and last night there weren't very many people, so we said to the ushers, who always sit and watch us play, "C'mon! Get up here!" There's this feeling of not just the creative team, but also the administrative team and the ushers, and that's what the Old Vic does so well. It's a great institution.

**What helps you prepare for a performance? How do you get into a role? Do you have any rituals or methods?**

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**Kim** Volleyball!

**Seth** Before a show, I will do my own personal warm up, vocally and physically. For me it's always different each show, I find what I need for that particular project and develop a warm up around that. It's been great for this because so much of this play is relying on the rest of your company and the rest of your cast to help. Everyone is helping everyone else through the whole play in certain ways, so to get that time with everyone; to connect and have that experience and play games together and just be silly – because the play is so heavy and so dark in so many ways – getting to have that time to laugh and be silly and play games with each other, for me helps... and then after that I have my own time to descent down the darkness of Chance and the play! I think there's comedy in there as well, but I think the themes are very tragic; it's a tragedy. What's great is because the company is so lovely and so supportive, it feels like we can jump in and out of that weight and darkness with ease. It's not like pulling teeth; it's really an easy thing to do, because you can step offstage and know that you're going to be in good company.

**We work with young people, many of whom would love to get into the creative industry. What would be your top tip for anyone wishing to become an actor?**

**Kim** If you can do anything else, do it! It has to be what you really, really want to do more than anything else. To really get out of it what you put in. I think people see the glory of it, but they don't see the guts of it and the guts is where the glory is! I also think it's really important to train; I think it gives you such a solid foundation and you find your own technique and ultimately what works for you. I think you need that experience because it starts at drama school; knowing how to play, how to be open and I think that people who are more separated, or are out of that communal feeling of what theatre is – in film, it's less communal, I think it might be harder to adjust.

**Seth** I think I would say that if it is something you love and something that you want to do then my advice would be, do it! Put in the work and whether that's at drama school or whether that's finding something else. It's hard because theatre is a collaborative thing, you can't do it in a vacuum, you can't just lock yourself away and paint and write for hours and hours a day, it has to be in relation to other people and that always makes it harder. Find your plan, find your people that you can create with and don't wait for someone to give you permission to create. I think that's something that a lot of people get caught in, the feeling that someone has to cast me in a play, someone had to put me in their film in order for me to do what I want to do. I would say don't let that stop you; do it. Do it yourself; get together... That would be my advice.

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