



## **Tea and Sympathy**

*Robert Woodruff Anderson*

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Drama / 9m, 2f / Int. From the author of *I Never Sang for My Father*, this groundbreaking drama explores a sensitive young man's coming of age amid the taunts and suspicions of his classmates and teachers at a private boy's academy. Only a sympathetic act of compassion by the wife of the headmaster gives young Tom the courage to grow into a man. A hit onstage and film with Deborah Kerr.

## **Tea and Sympathy Details**

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Author : Robert Woodruff Anderson

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## From Reader Review Tea and Sympathy for online ebook

### Frederick says

Robert Anderson's 1953 drama, TEA AND SYMPATHY, is an American counterpart to any number of Terence Rattigan's plays.

Anderson and Rattigan were roughly contemporaneous and both wrote about suppressed sexuality at a time of sexual oppression. While I do think Rattigan's plays do not date and that TEA AND SYMPATHY does, I, by no means, reject TEA AND SYMPATHY. Its great truth is in precisely the thing 21st-century readers find disappointing. But I will not spoil it for you.

Do read it, or seek a production of it if there is one. If all you have is the movie, read the play first and then see the movie. The movie had some of the same actors as the Broadway production, but substantive changes had to be made to avoid censorship. I would imagine there is an audiobook of this play, and that might be a fine way to experience it.

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### SJ says

I really enjoyed reading this play. I look forward to seeing it performed someday.

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### Kate Tooley says

read probably five years ago I remember really enjoying his treatement of the characters and portrayals of their interactions. A fairly decent film version was done with Deborah Kerr.

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### Lina Zikas says

It was very short, but every page was full of action. I liked it, and I can see why it was controversial for its time. But I liked it.

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### Daniel says

A little dated now in some ways (it was published in 1953), this remains an excellent play about the dangers of being different, perceived or otherwise. There are humor, poignancy, and a bit of WHOA thrown in there too. Originally directed by Elia Kazan (!) and starring Deborah Kerr.

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### Daniel Hiland says

Powerful play about a young college student falsely accused of homosexuality. Though the topic of sexual orientation and associated prejudice was taboo in 1953, the story is told in a touching, compassionate way, and holds a message about tolerance that still applies, some sixty years later. The edition I obtained (at a thrift store) is copyrighted 1953 "as an unpublished work," and includes photos of the cast on stage: Deborah Kerr, John Kerr, Alan Sues, Dick York and Leif Erickson, among others. It's a great story, whether in play or movie form, and one I won't soon forget.

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### **Vichy says**

Τσ?ι και συμπ?θεια: Εσφαλμ?νη ?κφραση ?κτυπο (*calque*) εκ της αγγλικ?ς *tea and sympathy*. Στα ελληνικ? πρ?κειται για στοργ? και προδ?ρμ, παρηγορι? στον ?ρρωστο ? πολ? απλ? για καιφ? και κουβεντο?λα.

*slang.gr*

Ο συγγραφ?ας ε?ναι γνωστ?ς ως ο δραματουργ?ς της μοναξι?ς. Τσ?ι και συμπ?θεια προσφ?ρουν οι σ?ζυγοι των καθηγητ?ν εν?ς εσωτερικο? σχολε?ου αρρ?νων στη Ν?α Αγγλ?α τη δεκαετ?α του '50. Μια μοναχικ? νεαρ? σ?ζυγος αναπτ?σσει δεσμο?ς καρδι?ς με ?να μοναχικ? 18χρονο μαθητ?, του οπο?ου του ?χει "βγει το ?νομα" με μεγ?λη ευκολ?α επειδ? παρεκκλ?νει απ? το στερε?τυπο της ανδροπρεπο?ς συμπεριφορ?ς.

Παρα?ταν μελαγχολικ? για τα γο?στα μου.

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### **Kassie King says**

[ Laura's actions with Tom toe the line of co

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### **Andrew says**

A heartbreak tale. It is a must read.

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### **Connie says**

Written in 1953, this play is about Tom Lee, an effeminate young man of eighteen at a New England boarding school. He is being bullied by the other boys, and his sexual orientation is being questioned after skinny dipping with a male teacher at the school. Laura, the wife of his housemaster, is very sensitive to Tom's problems. Her husband thinks she should back off and offer no more support than "tea and sympathy." She feels that Tom is being teased because he's a little different, a musician and actor with longer hair, not fitting into the athletic mold of the other guys. Laura gets so involved that she crosses into dangerous territory for a faculty wife.

There is a lot written today about bullying of people who happen to be a little different, have a different sexual orientation, or act young for their age. But this play was probably ahead of its time in the 1950s when these things were not talked about much. This coming-of-age play showed how rumors, gossiping, and

bullying can do enormous harm.

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### **Elise says**

I hated this book. I think I hate this playwright's work.

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### **Amy Nicole says**

I'm trying to read more plays and get more educated in theatre, so this was a step towards that. I really liked the characters. I felt like everything tied in pretty well. It was interesting because the setting was only in about 3 rooms of a house and all of the "action" that occurred outside of the house had to be explained or mentioned when the characters came in. It made things interesting since the more 'intense' scenes happened outside of the setting.

I liked the ending though. I thought the relationship between the characters, especially Laura and Bill, was very well developed and shown through their dialogue and actions. Tom was my favorite. The things he was going through with his sexuality and peoples' perceptions of him seemed so relevant to today's society's preconceptions and prejudices even though it was written a few decades ago.

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### **Gale says**

#### **"TRIAL BY PREJUDICE"**

Robert Anderson's 1953 drama in three acts proves a powerful indictment against macho prejudice, as well as a subtle warning to society to accept the "off-horse" with humane tolerance. Set in a boys' boarding school in New England the story unfolds in the home of a teacher (master), middle-aged Bill Reynolds, who revels in his residents' athletic prowess. Laura, his 24-year old bride, gradually realizes that he is not the same, vulnerable man whom she met and fell in love with in Italy. He seems to prefer the masculine company of the guys to spending quality time with her. Her only friend, Lilly, is also a former actress, but this gal revels in the lascivious attention of the junior jocks.

Tom, one of the boys in this House, is just 17, sensitive by nature and lonely in the extreme--totally out of place with the butch fellows who sport crew cuts. To further emphasize Tom's not fitting in, although he is a tennis star in his own right, he prefers poetry and playing women's roles in amateur theatricals. When he is "seen" at a beach in the buff with another master, rumors abound that he is gay; he is suddenly the butt of nasty thoughts, snide remarks and gradual social ostracism.

As the wife of a master Laura is merely expected to offer tea and sympathy to the resident boys in her House--to set a genteel tone in the parlor. But something about Tom arouses more than her sympathy, which escalates to fascination and ultimately desire--on both sides. In order to counter the ugly rumors about his being homosexual--based on the flimsiest of proof--Tom rashly makes a date with a trampy girl, hoping to get a reputation as a "regular guy." The scheme backfires to the boy's mortification. Equally eager to establish Tom's manhood on campus Laura takes matters into her own hands, but how far will she go to soothe his ego? Either way his reputation is shattered and he faces expulsion--at least from the House, if the

not the school itself. As a dramatic stroke of genius it is the climax of literary irony that the very youth who is scorned for being gay has a secret affair with the wife of his chief tormentor. Insightful and thought-provoking even in the contemporary age of Open Sexuality.

(January 5, 2010.)

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### **Karla says**

I first read this play in college. I thought the plot looked interesting and wanted something good to read over the weekend. This play really stuck with me, I thought the characters were so authentic. I thought about them long after I finished the play. I always thought this would be a wonderful play to direct.

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### **Carlos says**

There is such depth of feeling in this play as to make it heart-achingly beautiful. Anderson manages to highlight perfectly the plight of the young man that every other man is ready to call “queer” simply because he does not quite fit in, because he likes music, doesn’t like aggressive sports and even walks “funny”. Through the eyes of a woman who can see the persecution of this young man for what it is, a scapegoat for the insecurities of its leaders, the reader is able to empathize with the hopeless situation the young man is put in. While I would have liked it even more if the young man had indeed been gay and all this persecution had still been shown to be ludicrous, it is no mean feat for a play of 1950s to focus on the irrationality of the persecution of the different.

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### **Lauren says**

*Tea and Sympathy* manages to be both dated and surprisingly relevant.

At an all-boys’ New England boarding school, Tom is a social outcast because he’s different than the other boys. He’s not an athlete and he doesn’t mind playing the female part in the school’s theatrical productions. He’s effeminate and rumors therefore abound about him. The one person who sympathizes with him is the new wife of his housemaster.

The twist is that Tom is not gay but is secretly in love with her.

I liked this play from the standpoint of how it dealt with social hierarchies, of how people make decisions to maintain their own social status, even when it conflicts with their moral compass. I found the play surprisingly light on its feet for the most part, willing to touch on issues without belaboring the point.

The subplot between the new wife and her husband is a little flatter than Tom’s tale, but it does a nice job of paralleling and highlighting the play’s themes.

That Tom is straight but merely meets the stereotypical idea of a gay man is part of the play’s resonance. Yes, attitudes have changed in the past sixty years, but people are still judged based on stereotypes and whether they fit certain expectations. If anything, I think it might be worse in our wired, segmented culture.

I also watched the movie, which was significantly revised due to the Hays Code. Given the limitations, it's a decent adaptation, and I liked that they brought over the actors from the Broadway run. Definitely worth both reading (or watching the play) and checking out the movie. Recommended.

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### **zeynab kaveh says**

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### **Alana says**

[It feels dated, due to the subject matter and how it's handled. Apparently in Hollywood versions the young men are treated as college age rather than prep school, which, to me, changes the tone of the story. If the boy is barely 18, Laura comes across as much more predatory, even if she is really just trying to help him, which is one of the things that disturbed me about the play. But I wonder how much of that is my looking at it from 2017 ey

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### **Kristin says**

I'm curious how this was received in the 50s. Anyone who took Stephen's Gay & Lesbian Drama class, I'd love to hear what you discussed in this one

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### **Katherine says**

I love what another reviewer referred to as the WHOA factor in this play. The play is explicit about things the movie only implies. Touches on themes like guilt for tragic actions that might have happened but didn't. Why do we feel more guilty for doing something to someone when it leads to that person's suicide or some other excessively AWFUL outcome rather than an unknown outcome or just plain suffering of the victim? We did the thing, no matter the result. We are accountable. A rich, eloquent picture of prejudice back in the day.

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