



The Rattigan

The Newsletter of
The Terence Rattigan Society

ISSUE NO. 16 DECEMBER 2015

Version

The Society plays *Follow My Leader* in clubland

When, like us, you don't actually have to have an AGM, it can be a challenge to put together an event that will make it worth the effort for our members to attend. But when you have members like Adrian Brown and Denis Moriarty eager to do their part to make the Society a success, the challenge disappears. So it was that, courtesy of Denis' hospitality, we gathered in the elegant surroundings of the Oxford and Cambridge Club in London's Pall Mall to enjoy not only an excellent meal but also a rehearsed reading of Rattigan's *Follow My Leader* under Adrian's expert direction.

As Adrian explained to us after a relaxing pre-dinner glass, *Follow My Leader* was, with *After the Dance*, one of Rattigan's attempts in 1938 to follow the success of *French Without Tears*. Written in collaboration with Harrow and Oxford friend, Tony Goldschmidt, the play reflects Terry's idealism and pacifism in his endeavour to parody the rise of Nazism by chronicling the political machinations of the fictitious Moronia. In thinly disguised jibes at the likes of Hitler, Goering and Goebbels, the play portrays the fate of the hapless plumber, Hans Zedesi, plucked from obscurity as the puppet of a corrupt totalitarian regime. Along-

side the political commentary, there's a vein of broad humour, typified by the party greeting, 'Up Zedesi!'. Fortunately, with the love of a good woman behind him, Zedesi rebels and overthrows the regime. In a final speech, he rues that his artisan counterpart in Germany is bound for a nasty end – 'He should have stuck to house painting'.



Clive Montellier reports on the curtain-raiser to the AGM Dinner in Pall Mall

Ironically, *Follow My Leader* proved too controversial for the Lord Chamberlain; in the mood of appeasement of 1938, an attack on the German leadership might prove too provocative and the play was banned (ironic, too, that Rattigan would in later years be condemned for being a 'safe' writer). By the time

that tension had deteriorated into war and a licence was granted, *Follow My Leader's* time had passed and the production in 1940 lasted for just eleven performances. Goldschmidt was himself killed in the Tunisian campaign in 1943, whilst serving in the Royal Artillery. Many of his men wrote movingly of a much-loved officer, including one Terence 'Spike' Milligan.

And 75 years later, the Society was treated to the twelfth performance, featuring a cast drawn entirely from our own ranks. **Cont. on page 5...**

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The Terence Rattigan Society

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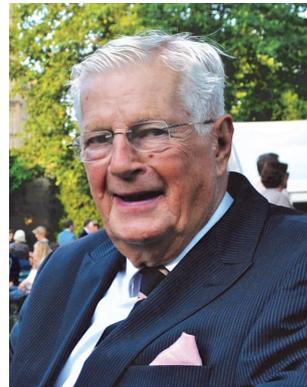
INTRODUCING Douglas Gordon

Like several members of the Society, founder member Douglas Gordon is also an avid member of the Noël Coward Society, the link between the two being not only an appreciation of great writing for the theatre but our esteemed Chairman Barbara Longford, who also chaired the Noël Coward Society for many years.

At the age of sixteen and a half, Douglas was awarded an English Speaking Union Schoolboy scholarship for a year to study at an American Prep School. Following that he studied hotel administration at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, graduating in 1952.

This clearly set him up for a career in the hotel industry and on his return to the UK he worked at the Grosvenor House, Park Lane, in London and for Charles Laughton's brother Tommy at the Royal Hotel, Scarborough, before being asked to be the Executive Assistant Manager at the London Hilton, to oversee the opening in 1962.

While working at Grosvenor House he also became an Assistant Scout Master to the 56th Westminster Sea Scout Troop, whose headquarters were nearby in North Audley Street. It was at this time that he met the legendary Ralph Reader, founder of the famous Boy Scout Gang Show and he invited Douglas to join the cast of the show which he was then staging at the Golders Green Hippodrome. That was the start of a lifelong love of



theatre and performance.

On leaving the Hilton in 1965, Douglas managed to buy a small hotel at Shepperton-on-Thames. At that time the hotel had six rooms and one bathroom. Over the years the group has expanded to 144 rooms in the Shepperton and Weybridge area of Surrey. Working so near to London he was able to indulge his passion for theatre – especially musicals - becoming a member of the Ivor Novello Society and the Stephen Sondheim Society in addition to the aforementioned Noël Coward Society and of course, latterly, the TRS.

Among his prized possessions he happens to have three gold discs—not having recorded them himself, but being given them by grateful guests at his hotel! Those guests included Herman's Hermits, the 60s pop group, who had a gold disc with *There's a Kind of Hush*, Roger Daltrey of The Who, who donated his gold disc for *Tommy*, and the 80s jazz-funk band Shakatak. And now, in his 85th year, he has recorded a CD himself, as a member of the Weybridge Male Voice Choir. They have a very showbiz repertoire, with numbers such as *Luck Be a Lady Tonight* from *Guys and Dolls*, *Bring Him Home* from *Les Mis*, and *The Rose* by the wonderful Bette Midler.

Continued on p 5...

A talent for farce

New member Paddy Briggs reviews the Rattigan double bill at the Garrick



Zoë Wanamaker as Dame Maud in *Harlequinade* (above) and in its companion piece, *All On Her Own* (right), at the Garrick Theatre.

Terence Rattigan's two plays *Harlequinade* and *All On Her Own* are separated by a twenty year gap, by the medium for which they were written - and by rather more. The former, first produced in 1948, is as The Times critic put it at the time "...a laughing tribute to the theatre which is due from a young man upon whom it has smiled so consistently..." The latter was a commission for television and produced in 1968 at a time when Rattigan's star was recovering from a fall. That fall, not at all of his own making, was a reflection of the new drama of the mid-1950s when the perceived gentility of a Rattigan or a Noel Coward ("boulevard theatre") was supplanted by the realism of first Brecht, then the home grown Osborne, Arden, Wesker, Delaney and Pinter. However, whilst the drawing room may have been vacated there was rarely criticism by the new wave of dramatists who admired the craft of Coward or Rattigan - indeed Harold Pinter praised them both and had appeared in the latter's *Separate Tables*.

In choosing to include two Rattigan plays along with John Osborne's masterpiece *The Entertainer* in this long season of plays at the Garrick - by the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company - Branagh has acknowledged Theatre's debt to both. To choose *Harlequinade* rather than the more familiar *The Browning Version* or *The Winslow Boy* was vindicated by this superb production dominated by a truly great comic performance by Branagh himself as the actor/manager Arthur Gosport. Gosport is an aging juvenile playing Romeo in an Arts Council sponsored tour of Shakespeare's play. His dark and very full wig can only partly disguise the fact that he is perhaps thirty years too old for the role. His rather

younger wife Edna (Miranda Raison) is Juliet and between them they are "trouper" in the great tradition of the touring theatre. Rattigan was not a great fan of the Arts Council or of "Theatre with a Social Purpose" and his rather conservative demolition of it in *Harlequinade* could be somewhat bitter in less deft hands. In fact we just see them and their company as being borderline certifiable "Luvvies" without malice but full of gossip and pretensions.

Harlequinade is set on that sometimes difficult border between high comedy and outright farce. It is said that farce is "real people in unusual situations" and here the unusual is created by the arrival of a young woman who claims to be Gosport's grown up daughter, Muriel, and by the apparent existence of a grandchild (neither of whose existence he was previously aware). For Gosport the idea that he is a grandfather just before playing Romeo is a huge shock. The plot unfolds with plenty of opportunities for Branagh to demonstrate a special talent for farce and, of course, for character creation! There is much fine writing which is showcased with perfect timing (essential in farce) by the Company as a whole and by Branagh in particular.



Photo: Johan Persson

If *Harlequinade* is high comedy the monologue *All On Her Own* is sad and introspective. Whether Alan Bennett was aware of it when nearly twenty years later he put together his *Talking Heads* monologues, also for the BBC, I don't know. But the genre is the same - as is the quality of the writing. Rosemary returns tipsily from a party to an empty apartment where she has lived alone since the death of her husband. He died of an overdose of sleeping pills and she is unsure whether it was accidental or not and tries to find out. This she does as she demolishes the better part of a bottle of whisky. Her memories are in turn maudlin and sentimental but rich and passionate as well. For this to be convincing requires an actress of sensitivity and style and in Zoë Wanamaker we have just that. She is utterly believable in her sadness and her loneliness and her lack of comprehension as to how what happened happened. She also still has the forlorn beauty - a still vibrant if slightly fading sexiness - which you know has been her forte all her life. **Continued on back page...**

The Resistible Rise of Hans Zedesi

Reflections on Rattigan's 'Follow My Leader' by Roger Mills

To be fair, anybody unlucky enough not to have seen Henry Goodman's towering performance as Arturo Ui in what is Brecht's greatest play might have come to *Follow My leader* with a less jaundiced eye than mine. Covering the same ground basically as *The Resistible Rise* this early Rattigan piece, written with Tony Goldschmidt, and given a well-rehearsed reading at the recent AGM, attempts to satirise the rise of totalitarianism in the inter-war period through the story of one Hans Zedesi. He's a



Henry Goodman as Brecht's Arturo Ui, in the production first staged at Chichester in 2012, and which transferred to the Duchess Theatre the following year. Photograph by Tristram Kenton.

plumber who, quite by chance, is turned into the figurehead leader of a fictitious country by a couple of political and military chancers assisted by a token terrorist and a sleeping financial backer in the form of a baroness.

Eventually the worm turns (too late in the piece for real dramatic impact) sadly not for any real issue of principle but merely it seems because he is fed up with the job.

Why the plumber's surname? Simply put 'up' in front of it and the party slogan becomes... well I won't bore you. One wonders why he wasn't saddled with two brothers Kneize and Boump. Names of the imaginary countries are similarly inspired.

Of course even with the young Rattigan there is a fair bit to enjoy in what is essentially a series of one-liner set pieces and a few scenes which hint at what is to come. Of these most especially noteworthy are when the British Ambassador shows up to complain mildly that his embassy has been blown up under him and another where an economic policy has been purchased - from a

bloke who's now in the state asylum - and which has effectively abolished unemployment. There is also a touching scene between the plumber and a visiting queen discussing the limitations of their ceremonial roles. Overall, though, the feeling is of a breezy one-act student romp trying to get out.

The problem though runs rather deeper and isn't merely one of tone and a seeming belief that the likes of Hitler were picked rather than picking themselves. In *Arturo Ui* Brecht takes

an ultimately trivial issue - the wholesale cauliflower market - and treats attempts to corner it with the utmost seriousness, whereas Rattigan takes the vital seriousness of international relations and treats them trivially. We only laugh at a plot to blow up a diplomatic entourage (in order to trigger a war) because it's so clearly signalled that the explosives 'expert' is an idiot incapable of getting anything right. So, where in *Ui* the laughter dies to be replaced by sheer horror, in *Follow My Leader* there has been little in the way of humour, leave alone satire, in the first place and the plumber never really develops any real sense of how he is being used. (If you want to see where this plot machine can work can I suggest the Frank Kapra-esque Kevin Kline movie *Dave* where the manipulator is played by a suitably menacing Frank Langella. Here, because the dupe, conned into impersonating the US President who is his double, has his epiphany early enough, it makes a real and satisfying denouement possible.)

So was this members-only revival a worthwhile

exercise? I still really don't know, enjoyable though parts were. And if the TRS doesn't take a look at the likes of *Follow My Leader* few others will. What I will say is that if long-neglected work is to be done, putting it amongst friends in the convivial setting of a London Club with a couple of glasses of wine on board is perhaps the best idea.

Truth is of course that very few plays are worth reviving. In a talk attended by this writer, Jonathan Church pondered whether any of the eight new pieces a year put on in one of his theatre jobs was worth another outing. The same question might be posed about the current revival of Granville-Barker's *Waste*. Adrian Brown in his intro reckoned we were seeing the twelfth performance of *Leader*, the first run having closed after eleven following a Cardiff tryout.

Probably best to bear in mind the next number and quietly put the scripts back in the cupboard.

☞

INTRODUCING Douglas Gordon *continued from page 2*

Douglas has made many friends in the theatre world, including the late lamented Roger Rees, whom he persuaded to write an article for this newsletter only a few issues ago on playing Arthur Winslow on Broadway. And now Douglas has himself written very touchingly about Roger on page 7 of this issue. ☞

Follow My Leader! *continued from page 1*

Denis Moriarty and Anthony Campling overcame their natural bonhomie to play the scheming politicians, with your Secretary self-typecast as their oily bespectacled henchman. Giles Cole reprised his Oxford Conference performance in the lead role, whilst Richard Duployen threw himself into the role of an anarchist terrorist and Alison Du Cane provided a highly convincing female lead as the journalist who rescues Zedesi from himself. Paddy Holland gave us a most regal Queen of Neurasthenia, John Howes a masterful diplomat,

and Philippa Comber, Shirley Jacobs and Richard Sachs played everyone else! Special mention must go to Martin Amherst-Lock, weaving the stage directions into a fluid narration that wouldn't have been out of place on a Radio 4 afternoon play. Oh yes – and we had the AGM, but who wants to read about that!

Editor's note: Suffice it to say, however, that the accounts were approved and your Committee was once again re-elected nem con, the entire business including Chairman's Report and Membership Report being conducted in a record 14 minutes. Such are the benefits of RAF discipline and training! Our Secretary vouchsafed that in the RAF the way to ensure a quick meeting was to have a barrel of beer waiting and to fine anyone who delayed its being deployed in a timely manner. ☞

From the archive

Jeremy Brett and Margaret Leighton in the original (1958) production of *Variation on a Theme* at the Globe Theatre. As we know, the play received very mixed notices, with Kenneth Tynan in particular being his usual (with Rattigan) viperish self, stating that he couldn't see any real acting going on at all. The star of the show for Tynan was Norman Hartnell, who designed Miss Leighton's gowns. It was not Rattigan's finest hour, especially since this was his first play after the great Osborne episode, when *Look Back in Anger* changed the face of British theatre. That face was no longer Rattigan's. *Footnote:* it was Margaret Leighton also who first performed *All On Her Own* on TV in 1968. ☞



Among friends at Trinity

Denis Moriarty reminisces about that glorious weekend in June

The sun shone, and just beyond the handsome eighteenth century gates of Trinity, TR's old Oxford college (1930-34), were Diana Scotney and Andrew Kenyon to greet us. Across the Front Quad where TR had his first rooms we were directed to an evocative College archive, collated by Clare Hopkins, who then took us on an informative tour of the college staircases, hall and chapel.

Fortified with coffee, we were welcomed by our esteemed trio: Barbara Longford, Clive 'Monty' Montellier and Giles Cole. We were among friends, and facing a packed and stimulating programme superbly organised in concept and delivery.

TR's two biographers began and ended the conference: Geoffrey Wansell in his customary Garrick bow tie proclaimed TR the genius of English twentieth century theatre, hurtfully knocked off his perch by Osborne, Devine and Tynan. Holly Hill, TRS representative in the USA, followed with the American dimension, an emotional response, she confessed: TR the master of plot and consummate poet of the theatre.

Dan Rebellato, with a clutch of scholarly Rattigan works to his credit, spoke to the challenging title 'Queer Terry', confronting the charge that TR was 'chicken' in facing up to his sexuality, with the view that it was more a subtle and careful construction of character, plumbing a profound understanding of what simultaneously reveals and conceals. The seeming absence of emotion *is* in fact the emotion.

That first morning was more than Wagner's *Rheingold* in length, almost three hours without a break, concentration unexpected of modern audiences, interested response, stimulating questions; we were on the edge of our seats throughout.

After lunch our TRS-sponsored drama students demonstrated their commitment and versatility in an illuminating session of excerpts chosen and interpreted in performance by Ian Flintoff, himself a former undergraduate at Trinity who, in the scorching summer of 1959, had directed and played Hamlet, no less, in the College gardens. He had gone on to a very respectable career in theatre, film and politics and now, with reference to Ibsen, Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *The Browning Version*, he explored with his young actors poignancy in how and why we are hurt—interpersonal relationships into which TR had such insight.

Alan Brodie, TR's latterday literary agent, brought the first day to a close with an elegant *tour d'horizon* of the TR legacy and reputation in the context of the centenary in 2011. This perspective was developed at the toast in

Hall at the Birthday Dinner that followed. This had much of the relaxed formality that TR would have recognised and enjoyed—refectory tables, a show of silver and candles, and a well-served dinner with some excellent College wines.

The speaker from our high table of assembled contributors and officers, was Michael Imison, an impresario of undergraduate theatre at the Edinburgh Fringe, and with a lot of TV experience before he, too, became TR's literary agent. He spoke warmly and comprehensively of working with TR at first hand, and laced this personal evaluation with anecdote and discernment.

We had tired the sun by talking, and it was decidedly chilly when we trooped outside to see today's undergraduate Trinity Players in a performance of *Hay Fever* in the College gardens. There was just time to grab a blanket and a necessary warmer from the bar, but any thoughts of mere endurance were soon dispelled by a spirited production, against a makeshift but imaginative set.

The following morning some of these performers were back with a rehearsed reading of *First Episode*, written by TR and Philip Heimann while still at Trinity, and full of verve and keen observation, with a particularly impressive reading of the character of Margot Gresham.

It was at Oxford, his biographers relate, that TR perceived that acting was not for him; he had a one-liner in a Gielgud-directed undergraduate *Romeo and Juliet*—it always attracted the wrong sort of laugh, and a different one each night. Edith Evans' next line as the Nurse "Put up, put up, this is a pitiful case" only served to compound the humiliation.

Michael Darlow presented a *tour de force* of a final session: in his own idiosyncratic and authoritative way, and with cleverly chosen illustrations from film and television, and with the help of two budding performers, Messrs Imison and Montellier, he explained the radical in Rattigan. Behind the posh exterior there lurked the questioning anti-establishmentarian. With the judgement of Solomon, Michael summarised his argument with wholly convincing resonance.

This was a wonderful debut conference. Whither now? We seem to have done it all. But somehow I think they will be back—Monty with his spot-on organisation, Giles with his relaxed chairmanship, and our much-loved Barbara, whose creation this all was. Here's to the next! 

Obituary

Nickleby to Winslow

Douglas Gordon
remembers his friend Roger Rees

On Wednesday 15 July 2015 at 7.45pm (NY Time) all the theatres on Broadway dimmed their lights for one minute in honour and memory of my very dear friend Roger Rees, who had died on July 11th after a heroic battle with brain cancer.

I first met Roger in 1962 when we were both appearing in *Ralph Reader's Gang Show* at the Golders Green Hippodrome. Our mentor, Ralph Reader, even in those far off days had spotted something special about Roger and gave him every encouragement. Ralph introduced Roger to Arthur Lane, the actor-manager who was producing *Hindle Wakes*, the Lancashire comedy by Stanley Houghton at the Wimbledon Theatre in south-west London. Roger was by this time painting scenery at that theatre. One of the cast had to drop out and Roger was offered the part. While working on *Hindle Wakes*, Roger was having a little trouble with the Lancashire accent. I suggested to him that he think *Coronation Street*. This seemed to solve the problem.

Years later Ralph Reader was quoted as saying "I did not put your name up in lights, son, but I certainly screwed in one of the bulbs".

Before working for Arthur Lane, Roger had been studying at the Slade School of Art. While at Art College he worked with me at The London Hilton, Park Lane. At this time the hotel had just opened to the public and I held the position of Executive Assistant Manager.

Roger's big break came in 1982 when he was chosen to play the lead role in *The Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* for the RSC. This eight and a half hour epic won Roger an Olivier Award in the UK and a Tony Award in the USA. The play was directed by Trevor Nunn. I was lucky enough to attend the first night in New York. After the show Roger kindly insisted that I joined him, Trevor Nunn and other members of the cast for dinner at the famous theatrical restaurant, Sardi's. I thought I had simply died and gone to heaven!

Many years later Roger was able to join Barbara

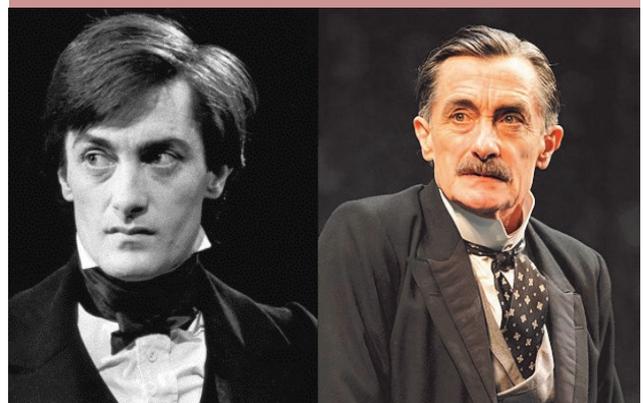
Longford, Ken Starrett, myself and other members of the American branch of the Noël Coward Society in laying flowers on the Master's statue at the George Gershwin Theatre in New York in 2008. He was Guest of Honour at the lunch which followed and members found him utterly charming and self-effacing.

It was as recently as 2013 that Roger played Arthur Winslow in TR's *The Winslow Boy* to great acclaim on Broadway (and wrote a fine article on the production in issue 14). Recently Benedict Cumberbatch was exposed to members of his audience filming his performance of Hamlet on their smart phones at the Barbican. In 1985 when Roger played the doleful Dane at the same theatre, he found it difficult to concentrate on his soliloquy while travelling in the backstage lift from his dressing room to the stage with the fireman, programme sellers and ladies selling ice cream. "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."

Dearest Roger, I miss you so much and will always cherish our friendship. Good night sweet prince and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.
Douglas. ✨



Roger Rees with Douglas Gordon and Michael Chen at the Warren Lodge Hotel in 2011; and, below, as Nicholas Nickleby in 1982 and Arthur Winslow in 2013.



A talent for farce

continued from p 3

These two plays are put together for the first time and serve as a timely reminder (along with recent revivals of *Flare Path* and *French Without Tears*) just how good a playwright Terence Rattigan was and how wide his range. If the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company maintains this standard throughout its season we are in for some further treats! ☞

This review by Paddy Briggs first appeared online at www.londontheatre1.com.

After the matinee



After the matinee performance of *Harlequinade* on 5 December, 28 TRS members were treated to a private audience with Sir Kenneth Branagh and another cast member, Tom Bateman, both of whom had given beautifully judged and very funny performances in the Rattigan farce. They came to join us in the stalls and answered questions about both *Harlequinade* and *All On Her Own*, in which Zoë Wanamaker gave a performance ripe with the oddities of loss and grief (*see the review on p3*). This was a particular treat and we are very grateful to Sir Ken and Tom Bateman for according us this privilege, especially as it was eating into their rest period before the evening performance. No trace of the vanity of Sir Ken's character, Arthur Gosport, here! He was relaxed, charming and forthright. Every bit the *modern* actor-manager. ☞

Dates for your diary

June 2016

A new production of *The Deep Blue Sea* will open at the National's Lyttelton Theatre in June, directed by Carrie Cracknell, whose recent credits include the hugely acclaimed production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* for the Young Vic. A TRS outing will be arranged. Further details to be announced in due course.

June/July 2016

The Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond is reviving its recent sold-out production of *French Without Tears*. It will open on 30 June and run until 30 July. Some TRS members saw this production earlier this year.

July 2016

Rattigan's 1943 farce *While the Sun Shines* is scheduled at the Theatre Royal, Bath, and will run from 13 to 30 July, directed by Christopher Luscombe. The Society hopes to arrange a visit. Watch this space.

A call for readers!

Plans for the Terence Rattigan Society Award for a new play move on apace, with a launch planned for late January. We are delighted that some theatre VIPs have seen fit to lend their names to the Award, namely Lord (Julian) Fellowes, Thea Sharrock, Professor Dan Rebellato, and our Vice-President David Suchet. It's a terrific mix—a writer, a director, a drama professor and an actor, all highly acclaimed in their fields.

They will be the final judges, but others will need to sift through the entries and agree on a longlist, and then a shortlist from which the above-mentioned can make their final choices.

So, this is a call for any members with script-reading, and perhaps scriptwriting, experience who would like to take part in this bold new venture. Full criteria and rules will be published in the next issue, but we would be grateful to anyone who would like to put their name forward at this stage. Members of the committee will be reading the entries and we anticipate needing two or three others to offer second and third opinions in the interests of fairness.

Please contact Barbara or Diana if you feel you could take this on. ☞