



The Rattigan

The Newsletter of
The Terence Rattigan Society

April 2017 Issue No. 20

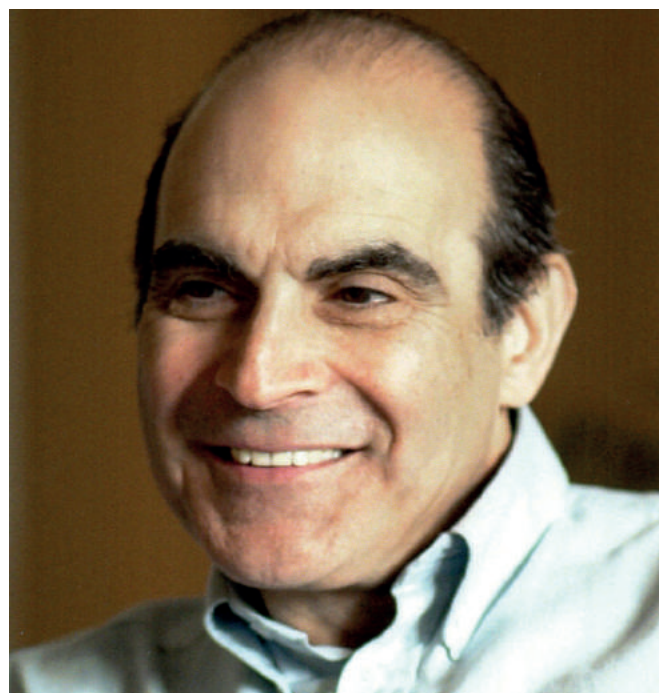
Version

DAVID SUCHET - OUR NEW PRESIDENT

Members will be delighted to learn that, following the death of our inaugural President, Princess Galitzine, David Suchet has accepted our invitation to become our President. David has been a supportive Vice-President since the launch in the centenary year when he planted a commemorative tree in the garden of the Actors' Church, Covent Garden, where Sir Terence Rattigan CBE has a plaque on the north wall above that of Sir Noël Coward. As members may recall, this event began as a theatrical occasion in the church when David gave the tribute, written by his fellow Vice-President, Geoffrey Wansell. David spoke again, after planting the tree and this turned out to be an amusing, as well as moving, occasion. He began his speech by talking about trees "*an extraordinary piece of nature and symbolic of the life of a human being...*" when suddenly the church bells rang out the TWELVE NOON CHIMES. David had to pause, but in true music hall tradition he included the interruption into his words. "*It never happens on stage....Talk amongst yourselves*" and when the chimes had stopped, he said "*I think this is Terry's joke, actually. Timing is everything*". He then continued his intended speech. He made his third speech of the day in the Irving Room at The Garrick Club, after receiving his Vice-Presidential scroll, drawing attention to the way in which Rattigan's plays have a quality reminiscent of musical composition. There are the top notes, the middle notes and the lower, darker, notes; not all of which have always been played to the full in productions of the plays in the past. In Rattigan's lifetime, David suggested, the top notes may have been given slightly more emphasis, and the lower tones given less than their full value. Now, he said, we have the advantage, with some excellent recent productions, of seeing the plays in their full depth and breadth.

In January 2016, David was kind enough to host the launch of The Terence Rattigan Society Award, at the Jermyn Street Theatre. He is also one of the final judges and will be reading the three finalist plays, selected from the 191 eligible submissions. David's latest appearance amongst us was at last year's Annual Birthday Dinner at the Garrick Club, when he gave the Toast to Sir Terence.

Given David's international stature as a theatre, film, television and radio actor; his demanding workload as well as his family commitments, I think his participation in our Society is a remarkable and gracious tribute to the memory



of Sir Terence and his work. I have assured David that, as President, he will not be asked to perform any additional duties, but to have his support and his name on our letterhead is invaluable. It is delightful too, that Sheila Suchet supports the Society by accompanying her husband to our outings. In Issue number 2 (Jan/Feb 2012) of this magazine, Giles Cole wrote an article welcoming David to the Society. At that time he was embarking on a West End production of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and indeed he has an affinity with American roles, having also appeared, unforgettably, in *All My Sons*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Oleanna* and in 2015 he starred in a new production of *Death of a Salesman*, for BBC Radio. By the end of 2013 David had played the detective in every one of the seventy Poirot stories that Agatha Christie wrote and in the very last episode *Curtain* he bid the character a very sad goodbye. Hercule Poirot was a part of David's life for almost 25 years. In that year too his first book *Poirot and Me* was published, written with his close friend, Geoffrey Wansell.

The following year David took the play about the election and death of Pope John Paul *The Last Confession* by Roger Crane, on a world tour. He had starred as

Cardinal Benelli in its premiere at Chichester in 2007 and also its transfer to The Theatre Royal, Haymarket.

In 2015 David played a woman for the first time in his then 46 years in the theatre - Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest* - to great acclaim. Michael Billington said it was: "a thoroughly enjoyable production and, at its centre, lies a superb performance by Suchet that reminds us that even Lady Bracknell contains a certain impishness beneath her elegantly frocked hauteur."

More recently, David has appeared in three BBC TV productions - *Peter Pan Goes Wrong*, *Dr. Who* and *Decline and Fall* and has over the years given us some unforgettable television portrayals. The Duke of York in *Richard II*, Robert Maxwell in *Maxwell*, Melmotte in *The Way We Live Now*, Blott in *Blott on the Landscape* and back in 1988 he played O'Connor, in Terence Rattigan's *Cause Célèbre*.

David is a Trustee of The Garrick Club which last year received a gift of a portrait of David by Sacha Newley. This is now hanging in the cocktail bar. The club already displays two other portraits of him, by Tom Coates and Helen T. Wilson.

His main performance in a Rattigan play was Gregor Antonescu in *Man and Boy* at the Duchess Theatre in 2005, directed by Maria Aitken. Rattigan's plays were rarely

revived at that time and I was thrilled to have the opportunity of seeing one of them in the West End, starring one of this country's finest actors. Again, I quote from Michael Billington's review: "But although Rattigan never analyses Antonescu, the role gives David Suchet a chance to display his hypnotic technical finesse. He shows the tycoon's ability to switch in a second from fake cordiality to reptilian menace. He also has the Olivier-like ability to invest the simple personal pronoun "you" with an accusatory ferocity. And, as he finally embraces his son without fully touching him, Suchet reveals the depths of the hero's isolation. It is a formidable performance by a remarkable actor that provides much of the psychological information Rattigan neglects to convey."

David turned down the part of Antonescu three times, but fortunately Geoffrey Wansell finally convinced him to take on the role. Antonescu is a stinker of a man but David, a remarkably kind, honest and warm man, has never shied away from taking on such challenges. We are indeed honoured to welcome him as our new President.

Barbara Longford

(Video recordings of the Actors' Church Tree Planting and other events of that day are available on the TRS website, courtesy of the artists who participated. Also all past magazines are available to view on our website).

REMEMBERING PRINCESS GALITZINE

As most members will know, our President Princess George Galitzine MBE died in December last. The Society was represented at both her funeral and the later memorial service.

Jean Dawnay was the longest resident of Eaton Square and her funeral took place on Wednesday 21st December 2016 at the beautiful early 19th century neoclassical church of St Peter's. Prince Michael of Kent, GCVO, CD attended, representing his family, the Kents, who were close friends of Jean and the church was packed.

Jean's daughter, Princess Catherine (Katya) had arranged an exquisite service, greatly enhanced by a choir of professional singers led by one of Jean's closest friends, the choral conductor Suzi Digby (Lady Eatwell) OBE. The choir sang the setting of words from the Sarum Primer of 1538 *God Be in My Head and My Understanding* by Sir Henry Walford Davies and a Russian anthem by Sergei Rachmaninov and everyone sang *Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven, Silent Night* and *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*.

The service was conducted by The Reverend Ralph Williamson, the Vicar, whom Katya had asked to make the address, based on words from Jean's family and friends. He seemed to capture Jean's spirit perfectly.

Lord Eatwell read one of Jean's favourite poems *What is this life if, full of care...* by William Henry Davies; another close friend, Dr Robin Hart, read *Dirge* from *Cymbeline* Act IV scene 2. Alexander Galitzine read from Corinthians, Chapter 13, and George Galitzine read, also



Princess Galitzine being interviewed by Geoffrey Wansell at the V&A society event in 2012

from the Sarum Primer, *O blessed Jesu, most mighty lion, King immortal and most victorious.*

Before the service we heard Praeludium in C (BWV 846) by J.S. Bach; *Nimrod* from the Enigma Variations by Sir Edward Elgar: Andante in F (Opus 9) by Sergei Rachmaninov and at the close, Bach's Praeludium et Fugue in C (BWV 545).

Three of Jean's oldest friends, all renowned writers were present: Viscount Norwich, CVO (John Julius Norwich); Baron Fellowes of West Stafford (Julian Fellowes) and Adrian Brown, both of whom are Honorary Members of the TRS.

On the first page of The Order of Service, beneath a photograph of Jean, were the words of Shakespeare's Sonnet 104:

*To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
For as you were, when first your eye I ey'd,
Such seems your beauty still.*

Barbara Longford

There is one thing that I am sure of: the Society's late President, Princess George Galitzine MBE, would have hugely enjoyed her Memorial Service at St Peter's Eaton Square on Monday 23rd of January 2017. She would have relished the sense of love and affection that enveloped the one hour of thanksgiving, greeting it with one of her trademark shy little laughs and the warmest of her smiles.

From the moment that the former Jean Dawnay's eleven-year-old grandson George read the first prayer standing at the lectern with his mother Katya, the Princess's daughter, by his side there could be no mistaking the warmth that filled the splendid surroundings of that most spectacular of central London churches, just a few hundred yards from her flat.

This was Jean's church, and it embraced her memory with all her characteristic grace, dignity and charm. The Reverend Ralph Williamson, who presided, made that abundantly clear in The Bidding prayer when he remembered her 'wisdom and love of life and, above all, her devotion to her family, friends and to the memory of her beloved husband, George'.

There was Rachmaninov, as a tribute to her love of Russian music, played majestically on the church's magnificent organ by the Director of Music, Andrew John Smith, but the choir also sang *All The Things You Are* by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein, to reflect Jean's love of Broadway musicals. She had, after all, almost been persuaded to play Eliza in *My Fair Lady*, only to decide against it.

Jean's old friend John Corless OBE paid tribute to her considerable charity work, including, of course, the Princess George Galitzine Memorial Library in St Petersburg, and the charitable trust that supports it. He even found a moment to explain how keen she had been on the Terence Rattigan Society, not least as someone who had

known Terry as a neighbour in Eaton Square, as a dear friend, and hostess of some of his most notable parties at his house in Sunningdale, including the famous one for Laurence Olivier, Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller during the shooting of *The Prince and the Showgirl*.

Perhaps the most moving tribute of all came from Jean's son-in-law, Nicholas Laing, who started by saying: 'I hope you're sitting comfortably. It is a long life', and so it was, all beautifully evoked with family anecdotes and reminiscences that brought Jean's extraordinary gentleness and humanity for everyone she encountered so vividly to life, as our own memories of her at the Society's events always confirmed.

Nicholas also reminded the two hundred or so members of the congregation, including their Royal Highnesses the Duke of Kent and Princess Alexandra that his mother-in-law had also worked at Bletchley Park during the war for the legendary code breaker Leo Marks. That was one reason that Marks's famous poem, written for members of the Special Operations Executive at that time, was included in every pew alongside the order of service, which so eloquently begins: 'The life that I have is all that I have and the life that I have is yours'.

In your mind's eye it was almost possible to hear Jean's unmistakable, soft caressing voice saying its final lines: 'Yet death will be but a pause. For the peace of my years in the long green grass will be yours and yours and yours'.

Those words perfectly captured Jean's indefatigable spirit, and brought her to life again, if only for a moment in the memory. Yes, Princess Galitzine would have enjoyed the service of thanksgiving in her name, just as we remember her for all the wonderful moments she brought to the Society and its members over five unforgettable years.

Geoffrey Wansell



The Terence Rattigan Society

President: David Suchet CBE
Vice-Presidents: Michael Darlow,
Greta Scacchi, Geoffrey Wansell

<i>Chairman</i>	Barbara Longford
<i>Membership Secretary</i>	Diana Scotney
<i>Treasurer</i>	Andrew Kenyon
<i>Editor</i>	Giles Cole
<i>Media Liaison</i>	Roger Mills
<i>Webmaster</i>	Stephen Bradley
<i>Theatre Liaison</i>	Michael Wheatley-Ward
<i>US Representative:</i>	Dr Holly Hill
<i>Secretary & RAF Liaison</i>	Gp Capt Clive Montellier OBE

committee@theterencerattigansociety.co.uk
www.theterencerattigansociety.co.uk

© 2017 The Terence Rattigan Society and/or individual contributors. Any views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual author and do not necessarily represent the views of The Terence Rattigan Society or its Committee.

COMING EVENTS

SOCIETY ANNUAL BIRTHDAY DINNER Wednesday 5th July, 2017 at the Garrick Club. Please see flyer with this issue and book early to avoid disappointment.

AFTER THE DANCE from Friday 26th May to Saturday 4th November Theatre by the Lake in Keswick is showing Rattigan's sharply satirical and heartrending play about a world on the cusp of change. The theatre, hailed by the Independent as 'the most beautifully located and friendly theatre in Britain', is set a short stroll from Derwentwater, amid the magnificent scenery of the Lake District. (Wainwright 3,5&6) Society Members may obtain a discount of £3.00 off the top two ticket prices for the matinee on Saturday 30 September by calling the box office on 01768 774411 and quoting 'Terence Rattigan Society'. (*Old timers will recall the location as the final resting place of the innovative mobile Century Theatre. Ed.*)

THE DEEP BLUE SEA from 15-17 June 2017 at The Mill Studio at Yvonne Arnaud Theatre Guildford Directed by Michael Gaunt. Tickets £15 from tinyurl.com/l4lar8k or 01483 440000.

A DAY AT THE DEEP BLUE SEA

Overcoming the difficulties caused by Southern Railway and buoyed up by the prospect of a sunny day at the seaside, some 35 of us gathered at Bedford House, 79 Marine Parade, Brighton, (right) for a morning visit to Sir Terence Rattigan's former home.

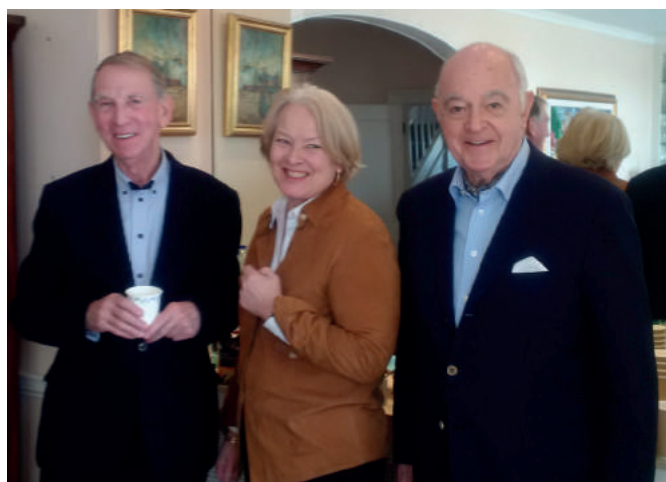
We were greeted by the owner and our host, Mr Luke Jeffers, who kindly allowed us to wander over the six-storeyed house and see every part of the Grade Two listed property. We could explore from the cramped roof space at the top, to the sub-basement where there is a well under the floor and a blocked-off entrance to a tunnel, which ran under the road to Madeira Drive and the sea. Luke told us that they had started to call this basement area The Theatre Room in honour of Terence Rattigan, and hoped to use it for parties and, possibly, small performances during the Brighton Festival.

The interior of the house is a fascinating complex of rooms, which has been extensively altered over the years, and renovation work was much in evidence during our visit. From the beautifully-proportioned drawing room on the



Apart from Sir Terence, there are other theatrical associations with the house. Annie Hancock, wife of Roger Hancock, the brother of the comedian, lived there for 20 years. As Annie Leake, actress and singer, she was first introduced to Roger Hancock by Hattie Jacques when they were both appearing at the Players Theatre in London, an event in a way recalled at Bedford House when we saw a shower curtain, a compilation of stills from comedy films of the 1960s. Roger Hancock was his brother's agent. His desk is in the study at Bedford House, and a brass plate is on a door, reading: "TONY HANCOCK - Sing Along - London Palladium 1963".

I was reminded too that Cuthbert Worsley, writer and drama critic, and friend of Rattigan, lived at the house on occasions, and Sir Terence agreed that Worsley could continue to stay there until the house was sold in 1965. Worsley died in Kemp Town, Brighton, in 1977. Geoffrey Wansell records in his biography of Rattigan that Worsley was in the audience on the opening night of *Look Back in Anger* in 1956 and persuaded Rattigan to stay until the end of the play. Had Rattigan decided to slip out during the interval, he would not have made that fateful remark to waiting reporters, and he would perhaps have been spared much of the heartache that dogged him for so long afterwards.



Norman Home and Robert & Pirjo Gardiner

ground floor at the front of the house, we walked from the hall, to climb the original wooden staircase, seeing the walls lined with Regency wallpaper, and entered the master bedroom suite, the Margaret Leighton bedroom - exclusively for her use whenever she wanted it - and the room that was Rattigan's study. For us, this was a special room; it is little changed since his time there. The carpet, wallpaper, bookcases and radiators were all put in during Rattigan's ownership.

I understand that TRS Member, Robert Gardiner, owned a framed, signed photograph of Margaret Leighton, which he has now sent to Luke, on behalf of TRS members, for display in the Margaret Leighton suite.

The house itself was constructed in about 1814, probably by the Duke of Bedford, whose name is perpetuated in the name Bedford Street, on the corner of which the house actually stands. Sir Terence bought the house in 1961, perhaps attracted to it because of its location, very close to Royal Crescent where Sir Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh lived.



Jinnie & Denis Moriarty and The Revd. Aidan Harker



Members listening to the Host Luke Jeffers' speech.

Having toured the house, with Luke and his partner Rob at hand for advice and help, we enjoyed a generous buffet lunch in the drawing room, and Luke gave us a more formal welcome. He recalled what we considered was a brave reaction when he said he had been keen for us to visit the house and then found that the number coming to lunch with him kept increasing. Luke described Rattigan's love/hate relationship with the house, especially following his unhappiness with the interior designs carried out to it, even though they had been made by his partner at the time, Michael Franklin. The Regency staircase was particularly loathed by Vivien Leigh when she saw the changes Michael had made.

Luke then introduced Pat Boxall, the Director of *The Deep Blue Sea* which we were going on to see at the New Venture Theatre, in the listed building along the road in Brighton. We gave a heartfelt round of applause to Luke and Rob for all they had done for us, and prepared to set off for the theatre.

The Deep Blue Sea

As Pat Boxall, the play's Director, noted in the programme, what could be more appropriate than that this play actually premiered at The Theatre Royal, Brighton, 65 years ago on 4th February 1952 for a two-week run with Peggy Ashcroft and Kenneth More in the roles of Hester and Freddie.

Vivien Leigh, who famously played Hester in the 1955 film version, was President of the New Venture Theatre, as we could see from a signed photograph on the wall as we climbed the stairs to the auditorium.

New Venture certainly did justice to this masterpiece, with perfect casting and an effective all-round production. The set lovingly created the detail of a cramped and very ordinary room in a cheap rented flat in London in the early 1950s. We were aware of the footsteps of other tenants on the stairs outside Hester's room, their lack of privacy and the noise of traffic from Ladbroke Grove outside.

As Hester Collyer, Emmie Spencer gave a compelling portrait of the upper middle-class wife of a judge, trapped in deep emotional involvement with Freddie Page, the young former fighter pilot who cannot give her the love and support that she needs. Emmie Spencer quickly settles into the role,

calm and dignified, in a display of repressed desperation as her tragic situation develops.

Neil Drew has all the right swagger of youth and lack of genuine feeling for others, as Freddie Page, and he cleverly builds on this in his attitude towards Hester, making later scenes unbearably sad.

It was impressive also to see emphasis on the telling absence of physical contact between these two people. They cannot overcome their innate differences and connect emotionally. This makes one of the pivotal scenes even more poignant - when Hester stops cleaning Freddie's shoes, on realising that Freddie is going to leave her. She shakes convulsively and is unable to get up and move towards Freddie, and he stands apart and aloof, unable to give her any physical comfort.

There is splendid support from Diane Robinson as landlady Mrs Elton, and Jeremy Crow as the disgraced doctor, both of whom show the capacity for sensitive care and advice that Freddie so obviously lacks. Mark Lester is the perfectly believable, stolid judge, formal but not pompous, giving confidence that he would provide a comfortable but sadly unfulfilling life for Hester. We warmed to Matthew Davies's portrayal of Jackie, Freddie's gregarious drinking pal, out of his depth in the situation that develops around him. As the two other lodgers, Ben Pritchard and Isabella McCarthy Sommerville complete the excellent cast, in a production which will long remain in our memory.

The ending of this play is particularly important. The recent National Theatre production did not follow the stage directions for the original ending but showed Hester preparing a fried-egg sandwich and sitting down to eat it in the closing moments of the play.

Although Hester does remark, in the fraught closing scene with Freddie, that she will get herself something to eat later, it seems obvious that they are both desperate to find things to say, to fill the gaps as they stand awkwardly facing each other.

New Venture's ending exactly followed the original stage directions, and was, I believe, as the playwright intended. As such, it was perfect. Hester goes to the fire and lights it with a match. She stands watching the flame. She turns back to the sofa and is quietly folding one of Freddie's scarves as the curtain falls.

Let the playwright have the last word. Terence Rattigan reportedly said, after the original West End opening of the play: "I made my heroine live and actually have her light the gas-fire to say 'Well, I'm going to live, but for nothing'".

Many of us rounded off the day with supper at The Lion and Lobster around the corner from the theatre. An enjoyable way to end a memorable day, and provide an opportunity to thank Barbara for making it possible.

Norman Home

INTRODUCING ROGER MILLS

It seems almost disingenuous to be introducing Roger Mills, as the 'new' member of the TRS committee, given that he's been beavering away behind the scenes for us over the past year, bringing professional flair to the media launch of the Sir Terence Rattigan Award, and academic rigour to the marking scheme behind the entries, but it was just that value that he's brought to our activities that convinced us all that we needed to entice him onto the Committee on a permanent basis as our Media Liaison member.

Roger's passion for the performing arts dates back to school days in Tetbury (Glos) and a combination of acting and music, though he maintains that it was his shortcomings as an actor and musician (he stresses he didn't have to be told either!), together with regular visits to the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham in its repertory heyday under the sadly seemingly, he thinks, forgotten Malcolm Farquar, that fuelled an interest in the backstage crafts.

Unsurprisingly, his choice of college was driven by the technical facilities on offer, with Padgate in Warrington sealing the deal with a fly tower (non-counterweighted hemp sets) and revolve, and an attitude that the theatre was there as a laboratory for the students to experiment in under the guidance of the unique Derek Newton. He left with a Cert Ed in English & Theatre Arts (and a Commendation). Over the three years he made unsuccessful efforts to argue the qualities of Rattigan in the face of *Chips with Everything*, *Zigger Zagger* and the like. At the same time he developed a deep suspicion of Stanislavski and Grotowski probably, he says, because his own mediocre acting abilities (reliable as sea captains and farmers but not much else) made him underestimate just how difficult an art it actually is!

1976 took Roger into teaching in a comprehensive on a large council estate near Portsmouth where he stayed for 21 fabulous years, starting in Drama but developing gradually into a Social Scientist which saw him as Head of Community Studies department. However, his background in drama was 'outed' in 1988, taking him back to stagecraft, including designing and equipping the technical facilities in a new 175 seat studio theatre and publication of *A First Guide to Stage Lighting* as a handbook for unskilled teachers.

Dismayed by the homogenisation of teaching in the 1990s, and with no desire to re-enact Mr Chips for real, he returned to university for an MSc in research where his thesis on volunteer recruitment in the industrial heritage sector gained him a distinction. He turned professional as a writer in 1999, specialising in the Amusement, Retail Market and Outdoor Event sectors. A freelance editor and layout designer, he is the only roving journalist writing on retail market trade bi-weekly in the UK as well as being a member of the Association of London Markets.

Away from work, he combines his love of (good) theatre with a range of heritage interests, including the fairground industry, steam and industrial preservation, the cinema (secret pleasure in romantic comedies) and radio comedy. A member of the Royal Central's Pivot Club he provides two annual equipment purchase bursaries for BA Theatre Practice students of limited means. He has recently taken up bowls, finding it exhilarating and frustrating in almost equal measure. Idols include Tony Hancock, Alec Guinness, Julia

Roberts, Fred & Ginger, John Arlott, A Wainwright, Frederick Bentham, Billy Cotton, Max Miller and, of course, Terence Rattigan. One of our early members, he joined the Society after a talk by Michael Darlow and Dr Holly Hill at Chichester in the anniversary year. He takes delight in pointing out that the Society is the only organisation with functions interesting and company convivial enough to get him into a dinner jacket!

We're delighted to have someone of Roger's experience and broad professional background on the Committee, not only steering our engagement with the Media but sharing the burden of editorship with Giles Cole.

Clive Montellier

As from this issue *The Rattigan Version* will be edited alternately by Roger Mills (April & October) email trsnews@virginmedia.com and Giles Cole (July & January) email gc@gilescole.com. Contributions are welcome ideally before the final week of the month preceding publication date.

MATTERS ARISING

Michael Darlow writes In his review in the Society's December Newsletter Paddy Briggs says that *While The Sun Shines* does not even appear in any of the four volumes of The Collected Plays. Sorry Paddy, but you are wrong. *While The Sun Shines* appears in Volume 1 of The Collected Plays of Terence Rattigan (Hamish Hamilton, 1953) with a Preface written by Sir Terence himself.

As for the dismissal of the play as merely 'a play for its time', a time that has passed, I think that Mr Briggs must be suffering from a dose of sense of humour failure or of political correctness hyper-tension. In 1943, when the original production of *While The Sun Shines* opened in London, the august and much feared critic James Agate compared Rattigan to Oscar Wilde, saying that "Mr Rattigan" was "a playwright with the brains not to take himself seriously" and continued: "This piece is delightful, a little masterpiece of tingling impertinence."

And in Christopher Luscombe's excellent production at the Bath Theatre Royal the play still seemed perfectly worthy of that description. I saw the Bath production twice and on both occasions the audience loved it. At the end of the first night it was greeted with sustained and uninhibited cheers. The same thing had happened when it was revived by Alec McCowen at Hampstead in 1973 and, some years later, in Greenwich. To suggest, as Mr Briggs does, that it is no more than 'a play for its time' and that seventy years on audiences might be 'a bit puzzled by it' is clearly wrong. I am sorry Mr Briggs, but audiences simply do not roar with laughter throughout and break into spontaneous cheers at the end of plays which are mere plays for their times or which they are 'puzzled by'.

Giles Cole writes The front page tribute to our late President in the last issue was written by our Chairman, Barbara Longford, but unfortunately the attribution was inadvertently omitted in the late stages of the editing process and the piece appeared anonymously. Apologies to Barbara, and to all readers who may not have recognised her lucid and graceful style!

A READER'S REFLECTIONS ON RATTIGAN'S COMMERCIALITY

In certainly my most concentrated period of play reading, excepting student days, I've assessed around 20% of the 191 scripts entered for the TRS Award. And boy do we have some good writers in this country. But... while 80% have been well written, imaginative and often playable straight off the page only a very small proportion has fulfilled the need to be what, anyway to my mind, is **commercial**. Perhaps then we should have made clear right from the start what made Terence Rattigan at his peak so bankable and by the same token what entrants might have aimed for.

I suppose first of all to be commercial in the strict sense any production should stand a fair chance of a profit or at least recouping its costs over the planned run. Expenses are key. Two sets usually mean more expense than one, ten actors cost more than five, more scene changes equal more crew, every prop needs to be plotted, handled and stored. Go back to Rattigan and what do we find? Simplicity. All the action in *The Deep Blue Sea* takes place in the flat, *The Browning Version* and *The Winslow Boy* in a drawing room. No set changes and scenery knockable-up out of what every rep theatre would have had standing ready in the scenery dock. Cast-wise too these are slim-line. Rattigan knew in his bones, you see, that in the end the West End is a business – a thing the subsidised theatre has too often, I think, forgotten.

True we set a limit on the casting for the competition of six with doubling allowed. Fine, but there is doubling and doubling. One script I examined had 36 parts which could, the writer claimed airily, be handled by six. With no doubling plot it was impossible to verify that and anyway 36 costumes are a tad dearer than half a dozen. Another, which I really enjoyed, needed copyright video and music ruinously expensive to licence. A third, incidentally stunning, had set requirements so complex that there would be no budget left for the cast. Several writers clearly had no idea of the sheer hassle and supervisory expense involved in using minors on stage. As for the one which needed the construction of a practical prop tree, species specified, that had to shed leaves on cue I'll say no more!

In contrast, it seems to me that the only time Rattigan gets expensively complex is when you try to stage theatrically his work written originally for other media. Though it's slim on cast, I think a stage version of *Heart to Heart* would need quite a lot of investment in sets. *Cause Célèbre* too needs more settings than work written specifically for the stage – we have the court scene in full, not hinted at as in *The Winslow Boy*.

If we leave aside costs for a moment let's look at another aspect of commerciality – appeal. Surely a commercial play should offer an entertaining night out for the widest possible audience? No I'm not dusting off Aunt Edna here, just pointing out that if you want to get your money back, and generate the same kind of continuing earnings as say *The Winslow Boy*, you do have to consider 'box-office'. This doesn't mean easy, or light-hearted, or unchallenging but it does I think mean writing with the widest possible audience in mind. Now the play about the bondage couple and their strange relationship was mildly interesting in its own way, though happily the stage in general seems to have realised

that sex as a spectator sport is over-rated. Anyway the faux fur trimmed novelty handcuffs on sale around Valentines time indicates that restraint in bed – if I might put it that way – is maybe more common than one might think, so even novelty value seems chancy. But in a play ostensibly about a haunting by a past wife it did seem a tad gratuitous. Then there was the one about the thirteen year old girl and her mentally handicapped 46 year old uncle in the attic not to mention the other one which had the heroine (perhaps leading character might be a better phrase actually) forced to have exhibitionist sex (happily not on stage) in order to get a paediatrician to withdraw a damning report on her. There was one other based on a fairy story that had a premise so distasteful I'd better not mention it here. All gritty stuff but not as real and involvngly gritty as the mutual loathing/poisonous incomprehension of the Crocker-Harrises or the sexual cravings driving on Hester Collyer.

Too many entries I looked at tried just too darned hard to find some sort of 'relevant' or 'challenging' story that they overlooked the need to make any links on an empathetic level to an audience. Not, anyway, in the way we all empathise with Arthur Winslow even if we do think he is being daft. Personally I blame this on a combination of creative writing courses, and television drama or soap opera storylines. What can be dealt with over weeks on the box simply won't cut the mustard on the stage in just over two hours. It has to be simple direct and telling. And the stage *is* different. Some, too many to be frank, of my entries simply didn't allow for that enduring truth.

And surely a commercial proposition has to get out of the starting blocks quickly; there is simply no time for the lengthy exposition of many entries. Back to Terry. Ronnie Winslow is discovered home, unexpected, and the business of the postal order exposed in the first few pages. Those indiscreet exchanges between Taplow and Frank Hunter tell us all we need to know about the Crock and with the arrival of Millie all is laid out. It's all so spare, so stripped down and so effective. Most critically, though, in a very short time we are given someone to root for. But this quality is perhaps nowhere better laid out than in the first scene of *Ross* where we can't help but be both intrigued and engaged by this unusual man. And they are simple stories. Indeed I really can't think of anything much in the way of sub-plots in any Rattigan play for the theatre. He knows there isn't time.

Most of all these Rattigan plays are about people – not issues. Try as I might I can't think of an issues play pure and simple which is truly commercial. My batch included a relentless polemic on the Health Service and PFI; a ditto about the care system, low pay and migrant workers; another on the family courts system. Some were admirable in their way - but in the end all I was left with was the sincerity of feeling on the part of the author. Now sincerity is all very well but commercial work requires the issues to emerge from and through character - not the other way round. Even *An Inspector Calls* while superficially dealing with class and morality is, at bottom, about the family around the table. When at the end we hear the line "well he inspected us alright!" it rings with truth and makes the audience look at

the very innermost parts of their own psyche.

Commerciality in any drama it seems to me starts and ends with characters - yes including, in Godfrey Basley's advice to Norman Painting: 'someone to hate' but also someone to have a stake in. It's why we agonise for, but are with, Laura Jesson in every step she takes - even to the platform edge. Why Sir William Collyer is so important to the achievement which is *The Deep Blue Sea*. Why we hope against all reason that Rose and Ron to make the 'right' choices no matter what they might be. Why we ache - yes ache - for Sybil Railton-Bell to stand up to her devil of a mother.

I suppose in the end what all this reading has hammered home to me is that Rattigan should be valued for precisely those commercial qualities that he was despised for back in the sixties. Name another twentieth century playwright with

the same number of plays not only continually revived - but deservedly so too.

So is it all doom and gloom? Certainly not. In December with all my first readings finished I graded six scripts as worthy of going on to the next stage. Maybe that's about par. I don't know. But the sad thing about most of the others is that while they may be interesting or worthy - they miss the boat of HMS Shaftesbury Avenue - or even the amateur crewed HMS Drill Hall Shipton Moyne who will continue with *The Crock*, *Ronnie Winslow*, *Hester Collyer*, the *Railton-Bells* and the likes of *Anne Shankland* until the scripts fall into dust.

Roger Mills

LOVE IN IDLENESS AT THE MENIER THEATRE - MARCH 2017

Four years ago I saw that Rattigan's *Less than Kind* was on tour and I managed to catch up with it at Richmond Theatre. It was unknown to me - hardly surprisingly as it had never been performed and does not appear in the *Collected Plays*. What had happened back in 1944 was that the original play had morphed into a new one, *Love in Idleness*, and become a vehicle for the Lunts - Alfred Lunt and his wife Lynn Fontanne - both in the West End and on Broadway. Geoffrey Wansell and Michael Darlow each tell this story well, including the spat with a rather jealous Noel Coward!

So that 2013 tour was the first production of "*Less than Kind*" and "*Love in Idleness*" has never been revived - until now with Trevor Nunn's production at the Menier Theatre from where it will transfer at the Apollo opening on 11th May for a limited season. Trevor Nunn describes in the programme how he was looking for "... a modern classic to revive" and chanced upon *Love in Idleness* which he then turned into a third version of the story reincorporating part of the *Less than Kind* original. His timing is excellent as both of Rattigan's other wartime plays - *Flare Path* and *While the Sun Shines* have had successful recent revivals and the plays can be regarded as a trilogy.

I recall *Less than Kind* as being amusing but a bit lightweight - but Nunn's *Love in Idleness* is a much stronger version and, as you would expect, very tightly directed.

Sir John Fletcher (Anthony Head) is a Canadian Minister in the British Government - a businessman who is in charge of Tank Production. He is in love with and lives 'in sin', as it used to be termed, with a widowed woman, Olivia Brown (Eve Best). Fletcher cannot get a divorce from the wife from whom he is separated because that would damage him (and the Government) at a crucial time in the War. Mrs Brown's teenage son Michael (Edward Bluemel) turns up from Canada full

of socialist fervour - an irritating invasion of the couple's domestic space by someone who is "...too small for a spanking, too big for a punch on the nose." The interplay between the mature experienced Fletcher and the callow and opinionated youth is well done - and timeless! And not just shadow-boxing either. As Nunn puts it "The end of the war is in sight and it's time to ask what sort of new world there must be when the fighting is finally over".

In Trevor Nunn's hands this rediscovery of *Love in Idleness* is fully justified - as was last year's revival of the also neglected *While the Sun Shines* by Christopher Luscombe. Whilst purists may quibble with a director significantly altering the original text, if it is as well done as Nunn has done it, and improves the play for a modern audience, it can only heighten Rattigan's reputation which I believe that this thought-provoking and well-performed production certainly does.

Paddy Briggs



Published by The Terence Rattigan Society and Printed by Triographics Printers Ltd, 121 London Road, Knebworth, SG3 6EX