

The Rattigan

The Newsletter of
The Terence Rattigan Society

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Version

A script in hand experience at the V&A



Clive Montellier

reports on a visit to the V&A Archive Collection

Photos by John Ruddy

The V&A Archive Collection is one of those institutions that you imagine must exist, but you're not sure where, or how you would get inside it, or what to look for if you ever did. Our visit on 8 September succeeded on all counts. The Collection is housed in a building fascinating in its own right: the former HQ of the National Savings Bank. Its monumental Victorian facade and endless tiled corridors provide not only a secure but also a thermally inert environment (i.e. it never gets very hot or cold) for the treasures within, and always leave one wondering what gems lie around the next turn. Our host, Dr Kate Dorney, assisted by Simon Sladen, gave us a glimpse at the enormity of the

Theatrical Archive: thousands of playbills, photographs, set designs, books and magazines, all beautifully labelled and categorised – not to mention a more selective but breathtaking set of costumes, from Elton John's stage outfits to the ballet costumes from the first production of *The Rite of Spring*.

Before we all got distracted, we were shown a wide selection of Rattigan-related items drawn from across the collection. I suspect we could all list highlights from amongst the wealth of material that we were allowed to inspect and handle – numerous rehearsal scripts lodged with the Lord Chamberlain's office with each line change – and often stage movements – carefully annotated; letters to the young Terry's father commiserating on his departure from the Harrow cricket team; the original manuscript of *Adventure Story*, in Rattigan's own hand, with all the crossings out to show a work in creation, and the set designs by



George Wakhevitch from 1948, themselves a work of art. Particularly poignant was a set of photographs, donated anonymously in memory of Rattigan, and containing not only some early

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<i>Webmaster</i>	Stephen Bradley (stevebradley1@me.com)
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Stuart Griffiths INTRODUCES HIMSELF...

I have a schoolboy memory of Rattigan. My father was involved in amateur dramatics at Evesham, where we lived. Through contacts, we were able to see a rehearsal in London for the first ever TV production of *The Winslow Boy* at the old Alexandra Palace BBC Studios in 1949. I can't recall the rehearsals in any detail, but I do have a vivid memory of seeing John Mills, who was playing Arthur Winslow, coming into the spotlight with his two little girls, Hayley and Juliet, one in each hand, to show them the studio.

Another schoolboy memory is of when my friends and I quoted lines from *The Browning Version*, which was regularly on the radio. "The Himmler of the Lower Fifth", "You laughed at my little joke, Taplow", and "Artful little beast!" This was done in a spirit of pure admiration at lines that were very memorable and very quotable.

Later, when the Osborne revolution blazed out with *Look Back in Anger*, I saw no conflict between him and Rattigan. As far as I was concerned they were both terrific writers, and I still think that. They actually explored the same themes at times. It's tragic that Rattigan's subsequent work – though not his earlier plays – fell victim to the tyranny of fashion.

In 1958 I was President of the Oxford Union and was active in university journalism and drama.



I acted with the Magdalen College Players, including a production of *Antony and Cleopatra* in which I appeared with Dudley Moore (he played Enobarbus, and I played a composite role of all the Roman generals!)

Like many who read Law at Oxford (Anthony Howard, Hugo Young, Philip French) I went into journalism: I was on *The News Chronicle*, *The Yorkshire Post* and *The London Evening Standard*. Mostly I was a leader-writer, but I also wrote theatre reviews, book reviews and features.

In 1973, the Head of BBC Radio Drama, Martin Esslin, the leading authority on Brecht and on the Theatre of the Absurd, asked me to join Radio Drama as a script editor and director. Our Chairman, Barbara Longford, was Martin's assistant at the time. Two years later I joined BBC Television as the senior script editor of classic plays. This prestigious post was offered me by the distinguished director and Head of Plays, James Cellan Jones, a leading member of this Society, profiled in an earlier issue.

My professional connection with Rattigan came with Michael Darlow's memorable production of *The Winslow Boy* with Ian Richardson, Gordon Jackson and Emma Thompson. **Cont. on p 8...**

Shelagh Delaney: avenging angel of the North?

by **Adrian Brown**

Much as one hates to cast doubt upon a pious legend, there are perhaps a few aspects of the published eulogium upon the life and dramatic influences of Shelagh Delaney (who died 20 Nov 2011) that merit inspection and comment from someone who was very much around when the events described took place.

I was in 1958 a fledgling drama director for BBC television, having just emerged from 'rep', and was at 24 keenly alive to all the dramatic trends of the time, which were numerous. My first television production earlier that year had been *Britannia of Billingsgate*, a play by Sewell Stokes, which we had similarly filled with "gritty working-class realism", as the critics had pointed out, and which had centred upon a working-class Mum played by Hermione Baddeley who, strangely enough, went on to play to great acclaim the mother, Helen, in *A Taste of Honey* on Broadway.

In my search for innovative dramatic material, I would make regular visits to Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop company down at the old Theatre Royal at Stratford East, then just beginning its ascent into notoriety. Here I became acquainted with several members of the company, quite a few of whom had come from 'up North', and with some of whom I subsequently worked. Among these were Frances Cuka, who played the feisty girl Josephine in *A Taste of Honey*, and Avis Bunnage who played the even more feisty mother, Helen. I also met Shelagh Delaney herself when, eager to seize upon a trend, I boldly asked her if she would consider writing for television perhaps a series of half-hour working-class stories, similar to a series I was doing at the time, although set in her home territory. I pressed a card upon her but sadly heard no more about this suggestion, although, to be fair, I did not pursue it myself with any vigour, so absorbed was I with other exciting and novel prospects opening up to me, including directing my first play in the West End, Jeremy Kingston's equally down-to-earth tragicomedy

about the hand-to-mouth existence of impoverished students: *No Concern of Mine*, for which Sewell Stokes had recommended me.

However, when late one night I ran into Avis Bunnage, then playing in *A Taste of Honey* at the Criterion, and over a coffee expressed some disappointment over Miss Delaney's lack of response to the opportunity I had offered, Avis revealed to me that the script as first shown to Joan Littlewood in Stratford had been far from a beautifully-rounded study of working-class life and a beacon to other emergent playwrights as is the legend, but instead a virtually unplayable submission by a complete novice. It was only after, continued Miss Bunnage, it had been subjected to Miss Littlewood's notorious method of using a script as a basis of improvisation by the cast, and then writing down the words that ensued – as she did with so many other scripts by other writers – that the play *A Taste of Honey*, as we subsequently knew it, was born, and later developed into a screenplay earning BAFTA and Writers' Guild awards, but with no mention of Miss Littlewood and her actors.

The only other known play by Miss Delaney, *The Lion In Love*, had, alas, rather less of gritty reality and more of dramatic cliché about it, and so lasted hardly any time, never to be succeeded by another.



Shelagh Delaney – 'the girl from nowhere'

Photo: Manchester Confidential

As for the contention that Miss Delaney felt impelled to write her play because she thought Terence Rattigan's play *Variation on a Theme* showed insensitivity in the way it portrayed homosexuality, well, this is the first I have heard of it, and this aspect was certainly never discussed at the time.

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Pretty Showgirl?

Roger Mills asks whether Rattigan influenced a 1980s hit

I suppose it was the raincoat and footstool that did it for me—I mean made me see *Pretty Woman* very much as a remake, homage even, to *The Prince and the Showgirl*. OK, yes, they are both retellings in their own way of the Cinderella story so there are bound to be plot similarities, but to anybody familiar with both there's more to it than that.

For a start both are far better films than they are often given credit for. The screenplays are first class. Rattigan, one suspects, was never satisfied with the movie-making process. But in all his oeuvre there is no mistaking his enduring concerns, precise language and humour – even in *Brighton Rock* – and maybe his best *The Stars Look Down*. Imagine *The Devil Wears Prada* scripted by Rattigan – what a film that would have been. In *The Prince* there is sparkling repartee and excellent one-liners; for example Monroe, as Elsie Marina, to Richard Wattis as Northbrook: “There is a word for what you are and it is not Deputy Head of the Far Eastern Section!”

With *Pretty Woman* it's hard to say just how much of J F Lawton's original script, yclept *\$3000*, ended up on the sound stage; it had been in ‘turn round’ for some time after Vestron spent all the *Dirty Dancing* profits and collapsed. Drafts available online show a much darker vision, described by Julia Roberts on *Inside the Actors Studio* as “two horrible people spending a week together”. My personal belief is that Garry Marshall, Gere and Roberts did a lot of work on it influenced by..? Well, we'll see. With the exception of the rape attempt by Jason Alexander as Tuckey (impossible for a ‘Julia-ite’ to watch but essential for Gere's Edward Lewis to show his true colours) it walks the same moral and social tightrope as *The Prince*.

Leaving aside these broad themes there are certain parallels that to me cannot be chance. Principal is the raincoat (almost identical) of course, used by both Monroe and Roberts for concealment on exit, in the first case, entrance in the latter, but which Gere has absolutely no logical reason to

have in the Lotus. On the first night, Monroe's “I'm just playing a little game over here by myself” is a dead ringer for Roberts' “I'm just having a little carpet picnic. Care to join me?” Olivier's concern with business and paperwork even in an assignation he's just arranged – he seems to have as little concern with food as Gere has with drink – is as striking. Roberts has no need to fetch the cushion to kneel on – but it mirrors Monroe kicking the footstool in order to kneel for the Prince. Roberts goes to the opera, Monroe goes to the Coronation. Both are brought to tears by their experiences. And just look at the way both eat the caviar!

And come on! The way the waiter catches the escargot is a dead ringer for the factotum similarly bagging Monroe's casually thrown memento brooch. The necklace, the sleep on the couch, the aborted departure, the brooch left because it has not been earned – mirroring the \$3000 left on the bed. The tête-à-tête on the stairs with the young King is the snap dog in the park.... Watch them back to back in production order and see how many you can count.

Of course when push comes to shove *The Prince* is Richard Wattis' film, though Sybil Thorn-dike does her best to pinch it. Northbrook's ‘guardian angel’ role is so well written and Wattis' performance so wonderfully nuanced as to merit the description ‘triumph’.

Hector Elizondo, a very similar kind of leading player and equally tonsorially challenged in real





life, doesn't have the same opportunities, though he does his best to steal the scenes he is in as hotel manager Barnard Thompson. When he sends Roberts to the women's clothing department he inhabits Wattis territory completely. He ends up as the same kind of confidante of both protagonists. Elizondo guides Roberts through the canteen of cutlery just as Wattis shepherds Monroe through the abbey – another showpiece of silverware and opportunities to do the wrong thing.

Sexually both movies are ambiguous. Roberts asks Gere "Now you have got me here, what are you going to do with me?" He doesn't know why but he certainly knows what, and anyway she seduces him! Gere's Edward Lewis is a sleeping prince himself. Olivier's performance I find hard to assess since he invariably alienates me, and here he seems to be on Mogadon for most of the time.

Director Garry Marshall told Gere that his job was that of a ballet dancer holding Roberts aloft to do her stuff. Olivier is doing the same though the relaxation which starts with the shaving scene presents a wonderful contrast with what went before. It's just too late and too unbelievable.

And frankly what Monroe sees in his prince is a


mystery to me. Olivier has invited Monroe, one imagines, for one purpose only and then shows no sign of wanting to go through with it. (After repeated watchings I still can't decide whether they actually ever 'do it'!) Given the writer, one is tempted to assign the 'usual explanation' to such reluctance but Oliver plays the prince with such restraint one wonders if the act of love would simply revolt him. Gere is reticent too with Roberts, though like Olivier, when it comes to business he can be as ruthless as you like.

Both the female leads are 'stars' of course and not just (or even) actresses. Cards on the table: Monroe never causes even the mildest flutter *pour moi*; Roberts, despite her technical limitations, is invariably enchanting. Yet the casting is sound. Roberts would terrify Olivier's Prince. Monroe would bore Gere's Lewis.

In the end Gere gets his girl, by forgoing the kind of set up one feels Olivier has in mind for Monroe – if and when she

takes that private carriage. Well, had Rattigan lived until 1989, with its revolutionised sexual mores, he might have done the same with his characters. *The Prince* ends with the clear message that some relationships are impossible, *Pretty Woman* with 'love is all'. Both see male concerns with politics and business moderated by the feminine touch. Mind you, it's pretty obvious that when Vivian Ward joins Lewis in the mergers and acquisitions business, after Tuckey has been fired, they'd be a ruthless team.

So am I being fanciful? Not knowing Garry Marshall, I can't ask. Go and watch both films – with a bottle of Chablis and a dish of strawberries to hand – and see what you think!

Final question. Why should every red-blooded male, straight or not, envy Ralph Bellamy (Morse in *Pretty Woman*)? Because he appeared with both Ginger Rogers and Julia Roberts in their prime, that's why. Both had what Arthur Abbott would call 'gumption'. Both Rs could have played Bobbie Wickham and Vivian Ward. They have the right hair colour—or wrong, as Jeeves would warn. Monroe could only have managed Madeline Bassett – but an admittedly sexy one! 

An Encounter

David Dudding recounts a chance meeting with an Old Gentleman in 1958

It was a long time ago but I remember it well. Soon after arriving in London I was whisked off to a party in Hove. My landlord said that Robin Maugham was giving a party for Noel and that I would lower the average age (I had just turned 19). I'd heard of Somerset Maugham but Robin Maugham meant nothing to me. As for 'Noel', I knew two Noels at school and I had a cousin called Noel. I didn't think the party could be for any of them. Never mind. My first grown-up party.

My landlord and I were among the first guests to arrive. Lovely flat with objets d'art including two cameo carved shells and an old gentleman sitting alone at the far end of the room. Robin led me over to him and mumbled something about "a pretty young man". He then left to greet the new arrivals.

"Hello", I said. "I'm David Dudding."

"Are you indeed?" replied the old gentleman. "Are you an actor?"

"Oh no. I have been on stage at school though. I played Miss Brent in *Ten Little Niggers**."

"How delightful."

"It's a play by Agatha Christie. I expect you've heard of her – she's very famous. Then I was a maid in a play called *French Without Tears*. I can't remember who wrote it, but it's quite funny. I often had to play the female parts as it was an all-boys school. When I got a bit older I could be male – well, not exactly male because Strephon in *Iolanthe* is actually half fairy. Nowadays I'm just part of the audience."

"And how do you come to be here today, young man?"

"I've just arrived in London and my landlord invited me. He knows I go to the theatre as often as I can and thought I would be interested."

"I see."

"These people are very rude. They come up to you and say hello and then they go straight back to the drinks table."

"They're not really being rude. They come over and make predictable remarks, so I send them away."

"Oh. Shall I go?"

"You haven't made any predictable remarks yet. I'll send you away when you do. Move my stick and sit on the floor beside me." I did so. "Now tell me, how often do you go to the theatre?"

"Three or four times a week. Mostly to first nights. I have a friend who is a box office manager. He gets comps – that's complimentary tickets – to fill the theatre. People don't pay for tickets until they've read the crits – that's the reviews in the next day's papers. I have a dinner suit so I go to almost everything. So does the Duke of Bedford. He's beginning to think he knows me."

"Charming. And what have you seen recently?"

"Oh, a frightful play. It should never have been put on. Why the angels backed it I can't imagine – that's the people who put up the money. It was so very silly. The central character is supposed to have painted several 'important' pictures, including one entitled *Nude With Violin*" – a loud, explosive snort from the old gentleman – "it was quite obvious from the start that he'd never painted anything in his life. It wasn't even well acted."

Guests queued politely to be nodded to and sent on their way. Apart from an occasional chortle, all the old gentleman said was: "Go on" and "Then what?" giving me no chance to join the party.

Finally, my landlord came to say it was time

for us to go. It came as a relief.

"Must you take this young man away so soon?" said the old gentleman. "He hasn't said a predictable thing all afternoon."

The Robin fellow all but pushed us out, hissing at my landlord: "Noel couldn't come. So Terence had the field to himself – and this boy let no one else near. I never want to see him again."

And he didn't. 



* Later editions changed the title to *Ten Little Indians*, for obvious reasons and, finally, the Christie estate approved the US version of the title, *And Then There Were None*. (Ed.)

Shelagh Delaney

cont. from page 3

No one disputes that *Variation* is not among Terence Rattigan's best plays, and that its subject-matter – a super-rich 'kept woman' dying of consumption on the Riviera in 1958, in the style of Camille a hundred years before, and toying with a toy-boy while awaiting the end – was subjected to some ridicule. But Miss Delaney must have led a sheltered provincial life not to know there were as many venal exploitive young homosexuals like Rattigan's 'Ron' in those dark blackmailing times, as there were kindly motherly types like her own gentle 'Geoffrey'. And anyway one wonders whom she had seen playing 'Ron'? I, as a close friend of Mr Rattigan at the time, remember a great fuss and panic, as the pre-London tour approached the capital, that the actor Tim Seely was not comfortable in the role, so that he was replaced in the last date, Brighton, by Jeremy Brett. Since the ballet background of this character had been based on my own experiences with the Grand Ballet du Marquis de Cuevas in Cannes and Monte Carlo, about which 'Terry' interrogated me mercilessly during the writing, I was hurriedly summoned from the BBC to Brighton to help Mr Brett with these aspects of the role.

My contention is that this story of an avenging angel from the lower orders arising in her wrath to smite with a gritty, hard-edged realism, sprung from her own fiery incorruptible brain, an effete out-of-touch playwright of works suited only to upper-class twits and their sycophants is all sentimental hoo-ha, a part of the general Rattigan-bashing which became a popular sport among the Tynan-led dramaturgs of the time, and has no basis in reality.

Terence Rattigan was in fact the concealed avant-garde of his time, as demonstrated in the recent series of revivals for his centenary. He portrays the raw emotion in the human heart masked by a decent restraint, the anxieties tormenting people of all backgrounds however rough or polished their exterior, as opposed to those in-yer-face writers who would not recognize a subtlety if it bit them on the bum, and whose clamorous

resentments are only superficial.

Indeed in the production of Sir Terence's 1944 play *Less Than Kind* (which I have been privileged to direct, calling it back from obscurity to tremendous critical acclaim in all the national papers, and having directed and produced it on a tour of major theatres countrywide), he confronts the serious social issues facing post-war Britain in a strongly-worded debate between a Tory establishment figure, and an 'angry young man' opposed to assumptions of privilege among the well-placed social classes, twenty years or more before the Royal Court regime was thought of - or many of its clamouring iconoclasts were born. ✎

The TRS gift card

P.S. Christmas is coming!



Members are reminded that we have a gift card available (from Membership Secretary Di Scotney) which might just serve a useful purpose as a Christmas card and gift all in one. A year's membership of the Society could be just the thing for that theatre-loving relative!

Stuart Griffiths *cont. from p 2*

I remember one striking point of chronology: I was in rehearsal watching Emma dance to *Alexander's Ragtime Band* by Irving Berlin. The setting of the play was 1912 but, incredibly, in 1988 when we were making the production, Irving Berlin was still alive. He was over a hundred when he died.

I've also written a couple of books, which sold well in their day, but are now freely available on the internet (www.pontcanna.com) and on Amazon Kindle. The first, *How Plays Are Made*, on the techniques of play construction, was originally a pamphlet written while I was at the BBC, and then commissioned by the legendary agent Peggy Ramsay. It was published by Heinemann for nearly twenty years, the only condition of publication being that I double its length! It was one of the first books in the UK on how to write plays, of which there are now a huge number.

The other book was *Shakespeare's Language: Keys to Understand It*. In my research I discovered close links between Shakespeare and Latin grammar, and identified about twenty keys to understanding the structure of the Bard's language. Two main ones are the infinitive sentence, e.g. "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him" and the conditional sentence, e.g. "If music be the food of love, play on".

But enough of Latin scholarship! This Society is dedicated to the life and works of Terence Rattigan, of whom I am a dedicated admirer. ☎

The Rattigan Archives at the V&A

cont. from p 1

photos of the Rattigan family but also a wonderfully rakish Horst shot of TR later in his RAF career and demonstrating the confidence his military service gave him. It was a shame that both Michael Darlow and Princess Jean Galitzine were forced to pull out of the trip for reasons beyond their control; their own perspectives, respectively, as a biographer who has interpreted this material professionally and friend who would have been there as much of it was created, would have added yet more depth to our exploration.

A convivial pub lunch across the road was followed

Dates for your diary

Tuesday 28 October:

First Episode opens at the Jermyn Street Theatre and runs until 22 November. *First Episode* is the first play Rattigan wrote, with Oxford friend Philip Heimann, and which transferred to the West End for a short run, giving TR his first taste of theatrical success—before *French Without Tears* established his name. Bookings should be made direct with the theatre box office: 020 7287 2875.

Sunday 9 November:

The Society AGM takes place this year in a private room in Sheekey's, the famous theatreland fish restaurant. Very few places are left for this special lunch!

Saturday 6 December:

Christmas Party at K5 Albany, TR's former 'set'. 12 noon–2.30 pm. Full details are in the booking form enclosed with this edition.

Saturday 6 - Sunday 7 June 2015:

48 members are so far attending our **Conference at Trinity College, Oxford**. There is room for more! Further details in later editions of this newsletter. Deposit £40.

by a screening of the V&A's official film of the 2011 Old Vic production of *Cause Célèbre*. Such recordings are a relatively new venture for the Museum to add to their collection of released film, video and DVD, and they have amassed over 300 since starting the project in 1991. Quite apart from the chance to spend an afternoon watching a first-class production of a gripping play, the importance of this strand of the collection was only too obvious. How often has any of us wished we could have a glimpse into the past to see how an original production looked and sounded? The V&A is determined that future generations will.

It was telling, however, that one of the greatest challenges facing the Museum staff is the constant refreshing in both format and medium demanded by digital records; as they said, put paper in a box in the dark and it'll stay there forever.

Our thanks, as ever, go to Babs for organising a fascinating day, and to Dr Kate and Simon not just for looking after us so well, but for the care and passion they pour into their jobs daily. For those who missed the trip, information on the collection and access arrangements can be found at www.vam.ac.uk/page/t/theatre-and-performance. And my personal highlights? A glimpse of the ventriloquist's dummy, Archie Andrews, high on a shelf, and a line from the rehearsal script of *Ross*, which I think made it into the final version: "What made you join the RAF?" - "I think I had a mental breakdown, sir". ☎