



# The Rattigan

The Newsletter of  
The Terence Rattigan Society

ISSUE NO. 8 AUGUST 2013

## Version

## An audience at the V&A

Master lyricist Michael Flanders prefaced many performances of *At the Drop of Another Hat* with: "The purpose of satire, it has been rightly said, is to strip off the veneer of comforting illusion and cosy half-truth. And our job, as I see it, is to put it back again!" - with their 'respectable songs for responsible people'.

But MF and his Quaker pacifist partner Donald Swann were as iconoclastic as they come, and the urbanity of their presentation could not disguise, at least for those with open ears, the highly political agenda of songs from *The Ostrich* through to *The Reluctant Cannibal*. Wily old MF was getting his retaliation in first - turning on ...*Hat* the kind of accusation often levelled at Terence Rattigan.

Yet the fifties of *The Deep Blue Sea* and *Separate Tables* were a strange decade, a deferential time when the BBC sent full film crews on all royal tours and there were enough blimps in the establishment to even consider mounting Suez. Debutantes still came out garbed in the modes modelled by Jean Dawnay (after marriage Princess George Galitzine), once the face of Dior.

Now our President, Jean frequented Sunningdale as friend of, and hostess for, Terence Rattigan—a life that was related in the first part of the evening in an interview with Geoffrey Wansell. If there were no stunning revelations, there was a glimpse of the time when gay men lived in terror of exposure no matter how urbane they looked. But respectability is built at least in part on repression of human nature, which, as Jean pointed out, doesn't change much. I hope someone recorded this magic fifteen minutes.

Watching the evening's rehearsed readings, which followed, it struck one that Rattigan's plays were derided by the likes of the uber-childish Kenneth Tynan because they simply couldn't, or wouldn't, see past the

surface respectability of Dawnay, Rattigan, and the like. But the carnation in the buttonhole and the G&T was only a veneer - and a very, very, thin one. Strip off the varnish and the plays, to 2013 eyes, often seem to have a shocking frankness in their four-letter-word-free beautifully constructed language. (Perhaps it is too often forgotten that *Brighton Rock* was a Rattigan screenplay.)



### Respectable Plays for Responsible People? A report (with photographs) by Roger Mills

If Rattigan's was the art of concealment it was concealment in broad daylight. That - at least it seemed to me - was Wansell's thesis. One wouldn't have expected anything less from the authorised biographer perhaps, but it would have been hard to fault the selection of extracts presented to back all this up.

Nothing the angry young men (a phrase the late Derek Newton, who should know, told me was dreamt up by George Fearon, press officer of the

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## The Terence Rattigan Society

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



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### INTRODUCING Our Vice-President, Greta Scacchi

Playing Hester Collyer in Edward Hall's production of *The Deep Blue Sea* in 2008 was a gratifying experience for Greta Scacchi for two reasons: not only was it the first time she had been able to cast herself in a major role, but having done so, she received rave notices.

Charles Spencer said in his *Telegraph* review: "Greta Scacchi is a revelation in a role - originally played by Peggy Ashcroft - that demands acting of the highest order".

Greta had seen and greatly admired Penelope Wilton in the role in 1993 at the Almeida and it was her first choice when asked to suggest a part for herself at the Theatre Royal, Bath. She was well-known as a film and television actress, with *Heat and Dust* (1983) perhaps being the film that firmly established her name, and although somewhat daunted by the challenge of playing the emotionally complex judge's wife in *The Deep Blue Sea*, she rose to the occasion magnificently.

She rightly regards Rattigan as one of our greatest playwrights. He is superb at marrying emotional depth with naturalistic dialogue. He makes the language tell the story, or, as she puts it herself, he "has a relish for catching the twittering of real speech", with the "sound that people make" being just one strand of what is going on in relationships.

She sees it as no surprise that there is a connection between Rattigan and David Mamet (Mamet directed a film version of *The Winslow Boy* in 1999) as they both capture "the enigma of dialogue" when it is triggered by emotion. Pinter too.

The role of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is another favourite for Greta. She describes it as an extraordinary



Photo: Jeff Gilbert

psychological journey, where the character evolves before your eyes as the play progresses. This richness of character she also sees in Hester Collyer.

In essence *The Deep Blue Sea* examines the universal theme of "what is love?". What is a practical, manageable relationship when the heart is in conflict with the head, and when the degree of love

between the two lovers is unbalanced?

Playing Hester touched a raw nerve for Greta. She has never had so many passionate letters, pages long, from audience members—mostly, though not exclusively, women. She also discovered, though, that some younger people didn't understand the dilemma the character faces. One remark overheard by the Company Manager was "So he doesn't love her? Why doesn't she just get over it?". But at the matinee performances especially, when there were older people in the audience the play really took off. She has never experienced such a collective holding of breath at the key moments.

Millie Crocker-Harris (for some reason called Laura in the film version of *The Browning Version*, directed by Mike Figgis in 1994) is another Rattigan role that Greta has played with great success. Let us hope there are others to come - Lydia in *In Praise of Love* perhaps?

In any event, we are privileged to have such a distinguished performer as a Vice-President alongside David Suchet, whose 2005 performance in *Man and Boy* was also a defining moment in the revival of Rattigan's reputation.

## John Gay and TR at Separate Tables by Scott McConnell

**John Gay is a Los Angeles-based screenwriter. His films include *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, *The Hallelujah Trail*, *No Way to Treat a Lady* and *Soldier Blue*. He has been nominated for Academy, Writers' Guild, and Emmy Awards. In 1958 he co-adapted Terence Rattigan's play *Separate Tables* for the screen. This is an edited version of an interview with Scott McConnell in November 2011.**

SM: How much of the final shooting script was you and how much was Rattigan?

JG: Oh, I would say mostly Rattigan. I have to go into being immodest and say I did this and I did that. But you've got a situation, right from the beginning, in which Rattigan wrote the plays, for God's sake.

SM: Did you get any feedback from Terence Rattigan about what he thought of your work on his story?

JG: According to Harold (Hecht, one of the producers) he was quite happy with the way the script turned out. Rattigan read it and says, "It's fine with me" and that was how it went through.

SM: What is your opinion of Rattigan as a writer?

JG: I don't want to call Rattigan a genius, but he was supreme, he was so good. I love the way that he instinctively knew that less is more. You don't have to hit them on the head with it!

SM: Tell me more about this principle of "less is more." Rattigan once stated that "Drama is inference, and inference is drama."

JG: Inference is important. Any time you hit something on the head it doesn't sound right. You have to imply something and it sinks in more deeply to the audience. It's the same principle in acting. Little is more. You indicate or you imply and let the audience do some work and you're far more effective. For example, in *Separate Tables*, the Major being so tight within himself, so hiding, with his horrendous secret—if he were trying to do that outwardly it's very on the nose. I think (David) Niven was just wonderful in the way he underplayed the Major.

SM: Let's look at an example of implication in the dialogue. In one scene, Miss Cooper tells John Malcolm that Anne Shankland is taking drugs to help her sleep. Malcolm says, "Why does she do it?" Miss Cooper replies, "Why do you go to The Feathers?"

JG: So there you are. She could have said anything then, but she doesn't come back at him and say, "Well, you go to The Feathers, don't you?" She doesn't hit him, she just throws it back to him. That's good writing. She

could say, "How could you say that? Didn't I see you drunk the other night?" and so forth. That's what you don't do! Because it's too obvious, it's phoney, it doesn't seem real! It's inherently more important the way it was written. That's why he's Rattigan.

SM: You and Rattigan were nominated for an Academy Award for Best Screenplay based on material from another medium. Tell me about that.

JG: He didn't go to the ceremony. I went with my wife, Barbara. And it was like another world. I mean, one day I'm in New Jersey, the next thing I know I'm going to the Oscars. Although Rattigan didn't go he did send me a cable before it. I'll read it to you. From the top it says: "*From Terence Rattigan sent to United Artists New York from Hong Kong. March 27, 1959. To JG: Gay, belated mutual felicitations on nomination. Unhappily I can't be there, so you must bear the brunt and meet those Kipling imposters, Triumph or Disaster, with a gay smile and a thought for your proud and grateful collaborator.*"

SM: How did you finally get to meet Terence Rattigan?

JG: It was a Sunday afternoon and I came over to Harold's house in Beverly Hills and Jim Hill was there with Rita Hayworth. Harold said, "Oh, I've had this yacht now for years. We'll get down to San Pedro docks and meet Terence Rattigan there. Wait 'til you see her!" And he just raved about the yacht all the way there. So we got down to the dock and I looked out the window and I saw this magnificent, magnificent yacht. It was just gorgeous. I don't know how many feet high. But that wasn't Harold's yacht and I'm saying to myself: Where the hell is Harold's yacht? So Rattigan arrived and got out of his car and sees the yacht, and he says, "Oh, Harold, I had no idea. She is beautiful! I can't wait to go out!" And Jim and I are looking at each other. We knew immediately that Rattigan was looking at the wrong yacht. And Harold just kind of shrunk and said, "Mine is over here." The great line Rattigan said to me was, "Oh, it's that one, Harold?" Rattigan being the way he was continued, "Oh, yes. Oh, of course. Oh, this is lovely, Harold." He would just try to save the situation, but he knew he had made a mistake. He was very quiet, very gentle, handsome, a lovely guy. Just a lovely man.

SM: What was your reaction to the finished movie?

JG: As a matter of fact, considering all the things that the production went through, and then you get to the final picture, I think it went far better than I thought it might. I was really, really proud of that. ☺

**Scott McConnell is a writer/producer in Los Angeles. A former literature teacher, he has written a study text for Rattigan's *The Browning Version*. The full text of this interview can be read on the Society website.**



## An audience at the V&A, cont. from p1

Royal Court) could offer would come within a country mile of the evil Millie Crocker-Harris. And the moment when she pulls the rug out from under Taplow's innocent gift still leaves one breathless. Freddie Page's angry mystification at Esther's attempted suicide isn't *only* about how it would look. And John Malcolm's, oh so accurate, skewering of Ann Shankland (modelled, we learned, on Jean Dawnay), with its coruscating indictment of the class system, and the way love can turn to manipulation, match anything the hard-boilers came up with over the ironing board.

The cast of Geoffrey himself, whose brief but erudite



introductions were nicely judged, Giles Cole, Judy Buxton and Stephen Martin-Bradley gave ex-

cellent readings.

As another step in the rehabilitation of Terence Rattigan this evening must be counted a success. But only another step. Indeed, overheard chat at the drinks afterwards indicated that the traditional sixties' view of the playwright is still well entrenched despite the noughties' succession of high profile revivals. The proselytisation must continue.

As an aside, Geoffrey's remark that Rattigan's key concern was with the impossibility of equality of commitment in a love-match probably caused many watching couples to sit and ponder over their bedtime cocoa. Cocoa? Well, we are all Aunt Ednas now, aren't we?

And as for Ken Tynan, perhaps you'll all join me in a glass of Sanatogen and a verse or two of that old Flanders and Swann favourite "Pee Po Belly Bum Drawers! Ma's out. Pa's out. Let's talk rude...." ☺

**Roger Mills is a TRS member, Editor of 'Steaming' magazine and runs Certainly Research, a PR, Media and Client Research company.**

## The TRS membership gift card is now available

The Society has had some unique gift cards printed (shown opposite) which can be sent to any new members who receive gift membership from an existing member. To arrange this you should send the name and address of the recipient of your gift to Diana Scotney, 25 Radcliffe Road, Hitchin, Herts, SG5 1QH with a cheque for £20 (a reduced price for one year's membership by cheque). Diana will include the card, with your name on it, with the welcome pack she sends out to the new member you have nominated. ☺



## Dates for your diary

The premiere of the Rattigan/Gielgud adaptation of **A Tale of Two Cities** takes place in the autumn at the King's Head Theatre in Islington. The Society is organising an outing to the show on **Thursday 3 October**. There will be a Q&A afterwards led by Michael Darlow, and there is also the option of a pre-show supper. See the enclosed flyer and booking form.

TRS Treasurer **Andrew Kenyon** is directing The Ladbroke Players in an amateur production of **The Browning Version** on **Saturday 9 November 2013**. There will be a TRS outing to the matinee performance and the Society's **AGM** will take place at an adjacent venue, following the performance, with an optional meal available. A flyer and booking form is also enclosed with this newsletter.

Looking further ahead, we are also planning a visit to the **British Library**, which houses some of Rattigan's papers and manuscripts. It is hoped that Professor **Dan Rebellato** will give a talk.

The Ballroom at the RAF Club in Piccadilly has been booked for the **Rattigan Birthday Dinner** on **Friday 6 June 2014**. It's a long way off, but do pencil it into your diaries!

Other events under consideration for next year include a study day at **Trinity College, Oxford**, where Rattigan was an undergraduate. More details will come your way when available.

Contributions to the next edition should be sent to the editor (gc@gilescole.com) by Saturday 26 October 2013.

## Annual Financial Summary by the Treasurer

**Society Account Balance as at 31 July 2012:** 2,174.65  
(as shown on Annual Report given to members at AGM)

**Total Credits**  
**for period 1 August 2012 – 31 July 2013:** 8,881.91

**Sub-Total** 11,056.56

**Total Debits**  
**for period 1 August 2012 – 31 July 2013:** 6,409.66

**Society Account Balance as at 31 July 2013:** 4,646.90

A full audited account of the financial year from 1 August 2012 - 31 July 2013 will be available to all members attending the Annual General Meeting of the Society scheduled for Saturday 9 November.

**Andrew Kenyon**  
Treasurer

