



The Rattigan

The Newsletter of
The Terence Rattigan Society

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Version

One of the striking things about researching magazines and trade journals from 1939-1945 is how much they follow Basil Fawcett's approach to the war. At first this seemed a tad strange to my post-war peepers until I tumbled to the fact that their readers had stood enough of reading about what was going on all around them. So I ditched all my plans for what to put into this issue about, well I won't mention it. That was the only idea I had. Then came the two test cricket series in front of empty stands (so it became essentially merely 'product' to fill television schedules). I boycotted this pointlessness but it did make me think. What would it be like to break the test match run record or take all ten and walk off to the sound of your own feet? * Idea. **The Final Test** and Sam Palmer in silence. That led to a little bit of research, which led to some interesting results and pretty well the entire issue. As Terry says himself in these pages - don't worry it's not all about cricket! **Roger Mills**

**Yes I know it would be just like the average county match if the man was asleep and the dog didn't bark.*

SOCIETY NEWS

Since the last Rattigan Version there have been a number of changes on the committee. First off Susan Cooper, after doing a wonderful job as Events Secretary, has offered to take on the role of Membership Secretary. Phill Ward has accepted our invitation to join the TRS Committee as the new Events Secretary. Following changes at the Terence Rattigan Charitable Trust Lee Penhaligan has stepped down as the ex-officio member representing the Trust. We thank her for all her kind cooperation and assistance over the years. After retiring from business working largely in London, making future attendance at meetings problematic, Roger Mills has reluctantly decided to step down from the committee at the AGM. Our former committee member Steve Bradley has decided to close down his web server which has hosted our website since the society was founded. We thank him very much for his support over the years. We have found a new host and hope that members will see a seamless changeover.

The AGM is planned for 6.30pm on Monday 23rd November and, as you will understand, will be a virtual meeting hosted on the zoom platform. More details in the formal notice. The society regrets most sincerely the absence of this popular social event but with the rapidly changing regulations and no certainty of what might be in place the next day, leave alone a month down the line, there was no alternative. Rest assured that we will begin to organise 'real' events as soon as is practicable.

On that subject, looking forward to next year, we hope to host the Sir Terence Rattigan Birthday Dinner at the Oxford and Cambridge Club on 9th June 2021. More details will follow in due course.

NEW PODCAST

The Deep Blue Sea is the subject of an episode in the new on-line series **The Play Podcast**. This edition was timed to coincide with the National Theatre streaming the NT Live video of their 2016 production and the guest discussing the play is Dan Rebellato.

It's available wherever people get their podcasts, but members can also access it via its own website theplaypodcast.com



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The Festival of Britain

The Final Test was Rattigan's contribution to the BBC's *Festival of Britain* play series so as an *apéritif* Denis Moriarty recalls that year's festivities... I was fifteen. I was there with Muriel - perhaps the second or third of a fumbling adolescent inadequacy on my part. We must have travelled up from Reading - where we were both at school - by the cheaper Thames Valley bus. This trundled its weary way through Slough and Staines; the more expensive Southern Region would have deposited us at Waterloo, right on site for the Festival of Britain wonderland. That last year or so, 1950-51, had been formative. I had sung the eponymous *Iolanthe* in the school production of that title. Ten months later again I played the name part in Shaw's *St Joan* (not very well - the lines I had found too many and difficult). I redeemed myself only another ten weeks on - my voice slipping to a croaking baritone - as Bunthorne in that year's Gilbert and Sullivan *Patience*. So the Festival was our first big day out.

I had just taken O levels, a mere five subjects if you were going to stay on in the Sixth Form, and the best you could hope for was a clutch of 2s and 3s. (Grade 1 - the equivalent of a 9 today - was a rarity, and well beyond expectations.) We knew the Festival of Britain had opened in May, still in the days of post-war rationing and austerity, vilified by many as a serious waste of public money. Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* had led the charge. Herbert Morrison, scion of the old LCC, sometime Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary in the Attlee Labour Government, radiated confidence that this would lift us out of post-war gloom and point to a bright future, celebrating British character and achievement for the modern age. It had resonance and reference to Prince Albert's Great Exhibition of 1851, whose Crystal Palace had once graced Hyde Park, and was re-erected at Crystal Palace, where I was taken in my mother's arms to see it burn to the ground in 1936.

The approach to the South Bank site was from Waterloo, across a water park full of fountains and dominated by a cascade feature, which at regular intervals would gird up its loins beginning with a trickle at the top - some 20 feet high - and with an increasing rumble motivating and activating its component parts eventually debouch with a great roar into its reservoir at ground zero. Over to the right was the Shot Tower. This 160 feet high survivor from 1826 was an elegantly tapering circular brick building for the manufacture of molten lead. (And some traditionalists would have mischievously said, even then, the best building on the South Bank.) Elsewhere

was Brave New World; the Dome of Discovery, the centrepiece which housed the main exhibitions, the British initiative in invention and exploration. It was a low-rise, vast brooding space 365 feet in diameter, then the largest Dome in the world. No supports within - but tent-like, supported by the tension of outside struts and stays. It succeeded as a place of awe and wonder. Its companion was the Skylon, 296 feet high, a futuristic inspiration of two young architects Powell and Moya who became household names. Later they designed hospitals, a court at Cambridge, a quad and a whole new college at Oxford. Not to mention the Chichester Festival Theatre. Was the Skylon a building- or a gesture, and did it have function or was it purely decorative? It drew, also, on exterior tension, floating on cables, and was, even to my teenage eye, potentially a thing of beauty, slender, graceful, soaring hopefully to the sky, tugging for take-off, prescient of rocket science that would search out the moon. The other attraction was the Lion and Unicorn Pavilion, an imaginative celebration of English oddity and eccentricity,

characterised in work by Rowland Emmett. He was a leading cartoonist who worked for Punch, and created a popular zany miniature railway at the up river Battersea Pleasure Gardens, reached by boat from the local pier.

The presiding spirit that hovered over the buildings on site was Hugh Casson, a delightful fellow, an architect himself who later became President of the Royal Academy, and a favourite with TV film crews on location, sketching away in between talking to camera and generously distributing his drawings to those assembled at the end of the day. Little did I know, drifting through this wonderland in 1951, that briefly in later life I should along with Powell of the Moya collaboration and a clutch of others involved, but fleetingly, brush shoulders with this impressive array of talent and bustling creativity.

Much of what made up the 1951 exhibition did not outlive the return of Churchill, always indifferent and somewhat dismissive of the enterprise, who became Prime Minister later that year. Much in the same way that the government of the recently independent India had done with the site of the Delhi Durbar field of 1911, where the then newly crowned King and Emperor George V received the homage of his princes, it was swept away to become a car park. The Shot Tower remained till 1967 and the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Hayward Gallery were built about the same time.

The Royal Festival Hall, the single supreme survivor, is still going strong. It was unfinished when it opened in



1951 and the entrance was on the east, not the river side as now. We returned to the Festival as a family shortly after my first visit with my Muriel. My brother had his 21st birthday in July only a couple of months after achieving the first of his two Oxford first class honours. (There are now in percentage six times as many each year.) My father wanted to make this a celebration in the RFH restaurant overlooking the Thames at a table with a river view of all those odd shapes in the exhibition below and in the distance Wren's St Paul's, not yet dwarfed by Shard and Cheesegrater. We would have eaten off a set menu, limited for choice and austere at that, and costing a guinea (twenty one shillings, £1.05, £85 at today's prices) for three courses. I remember being bowled over as we made our way through an amazing expanse of internal spaces, made possible, I learned later, with pillars rising through the whole height of the structure and the developing technology of stressed concrete; superb detailing, some of which still exists, carpets, engraved glass, grooved staircase rails over a gentle ascent. The concert hall was magical and modern with jutting boxes and clean lines. But the dry acoustic, critically considered and acclaimed at the time, was modified in later years. I later heard Thomas Beecham there conducting a concert of Lollipops in what must have been one of his last public appearances. And Fischer-Dieskau who held a capacity two thousand audience spellbound with a recital wholly devoted to Schubert songs. In the 1960s the auditorium became a regular feature of my London life being lucky enough to sing in the crack Philharmonia Chorus with some famous conductors, Brahms Requiem, the Beethoven Mass and Choral Symphony with Klemperer, umpteen Verdi Requiems with Carlo Maria Giulini,



THE SOUTH BANK SITE

Carmina Burana with Stokowski, Britten's Spring Symphony and Walton's Balshazzar's Feast, each conducted by their composers.

Yet in 1951 I'd only vaguely heard of Rattigan; in most unlikely circumstances the chance came doing national service in the Army three years later, when during the rigours of Eaton Hall Officer Cadet School, I was cast as Brian Curtis in *French Without Tears*, produced by our Company Commander, Major Douglas Bright, Eton and the Coldstream Guards. This was a very convenient way, incidentally, of avoiding fatigues and extra parades. I had no idea as I savoured meat and two veg in the RFH restaurant that July evening in 1951 that less than a mile across the Thames to the north *Who is Sylvia* had still three months of its year long run to play at the Criterion.

TV in 1951

To recall what television was like in 1951 you'd have to be around 80 and come from a reasonably well-off family living in the home counties or the Midlands. When TV reopened in 1946 (with the cartoon *Touchdown Mickey* which was running when the plug was pulled in 1939) the Baird System, all three versions, was already dead and gone, the Marconi/EMI system at 405 lines the one selected for development.

But in fact network development had been slow and by 1951 only 731,000 television licences were issued at a cost of £3 apiece. A receiver with a decent size screen would set you back upwards of 85gns (£89.5.0) and it wasn't uncommon to see sets at 100gns (£105.0.0). That's between £2500 adjusted for prices and £7310 for earnings at today's values. (Actually a monochrome set cost about £80 for as long as they were produced.)

But if you lived in the North of England, the West Country, Scotland and Wales there was no point laying out on one. You couldn't get the programmes.

London and the South East had been served since the start, Sutton Coldfield opened in 1949 for the Midlands.

The West Country had to wait until Wenvoe opened in 1954. For the North Holme Moss was on stream in 1951 but just missed our date. In Scotland Kirk o Shotts went live in 1952 while Northern Ireland had to wait until 1953.

So the maximum audience for Terry would have been however many people could gather round the proportion of the 731,000 sets switched on.

It is often asserted that the 1953 Coronation was the impetus for the sale of televisions en masse but this is a myth. Agreed between 1951 and 1953 an extra 1.4m licences were issued, but this was about the average annual rise until the first year that numbers overtook radio



- which was 1958. In many parts of the UK the main spur to going in for a set was the arrival of ITV in your area - as late as 1962 in places.

Radio was still king really right up to the late fifties when ITV increasingly competed with the beeb and their network gradually expanded.

You may know the story of Morecambe and Wise's

first TV series *Running Wild* (1954) which got the comment "Definition of a TV? The box they buried Morecambe and Wise in." They were mortified but when they got on stage they realized that no one in their variety audience had seen it at all!

The Final Test probably fared about as well...

Terry on the telly

Fraser McMaster looks at what preceded *The Final Test*

BBC Television and *French Without Tears* were both launched on the London public in the same week in 1936, on the 2nd and 6th November respectively. The London public because of the limited reach of the Ally Pally transmitter and the fact that's where the Criterion Theatre is. At this distance in time it's hard to say which had the most impact - certainly Auntie made a splash with her new service but the number of sets in use must have been tiny compared to the tickets sold for the play. But it is a nice coincidence and actually Terry and Auntie had quite a good relationship in the early days of telly, and especially after the resumption of service in 1946.

Compared with today's offering of drama, about which the current programme planners should hang their heads in shame, the output was prodigious. Sometimes three single plays a week, often repeated - live of course - on another day.

Robert McDermott, the Head of Drama in 1950, followed the policy of both the first Directors of Programmes Cecil McGivern and Cecil Madden and that was to build a corps of new writers who were alive to the capabilities of the new medium. He commented: "I knew that it wouldn't be possible—nor, indeed, desirable—to concentrate exclusively on new material. I realised that the television audience would always need a staple ration of 'Shaftesbury Avenue Successes', but I was anxious that, in time, these would constitute not more than fifty per cent of our total output so that television would not appear to be borrowing only from established stage and screen successes. I wanted it to be realised that this was a medium which needed special study."

"Of the remaining fifty per cent of plays, it was my aim to make half of them specially written for the medium and the rest admittedly written originally for the stage or screen but not yet seen on either. In making up the three-monthly drama schedule I contrived to approach as closely as possible these proportions of West End plays and classics, and plays untried or specially written, to obtain a balance that would please the largest number over any one month." McDermott also valued the freedom not to have to book star for box office appeal, though star names did appear, and he was also clear that television could be used as a try out medium as well. Indeed *The Happiest Days of Your Life* started out as a single television play.

Already too there was a realisation that TV has both

new opportunities and weaknesses. Michael Barry who was already experienced in adapting stage plays for the new medium had this to say in 1950: "Too often the producer has to compromise with his material because there are such fundamental differences between the theatre and television. For instance, the playwright can position six characters on his theatre set, and then construct a dialogue scene with short speeches from each of them. Only by the use of makeshift ingenuity can the television producer translate such a scene to his viewers. Nearly all theatre scenes tend to be too long when seen on the television screen, and the climax of mood and emotion that was correctly placed for the theatre audience can be weakened or made ineffective by the new punctuation of camera shots from several angles."

That didn't deter Auntie from *Rattigan* though and the first production made in house was in 1947 and that was *When the Sun Shines* with Bonar Colleano repeating his film and indeed stage performance. 'Scanner' writing in the *Radio Times* talks of the impossibility of getting tickets for any *Rattigan* without thinking many weeks ahead and reminding readers that Colleano came to attention first in *The Way to the Stars*. 1949 was a bumper year with May offering *Browning* starring Mary Ellis and Barry Jones performed by the Phoenix Theatre Company, and presented for television by Campbell Logan. Lionel Hale, previewing the show, used some very frank language calling Molly 'a genteel slut' and Andrew 'a pedant and failure' warning viewers that it is not a play for those who want to be cosy and hoping very much that the children will be in bed. "What the TV camera must do," he reckoned "is pick up the gradual development or exposure of characters. All the camera can do is record Mr Rattigan's imagination and hope to equal it." In November 1949 came *French Without Tears* based on the stage production by Robert Flemyng with Moira Lister, Robert Flemyng, Clive Morton, and Patricia Plunkett, presented for television by John Glyn-Jones and on 18th December 1949 viewers could see a *Winslow* starring Roger Livesey, Valerie White, Walter Fitzgerald and Jack Watling (by permission of Herbert Wilcox). There is a long appreciation of the work and the Archer-Shee case, again by Lionel Hale. He writes: "Mr Rattigan has a great theme and himself provides a theatrical expertise worthy of it. It is worth noting that when *The Winslow Boy* was recently played in Germany the

concept of the individual versus the tyranny of the state surprised and delighted its audiences. The play in fact is worth ten thousand speeches full of words like democracy and progress. It seems to me an excellent choice for television; its focus is narrowed to a few people and its writing is distinguished.”

In July 1950 came *Adventure Story*, remembered by Floor Manager Paddy Russell as the first production to use two studios. It was also the first television play for Gladys Cooper and it also featured Patrick Troughton, Michael Hordern and John Slater. It was produced by

Michael Barry and had a special musical score by Ben Frankel. Gladys Cooper, who had returned to London to act in a Peter Ustinov play, told the Radio Times that: “At the moment only two things interested her. One is television drama which has truly impressed me since I came back, The other is reading plays for stage production.”

So to sum up by the time *The Final Test* came along the only successes of Rattigan that hadn't played on TV in one way or another were *Love in Idleness*, *After the Dance* and *Flare Path*.

My First TV Play

How Terence Rattigan introduced *The Final Test* to viewers

The Final Test is, for me, the first test. For the last five years I have been a steady, often appreciative, and occasionally critical viewer of television drama, but the idea of writing especially for that medium had not occurred to me until I received the flattering invitation to contribute to the series of Festival plays this summer.

It was with some nervousness that I accepted. Although I had seen productions of several of my plays on television. And, in the case of *The Browning Version*, had actually sat in the control room at Alexandra Palace during the performance and watched that bewildering feat of legerdemain by which the television producer keeps control of his actors and technicians. I had to admit to myself that these experiences had left me with a very bare knowledge of the technique of this mysterious new medium.

I suppose I could have evaded this difficulty by simply ignoring it. I could have written the sort of play I am accustomed to write, and in which the passing years have given me a certain claim to technical proficiency: and then have left it to every producer to make the necessary adjustments and emendations to suit his cameras. Perhaps misguidedly (though, of course, I don't really think so) I decided to reject this course as defeatist, and to try to write something to which I could at least ascribe the virtue that it was composed especially for the medium. And indeed I gave myself the even more rigorous ambition of contriving that the resulting work should not be just a loose mixture of stage play and film (an obvious temptation to such a tyro as myself) but that it should be something to which, in effect, only television could really do justice.

It seemed necessary therefore to choose a subject that would exploit the three most striking characteristics of good television drama - its flexibility, its immediacy, and its intimacy; that would avoid those characteristics of stage drama which television has not yet learned how to reproduce - namely the crowded scene and the elaborate setting; and that would not unduly task the resources of the television camera by requiring it to perform those feats of omnipresence and omniscience that film writers so unthinkingly demand of their own camera.

I must repeat at this point - for fear that anyone might think that I am trying to write a manual for television writers - that I approached this problem strictly from the point of view of the ordinary licence-holder. Happily the medium is so young that it has hardly had time yet to produce its own set of rigid do's and don'ts (under which so many aspiring writers for stage and screen have needlessly suffered in the past), and the minds of those in charge of television drama seem most encouragingly and refreshingly free from any such dogmatism. But all viewers have the right to decide for themselves what they think television does best and what they think it does worst, and that decision, over five years of viewing, I had already made for myself. For myself, I repeat - at the risk of becoming a bore - not for anyone else.

What subject, then, seemed best to fill these requirements? I chose carefully. Whether wisely it is hard for me to say. But I do believe that *The Final Test*, if it does nothing else, does at least justify its sub-title. I claim that it is in fact, 'A comedy for television.'

I make no other claims for it (at least not in print). As a newcomer to the medium I didn't think that I should try too much, too soon. So I have to confess that the comedy, though imposingly billed as Festival Drama, displays no purpose more imposing than that of attempting to entertain and beguile its very widespread audience for roughly ninety minutes.

So, if in your Sunday-night viewing your pleasure lies exclusively in finding yourself purged with pity and terror; I beg you not to switch on. Because, I assure you, you won't be. And I shall also be arrogant enough to beg those of you who do switch on, and who may be misguided enough not to share my own enthusiasm for the game of cricket ('I have heard that such people exist'; as a character remarks in the play), not, on discovering to your horror that *The Final Test* does in fact mean the final test, to switch off too soon. Cricket is only the background. It is not, please believe me, the play.

The Final Test - A production history

Sorrel Asher-McGill gives us the score

The Final Test premiered on the 29th July 1951, a Sunday evening with a repeat, another live performance, the following Thursday. Production was by Royston Morley and James Bould's credit for six settings shows that Rattigan was using the flexibility of the medium to the full.

Retiring test batsman Sam Palmer was Patrick Barr with Ethel played by Joyce Carey. Reggie was played by Ray Jackson, the one constant actor in every presentation. Jackson's life partner, the illusionist Eric Lindsay (with whom he seems to have retired from acting to take up keeping coffee bars in the late 1950s) claims that Rattigan wrote Reggie especially for him. Now that's intriguing but is it true? Ray, Michael Darlow told us, was just the type of young chap who might have appealed to Rattigan but there is no known relationship between the two. Michael also pointed to a resemblance to a young Jack Warner but this can't possibly have been any reason for him to be picked for the television presentation. However for Ray Jackson to be a fixture on TV, in the film and on radio must I think be significant. Numerous contemporary cricketers and commentators are used to obviously give an impression of reality.

Aside from a few production stills nothing of this production exists. Telerecording, filming of a TV screen, was available at the time but not commonly used. (Indeed the one drama presentation that, according to Cecil Madden, was recorded - *The Scarlet Pimpernel* - was destroyed after legal action threatened by Sir Alexander Korda who claimed to own the film rights. A telerecording clearly was a film and the beeb clearly weren't prepared to go to court to argue semantics.)

Perhaps more significantly the papers, which clearly felt their readers would not be interested, ignored it.

Two years later came the film directed by Anthony Asquith and starring Jack Warner, an admirable screen actor, far better than many of his contemporaries and underrated in my opinion. As usual he is never less than watchable as Sam Palmer if utterly unconvincing as a cricketer. His autobiography, *Evening All*, reveals he could not stand the game. No surprise then that he clearly doesn't understand it. A week at Alf Gover's cricket school to make himself look more like a player was a futile exercise. Not his fault - he just joins the serried ranks of actors failing as abysmally to play sportsmen as the real cricketers taking part prove once again that non-actors, as might be expected, can't act! Then there's anno domini. Yes, cricketers used to go on next longer in those days, sometimes until after the age of 40, but nothing can disguise the fact that Jack at 57 is far too old for the part and far from athletic too.

The dressing room scenes featuring Len Hutton are quite cringingly awful and things at the ground aren't

much better. Both the American Senator, Stanley Maxted, and stereotype Englishman Richard Wattis clearly know their scenes are irrelevant, Wattis in particular making none of his usual efforts to steal the scene.

Everything is more successful when we are away from the game. Back at home Sam seems happier as the character and Jack as an actor and there is little to fault in the local pub or round the dining table where Adrienne Allen as Ethel and Brenda Bruce as Cora give sympathetic support. Robert Morley plays the poet as a boiler-suited mountebank - completely self-centred and obviously idle - pretty well entirely for laughs. Well received on release, time has not been kind to it and Sky Cinema is surely right to conclude: "It's difficult to imagine that this little film packed London's huge Odeon, Leicester Square, in its day, but it did." It still whiles away a nostalgic hour or so but I suspect even then it bore little relationship to the true lifestyle of a cricket pro.

Royston Morley produced the play for radio in 1956 with Patrick Barr again playing Sam, Brenda Bruce Cora and Ray Jackson Reggie. This was repeated in 1958 and recording of this does survive available to listen to in The Reading Room of the British library. The adaptation is by Cynthia Pughe and seems, from the listings in the Radio Times, to follow quite closely the television script. Again it's garnished with a long list of contemporary players and commentators.

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TELEVISION AND RADIO

Arlott, Rattigan, The Final Test and the soul of cricket

Roger Mills on the writer and his dramatic commentator

“Hollies pitches the ball up slowly and he’s bowled...Bradman bowled Hollies nought.... bowled Hollies nought. And what do you say under these circumstances?”

“How I wonder if you see the ball very clearly in your last Test in England, on a ground where you’ve played some of the biggest cricket of your life and where the opposing side has just stood around you and given you three cheers, and the crowd has clapped you all the way to the wicket. I wonder if you really see the ball at all. Anyway, Bradman went forward, it was Hollies’ googly, it clean bowled him, groping right down the pitch and he was just beaten all the way... and Australia are 117-2.”

Don Bradman’s final test innings as described by John Arlott. My contemporaries will hear the Hampshire music in every word. In the end he called it Basingstoke Bronchial but it never really changed. Not a word out of place but instant empathetic analysis from someone who thinks before they put their mouth into gear. It’s a fitting memorial to The Don, an example of the cruelty of cricket as a game and a reminder of perhaps the greatest cricket commentator there has ever been.

Terence Rattigan’s television play *The Final Test* was inspired by Bradman’s final innings on 14th August 1948 and maybe, who knows, by that very radio commentary. (The match was being televised for a couple of hours after tea and indeed the cameras may have picked up this dismissal. But coverage was being shared with the Olympic Games at the time...)

Cricket lovers like me will be astonished to realise it is 40 years this year that unique voice departed TMS. So distinctive, so remarkable, just a few words as sound effects in a play would be sufficient to fix the time of year. Probably why he was actually in *The Final Test* in all its incarnations; television play, radio adaptation and film. He started commentary in 1946 and by 1951 was the voice of cricket as essential to the realistic portrayal of an Oval test as Archbishop Tenison’s School and the Gasometers. If you wanted a realistic background he had to be in it.

Arlott’s and Rattigan’s could be seen as parallel lives. Born within three years of each other; each formidably intelligent departed formal education before they needed - in the face of parental opposition. Arlott, infuriated with the petty tyrannies of his local grammar school in a show of rebellion (he later described it as ‘Fool again’) stalked out of the geography exam to go and see a football match and never returned. Rattigan similarly rebelling, exiting Oxford without a degree. Both were determined in one way or another to live through their pens if it was

possible. With Rattigan it was always to be plays but it was poetry that first fascinated the Hampshire man. (It is tragedy that he gave up verse writing in 1952.) Terry avoided ‘the diplomatic’ but only through hack-work. JA joined the police never thinking he could/would do anything else. Both got their big break by chance. Rattigan through *French without Tears*. Arlott because John Betjeman happened to mention to Geoffrey Grigson that he’d heard of this Southampton policeman who wrote poetry leading to an invitation to give a talk on the BBC. Each bestrode their field in the fifties: Arlott across BBC output and the press (5000 words a day was typical) while Rattigan dominated the West End. Success engendered expensive tastes meaning that both had to work hard; Rattigan’s gambling was matched by Arlott’s book and wine collecting. Tragic deaths, Kenneth Morgan’s suicide and Arlott’s eldest son Jim’s fatal car crash in an MG his father had financed, coloured both - maybe even causing them to be more driven. Both were often extravagantly hospitable, both liked the good things in life. Each smoked like chimneys with dire effects on their later health. Both knew their chosen fields inside out.

I strongly fancy that both would have given up all the success they had in the forties and fifties in exchange for being first class cricketers. Arlott’s one first class appearance was as a substitute fielder for Hampshire at Worcester but he was a keen amateur player. Rattigan’s prowess as a schoolboy and undergraduate is well known.

Of the two Arlott was, is, my ultimate hero - a country chap with a country accent who’d stormed the RP bastions of the BBC and won, ending up as a poetry producer. Cricket commentary came by chance too - simply because he was working in the Eastern Service and it was an Indian team touring that year. Donald Stevenson the head of service said to JA: “Well you might as well do it.”

Arlott recalled years later: “I thought somebody had turned me upside down. It was impossible but you know for the others it was no great translation they were somewhere about there but for me it was a sort of seventh heaven to be watching cricket and talking about it and being paid for it”

But it was a victory he never seemed certain was permanent.

He identified so strongly with Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* that one suspects he was burdened with the, sadly common, inferiority complex that goes with a rural accent. A vulgar voice and an interesting mind was how Head of OBs Seymour de Lotbiniere described JA - to his face. After that I wasn’t surprised to read of Arlott’s

continuing insecurities, the reassurance he needed that he would be employed again, the anxiety when faced with a new producer or editor. "I lived under real fear of the sack until 1975" he said in 1980 about his relationship with the BBC, going on that if there was a letter from *The Guardian*, his main regular press job, in the morning post he always opened that first in case it was the sack. All freelancers know that feeling - but for those for whom being there at all seems a miracle it might be an ever present voice in the head. It seems that he was always feeling the need to prove himself. Even at retirement he wondered why anybody wanted to employ him.

In the end of course it's Rattigan - equally racked with anxiety under the suave exterior - who gets the sack, dismissed by a new theatrical establishment who use him as a whipping boy for every fault they find with the existing scene. Even though Somerset Maugham had warned him years earlier that he could expect 20 years before being usurped it was, as Geoffrey Wansell says, a brutal fate made even more brutal due to the fact that he and his friends couldn't comprehend the reason for it. Arlott always admitted that being a commentator was far easier than being a player and lasted longer too. As a player in the theatrical game Rattigan, not overnight but actually over a period of years, became as out of fashion as the specialist wicket keeper who batted at eleven and the wily leg spinner who couldn't field or make a run in the changing cricket scene of the period. It wasn't just a theatre which became more utilitarian and less a place for craftsmanship in the 60s, it was everywhere.

The game both knew and loved was changing too and I suspect both looked on wondering if the soul of Cricket was under threat. The soul of Cricket? Come off it - how can a game have a soul? Fair question but I think it does.

As Edward Lewis says to Vivian Ward in *Pretty Woman*: "People's reaction to opera the first time they see it is very dramatic. They either love it or they hate it. If they love it, they will always love it. If they don't, they may learn to appreciate it, but it will never become part of their soul." Cricket is the same and both men had fallen under its spell. But the bitter sweet lines

There falls across this one December day

The light remembered from those suns of June

which start Arlott's poem celebrating Jack Hobbs say more about the game than the whole of *The Final Test*. Melancholic minor key truths about the transience of both summer and life in this lovely verse that reduces me almost to tears every time I read it. For every cricket lover, and Terence Rattigan was amongst our number, winter is always too long. Once the days lengthen around 22nd December and certainly after twelfth night we yearn for the first sight of spring.

That truth is something both Arlott and Rattigan realised at the deepest level - though in terms of fiction Arlott's only attempt to verbalise it was a short story *It Ain't Half a Bloody Game* - his cricket poems are much more evocative but again mainly for the addict. Rattigan's aim, at the heart of *The Final Test*, is I think to try to explain the soul of the game to the mystified.

To show how a trivial pastime invented by Wealden farm workers to fill the lunch hour can have such a hold. On the incompetent player still looking for a game next Saturday. On the driver who pauses to watch half an hour of two village green teams he doesn't know playing for a result he'll never hear. On Mathematician GH Hardy who said: "If I knew that I was going to die today, I think I should still want to hear the cricket scores." On this writer who scored several matches involving Sam Cook (Glos 46-64; 1782 wickets at 20; 1695 runs at 5.4.).

One critic called the film the most significant about cricket ever. Well in the final quarter of an hour or so it does give some enduring truths about the game but I think to the non-addict the mysterious appeal of a competition that can last five days and still end in a draw would remain. I've watched the film several times in preparing this article and the best opinion I can come up with is patchily entertaining with some very funny moments.

When it takes off though you sense a much better play trying to get out. Rattigan is as usual at his best on the smaller scale around the dining table and watching the television. At the dinner party he gets pitch-perfect the awestruck besotted fan confronted by their hero and the incomprehension of the celebrity who is merely doing a job and can't understand the hero-worship. That's not to say Sam Palmer doesn't have cricket in his soul but he feels it differently. Geoffrey Wansell reproduces a large section of dialogue from this scene in his book and it is Rattigan at his best. Sam Palmer regrets that being a sportsperson means success comes when you are too young and everything after is an anti-climax. Terry was 40, about professional sport's limit, when he penned that, was he already a tad pessimistic? Who knows?

In the end though I think I found the real problem and it is Reggie. Yes he doesn't like cricket - no problem there. Yes he wants to be poet - in a mad seventeen-year-old phase so did I. (Maybe we all do?) Yes he wants to meet his hero Alexander Whitehead. I understand. But I do wonder if even the most self-centred adolescent would be unfeeling and crass enough to deliberately miss their father's final appearance in a test match. It simply doesn't ring true. But hey this is fiction - though it does hint at autobiography as well - and makes Sam even more worthy of our sympathy.

Arlott once said his biggest regret was that he'd never written a novel. Never less than readable, his journalism sometimes touches on the soul of cricket but like all press it's literature in a hurry. One wishes he had written at length just as one wishes Rattigan had returned to *The Final Test* in his later years and distil the essence of why father and son see bat on ball so differently.

The play is, though, prophetic. Sam scores his duck and the crowd rise to him - something Arlott in the script says is unprecedented. But it happened to him on September 2nd 1980 as he gave his last test match commentary. If only Terry had lived long enough I think he'd have joined in.

Whether either would bother with T20 I doubt. It has bat, ball and wickets but a soul? I do wonder.