



# The Rattigan

The Newsletter of  
The Terence Rattigan Society

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## Version

## All On Her Own streamed on demand

Rattigan's original title for this 30-minute drama was *Duologue*, which sounds a little pedestrian perhaps, or even unimaginative, but is very accurate in that the one character, a middle-class widow, engages in a late-night conversation with her recently deceased husband and we hear his voice through her. The most poignant aspect of the play is that an apparently ill-matched couple rediscover themselves but only after Gregory, the plumber who liked to call himself 'a building contractor' and whom his wife Rosemary now refers to as 'an architect', has taken his own life.

Or has he? That is the question at the heart of the play: was it a drunken accident or suicide? Why would he feel the need to take an overdose is the question which she (in Gregory's voice) poses for herself. And her answer is that she, quite possibly, drove him to it. She tries to remember the exact words he used to describe their marriage – was it "unfailingly polite" or "impeccably polite"? She was brought up to be polite, when Gregory perhaps wanted something more raw and robust. They do seem to have been opposites: she, a middle-class southerner, and he a Geordie who had a plumbing business in Huddersfield.

Thus we see a painful portrait of a failing marriage where whisky opens Rosemary up emotionally to face the demon that now confronts her. And just as she senses Gregory's presence in their neat, well-furnished sitting room, in a house which he hated yet which she persuaded him to buy, we sense his presence very much within her



Janie Dee as Rosemary Hodge in *All On Her Own*

Photo: Danny Kaan

and the life she must now lead "all on her own".

Perhaps there is an element of reversal here in a comparison with another Rattigan protagonist, Hester Collyer in *The Deep Blue Sea* – she being a well brought up, middle-class lady married to a very respectable but dull man; she finds her life stifling and abandons everything for passion. In Rosemary Hodge we have a middle-class lady who married the man who might be seen as her version of Freddie Page, but for whom she can show little emotion or passion. **Continued on back page...**

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### Introducing

## Jeffrey Holland

Our newest honorary member will be familiar to Society members in many guises, the most recent being as the ambitious politician Sir Stanley Johnson in the TRS online reading of Rattigan's *Heart to Heart*.

The story of Jeffrey's career is also a familiar one - that of the understudy getting his chance to triumph in the role he has been covering—twice! In 1975 he auditioned for the late great Jimmy Perry and David Croft to join the cast of the stage version of *Dad's Army*. He played in the ensemble and understudied Privates Pike and Walker for six months in the West End; the show then went out on tour and he was promoted to play Walker, the cockney spiv. And thus he joined the ranks of what could be called the Perry/Croft repertory company, being cast in various guest roles in subsequent series. But his real breakthrough came with the holiday camp sitcom, *Hi-de-Hi!* The role of Spike Dixon, the naïve but kind-hearted comic, was written with him in mind, and the show ran for nine series, winning a BAFTA for Best Comedy Series in 1984.

Jeffrey was born in Walsall, Staffordshire, and his love of theatre began at the age of 16, when he joined a local am-dram group for under-21s, but perhaps the fact that he'd been told the girls were very pretty had something to do with it. In any case, pretty girls or no, he discovered he had a knack for comedy, which did his self-esteem a world of good, he says. He was by his own admission a gawky lad, spotty-faced, specky-eyed, with big teeth, and the last thing he expected to do



was appear on stage in front of an audience. But he had got the bug. Subsequently he went to drama school in Birmingham and on completing his training, he landed a job at the Belgrade Theatre,

Coventry, when he was 22. He spent the next five years honing his craft and playing everything from pantomime to Shakespeare, a highlight of the latter being an appearance as Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*. Such intensive stage experience in repertory for such a length of time is completely unheard of today, and more is the pity, many would say.

His first panto appearance in Coventry was as the Slave of the Ring in *Aladdin* in 1968, since when he has played in 45 different productions over 50 years, with 25 of them as Dame. He is now generally reckoned to be among the top five pantomime dames in the country.

His second break in taking over a role came in 1980 when he was appearing in *Robinson Crusoe* at the Alexandra Theatre in Birmingham. Frankie Howerd was the star of the show, but it was the year of the big freeze and one day Frankie slipped on some ice on his way into the theatre and broke his hip. As a result, Jeffrey found himself taking over Frankie's role at very short notice and to great acclaim—especially from the other members of the cast who all went up a notch in their billing!

On television, Jeffrey also had a leading role in *Oh, Dr Beeching!*, a David Croft sitcom about a small branch line station threatened with closure, in which he played the new stationmaster, Cecil Parkin; another hit show was Perry and Croft's *You Rang, M'Lord?*, in which he was the very correct and pompous footman James Twelvetrees. Incidentally, on asking if Spike Dixon - perhaps his best loved character - was his own personal favourite, Jeffrey stated that the part he relished most was in fact Twelvetrees because it was "such a great straight role for me, within the comedy of the show" - an indication perhaps that he still has a yearning for less comedic, and more serious, roles. That would seem to be borne out by the huge success he has had with his one-man show about Stan Laurel, which, although exploring a great comedy partnership, is a very delicate and touching piece of work, thoroughly recommended to any Society member who has not seen it.

He first had the idea for *...and this is my friend Mr Laurel* in the 1970s, but it didn't come to fruition until 40 years later when it was co-written by Jeffrey and Gail Louw. It played three sold out seasons at the Edinburgh Festival as well as many touring dates throughout the UK.

Jeffrey has had a lengthy and wide-ranging career, including a tour of *'Allo, 'Allo!* in which he recreated the role of René. A little concerned that Gordon Kaye had been so strongly identified with the role that the public might not readily accept another actor's interpretation, he was delighted to find that audiences immediately warmed to him, though he modestly states that it was the show that was really the star, not him.

His wife Judy Buxton also starred in this production as Michelle of the Resistance; they originally met in a production of Neil Simon's *The Gingerbread Lady* at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, in 1994, but it was during a Far East tour of the Ray Cooney farce *Out of Order* some time later that "Cupid fired his little arrow" as Jeffrey puts it. Judy is also of course an honorary member of the TRS, and appeared alongside him (literally) in the online reading of *Heart to Heart*.

Another achievement of which Jeff admits he is rather proud is *Goon Again*, the 50th anniversary celebration of *The Goon Show* on Radio 2, in which he assumed the mantle of Peter Sellers, playing Bluebottle, Grytpype-Thynne, Major

Bloodnok and Henry Crun. Following in great footsteps indeed.

And never one to miss a gag, Jeff has just rung to point out that if Sir Ian McKellen can play Hamlet at the age of 81, as it has been announced that he is doing, then he, Jeff, is looking forward to playing 14-year-old naval cadet, Ronnie Winslow, any time soon. Should be well within his range.

We welcome Jeff to the TRS fold and hope we can see him and Judy (in whatever guises) before very much longer. ☺



**Jeffrey as the footman James Twelvetrees in *You Rang, M'Lord?* (above) and in his acclaimed one-man show *...and this is my friend Mr Laurel* (below). On the facing page he is of course pictured as Spike in *Hi-de-Hi!***



# *Heart to Heart* adapted for the Zoom age

## by Denis Moriarty

As Geoffrey Wansell informed us, in his introduction to this online reading of Terence Rattigan's 1962 television play, it is a "human, deeply felt, extraordinary play about his enduring themes of the inequality of love, infidelity, and the difficulties of struggling to do the right thing". It was "a typically elegant piece of drama and perfectly constructed". Rattigan worked on it while he was writing *Man and Boy*, which he had hoped would be his masterpiece, but which it didn't quite turn out to be. Geoffrey went on to say that Rattigan had always wanted Richard Burton to play the interviewer David Mann and he and the producer Alvin Rakoff flew to Rome to meet Burton when he was preparing to film *Cleopatra* with Elizabeth Taylor. Burton wanted to do it but *Cleopatra* proved so demanding that in the end he had to pull out. Kenneth More was then cast alongside Ralph Richardson who was always going to play Sir Stanley Johnson. *Ed.*

Spare a thought for actors in Zoomland; stripped of all theatrical aids, save a whisky glass and a saucy hat, and reduced to the mid-shot - happily full frame and not split-screen; our TRS cast in *Heart to Heart* live-streamed and laboured splendidly - and emerged triumphant. They made us listen to the text - and what a play this is; there's scarcely a line that does not reveal, often with great economy, another dimension to the character, or a twist in the tensions that make Rattigan the master that he is - loyalties, infidelities, concealments, the interlocking of dependency, the shifting sands of motive.

Geoffrey Wansell, one of our Vice-Presidents and indeed one of our Rattigan biographers, whetted our appetite in setting the context of the play - commissioned by BBC TV - then one of only two national channels - and seen in prime time (just think of that) on 6 December 1962 - and perhaps never since. It looked in part to a moment in America, the Kennedy—Nixon TV debates two years earlier, when Nixon seemed to extricate himself from bribery accusations by seizing the

initiative in an emotional appeal direct to the audience - pleading overwork, a needy wife, tears, and even the family dog thrown in. At home, Rattigan had witnessed, and identified with, the



Two honorary members, husband and wife team Judy Buxton and Jeffrey Holland, who appeared as Peggy Mann and Sir Stanley Johnson in the recent online reading of *Heart to Heart*

lonely and sexually frustrated Gilbert Harding - unmasked in a *Face to Face* television interview by the first of the television Grand Inquisitors, John Freeman, a rising MP star in the 1945 Parliament, later High Commissioner in India - and a forerunner of Robin Day, of the signature bow-tie, and many others.

Giles Cole, whose initiative this live-stream was,

reduced the script by about a quarter - no easy task - and provided in its place a narrator, our Secretary, Martin Amherst Lock, whose task it was to set the scenes and fill in any gaps lost in adaptation. Comfortably framed by rustic rafters of a lockdown timber-frame, he delivered his script with a pace and point that kept the plot nimbly nipping along. Giles played Rattigan's interviewer David Mann, relishing his part with zest and energy; from his long theatre experience, here was a compelling portrait of insecurity, a sense of phoney confidence, reliance on the

bottle, the dysfunctional personal life, the need for assurance and esteem, the principled pursuit of his 'victim.'

Judy Buxton, in a well judged performance as his wife Peggy, skilfully handled the residue of affection and loyalty that lingers in many a loveless marriage - a wounded character, with not entirely satisfactory solutions for her own self-esteem and survival. The third party to this triangle was Jessie, the Production Assistant on the show, a character all too readily recognisable in the TV world. Amanda Weston brought a keenly studied tenderness and some poignant lines to the dilemmas of loyalty - often the burden of women devoted to their work, their men or home, explored and exploited in a variety of ways. Our Treasurer, Alison Du Cane, played Miss Knott, harbinger of incrimination, intent in motive, assertive and suitably hatted in a pivotal scene - the aggrieved secretary to a seemingly unprincipled politician.

Mr Stockton - he alone with Miss Knott not vouchsafed a first name - was Controller of Programmes - a suspiciously sinister title in media circles, the familiar CPTel in BBC parlance. In this part Alison's real life husband, Leslie, sharing domestic elegance from their London Riverside, caught the right mix of the compromised boss - presiding over the Inquisitor's contract, yet chummy, and urging softly-softly with the Cabinet Minister 'victim', and leaning on his Producer - Michael Gaunt - to connive in pulling the plugs if the live-show interview went haywire, but in the event to zoom in close when a Moment of Television History was at hand. Michael brought years in the theatre to his role in the subtleties of goading, restraining, bolstering and collaboration. At Giles' request, he also cast a careful and helpful producer's eagle eye over the webinar ensemble.

Sir Stanley Johnson, the politician about to be exposed, was played with characterful and very convincing bluster by Jeffrey Holland - 'man of the people' up against the 'bright young intellectual'. His strong performance added a special intensity in



Ralph Richardson as Sir Stanley Johnson and Kenneth More as David Mann in the original 1962 BBC TV production of *Heart to Heart*

the countdown to the dramatic climax, when Sir Stanley seizes the occasion with an appeal to his audience - the public confessional, albeit economical with the truth, and with the wife and cat all there in good measure; but thrilling stuff, and the craft of the writing had us all on the edge of our seats.

Rattigan's skills as a man of the theatre perhaps impress most in the subsequent dying fall; a tainted politician emerges with overwhelming phone-in support, although hobbled perhaps in his aspirations for the top job, the vulnerable David Mann shored up for the moment maybe by his 'place in history', but the doubts, the enigma, and the domestic insufficiencies live on. The sensitivities to frailty, and the shifting whirlpool of human emotion, together with a taut and economic script underline Rattigan's power as a playwright and his relevance to 1962 as much as to today, and beyond.

Michael Darlow - another of our Vice-Presidents and also his biographer - describes *Heart to Heart* as 'Rattigan's best play between *Separate Tables* in 1954 and *In Praise of Love* in 1973'. It's a play that deserves much more oxygen - and thanks to this TRS webinar and Giles Cole and his talented company we had it in plenty. We are greatly indebted to them all; congratulations on a great show. ☺

# An Air Force Air Shot

by Roger Mills

When you can use your smartphone to tell your altitude on a fell walk, or the tide times on a coastal trek, as well as allowing you to view the shipping movements in Chesapeake Bay, it's a bit of a shock to remember when the tape recorder was cutting edge. But go back to the 50s and 60s and there were tape recording clubs where blokes, mostly, probably smoking pipes and wearing tweed jackets bent over the Ferrograph with razor blades and splicing tape making their own audio programmes of local actuality and the like. And sometimes naughtily making pirate copies of radio plays which survived long enough to find their way to YouTube - maybe the only record of long wiped masters.

I suspect one of these guys must have been responsible for the RD Smith-directed BBC performance of *Flare Path* from 1965, which I came across on YouTube recently. Frankly I was surprised he'd had the chance - I'd thought that this wartime play had been largely forgotten until the National Theatre revival a few years ago, but a bit of devilling found to the contrary and that the Beeb had visited the lounge of The Falcon three or four times since it premiered, and with an interesting adaptor too.

Excerpts from the original London production aired on 24th April 1943, and in an introduction in his *Radio Times* column, C Gordon Glover said: "There has yet to be written a great play about this war. The nearest approach that has come my way is Terence Rattigan's *Flare Path*, an excerpt from which will be broadcast on Wednesday night. It is written with effective restraint and thorough understanding - Rattigan is himself in the RAF - and gives to Adrienne Allen the part of the barmaid who in marrying a Polish pilot becomes a countess, a chance she has taken with both hands."

On 24th January the following year, listeners could hear members of the War Office Central Pool of Artists in scenes from the play produced by Val Gielgud, which they were touring to service audiences in camps and garrison theatres.

It was 1949 before the first BBC production in an adaptation by Kenneth Morgan. Now, I have seen no mention of this in any of the biographies but this may, I suspect, have been one of the tasks Michael Darlow tells us Rattigan passed on to Morgan for which he could pay him as tax deductible expenses - giving the financial

support needed as his lover's acting career had stalled. It's this adaptation which is the version used in all future broadcasts including the one I found of YouTube. So how much adaptation was there? Trimming for length might be a better word - though given the way in which radio drama was produced it would be hard to say how much Morgan cut and how much was done, pencil in hand, in the studio. I listened to the airshot script in hand and much of the excision was clearly to get it down to 80 minutes - aside from a nod to the BBC Green Book cleaning up a few mild expletives (e.g. bastard to basket) all Rattigan's original dialogue is unaltered. The cast was:

*Countess Skriczevinsky: Belle Chrystall*

*Peter Kyle: John Bentley*

*Mrs Oakes: Dora Gregory*

*Sergeant Miller: Leslie Dwyer*

*Percy: Billy Thatcher*

*Count Skriczevinsky: Gerard Heinz*

*Flight-Lieutenant Graham: Basil Jones*

*Patricia Graham: Anne Cullen*

*Mrs Miller: Ivy Collins*

*Squadron-Leader Swanson: Ivan Samson*

*Produced by Neil Tuson; TX 5th January 1949, repeated 10th January 1949.*

John Bentley was later to find a sort of place in history as Meg Richardson's second husband in *Crossroads* while Ann Cullen and Basil Jones would in a very few years entertain the nation as Carol and John Tregorran in *The Archers*.

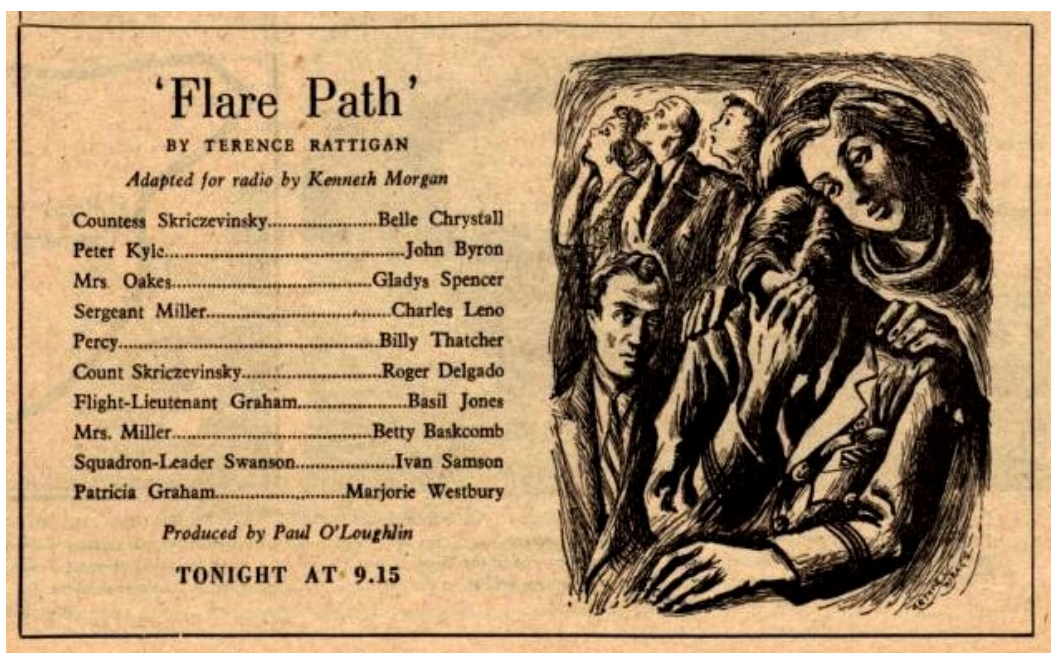
Easter Monday 1950 saw another outing, but in a new production introduced perceptively for *Radio Times* by Stephen Williams: "On the surface this is a play about airmen taking off for raids on Germany and coming back or not coming back, according to their luck. Under the surface it is, like all plays worth anything at all, a series of variations on the theme of human nature. And human nature is never more quickly recognisable than among men thrown together in daring and hazardous enterprises." (Williams, incidentally, was one of the first broadcasters in the commercial radio industry, going to Radio Normandy in 1932 and being the first voice for Radio Luxembourg in 1933. In 1992, when Luxy closed down its terrestrial service, he was brought back to make the final announcement: 'Good luck, good listening ... and goodbye'.) The cast this time was:

*Countess Skriczevinsky: Belle Chrystall*

*Peter Kyle: John Byron*  
*Mrs Oakes: Gladys Spencer*  
*Sergeant Miller: Charles Leno*  
*Percy: Billy Thatcher*  
*Count Skriczevinsky: Roger Delgado*  
*Flight-Lieutenant Graham: Basil Jones*  
*Patricia Graham: Margery Westbury*  
*Mrs Miller: Betty Baskcomb*  
*Squadron-Leader Swanson: Ivan Samson*  
*Produced by Paul O'Loughlin; TX 10th April 1950.*

Now we come to my version produced by RD 'Reggie' Smith. Smith was one of those figures gathered round

days – more's the pity. The cast this time was:  
*Mrs Oakes: Gladys Spencer*  
*Peter Kyle: Basil Jones*  
*Doris: Betty Baskcomb*  
*Sergeant Miller: Joe Sterne*  
*Percy: Tim Seely*  
*Count Skriczevinsky: Anthony Jacobs*  
*Flight -Lieutenant Teddy Graham: Anthony Hall*  
*Patricia Graham: Jane Wenham*  
*Maudie Miller: Norma Griffin*  
*Squadron-Leader Swanson: Eric Anderson*  
*TX 11th December 1965; repeated 4th & 10th October 1969.*



So, you're no doubt asking, is this worth an hour and a half of my time? Without a doubt. I found it an engrossing and moving interpretation. We're also taken back to the golden age of radio drama where actors spent so much time in the studio they developed a natural approach to the medium, which has been largely lost amongst today's attenuated schedules

himself by Douglas Cleverdon who could only have existed in the Corporation of the time. A committed Communist for most of his life, a womaniser with an open marriage to Olivia Manning, Smith came from obscure Birmingham origins to be taught by Louis McNiece, who became a lifelong friend.

Norman Painting describes Smith's place as a "golden one in the history of British broadcasting in the fifties and sixties". He goes on: "Broadcasting for Reggie, though, was always an adventure. His casts had a habit of growing as rehearsals progressed: some out-of-work actor would call to see him, and be given a part on the spot. You would often start with four or five small parts such as newsboy, professor, Indian, worried old man, cultured voice etc, and end up with only two or three. And if Dylan Thomas happened to arrive, he was sure to be given one of your parts; but nobody minded. The converse was often true: you could sometimes end up playing a far more important part than you started off with." I can't see that approach being tolerated these

- I once read it described as being able to shout 'Death to Caesar' convincingly while cleaning your glasses or tapping the ash off a fag. The microphone technique is completely assured and the performances suited to the receivers with the tiny amplifiers and solid wooden cabinets.

The warm acoustic, microphones used, and analogue sound take the listener into the hotel lounge and not - as with many modern digital recordings – feeling as if they are listening outside. (There's also that background static of just audible high-powered continental stations, which accompanied all evening listening - an evocative memory those of us of a certain age will find inexpressibly comforting in the present strange times. I was back listening with Granny and Grampy.)

Of the performances, which are uniformly convincing, I'd single out Norma Griffin as Maudie, maybe the best playing of a salt-of-the-earth Londoner I have ever heard. Not a bit of stage cockney here.

Recommended. 

## All On Her Own streamed on demand

*Continued from front page*

She is constrained by her 'politeness'. And she now feels this failing may have driven him to desperate measures. So we have an examination, as so often in *Rattigan*, of the inequality of love, and indeed of marriage. We sense that Rosemary loved Gregory but was incapable of expressing it to him in a way that he understood, or wanted, much as Sir William Collyer, the high court judge, loves Hester, but not in the way she wants or can endure.

One wonders how Rosemary would fare if her character were transposed to a full-length drama, and what the outcomes would be – what reversals would she undergo in her quest for inner peace? And would she reconcile herself with Gregory, or find someone more attuned to her calm politeness in matters of the heart? Rosemary is not as rounded a character as Hester – understandably, in a much briefer play, but the elements are there for a larger dramatic picture – and that is the precise strength of *All On Her Own*.

Janie Dee played the role in a filmed and streamed production in February, directed by Alastair Knights, and she did it full justice. She epitomised the woman confused both by her own grief and her dissatisfaction with herself and what had gone before, her calmness finally exploding in a liaison with the whisky decanter as she discovers rage and self-hatred in her loneliness. In other words, she finally discovers passion within herself, but tragically too late. Yet the performance was subtler than that: yes, it was gut-wrenching, but it also captured that strange phenomenon of a genuinely shattered person almost acting out her own pain to herself. There was an awareness that she was seeing herself in this new light even as the light began to dawn.

The Society had the pleasure of seeing Zoë Wanamaker essay the same role as the curtain-raiser to *Harlequinade* in the Kenneth Branagh season at the Garrick Theatre in 2015/16 and a comparison is inevitable. Zoë had an earthier quality, and went further in her deliberations via the whisky bottle; her anguish was from the pit of the stomach and utterly compelling in its ugliness.

She expressed physical pain as she confronted herself, whereas Janie's pain was somehow less expected and so more troubling. Both first-rate interpretations of the character, but of the two I would edge Janie Dee ahead for the reasons above mentioned. You don't expect Janie's Rosemary to lose herself in whisky-fuelled rage – she is too calm and collected for that – too precise in her analytical observations of her husband and herself – so when it comes it hits you between the eyes. And then there is the extra sense that she is somehow putting herself through a necessary stage in her recovery from the shock of death. And she knows she is doing it. Even as she discovers passion within herself, she is noting it, calculating the odds of survival as a woman all on her own. Riveting.

**Giles Cole** ∞

### **Editorial footnote:**

*Following the positive reception of the recent online reading of Rattigan's 'Heart to Heart' (see the Chairman's report, on pages 4 & 5) the committee has been investigating other options for online readings, while we are still unable to meet properly in person for Society events.*

*One play which found much favour was 'Kenny Morgan' by Mike Poulton, which dramatises how the suicide of Rattigan's lover may have inspired 'The Deep Blue Sea'. Rattigan himself appears as a character and the play was well received at the Arcola Theatre in 2016 in a production by Lucy Bailey.*

*However, according to the author's agents, licences are no longer being granted for performances, or indeed readings, of this play, for reasons unexplained. A disappointing outcome. The search therefore continues.*

*One option would be to have a reading of a play by a Rattigan contemporary, such as Coward or Somerset Maugham, or another would of course be a further play by Rattigan himself. Any suggestions from the membership will be welcome. ∞*