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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAYS OF  
TERENCE RATTIGAN.

City University of New York, Ph.D., 1977  
Theater

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HOLLY HILL

1977

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAYS OF TERENCE RATTIGAN

by

HOLLY HILL

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate  
Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University  
of New York.

1977

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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The City University of New York

FOR MY BELOVED PARENTS,  
BEA AND EARL HIRSHEIMER

## PREFACE

In the Fall of 1970, just after I had begun studying for an M.F.A. in theatre history and drama criticism at Columbia University, I told one of my professors that I wanted to write my Master's thesis, and eventually my Ph.D. dissertation, on the plays of Terence Rattigan. The professor (who incidentally was British) dismissed my idea with a curt: "Nobody takes Rattigan seriously."

The professor's comment is related here because his attitude toward Rattigan, and my subsequent discovery that it was shared by most American and by many British critics and scholars, greatly influenced the structure of this work. For Rattigan to be dismissed as a lightweight playwright, something had to be lacking either in his plays or in the critics' perception of them. Thus it seemed essential to me that not only the plays themselves but the critics' response to them should be examined.

Another primary consideration in the design of this work was the service it might provide theatre historians and future Rattigan scholars as a basic record of his playwriting career. Since this is the first full-length study of Rattigan's work in the theatre, I thought it important to begin with the accounts of his childhood interest in and early attempts at playwriting, and to proceed chronologically through the writing and production of his plays and the development of his theoretical essays.

As I analyzed Rattigan's plays, a third important consideration

developed: an interpretation of Rattigan's personal vision as a dramatist. Future critics and scholars may offer different interpretations, and there is much scope for more detailed examinations of many aspects of Rattigan's work than are attempted here. There is also an opportunity for another general study on a topic I have not, for reasons of length, even touched upon: Rattigan's radio, television and screenplays.

Many people have been enormously helpful to me in this project. Sir Terence Rattigan's generosity in granting me an interview in December of 1974, and subsequently giving me permission to work with the manuscripts and press scrapbooks in his private collection, was most deeply appreciated. Sir Terence's secretary, Mrs. Harold French, patiently and graciously facilitated my research in the private collection in London during the summer of 1975. Also greatly aiding me in the research phase were the staffs of the Theatre Collection at the Research Division of the Lincoln Center Library of the Performing Arts and of the Newspaper and Periodical Collection of the British Museum at Colindale.

As a student, I have been fortunate in having many professors who, like good directors in the theatre, gave me good advice while allowing me freedom to develop my own insights and techniques. I am grateful to my dissertation committee at the Graduate School of The City University of New York: Chairman Glenn Loney and members Edwin Wilson and Daniel C. Gerould; to the Chairman of the Theatre Department, Stanley Waren and to his predecessor, Bernard Dukore; and also to my Master's thesis advisor at Columbia, Albert Bermel, and to the Chairman of the Columbia program, Bernard Beckerman.

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Others to whom I am indebted are Dr. Allan Blumenthal, Alexander Cohen, Frank Dunlop, Michael Imison, and Roger Machell for giving me informative and enjoyable interviews; Barbara Weiss, for typing the manuscript, and Dorene Castle, for proofreading it. I am also deeply grateful to Arthur Silber, who originally suggested that I write about Rattigan, and to Dr. Saraleigh Carney, Andrew Warner Hill, Kay and Phillip J. Smith, and to my parents for their interest in and encouragement of this work.

Preparing a dissertation is often a frustrating and exhausting project. During the years that I have worked on mine, I have been continuously conscious and very appreciative of the fact that, whatever problems I might be encountering in the research and writing, I have never, for one moment, been bored with my subject. The plays of Sir Terence Rattigan have been a fascinating and inspiring study. It is my greatest hope that at least some of this fascination and inspiration will be shared by my readers.

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## INTRODUCTION

Frank Dunlop, Artistic Director of the Young Vic, relates that when he suggested in 1973 that the company revive Terence Rattigan's 1936 comedy French without Tears:

They thought I must be mad. I put it to the Arts Council, who had hysterics. They said, "You've got to be mad. This is just trash."

But I remembered seeing a production of French without Tears and finding it very entertaining. Then I read it, and found it absolutely smashing--wonderfully constructed, very funny, and very moving because all of the characters are very, very true. In it you see people behaving the way you did when you were young and felt desperate about a lot of things.

Rattigan knows about love, and that's in French without Tears in the most delicate way. He knows about friendship and relationships between people too, and I don't know of any other playwright but Osborne who understands relationships between people in such a subtle way.

I thought the play just as relevant in 1973 as when Rattigan had written it almost forty years before. The hero is fighting to write and get out of his social class and into contact with other people. That is still very relevant in England--breaking out of one's class, doing some sort of job, making connections between people from different strata of society. Rattigan does it very delicately and implicitly, rather than with some big message.

The company read the play and adored it. It was quite difficult and delicate to work on--the equivalent of Restoration comedy--but they were entranced all the time because of the truth of the characters. We ran it for nearly a year in our repertoire, and it became a very important revival for Rattigan.<sup>1</sup>

The story of the Young Vic's revival of French without Tears represents, in miniature, the story of Terence Rattigan's struggle for recognition as a serious dramatist. One of the most commercially successful playwrights in the modern theatre, he has rarely been acknowledged as an artist.

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Dunlop, interview in New York City, 17 December 1975.

Rattigan's early comedies, French without Tears and While the Sun Shines (1944), established a still-unbroken box office record: Rattigan is the only playwright to have had two productions run for more than one thousand performances each in London.<sup>2</sup> Love in Idleness (1944, retitled O Mistress Mine in America), starring Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, became the greatest success of the Lunts' careers. It ran 451 performances on Broadway and the Lunts played it, in London and New York and on tour in Europe and America, for almost four years. During this period, Rattigan was widely regarded as an agile inventor of vehicles for actors whose performances made his flimsy material seem better than it was.

Even at the peak of his career, with the productions of his dramas The Winslow Boy (1946), The Browning Version (1948), The Deep Blue Sea (1952) and Separate Tables (1954), Rattigan was considered by many British and by most American critics as a popular entertainer of the sort whose works help keep the theatre alive during a given period, but who do not express the spirit and style of that period with any profound or unique insight.

After the arrival of the "New Wave" of British dramatists and of the Absurdist in the mid-fifties, Rattigan's reputation suffered even further from attacks by younger critics, who viewed his works as representative of much that the new playwrights were in revolt against. Except for Ross (1960), Rattigan's later work has often been dismissed as hardly worthy of serious consideration. One British critic even suggested in 1970 that: "Some PhD will have a man-and-masks ball one day

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<sup>2</sup>All records and criticisms referred to are fully documented in succeeding chapters.

with the theme of 'Terence Rattigan and the Hollow Professional.'<sup>3</sup>

Rattigan has been denied recognition as an artist for many reasons. He has been denounced as old-fashioned because he writes well-made plays, superficial because he refuses to dramatize ideological issues, and sentimental because he depicts man as being capable of charting his psychological and existential destiny through his own choices and actions. His popularity with audiences has been held against him in the form of accusations that he deliberately panders to a lowbrow audience's tastes, and that he manipulates audiences' emotions through displays of flamboyant but shallow theatricality. Rattigan has generally been credited with making no innovations whatsoever in the form or content of his plays; he has been refused acceptance as a poet of the theatre; and, finally, he has been charged with having no personal point of view, no individual vision and signature which distinguishes the true artist from the competent but ephemeral popular entertainer.

But there are indications, in retrospective articles on Rattigan's work published in Britain and America during the 1970s, and in British reviews of London revivals of his plays,<sup>4</sup> that the critical attitude toward Rattigan is gradually changing, and that he may yet be widely acclaimed as an artist whose plays will endure.

No critic or scholar has, until this time, given Rattigan serious consideration in a full-length study of his twenty-three produced plays. It is the purpose of this work to do so. The form and content of the plays, Rattigan's theoretical essays, and the criticism of his work will

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<sup>3</sup>Ronald Bryden, Observer, 27 September 1970.

<sup>4</sup>These articles and reviews are documented in the Conclusion.

be examined chronologically. It is hoped that the ensuing study will offer a definition of Rattigan's characteristics as a dramatist, and an answer to the question of whether he should be considered "the Hollow Professional" or an artist who has made significant contributions to twentieth-century drama.

## CHAPTER I

If a photographic impression of Terence Rattigan's childhood could be produced from the published accounts of it, it would show a small boy sitting on the edge of his seat in a theatre, absorbed in the events unfolding on the stage. "If he had had his way, he would have got there before the dust sheets were removed from the seats,"<sup>1</sup> recalled his mother. Rattigan's parents took him to the theatre often; when often was not enough, he hoarded his allowance and went without their permission.<sup>2</sup>

Terence Rattigan was not born in a trunk and raised in the wings of a theatre; his childhood theatrical experience was from the front of the auditorium. There he developed a precocious awareness of the co-operative nature of theatrical art by distinguishing its essential elements: play, actors and audience. He first became conscious of the performances' effects upon an audience:

If my neighbours gasped with fear for the heroine when she was confronted with a fate worse than death, I gasped with them, although I suppose I could have had but the haziest idea of the exact nature of the lady's peril; when my neighbours laughed at the witty and immoral paradoxes of the hero's bachelor friend, I laughed at them too, although I could have appreciated neither their wit nor their immorality . . . .

All of which, no doubt, sounds very foolish--seemingly no more than an expression, in a rather absurd form, of the ordinary child's urge to ape the grown-ups. Yet I don't think it was only that. Up in my galleries (or, as my pocket money increased proportionately

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Hamblett, "Terence Rattigan's Success Story," John Bull, 6 December 1952, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Ernest Betts, Daily Express, 27 April 1946.

with my snobbishness, down in my pits), I was experiencing emotions which, though no doubt insincere of origin in that they were induced and coloured by the adult emotions around me, were none the less most deeply felt.<sup>3</sup>

Some time before the age of eleven, when he wrote his first play, Rattigan perceived that someone had made it possible for him to experience those emotions--someone had invented the story, the characters, the dialogue acted before him. He determined to be that someone--a playwright. As he had been moved emotionally as a member of the audience, so he set his goal to move, generating in himself a dual awareness--himself as author and as his own audience:

When I came, therefore, to try to reproduce, as a precocious playwright, the emotions that had been aroused in myself as a precocious member of an audience, the results, though no doubt ludicrous, were at least instinctively theatrical. It was by no cold and conscious exercise that I was able to act as audience to my own plays. I could not have written them otherwise.<sup>4</sup>

When, a few decades later in The Browning Version, Rattigan had Crocker-Harris say about his adolescent translation of The Agamemnon: "The play had so excited and moved me that I wished to communicate, however imperfectly, some of that emotion to others,"<sup>5</sup> Rattigan may have been recalling his own youthful inspiration.

Having chosen his career, Rattigan supplemented his theatre-going by reading every play that he could find in the school library.<sup>6</sup> Some-

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<sup>3</sup>Terence Rattigan, Preface to The Collected Plays of Terence Rattigan, 3 vols. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953-64), 2:xiv (hereafter cited as Preface and Plays). Permission to quote from Hamish Hamilton.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. xiv-xv.

<sup>5</sup>Plays, 2:20.

<sup>6</sup>"Pauline Tooth Interviews Sir Terence Rattigan," n.p. Available in the Terence Rattigan clipping folder in the Theatre Collection, Performing Arts Research Center, the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations (hereafter cited as LC folder).

where between theatre and library, he realized the importance of actors, those indispensable beings who turned literature into theatre. He became a pint-size talking edition of Theatre World, astonishing his elders by reciting the names of all the leading actors and actresses (and also the dates when and the theatres where every play had been produced, confirming the impression that Rattigan knew early that a playwright had to have an audience).<sup>7</sup> When he wrote his first play in 1922, he carefully cast it with performers he had observed and admired.

The eleven-year-old Rattigan evidently had some doubts about the perfection of his first effort, a ten-minute drama with a prologue set in a 1925 English drawing room and a dream sequence in the Roman palace of the Borgias in 1489,<sup>8</sup> called "The Parchment,"<sup>9</sup> for he added a note that: "The author wishes to apologize for any historical inaccuracies." But he had no doubts about the quality of the actors he required. Rattigan recalled that:

I had the nerve to state in portentous green ink that "the author" (who, incidentally, was in his first month at Harrow) "wishes it known that the following cast might be suitable for a presentation of this work." There follow the names of Godfrey Tearle, Gladys Cooper, Marie Tempest, Matheson Lang, Isobel Elsom, Henry Ainley--and of a promising young actor over whom I hesitated long before finally giving him the five-line role of a comic poet--Noël Coward.<sup>10</sup>

Rattigan continued to write plays throughout his adolescence. As a scholarship student at Harrow, he acquired some first-hand knowledge of acting, playing a corpse in a production of Julius Caesar<sup>11</sup> and, ap-

<sup>7</sup>Norman Hast, "Introducing Terence Rattigan," Theatre World, April 1939, p. 180.

<sup>8</sup>Barry Hyams, "The People's Playwright . . . A Chat with Terence Rattigan," Theatre Arts, November 1956, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup>Tooth. <sup>10</sup>Preface, 2:xv. <sup>11</sup>Hast.

parently, a somewhat larger role in an unnamed production, for Kenneth Tynan reported that when Rattigan let his schoolwork slip to act in a play, the headmaster gave him a choice between relinquishing the part or taking a beating, and Rattigan chose the beating.<sup>12</sup> Rattigan also ventured into drama criticism, writing in a 1929 essay on modern drama in The Harrovian of "a ceaseless conflict being waged in the drama of today, Entertainment versus Instruction," and predicting "a mechanized drama of the future."<sup>13</sup>

He received his own first piece of drama criticism from a Harrow master, who awarded him two points out of ten on a one-page French playlet which he had written on assignment. "French execrable," the master wrote across the page: "theatre sense first class." Rattigan, then fourteen, "had seized the theatrical opportunity with both hands," and had "plunged straight into the climactic scene of some plainly very turgid tragedy." He showed an early penchant for large casts, for in the one-page playlet there appeared an errant wife, a jealous aristocratic husband, a handsome young gendarme, and three maids to do the wife's hair. The playlet proved memorable both because of the master's farsighted comment and for an error which may have given Rattigan the idea for the most-quoted line of his first success, French without Tears. At the end of his school playlet, Rattigan's heroine was supposed to faint. Unable to think of the French for "faint," Rattigan wrote that his heroine "mesure son longueur."<sup>14</sup> A similar adroit improvisation occurs in the opening lines of French without Tears, when one character answers another's

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<sup>12</sup>Evening Standard, 1 July 1953.

<sup>13</sup>Hamblett. <sup>14</sup>Preface, 2:vii-viii.

query about how to say "she has ideas above her station" with "Elle a des idées au-dessus de sa gare."<sup>15</sup>

Most of Rattigan's early plays--what he calls his juvenilia--are packed away, but one which he wrote at fifteen was left behind in his London study. The original manuscript is hand-written in black ink on the ruled sheets of a school notebook and bound with dark blue ribbon which has had to be buttressed with staples, for the notebook holes have frayed. It bears the title "Integer Vitae, a play in two acts," and the credit "by T. M. Rattigan, author of The Consul's Wife. King's Evidence." A typed copy shows a penciled note: "age 15," and a new title: "Integer Vitae" is inked out and "The Pure in Heart" is written in.<sup>16</sup>

"The Pure in Heart" shows Rattigan charting his way toward strongly motivated characters and suspenseful plots, and experimenting with the use of dramatic implication. Rattigan moves from historical to domestic drama--the setting is the drawing room of a suburban house--and treats a subject he would write about often: family relationships. In the opening scene, a husband and wife discuss his job. Just that day, when the husband asked for a raise, he was told that he was being fired because junior clerks in the firm could do his work. A plea that dismissal would mean the workhouse for him and his wife was to no avail, but the husband kept his job by pointing out that no one but he, with his "reputation for never doing what he shouldn't," could make the junior clerks tow the mark. The husband was told that his job was good as long as his reputation

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<sup>15</sup>plays, 1:16.

<sup>16</sup>"Integer Vitae," retitled "The Pure in Heart," MSS in Rattigan's private collection, London. All references from typed MS (hereafter, Rattigan's collection cited as Ratt. Coll.)

for "blameless integrity" was. Their financial problems lead the couple into a brief discussion of their son--they used their savings to send him to a public school hoping that the son would have a career and care for them in their old age, but he has become a wastrel.

At this point the son enters and discloses that on the previous evening he killed a man to save his girl's honor. He has left no clues, and defers to his father's plea that he go to Canada for a while, but then he reads in the evening paper that another man has been arrested for the murder. The son decides to give himself up, but the father, who does not care about the fate of the innocent man but only about his own loss of reputation and job if the son is arrested, counsels him to flee anyway. The curtain line is the father's contemptuous judgment of his son's decision to wait and see whether the innocent man is convicted rather than run away: "Then you're a damn fool!"

There are some flaws in the plot in Act I--nothing is ever said, for example, about the character of the murdered man or of the son's girl which would make the murder seem more than a melodramatic plot device. In Act II, the thread of action unravels with a few more snarls. The family anxiously awaits news of the murder trial verdict while a chatty neighbor drops in for tea. The verdict is apparently guilty, and the distraught mother is left with her talkative friend--who does not know the family's secret--while the son and father go upstairs to talk. Within a few moments, the son is dead from a fall off a collapsing balcony.

After policemen, a doctor and the maid parade in and out performing their tasks, the mother accuses the father of murder, because he knew that the balcony was unsafe but did not warn his son. The father admits

that fear of his son confessing prompted his silence, but he also discloses that the son did not say that he was going to confess. The mother reveals that the murder trial verdict was "innocent," and speculates that the son said "guilty" to frighten the father. She leaves the house, in spite of the father's plea:

FATHER. Look here, Kate, it's no use crying over spilt milk. I'd give anything I could to undo what I've done. It's no use making it worse by living as enemies for the rest of our lives. I'll have to go on living the same life at the Office--

MOTHER. With the reputation of never having done anything you oughtn't?

FATHER. Of course. And there's no reason why we shouldn't go on living the same life as before, in spite of what has happened.

The play ends with the deserted father staring at his son's gun, apparently contemplating suicide, and deciding "with an air of martyrdom," to go to the office instead: "It'll create a good impression."

The only full characterization in "The Pure in Heart" is that of the father. Though he ends a villain, the father seems sympathetic until he shows his willingness to let an innocent man be tried and even hanged for murder. Rattigan was experimenting with his technique of exposing a character to a crisis and using that situation to reveal the character's deepest concerns. The path the father follows from "blameless integrity" to murder-by-silence is an ironic and a technically sophisticated one for an adolescent to chart, for along the way Rattigan raises some questions about the façade and the reality of reputation, and he manages to express them not in rhetoric but in action.

Stylistically, Rattigan works here with dramatic implication not only in embodying his ideas more in action than speech, but also in using only a word to imply worlds beyond that word. When the son first enters, unsteady on his feet, the father says, "Well, then, what's the matter with

you? Have you committed a murder or something?" The son's answer, "Yes," threatens the father's reputation and job, anticipates other bleak events resulting from his crime, gives proof that his parent's disappointment in his character is well-founded, and provides a shock in itself. It is "theatrical"--crudely so, likely to get a laugh rather than a gasp from an adult audience--but a lively moment on stage, prepared for by the parents' discussion of their woes.

More complex is Rattigan's use of "guilty." The son goes offstage to learn the murder trial verdict. When he returns, he says to the chatty visiting neighbor, "I am afraid I have been guilty of inattention, Mrs. Penn." Rattigan's stage direction is that the son looks at his father when saying the line, "with peculiar emphasis on the word 'guilty.'" On the action level, "guilty" implies the son's imminent confession and hanging for murder and his parents' reduction to the workhouse. In the parents it evokes such emotions as fear, grief and resignation, while for the talkative neighbor, "guilty" gives satisfaction as the son's apology for being inattentive.

Rattigan's development of strongly motivated characters and suspenseful plots was to grow more refined and sophisticated in time--he was to discard unnecessary characters and abandon murder and accident as plot devices--while his use of dramatic implication would become the hallmark of his writing style. It is worthy of note that in "The Pure in Heart" he showed a clear sense of direction, structurally and stylistically, at the age of fifteen.

Apparently none of Rattigan's juvenilia were produced--not even by friends and relatives in the proverbial attic or garage--but this oversight was rectified during his undergraduate career at Trinity College,

Oxford. Rattigan won a scholarship to study history,<sup>17</sup> supposedly bowing to his parents' desire that he prepare himself for the diplomatic service.<sup>18</sup> But offstage and on, he was soon involved with the theatre. Of his tenure as drama critic for the Cherwell, Oxford's undergraduate newspaper, Rattigan later commented:

I used to go religiously to the Oxford Repertory Theatre every Monday night, and the performance was always terrible because, poor loves, they could never get it right. I was continually after them for not getting their lines right or the Duke was wearing threadbare trousers --you know, really cheeky, bad undergraduate criticism.

Discouraged that none of his plays had ever been produced, Rattigan even considered becoming a critic. His mind was changed by the reply of critic St. John Ervine, whom he wrote for advice, which Rattigan recalled as: "Press on. I haven't read any of your plays and I'm sure they're pretty awful, but it's better to be a creative writer than a critic."<sup>19</sup>

Rattigan made his last attempt to act in an Oxford production of Romeo and Juliet, with Peggy Ashcroft as Juliet and Edith Evans as the Nurse, directed by John Gielgud. Rattigan was supposed to walk on as a musician in the last act, look at Juliet's dead body and at the weeping Nurse, say "Faith, we must put up our pipes and be gone," and be gone. On opening night, Rattigan's line was greeted with a huge laugh. Though he read it with a different inflection every night, the line still got a laugh. Finally Rattigan mumbled it under his breath, and hung up his

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<sup>17</sup>R. J. Minney, "Rattigan Touches Wood," Everybody's, 7 November 1953.

<sup>18</sup>Hast.

<sup>19</sup>John Simon, "Rattigan Talks to John Simon," Theatre Arts, April 1962, p. 24.

sock and buskin for good.<sup>20</sup>

Rattigan did appear onstage again soon, not as an actor but as co-author, at curtain call on opening night, of his first West End production. Of the premiere of First Episode, British critic W. A. Darlington noted: "It is written by two very young authors, Terence Rattigan and Philip Heimann, who took an enthusiastic curtain call very modestly last night, one wearing a white flower in his button hole and the other a red; but which was the supporter of York and which of Lancaster we were left to guess."<sup>21</sup> Classmates at Oxford,<sup>22</sup> Rattigan and Heimann collaborated on a comedy-drama of Oxonian escapades and their sometimes sad consequences, which was produced at the Comedy Theater on 26 January 1934.<sup>23</sup>

First Episode<sup>24</sup> revolves around two girl-chasing undergraduates, Tony and David, and the complications which develop from Tony's involvement with Margot, a sophisticated, successful London actress who makes a guest appearance in Tony's student production of Anthony and Cleopatra. Tony arranges to send his voluptuous but empty-headed girlfriend Joan to David's bed, and to replace her with Margot. Tony lets his schoolwork slip and his finances dwindle while wooing Margot, but begins to panic when she becomes increasingly possessive. Tony's roommate David, able

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<sup>20</sup>Howard Kissel, "How Rattigan Wrestled with Nelson's One Failure," Women's Wear Daily, 17 April 1973.

<sup>21</sup>Daily Telegraph, 27 January 1934.

<sup>22</sup>H. G., Observer, 17 September 1933.

<sup>23</sup>Who's Who in The Theatre, 8th ed. (London: Sir Issac Pitman & Sons, 1936), p. 76 (hereafter cited as Who's Who).

<sup>24</sup>Philip Heimann and Terence Rattigan, First Episode, MS in Ratt. Coll. All references from MS.

to conduct an affair with Joan without jeopardizing his chances at a "first" in his final exams, disapproves of Margot's influence on Tony and counsels him to abandon her to study for his exams. When Tony breaks off with Margot, she blames David, and turns him in to the college proctor when he visits Joan's bedroom after hours. David is expelled, and no one is happy in the end but the empty-headed Joan, who ends up with the equally empty-headed Albert, one of Tony and David's roommates.

It is risky to comment on Rattigan's collaborations, as his exact contributions can only be surmised. On the premise, however, that what Rattigan did not write himself he approved of, or at least acquiesced in, one can detect some of his developing characteristics as a dramatist in First Episode. Comic and serious elements are crudely mingled in the play, but comedy is sometimes used very effectively to heighten serious moments. Tony breaks off with Margot as his roommates, who have laid a heavy bet on the Derby, listen to the race. Margot turns bitterly on David as the undergraduates, celebrating winning their bet, dance around her. Just before he is caught by the proctors, David has an abandoned drunk scene in Joan's bedroom. With tipsy exaggerations, he pictures the glories of the journalistic career which will be open to him after he takes his "first," as his captors come down the hall to signal the end of those hopes.

In the Derby celebration scene, there is a touch which would characterize much of Rattigan's later work with minor characters. The boys' butler James, a stickler for rules who insists that girls leave at the proper time, overhears the Derby bet scheme and surreptitiously places a bet of his own. When he wins, he joins the students' victory dance at a discreet distance--a humanizing touch which turns a minor character

from a cipher into something of an individual. Discernible too is Rattigan's tendency to underplay a scene à faire, instead of making it an emotional display: when Margot returns to face David after she has turned him in, she makes a confession and an apology to a silently packing David and Tony.

Though First Episode has some effective moments, it cannot be counted a successful play because the characters' motivations are not clear and believable. Tony has no discernible charm--he is callous to Joan, equally callous to his roommate Albert, and is feckless and undisciplined. Even when one imagines him acted by a very handsome and personally charming young man, it is hard to believe that Margot would care for him as seriously as she does (though one can smile at the young authors' assumption that youth and good looks would magically enslave the affections of an admired, thirty-five-year-old actress).<sup>25</sup> David too has no particular charm--he is as callous as Tony and his taste in women, which rests entirely on their measurements, is at odds with his supposed intelligence. This latter characteristic of David is perhaps the most significant feature of First Episode, for it provides a primitive impression of a theme which later dominates Rattigan's dramas: the mind-body dichotomy, or the assumption that man's spiritual and physical natures are irreconcilable and that one can be satisfied only at the expense of the other.

The London drama critics received First Episode with considerable warmth. Though one critic dissented: "Just to show us what they could do, they zoomed from fake-romance to fake-tragedy to fake-dissillusionment,

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<sup>25</sup>Margot is 28 in MS, but her age was apparently changed in the production, as Darlington refers to Margot's age as 35 in his review.

to fake-reconciliation--and flung in a bedlamite bedroom scene for full measure,"<sup>26</sup> another predicted:

Nothing would surprise me less than to see "First Episode" run for a year. . . . There is a serious basis to the piece, but the surface of it is almost continuously comic, and the irresistible humour of the treatment disinfects a bedroom scene which ought to be most improper, but somehow contrives to be immensely funny.<sup>27</sup>

A more balanced appraisal appeared in the Times:

It is mildly surprising to learn that no more than two authors have been needed to produce this frisky, tragi-comic version of university life. For most of the evening our impression is that at least half a dozen minds must be at work, each pulling a different way, so oddly irregular is the play's movement and so constantly shifting is its centre of interest.

Declaring that "the piece has liveliness to cover its rather more than occasional failure to make its development plausible," the Times critic described its farcical elements as being "as uproarious as Charley's Aunt."<sup>28</sup> Many critics agreed that the comedy in First Episode was its strong point, and the New Statesman and Nation's reviewer concluded: "With a more rigid purpose these two authors might write a thrilling comedy of manners."<sup>29</sup>

First Episode apparently lasted less than three months at the

<sup>26</sup>R. S. P., Daily Herald, 27 January 1934.

<sup>27</sup>J. G. B., Evening News, 27 January 1934. Predictions that the play would run came also from James Agate, Sunday Times; and Sunday Pictorial, both 28 January. The play received generally favorable notices from G. B., Daily Express; J. C., Daily Sketch; and P. P., Evening Standard, all 27 January.

<sup>28</sup>27 January 1934. Also citing the comedy as First Episode's greatest strength were Agate, Darlington; M. Willson Disher, Daily Mail, 27 January; and H. H., Sunday Observer, 28 January.

<sup>29</sup>3 February 1934, p. 155.

Comedy.<sup>30</sup> A different company acted the play at the Garrick Theatre 7 December 1934,<sup>31</sup> and a New York production opened 17 September of the same year. Of the latter, Brooks Atkinson wrote: "In this reviewer's opinion it is an unpalatable mixture of tenderness and ear-splitting farce, and it is very crudely directed. If the authors were willing to pursue their theme earnestly, 'First Episode' might well be a disarmingly poignant drama."<sup>32</sup> Rattigan's first Broadway run lasted two weeks.<sup>33</sup>

Rattigan made no money from First Episode, for he and Heilmann had put up £200 to get it produced, and they unwittingly signed a contract which gave them no right to receive either their investment back or any royalties.<sup>34</sup> But Rattigan felt sufficiently encouraged to leave Oxford before taking his exams and to take up playwriting as his profession. His parents, Rattigan recalled, were not pleased:

My father and I, it is true, had some rather warm discussions on the subject of my career. He questioned my capacity to write, in the first place. Next he pointed out that I should have an easier road in the Diplomatic, where he and my grandfather before him, had spent their lives. Furthermore, one could be in the service and still write. He had done it himself, publishing an entertaining book some years ago called "Diversions of A Diplomat," telling some of his experiences in Turkey, Rumania and other posts. Such writing, for one's own pleasure, was quite acceptable, he thought. But to

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<sup>30</sup>The play disappears from the Times' listing after Sunday, 8 April 1934.

<sup>31</sup>Who's Who, 8th ed., p. 121.

<sup>32</sup>New York Times, 18 September 1934. Also criticizing the mixture of seriousness and comedy was Robert Garland, World-Telegram, 18 September. John Mason Brown, Evening Post, 18 September called First Episode a badly-written story.

<sup>33</sup>Robert Coleman, "Escaped Banking in Diplomacy," n.p., LC folder.

<sup>34</sup>James Leaser, "The Terence Rattigan Nobody Knows," Woman, 17 December 1960, p. 18.

write as a profession was almost like sport as a profession; it took away one's standing not only as an amateur but practically as a gentleman.<sup>35</sup>

Though Rattigan's father did not approve his son's choice, he made a bargain with him: he would give him a modest allowance for exactly two years, to enable him to write. If success as a playwright was not forthcoming by the end of that period, the career was to be abandoned. Rattigan set to work. He wrote five or six plays during his probationary period:<sup>36</sup> a comedy, a melodrama and a dramatization of A Tale of Two Cities--all extant; an adaptation of a gloomy novel, and one or two other plays which have never been named--all possibly lost.<sup>37</sup>

Rattigan finished his comedy and began sending it to West End producers, who promptly rejected it. He next wrote what he later described as "a ghastly item called 'Black Forest,' a turgid drama about tangled emotions."<sup>38</sup> Though the manuscript of "Black Forest" does read clumsily,

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<sup>35</sup>Rattigan, "Author of London Comedy Puts Himself in His Play," Post, 25 September 1937.

<sup>36</sup>Rattigan gives the number as 5 to Hyams. Lucius Beebe gives the number as 6 in "Terence Rattigan Won A Race: It was The Stage Versus Bank," Herald-Tribune, 10 October 1937; James Lansdale Hodson also says 6 in "Four Young Dramatists," Daily Telegraph (Sheffield ed.), 24 April 1938.

<sup>37</sup>Frank Dunlop told me that he had the MS of a comedy that Rattigan wrote before French without Tears, and that this was the only existing copy of the play. He was going to read it for a possible production.

The adaption of the gloomy novel may have been of Hector Bolitho's Grey Farm. This is uncertain, because Bolitho states that he first met Rattigan when the latter was writing a comedy (See "Victory Over Cleverness," Town and Country, March 1948, p. 91). Hamblett quotes Rattigan as stating that he wanted to write a tragedy about some personal experiences, but wrote a comedy because he had just finished adapting a gloomy novel. If both are referring to the same comedy, then the "gloomy novel" must not have been Bolitho's, and the adaptation of Grey Farm (not extant), discussed in Chapter II, was done later.

<sup>38</sup>Emory Lewis, "Busy Briton on Broadway," Cue, 27 October 1956, p. 10.

it offers a sharp sketch of an intolerant Englishman abroad, who utters such sentiments as "The place is always so full of Germans it must smell terribly."<sup>39</sup> It also includes Rattigan's first portrait of an energetic schoolboy who tries, with faint success, to fathom the standards of the adults around him. When his family is indignant about an unmarried couple who are living together, the fourteen-year-old boy asks: "You mean that if a clergyman came along and married them to-day, they'd suddenly change from nasty people to nice people?" "Black Forest" flounders in its serious intentions: in the tangled inability of an assortment of young people to recognize and reconcile their emotional and physical needs. It represents a further effort by Rattigan to explore the issue implicit in David's characterization in First Episode, but he only hazily grasps that issue.

With several rejections of his comedy in hand, Rattigan turned to a more hopeful project, a dramatization of A Tale of Two Cities in collaboration with John Gielgud. Bronson Albery agreed to present Tale at the New Theatre, with Gielgud doubling as Sidney Carton and the Marquis St. Evrémonde. Then Sir John Martin-Harvey, nearly seventy and retiring, announced that he was planning to play Carton himself in a farewell tour of his own adaptation of the novel, The Only Way. Rattigan was left with a check for £50, which Gielgud talked Albery into sending him. It was his first income as a professional playwright.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>"Black Forest," MS in Ratt. Coll. Both quotations from act 2, sc. 1.

<sup>40</sup>Ronald Hayman, "Life for Father," Times, 19 September 1970. "Tale of Two Cities" was never staged in London, but Rattigan and Gielgud permitted a presentation of their adaptation by the St. Brendan's College Dramatic Society 23-28 January 1950. The program, in Rattigan's collection, states that this was the adaptation's stage premiere. With Eric

Albery invited Rattigan to send him any other plays that he had. Rattigan decided to submit the comedy, which had, by then, been rejected by some six to nine managements.<sup>41</sup> Noting that it had one set and a cast of only ten, Albery and Howard Wyndham optioned the play as possible cheap filler material if one of their three shows then running should close. The shows survived, however, and the producers failed to renew their option.<sup>42</sup>

Rattigan's two-year probationary period was almost over. Desperate, he took a job writing scenarios in Warner Brothers' London office. He offered his boss all rights to his unfortunate comedy for £200. The boss refused, but Albery and Wyndham renewed their option when one of their shows closed unexpectedly. Rattigan's comedy was booked into the Criterion as a fill-in. It filled in for almost three years. Had he bought the play for £200, Rattigan's Warner Brothers boss would have made £100,000.<sup>43</sup> The comedy was French without Tears.

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Portman as Sidney Carton, the adaptation was given a radio broadcast in May 1953. A review in the Listener, 28 May 1953, notes that the Rattigan-Gielgud version "was a far, far better thing than we had known before."

<sup>41</sup>Hayman says 6; Tooth says 9, as does Kaye Webb in "Success without Tears," Illustrated, 11 September 1948, p. 26; Leaser says 8.

<sup>42</sup>Beebe. <sup>43</sup>Leaser.

## CHAPTER II

The final dress rehearsal of French without Tears was such a disaster that one of its producers sold his share in it the minute the curtain fell, and another arranged for a play on tour to come in to the Criterion in ten days.<sup>1</sup> Most of the cast predicted a week's run at most,<sup>2</sup> and one of the principles, Jessica Tandy, told director Harold French: "Mr. French, you know we can't open tomorrow night. This isn't a play, it's a charade and an under-rehearsed one at that."<sup>3</sup>

Fortunately for all concerned, Harold French did not agree. Though the play had been hurriedly readied, without tryouts, to fill in for an unexpected flop, and had been cast not with established stars but with relatively new and young actors, French believed in it: "It was very funny, but, to me at any rate, it had an extra quality--tenderness."<sup>4</sup> He blamed the rehearsal disaster on sloppy acting and ordered another full-dress run-through in fifteen minutes. He left a stunned cast backstage and, not knowing whether they would obey his order or leave the theatre, went in search of his author. He found Rattigan in the lobby, "a lone figure, head down, apparently intrigued by the pattern of the carpet." "I . . . I . . . don't think I could stand it again," Rattigan replied to French's announcement. French grabbed Rattigan by the

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<sup>1</sup>Harold French, I Thought I Never Could (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>Sunday Express, 27 June 1937. <sup>3</sup>French, p. 160. <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 152.

arm and propelled him into the house. Cast and crew were in position, and the final, final dress-rehearsal went well.<sup>5</sup>

On opening night, 6 November 1936, it rained. Most of the fashionable London audience had gone to the premiere of a Marlene Dietrich film, and a gloomy Rattigan had dinner with his parents.<sup>6</sup> His father opened a bottle of champagne and Rattigan's mother, beginning a tradition repeated for each of her son's openings, carried the cork with her to the theatre for luck.<sup>7</sup> The curtain rose, and actress Cecily Courtneidge, sitting down front, laughed on the fourth line. The rest of the audience joined her, and they never stopped. When the final curtain fell, there was tumultuous applause and calls for "Author!" Harold French went frantically in search of Rattigan:

I found him, white-tied and tailed, green faced and dithering, being supported by a convenient back wall.

"They're yelling for you, go on and thank them."

"Come with me," he hiccuped--a child to a nannie. I relieved the wall of its reluctant support, took him by the scruff of the neck, and threw him on to the stage.<sup>8</sup>

Rattigan stepped out to make his curtain speech, which "I was prepared to deliver extemporaneously after working not more than five hours on it." But no one had told the stage-hands about his appearance, and they released the curtains, which closed in on him from either side of the stage as he spoke and caught him by the neck.<sup>9</sup> Rattigan gave up

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>6</sup>James Leaser, "The Terence Rattigan Nobody Knows," Woman, 17 December 1960, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup>"Playboy Comes of Age," Picture Post, 5 April 1952.

<sup>8</sup>French, pp. 161-62.

<sup>9</sup>Lucius Beebe, "Playwright Denies The Old School Tie Influences Him," Herald-Tribune, 6 November 1949.

making curtain speeches and was subsequently observed at his openings standing at the back of the house, vigorously applauding and yelling "Author!" at the top of his lungs.<sup>10</sup>

Most of the London critics agreed with the opening-night audience. "This is a brilliant little comedy, exactly in the Criterion's best sparkling tradition. It is gay, witty, thoroughly contemporary without being unpleasantly 'modern,' brisk without blather, and with a touch of lovable truth behind all its satire,"<sup>11</sup> wrote the critic for the Morning Post. The Evening News' reviewer declared: "Mr. Rattigan has written a first-rate example of a light comedy according to the best modern formula: high spirits, a dash of sentiment, utterly natural dialogue, and an original setting out of which the plot grows of its own accord."<sup>12</sup>

Rattigan's setting, a crammer's in a seaside town in France where British students are spending their summer learning French, was novel to most of the audience while familiar to him. He readily acknowledged that the background, action and characters of French without Tears were inspired by his own experiences:

While I was at Trinity I spent two successive summers on the Continent, one in Germany and the other in France, at just such places as I depict in the play as being presided over by Maingot, and, as a matter of fact, I feel that my play is a pretty fair picture of the casual, inconsequential life of flirtations and linguistics which is lived at such polite seminaries.<sup>13</sup>

Rattigan's heroine, an alluring young girl appropriately named Diana after the goddess of the hunt, was based upon a ruthless flirt he had

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<sup>10</sup>Kenneth Tynan, "An Inner View of Terence Rattigan," Harper's Bazaar, November 1952, p. 185.

<sup>11</sup>November 1936. <sup>12</sup>J. G. B., 7 November 1936.

<sup>13</sup>Beebe.

observed at one of his crammer's.<sup>14</sup> Alan, the play's hero, was somewhat autobiographical--an ambassador's son destined for the diplomatic service but longing instead to be a novelist.<sup>15</sup>

In French without Tears, there are five students at M. Maingot's crammer's: Alan, Diana's brother Kenneth, and Kit--all studying French for their diplomatic exams; Brian, a young businessman studying French for commercial purposes; and a thirty-five-year-old naval officer, Commander Rogers, who is learning French for an internship exam. In Act I, Diana flaunts her romantic conquest of Kit, much to the distress of M. Maingot's daughter Jacqueline, who loves Kit without his knowledge. When the Commander arrives, Diana begins to entice him. Her machinations are jealously observed by Kit and mocked by Alan, who is attracted to but wary of Diana.

Diana completes her conquest of the Commander and also reaffirms her love for Kit in Act II. In a scene reminiscent of the Elyot-Victor clash in Private Lives, the Commander and Kit fight over Diana until they discover that she has used the same "line" on them. Together with Alan, they confront Diana with her perfidy at the beginning of Act III, and demand to know whether she really loves the Commander or Kit. They (and the audience) anticipate Diana's humiliation, but she turns the tables on her would-be tormentors by declaring that she loves Alan. She pursues him for the rest of the play but Alan, helped by Brian and the Commander, eludes her, while Kit, prompted by Alan, turns his affections to Jacqueline (whom everybody calls Jack). Alan's romantic and career quan-

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<sup>14</sup>R. S., Daily Express, 7 November 1936.

<sup>15</sup>Rattigan, "Author of London Comedy Puts Himself in His Play," Post, 25 September 1937.

dries are bound together by his decision to flee both Diana and the diplomatic and return to London to write novels.

Diana's long anticipated come-uppance occurs at the end, when she prepares to vamp a new student, Lord Heybrook, who turns out to be a fifteen-year-old boy.<sup>16</sup> As the other characters laugh uproariously, she determines to take the train to London with Alan, who cries: "Stop laughing, you idiots. It isn't funny. It's a bloody tragedy."<sup>17</sup>

Rattigan's plot is original in two ways. One was commended by a British critic:

The original point about the story is that it is told from the young man's point of view; as a rule, a playwright shows us the hero in love as a woman sees him, but Mr. Rattigan gives us a group of young men and lets us hear their very frank discussions about girls and this business of falling in love.<sup>18</sup>

The other was described by Rattigan himself: "In French without Tears, a

<sup>16</sup>French, P. 157, notes that Lord Heybrook's appearance was greeted with "screams of delight" on opening night. He relates (p. 162) that the exact nature of Lord Heybrook's identity was a last-minute inspiration of Rattigan's. Sitting with French after the first dress rehearsal, Rattigan confided: ". . . what I don't like is that blond, swishy queer coming in with his dog and that fatuous, dragged-in line, 'Come along, Alcibiades.' It's . . . sort of . . . out of character with the rest of the play." (Ellipses French's.) Rattigan's distaste for his original idea may have been increased by the fact that "Alcibiades" had shown an undue interest in a table leg at the rehearsal; at any rate, Rattigan thought for a moment and said: "A title can be inherited at any age. Why couldn't Lord Heybrook be a little boy of thirteen or fourteen? It would be just as big a smack in the eye for Kay [Kay Hammond, who played Diana], the twist to the play would be there without the unpleasant taste."

Of this ending, the critic for the Lady, 19 November 1936, p. 96, wrote: "It is really very funny and one of the best jokes is produced in the last moment of the play." The critic for the New Statesman and Nation, 14 November, noted: "Not the least merit of the play is that where it well might fail, in the last act, it keeps up its high level and the final and unexpected denouement is extremely amusing. . . ."

<sup>17</sup>Rattigan, French without Tears, Plays, 1:82. All quotations from this edition.

<sup>18</sup>Lady.

femme fatale, far from destroying a relationship between two great friends, actually makes a friendship between two deadly enemies." This, Rattigan commented, was "based on the familiar comedic formula of standing a well-worn dramatic (in this case, romantic) cliché on its head, and enjoying the results."<sup>19</sup>

Rattigan's plot has the vitality of a mixed doubles grudge match in tennis, with the Commander usurping Kit's place as Diana's partner, Kit slamming at him at every opportunity, Jack trying to persuade Kit of the advantages of their partnership while pleading with Diana to forfeit some points, and Diana causing great confusion by gliding back and forth between sides. Adding to the fracas--and to the enjoyment of the crowd--are the activities of a far-from-impartial referee, Alan, who cheers for Kit and Jack and makes every possible call against Diana and the Commander. Just as the warring male members of the teams join forces against their once-desired partner, she causes complete chaos on the court by declaring that she wants to play with the referee! The referee bolts from the court, pursued by one of the players, as the other team decides to make their own match.

The outcome of the game is not a clear call, and French without Tears ends on an indefinite note unusual in romantic comedy. There is no real sense of "happily ever after" at the curtain. Kit and Jack have only decided to see whether they can unite loving and liking one another, and Alan must face an angry father, a pursuing Diana, and a very uncertain future as a novelist. This sense, not of a period but of a semicolon or dash marking his characters' futures, was to become characteristic of

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<sup>19</sup>Rattigan, Olivier, ed. Logan Gourlay (London: Weidenfelt & Nicolson, 1973), pp. 129-30.

Rattigan's endings.

Rattigan also begins, in French without Tears, to give his characters a self-awareness which lends them an air of dignity and individuality even on a light comic level. Diana is not a stereotyped vamp who exists only on a level of physical allure and cunning; she knows her assets and liabilities and discusses them quite candidly with Jack:

Now I'm not nice. I'm not clever and I can't talk intelligently. There's only one thing I've got, and I don't think you'll deny it. I have got a sort of gift for making men fall in love with me. . . . The fact remains that having men in love with me is my whole life. It's hard for you to understand, I know. You see, you're the sort of person that people like. But nobody likes me. . . . Kit despises me. If he didn't love me he'd loathe me. That's why I can't let him go.<sup>20</sup>

The Commander, generally regarded as stuffy until his alliance with Kit and Alan, is a nice man with real feelings which were hurt when he was snubbed:

Oh, I may have seemed a bortious bump, but that was only because I was in a blue funk of you all. Here was I who'd never been away from my ship for more than a few days at a time, suddenly plumped down in a house full of strange people . . . and all convinced I was a half-wit. . . . I didn't agree with most of your opinions, but I enjoyed listening to them. I wanted to discuss them with you, but I was never given the chance.<sup>21</sup>

Alan, who affects an air of casual superiority and indifference to the emotional storms around him and seems most at home ridiculing Diana and the Commander, shows himself to be magnanimous in recognizing his misjudgment of the latter, more uncertain than any of the students in his terror of Diana, sentimental in his efforts to bring Kit and Jack to-

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<sup>20</sup>Act 2, sc. 2. Emphasis Rattigan's. Of Diana's character, Ivor Brown wrote in the Illustrated London News, 21 November 1936 that: "The vamp as vamp is often a nuisance on the stage, but the vamp as a booby, amusing as she is attractive, is excellent company."

<sup>21</sup>Act 3, sc. 1.

gether, and particularly vulnerable in his anxiety over his career.<sup>22</sup>

Of Rattigan's characterizations, the critic for the New Statesman noted that:

This delightful and refreshing play makes no pretensions to seriousness, but it is so well observed in the summing-up of its different characters, that there is in point of fact, a serious commentary on human life beneath the froth of its outward appearance.<sup>23</sup>

One such commentary is about snobbery--the snobbery of youth and of class. Alan, an ambassador's son, is the social and intellectual leader at the crammer's. Yet, in the mid-30s, when Maingot is worrying about Hitler, Alan wears a German jacket just to annoy him,<sup>24</sup> and blithely observes that "There must be a war on somewhere."<sup>25</sup> He is aware that all is not well in the world, but he wears his German jacket to the Casino, remarking "I shall probably be lynched in this thing."<sup>26</sup> World events don't affect his sheltered life at the moment, his attitude projects, so why should he care how anyone else feels about them?

Alan meets the Commander not as an individual but labels him, on first sight, as a stodgy, almost middle-aged representative of the Navy, and leads the other students in making fun of him. There is some irony, and a hint of poignance, in the scorn of one service for another, as the Commander indicates when he says:

From the moment I arrived, you all treated me as if I were some interesting old relic of a bygone age. . . . You all seemed to think that because I was in the Navy I was incapable of consecutive thought . . . . As a matter of fact, it's done me a lot of good being here.

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<sup>22</sup>A. E. Wilson commented in the Star, 7 November 1936: "One of the many delights of the comedy is to see an agreeably dull-witted naval commander in the toils. Another is to see the wary and cynical would-be diplomat . . . lured willy-nilly to his doom."

<sup>23</sup>14 November 1936. <sup>24</sup>Act 1. <sup>25</sup>Act 3, sc. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Act 2, sc. 2.

One gets into a bit of a rut, you know, in the Service. One's apt to forget that there are some people in the world who have different ideas and opinions to one's own. You'll find the same in the diplomatic.<sup>27</sup>

The social commentary in French without Tears is never stressed, but implied. If one considers it with the wisdom of hindsight, one might note that a war--a war resulting from the German problems so casually dismissed by Alan--would quickly reverse the inferior-superior positions assumed by the students and the career officer. Indeed, eight years later Rattigan reflected the social changes brought about by the war, when aristocrats found themselves subordinates in the services, in While the Sun Shines. Historically, French without Tears may be viewed as a sunny look at the untroubled youth of England's soon-to-be soldiers.

The play also examines the relationship of love and sex at a depth uncharacteristic of light comedy.<sup>28</sup> In the frank dialogue, the characters examine the question of assumed virtue. "How simple everything would be if that sort of so-called virtue were made illegal--if it were just a question of will you or won't you," Alan says. "No one ought to be allowed to get away with that--'I'd like to but I musn't.' It's that that leads to all the trouble."<sup>29</sup>

Brian, who regularly visits a tart named Chi-Chi, is immune to Diana precisely because his physical needs are being satisfied.<sup>30</sup> When

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<sup>27</sup>Act 3, sc. 1.

<sup>28</sup>Some critics considered French without Tears risqué. The Lady's critic commented that the play was "highly diverting, though it is hardly the play to choose for one's more prudish relatives unless they are unlikely to understand all the dialogue." Eric, Punch, 18 November 1936, p. 59, called it a "frivolously entertaining and faintly improper comedy." What's On, 13 November, warned that the play was "not for grandmother."

<sup>29</sup>Act 3, sc. 1.      <sup>30</sup>Act 1.

Diana flirts with him, he dares to call her bluff, and gets his face slapped. "I said, well, if that isn't what you want, what the hell do you want? Then she got up and left me. I never laughed so much in all my life." Alan decides to follow Brian's example, but only when he is assured that he will have no success with Diana. "If she says no, then, lacking your own sterling qualities, I shan't pay a visit to Rue Lafayette 23. No. I shall run away. I shall go back to London tomorrow."<sup>31</sup>

Alan and Kit are both caught in the mind-body dichotomy. They desire an attractive girl with few virtues of character, and are unable to desire the less alluring but infinitely more worthy Jack. "She's exactly the sort of girl I should like to be in love with," says Alan. "Love and Jack," Kit muses. "They just don't seem to connect. I'm frightfully fond of her, but somehow--I don't know--I mean you couldn't kiss her or make love to her." Kit eventually overcomes this reservation, but he and Jack can't quite decide what they have. "We're not love-birds. We're friends," Jack states. "Sentimental friends," Kit says, and Jack corrects him, "No. Friends who sometimes feel sentimental."<sup>32</sup> The combination of love and friendship, of sex and liking, is one that they approach uncertainly.

Alan's description of his ideal wife is a little monument of Benedictian smugness:

First of all, she must not be a cow. Secondly, she will be able to converse freely and intelligently with me on all subjects--Politics--Philosophy--Religion--Thirdly, she will have all the masculine virtues and none of the feminine vices. Fourthly, she will be physically unattractive enough to keep her faithful to me, and attractive

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<sup>31</sup>Act 3, sc. 1.

<sup>32</sup>The conversations between Alan and Kit and between Kit and Jack occur in act 3, sc. 2.

enough to make me desire her. Fifthly, she will be in love with me. That's all, I think.<sup>33</sup>

For all his occasional callousness and cynicism, Alan is a little English gentleman--what he desires is absolute safety, what he fears is having his emotions really aroused--that is why he is afraid of Diana. Rattigan's later dramas are filled with characters who cannot face sex at all, or who cannot reconcile physical passion with liking.

Sexual relations may be a problem to Rattigan's characters, but they usually prove themselves capable of forming genuine friendships with members of both sexes. Alan's solicitude for Jack softens the unattractive effect of his rudeness to the Commander in the play's first half, and the bond formed between Alan, the Commander and Kit--all the stronger for their earlier misunderstandings--not only crosses lines of age and prejudice but also, because of the trio's Act III conversations, propels Kit toward Jack and Alan toward his career as a novelist.

As Rattigan's story and characters prove substantial rather than superficial, so does his dialogue, which operates on more levels than the obvious one of banter. In the first scene, Brian mentions Diana's name. The newly-arrived Commander asks if she is learning French too. "No," Brian replies, "she just stops us from learning it." The line is a wisecrack, but it also indicates Diana's machinations, of which the Commander will be the next victim. In Act II, Alan's novel, rejected by yet another publisher, is returned by mail. Alan describes the plot to the inquisitive Commander: it is about two young men who, though they are pacifists, end up warring with each other over a woman. The Commander disapproves of Alan's pacifist philosophy and wonders whether

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<sup>33</sup>Act 3, sc. 1.

Alan wouldn't fight if someone stole his girl. Kit, believing that the Commander has taken Diana away from him, seizes upon the Commander's question to provoke a quarrel. Alan announces to both that the men in his novel reaffirm their friendship and leave the girl when they conclude that she's a bitch, and Kit and the Commander turn their wrath upon him. In two pages of dialogue, Alan's literary and political proclivities are sketched, the conflicts between Alan and the Commander and between the Commander and Kit are intensified, and the solution to both is foreshadowed.

Rattigan also uses French throughout the play, not only to maintain his setting but also to characterize and to increase conflict. Kenneth's halting French, Alan's casual fluency, and Brian's devil-may-care mangling of the language (the famous "Elle a des idées au-dessus de sa gare" in his invention) convey the mental proficiency and attitudes of each. When Alan retells an anecdote of the Commander's to Maingot in French, deliberately making the Commander look foolish, the enmity between them grows.<sup>34</sup> Rattigan also uses French to foreshadow the romantic involvement of Kit and Jack, and even to indicate its nature, when Kit translates a Baudelaire sentiment on pure love to her in Act I.

Critics who would later contend that Rattigan showed no personal vision in his plays might, had they examined French without Tears in depth, have seen his vision developed to a significant degree in the form and content of his first great success, which he wrote at twenty-three. The meticulously crafted plot develops from clearly motivated value conflicts within and between characters. The resolutions of the

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<sup>34</sup>Act 2, sc. 1.

conflicts follow logically from the preceding events, creating the impression that the world of the play is an orderly and intelligible one governed not by external forces but by the choices and actions of the characters.

Rattigan integrates plot with characterization by depicting individuals of diverse backgrounds and temperaments who grow in self-awareness and in awareness of others, and change the direction of their lives as a result of their encounters. Thematically, Rattigan deals with problems which divide people within themselves and from each other (snobbery, emotional repression, contradictory ideas about love and sex) and solutions which help them (listening to and attempting to understand others, facing one's fears, friendship). These characteristics of form and content appear in Rattigan's subsequent plays, and project a distinctly individual vision of the world and man's place in it.

Though this vision is recognizable in French without Tears, most of the play's first critics understandably did not look for it, but viewed the comedy at face value as light entertainment.

The British critics differed over the quality of the play's plot, characterizations and dialogue. Of the plot, the Times' critic wrote: "A very amusing game it is, and the more remarkable in that its excursions into sentiment . . . are so smooth and carefully proportioned that they do not break the form."<sup>35</sup> Several critics judged that the plot was inconsequential. One stated: "I don't know what number this plot is, but anyhow it could be earmarked 'unreliability in the emotional life.'"

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<sup>35</sup>7 November 1936.

They call it a light comedy. Light is the word. But it is very funny."<sup>36</sup>

Estimates of Rattigan's characterization and dialogue ranged from a comment on the play's "highly individual youths whose small-talk, while not exactly witty, is something almost as effective--a jocularity pungent and natural,"<sup>37</sup> to "The author, Terence Rattigan, occasionally hints that he could say more with better wit. He has refrained."<sup>38</sup> Despite such differences, however, most agreed that French without Tears was highly agreeable. The Times declared: ". . . for what we are concerned with is a world in which nothing matters except to be entertained. The entertainment, in its own frothy kind, is beyond dispute."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>R. E., Daily Express, 7 November 1936. Clive Macmanus, Daily Mail, 7 November wrote: "All that happens is that Miss Hammond trifles with the affections of three of the students and Miss Tandy [Jack] captures one on the rebound." A. D., Manchester Guardian, 9 November, commented on "the plot's inconsequence," while the critic for the Manchester Evening News, 14 November, declared: "The story matters little. In fact, there is not a story. There is merely the repetition of one incident." The Stage's reviewer, 12 November, p. 68, wrote: "It says much for the skill as a dramatist of Terence Rattigan that his comedy is all about practically nothing at all."

<sup>37</sup>Alan Bott, Tatler, 25 November 1936, pp. 354-55. Commending Rattigan's characterizations were J. G. B.; Macmanus; Wilson; the Lady and New Statesman. Of his dialogue, the Times, 7 November, noted: "Mr. Rattigan writes a sly, cool, and delightfully opportune dialogue." Macmanus held: "The exchanges between [the young men] are handled with a frivolous wit that never misses its mark." J. G. B. and the Morning Post also approved of the dialogue.

<sup>38</sup>News Chronicle, 7 November 1936. A. D. referred to the "mercurial meringuery" of all the characters but the Commander and called the dialogue glib. The Manchester Evening News commented: "The characters are worthless and they are not well drawn although they have a superficial brilliance." Of the dialogue, Ivor Brown wrote in the Observer, 8 November: "Wit has not much chance amid this nonsense, but humour has, and the play rattles along, leading nowhere in particular, but never flagging in jovial absurdity."

<sup>39</sup>W. A. Darlington wrote in the Daily Telegraph, 7 November 1936: "The gift of real lightness is a rare one in the theatre, and Terence Rattigan is a lucky young man to have it." Darlington called the play "a gay trifle"; Brown a "happy-go-lucky charade"; Macmanus "a joyous

The cast of the play--Kay Hammond as Diana, Jessica Tandy as Jack, Rex Harrison as Alan, Roland Culver as the Commander, Robert Flemyng as Kit, Guy Middleton as Brian, and Trevor Howard as Kenneth--was almost universally praised. The production made stars of Kay Hammond and Rex Harrison and boosted the careers not only of their West End colleagues but, subsequently, of actors who played French without Tears on tour.<sup>40</sup> From the critics, Rattigan got his first taste of being told that the actors saved his play: "For his play, brief and brittle, with little construction and no freshness of fun, has been turned by the company into the semblance of a really gay comedy,"<sup>41</sup> though this was balanced with: "Mister Rattigan is fortunate in his cast and they are fortunate in their author."<sup>42</sup>

The play received few such outright condemnations as: "It has no conceivable relation to British drama, and is a depressing commentary on the West End theatre,"<sup>43</sup> but the Sunday Times critic James Agate detested both the play and the production. "This is not a play," he wrote. "It is not anything. It is nothing. It is not witty. It has no plot. It is almost without characterisation." Agate admitted that he left the theatre early, with deafening laughter echoing behind him. He had been

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jest." The critic for the Sphere, 14 November, commented: "Froth from beginning to end, it is froth of the highest quality and it fails to satisfy the appetite (which is the way of froth) only in the sense that one rises from the meal with a desire for more. And that is one of the definitions of a perfect meal." The Stage held: "Few light comedies of recent times have contained so much food for laughter or such contagious high spirits."

<sup>40</sup>"Lucky Tradition," Daily Mail, 20 February 1939.

<sup>41</sup>Brown. <sup>42</sup>Macmanus.

<sup>43</sup>p. L. M., Daily Herald, 7 November 1936.

incensed by the play, and by the youth of the cast: "If I am to spend a whole evening in a theatre there must be older players to provide the serious relief."<sup>44</sup>

Agate's criticism did the play little harm, for it began a London run of 1,030 performances.<sup>45</sup> By February of 1937, it had broken every house record at the Criterion for sixty-two years,<sup>46</sup> and there had not been one vacant seat at any evening performance, and few matinees, since the first night.<sup>47</sup> One woman, who saw it ten times, told the box office personnel that the tonic effect of French without Tears saved her a doctor's fee.<sup>48</sup>

The play was translated into several languages and produced in Sweden, Holland, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Germany, and New Zealand.<sup>49</sup> A French adaptation, in which the locale was changed to a British crammer's, to which French students came to learn English,<sup>50</sup> ran for a year in Paris.<sup>51</sup> Of that production, launched in October of 1937, one critic wrote: "In type, in the grace with solidity of its construction, in its fanciful yet realistic delineation of character, in its ironic subtlety and the polish of its wit, 'French without Tears' is as French in spirit as is the English comedy of the Restoration period," and compared the

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<sup>44</sup>8 November 1936. <sup>45</sup>News Chronicle, 20 April 1939.

<sup>46</sup>Manchester Daily Express, 2 February 1937.

<sup>47</sup>Daily Mail, 22 October 1937.

<sup>48</sup>Daily Mail, 10 April 1939.

<sup>49</sup>Bolitho, p. 91.

<sup>50</sup>Priscilla, "Priscilla in Paris," Tatler, 21 July 1937.

<sup>51</sup>Daily Telegraph, 7 June 1938.

character of Diana to Moliere's Célimène.<sup>52</sup>

James Agate viewed the success of French without Tears with profound disapproval, and began a campaign to discredit the play by dropping disparaging mentions of it in his Sunday Times columns.<sup>53</sup> These culminated in February of 1938 with his publication of a list, in order of his preference, of plays currently running in London. "I am not concerned with anything at all except the value of the pieces as contributions to the drama, always remembering that a good farce is better than a bad tragedy," declared Agate, and placed French without Tears twenty-third, at the bottom of the list.<sup>54</sup>

A public battle between Agate and defenders of Rattigan, who remained silent himself, began with a letter from John Gielgud to the Sunday Times in March 1938,<sup>55</sup> and continued in its pages and in those of

<sup>52</sup>Percy Mitchell, Daily Mail (continental ed., Paris), 11 July 1937.

<sup>53</sup>Among Agate's disparaging comments about French without Tears were the following:

In a review of another comedy, Bats in the Belfry, Agate wrote that French without Tears ". . . now turns out to have been a better piece than I thought at the time. At least its successors look like being inconceivably worse." 14 March 1937.

". . . whoever wrote 'French without Tears,' Agate commented, listing it among "popular contrivances." 10 October 1937.

"'Je suppose que vous donnerèz l'enfer a ceci!' said a fervent for the Rattigan school of playwriting as we were coming out of the theatre on Thursday night last. I replied: 'Mais non. Bien que ce n'est pas mas tasse de thé, je reconnais un gagneur quant je le vais! Après tout, celui qui vit pour plair doit plair pour vivre!'" 9 January 1938.

Complaining about the taste of London theatre managers, Agate referred to an imaginary "French Bats in Margaret's Belfry"---a combination of French without Tears, Bats in the Belfry, and another comedy he disliked, George and Margaret. 23 January 1938. Agate's review of George and Margaret 28 February 1937.

<sup>54</sup>27 February 1938.

<sup>55</sup>6 March. Gielgud wrote: "It seems a pity that your critic, not content with having dismissed this play contemptuously on its first production, should lose no opportunity since to belittle and sneer at its success on a number of occasions."

the Daily Telegraph and of a weekly journal called Truth.<sup>56</sup> In the Daily Telegraph, Sydney W. Carroll wrote of French without Tears:

I find it admirable constructed. Every situation has been carefully prepared. Every character is consistently drawn. . . . The theatre that denies the right of a dramatist to score in trifles of this nature is puritannical and old-fashioned.<sup>57</sup>

Attacked from several quarters, Agate kept his disapproval out of print as French without Tears ran another full year. His assaults appear to have had few ill effects--indeed, in letters to Truth, one correspondent maintained that Agate's reputation and not Rattigan's would suffer from the former's "pompous and peevish pinpricks," and another declared that

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<sup>56</sup>Henry Newnham, "Agate and Rattigan," Truth, 9 March 1938, p. 98, wrote: "Despite this public approbation, Mr. Agate never omits an opportunity--and he makes one if it doesn't present itself--of denegrating Mr. Terence Rattigan's play. I must tell Mr. Agate that his gibes at it have long since ceased to be what the law recognizes as 'fair comment,' made without malice and in the public interest."

Newnham asserted that not only did Agate leave French without Tears early on opening night, as Agate admitted, but that he had actually arrived "fifteen minutes after the curtain was up, stayed for about half an hour--during which time he paid more attention to the audience than to what was going forward on the stage--and then ostentatiously left the theatre. Mr. Agate will correct me if these facts are inaccurate."

Agate never answered Newnham, but he replied to Gielgud's letter on 13 March 1938, by quoting George Jean Nathan's opinion of French without Tears (from Nathan's The Morning After the First Night): "This finer theatre that so many of us bores have our hearts set upon will never emerge from the critical encouragement of things like "French without Tears" . . . . They may be harmless so far as the average, lazy, stupid, perfunctory, popular audience goes, though in the long run I doubt even that, but they are certainly not harmless so far as the theatre that true criticism has in mind is concerned."

Newnham returned to the attack in "Limits of Criticism," Truth, 16 March 1938, p. 349. He called Agate's answer to Gielgud no answer at all, and his use of Nathan's criticism irrelevant to the real issue, which was "his pursuit of French without Tears for over a year with a persistent vindictiveness that is both contemptible and I am glad to say, unique in all my experience of journalism."

Agate, in the meantime, had defended his opinion in a speech at a Gallery First Nighters banquet and had been challenged from the floor by Percy Walsh, who was playing Maingot in the production. Stage, 10 March 1938.

<sup>57</sup>"Thriving on Abuse," 14 May 1938.

Agate's attacks had sent him to see the play, which he had thoroughly enjoyed.<sup>58</sup> The Agate campaign is significant in Rattigan's career, however, as it represents the first of many critical assaults upon the intrinsic quality and lasting value of his plays.

The American drama critics were largely negative in their appraisal of French without Tears, which opened 28 September 1937, at the Henry Miller Theatre and ran 111 performances.<sup>59</sup> Several critics found the play pleasant but much too light, and viewed its success in Britain as an example of the difference between British and American tastes. Brooks Atkinson commented that Rattigan:

. . . writes with capricious gaiety. Although his story is commonplace and his characters are unprepossessing, his style is an attractive one. . . .

But London comedies in New York are like New York comedies in London--a bit wan and dissipated by the hearty voyage. After a brightly prattling first act, this one becomes so light that it almost floats out of the theatre.<sup>60</sup>

Richard Watts, writing in the Herald-Tribune, was more approving:

Certainly it is no overwhelming comic masterpiece, but it does possess charm, vivacity, and engaging amiability . . . .

"French without Tears" assuredly cannot be accused of possessing any vulgar contact with the ugly actualities about us. . . . Here is most certainly the escapist drama, but it presents a happy land so lacking in the graver emotions and the serious struggles of life that its ivory tower seems a comfortable and enviable place.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup>Letters to Truth, 16 March 1938, pp. 353-54.

<sup>59</sup>Time, 17 June 1946, p. 90.

<sup>60</sup>New York Times, 29 September 1937. In agreement that the play was pleasant but too light and an example of British fare unlikely to succeed in America were Robert Coleman, Daily Mirror; Richard Lockridge, Sun; Sidney B. Whipple, World-Telegram, all 29 September. Also finding the play too light was Burns Mantle, Daily News, 29 September. Coleman declared that the play probably seemed better than it was because of the cast, staging, and set.

<sup>61</sup>29 September 1937. John Anderson, Journal-American, 29 September, called the play "genial and diverting . . . . It solves, of course, no

In their reviews of French without Tears, several American critics raised points which were to recur in American evaluations of Rattigan's plays: the alleged lightweight quality of Rattigan's construction, the lack of serious purpose behind his work, and the difference between British and American tastes. Rattigan addressed himself to the last two points, considering them from a broad rather than a purely personal perspective, when he made his debut--at the age of twenty-five--as a theorist in the New York Times a few weeks after French without Tears opened on Broadway. He began with the statement that: "The English theatre is escapist--so it is dead. That is what I have been hearing repeated since I have been in New York," and proceeded to discuss what he saw as some of the differences between British and American drama. Acknowledging that British drama was escapist, he outlined and defended the reasons for this: "I have always heard Englishmen accept the fact that the American theatre is the most vital in the world. . . . It may be that the American stage is powerful because playwrights here gradually have taken on the additional functions of sociologists." Rattigan noted that some critics compared British drama--with Galsworthy dead, Maugham no longer writing and Shaw writing infrequently--unfavorably with the works of O'Neill, Anderson, Sherwood, and Behrman. "These men write plays that face the modern world and its problems fearlessly; they show life as it is in all its harrowing aspects; they provide some message for its betterment," while the current British writers--critics asserted--ran away "from the problems of peace and war, dictatorship, unemployment, poverty."

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world problems, except the problem of entertainment--which is, I assume, something." John Mason Brown, Evening Post, 29 September, wrote: "All in all the evening is both agreeable and diverting in its very light way."

Rattigan held that the English theatre was escapist for three reasons: censorship, which frustrated any honest treatment of most topical and controversial subjects; audience preference, which was currently influenced by the fact that the British, unlike the Americans, were living under the clouds of war, civil strife and national upheaval; and tradition, which was exemplified by the fact that Shakespeare's plays little reflected the pressures of social upheaval which resulted in the Puritan Revolution not too long after his death. "At the time, nobody apparently considered it strange that Shakespeare should write a play about King John without once mentioning Magna Carta," Rattigan wrote. He maintained that Shaw and Galsworthy:

. . . brought about a revolution in playwriting, though I venture to think that their influence was stronger in this country than in their own. English audiences listened to Shaw because he made them laugh. They went to Galsworthy's plays because he was a superb technician and gave them characters that were real and situations which they found exciting. I don't honestly believe that they cared much for the message which either of these dramatists contributed. Perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps they did. At any rate, they continued to flock to plays which unashamedly admitted that they bore no message, that they dealt with no sociological problems . . .

Here, thirteen years before he developed it fully in "The Play of Ideas," was Rattigan's defense of character and plot as more important than message in the drama, and of entertainment as an appropriate end in itself:

But the English theatre is not dead. Eager audiences still come to our performances and go away pleased and refreshed. Possibly they do not go away mentally stimulated. But evidently they have, with adult dignity, been absorbed and amused. Whence the dictum that that is invariably not enough? That it is the least of the theatre's functions?<sup>62</sup>

Carpers might maintain that Rattigan was merely feeling peevish because French without Tears had not been received by the New York critics

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<sup>62</sup>Rattigan, "Drama without Tears," 10 October 1937.

with the same enthusiasm as by the British. But they should reflect that Rattigan had been forming his ideas about the drama consciously and conscientiously since childhood, and that he could easily have collected the royalties from his first success without taking the chance of bringing critical wrath upon himself. He took this chance often in his career, as he developed his theories about the drama along the lines that he laid out in his debut article.

Rattigan's next play, a drama called After the Dance, opened at the St. James Theatre 21 July 1939.<sup>63</sup> An honorable flop, it showed Rattigan growing as a dramatist but ran for only sixty performances.<sup>64</sup> Before the opening, Rattigan commented about his turn from comedy to drama:

After the success of my "French without Tears," people advised me to write another light play. But I wish to be a professional playwright, not a trifler; and if you keep to the same mood it is impossible to learn anything new about playwriting. "After the Dance" is the play I felt I wanted to write.<sup>65</sup>

A pre-production article in the Times described the play:

"After the Dance" portrays two sets of people, the young and the not-so-young. The former represent the serious-minded and well-mannered youth of to-day, who have contemporary problems to deal with; the others are the pathetic would-be bohemians of the post-war era who attribute their failings to an upheaval which actually affected them very little.<sup>66</sup>

Rattigan noted that the younger generation in his play: ". . . came after

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<sup>63</sup>Times, 22 June 1939.

<sup>64</sup>This number is given in an undated article from the Stage in Rattigan's press clipping scrapbook labeled "After the Dance and Flare Path" (hereafter, articles with incomplete identification which can be found in a Rattigan scrapbook will be cited as TRPS-followed by the title of the scrapbook in which the particular article appears).

<sup>65</sup>Times, 4 June 1939.      <sup>66</sup>21 May 1939.

the Bright Young Things generation which Noel Coward interpreted in 'The Vortex.' It was the generation just before the Depression; and when I was at Oxford, Youth had done with the frivolity of the previous period and was exceedingly serious."<sup>67</sup>

The plot of After the Dance is simple: In their Mayfair flat, David and Joan Scott-Fowler, wealthy Bright Young Things of Britain's 1920s, continue to drink, gossip, and party with a genial live-in sponge named John and a number of friends. Now in their thirties, they are all dissipated and living in the past. David, a would-be author who has been working on an inept biography of King Bomba of Naples for years, hires his young cousin Peter as his secretary. Peter's fiancée, Helen, falls in love with David, determines to reform him, and takes him away from Joan. Joan, who loves David but has never told him so for fear of boring him, commits suicide. David realizes that he is too dissipated to do anything but destroy Helen as he did his wife, and returns to the bottle.

Though there are several strengths in After the Dance, it suffers from a basic weakness. Rattigan's theme, presumably about the contrast between the generations, is not fully dramatized. The younger generation, represented by Helen and Peter, talk condescendingly about ambition vs. laziness and moral rectitude vs. lassitude, but do not practice what they preach. Neither has any particular skills or real job. Peter works for David only because he cannot find anything else, and Helen, though looking for a job, is unemployed. Delighted to learn that David needs her, Helen proposes to him, insists on telling Joan of their engagement, and breaks off with Peter with a callous disregard for his feelings. Peter

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<sup>67</sup>Evening Standard, 28 December 1938.

then goes on a bender, accepts money from David, and begins to associate with David's feckless friends. Both Helen and Peter are parasites; they criticize the older generation but they cannot make lives independent from it. The paleness of the younger generation offers no real contrast to the weaknesses of the older one.

This paleness also makes some of Rattigan's scenes seem overly theatrical, especially a big party scene in Act II which ends with Joan's suicide off a balcony.<sup>68</sup> The suicide is not a resolution but a forestallment of the conflict, for without a fight Joan surrenders the man she loves to a rival not half as alluring or sympathetic as herself.

Nevertheless, positive qualities are evident in After the Dance. Rattigan uses comedy to achieve a variety of effects. John, for example, is neatly characterized with one line: when asked to help bring up some bottles from the cellar, he says, "But there are some stairs to go down." Joan's brittle comment to Helen, "Let's have a quiet little divorce, shall we, with only the family as guests?"<sup>69</sup> stresses her determination to be gay and witty in spite of her anguish at losing David. The dissolute nature of the aging Bright Young Things' lives is captured in an Act I anecdote that is both funny and chilling: Joan relates that a dope-addicted friend tried to give herself a shot under a table at a civic luncheon and injected the Mayor sitting next to her instead.

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<sup>68</sup>Joan's suicide off a balcony is reminiscent not only of Rattigan's "The Pure in Heart," but also of Pinero's Zoe in Mid-Channel. Archie De Bear, Daily Sketch, 22 June 1939, noted that Joan went off her balcony in the same theatre as Zoe had some years before. The Times critic, 22 June 1939, stated that Joan's suicide seemed to belong to the theatre of Sardou.

<sup>69</sup>Rattigan, After the Dance (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1939). John's reply and Joan's comment occur in act 2, sc. 1. All references from this edition.

As in French without Tears, the characters are not types, but individuals. John is as aware of his own weaknesses as he is of others'.

He tells Peter:

Now here are you and I, neither of us a member of the moneyed classes, yet both possessing the advantage of being able to live as a parasite on one of them. You by means of a blood relation, I by means of a certain ability to act as a kind of court jester.<sup>70</sup>

He comments to Helen: "David can't go back and start again because, although he wants to, he hasn't got the character to do it. Now I--I have got the character to do it--but then, of course, I don't want to."<sup>71</sup> Lazy and cynical, John is also capable of being a good friend to Joan, sympathizing with her suffering, and even of generosity toward Helen, warning David that he will only destroy her.

Helen and Peter are certainly variations on innocent, idealistic ingenues and juveniles, and David has a kind of self-awareness which makes his sacrifice of Helen believable, even though he is a person who flees from facing himself. In the first scene of Act II, he is upset by Helen's honest appraisal of his book. He tells her that he knows that the book is bad, but that he wanted her to lie because the book is a symbol to him, "the only link I've got between what I am now and what I'd like to be."

In his dialogue, Rattigan gave evidence of the skill he was developing in having characters reveal emotions through what they do not say to each other:

JOAN. You didn't want to fall in love with Helen, did you?

DAVID. I tried hard enough not to.

JOAN. It's hell, that, isn't it--trying to stop yourself falling

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<sup>70</sup>Act 1.

<sup>71</sup>Act 2, sc. 1. Emphasis Rattigan's.

in love.

DAVID. It can't be done, I'm afraid. . . .

JOAN. You see, I've made a silly mistake about you. I thought you really were bored with people like--like Helen, and with the idea of not drinking, and leading a serious life and all that. If only I'd known I might have been able to help you perhaps a little more with your work and--and things. Like Helen is doing now. Only, of course, I could never have done it as well.

DAVID. I suppose I was ashamed to show you that side of myself. Anyway, I wouldn't have bored you with all that.

JOAN. It's silly, isn't it? I wouldn't have been bored at all.<sup>72</sup>

Rattigan captures whatever poignance there is in the waste of these two lives in this exchange.

The British critics credited Rattigan with finding an original and arresting subject for his first drama. One noted:

Mr. Rattigan is, I believe, the first to show us in Neon lighting a picture of this superannuated-at-forty brigade, still potential for mischief if for nothing else, overlapping alongside a present younger generation who might be children of another planet, with their serious good sense, their powers of self-discipline, their clear code of moral responsibility, their slightly priggish scorn of the generation before them.<sup>73</sup>

Many judged that the play suffered from a lack of sympathetic characters. Ivor Brown wrote in the Observer: "It is the handicap of Mr. Rattigan's play that he has not managed to make either side agreeable. . . . it is prudent policy in the theatre to give some scope for sympathy. This has only been partially achieved."<sup>74</sup> Others praised Rattigan's character-

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<sup>72</sup>Act 2, sc. 2.

<sup>73</sup>G. B. Stern, "The Generation Theme," Daily Telegraph, 17 August 1939. This article was written after the play closed--undeservedly, Stern commented. Other references to Rattigan's arresting subject are in News Chronicle, 23 May 1939; V. T., Evening News, 22 June; Ivor Brown, Observer; and Sunday Express, both 25 June. The New Statesman and Nation, 1 July, pp. 13-14 thought that Rattigan had "found a fine, fat theme for a comedy, and wasted it upon a melodrama."

<sup>74</sup>25 June 1939. In agreement were De Bear; P. L. M., Daily Herald, n.d., TRPS--"After the Dance and Flare Path"; Herbert Farjeon, Bystander, 5 July 1939. On the other hand, A. E. Wilson, Star, 22 June, wrote: "The whole play, the essential pathos of and tragedy of it, struck me as

drawing,<sup>75</sup> and one critic made a particularly perceptive observation about Rattigan's approach to characterization:

I do not think that Mr. Rattigan gave his wastrel strength and his egotist altruism merely for dramatic effect, although he was doubtless aware that by doing so he would win the audience's sympathy and applause. It is more likely that he could not help himself; that he is temperamentally incapable of seeing people as unshaded blacks and whites. It requires a true dramatist to make his puppets live like real sons of Adam--with strange mixtures of timidity and courage, pettiness and generosity.<sup>76</sup>

Another issue raised by the critics was Rattigan's sense of theatre.

The New Statesman's critic wrote:

Mr. Rattigan, evidently a born dramatist, seems in danger of falling a victim to his sense of the theatre. In French without Tears he kept his eye, like a painter's, on the object; in his new play he has preferred to construct "big scenes." He has something interesting to say, but forgets in his anxiety to be effective.<sup>77</sup>

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singularly moving." In the Lady, 6 July: "Mr. Rattigan has achieved a remarkable feat in this play--that of presenting a set of characters of whom we must disapprove and yet cannot dislike."

<sup>75</sup>The Times, 22 June 1939, commented on "the subtlety of Mr. Rattigan's studies of his principle men and women." W. A. Darlington, Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, 22 June, declared: "All these people are drawn with an extraordinary fidelity which both holds the audience's interest and inspires the actors."

Brown called Rattigan's study of Joan first-rate; the New Statesman critic called Helen "a brilliantly caught character" (though he found the other characters puppets); James Agate, Sunday Times, 25 June, wrote about Helen: "One must be grateful to Mr. Rattigan for giving us an ingenue who is unsympathetic enough to be interesting."

George Bullock, Era, 29 June, wrote, however, "The chief weakness of this very thoughtful play is in the character drawing of David and Joan. Allowing for the incalculability of human behavior, and for the fact that weakness and strength may dwell in one personality, these two people are not representative of the worthless crowd Mr. Rattigan is seeking to portray. They are too fundamentally decent and sincere . . ."

<sup>76</sup>Truth, 30 June 1939. The Times said: "Mr. Rattigan's estimates of character are never fiercely prejudiced, and his method of allowing his people gradually to reveal themselves gives to his play a genuine distinction." Darlington also commented on this point.

<sup>77</sup>Stephen Williams, Evening Standard, 22 June 1939, commented on Rattigan's "masterly sense of stagecraft." In "English with Tears," Cavalcade, 29 June, Rattigan was called a master craftsman.

Finding subtlety and strength in Rattigan's writing, however, was W. A. Darlington, who commented:

. . . Mr. Rattigan is a real dramatist, and it takes a real dramatist to contrive a dénouement to a play which is at once satisfactory and not obvious.

The conclusion reached is that a man like David is lost. Helen cannot save him from himself, and will herself be lost if she tries. Mr. Rattigan states this with a firmness that is all the stronger because of the sympathy he feels for his older characters.<sup>78</sup>

There was also praise for Rattigan's use of comedy and for his dialogue.<sup>79</sup> The London critics heartily congratulated Rattigan for his turn to serious drama. As one stated:

The dialogue has many witty lines and many shrewd observations on life, while the construction of the play and the admirable curtains show that Terence Rattigan is a genuine playwright and not a lucky amateur, as some who disliked French without Tears used to maintain.<sup>80</sup>

Some critics predicted a good run for After the Dance, and one looked even further into the future:

It only remains to wish this play the long and prosperous run that

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<sup>78</sup>Daily Telegraph and Morning Post. Anthony Squire, News Chronicle, 22 June 1939, wrote that: "In the third act it is developed and concluded on as high a level as any attained on the London stage in the last five years." Queen, 6 July, also commended the ending.

<sup>79</sup>Williams praised Rattigan for using a minimum of comic relief; V. T. called After the Dance no amusing trifle but a very serious play with comedy and a tragedy. Philip Page, Daily Mail, 22 June 1939, referred to "witty lines in plenty"; V. T. to the "smart small talk"; John Grimm, Daily Express, 22 June, wrote: "His dialogue is fluent, sly and engaging."

<sup>80</sup>D. C. F., Theatre World, 5 July 1939. Also congratulating Rattigan for his turn to serious drama, and mostly preferring After the Dance to French without Tears were Darlington; P. L. M.; V. T.; Williams, and Truth. Even James Agate had close-to-kind words: "Mr. Rattigan is the author of the most successful farce of modern times. Presumably it would have been easy for him to continue to provoke what Goldsmith so unkindly calls the loud laugh that speaks the vacant mind. But Mr. Rattigan's mind is by no means vacant."

it deserves, to congratulate its author on having justified so conclusively his departure from the realms of comedy, and to look forward to a long series of his triumphs during the next 40 or 50 years.<sup>81</sup>

For a while, more triumphs seemed unlikely to come. The completely carefree existence that many of Rattigan's enviers had attributed to him since the opening of French without Tears was a great exaggeration. Exhausted from the strain of his two probationary years, he had suffered a nervous breakdown.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, he had signed a seven year contract as a scenario writer for Warner Brothers at £15 a week and, after the success of French without Tears, Warners leased Rattigan for £200 a week to other companies. Finally, as Rattigan later put it, "by the Grace of God they went bust," and he was free.<sup>83</sup> Though he reportedly made close to £25,000 from his first success, and also reportedly spent it all,<sup>84</sup> the closing of After the Dance left him nearly broke and very hurt; years later he told an interviewer: "Since that one failure I wanted to prove that it could be done."<sup>85</sup>

He did not begin to prove it until after two more flops. Rattigan had collaborated with Anthony Maurice on a satire about Hitler called

<sup>81</sup>Squire.

<sup>82</sup>Ernest Betts, Daily Mail, 20 May 1939.

<sup>83</sup>Bill Haggerty, Radio Times, 2 August 1939.

<sup>84</sup>Kenneth Tynan, Evening Standard, 1 July 1953. Tynan says that Rattigan, a compulsive gambler, lost nearly £25,000 in three weeks in French casinos after French without Tears closed. There is no confirmation of the gambling allegation in any other article about Rattigan.

<sup>85</sup>Ernest Betts, Daily Express, 27 April 1946. Betts refers to Rattigan's being broke after the closing of After the Dance.

Follow My Leader. The original idea was apparently his, for he told a reporter in March 1938 that he had just called Maurice in because "I brooded over this plot for so long that I completely forgot how to hatch. I didn't know what was funny anymore, or what wasn't. I wanted someone to scrap the bad ideas and substitute better ones . . . ."<sup>86</sup> However effective Follow My Leader may or may not have been in its original form, it did not make it to the stage without the censor's interference. First, in early 1939, the Lord Chamberlain forbade its production because of the delicate political situation in Europe,<sup>87</sup> and also, one report asserts, because it poked fun at a British ambassador!<sup>88</sup> Later that year the Foreign Office called Rattigan and Maurice and asked them to do the play.<sup>89</sup> But, Rattigan recalled, "when the play was eventually produced war had already broken out and the humour, which had been tactfully played down, was lost."<sup>90</sup>

The reviews support Rattigan's contention. Several critics thought the play amusing, but found the laughter sticking in their throats. One commented: "Perhaps it would have all been very funny before the war when the piece was written. Now it does not dazzle one with its wit nor double one up with laughter."<sup>91</sup> Another wrote:

But it is almost impossible to satirize dictatorship effectively in terms of comedy or farce, when the wildest extravagances that can be

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<sup>86</sup>Sunday Referee, 8 March 1938.

<sup>87</sup>Michael Pearson, Auckland Weekly News (New Zealand), 24 November 1946. TRPS-"Personals."

<sup>88</sup>Reynolds News, 18 January 1940.

<sup>89</sup>Newark Evening News (New Jersey), 3 May 1943.

<sup>90</sup>Pearson.

<sup>91</sup>Ian Coster, Evening Standard, 17 January 1940.

put on the stage are daily outdone in the bedlam of totalitarian fact. Mr. Rattigan and Mr. Maurice maintain a very fair standard of burlesque with their totalitarians, but their best moments are unquestionably those in which for short intervals enfeebled democrats are allowed to usurp their place.<sup>92</sup>

The totalitarians in Follow My Leader are two rival political officials, modeled on Goering and Himmler, who hire a naive plumber as figurehead-fuehrer of the country they run--the mythical Central European domain of Moronia. Some of the humor is silly-funny: the plumber's name is Zedesi, and the party salute is "Up Zedesi!"<sup>93</sup> Zedesi screams speeches from a balcony, line-by-line, as one of his mentors dictates them to him (one such line is "I am not the man to be dictated to by anyone!"),<sup>94</sup> and a mad scientist named Riszki runs around shooting at the wrong targets and blowing up the wrong buildings.

The best satire is not of Hitler or dictatorship (what previously existed may have been completely watered down by the censor), but of the British ambassador who says, when his Embassy is blown up around him: "Of course Whitehall will take no hasty decisions, and the matter will be viewed from every angle, but it is conceivable that they may instruct me to deliver a formal protest," and of a King from a neighboring country who, having as little power as Zedesi, describes how he gets his information: "Our cook's brother-in-law works as a footman to the Under Secretary

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<sup>92</sup>Derek Verschoyle, Spectator, 26 January 1940, p. 10. Agreeing that the humor was blunted by the realities of war were Elspeth Grant, Daily Sketch; Phillip Page, Daily Mail, both 17 January; James Agate, Sunday Times, 21 January.

<sup>93</sup>Anthony Maurice and Terence Rattigan, Follow My Leader, MS in Ratt. Coll. All references from this MS.

<sup>94</sup>Act 2.

for Foreign Affairs, and he hears a lot."<sup>95</sup> Several critics praised these scenes,<sup>96</sup> but found the play as a whole amusing but not hilarious. Follow My Leader opened at the Apollo Theatre 16 January 1940,<sup>97</sup> and closed in ten days.<sup>98</sup>

Grey Farm, Rattigan's dramatization of the novel of the same name by Hector Bolitho, fared little better in New York, where it ran from 3 May-1 June at the Hudson Theatre,<sup>99</sup> with Oscar Homolka making his American debut in the leading role.<sup>100</sup> Bolitho reflected:

Neither of us saw the play, but I have been told since that we would not have recognized it anyway. Mr. Homolka was cast to play the part of a neurotic, sensitive introvert in a remote English farm-house. When the notices arrived in London, we felt that our solemn, quiet little piece had been turned into a Mid-European rodeo.<sup>101</sup>

Variety described the Broadway production as a:

. . . psychological horror piece . . . hopeless script . . . Deals with the mental disintegration if [sic] a possessive father whose jealousy is turned to mania by his only son's love for a Cambridge University co-ed. It seems the old man just can't control his thumbs which, ever since his wife died in childbirth nineteen years before, have been itching to squeeze someone's neck.<sup>102</sup>

Brooks Atkinson's review bore the headline "Daddy Goes A-choking,"<sup>103</sup> and John Mason Brown wrote: "It is impossible to imagine trash on a more whole-

<sup>95</sup>The ambassador's and the King's speeches are in act 3.

<sup>96</sup>Verschoyle and Ivor Brown in the Observer, 21 January 1940, praise both scenes; Agate and John Grene in the Daily Express, 17 January 1940, praise the ambassador scene.

<sup>97</sup>Times, 17 January 1940. <sup>98</sup>Newark Evening News.

<sup>99</sup>"Grey Farm" card in the Play Statistics File in the Lincoln Center Theatre Collection (hereafter cited as LC Play Stats).

<sup>100</sup>Burns Mantle, Daily News, 4 May 1940.

<sup>101</sup>p. 91. <sup>102</sup>Hobe Morrison, 11 May 1940.

<sup>103</sup>New York Times, 4 May 1940.

sale and boring scale than 'Grey Farm.'<sup>104</sup>

"We lunched, frugally, on the royalties, and learned to forget," said Bolitho.<sup>105</sup> Forgetting may not have been as easy for Rattigan, who was being trailed by a malicious song, set to the tune of "Michael Finnegan," which made its way through theatrical circles:

There was a young man called Terry Rattigan;  
Had one hit and then fell flat again;  
Sat right down and then begat again;  
Tireless Terry Rattigan.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Post, 4 May 1940.   <sup>105</sup>P. 91.

<sup>106</sup>Tynan. Tynan says that the song was circulating after the failure of After the Dance, but since it refers to Rattigan's having had one flop and another production ("fell flat again . . . then begat again"), I have placed the circulation of the song later in time.

### CHAPTER III

Rattigan was stung by, and resentful of the "lucky fluke" and "one-play Rattigan" attitude symbolized by the scurrilous song. "Quite wrongly resentful," he later wrote,

. . . because I could not possibly expect others to know of the high theatrical ambition that burned in me, nor of my intense longing to be taken seriously as a professional playwright.

That longing had to remain unfulfilled for six long years until, in the intervals of whirling about over the South Atlantic in uneventful search of seemingly non-existent submarines, I wrote Flare Path . . . and at long last I found myself commended, if not exactly as a professional playwright, at least as a promising apprentice who had definitely begun to learn the rudiments of his job.<sup>1</sup>

Flare Path very nearly became a war casualty before it was finished. Rattigan volunteered for service with the R.A.F. and wrote the first two acts in between tours of duty as a rear gunner with Coastal Command. On a flight to Africa, an engine on his plane cut and froze, and the crew was ordered to jettison every possible object to prevent the plane from ditching.<sup>2</sup> Rattigan was about to throw his suitcase overboard when he remembered that the notebook containing his unfinished play was inside: "Feeling very guilty, because the others weren't even allowed to keep the photographs of their girl-friends, I tore off the hard-backed cover and put the pages back in my pocket."<sup>3</sup> The plane, with only a few minutes fuel left, landed in Gambia, and Rattigan finished Flare Path there,

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<sup>1</sup>Preface, 1:xiv.    <sup>2</sup>Bolitho, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup>Mary Benedetta, "An Aperitif with Terence Rattigan," My Home, October 1953.

buoyed by the news that the local hospital was about to stage French without Tears.<sup>4</sup>

Flare Path opened at the Apollo Theatre in London 13 August 1942.<sup>5</sup> Rattigan used the war background and his special knowledge of the R.A.F. to write a drama about the war's effects on the personal lives of some combatants, both military and civilian. His setting was the lounge of a small hotel so near an R.A.F. field that from the lounge windows the residents can watch the planes as they taxi up and down the lighted flare path. "The picture, moving and very convincing, is of a world apart," wrote one critic. "Not only the pilots, but the landlady and boy-waiter have their lives concentrated on the great runways visible through the window."<sup>6</sup> In this "world apart" are gathered three couples: a young bomber pilot, Teddy, and his visiting actress-wife, Pat; a Polish refugee Count turned pilot and his British wife; and a gunner Sergeant, Dusty, and his visiting wife, Maudie. Through these couples, Rattigan tells three love stories, two of them convincing and one unconvincing.

Rattigan showed in Flare Path, as he had in After the Dance, that he was learning the rudiments of writing serious drama, but was not yet in full control of his material. Flare Path alone among Rattigan's dramas seems dated today,<sup>7</sup> not so much because of its World War II background, but because Rattigan allowed his theme--the war's demands and

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<sup>4</sup>Leaser, p. 21. <sup>5</sup>Plays, 1:86.

<sup>6</sup>New Statesman and Nation, 22 August 1942, p. 123. Rattigan's setting was also praised in the Times, 14 August.

<sup>7</sup>Rattigan told Johannesburg reporter Jeanette Keill in 1974 that "I must admit I have come to dread all revivals of 'Flare Path' because it has dated so badly." (Newspaper and exact date unidentified in TRPS-"In Praise of Love").

the combatants' valiant response--to be illustrated at the expense of some of his characters' credibility.

Rattigan's unconvincing love story forms the play's main plot. Pat has come to the hotel to tell Teddy that she is leaving him to return to her former lover, a fading movie star named Peter Kyle. Peter follows her, and the unsuspecting Teddy and the others welcome him as a visiting celebrity, while Pat is torn between her husband's and her lover's need of her. The problems with the Teddy-Pat-Peter triangle are that none of the characters emerge as rounded individuals, and that Pat's conflict of love versus duty is resolved more by an external factor than an internal conviction.

The background of Pat and Peter's love affair and her marriage on the rebound to Teddy after knowing him only a few days is given in the lovers' scenes in Acts I and II. When asked what she feels for Teddy, Pat tells Peter that her husband is "terribly nice. But in the sense which you mean, I don't feel anything for him at all." While Pat does not love or desire Teddy, her feelings for Peter are a mixture of sensuality and motherliness. She loves him, she declares, because what is underneath his self-possessed film star act is "simple and childish and --I don't know--just rather helpless." In her attraction to helplessness, for she stays with Teddy after he momentarily crumples under the pressures of battle and reveals his fears and his need of her help to overcome them, Pat is a little like Helen in After the Dance. But she is basically a passive character, and her renunciation of Peter in the name of her duty to Teddy seems more a belated war effort than a painful choice of one man over another. She tells Peter:

I used to think that our private happiness was something far too

important to be affected by outside things, like the war or marriage vows. . . . beside what's happening out there, it's just tiny and rather--cheap . . . . I've suddenly found that I'm in the battle and I can't . . . . desert.<sup>8</sup>

Peter's claim on Pat is also one of need, for at the age of forty-one he has been declared no longer useful by his Hollywood studio. His second-class celebrity status is emphasized when several characters ask him if he knows such stars as Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour. The war in the midst of which he finds himself in his native England is unreal to him:

All I know is that my own little private world is going--well it's gone really--and the rest of the world--the real world--has turned its back on me and left me out . . . . I hate being left out in the cold. I know it's a selfish way of looking at it, but I don't care.<sup>9</sup>

Peter is a neutral rather than sympathetic character: slightly seedy, decent enough, but bland.

Teddy is a shadowy figure, for in contrast to the other characters he is given no background. Pat says that there is not much to know of him;<sup>10</sup> what is seen in the play is a boyish delight in having a glamorous wife, and a mixture of understandable anxiety and courage. After his first meeting with Teddy, Peter comments, "He's nice, but what a baby!" Teddy regards Pat as a prize he miraculously won rather than as a person; this is brought home to her when she learns that the men at the R.A.F. base have petitioned him not to mention her name more than ten times a day.<sup>11</sup> Not until Teddy's breakdown does he begin to treat her as a wife. Rattigan prepares for the Act II breakdown well by having Teddy, in his first scene alone with Pat, seize upon the fact that she and Peter are

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<sup>8</sup>Rattigan, Flare Path, Plays, 1:152. All references from this edition.

<sup>9</sup>Act 2, sc. 1.    <sup>10</sup>Act 1.    <sup>11</sup>Act 2, sc. 1.

actors to reveal that he too acts, especially in front of his men, who like him to put on a cheerful face. This interests Pat, and readies her for the moment when Teddy's sense of responsibility for his crew's lives and the necessity he feels of never showing them how afraid he is in battle, makes him turn to her for understanding. But Teddy has little identity except as an R.A.F. bomber pilot; he only begins to emerge as an individual at the end of the play, when he tells Pat that he is no longer afraid of her.

Though Flare Path's central love story is unconvincing, the love stories of the two supporting couples are successful both in themselves and in their illustration of Rattigan's theme. The war's effect on the lives of the English working class is exemplified in Maudie and Dusty's plight: they have lost their home in an air raid and she is reduced to living with an unpleasant relative and working in a laundry while Dusty, who had a good pre-war job with London Transport, develops back-aches sitting in his freezing position as a rear tail gunner. ". . . but what I say is, there's a war going on, and things have got to be a bit different, and we've just got to get used to it, that's all." Maudie declares.<sup>12</sup> The understated quality of Maudie's fortitude is complemented by the understated quality of the affection between her and her husband. She and Dusty bicker constantly over bus schedules and remedies for his back, and reveal their feelings obliquely through statements to other characters, like Maudie's plea to Teddy that he look out for Dusty as they leave to fly a mission at the end of Act I.

Through the character of the Count, Rattigan captures the war's

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

effects on some of the European populace--the Count lost his estates in Poland and barely escaped alive after his first wife and son were shot down by the Nazis as the family fled. The Count speaks English haltingly, and unlike the other airmen, welcomes each new chance to fly into combat. The Countess, a raffish former barmaid who alternately teases and mothers her husband, is snubbed by Maudie and Peter--a subtle indication that social stratification exists even amidst the crises of war. Peter doubts that the Count will want his wife after the war. The Countess overhears this, and states:

I know what you meant. You meant my Johnny's going to leave me flat the minute the war's over. That's what you meant. I'm only all right for him as long as the war goes on, and as soon as it's over and he gets back home he'll realize he's made an awful muckup in marrying me . . .<sup>13</sup> I don't know it isn't true. I wish I did. I think it is true.

Yet the Countess has dignity--in her common way she cheers the men, and her anxiety for them, greater than the other wives', is demonstrated by her all-night vigils when they are flying.

Rattigan skillfully uses the development of the Count and Countess' love story to bring about Peter's surrender of Pat. In Act III the Countess, believing her husband lost in action, opens a letter that he left for her in case of his death. It is written in French, the Count's second language, and she asks Peter to translate it for her. Peter has refused to accept Pat's decision to stay with Teddy, and is waiting to tell Teddy about their love affair. Reluctantly, he turns from his own problem to help the Countess, and learns how wrong he has been about her. The letter is full of the Count's love and respect for his wife, of his gratitude for her sympathy and support, and of his hope that he could

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid. Emphasis Rattigan's.

have repaid her after the war. From this, Peter realizes what a supportive wife can mean to a pilot, and leaves without challenging Teddy. Peter's renunciation of Pat seems more psychologically credible than hers of him, because the Count's letter exposes the pettiness of the grounds on which Peter has treated the Countess as an outsider, and makes his own position as an outsider poignantly clear.

Rattigan did not end the story of the Count and Countess at this point, however; moments after the letter-reading, the Count returns, having narrowly missed death when his plane crash-landed at sea. His reappearance is a coup de théâtre, but a debatable one. On the positive side, it emphasizes the uncertainty in which the airmen and their loved ones must live, but on the negative side it seems too good to be true. There is a quality in Flare Path of plot manipulation. Given the war context in which the play was written, one can hardly blame Rattigan for wanting to stress the positive and the hopeful in characterization and action. What is questionable is not his desire to emphasize those qualities, but the fact that, artistically, the valiant theme of Flare Path is not fully integrated with its characterizations and plot.

In drawing the minor characters in the play, Rattigan fulfilled the promise he had shown with the role of the butler in First Episode. The landlady is a crusty stick-to-the-rules person who nevertheless bends the rules to prepare forbidden foods for returning crews. When, at the end of Act II, Teddy buries her special breakfast in the garden because the crew has not felt well enough to eat it, the mutual consideration of the military and civilian combatants is amusingly and movingly stressed. A similar touch is seen in Act III, when the boy-waiter, who has a grisly interest in casualties, an amateur spy's ear for classified orders, and

a case of hero-worship for Teddy, gives the Countess his good luck charm to express his hope that the Count will return.

As in First Episode and in After the Dance, Rattigan mixes comedy and drama throughout Flare Path. There is comedy in the characters' eccentricities--the waiter's attempts to be in on the war vicariously, the Countess's bantering with the other characters, and the airman's affectionate raillery. In the dialogue there are only a few war jokes, like Dusty's query that eggs are "those little round things that used to come out of hens in peace time?"<sup>14</sup> Rattigan makes capital of the Count's mangled English for comic effect, but he also uses it in the final scene to keep the return of the Count from becoming sentimental. The Count's explanation of his plane's crash-landing at sea must be made for the characters and for the audience. It is made in broken English: "We--land --pumkek . . . . We--not hurt--not much. We go pouf . . . . Dinghy--yes," as is his reunion with his wife: "Please--I fall in se drink."

Flare Path shows Rattigan's skill in the use of dramatic implication growing, particularly in the Count's harrowing escape captured in broken English and in the effect of the Count's letter upon Peter. There are many such touches in the play. In one detail--the Countess' worry that her husband might be shot down over German territory, because the Germans do not treat Poles as prisoners of war--Rattigan captures an evil aspect of Nazism more effectively than he could with a score of anti-Nazi diatribes.<sup>15</sup> Rattigan not only uses the presence of new arrivals at the hotel to make the explanations of war terms and R.A.F. slang plausible, he also uses a slang term to indicate an important turn-

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<sup>14</sup>Act 2, sc. 2.    <sup>15</sup>Act 3.

ing point in the action. "This is the first time you've been here for a do, isn't it?" the Countess asks Pat in Act I. "A do. Oh, God, how I hate all this polite Air Force understatement. Isn't there a more dignified word for it than a do?" Pat wonders. In Act III, before the audience is told that she has decided to stay with Teddy, Pat comments to his Squadron Leader that the fliers "had a rather shaky do last night." Pat's use of the slang term she hated signals her acceptance of her role as an airman's wife.

Another strength in Flare Path is the force with which Rattigan brings the outside world of the war into the intimacy of the hotel lounge. The omnipresent window through which the residents scrutinize the airfield; the ominous sound effects of planes taking off and landing, of limping in with engine trouble and being shot down by German raiders; the blackout precautions fretted over by the landlady are constant reminders of the nature of the battle. The men's departure on their missions and the anxiety over their return give the play a particular tension--not so much a gradual buildup to a climax (though there is one in Pat's decision to stay with Teddy) but a continuous stretch between the poles of anxiety and relief, the day-to-day struggle of people living under extraordinary stress.

The British critics had considerable praise for Rattigan's assemblage of characters and mixture of drama and comedy. The New Statesman's critic commented: "The variety of these figures and their relationships are highly dramatic, but tactfully interwoven with the comedy of character."<sup>16</sup> The critics generally agreed that Rattigan's main plot was un-

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<sup>16</sup>P. 124. Also commending the general assembly of characters were W. A. Darlington, Daily Telegraph and Morning Post and Clarence Winchester,

successful because the characters of Pat, Peter and Teddy were not fully drawn.<sup>17</sup> Several commended the letter-reading scene, but questioned the Count's return.<sup>18</sup> Their over-all estimates of the play were favorable, ranging from W. A. Darlington's wholehearted endorsement: "What an excellent playwright we have in Terence Rattigan. How light and sure his touch is, whether he is making you laugh or cry," to James Agate's less hearty: "Considered as entertainment, Mr. Rattigan's piece is extraordinarily

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Daily Sketch, both 14 August 1942; Ivor Brown, Observer, 16 August.

Also praising Rattigan's mixture of comedy and drama were Brown, Darlington, and Margot Beck, Sunday Chronicle, 16 August.

<sup>17</sup>Brown wrote that Pat ". . . who seems to be quite unbelievably unimaginative, has to have the meaning of her husband's work forced on her eyes, which are as blind as glamorous. . . ."

About Rattigan's depiction of Peter, the New Statesman's critic commented: "He never gains our sympathy for the film-star, and we do not feel that to give him up is any real effort for the wife."

The Times critic said of Teddy: "We dare not believe in him as a man; we might arrive at conclusions which would in all the circumstances be heartless. The little problem the play discloses had better be left to settle itself finally when the airman is no longer an airman and the film actor, having altogether lost his prestige, may demand the sympathy which is at present denied him." James Redfern, Spectator, 21 August 1942, p. 171, wrote: "The passionate climax, the crucial scene when the young airman's return from his Rhineland night raid to his wife at 5:30 in the morning, completely missed fire, since the characters of hypersensitive hero and erring wife had never been roundly drawn by the dramatist . . . ."

<sup>18</sup>Brown called the letter-reading "a poignant episode, French with tears abounding." The New Statesman thought it the play's best scene, and Agate wrote in the Sunday Times, 16 August 1942: "Thus a scene which is effective in itself is also an essential cog in the play's machinery. Which is craftsmanship."

Philip Page, Daily Mail, 14 August; Agate; and the New Statesman criticized the Count's return. The latter wrote: "This seems to me a wanton sacrifice to the wishes of the audience. No ending can be really happy, since duty will be menacing again before the week is out, and the audience, glad that the English pilot has kept his wife, should have before it the Pole's widow, tragic as a contrast and significant as a possible omen. If Mr. Rattigan had had the courage to make this ending, the play would still, I am sure, attract an enormous public, for it is immensely effective alike in comedy, pathos. . . ." Redfern commended both the letter-reading and the Count's return.

lively. A laugh every minute, a roar every five minutes, and a tear every ten. At times it is a little better than this."

A few critics commended Rattigan for writing movingly about the war.

The Evening News' reviewer stated:

One must be grateful for "Flare Path" because it expressed for all what we feel about the task men of the R.A.F., feelings which are apt to seem inadequate put into words. The play is first-class melodrama, but with little exaggeration; it is also a document of the heroic side of these times.<sup>19</sup>

A colleague commented:

There is a sincerity about [the characters] not often achieved, and the play builds up an emotional appeal that does more to reveal the drama behind the awful words, "one of our machines did not return," than half a dozen books.<sup>20</sup>

Churchill's comment on Flare Path was: "I was very much moved by this play. It is a masterpiece of understatement. But we are rather good at that, aren't we?"<sup>21</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt wrote of it in her newspaper column, "I am glad it is to go to the United States because it is a true and moving picture of the R.A.F."<sup>22</sup> But the New York critics were not moved by the play, which opened on Broadway 23 December 1942.<sup>23</sup> Though there was praise in such comments as: ". . . a war play that has

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<sup>19</sup>14 August 1942.

<sup>20</sup>Cavalcade, 22 August 1942. This reviewer thought that Flare Path "certainly comes close to being the best [play] of the war," and noted that Lillian Hellman's Watch on the Rhine was also playing in London. In Radio Times, 7 March 1943, a writer commented: "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 . . ." Flare Path was praised for its lack of false heroics in the Sunday Dispatch, 16 August 1942, and Advertiser's Weekly, 20 August.

<sup>21</sup>Daily Sketch, 12 January 1943.

<sup>22</sup>"My Day," Daily Mail, 30 October 1942.

<sup>23</sup>LC Play Stats.

substance, beauty and truth; a perfectly believable, deeply moving play about people, not a war poster . . . ,"<sup>24</sup> the general consensus was that Flare Path was not a very good play.<sup>25</sup> George Jean Nathan declared:

They come pretty bad at times, these English imports that have achieved big success in London, but they do not often come quite so entirely bad as this. If the play has so much as even one-half of one redeeming feature, it has eluded this critical cunning. The author's purpose and intention is to pay tribute to the valor of the Royal Air Force; what he achieves, so trivial being his equipment, is something that rather puts that admirable body into a ridiculous light.<sup>26</sup>

As they had in their reviews of French without Tears, several American critics referred to sea change: "It seems to be another case of an English hit destined to become an American miss,"<sup>27</sup> and some called Rattigan's writing mechanical.<sup>28</sup> Indicating that Rattigan had been right when he wrote in his first theoretical article that American critics urged dramatists to write messages into their plays, Commonweal's critic complained that: "The moral values present in the current war are absent

<sup>24</sup>Burton Roscoe, World-Telegram, 24 December 1942. George Freedly, Morning Telegraph, 25 December, called the play "convincing, tender and frequently quite touching . . . . He has mixed in comedy quite lightly without overdoing it." In the Herald-Tribune, 24 December, Howard Barnes termed the play "a moderately effective drama," and Newsweek's critic, 4 January 1943, found it literate and pleasant. Lewis Nichols, New York Times, 29 December, commented that Rattigan was best with his minor characters. So did Richard Watts, reviewing the London production in the Herald-Tribune, 10 November 1942.

<sup>25</sup>John Anderson, Journal-American; Robert Coleman, Daily Mirror; Rowland Field, Newark Evening News--all 24 December 1942; J. D. B., Christian Science Monitor, 26 December.

<sup>26</sup>The Theatre Book of the Year 1942-43 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), p. 187.

<sup>27</sup>Coleman. Nicols also commented on sea change: ". . . as it reaches this side of the water the drama seems sentimental, slow and confused."

<sup>28</sup>Watts referred to the "machine-made story"; Roscoe commented, "contrived and mechanical." Coleman praised the scenes of Teddy's breakdown and the Count's return.

from the play. . . . As a war play it is of neuter gender."<sup>29</sup> John Gassner used Flare Path as an example that: "There has been indeed little indication of real awareness in any of the plays of the British stage, which does not appear to have heard much about the social changes we have been told about through the press."<sup>30</sup>

Flare Path closed after fourteen performances in New York,<sup>31</sup> but ran for 679 in London,<sup>32</sup> after two West End managers had turned it down, advising Rattigan that the British public did not want to see a war play.<sup>33</sup> The productions were notable for two debuts--Anthony Asquith's first direction of a play in London,<sup>34</sup> and Alec Guinness' Broadway debut in the role of Teddy.<sup>35</sup> Phyllis Calvert played Pat in London,<sup>36</sup> and Nancy Kelly acted the role in New York. Margaret Webster directed the Broadway company.<sup>37</sup> The play toured England with a second company, while the original cast eventually performed it abroad, even playing it at the Royal Opera House in Cairo. Translations were performed in the Scandinavian countries and in Germany and Czechoslovakia after the war.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>James N. Vaughan, 15 January 1943, p. 327. Emphasis Vaughan's.

<sup>30</sup>Current History, n.s. 3 (February 1943): 550.

<sup>31</sup>LC Play Stats.

<sup>32</sup>Who's Who, 10th ed. (1947), p. 1766.

<sup>33</sup>Daily Herald, 6 September 1943.

<sup>34</sup>Darlington. <sup>35</sup>Freedley.

<sup>36</sup>Plays, 1:86. <sup>37</sup>Freedley.

<sup>38</sup>There are untranslated foreign reviews, reviews of the provincial touring company, and an unidentified newspaper notice of the Cairo performance of Flare Path in TRPS--"After the Dance and Flare Path." The Prague production is mentioned as currently running by Michael Peasor, Auckland Weekly News (New Zealand), 24 November 1946.

A student production at the Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1959 played to packed houses.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout his career, Rattigan has unsettled critics by writing both successful dramas and comedies. On Christmas Eve 1943,<sup>40</sup> while Flare Path was in the second year of its run, his comedy with a war background opened at the theatre next door. A photograph in one of Rattigan's scrapbooks captures the two marquees--Flare Path at the Apollo and, beside it, While the Sun Shines at the Globe.<sup>41</sup>

Rattigan wrote While the Sun Shines during a three-week leave from his R.A.F. duties, "as a desperate attempt to copy 'French without Tears.'"<sup>42</sup> As in his first success, there are a nice and a naughty girl, three suitors, and the nice girl's father among the characters, and the plot centers around a romantic quadrangle.

While the Sun Shines' setting is the elegant Albany chambers of Bobby, the young Earl of Harpenden, in wartime London. The three suitors have an international flavor: Bobby is a British sailor, and his rivals are an American Army lieutenant and a Free French lieutenant (if the plot of French without Tears seems like a tennis match, that of While the Sun Shines resembles an Allied love Olympics). The object of the servicemen's affections is not a scalp-hunting tease like Diana, but

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<sup>39</sup>Time and Tide, 21 February 1959.

<sup>40</sup>Plays, 1:174

<sup>41</sup>TRPS-"After the Dance and Flare Path."

<sup>42</sup>Robert Muller, "Soul-searching with Terence Rattigan," Daily Mail, 30 April 1960.

Lady Elisabeth, the guilelessly beautiful young daughter of the Duke of Ayr and Stirling.

In Act I, Bobby invites the American lieutenant, whom he rescued from a bender the previous evening, to stay in his chambers while he and Elisabeth go on their honeymoon. Elisabeth arrives for their wedding, which is to take place the following day, and announces that she has invited the Frenchman, whom she met on the train, to stay in Bobby's chambers too. Bobby goes to an appointment at the Admiralty, pursued by Elisabeth's impecunious father, who begs for an allowance as part of Elisabeth's marriage settlement. The Frenchman arrives and tells Elisabeth that she doesn't really love Bobby and that she should wait for a true love--hinting that this is himself. Then the American, awaiting a date arranged by Bobby with his former mistress, Mabel Crum, mistakes Elisabeth for Mabel, gets her drunk and begins to make love to her until a phone call from Mabel alerts him to his error. Rushing out in horror, he leaves Elisabeth in a tipsy state of confusion.

In Act II, the Duke announces that Elisabeth is calling off the wedding because she doesn't love Bobby. The American and Frenchman proclaim their love for her, they and Bobby argue, and the act ends with their shooting craps to determine who will go to see Elisabeth at her hotel. In the first scene of Act III, Bobby and the Frenchman bicker while the American stays out all night with Elisabeth. A depressed Bobby proposes to Mabel, who has shared their vigil. She accepts, and he feels bound to honor their engagement even when Elisabeth appears to say that she has been talking with her American suitor all night and has realized that she loves Bobby. The following morning (scene 2), Mabel releases Bobby from their engagement and brings about his reconciliation with

Elisabeth. The play ends with another crap-shoot to see whether the American or Frenchman will be Bobby's best man.

While there are similarities between French without Tears and While the Sun Shines, the plot of the second comedy is not as original or as well-constructed as that of the first. Its novel feature is its variation on the bedroom farce, with three young men sharing the bed.<sup>43</sup> Rattigan sets the tone for this variation and neatly accomplishes some exposition in the first scene when Bobby's butler mistakes the sleeping American for Mabel and has to go back into the bedroom for a second look.

There are many strengths in the plot, particularly in Elisabeth's near-seduction scene,<sup>44</sup> the first- and second-act curtains, and the charm with which Rattigan keeps Bobby and Elisabeth's reconciliation scene from becoming sentimental by having them play with their backs to each other (because it is their wedding day and Mabel insists that it would be bad luck for them to look at each other). But the vitality of the first act wanes part-way through the second because Elisabeth is kept offstage, and dwindles in the third because Elisabeth's reversal takes place off-stage. The problem of her indecision, which Rattigan sets up so well in act I, gets lost in the bickering between her suitors, and the plot turns on an event which the audience is deprived of seeing.

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<sup>43</sup>A. E. Wilson, Star, 28 December 1943, commented: "Terence Rattigan not only contrives an original variation of the bedroom farce, but to reflect the startling manners and oddities of war-time conditions." Beverly Baxter in the Evening Standard, 1 January 1944, wrote: "Mr. Rattigan is to be congratulated especially on one point. He manages to bring three young men . . . to sleep in the same chambers in Albany without any palsy-walsy frolicking."

<sup>44</sup>Baxter called the Elisabeth-American encounter "A sheer joy. It deserves to rank with the classic drinking scenes of the English drama."

The mood of While the Sun Shines is, like French without Tears, light and gay. As the gathering clouds of European war in the thirties wafted by the characters in the latter, so does the war itself touch While the Sun Shines characters only comically, as in Bobby's grief that a precious egg has been broken, and the American lieutenant's delight that a British lord who is only a common sailor must stand to attention for him.<sup>45</sup>

But Rattigan touches social issues more deeply than in his pre-war comedy. John Gassner, the American critic who complained in his Flare Path review that British playwrights showed no awareness of changes within British society, would have found less cause for complaint in While the Sun Shines. Bobby has been rejected for promotion by the Navy three times, and is rejected again during the play. "His earlship and all that I may be," he tells the American, "but, as I am reluctantly forced to conclude, I am also an extremely incompetent sailor." Elisabeth has been demoted from sergeant to corporal in the W.A.A.F.'s because she left some defense plans in a Ladies' room. "Funny, we're neither of us awfully good at our jobs, are we?" says Bobby.<sup>46</sup>

Bobby has a fortune of two million pounds, but doesn't even care about the value and history of his Albany surroundings. The American quotes Byron, whom Bobby has never read, and Bobby tells his butler not to worry about the American's staying in his chambers because "he appreciates my things much better than I do."<sup>47</sup>

Both Bobby and Elisabeth have good looks, youth, and charm, but

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<sup>45</sup>Rattigan, While the Sun Shines, Plays, 1:188. All references from this edition.

<sup>46</sup>Act 1.   <sup>47</sup>Ibid.

they are passive and rather helpless. The Frenchman, who is a socialist, tells Bobby that:

You will need a simple hard-working girl to look after you--as a mother looks after a child. But the Lady Elisabeth, it would now appear, is incapable of looking after herself. . . . My good friend, imagine yourself when your millions are removed from you, as they will be. Look at you now--a simple sailor. . . . In the post-war world . . . .

Bobby's reply is comic--"Surely I'd get a pound a week from Sir William Beveridge?"<sup>48</sup> but he is acutely aware of his vulnerability as an incompetent aristocrat. When he and Elisabeth are reconciled, he warns her that he is doomed to extinction. "I don't mind, provided we both get extinguished together," she answers. Though Elisabeth decides that she is truly in love with Bobby after all, she tells the American that she doesn't want to see him again because he is too attractive to be safe.<sup>49</sup> She and Bobby opt for the safe, the familiar, the old world in which they feel comfortable, the world which is theirs while the sun shines. One critic called the comedy:

. . . a play of inverted social significance. He writes of his people as if they were French aristocrats after the Revolution. The lamp-post and the guillotine are outside the Albany.<sup>50</sup>

In While the Sun Shines Rattigan deals with social issues more explicitly than in French without Tears, and with the mind-body dichotomy in love more implicitly. Bobby is shocked by Elisabeth in Act I when she coolly discusses his relationship with Mabel and her own naivete. But he thinks nothing of exchanging gossip about his escapades with the American, and of passing his mistress on to him. The American refers to his hometown versions of Mabel and of Elisabeth, and says of his own

<sup>48</sup>Act 3, sc. 1.      <sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Montagu Slater, Reynold's News, 2 January 1944.

fiancée, "Dulcie's a good girl. I'm in love with Dulcie--I hope."<sup>51</sup> When Elisabeth decides on safety with Bobby, the American remembers Dulcie and again refers to her being a good girl.<sup>52</sup> With the inclusion of the American among the characters who accept the distinction between safe, relatively unemotional and respectable love leading to marriage and exciting but illicit adventures, Rattigan implies that the mind-body dichotomy is not limited to Britons.

Most of Rattigan's characterizations in While the Sun Shines are skillfully drawn. Bobby, Elisabeth, and Elisabeth's father are perfectly believable as incompetent aristocrats who cling to their world of unearned and unappreciated values. The American lieutenant and Bobby's butler provide a nicely understated contrast to them. The American is impressed by Bobby's title and surroundings and surprised by Bobby's lack of appreciation for anything but the material comforts which accompany his wealth. He is slightly critical: "You know, it doesn't seem right to me that a guy should be worth all that money and not have had to work for it," but good-naturedly lacking in rancor about the difference in their positions. He and Bobby meet on the common ground of enjoying themselves with girls and drinks. Bobby's butler points out that Americans inherit wealth too, and is content with his life in service. He relates that his father was an American opera singer and his mother a housemaid, and that he seems to have inherited his mother's talents.<sup>53</sup> He is an imperturbable type of butler, but an individual.

The Frenchman, however, seems something of a mouthpiece with his tendency to preach--first to Elisabeth about her need for a passionate

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<sup>51</sup>Act 2.    <sup>52</sup>Act 3, sc. 1.    <sup>53</sup>Act 1.

love and then to Bobby about post-war socialist society. He is given the role of troublemaker in the plot, which could account for his lack of charm in contrast to Bobby and the American, but he not only lacks charm but individuality, existing largely on a note of contentiousness. For one bright moment, his armor is pierced and he becomes a vulnerable young man at the end of the first scene in Act II when he exits into the bedroom he is to share with Bobby and the American, who are furious with him. Rattigan's stage directions indicate that the Frenchman "hesitates for some time, looking decidedly nervous. Then he straightens his shoulders with a determined air," murmurs "Vive la France!" and "walks into the bedroom with an air of an aristocrat going to the guillotine."

Though the Frenchman is a weak characterization,<sup>54</sup> Elisabeth's father and Mabel Crum are particularly lively. The Duke is a gambler who first rages when the suitors shoot craps for Elisabeth, but soon joins the game to win hundreds of pounds from Bobby. Mabel is a secretary who has been both Bobby's and the Duke's mistress. Like Diana in French without Tears, Mabel tells the nice girl just how naughty she is but, unlike Diana, she does more than tease, and proclaims her enjoyment of sex: "I'm a trollop--let's face it--but not for money." Mabel points out to Elisabeth that, unlike her, she's had to take care of herself, and she is braver than Elisabeth in opting for freedom rather than safety.

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<sup>54</sup>The critic for the New Statesman and Nation, 8 January 1944, thought that the Frenchman was not recognizably French and was painted "with a queer vindictiveness." James Agate, Sunday Times, 26 December 1943, wrote: "Five out of Mr. Rattigan's six leading characters are beautifully observed. Mr. Rattigan's one failure is the French lieutenant. . . ." Philip Hope-Wallace, Time and Tide, 8 January 1944, found the Frenchman and the women farcically unreal. The critic for the Guardian, 7 January, commented that Bobby and Elisabeth were the least defined characters: "They serve as leading strings with which to guide the more wildly humorous characters . . . ."

She releases Bobby from his proposal because she realizes that she likes men so much that she could never be faithful to one, and because she is decent enough not to want to hurt him.<sup>55</sup> Mabel is a daring stage trollop for 1944, because she really likes men and sex and decides against the safety and respectability of marriage, and because she is portrayed sympathetically.

While Rattigan's integration of ideas, characterization and plot is uneven in all of his early plays except French without Tears, his expertise with the implicit in his dialogue is evident in every work. Rattigan's dialogue depends upon context. It is seldom so witty or penetrating as to be quotable on its own, but in context it can be funny in itself and in what it reveals about character and action. When, for example, Bobby introduces the Duke to the American, the latter asks if this is Bobby's father-in-law. Bobby replies: "Yes, to be--or rather--not to be."<sup>56</sup> In its variation on Hamlet's query, the line is silly-funny, but in context it also reveals Bobby's agitation at his realization that the American is his rival for Elisabeth. In Act I, Rattigan implies some differences between British formality and American informality in the services when the American wonders why Bobby brought him home:

BOBBY. I thought of that, but not knowing the customs of the American Army I wasn't sure how they would view the parking on their doorstep at four o'clock in the morning of a very pickled lieutenant, inclined to embrace everyone he saw and call them Dulcie.

AMERICAN. (After a moment's thought) It would have been O.K.

The image of the Americans' winking at the lieutenant's state is amusing in itself and it also lends to the contrasting image of the starchy Admiralty when Bobby reports in Act II that he was rejected for promotion

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<sup>55</sup>Act 3, sc. 2.    <sup>56</sup>Act 2.

partly because he was untidy and late for his appointment. The contrast between the Frenchman's pomposity and Bobby's boyish charm is captured in a line which also provides a laugh at a famous British sentiment:

FRENCHMAN. Milord, I am astonished with you. Was that what you learnt on the playing-fields of Eton?  
BOBBY. I was at Harrow.<sup>57</sup>

A few British critics showed appreciation of Rattigan's skill in the use of dramatic implication in their reviews. The Guardian's reviewer found that Rattigan's text had "the inspired lucidity and economy of P. G. Wodehouse at his best. . . . This gay farce never forsakes the shrewd hint for the tendentious emphasis, and is triumphant Rattigan."<sup>58</sup>

The Daily Mail commented:

It is not only the wittiest play in London, it is also the funniest. The thing simply crackles and sparkles from beginning to end. You anticipate every retort, and when it comes it is ten times better than you anticipated.<sup>59</sup>

The critics varied somewhat in their estimates of Rattigan's characterizations and plot. The consensus was that the American was the most and the Frenchman the least successfully drawn,<sup>60</sup> and there was some agreement that the first act was best and the third weakest.<sup>61</sup> Interesting because of its possible influence on Rattigan's subsequent development of his theory about the farce of character was some critical debate over whether While the Sun Shines was a comedy or a farce. Rattigan

<sup>57</sup>Act 2. 587 January 1944.

<sup>59</sup>28 December 1943. The New Statesman's critic called Rattigan's dialogue "delightfully neat."

<sup>60</sup>Praising the American as Rattigan's best characterization were G. W. B., Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, 28 December 1943; the Stage, 30 December; and Baxter.

<sup>61</sup>Baxter; G. W. B.; Daily Mail; Times, 28 December 1943; James Redfern, Spectator, 7 January 1944, p. 10.

himself called it a light comedy,<sup>62</sup> as did the critics for the Daily Mail and Sphere. It was called a successful farce in the Times, a successful mixture of comedy (Act I) and farce (II and III) in Stage, and an unsuccessful mixture in Time and Tide. In the latter, Philip Hope-Wallace wrote:

But, while making the motions of farce, the piece has the true-to-life scale, kindly observation and plausibility of comedy; indeed, invites sympathy, not satire. . . . You can't have it both ways. You cannot start your audience looking for human relationships, and at the same time claim the indulgence due to farce. You have to choose between human relations and naughtiness, at any rate in the theatre. An interest in one makes you bored with the other. . . .

Two years after this, Rattigan rejected the critical assumption that farce was exclusive of human relationships in an article about his approach to playwriting;<sup>63</sup> two years later he put his theory into practice in Harlequinade.

Rattigan's return to comedy was criticized by Ivor Brown: "There is no effort here to renew the poignancies of 'Flare Path'; the play descends from (or to) 'French without Tears' . . . a quite ordinary pursuit of routine fun. . . ." Beverly Baxter called While the Sun Shines "the most modern museum piece in town," but Rattigan was also hailed as a dramatist of genius by Philip Page in Sphere.<sup>64</sup> The Tatler's critic wrote that a Rattigan play was "fast becoming a good reason in itself for going to the theatre,"<sup>65</sup> and James Agate called the copy of the play he had tried to discredit "a little masterpiece of tingling

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<sup>62</sup>Preface, l:xiv.

<sup>63</sup>Rattigan, "How I Write My Plays," Strand, February 1947.

<sup>64</sup>5 January 1944.

<sup>65</sup>Horace Horsnell, n.d., TRPS-"While the Sun Shines."

impertinence."<sup>66</sup> The only strident complaint about the play issued not from a critic but from a female journalist who urged that the comedy's "suggestive remarks about the U.S. forces" be cut. Though she admitted that the American officers attending the play on the same evening as she took no offense, she stoutly maintained that the offending lines did "nothing to help Anglo-American friendship."<sup>67</sup>

Neither did the play as a whole when the Broadway production, directed by George S. Kaufman, opened at the Lyceum Theater 19 September 1944.<sup>68</sup> Some American critics gave balanced appraisals, like George Freedley's:

There are a number of laughs in "While the Sun Shines," which provide the beginning of a pleasant evening, but the play lacks the strength and push to carry through to a hilarious conclusion which this kind of farce must do to be successful.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Agate began his review: "About 'An Ideal Husband' on its first production Mr. Shaw wrote: 'It is useless to describe a play which has no thesis: which is, in the purest integrity, a play and nothing less.' And about its author, 'In a certain sense Mr. Wilde is our only playwright. He plays with everything: with wit, with philosophy, with drama, with actors and audience, with the whole theatre.' The same might be said to-day of Mr. Rattigan, a playwright with the brains not to take himself seriously."

Rattigan, who had remained publicly silent throughout Agate's attacks on French without Tears, eventually commented on the critic's change of attitude in the Preface to the first volume of his plays: "Now one cannot grow from nothing into Oscar Wilde between one light comedy and another, especially if the second is quite consciously modelled on the first . . . Unhappily therefore I must refrain from quoting from a judgment which by the very violence of its fluctuation must be suspect no less to my readers than to myself." (pp. xiv-xv.)

<sup>67</sup>Hilde Marchant, Daily Mirror, 5 January 1944.

<sup>68</sup>Lewis Nichols, New York Times, 20 September 1944.

<sup>69</sup>Morning Telegraph, 22 September 1944. Howard Barnes wrote in the Herald-Tribune that there was a fabric of genuine comedy in Rattigan's writing, and that his lines were full of laughter.

Others spoke of sea change,<sup>70</sup> and a number of American critics joined in a chorus shouting "mechanic," an accusation they would level often at Rattigan. "'While the Sun Shines' is not a good play basically, for it is contrived as though by a ruler, pencil and a pair of shears," wrote Lewis Nichols in the New York Times.<sup>71</sup> George Jean Nathan commented: "Mr. Rattigan, whose play amounts to little more than a machine-made-box-office tool, rusted, has gone deep into the old wastebasket for his observations and his characters."<sup>72</sup> The Post's critic declared, "an obvious and only occasionally diverting comedy tossed together by a hack writer in a hurry."<sup>73</sup>

There were a few qualified plaudits,<sup>74</sup> and one detractor predicted a run: ". . . such period pieces (watered Wodehouse) . . . do not earnestly seem to me worth time, money or the dubious amenities of this column. After all, the only phenomenon I am bound despairingly to report

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<sup>70</sup>Ibee, Variety, 27 September 1944; Wolcott Gibbs, New Yorker, 30 September, p. 38; George Jean Nathan, The Theatre Book of the Year, 1944-45 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), p. 72. Nathan gave Rattigan credit for one virtue in his play: "Unlike so many other young English playwrights, he deals with the emotions of normal people, which comes as a relief. For some years now we have been treated in English imports to so much degeneracy, perversion, and psychopathic aberration that the mere sight of a character putting his arms around a woman and kissing her is in the nature of a sensational dramatic event."

<sup>71</sup>24 September 1944, sec. 2, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup>p. 73.

<sup>73</sup>Wilella Waldorf, 20 September 1944. Newsweek, 2 October, p. 99; Ward Morehouse, Sun, 20 October; and Ibee called Rattigan's story thin.

<sup>74</sup>Nicols found that: "It is pleasant to hear laughter in the theatre again, and despite its occasional lapses, 'While the Sun Shines' does give it." Barnes commented: "Although it is essentially a genteel conversation piece, uniforms, various members of the armed forces and the less serious rigors of war time give old situations a facade of freshness."

is that it will run, I think."<sup>75</sup> The American critic was wrong, however, for While the Sun Shines lasted only thirty-nine performances on Broadway,<sup>76</sup> while a British reviewer who had predicted a run of almost two years<sup>77</sup> underestimated the play's London success. While the Sun Shines ran on the West End for 1,154 performances<sup>78</sup>--115 more than French without Tears--and gave Rattigan, at the age of thirty-four, a record he has held ever since of being the only playwright to have had two plays run for over a thousand performances each on the West End.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Kappo Phelan, Commonweal, 6 October 1944, p. 590.

<sup>76</sup>LC Play Stats.

<sup>77</sup>Daily Mail, 28 September 1943.

<sup>78</sup>Who's Who, 15th ed. (1972), p. 1598.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid. In this list of plays with London runs of 500 or more performances, there are 49 entries of 1000+ performances. The revues Beyond the Fringe and Beyond the Fringe 1964-6, by a quartet of authors (Alan Bennett, Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller, Dudley Moore) both ran more than a thousand performances, but Rattigan is the only single author to have had two plays reach the 1000+ mark. In addition, four Rattigan plays had runs of 500+: Flare Path, The Deep Blue Sea, Separate Tables and Ross.

#### CHAPTER IV

In terms of Rattigan's development as a playwright, his career falls into three periods: from French without Tears through While the Sun Shines (1936-44); from Love in Idleness through Separate Tables (1944-54); and from Variation on a Theme (1958) to the present. In the comedies and dramas of the first period, Rattigan began to adapt the form of the well-made play to his own distinctive uses. He approached the well-made structure from a psychological perspective. Consciously or unconsciously, he molded it into an expression of the conviction that individuals shape their characters and their lives by the nature of the values that they hold, and the actions that they take (or fail to take) in pursuit of them. This conviction can be observed in embryo in Rattigan's early plays; it emerges fully in his works from 1944-54.

These were Rattigan's most artistically productive years, years in which he mastered the form and brought psychological insight and fresh life to the content of the well-made play, both in full-length (The Winslow Boy, The Deep Blue Sea) and in one-act domestic dramas (The Browning Version, Table by the Window, Table Number Seven). In theoretical articles and in practice, Rattigan solidified his approach to playwriting and applied it to genres new to him: high comedy (Love in Idleness, Who Is Sylvia?), farce (Harlequinade), epic (Adventure Story) and fantasy (The Sleeping Prince). Between the ages of thirty-one, when he wrote Love in Idleness, and forty-one, when he authored Separate Tables,

Rattigan's output was extraordinarily versatile, ambitious, and in most instances artistically sound.

The Rattigan criticism also falls into three periods, characterized by the general critical attitude to his works. The first period, in which Rattigan was usually considered an agile inventor of lightweight material of little or no artistic value, does not end with the production of While the Sun Shines, but with that of Love in Idleness. This is significant, for in failing to recognize the artistic wholeness of Love in Idleness, most of the critics missed some vital clues to Rattigan's distinctive qualities as a dramatist.

Many Rattigan critics seem to have been distracted from giving him serious consideration because of his commercial success. An image of Rattigan as a fair-haired darling of Fortune had been created with the success of French without Tears, and when Love in Idleness followed While the Sun Shines as a London sell-out, the picture of Rattigan the Lucky was enlarged. Rattigan critics often overlooked the facts that the two-year probationary period before his first West End hit cost him a nervous breakdown, that Follow My Leader may have been a victim of the Lord Chamberlain, and that almost eight years passed between the openings of French without Tears and Flare Path. Kenneth Tynan exemplified this attitude in a 1953 article in which he glossed over Rattigan's early struggles and disappointments and wisecracked that "Success continued to dog him."<sup>1</sup>

But Rattigan's successes were almost always accompanied by struggles and disappointments--difficulties with the writing, rejections by

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<sup>1</sup>Evening Standard, 1 July.

actors and producers, and critical debates about the nature and quality of his work. The history of Love in Idleness provides an apt illustration of these points.

Rattigan originally wrote the comedy for Gertrude Lawrence, after she encouraged his idea for it in a brief, chance meeting when she was on a USO tour in England. But when the play was finished, Miss Lawrence had no recollection of encouraging Rattigan to write it, and left England to work in America.

Rattigan could not believe it. He was desolate. To think she had completely forgotten the play! As originally written, it revolved around the woman. It was a comedy of a woman suffering from a conflict between her need for her lover and her love for her son, and it needed a superb actress of a certain flash and flair. He couldn't see anybody but Lawrence in the role. Every line had been written with Lawrence in his mind. The bottom had been kicked out of Rattigan's world.<sup>2</sup>

Playwright Ivor Novello arranged for Rattigan to meet the Lunts, who were touring England in Robert Sherwood's There Shall Be No Night. Rattigan hesitantly explained to Alfred Lunt that the woman's lover was not a starring but a supporting role, equal to that of the son but less sympathetic. The character was a rich Tory Finance Minister who had engaged in shady manipulations when making his money, while the son was a Marxist enthusiast who disapproved of his mother's lover on moral and political grounds. Lunt reassured Rattigan that the size of their roles would not matter. "Sometimes Lynn has the play and sometimes it's my play. Mr. Rattigan, if your play is good, I'll be satisfied to hold a tray and let it be Lynn's play. The play is what matters."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Maurice Zolotow, Stage Struck: The Romance of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne (New York: Fawcett World Library, 1964), pp. 284-85.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

Two days later the Lunts told Rattigan that they wanted to go into rehearsal for Love in Idleness right away. The play needed a few adjustments here and there, they thought, but fundamentally it was lovely and they would both be happy to appear in it, with Lunt himself directing.

The "adjustments here and there" amounted to rewriting the play. In retrospect, Rattigan mused that he had gotten the "treatment" from Alfred Lunt. The Lunts' biographer, Maurice Zolotow, observed: "It was the old story of 'they' and their 'dislikes.'" As Rattigan, taking time off whenever he could from his R.A.F. post, attended rehearsals, Lunt would ask for a few changes. "He was so subtle about it," Rattigan recalled,

. . . that I didn't realize he was making me write a new play. In the end he was right. I wrote a far better play because of his suggestions. But at the time it was rather a trying experience.

Lunt would approve Rattigan's changes for Act I and then ask for more work on II. When II was improved, he would point out a few weaknesses in III, and so round-about until the play was reshaped into a story about two leading characters, Olivia Brown and her lover, with Olivia's son as the would-be spoiler of their happiness. Lunt, Rattigan remembered, would complain that:

Sir John Fletcher, the minister, that was Alfred's role, well wasn't he a little too brutal here? And my but he was a dreadful reactionary, and in this passage here he was such a disagreeable Tory and 'they won't like it, you know.' And he'd lose the audience in this scene here. As I'd written it, Olivia's son was constantly scoring off Sir John. Gradually--so gradually I didn't know it myself--the minister began scoring off Michael, the son. In fact, Michael became rather a snotty character, while Sir John changed into a fine fellow, good hearted, a worldly chap doing his best for God, for England, and for Lynn Fontanne, and having to put up with this beastly little bugger of a left-wing socialist.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 286.

Rattigan's anxiety about the rewrites spread to Alfred Lunt, who began to wonder if he was spoiling what he considered "a perfect gem of a play." They opened out of town to bad reviews and Noel Coward, who had money in the production, came to see it and advised them to close right away. Rattigan and Lunt, sitting in the latter's thin-walled dressing room, polished off a bottle of whiskey while they gloomily overheard the devastating comments Coward was making to Lynn Fontanne next door. Back in the Lunts' hotel room, as Coward was analyzing the play and Rattigan was trying vainly to get drunk, Lynn Fontanne motioned Rattigan to follow her into the bedroom.

"Look," she whispered, "nothing that Noel has said or will say can affect me. This is an enchanting play and we're going to do it in London. I know Alfred will want to close it. But don't worry. I shall talk Alfred around. I have faith in the play."

An hour later, Lunt beckoned Rattigan into the bathroom.

"My boy," Alfred murmured, "as you can see, Lynn is disheartened by Noel's reaction. She's going to want to close the play. But no matter what Lynn says, we shall do it. It's a good play. Now don't say anything. Leave it to me to talk Lynn around to my way of thinking. I have such confidence in your play that I'm going to buy Noel's share in it."<sup>5</sup>

Rattigan rewrote, the Lunts rehearsed, and 20 December 1944 Love in Idleness opened at the Lyric Theatre in London,<sup>6</sup> which quickly became known as "the theatre you couldn't get into." During the six months limited run, played in the anxious atmosphere of intense German rocket bombardment, there was never an empty seat in the house. The Lunts toured the play to army camps in France and Germany, opened it 23 January 1946, under the title of O Mistress Mine at the Empire Theatre on Broadway, and toured the States in it. The play was the biggest hit of the Lunts'

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 288. <sup>6</sup>Plays, 1:264.

careers, and their longest Broadway run--451 performances. Altogether they played it, in New York and Europe and on tour, for almost four years.<sup>7</sup>

In almost every review, in both London and New York, the critics raved about the Lunts and speculated about Rattigan's contribution to the play's success. Only a few London critics were negative. The Times' critic wrote: "The truth is that Mr. Rattigan has on this occasion been insufficiently inventive, and perhaps insufficiently witty, for his theme."<sup>8</sup> Philip Hope-Wallace commented:

Certainly with other actors, one would feel the piece too superficial and too static. Maturity gracefully conquers callousness? Charming gesture but a trifle too easily arrived at even for a lightweight.<sup>9</sup>

Most reviewers were moderate:

I do not suggest that the author should be denied his share of the credit for a hilarious evening, since here is a clever comedy. But played by a less brilliant company, this slender yarn . . . would have been far less entertaining, to put it mildly.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Zolotow, pp. 289-91.      <sup>8</sup>21 December 1944.

<sup>9</sup>Time and Tide, 30 December 1944. Desmond MacCarthy commented in the New Statesman and Nation, 30 December, p. 436: "For, in itself, it is a thin little play. Its theme wears thin before the end because he has used it only as a string on which to hang a series of ludicrous scenes." James Redfern wrote in the Spectator, 29 December, p. 598: ". . . Terence Rattigan has failed to make the most of his theme. . . . he might have written, and probably intended to write, a brilliant comedy, treating the subject of Hamlet from a present-day point of view. But to do that successfully needed more guns than Mr. Rattigan carries, and he has skated off his subject with the flimsiest of make-believe."

<sup>10</sup>Philip Page, Daily Mail, 21 December 1944. W. A. Darlington, Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, 21 December, wrote: "Probably this is not Mr. Rattigan's best play, but it is difficult to tell. The dramatist who is lucky enough to provide a vehicle for Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt is almost out of the critic's reach, for that occasion only." Beverley Baxter, Evening Standard, 23 December, wondered: "Is this a play which will be read in the years to come for its literary quality? I wish I could say 'No,' but again one is rendered helpless." These critics admitted to finding it difficult to judge Rattigan's contribution because the Lunts had been so dazzling.

A few London critics praised Rattigan highly: "This is Mr. Rattigan's most mature play. It scarcely seems possible to me that he is only 31, for this comedy has, I think, fiftyish cynicism towards youthful enthusiasm, and a fiftyish resignation to the ways of the world . . ."<sup>11</sup> And Beverley Nichols named the issue of credit clearly:

This play is of so light a texture that it has aroused the usual futile discussion on the lines of "What would it be without the Lunts?" The best answer to that question was given to me years ago by old Sir Arthur Pinero, who said, "Of all the nonsense written about the stage, the silliest is that actors can give great performances without any material."

Rattigan has provided the material. . . . It has all the Rattigan wit; it is the best constructed play he has yet given us.<sup>12</sup>

The New York critics, however, panned Rattigan with only a few exceptions. Lewis Nichols wrote in the New York Times: "As a play, Mr. Rattigan's part of the evening is inconsequential--if that is not even building it up a little. It is filled with flaws, implausibilities and occasional moments when one of the Lunts is off the stage."<sup>13</sup> George Jean Nathan declared: "The comedy, which is minus invention and wit and plainly manufactured as a vehicle for two popular stars . . . is wholly negligible . . ."<sup>14</sup> Vernon Rice commented that "O Mistress Mine is pure escapism. . . . it is all a little too smooth, too polished and a little

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<sup>11</sup>Elsbeth Grant, Daily Sketch, 21 December 1944. Ernest Betts, Daily Express, 21 December, wrote: "Author Terence Rattigan is at the top of his form in this delicious comedy. . . ." Ivor Brown, Observer, 24 December, commented: "'Love in Idleness' . . . may not prove, when it passes into other hands, to be Mr. Rattigan's most successful piece, but to me it certainly seems his best . . . ." D. H., Evening Standard, 21 December, called the play "a combination of sophisticated comedy plus a solid foundation of deep, human emotion. . . . This is a most satisfying and dazzling piece of theatre . . . ."

<sup>12</sup>Source unnamed, TRPS-"Love in Idleness."

<sup>13</sup>24 January 1946.

<sup>14</sup>Theater Book of the Year, 1945-46 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), pp. 29-31.

too unreal."<sup>15</sup>

Among the exceptions were such comments as the World-Telegram critic's'

. . . the sweetest, funniest and most intelligent play of their [the Lunts'] entire career (which embraces such funny ones as "The Taming of the Shrew" and some persiflage by Noel Coward) . . . a beautiful, tender, touching, hilarious comedy.<sup>16</sup>

John Mason Brown tried to put the credit controversy into balance:

Granting that Mr. Rattigan has cut his light cloth with the Lunts in mind, it seems only right that his skill as a tailor should win its own applause. Some of my colleagues, I note, have dismissed the script of O Mistress Mine as if it were nonexistent. They have frowned on it because it is jubilantly unimportant. Mr. Nathan has even spanked the Lunts for appearing in so trivial a comedy. As I see it, however, its unimportance is the point of Mr. Rattigan's play, and one of the sources of its pleasures. I should think it would have to be judged in terms of the opportunities with which it provides the Lunts, and the laughs it supplies the audience, rather than in terms of what it does not pretend to say.

Brown ended his review by remarking that the Lunts and Rattigan "must be as happy as for a few hours at each performance they make others."<sup>17</sup>

But the happiness of both playwright and stars was clouded by the critics' jibes. As Rattigan recalled:

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<sup>15</sup>Post, 24 January 1946. Howard Barnes, Herald-Tribune, 24 January, wrote: "Terence Rattigan's comedy is on the expedient, not to say spavined, side." Ward Morehouse, Sun, 24 January, called the play a "slight, light skimpy comedy." The critic for Time, 4 February, p. 61, commented: "Most of O Mistress Mine is about as real--and as valuable--as stage money . . . . And playwright Rattigan plainly wrote it for escape." Newsweek's critic, 4 February, p. 80, found that "it remains a vehicle rather than a play." George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, 24 January, referred to the "slightness and the contrived nature of the plot." Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, 1 September, sec. 2, p. 1, called the play "a wretched little comedy that is hardly worth the trouble of acting."

<sup>16</sup>Burton Roscoe, 24 January 1946. Robert Garland, Journal-American, 24 January, commented: "An adult, intelligent and entertaining comedy by an adult, intelligent and established playwright."

<sup>17</sup>Dramatis Personae (New York: Viking Press, 1963), pp. 255-56.

This comedy was graced, and, I am sure too, greatly enhanced by the two exquisite performances of the world-famous Lunts; who nevertheless, and with the generosity typical of them, were even more indignant than I to read, amid the wildly enthusiastic acclaim for their own magic, the general critical consensus that the piece they had chosen to perform might just as well have been the telephone book for all the difference it would have made to the delights of the evening. When this judgment was repeated in America with still more vigour and self-certainty, they were even goaded, I believe, seriously to challenge one of their most fervent critical partisans to sit through a two-and-a-half-hour recital by them of the Manhattan directory and were not surprised when the challenge was cravenly rejected.<sup>18</sup>

Alfred Lunt said about the play:

Not since Sardou has there been a writer with such a gift for plot construction as Rattigan. You know, the plot of O Mistress Mine . . . is so tenuous, it's almost invisible. You can hardly see it, but it's there all the time, like a very fine silk line, binding the whole play together. Rather like fishing for tarpon. You use a very fine line and yet the line is so strong you can catch a six hundred pound fish with it.<sup>19</sup>

The controversy over how much credit Rattigan deserved for the success of Love in Idleness drew most of the critics' attention away from the structural and stylistic growth which Rattigan had demonstrated in his newest comedy. It was the first of his plays to rely upon scenes of intimate conversation between two, and occasionally three characters to carry the full weight of plot and theme. There are only brief appearances by two supporting and four minor characters in Love in Idleness, in contrast to the group scenes involving crammer's residents in French without Tears, aging Bright Young Things in After the Dance, political figures in Follow My Leader, war combatants in Flare Path, and Bobby's visitors in While the Sun Shines, which alternate in each play with intimate scenes involving various combinations of two characters. With Love in Idleness, Rattigan demonstrated that he could sustain interest

<sup>18</sup>Preface, 1:xv.    <sup>19</sup>Zolotow, p. 287.

for three acts with perceptive studies of three characters. Influenced by the Lunts, Rattigan created in Olivia and Sir John the happiest and most serene, though by no means the only, of his loving couples. In Michael, Rattigan drew his first full-length portrait of a youngster at odds with the adult world he is about to enter.

There was critical debate over the characters' believability. Olivia and John, in their relationship, posed little problem: "Their relationship is well suggested by both the dramatist and the actors. We believe in their intimacy, in his acceptance of her with all her faults, in her devotion to him."<sup>20</sup> It was Michael's influence that was questioned. Several critics found that the plot developments which resulted from his opposition to his mother's lover were unbelievable, and one called Michael "a mere incredible deus ex machina."<sup>21</sup>

Many critics applauded Rattigan's first act, which dramatizes the happiness of Olivia and John, the sudden return of seventeen-year-old Michael after five years in Canada, and Michael's shock and disapproval upon discovering his mother's relationship with John.<sup>22</sup> It was the second act, in which Olivia chooses to leave John and set up a home for herself and Michael, and the third, in which the lovers are reunited when John finds a way to reach Michael, that seemed disturbing, although few critics agreed upon the reason.

The New Statesman's critic suggested that:

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<sup>20</sup>MacCarthy.

<sup>21</sup>Redfern. Also questioning Michael's influence were Brown, MacCarthy and Hope-Wallace.

<sup>22</sup>Praising Act I, and commenting that II and III were weak, were Brown; MacCarthy; S. W., Evening News, 21 December 1944; L. H., Manchester Guardian, 22 December.

. . . Olivia's love for her son is not made credible . . . There is no proper tension. The two sides of the tug in Olivia are not even temporarily balanced. Michael is too much of the rude young ass, and the audience has no reason to suspect that he could be dearer to her than her lover.<sup>23</sup>

Agreeing that the characterization of Olivia was flawed, another critic commented: "But Mr. Rattigan has drawn a portrait of a woman who, as is evident from the way she treats her precious child, has never known and could never know the meaning of mother love." Olivia would never leave John, this critic asserted, because she was "sensual" and "luxury-loving."<sup>24</sup> The Times critic declared that John's letting himself be bullied by Michael rang false, while Ivor Brown suggested in the Observer that Michael's parting of the lovers seemed unlikely, and that the last act reconciliation was "of the theatre, not of life."<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the charm which the Lunts brought to the relationship of Olivia and John made Olivia's bond with her son seem less compelling than it is in Rattigan's play, for the hypothesis that her motherly feelings are slight is not proven by the text. In Act I, it is established that Olivia and Michael's father, who died while Michael was in Canada, sent him away to keep him safe during the war. Far from feeling abandoned, Michael talks about how well he was cared for and how happy he was. Olivia has kept and almost memorized his letters, which pleases him, and has arranged for Michael to have a job in John's War Ministry. Michael, who has become involved with a group of young socialists in Canada, is not pleased at the prospect of working for a man he calls "a rank monopolistic

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<sup>23</sup>MacCarthy.

<sup>24</sup>Scotsman (Edinburgh), 30 December 1944.

<sup>25</sup>S. W. agreed with Brown: "The last act is a failure--a glorious, hilarious failure, but still a blinkering of plain facts."

reactionary," but he is thrilled with the salary he will earn: "Gosh, seven or eight pounds! Well, I suppose one can't afford to be too choosy, if the job is worth all that money."<sup>26</sup>

Olivia tries to tell Michael about her relationship with John, but finds Michael's hostility to him, and her son's insistence on regarding her as a relic--he repeatedly calls her "Poor old Mum"--make the revelation very difficult. She tries to keep peace between son and lover:

JOHN. He also accused me of nepotism, fraud, incompetence, peculation, and treachery.

OLIVIA. Did he really? Isn't he naughty?

but finds it hard to deal with a son who was a little boy when he went away and is now almost a man. When Michael, being shown to his room by the maid, learns that the house belongs to John, he realizes the situation and gives his estimate--that his mother has been weak and John has been vile. The act ends as the tug of war for Olivia's loyalty begins: Michael insists that they all go to a working-class restaurant for dinner and John beats Michael at his own game by picking out a difficult bus route to get there.

In Act II, Michael continually snipes at John's political and economic policies--while accepting his salary at the Ministry--and John tries to convince the worried Olivia that Michael, far from being unhappy, is having a wonderful time playing Hamlet to his Claudius and Olivia's Gertrude. Michael's behavior, such as his trying vainly to prove that Olivia knew John before she became a widow and his inviting the lovers to go see a play called Murder in the Family, bears out John's judgment. Olivia is constantly torn: "You can dress in black silk tights for all I

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<sup>26</sup>Rattigan, Love in Idleness, Plays, 1:287. All references from this edition.

care. Only you'd better not--it might annoy John."

Michael is clearly trying to part the lovers, for unbeknownst to them he has invited John's estranged wife to the house. In the first Olivia-John scene of the play, their conviction that John must not divorce his wife while he is in the Ministry of Tanks (because of the propaganda the Germans might make from the scandal) has been made clear. But Michael is bitterly disappointed to learn from John's wife that she never loved him, is perfectly happy without him, knows about Olivia and doesn't care. She laughs at Michael's assumption that Olivia is too old to be in love with John, and his outburst that "I hate her being the parasite of a rich old voluptuary!" His humiliation is complete when Olivia, John, and the wife carry off their surprise meeting with "civilized" small talk.<sup>27</sup>

Just as Olivia expected Michael to be the little boy he was when he went away, Michael expected her to be as she was when they parted. That she is not, but has become a glamorous society woman--the antithesis of his ideals--appalls him. He is further shocked when he questions Olivia about her life with his father and learns that she had stopped loving him long ago--though she remained his helpful and faithful wife--and that she had fallen deeply in love for the first time in her life when she met John. Of Michael's father and her life with him, she says:

Don't think I ever resented his not being a success. I never asked for nor expected another sort of life. With you and him--I suppose it was you who turned the scales--I would have been quite content to have lived the rest of my life as the wife of an unsuccessful doctor in Baron's Court.

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<sup>27</sup>The Times critic found that: "The best written scene in the play is that in which the budding Hamlet seeks to stir the moral indignation of the Cabinet Minister's wife . . . ."

She admits that, in addition to loving John, she loves his life-style:

All this grandeur--as you call it, is very important to me. I sometimes think I only began to live when I moved into this house. It's hard to separate that feeling from my love for John; and if, in falling in love with John, I've become a Dorchester society woman and therefore you no longer recognize me, I'm sorry, but there's nothing I can do about it.

When Michael declares that he will move out, and then breaks down and sobs "Don't go on with it, Mum! Please don't! Please! I can't bear it," Olivia is broken. Throughout Act II, she has been concerned over whether Michael is really unhappy; when she sees how miserable he is, she tells John that she must leave him.

In Act III, Olivia and Michael have returned to their flat in Baron's Court. Olivia is alone most of the time, for Michael, having gotten what he wanted from her, is busy working and dating. She does not complain, but tries to reassure Michael that she is perfectly happy, and tries to take an interest not only in his dating problems but in his political beliefs. When John comes to tell her that his job with the Ministry is completed and that his wife has agreed to a divorce so that he can marry Olivia, she still refuses him for Michael's sake. Throughout the play, hers are not the actions of an uncaring mother, and her love for John and for Michael are both firmly established in the writing.

If Olivia's conflict and actions are accepted as believable, the questions of John's reactions and of his final, tenuous truce with Michael still remain. Whether or not these are credible rests upon the psychologies of the two characters. Here, Rattigan probed more deeply than in any previous play. John does not allow Michael to bully him; he expresses irritation and anger frequently. But he cannot throw Michael out for fear of losing Olivia, and so he wages psychological war by trying to get

her, and Michael himself, to recognize Michael's posturings. John's refusal to accept defeat is seen in his plea to her at the end of II and his return in III. But his victory must be over Michael rather than Olivia, and it is on John's understanding of his adversary, always more perceptive than Olivia's, that the plot turns.

Michael is a "rude young ass" often--John's cry that "Our lives have been split and blasted apart by a little moral gangster with an Oedipus complex and a passion for self-dramatization"<sup>28</sup> is only partly exaggeration. But the situation Michael confronts is one that he does not know how to handle, and his rudeness, his admitted play-acting, and his genuine distress are not only plausible reactions in a seventeen-year-old who finds his security threatened, but are the wrenching consequences of a contradiction in Michael's nature over what he declares to be his ideals and what he actually wants in his personal life.

Because he is a professed socialist, Michael disapproves of everything that John, a rich businessman who wrote a book titled A Defence of Private Enterprise, represents. This, even more than his shock at the revelation of his mother's sexual liason, is the key to his opposition of John. Michael is certainly possessive of Olivia, but he does not wish to keep her entirely to himself--he actually tries to get her together with a neighbor she finds dull--and he does want her to marry again. It is John himself and the life-style Olivia enjoyed with him that Michael cannot abide.

Yet Michael is drawn to money and to enjoyment himself. This is first established in Michael's acceptance of the War Ministry job, which

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<sup>28</sup>Act 3.

he does not give up after he succeeds in parting Olivia and John. He admires his mother's Molyneux gowns in Act I, and has acquired a new hair-style and some cologne to please his girlfriend Sylvia in III. He is awed by John's house, and apologizes to him for the Baron's Court flat:

I'm afraid it's pretty ghastly--really . . . It's so inconvenient, having no lift. I'm thinking seriously of moving, as a matter of fact. . . . I've seen quite a nice little flat in Montpelier Square --ground floor--Adamses' house.

Michael enjoys drinking John's whiskey in Act I and keeps a bottle of gin in Baron's Court for Sylvia: "I paid sixteen and fourpence for it, in the black market . . . . I don't approve of it, of course, but--well --she likes gin, you see." And he bitterly laments the fact that he is losing Sylvia to another suitor because "I can't afford to take her to the Savoy."

It is John's recognition and skillful manipulation of Michael's contradiction which makes the plot resolution credible. This is prepared for by the argument which precedes their detente:

JOHN. Well--thanks to you--she's decided to work her passage through the New World. Very right, very proper. Only--tell me this --is there no better use to be made of beauty and charm--austerity age though this may be--than to consign them to a hermit's life in a kitchen? I'm only asking for information, Michael. It's going to be your world--you and your generation are going to administer it.

MICHAEL. (Hotly.) And we're jolly well going to administer it, too--without the help of any reactionary old fogies--

JOHN. All right, all right. Only remember this. Ten years from now, when you're a successful commissar, living in an enormous mansion in Park Lane, with huge Adam's ceilings, and Sylvia Hart as your paramour, drinking bottle after bottle of black-market gin, I shall have a very good chuckle, as I pass by, selling my State-owned matches in the street.<sup>29</sup>

Michael does not recognize the contradiction between what he preaches and practices. A few moments after his argument with John, he laments

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<sup>29</sup>Permission to quote from Hamish Hamilton.

that Sylvia has stood him up to go to the Savoy. When John offers to reserve him a table there, Michael not only accepts eagerly, but asks John to accompany him:

Oh, please do. Please. It'd make all the difference. Gosh! Just think of her face when I walk in with you. . . . Me--with a Cabinet Minister! She'd never forget it as long as she lives. She's the most terrible snob.

At the end, when a bewildered Olivia suggests that they all ride a bus to the Savoy, it is Michael who wants to take John's car. Michael's capitulation, though it might have been disappointing to critics who shared his ideals and deplored his contradictions, is true to the psychology of his character as established by Rattigan from Michael's first appearance. Far from justifying one criticism that the play "wavers off the level of ironic comedy,"<sup>30</sup> Love in Idleness is ironic to its core.

Characteristic of Rattigan, the irony is gentle. He does not draw Michael as ludicrous and unsympathetic, but as confused and mistaken. Beginning with Michael and continuing through Ronnie in The Winslow Boy, Taplow in The Browning Version, Nicky in The Sleeping Prince, Fiona in Variation on a Theme and George in A Bequest to the Nation, Rattigan's portraits of adolescents are distinguished by that special grace of attitude with which some adults treat youngsters not as types labeled "adolescents" but as individuals worthy of sympathetic attention.<sup>31</sup> Equally sympathetic to the sensibilities of adults, Rattigan often uses youthful figures of speech to stress the vulnerability of his most sophisticated

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<sup>30</sup>L. H.

<sup>31</sup>Baxter wrote that: "Certainly the study of the adolescent Michael is the best thing Rattigan has ever done." The Times critic commented: "The author's observation is surest in the character of the son . . . ." Stark Young called Michael a well-written part in the New Republic, 4 February 1946, p. 158.

characters, as when John tells Olivia in Act I that when he was bullied in Parliament that day, "At the end of it I knew that if one more of them got up and was unkind, I'd have burst into tears there and then on the Speaker's lap."

The critics disagreed not only over characterization and plot, but also over Rattigan's dialogue. "But what about the author? It is hard to say. The lines sounded as if they were the wittiest since the days of Oscar Wilde. What is more, they may have been," a London reviewer mused, adding that the Lunts could, however, make anything sound superb.<sup>32</sup> One American critic commended "some of the brightest, wittiest dialogue that has been around for some time . . . ,"<sup>33</sup> but Woolcott Gibbs wrote in the New Yorker:

. . . the actual verbal humor is a sort of second-best Coward--the studious juxtaposition of unlikely words, the trick of comic understatement too persistently employed, the bright, expected perversity inevitably following the solemn speech--and that, like most formula wit, its real impact is slight and its effect almost wholly a matter of delivery.<sup>34</sup>

No one commented on the growing sophistication of Rattigan's use of the implicit in both dialogue and spectacle. Before John's wife appears, he has commented that she was unfaithful to him with a certain Guards' officer. When Olivia tells John that "Lady Fletcher has some friends waiting for her, John," he says to his wife, "Oh. Well--remember me to him, will you?"<sup>35</sup> After Olivia confesses her intense embarrassment at being confronted with his wife, John asks her what is the point of

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<sup>32</sup>Recorder, 30 December 1944.      <sup>33</sup>Rice.

<sup>34</sup>2 February 1946, pp. 34-35. Louis Kronenberger, P.M., 25 January 1946, commented: "Mr. Rattigan's dialogue does not sparkle very often, but most of it is serviceable enough."

<sup>35</sup>Act 2.

trying to pass off such a situation with small talk. "There isn't a situation in the world that can't be passed off with small talk," Olivia replies. Her maxim is illustrated a little later when she and John, knowing that they must part, hide their agitation by small talk when greeting their party guests.<sup>36</sup>

The Lunts evidently invented the bits of extended pantomime described in the script,<sup>37</sup> but Rattigan had already shown a solid grasp of the use of spectacle, not as an end in itself but as a means for furthering characterization, plot, mood, and theme. Bobby's appearance in his sailor suit in While the Sun Shines telegraphs his ineffectuality before anything is said about it; little Lord Heybrook's walk across the stage gives French without Tears its final plot twist; the flare path visible from the windows emphasizes the war-time tensions in Flare Path, while Pat's standing to the outside of and then joining the celebrating R.A.F. group at the play's end visually reiterates the theme that the war takes precedence over personal concerns. In Love in Idleness, John has taken off his shoes and hastily puts them back on when Michael first appears. Michael notices John's slip, Olivia is flustered, and the conflict is captured with a few gestures. In Act III, the contrasts between Olivia's life with John and with Michael, and between her interests and her son's, are conveyed visually and verbally as Olivia and Michael sit in their shabby flat, she reading the Tatler and he the Labour Monthly, making such comments as:

MICHAEL. Gosh! Did you know that in 1926 the average wage of the non-skilled industrial worker in England was only twenty-eight and threepence?

OLIVIA. Good Lord! What has Laura Ryde-Davis done to her hair?

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid. <sup>37</sup>Zolotow, p. 289.

MICHAEL. Oh, corking! He's certainly letting the Government have it this month--Old Laski.

OLIVIA. I didn't know *Ciro's* had opened again, did you?

Debate over the play's merits continued when a second American company, starring Sylvia Sidney and John Loder, went on tour in 1948.<sup>38</sup> But time seemed to favor Rattigan in the critics' judgment.<sup>39</sup> Though one Canadian reviewer found the play thin,<sup>40</sup> another declared that the Sidney-Loder casting proved "that Mr. Rattigan had more to do with its success than had been suspected."<sup>41</sup> A third Canadian reviewer stated that: "Terence Rattigan is among the best writers of high comedy today, and 'O Mistress Mine' is undoubtedly his best achievement in that field

<sup>38</sup>Toronto Star, 28 December 1948. In addition to the touring companies, *Love in Idleness* was performed in many foreign countries. Opening in Stockholm in September 1945, a production ran for 175 performances and then toured Swedish provinces.

The Finnish National Theatre, the Fredericksborg Theatre in Copenhagen, the Akademie Theatre in Vienna and theatres in South America and New Zealand all mounted productions between 1946 and 1950. The Kleine Komedie in Munich gave the play in 1959, and in 1951 an adaptation had been presented in Paris in which Olivia had become a Polish Countess and Michael had metamorphosed into her daughter! The European productions are noted in assorted clippings in TRPS--"Love in Idleness." The South American and New Zealand productions are mentioned by Michael Pearson in the Auckland Weekly News (New Zealand), 24 November 1946.

<sup>39</sup>Hector Bolitho, who remarked of the first London and New York reviews of *Love in Idleness*: "But critics often prefer to astonish their readers by telling them what a play is not, rather than face the mental exercise of exploring what it is," saw the play again when the Lunts began their American tour, and tried: ". . . to search past the devastating charms of Miss Fontanne for the bones and flesh of Mr. Rattigan's play. I think there is greater quality in the writing of *O Mistress Mine* than we first admitted. The lines in which the boy, Michael Brown, recalls his years in Canada, and most of the scenes with his mother, seem to me both beautiful and tender. The quality is in the words, not only in the acting." (Town and Country, p. 114.)

<sup>40</sup>Toronto Star.

<sup>41</sup>Herbert Whittaker, Montreal Gazette, 4 January 1949.

to date."<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps one reason, in addition to their being overwhelmed by the Lunts, that the critics did not find the substance in Rattigan's play is that they did not recognize its theme. Some saw the issue in terms of the mother's conflict,<sup>43</sup> or the son's Hamletish guise, and others seized upon the Hamlet metaphor which Rattigan used only in Act II, and declared that it was his theme: "It has been left to Mr. Rattigan to think of 'Hamlet' as a modern comedy. . . ." <sup>44</sup> "It is Hamlet, as perhaps Yorick, the King's jester, might have written it."<sup>45</sup>

While Rattigan does depict a struggle between maternal and romantic love in Olivia's conflict, and invokes comedic echoes of Hamlet in Michael's machinations, he attempts and accomplishes more. The plot turns on the conflict between John and Michael, a conflict which encompasses not only a struggle for Olivia but different attitudes toward how she should live her life.

Olivia's life with John represents one in which qualities such as beauty, charm, refinement, and mutually fulfilling love and pleasure are viewed not only with approval but with pride. This is conveyed through Olivia's love of John for both himself and his life-style, and through John's refusal to apologize for that style, his pride in having earned it, and his pleasure in sharing it with Olivia. The life which Michael represents is one in which those qualities are suspect. They must be

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<sup>42</sup>S. Morgan-Powell, Montreal Daily Star, 4 January 1949.

<sup>43</sup>MacCarthy; Scotsman; Page.

<sup>44</sup>James Agate, Sunday Times, 24 December 1944.

<sup>45</sup>D. H. Also seeing a Hamlet theme were the Times; Redfern and L. H.

apologized for or rationalized, for they represent debased values, as Rattigan demonstrates through Michael's defensive attraction to a life-style which, in Michael's view, represents a betrayal of his socialist ideals. Rattigan's theme, wholly integrated to his plot and characterizations, is a defense of the values shared by Olivia and John.

Whether Rattigan set out to express this theme is doubtful. Michael had originally been the sympathetic and John the unscrupulous, unsympathetic character in his first draft. But Rattigan shifted sympathy from Michael subtly. Michael is sympathetic in his confusion and distress, unsympathetic only to the degree that he attempts to dictate to others how they should live. When John asks Michael whether there is no better use to be made of beauty and charm than to consign them to a hermit's life in a kitchen, he is pleading that Michael see his mother as an individual. Underlying the defense of the values shared by Olivia and John is a general theme important in Rattigan's work: the defense of the individual's right to choose his or her own values. In a New York interview, Rattigan commented about Love in Idleness:

But the clash of left and right is not very prominent, really. I don't have any strong political convictions. I believe in old-fashioned liberalism. In writing, I try to pose a problem, but not to comment. I show the audience, this is what you've made of the world. Is it right or wrong. That's for you to decide.<sup>46</sup>

A few critics seemed to sense that Rattigan was writing something more significant than a glittering high comedy. Ivor Brown wrote that: "For me the evening was more than an inspiring pleasure: it was also a much needed reassurance that the theatre is still a civilized place."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Seymour Peck, "Terence's Life with Father," P.M., 22 January 1946, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup>F. S. in Theatre World, 3 March 1945, found the play "an affair

Beverley Nichols suggested that Rattigan should one day write "a play that will cause the sort of social uproar which it is one of the theatre's functions to create." Nichols, who hoped that Rattigan would realize and write about two things: "that all is not gold that glitters" and "that all that glitters is not, ipso facto, to be damned," came very close to identifying what he had already done. Nichols cited the scene in which Olivia read the Tatler and Michael the Labour Monthly as the germ of the play, a "brilliant little episode" capturing "Youth versus age, old versus new, rich versus poor, the individual versus the state." A Montreal critic called the work "a graceful play of conflict between conservatism and the young idea."<sup>48</sup>

Love in Idleness' affirmation of the value of beauty, charm, refinement and mutually fulfilling love and pleasure captured, historically, a viewpoint which became heresy to most intellectuals, artists, politicians, and other figures in the arena of ideas after World War II. A serious defense of glamor of any kind would all but cease to exist in post-war drama. In addition to its worth as a soundly constructed, psychologically perceptive high comedy, Love in Idleness is a valuable social document: it pictures a clash between pre-war and post-war values, and in so doing foreshadows and contrasts with the dreariness of life dramatized by many of Rattigan's successors.

No clearer illustration in Rattigan's career of the critics' failure

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on the surface by comparison with the deep ugliness of life as it too often is to-day."

<sup>48</sup>Whittaker.

to understand his work beyond a certain point exists than in their reception of his next play, The Winslow Boy. Most of the critics failed to perceive the very strong threads of character, plot and theme uniting Love in Idleness and damned the play for faulty construction: most of the critics fell short in a similar manner with The Winslow Boy, and either damned or praised the play for the wrong reasons.

The Winslow Boy marked a turning point in critical estimates of Rattigan's work. "This play is completely real. Mr. Rattigan's writing makes no empty gestures to the gallery. I promote Mr. Rattigan from the rank of commercial playwright to that of dramatist . . ." <sup>49</sup> "In 'The Winslow Boy' . . . Terence Rattigan for the first time does full justice to himself as a serious dramatist."<sup>50</sup> To these accolades from British critics, John Mason Brown added one from America: ". . . beyond dispute the best play he has so far written."<sup>51</sup> Praise for Rattigan was not unanimous on either side of the Atlantic, but it was considerable--though often of a left-handed nature, as Rattigan recalled:

It was generally felt to be very strange that a notoriously insincere farceur could so readily turn his hand to matters of fairly serious theatrical moment, and I found myself on the one hand warmly commended for my courage, and on the other sternly reprimanded for having hidden for so long my light under a bushel.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Paul Dehn, Sunday Chronicle, 28 May 1946.

<sup>50</sup>Elsbeth Grant, Daily Sketch, 24 May 1946. Some critics still refused to take Rattigan seriously, however. The Daily Mirror critic, 30 May, commented that: "The theme of individual liberty ought to be enough for any dramatist, but Mr. Rattigan was not to be denied his cliques. Perhaps as a past master at long runs he knows best." Ernest Betts, Daily Express, 24 May, noted that the audience ". . . certainly liked the play. But it does not quite live up to the story that thrilled the country in 1908." The prejudice against Rattigan's popularity with audiences is marked in both critics' comments.

<sup>51</sup>Dramatis Personae, p. 313. <sup>52</sup>Preface, 1:xvii.

The critical success of The Winslow Boy was underscored when Rattigan won, in 1947, the first Ellen Terry Award given to the author of the most outstanding play of the London season,<sup>53</sup> and when the play was cited, over Brecht's Galileo, as the best foreign play of the 1947-48 Broadway season by the New York Drama Critics Circle.<sup>54</sup> In San Francisco, where touring companies of two Rattigan plays performed during the 1948 season, the Drama Critic's Council selected The Winslow Boy as the best play, with O Mistress Mine and Medea as runners-up.<sup>55</sup> The Winslow Boy ran from 23 May 1946, for 476 performances at the Lyric Theatre in London,<sup>56</sup> and from 29 October 1947, for 218 performances at the Empire Theatre in New York.<sup>57</sup> Like most of Rattigan's early plays, The Winslow Boy was subsequently produced in many European countries.<sup>58</sup>

The reason for which the British and American critics cited The Winslow Boy as having more than evanescent entertainment value is that it had a serious theme--even, indeed, a moral-political one. Rattigan's inspiration had been the famous Archer-Shee case of 1908. A young naval cadet had been accused of stealing a five shilling postal order and dismissed from the Service. His father, believing in the boy's innocence, ruined his own health and his family's financial security battling to secure his son's vindication. The case, which became a national cause

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<sup>53</sup>Theatre World, August 1947.

<sup>54</sup>New York Times, 1 April 1948.

<sup>55</sup>New York Times, 8 January 1949.

<sup>56</sup>Who's Who, 11th ed. (1952), p. 1835.

<sup>57</sup>LC Play Stats.

<sup>58</sup>Clippings in TRPS-"The Winslow Boy" cite productions in Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Germany and Italy between 1946 and 1953.

célèbre, was eventually fought out and won in the House of Lords.<sup>59</sup>

Rattigan wrote The Winslow Boy in four acts, and set it in the 1914-1918 period. In the first act, fourteen-year-old Ronnie Winslow, dismissed from the Royal Naval College for allegedly stealing a five pound postal order, comes home, protesting his innocence. At the end of the act his father, Arthur Winslow, begins his battle to have Ronnie vindicated by phoning the College. Act II takes place nine months later: Arthur's efforts to secure a fair trial for Ronnie have the Admiralty in an uproar, British citizens divided on the merits of his cause, and his own family in increasingly straitened circumstances. Arthur hopes to engage a brilliant, charismatic lawyer, Sir Robert Morton, to secure a trial for Ronnie via a Petition of Right (whereby a British citizen can sue the Crown for redress of a wrong, redress being granted as a matter of grace),<sup>60</sup> and to defend Ronnie at the trial. After a savage cross-examination of Ronnie in front of his family, Sir Robert pronounces him innocent and agrees to take the case.

Nine months more have passed in Act III, and still the Petition of Right has not been endorsed. Arthur and his family have suffered further losses and almost give up, but the decision is made to continue the struggle when the Petition is granted. In Act IV, some five months later, the Winslows reflect on their losses as the trial nears completion, and at last receive news of Ronnie's vindication.

The critics praised The Winslow Boy as a thesis play. The Times

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<sup>59</sup>T. C. Worsley, "Terence Rattigan and His Critics," London Magazine, 4 n.s. 6 (September 1964): 62.

<sup>60</sup>Rattigan, The Winslow Boy, Plays, 1:401. All references from this edition.

critic commented:

It is not often that a play professing to treat a cause célèbre succeeds in suggesting that the material which we are privileged to inspect at close quarters is stuff likely to excite a vast public interest. The case of the Winslow Boy has this special momentousness, a quality it owes not to its likeness in outline to the Archer-Shee case of 1908, but to the adroitness with which Mr. Rattigan has in a brilliant first act [in the production, the act-break came after Rattigan's Act II, which ends with Sir Robert's cross-examination of Ronnie] arranged the incidents, established the suitability of the characters to his purpose, and pointed the issues.

The issues, noted the critic, were private rights versus bureaucracy.<sup>61</sup>

". . . nobody is going to convince me that this is not Mr. Rattigan's tract for these particular times in defence of individual liberty," wrote Lionel Hale in the Daily Mail, declaring that Rattigan had made the story of the Archer-Shee case more inspiring than the original.<sup>62</sup> ". . . his most considerable play," judged J. C. Trewin in the Observer. "It is, in effect, a Petition of Right, a plea for the liberty of the individual: Mr. Rattigan has vigorously wedded doctrine and drama."<sup>63</sup> "Its moral (and this must be Mr. Rattigan's first play with a moral as opposed to a mere plot)," stated Paul Dehn in the Sunday Chronicle, "is that, even in the smallest matter of Right and Wrong, no sacrifice is too great provided that Right be done."<sup>64</sup>

In America, John Mason Brown concluded:

In a world where the importance of the individual has dwindled, where it is frankly menaced by bureaucratic encroachments, where the respect for what is expedient has alarmingly outdistanced the regard for what is right, and where in many countries there is not even a pretense to justice as we understand the word, the restatement in The Winslow Boy of the Archer-Shee case acquires a special significance.<sup>65</sup>

Brooks Atkinson commented that: "On the theme of a callous injustice done

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<sup>61</sup>24 May 1946.    <sup>62</sup>24 May 1946.    <sup>63</sup>26 May 1946.

<sup>64</sup>28 May 1946.    <sup>65</sup>p. 316.

to a small boy Mr. Rattigan has written a stunning first act."<sup>66</sup>

In their excitement over the fact that Rattigan had shown some ideological consciousness by dealing with the subjects of rights, justice, and liberty, most of the critics missed the broader theme of his play. Three issues are involved in the play's conflict: two are moral-political and one is psychological. Rattigan distinguishes between the principles of right and justice for which the battle over the Winslow boy is waged. The moral concept of right is represented by the words of the Petition: "Let Right Be Done." The moral concept of right is expressed politically in the concept of individual rights: the issue at stake in The Winslow Boy is the recognition by government of the individual's right of liberty versus the sacrifice of this right to the alleged public good. The political concept of justice rests upon the recognition of an accused individual's right to a jury trial and representation by counsel. The issue at stake with regard to justice in the play is the right to prove Ronnie Winslow's innocence or guilt through trial by jury.

The psychological issue in The Winslow Boy concerns the values the characters hold and what actions they are willing to take to support them. It is their concern for the issues of right and/or justice, or their lack of it, which motivates their choices. The psychological relationship of values to actions--not right and justice, which are simply the specific issues raised by the Winslow case--is Rattigan's fundamental concern in the play.

As early as his adolescent creation in "The Pure in Heart" of the

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<sup>66</sup>New York Times, 30 October 1947.

father who values his reputation for blameless integrity and is willing to act shamefully to preserve it, Rattigan showed an interest in the relationship of values to action and in expressing the relationship as that of characterization and plot in his plays. David Scott-Fowler in After the Dance and Pat in Flare Path represent early attempts to explore the relationship of values to action, but not until his creation of Michael in Love in Idleness was Rattigan successful in molding a plot from a value conflict which penetrated deeply into a character's soul. Without, at first, consciously intending to do so, this was what Rattigan accomplished with a group of characters in The Winslow Boy. Reflecting on his approach to playwrighting some months after the play opened, Rattigan wrote:

A play is born--for me, at any rate--in a character, in a background or setting, in a period or in a theme--never in a plot. I believe, at any rate, that in the process of a play's preliminary construction, during that long and difficult period of gestation before a line is put on paper, the plot is the last of the vital organs to take shape.

If the characters are correctly fashioned--by which I do not mean accurately representing living people, but correctly conceived in their relationship to each other--the play will grow out of them. A number of firmly and definitely imagined characters will act--must act--in a firm and definite way. This gives you your plot. If it doesn't, your characters are wrongly conceived.

Rattigan went on to say that "A plot, in fact, should come as a gift from the gods of drama, earned, it is true, by the laborious task of moulding character, background, and theme, but not casually picked up as 'an idea for a play,'" and to admit that he had only tried to break this rule once, with The Winslow Boy.<sup>67</sup> Producer-writer Anatole de Grunewald and director Anthony Asquith, with whom Rattigan had collaborated on several films,<sup>68</sup> asked him if he had an idea for a film about

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<sup>67</sup>"How I Write My Plays."

<sup>68</sup>A writer in the Tatler and Bystander, 29 December 1948, p. 407,

British justice. Rattigan recalled:

. . . it was 1946 and we were still making film with a kind of propaganda interest. I told de Grunewald about the Archer-Shee case, but when he read it up he said no, it was too dull.

I got very angry and said that if he didn't want to do the bloody thing as a film, I would do it as a play.<sup>69</sup>

"Fascinated and moved"<sup>70</sup> by the Archer-Shee case, Rattigan thought that he had the plot of his play already and that "I had, therefore to fashion characters who could, because they actually did, only behave in a certain way." He could not do it. Action had to develop from character rather than the reverse. "Once again, in fact, I found I could only write my play by allowing my own characters to make their own story."<sup>71</sup>

Rattigan retained many incidents from the Archer-Shee case, including the long fight to secure a trial for the boy, his examination at home by the barrister hired to defend him, and his having been out at the theatre (Rattigan makes it a film) when the Admiralty conceded the case in the House of Lords.<sup>72</sup> Within the real Archer-Shee family, however, the elder son was a Major, a Tory MP, and his father's strongest support through the case,<sup>73</sup> and the daughter was a staunch Tory.<sup>74</sup> In the Winslow family, the elder son is the feckless Dickie who believes Ronnie guilty, and his older sister Catherine is a socialist, a suffragette, and her

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credits Rattigan, de Grunewald and Asquith for being "responsible for a group of films which did much to make the British screen renaissance a reality." Rattigan's screenplays are listed in Appendix B.

<sup>69</sup>Bill Haggerty, Radio Times, 2 August 1973.

<sup>70</sup>Preface, 1:xvii. <sup>71</sup>"How I Write My Plays."

<sup>72</sup>Brown, p. 316.

<sup>73</sup>Alan Dent, News Chronicle, 25 May 1946.

<sup>74</sup>Mary Benedetta, "An Aperitif with Terence Rattigan."

father's great ally. The Archer-Shee's barrister was Sir Edward Carson, whose cross-examination of Oscar Wilde in the Queensbury case had ruined the playwright.<sup>75</sup> Harold Hobson states that Carson took the Archer-Shee case for political gain,<sup>76</sup> but Rattigan's Sir Robert Morton rejects the office of Lord Chief Justice to fight for Ronnie Winslow's vindication.

What effects did Rattigan's refashioning of the Archer-Shee case have on The Winslow Boy? With the real-life characters of the elder son and lawyer, any connection between their support of the case and any hopes either may have had of political gain from it would have cried out for exploration. An interesting and probably cynical play about political maneuvering under the guise of a struggle for right and justice might have resulted, and one British critic implied that this would have been the better play on the case: "In the hands of a more mature dramatist than Terence Rattigan the theme of The Winslow Boy . . . could have provided a Swiftian twist to man's incredible folly at all times." The critic complained that Rattigan had played it safe, and that his play emerged "less a cause célèbre than an attempt to shift a mountain the better to see a molehill."<sup>77</sup>

But the play this critic wished for could not be written by an author who had declared that he liked to pose a problem rather than comment on one, and who had explored, even in his first light comedies, not what divides people from one another as much as the areas where people from diverse backgrounds can reach out and touch on some common ground.

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<sup>75</sup>Everybody's Weekly, 8 June 1947.

<sup>76</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 17 March 1949.

<sup>77</sup>J. C., Cavalcade, 1 June 1946.

Rattigan posed the implicit problem of "what would you do in such a situation?" by dramatizing varied characters' responses to the case in The Winslow Boy. By making Catherine and Sir Robert political antagonists who chaff each other over their differences but unite in the Winslow battle, Rattigan created his meeting-ground. "No one party has a monopoly of concern for individual liberty. On that issue, all parties are united," says Sir Robert at the end of the play. "No. Not all parties. Only some people from all parties," answers Catherine. "We can only hope, then, that those some people will always prove enough people," Sir Robert concludes.

Within the so-called "molehill" of his characters, Rattigan created a microcosm of psychological portraits. His plot rises from an outside event--Ronnie's dismissal from the naval academy--which propels the characters into a prolonged crisis. Within the plot there are two kinds of conflict, external and internal. Rattigan dramatizes the external conflict without ever showing it, by focusing on its effect on his characters. It is as if Flare Path, which brought World War II into a hotel lounge, had been a dress-rehearsal for the battle which the Winslows wage from their living room. The conflict between the Winslows and the government takes place entirely offstage. Rattigan employs various devices to bring the battle onstage--newspaper stories and an interview, reports from members of the Winslow family and from outsiders--but his focus is always on the issues involved in the battle and on the characters' attitudes towards those issues. The most important conflict in The Winslow Boy is internal--within the characters over how far each is willing to go in support of the issues at stake.

The characters fall into two broad categories: those whose highest

values are principles, and those whose highest values are pragmatic. In the first category belong Arthur and Catherine Winslow and Sir Robert Morton. In the second are Grace, Dickie, and Ronnie Winslow; the family maid, Violet; their solicitor, Desmond Curry; Catherine's fiance, John, and a newspaper reporter, Miss Barnes. The three leading characters--Arthur, Catherine and Sir Robert--are in the course of the action faced with crucial choices, in which they must weigh their health, happiness, or career, on issues of principle. The remaining characters are seen in their reactions to the effects those choices have on their lives.

The principled/pragmatic contrast between the characters is revealed in the Winslows' first exchange of dialogue. As Ronnie hides outside, afraid to face his father, the rest of the family returns from church. The mother, Grace, complains that the family minister is inaudible, and Dickie agrees with her. Arthur defends the minister as a good man, and Grace asks, "But what's the use of being good if you're inaudible!" Catherine names the issue as a matter of principle: "A problem in ethics for you, Father."

Arthur and Catherine are spiritual allies, as are Grace and Dickie, from the beginning. Arthur is a man with a gruff exterior and an inner warmth. Ronnie is afraid of him, but when Arthur learns about the dismissal, he asks only whether Ronnie committed the theft. He accepts his son's word that he did not, and embarks upon a fight which he knows, from his doctor's and his wife's warnings, will cost him his life. His highest value is justice. "An injustice has been done. I am going to set it right, and there is no sacrifice in the world I am not prepared to make in order to do so."<sup>78</sup> Yet there is one sacrifice Arthur is not

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<sup>78</sup>Act 3.

willing to make--that of his daughter's happiness. When Arthur learns that John's father has threatened to stop his son's marriage to Catherine if he continues the case, he asks Sir Robert to drop it: "I have made many sacrifices for this case. Some of them I had no right to make, but I made them none the less. But there is a limit and I have reached it."<sup>79</sup>

Arthur believes that there is no sacrifice he is unwilling to make, while Catherine believes that her willingness to pursue the case stops at a definite point. Both learn that they are wrong. Catherine, deeply in love with John, tells Dickie that "If there's ever a clash between what I believe and what I feel, there's not much doubt about which will win,"<sup>80</sup> and means that she intends to marry John whatever the obstacles. When John makes it clear that his father's opposition, which includes a refusal to grant them an allowance they will need to live comfortably, will make their marriage impossible, she appears to accept his plea that she drop the case: "I love you, John, and I want to be your wife."

Yet when the news comes a moment later that the Petition of Right will be endorsed so that the case can come to trial, and Arthur leaves the decision to her, Catherine declares: "Do you need my instructions, Sir Robert? Aren't they already on the Petition? Doesn't it say: Let Right be done?" Her greatest value, she finds, is what she believes. She does not even know whether Ronnie is guilty or not:

His innocence or guilt aren't important to me. They are to my father. Not to me. I believe he didn't do it; but I may be wrong. . . . All that I care about is that people should know that a Government Department has ignored a fundamental human right and that it should be forced to acknowledge it. That's all that's important to me.<sup>81</sup>

Sir Robert seems to be what Catherine calls him behind his back--

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid.    <sup>80</sup>Act 2.    <sup>81</sup>Act 3.

"a hard, cold-blooded, supercilious, sneering fish." He seems more concerned with being on time for a dinner engagement than in cross-examining Ronnie, and takes care never to express his emotions. Catherine believes that he accepted the case for base motives: "First--publicity--you know-- look at me, the staunch defender of the little man--and then second--a nice popular stick to beat the Government with. Both very useful to an ambitious man."<sup>82</sup> When Catherine learns from Desmond that Sir Robert refused the highly prestigious office of Lord Chief Justice simply to pursue the Winslow case, she apologizes to Sir Robert for her doubts about his motives--another instance of her determination to do what she thinks is right. She has heard that the "cold fish" wept when the verdict was announced, and asks him why. Sir Robert's reply that it was because right had been done, her question, "Not justice?" and his answer:

No. Not justice. Right. It is easy to do justice--very hard to do right. Unfortunately, while the appeal of justice is intellectual, the appeal of right appears for some odd reason to induce tears in court.<sup>83</sup>

bind together the leitmotifs of justice and right in the play.

Arthur's espousal of justice, Catherine's of right, and Sir Robert's of both make them interdependent structurally as well as thematically. Arthur begins the case and hires Sir Robert, Catherine makes the decision to go to trial, and Sir Robert wins vindication. Each gives up certain values for others they consider more important. They do not even agree on what is most important. The theme of the play, embodied not in their slightly different ideals but in their actions, is a demonstration of the kind of human spirit (or psychology) which makes it possible for any righteous ideals to triumph in the world.

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid.      <sup>83</sup>Act 4.

Arthur, Catherine and Sir Robert act out of concern for principles. The rest of the characters, pragmatists all, are indifferent to those principles. Grace's highest values are "a happy home and peace and quiet and an ordinary respectable life, and some sort of future for us and our children." Her attitude toward the case is "it's all very exciting and important, I'm sure, but it doesn't bring back any of the things we've lost."<sup>84</sup> Though she becomes caught up in the trial: "You never saw such crowds in all your life. And such excitement! Cheers and applause and people being turned out. It's thrilling--you'll love it, Dickie," and spunkily bypasses the reporters clustered outside the Winslow home: "I always shout I'm the maid and don't know nothing," she is more concerned with what to wear to the trial than with its outcome.<sup>85</sup>

Dickie cares only for having a good time. He slights his Oxford studies, and when compelled by the family's dwindling finances to leave school and work in a bank, takes his boss to the races and jovially reports that the boss "had the time of his life and lost his shirt."<sup>86</sup> His estimate of the case is: "Well, I mean--looking at it from every angle and all that--it does seem rather a much ado about damn all. I mean to say--a mere matter of pinching." Dickie assumes that Ronnie is guilty in spite of his protestations of innocence:

My gosh, I could just about murder that little brother of mine. What's he have to go about pinching postal orders for? And why the hell does he have to get himself nabbed doing it? Silly little blighter!<sup>87</sup>

The character supposedly most concerned with the case is the least involved. Ronnie Winslow's greatest concern is his father's reaction to his dismissal; when Arthur believes his declaration of innocence, Ronnie

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<sup>84</sup>Act 3.    <sup>85</sup>Act 4.    <sup>86</sup>Ibid.    <sup>87</sup>Act 2.

virtually forgets about his ordeal. When he returns from his new school, happy and exuberant, to meet Sir Robert, he says "Oh, the case! Father, do you know the train had fourteen coaches!"<sup>88</sup> Ronnie is onstage throughout Act III, sleeping through Grace and Arthur's argument, Catherine and John's discussion, and Catherine's decision to continue the fight. Rattigan's stage direction that she looks "down at the sleeping Ronnie" rather than at John when she makes her choice, and Ronnie's absence at the movies when he is vindicated stress that the battle is not over an emotionally scarred boy but over principle.

The tone of John's character is given in one of his first lines, when he replies to Arthur's question of whether he smokes with "In moderation, of course."<sup>89</sup> John is a moderate in his tastes and in his emotions. Catherine states that she loves him more than he loves her,<sup>90</sup> and John's failure to understand her is revealed in his reaction to his father's ultimatum and her apparent acquiescence to it: "Darling! I was sure nothing so stupid and trivial [as the case] could possibly come between us."<sup>91</sup>

Desmond Curry, the family solicitor hopelessly in love with Catherine, expresses no opinion about the case, implying that it has no personal meaning to him. He brings Sir Robert into the case and serves the family faithfully; the impetus for his loyalty is expressed in his proposal to Catherine just before the verdict is brought in. Desmond is a pale man who seems emotionally to live in the past, when he was a cricket star. His willingness to marry Catherine knowing that she doesn't love him marks him as a character who has resigned himself to a half-life.

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid.    <sup>89</sup>Act 1.    <sup>90</sup>Ibid.    <sup>91</sup>Act 3.

Miss Barnes, the newspaper reporter who comes to interview Arthur about the case, is oblivious of its implications. Hers is a "human interest" angle of the most superficial sort. When Arthur states that "I shall continue to fight this monstrous injustice with every weapon and every means at my disposal," Miss Barnes' attention wanders and she exclaims: "Oh, what charming curtains! What are they made of?"<sup>92</sup>

The family maid Violet, half-servant and half honorary relation, who demands and gets a homecoming kiss from Ronnie in the first scene, is a bustling comic character. Arthur apologizes to John for her improprieties:

. . . I am afraid that, as parlourmaid, she has developed certain marked eccentricities in the performance of her duties, due, no doubt, to the fact that she has never fully known what those duties were.<sup>93</sup>

Her position in the household serves to heighten dramatic tension at the point where she brings in an extra glass for the toast to Catherine's engagement and Arthur assumes that she means it for herself. When she declares that it is for Ronnie, Arthur learns what the rest of his family already know and have been trying to keep from him--that Ronnie has come home in disgrace.

At the end of the play, Violet brings the news from court that the case has been won:

The cheering and the shouting and the carrying-on--you never heard anything like it in all your life . . . even the jury joined in . . . And then outside in the street it was just the same.

The fact that all of the characters, inside and outside the family, are oblivious of or indifferent to the issues involved in the case except for Arthur, Catherine and Sir Robert underscores the loneliness of their

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<sup>92</sup>Act 2.    <sup>93</sup>Act 1.

struggle. But Rattigan's use of the exuberant comic figure to herald the victory brings into the Winslow home the sense of celebration felt in the outside world, which has been inspired by the battle. And when Violet declares:

I don't mind telling you, sir, I wondered sometimes whether you and Miss Kate weren't just wasting your time carrying on the way you have. Still, you couldn't have felt that if you'd been there today--

she underlines the theme--had it been left to her or to Grace, Dickie, John, Desmond or Miss Barnes, there would have been no battle and no victory for right and justice.

Most of the critics did not judge the play by its psychological theme, however, but by its leitmotifs. Consequently, many evaluated Rattigan's plot from a marred perspective. Writing in the Tatler, Anthony Cookman declared that he had wanted to see what Rattigan would do with a big theme, and had thought, after the first half, that "Nothing could be better than all this." The family affairs underscored Rattigan's point of the importance of individual liberty, Cookman felt, but he was neither exactly satisfied with nor disappointed by Acts III and IV. "It is all very skillfully done, but the doing of it turns what might have been a big play into what will almost certainly be a highly successful one."<sup>94</sup> Variety's critic concluded:

The result is a great theme in a small play. The sacrifice of money, of social position and of the elder son and daughter's prospects seem a trifle in the scale. One wonders if Rattigan really delved into the terrific implications of the case.<sup>95</sup>

Neither critic defined what a "big" play would be in his estimation, but Joseph Wood Krutch implied that definition in the Nation:

Almost any American playwright who had chosen this subject would

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<sup>94</sup>January 1946, p. 294. <sup>95</sup>Ebet, 29 May 1946.

undoubtedly have attempted to make it "big." Whether he happened to be a Communist or liberal, he would have argued all his points with vociferous vigor and would have attempted to keep his audience wrought up to a high pitch of excitement by putting on stage all the climactic moments, including, certainly, the big scene of the parliamentary debate itself.<sup>96</sup>

Brooks Atkinson took a similar view:

As a matter of fact, he is writing about the ethical inviolability of civil rights. The American approach would be to make a resounding stump speech in defense of individual freedom under the law--a method as artificial as Mr. Rattigan's last-act puppetry. But with the decent reticence of an English writer, Mr. Rattigan chronicles the Winslow case purely in terms of the home-life of an English family.<sup>97</sup>

Rattigan himself stated about the play:

In *The Winslow Boy*, the drama of injustice and of a little man's dedication to setting things right seemed to have more pathos and validity just because it involved an inconsequential individual.<sup>98</sup>

But the critics divided over Rattigan's choice to confine the action within the Winslow home. "Against the family scene, sketched in with all this author's mastery of light and shade, the fight assumes a significance far greater than itself," commented the critic for Punch.<sup>99</sup> The World-Telegram's reviewer wrote:

The story is the personal one where homely values are distended or dissolved by the public exposure of this family's stakes. To preserve this intimate and deeply touching quality of the play's drama, Mr. Rattigan has had to employ as much exposition as the Greeks. But he has dramatized it with such skill, in vivid causes

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<sup>96</sup>15 November 1947, p. 538.

<sup>97</sup>New York Times, 9 November 1947, sec. 2, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup>Barry Hyams, Theater Arts, November 1956, p. 21.

<sup>99</sup>5 June 1946, p. 490. J. C. Trewin wrote in John O'London's Weekly, 14 June 1946: "Conventionally, the present play should have a final scene in court. But Rattigan, with a bravery rare in a Shaftsbury Avenue dramatist (this young man is not apt at follow-my-leader) keeps the action in the home." Stage's critic, 30 May, commented: "This was the artistically correct choice as well as the practically sensible one."

and effects, that one is never conscious of the recounting of an event.<sup>100</sup>

Criticizing Rattigan's choice, the Sunday Express critic declared: "They were very interesting events, but unfortunately in Mr. Rattigan's version practically none of them took place on the stage."<sup>101</sup> John Mason Brown commented:

. . . Mr. Rattigan is unwilling to follow his story into the courtroom, where it belongs. Instead, he continues to place it in the Winslow living room. This means that several of the characters begin to function as Greek messengers. They must not only tell us what is happening at the trial, when we would like to see and hear it for ourselves, but they are forced into improbable explanations of their own absence from it.<sup>102</sup>

The "improbable explanations" are that Catherine and Grace take turns going to the trial because Arthur, his health failing rapidly, cannot be left alone.

A fairly common bone of contention was the second half of the play. One British critic maintained that it "shows us the bad side of first-class commercial drama by bringing in a sub plot of love proposals and counter proposals which is rather more relevant to what the public wants than to the principal theme of the play."<sup>103</sup> Brooks Atkinson found:

But the second act of "The Winslow Boy" fritters away the genuine emotion of the theme with some shabby theatrical devices. . . . the standard retribution scenes as though he had been studying Pinero. This would not matter if the first act of "The Winslow Boy" did not have so much sweep and character. For it is disillusioning to discover that Mr. Rattigan is only a practicing playwright when the occasion calls for an artist.<sup>104</sup>

In a follow-up article to his initial review, Atkinson wrote:

He wins a kind of bogus sympathy for an ineffectual family

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<sup>100</sup>William Hawkins, 30 October 1947.

<sup>101</sup>28 May 1946. <sup>102</sup>P. 316.

<sup>103</sup>Time and Tide, 1 June 1946. <sup>104</sup>30 October.

attorney by introducing a gratuitous proposal scene which he forgets as soon as he has achieved his effect. In another standard scene he melodramatically breaks off the engagement of the daughter to an ambitious Army officer to establish in his play the social desolation of the Winslow family, who are engaged in an unpopular law cause.

Atkinson also accused Rattigan of arranging "showy theatrical scenes by cunningly leading the audience to expect bad news." Noting that Rattigan prepared the audience for a "guilty" verdict, Atkinson declared that: "After a while you begin to distrust Mr. Rattigan's sincerity. For he seems to be less interested in the moral values of a fine theme than in the effects he is able to devise in the theatre."<sup>105</sup>

The disappointment of some critics over the second half of the play is most understandable if it is viewed as a failure to judge the action by its theme. If the theme were a defense of individual liberty/rights/justice, the desire of some critics to see the issue formally expounded in court and their objections to Catherine's love problems are comprehensible. But if The Winslow Boy is about the kind of human spirit which makes it possible for any righteous ideals to triumph, then Rattigan's concentration on Grace's and John's opposition to the case, and Arthur's and Catherine's discoveries of the limits to which they will go, is essential.

Catherine's decision to continue the case at the cost of her marriage to John is the crisis of the play. "Let Right be done." With four words--Rattigan's characteristic use of minimal means for maximum effects --Catherine changes the lives of every character onstage. To some critics in 1947, her decision may not have seemed courageous because they dropped the context of the play's period and judged Catherine in the

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<sup>105</sup>g November.

light of their own era. But in 1918, a woman's options were very limited, as Rattigan makes perfectly clear when Catherine comments to Arthur that she is nearing thirty and hasn't the looks likely to attract suitors, or the accomplishments likely to gain her employment.<sup>106</sup>

Desmond's proposal scene accomplishes two purposes. It gives him an opportunity to tell Catherine of the sacrifice Sir Robert has made in the battle (and he is the only character who conceivably could know about the offer of the office of Lord Chief Justice). This not only changes Catherine's judgment of Sir Robert but also enlarges her understanding of the lonely struggle in which she has been engaged, and inspires her comment that some people of all parties are concerned with individual liberty. The proposal, which offers Catherine a comfortable, if unfulfilling future, also helps her eventually to realize that she has grown to a point where compromise is psychologically impossible for her.

Rattigan does prepare the audience for possible disaster in Act IV when Arthur and Catherine, anticipating a losing verdict in the trial, discuss their actions. Rather than evidence of Rattigan's insincerity and showy theatricality, the scene is a vivid demonstration of his devotion to probing psychological cause and effect. Arthur knows that he has given his life to their struggle, and Catherine feels that she has no future. She has just learned that John is being married and that her Suffragette Association cannot pay her a living wage:

The choice is quite simple. Either I marry Desmond and settle down into quite a comfortable and not really useless existence--or I go on for the rest of my life earning two pounds a week in the service of a hopeless cause.

Yet they still believe that they have done the right thing:

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<sup>106</sup>Act 4.

ARTHUR. Brute stubbornness--a selfish refusal to admit defeat. That's what your mother thinks have been our motives.

CATHERINE. Perhaps she's right. Perhaps that's all they've been.

ARTHUR. But perhaps brute stubbornness isn't such a bad quality in the face of injustice?

CATHERINE. Or in the face of tyranny. (Pause) If you could go back, Father, and choose again--would your choice be different?

ARTHUR. Perhaps.

CATHERINE. I don't think so.

ARTHUR. I don't think so, either.

CATHERINE. I still say we both knew what we were doing. And we were right to do it.

To say "I'm glad I did it" when one has won is infinitely easier than to reach the same conclusion when the battle seems lost. But by remaining true to their ideals, Arthur and Catherine win psychologically regardless of the verdict. The cause--their support of principle--leads to the effect--their victory in principle, and to have written the scene at any other point in the action, or to have excluded it, would have been untrue to the characters.

The scene is also a necessary step to the ending of the play. Catherine's realization that she is proud of her actions prepares her psychologically for her final decision to continue working for what she believes is right. After the victory has been announced, Sir Robert bids goodbye and asks her if he will see her in Parliament again one day. Her reply, "Yes, Sir Robert. One day. But not in the Gallery. Across the floor," gives the final meaning of her personal struggle, and her triumph. The implication of the line is that Catherine will not marry Desmond but will take even bolder action to further her ideals--she will seek membership in the Commons. She stands onstage at the end of the play with an uplifted spirit and a broadened vision, the rewards for the choices she has made, and an implicit inspiration to others who might act as she has. Rattigan thus carries the battle, and the victory, be-

yond the Winslow case, and makes his theme even stronger.

The only critic who seemed to appreciate what Rattigan was doing in Acts III and IV was Philip Hope-Wallace, who reflected that, after the play's first half, ". . . your not-so-clever-dramatist would be stumped." Neither Arthur nor Ronnie are tragic figures, Hope-Wallace noted, and "The long legal fight is not to be shown in dramatic terms, except through the eyes of someone else to whom it mattered deeply for reasons which we must see unfolded . . ." Catherine, he concluded, was Rattigan's real hero:

In Act II we are made to see the whole struggle personified in terms of her own unhappy love affairs and her wavering belief in a cause (in this case Woman's Suffrage). When vindication comes at last . . . it is not merely the triumph of a disembodied principle (so dull on the stage, vide pageants) or the final victory procession for a tired old man (the father's moment was when he backed his son's word), but an inspiration and a point of departure for an undecided woman.<sup>107</sup>

There was also much discussion of the final scene in Act II, in which Sir Robert, cross-examining Ronnie, seems to trap him in contradictions, accuses him of lying, reduces him to hysterics, and then calmly announces "The boy is plainly innocent. I accept the brief." Most critics agreed that the scene was theatrical: ". . . the best theatre stroke we have seen in London in a long time."<sup>108</sup> "At the premiere there seemed to be fully half a minute before the audience's responsive thunder."<sup>109</sup> ". . . likely to be used as a classic example in textbooks of the future."<sup>110</sup>

But there was disagreement over whether the theatricality was ex-

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<sup>107</sup>Time and Tide, 1 June 1946. Emphasis Hope-Wallace's. Hope-Wallace's review is not the same as the unsigned article cited previously.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid. <sup>109</sup>Trewin.

<sup>110</sup>Sewell Stokes, "Curiouser and Curiouser," Theatre Arts, 30 October 1946, p. 597.

cessive: "Mr. Rattigan cheapens it a trifle with the studied flamboyance of an impromptu cross-examination by a bombastic jurist."<sup>111</sup> "This is as dramatic as any actual court scene and its curtain is such that the two acts following it cannot help being something of an anti-climax."<sup>112</sup>

In the scene, the audience learns the full facts about the alleged theft and sees Sir Robert in action. His spectacular tactics are only reported for the rest of the play, but they are vividly real to the audience because they have seen them. One could hardly imagine a tame Desmond forcing the government to endorse a Petition of Right or to concede defeat --Sir Robert's must be a dynamic personality capable of throwing an opponent completely off balance. The cross-examination is highly theatrical (why should theatre not be, one wonders), but particularly so because the examination takes place not in the formal, depersonalized setting of a courtroom but in Ronnie's house, before all the Winslows, whose material and spiritual welfare depend on its outcome. If the critics had fully appreciated this aspect of the scene, they might have understood Rattigan's theme.

Though one critic commented that Rattigan handled his supposed theme "with as many unexpected twists as a volume of O'Henry short stories,"<sup>113</sup> few caught the relationship of Rattigan's plot to that of a thriller. The Winslow Boy is technically a domestic drama, but by posing questions from the moment the curtain rises: why is Ronnie upset? what will Arthur do when he finds out? will Sir Robert take the case? will the Petition be endorsed?--Rattigan makes the issue of "Will Right be

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<sup>111</sup>Atkinson, 30 October.      <sup>112</sup>Stokes.

<sup>113</sup>E. S. A., Advertiser's Weekly, 30 May 1946.

done?" as theatrical as any variant of Whodunnit. He does more than this, however, for he combines the mounting suspense of a thriller plot with serious moral concerns. In the reports of national interest in and eventual enthusiasm for the Winslow case, Rattigan shows how individual citizens' support of moral principles can affect the lives of countless peoples. Harold Clurman commented on this, though he restricted Rattigan's vision to a parable illustrating the specifically "English devotion to the rights of the individual" and "The English feeling" for the decency of every human being:

When the father, after his son's exoneration, cries out, "Thank God we beat them!" we sense that the playwright is referring to adversaries far more malevolent than those the characters in the play have been combatting. The effect is morally gratifying, as if one were witnessing a demonstration of national decency!<sup>114</sup>

A colleague of Clurman's noted:

It must be confessed that to American audiences the repressed pathos of the British stiff upper lip can sometimes be uncomfortable in the theatre. It is to Mr. Rattigan's credit that he makes it not only effective dramatically but gives it a completely credible air of gallantry. In the end you feel that the victory has really been a triumph for human rights.<sup>115</sup>

Even Brooks Atkinson, after two articles chastizing Rattigan for failing to live up to his supposed theme, conceded: "Well, that may be too severe an attitude to take toward a play which does succeed alternately in breaking your heart and in arousing your admiration for people of probity."<sup>116</sup>

Estimations of The Winslow Boy's over-all worth differed on both sides of the Atlantic, though the American critics were--by now characteristically--less impressed than the British. George Jean Nathan declared:

Mr. Rattigan's play is very far from falling into the category of

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<sup>114</sup>Lies Like Truth (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 173.

<sup>115</sup>Hawkins.   <sup>116</sup>9 November.

worst, it is, as has been said, fairly impressive showshop material; but if it was the best play of its English year, God save the English drama.<sup>117</sup>

Louis Kronenberger wrote of the play:

As a theater-piece, I found much of it interesting; as a theater production, I found more. But as anything beyond that, it struck me --as has everything I have ever seen of Mr. Rattigan's--as evidence of an incorrigibly trashy mind. . . . like Noel Coward, Mr. Rattigan often thinks he is being serious when he is only being sentimental; and his keenly developed sense of theater makes him unable to resist anything--relevant or irrelevant, high-pitched or low-pitched--that he suspects may get across. As a result, one takes what he has to offer for what it is worth in theatrical entertainment alone.<sup>118</sup>

In the Herald-Tribune, Howard Barnes disagreed:

With unerring craftsmanship, he has transmuted the records of that case into a challenging and memorable piece of theater which speaks a common and abiding language in its declaration of personal liberty. Since he has not forgotten his gift of wit, "The Winslow Boy" is uncommonly entertaining as well as moving.<sup>119</sup>

The European reviews of The Winslow Boy were mostly favorable, ranging from "pleasant but old-fashioned" in Denmark,<sup>120</sup> to a Swedish critic's:

There is no doubt that this gifted English dramatist will set the tone of the international theatre for some years to come. He has sought and found the tone of what the public wants to see and what questions it wants to have answered during an evening at the theatre. In "The Winslow Boy" he has taken up a series of questions which con-

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<sup>117</sup>Theater Book of the Year, 1947-48 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), pp. 121-23. In the New York News, 30 October 1947, John Chapman wrote: "'The Winslow Boy' is a frightfully genteel and more than faintly tedious account . . . and it is just about as exciting as a pillow fight."

<sup>118</sup>P.M., 31 October 1947.

<sup>119</sup>30 October 1947.

<sup>120</sup>Translated review from Jyllands-Posten (Denmark), 9 November 1947. A critic for Il Tempo di Milano (Italy), 9 June 1953, commented that "Terence Rattigan is not unworthy of his baptismal name." A German critic for Freies Volk, 29 October 1949, lamented Rattigan's lack of social criticism in favor of love interest. All foreign reviews in English translations and original languages in TRPS--"The Winslow Boy."

cern us all terribly closely the day after the hangings at Nuremberg.<sup>121</sup> This critic wrote that a case similar to the one Rattigan dramatized had occurred in Sweden, and a Viennese reviewer recounted a like case in Germany. The Viennese noted that in The Winslow Boy: "Psychology is not neglected, as it is in some moral, didactic and tendencious plays; it is of primary importance, for everything turns upon it."<sup>122</sup>

The play was a great success throughout West Germany in 1949-50, where it was presented by many different companies. At its Berlin opening there were forty-eight curtain calls. Newspapers in the various towns devoted a great deal of space to the Archer-Shee case and to the play, and the Russian papers tried to belittle it. "Anyhow," one London report of the German productions concluded, "the play has set a train of thought in motion and its author Terence Rattigan is one of the most discussed men in literary circles in Western Germany."<sup>123</sup> A Sunday Times article declared that the German critics judged the play as having a lesson for Germany in its story about the victory of a middle-class citizen who fights the authorities to see right done."<sup>124</sup>

Two British critics, writing about The Winslow Boy some time after

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<sup>121</sup>Eskilstuna Kurirer, 17 October 1946. This critic also commented: "Rattigan works with very small means, but means so right and truly human that his appeal is personal, warm, penetrating. He also has important things to say." The critic for Sarmlandsposten (Sweden), 17 October 1946, recalled seeing Love in Idleness too and wrote: ". . . Terence Rattigan is one of those people who can knock up a morally and intellectually rather shoddy comedy one day, and write a piece of really great drama the next. 'The Winslow Boy' is a really perfect play . . . ."

<sup>122</sup>Unnamed paper from Vienna, March 1948.

<sup>123</sup>Alfred Unger, "'The Winslow Boy' in Germany," Theatre World, 1 June 1950.

<sup>124</sup><sub>30</sub> October 1949.

its premiere, summarized its effect on Rattigan's career from different points of view. In 1949, Harold Hobson stated:

For Mr. Rattigan has done what the politicians failed to do: he has seen in the Archer-Shee case not a mere extra example of parliamentary political tactics, but the exposition of a profound principle [right]. What he has seen he expressed in theatrical terms so expert that the public and the critics have, without question, accepted as history what really, fundamentally, is drama. A playwright could hardly expect a more striking tribute to the power of his work.

Noting that The Winslow Boy marked the turning point in Rattigan's career, Hobson concluded: "He became, at a stroke, a man to be seriously reckoned with."<sup>125</sup>

T. C. Worsley, in a retrospective article on Rattigan written in 1964, also considered The Winslow Boy the first play which moved the critics to take Rattigan seriously, but suggested that they did so for the wrong reasons. The critics, Worsley wrote, were pleased with the play:

. . . on the grounds that it was about something. This demand that plays should be about something, and that if they aren't, they aren't considerable, crops up again and again in current dramatic criticism. Is Hedda Gabler about something in this sense, is The Duchess of Malfi? But The Winslow Boy was praised as being about the rights of the individual. Perhaps now, the argument ran, Rattigan would put away childish things and use his undoubted talent to write plays about something. In which case he would be worth taking seriously. Fortunately, he took no notice.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Christian Science Monitor.

<sup>126</sup>London Magazine, p. 162. Emphasis Worsley's.

## CHAPTER V

In his next three plays, Rattigan extended his range by fully developing a theme he had used as a leitmotif in earlier works, by attempting new themes, and by working in forms new to him. The Browning Version and Harlequinade are one-act plays which were presented together under the title Playbill, and Adventure Story is an historical epic.

Rattigan's interest in the one-act form stemmed from his judgment that economy is perhaps the greatest of all dramatic virtues, and that intermissions are the greatest enemy to economy because of their influence on the shaping of plays. Writing in the New York Times, Rattigan stressed the playwright's responsibility, with the aid of his actors, designers, and director, "to induce in his audience that 'willing suspension of disbelief' without which no play can be wholly appreciated." Intermission chit-chat disturbs the dramatic illusion, perhaps twice in a performance, he maintained, and it might take a playwright as long as ten minutes to create it again. He suggested a future for the development of plays sixty to eighty minutes in length,<sup>1</sup> a prophecy which was abundantly fulfilled in the Sixties.

Though Olivier had doubled as Oedipus and as Mr. Puff in The Critic in 1945,<sup>2</sup> and Noel Coward had in 1937 presented his triple bill Tonight

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<sup>1</sup>"Of Time and the Theatre," 9 October 1949.

<sup>2</sup>Yorkshire Post, 10 September 1948. TRPS-"Playbill."

at 8:30 at the Phoenix Theatre,<sup>3</sup> where Playbill opened 8 September 1948,<sup>4</sup> Rattigan's was the first attempt to present one-act plays in the West End since the war.<sup>5</sup> T. C. Worsley credits him as:

. . . the first to re-introduce this form successfully in the commercial theatre, and thus open a door the New Wave were glad to find open for them. And it is worth noting that at the time the one-acter seemed so impossible and demoted a form that the reigning management of the time (H. M. Tennant) who had produced his previous plays to their great profit and his, declined the chance of staging it, and it went, like his next double bill, to a more adventurous management.<sup>6</sup>

H. M. Tennant was not the only rejecter of Playbill. Rattigan had written The Browning Version and Harlequinade for John Gielgud. There are two versions of Gielgud's refusal to play them. Kenneth Tynan reports: "Rattigan cannot speak, without suffering, of the moment when Gielgud made it clear that he would never perform in The Browning Version and Harlequinade." According to Tynan, Gielgud told Rattigan: "I've done so much first-rate stuff. How will my public stomach the second-rate."<sup>7</sup>

Gielgud's biographer, Ronald Hayman, states that neither Gielgud nor Hugh Beaumont, the head of H. M. Tennant,

. . . were enthusiastic about Harlequinade, and they both thought the idea of a double bill was dangerous. During a walk in Central Park, John tactlessly said to Rattigan "I have to be very careful what I play now."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup>J. C. Trewin, Illustrated London News, n.d. TRPS-"Playbill."

<sup>4</sup>Plays, 2:4.

<sup>5</sup>Leonard Mosley, Daily Express, 9 September 1948.

<sup>6</sup>London Magazine, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup>Harper's Bazaar, November 1952, p. 185. Emphasis Tynan's.

<sup>8</sup>Ronald Hayman, John Gielgud (London: Heinemann, 1971), p. 160. Gielgud eventually played Crocker-Harris twice. Radio Times, 27 September

Although Gielgud had been announced as Playbill's star, Eric Portman took the leading role in each play, with such success that his acting career, which had become restricted to playing film villains, was revitalized.<sup>9</sup> Portman won the Ellen Terry Award in 1949 as Best Actor for Playbill, and Rattigan won for the plays.<sup>10</sup>

The protagonists in The Browning Version and Harlequinade are studies of two vastly different psychologies. As one London critic described them:

The evening is divided into two sharply contrasting halves. The first, a one-act play presenting a "Mr. Chips" in reverse--unloved, unlovable, so essentially pathetic that he touches tragedy; the second, the riotous, hilarious, satirical fantasia on the theatrical temperament during rehearsal and actually in the theatre.<sup>11</sup>

The Browning Version is an in-depth study of a psychological state which Rattigan had used as a leitmotif of characterization in several earlier plays. Teddy, Dusty, and Maudie in Flare Path, David and Joan in After the Dance, and Catherine and Sir Robert in The Winslow Boy are all, to some extent, emotionally repressed. They reveal their emotions with difficulty--sometimes indirectly, as Dusty and Maudie express their affection for each other to Teddy, Pat, Peter, and the Countess, and David and Joan confide their feelings to John; sometimes in a crisis, as Teddy's

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1957, lists a broadcast of The Browning Version, starring Gielgud and Angela Baddeley, and Hayman (pp. 205-06) describes Gielgud's American television debut as Crocker-Harris as "a triumph for John. Not a single review was hostile and many of them featured words like 'brilliant,' 'superb,' 'superlative,' 'impeccable,' and 'masterpiece.'" Both Hayman and Tynan also note that Rattigan wrote Sir Robert Morton in The Winslow Boy for Gielgud.

<sup>9</sup>Daily Record (Edinburgh), 10 August 1948.

<sup>10</sup>News Chronicle, 3 August 1949.

<sup>11</sup>G. R., Daily Mail, 9 September 1948.

breakdown and Sir Robert's tears in court; and sometimes when all seems lost and despair leaves them less guarded, as in Catherine's Third Act scene with Arthur. Turning his full attention to the subject of emotional repression in The Browning Version, Rattigan used each of these revelatory techniques to draw the character of Andrew Crocker-Harris, an anguished man so aloofly out of touch with his despair that he emerges as a Giacometti figure in a tailored suit.

Rattigan's theme is the tragedy of emotional repression. It is the most original theme he ever created, and a difficult one to dramatize. Without the use of soliloquy, or of a narrator or *raisonneur* figure to offer explicit explanations, Rattigan made the causes and effects of repression intelligible and dramatic in a classically severe plot. In little over an hour, the accumulated tensions of a lifetime press upon his protagonist, bring him to self-knowledge, and impel him to action.

Andrew Crocker-Harris is a Greek master being forced to retire from his position at a prestigious public school to a less taxing post at a crammer's school for backward boys because of ill health. Once a brilliant and idealistic scholar, he has become a desiccated pedant. He learns from the attitude and actions of the Headmaster that his colleagues hold him in contempt and that the students he once hoped to inspire dislike and fear him. Crocker-Harris's shallow, promiscuous wife Millie taunts him as a failure and hopes to leave him for her current lover.

A parting gift--the Robert Browning version of The Agamemnon--from one student who genuinely likes him brings back to Crocker-Harris the emotional meaning of his vocation, and he breaks down and sobs un-

controllably. Millie viciously undercuts the value of the gift by casting doubt on the student's motive, an action which so revolts her lover that he breaks with her and contritely offers his friendship to Crocker-Harris. The possibility of Crocker-Harris's spiritual rebirth is indicated as he hesitantly accepts the offer of friendship, initiates a break with Millie, and asserts himself to the Headmaster.

Structurally, The Browning Version falls into two sections. In the first, Rattigan dramatizes Crocker-Harris's emotional state. In the opening scene, a young student, Taplow, tells Millie's lover, a young science master named Frank Hunter, that Crocker-Harris is frightening because he has no feelings:

He's all shriveled up inside like a nut and he seems to hate people to like him. . . . The funny thing is that in spite of everything, I do rather like him. I can't help it. And sometimes I think he sees it and that seems to shrivel him up even more.<sup>12</sup>

Crocker-Harris justifies Taplow's observation about his lack of feelings when he appears, for he seems equally impervious both to Millie's insults and to Hunter's attempts to be friendly and sympathetic. When the Headmaster asks him to cede his place as final speaker at the school prize-giving ceremony the next day so that a popular athletics master can speak last, and shatters his hopes for a badly-needed retirement pension by announcing that the school governors will not award it--even though they made an exception for another early retiree who had coached the school to a cricket victory--Crocker-Harris agrees to speak early and registers no protest to the governors' decision. Faced with a future of financial hardship, burdened with a hostile wife, and slighted by his colleagues, Crocker-Harris treats his situation as if it had no emotional

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<sup>12</sup>Rattigan, The Browning Version, Plays, 2:9. All references from this edition.

meaning to him. The contrast between the bleakness of the facts confronting him and the flatness of his reaction to them exposes a deeply repressed personality.

In the second half of the play, Rattigan explores the causes of Crocker-Harris's emotional state, and the means of his reawakening. When he began his career, Crocker-Harris was, as the Headmaster recalls, "perhaps the most brilliant classical scholar we have ever had at the school." In his only emotional display in the drama's first half, Crocker-Harris is touched as he gives a makeup lesson to Taplow by the boy's show of enthusiasm for The Agamemnon. He tells Taplow that he had, while still in school, written his own translation of the play, and speaks freely of his emotional involvement in the project: ". . . I derived great joy from it. The play had so excited and moved me that I wished to communicate, however imperfectly, some of that emotion to others." Crocker-Harris is recalled to the present, and to his withdrawn state, by his recollection that the translation is lost: ". . . like so many other things. Lost for good."

After the Headmaster's visit, Crocker-Harris receives the young master who will replace him. The master asks his advice about handling his future students and, meaning to compliment Crocker-Harris, relates that: "The Headmaster said you ruled them with a rod of iron. He called you the Himmler of the lower fifth." The news that his students fear him strikes Crocker-Harris as no other blow has, and wrings from him a confession of the steps by which he betrayed and repressed his greatest values.

Crocker-Harris's goal as he began his career was "to communicate to the boys some of my own joy in the great literature of the past."

Though he failed with most students, he treasured the times that he succeeded, for "a single success can atone, and more than atone, for all the failures in the world." But, in the early years of his career, he allowed himself to be intimidated by his belief that "I didn't possess the knack of making myself liked." Though he consciously considered popularity not a quality of great importance to a schoolmaster, he surrendered to his uneasiness with the students and searched for a substitute for popularity. He deliberately accentuated certain mannerisms which made his students laugh at him, and encouraged their laughter by playing up to it. He rationalized his lowering of himself to his students with "you can teach more things by laughter than by earnestness."

When Crocker-Harris replaced his serious approach to his subject and vocation with an attempt to teach by making light of them, he substituted an apology for his greatest values for his dedication to them. As his teaching effectiveness deteriorated, he lost touch with both the source of his vocation--his desire to communicate his love of great literature--and with its object--the students he wished to inspire. Eventually he became aware that his students no longer even laughed at but positively disliked him. More perceptive than he, they sensed that he had "a sickness of the soul." Now faced with the revelation that his students fear him, he predicts that "the Himmler of the lower fifth" will become his epitaph.

Taplow's gift of the book, which follows the scene of Crocker-Harris's confession, is a bridge between the schoolmaster's present, past and future. It offers him evidence of that "single success" which he had ceased consciously to hope for. The reminder that such success is possible, and that he had never stopped longing for it, breaks him

as his recognition of failure had not.

Millie's attempt to destroy Crocker-Harris's joy in the gift by suggesting that it is a bribe meant to placate Crocker-Harris, lest he fail Taplow if told that Millie caught him imitating Crocker-Harris in the first scene, is intended as a death blow to her husband, but becomes another bridge to his emotional release. Hunter's revulsion at her action awakens his fundamental sense of decency, as he breaks with her and advises Crocker-Harris to do the same. His advice prompts Crocker-Harris to reveal the second cause of his withdrawn state: his sense that he had wronged Millie by marrying her and expecting her to respond to his spiritual qualities while proving unable to satisfy her purely physical needs, and his consequent acquiescence to her private and public humiliation of him as she flaunted her affairs--including the one with Hunter--to his face. As he tried vainly to make light of his teaching vocation, Crocker-Harris attempts to make a joke of the bitter hatred which has become his only bond with Millie: "Merely the problem of an unsatisfied wife and a henpecked husband . . . It is usually, I believe, a subject for farce."

Rattigan significantly saves the exploration of Crocker-Harris's marital unhappiness until late in the play, after he has probed his career failure. Crocker-Harris's love of literature and of teaching are partially redeemable values; his marriage is not. In Crocker-Harris's hesitant acceptance of Hunter's offer of friendship, and in his subsequent break with Millie and his reclaiming of his right to speak last at the school ceremony from the Headmaster, the possibility of his spiritual rebirth is indicated.

In the plot, characterization, and theme of The Winslow Boy, Rattigan stressed the relationship of values to action. In The Browning Version,

he emphasized the relationship of values to emotions. It is by losing touch with his values that Crocker-Harris becomes so unfeeling as to appear inhuman; it is by regaining touch with those values that he is revitalized. The ending of the play is not, like that of The Winslow Boy, triumphant in tone, but muted and grave. The depth of Crocker-Harris's tragedy is stressed--he has barely begun to de-repress, and he will never regain all that he has lost. But he is spiritually alive again, and has a chance to achieve some measure of fulfillment--how great a chance Rattigan leaves to his audience to decide.<sup>13</sup>

It is characteristic of Rattigan's approach to playwriting that he would dramatize the tragedy of emotional repression without ever mentioning the word "repression." His approach is not that of a detached, clinical analyst but of an involved and sympathetic participant in human life. He disclosed that he had put a great deal of himself into The Browning Version:

To a great extent, Taplow is myself when young at Harrow. I must have been thirteen when I read The Agamemnon and it became the first play I ever loved; certainly it was this play that gave me the urge to become a dramatist.

Like all schoolboys I was inarticulate when it came to expressing my thanks to the master who taught me Greek, and in a way, this play seeks to repay him for all he did for me.

Rattigan added that his Harrow Greek master was no Crocker-Harris, "but it is true to say that there is a Crocker-Harris in most schools--a man devoted to the subject he teaches and without interest in anything else."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Except for the Times (9 September 1948) critic, who commented that Crocker-Harris still had Aeschylus while Millie had nothing, the London reviewers agreed that Crocker-Harris's future was bleak. In Land og Folk (Copenhagen), 9 August 1949, Rattigan commented that Crocker-Harris had no hope left, inside or outside of his marriage. Translation of Danish interview in TRPS-"Personals."

<sup>14</sup>TV Times, 13 June 1958.

Rattigan's sympathy for Crocker-Harris is evidenced in an incident he described to an interviewer. Rattigan's manservant came into his study while he was writing The Browning Version, and asked him what was wrong. Rattigan was not, until that moment, conscious of the fact that tears were streaming down his face.<sup>15</sup>

Rattigan did not comment publicly on how much of himself he put into The Browning Version's companion piece, Harlequinade, a farce about a theatrical troupe led by a renowned married couple, Arthur and Edna Gosport. Critics on both sides of the Atlantic assumed that the couple was modeled on the Lunts,<sup>16</sup> and Gielgud's biographer added that "Rattigan also drew on his memories of John as the director of the 1932 OUDS production of Romeo and Juliet, and if he had appeared as the aging actor who plays Romeo, John would have been able to introduce some amusing self-parody."<sup>17</sup> It is certain that Rattigan had a laugh at himself in the play, in the character of a young walk-on who is given a line in Romeo and Juliet and practices it with every possible inflection. The line was the one that Rattigan himself had never gotten right in the OUDS production: "Faith, we may put up our pipes and begone."

Personal references notwithstanding, the important clue to Rattigan's design in Harlequinade is found in the article he wrote about his methods of work at the time of The Winslow Boy. After discussing drama, and disclosing how he had found in The Winslow Boy that he had first to

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<sup>15</sup>John Cruesemann, "The Way I Work," Daily Express, 8 March 1960.

<sup>16</sup>Beverley Baxter, Evening Standard, 10 September 1948; Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 19 September 1948; Ward Morehouse, New York Sun, 13 October 1949; Edward Southern Hipp, Newark Evening News, 16 October 1949; Hobe Morrison, Variety, 19 October 1949.

<sup>17</sup>Hayman, p. 160.

create his own characters and then let them tell the story, even if it departed in places from historical fact, Rattigan raised the issue of farce. Disagreeing with the assumption that, in farce, plot is all and character nothing, he commented:

I believe in the farce of character--a contradiction in terms, most purist-minded theatre critics would say, but wrongly, as I think.

Plot, in farce, is necessarily so extravagant that it is usually believed impossible for the author to introduce even the elements of characterisation without destroying the illusion and killing laughter. But if the plot, however extreme, is, at the very beginning, rooted in character, it is possible, with a little forcing, to mould the plot into the most extravagant and farcical shape without exciting the audience's disbelief.<sup>18</sup>

The plot of Harlequinade involves the complications which interrupt a dress-rehearsal of Romeo and Juliet at a provincial theatre--a stop on the company's upcoming European tour. Principle among these are the arrival of a young local couple who introduce themselves as Arthur Gosport's daughter and son-in-law and bring him his baby grandson. Their appearance confronts Arthur with the news that, because he never bothered to divorce the wife he married as a juvenile when playing the town years before--and promptly forgot after deserting her--his marriage to Edna is bigamous. The stage manager's "civilian" fiancée arrives with a demand that he give up the theatre to marry her; the local theatre manager and a policeman make untimely appearances, and all are caught up in the flurry of the rehearsal, cast defections and replacements, tryouts for a new production, and with the panic which develops from the revelation of Arthur's bigamy and its possible implications for the company's future.

The importance of Harlequinade among Rattigan's works is that it shows how extravagant he can be when he chooses--fifteen characters and

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<sup>18</sup>"How I Write My Plays."

a plot with myriad threads in a one-act play--without losing sight of human psychology. His focus is on the theatrical mentality, embodied in the Gosports and described by the stage manager:

. . . the Gosports are eternal. They're the theatre at its worst and at its best. They're true theatre, because they're entirely self-centered, entirely exhibitionist, and entirely dotty, and because they make no compromise whatever with the outside world.<sup>19</sup>

The single-mindedness of the theatrical mentality is illustrated particularly through Arthur. Nothing outside of the theatre has much reality to him. Trying to remember when he played a town before, he declares, "Yes, I can tell you exactly. It was the year Gladys Cooper opened in The Sign of the Door." That the year was also that of the general strike seems to have made little impression on him. When he sees the baby who turns out to be his grandson in a carriage offstage, Arthur grumbles that its presence might cause "a very nasty accident. Somebody might easily trip over it and ruin their exit." His reaction to the news that he might go to prison for life as a bigamist is "The Arts Council will fix that. Now don't let's waste any more time. We've got to get to work."

Arthur's single-mindedness is shared by his wife and their colleagues, from the walk-on who practices his line to death to his Aunt, Dame Maud, a renowned Juliet of her day now playing the Nurse, who assumes that the bigamy crisis is a plot against the company initiated by the Old Vic. Rattigan freshens his tale of theatrical life with some satire--topical in 1949 and in 1977--on theatre with a social purpose, which is described as:

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<sup>19</sup>Rattigan, Harlequinade, Plays, 2:73. All references from this edition.

. . . playing Shakespeare to audiences who'd rather go to the films; while audiences who'd rather go to Shakespeare are driven to the films because they haven't got Shakespeare to go to.

and criticized:

Theatre with a social purpose, indeed! It's a contradiction in terms. Good citizenship and good theatre don't go together. They never have and they never will. All through the ages, from Burbage downwards, the theatre--the true theatre--has consisted of blind, anti-social, self-sufficient, certifiable Gosports.

Rattigan also has a laugh at modern verse plays: the Gosports are readying one about Death, called "Follow the Leviathan to My Father's Grave," in which Arthur plays a pencil-sharpener. Throughout Harlequinade, Rattigan shows his ability to keep his tongue firmly in his cheek, without sticking it out nastily at anybody. In his Foreward, written to the Gosport's imaginary producer, Mr. Wilmot, he declares this intention clearly: "You and I both know, dear Mr. Wilmot--who better?--that if the correct definition of farce is 'the theatrical presentation of unlikely events' then this play belies its label."<sup>20</sup>

Though The Browning Version and Harlequinade can stand on their own, separately, their coupling in Playbill represents a purposeful artistic design. Characteristic of Rattigan, the design is predominantly psychological. It encompasses studies of vastly different types of human beings--the severely repressed and the flamboyantly theatrical--embodied in plots ingeniously similar enough in construction to highlight the contrast between the personalities. In both, errors from the past press upon the protagonists. Crocker-Harris faces his errors with anguished dignity, accepting responsibility for having made them and for changing the course of his future life. Arthur Gosport treats the exposure of

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

his errors as an irritating distraction from the much more important business of getting on with the show. In both the drama and the farce, the audience has an opportunity of knowing these men intimately, and in the two combined of experiencing a gamut of emotions from tears to laughter.

The London critics' reception of Playbill was one of almost universal praise for both plays, for stars Eric Portman and Mary Ellis (who played Millie Crocker-Harris and Edna Gosport), and for director Peter Glenville. Among the plaudits, Rattigan was commended for his psychological insight: "In both plays the acute, perceptive talent of Mr. Rattigan pierces to the very essence of his characters. In both one is looking at the workings of real human souls,"<sup>21</sup> and for his venture into the one-act form. J. C. Trewin stated that the one-act is the most difficult stage length and a trial of a dramatist's strength, for a playwright might be too wordy in an effort to stretch curtain-raiser material or might try desperately to telescope full-length material into one act. He noted that:

Rattigan has avoided all snares. He stops "The Browning Version" at the point when it would have been unutterably painful to have gone farther, and when we know that every shred is peeled from the tragic lives of husband and wife. The second play, a hubble-bubble farce, has been watched with a similar nicety. A few minutes more and laughter would have dried.<sup>22</sup>

Though Trewin wrote at some length about Harlequinade and placed it among the classic plays about the theatre, comparing it favorably with The Rehearsal, The Critic, and Trelawny of the "Wells",<sup>22</sup> most attention was given in the reviews to The Browning Version, which was generally

<sup>21</sup>G. R., Daily Mail.      <sup>22</sup>Illustrated London News.

<sup>23</sup>John O'London's Weekly, 1 October 1949, p. 460.

recognized as "a psychological study of great strength and poignance."<sup>24</sup> Rattigan's steady progress as a playwright was commended in such comments as T. C. Worsley's:

There is not much need at this point to praise Mr. Rattigan's skill; that we now take for granted. Up till now it has been mainly used with an easy command over the surfaces. The Winslow Boy went one layer deeper (the father was a character with a convincing background). In The Browning Version, Mr. Rattigan digs down several layers. . . . There is a long progress in quality from the gay frivolity of French without Tears to The Browning Version, and Mr. Rattigan will plainly go much further yet.<sup>25</sup>

The most significant commentary, in terms of an appreciation of Rattigan's distinctive qualities as a playwright, came from Harold Hobson, who wrote at length about Rattigan's style:

As one listens wearily night after night to the banal, clipped, naturalistic dialogue of the modern drama, one's heart cries out for writing of courage and colour, for the evocative word and the bantered phrase. But Mr. Rattigan makes one doubt the necessity of that cry.

In "The Browning Version" there is not a single sentence that in itself would raise the emotional level of a railway time-table. There is hardly a word that would be out of place in giving an order for a pound of vegetables.

Yet, Hobson found, Rattigan's craftsmanship and the quality of his feeling for Crocker-Harris were so fine,

. . . that when Mr. Portman asks the solitary schoolboy who had thought fit to give him a parting gift to pour out a dose of medicine, the audience cannot restrain its tears; when his wife cruelly remarks that the gift was merely a piece of astute policy, an audible thrill of horror runs through it; and when at the end Mr. Portman utters into the telephone these apparently quite unexciting words,

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<sup>24</sup>Peter Fleming, Spectator, 17 September 1948, p. 366. Sharing this view were T. C. Worsley, New Statesman and Nation, 18 September 1948; Geoffrey Tarran, Morning Advertiser, 13 September; Punch, 29 September; G. R., and Trewin (London Illustrated News). The Times, 9 September, dissented: "But in spite of sudden breath-taking brutalities, the piece is curiously not of the theatre. One finds oneself pouring over it, when one should be carried along."

<sup>25</sup>New Statesman.

"I am of the opinion that occasionally an anti-climax can be surprisingly effective," its heart responds as to the sound of a trumpet. It is not, Mr. Rattigan reminds us, the intrinsic quality of the words that matter, but the amount and nature of the emotion they can be made to convey.<sup>26</sup>

Hobson and W. A. Darlington tried to smooth Playbill's way across the Atlantic as they wrote of its merits for American papers. In the New York Times, Darlington tried to explain the gulf between British and American estimations of Rattigan's work, and suggested that while Americans viewed Rattigan as a lightweight:

Our Mr. Rattigan is a much more impressive figure than that. To begin with, we found "French without Tears" very funny indeed, and all the funnier because it relied for its effect on character drawing. And, to continue, his record of success over here is not merely impressive--it is phenomenal.

Rattigan's success with the difficult theme in The Browning Version was the result, Darlington commented, of:

. . . not only the superb craftsmanship which is the secret of his monotonous success in the lighter pieces but also that sure grasp of character which has been seen before in "After the Dance," in parts of "Flare Path," and in "The Winslow Boy."<sup>27</sup>

As on previous occasions, most of the American critics persisted in viewing Rattigan as, at best, a competent craftsman. Playbill, directed by Peter Glenville and starring Maurice Evans and Edna Best, opened at the Coronet Theatre in New York 12 October 1949,<sup>28</sup> to very mixed reviews. Comments varied from the opinion that the two plays "compliment each other superbly and provide balance as well as variety"<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Sunday Times.

<sup>27</sup>10 October 1948. Hobson wrote about Playbill in the Christian Science Monitor, 2 October 1948.

<sup>28</sup>Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, 13 October 1949.

<sup>29</sup>Thomas R. Dash, Women's Wear Daily, 13 October 1949. Concurring was Robert Coleman, Daily Mirror, 13 October.

to "As playwriting, it is not too far from double bilge."<sup>30</sup> Most of the New York critics dismissed Harlequinade as a mere trifle,<sup>31</sup> though several found merit in The Browning Version and one even called it "A three-dimensional exposure of the bitterest frustration . . . a masterpiece."<sup>32</sup> The issue of Rattigan's craftsmanship was raised by several critics, among them Brooks Atkinson. While crediting Rattigan for having created Crocker-Harris with skill and dignity, Atkinson mused:

Is it a fine character portrait or only superior hack work? This column is choosing the less worthy side of the argument. Although Mr. Rattigan's broken schoolmaster is a pathetic spectacle, he is in point of fact a crochety, inferior old man without much to recommend him except his helplessness. . . . to this column "The Browning Version" seems clever rather than genuine--Pinero watered down for modern taste.<sup>33</sup>

In judging The Browning Version, several American critics confused its setting with its subject and theme. This confusion caused them to view the play not as a psychological study but as a characteristically British tale about British school-life, not very original and not very meaningful to a non-British audience.<sup>34</sup> This was the most significant

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<sup>30</sup>Time, 24 October 1949, p. 58. Similar views from John Chapman, Daily News and Robert Garland, Journal-American, 13 October; and from George Jean Nathan, Journal-American, 17 October.

<sup>31</sup>Wolcott Gibbs, New Yorker, 24 October 1949, p. 60; John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, 15 October; Hobe Morrison, Variety, 19 October; John Mason Brown, Saturday Review, 5 November, pp. 26-7.

<sup>32</sup>Garland. Agreeing were Brown and Howard Barnes, Herald-Tribune, 13 October 1949.

<sup>33</sup>13 October. Also citing Rattigan for hack work were Nathan; Gibbs; and Eric Bentley, In Search of Theater (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 41.

<sup>34</sup>Atkinson; Chapman; Nathan; William Hawkins, World-Telegram, 13 October; Harold Clurman, New Republic, 7 November 1949, p. 21. Richard Watts, Post, 13 October credited Rattigan with bringing "so much freshness and individuality" to the Mr. Chips type of character.

aspect of the American criticism of The Browning Version, for it provoked some debate about the reasons for the divergent receptions of British and American plays on each other's shores. Brooks Atkinson wrote:

Some English critics have dismissed Willy Loman in "Death of a Salesman" as pure sentimentality, although most of us look on him as a tragic figure. There is no accounting for this difference in attitudes, but it certainly exists, for to me Mr. Rattigan's schoolmaster is pure sentimentality and I cannot grieve over his misfortune.<sup>35</sup>

Of the contrast between Playbill's prizewinning British and tepid American receptions, Life magazine commented:

To professional playgoers this is just another current example of the perennial differences in national taste. Right now many English critics, having just seen the London productions of A Streetcar Named Desire and Death of a Salesman, think that these prize-winning plays are not so wonderful either.<sup>36</sup>

A thoughtful essay on this issue came from Rattigan himself in a New York Times article titled "Sea Change Problem." Addressing himself to the question of why plays of character face greater hazards on exportation from their native countries than plays of ideas, he suggested that:

. . . plays of character, be they Russian, American, English or French, really demand a contribution from an audience which, when that audience is foreign and unversed in the customs, idiom and idiosyncrasies of the dramatist's native country, cannot readily be given. The portrait, however meticulously drawn, becomes blurred and coarsened and emerges often merely as a type, confused in the audience's mind with a hundred other such Russians or Americans, or Englishmen or Frenchmen, all very like each other and totally unlike anyone else.

Unable to perceive the clear outlines of a character portrait, Rattigan mused, an audience was likely to focus on an unfamiliar background

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<sup>35</sup>New York Times, 16 October 1949.

<sup>36</sup>31 October 1949, p. 93.

and to accord it much more importance than an author intended. Praising A Streetcar Named Desire for "the roundness and the extraordinary theatricality" of Williams's portrait of Blanche du Bois, Rattigan noted that the play had been described by several British critics as a picture of tenement life in New Orleans, a reaction similar in principle to The Browning Version's designation in America as a play about English public school life.<sup>37</sup>

The difference in critical and in audience tastes was reflected in Playbill's runs: on Broadway it lasted only 62 performances,<sup>38</sup> while in London there were 245 performances.<sup>39</sup> The two plays, sometimes produced separately and sometimes together, apparently fared well in European translations. A Copenhagen critic called The Browning Version "a modern version of 'The Dance of Death'" and Harlequinade "tremendously funny and to my mind far superior to the rather threadbare and strained Noel Coward comedies of recent years. With Rattigan the characters are more natural, there is a human friendliness about them."<sup>40</sup> A German

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<sup>37</sup>New York Times, n.d., LC File.

<sup>38</sup>LC Play Stats. In an attempt to improve the presentation, Rattigan succumbed to pressure and reversed the running order of the plays. Beverley Baxter had first advised him to do so in the London reviews, "for tragedy uplifts the spirit, whereas laughter often leaves a void." Rattigan had resisted the shift, reasoning "In the first place . . . farce is more difficult than serious drama and might not go over until the audience is warmed up. Also after Harlequinade, the audience might not take The Browning Version seriously." When the order was changed successfully, Rattigan conceded that "The latecomers no longer disturb the mood of The Browning Version, the comedy does not hurt as a curtain-raiser, and it proved the value of theory in the theatre--it is of no value at all." The first Rattigan quotation is from Variety, 26 October 1949; the second from the New York Times, 6 November 1949.

<sup>39</sup>The Stage Yearbook (London: Carson & Comerford, 1950), p. 155.

<sup>40</sup>O'Harris, Berlingske Tidende (Copenhagen), 12 October 1949. Review of Playbill production at the Fredericksborg Theatre. Translation in TRPS-"Playbill."

reviewer described The Browning Version as a psychological study in the Strindbergian manner, so closely constructed as to stand as a text-book example, and concluded:

The Browning Version, at all events, testifies--contrary to the better knowledge of English critics--that its author . . . is a born dramatist with a highly developed sense for what lies smouldering under the surface, far removed from the society play sprung from the boulevard genre with which, as is well known, Rattigan toyed until, with The Winslow Boy and Adventure Story, he convinced the critics of the double nature of his talent, the two compartments in his workshop.<sup>41</sup>

Having utilized the one-act form for studies of two divergent personalities, Rattigan extended his range still further with his next play. In Adventure Story, he attempted his first portrait of a larger-than-life character and employed the form of an historical epic. The play covers the life of Alexander the Great from his ascension to power in Greece at the age of twenty, through his world conquests, to his death at thirty-two.

The subject of Alexander having fired Rattigan's imagination,<sup>42</sup> he researched the historical material, found many conflicting stories, and decided to rely on Plutarch's account of Alexander's life.<sup>43</sup> Though most of Adventure Story's events come from Plutarch, Rattigan tried, as in The Winslow Boy, to create characters who would illuminate those

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<sup>41</sup>Wolfgang Schwerbrock, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 24 December 1954. Review of Playbill at the Rossmarkt in Frankfurt. Translation in TRPS-"Playbill." John Mason Brown and Philip Hope-Wallace, Time and Tide, 18 September 1948, compared Millie Crocker-Harris to a Strindberg heroine.

<sup>42</sup>"Rattigan Touches Wood," Everybody's, 7 November 1953.

<sup>43</sup>Ruth Jordan, "Another Adventure Story," Woman's Journal, August 1949; pp. 31-33.

historical events in terms of their psychological causes and effects.

He described Adventure Story as:

. . . a drama of action and character, the story of an adventure unsurpassed in history, and a study of the strange, brilliant, many-sided character who performed it. Now in drama, as I believe, action should rise out of character, not character out of action, so although little is known by historians of Alexander the man but much of what he did, the purpose of the play is nevertheless to explain the deeds by the man, and not the man by the deeds. I have tried to discover what was in Alexander's heart that drove him on in his tempestuous, ruthless, invincible march . . . .<sup>44</sup>

The Winslow Boy had been a story involving considerable existential loss and eventual spiritual triumph; Adventure Story reversed this pattern. Rattigan commented:

It is a story both of success and of failure, of material conquest and of spiritual defeat. "Absolute power corrupts absolutely" said Lord Acton, and the story of Alexander does not belie this universally-held belief. Yet the corruption of power is not the theme of Adventure Story. For even absolute power can only corrupt the corruptible and Alexander's tragedy was that he set out to conquer the world before he had first succeeded in conquering himself. "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" That, I hope, is the story the play tells.<sup>45</sup>

Rattigan told Alexander's story in twelve scenes, including an Epilogue and Prologue. In the Prologue, Alexander lies dying. As his mourning soldiers file by his deathbed in a last salute, and his generals implore him to name his successor, he speaks an inner monologue heard only by the audience. "Where did it first go wrong?" he asks despairingly.<sup>46</sup> This question sets the focus for the play as a psychological drama; since Alexander has succeeded in becoming Master of the World, the wrong he questions must be spiritual. The five scenes of Act I dramatize his rise to power; the five scenes of Act II his descent into

<sup>44</sup>Radio Times, 29 April 1949, p. 5.   <sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Rattigan, Adventure Story, Plays, 2:107. All references from this edition.

despotism, and the Epilogue his evaluation of his adventure: "Who is to be the Master of the World? Who shall I condemn to death? . . . No one. This will be my last act of mercy."

The strengths of Adventure Story, both on its own independent merits and as evidence of Rattigan's continuing growth as a dramatist, are considerable. The epic scope of the play emphasizes Rattigan's narrative power. He condensed twelve years of world conquest into twelve scenes with a clear, clean progression, with no need for interruptions by a narrator and no padding. Every scene advances the plot, illuminates the characters of Alexander, his followers and/or his opponents, and explores the thematic motifs.

In Scene 2 of Act I, for example, Rattigan introduces the Persian Emperor Darius, his family, and his general Bessus. The action moves forward as Darius and Bessus discuss Alexander's victories to date and their plans to meet him in battle should he break through the Cilician Gates, a pass considered to be impregnable. They regard Alexander not as a dangerous enemy but as a dashing "lunatic schoolboy," and though they are astonished when news arrives that Alexander has forced through the Gates, Darius concludes: ". . . I'm looking forward to meeting this young man."

Darius and his family are depicted as urbane, warmly affectionate people desirous of peace. There has been no serious fighting in his empire for over two centuries, Darius declares, and he goes to battle reluctantly, stating that he will not kill Alexander if he captures him but will make him a friend. The portrait of family life which Rattigan draws provides contrast to Alexander's depiction of his own turbulent family relations. The loving relationship which Alexander establishes

with Darius's family when they become his captives, and the many questions he asks the Queen Mother about the family stress his need to understand and to overcome his conviction that he must prove himself through conquest to his dead father, who despised him as a weakling.

Alexander's failure to examine his need to prove himself to a dead man is part of a broader thematic motif indicated in Scene 2 when the characters discuss Alexander's solution to the problem of the Gordian knot. According to legend, the person who could untie the knot would rule the world. Coming upon the knot in his early conquests, Alexander did not pause to think about how to untie it, but simply severed it with his sword. The symbol of the knot is used again in Act II, and contributes to the portrayal of Alexander as a man of action rather than of thought.

The scope of Adventure Story also stresses Rattigan's stylistic ability to combine intimacy of tone and flamboyant theatricality, an ability most evident in his earlier work in Sir Robert's cross-examination of Ronnie in The Winslow Boy. Intimacy of tone prevailed in The Browning Version, flamboyance in Harlequinade; in Adventure Story Rattigan combines both elements inventively.

The play evokes the sweep of world conquest without a single battle scene. Offstage sounds--women screaming and men laughing as the Greeks sack the Persian camp in Scene 3 of Act I, and dry statistics in the dialogue--sixty to seventy thousand Persian dead--bespeak the carnage of conquest. The bloodshed which continues even after conquest, in the name of solidifying Alexander's gains, is invoked in mentions of spies, torture and executions, and of plans to put down rebellion both in Alexander's conquered provinces and among his own men.

The struggle for conquest and consolidation is captured in the play's spectacle, an element Rattigan employs with relish: "Hitherto, I have written plays with six characters and one drawing-room set. I have never written anything with such satisfaction as the stage direction to the second scene, 'The Hanging Gardens of Babylon,'"<sup>47</sup> but with restraint. The luxurious appointments of Darius's tent, seized by Alexander, disappear and reappear as Alexander fluctuates between accepting and rejecting symbols of power. The pageantry in sets and costumes is purposeful: when Alexander first dons Persian dress he offends a militantly Macedonian follower, provoking dissension which eventually leads to the follower's death.

There is no use of physical action as an end in itself in Adventure Story. The lives of millions are directly affected by the battles, but the play consists mainly of conversations between two or three characters. The reported toll of tens of thousands of lives is background to the psychological disintegration of Alexander as he takes those lives. This is dramatized in scenes of vivid contrasts. In Scene 5 of Act I, for instance, Alexander courageously gambles his own life on his judgment of the bond of affection between himself and the Queen Mother of Persia. He finishes a drink that she brings him, though he has been warned that she has poisoned it, and learns that she only pretended to agree to poison him in order to prevent a Persian spy from recruiting another assassin. In Scene 2 of Act II, Alexander cynically gambles with someone else's life. His captive mistress Roxana is the daughter of a rebelling chieftain. He can execute her to punish her father, or he can marry her to

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<sup>47</sup>Harold Hobson, Christian Science Monitor, 29 January 1949.

win the chieftain's allegiance. Alexander has the unwitting Roxana determine her own fate by choosing between a dagger--representing death-- and a ring--representing marriage--hidden in his hands.<sup>48</sup>

In the last scene of Act One, Alexander, on the eve of his final battle with Darius, refuses to steal a victory by attacking in the night, cautions his friends Philotas and Cleitus not to take unnecessary risks with their lives, denies his general Parmenion's request that he protect Alexander by disguising himself as him in the battle, and sends home a young soldier he judges too sensitive for combat. He sleeps peacefully on the battle eve, watched over by his closest friend Hephaestion and by the Queen Mother, whose son he will try to kill.

In Scene 4 of Act II, on his wedding eve, Alexander calmly announces the execution of Philotas for voicing ill opinions of him and the murder of his loyal general Parmenion (because he was Philotas's father and Alexander feared his possible rebellion over Philotas's execution). Enraged by Cleitus's refusal to abase himself in the Persian manner and by his taunt that Alexander's father would be ashamed of him, Alexander kills him. Overcome by remorse, he tries to kill himself and is knocked unconscious by Hephaestion. By creating such contrasts-- Alexander's two gambles and his behavior on the eve of significant events in his conquest and consolidation of empire, Rattigan maintains a firm control over an enormous amount of material.

Rattigan had set out to create a drama of action and of character

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<sup>48</sup>Rattigan took the poisoned drink sequence from Plutarch, substituting the Queen Mother for Alexander's physician, the alleged traitor in Plutarch. The Roxana gamble is Rattigan's invention. Plutarch, Lives of the Noble Greeks, ed. Edmund Fuller (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1959), pp. 269-349.

in Adventure Story. On the level of the adventure story itself, the play is very successful. On the level of character, it is flawed. In an effort to draw a rounded portrait of Alexander, Rattigan included so many views of his character that the total picture is blurred and confusing.

Alexander is characterized as a charming, idealistic, adventurous young man who turns into a despot. Why did Alexander want to conquer the world, the play asks, and what was there in the nature of his ambition, and in the nature of Alexander himself, which spelled inevitable destruction for him, for most of the people he valued, and for countless peoples across the path of his conquests?

There are several thematic motifs in Rattigan's answer to these questions. Principal among them is Alexander's need to know himself. The image of Alexander as a man of action rather than of thought is colorfully captured in Alexander's entrance. Refused an interview with the Pythia, high priestess of Delphi, he climbs up the sacred statue of Apollo and leaps over a balcony into her private chamber. His conversation with the Pythia, full of battle plans and of insufficiently thought-out reasons for initiating them, prompts her to warn him: "Before any others, there is one conquest you must make first. . . . Yourself."

Alexander's severance of the Gordian knot is a symbol of his action-oriented psychology. At the end of the first scene in Act II, as he gazes at Darius's dead body lying in a cart similar to that which held the knot, Alexander recalls that he had not really solved that puzzle. "How can one solve a puzzle with a sword" he asks, but persistently refuses to recognize that a mental problem cannot be solved through physical action.

What a man is--is nothing. What a man does is everything. I don't

know--and don't care--what I am--or what I do to myself with my thoughts and deeds. I do know--and do care--what I've done . . . . 49

Alexander cries as he grows more and more despotic. He repeats his cry to the Queen Mother, whose reply: "But what you do makes you what you are,"<sup>50</sup> is a fulfillment of this motif, naming the issue that Alexander has fallen a victim to his refusal to think.

The psychological destruction which Alexander brings on himself, and the devastation he wreaks all about him, are depicted as the results of his failure to think about the nature of what he is doing and his reasons for doing it. The nature of his plan for world conquest is, in Alexander's view, the pursuit of a noble ideal. He tells the Pythia that he wishes to establish a world state and universal peace. But the manner in which he holds his ideal makes it a death sentence.

Alexander defines his world state as one in which all foreigners will "have the same rights as the Greeks, but will have to submit to being ruled by a Greek instead of a Persian." A state established and maintained through the submission rather than the consent of the governed is a dictatorship. The establishment and maintenance of universal peace through the initiation of force is a contradiction in terms. Alexander sees neither the evil of the first, nor the impossibility of the second of his goals. By placing himself in their service, he embraces an irreconcilable conflict and delivers himself--and the world--to its consequences.

The evil nature of Alexander's ideal is never identified in the dialogue. Instead, in the penultimate scene of the play, Alexander asks

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<sup>49</sup>Act 2, sc. 2. Emphasis Rattigan's.

<sup>50</sup>Act 2, sc. 5.

Hephaestion if his ideal isn't a worthy vision, and Hephaestion supports him. Perhaps Rattigan did not recognize the evil.<sup>51</sup> Or perhaps he was being true to the historical fact that, in Alexander's time, wars of conquest and states which people today would regard as dictatorships were accepted as the rule, and Alexander's hope to establish a "benevolent" dictatorship would have been regarded by his contemporaries as an idealistic eccentricity.<sup>52</sup> The Pythia indicates this view by agreeing with Alexander's goals, and by saying that she doesn't think him mad, only very young. Yet, confusingly, she subsequently asks "Why must you do this madness, Alexander?" Alexander admits that his former tutor, Aristotle, who believes in the ideal of the world state, does not approve of his plan to put it into practice, but does not say why. The issue raised

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<sup>51</sup>Although this impression is plausible based upon a reading of the play, Rattigan stated in an interview with me in New York, 5 December 1974: "Of course I didn't think it was a noble ideal, but I think I was worried that--it was very close to '45 wasn't it, and with the memories of the bunker in everybody's mind I didn't want to go on very much about it. I think I fucked it in some way. I'd like to read it again just to tell you what I was thinking of at the time. I was afraid of the obvious cliché, you know--all conquerors are necessarily dictators, which I don't think is necessarily true, but it seems to have proved true up to now, hasn't it? I suppose I was trying to say that it depends on who has the ideal. I think what I meant is that if Alexander failed, then everyone would. It would seem to me to make the most sense, because Alexander was a very special person. A world ruled by force of arms, and by one man--that is where the ideal must crash. Although he was taught by Aristotle and worshiped the Athenian democracy, the fact remained that he still had to be the Persian tyrant, didn't he?"

<sup>52</sup>Mary Renault, in The Nature of Alexander (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), p. 99, states: "It is as foolish to apply anachronistic moral standards to this [Alexander's war of conquest] as it would be to condemn Hippocrates for not teaching aseptic surgery. In the long evolution of human thought (so generally in advance of human conduct) the notion that war was wrong had not yet entered the world. . . . Aristotle warmly supported wars of Hellenizing conquest so long as 'barbarians' were not treated as men. A century later, a handful of Stoics began to question war's morality, but were little heeded."

is not, like that of the relationship between action and thought, explicitly resolved. The irreconcilability of Alexander's ideal with practical reality is, however, clearly dramatized in the action, and the raising of that issue in the first scene gives the action a strong sense of dramatic inevitability.

The third important thematic motif in Adventure Story deals with Alexander's failure to understand his personal motivation for pursuing his vision. He tells the Pythia that he must conquer the world in order to fulfill a boast he made to his father, Phillip, who humiliated him publicly, even though Phillip is dead. Alexander's sense of rejection by his father drives him in many ways. He uses his memory of Phillip's accusation that he was a "weak, effeminate coward" to replace his fear with anger before the final battle with Darius,<sup>53</sup> and his moment of triumph, when he dons Darius's mantle, to beg that his father's spirit see him and burn with envy.<sup>54</sup> Alexander's need, thwarted in childhood and adolescence, to receive and to give affection and approval inspires his relationships with his spiritual father, Cleitus, with the Queen Mother, and with his followers, to whom he gives generous praise and rewards. This aspect of Alexander is particularly important as the weight of power settles upon him and the need to be obeyed overwhelms the need for close human relationships. Alexander kills his spiritual father, has Philotas executed and Parmenion murdered, and mistreats Hephaestion and the Queen Mother.

Alexander's inclination to be generous is stressed in his dying words. He refuses to name a successor, to condemn him to the spiritual

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<sup>53</sup>Act 2, sc. 5.    <sup>54</sup>Act 1, sc. 3.

death he acknowledges in himself. "This will be my last act of mercy," he says. But the tragedy is that he can't be merciful. His next line is: "Let them fight it out for themselves." Whether he names a successor or not, his followers will be battling for power and the carnage will continue because of the nature of his legacy. The two motifs--Alexander's need for affection and approval and the impossibility of working out such needs in any context of force--are united in Alexander's dying words.

Had Rattigan attempted only this much in Alexander's characterization, the clarity of his portrait and of his narrative line might have been closely matched. But Rattigan raises several other issues. In his conversation with the Pythia, Alexander brings up the question of his possible divinity. He does so again after his first victory over Darius, and in his second-act confrontation with Philotas. Also in the Pythia scene, Alexander states that some people think him mad, and in five other scenes he either wonders if he is mad or is branded mad by others. A third issue, raised by Bessus in the first act and by the Queen Mother in the second, is the theory that there is a devil in Alexander which will destroy him. None of these issues--god, madman, or devil--is really explored. They are sprinkled through various scenes, and left hanging.

The three principle motifs in Alexander's characterization are weighty enough without the additional burden of the three minor ones, which confuse rather than clarify Rattigan's view of Alexander. The result is that Rattigan's impressive achievement in taking a form new to himself and investing it with great narrative vitality and an intimacy of tone unusual in an epic is marred by his failure to maintain control over the various motifs he tried to weave into Alexander's characterization. In its plot and its characterization of Alexander, Adventure Story

is somewhat like a broad canvas with a general design painted in the lucid style of Vermeer, and an Impressionistic central figure.

Adventure Story, directed by Peter Glenville, opened at the St. James Theatre 17 March 1949,<sup>55</sup> and ran for one hundred and eight performances.<sup>56</sup> Paul Scofield, then twenty-six, achieved West End stardom with his performance of Alexander.<sup>57</sup>

Most of the London critics commended Rattigan for his attempt to grapple with the exceptionally difficult subject of Alexander--an attempt eschewed by Shakespeare and Shaw--but agreed that the play was flawed.

Ivor Brown wrote:

I cannot find myself altogether believing in his Alexander, shadowed o'er with the pale cast of Freud and always aching to lay his head on mother's knee. But I liked the gallantry of the whole attempt . . . .<sup>58</sup>

J. C. Trewin commented:

It is, in fact, a sincere and courageous play. Not a major study of character, but at least a strongly dramatic play of incident, reported in honest theatrical terms. . . . as a combination of portrait play and historical panorama the piece has ample life and ability.<sup>59</sup>

Critical objections to Adventure Story fell into four categories, two of which reveal little about the play but much about some critics' insistence on judging a play by standards irrelevant to the play itself. A few reviewers objected that the play bore too much relationship to Nazi-inspired subjects. "It must analyze the motives of a dictator and

<sup>55</sup>Plays, 1:104.

<sup>56</sup>The Stage Yearbook (1950), p. 156.

<sup>57</sup>Cecil Wilson, Daily Mail, 18 March 1949.

<sup>58</sup>Observer, 20 March 1949.

<sup>59</sup>London Illustrated News, 4 April 1949, p. 488.

the stage has lately had a great deal of such analysis. . . ."60 "It might have been subtitled 'Blitzkrieg B. C.' This Alexander . . . storms and squirms, bullies and weeps, combines the cruelty of a monster with the tenderness of a child, and does almost everything else Hitlerian but bite his Persian carpets."61 Harold Hobson, however, commented:

The theme that underlies the murders, poisons and intrigues as well as the lovely interludes of affection and friendship, of Mr. Rattigan's play comes far nearer to our own distresses than any mere tale about a phenomenally successful conqueror. Across the gulf of twenty-two hundred years it breathes a message that is as poetically beautiful as it is politically sad.<sup>62</sup>

Other reviews criticized Rattigan for not being Marlowe, Shakespeare, or Shaw: ". . . the stern fact remains that Shakespeare did this kind of thing much better."<sup>63</sup> The prevailing criticism in this area was of Rattigan's dialogue. Representative of this attitude was Alan Dent's:

But what very plain prose to be sure. . . it seems to me idle to pretend that the general level of Mr. Rattigan's dialogue is high enough for the dignity of the subject. Nor is it witty enough for the opportunities that this theme of world-aggrandizement affords.<sup>64</sup>

Such critics lamented the lack of "big" speeches, over-reacted to a few-- and only a few--jarring colloquialisms like Parmenion's comment that Philotas has been "cheeking" Alexander,<sup>65</sup> and ignored Rattigan's masterful use of the implicit. When Alexander takes the supposedly poisoned drink from the Queen Mother, he hands the spy's confession of her alleged

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<sup>60</sup>Times, 18 March 1949.      <sup>61</sup>Wilson.

<sup>62</sup>Sunday Times, 20 March 1949.

<sup>63</sup>Beverley Baxter, Evening Standard, 18 March 1949.

<sup>64</sup>News Chronicle, 18 March 1949. Also criticizing Rattigan's dialogue were Baxter; Trewin; and J. P. H., Spectator, 25 March 1949, p. 394.

<sup>65</sup>Act 2, sc. 3.

treason to her to read. As she reads, he drinks. When Alexander makes Roxana choose life or death, the audience knows that she does not understand a word of Greek and is unaware of the risk she takes--she giggles delightedly at what she thinks is a game. In both scenes, the suspense of the gamble and its meaning to the characters are captured without a word.

Anthony Cookman defended the play's virtues and criticized its flaws on its own terms. He scorned the arguments that Rattigan should not have tackled a subject Shakespeare rejected, and in prose, as nonsense. Rattigan hadn't Shaw's verbal wit or political range, he conceded, but was witty enough, could make "urgent drama" out of political necessities, and--even more than Shaw--could "invest history with a sense of warm, human values." Cookman's criticism of Adventure Story, shared by several of his colleagues, was that while Rattigan's exposition of simple facts was masterly, his explanation of those facts in terms of his central idea was incomplete.<sup>66</sup>

The fourth type of general criticism of the play was of its construction, and consisted of arguments over whether the drama became more or less exciting in the second act.<sup>67</sup> Especially commended were Alexander's scenes with the Queen Mother<sup>68</sup> and the play's theatricality:

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<sup>66</sup>Tatler and Bystander, 30 March 1949, p. 424. Concurring were Brown and T. C. Worsley, New Statesman and Nation, 20 March 1949, p. 942.

<sup>67</sup>Brown; Cookman; Times; Wilson; and W. A. Darlington, Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, 18 March 1949, all decreed that the action went downhill in the second act. Paul Boyle in the Daily Graphic and Daily Sketch, 18 March, found the second act superior to the first.

<sup>68</sup>Hobson, Times, and Trewin in the Lady (n.d., TRPS-"Adventure Story").

Adventure Story is intensely theatrical--in the full, rich, old-fashioned sense of that now degraded word. Watching the succession of luxurious, Pollock-like scenes which follow each other with a satisfying rapidity, you recapture some of the excitement the theatre gave you as a child.<sup>69</sup>

Adventure Story was never presented on Broadway, though there were rumors of a Theater Guild production to star either Marlon Brando or Montgomery Clift.<sup>70</sup> It was, however, highly successful in Germany, where The Winslow Boy was being revived only two years after its initial production. On its premiere in Oldenburg, Adventure Story was reviewed throughout Germany as a great play which would live on,<sup>71</sup> and other German productions were scheduled. One Oldenburg critic wrote that the drama "confirms Rattigan's rank as the legitimate successor of Bernard Shaw in the realm of the English theatre."<sup>72</sup>

Of the significance of Adventure Story to his career, Rattigan later said that it taught him his limitations. "It taught me that it is not enough to have a great heroic theme."<sup>73</sup> But he was obviously attracted to larger-than-life figures, and would draw them again in Ross, Man and Boy, and A Bequest to the Nation. The portrait which some critics, from the 1930s to the 70s, have insisted on painting of Rattigan

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<sup>69</sup>J. P. H., Spectator.

<sup>70</sup>Hobe Morrison, Variety, 26 October 1949.

<sup>71</sup>Alfred Unger, Theatre World, October 1952, p. 16.

<sup>72</sup>Nordwest-Zeitung Oldenburg, 21 January 1952. Translation in TRPS-"Adventure Story."

<sup>73</sup>Everybody's. In a Sunday Times interview with Philip Oakes, 1 February 1976, Rattigan commented: "Actors and writers both have their testing times. For actors it's daring to play the big classical roles. They have to take that chance if they want to be really judged. For me the test was to write Adventure Story . . . And now I'm bound to acknowledge that it didn't work. I wasn't ready." Rattigan added that he would like to rewrite the play.

as the lightweight farceur and boulevard dramatist had ceased being an accurate one as early as the flawed but ambitious After the Dance. With his excursions into new forms in Playbill and Adventure Story he continued to extend his range, and merited J. C. Trewin's accolade: "Rattigan's own adventure story, his refusal to be 'typed' as a dramatist, should have the welcome its courage warrants."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Trewin, Illustrated London News.

## CHAPTER VI

Rattigan had opened his New York Times "Sea Change Problem" article by stating that he believed that the best plays are about people and not about things. Since his purpose was to examine why plays of character faced greater hazards than plays of ideas in foreign production, he did not argue the reasons for his judgment, noting:

. . . I've no wish to enter the lists against the proponents of "sociological" drama, and of theatre of "contemporary significance," because, for one thing, experience has taught me that in that field they fight very naughtily . . . .<sup>1</sup>

Within a year, however, Rattigan changed his mind about entering the lists, and sent an article "Concerning the Play of Ideas," to the New Statesman and Nation. The response was immediate and vehement--in subsequent weeks Rattigan was answered, and largely attacked, by James Bridie, Benn Levy, Peter Ustinov, Sean O'Casey, Ted Willis, Christopher Fry, and George Bernard Shaw,<sup>2</sup> and the controversy was reported in the

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<sup>1</sup>LC File.

<sup>2</sup>The Play of Ideas correspondence appeared in the New Statesman and Nation, in the following order:

Rattigan, 4 March, 1950, pp. 241-42.  
James Bridie, 11 March, pp. 270-71.  
Benn W. Levy, 25 March, p. 338.  
Peter Ustinov, 1 April, p. 367.  
Sean O'Casey, 8 April, pp. 397-98.  
Ted Willis, 15 April, pp. 426-27.  
Christopher Fry, 22 April, p. 458.  
George Bernard Shaw, 6 May, pp. 510-11.  
Rattigan, 13 May, pp. 545-46.

British and foreign press.<sup>3</sup>

The Play of Ideas correspondence would, by itself, make an interesting subject for a book. Though none of the contributors defined their terms clearly, their debate reflects creative and critical trends in twentieth century drama. As a controversy, it has historical parallels in, for example, the seventeenth and eighteenth century conflicts between the Neo-Classicalists and the Romantics, and a subsequent parallel in the 1958 debate on theatre and anti-theatre between Kenneth Tynan and Eugene Ionesco in the Observer.<sup>4</sup>

In their essays, there is material for exploration of each playwright's comments in relation to his own work and to that of his colleagues. A small but amusing example of this is Bridie's assertion that "We are on the point of removing into the era of Christopher Fry . . ." followed by Willis's comment that:

I have sufficient faith in the theatre to hope that Fry marks rather the end of an era than the opening of a new one. Certainly I see no progress in any attempt, no matter how talented, to find new ways to express old trivialities,

and Fry's retort: ". . . we should be careful not to call trivial whatever is alien to our own corner of thought."

A detailed analysis of the Play of Ideas controversy and its ramifications is, however, beyond the scope of this work. Important to an

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<sup>3</sup>The controversy, with positive and negative comments on the various contributions and evident enjoyment of Shaw's polemics, was reported in Die Presse (Vienna), 21 May 1950, and National-tidende (Copenhagen), 22 May 1950. Translations in TRPS-"French without Tears (1949), Final Test, Play of Ideas." Brooks Atkinson discussed the "Play of Ideas," along with Rattigan's prefaces to the first two volumes of his collected works, in the New York Times, 29 August 1953.

<sup>4</sup>Discussed by Martin Esslin in The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), pp. 79-84.

understanding of the controversy's significance in Rattigan's career are some knowledge of the major points he raised and of the nature of the response to them, and an understanding of the effect that the controversy had on Rattigan's critical standing.

Rattigan, opening by repeating the statement in his New York Times article that he believed that the best plays were about people and not about things, attacked the cult of critics and theorists who, beginning with Shaw in the Saturday Review in 1895, had elevated the play of ideas to a position of superiority over nonideological dramas. The followers of this cult were, he judged, both misguided and old-fashioned. They were misguided first because they seemed to hold that ideology equaled intellect, a tenet Rattigan disputed. And second, he maintained that they had misread their original source of inspiration, Ibsen, who was more interested in his characters and less in his ideas than were his followers and critics.

Rattigan held that the Play of Ideas cult was old-fashioned because it had resulted in fifty years of stagnant critical theory. The cultists, ignoring the fact that the history of artistic endeavor is the history of change, had so settled into their own pet theories that they were still, in 1950, encouraging dramatists to write like late Ibsen or early Shaw, and were refusing to take nonideological dramatists seriously. Many of Shaw's followers, less honest and logical than he, had even, Rattigan scoffed, insisted on reinterpreting such dramatists as Shakespeare, Congreve, Sheridan, Wilde, and Chekhov so that their plays could have ideological significance:

Othello has become a plea for racial equality, Macbeth a disposition on absolutism . . . . Tchekov was a precursor of the Russian revolution and The Cherry Orchard simply drips with contemporaneity.

By the ideologists' view, the nonideological playwrights were left with no ancestor but Pinero:

. . . whose name is, anyway, only used as a term of reproach. . . . So complete, in fact, has been the Shavian-Ibsenite victory that in 1950 any defence of the theatre they defeated is considered to be no more than a naughty heretical joke. Daily, we playwrights are exhorted to adopt themes of urgent topicality, and not a voice is raised in our defence if we refuse.

Yet, Rattigan noted, the nonideological theatre had continued to exist, and he asked whether this was not because the theatre which deals with people and stories instead of with ideas and theories isn't immortal:

From Aeschylus to Tennessee Williams the only theatre that has ever mattered is the theatre of character and narrative. . . . I don't think that ideas per se, social, political or moral, have a very important place in the theatre. They definitely take third place to character and narrative, anyway.

Rattigan concluded with the statement that the trouble with the contemporary theatre was not that so few writers refused to look the facts of the present world in the face, but that so many refused to look at anything else.

Rattigan's essay was an extension of and logical development from the one he had written for the New York Times in 1937, in which he had defended so-called British escapist drama and nondidactic entertainment. And it obviously was a defense of his own approach to playwriting, set forth in his 1947 article "How I Write My Plays," in which he described his method of letting his plays grow out of his characters. In his "Play of Ideas" essay, however, Rattigan undercut the effectiveness of the pertinent issues he raised through a lack of clarity. First, he failed to make it clear that he was not maintaining that any play could be written without some ideas. He was forced to correct this error over and over again in subsequent statements, such as the following response

to a question from John Simon in a 1962 interview:

No play can be written without ideas, even a half-wit child has to put an idea into his play. What I mean is you must never sacrifice your people to ideas. The play should not be ideological.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, Rattigan confused the issues by never firmly defining what he meant by "plays of ideas." He seemed to mean didactic plays in which social, political or moral messages are delivered at the expense of characterization and narrative, as he indicated in his reply to Simon. But he interchanged the terms "ideological plays" and "plays of ideas" frequently, and one wonders why he did not define "plays of ideas" specifically as ideological tracts and make it clear that he did not oppose ideas in plays so long as they did not reduce characters to mouthpieces.

Rattigan's respondents defined their terms no more clearly than he, and parts of the correspondence were written around rather than to the issues. There was no one point of agreement among the respondents, even on the importance of the debate itself. Only Peter Ustinov agreed with Rattigan that the theatre was suffering from an excess of didacticism, and Benn Levy conceded that "fifty years under the Ibsen-Shaw idiom is a fair spell" and that it might be time for a change.

Levy, Sean O'Casey, and, in particular, James Bridie rushed to Shaw's defense, declaring that Shaw was a liberator who had brought dead drama back to life and who had made possible all subsequent plays, including theirs and Rattigan's. Ustinov maintained that Bridie had overpraised and that Rattigan had underblamed Shaw, but agreed with Bridie that dramatists should not turn critics, because dramatists' views were molded by their own capabilities and prejudices. Bridie and Levy accused

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<sup>5</sup>"Rattigan Talks to John Simon," p. 74.

Rattigan of laying down the law in a manner that Shaw had never done-- surely a misreading of both Rattigan and Shaw--but Levy and Ustinov both correctly called attention to Rattigan's mixing of the terms "plays of ideas" and "ideological drama." Ustinov maintained that the best plays were a blend of human relations and ideas.

Christopher Fry remained aloof from the specific issues by writing against "a shoddy system of labels." If plays could be labeled as plays of ideas, character, or mood, he declared, what was wanted was more of all. Ted Willis agreed in part with Fry, though he pleaded that "the great issues which are tearing at the guts of the world" might find reflection in "ten or twenty per cent of our theatres." He maintained that:

When theatre has been worth anything at all, it has expressed ideas. It will only climb out of its present soggy inertia if the dramatists of today start dealing with ideas instead of trivialities.

Willis admitted his envy of the 1930s in America, when new dramatists had given a social direction to realism.

O'Casey defended the ideological interpretation of plays from the past:

There is a lot to be said for the opinion that all, or most, of the older, greater works, if not loaded, are strongly tinted with social significance; that they comment on, and often condemn, the activity and manner of their time.

Shaw took Willis's and O'Casey's defense of plays of ideas/ideologies further by declaring that:

. . . the masterpieces of Aeschylus, Euripides and Aristophanes to Hamlet, Faust, Peer Gynt and--well, no matter: all these [are] . . . not only entertaining, but intensely didactic (what Mr. Rattigan calls plays with ideas), and long-lived enough to be hyperbolically called immortal.

Shaw's essay on "The Play of Ideas" was supposed to have, in Rattigan's own view, "with a single blow annihilated not only myself but

all my attackers as well."<sup>6</sup> It is difficult, reading Shaw's article, to accept this evaluation.

Shaw declared that Bridie and the other correspondents had mopped the floor with Rattigan, but that he would say a word in his defense. Calling Rattigan an "irrational genius," Shaw wrote:

The difference between his [Rattigan's] practice and mine is that I reason out every sentence I write to the utmost of my capacity before I commit it to print, whereas he slams down everything that comes into his head without reasoning about it at all.

Even though Shaw followed this statement with his opinion that Rattigan's "head is a bright one and the things that come into it, reasonable or not, are all entertaining, and often penetrating and true," he gave no support for his judgment of Rattigan's method. Far from sustaining Shaw's contention that they were slammed down without reasoning, such plays as The Browning Version, The Winslow Boy and Love in Idleness give proof of the most painstaking labor, the most careful attention to the inner logic of the plays' characterizations, plot structures, and thematic development.

Following his "defense" of Rattigan, Shaw maintained that Rattigan did not like his ideas and consequently had concluded that plays which have any ideas in them are bad plays and not plays at all but tracts. Attacking Rattigan where he was vulnerable, because he had not been clear on this point, Shaw noted that Rattigan knew that minds could not operate and plays could not exist without ideas. But he then mixed this truth with his own opinion that the quality of a play was in the quality of its ideas (whereas Rattigan had maintained that the quality was in characterization and narrative, whether there were ideas per se or not).

Shaw then asked what the function of a playwright is, and without

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<sup>6</sup>Plays, Preface, 2:xx.

precisely answering his own question, commented on men's various ranges of experience and varying mental capacities. He concluded with the previously quoted statement that all dramatic masterpieces are not only entertaining but intensely didactic, and noted that there are many gradations of drama, from tragedy to melodrama, high to low comedy, farce to filth. Whereas Rattigan made the error of not distinguishing between plays which are clearly didactic and those which contain ideas not stressed as messages, Shaw blurred any distinction by implying that unless a play is intensely didactic it cannot possibly be considered a masterpiece, whatever its other merits (and Shaw did not name any others except "entertaining").

The remainder of Shaw's article was a discourse on theatre history which he began with a significant combination of ideas. As examples of the origins of theatre, he gave both the vagabond entertainer trying to amuse a queue outside a theatre and the Hyde Park orator, and referred to his own movement from street orator for socialist causes to great-hall orator in England and America. "Why do I tell this tale?" he asked. "Because it illustrates the development of the theatre from the pavement to the tribune and the cathedral . . . ." He then launched into comments about the development of scenery and the various stages, and of Italian opera, until he eventually maintained that he was the most old-fashioned of playwrights, having shaped his own plays according to the best lessons he learned from theatre history. He closed with the assertions that he knew his theatre history as it was in the past and survived in the present; that without knowing it no playwright or critic could be fully qualified; and that none of the contributors to the Play of Ideas correspondence had offered any "convincing evidence that the writers have ever seen, written

or produced a play."

The last assertion is unfounded, for Rattigan and several others had drawn examples from theatre history to illustrate some of their points. But Shaw's method throughout his historical essay is questionable. By maintaining from the beginning that the vagabond entertainer and his own socialist speech-making were equivalent modern examples of ancient historical models of the theatre's origins, he coupled entertainment and political speech-making, and implied that the latter had, therefore, an indisputable place in the theatre. Shaw incontestably defended his position with rhetorical gusto, but with such insufficiently supported arguments that it cannot be regarded as "an annihilation" of the other correspondents (except perhaps on the grounds of rhetorical flourish).

Rattigan closed the correspondence with a reply to his attackers:

So thunderous a response as I seem to have provoked inevitably leads me, and perhaps your readers, to believe that my heresy must have made some sense, and perhaps even dangerous sense.

He corrected some of the mistaken impressions he had created with his initial lack of clarity by vowing that he had not meant that no good plays contain ideas, or that all plays about character were good. But he reiterated his belief that the successful creation of living creatures on the stage, in whatever style of expression, "has always been, is now, and will remain a higher achievement for the dramatist than the successful assertion of an idea, or series of ideas . . . ." He further clarified his distaste for message plays with one of the strongest statements he ever made:

Which came first . . . the people or the idea? I think it's hypocrisy to say that one can't possibly judge. Arrogantly, let me state my firm belief that I can judge, and, didactically, let me reiterate my continued preference for plays in which the ideas have sprung from the characters over plays in which the characters have been

created as mouthpieces for the ideas.<sup>7</sup>

As will be seen, particularly in articles on Rattigan and in criticisms of his plays after the "Angry Young Man" revolution in the mid-Fifties and the rise of Absurdism, Rattigan's stand in the Play of Ideas controversy tended to brand him as an arch Establishment figure, both a political reactionary<sup>8</sup> (an issue irrelevant to judging his plays, but useful as ammunition by irresponsible commentators)<sup>9</sup> and a theatrical impediment to Progress. That he had pleaded for progress in his contributions to the controversy did not matter to those who either wanted more ideological drama or wanted to smash the concepts of characterization and narrative he had defended--he was an enemy, and he suffered for it.<sup>10</sup>

The controversy had, however, no effect on the criticism of Rattigan's next play, a comedy called Who Is Sylvia? There was, by now, a

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<sup>7</sup>Emphasis Rattigan's.

<sup>8</sup>Rattigan has apparently never been a political conservative. In an interview with Robert Muller, Daily Mail, 23 September 1959, he stated: "I could have written the Royal Court type of play 20 years ago. In the late thirties we really had things to be indignant about. I, too, used to parade up and down Downing Street with banners shouting 'Arms for Spain.' I was charged by Mounted Police in Trafalgar Square. Because I've always put character before ideas in my plays, people think I have no political views." In his interview with me, Rattigan indicated that he still suffered from this distinction: "People think I'm reactionary, and I'm not in the least. I got pneumonia canvassing for Labour in the recent elections. That'll teach me!"

<sup>9</sup>Robert Muller, Theatre News Letter, 25 March 1950, provided the earliest example of this. In an article about "The Play of Ideas," he attacked Rattigan fiercely, accusing him of merely attacking ideas which were not his own: "Equate Character with Right Thinking and Idea with Subversive Thinking and you begin to appreciate what Mr. Rattigan is trying to say."

<sup>10</sup>Significantly, a recent article by Martin Gottfried supports

general recognition by the London critics of Rattigan's growth and increasing importance as a dramatist, and an attitude of critical--as opposed to merely commercial--excitement surrounding an opening of a Rattigan play. There was also a critical demand that the offering show further artistic advances. These attitudes are captured in Geoffrey Tarran's notice for Who Is Sylvia?:

A new play from Terence Rattigan is now a matter of primary theatrical importance. In recent years, he has proved himself one of the most versatile and accomplished of dramatists and his treatment of ancient history and modern social problems has been as brilliant as his gay experiments with comedy and romance. No news about autumn activity caused greater satisfaction than his reversion to the lighter vein with "Who Is Sylvia," and there was much prophecy about another triumph for him at the Criterion Theatre, where the presentation of "French without Tears" made him famous and led to much good fortune for him and his interpreters. But "Who Is Sylvia" fails to reach the remarkably high standard which he has created for himself.<sup>11</sup>

Who Is Sylvia?, directed by Anthony Quayle and starring Robert

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Rattigan's viewpoint (though Gottfried's subject was an analysis of the reasons audiences have rejected Absurdist plays and Rattigan is never mentioned). In "Drama: 20 Years After 'Godot'," Post, 18 September 1976, Gottfried wrote:

"No play will be popular, or even deserves to be, until it can inspire the excitement and feelings of people who go to the theater not for academic reasons, or intellectual appreciation, but for the theatrical experience. . . .

"Popularity is no measure of quality but it is an indication of a public yen for drama and it suggests what excites that public. The kind of play that has been successful these past 20 years [that Rattigan had maintained, had been successful since the Greeks] proves a continuing public affection for dramas with stories, characters and emotion. One might deplore it but one cannot deny it.

"And I do not deplore it. It is still the human element and the theatrical flair that affects us most powerfully. Our minds can be with a play, and our esthetic appreciation, but our guts respond to the characters in it and the situations successfully theatricalized."

<sup>11</sup>Morning Advertiser, 1 November 1950. Similar remarks from Harold Conway, Evening Standard; W. A. Darlington, Daily Telegraph and Morning Post; Stephen Williams, Evening News; Cecil Wilson, Daily Mail, all 25 October 1950.

Flemyng and Roland Culver, opened 24 October 1950,<sup>12</sup> and in spite of mixed reviews, ran for 381 performances.<sup>13</sup> It was never produced on Broadway, but was played with great commercial success in Sweden, Denmark, and Italy.<sup>14</sup>

The plot of the comedy revolves around the efforts of a British lord, Mark Binfield, to lead a double life. While maintaining the dignified public image of a successful diplomat and devoted husband and father, he pursues, under the alias of Mark Wright, various young women who have the same beautiful face of a girl named Sylvia whom he kissed once at the age of seventeen and never saw again.

In each of the three acts, set in Mark Wright's Knightsbridge hideaway in 1917, 1929, and 1950, he pursues a different "Sylvia" and is frustrated by intrusions from his "other" world. At the end, humiliated by his understanding wife's revelation that she not only knew about "Mark Wright" from the beginning, but even took precautions to make certain that his amorous adventures did not tarnish the public image and diplomatic career of Lord Binfield, he retires from his double life at the age of sixty-four with a defiant comment to a bachelor friend that "I have jolly well had my cake and I have jolly well eaten it--and that's more than can jolly well be said for most people, including yourself, so yah!"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Plays, 2:204.

<sup>13</sup>Stage Yearbook (1952), p. 203.

<sup>14</sup>Translations of press clippings from Swedish, Danish and Italian newspapers in TRPS-"Who Is Sylvia."

<sup>15</sup>Rattigan, Who Is Sylvia?, Plays, 2:287. All references from this edition.

The idea of the play--a man pursuing his youthful ideal in the guise of different women over several decades--is a bright comic invention. The play's virtues include a classic opening phone exposition, in which Mark talks to his wife and then to the foreign office to set up the lies covering his first affair. The conversation with his wife, with references to their naughty child Denis and other domestic matters, and Mark's statement to his foreign office colleague that he is embarking on his very first extra-marital adventure, convey the affectionate tone of his domestic relationships. Mark's exasperation with the phone operator at the office, who won't put him through without proper identification, provides an opportunity for him to give facts about his life in the context of some satirical pokes at the foreign office.

In each act, background information about Mark's double life is neatly tied to the progress of Mark's current affair and to its resolution. In Act II, for example, Mark's attachment to a young actress and the difficulty he has had maintaining their relationship while Ambassador to Brussels prompts him to consider turning down his new post in La Paz and abandoning the diplomatic service altogether. His dilemma is resolved when his son Denis appears and his mistress discovers that Mark has lied about his identity, and also--by nine years--about his age. The mistress loses interest, and Denis begins to talk Mark into staying with his successful career.

The minor characters in the play serve both to convey the style of Mark Wright's life and to further the plot. Mark's true identity in Act II is proclaimed by a party guest he has been trying to avoid because the guest knows him as Binfield. The character of Oscar, who adventures through the play with Mark Wright and is also Denis's godfather,

serves as a bridge between Mark's worlds.

The three "Sylvias"---a flapper, an actress, and a model---are, however, virtually indistinguishable. Their vacuousness may have been intentional, since Mark's quest is for a face and not for the personality behind it--but the effect is bland rather than dramatic. Mark is almost as bland as his amours. An emotional adolescent who has never grown up, his charm is one of social manner rather than of character, and the combination of dull protagonist and dull mistresses against a background of relatively lively supporting characters and situations, makes Who Is Sylvia? seem more a series of cartoon sketches than a play.

Another flaw in the work rises from Rattigan's suggestion of a serious psychological theme--a man's futile effort to preserve his youth by pursuing an illusion from it--which Rattigan fails to explore. In Act II, Oscar warns Mark that:

I'm always terrified of the disaster that looms ahead for a character like you who refuses to come out of the emotional nursery. Still in love with the girl he met at seventeen . . . You're an emotional Peter Pan.

Mark rejects Oscar's judgment, declaring that he has simply found an outlet for the marital seven year itch, but in Act II he is ready to trade one life for another:

Minister in La Paz! I tell you, Oscar, if I give in now, I give in to old age, and dullness and respectability and drab security and all the things I've been trying to run away from in the last thirteen years--ever since I invented Mark Wright. . . . Binfield is nothing--there are millions like him--respectable, domesticated, frustrated bores, half-dead without knowing it. But Wright is alive--he has a great capacity for living--and life should be lived in full tide--not snoozed away in stagnant backwaters.

In Mark's search for a face he once loved, regardless of the character behind the face, he is an overaged descendent of David in First Episode and of Alan in French without Tears, who, in spite of their sup-

posed intelligence, become involved with physically alluring, empty-headed girls. Mark is emotionally adolescent, not in his desire to make his life exciting, but in the way that he holds and pursues that desire --in his quest for the face and in his maintenance of a double life and its deceptions.

Psychologically, Mark is a character torn by the mind-body dichotomy. His search for an ideal represented by a face and his conviction that his two worlds represent youth and age, life and death, are manifestations of the belief that the physical and spiritual are irreconcilable. In Mark, Rattigan had material for the sort of study he had proved capable of with Love in Idleness, in which his characters revealed real emotions and grappled with real problems without slipping from comedy into serious drama. However, Rattigan simply indicated Mark's problem and then evaded it. His evasion gives the play a pervasively cool tone, as one critic noted: "Underlying the piece's fun is more than a touch of heartlessness, a quality which, for all his modernity, I did not expect in Mr. Rattigan."<sup>16</sup>

A recurrent theme in the London reviews was a lament for Rattigan's evasion:

. . . it is continuously concerned with that bitterest thing in life's comedy, the loss of illusion with the approach of age. . . . Mr. Rattigan's touch stays remarkably light, though his subject is here and there genuinely and contractably serious and not really the stuff of frivolous comedy.<sup>17</sup>

The effect of the evasion on the play's structure was widely noted, as in the Times:

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<sup>16</sup>Truth, 3 November 1950.

<sup>17</sup>Alan Dent, News Chronicle, 25 October 1950. Concurring were Darlington; John Barber, Daily Express, and J. C. B., Manchester Guardian, both 25 October; Ivor Brown, Observer, 29 October.

If this theme were treated seriously, and the first act is scattered with what seem to be the bits and pieces of a serious attention, the repetitiveness of the story would be its theatrical strength; but treated as a light comedy the story, entertainingly as it is told, divides itself into three short plays with too many points of resemblance.<sup>18</sup>

Few of the critics dismissed Who Is Sylvia? as being without virtues, however. Alan Dent commented:

This is a comedy which keeps us sadly smiling most of the time rather than in continuous laughter. But the author would not be Mr. Rattigan if the play did not have many wholly happy lines, quite a deal of verve and dash, and not a little subtlety.<sup>19</sup>

But the consensus was that the play was Rattigan's least appealing comedy, and one critic even ventured the opinion that "the most encouraging thing that can be said of Mr. Rattigan is that now he has his worst play behind him."<sup>20</sup>

A perceptive critical observation was that Rattigan seemed too weary to trace the ideas in his play to any conclusion.<sup>21</sup> A comment Rattigan later made about the development of the play does reveal a kind of weariness. He had, he disclosed, based the situation on that of a married couple who were close friends of his. The man was always pursuing his ideal and the wife knew, and "if either had taken it more seriously it could have ended in tragedy."<sup>22</sup> Rattigan had planned the play

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<sup>18</sup>25 October 1950. Similar views from Conway; Wilson; J. C. Trewin, Spectator, 17 November 1950, p. 780; New Statesman and Nation, 4 November; Punch, 8 November.

<sup>19</sup>In agreement were Brown; Tarran; A. E. Wilson, Star, 25 October 1950; Sunday Times, 29 October; Playgoer, December 1950.

<sup>20</sup>Sunday Graphic, 29 October 1950.

<sup>21</sup>Williams.

<sup>22</sup>Politiker (Denmark), 20 December 1959. Translation in TRPS-  
"Who Is Sylvia."

as a serious drama, but "it just turned into frivolity."<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps when he wrote Who Is Sylvia? Rattigan was not quite ready to explore in depth an issue--the mind-body dichotomy in love--which had been emerging intermittently in his work ever since he implied it in David's and Alan's attitudes towards sex in his first two produced plays, through Pat's contrasting feelings for Peter and Teddy in Flare Path, to the Crocker-Harris's incompatibility in The Browning Version. Evaded in Who Is Sylvia?, the issue emerged as a serious theme in Rattigan's next drama, The Deep Blue Sea.

Rattigan commented that The Deep Blue Sea was "the hardest of my plays to write because of the emotional angle," and admitted that he had rewritten the third act seven times in seven different ways until he was satisfied with it.<sup>24</sup> He described the play as being about a sex obsession of "a woman who surrenders herself willingly to a cad of the first order."<sup>25</sup> "The play is a study of obsession, and of the shame that a sensitive, clear-minded and strong-willed woman must feel when she discovers she has inside her a compulsion that seems too strong for her to resist."<sup>26</sup>

Rattigan's comments about The Deep Blue Sea are interesting because they illustrate an instance in which his usually astute judgment

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<sup>23</sup>John Barber, Daily Express, 25 October 1950.

<sup>24</sup>Mary Benedetta, My Home.

<sup>25</sup>"Rattigan Talks to John Simon," p. 24.

<sup>26</sup>Rattigan, "Matter of Sea Change," Herald-Tribune, 2 November 1952.

about his own accomplishment is lacking. Or perhaps they reveal that, whatever his conscious conception was for The Deep Blue Sea, he treated broader issues than he recognized. How much broader can be readily perceived twenty-five years after the play's premiere in 1952. In terms of cultural trends, Rattigan was ahead of his time,<sup>27</sup> though theatrically he was following in the footsteps of Ibsen's A Doll's House by creating a heroine who has tried to live for and through the men in her life, and has found that she cannot.

Today, American literature in particular abounds in fiction and nonfiction works exploring the dilemmas of women in their thirties to fifties who feel that they have lost, or have never found themselves as individuals because they have tried to live through their marriages and/or love affairs. Many, separated or divorced, with or without children, have no job training and no career goals, and feel suddenly and agonizingly cut off from themselves and from the world. This is the plight of The Deep Blue Sea's heroine, Hester Collyer, a plight which Rattigan portrayed sympathetically at a time when most intellectuals and the general public were unaware of its broad applicability.

The Deep Blue Sea is set in the flat of Hester Collyer, a married woman in her middle thirties, and her slightly younger lover Freddie Page, in a run-down district of London. As the curtain rises, the landlady and a neighbor discover Hester lying in front of an unlit gas heater. She has tried, and has failed, to commit suicide.

As the action--which lasts from early morning to late evening of one day--unfolds in three acts, Hester's reasons for wanting to die, and

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<sup>27</sup>Dating a gradual awakening to women's issues from the publication of Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique in 1963.

the alternatives open to her if she chooses to live, are explored. Her husband, Sir William Collyer, is a distinguished judge who still loves her and wants her to return to him. Her lover, Freddie, a former R.A.F. and ex-test pilot who has become an habitual drinker, also loves her but is startled by the discovery of her suicide attempt into realizing that their love affair is destroying them both, and determines to leave her.

Though she feels affection for her husband, Hester has realized that his professed love for her is as a prized possession rather than as an individual, and that she cannot return to her life with him. She loves Freddie with a consuming passion, but has been driven to suicide by her realization that Freddie is incapable of feeling any passion at all. Shamed by the dilemma she has placed herself in, Hester can find no shred of self-respect to make her feel worthy of living.

Miller, a neighbor who helps revive Hester in the opening scene and who thwarts her second suicide attempt in Act II, is a former doctor who lost his license and was sent to prison for an unspecified offense.<sup>28</sup> Now a bookmaker's clerk who does unpaid work in his former speciality, infantile paralysis, by night, he understands Hester's suffering and counsels her, sympathetically but unsentimentally, to face her losses and go on living. As the curtain falls, Hester finds the shred of self-

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<sup>28</sup>The London reviewers who commented on the offense assumed it to be abortion (T. C. Worsley, New Statesman and Nation, 24 January 1953, pp. 301-02; Stage, 13 March 1952). In an early draft of the play, labeled version #2 and dated 19 December 1950, Miller is an acknowledged homosexual, but by version #3, dated 7 February 1951, he says nothing about the reason he lost his license and the only hint is in the landlady's line to Hester: "Some people are born different to others and it's no good pretending that that makes them wicked and striking them off registers just because of it." (MSS in Ratt. Coll.) Perhaps the reason that Miller's offense is unspecified as homosexuality, abortion, or anything else is British censorship. Whatever the reason, Miller is a much more subtle and universal figure in the final draft.

respect she has been seeking as she says goodbye to Freddie, though she knows that she might hold him indefinitely. With Freddie gone, she turns on the gas heater--and lights it.

The Deep Blue Sea's plot bears some resemblance to The Winslow Boy's in that it is a thriller constantly posing questions: the psychological question of why Hester wants to die, and the action question of whether she will attempt suicide again.<sup>29</sup> Rattigan's narrative skill shows in his gradually--almost up to the final curtain--unraveling threads from the characters' pasts which propel the action toward a resolution of literal life or death. In the opening scene, for example, as Miller ministers to Hester in the offstage bedroom, the landlady and two neighbors, a young couple named Philip and Ann Welch, try to help Hester. Freddie is away, and as the Welches wonder whether they shouldn't phone some relative of Hester's, the landlady lets it slip that Hester's nearest relative is her husband--not Freddie, as the Welches believe, but Sir William. The Welches' call to Sir William brings him back into Hester's life, while their awe at phoning such a distinguished man stresses the contrast between Hester's present and former life styles.

In Act III, Philip Welch comes for Freddie's clothes. Hester tries to stall him, hoping to learn where Freddie has gone. Welch, uncomfortable but sympathetic, tries to help her by describing his own passionate extra-marital affair, which he ended, as he advises Hester to do, because:

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<sup>29</sup>Several critics commented on the thriller-like suspense of the drama. John Barber wrote in the Daily Express, 7 March 1952: "Suspense never lets up. I seethed with curiosity from the start. The intervals seemed endless. I had to know what would happen next to these nervy, desolate people." At Hester's second suicide attempt, Barber wrote that "The audience froze with anxiety." Other comments on the mounting suspense from Ivor Brown, Observer, 9 March; Punch, 19 March; Theatre World, May 1952.

. . . if you do think things out honestly, you'll see how awfully petty the whole thing really is . . . it is really the spiritual values that count in this life, isn't it? I mean the physical side is really awfully unimportant--objectively speaking, don't you think?<sup>30</sup>

Welch's tale simply contributes to Hester's sense of isolation, for, though she tells him that her clergyman father agreed with his estimate of the pettiness of the physical side, she cannot. She does manage to learn where Freddie is, phones, and begs him just to come and say goodbye, admitting afterwards to Welch that Freddie has refused because he knows that if he comes she will induce him to stay. Welch leaves with Freddie's clothes, and the combination of his clumsy advice and of the final break with Freddie drives Hester to her second suicide attempt, while her phone call does, a scene later, bring Freddie back.

The plot of The Deep Blue Sea involves a triangle, but a psychological more than a romantic one, with Sir William Collyer and Freddie Page representing two kinds of loving, William spiritual and Freddie physical, and Hester both. In The Browning Version, Rattigan had drawn in the Crocker-Harris a couple mismatched because of conflicting needs, Crocker-Harris for spiritual and Millie for physical love. Though in Hester Rattigan created a woman whose craving for physical satisfaction, once awakened, has become obsessive, her total needs are a complex mixture of the physical and the spiritual.

While Hester lived with her husband for seven years, happily, as she admits, the marriage was without passion. William values Hester as a pleasant companion and hostess, a charming player of the role of wife. Hester tells him that he never truly wanted her love, "You wanted me

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<sup>30</sup>Rattigan, The Deep Blue Sea, Plays, 2:357. Emphasis Rattigan's. All references from this edition.

simply to be a loving wife. There's all the difference in the world."<sup>31</sup>

William considers Hester's attraction to Freddie purely physical:

. . . this man you say you love is morally and intellectually a mile  
your inferior and has absolutely nothing in common with you whatever.  
. . . what you're suffering from is no more than an ordinary and  
rather sordid infatuation . . . it's your plain and simple duty  
to exert every effort of will you're capable of in order to return  
to sanity at once.

But Hester believes that it is more:

But in sober truth, Bill--in sober truth neither you nor I nor any-  
one else can explain what I feel for Freddie. It's all far too big  
and confusing to be tied up in such a neat little parcel and labelled  
lust. Lust isn't the whole of life--and Freddie is, you see, to me.  
The whole of life--and of death, too, it seems. Put a label on that,  
if you can--<sup>32</sup>

But, while Freddie is the whole of life to Hester, she is much too  
much for him. Not only does he complain to his R.A.F. friend and con-  
fidant Jackie in Act II that he and Hester fight because "I can't be a  
ruddy Romeo all the time," he feels unequal to Hester's great emotional  
needs. He loves her more than he ever has anyone, he declares,

But--well--moderation in all things--that's always been my motto.  
. . . My God, how I hate getting tangled up in other people's emo-  
tions. It's the one thing I've tried to avoid all my life, and yet  
it always seems to be happening to me. . . . Too many emotions.  
Far too ruddy many. I loathe 'em.

Hester wants more from a man than either William or Freddie can  
give her, but she wants to give more too. "I had more to give you--far  
more--than you ever wanted from me," she tells William. "But to under-  
stand what I'm doing now," she writes Freddie in her suicide note, "you  
must feel even a small part of what I'm feeling now, and that I know you  
can never do. . . . You can't help being as you are--I can't help being  
as I am."<sup>33</sup> Neither man understands Hester's needs except as forces

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<sup>31</sup>Act 3.    <sup>32</sup>Act 2.

<sup>33</sup>Hester to William in act 3; note read by Freddie in act 2.

destructive to themselves and to her, as indeed they are. But not because Hester is, like Millie Crocker-Harris, wanton and vindictive. The discoveries she has made about herself through her meeting and affair with Freddie have overwhelmed her.

Through the wrenching of Hester's apparently total dependence, initially on William and then on Freddie, to give meaning to her life, she emerges subtly as a woman who is just coming to know herself as an individual. Crocker-Harris became a living corpse by losing touch with his greatest values. Except for a youthful interest in painting which she has maintained, Hester seems never to have developed any strong personal values apart from her marriage and love affair. She is not a living corpse, but an unfinished figure, struggling to define her own features. Rattigan draws her quite deliberately as an unglamorous figure--attractive but not alluring,<sup>34</sup> refined but not elegant, intelligent but not intellectual--a woman one would not notice in a crowd.

Hester's only extraordinary qualities are her capacity to feel and to admit to passion, and her integrity in accepting responsibility for her feelings and actions. When William says that Freddie has driven her to suicide, she answers quietly that she has driven herself there.<sup>35</sup> She feels that she cannot face the future alone--a point stressed in Act III when Ann Welch asks Hester to send Philip to her as soon as he gets home, because she is not very good at being left alone, and Hester answers, "Yes, Mrs. Welch, I understand." And she feels such self-hatred for

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<sup>34</sup>Rattigan's description of Hester is: "She is in the middle thirties with a thoughtful, remote face that has no pretensions to great beauty." *Plays*, 2:304.

<sup>35</sup>Act 2.

having gotten herself into her predicament that she not only does not want to live, but feels unworthy of living.<sup>36</sup>

While William, Freddie, the Welches, and the landlady do not share the latter harsh judgment, they do consider her behavior aberrant. Only Miller, who has also suffered deeply for his "aberrant" behavior, recognizes Hester's exceptional integrity and is capable of giving her some insight:

To see yourself as the world sees you may be very brave, but it can also be very foolish. Why should you accept the world's view of you as a weak-willed neurotic--better dead than alive? What right have they to judge? To judge you they must have the capacity to feel as you feel. And who has? One in a thousand. You alone know how you have felt. And you alone know how unequal the battle has always been that your will has had to fight.

Hester feels that she cannot live without Freddie, but Miller counsels her to live for the purpose of living. This is a new note in Rattigan's work--the explicit statement that life itself is a value worth pursuing for its own sake, regardless of the suffering it may entail. The purpose of life is to live it, and in order to do so one finds whatever help one can. Miller states that his volunteer hospital research is such a help to him, and suggests that Hester's painting may be to her. In a scene similar in tone to that between Crocker-Harris and Hunter in The Browning Version, Miller extends two gestures of hope for the future. He asks to buy a painting he has admired in Act II, and offers his friendship. There is no hint of a potential romantic relationship, nor is the Act III scene between Miller and Hester sentimental through any implication that Miller is being charitably kind. Crocker-Harris and Hester earn their offers of friendship by winning the respect of their potential

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<sup>36</sup>Hester-Miller scene in act 3.

friends. The fact that the latter, in both cases, see them more objectively than they have been seeing themselves helps Crocker-Harris and Hester take their first steps toward self-respect and independence.

The Deep Blue Sea marks, in the nature of Rattigan's characterizations, the full emergence of his distinctive attitude toward mankind. This might be deduced as early as French without Tears in his portrayal of the Commander as a man who, when given a chance to speak, turns out to be not a priggish bore but a person of warmth and sensitivity. Except for rare characterizations like the vicious Millie Crocker-Harris and the tyrannical Mrs. Railton-Bell in Separate Tables, Rattigan seldom paints portraits in villainous black. Nor does he paint in any fashionably modern tones of moral grayness, absolving all characters of moral responsibility. He paints in many subtle hues, investing even his largely negative characters with a sense of dignity which rises from their awareness of themselves and from their acceptance of responsibility for their actions.

It is amazing, in this context, to read Rattigan's comment on Freddie Page as a "cad of the first order." Freddie could have become a mere type--an homme fatal, as he calls himself--but he is aware of the pain he has caused Hester and other women by his inability to love deeply, and he regrets it:

Hester says I've got no feelings and perhaps she's right, but anyway I've got something inside that can get hurt--the way it's hurt now. I don't enjoy causing other people misery. I'm not a ruddy sadist. My sort never gets a hearing. We're called a lot of rude names, and nobody ever thinks we have a case.

As Freddie describes "his sort":

He may be a perfectly ordinary bloke, kind, well-intentioned, good friend, perhaps even a good husband if he's allowed to be. But he's not allowed to be--that's my point. Demands are made on him which

he just can't fulfill. If he tries, he's cheating, and cheating doesn't help anyone. Now if he's honest and doesn't try--well, then everyone says he's a skunk and a heartless cad . . . .

Freddie may be weak and childishly rude at times, but he is not a cad who uses women--it is he who has worried about Hester's divorce so that he can marry her, and he who decides to leave her when he sees how much the difference in their feelings is hurting her.<sup>37</sup> He is an homme fatal who does not relish the distinction.

Nor is William a type--the outraged husband. He is a decent man, hurt and bewildered, who wants to help the woman who has wronged him. Miller, the outcast doctor who has the most reason to curse life--or society, fate, or some outside force for his suffering--is the one who declares that life itself has value. This is the attitude toward mankind that Rattigan projects through his characterizations--that types rarely exist as such, because people usually have a story to tell which, like the apparently colorless Philip Welch's disclosure of his passionate love affair, reveals some unexpected dimension within them.

Perhaps Rattigan's attitude is most clearly captured in a symbol, one of his few, that he uses in The Deep Blue Sea. In describing his reaction to the painting he wishes to buy from her, Miller tells Hester:

I'm not an art expert, but I believe there was talent here. Just a spark, that's all, which with a little feeding might have become a little flame. Not a great fire which could have illumined the world --oh no--I'm not saying that. But the world is a dark enough place for even a little flicker to be welcome.

When Hester makes the choice to live, she lights the flame of the gas heater. The flame is a symbol of the will to live and of the value of human life--even of its smallest sparks.

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<sup>37</sup>Quotations and facts from Freddie in act 2.

The Deep Blue Sea, directed by Frith Banbury, opened at the Duchess Theatre 6 March 1952, with Peggy Ashcroft as Hester, Roland Culver as Sir William, and Kenneth More as Freddie.<sup>38</sup> The reviews of both play and production were generally excellent. Some critics were puzzled by Hester's character, as Ivor Brown, who asked "What fretted this unquiet spirit?" and wondered whether it was boredom with her husband, sensuality, or mother instinct directed at Freddie, or "Perhaps she just needs a good slap or a straight talk by a Marriage Guidance Expert."<sup>39</sup> Such comments would today undoubtedly be cited as chauvinistic.

Even the critics who were puzzled by Hester, however, seemed to agree that Rattigan had created an interesting study. Several offered theories about her--she was an abstraction of Obsession,<sup>40</sup> she was over-sexed or unlucky in her choice of man,<sup>41</sup> she was irresponsible and inconsiderate.<sup>42</sup> Others compared her to Phedre and Berenice,<sup>43</sup> to Ibsen's

<sup>38</sup>Plays, 2:292.

<sup>39</sup>Others who thought Hester a puzzle, one at least partially unsolved by Rattigan, were W. A. Darlington, Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, and Cecil Wilson, Daily Mail, both 7 March 1952.

<sup>40</sup>Worsley.

<sup>41</sup>Raymond Douglas, Freethinker, 11 May 1952.

<sup>42</sup>Peter Fleming, Spectator, 14 March 1952, p. 326.

<sup>43</sup>Favorable comparison to Phedre and Madame Butterfly in Time and Tide, 14 March 1952. Veronica Wedgwood, on a 16 March radio discussion of the play, mentioned Phedre and Berenice. These critics found that Rattigan had dealt with profound themes through ordinary characters. Wedgwood said: "It's full of profound themes which are always playing over and exploiting unprofound people. . . . it was reaching out toward these people in the Notting Hill flat towards the eternal verities. . . ." Transcription of radio broadcast in TRPS-"Deep Blue Sea." Hereafter cited as TRPS-DBS.

Nora and Ellida Wangel,<sup>44</sup> and to Tennessee Williams's lost heroines.<sup>45</sup> The fact that, in Hester, Rattigan had created the first "long, straight, emotional part for a young woman since Shaw's St. Joan" was also noted.<sup>46</sup>

Freddie's character also excited considerable interest. John Barber devoted most of his notice to discussing why Rattigan should have written the play about what happens to the war hero who goes to pieces after the fighting,<sup>47</sup> while others commented along the lines of T. C. Worsley's: "But he doesn't remain a mere type. He expands in the second act under the author's compassionate handling (compassion and humanity are the new notes which are coming through in Mr. Rattigan's work)."

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<sup>44</sup>Lutz Weltmann, Der Mittag (Düsseldorf), n.d., but about the London premiere of The Deep Blue Sea wrote that "Rattigan's Hester Collyer is an Ellida who follows 'the strange man' . . . she decides, a second Nora, to stand on her own feet. . . . his play enters the true world of tragedy: the inevitable loneliness of a woman whose whole world is love, and the true drama of the times: in the age of frustration a husband can provide it less than ever." Translation in TRPS-DBS.

<sup>45</sup>Times Educational Supplement, 4 April 1952: "With his new play The Deep Blue Sea, Mr. Terence Rattigan strikes into Tennessee Williams-land. This is the vague tragi-comic country where heroines come to realize their appalling aloneness not through vast calamity but by the sordid failure of personal relationships, by the impossibility of right communication with the right person at the right time."

<sup>46</sup>Band Wagon, April 1952. Peggy Ashcroft's initial reaction to the role of Hester was unsympathetic. She had, when invited by Rattigan to lunch to discuss his new play, visualized a gay comedy for herself, and was dismayed to find a drama. She thought the play Rattigan's finest, but lost patience with Hester and accepted the role reluctantly. By the end of rehearsals, she felt in complete sympathy with Hester and eventually became her ardent champion. Looker-on, Theatre World, May 1952.

<sup>47</sup>Barber's lament that Rattigan missed writing "the play of the age" about Freddie misses the point of his characterization. Though Freddie is a war hero who has never been happy since he left the R.A.F. (as Hester says in act 2), he is no different in principle from the high school or college hero (or beauty queen) who never grows--in character or achievement--past a youthful moment in the spotlight. Freddie's character has a much more universal application than Barber perceived.

Worsley also noted about Miller that:

It is another admirable stroke of Mr. Rattigan's that the only person who can help Hester should be an unattractive . . . ex-doctor . . . Disaster has pared away from him every spare ounce of sentimentality, but without destroying his heart.<sup>48</sup>

Harold Hobson commended growth in Rattigan's characterizations:

In his play, so tragic in theme, Mr. Rattigan finds no need for a villain. He understands and sympathizes with the motives and points of view of all his characters. That is, of course, one of the marks of a dramatist of the first order.<sup>49</sup>

The issue most debated by London critics was The Deep Blue Sea's ending. Some critics stated or implied that Hester should logically have committed suicide,<sup>50</sup> while others applauded what they perceived as the uncertainty at the final curtain.<sup>51</sup> Alan Dent, who had some doubts about the ending when he first saw the play, went back and wrote of his second viewing, ". . . I now wish to retract and recant. Mr. Rattigan's ending is subtle, daring, unconventional, beautiful, courageous, right."<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Similar comments on Freddie from Darlington; Stage, Times Weekly Edition, 13 March 1952.

<sup>49</sup>Sunday Times, 9 March 1952. Similar comments from Kenneth A. Hurren, What's On in London, 14 March; and Punch.

<sup>50</sup>Hurren; Beverley Baxter, Evening Standard, and Stephen Williams, Evening News, both 7 March 1952; Sunday Dispatch, 9 March. Sunday Express, 9 March, noted that the last act "slips dangerously into vague platitudes."

<sup>51</sup>Darlington; Walter Hayes, Daily Graphic and Daily Sketch, 7 March 1952; Tribune, 14 March; Queen, 26 March. John Steinbeck, in an article on the London theatre in the Evening Standard, 1 August 1952, called The Deep Blue Sea "the finest theatre I have seen in London so far. . . . a story that grows through its violence to the tearing, moving silence of its ending."

<sup>52</sup>Evening Chronicle, 7 March and 13 March 1952. In "Rattigan Talks to John Simon," p. 24, Rattigan stated: "The play I think has the most tragic of all endings. The pistol shot offstage is the sentimental ending. Nothing is easier than suicide in a case of that kind." Rattigan noted that the ending had been changed in the film of the play, against his wishes. Some critics noted that the play was depressing (Barber;

In their judgment of the play as a whole, most critics felt that it had put Rattigan back on top, after his failure with Who Is Sylvia?. Hobson judged the play Rattigan's best, and "the best English play in the Naturalistic manner in a long time."<sup>53</sup> Alan Dent wrote: "This is as enthralling as anything Mr. Rattigan has ever done before, which is saying much. It argues the conflict between spiritual values and the pettiness of the physical side most frankly as well as soundly."<sup>54</sup> Wor-sley concluded:

Mr. Terence Rattigan has given us in The Deep Blue Sea an extremely poignant play, concentrated, taut and true. The theme, the obsessional infatuation of a married woman for a young man in no obvious way suited to her, is painful and harrowing in the extreme. But Mr. Rattigan has refused the temptation to make concessions. He gives us the impression of having faced his subject as squarely as he knew how and of having brought to bear on it all the conviction of which he was capable. Consequently it bears the unmistakable stamp of sincerity, it rings right, not as The Browning Version seemed to me to do, only through the central character, but through and through.<sup>55</sup>

Once again there were attempts to smooth a Rattigan play's path across the Atlantic. Hobson wrote for the Christian Science Monitor,<sup>56</sup> Rattigan wrote again on Sea Change<sup>57</sup> and altered British idioms for the Times Educational Supplement). This was not Rattigan's intention. In our interview, he declared this explicitly, noting that "certainly the symbol at the end, the lighting of the gas fire, is the reverse of depressing."

<sup>53</sup>Sunday Times.      <sup>54</sup>Evening Chronicle.

<sup>55</sup>Others who found the play exceptional were Cecil Wilson, Time and Tide; John G. Drummond, Sunday Chronicle, 9 March. While several critics had reservations about the play, and some--like Darlington--thought it well-crafted but not outstanding, none panned it except Donald Douglas in the Daily Worker, 21 March, who complained that, since Hester's problem was purely personal and not viewed as a social malady, no one could identify with it or see it applied to anyone else.

<sup>56</sup>N.d. TRPS-DBS.

<sup>57</sup>"Matter of Sea Change," Boston Post, 14 October 1952, and Herald-Tribune, 2 November 1952.

American audience,<sup>58</sup> and Kenneth Tynan wrote a retrospective article on Rattigan's career for Harper's Bazaar. Tynan's article was a curious mixture of sarcasm and of a defense of Rattigan as a dramatist. He dwelt on Rattigan's early successes, while failing to mention most of his setbacks, and ended with an admittedly unauthenticated anecdote about Rattigan's person vanity. His defense of Rattigan as a dramatist was sometimes itself sarcastic, as in the comment: "He may now club us with a masterpiece."

Tynan called French without Tears "a clean and shapely piece," Love in Idleness "Rattigan's roundest work to date," and The Winslow Boy almost "a searching inquiry into the workings of justice; the 'almost' included a romantic subplot and a comic char-woman. But the play contained what is defensibly the best second-act curtain of the last twenty years . . . ." Tynan criticized The Browning Version as cold precision work, Adventure Story for its pedestrian language, and noted that he had given Rattigan up as a competent but minor playwright until The Deep Blue Sea. "I was quite wrong, which is why I am writing this," he continued. He conceded that he had missed a vital clue in Crocker-Harris's speech about different kinds of passion, which emerged as the germ of what he considered Rattigan's best play, The Deep Blue Sea:

The play stands up; the clue is universal. I do not say that Rattigan has taken on giant-hood as a dramatist. His characters still think in terms of "niceness" and "unpleasantness," not of "goodness" and "evil"; but they are less evasive than they ever were. They are talking about realities, probing past appearances, and scarring each other.

Though Tynan considered The Deep Blue Sea the most striking new English play in a decade, he had doubts about its Broadway possibilities: ". . . a

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<sup>58</sup>Rattigan, Herald-Tribune.

romantic play which is not a comedy is the hardest thing in the world to put over on a New York critic."<sup>59</sup>

The Deep Blue Sea, directed by Frith Banbury and starring Margaret Sullavan as Hester, opened at the Morosco Theatre in New York 6 November 1952.<sup>60</sup> Once again safe passage was denied--the reviews were as mixed as those for Playbill, for some of the same reasons. Again there was the charge that Rattigan was only a craftsman with some theatrical flair: "This is another Rattigan play somewhat suggestive of Pinero, not only in its careful knowing construction as a 'well-made play' but in its apparent artificiality and emotional flavor."<sup>61</sup>

Playwright Rattigan is not such a hack as to brush aside the serious point of his story; rather, he responds just enough to betray it. Far more theater man than playwright, he has a way, whether with a scene's falling apart or a character's fate, of being saved by the bell--by someone on the phone or someone at the door. He seems less to chronicle suffering than to exploit it.<sup>62</sup>

Several American critics called the play a soap opera,<sup>63</sup> but there

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<sup>59</sup>"An Inner View of Terence Rattigan," November 1952, pp. 118 and 195.

<sup>60</sup>Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, 6 November 1952.

<sup>61</sup>Variety, 12 November 1952.

<sup>62</sup>Time, 17 November 1952, p. 102. Many critics felt that even Rattigan's craftsmanship and sense of theatre had lessened, or at least remained unimproved and unworthy of esteem. Among these were Atkinson; Joseph T. Shipley, New Leader, 24 November; George Jean Nathan, The Theatre in the Fifties (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), pp. 31-35. John Mason Brown, Saturday Review, 22 November, pp. 36-7, judged that Rattigan, in choosing obsessive love as his subject, had been forced merely to hint at his theme because it was more a subject for a novel, so that Rattigan had been mastered by his medium (the theatre's limitations) in this case.

<sup>63</sup>Atkinson; Richard Watts, Post, 6 November 1952; John Chapman, Daily News, 7 November. Some critics suggested that the play might have been ill served by its production, particularly by Margaret Sullavan's performance. Among these were Watts; Walter Kerr, Herald-Tribune, 6 November and 16 November 1952; Newsweek, 17 November 1952, p. 74.

were a few admirers of Rattigan's work. Whitney Bolton wrote:

Terence Rattigan's study of obsessive love in "The Deep Blue Sea" is as clear an answer as there is at hand to the acute personal problems which affect so many in today's tense and disordered world. True, most of these tensions rise from dozens of other causes beside such compulsion to love an unworthy, but the basic problem of whether one shall face realities and fight them is the same. It is Mr. Rattigan's belief that the worthy persons choose to fight and that getting up from the floor after a knockdown is difficult but admirable.<sup>64</sup>

Brooks Atkinson, in his initial and in a follow-up review, continued to deny Rattigan artistic recognition and to stress the difference between British and American expectations of a dramatist, praising The Time of the Cuckoo as superior to The Deep Blue Sea because "it has more spontaneity, discrimination and spirit."<sup>65</sup> Seeming to buttress his own argument by quoting Walter Kerr's review of Rattigan's play out-of-context,<sup>66</sup> Atkinson concluded that Rattigan remained too personally aloof from his characters and themes for an American audience: "To our way of thinking, Mr. Rattigan is too easily satisfied with craftsmanship."

Interesting because it projects an opposite view of Rattigan's involvement in his plays is Richard Hayes's:

Mr. Rattigan is the most personal of playwrights; no one writing for the stage today, of his quality and preoccupation, brings so much theatrical guile or so much concentration to the intense, airless and

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<sup>64</sup>Morning Telegraph, 7 November 1952; Louis Sheaffer, Brooklyn Eagle, 6 November; John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, 8 November. Critics who took a middle stand were John Mason Brown; Newsweek; John McClain, Journal-American, 6 November; Margaret Marshall, Nation, 22 November, p. 473.

<sup>65</sup>New York Times, 14 December 1952.

<sup>66</sup>Kerr, 6 November, wrote that what was lacking in the play "is any real sense of the driving passion which sends three characters into anguished conflict all night long," and maintained that Rattigan had Hester tell too much and show too little. Atkinson, 14 December, twisted this to mean: "In Mr. Kerr's phrase, 'The Deep Blue Sea' lacks 'the driving passion' of an artist who has a personal interest in his characters."

often terrifying world of "personal relations" . . . it is Mr. Rattigan's terrible honesty which makes so striking an impact. In his studies of three men whose lives impinge on Hester's, he conveys not merely the illusion of contemporaneity but something of the very shape and pressure of our time.<sup>67</sup>

Once again a Rattigan play ran much longer in London--513 performances<sup>68</sup> followed by a tour of Britain, Australia, and New Zealand,<sup>69</sup> to 132 Broadway performances<sup>70</sup> and a tour.<sup>71</sup> The play was cited as the best of the 1952 season by the London drama critics in a poll taken by Everybody's<sup>72</sup> and by May 1954, it had been translated and produced in Greece, France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Norway, Holland, and Yugoslavia.<sup>73</sup>

Like Love in Idleness, The Deep Blue Sea seemed to "grow on" critics after a second viewing. Brooks Atkinson saw the London production, with Googie Withers as Hester, in April 1953. Though he still judged that, to an American, the play looked like "a rueful romance of no particular literary or artistic distinction," he concluded:

You may resist the basic situation as meretricious but you cannot remain impervious to the mordant candor of Mr. Rattigan's description of the consequences. No one in the audience moves a muscle

<sup>67</sup>Commonweal, 28 November 1952, pp. 197-98.

<sup>68</sup>The Stage Year Book (1954), p. 151.

<sup>69</sup>Clippings from touring production, starring Googie Withers, in TRPS-DBS.

<sup>70</sup>LC Play Stats.

<sup>71</sup>Donald Kirkley, "On Atlantic Voyage," Chicago Sun, 8 May 1959.

<sup>72</sup>10 January 1953.

<sup>73</sup>Translations of clippings from foreign productions in TRPS-DBS reveal a cross-section of reviews, from mixed to negative to raves. Only in England did the play seem to be as widely regarded as any previous Rattigan drama.

while the actors face some painful conclusions with steely resolution.<sup>74</sup>

The British critics, viewing Peggy Ashcroft's first replacement, Celia Johnson, and her second, Googie Withers, found themselves seeing more dimensions in Hester's character through each successive actress's portrayal, and in the play itself. T. C. Worsley wrote that "on the second visit its impact was no less weighty than on the first." He liked the ending better on a second view, and commented, as few critics had, on the manner in which Rattigan treated actors. Particularly in the early stages of his career, Rattigan's plays were often viewed as successful largely because of stellar performances. Worsley put this argument into some perspective by noting:

Then, what strikes one as remarkable is the economy with which the playwright achieves his effects. . . . Here Mr. Rattigan shows another side of his gift--knowing how much he can safely leave to his actors. He supplies a whole set of complicated emotions in a few understated dis-syllables, and the actors--or these actors anyhow--fill in with a whole set of understated gestures and facial movements.<sup>75</sup>

If the critics had not always known how much Rattigan gave to his actors, most actors apparently did. Gielgud may have turned down Playbill because he was afraid it might diminish his reputation as a classical actor, but Olivier insisted on starring in and directing Rattigan's next play against--in an ironic twist on the Gielgud refusal--Rattigan's own wishes.

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<sup>74</sup>New York Times, 4 April 1953.

<sup>75</sup>New Statesman and Nation, 24 January 1953. Among reviews of the play with Celia Johnson are the Times, 2 September, and J. C. Trewin, Observer, 7 September 1952. Googie Withers's Hester reviewed by Worsley; Darlington, Daily Telegraph; John Barber, Daily Express, all 2 January 1953.

## CHAPTER VII

Rattigan began his contribution to a book of essays written by theatrical notables who had worked with Olivier:

He has been in only one of my plays, and then I was reluctant to have him. "Reluctant to have Olivier?" I can hear the cry of outrage. "In one of his plays. He must be mad or joking." I'm not joking, but I may very well have been mad; but please consider the circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

The circumstances were that Rattigan had written a play for the June 1953 celebrations surrounding the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The Sleeping Prince was to be billed as an "Occasional Fairy-Tale," a light comedy designed to contrast with the many serious works being prepared for the occasion, and inspired by Rattigan's reading of royal memoirs from the pre-World War I period.<sup>2</sup>

Set in the London Legation of the imaginary Balkan kingdom of Carpathia<sup>3</sup> in 1911, during the Coronation festivities for George V, The Sleeping Prince is an inversion of Sleeping Beauty, with touches of Cinderella and Alice in Wonderland. Sleeping Beauty--or in this case, Sleeping Ugly--the Prince Regent of Carpathia, invites Cinderella-Alice,

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<sup>1</sup>Olivier, p. 129. Emphasis Rattigan's.

<sup>2</sup>Mary Benedetta, My Home. In "Marilyn, Sir Lew and I," Daily Express, 25 June 1959, Rattigan wrote that he chose the period because his mother had had to miss the 1911 Coronation (at which his father was an official) due to his birth ten days before.

<sup>3</sup>In Olivier, p. 130, Rattigan noted that he chose the name of Carpathia carefully "for the echoes of Anthony Hope and Strauss operettas . . . ."

Mary Morgan, an American chorus girl currently in a London musical comedy, for supper and a brief amour. Far from being the compliant cocotte he expects, Mary is a mixture of sentimental romantic and wily intriguer, and she turns the Prince's clockwork world into a series of alarms. She falls in love with him, becomes chief negotiator in a Carpathian political struggle between the Prince and his sixteen-year-old son, King Nicky, and is invited to be lady-in-waiting to the Prince's eccentric wife, the Grand Duchess, at the Coronation. Gaily preaching a "love conquers all" philosophy, she reconciles Prince and King, and wins the icy Prince's adoration before parting from him with a vague promise to visit him in Carpathia and the bittersweet reflection that ". . . whatever happens, always remember this. Coming out of a heavenly dream can be a little sad, I grant, but that doesn't make the dream any the less heavenly, does it?"<sup>4</sup>

Rattigan, realizing fully that "I'd get hell from the critics if they thought I'd seriously meant this airy trifle to be the next step, after The Deep Blue Sea, in my development as a dramatist," intended The Sleeping Prince "purely as a little nonsense for a great occasion. A non-star cast, a light production and a limited run."<sup>5</sup> His modest plan was, like the Prince's in his play, thwarted. Olivier phoned Rattigan while he was writing the play and expressed interest in it for himself and Vivien Leigh.<sup>6</sup> Rattigan's reaction was that: "My little 'occasional fairy tale' couldn't contain one of those two gigantic talents, let alone both."

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<sup>4</sup>Rattigan, The Sleeping Prince, Plays, 2:93. All references from this edition.

<sup>5</sup>Olivier, p. 131. <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

Rattigan felt, and continued in his judgment through the production, that Vivien Leigh, "one of nature's grand-duchesses if ever I saw one," would not be believable as an American chorus girl. But he was even more alarmed at the prospect of Olivier as the Prince, who was conceived as a reversal of the clichéd "irresistibly attractive Königliche Höheit who longs to escape the bondage of royal duty for the bliss of anonymity and the joys of ordinary love." Rattigan's Prince was an unattractive, mundane, martinet of a man devoted to his job as Regent, and interested in "love" only to the degree that it was pleasant, uncomplicated, and in no way intrusive on his rigid routine. "'Prince Uncharming'," Rattigan commented, "and I venture to think rather closer to the truth of pre-First World War royalty than the romantic legend."<sup>7</sup> His evaluation of Olivier as the potential Prince was: "How on earth could Larry persuade an audience that he was 'Prince Uncharming' when he had made even Richard III into one of the most sexually attractive characters ever to disgrace a stage?"<sup>8</sup>

But Rattigan consented to let Olivier read the play, and then to direct himself and Vivien Leigh in it, and anticipated disaster when the news of their collaboration was widely heralded by the press and public. His concern grew when Vivien Leigh's illness forced postponement of the premiere until November, five months after the "occasion" for which the play had been written. Though he ultimately considered Olivier's performance a perfect and magical reflection of his Prince,<sup>9</sup> and though the play ran for 274 performances,<sup>10</sup> the London reviews, mixed for both of

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 130.   <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 132.   <sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-35.

<sup>10</sup>From 5 November 1953, at the Phoenix Theatre. The Stage Year Book (1955), p. 177.

the stars and for the play, show that Rattigan's concern was justified.

"The trouble with success is that it creates its own standards and its own hazards," wrote one critic. "Rattigan, Olivier and Vivien Leigh constitute a success story from which there is no escape. . . . The Sleeping Prince is not a play but a vehicle--and a vehicle that cracks."<sup>11</sup> Said another ". . . it seems a pity that in these spare times so much talent should have gone into so little."<sup>12</sup> There were the by-now predictable remarks that the actors made the play seem better than it was,<sup>13</sup> countered by the judgment that Rattigan had written marvelous roles to act.<sup>14</sup> And there were some notes of appreciation for the play as Rattigan had intended it, like T. C. Worsley's:

The pièce d'occasion is not to be judged by the same kind of standards one would apply to works written without any conditions attached. . . . Even less should one regard The Sleeping Prince as a successor to The Deep Blue Sea, and complain that it doesn't carry its author any further. . . . It is an exercise of brilliant theatrical talent devised for a special occasion, a light-hearted tribute if you like, and as such it is eminently successful. . . . soufflés are not easier to cook than rump steaks, even if it is true that the latter are more sustaining.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Beverley Baxter, Sunday Express, 8 November 1953. John Barber, Daily Express, 6 November, wrote that the play was a falling-off from The Deep Blue Sea, but "such smart, sleek fun."

<sup>12</sup>Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, 6 November 1953.

<sup>13</sup>Rattigan seldom escaped this. Even Peggy Ashcroft had been chastized by J. C. Trewin in John O' London's Weekly, 3 March 1952, for playing Hester "when she might be adding to her classical record at the Vic." Among those citing the Oliviers for adding undeserved lustre to The Sleeping Prince were Barber; Ivor Brown, Observer, 8 November 1953; Kenneth A. Hurren, What's On in London, 13 November, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup>W. A. Darlington, Daily Telegraph, 6 November 1953; Elizabeth Frank, News Chronicle, 6 November; T. C. Worsley, New Statesman and Nation, 14 November.

<sup>15</sup>Trewin expressed a judgment similar to Worsley's in the Illustrated London News, 21 November 1953, p. 836.

The issue most debated by the critics was the effectiveness of Rattigan's plot, for some judged that the intermingling of young King Nicky's concerns with the Prince's romance overcomplicated the action,<sup>16</sup> while others thought that the mixups, which delay the consummation of the affair between Mary and the Prince until the penultimate scene of the play, added to its virtues.<sup>17</sup> There was particular praise for Rattigan's creation of the Grand Duchess,<sup>18</sup> and some appreciation for his use of the fairy-tale idiom with sophisticated twists.<sup>19</sup>

When The Sleeping Prince, with Michael Redgrave and Barbara Bel Geddes starring, opened on Broadway, 1 November 1956, at the Coronet Theatre, the New York critics found virtually nothing in it to appreciate. Reviews for Redgrave and Bel Geddes were as mixed as they had been for the Oliviers, and though George Freedley found the play "a delightfully daffy comedy,"<sup>20</sup> Brooks Atkinson called it an "insipid parlor charade."<sup>21</sup> Time voiced the majority opinion that The Sleeping Prince was a sleeping pill: "Playwright Rattigan here blindly scattereth poppy

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<sup>16</sup>Frank, Shulman; Trewin in the Lady, 19 November 1953; Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 8 November; Times Weekly Review, 12 November; Philip Hope-Wallace, Manchester Guardian, 7 November.

<sup>17</sup>Worsley; Punch, 11 November 1953; Stage, 11 November.

<sup>18</sup>Brown; Shulman; Worsley.

<sup>19</sup>Derek Granger, Financial Times, 6 November 1953, cited the play's "modish innocence which is very beguiling." A. E. Wilson in the Evening Star, 6 November, noted "the gaiety, the satirical wit and the delicate naughtiness of the comedy . . ." Queen, 18 November, commented: "It is all great fun, with enough naughtiness lurking amongst the push to make it essentially a fairy tale for grown-ups."

<sup>20</sup>Morning Telegraph, 9 November 1956. John Chapman, Daily News, 3 November, called the play "a pleasantly romantic marshmallow."

<sup>21</sup>New York Times, 2 November 1956.

while contriving poppycock,"<sup>22</sup> and the play straggled through only 52 performances.<sup>23</sup>

The Sleeping Prince was Rattigan's last comedy for twenty years. As a pièce d'occasion, with its Edwardian setting, elegant costuming, and good-natured humor at the vagaries of Balkan royalty, British diplomacy, and American naivete and know-how, it would surely, as Worsley noted, have graced the occasion of Elizabeth's Coronation. But the play, Rattigan's only full-length period comedy, has virtues on its own.

Though some of the scenes in Act II, like the Grand Duchess's reminiscences about a royal production of King Lear in which she played Kent, and a card game between Nicky and the ill-mannered young princess he is supposed to marry, are superfluous, the strength of Rattigan's plot is in the expansion of the comic concept of love, as held by Mary, to include more than seduction. The Prince becomes humanized--Sleeping Ugly awakens--through Mary's involvement with all aspects of his life. She shows him how to get along better with his son, how to resolve a political crisis by diplomacy rather than force, and how to treat a woman as she wants to be treated, rather than expecting everyone to obey his dictates like figures falling into place by his mathematical calculation.

The fairy-tale love story mixes sentiment with considerable satire. In Act I, Mary demands that she be seduced in a schmaltzy style repugnant to the martinet Prince, who is forced to speak poetry to the accompaniment of gypsy violin music. This is the first crack in the Prince's armor and is also a spoof of elaborate Edwardian seduction. The satirical element is reinforced in the second scene of Act II when Mary seduces

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<sup>22</sup>12 November 1956, p. 71.    <sup>23</sup>LC Play Stats.

the Prince, using some of his original techniques and those she had demanded for herself, on him. The physical discomfort inherent in elaborate seduction--the would-be seducers moving themselves and props around to ease aching limbs--is indicated by Rattigan in many more stage directions than usually appear in his plays, and underscores his modern slant on the period antics. Even the ending is a modern twist on the traditional fairy tale's "happily ever after": Mary and the Prince will be happier remembering their brief affair than prolonging the relationship.

As in most Rattigan plays, his supporting and minor characters are well-conceived, from the major domo who hisses at Mary when she breaches protocol to the boy-man King Nicky, who, as his price for cooperation with his father, mixes a demand for general amnesty for political prisoners with one for a motorcycle and the freedom to ride it anywhere in Carpathia, to the Grand Duchess, an ebullient, gossipy, scatter-brained Fairy Godmother sort of figure who belongs beside Arthur Gosport in Rattigan's gallery of extravagants.

The Sleeping Prince is undoubtedly an airy trifle, but, as Worsley implied, why must that be a negative distinction? Even if it were not a pièce d'occasion, why should the composition of a light romantic comedy with satirical embellishment be considered an artistic falling-off after a drama like The Deep Blue Sea? To the contrary, Rattigan's adult fairy tale is another proof of his versatility, rather a farther reach than a falling-off.

Shortly after the November 1953 premiere of The Sleeping Prince, the first two volumes of Rattigan's Collected Plays were published in

London by Hamish Hamilton.<sup>24</sup> Rattigan's fifteen-page Prefaces to each of these volumes provide valuable material, both for an appreciation of his work and for an understanding of the gulf which had always existed between Rattigan and his critics and which widened because of the Prefaces and of Rattigan's contributions to the Play of Ideas debate. Unwittingly, Rattigan in these theoretical essays gave his detractors a cache of ammunition with which to bombard him for the next quarter-century.

Rattigan's theoretical essays are a defense of his playwriting practices, a plea that he be judged on his own terms, and an exploration of the playwright-audience relationship. The opening paragraphs of the first Preface are essentially a defense against the position that a popular success cannot be a good play. Rattigan muses, tongue-in-cheek, that he finds himself at a disadvantage in presenting himself to the reader as a serious dramatist because he cannot recommend his plays to the discriminating reader on the grounds that they were rejected by indiscriminating audiences, nor can he decry the bad taste of West End producers. He defends the taste of audiences through history, maintaining that though they have unquestionably supported much rubbish, the record shows that they have also supported the best, sometimes against critics' advice. What infuriates writers on theatre about audiences, Rattigan states, is:

. . . that no power on earth can coerce them or persuade them, or educate them to go to see what they don't want to see; and that, equally, they cannot be coerced or persuaded or educated from seeing what you don't want them to see.

Rattigan wonders whether the five plays in Volume I--French with-  
out Tears, Flare Path, While the Sun Shines, Love in Idleness, and The

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<sup>24</sup>Plays, Prefaces, 1 and 2. All references from these editions. All emphases Rattigan's.

Winslow Boy--have anything in common which might possibly explain their success with audiences, and whether the critics might have identified that common quality. He admits that he reads the critics, saves notices, and takes them seriously, though he denies that he has ever been guided by them in his subsequent work (a claim justified, for example, by Rattigan's alternation of his dramas and comedies, in spite of critics who chastized him whenever he "reverted" to comedy), or in his own judgment of it. He sketches the critics' reception of the plays included in Volume I, noting their general approval but their refusal to take him seriously as a professional playwright, an attitude which began to thaw somewhat with The Winslow Boy. The quality which most critics found in that play was, Rattigan states, a sense of theatre. He postulates that, though the critics did not recognize it, a sense of theatre is the quality common to all five plays.

Though he states very clearly that a sense of theatre is not, by itself, enough to render a play great or even commendable, Rattigan maintains that it is a quality which all great playwrights must possess. Sense of theatre does not rest in craftsmanship, in the gift of poetic or rhetorical eloquence, or in the explicit, he maintains, but ". . . in those moments when the least is being said and the most suggested. . . . 'Never, never, never, never, never' . . . . 'Mother, give me the sun.'"

Has not the sense of theatre then something to do with the ability to thrill an audience by the mere power of suggestion . . . . Surely, in comedy as in tragedy, it is the implicit rather than the explicit that gives life to a scene and, by demanding the collaboration of an audience, holds it, contented, flattered, alert and responsive.

Rattigan contends, in opposition to the supporters of the Congreve-Wilde "gilded phrase" school, that the weapons of understatement and suggestion

are even more effective in comedy than in tragedy, and that, to the degree to which he practiced this theory in his early comedies against the accepted critical opinion, he can lay claim to a small element of pioneering and experiment in them.

Rattigan's use of the implicit in his early comedies does contrast to the "gilded phrase" school and was generally unrecognized as his individual style by most critics. What seems remarkable in the first Preface is the degree to which Rattigan was conscious and in control of a very sophisticated technique, which he describes as "the most vital problems of the whole craft of playwriting--what not to have your actors say, and how best to have them not say it," at a very early age. Rattigan's view of the implicit as the sense of theatre projects an unusual respect for the cooperative nature of theatre. A playwright who employs understatement and suggestion is counting on the perception and talent of his performers and the alertness of his audience to follow the paths and reach the destination he has blueprinted for them.<sup>25</sup>

Rattigan's second Preface is largely an attempt to explore the role of the audience. The position that he takes--that an audience is indispensable, that without it a play cannot exist as a play--is unexceptionable; even Artaud and his followers, who have decried the role of the

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<sup>25</sup>Peter Glenville, who directed Playbill, Adventure Story and Separate Tables, commented about Rattigan's style: "The writing is so economical and dramatically taut that rehearsals are extremely concentrated, and an adjective dropped or misdirected may spoil the effect of a whole passage of dialogue. Every line performs its function and though it may in itself be entertaining, it also takes us deeper into the story and the character. Cigarettes, for example, are stale and often superfluous properties on the stage. However," Glenville noted, Rattigan used Millie's request for a cigarette from Frank in The Browning Version to check on whether he still has the case she gave him, and to reveal their relationship. "Directing a Rattigan Play," Plays and Players, November 1954.

playwright, have never suggested that theatre can exist without an audience. In an effort to personify the general audience which had supported the theatre from the Greeks to the present, Rattigan invents a comic character whom he christens Aunt Edna:

. . . a nice, respectable, middle-class, middle-aged, maiden lady, with time on her hands and the money to help her pass it. . . . a hopeless lowbrow . . . Aunt Edna is universal, and to those who feel that all the problems of the modern theatre might be solved by her liquidation, let me add that I have no doubt at all that she is also immortal.

Rattigan declares that, while the painter, composer or novelist of genius could afford to disregard Aunt Edna, the playwright could not, for if he displeased her, he was lost. A playwright might tease or even bully her, but he must not mock, bore, befuddle, or woo, cosset or pander to her. He had made friends with Aunt Edna as a boy, Rattigan admits:

Yet, as time went on and I made efforts to develop as a serious writer for the theatre, I began to realize more clearly that the friendship, rewarding though it be, must never become too close.

Rattigan pursues Aunt Edna's influence on his own work, describing the development within his mind of a "controlled shizophrenia" whereby he acted as audience to his plays as he wrote them. As he matured, he distinguished between theatricalism--impossibly happy endings, flashy exits and entrances, and convenient faints and suicides enjoyed by Aunt Edna for their own sake--and "theatre." He tried to discipline the Aunt Edna within himself, who had, he feels, been too influential in the writing of his first two comedies. As illustration of his struggle, Rattigan cites the inconclusive endings of The Browning Version and The Deep Blue Sea. Death by heart attack in the former and successful suicide in the latter would have better pleased audiences and critics, he realized, but would have been a compromise with Aunt Edna. In this regard, he re-

marks, the critics "have almost as much of Aunt Edna in them as myself, indignantly as they may deny the imputation . . . ."

In a negative sense, a type of schizcphrenia seems much more evident in Rattigan's essays than in any of his plays. Beginning with his 1937 debut as a theorist, Rattigan had much to say about the craft of playwriting, about criticism, about the nature of theatre. But, particularly in the Prefaces and in some remarks in the Play of Ideas correspondence, he seemed torn between a desire to make serious, strong statements and a tendency to qualify or to undercut them. He ends "Concerning the Play of Ideas" with some strong statements about the place ideas have in the theatre, but in the form of an imaginary conversation with an adversary who comically knocks him down. He opens his reply to the other correspondents with references, continued in later paragraphs, to himself as a cheeky fourth former belabored by some of the biggest and brainiest boys in school.

A note of levity also colors Rattigan's presentation of many issues in his Prefaces, and puts him at a disadvantage throughout. Instead of placing himself firmly in a position of authority, he puts himself on the defensive from the beginning with his tongue-in-cheek discussion of the disadvantages of being a popular playwright. In the second Preface, he "confesses" that his plays are well-made, and comments:

This is an idiosyncrasy which, in certain critical circles, mainly American, is considered to reveal an insincerity of aim, and a cynical lack of feeling in the author.

Rattigan again "confesses" that he has never been able to understand the force of this argument, and proceeds to argue forcefully for craftsmanship. Among his comments are some thoughtful ones about Chekov:

The school of thought that condemns firm dramatic shape derives,

I suppose, originally from Tchekov, an author who, in my impertinent view, is not usually properly understood either by his worshippers or his active imitators. I believe that his plays are as firmly shaped as Ibsen's. The stream that seems to meander its casual length along does so between strong artificial banks, most carefully and cunningly contrived by a master craftsman. To admire the stream and ignore the artifice that gave it its course seems to me a grave oversight, and may well have led over the years to the present critical misapprehension by which laziness of construction is thought a virtue and the shapelessness of a play is taken as evidence of artistic integrity.

Rattigan then summarizes the problem as it affects himself: "If these plays of mine are 'well made' it is for one reason only: because--eccentric as I am--I prefer to make them well than to make them ill." Rattigan's use of such words as "confess," "idiosyncrasy," "impertinent," and "eccentric" may have been intended as sarcasm, but they appear apologetic and undercut the strength of his arguments.

Rattigan's humor is gentle--perhaps gentlemanly is an even more accurate description--rather than biting. It lulls rather than challenges readers, and makes it harder for them to do what Rattigan so clearly desires--to take him seriously. Even as he admits to taking his critics seriously, Rattigan jokes about exploding "the pose which I have often assiduously tried to assume, that of the urbane, even-tempered, world-hardened cynic, utterly indifferent alike to praise or to blame." The schizophrenic note in Rattigan's Prefaces appears to come from his struggle between assuming and dropping that pose.

Nowhere is the note of levity more disastrous than in Rattigan's creation of Aunt Edna. He seemed, with the comic personification of the universal audience, to be maintaining that there is a basic emotional, non-intellectual level on which any play which is to survive must touch an audience.<sup>26</sup> Every author has his groundlings. But, master of psychology

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<sup>26</sup>Rattigan declared this explicitly in the Preface to the third volume of his Collected Plays, which is discussed in Chapter VIII.

though he was proving to be as a playwright, he miscalculated badly with Aunt Edna, by creating a lowbrow character with whom virtually nobody would consciously identify. Rattigan's description of Aunt Edna clashes with the respect he conveys for audiences in many passages, and undercuts rather than supports his argument that popularity is not proof of lack of quality. Rattigan may have been trying to teach--or persuade--by following Crocker-Harris's philosophy that ". . . you can teach more things by laughter than by earnestness . . ." but, like Crocker-Harris, he failed.<sup>27</sup>

Even at his most earnest, in his declaration in the first Preface of his hope ". . . of achieving my ambition--and please do not jibe at it, for it is harmless--to write, before I die, one great play," Rattigan undercuts himself. There is a note of apology--why does he describe what should be regarded as the highest, finest ambition of a serious playwright as merely "harmless?"--and also an implicit expectation of being scoffed at for loving his work so much and taking it so seriously. The latter is understandable, given the amount of scoffing Rattigan had already endured, but it is also an open invitation to critical bullies.

A comparison of Rattigan's approach in his Prefaces and of Shaw's in the Play of Ideas stresses one major cause of Rattigan's vulnerability to his detractors. Why did Rattigan, and apparently others, consider that Shaw's unsupported arguments had "annihilated" all the contributors? Only one answer seems possible: because Shaw took an authoritarian position and projected strong moral conviction. The attitude he conveyed

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<sup>27</sup>Roger Machell, Rattigan's editor at Hamish Hamilton, stated to me in a London interview 27 August 1975, that he and his colleagues had found Aunt Edna "awfully amusing, written slightly tongue-in-cheek. I couldn't imagine anyone taking it completely seriously. I never thought

was, in effect, "I am Right. Period." By contrast, Rattigan, as a theorist, spends almost as much time building defenses as mounting offensives, and in intellectual warfare, the battle often goes--in the short run at least--to the most fiercely confident and determined side.

Kenneth Tynan was the first critic to attack Rattigan for his Prefaces. Having seen an advance copy of them, he used The Sleeping Prince, at its opening, as a perfect illustration of Rattigan's dicta that the theatre is no place for ideas, and that his best audience is the imaginary Aunt Edna. Tynan dismissed Rattigan with: "'The Sleeping Prince' demonstrates, once and for all, that he means what he says."<sup>28</sup> In a subsequent article in the Observer, he called Rattigan "the bathtub baritone of the drama." Tynan granted Rattigan's "supreme agility as a craftsman," and noted that he had written "two striking tragedies of understatement, a vivid drame à thèse, and a clutch of likeable comedies," and doubted that Rattigan would remain content in his secure position at the head of second-rank dramatists. But he also accused Rattigan of being so eager to please audiences that he had created only one unpleasant character, Millie Crocker-Harris, in all of his work. He scoffed at Rattigan's defense of Aunt Edna, maintaining that she went to the classics only because generations of highbrows had told her to, and followed rather than led intelligent taste.<sup>29</sup>

John Barber, reviewing the Prefaces, declared that Rattigan was

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for a moment that it would be used as a stick to beat him with. I've kicked myself ever since."

<sup>28</sup>Daily Sketch, 6 November 1953.

<sup>29</sup>Observer, 27 December 1953. In "Rattigan Talks to John Simon," p. 24, Rattigan refuted Tynan's statement that Aunt Edna is led by highbrows with "She never, never listens to what the critics say."

cross because the critics had not praised his recent comedies:

Sad, isn't it? To be so prosperous, so gifted . . . and spoiled. For that is what it comes to--to be so avid for more success and more success that it gets harder every morning to sit down in humble obedience to your own finest instincts.<sup>30</sup>

Other critics, however, praised the Prefaces as being lively and charming, and defended Rattigan's growth as a playwright.<sup>31</sup> In America, Walter Kerr remarked, "We do spend a lot of our energy these times showing Aunt Edna volumes of Gordon Craig and sternly stressing her obligation to us. We might do a great deal better by sounding her out."<sup>32</sup> Brooks Atkinson, by contrast, noted that "Mr. Rattigan's argument is naturally a defense of his limitations as a writer. He does not have a strong point of view. His principle gift as a playwright is his sense of theatre."<sup>33</sup> Aunt Edna and Rattigan, whom one critic called her privileged nephew,<sup>34</sup> were henceforward linked in many critics' evaluations

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<sup>30</sup>Daily Express, 21 November 1953. Ellipsis his. A writer in the Sunday Times, 3 January 1954, found the Prefaces "quarrelsome, arrogant, self-satisfied, and ungenerous, as well as quick-witted . . . ."

<sup>31</sup>W. A. Darlington, Daily Telegraph, 27 November 1953; Times Literary Supplement, 18 December 1953; Irish Times, 28 November 1953.

<sup>32</sup>Herald-Tribune, September 1954. TRPS-"French without Tears (1949)-Play of Ideas."

In "Drama: 20 Years After 'Godot'," Martin Gottfried wrote: "I don't think playwrights can long persist in ignoring audiences. Much like the composers who for so long have insisted on writing serial, aleatory or electronic music, despite listener rejection, playwrights who take a public-be-damned attitude find themselves in theaters empty but for critics. . . ."

"For the theater is a medium of involvement, even before it is one of art. It cannot exist without an audience and that audience cannot be dragged in, kicking and screaming, to see something it is told is artistic but doesn't like. . . ."

"The solution lies in a realization that no style of playwriting can exclude emotion, surprise, conflict and tension. . . ."

<sup>33</sup>"An Issue Posed," New York Times, n. d., LC Folder.

<sup>34</sup>Times Literary Supplement.

of Rattigan's plays, as the reviews of his next drama, Separate Tables, soon revealed.

Though Separate Tables provoked some debate among several British and a few American critics over whether Rattigan had, in its design, compromised with the Aunt Edna in his soul, it was one of his greatest successes on both sides of the Atlantic. Opening 22 September 1954 in London,<sup>35</sup> it ran for 726 performances,<sup>36</sup> becoming the longest run at the St. James Theatre since its construction in 1835,<sup>37</sup> and was voted "the most striking new work of 1954" by the British drama critics.<sup>38</sup> In New York, it was acclaimed by a majority of the Broadway critics, and played at the Music Box Theatre for 322 performances, the longest American run of any Rattigan drama.<sup>39</sup>

Separate Tables, like Playbill, is comprised of two one-act plays. Instead of being a dramatic and a comic study of contrasting personalities, however, Table by the Window and Table Number Seven are dramas imaginatively linked by the same setting, cast of supporting characters, and themes. Against a common background, a story develops in each play around a different male and female protagonist. As in Playbill, these leading characters have vividly contrasting personalities, and are de-

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<sup>35</sup>Plays, 2:98.

<sup>36</sup>The Stage Year Book (1957), p. 40.

<sup>37</sup>Times, 6 January 1956.

<sup>38</sup>English 10 (Spring 1955):139.

<sup>39</sup>IC Play Stats.

signed for virtuoso performers who can act both roles.

The setting of Separate Tables is the lounge and dining room of a small, unpretentious hotel in Bournemouth, which houses several elderly residents, a young couple on holiday, the hotel manageress, and two waitresses. In the first play, Table by the Window, an aging beauty, former model Anne Shankland, comes to the hotel, where her ex-husband, John Malcolm, has lived for several years, in a desperate attempt to win him back. Anne and John are another of Rattigan's mismatched couples: she a narcissist incapable of giving but frantically craving love and attention, he a man unable to control a passion for Anne so overwhelming that he served a short prison term and destroyed his promising political career for almost killing her when she constantly teased and then refused him during their marriage.

In their eight years apart, John has taken a job writing political articles for a liberal magazine under a pseudonym and has tried to forget Anne through drink and an affair with the hotel manageress, Miss Cooper. Anne has married and divorced a homosexual and turned toward drugs. Playing her accustomed role of temptress, Anne almost succeeds in seducing John, until Miss Cooper exposes her as a liar. Anne has claimed that her presence at the hotel is coincidence, but Miss Cooper tells John that Anne has received a call from the editor of his magazine. Ashamed of her jealous action when John brutally rejects Anne, Miss Cooper learns from her how ill and desperate she really is, and tells John. When Anne confesses to John how much she really needs him, they effect an unsteady reconciliation, aware that they have little more hope together than they do apart.

In Table Number Seven, which takes place eighteen months after the

events of the first play, two regular residents, mentioned but not seen in Table by the Window, are the focus of attention. Major Pollock, a retired army officer with an impressive public school and war record which he constantly boasts about, has formed a gentle friendship with Sybil Railton-Bell, a severely repressed, thirty-three-year-old spinster cowed by her tyrannical mother.

Because of his arrest for a minor sexual offense--nudging women in a cinema--the Major is revealed as a fraud--a council school-educated, enlisted man who never served at the front and who rose only to the rank of lieutenant. Mrs. Railton-Bell, outraged by the "Major's"<sup>40</sup> behavior and threatened by Sybil's attraction to him, convinces several of the residents to demand that Miss Cooper ask him to leave the hotel. She does the opposite, and tries to persuade him to stay. He claims that he does not have the courage to do so, but he appears at dinner, and instead of being snubbed by the other residents, is slowly greeted by most of them, including Sybil, who finds the courage to defy her mother publicly.

The themes which unite both plays are loneliness and compassion. Loneliness is stressed in the setting of the isolated seaside hotel and the symbolically separate tables. Rattigan weaves an amazing variety of states of loneliness into his characterizations. Three of the residents are elderly people living on small pensions or savings. Lady Matheson, the widow of a civil servant, is so poor that she cannot even afford to have her radio repaired, though the music she hears on it is her greatest source of pleasure. Remarking about a television cooking program, she

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<sup>40</sup>Though the title of Major is bogus, the character has been referred to as the Major (with and without quotation marks) rather than as Pollock, in almost all critical discussions of Separate Tables.

laments that she will never have an opportunity to cook any of the dishes. Mr. Fowler, a retired classics master, lives for letters from his former students, and hopes in vain that they will visit him. Miss Meacham, a crusty spinster who spends her time alternately daydreaming of talking with historical personalities and studying racing forms, declares that she faced the fact that she was an "alone" type in her youth: "People have always scared me a bit, you see. They're so complicated. I suppose that's why I prefer the dead ones. Any trouble from them and you switch them off like a television set."<sup>41</sup> When other residents express sympathy for Mr. Fowler's longing to see his former students, she comments:

Why should we old has-beens expect the young to show us consideration? We've had our life. They've still got theirs to live. Seeing us can only remind them of death, and old people's diseases. . . . I don't want to remind them of what they've got to become.

Mrs. Railton-Bell, wealthy enough to afford a modest amount of furs, jewelry, and formal attire which she flaunts, as well as an occasional trip for herself and Sybil, clings to her social pretensions, her power over Sybil, and her influence among the residents. Her loneliness is brutally ugly--it is the loneliness of the petty tyrant--grasping, malicious, bereft of humanity and of dignity.

The presence of the young couple, Charles and Jean Stratton, who are students in the first play and a married couple with a baby in the second, provides contrast to the older residents. While the latter look backward, Charles is looking forward to being a doctor, and Jean, to a career. She has abandoned her militant careerism for doting motherhood in the second play, but Rattigan makes a telling point with her change.

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<sup>41</sup>Rattigan, Separate Tables, Plays, 3:143. All references from this edition.

Jean's baby-talk to her sleeping son is comic, but the vehemence with which she, as a mother, condemns the "Major" as a public menace, declaring that she might one day have a daughter who could be molested by such a man, makes her Mrs. Railton-Bell's staunchest ally. Jean has wondered in the first play if she will ever be like any of the lonely old people at the hotel. Rattigan's subtle point in her characterization is that she has the potential to become like the worst of them. An interesting aspect of loneliness is dramatized through Charles when he alone votes against the "Major's" expulsion. "You must forgive me," he says. "I suppose it's just that I'm feeling a little light-headed at finding myself, on an issue of common humanity, in a minority of one."

Miss Cooper is the pivotal character in Separate Tables, the catalyst in both plots. She gives as much time and attention to the personal crises of her charges as she does to management problems, and by granting the benefit of the doubt to characters burdened by their weaknesses, helps them to find their strengths. She faces her own griefs privately, maintaining her efficient professional manner. Hers is the isolation of the strong.

The four major characters are all in middle age.<sup>42</sup> Their youthful dreams are broken, but they still have some choice about what to do with the rest of their lives. They are not resigned, like the elderly residents, but suspended.

Anne Shankland's is the loneliness of the narcissist who has never learned to consider others and is terrified by the prospect of facing

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<sup>42</sup>Though chronologically Sybil is thirty-three, she has characteristics of the confirmed spinster, and Rattigan describes her as "wizened" and "dowdy." Plays, 3:162.

her declining years with no one to minister to her needs. She is worse than a narcissist, however, she is a sadist. Critics have sometimes lamented the fact that Rattigan's characters seemed less to confront one another than to avoid confrontations in which their angers, frustrations, and griefs were given full expression. That this was a matter of selective focus rather than a lack of ability to write lacerating confrontations, Rattigan amply demonstrated in Anne's attempted seduction of John. John reminds her that she married him, a man from a poor family who began as a dock worker and rose to Junior Labour Minister by the time he was thirty, rather than the baronet or millionaire who also sought her hand:

Because where would your fun have been in enslaving the sort of man who was already the slave of his own head gardner? You wanted bigger game. Wilder game. None of your tame baronets and Australian millionaires, too well-mannered to protest when you denied them their conjugal rights, and too well-brought-up not to take your headaches at bedtime as just headaches at bedtime. . . . No, Anne, dear. What enjoyment would there have been for you in using your weapons on that sort of a husband? But to turn them on a genuine, live, roaring savage from the slums of Hull, to make him grovel at the vague and distant promise of delights that were his anyway by right, or goad him to such a frenzy of drink and rage by a locked door that he'd kick it in and hit you with his fist so hard that you'd knock yourself unconscious against a wall--that must really have been fun.<sup>43</sup>

But John has wrecked his own life by entering into "a marriage that every prompting of reason told me must be disastrous," because of his violent love and desperate craving for Anne. His feeling for her is as unreasonable as Hester's for Freddie. He names as one reason for their incompatibility the gulf in behavior and in expectations that their difference in class had engendered.<sup>44</sup> By succumbing to the hollow beauty

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<sup>43</sup>Permission to quote from Hamish Hamilton.

<sup>44</sup>Class differences are also indicated in a brief earlier scene between John, Lady Matheson, and Mrs. Railton-Bell. John, drunk, lec-

and elegance of Anne, John ultimately betrayed the values which moved him from the docks into Parliament, ruined his career, lost the chance to fight for his political convictions in the government, and became an outcast, reduced to the indignity of writing under a pseudonym.

Sybil's loneliness is that of an adult who has allowed herself to be treated as a frail and backward child for most of her life, and has become miserably dependent on a parent. "Major" Pollock's is that of the faker, the person who invents an identity because he cannot bear himself as he really is, and is forced always to play that identity for others. Both he and Sybil are strangers to themselves.

The presence of the two chatty waitresses, who are oblivious to the residents' problems, emphasizes the other characters' isolation. A detail--one waitress's telling Mr. Fowler that the cook is out of the dish he wants, and then giving that same dish to the more commanding Anne when she later requests it, underscores the small indignities which the elderly residents endure.

Most of the characters in Separate Tables are misfits or outcasts, but Rattigan does not treat them as such. He asks compassion for them--not compassion which begs for a suspension of judgment, but which asks that individuals be granted the benefit of the doubt. Rattigan asks that the context of people's actions be considered before judgment is made, and that compassion be granted not primarily for their frailties but for their struggles to face them. This attitude is dramatized in

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tures the two staunch Tories on why they should vote Labor, expressing sympathy to Lady Matheson as a victim of the class struggle and threatening Mrs. Railton-Bell with a proposed tax on her capital. This scene both gives exposition about John's past and stresses that he is an outsider among the hotel residents.

each play of Separate Tables.

In Table by the Window, Rattigan first shows the pattern of behavior which destroyed Anne and John's marriage and his career, and then shows how they try to change that pattern. Miss Cooper, in love with John and most in a position to despise and damn Anne, tries to consider both of their contexts. She sees that John's love for Anne will never abate, that without her he is not really living. She tells him:

She is vain and spoiled and selfish and deceitful. Of course, with you being in love with her, you look at all those faults like in a kind of distorting mirror, so that they seem like monstrous sins . . . Well, I just see them as ordinary human faults, that's all--the sort of faults a lot of people have--mostly women, I grant, but some men too. I don't like them but they don't stop me feeling sorry for a woman who's unhappy and desperate and ill and needing help more than anyone I have ever known.<sup>45</sup>

Anne, when she reappears, is open with John for the first time, apologizing for her liss, admitting to her flaws and fears, and to her admiration and need for him. John realizes that, though they might both try to satisfy each other's needs, they would fail: "Because our two needs for each other are like two chemicals that are harmless by themselves, but when brought together in a test-tube can make an explosion as deadly as dynamite." Anne, looking around at the separate tables in the dining room, feels that a possible explosion would be preferable to slow death apart: "After all, there are worse deaths, aren't there? Slower and more painful and more frightening? So frightening, John. So frighten-

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<sup>45</sup>Emphasis Rattigan's. The Times, 23 September 1954, and Punch, 29 September, criticized the fact that the manageress learns of her rival's plight, took place offstage, after Miss Cooper took Anne, hysterical over John's rejection, upstairs. The scene would certainly have been interesting. Its absence is possibly a matter of balance--Rattigan may have judged that Miss Cooper's counseling of both major characters in both plays might have made too much of a pattern. Her conversation with John differs from that with the Major because of her relationship with the former.

ing." With quiet dignity, because with full knowledge of their chances and acceptance of the odds, they effect their bleak reconciliation. It is for this dignity, earned through suffering, that they prove worthy of compassion.

Anne and John are not an integral part of life at the hotel--it is a hiding place for him and a frightening omen of the future to her. As a transient, Anne is an object of curiosity; John, though a resident, is also an outsider--his drinking habits and his liberal political sentiments antagonize the residents but affect them little.<sup>46</sup> By contrast, the exposure of the "Major" in Table Number Seven involves all the residents and Miss Cooper in a crisis which teaches many of them more about themselves and alters their futures.

The characters' reaction to Mrs. Railton-Bell's revelation that the "Major" is a fraud is one of gossipy excitement, for all but Sybil have been bored by his public school and war stories. Even their reaction to the fact that the "Major" pleaded guilty to nudging one woman and sitting next to five others in the cinema is at first a light one, as Charles and Jean speculate on how many nudges there might have been. But the moment that Mrs. Railton-Bell proposes that they demand that Miss Cooper ask the "Major" to leave, the scene becomes a serious trial in miniature,

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<sup>46</sup>Worsley, New Statesman and Nation, 2 October 1954, considered it a flaw that the clash in Table by the Window did not come out of the setting, as did that in Table Number Seven, but could, in his view, have taken place anywhere. But, after all, the setting is a hotel, where transients are likely to come for just such purposes as John and Anne. The setting is important to their story for it represents a future of slow decay for them. Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, 3 November 1956, p. 29, wrote: "The decision of whether to explode out together or fizzle out apart is made more poignant by being arrived at among the ludicrously contrasting humdrumness and unconcerns of the smallminded residents."

in which each character, according to his or her personal values and context, expresses a different point of view.

Charles votes against the "Major's" expulsion, declaring that, while he personally finds the more furtive forms of sexual expression ugly and repulsive, his lack of understanding may be a shortcoming in him, and certainly places him in a state of prejudice in which one must be very wary of passing moral judgments. From an ethical standpoint, he feels, the "Major" has done no real harm. Jean hotly disagrees, seeing the problem from her dotting new mother point of view. Mr. Fowler, the classics master, sees Charles's stand as a modern viewpoint, to which the old standards of morality are opposed. Certain acts are wrong because they are wrong in themselves, and tolerance of evil may be an evil, he declares. While he does so reluctantly, remembering how he once had to recommend a boy for expulsion, he votes against the "Major."

Lady Matheson, torn between her loyalty to Mrs. Railton-Bell, her only friend at the hotel, and her feeling that the incident has been blown out of proportion, defers to Mrs. Railton-Bell's bullying. Miss Meacham does not vote, stating that she doesn't give a damn that the "Major" is a phony and a dirty old man in addition to being a bore, while Sybil, asked by Charles to express her own opinion, becomes hysterical. As Mrs. Railton-Bell takes her upstairs, Charles remarks that he had hoped to see Sybil disagree with her mother in public just once, for it would save her soul.

The trial scene is masterful in the way that Rattigan explores many sides of the debate both in general moral terms and in terms of each character's personal values. But it is doubly so for the manner in which it prepares for the characters' reactions to the "Major's" appearance at dinner.

Shocked silence greets the "Major's" entrance as he walks to his table and buries himself in the menu. Charles, the most confident and assertive of the residents, greets him first. Charles is followed, in the psychological order of their assertiveness in the trial scene, by Mr. Fowler, Miss Meacham, Lady Matheson, and finally Sybil. None of these characters had wanted maliciously to condemn the "Major," and all respond to his courage with courage of their own. The ending of Separate Tables is, among Rattigan's plays, most like that of The Winslow Boy in its tone of triumph for the human spirit. That this tone is Rattigan's intention is clearly indicated in his final stage direction, that a decorous silence reigns over the room, which "no longer gives any sign of the battle that has just been fought and won between its four, bare walls."

While all of the characters but Mrs. Railton-Bell and Jean share in the victory, the agonizing struggles and ultimate triumphs are the "Major's" and Sybil's. Both characters are studies in repression like Crocker-Harris, but Rattigan, probing this state deeply, shows that severe emotional repression has many causes and manifestations. Sybil veers between stammering timidity and hysteria. That she has some mind of her own is clear in her longing to "do something," her shy pride that she once held a job for a short time, and her seeking of the "Major's" companionship, all in spite of her mother's disapproval. But her mother--tyrannizing over Sybil since her father's death when she was only seven, forbidding her to go to school and tutoring her herself, discouraging her from working and from having any interest in men and from showing any signs of independence by her constant propaganda that she is a frail, unhealthy, and sometimes ungrateful child--has all but smothered Sybil. Sybil is repelled and frightened by the "Major's" misdemeanor, but equally fright-

ened at losing his companionship and from worrying about what will happen to him once he leaves the hotel. As she tells Miss Cooper, she realizes that the "Major" is right when he says that they are alike in fearing life and sex. She wonders if she isn't a freak, and Miss Cooper replies, stressing, as does Miller in The Deep Blue Sea, that people must be considered as individuals and must not be labeled:

I never know what that word means. If you mean you're different from other people, then, I suppose, you are a freak. But all human beings are a little different from each other, aren't they? . . . I've never met an ordinary person. To me all people are extraordinary. I meet all sorts here, you know, in my job, and the one thing I've learnt in five years is that the word normal, applied to any human being, is utterly meaningless. In a sort of way it's an insult to our Maker, don't you think, to suppose that He could possibly work to any set pattern.

In his scene with Sybil, after his exposure, the "Major" tells her how he came to be afraid of life and of sex--a shy boy despised by his father and schoolmates, pathetically happy to get an army commission as a lieutenant, hoping that some woman might then look at him. "But it didn't work. It never has worked. I'm made in a certain way, and I can't change it. It has to be in the dark, you see, and strangers . . ." Convinced that he could not achieve anything in the real world, he invented a prestigious background, and lived a daydream because he couldn't bear the reality.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Manhattan psychiatrist Dr. Allan Blumenthal recommends that his group therapy patients read The Browning Version and Separate Tables. In an interview 11 January 1977, Dr. Blumenthal commented:

"I consider Rattigan a superb dramatist, particularly skillful in his handling of psychological repression. For this reason, I encourage my patients in group therapy to study his works, especially The Browning Version and Separate Tables, in order to gain insight into the mechanism of repression.

"In the character of Crocker-Harris, for example, one can readily appreciate the nature of the inner conflicts and the manner in which his subconscious operates to maintain a placid and expressionless emotional equilibrium. It takes a real psychological cataclysm to break down the

On the question of harm, raised by Charles in the trial scene, the "Major" accepts responsibility, not for harming the women he sat next to or nudged, but for hurting Sybil. He tells her about himself, hoping to help her understand, fearing that she will never get over her disappointment, and comments to Miss Cooper: "One's apt to excuse oneself sometimes by saying: Well, after all, what I do doesn't do anybody much harm. But one does, you see. That's not a thought I like."

Though the "Major" claims that he is made in a way he can't change, Miss Cooper challenges his view, suggesting that he stay in the hotel and prove to himself that he can live as Mr. Pollock, both for his sake and Sybil's. As in The Browning Version and The Deep Blue Sea, the extended hand of friendship and understanding has a healing power in Table Number Seven. Sybil and the "Major" help each other--he by talking to her openly, a thing he says he has never done with anyone, and by making his concern for her manifest; she by offering to loan him money and blessing him as she says goodbye. Miss Cooper helps both by projecting her belief that each has strengths they can discover and act on in order to win independence and self-respect. And she speaks from deeply personal experience, as Rattigan makes apparent when the "Major" asks if she hasn't suffered too, and she indicates that she still loves John but has learned to live without hope, happy at least for the memory. In such moments,

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repression and to reveal his actual feelings. Crocker-Harris is prototypical of the stoical, repressed individual who holds strong values and ideas. But, because he considers himself to be ineffectual and feels that his values have no place in the real world, he is forced to hide from the world--and from himself--the intensity of his emotions.

"Dramatizing psychological problems is a formidable assignment. Because the conflicts are internal, it is difficult to make their effects in action dramatic and convincing. In this respect, Rattigan is surely a genius."

Rattigan demonstrates the loneliness of people who seldom communicate with others on a personal level, and the barriers which tumble when someone expresses a genuine interest in listening.

Rattigan described Separate Tables as a plea for tolerance. The "Major's" plight had been inspired by an incident in Britain in which an actor's arrest for homosexuality had created a great scandal, which had quieted when the actor courageously continued his stage appearances.<sup>48</sup> Rattigan could not write about homosexuality because of British censorship,<sup>49</sup> a restriction for which he later felt grateful: "If I had written the man as a homosexual, the play may have been construed as a thesis drama begging for tolerance specifically of the homosexual. Instead it is a play for the understanding of everyone."<sup>50</sup> Eric Portman, who played John Malcolm and the "Major" in the London and Broadway productions of Separate Tables, commented:

Rattigan is very sensitive to present-day trends of thought and feeling. If you look a little beneath the surface of theatrical effects, I think you cannot fail to see that both plays in "Separate Tables" have considerable daring. I believe that Rattigan is helping to open up fresh paths for the treatment on the stage of all sorts of topics and emotions, that, so far, have not been allowed in our theatre. But, like any expert and intelligent man of the theatre who wishes to command an audience, he never chooses the wrong psychological moment, or goes beyond the capacity of his audience's understanding.<sup>51</sup>

T. C. Worsley wrote that Rattigan had chosen his most difficult subject to date in Separate Tables, for the major characters were likely

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<sup>48</sup>Arthur Gelb, "The Busiest Playwright in Town," New York Times, 21 October 1956.

<sup>49</sup>"Rattigan Talks to John Simon," p. 24.

<sup>50</sup>Gelb.

<sup>51</sup>"Portman Discusses Rattigan," Stage, 7 October 1954.

to alienate audiences, and Rattigan's triumph was ". . . to have engaged our human sympathies for the least admirable of characters and, without falsity, to have demonstrated even there the little germ of quality, the discovery of a residue of self-respect at the bottom of the barrel."<sup>52</sup> While a few British critics commended Rattigan's daring,<sup>53</sup> however, there were many who, though finding much to praise in both plays, judged that Rattigan had compromised with Aunt Edna. The Times wrote:

Both "Table by the Window" and "Table Number Seven" saw Mr. Rattigan almost at his best as an artist and quite at his best as a storyteller who is careful to please the numerous body of playgoers whom he has personified in an Aunt Edna.

His Aunt Edna is an influential old lady who likes happy endings and she is not over particular as to the dramatic methods employed to bring them about. Mr. Rattigan's determination to consult her wishes on this matter doubtless accounts for a faint streak of falsity which runs through these extremely entertaining stage stories. . . . both create the uneasy feeling that the subtle artist is deliberately blunting the edge of his story.<sup>54</sup>

As with The Browning Version and The Deep Blue Sea, a battle over whether Rattigan's endings were happy or unhappy, dramatically true or

<sup>52</sup>New Statesman and Nation.

<sup>53</sup>Worsley; Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 26 September 1954; What's On, 1 October.

<sup>54</sup>23 September 1954; W. J. Igoe, Catholic Herald, 11 October; Reynolds, 26 September; Stage, 30 September; Sunday Express, 26 September. Kenneth Tynan wrote his review in the Observer, 26 September, in the form of a dialogue between Aunt Edna and a Young Perfectionist. While conceding that John and the "Major" were original and disturbing creations, the Young Perfectionist lamented that there was something in Separate Tables for both him and Aunt Edna, "But not quite enough for either of us."

In America, only Time, 5 November 1956, p. 75, and Tom F. Driver, Christian Century, 14 November, p. 1328, implied that Rattigan tried to please Aunt Edna with Separate Tables. According to translated clippings in TRPS-"Separate Tables," the play was produced in Germany, Holland, Denmark and Norway between 1957 and 1958. Klaus Kasper, Telegraf (Berlin), 8 October 1957, wrote that Rattigan, in his happy endings, ranked psychology and Aunt Edna's wishful thinking as parallel.

theatrically phony, was waged.<sup>55</sup> A few criticized, and others praised, Miss Cooper's role as catalyst in both plots.<sup>56</sup> Several critics considered Table Number Seven superior--some called it a masterpiece--to Table by the Window,<sup>57</sup> and Rattigan had many defenders who found great virtues in both plays. Derek Granger wrote:

Indeed, the dexterity of the idea is in itself dazzling. One may reflect that Chekhov's decaying country houses were more poetical points of vantage from which to observe the slow death of the heart, but never perhaps was there a more absolute wasteland of lost hopes and illusions than in the "lounges" and dining-rooms of such places as the "Beaugard." With all this, Mr. Rattigan's acute social observation never fails him; and though it may be justly said that his minor characters are "types" one continually marvels at the way he

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<sup>55</sup>Among the critics who found the "happy" endings unconvincing were the Times and Sunday Express; John Barber, Daily Express, 23 September 1954; W. A. Darlington, Daily Telegraph and Morning Post; Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, both 23 September.

Stage, 30 September, declared that the ending of Table by the Window was a compromise with Aunt Edna, but that the ending of Table Number Seven was ". . . the best moment of the evening. . . . It is clear that a triumph of right over wrong, stated in simple human terms, can still fill a modern theatre with a thrilling atmosphere."

Paul Dehn, BBC Broadcast, 3 October (Transcription in TRPS-"Separate Tables"), thought that both endings were really unhappy and made the point that a corollary message of the play was that it was better in certain circumstances for two people to be somewhat unhappier together than completely unhappy alone.

Ronald Barber, Plays and Players, November 1954, wrote that the ending to the first play was frightening because the audience knew that Anne and John's reconciliation couldn't last, while the ending to the second play brought "a feeling of hope for the survival of tolerant, decent behavior in modern society. It is one of the most touching scenes in contemporary drama."

Richard Findlater, Tribune, 22 October, found both endings happy. "Yet what is more striking, I feel, is the difficulty with which the happy ending is reached, a difficulty in which there is an uncommon amount not only of theatrical skill but of human truth."

<sup>56</sup>Criticizing Miss Cooper as an interference were Darlington and Anthony Cookman, Tatler and Bystander, 6 October, p. 18. Praising her role as catalyst were Paul Holt, Daily Herald, n.d., TRPS-"Separate Tables"; J. C. Trewin, Sketch, 6 October, p. 298; Punch, 29 September.

<sup>57</sup>Hobson; Worsley; Elizabeth Frank, News Chronicle, 23 September.

makes the "typical" seem so genuinely alive, at his sense of natural comedy which brings humour straight out of character with hardly any help from "the funny line," and with that unflinching feeling for dramatic fitness which allows him to make his effects with such economy that words seem barely necessary.<sup>58</sup>

Again there was positive word-of-mouth from London to Broadway, but the critics writing glowingly of Separate Tables were American rather than British.<sup>59</sup> Also for the first time, the cast of a Rattigan drama had the same leads--Eric Portman and Margaret Leighton--and several of the same supporting players as the London production. Peter Glenville directed the plays both in London and New York.<sup>60</sup> These factors may have contributed to the Broadway success of Separate Tables, which was received with general praise,<sup>61</sup> though with some debate.<sup>62</sup> Brooks Atkinson

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<sup>58</sup>Financial Times, 23 September. Also praising the ingenuity of Rattigan's idea was Worsley; Rattigan's social observation, Shulman; his supporting characterizations, Edwin Burch, Truth, 1 October; Time and Tide, 2 October; English; and Rattigan's dialogue, Hobson, Punch, and F. S., Theatre World, November 1954.

<sup>59</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "Two by Rattigan," New York Times, 22 May 1955; Richard Watts, "Chiefly about Terence Rattigan," Post, 7 July 1955; Marya Mannes, Reporter, 20 October 1955; Bonamy Dobr c, "Arts and Letters--Some London Plays," Sewanee Review 63(April-June 1955): 270-80.

<sup>60</sup>London production credits in Plays, 3:98-9. American credits in Rattigan, Separate Tables (New York: Signet Book, 1955), pp. 9 and 75.

<sup>61</sup>Agreeing that, on this occasion, a Rattigan play had traveled well and deserved praise were Brooks Atkinson, New York Times; Tom Donnelly, World Telegram and Sun; Richard Watts, Post, all 26 October 1956; Hobe Morrison, Variety, 31 October; John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, 3 November.

<sup>62</sup>Critics who thought the first play good but the second superior were Atkinson; Whitney Bolton, Morning Telegraph, 27 October; George Oppenheimer, Newsday, 1 November. Disliking the first but praising the second play highly were John McClain, Journal-American, 26 October; Woolcott Gibbs, New Yorker, 3 November, p. 68; Theatre Arts, January 1957, p. 20. Gibbs called Table Number Seven a "little masterpiece of low-keyed eloquence."

Martin Dickstein, Brooklyn Daily, 29 October, and Richard Hayes, Commonweal, 30 November, p. 234, thought the first play better than the second. Of Table by the Window, Hayes wrote that Rattigan had seen that

declared: "After manipulating small and sometimes maudlin stories with conspicuous skill for several years, Terence Rattigan has now come to grips triumphantly with a moving theme."<sup>63</sup> Especially impressed with Table Number Seven, which he called a masterpiece in miniature, Atkinson wrote:

In his spare literary style, Mr. Rattigan conveys overwhelming pity and tenderness. What he does not say is more eloquent than what he has put on paper. The surface is taut and resilient, but the interior of the play is deep and merciful. Although he and his actors are expert craftsmen, they are artists too. They illuminate human nature.<sup>64</sup>

The nature of the American critics' praise for Separate Tables, especially when considered in conjunction with the reasons for their partial approval of The Winslow Boy, is a vivid confirmation of what Rattigan recognized in his 1937 New York Times article--that American critics favored ideological dramatists. Whitney Bolton wrote:

Terence Rattigan's compassionate survey of human weaknesses and hungers has at last reached here and the only pity of it is that it took so long. Here is an evening in which a literate and forgiving writer takes careful study of his fellow man, and for every sin in the book finds a way to forgive. "Separate Tables," on the

God and Society were no longer modern whipping boys, but Sex.

John Chapman, Daily News, and Robert Coleman, Daily Mirror, both 26 October 1956, found both plays boring. Gerald Weales, New Republic, 12 November, p. 23; Harold Clurman, Lies Like Truth, pp. 174-76; Newsweek, 5 November, p. 78; Driver; and Time, all called the plays ultimately too predictable, offering them nothing to take home with them.

<sup>63</sup>26 October.

<sup>64</sup>New York Times, 11 November 1956. While most critics praised Rattigan for his style, Harold Clurman, p. 176, differed: "In its way, Separate Tables is perfect. One certainly enjoys it, though inwardly one is barely touched. It suffers the limitations of its virtues. For all its gentlemanly understatement, it is too explicit. Everything is too thoroughly defined and articulated because nothing beyond what is definite--which means what is already known--is sought. There is not a blurred moment, a blot of indecision; nothing is unresolved or mysterious. The make is first-rate, but artistic creation is something else again."

surface a light thing, is actually a deeply serious and studious demonstration that to be tolerant is to be wise.<sup>65</sup>

Atkinson wrote that Rattigan's subject of loneliness was "relevant";<sup>66</sup> Hobe Morrison of Variety declared that both plays of Separate Tables had immediacy and point and proved that Rattigan was "capable of penetrating, urgent drama when he finds a vital, topical subject."<sup>67</sup>

The fact is that many of the American drama critics seemed incapable of evaluating Rattigan's work positively unless they could find some ideological virtues in it. Both The Browning Version and The Deep Blue Sea are profoundly personal plays. The problems suffered by the characters--emotional repression, betrayal of values, the spiritual-physical dichotomy in love, a woman's need for sexual fulfillment and her need to develop herself as an individual--are universally applicable,<sup>68</sup> but Rattigan set them in a personal rather than social context.

His focus in The Winslow Boy is also on a psychological issue, but it is set in the context of a battle against the government. In Separate

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<sup>65</sup>Morning Telegraph. <sup>66</sup>22 May 1955.

<sup>67</sup>31 October 1956.

<sup>68</sup>Dr. Allan Blumenthal commented: "I believe the issues dramatized by Rattigan are universal. Psychological repression, for example, is not confined to the prototypical British types. Repression as a dominant symptom leading to the muting of emotions and the turning underground of deep personal values is widespread. I have found this problem in patients from a wide variety of cultures--in patients from the United States, from Canada, Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Denmark and Australia.

"Many of the other conflicts dramatized by Rattigan are the result of confusions over philosophical issues--issues such as the mind-body dichotomy, free will vs. determinism, the meaning of sex, the role of women, etc. Such philosophical questions arise in every culture, and every individual is potentially a victim of irrational and contradictory philosophical attitudes within his culture. Although Rattigan chooses his characters predominantly from one particular social group, the problems they manifest stem from philosophical questions relevant to all people."

Tables, he also focuses on psychological issues--but a part of the problem between John and Anne is dramatized as a clash between class values,<sup>69</sup> and the trial of the "Major" is a clash of "normal" society versus "abnormal" individual, with a specific comment by Charles that Mrs. Railton-Bell is using the tactics of Senator McCarthy.<sup>70</sup> Separate Tables was hailed in America as a "deeper" drama, a play of more than "mere" craftsmanship, because it dramatized such compassion for the elderly, the outcasts, the misfits of society<sup>71</sup>--fashionable attitudes among ideologists. To the degree that The Winslow Boy was applauded by American critics, it was as a thesis drama, with criticism for its "descent" into personal considerations like Catherine's broken engagement. Surely the relatively warm reception given these two plays, and the cool reception of The Browning Version and The Deep Blue Sea, were no coincidences, but proof that Rattigan was entirely correct in 1937 and again in 1950, when he wrote in "Concerning the Play of Ideas":

I further believe that the intellectual avant-garde of the English theatre--or rather, let's be both brave and accurate, and say of the English-speaking theatre, since in my view, the Americans are the worst offenders--are, in their insistence on the superiority of the play of ideas over the play of character and situation, not only misguided but old-fashioned.<sup>72</sup>

Apparently Rattigan did not think of it at the time--and it was

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<sup>69</sup>Atkinson, New York Times, 15 September 1957: "From a literary point of view, 'Table by the Window' is a triumph of many little understatements about polite social tensions in British society."

<sup>70</sup>Theatre Arts wrote that the second play was "something we have not associated with Rattigan--a study of human behavior in the midst of what takes on the familiar aspects of a witch hunt."

<sup>71</sup>Watts, 26 October, wrote of "the touching loneliness of social outcasts in a world of genteel poverty."

<sup>72</sup>P. 24.

irrelevant anyway to his attack on the play of ideas--but he might have remarked, to critics who insisted that plays have ideological relevance,<sup>73</sup> that the most often ignored and otherwise maligned and mistreated minority throughout history has always been not a group of one distinction or another--religious, racial, class or sex--but the individual.<sup>74</sup> Rattigan's focus on, and implicit defense of, the individual as an individual is one of his most striking and unique contributions to twentieth century drama.

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<sup>73</sup>In addition to using ideological relevance as a standard of criticism, the theatrical ferment which the Absurdist and Angry Young Men were beginning to engender also began to appear in criticisms of Rattigan's plays as early as 1957. Florian Kienzl, Der Tag (Berlin), 8 October 1957, wrote: "One cannot always play Ionesco. Rattigan is solid theatre, and as such we welcome him." Horst Koegler, Die Welt, 8 October, declared: "Where John Osborne looks back in anger, Terence Rattigan looks on with unconcerned composure. He never takes part!"

<sup>74</sup>In his interview with me, Rattigan remarked: "People should care about people, and I've some doubts that the ideologists do. They may care about the starving millions, but they're not worried too much about those millions' particular concerns."

## CHAPTER VIII

There were many questions that critics might have asked about Rattigan's plays at this point in his career. They might have asked whether his craftsmanship merely manifested Rattigan's dedication to a particular style of playwriting, or whether there was a view of the world implicit in the form of his plays. With regard to the plays' content, critics might have wondered if Rattigan's emphasis on the possibility and responsibility of choice in his characterizations, and his defense of the individual, expressed a view of man's place in the world. They might have asked if the plays' recurring themes dealt with psychological issues of universal importance, and marked Rattigan as a dramatist deeply concerned with fundamental conflicts within man's soul. But most critics did not take Rattigan seriously enough to ask such questions, as C. P. Snow noted in 1957:

Once the critics had made up their minds that a popular rather than a serious playwright had arrived on the scene, nothing could make them give Rattigan the attention he deserved. But if Terence Rattigan had received the kind of serious criticism that has since been showered on one or two playwrights--the sort of criticism that many novelists expect to get--he would certainly have become a much more important dramatist than has been his lot so far.<sup>1</sup>

Critics had not recognized Rattigan as an artist of individual vision by the time of Separate Tables' London premiere in 1954, and subsequent events in the theatre made the attainment of such recognition even more

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<sup>1</sup>"Fads of Critics," Manchester Guardian, 23 October 1957.

difficult. In 1956, John Osborne's Look Back in Anger ushered in what critics alternately called the Angry Young Man Revolution or the New Wave in British drama. Enthusiasm, particularly among the younger British critics, for the form, content, and style of plays by such authors as Osborne, John Arden, and Arnold Wesker, coupled with interest in the Absurdist playwrights, contributed to a backlash against Rattigan. Tom Stoppard, the most critically acclaimed young British playwright of the late sixties and the seventies, recently commented about this backlash:

. . . I felt there was an overreaction against everything Osborne was supposedly overturning--the old fashioned theater of Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan.

Nobody wants to see maids and footmen endlessly tiptoeing back and forth as they bring milady's tea, but those plays, at least, were well constructed and had humor. But after you saw half a dozen plays by these new young revolutionary geniuses--they wrote like skyrockets but they couldn't construct a one-car garage which stays up--you were forced to realize that one of the values of theater is the ability to carpenter and construct a complex structure which stays up by its own rules, even if the playwright, by accident of timing, more than anything else, has not provided a new language or subject matter.

It's interesting, isn't it, that right through the revolution, Ibsen and Chekhov never stopped being done, and today, Ken Tynan, high priest of the revolution, who wouldn't permit Terence Rattigan to be done at the National Theater, is a citizen of Los Angeles, and Rattigan's "Separate Tables" is being revived in London next month . . . .

Is that a retrograde or the inevitable justice which gifted people, in the end, are going to get?

Everything goes in cycles . . . . The wheels are always turning. The in becomes out and, in time, in again. . . .<sup>2</sup>

However the wheel may be turning in the seventies, Rattigan was out of fashion with most critics in the late fifties and the sixties. The absence of thoughtful critical appraisal may have been particularly damaging to his career at that time, for his next three plays were attempts to extend his range far beyond the realm of intimate, realistic drama that he had already mastered.

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<sup>2</sup>Bernard Drew, "Stoppard Talks of Playwrights, Playwriting," White Plains Reporter-Dispatch (New York), 19 January 1977. Permission to quote from the Westchester-Rockland Newspapers.

The first of these was Variation on a Theme. Written for Margaret Leighton,<sup>3</sup> the play is Rattigan's variation on Dumas's La Dame aux Camélias. Produced only in London, where it opened 8 May 1958, at the Globe Theatre,<sup>4</sup> it was a critical and commercial failure and closed after 132 performances.<sup>5</sup>

Rattigan preserved the form of Dumas's play in his plot. Variation has two acts, each with two scenes. The first three scenes correspond to Dumas's first three acts, and the final scene combines Acts IV and V of La Dame. In the first scene of Act I, there is the meeting of the lovers, the introduction of a rival, and the heroine's acceptance of the hero, with a repetition of Marguerite's line, "Why not?"<sup>6</sup> Rattigan's Marguerite is Rose Fish, a thirty-five-year-old beautiful and stylish former secretary from Birmingham who has used a small inheritance from her late first husband to launch herself in international cafe society. After marrying and divorcing a French Marquis, a British lord, and a Hollywood star, she is about to marry Kurt Mast, a German millionaire who founded his fortune in black market dealings after World War II. Ill with tuberculosis and neglectful of the regimen of medicine, diet, and rest which could cure her, Rose has rented a luxurious villa in the South of France and spends her time gambling and partying with Kurt and their cafe society friends.

Rattigan's Armand is Ron Vale, a ballet dancer nine years Rose's junior, who craves the wealth, glamor and social success which Rose rep-

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<sup>3</sup>Plays, 3:198. <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>5</sup>The Stage Year-Book (1959), p. 41.

<sup>6</sup>Rattigan, Variation on a Theme, Plays, 3:226. Alexandre Dumas fils, Camille (La Dame aux Camélias), English version by Edith Reynolds and Nigel Playfair. Camille and Other Plays, ed. by Stephen S. Stanton (New York: Hill & Wang, 1957), p. 122. All references from each play from these respective editions.

resents to him. To Rose, Ron's pretensions--he has invented a Russian name and accent to disguise his own Birmingham origin--are alternately irritating, amusing, and touching. They meet at a gambling casino where Ron's choreographer and mentor Sam Duveen loans Rose money to pay a debt. In scene one of Variation, Ron follows Rose home to her villa to collect the debt. He meets Kurt, Rose's companion Hettie, and Rose's sixteen-year-old daughter Fiona, and persuades Rose to let him spend the night with her.

In scene two of Act I, there is an indication that the heroine has fallen in love for the first time in her life; the lovers quarrel over his jealousy and pride, and the act ends with the two embarking on an idyll. In Variation they do not leave for the country as in La Dame; Kurt goes on a business trip, and Rose brings Ron to the villa to live. There is a plethora of letters in Dumas's play; when Armand wants to break with Marguerite, he sends a note to her while she is receiving a rival. In Variation, Ron confronts his rival. Ron's pride is not like Armand's, based upon an unwillingness to live on the money Marguerite receives from granting her favors to other men. Ron feels inferior to and snubbed by Rose's wealthy friends. Scorned by Kurt as an effeminate ballet boy, Ron tries to show off by repeating a ballet lift with which he has earlier entertained Fiona. But he has been drinking too much, Fiona overbalances, and in an effort to soften her fall, Ron breaks his ankle. He not only wins Rose's sympathy, as Armand won Marguerite's with his apology for his note, but he also interrupts his career and thereby endangers his future, as Armand endangers his future (and his sister's) by going away with Marguerite.

Ron's need of Rose becomes a bond she clings to, particularly when

she is persistently rejected by Fiona. Rose plans to marry Ron and to sell her possessions to set up an art gallery and travel agency for them to run together. Rattigan's opening scene of Act II corresponds to Dumas's meeting between Marguerite and M. Duval. Rattigan's M. Duval is Sam Duveen, not Ron's father, but his father-figure, a man who discovered Ron, gave him a place in the dance world as a solo performer, and knows that Ron's attraction to Rose's milieu and his intention of giving up ballet to marry her will ruin him.

Sam maintains that, though Ron hasn't the discipline to become a great dancer, he needs ballet: "Because it's a job he does quite well, and the only one he ever will do." Sam does not, like M. Duval, plead for his "son." He simply states, from his own experience, that Ron is incapable of loving and ends by hating the people he needs. Sam warns Rose that Ron will destroy the relationship with her and, if he interrupts his ballet career for too long, have nothing left. The scene ends with Rose deciding to return to Kurt, and telling Ron of her decision in a taped message spoken into the recorder which Fiona has been using to practice her RADA audition speech.

Dumas's card scene between the Baron and Armand is played between Kurt and Ron in Rattigan's final scene, with Ron throwing his winnings at Rose to pay for her many gifts to him. Rose forestalls a fight between Ron and Kurt, and Ron, humiliated, appears to leave. He waits until Rose is alone and reappears to ask her what he did that made her reject him. He has returned to the ballet, and Rose, knowing that she has only a few months to live if she does not go to a sanatorium, decides to spend her last months in the villa with Ron, without telling him of her condition, and insisting that he continue dancing.

Rattigan's plot parallels the events of Dumas's--ending with a projected rather than an actual death--while refining some of its elements. Armand's three rivals and Marguerite's two confidants are condensed to Kurt and Hettie, and the social set surrounding Rose is exemplified by only two minor characters: Mona, a rich American widow, and her young man-of-the-moment. Dumas's seven letters are absent--only one letter announces Kurt's return from his business trip, and the use of the tape machine allows Rose to show her emotions at parting from Ron.

Keeping the essential form of La Dame, Rattigan varied the content. Here he dismayed most of his critics by suggesting, in his choice of milieu and of characters, that the romanticism associated with Dumas's play does not exist, is perhaps impossible in mid-twentieth century life and art. The critics apparently expected Dumas's romantic candlelight glow on delicate camelias; Rattigan gave them a neon glare on petals made of plastic.

Dumas wrote La Dame in an era characterized by a definite social and moral code. By this code, Marguerite was an outcast who could never win respectability. "And so, whatever she may do, the woman, once she has fallen can never rise again. God may forgive her, perhaps, the world never," says Marguerite in Act III, and in her death scene she understands that M. Duval would never have encouraged Armand's return if she were not dying.

Rattigan dramatized in Variation the fluctuating, indefinite social and moral codes of the mid-twentieth century. Money and celebrity, not respectability, are the values sought by most of his characters. Except that their milieu is the south of France rather than a hotel in Bourne-mouth, the characters in Variation are as displaced as those in Separate

Tables. Hettie, Rose's confidante, symbolizes the topsy-turvy social world: she is the daughter of a Duke, impoverished by death duties and by her own foolish gambling, reduced to being a paid companion to a former Birmingham secretary. In this world, only Sam seems relatively secure, both because he loves his work and is successful at it and because he has come to terms with his personal limitations. "Feelings can't sometimes be helped, but the expression of them can. They can and they are," he declares, referring to his unrequited, undemanding love of Ron and the suffering he has accepted as its price. M. Duval was the voice of morality and society in La Dame. No exact equivalent of this is possible in the world of Variation. Sam serves as the voice of objectivity, stating facts without pleading, and Hettie is the voice of practicality, constantly reminding Rose of her health, her debts, and her limited options.

Morality in Variation's world has virtually no place. There are references in La Dame to innocent young girls who should be admired and protected. In Variation, sixteen-year-old Fiona has little left to be protected from. She describes the novel an acquaintance is writing as being "about a lot of young people who have love affairs with each other and don't much enjoy it, but go on doing it because there isn't any point in doing anything else." Mona says of her: "So innocent and fresh and unsullied and doesn't miss a goddam trick."<sup>7</sup> Fiona is not shocked by the behavior of Rose and her friends, but bored.

In the world of Variation, the double standard of morality has fallen, and has even been inverted. When Ron, trying to make Rose jealous in scene 2 of Act I, threatens to go home with Mona, Rose tells him

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<sup>7</sup>Fiona's line from act 1, sc. 1; Mona's from act 1, sc. 2.

that he can't return to her if he does. Ron complains that it's all right for Rose to have Kurt, and she retorts: ". . . I'm just telling you the facts. I'm not discussing the justice of them." Morality is dependent on money in this milieu, where Ron is regarded as a social-climbing gigolo because he hasn't any, Rose feels free to set the rules because she has, and Rose is not looked down upon because her money comes from Kurt.

Rattigan uses Dumas's era and the play itself to contrast with and comment on his own. Rose's villa was built in the late 19th century by a Grand Duke, and Fiona likes to practice her RADA audition--which is Marguerite's second act speech to Armand--to the Grand Duke's statue. Fiona loves Marguerite and feels for her as she cannot feel for Rose. She comments ironically that she ought to meet and study someone like Marguerite, ". . . but of course they don't exist nowadays." She longs for an Armand in her life, and says wistfully of what Ron calls "this bloody Welfare world" that "I think equality's a very good thing. Only -- it--well--does rather take the romance out of life."<sup>8</sup> Fiona plays a record of La Traviata as Rose and Ron go upstairs in the first scene, much as Dumas used references to the novel of Manon Lescaut to underscore moments in La Dame. Rose's farewell message to Ron in Act II is spoken on the tape machine Fiona has used to record her Marguerite speech in the previous scene.

Within the amoral world he depicted in his play, Rattigan tried to create variations on the characters of Marguerite and Armand. There could be no exact equivalent of a 19th-century courtesan in that world. There is no sense, with Rose, that she is trapped by a social-moral code which

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<sup>8</sup>Both quotations from act 1, sc. 1.

she has transgressed. "How the hell did I start it all?" she asks.

I can't even remember now. I know I loathed home--but a lot of girls do that. I know I read a lot of magazine trash about rich peers marrying humble working girls, and about the glittering, glamorous life of the international set, but a lot of girls do that too. I know I preferred Cannes to Edgbaston and Florida to the Welfare State, but am I alone in that?<sup>9</sup>

Rose admits that she sought luxury and celebrity, found it, and has no one but herself to blame for her dissatisfaction. Rattigan had to find other sources than society's rejection for the torment of her position. This he did with Fiona's polite but utterly disinterested attitude. Her disinterest makes Rose weep on one of the few occasions in her life. Rose wants desperately to be needed, and Fiona's rejection is neatly bound to Rose's response to Ron, who confesses that he needs Rose on several occasions. Rose's hope of fulfilling Ron's need is disappointed, however, by Sam's brutal warning that she will simply turn him into a male version of herself. She can escape society's condemnation, but not the uselessness of her wasted life. Rose has Marguerite's honesty and is able to understand what she has become, which motivates her sending Ron away, her carelessness with her health, and her final decision to spend her last months with Ron when she knows that he will continue dancing.

Rattigan's greatest variation is not Rose but Ron. Like Armand, Ron is jealous and impulsive but, unlike him, he has no nobility of character. Armand loves Marguerite and wants to take care of her; until the final scene, Ron seems more interested in basking in the reflection of Rose's money and celebrity and in being taken care of by her, than in giving anything in return. Ron becomes attractive in the last scene when, like an errant boy, he catalogues all the little things he believes he

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<sup>9</sup>Act. 2, sc. 2.

must have done to lose Rose and touches her with his vulnerability, and when he shows that he wants to work and pay his own way. Ron's balletic career seems one of the few choices Rattigan could have made, faced with the necessity of giving Rose a reason to sacrifice her love to his interests. Were he, for example, a doctor, lawyer, or even an actor, he might resume his career after some interruption; Sam makes it clear that Ron will never be able to recapture his dancing technique after a long delay.

The unusual aspect of Ron's characterization in comparison with Armand's is the point Rattigan makes through it about the shifting roles of the sexes in modern life. The double standard in Variation works against Ron rather than Rose, and she is not the outsider in this world, but he. She, Sam says, can move on to a sixth husband after Ron, but he will be pointed out as "Rose Fish's fifth . . . He was a dancer once, they say. Hard to believe now, looking at him." Men in Dumas's society had identities fixed by birth and social position. Men in Rattigan's have identities fixed by work and/or wealth, or are the equivalents of Marguerite in her society--playthings who "belong" only so long as they amuse.

In such a world, the "pure" romantic love of Marguerite and Armand --she for his goodness and protectiveness, he for her beauty and grace-- seems impossible. In Variation men and women are too aware, too open to myriad influences and temptations, to love without psychological as well as material complications. Sex has little value in this milieu, where it is so cheap. But need--Rose and Ron's need of each other, partly mother-son and partly familiar spirits meeting in an unfamiliar world-- does have meaning. As he and Rose reconcile, Ron muses:

It's funny about us, isn't it? I mean, both of us coming from the same town, both of us knowing exactly what we want--and exactly how we're going to get it too--and then, suddenly, what have we got? Just what everybody else in the world has got--each other. Whoever it is that fixes things up there has quite a line in practical jokes himself . . . .

The finding of the familiar spirit in Variation replaces the romantic passion of La Dame; Rattigan's is a love theme played in a world where jarring atonality has replaced lush melody.

Literarily, as a variation on La Dame aux Camélias, Variation on a Theme is ingeniously conceived and executed. Theatrically, however, Rattigan seems either to have outwitted himself or to have failed to be ingenious enough, for, unlike Dumas, he failed to find a point of profound sympathy for the audience with his Marguerite and particularly with his Armand. Until his final scene with Rose, Ron is so weak and petulant a character that it is difficult to understand Rose's love for him, and to care what happens to them. It seems evident, in Ron's eventual acquisition of dignity and in Rose's desperation to be needed, that Rattigan tried to create sympathetic figures. But he did not, as with Sybil and the "Major" in Separate Tables, succeed in ennobling characters who are psychological and social misfits. To the extent that Rose and Ron are unsympathetic, Variation flounders as a play likely to grip an audience. Rattigan's reach, though of impressive magnitude, falls somewhat short of his grasp in a complex but emotionally elusive drama.

Many London critics seemed to have approached Variation on a Theme anticipating not the variation clearly indicated in the title, but a modern-dress reproduction of the original La Dame. They not only criticized Rattigan for failing to create sympathy for Rose and Ron,<sup>10</sup> but

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<sup>10</sup>Felix Barber, Evening News; John Barber, Daily Express; W. A.

also complained that Rattigan's play lacked the romantic glow and the sparks of gaiety in Dumas: that Rattigan's milieu and social circle were unattractive and dreary,<sup>11</sup> and that Rattigan had forsaken his usual wit and style for flat, shallow dialogue.<sup>12</sup> Some criticized Rattigan for careless craftsmanship,<sup>13</sup> not considering that Rattigan had retained Dumas's plot and made several simple, imaginative adjustments within it. These critics did not ask the same questions that Rattigan, judging from his text, must have asked: whether it was possible, a century after Marguerite and Armand had been created, to find their exact or near-counterparts and, if not, what the variations on their characters might convey about modern life which would be comparable to what the originals had projected about the times in which they "lived."

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Darlington, Daily Telegraph and Morning Post; Cecil Wilson, Daily Mail, all 9 May 1958; Punch, 14 May; Alex Matheson Cain, Tablet, and Anthony Lejeune, Time and Tide, both 17 May.

<sup>11</sup>Criticizing the lack of romantic glow was Cookman; censuring the milieu and social circle were Cain and J. C. Trewin, Lady, 22 May 1958.

<sup>12</sup>Barber; Harry Weaver, Daily Herald, 5 May 1958; Robert Wraight, Star, 9 May; R. B. M., Stage, 15 May; Rich, Variety, 21 May.

<sup>13</sup>Kenneth Tynan, Observer, 11 May 1958, wrote his review as a monologue by Rattigan's Muse, who lectures him on sloppy secondhand ideas and craftsmanship. He declared that the play was what Rattigan thought the public wanted. The Times, 9 May, maintained that Rattigan had taken less than his usual care with the plot and that Ron's last visit was not well arranged. Alan Dent, News Chronicle, 9 May, criticized the tape scene and Sam as the M. Duval figure.

In Rattigan's favor, Trewin declared that Rose's early typing exercise (which she performs to convince Ron that she was really a secretary before her first marriage) was a cunning exposition, praised the tape message and the final scene between Rose and Ron, and declared the play technically triumphant. T. C. Worsley, New Statesman, 17 May 1958, pp. 633-34; Wraight and R. B. M. praised the Sam-M. Duval character and his scene with Rose; John Mortimer, Evening Standard, 9 May, found the final scene as real and subtle as that in Separate Tables.

So completely did a few critics miss the spirit of Rattigan's variation that they indulged in an activity which T. C. Worsley called a "seamy line of personal smear."<sup>14</sup> They speculated about the "real" intention behind Rattigan's play, without any first-hand evidence, from the text or from Rattigan, to support their speculations. Harold Hobson, elsewhere a responsible appraiser of Rattigan's work, felt that Variation "was about something not its ostensible subject," and declared that the play was less like La Dame than Bourdet's La Prisonniere,<sup>15</sup> a study of homosexuality. The Manchester Guardian's reviewer saw a homosexual undertone in the play,<sup>16</sup> and Alan Brien wrote in the Spectator:

The surface theme is unconvincingly and unenthusiastically prodded through the hoop with a sort of weary expertise. Why do sizable stretches of the play still grip and shock and embarrass as a real play should? Because the subject should be a homosexual relationship between a bored and aging rentier and a sharp, oily male tart. Whether Mr. Rattigan intended us to see such a theme behind the gauze, I do not know.<sup>17</sup>

Only two critics, T. C. Worsley and Derek Granger, found Rattigan's craftsmanship and his creative imagination worthy of high praise. Worsley maintained that Variation was Rattigan's best play to date, and prophesied that ". . . it will make its own way slowly forward, without much help from anyone, into the group of those plays of our time which deserve re-

<sup>14</sup>London Magazine, p. 69.

<sup>15</sup>Sunday Times, 11 May 1958.

<sup>16</sup>Gerald Fay, 5 May 1958.

<sup>17</sup>16 May 1958, pp. 621-22. A better-known instance of critical presumption is the interpretation of Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf as being "really" about two homosexual couples. Albee commented: "That's a bunch of nonsense. . . . I reread the play to see if it can function on the homosexual level and it can't! . . . I've left very simple instructions: Do the play the way it was written, with two men and two women." Daniel Stern, "Albee as Director: 'I Want My Intent Clear,'" New York Times, 28 March 1976.

spect." Worsley noted that Rattigan had shifted the milieu but kept the characters of La Dame, removing the romantic gauze of the previous century which softened them, and exposing them in a "hard, merciless, unrelenting and absolutely modern light." He continued:

And for those with any literary-dramatic sensibility at all, half the pleasure of an absorbing evening will come from the play the dramatist makes with the expectations lying there in our memories, precisely with the shifting variations on this theme. . . . In addition to its shape, it is passionate, raw and truthful. No play of his has been written with such economy and weight . . . . In no play has he compromised less. It is this, I suggest, which has dismayed his critics. . . . How easy it would have been for a writer of his temperament to produce a modern version of La Dame which did please and how his detractors would then have enjoyed their sentimental evening with the additional luxury of being able to sneer? Deprived of their enjoyment in the obvious sense, they have merely sneered.

Worsley concluded that Variation could be enjoyed without any knowledge of La Dame because of its masterful construction, characterization, and passionate qualities.<sup>18</sup>

Rattigan's next play, Ross, which he called "a dramatic portrait,"<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>New Statesman. In London Magazine, p. 68, Worsley attacked the "feeble logic" of many critics who objected to Variation: "Thus Mr. Kenneth Tynan, always ready to substitute sneering for analysis in the case of any playwright who couldn't be fitted into the procrustean bed of his naive marxism, produced once again in the teeth of the evidence the sneer that Rattigan was only giving the public what he thought they wanted."

Of Alan Brien's opinion that Variation should be about the relationship between a male tart and his rentier, Worsley wrote: "But what on earth would this have had to do with this variation on that theme? Only a journalistic desire to show off that he was somehow 'in the know' . . . could account for so nonsensical a pronouncement. Anyone really 'in the know' would instantly have recognized the actual relationship on which this Marguerite was founded and would have perceived it to be devastatingly accurate as a transmuted portrait of the lady in the case." Worsley did not name the lady he referred to.

Derek Granger's favorable review of Variation in the Financial Times, 9 May 1958.

<sup>19</sup>Plays, 3:307.

was more enthusiastically received. The portrait, Rattigan's second attempt to dramatize a large-than-life character, was of T. E. Lawrence.

Much more successful both critically and commercially than Adventure Story, Rattigan's portrait of Alexander the Great, Ross, with Alec Guinness as Lawrence, opened 12 May 1960, at the Haymarket Theatre in London. Directed by Glen Byam Shaw,<sup>20</sup> the production played 762 performances<sup>21</sup>--the longest run of any Rattigan drama--and toured Britain with Alec Guinness's successor, Michael Bryant.<sup>22</sup> A Broadway production, also directed by Shaw and with John Mills as Lawrence, opened 26 December 1961, at the Eugene O'Neill Theater,<sup>23</sup> and ran for 159 performances.<sup>24</sup>

Like Adventure Story, Ross is epic in structure and traces the psychological destruction of a brilliant military leader. There are eight scenes in each of Ross's two acts. The first three scenes dramatize Lawrence's vain attempt, after World War I, to find spiritual peace as an aircraftman enlisted in the R.A.F. under the pseudonym of Ross. He is recognized by another enlisted man, refuses to pay blackmail to conceal his identity, and, as the would-be-blackmailer leaves to sell his information to a London newspaper, drifts into a malarial dream.

The dream sequence, which takes the form of a lantern slide lecture on Lawrence's exploits in Arabia, during which several supporting characters from his desert campaigns give brief estimates of his character, provides a bridge to the next five scenes in Act I. These trace Lawrence's

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>21</sup>The Stage Year Book (1963), p. 37. Who's Who, 15th ed., p. 1599, lists 763 performances for Ross.

<sup>22</sup>Don Chapman, Oxford Mail, 1 May 1962.

<sup>23</sup>Howard Taubman, New York Times, 27 December 1961.

<sup>24</sup>LC Play Stats.

military career during the war: his unauthorized embarkation into hostile Arab territory no Christian had ever crossed, his acceptance as a leader by warring Arab tribesman, his recognition by the Turks as a guerilla leader dangerous to their Middle Eastern Empire, his persuasion of the Arab chieftan Auda Abu Tayi to cross a virtually impenetrable desert in order to launch a surprise attack on the Turkish fortress at Akaba, and his exultation over his triumph at Akaba--mingled with guilt about the bloodshed in which he has taken part. Act I ends with Lawrence musing: "Oh Ross--how did I become you?"<sup>25</sup>

The first six scenes of Act II depict Lawrence's rise to fame and his growing disillusionment with himself and with the war. Reluctantly, he accepts from the British General Allenby the formal leadership of the Arab revolt against the Turks, to be coordinated with Allenby's own operations in the Middle East. Captured by the Turks, he is flogged and raped (offstage) at the order of a Turkish General who seeks to destroy Lawrence by breaking his faith in himself. Lawrence returns to British headquarters determined to relinquish his post, but Allenby shames him into continuing, and he helps the Arabs destroy the Turks and enter Damascus. He has become an international celebrity but, sickened by the war and by his sense of personal shame, he feels that he will never find inner peace. In the last two scenes, at the R.A.F. base where he has sought refuge as Ross, Lawrence's identity is revealed and he is discharged from the Service. Still in search of peace, he plans to re-enlist under the name of Shaw.

In terms of Rattigan's attempt to integrate an expansive narrative

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<sup>25</sup>Terence Rattigan, Ross, Plays, 3:363. All references from this edition.

structure with a comprehensive character study, Ross is his most complex and ambitious play. There is a density in its texture because of the sheer weight of material it encompasses--Rattigan has to explain the British, Arab and Turkish positions during the World War I Middle Eastern conflict and, simultaneously, to explore the inner conflicts of a character who is both a man of action and a tormented intellectual. It is difficult to imagine how Rattigan, without resorting to narration, could have better organized in theatrical terms the mass of factual material he chose to deal with.

In constructing his narrative, Rattigan used many techniques to convey a maximum of information dramatically. The dream sequence--the only one in Rattigan's produced plays--serves many purposes. It provides a bridge for the audience, who are shown the contrast between the ill and unhappy Ross they have already seen and a photograph on the lantern slide screen of the dashing Lawrence of Arabia they will meet in the next scene. The sequence also indicates the presence of the three sides in the upcoming military conflict and briefly introduces most of the major supporting characters--a help in keeping them straight later, as most appear in only two to four of the total of sixteen scenes. Through the conflicting viewpoints of Lawrence expressed by the characters and summarized by the lecturer (who also appears later, as a newspaper reporter who interviews and photographs Lawrence), the basic psychological question of the play is raised: what was the truth about Lawrence's character? In addition, the dream sequence injects a note of suspense through the cryptic comments of the Turkish General, who intimates that only he and Lawrence know the truth, and that Lawrence will never be brave enough to tell it.

As the story of Lawrence's exploits unfolds, Rattigan finds ways

of giving information about the past progress and future strategy of the war in the context of the action. In scene 5 of Act I, for example, Lawrence explains some of his theories about uniting the Arabs to fight the Turks to his young Arab bodyguard. As the latter complains about the pace at which Lawrence is driving them to meet the chieftain Auda, Rattigan moves the action across the desert. He indicates some of the problems Lawrence faces when the bodyguard expresses doubt that Auda will fight the Turks because they pay him generously to keep peace, and explains that Arabs will not fight together because of their blood feuds. A quarrel between the Arabs accompanying Lawrence illustrates the latter point: one tribesman murders a man from a rival tribe, and Lawrence shows his capacity for leadership by executing the murderer himself in order to prevent a blood feud--committing the first of many acts of bloodshed which will later haunt him.

Rattigan uses considerable comedy to characterize, give information, and to maintain a sense of human relationships among the numerous characters across the broad canvas of Lawrence's story. In the first scene, Lawrence (as Ross) answers a charge of reporting to the R.A.F. base after curfew. The officer conducting the hearing insists on knowing the names of the people with whom Ross spent the previous evening. With great reluctance, Ross discloses that they were Lord and Lady Astor, Mr. and Mrs. George Bernard Shaw, and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The incident infuriates the officer, who charges Ross with gross insubordination; endears him to the other enlisted men, who admire his apparent impertinence; and gives one of the men the clue to Ross's real identity.

In the scene between Lawrence and Auda, Rattigan balances comedy and suspense. Lawrence flatters Auda into considering a raid on the

Turkish port of Akaba. Instead of formally indicating his consent, Auda bickers with Lawrence over whether his camel charge should be by day or by night, and with or without a battle cry and a warning. Their verbal fencing is interrupted by a Turkish officer, who brings Auda a coveted set of false teeth and news of a ten thousand pound reward for Lawrence's capture.

Playing a game of brinksmanship with Lawrence's life, Auda brings him into the conversation and asks him to escort the officer out. Returning, Lawrence confronts Auda with knowledge of his game: had the officer recognized him (Lawrence is wearing native dress), Auda could have earned the reward without violating the Arab law of hospitality by betraying a guest. Auda accepts defeat by smashing the false teeth. The incidents dramatize Lawrence's quick-wittedness in dealing with the Arabs and his self-control in the midst of danger, as well as the state of Arab-Turkish cooperation which Lawrence is undermining.

A more sophisticated kind of comedy--a game of conversational one-upsmanship--is employed in the Act II meeting of Lawrence and General Allenby. Both are cultured, practical men who recognize each other as worthy adversaries and enjoy both winning and losing points as they take each other's measure. The Allenby scene provides a subtle balance with the more broadly comic Auda sequence by showing that Allenby is as adept at handling Lawrence as Lawrence was at manipulating Auda. After Lawrence has described all the reasons why he is unfit to accept leadership of the Arab revolt, Allenby coolly selects Lawrence's most vulnerable point--his pride in his own will--and uses it to defeat Lawrence by pointing out that he might will himself to lead a cause he does not believe in. And, in the process of sparring over Lawrence's acceptance, the

conduct of the war and the existence of secret diplomatic agreements are explained. These are integrated with the motivations of Lawrence, whose knowledge of the diplomatic agreement dividing Arab territories between Britain and France after the war will force him to lie to his Arab comrades.

Always Rattigan tries to make the volume of strategic information he must impart both as comprehensible and as theatrical as possible. Descriptions of atrocities are given in arguments between Lawrence and a disapproving British officer; Lawrence's mercy-killing of his wounded Arab bodyguard is mentioned in a formal report; the destruction of the Turkish General who ordered Lawrence's flogging and rape is implied in Lawrence's outburst of laughter upon realizing that the Arabs massacred the Turks at Deraa, the General's headquarters.

Many critics commended Rattigan for his handling of this mass of material. T. C. Worsley wrote:

As an act of compression alone, Mr. Rattigan's dramatic portrait would command our admiration. The material about Lawrence is voluminous; the actual sweep of his life story extensive in place and time. To have reduced it to two-and-a-half hours and, in the process, clarified for us the campaigns, is a very considerable intellectual feat. And if Mr. Rattigan makes it seem easy, only the imperceptive will fail to see that it is one of his special gifts to do this.<sup>26</sup>

Alan Brien commented in The Spectator:

To object that each climax always erupts at the inevitable point, that every joke releases a moment of tension and slackens the thread for the next sharp tug, that scene after scene turns the hero through a different angle of vision, that the entire play has been painstakingly carpentered, caulked and painted before being launched—that is to fall into the heresy of The Superiority of the Unmade Play . . . . It is also to confuse hindsight with insight. Now we can see that these threads were obvious links in the Lawrence story, but would we

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<sup>26</sup>Financial Times, 13 May 1960.

have found them ourselves in the enormous tangled cocoon of the Lawrence myth?<sup>27</sup>

Though there were a few critics who maintained that Ross's construction was too carpentered,<sup>28</sup> or badly shaped,<sup>29</sup> the major question raised with regard to the play was whether or not Rattigan had created a convincing portrait of Lawrence.

As each scene depicts events in Lawrence's career, so each offers clues to the riddle of his character. Rattigan spent five years preparing Ross, from his initial reading of Lawrence's The Seven Pillars of Wisdom to the play's London opening.<sup>30</sup> He read Lawrence's books and letters, sixteen biographies of him, much additional material,<sup>31</sup> and tried in Ross both to present divergent interpretations of Lawrence's character and his own. In an interview, Rattigan declared that "Ross is a play of ideas in the sense that there is an idea behind it. Man can't be God. It is as simple as that. Or that a man might lose his soul by worshipping

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<sup>27</sup>20 May 1960, p. 732. Many critics commended the comedy in Ross, citing especially the first Allenby scene. Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 15 May, wrote: "There is a brilliant scene between Allenby and Lawrence at the beginning of the second act, in which the civilized and cutting conversational ripostes would have put General Burgogynne himself on his mettle."

Others acclaiming the comedy in Ross were Worsley; Times and Robert Wraight, Star, both 13 May; Renyolds News and Alan Pryce-Jones, The Observer, both 15 May; F. S., Theatre World, n. d. TRPS-"Ross and Man and Boy."

Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, 13 January 1962, p. 51, called the Allenby scene "superbly measured stagecraft," the Auda scene "obvious but sure-fire theatre."

<sup>28</sup>Robert Muller, Daily Mail, 13 May 1960; J. T., Village Voice, 11 January 1962.

<sup>29</sup>Felix Barber, Evening News, 3 May 1960; Merwyn Jones, Tribune, 20 May. Wraight and Molly Hobman, Oxford Mail, 14 May, judged the play too documentary for those seeking simple entertainment and not enlightening enough for those wanting to know more about the Lawrence legend.

<sup>30</sup>"Rattigan Talks to John Simon," p. 23.

<sup>31</sup>Evening Standard, 13 May 1960.

a false God."<sup>32</sup>

In Rattigan's view, Lawrence became Ross because he worshiped the false God of his own will, and was destroyed psychologically upon discovering that behind his will power were not strength and integrity but inclinations he could not face. Rattigan commented:

Anyone reading "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom" . . . would see that the man was devastated by the revelation that he had homosexual and masochistic tendencies.

This was before Freud, you remember. And to him it was shattering to suspect what was in back of his tremendous will power. He couldn't live with himself. You might say he committed mind suicide, wanting to be only a number in the Air Force.<sup>33</sup>

Scene by scene, Rattigan tries to build a case for ~~his~~ interpretation of Lawrence's character. In the first scene of Act I, when Lawrence faces the R.A.F. officer, he makes two distinctions. One is between discipline, which he cares for, and authority, which he does not. The other is between making an excuse and giving a reason for his lateness. He states that he joined the R.A.F.:

Because I wanted to, because I was destitute, because I enjoy discipline, and because I had a mental breakdown. If you prefer, sir,

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<sup>32</sup>"Rattigan Talks to John Simon," p. 74. On p. 23 of this interview, Rattigan commented that the fact-fiction relationship of material in Ross was 50-50.

<sup>33</sup>Frances Herridge, "Across the Footlights," Post, 9 January 1962. It is interesting to note that a recent biography of Lawrence appears to agree, in part, with Rattigan's interpretation. Reviewing a Lawrence biography, A Prince of Disorder, by John E. Mack, in The New York Times Book Review, 21 March 1976, pp. 1-2, Paul Zweig wrote: "He [Lawrence] seems to have lived the Arabian experience as a kind of medieval fairytale, until reality crashed in on him when he was captured at Darea, tortured and perhaps homosexually assaulted by the Turkish bey. Later, according to Mack, Lawrence became obsessed by the erotic feelings that had welled up in him under torture. This obsession was at the heart of Lawrence's breakdown, for he knew now that his protective fairytale had lied to him. The 'citadel' of his self-control could never again be counted on to withstand the eruptive animal he had tried so hard not to be." Zweig notes that the biographer, Mack, is a practicing psychoanalyst.

we can substitute for 'mental'--the word 'spiritual.' I don't happen to like it myself, but at least it avoids the imputation of insolence. In the distinctions Lawrence makes, and in his style of speech, he reveals himself as a troubled intellectual.

Lawrence's sergeant mentions that he has physical handicaps, including scars on his back. Questioned about these, Lawrence says that they are from an accident which seemed serious at the time that it occurred. The R.A.F. officer tries to get Lawrence to tell him about the trouble he seems to be in mentally, and he replies, "The untellable . . . can't be told." In the next scene, Lawrence is moved by his fellow enlisted men's approval of his apparent insolence to the officer, and though he moves brusquely away from a man who has thrown his arm around his shoulder (and, in the following scene, says that he dislikes being touched), he tells the sergeant that for the first time in five years he had had a moment of feeling that life was worth living.

In his discussion with the blackmailer, Lawrence states that he needs the R.A.F. as a sort of monastic refuge because he has lost his soul by worshipping the false god of his will, and that the loss has made him into Ross. Told that he is indulging in self-pity, and that nothing is worse, he replies:

Oh yes there is. Self-knowledge. Why shouldn't a man pity himself if he is pitiable? But to know yourself--or rather to be shown yourself--as you really are--Yes. How stupid those ancient Greeks were.

Through the rest of the first act to the meeting between Lawrence and Allenby, Rattigan shows Lawrence testing his will by driving himself to daring exploits. He enjoys the exploits, but is never quite certain of his motives. In scene 5 of Act I, he admits to his Arab bodyguard that he doesn't understand what cause he is serving, and at the end of

the act he expresses growing doubts:

I've done it. Done it. I've captured Akaba. I've done what none of the professional soldiers could have done. I've captured the key to Southern Arabia with five hundred inefficient, untrustworthy Arab bandits. Why don't you enjoy the memory? What makes you so unhappy? Is it that Moroccan I shot in the desert and couldn't kill cleanly because my hand was shaking so much? The mangled Turkish bodies in the dynamited trains? Those men that died in the desert? . . .

War is war, after all. The enemy has to be killed and our own men have to die. And surely, at least I've been more sparing of them than any red-tabbed superman?

What is wrong in trying to write my name in history? Lawrence of Akaba--perhaps--who knows?

Oh Ross--how did I become you?

Scenes 2 through 4 of Act II depict Lawrence's psychological destruction. The Turkish General, seen in Act I in the dream sequence and in a brief scene in which he posts a reward for Lawrence's capture, is one of Rattigan's near-villains--a negative character whose position is explored from his own point of view.<sup>34</sup> A homosexual whose lover is the Captain with whom he discusses his plans, the General destroys Lawrence with cunning but with regret. Lawrence must be defeated, but the General is a strategist rather than a sadist. Information he has collected about Lawrence's sexual proclivities reveals that he has none, and that he avoids all physical contact. The General sees this as the possible key to Lawrence's destruction: "A rebellious body, a strong will and a troubled spirit." If Lawrence's faith in what he calls his bodily integrity could be broken so, the General reasons, might his faith in his will and his destiny.

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<sup>34</sup>C. H. H., Oxford Times, 4 May 1962, quoted Lawrence as stating in The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: "In Deraa that night the citadel of my integrity had been irrevocably lost." D. H., Bristol Evening Post, 13 May 1962, stated that in Pillars, Lawrence wrote that he believed that the Turkish in Deraa did not know who he was. It is characteristic of Rattigan's view of character and plot that he would make the incident at Deraa not accidental but purposeful, arising from an external conflict--Lawrence and the Arabs versus the Turks--and crucially affecting Lawrence's internal conflicts.

In scene 3, Lawrence is arrested behind Turkish lines. In scene 4, he is flogged and raped offstage, as the General states: ". . . if my plan succeeds tonight it will be the end for him. Bodily integrity violated, will broken, enemy destroyed." Lawrence is brought in and lies motionless as the General tells him:

I do pity you, you know. You won't ever believe it, but it's true. I know what was revealed to you tonight, and I know what that revelation will have done to you. . . . It's a pity your desert adventure couldn't have ended cleanly, in front of a firing squad. But that's for lesser enemies--not for you. For you, killing wasn't enough. You had to be--destroyed.

For the remainder of the play, Lawrence seems to be in a state of shock. In scene 5, he asks Allenby to relieve him of his post. But he goes back to the fight, and his reasons for doing so are not clear. Early in the scene, he agrees to be interviewed and photographed by a newspaperman, which surprises his senior officers. No reason is given for his agreement. Nor are there any explanations when Lawrence later balks at Allenby's order that he join his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, but allows Allenby's order to shame him into going back to the war. Lawrence's sudden, unexplained switches give the scene a blurred quality, not justifiable simply as a dramatization of his emotional distress.

In his last scene as Lawrence, he dictates a report about conquest and massacre, tells Auda that his Arab bodyguard's last words to him were "God will give you peace," and argues with a British General over Arab and Turkish reprisals. When Lawrence laughs at the realization about the massacre at Deraa, the General calls him a callous, soulless, sadistic brute lost to all human feeling, and Lawrence agrees with him. At the end of the play, as he leaves the R.A.F. barracks as Ross, he repeats his bodyguard's line, "God will give you peace."

Rattigan's view of Lawrence's character is reasonably clear--clearer than his depiction of Alexander the Great in Adventure Story-- because he selected one theory and integrated most of the details about Lawrence to express it. But whether his view was convincing psychologically and theatrically was a matter for considerable critical debate. J. C. Trewin predicted much discussion about Ross, and considered the impetus it gave to debate one of the play's virtues:

I am here to affirm that Terence Rattigan is a magnificent storyteller, and that in his play he has a subject that blazes beneath his hand: the enigma of Lawrence of Arabia. It remains an enigma, but Rattigan, writing without bias, has placed before us, with all his narrator's art, every fact that can be assembled in a theatre. . . . it is long since I remember a new play that has been more enthralling in the theatre, or that is likely to start more discussion outside.<sup>35</sup>

A few critics found Rattigan's portrait of Lawrence very satisfactory. Among these were Alan Brien, who wrote: "Unless the real Lawrence were abandoned altogether, I don't see how his life could be staged with less fiction and more integrity."<sup>36</sup> Whitney Bolton commented in the New York Morning Telegraph about Rattigan's interpretation of Lawrence:

This makes for, in the best of all possible taste, a play of resonance and excitement, of literacy and compassion . . . a complicated human portrait. Mr. Rattigan has written well and sometimes explosively.<sup>37</sup>

Most critics, however, thought that Lawrence still emerged as an enigma. Though a few found Rattigan's characterization of Lawrence superficial,<sup>38</sup> many British critics considered Lawrence's personality impossible fully to explain, and credited Rattigan with making a good to a fascinating

<sup>35</sup>Lady, 26 May 1960. <sup>36</sup>Spectator.

<sup>37</sup>27 December 1961. Other critics who praised the construction and the portrait of Lawrence were Worsley; Times; Punch, 18 May 1960; Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, 27 December 1961.

<sup>38</sup>Bernard Levin, Daily Express, 13 May 1960; R. S. Marriott, Stage and Television Today, 19 May 1960.

attempt at a rounded portrait.<sup>39</sup> Most of the American critics, however, were disturbed and unconvinced by Rattigan's interpretation. Walter Kerr wrote that Rattigan's reliance on the offstage flogging and rape was not sufficient:

In "Ross" Lawrence steadfastly refuses to confide in us. Not only about the event itself but about the precise state of his mind and soul. We are thus left to find intimacy, as best we can, on the implications of one thing that may have been done to him. It does not seem to me that the gesture possesses a sufficient power to make a mysterious man breathe.<sup>40</sup>

Kerr and several colleagues, both American and British, found themselves ultimately unmoved by Lawrence, unable to make or to maintain emotional contact with his personality.<sup>41</sup>

Lawrence does remain an elusive figure in Ross, and the play as a whole has a slightly blurred quality, like a kaleidoscope which never quite comes into focus. It is difficult to determine one single reason for this quality, but several possibilities occur. Foremost is the nature of Lawrence himself. An intellectual who reveals himself only obliquely, who cannot or will not explain himself, he is a character one may sympathize with only to a degree. The audience is kept at a distance from

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<sup>39</sup>Andrew Smith, Daily Herald; Harold Conway, Daily Sketch; Dick Richards, Daily Mirror, all 13 May 1960; John Rosselli, The Guardian, 14 May; Renold's News, 15 May; Kenneth A. Hurren, What's On in London, 20 May, p. 16; Roger Jenkins, Encore, July-August 1960.

<sup>40</sup>Herald-Tribune, 14 January 1962. Other critics who were unconvinced by Rattigan's explanation of Lawrence, but who nevertheless praised the play for its construction, wit, and force were Taubman; Richard Gilman, Commonweal, 19 January 1962, pp. 435-36; Time, 5 January 1962, p. 52; John McCarten, New Yorker, 6 January 1962, p. 55; Newsweek, 8 January 1962, p. 44; John Gassner, Educational Theater Journal, 14 (March 1962): 66-7.

<sup>41</sup>Milton Shulman, Evening Standard and Bernard Levin, Daily Express, both 13 May 1960; Norman Nadel, World Telegram and Sun and Thomas Dash, Women's Wear Daily, both 27 December 1961; Richard P. Cooke, Wall St. Journal, 28 December.

his despair because it never sees it fully acknowledged--as it does, for example, by the protagonists in The Browning Version, The Deep Blue Sea, and Separate Tables.

If Lawrence's humiliation by the Turks is to be accepted as his psychological coup de grace, the audience needs to see its effects more fully dramatized than they are in the puzzling scene with Allenby which follows it. Rattigan tried to show Lawrence's despair implicitly, but for once his power to make an emotional impact by use of the implicit deserted him. And Lawrence's previously quoted soliloquy at the end of Act I, with its awkward flash-forward ending, seems pedestrian.<sup>42</sup> There is no moment when the audience sees the character emotionally stripped, and it is difficult to penetrate his many defenses.

Another reason for the blurred emotional quality in the play is that the supporting characters have little personal stake in the action

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<sup>42</sup>Of Rattigan's dialogue, Harold Hobson wrote: "It would be churlish to deny that Mr. Rattigan, in this play, has had a large and fascinating inspiration, just as it would be inaccurate to suggest that he is as yet as learned in the torments of the soul as he is in the devastation of drawing-room wit. If I say that he is closer to Wilde than to Beckett I mean it not as a criticism but as a statement of fact. It results in the play being exceedingly entertaining in its lighter aspects, and in its darker and more searching moments Alec Guinness . . . richly and restrainedly explores the worse corners of self-doubt and disgust, only dimly handicapped by the bareness of Mr. Rattigan's aesthetic prose."

Others criticizing Rattigan's dialogue were John Simon, Theater Arts, March 1962, p. 58, and Kenneth Tynan, Observer, 5 February 1961.

Only Tynan and Felix Barber wrote contemptuous reviews of Ross. The latter was the only critic to state that Alec Guinness's performance was superior to Rattigan's play. Tynan's review includes a misreading of Adventure Story. He states that Alexander is destroyed by the discovery of his mother complex (which is not a factor in his destruction). Tynan compared Alexander's destruction because of sexual abnormality (alleged by Tynan) with Lawrence's (alleged by Rattigan) in preparation for a wisecrack about Lawrence: "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the world and lose his virginity?"

and in Lawrence's psychological deterioration. The characters surrounding Alexander in Adventure Story are involved with him emotionally through bonds of friendship; whether they continue to support, or whether they denounce him, is crucial to each of them personally, and to Alexander. Though Lawrence's Arab bodyguards and Auda obviously develop affection and admiration for him, though Allenby enjoys sparring with him, though the Turkish General regrets having to treat him brutally, and some R.A.F. personnel pity him, Lawrence remains aloof emotionally from them and they from him; the relationships in the play are more strategic than personal.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, in an effort to answer the question raised in the dream sequence concerning the truth about Lawrence, Rattigan includes not only a wealth of events and a theory about Lawrence's psychology, but also the theories of others. The R.A.F. personnel, British officers, Arabs and Turks all express opinions of him throughout the play. The mass of this material is overwhelming.

Ross in its complexities is the most intellectually demanding of Rattigan's plays, and requires an analytical attention from an audience simply to keep all the strategies, events, psychological theories, and relationships straight. This factor, combined with that of a protagonist who eludes full contact with an audience's intellectual understanding or its emotional empathy, undermines the dramatic impact of the play.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Some critics criticized the supporting characterizations in Ross as being superficial and conventional. D. W., Tablet, 21 May 1960, found the British characters excellent but the Arabs and Turks superficial. Queen, May 1960, and John Gassner found all the supporting characters sketchy.

<sup>44</sup>Richard Watts, Post, 27 December 1961, called Ross "moving and immensely interesting." In a follow-up article on 7 January 1962, he concluded: "Despite the attention deservedly aroused by the new wave of British dramatists, Mr. Rattigan, on the solid basis of his achievements

The problem of an emotionally and intellectually elusive protagonist mars Rattigan's third play of this period,<sup>45</sup> Man and Boy. A critical failure on both sides of the Atlantic, the play opened for a limited

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in the theater, continues to be England's first playwright, and 'Ross' is one of his finest dramas."

Henry Hewes concluded: "While 'Ross' is a play that falls short of being as profound or as poetic as its tragic subject matter demands, it does tell the Lawrence story with sharply constructed interchanges that can often be subtle, incisive, and entertaining."

C. B. Mortlock, City Press, 20 May 1960, commented: "Perhaps because he is so successful and fashionable, Terence Rattigan is not usually acclaimed as a genius. By definition a genius is a creative artist possessed of extraordinary imaginative and inventive capacity. Mr. Rattigan qualifies on that score. It is also a mark of genius constantly to eschew what is easy and to choose what is difficult and elusive."

<sup>45</sup>Rattigan helped write the book for Joie de Vivre, a musical version of French without Tears, which opened in London at the Queens Theatre 14 July 1960 (two months after the triumphant premiere of Ross), and closed after 4 performances. Stage Year Book (1961), p. 39.

There is no script of Joie de Vivre in Rattigan's collection, but reviews of the production indicate that the story of French without Tears was updated to the present, given an island setting, and topical references to, for example, the H Bomb and Marilyn Monroe. Chi Chi, a prostitute referred to by Brian in the original, was turned into a character in the musical. The audience booed the production, and Rattigan said afterwards: "I won't alibi or make excuses. It wasn't the 'hatchet men' among the critics. It was the audience. They just didn't like the play." Gerald McKnight, Sunday Dispatch, 17 July 1960. He also noted, with humor, that "I must take full responsibility for the flop because I helped to re-write the book. 'Variation on a Theme' got a worse Press and was a bigger flop for me because I wrote it all." News Chronicle, 16 July 1960.

Most of the critics found that the updating and topical references hurt the play by cheapening it and making it seem dated rather than fresh. Bernard Levin, Daily Express; Milton Shulman, Evening Standard; Harold Conway, Sketch; Times, all 15 July; Robert Wraight, Star, 16 July; Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 17 July.

A few critics (W. A. Darlington, Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, 15 July; T. C. Worsley, Financial Times, 16 July; Sunday Graphic, 17 July) found the musical agreeable, but several maintained that Rattigan's excellent light construction was weighed down by the intrusion of songs and dances, and that some of the construction had had to be sacrificed to give space to musical numbers. Darlington; Robert Muller, Daily Mail; Elizabeth Frank, News Chronicle, all 15 July.

Most of the London critics, including Muller, Darlington, Frank,

(prior to Broadway) run,<sup>46</sup> on 4 September 1963, at the Queens Theatre in London, where it played 69 performances.<sup>47</sup> Opening 12 November at the Brooks Atkinson Theater in New York, it survived for only 54 performances.<sup>48</sup> Charles Boyer starred in the production, which was directed by Michael Benthall.<sup>49</sup>

Man and Boy is a three-act drama set in the Greenwich Village basement apartment of Basil Anthony in 1934. In the first scene, Basil, a young musician with socialist sympathies, listens intently to a radio broadcast about the imminent collapse of the international financial empire of Gregor Antonescu. Basil's mistress, Carol Penn, tries to interest him in discussing their future, when they are interrupted by the appearance

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and Worsley, did not blame Rattigan for the failure of Joie de Vivre. Representative of this view was Harold Hobson's commentary: "At the end of it all, bruised in spirit and flushed with embarrassment, one is left nevertheless brooding over the extraordinary talent of Mr. Rattigan. Here is a man who has a greater sense of the theatre than any of his contemporaries except Jean Anouilh, a man who, lacking only the fertilizing flood of words, can be witty, or touching, or, as in 'Ross,' delicately and penetratingly perceptive in dangerous quarters of the human spirit. In the thirties several dramatists of promise appeared, Ronald Mackenzie, J. B. Priestly, W. H. Auden, and Mr. Rattigan himself. What has become of them? . . . Only Mr. Rattigan remains, still fresh, still young, still plunging hopefully down new paths, his compass in good order, unafraid of the jungle. I, at any rate, along with my Aunt Edna, am grateful for him and to him."

Another of Rattigan's comedies, The Sleeping Prince, was made into a musical in America. Called The Girl Who Came to Supper, its book was by Harry Kurnitz and the music and lyrics by Noel Coward. Florence Henderson and Jose Ferrer starred in the production, which opened at the Broadway Theater 8 December 1963 (Howard Taubman, New York Times, 9 December), and ran for 113 performances. LC Play Stats.

<sup>46</sup>Herbert Kretzmer, Daily Express, 5 September 1963.

<sup>47</sup>Stage Year Book (1964), p. 39.

<sup>48</sup>LC Play Stats.

<sup>49</sup>Production credits in London and New York reviews. Rattigan had wanted Rex Harrison for the role that Boyer played. Frances Herridge, "Across the Footlights."

of Antonescu and, a few moments later, of Antonescu's aide, Sven Johnson.

Through conversations between these four characters, the audience learns that Basil is Antonescu's illegitimate, legally adopted son; that Basil disowned his father five years before, when Antonescu explained the nature of his business dealings to his prospective heir; and that Basil and Antonescu have not met since. Antonescu, however, has kept a dossier on Basil (as he has on Carol and on all persons he deals or might deal with) and has come to use his son's apartment as a refuge from the press while he fights to save his financial empire. Basil, torn between admiring and despising his father, offers to help him. As Carol leaves for work, and the president and accountant of a firm with which Antonescu must merge in order to salvage his businesses arrive, Antonescu decides to make Basil an unwitting dupe in his plan to influence the president, whom Antonescu knows from a dossier is a homosexual.

In Act II, while Basil waits in his onstage bedroom to be summoned, Antonescu and Sven hold a business meeting in the living room. Antonescu first unnerves the accountant, who presents evidence of a six-million-dollar shortage in the assets of the Antonescu company involved in the proposed merger. By the subtle use of innuendo, Antonescu undercuts the accountant's competence in the eyes of the president, while at the same time distracting the president's attention from business matters by implying that he, too, is a homosexual and that Basil is his lover. When the accountant is goaded into an angry outburst and exits, Antonescu dismisses him as an hysteric and persuades the president to reopen the question of the merger.

As Sven, in the bedroom, phones a message for the press that the merger is virtually assured and Antonescu's empire secure, Antonescu in-

roduces Basil to the president and implies his willingness to share his "lover." Basil realizes how he is being used, but Antonescu effects his silence by appealing to his socialist conscience, implying that any lack of cooperation would destroy his financial empire and throw a million people out of work. The president exits content, Basil denounces his father and runs from the apartment, and Antonescu and Sven exult in their triumph.

In Act III, Antonescu receives his wife, a raffish former typist whom he married in order to found, in her name, The Antonescu Foundation, a charitable organization from which he funnels funds into his businesses. The wife signs a blank check for him and Antonescu makes financial calculations until Basil returns with a newspaper account of the discovery of discrepancies in Antonescu's London business accounts and of Antonescu's probable indictment for criminal fraud.

As Basil and Sven plan to help Antonescu escape to Mexico, they hear a radio announcement that a warrant for his arrest has been sworn. Antonescu refuses Basil's help and sends him away. Planning to shoot himself rather than face arrest, Antonescu appeals first to his wife and then to Sven to stay with him until his death, but neither wants to be involved with the scandal of his downfall. The curtain falls as Sven exits and Antonescu sits alone on the bed with a gun in his hand.

Man and Boy is part melodrama and part psychological drama, but succeeds as neither. It is a melodrama partially because all of the supporting characters are types: the bright girl friend, the raffish wife, the cool henchman, the earnest accountant, the fatuous president. These characters seem mere plot functionaries: Carol, for example, appears only in Act I, where her presence establishes Basil as a heterosexual and her

ignorance of his background provides motivation for the exposition. The wife appears only in Act III, where her functions are to provide another (and unnecessary) illustration of how Antonescu uses people and to stress his loneliness at the end. Rattigan's supporting characters usually, and properly, forward his plots, but they usually also have moments of self-revelation in which they emerge as distinct individuals. The supporting characters in Man and Boy, however, have little individuality.

The play comes close to melodrama in its plot because its emphasis is on the manipulation of victims by a villain. It fails as melodrama, however, because Antonescu is too ambiguous a figure to qualify as a black villain and, even more, because there is no hero-figure even to match wits with, much less triumph over him.

Man and Boy does not succeed as psychological drama because Rattigan's focus seems split between probing Antonescu's character and illuminating the relationship between Antonescu and Basil. This split focus is evident not only in the play, but in Rattigan's comments about it. He told one interviewer that Antonescu was loosely based on the figure of Ivar Kreuger, the Swedish match king whose suicide in 1932 was followed by the collapse of his financial empire and by the revelation that the empire had been built by criminal fraud.<sup>50</sup>

Rattigan told another reporter that the genesis of the play occurred when he was discussing Kreuger's biography with someone who told him that Kreuger had an illegitimate son, and he began to wonder how such a boy would react to the discovery that his father was an arch-criminal.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Stephen Watts, "Rattigan's Image," New York Times, 10 November 1963.

<sup>51</sup>"Rattigan Talks to John Simon," p. 76.

Rattigan also commented that though he had not realized it when writing the play, Man and Boy was a sequel to Ross: "'Ross' is about a man who tries to be God and this is about a man who tries to be the Devil. It's a different setting and period, but similar in theme. It's about one of those financial wizards who live without human emotion of any kind."<sup>52</sup>

The problem with Man and Boy as psychological drama is that it is not precisely about either Antonescu or the relationship between father and son. Though the audience is given vivid demonstrations of Antonescu's methods, it never learns why the financial genius became a criminal. Basil makes what excuses he can for the combination of worship and contempt he feels for his father by maintaining, in Acts I and III, that Antonescu is as much victim as victimizer in a capitalist system, because he starved and begged on the streets of his native Rumania as a child. But in Act III, Antonescu tells him that he never begged in his life.

Why did Antonescu build an empire through fraud? Why also did he give, as is established by Basil, millions of dollars to poor countries and become a famed philanthropist, apparently benefitting many people while defrauding and ruining others? The closest Rattigan comes to an explanation is Antonescu's comment to Sven at the end of Act II that the risk he took in using Basil as he did was fun. "What I did tonight I did alone--without an accomplice--and that was important to me."<sup>53</sup> That is hardly more than, at best, an intriguing hint as to what motivates the character.

The reasons for Basil's mixed emotions are clear enough: he admires

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<sup>52</sup>Herridge.

<sup>53</sup>Rattigan, Man and Boy (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1963), p. 61.

in his father a strength he does not possess himself, but despises the uses to which Antonescu puts that strength. But by making Basil such a weak character, Rattigan deprived the play of any real dramatic conflict. Though the reason that Antonescu gives for his emotional rejection of Basil throughout his son's life is his recognition that Basil represents a conscience he cannot afford to have, Basil is too pale a representative of conscience to have much effect on Antonescu's actions.

Rattigan implies, in Antonescu's conversations with Sven in Acts II and III, and in his sending Basil away before his suicide, that Antonescu is struggling not to feel, and particularly not to show, any emotion for his son.<sup>54</sup> But this inner struggle is given so little emphasis in comparison to Antonescu's existential struggle to save his empire, and the latter struggle is conducted against such weak-willed adversaries, that the action consists more of business problem-solving than psychological or existential conflict.

Though it is only loosely a biographical play and lacks the epic scope of Adventure Story and Ross, Man and Boy belongs in the same category with those dramas, for all attempt to illuminate the psychological flaws of great men of action. In all three dramas, loneliness is a theme--the loneliness of great men of action who have no peers. And in Ross and Man and Boy, the denial of both the feeling and the expression of emotion is also a motif.

In depicting Alexander, Lawrence, and Antonescu as men of action,

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<sup>54</sup>T. C. Worsley, Financial Times, 5 September 1963, commented that the pimping scene accomplished a double purpose--Antonescu's practical and psychological rejection of his son in advance of any emotional claim that the boy might make, because Antonescu had had to fall back on Basil when in trouble.

Rattigan succeeded. Man and Boy's greatest virtue is the narrative vitality of the scenes in which Antonescu manipulates people, like a hypnotist so powerful that he can mesmerize people without their consent. But in illuminating the psychologies of his men of action, Rattigan fails in varying degrees. Adventure Story and Ross suffer from an overabundance of material, from too many motifs to render a clear portrait of their protagonists. Man and Boy is wanting because Rattigan supplies only vague hints as to Antonescu's motivations. It is difficult to care about Antonescu because he is unfathomable, and about Basil because he is ineffectual. Thus the play lacks, even more than Variation on a Theme and Ross, an emotional center for an audience.

Most of the New York drama critics found Man and Boy simply dull.<sup>55</sup> Walter Kerr thought that the play was marred particularly by what he viewed as Rattigan's use of comedy (such as the scene with the wife and, to a lesser degree, the gulling of the president) to lighten melodramatic material. Kerr wrote:

With some of the characters announcing that the world is coming to an end and others behaving as though a perfectly good weekend were being spoiled, the fundamental seriousness is not relieved; it is merely made to seem silly.<sup>56</sup>

Howard Taubman, of the New York Times, declared that: "'Man and Boy' masquerades as serious drama, but it is only slick, superficial entertainment."<sup>57</sup> He criticized Rattigan for ignoring the social implica-

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<sup>55</sup>John McClain, Journal-American; George Oppenheimer, Newsday; Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily; Edward Southern Hipp, Newark Evening News, all 13 November 1963; Richard P. Cooke, Wall Street Journal, 14 November; Melvin Maddocks, Christian Science Monitor, 15 November; Hobe, Variety, 20 November; Time, 22 November, p. 71; Newsweek, 25 November, p. 71.

<sup>56</sup>Herald Tribune, 13 November 1962.

<sup>57</sup>"The Facile Way," 1 December 1963.

tions of his subject:

What might have been? With a central character like Antonescu, 'Man and Boy' might have ventured into the social implications of such a career. One does not ask for a tract in the theater, especially from Mr. Rattigan. But his play has the appearance of being serious about an arresting theme. It is almost impossible to believe that it could be restricted so completely to the personality of Antonescu and that it could avoid so thoroughly the meaning of such a life in its relation to society.<sup>58</sup>

While most of the London critics thought that neither the character of Antonescu nor the father-son relationship were sufficiently explored,<sup>59</sup> they differed widely in their appraisals of Man and Boy. A few found it engrossing,<sup>60</sup> and Bernard Levin thought it, in spite of its flaws, Rattigan's best play. Levin wrote:

Perhaps Mr. Rattigan has not explained the psychology of great men who turn to crime, any more than Ross really explained T. E. Lawrence.

But his dialogue, apart from a few touches of glibness; his unflinching dramatic cunning; his narrative power, faultless in its patient unwinding; above all his restless imaginative curiosity about the springs of human activity; these fuse, hot and glowing, into his

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<sup>58</sup>New York Times, 13 November 1963. London critic Alan Brien, Sunday Telegraph, 8 September 1963, noted that Rattigan had chosen one of the key themes of the age, "a madman in the driving seat of the juggernaut," but was only partially successful in dramatizing it.

The British critics did not attack Man and Boy for its lack of social commitment. When Stephen Watts in the New York Times interview questioned Rattigan about his "lack," he answered: "I am what I am. I cannot deny it, and I certainly won't apologize for it. I write about people I know--just as, for instance, Wesker does. It would be very silly of me to try to write about life in the East End.

"I don't believe in commitment. I am concerned with people as they are rather than what they stand for. Shakespeare wasn't committed. It's impossible to tell where he stood in the political context of his time. Imagine the effrontery of an author today if he called a play, 'As You Like It.' What could be more uncommitted? Now I suppose he'd have to call it 'This Is How It Is.'"

<sup>59</sup>Worsley; Times; Colin Frame, Evening News; Philip Hope-Wallace, The Guardian; Bernard Levin, Daily Mail, all 5 September 1963; Stage, 12 September; Kenneth A. Hurren, What's On, 13 September.

<sup>60</sup>Caryl Brahms, Time and Tide, 19 September 1963; H. G. M., Theatre World, 13 October; Herald-Tribune (Paris ed.), 24 August.

finest work and a play that outdistances all but a handful of authors writing in England today.<sup>61</sup>

Several critics, however, approached Man and Boy as some of their colleagues had Variation on a Theme, and declared that the play was "really" about "something else." These critics also summoned the spectre of Aunt Edna to haunt Rattigan again. Representative of this view was Penelope Gilliat's notice in the Observer, in which she called Rattigan a middlebrow who wanted to be more but who was always looking out for Aunt Edna. Man and Boy, Gilliat maintained, was really about:

. . . a rich queer humiliated by loving a boy who has rejected him physically. I can't think of any other way of explaining to myself why I felt all the time as though I were being fobbed off, and as though there were the vague shape of a very painful play under the dull-eyed writing and the tawdry stage tricks. . . . I don't think this is really the sort of play that he most wants to write any more: he wants to bring off the real thing.<sup>62</sup>

Gilliat's criticism was echoed by several of her colleagues,<sup>63</sup> and the

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<sup>61</sup>John Russell Taylor, in The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 159, considered the ambiguity in Man and Boy one of its virtues: "But Man and Boy is a distinct advance on The Deep Blue Sea, in that the earlier play, excellent as it is on its own chosen level, does not go much further than its text; everything in it is explicit, clear, and its effects can be completely analysed and explained. Man and Boy, for all its neatness as a piece of plotting, goes beyond this: it has the fascination of a tale that is told, not precisely explicable, seeming to imply much more than it says. For unlike The Deep Blue Sea it does not actually say anything: or what it has to say escapes all neat, pat formulation. It is the character-portrait of a man without qualities, and Rattigan seems in it for the first time to be moving outside the neat, clear-cut world of the well-made play, where there is always an explanation hidden somewhere in a secret drawer, and into the shifting, indeterminate world of contemporary drama. . . . But still preserving the form of the well-made play: a curious and potentially explosive combination."

<sup>62</sup>8 September 1963.

<sup>63</sup>Also theorizing that Man and Boy was about "something else" were J. W. Lambert, Sunday Times, 8 September, and David Pryce-Jones, Spectator, 13 September 1963, p. 320. On the other hand, the critic for Stage and Howard Taubman, in both his articles, accused Rattigan of merely being

nature of these attacks prompted T. C. Worsley to comment:

This seamy line of personal smear is not criticism; it is gossip journalism. (How would Miss Gilliat have liked it, if notices of John Osborne's second play in his Plays for England (the one about the fetichists) had been treated as a gloss on her sexual relations with her new partner of the time, John Osborne?) And for supposedly intellectual critics to be superior about Rattigan as a middlebrow . . . while themselves indulging in innuendo that might be more

fashionable by introducing a homosexual element into his play.

J. W. Lambert wrote that Aunt Edna might be Rattigan's greatest contribution, because he never came to grips with most of his other characters, subjects, or themes. Alan Brien commented on what he judged Rattigan's ambivalence as a businessman and artist: "He is both the master and the slave of the box office, tending to flatter the audience when he should be torturing himself."

Ronald Bryden, New Statesman, 20 September 1963, p. 368, declared that Rattigan couldn't or wouldn't come to grips with his characters, and that he seemed to agree with Aunt Edna in thinking that there was nothing so comforting as a mystery. Noting that Rattigan was usually praised as a well-made playwright, Bryden commented:

"The well-made play comes down through Sardou from Racine. It was shaped to spare its characters and its audience nothing: to produce every possible confrontation, to force every character to declare himself. Its climax and purpose was the scene à faire, the final orgy of expression in which everything is had out, thumped home, exposed and lacerated. If you look carefully through Rattigan's work, its most curious aspect is his skill in avoiding such scenes."

Bryden criticized the lack of confrontation between characters in Rattigan's plays and concluded: "But this is the theatre of Aunt Edna: she must be fascinated while being spared the pains of reality." It is interesting to note in Bryden's comments the shift in standards among some British critics. For the first three decades of his career, Rattigan was sometimes berated for his lack of ideology. Confrontation became a fashion in the mid-fifties, and Bryden, one of the newer critics, used the new fashion as a new weapon against Rattigan.

It did not seem to occur to Bryden that Rattigan might be molding the well-made play to his own uses, being interested much more in having characters confront themselves than each other (he showed, with Anne and John in Separate Tables, that he was fully capable of writing a brutal confrontation scene). And Bryden might also have noted that one of Rattigan's major themes is the disastrous consequences of evading reality--specifically of failing to know one's self--and that the treatment of this theme is not aimed at sparing Aunt Edna pain. That Rattigan failed to have Lawrence and Antonescu confront themselves, and Antonescu and Basil confront each other, is true, but not sufficient reason to attack Rattigan's work as being deliberately evasive.

fitted to Confidential shows the depths to which theatrical criticism, now at its lowest ebb, can sink.<sup>64</sup>

Rattigan continued to provoke criticism as a middlebrow, however, by defiantly making Aunt Edna the subject of the Preface to the third volume of his Collected Plays, published in 1964.<sup>65</sup> The Preface is written in the form of a courtroom scene. Rattigan, under cross-examination by the plaintiff's counsel, is being sued for libel by Aunt Edna, who objects to being called a hopeless lowbrow.

The third Preface is Rattigan's attempt to bring Aunt Edna up to date. He maintains that some of her characteristics may change: in 1964 she is not necessarily a maiden lady, probably works for a living, votes Liberal, and favors a classless society. But, Rattigan affirms, her attitude toward the theatre remains constant. She goes to Osborne and Wesker because of their gift for expressing their feelings, and to Pinter, Ionesco, and Beckett because she enjoys being mystified and having her emotions stirred to pure theatrical excitement. Aunt Edna has, Rattigan concludes, an elastic brow, capable of stretching to embrace change in the theatre and to appreciate plays of any school provided that they are good plays. Rattigan concludes:

Aunt Edna remains Aunt Edna, with only two basic demands of the theatre--first, that it excite her to laugh or to cry or to wonder what is going to happen next; and, second, that she can suspend her disbelief willingly and without effort. It's only Aunt Edna's emotions that a playwright can hope to excite, because we know for sure that she does bring those to the theatre. But we can't hope to excite her intellect because, if she has one at all, which is unlikely,

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<sup>64</sup>London Magazine, p. 69.

<sup>65</sup>Rattigan, Preface, Plays, 3:vii-xxvii.

she will almost certainly have left it behind in her rooms, or forgotten it on the bus, or checked it in at the theatre cloakroom. You may ask me: "What about plays of rhetoric?" "What about plays of wit?" I would answer by repeating that both, too, are aimed at the plaintiff's emotions, not at her intellect. Laughter, tears, excitement. That is all she demands. She is bored by propaganda, enraged at being "alienated," loathes placards coming down and telling her what is going to happen next, hates a lot of philosophical talk on the stage with nothing happening at all, enjoys poetry only when it is dramatic and fine prose only when there is action to go with it. Her greatest joy is still and always will be a good strong meaty plot told by good strong meaty characters . . . . She is unchanging and unchangeable, immortal and everlasting, and all she ever brings to the theatre is her undying love for it.<sup>66</sup>

The repartee in the Preface between Rattigan, a befuddled judge, an enraged Aunt Edna, and the two trial counsels is witty, sharp, and smoothly readable. Because Rattigan clearly sets the scene for the use of comedy to defend his views, the third Preface suffers less than the first and second from a divided tone. Rattigan's frustration and defensiveness, his earnestness and sense of conviction, are all expressed. But because the views given by the other characters make the causes of Rattigan's mixed emotions clear, the former qualities do not undercut the latter. In addition, Rattigan's openly defensive position gives him some psychological advantage as an embattled underdog.

The third Preface does suffer, however, from Rattigan's persistent lack of clarity in his theoretical writing. He states that Aunt Edna does not bring an intellect to the theatre--may not, in fact, have one. He may mean that she is not an intellectual, not that she is mindless, but by not saying so he leaves himself open to the charge that Aunt Edna is a moron. Rattigan should have, by the time he wrote the third Preface, known better than to trust that critics would assume that he understood that it takes a mind to recognize a good story and characters. His lack

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<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxvii. Permission to quote from Hamish Hamilton.

of clarity invited misinterpretation, and accordingly R. B. Marriot wrote:

If Mr. Rattigan's portrait of [Aunt Edna] is true, then undoubtedly she is a moron.

But surely Mr. Rattigan does not write plays only for morons. Because he writes only to excite emotion of one sort or another, and not also to touch the mind, he appears to conclude that the theatre, if it is to be any good and have a wide appeal, must be more or less mindless. . . .

It is difficult to tell just what Mr. Rattigan wants. If he is satisfied with success by way of Aunt Edna and all she implies and stands for, then why does he go to such lengths to justify his work? And why, if Aunt Edna and the theatre are one and the same, did he write "Adventure Story" and, just recently, "Man and Boy"?<sup>67</sup>

Rattigan had answered the question of what he wanted in an interview given prior to the opening of Man and Boy. "I did not write Man and Boy to be successful. I am trying to get them to take me seriously as a writer. . . . I do not want to go down simply as a matinee playwright."<sup>68</sup> Yet matinee playwright is what the younger generation of British critics labeled him. Though he later commented:

I know this shouldn't have bothered me, really; but writers tend to be a pretty vulnerable bunch, and, at the time, I was more vulnerable than most and couldn't stand the heartache of being blasted by venom and invective every time I opened the paper,<sup>69</sup>

Rattigan did not write another play for seven years.

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<sup>67</sup>"Rattigan and Aunt Edna," Stage, 12 March 1964.

<sup>68</sup>U. S., Evening Standard, 5 September 1963.

<sup>69</sup>Clive Hirschhorn, "When Rattigan Thought He Was Going to Die," Sunday Express, 20 September 1970. The "at the time, I was more vulnerable than most" probably refers to the fact that Rattigan was, around the time of the production of Man and Boy and for an undisclosed period afterwards, under the impression that he had leukemia and was going to die. The diagnosis proved to be mistaken, and he was eventually told that he had a virus infection.

## CHAPTER IX

Though Rattigan offered no new plays, he wrote several movie and television scripts between 1963 and 1970.<sup>1</sup> He expanded one of the latter, a drama about Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton,<sup>2</sup> into his next play, A Bequest to the Nation. Starring Ian Holm as Nelson and Zoe Caldwell as Emma Hamilton, and directed by Peter Glenville, the play opened 23 September 1970, at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, in London, and ran for 124 performances.<sup>3</sup>

A Bequest to the Nation is written in two acts, each with four scenes. The first six scenes take place in England in 1805, during Lord Nelson's brief visit before the Battle of Trafalgar. The seventh occurs on Nelson's ship just before the battle, and the last in the home he shared with Emma Hamilton, after news of his death has reached England. Rattigan indicated that the set was to be

. . . a permanent and open architectural structure which will include a staircase and different levels for the various acting areas.  
. . . the sets are not naturalistic, and the scene changes are indicated more by the use of lighting than by physical transformation.

Backdrops were to suggest various locales.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Rattigan's screen, television and radio plays are listed chronologically in Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup>The television play, titled Nelson, was aired in March 1966. Michael Bryant played Nelson, Rachel Roberts was Emma Hamilton, and the drama was introduced by Prince Phillip. Times, 15 March 1966.

<sup>3</sup>Variety, 13 January 1971.

<sup>4</sup>Rattigan, A Bequest to the Nation (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd.,

Nelson is ill and exhausted from years of naval battles and from personal conflicts. Having been separated from his mistress during two years at sea, he longs to be with her, and has promised Emma that he will not return to duty for a year. Yet he realizes that only he can lead the British fleet in the untried, daring attack he has planned on Napoleon's fleet at Trafalgar. His naval colleagues regard Emma as a vulgar, drunken slut whose liaison with Nelson has diminished the great Admiral's image in the eyes of his countrymen, and struggle to turn Nelson back to duty. Lady Nelson, deserted by her husband and shunned by his family and followers, who fear Nelson's wrath over any slight of Emma, tries to reach Nelson, who refuses all contact with her.

Desperate to hold Nelson, Emma plays hostess to his obsequious relations and disapproving friends, humiliating him publicly while beguiling him privately. But ultimately she sends him to Trafalgar herself, telling him:

I love my Nelson--But I love all of him. I don't want him only half a man, with the better half pining to be out at sea. . . . I wouldn't want to be thought of as a woman who kept you from going out when the country needed you. It is my country, too, you know.<sup>5</sup>

Emma begs only that Nelson will swear to do everything in his power not to get himself killed. Instead, he swears that he will do all in his power not to leave her alone and deserted. Before Trafalgar, he wills Emma as a legacy to his King and country, "that they will give her an ample provision to maintain her rank in life," and deliberately courts death by choosing to command the most exposed ship, and by wearing his

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1970), p. ix. The production credits are on p. viii. All references from the play are from this edition. All emphases Rattigan's.

<sup>5</sup>Act 2, sc. 2.

full uniform in the battle. In the final scene, Lady Nelson visits Emma to assure her that she will try to see that Nelson's will is honored. Emma laughs, knowing that the bequest will be ignored and that she will die in poverty.

A Bequest to the Nation belongs partly in the category of Rattigan's plays about great men of action and partly among his intimate realistic dramas. Its genesis was in discussions between Rattigan and Prince Phillip, after Rattigan was asked to write a television play for one of the Prince's charities. Rattigan was interested in writing about Lord Nelson, but felt that his life was too much of a success story. "I can't be sorry for him," he told the Prince, "and I can't write about anybody for whom I don't feel compassion." Prince Phillip reminded Rattigan of Nelson's one great failure--his unhonored bequest of Lady Hamilton to the nation, and Rattigan tried to imagine why Nelson's mistress was ignored. He found that:

It wasn't meanness--they gave a lot of money to his brother. It wasn't snobbery--she was the wife of the British Ambassador to Naples and was perfectly acceptable as Lady Hamilton. And it wasn't prudishness--that age was as permissive as our own.

Then, I thought, isn't it just possible that no one liked her? That she was an absolute cow? In references to her at the time, there's not a hint of snobbery. She was just a repulsive woman--a glutton, a drunkard with a loud voice--fun for a moment, but then you want to get her off your hands. . . . If you can imagine Christine Keeler or Mandy Rice-Davies being left to the nation, you've got the idea.<sup>6</sup>

Structurally, A Bequest to the Nation resembles Man and Boy, but its integration of plot and characterization is superior. Rattigan tries to explore Nelson's character and his relationship with Lady Hamilton, as he had attempted to draw Antonescu and his relationship with Basil,

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<sup>6</sup>Howard Kissel, "How Rattigan Wrestled with Nelson's One Failure," Women's Wear Daily, 17 April 1973, p. 22.

but he approaches Nelson's character through the nature and influence of his love affair. In Man and Boy, Basil was a secondary consideration and the plot focused on Antonescu's struggle to save his financial empire. In Bequest, the conflict of public duty versus private passion within Nelson, and the conflicts between the other characters, all derive from the problems caused by Nelson's relationship with Emma.

The problem with Bequest as one of Rattigan's biographical plays about great men of action is that little is seen of Nelson's greatness. In Adventure Story, Ross, and Man and Boy, Rattigan made it clear how, if not why, his protagonists rose to power. But in Bequest there is mostly just talk about Nelson's great deeds and the worship his men feel for him. There was an opportunity, in scene 2 of Act I, for Nelson as a naval genius and great commander to emerge. But the character of the eighty-year-old First Lord of the Admiralty with whom Nelson has the scene has neither the mystic authority of the Pythia in Adventure Story, the cunning of Auda or General Allenby in Ross, or even the angry persistence of the accountant in Man and Boy. He is too bland to spark Nelson into a demonstration of his skill and daring. By the time Rattigan gets to the explanation of Nelson's ingenious battle plan for Trafalgar toward the middle of scene 2 of Act II, and to the brief scene at sea, it is rather late to give a compelling demonstration of his greatness in action.

A Bequest to the Nation, however, succeeds more than Rattigan's other biographical plays in illuminating the personal character of the protagonist. Perhaps this is because, beneath its historical trappings, it is an intimate drama about the plight of three tortured people, caught in the contradictions of the mind-body dichotomy.

Nelson, Emma, and Lady Nelson form a triangle similar to that of, respectively, Hester, Freddie, and Sir William in The Deep Blue Sea. Nelson loves a woman whom everyone regards as beneath him in every way. Like Hester, he is the child of a minister; he married a decent but sexually unresponsive partner, and he awakened later in life to a passion which brought him both ecstasy and shame. Also like Hester, Nelson is sensitive and intelligent enough to understand his dilemma. He tells Captain Hardy, the character most bitterly opposed to Emma:

. . . don't you think I see exactly what you see, a drunken, middle-aged woman making a fool of herself and of me. Do you think I relish the gutter-talk, don't wince at the vulgarity, and have lost the capacity to smell liquor on the breath? Do you think I don't feel blasted with shame every day that I spend at Emma's side?<sup>7</sup>

Hester only senses that there is something terribly wrong with the teaching that divides people's minds and bodies, however. Nelson claims that the two can be, and are for him, one. He can endure the humiliations of his days with Emma, he explains to Hardy, because of the nights which follow. To Hardy's question of how any love can be respected that begins and ends in the bed, he replies:

To me, very easily. To the forty-year-old Admiral who had never known or enjoyed what most other men have enjoyed and long since forgotten--that in the release of the bed there lies an ecstasy so strong and a satisfaction so profound that it seems that it is everything that life can offer a man, the very purpose of his existence on earth --well to that poor crass innocent of an Admiral in Naples Bay the question was not so easy--oh no, Hardy, not easy at all. You must remember, you see, that, even at that age, I was still the rector's son who, from the cradle, had been preached the abomination of carnal love, and the ineffable joys of holy wedlock. But when at last I surrendered to Emma, I found--why should I be ashamed to say it?--

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<sup>7</sup>Rattigan stated that there was no historical evidence that Nelson ever knew how vulgar Emma was, but that he thought it impossible that a really sensitive man, and especially a man as vain as Nelson, would not have known. Ronald Hayman, "Life for Father," Times, 19 September 1970. The conversation between Nelson and Hardy occurs in Act 2, sc. 2. Permission to quote from Hamish Hamilton.

that carnal love concerns the soul quite as much as it concerns the body. For the body is still the soul and the soul is still the body. At least they are for me. You must understand that there is nothing in Emma I would change, Hardy. I love her and I want her exactly as she is--because I am obsessed and I want her absolutely.

Hardy remarks that he doesn't think Nelson's love does begin and end in the bed. Nelson responds:

You are right. And yet without the bed what would it be? Nothing. But that other love--that ineffable bliss of wedlock--the one so blessed by my father and thought by all the world so fitting for a national hero; the tight brave smile, the rigid body the--'if this makes my beloved husband happy then I'll do it, even if the messy business quite disgusts my well-bred sensibilities'. Oh Hardy, that was a hell of humiliation--a hell--but a hell from which I am now so very happily escaped--

Reviewing Bequest in the Observer, Ronald Bryden noted that:

Rattigan's theme, all through his career, has been the impossibility of equal love. He belongs to that English generation for which passion required stepping out of one's class. You can love a lady or gentleman, but to find sexual liberation you have to degrade yourself to a person with whom nothing else is possible.<sup>8</sup>

Bryden's observations are true, but superficial. Rattigan's concern with the problems of unequal love are not merely those of a generation or a class. Hester is not arbitrarily the daughter of a minister. Nelson's parentage may have seemed a fortunate coincidence to Rattigan, or might have given him the clue to the difficulty he admittedly found in reconciling what he called "the seemingly opposed facets of Nelson's nature."<sup>9</sup>

Rattigan is concerned with a moral code, that of Christianity (and, before Christianity, that of Plato), which divides people within themselves and separates them from one another. He dramatizes the contradictions inherent in this code, and the torment which it engenders. He offers no solution to the dilemma. The fact that he depicts Nelson's death

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<sup>8</sup>27 September 1970.

<sup>9</sup>TV Weekly, 10 March 1966.

as a virtual suicide<sup>10</sup> demonstrates that Nelson could not, in spite of his protestations, live with the mixture of ecstasy, humiliation, and guilt that he felt in his situation. Rattigan's characters cry out, softly or stridently as their natures warrant, in pain and protest against the code and try, with limited success, to break away from it.

Another point that Rattigan makes frequently is that moral judgments cannot be made by a book of rules universally applied, but that people's actions can only be judged when one understands the context in which they are taken. Usually the context that Rattigan uses places his characters in a more creditable light, but he somewhat reverses this technique in Bequest. Two of the characters, Hardy and Nelson's sixteen-year-old nephew George, assume that the Nelson they so admire could not possibly have deserted his wife and have subsequently refused to see Lady Nelson unless she had done him some grievous wrong.

In the first scene of Act III, George, pitying Lady Nelson, delivers a loving and forgiving letter from her to her husband, which provokes Nelson into a violent rage. In the next scene, Nelson tries to explain to his bewildered and hurt nephew why he reacted as he did. The difficulties of following Christian morality are examined from a different perspective as Nelson tells George:

George, when one has done wrong to someone--an open wrong, a shameful and humiliating wrong, a wrong on an epic scale, to be forgiven for it is the very hell.

I shock you, of course. You're my Reverend father's grandson and to answer forgiveness by hatred must seem unchristian at the least. But is it? Jesus told us how to answer a blow on the cheek,

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<sup>10</sup>Nelson's death as suicide is dramatized in the wording of his promise to Emma and in his choices of ship and uniform at Trafalgar. In Ronald Hayman's interview, Rattigan stated that he thought Nelson's death was a suicide and that his leaving Emma to the nation was his way of keeping his promise to protect her.

but he never told us how to answer a kiss. I haven't always been a bad Christian, George. I've even managed sometimes, to love my enemies a little. Not too much, mind you. Moderation in all things. But I do try to save them from drowning, even at risk to our ships, and no one can say I ever treated a prisoner-of-war other than with honour and gentleness. But George--

George--what about an enemy who won't retaliate? Who answers every broadside with a signal gently fluttering at the mast which says: 'Whatever you do to me, my dearest husband, I will always forgive you and go on loving you for ever.' What about that enemy, George? In this matter of loving enemies my dearest wife has beat me in the chase. What is there, then, left for me but to hate?<sup>11</sup>

George wants to see Nelson only as a hero, but Nelson insists on accepting responsibility for his ignoble as well as his noble deeds.

In spite of the virtues in A Bequest to the Nation's exploration of conflicting passions, several factors keep it from being nearly as effective a drama as The Deep Blue Sea. In the latter, Freddie, for all his flaws, is made attractive and sympathetic enough early in the play that the audience can see why Hester may have been drawn to him. Emma Hamilton does not begin to show her better qualities until the second half of Bequest. In all but her last two scenes, she is as vulgar, foul-mouthed, and unlikeable as everyone says she is.

Lady Nelson is made sympathetic in the very first scene when, with dignity, she begs George to deliver her letter to Nelson and when she breaks down and sobs at the explanation of a nickname given her by the public. She is, like Sir William in The Deep Blue Sea, a decent and sensitive person. While one can understand why Nelson cannot return to her and why he might find her forgiveness unbearable, it is very difficult to fathom his obsession for Emma. He speaks of the joy he experiences with her but, again, Rattigan waits until very late in the play, until the one scene in which Emma and Nelson are alone, to show any evi-

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<sup>11</sup>Permission to quote from Hamish Hamilton.

dence of that joy. Theirs is a mutual, not a one-sided passion like Hester's and Freddie's, but in spite of all the talk about it, it does not become believable until the last third of the drama.

Another drawback in Bequest is its number of extraneous characters. Nelson, Emma, Lady Nelson, George, and Hardy are indispensable, but a plethora of servants, relations, and naval personnel distract from rather than add to the delineation of Nelson's conflicts.

The play also suffers from an uneven quality in the dialogue. Sometimes characters speak, as in Nelson's previously quoted passages, some of Rattigan's most thoughtful dialogue. "Jesus told us how to answer a blow on the cheek, but he never told us how to answer a kiss," is one of Rattigan's most original lines. But there are also such banal utterances as Nelson's:

I don't understand how a man's love of England can keep pace with anything except--just England. You don't love England as you love a person or a thing or an idea. You don't even love it because it's your country. You love it because it's England, and if you don't love it, you are damned.<sup>12</sup>

Even more damaging are the four-letter words Rattigan sprinkles through Emma's dialogue. "Fart off," is her first line; moments later she cries, "Oh farting arses! Did I break my shiting glass?" The end of censorship in England made the use of such language possible, and Rattigan commented that: "I'm not sure it isn't going to shock the audience, but it's part of the character and it is indeed shocking certain characters on stage, including, I may say, Nelson."<sup>13</sup> But four-letter words in Rattigan's dialogue draw attention to themselves and away from the character who says them and the context in which they occur because they are so

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<sup>12</sup>Act 1, sc. 2.    <sup>13</sup>Hayman.

alien to the stylized way in which Rattigan uses language. They provide an out-of-context shock and are entirely dispensable; Emma is vulgar enough without them.<sup>14</sup>

Though they found virtues in A Bequest to the Nation, several London critics judged it old-fashioned. Irving Wardle of the Times thought the play too confined by the tradition of Pinero. Wardle maintained that while Rattigan touched upon the subject of middle-aged passion, and raised the question of whether Lady Hamilton was as unworthy as the crowd judged her, ". . . the form in which Mr. Rattigan is working prevents [these subjects] from leading more than an underground existence. He is stuck with the fable of the man in high office and the woman with a past . . ."<sup>15</sup>

John Barber commented in the Daily Telegraph that neither Rattigan's use of history nor his language evoked a period or a hero, but added:

However, through his gentleman-puppet, the playwright conveys his own admiration of youthful gallantry [in the character of George], besides a thoroughly modern compassion for the rejected, and a fairly modern championship of physical love. We leave the theatre aglow with admiration.

Admiration for his skill to amuse and almost start a tear.<sup>16</sup>

Some critics judged Emma a rich characterization, but Nelson, particularly

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<sup>14</sup>Kenneth Hurren, Spectator, 3 October 1970, p. 374, found Rattigan's obscenities unseemly, and Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 9 September, thought them silly. Hobson went on to say, however, that: "The accusation that [Rattigan's] style is flat is based on a misconception of his aims. His sense of drama is so sure that he has no need of honeyed phrases or inflated rhetoric. The creation and resolution of suspense, the coup de théâtre, the dull, banal word whose setting makes it glow are . . . 'as plates dropped from his pocket'" [a quotation from Anthony and Cleopatra which Rattigan used in Act 2, sc. 1].

<sup>15</sup>24 September 1970. Others finding Bequest old-fashioned were Hurren; Ian Christie, Daily Express, and Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, both 24 September.

<sup>16</sup>24 September 1970.

Nelson as a great man, not credible.<sup>17</sup> Peter Lewis, on the other hand, wrote in the Daily Mail that ". . . it is a piece that shows that there is life in history, as opposed to costume drama. Mr. Rattigan gets my vote as a very original, new playwright."<sup>18</sup> B. A. Young of the Financial Times appraised Bequest in the context of Rattigan's other historical plays:

. . . the play is a romantic gloss on history, no more. And no less: Mr. Rattigan is at his best in this genre. He showed in Adventure Story (that underrated piece) and in Ross how adept he is at taking a framework of accepted fact, and clothing it with drama of a kind that makes of the participants acceptable, though not necessarily unarguable, historical characters. . . . it is one of Mr. Rattigan's particular abilities that he is able to inflate stock characters to historic magnitude, which is something different from the more frequent practice of reducing historic character to everyday magnitude. His Emma, like his Alexander, demonstrates how the habits and emotions that are familiar in ordinary life work when they inhabit exceptional people.<sup>19</sup>

A Bequest to the Nation is the fourth of Rattigan's plays about great men of action. Though his aspiration exceeded his accomplishment in each, he demonstrated great narrative power within the epic structures of Adventure Story and Ross. In all four plays he raised the question of the relationship between greatness in character and in action, of whether a man is great because of what he is or what he does.<sup>20</sup> It is

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<sup>17</sup>Shulman; B. A. Young, Financial Times, 24 September 1970; R. B. Marriott, publication not noted in TRPS-"Heart to Heart"-"Chips". Ronald Bryden criticized Bequest for the same reason that he had, in his review of Man and Boy, criticized Rattigan's work in general. He found Nelson unreal and the lack of confrontation between characters a flaw, and concluded that the play had nothing to do with life but was "wallowing theatre."

<sup>18</sup>24 September 1970. C. H., Sunday Express, 28 September, also admired the play. Hugh Whitmore, Harper's Queen, November 1970, found Bequest just satisfying as historical drama but remarkable as an examination of middle-aged love.

<sup>19</sup>24 September 1970.

<sup>20</sup>In Bequest, George raises this question in Act 1, sc. 3, and Hardy

in answering this question that he, to varying degrees in each drama, failed. Perhaps if he wrote more on this subject he would find his answer.<sup>21</sup> But he seems to be less comfortable starting with extraordinary, larger-than-life characters and exposing their flaws than in starting with "ordinary" people and showing them to be extraordinary, even if only in a few moments of honest self-appraisal or of offering support to others. Judging from the body of Rattigan's work, he seems to be at his best when searching for the strengths rather than the weaknesses of character in mankind: an unusual point of view in modern drama.

A surprising combination of attitudes was projected in Rattigan's next two plays, a double bill of one-acts entitled In Praise of Love. In one of the plays, After Lydia, Rattigan showed his characteristic attitude of searching for and finding unusual strength of character in ordinary people. In the other, Before Dawn, Rattigan produced a puzzling series of sneers.

The double bill, starring Donald Sinden and Joan Greenwood in the leading roles of both plays and directed by John Dexter, opened at the Duchess Theatre in London 27 September 1973,<sup>22</sup> and ran 131 performances.<sup>23</sup>

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says that Nelson is great in both: "How could he have done what he's done without being what he is?"

<sup>21</sup>In his interview with me, Rattigan described another biographical play he was planning to write. His comments are quoted in Appendix D.

<sup>22</sup>Rattigan, In Praise of Love (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1973), n. p.

<sup>23</sup>Variety, 23 January 1974.

In Praise of Love, with different casts, went on tour in Britain and South Africa.<sup>24</sup> An expanded version of After Lydia was produced in America as In Praise of Love. Starring Rex Harrison and Julie Harris and directed by Fred Coe, it opened at the Morosco Theatre 10 December 1974,<sup>25</sup> and ran for 199 performances.<sup>26</sup>

Before Dawn is a burlesque of the confrontation between Baron Scarpia and Tosca in the fourth act of Sardou's Tosca, and the second act of the Puccini opera.<sup>27</sup> The setting is the Baron's private sitting-room in the Castle Sant'Angelo in Naples, with a door leading to his offstage bedroom. The Baron, as in the play and opera, gives Tosca a choice: share his bed and save the life of her condemned beloved, Mario Cavaradossi, or he will have Mario shot as a French spy. Tosca very reluctantly consents, and Rattigan adds to the original story from this point.

Tosca's effort to stab the Baron fails because he wears a leather vest for the purpose of thwarting such attempts. He takes her into the bedroom, the lights dim, and come up again on a new situation: the Baron has proven impotent. As Tosca greedily eats supper, she and the Baron

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<sup>24</sup>British tour, starring John Gregson, mentioned in Surrey Daily Advertiser, 24 July 1974. Clippings about South Africa tour, starring Robert Flemyng and Muriel Pavlow, are in TRPS-"In Praise of Love." The Wolverhampton Express and Star, 14 February 1974, noted that In Praise of Love was given its continental premiere at Vienna's English Theatre in February 1974.

<sup>25</sup>Rattigan, In Praise of Love (New York: Samuel French, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup>LC Play Stats.

<sup>27</sup>Rattigan refers to the setting's resemblance to that in the fourth act of Sardou's play and the second act of Puccini's opera in his opening stage directions to Before Dawn in the Hamish Hamilton edition. All references from Before Dawn from this edition.

exchange confidences. She loves and desires Mario, but he loves her only spiritually. She implies that Mario is a homosexual, and reveals her jealousy of his relationship with another spy, Angelotti, by casually betraying his identity.

The Baron has his own secrets: he is in the pay of the King of Naples, but in order to ensure his own survival should Napoleon triumph, he is also in contact with him. Napoleon himself has betrayed Mario and ordered his execution. Tosca makes a future date with the Baron, promising him a successful amour. Mario is saved and sent into exile in England, a fate he bemoans in an offstage cry: "Oh no! Not England! Why didn't you kill me!" The curtain falls as the Baron is about to consummate his relationship with Tosca, as she counts cupids on the ceiling.

Had Rattigan written Before Dawn while still at Oxford, it might be considered a youthful impertinence. As a work of his maturity, however, it is shocking on three counts. First, Rattigan jeers at his own tradition of well-made playwrighting by burlesquing the most famous play of a founder of that tradition. He takes Sardou's dramatic conflict between implacable enemies and ridicules it by portraying the Baron and Tosca as almost casual betrayers of their causes.

Second, Rattigan insults the Puccini opera which Sardou's play inspired, and which has become a classic, by using the opera's most famous aria as a set-up for a cheap double entendre. Rattigan's Tosca sings "Vissi d'arte" offstage while the Baron discusses her fate (he considers having her shot with Mario so that she cannot reveal his impotence, which he calls a state secret) with his aide, Schiaronne. When Tosca returns, the Baron asks her what heavenly aria she was singing and she says that she was improvising. The Baron remarks that she possesses a truly mag-

nificent organ, and she replies that even she has evenings when it is not quite at its peak. This is the level of dialogue throughout--double entendres about the firing squad mixing up their blanks with their balls; a remark by Tosca that the Baron should not take his failure so hard-- or rather so much to heart.

Third, Rattigan even derides his own attempts to bring psychological depth to the well-made play by poking fun at one of his grave concerns as a dramatist. Tosca and the Baron engage in a dialogue about spiritual and physical love. Mario's love of Tosca represents the former, the Baron's lust the latter. The Baron claims that his impotence must be the result of his worship of Tosca as an artist, and she promises him spiritual and physical regeneration.

Rattigan's apparent intention in Before Dawn was to provide a counterpoint to the genuine love story in After Lydia by dramatizing Italians' propensity for talking about love without doing much loving.<sup>28</sup> This theme might have provided an effective contrast to After Lydia, as Harlequinade did to The Browning Version. One can only wonder why Rattigan embodied the theme in what amounts to a sneer at his own playwriting tradition and at himself. A few London critics found the play amusing,<sup>29</sup> but the majority condemned it with such comments as ". . . a tawdry and feeble burlesque of Tosca . . . numbing in its effrontery to the taste of grown-up

<sup>28</sup>"Why the English Lose at Love," Evening Standard, 7 September 1973.

<sup>29</sup>Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 30 September 1973; Jane Gaskell, Daily Mail, October 1; Jason Hillgate, What's On in London, 5 October; Douglas Blake, The Stage and Television Today, 4 October. Martin Gottfried, favorably reviewing both plays in the British production in Women's Wear Daily, 18 January 1974, called Before Dawn "a funny divertimento."

audiences . . . ."30

Though Rattigan did not display in Before Dawn the talent for affectionate satire evident in Harlequinade, he did in After Lydia draw a sympathetic portrait of a man who is not all that he seems on first acquaintance which is reminiscent of his portrayal of Crocker-Harris in The Browning Version. After Lydia lacks the perfection of craftsmanship of the earlier play, but deals with considerable skill with two of the same themes: the tragedy of emotional repression and the importance of kindness in human relations.

After Lydia is set in the suburban London flat of Lydia and Sebastian Cruttwell. The first of the play's two scenes is devoted to exposition. Lydia confides in the family's oldest friend, Mark Walters. Despite her doctor's attempts to deceive her, Lydia knows that she is dying of leukemia, and is determined to keep the knowledge from her husband. An Estonian war refugee who suffered Nazi and Russian persecution until her marriage to Sebastian twenty-eight years previously, Lydia fears boring him with her illness as she believes she once bored him with her refugee experiences. She is concerned with finding someone to take care of Sebastian after her death, and with the welfare of their sensitive, twenty-year-old son, Joey. Sebastian, once a fine but unsuccessful novelist turned literary critic, seems coldly indifferent to anyone's needs and feelings but his own. He treats Lydia like a servant, ridicules Joey for political convictions which differ from his own, and scoffs at Mark

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<sup>30</sup>Kenneth Hurren, Spectator, 13 October 1973, p. 489. Other condemnations of Before Dawn from Charles Lewsen, Times; Milton Shulman, Evening Standard; Herbert Kretzmer, Daily Express; Michael Coveney, Financial Times; Michael Billington, Guardian, all 28 September; Russell Davies, Observer, 30 September; Listener, 4 October.

for the millions he earns writing best-selling sex novels.

Sebastian's callousness is capped in the second scene by his forgetting Joey's debut as a television dramatist. Lydia, who is planning to go with Mark on a holiday recommended by her doctor, has cajoled Joey into agreeing to stay with Sebastian, hoping that father and son will develop a closeness which will compensate both for her loss. She has invited Mark to watch Joey's play with the family, but Sebastian appears after the end of the telecast. A crushed Joey and furious Lydia rush upstairs.

Sebastian then reveals to Mark that he forgot Joey's play because he had just received confirmation of Lydia's imminent death from her doctor. He has known of her illness from its discovery and, determined that she not relive her wartime experience of anticipating death at any moment, has kept the knowledge from her. His callousness, once a habit, is now a mask he dons lest a word or gesture of solicitude make Lydia suspicious. It is a difficult role for him to play, because he has realized that he loves Lydia, and feels that life without her will be endless misery.

Sebastian confides in Mark because he wants Mark to take care of Lydia while they are away. Mark says nothing about Lydia's knowledge of her illness to Sebastian, but lets Lydia know of her husband's pretence. Stunned by, and deeply happy in her discovery that the husband whom she has always loved loves her, she allows Sebastian to maintain his facade, and encourages him to make up with Joey. The curtain falls as Sebastian and Joey play chess while Lydia goes serenely upstairs to bed.

Structurally, After Lydia is a psychological suspense story. Two thirds of the play are devoted to creating a negative picture of Sebastian

as a childish, boorish, posturing man who has no consideration for others. When the revelation of his own despair, and of the real kindness with which he is trying to treat Lydia comes, it is a coup de théâtre.<sup>31</sup> It is not just a startling twist, however, but a believable revelation of character, and the manner in which Rattigan prepares for the revelation to be believable marks a further development in his dramatic technique.

After Lydia was inspired by several incidents in Rattigan's own life. Around the time of the production of Man and Boy,<sup>32</sup> and for some time after, Rattigan thought that he was dying of leukemia. The diagnosis proved to be mistaken, but Rattigan told an interviewer, ". . . for a while I prepared myself for death. It was the most shattering experience of my life, and I shall certainly use it in a play one day."<sup>33</sup> He told another reporter that After Lydia was founded on a personal experience in which he was involved, "in fact I was really the man in the middle."<sup>34</sup> Later, Rattigan confirmed that the play was inspired by Kay Kendall's death from leukemia a few years after her marriage to his friend, Rex Harrison.<sup>35</sup> The third experience which influenced the writing of After Lydia was producer Hugh Beaumont's asking Rattigan if he had ever thought

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<sup>31</sup>Hillgate declared that the twist would in time become as famous as the coup de théâtre in The Winslow Boy. Hurren compared it to the moment when Crocker-Harris cried in The Browning Version. Hobson declared it one of the great moments of the British theatre.

<sup>32</sup>In an interview in New York, 8 April 1976, Alexander Cohen, who produced Man and Boy on Broadway, remarked that Rattigan thought that he had leukemia at the time of the Broadway production.

<sup>33</sup>Clive Hirschorn, "When Rattigan Thought He Was Going to Die," Sunday Express, 20 September 1970.

<sup>34</sup>"Pauline Tooth Interviews Sir Terence Rattigan." LC file.

<sup>35</sup>Jeanette Keill, interview in an unidentified Johannesburg, South Africa newspaper. TRPS-"In Praise of Love."

of doing something about death as a comedy.<sup>36</sup> Rattigan distilled his own and his friends' encounter with a fatal illness and Beaumont's suggestion into a drama which he came close to calling a comedy.<sup>37</sup>

All of Rattigan's fourteen dramas<sup>38</sup> are crisis plays, in which his protagonists confront problems which threaten to destroy them psychologically and/or existentially. And in all of these plays, Rattigan uses comedy in various ways to heighten the drama. But in no drama did he attempt such a pervasive and potentially precarious mixture of comedy and seriousness as in After Lydia.

In After Lydia, Rattigan's protagonists Sebastian and Lydia face the inescapable crisis of death, with anguish for themselves, for each other, and for their son. But the play is, on the surface, almost a domestic comedy. As much of the dialogue is devoted to bickering and bantering as to thoughtful reflection, and as much of the action to housekeeping tasks, chess-playing, and Mark's gift-giving as to dealing with the problems surrounding Lydia's illness.

Rattigan uses comic dialogue and action, and sometimes even bad jokes, slowly to build a picture of a household under almost unbearable emotional pressure, a household in which characters both deliberately and unthinkingly use comedy to mask their own feelings and to try to spare

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<sup>36</sup>Derek Allwright, Showguide, 15-21 November 1973, pp. 5-6.

<sup>37</sup>In our interview, Rattigan stated about the play: "I thought I ought to call it a comedy, and decided not. It's a play, a drama, whatever you like to call it. I want people to laugh at his [Sebastian's] selfishness. There were some models for the character, but if you like it's me too. I think we all have some of that quality of taking other people entirely for granted."

<sup>38</sup>I include First Episode in this reckoning but exclude Grey Farm because no script of it is (apparently) extant.

the feelings of others. For example, the only hint that Rattigan gives of Sebastian's knowledge of Lydia's illness is at the beginning of his chess game with Mark in the first scene. Lydia exits and Sebastian, who has been writing an article about two books on Shakespeare's imagery, begins to quote Claudio's speech from Measure for Measure:

Ay, but to die and go we know not where;  
to lie in cold obstruction and to rot;  
This sensible warm motion to become  
a kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit--  
Are you making that move?<sup>39</sup>

Sebastian goes on with Claudio's speech, interspersing it with comments about Mark's chess move, including "Can't keep your hand on it for ever, you know--as the Bishop said to the actress--"

Later, when he is discussing Lydia's illness with Mark and the rejected possibility of seeing a supposed specialist in Denver, Sebastian states:

I'd already got my story ready for Denver. I'd induced some wretched little local college to offer me a resident lectureship. Jesus, imagine that! . . . Now, Winnie Slobberwicz, stop groping your neighbor and listen. Balls-ache, as you are pleased to pronounce him, is the name of an important French writer and not an occupational disease.-- Oh, I'm sorry Mark. My jokes are so feeble these days, it's a wonder she hasn't seen through them. And me. But she hasn't, thank God. . . .<sup>40</sup>

After Lydia represents what is perhaps Rattigan's most daring use of the implicit in his career, because he employs comedy throughout the play to stress and often to express the deepest feelings of his protagonists. In his revelation scene with Mark, Sebastian expresses his concern for Joey:

Oh God, the poor little sod! He worships his mother. Too much, I

<sup>39</sup>Rattigan, After Lydia, In Praise of Love (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1973), p. 25. All references from this edition.

<sup>40</sup>First ellipsis Rattigan's.

suppose--but you can't blame him. Yes, he's going to be quite a handful after--I'll have to try. Tonight won't have helped much, will it?

After Lydia, following Mark's suggestion, has found the doctor's reports which Sebastian has kept hidden from her and realized what he has been doing, she is surprised by Sebastian before she has had time to return the reports to their hiding place on top of the bookcase. She stands in an awkward position to conceal them from him, and the tenor of their exchange is domestic:

SEBASTIAN. Why are you leaning there like Isadora Duncan?

LYDIA. I've been putting books in their right places, under your orders, sir.

SEBASTIAN. Good. That'll be a change. All right. Go and get the little bugger down.

LYDIA. No.

SEBASTIAN. No?

LYDIA. You go up.

SEBASTIAN. (Outraged) Go up? Knock timidly at his door and beg leave to enter that room with all those Liberal Posters on the wall--crawl across the carpet like a penitent, abase myself like Henry IV at Canossa, scourge myself--all right. I'll go up.

(He goes up the stairs, climbing reluctantly)

Why are you looking at me like that?

LYDIA. A cat may look at a king.

SEBASTIAN. Are you pissed again?

LYDIA. Oh yes.

SEBASTIAN. Vodka.

LYDIA. Something--kind of--headier--

SEBASTIAN. Kirsch, or Slivovitz or something? My God, darling, you'll end up in an alcoholics' ward.

Behind Sebastian's usual testiness is all his love and concern for Lydia. In her line "A cat may look at a king" is her love for him, and in "Something--kind of--headier--" is her happiness that her love is returned. Characteristically, Rattigan eschewed the "big" sentimental reconciliation scene and achieved the emotional effect of a reconciliation with great subtlety, suggesting the emotions behind the light dialogue and leaving the rest to the audience's imagination.

Not only does Rattigan use comic dialogue and action to emphasize

the fundamentally serious nature of his situation, but he also creates Sebastian as a comic figure in order to stress the depth of his personal tragedy. Most of the comedy in the play is directed at Sebastian, at his outrageous selfishness, his posturing, his helplessness around the house, and at his childish insistence on being the center of everyone's attention. With only the one hint, in the Shakespeare quotation, that Sebastian has anything on his mind but himself, Rattigan creates a negative picture of the character in which potential audience hatred of him (especially in light of the sympathy evoked for Lydia from the beginning) is tempered by making him a Miles Gloriosus figure.

The implicit question raised in Sebastian's characterization, up to his revelation scene with Mark, is how Lydia could still be in love with him, as she tells Mark she is. Lydia claims, in her scene with Joey before the telecast of his play, that Sebastian is not as uncaring as he seems to be, and begs Joey to make more of an effort to know him. Joey thinks that this would be a pretence, and that honesty is the most important thing in life. Lydia maintains that pretending, or maintaining good manners in human relations, is more important:

Manners--real manners--means slipping your teeth into your pocket and pretending you're not hurt. It also means trying to feel some understanding for the man who kicked you.

The importance of trying to understand and to be kind to people even when they seem not to deserve it is one of Rattigan's themes, and Lydia's exposition of it prepares the audience psychologically for the revelation of Sebastian's understanding and kindness, which justify her love for him.

Sebastian is, like Crocker-Harris, a study in the ravages of emotional repression. Sebastian's tragedy is not that he has become all

shriveled up inside, as Taplow says of Crocker-Harris, but that he has so inflated himself with a sense of self-importance that he has failed to recognize what was really important to him until too late. He tells Mark:

You see the thing is, Mark, I didn't begin really to love her until I knew I was losing her. . . . Did I feel about her like this from the beginning? It's possible. It's possible. And wouldn't allow myself to? Yes, possible.

Do you know what 'le vice Anglais?--the English vice--really is? Not flagellation, not pederasty--whatever the French believe it to be. It's our refusal to admit to our emotions. We think they demean us, I suppose.

Well, I'm being punished now, all right--for a lifetime of vice. Very moral endings to a Victorian novel. I'm becoming maudlin. But, oh Mark, life without Lydia will be such endless misery.<sup>41</sup>

What makes the revelation of Sebastian's love for and kindness toward Lydia so dramatic is Rattigan's daring in creating a Miles Gloriosus figure, and then turning the comedy abruptly to personal tragedy. He reveals that the inflated figure is not just pricked but stabbed to the heart, and that his posturing and testiness are the only acts of love and kindness that he can perform in his circumstances.

While there are great virtues in the writing of After Lydia, there are also flaws which prevent the play from standing among Rattigan's best. Foremost is a structural weakness. There is too much exposition and too little action for fully two-thirds of the play. A weakness in characterization contributes to the sluggish pace of the exposition, in that Mark is an affable but bland creation. He has, he tells Lydia and Sebastian, loved Lydia from their first meeting shortly after her marriage to Sebastian. But he is resigned to loving Lydia from a distance, and his attitude of graceful resignation prevents him from having enough of a personal

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<sup>41</sup>Emphasis Rattigan's.

stake in the action to make him more participant than passive confidant. Rattigan hints at potentially interesting qualities in Mark: his knowledge that his success does not put him in the same class with Sebastian as a novelist, and the emptiness of his personal life. But since Mark only makes jokes about his literary crudity, his wealth, and his faithless wives, his character creates a superficial impression.

One other flaw in After Lydia is some vulgarities in the dialogue, including Sebastian's bad sex jokes and his calling himself "an uncaring shit." As in A Bequest to the Nation, the crudities are shocking amidst the stylized refinement of most of Rattigan's dialogue.<sup>42</sup>

From Sebastian's revelation scene, however, the last third of the play (excepting the crudities in dialogue) is vintage Rattigan writing. As soon as Sebastian's secret is disclosed, a series of action questions arise: will Mark tell Sebastian and Lydia about each other's secrets, will Lydia and Sebastian confront each other with the truth, will Joey learn what his father is really like? Rattigan's denouement is completely true to his characters. Lydia's protection of Sebastian's secret is her act of kindness to him. Sebastian's forgetting Joey's debut is a sign that he can only handle so much stress. Lydia's assurance of his love is what she most needs, and receives; what he most needs and receives in return is time to learn to handle the emotions he has just discovered and the responsibility for himself and Joey. Though they lack their glamor and emotional openness with each other, Lydia and Sebastian are, by the

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<sup>42</sup>In our interview, Rattigan defended his use of "uncaring shit" by saying, "You see, he can't be an uncaring shit and say he's one. That's why I made that line so important. You see, at least he knows that. That makes it possible for him to say that to the boy. Saying that to the boy makes it possible for the boy to see him in a new light."

end of the play, somewhat reminiscent of Olivia and John in Love in Idle-ness: a mature couple who truly love each other.

British reviews of After Lydia varied from the judgment that it represented Rattigan at the top of his form,<sup>43</sup> to the opinion that it was an old-fashioned "product of a spirit languishing in the glow of a former heyday."<sup>44</sup> A few critics felt that Rattigan's characters only shadow-boxed with each other, never showing their true feelings,<sup>45</sup> and some found the exposition tortuous and prolonged. Michael Billington wrote in the Guardian:

It's only when you remember a play like "The Browning Version," which really said something about the English habit of suppressing emotion until the eleventh hour, that the work seems a rather crude and obvious piece of audience manipulation not far above the level of "Love Story."<sup>46</sup>

Many British critics commended Rattigan's structure and characterization. Jason Hillgate stated in What's On:

Their relationship is not precisely as it appears, and we find ultimately that our emotional involvement is greater and of different kind than might be anticipated in the earlier part of the work. It is the particular gift of Sir Terence to be able to build a situation to a climactic disclosure that is at once true and utterly

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<sup>43</sup>Frank Marcus, Sunday Telegraph, 30 September 1973. Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 30 September, wrote: "Rattigan has never written better than this: and in this form of drama no one has ever written better than Rattigan."

<sup>44</sup>Michael Coveney, Financial Times, 28 September 1973.

<sup>45</sup>Charles Lewson, Times; Arthur Thirkell, Daily Mirror, both 28 September 1973.

<sup>46</sup>28 September 1973. J. C. Trewin, Birmingham Post, 28 September, wrote that the exposition was long but that Rattigan made his effect with startling ingenuity. Milton Shulman, New Statesman, 5 October, stated that Rattigan skirted the perils of over-morbidity and sentimentality, but that at times he suspected that the play was only a tear-jerker masquerading as a significant dramatic statement.

convincing, yet at the same time almost impossible to anticipate.<sup>47</sup>

John Barber and Harold Hobson judged that After Lydia was a deeply touching drama about the revelation of kindness and love. Hobson wrote:

. . . it is the most piercing exposition of love under great stress that I have ever seen on the stage; it is an experience of such power and beauty as will intensify one's appreciation of what consummate theatre can achieve . . .<sup>48</sup>

American reviews for the play were equally mixed, but it should be noted that when After Lydia was presented on Broadway as In Praise of Love, several changes had been made which weakened Rattigan's original script. The play was lengthened, its two scenes made into two acts, and considerable dialogue was added, including more expository passages. Instead of simply telling Mark that she stole looks at her doctor's reports in his office, for example, Lydia goes into detail about how her training in the Estonian resistance movement helped her deceive the doctor. Instead of simply telling Mark that he does not want Lydia to relive her wartime horror of anticipating death at any moment, Sebastian gives a lengthy account of her escape from an execution squad. Such explanations are unnecessary. The characters' actions and motivations were clear in the original version, and the elaborated refugee experiences come close to creating the impression that the audience is being pressed rather than drawn into sympathy with Lydia. An addition of another crudity, in the form of an exchange between Sebastian and Lydia over whether urine and feces should be called "wee wee" and "ka ka" demeans both characters.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>5 October 1973. In agreement were Hobson, Hurren, and Marcus; Davies, and Felix Barber, Evening News, 28 September 1973, thought the revelation a bit of a cheat.

<sup>48</sup>Sunday Times, 21 October 1973. John Barber, Daily Telegraph, expressed similar approval.

<sup>49</sup>Rattigan, In Praise of Love (New York: Samuel French, Inc.,

Even more harmful than these additions, however, are some changes in the story. Lydia's disease is changed from leukemia to poly-arteritis, from a familiar to an exotic-sounding illness which requires some additional explanation and which necessitated the removal of a very effective proof of Sebastian's concern. In After Lydia, Mark mentions a leukemia specialist in Denver in the first scene; Sebastian later tells Mark that he checked out his specialist and that he refused to take Lydia's case. This had to be cut from In Praise of Love.

The worst change from After Lydia to In Praise of Love, however, is a shift in emphasis in the character of Sebastian. In the American version, Sebastian sneaks a look at Lydia's latest medical report soon after the curtain rises, giving his concern for her away at the beginning. Instead of Mark taking Lydia, who has suffered a slight stroke, upstairs at the end of the first scene while Sebastian goes back to his chess board, Sebastian takes her up in the re-worked script. Some sympathy is directed at Sebastian from the first, his scene with Mark is a confirmation rather than a revelation, and the structure of the play is thrown completely out of balance. These changes may not have been initiated, may not even have been approved of by Rattigan,<sup>50</sup> but they are

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1975), Act 1. All references from this edition.

<sup>50</sup>In the script of In Praise of Love which was lent to me by the Arthur Cantor Office (which produced the play on Broadway) just before rehearsals began, Lydia's disease was leukemia and neither of the stage directions which give away Sebastian's concern for Lydia were included.

Rattigan was ill with pneumonia during the rehearsals and early tryouts of In Praise of Love (he told me this much in our interview). He did not see the production until just before it went to Broadway. When I saw an early preview of the play, the alteration in Sebastian's characterization had been made. In fact, Rex Harrison was playing for sympathy from the moment of his entrance.

Certainly Rattigan must have made the change in disease, for a reason never explained in public. Whether he made, approved of, or was com-

in the American acting edition of the play which bears his name, and were seen in the Broadway production.

The American drama critics veered from those who, like Clive Barnes in the New York Times, called the play sentimental and facile, to those who commended Rattigan's skill. Barnes thought that Rattigan's basic situation was not believable or interesting, that the characters were unexplored, and that the writing had an air of B.B.C. chic. He concluded:

There are many theatergoers--even if they do not fully realize it themselves--who relish a package of theatrical confirmation rather than theatrical confrontation. This could be their kind of show. It was not mine.<sup>51</sup>

Taking an opposite view, Rex Reed wrote in the Daily News:

There is warmth, humor and lovely catharsis in this play about literate people who have real relationships to each other and genuine affection for each other beneath their polished surfaces. "In Praise of Love" is the kind of play Broadway has been longing for. It is an extraordinary evening of rare perfection. With all of the pretentious twaddle around, it's reassuring to know somebody is interested in bringing some quality back to the professional theater.<sup>52</sup>

Some found the play ultimately touching after too prolonged an exposition,<sup>53</sup> but the majority of American critics regarded In Praise of  

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pelled to accept the change in Sebastian's characterization is officially unknown.

<sup>51</sup>11 December 1974. Note the emphasis from Barnes, who is British, on "confrontation." Some critics found the play sentimental soap opera: Allan Wallach, Newsday, 11 December, and T. E. Kalem, Time, 23 December, pp. 46-7. Calling the play old-fashioned were Douglas Watt, Daily News, 11 December, and Timothy McKenna, Paterson News (New Jersey), 16 December.

<sup>52</sup>22 December 1974. Commending the superb artistry in the writing was Hobe, Variety, 11 December. Calling the play moving and beautiful and one of Rattigan's best works was Richard Watts, Post, 15 December.

<sup>53</sup>Edwin Wilson, Wall Street Journal, 14 December 1974; Walter Kerr, New York Times, 22 December (Kerr also thought that the play suffered from the English vice it was about, and was a play of evasions). William A. Raidy, Long Island Press, 11 December, found Act 1 too long and never believed that Sebastian and Lydia were in love.

Love as a minor work of quiet charm, amusing, touching, and romantically old-fashioned.<sup>54</sup> Martin Gottfried commented:

Aspiring to be no more than a touching diversion, it is just that. "Just that" should not imply a simplicity in the task. Well-made plays like Rattigan writes are indeed out of fashion--this is his first production in ten years [on Broadway]--and in large, exclusive doses they deserve to be. Still and all, I've sometimes wondered half-seriously whether younger playwrights hurried them away because they were too difficult to write. After all, there's a plot to invent, characters to create and even idiosyncratic dialogue to write.

Gottfried concluded that In Praise of Love was "funny, touching, and emotionally rewarding. It is the theater. Remember that?"<sup>55</sup> Gottfried's and Reed's reviews indicate some attempt to put Rattigan's work into a contemporary perspective. On this subject, Jack Kroll of Newsweek wrote that In Praise of Love was not Rattigan's best work:

But how would history judge between Rattigan and Osborne right now? Rattigan the drawing-room dramatist has almost certainly written more good plays ("The Winslow Boy," "The Deep Blue Sea," "The Browning Version") than Osborne, whose "Look Back in Anger" is still his best play.<sup>56</sup>

A few of the American criticisms of In Praise of Love indicated positive reappraisals of Rattigan's stature in contemporary theatre. But, in general, most British and American critics still did not take Rattigan seriously enough to ask fundamental questions about his approach to drama. The plays of the third period of his career may not have equaled the artistic achievements of those that he wrote between 1944 and 1954,<sup>57</sup> but they were worthy of more serious attention than they received.

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<sup>54</sup>Emory Lewis, Bergen Record (New Jersey), 11 December 1974; John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, 13 December; Marilyn Stasio, Cue, and John Simon, New York Magazine, p. 63, both 23 December; Patrick Pacheco, After Dark, 5 February 1975, p. 21.

<sup>55</sup>Post, 11 December 1974. <sup>56</sup>23 December 1974, p. 56.

<sup>57</sup>T. C. Worsley, London Magazine, pp. 67-8, considered Variation

Variation on a Theme was an imaginative reworking of Dumas's 19th century drama in which Rattigan depicted the fluctuating moral and social standards of his own era. Few critics even bothered to consider the nature and extent of Rattigan's variation on the world and characters of his predecessor. In Ross, as in the earlier Adventure Story, Rattigan brought the tightness and clarity of construction characteristic of the well-made play to the epic, a novel approach to what has often been regarded as a "loose" form. Though many critics acknowledged the narrative power of both plays, they did not recognize the nature of Rattigan's achievement in applying principles of one form to another.

With Man and Boy and A Bequest to the Nation, Rattigan made still another innovative approach: he attempted studies of larger-than-life characters in the intimate settings of domestic dramas. Not until twenty years after Separate Tables did Rattigan return to the form of his greatest triumphs in the pure domestic drama, In Praise of Love. Even if the

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on a Theme one of Rattigan's finest plays, and one destined to "live." As a matter of justice, I think I should admit that Variation is Rattigan's only play about which I am uncertain of my own evaluation. After many readings of, and much thinking about the play, I still see Ron's generally unsympathetic character, and the negative effect it has on evoking sympathy for the lovers' relationship, as flaws. Yet they may be strengths. Rattigan may have been at his most daring in making Ron as weak as he is until the last scene, when he finally accepts responsibility for his own life and approaches Rose not as a means of entry into cafe society, but as a kindred spirit: a fellow Brum. This last-minute awakening of sympathy for Ron and of understanding for his bond with Rose may be Rattigan's final variation--and the only possible equivalent to--the "pure" romantic love of Marguerite and Armand. When Rose and Ron admit that they have failed to achieve happiness in the cafe society world, and acknowledge their bond in the common origins they have tried to escape, they achieve in some measure a return to innocence. Worsley regarded the play's resolution as absolutely right and true. If he is correct, then the play is one of Rattigan's finest, a work of both literary and theatrical virtuosity. Benedict Nightingale, in the New Statesman, 21 January 1977, p. 98, suggested that Variation might be worth reappraisal.

approaches he attempted in the intervening years were partial failures, they might justly have been acknowledged as evidence of his attempts, particularly courageous in a hostile critical environment, to grow as an artist.

## CONCLUSION

Though his reputation with the critics suffered an eclipse during the fifties and sixties, Rattigan has nevertheless remained a living dramatist in far more than the literal sense. Rattigan's London agent confirms that requests to perform his plays arrive regularly from European, South American, and Israeli producers, and that the plays seem to be particularly popular in Japan.<sup>1</sup> Rattigan's New York agent states that the plays most often performed in America are The Winslow Boy, The Browning Version, and Harlequinade, and that there have also been recent productions of Separate Tables and O Mistress Mine.<sup>2</sup>

In Britain, Rattigan received one of his country's highest honors when he was knighted in June 1971.<sup>3</sup> That the knighthood was recognition of contributions made to the drama throughout his career was indicated by the abundance of Rattigan works seen in London during the 1970-71 season. There was a successful revival of The Winslow Boy and the new play, A Bequest to the Nation, on stage; four of his plays were presented on television, and a special series of his films was shown at the National Film Theatre.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Imison, of Jan Van Loewen, interview in London, 6 August 1975.

<sup>2</sup>Selma Luttinger, of Harold Freedman Brandt and Brandt Dramatic Dept., letter dated 5 May 1976.

<sup>3</sup>Times, 12 June 1971.

<sup>4</sup>Shaun Asher, "Rattigan's Festival of Acclaim," Daily Mail, 20 May 1971.

British radio and television have contributed to keeping Rattigan's plays before public and critics,<sup>5</sup> and stage productions abound in the British provinces. A file of press clippings in Rattigan's London study in June 1975 attested to his enduring popularity with British audiences. The clippings revealed that, from April through June of that year, twenty-two productions of his plays were given by professional and amateur groups in Britain, including presentations at three drama festivals. Interestingly for those who might still persist in distinguishing Rattigan as a predominantly comedic playwright, productions of his dramas outweighed those of his comedies by fifteen to seven. The choices ranged from his oldest to his latest plays: four productions of French without Tears; three each of The Browning Version, The Deep Blue Sea, Separate Tables and A Bequest to the Nation; two each of The Sleeping Prince and In Praise of Love; and one each of The Winslow Boy and Harlequinade.<sup>6</sup>

Though in 1953 Rattigan recalled an ". . . earnest young repertory manager who once said to me, in all good faith, 'What's so nice about doing your plays in my theatre is that their profits pay for the good ones,'" <sup>7</sup> contemporary critical reactions to Rattigan revivals suggest that the once-fashionable attitude of denigrating Rattigan is giving way to respect and, in many cases, admiration. Five Rattigan plays have been revived in London in the seventies,<sup>8</sup> all to critical acclaim.

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<sup>5</sup>A partial listing of television and radio productions of Rattigan's plays, and critical comments on them, is in Appendix C.

<sup>6</sup>Statistics compiled from an envelope of press clippings in Ratt. Coll.

<sup>7</sup>Preface, 1:x.

<sup>8</sup>Also, Robert Flemyng, who played Kit in the original French without Tears production, directed and starred as Alan in a London revival of

After Frank Dunlop's Young Vic revival of French without Tears, which opened 27 July 1973,<sup>9</sup> Rattigan was hailed as an unjustly neglected comic writer by the Times,<sup>10</sup> and the Daily Mail found that his "superb sense of theatre sings across the decades."<sup>11</sup> John Barber wrote in the Daily Telegraph:

So we were not wrong, those of us who remember "French without Tears" as delicious, and somehow something more than a mere frolic. In the revival at the Young Vic the comedy seems as fresh and as truthful as when we first saw it.

Laughter is won, not by jokes or gags, but by the absurdity, the naiveté and the vanity of the people. And because they are real, of course, they can also be most moving.<sup>12</sup>

The Sunday Times concluded that Rattigan could fill a theatre with radiant

the play. It opened 15 June 1949, at the Vaudeville Theatre, and ran 157 performances. Stage Year-Book (London: Carson & Comerford, 1950), p. 157. Flemyng gave the play a contemporary setting.

The Times, 16 June 1949, commented: ". . . it is high time London had the opportunity of seeing [French without Tears] again. . . . It is only a trifle about a coquette let loose among the young men at a crammer's in the South of France, but it has an air of high spirits and a good humour that can still be delightful."

Most critics agreed that the play had a lasting appeal: Daily Telegraph; A. E. Wilson, Star; P. L. Marnock, Daily Herald, all 16 June; News Chronicle, 18 June; Stage, 23 June; Anthony Cookman, Tatler and Bystander, 29 June; J. C. Trewin, Illustrated London News, 2 July; F. S., Theatre World, August 1949, p. 6.

Ted Willis, Daily Worker, 12 July, wrote that French without Tears was "in many respects a classical example of English 20th century farcical comedy." John G. Drummond, Sunday Express, 19 June, placed the play in an historical perspective: "But as Mediterranean sunshine floods the stage, and these particular young men pursue their pre-Munich revels, there is a slight tinge of melancholy in the laughter and one is inclined to sigh and say: 'Ah yes, that's how it used to be.'"

Apparently a 1955 revival of French without Tears in Denmark was a great success. A critic in Dagens Nyheder, 6 November 1955, wrote: "It can hardly be questioned that Terence Rattigan's first play from the late 1930s is a little classic among comedies. The situation is eternal. It repeats itself continuously. . . . Movingly true to life, witty, and ironical. . . . French without Tears is, in short, a comedy that can be performed every ten years with a fresh batch of actors." Translated clipping in TRPS—"French without Tears."

<sup>9</sup>Charles Lewson, Times, 28 July 1973.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. <sup>11</sup>30 July 1973. <sup>12</sup>28 July 1973.

happiness with:

. . . the sweet suavity and delicate gradations of his dialogue, its wealth of nuance and its magically paradoxical calculation of spontaneity. There is also an underlying seriousness, both personal and political, that time has not touched, so that one leaves the theatre not only with a heart exhilarated but also a mind enriched.<sup>13</sup>

When actor Alec McCowen made his directing debut in 1972, he chose While the Sun Shines, a comedy he had enjoyed acting in early in his career. His production opened 18 December at the Hampstead Theatre Club for a four-week limited run.<sup>14</sup> While recognizing some faults in the play, the London critics generally agreed that it was still greatly entertaining. Several mentioned that they and the audience had rolled in the aisles,<sup>15</sup> and some declared that it was worth seeing as an example of the craftsmanship which had disappeared from contemporary theatre.<sup>16</sup>

On 5 November 1970, a revival of The Winslow Boy, starring Kenneth More as Sir Robert Morton, and directed by Frith Banbury, opened at the New Theatre and ran for 240 performances.<sup>17</sup> More and Banbury referred to the play's "relevance today, because the small man is even more beset with rules and regulations than in 1910, or 1946 . . ." One commentator declared this the understatement of the year.<sup>18</sup> Among the critics who had

<sup>13</sup>29 July 1973.

<sup>14</sup>John Crosby, Plays and Players, February 1973.

<sup>15</sup>Crosby; Stan Gebler Davies, Evening Standard and J. B., Daily Telegraph, both 19 December 1972.

<sup>16</sup>J. B.; B. A. Young, Financial Times, 19 December 1972.

<sup>17</sup>Plays and Players, June 1971, p. 5. I have guessed at the figure of 240--the production ran from 5 November 1970 to 29 May 1971, or 30 weeks.

<sup>18</sup>Edward Grayson, "The Relevance of The Winslow Boy," New Law Journal, 12 November 1970, quoted More and Banbury and made the comment about understatement.

reviewed The Winslow Boy in 1946, Philip Hope-Wallace and J. C. Trewin found the play still admirable, and Trewin wondered what excuses the post-1956 group of critics would find for denigrating it.<sup>19</sup> B. A. Young, referring to the cloud of unfashionableness that had masked Rattigan's work "since the rise of the new wave, or ripple, in 1956," declared that the revival of The Winslow Boy proved its quality, and that it was a masterpiece of construction and of writing for actors.<sup>20</sup>

The critics could find little in the play to denigrate except its "old-fashionedness," but even those who found it somewhat out-moded admitted the strength of its "celebration of moral values, which have never gone out of fashion,"<sup>21</sup> and most applauded its emotional power and "relevance."<sup>22</sup> Ronald Bryden, who considered The Winslow Boy an outstandingly good play by any criteria, indulged in the familiar cry that Rattigan had really wanted to write a different play (about, he speculated, English intolerance as exemplified by John's father), but couldn't for fear of alienating the audience of his time. But Bryden conceded that there had been little tolerance in the treatment of Rattigan and his recent

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<sup>19</sup>Hope-Wallace in the Guardian and Trewin in the Birmingham Post, both 6 November 1970.

<sup>20</sup>Financial Times, 6 November 1972. Also citing the great acting roles in the play was Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, 6 November.

<sup>21</sup>Herbert Kretzmer, Daily Express, 6 November 1972. Peter Lewis, Daily Mail, 6 November, called the drama an honorable specimen of an out-moded kind of play; Irving Wardle, Times, 6 November, judged it ironical that watching the mechanics of the play was what made it a pleasure in 1972. Shulman and John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 6 November, cited "the pettiness" of the Winslows' struggle as a great strength in the play.

<sup>22</sup>Barber; Shulman; R. B. Marriott, Stage and Television Today, 12 November; Punch, 11 November.

work from Rattigan's colleagues and critics.<sup>23</sup>

The Browning Version received its first London revival at a pub-theatre, the King's Head in Islington, opening 8 January 1976. The production, directed by Stewart Trotter, and starring Nigel Stock and Barbara Jefford,<sup>24</sup> received the annual H. M. Tennant Award for the best production outside of the West End.<sup>25</sup> Many critics commented on Rattigan's ability to reach a new and different audience. John Barber wrote:

Terence Rattigan's reputation can stand or fall by "The Browning Version." I was fascinated to see how this fashionable Shaftesbury Avenue author would be received at the King's Head, Islington, by a pub crowd of young beards and fierce-looking girls who were not born when the piece was written in 1948. . . . the audience's laughter, their appalled silences and their obvious emotional involvement, were a new generation's tribute to an old master--not only to Rattigan's delicate craftsmanship but to his penetration into the hearts of men and women.<sup>26</sup>

Among the manifold critical tributes to The Browning Version<sup>27</sup> were two particularly perceptive observations. John Elsom, writing in the

<sup>23</sup>Observer, 8 November 1970.

<sup>24</sup>Times, 8 January 1976.

<sup>25</sup>Plays and Players, September 1976, p. 6. The award was judged by a panel of critics, including Harold Hobson, Irving Wardle, B. A. Young, Barry Hanson, and, representing Tennant's, James Noble.

<sup>26</sup>Daily Telegraph, 9 January 1976. Also commenting on the play's success in the pub theatre context were Jason Hillgate, What's On in London, 16 January, p. 25; Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 16 January; John Elson, "Rattigan's Red Carpet," Listener, 15 January, p. 56; Quarterly Theatre Review, Spring 1976, p. 46.

Other critics who judged that The Browning Version still had theatrical power were Robert Cushman, Observer, 11 January; Sheridan Morley, Punch, 14-20 January; Spectator, n.d., p. 20; R. B. Marriott, Stage and Television Today, 15 January; Clive Hirschhorn, Sunday Express, 18 January.

<sup>27</sup>The only adverse criticism of the play was of the supporting characterizations, all of which Cushman found to be thin. B. A. Young, Financial Times, 9 January 1976, thought all but, perhaps, Taplow, to be stereotypes. Marriott, on the other hand, wrote about the delicacy in

Listener, recognized, as few critics have, one of Rattigan's unique contributions to contemporary drama: his championship of the individual.

Elson commented that it was rarely acknowledged:

. . . that individuals make and modify the systems within which they live and that "politics" is the sum total of an almost infinite number of private transactions, which can be good or bad according to (and only according to) the human warmth and understanding with which they are invested. We have caught the habit of being passionate about systems, weak and sloppy about individuals and their transactional relationships, and unwilling, except polemically, to bring the sides together. Rattigan is cool about "systems," passionate about people, and sloppy about neither.

This, leaving aside his skill at writing plays, is why Rattigan is worth a fresh look, particularly within the fringe context. He inherited and expressed certain liberal, humane values which we are in danger of forgetting.<sup>28</sup>

Harold Hobson, calling The Browning Version "a masterpiece if ever there was one, the best one-act play in the language . . . ," wrote about another of Rattigan's special concerns--kindness:

What is most moving in art is not man's inhumanity to man, but his humanity . . . . It is after this truth that Terence Rattigan has fashioned The Browning Version. . . . a play about an heroic act so uncompromising in its denials of the values of the society amongst which it is committed that momentarily it breaks down the self-control of its recipient, and that of the audience, too--a very rare thing in the contemporary theatre.<sup>29</sup>

The most recent Rattigan revival, opening 17 January 1977, at the Apollo Theatre in London, has been Separate Tables. Of this production, starring John Mills and Jill Bennett, and directed by Michael Blakemore,<sup>30</sup> Frank Marcus commented in the Sunday Telegraph:

It has been evident for some time now that the best plays of Sir

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much of the character drawing.

Hirschhorn, Young, and Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 11 January, found Taplow's gift-giving and Crocker-Harris's reaction one of the great moments in the modern theatre.

<sup>28</sup>"Rattigan's Red Carpet," p. 56. <sup>29</sup>Sunday Times.

<sup>30</sup>Sunday Telegraph, 16 January 1977.

Terence Rattigan possess that elusive theatrical quality which ensures survival. His craftsmanship rivals that of Pinero, but his most characteristic quality is to be found in his deployment of humour and pathos, especially the latter.

It is not surprising that his reputation was in a state of eclipse when it was fashionable above all to be cool. Sir Terence displays a huge sympathy for his characters: he feels sorry for them and is not afraid to show it.<sup>31</sup>

As with the reviews of the original production of Separate Tables, there was some debate among critics of the revival over the comparative merits of Table by the Window and Table Number Seven,<sup>32</sup> over the credibility of the supporting characters,<sup>33</sup> and over the "happy" endings.<sup>34</sup> But the critics agreed that the play was well worth reviving.<sup>35</sup> Benedict

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<sup>31</sup>23 January 1977.

<sup>32</sup>Finding Table Number Seven much superior to Table by the Window were Marcus; Irving Wardle, Times, 19 January 1977; and Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 21 January, p. 98. Wardle placed Table Number Seven "in the same class as The Browning Version."

In the Observer, 23 January, Robert Cushman wrote that time had narrowed the gap between the two plays: "The sado-masochistic couple of the first have good Strindbergian stuff in them, though their story is told with surprising clumsiness. The repressed pair of the second have compassion and Rattigan's best technique on their side, but their problems now seem enviably cut and dried." Cushman found that "the small-hotel ambience is as infallibly beguiling as ever . . ."

<sup>33</sup>Nightingale found the supporting roles stock characterizations. B. A. Young, Financial Times, 19 January, wondered whether Rattigan's writing or some of the performances led to the same impression. Marcus, by contrast, wrote about Miss Cooper: "The Hotel Manageress . . . fulfills a similar dramatic function to that of the philosophical bartenders in the plays of O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, although she does not share their detachment." Cushman, Young, and John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 19 January, all referred to the acting chances that the roles gave the performers.

<sup>34</sup>Criticizing the endings as too cunningly contrived was Barber; as evidence of Rattigan's determination to please, Young. Wardle, however, wrote of Table Number Seven: "The ending, with voice after voice breaking the chilly dining room silence . . . resolves the piece in absolute and genuinely affecting obedience to the frigidly respectable environment."

<sup>35</sup>In the Sunday Express, Clive Hirschhorn commented: "On the surface, life at the Beauregard Private Hotel in Bournemouth is about as

Nightingale, writing in the New Statesman, suggested that:

Sooner or later, they [the National Theatre] are going to have to face the question of Terence Rattigan, such a power in the post-war British theatre and, it may be, too harshly treated when the critical tumbrils rolled out in the mid-Fifties. . . . it would be nice to take a proper look at The Deep Blue Sea, perhaps even at Variation on a Theme. Certainly, the present revival of Separate Tables should remind the open-minded that Rattigan can write with some sensitivity and passion of the frazzled loners who people his peculiar corner of the English menagerie.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, Rattigan's reputation as a serious playwright is growing. Though not one critic or scholar has yet seen fit to honor him in a book, and few have singled him out in articles devoted to an overview of his work, there are indications in several retrospective articles of a re-assessment of Rattigan's stature as a dramatist. One change is that the charges leveled against him in the past are being analyzed and questioned rather than accepted at face value.

As early as 1951, J. C. Trewin, in a retrospective article on Rattigan's work, questioned one barrier to his recognition--his popularity

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inviting as a stroll down the prom in a blizzard. Yet master storyteller Terence Rattigan makes theatrical magic from it . . . ." Barber wrote: "'Separate Tables' . . . wears wonderfully well. Terence Rattigan's famous brace of bitter-sweet plays, a standby of the reps since their 1954 debut, come up sparkling in Michael Blakemore's meticulous revival."

<sup>36</sup>21 January 1977, pp. 97-8.

Though The Deep Blue Sea has yet to be revived in London, E. S. wrote in the Daily Telegraph, 21 September 1972, about a revival at the Nottingham Repertory Company: ". . . this tragedy of misprised love is as powerful and compelling as in Peggy Ashcroft's day." A Times critic, 7 July 1971, writing about a production at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guilford, found The Deep Blue Sea a remarkable study in emotional and physical desperation and a forceful attack on those who elevate undefined spiritual values above the dark power of sex. Though he sided with those who found the ending anticlimactical, he declared that the play: ". . . reminds one that those who see Rattigan purely as an advocate of the traditional English public school virtues are attaching the wrong stereotype to the wrong dramatist."

with audiences:

Commercially successful is an embarrassing, slightly snobbish phrase. There is an overtone of distaste. It hints that a dramatist with this kind of success has no real right to fame; he is a mayfly, and the great writers of the future are to be discovered in cellars off the Strand or in teacup-theatres near Notting Hill. Anyone with that idea must find Rattigan troublesome.

Trewin concluded that Rattigan knew how to work in all moods, was steadily increasing his range, and that even in his failures like Adventure Story had shown a sense of theatre and a gift for persuasive dialogue.<sup>37</sup>

T. C. Worsley, in a 1964 article titled "Terence Rattigan and His Critics," attacked "the hysterically fashion-conscious climate of the theatre in the last few years" which had damned Rattigan. Worsley judged it unlikely that Rattigan would be fairly evaluated in the near future:

First, he deals with a layer of society which it is for the moment unfashionable to deal with. The fact that he catches exactly and turns to superb theatrical use its characteristic use of understatement, instead of being counted as a virtue, is now regarded as a weakness when cosmic rumblings are all the rage. Then again, his approach to the theatre is thoroughly (and rightly) theatrical, and this is currently thought a major sin . . . Then finally--and it is really part of the same charge--he believes in workmanship at a time when it is vougish to leave the edges all unfinished. . . . All the same, construction is finally the surest way of keeping time at bay. Who would have thought at the time that Feydeau would be played at the Comedie Française seventy years later?

Worsley maintained that Rattigan worked on a small scale and in a narrow range, and did not strike deep below the surface, except, perhaps, in exploring obsession and the experience of humiliation. But, he declared, within Rattigan's chosen range his plays were exact and true, with a perfection of tone and of effects exactly achieved. Worsley regarded humiliation as the hidden theme in Rattigan's six dramas from The

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<sup>37</sup>Adelphi (Second Quarter 1951): 222-28.

Browning Version to Man and Boy.<sup>38</sup> As Rattigan's four best plays, and the most likely to win him a lasting reputation, Worsley cited The Browning Version, The Deep Blue Sea, Separate Tables, and Variation on a Theme. In time, he predicted, Rattigan's achievement would stand out:

. . . . and then the critics will perhaps notice too that with each play he writes the texture gets richer and thicker, that the graph of his development shows a steady upward curve.<sup>39</sup>

In 1964, Worsley ranked Rattigan's plays with Somerset Maugham's short stories. In 1974, Harold Hobson set him higher:

The more one sees of the drama in Fringe theatres--and some of it is very stimulating--the more does it become incontestable that the greatest contemporary masters of dramatic construction are Terence Rattigan, Jean Anouilh, and--in "Waiting for Godot"--Samuel Beckett. Rattigan and Anouilh can build up a situation so that the simplest phrase in the world, properly placed, will release wild laughter or plunge us into tears . . . .

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<sup>38</sup>Humiliation is unquestionably an experience shared by many Rattigan characters. But to view it as Rattigan's hidden theme represents a misunderstanding of the process of psychological cause and effect through which Rattigan explores character. Humiliation is a mid-point in this process for those characters who experience it in Rattigan's plays. Rattigan shows how the characters reached that point (usually through their own errors, sometimes through an outside factor like Ronnie's dismissal from the Naval Academy) and, most importantly, how they earn self-respect through their own efforts and the help of others. Rattigan's emphasis is never on humiliation per se, but on the triumph (however small) of the human spirit over humiliation and other threats to its survival.

<sup>39</sup>London Magazine, pp. 60-72. There was one other detailed consideration of Rattigan's works in the sixties. In his 1967 book The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play, a study of the British well-made play from Tom Robertson to Rattigan, John Russell Taylor designated Rattigan as a "wilful and self-conscious neo-classicist" in his use of the well-made form. Taylor found that Rattigan had moved the form forward by bringing previously forbidden subjects like homosexuality into discussion on the stage and by, in Taylor's judgment, dispensing after The Winslow Boy "with the over-neatness and over-explicitness which marred many otherwise admirable plays in the hey-day of the well-made drawing-room drama." Taylor viewed humiliation and the role of the neurotic, embittered woman in life as Rattigan's major subjects. As Rattigan's best plays, he cited The Browning Version, The Deep Blue Sea, and Man and Boy (pp. 146-60).

Hobson noted that a new play by John Haire was crude and rudimentary compared with The Deep Blue Sea, Ross, In Praise of Love, Waiting for Godot, Ardele, Beckett, or Ne reveillez pas Madame.<sup>40</sup> Formerly denied any stature as a dramatist, Rattigan seems to be emerging, at least in Britain, in prestigious playwriting company. A writer in Radio Times, in October 1975, suggested that Rattigan took his characters:

. . . out to the crucial point of isolation where Beckett starts to explore them. . . . they live in an emptiness, a state of moral solitude, as chilling and pessimistic as the desert spaces in the plays of Samuel Beckett.<sup>41</sup>

Not all evaluations of Rattigan have been favorable. Among the charges often made are that Rattigan's plays are mechanical, and that he has been too fearful of offending his audience. Allardyce Nicol repeated the first charge in the 1962 edition of British Drama: "[Rattigan's] writings have vigor, certainly, yet when they are looked at carefully they are seen to have a mechanical rather than an organic being."<sup>42</sup> The second charge was voiced by John Barber in an otherwise complimentary article on Rattigan in the Daily Telegraph in 1973. Barber wrote that the Young Vic production of French without Tears was "an acknowledgment of the quality and importance of mainstream theatre."

What am I saying? That a minority audience will always demand the avant garde's extraordinary insights and devastating attack. But that a far bigger audience will be moved, and made more self-aware, by the painful accuracy of Rattigan's observation of people, and his charming technical adroitness in telling their stories. "The difficulty of this particular medium," Rattigan said in a serious aside, "is to be truthful and to hold an audience as an audience is only held by truth. Recognition, that's the point. You only get

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<sup>40</sup>Sunday Times, 1 June.

<sup>41</sup>Jonathan Raban, 25-31 October, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup>British Drama, 5th ed., rev. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1962), pp. 324-25.

that absolute stillness in the theatre when the truth is being told, when the audience recognize it and know: this is the way people behave to each other."

Barber concluded that "it would be stupid then to deny the artistic achievement of a dramatist because one distrusts his own and his characters' 'good manners' . . . ." Though he felt that Rattigan had inhibited his talent by fearing to offend, he conceded that: "No living writer is more capable of a kind of greatness--of commanding that absolute stillness which comes only when the absolute truth is being told."<sup>43</sup>

American critics and scholars, always less appreciative of Rattigan's work than their British colleagues, have also shown some signs of recognition for him as a serious dramatist. Among several favorable scholarly appraisals was Myron Matlaw's judgment in Modern World Drama--an Encyclopedia, published in 1972:

Rattigan's serious drama, if not didactic, certainly is thoughtful and demonstrates his understanding of and concern with important human problems. Though his skill in depicting these in the theatre --and his consequent popularity with fashionable audiences--would appear to add to rather than detract from the plays' quality, students of the drama have generally ignored his work. Dismissed as a mere, though first-rate craftsman, Rattigan has never been accorded his deserved stature as a dramatist.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>"Rattigan's Return," 30 July 1973. Emphasis Barber's. A letter from Nigel Frith to the Daily Telegraph, 4 August, raised additional issues important to evaluating Rattigan's work. Frith wrote:

"Mr. Barber did not really mention the one category in which Rattigan surpasses other British dramatists: his ability to write a play as an artistic whole, a drama in which all the scenes and passages of dialogue add up to a continuous and compelling story. . . .

"The swing towards Rattigan, which we are now witnessing, should press home these points: for the past 20 years we have been behaving like Victorian maiden aunts who get flustered and embarrassed whenever the taboo word plot is mentioned, and any writer who uses this immoral technique is instantly branded as slick, popular, and rather naughty."

<sup>44</sup>(New York: E. P. Dutton), p. 640. The entry under "Terence Rattigan" in Crowell's Handbook of Contemporary Drama (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1971), pp. 379-80, notes that the excellence of construction in Rattigan's early plays had tended to mask his progress to the

American newspaper and magazine drama critics have yet to accord Rattigan recognition as an artist.<sup>45</sup> Their reception of the Young Vic revival of French without Tears, which played at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in the spring of 1974, was decidedly tepid. Most declared that the play was not worth reviving.<sup>46</sup> Martin Gottfried, however, wrote an article on Rattigan for the program at the Washington tryout of In Praise

psychological accuracy of his later writing, and its strength in the slow revelation of private emotions.

In the Encyclopedia of World Drama (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), s.v. "Terence Rattigan," plays cited as solid works of a serious dramatist are The Winslow Boy, The Browning Version, Separate Tables, and Ross.

<sup>45</sup>The only American critic to accord Rattigan full recognition as an artist of high stature was Kay Nolte Smith, for several years drama critic for the Objectivist, a journal edited by Ayn Rand. In "Terence Rattigan," 10 (March 1971): 9-16, Mrs. Smith wrote that Rattigan's ". . . special province is man's inner life; he is a master of the drama of character. The hallmark of his work is the revelation of psychology through dramatic action, in a style that is beautifully clear and purposeful and unique. . . . In a Rattigan plot, the events reveal the characters' inner states and change the course of their lives; psychology is put into action, and action is made psychological. Both by its content and its form, a Rattigan drama gives one an understanding of men's behavior, and the awareness that the cause of the behavior lies within man himself."

Mrs. Smith characterized Rattigan's style as: ". . . maximum effects achieved by minimal means. With superb integration, he uses the quiet, ordinary phrase to convey volumes of meaning and the small, intimate action to reveal emotional depths. No other playwright condenses so much power into so fine a conduit." Noting that Rattigan's vision of man was unique in modern drama, Mrs. Smith wrote that: ". . . he presents 'the average man' as a man of moral stature. While other writers look for feet of clay in heroes, Mr. Rattigan looks for wings in the average man." As representative of Rattigan's best work, she cited The Winslow Boy, The Browning Version, Adventure Story, and O Mistress Mine.

<sup>46</sup>Clive Barnes, New York Times, 19 March 1974; Douglas Watt, Daily News, 18 March; John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, 20 March; George Oppenheimer, Newsday, 31 March; John Simon, New York Magazine, 1 April, p. 74. In an appreciative article on Rattigan's work, "Plays of Terence Rattigan," Post, 30 March, Richard Watts suggested that Rattigan would have been better represented by The Winslow Boy or Separate Tables.

of Love. Titled "In Praise of Craftsmanship," Gottfried's essay was not a defense of Rattigan as an artist, but an attempt to put Rattigan's work into some contemporary perspective. Rattigan had been prematurely retired by fashion at the peak of his powers when the kitchen sink and absurdist superseded the well-made plays, Gottfried noted, but:

The kitchen sink plays . . . already seem dated and the absurdist pioneers such as Ionesco and Genet no longer seem as good at play-writing as they once did. Perhaps we mistook novelty for artistry. Perhaps we granted too hastily an immunity from the tough rules we impose on traditionalists.

Gottfried maintained that a playwright could not use a disorderly world as an excuse for disorderly writing. While he felt that Rattigan's plays were old-fashioned, he suggested that Rattigan was, in his own way, flouting fashion by celebrating the refinement of his own mind. Gottfried concluded that good work was good work regardless of fashion, and that it would be silly to turn one's back on Rattigan's good work because of fashion.<sup>47</sup>

The retrospective writers on Rattigan take note of many reasons why he has been denied recognition as a dramatist of stature. These reasons--the basic criticisms leveled at Rattigan during his career--must be examined in order to reach a judgment about that stature.

One of the most frequently cited barriers to serious consideration of Rattigan's work--his popularity with audiences--ignores historical precedent, for many playwrights who are now considered classical dramatists were immensely popular in their own eras. In principle, the argu-

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<sup>47</sup>Stagebill (Washington, D.C.), November 1974, pp. 14, 23, 24, 26. Emphasis Gottfried's.

ment against popularity implies a distrust of the role that the very presence and the free choice of audiences plays in making theatre possible. And it also evidences a malevolent attitude toward success which should never be countenanced as a standard of or a substitute for judgment. Admittedly, a playwright's popularity is evidence that his plays have a basic, immediate level of appeal to great numbers of people, but not necessarily any value beyond that appeal. But as an argument against there being artistic value in any playwright's work, popularity is wholly spurious.

So, in fact, are several other charges made against Rattigan. Many of these charges are related in a striking manner, for they are concerned primarily with fashions. The argument against Rattigan as a writer of well-made plays, for example, holds that the well-made play is an anachronism, a relic of the nineteenth century. Its form is largely a mechanical contrivance in which manipulations of plot take precedence over, and sometimes sacrifice altogether, credible characterization and thematic concerns. Its content is written about and for a middle-class audience, and has little or no relevance to anyone who does not identify with that class.

That Rattigan writes in the well-made form is true. All of his plays, except his epic dramas and his vignette comedy Who Is Sylvia?, fall into that category, and even the latter show some characteristics of well-made construction. But the charges made against Rattigan as a writer of well-made plays are specious both for evaluating his plays in an historical perspective and on their own terms.

Among his predecessors in the British well-made tradition, Rattigan has most often been compared to Pinero. Such comparisons have not

always been favorable, as evidenced by Brooks Atkinson's judgment that The Browning Version "seems clever rather than genuine--Pinero watered down for modern tastes."<sup>48</sup> Though a brief analysis of Rattigan in relation to any of his predecessors cannot be presented as definitive, a comparison of a Rattigan and a Pinero drama may serve to illustrate Rattigan's development of the British well-made play.

Rattigan's The Deep Blue Sea and Pinero's Mid-Channel have striking similarities in content and are considered among each dramatist's most important works.<sup>49</sup> Written in 1909, Mid-Channel is a four-act drama about marital dissatisfaction. A stockbroker and his wife, Theo and Zoe Blundell, separate after fourteen years of marriage. Each has an unhappy love affair and, prompted by the advice of a friend, Peter Mottram, try to reconcile. But when Zoe learns that Theo cannot forgive her affair, and that her lover has become engaged to a young girl, she commits suicide.

In both Mid-Channel and The Deep Blue Sea, there are four major characters--a husband and wife whose marriage has fallen apart, the wife's young lover, and a fourth party who offers counsel. A picture of the society in which the characters move is drawn, and questions of social convention and sexual morality are raised.

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<sup>48</sup>New York Times, 13 October 1949.

<sup>49</sup>Myron Matlaw, p. 603, states that Mid-Channel and The Second Mrs. Tanqueray are Pinero's best-remembered plays. Allardyce Nicoll, p. 235, judges that Pinero's reputation is chiefly founded on Mid-Channel, The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, and Iris. Agreement with Nicoll is found in the Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama, ed. John Gassner and Edward Quinn (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), p. 656. Walter Lazenby, Arthur Wing Pinero (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), p. 156, states that Mid-Channel can be favorably compared with some of the best modern plays.

One of the first differences noticeable in the plays is in the four major characterizations. Pinero's characters lack dimension. Peter Mottram is a windy raisonneur who shuttles between Zoe and Theo offering platitudinous advice. Likening their marriage to crockery, he comments:

Well, but ain't it wiser to repair the broken china, rather than chuck the bits into the dustbin? It's still showy and effective at a distance; and there are cases--rare, but they exist--where the mendin's been done so neatly that the flaws are almost imperceptible.<sup>50</sup>

Peter's is the voice of conventionality. Apart from the fact that he is Theo's business partner and a friend to both Theo and Zoe, he has no crucial interest at stake in their quarrel. By contrast, in The Deep Blue Sea, Miller, the social outcast, offers Hester most unconventional advice --to reject the world's opinion of her as a weak, neurotic woman; to take pride in her capacity to feel, and to learn to live for herself. And he has much at stake in her decision--the loss or gain of a friend capable of understanding his own depth of feeling.

Except for a few moments of self-recrimination over his affair with a cheap woman, Pinero's Theo is a type: the middle-aged husband who wants an obedient, undemanding, virtuous wife and is outraged when his wishes are unfulfilled. Zoe's lover, Leonard Ferris, is entirely feckless except for his declaration of love for Zoe in Act II, which he offers as proof that he is not a complete cad. Zoe is a shallow society woman who alternately teases, whimpers, flounces and rages, and seems primarily concerned with being pampered. As the only excuse for her aimless existence, she pleads that the decision which she and Theo made

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<sup>50</sup>Arthur Wing Pinero, "Mid-Channel," in Edwardian Plays, ed. Gerald Weales (New York: Hill & Wang, 1962), pp. 219-318. All references from this edition.

when they married, to pursue success unencumbered by children, has left her with nothing worthwhile to do. All three characters share identical qualities--irascibility, selfishness, impulsiveness, self-righteousness. Again, in Rattigan's play there is a difference: like Miller, William, Freddie, and Hester are characterizations against type. With his four major characters, Rattigan took types often seen in his predecessors' plays--raisonneurs, aggrieved husbands, cads, and errant women--and looked at them as individuals, with fresh insight and genuine compassion for each.

Mid-Channel is set in a world in which moral and social values are taken for granted. The Deep Blue Sea questions not only the double standard of sexual morality applied in Pinero's play, but goes deeper, questioning the very basis of Christian morality in the mind-body dichotomy. Rattigan also condemns social convention by drawing sympathetic portraits of Hester and Miller, who defy society's rules and grow rather than deteriorate spiritually, and by painting William against type in his eagerness to take Hester back. Rattigan's is a humanistic as opposed to a conventional perspective.

Rattigan's plot is much more tightly constructed than Pinero's. Pinero, for example, opens with a conventional exposition in which two visitors arrive for tea at Zoe's and discuss the Blundells' background and marital problems while waiting for their hostess. Rattigan's exposition begins as a direct result of Hester's suicide attempt and moves the action forward, as in the phoning of William, while giving background information.

There are touches in Mid-Channel, such as Zoe's Act III declaration to Theo that she will take him back as her husband in name only,

which are simply inexplicable. Prior to this point, Zoe has made no statement about an unsatisfactory sexual relationship with Theo, nor has she exhibited distaste for sex, or any particular attitude toward it. Her sudden determination to be an untouched wife has no relation to her character as it has been developed, to any thematic concern, or to any plot development except that it provokes Theo into questioning her about her relationship with Leonard.

Several characters in Mid-Channel are mere props--three door-opening, tea-serving butlers, Zoe's maid, and some workmen.<sup>51</sup> Each of Rattigan's supporting characters has individuality and is important to the action in much more than a mechanical sense. Philip Welch, for example, not only forwards the action by carrying away Freddie's clothes, but distresses Hester with his well-meant sentiments on the unimportance of physical love. The combination drives Hester to her second suicide attempt.

The possibility of suicide is raised from the opening tableau of The Deep Blue Sea. It introduces Miller and the Welches to Hester's life, brings William back, and drives Freddie away. The action question of whether Hester will kill herself is fully integrated with the thematic questions raised as the characters try to understand why she wants to die and try to save her. Pinero handles his suicide most clumsily. In the first scene, Zoe remarks that if she ever kills herself, it will be

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<sup>51</sup>In Pinero's defense, it should be noted that a multitude of servants was a convention of drawing-room drama. When Rattigan used servants, he usually created individuals, but occasionally he, too, created "props" (the servants in The Sleeping Prince, and, in A Bequest to the Nation, all the servants but Betsy, the maid whose gift to Nelson prompts him to write a thank-you note to her, an action which contrasts with his rude rejection of his wife's letter).

in the winter. Suicide is not mentioned again until the final scene, when Zoe tells Leonard that she'd kill herself rather than be the cause of breaking his engagement. Moments later she is dead, and Peter comments that she had once told him that it would be in the wintertime. But Peter was not onstage when Zoe made that remark in the first scene. Zoe's suicide was the easy, conventional way out for Pinero. Hester's decision to try and live was the opposite for Rattigan. He does not offer his heroine the peace of oblivion, but the difficulty of facing life without false hopes, without men to give her an identity and a purpose. And he does not guarantee that she will win her struggle.

Rattigan, far from recycling shopworn formulas of the well-made play, rejected those formulas soundly. He worked against rather than to type in characterization; spurned superficial solutions to serious problems in his endings; disdained the moral and social standards which characterized the world of his predecessors' plays, and conveyed instead the fluctuating standards of his own time. Constructing an indivisible whole with his plots, characterizations and themes, Rattigan refined the form, broadened the content, and gave new life to the well-made play.

Critics' hostility to Rattigan as a writer of well-made plays may have had, however, a much deeper basis than objections to his use of a supposedly outmoded form with its supposed exclusively middle-class content. The philosophical outlook consistently implicit in the form and content of Rattigan's plays is alien to the prevailing philosophies of the mid-twentieth century. It is so philosophically out-of-fashion that critics may have condemned it automatically, without identifying the premises they were rejecting. This unthinking rejection may, in turn, explain critics' failure to ask whether Rattigan might be making a unique

contribution to the theatre of his time by following his unusual personal vision.

Martin Gottfried is one of the few critics who has attempted to place Rattigan in a philosophical perspective:<sup>52</sup>

Such dramas as Rattigan's seemed superficial and sentimental. Surrealism and metaphor were artistic devices more appropriate to an irrational universe. Being well made somehow came to mean shallow and commercial . . . . It is considered the relic of a scientific age that believed in rationalism. . . . It is hard to defend drawing room drama when life and we have grown so complicated. A confusing and neurotic world has made simple plays with simple answers seem packaged and pat.<sup>53</sup>

Rattigan's plays may have seemed packaged and pat because of their philosophical framework. For in form and content, they consistently affirm the individual's ability to chart his own destiny in an intelligible universe.

Rattigan's primary interest as a playwright is in characterization. "Subject matter stems from people," he once commented. "If people are interesting, their characters colorful with lights and shadows playing in their emotional corners, then exploring them becomes an adventure in drama."<sup>54</sup> Rattigan explores people by examining the reasons why they think, feel and act as they do: the foundation of his characterization is motivation. Rattigan may sometimes, as in Adventure Story, Ross, and

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<sup>52</sup>Kay Smith, pp. 9-10, judged Rattigan ". . . a serious Romantic playwright, the only one of our time. . . . Unlike his nineteenth century Romantic predecessors, Mr. Rattigan does not project a world open to man's grandest actions; he does not create heroic figures or exalt idealism. He works on a smaller canvas, and he paints with muted tones. He is of the twentieth century both literally and metaphorically, and one can often hear in his dramas a sound like the troubled sigh of the best among contemporary men--a sigh of confusion and sadness."

<sup>53</sup>"In Praise of Craftsmanship," pp. 14 and 23.

<sup>54</sup>Barry Hyams, Theatre Arts, November 1956, p. 21.

Man and Boy, fail to probe his characters' motivations fully and clearly. But he never implies that there are no reasons for a character's choices and actions, or that a character is determined by forces beyond his comprehension or control. Rattigan's characters are influenced by such factors as their physical and intellectual characteristics, economic circumstances, social class, and the ideas and events of the world around them. But they are neither the product nor prey of Fate, Necessity, gods, class, society, chance, heredity, instincts, environmental conditioning, or some mysterious unnamed, unseen, unconquerable menace. His characters succeed or fail, spiritually and existentially, because of their own choices and actions.

Rattigan's plots arise from the characters' choices and actions in pursuit of specific values. The values are either spiritual--the qualities of character individuals wish to create, to keep or to change in themselves and the qualities they seek in others, or existential--the goals they pursue in the physical world. Motivation in terms of values is the foundation of Rattigan's characterizations and, as a result, value conflicts within and between characters are the foundation of his plots. Rattigan's plots delineate crises his characters face, their efforts to solve them, and the resolutions that they reach. The sequences of events in the plays are guided by the laws of logic, through the establishment of cause to the illustration of effect. The causes of the events are the characters' choices and actions in pursuit or in default of their values. The effects are the spiritual and existential well-being of achieving, or the distress of failing to achieve their goals.

However a character holds and pursues values, Rattigan shows that it is a search for something of importance which sustains an individual's

life, and that every individual must make that search for himself. In Rattigan's characterizations, his emphasis on the necessity of individual choice and action, and his dramatization of the variety of choices and actions open to individuals, project a view of man as metaphysically free. In Rattigan's plots, the clear delineation of the cause and effect relationship between the nature of what an individual pursues, and his spiritual and existential well-being, projects a view of the universe as intelligible. The form of a Rattigan play is inseparable from its content, and expresses the same conviction--that individuals shape and govern their lives by the nature of the goals they choose to pursue.

That conviction, implicit in every Rattigan play, distinguishes Rattigan as an individualist among contemporary dramatists, most of whom project a metaphysical estimate of the universe as unintelligible, of man as the victim of forces he does not understand or cannot control, and of a struggle for values as either meaningless or futile. But most critics have not recognized this basis of Rattigan's individuality as a dramatist. To the degree that they appear to have sensed it, they have dismissed his plays as simplistic and sentimental. But within the intelligible, metaphysically free universe of Rattigan's plays, the problems the characters face, and the solutions they find, are neither simple nor sentimental.

Characters never solve all of their problems in Rattigan's plays; they simply achieve or fail to achieve a greater degree of understanding of themselves and/or of others, and move forward or regress accordingly. No Rattigan play ends "happily ever after." The comedies end with a respite rather than a celebration. In French without Tears, Alan is on his way to a new career chosen in defiance of his father's wishes and of

the publishers who have rejected his manuscripts, and he is being pursued by a girl he fears, while Kit and Jack face an uneasy future testing whether they can be friends and lovers. In While the Sun Shines, the three young soldiers must go back to war after the wedding.<sup>55</sup> Michael's value conflict is not resolved by John's manipulation in Love in Idleness, and there is no sense that John's future with Olivia is assured. The Gosports and their troupe in Harlequinade must still face the problem of Arthur's bigamy after their opening night; Lord Binfield is humiliated and depressed by the exposure of his double life in Who Is Sylvia?; and the lovers part in The Sleeping Prince.

The dramas conclude on a subtle note of balance between possible losses and gains. In After the Dance, the protagonist unselfishly renounces the girl he loves, but reaches for the bottle. The R.A.F. men in Flare Path must go on flying their hazardous mission, and Teddy has acquired only a tenuous hold on Pat even if he survives the war. The case is won in The Winslow Boy, but the family finances are exhausted, Arthur is dying, and Catherine faces a long struggle to earn a living and embark on a political career. Crocker-Harris in The Browning Version must try to rebuild his life burdened with a heart condition and an ill-paying and uninspiring job at a crammer's. Hester must struggle to find meaning in her life in The Deep Blue Sea, and in Separate Tables, Anne and John, and Sybil and the "Major," have taken only a few steps towards dealing with their enormous problems. Rose Fish, in Variation on a Theme, has only a few months of happiness possible to her, while

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<sup>55</sup>J. B., Daily Telegraph, 19 December 1972, quotes Rattigan as saying, "I thought it very likely that the three young men in the play would not see the end of the war . . . ."

Ron faces both the loss of the woman he needs and the inevitable waning of his dancing career, the only job he is capable of doing. In Ross, Lawrence must begin his vain search for peace still another time; in A Bequest to the Nation, Emma Hamilton is left without Nelson and with the knowledge that his bequest will not be honored; and in In Praise of Love, Sebastian must lose the wife he has just realized he loves and cope with his hostile son. In those plays which end with the protagonist's death, Alexander in Adventure Story and Antonescu in Man and Boy die spiritually bewildered, not understanding why their great existential achievements have left them with a sense of failure. Lord Nelson, in Bequest, sacrifices his personal happiness to his sense of duty.

Rattigan's endings demonstrate that even in a universe in which man is metaphysically free, happiness and success are only possible, never guaranteed. The endings are dramaturgically conclusive in that they follow logically from the preceding action and give each work a sense of wholeness unto itself. But there is no sense in any final positive tableau that the characters' futures are frozen on a note of eternal triumph.

The resolutions to Rattigan's plays give the sense of a semicolon, dash, or even a question mark, which follows logically from the characters' discoveries of problems which defy easy solutions. Rattigan has been damned for refusing to follow fashion by writing ideological plays. But while not ideological, his comedies and dramas are far from bereft of ideas in the problems that they dramatize. Because Rattigan's interest is in individuals--as opposed to people identified in socio-political terms--he probes personal psychology, and in so doing makes some unique contributions to contemporary drama.

Few playwrights have ever dealt with the problems of emotional repression with Rattigan's insight and compassion. Fear of emotion--of feeling and of expressing feelings--is a leitmotif or a central issue in almost every Rattigan play. That fear is expressed on the comic level in, for example, Alan's fear of his attraction to Diana in French without Tears and Elisabeth's of her attraction to the American lieutenant in While the Sun Shines, and in the Prince Regent's martinet demeanor in The Sleeping Prince. In the dramas, it is expressed in the embarrassed and often indirect admissions of feelings of many of the characters in Flare Path, The Winslow Boy, Variation on a Theme, Man and Boy, A Bequest to the Nation, and In Praise of Love. Repression is also dramatized in the near-tragic confusions of Crocker-Harris, Hester, Sybil and the "Major," and Lawrence.

Rattigan probes repression from many angles. With Sybil and the "Major," he shows that repression is the result of a conviction, traceable from childhood and adolescence, that they could never achieve any goals they set themselves. Repression is partially the result of a gradual betrayal of values in Crocker-Harris, and the effect of a confusion and contradiction of ideas in Lawrence. Most generally in Rattigan's plays, repression is the manifestation of an unwitting acceptance of standards of social behavior in which strong emotions of almost any sort are condemned. Sebastian, in In Praise of Love, calls this the vice Anglais, but Rattigan shows that the vice is not exclusive to Britons with such characters as the Polish Count in Flare Path, the Prince Regent, and Antonescu.

The second theme which pervades most of Rattigan's plays is the mind-body dichotomy in love. Implicitly condemning Christian morality

for its teaching that spiritual love is superior to physical, Rattigan shows the ravages of that teaching as it affects most of his couples. The psychological devastation which results from the coupling of people who cannot achieve a union which is both spiritual and physical is drawn in the Crocker-Harris, Hester with William and with Freddie, Anne and John, and Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton. Rattigan never resolves this dilemma, but he explores it from many angles. Sometimes he draws it with stunning brutality, as in the sado-masochistic relationships of the Crocker-Harris and of Anne and John, and in the implied sado-masochistic and homosexual awakenings of Lawrence. Subtle variations of the mind-body dichotomy are often revealed through triangular relationships: Pat, Teddy, and Peter in Flare Path; Hester, William, and Freddie; Anne, John, and Miss Cooper; Rose, Ron, and Sam; Emma Hamilton and Lord and Lady Nelson.

The importance of understanding, of compassion, and of friendship, and the value of life itself, are also significant themes in Rattigan's work. Rattigan shows that it is vital to listen--to listen to oneself and to others, especially in a world in which, as described by Martin Gottfried, "life and we have grown so complicated. A confusing and neurotic world . . ."<sup>56</sup> Rattigan does not see the solutions to the world's problems in terms of social and political theories but in terms of individual responsibility. Thirteen of his fifteen dramas are set in the twentieth century, and in these he captures the bewilderment of people living in a world without a firm moral and social structure to give them a sense of place and security. This is a stark world in which

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<sup>56</sup>"In Praise of Craftsmanship," p. 23.

confusion and loneliness predominate, and the individual's only resources are the strengths he can find in himself or in others.

Rattigan's distinctive attitude toward man is both compassionate and demanding. He does not accept any variation of the plea: "I couldn't help it." The distinction Rattigan makes with regard to human behavior is captured in Sam's line in Variation on a Theme: "Feelings can't sometimes be helped, but the expression of them can."<sup>57</sup> Rattigan's characters are often emotionally entangled in situations and relationships which they recognize as being detrimental to their spiritual and existential well-being, and perhaps to that of others. They may feel hopeless, but are always aware that they can take action to disentangle themselves from their injurious situations and relationships, and they usually do. A Rattigan character may, in moments of humiliation or despair, utter the equivalent of "I can't help it," but that he can is borne out in his subsequent actions.

The sympathy for people which Rattigan conveys in his characterizations amounts not to a making of excuses for their weaknesses and flaws, but to a respect for every individual's capacity to think and act. While so many characters in modern drama complain about their meaningless lives and blame forces outside themselves for their problems, Rattigan's characters achieve a unique dignity. This accomplishment has often been labeled sentimental and superficial by critics who seem, by implication, to regard a view of man as ineffectual or depraved as profound and mature.

The attitude of respect for man which Rattigan conveys in his characterizations extends to his audiences. His development, outlined in

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<sup>57</sup>Act 2, sc. 1.

his first Preface, of the use of dramatic implication requires that audiences work to get the most from his plays. Yet he stands accused of inhibiting his talent by fearing to offend audiences.

Rattigan has, by his own admission, always been audience-conscious, beginning with his youthful enthusiasm for the theatre as an audience member and growing into a desire to move audiences as he himself had been moved. He has certainly not followed contemporary fashion by haranguing or by seeking to shock or to mystify his audiences. But he has hardly stayed away from controversial material in his delineation of sexual problems, in his condemnation of a morality which divides man's body and spirit, in his compassion for social outcasts, in his contempt for the prejudices which make people outcasts, and in his defense of the individual as an individual. Indeed, in his refusal to bow to the fashions of haranguing, shocking, and mystifying audiences, he has been true to his own vision.

The remaining fashion-oriented charge against Rattigan is that he is theatrical. When this charge is pejorative--for theatricality is also a quality for which Rattigan has been commended--it is made in either a narrow or a broad sense. The narrow sense pertains to specific scenes in plays, among them the Count's return in Flare Path, Sir Robert's cross-examination of Ronnie in The Winslow Boy, and the "happy" endings in The Browning Version, The Deep Blue Sea, and Separate Tables. These have seemed to some critics not organic developments from character and situation but concessions to audience tastes for "big" moments and happy conclusions.

That the endings are not happy in any conclusive sense has already been discussed. Sir Robert's cross-examination of Ronnie, so flamboyant

that critics were citing it for years afterwards as one of their most memorable moments in the theatre,<sup>58</sup> is theatrical precisely because of its context. The past is revealed in the full examination of the facts of the case; the emotional impact of the examination is intensified by the presence of the Winslows, whose futures depend on Sir Robert's decision; and Sir Robert's tactics are essential to further developments in the play, for they make his ability to press and to win the case believable and they augment Catherine's prejudices against him, allowing the gradual revelation of his motives to have greater impact upon her. The only arguable instance of bogus theatricality is the Count's return, which does seem too good to be true.

The broader sense in which the term theatrical is used against Rattigan seems to indicate a prejudice against a playwright so skilled in evoking audiences' emotions. Rattigan has always seen his primary goal as moving an audience to laughter and/or to tears. But Martin Gottfried's closing remarks in "In Praise of Craftsmanship" suggest that Rattigan's ability to evoke emotion upsets some of his critics:

If we are embarrassed afterwards about having been touched by ephemera, perhaps we might question the sources of our embarrassment. There is nothing wrong with being touched.<sup>59</sup>

Gottfried's statement points to a possible psychological contradiction in some critics--that of going to the theatre and resisting being moved.

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<sup>58</sup>Richard Watts, Post, 30 March 1974, referred to the scene as one "I'll surely never forget." J. C. Trewin in his Adelphi article recalled that he had rarely heard such cheering at a curtain-fall as that which greeted the scene on The Winslow Boy's London opening. Even Kenneth Tynan, Harper's Bazaar, November 1952, p. 118, said: "But the play contained what is defensibly the best second-act curtain of the last twenty years. . . ."

<sup>59</sup>p. 26.

Critics and theorists from Aristotle to Artaud have agreed that theatre is meant to move audiences, be it on a light or a profound level. One shudders at the possibility that some critics may, knowingly or unwittingly, punish playwrights for trying to move them.<sup>60</sup> Gottfried's statement also suggests that critics who have this problem with regard to Rattigan need not only to examine the sources of their embarrassment in terms of their own psychological premises, but also in terms of the value of Rattigan's work. Perhaps their dismissal of it as ephemeral provokes their embarrassment.

Still another source of Rattigan's confinement to the second rank of dramatists has been the charge that he is not an innovator. Many of the first-rank dramatists throughout history have radically altered the form and/or the content of the drama. Rattigan is no radical innovator --he stands clearly in the tradition of the well-made play. But while not innovative in the broad sense, Rattigan has, by his use and refinement of the well-made form, expressed a philosophical outlook which is radical in contemporary drama. And, individually, almost all of his plays display some innovative touches.

Rattigan himself commented on the pioneering element of the use of implication in his early comedies. In addition to this, in French without Tears he turned the cliché of the femme fatale who makes deadly

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<sup>60</sup>In our interview, Rattigan expressed his bewilderment at being criticized for moving people: "I think the critics don't like being moved, but they are moved. I mean, I'm there to move them to tears or to laughter, and a critic as you know sets his face and he won't laugh and he won't cry, and sometimes I find that they resent being moved and they take it out on you. I've often wondered why I'm sometimes attacked so savagely for having tried to make them cry in a play about repression. As a member of an audience, I'm perfectly happy to be seen with tears streaming down my face, or roaring with laughter."

enemies out of the men in her life upside down to show a femme fatale driving men into firm alliance, and examined love at a depth unusual in light comedy. In After the Dance, the critics recognized that his attempt to contrast the Bright Young Things with the somber following generation was an original idea. While the Sun Shines featured a novel variation on the bedroom farce, with three contentious young men sharing the bed, while Love in Idleness defended glamor, gaiety, and refinement against the burgeoning idea that people had no right to a life style characterized by those qualities. The Winslow Boy, hailed superficially as a thesis play, went beyond the ideological positions of its characters to examine the kind of human spirit which makes it possible for any righteous ideals to triumph in the world.

With Playbill, Rattigan reintroduced the one-act form to the West End and wrote two very different plays artistically linked by their studies of contrasting psychologies in similar plot structures. In The Browning Version, he dramatized the most original of his themes by depicting the tragedy of emotional repression, and in Harlequinade he contradicted traditional theories by writing a farce of character. His idea of a man pursuing an ideal face through several generations was a bright comic invention in Who Is Sylvia?, as was his creation of a Prince Uncharming in The Sleeping Prince.

In The Deep Blue Sea, Rattigan showed an understanding of a woman's need for sexual fulfillment and for an identity separate from her relationship with men before any of his colleagues seemed to be aware of the depth of those problems in contemporary life. In both that play and Separate Tables, he depicted sexual problems and social outcasts with a plea for understanding and compassion. He dared to remove the romantic

aura from Dumas's La Dame aux Camélias--not in order to denigrate the original, as some of his colleagues, in the modern spirit of scoffing at achievement, might have done, but in order to show the difference in standards and moods from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. With Adventure Story and Ross, he applied principles of well-made play construction to the epic form, and in Man and Boy and A Bequest to the Nation, he attempted studies of larger-than-life characters in the intimate settings of domestic dramas. Finally, in his studies of Alexander the Great, Lawrence of Arabia, and the Ivar Kreuger figure of Antonescu, he tried to extend his range, and took on subjects no author who wanted to remain on safe ground would dare approach.

The remaining barrier to Rattigan's acceptance as a dramatic artist is the charge that he is not a poet of the theatre. This charge is made with regard to his use of language and to his alleged lack of personal vision. Rattigan's use of naturalistic dialogue is so polished and refined, integrated on so many levels of meaning, that while it appears to be realistically conversational, it is actually lucidly stylized. One can pick almost any page of a Rattigan play and find that the dialogue accomplishes a myriad of purposes--revealing the past, capturing the present, preparing for the future, delineating character, developing thematic motifs--with startling economy. To take just one example, previously uncited, of Rattigan's dialogue: early in Table Number Seven, the "Major" has a conversation with Mr. Fowler:

MAJOR. Well, Fowler, who's your letter from? An old flame?

FOWLER. Old flame? I haven't got any old flames. I leave that to you galloping majors.

MAJOR. Well, I used to do all right once, I must say. In the regiment they used to call me Bucko Pollock. Regency buck--you see. Still, those days are past and gone. Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume.

FOWLER. (correcting his accent) Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume.

Didn't they teach you the new pronunciation at Wellington?

MAJOR. No. The old.

FOWLER. When were you there?

MAJOR. Now, let's think. It must have been nineteen eighteen I went up--

FOWLER. But they were using the new pronunciation then, I know. Our head classics master was an old Wellingtonian and I remember distinctly his telling me--

MAJOR. Well, perhaps they did and I've forgotten it. Never was much of a hand at Greek.

FOWLER. Latin. Horace.

MAJOR. Horace, of course. Stupid of me. Well, who is your letter from?

In this excerpt, Rattigan reminds the audience that Mr. Fowler is a retired teacher, and he integrates Fowler's specialty--the classics--to one of the "Major's" pretenses--a public school education. He shows the teacher correcting the pretender and the pretender attempting to recover, thus conveying the flavor of both characters. The "Major" is caught in an error which foreshadows his exposure as a liar about his military and educational background. Another boast--of his prowess with women--anticipates the revelation of his arrest on a sexual offense.

One detail in this dialogue--the "Major's" mispronounced Latin quotation--suggests that he is a fraud. At the end of the play, Rattigan uses a related detail to convey the "Major's" determination to try and live honestly. Doreen, the hotel waitress, serves the "Major" his dinner:

DOREEN. Sorry it's been so long. You're a bit late, you know.

MAJOR. Yes. My fault.

DOREEN. What's the matter with you tonight? You always say "Mea culpa."

MAJOR. Do I? Well--they both mean the same, don't they?

The replacing of the Latin "Mea culpa" with "My fault" is one way Rattigan dramatizes the winning of an agonizing spiritual battle. It is this clarity and purposefulness--the revelation of character and of information at the same time, the preparation for future in present events, and

the attention to detail--which marks Rattigan's writing style. The precision with which Rattigan uses language is, in terms of his plays' style, parallel to the cause and effect relationships established in their structures. Style and structure are complimentary and both express, in their clarity and purposefulness, Rattigan's vision of an intelligible universe.

As to the limitations of Rattigan's language, it is certainly true that he does not write poetry,<sup>61</sup> and that his prose makes sparse use of rhetorical flourish and metaphorical embellishment. But it is, in its masterly use of implication, extraordinarily rich in meaning. Harold Hobson acknowledged this when he wrote: "It is not, Mr. Rattigan reminds us, the intrinsic quality of the words that matter, but the amount and nature of the emotion that they can be made to convey."<sup>62</sup>

Is mastery of the use of dramatic implication--the knowledge of when to have characters speak, when to let them remain silent, and of how much to have them say to convey a maximum of meaning and of emotion--not, in the broadest application of the term, poetical? If Rattigan can make, as many critics have admitted, the imaginations and emotions of an audience soar with so simple a line as Sybil's "I'm going to stay in the dining room, and finish my dinner," is he not a poet of the theatre?

Those who would jeer at such a possibility would still confine Rattigan to the rank of those whose plays are well-crafted but super-

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<sup>61</sup>Critics who have used against Rattigan the definition of a poet as a maker of verses might reflect on Aristotle's description of the dramatic poet: "It clearly follows that the poet or 'maker' should be the maker of plots rather than of verses; since he is a poet because he imitates, and what he imitates are actions." By this standard, Rattigan is a master poet of the theatre. "The Poetics," trans. by S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), p. 37. Emphasis added.

<sup>62</sup>Sunday Times, 19 September 1948.

ficial, expressive of the spirit of "the hollow professional,"<sup>63</sup> bereft of the soul of an artist. The complaint runs throughout the Rattigan criticism that he has no personal point of view, no animating vision in the theatre. This charge holds that Rattigan never participates but remains outside of his plays, manipulating their form and content with often superb craftsmanship but without the individual signature from within which distinguishes the poet of the theatre, the true dramatic artist.

Rattigan's personal vision is implicit in every one of his plays from French without Tears to In Praise of Love, excepting only Before the Dawn. Perhaps because it is implicit, it has seemed to unperceiving critics to be nonexistent. But, as one critic did note about Rattigan's method:

The special power of implication lies in the fact that although one responds as the author intended, the response seems to be one's own. The events have been meaningfully linked by the author's purpose, but the connections are made explicit by the viewer himself, who experiences the pleasure of discovery. Understatement stresses the evidence which evokes the viewer's emotions, thus making them stronger. One holds the audience, as Mr. Rattigan points out, "by demanding [its] collaboration."<sup>64</sup>

Rattigan is not a self-conscious philosopher,<sup>65</sup> and when he tries to deal with philosophical issues explicitly, he sometimes fails. His

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<sup>63</sup>Based upon Ronald Bryden's remark, mentioned in the Introduction, that "Some PhD will have a man-and-masks ball one day with the theme of 'Terence Rattigan and the Hollow Professional.'"

<sup>64</sup>Smith, p. 11. Emphasis hers.

<sup>65</sup>When John Simon, Theatre Arts, April 1962, p. 76, asked Rattigan if he could summarize his own vision, Rattigan answered: "No. Because it varies from play to play. It's a vision of a human being or of a situation between two human beings which is personal to you and which you are seeing with your God's eye view and you are saying, 'I can communicate this to an audience.'"

most successful integration of action and characterization with explicit philosophic ideas is in The Winslow Boy. Usually when he attempts to deal with intellectual matters, he proves himself a limited thinker rather than one who penetrates the philosophical foundations of such ideas as the mind-body dichotomy, or one who presents new ideas. When he tries to delve into very complex levels of psychology in his characterizations of Alexander, Lawrence, and Antonescu, he is only partially successful.

But the fact that Rattigan is not a great intellectual playwright does not preclude his communicating a profound personal vision. What other contemporary playwright has created, in both the form and content of his plays, a picture of an intelligible universe in which man is motivated not by any deterministic force but by his own powers of choice and action? Who besides Rattigan has consistently shown his deep and hard-won compassion for the struggles individuals undergo in recognizing and in dealing with their responsibilities to themselves and to others, and his genuine respect for the dignity of the lonely individual? Who besides Rattigan has consistently looked for, and found, extraordinary strengths in the souls of "ordinary" men and women?

Of the manifold charges which would confine him to the second rank of dramatists, Rattigan stands acquitted. Those who understand, now and in the future,<sup>66</sup> the full nature of the form and content of his plays,

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<sup>66</sup>It is interesting to note that, out of Rattigan's twenty-three plays, eleven have been cited as works of stature by the various critics and scholars who have written retrospective articles on Rattigan. The Browning Version is almost always listed, with The Deep Blue Sea, Separate Tables, and The Winslow Boy close behind. Ross has also been cited, and Adventure Story, Variation on a Theme, Man and Boy, and In Praise of Love have each received one vote. Among Rattigan's comedies, Love in Idleness and French without Tears have been cited.

For this record, I would like to state that I regard The Browning

must surely recognize that they express a profoundly personal vision of the world and of man which is unique among contemporary dramatists. What, in justice, is left but to acknowledge Sir Terence Rattigan as an artist of stature?

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Version as Rattigan's greatest play, for the originality of its theme--an extraordinarily difficult one to dramatize--and the classical perfection of its integration of form and content. Close behind The Browning Version and also, in my judgment, great plays are The Deep Blue Sea, The Winslow Boy, and Separate Tables.

Among Rattigan's comedies, I believe that Love in Idleness is an exceptionally fine high comedy, with a theme courageous for its time. French without Tears has a depth and a quality of tenderness in its depiction of love and friendship which are unusual in a light romantic comedy. Harlequinade not only succeeds as a farce of character, but belongs among the classic plays about the theatre for its perceptive and affectionate spoofing of the theatrical temperament. All three comedies are beautifully constructed, and the coupling of Harlequinade and The Browning Version offers a most unusual theatrical experience in its emotional scope and overall structural ingenuity.

Among Rattigan's partial failures, I regard Variation on a Theme as a display of literary virtuosity; the original version of In Praise of Love (After Lydia) as a great play from the moment of Sebastian's entrance in the second scene; and Adventure Story as a theatrically vivid historical drama, highly producible for the sweep of its narrative in spite of its flaws in the characterization of Alexander. And, in case anyone should ever wonder, I would like to state that my purely personal favorite among Rattigan's plays is The Winslow Boy, because it projects his most heroic vision of man.

## APPENDIX A

ORIGINAL CASTS, DIRECTORS, THEATRES, OPENING DATES AND NUMBER  
OF PERFORMANCES OF RATTIGAN'S PLAYS IN LONDON AND NEW YORK

The references for the theatres, opening dates, and runs of each play are cited in the text. Cast lists and directing credits have been compiled and cross-referenced from Rattigan's published plays, Who's Who and London and New York reviews.

FIRST EPISODE

London: Comedy Theatre  
Opening: 26 January 1934  
Performances: Approximately 80

ALBERT ARNOLD . . . . .	Max Adrian*
PHILIP KAHN . . . . .	Angus L. MacLeod
JOAN TAYLOR . . . . .	Meriel Forbes
TONY WODEHOUSE. . . . .	William Fox
DAVID LISTER. . . . .	Patrick Waddington*
MARGOT GRESHAM. . . . .	Barbara Hoffe
JAMES . . . . .	Vincent King
A BULLER. . . . .	Jack Allen

Directed by: Muriel Pratt

New York: Ritz Theatre  
Opening: 17 September 1934  
Performances: Approximately 40

ALBERT ARNOLD . . . . .	Max Adrian*
PHILIP KAHN . . . . .	Statts Cotsworth
JOAN TAYLOR . . . . .	Gerrie Worthing
TONY WODEHOUSE. . . . .	John Halloran
DAVID LISTER. . . . .	Patrick Waddington*
MARGOT GRESHAM. . . . .	Leona Maricle
JAMES . . . . .	Stanley Harrison
A BULLER. . . . .	T. C. Dunham

Directed by: Haddon Mason

\*London and New York productions

FRENCH WITHOUT TEARS

London: Criterion Theatre  
 Opening: 6 November 1936  
 Performances: 1,030

KENNETH LAKE . . . . .	Trevor Howard
BRIAN CURTIS . . . . .	Guy Middleton*
HON. ALAN HOWARD . . . . .	Rex Harrison
MARIANNE . . . . .	Yvonne Andre
MONSIEUR MAINGOT . . . . .	Percy Walsh
LT.-CMDR. ROGERS . . . . .	Roland Culver
DIANA LAKE . . . . .	Kay Hammond
KIT NEILAN . . . . .	Robert Flemyng
JACQUELINE MAINGOT . . . . .	Jessica Tandy
LORD HEYBROOK. . . . .	William Dear

Directed by: Harold French\*

New York: Henry Miller Theatre  
 Opening: 28 September 1937  
 Performances: 111

KENNETH LAKE . . . . .	Philip Friend
BRIAN CURTIS . . . . .	Guy Middleton*
HON. ALAN HOWARD . . . . .	Frank Lawton
MARIANNE . . . . .	Simone Petitjean
MONSIEUR MAINGOT . . . . .	Marcel Valée
LT.-CMDR. ROGERS . . . . .	Cyril Raymond
DIANA LAKE . . . . .	Penelope Dudley Ward
JACQUELINE MAINGOT . . . . .	Jacqueline Porel
LORD HEYBROOK. . . . .	Edward Ryan, Jr.

Directed by: Harold French\*

\*London and New York productions

AFTER THE DANCE

London: St. James's Theatre  
 Opening: 21 June 1939  
 Performances: 60

JOHN REID . . . . .	Martin Walker
PETER SCOTT-FOWLER. . . . .	Hubert Gegg
WILLIAMS. . . . .	Gordon Court
JOAN SCOTT-FOWLER . . . . .	Catherine Lacey
HELEN BANNER. . . . .	Anne Firth
DR. GEORGE BANNER . . . . .	Robert Kempson
JULIA BROWNE. . . . .	Viola Lyel
CYRIL CARTER. . . . .	Leonard Coppins
DAVID SCOTT-FOWLER. . . . .	Robert Harris
MOYA LEXINGTON. . . . .	Millicent Wolf
LAWRENCE WALTERS. . . . .	Osmund Willson
ARTHUR POWER. . . . .	Henry Caine
MISS POTTER . . . . .	Lois Heatherley

Directed by: Michael Macowan

FOLLOW MY LEADER

London: Apollo Theatre  
 Opening: 16 January 1940  
 Performances: Approximately 15

KARL SILVOVITZ. . . . .	Walter Hudd
QUETSCH . . . . .	Frith Banbury
PAUL. . . . .	Kenneth Morgan
RISZKI. . . . .	Erik Chitty
MAJOR OTTO BARATSCH . . . . .	Francis L. Sullivan
MARIE PILAWA. . . . .	Eileen Peel
HANS ZEDESI . . . . .	Reginald Beckwith
ANNOUNCER . . . . .	Bush Bailey
FIRST PHOTOGRAPHER. . . . .	Geoffrey Clarke
SECOND PHOTOGRAPHER . . . . .	Raymond Leigh
CHILD . . . . .	Odile de Chalus
POLICEMAN . . . . .	Ronald Fortt
KING STEFAN of NEURASTHENIA . . . . .	Athole Stewart
SIR COSMO TATE-JOHNSON. . . . .	Marcus Barron

Directed by: Athole Stewart

GREY FARM

New York: Hudson Theatre  
Opening: 3 May 1940  
Performances: Approximately 35

MRS. IRON. . . . .	Evelyn Varden
STEPHEN GRANTHAM . . . . .	John Cromwell
JUDITH WEAVER. . . . .	Jane Sterling
JAMES GRANTHAM . . . . .	Oscar Homolka
MAVIS. . . . .	Maria Temple
LADY WEAVER. . . . .	Adrienna Morrison
ELLEN. . . . .	Vera Mellish

Directed by: Berthold Viertel

FLARE PATH

London: Apollo Theatre  
 Opening: 13 August 1942  
 Performances: 679

PETER KYLE . . . . .	Martin Walker
COUNTESS SKRICZEVINSKY . . . . .	Adrienne Allen
MRS. OAKES . . . . .	Dora Gregory
SERGEANT MILLER (DUSTY) . . . . .	Leslie Duyer
PERCY . . . . .	George Cole
COUNT SKRICZEVINSKY . . . . .	Gerard Hinze
FLIGHT-LIEUTENANT GRAHAM (TEDDY) . . . . .	Jack Watling
PATRICIA GRAHAM . . . . .	Phyllis Calvert
MRS. MILLER (MAUDIE) . . . . .	Kathleen Harrison
SQUADRON-LEADER SWANSON . . . . .	Ivan Samson
CORPORAL JONES . . . . .	John Bradley

Directed by: Anthony Asquith

New York: Henry Miller Theatre  
 Opening: 23 December 1942  
 Performances: 14

PETER KYLE . . . . .	Arthur Margetson
COUNTESS SKRICZEVINSKY . . . . .	Doris Patston
MRS. OAKES . . . . .	Cynthia Latham
SERGEANT MILLER (DUSTY) . . . . .	Gerald Savory
PERCY . . . . .	Bob White
COUNT SKRICZEVINSKY . . . . .	Alexander Ivo
FLIGHT-LIEUTENANT GRAHAM (TEDDY) . . . . .	Alec Guinness
PATRICIA GRAHAM . . . . .	Nancy Kelly
MRS. MILLER (MAUDIE) . . . . .	Helena Pickard
SQUADRON-LEADER SWANSON . . . . .	Renyolds Denniston

Directed by: Margaret Webster

WHILE THE SUN SHINES

London: Globe Theatre  
 Opening: 24 December 1943  
 Performances: 1,154

HORTON. . . . .	Douglas Jeffries
THE EARL OF HARPENDEN . . . . .	Michael Wilding
LIEUTENANT MULVANEY . . . . .	Hugh McDermott
LADY ELISABETH RANDALL. . . . .	Jane Baxter
THE DUKE OF AYR AND STIRLING. . . . .	Ronald Squire
LIEUTENANT COLBERT. . . . .	Eugene Deckers
MABEL CRUM. . . . .	Brenda Bruce

Directed by: Anthony Asquith

New York: Lyceum Theatre  
 Opening: 19 September 1944  
 Performances: 39

HORTON. . . . .	J. P. Wilson
THE EARL OF HARPENDEN . . . . .	Stanley Bell
LIEUTENANT MULVANEY . . . . .	Lewis Howard
LADY ELISABETH RANDALL. . . . .	Anne Burr
THE DUKE OF AYR AND STIRLING. . . . .	Melville Cooper
LIEUTENANT COLBERT. . . . .	Alexander Ivo
MABEL CRUM. . . . .	Cathleen Cordell

Directed by: George S. Kaufman

LOVE IN IDLENESS

London: Lyric Theatre  
 Opening: 20 December 1944  
 Performances: 213 (limited run)

OLIVIA BROWN . . . . .	Lynn Fontanne*
POLTON . . . . .	Margaret Murray
MISS DELL. . . . .	Peggy Dear
SIR JOHN FLETCHER. . . . .	Alfred Lunt*
MICHAEL BROWN. . . . .	Brian Nissen
DIANA FLETCHER . . . . .	Kathleen Kent
CELIA WENTWORTH. . . . .	Mona Harrison
SIR THOMAS MARKHAM . . . . .	Frank Forder
LADY MARKHAM . . . . .	Antoinette Keith

Directed by: Alfred Lunt\*

Retitled O MISTRESS MINE

New York: Empire Theatre  
 Opening: 23 January 1946  
 Performances: 451

OLIVIA BROWN . . . . .	Lynn Fontanne*
POLTON . . . . .	Margery Maude
MISS DELL. . . . .	Esther Mitchell
SIR JOHN FLETCHER. . . . .	Alfred Lunt*
MICHAEL BROWN. . . . .	Dick Van Patten
DIANA FLETCHER . . . . .	Ann Lee
CELIA WENTWORTH. . . . .	Marie Paxton

Directed by: Alfred Lunt\*

\*London and New York productions

THE WINSLOW BOY

London: Lyric Theatre  
 Opening: 23 May 1946  
 Performances: 476

RONNIE WINSLOW . . . . .	Michael Newell*
VIOLET . . . . .	Kathleen Harrison
ARTHUR WINSLOW . . . . .	Frank Cellier
GRACE WINSLOW . . . . .	Madge Compton*
DICKIE WINSLOW . . . . .	Jack Watling
CATHERINE WINSLOW . . . . .	Angela Baddeley
JOHN WATHERSTONE . . . . .	Alastair Bannerman
DESMOND CURRY . . . . .	Clive Morton
MISS BARNES . . . . .	Mona Washbourne
FRED . . . . .	Brian Harding
SIR ROBERT MORTON . . . . .	Emlyn Williams

Directed by: Glen Byam Shaw\*

New York: Empire Theatre  
 Opening: 29 October 1947  
 Performances: 218

RONNIE WINSLOW . . . . .	Michael Newell*
VIOLET . . . . .	Betty Sinclair
ARTHUR WINSLOW . . . . .	Alan Webb
GRACE WINSLOW . . . . .	Madge Compton*
DICKIE WINSLOW . . . . .	Owen Holder
CATHERINE WINSLOW . . . . .	Valerie White
JOHN WATHERSTONE . . . . .	Michael Kingsley
DESMOND CURRY . . . . .	George Denson
MISS BARNES . . . . .	Dorothy Hamilton
FRED . . . . .	Leonard Michell
SIR ROBERT MORTON . . . . .	Frank Allenby

Directed by: Glen Byam Shaw\*

\*London and New York productions

PLAYBILL

London: Phoenix Theatre  
 Opening: 8 September 1948  
 Performances: 245

THE BROWNING VERSION

JOHN TAPLOW . . . . .	Peter Scott
FRANK HUNTER. . . . .	Hector Ross
MILLIE CROCKER-HARRIS . . . . .	Mary Ellis
ANDREW CROCKER-HARRIS . . . . .	Eric Portman
DR. FROBISHER . . . . .	Campbell Cotts
PETER GILBERT . . . . .	Anthony Oliver
MRS. GILBERT. . . . .	Henryetta Edwards

HARLEQUINADE

ARTHUR GOSPORT. . . . .	Eric Portman
EDNA SELBY. . . . .	Mary Ellis
DAME MAUD GOSPORT . . . . .	Marie Lohr
JACK WAKEFIELD. . . . .	Hector Ross
GEORGE CHUDLEIGH. . . . .	Kenneth Edwards
FIRST HALBERDIER. . . . .	Peter Scott
SECOND HALBERDIER . . . . .	Basil Howes
MISS FISHLOCK . . . . .	Noel Dyson
FRED INGRAM . . . . .	Anthony Oliver
JOHNNY. . . . .	Henry Bryce
MURIEL PALMER . . . . .	Thelma Ruby
TOM PALMER. . . . .	Patrick Jordan
MR. BURTON. . . . .	Campbell Cotts
JOYCE LANGLAND. . . . .	Henryetta Edwards
POLICEMAN . . . . .	Manville Tarrant

Directed by: Peter Glenville\*

\*London and New York productions

New York: Coronet Theatre  
 Opening: 12 October 1949  
 Performances: 62

THE BROWNING VERSION

JOHN TAPLOW . . . . .	Peter Scott-Smith
FRANK HUNTER. . . . .	Ron Randell
MILLIE CROCKER-HARRIS . . . . .	Edna Best
ANDREW CROCKER-HARRIS . . . . .	Maurice Evans
DR. FROBISHER . . . . .	Louis Hector
PETER GILBERT . . . . .	Frederick Bradlee
MRS. GILBERT. . . . .	Patricia Wheel

HARLEQUINADE

ARTHUR GOSPORT. . . . .	Maurice Evans
EDNA SELBY. . . . .	Edna Best
DAME MAUD GOSPORT . . . . .	Bertha Belmore
JACK WAKEFIELD. . . . .	Ron Randell
GEORGE CHUDLEIGH. . . . .	Harry Sothern
FIRST HALBERDIER. . . . .	Peter Scott-Smith
SECOND HALBERDIER . . . . .	Tom Hughes Sand
MISS FISHLOCK . . . . .	Olive Blakeney
FRED INGRAM . . . . .	Frederick Bradlee
JOHNNY. . . . .	Bertram Tanswell
MURIEL PALMER . . . . .	Eileen Page
TOM PALMER. . . . .	Peter Martyn
MR. BURTON. . . . .	Louis Hector
JOYCE LANGLAND. . . . .	Patricia Wheel

Directed by: Peter Glenville\*

\*London and New York productions

ADVENTURE STORY

London: St. James's Theatre  
 Opening: 17 March 1949  
 Performances: 108

PTOLEMY . . . . .	Raymond Westwell
PERDICCAS . . . . .	Antony Baird
MAZARES . . . . .	Marne Maitland
ALEXANDER . . . . .	Paul Scofield
PYTHIA OF DELPHI . . . . .	Veronica Turleigh
HEPHAESTION . . . . .	Julian Dallas
PHILOTAS . . . . .	Robert Flemyng
AN ATTENDANT . . . . .	Natasha Wills
DARIUS, KING OF PERSIA . . . . .	Noel Willman
BESSUS . . . . .	William Devlin
QUEEN-MOTHER OF PERSIA . . . . .	Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies
QUEEN STATIRA OF PERSIA . . . . .	Hazel Terry
PRINCESS STATIRA OF PERSIA . . . . .	June Rodney
CLEITUS . . . . .	Cecil Truncer
PARMENION . . . . .	Nicholas Hannen
PALACE OFFICIAL . . . . .	Walter Gotell
ROXANA . . . . .	Joy Parker
GREEK SOLDIERS . . . . .	Stanley Baker John Van Eyssen
PERSIAN SOLDIERS . . . . .	Terence Longdon David Oxley Frederick Treves

Directed by: Peter Glenville

WHO IS SYLVIA?

London: Criterion Theatre

Opening: 24 October 1950

Performances: 381

MARK. . . . .	Robert Fleming
WILLIAMS. . . . .	Esmond Knight
DAPHNE. . . . .	Diane Hart
SIDNEY. . . . .	Alan Woolston
ETHEL . . . . .	Diana Allen
OSCAR . . . . .	Roland Culver
BUBBLES . . . . .	Diana Hope
NORA. . . . .	Diane Hart
DENIS . . . . .	David Aylmer
WILBERFORCE . . . . .	Roger Maxwell
DORIS . . . . .	Diane Hart
CHLOE . . . . .	Joan Benham
CAROLINE. . . . .	Athene Seyler

Directed by: Anthony Quale

THE DEEP BLUE SEA

London: Duchess Theatre  
 Opening: 6 March 1952  
 Performances: 513

PHILIP WELCH . . . . .	David Aylmer
MRS. ELTON . . . . .	Barbara Leake
ANN WELCH. . . . .	Ann Walford
HESTER COLLYER . . . . .	Peggy Ashcroft
MR. MILLER . . . . .	Peter Illing
WILLIAM COLLYER. . . . .	Roland Culver
FREDDIE PAGE . . . . .	Kenneth More
JACKIE JACKSON . . . . .	Raymond Francis

Directed by: Frith Banbury\*

New York: Morosco Theatre  
 Opening: 5 November 1952  
 Performances: 132

PHILIP WELCH . . . . .	John Merivale
MRS. ELTON . . . . .	Betty Sinclair
ANN WELCH. . . . .	Stella Andrew
HESTER COLLYER . . . . .	Margaret Sullivan
MR. MILLER . . . . .	Herbert Berghof
WILLIAM COLLYER. . . . .	Alan Webb
FREDDIE PAGE . . . . .	James Hanley
JACKIE JACKSON . . . . .	Felix Deebank

Directed by: Frith Banbury\*

\*London and New York productions

THE SLEEPING PRINCE

London: Phoenix Theatre  
 Opening: 5 November 1953  
 Performances: 274

PETER NORTHBROOK . . . . .	Richard Wattis
MARY . . . . .	Vivien Leigh
THE MAJOR-DOMO . . . . .	Paul Hardwick
THE REGENT . . . . .	Laurence Olivier
THE KING . . . . .	Jeremy Spenser
THE GRAND DUCHESS. . . . .	Martita Hunt
THE COUNTESS . . . . .	Rosamund Greenwood
THE BARONESS . . . . .	Daphne Newton
THE ARCHDUCHESS. . . . .	Elaine Inescort
THE PRINCESS . . . . .	Nicola Delman
FOOTMEN. . . . .	Peter Barkworth
	Angus Mackay
	Terence Owen

Directed by: Laurence Olivier

New York: Coronet Theatre  
 Opening: 1 November 1956  
 Performances: 60

PETER NORTHBROOK . . . . .	Rex O'Malley
MARY . . . . .	Barbara Bel Geddes
THE MAJOR-DOMO . . . . .	Ronald Dawson
THE REGENT . . . . .	Michael Redgrave
THE KING . . . . .	Johnny Stewart
THE GRAND DUCHESS. . . . .	Cathleen Nesbitt
THE COUNTESS . . . . .	Nydia Westman
THE BARONESS . . . . .	Betty Sinclair
THE ARCHDUCHESS. . . . .	Neff Jerome
THE PRINCESS . . . . .	Elwin Stock
BUTLER . . . . .	Sorrell Booke
FIRST FOOTMAN. . . . .	William Major
SECOND FOOTMAN . . . . .	Martin Waldron

Directed by: Michael Redgrave

SEPARATE TABLES

London: St. James's Theatre  
 Opening: 22 September 1954  
 Performances: 726

TABLE BY THE WINDOW

MABEL . . . . .	Marion Fawcett
LADY MATHESON . . . . .	Jane Eccles*
MRS. RAILTON-BELL . . . . .	Phyllis Neilson-Terry*
MISS MEACHAM. . . . .	May Hallatt*
DOREEN. . . . .	Priscilla Morgan
MR. FOWLER. . . . .	Aubrey Mather
MRS. SHANKLAND. . . . .	Margaret Leighton*
MISS COOPER . . . . .	Beryl Measor*
MR. MALCOLM . . . . .	Eric Portman*
CHARLES STRATTON. . . . .	Basil Henson
JEAN TANNER . . . . .	Patricia Raine

TABLE NUMBER SEVEN

JEAN STRATTON . . . . .	Patricia Raine
CHARLES STRATTON. . . . .	Basil Henson
MAJOR POLLOCK . . . . .	Eric Portman*
MR. FOWLER. . . . .	Aubrey Mather
MISS COOPER . . . . .	Beryl Measor*
MRS. RAILTON-BELL . . . . .	Phyllis Neilson-Terry*
MISS RAILTON-BELL . . . . .	Margaret Leighton*
LADY MATHESON . . . . .	Jane Eccles*
MISS MEACHAM. . . . .	May Hallatt*
MABEL . . . . .	Marion Fawcett
DOREEN. . . . .	Priscilla Morgan

Directed by: Peter Glenville\*

\*London and New York productions

New York: Music Box Theatre  
 Opening: 25 October 1956  
 Performances: 322

TABLE BY THE WINDOW

MABEL . . . . .	Georgia Harvey
LADY MATHESON . . . . .	Jane Eccles*
MRS. RAILTON-BELL . . . . .	Phyllis Neilson-Terry*
MISS MEACHAM. . . . .	May Hallatt*
DOREEN. . . . .	Helena Carroll
MR. FOWLER. . . . .	William Podmore
MRS. SHANKLAND. . . . .	Margaret Leighton*
MISS COOPER . . . . .	Beryl Measor*
MR. MALCOLM . . . . .	Eric Portman*
CHARLES STRATTON. . . . .	Donald Harron
JEAN TANNER . . . . .	Ann Hillary

TABLE NUMBER SEVEN

JEAN STRATTON . . . . .	Ann Hillary
CHARLES STRATTON. . . . .	Donald Harron
MAJOR POLLOCK . . . . .	Eric Portman*
MR. FOWLER. . . . .	William Podmore
MISS COOPER . . . . .	Beryl Measor*
MRS. RAILTON-BELL . . . . .	Phyllis Neilson-Terry*
MISS RAILTON-BELL . . . . .	Margaret Leigh-Jon*
LADY MATHESON . . . . .	Jane Eccles*
MISS MEACHAM. . . . .	May Hallatt*
MABEL . . . . .	Georgia Harvey
DOREEN. . . . .	Helena Carroll

Directed by: Peter Glenville\*

\*London and New York productions

VARIATION ON A THEME

London: Globe Theatre

Opening: 8 May 1958

Performances: 132

ROSE . . . . .	Margaret Leighton
HETTIE . . . . .	Jean Anderson
RON. . . . .	Jeremy Brett
KURT . . . . .	George Pravda
FIONA. . . . .	Felicity Ross
MONA . . . . .	Mavis Villiers
ADRIAN . . . . .	Lawrence Dalzell
SAM. . . . .	Michael Goodiffe

Directed by: John Gielgud

ROSS

London: Theatre Royal, Haymarket

Opening: 12 May 1960

Performances: 762

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT STOKER . . . . .	Geoffrey Colville
FLIGHT SERGEANT THOMPSON . . . . .	Dervis Ward
AIRCRAFTMAN PARSONS. . . . .	Peter Bayliss
AIRCRAFTMAN EVANS. . . . .	John Southworth
AIRCRAFTMAN DICKINSON. . . . .	Gerald Harper
AIRCRAFTMAN ROSS . . . . .	Alec Guinness
FRANKS (the lecturer). . . . .	James Grout
GENERAL ALLENBY. . . . .	Harry Andrews
RONALD STOORS. . . . .	Anthony Nicholls*
COLONEL BARRINGTON . . . . .	Leon Sinden
AUDA ABU TAYI. . . . .	Mark Dignam
TURKISH MILITARY GOVERNOR. . . . .	Geoffrey Keen*
HAMED. . . . .	Robert Arnold
RASHID . . . . .	Charles Laurence
A TURKISH CAPTAIN. . . . .	Basil Hoskins
A TURKISH SERGEANT . . . . .	Raymond Adamson
A BRITISH CORPORAL . . . . .	John Trenaman
A. D. C. . . . .	Ian Clark
A PHOTOGRAPHER . . . . .	Antony Kenway
AN AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER. . . . .	William Feltham
FLIGHT LIEUTENANT HIGGINS. . . . .	Peter Cellier
GROUP CAPTAIN WOOD . . . . .	John Stuart

Directed by: Glen Byam Shaw\*

\*London and New York productions

New York: Eugene O'Neill Theatre  
 Opening: 26 December 1961  
 Performances: 159

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT STOKER . . . . .	Robert Milli
FLIGHT SERGEANT THOMPSON . . . . .	Ted Gunther
AIRCRAFTMAN PARSONS. . . . .	Bill Glover
AIRCRAFTMAN DICKINSON. . . . .	Francis Bethencourt
AIRCRAFTMAN ROSS . . . . .	John Mills
FRANKS (the lecturer). . . . .	Kenneth Ruta
GENERAL ALLENBY. . . . .	John Williams
RONALD STOORS. . . . .	Anthony Nicholls*
COLONEL BARRINGTON . . . . .	Court Benson
AUDA ABU TAYI. . . . .	Paul Sparer
TURKISH MILITARY GOVERNOR. . . . .	Geoffrey Keen*
HAMED. . . . .	Cal Bellini
RASHID . . . . .	Joseph Della Sorte
A TURKISH CAPTAIN. . . . .	Eric Van Nuys
A TURKISH SERGEANT . . . . .	Thomas Newman
A BRITISH CORPORAL . . . . .	Del Tenney
A. D. C. . . . .	Nicolas Coster
A PHOTOGRAPHER . . . . .	Scott Graham
AN AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER. . . . .	John Hallow
FLIGHT LIEUTENANT HIGGINS. . . . .	James Valentine
GROUP CAPTAIN WOOD . . . . .	James Craven

Directed by: Glen Byam Shaw\*

\*London and New York productions

MAN AND BOY

London: Queens Theatre  
 Opening: 4 September 1963  
 Performances: 69 (limited run)

CAROL PENN. . . . .	Alice Kennedy Turney
BASIL ANTHONY . . . . .	Barry Justice*
GREGOR ANTONESCU. . . . .	Charles Boyer*
SVEN JOHNSON. . . . .	Geoffrey Keen*
MARK L. HERRIS. . . . .	Austin Willis*
DAVID BEESTON . . . . .	William Smithers*
COUNTESS ANTONESCU. . . . .	Jane Downs*

Directed by: Michael Benthall\*

New York: Brooks Atkinson Theatre  
 Opening: 12 November 1963  
 Performances: 54

CAROL PENN. . . . .	Louise Sorel
BASIL ANTHONY . . . . .	Barry Justice*
GREGOR ANTONESCU. . . . .	Charles Boyer*
SVEN JOHNSON. . . . .	Geoffrey Keen*
MARK L. HERRIS. . . . .	Austin Willis*
DAVID BEESTON . . . . .	William Smithers*
COUNTESS ANTONESCU. . . . .	Jane Downs*

Directed by: Michael Benthall\*

\*London and New York productions

A BEQUEST TO THE NATION

London: Theatre Royal, Haymarket  
 Opening: 23 September 1970  
 Performances: 124

GEORGE MATCHAM SNR . . . . .	Ewan Roberts
KATHERINE MATCHAM. . . . .	Jean Harvey
BETSY. . . . .	Deborah Watling
GEORGE MATCHAM JNR . . . . .	Michael Wardle
EMILY. . . . .	Una Brandon Jones
FRANCES, LADY NELSON . . . . .	Leueen MacGrath
NELSON . . . . .	Ian Holm
LORD BARHAM. . . . .	A. J. Broan
EMMA HAMILTON. . . . .	Zoe Caldwell
FRANCESCA. . . . .	Marisa Merlini
LORD MINTO . . . . .	Michael Aldridge
CAPTAIN HARDY. . . . .	Brian Glover
REV. WILLIAM NELSON. . . . .	Geoffrey Edwards
SARAH NELSON . . . . .	Eira Griffiths
HORATIO. . . . .	Stuart Knee
CAPTAIN BLACKWOOD. . . . .	Geoffrey Deevers
MIDSHIPMAN . . . . .	Stuart Knee
FOOTMEN, SAILORS, MAIDS. . . . .	Stanley Lloyd
	Conrad Asquith
	Graham Edwards
	Chris Carbis
	Deborah Watling
	Alison Coleridge

Directed by: Peter Glenville

IN PRAISE OF LOVE

London: Duchess Theatre  
 Opening: 27 September 1973  
 Performances: 131

BEFORE DAWN

THE BARON . . . . . Donald Sinden  
 THE LACKEY . . . . . Don Fellows  
 THE CAPTAIN . . . . . Richard Warwick  
 THE DIVA . . . . . Joan Greenwood

AFTER LYDIA

LYDIA CRUTTWELL . . . . . Joan Greenwood  
 SEBASTIAN CRUTTWELL . . . . . Donald Sinden  
 MARK WALTERS . . . . . Don Fellows  
 JOEY CRUTTWELL . . . . . Richard Warwick

Directed by: John Dexter

New York: Morosco Theatre  
 Opening: 10 December 1974  
 Performances: 199

IN PRAISE OF LOVE

LYDIA CRUTTWELL . . . . . Julie Harris  
 SEBASTIAN CRUTTWELL . . . . . Rex Harrison  
 MARK WALTERS . . . . . Martin Gabel  
 JOEY CRUTTWELL . . . . . Peter Burnell

Directed by: Fred Coe

## APPENDIX B

## RATTIGAN'S SCREEN, TELEVISION AND RADIO PLAYS

SCREENPLAYS<sup>1</sup>

French without Tears (1939), screenplay with Ian Dalrymple and Anatole de Grunewald.

Quiet Wedding (1940), screenplay with Anatole de Grunewald.

The Day Will Dawn (1942), screenplay with Anatole de Grunewald and Patrick Kirwan. Released in America as The Avengers.

Uncensored (1942), screenplay with Wolfgang Wilhelm and Rodney Ackland.

English without Tears (1944), screenplay with Anatole de Grunewald. Released in America as Her Man Gilbey.

Journey Together (1945).

The Way to the Stars (1945), screenplay with Anatole de Grunewald. Released in America as Johnny in the Clouds.

Brighton Rock (1947), screenplay with Graham Greene.

While the Sun Shines (1947), screenplay with Anatole de Grunewald.

Bond Street (1948), screenplay with Anatole de Grunewald and Rodney Ackland.

The Winslow Boy (1948), screenplay with Anatole de Grunewald.

The Browning Version (1951).<sup>2</sup>

The Sound Barrier (1952). Released in America as Breaking the Sound Barrier.

<sup>1</sup>List compiled from Denis Gifford, The British Film Catalogue 1895-1970 (London: McGraw-Hill, 1973) and Who Wrote the Movie and What Else Did He Write? (Los Angeles: The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Writers' Guild of America West, 1970).

<sup>2</sup>According to Kine Weekly, 1 March 1951, The Browning Version won two awards at the Berlin Film Festival: one for "outstanding distinction in the dramatic field," and another for the "film with most public appeal." Today's Cinema, 19 June 1951, notes that The Browning Version won two awards at the Cannes Film Festival: Rattigan won for Best Screenplay and Michael Redgrave (as Crocker-Harris) won for Best Actor.

The Final Test (1953).

The Man Who Loved Redheads (1955).

The Deep Blue Sea (1955).

The Prince and the Showgirl (1957).

Separate Tables (1958), screenplay with John Gay.<sup>3</sup>

The V.I.P.s (1963).

The Yellow Rolls Royce (1965).

Goodbye Mr. Chips (1969).

#### TELEVISION PLAYS<sup>4</sup>

The Final Test (1951).

Heart to Heart (1962).

Ninety Years On (1964).

Nelson (1966).

All on Her Own (1968).

High Summer (1972).

#### RADIO<sup>5</sup>

Cause Célèbre (1975).

<sup>3</sup>Who Wrote the Movie notes that Separate Tables was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Screenplay and for a Screen Writers' Guild Annual Award.

<sup>4</sup>Rattigan's television plays are listed on p. 636 of Contemporary Dramatists, ed. James Vinson (London: St. James Press, 1973).

<sup>5</sup>Radio Times, 25-31 October 1975, p. 3.

## APPENDIX C

## A LIST OF SOME RADIO AND TELEVISION

## PRODUCTIONS OF RATTIGAN'S PLAYS

1. In 1959, a televised version of While the Sun Shines was greeted with the comments: "But in spite of its age this sun has not been eclipsed," and "By all rights it should have dated except the right of craftsmanship." (First quote from Donald Dinsley, Sunday Dispatch, 29 March 1959; second from Time and Tide, 4 April 1959.

2. With Peter Cushing as Sir Robert Morton, The Winslow Boy was televised in 1958 (Radio Times, 7 March 1958). Of this production, Philip Purser wrote in the News Chronicle, 14 March: ". . . a major minor classic, a play of such consummate theatrical skill that it would have the stoniest solitary viewer on his feet and cheering." Harold Conway criticized Rattigan for stooping to theatrical tricks in the Daily Sketch, 14 March, but the Observer, 16 March, noted: "Nothing short of the knowledge that a nuclear warhead with my name on it had just left the launching site could have torn me away from the set." Purser commented about a German television production of the play that "it did more to promote British ideals than ten years of cultural exchanges."

With Emlyn Williams repeating his stage performance as Sir Robert, The Winslow Boy was presented on television 20 August 1961 (Times, 21 August). Reviews for the production were bad, and Kenneth Pearson wrote in the Sunday Times, 27 August:

Mr. Rattigan? Ah, yes. Writes plays, doesn't he? Mm. Well made? Oh, no doubt about it. They're like the chair I'm sitting on: it fulfills its function, but you would hardly mistake it for Chippendale.

The most recent British television production of The Winslow Boy

was in January 1977 (Times, 9 January), with Alan Badel as Sir Robert.

Of this production, Stanley Renyolds wrote in the Sunday Times, 18 January:

. . . there is no need to praise Mr. Rattigan's skill at hand-tooling a play. Yet, as pleasant, as pleasing as the play was, the old complaints about Mr. Rattigan's work still hold true. That is, where are the villains, the bad guys? . . .

If Mr. Rattigan was not after faceless authority, what then was he aiming at? He was, I think, simply aiming to please and that . . . is not enough for anyone, save Mr. Rattigan's Aunt Edna.

In America, The Winslow Boy was presented on the Du Pont Show of the Month, 13 November 1958 (Jack Gould, New York Times, 14 November).

It starred Frederic March, Florence Eldridge, and Siobhan McKenna as, respectively, Arthur, Grace and Catherine Winslow, and Noel Wilman as Sir Robert. Rose, Variety, n.d., TRPS-"The Winslow Boy," commented:

"Winslow Boy' might represent the 'play it safe' school of dramaturgy, but one could not have asked for a better translation."

3. The Browning Version, with its original cast, was presented on the radio in Britain in June 1949 (Philip Hope-Wallace, Listener, 16 June), and the Maurice Evans-Edna Best company did the play on American radio in December 1949 (William F. McDermott, Cleveland Plain Dealer, 21 December). John Gielgud and Angela Baddeley gave the play on the radio in Britain in September 1957, and this version was rebroadcast in March 1960 (Radio Times, 16 March 1960).

Peter Cushing played Crocker-Harris on television 12 July 1955 (Daily Telegraph, 13 July). Reviews of this production in TRPS-"Playbill" commented on how well-suited the play was to television. According to TV Times, 13 June 1958, Robert Flemmyng and Elizabeth Sellars played the Crocker-Harrises on television 12 June 1958.

In America, The Browning Version was telecast 23 April 1959. John Gielgud and Margaret Leighton played the Crocker-Harrises and Robert

Stephens played Frank Hunter (Jack Gould, New York Times, 24 April).

Gould called the play "dark and uneven."

4. Radio Times, 12 June 1953, lists a June television production of Harlequinade, with much of the original stage cast. TV Times, 26 April 1973, notes that Dame Edith Evans, at the age of eighty-five, made her television debut as Dame Maud in Harlequinade, 29 April 1973.

5. Sean Connery starred as Alexander in a BBC telecast of Adventure Story in June 1961. The Times' critic, 13 June, wrote:

. . . whatever criticisms can be made of its reliance upon easy-going psychological explanations which sound more convincing than they really are, he builds his plays soundly, moves them along with well-controlled speed, and perhaps most importantly, offers his actors the freedom to add out of their own skill and personality the intensities he does not supply in the text.

A critic wrote in the Listener, 22 June:

Alexander's personality remains as enigmatic as Ross's does today. Yet whereas in Ross we feel that an explanation has eluded the dramatist despite his attempts at finding a solution, in the earlier Adventure Story the impression gained is that the playwright has mistaken dramatic expertise for the ability to disclose motivation.

6. The Deep Blue Sea received almost unanimously rave reviews from a 1954 telecast. Out of thirty-one reviews in TRPS-"Deep Blue Sea," only two are slightly negative towards the play. Representative of the others are the judgments that the play may end up in the great category (G. Butcher, Sketch, 13 January); that Rattigan showed his genius in the character of Miller (Alison Macleod, Daily Worker, 21 January); and that the Hester-Phillip Welch scene is "surely one of the most moving strokes of irony in modern drama." (Peter Foster, "The Best Post-War English Play," Radio Times, 15 January). The Sunday Times, 27 January 1957, accompanied a listing of a Deep Blue Sea television production with the comment: "Any moment now there will be a Rattigan canonization, as a new

generation discovers that he has relevance as well as superb craftsmanship."

7. According to Radio Times, 12 March 1970, Eric Porter and Geraldine McEwan starred in a television production of Separate Tables, with Cathleen Nesbitt as Lady Matheson. The Daily Mirror, 16 March, declared that the production "came as a reminder of its author's endlessly underestimated skill."

8. Irene Worth starred in a television production of Variation on a Theme in April 1966 (Times, 19 April), and Claire Bloom starred in In Praise of Love in January 1976 (Philip Oakes, "Living for the Present," Sunday Times, 1 February 1976).

9. In addition to individual productions, there have been three Rattigan Festivals in Britain. In 1957, there was a BBC radio festival of six plays--French without Tears, While the Sun Shines, The Winslow Boy, The Browning Version, Adventure Story, and The Deep Blue Sea. (Val Gielgud, "A Festival of Rattigan Plays," Radio Times, 27 September). A 1964 television festival included Separate Tables, Variation on a Theme, and Nelson, the original television version of A Bequest to the Nation (Times, 6 May 1964), and a television festival presented in 1970-71 on the occasion of Rattigan's knighthood and sixtieth birthday (Shaun Asher, "Rattigan's Festival of Acclaim," Daily Mail, 29 May 1971). Of the radio festival, Val Gielgud noted that:

The main object is to show the great variety, both of subject and of treatment, which is to be found in the works of a dramatist universally acknowledged as popular in the highest degree, but perhaps too little recognized as one of the finest living masters of stagecraft in all its forms.

## APPENDIX D

## RATTIGAN'S COMMENTS ON A PROSPECTIVE PLAY

In our 5 December 1974 interview, Rattigan spoke at length about another biographical play he was planning to write, about British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith and his family during World War I. Rattigan commented:

I always wanted to write a play of 1916, because I believe that the Battle of the Somme saw the end of a form of Western civilization, and life was never the same after that. Until that moment, life could have gone on as it had. Perhaps it wasn't right that it should, but it could have gone on. And it was in Asquith's power to stop the war. I think there's some evidence for that in the Lansdowne letter. If peace had been settled with Germany, not on the basis of unconditional surrender but of negotiation, the holocaust could have been stopped.

But Asquith was a sick man. He was made sicker than he need have been by the death of his favorite son Raymond, who was one of the great leading lights of that generation, the generation of Rupert Brooke. He was a brilliant scholar and had a marvelous future, probably in politics but quite possibly as a writer.

Raymond was killed in the Somme, and he chose deliberately to go as a second lieutenant in the front line, despising himself for doing it when of course he could have had what they called a cushy job as the Prime Minister's son.

I found out quite by chance that, during Asquith's visit to General Hague in his headquarters during the Somme, Hague allowed Raymond, this paragon, to come and see his father. A week later, Asquith learned that the boy had been killed.

Now, two months later, Lloyd George shoved Asquith out. Lloyd George was a figure like Clemenceau--the war has to be won to the last drop of blood, as it were. And so to 1918, so to Versailles, so to the next war. And it's one of the fascinating "ifs" of history, what would have happened if Raymond hadn't been killed and Asquith had stopped the war.

First of all, Raymond was slightly suicidally inclined. Secondly, of course, his father could have saved him. But with the repressions of that period, Asquith couldn't bring himself to do that.

It might have been possible for Margot Asquith, a character I'd like to write about, to have gotten her husband to offer Raymond the cushy job. I found out, also by chance, that the Asquiths never touched each other. It used to madden Margot. She said: "They're unfeeling, these Asquiths. They never even shake hands." But they loved each other. Asquith loved his son passionately, and the son loved his father, and of course I was instantly thinking of

the scene with the son and the father at opposite ends of the stage when they say goodbye at the Somme.

And from that coincidence that Asquith went to the front line possibly to stop the war, and the emotional link with Raymond, who was killed at that time, and then Asquith not stopping the fight, I think there is something I want to write about there. We were talking about emotional repression, and it's so right for this play, because I think that it could be so very deeply moving that they never touch each other at all, and that they're at opposite ends of the stage when Raymond is given the choice of the cushy job at headquarters and he chooses to go back, and they say goodbye to each other. And that is the last we see of Raymond.

When I was in London in the summer of 1975, Rattigan's secretary, Mrs. Harold French, told me that he was researching the Asquith play. Rattigan became ill during the summer, however, and in February of 1976 revealed that he had cancer:

There's no doubt about the diagnosis. I have to accept it. And, of course, the question arises: how much time do I have left? I would like to complete a couple more plays and write my autobiography. Five years would do it. But there's no guarantee about these things. I'm pushing on as best I can.

Rattigan said that he had started the Asquith play and wanted to get back to it.<sup>1</sup>

I spoke with Roger Machell, Rattigan's editor at Hamish Hamilton, 15 June 1976. Mr. Machell told me that Rattigan had completed the stage version of a radio play he had written in 1975, about a famous murder trial, the Rattenbury case, of the thirties, but that he knew of no further work on the Asquith drama.

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<sup>1</sup>Phillip Oakes, "Living for the Present," Sunday Times, 1 February 1976.

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