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1. Introduction

Not many periods in British Theatre have been as productive as the 20th century; the theatrical output and also the „stylistic ambition“ (Innes 1) very much rivalled the Elizabethan Theatre. Compared to the previous era, the 20th century produced a wider range of plays and it also further developed (and experimented with) older traditions (e.g. the well-made play); in addition, it continued extending the “subject matter of the stage” (Innes 1). Constant social and political change, such as the two World Wars, Britain’s imperial role and many technological advances, provided the many playwrights with constant inspiration and interesting materials for their plays. (Innes 1) However, it often remains unconsidered that the 20th century in British drama was also characterised by frequent highs and lows: both at the end of the 19th century and during the 1950s, the theatre world was frustrated by its own stagnation and by the obvious changes that were happening in the rest of Europe. Audiences and critics alike were unsatisfied with the theatre’s stasis and called for a revolution: at the end of the 19th century first signs of change appeared, especially through William Archer, Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, which then led to a new wave of drama in the early 20th century; during the 1950s a similar feeling of dissatisfaction led to the birth of the “Angry Young Men” movement, largely triggered by the premiere of John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* on 8 May, 1956. Especially during the latter revolution, playwrights belonging to (or representing) the old order, were immediately dismissed: one of the most famous and nowadays largely forgotten casualties of this time was Terence Rattigan (1911-1977).

During the 1960s, Terence Rattigan felt so unloved in Britain that he decided to leave and live in Bermuda. He had been an immensely popular playwright up until 1956 and the sudden dismissal broke his heart: “Few playwrights in the 20th century were dismissed as cruelly from the warm hearthside of critical approval as Rattigan was in the wake of John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*” (Cavendish *Telegraph*). Rattigan’s persona was connected to the “well-made play” and the theatre of entertainment and was therefore deemed old-fashioned, redundant and seen as embodying everything “kitchen-sink” dramatists were trying to destroy. However, nearly seventy years later and after roughly two decades of very popular and much praised Rattigan revivals, the question still remains whether his dismissal from public favour was indeed justified. According to his second biographer, Geoffrey Wansell (Introduction ix), Rattigan’ fate was in fact due to the “bigotry, jealousy and shortsightedness of an influential group of individuals in what came to be the English theatrical establishment. As a result of their prejudice, and for no sound reason, he was suddenly,

unforgivably and unreasonably dismissed as a playwright of no consequence. It was to break his spirit [...] and shorten his life”.

Rattigan’s plays were and definitely still are accurate and moving portraits of the English middle-classes; the characters in his plays are lonely and hopeless and seem to be suffering from the one “English vice” (In Praise of Love 247) Rattigan himself had identified: the inability to show and express emotions. Named the “poet of repression” (Hensher *Guardian*), the playwright succeeded in creating stories and characters that have survived over time and even nowadays move audiences to tears; his themes of fear and ineptitude are still as up-to-date now as they were seven decades ago. It is therefore extremely important to revisit Rattigan’s career and show when and why such a change of perception has taken place and, in order to restore his reputation to its original level, prove that his plays were anything else but old-fashioned and outdated and that, in fact, throughout his career, Rattigan had tried to show the true life and emotional landscape of British society at the time and also to revolutionise the conventions of the well-made play, since his writing in its tradition undoubtedly triggered Rattigan’s downfall.

2. The history of the well-made play

During the history of British theatre, playwrights have invented and experimented with many genres and traditions, but if we look at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, no genre has been as controversially received and yet been so extremely popular as the well-made play. After its initial enormous success, the genre’s fortunes shifted and, in the course of the 20th century, it was reduced to nothing more than a derogatory term for old-fashioned plays. Even nowadays, the term “well-made” is somewhat perceived as being an insult, despite the fact that literary heavyweights, such as Somerset Maugham, Noel Coward and also to some extent, Oscar Wilde made use of its conventions. It is therefore important to analyse when and why this shift of perception has taken place, and in order to succeed, one has to first look at the well-made play’s birth in France in the early 19th century. (Taylor 9, 11)

A) French Precursors

The French playwright Eugene Scribe has long been acknowledged to be the “father” of the well-made play. Born in 1791, he wrote his first play in 1815, and during his lifetime produced between 400 and 500 plays, alone or in collaboration, (article) and his influence on both French and foreign playwrights is undeniable (Cardwell 876).

Scribe began by writing “comédie-vaudevilles” (French comedies involving music and dance) (Kuritz 277), but he very soon developed his own idea of what would please and entertain the audience. His primary aim was to catch and hold the audience’s attention throughout the play and he soon realised that the best way of achieving said goal was a well-told story. Therefore, the essence of his “pièce bien faite” was to structure and relate a story in a way, that the audience would be kept “expectant from beginning to end” (Taylor 12), in order to be able to send them home happy and entertained. By the early 1820s, Scribe started applying his efforts to more “serious” drama and thus started to lightly touch on many issues that would be the thematic centre of the “social drama” to come. (Taylor 11-12) Even hereby, his secret was to tell the story in a way that “there is not one moment in the whole evening when the audience is not in a state of eager expectation, waiting for something to happen, for some secret to be uncovered, some identity revealed, some inevitable confrontation actually to occur” (Taylor 15). This, and only this, is what Scribe meant by a well-made play (Dietrich 15, Taylor 12).

For many years now, scholars have tried to find a formula to Scribe’s success and to his “pièce bien faite”, nevertheless, because of the extent of his opus, it has proven nearly impossible. His way of achieving audience involvement and constant interest naturally varies from play to play and thus has made it difficult for critics nowadays to define the main features and characteristics of the well-made play. Cardwell (877) now claims that “the search of a formula that will explain the structure of the well-made play is doomed to failure. There is no general structure that is common to all such plays.” Nevertheless, he continues, it is possible to describe tendencies and common practices, whereby the “emphasis will be on the typical rather than on the exceptional” (Cardwell 877).

Eugene Scribe’s work consists of different types of plays: there are not only comedies with different themes (social and political), but also a play that could be seen as a precursor of the “pièce à thèse” (*La Calomnie*) and a serious drama, *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, which at the same time is one of Scribe’s

most popular plays, up to the present day. The flexibility of the well-made play, which is proven by its applicability to various kinds of plays, is one of the main reasons why this genre has survived over the years. Nevertheless, some important constant features can be found when analysing well-made plays: as far as the exposition is concerned, it has to be complete, which means that every previous event must be alluded to, even though details can be filled in later. The play usually begins with a crisis that precipitates an already unstable situation; thus, the audience's curiosity and interest are immediately aroused. In his plays, Scribe tried to avoid dialogues in which information already known to the characters was shared, in order to inform the audience; he rather used scenes that were more natural and very often helped to advance the action. (Cardwell 877-878)

The action was at the core of the play: it was made up of attempts to overcome one, or usually more, obstacles, which then eventually culminate in the last, major obstacle that will lead to the denouement. Mostly, these obstacles have something to do with communication, "either achieving or preventing it" (Cardwell 878). Furthermore, the action of a well-made play nearly always includes situations, known as "*scènes à faire*", which usually involve a direct confrontation between the protagonist and their direct antagonist; at the end, one of them (not necessarily the "hero") emerges as the winner of said confrontation. The audience is made to long for these "*scenes a faire*", but at the same time they are dreaded and believed "to be unavoidable". They are usually placed very late in the action and point directly to the denouement. The typical scene is "carefully prepared, highly dramatic, and, despite its structural importance, designed primarily for the emotional satisfaction of the audience" (Cardwell 878).

The basic dramatic device used by Scribe is the "*quiproquo*". In the course of the action, many bits of information are shared, hidden, misunderstood and invented, which causes the ups and downs of the action. This vital role of communication, as mentioned previously, can mostly be seen by the frequent use of letters and papers as means of conveying and hiding information. The secret, or *quiproquo*, is usually made obvious to the audience from the very beginning, because thus the potential for drama and the suspense are heightened; they always know what is at stake and therefore follow the story closely and eagerly, in order to find out how the misunderstanding and the situation are going to be resolved. (Cardwell 879)

Moreover, it is a very important feature in the well-made play that every scene has to make a "definite contribution to the development of the action" (Cardwell 879). Since communication in

this genre is so important, the constellations of characters on stage are mostly determined by what information has to be delivered and to whom. Thus, it can be said that the structure of a well-made play is characterised by the “arrangement of the entrances and exits of the characters and the onstage combinations that result” (Cardwell 879). In order to keep the audience interested, the meeting between important characters is often delayed, or sometimes permitted and then interrupted, in order to render the final scene and the subsequent (expected) outcome even more craved for. The primary aim of the well-made play, namely to keep the audience entertained and intrigued, is thus managed more than successfully.

One of the primary areas where structural variation becomes possible in the well-made play, is in the number, length and importance of the sub-plot(s). Usually, every play has at least one secondary plot, but there can be up to seven and they are usually very closely linked to the main plot. Their importance shifts from virtually negligible to equally important as the main plot; and even though they can theoretically start and end at any given moment in the play, it is of vital importance that the problem in the sub-plot(s) will be resolved before the final curtain. In the world of the well-made play, no open or loose endings are permitted (Cardwell 880).

Finally, the denouement, first and foremost, has to be swift and it usually takes place in the very last scene, when all hope for the characters and for a resolution of the desperate situation seems lost. The reversal of the situation must be unpredictable, otherwise, if too predictable, the play will have failed in retaining the audience’s interest. Much of the art of the well-made play lies exactly in arranging the scenes and the conveyance of information in such a way that the audience will never fully know what is going to happen and how the characters will end up; however, when the final solution is presented to them, it must be logical, in order for them to accept it straight away, without doubts and regrets. (Cardwell 881)

Scribe was not particularly interested in teaching or bettering his audience; his primary aim was to please and entertain the theatre-goers, which he saw as pertaining to the general public, and not to a select elite. This view partly explains the harsh reaction of Alexandre Dumas fils and other writers belonging to the tradition of the “*pièce à thèse*” who could not stand the idea of writing for the mere aim of pleasing an audience. However, it is important to note that Scribe’s plays are usually not entirely devoid of lessons to be learned, but the author chooses to treat them lightly and with good humour, thus avoiding the spectators to feel preached to. As phrased by Cardwell (881), “[t]he

primacy of entertainment is the root of Scribe's philosophy of the theatre."

Another interesting aspect in Scribe's well-made play is the combination between truth and fiction, two ideas that usually contradict each other. In Scribe's eyes, the concept of truth is related to audience acceptance: if what he writes is not plausible, the audience will not identify with the characters and follow the action. However, this concept is very problematic for a playwright who focusses all his skills on maintaining suspense, which in turn requires an interesting story, uncommon events, and scenes full of surprises. What people experience every day is not interesting; on the other hand, if what is portrayed in the play is impossible, people will stop to believe and stop to follow the plot. Therefore, careful structuring and preparing is needed when writing a well-made play, in order to make the story uncommon enough, yet not unlikely: "[...] the primary and most consistent characteristic of the well-made play is the thoroughness with which every action, every event, even every entrance and exit is prepared, explained, justified." (Cardwell 882)

Moreover, in order to further increase "realism" in his plays, Scribe decided to include only characters and settings and problems taken from the society of his time. It is only the plot and certain situations that are blatantly fictional: in real life, one would not find so many coincidences and happy endings, and "not quite so many millions belong to unattached heiresses or handsome young men" (Cardwell 883). The structure of his plays is therefore quite artificial, since first and foremost it has to meet certain dramatic needs. However, by including details of everyday life, common issues and problems, by even sticking closely to the spoken language of his time, he manages to impart his plays with a high sense of plausibility and therefore manages to retain the audience's attention throughout the whole play. (Cardwell 882-883)

Many of these features can be found in more modern plays, a fact that shows the immense influence Eugene Scribe has had on the development of European drama. His conviction that the most important aim in theatre was to keep the audience happy and entertained might not have been very popular at the time, nevertheless, his "*pièce bien faite*" was so successful that British playwrights imported it to their country and adapted it to their society and culture. But also in France the development of the well-made play did not stop: Scribe's disciple Victorien Sardou (1831-1908) wrote nearly as many plays as his master, unfortunately he does not equal his fame: nowadays he is mostly known for G. B. Shaw's coinage of the term "Sardoodledom", which during Shaw's time was used as a derogatory term to describe well-made plays (Taylor 16, Styan 303). Nevertheless, it

is important to add that Sardou managed to “convert Scribe’s machine for generating intrigue into a formulaic plot to give the well-made play its reputation for tight construction” (Dietrich 15). After Sardou came Eugene Labiche and Georges Feydeau, who took the well-made play further in the area of comedy, emphasising the need for bigger and more frequent laughter instead of bigger thrills (Dietrich 15).

The British well-made play developed into a completely different direction than the French “*pièce bien faite*”. Playwrights in Britain were intrigued by its success and decided to try it in their country. And even though the French model always remained in front of their eyes, they managed to transform the genre into something completely different. The playwright to first attempt to adapt this tradition to an English play was T.W. Robertson and it was subsequently taken further by Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero (Taylor 18).

B) The British well-made play

a) Tom Robertson and the 1870s

During the 1870s, a British playwright attempted for the first time to adapt the genre of the well-made play to an English stage; his name was Tom Robertson (1829-1871). According to John Russell Taylor, Robertson is primarily known for “having introduced on the mid-Victorian stage a realistic picture of everyday middle-class life” (Taylor 19). At the time, scholars thought that Robertson initiated a “realistic reform” for the British stage, and even though his plots, when read from a contemporary perspective, seem hardly less melodramatic than the ones from his French predecessors, it is nevertheless important to have a closer look at his work. (Taylor 19)

Robertson was very familiar with Eugene Scribe’s work and method of writing and it is therefore very likely that what he knew about the “*pièce bien faite*” he learned directly from dealing with the plays of its creator, which, at the start of his career, he sometimes even translated. His first original success came in 1865 with his play *Society* and it marked his arrival as “the dramatist of the day” (Taylor 23), an assessment that was confirmed by his subsequent productions *Ours* in 1866 and *Caste*, his most popular play, in 1867. In all of these plays, despite the fact that they are somewhat clumsy, there are signs of a new approach to drama: after their success, Robertson was classed as a

writer of plays that are now characterised as “romantic comedy-drama of middle-class life” (Taylor 23) and he continued maturing the convention during the rest of his career (Taylor 26). From a contemporary point of view, the realism in Robertson’s plays does not seem to be ground-breaking, however, in late 19th century Britain it had an immense impact. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to regard Robertson as a revolutionary dramatist, since in his lifetime, he could not have been more disinclined to follow any rules or doctrines at all. His style of writing did not represent an open attack at the popular British theatre of the time, it was however a “refinement, a modification of detail” (Taylor 28). He followed Scribe’s example closely and he did it so well and to such an extent that in keeping the audience entertained and focused on the stories he told he hardly had any rivals at that time. But what distinguished Robertson from Scribe was his reluctance to fall into melodrama and to rather apply the genre to more every-day people and situations. Thus, “the systematic application of Scribe-like technique and the concentration on contemporary middle-class British life for subject-matter - taken together was a new and influential genre: the British realistic well-made play, a genre that was going to be widely influential in the years to come.” (Taylor 28)

b) “The Renaissance of the British Drama” (Dietrich 3)

Twenty years after Robertson’s death, a new period in British theatre history started and it was going to be one of the most influential times ever witnessed: it was a “renaissance of the modern period” (Dietrich 3) and it featured such famous writers as George Bernard Shaw and a new development, named the “New Drama”. This “renaissance” roughly occupied the years between 1890 and 1950 (the “New Drama” arose around 1900 and lasted until the 1930s) and it turned out to be one of the most prolific eras in British Theatre history. (Dietrich 3, Innes 1)

William Archer (1856-1924), an influential drama critic of the “New Drama” movement, referred to the time between 1642, when Puritans closed the theatres and 1890, the advent of this new era, as the “dark ages of drama”, with only a few glimmers of hope found along the way (e.g. Robertson, Sheridan, Wycherley). In his *The Old Drama and the New*, published in 1923, Archer compared the two periods and judged “Old Drama” up to 1890 to be a “dreary desert” (qtd. In Dietrich 3), mostly because of its “pleasure-seeking addiction to melodrama, low comedy, and other escapist fare” (Dietrich 3). In this context, Dietrich points out two major events that signalled the birth of the New Drama (besides the first London production of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* in 1889): on the one

hand, the death of Dion Boucicault, one of the most important and innovative playwrights of the nineteenth century, and on the other hand the rise of Ibsenism in Britain, largely triggered by George Bernard Shaw (his revised lecture *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*), who at that time was two years away from writing his first play. (Dietrich 28) These two seminal events marked the start of an era whose playwrights were considered “‘prophets’ of a new dispensation” (e.g. Pinero, Jones), even though, when seen from a contemporary point of view, they were more likely precursors of “an even greater drama to come” (Dietrich 39).

I. Arthur Wing Pinero (1855-1934) and Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929) – the precursors of the “New Drama”

During the 1890s, theatre was a combination between Old and New Drama; realistic well-made plays gradually gained on the Old Drama, even though it has to be said that their realism very often only disguised melodrama and the problems and issues depicted in those stories were mostly “unproblematic” (Dietrich 39-40). This situation stemmed from the fact that playwrights writing in Ibsen’s tradition were less popular at the time (even though they appealed to the intelligentsia) than writers who stuck with the older, more melodramatic model; therefore, dramatists pertaining to the “New Drama” had to find a compromise if they wanted to be performed in larger theatres for a longer period of time: their “Ibsenism” had to be toned down and they had to stick to melodramatic moral conventions (“one could be ‘unpleasant’ in one’s realism only if one were melodramatically ‘moral’ in one’s dénouement”(Dietrich 40)). The playwrights who were most successful in applying this compromise to the stage were Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones and also, to some extent, Oscar Wilde. (Dietrich 39-40)

Throughout the 1880s, William Archer was watching out for a new dramatist who would do for the British stage what Ibsen was doing for continental Europe. For quite a while he had been watching two barely produced playwrights, Jones and Pinero, and his interest increased when they started writing plays of a more realistic nature. At the appearance of Pinero’s *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (1893) Archer was convinced he had found what he was looking for; he deemed it to be “The one play of what may be called European merit which the modern English stage can as yet boast” (Dietrich 40).

The reaction to the play was sensational. Pinero managed to bring out onto the British stage considerations and opinions that had never been heard before, by realistically handling the subject of the woman with a past and by suggesting that the double standards of sexual behaviour between men and women and the uncharitable treatment of women in difficult circumstances was the cause of marital despair and “wandering husbands” (Gewirtz 307). Furthermore, his play and his plea for tolerance were rendered even more forceful by the play’s solid “well-made” structure and by the depiction of characters, such as Paula Tanqueray, with unusual psychological depth. (Gewirtz 307)

After the play’s production, William Archer said that “technically, the work is as nearly as possible perfect” (Dietrich 44); however, George Bernard Shaw, heavily attacked it on its publication in 1895: Pinero became Shaw’s main target when advertising the “New Drama”, and *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* was defined by him as an example of “Sardoodledom” (Innes 3). To him, the exposition and the plotting of the play were mechanical and crude and he therefore did not agree with Archer’s assessment. (Dietrich 44)

Despite Shaw’s opinion, Pinero became a vastly influential and popular playwright; a dramatist who could tell interesting and exciting stories to maximum effect. (Taylor 53) He also followed in the tradition of those nineteenth-century writers who wrote for the general public and not for an audience of selected few. He thus wrote for the West End, where he produced and directed his plays with a rigid hand. (Gewirtz 319) When looking at his entire career, which was extremely prolific, Taylor claims that he was the only British dramatist who persistently managed to make the well-made play work, and not only in comedy and farce, but also in serious drama (Taylor 52). What he excels in, is “the adroit mixing of apparently incompatible elements-satire and sentiment, cynical realism and rosy nostalgia- into coherent, well-made plays which convince us, against all odds, that they are really all of a piece” (Taylor 74). And it is also important to add that Pinero, a theatre man through and through, was an ideal example of a dramatist who completely understood the need for being earnest and contrived at the same time, in order to be recognised as the leader of the “New Drama” and despite Shaw’s criticism and other critics’ judgements about the contrived nature of some of his stories, Pinero can indeed be regarded as one of the leading precursors of the “New Drama”. (Dietrich 49)

There are many positive things to be said about Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929), but it is probably

as a dramatist that he had the biggest impact on the theatre. From the very beginning of his career, he attempted write high drama with serious subject matter, and by doing this he managed to gain considerable and long-lasting popularity (Dietrich 50). Together with his contemporary, Arthur Wing Pinero, he brought the English well-made play to its short dramatic maturity (Taylor 51).

During the first decade of his career, there was little, if anything to indicate that he would become one of the leading dramatists of the “New Drama”. He achieved modest successes with various short pieces, but it was only in 1882 that he gained world-wide popularity: *The Silver King* was first performed in 1882 and was afterwards frequently revived for twenty years in England, on the Continent and also in the United States. From this moment on, Jones became one of the leading voices of the English theatre at the time (Dietrich 51, Lindroth 244-245).

From the very beginning, Jones refused to be restricted to only one type of drama. Even though most of his success stemmed from his skills in producing fast-paced and gripping melodrama, he very soon began to experiment with other genres. However, it is important to note that whichever genre he was writing in, his striking ability at creating well-made plays was always in the foreground. (Lindroth 238) Furthermore, he tried to combine the conventions of the “pièce bien faite” with significant social issues as primary themes. In Jones’s opinion, drama was not simply entertainment for the masses; it was serious literature that had to seriously deal with social situations and problems in a realistic manner. However, the entertainment aspect of a play should never be entirely forgotten. He insisted that drama had to be “restored to its rightful position as a great art form that would ‘assert the value and dignity of human life’, one that is ‘full of meaning and importance’”. (qtd. In Lindroth 239)

Jones’s play *Mrs. Dane’s Defense* (1900) is probably the best example for a realistic well-made play in the style of Arthur Wing Pinero. It deals with the question of whether a woman with a past (Felicia Hindemarth) can successfully hide her “fallen state” and return to polite and respectable society. In the play, even though a happy ending for Felicia seems possible for a time, her deeds are finally discovered and she is forced to leave polite society for good, as a supposedly “deserved” exile. (Dietrich 54) In this final fate of the female protagonist, the morality of the British well-made play à la Pinero and Jones is exemplified: as long as the woman with a past is instantly shunned by society forever, the play works (Taylor 47): therefore, both Mrs Dane and Paula Tanqueray are not allowed to find lasting happiness. However, a positive outcome is hinted at in the play for the rest of

the characters. Despite this rather commercial happy ending, “the play through three acts expertly counterpoints characters, building through an emotional crescendo to a very theatrical climax, displaying Jones’s deserved reputation for tight construction and story-telling ability” (Dietrich 55). Even Jones himself was aware of his rather conventional ending: he dismissed his play as a “drawing room melodrama”. Convention had once again overruled characterisation, since it was convention alone that doomed Mrs Dane to exile and necessarily made her into a “villainess”: “convention also cancelled the ‘problem’, for the conclusion was foregone” (Dietrich 55).

One characteristic rendered Jones’s writing even more unique in his time: his “Englishness” (Lindroth 245). In all his plays, he depicts the realities of contemporary British life and thus makes the English middle class, for instance, worthy of “serious artistic attention” (Lindroth 245, Taylor 37). Furthermore, throughout his entire life, Jones defended English drama in comparison to that of the Continent, since, in his opinion, it was in England that the “true realism” was developing, rather than in Ibsen’s Norway. Therefore, it can be said that Jones’s Englishness was definitely one of his defining features (Lindroth 245).

From the very start of his career, Jones was regarded as “instrumental in lifting British drama from the level of cheap spectacle and easy entertainment to which it had fallen” (Lindroth 244). Together with Pinero and Oscar Wilde he was seen as forming the forefront of the beginning of the “New Drama” and new realism for the theatre, i.e. one of its most influential precursors: his skills in writing well-made dramas has been and still is very much acknowledged and *Mrs Dane’s Defence* remains one of the most popular plays in English theatre history. (Lindroth 244-245)

ii. Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

George Bernard Shaw thoroughly despised the well-made play and never missed an opportunity to share his opinions: he harshly attacked Robertson, Jones and Pinero for their contrived plots and their melodramatic solutions (“Sardoodledom” Innes 3). However, he was not entirely opposed to the theatre of his time: there was one playwright who consistently retained Shaw’s regard: Oscar Wilde. And even though, as Taylor (88) claims, Shaw “managed to drag the more serious elements

in British drama away from the well-made, realistic drawing-room drama”, he still left one particular area, the area Oscar Wilde was writing in, safe from any major attacks: drawing-room comedy was thus left to “fend for itself”.

Pinero and Jones were very much concerned with commercial success and social acceptance and therefore, their works “lacked precisely the freshness and individuality of vision one expects of great art, instead partaking of the age’s real decadence in manners and morals” (Dietrich 60). Despite their achievements in preparing the field for the “New Drama” to come, their plays were still very much ruled by “social, literary and dramatic conventions”, as can be seen when looking at the endings of their two major plays: *Mrs Dane’s Defence* and *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*. It is therefore even more interesting that, when looking merely at the plots of three of Wilde’s most popular plays (*Lady Windermere’s Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance* and *An Ideal Husband*) there is nothing to indicate that they were not written by Pinero (Dietrich 64-65). The different aspect that Wilde introduced in these plays was an element of “moral ambiguity and relativity into 'well-made' plots” (Dietrich 65). In these plays the rakes usually shine conversationally and also escape moral condemnation; wit is what redeems them: “[t]he temptation is to just go on quoting the aphorisms, paradoxes, and epigrams that give the plays their life [...] and ignore the fact that the plots require them to say things that contradict their wit” (Dietrich 65). Thus, the moral basis of the well-made play is subverted, a characteristic that made Oscar Wilde unique and very popular.

In *The Importance of Being Ernest* (1895), this convention is taken even further: even the slightest pretence of seriousness is eliminated in a plot which concentrates on the “farcical farrago” about two courtiers, two girls who are under the erroneous impression of both being in love with a man called Ernest, an overbearing mother-in-law and a complicated history of a baby left in a hand-bag at Victoria Station. According to Taylor (90), in this play, “all the machinery of the well-made play finds a triumphantly and unarguably proper use”. Oscar Wilde managed to combine the “lyrical ideal of the Symbolists” and the traditional conventions of the comedy of manners and the serious well-made play, but only by adding the well-made play in his parodistic form. (Dietrich 68).

Unfortunately, Wilde disappeared prematurely from the stage; nevertheless, he opened the door for the greater drama to come. First of all, he questioned the idealistic notions of good and evil in the drama à la Pinero, opening the way for later playwrights such as Somerset Maugham and Galsworthy and hereby also showing that wit was not detrimental to the genre. Secondly, he revived

and transformed the comedy of manners, making it a viable genre again for further future development (e.g. Coward, Maugham) (Dietrich 73). Pinero and Jones and the drama they represented were, during the 1890s, already harshly criticised and discredited by writers such as George Bernard Shaw; their contemporary Oscar Wilde, on the other hand, managed to show that the conventions considered by some obsolete for serious drama, were very much acceptable for comedy (Taylor 90-91).

c) 1900-1930: “The Triumph of ‘The New Drama’” (Dietrich 102)

At the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, the initial phase of the “New Drama” came to an end. In the first two decades of the 20th century, which were marked by World War I and the succession to the throne of first Edward and then George, a new atmosphere started arising in Britain: a growing disdain for the past was coupled with young people’s belief that “rebellious youth could take on the whole of history” and that, especially drama, was not indebted to the past. An incredible enthusiasm for the future started taking over all layers of society, a fact which added some pressure on new (and old) writers: it was now required of artists to be constantly “up-to-date, or, better yet, on “the cutting edge” of the avant-garde” (Dietrich 103). This meant that writers such as Pinero and Jones, who continued doing what made them successful in the 1890s, were, by 1910, considered old-fashioned and outdated. Pinero, realising the problem, shyly and rather unsuccessfully, started experimenting with non-realistic forms; Jones, on the other hand, abandoned the stage completely after 1918. (Dietrich 103). This was an age where the new and exciting was worshipped and where the public more and more craved for groundbreaking revolutions; new technologies (e.g. the radio, the gramophone and the cinema) for instance, started stealing the audience from the stage: therefore, that the major dramatists of the period had to very often accommodate “West End commercial principles”: Galsworthy, for instance, decided to introduce elements of the “well-made thriller” into his plays, while Coward and Maugham, later on, made their light comedies even lighter. In the period between 1900 and 1930 there was an increasing success of the “repertory revival and the arts-theatre movement”; the West End had therefore to raise its “sights or lose prestige” and had to deal with more competent and intellectual audiences. Thus, the standards for playwrights and, consequently the quality of their plays, dramatically increased during this time.

(Dietrich 106).

i. **Harley Granville-Barker (1877-1946)**

In the course of his career, Granville-Barker majorly contributed to the English theatre through his work as an actor, director and critic. His most important plays were *The Marrying of Ann Leete*, *The Voyse Inheritance*, *Waste* and *The Madras House* and they were all fashioned according to the plays of the dramatists of the day and he wrote primarily well-made plays: “[l]ike Shaw he wrote dramas of ideas; and like Galsworthy, he was preoccupied with social problems” (Hochman 379). However, according to Hochman (379) in the McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia, there was one thing that distinguished this dramatist from all the rest at that time: Granville-Barker was concerned with what he called “interior action”, i.e. the moral and emotional struggle characters go through and the questioning of their motives.

Granville-Barker’s chief strength lay in his dialogue: “not only does his almost musical phrasing serve to give vitality to individual characters, but he is also a master in the handling of group dialogue” (Hochman 379). Unfortunately, his subtlety contributed to, for a very long time, keep his plays off the stage; and even though he is considered by many critics to be one of the finest playwrights of the Edwardian era, his talent never really translated into a “corresponding success on the stage”. However, he managed to leave his mark on British theatre development by laying the groundwork for the foundation of a National Theatre; and his contribution to the stage (e.g. lighting) rendered him one of the most influential directors of theatre history. (Hochman 379)

ii. **William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965)**

Before the heyday of Maugham’s career, there was a group of writers that further developed the tradition of the well-made play and thus made sure that the genre would survive in a climate of general disdain for its conventions: e.g. Galsworthy and Lonsdale. At this time, Pinero and Jones were already relegated to the background of dramatic life and the well-made play was increasingly regarded as being old-fashioned and outdated. However, Galsworthy managed to keep the genre alive by writing realistic social drama that, above all, dealt with issues concerning the class-system.

His plots were concerned with contemporary issues and thus managed to keep the well-made play safe from extinction. (Dietrich 145, Taylor 110). Galsworthy's most successful play in the early period of his dramatic work is *Strife* (1909) and in it, according to Taylor, as far as structure and dramatic progression is concerned, the playwright almost equals Sardou, while as far as intelligence is concerned, "it matches Shaw, only to excel him in high seriousness". (Taylor 117) Thus, at a time when it was generally believed that the well-made play was "a thing of the past", a genre which could never "give rise to lasting drama in the enlightened twentieth century", talented playwrights managed to give this genre new importance and relevance, and amongst them, one of the most important figures was William Somerset Maugham (Taylor 92).

Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) took over the tradition of the comedy of manners from Oscar Wilde and then passed it on to Noel Coward. Compared to its precursors during the Restoration period, and even compared to Wilde's variant, Somerset Maughman's comedy of manners was relatively polite, "its irreverence (was) mixed with circumspection" (Dietrich 160). At the time, there were still enough people who thought that mere entertainment was a good enough reason for going to the theatre and that is where Maugham succeeded above all: he kept the audience amused and they adored him for it (Taylor 93). However, the playwright did not achieve a major success until 1907 (with *Lady Frederick*), a time when the theatre was definitely "ready for a reaction against the reaction against the well-made play. Provided, of course, that nobody recognized it as such" (Taylor 95, Dietrich 162). It is exactly in 1907-1908 that Maugham became one of the few playwrights to have four plays performed at the same time (Rattigan managed to equal this achievement), and from then on he was welcomed in the West End. His early works were mainly "realistic, often with a comic overlay" (Dietrich 162). The tight well-made structure was typical of his work: he wanted to entertain his audience, which he managed superbly, being, like Scribe, an extremely skilled story-teller. On the whole, he wrote thirty-one plays. (Dietrich 162)

Because of Maugham's conviction that the theatre was there to entertain and not to instruct, his plays were mostly received better by the audience than the critics; reviewers accused him of having a cynical view of the theatre and the playwright therefore had a critical and tense relationship with critics for the rest of his life (Gross 287).

Maugham ended his thirty-year career by writing plays the way he wanted to, completely disregarding the box-office; nevertheless, he did not seem to be able to write "serious" plays

“without falling into cliché” (Dietrich 166). Maugham was convinced that playwriting required the submission to a rigorous craft and the complete self-abnegation when following its rules; however, according to Taylor, Maugham never really managed to bring together the conventions and requirements of the well-made play and his desire to write seriously about problems and issues in real life, in a way that would give the audience the illusionary impression that they were watching real life, un-manipulated by any higher instance. (Taylor 104, Gross 289) When reading his plays of that time, Dietrich (166) claims that one always has the feeling that the playwright was holding back, that he was wanting to experiment and take his craft one step further, but that, in fact, he never had the courage to do so: “His adaptation of the comedy of manners to modern modes has its daring moments but overall seems less innovative than Wilde’s efforts”. But, as mentioned previously, it was enough to keep a genre alive that by many was considered to be doomed to oblivion. (Dietrich 166, Taylor 108-109)

iii. Noel Coward (1899-1973)

When analysing Noel Coward and his impact on British theatre history, scholars do not agree on an assessment. During his lifetime, he was frequently and harshly criticised by reviewers and, to an equal extent, loved and revered by his audience and he was therefore ignored for a long time by serious scholarly criticism. Nevertheless, after his death, John Lahr (*Coward the Playwright*) and Robert F. Kiernan re-evaluated his opus: according to them, his simplistic dramaturgy and his light, elegant and stylish comedy were definitely worthy of attention. Thus, in recent years, there has been a revival of Noel Coward’s plays and a thorough reassessment of his skills and importance for the development of British drama. (Dietrich 167, Duerden 91)

Interestingly, Coward’s huge popularity and the extent of his work might account for the problems scholars nowadays have when dealing with him. During the 1920s and 1930s, Coward was immensely popular: he embodied the “Bright Young Things” (especially after publishing *The Vortex*) and, with his wit and humour, managed to challenge established conventions (Duerden 91). He later became a member of the tamer, “middle-aged ‘Smart Set’” during the 1940s and 1950s and then part of the “Beautiful People” of the 1950s and 1960s. During this time, his reputation and his career started to fade away, primarily due to John Osborne’s play *Look Back in Anger* and the subsequent advent of the “Angry Young Men”. Coward, like Rattigan as well, was dismissed from

public favour, mainly because of his luxurious lifestyle and the fact that he embodied everything the young writers at the time came to despise. (Duerden 91, *British Drama* 169)

Noel Coward still represents one of the most intriguing figures and one of the most under-estimated talents British theatre has had to offer: during his career, he, to a certain extent, ignored Modernism and ground-breaking changes in the theatre world and decided to stick with and perfect the comedy of manners. (Duerden 81) However, his real brilliance as a playwright came from his use of language and not from his plots or his depiction of social issues. In his best plays, language becomes a weapon: “the greater the contrast between the graceful, artificial, crisp lines and what the characters actually do to one another, the finer Coward’s language and the play become” (Duerden 92). His best plays remain his comedies, especially the ones written during the 1920s and 1930s (e.g. *Hay Fever*, *Private Lives*). A playwright of immense promise in the early stages of his career, he provided his audience with a realistic picture of his generation: “nervous, hysterical, self-centred, and possessing a sad awareness of age” (Duerden 92) According to Dietrich (171), Coward’s chief importance to the history of drama was his position as a transitional figure who “built bridges to the future that he himself was not entirely aware of” and thankfully, after decades of being ignored and underestimated by scholarly criticism, his revival and re-assessment in recent years has finally given him the credit owed to him. (Dietrich 171)

3. Terence Rattigan- first success and after

At the beginning of the 1930s, it became obvious that one of the most striking characteristics of British drama in the 20th century was that it remained largely untouched by changing times. As Taylor (146) claims, “British dramatists remained in general wedded to the predominantly realistic theatre of their fathers and grandfathers”, even though they were very much aware of the developments going on around them. This is probably why, even though it was said to be dead, the tradition of the well-made drawing room drama did not die out completely (Taylor 148); the tradition was upheld by writers such as Noel Coward in his later days and was developed further by Terence Rattigan (1911-1977). (Taylor 148, Innes 1, 4).

Throughout his career, and even nowadays, Terence Rattigan has been closely connected to the faith and development of the well-made play, a fact that at the start of his career blessed him with extreme success, but also contributed to his downfall in the late 1950s, since, in a revolutionary time for British drama, he was charged by critics and the audience with being old-fashioned and outdated. In order to assess whether this judgement was indeed correct, it is of vital importance to start the analysis of Rattigan's career at the very beginning, with his first major success, *French Without Tears*.

A) *French Without Tears* (1936)

a) Background

At the beginning of the year 1936, Terence Rattigan was not yet able to support himself as a writer. Despite the fact that he was asked to collaborate with John Gielgud, one of the most influential actors of the time, and Hector Bolitho, he was under immense pressure: two years earlier he had convinced his father, a strict and old-fashioned diplomat, to let him drop out of Oxford and try his luck in the theatre. Reluctantly, Frank Rattigan had agreed, posing his son one condition: if after two years he was not able to live by his pen, he would accept his defeat and allow his father to look for a job for him. In 1936, this "period of grace" was drawing to an end. All his plays, apart from *Gone Away*, which was bought as a nine-month option by Bronson Albery, had been rejected several times and Rattigan's confidence was beginning to dwindle. (Darlow and Hodson 73)

When the two-year period was over, Rattigan had to accept whatever job his father found for him. Luckily, even though Frank Rattigan was most disappointed in his son's choice of career, he did not desert him completely. He contacted a film producer and got young Terry a job as a scriptwriter at Warner Brothers at their Teddington Studios. The contract was to last for seven years with the option to a renewal for an indefinite period; moreover, the pay was more than acceptable. Still, Terence Rattigan was not satisfied. The idea of having to write whatever the studio wanted him to, was not agreeing with him. Nevertheless, he complied. However, after having spent some time on the job, he could not resist temptation and tried to get one of his plays produced: he went to the head of the studio, Irving Asher, and offered him to sell Warner Brothers the rights to *Gone Away*

for only 200 pounds. The endeavour did not end successfully: the studio declined, claiming the play was no good. And since his next assignments did not fare any better, Rattigan was put in the care of another screenwriter, deemed to be more talented, who was supposed to show him how to write scripts properly, thus completely shattering his already shaky self-confidence: this new job was proving to be an absolute disaster (Darlow and Hodson 75).

Nevertheless, without Rattigan suspecting anything, a lucky coincidence changed the tide in his favour. A major production at the Criterion, under the supervision of Bronson Albery, started to lose money, and he needed a cheap production to cover the time until a new, major play could be found and prepared. The play he had bought an option for, but never acted on, a year earlier came back to his mind and proved to be the perfect hole-filler: *Gone Away* was cheap and easy to produce. Casting, therefore, began straight away, signing Rex Harrison and Kay Hammond as the lead characters, and the then rising star Harold French as the producer (Darlow and Hodson 76). The only problem encountered on the way of the play's first performance, was its name: it was quickly changed from *Gone Away* to *French Without Tears* (Darlow and Hodson 78).

b) Themes and Structure

The action of the play is set on the west coast of France, specifically in Monsieur Maingot's cramming establishment. The plot traces the "comic results of the man-hunting activities of a beautiful young woman, Diana", who tries to entice and play every one of the five residents of the establishment at the same time (Darlow and Hodson 83-84). However, under its bright and cheery surface, *French Without Tears* is a "gentle comedy of character, in which each seems for a moment to be faced with what he has most desired and finds that it is in fact what he most fears" (Taylor 148). According to Rattigan's own admission, he followed Anton Chekhov's model while writing this comedy; the play consists of a succession of brief scenes between different characters, which all contribute to reaching the final crisis and consequent denouement. All the characters are of equal importance and are also equally fully developed. The accumulation of small events and revelations leads, in the well-made play tradition, to the final "showdown", where Diana is humiliated and finally forced to leave the establishment (Darlow and Hodson 84).

According to Darlow and Hodson (84), there is one more characteristic that, from a contemporary

point of view, shows Rattigan's indebtedness to Anton Chekhov in this play: as the Russian playwright manages to convey the uneasiness and tension in middle-class pre-revolutionary Russian society in his plays, Rattigan manages to convey a similar idea in *French Without Tears*. While to many theatre-goers at the time, the play seemed to be nothing but futile entertainment, underneath the comedy there lurks in fact a sense of being "at the mercy of outside events" (Darlow and Hodson 85). Behind the characters' everyday life, there lies "a world of political violence which is not subject to reason or argument" (Darlow and Hodson 85). The most straightforward passage in the play concerning politics, is when the student Alan, who is planning to escape the diplomat's life his father has planned for him in order to pursue writing, tells one of the other characters, Commander Rogers, about his novel. The plot concerns two friends who decide to desert their country in the wake of war, being driven by their pacifistic convictions. But while abroad, they start fighting over a woman, very much the same way the boys fight over Diana in the play. Eventually, in Alan's novel, the two protagonists go back to fight for their country, because even though they know that the instinct to fight (the war or each other) is in itself an abominable instinct, they also realise that their reason is not strong enough to fight the urge; nevertheless, according to Alan, their ideal is still very much right and just.

Not all the characters agree:

KIT. (*From his corner, morosely.*) What's the use of an ideal if you can't live up to it?

ALAN. In a hundred years' time men may be able to live up to our ideals even if they can't live up to their own. (FWT 41)

This ultimate triumph of reason over instinct, and the conflict in the human mind between reason and emotion lies at the bottom of *French Without Tears* and many other plays throughout Rattigan's theatrical career (Darlow and Hodson 85):

ROGERS. Because in this case reason tells us something our vanity won't let us accept.

KIT. It tells us that Diana's a bitch.

ROGERS *half moves out of his chair.*

Reason! Reason!

ROGERS subsides.

ROGERS. You're right. We'd better face it. Diana's in love with neither of us, and she's made a fool

out of both of us. (FWT 52)

In Rattigan's plays the "consequence of giving way to overpowering emotions is almost always shame" (Darlow and Hodson 85-86) and that is a feeling that the boys in the play cannot bear. Therefore, according to the group, the only man in their midst who has found the "right" way of living, is Brian.

JAQUELINE. [...] I think [Brian's] too stupid to be bad tempered.

KIT. [...] No, Brian may be stupid but he's right-minded. He's solved the problem of living better than any of us.

[...]

It seems a simple solution too. All it needs, apparently, is the occasional outlay of fifty francs. I wish I could do the same. (FWT 33)

Since he fears intimacy above all, Brian decides to segregate his sexual feelings and urges from the rest of his life; he is not interested in love or in building relationships and therefore thinks that he has found the way to live without being neither hurt nor disappointed. But, in fact, Brian has avoided the problem and not solved it; he has not managed to combine love and sex, real emotions and physical needs and has therefore decided to bar feelings from his life altogether. In Rattigan's plays, the characters' inability to reconcile what they feel in their hearts and their sexual activities, is a "characteristic of their Englishness" (O'Connor 146). Alan, for instance, expresses the major fear of all the young men staying at Miramar, when he declares that "love is only sublimated sex" (FWT 56); he furthermore condemns flirtation and speaks out for sexual honesty and straightforwardness:

ALAN. 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.

[...]

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. (FWT 56-57)

Nevertheless, even though Alan is very eloquent and forceful when expressing his opinions, he is not equally forceful when he has to act on them: "Alan claims to be frustrated by the conventional

mores of his class and background, but does not realize that he also upholds certain of the very conventions he purports to resent.” (O’Connor 147) Alan spends the whole play claiming to be the only one not to fall for Diana’s charms, since he does not condone her unsettling social conventions by chasing men. He fully realises that in the relatively licentious French atmosphere, Diana can be lethal, because she makes men forget their good sense. Nevertheless, when Diana finally confesses to him that he is the only one she wants, he crumbles: “I can’t help it. I shall fall. Oh God! I know it, I shall fall.” (FWT 61) At this stage, he admits to his weakness and also realises that he has to stay away from Diana at all costs, since his self-control is not strong enough to resist her. It is only when Brian gets “the old green light” (FWT 68) from Diana when they are both drunk, but she consequently refuses to sleep with him, when Alan decides to take action: he will proposition her, and according to her answer, he will choose his future: if she is willing, he will stay on in France, if she should refuse him, he will leave and become a writer. Thus, Alan gives Diana all the power and makes his life dependent on her reaction. Eventually, since she declines his advances, Alan starts packing and prepares himself for his new life as a writer, fully knowing that in the process, he has been exposed as an utter hypocrite (O’Connor 147-148).

Diana’s character is quite clearly an ambivalent one. On the one hand, she is represented as a predatory woman, who likes to ensnare men and interfere with their relationships to each other; on the other hand, she is also the only one who stands by her character and thus manages to give full vent to her emotions, without succumbing to the subsequent feeling of embarrassment; she is consequently the most truthful character in the play (Wansell 82, O’Connor 148). Furthermore, she advocates sexual freedom, which is a characteristic not usually associated with the English, but it is nevertheless an attitude towards sex that is a lot healthier than the one the rest of the group hold on to (O’Connor 148). The rest of the residents desperately try to control themselves, in order not to lose their hearts and their dignity, since to them this would be the worst of all fates. Thus, Rattigan has not only turned the well-known convention of the woman-hunting male upside-down, but he has also, for the first, but not the last time in his career, attempted to show the one true vice (in his opinion) of Englishmen: their inability to show and admit emotions and accept love. All the male characters, apart from Brian, make speeches about love, but at the same time do not realise the game that is really going on; they do not manage to look reality in the eye. Brian, as mentioned previously, is the only happy man amongst them, since he prefers to pay for sex, rather than to fall in love; it is safer that way. (Wansell 82)

The most mature and serious love in the play, is that of Jaqueline Maingot for Kit Neilan. The world of *French Without Tears* is generally characterised by a “public-school camaraderie”, in which men feel very secure about their gender roles and at the same time, women (especially Diana) are usually seen as a disruptive force that threatens said relationships between men. (O’Connor 135) Jaqueline, or “Jack”, however, is an exception; she is not regarded as an outsider, since she speaks French and in a rather maternal way takes care of the boys at Miramar. Kit is utterly oblivious to Jaqueline’s feelings for him; a true friendship can exist between Jaqueline and the rest of the men, because unlike Diana, her gender does not threaten them. She is de-feminized and treated casually as “one of the lads” (O’Connor 148).

KIT. [...] I like you so much that it’s sometimes quite an effort to remember that you’re a woman at all.

JAQUELINE. Oh.

[...]

I thought you liked women.

KIT. I don’t think one likes women, does one? One loves them sometimes, but that’s a different thing altogether. Still, I like you. That’s what’s so odd. (FWT 33)

In the play, love is only used in connection to sex. Liking does not involve any sexual needs or attraction and is therefore regarded as safe. Diana, the threatening man-eater, is loved but not liked (“[...] you’re the sort of person that people *like*. But nobody *likes* me.” FWT 45) and Jaqueline, the mother-figure at the establishment, is liked but not loved. At one point, Alan even describes the sort of girl that he would like to fall in love with: according to him, she must have “all the masculine virtues and none of the feminine vices” (FWT 62). This description poignantly characterises Jaqueline: she represents the perfect girlfriend/wife, nevertheless none of the men seem to perceive her that way, especially not Kit: “Love and Jack. They just don’t seem to connect.” (FWT 62) However, in the end, Jaqueline is the only character in the play who exactly gets what she wants, namely Kit to fall in love with her and choose her over Diana (O’Connor 148-149).

Most of the humour is generated by the language of the play: Rattigan draws on the cultural and linguistic differences between English and French in order to make his play funny. French is a romance language, and it is exactly in the expression of love and romance that the residents of Miramar are found wanting. According to Rattigan, an honest display of emotions and sexual desire

is “alien to the traditionally cool and understated British” (O’Connor 142). According to Sean O’Connor (142), Rattigan is very interested, like Edward Morgan Forster, in the English hesitation to feel and the fear of potential mortification that such a display of emotion might entail, both physically and verbally. Hereby, language is one of the major problems because the simplest and most basic concepts evade definition; the subtle nature of emotions is even harder to grasp. By pointing out the characters’ inability to express themselves, Rattigan also points to the inadequateness of language when trying to speak about certain subjects, particularly love and lust: “[s]uch a metaphorical use of the young men’s inability to acquire French alerts us to their inability to express sexual or emotional feelings in English” (O’Connor 143). Thus, for the first time in his career, but not the last, Rattigan addresses the consequences of the verbal inability to express emotions and feelings and the shortcomings of language when trying to do so (O’Connor 143).

Even in his lightest comedy, Rattigan deals with the consequences of unexpressed emotions and unrequited love: the characters that do not manage to express what they think and feel end up desperate and seriously hurt. Kit and Rogers both love Diana, who does not love them and plays them for fools. She loves Alan, on the other hand, who nevertheless does not return her feelings and flees the country. As mentioned previously, the only happy couple at the end of the play are Kit and Jaqueline, but only when Kit, who is oblivious of “Jack’s” feelings throughout the play, is told the truth by Alan. At the end, the two seem to get a happy ending (Darlow and Hodson 86), even though this happy ending was, for quite some time, endangered by Kit’s inability to see the truth and act accordingly.

c) Reception

Despite the gloomy expectations for the first night, the success of *French Without Tears* was immediate; every review (apart from one by James Agate) was as enthusiastic as the audience’s reaction (Wansell 80). The play seemed to inspire “escapist fun” and high spirits, something both young and old were craving for at that time. According to Wansell (81), Rattigan was “speaking for a new generation of young people, in a language that they could understand, but in terms that did not offend the fathers and mothers who paid for their seats in the stalls”.

French Without Tears easily became the most famous comedy of the 1930s, and the “representative

British play of the decade” (Darlow and Hodson 84), since both Noel Coward and George Bernard Shaw did not write anything to equal Rattigan’s first success between 1930 and the war. In this play, the “inequalities of love and the failure to express hidden feelings” are presented in a light tone, a tone that throughout Rattigan’s career would get more and more serious when discussing the same theme. But despite his subsequent efforts to move past it, *French Without Tears* and its immense success would stick with Rattigan for the rest of his life (Darlow and Hodson 84, 86).

B) After the Dance (1939)

His next major play, *After the Dance*, took a while to develop. Rattigan was haunted by the success of *French Without Tears* and conscious that he had to come up with another successful play very soon, otherwise he would have been branded a “one-hit-wonder” by the critics. As one of his fellow-screenwriters at Warner Brothers said, “one was always aware in Rattigan of a deep inner bitterness, no doubt accentuated by the irksome position in which he found himself at that moment. In the Theatre good publicity such as he was enjoying is something to be taken advantage of without delay” (qtd. in Rebellato *After the Dance* xix).

a) Themes

Rattigan did not want to be considered a “lightweight” (Wansell 83) forever; therefore, his next play was meant to be more serious and reflective. In *After the Dance*, the protagonist, David Scott-Fowler, is a hard-drinking writer, who, instead of concentrating on his work, lives a life of pleasure that does not satisfy him. His wife Joan, whom he has been married to for twelve years, shares his lifestyle; but for fear of boring her husband with her emotions, she has meticulously hidden her true feelings over the years, creating the impression of indifference, thus leaving her husband to crave that emotional warmth, that Joan does not give him (Wansell 94). The succession of wild parties that she hosts are an attempt to provide her husband with the life-style she thinks he wants, but her happiness (and David’s happiness) are only a pretence; “[t]he gavotte of pretence each dances round the other is both ridiculous and sad” (Wansell 94). Living with the couple in their Mayfair apartment, is an old friend of theirs, John Reid; in the play, he mostly observes and comments everything that is going on around him, and, as the only character in the play, he sees the truth about

everybody else. He is the one who makes Joan realise that her husband craves nothing more than love and understanding from his wife:

JOAN. Not me. He doesn't want me to be in love with him. I'd have bored him to death if I'd ever let him see it. I know that.

JOHN. It's awful how two people can misunderstand each other as much as you and David have over twelve years. (ATD 51)

Unfortunately, this conversation and Joan's final admission to her real feelings, comes too late. David Scott-Fowler has already fallen for his younger brother's fiancée Helen, who, unlike Joan herself, means to make David a better man and, by loving him and caring for him, means to restore him to former health and glory. Once again, Rattigan tries to show the consequences of emotions hidden until it is too late and of the inequality of love. When Joan finally finds out about her husband and Helen, her reaction is still composed and calm: "[I]et's have a quiet little divorce, shall we, with only the family as guests" (ATD 49). Even in this moment of utter desperation, she does not allow herself to show what is in her heart. Only the audience understands what is really going on beneath the surface, guided by hints such as Joan's absent response to Helen's remark:

HELEN. Thank you, Joan, for taking this so well.

JOAN. Have I taken it well? I didn't know. (ATD 50)

Joan manages to remain a model of indifference and uncaring and her eventual desperate breakdown in front of John ("Oh John, I do need him so much- so much more than Helen" ATD 51) becomes therefore even more heartbreaking. Joan, denying her feelings and wearing a mask for so long, finally has to admit to her friend, and to herself, that all she wanted all along was her husband and her husband's love, but that, partly by her own undoing, she has lost him and their life together (Rebellato *After the Dance* xxvii).

Joan and David are touching characters, especially because of their inability to express their desire and need for each other, and the torment stemming from this inarticulacy is intense. Both are assuming that they are doing exactly what the other one needs and wants. (Bertolini 37) Only at the end of Act II Joan finally admits to her husband that she has loved him all along, but that she did not want to bore him and make him change his lifestyle:

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 bit 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. (ATD 62)

This misunderstanding leads to the characters' undoing. During a party, Joan, outwardly still calm and proper, throws herself from the balcony, knowing that she could not go on living without her husband. After her suicide, the play ends in disillusion (Darlow and Hodson 94): David and Helen turn out to be completely incompatible, and even though David has stopped drinking temporarily, he does not manage to reform himself. Finally it is John who decides to give up his parasitic life, who makes David see the truth: the relationship between him and Helen is doomed to failure, and, eventually, he will drive her to suicide, like Joan.

DAVID. Are you trying to tell me that Helen isn't in love with me?

JOHN. No, I'm not. She's in love with you all right, and you're in love with her. The only difference between you is that in a year's time she'll be even more in love with you than she is now, and you'll undoubtedly hate her like hell.

DAVID. (*Controlling himself*) What makes you think that?

JOHN. The fact that you half hate her already. (ATD 80)

After this conversation, David finally realises that he has to let Helen go, and he goes back to his old habits, slowly but surely drinking himself to death. At the end of the play, because of unexpressed emotions and regrets, all hope has left David's life, and his drinking seems to be as much a way of killing himself, as Joan's jumping off the balcony, even though a much slower one (Darlow and Hodson 94). The only character moving on is John, who has finally decided to become a writer and leave his old life behind (Wansell 96).

b) “The Bright Young Things”

In *After the Dance*, Rattigan deals with his view of two generations: the so-called “Bright Young People”, or “Bright Young Things”, who “put the “roar” into the Roaring Twenties”, by making drinking and constant partying into a way of life, and the more sober and practical generation that followed. As can be seen in the play, the “Bright Young Things” saw their wildness as a conscious rebellious act against post-war society and the way the Great War had made the “world and the very idea of purpose seem absurd” (Bertolini 35). Thus, their disregarding and ridiculing attitude towards all traditional values and conventions is explained. The play, among other things, concentrates on the efforts of a young woman of the new generation to try and save one of these “Bright Young People” from certain decay and death. But the question that arises, while the audience watches the plot unfold, is whether she (Helen) will succeed in her attempt, or whether the downward spiral David and his friends find themselves in, will prove too strong for her and therefore drag her (and the new generation) down with them (Bertolini 35).

c) The “power of implication” (Rattigan Preface 1 xx)

Nowadays it has become commonplace to criticise Rattigan for repressing emotions at all costs in his plays, but for *After the Dance* the opposite is true; the playwright proves impressive skill by depicting the “appalling forces that conspire to make emotions impossible to express”. Even though the characters do not admit to their feelings easily and lightly, the audience is provided with enough information “to chart the violence meted out by one generation on the other, and to endow the tiniest moments with a fierce intensity” (Rebellato *After the Dance* xxvii). In the introduction to the first volume of his *Collected Plays*, Rattigan defined art as being first and foremost an art of “implication” and of knowing exactly “what *not* to have your actors say, and how best to have them *not* say it” (Rattigan Preface 1 xx-xxi). Therefore, one could claim that Rattigan collaborated with his audience: he managed to give the audience hints about the characters’ inner workings- their disappointed hopes, their wishes and their longings- without ever expressing or stating anything openly or straightforwardly. Thus, the audience comes to know the characters more “from what they do not say than from what they do say, and more from when exactly they do not say it”; Rattigan’s art is one of “subtext” and implication: what the characters feel and think underneath the surface is

never expressed clearly; nevertheless, the audience knows what is going on. (Bertolini 37)

Rattigan's ability to create powerful emotions through understatement and restraint is best seen in the party scene, before Joan kills herself. She knows that she has lost her husband to another woman, and she knows that all attempts at winning back her life back and behaving differently are in vain. But never, at any moment, does she actually express any of this; she behaves like a model host. Rattigan manages to build up the tension by indirection and irony and he also succeeds in hinting at the intensity of emotions behind Joan's carefree façade, thus giving the audience clue about her true state of mind. The audience knows how much Joan must be suffering when one of the party-guests starts gossiping about the end of Joan's marriage; the fact of being the topic of a ritual she has taken part in so many times before herself, is a step to her suicide; when she is dead, she becomes merely another story to tell at another party (Rebellato *After the Dance* xxvii).

d) Reception

When first performed in 1939, the play was quite difficult to take for certain critics, since the identification with the characters in the play is not a straightforward one. According to Rattigan's own admission, and as mentioned earlier, *After the Dance* was supposed to be an attack on the "Bright Young Things" of the 1920s by different generation. The main character, David Scott-Fowler, for instance, is reminiscent, not only by name, of F. Scott Fitzgerald, who had a drinking problem as well and at one stage in his life was forced to write screenplays far beneath his own, extraordinary talent. Another writer called to mind while reading *After the Dance* is Noel Coward. Rattigan respected Coward, even though he did not agree with the use of his craftsmanship. And even in later years, when Coward and Rattigan were bracketed together as both writing well-made plays, Rattigan always respectfully distanced himself from his colleague, claiming that Coward belonged to a previous generation and therefore had nothing much in common with himself. He also wanted to reprove Coward for not, in his eyes, having been able to live up to his talent and he himself was not planning on making the same mistake. (Rebellato *After the Dance* xxiv, Darlow and Hodson 94-95). This does not suggest that Rattigan took sides in *After the Dance*, on the contrary; as the play appears now, "it endorses neither old nor young, and instead plays with our sympathies to add layer upon layer of complexity to our identification, building to an ending which defies simple emotional categorisation"; thus, Rattigan was slowly but surely starting to move away from

the well-made play, a development that would become even more obvious at the pinnacle of his career (Rebellato *After the Dance* xxiv).

Even though the play opened to general good reviews, it closed after only sixty performances. One of the reasons for its early closure was probably the “increasing bleakness of the international outlook”. The British public sensed the inevitability of war and was therefore disinclined to sit through a dramatisation of the previous generation’s “disengagement from life”; (Bertolini 36) *After the Dance* is filled with references to appeasement and the gloom of war and the tone becomes increasingly bleak and apprehensive as the play moves to the third act. Furthermore, the play was excluded from the first edition of Rattigan’s *Collected Works*, since the author keenly felt its fate at the box office, and it has not been reprinted until the 1990s, when the critic Craig Brown in the *Sunday Times* claimed that it was “a subversion of the well-made drama for which Rattigan was later to be dismissed by his juniors” (Rebellato *After the Dance* xxiii). Even though it lay forgotten for a long time, it now stands as one of Rattigan’s most powerful and emotionally violent plays (Rebellato *After the Dance* xxx): it shows Rattigan’s individual dramatic vision and his skills as a “sculptor of dialogue, scene, and play structure are fully on display here” (Bertolini 36). In addition, this play already very early showed his will and ambition to get past the regulations and restrictions of the well-made play.

e) The National Theatre Production

After the Dance was deemed by Rattigan to be an absolute failure, since, in 1939, it closed after only 60 performances. Scholars agree that the play’s comparatively unsuccessful run was mostly due to the looming war and not to the play’s quality; nevertheless, the play was not included in Rattigan’s *Collected Plays*, since the playwright deeply felt its failure and therefore, in the following decades, the play remained untouched for nearly six decades. *After the Dance* was finally televised in 1994 and it also received a touring production in 2002; however, the National Theatre production in summer 2010 was its first revival in London for more than 70 years (*Telegraph*).

As Charles Spencer from the *Daily Telegraph* claims in his review, plays are usually neglected for the simple reason that they “aren’t much good”; however, in Thea Sharrock’s production, “the play emerges as a piece that can stand comparison with Rattigan’s greatest works, such as *The Deep*

Blue Sea and The Browning Version” (*Telegraph*). With Nancy Carroll and Benedict Cumberbatch in the leading roles, the director manages to uncover all the subtlety behind Rattigan’s work, and with an impressive 1930s design for the characters’ Mayfair apartment (by Hildegard Bechtler), she succeeds in perfectly conveying the lavished and luxurious atmosphere the group of middle-aged hedonists live in. Through outstanding performances, not only by the two main actors, but also by Adrian Scarborough as Cliff, the parasitic best friend with uncommon insights into humanity, and by Faye Castelow as Helen, the naïve but determined new girlfriend, the hidden emotional depths behind Rattigan’s piece of work are impressively revealed. Thus, Sharrock’s attention to every microscopic detail manages to revive a play that for such a long time lay forgotten.

(*Telegraph*, *Guardian After the Dance*, *Evening Standard*)

According to Michael Billington from The Guardian, British theatre every few years re-discovers Terence Rattigan’s opus with an “air of astonished surprise”; this outstanding production leaves the audience and the critics alike with the conviction that an under-estimated and neglected classic has finally received the honour it deserves (*Telegraph*) and has also reminded the theatre world that Rattigan should indeed finally be accepted as one of the “supreme dramatists of the 20th century” (*Guardian After the Dance*).

C) *The Winslow Boy* (1946)

a) Background

Between 1939 and 1946, after, in his eyes, the flop of *After the Dance*, Rattigan tried very hard to reach the same popularity that he experienced with *French Without Tears*: the three plays that he wrote (*Flare Path* 1942, *While the Sun Shines* 1943 and *Love in Idleness* 1994) did well, but nothing prepared the audience and the critics for his next major play, *The Winslow Boy*. It was a surprise that after *After the Dance* and Rattigan’s attempt at taking the well-made play a step further, he wrote a “full-dress revival of the well-made drawing-room drama” (Taylor 150). Despite the fact that the “scene à faire”, i.e. the proclamation of the final verdict, is not actually included in the play, Rattigan nevertheless manages, by providing the necessary information via the accounts of secondary characters, to express its full dramatic impact. The plot of the play recalls the Archer-

Shee case of 1908, and it does so very much in the tradition of *Mrs Dane's Defence* (Taylor 150). But despite its traditional structure, *The Winslow Boy* would finally project Rattigan to the Olympus of English playwrights.

Before he started writing the play, Rattigan encountered one major problem: usually, he would begin his creative process with characters, relationships and/ or ideas and would work out the rest accordingly; this time he found himself faced with an already worked out plot, and he had to invert his writing process. In Rattigan's own words: "I found it a dreadful task and, after hurling the play many times into my mental waste-paper basket, I decided that the only way that the impossible equation would work out was by dint of some judiciously concealed cheating" (qtd. in Rebellato *The Winslow Boy* xx). This resulted in Rattigan's decision to keep the court scene and other public scenes off stage; thus, some information had to be conveyed differently, but Rattigan did not want to introduce the contrived device of a character that only passed on information to other characters. Therefore, some other way had to be found and it was finally managed by introducing the press' growing interest for the case, as a small man's fight against the establishment (Darlow and Hodson 141).

b) Themes

The play follows the fate of a young naval cadet, Ronnie Winslow; after being expelled for stealing a postal-order for 5s, his father does everything in his power to get his son cleared from all charges. As Taylor (151) claims, the piece is a "deliberate, self-conscious piece of revivalism". This genre gave Rattigan various theatrical advantages: through technical devices, the legal story could be introduced in the plot without any problems and it also provided Rattigan with "a formal language with which to conjure up a family living on the other side of two world wars" (Rebellato *The Winslow Boy* xix). In fact, the play relies on the distance between the Edwardian era and the post-war British period it was written in, for its "thematic resonance" and is therefore "essentially British in structure, theme, and intended audience" (Morra 748). Rattigan manages to give some of his characters, e.g. Sir Robert Morton, the lawyer, the verbal stiffness of the Edwardian era and thus manages to successfully revive the style of authors such as Granville Barker or Galsworthy:

SIR ROBERT. It is interesting to note that the exact words he uses on such occasions are: Let Right be done.

ARTHUR. Let Right be done? I like that phrase, sir.

SIR ROBERT. It has a certain ring about it- has it not? (*Languidly.*) Let Right be done. (TWB 47)

By keeping the main action (the “scene à faire”) away from the court and at the family’s home, Rattigan is able to introduce more emotional concerns that further complicate the story. In fact, the play’s focus on the family and the trial’s consequences on their every-day lives, is one of the most striking features of *The Winslow Boy*. Ronnie’s father, Arthur Winslow, gradually loses his health, Dickie, the older brother, has to give up his undergraduate career, and Catherine, the sister, loses her fiancée. Ronnie’s mother Grace finally confronts her husband about his motives for the fight that is having extreme consequences for all the family members:

ARTHUR. (*Quietly*) For Justice, Grace.

GRACE. That sounds very noble. Are you sure it’s true? Are you sure it isn’t just plain pride and self-importance and sheer brute stubbornness?

ARTHUR. (*Putting a hand out*) No, Grace. I don’t think it is. I really don’t think it is-

GRACE. (*Shaking off his hand*) No. This time I’m not going to cry and say I’m sorry, and make it all up again. I can stand anything if there’s a reason for it. But for no reason at all, it’s unfair to ask so much of me. (TWB 60)

Grace desperately tries to preserve the unity of the family and its “normality”, and, as in many other plays, it is indicative of Rattigan’s concern with the interplay of private and public, that has also a strong meaning in his own life. As Rebellato (*The Winslow Boy* xxv) claims, “Rattigan’s keen delineation of this family sets up parallels which open up the simplistic court room drama that is unfolding”. What is very interesting in the play is that, even though every court scene is meticulously kept off stage, the spirit of cross-examination is all-pervasive. Robert Morton’s interrogation of Ronnie, which is also one of the most powerful scenes of the play, is anticipated by Arthur’s financial questioning of Catherine’s suitor and his own interrogation of Ronnie: “[i]f you tell me a lie, I shall know it, because a lie between you and me can’t be hidden” (TWB 28). Ronnie is passed from interrogation to interrogation, and what they all have in common is their “patriarchal ferocity, their implacable and arbitrary decisions of right and wrong” (Rebellato *The Winslow Boy* xxv). So, despite the consequences to the entire family, Rattigan lets Arthur’s personal interest shape all we see and get to know about the Winslows and their fate (Rebellato *The Winslow Boy* xxiv)

An opposing perspective is introduced by Catherine, the suffragette daughter. Her calm and cool demeanour gives her a certain distance from the rest of the family. She is the only character, apart from Robert Morton, who has an objective perspective of the whole affair, and she also considers its political aspect and voices the play's dominating debate: "the distinction between the technical employment of the law and her passionate advocacy of human rights" (Rebellato *The Winslow Boy* xxv). The play, as it is typical of Rattigan, tries to analyse the relationship between heart and head, in *The Winslow Boy* acted out by Catherine and Sir Robert Morton. While Catherine, at first, gives the impression that she would always choose her heart over her convictions ("[i]f there's ever a clash between what I believe and what I feel, there's not much doubt about which will win" TWB 32), she ends up doing the opposite, when she has to choose between her political convictions and her affection for John (Rebellato *The Winslow Boy* xxvi). Sir Robert, on the other hand, gets emotionally engaged in the case, much in contrast to his initial cold and distant attitude; the two characters seem to substitute and to constantly stand in contrast to each other (Rebellato *The Winslow Boy* xxvi). Moreover, while the men (Arthur and Morton) focus on the mere facts of the case, Catherine takes the discussion a step further:

CATHERINE. (*Quietly*) 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 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. (TWB 71)

She, as the only characters, acknowledges that there is more to this trial than just the question of whether Ronnie is guilty or innocent. During a conversation with her fiancée, whom she eventually loses, because of the scandal involving her family, she voices her concern for the state of the country (Darlow and Hodson 144): "[...] if ever the time comes that the House of Commons has so much on its mind that it can't find time to discuss a Ronnie Winslow and his bally postal order, this country will be a far poorer place than it is now." (TWB 72)

At the end, the Winslow family wins the court case, a fact that is announced by the maid, the only family member at the trial, but every single character has sustained lasting damage in the process. But it is clear that to Rattigan the final victory is not the main subject of the play; the final confrontation between Catherine and Sir Robert seems to be far more important, since the play

increasingly focuses on these two characters. Catherine's admiration for Sir Robert grows throughout the play, especially when she hears that he has passed over the chance to become Lord Chief Justice in order to finish the case. Similarly, Sir Robert has started to respect Catherine's intellect and her passion for social issues. The scene starts with Catherine asking Sir Robert why he has let such an incredible opportunity pass by and why he is so keen to prevent people from knowing what he is really like. Sir Robert responds that he tries to hide his emotions because "[...] as a lawyer I must necessarily distrust them. [...] Emotions muddy the issue. Cold, clear logic- and buckets of it- should be the lawyer's only equipment." (TWB 94). As typical of Rattigan, the main character is afraid to show what he truly feels and thus lives a life of deceit and pretence. But the conversation swiftly moves on to the very core of the play's theme: Sir Robert admits to have wept in court because

SIR ROBERT. [...] right had been done.

CATHERINE. Not justice?

SIR ROBERT. No. Not justice. Right. It is easy to do justice- very hard to do right. (TWB 94- 95)

Catherine finally asks him how he can reconcile his support for the Winslow case with his political beliefs.

SIR ROBERT. Very easily. No one party has a monopoly of concern for individual liberty. On that issue all parties are united.

[...]

CATHERINE. No. Not all parties. Only some people from all parties.

SIR ROBERT. [...] We can only hope, then, that those same people will always prove enough people. [...] (TWB 95)

The two characters, even though radically opposite at the start of the play, have, in the end, found a common ground and part with mutual respect. It is not a happy ending in the conventional sense of the word, but a happy ending characteristic of Rattigan. The audience understands that the characters will keep living their lives, even though strongly shaken by the events: Catherine, for instance, has completely given up the hope for emotional fulfilment, but at the same time finds gratification in doing her duty and fighting for an ideal (Darlow and Hodson 145).

c) Reception

Despite Rattigan's deliberate use of the conventions of the well-made play, with a single drawing-room setting and a tight dramatisation of the impact of social problems and issues on a domestic environment, the play is more a "commentary upon, if not a reinvention of, an Edwardian dramatic tradition" (Morra 753). *The Winslow Boy* is not a "problem play", unlike the plays by Jones and Pinero that provided Rattigan with the structural model for his story; it rather explores individual perceptions and reactions. Therefore, by using the traditional frame of a "problem play", Rattigan was able to subvert its convention and find a new focus for drama: "His approach to their (the characters') pursuit of the case at great personal, social, and economic cost is ambivalent, if not inherently critical" (Morra 753).

The Winslow Boy, first performed in London in 1946, finally made Rattigan into one of the most popular and best-known playwrights of the era and at the same time it marks the beginning of a ten-year period in which Rattigan's plays and first nights would get serious critical attention and acclaim. "Recognition began to grow of the scope of his ambitions, the sensitivity of his craft and the complexity of his emotional choreography" (Rebellato *The Winslow Boy* xxix).

4. The pinnacle of Terence Rattigan's career

After the production of *The Winslow Boy*, Rattigan entered one of the most productive phases of his career. In the space of two months, Rattigan wrote three plays: *The Browning Version*, *Perdita* and *High Summer*, which he gave to Hugh "Binkie" Beaumont, the leading theatre producer of that era. The plays, especially *The Browning Version* were meant for John Gielgud, who previously had refused to play Sir Robert Morton in *The Winslow Boy* and at first, it seemed Rattigan's wish might be fulfilled (Wansell 166-167). Unfortunately, Gielgud retreated from the project, and for some time it seemed as if the plays would never be performed. Rattigan, however, did not want to give up; Gielgud was later replaced by Maurice Evans and after a lot of trouble, the plays were finally performed in 1948 at the Phoenix Theatre in London as a double-bill consisting of two one-acters, *The Browning Version* and *Harlequinade*.

A) *The Browning Version* (1948)

a) Themes

The reason why Rattigan fought more for this play than for any other, was that the main theme was very dear to his heart- he would return to it many more times throughout his career. For the first time, he dramatically analysed the “pain and loneliness that lie behind the restraint and reticence of English society, and especially the upper middle classes” (Wansell 170). Like in *After the Dance*, for instance, Rattigan intended to show what happens to characters who live behind a façade all their lives and to reveal what is concealed behind their mask; he managed to do so in *The Browning Version*, creating an intense one-act play that from the very beginning captivates the audience’s attention. (Wansell 171)

The Browning Version is set in an English public school, most likely Rattigan’s Harrow; it represents a “painful study of reticence and humiliation” (O’Connor 189). Andrew Crocker-Harris, a classics teacher at the school, is a character who has not been able to reach the promise of his potential throughout his life. Having to retire early from his job, mostly for health-reasons, he also shows a mental weariness, not having managed to inspire any of his students and also having to resign himself, as he sees it, to his wasted life. In every way a failure, Crocker-Harris has accepted his dreary and unhappy life and therefore does not even attempt to save his troubled marriage. He knows very well that over the years he has not been able to give his wife the love she wanted and therefore has taken a younger lover now, ironically one of Crocker-Harris’s younger colleagues, Frank Hunter. When, at the end of the play, the two characters confront each other, Crocker-Harris admits that, despite the fact that she has repeatedly cheated on him, his wife is not the only one to blame for their misery:

ANDREW. [...] You see, my dear Hunter, she is really quite as much to be pitied as I. [...] Both of us needing from the other something that would make life supportable for us, and neither of us able to give it. Two kinds of love. Hers and mine. Worlds apart, as I know now, though when I married her I didn’t think they were incompatible. In those days I hadn’t thought that her kind of love, the love she requires and which I was unable to give her- was so important that its absence would drive out the other kind of love- the kind of love that I require and which I thought, in my folly, was by far the greater part of love. (TBV 50-51)

Having been completely oblivious to the facts and ways of life, Andrew freely admits that he is a complete failure in every aspect of his existence. After eight years in the school, Crocker-Harris has turned from an idealistic classics teacher, into a dried up, disillusioned old man who is disliked by his colleagues and feared by his pupils (“[t]he Himmler of the lower fifth” TBV 32). His ambition to be able to pass on his passion for Greek literature to the many school-boys has vanished in the course of time. At the start of the play, he is very much aware of all his failures and suffers immensely under them (Darlow and Hodson 155). Nevertheless, Crocker-Harris never openly shows his feelings and his pain. Even when he is humiliated by the headmaster, and even in the face of his wife’s cruelty, who constantly abuses him and rubs her affair with Frank Hunter into his face, he stays outwardly calm and indifferent (Darlow and Hodson 155): “[y]ou can’t hurt Andrew, he’s dead.” (TBV 45)

TAPLOW. Anyway, the Crock isn’t a sadist. That’s what I’m saying. He wouldn’t be so frightening if he were- because at least it would show he had some feelings. But he hasn’t. He’s all shrivelled up inside like a nut and he seems to hate people to like him. (TBV 6)

Years of hidden and pent-up emotions are finally released, when one of the pupils Andrew gives extra lessons to, gives him a Robert Browning translation of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* as a present, with the dedication: “God from afar looks graciously upon a gentle master” (TBV 40); for Crocker-Harris, this gesture is a sign that all his toils have not been in vain, that he has indeed managed to infuse some inspiration into his pupils; his life has not been a complete and utter failure after all:

ANDREW. I am not a very emotional person, as you know, but there was something so very touching and kindly about his action [...] (TBV 41)

b) Millie Crocker-Harris- a casualty of incompatible love

Unfortunately, the moment of happiness and satisfaction does not last. Millie, Crocker-Harris’s wife, cannot stand the idea of her husband not being miserable, since she herself sees no escape from her own desperate situation. Especially in front of her lover Frank, whom she feels slipping

away, she wants to further humiliate Andrew:

MILLIE. My dear, because I came into this room this afternoon to find him [Taplow] giving an imitation of you to Frank here. Obviously he was scared stiff I was going to tell you, and you'd ditch his remove or something. I don't blame him for trying a few bobs' worth of appeasement. (TBV 42-43)

And when confronted by Frank as to what possible motive she could have had for so blatantly destroying her husband's last hope:

MILLIE. Well, why not? [...] Why should he be allowed his comforting little illusions? I'm not. (TBV 43)

But her actions backfire. Frank, having finally seen her in all her meanness and desperation, does not want to have anything to do with her anymore:

FRANK. Forget? If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget that little glimpse you've just given me of yourself.

MILLIE. Frank- you're making a frightening mountain out of an absurd little molehill.

FRANK. Of course, but the mountain I'm making in my imagination is so frightening that I'd rather try to forget both it and the repulsive little molehill that gave it birth. But as I know I never can, I tell you, Millie- from this moment you and I are finished. (TBV 44)

The general tone of the play is pervaded by "almost Catholic feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment" (O'Connor 190). The action consists of constant cruelties and degradations, not just for Crocker-Harris, but also for his wife. Millie Crocker-Harris constantly humiliates herself when speaking to her lover: she desperately tries to salvage their affair. Frank cannot return her feelings and is increasingly tiring of her. Nevertheless, Millie, despite knowing the truth, throws herself at him, hoping to be able to persuade him to love her.

MILLIE. [...] I shan't see you for six weeks.

FRANK. (*lightly*) You'll survive that, all right.

MILLIE. Yes, I'll survive it- [...] but not as easily as you will.

(Frank says *nothing*.)

I haven't much pride, have I? (*She crosses to FRANK and stands above the easy chair, approaches him.*) Frank, darling- [...] I love you so much.

(FRANK *kisses her on the mouth, but a trifle perfunctorily and then rises and breaks quickly away, as if afraid someone had come into the room. [...]*) (TBV 10)

But despite his coldness, Millie does not want to give up: she tries to make Frank feel guilty, by discussing a recent humiliation he has inflicted upon her: Frank had forgotten that the Crocker-Harrises had invited him to watch the cricket with them and therefore, when he turned up, he watched the match in a box with a more successful teacher and his wife. Thus, Millie felt even more slighted, because it made her realise the full extent of her situation and isolation, i.e. the lack of money and popularity, due to her husband's unsuccessful life.

MILLIE. [...] I know you're not in love with me- but haven't you ever been in love with anyone? Don't you realize what torture you inflict on someone who loves you when you do a thing like that? (TBV 13)

Millie's dependency on Frank foreshadows Hester Collyer's in *The Deep Blue Sea*; in general, the character of Millie Crocker-Harris can be regarded as the first of a line of passionate, unsatisfied female characters in Rattigan's career. Frank cannot return her love and her husband has never made her happy; all her life is a mere disappointment and she finds herself growing older and meaner before her time. The only pleasure she still finds in her existence is to humiliate her husband whenever possible. Every blow she throws is "aimed and calculated to wound" (O'Connor 192). If she cannot be happy, why should he?

c) Andrew Crocker-Harris- the failed schoolmaster

Crocker-Harris precarious situation is further aggravated when he is finally confronted with how he is perceived in the school, by his colleagues and by his pupils: they call him "[t]he Himmler of the lower fifth" (TVB 32):

ANDREW. I knew, of course, that I was not only not liked, but now positively disliked. I had realized too that the boys- for many long years now- had ceased to laugh at me [...] Perhaps it was my illness [...] Not a sickness of the body, but a sickness of the soul. At all events, it didn't take much discernment on my part to realize I had become an utter failure as a schoolmaster. Still, stupidly enough, I hadn't realized that I was also feared. 'The Himmler of the lower fifth!' I suppose that will become my epitaph. (TBV 34)

By having been confronted with what he has become, Crocker-Harris finally decides to give his life a turn; and even though it is just a small step, he manages to preserve some of his self-respect in the end, unlike his wife. The headmaster had refused to grant him a badly needed pension, and, in order to embarrass him further, had also asked him to give up his right to speak last at the end-of-term prize giving. And even though he agreed at first, being so used to the humiliation and indifference in his life, he changes his mind in the end, thus managing to win back at least part of his self-esteem (O'Connor 193).

Andrew even manages to win Frank's sympathies, despite their difficult relationship:

FRANK. [...] what I did I did cold-bloodedly out of weakness and ignorance and crass stupidity. I'm bitterly, bitterly ashamed of myself, but, in a sense, I'm glad you know, [...] though I'd rather a thousand times that you'd heard it from me than from your wife. I won't ask you to forgive me. I can only tell you, with complete truth, that the only emotion she has ever succeeded in arousing in me she aroused in me for the first time ten minutes ago- an intense and passionate disgust. (TBV 50)

Nevertheless, Crocker-Harris does not care for the explanation. As mentioned previously, he is the only one who understands, if not condones, his wife's behaviour. He knows that, if he had not been so naive as to think that his love and her love were compatible, if he had only known more about life and love, he would never have married her and he would have saved them both a lot of pain and despair. Because, in the end, they both have hurt each other, and they both have made each other miserable.

d) A play of repression and despair

The whole play is pervaded by deceit and falsity. Characters who do not express their feelings and incompatible relationships are at the core of the plot and their full destructive force is shown for the first time in one of Rattigan's writings. He shows that lies and deceit in personal relationships and emotional repression only lead to unhappiness; not just to personal misery, but also to the betrayal of integrity and beliefs. The characters in *The Browning Version* all inhabit an "emotional wasteland of unsatisfied longings", in which emotions and life have nearly faded away over the years (Darlow and Hodson 156-157). Crocker-Harris knows that at only forty years of age, he has become old before his time, which is partly connected to his disillusionment and his feeling of failure. It is interesting to note, that part of the reason for his failure as a schoolmaster is due to the fact that over the years Crocker-Harris has increasingly encouraged his pupils to laugh at him. By playing up to their delight about his clumsy figures of speech and his "mannerisms" (Darlow and Hodson 157), he has tried to make up for his natural inability to make people like him. He even tries to explain his behaviour by claiming that more things are taught to young minds through laughter than through serious teaching; nevertheless, he also realises that thus he has compromised his ability to communicate his passion for the great classical literature. Consequently, it can be said that by pretending to be someone else, by being afraid to show his true nature, he has betrayed himself and also the literature he loves so much. This betrayal, or "sickness of the soul" (TBV 34), as he himself describes it, is at the core of his failure (Darlow and Hodson 157- 158).

The denouement is a further example of Rattigan's extraordinary artistry; instead of rounding off the play by letting Crocker-Harris die of his heart disease, for instance, which would have won him the acclaim of both critics and audience, he chose to let the "colourless schoolmaster" (Darlow and Hodson 159) live on, since death or suicide would have been too easy a way out. But unfortunately, by giving his play an unconventional ending, he upset most of the more conventional theatre-goers. Nevertheless, despite being inconclusive, the ending of the play is more in character with what Rattigan was trying to say and it also once more shows that Rattigan was, contrary to popular belief, not at all enslaved to the rules of the well-made play; on the contrary, he always tried to subvert its most contrived and unrealistic conventions. In fact, the playwright kept most of his endings unresolved (e.g. *The Deep Blue Sea*, *After the Dance*), even though *The Browning Version* is probably the first one where he took a calculated risk, "deliberately leaving the play unresolved, in the hope of making the audience continue to ponder the implications of what had been placed

before them” (Darlow and Hodson 160). Crocker-Harris, despite his last act of defiance, which does indeed restore some of his dignity, still has to try and live on, knowing that he has failed as a schoolmaster and also as a husband. His problems are not solved in the end, and they will continue to haunt him for the remainder of his life. This is one of the messages that can be found in most of Rattigan’s mature plays: human beings have to accept themselves and their vices and failures, despite the pain caused by such realisations, otherwise living becomes impossible. This ending very much foreshadows Rattigan’s denouement in *The Deep Blue Sea*, where the main character Hester Collyer also decides to live on, despite her loss and the pain it causes her, and also despite the fact that she knows that suicide might, in many ways, be the easier way out. According to Rattigan, there can be no hope without self-knowledge; deluding oneself, even though very comforting, eventually only leads to death. Human beings, ultimately being “the masters of their own fate” (Darlow and Hodson 160), have to come to terms with their lives, their regrets and their actions and they have to do it by themselves. Love and friendship can help in moments of need, but in the end, everybody is on their own. This idea did not agree with many of the critics and theatregoers of the time, since they perceived it to be unnecessarily bleak for a play, but, when looked at with more objective eyes, Rattigan’s opinions in this case are neither bleak nor comforting: “Rattigan’s position is profoundly humanistic” (Darlow and Hodson 160).

B) The play of ideas debate

Early in the year 1950 Rattigan experienced a major setback. Despite the success of *The Browning Version*, his subsequent project, a play based on the life of Alexander the Great (*Adventure Story*) was not as popular. The theme had interested Rattigan for quite a while, and he had invested a lot of energy and enthusiasm in writing it and getting it produced. Nevertheless, it opened to lukewarm receptions and did not survive very long. This failure revived the feeling in Rattigan that, despite his many attempts, he “was still doomed never to be taken seriously, at least by those sections of English literary society who set themselves up in judgement on what was good or bad” (Wansell 205). Therefore, full of anger and resentment, he started defending *Adventure Story* in a series of articles, in which he openly stated for the first time that “[p]lays should be about people rather than ideas” (qtd. in Darlow and Hodson 178). By writing this essay he made himself a target to all those people who at the time were attacking the well-made play, even though he did not realise the huge

extent of the consequences of his actions at that time (Wansell 206).

The essay *Concerning the play of ideas* was published on 4 March 1950 in the influential *New Statesman* and in the first few paragraphs Rattigan's intentions were already made very clear:

[...] I am in fact a heretic from the now widely held faith that a play which concerns itself with, say, the artificial insemination of human beings or the National Health Service is of necessity worthier of critical esteem than a play about, say, a mother's relations with her son or about a husband's jealousy of his wife. I further believe that the intellectual *avant-garde* of the English theatre [...] 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. [...] (Rattigan *Play of Ideas* 381-382)

Most of all, he criticised George Bernard Shaw for having steered British theatre in the wrong direction, by supporting Ibsenite theatre, a campaign that he had started in the 1890s. He claimed that, after half a decade dominated by Shaw's ideas and theories, the time had come for a change and for a re-evaluation of certain Shavian values (Darlow and Hodson 181). The Shavian victory had been so complete, he claimed

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. That refusal is universally and blandly taken to indicate that our minds are empty of ideas, and being so, are despicable. [...] (qtd. in Darlow and Hodson 181)

He plainly admitted that this essay was probably going to land him in "the intellectual and critical soup" (qtd. in Wansell 207), but that, nevertheless, he had to criticize the *avant-garde*:

The misconception on which your cult is founded is that ideology equals intellect. It doesn't. The mis-reading is of Ibsen, who was considerably less interested in his own ideas than were his followers, and considerably more interested in his own characters than were his critics. (qtd. in Wansell 207)

As Wansell (207) claims, it was not the first time that Rattigan "allowed his pen to run away with him"; he did not think of what the reactions to his statements might be and how his essay might tarnish his reputation forever. He concluded his essay very forcefully:

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.

You see, if the ideas are of contemporary significance they tend to divide the audience, and if they are not they tend to confuse it... The trouble with the theatre today is not that so few writers refuse to look the facts of the present world in the face but that so many refuse to look at anything else. (qtd. in Darlow and Hodson 182)

The reaction to the essay was, as mentioned earlier, quite heated. The Scottish playwright James Bridie was the first to respond, defending Shaw:

Rattigan has got him all wrong... He has made possible all our plays- Rattigan's, Priestley's, the whole boiling of them. He has broken the old moulds, with their insistence that there were only four kinds of play; that they must be about murder and/or adultery; and that there was only one way of doing each variety. This has allowed a number of intelligent craftsmen to make their own, individual contributions without being booed by the gallery or bullied by the critics. Rattigan, of all people, ought to be grateful. Does he imagine for a moment that *French Without Tears* or *While the Sun Shines* would have run for a fortnight under the old dispensation? (qtd. in Wansell 207-208)

Many more playwrights contributed to the discussion, most of them taking Shaw's side and condemning Rattigan. Even Peter Ustinov chipped in:

I do not recognise a sharp dividing line between the plays of human relations and the plays of ideas. The best plays are, I believe, a felicitous blend of the two. Ideas are not confined to the dreary social message, and I would go so far as to say that there is no better purveyor of ideas than the play with a deep and subtle human interest. (qtd. in Wansell 208)

Sean O'Casey followed: "[n]o one can write about ideas without creating persons to express them; but it is one thing to have an idea in a head and quite another to place it in a play. It takes a mastermind to do that so that it will appeal to the imagination of an audience. Shaw and Ibsen are masters of this fancy." (qtd. in Wansell 208)

Finally, Shaw himself, who was still alive at the age of 94, joined in the argument. He started his contribution by plainly stating the difference between himself and Rattigan, who in his opinion was "not a reasoner" (Shaw 289): "The difference between his 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." (Shaw 289)

This lack of reasoning on Rattigan's part led him, in Shaw's opinion, to many contradictions and even delusions; nevertheless, everything that he had to say, whether it was true or not, was always entertaining. Shaw continued by professing that

[...] there are ideas at the back of my plays; and Mr Rattigan does not like my plays because they are not exactly like his own, and no doubt bore him; so he instantly declares that plays that have any ideas in them are bad plays, and indeed not plays at all, but platform speeches, pamphlets and leading articles. (Shaw 290)

The playwright further elaborated on the subject by stating that:

Mr Rattigan,[...] being an irrational genius, does let himself in for the more absurd complaint that, though plays must be all talk, the talk should have no ideas behind it, though he knows as well as I do when, if ever, he thinks for a moment, that without a stock of ideas, mind cannot operate and plays cannot exist. The quality of a play is the quality of its ideas. (Shaw 290)

Shaw's response to Rattigan's accusation had its effect, even though the playwright would have never admitted it. In his final contribution to the debate, Rattigan seemed to be clearly "less dogmatic" than he was before: he claimed that he was unrepentant and that all he had been trying to say was that "the successful creation of living characters upon the stage... 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..." (qtd. in Darlow and Hodson 183).

Rattigan's article had a profound effect on his subsequent career and his reputation. Without realising it, he had given ammunition to those critics who had suspected for quite some time that the only thing that interested him was commercial success (Darlow and Hodson 183). Already suspect for his luxurious lifestyle, he was now dismissed by his critics as "facile and unthinking", a branding that was going to stick until the end of his life (Wansell 209).

In fact, reality had little if nothing to do with this image. Rattigan always tried to make sure that his plays dealt with complex emotions, and to ensure that the characters he created would bring these emotions to life. But by attacking Shaw and Ibsenism he did not do himself any favours; he damaged his career to such a degree that it would take him at least another decade to be able to grasp the extent of the debate's consequences. His reputation was tarnished in the minds of the young playwrights who would subsequently win over the theatre world and who, by 1956, would contribute to Rattigan's final fall from grace. (Wansell 209)

D) *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952)

a) Genesis

While the dispute concerning the Play of Ideas was still raging in *The New Statesman*, Rattigan was already working on a new play. This time, more than at any other stage of his career, the play was to be rooted in Rattigan's own, personal and painful experience. In the 1940s, Rattigan was living with one of his lovers, Kenneth Morgan, who had also starred in the film-version of *French Without Tears*. Even though he was deeply attached to Morgan, the playwright refused to give up his other lovers (such as the M.P. for Southend at the time, Henry "Chips" Channon) and his many parties and fashionable guests, in whose presence the young actor felt more and more uncomfortable. Eventually, Morgan left Rattigan for another man and when this new relationship also ended, he committed suicide by ingesting a large quantity of sleeping pills; since this method proved to be unsuccessful, he ultimately gassed himself. His death proved to be a huge blow for Rattigan. Almost immediately he decided to shape his next play around a suicide attempt and base its main theme on the "illogicality of love" (Wansell 216, Curtis Vii).

The play proved more difficult to write than expected; for more than two years Rattigan worked on *The Deep Blue Sea*, constantly rewriting and remodelling, until it was finally ready for production in early 1952. As Rattigan admitted himself, it was "the hardest of my plays to write because of the emotional angle" (qtd. in Darlow and Hodson 196) which might be one of the reasons for the play's immediate success and its lasting appeal to audiences of the following generations.

b) Themes

Like *The Browning Version*, *The Deep Blue Sea* explores various types of love, and how people who cannot agree on a definition of this concept, are dragged into despair by it. Hester Collyer, the protagonist, has escaped the safe haven of her marriage to a wealthy and popular judge and has gone to live with her lover, Freddie, an ex RAF pilot whom, unlike her husband, she loves passionately. On the other hand, Freddie cannot return the intensity of her feelings. Suffering under the situation, Hester chooses suicide, but her plan of gassing herself does not work out; she is saved by her neighbours. This scene opens the play and immediately introduces the audience to the extent

of Hester's despair. When questioned on her motives by her landlady, she replies: "[...] when you're between any kind of devil and the deep blue sea, the deep blue sea sometimes looks very inviting." (TDBS 18) In fact, her suicide attempt was triggered by Freddie forgetting her birthday, a fact that confirms Hester's suspicions that Freddie is unable to return her feelings and is also, to a certain extent, overwhelmed by them. At the same time, she feels unable to leave the dingy flat in North-West London, in which she has been living with Freddy for a year, knowing that her passion is so strong that she would not manage to stay away. As Rattigan explained himself, 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" (qtd. in Darlow and Hodson 2000). Hester knows she is practically obsessed with her lover, but her feelings are too strong, and the only way out of her desperate situation seems to be suicide.

When her husband, Sir William Collyer, who still loves her, comes to see her, she feels unable to even consider to go back to him and to all the comforts he has to offer; now that she has experienced the intensity of love, also in its physical form, she cannot resign herself to live in a passionless marriage, it would ruin her. When Collyer asks her what drove her to her desperate act, she explains further:

HESTER. [...] Anger, hatred and shame- in about equal parts I think.

COLLYER. Anger- at Page?

HESTER. Yes.

COLLYER. And hatred-?

HESTER. Of myself, of course. (*Pause.*) Shame at being alive. (TDBS 21-22)

And when questioned about Freddie's feelings for her, she claims they have not changed, because:

HESTER. [...] They couldn't, you see. Zero minus zero is still zero.

[...]

COLLYER. How long have you known this?

HESTER. From the beginning.

COLLYER. But you told me-----

HESTER. I don't know what I told you, Bill. If I lied, I'm sorry. You must blame my conventional upbringing. You see I was brought up to think that in a case of this kind it's more proper for

it to be the man who does the loving.

Pause.

COLLYER. But how, in the name of reason, could you have gone on loving a man who by your own confession, can give you nothing in return?

HESTER. Oh, but he can give me something in return, and even does, from time to time.

COLLYER. What?

HESTER. Himself. (TDBS 23-24)

Despite everybody else's opinion, Hester knows the full truth of her situation. She has known from the beginning that her way of loving was not Freddie's, and that the only passion she could ever get from him was of a physical nature. Nevertheless, she leaves her home, her husband and all her friends in order to be with him, knowing that she would be unable to fight what she feels. This hopeless situation results in Hester getting more and more frustrated and desperate. But despite obviously being sexually dependent on Freddie, she refuses to admit to her husband that what she feels is mere lust:

HESTER. [...] Bill- in sober truth neither you nor I nor anyone 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- (TDBS 46)

Hester is fully aware of the fact that to everybody else and even to society in general, her actions are unreasonable and illogical; at the same time she knows that she cannot help acting the way she does: Hester does not have the power to fight her love and her passion. Even when her neighbour Philip Welch tries to "reason" with her: "[...] it is really the spiritual values that count in life, isn't it? I mean the physical side is really awfully unimportant- objectively thinking, don't you think?" (TDBS 67)

But his advice is meaningless for Hester; she cannot be "objective", since her passion has taken over every facet of her being; she is aware of the fact that Freddie is "morally and intellectually a mile [her] inferior and has absolutely nothing in common" (TDBS 48) with her, but these considerations are meaningless compared to her feelings. Freddie has become the centre of her world, of her very existence and she proves to be powerless, even in the face of his indifference

(O'Connor 183).

c) Freddie Page and the “vice Anglais” (*In Praise of Love* 247)

It is important to consider that Hester is not the only character who gets hurt by her overwhelming passion and desires. Freddie, an ex-RAF pilot, has started drinking and getting into pub-crawls, which hinders him from flying again and going back to do what he really loves. Hester's passion proves to be too much for him; in post-war Britain, his motto is: “moderation in all things” (TDBS 33), which stands in blatant contrast to Hester's way of living; her dependence on him has turned his life into a living hell. He complains to his friend that he feels out of his depth; he tries with all his power not to get entangled in people's emotions, but he always does: “[t]oo many emotions. Far too ruddy many. I loath ‘em.” (TDBS 39) In his opinion, people's overflowing emotions always get them (and him) in precarious situations; if Hester had died, people would have blamed him:

FREDDIE. [...] She 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 casing 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. (TDBS 39)

Hester's feelings and her reactions to them prove to be too much for Freddie. He does not want to be the centre of Hester's world, because she is not his. He plays golf, drinks with his friends and continually looks for some shallow entertainment to pursue, which is also a way for him to forget the feeling of uselessness in post-war British society; Hester does not have anything anymore, since she has given up her life and her reputation in order to be with her lover; she is now left with nothing. Freddie does indeed love her in his own way, but compared to Hester's absolute love, his kind is much more casual. Therefore, he cannot understand Hester's actions and her desperation, which in turn leads him to his own (near) destruction (O'Connor 184).

As Sean O'Connor (184) claims, the character of Freddie Page could be identified as suffering from what Rattigan, in *In Praise of Love*, calls “the English vice [...] our refusal to admit to our emotions” (*In Praise of Love* 247); he is not vicious, nor is he knowingly callous. He just cannot

help himself, the casual attitude towards emotions and relationships is just an integral part of his personality; he has even managed to reduce love to a mathematical equation: “[t]ake two people- 'A' and 'B'. 'A' loves 'B'- 'B' doesn't love 'A', or at least not in the same way. He wants to, but he just can't. It's not his nature.” (TDBS 39)

These two attitudes towards love, lead to an “emotional game which neither Freddie nor Hester can win”; the two characters have an “evil affinity” (TDBS 62) towards one another and thus make each other's lives absolutely miserable (Gilleman 112):

FREDDIE. [reading Hester's suicide note] You can't help being as you are- I can't help being as I am. The fault lies in whichever of the gods had himself a good laugh up above by arranging for the two of us to meet. (TDBS 36)

Freddie is finally the one who realises that they have become “death to each other” (TDBS 61) and that he therefore has to leave Hester. After his final goodbye, Hester is seen carefully packing her lovers clothes; before breaking down, she “buries her face in his mackintosh” (TDBS 76), trying to recapture the smell of the man she has just lost. It is at the same time a beautiful and heartbreaking image of a woman whose love has died, but who still clings on to the very last moment (O'Connor 185).

d) Dénouement- Hester's choice

When Freddie decides to leave, all her hopes vanish, and since she cannot deal with the situation the only viable solution seems to be suicide again. Nevertheless, she is interrupted in her attempt by the entrance of one of her neighbours, Mr. Miller. Miller is a former doctor who after her first suicide attempt takes care of her and in the play generally functions as a sort of “deus ex machina”, by providing her with an alternative to death and thus ultimately saving her life (Gilleman 113). He does so by confronting Hester with the truth:

MILLER. I'm not trying to decide for you whether you live or die. That choice is yours and you have quite enough courage to make it for yourself--- [...] It takes courage to condemn

yourself to death. Most suicides die to escape. *You're* dying because you feel unworthy to live. Isn't that true? (TDBS 71)

But Hester does not want to listen at first. The only thing she knows is that she is desperate and that she will not be able to face life after what she has lost; she cannot and does not want to live without love and hope. Nevertheless, with a very convincing speech, Miller manages to make her understand that she has to face the loss of hope and the loss of her lover dispassionately; that maybe living without hope can also mean to live without despair:

MILLER. [...] Your Freddie has left you. He's never going to come back again. Never in the world. Never.

At each word she wilts as if at a physical blow.

HESTER. (*Wildly.*) I know. I know. That's what I can't face.

MILLER. (*With brutal force.*) Yes, you can. That word 'never'. Face that and you can face life. Get beyond hope. It's your only chance.

HESTER. What is there beyond hope?

MILLER. Life. You must believe that. It's true- I know. (TDBS 71-72)

Miller reveals himself to be a fellow sufferer. At a certain point in time he came very close to suicide himself, even though it is not specified in the play what he is supposed to have done. All that is mentioned is that he lost his medical licence and that he seems to be more understanding of Hester's situation than anybody else in her surroundings (O'Connor 184):

MILLER. [...] 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. (TDBS 73)

Miller makes Hester understand that, even though nobody can relate to her feelings and her passion, she cannot be ashamed of her emotions. All she can do is to continue living, which is, to Miller at least, the "only purpose in life" (TDBS 72). Thus, Hester decides to take her life in her own hands again, and to continue her career as an artist, even though she has to give up her passions and finally

accept human isolation. The play ends the way it started, with Hester at the gas fire, which she actually lights this time. As O'Connor (187) claims, "[i]t is a small flame of life, not necessarily hopeful, but at least a flame of possibility."

e) The characters as products of their time

All the characters in *The Deep Blue Sea* are deeply influenced by the time they are living in. Hester Collyer, for instance, is a casualty of post-war British society. She inhabits a transitional period in British history, where confusion and reassessment are dominant. The social conventions and traditions of the 1930s were undermined by the war, the class-system and the "role" of women were also turned upside down; thus, the people living during this age are left with no securities and no rules and therefore live in a constant state of confusion. Especially women were empowered both sexually and as labour force after the war and middle-class characters, like Hester Collyer, were given the power to question their traditional role. Hester's world is a broken one, which is also shown by the environment she lives in and the housing situation:

SCENE [...] *It is a big room for it is on the first floor of a large and gloomy Victorian mansion, converted to flats after World War I, but it has an air of dinginess, even of squalor, heightened by the fact that it has, like its immediate badly-blitzed neighbourhood, so obviously 'come down in the world' (TDBS 3)*

The upheaval of traditions and conventions has left her clueless as to what has to be done, and her confusion has consequently brought about desperation and panic. In this context, *The Deep Blue Sea* is not very different from the ground breaking play *Look Back in Anger*, by John Osborne, which would first be performed in 1956. Both deal with the sense of inadequacy and helplessness that was so characteristic of immediate post-war Britain. As O'Connor (180) claims, "[i]n many ways *The Deep Blue Sea* is the examination of the fall from grace of a typical heroine of the 'well-made' school directly into the kitchen sink". (O'Connor 180)

The helplessness post-war British society experienced can best be witnessed in Freddie Page. In his character, the audience found more than an "understanding portrait of a familiar type of Englishman"; he was somehow perceived to be an allegorical figure of the time. Very successful as

an RAF pilot during the war, Freddie Page feels useless and lost in the new society. His skills are no longer required and after having experienced glory and having gained honour in the war, he is not able to come to terms with the present. He realises that he is beginning to age, nevertheless he does not seem to be able to find a suitable job, nor does he manage to keep his life under control, and has therefore started to abuse alcohol (Darlow and Hodson 203): “[...] He does it [drink] because his life stopped in 1940. He loved 1940, you know. There were some like that. He’s never been really happy since he left the R.A.F.” (TDBS 47)

As Darlow and Hodson claim in their Rattigan-biography (203), Freddie “could have been a symbol for Britain itself in 1952”, a symbol for all the people shell-shocked by the war and by their struggle to fit in a new order, a new world.

f) Reception

According to various scholars, *The Deep Blue Sea* is certainly Rattigan’s finest full-length serious play, an assessment that was also shared by the first night audience. After the heated discussion on the play of ideas, Rattigan was, over night, re-established as one of the leading British dramatist of the time. Even the critics were nearly unanimous in their praise of *The Deep Blue Sea*; the only point of concern seemed to be its ending. The critics at the time were of the opinion that Hester should have been allowed to kill herself, instead of living on without anything to live for. Kenneth Tynan, for instance, one of the leading theatre critics of the time, (he would also become Rattigan’s leading antagonist in the years to come), claimed to be utterly disappointed by the last act:

[...] I shall never forgive Mr Rattigan for his last act. It is intolerable: his brilliance lays an ambush for itself, and walks straight into it. If his heroine kills herself, he will merely be repeating the pattern, so he decides to let her live. But he has stated the case for her death so pungently that he cannot argue her out of the impasse without forfeiting our respect... Dishonestly, he makes her insist that she does not *deserve* to live, thus hauling in all kinds of moral implications which are totally irrelevant, since her point was purely that she could not *bear* to live. When, finally, she chooses survival, it is for all the wrong reasons. (qtd. in Darlow and Hodson 201-202)

For the rest of his life, Rattigan kept arguing against this criticism. He claimed that, dramatically, it would not have been right for Hester to kill herself. With all his might he wanted to avoid a sentimental ending, such as found in Pinero’s *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* for instance, which

proves that he was trying to move away from the old-school well-made play tradition, even if it meant alienating some of the theatre-goers. “Whereas in a short play [...] the suicide ending might be logical and conclusive, in the dramatic sense in a play of full length it seemed merely sentimental- like the suicide of Paula Tanquaray” (qtd. in Wansell 224).

Such an ending would have been exactly what the audience wanted and expected, an ending that he would have written in his earlier life, but that now, he felt, was unworthy of his skills (Curtis xi, Wansell 224):

The strongest evidence that the present ending is right is that it is, of all Hester’s fates, by far the least popular. There is hardly a member of the audience who would not prefer her to kill herself- a fact which, for me, would make the so-called 'tragic' ending not tragic at all and highly suspect. Hester’s real tragedy lies in life, not death. (qtd. in Wansell 224)

Rattigan’s ending and the assessment of the audience speaks volumes about his opinions about life and love. To place an unexpected ending after the full extent of the characters’ tragic lives has been revealed, is one of his most striking and interesting characteristics as a playwright. In his opinion, it is absolutely necessary for people (and hence for his characters) to face their lives the way they really are, despite the pain it might cause. Therefore, Hester decides to live, even though fully aware of the fact that she is living for nothing; Crocker-Harris in *The Browning Version* still manages to preserve his self-respect by speaking last at the end of term prize giving; and even Alan in *French Without Tears* is fully determined not to give in to his weakness and to escape the predatory Diana. All these endings show Rattigan’s belief that despite people’s suffering and pain, hope can still survive and that the knowledge of one’s situation in life is always better than to live behind a delusional façade (Wansell 225).

E) “Aunt Edna’s Entrance” (Wansell 233)

After the success of *The Deep Blue Sea*, Rattigan had to suffer two immense personal losses: his father Frank Rattigan and his elder brother died within the space of a few months. This shock led to a sort of frenzy in Rattigan, since he slowly started to fall prey to the fear that he, too, would die

young. He therefore set out, at the age of 41, to work even harder and to live every day as if it was his last. Before his death he at least wanted to complete his “one great play” (Rattigan Preface 1 xviii) that would manage to include his name in the history books (Wansell 233). But without the steadying influence of his father, Rattigan became more and more defensive towards the critics and the public, and this can be witnessed especially in the two introductions to the first edition of his *Collected Plays*. The publisher Hamish Hamilton was preparing this two-volume edition for the autumn of 1953; Rattigan perceived this to be a great honour and therefore wanted to use the opportunity to explain himself and his way of writing (i.e. his credo as a playwright) to the audience and the critics and he therefore very carefully chose the plays which were to be included in the *Collected Plays*. (Wansell 240)

Rattigan was determined to present the first volume as evidence of his successes; it was therefore to include *French Without Tears*, *Flare Path*, *While the Sun Shines*, *Love in Idleness* and *The Winslow Boy*; his two pre-war flops *After the Dance* and *Follow My Leader* were excluded, since they would weaken his argument in the introduction. According to Wansell (240), his choice to exclude *After The Dance* from the first volume, but to include two weaker plays in the second was “evidence of the lack of perspective that was afflicting him at the time”.

The tone of the two introductions was defensive, which showed his vulnerability at the time and his resentment towards audience and critics for having judged him as a “lucky fluke” (Rattigan preface 1, xiv), instead of taking him and his plays seriously. He started his first preface by explaining that the five plays included in the first edition had all been successes, therefore very much liked by the audience. When presenting himself as a serious playwright to the discriminating public he found himself at a bit of a disadvantage, since he could not recommend the plays on the grounds of their rejection by an indiscriminating audience. He was therefore to imply that the fact that his five plays had been popular with a West End audience might have been positive. He claimed that throughout history the audience’s taste had not been as bad as some “snobbish” (Rattigan Preface 1 viii) people had claimed and that therefore there had to be a common reason for his five plays to have been successful, and this common reason, according to Rattigan, was his innate “sense of theatre” (Rattigan Preface 1 xviii), more an innate creative talent than a skill to be learned:

Now although it may be hard to say exactly what sense of theatre is, it is comparatively easy to say what it is not. It has nothing, for instance, to do with those problems of construction, technique, and craftsmanship which may be learnt, as I learnt them myself, by an assiduous study of the

acknowledged models (Rattigan Preface 1 xviii)

“Sense of theatre” (Rattigan Preface 1 xviii) has indeed, according to Rattigan, something to do with the ability of thrilling an audience from the very first moments onwards; it is more the implicit than the explicit that enlivens a scene and the weapons of understatement and suggestion are very powerful in comedy, and also in tragedy. It was, by itself, not a quality that could ensure great drama, but at the same time it was a mysterious talent that all great dramatists shared, including Rattigan himself. (Rattigan Preface 1 xix-xxi)

He forcefully pointed out that he had been criticised by reviewers times and times again for the popularity of his plays and their well-constructed nature and that he had often been reproached with only wanting to please his audience and ensure his position as a popular playwright. What the critics, according to Rattigan, did not take into account was his real talent for the theatre and it was very important to him to make them see it. He did acknowledge though that “[he] could not possibly expect others to know of the high theatrical ambitions that burned in [him] nor of [his] intense longing to be taken seriously as a professional playwright.” (Rattigan Preface 1 xiv) This shows very clearly that the primary aim of this first preface was a sort of self-justification, since, at all times, and despite his many successes, Rattigan was still plagued by self-doubt and by what the audience and the critics might or might not think of him. It was, as Wansell (241) phrases it, “a battle with the ghosts that haunted him fought out between hard covers”.

This craving to be recognised as a serious dramatist is the primary theme of this first introduction. He could never fully understand why success at the box-set would immediately ensure a playwright the criticism and ridicule of certain “high brow” critics and members of the “new literary smart set” (Wansell 241) and that is what he was trying to show in his preface. What he failed to realise, according to Wansell, is that his whole life-style, the expensive cars and parties and his blatant obsession with commercial success and recognition, did not fare well with the British public, who would lavish in understatement and moderation. It was therefore his way of life that was beginning to tell against him (Wansell 241) and this introduction immediately provided his critical enemies with a lot of ammunition (Darlow and Hodson 221).

But if this first introduction was defensive, the second one was an absolute disaster. The second volume of his *Collected Plays* was meant to show his development towards maturity as a

playwright and thus show that he was indeed worthy of the critics' attention and their acclaim. He started the preface by claiming that a play cannot exist in a complete vacuum; unless there is an audience to see it, it is nothing:

[...] But a play can neither be great, nor a masterpiece, nor a work of genius, nor talented, nor untalented, nor indeed anything at all, unless it has an audience to see it. For without an audience it simply does not exist. No audience means no performance, and no performance means no play. This fact, sadly lamented though it may have been over the centuries, by aspiring, talented but unperformed dramatists is hard, I admit, but utterly inescapable. (Rattigan Preface 2 xi)

In order to prove his point, he went on to define his audience:

[...] let us invent a character, a nice, respectable, middle-class, middle-aged, maiden lady, with time on her hands and the money to help her pass it. She enjoys pictures, books, music, and the theatre and though to none of these arts (or rather, for consistency's sake, to none of these three arts and the one craft) does she bring much knowledge or discernment, at least, as she is apt to tell her cronies, she 'does know what she likes'. Let us call her Aunt Edna. (Rattigan Preface 2 xi-xii)

We are told that Aunt Edna "does not appreciate Kafka-' so obscure, my dear, and why always look on the dark side of things?'" , and "upset by Picasso- 'those dreadful reds, my dear, and why three noses?'" ; she is, as Rattigan phrases it, a "hopeless lowbrow" and she can therefore be disregarded by these artists, since she is unappreciative of their work. But, unfortunately, the playwright proves to be an exception: "[...] should he displease Aunt Edna, he is utterly lost." And furthermore: "[t]he playwright who has been unfortunate or unwise enough to incur her displeasure, will soon pay a dreadful price." (Rattigan Preface 2 xii) What Aunt Edna does not like, nobody ever will; and even though she enjoys being teased and bullied every once and a while, she is definitely not to be trifled with, because whatever her opinion, Aunt Edna "will be listened to" (Rattigan Preface 2 xii, xvi).

Rattigan was convinced that he had created an amusing character, who would make his opinion easier to understand for the audience and the critics; Aunt Edna was supposed to defend Rattigan's "well-made Shaftesbury Avenue theatre against the threat of the kitchen-sink revolution" (Rebellato 1956 131). What he did not realise is that, by introducing her, he made himself an easy target in 1950s British society; the plan backfired from the start and even one of his editors, Roger Machell, later recalled that he was not at all aware of Aunt Edna's potential threat to Rattigan's reputation: "I never thought for a moment that it would be used as a stick to beat him with. I've kicked myself ever since." (qtd. in O'Connor 176)

But unfortunately, the harm was done; as soon as the books were published the attacks began. It was assumed that Rattigan was either speaking about Aunt Edna in a patronising way, or “slavishly writing down to her level” (Rebellato 1956 107). “Aunt Edna” became a catch-phrase in the theatrical world; it made Rattigan seem exactly what he was trying, with all his might, not to seem: nothing more than a theatrical craftsman who was determined to gain commercial success, even if it meant to give up his own opinions and ideals in the process (Wansell 242). Rattigan claimed that he could have not written his plays without Aunt Edna: “Aunt Edna, or at least her juvenile counterpart, was inside my creative brain and in pleasing her I was only pleasing myself.” (Rattigan Preface 2 xv) To the young playwrights and new critics of the time this meant that Rattigan had condemned himself out of his own mouth (Wansell 242).

The critics tore Rattigan apart; even his good friend John Barber had no mercy: in the *Daily Express* he openly articulated his irritation:

I know why you are cross. We are disappointed in you now. Your later comedies make us cross. We did praise you, and we have stopped. That is what hurts. [...] 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. (qtd. in Wansell 243)

Moreover, Kenneth Tynan, who would in later years become one of Rattigan's major critics, joined in the artistic outcry: “[t]he greatest plays are those which convince us that men can occasionally speak like angels. The rest, which conspire to imply that angels speak exactly like men, deserve and achieve respectable acclaim, but they must not repine if, finally, their passports to immortality are found wanting.” (qtd. in Wansell 244)

Before publishing the two volumes of his *Collected plays*, Rattigan did not realise in the least how much damage he was going to cause to his reputation. The conflict between quality and popularity had haunted him when dealing with the critics ever since his very first success *French Without Tears*; over the years, he had become overly sensitive, but he had managed to conceal his feelings fairly well until his father's death. Once the one authority figure in his life was gone, he could not help but vent the full size of his resentment towards the critics of the time. When criticising his statements in the two introductions, nobody realised that they were dealing with a severely complex character whose self-esteem was practically non-existent and who wanted nothing more than to be

accepted and respected as a talented playwright. Little did Rattigan know that his attempt at self-justification was going to bring about far more than the immediate, harsh answers of the critics; unfortunately, Aunt Edna, in connection with the dispute about the play of ideas, was going to cost him his reputation and also vastly contribute to his sudden dismissal from the theatre world in 1956. (Wansell 242, Darlow and Hodson 223)

F) Separate Tables (1958)

a) Background and genesis

Very soon after the two volumes of his *Collected Plays* were published, Rattigan was already working at a new play. As in previous cases, the inspiration for his new double-bill, stemmed from his personal life. One of his very close friends, the famous actor John Gielgud, was arrested in 1953 for what was called at the time “indecent behaviour”. Gielgud was fined 10 pounds and his reputation was briefly at risk; furthermore, this event deeply shocked the whole homosexual community in Britain. There were many people, especially Gielgud’s close friends, who feared that the actor would be booed off the stage at his next performance, which would take place only a few days later in Liverpool. But in fact, the opposite happened: the relieved actor was given a standing ovation, a reaction that nobody in the theatre world had expected. (Wansell 251-252)

This event, in addition to Rattigan’s experiences during a stay at a hotel with his mother Vera (the Stanhop Court), led the playwright to conceive a pair of one-acters, dealing with human isolation and culminating in an outcry for social and emotional tolerance (O’Connor 202). He wanted to, once more, analyse the suppression of emotions and the British people’s main vice, the inability to verbalise and show the inner-workings of their minds and souls (Wansell 252). Even though the two plays are in fact self-contained, they stand in close thematic connection to each other, featuring the same supporting cast and with the two protagonists, in each play, played by the same actors. Thus, Rattigan was meaning to imply a close relationship between the problems and dilemmas of the four protagonists in this double-bill (O’Connor 202).

b) Table by the Window

The first play in *Separate Tables*, *Table by the Window*, is set in the dining room of the Beauregard Private Hotel, near Bournemouth, a facility mostly inhabited by long-term residents. It is apparent straight away that the hotel hides lives filled with immense loneliness, concealed beneath a surface of politeness and fake courtesies, replacing genuine feeling and human kindness. Most of the guests are elderly, very much concerned with making their money last, without having to give up the required niceties of respectability. Each resident tries to hide their loneliness and boredom, by filling their everyday lives with meaningless obsessions. Miss Meacham and Lady Matheson spend their days concerning themselves with horse-racing and listening to the wireless respectively; Mr Fowler, a retired schoolmaster, passes his time by organising visits from old students, who nevertheless never show up (“[...] I’m beginning to doubt the very existence of Mr Fowler’s famous young painter friend.” ST 86); and Mrs Railton-Bell fills her empty hours with petty gossip and with harassing her spinster daughter Sybil. Even the manager of the hotel, Miss Cooper, does not seem to lead a happy life: instead of dealing with her loneliness, she throws herself into work and tries to save her guests from their isolation: “[...] I hate any of my guests to feel lonely. [...] Loneliness is a terrible thing [...]” (ST 91-92).

The young student-couple living in the hotel, Charles Stratton and Jean Tanner, seem to represent the new generation, by wanting to avoid social conventions and traditions: “[...] most people aren’t as sensible as we are. They get married and are miserable when it goes wrong. Thank Heavens that can’t happen to us. We’re too integrated.” (ST 95) Ironically, eight months later, they get married and a boy is born who takes up all of Jean’s time and distracts her both from her studies and from the frustrations recently arisen in her marriage. (O’Connor 203-204)

The environment and the presentation of the various characters staying at the hotel, sets the scene and prepares the audience for the events to come. The atmosphere that Rattigan creates from the first moments onwards is one of awkwardness and emotional repression. Each of the guests is trapped in their own loneliness and isolation, a fact that is further enhanced by their separate tables: “each individual is an island, separated from fellow men by an ingrained cultural reticence and politeness”. Every guest eats alone, and even on the rare occasion when they discuss the weather or some other trivial matter, the distance between one table and the other makes sure that the isolation is never overcome, that the loneliness each guest feels, is never forgotten (O’Connor 204).

Table by the Window focuses on the relationship between an ageing model, Anne Shankland, and her former, violent husband John Malcolm. Anne, after having been divorced a second time, has come to Beauregard hotel, in order to look for John and to try and become reconciled with him. John, a former Labour politician turned journalist, on the other hand, has tried to hide at the hotel from the scandal concerning the two characters' marriage: Anne was unwilling or unable to gratify John's passionate needs, which in turn led to him attacking her and consequently being charged for attempted murder and imprisoned. After their divorce, both Anne and John have suffered immensely, Anne not being able to cope with her loneliness and her fading beauty, and John having to give up his promising career as a politician and having to face public disgrace. At the time of her arrival at the hotel, Anne is frightened of her future, and therefore tries to win her ex-husband back. Again, as in *The Deep Blue Sea*, Rattigan shows how different types of love and different needs can lead to destruction, in this case to physical violence. Like the other residents of the hotel, both Anne and John suffer from their loneliness and despair, and have therefore tried to find solace in prescription drugs and alcohol respectively. When talking about her, Miss Cooper and Miss Meacham manage to characterise Anne's personality very well:

MISS MEACHAM. [Anne Shankland]'s not an 'alone' type.

MISS COOPER. Is any type an 'alone' type, Miss Meacham?

MISS MEACHAM. Oh yes. They're rare, of course, but *you* are for one, I'd say.

MISS COOPER. Am I?

MISS MEACHAM. Oh, I'm not saying you won't fall in love one day, and get married, or something silly like that. I'm only saying that if you don't you'll be all right. You're self-sufficient. (ST 118)

Anne Shankland is indeed not an "alone type" (ST 118); her inability, as mentioned previously, to cope with her solitude and the possibility of being alone for the rest of her life, has compelled her to go look for a man who in the past has treated her cruelly, and who still resents her for her own coldness and indifference towards him and reproaches her for having wanted to make a slave of him, a slave to her will and her fancies:

ANNE. If all I wanted to do was to make my husband a slave, why should I specially have chosen you and not the others?

JOHN. Because where would your fun have been in enslaving the sort of man who was already the slave of his own head gardener? 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. (ST 108)

John only married Anne because his craving for her was so violent he could not refuse her anything, even though he knew from the start that their personalities and their different upbringing would lead to a disastrous end. She, in turn, wanted to tame him, to make him her plaything. John rightly assumes that Anne's coming back has nothing indeed to do with her lingering feelings, but more with her fear of living alone and not being able to make people fall in love with her anymore. Therefore, he refuses to listen to her reasons and for a while, at least, manages to resist her desperate attempts to become reconciled. It is only with Miss Cooper's help, who selflessly renounces all her claims to him, that they eventually decide to try again, even though they know that they have little hope of succeeding. Like in *The Deep Blue Sea*, the two characters know that their love destroys them and that their relationship will not make them happy. On the other hand, unlike Hester and Freddie, they know that they would have no hope whatsoever in their lives without each other either, and therefore decide to stay together. As in *The Deep Blue Sea*, love is portrayed as a violent and destructive force. The two characters are dependent on each other and despite all the rational reasons they would have not to be together, they cannot stay away and therefore have to accept their fates (Darlow and Hodson 226): "[w]hen you're together you slash each other to pieces, and when you're apart you slash yourselves to pieces." (ST 121)

The ending in this one-acter is the opposite of the ending in *The Deep Blue Sea*, and it was conceived so on purpose. Rattigan wanted to create a reverse situation and find out what would have happened if Freddie and Hester had stayed together ("Better for evil affinity to torture each other than to be tortured alone." (qtd. in Wansell 250)) This approach can furthermore be seen as a new examination of the main theme in *The Browning Version*: two types of love which are

incompatible and therefore leave the characters desperate and in pieces. Only, unlike *The Browning Version*, in this play it is the woman who cannot, or will not, sexually engage in the relationship, a fact that seems to make the woman's position even stronger in the play (O'Connor 205).

Anne's refusal to comply with her husband's passions can be explained by her being terrified of sex, very much like the spinster Sybil Railton-Bell in *Table Number Seven*; she is "[c]arved in ice" (ST 113). As a reason for her refusal, she explains to her husband that she does not want to have children ("[a] famous model mustn't gamble her figure merely for posterity" ST 106-107); ironically, her having had children would have relieved her fears of living and dying alone. Interestingly, Anne's second husband was as cold and indifferent as she, and therefore the complete opposite of John; the marriage, however, did not work out either and having experienced both extremes of sexual hunger and impotence in her husbands, Malcolm asks her which option she would define as "ideal": "[o]ne who loves you too little- or one who loves you too much?" (ST 89) Their relationship was dominated by two opposite tempers, hers too cold, his too hot and was therefore doomed to failure from the beginning (O'Connor 206).

When Anne arrives at the Beauregard Hotel, she pretends that her meeting with John is absolutely coincidental; her loneliness drives her to try and win him back by deceiving him, and at first it seems as if she might succeed:

ANNE. [...] But it's such a wonderful fluke our meeting again like this, that we really shouldn't waste it. We must see more of each other now. After all when fate plays as astounding a trick as this on us, it must mean something, mustn't it? Don't send me away tomorrow. Let me stay on a little while. (ST 111)

When she offers John to spend the night with her, all of his dreams seem to come true: a night full of consensual sex, something that he never got in his marriage, makes him temporarily forget his resentment towards his ex-wife. When he finds out the truth, namely that Anne was trying to use him in order not to have to live alone, his rage comes back even stronger and for a moment it seems as if he might attack her again:

JOHN. Yes, I can see the make-up now all right. Yes, Anne, I can see little lines there that weren't there before and it won't be very long now before this face will begin to decay and then

there'll be nothing left to drive a man to-

He has slipped his hands on to her throat.

ANNE. (*Quietly*) Why don't you?

He stands looking at her for a moment and then pushes her violently away.[...] (ST 115)

Malcolm just does not understand how she could have deceived him again:

JOHN. The only way *you* could think of, of course. You wouldn't have thought of writing me a letter, or ringing me up, or telling me the truth in there? (*He points to the dining-room*) Oh no. You had to have your conquest, you had to have your unconditional surrender, and if you could do it by lying and cheating so much the better. It makes the greater triumph. (ST 115)

The day after, it is finally Malcolm's "canoodle" (Miss Cooper, ST 110) who opens his eyes to the truth: Anne is too proud and too afraid of the future, she did not want to beg John for his affection for fear of being turned down:

MISS COOPER. [...] If she'd shown you she was unhappy she'd have had to show you how much she needed you and that she'd never do- not her- not in a million years. Of course that's why she lied about coming down here. (ST 121)

John fully realises that the two of them will never be able to reconcile their different needs, hers emotional and his physical: "[...] 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 explosive as deadly as dynamite." (ST 126); nevertheless, they decide to try. Anne finally admits to her cowardice and explains that she would rather suffer with John than to have to suffer on her own:

ANNE. [...] there are worse deaths, aren't there? (*She looks round the room at the empty tables.*) Slower and more painful and more frightening. So frightening, John. So frightening. (*She lowers her head as once more the tears come.*) I'm an awful coward you see. I never have been able to face up to anything alone- the blitzes in the war, being ill, having operations, all that. And now I can't even face- just getting old. (ST 126-127)

Their conversation takes place between their tables and when Anne finally breaks down, John joins

her at her table, thus signalling that he will stay with her, even though their reconciliation is doomed. But for the first time in *Table by the Window*, the isolation of the single tables is overcome and a glimpse of hope arises, however slight, and proves that human solitude can be relieved through human comfort: “[...] whatever happens, perhaps their inner sense of solitariness, their need of human comfort and their fear will result in endless attempts to reconcile themselves to each other.” (O’Connor 208).

c) *Table Number Seven*

The real “coup de theatre” (Curtis xiii) happens in this second one-acter: *Table Number Seven* takes place eighteen months after *Table by the Window* and introduces two new characters, who, according to Anthony Curtis, are among the finest creations of Rattigan’s career: Major Pollock, who returns to the Beauregard Hotel after visiting London, and Sybil Railton-Bell, who comes back to the clutches of her over-bearing mother after a stay away. These two characters are “emotional have-nots” (Curtis xiii), who in the course of their lives have built up protective walls around themselves which are eventually shattered by the events of the play. Forming the background of his one-acter are the same anonymous, minor figures as in the first half; however, this time they develop into individualised figures, which, during the play, are able to catalyse the dramatic situation and finally determine its outcome (Innes 91). The old major and the emotionally repressed girl have slowly built an understanding relationship, by going for regular walks. It enables Sybil to escape her mother’s overbearing care and Pollock to talk to a kindred soul. But unfortunately, their bliss is interrupted by the discovery that Major Pollock is a fraud, who has only adopted the persona of “the typical retired English major” and is in reality only a “council-school-educated second lieutenant” (O’Connor 209). The truth is revealed by a local newspaper report, spotted by Mrs Railton-Bell: The major was arrested and charged for “insulting behaviour”, that is molesting women in a theatre in Bournemouth. When she reads the article, Mrs Railton-Bell insists on a meeting between the residents, in order to discuss further actions against the Major (O’Connor 209). According to Anthony Curtis (xiii), what follows is one of the most skilfully written miniature trial scenes in modern theatre history, “with a wide spectrum of attitude where each new opinion revealingly identifies its utterer”. All the guests, some more reluctantly than others, decide that the Major has to leave the hotel, and therefore summon Miss Cooper, in order to let her do their “dirty work”. Sybil, shocked by the discovery, becomes hysterical and does not manage to defend her

friend in front of the rest of the residents. Only Charles Stratton, the medical student of the first play, defends the Major's "sexual idiosyncrasies" (O'Connor 209):

CHARLES. [...] my dislike of the Major's offence is emotional and not logical. My lack of understanding of it is probably a shortcoming in me. The Major presumably understands my form of lovemaking. I *should* therefore understand his. But I don't. So I am plainly in a state of prejudice against him, and must be very wary of any moral judgements I may pass in this matter. (ST 147)

He continues by claiming that in fact, from the standpoint of Christian ethics, the Major's offence has not harmed anyone in the hotel (Darlow and Hodson 229): "[...] apart from possibly slightly bruising the arm of a certain lady, [...] and apart from telling us a few rather pathetic lies about his past life, which most of us do anyway from time to time, I really can't see he's done anything to justify us chucking him out into the street." (ST 147)

Another opinion in the matter is expressed by the retired schoolmaster, who in the first half of this double-bill was waiting for a "Godot-like former pupil" (Curtis xiii) to visit him at the hotel: Mr Fowler argues that after the war, a "wave of vice and sexual excess" (ST 149) had swept the country and that therefore the refusal to speak up against evil was in itself an evil. Consequently, he felt that he had to agree with Mrs Railton Bell; on the other hand, he also felt very uncomfortable to side with a person with such questionable motives (Darlow and Hodson 229): "[t]he trouble about being on the side of right, as one sees it, is that one sometimes finds oneself in the company of such very questionable allies." (ST 153)

When Major Pollock's only friend in the hotel, Miss Railton Bell, is questioned, she is unable to express an opinion. Terrified of her mother and deeply repressed, she becomes hysterical ("[i]t made me sick. It made me sick. It made me sick. It made me sick." ST 151) and has to be escorted out of the room. When talking about her, the young doctor Charles Stratton assesses her situation:

CHARLES. She was sitting there quite peacefully, apparently listening. I wasn't to know she was in a state of high suppressed hysteria. I might, admittedly, have guessed, but anyway, I had an idiotic but well-meaning hope that I might get her- just this once- just this once in the whole of her life- to disagree publicly with her mother. It could save her soul if she ever did. (ST

And this is in fact what happens at the end of the play: the two characters, the “Major” and Sybil, meet each other by chance. This scene is, according to Darlow and Hodson (230), written with such an absolute mastery, “as to banish the basic implausibility of the situation”. Sybil, overwhelmed by her emotions, asks the Major why he harassed those women:

MAJOR. I don’t know. I wish I could answer that. Why does anyone do anything they shouldn’t?

Why do some people drink too much, and other people smoke fifty cigarettes a day?

Because they can’t stop it, I suppose.

SIBYL. Then this wasn’t- the first time?

MAJOR. (*Quietly*) No. (ST 154-155)

Furthermore, since the Newspaper article has already exposed him as a fraud, the Major lets his façade down completely and, in a very moving confession, explains to Sybil his affliction and how he reached this pathetic state:

MAJOR. [...] You wouldn’t guess, I know, but ever since school I’ve always been scared to death of women. Of everyone, in a way, I suppose, but mostly of women. I had a bad time at school- which wasn’t Wellington, of course- just a Council school. Boys hate other boys to be timid and shy, and they gave it to me good and proper. My father despised me, too. He was a sergeant-major in the Black Watch. He made me join the Army, but I was always a bitter disappointment to him. He died before I got my commission. I only got that by a wangle. It wasn’t difficult at the beginning of the war. But it meant everything to me, all the same. Being saluted, being called sir- I thought I’m someone, now, a real person. Perhaps some woman might even- (*He stops*) 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 the dark, you see, and strangers, because- (ST 155)

He tells the frightened young girl that she is the first person in his whole life he has talked to about his most private feelings and that, in fact, he does not care about the others in the hotel, because they are only interested in gossip, and will forget about him very soon. However, he is very interested in her and it pains him that she might end up (or already be) disgusted and disappointed

by him:

SIBYL What makes me so different from the others?

[...]

MAJOR. Your being so scared of – well- shall we call it life? It sounds more respectable than the word which I know you hate. You and I are awfully alike, you know. That's why I suppose we've drifted so much together in this place. (ST 156)

But Sibyl vehemently protests against this assumption:

SYBIL. How can you say we're alike? I don't – (*She stops, unable to continue.*)

MAJOR. I know you don't. You're not even tempted and never will be. You're very lucky. Or are you? Who's to say, really? All I meant was that we're both of us frightened of people, and yet we've somehow managed to forget our fright when we've been in each other's company. Speaking for myself, I'm grateful and always will be. Of course I can't expect *you* to feel the same way now. (ST 156)

The Major tries to explain to Sybil that everyone has their afflictions and their vices and that they very often lead to solitude and despair (e.g. Anne Shankland and John Malcolm). But this loneliness can be relieved, even if only for a while, by human contact and human sympathy. The reason why he told lies to everyone is because he does not like himself very much:

MAJOR. I don't like myself as I am, I suppose, so I've had to invent another person. It's not so harmful, really. We've all got daydreams. Mine have gone a step further than most people's – that's all. Quite often I've even managed to believe in the Major myself. [...] (ST 156)

When Pollock leaves to organise another accommodation, Sybil gets the chance to speak about what the Major said and what happened, to Miss Cooper, finally realising that in order to make experiences in the world and in order to live a full life she has to leave her mother and look for a job; for her, that is the only chance to a happy life. Miss Cooper, who has resigned herself to being alone ("I've settled for the situation, you see, and it's surprising how cheerful one can be when one gives up hope." ST 162), also makes her understand that everybody has their faults, but that these faults do not necessarily make the person evil, disgusting or a "freak" (ST 159):

SYBIL. I'd like to be ordinary.

MISS COOPER. I wouldn't know about that, dear. You see, I've never met an ordinary person. To me all people are extra-ordinary. 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 a way it's an insult to our Maker, don't you think, to suppose that He could possibly work to any set pattern. (ST 159)

The Major is eventually persuaded to stay in the hotel and face his fears and his fellow guests. As in many of Rattigan's plays, the characters cannot achieve happiness and contentment, unless they face who they really are and start living with the situation. Pollock's "possible salvation" (Darlow and Hodson 230) lies in this fact: his façade breaks down and he has to continue to live as himself, without telling lies and deceiving people. His entrance in the dining room is greeted with shock and silence. Nevertheless, one by one the guests, led by Charles Stratton, start acknowledging him and eventually leave Mrs Railton-Bell, the "ring-leader", completely isolated. She therefore gets up very suddenly and intimates to her daughter to leave with her; Sybil, finally having found her voice and a bit of self-confidence, refuses to and grants the Major, and herself, a triumphant victory over Mrs Railton-Bell and over prejudice, a moment very similar to Crocker-Harris's final insistence on speaking last at the end of term prize-giving. Thus Sybil manages to achieve her moment of maturity (Curtis xiii): "This tiny public gesture of defiance brings the curtain down on a note of triumph for humanity over repression and prejudice" (Darlow and Hodson 231).

i. The Major's offence

According to Sean O' Connor (210), there is far more to the bogus Major than meets the eye, a fact that is hinted at especially by the forceful appeal to tolerance by Charles Stratton. Rattigan had discussed the pain and despair caused by loneliness in all the characters of *Table by the Window* and in addition had analysed the consequences of sexual obsession and frigidity in the mismatched marriage of Anne Shankland and John Malcolm; in *Table Number Seven*, he wanted to focus all the problems and issues addressed in the first half onto one character: a homosexual, fake Major. When the successful production in London was over, Rattigan moved on to prepare its opening in New York by slightly rewriting *Separate Tables* the way it was meant to be from the very start. He

believed very strongly that in England he had to conspire with the audience: “[...] I was in fact saying to them, 'Look, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Lord Chamberlain has forced me into an evasion, but you and I will foil him. Everybody in the play is going to behave as if there were no evasion at all and as if the more important and serious theme were still the issue.’” (qtd. in O’Connor 210)

But for an American audience, who was not used to British evasiveness, he felt that the change of the Major’s sexuality would be of greater effect and this opinion was shared by many of his most esteemed friends, such as Laurence Olivier and Alec Guinness. In a letter to Bob Whitehead, the American producer who was going to set up *Separate Tables* for Broadway, he further explained his opinion:

The play as I had originally conceived it concerned the effect on a collection of highly conventional people of the discovery that one of their number was a sexual deviant, and that deviation I had naturally imagined as the one most likely to be outside the sphere of their sympathetic understanding; the one which the Major would be most ashamed at their finding out and the one for which the whole of the character was originally conceived: obviously homosexuality. (qtd. in O’Connor 211)

Rattigan continued to list a few of the reactions by the guests of the Beauregard Hotel that in his opinion showed very clearly that the Major’s offence was a homosexual one: Sybil’s hysterical outcry “It made me sick. It made me sick. It made me sick. It made me sick.” (ST 151) for instance is so extreme that no other conclusion, in Rattigan’s opinion, can be drawn. Furthermore, he stresses the “otherness” of the Major: he is clearly isolated from the rest of the society; his behaviour estranges their English polite characters. In the course of the play, they have to deal with the issue of sex, which in itself is very difficult for the English, and, in addition, with a form of sexuality that to them is an abomination and also against the law. However, at the end of the play, the humanity of the guests prevails and thus leads them to accept and “overlook” to some extent the Major’s differences. They finally realise that he is a human being after all, and is therefore deserving of their compassion and understanding (O’Connor 210-211).

Unfortunately, this amendment to the play would never actually be put into practice. Whitehead was absolutely appalled by the idea, claiming that if the Major would be made to be homosexual, the play would lose some of its strength and its agenda would be significantly narrowed: instead of being about men’s cruelty and inhumanity towards fellow men, it would turn into a play about homosexuality, and, in Whitehead’s opinion, this would not work. It is left to argue whether

Whitehead's motives were driven more by concern about the box-office than about the actual play and its main message; fact is that Rattigan, once again, did not get his way and had, once more, to bow to the requirements of the trade. Maybe, as George Wansell argues, if Rattigan had insisted more forcefully on the integration of his changes into the Broadway production, his reputation in the 1950s and 1960s of always wanting to play it safe would have changed over night (qtd. O'Connor 212).

d) Parallels and common themes in the two one-acters

Table by the Window and *Table Number Seven*, very powerful plays by themselves, only grow in meaning and strength when seen as a whole. Besides the shared setting, the Beauregard Hotel, and the common minor characters (such as Miss Meacham) as a background, the two one-acters are tied together by many more features: firstly, both plots begin with a retrospective action that slowly uncovers the truth about the past and are then followed by the glimpse and hope of a new relationship. Both male protagonists despise themselves and hide behind a façade made up of pseudonyms and lies about their identities. John Malcolm was sentenced to jail for attacking and severely injuring his wife while Major Pollock has been questioned about committing minor sex crimes. The women in the two plays also mirror each other: Anne Shankland and Sybil Railton-Bell both cover their insecurities at first by pretending to be self-confident and self-assured, while underneath they both suffer grievously under despair and loneliness; in the second half of the double bill, both female protagonists manage to defeat from their weaknesses and assert themselves in front of their fellow humans. These analogies between the four main characters are further enhanced by the fact that they are supposed to be played by the same actor/actress (Innes 91).

According to Innes (91), the two halves, despite being linked by many features, seem out of order at first glance: "[t]he rhetoric of passion is followed by the unstated suggestion of a minimal commitment". The retarded and emotionally repressed daughter of Mrs Railton-Bell reaches maturity by finally defying her mother: she categorically refuses to ignore the pitiful and pathetic figure of the wannabe-Major; Pollock, in turn, by the end of the play manages to find the courage to stay in a place where his real identity is known, instead of running away to a new place where the creation of a new lie would be necessary in order to live on. But unfortunately, because of their

deficiencies, a future together for these two characters is very unlikely. (Innes 91-92)

This “almost anticlimactic reversal” (Innes 92) expresses very well one of Rattigan’s main theatrical focuses: in his opinion, it was “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”. Christopher Innes claims that this “quality of understated suggestion” clearly links Rattigan’s work to both Granville-Barker’s “barely verbalized impressionism” and to Harold Pinter’s “use of silence to carry emotional meaning” (Innes 92). On a different level, this obliqueness has a rather unsettling effect, “using the contrast with standard patterns of domestic drama- avoiding a rising action and unified plot, denying a clear resolution- to question moral norms” (Innes 92).

e) Reception

Before *Separate Tables* was performed for the first time, one thought heavily upset Terence Rattigan: he was afraid that through some misunderstanding, the audience would be led to believe that the Major and Sybil Railton-Bell would eventually get involved in a relationship. Under no circumstance did Rattigan want this to be the message that the theatre-goers would take home. Fortunately, on the first night, no such thing happened. The audience loved the play, because they were able to identify with all the protagonists, for the obvious pain and loneliness they were in, the same way they identified with Hester Collyer two years earlier. As with *The Deep Blue Sea*, Rattigan had created plays that could be enjoyed by all kinds of audiences. People, especially women, sympathised with Hester Collyer without knowing that she was mostly based on Rattigan’s affair with Kenneth Morgan; similarly, the character of Major Pollock appealed to the audience, because he was forced to confront himself and his weaknesses and learn to live with them. The humanity of both characters captured the audience, not the “specific sexual details of their genesis” (Wansell 256).

According to Christopher Innes (92), *Separate Tables* is Rattigan’s most popular and also most beloved piece; he once again, as in so many other plays, addresses his typical themes of “loneliness, inarticulacy, and above all the twin poles of sexual obsession and repression” (Innes 92). Almost all of his plays deal with these issues: both repression and obsession are seen as extremely damaging, while true strength is defined as asexual: “[...] being alone, that’s the real blessed state- if you’ve the

character for it” (ST 119). This opinion is clearly reflected in the way Rattigan constructs his plays; and it is also interesting to see that the “more urgent the need or violent the passion, the more rational and verbal the characters’ expression of emotion” (Innes 92).

A few months after the premiere of *Separate Tables*’s first night, Rattigan went on a tour of Australia; he was utterly exhausted by the efforts of re-writing *The Deep Blue Sea* for a film and by the endless negotiations for the Broadway production of his double-bill. When he left, he was a playwright at the pinnacle of his career; the critic Harold Hobson had just paid him a major compliment in the *Sunday Times* in January 1955: according to him, early success had not spoiled Terence Rattigan: “Mr Rattigan began with a huge popular success. This success made my predecessor deeply uneasy. It need not have done. Mr Rattigan could hardly have developed finer qualities if, in his early days, he had been as viciously attacked as Ibsen” (qtd. in Wansell 263). Utterly confident of his popularity, Rattigan did not expect what was going to happen next: when he came back from Australia, the theatre that Aunt Edna and himself had come to know and love had gone forever; a radical and permanent change had taken place, triggered by a single play, John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*. This change was going to have extreme consequences for Rattigan’s career and reputation; from one day to the other he was dismissed from the critics’ and the audience’s favour and he would not gain it back fully until long after his death. (Wansell 263)

5. 1956 and all that (Rebellato)

While Rattigan was in Australia the theatre-world in Britain was changing radically; the playwright was taken completely by surprise, since when he left, and during his stay in *Down Under*, he was completely convinced that he had finally managed to regain his popularity. In his opinion, the commercial success of his plays (e.g. *Separate Tables*) and his films was all that mattered and he was therefore not prepared for the sudden decline in critical and public esteem that he was going to witness (Wansell 264). One of Rattigan’s dear friends, Harold Hobson, recalled in his autobiography that “[t]here was discontent, often unjust, with the conventional drama of the day, which began to be attacked with a bitterness that surprised and distressed me. Terence Rattigan, in particular, was made the target for abuse and vilification, the violence of which broke his gentle and

chivalrous spirit.” (qtd. in Wansell 264)

A) Historical Background

By 1956, British theatre was in a pitiful state. The West End was held firmly by a few theatre managers (the most influential being Hugh “Binkie” Beaumont) and the plays performed insisted in reflecting only a small part of society (middle-class), even though war and despair were raging around everybody. (Rebellato 1956 1) British society, and consequently British culture, was stagnating and, despite some notable exceptions such as Rattigan, Eliot and Christopher Fry, the theatre world was asking for a regeneration and revolution, led by one of the major critics of the time, Kenneth Tynan. But the question remained: where could such a new influence be found? (Pattie 38, Rebellato 1956 1)

The first sign of something new and exciting happening in the theatre world was the first English production of Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot* in 1955 at the Arts Theatre. Directed by Peter Hall, this production was to transform the British audience’s reaction to and perception of theatre forever. The play’s allegorical and uncompromising tone stood in extreme contrast to Rattigan’s carefully crafted Naturalism and was therefore initially hard to swallow for the audience used to characters such as Hester Collyer and Crocker-Harris. However, a younger generation of theatre-goers was “waiting in the wings” and their expectations were not disappointed (Wansell 265).

Rattigan’s reaction to Samuel Beckett’s play was dismissive and he thus once again endangered his reputation. Supported by his friends and admirers, who also claimed not to like and understand the new play, he wrote a piece for the *New Statesman*, criticising the play from Aunt Edna’s point of view (*Aunt Edna waits for Godot*):

How could I like the play, seeing that Mr Samuel Beckett plainly hates me so much that he’s refused point blank to give me a play at all? ...Even a middlebrow like myself could have told him that a really good play had to be on two levels, an upper one, which I suppose you’d call symbolical, and a lower one, which is based on story and character. By writing on the upper level alone, all Mr Beckett has done is to produce one of those things that thirty years ago we used to call Experimental Theatre - you wouldn’t remember that, of course, and that’s a movement which led absolutely nowhere. (qtd. in Wansell 265-266)

Even though Aunt Edna, in conversation with her “nephew”, admitted to have enjoyed her evening, once again she exposed Rattigan to humiliating condemnation and criticism and further compromised his reputation amongst a “younger and more serious generation” (Wansell 266).

However, the real breakthrough came on 8 May 1956; the English Stage Company presented a new play at the Royal Court in London, which was now under the management of George Devine. It was one of the first productions at this theatre; Devine had made it his mission to only, or predominantly, stage plays of new, unknown authors. On this occasion it was *Look Back in Anger*, by John Osborne. Rattigan went to the premiere with his two friends “Binkie” Beaumont and Margaret Leighton. It is safe to say that not many people in the audience did realise that night that they were witnessing one of the seminal moments of British Theatre History. Rattigan, for instance, did not enjoy the play and wanted to leave during the interval, together with Beaumont, but was ultimately persuaded to stay by the critic Cuthbert Worsley, who was utterly enthusiastic about the play. After it was over, Rattigan voiced his malcontent: he conceded that the play was well written, but at the same time it was badly constructed and he could not understand what the protagonist of the play, Jimmy Porter, had to be so angry about. When he was asked what he thought by a reporter of the “Daily Express”, he answered that John Osborne was obviously saying: “[l]ook, Ma, I’m not Terence Rattigan” (qtd. in Wansell 270 and Darlow and Hodson 240- 241). It was a conceited and quite foolish remark and yet again, it would contribute to Rattigan’s dismissal from popular and critical favour for the next two decades. But Rattigan was utterly unaware of the terrible impact his words might have on other people and he returned home feeling quite safe that *Look Back in Anger* would not be able to threaten his reputation at all. He could not have been more wrong. (Wansell 270).

In fact, with 8 May 1956, everything changed. Interest in the play increased: new, young audiences all stormed to the Royal Court to listen to Jimmy Porter expressing their own fears and doubts about Britain and the world. The media, largely due to Rattigan’s remarks, started to create a dangerous opposition first between Rattigan and Osborne, and then between Rattigan and the entire “New Wave”, and even though it was a largely false assumption (and despite Rattigan’s repeated corrections of his hasty statement), it would get embedded in the audience’s and the critics’ minds for a long time. The old, well-made dramatists were suddenly, from one night to the other, dismissed and shown up as “cobwebbed”, in comparison to the new, honest and angry theatre wave. (Rebellato 1956 1-2, Darlow and Hodson 241) As Rebellato (2) claims in *1956 and all that*, “[a]

new wave of dramatists sprang up in Osborne's wake; planting their colours on British stages, speaking for a generation who had for so long been silent, they forged a living, adult, vital theatre".

The immediate success of *Look Back in Anger* was largely fuelled by the press; in particular, Kenneth Tynan's review of the play would make history. It strongly contributed to the dichotomy of the old versus the new, the well-made play versus the "kitchen sink drama", Rattigan versus Osborne. In his piece, published on 13 May 1956, Tynan enthusiastically praises *Look Back*:

What with his flair for introspection, his gift for ribald parody, his excoriating candour, his contempt for "phoneyess", his weakness for soliloquy and his desperate conviction that the time is out of joint, Jimmy Porter is the completest young pup in our literature since Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. I agree that *Look Back in Anger* is likely to remain a minority taste. What matters, however, is the size of the minority. I estimate it at roughly 6,733,000, which is the number of people in this country between the ages of 20 and 30. And this figure will doubtless be swelled by refugees from other age groups curious to know precisely what the contemporary young pup is thinking and feeling. (Tynan *Guardian*)

[...] *Look Back in Anger* presents postwar youth as it really is, with special emphasis on the non-U intelligentsia who live in bed-sitters... To have done this at all would have been a signal achievement; to have done it in a first play is a minor miracle.[...] (qtd. in Carpenter 133)
After this review appeared, the play became more and more successful and for the critics and the audience alike there was no doubt anymore that a new wave had made its appearance on the English stage; nothing would remain the way it was, and the public rejoiced about this development. Consequently, everything that was connected to the pre-1956 era was suddenly dismissed: writers who were unfortunate enough to have practised their profession in the 1940s were now all labelled old-fashioned and outdated: Rattigan especially was suddenly hated, despite the fact that he had been deeply revered only a few days before. In his own words: "[t]here I was in 1956, a reasonably successful playwright with *Separate Tables* just opened, and suddenly the whole Royal Court thing exploded, and Coward and Priestley and I were all dismissed, sacked by the critics." (qtd. in Cavendish *Telegraph*)

Rattigan's style of writing, his talent for subtly depicting the middle classes and their suppressed emotional lives, was not wanted anymore and his work was therefore "fixed with labels (shallow, complacent, sentimental, old-fashioned) that were largely undeserved" (Mandala 80). The term "well-made" became an insult and was seen as a synonym for hypocrisy, moral decay and intellectual deterioration. Besides writing well-made plays, Rattigan depicted characters from the

middle-class in his work, without criticising their middle-class attitudes, and at the time, this was seen as a major crime against the theatre.(Mandala 82) Thus, 1956 came to be seen as a “watershed moment” that freed the British theatre from the Dark Age and led it forward to a modern and more ideological period, which, first and foremost, would put the real lives and concerns of the population at that time on stage and would thus become the leading force of a new generation (Mandala 80-81).

B) *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne (1956)

As mentioned in Darlow and Hodson (241), through *Look Back in Anger* the post-war generation had at last made it onto the stage. Critics coined the term “kitchen-sink realism” for this New Wave, implying “naturalistic lower-class settings” (Gilleman 146) and thus putting it in contrast to the well-made drawing room drama and its middle class characters. Jimmy Porter, the protagonist in *Look Back in Anger*, does indeed represent a new class, the “declassé” and consequently stands in contrast to the other two major characters, namely Alison, his wife, who represents the upper classes and Cliff, his best friend and flatmate, who represents the lower classes. During the day, he tends to a sweet stall in the market and at night he passes his time by playing jazz trumpet in pubs. Jimmy lives in a transitional period, and he himself is a product of it: educated at one of the new universities and stemming from a lower middle-class background, he at the same time feels constantly frustrated by the fact that, despite the theoretical change in society after the war, practically, there still exists an inequality between the classes and “the best jobs continue to go to the public school boys and the Oxbridge-educated” (Gilleman 148). Alison, Jimmy’s wife, stands in direct contrast to him: the daughter of a former colonel in the British Raj, she represents everything that Jimmy has grown to hate, and therefore constitutes the primary target of his angry rants. She, on the other hand, tries to adapt to Jimmy’s lifestyle, and despite being someone more used to being served than serving, she is in charge of all the housework at their flat, and in nearly every scene, the audience witnesses her ironing, while calmly and quietly coping with Jimmy’s mistreatment of her. Furthermore, the third primary character in the play, Cliff, represents another opposition to Jimmy: he expresses himself in a working-class idiom (“[d]on’t let’s brawl, boyo” LBIA 53), since he belongs to the lower classes, but at the same time proves to possess more irony and intellect than one would expect: “[t]he sweet-stall’s all right, but I think I’d like to try something else. You’re

highly educated, and it suits you, but I need something a bit better” (LBIA 88). (Gilleman 148-149)

The main action is characterised by a process of isolation, with the main character Jimmy gradually driving his two companions away. Despite being well-informed and very smart, Jimmy has been denied the political opportunities to change society and the world in general, and is therefore reduced to angry monologues and aggressive and violent attacks towards his pregnant wife. Being very conscious about his own class background and the consequences of such roots in society, he transforms his wife into a “surrogate for the class system” (Innes 98) and therefore fails to perceive her as a real person and to acknowledge her real qualities, being too busy blaming her and making her pay for the shortcomings of society at the time. The love-hate relationship between the couple leads Alison to leave Jimmy and to return to her parents, who have been opposed to the match from the very beginning, leaving Jimmy with a temporary “substitute”, Helen, who, for some time at least, takes Alison’s place. This development also drives away Cliff, who cannot stand the “lack of emotional integrity” (Innes 99) displayed by the new union. Eventually though, Helen leaves as well, welcoming back a subdued Alison, having lost her baby and being unable to bear more, and the play ends with the couple reunited in an atmosphere of mutual misery (Innes 99).

With Jimmy, Osborne creates an educated working-class hero, whose opinions are very smart and well-informed and are never presented as “symptoms of lower-class vanity” (Gilleman 149). His rants consist of pieces of politics and social issues that the audience at the time was familiar with and could therefore easily understand; he criticises various institutions and events, such as the return to power of the Conservative Party, but above all he speaks out against the passivity and lack of meaning of his age (Innes 102):

JIMMY. [...] I suppose people of our generation aren’t able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties, when we were still kids. (*in his familiar, semi-serious mood*) There aren’t any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won’t be in aid of the old-fashioned, grand design. It’ll just be for the Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus. (LBIA 89)

Ironically, despite being well-informed and witty, Jimmy’s remarks do not reach anyone; the only audience available to him are his wife and his best friend, who most of the time do not seem to care

about his passion and frustration. Their days usually consist of Alison ironing, Cliff reading the paper, and solitary Jimmy musing about the world and the meaning of life. But since he lacks the intellectual exchange that he would need so badly, and being painfully aware of the fact that his roots have held him back in life, he turns on his audience and abuses them both verbally and physically; for instance, when criticising an article about the Bishop of Bromley, he sees an opportunity to attack Alison's family: "You don't suppose your father could have written it, do you? [...] Sounds rather like Daddy, don't you think? [...] Is the Bishop of Bromley his nom de plume [...]?" (LBIA 7) His frustration and aggression are mostly triggered by boredom, for instance on a rainy Sunday afternoon and he lets it out shamelessly on his two companions:

JIMMY. God, how I hate Sundays! It's always so depressing, always the same. [...] Reading the papers, drinking tea, ironing. A few more hours, and another week gone. Our youth is slipping away [...] Oh heavens, how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm [...] Why don't we have a little game? Let's pretend that we're human beings, and that we're actually alive [...] Oh, brother, it's such a long time since I was with anyone who got enthusiastic about anything [...] Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions and no enthusiasm. Just another Sunday evening. (LBIA 8-10)

But Jimmy's anger and discontent do not stop there. Alison's brother is a Conservative MP and thus a perfect target for Jimmy's ruthless criticism:

JIMMY. The Platitude from Outer Space- that's brother Nigel [...] But somewhere at the back of that mind is the vague knowledge that he and his pals have been plundering and fooling everybody for generations [...] He's a patriot and an Englishman, and he doesn't like the idea that he may have been selling out his countryman [sic!] all these years, so what does he do? The only thing he *can* do- seek sanctuary in his own stupidity. (LBIA 14-15)

His rants do not only concern politics and social issues, but they are also very often directed against his wife and her character. Even more enraged by Alison's quiet endurance of his aggressions, he even becomes physically violent, which he then justifies with misogynist remarks and with the assurance that his temper arises from love:

JIMMY. There's hardly a moment when I'm not- watching and wanting you. I've got to hit out

somehow. Nearly four years of being in the same room with you, night and day, and I still can't stop my sweat breaking out when I see you doing- something as ordinary as leaning over an ironing board. (LBIA 30-31)

According to Humphrey Carpenter (125), Alison accepts this explanation and justification without a word of reproof, and therefore she represents “a male dream of the ideal wife”: she slaves away at the ironing board, is sexually submissive and is apparently indifferent in the face of constant insults. Indeed, both Alison and Helen, her temporary “replacement”, seem to scarcely exist as individuals, they are “just shadows of Jimmy, which is why both women are seen wearing one of his shirts” (Carpenter 125). This is exactly the way Jimmy perceives his wife: to him, she is not an individual, she is an incarnation of everything that he hates about the time and society he lives in. His resentment even turns into wilful cruelty:

JIMMY. If only something- something would happen to you, and wake you out of your beauty sleep! (*coming in close to her*) If you could have a child, and it would die [...] if only I could watch you face that. I wonder if you might even become a recognizable human being yourself. But I doubt it. (LBIA 36)

What Jimmy does not know is that Alison is in fact pregnant, but she does not have the courage to let him know, for fear of his reaction. She therefore lets Helen, who has an agenda of her own, persuade her to go back to her parents, a decision that gives the audience even more insight into Jimmy's character: unexpectedly, when Alison's father comes by to take his daughter home, he proves to be actually sympathising with Jimmy. He admits that all the problems Alison and Jimmy have had with Alison's parents and Jimmy's subsequent resentment towards them, might not entirely have been his fault: “I'm afraid I can't help feeling that he must have had a certain amount of right on his side. [...] Your mother and I weren't entirely free from blame.” (LBIA 67)

Completely unexpectedly, Alison's father excuses Jimmy's behaviour towards him and his wife, which in turn leads Alison to admit that her father and Jimmy are probably more alike than they both would like to think: Jimmy rages about the stagnation of society and politics in the 1950s, while Alison's father lives in constant nostalgia of the old order (“You're hurt because everything is changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same.” LBIA 70); thus, the most unlikely of characters discover to have something in common.

Interestingly, in the midst of all his ranting, Jimmy even admits that he somehow understands people belonging to the old order and to a certain extent also sympathises with them (e.g. with Alison's father) (Carpenter 123):

JIMMY. I hate to admit it, but I think I can understand how her Daddy must have felt when he came back from India, after all those years away. The old Edwardian brigade do make their brief little world look pretty tempting. All home-made cakes and croquet, bright ideas, bright uniforms [...] Phoney, too, of course [...] Still, even I regret it somehow, phoney or not [...] But I must say it's pretty dreary living in the American Age [...] Perhaps all our children will be Americans. (LBIA 11)

In fact, Jimmy Porter, for being an "up to-the-minute young person" (Carpenter 127), at twenty five years of age, he is already embittered and disillusioned by life and humanity, a character trait that is more often found in middle-aged people and does not suit his position as an "archetypal youth of the Fifties" (Carpenter 127). One could even say, that Jimmy is, despite his anger and his demands for a new and better society, a quite old-fashioned character:

HELEN. I have discovered what is wrong with Jimmy. It's very simple really. He was born out of his time. [...] There's no place for people like that any longer- in sex, or politics, or anything. That's why he's so futile. Sometimes, when I listen to him, I feel he thinks he's still in the middle of the French Revolution. And that's where he ought to be [...] He'll never do anything, and he'll never amount to anything. (LBIA 96)

Alison, too, agrees with this assessment: "I suppose he's what you'd call an Eminent Victorian." (LBIA 96). Therefore, one could claim that Jimmy is a character full of contradictions. His rage causes him to mistreat everyone around him, especially his wife, who, in his eyes, is the embodiment of what is wrong with the country, a product of the old order; nevertheless, at the same time, even though he does not want to admit it, the society and the world of the past trigger feelings of nostalgia. Consequently, the question remains to be answered where his anger and his aggression actually come from.

In the play, Jimmy analyses himself and puts most of his anger down to the premature and traumatic death of his father and his mother's emotional coldness during that time (Carpenter 127):

JIMMY. For twelve months, I watched my father dying- when I was ten years old [...] My mother looked after him without complaining, and that was about all. Perhaps she pitied him. I suppose she was capable of that [...] But *I* was the only one who cared! [...] Every time I sat on the edge of his bed, to listen to him talking or reading to me, I had to fight back my tears. At the end of twelve months, I was a veteran [...] All that that feverish failure of a man had to listen to was a small, frightened boy [...] You see, I learnt at an early age what it was to be angry- angry and helpless. (LBIA 58-59)

Thus, it becomes clear that Jimmy's anger goes beyond mere frustration with the state of Britain and its population: it is a consequence of traumatic events in his early life, the absence of his father and the emotional absence of his mother (Carpenter 127). Consequently, the unbearable anger that has become an integral part of Jimmy's character and life, destroys all the other relationships that he has: his wife leaves him, even though only temporarily; Helen, his mistress, abandons him as well, despite her initial conviction to be able to change and "improve" him; and his best friend, to whom he is linked by an affection that sometimes seems to even be stronger than the feelings he has for his wife, decides to change his life and move on from the stagnant position all the characters in the play live in. But despite the audience's expectations of a solitary ending for Jimmy Porter, the play ends quite differently. After having lost her baby, Alison returns to her husband; this moment marks the interruption of the vicious cycle of disproportionate anger and quiet suffering that was part of all the characters' lives for a very long time and it also manages to finally destroy Alison's neutrality, which Jimmy had resented from the very beginning of the play and "qualifies her as a 'human being' in Jimmy's terms" (Innes 102). Thus, the couple is reunited, joined by their feelings of misery and hopelessness and they resume their Bears and Squirrels game, which gives them both comfort and hope. (Innes 102)

According to Innes (99), *Look Back in Anger* is not only interesting on the surface level; the play has also a symbolic structure: the four protagonists are "clearly divided on class lines, in which sex equals status". (Innes 99) Jimmy and Cliff, characterised as honest and "good" proletarians, are set against Helena and Alison, cold, repressed and immoral gentry. The social conflict between these two sides is represented by the issues and conflicts in Jimmy's marriage to Alison and also in his subsequent seduction of Helena, Alison's counterpart. Society itself is represented by Alison and her "apparent avoidance of commitment"; according to Jimmy, this character trait could be defined as

“pusillanimous” (“Adjective. Wanting of firmness of mind, of small courage [...]” LBIA 17)

Alison’s brother Nigel represents the epitome of herself and her insensitivity; through this, in Jimmy’s eyes, the Establishment manages to keep its hold over the working classes. (Innes 99-100)

The symbolism beneath the surface of the play was overlooked by many of the theatre-goers during the late 1950s: the most common reactions focused so much on Jimmy’s rants and tirades that all the rest slid into the background. The protagonist’s centrality and his deafening voice are quite overwhelming, since when he is not on stage, he represents the primary topic in the other characters’ conversations. Nevertheless, Jimmy does not retain his alleged supremacy until the end of the play: as mentioned before, his friend Cliff decides to declare his independence and move out of the flat and Alison ends up dominating Jimmy: “[h]er self-controlled reserve turns out to be a pose; and the audience is clearly intended to empathize with her as a suffering individual. When that point comes, she ceases to represent anything.” (Innes 100)

But according to Innes (100), it was neither Jimmy’s eloquent and aggressive anger, nor his political insights, that made him the spokesman for a whole generation, but rather the play’s inherent negativism and in some circles, the protagonist of *Look Back In Anger* was compared to James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause* of 1955. The important difference between the two characters though was that Jimmy Porter’s rebellion was a purely verbal one. The scholar claims that forceful and skilled expression can be a cover for impotence, an argument that is supported by the stage directions (“[t]o be as vehement as he is is to be almost non-committal.” LBIA 2) and by Jimmy’s own admission of feeling both “angry and helpless” (LBIA 59), passionate and at the same time powerless.

However, despite Jimmy’s inability to act out the rebellion he thought necessary for the world, his anger and aggression found an eager audience in the theatre-goers and critics of the late 1950s. The protagonist of *Look Back in Anger* dominates the dialogue and was therefore chosen to be the spokesman of a new generation, a new wave in theatre, which was soon labelled “kitchen sink” drama, for its entirely new level of social realism (e.g. the general ordinariness of the characters’ pastimes and occupations, and the shabbiness of the flat). In addition, these realistic representations underline the plot-line of the play; as Innes (102) claims, “[t]hat it is always Sunday not only implies the missing spiritual centre in these characters’ existence, but provides an image of stasis and displacement. In this context all actions are repetitive, ritualized and pointless. The ironing is

never finished and the clothes they wear are never clean.”

Very soon after the first night of *Look Back in Anger*, another name was coined for the new wave: “Angry Young Men”. The publicist who invented the term was George Fearon, part-time press officer for the ESC. John Osborne himself recalls their meeting the following way:

He equivocated shiftily, even for one in his trade, and then told me with some relish how much he disliked the play and how he had no idea how he could possibly publicize it successfully. The prospect began to puff him up with rare pleasure. He looked at me cheerfully as if he were Albert Pierrepoint guessing my weight. ‘I suppose you’re really- an angry young man...’ (qtd. in Rebellato 1956 116)

Even though the term would survive and even though it became the most popular name for the new wave of playwrights in the late 1950s, it was also very controversial. Most dramatists grouped under this designation strongly criticised it (even though Osborne did popularise it), claiming that journalists had come up with it, without knowing anything about the writers they described. (Rebellato 1956 116-117, Innes 99, 104) The catchphrase gained rapid popularity as the “defining image of a ‘lost generation’” (Innes 104) and, in combination with the date of *Look Back in Anger* ‘s first performance (May 8 1956) it would define the start of a new era in British theatre history (Innes 98).

C) Osborne vs. Rattigan

As mentioned in the previous chapter, when *Look Back in Anger* was first performed, Rattigan was at the pinnacle of his career. *Separate Tables* was enjoying a major success, and the playwright was quite sure that he had finally made it: he was a popular and talented dramatist and he was recognised as such by both the audience and the critics. Therefore, he would have never expected his sudden fall from grace in the wake of Jimmy Porter’s first appearance on stage. Something in British theatre had changed and people like Kenneth Tynan started to think of the 1950s as a time when the young took the place of the old, the new of the old-fashioned. Rattigan, and many other playwrights with him, were condemned as superfluous and boring and therefore dismissed from public favour. For many, Terence Rattigan’s invention “Aunt Edna”, for instance, represented the audiences he was wanting to write for, and they were, as the public, middle-class, “tea-sipping

matinee fodder” (Elsom 75). Aunt Edna would not have liked *Look Back in Anger* and similarly, the audience this new play was speaking for would never have wanted to be associated with the old lady. But in retrospect, the question arises whether Osborne’s play was indeed a revolutionary one; and furthermore, whether the dismissal of Terence Rattigan after May 8, 1956 was indeed a justified one. (Elsom 75) Rattigan and Osborne represented two types of theatre: the one thought of the theatre as a place for entertainment, and not for ideas; the other one perceived the stage to be the perfect opportunity to analyse Britain’s social and political state and where anger and honesty were the main ingredients. But even though these two ideas have little in common, it is doubtful whether the reaction to *Look Back in Anger* and Rattigan’s banishment from public attention was anything else but exaggerated and also premature (Pattie 74).

Various scholars agree that Osborne’s play was, in stylistic terms, not as innovative as critics and the audience thought at the time. The playwright himself admitted later that *Look Back in Anger* was a “formal, rather old-fashioned play” (qtd. in Innes 103); indeed, very distinct parallels can be found between Osborne’s play and *Separate Tables* by Terence Rattigan, exactly the kind of play that Osborne and his New Wave displaced as inferior and outdated (Innes 90, 103, Rebellato 1956 5). Furthermore, Rebellato states that there is indeed nothing new about Jimmy Porter’s rhetoric either: it reminds the readers of Shavian characters, such as his Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion*, especially because of his misogyny, one of Jimmy Porter’s strongest characteristics (e.g. “[w]hy, why, why, why do we let these women bleed us to death?” LBIA 89). And, as argued by Humphrey Carpenter in *The angry young men*, the overall model of the play is even older than Shaw himself. (Rebellato 1956 128) It is therefore of vital importance, when analysing Rattigan’s fate in the post-1956 era, to compare Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* with some of Rattigan’s work, especially *The Deep Blue Sea*.

As mentioned previously, the importance of *Look Back in Anger* was questioned from the very beginning, and not only by Osborne himself. Formally, it is clearly written in the tradition of the well-made play: it is conventionally structured in three acts and also has “contrived exits and entrances typical of a play whose action is confined to one room, and melodramatic curtains” (Gilleman 106). But this is not the only reason for the play not ageing well: even the language, which at the time was deemed to be its most striking innovative feature and at one point was described as “slangy, gay, messy and irreverent” (Gilleman 106), nowadays sounds contrived and “overly literary” (e.g. “she’s as rough as a night in a Bombay brothel, and as tough as a matelot’s

arm” LBIA 52). Furthermore, at certain points, the play tends to fall into melodrama:

JIMMY. One day, when I’m no longer spending my days running a sweet-stall, I may write a book about us all. It’s all here. (*slapping his forehead*) Written in flames a mile high. And it won’t be recollected in tranquillity either, picking daffodils with Auntie Wordsworth. It’ll be recollected in fire, and blood. My blood. (LBIA 54)

Gilleman (106) claims that no contemporary writer could ever have written these lines and that upon hearing them, a contemporary audience would “burst into laughter”. There are many moments in *Look Back in Anger* when melodrama takes over and pathos risks becoming farce: thus, the protagonist Jimmy Porter cannot be taken seriously anymore and risks becoming a laughing-stock, which in turn causes his power over the other characters to become less plausible. Moreover, the play’s symmetrical structure undermines its attempt at portraying a new, brutal kind of realism (e.g. Helena mirroring Alison’s ironing in Act three) and the play generally contains too many references to characters that the audience never meets, and too many overly-long and contrived monologues in order to be characterised, at least in its formal aspects, as ground-breaking and new: “[i]n both good and bad ways, *Look Back* is an immature play: energetic but gawky, reckless in jettisoning some conventions of ‘good playwriting’ and slavish in following others” (Gilleman 107).

Consequently, one can safely claim that Osborne’s play was structurally not so far away from Terence Rattigan’s and Noel Coward’s plays. Even thematically, some similarities can be found: *Look Back in Anger* and *The Deep Blue Sea* for instance, both deal with overpowering and dangerous passions and emotions: Hester’s love and Jimmy’s anger. Furthermore, both plays deal with doomed and desperate relationships and with a male character’s desire to escape social conventions and the overwhelming situation he finds himself in. The love featured in both plays crosses class barriers and thus leads to hopeless situations and the relationship seems to be doomed from the very beginning (Gilleman 109).

Both writers, at some stage of their career, were considered revolutionary and controversial. Rattigan, for instance, when *The Deep Blue Sea* was first performed, was accused of having presented a study in “female sexual perversion” and was even condemned by the audience and critics for not choosing an “easy-way out” ending, i.e. for letting Hester, the woman with a past, live instead of kill herself. (Gilleman 110) According to Gilleman (111), “as far as the “seriousness” of

the work is concerned (as measured by the degree of the controversy its themes provoked), the differences among these playwrights are often overstated". Consequently, the question arises why these two playwrights at some stage in history were regarded as two opposites, one made to represent the old and outdated, and the other the new and revolutionary. What caused Rattigan to be dismissed from the hearth of public adoration and Osborne to be hailed the spokesman of a new generation?

According to Luc Gilleman, one of the most important contemporary scholars on Osborne and the "Angry Young Men", it is in the presentation of the themes, especially in their use of language, that the two playwrights differ considerably. At the heart of the well-made play, there is always the confrontation scene, which finally reveals the truth about the characters and leads to the denouement. Gilleman claims that it is quite difficult to switch from the everyday "language of evasion" to the language of truth without sounding inauthentic and therefore, in his view, Rattigan struggles considerably to make his confrontation scene in *The Deep Blue Sea* convincing and he therefore has to resort to an increase in emotional intensity. When Hester is forced to explain her feelings to Mr Miller and is on the verge of committing suicide again, what she says is not as important anymore as how she says it, and as "form gains on content", the stage directions become more detailed and more frequent (e.g. "*hysterically*", "*with a despairing cry*", "*at each word she wilts as if at a physical blow*" (TDBS 71)) (Gilleman 111-113). Eventually, Hester takes Miller's advice to keep on living, but it is only after Miller has restored language itself to its proper meaning: words have to be stripped of their ambiguity and given back their "true and inflexible meaning":

MILLER.[...] To live without hope can mean to live without despair.

HESTER. Those are just words.

MILLER. Words can help you if your mind can only grasp them. (*He twists her roughly round to face him. Harshly.*) Your Freddie has left you. He's never going to come back again. Never in the world. Never. (TDBS 71)

Thus, the power of language at certain moments is shown to sort out emotions and "bring them back to order" (Gilleman 116).

By the end of the play, Hester has become a completely different woman. She has learned that she

cannot focus her passions on a man (i.e. on sex), but that she rather has to find some other occupation to keep her going in life (her art). This development in the play takes place extremely quickly, since it takes place over a twelve-hour period and it is mainly brought about by the “transformative power of dialogue, of people talking and listening to one another” (Gilleman 116). The element of transformation is in itself a core characteristic of the well-made play: education is vital, because it leads characters to find out something about their lives and thus changes their existence forever. The empirical paradigm that the characters’ inner and outer worlds are connected through the mediation of language is at the core of this genre: “Seeing is knowing, knowing is articulating, and articulating is changing” (Gilleman 117). Close and accurate perception is always precedent to eloquent and accurate articulating, and that is why the truth is always in the foreground in the well-made play. This paradigm is exactly where the two playwrights differ the most: Osborne, as Rattigan, does exploit it, but at the same time he also questions it and thus his *Look Back in Anger* “moves drama well beyond the limitations of the well-made play” (Gilleman 118).

Like *The Deep Blue Sea*, *Look Back in Anger* is also concerned with education and change; Alison admits to her having learned the lesson when she returns to Jimmy at the end of the play: “I was wrong, I was wrong!” (LBIA 101) She has finally started to see the world the way Jimmy wants her to and, to a certain extent, this is exactly the ending that would be expected in a well-made play. (Gilleman 118) Nevertheless, the situation differs in one important detail: the story starts with a woman who already seems to belong to the man: they are married, she does his ironing, is sexually compliant and ignores his abuse. However, Jimmy wants more: at the end of the first Act he exclaims: “Oh, my dear wife, you’ve got so much to learn. I only hope you learn it one day” (LBIA 36). He is not satisfied with having debased her from her upper-class position to a “nut-munching squirrel” (LBIA 32); he wants to own every fibre of her. As Alison explains to Helena:

ALISON. [...] It’s what he would call a question of allegiances, and he expects you to be pretty literal about them. Not only about himself and all the things he believes in, his present and his future, but his past as well. All the people he admires and loves, and has loved. The friends he used to know, people I’ve never even known- and probably wouldn’t have liked. His father, who died years ago. Even the other women he’s loved. (LBIA 40)

Jimmy requires “unconditional commitment” from his wife, even though he does not grace her with the same behaviour. He constantly bullies her and makes fun of her friends and her parents; in his

eyes, love should be absolute, and an “act of faith” (Gilleman 119); Jimmy wants to dominate and change his wife and therefore goes even a step further than the heroine of *The Deep Blue Sea*. However, Jimmy’s attempts at controlling Alison only result in frustration: the more he tries to control her, the more he feels controlled by her. (Gilleman 119) On the other hand, Alison can never satisfy Jimmy’s expectations: the more she humiliates herself in front of her family and friends, the more she tries to fulfil Jimmy’s demands, the more suspicious her husband gets. Thus, the couple is caught up in an impossible situation, where both are willing yet unable to fulfil each other’s needs and therefore make each other miserable. Their relationship is as destructive as the one between Hester and Freddie; both couples seem to be doomed to failure from the very beginning. Nevertheless, Alison and Jimmy decide to stay together, realising that it is their best chance at some sort of happiness; on the other hand, Freddie has to leave Hester precisely for that reason, since peace and happiness would be impossible if they stayed together (Gilleman 119-120).

Despite the similarities between the two plays, Luc Gilleman (121) claims that they differ in one particular detail: *Look Back in Anger*, in his opinion, subverts the tradition of the well-made play: “the supposed link between perception and cognition” and that “between cognition and articulation” is challenged. Furthermore, in Osborne’s play, there is no clear distinction between truth and illusion anymore. While in *The Deep Blue Sea* hysteria signals a moment of drastic change and development, in *Look Back in Anger*, hysteria has become the “habitual mode of being, delivering the energy whereby an illusory self attempts to erect itself above an unknowable reality” (Gilleman 121-122):

JIMMY. One of us is crazy. One of us is mean and stupid and crazy. Which is it? Is it me? Is it me, standing here like an hysterical girl, hardly able to get my words out? Or is it her? Sitting there, putting on her shoes to go out with that- (*But inspiration has deserted him by now.*) Which is it? (LBIA 60)

In Gilleman’s opinion, by leaving this question without an answer, *Look Back in Anger* launched itself into the future, past playwrights such as Terence Rattigan and Noel Coward, to explore the “existential uncertainty” that was to become a vital characteristic of modern day theatre. However, at the same time, the scholar strongly underlines the conviction that the play’s success might indeed have been artificially inflated, since at the time, British theatre was positively obsessed with its own stasis and also very conscious of the fact that change for drama was taking place everywhere else

(e.g. Germany with Brecht, France with Sartre and Beckett) (Gilleman 107). This view is supported by many other contemporary scholars: John Elsom (74) for instance, claims that *Look Back in Anger*, in many respects, is a “conventional, wordy and rather clumsy play” and that nowadays one might wonder what the extreme significance of it was; over the years, the play was both over- and underestimated and its popularity was largely due to a time of uncertainty and discontent in the theatre realm and to general political and social disillusion. Furthermore, Susan Mandala points out that already in the 1960s many critics realised that the reactions to Rattigan in the wake of the first performance of *Look Back in Anger* were largely due to prejudice against a playwright who, to a certain extent, wanted to maintain older literary traditions. This view has become more and more popular over the last decades, but unfortunately, despite the welcome correctives, many people still do not realise that, by condemning the well-made play in the 1950s, many significant and very interesting elements of this genre were overlooked, such as the controlled release of information (Mandala 81).

It can therefore be said that, despite the fact that *Look Back in Anger* was deemed the start of a “New Wave” in theatre history, and despite the fact that playwrights such as Rattigan and Noel Coward were dismissed in the wake of its overwhelming success, the similarities between Rattigan and Osborne are astounding. Both playwrights deal with problematic and complex characters, characters that have to deal with the changing rules and conventions in society after the war. Hester Collyer struggles in the world and does not know how to handle her new situation and her overwhelming passion for her lover. Even Freddie, who was extremely successful during the war as an RAF pilot, finds himself at a loss as how to continue living in a time of peace. He is not needed anymore and he has to find a new meaning in his life, far away from Hester and their destructive relationship. In this respect, Jimmy Porter is quite similar to Rattigan’s characters. He claims that there are no good causes left to be fought for, because they were all fought out by the previous generation. He, too, is faced with a changing world and he, too, is a casualty of a war, since most of his anger derives from his father being killed during the Civil War in Spain. The relationship between Jimmy and Alison is also a complicated one: like Hester and Freddie, class difference is a major issue, which leads Jimmy to resent and sometimes even despise his wife. Nevertheless, Jimmy and Alison, unlike Hester and Freddie, decide to stay together, hoping to eventually find happiness in each other. Freddie and Hester are left to fend for themselves in a changing world.

Thus, the only major difference in the plot of the two plays is in how the discontent and

dissatisfaction are voiced: Rattigan is a master of understatement and always depicts characters who repress their feelings; when they finally decide to make people see what they really think and feel it is usually too late; by not having acted sooner, they usually bring about their own downfall. Hester only lets out the whole of her despair when she is confronted by Doctor Miller; Freddie phrases his doubts and his unhappiness only when he is drunk. But just because they usually choose to repress their feelings, it does not make them any less real. Jimmy Porter, on the other hand, voices his feelings all the time, even sometimes exaggeratedly. He rants and raves and makes everybody around him feel miserable. However, his emotions are not in any way different, neither stronger nor weaker, than Hester's or Freddie's, it is their expression that differs markedly. Thus, one can safely agree with scholars claiming that the success of *Look Back in Anger* and Rattigan's subsequent downfall were mostly due to a time of uncertainty, a time that demanded something new on the British stage. In the wake of Osborne's play, the genre of the well-made play was ridiculed and despised and the playwrights writing in its tradition dismissed from public favour, despite their previous achievements and popularity, a fact that is even harder to understand when considering that, in Osborne's own words, *Look Back in Anger* was an essentially old-fashioned play, structured according to the well-made tradition. Similarly, Rattigan was not as out-dated as everybody liked to think, since the fate of the heroine in *The Deep Blue Sea* could be characterised as a "fall from grace of a typical heroine of the 'well-made' school directly into the kitchen sink" (O'Connor 180).

6. Decline and Death

May 8 1956 was to transform Rattigan's life forever; as Innes (89) explains, Rattigan was "relegated to critical oblivion at the height of his career", and this sudden fall from grace completely destroyed his spirits. Rattigan had not changed; the theatre around him had changed: "[h]e was swept aside in a tidal wave of 'new drama', more modern-seeming than his subtle, discreet examinations of human emotion. The softer cadences of his plays were lost amid the clamour of a new generation of playwrights. The noise of their anger drowned him." (Wansell 283)

It is generally believed that the speed of his "consignment to oblivion" (Wansell 283) was to hasten his death. Rattigan's shaky and fragile self-confidence could not bear the sudden dismissal from public favour, especially because to him public recognition was one of the most important things in

his life. The worst thing hereby was that neither he nor his friends could really understand why. However, according to Wansell (284), there is at least one explanation: the young, mostly needy writers of the time resented the upper-middle-class figure Rattigan represented in public. He was condemned for both his life and his plays, since to them they both exemplified everything they had come to hate about Shaftesbury Avenue and all that was wrong with British theatre. Led by Kenneth Tynan's example, the idolised Osborne and his play *Look Back in Anger* as the opposite to everything Rattigan stood for, without realising how close Rattigan's work was to that "of the man who had apparently rendered him extinct" (Wansell 284)

After his harsh dismissal, Rattigan went back to work angry and disappointed in his audience and the critics. He felt unjustly treated and therefore tried even more than usual to please them, in order to make them understand that they were making a mistake. Furthermore, at this time, his health started to decline; the family problems and the professional strains of the previous five years had left their traces (Wansell 287). But despite these setbacks, Rattigan kept producing plays, always believing that he was still going to write his one true masterpiece. However, the audience did not grace his new productions with much favour: *Variations on a Theme* (1958) for instance, was publicly ripped apart, which clearly showed that the age of Rattigan had come to an end, even though the playwright himself did not want to admit it (Wansell 297).

Rattigan did not give up: there was a new resolution in him, a "determination to tackle more difficult subjects and extend his range in the theatre" (Darlow and Hodson 252) In an interview with Robert Muller, he took advantage of the opportunity and defended himself (and the well-made play) against criticism from audiences and reviewers: "I may be old-fashioned about some of these new playwrights, but they've just got to learn their job. It's not really a help to a writer to be called a genius with his first play" (qtd. in Darlow and Hodson 252) Comparing himself to the new, angry playwrights, he also remembers his own political feelings when the Spanish Civil War broke out: "[i]n the late thirties we had things to be indignant about... Because I've always put character before ideas in my plays, people think I have no political views... People just never think of me in that sort of way. I suppose I wear the wrong kind of clothes". (qtd. in Darlow and Hodson 252)

This interview clearly showed that Rattigan was struggling with his position and his self-confidence, a condition worsened by the absolutely disastrous reception of his *Joie de Vivre* (1960), a musical version of *French Without Tears*. In the immediate aftermath of its first night, Rattigan

and Kenneth Tynan engaged in a “verbal fisticuffs” (Wansell 311), which turned an already existing antipathy into a strong enmity. Tynan destroyed *Joie de Vivre* in his review and thus sealed Rattigan’s fate and decline for the rest of his life (Wansell 313). And since his next play, *Ross*, dealing with Lawrence of Arabia, failed at the box office as well, Rattigan started believing that England had deserted and turned against him. Therefore, he decided to retire abroad (Wansell 313).

From that moment on, Rattigan’s situation went from bad to worse: none of his projects for the theatre had any success and he therefore kept himself going with writing screenplays for Hollywood (e.g. *The Yellow Rolls Royce*). Furthermore, he had been diagnosed with leukaemia, an illness he had had a particular dread of ever since his very good friend Kay Kendall had died of the same condition. (Darlow and Hodson 269) Nevertheless, once again, Rattigan did not give up. He still wanted to increase his reputation: he was convinced that if he could not persuade the critics that he was a serious playwright and worthy of their consideration, he might as well retire. The play with which he hoped to turn his situation around was *Man and Boy*. (Wansell 318) Before it was finally performed, Rattigan also revisited the topic of Aunt Edna: he claimed that unfortunately, Aunt Edna seemed to be immortal and that even her own creator would not be able to destroy her:

[...] Ten years ago I said she was immortal, and that is just what I am afraid the old girl is. And that is sad for my hope of being accepted by the post Osborne generation as a dramatist of serious intentions (qtd. in Wansell 333).

I am an unfashionable word. [...] Most unfashionable. Oh, I’ve learned to live with that. That doesn’t matter so much. Except, you see, I’d love to be taken a little more seriously by the critics. It is still assumed by some critics that I am still writing to lift the hearts of those Aunt Ednas of mine. I have tried to keep pace. Yet continually I am reading articles about the need to demolish the old theatre- and blow up Coward and Rattigan. I tell you, I don’t dig that at all. I can’t write a bit like Osborne and Wesker. I can’t because you see I’ve grown up... The truth is anger isn’t so becoming in a middle-aged playwright. (qtd. in Wansell 333)

Through his diagnosis Rattigan had been made painfully aware of the fact that he was not immortal. Time was running out and he wanted to gain back his position as an acclaimed playwright as soon as possible; all his hopes lay with *Man and Boy*. However, the play did not succeed, despite some positive reviews after its first night: for Rattigan it meant that his one ambition to write one “great play” and to regain his status as successful dramatist had failed: “[a]s Rattigan set off back across the Atlantic, he doubted whether he would ever write a play again” (Wansell 341).

During the 1960s, Rattigan’s situation continued to worsen. Due to the constant criticism he was

receiving from the audience and the reviewers, and since his health strongly deteriorated, Rattigan decided to retire into exile to Bermuda in 1965: as Wansell (350) puts it, “[Rattigan] was leaving to escape humiliation”. During this time, Rattigan’s depression developed into a form of persecution and this ailment would stay with him until his death. However, he continued to write plays and screenplays for Hollywood, but he never managed to achieve the same success he had experienced in the early 1950s. Furthermore, his career as a screenplay writer in America did neither inspire nor satisfy him; it was largely motivated by his need to make money and to a certain extent he perceived it as being a waste of his talent. Rattigan was a man of the theatre, and, even though the theatre world despised him, he would remain attached to it for the rest of his life (Wansell 353-354).

The 1960s were extremely difficult for Rattigan; however, the 1970s seemed to indicate a change in favour of Rattigan and his plays. At the end of 1970, *The Winslow Boy* was successfully revived and marked the beginning of a ten-year period of Rattigan revivals (1972, *While the Sun Shines* at the Hampstead Theatre; 1973, *French Without Tears* at the Young Vic). In 1971, Rattigan went back to England, partly because of this renewed fortune, and partly because he was given a knighthood in the New Year’s honours list. In 1973, the playwright wrote a new double-bill: *In Praise of Love* comprised *Before Dawn* and the moving story of emotional restraint *After Lydia*. The reception of this new Rattigan-project was lukewarm but more respectful than it had been in a long time; however, the weakness of the first play detracted considerably from the quality of the second. (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xviii) Nevertheless, Rattigan’s reputation was once again improving.

A) *Cause Célèbre* (1977)

Rattigan’s next play was, in many ways, going to be the opposite of *After Lydia*. While the latter dealt with emotional repression and the “personal power of indirection and the unspoken”, *Cause Célèbre* would be a “defence of sexual desire, emotional honesty and a ferocious attack on the moral pieties of middle-class, middle-brow Middle England” (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxv).

a) Radio production

Deeply disappointed by the recent failure of one of his projects (a television play on Vaslav Nijinsky), Rattigan was very glad to accept the commission for a radio play; for the story he turned to the “Rattenbury Case”, a court-case he had heard of in 1935 and the details of whose interesting story he clearly recalled. The case “contained every suppressed human emotion that he had made his own as a playwright, and it was set in a world that he knew well, the genteel, apparently respectable but sometimes empty and solitary world of the English upper middle class” (Wansell 382).

Most of the radio play, and also of the stage play to come, was taken from the real events of 1935. Alma Rattenbury, a thirty-year-old and still attractive popular song composer had married an older businessman, who could not satisfy her sexually. Consequently, she had taken her eighteen-year-old chauffeur as her lover. After a trip to London, the young man, George Stoner, became increasingly jealous of Alma, especially when he found out that the woman was still having sexual relations with her husband. Mr Rattenbury was consequently beaten to death with a wooden mallet and both Mrs Rattenbury and George were arrested and charged with murder. (Wansell 382-383, *Rebellato Cause Célèbre* xxvi)

In 1935, this case became a “cause célèbre” (Wansell 383); Alma Rattenbury represented the typical “scarlet woman”, who had first seduced a young man of eighteen, and then persuaded him to brutally murder her husband. The public therefore thought that George Stoner should be freed and Alma Rattenbury convicted, even though she did not technically commit the crime. However, the jury found Alma Rattenbury not guilty and consequently freed her. George Stoner however, was convicted and sentenced to be hanged. A few weeks later, convinced that her young lover was going to die, Alma committed suicide by stabbing herself with a knife. The young man’s sentence was later changed into life imprisonment and, by the 1950s, he had been released. During all this time, George Stoner had never given an account of what had really happened on the night of Mr Rattenbury’s murder. (Wansell 382-383, Darlow and Hodson 305-306)

This story haunted Rattigan for many years. In the 1970s, he decided to use it in order to once again explore the English attitude towards sexuality, to emotions and the consequences that ensued from it (Wansell 383). Some parts of the play can be regarded as a kind of documentary: details about the

murder, the trial and Alma's decision to kill herself were largely taken from witness reports, court transcripts and Mrs Rattenbury's letters. However, the playwright did not want to write a "pure documentary" (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxvi) and he therefore made some crucial changes to the story: Rattigan introduced a completely fictional sub-plot, dealing with a Mrs Davenport, who is called for jury service. Despite her prejudices against and her antipathy for the "scarlet woman", she finally votes "not guilty", "the truth overwhelming hatred at the last" (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxvi). Furthermore, Rattigan wanted to focus part of his play not only on the proceedings in court, but also on the social outcry following the crime and the public's perception and treatment of Alma Rattenbury. This the play shows in extreme detail: Mrs Davenport's puritan attitude is augmented by the appearance of an angry mob, whose aggression Rattigan clearly states in the stage directions (e.g. "a storm of booing, hissing and shouts of 'Shame!'" CC 101). Moreover, he also tries to uncover the reasons for the public's hatred of the woman: the play clearly shows the press's persistent interest in the case and its constant misreporting, which, in turn, fuelled people's indignation. As mentioned previously, the general consensus among the public was that Alma Rattenbury had forced her young lover to kill her inconvenient husband and that therefore she, and not George, should be hanged and the press contributed to amplify this fury: "For example, when we hear George and Alma enter their pleas, George sounds confident and Alma hesitant, though reporters phone in stories of her brazenness and his timidity" (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxvii).

According to Rebellato (*Cause Célèbre* xxviii, xxvi), one of the most striking features of this play, apart from being one of Rattigan's most personal pieces of writing, is Alma Rattenbury's attitude towards sex. In the course of the play, she, as probably one of the only characters in Rattigan's career, learns how to tell the truth about herself; when she is finally questioned in court, it is her "utter lack of evasiveness on matters sexual that compels us, her plain comfort with her sexuality that acts as a convincing counter to the forces of piety and prurience".

The play was recorded between 22 and 26 September and was directed by veteran BBC radio producer, Norman Wright. It was finally broadcast on 27 September 1975. The play uses the advantages of the radio very successfully: the dozens of locations and the fifty or more scenes "flow restlessly into one another, following characters on journeys, the proceedings taking on, at times, a hallucinator character as the language of the law joins forces with moral piety to denounce Alma" (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxix).

b) Stage play

When the radio play was first broadcast, the ex-actor and theatre producer John Gale immediately contacted Rattigan: he loved the play and wanted to adapt it for the stage. Rattigan, whose health had increasingly deteriorated in the last years (he was diagnosed with bone cancer only a few months earlier) and who knew that his time was running out, really wanted to see another one of his plays performed on a West End stage and therefore eagerly agreed. However, at first he did not know how to transfer the radio play's fluidity between scenes and location changes onto the stage. (Darlow and Hodson 307, Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxix) In fact, the whole way to the play's production was riddled with problems and complications. After having changed two directors, Robin Midgley finally appeared and from then on, the two artists worked together in Bermuda, as much as Rattigan's health allowed him to and in the spring of 1977, the play went into rehearsal (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxix).

Unlike the radio-play, the stage play is not completely chronological; it leaps backwards and forwards in time, "taking us into Alma and Edith's [Davenport] subjective experiences of the trial, overlaying scenes imagistically on top of one another" (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxxii). The play starts at the moment of crisis (the beginning of the trial) and then explores what has led to that particular moment. Thus, Rattigan manages to show how the press placed different values and meanings on the same events (Darlow and Hodson 306). This radical structure (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxxii) is supported by the a-fore mentioned sub-plot, concerning Mrs Davenport: this sexually repressed, middle-aged woman has driven her husband into the arms of another woman and has increasingly lost contact to her adolescent son, Tony. This secondary plot nearly amounts to a second play and, according to Darlow and Hodson (306), Rattigan managed to successfully connect the two plots, since he "allowed them to develop side by side in a form of continuous musical counterpoint in which they sometimes touch and affect each other".

According to Wansell (383), this sub-plot is one of the most "painfully honest- and autobiographical" Rattigan has ever written. Mrs Davenport lives in a small hotel in West Kensington, the exact location he had given for the abode of his (probably) most unpopular creation, Aunt Edna. Furthermore, Mrs Davenport's exact address is given as The Cornwall Gardens Hotel; Cornwall Gardens is the street in West Kensington that Rattigan was born in and his mother Vera's home. The biographical parallels do not end here: Mrs Davenport has an incompatible

husband and after a string of affairs, her marriage is in pieces, a situation that exactly mirrors Vera's marriage to Frank Rattigan. (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxvi, Wansell 383) In the play the audience finds out about this situation when Edith talks to her estranged, adolescent son Tony. Very much the same way that Edith Davenport is a portrait of Rattigan's dead mother (both also stem from a distinguished family of lawyers), Tony is an attempt by Rattigan to trace his own (sexual) development as a young boy (Wansell 384):

TONY. I wonder what our parents think we *do* between thirteen and twenty-one.

BROWNE. Solo, I should think, or else have cold tubs and brisk trots.

TONY. It's such damn humbug. Of course they know we're safe- apart from Shuttleworths, which they don't like to think about. You should have heard my mother on this Mrs Rattenbury. The murder apart, my mother seems to think she's the monster of Glamis, just because she's twenty years older than Wood... And why not? Look at her. (*Slaps the paper*) She's damned attractive. (CC 30)

Mrs Davenport loves her son excessively, as a substitute to her failed marriage; however, she refuses to accept Tony's developing sexuality. Therefore, the young man, with his father's money, who is not living with the family, decides to experiment and visits a prostitute. However, the results are disastrous, since he contracts a venereal disease and consequently has to deal with the cure and the shame on his own (Edith refuses to speak to him about these matters). (Wansell 384)

TONY. Mum- twice a day for maybe six weeks, maybe longer, I'll have to lock myself in there- (*Points off.*) and you'll hear a tap running. Do you honestly think I can hope to come out of there without knowing what you're saying to yourself: 'My son has committed a filthy, disgusting act, and he's been punished for it with a filthy, disgusting disease and a filthy, disgusting treatment-

MRS DAVENPORT (*roused*). Well, isn't that true?

TONY. No. What I did that night was silly, if you like, but the act was as natural as breathing- and a good deal more pleasant. (CC 44)

Humiliated, Tony turns away from "the possibility of heterosexuality" (Wansell 384) and returns to an affair with a younger boy at his school. Furthermore, Tony also learns that the "dark picture" (Wansell 384) painted by Edith of his father is an utter exaggeration and that his father's affairs

were very often only brief encounters in order to get what his wife refused him. Mrs Davenport has used these affairs in order to uphold the picture of her as “the wronged party” (Wansell 384). But even when the spouses are confronted and Mr Davenport begs her to take him back, she coldly refuses him:

DAVENPORT. [...] I must tell you with complete truth that there is no other woman in my life. No single other woman, that is.

[...]

Without you, Edie, and without Tony, I have been a very lonely man. So, I believe, are you lonely without me. Please let me come back into your life. If you do I promise to behave as well as I can. That doesn't, I'm afraid, mean as well as you'd want me to. [...] But if you can only bring yourself to overlook an occasional late night at the office, or the odd dinner at the Club with the Permanent Secretary, I swear a solemn oath to you that you will never otherwise be humiliated. I renounce my conjugal rights entirely, but I earnestly entreat you to let me once again be your loving husband.

[...]

MRS DAVENPORT. The answer is no. (CC 64-65)

According to Rebellato (*Cause Célèbre* xxxvi), *Cause Célèbre* is a remarkable achievement. Above all, it shows Rattigan's willingness to experiment to the very last: the most astonishing feature hereby is the playwright's ability to control his “complex and multilayered structure” (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxxvi). Most of the first half of the story is witnessed through Edith Daveport's eyes, “the stage appearing to represent her own distorted perspective” (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxxvi). After arguing with her son, she is left muttering: “That... that...woman” (CC 44), and immediately after this outcry, the setting changes to the Old Bailey, where an angry mob is waiting for Alma to arrive. The second scene develops naturally from the first, “as if in insane public amplification of her private emotion” (Bartlett, qtd. in Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxxvii)

The action of the second act is witnessed through Alma's eyes; the plot fluently moves from her testimony to constant flashbacks, which clearly represents the confused and shattered state of Alma's mind. Later, when the barristers sum up the case, we hear different speeches flowing together, “united by cruel sexual contempt” (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxxvii). When the judge proclaims the verdict, the stage directions mirror the audience's disappointed reactions: “[t]he court

hears a storm of booing, hissing and shouts of “Shame!”- but we do not hear it” (CC 101).

According to Rebellato, this makes the situation apparent: the mob has exploded, asking for Alma’s life. However, the audience in the theatre only perceives it through Alma’s numbed and shocked consciousness. As the play moves on into its last moments, the different characters and their actions are intertwined: “the stories, the time structures are now overlaid entirely on one another” (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxxvii). Edith, getting drunk after the verdict and after having lost both her husband and her son, is seen on the same stage as Alma, sitting on the bank of the River Avon, preparing herself to commit suicide; time stops to exist, future and present are dissolved and we witness the Coroner reading the report on the suicide that is about to happen at the same time as Edith’s “horrificed, ranting reaction” to Alma’s final act. The ending thus becomes one of the most powerful and emotionally moving Rattigan has ever written. (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxxvii)

Alma is perhaps the most straightforward and candid character in the entire Rattigan opus and she stands in striking contrast to the conceited and prejudiced world she lives in. When she is questioned in the witness-box, her artless attitude towards sexual matters stands out even more:

O’CONNOR. Since that time you did not live together as husband and wife at all?

ALMA. No.

JUDGE. Mrs Rattenbury, you do understand what was meant by the question?

ALMA. Yes.

O’CONNOR. Did your husband have a separate room?

ALMA. Yes.

O’CONNOR. Was that at his suggestion or yours?

ALMA. Oh, his.

O’CONNOR. You would have been ready to continue marital relations with him?

ALMA. Oh yes, of course. (CC 76)

Especially in court, Alma’s simple and unadorned answers stand in extreme opposition to “the legal counsels’ rhetorical flights, and Davenport’s tangled, puritanical rages” (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxxviii).

When adapting the original case for the stage, Rattigan made a number of changes; the most interesting one is the way he “theatricalises Alma’s decision to testify” (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre*

xxxviii). The historical Alma decided to testify against her young lover before the trial began. In the play, Alma changes her mind in two highly intense scenes: in the first, O'Connor tries to make her realise the consequences of her shielding George by bringing her young son Christopher to the prison.

ALMA. (*trying to steady her voice*). Well, Chris, what have you been told to say to me?

[...]

CHRISTOPHER. Well, the obvious thing, of course.

ALMA. What's that?

CHRISTOPHER. About your not giving George away in court. It was a bit of a shock, because he says the jury may find you guilty; but he put it so nicely, though...

ALMA (*faintly*). How did he put it?

CHRISTOPHER. Well, he said that as a schoolboy I'd understand about not sneaking on a friend... Well, of course I understand, except in this kind of thing... I mean, in a case of murder- real murder- what they might do- except, of course, they'd never do that to you... Oh, Mummy!... (CC 55)

Alma is horrified, nevertheless, she does not yet promise to testify: "[d]on't think you've won, Mr O'Connor" (CC 56). After this incident, O'Connor calls Alma to the witness-box, without knowing whether she will testify against her lover. It is a highly "electrifying" scene and when she finally does bear witness, it represents both O'Connor's triumph and Alma's defeat, "her survival and her own death" (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxxix). Still feeling morally responsible for what happened to her husband and not being able to bear her lover's execution and her own stigma as a "scarlet woman" and a seducer, she decides to kill herself. The play ends with Alma's farewell in her suicide letter:

ALMA. Eight o'clock. After so much running and walking I have got here, I should find myself just at this spot, where George and I once made love. It is beautiful here. What a lovely world we are in, if only we would let ourselves see it. It must be easier to be hanged than to have to do the job oneself. But that's just my bad luck. Pray God nothing stops me. God bless my children and look after them. One has to be bold to do this thing. But it is beautiful here, and I am alone. Thank God for peace at last. (CC 107)

Rattigan made various changes to this last letter and thus rendered it simpler and more resigned. At the centre stands the powerful line: “[w]hat a lovely world we are in, if only we would let ourselves see it” (CC 107): as Rebellato claims, “[a]s the darkness of the world closes around her, the line becomes ironic in its mismatch to the hatred we have seen, but it also stands defiantly as Rattigan’s utopian affirmation of the irreducibility of love” (Rebellato *Cause Célèbre* xxxix- xl). As in so many other plays throughout his career, Rattigan once again focused his energy on the inequality of passion and desire between two partners and, once again, he proved to be able to catch its enormous pain and loneliness with extreme mastery. (Wansell 393)

c) Reception

On 4 July, five weeks after a painful operation, Rattigan attended the first night of *Cause Célèbre* at Her Majesty’s Theatre in London. This time he was convinced that this was his very last first night, and so was the audience. The play went well and when the final curtain fell, the applause was “loud and sustained” (Wansell 393). However, the enthusiastic frenzy that had marked the first night of so many of his plays was nowhere to be seen. “The days of gushing ovations had disappeared” (Wansell 393), and the calmer and more measured rapture and the final applause were meant both for the play, but also for the playwright and his long and fruitful career. The reviews in the newspapers the next morning, mirrored this special atmosphere: they were “almost uniformly good” (Darlow and Hodson 318); the only negative voice was Milton Shulman’s in the *Evening Standard*, who found the sub-plot contrived and the whole first night lacking tension and atmosphere. Probably the best review came from Bernard Levin in the *Sunday Times*:

A critic has a duty to ignore anything happening off stage, and to make no allowances for any shortcomings that may result... All the same, I am at any rate partly human, and it would be absurd, as well as impossible, for me to persuade myself that I do not know that Terence Rattigan has for the last couple of years been staring into the eyes of the old gentleman with the scythe... So I am doubly delighted to say that *Cause Célèbre* (Her Majesty’s) betrays no sign of failing powers; on the contrary it could almost herald a new direction for Sir Terence, and a most interesting one, too. [...] *Cause Célèbre* is by a man who knows that in every human being there is a capacity to reflect the divine, and that it is love in all its forms, from the noblest to the most tawdry, that is most likely to show the gleam of that reflection. His play is theatrical in the best sense of the word, and I hope he will be spared to write many more such. (qtd. in Darlow and Hodson 319)

The good reviews cheered Rattigan up and he decided to once again meet with his first biographers,

Darlow and Hodson. When speaking to them, he looked back at his career and at only one point did he consider his past with a bitter tone: the early 1960s had left a deep mark on his shaky self-confidence and, even in retrospect, he claimed that he had been treated unfairly: “I discovered that any play I wrote would get smashed. I just didn’t have a chance with anything. But perhaps I should have stayed and fought it out. I don’t know.” (qtd. in Darlow and Hodson 319-320) He admitted that having been able to attend another first night in his lifetime and having been acclaimed again, had given him more pleasure anybody could fathom:

I didn’t think it would happen to me. I had hoped, though, that it might. I always thought they had been a bit unfair to me- and at a particular time they were being a bit unfair to me. It’s all very well to dislike one’s plays, but they ought to be disliked for a better reason than that they’re out of fashion. Out of fashion isn’t enough, I think. I always thought that justice would one day be done to me, but whether in my lifetime or not I didn’t know. But it’s very gratifying that it’s happened in my lifetime. (qtd. in Darlowe and Hodson 320)

In August 1977, Rattigan contracted meningitis and three months later, on 30 November 1977, he quietly slipped away in Bermuda. The news of his death reached London later that evening; the newspapers printed their obituaries and BBC 2’s Late News carried a full report of his life and his many achievements. The most appreciative was the one in *The Times*, characterising Rattigan as “one of the leaders of the twentieth-century stage in what has come to be known as the Theatre of Entertainment... he wrote some of the most enduring narrative plays of his period, designed for a ‘commercial’ theatre and using traditional techniques Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones would have recognised” (qtd. in Wansell 395-396) Michael Billington went even further in *The Guardian*: he described the playwright as “a much misunderstood dramatist” and added:

Because he was commercially successful, because of his urbane Harrovian manner and because of his cryptic style, it was often assumed that he was simply a purveyor of good middlebrow entertainment. And he himself fostered the illusion through his creation of the archetypal English playgoer who he dubbed Aunt Edna. (qtd. in Wansell 396)

Billington was convinced that there was far more to Rattigan and his talent than immediately met the eye: “[h]is whole work is a sustained assault on English middle-class values: fear of emotional commitment, terror in the face of passion, apprehension about sex. In fact few dramatists this century have written with more understanding about the human heart than Terence Rattigan.” (qtd. in Wansell 396) Rattigan would have liked to witness these respectful and generous articles published in the wake of his death; “[t]he eclipse of his reputation seemed finally over. He died a

national figure.” (Darlowe and Hodson 320, Wansell 395)

7. Conclusion

Terence Rattigan’s return to favour has been nearly as dramatic as his dismissal from public favour in 1956. On the occasion of the celebrations of the centenary of his birth, many of his plays were revived (e.g. *Cause Célèbre*, *Flare Path*, *The Deep Blue Sea*, *Separate Tables*) and thus contributed to “[re-establish] him as an important and enduring literary figure- more so than the Angry Young Men who displaced him” (Nestruck *Globe*). Nowadays, the judgement Rattigan received during the 1950s has been refuted and it has been indeed acknowledged, that despite writing in the tradition of the well-made play, Rattigan still very much tried to further develop the genre and adapt it to his own needs and was therefore at no stage old-fashioned or redundant.

Rattigan was “the great playwright of restraint” (Hensher *Guardian*); he wrote about the intensity of feeling that every human being experiences at least once in their lives, and the destructive power of passion and un-requested love. His characters usually dealt with these issues in the confines of their class and their times, always keeping up their calm and composed facades, never able to really express and phrase their real emotions. However, the notion entertained during the 1950s and 1960s that Rattigan wrote about and especially *for* the middle-classes has long been refuted: as mentioned in by director Thea Sharrock in the BBC documentary *The Rattigan Enigma* (BBC 4, 2011)¹, the playwright wrote about the middle-classes because that is what he knew best; he belonged to that layer of society and was therefore able to write about it realistically and in great detail. The themes

¹ „[...] Essentially, although the characters that he often writes about [...] are of a very small sliver of society. What he’s really interested in is what it is that drives us, what it is that makes our hearts ache, what it is that makes us laugh, what it is that makes us feel happy and take pleasure in other people, and how we have an amazing capacity to hurt other people. He always said, “This is the class that I come from,” and he wrote about those people because he understood them better, but you don’t have to be a member of the class to understand it, and that’s, I think, what’s so brilliant about his writing and why he’s been so misunderstood for so long, because people like you [Cumberbatch] have made that mistake of going, “Well, you know, isn’t it only that he writes about a certain type of person *for* a certain type of person?” And the answer is no, he doesn’t at all.”

at the core of his plays, however, could be understood by every human being, regardless of their roots. This is indeed the reason why Rattigan's opus has survived and why it still speaks to audiences with the same intensity as at the heyday of his career. And despite his unfair and short-sighted dismissal from public favour in the 1950s, and despite his work having been ignored for seventy years (Wansell Introduction ix), his reputation has finally been restored and his name returned to its proper place in the limelight. Rattigan has left a lasting imprint on British theatre history and thus his wish of being remembered after his death was fulfilled. As phrased in William Douglas-Home's address for Rattigan's funeral in 1977:

And, it is by those works- let us remember- and not by the memory of having known and loved him, that posterity will judge him. And that judgement, I submit without much fear of contradiction, will be that that gentleness, inherent in his character, enabled him to write his plays, without flamboyance and vulgarity, but with, instead, compassion and integrity and humour and a wealth of understanding, which ensured that, in no single one of them, was any line penned that, in any way, diminishes the dignity of man- rather, enhances it. And this is why whatever anyone may write about him, now or in the future, is and will be, in a sense superfluous. The fact is- let us thank God for it- he, himself, with his own works, inscribed his own unique and indestructible memorial. (qtd. in Wansell 398)

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10. Appendix

A) Abstract

In der Diplomarbeit „In and out of the limelight- Terence Rattigan revisited“ wird die Karriere vom englischen Dramaturgen Terence Rattigan evaluiert. Von den Anfängen bis hin zu seinem Tod werden seine wichtigsten Dramen analysiert und interpretiert; dadurch wird versucht sein plötzlicher Verlust an Popularität in den 1950er Jahren zu verstehen und die Gründe dafür in neue Licht zu rücken.

In den ersten Kapiteln wird die Geschichte des „well-made play“ skizziert, das Genre in dem Rattigan primär tätig war. Dadurch werden dessen unterschiedliche Strömungen angesprochen, um im späteren Teil die Karriere von Rattigan und seinen Stil besser verstehen zu können.

In den folgenden zwei großen Kapiteln werden die Anfänge von seiner Karriere und seine größten Erfolge, vor seinem öffentlichen Populärkeitsabsturz, beschrieben. Ziel dessen ist es die Entwicklung seines Stils und seiner Thematiken, die sich intensiv mit dem emotionalen Leiden von Menschen auseinandersetzte, zu veranschaulichen. Dabei werden sechs seiner berühmtesten Dramen herangezogen: „French Without Tears“, „After the Dance“ und „The Winslow Boy“ im ersten Teil, „The Browning Version“, „The Deep Blue Sea“ und „Separate Tables“ im zweiten. Weiters werden Rattigans erste Fehlschritte, die viel Missmut sowohl bei dem Publikum als auch bei den Kritikern auslösten, thematisiert (siehe „Aunt Edna“ und „Concerning the Play of Ideas“). Diese Fehlentscheidungen, bzw. emotionale Selbstverteidigungen trugen immens zum späteren öffentlichen Verabscheuen bei, da sie in gewisser Weise Publikum und Kritiker beleidigten. Es ist aber äußerst wichtig dazuzusagen, dass sich Rattigan damals keineswegs seiner Fehlritte bewusst war.

Die letzten zwei großen Kapitel behandeln Rattigans Populärkeitsverlust und die Gründe dafür. Deshalb wird John Osbornes Drama „Look Back in Anger“ eingehend analysiert, da dessen Premiere den Anfang von Rattigans Schicksal markierte. Jedoch wird durch diese Analyse die Hauptthese der Diplomarbeit, nämlich dass Rattigans Sturz vom öffentlichen Wohlwollen wenig mit seinem Können zu tun hatte, sondern vorwiegend auf die Vorurteile gegenüber dem Dramaturgen von Seiten der Kritiker und des Publikums zurückzuführen ist, bestätigt. Rattigan war keineswegs so altmodisch und elitär, wie viele Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts glaubten; gleichermaßen war Osbornes Drama nicht so innovativ wie von den Medien behauptet wurde. Es wird dadurch in diesem letzten Kapitel und in der Schlussfolgerung das Argument bestätigt, dass Rattigans Leben und Werk fälschlicherweise verurteilt wurden und die These aufgestellt, dass es daher äußerst wichtig ist, seine Dramen neu zu entdecken und seinem Lebenswerk den Respekt und das Ansehen zurückzuerstatten, das ihm gebührt.

B)CV

Ausbildung

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
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