Adaptable Terence Rattigan: *Separate Tables*, separate entities?

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TERENCE RATTIGAN'S REPUTATION has essentially been that of a theatre writer, and a conservative one, who is supposed to have avoided the darker themes that invaded the British stage after (roughly) the arrival of *Look Back in Anger* in 1956. This view of Rattigan is by now surely on its way out. His relation to the theatre and the so-called New Wave is undoubtedly more complex. However, his track record as a screenwriter, sometimes but not always adapting his own plays, should not be forgotten. In 1939 we have *French Without Tears*, then *Quiet Wedding* (1940), *The Day Will Dawn* (1942), *Uncensored* (1942), *English Without Tears* (1944), *Journey Together* (1945), *The Way to the Stars* (1945), *While the Sun Shines* (1947), *Brighton Rock* (1947, from Greene's novel), *Bond Street* (1948), and then a wonderful version of his own play *The Winslow Boy* (1948). In the 1950s he wrote *The Browning Version* (1951), *The Sound Barrier* (1952), *The Final Test* (1953), then disappointingly *The Man Who Loved Redheads* (1954), but triumphantly another adaptation of his own play *The Deep Blue Sea* (1955). *The Prince and the Showgirl* (1957), starring Marilyn Monroe and Laurence Olivier, who also directed, is often seen as the end of his film career. (It was an unsatisfactory, though intermittently charming, tardy revival of his Festival of Britain stage play that celebrated nation and the Oliviers – Vivien Leigh had the Monroe role – called *The Sleeping Prince*.) But actually his last film was much more distinguished: *Separate Tables* (1959), an American adaptation by Rattigan himself – but see below – of his own play (or rather two one-acters) of the same name. In it the work of the 'West End dramatist' (the cliché view of Rattigan) was brought to the screen by director Delbert Mann

My interest in the 1950s was sparked by my father giving up smoking on the death from emphysema of Kenneth Tynan, his schoolboy hero, in 1980. I subsequently wrote a study of Harold Hobson (*Harold Hobson: Witness and Judge*, 1995) and a survey of post-war theatre (*British Theatre Since the War*, 1999), and I am working on a book about Tynan and theatre criticism for Yale University Press. I am Head of Drama in the Department of English Literature at Sheffield University. *Dominic Shellard*

who was at the heart of New York realism in his earlier films, with versions of Paddy Chayevsky's brilliant, working-class TV dramas *Marty* (1955) and *The Bachelor Party* (1957).

In this essay I am going to explore the 'separate entities' that are Rattigan's play and Rattigan's screenplay, first by distinguishing the strength of the theatre *Separate Tables* (1954), and then by trying to locate the distinction and peculiarity of the film, which earned two Oscars in 1959. On the way we will see how some interesting problems of censorship and homosexuality arose in Rattigan's time. The theatrical *Separate Tables* is a double-hander consisting of 'Table by the Window' and 'Table Number Seven'. It was first produced at the St James's Theatre, London, on 22 September 1954, two years before the frequently trumpeted theatrical watershed of 1956, when post-war drama allegedly came of age.¹ The film which conflated the two plays was released in 1958, directed by Mann, produced by Harold Hecht and starring the very English David Niven, Wendy Hiller and Gladys Cooper as well as the very American Rita Hayworth and Burt Lancaster.

'Table by the Window' and 'Table Number Seven' are both set in the Beauregard Private Hotel (a deliberately significant name), near Bournemouth, the south-coast resort that was notable then and now for its large retirement population.² The action of the two plays occurs within eighteen months. The atmosphere is one of stasis, the outside world a disconcerting presence for the majority of residents, mediated by television, gossip in the dining room or the expression of prejudice in the residents' lounge.

The well-spring of *Separate Tables* is isolation from one's fellow human beings, and there are few plays that manage so effectively to convey the debilitating effects of loneliness. In the opening scene of 'Table by the Window' the frigidity of the hotel is disrupted by the arrival of the glamorous Anne Shankland. This upsets John Malcolm, the dyspeptic, pub-frequenting resident in his forties, because they share an uncomfortable past. By piecing together snippets of biography from a tense conversation across the tables ('separate'), the audience can work out the play's pre-history. John and Anne had been married for three years; eight have elapsed since John attacked her and was jailed for domestic violence and assault on a police officer; her subsequent marriage ended in divorce on grounds of cruelty. John now earns his living by writing for a left-wing journal, *New Outlook*, and has been attempting to rebuild his life. The fragile equanimity of their conversation disintegrates when Anne hints that she is prepared to forgive him ('Eight years will cure most scars') and John rushes out into the night to seek solace at 'The Feathers'. The wise, realistic hotel manager, Miss Cooper (Pat), who remarks that superficial conversation is an obligatory part her job, observes

pertinently to Anne, 'People are sometimes so odd about not talking to newcomers, I don't know why, and I hate any of my guests to feel lonely. [*Conversationally*] Loneliness is a terrible thing, don't you agree?'

Later the theme of loneliness and incompatibility is developed through a series of vignettes in a delicacy of characterisation which could earn Rattigan the title of 'the Jane Austen of British theatre'. The youngest guests, Charles and Jean, disagree about marriage. Interestingly, he wants respectability while she is eager to maintain her independence. An elder resident, Lady Railton-Bell, reveals to a tipsy John Malcolm her revulsion at the leftist slant of his *New Outlook* pieces and confesses she would rather die than vote for the Labour Party; and Miss Cooper and John, now ashamed of his 'sordid little piece of alcoholic self-assertion', discuss whether he could ever go back to his old career which was (a surprise to most audiences) as junior minister in the 1945 Labour government, before his prison term. Cut off from this previous life by his own *hamatia*, he has no way back, though he has found some quiet happiness with Miss Cooper, who is naturally destabilised by the arrival of Anne. In *Separate Tables* romantic closure and the false reassurance of a neatly congenial relationship is always avoided.

JOHN: [*Simply*] Do you know, Pat, that I love you very sincerely?

MISS COOPER: [*With a smile*] Sincerely? That sounds a little like what a brother says to a sister.

JOHN: [*With an answering smile*] You have surely reason enough to know that my feelings for you can transcend the fraternal.

[MISS COOPER *rises and moves to JOHN, who puts his hand on her arm*]

But 'they move apart, not in alarm, but as if from long practice'. This physical 'separation' is emblematic of 'Table by the Window's' poignant yearning for union.

A second conversation between Anne and John ends in disaster. They cannot agree why they broke up. He stresses their different backgrounds, her refusal to have children and impatience with his (lack of) social graces. She counters with her career as a model and his delusion that she never really loved him. As they talk they become gentler. Anne confesses she is in 'a bad way' and cannot bear her loneliness, dreading a life 'in a few years' time at one of those separate tables'. Relaxed by intimacy, their sexual attraction is reawakened and Anne proposes they go to her room, but she is called to the telephone by Miss Cooper – who corrects John's belief that the meeting with his wife was a true coincidence. Anne was on the phone that very minute to his publisher, Wilder. John realises she had tracked him down and, angry at seemingly being trapped into 'unconditional surrender', he melodramatically '*slips his hand on to her throat*', but instead of injuring

her he pushes her to the floor and leaves.

There is a short final scene to this one-act play which introduces a motif common to both one-acters that make up *Separate Tables: abnegation*. In spite of loving John, Miss Cooper, we learn, sat up all night with Anne, while John paced the seafront. In her kind, cautious way, she established that Anne was addicted to sleeping pills and drugs; she now says – incredibly – that she feels it necessary to give John up for Anne's sake:

She didn't win me over, for heaven's sake! Feeling the way I do, do you think she could? Anyway, to do her justice, she didn't even try... She didn't give me an act, and I could see her as she is all right. I think all you've ever told me about her is probably true. She *is* vain and spoiled and selfish and deceitful. Of course, with you being in love with her, you look at all those faults like in a kind of distorting mirror, so they seem like monstrous sins and drive you to – well – the sort of thing that happened last night. Well, I just see them as ordinary human faults, that's all – the sort of faults a lot of people have – mostly women, I grant, but some men, too. I don't like them, but they don't stop me feeling sorry for a woman who's unhappy and desperate and ill and needing help more than anyone I have ever known.

Miss Cooper's quiescence was soon to become outdated in the blast of angry rhetoric that swept through parts of the British theatre in the late 1950s, but its calm stoicism has a renewed resonance today in an era in which grandiloquent gestures are viewed with more suspicion. With quiet fervour, Miss Cooper is articulating a world view every bit as passionate as Jimmy Porter's outbursts, but in a lower key and a more equable tone. Her universal plea for greater understanding and tolerance of human frailty and her pointed emphasis on 'ordinary human faults' foreshadows 'Table Number Seven', the second play in *Separate Tables*, in which we see Rattigan's involvement with questions of sexual identity.

'Table Number Seven' is a play which represents a significant shift in Rattigan's dramaturgy. In his introduction to the second volume of his *Collected Plays* in 1953, Rattigan disastrously defined his ideal audience member by proclaiming the 'simple truth' that the theatre could not afford to offend a 'nice, respectable, middle-class, middle-aged, maiden lady with time on her hands and the money to help her pass it', whom he chose to call 'Aunt Edna'.³ But 'Table by the Window' deliberately subverted Aunt Edna's respectable expectations by an ending that stressed incompatibility and a lack of clarity. John's belief that they 'haven't very much hope together' is matched by Anne's questioning of whether they have very much hope apart. Instead of leaving the hotel, perhaps in a sunset together, they merely agree to share a table for lunch, a downbeat ending that might disappoint Aunt Edna.

'Table by the Window' cleverly uses bathos. It is tense, dispassionate and equivocal, but it is overshadowed by 'Table Number Seven' which has the most famous character in *Separate Tables*, Major Pollock. Absent in the first play ('away visiting friends') his presence in the second which takes place eighteen months later provides the dramatic focus. There seems something slightly bogus about this major from the beginning. His posh voice and locutions ('Lovely day, what?') are anachronistic in the postwar period. He says he was at Sandhurst, but gives a shaky response when asked if he was awarded the Sword of Honour. He embarrassingly confuses a Latin phrase for a Greek one which shocks the retired schoolmaster, Mr Fowler, and makes him doubt that the Major really was at Wellington.

It soon emerges that the Major has reason to be evasive about his recent past. He becomes suspiciously anxious to hide a copy of the local newspaper from his fellow residents and it is soon revealed that the paper has a report of the Major being bound over by the magistrates' court for committing a criminal offence. What does Major Pollock have to hide?

When he was writing 'Table Number Seven', Rattigan was very sure that he wanted the Major to be involved with something close to his own life: homosexuality.

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 cause a dramatic shock, the one most likely to be outside the sphere of their sympathetic understanding: the one which the Major would be most ashamed of their finding out and the one for which the whole of the part of the character of the Major was originally conceived: obviously homosexuality.⁴

He himself felt obliged to conceal his sexuality, but he also wanted to show not only a version of the love (or sexuality) that dared not speak its name, but the tolerance of this love by ordinary people. This had been recently demonstrated after the actor John Gielgud's conviction in 1953 for propositioning a man in a public lavatory ('cottaging'). Rattigan was impressed by the fact that when Gielgud (bravely) went on stage after his court appearance, he was greeted by a standing ovation and empathetic warmth. It seemed that the audience had the good sense Rattigan portrayed in Miss Cooper in *Separate Tables*. But he soon acknowledged that the Lord Chamberlain would not allow the Major's offence to be related to homosexuality: "I realized that, if I were to get the play done in the West End at all, I would have to find a way round the Lord Chamberlain's present objection to any mention of this particular subject."⁵ The term actually used by the Lord Chamberlain's office was the 'forbidden' subject.⁶ Rattigan altered his plot

and the Major's offence. Now the Major was in court for indecent behaviour in a cinema. He 'persistently nudged' one woman in the arm and later 'attempted to take other liberties. She subsequently vacated her seat, and complained to an usherette.' The censor had no difficulty with this and the reader's report for 'Table Number Seven' termed it 'a little masterpiece'. *Separate Tables* duly opened on 22 September 1954 and ran for 726 performances. Soon a Broadway transfer was organised. Perhaps because of the liberalising of attitudes seemingly announced by the arrival of *Look Back in Anger* in 1956, Rattigan was now eager to return to his original conception of the Major's offence. There had after all been two important American plays concerned with homosexuality: Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* (1955) and Robert Anderson's *Tea and Sympathy* performed on the London stage in 1953 and filmed by Vincente Minnelli in 1956. Paddy Chayevsky, the television writer, author of *Marty* and collaborator with Delbert Mann, had written interestingly on the subject of homosexuality in the preface to *Marty* in his collected *Television Plays* (1955), though it was only published in America. Rattigan therefore rewrote the magistrates' court material more boldly and more interestingly than his rather anodyne segment on the Major nudging an arm in a cinema. This was how the charge was now framed.

A Mr. William Osborne, 38, of 4 Studland Row, giving evidence, said that about 11.15 p.m. on July the 18th Pollock had approached him on the Esplanade, and had asked him for a light. He had obliged and Pollock had thereupon offered him a cigarette, which he had accepted. A few words were exchanged, following which Pollock made a certain suggestion. He (Mr. Osborne) walked away and issued a complaint to the first policeman he saw. Under cross-examination by L. P. Crowther, the defendant's counsel, Mr. Osborne admitted that he had twice previously given evidence in Bournemouth, in similar cases, but refused to admit that he had acted as a 'stooge' for the police. Counsel then observed that it was indeed a remarkable coincidence. Inspector Franklin, giving evidence, said that following Mr. Osborne's complaint a watch was kept on Pollock for roughly an hour. During this time he was seen to approach no less than four persons, on each occasion with an unlighted cigarette in his mouth. There was quite a heavy drizzle that night and the Inspector noted that on at least two occasions the cigarette would not light, and Pollock had had to throw it away. None of them, he admitted, had seemed particularly disturbed or shocked by what was said to them by the defendant, but of course this was not unusual in cases of this kind. At 1 a.m. Pollock was arrested and, after being charged and cautioned, stated, 'You have made a terrible mistake. You have the wrong man. I was only walking home and wanted a light for my cigarette, I am a Colonel in the Scots Guards.' Later he made a statement. A petrol lighter, in perfect working order, was found in his pocket. Mr. Crowther, in his plea for the defendant, stated that his client had had a momentary aberration. He was extremely sorry and ashamed of himself and

would undertake never to behave in so stupid and improper a manner in future. He asked that his client's blameless record should be taken into account. He had enlisted in the army in 1925 and in 1939 was granted a commission as a second lieutenant in the Royal Army Service Corps ...⁷

However, American producer Bob Whitehead was horrified by the foregrounding of this theme; 'in being so specific about his "offence" I feel the play becomes smaller', he wrote in September 1956. Rattigan therefore reluctantly shelved the new version.⁸

Arguably it does not matter too much what the Major did because the emotional centre of the play is the residents' reactions to *some* act outside their experience. The central segment is really a 'trial scene', a meeting called by the bully Mrs Railton-Bell who wants the Major expelled from the Beauregard Hotel. However, she is confronted with some surprising responses: the gentle Lady Matheson and Mr Fowler are discomforted by Mrs Railton-Bell's vehement bigotry; the female half of the 'nice young couple' in the previous play, Jean (now married to Charles), from whom tolerance might be expected, declares herself disgusted by the Major's sexuality. But Charles makes a rousingly positive speech:

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 love-making. I should therefore understand his. But I don't. So I am plainly in a state of prejudice against him, and must be wary of any moral judgements I may pass in this matter. It's only fair to approach it from the purely logical standpoint of practical Christian ethics, and ask myself the question: 'What harm has the man done?' Well, apart from possibly bruising the arm of a certain lady, ... and apart from telling a few rather pathetic lies about his past life, which most of us do from time to time, I really can't see he's done anything to justify us chucking him out into the street.

In this plea for the appreciation of difference, Charles appears to be acting as Rattigan's mouthpiece and underlines, in his measured, insightful appeal, the difference between the strident polemic of the 'angry young men' and the plaintive, diplomatic persuasion of this representative of the old guard.

Not everybody is as magnanimous as Charles. Mrs Railton-Bell has a down-trodden, nervy daughter Sybil (beautifully played by Deborah Kerr), who had been drawn to the Major through a mutual insecurity. She is devastated by his offence. Her pitiful plea to the Major ('Why have you told so many awful lies?') provokes a moving moment of anagnorisis on his part: '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.' This is the key point about the two plays in *Separate Tables*. The characters suffer from loneliness and disappointment, against which they quietly battle, and we realise that their struggle might be alleviated if they opened themselves up to the understanding of others rather than rely on an isolating stoicism. Rattigan is saying that the stiff upper lip can cause disastrous emotional constriction – not a view that his detractors, then and now, are keen to acknowledge, just as they will not admit that he is a more multivalent writer than is usually believed. The climax of the plays occurs when the inhibited, now distraught, Sybil opens up, surely for the first time, about her real feelings to Miss Cooper: 'The Major says that we're both scared of life and people and sex. There – I've said the word. He says I hate saying it even, and he's right – I do. What's the matter with me? There must be something the matter with me – I'm a freak, aren't I?' Miss Cooper, embodiment of Rattiganesque (and British, postwar?) good sense, makes the core speech of the play about 'freaks'.

I never know what that word means. If you mean you're different from other people, then, I suppose, you are a freak. But all human beings are a bit different from each other, aren't they? What a dull world it would be if they weren't. You see, I've never met an ordinary person. To me all people are extraordinary. I meet all sorts here, you know, in my job, and the one thing I've learnt in five years is that the word normal, applied to any human being, is utterly meaningless. In a sort of way its an insult to our Maker, don't you think, to suppose that He could possibly work to any set pattern?

This open celebration of diversity makes *Separate Tables* a very forward-looking work and the beautiful simplicity of its final scene makes it a heartening one, too. It is believed that the Major will 'slink away', but finally he has the courage to make a quiet arrival which is electrifying. One by one the residents, to the mortification of the detestable Mrs Railton-Bell, engage in minimal but gently cordial pleasantries with him. We learn that he is no longer to call himself 'Major'; he tells the waitress he no longer says things like 'mea culpa'; and crucially he indicates that he is yet to make a decision as to how long he will be staying at the Beauregard. (In this we know he has the support of Miss Cooper.) There is no easy closure to the episode in his life, or the play. The acceptance of Mr Pollock is not guaranteed and his re-assimilation is far from complete, but the unsentimental humanity of the other residents is an encouraging start, brought about by his own honesty.

Mrs Railton-Bell, however, isolates herself by attempting to stage a dramatic walk-out from the dining room – and Sybil refuses to follow her, on the edge of emancipation. Mrs Railton-Bell retreats to the sound of Sybil engaging in conversation with her friend, Mr Pollock, and Rattigan takes

great pains to avoid any facile symmetry at the end of 'Table by the Window'. The final stage direction is '*A decorous silence, broken only by the renewed murmur of the casuals, reigns once more, and the dining-room of the Beauregard Private Hotel no longer gives any sign of the battle that has just been fought and won between its four, bare walls.*'

The Broadway production of *Separate Tables* was a smash-hit, opening on 25 October 1956 and running for 322 performances, followed by a six-month tour. Harold Freedman sold the film rights to Ben Hecht and his new partner, Burt Lancaster, for \$175,000, rising to a maximum of \$300,000. Rattigan was to be paid \$50,000 for a script to be delivered by 1 June 1957. It was to be a United Artists production.

The production company insisted on significant changes. The film conflated the two one-act plays. On the stage the same actor (Eric Portman) played the disgraced politician and the Major, but for the film Burt Lancaster was John and David Niven took the part of Major Pollock. The film played up a hint of romance between the Major and Sybil Railton-Bell, suggesting at least a potential heterosexuality for the military man. Rattigan never wanted this, however, thinking it would be a 'bowdlerisation of the original'.⁹ So the studio covertly employed a second screenwriter, John Gay, to deliver its wishes. Rattigan was furious, but partly because of personal exhaustion, partly because he realised the change was commercially sensible, he agreed to a jointly devised screenplay so long as he had first place in the credits.

It would be completely wrong to see Hecht, Lancaster and Delbert Mann's *Separate Tables* as a watered-down version of the play. The conflation of the two plots adds intensity and there is a deeper characterisation of several of the residents, like the eccentric Miss Meacham (enthusiastic billiards player and committed student of racing form) and Jean Stratton, the antithesis of the passive 1950s wife, wearing slacks, refusing to dress for dinner and confidently stating that she intends to 'produce paintings and not children'.

The casting of the stars Burt Lancaster as John Malcolm, the leftist firebrand, and Rita Hayworth as Anne Shankland (his ex-wife, the model), necessarily imparted different significance to their characters. Hayworth gives glamour to Anne's arrival in the dowdy hotel. Beautiful, distant and disconcerting, she claims that she has come down to Bournemouth to help John having heard he was in difficulties: skilfully little time is left to consider the plausibility of this, as the crisis of the Major's court case swiftly envelops the Beauregard. Although the references to British party politics are removed and John is transformed into a reclusive American writer, he is still depicted as a class warrior who enjoys taunting the snobbish Mrs Railton-Bell. It is quite apparent that in this English-American film there is still latitude to

consider the issue of class division, and there is, if anything, a greater sense of class consciousness than in the play. Lancaster and Hayworth are self-evident Americans, a fresh national presence which catalytically highlights the antiquated nature of the class codes by which the English residents appear to operate.

One crucial alteration in the film is the presence of John at the residents' meeting to discuss Major Pollock's future. He is refreshingly flippant about the number of nudges the Major is alleged to have made in the darkness of the cinema and Burt Lancaster obviously enjoys the rhetorical flourishes that this repointing of John's character allows.

After the drama of the residents' meeting, Anne and John retire to the verandah where their physical attraction for each other is made much more explicit than in the play. A very passionate embrace is interrupted by Miss Cooper – and this is, perhaps, the weakest moment of the film. The ambiguous nature of their relationship in 'Table by the Window' now becomes a more calculating, less open-ended affair which descends into a violence that seems more appropriate for *A Streetcar Named Desire* than a Rattigan drama. (Though elsewhere, in Hayworth's performance, the film is able to rise to *Streetcar*-like intensities, as we shall see.) But if the drama of the violence itself is heavy-handed, its consequence is one of the subtle touches which elevates the film. It is Miss Meacham who confirms that Anne is not seriously hurt by revealing that she is going to leave. 'She's not the alone type,' Miss Meacham concludes, and then, with a wistfulness that confirms the pervasive nature of the residents' isolation, observes that 'people have always scared me'. Sybil Railton-Bell, too, is afraid of human contact: she begs the Major not to 'pretend anymore' but when he explains, in the key moment of the film, that 'I'm made in a certain way and I can't change it', she is less distressed by this revelation than by his accurate diagnosis of their shared misfortune: 'You're so scared of life ... We're awfully alike.' In a tender new scene, it is to the wounded Anne and not to Miss Cooper that Sybil confides her fear of sex. This allows Miss Cooper to become Anne's confidante after John's violence. In a highly effective set-piece, Miss Cooper explains to John that Anne takes three times the recommended dose of sleeping pills and in her palpable vulnerability is as similar to John as the Major is to Sybil. There is 'not much to choose between the two of you', she adds, and in a moment of poignant self-abnegation that must have contributed to Wendy Hiller's securing her Oscar as Best Supporting Actress, she urges John to go to her again because it is quite clear that 'you love her'.

The themes of *Separate Tables* come together in the final dining-room scene. John enters having spent the night walking on the seafront and sits at

a separate table from Anne. She apologises to him for lying about how she had tracked him down and admits that he is all the things that she is not ('honest, true and dependable'). With simple symbolism, John joins her table. At this point, Major Pollock enters. Uncertain as to how to react, the fellow residents are nervously silent: a truly thrilling moment of cinema. After a long pause, the camera enquiring (as it were) of several characters, it is John who is first to address him with a simple 'Good morning', an affirmation of friendship.

The film *Separate Tables* was as much a box-office success as its stage counterpart. Its opening in Britain on 13 February 1959 was swiftly followed by the award of Oscars to David Niven (Best Actor) and Wendy Hiller (Best Supporting Actress). What is most striking today is how skilfully the film manages to convey the stifling claustrophobia of the Beauregard Hotel. Rita Hayworth, in one of her very few powerful mature roles, invites comparison with Vivien Leigh in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Burt Lancaster has emerged as an actor of subtlety, having come far from the flamboyant heroics and circus skills of his early films like *The Flame and the Arrow* (1950). He is a real rebel in the dusty chintz. David Niven's bluster as the Major embarrassingly jars, a parody of his 'decent chap' screen selves. Gladys Cooper (Mrs Railton-Bell) is a beguiling mixture of the stern and the sinister, prowling the hotel with haughty elegance. The American factors in the film (the stars Lancaster and Hayworth and the noir-ish melodrama) heighten the Englishness of the theme and of the other performers, leading and supporting. And at the heart of this success is Rattigan, the discreet, adaptable, morally thoughtful dramatist. But for all Rattigan's success as writer in *Separate Tables*, the shift in the tectonic plates of British theatre after the *Look Back in Anger* watershed of 1956 swiftly cast him to the sidelines.

Notes

- 1 It was first published as *Separate Tables* by Hamish Hamilton in 1955; a second impression appeared in July 1955 and a third in January 1957.
- 2 The 1955 Samuel French 'Acting Edition' of *Separate Tables* renamed the two plays as 'Table No. 1' and 'Table No. 2', 'according to the Author's wishes', p. iv. I have retained the unamended titles of the third Hamish Hamilton impression of the play, since this was published two years later in 1957.
- 3 Terence Rattigan, 'Introduction', *Collected Plays: Volume Two* (Hamish Hamilton, 1953), p. iv.
- 4 Geoffrey Wansell, *Terence Rattigan* (Fourth Estate, 1995), p. 252.
- 5 Wansell, *Rattigan*, p. 253.
- 6 This was the term given to the theme of homosexuality by the Lord Chamberlain, who retained powers of censorship over British drama until 1968. There was a complete ban on any reference to the topic until 1958 when the Lord Chamberlain issued a secret memor-

andum to his readers that reluctantly explained his reasons for a relaxation of the edict. See Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre Since the War* (Yale University Press, 2000).

- 7 The altered version is in the Terence Rattigan Archive, Department of Literary Manuscripts, British Library.
- 8 Bob Whitehead, letter to Terence Rattigan (5 September 1956), British Library.
- 9 Wansell, *Rattigan*, pp. 256, 56–9.