

PROSCENIUM

Separate Tables

By Terence Rattigan

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Wednesday 13th June to Saturday 16th March 2012
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

Separate Table

By Terence Rattigan

Cast:

John Malcolm/Major Pollock	Mark Sutherland
Anne Shankland/Sybil Railton-Bell	Denise Bone
Miss Cooper	Shirley Wootten
Mrs Railton-Bell	Anne Gerrard
Lady Matheson	Sheila Harvey
Miss Meacham	Caroline Bronne-Shanbury
Mr Fowler	David Pearson
Charles Stratton	Ben Morris
Jean Tanner/Stratton	Clare Wooster
Mabel	Susi Thornton/Crystal Anthony
Doreen	Lynette Shanbury

Directed by	Alan Bobroff
Stage Manager	Arnold Glickman
Set Construction	Mark Brookes
Properties	Crystal Anthony
Wardrobe	Evelyn Moutrie
Sound/lighting	Richard Brice

Rehearsal Prompt	Keith Bayross
Publicity photograph	Mark Sutherland

Table 1

Scene 1: The dining-room. Dinner time.

Scene 2: The lounge. After dinner.

Scene 3: The dining-room. The following morning.

———— Interval ————

Table 2

Scene 1: The lounge eighteen months later. After tea.

Scene 2: The dining room. Dinner time.

All the action takes place at the Beauregard Private Hotel,
Bournemouth in the mid nineteen-fifties.

Acknowledgements

The Harrow Hotel for providing all the
dining room equipment.

Hartsbourne Country Club for the location
of the publicity photograph.

East Lane Theatre Company for furniture.

The Playwright

Terence Rattigan had a secure, comfortable, Edwardian middle class family background. Both his grandfathers were barristers and his father, Frank, was a diplomat. However, in spite of the undoubted social status, the Rattigans were not particularly wealthy and believed firmly in the sons being self-reliant. Terence was never as well off as most of his peers at prep school, Harrow and Oxford. Even at an early age Terence was fascinated by the theatre, announcing at the age of seven that he was going to be a playwright: he spent his pocket money on going to the theatre and reading plays and would entertain everyone by reciting names, dates and places connected with the most obscure productions.

His father managed to hide a series of affairs from his wife, until a misguided relationship with the future Queen of Greece forced him into an early retirement, living on a small pension. He continued to 'play the part' of an elder statesman and tried to impose all his frustrated ambitions onto Terence, wanting him to follow in his footsteps and become a diplomat and sportsman. However Terence had begun to write and mix with the theatre set at Oxford and managed to persuade his father to give him time to develop his talent and to grant him £200 a year for two years. If he had not made a success of writing by then he agreed to enter a more secure profession.

French Without Tears (1936) ensured his artistic and financial success, but it was his time in the air force that helped him mature as a perceptive creator of character by widening the range of his experience. At one point in the late forties/early fifties Rattigan's popularity with audiences was such that his plays occupied three adjoining theatres in Shaftesbury Avenue for almost three years. He

believed in craftsmanship and structure in play writing and championed the ‘theatre of character’ over the ‘theatre of ideas’.

However, in 1956 the success of *Look Back in Anger* changed the face of the theatre and Rattigan seemed increasingly middle-class, conventional and out-dated. Indeed when Osborne was challenged on the vulgarity of his play he responded, ‘Look, Ma, I’m not Terence Rattigan’. When Rattigan published a collection of his plays he wrote in the forward: ‘The prototypical theatre goer is a nice respectable, middle class, middle aged lady with time on her hands and the money to help her pass it.’ He called her ‘Aunt Edna’ and declared should a playwright displease Aunt Edna he would be ‘utterly lost’. Kenneth Tynan’s review of *Separate Tables* took the form of an imaginary conversation and ended:

Aunt Edna: Clearly there is something here for both of us.

Young Perfectionist: Yes. But not quite enough for either of us.

It was unfortunate that the decline in his popularity led to the failure of his 1957 play *Variations on a Theme*, which was the first time that he openly and honestly addressed the issue of his homosexuality.

Out of touch with the Britain of the sixties he left and set up home in Bermuda, but there was a revival of interest in his plays in the seventies. Harold Pinter, who met him in the late 1950s was an admirer: ‘He wasn’t at all pretentious. He had real charm and was suffering from the way he had been treated. It was fashion and spite that saw him booted about.. driven by envy. He had a great respect for the craft of writing. He was very skilful, very entertaining and very shrewd about human nature. He wasn’t a safe playwright at all but very adventurous.’

The Play

Set in the mid-fifties, *Separate Tables* is a study of the lies, class judgments and repressed passions of the long-term residents of the Beauregard Private Hotel. Made up of two linked one-act plays, *Separate Tables* explores the seedy gentility of the guests who live by the strict rules of a bygone era.

Although Rattigan rejected the ‘Theatre of Ideas’, particularly the presentation and discussion of political and social conflicts explored by the ‘Kitchen Sink’ dramatists, his plays are concerned with moral issues and *Separate Tables* is very much concerned with the theme of concealment – concealment of emotions or character or the past.

While writing the play in 1953 Rattigan originally conceived the Major’s offence to be a homosexual one. He later claimed that he had been so eager to address the battles being waged around homosexuality in the 1950s that he forgot about the censorship still exercised over the theatre by the Lord Chamberlain. However, in order to ensure that the play was staged in the West End Rattigan realised that he would have to adapt the nature of the major’s crime, and so importuning male persons on the esplanade became pestering women in a local cinema. He did write five new passages for the Broadway premier in 1956 but these were not used and remained unperformed until the 1990s.

Career

- 1911 Born in 100, Cornwall Gardens, Wimbledon.
- 1925 Entered Harrow on a scholarship
- 1929 Played cricket for Harrow against Eton at Lords – ‘the happiest year of my life.’
- 1930 Trinity College, Oxford.
- 1933 His first play, *First Episode*, opened at the Q Theatre.
- 1935 Worked with John Gielgud on adaptation of *Tale of Two Cities*.
- 1936 *French Without Tears* opened at the Criterion: ‘gay witty, thoroughly contemporary without being unpleasantly modern.’
- 1940 Served in the RAF.
- 1942 *Flare Path* opened at the Apollo.
- 1944 Collaborated with Asquith on film *Way to the Stars*.
- 1946 *The Winslow Boy* won the Ellen Terry Best Play award.
- 1947 Wrote the screenplay for *Brighton Rock*.
- 1947 *The Browning Version* won Ellen Terry Best Play award.
- 1948 Anthony Asquith’s film of *The Winslow Boy*.
- 1952 *The Deep Blue Sea*.
- 1954 *Separate Tables*.
- 1957 *Variations on a Scene*.
- 1960 *Joie de Vie* opened and closed after four days.
- 1964 Rented a house in Bermuda.
- 1971 Knighted in the Queen’s Birthday Honours.
- 1975 Wrote a play for radio, *Cause Celebre*, - a great success.
- 1976 *Cause Celebre* opened at Her Majesty’s Theatre.
- 1977 Died at his home in Bermuda.

About Proscenium

Proscenium was founded in 1924. Since then, the aim of this experienced group has been to present classic and contemporary plays to as wide an audience as possible. Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

The company meets three times a week, at the Harrow Arts Centre for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

Artistic Director : Michael Gerrard

Secretary : Izzie Cartwright

Chair : Crystal Anthony

Contact us at www.proscenium.org.uk



Midsummer Nights Dream (1959)



Macbeth (2006)



*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
are Dead (1972)*