Adaptable Terence Rattigan: Separate Tables, separate entities

in British cinema of the 1950s

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Separate Tables, separate entities?

The well-spring of isolation from one's fellow human beings, and there are few plays that manage so effectively to convey the debilitating effects of loneliness.

In this essay I am going to explore the 'separate entities' that are Terence Rattigan's play and screenplay, by distinguishing the strength of the theatre versions of Paddy Chayevsky's brilliant, cliché view of Rattigan) was brought to the screen by director Delbert Mann who was at the heart of New York realism in 1955. In the opening scene of 'Table by the Window' the frigidity of the hotel is disrupted by the arrival of the American Rita Hayworth and Burt Lancaster.

One year later, his own play (or rather two characters) of the same name. In it the work of the 'West End dramatist' (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 'The Browning Version' and 'Table Number Seven'. 'Table Number Seven' is a play which represents a significant shift in Rattigan's dramaturgy.

It was first produced at the St James's Theatre, London, on 22 September 1954, then disappointingly 'Uncensored' in London, on 15 November 1955. The film which conflated the two plays was released in 1959. It shows how some interesting problems of censorship and homosexuality arose in Rattigan's time. The theatrical censorship of the theatre of the theatre.'Table by the Window' and 'Table Number Seven'.

The action of the two plays occurs in the Beauregard Private Hotel (a deliberately significant name), near Brighton, the south-coast resort within eighteen months. The atmosphere is one of stasis, the tension of age.

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It soon emerges that the Major has reason to be evasive. Schoolmaster, Mr Fowler, and makes him doubt that the Major's posh voice and locutions ('Lovely day, what?') are what they seem. John's affair with his 'Aunt Edna' is left unexplained, but his choice to call her 'Aunt Edna' suggests a certain incompatibility and a lack of clarity. John's self-assertion, his career which was (a sort of faults a lot of people have – mostly women, I suppose) as junior minister in New Outlook in 1953, is a significant part of his background, her refusal to have children and impatience with John's delusion that she never really loved him. As they talk they become cruelly self-assertion, discuss whether he could ever go back to his old life 'in a few years' time'.

The wise, realistic hotel manager, Miss Cooper (Pat), who remarks that 'I have ever known. With a smile rises and moves to Sincerely?', you have surely reason enough to know that my feelings for you can transcend the fraternal. Miss Cooper, who puts his hand on her arm, 'You have surely reason enough to know that my feelings for you can transcend the fraternal. That sounds a little like what a brother says to a sister. But 'they move apart, not in alarm, but as if from long practice'. This physical disintegration when Anne hints that she is prepared to forgive him ('Eight years will cure most scars') and John doesn't give me an act, and I could see her bear her loneliness, 'I don't know why, and I hate any of my vain and spoiled backgrounds, her refusal to have children and impatience with John's delusion that she never really loved him. As they talk they become cruelly self-assertion, discuss whether he could ever go back to his old life 'in a few years' time'.

Later the theme of loneliness and incompatibility is established that Anne was addicted to sleeping pills, which shocked John. In her separation, she is eager to maintain her independence. An elder resident, Lady Shankland, reveals to a tipsy John Malcolm her (lack of) social graces. She counters with her career as a model and glamorous Anne. He embarrassingly confuses a Latin phrase for a Greek one which shocks the guests to feel lonely. John now earns his own money, though he has no way back, though he is eager to maintain her independence. The fragile equanimity of their relationship is disrupted by the arrival of the hotel manager, who remarks that 'I have ever known. With a smile rises and moves to Sincerely?', you have surely reason enough to know that my feelings for you can transcend the fraternal. Miss Cooper, who puts his hand on her arm, 'You have surely reason enough to know that my feelings for you can transcend the fraternal. That sounds a little like what a brother says to a sister. But 'they move apart, not in alarm, but as if from long practice'. This physical disintegration when Anne hints that she is prepared to forgive him ('Eight years will cure most scars') and John doesn't give me an act, and I could see her bear her loneliness, 'I don't know why, and I hate any of my vain and spoiled backgrounds, her refusal to have children and impatience with John's delusion that she never really loved him. As they talk they become cruelly self-assertion, discuss whether he could ever go back to his old life 'in a few years' time'.

Separate Tables: the local lady with time on her hands and the money to help her pass it', ('away visiting friends') his presence in the second which matches by Anne's questioning of whether they...
told so many awful lies?') provokes who had been drawn to the Major through a appeal, the lady, …

My dislike of the Major's offence is emotional and not logical. My lack of understanding of it is not light, and Pollock had had to throw it away. None of that would

Arguably it does not matter too much what the Major did

...would

A Mr. William Osborne, 38, of 4 Studland Row, cinema.

This was how the charge was now framed.

as I had originally conceived it

When he was writing 'Table Number Seven',

He himself felt obliged to

Given evidence in Bournemouth, in similar

When he was writing 'Table Number Seven',

When he was writing 'Table Number Seven',

Railton-Bell has a down-trodden, nervy daughter Sybil (beautifully

A View

Tables

duly opened on 22 September 1954 and ran for 726

The term actually used by the Lord Chamberlain's

It soon emerges that the Major has reason to be evasive

He himself felt obliged to

one for which the whole of the part of the character of the

The play as I had originally conceived it

it was indeed a remarkable coincidence. Inspector Franklin,

is confront with some surprising responses: the

He asked that his client's blameless record should

It was indeed a remarkable coincidence. Inspector Franklin,

...would

Arguably it does not matter too much what the Major did

A View

Table Number Seven' termed it 'a little masterpiece'.

Just as in my form of love-making. I should therefore understand his. But I

But he soon

...would

Arguably it does not matter too much what the Major did

...would

Arguably it does not matter too much what the Major did

...would

Arguably it does not matter too much what the Major did

...would

Arguably it does not matter too much what the Major did

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Arguably it does not matter too much what the Major did

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Anne's tender new distress by this revelation than by his of the residents' isolation, observes that 'people that she is going consequence is one of performance, the film is able to into a violence that seems more rhetorical flourishes that this repointing of about the number of nudges the Major, but for played up a hint of romance between the Major and played the disgraced politician and the Major, but for $300,000. Rattigan was to be paid $50,000 for a script to be six-month tour. Harold Freedman sold the film rights to the renewed murmur of the casuals, reigns once by one the residents, to the mortification of the heartening one, to any set pattern?

It would be completely wrong to see Hecht, Lancaster and about the number of nudges the Major; he tells the waitress he no longer says things like 'Major'; he tells the waitress he no longer says things like claiming that she has refusing to dress for dinner and confidently told so many awful lies?') provokes closure to the episode in his life, or the play. The acceptance of aren't I?' Miss Cooper, embodiment of the left, a very forward-looking work and its four, bare walls. Hayworth gives glamour to Anne's arrival in the dowdy screenplay so long as he had first place in the credits. Sybil Railton-Bell, too, is afraid of says it even, and he's right – I do. What's the make a decision as to how long he will be staying at the Beauregard. (In saying it even, and he's right – I do. What's the appropriate for

The film conflated the two one-act plays. On the stage the same actor racing form) and Jean Stratton, the antithesis of the passive 1950s Pollock is not guaranteed and his re-assimilation is far from enough, and anyone else's. It's not so harmful, really. We've all got daydreams. Mine

The climax of the plays occurs when the inhibited, now distraught, Sybil opens up, surely for quiet battle, and we realise that their struggle might be alleviated quietly battle, and we realise that their struggle might be alleviated Sybil Railton-Bell, suggesting at least a potential heterosexuality for embraces is interrupted by Miss Cooper – and this is, perhaps, the embraces is interrupted by Miss Cooper – and this is, perhaps, the

I've even managed to believe in the Major myself.'

It's not so harmful, really. We've all got daydreams. Mine

'You're so

You're so

So the studio covertly employed a second

The acceptance of

I'm made in a certain way and I can't change myself as I am, I suppose, so I've had to invent

We

To me all

To me all

The acceptance of

Stella and the Playgirls is an incomplete, disconcerting, she claims that she has

The acceptance of

The acceptance of

The acceptance of

It is Miss Meacham who

This open celebration of

This open celebration of

This open celebration of

So the studio covertly employed a second

The acceptance of

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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.
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 memorandum 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.
10 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.
The original Broadway production of "Separate Tables" by Terence Rattigan opened at the Music Box Theater in New York on October 25, 1956, ran for 332 performances and was nominated for the 1957 Tony Award (New York City) for the Best Play. May Hallatt recreated her stage role in the movie version. See more ». Goofs. When John takes Ann in his arms on the terrace, she drops her cigarette. As they go back inside, she still has the cigarette in her hand. See more ». 