



CAUSE CÉLÈBRE

BY TERENCE RATTIGAN

TEACHERS' RESOURCE PACK
RESEARCHED & WRITTEN BY
ELLEN GROVES & ANNE LANGFORD

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THE OLD VIC
THEATRE
COMPANY

CAUSE CÉLÈBRE

BY TERENCE RATTIGAN



Lucy Black
Joan Webster



Timothy Carlton
Francis Rattenbury



Simon Chandler
John Davenport



Richard Clifford
Croom - Johnson



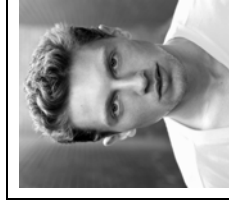
Oliver Coopersmith
Christopher



Niamh Cusack
Edith Davenport



Anne-Marie Duff
Alma Rattenbury



Rory Fleck-Byrne
Montague &
Randolph Browne



Freddie Fox
Tony Davenport



Jenny Galloway
Irene Riggs



Patrick Godfrey
Judge



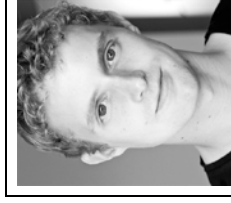
Nicholas Jones
O'Connor



Tommy McDonnell
George Wood



Lucy Robinson
Stella Morrison



Tristan Shepherd
Clerk of Court



Richard Teverson
Casswell



Sarah Waddell
Warder



Michael Webber
Sergeant Bagwell



Tristram Wymark
Porter

Understudy responsibilities

Lucy Black: Edith Davenport & Alma Rattenbury

Rory Fleck Byrne: George Wood & Casswell

Tristan Shepherd: Tony Davenport & Randolph Browne & Montague

Richard Teverson: O'Connor & Croom Johnson

Sarah Waddell: Stella Morrison & Irene Riggs & Joan Webster & Clerk of Court

Michael Webber: Francis Rattenbury & Porter

Tristram Wymark: John Davenport & Judge & Sergeant Bagwell

SIR TERENCE RATTIGAN HIS STORY

Sir Terence Mervyn Rattigan was born in Kensington, London on 10 June 1911 and died of cancer on 30 November 1977. He was one of the 20th century's best known playwrights. He was educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Oxford. Rattigan's father was an international diplomat and his mother came from a family of Irish lawyers. As his parents travelled a great deal, he spent increasing amounts of his childhood with his paternal grandmother. It seems his interest in theatre was roused at age 6 when his Aunt Barbara took him to see *Cinderella*. By the end of his time at Harrow Rattigan had become a quiet, gentle and popular young man. He was, however, something of a rebel, passing round banned works of literature and participating in protests aimed to bring an end to compulsory Officer Training Corps parades at the school.

After Harrow, Rattigan won a partial scholarship to Oxford to read History. He continued writing plays during his time at Oxford and took part in theatrical life as a performer too.

When *First Episode* was staged at the Comedy Theatre in the West End, Rattigan left Oxford to focus on his writing. When the play closed, he was broke and returned home to his father. By leaving Oxford without a degree Rattigan had ruined his chances of becoming a diplomat; fortunately his father took pity on him. He offered him an allowance of £200 a year for two years to allow him to stay at home and write, on the condition that, if at the end of that time he still could not support himself as writer, Rattigan would allow his father to choose a different job for him.

Rattigan formed a close friendship with actor John Gielgud and together they wrote and adaptation of Charles Dicken's *A Tale of Two Cities*. Rattigan was profoundly affected by Gielgud's arrest when he was accused of homosexual offences; it is said to have triggered him writing *Separate Tables*.

It seems Rattigan was not only inspired by events in his life but also by his middle class upbringing, which is reflected in most of his plays.



CHRONOLOGY

RATTIGAN'S CAREER

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|---|---|
| <p>1926 – At Harrow School aged 15 Rattigan writes his first play <i>Integer Vitae</i> or <i>The Pure in Heart</i>. It seems it was never performed.</p> <p>1933 – <i>First play First Episode</i>, a rewrite of his play <i>Embryo</i> is staged in a small theatre near Kew Bridge, London. It then transfers to the Comedy Theatre in the West End, earning Rattigan £100 in royalties.</p> <p>1935 – Rattigan writes <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> with John Gielgud. The play wasn't produced due to a coinciding adaptation.</p> <p>1936 – Having abandoned his studies to become a full time playwright Rattigan writes <i>French Without Tears</i>. It opens in the Criterion Theatre, London and is Rattigan's first critical and box office success.</p> <p>1938 – With Tony Goldschmidt, Rattigan writes the farce <i>Follow My Leader</i> about the rise of Hitler. Goldschmidt and Rattigan tried to rush the production when Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia but it was banned but the censors for fear of offending Hitler.</p> <p>1939 – In an attempt to move away from comedy, Rattigan writes <i>After The Dance</i> which premieres at St James's Theatre, London.</p> <p>1940 – <i>French Without Tears</i> is made into a film, directed by Anthony Asquith and starring Ray Milland. <i>Follow My Leader</i> is also finally produced but closes within weeks. Rattigan also writes <i>Grey Farm</i> with Hector Bolitho, which is produced in the Hudson Theatre, New York. It closes within weeks of opening.</p> <p>1942 – Rattigan's next play <i>Flare Path</i> opens at the Apollo Theatre and is a success.</p> <p>1943 – Rattigan returns to comedy with <i>While the Sun Shines</i>: the farce is popular and critically acclaimed.</p> <p>1944 – Continuing with comedy, Rattigan writes <i>Love in Idleness</i> which plays in the Lyric, London. It later played at the Empire, New York starting in January 1946.</p> <p>1948 – A one act farce, Rattigan's <i>Harlequinade</i> opened at the Phoenix Theatre alongside <i>The Browning Version</i>, another of his plays.</p> <p>1949 – This year saw Rattigan produce <i>Adventure Story</i>, a play in which, most critics agreed, he overstretched himself.</p> | <p>1950 – The Rattigan/Gielgud version of <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> is produced as a radio play. His play <i>Who Is Sylvia</i> is unsuccessful and panned by critics.</p> <p>1952 – Rattigan follows two unsuccessful plays with what was often described as 'his finest play to date': <i>The Deep Blue Sea</i>.</p> <p>1953 – Sir Laurence Olivier stars in Rattigan's <i>The Sleeping Prince</i>, which the critics deem a 'waste of talent'.</p> <p>1954 – <i>Separate Tables</i> sees Rattigan return to commercial and critical success.</p> <p>1958 – Rattigan claims his next play <i>Variation on a Theme</i> is intended to 'blow up the establishment'. The critics called it 'tame'.</p> <p>1960 – <i>Ross</i> opens at Theatre Royal, Haymarket starring Alec Guinness. The same year Rattigan's <i>Joie de Vivre</i>, the musical version of <i>French Without Tears</i> closes after four nights.</p> <p>1963 – Rattigan's <i>Man & Boy</i> only has a short run. Laurence Olivier and Rex Harrison turn down the lead role, concerned about what playing an openly homosexual character might do to their reputations.</p> <p>1970 – Ian Holm stars in Rattigan's next work <i>A Bequest to The Nation</i> which receives damning reviews.</p> <p>1971 – Rattigan is knighted in the Queen's Birthday Honours. The same year he is diagnosed with leukaemia.</p> <p>1973 – Rattigan seemingly returns to a farcical style with <i>In Praise of Love</i>, but the action reveals itself as a tense drama. It receives great reviews.</p> <p>1976 – <i>Duologue</i> is shown at the King's Head Theatre, a London fringe venue associated with the avant-garde theatre movement.</p> <p>1977 – Rattigan ignores his doctors' warnings that his cancer is spreading and stages a rewrite of his 1975 radio play, <i>Cause Célèbre</i>. He leaves hospital one evening to attend the opening night at Her Majesty's Theatre. He dies four months later.</p> |
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CAUSE CÉLÈBRE SYNOPSIS

The action takes place in Bournemouth and London between 1934 and 1935.

ACT I

The curtain rises on a Clerk of the Court, Mrs Davenport and Alma Rattenbury. The clerk reads a charge to Alma; she is charged with the murder of Francis Mawson Rattenbury. She is asked for her plea: 'not guilty' is the response. Mrs Davenport is sworn in as juror.

The scene changes to a sitting room of a flat in Kensington, London. Mrs Davenport has just come in with an official letter; it transpires it is a jury summons. Mrs Davenport explains to her younger sister, Stella, that she is quite looking forward to it as she has plenty of time on her hands now she is separated from her husband, as a result of his infidelities and his continuing relationship with another woman. Mrs Davenport is concerned that the time her son Tony and her estranged husband John spend together will give John the opportunity to turn Tony against her.

The scene changes to Tony and John Davenport saying goodbye. Tony asks if he will be able to still see his father and is told the choice lies with his mother. They discuss how Davenport had promised to take Tony to a brothel but hadn't due to his age. Davenport advises Tony to wait a few years before going to a brothel and warns him, when he does, to take precautions.

The action moves to the Rattenbury residence in Bournemouth. Irene, the Rattenburys' maid and Alma's companion, is talking to Wood who has come to the house in response to an advertisement for home help. Irene tells him he is too old, but when Alma sees him she disagrees and decides to hire him despite Irene's concerns. Alma introduces Wood to her husband, Mr Francis Rattenbury, who is deaf and elderly.

Back in Mrs Davenport's flat, she and Tony discuss the news of the moment: that Mrs Rattenbury and her young lover George Wood have battered Mr Rattenbury to death. It is in all the newspapers. Stella arrives and they further discuss the Rattenbury case. Mrs Davenport is most upset by the fact that Wood is so much younger than Alma, the same age as Tony in fact.

Tony's friend Randolph arrives and the two boys, away from the ladies, discuss their libido and how to satisfy it. Tony, ignoring Randolph's advice, decides to visit a brothel.

The action moves over to a small prison cell, housing Alma, with her wardress Joan, who is stern despite Alma's attempts to befriend her. Alma is visited by her defence lawyers, O'Connor and Montagu. Alma is claiming she killed her husband and that Wood had nothing to do with it whatsoever, she wants to protect him and save his life. Through some difficult questioning, straight talking and emotional blackmail they begin to persuade her to tell the 'truth': that Wood did it. The lawyers leave Alma in an emotional state. Left alone together, Joan drops her stern persona and becomes friendly with Alma.

Back in the Davenport flat, Stella and Mrs Davenport are discussing how Mrs Davenport can avoid jury duty on the Rattenbury case. Tony asks to see his father and his mother refuses despite his insistence. He explains that he needs to talk to a man. He reveals enough information to make clear that he has caught an infection from his visit to a prostitute, and goes to his father.

We see Joan and Alma arrive at the courthouse dressed as one another to protect Alma from the aggressive crowd outside. Alma is upset by the derogatory comments from the crowd.

The scene shifts to O'Connor and Casswell, a lawyer defending Wood. O'Connor uses his seniority and experience to advise and influence Casswell's approach. He suggests the weakness of their case lies in Wood's claim he was under the influence of cocaine and suggests he try again to dissuade Wood from this line of defence.

Casswell goes to Wood and is unsuccessful in dissuading him. Wood is determined to protect Alma, his first lover, from the death sentence.

Joan, O'Connor and Montagu are with Alma just before they go into the courtroom. Alma tells O'Connor she will not be going into the witness-box. She can only stick to the truth if she doesn't have to implicate Wood herself. O'Connor sends for Alma's eldest son Christopher in an attempt to show her why she must fight for her life. Alma and Christopher have a short conversation which before he is taken to his seat. He will be watching the trial.

ACT 2

The curtain rises on the Judge and Mrs Davenport. Mrs Davenport is making her case for being excused from the jury: her deep dislike for and prejudice against Alma. The judge dismisses this as a response to the media coverage the case has had and is happy to proceed; the lawyers on either side do not object either. Mrs Davenport must stay on the jury.

The trial is underway. O'Connor objects to Wood's lawyer's, Croom-Johnson's, use of the phrase 'woman and boy' in his opening address. O'Connor is evidently competitive.

The scene changes back to the Davenport flat where Tony has still not returned home from his father. Stella and Mrs Davenport discuss the fact that Mrs Davenport has been elected forewoman of the jury. Tony then appears with his father who informs Mrs Davenport that Tony has been suicidal, not just because of his infection, which is treatable, but because of the psychological impact of the incident. Davenport asks to come home, to reconcile the marriage but Mrs Davenport refuses.

We return to the trial. Police Sergeant Bagwell is in the witness box being questioned by Croom-Johnson. We learn how, on the night of the murder, Alma was drunk, dancing around and trying to kiss the police officers present. She was also announcing that she had killed her husband claiming to have hidden the mallet but being too drunk to remember where. O'Connor begins his cross examination. He not only suggests Alma's behaviour was due to hysteria induced by shock, but manages to lead the sergeant into explaining how the police handbook advises keeping a person in shock warm and away from alcohol. The sergeant admits it was very cold that night and he did not prevent Alma from drinking. The police handbook states that failure to comply with the advice given could be fatal. Thus the sergeant is discredited and hysteria made a likely explanation for Alma's behaviour.

O'Connor calls Alma to the stand, even though he is still unsure if she will comply. She does but is visibly in a daze and speaks in a barely audible voice. Alma confirms that herself and her husband had not been living 'as husband and wife' for some time and that for five months she was having sexual relations with Wood. She also states that her husband must have known about the affair but was entirely apathetic towards it. She talks of how she planned to end the affair. When the line of questioning comes round to the night of the murder, Alma seems unable to continue. O'Connor reads Wood's statement about the events of the evening. The statement outlines how Wood heard Alma and Mr Rattenbury being intimate with each other and how his jealousy drove him to kill Mr Rattenbury, by beating him repeatedly over the head with a mallet which he then hid in the garden. He then went to Alma and explained. She was devastated by the news and called a doctor, telling Wood to go to his bedroom and to play innocent when questioned.

Alma confirms Wood's version of events as the truth and that she had no part in planning his murder.

Croom-Johnson begins his cross examination. His questions reveal little until he leads Alma to explain that she did not tell the police the truth about Wood being the killer because she felt 'responsible'. O'Connor clarifies this as feeling responsible for Wood's protection rather than for her husband's death.

The scene returns to the Davenport flat. It seems that Mrs Davenport has been moved by the case and is less damning of Alma. Tony wants to stay with his father.

Back to the trial and Casswell and Croom-Johnson make their closing speeches. They call into question the credibility of an adulteress and a liar. O'Connor responds by referring to Mrs Davenport's objections to participate in the trial as she was so disgusted by Alma's behaviour. He reminds the jury that her charge has nothing to do with all this, her charge is murder.

Whilst the jury withdraw to make their decision, Alma seems absent, she is only concerned that Christopher knows her innocence, not what the jury say.

The jury find Wood guilty of murder and Alma not guilty. Alma is released into the care of Irene and they exit. Within minutes, Irene returns and exclaims that Alma has run away.

Back in the Davenport flat, Mrs Davenport tells Stella how the jury voted five for guilty, six for not. Her vote made it five-seven and then the rest gave way to her, thus securing Alma's release. Stella is not impressed and assures Mrs Davenport that this will affect her social standing.

The scene fades to a coroner reading his report to an unseen court. He explains that Alma Rattenbury committed suicide by stabbing herself as a result of Wood's death sentence. Had she lived a few more days she would have heard of the reprieve accorded him.

What does 'cause célèbre' mean?

'Cause célèbre' is French for Famous Cause: it means an issue or incident that creates extensive public debate, campaigning and controversy. The term is particularly associated with renowned legal cases.

CAUSE CÉLÈBRE CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Alma Rattenbury

Alma is in her late 30s. She is glamorous, beautiful and full of life. She has an infectious love of life and sees it as a gift to be enjoyed. Before her marriage to Francis she was married twice: her first husband died and the second marriage ended in divorce. Alma has two sons, Christopher from her second marriage and 'Little John' with Mr Rattenbury. She employs Wood as a chauffeur and home help and is attracted to him immediately. They embark on a passionate affair. Alma often 'fibs' to her husband to get money out of him for house keeping and to spend on Wood. When her husband is murdered she confesses and takes the blame, in order to save Wood. We see a sharp contrast between the fun-loving and confident Alma at the start of the play, and the withdrawn, quiet Alma of the court case. Her despair that Wood is sentenced to hang leads her to commit suicide. This not only illustrates the love she has for Wood, but the feeling of responsibility she feels for his actions.

Francis Rattenbury

Mr Rattenbury is in his late 60s. He is an architect and business man and is Alma's husband. He too was married once before and divorced his first wife in order to be with Alma. His financial ventures are suffering due to the financial climate of the times. It seems he is aware of his wife's affair but not concerned. He is the father of 'Little John', aged 6. His focus seems to be his declining fortune and he is reluctant to provide Alma with sufficient house-keeping money and takes any opportunity to save money.

Irene Riggs

Irene is Alma's maid, though she prefers to be referred to as companion. Irene is suspicious of Wood as soon as he arrives at the Rattenbury's house responding to an advertisement for help. Irene sees that he is a young man, rather than the boy she had in mind, and suspects that this will lead to trouble. Despite this she continues to remain loyal to Alma, frequently visiting her in prison and attending the trial. Irene also intends to have Alma to stay with her when she is released from custody.

George Wood

At the beginning of the play we meet Percy Wood when he is aged 17. His father is a builder who employs him from time to time. Due to the economic climate of the 1930s, there is little work for him at present so he has responded to an advertisement for help at the Rattenbury residence. Alma is instantly taken with his manly physique (the result of manual labour and cycling) and hires him. Alma dislikes calling him Percy or Wood so decides upon calling him 'George', his middle name. George falls madly in love with Alma and enters willingly into the affair. However, his jealousy of Alma's fondness of her husband and continuing tenderness towards him leads him to brutally murder Mr Rattenbury with a mallet to the head. He refuses to implicate Alma in his defence, citing his love for her as the reason.

Edith Davenport

Mrs Davenport is reasonably well off and well connected. She has recently separated from her husband John as a result of his infidelities. Mrs Davenport has a strict moral code and does not care for sexual contact or condone promiscuity. She is vehemently protective of her 17 year old son, Tony, both in terms of women and the influence of his father. This protectiveness is what causes her disgust towards Mr Rattenbury. At the start of the play, Mrs Davenport is certain that Mr Davenport will not challenge her for custody over Tony.

Mrs Davenport ends up on the Jury for the trial of Wood and Alma and feels repulsion towards Alma. Despite her dislike of Alma, she is convinced by the defence of her innocence and finds her not guilty. She maintains her position towards her moral character but is eventually able to separate that from the accusation of murder.

John Davenport

Davenport is Mrs Davenport's estranged husband who had several affairs through the course of their marriage. Both Mr and Mrs Davenport seem to acknowledge the infidelities occurred due to being assigned separate beds relatively early on in the relationship, at Mrs Davenport's insistence. We learn that despite his advances and pleas, Mrs Davenport was reluctant to satisfy his sexual needs or desires so he looked elsewhere. He pretends to his wife that he is still in a relationship as he sees this as a matter of pride, perhaps as a way to compensate for his wife calling the shots over their divorce. He does, however, admit the truth about this to Tony, his son, with whom he is close. It seems he never loved any of his conquests and is lonely and miserable away from his wife whom he still loves. He is only able to see Tony with Mrs Davenport's permission which she is reluctant to give. At the end of play, he makes a final attempt to rekindle his relationship with his wife but as he cannot promise to remain faithful she cannot accept his terms.

Tony Davenport

Tony is John and Edith Davenport's son. He is 17 and his main focus seems to be his desire to have sex. Unlike his mother he is controlled by his emotions and more primal urges rather than logic and a strong moral code. After reading about the Rattenbury case in the papers, he becomes jealous of Wood. He is frustrated by his mother's lack of understanding or awareness in this area and eventually heads out to a brothel, despite warnings from his father and best friend, Rudolph. Tony catches an infection as a result and is so upset by this that he defies his mother and goes to his father who takes him out of school, citing his psychological state as the reason. It is his father who explains to his mother that the infection he has will be healed soon enough, but it is the anguish and heart ache of the affair that has really harmed him.

Stella Morrison

Stella is Mrs Davenport's younger sister. She is considerably wealthier than Mrs Davenport, dresses well and is of a less serious disposition than her sister. She too is appalled by the Rattenbury murder, but is more concerned with the fact that Alma had an affair with a servant of all people more than anything else. She laughs and jokes more than her sister, especially with Tony, which seems to displease Mrs Davenport. It seems that Stella is in a happy and comfortable marriage with Henry Morrison but there are hints that she is unhappy or frustrated by his lack of libido.

O'Connor

O'Connor is Alma's defence attorney. He is competitive and confident. He resents the success of his junior, Montagu, and the rapport he has with Alma. He is not afraid to push the boundaries of fairness and does so in various ways throughout the trial. He does, however, resent his 'enemy' behaving in a way he deems unfair; this double standard serves to highlight his competitive nature. It does appear though, that he is not solely motivated by beating his counterpart in the trial. He is determined not to allow Alma to take the blame for the murder and seems genuinely concerned for her life. He mentions to Caswell that his is always aware of what is at stake: her life.

Montagu

Montagu is part of Alma's defence team, junior to O'Connor. He is full of admiration for Alma and tells her so quite freely. It is highly likely that he is attracted to her. He is keen to save her and in order to persuade her to change her story of 'that night' he is happy to lead her to break down. He is concerned about her even after the not guilty verdict has been delivered when she flees from Irene.

Croom-Johnson

Croom-Johnson is the lawyer prosecuting Wood and Alma. He appears to be every bit as competitive as O'Connor, though perhaps less of a maverick.

Caswell

Caswell is Wood's defence lawyer and is feeling the strain of such a high-profile case. He confides in O'Connor about the difficulties they are having mounting a defence and takes his advice, despite his suspicions that he is being hoodwinked. He is also painfully aware that two lives are at stake.

Joan Webster

Joan is the warder supervising Alma in custody before the trial. When we first meet her, she is a stickler for the rules, refusing to address Alma by her Christian name or be addressed by her own. She soon changes her ways when she sees how vulnerable Alma is. Not only do Christian names become the mode of address but Joan even disguises herself as Alma to protect her from the attention of the braying crowd outside the courtroom. By the end of the play, Joan and Alma are on good terms and seem quite attached to one another.

THEATRICAL CONTEXT OF THE PLAY

Cause Célèbre was written in 1977; from the mid 50s to this point Modern theatre came into its own. Modern theatre deviates from classical in several aspects. Firstly it deviates from the traditional three act structure by which previous theatre was bound. The change in structure also led to experimentation with narratives being played out in a non linear style, with a rejection of French classical ideals of the unities of time, place and action which had demanded that one action be played out in one place over no more than 24 hours. Theatre had previously been concerned with historical figures, nobility or gods, the age of Modern drama saw plays concerning 'real' people and a variety of classes.

It is widely thought that the British age of Modern theatre began with Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* which premiered at the Royal Court in 1956. Despite critical questions over the play's quality, it undoubtedly set the course for a new direction in British Theatre. It is reported that Rattigan did not ignore this event, although his immediate theatrical responses might not indicate it.

The following theatrical frenzy of the 1960s and 70s included work like the political inspired performances of *Littlewood's Theatre Workshop*, *7:84*, *Red Ladder* and so on. There was a great deal of absurd theatre like early Stoppard, Albee, Beckett and Ionesco. The time also saw feminist work from people like *Monstrous Regiment*. Experimentation with improvisation also became fashionable, most famously with the work of Mike Leigh, not to mention the rise of dance drama, 'the happening' and performance art.

The most famous playwrights and dramatists in 60s & 70s include, among others: Harold Pinter, Mike Leigh, Joan Littlewood, Samuel Beckett, Neil Simon, Michael Frayn, Tom Stoppard, John Guare, David Mamet, Brian Friel, Willy Russel, Peter Nichols, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, and Eugene Ionesco.

It seems that *Cause Célèbre* was Rattigan's first major and finest experiment with form and narrative in the vein of his contemporaries. The story is played out in a non linear fashion, jumping from scene to scene utilising heightened theatrical techniques like lighting and design to create a Modern work.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE PLAY **BRITAIN IN THE 1930s**

'It's terrible – this slump' Alma

There is little doubt that English society in the interwar years witnessed real social change in response to female emancipation in 1928 and the tragedies of the Great War.

In the 1930s Britain was subject to a Great Depression, also known as the Great Slump. It was in fact the largest economic depression in Britain in the 20th century. It was directly linked to the global depression of the time, which was only finally solved with the outbreak of World War II.

The Great Depression began in America when the stock market crashed in September 1929; known as the Wall Street Crash this is often referred to as Black Tuesday. It hit Britain and Ireland at a time when they were still reeling from the effects of World War I. This meant that formerly wealthy people found themselves without the income they had become accustomed to. Demand for British products and British industry collapsed, causing unemployment levels to rocket. In 1930 unemployment went from 1 to 2.5 million and by the end of 1931, it had reached nearly 3 million. By 1934/5, when *Cause Célèbre* is set, employment figures were very slowly on the rise. However, the economy in Britain was only finally stimulated by the outbreak of World War II.

It is worth taking a moment to compare the economy in Britain in the 1930s to today's situation. Unemployment currently stands at just over 2.9 million: this appears to be a larger figure than the early 1930s. However, the population of the UK then was approximately 45 million and now it stands at approximately 62 million. Therefore, the percentage unemployed in the 30s was actually far greater than today. As a result of the economic slump there was also an increase in inflation, most acutely felt in Germany with hyperinflation meaning their currency lost a huge amount of value and people were forced to spend their life savings on food. Similar trends were seen in Britain. Today, in 2011, we are seeing the cost of food increase too, with supermarkets doing everything they can to convince us that they are keeping costs down. With pay freezes across many sectors and decreasing pensions people are having to spend a far greater proportion of their income on food.

The First World War had started a process of social change that would completely alter British society, including affording women the right to vote and enter professional jobs. Yet the 1930s remains an era in which class structure, artistic censorship and a 'proper' sense of morality prevailed. The institution of marriage was elevated to lofty status, it was regarded as both a force with which to stabilise society and a means of reversing the nation's declining birth trend. To maintain the integrity of marriage English law would only grant a divorce on the grounds of sexual misconduct, until 1937 when alternative grounds such as cruelty, habitual drunkenness, desertion and rape were introduced.

Meanwhile, the working classes were encouraged to aspire to middle-class ideals of home centred lives and family-based activities. Indeed, it was the middle classes who continued to represent the moral compass of the nation, openly expressing their outrage at the laxity displayed by wealthier and poorer members of society alike. It seems moral standards were dictated by middle class, middle-aged men.

Morality and the media had a profound influence on society in the 1930s, a decade in which the newspaperman flourished. Playing an unprecedented role in society, the newspaper had become the dominant medium for the delivery of news. The *Daily Mirror* changed the shape of journalism when it re-launched in 1934 to shed its middle-of-the-road approach, downgrading tone and content in favour of a mass audience. The man at the forefront of the revolution, Harry Guy Bartholomew, took his inspiration from the USA where human-interest stories and overblown reporting of murder cases underpinned the success of tabloid papers such as the *New York Daily News*. In this environment crime news, in particular court reporting, began to represent big business for the UK's daily papers. This was a time in which the popular press was accused of placing its commercial interest in sensational stories ahead of its wider social responsibilities. Critics accused editors of inflated crime coverage, suggesting this could prove a real threat to public morality. Despite this, reader interest in accidents, courts and divorces meant that papers including the *Daily Express* not only devoted regular columns to the subject, but that these events were sometimes peddled as entertainment, something we are more than familiar with today.

Against this new backdrop of tabloid reporting, as the newspapers increasingly had a powerful say in determining accepted codes of moral behaviour, Alma Rattenbury would be brought to trial

THE 'TRUE' STORY

Alma Pakenham (her maiden name) met her husband Francis Rattenbury in Canada, where Francis had emigrated and built himself a strong reputation and fortune as an architect, designing several landmarks, perhaps most notably in Victoria. Alma herself was well known as a child prodigy, a singer, piano player and song writer, gaining notoriety throughout her adult life.

The first public stir the couple caused was when Francis left his wife and two children for Alma, 29 years his junior. Francis fell out of favour in Victoria when he flaunted his affair with Alma and treated his ex-wife, Florence, badly; apparently turning off the heating and lighting in the home after he left. The pair left Canada for England in 1929 after the birth of their son, John. That was the year Florence died.

In England the pair began to struggle financially. Rattenbury was semi-retired and his financial investments turned sour, such was the economic climate of the time. The marriage was beginning to collapse. It was about this time that Francis advertised in the Bournemouth Echo for a chauffeur and hired George Percy Stoner (Wood in the play). Alma began an affair with Stoner who eventually moved in to the Rattenbury home.

In 1935, Francis Rattenbury was murdered in the family home by repeated blows to the head with a mallet. Alma confessed to the crime. Stoner, however, confessed to the housekeeper that he, in fact, had committed the murder. Both Alma and Stoner were arrested and charged, although Alma later retracted her confession. Stoner was found guilty and sentenced to death. Just a few days after the trial, Alma repeatedly stabbed herself on a riverbank in Christchurch, Dorset. Poignantly, due to public pressure claiming that Stoner had been led astray by his lover, his sentence was reduced to life imprisonment.

Stoner served seven years before being released to serve in the army during World War II. He died in 2000 in Christchurch Hospital.



Francis Rattenbury



Alma Rattenbury



George Stoner

CRIMES OF PASSION CASE STUDIES

CASE 1: TEXAS, USA

Candy Montgomery and Betty Gore were friends. Not good friends, but friends nonetheless. They were both 30 and married, with two children each. Their daughters were best friends. It seems they were both dissatisfied with their marriages: Candy's solution was to have an affair with Betty's husband, Allan, which lasted from December 1978 to October 1979.

On Friday 13 June 1980 Allan Gore, whilst out of town on business, struggled to contact his wife and concerned by this asked neighbours to check in on her. The neighbours found Betty Gore face up in a pool of blood on the laundry room floor.

The investigators were convinced the crime had been committed by a friend or family member because there was no sign of forced entry and nothing had been stolen. Small bloody foot prints left in the house lead them to deduce the murderer was either a youth or a woman.

The police interviewed and fingerprinted the Gores' friends and family. Candy's prints matched a bloody thumbprint found on the freezer and she was arrested on 26 June 1980. Under a lie-detector test carried out by her attorneys Candy admitted killing Betty.

In the trial, Candy pleaded not guilty, citing self defence as the reason. On Candy's behalf, a Dallas psychiatrist, Maurice Green, testified that she had been in a "dreamlike" trance when she had committed the murder. Candy claimed, on the stand, that Betty had attacked her with the axe they kept for chopping wood, confronting her about the affair. They had grappled for the axe, resulting in Candy's panic and rage and the vicious attack on her former friend. In fact, Candy had to be hypnotised in order for the events of the attack to return to her.

The jury found her not guilty, which was a controversial decision. Critics questioned how the attack could have been self defence when so many blows were struck after the victim had died.

Candy's husband stuck by her and they moved away. Allan Gore re-married less than three months after the trial to a woman he started seeing within weeks of Betty's death. His two daughters went to live with their maternal grandparents in another state.



Candy Montgomery

CASE 2: ILLINOIS, USA

Donald Weber Jr. was a popular young man with a promising future. He was athletic, clever, handsome and likeable. He came from a well off and popular family. In 1983 he met Lynda Singhsinsuk and they soon became lovers.

In autumn 1984 the pair was parted when Weber went off to law school in New York. They remained an item and frequently wrote and spoke to each other. The distance put a strain on the relationship though and Weber became paranoid about the new friends Lynda was mentioning in her letters. In 1990, when Weber lost his job and decided to move to Chicago, the pair split up when Lynda admitted she had been having a relationship with a friend, Thad. Weber told a psychiatrist he wasn't sure if he love Lynda, but was obsessed with getting her back.

On Monday 16 April 1990, Weber went, with a .22 calibre hand gun, some ammunition and a rope to Chicago. He arrived on Lynda's door step at 10.30pm. Weber shot her six times in the chest, one bullet pierced her heart. He buried her in a rubbish dump.

Lynda was listed as missing: with no body there was no crime. Weber was questioned but released when he couldn't be placed at the scene.

Five months later Weber read that hunters sometimes found the bodies of murder victims. He dug Lynda up and buried her again in a forest in Arizona. He fled to Thailand, apparently chosen because it has no extradition agreement with the USA. It seemed he had gotten away with it. However, on Christmas Day 1990 he telephoned Lynda's parents and offered to tell them where her body was in exchange for \$50,000.

The Singhsinsuks hired a private detective who tracked down Weber in Thailand and spent 22 hours grilling him. He confessed but showed no remorse and drew a map to Lynda's grave. Weber later flew to Arizona to lead a private search party.

In March 1991, when Lynda's body had been identified, Weber was arrested and charged with murder, armed robbery and concealing a homicide. Weber told his lawyers that he wanted the death penalty. However, Illinois law states the death penalty can only be imposed when a jury returns a guilty verdict. Weber pleaded guilty to spare the Singhsinsuk family the ordeal of a trial. Weber was sentenced to 75 years imprisonment. He will be eligible for parole in 2027.

A PARALLEL CASE THE OJ SIMPSON TRIAL

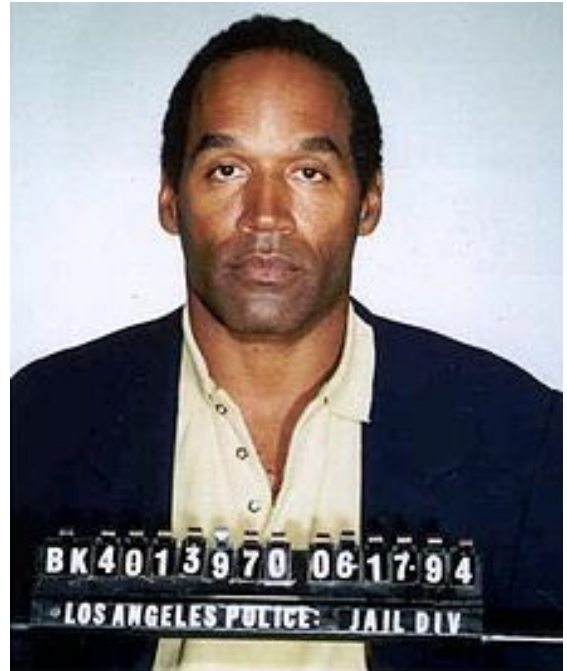
The OJ Simpson murder trial, officially known as *The People vs Simpson*, was the most publicised case of the 20th century. Simpson was tried for two counts of murder following the death of both his ex wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman in June 1994. After a trial of nine months, Simpson was acquitted.

The parallels between this case and that of the Rattenbury trial lie in several areas. Firstly, the media coverage the case received was phenomenal and controversial; the issue of whether or not to allow any video cameras into the courtroom was among the first issues Judge Ito had to decide, eventually ruling that live camera coverage was warranted. Following the trial Ito was criticised for this decision by other legal professionals. Furthermore Ito himself and others related to the case were said to have been influenced to some degree by the media presence, and the publicity that came with it. Indeed, some would say it is difficult to see how they could not be influenced by such a high level of public and media interest; the trial was covered in 2,237 news segments from between 1994 and 1997.

The public response to the verdict also mirrors the Rattenbury case and the public response to Stoner's sentence. Critics of the not-guilty verdict contend that the deliberation time taken by the jury was unduly short and that jurors did not understand the scientific evidence. There is also contention about an incriminating statement Simpson made to police about cutting his finger the night the murders took place. The jury was not permitted to hear the tape of this statement. It has also been said that the prosecutors should have gone into more detail about Simpson's abuse of his wife, and that it should have been made clear to the mostly African-American jury that Simpson had little impact in the black community and had done nothing to help those less fortunate than him.

Another, more obvious parallel lies in the relationship between the three. There are suggestions that Goldman's relationship with Nicole was more than platonic. The two certainly spent an increasing amount of time together, meeting for coffee, going to clubs and restaurants together, "...he boasted of her stunning good looks and talked about the special kick it gave him to see heads turn when the two of them pulled up in her white Ferrari in front of The Gate, a fashionable West Hollywood dance club, with him behind the wheel."¹. Although the triangle in the Rattenbury case is different, the similarity is visible none the less.

For Simpson the trial was a fall from grace in terms of public opinion and such was the case with Alma. Both cases involve incidents of infidelity, questions about the impact of the media on the fairness of the trial and as the two were high profile public figures both cases are typical of a cause célèbre.



OJ Simpson

1 Mosk, Matthew; Hall, Carla (1994-06-15). "Victim Thrived on Life in Fast Lane, His Friends Recall". The Los Angeles Times. Retrieved 2009-03-10.

WOMEN & THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

"I can't judge this woman fairly and no power on earth can make me"
Mrs Davenport

When Alma Rattenbury was facing trial in 1935 women had very little presence in the criminal justice system. It was a widely held belief that crime and criminality were a male domain and that women who committed crimes were more of an aberration and somehow unwomanly. This perception continues to the present day: a government survey in 2009 showed that 47% of the population believed that men were more likely to commit crime than women. In 2010 women only made up 5% of the prison population.

Despite the smaller numbers of women in prison, closer examination of the female prison population shows us that in 2010 68% of women in prison are there for non-violent offences, compared with 47% of men, despite evidence showing that community sentencing can be more effective than prison when an offender does not pose a violent threat to society.



It is estimated that up to 17,700 children each year are separated from their mothers due to imprisonment and at least a third of women offenders with children are lone parents. Women are often not prepared for sentencing outcomes by their lawyers and may be placed in custody without the opportunity to arrange for the care of their children, resulting in children being taken into local authority care. Some 30% of female prisoners lose their accommodation while serving their sentence so are homeless on release. One in three women prisoners have a history of sexual abuse, compared to one in ten male prisoners, and over 50% have experienced domestic violence, compared to 25% of men. Whilst female prisoners contribute only 5% of the prison population they represent 50% of the incidences of self harm and high levels of suicide.

In *Cause Célèbre* we see how Mrs Davenport and Stella judge Alma's behaviour before the case, finding her abhorrent, and, before hearing the evidence, making a judgement about her likelihood to commit murder based on her perceived loose sexual morals. Wood is seen as the victim, an innocent young man led astray by a predatory older woman, perhaps reflecting a wider fear of female sexuality and growing independence.

It is interesting to note that when Mrs Davenport is called up for jury service and appointed Forewoman it is only 13 years after the first women served on a jury in UK. On 12 January 1921 Mrs. Taylor Bumpstead was the first female juror in the UK and, like Mrs Davenport, she too was elected Forewoman by the other jurors. One of the other women jurors called on that day felt that "that the presence of women on juries would result in greater care being taken in cases where women were concerned". We can see that attitudes do not always support this as there seems to be an expectation of how a female victim should behave. Just as Alma is judged for being found drinking and dancing in the room with her husband's dead body, a 2009 Home office survey revealed one in four believe that a woman is partially responsible if she is raped or sexually assaulted when she is drunk, and one third thought she would be partially responsible if she flirted heavily with the man beforehand.

It is important to have a diversity of views and experiences in those responsible for creating and implementing the justice system for it to be fair for those who participate in it, either as victim or offender. While women are so under-represented in the legal profession, particularly at senior levels, it is exceedingly hard for society to deliver and benefit from an effective and fair criminal justice system.

THE DEATH PENALTY IN THE UK & AROUND THE WORLD

It seems the first recorded execution in the UK took place in 1196. During the reign of Henry VIII, it has been suggested that approximately 72,000 people were executed by various methods including hanging and, of course, beheading. There is, however, some question over the accuracy of this figure.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, criminal law peaked with over 200 crimes carrying the maximum sentence of death. This became known as the 'Bloody code'. Capital offences in the 'Bloody Code' included vagrancy for soldiers and sailors, and "strong evidence of malice" in children aged 7–14 years of age.

In the 20th century there were periods when the death penalty was suspended. During these times, it has been reported that there was an increase in certain types of crime, particularly violent crime. For example, there was a steep increase in 1948 when the death penalty was openly suspended for much of that year.

The abolition of the death penalty in the UK was the result of a long process of reform which seemingly began in 1808 when the death penalty was dropped for lesser offences like pick-pocketing. Between 1832–1834 Parliament abolished the death penalty for shoplifting goods worth five shillings or less, letter-stealing and sacrilege. Gibbeting – where executed corpses were displayed publicly in cages – was abolished in 1843.

1864–1866 saw the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment which concluded that there was no case for abolition but a recommendation was made for an end to public execution. As a result, from 1868 executions in Britain were carried out in prisons.

The Children Act 1908 ruled that children under the age of 16 could no longer be executed but 17-year olds could still be hanged. The last recorded hanging of a person under the age of 18, however, was a 17 year old in 1889. In 1933 the minimum age for execution was raised to 18. Pregnant women had not had the death sentence carried out since the 18th century and this was formalised as law in 1931.

The issue of abolishment of the death penalty was brought before parliament in 1938. The Criminal Just Bill called for an experimental five-year suspension of capital punishment. The outbreak of World War II meant the Bill was postponed. When the proposal returned after the war it was passed by a majority in the House of Commons but failed in the House of Lords.

Another commission, The Royal Commission on Capital Punishment 1949–1953, was instigated to explore the issue of abolition and modification once again. The resulting report considered, but rejected, other methods of execution like electrocution or gassing as used in the USA. The statistics in the report were inclusive with regards to capital punishment as a deterrent for criminals. The report made no mention of miscarriage of justice. It seems that wrongful executions made up very little of the debate surrounding abolition. The report did, however, recommend abolition from an ethical point of view. The conclusion was that unless there was overwhelming public support for abolition the death penalty should remain in place.

Between 1900 and 1949 records show that over 600 men and 11 women were executed in England and Wales. The last executions in the United Kingdom by hanging took place in 1964. In 1965 a private member's bill to suspend the death penalty was brought to parliament. It was passed in the House of Commons and then in the House of Lords. In 1969 the law was made permanent in England, Scotland and Wales, but not in Northern Ireland. It wasn't until 1973 that the law was passed for Northern Ireland.

Despite no hangings being carried out since 1964, the death penalty remained on the statute book in the UK for some offences like treason and military offences until 1998. The gallows were finally removed from Holloway Prison in 1998 as a result of the Human Rights Act which saw the UK formally abolished the death penalty for all crimes.

Death Penalty Outside the UK

Most of Europe followed a fairly similar path to the UK. Belarus is the last European country still using the death penalty: the most recent execution there was in March 2010. Latvia maintains the penalty for crimes committed during war time but it seems this will not stand for much longer.

Famously the death penalty is still operational in the United States. It is legal but is only operational in certain states. The USA and Iran are the only states that retain the power to impose the death sentence on those under the age of 18. However, in the USA, there have been no executions of anyone under the age of 19 since 1964.

There are a total of 87 countries that have abolished the death penalty for all crimes, 11 countries have abolished the death penalty for all but exceptional crimes, and 27 countries can be considered abolitionist in practice: although they retain the death penalty in law they have not executed anyone for the past 10 years or more.

There are 71 countries that retain and use the death penalty but not all do so on a regular basis. Since 2000 six main methods of execution have been used: beheading, electrocution, hanging, lethal injection, shooting and stoning. In 2005 at least 5,186 people were sentenced to death in 53 countries. The number could be many more because some states (Uzbekistan, Belarus and China for example) do not release records of those executed. Of all known executions in the world 94% took place in China, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the USA.



Death Penalty and Women

It seems there has always been a fascination with female criminals due to the relative rarity of cases. The last execution of a woman in the UK was in 1955. Between 1735 and 1955 just over 600 women and girls were executed in Britain. The vast majority of these were hanged but records show approximately 32 women were burned at the stake for treason up to 1780. There were no beheadings of women since 1735 and there is no record of there ever having been a woman executed by shooting.

IN CONVERSATION WITH... NIAMH CUSACK

How did you approach developing the character of Mrs Davenport?

Well, Edith is quite far away from me: I'm Irish, she's English; I'm a 21st Century woman and she is a traditional early 20th Century woman. I suppose I relied very, very heavily on Rattigan's writing and that really is the key. He's written her very specifically; he's made it very clear at the beginning of the play that she's someone who wants to do good. She says she wants to be on a jury because she might "do a bit of good for some old soul who's snatched a pair of silk stockings from Barkers". She's made it very clear that she doesn't like sex, which is key to her response to Alma who likes sex. She's divorcing her husband because he's had affairs but the reason he's had affairs is that she doesn't want to have sex anymore. It's quite complicated; nobody is bad in the story, everybody's mottled. Rattigan is very, very specific about where he's placing her in society: she's very much a Kensington lady and she's not just middle class, she's upper, upper middle class. Her sister Stella adds to the sense of who Edith is. She has this very intense relationship with her son. In this, Edith and I marry because I have one son, my only child. I said to Thea when I met her for the job that I really understood the soul of the woman. I understand a woman who is finding it very difficult to let her son grow up. From my experience, not my own personal experience, from my mother, I know what it's like to have a very difficult marriage. My mother's marriage was not easy and I used some of that; I allowed that sense memory to inform what Rattigan has written. He is so specific in terms of

how someone says something or when there's a pause. If he's written there is a pause he's giving you a huge hint and you just have to mine why he's given you that. That may take you a while. It did me. To be honest, almost every play I do I never really know the part until I've done it in front of an audience, but with this part more than any other I felt I really wasn't going to know. I just had to trust that I would find out, with the audience, who this character was. I definitely think that's been the case.



What was the biggest challenge of bringing Edith to life?

I think the fact that she doesn't show her emotions as she's an incredibly controlled and apparently unemotional person. Of course underneath all hell is breaking loose inside her. I think that's the biggest thing. Personally I'm quite an emotional person, in touch with my emotions and I'll cry at the drop of a hat, whereas Edith is someone who doesn't cry even though she is bleeding inside. To trust that the audience would know that this woman has a heart has been really important to me. Any actor will tell you that any character you have you love and protect as you feel your character is a little bit of you. I feel very protective of Edith, I wanted to make sure that the audience understood that she had got great heart and in fact that she was a very vulnerable woman. I've had to trust Thea on that and be led by her responses; she's been terribly helpful as she is English and she's done a lot of Rattigan so understood the character better than I did at the beginning of the process.

What preparation do you do for roles?

It changes from production to production but with this one I had quite a few of sessions with Jill McCullough who was the dialect coach. The way Edith speaks is very, very particular to the 1930s and to her particular class and it wasn't an accent I'd done before. The sessions were hugely useful as the way that a character speaks gives you a clear idea about them. That was part of building the carapace, the armour that Edith puts on, and her accent is very much part of her armour. I read the play many times and lots of other Rattigan plays to get a sense of society and morality at that time as it is very different to how we live now. Although there are things that cross over I think that the prurience and the salacious pleasure that the public get now out of reading Heat magazine is not a million miles away from the delight that people took in reading about this particular case. The enjoyment they took out of the sordid details of the case is reflected in Cause Célèbre by the way the lawyers play upon it to try to win the case, and how Tony and Randolph pour over the newspapers.

What was it like developing a character in play where some characters were real people? Edith is fictional but she is almost like a mirror to Alma, was that interesting?

Probably like any good playwright he'd digested the Alma story and turned her into a figment of his imagination. I think that Edith is a difficult part to play; they say that Rattigan based her on his mother who he was very close to. It feels to me he almost judges Edith and of all the characters I feel that she's the one he is the toughest on, even though he understands her vulnerabilities. So the one person you might expect him to make a judgement on, who was real, he doesn't, he's incredibly empathetic with Alma.

What have you enjoyed most about the process?

The people I'm working with. I've loved working with Thea, she has an infinite supply of energy and focus. I think also discovering Rattigan and that period. I know when I get into the run I'm going to have a real ball playing Edith because I'll probably never play anyone like her again. The whole presentation of that period is rather delicious once you get into it. Terence Rattigan is a great writer for women and a great writer for human beings. There isn't a bad character in this play, every character gets a moment if not more. If you are a drama student go through Rattigan plays as there are great bits that no-one will of thought of doing for auditions!

IN CONVERSATION WITH... FREDDIE FOX

It's been quite a year for you, are you feeling at home at The Old Vic now?

I've gone straight from being in *A Flea in Her Ear* to this show: I'm moving most of my wardrobe in! It's such a welcoming environment, such a good relationship with everyone in the building. I'm as lucky as anything, it's the best company in the world.

How did you go about developing the character of Tony Davenport?

I was performing in *A Flea in Her Ear* at the same time as rehearsing this show which was not like anything I have ever done before. The demand on my time was more intense than it ever had been. I found it one of the most difficult tasks to create Tony, simply because the part was so much closer to me, to Freddie of four or five years ago, than any part I've ever played. I was relying a lot on recall and my own instincts, as opposed to what I'm more comfortable with which is going to find a character and inventing things or picking things up from the outside. I do have to find more of the truth from myself. It was in a way a simpler and less active process but more difficult than previous roles. I've had to really invest in the stakes of his character.

I was rehearsing for *Cause Célèbre* the whole time that I was performing in *A Flea in Her Ear*; it was quite difficult to switch between the characters sometimes. There were definitely moments in the rehearsal room and I'd be doing double takes or something and Thea would shout, for goodness sake this isn't farce! It's two such different styles, both truthful but very different. It was quite hard work; Rattigan is the master of held back emotion, a sort of Englishness which was different to what I was doing every evening.

What was it like developing a character in play where some characters are based on real people. Tony is fictional but was it challenging?

No, I find it much easier. I've played real characters before, characters who are still alive. It was an added pressure to be faithful to reality. I much preferred researching around that period but not actually being somebody. I think it's a bit different as these characters are dead and long gone but you still have to try and find the truth of that person. With Tony I just had to find it all within myself. Remembering what I was like as a 17 year old boy, and that crossover between boyhood and manhood: a lot of it is quite difficult. My relationship with my mother is incredibly close, rather like Tony's with Edith, but there have been some serious, explosive moments too. It's very close to my reality.

Niamh who plays my mother commands such respect. As a drama student I remember seeing her at the Tricycle and thinking isn't she wonderful. She trained a little at Guildhall too and there was always a big picture of her on the alumni board, all the people that one day you want to work with. And here I am. As I've got to know her she's so warm and loves contact, yet as the character she has to shun and suppress all that but you can always tell how much she loves her son. It's made my job so easy, to get to work with someone of that calibre.

What preparation do you do for roles?

I do have a process, it's different to filming. For theatre I always read the script lots and lots. I do some research but you've got a month to investigate with other actors. I find if you rush into preparing something rather like you have to with film, you don't have the same time to investigate. In film you don't have time and have to arrive prepared, with decisions made. So I read the play a lot, do all the groundwork, like work out what this disease is that Tony has; I talked to a doctor friend of mine and we worked out that he has gonorrhoea almost definitely. There are so many unspoken things; I had to be clear about what was happening, for example what gonorrhoea is like, how they would have treated it back then. We also had to learn our lines before we started which was a bit like – oh no! And then you really allow the director and the other actors to start to inform the character that you are. I found at drama school that having everything in place before rehearsals started



was fatal, it became un-spontaneous. It's really important to remain open to collaboration. The genius of Rattigan is that his understanding of the human condition, and his words and his characters are all so precise and real and you just need to allow that to inform you, rather than thinking about does this guy have a twitch or something.

How was it working with such precise stage directions?

Rattigan is quite specific, nothing like Feydeau who wrote pages of precise stage directions. I've found that as a young, inexperienced actor going into this and hearing on the first day of rehearsal Nick Jones saying "If you don't pay attention to punctuation and his little stage directions it's at your peril". Of course he was quite right. With filming you can so used to reading a script and going, I don't need to pause there. That's the way of filming; you mould and adapt a script more. With this, he's so precise. With where his pauses are, if you observe his pauses and then press on with the dialogue you see how exact and how right it is. How the scene starts to move in the right direction as soon as you pay attention to the pauses.

What have you learned from this process?

Lot's. Trusting good writing. When you are working with great actors allow them to inform your performance: responding to someone creates great drama. Not going out and doing it all on your own. From Thea I've learnt from her precise notes and her insight into Rattigan.

How much do you think young people today, 17 year olds who come and see the play, will see themselves in Tony?

I think if you are a young man you see the frustration that young guys have with their parents. Saying "I am a man, Mum, I am a man. Stop patronising me and treating me like a child": every boy goes through that. That's the crux of Tony. And discovering sex, every boy does it!

IN CONVERSATION WITH... RICHARD TEVERSON

So you are playing Casswell who is Wood's defence lawyer?

Yes, Casswell is appointed by the state through the Poor Persons Defence Act: he's the modern equivalent to legal aid for someone who doesn't have the money to instruct their own lawyer.

How did you go about developing the character?

I like doing a bit of research; even though I got the mickey taken out of me by Thea right from the start, but she said it's all really valuable. When you are dealing with a real person they immediately give you somewhere to go. Partly through wanting to be truthful and honest to the person as they were a real person, and also for me as an actor to have a handle on who the person might be. I think the writer has a view on the person and that will be an artistic version of them. You may find a little clue within research, a way into them. I was very fortunate that Casswell had written a book about this career, with chapters about different stages of his career, with headings like 'The second client of mine to be hanged'. Reading things like made me think, it is just a job, to be as bleak as that. 'My second client to be hanged' was a disappointment for him, but it's still a job and that was very useful. I went to the Old Bailey and sat in the public gallery of court number one and a couple of other courts as well, just to see how barristers act in this day and age. To be in court number one, where a lot of our play is set, to take in as much as I can about the atmosphere was useful. The legal stuff is very important but the play is not about legal arguments, it's about people. For me it's important to have a feel for what those barristers must go through, and then with any research it's always important to throw it away and not think about it too much and just focus on the other people in the scene.



What is the challenge of bringing someone who is real to life?

I've played real people before. I've played Kenneth Williams and there you've got a lot of stuff to look at, to get an essence of the person vocally and physically. Obviously with Casswell there isn't that. I've got pictures, I've got a feel of him from his writing, I've read about his life and read newspaper clippings about how he presented his summation so I have an idea about how he spoke. With this it's then really important to go to the play. What's interesting about studying the real life murder case, as there's some great books on it that I took a look at, you realise why Rattigan has chosen to highlight certain bits and not other bits. Certainly bits of the plot have been changed to make it more interesting on stage, to make it fit together better. Equally you think why has he left that out but chosen to do that? Why is that important? In the book there is an amazing detail that, unfortunately made us laugh in rehearsals, but made me realise the shock she was going through: either Alma or Irene stood on Rattenbury's false teeth and then Alma tried to put them into his mouth to help him speak to her because he was moaning. That weird panic of the death.

Do you have a particular process when you approach a role?

Every role is different really. If it's a completely fictional play than I will look at the period and things like that. I've always like to do quite a lot of research but I'm aware that it's not how everyone works. It gives me a level of comfort, especially when playing a barrister; these guys are so on top of their briefs so it's my job to be on top of the brief of being a barrister. It feels like I can sit in his skin better, rather than just thinking I'm going to play pompous man here for example.

Rattigan gives quite precise stage directions, was there a challenge in playing those for you?

Not for me necessarily. Personally I'm not so keen on stage directions; I'm never quite clear on how many of them came from the author and how many came from the DSM's book for the original production. I tend to jettison most of them and then I'd be caught out because Thea would say, "Oh it says here...". I pay a lot of attention when it says to pause because I think that those always come from the writer. There's a few of those I've had to observe in my scenes, obviously it has to mean something, and it's important to try and work out why the characters are choosing not to speak in that moment.

What did you enjoy most about the rehearsal process?

Being in the rehearsal room. Thea is amazing, people have probably said it before. I've worked with her once before last year, she's so incredibly intelligent but wears it lightly. She challenges in a really gentle way by asking questions and testing people; if anything goes wrong she's always the first person to laugh. It's a really happy environment. She's really on it with the play, if you've ever got a question she always has a thought on it but asks about your thoughts too. You never feel imposed upon; with some directors you can feel that you are giving their performance for them. Thea is just gently, gently pulling out what everybody has got to offer and pulling it all together.

REHEARSAL NOTES FROM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ELEANOR WHILE

Could you describe the process of taking the play from page to stage?

Before rehearsals began there was a lot of work between the director (Thea), the designer (Hildegard), the lighting designer (Bruno), the composer (Adrian) and the sound designer (Ian). The creative team (particularly Thea and Hildegard) would meet to discuss the development of the world of the play, to share research and make decisions about staging. The play demands a lot from the set design and the design had to be completed before the rehearsals began, so Thea had to already have a strong idea of the staging before working with the actors. That said all the characters emerged through the rehearsal process, it wasn't a case of imposing a pre-empted vision of the play on the rehearsal room.

On the first day of the rehearsals the cast read the play out loud and, having already done so much work on the play, to finally hear it spoken was amazing: it's so exciting, it all comes to life and feels real. Next we got the play on its feet with the actors running the play with scripts in hand. It's a good way to get a feel for the play, what is needed and what the challenges might be. Thea gave them a few chairs, a couple of glasses and some newspapers to use but that was it. It was nerve-wracking for the actors as they had only met each other a few days before, but pretty soon everyone relaxed and got into it. We then did some 'table work'; it's a complex play so it needed some time. There wasn't a system as such, just working through the play with open discussion, working out if there was anything that we didn't understand or if there was more research to do. Some people had already done a lot of research and this was a good time to share this. From here we started working through the play from the beginning: like making a painting we sketch in scenes then return to them, filling them in with more and more detail. Thea felt that all the characters were telling Alma's story, from different angles. There is also a lot of mirroring between Alma's story and Mrs Davenport's story so we spent a long time with all the actors in the rehearsal room. If we had rehearsed the two stories separately I don't think we'd have found such truthful connections between them. By the end of the four weeks rehearsal it felt like the actors performances were bursting out of the rehearsal room, we were ready for The Old Vic stage!



The technical rehearsals were very important. The set is technically complicated so the technical rehearsal took three long days but the production really came together during this process. The technical rehearsal is the part of the process in which all of the creative strands are woven together – it's exciting to watch the whole production evolve out of previously separate parts. Because the play was originally a radio play, its structure is episodic. This posed a challenge during the technical rehearsal; to find ways to maintain the flow of action on stage. The previews were really important too: we were working a lot in the daytime before the shows in the evenings. The Old Vic is a big theatre and we've been able to find the right kind of storytelling style for the space. The actors worked really hard to find the truth of the story and the characters in rehearsal and during previews they got to explore how to open this story up to an audience of over nine hundred.

What was your role in the process?

Before rehearsals began, my main role was supporting the Thea (Director) in meetings with the creative team, in auditions and in undertaking research. For example before rehearsals began I would attend meetings with Thea and Hildegard then ensure that all the rest of the team knew what had been discussed or decided. This communication role as an assistant director is also really important in the technical rehearsals. I was involved in casting the actors, especially for the understudy roles, as it is my job to rehearse them.

Thea asked me to do some specific research about the press coverage of the trial so I went to the British Library Newspaper archive in North London. I discovered the tabloid newspapers covered the trial extensively: there were seven page spreads in *The Mirror* and *The Express*, really sensationalist stuff; *The Times* was a bit more restrained but still covered it. I also did some research around the radio play which has more scenes than the stage play: we read a few scenes that were in the radio play but not the stage play in the rehearsal room as part of the research process.

During the rehearsal as well as the general role of supporting Thea I would sometimes have specific tasks to pay attention to, such as looking at when a cabinet should be opened or closed and by who, making sure that the small details were right. Thea runs a really open rehearsal room so if I spotted something that wasn't working I could raise it with her. I was also responsible for rehearsing the understudies, which meant a lot of evening calls. Rehearsing understudies is an interesting challenge as you need to make sure that if the understudies go on, it will still be the same show but they can't be a carbon copy of the principal actors, they also have to find the truth of the characters for themselves.

What were the particular challenges of the play?

There are lots of very specific stage directions and sometimes that can be tricky for actors who want to do their own thing. We soon learned that most of them were as important as the dialogue in telling you something about the character or action. In some early rehearsals it was a case of the actors going through the motions as they were performing exact actions described by Rattigan on specific lines. However, we found out Rattigan is nearly 100% right, the specific stage directions told us so much about what was happening that it soon became natural and integral to the performances.

It became really important to keep the pace of the dialogue moving as Rattigan writes at a fast pace. He does not leave time for his characters to stop and think very often, as in real life his character's think as they talk. Therefore we had to stop the actors putting in pauses unless they are specified in the text, and to make sure the words keep moving to maintain the rhythm of the play.

What did you learn during the process?

Oh loads! It was great because everyone was so happy during the show, I don't think I've worked on a project where everyone was so positive. I think that was because Thea really respected everyone and really invested in them which has enhanced the importance of this for me. I also learned what a fantastic writer Rattigan is; I'd never worked on a Rattigan play before and it wasn't what I expected. He writes so well about the human condition, the human spirit. Even though the play is set in the 1930s it's really about the fundamental challenges of life; love, motherhood, guilt, sex, justice and betrayal.



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