

British Theatre Guide

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The Deep Blue Sea

Terence Rattigan

Theatre Royal Bath Productions with Len Blavatnik and Danny Cohen for Access Entertainment

Theatre Royal Haymarket

7 May–21 June 2025

Terence Rattigan's fine play is set in a rather seedy flat in Notting Hill (then a run down part of London) at the beginning of the 1950s at a time when food was still rationed, furnished rooms had shilling in the slot gas meters and both suicide and homosexuality were classed as criminal.

Lindsay Posner's production, first seen at the Theatre Royal Bath last year, also feels very of its period with Peter McKintosh's detailed box set and a marked contrast between its upper- and lower-class characters, the latter given their own reality but presented as their "betters" would view them.

The play starts with an attempted suicide. A woman's body lies in front of a gas fire, still breathing due to the lack of a shilling in that meter. Landlady Mrs Elton (Selina Cadell) and her upper floor tenants, civil servant clerk Philip Welch (Preston Nyman) and his wife Ann (Lisa Ambalayanar), smell gas and burst into a room rather larger than real life, their characters concerned but performed with a comic edge.

They fetch fellow tenant Mr Miller, who takes charge. He is a former doctor who had been struck off the register (we don't learn why). Finbar Lynch makes him gentle and supportive but very contained and private. While he tends the unsuccessful suicide, Hester, the Welches learn that she is not married to Freddie Page, who is away at a golf tournament, but the wife of High Court Judge Sir William Collyer, and Welch telephones Sir William.

Hester has abandoned a comfortable but claustrophobic marriage to live with Freddie, a former RAF flyer and then a test-flight pilot, who has lost his nerve and is aimlessly trying to get by. It is a passionate but tempestuous affair in which, as Freddie puts it to an old RAF chum, "A loves B and B loves A—but not in the same way". It just isn't in his nature.

Sir William still offers stability, and Hester knows Freddie can't change, but she is obsessed with him. As Miller points out, it is often the petty things that trigger reaction. Here Freddie simply forgot her birthday, but the real problem has no solution.

Hadley Fraser doesn't make Freddie a hunky sex-idol, though there is a glimpse of the erotic charge Hester gets from him, he is a nice guy who just can't handle postwar life, escaping in getting drunk very convincingly. His neediness and vulnerability are part of what attracts Hester. Nicholas Farrell's Sir William hides his vulnerability behind calmness and caring, though the way he asks questions still feels forensic.

Tamsin Greig's Hester would seem well matched with Sir William. The clergyman's well-brought-up daughter hides her tension, but in control in front of others, she can suddenly lose it in a screaming match with Freddie. Her control is sometimes too contained—in this much larger theatre than Bath,

it needs more projection just to hear her—but her silences are heavy with meaning. That can be very moving.

Love is a strange thing; it can be very painful as Rattigan and these performances vividly remind us.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)