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Paul T Davies Column: Review - The Browning Version, Headgate Theatre, Colchester

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Until the tidal wave of John Osborne and the 'Angry Young Men' generation of playwrights swept him away, Terrence Rattigan was the King of the West End.

His middle class, drawing room, English dramas portrayed a world of crumbling lives, stiff upper lips being challenged by the demands of love and pain.

Although dated, his work lends itself to actors, and, although I have very little sympathy for posh, public school characters, when done well the results can be satisfying.

Headgate Theatre's production is beautifully directed by Andrew Hodgson, performed on a triumph of a set, and contains fine performances all round.

Crocker-Harris is leaving his teaching post due to a heart condition that makes it advisable that he doesn't live under constant stress. Known as the Himmler of the lower fifth, he is strict, unyielding from the rules, cold, unloved by the pupils, and loathed by his wife, who is having an affair with fellow teacher Frank Hunter.

Set on the penultimate day of term, Crocker-Harris insists on a tutorial with wayward pupil John Taplow, and seems blind to the circumstances around him. When he is told the school will not be giving him a pension, he holds it together, but it is a gift of a translation of Agamemnon, the Browning version, as a farewell gift from Taplow that breaks him, and we discover he has known all along of his wife's infidelity.

As Cocker-Harris, Michael Cook gives an excellent study of repressed emotions, and Laura Hill provides a fine performance as his wife Millie, managing to elicit sympathy even though Rattigan portrays her rather too much as a manipulative vamp. Will Parrick captures the honesty and directness of Frank Hunter perfectly, and Joseph Russell is perfect as Taplow. Malcolm Kimmance as the headmaster and Wayne Setford and Leanne Howard as the incoming couple complete the cast ensemble perfectly.

The production captured the period well, and, despite the play creaking with age, provided an enjoyable evening's entertainment.