

SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION



On Cue

THE DEEP BLUE SEA

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Compiled by Lisa Mumford.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Lisa Mumford is the Education Projects Officer for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Lisa on lmumford@sydneytheatre.com.au.

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About On Cue and STC

ABOUT ON CUE

STC Ed has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season.

Each school show will be accompanied by an On Cue e-publication which will feature essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences.

For more in-depth digital resources surrounding productions, please visit the STC Ed page on our website.

Such resources include:

- STC documentaries
- Design sketchbooks

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 40 years later, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Roslyn Packer Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

sydneytheatre.com.au

Curriculum Connections



SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 9 to 12

SUBJECTS

Drama and English Stages 5 and 6:

- Dramatic Forms and Performance Styles; Realism/Scripted Drama

Drama Stage 6:

- Improvisation, Playbuilding and Acting
- Elements of Production in Performance
- Theatrical Traditions and Performance Styles: Realism

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

The Deep Blue Sea

By Terence Rattigan

FREDDIE PAGE

Fayssal Bazzi

MR MILLER

Paul Capsis

WILLIAM COLLYER

Matt Day

MRS ELTON

Vanessa Downing

HESTER COLLYER

Marta Dusseldorp

JACKIE JACKSON

Charlie Garber

PHILIP WELCH

Brandon McClelland

ANN WELCH

Contessa Treffone

DIRECTOR

Paige Rattray

DESIGNER

David Fleischer

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Nick Schlieper

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

James Brown

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Kenneth Moraleda

FIGHT & MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

Nigel Poulton

VOICE & TEXT COACH

Charmian Gradwell

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Genevieve Jones

STAGE MANAGER

Sarah Smith

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

Katie Hankin

STAGING SUPERVISOR

Chris Fleming

MECHANIST

Kane Mott

MECHANIST

Ash Lyons

SOUND SUPERVISOR

Luke Davis

SOUND OPERATOR

David Trumpmanis

VENUE SOUND

Ben Andrews

LIGHTING SUPERVISOR

Andrew Tompkins

LIGHTING OPERATOR

Amy Robertson

WARDROBE & WIG SUPERVISOR

Lauren A Proietti

WARDROBE MAINTENANCE

Simone Edwards

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHER

Brett Boardman

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHER

Daniel Boud

APPROX 2 HOURS, 30 MINUTES (INCLUDING INTERVAL)

The Deep Blue Sea © The Sir Terence Rattigan Charitable Trust, 1952. First produced at the Duchess Theatre, London, on 6 March 1952. Copyright agent: Alan Brodie Representation Ltd; www.alanbrodie.com

This production of *The Deep Blue Sea* premiered at the Roslyn Packer Theatre on 8 February 2020.



PRODUCTION PATRON
REBEL PENFOLD-RUSSELL

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STC acknowledges the Gadigal and Bidjigal people of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land on which the company gathers. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with whom we work and with whom we share stories.

A Note from the Director

Paige Rattray

My initial reaction to *The Deep Blue Sea* was one of real surprise. When I went to see the 2015 production at the National Theatre in London, I was aware of Rattigan's reputation as an observer of the British middle-class, a society playwright, but was not prepared to meet one of the most complex, nuanced and thoroughly human female characters in the history of Western theatre.

As a director, I have always sought out incredible roles for women and it's no longer controversial to point out how very few there are in the Western theatre canon. So, when I was faced with Hester Collyer – who is on equal standing with those great roles – I was shocked that she'd managed to fly below my radar.

But that feeling was quickly replaced by admiration. Hester is spectacular. She's sensitive, she's forthright and she's wonderfully flawed, and through the development of her character we see Rattigan's deep and sympathetic understanding of the human condition. She is very much a product of her time but, beneath the period references and slightly arch vocabulary, Hester could have been written last month.

In this production, as in all my productions, the cast and I are aiming to get to the heart of these characters and the reality of their lives. The themes and content in this play are by and large difficult and upsetting. And when I saw the play back in 2015, a version that's turned out to be very different to the one we're mounting now, I very much focused on the tragedy of Hester's circumstances.

But through the development of this production, throughout my research and with the insights of the team of creatives that are making this show happen, I've come to realise that Hester's ongoing emancipation, what society has taught her to expect and what she has to tear herself away from, is the play's central interest. It's a play about living, not dying.

Strange though it might seem, there are moments of real humour in this play – with all of Hester's neighbours coming and going at various times through a single door, there are even moments that border on the farcical.

Rattigan didn't include these moments to undermine the seriousness of Hester's experiences or to add moments of levity to relieve the audience. Instead, I think they're there to illustrate the richness and the unpredictability of human emotion.

One of the reasons Hester feels her existential disappointment

so acutely is the social pressure she is under, and we're still under today, to be constantly happy and to perpetually aspire towards joy and success. It's an impossible standard to meet. But it's a standard so ubiquitous that many of us, including Hester, are left feeling isolated and broken by our inability to find perfect happiness.

What Rattigan is campaigning for, I think, is that we embrace the whole spectrum of emotions, to take the good with the bad and everything in between. That's why, amongst the sadness and longing, *The Deep Blue Sea* shows us glimpses of laughter and absurdity.

I often say that a really good play will have one line that changes the way you think about the world. *The Deep Blue Sea* has at least five such lines. One of my personal favourites, "to live without hope can mean to live without despair," could be read as nihilism, giving up. Instead I choose to understand it as a plea for a sort of emotional equilibrium: if we accept that happiness isn't guaranteed and perpetual then there's a chance our lows won't be as low.

Because this show deals in such deep and subjective ideas I have encouraged the cast to filter the play's content through their own experiences and see how that manifests in their performance. It goes without saying that this cast is made up of remarkably talented people and it's been incredible to see how their instincts and skills have revealed new aspects of the text.

There's also a lot more kindness in the play than I first realised. *The Deep Blue Sea* is, in many ways, a play about the brutal realities of life but dotted throughout the text are moments between Hester and the other characters that shock you with their tenderness.

It's this tenderness, this sensitive generosity, that might be the centre of the play for me. It's well documented that *The Deep Blue Sea* was, at least in part, inspired by the tragic suicide of one of Rattigan's lovers. There is even some conjecture that in early versions of the play the protagonist was a man (though these claims have never been officially verified).

What moves me most about this connection is the fact that this play appears to be an attempt by Rattigan to rewrite the narrative of his lover's death. In moving Hester through her despair, through her reliance on other people to a place where she can exist for and with herself, Rattigan is giving his lover (and the audience) a model for a new way to look at life and a new way to survive it.

In this sense, *The Deep Blue Sea* feels like a vital act of kindness.

Synopsis

ACT I MORNING

The play is set over the course of one day in the life of Hester Collyer. In the opening scene, Hester is found by her neighbours on the floor of her apartment after having attempted suicide. After smelling gas, Mrs Elton the landlady opens Hester's flat and her and Phillip Welch, a resident, find Hester. They call on Mr Miller, another resident with medical experience to come and help out. Freddie, Hester's partner is not home, and in an attempt to find a next of kin to notify, Mrs Elton reveals that Hester is married to Sir William Collyer from whom she is separated. He is contacted about Hester's situation and agrees to come to the flat. Hester finds the note she left for Freddie and puts it in her dressing gown pocket. Freddie arrives home from golf and remembers it is Hester's birthday, and suggests they go out to celebrate. While Hester is getting ready, she has left her dressing gown in the lounge room. Searching for a cigarette, Freddie finds the suicide note in Hester's dressing gown pocket.

Vanessa Downing in rehearsals for Sydney Theatre Company's *The Deep Blue Sea* © Brett Boardman



Synopsis cont'd

ACT II AFTERNOON

Freddie meets with his friend Jackie to discuss what has happened with Hester. Hester arrives and the mood is tense. Hester and Collyer meet and he expresses concern for her in her relationship with Freddie. The Act finishes with Freddie leaving Hester, and she is devastated.

ACT III EVENING

The final Act of the play is set later in the evening. Freddie has left and Sir William returns to try and convince Hester to return to their marriage. Devastated by Freddie's leaving, Hester puts money in the gas meter again in what is looking like another suicide attempt. While she is doing this, Miller arrives. He is concerned about Hester and extends his friendship to her, and this exchange seems to save Hester. The play closes with Hester packing Freddie's things, a gesture of acceptance. She has decided to go on living for her own sake.



Fayssal Bazzi and Charlie Garber in rehearsals for Sydney Theatre Company's *The Deep Blue Sea* © Brett Boardman

Character Analysis



Marta Dusseldorp in rehearsals for Sydney Theatre Company's *The Deep Blue Sea* © Brett Boardman

HESTER COLLYER

Hester is the central protagonist of the play; this is her story. The play opens and closes with Hester in a state of crisis and flux, and throughout the play the audience bears witness to her emotional journey. As her background is revealed, Hester's character develops. She is revealed to be spontaneous and lustful, with a tendency for dissatisfaction. It was her impulsiveness that saw her leave Sir William for Freddie and lead to the life she is living when the audience meets her in the play.

Character Analysis cont'd



Fayssal Bazzi in rehearsals for Sydney Theatre Company's *The Deep Blue Sea*
© Brett Boardman

FREDDIE PAGE

Freddie was a test pilot in the war, but when the play opens he is unemployed. This has led to him drinking more, and he spends part of the play in a state of drunkenness. This state is used also to point to his youth and immaturity; he is devastated by Hester's attempt on her life but unable to talk to her about it, instead he invites a friend over to drink with and tells him about what has happened. In the end, Freddie leaves Hester in spite of her desperately wanting him to stay. Perhaps this is because he feels like he doesn't know her anymore, or that he is scared of what might happen if he stays with her.

SIR WILLIAM COLLYER

Sir William Collyer is Hester's husband from whom she is separated but not divorced. He is a high standing citizen, a wealthy judge and a caring man, concerned for Hester and her well-being. Sir William is called when Hester is found unconscious but when she wakes up she doesn't want him there, she doesn't want him to know what has happened. As a character, Sir William serves as an insight into Hester's old world and the life she lived before she met Freddie.



Matt Day in rehearsals for Sydney Theatre Company's *The Deep Blue Sea* © Nisha Agiasotis

Character Analysis cont'd

MR MILLER

A shadow is cast over the doctor character from the start of the play. He lives in the building and is called on when Hester is found sick, to examine her. It is established that he is not a registered medical doctor but that he has in the past worked as a doctor. Why he is no longer registered is unclear at the start of the play but he now works as a bookkeeper in order to make money. It is suggested later in the play that he may have performed an illegal procedure, when Mrs Elton is retelling Hester about a reference Miller once made to being in gaol. Mrs Elton has forgiven Miller's indiscretion, assuming it was for the benefit of the patient and saying 'It takes all sorts to make a world, after all' (Rattigan, 1955, p. 60). It is Miller's friendship with Hester that saves her in the end.



Paul Capsis in rehearsals for Sydney Theatre Company's *The Deep Blue Sea* © Brett Boardman

Themes and Ideas

REPPRESSED SEXUALITY

The play is concerned with Hester's inability to achieve happiness in love, her inability to be who she wants to be, and to be with who she wants to be with. It is widely accepted that the love affair Hester engages in with Freddie is autobiographical and that Terrence Rattigan is writing about his own experiences, swapping his gender for a woman. Living in a time when homosexuality was illegal in England, Rattigan was forced to veil his own experiences. The repressed sexuality of Hester, and her living with Freddie unmarried, is a metaphor for Rattigan's illegal relationship with a male lover. Due to the homophobia of the time in which Rattigan was living and working, he found it necessary to change his character's gender in order for him to be able to tell his story.



Marta Dusseldorp in rehearsals for Sydney Theatre Company's *The Deep Blue Sea* © Brett Boardman

Themes and Ideas cont'd

HOPE AND DESPAIR

The concept of hope is explored in *The Deep Blue Sea*. The play opens immediately following an act of despair, and goes on to wrestle with ideas of hope and how to find it through life's difficulties. The play ends with Hester in her apartment, having lost the life she left her husband for. She is alone and has a difficult life ahead of her, but she is committed to carrying on regardless. It is the conversation with Mr Miller that offers Hester a sense of hope. The two characters share a certain eccentricity which endears them to each other and they form a bond. In a conversation they have, Hester understands that Miller has been through a difficult period in his own life. He says to her 'To live without hope can mean to live without despair' (Rattigan, 1955, pg. 71), offering her a paradox of sorts: that to simply live each day offers a kind of hope free from expectation and disappointment.

DESIRE, LOVE AND HEARTBREAK

Sir William Collyer seems to be the logical partner for Hester. They have been married, he is a well-established judge and he is very wealthy. He seems to be genuinely concerned for Hester and her well-being and subsequently a good match as a partner for her. The character of Sir William is deliberately used by Rattigan to contrast with Freddie, who is young, hot-headed and unable to provide financial stability. Although Sir William seems the right match to provide Hester with a comfortable and happy life, it is Freddie whom Hester loves. Rattigan uses this contrast to show that desire does not follow reason, that we can't help who we fall in love with. Hester completely changes her life for this new relationship with Freddie but ultimately she doesn't feel the relief and satisfaction she was hoping for. While she follows her desire and tries to do right by herself, she learns that the life she was hoping for may not be available.

Themes and Ideas cont'd



Charlie Garber and Fayssal Bazzi in rehearsals for Sydney Theatre Company's *The Deep Blue Sea* © Brett Boardman

POST-WAR BRITAIN

The play is set soon after the end of the Second World War and the characters are living through the after effects of the war. Hester and Freddie's living conditions are simple, and Freddie's career as a test pilot has come to an end, leaving them in a financially insecure position. The post-war period was a time of upheaval in which people were attempting to recreate their old lives or to build new ones.

TRADITIONAL THREE ACT PLAY

The play follows a conventional dramatic structure, which allows the main ideas to be introduced, explored and resolved. The play opens with the catalyst for the ensuing action, Hester's attempted suicide, and as the action of the play progresses and her situation is revealed, other characters come to terms with what has happened. Other tensions arise as the narrative unfolds and the play ends with a kind of resolution as Hester accepts her ability to go on living without Freddie.





Marta Dusseldorp in rehearsals for Sydney Theatre Company's *The Deep Blue Sea* © Brett Boardman

Designed by David Fleischer, the set and costumes reference the period in which the play was written and is set, the early 1950s.

When discussing the design, David Fleischer says: "The play was written with characters of Rattigan's world. He chose to write a piece that was not set anywhere but his own reality. However, as we maintain the period of writing, it has become very important for the work as a whole to not exist as a museum piece. Like in any work, we bring our contemporary sensibilities in recreating the fashion of the day, in order to prioritise our audience's connection with the psychology of the characters. Like the set, we have deliberately chosen to leave out certain period details, or reimagine or reorganise

them. Ultimately the aim of this design is not only to tell the audience where we are, but how these characters relate to themselves and each other, as distinct human beings that could face the same existential troubles in any given era."

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