

THEATRE

Latin lessons

ROMEO is not in his first youth. To rejuvenate himself he performs a merry little jump aiming for his Juliet, an old bag on a balcony. The joke in Terence Rattigan's *Harlequinade* (Royalty Theatre) is not merely that Romeo is old enough to be a grandfather but the discovery that he actually is a grandfather.

The fact that this play is about bad acting does not insure it against the real thing. But, directed by Tim Luscombe, Paul Eddington's tormented old hack is amusing and Dorothy Tutin proves, divertingly, that it is not possible to flatter someone successfully while eating a banana.

The evening picks up in the second half with Rattigan's *The Browning Version*, first staged with *Harlequinade*, in 1948. In a mellow, disordered study (designed by Carl Toins) a Latin master, Crocker-Harris (Paul Eddington), swallows medicine, sherry and his pride with pained decorum. He is retiring—in both senses of the word. His abrasive, tweedy wife (Dorothy Tutin) stares out through French windows onto greenery and chain-smokes. She is obsessed with a young master Frank Hunter (John Durtine) with whom she is having an affair. Dorothy Tutin shifts skilfully from tyrant to victim and shows how misery translates into cruelty.

Paul Eddington brings out the point that manners maketh and at the same time breaketh man, and shows eloquently a man who knows how to plan a timetable while filling his own time wretchedly. His pupil, Taplow, stoutly played by Daniel Beales, describes him as a likeable but shrivelled nut. The nut cracks when, in the only generous moment of the play, Taplow presents his schoolmaster with Browning's translation of *Aeschylus*. The scene brought a lump to my throat and tears to my eyes, long before Crocker-Harris had carefully translated its touching Latin dedication.

KATE KELLAWAY

Kate Kellaway on Rattigan

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Sat, Feb 22, 2020