

British Theatre Guide

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DNA

Dennis Kelly
Hull Truck Company
Unicorn Theatre
17–28 April 2012

Hull Truck theatre is touring with this production, which is currently showing at the Unicorn Theatre.

Dennis Kelly, the writer, has a reputation for portraying violence and abuse. This play is no exception as it explores youth in connection to violence.

Like many stories about youth and violence it has a seemingly innocent act at its source. That is if bullying, incitement to danger and peer pressure are nothing more than innocent acts by a group of immature youth. However, in most cases, this is just criminal impunity, which is the clear didactic message of the play.

The victim, in this case, is Adam; the initiators are his friendly gang of schoolmates who try to cover up the tragedy to any cost. Most, at the news of Adam's accidental and dubious death, are lost for words, or lost in words—they cannot stop talking about it—and pathetically so. Ironically, the mute leader Phil (James Alexandrou), the least talkative of the group, makes a stand and firmly decides the way forward.

The beauty of this play, of its script, is that we hardly see any violence at all. The story is told and develops through the intense, agitated dialogues between the members of this friendly gang. This is a very structured piece based on two main archetypal scenes: one at the top of a hill, where Lea (Leah Brotherhead) talks vivaciously to Phil while he eats; the other at the bottom of the hill, where the gang members talk to each other about the troubles ahead.

The best scenes are those between Lea and Phil: her talking away about God and the world, the universe, life and much more in a sweet, heavy, northern accent; Philip with stubborn indifference, eating up whatever goodies his shopping bag seems to contain. There is something very sad and something very charming about these two youths' encounters, like an old couple who have known each other for years, where the man often closes up in an unnerving silence. There is much humour in these scenes and some good acting, especially Leah Brotherhead who has to carry most of the weight and many of the words.

However as Lea grows tired with Phil and the world around these two collapses a little, things spur out of control and so do the script, the pace and the humour. It all starts to lose impact, energy and it bores a little.

Effective as a narrative device, repeating similar scenes throughout the play in parallel loses its novelty as the piece progresses and cannot make a real impact closer to the end.

Moving onto the production, there are some unhappy choices; the music that is so TV-like tries unnecessarily to thicken the ambience of the production with some more suspense; the minimalist

set, mainly made of huge vertical blinds used for hastily put-together video projections, is simply bad taste. This is especially true in the case of the scenes at the top of the hill: clouds in a blue sky are diligently projected, unchanged each time. These really try very hard to make the point that this could be a place of idyllic rural tranquillity in contrast with the urban chaos beneath, at the bottom of the hill.

In the end, it all feels a bit half-chewed, a bit rushed, a bit less convincing also because the surprises are unrealistic and the script is still too precious with its own structure. It is still, nevertheless, an entertaining piece of theatre, topically portraying a dark vision of the world of youth with a clear moral message.

Reviewer: [Mary Mazzilli](#)