

British Theatre Guide

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The Dwarfs

Harold Pinter (adapted by Kerry Lee Crabbe)
Tricycle, Kilburn
(2003)

The Dwarfs was originally written as a largely impenetrable novel that was commenced by Harold Pinter over 50 years ago but not published until 1990. The author adapted it as a play in 1960 but was dissatisfied with the outcome, partly because the key character of Virginia was omitted.

It is greatly to Kerry Lee Crabbe's credit that he has now created an entertaining and insightful play from the novel. This version both acts as a slice of autobiography of a great playwright and also as a precursor of much of his later work.

The latter aspect is assisted by Christopher Morahan's direction. For example, a funny seduction scene between actor, Mark, and the now visible Virginia could have come straight from *The Lover*.

The play is largely set in various grimy flats in Hackney in the early fifties. These are occupied by the four characters all of whom are in their mid-twenties.

The three men might to an extent represent different aspects of their author as well as a group of friends. Len, played by Mark Rice-Oxley, is a bespectacled writer who always appears cheery. He writes during the day and works on nightshifts to support himself. Jamie Lee's Pete has a City job and an uncomfortable love affair with Daisy Haggard as Virginia that is fast going sour, both physically and spiritually. Mark, played by Ben Caplan (who looks like a young Pinter,) is an actor with private income who is cooler and more detached; a real Pinter man and the writer himself, thinly disguised.

The action is limited, with the thoughts of these three young intellectuals brought out in a series of short scenes as various groupings meet. They vary across life and love, the latter coming to the fore as the seemingly demure but rather sluttish Virginia walks out on Pete and crosses over to Mark.

As so often with Pinter, *The Dwarfs* is very carefully written (the novel took four years), often with rather beautiful dialogue. There is humour but also a great sense of threat, nowhere brought out better than in a shouting match in the street between Pete and Virginia. This is very realistic and causes a feeling of embarrassment even for those in the Royal Circle.

Christopher Morahan draws good performances from his cast. The simple, adaptable set designed by Eileen Diss and superb, evocative lighting from Mick Hughes enhance a surprisingly enjoyable production that may well get a West End transfer.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)