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THEATER REVIEW | 'BHUTAN'

# A Family's Psychic Journey to an Unreachable Horizon

By [NEIL GENZLINGER](#)

The story in “Bhutan” may be awfully familiar, but it’s also awfully well told, which you would expect from the pedigrees involved. Now if only someone would rein in those Down East accents a bit.

The play, at the Cherry Lane Theater, is named for the kingdom in the Himalayas, but everyone in it talks like a caricature of a Maine lobsterman, since it’s set somewhere in New England, and that exaggerated drawl (done inconsistently here, as it almost always is) is theatrical shorthand for “poor and undereducated.”

Happily, there comes a point not too far into this 90-minute drama when you stop being distracted by the accent and start listening to the story, written by Daisy Foote, directed by Evan Yionoulis and enacted by a fine cast of four: Tasha Lawrence, Sarah Lord, Amy Redford and Jedadiah Schultz.

Ms. Lawrence plays Mary, a youngish widow with a good-hearted teenage son, Warren (Mr. Schultz); a smart but socially awkward daughter, Frances (Ms. Lord); and an unseen neighbor whose adventures in places like Bhutan have captured Frances’s imagination. Probably you’ve already worked out the dynamics from that little description. Each character (the fourth is Mary’s brassy sister, Sara) has some personal Bhutan, an unattainable goal that is seen as a ticket out of the dreary life that looms ahead.

Ms. Foote, no doubt realizing that the theme is not exactly fresh, finds a captivating way to deliver it: The characters have barely been introduced when she flashes forward, showing Warren in a prison jumpsuit and Mary’s modest domestic tranquillity shattered. Back and forth in time

the story goes, with Ms. Foote, who learned something about playwriting from her father, Horton, expertly trickling out the details of the familial meltdown.

This is a well-made play, with all four characters experiencing emotional journeys, and so the time-jumping gimmick requires deft acting, the performers alternating between their early and later personas. Mr. Schultz covers the most distance and does so nicely. Ms. Redford, daughter of Robert, is the most entertaining. But it's Ms. Lord who quietly anchors the play with an understated teenage longing that's completely believable.

The denouement turns out to be fairly ordinary, and later you realize that had the story been told in straight chronological fashion it wouldn't have been much of a story at all. There's also a hokey metaphor involving a rumbly furnace that ought to be excised. But even with the flaws, it's a gratifying hour and a half.

*"Bhutan" continues through Dec. 9 at the Cherry Lane Theater, 38 Commerce Street, West Village, (212) 239-6200.*