

that men have always been bastards. But we knew that already.

The show does gather strength in the second half, and it's refreshing to find a writer with a taste for an intricate plot. But neither John Tiffany's production for the Traverse Theatre Company, nor some excellent performances from Patricia Kerrigan, Sheila Reid *et al* can disguise the fact that this is a worryingly derivative play that stubbornly refuses to take dramatic flight.

I was far more absorbed by Zinnie Harris's *Further Than the Furthest Thing*, inspired by the real-life story of Tristan da Cunha, the remote island in the South Atlantic which had to be evacuated when the volcano blew its top in 1961.

Harris's grandfather briefly served there as an Anglican priest, and her imagination has clearly been fired by the idea of this small, remote community, suddenly and traumatically uprooted to England.

Although it has a cast of only five, this haunting piece has an epic quality, and the re-creation of the islanders' idiosyncratic speech patterns — "A little pinnawin [penguin] is gone smash on our floor" — is highly beguiling.

What worries me is that Harris freely admits that the play is a mixture of fact and fiction, and I found myself longing for a more documentary approach. Was there a deep and guilty trauma in the islanders' recent history, as Harris suggests? Did England

really do the dirty on the immigrants? The play leaves you with no way of knowing, and as with so much faction, you suspect the author is taking morally suspect liberties with the truth.

Harris is definitely a writer to watch, though, and there is an especially moving performance from Paola Dionisotti as an anguished islander in Irina Brown's production, a joint effort between Glasgow's Tron Theatre and the National Theatre.

Sue Glover's *Shetland Saga* is a likeable, good-hearted play about relations between a crew of stranded Bulgarians on a factory-fishing ship and the local islanders. Love blossoms across the language divide, but is threatened by dodgy dealing involving the