

design: Robert Carter photo: Frances Carter



**MONSTROUS  
REGIMENT**

present

# SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER

Based on an original production by Théâtre de l'Aquarium

Directed by Hilary Westlake

Tues 2 Dec – Sun 21 Dec

**ICA THEATRE**

The Mall, London SW1

930 3647

# MONSTROUS REGIMENT

presents

## SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER

Based on an original production by Theatre De L'Aquarium

**DIRECTED BY HILARY WESTLAKE**  
**TRANSLATED BY GILLIAN HANNA**  
**DESIGNED BY GEMMA JACKSON**  
**LIGHTING DESIGN BY STEVE WHITSON**

This bizarre comedy was written and devised in its original form by the Parisian collective THEATRE DE L'AQUARIUM, who mounted it with enormous success in Paris and subsequently toured it throughout Europe. It is now to have its first English production.

Taking off from a passage in Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own', in which she imagines what might have happened to a sister of Shakespeare's blessed with a talent equal to his own, it uses visual rather than primarily verbal images to explore the world of four brides and two grandmothers. It examines the way in which 'the skills of housewifery' and 'the stereotypes of feminine manners' are passed on from one generation to the next, holding true to the originators' aim to present popular theatre replete with magic and excitement – to take socially relevant work out of the fringe ghetto.

It combines the visual imagination of the very best performance art, the immediate humour of pantomime and the eclecticism of Elizabethan theatre with the energy and commitment of the fringe.

This potent mix is created by the MONSTROUS REGIMENT ensemble in a production directed by Hilary Westlake co-creator and director of the magical and savagely funny CIRCUS LUMIERE and designed by Gemma Jackson who was responsible, among many other London design credits, for the startling visual coups of Snoo Wilson's FLAMING BODIES.

SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER is a large and extravagant show which would make William proud of his imaginary sister.

It is the centrepiece of MONSTROUS REGIMENT's season of BRITISH PREMIERES.

### BRITISH PREMIERES

**MONSTROUS REGIMENT** is an ensemble company comprising feminist theatre workers. Since 1976 they have performed a wide variety of shows exploring the role of women in society – past, present and future. They have shown that feminist theatre can be challenging, entertaining and well-suited to the main stages of our major playhouses. Their work has been hall-marked with a vigour and a commitment to theatrecraft that has gained them critical acclaim and endeared them to audiences throughout Britain – not least for the quality of the music which has formed an essential part of most of their work.

**BRITISH PREMIERES** marks a new departure for the company, which has up until now performed specially commissioned plays and cabarets, in that they will be presenting for the first time in the UK three radically different but unanimously successful foreign productions:

**DIALOGUE BETWEEN A PROSTITUTE AND ONE OF HER CLIENTS** by Dacia Maraini (ITALY):  
(Autumn tour, 1980 and Spring tour 1981) A provocative two hander with audience discussion.

"...extremely poetic...using a skilful and very relaxed translation by Gillian Hanna of MONSTROUS REGIMENT, the actors give alert intelligent performances...informed by a dry, ironic wit" ....SPARE RIB.

**SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER** based on the original production by Theatre De L'Aquarium (FRANCE):  
(ICA, London December 1980).

**MOURNING PICTURES** by Honor Moore (AMERICA): (Spring tour 1981)

For further details about the above plays and MONSTROUS REGIMENT contact:  
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# MONSTROUS REGIMENT

Theatre: West End/News



MARK RUSHER

## A Vision Of Our Own

Ros Franey looks at *Monstrous Regiment's* latest adventure with the foreign.

Monstrous Regiment are taking a year off from their quest for the perfect British script and giving British premieres to three foreign plays. The idea was inspired by Gillian Hanna's Arts Council sponsored visit to Europe. She translated 'Shakespeare's Sister', a play devised by the Paris group Theatre de l'Aquarium; and 'Dialogue Between a Prostitute and One of Her Clients' by Italian feminist Dacia Maraini — theatre at its most live, with audience participation — which may be revived next spring. The third play, 'Mourning Pictures', which tells the story of a woman's losing fight against cancer, arrived from New York where it had already been successfully performed on Broadway.

Of the three, 'Shakespeare's Sister' depends particularly on visual rather than verbal effect. It takes as its starting point Virginia Woolf's fantasy in 'A Room of One's Own', about the fortunes of Shakespeare's sister — a woman of equal gifts to her brother who might have run away to London to be a writer... but the play is no historical romance. Theatre de l'Aquarium illustrate Woolf's point by means of a highly stylised ritual in which 'the skills of housewifery' are handed down from two grandmothers to four white-clad brides. The performance looks funny and magical in the best traditions of European performance art; it is this visual tradition, together with the

well-established theatre of serious ideas, that stirs Monstrous Regiment most about European drama. They deplore the lacks of critical and financial support for 'visual' theatre in Britain, attributing it partly to the strength of our literary heritage which may have been responsible for relegating visual effect to pantomime — a back seat in the theatre.

'There is an anti-intellectual, philistine streak in English culture — as if society were ashamed of its artists. Yet Britain has a greater diversity of fringe groups, particularly women's groups, than other European countries, and critical attitudes are starting to change' — one vital reason for bringing 'Shakespeare's Sister' to London now. The play's unusual visual emphasis (which can only be enhanced by the use of Lumiere and Son's Hilary Westlake as director) should provide a challenge to audiences as well as the company.

But the question of political content is nonetheless central to Monstrous Regiment's work. 'We're on a constant see-saw between saying something we think is important and putting on a show which appeals to people as theatre. In the past we've always put theatre before politics. From now on we're anxious not to lose sight of the political side'.

'Shakespeare's Sister' will run from Dec 2-21 at the ICA. See Fringe listings.

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TIME OUT

NOV 28 - DEC 4 1980