



Don't miss PAOLA DIONISOTTI (above) and Maggie Nicols in THE FOURTH WALL (Drill Hall), reviewed this week.

## FRINGE

■ 'The Fourth Wall' by Dario Fo and Franca Rame (The Drill Hall)  
In a mirrored set that kaleidoscopically suggests a rehearsal studio, airy sunlit playground; modern white torture chamber and crazed concrete urban wilderness at the touch of a lightswitch, two women reflect on their life and times--and us: the audience, the silent majority, the fourth wall of the prison and the necessary dimension that enables the state to clip the wings of those who would have us fly. In four pieces of monologue-duologue drawn from Fo and Rame and their own unmistakable personal experience, Maggie Nicols and Paola Dionisotti produce a startling piece of spontaneous and controlled theatre. Nicols has long been a performer whose full potential remained largely unrealised in easy company; however paired with, and playing off, an actress of Dionisotti's calibre, her soaringly quick-witted improvisational capacities are channeled and held in check by her partner whose own free-flowing impulses are given rein in this unconventional and exciting combination. The result is the kind of evening that superlatives were invented for. Do not expect easy laughs, comfortable images or a cosy time; the material is hard, hard stuff--it comes from hard sources: the madhouse, the brothel, Stammheim prison and the world inhabited by most women at one time or another. Nicols and Dionisotti will take you, with laughter and feeling, right to the edge where you can look over and perceive a truth: 'You'll never make me go mad. You'll have to kill me as I am. Sane.' Brilliant. Buy a season ticket. (Diana Simmonds)

CITY LIMITS APRIL 1-7, 1983

## DRILL HALL

Rosalind Carne

### The Fourth Wall

DARIO FO and Franca Rame are a prolific pair of writers and they are not afraid to repeat themselves. Paola Dionisotti is the principal voice in these four monologues produced by Monstrous Regiment and directed by Penny Cherns. She is an accomplished and confident actress, but despite the apparent range of material, it always comes back to the same starting point—an angry woman and a hostile world. Fine as far as it goes; it just doesn't go far enough. Continuous ridicule of the male sex grows tedious, as do vague exhortations to revolution.

Gillian Hanna's translation from the Italian does justice to what the authors do best—bursts of dry humour and sharp visual impressions. These are complemented by Hildegard Bechtler's bleached

prison cell design with its mirror wall and perspex divide. Maggie Nicols takes a subsidiary role in the action, popping up solo from time to time with an appropriate radical song.

Two of the scenes are devoted to the unsolved mysteries surrounding the deaths of members of the Red Army Faction, better known as the Baader-Meinhof gang. Mr and Mrs Fo have no doubts about the guilty party, but they do little to increase our understanding of the events. Still, Ms Dionisotti gives a powerful sense of the nightmare of incarceration and a horrific account of the experience of bleeding over a mortuary slab.

The remaining pieces are lighter in spirit, but even less illuminating in substance. Alice In Wonderless Land is a heavy-handed attempt to overreach the original by turning the White Rabbit into a sex-exploitation movie mogul. The Whore In The Madhouse presents a questionable analysis of the ethics of prostitution, making the offensive assumption that the prostitutes have lost their self-respect. Ask the girls from PRO.

## DRILL HALL

### The Fourth Wall

IF MONSTROUS Regiment wouldn't call themselves a collective, I would blame the director for a frustrating evening at the Drill Hall.

Here is a singer (Maggie Nichols) with a most wonderful voice-range and a marvellous actress (Paola Dionisotti) who is squashed into a framework imposed upon her by the singer, determined to act. And we have a marvellous script by Dario Fo and Franca Rame drowned by a lack of understanding of its very heart.

In the first of the four monologues "I'm Ulrike-Screaming" for instance, Paola Dionisotti sits at a raised white table in Hildegard Bechtler's somewhat over-used stage of mirror-walls with a transparent screen hanging in the middle, behind which Maggie Nichols sits on a white chair facing the mirror and acting as an "alter ego" to Ulrike Meinhof.

Dionisotti's Ulrike first speaks in a

calm, resigned voice about her imprisonment to later explode in passionate hatred about the German welfare-state — to which "alter ego's" contribution is to furiously crumple up a piece of white paper she has been previously studying intensely, and throw it dramatically at the floor.

Out of sheer embarrassment felt by this tedious symbolism, one can concentrate on the text only by strenuously ignoring the half of the stage "alter ego" is occupying. And this is true — if in variations — of the presentation of the rest of the monologues as well.

While I enjoy Monstrous Regiment's personal approach, I very much object to the fact, that this production should go out under the authorship of Dario Fo and Franca Rame.

I would very much like to see Paola Dionisotti, though, perform without any of this fancy stuff, as a one-woman show, Dario Fo's and Franca Rame's monologues.

Ria Julian

THE STAGE and TELEVISION TODAY, April 7, 1983 — 11

Guardian 23.3.83

**Drill Hall**

16 Cheries St, WC1 (637 8270)  
Goodge St tube.

'**The Fourth Wall**' presented by  
Monstrous Regiment based on four  
plays by Dario Fo and Franca Rame  
with Paola Dionisotti and Maggie  
Nicols. Directed by Penny Cherns.

The four monologues '**I'm Ulrike  
I'm Screaming**', '**Alice in  
Wonderless Land**', '**It Happened  
Tomorrow**' and '**The Whore in  
the Madhouse**' will be presented  
in a single performance.

In the world according to the Fo and  
Rame, women are abused by a hos-  
tile, male-dominated society. They  
must rebel, but when they do they  
are inevitably fucked over. Angrily,  
they repeat their claim throughout

the four monologues leaving no  
space for those of us who might have  
doubts. The two most gripping  
monologues are horrifying accounts  
of the 'suicidal' fate of members of  
the Baader Meinhof gang locked  
away in solitary confinement in the  
Stuttgart Stammheim. Another des-  
cribes a self-deprecating whore,  
wired up for tests like a piece of  
meat, retribution for going a little mad  
and trying to take her revenge on  
men. Interspersed between the  
monologues, Maggie Nicols' jazzy,  
rambling songs and anecdotes jar un-  
comfortably with the intensity and  
concentration of both the writing and  
Paola Dionisotti's committed per-  
formance.

(Jane Edwardes)

8pm. £3.10, £2.10 conc. Tue-Sat.

Tue, Wed all seats £2.10.

Every Monday: **Women Only Bar  
Night** 6-11pm. Admission 30p, un-  
waged free.



## the Drill Hall

MONSTROUS Regiment's production of four monologues by Dario Fo and Franca Rame from *Tutta Casa Letto E Chiesa*, under the title **THE FOURTH WALL**, was intriguing rather than wholly satisfying.

Paola Dionisotti, a Dario Fo veteran, put in a firm and considered performance, ably supported by Maggie Nicols in a difficult subsidiary role, and the mirrored set created an exact sense of women's isolation and oppression in society.

But the text, concentrating in two of the monologues on the last days in prison of the Red Army Faction, took a particularly Euro-centrist, 1970s' stance on the onslaught of consumer society, with slightly undeveloped grounds for its final optimism.

No-one should forget the deaths of Ulrike Meinhof and her comrades, who "committed suicide", according to the West German prison authorities, but the mythologisation of their struggle was not challenged here.

The best of the monologues, the Whore in the Madhouse, also took up a stance of protest against consumerist categorisation, conflated with the struggle against male definitions, with a clear argument for individual terrorism as a political action accessible to women.

The result was a presentation which stressed resilience in isolation, but stopped short of building opposition beyond that. Incidentally, Ms Nicols did Fran Landesman proud with an interpolated and chilling version of *White Nightmare*.

Ham and High 25/3/83

# Piling on all the anguish

by  
Christopher  
Hudson

WHEN the women's theatre group Monstrous Regiment mobilizes at the Drill Hall, you can expect the sparks to fly. And so they do in *The Fourth Wall*, four monologues by Dario Fo and Franca Rame, performed by Paola Dionisotti with incidental noises by Maggie Nicols.

Men—a.k.a. pigs, MCPs, rapists, bastards, politicians, psychiatrists and capitalist swine — are raked by gunfire, hung, drawn, quartered, crushed on the wheel and boiled in oil, until it's a wonder any of us were able to walk unaided to the exit afterwards.

In all of this torturous process there was no joy, no flicker of humour that was not heavily ironic, no happi-

ness, nothing affirmative. The audience instead was presented with a picture of unrelieved oppression and anguish, only redeemable, so we were told, by revolutionary political action.

Two of the monologues, therefore, were from members of the Baader-Meinhof gang, wickedly imprisoned after their long, heroic struggle against the forces of evil. No mention of their murders and abductions, but a bitter litany

of complaint from Ulrike Meinhof about sensory deprivation in her cell, and later a harrowing account of the attempted death of Gudrun Ensslin, another of the terrorists.

Paola Dionisotti declaims both of these with riveting control and intensity of feeling. She is as magnetic in the two other pieces, *Alice In Wonderless Land* and *The Whore In The Madhouse*.

What I don't understand is how such an accomplished actress could lend her talent to this material which is the worst kind of parody of sexist feminism. *Monstrous Regiment* is too worthwhile a company to get away with supposing that unbalanced diatribe makes good political theatre.

The Standard 25/3/83