



1991 Book Complete Introduction

This file contains the complete Introduction and other editorial material from *Monstrous Regiment: A Collective Celebration*, edited and compiled by Gillian Hanna.

There are six other Archive files that divide the Introduction into sections mapping on to the periods used in the website's History pages.

Published by Nick Hern Books in 1991, the book had been planned to mark the company's fifteenth anniversary in 1990, but was held back for a year so that important developments in 1990-91 could be included.

Gillian Hanna's Introduction provides an extensive historical account of the company. It also includes extracts from the recollections of people who had worked with Monstrous Regiment, and had been asked to contribute these for the projected book.

The book also included the scripts of four plays - *Scum*, *My Sister In This House*, *Island Life* and *Love Story Of The Century*. But these are not included here.

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GILLIAN HANNA ■ MONSTROUS REGIMENT

MONSTROUS REGIMENT



A
COLLECTIVE
CELEBRATION

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MONSTROUS REGIMENT is a theatre company with twin sparks at its centre: the complex nature of women's experience and the dynamic nature of the theatre. It aims to produce extraordinary work that illuminates, entertains and moves the audience. Founded in 1975 by a group of professional performers, the company has explored a wide range of theatrical forms over the years, including the epic, the straight play, musicals, real performance pieces and cabaret. It has always been its policy to provide work opportunities for women, whether as performers, writers, musicians, designers, directors or technicians, although both women and men have worked with the company.

Monstrous Regiment has commissioned a large body of plays about women from such writers as Robyn Archer, Chris Bond, Caryl Churchill, David Edgar, Bryony Lavery, Claire Luckham, Rose Tremain and Michelene Wandor. The company has recently taken a new direction by appointing its first artistic director, Clare Venables.

GILLIAN HANNA is an actress and translator. Educated at Trinity College, Dublin, where she took a degree in Modern Languages, she has worked in theatre and television for over twenty years. In 1975 she was one of the group of performers who founded Monstrous Regiment and has worked with the company extensively since then. She translates plays from French and Italian and has published fourteen of her translations of Franca Rame and Dario Fo's plays.

To the memory of Angela Hopkins and Ruth Marks

MONSTROUS REGIMENT

Four Plays and a Collective Celebration
Selected and compiled by Gillian Hanna

SCUM by Claire Luckham and Chris Bond

MY SISTER IN THIS HOUSE

by Wendy Kesselman

ISLAND LIFE by Jenny McLeod

LOVE STORY OF THE CENTURY

by Märta Tikkanen

from the translation

by Stina Katchadourian

adapted by Clare Venables



NICK HERN BOOKS

London

A Nick Hern Book

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Music and lyrics for 'Sleep My Little Sister, Sleep' in *My Sister in This House* copyright © 1981 by Wendy Kesselman

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Contents

	Page
Prologue	ix
Introduction	xiii
Production Photographs	lxxxv
Scum	1
My Sister in This House	81
Island Life	147
Love Story of the Century	215

Gillian Hanna would like to thank Chris Bowler, Katrina Duncan, Diane Gelon, Mary McCusker, Cheryl Moch, Rose Sharp and Clare Venables for invaluable help in the preparation of this book.

Meditation on Monstrous Regiment, a.k.a. Monsters

'MONSTER': Oxford English Dictionary definition:

'Originally: a Divine Portent or Warning.

From 1710: a Prodigy or Marvel.'

*(Plus all the other more obvious ones of animals of huge size,
combinations of 2 animals in one, etc., etc.)*

DIVINE PORTENT, WARNING, PRODIGY, MARVEL

*No wonder I have always loved their pet name more than their full
one. 'Regiment' frightened me.*

*CLARE VENABLES
Artistic Director, 1991*

Prologue

This is a personal, partial – in both senses – record of some significant moments in the life of a theatre company. Even if I had wanted to, I am not the right person to write a scholarly document of social history. What I want to do here is to try and give some sense of what it felt like to be part of an enormous wave of social change. It isn't a minutely detailed account of The Monstrous Regiment's existence over the last fifteen years; more like a series of snapshots from the family album. So I apologise in advance to all those who will feel – who will *know* – that there are other versions of this story.

There is, of course, another history which underpins this one, the history which is rarely spoken of: the emotions, the rivalries, the quarrels, the love affairs licit and illicit that are part of any social group and especially a tightly-knit bunch of emotionally volatile idealists embarked on what they perceived as a life and art struggle to change the world. I am conscious that in omitting this vital thread of the company's life only part of the truth is visible. But that story, however crucial, belongs to those who lived it. I simply want to acknowledge its absent presence here.

What do I remember? How do I want to be remembered?

Scum: Chalking 'Vive la Commune' on an upturned table as I listened to Helen Glavin playing her most beautiful song of all, 'Cherry Time' – dreaming of love and the spring while facing death. And there we were, with our dreams still intact.

CHRIS BOWLER
Company Member, Performer, Writer,
Director, 1975 to the present.

Soon after the question of writing this introduction was raised in the company, I had a dream that was so vivid I had to write it

down. It surprised me because I'm not given to 'significant' dreams.

In the dream, the company had gathered together a group of women, many of whom I recognised as having worked with the company over the past fifteen years. We wanted some help with a difficulty we had got ourselves into: was it a hopeless task for women of our age and experience (early to late forties) to look for younger writers who could write about the concerns we wanted to see expressed on the stage? (This reflected an actual discussion the company was having at the time. We had been considering, for example, organising a conference on the issue.) There were some difficulties about the meeting itself. Some of us had agreed to meet in a building in Lower Regent Street, but we had got confused between Lower Regent Street and the Haymarket, so there was a terrible muddle; we thought that some women hadn't turned up, whereas in fact they had. We arrived in someone's house or flat. A private space, not public. There was difficulty in focusing the discussion. Every time a useful line of discussion got going, someone would move to another room, disrupting the flow, or someone would start another discussion on the other side of the room. There was a clear division between some of the younger women who couldn't see the point of the discussion and some of the older women who felt that these issues were now out of date and had no relevance to their lives. Someone said very loudly: 'I hope this isn't going to turn into a talking shop.' After a lot of talk and discussion - some useful some not - the meeting broke up. There was a general feeling that the younger women would not come back to another meeting. And in the dream I said to Cathy Itzin*: 'I started to panic when I heard that "talking shop" remark'. 'So did I', she said. 'And I couldn't bear it. I think I would die if the next generation didn't understand what we did and why, to the extent that it became necessary for them to start all over again as if we had never existed.'

While this short introduction cannot carry the burden of passing on all that we learned, I hope that it will make a contribution to the discussion that will begin when sufficient numbers of younger women perceive the hollowness of the premises of 'post feminism' and the next wave of feminism starts to take shape.

* Catherine Itzin, journalist and writer, author of *Stages in the Revolution* (Eyre Methuen, 1980).

When my mother started working at Monstrous Regiment I was all of about 5 years old. Now I'm 18, considered by many as a woman in my own right and shortly off to university. And believe me, it's as weird for me to see the Monsters grow up as I'm sure it is for them to see me. Sure, I've grown from being about 2 foot tall to a grand 5 foot 11 inches, but if you ask me, the Monsters have grown no less visibly. Whatever happened to that dingy office that was about 3 foot square in Essex Road? If you ask me my growing effort is measly compared to theirs! I see the name 'Monstrous Regiment' all over the place now and I must say I feel proud of their achievements.

So, what do I remember about the Monsters? I remember a few faces and even fewer names. I remember watching grown women, and the odd man, doing all sorts of strange things -- screaming and 'relaxing'. I remember seeing every play the group did but not understanding a single word of any of them. I remember finding my first wobbly tooth at Chrissie Bowler's house, and designing flags for the company, and Bili the best dog ever, and eating lokshen pudding at Goswell Road. And my best memory is of Mary, Gillie and Chris singing me to sleep one bedtime.

Seriously though, the time I spent with the Monsters really was excellent fun. Of course I took it all for granted but in retrospect I'm sure that growing up among so many feminists helped form my opinions and attitude. I understand better than most girls my age the aims, achievements and implications of the women's movement, and also what still has to be fought for. I suppose I also take fringe theatre rather too much for granted, due to an overdose at an early age. The Monsters have contributed greatly to an upbringing that I'm grateful for.

When I played the child of the future in Shakespeare's Sister at the ICA the most exciting thing for me was that I was allowed to stay up until way past my bedtime every night except Sunday. It was quite impressive to say that I was acting on a West End stage, but I actually couldn't have cared less. I did get £35 per week (half the real wage) but I didn't really understand money and I didn't even get a new dress as a costume. Still, I suppose it was fun to walk on stage every night, turn a record player off, walk to the front of the stage and read from some pieces of paper in a saucepan.

Monstrous Regiment will never be a theatre company to me, as far as I'm concerned they are a group of 'aunties' and a part of my upbringing. Predictably, now I have no desire to go and see a Monstrous Regiment play (unless of course one of my monsters is in

it) but I still keep an eye out for them and am absolutely amazed that it's 15 years. Now, at last my chance to say . . . 'HAVEN'T YOU GROWN!!'

Happy Birthday Monsters and Thank you.

Much love.

*HANNAH BEARDON
Daughter of Sue and Star of the wonderful
Shakespeare's Sister, 1980.*

Introduction

The four plays in this volume cover fifteen years of Monstrous Regiment's existence - from *Scum: Death, Destruction and Dirty Washing*, the first show we produced, to *Love Story of the Century*, which toured in the Spring of 1990. Fifteen years, because although *Scum* did not open until May 1976, we had set up the company the previous August.

We are extremely glad to have the opportunity of getting some of the work we have performed into print. More and more women are writing plays and they are being produced, but they are rendered invisible because the texts are not published. It is important that people are made aware of the existence of women authors, beyond the handful that make it to the main stages of major mainstream theatres. *My Sister in This House* is well known in America, but hardly at all in England, and the other three plays in this volume are almost unknown outside the comparatively small number of people who saw them in performance. One of the aims The Monstrous Regiment started out with was to create a body of work by and about women that could be performed by others, so we've always thought that making the texts publicly visible and available was of vital importance.

Because a major and crucial part of our existence is the creation and promotion of new writing, students often ask us what work method we use in the creation of our plays. We can never answer the question straightforwardly. The truth is that we have never evolved a 'work method' as such. Projects have been conceived and created in different ways. The work method fitted the talents and interests of the people who made up the company at any particular time. Or the desires of the author. It also reflected the state the company was in: in the early days, we demanded the involvement of every member of the company with the script at all stages and we continued to work at and shape the scripts through rehearsals and even on the road. At other points, when we commissioned authors, we pretty much left them alone, once the initial idea or scenario had been discussed and agreed.

Scum, which was created during a period of excitement and turmoil, involved a seemingly endless process of to-ing and fro-ing between the authors and the company to the extent that it is now almost impossible to know who wrote certain passages of the play (although, of course, it is Claire Luckham and Chris Bond's play). The development of *Island Life* followed a more conventional path. Jenny McLeod presented us with a choice of two scenarios. In discussion with her, we decided on one of them. She then went away and wrote the play. There were discussions and rewrites, of course, especially once the play went into rehearsal, but the process was a relatively conventional one, unlike *Scum*.

The change in approach reflects the material changes in the structure of the company and the world in which it works. So in 1975 we were a collective of eleven people, all of whom had the right and the burning desire to contribute to the making of the play. But by 1989, as a management of five, we were playing a more traditional, 'managerial' role.

My Sister in This House and *Love Story of the Century* represent another strand of the company's work. We have always felt that we needed to be in touch with what women were writing about in other countries – Sisterhood is Global – so we have produced plays from the USA, and translations from Italian, French, Spanish, and, in the case of *Love Story of the Century*, Finnish.

The First Fury: Creating the Company 1975–1979

Like many plays produced by the political touring companies of the 1970s, *Scum* came out of passionate commitment to principles, hard thinking about political objectives, explosive energy, careful organisation and near total chaos.

In 1970, a group of women had staged a much-publicised disruption of the Miss World contest. That was the same year in which the first Women's Liberation conference was held in Oxford. Germaine Greer published *The Female Eunuch* in 1972. The mythical American bra-burners were never out of the newspapers: women were back on the political agenda in a way they had not been since the days of the suffragettes.

More and more women were noticing that the famous sexual and political revolution of the 1960s just meant more better sex for the men; and that commitment to left-wing ideas meant more

licking envelopes and making tea for the women. At best the revolution was passing women by; at worst it was rolling over them.

The atmosphere of the time was extraordinary: the shivering excitement in the air was almost tangible. Women felt they were throwing off the shackles of a thousand years or more and finding freedom. We were going to be the midwives for a whole new era of equality. The fact that our grandmothers had had the same feelings fifty years before was neither here nor there. The more we discovered what had been 'hidden from history', the more furious we became, the more convinced we were that this time we were not going to rest until the world was transformed. We were going to change things irrevocably, and our daughters and granddaughters would be able to learn from our successes and mistakes. Somehow we would pass on our knowledge, so that the next generation could take up where we left off instead of having to start all over again.

'Women are revolting', the badge said. Everywhere you turned, we were marching, writing, performing, striking, picketing, occupying newspapers and men-only wine bars, arguing with each other and everyone else. What's hard to grab hold of and pass on at a distance of twenty years is the sheer exhilaration and excitement of the times. The Buzz. The feeling – the knowledge – that what we were doing was *the* most important political and social movement, gave anyone who was part of it, however peripherally, a real sense of their own importance in the world. The movement was visionary and idealistic, but it was also practical: arguments about equal pay, equal rights, nursery care were raging.

In the context of this whirlwind of social change, it was inevitable that the ideas being debated so fiercely would find their way onto the stage. Some of the routes by which they did so are reflected in the diversity of the backgrounds of the women (and men) who became the Monstrous Regiment.

Perhaps some of the difficulties I find in relating to these accounts of the company are to do with class and education. I wasn't a member of the educated middle-classes, who came to socialism and feminism via the universities and polytechnics of the 60s and 70s. My own route was a different one. And often I resented my inability to compete with other members of the collective in articulating my thoughts in recognisable well-honed phrases.

*The resentment and frustration will probably never quite disappear.
But nor will my memories of the positive joy of being one of the
Monstrous Regiment.*

MARY MCCUSKER

*Company Member, Performer, 1975 to the present,
Executive Director, 1990-1991.*

During the afternoon of August 14th 1975, a freak rainstorm hit a very small area of north London. For three hours it poured down. Hundreds of people were left homeless as their basement flats were flooded, and in Gospel Oak, dinghies and rowing boats were being used to rescue the stranded. August 14th also happened to be the afternoon when a handful of disaffected and fed up actresses and musicians were supposed to be getting together to talk about setting up some kind of music theatre company. The meeting was in Gospel Oak. As the water level rose, and the one or two who had arrived before the storm really got going had to help to try and clear the blocked drain in the garden - to stop the water pouring in under the back door - we decided that this was one of those great ideas that had been rained off. No such thing. During the late afternoon and into the early evening, one by one, they all appeared: bedraggled and soaking wet, but they appeared. As we noted with glee, it seemed to be a wonderfully auspicious omen. It took us another eight months to get the company on its feet. Some of that original group left and others arrived before we opened the first production, but in the mythology of the company, The Afternoon of the Storm has always been the Beginning of the Monstrous Regiment.

'Atmosphere' is so difficult to pin down in words. There was ups and there was downs; and life is complicated; and memory treacherous.

DAVID BRADFORD

*Company Member, Performer,
Director, different periods
between 1975-1983.*

Who were we, and why were we there? The actors among us had been working in the professional theatre: Some were from

'straight' theatre and television; some had moved from that in the early 1970s into touring socialist companies or TIE (Theatre-in-Education) or radical experimental groups of one kind or another. We were musicians, too, singers and instrumentalists looking for a way to express something beyond the sexist platitudes of current popular music.

Each of us, in our individual situation, discovered that we wanted to marry our ideas and beliefs with the work we did every day. In an action that was partly conscious and partly unconscious, we were groping our way towards another way of looking at our work: we were questioning what 'the personal is political' might mean in the arena of our own working lives.

At some point, the tension between what we believed to be true about women, and what we were being asked to portray on the stage as being true about women, was too much.

Rarely were we able to play women who lived on stage in their own right. We were always someone's wife, mother or lover. (*Someone* being a man, of course.) Our theatrical identity was usually defined in terms of our relationship to the (more important) male characters. We only had an existence at all because we were attached to a man. The male protagonist gave us a reason for existing on stage. As Mary McCusker was often heard to muse: 'If I have to play another tart with a heart of gold in a PVC skirt, I'm going to throw up.' And in bands we were required to be the attractive front; wear sexy clothes and sing. Musicians, real musicians, were axiomatically male.

If we ever questioned any of this, we were inevitably accused of 'whining'. Whether in straight theatre or left-wing groups, the Women's Movement was regarded with suspicion if not out and out hostility. (Trivialising women's aspirations was always one good way of trying to blunt the purpose of what we were up to. An interview we did with Erland Clouston for the *Liverpool Daily Post* started: 'You won't notice anything odd about the next play you go to, but that's just conditioning. "The average ratio's about six to two", the Monstrous Regiment sigh, filing their nails. Actors, they're talking about, men to women.')

Critical response has ranged from the belligerent to the rapturous, stopping at many points in between, including the patronising and disdainful. A common reaction of critics to women's work (often, though not always, male critics) is total incomprehension. Unhappily there is only room here for a tiny selection of the classics that have come our way.

'To use the Paris Commune as a vehicle for sentiments as simplistic and modish as those of the Women's Liberation Movement might seem to be politically irresponsible . . .'

JEFF NUTTALL,

*The Guardian on Scum: Death Destruction
and Dirty Washing, 1976.*

'The Women's Lib movement, in spite of the considerable advances it has made, is still at a stage where resentment dominates reason. Because it keeps striving for the unattainable goal of happiness through equality, frustration is its inevitable reward. Teendreams by David Edgar with Susan Todd at the ICA theatre has the authentic shrill note of so much writing about women's rights. When it is not railing at men as oppressors, it is haranguing women for failing to take part in the struggle. Being a mere male, Mr Edgar, as a Women's Lib propagandist, has the disadvantage of seeing too many sides of the argument.'

MILTON SHULMAN,

the Evening Standard, March 1979.

'The company - a feminist bunch who order up plays by women writers - managed somehow to produce something that was about people as much as women.'

PHILIP KEY,

*Liverpool Daily Post, October 1981,
on Yoga Class.*

'Sometimes you do tend to wonder if authors are losing their marbles. The search for novelty at any cost gives rise to some curious malformations.

Bryony Lavery's latest farce is a complete confusion. Miss Lavery belongs to that modern breed of bellyaching feminist who protest the role of women in what is believed to be a male-dominated world. Which is nonsense.'

RICHARD EDMONDS,

*Birmingham Post, November 1984,
on Origin of the Species.*

'Gillian Hanna is Calamity Jane, who maybe partly accounts for the success of the production by persuading the playgoer to forget for considerable periods that this is in fact an all-woman show.'

A.R.,
unidentified Scunthorpe paper, 1983.

We were mirroring the journeys of many other women at that moment: realising that we would wait till Doomsday if we were waiting for men to come through with anything beyond waffle about women's roles, we took action into our own hands. As we used to say in another context, the slave owners didn't give up ownership of their slaves willingly. Freedom has to be fought for.

The commitment with which we had engaged in the political struggle that was set in motion in the post '68 period helps to explain why women who came out of left-wing politics sometimes found it hard to embrace the full force of feminism. It was hard to face the idea that comrades with whom you had worked side by side were actually guilty of bad faith. Hanging on to their own male privileges, they retreated behind a wall and threw darts over the top with 'The Women's Movement is a diversion' written on them. Considering our delight when we discovered the idea of women organising autonomously, it's odd that some of us still hung on loyally to so many of the beliefs associated with our male dominated past.

Like all radicals nibbling at the edge of society we were up against an old problem: do you try and infiltrate ideas into the body politic of the ruling culture by working within the mainstream (and run the risk of diluting the radicalism of the politics) or act autonomously outside the mainstream and run the risk of being marginalised?

In 1975, a body of our peers seemed to be showing us that maybe this wasn't such a big issue: companies like Joint Stock, 7:84, Pip Simmons and The Freehold had been waving two fingers at the conventional theatre world. To those of us who had worked in such companies, whether in socialist groups like 7:84 or Belt & Braces, or in what Chris Bowler called 'the lunatic fringe', there wasn't really an argument. As we couldn't get anyone in the 'straight' theatre to take seriously the questions we were asking, forming our own company was the only road open to us.

And, of course, we had foremothers to look to. The Women's Street Theatre Group had been founded in 1970. In 1972 the

Bolton Octagon's TIE company had devised and performed *Sweetie Pie*, a play focusing on the 'four demands' of the 1970 Women's Liberation Conference. (Equal pay, equal education and opportunity, 24-hour nurseries and free contraception and abortion on demand.) Then in 1973, the Almost Free Theatre hosted a Women's Theatre Festival, out of which emerged two groups: The Women's Company and the Women's Theatre Group.

How our particular group came to be meeting in north London in the middle of a thunderstorm was through a theatrical accident: I had been working with the socialist touring company Belt & Braces. We were recasting a play about the Kent coalfields in the 1930s. Naturally enough, there wasn't an enormous number of parts for women in it. Two, in fact. And I had the only good one. The other one was a cough and a spit. At the auditions, I was amazed at the women who came to see us. They were so talented, so full of energy and ideas. It was outrageous that the scarcity of work for women meant that they were prepared to audition for what amounted to a 'bit part'.

Someone pointed out to me that I was always whingeing on about 'women' so, why didn't I put my money where my mouth was? So I contacted several of the women who had come to the auditions and asked if they would be interested in the idea of forming a women's company. Those who said yes were invited to a meeting. And that's where it began. In a thunderstorm.

There was never any question but that we would set ourselves up as a collective organisation. The company was always conceived as a performers' collective. Given the political climate of the time, the legacy of the libertarian politics of the 1960s and the fact that most of us had experience of some kind of socialist organisation, no other form of structure was considered. We felt too, that collective organisation was somehow the natural way for women to work. It was a period when women were emerging from their individual lives, sharing their histories and stories with each other. Collective work and action broke down the isolation individual women experienced and showed us that we weren't mad or bad.

Besides, there was the spur of feeling that the collectives we had experience of didn't really work. We wanted to do it better; to show that a collective could work efficiently, and honestly. Honestly in the sense that we were aware of the dangers of the 'hidden hierarchy' that can lie beneath the surface of a group, unacknowledged but nonetheless powerful and controlling. We

wanted no one person to be so important that she could be considered to be the Artistic Director. Once the company had been established and was up and running, this issue of power and hidden hierarchies came up again and again. We were always conscious of it and struggled and argued and discussed the question endlessly, as the minutes of our company meetings show.

Item 8. Mouse Control

*There are mice. Should we get a cat? Roger: Against it --responsibility and smell. Thinks we should get the Public Health Department.
Gillie: Pro the cat. Much division. No decision taken.*

Extract from the Minutes Book. September 7th 1977.

Although I brought together the women who came to the first meeting, I didn't really 'choose' them. They chose themselves (accidentally) by coming to the Belt & Braces auditions, and later re-chose themselves by staying with the group while others dropped out. At this very early stage there was one man involved with us. In the period between the first meeting and the opening of the first show nine months later we 'attached' other people to us in different ways. Some we knew of from other projects we had worked on. Some we found through auditions and interviews. Some just appeared.

Between August and December 1975 we formed the company proper. We were forced to work in a hand-to-mouth sort of way because we were scattered all over the country. We decided on the subject and title of the first play, commissioned it and invited a director to work with us on it; we named the company and began the process of setting it up as a legal entity. We drew up a 'shopping list' of possible future projects.

The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women is the title of a pamphlet written in 1558 by John Knox, the Scottish preacher and minister. There is some academic discussion as to whether 'Regiment' should more accurately be 'Regimen' meaning 'rule of', since the pamphlet was a virulent attack on Elizabeth I of England and Mary Stuart. We were unaware of any such controversy, and in any case we were rather taken with the image of armies of women driving around the

country in battered Transit vans putting on plays. It always amused us to note the different responses we got to that name. To us, it was half comic – whole serious, but definitely intended to produce a smile. We were often astounded at the number of people who failed to get the joke.

The heatwave of summer 1976 peaked during our week of one-night stands for Southern Arts. One week I had booked included a performance at the West End Centre in Aldershot. We were very aware of being in a town dominated by the military – after all we were a regiment too. I was half expecting to be taken away and shot as a dirty feminist. The patriarchal machinery was all around us but we weren't afraid. It was blistering hot but we had women's work to do, getting the Scum set (wooden flooring pallets and half-barrel washing tubs and a cast-iron stove) out of the van and into the theatre. We decided that swimwear was the order of the day, and of course our personalised carpenters' aprons and gardening gloves (the pallets were full of splinters). Yes, we were feminists, but we had bodies, and we didn't care who knew it. The W.E.C. didn't know what to do for the best. Should they comment, or stay mum and pretend that all their companies did get-ins in bikinis? Discretion won the day – or was it fear? Did they think we'd turn on them with our spanners and ratchet screwdrivers? After the show, one brave soul told me they'd expected us all to turn up in boiler suits and dungarees. So, victory to the Regiment. Another stereotype shattered.

CHRIS BOWLER,
Company Member, Performer, Writer,
Director, 1975 to the present.

While we were involved with the practical job of setting up the company, at the same time we began the meetings and discussions which were to fuel its life over the next fifteen years; who are we? who do we want to be? what are we doing? who are we doing it for? More specifically, we embarked on the long investigation of our relationship to the two great social forces that motivated us: socialism and feminism.

An overview? I can't think of one.

Best thing; the company's ability to contain difference; the sort of rows and conflicts they had, in previous companies of my experience there'd have been sackings, scapegoating, all right-on justified of course . . . but not the Monsters. They went through it and survived, and I believe that is profoundly about them being women – mostly. I'd never experienced meetings with so much subtext, so much going on under the surface. But somehow it was all contained, and decisions were arrived at. Was this way to our advantage? Not always, for sure, but that was the way of it and the chemistry of it, and I came to love them for it.

Another best thing – the policy; 'We are a collective; we do plays; women's experience centre stage; never more men than women in the company.' Great. Easy to remember.

Favourite show I was in: Dialogue Between a Prostitute and One of Her Clients. Favourite show I wasn't in? Vinegar Tom.

JOHN SLADE

Company Member, Performer,
1979–1982.

In January 1976 we made two submissions to funding bodies: one application to the touring department of the Arts Council of Great Britain asking for a guarantee against loss to cover the first tour, and another to the Gulbenkian Foundation, asking for money to pay an administrator's salary for a year:

'We are a group of professionals (at the moment eight women and two men) who have an urgent desire to redress the balance of male/female status and opportunities in the theatre. At any one time, 91.5% of the Equity membership is unemployed. The latest survey shows that average annual earnings were £835; this average was based on male average earnings of £1,031, while for women it was £583. These figures force us to review the whole question of women in the theatre . . . These statistics graphically demonstrate the acuteness of the problem. Despite International Women's Year and the Sex Discrimination Act, we don't see any sign that directors and producers are even aware of the problem's existence, let alone that they are attempting to do anything about it. So we feel that we are forced to . . . The

imbalance that we have experienced is not only in the scarcity of work but also in the quality of the work that is offered: there is no challenge, no satisfaction and above all no truth in representing women by an endless parade of stereotypes . . . We can understand the motive behind the commercial theatre's obsession with bare breasts and false eyelashes, but even in those areas where subsidy is supposed to foster a more intelligent approach we find too much of the same kind of thinking . . . We have created a nucleus of committed people . . . who will provide continuity of policy, and who will be directors of a non-profit distributing company limited by guarantee. However, we know that there are many who will have valuable contributions to make but who, because of other commitments, (in the case of women these are usually children) are unable to promise an undivided fifty-two weeks a year undertaking. We do not think they should be excluded because of this. We see as an important part of our work the creation of a flexible group of writers, performers, directors, etc. who will come together in workshops . . . it is essential that we should become a forum for ideas . . .

'We intend to start fairly conventionally by seeking to establish ourselves on a well tried circuit and then to branch out into more difficult directions. In this we are pursuing the logical continuation of what we have been doing in our various spheres up till now. (The Liverpool Everyman, Incubus, the Combination, 7:84, Belt & Braces, etc.) As individuals we have experienced the problems of trying to reach a new audience and we do not underestimate them. However we feel it is our task to try and expand these efforts into new areas . . . we want to find that audience which is to be found in launderettes or in front of television sets. . . . Women in the past have tended to organise themselves for social purposes, and we intend to tap these organisations as well as those more usual ones structured round places of work or local issues. We are already booked to play in community centres around the Liverpool area and we will be working hard to expand our work in this direction . . .'

The Company

- Linda Broughton: Bolton Octagon TIE, Glasgow Citizens Freeway, Birmingham Rep, Cockpit TIE. Writer/performer.
- Chris Bowler: Combination, V Theatre Company, The People Show, Belt & Braces Roadshow. Performer/fire eater.
- Helen Glavin: Black & White Minstrel Show, West London Theatre Workshop, RedBrass, Red Buddha, Edinburgh Festival rock opera 'Shylock', musicals, pantomime, Farnham. Musician/dancer/performer/singer.
- Gillian Hanna: Liverpool Everyman, Newcastle University Theatre, 7:84, Belt & Braces Roadshow. Performer/admin.
- Annie Hayes: Birmingham Rep, Sheffield Playhouse, Lincoln Theatre Royal, Palace Theatre, Watford. Performer/singer.
- Claire Luckham: Ipswich, Watford, Royal Shakespeare Company. Stage manager/writer.
- Mary McCusker: Young Lyceum, Edinburgh. Glasgow Citizens, Welsh National Theatre, Perth, Newcastle University Theatre, Liverpool Everyman. Performer/animal impersonator.
- Pat McCulloch: American Conservatory Theatre, University of California Repertory Theatre, Committee Revue, San Francisco & New York, Voice, Incubus. Performer/musician.
- Chris Bond: Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Royal Shakespeare Company, Liverpool Everyman, Belt & Braces Roadshow, Northcott Theatre Exeter. Writer/performer/director.
- David Bradford: Lincoln Theatre Royal, Ipswich, Royal Court Theatre, London, Bolton Octagon, Leeds TIE, Community Industry, Liverpool Everyman, Belt & Braces Roadshow. Writer/performer/director.

Serious minded professionals trying to show that we had a sense of humour. Fire eating and animal impersonation, ho ho.

We did get our guarantee against loss from the Touring Department, largely thanks to Ruth Marks, an extraordinary woman who believed in encouraging ventures she thought had potential. She worked in the Arts Council at a time when what you were doing on stage was more important than The Business Plan. Her vision and courage in backing artistic talent was unusual and she had an enormous influence on many emerging companies. Ruth died at an absurdly young age, and she is badly missed.

In the 1980s the priorities of an arts administrator are shaped by considerations of funding, marketing and managerial efficiency. Arts funding bodies, guided by the prevailing monetarist philosophy of the present government, set stringent criteria for companies, based on their organisational effectiveness and ability to obtain a range of sponsorship. This is the age of the business plan, the consultant, the strategy, incentive-funding and expensive fund-raising training courses. The only growth area in the arts it seems and the only place anyone can make a decent living. Why fund an arts festival when you can fund a feasibility study on an arts festival. Why pay an artist when you can pay a consultant.

Of course efficiency and good management are important and were often less than they might have been in the 1970s. But if managerialism replaces commitment, excitement, the engagement of the arts and theatre with the deeply felt aspirations of both practitioner and audience, then theatre is empty and has nothing to say.

SUE BEARDON

Administrator, 1976-1978.

The genesis of the company's socialism is clear enough. Our individual histories had dictated it. Later on, as this amorphous group changed into the company that produced the first show and therefore became the founding members of Monstrous Regiment proper, we tried to clarify our relationship to the socialist movement. That commitment to looking for a new audience, already expressed in our first contacts with officialdom, became more concrete as we tried to forge links with the Trade Union movement. So we tried to express our politics both in

theory and practice – in the content of the plays, in the way we organised our own working lives, and in our attempts to track down that elusive new audience.

How did this relate to our feminism? What was a feminist? Were we socialist feminists, or feminist socialists? We certainly weren't radical feminists. Indeed, we infuriated many women by insisting that we weren't separatist. How could we be, with men in the group?

After the kind of huge rows and conflicts that there always are in groups like us, the resolution would generally be accompanied by tears, touching and hugging – the sort of thing, of course, that chaps just don't do as well. In any case, I think I was pretty good at keeping my head down and avoiding direct involvement in the huge rows and conflicts.

The most obvious way it was different was in the work itself. The world of the plays we did was female-driven. Even the simple fact of having a large majority had a huge impact. This meant that I was generally playing more supporting roles, although we were scrupulous in trying to avoid centering anything we did around one character. Curiously, I think this made it in some ways easier for the men than the women. Our presence as a minority on the stage was very noticeable. As MR wanted to explore the tensions in relationships between women and men, it often meant that the scenes involving men were exciting and dynamic because of that fact.

ROGER ALLAM
Company Member, Performer,
Musician, 1976–1979.

At this very early stage our feminism was on the whole formally unexpressed. Although many of us felt we were part of the Women's Liberation Movement, we had very little idea of what that might mean in practice.

Feminism was leaping in our heads, of course. To be a woman in 1975 and not to have felt the excitement of things starting to change, possibilities in the air, would have meant that you were only half alive. But the Women's Liberation Movement was not a political movement in the sense that we had known politics up to

that point. Those of us who came from a background of socialism knew how to join the I.S. (International Socialists) or the Communist Party (or even, God forbid, the Labour Party) but where did you go to join the Women's Liberation Movement? After all, the Women's Movement was everywhere and nowhere. There were no party cards, no enrolment formalities. Did buying *Spare Rib* make you a member? Were you a member because you read *The Female Eunuch* and agreed with Germaine Greer? Or had been to a Women's Liberation Conference? If you weren't in a consciousness raising group, did that mean you couldn't belong?

In the sixties I was a very junior part of the establishment world of the theatre. It was rarely referred to that I was female, apart from the odd comment about how unusual it was for a woman to be doing my job. Any conflict was mainly unconscious, and if I felt particular stress, I just blamed myself and my 'Personality'. (In fact, I was aware that it was a bonus being 'rare'; it was more likely I would get noticed. When I applied for an Arts Council bursary, I was very pissed off that there was another women, Glen Walford, on the shortlist. So was she, I discovered years later.)

Late sixties, early seventies. Wow! Everything is up for grabs! Everything is changing! Not me. I read about it. That's ALL I did. I read about it. Monsters were there. They joined in. They were doing it. I read about them. They frightened me. I didn't know them. I saw them. To me they looked confident, sorted out, independent. They seemed to have no truck with the likes of me. Had I even faintly dared to get to know them, which I didn't, I KNEW that they would have found my fears, dependence, ambitions etc., completely stupid. I would be the subject of one of their plays, not a colleague.

CLARE VENABLES
Artistic Director, 1991.

It is probably true to say that feminism crept up behind us and smacked us hard on the back of the head. The nature of the meetings turned out to be dramatically different from what we had imagined. Yes we were going about setting up a theatre company, in as businesslike a way as we knew how, but we were also raising our own consciousness as we went along. Our

frustrations, our anger became inextricably tangled with our determination to get the project going. We set out at the very beginning to make theatre and over the weeks and months of discussions we discovered that we were involved in something much bigger than that: we wanted to change the world. At the time, this didn't seem like such an outrageous project. All around us, women in every area of the world we knew were doing the same thing. It seemed as natural as breathing.

But much more exciting than breathing. Exhilarating. The sense of being in the right place at the right time, in step with a great movement in history, *part* of history, making history ourselves. We were part of a huge wave of women and we were going to remake everything. It gradually dawned on us that we didn't have to go out and join any movement. We were already in it. We were the Movement.

Where did this leave us in relation to men? On the one hand, there was no question of not having men in the group. Our anger at women's position in the world was directed at 'men' in general, or patriarchy, the male-dominated system. We tried hard not to see the men we worked with as being part of the male conspiracy to keep women in their places (on their backs). Although we recognised that 'the personal is political', and although each individual woman was struggling in her own life to make sense of the political relationship between men and women, we always felt that in the context of the company, men were part of the problem, so they had to be part of the answer. If, as we often said, we wanted to dramatise the flashpoints between men and women, we felt that those flashpoints had to be visible on the stage. Our only stated position was the legal one we wrote into the company's Memorandum and Articles of Association: that Monstrous Regiment would never contain more men than women. Besides, our political backgrounds predisposed us to think of men as comrades. We looked on our project as a shared one: men and women working together to create a new kind of theatre, a new set of working relationships.

I recall walking into the rehearsal room on our first day of Alarms. I was excited – for some time I had wanted to work with a women's theatre company. And yet I found myself surprised by my own reaction – surprised that I was surprised to see so many women in a rehearsal room. A female lighting designer, female director, female

photographer, female playwright, female designer, female administrators, and only one male, who was an actor. I had known that this was likely to be the case, but the reality was nevertheless quite extraordinary, because during 13 years of working in theatre, I had never experienced this gender-ratio before.

GERDA STEVENSON

Performer, Alarms, 1986-1987.

In retrospect, it seems to me that the basic mistake we made was an organisational one. Given that we operated collectively, we went to extraordinary lengths to try and ensure that everyone's voice was given equal status. (When we found that some of us were being silent in company meetings, we discussed it and looked for strategies that would enable the person to speak.) We remembered how unvalued and silenced we had felt in male-dominated companies, and we were determined not to repeat the patriarchal pattern of dominance and submission. It was important to us that the men should feel an equal part of the company. In effect, we spent a lot of time making sure that the men felt comfortable, and falling head-first into the trap of mothering them. We were, as Helen Glavin says, 'too nice'. Not that the men found it an easy situation to be in. We were asking them to abandon the privileges of patriarchy and work side by side with women as equals. But the equality was blurred, in that it was informally clear that the women led and directed the company. Perhaps if we had been able to find a different organisational structure, things might have been easier; a structure in which women were formally recognised as being the leaders, having the power; in which the men were employed by the women. As it was, because we spent so much energy maintaining an equilibrium between the sexes, we scarcely had any left to examine the issue of relations of power between the women.

Male stage managers in theatres did usually walk straight up to the men in the company when we arrived, assuming we were in charge. After a few surprising interventions by suddenly tetchy women from the company I realised what a pain in the neck this was for them, and developed a blank, into-the-distance vagueness for those moments between the stage manager's approach and the woman's arrival. I

know I could have discussed it but I chose discretion and a dumb look. Fortunately the women, like the cavalry, always arrived in time.

JOHN SLADE

Company Member, Performer, 1979-1982.

Scum: Death Destruction and Dirty Washing

From January to April 1975 we were more prosaically concerned with booking a tour and getting a show on the road.

The composition of the company had begun to reshape itself into its first public appearance: Claire Luckham and Chris Bond would still write *Scum*, although new commitments in Liverpool meant they couldn't be permanent members of the group; Susan Todd agreed to direct the play. She was the perfect choice. Not only did she have a great deal of directing experience in mainstream theatre, but she had been a member of the Women's Street Theatre Group, she had directed *Parade of Cats* at the Almost Free Women's Theatre Festival and she had been part of the Women's Company that came out of the Festival, directing Pam Gems' *Go West Young Woman* at the Roundhouse in 1974.

Chris Bowler, Mary McCusker and I turned down all other work we were offered and took on the administration of the company and the organisation of the tour. Helen Glavin was already writing music and songs. We advertised for and found a stage manager, d. Wilson. Andrea Montag was designing the set. With Susan we auditioned actors: Roger Allam, not long graduated from the Theatre Arts Course at Manchester University, and Alan Hulse, who had been working with The General Will in Bradford.

'A musical celebration of the women of the Paris Commune written by Claire Luckham and C.G. Bond . . . "See Bismark do the can-can; watch a man wind himself through a mangle; savour the aroma of grilled elephant's trunk; thrill to the sound of 'Le Temps des Cerises' and a dozen more show-stopping songs; tremble before the final spectacle of Paris burning amidst a sea of blood.' '

In our first press release we wanted to set the tone of what we were about: serious, but joyful. Later, we emphasised the serious a little more, in case people dismissed us as lightweight:

76

'On September 3rd 1870 a French army of 104,000 under Napoleon III surrendered to the Prussians at Sedan. This humiliation threw Paris into an uproar: Revolution, civil war and the eventual establishment of the Commune followed. It lasted only fifty-eight days, and ended with Paris ablaze, and an estimated 25,000 Communards dead. But although the Commune was destroyed, its example has always been important to Socialists: When Lenin died his body was draped in a red communard flag . . . for a brief two months Paris celebrated the Festival of the Oppressed. The sun shone as the scum of the earth sang and danced in the streets. Those who had been reduced to eating rats seized power and took the government of their lives into their own hands. In the very forefront of this revolution marched the Parisian women: exhorting, organising and demanding everything from crèches to guns, defending the barricades to the last.'

At some point we stumbled across a book in the Thames & Hudson series, 'Documents of Revolution', *The Communards of Paris 1871*. Reprinted in it was a selection of pamphlets, articles, decrees and posters written by the Communards themselves. We were amazed to read that not only had the women of Paris shown incredible physical courage (confronting and disarming soldiers sent to remove 'the people's canons'; later on, actually fighting the French army sent in to regain control of the city for the French government) but they had formed women's political clubs to agitate for their demands. When we read the list of what they were agitating for – equal pay, provision of crèche facilities for working women, education for girls, equal opportunities for women – we could see that we had a lot in common with these women. We had the vote, to be sure, but it didn't seem to us that a great deal more had been achieved in a hundred years.

We didn't change the world – in lots of ways things are worse for women now than they were then. But I know Scum changed a lot of women's lives (maybe some men's too). Some people hated the shows – but they never failed to stimulate. That was because they were born out of the real and often painful experience and feelings of the company and their friends. It made life very raw at times and there were casualties. There were times when I felt miserable.

But I doubt if I could have found any other job which I could combine with the practicalities of being a single parent, which allowed me to build my work life around my personal and political preoccupations, gave me a solid grounding for my continued involvement in the arts and provided me with lasting and valued friendships.

SUE BEARDON
Administrator, 1976-1978.

How did the script emerge? Certainly not as we had originally planned it.

One of the questions that came up again and again in the 1970s was the breaking down of the division of labour and the consequent hierarchy of skills. Why should an actor be considered more important than a stage manager? Why should the writer be God? Wouldn't it be more democratic to write scripts collectively? If you were working in a collective, how could one voice represent the ideas of the whole? We acknowledged some truth in this, but there were some areas where we recognised it as bunk. Enough of us (and I was one of them) had been through the painful experience of writing shows collectively in other groups to know that the skill of playwriting was one skill we wanted to acknowledge. We also knew that women writers had to be found and nourished. In one of our grant applications we had stated:

'We want to take the emphasis off collective writing, not because we are opposed to it as such, but because there are painfully few women writers actively involved in theatre and we want to encourage them.'

We were looking for a collective relationship with the writer. As it turned out, there was no recipe for what that relationship might be, and each one of our ventures with writers - whether it ended happily or unhappily - was different from the others.

I love words. I respect the skill that uses them to present eternal truths and to share hard-won insights. But too often I find myself resenting and distrusting how words have been used to turn my/bur

story into history – negating the process, the leapfrogging chaotic progress we made and are still making.

MARY MCCUSKER

*Company Member, Performer 1975 to the present,
Executive Director, 1990–1991.*

Our original intention in commissioning Claire and Chris was to establish some kind of process whereby they would write and we would then discuss it with them. Or we would have discussions out of which they would go away and write. We were all reading and researching like mad. When they moved to Liverpool and consequently assumed the role of 'outside' writers, as opposed to being part of the group itself, that process was stretched in a way none of us had ever imagined. Claire took on the main burden of the writing – as Chris was trying to rescue a theatre (he had been appointed Artistic Director of the Everyman) – and travelled up and down to London to work with us as often as she could. Somehow, the thread between us never gathered the strength it should have had, and by the time we started rehearsals the company felt that parts of the script were still in an unresolved state.

The main structure of the play – written by Claire and Chris – the situation, the characters, most of the dialogue – was as we finally performed it. Mole and Madame Masson in all her horrendous glory jumped off the pages and onto the stage. Whatever wasn't working we thought we could sort out on the rehearsal floor. Which is what we did. Under Susan's direction, we improvised, we discussed, we argued, we went away and wrote scenes and bits of scenes. We also added more songs. It's almost impossible to say now who did what. Everything I wrote was thrown out as terrible. I think a lot of the scene in which they discover how much Masson had been exploiting them was Mary's. Everybody wrote something. Certainly as director, Susan shaped whatever we came up with and was the final arbiter of what worked and what didn't.

It's impossible to say how the play would have looked if Claire and Chris had been able to be at rehearsal all the time. When they were eventually able to see it on the road, they weren't at all happy with what we had done. Their view of what needed changing in the working script they had delivered to us was very different to ours. Looking back now, it seems to me inevitable

that we would change aspects of the play in rehearsal, simply because of 'where we were at'. We identified with those women. We felt we knew them. We were trying to recreate our world just as they had. An interview in *Time Out* quoted one of us during rehearsals: 'It's important to us that we create this atmosphere of celebration, this release from toil . . . and create the kind of debate that went on. That's why it's interesting to us now. Women talking about marriage, day nurseries, women's education, equal pay.'

We, the company, were going through an experience which the writers couldn't be part of through an accident of physical separation. Just as we felt we were shattering everything that had gone before, so it was bound to be that we would want to shape the material we were putting on the stage in the same way. Life imitating art. Or was it the other way round? It was both; and somewhere in the middle and muddle a collision was inevitable.

The play opened in Cardiff at the Chapter Arts in April 1976 and then toured for over a year; we revived it in 1978.

The script that is printed here is the script as we performed it, with two changes that Claire and Chris have made in Act 2.

Our recollection of the events surrounding the writing and rehearsal period of Scum is substantially different from Gillie's. We were commissioned to write a play, not a 'working script', and that was what we delivered. That play was fundamentally altered in two ways: firstly because there were fewer performers available than we had agreed to write for, which was understandable; and secondly because the company wanted, in our view, to romanticise the story we had written, which was not. They did so without any consultation whatsoever, hence our surprise and anger on going to see the show.

CLAIRE LUCKHAM & CHRIS BOND
 Authors: Scum; Death, Destruction
 and Dirty Washing

After the First Night

Where does the life of a theatre company truly begin? I suppose it doesn't really exist at all before it first appears in public, no matter how much work has gone into setting it up. So the founder members of the company in that sense are those who

opened *Scum: Death Destruction and Dirty Washing* in Cardiff: Roger Allam, Chris Bowler, David Bradford, Helen Glavin, Alan Hulse, Mary McCusker, Susan Todd, d. Wilson and myself. But it wasn't as simple as that. Claire and Chris had been but were no longer 'members' of the company. Andrea Montag and Hilary Lewis who did the set and costumes were totally involved, but in as freelancers. Pat McCullough dropped out at a fairly late stage, so for the first tour Susan played Eugenie as well as directing the show. She also 'joined up' as a full time member rather than as a visiting director. Linda Broughton was definitely a member although she wasn't in the first tour of *Scum*.

Imagine being on an endless bus tour with a family of nine, all with behavioural problems and none willing to submit to parental control. And accommodation that alternated between B & Bs with a week's supply of poached eggs in the fridge, damp sheets and bath taps you had to pay for (the landlady kept them in a safe place) - and hospitality (provided by friends of the theatre) with all nine in one room sleeping on narrow strips of foam and beating off the hungry mice.

Add on the activity of lugging the set upstairs (you'd be surprised how often we did), converting an ill-lit corridor into a dressing room, and attempting to persuade the caretaker not to close the building half an hour before the show finishes - and you have an average day. The ideal venues, the good B & Bs and the hospitality that provided delightful rooms free were as few as feminists in the Conservative Party, and that made you cherish them all the more.

MARY MCCUSKER

*Company Member, Performer, 1975 to the present,
Executive Director, 1990-1991.*

Over the next couple of years, one or two came and went, but by and large we were a fairly constant group. When the Gulbenkian Foundation gave us a year's salary for a full time administrator, Sue Beardon took over from David who had been looking after the office. She came to us from a background of working in the Labour movement, and her skills both organisational and creative contributed to the development of the company's work in a way

that went far beyond the title 'administrator'.

We wanted to build a repertoire, so that while we were touring one show we could be preparing another. Our original submission to the Arts Council in January 1976 had described our plans for the first year and a half. After *Scum* we wanted to do: 'a show . . . at present untitled, the subject will be "Witchcraft - subversion and madness"'. We began research last September, and we are talking to several (women) writers about collaborating with us.' Then, 'as a contrast to the first two [plays] which will be "historical" pieces, a modern show set in an industrial context. Women at work. Probably including a (by then) retrospective look at how the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts are working. We are aiming to interest women in the organised Labour movement in this one, and we will be looking to bodies within that movement for substantial support.'

The untitled show turned into *Vinegar Tom* which Caryl Churchill wrote for us to produce and tour in the Autumn of 1976. Pam Brighton was the guest director.

We had been introduced to Caryl (in Hyde Park, after a march, NAC (National Abortion Campaign), I think) and she talked about how in researching her English Civil War play *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* for Joint Stock, she had come across a mass of material relating to women and witchcraft, and wanted to write a play about it. Her ideas fitted with ours, and we commissioned her to write it. In terms of our relationship with a writer, it was one of the happiest we ever had. There was never any disagreement about the basic argument of the play, although we had long discussions with Caryl about the characters Jack and Marjory, the couple who represented the emerging bourgeoisie. As I recall, their first scene was the only one which was substantially rewritten. Other changes Caryl made were largely practical. A scene in which Jack and another man drag the drowned corpse of the cunning woman through the village and dump it while they go and look for a drink had to be cut because it had to immediately precede the witchfinding scene and Roger didn't have time to change. The part of Betty had to be written in such a way that Josefina Cupido, who had just joined the company as a musician, and who had never acted before, could have a part that wouldn't be too terrifyingly long.

Scum and *Vinegar Tom* toured in repertoire through the end of 1976 and the spring of 1977. At the end of that year we produced a cabaret, *Floorshow*, and a play with music about domestic violence, *Kiss and Kill*.

At some point in 1976 d. Wilson had left and Meri Jenkins had taken over as technician/production/company manager. Over the next eight years Meri worked with the company, taking time out now and then to go and pursue other work, but she was a rock on which we all leaned. She had an uncanny skill of seeing a problem and dealing with it almost before the rest of us had noticed the problem existed. She also had the invaluable ability of hiding 'contingency money' in a production budget to stop us overspending on the sets.

I was 23, and a fledgling stage manager. In January, 1977 I joined Monsters as the Technical Stage Manager. I badly wanted the job. It was an awesome experience, taking care of everything for a group of people, majoritively women who had more experience than I, who appeared that articulate, that committed, who worked so hard, and were so hugely talented.

The company was still touring Scum. A few weeks after I joined we went to the University of Sussex at the beginning of a twelve week tour. The theatre seats about 800. The control box is located at the back of the theatre - a kind of giant gold fish bowl. I was alone throughout the performance. In that situation, there are times when it is very difficult to feel connected to what is happening on stage, since the show is heard through a tinny intercom, and the performers are at some distance. I was just beginning to feel as though I had a handle on things - the show was becoming more familiar. At the end of the performance I went through the usual lighting and sound cues - blackout, hold five seconds, lights up to full for the curtain call, as the full company gathered on stage. I glanced up - to my sheer amazement, the audience had begun to stand. Not just the one or two as at other performances, but everyone there. The company stepped forward to applaud the audience, and as the applause echoed back at me, I had an intense feeling of exhilaration and mad joy at what was happening. I had no one to throw my arms around, so I danced around the gold fish bowl, alone.

*MERI JENKINS
Technical Stage Manager, Company Manager,
Different periods 1977-1985.*

Susan Bassnett,* in a paper she read at the British Theatre Conference in Rostock, Germany, in April 1978 noted that, 'with (*Floorshow*) the company has moved into new areas . . . traditionally, the music business and the compèring of cabaret acts have been male dominated and consequently by entering the predominantly male preserve the company has been exploring new ground. The role of women in cabaret has been that of decoration or of servicing the male performers - hence the scantily dressed assistants in conjuring acts, the pretty girls in colourful costumes who assist compères and quizmasters, the dancers whose routines serve as short interludes between the main (usually male) acts. That is not to say, of course, that there are no female comédiennes, of course there are, but it is only when one sees Monstrous Regiment's *Floorshow* with women compères, women comédiennes, women drummers, women singers and the two men in very low-key positions that the extent of their innovation becomes apparent. In terms of the costume and design, the company have striven to escape the stereotype of the women in star-spangled bikinis, and the costumes are a kind of clown's overall, in brightly coloured satin, decorative but by no means sexist.'

Now that cabaret has become a cliché of the alternative theatre it doesn't seem like such an extraordinary thing to have done, but at the time we knew we were taking a leap in the dark. We were working with four writers - Caryl Churchill, Bryony Lavery, Michelene Wandor and David Bradford - and not one of us really knew what was going to work. We didn't even know if women could stand up in front of an audience, without a character, and be funny. So we wrestled endlessly over the problem of each woman finding her 'voice', and the difference between a performer's relationship to a 'persona' as opposed to a character.

A desire to discover if and how women could be funny; to explore as many genres of theatre as we could; to find out if there was such a thing as 'women's theatre' and was that any different from 'theatre', which was always implicitly male. We were searching and our theatrical curiosity pushed us into areas which were new to most of us. Nudged us as well into cabaret because of our good fortune in having three talented and accomplished musician/performers in the company. Roger was primarily an actor but had a wonderful trained tenor voice and could play a

* Susan Bassnett, Reader in Comparative Literature, University of Warwick.

mean piano and guitar; Helen was equally accomplished in either art, but was a skilled composer. She had written the music for both *Scum* and *Vinegar Tom*. Josefina was a percussionist, drummer and singer. Cabaret would give us a chance to let them shine. We wanted to show them off.

I was always being asked at that time and since, what it was like to work with a majority of women. I never quite knew what to say. In certain ways it was easier for me than other men who worked with the company. I wasn't exactly a blank sheet of paper, but I was only twenty-two, it was my first job, so I did not have any previous working experience to question or reject. I was not politically involved at university but it seemed natural to be a socialist. I suppose I had been vaguely and completely unthinkingly sympathetic to the idea of feminism at university (only in theory of course, not in practice), so being confronted with seven older, articulate women in a sense helped to form my thoughts in a more concrete way. I needed to embrace some beliefs, and here were ones that seemed natural, idealistic and, very importantly for me, rejecting of my parents' ones. I can certainly remember becoming tense and defensive in social situations with friends who might joke about it, or say 'cunt', or comment on women's bums. Not to say anything seemed a betrayal; and if I did say something I always did it clumsily and felt upset and embarrassed. But inside the group I felt supported and loved in a way that I am sure wouldn't have been available to me in a male group, as there was a playful atmosphere I felt at home in. To this day, when I meet Gillian, we are roughly aged twelve.

ROGER ALLAM

Company Member, Performer, Musician, 1976-1979.

Cabaret would also give us the opportunity to try and move out of the theatres and arts centres and into other spaces in pursuit of that new audience we were always in search of. Set design and fairly complicated lighting had meant we found it frustrating when we performed the plays in non-theatrical venues. Without the technical facilities which theatres gave us access to we always felt the shows weren't being seen at their best. We were depriving the audience of the whole experience. A cabaret, on the other

hand, would be more simple, designed to be flexible and play anywhere.

Kiss and Kill, written and directed by Susan Todd and Ann Mitchell, was an exploration of violence between men and women. Intended to be more experimental in form than anything we had previously done, it was almost a collage of short scenes exploring male violence, both domestic and 'public', and the relationship between the two. (One of the characters is a woman who has left her violent husband, but finds herself on the end of horrific abusive phone calls from him, another is an American living in London, a Vietnam veteran, who speaks graphically of the violence he saw and experienced in that war.) Musically, too, it was different from anything we had attempted before, in that it was largely improvised and therefore could change from night to night. Josefina sang, accompanied only by percussion.

We always thought it was an important play in the company's development, and were annoyed when people failed to recognise its experimental nature. Perhaps it was something to do with the subject matter - violence - that seemed to provoke violent reactions in the audiences. Love it or loathe it, it wasn't a piece that many people felt luke-warm about.

After the success of *Floorshow* we thought that the cabaret form was worth exploring still further, raising as it did questions about the female performer and her relationship to the audience. It seemed to us that no matter how skilled the performer was, or how strong the material, there was often an almost tangible sense of unease in the audience when the women performed; that when Roger or Clive Russell appeared on their own as opposed to one of the women, we thought we could often feel the audience relaxing. Was that a communal, unspoken, unconscious conviction that they felt safer when the men were centre-stage? Or were we somehow communicating our own fears that it still might not be legitimate for women to be confronting the audience in this direct way?

Time Gentlemen Please, written by Bryony Lavery, marked the first large change in the make-up of the company. Roger, Helen and Josefina left, so we auditioned musicians to replace them. We wanted to do a show about sex. And physical appearance. When Stephanie Howard was designing the costumes for *Floorshow* we discussed the appearance question endlessly. How could a woman look attractive without making herself into a sex object? We wanted, above all, not to deny our physical entities. Could we do this without exploiting our bodies? What was attractive anyway?

In the end, we went for bright, colourful, attractive yet sexless costumes. It was a solution, (although we were still attacked for them being 'too sexy') but somehow we all felt we'd avoided an issue rather than confronting it.

One of the objectives in *Time Gentlemen Please* was to try and challenge more directly the audience's (and our own) perception of female physical sexuality. Was a liberated woman allowed to be glamorous? Could women and men be equally glamorous? What might that look like?

These were questions which were as pertinent in our lives as on the stage. Perhaps because we mostly came from a background of professional theatre where we were used to costume and the idea of costume as something that was fluid and could be played with, we were personally never happy disowning our bodies under the androgynous uniform of dungarees. Of course we all wore dungarees at one time or another, but we were also the company that once did a get-out in cocktail dresses and high heels because we were on our way to a party and didn't have time to change.

In the written material of the show itself, the company was again challenging the received idea of female sexuality, and in particular female passivity in sexual relationships. (Not a new interest of ours. *Vinegar Tom* opens with a scene of a woman and a man having sex. We were insistent that the woman was very obviously *on top*.)

This was another occasion where a lot of people failed to get the joke. Or rather, failed to get the intensely serious purpose behind the joke. And, infamously, there was 'Leeds.'

A performance of *Time Gentlemen Please* at the Trades Club in Leeds was 'zapped'; literally stopped in the middle by a group of angry women and gay and left-wing activists. I wasn't in *Time Gentlemen Please*, but the descriptions of what happened were vivid. Angry women (and men) pulled the leads out of the amplifiers and speakers, climbed onto the stage and demanded that the performers get off. Chris refused to be terrorised into leaving the stage and finished the monologue she had been in the middle of. Mary then insisted on performing the last poem in the show. It was a traumatic experience: people screaming and shouting, arguing, crying. At the time, the reactions from both the zappers and the zapped was so emotional that it was impossible to make out exactly what it was that was being objected to. Confusing, too, because there seemed to be some kind of leftist factional in-fighting going on. Someone was screaming from the back, 'Tell me what your politics are and then I'll listen to you

... 'Someone else, infuriated by the interruption was shouting 'Doesn't anybody here understand irony . . . ?' The company offered to have a proper meeting in the next nearest venue so that the debate could be thrashed out in a less fraught atmosphere. Correspondence in *The Morning Star* attempted to clarify the issues on both sides. In reply to an attack on the show Susan Todd, who had directed the show, wrote that the women performers:

'deconstruct their traditional mode of stage presence and abandon coyness, terror and self-doubt for a direct expression of sexuality . . . that particular form of transformation was fought for very hard and it represents a victory for each woman over self-denigration.'

(Letter from Susan Todd, 28 November 1978.)

The incident was in one sense simply part of the flavour of the times. At conferences, women were often heckled or forced off the stage. We frequently heard tales of other companies being heckled or stopped. Intolerance and factionalism of the left was rampant at the time. Nor was feminism immune. 'Get-it-Rightism', one of the least savoury heirlooms passed on to us by the patriarchs of the left, flourished. In the end, it proved to be a poisonous heritage, encouraging the most narrowing kind of self-censorship.

A performer or speaker puts herself in a position of power just by being on a stage. An authoritarian figure, she is probably experiencing herself at her *least* powerful and most terrified, but the audience is unable to perceive this, unless she makes herself obviously vulnerable. When one of the women in *Time Gentlemen Please* was so upset by what had happened that she began to cry (off-stage) one of her accusers immediately put her arms around her and was clearly amazed that the performer should be so distressed.

This event had a profound effect on all of us within the company. In the preparation for the show, the company had spent many hours discussing in detail and with great openness their own sexual lives. Bryony wanted to work as much as possible from the truth of the performers' experiences. So to be attacked in this way was not simply an attack on the politics of the show; they experienced it as an attack on themselves, personally. There was probably no way the audience would have been able to perceive this, because by the time it arrived on stage, the experience had been turned into something other, more distant from the performers' own lives by the process of making it into

art. Yet the show clearly hit some of the nerves it was meant to. One of the disrupters had been shouting, 'We talk about these things in our women's groups but we don't want it thrown at us from the stage.'

In *Floorshow* we had aimed at a kind of rough and tumble style, which confronted the audience directly. If they shouted at us, we could shout back at them. I remember at one point combing through joke books to memorise put-downs for hecklers. 'Oh here's one alcoholic who isn't anonymous.' *Time Gentlemen Please* was intended to be ironic and sophisticated, more of a theatre show than *Floorshow*, and had no space for any kind of audience participation built into it. Consequently, the performers were helpless when the heckling started. There was no mechanism in the structure of the show which would have enabled us to control the audience reaction.

Aside: there had been accusations that only the women were dressed glamorously. This was quite untrue. Clive wore a white tuxedo and looked so glamorous that at a performance to a weekend school for women shop stewards the audience reaction was uproarious to say the least.

And what did we do after the show, we supremely arrogant and disregarding actors? Well, we did the get-out of course. Back down the stairs and into the van. Then we went back to our extremely seedy digs and sat around on the floor in someone's room trying to work out what went wrong. I seem to remember sitting in the dark. Perhaps we were afraid that our fans had followed us. I remember being very cold and depressed, and when I finally got up to stumble off to my own room there was a click and my back went out - the end to a perfect day.

CHRIS BOWLER
 Company Member, Performer,
 Writer, Director, 1975 to the present.

A few days after the event, Beatrix Campbell, a great supporter of our work, wrote to the company:

'Dear Monstrous Regiment,
 This is a fan letter which I'm writing, having been

stunned to hear the news that people broke up your show in Leeds the other night.

I'd at first assumed, clearly quite wrongly, that it was some National Front or Festival of Light types, being puritanical thugs, and was then stunned again to hear that it was feminists who did it.

And that made me think a bit about why I'd so enjoyed your show.

Now I'd like to tell you why I liked it, if it helps, because you were probably shattered by the Leeds experience. The first thing to say is that I've seen it a couple of times, with largely feminist - lesbian and heterosexual - audiences who loved it. Actually loved it. Why? Firstly I think because it is very polished, very funny and very radical. And these days you've got to go a long way to get that combination.

The second reason I think is because it takes sexual politics back into an idiom which is *typical*, i.e. it takes it out of the ghettos of men's culture, and it takes it out of the feminist ghetto too, where too often we make massive and inept assumptions about how the sexual contradictions are lived among masses of people, and about how far we in the Women's Movement have actually changed anything. I don't think that's true of the mainstream of the WLM, which is much more rooted in reality; I suppose I'd count myself as part of that - and indeed I'd count the Monstrous Regiment sisters as part of that Women's Liberation mainstream as well.

So it was an enormous relief to have a feminist critique of sexuality presented in a form that was a pleasure both to self-conscious feminists, and to women who'd not identify themselves in that way, but who nevertheless are fighting it out.

Another important reason was that it was about heterosexuality. By which I mean it made heterosexuality problematic. The absence of a full homosexual dimension is, I think, a problem.

I think homosexuality would have been incredibly difficult to present in this show because for it to have been problematic in an equivalent way to heterosexuality would be extremely hard to get right; in other words it wouldn't have been much cop to have nasty old heterosexuality having its guts ripped out in *Time Gentlemen Please*, only to have homosexuality immunised from criticism. I don't

think it would have been appropriate for a company like you, however, to take on such a critique, not at this stage anyway when gay politics and homosexuality in general in this country is still relatively besieged, still a fragile flower. If you'd had a confident gay caucus in the company then that would have been different.

One of the problems with the show in my view is in fact that the references to homosexuality are rather too bland and sentimental. I'd rather have not had them, I think. Much happier with the querying and parodying of heterosexuality - this is the first show I've seen that dares to take that on.'

I think Beatrix identified the collision correctly. In wanting to be *truthful* about sex and sexual experience, the company felt it was legitimate for them to deal only with what they knew personally. As there were no lesbians or gay men in the company that workshopped and performed *Time Gentlemen Please*, they decided that it would be improper to speak of homosexuality on the stage. What was intended as a subversion and explosion of heterosexuality must have looked like celebration to lesbians and gay men who were looking for affirmation and support in their struggle against oppression. It also has to be said that when people are angry, objectivity goes out of the window and the angry groups in the audience were unable to see the intentional irony of the show.

The issues highlighted by the events in Leeds reverberated in the company for a long time. Towards the end of the tour we had a painful meeting at which there was a clear difference of opinion between those who were in the show and those who were not (of whom I was one) as to what 'Leeds' meant in terms of the show itself and the company in general. Because of what had happened, and the emotions attached to the event, it was almost impossible to have any objective discussion about it. Those who had been there found that any criticism from other members of the collective became tangled up with the emotion of the attack. Looking back now, I think it is a measure of the company's strength that we were able to agree (not without pain) to differ, and that the incident didn't lead to a split or a 'putsch'.

In 1979 the company faced a major crisis, when certain important links with the past were severed and it took a new direction. At the beginning of the year we toured *Teendreams*, a 'retrospective look at ten years of the Women's Movement.' Susan Todd and David Edgar wrote it and Kate Crutchley came in to

but not about (and) want objectivity.

direct it. For the first time, we had no live music in a play. The idea was to use pop records as a means of tracing the passing of time over the ten years the play covered. Although we were happy with the piece, it didn't have quite the pzazz of previous work, and some of the critics thought it worthy but a bit dull. Perhaps we needed the cushion of live music to give us the bounce that the audiences had come to associate with the company's work.

We also had two projects in preparation. Caryl Churchill was commissioned to write another play. She was interested in seeing if there was any way of bringing together women from different historical periods and letting them talk to each other. In the minutes of our first discussion with her 'Dull Gret, Pope Joan, Pocahontas, a Japanese courtesan, Isabella Bird etc.' are mentioned. None of us had any idea how their meeting might be accomplished, but we hoped we might discover that in workshops. *Ms. Dante's Inferno* was floated as a possible title. When we came to do the workshops with Caryl we also introduced Florence Nightingale, Ruth Ellis (the last woman to be hanged in England) and Jane Auger (a possibly apocryphal contemporary of Shakespeare's who dressed as a man and went round fighting duels).

Then Susan Todd and David Bradford had conceived what we thought was the brilliant idea of following Caryl's play with a 'Season of Classic Plays'. We were getting very tired. Non-stop touring, crummy damp B & Bs, being away from home for weeks at a time were beginning to depress us. What about a season, in London, in which we would put on, deconstruct, three classics from the theatrical repertoire? It would mean we could stop touring for a few months while continuing to work. And as our ensemble was beginning to look a little ragged at the edges, it would mean we might be able to persuade actors who were interested in our work, but who wouldn't tour, or actors who had been part of the company but didn't want to tour any more, to join us on a temporary basis.

You called my bluff, backed me up. Much support, loving, chivvying all the way, but by the end I thought I'm too old to work in a rehearsal room where I can see my breath on a cold day.

PAOLA DIONISOTTI
Performer The Fourth Wall, 1983.

We hired the theatre in the club attached to the Methodist Church in the Walworth Road, Elephant & Castle, and printed leaflets advertising '*Women Beware Women* by Thomas Middleton, *Phaedra* based on Robert Lowell's translation of Racine's *Phèdre* and Euripides' *Hippolytus*, and *The Man of Mode* by George Etherege.'

Then we made a disastrous foray into the grave labelled 'devised writing'. There is a gap in the minutes of the company meetings between March and September 1979, so there is no record of how or why we did it. A fit of communal lunacy probably. Caryl had hit a block. (The ideas she was working on eventually re-emerged in a different form in *Top Girls*.) But we had a tour booked, a schedule of gigs and no show. We had to come up with something fast. Of all the things we might have done, we abandoned all our principles about working with writers, and decided to adapt Anita Loos' novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. The idea itself was inspired. We were always looking to do the unexpected. This was certainly a candidate in that category. The notion of a feminist company adapting this particular novel struck us as highly amusing.

We were probably led astray by the success of *Scum*, forgetting that in that case, Claire and Chris had created a substantial basis of structure and narrative, a vision from which we worked. Here we were starting with a book. A very different proposition. The show was a glorious disaster. Real twenties beaded frocks, the Ritz Hotel Paris, the Statue of Liberty on roller skates. It had all the ingredients of an absurd farce, but it never worked. It was too long. It was incoherent. Too many people had a hand in writing it. We toured it during the summer, miserable, pretending that it was alright, but fraying tempers and a bad atmosphere in the van told us that it wasn't. That version of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* met its Waterloo at the Communist University Summer School in London University (where we had previously performed *Scum* to great acclaim) to an audience that not only didn't see the joke, but hated it. As the interminable torture of the evening dragged on for three bottom-numbing hours, (even after we thought we had cut half an hour out of it) and the only sound we could hear was the sound of people leaving, we realised it was the end of civilisation as we knew it. After the performance, a great friend and supporter of the company came into the dressing room and murmured 'Darlings . . . the curtain call . . . how brave . . .' We knew it was curtains for us. Bad shows can have a disastrous effect on companies and this one was a stinker.

However bleakly funny it seems in retrospect, the show and particularly that performance was a watershed in that it provoked a major crisis which split the company and marked the end of the first phase of its life.

The great thing was, those early productions seemed to answer the hitherto unspoken needs of a large audience. It wasn't just the plays and their subject matter, it was also us - the women on stage. Everything seemed so very much in the present, nothing was reflective. The play and the costumes might be historical, but the electricity was now; and the now was also us using the best of ourselves and our skills to map out a new place for women to be. We said it was centre stage, but there were occasions it felt more like the front line. We had no history, we only had a future.

MARY MCCUSKER

*Company Member, Performer, 1975 to the present.
Executive Director, 1990-1991.*

The Second Stage. 1979-1982

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (Mark Two)

The split centred on the issue of survival: had the company come to the end of its useful life? Did the disaster of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* mean we had nothing more to say? On one side the belief that the company should retire on its laurels and disband. On the other, the belief that to stop now would leave us all with a very bitter taste in the mouth. There's more to life than one rotten show. Besides, we had a thousand three-colour posters we had to do something with.

Rather shakily, we began to put ourselves back together. We weren't certain whether we could resurrect ourselves without the ones who had left. In particular, we weren't sure how we would manage without Susan Todd whose intellect and passion had been a guiding force in the first years. Bryony Lavery rescued us by going back to the novel and starting all over again. She had the idea of making the show a dialogue between 'then' and 'now'. It wasn't so much an adaptation of the book as a series of comic variations with music.

1 INTRODUCTION

We went through a lengthy process of interviewing performers to join the company. We still identified ourselves as a functioning collective, and we weren't interested in actors who would come in and perform in one show. It was join up for fifty-two weeks a year or nothing.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes Mark Two turned out to be one of the most popular shows we ever produced. We toured it through the autumn and into the following spring. Audiences loved it. When we performed for a week at the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow they had to open the gallery, so many people turned up. They may have been suckered into thinking they were getting some sort of version of Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell, but once we started, who cared about those two dames?

Stylistically it was a new departure for us, which may explain why we made such a mess of it before when we'd tried to do it without a writer. Previously, the theatre shows had taken on serious themes in a sober style. The comic side of our work was expressed through the cabarets. Now we were trying to bring the two together.

The Season of Classic plays was abandoned, partly because all our energy had to be spent on getting the company up and running again, partly because it felt wrong to put on work which had been the brainchild of Susan who was no longer part of the company.

Ironically, although *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* Mark Two was a great success, we were left at the end of the tour feeling completely demoralised. Some of this was plain exhaustion. To balance the books we'd had to tour it for longer than we really wanted to. (Mark One had spent a lot of money and made very little income.) We wore it and ourselves into the ground. Some of the depression came from sheer misery and grief. Angela Hopkins, the director of Mark Two, was killed in a car crash on her way to the show part way through the tour. We had to try and process the painful feelings surrounding that tragedy while we continued to tour. At the end of the run we decided to take three months off; to give ourselves the space to assess our situation and plan the future.

We began to think of how insular the English theatre can be, how little we knew about the sexual politics of other countries, other cultures. We also had nothing 'on the stocks'. The work we had to put into resurrecting *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and then its ferocious touring schedule had left us with no time to think about commissioning new shows. So we found three already existing

plays and came up with the idea of making them into a 'foreign season'. A play from France, *Shakespeare's Sister*, written and originally performed by the Théâtre de l'Aquarium in Paris, *Dialogue Between a Prostitute and One of Her Clients* by the Italian writer Dacia Maraini, and *Mourning Pictures* by Honor Moore the American poet. I translated both of the foreign language plays. It meant we kept a measure of control over the work, and saved us money in that we didn't have to pay a commissioning fee or royalties as I was already on the payroll. The whole season was planned to fulfil a number of different needs, stylistic and practical.

Shakespeare's Sister was really a series of extraordinary visual images rather than a play. What text there was had been adapted from tape recordings of the voices of bored, trapped housewives the Théâtre de l'Aquarium had interviewed when they were putting the piece together. We had no experience of this kind of visual theatre, and realised we needed some expert help, so we asked Hilary Westlake, founder of Lumière and Son, to come and direct it for us. The show was not intended to tour because we wanted the freedom of designing a show that didn't have to fit into the back of a small truck. We were beginning to look for ways of getting off the rehearse/tour, rehearse/tour treadmill. We performed it for three weeks in December 1980 at the ICA.

Gemma Jackson had costumed Gillian Hanna, Mary McCusker, Chris Bowler and Josefina Cupido in white bridal gowns with all the attendant paraphernalia of veils, headdresses, ribbons and bouquets. Just seeing these women wearing these outfits, gracefully gliding in an almost airborne fashion across Gemma's Ideal Homes (Fringe Budget) kitchen floor was memorable enough.

Hilary Westlake directed, peppering the evening with numerous bits of ironic business. At one point, shortly after Gillian successfully managed to make operational the very useful wedding gift of a brand-new stove (actually a cleaned up second-hand one), a maroon was detonated as if the stove containing the newly weds' first dinner had exploded. The maroon also ignited some grease left-over from the days before the stove made its theatrical début causing an unexpected and undirected but nonetheless impressive column of smoke and flame to belch forth from the cooker.

Completely un-fazed the four actresses gracefully glided in their stylized fashion to various corners of the theatre in search of fire-fighting equipment. McCusker swanned up the centre aisle to receive a fire extinguisher (in much the same way I imagine she would accept an Oscar) from Simon, the ready theatre technician, and elegantly returned to the set where she promptly doused the up-staging mini-conflagration out of existence.

This got a healthy round of applause and featured, if I recall properly, in more than one of the reviews the following day. It was so well choreographed that audience and critics alike thought it part of the play.

STEVE WHITSON

Lighting Designer, Shakespeare's Sister, 1980.

Mourning Pictures, written in free verse, was the autobiographical story of a writer's relationship with her mother who is dying of cancer. It was directed by Penny Cherns. This was the first play we ever produced in which we made absolutely no contribution to the text. In other respects *Mourning Pictures* fitted into our usual pattern of work. It brought back live music into the company, and we toured it like any other of our previous shows. Later in the year it was recorded for BBC Radio 4, and was broadcast as *The Monday Play*.

Dialogue Between a Prostitute and One of Her Clients, directed by Ann Mitchell, was a two-hander, the smallest show we had done so far. We wanted to have something flexible that would tour, but not in the usual way. It could be done in small or non-theatrical spaces.

Dialogue had caused sensation and riots in Italy. What attracted us was the author's direction that at certain places during the performance the actors had to stop, step out of their characters and engage the audience in a discussion of the ideas being brought up in the play. We wanted to know if we could get an English audience to let go of its inhibitions and talk in public about sex. We tested the proposition all through rehearsals, inviting all kinds of people, including working prostitutes, to come in and 'rehearse' being the audience. *Dialogue* was the first of our shows to tour abroad. We took it to Holland later that year.

'What are men really looking for when they go to a prostitute?' the actress asks. Then suddenly, after only 15 minutes of performance, the show is stopped for the first of three inter-performance discussions with the audience. My immediate reaction was 'God, that's naff', swiftly followed by a feeling of having been ripped-off. . . fancy paying £1.50 in order to have a talk. In fact, the discussion turned out to be quite extraordinary, a genuinely integral part of the theatre experience. The intimacy and honesty of people's revelations about themselves and their sexuality astonished, intrigued and at times shocked me. To describe the show as 'thought-provoking' would sound like a Victorian understatement.

EILEEN FAIRWEATHER
Spare Rib, November 1980.

This season of work pushed us in interesting directions. None of them really said anything radically new about the condition of women in the world. We were often accused of being old fashioned and simplistic in what the plays *said* about sexual politics. That missed the point. We were a theatre company developing our craft. We were a 'political' company, yes, but theatre was our passion. Now that we had moved beyond the first flush of excitement and energy, we wanted to push artistic boundaries. Change or atrophy. We were trying to explore theatrical languages we were unfamiliar with: Visual language in *Shakespeare's Sister*, poetic language in *Mourning Pictures* and the relationship with the audience in *Dialogue*.

Chilly moments; taking my clothes off in Dialogue; the Monsters' only male nude? It was all very sensitive of course, very tasteful. That show had discussions with the audience, and one audience, of right-on drama students, completely slagged us off from beginning to end. Our politics were garbage. A couple of them came up to me afterwards and said 'You've got a nice body though. . . Want a hand with the get-out?'

Same show; in York the stage was invaded by irate public schoolboys. 'It seems very strange to us that everyone in this audience tonight who's spoken about sexual politics looks very like people who used to work for Monstrous Regiment.' Outrage and pandemonium from members of the audience who'd never seen us before. Exit public schoolboys.

Exit also, rather suddenly and surprisingly (for him), a drunk who insisted on sitting in on a women-only gig (same show) we did in Bristol.

JOHN SLADE

Company Member, Performer, 1979-1982.

The three plays taken together made a coherent whole; an attempt on our part to break new ground through an exploration of style. In retrospect, it seems to be significant that the discussion and analysis of sexual politics was taking a small step into the background. We were looking not so much at what we were doing, as how we were doing it.

1981 was too soon for any of us to have really begun to think through the implications of Margaret Thatcher's being in power. We knew she was no feminist or advocate of women's rights. But we had no sense of what was to hit us in the 1980s. If we thought about it at all, it was in materialist terms: we could see the attacks on women's economic interests as welfare cuts were implemented, we worried about cuts in arts funding. What we didn't see at that point was the spiritual gloom descending on us, as the very act of thinking about politics came to be seen as undesirable. We had always seen ourselves as riding on the crest of the wave of feminism. It buoyed us up, gave us strength and ideas and energy. We were part of the Movement. We were the Movement. We didn't foresee what would happen when apathy and paralysis overtook both the left and the Women's Movement under the onslaught of Thatcherism.

In 1981 we didn't see anything sinister in our desire to explore other theatrical styles. We didn't in any way identify it as having anything to do with a retreat from our feminist roots. And in one sense, of course it wasn't. We still wanted to ask tough questions about women's role in society. We couldn't know that this was going to become harder and harder to do in the context of a prevailing ideology trying to abolish the very idea of 'society'. It is no coincidence that the theatre groups that 'failed' in the 1980s were the political ones; and that the successful new companies were the ones that abandoned any attempt to analyse or question the world in which they moved in favour of explorations of style.

The season of foreign plays saw another change in the company's practice. Up to this point, it was always the assumption that, as a collective of performers, everyone was in

every play. There had been exceptions, of course, when someone felt tired and needed a break, or when members went off and did something else and then came back. It meant that when other actors came to work with us, they either 'joined up', or there were so many 'core' company members in the show that the relationships were relatively easy to negotiate.

Now, however, we started to think that we didn't all want to be in every play. It was another reaction to the touring treadmill. In practice this meant that it was now possible for full members of the company to be outnumbered on the road by performers who were not permanent members. What we hadn't yet begun to grasp was the implications of this situation. Having identified ourselves for so long as members of a collective, we had great difficulty in seeing ourselves as employers.

So when we toured Rose Tremain's *Yoga Class*, Chris Bowler and John Slade found themselves in a minority, and uncertain how to deal with that. The rest of us weren't much help. We hadn't even begun to formulate a structure to deal with this new situation. The essence of the problem was that the non-company members didn't know who was 'in charge'. Was it the director, as it would be in a conventional theatrical situation, or was it the two members of the collective? Nobody, not even Chris and John, was sure. The associations of that word 'employer' were so distasteful we failed to observe that it was possible to employ someone without exploiting them. In practice it often meant that we unwittingly refused to take responsibility where we should have done, and it was sometimes the (unidentified) source of tension between us and those who came to work with us.

We had been looking for new writers to work with, knowing that we wanted to get back to an engagement with the ideas of feminism. *Yoga Class* was one of a series of commissions we made at the beginning of the 1980s with this in mind. It was beautifully written and toured quite successfully, but it was somehow unsatisfactory. By placing the characters in the confining space of a yoga class we domesticated them in a way that was foreign to the nature of the company's work. We had always identified ourselves as dealing with 'big' issues: Women's lives, women's concerns, women's demands. In our work we aimed to be woman-identified, but we always strove to locate ourselves and the women we portrayed in a highly visible setting. We didn't want to be pushed and parcelled into the ghetto labelled 'women's work'.

We rehearsed at Elder Street, their then headquarters in the City. It was an amazing Dickensian-type warehouse building, with winding stairs, dusty corners and plenty of space for rehearsal. I used to walk to Spitalfields Market during my lunch break and with other bag ladies, help myself to perishable goods discarded by the greengrocers. I called them street vegetables. I was introduced to Yoga, which I have enjoyed ever since. I had to open the play standing on my head and when I told Chris I had never done it in my life she just smiled and said, 'You've got five weeks' rehearsal.' I mastered the skill and count it as a great achievement.

JOANNA FIELD

Performer Yoga Class, 1981, Island Life, 1988.

It was a tricky course to walk and took some balancing. We never equated the domestic, the female with 'second rate'. When we spoke with admiration of the 'epic', we saw the dangers of the subtext: 'male therefore admirable'. Experiencing our energy as having been bottled up and thwarted for too long, our vision encompassed the whole world. At the same time we recognised that the domestic arena is where many women spend their lives and we felt that 'reclaiming' the domestic should be part of our agenda. Just as in our organisational practice we tried to include women traditionally left out by incorporating child care into our budgets, so we wanted to break the patriarchal view that regards women's domestic lives as trivial and unimportant.

This conflict between confinement to the small and small scale and the desire to act on a wider stage was reflected in much of the company's work in the 1980s, and coincided with, or perhaps was triggered by, the shrinkage of funding in that same period. Having found our 'voice' in the 1970s and early 1980s, we had to struggle to find it again, or find a new voice later on against a background of cuts in the real value of our grant.

The cloudy relationship between form and content embodied that struggle. Our instinct was never to trust naturalism. While resenting the use of the words 'televisual' or 'soap opera' to describe women's writing (what male critics defined as soap opera we thought of as fractured and episodic, reflecting the nature of women's lives), we always wanted to escape the stifling effect of the naturalistic. Music was the clearest instrument for breaking it up. By the time we produced *Yoga Class* we no longer had actors who were also musicians in the company, and inflation meant we

couldn't afford to have a band. There was music in the play but not enough to push it out of its naturalistic mode.

When we commissioned a play from Melissa Murray, and she proposed to write about the revolutionaries who assassinated Tsar Alexander II, we fell on it as if it were cool water in a desert. We saw it as a return to our roots. *The Execution*, a vast historical panorama in which women were seen to be making and shaping history. These were the women who took advantage of the first wave of liberalism in Russia, went abroad (mostly to Switzerland) to get an education and then returned home to try and destroy the corrupt system personified by the great patriarch, Alexander.

We were betting our bottom dollar on the show being a huge success. Our intention was to tour it in England and then take it abroad. We had been in contact with an Australian arts festival who were making encouraging noises. After the success of *Dialogue* in Holland, Europe looked also enticing. More encouraging noises there. It was a chance, too, to revitalise and enlarge the collective. We were hoping that the new company we assembled would become the collective that would work together on subsequent projects. We were in expansive mood, out to conquer the world again.

When disaster strikes, you wonder afterwards why you never saw it coming. Our grand touring plans began to unravel before the play opened, an ominous sign, as we had been budgeting for a substantial income from that source, and we were already committing large amounts of money to the production. Then we began to nudge up against problems with the production itself. *The Execution* was too long, three acts, but it had patches of real brilliance. Melissa had written in a heightened, 'nineteenth century' style, trying to reflect the characters' era in the way they spoke. No naturalism there. We wanted music, and Sue Dunderdale, the director, wanted it to be grand and sweeping, so we commissioned Lindsay Cooper to write a taped score that would accompany the text.

Rehearsals were hard work but exciting and although we had nagging worries about the length of the evening, we never seriously doubted that it would work. As soon as we got in front of an audience, we began to fall apart. Of course, there were a few discriminating souls who enjoyed the play, but by and large audiences didn't. We got to the point where we would peer at the audience in the second interval to see how many we'd managed to keep for the third act. Perhaps we had never found the right style of acting that would have made it work. We were certainly never able to cut it to a manageable length.

After three weeks in London and a short tour (originally intended to be the first leg of a year's travelling with it) the whole company collapsed in exhaustion, misery and recriminations. This was the second major crisis in the company's life, and again it provoked a period of reassessment and a change of direction.

The story of 'the company' is stamped with the personalities of those involved. Without them it is just a name. The choices made came from those people wrestling with their differences and coping with their weaknesses – and eventually agreeing, believing, and achieving. And much of what the histories and analyses of the company attribute to political judgment and artistic intention in fact owed more to good reflexes, theatrical sense and sheer necessity.

I find it impossible to chart some ordered passage through those memories of meetings and productions that make up the tangible history of the company. It sometimes appears to be more like a piece of patchwork than a finished garment, a series of stepping stones as opposed to a well laid-out road. I do remember the people, the emotions and the traumas; and the talent, dedication and singlemindedness that were invested in every aspect of the company's work.

MARY MCCUSKER

*Company Member, Performer, 1975 to the present,
Executive Director, 1990–1991.*

The Third Stage. Learning to be a Management, 1982–1991

The sense of failure and demoralisation was so acute, it was impossible to think of working on another show. In the meantime the company couldn't be allowed to fold. If the company is going to go under, we said to each other, we want it to be on our own terms, and not because we've made a mess of something.

We had a couple of commitments to fulfil. We revived *Shakespeare's Sister* for a third excursion, with a cast that was part company members and part employed performers. The conditions in which we had to work (including a dress rehearsal at three in the morning because the venue where we were performing at the Edinburgh Festival was in a state of chaos and

couldn't cope with the needs of all the groups they had booked) did nothing to help the morale.

Provisionally, Penny Cherns, who had directed *Mourning Pictures*, and Paola Dionisotti, approached us with the idea of doing an evening of Franca Rame and Dario Fo's one-woman plays. We offered to produce it and I translated the text from the Italian. It had to be done on a shoestring since we had invested so much in *The Execution* that we hardly had any money left over for the rest of the financial year.

The Fourth Wall toured in the spring of 1983 and fulfilled all the criteria of the best Monstrous Regiment shows. It tackled sexual politics head-on; the two pieces about the women of the Baader-Meinhof gang dealt with terrorism and the state; the other two with women's sexuality. Musically, it was extraordinary, in that Paola performed the pieces with Maggie Nichols, who sang unaccompanied in counterpoint to the text. Because the music was improvised (within strict limits worked out in rehearsal) no two performances were ever the same. It was one of our best shows.

The breathing space that *The Fourth Wall* gave us enabled us to take time to analyse our position. We tried to face up to the causes of our failures and came to some difficult decisions.

Numerically, we were reduced to five women. Three performers, our lighting designer/technician Ronnie Wood and our administrator, Diane Robson. John Slade who had joined the company for *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* Mark Two wanted to stop touring completely. The rest of the cast of *The Execution* who might have formed the basis of a renewed collective clearly wouldn't want to be caught talking to us at a bus stop. Reluctantly we were forced to admit that the full time collective was a dead duck. We also had to face the fact that financially it had become impossible to maintain. With inflation eroding the value of our Arts Council Revenue grant almost month by month, we simply couldn't afford to pay eight or nine people for fifty-two weeks a year any more. Actually, we could only afford to pay one person for fifty-two weeks a year. Administrator excepted, we had all come off the payroll after *The Execution*. We would never again go back on it on a permanent basis. From this point on, apart from the administrator, we were all paid like any other performer or technician the company employed: when we were in a show we were paid the company wage. When we weren't, we worked elsewhere. All the administrative and managerial work we did from this point on we did unpaid, apart from basic expenses.

Perhaps this is as a good place as any to make a short digression on the role our administrators have played in the company's life. When I talk about 'we', I mean 'we the company', and that included Sue Beardon, our first full-time administrator and then Gus Garside who took over from her. Until this point in the company's life, when the full-time collective became impossible to maintain, it was hard to differentiate between company members. We were simply The Monstrous Regiment. We had different jobs, of course. Performers performed and administrators administrated. But we tried to break down the barriers set up by the traditional hierarchy of skills. We had a system of 'committees', including a finance committee to assist the administrator. We recognised that running a company is a skilled operation, and some people are better at, or are trained to do, some jobs rather than others. That was why, for example, we happily asked Gus to join us: he was the only candidate with the relevant professional qualifications. The contribution that both Sue and Gus made to the company's life went far beyond the usual administrative function. They were an integral part of all decisions, both administrative and artistic. When the company faced the fact that it could no longer operate as a full-time collective, the role of the administrator changed dramatically, and during the 1980s our administrators had to deal with a wholly different relationship to the company.

Joining the Company in 1983 as a young (!) administrator was a major turning point for me, bringing in to sharp relief my career, my love of the theatre, my politics and my life and moulding all four together.

The original collective had fragmented by this point (as much for financial reasons as any other) and almost every remaining member had begun pursuing individual careers outside of the Regiment again. This, of course, meant that attention and creative energy were not necessarily focused on Monstrous Regiment and I rapidly learnt the joys and horrors of the collective way of working.

The administration continued to be the last bastion in which the collective spirit was also translated into collective practice. All of the group would do a 'stint' in the office - some kind of ancient penance for actors whose first love belonged in front of the footlights and not in

front of the typewriter – although everyone did the latter with good grace!

SANDY BAILEY
Administrator, 1983–1988.

If we weren't a collective any more, what were we? Slowly, painfully, we accepted the fact that we were now a management. But to reflect the fact that we still had no Company Director or Artistic Director, we called ourselves a collective management.

We also had to face the fact that although we all wanted to continue to be part of Monstrous Regiment, we had differing needs in relation to the company. Mary and I still wanted the freedom to initiate shows, but basically we were performers, actors, and that's what we wanted to do. Chris, on the other hand, was losing interest in performing and wanted to write and direct. Without ever really putting it into words, we recognised that we were going in different directions and we tried to make room for that in the work.

In the period 1983–1985, Mary and I performed in two shows written by Bryony Lavery and directed by Nona Sheppard: *Calamity*, a three-woman wagon train across the mythical history of the Wild West (Jane Cox joined us to play Quiet Kate) and *Origin of the Species – a Love Story*, in which Mollie Starkey, famous archaeologist and raconteuse digs up her five-million-year-old ancestor, Victoria. *Calamity* reintroduced live music and was invited to play at the Women's Theatre Festival in Rome.

The name Bryony Lavery crops up often in the history of the company. Of all the writers we've worked with she's the one with whom we've had the longest relationship. Not only has she written three plays and a cabaret and a half for us, she has also run writers' workshops and organised readings. She has got us out of a lot of scrapes when we were in trouble of one sort or another, and we've had many of our best times with her.

Calamity also introduced Nona Sheppard to the company. She rescued us by agreeing to direct the show at the last minute, and has worked with us regularly ever since. Another woman who has got us out of some tight corners.

The blessing of being able to use the collective to my advantage. A sure way out of an awkward telephone situation would be to suggest I had to consult The Collective (always capital letters at this point). I would hang up; ruminate by myself for a few minutes and then call

back delivering the verdict that 'The Collective had decided that . . .' A skill I continue to use, in one way or another, still!

SANDY BAILEY

Administrator, 1983-1988.

Origin of the Species marked a new phase in the company's work in that it was our first co-production with a mainstream theatre. We produced it with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. As we continued to struggle for our financial existence during the 1980s, co-productions with larger institutions became a lifeline in the maintenance of our artistic standards. They gave us access to resources and facilities (workshops, wardrobe departments) beyond our own means. However, small entities taken under the wing of large institutions are in danger of being swallowed whole, and we felt we were constantly juggling our economic needs against our desire to work on our own terms.

During the same period, Chris pursued her interest in visual theatre, taking up a thread we had begun to explore in *Shakespeare's Sister*, by devising and directing *Enslaved By Dreams* (1984) celebrating the life of Florence Nightingale and *Point of Convergence* (1986), set in an indeterminate time and place, exploring the clash between two very different groups of young women. This show was originally produced with the Cockpit Theatre, and had six professional performers and fifteen unemployed women aged between fifteen and twenty-five in it. The show was rewritten for a subsequent tour so that it could be performed without the fifteen young women.

Two other fundamental changes in our working practices emerged at this period. Firstly, and most importantly, we became an all-women group. We're often asked about this, and how we came to the decision not to work with men. In fact, we never actually sat in a meeting and made a decision. The shift from a mixed group to an all-woman's group was more of a process than a decision. It evolved over a period of time.

All the men who had been in the collective left after *The Execution*. We had been forced to give up our collective identity and there was no reason at that point to expand the collective management. Thinking about the shows, we realised that we had never worked in an all-women, as opposed to women-dominated, environment and we wanted to explore that. We found that it gave us a different kind of freedom to anything we had experienced before and we enjoyed it.

Did I change? Would I have changed anyway? When it comes to it, was I really just there to represent the patriarchy? Or was there more to it than that? One thing is dead certain; it made my life more difficult.

Did it make my life richer? I think I know the answer to that question; I hope when I'm old I'll know I know the answer.

JOHN SLADE
*Company Member, Performer,
 1979-1982.*

We discovered that we had often given too much energy trying to prevent the men from feeling like 'token' men (as we had been made to feel like token women in other companies). Often we had, in fact, fallen into the old trap of mothering them and this had prevented us from fully exploring our relationships between each other as women. We were aware of the problem, as the minutes of our meetings reveal, but we were unable to resolve it. Issues of power, control, guilt, unresolved problems with the mother/daughter relationship, were never adequately recognised or sorted out. Would we have been able to manage the company better through its first seven years of life if we had been able to explore the conflicts between the women? Our joy at the discovery of the power of sisterhood masked the very real differences (political and aesthetic) we had. When the depth of those differences started to appear they frightened us and the presence of men in the group probably inhibited us when trying to deal with them. We had no mechanism for exploring conflict which excluded certain members of the group (the men). There are issues and conflicts which women simply do not want to air in the presence of men. At one point, for example, we sought the assistance of the Women's Therapy Centre who helped us sort through some of the group dynamics that were causing difficulties, but even there, we worked as a whole group, and I don't think we ever managed really to reach a deeper understanding of the specifically 'female' sources of the conflicts between women. I think it was the first (perhaps the only?) time the Women's Therapy Centre had had men coming through their doors.

It's possible that some of what prevented us from dealing with, or in some instances even acknowledging the existence of, those conflicts came from the need for us to see ourselves as

'superwoman' in front of the men. To openly admit to jealousy and rivalry would somehow have been a betrayal of sisterly solidarity. As someone said in another context, we talk about those things in our women's groups.

As a very long-haired composer, musical director, musician, actress and reluctant set lifter, I enthusiastically carried the Regiment's banner up and down the motorways of the land. People were often wary of our name. Would we be monsters, harridans, devourers of men; well no, actually I think that we were very nice, too nice perhaps. At that time there were usually two male actors in the company and they were treated with an abundance of respect and fairness, one might almost say that they were spoiled. Despite the great physical strength of these fellows, when we did 'get-ins' they would always be ironing or sewing whilst the foolish women would fight for the privilege of carrying two tons of wooden set up three flights of stairs.

HELEN GLAVIN

*Performer, Composer, Musician,
1975-1978.*

Gradually, over a period of time, at the beginning of the 1980s we came to the conclusion that we would be a women-directed company performing plays with all women casts except when the play absolutely required male characters, in which case we would employ male actors.

Secondly we came to the conclusion that from now on, we the performers would not have an automatic right to be in all productions. We were coming into the ambit of more conventional theatre rules, which meant for example, that we would have to cast plays taking the age of the characters into account. We would also have to be sensitive to the fact that guest directors might think Mary or I, the only performers remaining in the collective, weren't suited to a part even if we wanted to do it.

This issue surfaced several times between 1986 and 1988: Susan Todd came back to work with us and direct *My Song is Free* (1986) which both Mary and I had wanted to be in. But in the end we decided with Sue that we weren't right for the parts. And in *Waving* (1988) a co-production with the Sheffield Crucible Theatre, which Carol Bunyan had actually written with Mary and me in

mind, we reluctantly had to concede that the play would work better cast with performers who really were the same age as the characters.

Mary had been in *Alarms* (1986), a play we commissioned from the American writer Susan Yankowitz which dealt with the post-Chernobyl landscape. This one did have male characters in it. In addition to touring England, we were invited to the Boston Women's Theatre Festival in the United States where it was a great success.

Taking our production of Alarms to the USA, where we were participating in the Boston Women in Theatre Festival, 1987, was an exhilarating experience. I had never attended such a festival before - a broad mixture of women performers playing to predominantly female audiences, which were hugely rumbustious and enthusiastic in their response to most of the work on offer. Our play was written by the American poet/playwright/novelist, Susan Yankowitz, and I felt that it was really only in the USA that the humour and particularly American voice of the play was communicated and understood - this despite the fact that we were performing Alarms in British accents. My abiding memory of the festival was the hunger of its audiences - women who were there to feast on a small but rich harvest which bore the fruit of their own experiences. We were given the most warm reception by our American hosts and audiences, who seemed to respect Monstrous Regiment as something close to a grandmother of women's theatre from over the Atlantic.

GERDA STEVENSON

Performer, Alarms, 1986-1987.

Both Wendy Kesselman's *My Sister in This House* (produced 1987) and Jenny McLeod's *Island Life* (1988) were plays with which we were closely involved as producers but which had no actual members of Monstrous Regiment performing in them.

During the 1980s the company was in a constant state of balance/friction in our dealings with the writers we commissioned. We were often uncertain ourselves about how to deal with the changing world around us. This blurring of our own certainties coupled with a desire not to trample on the writers' creative process I think meant we often didn't give them a clear enough sense of what the company's philosophy and ideas were. So when

we approached writers we were interested in, we usually simply asked them to write about what they wanted to write about. A radical change from the days when we breathed down the writers' necks for months on end. In the argument about whether a play is a feminist play just because it is written by a woman and speaks of woman's experience, we were taking the side that said 'yes'. It was a change that we were only partially conscious of. In the absence of a clear picture of where the Women's Movement was going, we were as confused as everyone else as to what the plays we were performing should be saying. Our feeling was that if we couldn't point with any certainty to the way forward, then we had simply to support and encourage women writers. Keeping women's work in the public eye is no easy task in itself.

In the mid to late 1980s we were trying to reflect the changing world as we were experiencing it. Nothing new there. But we were experiencing it as painfully hard. As I've already mentioned, politically it was a nightmare, and feminism, in retreat like the left, was having to do some pretty fast footwork just to stay in the same place. Writers, of course, were no more immune from the feeling of confusion than we were. So the writing of the period reflects the withdrawal from the arena of public struggle. The dilemma for a company such as ours is how to balance the desire to take on the whole world against a desire to rescue the domestic lives of women from the dustbin marked 'trivial, unimportant'.

One of the issues we were becoming concerned with was the question of growing older. We noticed that opportunities for women performers get very thin on the ground after the age of forty or so, and we began to think that one of our concerns should be consciously to produce work about and for women of our own generation. The shift in emphasis can be seen in the change from *My Song is Free* and *Alarms*, both produced in 1986, one about women in detention in Pinochet's Chile, and the other tackling the destruction of the environment, to the plays we produced in the following two years which dealt with more personal, individual concerns.

We had been looking for an already existing script. In the changing economic climate, theatres were beginning to want to read the script of a show before they would book it. The birth process of a new play doesn't always conform to the strict timetable required by administrators and bookers, and we wanted to have a script we could let people read while we developed our commissions.

My Sister in This House had been performed several times in America by the time someone sent us the script. We couldn't understand why it had never been seen in this country. It is an extraordinary piece of drama: dense, claustrophobic, creating, second by second, the tiny mind-numbingly boring details of a suffocating provincial society. The play is based on an actual event that took place in France. The same actual event that Jean Genet used as the springboard for *The Maids*.

My Sister in This House was co-produced with the Leicester Haymarket Theatre, did a short tour and then played at the Hampstead Theatre. It provided us with a wonderful example of the pitfalls waiting for small scale alternative companies when they get involved with mainstream organisations. One of the reasons we had picked this particular play was we knew that it was a tried and tested piece of theatre. It was the most mainstream play we had done for a while, and we wanted to use it as a means of putting the name Monstrous Regiment back in the public eye. We achieved much of what we set out to do. Nancy Meckler directed a stunning production which had excellent reviews. However, we didn't manage to get the name of the company onto the London poster in large enough print, with the result that everyone thought that it was a Hampstead Theatre production, the critics referred to it as such, and we were rendered totally invisible.

In the Spring of 1986 we rehearsed Wendy Kesselman's play My Sister in This House. Set during the thirties in a provincial French city, the play took its story from real life events. Two sisters, live-in servants since their adolescence, brutally murdered and severely mutilated their mistress and her daughter after serving them faithfully and devotedly for seven years. Within the confines of a rigidly bourgeois social framework, Wendy's play examined the minutiae of these four women's lives. Amazingly Madame and Isabelle Danzard manage to conduct their lives virtually without speaking to the two girls who serve their every need.

The rehearsal process became a fascinating journey for us all. Susanna Hamilton and Maggie O'Neill, playing the sisters Christine and Lea, were sent out to spend a day with professional cleaners (who turned out to be sisters!). Each morning while Maggie Steed, Tilly Vosburgh and myself had coffee, Susanna and Maggie scrubbed and cleaned the rehearsal room. Countless improvisations inspired by clues in the text and an extended interview with a psychiatrist made it possible to create a palpable history and milieu for each of the four

women. What were the circumstances of life and character that could push these shy, gentle, loyal women to perform acts of such extreme violence? The more questions we asked, the more aware we became of the passionate nature of each of the four women, and their inherent sense of loneliness. We saw how their needs, when thwarted or unfulfilled, could manifest themselves in a desperate, possessive kind of loving. It was then we began to glimpse how the final tragic events in the play could have come to pass.'

NANCY MECKLER

Director, *My Sister in This House*, 1986.

In 1988 we produced *Waving* by Carol Bunyan and *Island Life* by Jenny McLeod. *Waving* reflected our interest in the process of growing older, the characters being around fifty. As one of them remarks, 'Well, Joan Collins is fifty, but not the same sort of fifty'.

We knew of Jenny McLeod through her prize-winning play *Crickel at Camp David*. She was then in her very early twenties and the quality of her writing was so impressive that we asked her to write a new play for us. We had been thinking about working from both ends of the spectrum as it were, reflecting the concern of our own (mid-forties) generation, and at the same time looking for younger women authors, of a different generation, to see what they were thinking about.

We were amazed to find that what Jenny most wanted to do was to write a play about old ladies. The process by which the play was produced was relatively conventional. Once we had agreed on the subject with her, she went away and wrote it. Thereafter Jane Collins, the director, worked closely with Jenny on subsequent drafts and rewrites.

Island Life, set in the wilderness of an old people's home, spends a weekend with Emmy, Sophia and Vera as they go about setting up an experiment to recreate or visit the (non-existent?) past. Their ritualised relationship is shattered by the intrusion of Kate, an accidental tourist in their fantasy life. The resulting mayhem as 'truth' clashes with 'illusion' is both comic and heart-rending. *Island Life* is certainly no naturalistic examination of the problems of old age. More, it is a kind of metaphysical meditation on the nature of truth and illusion. But it isn't didactic either. The characters are drawn in exuberant detail, and the language of the play is rich in the vocabulary and history of each of the women.

The play was a co-production with the Nottingham Playhouse,

first performed in a new studio space the theatre was opening. It made for appalling working conditions for the performers and the director, not to mention the set designer, Iona McLeish, trying to open a new (and difficult) play against a background of last minute furious building work. Later in the year, the production did a short tour and played in London with two changes in the cast.

A Common Woman (originally produced by the Sheffield Crucible Theatre), an evening of three short plays by Franca Rame and Dario Fo and *Beatrice* by Ian Brown, two one-woman shows we produced in 1989, brought Mary and me back into performing with the company (*A Common Woman* won a 1989 Time Out/01-for London Award) and at the beginning of 1990 we produced *Love Story of the Century*.

Love Story of the Century is a long autobiographical poem by Märta Tikkanen whose husband, a celebrated Finnish writer, was an alcoholic. The poem describes, sometimes in harrowing detail, the story of their life together, from the day they fell in love-at-first-sight, through their marriage, as he, always a heavy drinker, gradually descends into a pit of alcohol and destroys their relationship.

What is remarkable about the poem is its almost clinical recording of every nuance of feeling they went through: passionate love to loathing and every emotion in between. Nor does the author spare herself. Although alcoholism is plainly held responsible for the chaos of their lives, she acknowledges and charts her own unconscious participation in the mayhem.

Once we read the poem, we were shocked at our own insularity in never having even heard of it. It had originally been published in 1978, and since then had been dramatised and performed all over Europe (more than twenty productions in ten years.) There was, as far as we knew, no one theatrical version. We knew that it was sometimes performed as a one-woman show; we also found out that a production in Sweden had used three women and a man. We asked Clare Venables (who directed *Beatrice* and is skilled at cutting and shaping a text in rehearsal) to direct a dramatised version of the poem. She said she would, but only if we commissioned an adaptation first. She didn't want to cut and shape this one in rehearsal. In the event, her commitments elsewhere meant that she couldn't be with us during the rehearsal period, so we asked her to do the adaptation. Debbie Shewell directed it.

In deciding to construct a play with two performers we were wanting to explore the idea of the woman as divided self. She often knows what she 'ought' to do but cannot. In the later years of the marriage she is constantly at war with herself: should she leave him or not? Is she capable of leaving him? The poem is not as simplistic as this, however, and when we were working on it in rehearsal we found the division of text between the two voices didn't always fall into that obvious kind of inner conflict. When we came to patches in the adaptation that we didn't think worked, we went back to the poem and took out or put back verses or sections. The text printed here is the text as we eventually performed it.

When Märta came to London for the first night, we discovered to our horror that there was in fact an authorised dramatisation already in existence. In all the correspondence with her Swedish agent they had never thought to mention it, and we had never thought to ask. Fortunately she liked what we had done, and it is with her permission that our version is printed here.

We have included our stage directions to give readers some idea of what the production looked like. They are by no means an integral part of the text, and anybody performing the play will want to find their own style of production.

In 1990 the company produced *More Than One Antoinette* written and directed by Debbie Shewell, an exploration of the life and death of the first Mrs Rochester, drawing on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*. We also produced Marivaux's one-act play *The Colony* with a second act or companion piece, *The Colony Comes a Cropper*, written by Robyn Archer. The latter was a co-production with the Salisbury Playhouse, directed by Nona Sheppard, music composed by Lindsay Cooper.

Hanging on in the Eighties

What had the Monstrous Regiment set out to do in 1975? Among other things we wanted:

- To produce great shows.
- To discover and encourage women writers.
- To explore a theory of feminist culture. 'What is a feminist play?'
- To resurrect women's 'hidden history'.

- To give women opportunities for work – especially in technical areas which had always been male preserves.
- To put *real* women on the stage. No more stereotypes.
- To be a consciousness-raising group.
- To attempt a theory and practice of collectivity.
- To find a new audience.
- To explore the relationship between music and theatre.

And where did the 1980s leave us?

Post feminism and the free play of market forces. While red-braced Porsche-driving yuppies were let loose to roam the floor of the commodities market, and successful career women were falling over themselves to deny they even knew what that nasty word 'feminism' meant, what place was there for these old lady dinosaurs who would keep banging on about sisterhood and solidarity? What place was there for the word 'sisterhood' itself when the cult of unrestrained individualism told us that any woman could be Prime Minister if she had the guts and worked hard enough?

Against a backdrop of cuts in arts funding, rampant inflation that eroded the value of what grants we did get, and the dismemberment of the political theatre movement, survival was the name of the game. On the practical day-to-day level, running a theatre company became more and more of a struggle. We fought to maintain our standards of production, which, ironically, often caused painful tensions with women who came to work with us: from the outside we looked like a glossy company with a huge internal support network. From the inside, we looked like what we really were: a tiny group who didn't have enough women to do the work and didn't have the money to pay other people to come in and do it.

In such a difficult material position, the only way to continue to grow and develop is with the support of the community in which you are rooted. But in the 1980s our community fell apart. The Women's Movement retreated in confusion and we all suffered under the backlash of so-called 'post feminism'. (An interesting note. In her book *The Demon Lover: A Study of the Sexuality of Terrorism*, Robin Morgan found the expression 'post-feminist' being used as far back as 1919. So the idea that women should shut up and go home because they've fulfilled all their aspirations is not a new one.) Post-feminism is a spurious concept. As Naomi Wolf has recently pointed out 'no one speaks derisively about post-democracy'. Ten years of Thatcherism have shown us that

our democratic rights are not sacred. They have to be defended and fought for and a society that cares about its political institutions has to be constantly vigilant in defence of those rights.

This scramble for survival has meant that there has been very little chance to evaluate the theatrical implications of our work. In our continuing championing and performing of women's writing, the actual producing of the work has been such a battle in the 1980s that we have been forced to put one of our primary aims on the back boiler. The conscious exploration of what 'women's writing' is or might be has had to be postponed. This is still a project of some urgency. There seems to be a growing consensus of opinion that 'new writing' is in crisis, but the articles and papers which talk about this crisis never mention women's writing. As usual the dominant (male) is deemed to include the less visible female. It never seems to cross male critics' minds that women are not a special interest group, not a caucus, not a lobby. We are not even a minority. Women make up just over half the human race, and it is inevitable that we begin to explore what might constitute a specific female vision. Not just in terms of content, but in the structure of the drama we write. In June 1991 I attended the 2nd International Women Playwrights' Conference in Toronto and I was struck by the way many of the women writers talked about their work. They are consciously thinking about what makes their plays different from the classical (male) form. They are acutely aware of having embarked on an exploration. Of course we have continued to commission and champion women's work of all kinds, but economic conditions force us into a conservative position. We have had to form a relationship with establishment theatre which I suspect has not always been to our advantage. In commissioning plays we have had to use the traditional model, but we have none of the safeguards that traditional methods provide: almost without exception we have tried to produce every play we have commissioned, whether we thought it was ready or not, because we never had enough money to build up a body of work in preparation. In contrast, mainstream theatres may have up to twenty-five commissions in various stages of development at any one time. Out of those commissions, each theatre may go on to produce only four or five.

Where does a company such as ours find its place in the theatrical community, when mainstream, male-run theatres such as the Royal Court provide a more visible stage for women playwrights to work on? Indeed, it's probable that none of the

writers in this volume would like to be thought of as 'women writers', laden as that description is with resonances of the marginal and, by extension, the second rate.

Yet women are writing for the theatre. More now than ever before. But by and large they are still as invisible as they ever were. They are not being nurtured. With the closure of many studio spaces and smaller venues a traditional testing ground for new writing has been lost. Additionally, new writing itself has become harder and harder to put on as cuts in arts funding and a recession push bookers and producers into a more conservative position of producing safe plays. When critics like Michael Billington wail at the 'crisis in new writing' they never seem to grasp the obvious correlation between the 'crisis' and the economic situation in which theatre operates.

Not enough has changed in the last fifteen years. We were a group of performers and we started out looking for women writers as a way of making ourselves visible on stage. Enlightened self-interest. Mel Gussow, distinguished American critic and writer, recently wrote a long profile of Michael Gambon for *The New Yorker* (28 January, 1991). The article mentions the stars of the English stage: Ian McKellen, Alan Howard, Derek Jacobi . . . and on and on . . . and the new generation . . . Daniel Day-Lewis, Antony Sher, Simon Callow, Kenneth Branagh . . . Not one woman. You'd think Oliver Cromwell was still in Whitehall and women banished from the stage altogether.

It is still the case that for most theatrical purposes the male shall be deemed to include the female. As long as the male vision of the world is taken to be *the* vision of the world then women's writing will be identified as marginal. And many women will want to wriggle out of the identity their gender imposes on them. Understandably.

Fear of being marginalised: an issue that comes full circle again. What is the point of a women's theatre company? Shouldn't we rejoin the mainstream and try and infiltrate what we've learned into the body theatrical.

Being a woman designer I found it very comfortable working in a company that takes the concerns and interests and struggles women have seriously. The writing for women, by women with good parts for women of different ages. They are not separatist or judgmental but simply care for and take the art of women particularly seriously. When I work for them I feel appreciated and enabled. There may not

be a fantastic budget to work with but I feel valued and that is enhancing.

Recently I have approached them for new plays to run a project with new design students at Central St Martin's Theatre Design degree course. Young designers work on unperformed, maybe unfinished, plays. It can be helpful for a writer to see their play visualized and set in a proposed space before completing it. I hope this will be an ongoing relationship.

JENNY CAREY

Designer, Origin of the Species 1984, The Colony Comes a Cropper, 1990.

Part of the problem of women's theatrical invisibility has to lie in the classical foundations of our repertoire. Shakespeare pre-eminently, but also Marlowe, Jonson, the Jacobean, the Restoration playwrights. The model theatre company, the ideal, is one which can tackle and scale these heights of the English cultural experience. And a company which is geared up to do *Macbeth* (21 male characters, 5 female) or *Hamlet* (At least 20 male characters, 2 female) is hardly likely to be considering how they might employ more women.

Interestingly enough, two of the most celebrated examples of 'tinkering' with gender in classic texts were the National Theatre's *As You Like It* (1968) and *The Oresteia* (1981) both of which were performed by all-male casts. In other words, even with so few parts in the classical repertoire for women, what few there were were taken from them and given to men. Why? The rationale was that these plays were written for men to perform at times when women were not allowed on a public stage. But what was the real reason? Are men inherently more interesting than women on stage? Are they better actors than women? Does the deep authoritative male voice appeal to the audience more than women's voices? Or do they make more convincing women than women themselves? I was told a story about how Samuel Beckett reputedly refused to allow *Waiting for Godot* to be performed at all in Holland because a certain theatre, contrary to his wishes, performed it with an all-female cast. What terrible damage could four women inflict on this play that such a punishment should be meted out to an entire nation? Had they fouled it, besmirched it, somehow rendered it invalid? If Shakespeare can survive strobe lighting, motor bikes and Sherman tanks, can Beckett not survive being performed by women?

The physical invisibility of women on stage is only the manifestation of our invisibility in the whole theatrical edifice. That is why the women's theatre companies have to keep fighting for their right to exist. Fifteen years ago, we were looking forward to the day when we could pack up and go home knowing that women's experience, women's vision, women's culture had become an acknowledged part of culture in general. Unfortunately we can't pack those cases yet.

A New Beginning

To have survived for fifteen years is an achievement. The bigger achievement will be survival for the next fifteen years.

ROBERT BRECKMAN

Company Accountant, Advisory Committee Member 1975-1991.

In 1991 the company has taken a radical leap in a new direction. The structure of the company has always been the motor which carried the artistic policies forward. Towards the end of the 1980s we started to admit that the collective management model was not working well. For each of us to earn a living, as the company couldn't support us, we had to take work wherever we were offered it. This created a situation where it was possible for the company to be in pre-production or rehearsal for a show and for the administrator to be the only member of the company who was physically present. The result was that the process of taking major decisions of policy became inefficient and occasionally haphazard. This left the administrator with the burden of taking many decisions alone which should have been taken collectively. Additionally, the management collective had dwindled to three (Mary, Chris and myself) plus Rose Sharp, our administrator, the only one of us on the permanent payroll.

We tried to tackle the problem by setting up an Advisory Committee. The Committee has made an important contribution to the company's life, supporting and challenging our activities, but it was never intended to be a management body, and as it meets only quarterly, it couldn't really help to resolve the problems of the day to day running of the company.

I have already talked about the vital role the company's

administrators played in the early days of its existence. The nature of that role changed radically during the 1980s when the full-time collective ceased to exist. The nature may have changed but the vital importance of the administrator did not. If anything, it became more crucial still. After Diane Robson left us, first Sandy Bailey, then (briefly) Ferelith Lean and currently Rose Sharp have all had to cope with the problems posed by our attempts to keep the spirit and artistic standards of the company going without the full-time support of a collective that characterised the early days.

I had never heard of a business plan, a feasibility study or an arts strategy. I had no experience of marketing or financial management. But I was (still am) a committed feminist with ideas about how women on stage could blow a hole in the patriarchal hold on imagination and drama. I was actively involved in the Women's Movement and a whole range of cultural political groupings and activities. I was naive, misguided in many ways, but I was motivated, energetic and a fierce campaigner. I like to think that was why Monstrous Regiment asked me to work for them.

SUE BEARDON
Administrator, 1976-1978.

We gradually realised that we were 'ipso facto' forcing the role of artistic director on our administrators, who didn't want it. So when, in 1990, the Arts Council made continued funding dependent upon our appointing an Executive or Artistic Director, we were not greatly surprised. Nor, when we came to discuss it in depth, were we as aghast as we might have thought we would be.

Mary agreed to take the role of Executive Director for nine months while we sorted out how best to proceed. The work she did in those months was invaluable, indeed we probably wouldn't have survived at all if it hadn't been for her energy and skill. On the artistic side she oversaw the production of *The Colony* (with Rose) and organised workshops and rehearsed readings throughout the following six months in partnership with Tash Fairbanks, who was our first writer-in-residence. At the same time she produced a series of study papers which became our blueprint for survival.

Our discussions were guided by Sue Beardon, our very first administrator, now a management consultant, who came back to

help us to work through what we wanted to do. While still believing fiercely in the collective principle, we saw that in our situation, the renewal of the company and the company's work was the only thing that mattered. And perhaps 'collective' has other meanings than the one we had always assumed. We have always tried to be flexible at moments of crisis, to look for a course of action that would ensure the survival of the company and the ideas it stands for. So rather than cling on to a power it was no longer feasible for us to exercise, we decided that the appointment of an Artistic Director who would work side by side with the administrator, offered us an exciting chance to put the company back on its feet to face the challenges of the future. Consequently, in April 1991, we appointed Clare Venables as our first Artistic Director. She had just spent nine years as Artistic Director of one of the largest regional theatres in England, The Sheffield Crucible, and we could hardly believe our luck when she agreed to work with us. Her relationship with the company over the years meant that she was familiar with our work, and with us. She had been on the Advisory Committee since its inception and had worked with us on two productions in the last couple of years. She had co-produced *Waving* when she was at the Crucible. We had also planned together (until we discovered that neither party could afford it) for the company to become resident in the Crucible Studio for a season.

It will take many different forms over the years, but their first principle of majority is more important than is ever stated; in this 'post-feminist' era there is a danger that people can feel many battles have been won, and that we do not still need women's companies, rather in the way that women's pages in newspapers are now questioned by men and women alike. It is short-sighted. Perhaps life might be technically easier for our daughters (though actually I doubt even that) but until we are as confident in our female perspective as in our male, whether we are men or women, we need groups of women, working and exploring together. Not individual women struggling or conquering alone, but groups, sharing and conquering, and eventually welcoming the male principle because the female principle has become strong enough to match it.

CLARE VENABLES
Artistic Director, 1991.

With the addition of Katrina Duncan, who had known the company since 1979 when she worked with us on placement from the City University Arts Administration Course, and had been on the Advisory Committee, we formed ourselves into something approaching a conventional Board of Directors. I say 'something approaching' because I don't think any of us really sees what we are in the process of creating as a traditional structure. The word 'collective' may not look anything like it looked to us in 1975, but the resonances of the ideas it represents are still as strong. The last twenty years has had a profound effect on women's perception of ourselves. As Carolyn Heilbrun* says: 'What became essential was for women to see themselves collectively, not individually, not caught in some individual erotic and familial plot, and, inevitably, found wanting . . . I suspect that female narratives will be found where women exchange stories, where they read and talk collectively of ambitions, and possibilities, and accomplishments.'

We think we are ready to start telling the story all over again. Several years ago, David Bradford, one of the original group, told me about an expression he had found in a book on evolution. Apparently it is a technical term used to describe a species that is in the process of evolving. At a certain point in its development it is not possible to predict whether it will be successful or not. In the meantime, it is called a 'hopeful monster'. I think that isn't a bad way to describe how we feel about the company as we move into the 1990s. We are evolving into something quite different from what we have been. We acknowledge and salute that history and every person who contributed to its successes. At the same time, we recognise that we have to change in order to move on. We want to build on the past not live in it. We want the next fifteen years to be as extraordinary as the last fifteen have been. As we look into the future with anticipation we feel that we are indeed, 'hopeful monsters'.

* Carolyn Heilbrun: *Writing a Woman's Life*. WOMEN'S PRESS, 1989.

- Monstrous Regiment Productions**
- SCUM** 1976/77
by Claire Luckham, Chris Bond and the company
- VINEGAR TOM** 1976/77
by Caryl Churchill
- KISS AND KILL** 1977/78
by Ann Mitchell and Susan Todd
- FLOORSHOW** 1977/78
by Caryl Churchill, Bryony Lavery, Michelene Wandor and David Bradford
- TIME GENTLEMEN PLEASE** 1978
by Bryony Lavery
- TEENDREAMS** 1979
by David Edgar with Susan Todd
- GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES** 1979/80
by Bryony Lavery
- DIALOGUE BETWEEN A PROSTITUTE AND ONE OF HER CLIENTS** 1980
by Dacia Maraini. Translated by Gillian Hanna
- SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER** 1980
by Théâtre de l' Aquarium
Translated by Gillian Hanna
- MOURNING PICTURES** 1981
by Honor Moore
- YOGA CLASS** 1981
by Rose Tremain
- THE EXECUTION** 1982
by Melissa Murray
- THE FOURTH WALL** 1983
by Franca Rame and Dario Fo
Translated by Gillian Hanna
- CALAMITY** 1983/84
by Bryony Lavery
- ENSLAVED BY DREAMS** 1984
devised by Chris Bowler
- MACBETH WORKSHOPS** 1984/5
Devised and directed by Bettina Jonic
- ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES — A LOVE STORY** 1984/85
by Bryony Lavery
- POINT OF CONVERGENCE** 1985
Devised/Directed by Chris Bowler
- MY SONG IS FREE** 1986
by Jorge Diaz
Translated by Paloma Zozaya
Adapted by Nigel Gearing
- ALARMS** 1986
by Susan Yankowitz
- MY SISTER IN THIS HOUSE** 1987
by Wendy Kesselman
- WAVING** 1988
by Carol Bunyan
- ISLAND LIFE** 1988
by Jenny McLeod
- A COMMON WOMAN** 1988/89
by Dario Fo & Franca Rame
Translated by Gillian Hanna
- BEATRICE** 1989
by Ian Brown

**LOVE STORY OF THE
CENTURY** 1990

by Märta Tikkanen. Adapted by
Clare Venables
Translated by Stina Katchadourian

**MORE THAN ONE
ANTOINETTE** 1990

by Debbie Shewell

Administrators

Sandy Bailey
Sue Beardon
Katrina Duncan
Gus Garside
Ferelith Lean
Di Robson
Rose Sharp

Artistic/Executive Director

Mary McCusker
Clare Venables

Choreographers

Eve Darlow
Karen Rabinowitz

Costume Makers

Hilary Lewis
Pam Tate
Marion Weise

Designers

Hildegard Bechtler
Jenny Carey
Moggie Douglas
Stephanie Howard
Gemma Jackson
Annabel Lee
Claudia Mayer
Sue Mayes
Iona McLeish
Andrea Montag
Geraldine Pilgrim
Di Seymour

**THE COLONY COMES A
CROPPER!** 1990

Act I The Colony by Marivaux.
Translated by Gillian Hanna
Act II Comes a Cropper
by Robyn Archer

Directors

Chris Bowler
David Bradford
Pam Brighton
Penny Cherns
Jane Collins
Kate Crutchley
Sue Dunderdale
Caroline Eves
Angela Hopkins
Bettina Jonic
Angela Langfield
Nancy Meckler
Sharon Miller
Ann Mitchell
Jan Sargeant
Nona Sheppard
Debbie Shewell
Susan Todd
Clare Venables
Hilary Westlake

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The Drawing Room
Sophie Gibson
Claudine Meissner
Chris Montag
Alan Rickman
Lee Robinson
Jude Rugg
Angela Stewart-Park

Lighting Designers

Inigo Espejel
 Beth Hardisty
 Peter Higton
 Meri Jenkins
 Tina MacHugh
 Geoff Mersereau
 Charles Paton
 George Tarbuck
 Steve Whitson
 Veronica Wood

Musicians/Composers

Paul Abrahams
 Diane Adderley
 Roger Allam
 Richard Attree
 Lindsay Cooper
 Jane Cox
 Josefina Cupido
 Helen Glavin
 Sylvia Hallet
 Tony Haynes
 Joanna MacGregor
 Keith Morris

Performers

Diane Adderley
 Richard Albrecht
 Roger Allam
 Jenifer Armitage
 Denise Armon
 Diana Barrett
 Hannah Beardon
 Ian Blower
 Abigail Bond
 Chris Bowler
 David Bradford
 Linda Broughton
 Angela Bruce
 Vivienne Burgess
 Georgia Clarke
 Angela Clerkin
 Norma Cohen
 Nora Connolly
 Jane Cox

Stephen Crane
 Sally Cranfield
 Josefina Cupido
 Cotchie D'Arcy
 April de Angelis
 Paola Dionisotti
 Joanna Field
 Andrew Frame
 Susan Franklyn
 William Gaminara
 Tim Gatti
 Iain Glass
 Helen Glavin
 Aviva Goldkorn
 Celia Gore-Booth
 Tony Guilfoyle
 Suzanna Hamilton
 Gillian Hanna
 Gay Harding
 Ann Haydn
 Tamsin Heatley
 Joan Hooley
 Alan Hulse
 Irma Inniss
 Pauline Jefferson
 Paul Kiernan
 Pamela Lane
 Stephen Ley
 Jane Lowe
 Stella Maris
 Mary McCusker
 Marilyn Milgrom
 Marsha Millar
 Ann Mitchell
 Maureen Morris
 Maggie Nichols
 Maggie O'Neill
 Carlene Reed
 Sue Rogerson
 Clive Russell
 Mary Shand
 Rosamund Shelley
 Corinne Skinner-Carter
 John Slade
 Geraldine Somerville
 Maggie Steed
 Gerda Stevenson

Stella Tanner
Susan Todd
Marcia Tucker
Yolanda Vazquez
Lynne Verrall
Frances Viner
Tilly Vosburgh
Natasha Williams

Photographers

Sarah Ainslie
Sheila Burnett
Dee Conway
Phil Cutts
Howard Gibbins
Jane Harper
Sean Hudson
Gerry Murray
Raissa Page
Roger Perry
Mark Rusher
Mary Tisserand
Pamela Toller
Val Wilmer
Nigel Wright

Technical

Liz Ainley
Janet Ball
Alison Bullivant
Janet Cantrill
Lesley Chenery
Sheryl Crown
Valerie Dew
Inigo Espejel
Jessica Higgs
Meri Jenkins
Deirdre Malynn
Gill McBride
Greta Millington
Mel Nortcliffe
Tessa Panter
Lizz Poulter
Nancy Secchi
Sheila Sloane
Christine Thornhill
Debra Trethewey

d. Wilson
Veronica Wood

Writers

Jo Anderson
Robyn Archer
Chris Bond
Chris Bowler
David Bradford
Ian Brown
Carol Bunyan
Caryl Churchill
Ellen Dryden
David Edgar
Monica Gazzo
Nigel Gearing
Gillian Hanna
Stina Katchadourian
Wendy Kesselman
Bryony Lavery
Claire Luckham
Dacia Maraini
Jenny McLeod
Ann Mitchell
Honor Moore
Melissa Murray
Franca Rame & Dario Fo
Debbie Shewell
Théâtre de L'Aquarium
Märta Tikkanen
Susan Todd
Rose Tremain
Clare Venables
Micheline Wandor
Susan Yankowitz
Paloma Zozaya

**Monstrous Regiment
Advisory Committee - 25 June
1991**

Sandy Bailey
Simi Bedford
Robert Breckman
Beatrix Campbell
Caryl Churchill
Leonora Davis

Diane Gelon
 Cathy Itzin
 Helena Kennedy
 Ann McFerran
 Susie Orbach
 Veronica Wood

**Monstrous Regiment Plays in
 Print (in English)**

Vinegar Tom by Caryl Churchill
 (published in *Plays by Women Volume
 One*, Methuen)

Teendreams by David Edgar with
 Susan Todd (published in
Teendreams & Our Own People,
 Methuen)

Origin of the Species by Bryony
 Lavery (published in *Plays by Women
 Volume Six*, Methuen)

Mourning Pictures by Honor Moore
 (published in the USA in *The New
 Women's Theatre: Ten Plays by Contem-
 porary American Women* by Vintage)

The Fourth Wall by Franca Rame
 and Dario Fo, translated by Gillian
 Hanna (published in *Woman Alone*,
 Methuen)

A Common Woman by Dario Fo and
 Franca Rame, translated by Gillian
 Hanna (published in *Woman Alone*,
 Methuen)

Alarms by Susan Yankowitz
 (published in *Female Voices* by the
 Playwrights Press)

Production Photographs

1. Monstrous Regiment: The Company, 1976/77.
2. Gillian Hanna in *Scum: Death, Destruction and Dirty Washing* (1976).
3. Ian Blower, Roger Allam and Linda Broughton in *Scum: Death, Destruction and Dirty Washing* (1976).
4. Diane Adderley, Chris Bowler and Mary McCusker in *Time Gentlemen Please* (1978).
5. Chris Bowler and Mary McCusker in *Teendreams* (1979).
6. Mary McCusker, Chris Bowler, Josefina Cupido and Gillian Hanna in *Shakespeare's Sister* (1980).
7. Maggie Nichols and Paola Dionisotti in *The Fourth Wall* (1983).
8. Tamsin Heatley, Celia Gore-Booth and Sally Cranfield in *Enslaved by Dreams* (1984).
9. Mary Shand in *Point of Convergence* (1985).
10. Maureen Morris and Yolanda Vazquez in *My Song is Free* (1986).
11. Pamela Lane and Pauline Jefferson in *Waving* (1988).
12. Maggie O'Neill, Tilly Vosburgh and Suzanna Hamilton in *My Sister in This House* (1987).
13. Tilly Vosburgh and Maggie Steed in *My Sister in This House* (1987).
14. Joanna Field in *Island Life* (1988).
15. Joan Hooley and Stella Tanner in *Island Life* (1988).
16. Mary McCusker in *Beatrice* (1989).
17. Gillian Hanna and Mary McCusker in *Love Story of the Century* (1990).
18. Mary McCusker in *Love Story of the Century* (1990).
19. Natasha Williams Geraldine Somerville and William Gaminara in *More Than One Antoinette* (1990).
20. Monstrous Regiment: The Company, 1991.

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1. Monstrous Regiment 1976/77. *Left to right:* Meri Jenkins, Linda Broughton, Chris Bowler, Mary McCusker, Susan Todd, Josefina Cupido, Sue Beardon, Helen Glavin, Roger Allam, Ian Blower and Gillian Hanna.



2. Gillian Hanna in *Scum: Death, Destruction and Dirty Washing* (1976). Photo: Roger Perry.



3. Left to right: Ian Blower, Roger Allam and Linda Broughton in *Scum: Death, Destruction and Dirty Washing* (1976). Photo: Roger Perry.



4. Left to right: Diane Adderley, Chris Bowler and Mary McCusker in *Time Gentlemen Please* (1978).



5. Chris Bowler and Mary McCusker in *Teendreams* (1979).



6. Left to right: Mary McCusker, Chris Bowler, Josefina Cupido and Gillian Hanna in *Shakespeare's Sister* (1980). Photo: Mark Rusher.



7. Maggie Nichols (front) and Paola Dionisotti (back) in *The Fourth Wall* (1983).



8. Left to right: Tamsin Heatley, Celia Gore-Booth and Sally Cranfield in *Enslaved by Dreams* (1984). Photo: Roger Perry.



9. Mary Shand in *Point of Convergence* (1985). Photo: Greater London Council.



10. Maureen Morris (back) and Yolanda Vazquez (front) in *My Song is Free* (1986). Photo: Willoughby Gullachsen.



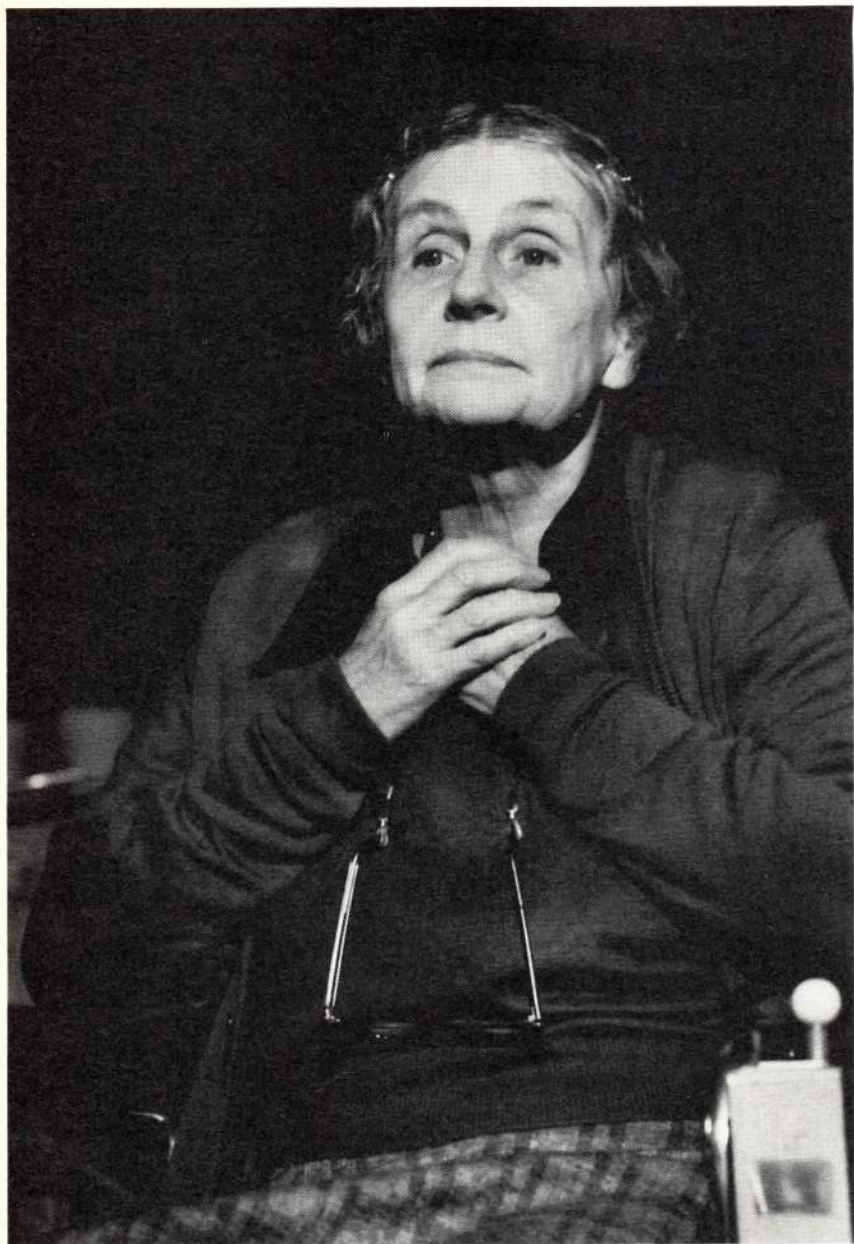
11. *Left to right:* Pamela Lane and Pauline Jefferson in *Waving* (1988). Photo: Gerry Murray.



12. *Left to right: Maggie O'Neill and Tilly Vosburgh (background: Suzanna Hamilton) in My Sister in This House (1987). Photo: Phil Cutts.*



13. *Left to right: Tilly Vosburgh and Maggie Steed in My Sister in This House (1987). Photo: Phil Cutts.*



14. Joanna Field in *Island Life* (1988). Photo: Mary Tisserand.



15. *Left to right: Joan Hooley and Stella Tanner in Island Life (1988). Photo: Sarah Ainslie.*



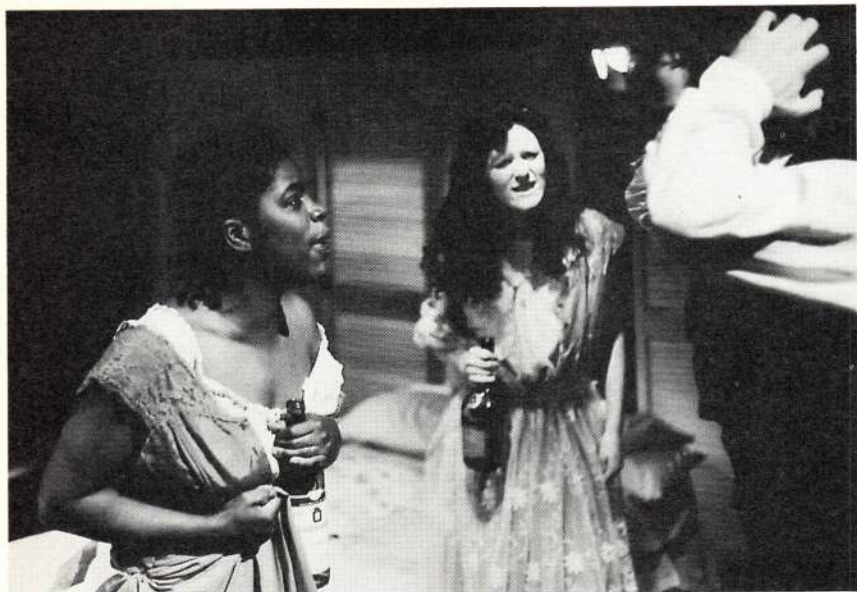
16. Mary McCusker in *Beatrice* (1989). Photo: Sean Hudson.



17. Gillian Hanna (front) and Mary McCusker (back) in *Love Story of the Century* (1990).



18. Mary McCusker in *Love Story of the Century* (1990).



19. *Left to right:* Natasha Williams, Geraldine Somerville and William Gaminara in *More Than One Antoinette* (1990). Photo: Sarah Ainslie.



20. *Monstrous Regiment* 1991. *Back, left to right:* Mary McCusker, Gillian Hanna, Katrina Duncan. *Front, left to right:* Rose Sharp, Chris Bowler, Clare Venables. Photo: Dee Conway.

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