



Press Cuttings 1980-1985

The items in this file come from material in the company's archive in the V&A's Theatre and Performance Archives.

Quite often, the press cuttings in the archive are photocopies of poor quality, and/or do not include full information about the writer, publication or date. The following list includes 'best guesses' about these.

Colin Chambers	<i>Morning Star</i>	Sept 80
S. Wainwright	[unknown]	Feb 81
Catherine Itzin	<i>Tribune</i>	Feb 81
Michelene Wandor	<i>Plays and Players</i>	June 83
Michael Leech	<i>The Stage</i>	March 84
Tom Vaughan	<i>Morning Star</i>	March 85

POLITICAL UPSURGE has its cultural counterpart, and the women's movement provides an eloquent example in publishing, photography, music, writing, other visual arts and particularly theatre.

And one of the leading theatre groups to come out of the alternative theatre movement during the last ten years also happens to be a feminist group, Monstrous Regiment — well known round Britain and at political gatherings of the left.

After more than four years of hectic touring and recently a lot of argument over ways of presenting new images of women, the group has been taking a breather.

Founder member Gillian Hanna says the collective needed a change. "We even had to ask ourselves whether we should go on or stop."

EXCITING

Fortunately the group, which on principle always has more women members than men, decided during a thoughtful summer that it would continue, but in a more flexible way.

The result — a new season of plays and a move this week to new premises. Both are exciting departures for the group.

Monstrous Regiment will be presenting through to the spring three new plays, all from abroad.

They are designed, says Gillian Hanna, to "give a taste of



Chris Bowler and John Slade from the Italian two-hander called "Dialogue Between a Prostitute and One of Her Clients."

what has been going on in other countries."

The first is a two-hander from Italy called "Dialogue Between A Prostitute And One Of Her Clients" by Dacia Marani and translated by Gillian Hanna who came across it two years ago on an Arts Council-funded "fact-finding" trip when she saw it performed at the Madelena in Rome—Europe's only permanent women's theatre.

Funny but disturbingly ambiguous, the play is not a documentary about prostitution but an exploration of sexual relations and the balance of power between men and women.

The play is broken in two places when the characters ask the audience to discuss the issues raised, a debate which

Bold group is back

COLIN CHAMBERS, Star theatre critic, reviews some new plays by Monstrous Regiment after their long absence.

continues after the play has finished.

Time will tell how valuable this experiment turns out to be, though audiences have to be prepared to take part — something perhaps they should have more control over, otherwise the experience can become oppressive and self-defeating.

The questions discussed are controversial, particularly the implication that a prostitute does for money what a wife or lover does without payment — an extension of the "wages for housework" argument?

Sex is a difficult subject to talk about in public, especially with a mixed audience who have never met each other before.

However, Ann Mitchell directs Chris Bowler and John Slade with a sure touch, achieving a discreet understatement that is quite compelling.

Second in the season is "Shakespeare's Sister" by Theatre de L'Aquarium, also discovered by Gillian Hanna, on her way to Italy.

Taking off from a passage in Virginia Wolf's "A Room of One's Own" in which she imagines what might have hap-

pened to a sister of Shakespeare's, it uses visual rather than primarily verbal images to explore the world of four brides and two grandmothers (played by men) and includes interviews with women confined to domestic work.

At one point, it links with Monstrous Regiment's first show, "Scum," which was set in the Paris Commune, when it recalls the role of women in the French revolutionary tradition.

CANCER

Last is an American play, "Mourning Pictures," by poet Honor Moore — so big a success off-Broadway in 1974 that it transferred to Broadway itself.

Mourning pictures were popular in the early 19th century, especially in New England, and were stitched or painted by young women for bereaved friends. The scene was often the survivors at the gravestone.

The play centres on a woman dying of cancer and the way her daughter and family react in coming to terms through poems, songs and dialogue with mortality.

Whereas "Shakespeare's

Sister" will have a three-week run in London during December, "Mourning Pictures" will tour next year, as "Dialogue" is doing now, though to smaller venues, with dates fixed in Bristol, York and London (details from 01-253 2172).

The group, however, will be better able to function now from its new base in London's East End—a five-storey warehouse not yet fully in working order that used to be a storage space for builders' merchants.

Although cramped conditions will no longer be a problem, the economic one remains. Last year, the group received nearly £41,000 from the Arts Council but the treadmill of production took its toll.

The council also finds it harder to understand the ways of a co-operative, which takes all its decisions through an often lengthy process of full company meetings.

"But," says Gillian Hanna, "we are still committed, and politics still informs all our work, whatever the difficulties," — good news, indeed, for all those eagerly awaiting the next visit from these bold pioneers

WOMENS ISSUES

MONSTROUS REGIMENT FIGHTS BACK

With feminist theatre one of the chief targets of the Arts Council's staggering and unheralded cuts earlier this year, I was relieved to hear that the feminist theatre company, "Monstrous Regiment", had (for this year at least) been spared the axe. When I went along to talk to the company about their work they were busy rehearsing for "Mourning Pictures", the last in a cycle of British premieres of three foreign plays.

"Monstrous Regiment" are an ensemble of male and female actors who got together in 1975 with the intention of producing "feminist" work. As they themselves put it: "our work explores the experience of woman past and present, and we want to place that experience in the centre of the stage, instead of in the wings."

At the moment the company comprises eight performers, two technicians and an administrator. Though they are a mixed group, they make

a point of never using more male than female actors and one of the aims of the company is to provide a stage for the work of women writers. This present series of three plays from abroad is, in fact, a change in direction for Monstrous Regiment who, up till now, have always had plays specially commissioned for them.

"Mourning Pictures", the last play in the series, will be touring Britain in the Spring and will be playing at the Tricycle Theatre, London, 10th-28th March. Written by the American poet, Honor Moore, it is largely autobiographical and deals with a woman dying of cancer. "Everyone will say it's a play about death" said Gillian Hanna, one of the Monstrous Regiment performers, "yet its real concern is the effect the woman's dying has on her relationship with her daughter."

Also this Spring, Monstrous Regiment will be touring with the first play of the cycle, Dacia Maraini's *Dialogue Between a Prostitute and One of Her Clients*. Translated

from the original Italian by Gillian Hanna and introducing audience discussion as an essential part of the production, "Dialogue . . ." manages to be both provocative and poetic. As the title suggests, the play consists of a conversation between a prostitute and one of her clients. The client, a young student, is rapidly disheartened and frustrated by the prostitute's refusal to conform to his preconceived image of a prostitute, and the sexual fantasy he thinks he has bought crumbles away around him. "You're not a prostitute!" he accuses her, sulkily. "What did you expect?" she returns.

What *did* he expect? What did *we*, the audience, expect? is what the play is asking, and in doing so it not only examines the nature of prostitution, but challenges the whole nature of heterosexuality, with its stereotyped ideas of the "natural" male and female roles. The balance of power between men and women, both inside and outside prostitution, is questioned and



Chris Bowler and John Slade in
"Dialogue Between a Prostitute and One of Her Clients"

mocked. The student is paying for the prostitute, but exactly what is he buying? *Who* is controlling *who*? The play has a refreshingly optimistic slant, since it is the woman who emerges as "victor", with the man made vulnerable and

confused by her persistent refusal to fit into the roles he is always trying to find for her.

"Dialogue . . ." will be at Theatre Space, London, 4th-16th May — don't miss it!

S. WAINWRIGHT

MONSTROUS REGIMENT

The Regiment affirms its strengths TRIBUNE 20/2/81

I JOINED Monstrous Regiment for a rehearsal of their new play *Mourning Pictures* by American Honor Moore (on tour and at the Tricycle Theatre in March). Director Penny Cherns orchestrated us all in an hour of exercises before I watched the performers work on the deeply moving story of the relationship between mother and daughter as the mother is dying. The play is also about how the whole family (the mother raised nine children) cope with terminal illness and loss.

Honor Moore is a poet, the play is in verse and is autobiographical. Banish images of *Emergency Ward 10* and *General Hospital*. This is no soap opera or deathbed melodrama, but a very gentle, very subtle study of people in crisis.

Maggie, the mother, is a pragmatic person. Her large family grown, she has just started a new and independent life as a student of creative writing. And this despite the major setback of an automobile accident that had seriously damaged her liver and nearly killed her.

Maggie's response to the news of her cancer (liver and elsewhere) and the progression of her illness is matter of fact on one level, though never without passion – and determined. We all fear death, so much so that we try to live under the illusion it doesn't exist or won't happen (to us). Maggie is *not* courageous in the cliché sense, thank goodness, because that is often

so alienating and unreal. It is her acceptance and expression of her fear which is so moving, and bound to make death less fearsome for those who can share the experiences of this play.

The deepest insights come in the mother/daughter relationship – itself a subject of perennial and profound interest. As the play begins, Margaret, the daughter says, "A week ago I wrote her I love you. Not the perfunctory 'I love you', a new one. The real

Theatre

one." That on its own would choke most daughters (and all women are daughters).

Then comes the bad news from her mother – cancer, not long to live. The irony of the timing – mother "goes" just as daughter "returns" – is almost unbearable in this case, this play. Margaret has little time in which finally to establish her separate identity. It's a strong feminist play.

Mourning Pictures is the third play in Monstrous Regiment's current season. Recently they staged *Shakespeare's Sister* at the ICA (forgoing for once their touring policy in order to experiment with a new style of production). Based on a production by the Theatre de L'Aquarium, it was a stunningly theatrical expressionistic elaboration of the themes of Virginia

Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* – about the gross inhibitions and limitations imposed on women by the demands of domesticity: marriage, child-bearing and rearing.

The point was emphatically dramatised: if Shakespeare's sister had had Shakespeare's genius she would still have been scrubbing the floors and washing dirty nappies. With the appearance of a little girl at the end there was more than a hint that future generations weren't yet free (understatement). It was a strong feminist play.

The first play of the season was *Dialogue Between a Prostitute and Her Client* by Italian Dacia Maraini – a two-hander (that's audacious for a permanent company of seven) that was structured to include at least two breaks in the action for audience participation in discussion. The day I saw it last summer was a dress rehearsal with a small invited audience, including the prostitute (from PROS) who'd acted as adviser. It was an altogether electric experience and a strong feminist play.

When Monstrous Regiment formed in 1975, it sprang from the socialist theatre movement – in personnel and ideology. But it was, earlier than others, committed to feminist work – in content, in constitution and in collective methods. They wanted to "seek a feminist interpretation of social reality, and a change in relationships which prolong a subordinate role in women in society."

They would always have more women than men in the company. They wanted to be able to control their own work and shape new roles

on and off stage for women theatre workers. They wanted more and better parts for women. From the beginning, the socialist perspective – from SCUM through work with Caryl Churchill, Susan Todd, David Edgar, David Bradford, Michelene Wandor, Ann Mitchell – was pervasive, and they have described themselves always as a socialist/feminist company.

Like other Left theatre workers a couple of years ago, members of Monstrous Regiment felt the need to take stock, reevaluate past work, look at new directions and how to relate to the changing political climate. Enabled by subsidy, they stopped work completely to reassess.

This period of self-examination was premised on the possibility – even likelihood – of stopping work permanently, unless they could find a good reason to go on. Both artistically and politically their new season of plays is a clear and confident statement of their new direction: in shorthand, less socialist, more feminist.

According to Monstrous Regiment: "Now that we are confident again about what we are doing, why and how, we feel less the need to put politics so overtly. The politics are implicit in our work and working methods. But we feel freer to concentrate on the feminist issues, and also to explore and experiment with style."

If there is a new direction for Left or revolutionary theatre in the eighties, it is in the area of feminist theatre (as well as women working in the theatre). Aggressively and unashamedly.

Catherine Itzin

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BEHIND THE FRINGE

Two women's groups operating in the fringe theatre movement – Monstrous Regiment and Mrs Worthington's Daughters – talk to Michelene Wandor about their approach and objectives



Mary McCusker of Monstrous Regiment.

Both Monstrous Regiment and Mrs Worthington's Daughters share two aims: to bring the experiences of women into the centre of the stage, and to operate as mixed companies, with women in the majority. To date both groups have also shown a commitment to text-based theatre, in contrast to both the Women's Theatre Group, which has collectively devised many of its shows (and is the oldest, all-women theatre company still going in this country – started in 1974), or the newer women's theatre companies whose work derives from performance art. Monstrous Regiment started in 1975, and has done new plays by contemporary writers; Mrs Worthington's Daughters started in 1978, and has been committed to resurrecting plays by and about women from the past. First I spoke to Mary McCusker about Monstrous Regiment, then to Anne Engle and Anne Stacy of Mrs Worthington's Daughters.

How is the company organised?

Well, we're a collective. We'd always said there will be men in the company, but we wanted women to be in the majority. Quite early on we had this phrase – that we were a feminist group that was non-separatist.

Has that worked smoothly?

At first I found rehearsals far freer, because men were in a minority. I felt as a performer that I felt able to be more adventurous, and to be able to take discussions in any direction I wanted without feeling that I was just being anecdotal or irrelevant, but it has become more complicated. For example, I think in some ways we were very protective of the men, because whenever we interviewed men we were very keen to make sure that it wasn't as bad for them in a company with more women, as it had been for us in a company which was mainly men. It also works the other way – one of the men who's worked a lot with us has said that he finds it very difficult as a man saying what he thinks a predominantly female group

should be doing. I began to wish that we'd gone through the stage of having only women in the company, because I feel my attitude toward women and power is very complex, and I've felt that the women expected more of each other than they ever have of any of the men – you wanted each other to be perfect almost. Even if there's only been the one man in the group, and we've been interviewing people for the job, that male voice of authority still seems to have more weight attached to it, even if he is in the minority. We nearly did an all-women play in 1979; Caryl Churchill, who had written *Vinegar Tom* for us in 1976, was keen to write a play about famous, successful women, but that fell through. At that point some people left the group, and we had a lot of discussions about whether and how to continue. The three of us who'd started the group had come together out of dissatisfaction with the opportunities for women performers on the fringe – we decided that we did want to continue.

Was there a change in policy at that point?

Not completely. But we did decide to do a foreign season of plays, for which we already had scripts in our hands. We did *Shakespeare's Sister*, which had been devised by a French theatre group, *Dialogue Between a Prostitute and her Client*, by an Italian writer, and *Mourning Pictures* by an American woman. After that we decided to commission three writers, and just give them their head. It is very difficult, because sometimes writers feel they have to 'get it right' for the company, and that can act as a constraint for them, but on the other hand you don't want to get into a situation where you have committed yourself to work for a long time on something that doesn't say what you want, or maybe doesn't even have parts that people in the company will feel enthusiastic about playing.

How will the company work in the future?

We've had a revenue grant from the Arts Council since our second year of operation, and it is very important that that continues. At the moment we still have a core of three founder members, but since 1981 we've all taken time to go and work with other companies. That has been very stimulating for us, both as individuals and for the group. We would like to enlarge that core of people – so that it wouldn't always be the same nucleus keeping power, but that's quite difficult, because there simply isn't enough money to pay for all the time and commitment people have to put in to a collective touring company. But it would still be women in the majority – I think that there must be more resource centres for women in the arts, because although there are loads of men working on the fringe for little money, their prospects of access to funds and other work for the future are far greater than any of the women I know, and it seems to me that you see lots of women with energy and talent being worn down because women seem to be working harder for less money and you get tired quicker. Often you don't get valid criticism of the work for its own sake; your work is somehow examined as though it comes from a ghetto place, like you're coming from some strange planet.

What are your immediate plans?

The next two shows will be initiated from particular interests of the women. We're doing a show with music – music has always been central to our work – based on *Calamity Jane*, followed by a show about *Florence Nightingale*. I feel terribly responsible, that we must keep going.

* * *



Anne Engel of *Mrs Worthington's Daughters*.

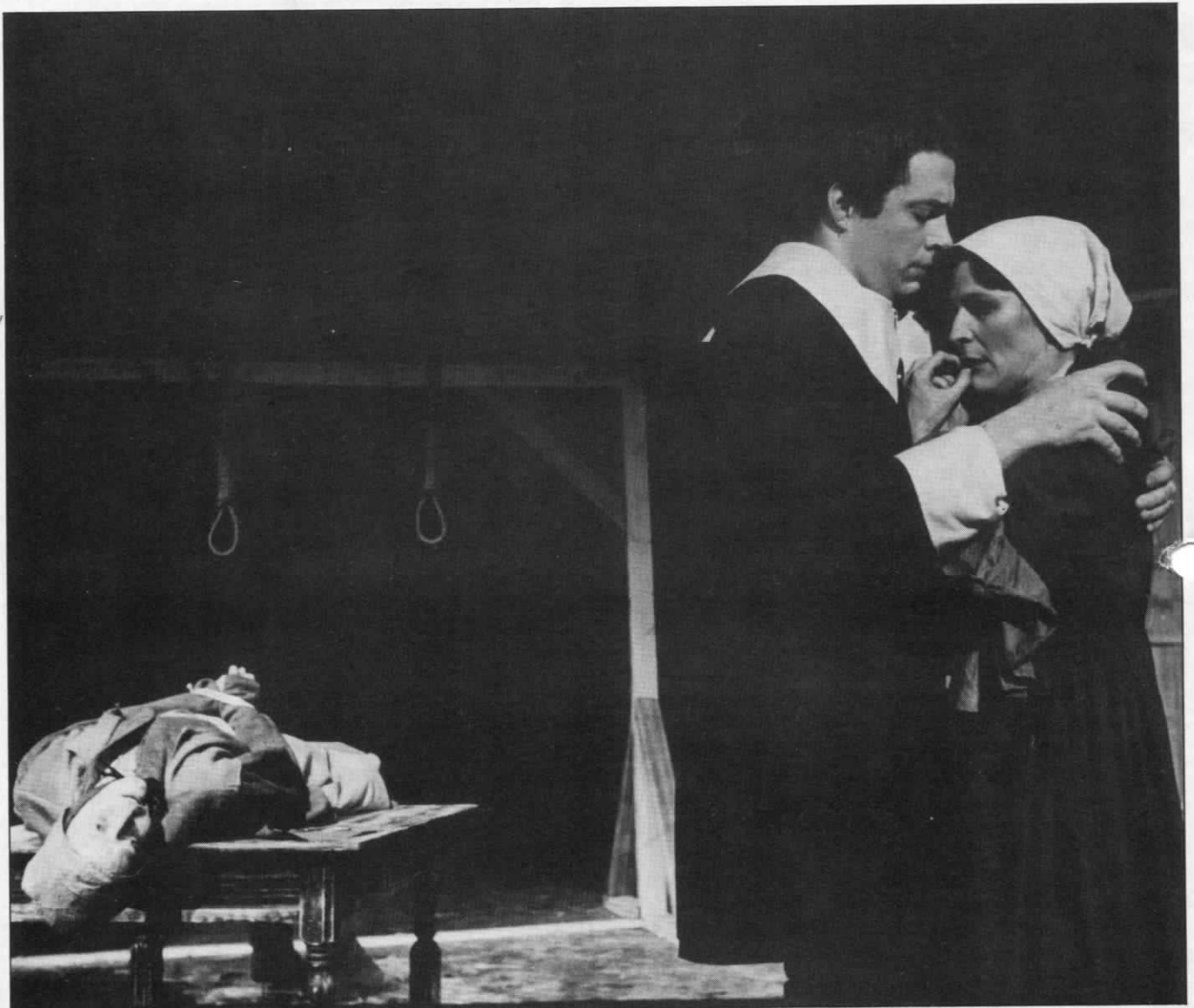
The basis of *Mrs Worthington's Daughters* was to resurrect plays from the past; has that been consistent?

Stacey: Yes except that last year we began to depart from that. We were touring in *Angels of War*, by Muriel Box, about women in World War II, and two men came on tour with us, and began writing some funny sketches about being on tour with a feminist company. We knew about the month of women's work in *Women Live*, in May 1982, and we suggested that they write a soap opera around the theme of a feminist touring company. So that was a departure.

Anne: So that made us decide very positively that we didn't want to do another well-made play of the late nineteenth, or early twentieth century – we'd shown that there were very competent women playwrights who were the equivalents of the male writers of their time. Also, it is difficult finding material that steps out of its period enough to remain interesting to a modern audience.

Stacey: Also, we're an actors' company, and one of the things that excited us about doing historical material was the chance to do parts that weren't available to us elsewhere, and actually now we want to stretch more as performers.

So what did you get from doing the soap opera that was new?



Monstrous Regiment's Vinegar Tom with Sue Todd, Roger Allam and Mary McCusker (on table).

Stacey: Fans.

Anne: The form was very exciting. We did live advertisements, we did episodes, and it was terribly complicated, involving no money and a huge cast.

How have you been funded?

Stacey: We've never had a revenue grant – we've applied for project grants only, and that's been a policy from the start. We'd all been in fulltime companies, and known the good and bad of that and we wanted to be a company where we could put things on because we really wanted to.

Anne: None of that strain of churning out material because you have to match up your number of Arts Council gigs, and it makes the process of working even more luxurious, because we know that when we come together to work it is really because we want to.

Stacey: Of course there are constraints, because it's always so uncertain. I think also our structure gives us a chance to work well with freelance designers and directors, because we're very clear that we're a management of four people (three woman and a man), but that when we're rehearsing a show and out on the road, we can also have a democratic structure with the people we hire. I think people enjoy working like that.

Anne: It's difficult, because when you're on a project

grant, there's still a huge amount of unpaid planning and administration work which we have to do the rest of the year.

What are your future plans?

Stacey: I think we definitely gained as a company by doing plays that already existed as scripts – commissioning writers to produce contemporary material is a terribly difficult thing. But we still see ourselves very much as having a historical preoccupation, with women's history and women's theatre history. We are not intending to do a play about the cuts, for example.

Anne: But we do want to change our own contribution – so we're hoping to do a combination of the best of both. We're planning two projects, one of which is a commissioned piece, a totally irreverent re-examination of Greek myths, appropriating the Greek goddesses as modern stereotypes, to which they lend themselves beautifully. Mythology is a cultural treasure chest, and we're going to use it in our own way. □

REFERENCE

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Monstrous Regiment encouraging the fresh talent – among women

MICHAEL LEECH reports

WITH SO many of our small theatre companies in peril it's good to see that Monstrous Regiment (the title comes from a blast from John Knox) still has a grip or is it just a toehold.

Currently the company is presenting "Enslaved by Dreams" and "Calamity", which is about to move to Rome for a women's festival.

The company started life about nine years ago, and some of the original members are still associated with the group. I talked to two, Gillian Hanna who plays Calamity Jane, and Mary McCusker who is Madame Moustache, in the exploration of the adventures of the 19th century Jane.

The theatre group isn't totally women but it is policy to encourage new talent among women, particularly playwrights – and both Hanna and McCusker wish they could produce more than they do.

How do they choose new plays? "Normally we work together to decide which ones we'll use – though having said that I have to say that 'Enslaved by Dreams' came about in an unorthodox fashion for us. One of the group, Chris Bowler, wanted to devise it and direct it which meant that we all had to agree that she should take the risk and develop her subject – which is Florence Nightingale and the little-known years of her life after return from the Crimea", explained McCusker.

"Usually it is a process whereby a nucleus of the group – currently about seven of us – throw ideas around for shows about a year ahead. Gilly thought she'd like to see something based on the letters of Calamity Jane, and since we

don't normally write them ourselves we asked Bryony Lavery to do the script. She took it over and we didn't hear anything else until she brought back a first draft. It normally works well this way – though sometimes writers do come to us with their own ideas", said McCusker.

This is the first time they've had two separate companies doing plays and at the same time too. "They are smaller cast pieces (gone are the days when we could afford more than three or four people in a cast!) and it means that with few people we can get better commitments for longer touring – we've had two productions on before, but they've been cross-cast; this way the two current shows can go separate ways," said Hanna.



● TAMSIN HEATLEY, CELIA GORE BOOTH and SALLY CRANFIELD in Monstrous Regiment's "Enslaved by Dreams".

there's a limit as to how much you can revive a given show."

"It's made more problematic because of inflation," puts in Hanna. "It has in effect cut our money over the years. When we started we were 11 people who worked 52 weeks in the year and we were very much more flexible in terms of a repertoire system. For example we toured our first show for nine weeks – then we rehearsed a Caryl Churchill show. Then for four or five months we toured the two of them together so that we could do whichever show people wanted and that was in many respects an ideal way of working.

"We at that stage intended to build up a rep and the idea was to have four or five shows on the stocks with the same actors – but that's become too expensive now because at the moment we can only afford to pay one person to work full time. That's our administrator, the rest of us have to come and go.

"This makes a rep system impossible and it makes continuity of operation difficult. For example last year I spent several months working in Liverpool and that meant we could only have policy meetings on my free day – Sundays. Which made it hard for other members of the company, and on tour Sunday is often the day off and people don't feel like having a meeting then. Economics have forced us to make cutbacks that cause real difficulties."

Not paid

Presumably there are times when the members aren't getting paid at all?

"Yes, that's true," answers McCusker. "We have to say sometimes 'right, we need to get this done' and we work for three or four weeks in the office

without pay. We all feel that what we are doing is more and more important – it's just that it becomes more difficult to make it possible."

Both agree that money is needed – but despite the 1 per cent cutback in their AC grant to £62,000 they don't intend to give up. "That may sound a lot, but the logistics make it tight and our budget due in April cuts every corner possible. There are so many unknowns too. Our contingency figures are laughable – and we just hope that we won't hit a mishap that spells disaster. It hits us hard when commissioning – two a year just isn't enough. We just wish we could do more, and being held back can be frustrating and a loss to all."

Demand

Do they try to keep plays in rep or do they die when the run is over?

"We have brought back 'Calamity' because of demand – but it's difficult to ask a long term commitment of actors because we don't pay very much, although it's Equity minimum – about £125 per week plus allowances," answers McCusker. "Also we don't want to let plays get stale. It's becoming more difficult in terms of bookings around the country – it's hard to get together a run of six or eight weeks and requests come in for all sorts of dates and times throughout the year. So every time we bring something back there are a lot of things to consider – the Arts Council funds us to do new work so

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Charity number 274577

"The stage"
15 March 1984

Pioneer women's theatre, which is monstrously good

ON TWO SIDES the traffic roars down Commercial Street and Bishopsgate; on the other, Folgate Street and Middlesex Street lead to Petticoat Lane Market.

Caged song-birds twitter outside the elegantly rebuilt tenement dwellings.

Just the other side of Aldgate Pump is Cable Street. This is the heartland of working-class London.

Monstrous Regiment, appropriately for a pioneer Socialist women's theatre group, have their headquarters here in a disused warehouse.

They are already past their tenth anniversary of existence and coming up in 1986 for the tenth anniversary of their first production.

They are not quite the oldest of their kind, the Women's Theatre Group being a year or two older.

Oddly enough both groups are presenting new shows this week: Monstrous Regiment at the Drill Hall with Origin of the Species, a new look from the female point of view at human history from the Big

Star theatre critic TOM VAUGHAN talks to members of the Socialist women's theatre group Monstrous Regiment and finds out about their latest work and aspirations.

Bang onwards; and the Women's Theatre Group are doing Anywhere to Anywhere, a play about the women pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary, who delivered warplanes from the factories and repair shops to the RAF during the war.

This is at the Albany Empire and will also open on March 20 before going on tour.

Origin of the Species is, I was told, a love story and at the same time a re-examination of the development of humankind as it has been seen by male philosophers, psychologists and anthropologists, such as Plato, Descartes, Freud and Darwin.

Research revealed the following gem, written in 1879 by a leading French social psychologist, called Gustav le Bon:

"All psychologists who have studied the intelligence of women recognise today that they represent the most inferior

forms of human evolution, and that they are closer to children and savages than adult civilised man. They excel in fickleness, inconsistency, absence of thought and logic and incapacity to reason. . . ."

I spoke to the team responsible for the production: Nona Sheppard, the director, Bryony Lavery the writer and Gillian Hanna who is half the cast (Mary McCusker the other half was laid up with the "dreaded Lurgi").

Gillian and Mary are founder-members of Monstrous Regiment.

Nona and Bryony who describe themselves as "semi-permanent freelancers" work with Monstrous from time to time—for instance in Calamity, a study of Wild-West women which I saw and much enjoyed at the Tricycle theatre last year.

From the work of theirs I have seen, I would place this group and this writer and director among the very top few practising the craft of theatre in Britain today.

And of the remainder of that few most are certainly also women — Jules Wright, Pam Brighton, Caryl Churchill, and Claire Luckham, just for starters.

Weariness

But male chauvinism in the august person of Sir Peter Hall can still have the chutzpah to select five directors for his new-look National Theatre set-up — and they are all men!

Gillian confessed to some weariness over her long fight for "candle-ends of money" to maintain the group's existence; instead of being able to pursue whole-heartedly its original aim of seeking to develop a specific women's approach to the theatre.

Bryony was more optimistic and indeed when one sees the number and standards of the groups around now, like Scarlet

afford plays with casts larger than four.

When they were founded there were eleven members of the co-operative and their first production had a cast of nine.

That shows graphically how the value of their grant has been eroded by inflation.

All three agreed that, for all the exciting theatre produced by fringe companies on a shoe-string and in tiny venues, real theatre, the kind of theatre the big public wants to go to, is big theatre.

Nona described a Belt and Braces production of a mining play, put on in the Gulbenkian Theatre at the University of Kent, and its enthusiastic reception by audiences of Kent miners brought to the theatre by coach.

Committed

The story of Peter Cox's recent Garden of England is very similar. "Only the best is good enough for the working class" remains a fundamental principle for all committed cultural workers.

They support the Women's Playhouse Trust in its campaign to acquire a big West End theatre to be run by women.

They equally support (in spite of many artistic reservations) Peter Hall and the 60-odd subsidised companies in their courageous and principled stand against the Arts Council under its present Thatcherite leadership.

For the future? In the summer they are undertaking a combined workshop project with the Cockpit Youth Theatre.

And, more problematic, because of the extensive technorama it will involve, a play about the 15th century Italian woman painter Artemisia Gentileschi, nearly all of whose paintings were attributed to her more famous father Orazio.

Her masterpiece (if I may use the word), a bloodstained and violent painting of "Judith with the head of Holofernes," is believed to have reference to her own experience.

CENTRAL HALL
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29 AND 30
MARCH 1985

MIGRANT ACTION GROUP PRESENTS

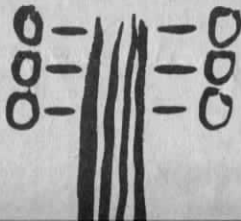
MIGRANT LONDON FESTIVAL

FRIDAY 29 MARCH
at 7pm

FEATURING
QUILAPAYON

**SHIVAN
and MELIKE**

Our Special Guest



Saturday 30 MARCH
from 1 to 10pm

FEATURING

BHANGRA (PUNJABI)
DANCE GROUP
COLOMBIA FOLK
DANCE GROUP
KURDISH DANCE

FREE
ADMISSION

the Drill Hall with Origin of the Species, a new look from the female point of view at human history from the Big "All psychologists who have studied the intelligence of women recognise today that they represent the most inferior

CENTRAL HALL
STOREY'S GATE
LONDON SW1
29 **AND** 30
MARCH 1985

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ADMISSION

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QUILAPAYUN

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Our Songs are Sisters

THE AFRICAN DAWN

BARRIO LATINO



Saturday 30 MARCH
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BHANGRA (PUNJABI)
DANCE GROUP

COLOMBIA FOLK
DANCE GROUP

KURDISH DANCE
GROUP

TARA THEATRE

SHIKISHA

PULA ARTS KOMUNE

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saw and much enjoyed at the Tricycle theatre last year.

From the work of theirs I have seen, I would place this group and this writer and director among the very top few practising the craft of theatre in Britain today.

And of the remainder of that few most are certainly also women — Jules Wright, Pam Brighton, Caryl Churchill, and Claire Luckham, just for starters.

Weariness

But male chauvinism in the august person of Sir Peter Hall can still have the chutzpah to select five directors for his new-look National Theatre set-up — and they are all men!

Gillian confessed to some weariness over her long fight for "candle-ends of money" to maintain the group's existence; instead of being able to pursue whole-heartedly its original aim of seeking to develop a specific women's approach to the theatre.

Bryony was more optimistic and indeed when one sees the number and standards of the groups around now, like Scarlet Harlets, Sensible Footwear, Hard Corps and others, one realises the debt they all owe to Monstrous Regiment's pioneering work and some idea of what they have achieved.

"A lot of people think we were an offshoot of the Women's Theatre Group," Gillian told me.

"Not so. We started quite independently as primarily a touring theatre.

"Are we secure now? Only till 1986. Like every group which depends on Arts Council support we can only plan a year ahead."

Origin of the Species is a two-hander and in general Monstrous Regiment cannot now

good enough for the working class" remains a fundamental principle for all committed cultural workers.

They support the Women's Playhouse Trust in its campaign to acquire a big West End theatre to be run by women.

They equally support (in spite of many artistic reservations) Peter Hall and the 60-odd subsidised companies in their courageous and principled stand against the Arts Council under its present Thatcherite leadership.

For the future? In the summer they are undertaking a combined workshop project with the Cockpit Youth Theatre.

And, more problematic, because of the extensive technorama it will involve, a play about the 15th century Italian woman painter Artemisia Gentileschi, nearly all of whose paintings were attributed to her more famous father Orazio.

Her masterpiece (if I may use the world), a bloodstained and violent painting of "Judith with the head of Holofernes," is believed to have reference to her own experience.

She was raped by her prospective teacher, who was a friend of her father's, and at his trial she was tortured to determine whether she was telling the truth!

In the meantime I eagerly await Origin of the Species, and salute the brave and brilliantly talented group of creative artists responsible for putting it on.

I will leave them with the last word: "What would satisfy us? Oh, I think a nice big theatre and about £2 million a year."

And that isn't joking. It would not be at all out of the way in a Socialist country; nor for that matter in quite a few capitalist ones.