

SPARE
RIB
November
1980.

shouldn't be capable of intelligent conversation either; the fantasy he'd hoped for is going all wrong. "I'm taking, you're being taken" he says, presumably hoping that the macho tone of his words will help speed up the transition from limp to erect. "No", replies the prostitute "you're buying, I'm selling. In fact, as you're the only one who'll get any pleasure out of this, you're really buying yourself, through me".

"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.

Despite the rawness of the subject matter, the play itself is extremely poetic, easily making the transition from naturalistic dialogue to fantasy monologue. Using a skilful and very relaxed translation by Monstrous Regiment's Gillian Hanna, the actors, Chris Bowler and John Slade, give alert and intelligent performances. Directed by Ann Mitchell, they manage to scan contradiction, such as when the prostitute momentarily feels drawn to the client's offer to "be your man, give you back the tenderness you've lost", rather than just go for the obvious and solely concentrate on the antagonisms between man and woman. Informed by a dry, ironic wit, the surprise punch-line ending, in particular, ensures that the woman is shown as

◀ victor rather than victim.
Eileen Fairweather

**DIALOGUE BETWEEN
A PROSTITUTE AND
ONE OF HER CLIENTS**

Presented by Monstrous
Regiment

When first performed in Italy Dacia Maraini's *Dialogue Between a Prostitute and one of her Clients* provoked audience riots. Seeing Monstrous Regiment's production of this play — the start of their season of British premieres of feminist plays from abroad — it was easy to see why; for in it not only is prostitution put under the microscope, but the power imbalance in marriage and heterosexual relations generally. Anyone going to this show for a quick, voyeuristic peek at this 'out of bounds' area of sex will surely end up questioning its 'sugar 'n' spice, church-sanctified aspects too.

The action (quite definitely 'so to speak' for in that favourite police phrase, penetration does not occur) takes place in the bedroom of a city street walker. For whatever reason she, on this particular afternoon, can't be bothered to play placatory or seductive games. Like most prostitutes she is a mother and, as she tidies away the nappies and groceries she has purchased shortly before the young student offered to purchase her, the excitement drains from his face. Prostitutes can't possibly have babies . . . 'tarts', he believes



NIGEL WRIGHT

Monstrous Regiment asks "What are men looking for when they go to a prostitute?"

MONSTROUS REGIMENT

THE SCOTSMAN - MAY 30, 1981

THE ARTS

Subtle shifts

MONSTROUS Regiment's presentation of *Dialogue between a Prostitute and one of her Clients* is not for those who want a cosy evening's entertainment leaving their prejudices undisturbed.

Dialogue, which is being presented at Edinburgh's Theatre Workshop, is a subtle and penetrating short play, adapted by the company from an Italian original. It uses the simple clear-cut lines of the transaction between a prostitute and her client as a kind of scalpel with which to expose the essential elements of all relationships between the sexes — the complex web of sexual desire, emotional need and financial dependence which both binds us together and holds us apart.

The performance shows why Monstrous Regiment have a particularly high reputation among feminist theatre groups. Chris Bowler and John Slade trace the play's subtle shifts of emotional balance with immense sensitivity. In itself, *Dialogue* would have made a fine and thought-provoking evening, but, in this production, the action is twice interrupted so that the audience can join in a discussion of what they have seen and questions arising from it. Strangely enough, this works beautifully. Joyce McMillan

Monstrous Regiment Limited
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Registered in England number 1332483
Registered Office: 49 South Molton Street London W1Y 1HE
Charity number 274517
Directors: Ms C Bowler, Ms J Cupido, Mr G Garside
Ms G L Hanna, Ms M McCusker, Mr J Slade

**"Dialogue Between a Prostitute
and One of Her Clients": 60 The
Pleasance**

This is a translation from the Italian of Dacia Maraini, and in many ways it is very Italian indeed. It is preoccupied with the cult of the Virgin, for instance, and the particular relationship between Italian mothers and their sons. At the same time, it explores the universal questions that arise between men and women everywhere. It does this with frankness, sensitivity and lyricism, but without startling originality. It is a self-declared piece of feminist writing and caused something of a sensation in Italy. Here it does not seem particularly propagandist or provocative, but perhaps our ideas on these matters are less rigid.

The play pauses twice for discussions with the audience. "English audiences," the programme remarks with questionable relevance, have shown that they are "hard to stop once they get going." So evidently are they in Edinburgh. Since the interruptions come early in the play, the discussion was not very closely related to it but it was certainly fluent and spontaneous. If you want to air your views on sex, marriage or society in general, here is your chance.

P. H. Scott

Theatre Space 48 William IV St,
WC2 (836 2035) Charing Cross tube.
To Sat:
'Dialogue Between a Prostitute
and One of Her Clients' by Dacia
Maraini, translated by Gillian Hanna.
Presented by Monstrous Regiment.
Compelling play about a prostitute
and her client which intersperses
conventional text with audience
debate. Worth seeing.
8.00, £1.25 + M'ship.

MONSTROUS REGIMENT

THE STAGE and TELEVISION

Reviews

MONSTROUS REGIMENT

Prostitute and Client

I ALWAYS SUSPECTED that theatre audiences, notably the sort one might categorise as "committed", much prefer their own text and voices to those provided onstage. The British premiere of an Italian feminist play, Dacia Maraini's script being translated by Gillian Hanna, would appear to prove the point.

At three places in the script, the actors swing out of character to discuss the ideas raised with their audience, with the predictable result that one pays less attention to the play than to what is propounded in it.

Which of course might very well be just what everyone intended, but it makes for a tedious bit of theatre if you are not sold on the notion that most heterosexual relationships are founded on misconceptions and that men are to blame for prostitution.

It is always difficult to judge a work in translation if you do not know either the original or another version in your own language but this one came over as woodenly dialogued for the most part and with the characters two-dimensional because they are such stereotypes.

Ann Mitchell's direction also cannot really be judged because of the fragmented nature of the piece. Chris Bowler plays the woman and John Slade is her client, a younger man with some weird "hang-ups" to exorcise. The programme mentions that it is not a documentary piece. True, but it is a debate which might have more valid drama about it if more than one viewpoint were permitted.

It seems ironical that a few yards down the Strand, Dyer's "Rattle of a Simple Man" (also a two-hander for a prostitute and a client) is about to be revived. No doubt that is just as unauthentic, but it is likely to prove better theatre.

Ann Morley-Priestman

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Datum 16 JUNI 1981

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BRABANTS DAGBLAD
Den Bosch

Engels vormingstoneel met groepsgesprek

Dialogoog tussen 'n hoer en een van haar klanten

Stuk: Dialogue between a prostitute and one of her clients. Schrijfster: Dacia Maraini. Groep: Monstrous Regiment. Regie: Ann Mitchell. Uitvoerenden: Chris Bowler en John Slade. Nederlandse première: De Melkweg, Amsterdam, 11 juni 1981.

(Door Arnold Verplancke)

Een provocerend stuk, dat sensatie heeft verwekt in Rome en tot protestacties van boze mannen heeft geleid in Genua. Zo omschrijft de Engelse groep Monstrous Regiment in haar programma het stuk „Dialogoog tussen een prostituée en een van haar klanten” van de Italiaanse schrijfster Dacia Maraini. De groep onderbreekt het korte stuk meermalen voor een „open dialoog” met het publiek. In Engeland sloeg dat zeer aan, aldus nogmaals het programmablad: de bezoekers hielden

niet meer op als ze eenmaal aan de gang waren.

Bij de Nederlandse première in Amsterdam geen sensatie en geen opzienbarende gesprekken. Het overwegend jonge publiek reageerde nogal laconiek op de voorstelling van de Engelse groep, die deed denken aan een groepsgesprek in een vormingscentrum, aan de hand van voorbeelden, gespeeld door een vormingstoneelgroep.

Het stuk gaat niet alleen over prostitutie, maar meer over de relatie tussen vrouwen en mannen in het algemeen. Een introverte, beetje verknipte jongeman komt op bezoek bij een zeer zelfbewuste, feministische prostituée. Tussen hen ontstaan gesprekjes die telkens de verschillende verwachtingspatronen en leefwerelden van mannen en vrouwen blootleggen. De jongeman wil een sfeertje bouwen en spelletjes spelen waarin zij moet doen alsof haar man zo kan thuiskomen of dat ze nog maagd is. Zij weigert, wijst hem op de

echte situatie en op de zakelijke relatie tussen hen. De jongeman blijkt vroeger zowel met jongens als met Mariabeelden erotische spelletjes te hebben gedaan en nu aan een duidelijk moedercomplex te lijden. Aan het eind probeert hij de vrouw aan zich te binden, via een huwelijk of zakelijk. Zij wijst dat af. Voor haar heeft de vrouw maar één vrijheid in het leven: de keuze of ze zich publiek of privé verkoopt.

De Engelse acteur en actrice spelen de twee types zeer zorgvuldig en natuurlijk. In de discussies met het publiek hebben ze echter iets kunstmatigs. Ze willen van het publiek weten of het ook wel eens is bekeken als koopwaar en of het bij de man het terugverlangen naar de moeder herkent. In Amsterdam leidde dat niet tot ontvullende reacties maar meer tot wat afstandelijk gepsychologiseer. Deze Engelstalige voorstelling is 18 en 19 juni te zien in De Effenaar te Eindhoven.

Branbants Dagblad Den Bosh
by Arnold Verplancke

Dialogue between a Prostitute and one of her Clients

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

A provocative play that caused a sensation in Rome and protests from angry men in Genoa. This is how the English group Monstrous Regiment describes the theatre piece "Dialogue between a Prostitute and one of her clients" by the Italian writer Dacia Maraini. The group stops the actual performance several times for an "open dialogue" with the audience.

to

In England, again according/the programme it really hit home, there was no stopping the audience once the discussion got going. None of this at the Dutch première in Amsterdam. The reaction of the mostly young audience was rather lukewarm.

The group's performance reminded one of those rather didactic group discussions that are being held in adult education centres.

The play is not just about prostitution, but more about the relationship between men and women in general. An introverted rather confused young man makes a visit to a very self confident feminist prostitute. The conversation between the two reveals the difference between what they both expect from life.

The young man wants to create an atmosphere in which they can play games; he wants her to act as if her husband could come home any minute; or act as if she's still a virgin, she refuses and points out that their relationship is purely business. It turns out that as a child, he played erotic games with other boys, and Madonna statues and that now he is suffering from a Mother complex.

Towards the end of the play he tries to bind her to him through both a marriage and a business proposal.

She refuses both. For her there is only one form of freedom in life, the choice between selling herself publicly or privately.

The English actress and actor play the two characters with great care and naturalness. But during the discussions they seem more artificial. They ask the audience whether they've ever experienced being "for sale", and whether men recognise feeling of longing for their mother when looking at prostitutes. This did not lead to revealing reactions in Amsterdam, just some aloof psycho-babble.

Monstrous Regiment brengt Engels feministisch toneel

Een vrouw uit het vak zag een stuk over prostitutie

Twee leden van de Engelse feministische theatergroep Monstrous Regiment toerden in Nederland met een stuk van de Italiaanse feministe Dacia Maraini. Het stuk was oorspronkelijk een dialoog tussen een prostituee en een zeer negatief getekende klant. Om de man meer invoelbaar te maken zijn de zwartste trekjes uit zijn tekst verwijderd in de bewerking die de Engelse groep speelt. In het stuk zijn publieksdiscussies ingebouwd, wat niet altijd even glad verloopt, zeker niet in het begin, omdat men dan z'n mond moet opendoen over een taboe-onderwerp in een taal die niet iedereen dagelijks spreekt: de voertaal van dit vormingstoneel is Engels. De hier volgende recensie is van een vrouw die het uitgebeelde vak beheerst.

door VIOLET

Monstrous Regiment was in de Melkweg in Amsterdam en de Effenaar in Eindhoven en speelde *Dialoog tussen een prostituee en een van haar cliënten* van Dacia Maraini. De vrouw wordt gespeeld door Chris Bowler en de man door John Slade. Monstrous Regiment is een feministische groep uit Londen, die alweer enige jaren bestaat en waarvan de meerderheid uit vrouwen bestaat; er zijn nu drie mannen lid van de groep en vier vrouwen. Hun naam ontleent ze aan de titel van een pamflet "Het gruwelijk heil der vrouwelijke strijders" of iets in



Chris Bowler en John Slade van Monstrous Regiment

Na Italië is het stuk nog in veel meer Europese landen gespeeld en Monstrous Regiment speelt het nu een klein jaar, zij het niet onafgebroken. Zelf vinden ze dat drie dagen achter elkaar wel het maximum is, om dat 't zo zwaar is. In feite is maar de helft van het stuk geschreven met een bestaande tekst. Na de eerste episode stopt men met spelen, gaat op 't bed zitten en vraagt de zaal: zo, wie van jullie heeft wel eens de ervaring gehad voor een hoer te worden aangezien? En dat is een vraag waar de zaal dan even tegenaan hikst, en dan aarzelend met antwoorden komt. Na enige discussie tussen de spelers en het publiek spelen ze de volgende episode, dan opnieuw een discussiepaauze in 't stuk en daarna nog een episode. De monologen van de vrouw over hoe ze tegenover haar klant staat vond ik poëtisch en zeer introspectief. De klant zegt in zijn rol echt alle hypocriete clichés die over hoeren bestaan, van regelrechte ontkenning tot doodgewoon grof gescheld. Het publiek heeft bepaald moeite met het stuk, zeker om er inhoudelijk op in te gaan; de discussies neigen er heel erg toe, zeker als de opmerkingen van mannen afkomstig zijn, om zeer op zijpaden terecht te komen. Vrouwen gaan meer inhoudelijk op het stuk in.

Tot mijn vreugde ontmoette ik er een collega en nog meer tot mijn vreugde deelden we een aantal inzichten, en de tweede avond hebben we naast elkaar gezeten 't stuk nogmaals gezien, en we hadden nogal een leidend aandeel in de discussie - hoe kan 't anders.

De spelers hadden in Engeland contact gehad met PROS, een van de hoerenorganisaties daar. Ik geloof dat ze tamelijk tevreden waren over de respons die ze kregen. Eigenlijk was ik helemaal niet verbaasd dat

DWL 1st July 1981

MONSTROUS REGIMENT BRINGS ENGLISH FEMINIST THEATRE

A Woman in the business saw a play about prostitution....by Violet

Two members of the English feminist theatre group- Monstrous Regiment have toured Holland with a play by the Italian feminist Dacia Maraini. The play was originally a dialogue between a prostitute and a very negatively written character, her customer. The English group has omitted the darkest side of the customer to make him a more acceptable figure. Built into the play are discussions with the public, which don't always run smoothly, especially at first, mainly because the discussion about this taboo subject is in English. The following review is by a woman 'in the business':

Monstrous Regiment have been at the Melkweg and the Effenaar in Eindhoven performing 'prostitute and her client' by Dacia Maraini. The woman is played by Chris Bowler and the man by John Slade. Monstrous Regiment is a feminist group from London, which has been around for a few years now; the group consists of 4 women and 3 men. They owe their name to a line from a pamphlet by John Knox.

This play "Dialogue..." is by Dacia Maraini, an Italian Feminist poet, playwright and journalist. It was first performed at Madalena, the only women's theatre (building) in Europe. It got a great deal of publicity, filled many halls and theatres where heated arguments took place outside with angry men who didn't agree with the play. Well some men can't cope when a mirror is held up to them, to show up their behaviour and motives. Imagine having to think about themselves! Not an easy task when you're not used to it.

Since Italy the play has been performed all over Europe and Monstrous Regiment has been touring it for about a year. The actors usually play no more than three days in a row, as it's a heavy show to do. Only half the show consists of written text - after the first part the players sit down on the bed and ask the audience if any of them has ever been looked upon as a prostitute. At first the audience is somewhat embarrassed, and then, hesitantly, the replies come.

After this discussion between actors and audience, there's another bit of theatre, another discussion and finally more 'real' theatre.

The woman's monologue I found very poetic and introspective. The customer really brings out all the hypocritical cliches about whores, from total denial of their existence to calling them names.

The audience find it difficult to cope with the play - especially during the discussions - when men join in the discussions always seem to sidetrack. Women seem to go straight into the discussions, they're more interested in the real subject.

I met a colleague of mine there and we shared several opinions about the subject and the second night we went and sat together and sort of led the discussion - not surprising really.

The actors were in contact with PROS in England, I believe they were quite pleased with the response. I really wasn't that surprised to see a play about prostitution. I was kind

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expecting it. And what Dutch group would dare to undertake something like that?