

MONSTROUS REGIMENT

ICA Theatre

The Mall, W1 (930 3647) Charing Cross tube.
Day Pass 50p.

To Sat: **'Enslaved By Dreams'** by Jo Anderson, presented by Monstrous Regiment.

Monstrous Regiment presents a dramatised triptych of the life of Florence Nightingale, the Victorian reformer so inappropriately idealised as the lady with the lamp. Writer-director Chris Bowler cauterises this myth, creating an impressionistic scenario where three actresses play Nightingale, portraying the various aspects of her complex, near-neurotic personality. Sally Cranfield perfectly captures the young Nightingale, alternating high-flown ambitions and a desperate need to please; Tamsin Heatley plays the middle-aged reformer as an inspired, resolute marinet, while Celia Gore-Booth is the invalided older woman, vacillating between fits of bossy business and the nefarious demands of the hypochondriac. Sometimes Bowler's dual role enslaves her creative enterprise, so that the show revolves too much around the machinations of Nightingale's psyche; it could use a more imaginative historical perspective. However she orchestrates the performers with great wit and subtlety, counterpointing realistic 'chatty' scenes with surreal performance imagery. The interplay of these two modes can be awkward, but despite these flaws, the show is continually fascinating and well worth seeing. (Ann McFerran)

Time out - 5-10 March '84

Monstrous Regiment Limited
4 Elder Street London E1 6BT
Telephone: 01-247 2398

Registered in England number 1332483
Registered Office: 49 South Molton Street London W1Y 1HE
Charity number 274517

Directors: Ms C Bowler, Ms J Cusido, Mr G Garside
Ms G L Hanna, Ms M McCusker, Mr J Slade



Celia Gore-Booth in "Enslaved by Dreams"

Ode to Nightingale

Enslaved by Dreams.
 Monstrous Regiment, Institute for Contemporary Arts until March 10, then touring.

I thought *Enslaved by Dreams*, about Florence Nightingale, was going to be yet another one of those dramatized biographies in which the central character spouts great goblets of his or her writings with the occasional pause for a bit of stage narrative.

I'm happy to say that Monstrous Regiment proved me wrong. The play presents us with three Florences. One is young, excitable and unfulfilled, one older and almost self-destructive in her fight to win her Crimean war - against disease, that is, not against the Russians. The third is bedridden, hypochondriacal, yet still forceful in her campaign for health reform.

The play doesn't confer heroic status on Florence Nightingale. In fact, through the interplay of the three characters as sisters - a clever device which neatly sidesteps the problem of creaky narrative convention - we see Florence's obsessions, regrets and weaknesses exposed. Above all, she believed, women were too much victims of their imaginations and percep-

tions of themselves: "Dreaming, never accomplishing. Thus women live, too much ashamed of their dreams."

Florence's dreams were of national reform in the area of health and sanitation. Her nightmares were about the death and decay she'd witnessed in the Crimea. The play too is dream like - intriguing and disturbing in turn. The set, depicting Florence's bedroom, is full of anachronistic props - electric lights, ballpoint pens and computer stationery. Throughout the play there are dances - acrobatic ballets with teacups, stately waltzes, and at the end, an Indian whirling-dervish affair, all flying hair and ballooning skirts.

The performances in *Enslaved by Dreams* are sensitive and funny and Chris Bowler's script (with plenty of help from Florence Nightingale's notes and journals) is fresh and challenging. At the end we're left with a new perspective on a character from history who has always seemed rather two dimensional - a sort of saintly Queen Victoria clone. Monstrous Regiment's portrayal is refreshingly (if slightly disturbingly) different.

Nick Baker

For tour details after March 10, telephone 01-247 2398.

Enslaved by Dreams

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To Sat: **'Enslaved By Dreams'**

presented by Monstrous Regiment. Monstrous Regiment presents a dramatised triptych of the life of Florence Nightingale, the Victorian reformer so inappropriately idealised as the lady with the lamp. Writer-director Chris Bowler cauterises this myth, creating an impressionistic scenario where three actresses play Nightingale, portraying the various aspects of her complex, near-neurotic personality. Sally Cranfield perfectly captures the young Nightingale, alternating high-flown ambitions and a desperate need to please; Tamsin Heatley plays the middle-aged reformer as an inspired, resolute marinet, while Celia Gore-Booth is the invalidated older woman, vacillating between fits of bossy business and the nefarious demands of the hypochondriac. Sometimes Bowler's dual role enslaves her creative enterprise, so that the show revolves too much around the machinations of Nightingale's psyche; it could use a more imaginative historical perspective. However she orchestrates the performers with great wit and subtlety, counterpointing realistic 'chatty' scenes with surreal performance imagery. The interplay of these two modes can be awkward, but despite these flaws, the show is continually fascinating and well worth seeing. (Ann McFerran)

Tue-Sun 8pm. £3.25.

From Tue: **'Earthly Paradise'** devised and directed by Geoff Moore, presented by Moving Being.

Tue-Sun 8pm (Wed 14 PN 7pm) £3.25.

TIME OUT 8-14 MARCH 1984

MONSTROUS REGIMENT

■ 'Enslaved By Dreams' presented by
Monstrous Regiment (ICA)
The Victorian feminine ideal of 'the Lady with
the Lamp' has remained unchallenged as a
model of patient, selfless service. Crucially it
has served to oppress following generations of
women both in their unpaid work, and in their
paid labour as nurses. The 'enslaving dream'
is not only of the trapped woman but also of
the expectations placed upon women by their
families. Chris Bowler's script takes the single
life of Florence Nightingale and through three
performers simultaneously explores the
results of the containment of energy imposed,
by Nightingale herself, and the society in
which she lived. The result is a fruitfully jagged
portrait of the behaviour it provoked:
boredom and frustration in the young
dreamer; obsessive over-work in the period of
her recognition and great work in the Crimea;
finally a grasping at illness and invalidity in her
later years. Unfortunately this does not add
up to a fresh insight into either the lot of (Vic-
torian) women nor the character of Florence
Nightingale herself, largely because the idea
is only toyed with and neither in the writing
nor performances is it developed towards the
dynamic possibilities which clearly lurk within.
A promising idea served particularly well by
Gemma Jackson's atmospheric design, but
which seems less a complete work—more a
promising embryo. (Diana Simmonds)

City Limits. 24 Feb - 2 March '84

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MONSTROUS REGIMENT

26 Feb - Observer

and when this week



AND SO TO BED

On her return from the Crimea in 1857, Florence Nightingale took to her bed until her death 53 years later and became a tough authority on welfare matters. The women's theatre company, Monstrous Regiment, explore this lesser known half of her life in a new play, 'Enslaved By Dreams'. Three actresses each portray an aspect of the formidable Florence's character. It opens tomorrow at London's ICA.

the glass was cleaned.

World premiere by the Monstrous Regiment

THE privilege of seeing a professional theatre in this area is rare, to see a world premiere of its work even rarer.

It was with considerable interest, therefore, that I visited Sudbury's Quay Theatre last week, to see the latest presentation by Monstrous Regiment, a feminist group with an excellent reputation to maintain.

My interest was well rewarded. The subject of "Enslaved by Dreams" is Florence Nightingale, but what she has to say in this play, largely through her own words, affects all of us who have ever used the National Health Service. Topically, too, there is a wry reference to the morality of the British Raj in India.

Deviser/director Chris Bowler constructs a vivid contrast between the horrors of the Crimean war and the life a lady was expected to live in 19th Century England.

The three actresses who do this, Sally Cranfield, Tamsin Heatley and Celia Gore-Booth used the Quay's facilities to perfection, whether haranguing the audience in the auditorium, performing acrobatics across the stage or, literally, kicking the bucket.

Small details which gave this production a touch of class were

THE
ARTS
THIS
WEEK



-- Tamsin's pencil flicks and loving looks at her card index system, Celia's strangulated sentence as her back was massaged and Sally's complete control of her crinoline gown!

Whilst use was made of the actresses luxuriant hair and lithesome bodies, I found Karen Rabinovitz's choreography was over-indulgent in its circling movements.

Would that every amateur theatre group within travelling distance had witnessed Monstrous Regiment.

At this premiere performance, sound and lighting cues were impeccable and prompting was unheard of. The role was not even considered on the programme. The music too was "live" -- clear singing and unusual instrumental -- xylophone, mouth-organ and saw!

Pat Rudkin

Halstead Gazette and Advertiser, Friday, February 24, 1984

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Enslaved by Dreams/ICA

Michael Coveney

The worst show I have seen all year was Monstrous Regiment's Wild West *Calamity* in Kilburn, but the same company runs it a close second with this lumpen, intellectually arid and physically inept piece about Florence Nightingale. It is clear no one involved knows how to take a pulse, or can be bothered to explain to an audience who Sidney Herbert was, or can—and this is the astounding news—even work up any sort of animated response to the feminist heroism of the great lady beyond a routine snigger at her concern for the military in India.

The format is the same as in *Calamity*: three actresses in a fixed setting mumbling banalities. Chris Bowler, who has devised and directed the piece, dampens your spirit from the off. The three girls arrive in a dead march carrying candles.

Gemma Jackson's design is a cut-out room with beds and a writing table. The pretence is towards surrealism, but that notion is soon knocked on the head the moment anyone speaks. Steve Whitson's lighting also implies that the show was meant to be more experimental, perhaps along the lines of the same company's *Shakespeare's Sister* a few years ago. That show was by no means perfect, but the promise it contained appears to have led nowhere.

In blue, Sally Cranfield represents the young Victorian bust-



Alastair Muir

Sally Cranfield, Celia Gore-Booth and Tamsin Heatley

ing out of repressive corsets to a career in nursing. In grey, Tamsin Heatley is a prim caricature of the Crimean heroine, slopping out buckets and button-holing members of the audience with her notes on nursing. In cream, Celia Gore-Booth is the crotchety, bed-ridden old lady, bossing everyone around to the last. The trio execute some

laughably primitive choreography, tumbling over beds and combing each other's hair, that sort of thing and perform the odd Victorian parlour song. Somehow, the sight of Miss Gore-Booth playing "No Place like Home" on a saw will lodge in my memory as the imagistic nadir of the feminist theatre movement.

Fleeting references to the Barrack at Scutari or the catastrophic conditions endured by the soldiers are not allowed to interfere with the overall mood of incompetent miasma. It goes without saying that Monstrous Regiment has nothing of note to say about the nursing profession or the fate of contemporary Nightingales.

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Financial Times - Friday 2 March '89