Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

TOUR OPENED: EXMOUTH (ROLLE COLLEGE) Oct 24th 79
- PART OF SWA TOUR.

THE GUARDIAN Friday October 26 1979

EXMOUTH

Allen Saddler

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

AFTER YEARS of firing from the hip the feminist group, Monstrous Regiment, have opted for slugging it out with a champagne bottle. As Anita Loos herself remarked, "a girl with brains ought to do something else with them besides think." Written by Bryony Lavery and using the book as a starting off point, it has Mary McCusker following Marilyn Monroe as the honey-voiced blonde with very basic ideas about security, and Gillian Hanna as her very commercial friend Dorothy.

Anita Loos's glorious send-up of the gold-digger is over 45 years old and, although robbed of its sting by stage and film versions, does nail down this method of survival in a man's world as a humiliating alternative. The show argues that Lorelei's pursuit of tangible assets through hooking may be effective, but that any means to an end isn't much use in the struggle for equality. The script could have been sharper and maybe the production could do with a polish, and while the music is pleasant the lyrics are hardly sharp enough to cut diamonds; but the central idea to attack backsliding sisters at the root is clever, and an advance in subtlety for the group.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes makes its point strongly enough, and is also entertaining, sometimes inventive, and has two riotous performances from McCusker and Hanna. McCusker catches the wondering innocence of Lorelei and almost completely covers the hard bitten interior, and Hanna is a continuous delight as a frowsty floozie with a jeweller's eyepiece always at the ready. Gentlemen Prefer Blondes is at the College of Art Theatre, Plymouth, tonight and tomorrow and touring.

Musical satire on Roaring '20s is sizzler

THE Monstrous Regiment, a fringe theatre company assisted by the Arts Council, is appearing this week in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" at the Plymouth College of Art and Design, writes Harvey Crane.

The production is based very loosely on the novel by Anita Loos which caused a stir when it was published in 1925.

This version, a musical with the musicians taking speaking and singing roles, is an amusing satire on the roaring 20s.

The show pulls no punches with its two hookers out for business at the Grand Hotel where the bored gold-diggers Loreli, alias Mabel Minnow, and Dorothy have designs on Gus the Button King or at least on his presents from Tiffany's, and it is only when real love comes into the plot that the explosion occurs.

Angela Hopkins directs the cast which includes Paul Abrahams, Chris Bowler, Josefina Cupido, Gillian Hanna, Gabrielle Harding, Mary McCusker and John Slade.

This sizzling production is extremely well performed and worth seeing.

WESTERN EVENING HERALD, Saturday, October 27, 1979.

WESTERN DAILY PRESS, Thursday, November 1, 1979–

DRY WIT OF THE SORDID BLONDES

Bristol Arts Centre: Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.

LAST night's performance of Bryony Lavery's dramatised version of Anita Loos's novel was gratifyingly more entertaining than controversial.

The democratic practice of Monstrous Regiment, a small feminist touring theatre, means individual performances are not acknowledged in the programme.

However, the two ladies (girls is out nowadays apparently) playing the parts of Lorelei and Dorothy, the two American 1920s hookers with hearts of cash, were splendid.

The between-the-wars social attitudes to women and the sordid background of the Great Depression were just lightly sketched in.

Contrived

What came over was hardly complimentary to men, the controllers of history, but contrived to laugh also at women's naivety in their acceptance of inferior roles as well as at their cunning in surviving.

Anita Loos's dry wit crackled with malevolent humour in many of the sketches in this revue like treatment of her book.

Angela Hopkins's versatile direction ranged wittily over various styles of the period, from music hall to silent film techniques.

The music was pleasantly and proficiently composed and performed by **Paul Abrahams** and **Josefina Cupido.** The two hour show runs until Saturday.

R.M.

Libbers make a point

Bristol Arts Centre: Monstrous Regiment in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes by Bryony Lavery.

Forget the book and the musical — this is the vamped-up strictly consciousness-raising feminist version. No sexism please, we're liberated..

Lorelei is a prostitute in 1925. She puts a little girl face on in the morning and lives to please men because she lives off men.

But in this snappy revue-style show she is visited by figures from sussed-out 1979 preaching women's lib.

Their scripted moralising interferes with the drama in a tiresome and obtrusive way at times but the emphasis is definitely on entertainment.

The traditional choice between marriage and career is gorgeously sent up in a boxing match between the man who will marry her and the man who will pay for her services.

Monstrous Regiment have a definite message but this isn't a man-hating show and closet chauvinists should come out and see it.

Altogether an extremely slick production, precision timed, with some lovely work in the song and dance routines and scene changes you missed if you blinked.

Josefini Cupido gave a lovely quick changing series of performances in her role of at least a dozen characters. The production runs all week.

HONOR WILSON

–EVENING POST, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 1 1979

STOCKTON

EVENING GAZETTE, Friday, November 30, 1979

Blonde on blonde boredom

By CHRIS ELLIOTT

AS A half-hearted chauvinist — but not a confirmed bachelor — I probably missed the point of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, last night's production at the Dovecot.

It seemed simple enough — the subjugation of women in the razzmataz world of Twenties America, and all the obvious parallels to be drawn with present-day attitudes.

Maybe it was something I had eaten, or perhaps simply a fit of critic's elbow, but the whole thing turned out to be burdensome and trite in the extreme.

The bright-eyed young cast — saddled with the unfortunate monicker Monstrous Regiment — kept telling us enthusiastically that it was all a huge joke. Sadly, jokes of any kind were in pretty short supply, and what came over instead was a big helping of fervent idealism dressed up to look like a cynical commentary on sex discrimination.

The play, written by Bryony Lavery after the book of the same name by Anita Loos, was lacking in most of the recognised departments. The dialogue was uninteresting, the plot nebulous, and they were fresh out of original ideas.

The single exception was the music, which the actors very ably performed themselves, mounting a podium behind them to bash on a drum kit and electronic keyboards.

The central figure was Lorelei, the archetypal goodtime girl gold-digger, whose "unraised consciousness" has condemned her to a life of sponging and whoring. Not an isolated character, the company assured is didactically, but a woman symbolic of all women — firmly squashed under the male thumb.

Horizontal boredom set in quickly as Lorry and her pal Dorothy — both of them sporting very poor American accents — quit the tinsel of uptown Chicago for a world cruise in search of moneyed men.

Wretched girls, they just couldn't see how fettered they were by conventional sex-role morality, know what I mean?

It's all been said before, and said better, I'm afraid.

YORKSHIRE POST MONDAY NOVEMBER 26 1979

Hurlfield Campus, Sheffield: Monstrous Regiment in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes."

FAR TOO many "feminist" plays are content to put soap opera on a soap box, haranguing their audience with the scandal of women's domestic servitude.

Not so this new show by Monstrous Regiment, a classy, rather giddy entertainment based by Bryony Lavery on the once-cultish novel by Anita Loos.

Two New York hookers from the 1920s are whisked round a sort of Gullible's Travels tour of Paris, London and Philadelphia in search of men and money, or preferably men with money. They find, inevitably, disillusionment.

There are plenty of smart gags, delivered in fine style by Gillian Hanna and Mary McCusker as the two professional ladies with grammar as loose as their morals, and a dozen songs by Paul Abrahams and Josephina Cupido which have a Kurt Weillish edge and pathos to which the rest of the show, directed by Angela Hopkins, rarely aspires.

Miss Lavery resists the temptation to bang the big drum about exploitation and capitalism — realising perhaps that prostitutes are ambiguous symbols, as much exploiters as exploited.

She resists so much in fact that if you did not know (whisper it very softly), you would never guess this was feminist theatre at all. More a sparkling cocktail for the gin and smalltalk set, neither shaken nor particularly stirred.

S McC.

THE GUARDIAN Thursday December 6 1979

MANCHESTER

Robin Thornber

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

TWO "chorus girls" work their passage from flapping New York in the 1920s to exotic olde worlde Europe by screwing casual gentlemen friends for all they're worth. For fifties Hollywood the novel by Anita Loos was a wisecracking, fallacious romp. For the Communists it was evidence of the exploitation of working class women by the predatory magnates of the capitalist system.

And for Monstrous Regiment, the feminist theatre group visiting the Brickhouse Studio at Manchester University Theatre, it's a parable of the exploitation of women by chauvinist males.

It seems to me they've raised their consciousness so high they need a pedestal to keep it up. This is the real chauvinism of the new sexual politics, where men can't do right for doing wrong.

Why does nobody see Gentlemen Prefer Blondes as a moral tale about two shameless, greedy, and unfeeling women exploiting the poor little tycoons that they rooked?

Having got that off my bosom, I must confess that the show is not without charm, humour, vitality, or occasional flashes of technical inventiveness.

Guardian 15/2/80

GLASGOW

Cordelia Oliver

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

F YOU feel put off by the dea of a feminist theatre ompany don't let your pre-udice keep you away from he Citizens Theatre where Monstrous Regiment is in emporary residence with Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. A trange subject for a feminist roup, you may well think, ntil you notice that the iece is credited to Bryony Lavery, after Anita Loos — long way after.

Few lovers of the original vill be offended, however. The skeleton of Lorelei's ini-nitable Diary is still more or ess intact but given a gal-anic twist by this engaging nd talented group who sing nd play and act and mime heir way through what turns ut to be a close-fought attle for the self respect, if ot the soul, of Lorelei and er "unrefined" friend Dor-thy.

To that end, the immortal air are removed from their 920s limbo, pastel feathers, rinages, diamonds and all. Encouraged to retell their tory in a "cheap touring ersion," they overcome their nitial reluctance to stay among these "rough girls nd men with no money," nd set to with a will but tubbornly resist all attempts o make them repent their oodle-like attitude to the Enemy, millionaire or not. The result is a draw: one of hem turns out to be a eminist at heart, and the other goes back under the dust sheet: no prizes for guessing which one.

Lorelei and Dorothy are the constant factor in this freewheeling version. All the rest is conjured up out of thin air and a few props by the rest of the company — sometimes hilariously, and never less than graphically. The music is good, the jokes as in the original are double-edged, and the songs are clever and catchy — for example: I like old men, the older the better/ In this give and take of supply and demand/ With an old master/ You get to sleep faster.

Scotsman 14/2/80

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

MONSTROUS Regiment's "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" at the Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow, has been derived by Bryony Lavery from Anita Loos' book of the same name. Two hookers from the original 1925 setting are invited by the Regiment to stage the diary of one of them with the assistance (and criticism) of the company. The numerous songs are aptly integrated into the action and the cast sings them well.

As the hookers reveal the devices by which they extract money from men, the watching feminists (one male) comment with growing dismay from the point of view of 1980. A number of ironies emerge — marriage for love is reviled by both hooker and feminist as a masculine subterfuge to enslave women — and the argument is by no means loaded in favour of the liberated ladies of the present.

The play refreshingly sends up their concern with superficialities, with, for example, not being patronisingly referred to as "girls." However, few more significant advantages of living in 1980 appear, and meanwhile the 1925 hookers are showing how well they do in the sphere that really matters in our society: the economic. If, as Adam Smith asserted, the right to buy and sell in a free market is the essence of freedom, what more can women ask for?

Well, quite a lot might be said about this ultimate irony but the play declines to debate it and this evasiveness, presumably intended to provoke thought, is merely irritating. The play's able and inventive direction by Angela Hopkins (who, tragically, died last week in a car accident) does not conceal its deficiencies. The lack of consistent wit in the dialogue and action means that all the high-spirited energy of the talented cast (among whom Josefina Cupido is particularly impressive) cannot make up for the fact that too few of the jokes really come off.

Charles Palliser

ET 13/2/80

Female Regiment march on city

BACK IN 1925, the buzz was about that Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. Maybe in 1980 they still do. But the times are changing for woen.

Monstrous Regiment, a feminist touring company, is at the Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow, this week with their adaptation of Anita Loos's tale of two cuties.

Loreli Lee and Dorothy Dempsey find themselves involved in some militant women's movement antics as they do a sort of Star Trek into the future.

There's a lot of flapping about, wisecracking, slapstick, and singing as the role of women in society is examined.

Last night's largely feminine audience enjoyed it all right. But a single joke, jibe, or point of view—take your pick — is stretched much too far for total success.

The company is a co-operative — it includes two men—and the regiment is a smal lenough one to make sure everyone has a lot to do.

But Monstrous Regiment lack the redeeming drive of other such didactic companies as Wildcat and "7.84."

ROBERT JEFFREY

Time Out
Nov 16-22 1979

★Battersea Arts Centre Lavender Hill, SW11. (223 5356) Clapham Junction BR.
Fifth Birthday Week Celebrations Fri (Nov 16):
'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' presented by **Monstrous Regiment** free adaptation by Bryony Lavery of Anita Loos' novel.
After the novel by Anita Loos—a long time after, as it says in the programme—Monstrous Regiment conjure up Lorelei Lee and her sidekick/mentor Dorothy as personifications of repressed womanhood in order to find out what makes them tick, expose them to the folly of their ways and raise their consciousnesses a bit. The ensuing confrontation, delicate, witty and dazzling in its slick synthesis of dialogue, song and dance, whirls the performers deftly through scenes from Lorelei's life and loves in America and Europe. This action is interspersed with lively criticism and a questioning of Montrous Regiment's own feelings towards Lorelei—most telling of which is their fear at her smybiotic relationship with the status quo. The play is very funny and excellently performed by the company's versatile actor-musicians. The more pity that it shies away from answers: Lorelei, miserable with her "successful" marriage and career, gets no comfort from her liberated sisters except the unoriginal message that even with nice men love is doomed, and it's up to her to seek out fulfilment.
(Ros Franey)

ALBANY EMPIRE

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

WHEN FEMINIST theatre company, Monstrous Regiment, mounts a contemporary version of Anita Loos' 1925 novel, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes", the targets would appear obvious enough. To their credit, however, the company spurns the more strident and cliched feminist statements in favour of a gently ironic, and often very comic, interpretation.

Bryony Lavery's adaptation, using the technique of jettisoning Lorelei and her friend Dorothy into 1979, to assist Monstrous Regiment in a touring version of the diamond-hunting blonde's diary, is not wholly successful. For Lorelei's life-style is anachronistic, based upon economic conditions prevailing half-a-century ago, and therefore to condemn it is not to say much that is pertinent or helpful today.

If the action advances the central argument and theme only tenuously, a number of tangential questions are thrown up concerning the nature of relationships, exploitation and friendship.

The value of friendship between women is especially espoused, with a telling juxtaposition of the easy "sisterhood" of the feminists, versus the petulant bickering of Lorelie and Dorothy.

Mary McCusker's hilarious Lorelei is in the manner of Marilyn Monroe's 1953 cinematic portrayal, but Gillian Hanna as Dorothy projects rather a different image from the hard-bitten, witty and resourceful woman of the original. Here, she is the archetypal fat, sad woman, and in search of something more elusive than diamonds: a man's love. She produces the best song of the evening, in her piquant lament on the foolhardiness of such a quest.

Directed by Angela Hopkins, the company displays a genuine comic talent, sometimes moving towards slapstick, sometimes hovering on the ironic. Two scenes, depicting a boxing match and a cocktail party, poke fun at social conventions through acute observation. The point is hammered home musically, by Paul Abrahams and Josefino Cupido on keyboards and drums.

It is debatable whether Lorelie, and what she represents, can be directly translated into contemporary life. Certainly when Anita Loos was asked, in 1963, what her theme would be if she were to rewrite the work, she caustically replied: "Gentlemen Prefer Gentlemen".

Moira Petty

Jan '80

theatre

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES

by Bryony Lavery

Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company

In the mid-twenties Anita Loos shocked and delighted America with her Lorelei Lee stories, the heroine and her friend Dorothy being 'professional ladies', who made fun of sex, and put economic independence before 'love'. "Kissing your hand may make you feel very good but a diamond bracelet lasts forever." Like Mae West, they have hearts of gold, a devotion to the polished pebbles, and a way with rich lusting males.

In the late seventies Monstrous Regiment put L[illegible]ei and Dorothy in a m[illegible]melight. On stage the company splits into 20s whores and 70s feminists, baddies and goodies, the former being invited to play-act their lives by the latter — critical on-lookers and self-appointed ideologues.

The 70s 'suffrage girls', as Lorelei coins them, make great efforts to let us know that amongst them, roles are constantly under scrutiny, personal relationships seen within their political framework, and self-criticism routine — so much so that a halo slowly settles above them. Try how they may, the 70s feminists come over as patronising, moralistic, and as pompous guardians of the women's liberation movement. And they do try: they provide a 20s social and economic context for Lorelei and Dorothy to move in. But it feels like a cardboard application of Marxism, rather than an exploration of how a set of historical circumstances may influence, limit, or broaden one's vision. "Lorelei Lee, she's still here; Lorelei Lee let go of me . . ." they sing, as if the not so 'dumb blonde' syndrome is some kind of contagious disease. The trouble with this play is that it deals in stereotypes, caricatures, and hasn't managed to go beyond appearances, let alone bring out contradictions.

Pity . . . because the music was good and some of the techniques effective — they experiment with stylised tableaux to bring over ideas and there is a wonderful simulation of a silent movie action in which the women struggle for some diamonds with their lawyers, all of them moving jerkily with lots of speeded up arm and leg movements. . . . Pity.

Anny Brackx

music about and for women in a new style that doesn't sound like the music men play. The two women of Qva, J[illegible]unalls and Rosemary S[illegible]feld, arranged and produced this themselves with the help of a male friend, Mike Trim.

A lot of anger is expressed, as in the 'Lesbian Fighting Song': *SO YOU MEN, MEN, MEN, MEN, MEN, MEN, MEN, YOU'D BETTER WATCH OUT*. Even their humour is biting: *And it seems like a revolution will be coming in on cue*. The anger disappears when Qva sing about women, and love and compassion shine through on this melodic, harmonious, sometimes punky cassette.

Qva's complex, jazzy melodies are occasionally overwhelmed by too many words or awkward phrasing. It is often hard to understand what Jana and Rosemary are singing; fortunately, an attractive lyric sheet has been included. Individually, Jana and Rosemary are good singers, but the uniqueness of their sound comes from their gorgeous close harmony vocals.

The two women are joined here by Benni Lees (bass) and Linda Malone (congas) from Soulyard, and Sammy Q on Fender Rhodes and string synthesizer. Their imaginative accompaniments complement Jana and Rosemary's rhythmic guitar playing — the finely-textured music and the provocative lyrics make this a highly rewarding, 'well-hatched' recording.

Myrna Greenfield

RAW SILK

Randy Crawford

(Warner Bros)

Randy Crawford is the woman who joined the Crusaders on their last European tour and sang the catchy vocal line to their hit single, *Street Life*. Prior to that, she was just one of a million Black women in America who learnt to sing in church on a Sunday, thought about being a star on Monday. She's got a voice like the young Aretha, full of style, soul and the joy of living, and that, in the perverse way of the record industry, means she has to be tamed down — 'grooming', they call it.

This is Crawford's third album, yet despite the uninhibited way she leaps on a harmless song like 'Where There was Darkness', handling the lyrics with superb rhythmic control, she's mostly confined here to status quo love-songs. Nevertheless, she shakes off the shackles on 'Blue Mood', the only other good track, tearing at the heartstrings with enough emotive expertise to make this worth the price of the album.

Randy Crawford is just one of a seemingly limitless number of Black singers, (particularly women), blessed with a voice that changes colour along with the words, yet seldom 'allowed' to put their best music on record. The way such artistic potential remains unexploited reflects a situation familiar to women everywhere.

Val Wilmer

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Lincolnshire & Humberside Arts Diary
March/April 80

Theatre

Monstrous Regiment

Roger Parry

MONSTROUS REGIMENT AT BOSTON

Monstrous Regiment's latest show, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is, as usual, a clever combination of controversy and theatrical dexterity. Adapted from Anita Loos' novel by Bryony Lavery, this show traces the rather audacious adventures of two 'show girls' (a euphemism, if ever there was one), Ms. Lorelei Lee and Ms. Dorothy Dempsey, as they make their way in the world.

This is a loose adaptation of the original and aims to make a link between the attitudes of women in the man's world of the American Great Depression, as compared with contemporary society.

Angela Hopkins' versatile direction ranges wittily over the various styles of the period, from Vaudeville to silent film techniques—and the music is equally lively.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes can be seen:

4-5 March
Blackfriars Arts Centre, Boston
7.30

EMMA THEATRE AT STAMFORD THEATRE

EMMA Theatre requires little introduction to the audiences in our area. Second of course to Great Eastern Stage, they must be the most popular of all the visiting companies: and, over the coming month or so, they will be making three separate visits to Stamford Theatre with three different shows.

The first will be Alan Aykbourn's *Mr. Whatnot,* which tells the story of an amorous piano tuner, who visits the local Lord and Lady Slingsby-Craddock and falls hopelessly in love with their debutante daughter Amanda. What follows is Aykbourn at his farcical best.

DO GENTLEMEN STILL PREFER BLONDES?

By TONY PATERSON

"THE guy's a slug — do you want to spend the rest of your life drowning in his mucus?" That is the question put to the dumb twenties blonde as she accepts another diamond trinket from her well-healed loverboy.

Despite the distastefully slimy imagery, the question seems to sum up the theme which runs through the play, "Gentlemen prefer blondes" by the feminist theatre group, Monstrous Regiment, which opened at the Half Moon Theatre last week.

DILEMMA

Based on the famous book of the same name by Anita Loos, it's about the dilemma faced by women in the largely pre-feminist twenties: dependence on slug-like rich men for a positive effluent of jewellery and good times.

Not surprisingly, Monstrous Regiment takes a hefty and often amusing swipe at the predicament and suggests that things haven't changed that much in 1980.

The story is based on an enactment of the diary of twenties blonde Lorelei Lee (Mary McCusker) and the humiliating girlish games she is obliged to play to score off men.

CAKE EATER

Eventually Miss Lee hits what she sees as the jackpot —marriage to a wealthy Presbyterian and the chance to become a Hollywood star.

She achieves this combination through a mixture of deceit and self-deception, proudly declaring that now she has got her cake and she can eat it as well.

But at the last minute the feminists from Monstrous Regiment offer her the chance to step into the eighteen and reject her hypocritical world.

Miss Lee declines, but her more down-to-earth companion Miss Dorothy Dempsey accepts, presumably accepting as well salvation through feminism.

BRIGHTER

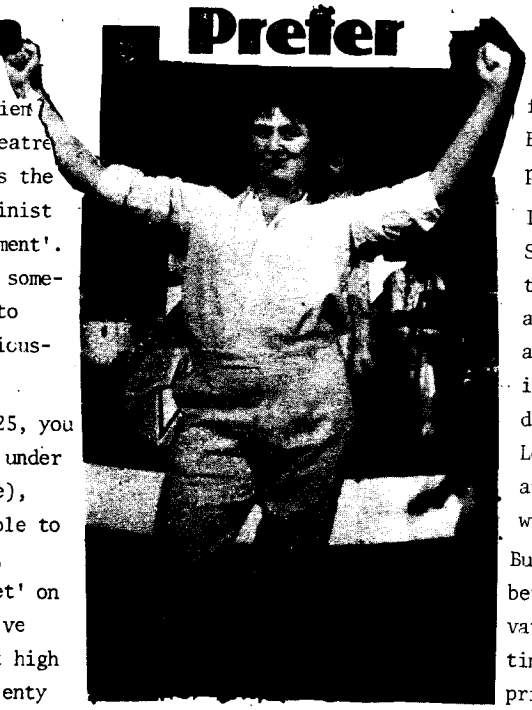
Bursts of humour and song serve to brighten up what could have been a dreary feminist sermon (the scene when Miss Lee confronts the parents of her cretinous Presbyterian husband-to-be is particularly funny).

But I doubt whether Monstrous Regiment's version of "Gentlemen prefer blondes" will be "embraced by the Soviet authorities as evidence of the exploitation of helpless female blondes by predatory magnates of the Capitalistic System," as Anita Loos tells us her book was, in her introduction to its 1963 edition.

"Gentlemen prefer blondes" will run at the Half Moon Theatre in Alie Street, Stepney, until April 19.

April 15 1980 HACKNEY GAZETTE 5

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes



Miss Lorelei Lee and her good friend Dorothy were at the Half Moon Theatre the other day. The occasion was the staging of her diary by this feminist group called 'The Monstrous Regiment'. It seemed this group disapproved somewhat of her ideology and wanted to make her aware: raise her consciousness.

Lorelie and Dorothy come from 1925, you see; both girls (well, they are under 35, so they qualify for the title), like something soft and comfortable to curl up on - like a man's wallet; they are both 'Women of the Street' on the make - their trouble is they've got hearts of gold - they melt at high temperatures, all they want is plenty of money, a comfortable existence but "fate keeps on happening" to them. Lorelei (who if you must know was born Mabel Minnow and started her career as a stenographer, but keep that to yourself) falls in love with Gerald Hamson and, in an effort to recover from this, takes a sea-cruise to Europe (and never you mind how she pays for it).

In Europe, she only meets Henry Spottard III (or is it 'the turd') the richest man in Philadelphia, but also the man who doesn't like fund, and by dint of her 'girlish tricks' ne is soon her affianced intended, all duly signed and sealed, because Lorelei reckons that verbal agreements are not worth the paper they're written on.

But then Hollywood pounces and she is torn between marriage, a career - public or private existence - after all "there comes a time when you want to knock up in your own private court". Which way will she turn? Can she teach these modern people a trick or two?

These and many more questions are posed in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" - the illuminating diary of a professional lady written by Bryony Lavery from the novel by Anita Loos.

Smiths News is the Student Newspaper of University of London, Goldsmiths College
Lewisham Way,
SE14 01-692 1406

April 80

Preference

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes by Bryony Lavery after the novel by Anita Loos: Monstrous Regiment at the Half Moon Theatre.

TAKE the dust sheets off your characters and catapult them from their seedy twenties setting to the present.

Not too original, perhaps, but in the case of the reluctant and understandably confused hookers, Lorelei Lee and Dorothey Dempsey, certainly entertaining.

With music, dance and humour, they take on members of the Monstrous Regiment and attempt to prove the values of the twenties aren't so dusty and their personal brand of immorality can hold up in the face of a feminist onslaught.

Although the secrets of Ms Lee's diary provide the vehicle for the action, the odds are against the two for whom the pursuit of a good time and its attendant wealth is life itself.

Will Dorothey and Lorelei waste this chance to update themselves? Do we care? If they are truly anachronistic doesn't it merely weaken the case of the modern players who invited them along?

Perhaps we gain too little with an examination of their past. History gives up its lessons only after extreme effort.

If the point is to show "the girl's" values have endured, it may be better not to remind us, but to attack their 1980 counterparts head-on. In this, Lorelei cannot really help us.- JEE.

MONSTROUS REGIMENT

Half Moon

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

by MICHAEL COVENEY

The idea behind Monstrous Regiment's touring show is to deride the sexploits of Lorelei Lee and Dorothy, exposing them to the critical brickbats of the contemporary women's movement. For an avowedly feminist company, this is no feeble proposition, but one cannot help feeling that the wrong target has been chosen. You could argue that Anita Loos's novel—apart from its intrinsic sylistic worth—is, in fact, a liberated text. The flapper flutter is used suite callously to cash in on male sexual chauvinism and Lorelei's eventual success in the film industry is not only a victory for women, but also an achievement of useful social repercussions.

It is a little unfair of Briony Lavery, the adapter, to dub the girls "hookers" right from the start. In sexual terms, men are as prone to use physical attributes and swagger to run their prey to ground as are women, whether the year is 1925 or 1980. To pretend otherwise is ludicrous. But the performance of Mary McCusker as Lorelei suggests that, given a wittier scenario and more ambitious production, she could have really been onto something. She resembles Dora Bryan and produces a vocal amalgam of Miss Piggy, Carol Channing and Marilyn Monroe. The idea of the dizzy blonde is a potent one, worthy of more serious consideration than it here receives.

Miss McCusker is given delightful support by Gillian Hanna as her acidulous sidekick, but the evening never takes off and settles, in the end, for racing through the novel's events without savouring the langauage. Josefina Cupido impresses as both singer and drummer, but when not singing or drumming she is reduced, along with Gabrielle Harding, to expressions of bored disapproval and terrible Women's Lib grunts. One gem: Miss McCusker turns on her adversaries at one point with: "Who are you calling a period piece?" The rest is dross. Tattiness of presentation cannot be excused by repetitive references to the cheapness of the show and the demands of touring.

Financial Times Monday April 14 1980

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