*The Daily Telegraph, Saturday, January 27, 1979*

*Bristol*

# 'Teendreams'

*By ERIC SHORTER*

LIKE any other kind of dramatised propaganda David Edgar's play for the feminist movement, "Teendreams," suffers at the Vandyck, Bristol, from a predictable point of view and of tone. The tail is apt to wag the dog on such occasions. Situation overshadows characterisation.

And because Mr Edgar is irritatingly devoted to short scenes punctuated by blackouts, it is a job to build up theatrical coherence. The thread of interest is always being snapped. It is as if we were watching a scenario for television.

Let us pray however that Mr Edgar sticks to the theatre; for he writes with a style which, against all the technical odds, flourishes in front of a crowd. And since the success of "Destiny" and of "Mary Barnes" this author has found a following that fills theatres.

★

This time he looks back on the last 10 years of Women's Lib with sympathy, wit and a degree of detachment which prevents any impression of preaching. The men maybe are something of a laughing-stock in their lack of emotional imagination but the girls are presented most convincingly in episodes ranging from university sit-ins and anti-bomb demos to marriage, separation and a Socialist teacher who feels guilty because one of her girl pupils has gone berserk and another has attempted suicide.

Written in collaboration with Monstrous Regiment and with Susan Todd, these glimpses of a certain generation coming to terms with its social status hardly brings any fresh ideas to bear.

But they are compellingly acted (especially by Chris Bowler, Gillian Hanna and Mary McCusker) and should be more effective still when Kate Crutchley's production has been run-in during the forthcoming national tour.

At all events the entertainment confirms Mr Edgar's growing reputation as an entertainingly intelligent guide to various social, political and medical issues.

THE GUARDIAN
January 31 1979

SHEFFIELD

Robin Thornber

# Teendreams

TEENDREAMS was written by David Edgar in consultation with Susan Todd and Monstrous Regiment, the feminist theatre group which is visiting the Sheffield Crucible Studio this week. And I'm afraid it bears the scars of having been assembled by a committee.

In there somewhere is a good simple story of a radical teacher (played passionately and compassionately by Gillian Hanna) trying to raise the consciousness of two of her pupils above the level of clothes, makeup, and grabbing yourself a husband and kids — and almost wrecking their lives and her own certainty. It's a complex and closely questioning piece, and far from being mere theatrical pamphleteering.

But Mr Edgar and Ms Todd have tried too hard to jazz it up by chopping about at the time scale until the ideas playfully trip each other up. And there are still long passages of tedium and triviality.

The result, sadly, is a dramatised statement that will stimulate and hearten committed members of the women's movement and leave the unconverted bewildered and untouched. If only they had done less work on it. Kate Crutchley directed.

BRISTOL
EVENING POST, FRIDAY, JANUARY 26 1979

**Vandyke Theatre, Bristol Monstrous Regiment in Teendreams by David Edgar with Susan Todd.**

This exercise in feminine disillusionment is the latest and most unexpected work by a playwright whose star is riding high at the moment.

Unexpected because it is a bitter exploration of feminine aspirations which is treated with an insight which seems unlikely across the great divide of sex.

Much of this clarity of vision must come from the unusual way in which the play was put together — after workshops, research among Women's Movement workers and teenage girls and with the help of a female collaborator.

This communal approach occasionally shows in the cliches of women's lib which abound; and the loose, episodic and rambling construction emphasises the banality — intentional perhaps? — of some of the writing.

Yet despite the inevitable predictability, the setting of the action over the years since 1961 underlines how much women still have to achieve if they are to gain real freedom from sexual stereotype.

## IMPRESSIVE

It also emphasises the dangers of forcing liberation on those who don't want to be liberated — here beautifully contrasted between idealistic middle class theories and the tatty teenage fantasies of two working class girls.

The end result is not an optimistic one for the women's movement for after running the full gamut of politics, teenage romance, marriage breakups, and the rest, our two heroines are left in pretty dresses ready to rejoin the great unliberated again.

Monstrous Regiment, a feminist performing group, work remarkably hard and successfully although occasionally defeated by the brevity of scenes which are sometimes too short to make a point.

Mary McCusker and Gillian Hanna are particularly impressive but the whole production (director Kate Crutchley) has great merit and deserves to do well on its national tour. It is at the Vandyke until Saturday.

**DAVID HARRISON**

BRIGHTON

EVENING ARGUS, Wednesday, February 21, 1979—

# Teenagers still dream dreams

by Jane Sullivan

TEENDREAMS wasn't dashed off in a day. It was a sensitive plant which required very careful nurturing.

First David Edgar and Susan Todd discussed their themes. Then they discussed it with the company.

Then a workshop session brought in women active in the women's liberation movement in the last ten years, and women researching in and working with girls aged 13-15.

## Virtue

Then the authors assembled the findings into a detailed synopsis, which they passed back to the company for more discussion.

Then—and only then— Mr Edgar sat down to actually write the thing.

**PLAY:** Teendreams (Gardner Centre, Sussex University).

**AUTHORS:** David Edgar, Susan Todd.

**PERFORMERS:** Monstrous Regiment (Chris Bowler, Gillian Hanna, Susan Todd, Jenifer Armitage, Mary McCusker, David Bradford, Clive Russell).

**DIRECTOR:** Kate Crutchley.

All that painstaking research and discussion is probably both the virtue and defect of Teendreams. Certainly a subject which takes in the last 17 years of the women's movement plus several related issues needs all the background it can get.

The conclusion? The French had the words for it, perhaps: "Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose." A huge gulf may yawn between the attitudes of young women in the Sixties and the Seventies, but they still have the same romantic illusions to overcome.

The theme is illustrated in typical Monstrous Regiment fashion, filling in the key moments in the lives of a chosen few characters in a series of short scenes which gradually build up to form a complete picture.

It makes a lively and thought-provoking evening with a refreshing lack of any strident tub-thumping or smug lessons. And yet it suffers at times from a case of too many cooks.

## Drive

While some scenes convince, others beat about the bush or hover uneasily on the edge of cant. The play doesn't have anything like the cohesive drive or persuasive dramatic power that we associate with the author of Destiny.

By far the best scenes are those that centre on the school where the teacher, a child of the Sixties (Gillian Hanna), is trying to raise the consciousness of two schoolgirls somewhere above the romantic magazines in which they bury their noses.

The results are perhaps too sudden and drastic, but they illustrate true reactions by teenagers to conflicting pressures as to what kind of women they should become.

That is what makes Teendreams well worth seeing, for all its faults; it may sometimes sound too awkward or too fluent, but it never rings false.

MORNING STAR
FEB 8, 1979

## 'Teendreams'

*From Sheffield JANE KING reviews Monstrous Regiment's new play "Teendreams:"*

DAVID EDGAR, Susan Todd, and Monstrous Regiment, together with members of Women's Liberation and "women researching in and working with teenage girls" have produced a rambling, episodic, confusing drama/documentary which looks at "the changes brought in some women's lives by the new respect for their demands which grew through the years 1968-1978."

Every thought, every ideal expressed, is called into question in dozens of scenes flashing back and forth over these ten years, until we are all brought to breaking point with the attempted suicide of the teenage girl, Tricia.

Her magazine dreams of romance are shattered, and the feminist teacher, Frances, who sees in the incident the failure of her own cherished ideals to change the lives of her students, temporarily abandons the movement.

So much time is spent upon the contradictions, the conflicts and the failures within the characters and within the movement — a thorough and honest exposition — that little is left to make real the final rehabilitation of Tricia (the suicide), Denise (the juvenile delinquent) and Fran (the middle-class feminist).

But rehabilitated they are and the play ends cheerfully with their adjustment to reality.

The eight women and two men in the cast fascinate throughout, with performances closely observed, fiercely felt and very funny. They riveted my attention for every minute of the play's excessive length. "Teendreams" would be even better value after expert pruning.

BRIGHTON AND HOVE GAZETTE, FEBRUARY 23, 1979—

# True life romances —and the reality

**TEENDREAMS is one of those rare plays which bites off more than anyone could possibly chew — but then swallows the lot.**

**The feminist theatre company Monstrous Regiment's latest production at the Gardner Centre covers as much ground as half a dozen less subtle plays.**

**To describe the theme given in the title — the disillusion following the explosion of the fantasy romance world of teenage magazines — would be merely to scratch the surface.**

**David Edgar's play is essentially about the oppression of women. But the issues raised include student politics, Socialism, internal politics of the women's movement, education, the penal system and lesbianism.**

**Incredibly, it manages to remain well above the level of propaganda.**

**Although the characters are instantly recogniseable, they are more than just symbols and we can easily sympathise with them.**

**Not that it's all heavy stuff.**

**There are moments of pure comedy — particularly in the school scenes when we feel like flicking pellets at a pompous teacher.**

**Tapes of 1960s and 1970s pop songs are used, often to highlight gaps between dream and reality, as when a disillusioned schoolgirl attempts suicide to the tune of It Might As Well Rain Until September.**

**It is, perhaps, inevitable that a play like this one raises more questions than it answers.**

**But it works. Many of the questions raised are unanswerable. In a sense that is the message — that there are no easy solutions.**

**We are left with the image of women struggling against a constraining society — but helped by love and support from each other.**

**J.W.**

Sussex Express, February 23 1979

# The shattering of the girls' fantasy world

**TEENDREAMS**
**(Gardner Centre, Brighton)**

THE crisis in David Edgar's Teendreams at the Gardner Centre, Brighton, this week comes at the very beginning — a teenage girl puts on her prettiest dress, plays a romantic record and gulps down an overdose of drugs.

She has just realised there is more to life than looking glamorous for the local stud and her fantasy world, manufactured by teenage magazines and pop idols, has been shattered.

Another victim of teendreams is Rosie, a girl who dutifully goes through the rituals of courtship, white wedding and motherhood and finally rebels against her superhousewife role.

Teendreams chronicles the feminist rebellion from the furious man-haters of the late 60's to today's quieter, but more effective revolt.

Presented by a female dominated company of players, Monstrous Regiment, it is a play which in some of its stilted undramatic scenes, as well as moments of startling truth, betrays its workshop origins.

The action shifts swiftly in time and place and were it not for the company's knack of conveying a certain scene and mood, it could easily get confusing.

I particularly enjoyed Mary McCusker's performance as the teenage Denise, who defiantly rejects the teendream image and goes on to become an unmarried mother, gleefully milking social security.

The remaining characters end up well-groomed, self-confident and much wiser for their experiences.

**ELENA CURTI**

EVENING NEWS
THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 1979

# Girls deprived of their dreams

**TEEN DREAMS: ICA Theatre**

THE FEMINIST theatre company Monstrous Regiment could not have chosen a better man than David Edgar.

He is a playwright who enjoys nothing better than, in the words of one of his characters, "murmuring sweet dialectics" at his audience.

Working on improvisation with the company before writing the play has provided him with a surfeit of argument, so it seems after the first two hours there is never going to be a last word.

The play deals with a teacher who attempts to wean her pupils off their fare of romantic pulp magazines and obsession with boyfriends.

Deprived of their dreams they become lost and confused. The girl with "character" develops into an aggressive delinquent, the pretty one is ashamed of her femininity and tries to kill herself.

In flashback we see a parallel friendship in the teacher's youth. She became a veteran of the students' revolt, her friend Rosie, a passive housewife, rebelling only after ten years of marriage.

**CLARE COLVIN**

VOGUE
MAY, 1979

MARINA WARNER

At the ICA, **Teendreams,** by David Edgar and Susan Todd, exposes the hollowness and the suffering caused by prevailing amorous convention; their point of view is that of antagonists, not protagonists, in the game of sex as they see it being played today. Two generations of women, the first young in the late sixties' time of revolution, the second young in the late seventies' time of disillusion, meet and unite in a common rebellion against dependence on men for fulfilment.

In a sequence of short scenes, cut filmically back and forth in time, their several stories are told, and the didactic content driven home. Acceptance of change, and of growth through failure, and of separateness, is the lesson, but its rawness and its potential sententiousness is avoided by some vivid writing—a keen scene in a teenage disco, for instance—and some marvellous interpretations, from Chris Bowler and Mary McCusker as the two teenage schoolfriends, and from David Bradford as an ageing sixties' activist.

BRIGHTON & HOVE ...



# True life romances —and the reality

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J.

EVENING STANDARD, THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 1979

# MILTON SHULMAN at the ICA

THE Women's Lib movement, in spite of the considerable advances it has made, is still at a stage where resentment dominates reason.

Because it keeps striving for the unattainable goal of happiness through equality, frustration is its inevitable reward.

**Teendreams** by David Edgar with Susan Todd at the **ICA Theatre** has the authentic shrill note of so much writing about women's rights. When it is not railing at men as oppressors, it is haranguing women for failing to take part in the struggle.

Being a mere male, Mr Edgar, as a Women's Lib propagandist, has the disadvantage of seeing too many sides of the argument.

Told in a series of short scenes erratically sprinkled between 1961 and 1978, the play concerns a radical teacher whose efforts to discourage two working-class teenagers from indulging in romantic fantasies result in one of them attempting suicide and the other becoming a juvenile delinquent.

Back in 1968, the teacher thought that when she met her man at a demo and walked hand in hand with him to a sit-in, the world had changed. But 10 years later she realises capitalism has not been destroyed, women still like to have babies and that her revolutionary fantasies had no more substance than the cheap dreams offered up by trashy women's magazines.

Gillian Hanna conveys with conviction the growing sense of frustration of the teacher who knows she is right but cannot understand why everything is going wrong. Chris Bowler looks suitably tormented as a young girl deprived of her false props for existence.

McCUSKER and Bowler—Romantic fantasies.

Mary McCusker conjures up some splendid rages.

Written with more hysteria than passion, I somehow felt that Mr Edgar was arguing a case rather than believing in it.

The episodic nature of the action, as well as a consistent note of breast-beating, left me both confused and indifferent about a battle which a lot of us think has already been won.

THE GUARDIAN Saturday March 3 1979

ICA

Andrew Veitch

# Teendreams

FIRST the good news: David Edgar, Susan Todd, and the Monstrous Regiment in harness at the ICA have a welcome, if fashionable, cynicism for the teen dreams of '68 — the "tatty teenage fantasies" of the Paris commune coming to Keele, of love on the student picket lines, of male supremacy melting in the red heat of the Socialist revolution.

There's a painfully accurate portrait by Susan Todd of a housewife who doesn't choose but is chosen, doesn't think, but is thought, doesn't do but is done. There's David Bradford as a pitiful Peter Pan figure, trapped in a time loop 10 years back when he was arrested on a student demo. There's Gillian Hanna as his Wendy in blue jeans, watching her house, her Socialist, liberationist ideals crumbling in the cold, dole queue teen dreams of the seventies. And Clive Russell as the butch teacher Brewer, aptly nicknamed The Droop. All of whom, and which, make the play worth seeing.

Now for the bad news. It's put together so scrappily, there are such dismal troughs between the peaks, that the play dies a thousand deaths. The middle class university women have some flesh, even though they wallow in self analysis, but those beneath socio economic grade BI are shells, empty generalisations in built-up boots and Bay City Roller tartans, on stage merely to press home the all-too-obvious point that society dictates the contents of the teen dream, and merely breaking that dream isn't going to change society.

The play twists and turns in time and space like a Mobius strip. And like travellers on that mathematical oddity, our heroes finally vanish impotently into the infinity of middle age. Which is a nice way of saying they disappear up their own orifices. Very disappointing.

Financial Times Thursday March 1 1979

# Teendreams by MICHAEL COVENEY

The author of *Destiny* is adamant in his defence of agitprop as a useful form of theatre, but David Edgar's passion on the subject is hardly justified by this meandering, cliché-ridden piece (written together with Susan Todd) for the feminist touring group, Monstrous Regiment. It shows two pairs of women striking political poses in a male-dominated world, yet the representative males are poorly served by the script and badly acted in Kate Crutchley's slapdash production.

Frances (Gillian Hanna) progresses from disappointment in 1968 to rôle of feminist teacher; two girls, Trisha and Denise, find her sympathetic to their disgust at male chauvinism. Frances tells them that her idea of a man is someone who treats her like a human being and washes his own socks. Frances's chum is a middle-class housewife who walks out on her husband after 10 years because, apparently, he snores and behaves huffily when she returns home late one night.

Structurally, the piece does not really work, as it takes too long to work out who is who and when is when. The two girls fall out in a disco scene, where Trisha (Chris Bowler) is set on by a trio of butch thugs comparing notes on shoplifting exploits. The thugs, naturally, are girls. Trisha swallows a lot of pills (we see her doing this, and choosing the right dress to do it in during a very long opening few minutes) and Denise (Mary McCusker) is smitten with guilt.

I do not dispute the central premise that men map their lives while women have theirs mapped, but even that partial truth does not constitute good theatre. The people likely to see this show do not have to be told. Sexist righteousness is always a dangerous game to play and oppressed males might resent the naming of a smug teacher "Brewer" in order to smirk at his droop.

New Statesman 9 March 1979

## Benedict Nightingale

"After this exuberant celebration of heterosexual desire, it is a little dampening to be confronted with a piece which manages to suggest that, given the arrogance, treachery and/or inadequacy of the only males apparently available to them, women would do well to steer everything from their affections to their prams as clear as possible of the sex as a whole. Speaking for myself, I felt a spark of guilty sympathy for the husband whose wife simply ups and leaves him when he complains that her late arrival home means he's missed his snooker. It seemed in itself a pretty poor reason for taking a child permanently away from its father. But the protagonist, a student revolutionary turned crusading feminist, sees it as a moral and spiritual triumph, and so, presumably, must we. Maybe the fellow is a pig and a boor and worse, past consideration, let alone redemption. The trouble is that it doesn't even occur to anyone involved in *Teendreams* that this might need proving. In this frosty world man is not an individual, but a generalisation, an abstraction. He is a political stance to be rejected, not a fellow-creature to be challenged and changed.

It would be surprising if all the play were as blinkered as this, because David Edgar is its author, or (rather) co-author with Susan Todd, a member of the Monstrous Regiment, which performs it. The first half is certainly a dismal business, which confuses you with its chronological jumps and doubling-up of parts, and positively exasperates you with its refusal to come seriously to grips with a potentially interesting subject, the radical Left's failure to concede that sexual equality may be a necessary precondition to social change. But if this manages mainly to remind us of Edgar's propagandist past, the second half is rather more recognisably the work of the author of *Destiny* and *Mary Barnes*. The ex-revolutionary has become a teacher, and tries to lure her charges from their pulp mags and fantasy heroes, an effort which indirectly leads to an attempted suicide. Progress, it is admitted, won't be simple, won't be painless. There is even a debate of sorts about the perimeters of liberation in which a chary male view is put with some understanding. It still isn't enough to expand the mental muscles, but it is better than a boot in the groin.

# Time Out

*In its attempt to look at the women's movement, Monstrous Regiment's* 'Teendreams' *(ICA) traces the developing awareness of Frances, a teacher, over the last decade, and her recent crisis of conscience over two of her pupils. Disturbed that they are skipping metalwork and dreaming of Perfect Romance instead of grasping their equal opportunities, Frances effects a clumsy introduction to feminism which topples one girl into attempted suicide and the other into vandalism. David Edgar underwent a lengthy series of workshops and discussions before writing this with Sue Todd, but the result is unwieldy, and despite good intentions smacks more of a journalistic crash-course in feminism than of a serious exploration. It rings truest when it's funny: Sue Todd whisking around as superstar housewife, and Gillian Hannah envisaging men turning into frogs are memorable moments.* (Ros Asquith)

TRIBUNE, MARCH 9, 1979

"Which is more than I can say for David Edgar's **Teendreams** (written and performed with Susan Todd and Monstrous Regiment at the ICA). In this case my expectations were dashed.

Edgar *can* write with razor-edged intellect, political punch and sharp incisive wit. And Monstrous Regiment *can* mount polished shows, entertaining, but also analytically sharp. But in *Teendreams*, there was none of this. The worthy material was trivialised, the result banal. I've been trying to put my finger on why this should happen, and can only come up with the short answer of self-indulgence.

The heroine moves from the heady days of 1968 (they met at the Demo, he whispered sweet dialectics in her ear and they walked off into the sit-in) to disillusionment and despair in 1978 (we thought we could change people, we were wrong). The problem is that nothing special happens drama-wise to justify her "change."

The treatment of the material had more in common with *Love Story* and *West Side Story* than Edgar's *Destiny* or Monstrous Regiment's *Scum*. The audience was asked to question the convictions of Left politics in the past ten years, but without the substance to warrant the questioning.

It was not obvious that — or how — the heroine/teacher's relationship with the teenagers tips them to suicide and vandalism, and the reasons suggested in the play — a need for consumerist props and romantic fantasy without which they have no identity — were just too glib to credit.

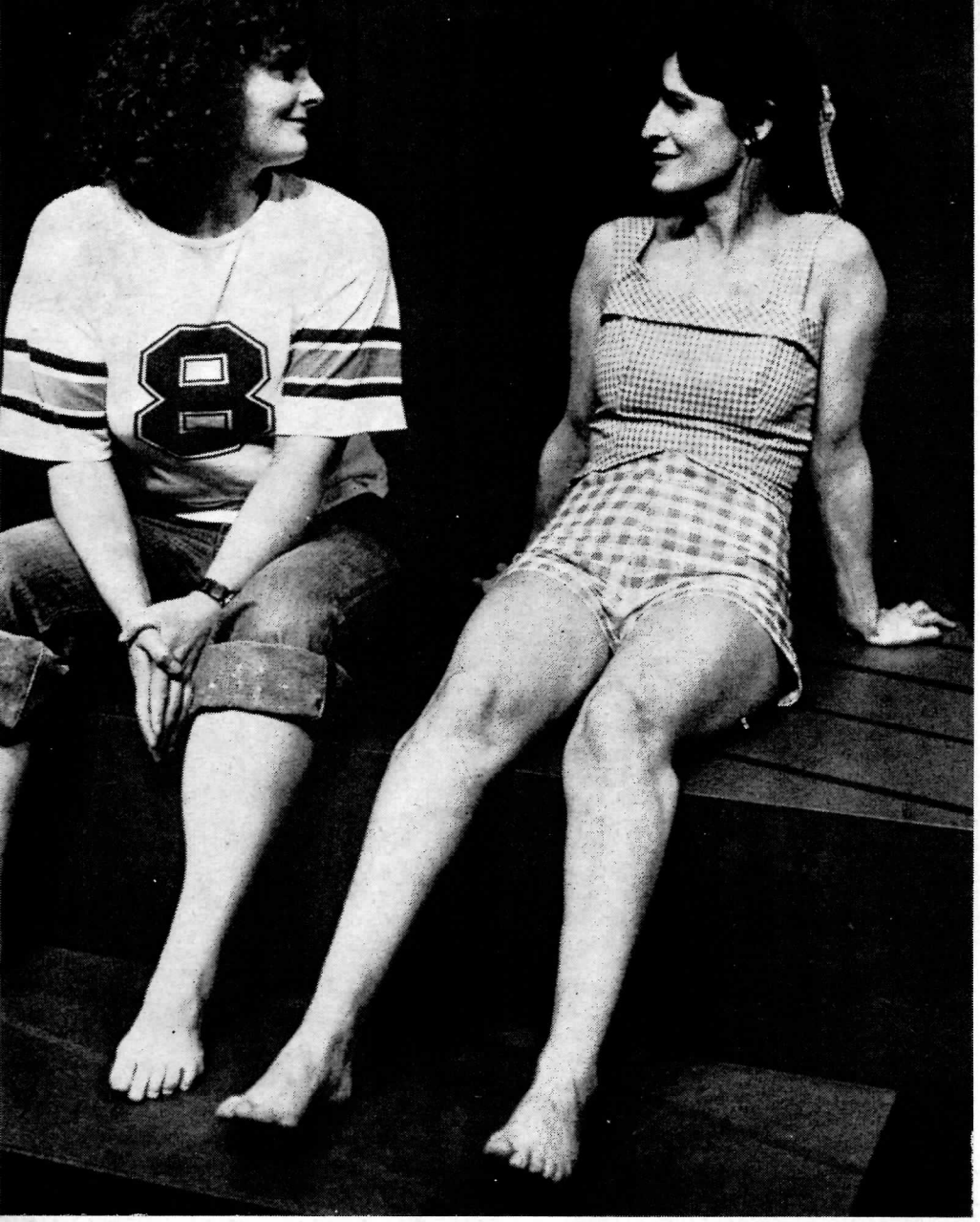
The tone is bleeding-heart feminist — all woe is woman and what a rotten world with all those beastly men. I thought Monstrous Regiment was a *socialist*-feminist company, and that Edgar was a socialist. But there was barely a hint of socialist world-view. This was fairy tale tossing itself off as a feminist critique of the seventies. And to add boredom to banality, it was over-written and under-structured.

On the surface it was easy to see why the BBC banned the television version of Dennis Potter's **Brimstone and Treacle** (Open Space). The devil invades a suburban home and rapes the helpless spastic daughter of the miserable and vulnerable parents. Shocking, offensive? And yet it wasn't — or anyway not for the obvious reasons.

But it was disappointing, because Potter had invented the potential for presenting a real force of malevolence (in the Mephistophelian rather than the "Damien Omen 2" sense) and a veritable moral battle — and then failed to exploit it.

The devil was just a mean little fascist who probably really only *was* after a cheap fuck and breaking the best china. Certainly he's caught with his trousers down and runs off as if the father were after him with a shotgun. So the violence was gratuitous and the ending dreadfully *deus ex machina*. Yawn.

**Catherine Itzin**



*Gillian Hanna and Susan Todd in the Monstrous Regiment's production of David Edgar's latest play specially written for the company together with Susan Todd.* *Mark Rusher*

# TEENDREAMS

David Edgar's new play for Monstrous Regiment, *Teendreams*, begins with a flash-forward: it depicts the suicide attempt of a teenage girl which is to be the pivotal point in the personal journey of a young feminist who, as the girl's teacher, has to come to terms with herself when she is accused of responsibility for the attempt. There is a sense in which all serious plays are didactic: they attempt to make some sort of shape and sense of the world in which they happen. Teendreams also wanders occasionally into the kind of didacticism that seeks to cover all points and arguments, and to defend itself in advance against the inevitable sectarian attacks of other groups involved in sexual or more conventionally Left-wing politics.

There is, for instance, a scene in which the heroine's flat becomes a refuge for an old friend who has just walked out on her husband. The heroine's boyfriend at first does the tactful thing (leaving the room to do the washing up) but later launches himself into an incredibly sententious speech about small-scale politics which totally depersonalises the woman's own experience and denies it any expression. The speech sat oddly on a character who had previously in the play showed, at the very least, a decent sensitivity. I was told afterwards that like much of the story-line the speech had actually happened (the play was written after extensive research, in collaboration with Monstrous Regiment's Susan Todd), but it seemed to be there just to make a point.

In fact it was a point which was made several other times anyway; it was part of the play's general defence against the charge that the feminist movement, or sexual politics as a whole, is some sort of sideshow distracting potential comrades from the main current of socialism. This is a subject worth arguing, but not worth getting obsessed with, in a play which despite its occasional repetition and occasional larboriousness does present a real and compelling story, does offer real characters as well as issues and is far too questioning to lapse into dull or ranting agit-prop. If it has a message, it is one of consolation to people disappointed that the revolution turns out not to be an overnight affair. The end sees the heroine and her friend getting on their glad rags for a night on the town, making the best of the progress that has been made, undefeated and having found a life they are able to lead.

The play is stretched over five different points in time, one of the slight passing echoes of David Edgar's *Destiny*. Instead of major public events providing the reference points we home-in on key personal moments in the teacher's life. That 'blissful dawn' of student revolt (whatever happened to the day which was meant to follow?) recalls 1968, and a reference to the Housing Finance Act (remember Fair Rents?) tells us it is 1972, but usually the most potent and ironic method of dating events comes from pop records used as part of the action or as bridges between scenes. Golden Oldies abound.

Occasionally the production by Kate Crutchley lapses into a crude and unsuccessful theatricality, notably with a disco scene (Bay City Roller vintage) which I thought patronised its subject without properly illuminating the poverty of the diet provided for them by vapid music and horrendous 'romance' magazines. But for the most part the performances sustain the play's momentum well, in spite of the misfiring of most of the many jokes on the night I saw it in Sheffield. The only person to play one role throughout is Gillian Hanna as the teacher, Frances; her ability to combine formidable strength with a sympathetic vulnerability is a priceless asset to the company. She gives a direct, candid performance which is by far the best example of the company's uncluttered style.

**Paul Allen**

**TEENDREAMS by David Edgar with Susan Todd. Presented by Monstrous Regiment at the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield, on 29 January 1979. Directed by Kate Crutchley, designed by Di Seymour, lighting by Mari Jenkins.**

Tricia/Cathy/Sandra, CHRIS BOWKER; Frances, GILLIAN HANNA; Rosie/Debbie, SUSAN TODD; Ruth/Sharon/Sister/Lynne, JENNIFER ARMITAGE; Anne/Maria/Denise, MARY McCUSKER; Colin/Kevin/Gary, DAVID BRADFORD; Dave/Howard/Tony/Brewer, CLIVE RUSSELL.

BIRMINGHAM

EVENING MAIL, TUESDAY, MARCH 20, 1979

# Such dedicated followers of passion

*Teendreams, Monstrous Regiment. Birmingham Rep. Studio Theatre.*

**IF THE slow opening of David Edgar's new play had been on television, I should undoubtedly have switched off before the wretched girl got so far as to keep taking the pills.**

**That would have been a pity. For while this play, written in collaboration with Susan Todd, hardly seems set for the same kind of success as Edgar's "Mary Barnes," it has some interesting comments to make on the hurly burly of women's battles lost and won, over the last 18 years or so.**

**Monstrous Regiment, the young company of eight women and two men, dedicated to putting on stage life as women experience it, here plead the cause of women firmly, if sometimes over-vociferously.**

**Teacher Frances Locket's failure to make her early ideals of women's liberation work for her pupils demonstrates the lasting tragedy of the women's movement — the apathy, even hostility, of so many women themselves.**

**Frances, convincingly played by Gillian Hanna, and newly-divorced Rosie (Susan Todd), end the play with a ray of hope for the future, perhaps, by pledging their friendship and support.**

**NORAH LEWIS**

The Birmingham Post, Tuesday, March 20, 1979.

# Teendreams

**. . . at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre Studio**

In last Sunday's *Observer* there was an article in the first person on women's friendships with each other, and on the same night, B B C television screened a programme in which women talked about their experience and growing self-knowledge. Both items were brave, enlightening and liberating.

The latest touring production by the Monstrous Regiment company covers this same ground and much more, yet never quite communicates that personal urgency and exhilaration in change. Working "to improve the status of women," the company says much here that is right and important, but I feel I've seen it all before.

If the dialogue did not sparkle we might think the play — spanning nearly 30 years and the lives of 20 characters — had been written by a committee. It was, almost, for David Edgar wrote the final script after evolving the substance with Susan Todd and the rest of the company. The message merges into our general atmosphere of change instead of pushing it further and deeper.

That said, the material could not have been better staged than it is by these five actresses and two actors under Kate Crutchley's direction. Whether the scene is the university sit-in, the squat, domestic bliss (played ironically) or domestic breakdown, or the schoolgirls skipping classes and the session with the psychiatrist, the performance is subtle, passionate and self-aware. But never quite as powerful as a person changing, and telling their own story.

D. J. HART

**NOTTINGHAM,**

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**JOHN KNOX called women "the monstrous regiment." So, just as the British soldiers of 1914 made a proud title from the Kaiser's insult about a contemptible little army, Monstrous Regiment has become the name for a theatre group committed to doing battle for women.**

**THEATRE**

**Emrys Bryson**

**Passionate about the way that women are treated — whether in the theatre or in society — Monstrous Regiment (eight women, two men) have, since 1975, delved into anything from wife-battering to witchcraft, and even a musical about women laundry workers in the Paris Commune.**

**They are at Nottingham Playhouse this week in "Teendreams", braving the good weather and any male chauvinistic pig who cares to rootle along.**

## Presentation

**A company with an avowed dedication always runs the risk, of course, of preaching to the converted, exasperating the rest and trotting out yards of sincere tosh.**

**Such faults show up at times in "Teendreams" by David Edgar, but it isn't tosh, exasperating though the method of presentation may be. One has the feeling that too many hands have been at work — collaborators Edgar and Susan Todd, women's libbers, teachers, social workers, and indeed the whole company in workshop discussions.**

**What has emerged is not so much a play, more a series of tableaux making contact in a varying degrees — from intensity to nil — with the progress of the piece and with the audience.**

**Starting with an unhappy teenager who puts on a few records and crams a handful of pills into her mouth, it sets off on a tortuous and circuitous route to 1961 and back again.**

## Sit-ins

**The girl's teacher was 19 then, going through the business of college sit-ins and calling everybody "comrade" and questioning everything, not least of all why it is that in revolutions the girls are still making the tea and doing the typing.**

**To bring about the interlocking destinies of the teacher and her suicidal pupil, we have many little sketches spread over 17 years or so — women's lib. meetings, adoring little woman cooking for her man, giggly schoolgirls doing a women's magazine romance quiz, a disco scene, etc.**

## Pop

**Sprinkled with a bit of pop and a lot of four-letter words, "Teendreams" gets pretty undergrad-ish, with awkwardly eager acting to match.**

**But when it makes its characters into people first and spokesmen second, it can be vivid, funny and touching — as when a pair of girls, best friends, quarrel with all the poignant ugliness of such things.**

**Paradoxically, it is when the play is concentrating on people rather than ideas that the basic idea comes over best.**

**Doubling up in the 20 roles of Kate Crutchley's production are Chris Bowler, Gillian Hanna, Susan Todd, Diane Adderley, Mary McCusker,David Bradford and Clive Russell.**

Spare Rib MAY 1979

# THEATRE

## Teendreams
## Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company

*Teendreams* is a play by a male socialist about "the changes wrought in some women's lives by the new respect for their demands"; the play spans 1968-1978 (with a brief flit back to 1961), written in short scenes, moving jaggedly backwards and forwards in time. Seven performers (five women, two men) play 20 parts in 23 scenes. The fragmented structure is intended to reflect the fragmented and peripheral way women respond to experience (according to Susan Todd, who worked with David Edgar in planning the play); it was also explicitly about the *impact* of certain politics, rather than about the politics themselves.

There are four main characters. Frances falls in love with a man on a demo, moves through the student movement, becomes a teacher, then a feminist. She goes through a period of despair, concluding that it is impossible to change people, rejecting the "rational cosmetic" of class analysis. She ends up teaching adult literacy, living in friendship with Rosie, the 'perfect wife and mother' of the 60s who has left her husband to become independent. Two of Frances' pupils, Trisha and Denise, spend most of their time obsessed by boys and magazines. Trisha attempts suicide, fails and takes a job; Denise becomes an unmarried mother. Thus, although the play's structure is not a simple event-follows-event narrative, these four stories develop, linked by Frances; we are shown different moments of change in four women's lives.

JANE HARPER

Boys and magazines — Teen Dreams?

The play is at its strongest when it fastens on particular details of experience and change: Rosie's slow awakening to her own discontent with marriage, Frances' moments of self-doubt, a row between the two girls about boys. Because the scenes move fast and efficiently (the production catches well the elliptical style of the writing) the overall impact of the play is of a series of moving snapshots, of impressions and quick change. But although particular moments are strong, the cumulative impact of the play is weak and questionable. It sets up a series of important questions and then leaves them unexplored. What *is* the play saying about the relationship between political event and personal change? How has feminism affected women's lives?

Overall, the play says little about 'change' beyond the fact that different people change differently. Because our view of the way feminism has affected people's lives is so limited (one scene about a 'CR' group — how many of Monstrous Regiment's audience know what a 'CR' group is?), it is hard to see what the significance of feminism is. Frances is the only character who represents a link between conscious feminism and other women, and her story is essentially a move away from feminism. This is partly because her initial grasp of both class and feminist politics is presented as youthful 'dreams', as something which will inevitably be undermined by the complexity of reality. Is the play saying that all political aims are 'dreams', from which people awake to 'reality'? If so, then that reality can only be the individual, atomised consciousness, the individual survival, with all its arbitrariness.

With a profound irony, it is the two men (Colin, Frances' boyfriend, and Brewer, her teaching colleague), who make the most telling comments on events. Colin at one point asserts: "It's not a question of whether people change but how." Set against this is Frances' despair at whether or not she can change people, and Rosie's apolitical view of change. In a brief episode which consists of the most dramatic moments in the play, Frances comes across her two pupils skiving off lessons; she tries to persuade them to see themselves as independent, to be less interested in make-up and boys. It is a gentle and moving scene, culminating with the three women laughing at Brewer. Later Brewer attacks Frances: "Feminism makes women unhappy," he says, accusing her of destroying the girls' "dreams". In answer Rosie speaks in defence of women "being mapped . . . being thought and being done". Of her marriage she says "I made no choice, I was chosen". In the sense that she is referring to the dangers of passive femininity, she is on the right lines, but as an answer to Brewer's demand that women be responsible for their actions, arguing that women are simply victims is politically bankrupt. That our only link within the play to feminism (Frances) rejects both organised feminism and class analysis is unlikely to convince anyone that Brewer is wrong.

I do not demand that a play produce a 'correct' line, nor that it should resolve itself into a happy ending. But it seems to me that a play which takes on the challenge of viewing the present as history needs to be assessed on whether it sets up a dynamic situation, in which the individual interacts with his/her historical context. *Teendreams* sidesteps the issues by concentrating on detail (often moving, powerful and always very well performed) and symptoms at the expense of an over-view of political causes. It appears to take risks and then duck away from them. It is interesting that when Edgar approaches a scene of conflict or passion, he often lops the pronouns off the beginnings of his sentences, a mannered retreat from direct confrontation. In the end the play has laid before us a mass of fascinating and provocative material; but it does not push forward our understanding of it, and indeed the use to which the fragmented form is put simply reproduces a picture of change for women as fragmented and peripheral; an apolitical view, which both feminism and socialism surely seek to challenge rather than to reinforce.

**Michelene Wandor**

*For details of future performances telephone Monstrous Regiment, 01-253 2172.*