

From *The Sunday Age*, 11th of September, 1989 by Rosemary Neill

The fantasy confronted

Theatre

Call of the Wild
by **Jenny Kemp**
Presented by the **Spoletto**
Festival
The Church Theatre
Melbourne

Director: **Jenny Kemp**. Designer:
Jacqueline Everitt. With **Margaret**
Cameron, **Victoria Eagger**, **Margaret**
Mills, **Mark Minchinton** and **Ruth**
Schoenheimer.

ROSEMARY NEILL

JENNY Kemp's new play flirts brazenly, almost insolently, with risk.

Call of the Wild has a febrile vigour and an almost sinful sexual candour, and it consists of fragmented, hallucinatory sequences drawn from dreams, the imagination, fantasy and myth.

The play is plotless, its verbal rhythms are anarchic, its acting is radically stylised and it suspends tense, time and reality. It is also characterless, in that the actors represent the collective psyche, or archetypes, rather than any one persona.

The potential imperilment that faces such a risk-taking work is that it can hang between lucidity - telling us something about the world and self-absorption. Although it is sometimes selfindulgent, and although its conclusion is disappointingly irresolute, Kemp's play mostly keeps this danger at bay.

The Church's production which the playwright also directs - is confronting, audaciously nonconformist and utterly transfixing. Through this production, Kemp shows that she has a boldly calculated facility for making us flinch and for dislocating and manipulating our expectations and emotions.

The playwright, whose last work, *Goodnight Sweet Dreams*, also dealt with dreams, is primarily concerned in this work with the subconscious life of the archetypal

female in a world that both worships and humiliates her. At the core of the narrative is Kemp's concern that people in contemporary society keep themselves remote from their subconscious selves.

Humour

Kemp's sorties Into the psyche represent an attempt to balance the inner, psychic life with the outer, conscious one. To this degree, Call of the Wild is a plea for the reclamation of the unfragmented, holistic self.

In order to mimic the fragmented patternings of the mind, the text shuttles, seemingly randomly, between concepts such as pornography, erotica, religion, rape and housework.

The dramatic impact of many of the dream-like sequences relies on humour, juxtaposition and subliminal mind flashes.

For instance, In one vignette - a spoof on Cinderella or Prince Charming-type fantasies -one of the ugly sisters cuts off her heel so her foot will fit the glass slipper. This send-up is followed by a lightning-quick reference to clitoridectomy, thus crossreferencing fairytale masochism with real-life mutilation.

The performances from the five-member cast are uniformly pleasing. Kemp asks much of her actors in that they must traverse highly stylised territory without collapsing into caricature and purging their personas of credulity.

Elizabeth Drake's sound composition is central to Call of the Wild. Layered like filo pastry, it completes rather than frames the on-stage picture. (That picture includes bare-breasted costumes, which, derived from a European painting, are a confrontation tactic in their own right.)

Jacqueline Everitt's visually compelling set, meanwhile, forms an aptly ethereal precinct in which the actors patrol the darker corners of the psyche.