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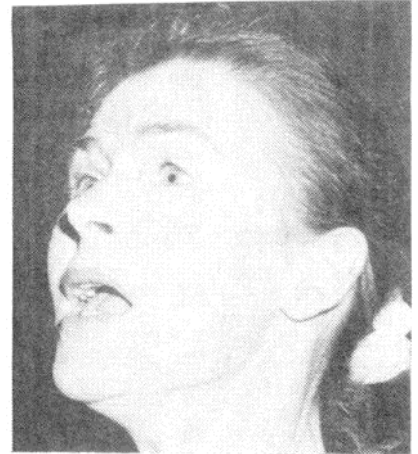
Imagistic vision of rape

THEATRE

Remember, written and directed by Jenny Kemp; music by Dalmazio Umberto Babare; designed by Jacqueline Everitt; with Margaret Cameron, Margaret Mills, Robert Menzies, Merfyn Owen and Ruth Schoenheimer (Gasworks, until 17 April).

LEONARD RADIC

THOSE who saw Jenny Kemp's 'The Call of the Wild' three years ago and 'The White Hotel' before it will know exactly what to expect from her new work.



Margaret Mills: haunted air.

It is first and foremost a piece of performance theatre, built from a complex mosaic of dreams, images and remembered incidents and underpinned by song and music. Like 'Call of the Wild', it is a semi-surreal work inspired by the images of Paul Delvaux. But unlike it, it has a storyline of sorts, with a basis in real life.

Kemp calls it "a critical examination of an act of murder". It might just as easily be described as a theatrical reaction to an act of rape. The rapist is a businessman with whom the victim, Moderna, has forged some kind of alliance. He rapes her at gun-point, and is shot dead by her in turn.

From her hospital bed she lives and relives the experience, each time with minor variations. Through her eyes we see not only her masked assailant (Merfyn Owen) but her feckless lover Jack (Robert Menzies) and a friend (Ruth Schoenheimer) who pops in and out of the piece, sometimes in the guise of hospital visitor, and at other times as a nightclub singer in a variety of extravagant costumes.

'Call of the Wild' was an erotic fantasy with strange disconnected elements. 'Remember' is more accessible. Its central incident is one to which theatregoers - female theatregoers especially - can relate. The act itself and the language used by Moderna's attacker is such as to send a shudder up any woman's spine. The attacker, she remembers, was "full of hatred". But what provoked this hatred is never explained.

This is the weakness of the piece. It operates at one level as a psychological thriller. But the psychology is paper thin and story outlines blurred. In 'Call of the Wild' the performers were not so much characters as states of mind and being. But here they have at least a semblance of reality. We know, for example,

that Moderna's lover Jack is unemployed and is prone to visions of his own. But the words he is given convey no sense of character. All that can usefully be said is that he is remote, and singularly lacking in affection (or at least the ability to express it).

Still, this is probably to miss the point: this is not a play in the conventional sense. Nor is it a work with a message. It works instead through image and suggestion. And at this level it is bold and original.

It takes place in a muddy landscape set with rocks. Crows squawk loudly, magpies carol, and lions roar in the distant forest. Moderna's remembrances from her hospital bed are acted out in turn by her alter ego (Margaret Cameron) who doubles as her nurse. Mills's Moderna has a frail, bewildered, sometimes haunted air. The production has songs composed by Dalmazio Umberto Babare which at times give the piece an operatic feel. All in all, an intriguing, if not exactly compelling piece of imagistic theatre, at its best when its creator allows her imagination free rein.