

# Hibberd's best with Gillies' masochism

*Stretch of the Imagination; Pram Factory, Back Theatre.*

This production confirms what was suspected in the original — that Hibberd had written his best and most thoroughly integrated work and created a memorable Australian personage of some repute: Monk O'Neil.

Monk, a former bon-vivant, Don Juan, latter day miser, misanthrope and macabre imaginer, is played by the redoubtable Max Gillies . . . looking remarkably like a declining Doc. Evatt.

Gillies under Paul Hampton's inventive



**THEATRE**

by

SUZANNE SPUNNER

direction, brings a strongly physical aspect to the role which borders on masochism.

Monk is an aesthete knocking his body and his thoughts into action, if not into shape in a painful self-inflicted ritual of living.

This Monk is thoroughly unrepentant, full of black jokes and yet

unable to take a trick.

Monk is the compleat Australian male as he might have been — no simple Ocker, but a man equally at home on the football field as he is sipping absinthe in Montparrasse, running into Proust, reading Plato over breakfast and vigorously disagreeing with him.

We believe in Monk although we'd be lucky to meet anybody like him. Gillies brings out all the nastiness and bitterness. I was surprised to find I remembered Peter Cummins' Monk as a nicer person, even innocent.

The writing is best when its most legendary: his succession of rapacious women who drained his vital juices, the triumphal tales of feats on the sporting field, the bar, and the cafe.

Thoroughly recommended, particularly if you've never seen the play and even if you have.

\* \* \*

*Old Flames* Grant St. till Dec. 11.

Whitehead's misogyny first observed in *The Foursome* reaches its apogee in *Old Flames* where he claims to show sexually liberated women in action talking among themselves.

It is an exercise in crass voyeurism ridden with more cliches than a *Cosmopolitan* revelation: how-I-broke-out-of-the-stereotype-and-found-myself.

Despite Whitehead's self appointed championing of the women's movement, the womens groups whose posters emblazon the foyer of Grant St. should demand the right to disassociate themselves.

The most sickening part of the whole cynical performance is that they would have us believe we are seeing 'liberation' and 'experimental theatre', when neither is in sight.