

I'M NOT A FEMINIST BUT...

REVIEW OF JENNY MUNDAY'S

BATTLE FATIGUE

Why don't you come on back to the war take up your tiny burden

Why don't you come on back to the war you can still get married

Leonard Cohen

I liked *Battle Fatigue*, but then I'm also a cranky old bat with a consciousness permanently split between traditional values and the gap represented by women's movement politics. I loved the music, I loved the set, I loved the acting. I have a major quarrel with the ideology, but first the good news.

The set throughout the three acts consisted of a kitchen table and chairs (formica, very fifties) a cupboard for dishes, a chest by the door, and a linoleum floor whose green squares matched the table (and didn't it all match way back then). The walls were made of plastic whose transparency enabled the viewing of other scenes in a very efficient blend of past and present, the two also separated by songs heard on the radio signifying war-time. Eighties ambience was provided by the character Kathy, whose clothes, job and cynicism signified the post-feminism "modern" woman, caught between tradition and choice.

The cast, directed by Mary Vingoe, was marvellous. Mulgrave Road Co-op Theatre gives consistently good performances with limited resources and funding; five women and one man played thirteen characters, representing first the women, then their friends and family as their stories unfolded in flashbacks around the kitchen table. First mother and daughter, then three women relegated to the kitchen during a party given for their male partners and war-time buddies, then the stories of the women themselves are revealed as the barriers between past and present dissolve.

The play is framed as a feminist politics of blaming

mother/daughter conflict, with daughter Kathy (Mary-Collin Chisholm) and mother Marion (Judith Orban) caught in the usual familial toils of guilt and resentment, their dialogue poignant and funny, the tension between them palpable. With listening, however, comes understanding. Daughter dons mothers fifties party dress and becomes her mother's acquaintance Frankie. Mother takes off her housecoat to reveal her fifties hostess self, they are joined by Doreen (Rona Waddington) and the oral tradition of women's storytelling works its cyclic spell.

Back another ten year in time and the women's wartime stories are given relevance. Mother was a private, Frankie was a nurse, and Doreen, the war-bride, an "ack-ack" girl. Their stories are then enacted with the inclusion of Corporal Smith, Lily, Carmaine, Sally and Mum (Mary Dale Steeves does a fine job wearing all these hats)

and Dad, Jack, Ron and Bill all convincingly and engagingly played by Rob MacLean. The stories are fun and funny (Ms. Munday gives us some hilarious lines) and the play concludes with the daughter enriched by having shared her mother's life.

And now the bad news. This is the age of post-feminism. Kathy begins with a really funny send-up of the women's art show she is organizing, where a pink-painted tunnel thrumming with the sound of a heart-beat, signifies the uterine and female world. The women are then criticized for their radical

men for their oppression, as opposed to blaming the institutions which construct patriarchy.

This is fine, very safe and humanist, except that the play again and again points to the oppression of its women characters by individual men. Jack demands his lunches and his buddy party, Doreen's Bill marries another woman and takes Doreen as his mistress, and Marion is done out of a lieutenantcy because, in a truly horrific example of misogyny at work, her army boss falsifies the list with her name next in line for promotion; but her, that's the way it is in life and there's nothing for it but endurance. (Both mother and daughter state this; it represents the play's closure politics.) If just one of those women had been black, (Pace Faulkner) there'd be little talk of endurance as a way of life.

In fact, feminist politics (without which this play would never have been produced) is never part of its dialectic. Women are represented as thoroughly locked into (and oppressed by) heterosexuality ("gay used to mean something pleasant"), marriage and motherhood (Doreen lacks happiness in marriage because she can't have children). A career is understood only as a poor replacement for the love of a good man. Even mother/daughter understanding is marred for me by Kathy's assumption of the role of mistress - the role which most threatens her mother.

At the end, we are left with Kathy and her mother, neither liking her role, both enduring regardless. As I said earlier, I'm just a cranky old bat, but if you stare hard enough at patriarchy, you're going to notice that it is composed mostly of members of the male sex; and then hopefully you'll grab one and ask him to at least make his own lunch.

Nevertheless, it was fine to see a play on Remembrance Day recollect part of women's input into wartime politics. I predict a long run for *Battle Fatigue*, not only is it safe, it's enjoyable. You should see it, if possible, at any one of its several New Brunswick performances till November 18th.

Lorna Drew



MOLECULES



Number one in a blatantly esoteric series concerning the appraisal of an unseen world.

This week: the T4 BASEPLATE

Within the spaces, folded like a multilayered shroud within a fold, a space of four notes. Orthogonal and sharp like an insistent arrow. There, floating, floating like a bark upon the waves; dipping prow with dimples generating waves and counter waves, stars in contrast bright and evermore bright upon the water. Time flowed. Welled and overflowed to, and from, depths like a cistern in the night and was full. Full from the wellspring of the makers brow.

Layer upon layer sifted over time as water ice upon the Jovian sphere. Silence in the clathrate. Unlocked, released by thermal evolution. Formed by the symmetry of twin fires in the hall of time. Roiling clouds struck through by chance as much as light from distant stars. Symmetry in the rungs. Symmetry in the helix as in the two hands of God. Expression and self expression were symmetrical. The scale replayed in seeming dissonance and yet, spiralling forth into some

primeval sea, like a wretch flung against the firmament, a form unto a form. A like unto alike, embraced and was fulfilled. A vessel in the mistral but now, not to drift unhelmed. Form upon the water and within, within a sign searching like unto another. Complete by chance, or not, and yet complete. Coiling and recoiling like a snake with two ends but one purpose. A tube exposed.

Fit by insistence of some will, a law. Like some great and oppressive weight a law. Such that side by side, paired and yet unlike, two forms are as one as the shadow and the light. In myriad casts year by the same potter thrown and so like other vessels all signed by the master's touch.

A perverse knot formed in the depths. A palindromic spark, caught between the ends of its own likeness. A mote with a shell of its own making. A guest, perhaps unbidden, carrying fruit from some distant shore. Crystal or unicorn?

Norm Watts

THE SEVENTH SEAL

Dir. Ingmar Bergman (Sweden, 1956)

Bergman's medieval morality film concerns a knight's quest for knowledge against a background of death, disease and corruption that functions as the social milieu of fourteenth-century Sweden. Its usefulness as post-modern allegory is, of course, self-evident.

Hoping for insight into the human condition, the knight plays chess with death. While the game is in progress, scenes of cruelty and depravity provide the psychological tension against which the knight's search is conducted. The squire's carnal cruelty establishes the dialectic for the knight's childlike innocence. Yet despite the obvious spectacle of the human race as damned, the knight's vision prevails and the human family is once more given privileged status.

It is not, however, only the plot that gives the film

relevance. Bergman's troop (Max Von Sydow and Gunnar Bjornstrand as knight and squire give remarkable performances) adds psychological relevance to the personification of abstract concepts (death brought to life, as it were). Lighting too creates an aura of magic and ambiguity; both the opening and closing scenes have the austerity of wood-cuts.

There is an aesthetic in the film that undercuts and works against a fatalistic reading. The Seventh Seal is full of beauty, and even a considerable amount of hope, given the setting. As an important work in the Bergman oeuvre, and especially as text wherein we read our own images/meanings, it holds considerable contemporary relevance.

Lorna Drew
November 10 and 11
Tilley Hall 8:00 PM

... (1981) ...