

Play aims microscope at women

Next week the theatre department plunges into conflict with *Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi*

By PAULETTE PEIROL

Imagine four disparate characters: an anorexic agrophobic waif, a mother of two children abducted by their father, a physiotherapist who works as a high-class escort at night, and a political activist unable to maintain both her ideals and her lover. Now imagine them all struggling through their individual crises in one communal living room. A premise such as this could easily become a farce, melodrama, or a feminist diatribe. Yet in *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* British playwright Pam Gems avoids all of these excessive categories. The play, being performed by York theatre students in Burton auditorium February 11-14, is instead a realistic examination of the conflicts facing these characters and the choice they make to resolve them.



Devoted mother of kidnapped children

Dramaturge Zwia Rechler stresses that Gems has portrayed her characters on an intimate level, offering a "microscopic view" of their lives. "It's like taking a wall out of a room and seeing in," Rechler says. *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* was written in 1976 for a mass media audience, and is structured in short, fast-paced scenes. Various crisis situations are the thrust of the play and act to bring the characters closer together to form a support system for each other.

"The crux of the play," says director Jill Courtney, a York theatre professor, "is the struggle for self-fulfillment in an often hostile world, that refuses to accommodate a woman's needs." Yet both Courtney and Rechler emphasize that the play is "not anti-male and not feminist." Rechler says that *Dusa* deals with "real issues which affect people at York, too... none of us are immune, although not all of us will choose these particular solutions."

Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi covers a broad spectrum of social issues indeed relevant to the York community. *Dusa*, played by Anne-Maria Hurlle, must deal with her shattered marriage and her desire to be a perfect mother; how can she be both a self-supporting working woman and a devoted mother? *Fish*, portrayed by Frieda Nagel, struggles for a balance between her political activities and her long-standing love affair, yet finds she is unable to maintain both desires. Her lover utterly willing to condescend himself to his needs. *Fish's* main problem is that she is able to fight for everybody else but cannot accept help from others.

Stas, played by Laura Egan, and *Vi*, acted by Lauren Piech, are more eccentric characters. *Stas* seems to be in complete control of her life; she works as a call girl in order to save



Idealistic political activist

money to study marine biology. She is concerned with the "how" rather than the "why" of her existence. *Vi* is a victim of her lower class "unskilled" upbringing; her only way of coping, it seems, is to take charge of her body.

The most challenging aspect of producing this play, according to Courtney, was doing the background research. It seems surprising that such a modern play would require a dramaturge, but Gems brings many issues to the front which need to be investigated. Topics include the class system in England, anorexia nervosa, agrophobia, Rosa Luxemburg (who *Fish's* character is modelled on), England's "anti-



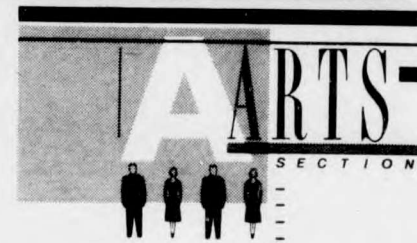
Anorexic agrophobic

Physiotherapist high class "escort"

discrimination law" for women in 1976, and the humanizing aspect which women offer politics.

This production focuses on "the unique needs and wants of each of

these women," according to Courtney. Rechler adds that they are trying to avoid making the characters "bleeding hearts"; "we are not trying to hit the audience on the head with internal problems." What is important in *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* is how characters control situations and respond to each other.



and Education Centre, Sophie Radziuk of York's Counselling and Development Centre, and Beth Walden of the Women's Centre. It is free and will take place on February 11, from 4-5:30 p.m. in the Purple Lounge of the Fine Arts Building.

On Friday, February 14, a symposium called "Women's Issues: Careers in the Arts" will be held from 10-11 a.m. in room 312 of the Fine Arts Building. Lisa Charendoff is the chairperson of this event. Speaking will be Alana Jones, artistic coordinator of the Muskoka Arts Festival, Jackie Samuda, a York graduate who is artistic director of Pyramid Productions, and Susie Carter of York's Communications Department.

Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi promises to be not only dramatic but provocative, bringing controversial issues to the forefront. Dare to be challenged by our theatre department; tickets are on sale now at the Burton Box Office, and are \$4 for students and seniors, \$5 for the general public.

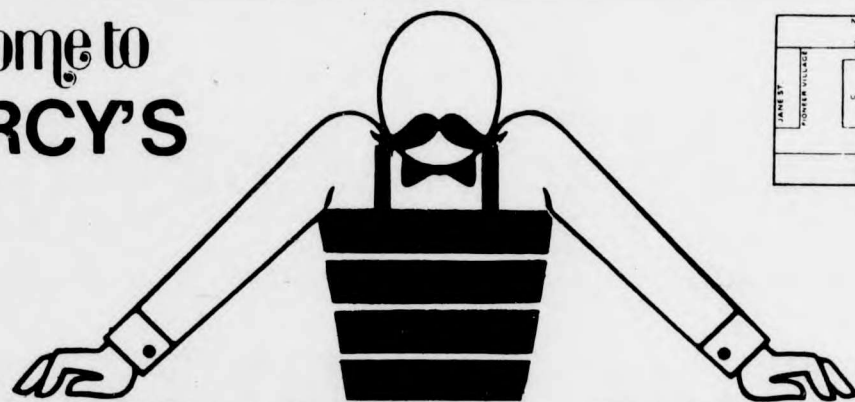
ERRATUM

Re: "York poets diverge in Antifaces" (*Excalibur*, Jan. 30/86). Margarita Feliciano did not organize the reading, nor did she coin its title. Also, the following paragraph was accidentally omitted:

Feliciano's work centers on historical subtexts interpreted culturally rather than politically. Her topics range from the ruins of a castle once inhabited by troubadours to the recent film *The Official Story*. Using a heavily metaphorical style, Feliciano seems to be trying to resurrect cultural icons. While her resonant voice was aesthetically pleasing to hear, her poetry lacked metaphoric credibility, and often lapsed into naive sentimentality.

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