

ENTERTAINMENT

Sheila Fischman:

The author's own celestial translator

Elliott Lefko

It's a good thing Sheila Fischman never listened to her mother, otherwise French Canadian authors such as Roch Carrier and Michel Tremblay may not have had their works published in English Canada.

When Fischman told her mother that she was using her degree from the University of Toronto to become a translator, the elder woman envisioned a career in the United Nations. She was horrified, however, to learn that the translating with which her daughter was to spend her days was not for foreign dignitaries, but for obscure French Canadian authors. Now, 25 books later, Ms. Fischman Sr. can take pride in the fact that her daughter has become

Canada's best-known translator.

"I guess I can take some credit for the introduction of French Canadian literature to the rest of Canada and the U.S.," says the shy, petite Fischman in a quiet voice devoid of any hint of breast-beating.

New fiction

"I came to Quebec at just the right time. There was a flood of exciting new fiction. I was the first person to devote myself to translating full-time," she remembers.

Fischman has translated works of such Quebec authors as Anne Hébert, Michel Tremblay, and her favourite Roch Carrier. It was Carrier's *The Celestial Bicycle* which brought Fischman to Toronto last week

to oversee the first couple of nights of the play she had translated.

Sitting in the Tarragon's administrative offices, Fischman recalls the first time she met Carrier.

"I'd been introduced to Roch and his wife socially, just around the time his *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* was released in its original French text in Quebec. It's hard to imagine," marvels Fischman, with more than a little awe, "but he wasn't known. Even in Quebec. Somebody had told me Roch was a writer. I was looking for something simple and straightforward that I could translate. I was hoping it would discipline me, and teach me to use the French dictionary."

Fischman received permission to translate this 'simple' book, and she admits that "the more I read the more I realized what a good book it was."

Career choice

Upon completion of her work Fischman mailed in the translated manuscript, and a career was born. Looking back on her career choice she says that translating is fascinating and intellectual work. "I really like working with words," says the graduate with a B.A. in Chemistry and an M.A. in Anthropology. "I don't imagine myself as a poet or a short story writer. I've no ambition towards that end."

Fischman says that the life of a translator is "disciplined and very boring."

"I begin working in my home office at 9:30 a.m., and continue until I don't feel like working anymore. If there's a pressing deadline I'll sometimes work evenings and weekends. Some days are more productive than



Albert Millaie in *The Celestial Bicycle* at the Tarragon until May 1.

others," she acknowledges.

Fischman feels that the public often misunderstands the translating process. "There's the misconception that I sit there every day with the author looking over my shoulder. Actually we have only a few meetings. I'll call if there's anything I don't understand."

"Before it goes to the publisher I send them the finished manuscript. I don't have to do it, but I do it as a matter of courtesy. They go over it to catch any errors, make notations and return it to me. I correct those and send it away," she explains.

Fischman claims that no author has ever expressed dissatisfaction with her work. "They're always so delighted with the fact that it's available in another language," she says.

Author's ideas

As her reputation increased, offers from other authors began to snowball. Fischman's only condition for accepting work is that she understands the parameters of the project. "To do it well you've got to have some empathy, ideally, with the author's ideas and style. There have been instances when authors said things I didn't believe in. But once I accept an assignment I don't feel my role is to proselytize."

Fischman says that her job has not grown easier over the years. "The more I do the more demanding I become. I hope my work is getting better. I know that I'm taking longer," she admits. "You become more aware of translation and what could be and should be. And I haven't lost my enthusiasm," she continues. "One's vocabulary increases and the french syntax becomes almost second nature."

La Guerre

As Fischman's clientele grows, she will still maintain her allegiance to her heroes such as Tremblay and Carrier. "I've translated just about everything Carrier's published. Our styles have developed together. When *La Guerre* was translated for the stage, someone else was chosen for the translation. I was furious, disappointed and I felt quite hurt. Perhaps at the time it might have been an over-reaction. But if it ever happens again I think my anger will be justified."

Judging by the high calibre and popularity of recent Fischman-Carrier collaborations, such as *The Hockey Sweater* and *The Celestial Bicycle*, it would seem that Ms. Fischman's independent daughter need not worry.



EDITORIALIZING

All the world's a stage
And all the men and women
merely players...

As You Like It

Al Locke

If we had a motto, this would be it. In looking over this year's Entertainment pages, composed and corrected in the wee hours of Thursday morning (sometimes by me personally), I cannot help but say, "a lot of work went into this." Aside from work, sweat, blood, tears, anguish, resulting in angry professors (essays written *were due*), missed dinners, and no sleep there is an exhausted sense of accomplishment. But a deadline approaches, the last deadline, and it is time to be more articulate. This is the last column of the year, the big 30.

Excalibur Entertainment in late '81 through '82 has grown to cover a fuller circle of events, and overcome space limitations to rise like a phoenix from the ashes of a onetime "Obscuretainment" (quote credit Berel Wetstein). The path to respectability has been a long and arduous one, he said keeping a tongue firmly planted in an already sore cheek, and without the help of many special and concerned people, it might never have been clumb, climbed, scaled or reached.

To Gary Cohen and Elliott (two t's) Lefko, who gambled on me (and lost) to handle the pressure job of entertainment: thank you. First for giving "the new kid" direction, and then for showing patience and understanding when all looked bleak.

To Berel Wetstein (not Barrell!) whose non-stop talk makes anybody feel welcome, and Lerrick Starr, whose knowledge of layout design put me on the right course, I can only say that I don't, never have, or ever will like either of you. Only kidding, thank you.

Jules Xavier also made his mark. A master of the cut-out photograph, otherwise flat photos were made to jump off the page. The purpose of this effect was to make the page more exciting, visually pleasing, and as a result more readable.

The names of dozens of people who wrote for Excalibur Entertainment will never be forgotten. These people volunteered their time to review the countless happenings around Toronto and York. Some of these individuals saw their stories get a late editorial chop, or get bumped to a later date, or simply killed—and they didn't kill me for it. Professional and amateur theatre companies and artists saw their shows reviewed, and the reviews didn't make it in the paper. Blame it on space, but don't anybody be discouraged.

To Ian Bailey, Michael Monastyrskij, and Paula Todd, who are in my opinion the three best writers Excalibur will have going for it next year—good luck. I don't think you'll need it however—talent speaks for itself.

Two Entertainment notables won't return next year: Tom King and Robyn Butt. King's cartooning ability and sense of humour made Googalunga an immense success. His will be a name worth remembering in the funny papers. Robyn Butt is perhaps the most gifted writer I have ever had the pleasure to work with. In subjective medium such as theatre, it is difficult to remove personal biases in the name of professionalism. It has been Excalibur's mandate to promote professionalism in every department, and with a reviewer such as Robyn Butt, that task is made a little easier.

For professionals and amateurs alike, my job has been attempting to make this section readable, entertaining and professional. We are all students here, volunteers attempting to serve the York Community to the best of our abilities. You the community with your displeasure over some stories, and praise of others, have made me feel that the year, the dedication of the time and effort has all been worthwhile. What more could anyone want when it comes time to say goodbye — 30.

Crackwalker a knockout

John Alevizakis

What does it take to hit you in the stomach, to knock you back in your seat? A manswimming in his own drunken vomit? A baby, strangled by his schizoid father, then presented to us by his retarded mother in a plastic bag?

These are some moments from the "Crackwalker", Judith Thompson's first play and judging by its success, not her last. It was not a clean, conservative, 'safe' production the TWP premiered on Tuesday



A scene from Thompson's *The Crackwalker* at TWP.

(runs until the twenty-fifth). Don't go planning to 'enjoy' the play: the filth and crudeness test one's definition of enjoyment. Your jaw drops, your stomach turns as you become a prisoner, witnessing the realities of the lower depths of society.

Crackwalker is the story of two lower class couples in, of all places, innocent Kingston, Ont.:

one held together by a love-hate passion, the other by their common oppressor - society. But its not the plot that keeps the play moving, its the characters, tied in knots, to each other and unable to see further than the next bed to sleep in, the next cigarette, the next bang...It's the extreme nature of each character's personality and the diversity between them that makes one ask, 'Is this possible?', while our tell-tale feelings of pity, tension, and nausea tell us 'Yes, it is.'

We wonder, amongst the

floorboards and Tim Horton doughnuts, between the drunkenness and sadism, masochism and despair, how life could continue to exist here at all. What we find is that values do in fact hold things together here: persistence and strength of will remain virtues. Within the vulgarities, cursing and spitting, theft and sex, there is a type of pride, a set of morals which are stood by with more strength than is often shown in higher classes.

continued on page 14

Rivoli's Nion:

Game Show Expectations

Linda Feesey

Nion has developed a truly contemporary clown theatre, that is as irreverent as it is funny, without recourse to verbal or slapstick humour. *Comedia Bizarre* is a campy and naughty cabaret show that showcases the Nion troupe. It's on for an extended run at the Rivoli, 334 Queen St. West.

It is the picaresque adventure of a cosmic visitor named Nion born before our eyes on the Rivoli stage. We are his only mediators with the patische that is the world. Nion, played energetically by Ian Wallace, looks to us for guidance and approval. If he is lost in the world/nightclub, his incom-

prehensible gurgles and primitive tumbling across the stage and our tables is lost on us. But the alien does not allow us to shrink free from our responsibilities as his 'godparents'. Amazingly through audience adlibs and his eagerness, he learns enough to make a successful foray into our world of game-show-expectations. And we, as his mentors, enjoy his triumphs and failures. Marcel Marceau, this ain't exactly. Take a sublime and fantastical journey through our pop culture, featuring a crash course in Franco-Italian game show phrases, to the Kabaret (as spelt in the Nion program) de la vita at the hands of Nion's *Comedia Bizarre*.