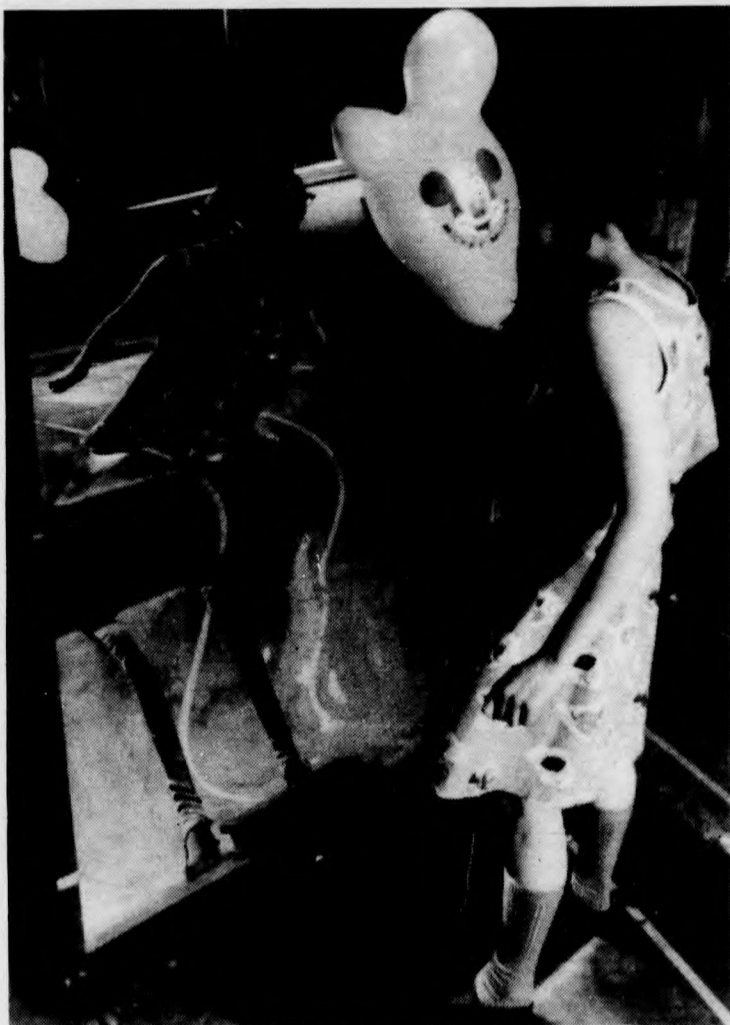


Handkuffed on Staller's Farm



Beppi and Sepp go to an amusement park in Staller's Farm

Elliott Lefko

It dreamt to me. It spoke to me, these words, these plays, these actors. They ripped through my ears and spread through my body, a whirling dervish of thoughts and energy that set my fancy into motion.

From the nightlights of Hamburg, Munchen, and the Black Forest come the words of Peter Handke and Franz Xaver Kroetz. Their respective plays, *Self Accusation* and *Staller's Farm* have transcended cultural boundaries and language translations to become live, brilliant theatre, right here in Toronto.

Both of these playwrights wield big guns in their home country. Yet their words have previously landed in North America only in small doses. Kroetz's plays have been performed a few times in the US (New Haven is surprisingly alert to his work), but *Staller's Farm* is his first work to be performed in Canada. Handke has been more fortunate, with a number of his works hitting the boards both here and in the U.S. Both writers have worked with film in Germany: Kroetz with R.W. Fassbinder (*Jailbait*), and Handke

with Wim Wenders. In addition, both Handke and the German filmmaker Werner Herzog have produced works based on the bewildering tale of *Kaspar Hauser*.

The similarities between the two playwrights are many. Both *Staller's Farm* and *Self Accusation* are understated works that challenge the mind. *Staller's Farm* employs four actors, each moving props and working the lights. The action comes in stops and starts, each shift stripping the actors, and sets, of their facade. *Self-accusation* uses two actors, plus two technicians working lights, sound, and providing live eerie sounds. The actors on stage use little props, focusing their attention on the verbiage, instead.

Staller's Farm is the more theatrical of the two. However, potential theatre-goers should adjust their expectations of theatrical staging. Kroetz's play is actually audience-repelling.

As mentioned the play breaks often, with the longest dramatic scene consisting of barely ten minutes. These few scenes are tossed to the audience as dramatic teases. The audience appeared so used to focusing its

attentions on the stop-and-go action that the dramatic effect of a near rape scene, or the speech that the father delivers in retribution, hit them squarely and kept them coming back for more.

The effect was short-lived, however. After the rape scene, the girl got up, picked up her panties, put them back on, found her glasses, snatched a prop and walked off stage, her face a blank map.

Canadian director Peter Froelich first saw the play in Yugoslavia (in German, on earphones). He was floored by Kroetz's dramatic power. Two years later, he translated it into English.

Froelich has worked recently as the director of the popular *Hank Williams Story* (with Sneezey Waters). After he developed the show, and saw it become a success, he turned his attention to *Staller's Farm*.

The plot revolves around an 18-year old retarded girl. Her father, Staller, owns a farm he works with his wife, and a hired hand, Sepp. The family lives in obscurity. They know each other but little else. They barely speak to each other. What little they do speak is mostly from the Bible.

Beppi, the retarded girl, is forgotten by her blank parents. She was "written off" a long time ago as simple and her parents have since barely minded her. When Sep, the hired hand, begins to spend time with her, she draws to the human contact, and they fall in love.

The brilliance of Kroetz comes in his choice of certain images to create the effect he needs.

In a scene leading up to the rape, Beppi and Sepp go to an amusement park. Their sad and mundane lives are cast into a time-warp, where fun is the ruling order. The sudden fantasy begins as they enter the 'funhouse'. Beppi baits her, teases her, counters her "no's" with his "yes's". Finally, they fall in. When they come back he is all smiles and she is in some form of ecstasy. Her face is torn between sorrow and joy, pain and pleasure. She has wet her pants.

Kroetz's characters come to a surreal focus at such a point. Their emotions are at a visceral level. He has drawn the aggravation, pain, and bizarre happiness that are at the heart of his view of mankind.



Remember Alberta

The *Bring Back Quintet* Department: Alan Rudolph's *Welcome to L.A.* was a classic beginning to a career. His *Remember My Name* for Robert Altman's *Lion's Gate Films* is a *Chirpin'* continuation. Starring



Geraldine Chaplin with cig

Geraldine Chaplin and Anthony Perkins, the film also introduces the great singing style of Alberta Hunter, the hottest 85-year old blues singer alive.

Says critic Jim Bickhart about the film soundtrack: "*Remember My Name* is an updating of the classic women's melodrama and it finds an eloquent musical voice in Alberta Hunter's classic blues style. She has written new tunes for the film, including the moving title song, and the ballad, "The love I have for You," and she reprises "Downhearted Blues", "My Castle's Rockin'" and other chestnuts.

Coming very soon to the Festival Cinema. Be Black soon.

The modernist Peter Handke has gone a polemical route with his *Self-Accusation*. The action is stripped down to just two human—one male, one female—in two glass booths, with a gauze curtain hiding a backdrop of a canvas and two lawn chairs. The room is filled with the sound of a synthesizer while a tape recorder records the dialogue spoken by the two characters, spewing it back, at interludes, while they separately and simultaneously deliver their poetic, clipped lines.

Handke goes for the head with his monotone montage of sound poetry. The two haltingly describe their awakening, their re-awakening, their awareness, and their death.

Handke's characters soon develop belligerent attitudes. They begin "laying their bikes against forbidden walls and disturbing the quiet of the night." One character describes "playing with the trigger of a cocked gun." The heads of the characters have been opened up, exposing angels and devils, swimming around, masquerading as positive and negative thoughts.

The characters soon fashion some understanding from the chaos of their lives. They sit on lawn chairs in front of a backdrop of a cloudy sky and a body of water. They re-examine their lives. Returning from the beach to the booths, they realize that they never fulfilled the optimism

of their youth. And they never did become what "I should have become."

Handke needs to express that man is usually defeated in his hopes and ambitions. His words look silly in reprisal—they lose their meanings. Really, the only thing he can control is the moment. Says one of the characters: "I call the moment delicious."

Handke ends the play by focusing his attention on the audience. He tells us that this is the end of the story. "I came to the theatre/I spoke this piece." This examination is for us to digest individually. The lights fade and we are left in our own mind caverns, accompanied by some suggestive synthesizer.

While Kroetz has given his characters little to say, and created them as plebes, Handke has given his reams of dialogue and made them intellectuals.

Both playwrights have fashioned their people as victims of the society in which they live. The moments of vigour and inspiration are far and few in the lives of their monosyllabic characters. Their possibilities of existence are curbed by surrounding forces.

Franz Xaver Kroetz's *Staller's Farm* Theatre Passe Muraille, 16 Ryerson Ave. 363-8988

Peter Handke's *Self-Accusation* Theatre Centre, 95 Danforth (Broadview subway station) 461-1644.

Endgame April 15-27, 8:30.

fester's flashback

that was the year that was...
april 7, 1980
fester bangs esq.

another school year has ended and i sit here slightly better educated and a lot more confused trying to type out a coherent set of recollections for the last issue of *excalibur*. the year in review is a marvellous tradition to which i now proudly/presumptuously/unhesitantly add my two cents worth:

1980 arrived, widely heralded and wildly anticipated it is so far a flop. the central squarites sucked the energy out of the new wave and now casually wear its most frivolous trappings. the most we can hope is that they will stay in the suburbs...

sixties nostalgia bloomed slightly/the sit-in and some fringe protesting. i would love to be able to invoke the memories of rubin and hoffman but daren't. the new activism seems very contained and to be practiced by only a very small minority. maybe next year we will all develop social consciences.

yesterday i saw three girls w/"bo derek" hairstyles. not a "10" among them. do you suppose they realize where the style originally came from?

james boyle was prevented from assuming the presidency of the c.y.s.f. because of the infighting/terror prevalent among the current power elite. shame. boyle was almost radical enough to have caused a real upheaval at york. lets hope he doesn't get sucked into the political black hole currently running student affairs and returns next year as a seriously threatening/anarchic candidate.

someone's basic insecurities resulted in an ignoble end to the c.y.s.f. film series. a program i

personally enjoyed. i don't care whose big tits offend or how bad the 3-d films were. censorship is simply not a viable alternative.

more people should stop and read the marxist-leninist paper sure it is propaganda and you may have several ideological disagreements but at least they are outraged at things that are outrageous and are willing to express it. which is a hell of a lot more than can be said for most yorkites.

york had several of its more illustrious students immortalized as sunshine boys/girls.

four good films played in toronto: **dawn of the dead, all that jazz, being there and rock n' roll high school.** so did innumerable lousy and/or mediocre ones.

lyceum is finally providing long deserved competition for the "york university bookstore". (i have a solution to their current problems: stock billy graham et. al in the comedy section where they belong.)

warren rill was not directly implicated in any deaths.

the zipless fuck played only one (and a generally disappointing one) concert all season. please a comeback. if we ever need it...

Rat, Dr.

The Doc is dead. Dr. Rat has been murdered and his body will be burned tonight. Only a youthful rat, he nonetheless was unpopular and a number of prime suspects are now being considered. It is doubtful, however, if any resolution can be reached. Authorities suspect very foul play. So it goes. I'm gonna miss that rat.