

TEREZKA, written by Margo Lee Sherman and Harry Rubeck; performed by Margo Lee Sherman; directed by Harry Rubeck; set by Frank Shifreen. The New Theatre, New York City, January, 1986.

Margo Lee Sherman's new one-woman performance piece, alternately assaults and caresses the audience with its deadly humour and tender images. Her Terezka persona unifies the perceptions of an anguished woman with the body movements of a 4-year old girl in a dazzling performance! Both the spiral structure of the work and its poetic folk images resonate with Yeats' The Circus Animals' Desertion, his rag-and-bone-shop of the heart. A snugley group of stuffed animals, placed like footlights, are Terezka's fictive audience. The setting is a surrealist attic: two chairs are bound together like hostages by a bobweb of rope; strings with piping are a chiming forest; a green, plastic telephone is her only link to the outside world; and an antique rocking horse is her Pegasus mode of transportation. The audience of toys reinforce Terezka's isolation - the wise madwoman in the attic.

Terezka, in the opening of the piece, is a dark figure in fetal position humming contrapuntally to a music box. She has a birthday party for her stuffed animal Donald, tells stories within stories about a little girl named Madge and a horse who couldn't fly, juggling worlds and words obsessively. She shrëaks on the phone for "The Department of Blood," for "The United States of America," for a reservation at a lake resort. She tells threatening parents, "I'll do anything you want!" She tells dead-baby-in-South-Africa jokes, recites lists of South American produce, sings about rockets in the air, and dances savagely as a horse. Overlaying all her personal despair and political rage is a love of language, "Sticks and stones can hurt my bones, but words, I love 'em, I love 'em, I love 'em."

The constellation of objects and words in Ms. Sherman's performance remind us of the importance of childhood play in artistic creation. Her toys function as what psychoanalyst Kohut termed archaic self-images, extensions of her pre-reflective personal world. They also function as what psychoanalyst Winnicott calls transitional objects. Her theatre piece occupies a borderland between inner and outer worlds. The withdrawal of this woman-child from a nightmarish shared cultural existence, is not merely masochistic and narcissistic, but provides a space for both authentic feeling and imagination. The end of the piece is a moment of redemption. Ms. Sherman/Terezka stands radiant and naked, proclaiming, "The most beautiful thing under the sun, is being under the sun!"

Terezka is a complex piece, difficult to write about, but exhilarating to experience. Ms. Sherman is one of the finest experimental actresses in New York. Her acting celebration of woman's interplay with patriarchal politics should be celebrated itself. Harry Rubeck's relentlessly inventive direction and Frank Shifreen's environment heighten the dark playfulness of her play.

- by Melinda Jo Guttman