

Arts & Entertainment

Women authors examine feminist aesthetics in art

By Cydney Wilson

A capacity crowd filled the Sheldon Auditorium Wednesday evening for a forum, "The Feminist Aesthetic: Women Writers and Society."

Presented were: Tillie Olsen, author of *Tell Me A Riddle*, *Silences* and *Yonondio*; Catherine Stimpson, critic, editor, founder of *Signs*, and author of *Class Notes*, and Mary Hellen Washington, critic and editor of *Black-Eyed Susans* and *Midnight Birds*.

Each woman spoke in turn, allowing questions after their speeches. Moira Ferguson, UNL English professor and chairperson of the Women's Studies Program, made the introductions.

In speaking about women in the arts, Stimpson spoke of women having not yet achieved a female aesthetic, and summarized her speech by attributing new forms of art, poetry, performance art and literature to the feminist movement.

Washington spoke from a different frame of reference than the other two women, addressing minority women as well. Near the conclusion of the evening, Washington made a clear statement concerning language and the printed word in the world of the arts, saying "the emphasis of the written word is practicality. In a world where film is dominated by men and whites one breaks barriers to only find one behind it."

Different perspectives

Olsen spoke of the female aesthetic, defining it in many different perspectives but initially as "that which we strive to judge our own work."

She traced the origins of the aesthetic, saying "it came from the creatures out of caves, the creation of language. The creation of food, clothing, and shelter bring in a sense of beauty and form, giving us our tradition. The female aesthetic also tries as much as possible to cling to reality, which has to do with the nature of human beings."

Olsen commented briefly on many to-

pics, trying to cover different areas than those raised previously by Washington and Stimpson.

Her views of the world of art were enlightening. She spoke of art forms as coming out of "women's restriction and confinement," adding that her daughter "engages in the art of quilting out of joy and freedom, yet one cannot help but conjure images of the women first engaged in such an activity and their role in society."

Olsen's definition of the female aesthetic broadened with the addition of form and content — "the old forms do not suit us, you have to make it so clear and so direct because you're writing against assumptions and silences." (Silences she defines as "being silenced, only in those realms as which we define as arts or literature.")

She lauded her fellow panel member, Washington, for taking strides in presenting changes in writing.

"The change, the leap in subject matter — it is what women embrace and what they command," she said.

Lesbianism

In closing comments, Olsen remarked, "In women everyday, what is called creativity goes on in forms that people don't realize."

Continuing by remarking that women's bodies are "beasts of burden," and naming class, sex and race as the "three greatest classes of women," she added that lesbianism is an important new element to the female aesthetic.

Olsen addressed many issues, all very briefly, and sometimes rather sporadically. In summary, she said, "too much unsaid, not enough clarified. . . love."

Olsen, the final speaker of the three, is a native Nebraskan. Born and raised in Omaha, she received a Doctorate of Arts and Letters from the University of Nebra-



Photo courtesy of UPC

Cornstock stages rockers

Cornstock XII, featuring three Midwestern rock bands, is slated for this afternoon. Comedian Tom Parks will open the show at 12:30 p.m., and will introduce the first band, Mischief, at 12:45 p.m. At 2:15 p.m., Lincoln country rocker Footloose will begin its set, and at 3:45 p.m., the Minneapolis-based group Chameleon is scheduled to take the stage.

Cornstock XII will be held in the grassy area between Filley Hall and the East Union. According to the National Weather Service, the temperature today could reach 80 degrees.

ska in 1979.

Olsen calls herself a woman who has lived a "triple life," one of mother, housewife and full-time working woman. She said "women who write must voice the unvoiced."

Olsen, along with four daughters, is currently a resident of San Francisco where May 18 has been declared Tillie Olsen Day by Mayor Diane Feinstein, (Olsen later admitted that Feinstein has named the other 364 days of the year for 364 other

people).

Her first work was published in 1934. Since then, she has received many honors and awards for her writing, including the O'Henry Award in 1969 for *Tell Me A Riddle*.

The audience Wednesday evening was appreciative, and during parts of the evening enthusiastic, yet they lacked the spark that great women such as Washington, Olsen and Stimpson are capable of igniting.

Bergman film plays fatalistic message too well

By David Thompson

Ingmar Bergman made his first film in 1945. Since then he has explored the technique of film making as few people have. Those explorations serve as an explanation for the technical perfection of *From the Life of Marionettes*, Bergman's second German film which first appeared in America in 1980 and which will be showing at the Sheldon Film Theater Friday, Sunday and Monday. It is a film



Movie Review

flawlessly crafted to the extent that it is almost too well done. The edges are neatly trimmed, and the film perhaps falls into place too easily, but this does not detract from its powerful beauty.

The story begins with a murder. In a scene of raw, dry color a man chokes a woman to death. From there it swings back in time to a soft black and white, and Bergman explores the events that led to the murder. We meet Peter, the murderer; Katarina, his wife; Mogens Jensen, a psychologist; Cordella, Peter's mother; Tim, a friend of Katarina's, and Ka, the prostitute who dies by Peter's hand. Using an interview structure that has been used in such American films as *Lenny* and *Reds*, Bergman presses these characters into talking about themselves and their feelings about Peter.

Answering the questions of an interviewer who is usually off screen, these characters come under the close scrutiny of Bergman's camera and explain their side of the story. The interviews, which take place after the murder, are interwoven with events which took place before the murder, and together the scenes form a tapestry which comes full circle. The screen flashes to color when the murder comes again at the end of the film, and this time it is filled with all that we know about what motivates the character and with the weight of Bergman's message. Like a Bach canon the melodies intertwine and we end where we began.

Sound confusing? It's not really, and Bergman flashes words on the screen explaining exactly where in time each scene takes place. We discover that Peter is a successful businessman who is beginning to feel the emptiness that lies behind a marriage filled with bickering and a social life filled with dinner parties, alcohol and drugs. "We like our pleasure, or perhaps each other's pleasure," he says, unsure where happiness lies.

That may not sound like adequate motivation for a murder, but the murder was a necessary vehicle for Bergman's message. He uses it as a tool, the speck of dust around which his film grows like a crystal. Peter's premonitions and fears of such a horrible event taking place reverberate throughout the film. "It frightens me that I want to kill another human being," he says, admitting that his desires are not always his own, that the puppeteer controls the strings. The dream that Peter has of the murder is depicted in a fabulously blank void of white with

Peter and his intended victim huddling in the center of it, players on an immense stage. It is one of the many outstanding scenes in the film.

Another scene of considerable strength, though weakened somewhat by a hint of pathos, is a conversation between Katarina and her friend Tim. Tim sits staring into a mirror, turning to address Katarina from time to time. Lamenting about his sad life, he looks back and forth from her to the mirror, addressing alternately her and himself, the game player and the game maker. "I'm governed by the forces I cannot master," he says. "Lust and mad excitement and beastliness." Like most of the characters, he is controlled by emotions and desires that are beyond him. "People like me never give thought to the mind," Katarina says.

The problem is that the film plays out Bergman's fatalistic message all too well, and the characters are caught within his finely tuned structure. "All ways out are closed," Peter says. The symbolism culminates a little too tidily in the murder, and one cannot quite justify Peter's action as "the one experience of unconquered reality" that Bergman makes it out to be.

Nevertheless, *From the Life of Marionettes* can be marveled at, being flawed only to the extent that it may be too well done, which is an extremely pleasing fault to discover in a film. Bergman has dipped below the skin of existence, playing out his beliefs in perfect form. "Below the surface I'm always crying," Katarina says after the murder, and while we are below the surface we feel the same.