

Workshop Notes

Tonight we bring you three short scenes from Lindsay Vickery's contemporary opera - in - the - making *Rendez - Vous*, from the novel *Djinn* by French novelist Alain Robbe - Grillet.

Djinn was written in 1981. It is a structuralist mystery and is placed firmly in the detective story tradition. Robbe - Grillet strips away the illusions of linear narrative to create a self reflective world of duplicity, where events and circumstances flow around the central character in a mysterious flux of "object - signs": clues that gradually accumulate to form a pattern which perhaps holds the solution to the mystery - a dynamic which powers the central forces in the film noir genre:

In the brief time I have had to research for this workshop I have been struck by the way that, in setting *Rendez - Vous* as an opera, Lindsay is intuitively melding principles that are shared between opera, one of the most oldest of theatrical forms, and late 20th century structuralist literature.

Ostensibly it is something of an odd marriage, to quote Paul Henry Lang::

Operatic conventions are not necessarily anti - dramatic, but they are anti - literary

But in *Rendez - Vous* I believe that this marriage has a great deal of promise. There are many common elements, and direct lines of exchange between these apparently disparate forms eg:

- The opera's traditional use of episodic, richly imagistic tableaux mirrors Robbe - Grillet's use of "the frozen scene", in which the meticulous exposition of the situation determines the outcome of the events.
- Opera uses its opulent aesthetic to distance an audience in much the same way as the "closed" polished surface of the structuralist aesthetic seeks to distance the work from any analysis beyond the author's intention.
- The interweaving of motifs and refrains throughout an operatic composition echos Robbe - Grillet's shifting time scales and his use of ambiguity and repetition.
- The mathematical precision of structure inherent in *Djinn* shares the same degree of exactitude as the formal arrangement of musical composition.
- Robbe - Grillet's use of distilled "object - signs", is reminiscent of Wagnerian symbolism, though their respective cultural uses differ.

Dickon Oxenburgh
Dramaturg. July, 1994

Three Scenes from Rendez - Vous

Police break into an empty apartment, the owner Simon Lecoeur has vanished leaving a bizarre document - a story which contains clues to his disappearance:

Simon Lecoeur, erstwhile private eye, becomes enmeshed in an underground organisation headed by Djinn, a woman of dangerous and seductive powers. He is sent on a mysterious mission - a bizarre trail laid by agents of the organisation, or is the whole story a figment of his paranoid imagination? The story climaxes in murder.

Scene 1

Simon Lecoeur is summoned to an old warehouse where he meets Djinn, the leader of a covert organisation, and Laura her sinister accomplice. He is given an envelope containing his assignment, about which he is told nothing, for reasons of secrecy.

Scene 2.

Simon leaves the warehouse, his head full of infatuated thoughts of Djinn. He stops for a coffee at a cafe. He is observed by a medical student who turns out to be an agent of the organisation. She gives him directions.

Scene 3

Simon runs into Marie and Jean, two strange children who also appear to hold keys to Simon's mission. They enter a restaurant where Marie weaves precocious fantasies around Simon concerning the identity of their father. She has told Simon in a previous scene that he is their father, now she changes her story, their father is the waiter, a ghostly incarnation of their dead father, lost at sea. Her coquettish child's play disorientates Simon..what new perils can befall our intrepid hero?

Alain Robbe-Grillet 1922 —

Born in Brest, France, Alain Robbe-Grillet was trained as an agronomist and then worked from 1945 to 1951 as a statistician and in research on tropical fruits in Paris, Africa, and the Antilles. Moving from science to fiction, he became France's principal spokesman for and practitioner of the "new novel" as well as a filmmaker of international renown; his screenplay for Last Year at Marienbad (1961) was highly influential. Robbe-Grillet's version of the "new novel" is highly descriptive and, in one sense, objective, following from his theories (as stated in For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction, 1964) that call for seeing the world-as-it-is: neutral, opaque, unconnected with man, incapable of being humanized into a sentimental system on a theological model. His first published novel, The Erasers, appeared in 1953, followed by The Voyeur (1955), Jealousy (1957), In the labyrinth (1959), Project for a Revolution in New York City (1972), Topology of a Phantom City (1978), and others. Snapshots (1962), a collection of experimental stories, was translated in 1968. Frequently Robbe-Grillet's fiction invites the reader to collaborate in the creative process.

Appendix
from { Biographical Sketches

The Art of Fiction

R. F. Dietrich (Uni of Sth Florida)

Roger H. Sundell (Uni of Wisconsin -
Milwaukee)

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