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Le Fusil de chasse: A ceremony where erotic pleasure and sadomasochistic submission echo Mishima's performance esthetics of self immolation

Reviewed by Alvina Ruprecht

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A poet who mentions in a journal article that one day, he saw a hunter walking in the woods holding a rifle, receives a letter from that same hunter named Josuke Misugi. The missive contains three letters that could be a source of inspiration for the poet. What was the content of those letters? What was the hunter's real reason for sending them? We soon find out as the three letters become the text of the play, *Le Fusil de chasse*, (*The Hunting Rifle*).

The male voice 'off' of the poet, speaking of the letters, becomes silent as the content of the letters materializes on stage. Actress Marie Brassard incarnates the three women who have written those letters. In this play, adapted by Serge Lamothe from a Novel by Yasushi Inoué, director François Girard (*Le Violin rouge*) brings the three women back, like ghosts, to read their epistles, thus allowing us to reconstruct the circumstances of their tragic lives.

As the ceremony begins, a lone male figure, perched on an elevated surface up stage, appears as an illuminated point in the dark. He is handling a long rifle, moving it up and down. There is something strangely erotic about his movements which are slow and hieratic. He never speaks although his emotions are transmitted by his exaggerated facial expressions which freeze periodically, giving the impression that his face is actually a masque. He remains in that elevated space throughout the

performance, never speaking, barely moving, as the women, incarnated by a single actress, tell their stories.

First there is a screen of falling water cascading down stage. As it lifts, we see Shoko, a young girl whose body is curled up in gestures of fear and despair. This timid and terrified school girl tells us she wants to understand what her mother felt for her ‘lover’, why she lied about her father, and why the mother killed herself and who was this woman “Midori who came into their lives.

Slowly, the actress then becomes ‘Midori’, the black haired beauty in the flaming red dress, the “other” woman, actually the abused wife driven to a state of depravity by the abjection she suffered at the hands of this husband who had many lovers. She screams, and rages, and walks slowly over the pebbles that cover the surface of the stage, the crunching could easily be broken glass, as Midori purposely subjects herself to pain and torture as she crosses the acting space.

Marie Brassard is then transformed into the traditionally submissive mother Saïko, the mistress who sacrificed all, even her own life, for the love of his man.

All these figures have come back to seek out explanations because none of the three voices possesses the whole story but together, they reconstruct everything so the story can finally be told in its complete form. That is the secret of the three letters.

A global picture of a deeply macho and misogynist Japanese society that destroys women comes to light. Serge Lamothe’s adaptation of the Inoué novel of the same name, with the help of director François Girard, (*le Violin rouge*), scenographer François Séguin, and soundscape artist Alexander MacSween, have produced a modern Noh drama, modeled after the erotico- sadomasochistic ceremonies inspired by the theatre of Mishima, ending in a female version of a ceremonial suicide about to take place, as the male watches.

Girard has dressed the stage in elements inspired by the traditional Noh stage. The panels of wood that cover the floor, the towers of natural elements that become layer upon layer of words that rise above the back of the stage; the water that pours forth in a torrential cascade at the very beginning, the brittle sounds of light wood percussions that announce the movement of the Noh story: the world of Noh characters returning from the dead who have come to reconstruct their lives to explain their deaths.

However, it is the actress, Marie Brassard who towers above the dark stage elements, and who inhabits the text like a supernatural creature, howling with anger, trembling with fear, melting with sensuous pleasure, burning with depravity or crying out in despair. She is magnificent. The whole sound scape that she produces in some way captures the vocal sounds of the Japanese Noh actors whose coded deliveries are so foreign to our own language. Somehow, Marie Brassard’s voice has captured that orchestration of sound that sends shivers up ones spine.

François Girard and his team have recreated a modern Noh experience that is perfectly synchronized and beautifully coordinated in this tale of death and abjection that strangely enough in no way puts into question the presence of the lone male, the hunter who has destroyed the lives of his prey.

The Fusil de Chasse, the object that symbolizes all the male power, becomes the perfect symbol of this highly ritualized society where the playwright has tried to give powerful voices to its victims. We could say that he has succeeded in doing just that. A beautiful ceremony where death, erotic pleasure and sadomasochistic submission fuse together in a vision that, in many ways, echoes, from a feminine perspective, Mishima’s performance esthetics of self immolation. An amazing piece of theatre.

Le Fusil de Chasse plays in the Theatre of the NAC until November 27, Performances at 7h30.

Alvina Ruprecht

Ottawa, November 26, 2010

Marie Brassard (Midori)

Une coproduction du Théâtre français du Centre national des Arts à Ottawa, du Parco Theater de Tokyo, de l'Usine C de Montréal,

Texte de Yasushi Inoué

Adaptation de SERge Lamothe

Mise en scène de François Girard,

Scénographie de François Séguin

Musique et conception sonore

d'Alexandre MacSween

Éclairages de David Finn

Costumes de Renée April

Distribution

Homme: Rodrigue Proteau

Les femmes : Marie Brassard.

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