

I first encountered Janice Findley's unique aesthetic vision while serving on a grant-giving panel. I'd watched many, many films that day—well-intentioned, pretty, amateurish, polished, angry, banal, every one a window into a mostly pedestrian imagination. Then came "Beyond Kabuki," a short film by Findley. And I felt that shock of recognition that every film critic cherishes, the moment when a work of art reaches out and identifies itself as Original, something utterly new, a vision unlike any you've seen before.

Findley's impressionistic narrative was an excursion into sensual style, voluptuously beautiful, terrifying, witty, and above all, riveting. Here was an artist who knew how to use cinema as a medium to conjure up and expose images from the darkness behind the brain, where gorgeous obsession, nightmare, daydream and primal memory thrive. Minimalist or wildly embroidered, Findley's images danced, choreographed by a fiercely original imagination.

More films followed, and I came to know the remarkable artist who made them. Then, recently, Findley the filmmaker let me know she would be directing again. But this time it would be Samuel Beckett...on stage! I went, I watched, and once again, felt that terrific shock of recognition. Findley demonstrated a profound grasp of stagecraft—transforming theatrical space into something like cinematic mise-en-scene—and, no surprise here, she translated Beckett as though he was blood kin. Souls and lives laid bare in language paradoxically stripped down to the bone and yet swollen with significance; ritualized sound and movement, unnerving, blackly hilarious; dream dances in the dark. You couldn't really say Findley had made a transition from film to theatre; this was more like an alchemical process in which such distinctions ceased to exist.

In October, Findley will bring Caryl Churchill's ambitious play "The Skriker" to Seattle's Erickson Theater. The British playwright has imagined an apocalyptic phantasmagoria located where reality and the world of faerie intersect; and dreams and nightmares leak into the everyday. As one New York critic noted, "The Skriker" is very like a photographic negative of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." In his dark comedy, the Bard upset nature and loosed chaos in the Forest of Arden, only to restore good order in the end after all the players have been magicked into a better understanding of themselves and their place in the world. In Churchill's blacker musical-comedy, set in present day London, the Skriker is a cruelly damaged descendant of Shakespeare's luminous Oberon and Titania. In our much-fallen world, both nature and magic, humankind and faerie, have suffered a dreadful sea-change—could it be the result of global warming?—and an energizing new order may not be in anyone's future.

Projected through Janice Findley's rich directorial imagination, "The Skriker" is sure to turn the stage of the Erickson Theatre into a magnificent magic lantern show, a choreographed Walpurgisnacht full of primal magic and beauty. I foresee "Beyond Kabuki" writ large in Findley's latest work of passionate originality. I wouldn't miss it for the world.

--Kathleen Murphy, film curator and writer-in-residence, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, 1990-2000; currently, film critic, MSN.com