

'TEMPEST ME'

film review by David Bateman



With the action taking place on and around a “Canadian made pocket cruiser”, and set along the edges of the Saint Lawrence River, Wesley Rickert's film 'Tempest Me' is an engaging water journey that possesses eloquent influences ranging from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to Homer's *Odyssey*. Rickert's extensive research and his skilful way of integrating complex 'philosophies' reveals, in the film, and the film maker, an intense curiosity regarding the ways in which classic narratives can be unearthed within unlikely settings.

A sense of Canada's cottage country, and adjacent environs, shines through with a double-edged appeal - showing the viewer many facets of a timeworn touristy fascination for floating about with no apparent destination. Tourist whimsy, the quest for natural beauty, and the simultaneously bleak, grandiose, and vast expanses of water, land, and trees, join forces with the film makers interest in texts that have filled the annals of history with existential queries regarding the nature of human activity at its most hollow and most holy. Rickert articulates some of the influences that led to the making of the script -

“I was reading something about the nature of oral narratives (Philology) and the use of repetitive phrases. I did a lot of research before I wrote this film, on the Iliad, the Odyssey, Helen of Troy, Dionysus, Poseidon, the Lotus

Eaters, Sirens, Discordia, her golden apple and the Judgement Of Paris, The Frogs by Aristophanes, Burlesque, Beauty, navigation, the avant-garde, Henry Fielding on his Voyage to Lisbon, & Fritjof Hansen, who was an arctic explorer, Aesthetics, Mata Hari and hundreds & hundreds of nautical phrases, many binders of material that became dialogue, I think I was even looking at Hamlet. The phrase “so they smote the grey seas with their oars”, is from the Odyssey & is almost a kind of shared or group repetition/compulsion, as in this time it will be possible for us to do something that it was not possible for us to do before, but without changing the water, the oars, or the boat, so representing the expression of a kind of collective insanity, a doomed collective failure in the face of the attempt to get something right this time.” – Rickert, May, 2023

This impressive pastiche of various texts comes together in a 98 minute film that, at times, intimates visually and textually, elements of Fellini, Homer, and iconic poet bill bissett voice-overs – voice-overs that add to the overall narrative a perfect blend of sound and rhythmic, surreal language that 'toasts' Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' with a collection of finely crafted verbal vignettes, punctuated by bissett's hauntingly lyrical, at times staccato-like way of reciting his own work.

An excerpt from bissett's poem, *sew whn is smooth sailing yu ask oh fervent* - written for the film - reveals a strong connection between the aesthetic drive of poet (bissett) and filmmaker (Rickert) through phonetic spelling, a form of broken, visually challenging text, and a narrative addressing the distractions, disturbances, joys, and queries that the overall narrative of the film employs.

sew whn is smooth sailing yu ask oh fervent

ths infernal internal e ternal tempest
sores me 2 dstraksyun

th turbulens uv us all riding out
on th waves 2 wher

n is th destinaysyun onlee furthr out 2 c

thos its pleysyurs n dangrs n nowher
reelee landing

4 longing as hard n willing n allowing th

changing winds storms n staree suspensful
lulls as we agen set loving sail

pull n lift anchor without know
ing

- bissett

The recent film *Triangle of Sadness* comes to mind as mini-yacht occupants take part in comical and bewildering interior scenes shot in the galley of the pocket cruiser – Gilligan’s Island gone wrong. People with an abundance of time on their hands and culturally wrung sweat, blood & tears in their collective capitalist pocketbooks, cruise through thousand island adjacent regions with a maddening nonchalance that is captured perfectly in a scene Rickert aptly describes as an example of “obsessive compulsive behaviour.”

“This galley kitchen scene with Ariel is very much about her musings on love, obsessive compulsive behaviour and servitude. The Captain’s hands and Ariels hands are confused. The other characters do not communicate with her, and they are unable to communicate with her. They can only watch her or attempt to confuse and distract her. The only thing they can hear Ariel say is taken as their cue to leave as quickly as possible.

I have probably been on half a dozen Caribbean cruises. The characters sailing on my films 24’ Canadian made pocket cruiser are not rich, but boating for pleasure certainly is an inherent luxury representing a state of abundance. Pleasure boating is “not work”, but then many things are “not work”. I think the Captain’s film character affects a wealth he does not have, both spiritually and in a material sense.” – Rickert, May 2023

Rickert's cast (Mike Smith - the Captain, Alexandra Milne - as Ariel, George Worrall – as the Colonialist, Ian Malone - as Caliban Zoe, Georgaras - as the Siren) carries the spectator through this odyssey with a finely tuned sense of smouldering – just below the surface – lunacy, serenity, and aplomb that well suits the pastiche, at times parody infused tone of the film. The writer/director’s fascination with the characters that populate his narrative show a distanced, yet finely, fiercely critical sense of a contemporary Canadian 'wilderness' littered with the spoil of capitalist hedonism and existential searching - for what? The ensemble creates, collectively,

and with a kind of angsty individual presence – both withdrawn & vibrant – the perfect mixture of leisure seekers caught in a subtly tempestuous anti-romance with the land and the sea.

'Tempest Me' tells this tale of materiality and wealth in an engagingly critical, surreal, and enlightening way, asking questions regarding “luxury and abundance” with text and visuals that simultaneously render landscape, interpersonal relations, and the perennial tourist's quest for god only knows what. And it all happens in a watery landscape that attests to both the drowning depth and the numbing shallowness of certain human recreational activities.

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Still Frames below;

All photos “Tempest Me” © Wesley Rickert 2023



at the Captain's table - drinking with the Captain, the Colonialist, Ariel, and Caliban serving



The Captain and Ariel taking an afternoon swim when the mood changes



The Captain and Ariel discuss nothingness and navigation on the flying bridge

David Bateman is a performance poet and arts journalist who has written and performed his work internationally. His most recent performance, 'Art Immuno Deficiency Syndrome' or 'Does his Giacometti Make Me Look Fat?' was presented as part of the FADO Performance Art Centre's 'Performance Club 6' series in Toronto Canada in the fall of 2019. He has four collections of poetry (Frontenac House Press, Calgary, Alberta, Canada) and two collaborative long poems ('Wait Until Late Afternoon' with Hiromi Goto - Frontenac House Press, & 'Pause' with Naomi Beth Wakan, Bevalia Press, Toronto). His first novel, DR SAD, supported by a Chalmers Fellowship, was published in 2020 by University of Calgary Press.

His reviews can be seen at - <http://batemanreviews.blogspot.com>



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