



66^e FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

la **colline**
théâtre national

Nouveau Roman

text and direction **Christophe Honoré**

A group photo. One woman, seven men, a little embarrassed because they are not used to posing before the camera. They are all novelists except one: Jérôme Lindon, head of the publishing company Éditions du Minuit, who brought them together on the sidewalk of the Rue Bernard-Palissy. And so one morning in the autumn of 1959 in Paris, the adventure of the Nouveau Roman takes shape, that true but false literary school that challenged the convention of novel writing, favouring experimentation to the detriment of the primacy of the plot and the psychology of the characters. It was through this photo, from the Italian photographer Mario Dondero, that Christophe Honoré wanted to bring to life again, in his own way, these men and women with diverse destinies. In his way, that is without any biopics, any historical reconstitution, but as close to the life and work as possible of these novelists, using the largest number of documents – their books of course, but also their interviews, memoirs and diaries – to sketch portraits, encounters, clashes. By entrusting the interpretation of these writers mostly to young actors, including Anaïs Demoustier and Ludivine Sagnier, and by having certain male roles played by women, and vice-versa, he means to create a distance that allows him to go the furthest from theatrical fiction. In a present in which the search for new artistic forms remains difficult, Christophe Honoré wishes to give a voice back to those who dared, 53 years ago, to assert loud and clear the desire to “produce something that doesn’t exist yet”. Famous and always in the eye of the media like Marguerite Duras, Samuel Beckett and Nathalie Sarraute, not as well known but recognized like Claude Simon, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor and Robert Pinget, discreet and self-effacing like Claude Mauriac and Claude Ollier, they will be joined on stage by Françoise Sagan, the best-selling novelist, and Catherine Robbe-Grillet, and will together constitute the figures of the play that Christophe Honoré imagined as a tribute to these tireless inventors.

Jean-François Perrier (Festival d'Avignon)

The gesture of writing is one of the least spectacular in existence. It gives rise, however, in particular in the cinema, to a number of conventional scenes, portraying the author at his desk. The figure of the writer, as is characterized by this gesture, therefore questions the very possibility of his representation, whether in films or theatre. Directing, filming a writer in the process of writing has no meaning. And as for recreating, on stage, the meaning of what he has written, there are potentialities other than simply asking actors to make themselves his megaphones. *Nouveau Roman* is therefore a writers' play that did not use a text. It was written, at least partially, directly on stage, based on improvisations.

Nouveau Roman is thus above all an actors' play in which they grapple with the figures of authors and publishers. Figures – Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, Alain and Catherine Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor, Samuel Beckett, Robert Pinget, Claude Simon, Claude Ollier, Claude Mauriac, Jérôme Lindon and Françoise Sagan – for whom the idea is not about mimicking but about appropriation. Most of the actor's work consisted in retreating this vast documentary body of works, both contextual, literary and critical, that was used as the show's raw material. Showing how a handful of singular hard-core personalities, brought together under the aegis of Éditions de Minuit, took part, despite everything, in the battles of its period. And once again raised – on other bases however – Sartre's famous question: what is literature?

Nouveau Roman, lastly, is a reflection on the heritage that was transmitted, rejected, diverted or left behind. A deferred dialogue, through interposed videos, with certain authors of our time who, in terms of this movement that was the *Nouveau Roman*, pondered the notions of the group, the avant-garde, experimentation and literary theory, the relationship that fiction has with the world. In a period that seems to have made a return to literature focused on a subject, *Nouveau Roman* is thus proposed to transpose, on stage and with the means specific to theatre, that specificity of the gesture of writing that the neo-novelists constantly asserted: to be, above all, a formal work, research.

Sébastien Zaegel

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