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DANTE'S WORDS IN CHILE'S INFERNO

The frightening reality of Raul Ruiz

It is still the nomadic and stateless films which give the Rotterdam Festival its particular style. Foremost amongst these is the latest from Raul Ruiz, an "Inferno" filmed in Chile and commissioned by British television. It is an "Inferno" truly in the spirit of Dante, on two levels, travelling through landscape but with the voice of John Gielgud reading, in English translation, Dante's profound verses. Himself an exiled poet, wandering through the portals of worldwide television, Ruiz is clever enough not to 'update' the Divine Comedy by putting Pinochet in it. He is content with the relationship between Dante's written word and images of contemporary Chile to convey his meaning. He is never happy filming normality and chooses from Dante's "Inferno" the more horrible and grotesque descriptions to give vent to his taste for the surreal, the baroque, for scenes of mutilation and fantastical apparitions. He conjures up visions, invents tree- and leaf-men, piles up mutilated corpses, shows decapitated bodies suspended from trees by the feet, eyeballs fried in oil as if from a cannibal recipe. All this as his Virgil reads out the articles of the Civil Code to the strains of a traditional song, "Chile, my beautiful country".

(Rough translation of "La Repubblica" article)