

Symbols, surrealism, dreams, mistaken paths

Looking at the Anthony Skene trilogy in THE PRISONER



Patrick McGoochan's Creation

With THE PRISONER Patrick McGoochan created an entertainment program to reflect about. His cult classic is centred on topics like freedom and personality. He was the source of inspiration, main actor and executive producer of the 17 episodes. He also wrote three scripts FREE FOR ALL, ONCE UPON A TIME and FALL OUT. And this trilogy is quintessential to THE PRISONER.

The Anthony-Skene-Trilogy

The only other writer who contributed three scripts to THE PRISONER was Anthony Skene (1924 - 2000). A successful author gifted with great imagination, he wrote the scripts for the episodes DANCE OF THE DEAD, A. B. AND C.' and MANY HAPPY RETURNS. It is possible to regard this trilogy as a mini series within THE PRISONER series. Connecting these episodes are influences of Greek mythology and depth psychology. In them you encounter many symbols: labyrinths, corridors, mirrors, keys, doors, water, cats, dancing parties and more. You find yourself transposed into an enigmatic, surrealistic atmosphere, the concealed world of dreams, aberrations by sea, land and air.

Dance Of The Dead - Pure Surrealism: Trial and Death

*"Tonight, when the moon rises,
the whole world will turn to silver."*

The eerie atmosphere of the episode is expressed by this radio transmission as well as by the strange encounter between No. 6 and No. 2 on the beach at twilight with their exchange of odd dialogues. The viewer is transferred into a unreal imaginative world of long shadows and dark nightmares.



Anthony Skene's sources of influence were two movies and the books they are based on: Jean Cocteau's 'Orphée' (1950) and the ancient Greek myth of "Orpheus in the underworld". And also Orson Welles' 'The Trial' (1962) based on Franz Kafka's novel. "Dance Of The Dead" thus displays a nightmarish trial and death as the central subject played with on various layers. It is inherent also in the original episode title DANCE OF THE DEAD - (German: TOTENTANZ; it is unknown who devised DIE ANKLAGE - THE ACCUSATION instead).



Psychologically speaking the tale of "Orpheus in the underworld" is about transgression, the breach of law and the loss of identity. In this sense our nameless hero unintentionally becomes involved in a weird cabaret. He is put before a trial consisting of the three historical characters of Emperor Caesar, Queen Elizabeth I. and Napoleon. Stripped of his identity as "Number 6" he is just the "accused". And he is found guilty of having broken the law. "In the name of the people" the death sentence is delivered which is to be executed "in the name of justice". But Number 6 escapes through corridors. Perhaps his "costume" - his own jacket - protects him. Earlier he told his room maid, "It means that I am still myself." - DANCE OF THE DEAD confronts viewers with pure surrealism.

A. B. and C. - Manipulated Dreams and Drug Abuse

"All that we see or seem is just a dream within a dream."
Edgar Allan Poe

Anthony Skene's second episode script has a brilliant story while presenting the viewers social criticism at the same time. His PLAY IN THREE ACTS (working title) is about drugs and dreams. The use as well as the misuse of drugs was widely common in the 1960s. Scientific research went ever deeper into the human subconscious. A. B. AND C. connects the two issues showing the influence of drugs on the human mind.

At the beginning of the episode Number 6 is applied a "dangerous drug" by the female doctor. She explains the method of mind control to Number 2: "Thoughts like sound waves. Transformed into electrical impulses and then images. Now you have control over his mind." A dreadful vision.



When Number 6 and Number 14 eventually encounter in front of the café Number 6 asks her: "How do you talk to somebody you met in your dream?" It is interesting to know the ensuing dialogue line of Skene's script which was abandoned. Number 6 says: "Where are we? I thought the whole Village was just a dream." She replies that this might be the case. And Number 6 says: "And you are a further dream within this dream?" A clear allusion to Edgar Allan Poes poem "A Dream within a dream".

With the use of drugs Number 6 is sent into the land of manipulated dreams three times by Number 2 in order to unveil his secrets. But Number 6 smells the intricate rat. "It's like dream. It's a wonderful party" (*in German: traumhaft = dreamlike*) he says to Engadine. The episode takes a surprising twist at the end because Number 6 even in his dreams is in control.



(This reflection about the Anthony Skene trilogy within the Prisoner series was published in the booklet of the 'Nummer 6' DVD and Blu-ray Edition by Koch Media 2010. It's presented here with illustrations missing in the booklet. English translation by Arno Baumgärtel.)

Many Happy Returns - Dangerous Odyssey and Return Home

"Who are you?" - "An emigrant." / "What day is it?" - "Saturday, March 18th."
"Tomorrow is my birthday." "You're a curious guy." - "Yes. You ... must be thinking that I am mad."



Another mythology classic was the source of inspiration for Anthony Skene's third PRISONER script: Homer's Odyssey. The episode is a variation on the Greek epos. Like Homer Skene tells about the nameless hero's long journey led astray. There are many dangers on his way home he has to cope with, on sea, land and in the air. He sails 25 days on a self constructed raft by sea, back on solid ground he encounters strangers, flees a police stop-and-search operation and then he is in London. In his own home he's a stranger now. His car is owned by the new tenant, Ms. Butterworth. His former colleagues are suspicious of him. "You spin a yarn that Hans Christan Andersen would reject for a fairy tale."

Comparison of the Village with the free world is made in this allegorical story of man in search of identity and home. "There are no names?" "Just numbers in a village that is a complete images of our society. A place to put people that can't afforded to be around."

Where is Number 6' true home? In the end Ms. Butterworth hands a self made birthday cake to our hero and welcomes him: MANY HAPPY RETURNS! In the unused ending of the episode script she has a newspaper reporting on the deadly crash landing of the searching aircraft. And she says, "Enjoy being dead." Sarcastically Number 6 replies, "I have to die first." - Anthony Skene's creative imagination helped in devising the mysterious PRISONER world.



Symbolism

"What were you looking for?"
- "A light. - A star."
- A ship.- An insect.
- A plane. - A flying fish. -
Someone belonging to my world."

DANCE OF THE DEAD

Anthony Skene employs a powerful symbolic language that mark his three PRISONER episodes. What follows is a selection of symbols he was using.



The long **corridors** leading to the secret labororium (A. B. AND C.) , in the subterranean word of the Village (DANCE OF THE DEAD) and in Number 6' former headquarter symbolise wrong paths and danger for Number 6. **Mirrors** reflect the world invertedly. Through the semi-transparent mirror (DANCE) Number 6 gets to watch the Village people from the Number 2 point of view. By correcting the skewed mirror on Madame Engadine's dreamy party Number 6 tries to straighten out the entire hall (A. B. AND C.).

A **black cat** is the only witness of Number 6' escape attempt from the deserted Village in MANY HAPPY RETURNS. Does she work for Number 2 like the other (or even: the same) black cat from DANCE OF THE DEAD? Disappointedly Number 6 sums it up: "Never trust a woman, even the four-legged version." Cats are mysterious and they have their own will. Sometimes purring, sometimes growling. Symbolically they stand for deceitfulness and mischief. In these three episodes the dominant **women** are the representatives of evil. Number 2 in DANCE OF THE DEAD is demonic and like a spider she pulls the strings of her cobweb around victim Number 6. The cooperative lady Ms. Butterworth from MANY HAPPY RETURNS turns out to be the new Number 2 when she congratulates Number 6 on his birthday. The female doctor Number 14 (of A. B. AND C.) risks the life of Number 6 by applying drugs to him and manipulates his unconsciousness. All three Skene episodes can be characterised as dreams. DANCE OF THE DEAD is a surrealistic nightmare, A. B. AND C. has dangerous dream manipulations. And MANY HAPPY RETURNS could be considered a daydream of Number 6 while taking a shower. "I like my dreams", Number 6 confesses. "Then you are mad" says Number 2 from DANCE OF THE DEAD.



Prelude to the Finale

Anthony Skene's three episodes indicate the PRISONER finale whereas the author didn't know anything about it. It is characterised by death, trial and return home.

Death - Number 6' life is at risk in A. B. AND C.. In DANCE OF THE DEAD he is sentenced to death and declared dead by Number 2. There is a lethal struggle in the penultimate episode ONCE UPON A TIME, either Number 6 or Number 2 will die.



Trial - The trial of the DANCE OF THE DEAD episode has its counterpart in final episode FALL OUT. Skene's trials are about the laws while revolt is the subject of FALL OUT.



Return home - We find a similar adventurous journey home to London in MANY HAPPY RETURNS as in FALL OUT. There is no dialouge, about 20 minutes each, only the image effectively narrating. In both episodes Number 6 is allowed to drive through London his Lotus 7 sports car, to enjoy his freedom he has (a)gained. - Or else, maybe in both episodes those rides are just a new begining?

Anthony Skene showed us that he was able to pick up inspirations for his three scripts. Also that he managed to create something individually new.

My thanks go the Dave Barrie, founder of the Prisoner Appreciation Society SIX OF ONE in England, for various information. They originate from talks and writing to author Anthony Skene.

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