

Loosing not only one's self but loosing confidence too

Ahmed Al Attar's "Othello" – Mondays have presumably divided the attention of the Chur audience on weekends. This has been completely done on purpose.

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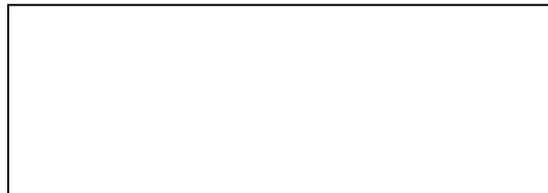
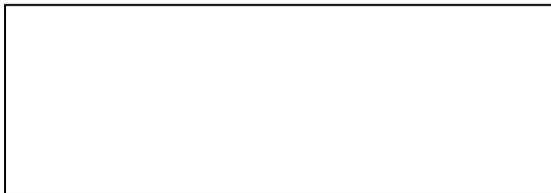
Cairo/Chur. Well, the main features of an "Othello" have been there on stage: a Moor, a white woman and a murder. Accordingly, Saturday night audience have also perceived parallels between William Shakespeare's tragedy "Othello" and the play directed by the Cairen Temple Independent Company, whose director and author Ahmed El Attar has embraced the play.

He who did watch the European debut of Al Attar's "About Othello or Who's afraid of William Shakespeare" expecting baroque fancy costumes and an unchanged text of the play expecting Moor of Venice, has been extremely disappointed on Saturday and yesterday: El Attar, his co-director Nevine El Ibiary and her team have condensed the comprehensive play, reducing it to a 50 minutes show focusing exclusively on the inner conflict of the main figure.

Hamlet too is an Othello

El Attar's approach to this confusing "Othello" montage is so unusual as well as close by: the Egyptian director focused completely on the identity crisis, which the hero Othello, as a man with a dark complexion in a world of white people, was carrying it around with him. In El Attar's play Shakespeare's war hero has changed into a pop star and Venice became Cairo, yet the mechanisms that lead to the murder triggered by jealousy remained as is. El Attar's stage direction exposes Shakespeare's Venetian offstage as replaceable – exactly as is the case with time, in which the drama moves.

More daring is the approach of the international group showing that even Shakespeare's plays can be absolutely interchangeable. For their text montage, El Attar and El Ibiary did not only use text from "Othello", but furthermore from "Hamlet", "Romeo and Juliet", "A Winter's Tale", "As you like it" and the "Merchant of Venice". How well this mix of the text fragments functions, is proven by the actual main dialog between Othello and Desdemona: It starts with a passage from "As you like it" and he answers in a monolog "to be or not to be" from "Hamlet". How well both abstracts -which origin lies in different dramas- organically join together, are a proof of the director's deep mastery in adapting from the source material.



Extremely excellent: The actors in Ahmed El Attar's "Othello"-Montage have performed brilliantly

The manifold repeated succession of Desdemona's love vows and Othello's borrowed questions in search of his own identity are in fact those, that carry the action in "About Othello or Who's afraid of William Shakespeare". Desdemona's (Crystal Sheperd-Cross) frustration rises to the same extent as Othello's (Ramsi Lehner) search within his own self with a flow of rough Arabic swear-words. Impressive too is how El Attar's main figure attempts, through the use of make-up, to turn into a white man and that at the end, after committing his murder, he gives up the own identity to the benefit of an interchangeable globalized mask –for Attar it is symbolized through the US-Pop-song "I Swear". This reading version almost renders the murdering of Desdemona into a kind of blood sacrifice.

A further excellent element is the way the stage direction in "About Othello" puts the different worlds of the Middle East and the West opposite to one another. On the left side, El Attar positions Othello's Family (invented and added to the original

text): they keep to the traditions and are anxious. On the right side of the stage, Desdemona struggles with a father, who is so busy that he does not show any interest in his daughter. Deep within the stage background, the ensemble's main scenes are shown on video and reflected on the wall that serves as a screen.

Confusing, yet worth seeing

All that took place on the impressive stage (Hussein Baydoun) in Chur is, as expressed by El Attar, still an incomplete play. In view of the tour in Europe planned in spring, the director and his team will keep on working on their play. It is thus possible, that "About Othello or Who's afraid of William Shakespeare" will continue to evolve and change. What the director and his team have performed with excellence on the Chur stage has been predominantly confusing, yet in a manner that is unbelievably worth seeing and worth giving it a thought.