



African Tales by Shakespeare

Nowy Teatr

Madalińskiego 10/16

02-513 Warsaw, Poland

t: 0048 379 33 00

www.nowyteatr.org



Cast and crew

Cast:

Stanisława Celińska, Ewa Dałkowska, Adam Ferency,
Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik, Wojciech Kalarus, Marek
Kalita, Zygmunt Malanowicz, Maja Ostaszewska, Piotr Polak,
Jacek Poniedziałek, Magdalena Popławska

Direction:

Krzysztof Warlikowski

Adaptation:

Krzysztof Warlikowski, Piotr Gruszczyński

Dramaturgy:

Piotr Gruszczyński

Set design and costumes:

Małgorzata Szczęśniak

Lighting design:

Felice Ross

Music:

Paweł Mykietyn

Choreography:

Claude Bardouil

Video:

Kamil Polak

Technical manager:

Paweł Kamionka

Assistant to the set designer:

Marcin Chlanda

Assistant director and video projections:

Katarzyna Łuszczuk

Stage manager:

Łukasz Jóźków

Light:

Dariusz Adamski

Sound:

Mirosław Burkot

Make up and hair:

Monika Kaleta

Props:

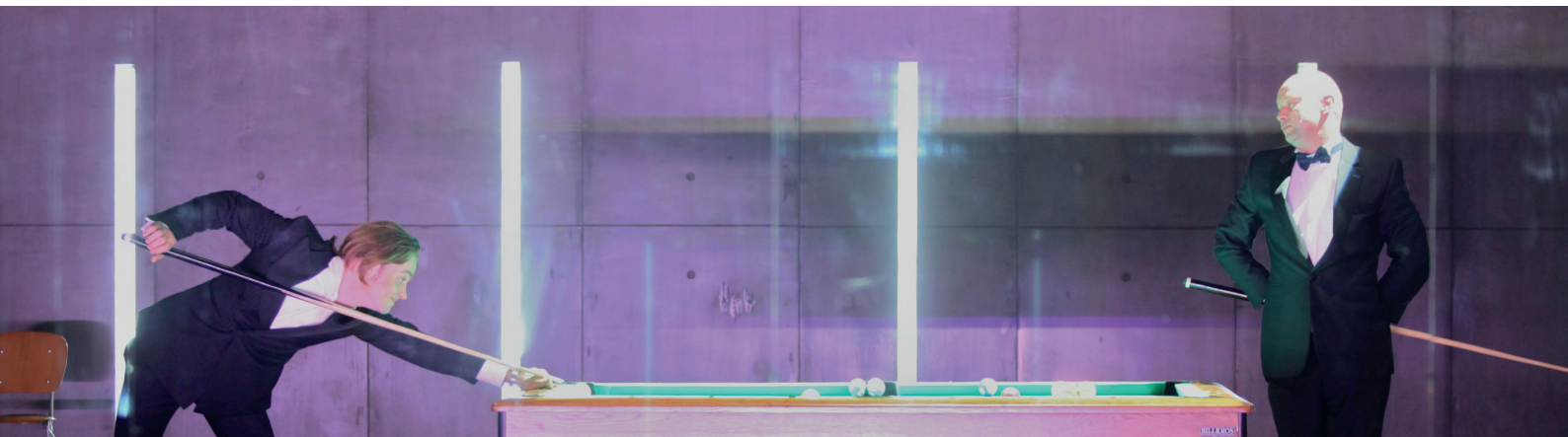
Tomasz Laskowski

Stage:

Kacper Maszkiewicz

Wardrobe:

Elżbieta Fornalska, Ewa Sokołowska



About the performance

Premiere:

October 5, 2011 - Liège, Belgium

Polish premiere:

December 2, 2011 - Warsaw

Show directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, based on Shakespeare's works: "Othello", "The Merchant of Venice", "King Lear", J.M. Coetzee's novels "Summertime" and "In the Heart of the Country" and the monologues of Wajdi Mouawad featuring actors from Nowy Teatr.

The production features all regular co-operators of Krzysztof Warlikowski: Małgorzata Szczęśniak (costumes and set design), Paweł Mykietyn (music), Piotr Gruszczyński (dramaturgy), Felice Ross (lighting design).

How to stem the bleeding of gods? Try it and you are bound to fail. Twilight of gods has touched all areas, even those secular, interpersonal ones described by Shakespeare. So we bleed together with gods and our blood falls upon us as a black rain which neither brings relief nor refreshment. Exactly the opposite, in the scorching African sun which beats down the characters of J.M. Coetzee's prose blood dries up with scabs sticking to clean clothes which we wear to hide our decomposition progressing day by day.

Lear, Shylock and Othello – three Shakespeare's heroes deprived of safe narration, stand before us with genuine force of their demise. A bleeding god is a man who desperately seeks love. A man who suffers miseries of an old man, Jew and Black - surrounded by women entangled with his weakness. Sooner or later everyone is to experience the condition of Lear, Othello or Shylock by becoming an animal banned from its herd. Shakespeare depicted these states through a tragic prism of history's titans acting in circumstances of tale and myth. Coetzee, knowing the apartheid reality, describes his characters only through categories of existence. He does not create soaring plots but instead designs intimate and unbearable psychotic worlds through which his own broken pride is filtered.

"African Tales by Shakespeare" is a show by Krzysztof Warlikowski made with Nowy Teatr's team and artists who have accompanied him for years. Director who has already staged ten Shakespeare dramas now creates his own fascinating vision of a man extracted from the space of border experiences.



Synopsis

Part One (duration: 1h 30)

1. Prologue: To Live
2. Division (Lear, Regana, Goneril, Cordelia) - King Lear
3. Pound of Flesh (Shylock, Antonio, Bassanio, Jessica) - The Merchant of Venice
4. Fear (Shylock and Antonio, Tubal, Salerio, Solanio) - The Merchant of Venice
5. Visions (Portia, Bassanio and Antonio, Shylock) - The Merchant of Venice
6. Letter (Antonio, Solanio) - The Merchant of Venice
7. Judgement (Shylock and Antonio, Portia, Bassanio, Solanio, Jessica, Doge) - The Merchant of Venice
8. Weddings (Portia, Bassanio, Antonio, Othello, Desdemona) - The Merchant of Venice, Othello

Intermission: 30 minutes

Part Two (duration: 1h 40)

1. Black one (Othello, Iago, Desdemona, Cassio) - Othello
2. White one (Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, Iago, Lodovico, Emilia) - Othello
3. Desdemona's Arm (Desdemona, Othello) - Othello
4. Great Black Fucked Phantom (Iago, Cassio) - Othello
5. Asylum (Lear, Goneril, Regan, Fool, Cordelia) - King Lear

Intermission: 20 minutes

Part Three (duration: 1h 20)

- 1 Julia (Goneril) - King Lear
- 2 Isolated (Cordelia and Lear) - King Lear
- 3 Hospital (Cordelia and Lear) - King Lear
- 4 Epilogue - Salsa (Regan) - King Lear



Who's who in Shakespeare

Lear:

King of England. Growing older, he decides to address the matter of throne succession and divides his wealth into three equal parts. He asks his three daughters for a declaration of love, making the size of the inheritance dependant on the warmth of that declaration. Goneril and Regan obediently declare their love to their father. But Cordelia protests. Her silence deprives her of participation in the inheritance, but also condemns Lear to be dependent on the other daughters, who do not keep their promises. Lear is enraged and, being completely helpless, he goes mad. Cordelia, returns with French forces to help him, but loses the battle and is put to death in prison. As a result, Lear is unable to spend the rest of his days at the side of his beloved daughter.

Cordelia:

Lear's youngest daughter who refuses to make a declaration of love to her father and gets dispossessed. She marries the King of France, and leaves England. When she learns about how Lear had been treated by her two older sisters, she hurries back with help, leading the army. After losing the battle, she gets imprisoned and hanged.

Goneril and Regan:

Lear's daughters who have assured him of their love and, in return for the dowry, promise to take turns in hosting their father with his adjutants. They did not keep their word.

Shylock:

Venetian Jew lending money at interest. His only daughter, Jessica, leaves him, fleeing with his money and her future husband, a Christian. When Antonio, who had repeatedly showed Shylock his anti-Semitic contempt, comes to borrow money for his friend, Shylock asks for an unusual collate-

ral on this debt: a pound of flesh carved out whatever part of Antonio's body from Shylock indicates. As a result of Antonio's alleged bankruptcy the case goes to court, where Shylock is trying to exact his bloody collateral. However, Portia, disguised as a lawyer, intervenes refuting Shylock's arguments and leading to his total humiliation.

Antonio:

The titular Merchant of Venice, a wealthy Venetian hopelessly in love with Bassanio. In desire to help his young friend contract a beneficial marriage with Portia, he gets in debt with the Jew Shylock, pledging to give a pound of his own flesh as the collateral. News of ships sinking with Antonio's goods reach Venice, which makes him feel bankrupt. This leads to the trial as a result of which Shylock is about to obtain his collateral. Thanks to the cunningness of Portia, disguised as a man, the judgment is not passed. In the finale of Shakespeare's play all the swaps and masquerades are clarified, but the situation remains unresolved and innocently suspended until late-night discussions and explanations.

Bassanio:

A young Venetian, a friend of Antonio's, suitor for the hand of Portia. Bassanio passes the test of the three caskets, indicating the lead one, where Portia's portrait is hidden. His erotic relationships with Antonio and Portia are ambivalent.

Portia:

Heiress of her late father's great fortune, living in Belmont. In order to get married, however, she must put herself and the potential husbands to a test of three caskets, appointed by her late father. One of the three caskets – gold, silver and lead – holds her portrait. The candidates must indicate the correct one, and those who fail to do so must renounce women forever. The only candidate who she likes is Bassanio



Who's who in Shakespeare

and he chooses the correct caskets. Portia offers him an engagement ring and then, to save Antonio, Bassanio's friend, in the court trial against Shylock, she disguises herself as a learned doctor of Padua and goes to Venice. There, she settles the case in Antonio's favor. In return for this, Portia, whom Bassanio cannot recognize in disguise, asks Bassanio to give up the engagement ring. He hesitates greatly, but then offers the token of Portia's love to the unknown man.

Jessica:

Shylock's daughter, who runs from the father with her christian fiancé, gets baptized and marries the gentile. She also takes her father's jewelry and money.

Salerio:

A friend of Antonio's.

Othello:

Moorish commander in the service of Venice. When he marries Desdemona, daughter of a Venetian senator, a scandal breaks out which, however, is quickly silenced because Othello, a commander of the army, is needed in Cyprus to defeat the Turkish army. He quickly defeats the enemy. His great victory is also the end of his political career. Othello's hating aide, Iago, oozes in Othello a belief in Desdemona's, Othello's white wife, infidelity. Othello strangles her, orders to kill her alleged lover Cassio and, upon recognizing his own guilt, commits suicide.

Desdemona:

Othello's white wife. A Venetian senator's daughter who secretly married black Othello. She follows her husband to Cyprus. She is unaware of a plot that had been unleashed around her because of her marital decision, gets accused of being unfaithful to her husband and of an alleged affair with Cassio. A strawberry-embroidered handkerchief, which had been Othello's first gift to her, was to be the crown evidence of her betrayal. She gets strangled by Othello.

Iago:

Othello's lieutenant. Envious, jealous and hateful. A racist type. Unable to bear Othello's rapid promotion and his marriage to a white woman, using complex schemes Iago devises to destroy Othello and, simultaneously, Cassio, who stands in highway to promotion.

Cassio:

Othello's assistant, best friend and confidant of Desdemona. Used by Iago in the scheme against Othello. He loses Othello's confidence and, in his eyes, becomes the main perpetrator of the destruction of his relationship with Desdemona. Cassio is murdered on the orders of Othello.

Lodovico:

Desdemona's cousin who brings from Venice an order to remove Othello from power in Cyprus.

Emilia:

Iago's wife, Desdemona's confidant and servant, unaware of her husband's manipulations.



The Prospero project

Prospero is the international project of theatres in Liège, Modena, Luxembourg, Rennes, Berlin, Lisbon and Tampere which in 2011 has invited Krzysztof Warlikowski. The earlier productions were directed by Thomas Ostermeier and Alvis Hermanis.

The Prospero Project aims at creating significant cultural events and their promotion across entire Europe which results in construction of the common European culture platform disregarding the national borders. From the political and social point of view it draws attention to culture and art as factors encouraging creativity, exchange and cohesion between countries while giving an impulse to social and economic development.

Show is made as co-production with Prospero group associating 6 European Theatres: Théâtre de la Place (Liège – Belgium), Théâtre National de Bretagne (Rennes – France), Emilia Romagna Teatro Fondazione (Modena – Italy), Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz (Berlin – Germany), Fundação Centro Cultural de Belém (Lisbon – Portugal), Tutkivan Teatterityön Keskus (Tampere – Finland), Grand Théâtre de la Ville de Luxembourg from Luxembourg as well as Paris Théâtre National de Chaillot.



Reviews

The show begins in a disturbing manner. It begins with a short animated film of falsely naive beauty presenting two characters inspired by Akira Kurosawa's Ikiru (1952): there's an old man who is at variance with his son and is looking for a meaning while talking to a young woman. He wants to give a meaning to the remnants of his life. That is how an existential dimension of the show is introduced. The same that is going to test the most intimate and archaic roots of anti-Semitism, racism, misogyny and also, generally speaking, of love, hate and devouring. I love you, I hate you, I'm devouring you, I'm fucking you, I'm killing you – just like in a primeval ritual (Africa again).

In one of the areas, which magically fold and unfold like in a dream, created by a stage designer, Małgorzata Szczśniak, we see Lear demanding statements of love from his daughters – who are worn out and not young anymore – in exchange for a part of his wealth. We are going to see him again at the end of the show, terminally ill with throat cancer, unable to speak, accompanied by Cordelia, who is so much like many agitated, dried out female characters from books written by a south-American writer, John Maxwell Coetzee.

Then Shylock appears. He's managed to turn himself into a kosher butcher, and is drawn into a trap of games between desire and death, which he himself provoked by demanding a pound of flesh from a young Antonio in exchange for money he borrowed for his friend Bassanio. Warlikowski emphasizes various symbolic exchanges which are streaming through his show like some underground currents. (...) At last Othello comes. From the beginning we discover sexual dimension of his business with Desdemona – it is presented clearly in another short animated film. (...)

A deep dimension of humanity presented by Warlikowski and his group may seem at first grim like a Dantes' woods, but this amazing odyssey does not pester a spectator or gives him a feeling of satiety. (...) The director uses mastery of a stage language and his ability to involve spectators in his theatrical space-time continuum and bring them into a state similar to hypnosis which enables them to be confronted with questions that niggle him.

Much of it is owed to actors – those wonderful Warlikowski's actors, who do not only give away a piece of human flesh but involve their bodies and souls. Let me just mention Adam Ferency, playing Lear, Shylock and Othello. His acting has rarely encountered density, depth and mystery. Though it must be said that the entire company seizes the audience and takes them into this journey which last stage may be quite surprising – it seems that everyone is taken by this joyous and perhaps a little bit vulgar class of salsa, life against a wish of death.

Fabienne Darge, „Le Monde”



Reviews

The show is based on three great plays of Shakespeare: (...) King Lear, Merchant of Venice and Othello, often presented as “a trilogy of the excluded”. Opowieści... is a show worth of “facing”; because the most important subject is not ideologically correct lecture on exclusion but rather heart-breaking analysis of existential loneliness. While reading Shakespeare’s plays, Warlikowski takes upon a role of a ruthless dissector of human misery; he is trying to reach a core of human existence, of a pain pulsating in entrails. In order to achieve that goal, he does not only undress an actor but skins him, cuts his throat and cuts out a pound of flesh near his heart. He strips of masks and fights against theatricality which is naively interpreted as a form of untruth, “pretending” or “playing parts”.

Małgorzata Grzegorzewska, „Teatr”

Sarcastic beginning and scornful ending – unhappy laughter and unbearable pain pervade most of the scenes. (...) This a puzzle that takes five hours with two breaks to complete, is characterized by general density and cruelty of rather verbal than physical character and rather metaphysical than political one. (...) Shylock, Othello and Lear are characters that have been ruined from within, they are pariahs, victims of their clans (...) and superstitions of the era (...). The final pirouette represented by a salsa class is unable to erase a general message saying that the world is cruel for the excluded and you can’t rely on love. (...) Special praise goes to an actor who plays all three major parts of Lear, Shylock and Othello for his ability to not distance himself from the others but be a part of the team.

Christian Jade, „RTBF Culture”

Incredible force of this show results from the fact that every single, even the smallest element, is important for the entirety and keeps is on the edge. Lighting, stage design, text, costumes and quite poised and restrained acting – absolutely everything is thought through, felt and controlled in such way that omnipresent, touchable and explosive emotions would not turn into sentimentality or hysteria. (...) Warlikowski while breaking all theatrical codes, encourages life and proposes everyone an incredible human experience.

Jean-Marie Wynants, „Le Soir”



On tour

October 5-8, 2011

Liège, Belgium, Théâtre de la Place

October 19-20, 2011

Modena, Italy, Vie Scena Contemporanea

October 28-29, 2011

Lisbon, Portugal, Centro Cultural de Belém

November 15-16, 2011

Rennes, France, Théâtre National de Bretagne

November 22-23, 2011

Luxembourg, Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg

March 3-4, 2012

Berlin, Germany, F.I.N.D.

March 16-23, 2012

Paris, France, Théâtre National de Chaillot

June 3, 2012

Saint Petersburg, Russia, Rainbow/Raduga Festival

September 18-19, 2012

Amsterdam, Holland, Statsschouwburg

March 22-23, 2014

Hong Kong, Hong Kong Arts Festival



Nowy Teatr

Artistic director

Krzysztof Warlikowski

Director

Karolina Ochab

Tour manager

Zofia Szymanowska

zofia.szymanowska@nowyteatr.org

t: 0048 510 019 287

Press service

Ewa Vedral

ewa.vedral@nowyteatr.org

t: 0048 500 197 339

Photographs:

Magda Hueckel, Konrad Pustoła

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Coproduction:

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