

## Misplaced paranoia

By **Mariam Hamdy**      November 15, 2007, 2:00 am

It isn't the mediocrity of an artwork that saddens a viewer, as one would presume, nor is it the fact that such a work is, in no way, shape or form, original. What is truly saddening is the amount of effort wasted and unused in its creation, not to mention the lack of awareness of its overall weakness.

A prime example is "Hawages Yawmeyyah fel Hagayes El Zawgeyyah (Paranoia of Married Life), a short play produced at the American University in Cairo's Howard Café.

"Hawages opens with a muttering monologue of Shoushou (Hesham El Shazly), donning a disappointingly typical Satan attire: black clothes and a red cape. He is a devil that has been expelled from hell, sent to Earth to commit a good deed as punishment.

Shoushou witnesses Abdel Mordy (Omar Kashef), a boring and annoyingly calm husband, whose lack of self-respect infuriates his wife Reda (Hanady). Reda is the textbook stereotype of the Egyptian wife: loud, rude and constantly complaining.

The argument between the couple implies a stagnant, unexciting relationship for Reda and complete oblivion by Abdel Mordy who seems to be content with himself and their life.

After an argument with an enraged Reda, Abdel Mordy is confronted with Shoushou, who reluctantly offers to help with the husband's dilemma. In the first act, Abdel Mordy suggests making Reda older so she'd appreciate his company in her old age, to which Shoushou magically complies.

On regretting his misguided decision at the start of the second act, he assumes that becoming the elder partner might be more fitting. Neither of the two solutions work, which ultimately leads the devil to go down on one knee and ask God for mercy from the couple who have driven him to insanity.

The play is supposedly a comedy, but only Hesham El Shazly's superb comedic timing provides a few laughs in the performance. His punch-lines and physical comedy are refreshingly lively; making the audience laugh at what would otherwise be, simply, bad jokes. Unfortunately, and despite their efforts, his co-stars failed to do the same with their boring, repetitive and uneventful scripts.

In fact, the most infuriating aspect of "Paranoia is how tremendously naïve and daft the script is. Every element felt like a stab at wit, from its title to the names of the characters: Reda and Abdel Mordy being synonyms of the word "content, and Shoushou the nickname of Shaytan - Arabic for devil.

The performers and the play's director apparently never come across Mohamed Sobhy's play "Takhirif, the American TV sitcom "Bewitched (1964) or even the movie "Bedazzled (2000), all of which dealt with supernatural beings interfering in human love in a comedic, smart manner. In fact, at one point in the play, you get the impression that the actors are completely convinced that their performances are a true stroke of originality.

The music in between the scenes was composed of a bizarre mixture of hard rock, and amazingly, "The Ghostbusters theme song played at the end. The stage direction was as predictable as the script while lighting effects were restricted to a mere red spotlight on the devil.

"Hawages is missing an objective, message or basic theme. The play offers nothing new from the many previous adaptations of similar plotlines, without even a hint of inventiveness.

The general feeling pervading the play was that of high school students who just don't know better. Sadly, they can't even use that excuse because none of the actors (including Omar Kashef, the director and scriptwriter) are undergraduates.

The entire production was one-dimensional, ill-conceived and, apart from El Shazly's performance, a let-down.



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