



International Festival of University Theater in Casablanca

36th edition

July 1-7, 2024

Edition Theme

Theater & Madness

Madness has been looked at throughout human history as a social phenomenon that challenges everything that is "normal". It is seen as a diabolical evil, a deviant and dangerous behavior that contradicts common sense or collective reasoning. In fact, madness is a phenomenon that defies the laws of nature, social rules, and ethics. However, with the emergence of psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and psychology, this view and belief about madness and the portrayal of the mad person have somewhat changed, as they are now considered to be a mental illness.

Indeed, these specialties have opened new horizons in writing and its creative process, despite remaining mysterious and complex. They have encouraged authors to make mental or psychological illness and individual behavior the subject of their work. This has been achieved both at the scientific level, such as in the groundbreaking work "History of Madness in the Classical Age" by Michel Foucault, and at the artistic level, with great works such as Don Quixote, Hamlet, Waiting for Godot, King Lear, The Toothbrush, and the Madman, The Imaginary Invalid, Summer Madness, The Bread of Madness, Caligula...etc. The character of the mad person has become portrayed in these works in multiple ways, sometimes sick, marginalized, harsh, annoying, rebellious, cursed, and other times wise, beloved, and loyal.

The history of literature and art is filled with figures who oscillated between the brightest manifestations of creativity and madness, among them: Van Gogh, Picasso, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Allan Edgar Poe, as well as actors and comedians Robin Williams and Tennessee Williams...etc. According to specialists, this is attributed to the excessive sensitivity and extraordinary sensory perception that creative individuals generally possess. It is what allows their brains to pick up on minute details and profound fears, and to process them in a different way from the general population.

According to this opinion, madness in creativity does not mean mental or psychological disorders as in the popular concept, but rather refers to breaking free from the constraints of surface reality into a vast world without constraints or restrictions, far from the authority of consciousness. Antonin Artaud, the author of "The Theatre of Cruelty," who rebelled against reality, did not consider Van Gogh insane, but considered him a victim of society and the psychiatric profession itself. He said about him, "No, Van Gogh was not insane, but his

artistic works were embodiment of Greek fires and atomic bombs, capable from his own perspective, of disturbing bourgeois customs and attacking institutions themselves." "Van Gogh does not beautify life, but creates another life, completely different." Artaud sees the primary function of theater as awakening the dormant forces in the audience, by revealing their deepest conflicts, dreams, and anxieties in front of them. Artaud proposed irrational automatism and delusion as alternatives that can liberate suppressed inclinations in a purifying process similar to the effect of catharsis found in classical tragedy.

If the classical theater was able to convey the worlds of the insane through the inmates of mental and psychiatric hospitals, prisons, and nursing homes, to the stage, contemporary theater was able to make these places, which were until recently forbidden to art and the public, a place for creativity and a real theater where artists and inmates participate not only as spectators but also as actors in the theatrical work. Perhaps the best example of this is what the Romanian psychiatrist Jacob Moreno did, the creator of "psychodrama theory". Moreno pushed the patient, with the guidance of a therapist and active participation from other patients, to improvise a theatrical work that emerges from their personal history, and this improvisation in psychodrama acts as therapy to guide the patient actor to achieve true catharsis.

The authors have been able to make theater a tool for expressing their ideas and emotions, as well as a means of purification, healing, or at least alleviating pain. In this regard, psychologists, led by Freud, consider the artist as a person capable of establishing an expressive relationship with their unconscious, in other words, capable of reviving hidden psychological energies in the general public.

Choosing "Theatre and Madness" as the theme for the 36th edition of the International Festival of University Theater in Casablanca was not random or coincidental, but rather stemmed from our belief in the importance of madness in creativity. Madness is one of the oldest and most prevalent themes in the history of theater, and art in general. They cannot be mentioned separately. In addition to that, the choice of this theme is directly related to the 36th edition of the festival. The psychiatric ward at Ibn Rushd Hospital bears the same number "36". However, this number holds a special symbolism in popular culture and the imagination of Casablanca, as it refers to madness in its various forms. Therefore, people from Casablanca often refer to someone as crazy, foolish, or having unique behavior as "36."

According to the previous, this Edition raises a set of questions, such as: Is madness truly the origin of art and creativity, or is it an obstacle to its manifestation? Are there distinct boundaries between mental illness and creative flow? Are plays written by mad artists real creations or just delusions and reflections of grandeur? How do some works unfold through suffering and psychological pain? How can creators, who celebrate life the most, also be the closest to death, madness, and suicide? Is there a compatibility between the general perception of madness and the changes brought about by psychology? Has psychology truly been able to change our view of madness and creativity? How do prevailing societal judgments allow us to perceive the artist, genius, or creator as if they belong to another world? And how can the audience directly immerse themselves in the psyche of the character or author when it comes to madness? How do mad individuals receive theatrical works?

A group of artists from different continents are taking part in this international seminar to shed light on the relationship between madness, theater, and creativity, based on theoretical, historical, philosophical, medical, artistic, and literary perspectives.