

Andrée Chedid talks about Love, Power and Violence

If seeing Andree Chedid's latest play is an unforgettable experience, meeting her in person is even more so.

Intense and attentive to every word you utter, she seems eager to capture as quickly as possible

the essence of what you're saying. Then, when she does respond to your questions, she uses such precise and rich language that it's a pleasure to sit back and savour the flow of her sentences and ideas. (cont.)

My hour long conversation with Chedid took place in a little cafe in Paris among the bustle of cars and the chinking noise of cups and saucers on wooden tables.

We spoke about her latest play "Echec a la Reine" — (Checkmate to the Queen) which was showing at the "Theatre du Quai de la Gare" from Feb. 22 to April 1, 1984.

"My play is about power, love and violence", began Chedid. "It is set in an enclosed universe (a palace), at an indefinite epoch, in an indefinite country because I wanted to say things that could be heard and understood by different people. I have the impression, that what is most important in human beings is what transcends frontiers."

"My story is about a Queen and her Fool," Chedid explained: "One day they play a game, she bets on her kingdom, he on his freedom. The Fool wins and he becomes King. But the Queen has a Son who has left his kingdom in search of liberty. One day he comes back. The game becomes a conflict."

You can't see them on stage, but the populace are watching intently the events in the palace. They have expectations, the sovereigns obligations. Fate and History will decide who will win and who will lose.

The plot, is so simple one might say, but one has to add that the issues, are complicated. For what makes matters complex, is the universality of the themes used and the incredible finesse with which Chedid depicts her characters.

The Queen, confined all her life to the closed universe of the palace, longs for freedom and self-fulfillment. The Fool, hiding behind his attire,

has more freedom than the Queen for he can play many roles and say whatever he wants.

"In fact, the Fool is quite an extraordinary man", says Chedid. He is very lucid and can speak the truth because he is a fool. Moreover, he is deeply in love with the Queen to whom he is ready to give everything, even his own life.

The Son by contrast returns from his long absence eager to resume his duties as a monarch and greedy for power.

The Queen's niece, Zina, who never approved of her aunt giving up the throne, takes sides with her cousin to help him recover his kingdom.

"This terrible conflict between the Son and his Mother," Chedid explains, is not just a conflict of generations. It is a conflict of ideals.

The Queen is disappointed with her son because he is disgusted with life. For her, life is never deceptive, on the contrary.

"She resembles those women of the Orient who hold on ferociously to life and are never discouraged or desperate."

As for the Fool,, Chedid continued, he believes that living a full life and betting on love and beauty is a way to win life and transcend death. Jok, the Fool, is a man who understands fully that life is made of compromises and games but, by temperament, he knows that one lives much better if one lives generously and openly. At a certain time he is seduced and lured by power and accepts it willingly. He realises that being in a powerful position can have positive aspects. He gives himself to the people, makes reforms and ends up feeling responsible to them.

But for Chedid the real questions is: "Where



Born in Egypt of Lebanese parents — Andree Chedid writes in French and Lives in Paris.

Author of numerous books of poetry, novels and plays, Chedid has been awarded many important prizes for Literature. They include: the Louis Lapier Award for poetry (1976), the Aigle D'Or for poetry (1972), the Royal Belgian Academy's Grand Prize for French Literature (1975) and the Mallarme Award for poetry (1976).

do responsibilities end and greed for power start? "You told me", declared Chedid that you were completely against violence. So is Jok, who even when he has the opportunity to kill stops short and says: No one will make an assassin out of me. Therefore, Jok consciously refuses to use violence even though he knows he is capable of it".

When I asked Chedid whether she really believed such people as Jok and the Queen, existed, she replied : "I really believe in this. I really believe that in life one always has a chance to meet absolutely extraordinary people. I also believe that

one should bet on lights rather than on shadows while realising that shadows exist."

As for her views on women, Chedid says: "It is important for a woman to be a lover, it is important for her to be a mother and know what responsibility is. But it is also important for a woman to express herself and to desire liberty."

Thus for Andrée Chedid, famous author and fulfilled woman, there are people who never give up on life and continue to hold on to their dreams till the end. There are others who change when they become adult, she says, and this is sad.

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