

British Theatre Guide

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Iram

Based on the stories of Sholem Aleichem
Herzliya Ensemble
Barbican Pit
(2010)

Iram is a classic example of director's theatre that fails to communicate. In this case, one imagines that Ofira Henig of Israel's Herzliya Ensemble had a vision of how she would like to reinvent the short stories of Sholem Aleichem.

It might be a need to understand Hebrew, or possibly the motivations of Miss Henig, but something disappeared in translation to the London stage.

Sholem Aleichem was something of a genius, who managed to convey all of the horrors of Jewish existence in Russia during the pogroms with a generous sense of humour. Anyone who has read the stories, seen *Fiddler on the Roof* or Saul Reichlin's impeccably crafted solo performance *Now You're Talking*, will have fallen in love with one of the greatest ever writers in Yiddish.

It has to be said that those who do not know the originals may leave the theatre none the wiser after 80 minutes watching this strange concoction, adapted from Aleichem's short story collection, *The Town of the Little People*.

The company has taken a handful of stories or themes and cut them into small chunks before putting them back together so that the tales and characters bleed into each other without any coherence.

Along the way, we see poor undertaker Israel visiting the Rabbi to learn about his intelligent son's attempts to become a doctor, see a mother terrified that her only remaining pot has been tainted forever and follow the Rabbi's two daughters, one growing towards matrimony, while the other is crippled and has nothing to look forward to but ridicule and an early death.

Even the town joker (village idiot?) fails to get many laughs, although one story about rich Rothschild is almost worth the admission price alone.

The narrative is further broken by a regular procession heading nowhere to the accompaniment of Leonard Cohen (or an imitator?) and a strange, writhing dance to a disco beat.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)