

In Copy

The HBO version of the Israeli “In Treatment” is suited to the American palate in a way that doesn’t offend the spirit of Israeli Psychological disorders. After viewing two episodes of the American version, we can say this much: Ayelet Zorer wins by a knock out.

Meirav Crystal

The decision to invest in the American version of “In Treatment” – an Israeli series with an unusual format that revolves entirely, both in text and in subtext, around emotional gestures – proves once more that “It’s not television, it’s HBO”. But it remains to be seen whether America - used by now to a mobile and an erratic television, filled with ostentatious activities and short on conversations, will get used to the almost entirely static camera and to characters that say and gesture more than they act.

American series include few moments of long conversations between characters. Even a minute long discourse is usually carried out while walking, and if the characters are sitting down, they would probably do it while they are eating, so as not to bore the viewer’s gaze. Will HBO viewers be able to see beyond the four walls of Paul’s, the therapist, clinic and not be suffocated by the reduced field of physical happening?

It is too soon to tell, since the American version will be broadcasted in an unknown date during the summer season, but the first two episodes of “In Treatment” have already been screened on the big television market in Cannes, and we’ve gotten hold of them. We can try to predict the success of the show based on this viewing, but it would be more fitting to focus our attention on the excitement we feel just from watching the credits to the Israeli creators and producers of the show.

The first episode tells the story of Laura, an intern Doctor, who’s been a patient of Paul’s for about year now, and is in love with her psychologist. The rolls played by the Israeli Assi Dayan and Ayelet Zorer are reenacted by Gabriel Byrne and Melissa George. In the second episode the air pilot Alex (Blair Underwood) enters the clinic after an air bombing he participated in, which resulted in the death of 16 Iraqi children.

So what can we say about a series we’ve already watched? The American “In Treatment” is a copy of the Israeli original, from the opening tune to the dialogues, and as such it still gets an excellent grade even in her new place of residence in America. It is not Gus Van Sant’s “Psycho” that copied Hitchcock’s original on a one to one scale. On the other hand it doesn’t resemble the American version of “The Office” which enjoys independent scripts.

The American “In Treatment” is suited to the American palate in a way that doesn’t offend the spirit of the original scripts. The dialogues are almost identical, but if you watch closely you can see the differences through the sweeping resemblance. In Israel,

no one will drive an hour and a half to a session with his therapist, like Alex does. Unlike the Israeli Yadin, Alex doesn't mention that he spoke with a relative of the therapist before choosing to come to him. In the United States of America a person who does that is considered to be rude at best, and a serial killer at worst.

Fine differences are exhibited in the characters as well. Melissa George's Laura is more theatrical in comparison to Ayelet Zorer's Naama, and Blair Underwood's Alex is more extroverted than Lior Ashkenazi's Yadin. Zorer and Ashkenazi's acting is less mannerist. In Zorer's case it works to her advantage and with the help of her delicate charisma she beats Melissa George by a knock out – Naama raises more sympathy than Laura. Underwood, on the other hand, succeeds in creating more interest by making his character more eccentric than the one played by Lior Ashkenazi. Gabriel Byrne nods well and stares perfectly. Like Assi Dayan, his measured speech succeeds in generating the feeling that he is omniscient, and yet confused and disturbed.

The all so known sentences, now spoken by different actors in a different language, evoke feelings similar to the ones emerging from the second viewing of a theater play. Despite the wealthier and perhaps more orchestrated production, the American "In Treatment" isn't better than the Israeli one, it's just different.

The characters might have drifted away from us physically and culturally, but viewing them has proved to be even more moving than before, since it feels like we are witnessing an historical moment, in which an Israeli piece is being translated, with no fundamental amendments, to something global. This is the result of an almost unbelievable process, in our province, in which an Israeli series, which overflows with benevolence, is noticed by the birthplace of high quality American television, that decides to take action.

Maybe this is the reason why HBO chose the road less traveled by it in this case, and decided to air a new version of a series that has already been broadcasted elsewhere. Maybe because it's not television, it's "In Treatment."