

# Tiyatro Eleřtirmenlięi ve Dramaturji Bۆlümü Dergisi

## Journal of Theatre Criticism and Dramaturgy

SAYI NUMBER 39 YIL YEAR 2024



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# Tiyatro Eleştirmenliği ve Dramaturji Bölümü Dergisi

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Temalı Sayı: İran Toplumunda Tiyatro

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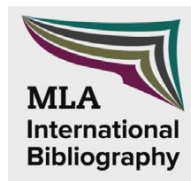
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## EDITORIAL / EDITÖRDEN

### Theater in Iranian Society

Compared to a broader spectrum of global theatrical history, the evolution of theater and modern dramatic literature in Iran is a relatively recent phenomenon, spanning less than two centuries. As Middle Eastern nations such as Turkey and Lebanon pursued social and cultural modernization, Iran embarked on a similar journey, culminating in the development of its theatrical traditions. Notably, Lebanese playwright Marun al-Naqqash staged his first play, “*al-Bakhil*,” in Beirut in 1847, while İbrahim Şinasi authored “The Wedding of a Poet” (*Şair Evlenmesi*) in 1859. Additionally, historical accounts suggest that Hayreddin Efendi may have penned earlier plays, which were subsequently discovered.

In the Iranian context, studies have revealed that exposure to European theatrical practices served as a catalyst for innovation. Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh emerged as a pioneering figure, producing his first play, “*Mulla İbrahim Khalil the Alchemist*,” in 1849. This work blends European stylistic elements with Iranian narrative traditions, composed in Azeri Turkish and later translated into Persian by Mirza Jafar Qarachedaghi. Mirza Aga Tabrizi, the first Persian-speaking playwright influenced by Akhundzadeh’s approach, authored five published plays, making a significant milestone in Persian dramatic literature.

Furthermore, indigenous performance arts, recognized as traditional forms of drama, have flourished in Iran since the advent of Islam. These include *Naqqāli*, *Pardeh-Khani*, *Shabih Khani (Ta’zieh)*, *Siah-Bazi (Takht-e-Howzi or Ru-Hawzi)*, and marionette performances (*Kheimeh shab bazi*). These art forms have evolved from their traditional roots into modern interpretations, now prominently featured on theatrical stages within academic institutions. This transformation has opened new avenues for Iranian cultural engagement.

Currently, the Iranian theater is advancing along two primary trajectories. The first involves playwriting grounded in non-Iranian methodologies and texts, particularly those originating in Europe. The second emphasizes experiential practices in stage performances rooted in ritual and traditional performance phenomena, merging elements of Western theater models with indigenous Iranian forms.



In this context, fostering theoretical creativity by critically examining local dramatic languages and performances is vital for theater research. A comprehensive understanding of contemporary Iranian theatrical practices is particularly important. Scholars and practitioners of theater studies and dramaturgy must examine the evolution of Iranian theater. To this end, dedicating a special issue of the “Journal of Theater Criticism and Dramaturgy” to Iranian theater is a timely and necessary initiative.

This inaugural issue features six articles addressing diverse aspects of Iranian theater, including textual analysis, narrative theory, applied theater practices, psychodrama, comparative research methodologies, and anthropological perspectives. These articles explore historical contexts and present-day challenges in Iranian theatrical art. Hopefully future editions will aim to broaden this discourse by incorporating additional scholarly perspectives on Iranian theater.

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## Pardeh Khani as Performance: An Approach Based on Erika Fischer-Lichte's Theories

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### ABSTRACT

*Pardeh Khani* is a distinctive form of traditional storytelling in Iran that is recognized for its unique performative qualities. This performance method combines storytelling, painting, and acting, which has resulted in the formation of a unique style of Iranian painting known as coffeehouse painting. This article examines the characteristics of *Pardeh Khani* based on performance theory, particularly using Erika Fischer-Lichte's theories, which emphasizes four key aspects: mediality, materiality, semioticity, and aestheticity, to uncover the performative possibilities of this tradition. Although *Pardeh Khani* has faced a decline in recent decades, the initial findings of this research indicate that it has the potential for renewal as an interdisciplinary art form by integrating advancements in both painting and narration. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of its performative possibilities is required to preserve and modernize this performance art.

**Keywords:** *Pardeh Khani*, Coffeehouse Painting, Iranian Performances, Fischer-Lichte, Interdisciplinary Art

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## Introduction

Pardeh Khani is an important part of the Iranian performance tradition. This art form has a long history and is considered a branch of *Naqqāli* (storytelling). It is one of Iran's authentic performance arts that intertwined with painting during its evolution to become a new method of storytelling.<sup>1</sup>

The theatrical form of Pardeh Khani, also referred to as *Pardeh Dāri* or *Shamāyel Gardāni*, was typically performed in places specifically dedicated to hosting such performances, such as coffeehouses.<sup>2</sup> Over time, painted curtains were added to enhance the narrative and improve the performance. Consequently, coffeehouse painting, named after these venues, developed in close relation to this performative method. The contents of such paintings were entirely dependent on the narrative, often featuring religious, epic, or mythological themes.<sup>3</sup> The combination of painting with Pardeh Khani made it one of the most theatrical forms of traditional storytelling.

In a Pardeh Khani performance, the storyteller hangs the painted curtain, which resembled a scroll with a series of images that sequentially follow one another, in a coffeehouse corner or a public square. The storyteller then gradually unrolls the scroll in front of the gathered audience, narrating the depicted events with a captivating and rhythmic voice, adding contextual details. When the narrative is a religious one, it can perhaps be considered just before *Ta'zieh*, which is the most popular form of religious theater.<sup>4</sup>

Many performing arts are meant to bring art into people's daily lives by fostering greater interaction with the audience. Pardeh Khani, as a performance with its historical significance and cultural importance for the Iranian people, had the potential to deeply penetrate their lives. However, due to a lack of updates in various aspects, such as form and content, this has not been achieved.

This study will therefore examine the possibilities of Pardeh Khani from a performance perspective, using the theories of Erika Fischer-Lichte, a renowned theorist in the field. It will outline the steps for preserving and preventing the decline of this traditional Iranian art. The following sections will sequentially address the research background, the theoretical framework, the history, and an analysis of the data and its results.

Pardeh Khani has been discussed in several books and articles, but these have generally limited themselves to explaining the method of performance and, in some cases, the details of curtains and storytellers' performances. Some of the most significant studies in this area include the following: In *Ta'zieh va Ta'zieh-Khani* (1974), Sadegh Homayouni dedicated several lines to Pardeh Khani and its close relationship with painting. However, he only mentioned it in the context of its impact on *Ta'zieh* and its expansion, without providing further details about the methods of performance. In *Selections from the History of Theater in the World* (1971), Jamshid Malekpour devoted an entire chapter to theater in the East, which included an introduction and providing general overview of Pardeh Khani in Iran. However, he also did not delve into its performative elements. Jaber Anasori's *Darāmad-i bar Namāyesh va Niāyesh dar Irān* (1987) also made references to this form of performance, but like most sources in this period, he limited himself to a general introduction of the form.

As studies in the field developed, scholars began to add more detail. In *Qahvehkhānehā-ye Irān* (1996), Ali Bolukbashi discussed the most renowned painters in the genre of coffeehouse painting, though he still made only general references to its performative uses. However, Mohammad Hossein Naserbakht (1998) described and categorized the characteristics of Pardeh Khani, the performer, and the painted curtain, and proceeded to analyze several painted curtains.

Behrouz Gharibpour, in "The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani" (1999), also defined and categorized the features of Pardeh Khani and the painted curtains, which are of great significance here. He also related some of the religious stories typically performed through Pardeh Khani. Notably, this was followed by one of the first foreign scholars to elaborate on Pardeh Khani, Peter Chelkowski, who made brief references to *these* performances and their paintings in his book *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran* (2005).

Meanwhile, Iranian scholars have begun adapting Western performance theory in their studies. In *Dānishnāmih-yi Namāyish-i-Irānī* (2008), Yadullah Agha-Abbasi examined the features of performance from the perspectives of Richard Schechner and Marvin Carlson, mentioning the general performative features of various Iranian performances, including a brief reference to narrative storytelling. However, he did not closely focus on any particular genre of Iranian performance or its alignment with performance art. In Bahram Beyzaie's *A Study on Iranian Theater* (2013), one of the most important written sources on Iranian theater, an entire chapter is dedicated to narrative storytelling. However, he provided only a brief introduction to this form of performance and its prominent use of painting.

<sup>1</sup> Behrouz Gharibpour, "The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani," *Faslnāme-ye Honar*, no. 40 (1999): 55.

<sup>2</sup> Bahram Beyzaie, *Namāyesh dar Irān* (A Study on Iranian Theatre), (Tehran: Roshangarān and Women Studies Publishing House, 2013), 76.

<sup>3</sup> Ruyin Pakbaz, *Encyclopedia of Art*, edition 10. (Tehran: Farhang Mo'aser, 2011), 587.

<sup>4</sup> Beyzaie, *Namāyesh dar Irān* (A Study on Iranian Theatre), 77.

More recently, Zahra Rahbarnia and Roshanak Davari (2017) examined Ta'zieh as a performance art, which included the role of the audience in this form of theater. This article is significant as it provides an updated analysis and categorization of the features of a traditional Iranian performance in comparison with performance art. Similarly, Leili Galehdaran and Reza Pourzarrin (2019) explored the relationship between the storyteller and the audience through the medium of the painted curtain and the interaction of visual and performative elements. Majid Fadaei (2020) and Ramtin Shahbazi and Mohammad Hashemi (2022) have focused more on narrative, with Fadaei examining the epic aspects of the Pardeh Khani narratives and Shahbazi and Hashemi discussing the use of time markers in these narratives and the storyteller's skill in creating narrative connections between the frames of the painted panels.

## Theoretical Framework

To clarify the criteria of performances and compare them with Pardeh Khani, this article will refer to the theories of Erika Fischer-Lichte, a prominent scholar in the performance field. Fischer-Lichte defines the concept of performance by referring to specific medial conditions (bodily co-presence), a particular material characteristic of materiality [its (transience), a special mode of creating meaning [semioticity or the emergence of meaning], and the specific type of aesthetic experience [the experience of liminality].<sup>5</sup> From this perspective, all phenomena that align with these criteria can be considered as performances. Richard Schechner's (2018) views on performance are also used to complete gaps in certain theoretical issues. We will first explain these four characteristics and then proceed to analyze them in the context of Pardeh Khani.

### • Mediality and the experience of liminality

Mediality and liminality share certain similarities. Mediality is defined as follows: "A performance exists in the moment of bodily copresence of 'actors' and 'spectators.'"<sup>6</sup> A performance thus possesses different situations of mediality rooted in its dependence on bodily co-presence. Fischer-Lichte further explains that during such interactions, actors influence the spectators and vice versa. Additionally, spectators can influence each other during the performance and in their reception of the work.

This concept is directly related to the aesthetic experience of liminality, which can occur rapidly through sudden physical changes in a person; such rapid occurrences can happen when intense emotions accompany the process of perception.<sup>7</sup> This subsequently prompts the spectator to become engaged in an event and challenge it. Based on these definitions, these two characteristics share a common ground in the interaction between the performer and the audience, which we will later analyze in more detail in comparison to Pardeh Khani.

### • Materiality and objects

Fischer-Lichte presents the transient condition of materiality by stating that performances cannot be contained within or transformed into material artifacts; they are ephemeral and transitory. Once a performance ends, it is irretrievable and lies beyond repetition. The transient materiality of performance emerges through the features of spatiality, corporeality, and tonality.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding spatiality, Fischer-Lichte explains that we must distinguish between the architectural space in which a performance takes place and the performative space created by the performance, the latter of which reciprocally affects the performance itself. Every movement of people, objects, light, and sound can alter this space. Therefore, the performative space is constantly fluctuating.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of corporeality, or physical presence, when actors step outside themselves to portray a figure using the "material of their own existence," they highlight this doubling and the simultaneous distancing of the figure from themselves. There is a tension between the actors' phenomenal bodies, their bodily existence, and the use of those bodies as signs to depict characters.<sup>10</sup>

The transient materiality of performance is also derived from the materiality of sound, or tonality. Sound creates presence and fills the space between the spectator and the performer, uniting them and establishing a relationship between them. The transience of the moment in which sound is produced contributes to the strength of a performance.

<sup>5</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 100.

<sup>6</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 43.

<sup>8</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 26.

Tonality has a profound emotional impact: it can cause listeners to tremble and breathe more rapidly, increase their heart rates, and induce feelings of melancholy or euphoria. It can arouse desires or bring forth vivid memories.<sup>11</sup>

Fischer-Lichte's understanding of transient materiality is comparable to Schechner's theory of the object in performance: In activities related to performance, the economic value of all objects is much less than the value attributed to them in the context of the activity, except for certain ritual implements and relics.<sup>12</sup> In other words, performance can attribute a transient value to objects or, conversely, diminish that value.

### • Semiotic and rules

Fischer-Lichte defines semiotic by stating that "Traditionally, performances were seen as a means to transmit preexisting meanings." However, considering the conditions mentioned above, understanding and interpreting meaning heavily rely on individual spectators' mentalities, which are related to factors such as age, gender, class, and cultural background.<sup>13</sup> From another angle, spectators enter into the rules of performance, but they may also interfere in and continuously generate new meanings in this process. Each audience member can add something to the performance based on their own characteristics, contributing to the creation of new meanings.

## Pardeh Khani and Its Relationship with Coffeehouse Painting and Storytelling

An overview of the history and performance characteristics of Pardeh Khani will allow for a comparison with the aspects outlined by Fischer-Lichte. Through this comparison, it will be possible to further consider the potential for modernizing this traditional performance method.

### • Pardeh Khani

Pardeh Khani, or dramatic storytelling, has its roots in religious narratives like the events of the Battle of Karbala (680 AD), and epics like the tragedy of Rostam and Sohrab. It is a subset of narrative storytelling, a meta-genre that gained prominence in the mid-fifth century with the rise of Shia Islam, particularly as a means of promoting and propagating Shia beliefs. This began with the Buwayhids, who paid special attention to the lives of the Imams. Various forms of religious storytelling emerged, including Mana'iq Khani, Fazail Khani, Sokhanvari, Hamleh Khani, and Pardeh Khani.<sup>14</sup>

Shemayel Gardani or Pardeh Dari is the act of presenting religious images on a curtain and narrating their stories.<sup>15</sup> A prominent feature of Iranian performances is the inclination toward storytelling, as noted by Naserbakht, and forms of storytelling in Iran often involve subplots that typically carry moral themes and relate to everyday life.<sup>16</sup> This method creates a complex, intertwined structure, linking the main event and characters with contemporary figures and the ordinary people who are spectators in the assembly. This presents an example of Fischer-Lichte's semiotic, which posits that performances can establish a connection between the past and the present during the process of meaning transfer, thereby creating new meanings in the presence of contemporary audiences.<sup>17</sup> This same quality was a reason for its promotion and spread by rulers such as the Safavid monarchs, who turned it into an effective means of religious promotion. This has also been seen in medieval Europe. Chelkowski has noted that in Iran and throughout the Islamic world, depicting and sculpting animals and humans has often been prohibited and considered illegitimate. Nevertheless, there are still artists who paint curtains depicting scenes from religious stories such as the sacrifice of the martyrs of Karbala or the revenge of Imam Hussein's killers. Performers display parts of such paintings every day and engage their audience with loud speeches, oratory, and rituals that have evolved over hundreds of years.<sup>18</sup>

In this manner, it can be said that Pardeh Khani is a subset of performance art in which storytelling is conveyed through painted images. As mentioned earlier, Pardeh Khani is also referred to as Shamayil Gardani and may depict religious figures. It could thus be argued that painting, like poetry or music, has sought a social place for itself and gained acceptance. The painting techniques used in these curtains are such that villains are usually depicted as ugly, abnormal, and repulsive. Their heads are shaved, their foreheads are short, their laughter is bitter and joyless, their mustaches

<sup>11</sup> Fischer-Lichte, , 34.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 38-39.

<sup>14</sup> Leyla Taghavi, "Coffeehouse Painting and Miniature - Formation and Interaction" *Art and Architecture*, no. 25 (2011): 11.

<sup>15</sup> Beyzaie, *Namāyesh dar Irān* (A Study on Iranian Theatre), 219.

<sup>16</sup> Mohammad Hossein Naserbakht, "Darvishi Curtains: The Art of Pardeh Khani and Darvishi Curtains Painting" *Honar*, no.35 (1998): 103.

<sup>17</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 51-53.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Chelkowski, *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*, Trans. Davood Hatami, (Tehran: Samt, 2005), 179.

are dangling, and their gaze is shameless.<sup>19</sup> These images, through the dynamic interactions between performers and audiences, are narrated in a new way each time and generate new meanings.

Other scholars have drawn connections between painting and performance art, including Kamyabi Mask, who discusses Pardeh Khani as follows:

In 1984, when I went to see Schechner for the works he had performed with the backing of UNESCO, we had a discussion that lasted two to three hours. If we consider the integration of arts... in my opinion, we had a form of performance art in the past called Pardeh Khani. There was a painted curtain with another curtain on it; a storyteller or curtain-holder stood by the painted curtain, gradually moving aside, then explaining the image on the curtain. We can consider this a performance in which painting, storytelling, and someone as an actor were used.<sup>20</sup>

Gharibpour also states that religious Pardeh Khani has three equally valuable basic elements: story (content), dramatic painting (dramatic representation), and storytelling (acting).<sup>21</sup> The defining element of painting in this performative style presents the first signs of the interdisciplinarity of this artform. However, from the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, due to Western influences and the emergence of new forms of entertainment, coupled with the overall decline of coffeehouses, Pardeh Khani gradually lost its prominence.

### • Coffeehouse Painting

Coffeehouse painting is closely associated with Naqqāli (storytelling). The term is used to describe a narrative oil painting with themes like battle scenes, festivities, or religious subjects. It emerged as a genre during the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911) and is based on the traditions of folk and religious art and influenced by the naturalistic painting style popular during that era. The coffeehouse can perhaps be considered the birthplace of this genre, not only because of its close link with storytelling but also because coffeehouse owners were among its initial patrons. However, these curtains have also been hung in places such as mourning ceremonies, shops, bathhouses, and wrestling arenas.<sup>22</sup> As previously mentioned, Fischer-Lichte emphasizes the need to distinguish between “architectural space,” the structure in which a performance takes place, and “performative space,” which is created by the performance itself and reciprocally affects it.<sup>23</sup> In terms of performance studies, the architectural space is the physical location where the painting is displayed, whereas the performative space is shaped by dynamic factors such as the constant movement of the audience, light, sound, and the presence of the storyteller. Thus, each time the paintings are in a new context, and with the changing presence of spectators and performers, they generate new meanings and create a fresh space for artistic experience.

According to Boloukbashi, coffeehouse paintings can be classified into two general categories based on contents: religious and nonreligious paintings. The notable pioneers of these two categories were the painters Hossein Qollar-Aghasi (1902–1966) and Mohammed Modabber (1890–1966).<sup>24</sup> Gharibpour refers to the painted curtain used in Pardeh Khani as a “dramatic” painting: this type of painting involves a performative act, with its images depicting pivotal points in narratives on which the storyteller (*Naqqāl*, “face” or “curtain reader”) elaborates. Therefore, the scenes lack static and still qualities.<sup>25</sup>

Bezyaie also notes that curtains are often painted with dark colors. Some curtains may depict one or several episodes from the life and tribulations of the Prophet’s family. Curtains may relate historical events like the tragedy of Karbala or its surrounding events (such as the deeds of Mukhtar al-Thaqafi or scenes of the torture and massacre in Yazid’s court), and others may pertain to the miracles and virtues of the Imams (such as the story of Imam Ali and Javanmard-e Ghassab).<sup>26</sup> The events of Karbala are among the most important themes of religious Pardeh Khani curtains.

### • Performer as Naqqāl in Pardeh Khani

The integration of the two arts of painting and storytelling in Pardeh Khani can be considered a component of its performance and interdisciplinary visibility. Naqqāl is one of the most important and authentic roles in Iranian theater. Just as Vaghe’e Khani (storytelling) is a demanding, specialized art based on established principles and traditions, Pardeh Khani narrators must possess a precise understanding and self-taught knowledge of the psychology of the audience. Their remarkable mastery over both their audiences and themselves stems directly from this foundation. In

<sup>19</sup> Sadeq Homayouni, *Ta’zieh va Ta’zieh-Khani (Ta’zieh and Ta’zieh Recitation)*, (Shiraz: Jashn-e-Honar Publication, 1974), 28.

<sup>20</sup> Ahmad Kamyabi Mask and Mohammad Bagher Ghahramani, “Impact on the Audience”, *Art and Architecture*, no 95-96 (2007): 87.

<sup>21</sup> Gharibpour, “The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani,” 56.

<sup>22</sup> Ruyin Pakbaz, *Encyclopedia of Art*, edition 10. (Tehran: Farhang Mo’aser, 2011), 587.

<sup>23</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge introduction to theatre and performance studies*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Ali Boloukbashi, *Qahvehkhānehā-ye Irān (Iranian Coffeehouses)*, (Tehran: Dāftar-e Pāzhūhesh-hā-ye Farhangī, 1996), 98.

<sup>25</sup> Gharibpour, “The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani,” 60.

<sup>26</sup> Bezyaie, *Namāyesh dar Irān (A Study on Iranian Theatre)*, 75-76.

recent centuries, the foundation of the Iranian storytelling tradition has also supported the acting methods of a newly emerging performance, known as Ta'zieh, helping it achieve a high degree of perfection in form.<sup>27</sup>

The live presence of the storyteller-as-performer can be associated with Fischer-Lichte's concept of mediality, which refers to the direct influence that both the audience and performers exert on one another by being simultaneously present in a performance space.<sup>28</sup> The storyteller's interactions with the audience often lead to sudden emotional changes in the performance, which, according to Fischer-Lichte's framework, results in the creation of an aesthetic experience that is unique and different in each performance.

Aqabbasi discusses a related characteristic of Naqqāli, namely improvisation. Many Iranian performances lack a written text, emphasizing improvisation instead. This type of creativity is not always meticulously planned. Iranian performers can effectively guide a show in the desired direction using the expertise gained through prior experience. However, there is always the possibility of unforeseen elements influencing a performance.<sup>29</sup> As a result, these highly skilled performers must begin their performances with an awareness of current and local public opinions and events. Each time they perform, they tailor their speeches to current issues and the perspectives of their audience. It is therefore rare for them to start and end a performance in the same way twice.<sup>30</sup> Having established the basic elements of Pardeh Khani, coffeehouse painting, and Naqqāl, we can now analyze the details of Pardeh Khani through the lens of performance theory.

## Data Analysis

This section will provide a more detailed comparison and examination of the characteristics of Pardeh Khani and its performative structure, expanding upon the explanations provided within Fischer-Lichte's theoretical framework.

### • Mediality and the experience of liminality

Fischer-Lichte discusses the concept of mediality as part of a reciprocal relationship; performance emerges in the moment of bodily co-presence of both actors and spectators.<sup>31</sup> For instance, in Naqqāli, a storyteller adjusts their performance based on the audience's reactions. This connection is better understood through Hassan Beigi's explanation. Shemayil Gardani, which had a notable presence across Iran during its peak, is among the performing arts where there is no distance between the narrator and the audience. Naqqāli uses poetry, storytelling techniques, oratory, and specific musical modes to establish a precise connection with the audience.<sup>32</sup> In other words, it is an art form in which a storyteller conveys a tale with their entire being, utilizing all their talents and physical expressions to captivate their audience, not only entertaining but astonishing or surprising them.<sup>33</sup>

As Fischer-Lichte suggests, in a performance, the audience members' reactions exert influence on each other and on the actors. Using these reactions, skilled Naqqāl-ha (storytellers) can precisely predict which parts of their story will be the most thrilling for the audience and how to deliver them for maximum impact. They achieve this effect by inserting pauses, modulating their voice, raising and lowering their tone at the appropriate times (such as whispering or shouting), adding a tremor to their voice, altering their pitch, clapping their hands together and stomping their feet on the ground, and even suspending the narrative at a critical point to keep the audience emotionally engaged.<sup>34</sup>

The excitement Beyzaie speaks of is not always internal and can lead to physical reactions from the audience, such as during the moment of a hero's death. This experience, derived from the bodily co-presence of the performer and the audience, inherently involves another aspect known as "aestheticity," stemming from combined physical and bodily experiences, as Fischer-Lichte notes. Pardeh Khani has the capacity to create such liminal experiences by evoking emotional moments and engaging the audience in scenes such as a hero's death or a story's climax. According to Fischer-Lichte, these experiences, which occur suddenly and intensely, are considered one of the key aesthetic dimensions of a performance.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Beyzaie, *Namāyesh dar Irān* (A Study on Iranian Theatre), 81.

<sup>28</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Yadullah Agha-Abbasi, "Theater: Iranian Theater and Its Relation to World Theater," *Art and Architecture*, no. 42-43 (2008): 243.

<sup>30</sup> Mohammad Reza Hasan Beigi, *Tehrān-i Ghadim* (Old Tehran), (Tehran: Ghoghnoos Publishing, 2006), 343.

<sup>31</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> Hasan Beigi, *Tehrān-i Ghadim* (Old Tehran), 343.

<sup>33</sup> Homayouni, *Ta'zieh va Ta'zieh-Khani* (*Ta'zieh and Ta'zieh Recitation*), 28.

<sup>34</sup> Beyzaie, *Namāyesh dar Irān* (A Study on Iranian Theatre), 81.

<sup>35</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 43.



**Figure 1.** *Pardeh Khani performance by Moshed Mirza Ali. Note the presence of the bodily co-presence of the storyteller and the spectators. Source: <http://tabnakfarhangi.ir>*

Therefore, a Pardeh Khani performance is contingent upon the full engagement of all participants and the mutual influence these participants on the performance (see Figure 1). The experience of liminality in performance is thus directly related to the condition of mediality, or bodily copresence. Agha-Abbasi argues that audience intervention is a key aspect of intimacy and transparency in postmodern performances, and that this transitions an audience from a passive to an active role. In Western theater, this trend began with Brecht, who advocated for audience involvement and eliminating their distance from the actors. Brecht, in turn, owed this inspiration to Eastern theater.<sup>36</sup> From this perspective, Pardeh Khani simultaneously embodies both mediality and liminality in its performance. These direct, complex connections between audience and storyteller dynamically transform the course of a performance, making Pardeh Khani one of the unique examples of traditional Iranian performance arts.

- **Transient materiality**

Pardeh Khani performances may take place in open spaces, completely confronting an audience with an event. Here, payments to the performer are entirely based on each viewer's discretion and do not significantly affect the performance mechanism. However, it should be noted that the money received for Pardeh Khani does not commodify it, as the concept of reward is involved. Regarding this, Gharibpour has stated that the remuneration received by the performer, or more precisely, "begging," is considered charity, which has reciprocal rewards for both the payer and the receiver.<sup>37</sup>

The painted curtains or canvases used in Pardeh Khani have also existed as long as this performance artform has existed. These are also not considered commodities, as they held their own ritualistic value and are treated with respect. However, some of these curtains have since been placed in museums, such as the works of painters like Qollar-Aghasi and Modabber. Due to their nature as artworks, they have been transformed into valuable items that possess material value (Figure 2). However, this was not the case during the performance process until recently.

<sup>36</sup> Agha-Abbasi, "Theater: Iranian Theater and Its Relation to World Theater," 242.

<sup>37</sup> Gharibpour, "The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani," 56.



Figure 2. The Pardeh of the Day of Ashura by Hossein Qollar-Aghasi, Malek Museum. Source: [www.honaronline.ir](http://www.honaronline.ir)

The main point here is that in performance, performers and audiences do not gather for the primary purpose of maximizing returns or producing more goods. This issue directly relates to materiality: performances cannot occupy a place in material goods or be transformed into them. They are ephemeral and unstable as acts of autopoiesis, a form of self-creation.<sup>38</sup> In terms of bodily co-presence, for example, a single narrator can be several actors at once and convincingly perform multiple roles, without the aid of supplementary theatrical elements such as stage decorations or music.<sup>39</sup> Fischer-Lichte calls this “corporeality.”<sup>40</sup>

Another important point is the absence of the traditional “character” in performance art. This stands in contrast to the traditional character of Western theater, which is constructed and treated as real, with the actor completely embodying their role. In Iranian performances, the actor is merely an intermediary. The narrator is not Rostam or Sohrab, but through them, we see both Rostam and Sohrab. This approach offers greater diversity and complexity and is more challenging. “The actor resembles but is not the character themselves.... Actors maintain a state of detachment and are always aware of their own work, avoiding the pitfalls of sensationalism.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Fischer-Lichte cites Brecht’s theory of acting, where the actor simultaneously portrays a character and takes a stance vis-à-vis that character.<sup>42</sup>

In the realm of tonality, Gharibpour emphasizes the importance of the voice in Pardeh Khani and other storytelling performances, stating that a storyteller possesses all the capabilities of both narrators and epic storytellers, and whenever necessary, takes on the emotional states of the characters. They sing, cry out, and sometimes, with skill akin to that of a professional eulogist, perform elegies for the dead.<sup>43</sup> The narrator creates most of the narrative through the use of their voice, as the performance space is not exclusively a space for watching (theatron), but for listening (auditorium).<sup>44</sup>

Here, it is crucial to supply a brief discussion on the nature of objects object in performance. As noted previously, Schechner argues that performances can either bestow value upon objects or diminish it. The market value of objects is usually significantly lower than their value within the context of the activity itself.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, in Pardeh Khani performances, there is the question regarding the sanctity of objects. In religious contexts, the elements and components of a performance are considered sacred from the beginning to the end.<sup>46</sup> For example, the painted curtain is recognized as a sacred object in religious Pardeh Khani. Gharibpour enumerates some key characteristics that transform the curtain into a sacred object. First, the persons and events depicted must denote religious occurrences. Their importance and sanctity are usually directly proportional to their size. For example, Imams are always much larger than ordinary people and often occupy the center of a curtain. Events or places like Judgment Day and Hell are depicted with symbols such as dragons, trees, and terrifying creatures to make the fate of sinners clear and tangible. The colors are usually bold and the images are two-dimensional. Realism may vary; for example, the faces of Imams painted may only be

<sup>38</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Beyzaie, *Namāyesh dar Irān* (A Study on Iranian Theatre), 82.

<sup>40</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Agha-Abbasi, “Theater: Iranian Theater and Its Relation to World Theater,” 243.

<sup>42</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 29.

<sup>43</sup> Gharibpour, “The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani,” 61.

<sup>44</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Schechner, *Performance theory*, 11.

<sup>46</sup> Gharibpour, “The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani,” 56.

painted in some cases, and the women of Karbala may be depicted as faceless. The narration provided by the performer will clarify the identities of individuals and the significant events.<sup>47</sup>

Based on the sacred nature of their use, the objects used in Pardeh Khani typically resist commodification. This only changes when their utility or function changes, such as paintings or scrolls that have been transferred to the museums. As a result, Pardeh Khani, as a performance, with its ephemeral and transitory characteristics, fits perfectly within Fischer-Lichte's theoretical framework on materiality; through its interaction with objects, space, and its audience, it generates its own unique values.

#### • Semioticity and rules

In the context of representation, performances were traditionally seen as a means of conveying preexisting meanings. If we assume that the bodily copresence of actors and audience is integral to the performance and that performances are inherently unstable, the idea of an absolute meaning in performance cannot exist. Understanding and interpreting meaning heavily relies on the interior life of each spectator. Within a performance, a special world is created where humans can establish rules and consequently create meanings based upon them. In Pardeh Khani, the narrator, based on the mentioned characteristics, engages in selecting narratives and improvisation. According to Anasori, the Pardeh Khan (or Naqqāl) is a skilled, discerning actor who carefully observes the audience and selects the appropriate characters to focus on based on its composition. For instance, if he sees a strong and handsome youth, he speaks of Qamar Bani Hashem, and if he sees an adolescent boy, he instead describes Hazrat-e Qasem, both of whom were significant figures in the Battle of Karbala.

As mentioned earlier in this section, the storyteller must know what type of discourse is suitable for a given moment and location. Naturally, the audience will also respond based on their own characteristics. In fact, it can be inferred that the rules of performing and the way each Naqqāl or storyteller narrates in each Pardeh Khani performance—as well as the interaction of the audience during that performance—can create new meanings. Each performance adheres to its own set of rules. Similarly, Pardeh Khani incorporates a mixture of traditions and regulations that can vary to an extent, from costume design to the use of objects. For instance, the Pardeh Khan will often refer to images with the *Metrāgh* (narrator's stick). This stick has been adopted for use by Mo'in-al-boka for pointing during Ta'zieh performances.<sup>48</sup> In terms of the number of curtains and their narratives, more specific laws and traditions prevail. For example, the sacred number 72 will often be incorporated, with Pardeh Khani about the Battle of Karbala including references to the 72 companions of Imam Hussein and it can also include 72 plot lines.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, special rules have been established for creating the paintings that assist the narrators during the performance. According to Royin Pakbaz, artists will often write the names of individuals alongside their images in the curtains. Furthermore, as noted above, the paintings often incorporate *Māqami* perspective, which depicts the size of characters based on the centrality of their roles. The main character is generally larger than the secondary characters and painters will use specific visual conventions to emphasize the positive or negative aspects of the characters. The efforts of the coffeehouse painter in representing scenes and displaying the physical and internal characteristics of the characters are generally influenced by a bias in favor of the heroes. Based on artists' ethical and ideological motivations and the logic of narrative in a curtain, the painter observed specific arrangements in depicting the figures and garments, color selection, and composition as storytelling elements.<sup>50</sup> As noted previously, faces may be obscured (Figure 2):

In the images of curtains, due to religious barriers, the face of the Imams is not shown, and only a halo of light distinguishes them.

These rules, particularly in the use of symbols and visual techniques, have thus established a foundation for conveying multilayered meanings in Pardeh Khani. While deeply rooted in tradition, however, these rules also have the capacity for endless reinterpretation and adaptation to new contexts, which can serve as strengths for further adapting Pardeh Khani for contemporary times.

#### • Time and space

Pardeh Khani performers must plan the duration of a narrative according to the patience and eagerness of their audience. This flexibility in storytelling allows Pardeh Khani to captivate diverse audiences across different eras. Following Schenker's view, a significant portion of traditional theater utilizes symbolic time.<sup>51</sup> For example, in Pardeh

<sup>47</sup> Gharibpour, "The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani," 60.

<sup>48</sup> Gharibpour, "The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani," 65.

<sup>49</sup> Gharibpour, "The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani," 58.

<sup>50</sup> Pakbaz, *Encyclopedia of Art*, 587.

<sup>51</sup> Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 9.



Khani about the Battle of Karbala, the events are generally not presented in chronological order, and instead draw from the episodic structure used in Eastern storytelling.<sup>52</sup> Rather, all curtain stories feature elaborate introductions and conclusions, which works to create anticipation in the audience. Even seemingly peripheral events can be skillfully interwoven with mastery to connect to the central events of Karbala.<sup>53</sup> Thus, time in such narratives is intertwined and generally holds a symbolic significance rather than adhering to real-time sequences of events. This approach to time offers more opportunities to create deeper emotional and symbolic meanings for the audience, as the break from real time allows for a stronger connection between the audience and symbolic or mythical narratives.



Figure 3. Pardeh Khani in a public place street. Source: [www.karnaval.ir](http://www.karnaval.ir)

Another important feature of the Pardeh Khani performance is space, which we will elaborate on in the continuation of this section, along with explaining the concept of spatiality previously mentioned in the materiality section. Pardeh Khani, due to its temporal and spatial constraints, does not allow for elaborate stage design or the use of special accessories. This type of performance can be done anywhere, with any number of spectators, and for any duration. The flexible use of time and space is a hallmark of Iranian performances, which have skillfully utilized these features throughout the millennia. In general, Iranian performances do not rely on stage design. They can take place in town squares, on platforms, in coffeehouses, in the corner of a living room, or any other location using minimal accessories. These performances are flexible and cost-effective, expanding their scope to wherever audiences may gather (Figure 3).<sup>54</sup> This simplicity and flexibility makes Pardeh Khani a suitable contemporary performance style for diverse audiences in various locations.

As mentioned earlier, there are two types of Pardeh Khani: one is religious and sacred in nature, and the other is heroic or mythological. Therefore, the subject of the curtain determines the location of its installation.<sup>55</sup> In each case, the performance venue will vary. It can be inferred that each type of Pardeh Khani requires an identity that the location will provide it. During Qajar Iran (1789–1925), for instance, narrators were mostly concentrated in cities with widespread meeting places (including coffeehouses), especially in Tehran and Isfahan. In cities lacking large coffeehouses or other gathering centers, narrators rarely thrived. Performance given in coffeehouses typically involves recounting mythological narratives, unless it was at a specific time, such as the days of Muharram or Ramadan. Meanwhile, the venues for religious Pardeh Khani include pilgrimage sites, holy shrines, and Imamzadehs.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, each type of Pardeh Khani takes on a unique identity based on the location in which it occurs. In other words, the venue can enhance the meaning of the performance and enrich the audience's experience.

As noted previously, Fisher-Lichte argues that the spatiality of performance is created in, through, and as the performance space and is perceived under the conditions created by that space.<sup>57</sup> Location also possesses a unique identity in the characteristics of Pardeh Khani, because it can vary depending on the content. As stated above, artists around the globe developed the concept of spatiality after being inspired by Eastern performances, including the attributes often observed in traditional Iranian performances.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Naserbakht, "Darvishi Curtains: The Art of Pardeh Khani and Darvishi Curtains Painting," 107.

<sup>53</sup> Gharibpour, "The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani," 58.

<sup>54</sup> Agha-Abbasi, "Theater: Iranian Theater and Its Relation to World Theater," 244.

<sup>55</sup> Pakbaz, *Encyclopedia of Art*, 587.

<sup>56</sup> Gharibpour, "The Sacred Art of Pardeh Khani," 56.

<sup>57</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, 23.

<sup>58</sup> Agha-Abbasi, "Theater: Iranian Theater and Its Relation to World Theater," 242.

### Pardeh Khani: An Interdisciplinary Art Form

According to Ruyin Pakbaz, Pardeh Khani has largely declined today due to the loss of its original functional nature.<sup>59</sup> In an era where many art forms are advancing and modernizing, Pardeh Khani may benefit from new painting techniques and other visual arts to diversify its storytelling. As paintings, sculptures, poetry, and other artworks enter a performance, they lose their independent identities, and they transform into elements that shape that performance. In this way, theater is an “interart,” and Theater and Performance Studies is an interdisciplinary field.<sup>60</sup> The use of new and digital technologies can also provide opportunities for the revival of traditional art forms. This transformation could give Pardeh Khani a modern appeal and make it more attractive to new generations.

Interdisciplinary performance art has seen consistent advances in recent decades. This raises the question of how traditional Iranian performance forms like Pardeh Khani, with its ties to coffeehouse paintings, can be integrated with other arts, including digital arts, to enhance its narrative expression more comprehensively and dynamically. In this case, Pardeh Khani has a significant potential for modernization and attracting new audiences. However, this endeavor requires further research and exploration.

Performance art is inherently collaborative, and like Kolazh art, it brings together and synchronizes diverse materials.<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, it seems that Pardeh Khani, by combining the arts of storytelling, painting, and acting, has the potential to modernize itself using advances in painting and multimedia arts, both in narrative and visual aspects. Its recent decline is largely due to a lack of alignment with social changes and the emergence of modern entertainment. Nevertheless, this does not signify the end of Pardeh Khani. With further research and exploration, it is possible to find ways to revitalize this art form while preserving its traditional values.

### Tables

To better understand the comparison between Fischer-Lichte’s theories and the performance of Pardeh Khani, we have designed a table based on the characteristics of Pardeh Khani and performance theories to distill the compatibility of these theories with this type of performance.

**Table 1.**Alignment of Pardeh Khani Characteristics with Fischer-Lichte’s Framework

Fischer-Lichte’s Framework		Performance	Pardeh Khani
1	<b>Mediality</b>	A performance exists in a moment of bodily co-presence of actors and spectators.	The narrator and audience are present in the same space. The narrator adjusts the narrative based on the audience’s reactions, creating pauses or engaging in dialog as necessary.
2	<b>Materiality</b>	<b>Spatiality</b>	The narrator chooses and presents a narrative based on the audience’s characteristics and the atmosphere in the performance space at that moment.
		<b>Corporeality</b>	The narrator, by distancing themselves from the characters, simultaneously embodies all the roles they narrate.
		<b>Tonality</b>	The narrator shapes the narration and the characters vocally, including singing, shouting, and eulogies. They will always return to the role of the narrator.
3	<b>Semioticity</b>	Factors such as age, gender, social class, and cultural background influence how people perceive performances.	The narrator selects the narrative of their painted curtain based on the audience and improvises during the performance based on the space created by them, thereby creating new meanings.
4	<b>Aestheticity</b>	Audiences may experience a broad spectrum of intense emotions during a performance. Each performance has the potential to create an aesthetic experience.	In religious performances, audiences often weep, while in mythological performances, they engage in various forms of sympathy.

<sup>59</sup> Pakbaz, *Encyclopedia of Art*, 588.

<sup>60</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge introduction to theatre and performance studies*, 147.

<sup>61</sup> Agha-Abbasi, “Theater: Iranian Theater and Its Relation to World Theater,” 243.

## Conclusion

This study has introduced Pardeh Khani and its characteristics and analyzed them based on the theories of Erika Fischer-Lichte. She, by defining concepts such as mediality, materiality, semioticity, and aestheticity, demonstrated that a performance transcends a static experience. Rather, a performance is a dynamic, ephemeral experience that depends on the simultaneous physical presence of both the audience and the performer. Pardeh Khani, as a traditional Iranian form of performance, combines the unique artistic elements of painting, storytelling, and performance, giving it a highly interdisciplinary characteristic and enabling it to create a distinct, meaningful experience for audiences.

The alignment between contemporary performance theories and the tradition of Pardeh Khani demonstrates that this traditional art form still possesses the potential for renewal and the creation of new meanings in today's world. The dynamic performance space and the improvisation of the storytellers in interaction with the audience, which is in line with Fischer-Lichte's theory of mediality, prove that Pardeh Khani can continue as a living, contemporary performance. This examination allows the redefinition of traditional values within new contexts and, by combining them with contemporary theories, the discovery of innovative ways to expand this art form. Pardeh Khani allows for complex interactions between the performer and the audience, which is clearly manifested through the bodily co-presence, emotional moments, and active participation of the audience in the storyteller's narration. However, the rules and conventions governing this art form, including the semiotics of the paintings and the use of tools such as the narrator's stick, provide Pardeh Khani with a traditional but flexible structure. These rules, along with the improvisations of the storytellers, not only lead to the creation of new meanings each time but have also transformed Pardeh Khani into a dynamic yet ritualistic art form that can still hold a special place in the culture and art of Iran. However, to accomplish the preservation and updating of Pardeh Khani, it is essential to establish a strong movement in the field of performance studies in Iran, in which ritual-traditional performances can be revisited and analyzed from new perspectives. This will allow the fundamental steps required for the growth and transformation of traditional Iranian performance methods.

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## *Chahar Sandough* by Bahram Beyzai and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* by Saadallah Wannous: A Comparative Study on the Function of the Protagonist's Character

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### ABSTRACT

The protagonists in Bahram Beyzai's *Chahar Sandough* and Saadallah Wannous's *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* play critical roles in the structural framework of their respective dramas. These works vividly reflect the structure of contemporary society, with the external realities influencing the protagonists and thereby enhancing their believability. The emancipatory themes, persistent interaction with individuals and society, demonstrations of power, lack of external control, and eventual triumph are key elements uniting the protagonists in these dramas. Consequently, the study identified significant parallels and shared dimensions between *Baizai's* "Scarecrow" and Wannous's "Abu Izza." This research focuses specifically on analyzing the function of the protagonists in these two works.

**Keywords:** protagonist, *Chahar Sandough*, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, Scarecrow, Abu Izza

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## Introduction

While efforts to uncover the native background of Persian and Arabic theater continue, dramatic literature in these languages largely emerged as a result of translation rather than originating directly from Iranian or Arabic cultural texts. Despite a rich cultural background, the development of theater in these regions was significantly influenced by its introduction from the Western world. It is also noteworthy that the study of performance arts in these linguistic domains has not reached the depth observed in European research. Some scholars have attempted to trace Iran's domain traditions back to pre-Islamic times.<sup>1</sup> However, the systematic and scientific approach to this art form is largely attributed to translation, a phenomenon that began influencing these two linguistic fields approximately a century and a half ago.

Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (1812–1878), a pioneer of reforms in Iran, was the first to introduce Western-style theater with a distinctly Iranian flavor. Born in the Caucasus to a family originally from Khameneh, Tabriz, Azerbaijan, Akhundzadeh was fluent in Russian, French, German, English, and Norwegian. He earned titles such as “Müller of the East,” “Gogol of the Caucasus,” and “Müller of Azerbaijan.” His notable works include six comedies written in Azeri Turkish between 1849 and 1855 and published in the *Qafqaz* newspaper. Besides being a playwright, Akhundzadeh was also Iran's first theater critic.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of Arabic theater occurred concurrently in the 19th century, thanks to the efforts of Maroun bin Elias bin Mikhail al-Naqqash (1817–1855), a Lebanese youth fluent in Turkish, French, and English. During a business trip to Egypt and Italy in 1846, he became acquainted with theater there. Upon returning to Lebanon, he collaborated with young enthusiasts to introduce this art form by establishing a theater in his home.<sup>3</sup> A remarkable factor in the emergence of Persian and Arabic theater was the connection to the outside world. Both Akhundzadeh and Maroun encountered theater during travel or migration, and their deep appreciation for the art drove them to bring it to their homelands. This does not suggest an absence of dramatic traditions in these languages but underscores that the scientific and professional form of theater emerged through sustained interactions with the West. The evolution of theater in Iran and the Arab world can be summarized in stages: translation, adaptation, imitation, classical tendencies, social realism, and eventually creativity.

Although Persian and Arabic theaters developed later than their Western counterparts, they soon recognized the importance of engaging the audience through emotions and attitudes. Establishing the connection became a crucial point, mirroring the Western approach. In 1826, Goethe remarked on the need for a naturalistic perspective in English stage design, highlighting advances in technical stagecraft, perspective, and costume design.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Persian and Arabic theaters emphasized character development and characterization to create a vivid connection with the audience, making this a central discussion in this article.

This study examines the protagonists in Bahram Beyzai's *Chahar Sandough* and Saadallah Wannous's *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*. It introduces the two dramas and their authors, outlines the role of characterization in dramatic literature, and performs a comparative analysis of the protagonists. The primary question guiding this research is: How do the authors create their characters, and how do these characters relate to social realities? A descriptive-analytical method is employed to explore these questions.

An article titled “Sociological Criticism of the Drama *Chahar Sandough*” by Fereydoun Vahida, Farzaneh Heydari, and Mahbubeh Khorasani (2015) was published in the journal “Literary Criticism and Theory” (Issue 1, pp. 139–161). This study analyzed Baizai's work using a sociological approach. Similarly, another article, “Sociological Examination of the Play *Chahar Sandough* of Bahram Baizai Based on the Opinions of Lucien Goldman,” authored by Faezeh Daemi and Ahmad Kamyabi Mask (2018), appeared in the journal “Fine Arts” (Issue 1, pp. 69–78). Additionally, Shirzad Taifi and Koresh Salmani Nasr (2017) contributed articles titled “Typology of the Dramas *Chahar Sandough*” and “In the Presence of Wind through Mathews Fry's Theory,” published in Tehran University's Persian Literature Journal (Issue 22, pp. 39–58).

Sana Shaolan authored “Saadallah Wannous and the Function of Heritage in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*,” written in Arabic, which examines the plot and characters of the play, emphasizing the function of tradition within the narrative. Similarly, Hossein Mirzaei and Abdulbasit Arab Yusufabadi (2012) published an article with the same approach and title in the journal “Arabic Language and Literature” (Issues 6). Their work explored the shared features between this play and the story “Sleeping and Waking” from “One Thousand and One Nights.”

<sup>1</sup> Abulqasem Janati Atai, *Karkard-e Namayesh dar Iran* (Safi Alisha, 1977), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Fatima Parchegani, *Nashato Al-Masrah fi Al-Mashregh, Vol. II* (Bisan, 2016), 83.

<sup>3</sup> Hanna Alfakhouri, *Al-Jame fi Tarikh-e ai-Adab al-Arabi* (Dar al-Jeel), 31.

<sup>4</sup> Bertholt Brecht, *Darbare-ye Theater*, trans: Faramarz Behzad (Khwarazmi, 1978), 121.

Despite these studies, no comparative research employing the approach adopted in this article has been identified within the available literature.

## Character

A primary and decisive element in advancing the goals of an artistic text is its characters. A character is defined as “a made-up individual who appears in stories, plays, etc.” In narrative or dramatic work, a character is a person whose psychological and moral qualities are manifested through their actions and dialogue. Characterization refers to the creation of such individuals who seem almost real within the narrative.<sup>5</sup>

In theater, the character establishes a direct connection with the audience, embodying many dimensions of performance art. Therefore, the success of a dramatic text often hinges on its capacity for characterization. Unlike novels, where description and elaboration are abundant, drama relies almost entirely on characters’ dialogues and mise-en-scènes descriptions. This distinct characteristic underscores the importance of characters in this literary genre.<sup>6</sup>

A drama fundamentally represents human action, and its central characters bring this action to life through their individuality, speech, and behavior. Characters in drama are inherently tied to the plot; their actions and dialogues define the structure and substance of the narrative. As drama reveals the potential of human action, it also explores human personality and vice versa.<sup>7</sup>

Personality includes the complexities and traits distinguishing one person from another. It reflects behavioral capacities unique to individuals, transcending general tendencies. While characters in drama share similarities with real-life individuals, significant and vital differences exist. A dramatic character exists within the framework of the narrative, often achieving a heightened sense of realism when embodied by the actor.<sup>8</sup>

## Bahram Beyzai and Saadallah Wannous

Bahram Beyzai (1938), an Iranian writer, researcher, translator, and director, was born in Tehran and raised near Kashan in a family with a hereditary tradition of staging passion plays. Although he showed little interest in formal studies and left the Persian literature program at Tehran University unfinished, he excelled in research, performance arts, poetry, and fiction. His brilliant works have attracted both Iranian and international audiences. Beyzai’s repertoire includes remarkable films, theatrical productions, translations of original works, and an in-depth study of “One Thousand and One Nights” (*where are 1000 legends?*). These contributions have established him as a profound thinker and prolific artist.

In 2010, Beyzai, accompanied by his wife, Mojdeh Shamsai, relocated to the United States at Stanford University’s invitation. There, he started teaching and conducting research in his areas of interest and still works there. Baizai’s scholarly and literary works explore hidden aspects of Iranian culture, navigating the rich stream of myths and legends. While maintaining the central motifs of traditional stories, he reimagines them as contemporary drama for modern readers. His innovative use of ancient Persian words and syntax lends an archaic dimension to the language, connecting the past to the present. Additionally, individual and social factors such as gender, geography, and age significantly influence the expression of language in his works, highlighting its role in reflecting societal matters.<sup>9</sup>

Saadallah Wannous (1941–1997), a renowned playwright and journalist in the Arab world, was born in Syria. He studied journalism in Cairo and later returned to Damascus, where he worked in the Ministry of Culture. He served on the editorial boards of *Al-Safir* in Lebanon and *Al-Thawrah* in Syria and directed the General Society of Drama and Music in Syria. His exposure to European drama during a 1996 trip to Paris enriched his artistic perspective. After returning to Syria, he was appointed director of the “Existentialism” Theater<sup>10</sup> and played a key role in establishing the High-Performance Arts Association in Damascus in the late 1970s, where he also taught.

Wannous achieved significant success in cultural activities, especially in drama. Among his accolades is the first *Sultan Al-Owais Prize*. A social writer, his works consistently address human concerns, reflecting the traditions and realities of the Arab world. Simultaneously, the contemporary philosophical currents, especially Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism, deeply influenced his artistic works.<sup>11</sup> Wannous passed away from cancer in May 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Jamal Mirsadeghi, *Anaser-e Dastan* (Sokhan, 2011), 84.

<sup>6</sup> Shiva Pourjahan and Ali Mohammadi, “Seyr-e Tahavvol-e Shakhshiyat dar Asar-e Namayeshi-ye Akbar Radi,” *Research Journal of Literary Criticism and Stylistics* 4 (2016), 49-50-70.

<sup>7</sup> Sam Smiley, *Namayeshnamehnevisi: sakhtar-e konesh*, trans: Sadegh Rashidi and Parasto Jafar (Afraz, 2013), 135.

<sup>8</sup> Smiley, *Namayeshnamehnevisi: sakhtar-e konesh*, 140.

<sup>9</sup> Reza Tarnian and Bahram Beyzai, *Zaban Hoveyyat va Ghodrat* (Rozbehan, 2018), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Mohammad Azzam, “Al-Hadathah fi Al-Muthaghafah,” *Afaq Al-marifa* 495 (2004), 308.

<sup>11</sup> Jabour Abdul Noor, *Al-moajam al-arabi* (Dar Al-’elam Lil malayean, 1984), 34.

### ***Chahar Sandough* (Four Boxes) and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* (The King is the King)**

Baizai wrote the play *Chahar Sandough* in 1967, and it was published later that year by Daftarhaye Zamaneh. It was republished in 1979 by *Rozebahan*. The play's main character is a scarecrow, with supporting roles identified as Yellow, Green, Red, and Black. The author begins the play with a minimalist stage description: "The stage is empty." Four characters are seated on the ground, deep in thought.<sup>12</sup> They each exclaim in turn, "Danger, danger, again danger, an unknown danger, a known and constant danger,"<sup>13</sup> ultimately deciding to devise a plan to safeguard their wealth, property, religion, and status. Their solution is the creation of a scarecrow. Yellow declares, "A scarecrow is necessary to both scare the enemy and create security, protecting us from danger."<sup>14</sup> The others agree, envisioning the scarecrow as a guardian, whether at home or in the mosque.<sup>15</sup> They celebrate this innovative idea, making their victory with joyous music. The scarecrow is constructed from a dry piece of wood, adorned with clothes, and armed with a sword and a whip to symbolize strength.

The scarecrow enters the scene with an impressive presence, exuding power and oppression. Gradually, everyone acknowledges its dominance and grandeur, even the very creators who brought it to life. Before long, the scarecrow assumes the role of a dictator, issuing commands and prohibitions without mercy. The dollmakers attempt to overthrow it but fail repeatedly, unable to confront its authority. Their futile efforts lead to imprisonment in *Chahar Sandough*, and ultimately, they lose trust in one another and resign themselves to a confined and degrading existence.

The drama *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* is one of Wannous's most celebrated plays. Written in 1978, it draws inspiration from the story "Sleeping and Waking" found in "One Thousand and One Nights." Wannous's main aim in this work is to critique and portray social and political realities. As many critics assert, it is "the most beautiful work inspired by traditional sources."<sup>16</sup> The main theme revolves around the transformation of one individual into another, particularly the metamorphosis of a king into another king through the mere act of exchanging garments.<sup>17</sup>

The play *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* comprises an introduction, five acts, and a conclusion. The introduction categorizes the characters into two groups: the poor, who are dreamers with sweet aspirations, and the wealthy, represented by Shahbandar Tojjar, a figure supported by the ruling powers.

As mentioned earlier, the story originates from "Sleeping and Waking," where the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid and his executioner Masrour, disguised as commoners, visit the home of a bankrupt merchant named Abul Hasan al-Khali. They then take him to the palace for amusement and temporarily place him on the throne. Similarly, in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, a king named Fakhr al-Din roams the city incognito with his vizier for entertainment. Fakhr al-Din, characterized by narcissism and arrogance, relishes humiliating others. During one such excursion, he visits the home of Abu Izza, a destitute merchant who has lost everything due to the schemes of Shahbandar Tojjar and Sheikh Taha. Harboring dreams of revenge, Abu Izza is mocked by everyone until the king learns of his desires during this clandestine visit.

The king decides to indulge Abu Izza's wish. Using a trick, he renders him unconscious, transports him to the palace, and places him on the throne. Once in power, Abu Izza transforms into an autocrat. He arrests, tortures, and imprisons many, wielding such authority that even the king's relatives regard him as the legitimate ruler. Completely subdued by this new emir, the former king finds himself powerless to remove him. Intoxicated with power, Abu Izza spares no one, not even his wife and daughter, while appointing those he once sought to punish as his advisers and servants.

### **Characterization in *Chahar Sandough* and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek***

Beizai and Wannous strive to provide a more expressive depiction of the characters in their dramas. Selecting characters from multiple and authentic societal layers, they aim to narrate the internal complexities of their personas, a key concern for both writers. This approach is specifically tied to the social and political transformations in Iranian and Arab societies, making these plays a historical lens on contemporary social and political events and trends.

The authors draw heavily from society in designing their characters. Although some events and dialogues may appear stereotypical, the characters generally symbolize real societal classes. A significant portion of the plays' energy is devoted to critiquing societal norms and traditional beliefs, a critical lens that resonates with the absolutist nature of Persian and Arabic audiences and their tacit acceptance of the dignity associated with the "King's" position.

<sup>12</sup> Bahram Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough* (Rozbehan, 1979), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ali Al-Rai, *Theater fi Al-Watan Al-Arabi* (Alam al-Marifa, 1998), 178.

<sup>17</sup> Hossein Mirzaei Nia and Abdulbasit Arab Yusefabadi, "Karkard-e Sonnat dar Namayeshname-ye Al-malek Hova Al-malek," *Journal of Arabic Language and Literature* 6 (2013), 118.



An analysis of the character types in the two plays underscores the crucial role of dialogue in defining character identity, as is common in dramatic works. These characters speak because they exist; their speech validates their presence both on stage and in the broader context of life and society. However, in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, and more explicitly in *Chahar Sandough*, this dialogue does not express the self but rather a “lack of presence,” a reflection of their limited influence beyond their spheres.

Recognizing this characteristic in the play’s characters offers insight into the structure and identity of contemporary Persian and Arabic societies: stagnant and silent, with little effort to challenge entrenched barriers and restrictions. This critique echoes Priska Degras, a professor at New York University, who in his article “Character for Beckett” discusses how Beckett’s characters, despite their confusion, immobility, and passivity, still speak. Their speech, though labyrinthine, retains potency, creating a sense that it is the final barrier separating the living from the dead.<sup>18</sup>

The characters in *Chahar Sandough* and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* evolve from simplicity to complexity, influenced by social currents. Initially addressing simple and often humorous concerns, they gradually emerge from passivity as societal realities shape their thoughts and language. They strive to challenge the monophonic atmosphere embodied by the protagonists. However, given the authoritarian and conservative underpinnings of Persian and Arab societies, their efforts (apart from those of the heroes) remain futile. As a result, the general characters are simple yet treated stereotypically and monotonously.

Most of the characters in the two plays are central. This concept is more expansively explored in *Chahar Sandough* than in Wannous’s play. Baizai conveys that no one remains on the margins when faced with political and social currents; everyone is somehow implicated in the broader context. This notion also holds true for *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*. However, as is common in narrative traditions, it is the protagonists who shoulder the main burden of the story.

### Scarecrow and Abu Izza: Protagonists in Focus

The Scarecrow and Abu Izza are the protagonists and significant characters in the two plays, driving the action, shaping the plot, and influencing other characters. A comparative analysis reveals no significant difference in identity between the Scarecrow and Abu Izza. Before delving into the shared characteristics of the two heroes, it is important to note their centrality to the narrator’s goals. The creation of a strong and armed scarecrow represents a societal response to perceived danger, intended to protect property, caravans, and sanctuaries while intimidating adversaries. Similarly, Abu Izza embodies a statistical critique of leadership. Previously, the proud king viewed himself as the executor of these protective measures. The convergence of the two characters becomes evident in several aspects, as highlighted in the text of the plays.

#### • Emancipators and Life-Givers

Protagonists are the product of their society, shaping and being shaped by it. When individuals feel oppressed by societal or power structures, they seek to transcend these confines through timeless or supernatural means, striving for liberation. The protagonists in these two dramas exemplify this phenomenon, as both emerge from pressures and attempt to escape the dominance of power structures. For instance, in *Chahar Sandough*, the creation of the scarecrow addresses threats to people and various societal groups, encapsulating its *raison d’être*:

**Green:** *Gentlemen! As you know, it is our creation. It is the result of our cooperation and consultation, and we are submissive and obedient. It is the protector of all of us in this dangerous world.*

**Red:** *Viva!*

**Zard:** *Its existence was necessary, and we recognized it. So, we gave it power.<sup>19</sup>*

Therefore, the protagonist in *Chahar Sandough* is a creation of both humanity and society, serving as a mechanism to address external pressures and possible dangers. This concept is also echoed in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, where the king retreats from confrontation with power, opting instead for disguise as a means to escape the monotony of daily life. In doing so, he encounters a man also burdened by societal pressures, a wealthy businessman who, unlike the king, craves power and seeks a hero to avenge the oppressive forces constraining him. This dynamic is illustrated in Abu Izza’s opening monologue:

<sup>18</sup> Frank Everar, *Dar Entezar-e Godou va payan-e bazi, a collection of essays on contemporary theater*, trans: Vahid Nejad Mohammad (Afraz, 2016), 79.

<sup>19</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 10.

**Abu Izza:** "To whom should I complain? All the individuals around me are lazy and ignorant. I am surrounded by bastards instead of noble and righteous people. They stole my property and looted all my possessions... I wish I could be received in the audience of the king. Only he can do justice to me and get me out of this pit that I am trapped in."<sup>20</sup>

Abu Izza rises to power as a hero, tasked with delivering justice. In this role, he parallels Baizai's scarecrow, standing against oppressive structures that hinder societal well-being. This shared proposal arises from the contemporary feeling of individuals being trapped by society and time, compelling them to seek organized solutions.<sup>21</sup> However, in both plays, this organization leads to tyranny and abnormality. The protagonists are envisioned as agents of peace, intended to restore balance and serve as emancipators and life-givers.

### • Individual or Social Constructions

As earlier mentioned, the presence of protagonists in these narratives stems from societal needs. However, the primary purpose of the heroes in *Chahar Sandough* and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* reflects illusions or even mere amusement. In *Chahar Sandough*, the characters perceive a fabricated danger or simply seek entertainment. Consequently, they decide, after much deliberation, to create a scarecrow to "protect" themselves from these imagined threats:

**Yellow:** "We need a scarecrow!"

**Green:** "Scarecrow. That's right, scarecrow."

**Yellow:** "It scares the enemy..."<sup>22</sup>

Ironically, the comedic element emerges when the characters admit that the scarecrow's purpose is, in fact, amusement:

**Red:** "How do we start it?"

**Green:** "Very good. It is amusing."<sup>23</sup>

A similar motif is evident in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, emphasized from the beginning. The drama begins with characters (Obeid and Abu Izza) playing with dolls. The king, observing this, remarks: "We are playing."<sup>24</sup> The word "doll" recurs repeatedly, highlighting its thematic importance. As the narrative progresses, Abu Izza emerges as a dominant figure, symbolizing the scarecrow of Baizai. He is the king's creation, an instrument of amusement used to consolidate power:

**King:** "I want to have some fun." An amusement beyond what is usual... I want to joke with people and my country."<sup>25</sup>

This act of jest results in Abu Izza being anonymously brought to the palace, crowned king, and seated on the throne. The shift is depicted through Maimoun, the king's servant, who massages Abu Izza's feet the following morning. Initially believing he is dreaming, Abu Izza soon realizes his ascension to the throne is real.<sup>26</sup> At this juncture, the protagonist enters a new phase, one driven by illusion and the pursuit of amusement.

### • Protagonist and Exerting Power

One defining characteristic of the protagonists in both *Chahar Sandough* and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* is their relationship with power. The protagonists cannot exist without power. While this power does not necessarily involve the use of force or violence, whether seen through the lens of legitimacy or charisma, their very presence in human society signifies power. This principle applies universally to protagonists in both fictional and dramatic works.

In *Chahar Sandough*, the characters come to understand that a protagonist without power cannot protect their interests. As a result, they provide the means to empower the protagonist:

**Yellow:** "We have to complete it."

**Green:** "It is impossible to complete an imperfect human being."

**Yellow:** "We should equip it."

(Red runs and grabs a whip, attaching it to the scarecrow's wooden wrist. Yellow attaches a train of cartridges, while Red adds a second-hand rifle. Black secures a trumpet, and Yellow attaches a tube camera).<sup>27</sup>

This scene demonstrates how the characters equip the scarecrow with symbols of power, each item representing an aspect of the scarecrow's newfound authority.

<sup>20</sup> Saadallah Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* (Dar Ibn al-Rashid, 1980), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Zarrafa, *Adabiyat-e Dastani*, trans: Nasrin Parvini (Foroughi, 1989), 146.

<sup>22</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 9.

Similarly, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* follows a comparable approach in introducing its protagonist. This is carried out in two ways: first, by the old king, who recognizes that Abu Izza cannot accomplish anything without power. Therefore, he places Abu Izza on the throne as a strategic move, thereby bestowing power upon him. Second, Abu Izza, whether as a bankrupt businessman or a newly crowned king, believes that he cannot fulfill his desires or exert control without power. This belief is especially emphasized in a conversation between Orghoob, the minister, and the new king:

**Orghoob:** “Now is the time to take revenge on our enemies.”<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the play, Abu Izza, the new king, takes a series of actions that reinforce his reliance on power to shape his reality. One particularly striking scene highlights the connection between the protagonist and power, as the king interacts with various symbols of authority, such as swords and lances. This interaction emphasizes the protagonist’s inherent need for power:

**King** (while touching the swords and bayonets with his fingertips, in a moment of pleasure): “I would like to have all these and feel their hardness with my fingers...”<sup>29</sup>

### • Out of Control and Supervision

Protagonists, often depicted as societal elites, act decisively and may at times challenge societal norms. This trait is markedly evident in the characters of Scarecrow and Abu Izza, who are crafted to address individual or collective problems and concerns. Initially serving their creators, the evolution of these characters reveals another dimension, a transformation that, while consistent with their identities, diverges from their creators’ intended goals. Consequently, they act contrary to these goals, escaping control and influence.

Baizai’s scarecrow wields a gun and a whip. Standing defiantly against its creators. When individuals attempt to strip him of his power and remove him from the narration, he resorts:

**Scarecrow:** *I want to live (raises the gun); there is no choice. You wanted me to be your servant. From now on, you must be my servant.*<sup>30</sup>

The scarecrow then demands complete subordination, ordering them to bow down before him.<sup>31</sup> In submission, everyone complies, and he first permits them to remain insignificant beings.<sup>32</sup> He assumes control over their entire identity, his oppressive dominance forcing them into submission to the extent that they seek refuge in a confined, restricted box. The scarecrow describes this box as the ideal space for those pursuing enlightenment and liberation, stating:

**Scarecrow:** *I have heard that scientific men need isolation and absolute silence.*<sup>33</sup>

In *Chahar Sandough*, the box symbolizes decline, stagnation, and a clinging dependence on the past.<sup>34</sup> Surprisingly, humanity adapts to this confinement, eventually seeking solace within it. As one character, speaking from inside the box, remarks, “All these, of course, show that we are equipped with an electric thermometer, an automatic cryostat, and various curtains to prevent sunlight. Our refrigerators are not colder than the surrounding environment. We own molded ice, molded globes, molded thoughts, and all molded things, demonstrating that no sorrow remains on earth except molded sorrows.”<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the protagonist not only escapes the control of the individuals who created him but also acts against their desires, wielding his authority to push them further into subjugation and deprive them of their fundamental rights.

Wannous also shows this transformation of the protagonist in his performance. Initially, Abu Izza, representing society, embodies the ideal hero, protecting the oppressed, restoring societal peace, and resisting corruption. He dreams of a hero (himself) who will punish wrongdoers,<sup>36</sup> naming the oppressors and mentally judging them. Up to this point, Abu Izza appears to be the voice of the society. However, when his dream materializes (Abu Izza the King), he sheds his role as society’s voice and evolves into a self-serving. These shifts align him with *Baizai*’s scarecrow: a powerful figure indifferent to social demands. The same criminals he once denounced joined his government, earning his favor. When the minister (representing society’s silent voice) urges him to seek justice against the criminals, Abu Izza grows angry, rebuking the minister and defending the oppressors:

<sup>28</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* 29.

<sup>30</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 70.

<sup>35</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 44.

<sup>36</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 2.

**Abu Izza:** “You want to make me an enemy of the government. Are you planning to destroy my throne?”<sup>37</sup>

As mentioned above, the creators of the hero lose their grip on the situation. Amir Fakhreddin, the former king, can no longer control his scarecrow-like creation, Abu Izza. He and the queen find themselves reduced to mere subjects. The princes and courtiers recognize Abu Izza as a legitimate rally against him. Intoxicated by power, Abu Izza spares even his wife and daughter.

### • Protagonist’s Victory

As Aristotle defines, the effective choice of the protagonist in tragedy lies in their ability to evoke both fear and pity in the audience. A protagonist should not be entirely flawless but must possess a weakness, such as pride that leads to their downfall and misfortune.”<sup>38</sup> In the dramas of Baizai and Wannous, the protagonists initially appear capable of resolving chaos and addressing shortcomings. However, as the play progresses, they become central agents of disorder. This paradox fuels societal conspiracies to dethrone them, resulting in repeated yet ultimately unsuccessful attempts to remove them from power.

In *Chahar Sandough*, the opposing forces, upon realizing the scarecrow’s despotic nature, initially believe they can strip him of his power. However, they soon discover his formidable strength and resort to appeasement through flattery and proximity.<sup>39</sup> When these tactics fail, they recognize the need for broader resistance. The scarecrow, in turn, manipulates the opposition by sowing division, rendering them ineffective.<sup>40</sup> As the resistance falters, some forces turn to self-delusion, creating a false sense of peace that momentarily reassures them of eventual success:

**Red:** The guy is afraid.

**Black:** I am not afraid as you are.

**Yellow:** But your actions are such that we thought you would be twice as afraid.

**Black:** You know I’m waiting for someone.

**Yellow:** No one is coming.

**Black:** Step by step. First, I have a premonition of his; second, I have dreamed of him, and third, he saves me.<sup>41</sup>

Some factions reject this illusory remedy, favoring practical struggle instead, yet they lack both the courage to fight and the trust needed for unity. This conflict is highlighted in a dialogue:

**Red:** There are unsayable things. Who should have the gun?

**Yellow:** Gun?

**Red:** It must be in the hands of one of us. I know this. But in whose hand?

**Yellow:** We cannot predict it.

**Red:** That’s the problem. How do you know that the person who had the gun will not take the place of the scarecrow?<sup>42</sup>

Faced with these dilemmas, they resort to compromise and alliances, allowing opportunities to vanish one by one.<sup>43</sup> In the final act, Black alone dares to confront the limitations of their resistance by breaking his box, symbolizing his willingness for a decisive battle. However, his efforts lead nowhere. The closure scenes reveal Yellow, Red, and Green retreating to their respective boxes, leaving empty. Black, now exposed and powerless, hears the scarecrow’s footsteps. The scarecrow triumphantly appears with a gun in hand, making him the ultimate victor.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, the character Abu Izza’s power is paralleled by growing resistance. He gradually erodes collective ideals, aligning with criminal forces to consolidate his authority. He fortifies his rule by empowering loyalists while dividing justice and morality. When the minister Orghoob requests punishment for Sheikh Taha, Abu Izza, referred to as “The King” (*Shah*) in this segment, deflects:

**King:** What is his crime?

**Orghoob:** His crime is heavy. He plunders the property of the orphans.

**King:** Doesn’t he praise us in the Friday prayer?

**Orghoob:** Why?

**King:** Has he stirred up people against us and caused sedition?

**Orghoob:** Does he dare? I said he looted the property of the orphans.

(...)

<sup>37</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* 26

<sup>38</sup> Dad Sima, *Farhang-e Estelihat-e Adabi* (Morwarid, 2017), 382.

<sup>39</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 29-30.

<sup>41</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 58.

<sup>42</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 70.

<sup>43</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 77.

<sup>44</sup> Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 83.

**Orghoob:** *Very well, the next person is Shahbandar, the trader.*

**King:** *Our friend Shahbandar?*

**Orghoob:** *Your friend? Do you call him a friend? Wasn't he the one who bankrupted us?*

**King:** *What happened to you today? Do you want to weaken our government?*<sup>45</sup>

By the fifth act, the King strives to dominate all aspects of the society, using appointees and adopting measures against opponents.<sup>46</sup> His pride blinds him to accountability, even toward his closest allies:

**King (still full of pride):** *You are here to present your report, not to ask me for an answer.*<sup>47</sup>

Or, he triumphantly declares, emphasizing the importance of his position: “Your Majesty does not like his power to be shaky.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, he calls his executioner, instructing him to stand ready at his side and await the execution of the command. This symbolizes the use of the ultimate weapon of authority. As he proclaims with unyielding determination in the scenes: “From now on, the king will personally implement the orders he has issued.<sup>49</sup> Or, ‘Nothing purifies kings like blood.’ Therefore, I will wash myself in blood... From today on, I will perfume myself with blood.”<sup>50</sup> The King’s last declaration, “Dreaming is forbidden,”<sup>51</sup> underscores his absolute dominion over both individual and societal dimensions of life. No one is permitted to dream without his sanction. Here, the king celebrates his ultimate triumph.

## Conclusion

*Chahar Sandough* and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* are profound explorations of the discourse of power in contemporary Iranian and Arab societies. They reflect the anxieties and struggles that have resulted in limitation and confinement for these nations, rather than fostering liberation and progress. The authors connect more deeply with the audience by addressing human and social issues, employing the language of drama, and creating realistic events and characters.

Although the narrative of *Chahar Sandough* unfolds through the protagonist, all characters in this play are distinct and actively contribute to the story. The succinctness of the narrative, while broadening its semantic inclusiveness and visionary scope, positions Baizai’s work as a masterful rhetorical composition. Baizai selects archetypal figures from society’s behavioral extremes, deliberately avoiding the use of generic names. Wannous, while remaining relatively faithful to the structure of “Sleeping and Waking,” diverges by introducing a multitude of characters and events, expanding the work’s complexity. Despite their differing approaches, both works ultimately pursue a common goal.

Baizai and Wannous emphasize that power provides characters with an extensive arena, not only to control others but also to claim boundaries and autonomy for themselves. This characteristic is evident in the thematic core of both texts and their societal and external parallels.

The protagonists of these works occupy the pinnacle of power without having earned it through merit or enduring its challenges. They swiftly abandon oversight and control of the forces that granted them authority, seizing control through coercion over the same entities. Remarkably, the forces resisting this domination are unable to counter the discourse of power. The final hope for their success dissipates as divisions emerge among their ranks. Consequently, these forces resign themselves to their dire circumstances, effectively conceding victory to the discourse of power.

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<sup>45</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 26.

<sup>46</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 27.

<sup>47</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 27.

<sup>48</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 35.

<sup>50</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 28.

<sup>51</sup> Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 35.

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## Iran's *Shahriaran Rastakhize Opera*: An Anthropological Interpretation

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### ABSTRACT

Mirzadeh Eshghi (1894–1924) was an innovative and patriotic Iranian poet. Mirzadeh is noted in the history of Iranian literature for pioneering a literary revolution and creating a new literary style. This qualitative study contemplates one of his literary innovations titled *Iran's Shahriaran Rastakhiz Opera*, scrutinizing historical documents and employing ethnographic techniques. It expresses Mirzadeh's concerns about the damage inflicted on the material and nonmaterial culture of Iranians after the Achaemenid era. This opera form utilizes four different genres of Iranian classical music, with six singers performing poems about cultural and social changes. Mirzadeh's opera is a very attractive tool for inculcating social and cultural awareness, especially regarding Iran's national and cultural identity. This study probes the diverse sociocultural and political functions accomplished by this dramatic work of art and simultaneously examines its problems.

**Keywords:** opera, Mirzadeh Eshghi, culture, Clifford Geertz, interpretation

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## Introduction

Theater and opera are effective means of meaning transmission between discrete actors including authors, artists, performers, and audiences. According to Lucien Goldman, artist, poet, and writer Mirzadeh Eshghi did not seek to benefit from literature merely for its own sake. Rather, he used his art, and particularly his literature, as a model to convey his thoughts and register his critique of the social system. This qualitative study purposed to examine Shahriaran's resurrection opera from the perspective of artistic anthropology to more intensively understand the sociocultural functions, artistic charms, and theatrical limitations of this seminal work by Mirzadeh Eshghi. To this end, it employed the technique of artistic ethnography, conducted a document review, and applied Clifford Geertz's theory of cultural interpretation to ascertain the sociocultural sect of this phenomenon. In so doing, it sought to understand the sociocultural objectives of this opera and to simultaneously discover its artistic limitations.

Hence, this study inspected several articles to apprehend how opera was established in Iranian literature and understand the hidden political, social, and cultural meanings and functions of *Iran's Shahriaran Rastakhize Opera*. In addition, it utilized the perspectives of theater and opera to determine the quality of the writing and presentation of this honorable work.

In this context, I adopted the qualitative research methodology to achieve the stated objectives and employed the techniques of interpretative ethnography and document review. Further, I used Clifford Geertz's (1973)<sup>1</sup> theory of cultural interpretation to interpret my findings. I selected the ethnographic approach because it allowed me to consider all elements of the studied subject.<sup>2</sup>

I also intended to descriptively examine the text of *Iran's Shahriaran Rastakhize Opera* before reviewing it through the lens of artistry. Then, I planned to deliberate on the construction and functions of the opera and take the semiotic standpoint to discuss problems related to the performance of the opera. Therefore, I needed to holistically review semiotics before attempting an interpretation. In addition, I searched for the resource most important to my study: the original text of Shahriaran's resurrection opera contained in a book on Mirzadeh Eshghi compiled by Ali Akbar Moshir Salimi and titled *Illustrated Generalities*.

First, certain definitions are mandated. I begin by clarifying the term "opera," a performance format that combines Western classical music and the performing arts: a classical music singer portrays every opera character. Opera is a type of theater in which music plays the main role and singers perform parts. However, opera is distinguished from musical theater. Generally, operas incorporate several performing arts such as acting, dance, or ballet, and require the composer and the writer of the opera's libretto to collaborate. In addition, operas encompass aspects of theater such as set and costume design. Operas represent a significant part of the Western classical music tradition and mainstream Western culture. However, attendance in opera performances became increasingly restricted to the elite class after World War II. Operas utilize both drama and music to depict reality. Thus, remarkable opera productions demand the mastery of both music and theater. According to Richard Wagner, performance is the noble goal of music. The musical, literary, and theatrical arts must be combined with stage design, décor, and direction to produce an opera. Moreover, opera performances incorporate unique theatrical aspects such as settings, atmosphere, costumes, makeup, and acting. In addition, the words utilized in operas or their titles are not spoken: rather, they are distinctively voiced or sung.

Notably, music is a principal element of opera performances and functions crucially in this art form. It is also important to note that opera is not an Iranian art genre. Thus, in the language of artistic anthropology, it is natural that the opera experienced special changes as an imported art form so it could conform to the cultural and social structures of its host society.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, besides the textual or literary divergences of the genres of Iranian and European operas, their musical language also differs substantively.

### *Iran's Shahriaran Rastakhize Opera Soundtrack*

*Iran's Shahriaran Rastakhize Opera* employs four discrete Iranian classical music genres: *Masnavi*, *Se Gah Qafqaz*, *Isfahan Bayat*, and *Laili and Majnoon* songs. The aesthetics and meanings of each of these musical genres relate to the sociocultural conditions of each opera scene.

Six singers showcase these four musical styles according to their rhythms, instruments, and vocals in the respective scenes. However, traditional Iranian music and the tones of the utilized lyrics are not apparently suited to opera performance. An old performance of this opera involved one of the first female Iranian singers and musicians the late Moluk Zarrabi (1910–2000 m) and music diploma holder Hossein Khan (1886–1941 m).

<sup>1</sup> Geertz Clifford, *The Interpretation of Culture* (USA: Amazon publisher, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> Kristin G. Esterberg, *Qualitative Research Method in Social Sciences*, Trans. Ahmad Pour Ahmad & Ali Shamae (Yazd: University of Yazd, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Schechner, *Between Theater & Anthropology* (Pensilvania: University of Pensilvania Press, 1981), 117.



Crucially, some of the opening musical notes of this Iranian opera genre are no longer available. Noteworthy, different music categories encompass discrete aesthetic implications; they can also signify the cultural and social conditions of historical periods. The music of a work can be changed in various performances to adhere to specific cultural patterns.<sup>4</sup>

This opera encompasses six singers, each using a musical style appropriate to the text to articulate opinions on cultural and social changes. The six vocalists are:

- First singer: Mirzadeh Eshghi
- Second singer: Khosro Dokht
- Third singer: Cyrus
- Fourth singer: Dariush
- Fifth singer: Anoushirvan
- Sixth singer: Rovani Shet Zarathustra

Mirzadeh is the narrator. Khosro Dokht is a princess. Dariush, Cyrus, and Anoushirvan represent kings from the Achaemenid to the Sassanid era and Rovani Shet Zarathustra is a Zoroastrian prophet. Mirzadeh refers to these characters as singers in this work.

The Iranian classical music genres used in this opera should also be described at this juncture:

- *Masnavi song*:

The musical style of the Masnavi song denotes a famed poetry format utilized in Persian literature to write long stories and content. Each Masnavi verse exhibits a distinct rhyme. The Masnavi stanza generally comprises thirteen syllables structured as a rhyming couplet.

- *Isfahan Bayat*:

Isfahan Bayat is a traditional Iranian song form that most musicians deem part of Homayun's system. Such songs incorporate diverse emotions denoting happiness and sadness. The rising and falling notes of such songs can be accompanied by texts describing emotional shifts. Therefore, this musical style is effectively deployed in Shahriaran's opera.

- *Se Gah Qafqaz*:

Se Gah is another Iranian musical instrument. It is placed at the bottom of Iranian musical instruments such as the Shahid and Ist string. The Se Gah Qafqaz song is also extremely important for Shahriaran's opera.

- *Laili and Majnoon song*:

The Laili and Majnoon song in the opera represents a traditional Iranian folk music style. The love story of Laili and Majnoon is renowned in literature, music, and other art forms, and this song genre functions significantly in the performance of this type of opera in Iran. Iranian opera follows the tenets of classical music, while Laili and Majnoon songs are rendered in a romantic and human musical style that conveys a special aesthetic value.<sup>5</sup>

Each of the six aforementioned opera singers uses musical styles appropriate to their performance.

### **Need for Changes in Literature: Mirzadeh Eshghi's Important Literary Concept**

Assuming that Persian literature is beautifully written, the colors of the currents of time have shrouded its original hues with the passing ages.<sup>6</sup> Indubitably, the cultural phenomenon of Persian literature requires polishing; new styles must be defined and refined so that Persian literature can regain its original splendor.<sup>7</sup>

In 1955, Mirzadeh Eshghi traveled from Baghdad to Mosul in Iraq. He encountered the ruins of the great city of Mada'in, or Teshphon during this journey. He lost his mind as he watched these ruins associated with the Achaemenid empire or the cradle of world civilization. In this regard, Mirzadeh Eshghi stated, "This opera of the resurrection of Shahriaran of Iran is the sign of tears that I have shed to mourn the ruins of the good and unfortunate." The utterance "tears and sighs" evidences Mirzadeh Eshghi's distress at the sight of the ruined ancient works of Ctesiphon, which should have remained preserved. He decided to conceive of the studied opera in such unpleasant circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

Mirzadeh wrote the lyrics necessary for the emotional description of this operatic system and considered the musical compositions essential for a beautiful performance.

<sup>4</sup> Aliakbar Moshir Salimi, *Koliyat Mosavar Mirzafah Eshghi* (Tehran: Amir Kabir Press, 1978), 261.

<sup>5</sup> Moshir Salimi, *Koliyat Mosavar Mirzafah Eshghi*, 234-236.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel G. Bates and Fred Plog, *Cultural Anthropology* (USA: McGraw-Hill inc, 1990), 266.

<sup>7</sup> Mahmood Ebadian, *Anvae Adabi* (Tehran: Soreh Mehr, 2000), 225.

<sup>8</sup> Moshir Salimi, *Koliyat Mosavar Mirzafah Eshghi*, 231

In terms of the opera's lyrical content, this segment of the opera's soundtrack addresses Mirzadeh's familiarity with the structure and outlines the musical purpose of the opera. Mirzadeh Eshghi uses the Masnavi song style to express his anguished response to the historical events. He then attempts to highlight in a brief format the significant aspects of the Three Times of Caucasus song at the next stage, sporting a bewildered and sorrowful expression. This song depicts historical occurrences in Iran and in it, he articulates the grievance of the Achaemenid forefathers at Iran's precarious state. He asserts that such incidents have converted Iran's pride and dignity into shame and humiliation. Through this song, Mirzadeh conveys his belief that Iranians are destroying their priceless cultural history, whereas Westerners treat their historical legacies with flowers.<sup>9</sup> All Iranians are embarrassed and ashamed of their cultural heritage in its contemporary deplorable form. In this context, he states in one of his poems:

*In Mada'an, where all the sultans are mourning  
Condolence pours from the Turkey sky  
The mourning curtain of the kings of Mirzadeh's predecessor saw love  
The thorn that was in the curtain is coming out of the curtain.*<sup>10</sup>

Then, in a drowsy mood, he sings along with a refrain from the *Laili and Majnoon* operetta:

*Now that I feel like I'm in the homeland  
I see a woman come out of the grave with a shroud  
She poked her head out of the dirt  
She looked around  
Suddenly what can I say when  
Shaun came out of it.*<sup>11</sup>

A beautiful but sad girl named Khosro Dokht also recounts another story about the changed history of Iran. Khosro Dokht rises from the grave with a beautiful but sad face. She introduces herself as an Iranian princess, the daughter of Kesra. She says the grief I sense from your critical condition has brought me out of my grave. She describes the land of Iran as prosperous in the past and evaluates that what remains is unfortunate. She queries the residents: "What has happened to the brave Iranian soldiers? Where is Khosro Tajdar? What is his opinion on today's Iran?" She calls to her father:

*O my monarch father, Khosro is sad  
Get up from the grave and learn about the state of your country.*<sup>12</sup>

As previously mentioned, this opera entails six singers who represent different citizenships and depict distinct social, political, and religious roles. Khosro Dokht or Khosro's daughter is the second opera singer to appear on stage after Mirzadeh Eshghi. She describes the sadness and discomfort sensed by her ancestors, ranging from Ki Khosro to the Sassanians, and communicates her feelings in the following couplet:

*My ancestors from the traders of Ki Khosro and Sasan  
are covered with dirt from the mourning of Iran.*

Therefore, Khosro's daughter grabs her hair and curses the foolish residents of contemporary Iran.<sup>13</sup>

The third opera singer to appear on stage is Cyrus, the first king of the Achaemenid era. Cyrus enters the stage with a well-groomed and impressive appearance. Notably, each character is set in the appropriate era in terms of the décor and costume. Cyrus places his hand on his forehead and squeezes it to signal his discomfort via the language of body symbolism.<sup>14</sup> He is also ashamed about this destruction of Iran's cultural heritage from the perspective of previous sultans:

<sup>9</sup> John Brookshire Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, Trans. Masood Ohadi (Tehran: Ayande pouyan cultural institution, 2000), 337.

<sup>10</sup> Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 234.

<sup>11</sup> Moshir Salimi, *Koliyat Mosavar Mirzafeh Eshghi*, 237.

<sup>12</sup> Moshir Salimi, *Koliyat Mosavar Mirzafeh Eshghi*, 239.

<sup>13</sup> Moshir Salimi, *Koliyat Mosavar Mirzafeh Eshghi*, 235.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Tradition and The Verbal Arts* (USA: Routledge, 2001), 91.

*Cry out with pity if my head is down  
I am ashamed of the kings who are underground.*<sup>15</sup>

He then states that Iran's current situation results from the lack of appreciation of past opportunities.

Along with other Achaemenid monarchs, Darius, Anoushirvan, and Khosro sport regal jewelry as they take the stage with gloomy and dejected expressions that convey their discontent with the current state of Iran's society and culture in comparison to earlier periods. The deterioration of the setting is another reason these rulers lament the loss of Iran's social and cultural legacy. In reality, the sultans refer in each of their pieces to the crumbling walls as indicators through which the audience can piece together its rich cultural and social history. The next few lyrics of the Isfahan Bayat are sung by Khosro, who then enters the stage in amazement:

*It is not known whether you are dead or alive  
O people, are you eunuchs, or are you slaves?  
Is this the life you are living? Death:  
What are you living for?  
Your ancestors are crying for you.  
Why are you a laughing stock among the nations?  
Irani was big and tall from the olden days  
What happened that you have turned your head?  
He died at your hands:  
Have you given up on maintaining this property?*<sup>16</sup>

Then Khosro's wife Shirin emerges beside Khosro the same sad state but her appearance is beautiful and well-groomed. She repeats the unpleasant experiences of the past kings:

*Oh, pure soil of the earth  
Iran, O the court of Shirin  
Where is your crown and jewel?  
In my husband's palace.*<sup>17</sup>

Her verses recount the previous kings with great authority and narrate the social, cultural, and political lifestyles they created for Iranians. Then, she turns to the audience and questions them about the destroyed pride and glory of the cultural heritage of the previous kings.<sup>18</sup>

After Shirin's lamentation, all the kings present in the scene lower their hands, end their mourning, and sing a grieving refrain as they take the tale of Iran's devastation to Zarathustra.

*O Zoroaster, Iran is ruined  
O pure-spirited Zoroaster  
This ship is in the water  
Shame on this water and soil of Zoroaster.*<sup>19</sup>

Eventually, all the kings conceal themselves behind walls. Subsequently, Zoroaster delivers his message about the social, cultural, religious, and political glory of Iranians, and Mirzadeh Eshghi awakens suddenly, reading the following verses with horror and surprise:

*What I saw in this ruined palace  
Was God asleep or awake?  
I saw the kings all sad.  
I saw them fighting for Iran!*

<sup>15</sup> Moshir Salimi, *Koliyat Mosavar Mirzadeh Eshghi*, 233.

<sup>16</sup> Finnegan, *Oral Tradition and The Verbal Arts*, 236.

<sup>17</sup> Moshir Salimi, *Koliyat Mosavar Mirzadeh Eshghi*, 244.

<sup>18</sup> Finnegan, *Oral Tradition and The Verbal Arts*, 236.

<sup>19</sup> Moshir Salimi, *Koliyat Mosavar Mirzadeh Eshghi*, 249.

*Our ancestors consider us a disgrace.  
Oh my God. Reach out to us  
Honor Zarathustra's promise  
Mirzadeh saw a dream; you interpret it.*<sup>20</sup>

### **Performative Characters of Iran's Shahriaran Rastakhize Opera**

The Iranian art world has long been familiar with semi-artistic styles such as opera. Mirzadeh Eshghi, an intellectual and critical Iranian poet created an opera form. Initially, Mirzadeh Eshghi became acquainted with European opera. Later, he contemplated its reconstruction according to Iranian artistic and literary conceptions. Mirzadeh also conceived of transformations in literary language. As previously noted, he decided to construct this colossal piece of performative art when he encountered the destroyed Achaemenid era masterpieces during his trip to Mada'in and Ctesiphon in Iraq.

Thus we grasp the following facts:

First, opera is not native to Iran, and it is still not abundantly represented in Iranian art. Opera is an art form; nevertheless, it delivers a very valuable and powerful message!

Second, opera is an imaginative art form. Its inventive qualities become increasingly vibrant, particularly in historical genres. Therefore, opera authors and actors must use their ingenuity to create dramatic moments in their scripts as well as their performances. It is only logical that opera scripts and their applications would become increasingly complex in tandem with the growing complexities of human history.<sup>21</sup> Such intricacies would naturally hinder seamless and organized opera presentations.

Third, the text of this opera lacks the literary fluency demanded by the depicted historical complexities and the multifaceted nature of Mirzadeh's literary text. The textual difficulties make the dramatic performance problematic.

Fourth, the grasp of the operatic message of this work mandates careful reading and requires an emotional construal of the meanings of the verses. The opera is successfully executed in such a context. We understand that performance art forms best represent theatrical texts that touch the heart.<sup>22</sup>

Fifth, we must select the phrasing, flow, pauses, and rhythms of the desired performance pieces to avoid monotony, ensure attractive, vibrant, and effortless renditions, and deliver a structure that is simple and apt. We must check and adjust words (rhythms) and refine the expressions of various emotions (moods). Thus, we must ascertain where a sentence or stanza begins and where it ends. We must determine the tones to be conveyed to the audiences by specific statements: for instance, which utterance is a question, and which transmits surprise? The director and actors of the studied opera must examine the text and master the delivery of the appropriate emotion and tone, an aspect that is fundamental and significant for theater performances. For example, the performance of the *Isfahan Bayat* in Tehran and the last performance of this opera in London in 2024 were extremely attractive but did not appropriately follow the stated directions and interpretations.<sup>23</sup>

Sixth, a metronome is used to regulate the intensity of musical sounds; similarly, writers or poets of opera lyrics must depict emotions such as anguish and happiness in high and low intensities via practice and experience. Mirzadeh's opera did not include this action because he was not a professional musician. Thus, the director of this opera must brainstorm and work with a musician to remedy this flaw and ensure an acceptable performance of the libretto.

Seventh, each component of this opera mandates numerous rhythm changes. Thus, both musical and oratorical tempo-related elements require focal attention to render a decent performance of this opera. Notably, this problem is directed at the text on the one hand, and at the poem reciter or declaimer on the other hand.<sup>24</sup>

Eighth, producers and performers of this opera should attend more keenly to the music of the verses. The verses related to each actor or reciter must necessarily be compatible with the position and contexts of each depicted character such as a king, a king's daughter, or Zarathustra. For example, ordinarily, the statement "This is not our Iran, where is Iran?" could be ambiguously construed in a song and its meaning could be constructed in different ways according to the different characters who render it.<sup>25</sup> The lack of appropriate attention to each role can, in turn, adversely affect the attractiveness of the opera's performance. Of course, opera is condensed; therefore, any deficiencies in literary editing and any disharmony in the interpretation of the words can adversely affect the performance of the opera.

<sup>20</sup> Finnegan, *Oral Tradition and The Verbal Arts*, 239.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Nash, *Narrative in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 131.

<sup>22</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 148.

<sup>23</sup> Noshin Abdol Hosain, *Theatre Art* (Tehran: Amir Kabir Press, 1985), 12.

<sup>24</sup> Abdol Hosain, *Theatre Art*, 20.

<sup>25</sup> D' Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 248.

Evidently, the knowledge of facial expressions is important in life and naturally in performance art. In particular, facial expressions represent a means of creating and transmitting cultural messages. The actors in Mirzadeh's dense work must critically convey extremely diverse moods. Each actor in the opera must relate to a specific time in history because in general, the opera aims to communicate the formation and evolution of Iranian community life through the ages. Each stage of the opera includes a specific style and phase of Iranian culture and civilization. Obviously, part of the charm of every performance is vested in the aspect of ensuring that the facial expressions are suited for their specific time.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the success of opera performances is also related to how successfully the producers and actors apprehend the elements essential to facial appearances in opera performances.

Performances based on poems are attractive to audiences only when the poem's arrangement and combination of beautiful words are appropriately showcased. Of course, this effect can occur only when the poem's meter and rhyme are regular and consistent. If so, the reading of the text becomes eloquent, and the performance of the opera singer is successful. As previously noted, Mirzadeh's poems do not incorporate the necessary consonances, and their oral performance can be problematic.

Mirzadeh's poems demand special reading. Syllables and hyphens should be perfectly and appropriately pronounced. In the studied opera, Mirzadeh's verses require a distinctive reading and voice to exert the necessary effect (please refer to the text of the opera in the illustrated book of Mirzadeh Eshghi for examples). When the verses are read, due attention must also essentially be devoted to long and short syllables and the tensions and intensities of the words. Given this context, it is evident that both the textual and performance-related aspects of the opera pose significant difficulties. The performance can become more attractive if the text is accurately and appropriately amended and adapted.<sup>27</sup>

### **Phenomenology of Iran's *Shahriaran Rastakhize Opera***

Common sense dictates that we should accept Mirzadeh's textual criticisms and consider the operatic renditions accomplished in Iran and other nations by him and others. However, we must also remember that Mirzadeh's opera was a literary and theatrical innovation for Iran. Poet and writer Mirzadeh Eshghi achieved two objectives by creating this opera. First, according to Goldman (1913–1970), Mirzadeh supplemented the aesthetic image of his messaging tools of poetry and prose. Second, he established the foundations for the creation of a national art form when he was still very young, a laudable feat.

Further, Mirzadeh Eshghi always delivered his political, social, and cultural themes to his audiences through the aesthetic language of poetry and prose. However, he sought to add a more wide-ranging artistic appeal to his repertoire by creating a musical opera to sway public opinion from politics, literature, and culture toward the creation of a national identity. Heidegger inspired Gadamer's (1900–2002) conception of art, according to which "human play leads to the true evolution of being an art." The interpretation of creative games reveals a portion of the truth of existence. A game is not always a show, but a show is always a game.<sup>28</sup>

In aesthetic terms, a creative work begins with external indications and meanings. Further, the phenomenology of art holds the power to disclose more exact and profound significations in terms of sense and reasoning. Hence, we must recognize that the signals and meanings of creative works such as Iran's *Shahriaran Rastakhize Opera* cannot be summed merely by their textual and theatrical aspects. Rather, they reveal a more specific type of meaning through semantic-logical excavations. This opera conceived and composed by Mirzadeh showcases his creative sensibility.

However, his ideas and inner sense also function in the development of this work. In reality, we must understand his paradigm and philosophy in producing such a work. Thus, we must first determine Mirzadeh's worldview during the development of this work to better and more intensively understand it. Then, we can apprehend his intentions and determine whether the relevant difficulties are based on the production quality or our theoretical and mental characteristics.<sup>29</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The review of *Iran's Shahriaran Rastakhize Opera* disclosed that this work of art has attracted varied types of critiques based on aesthetics, cultural sociology, art anthropology, and critical literature. Other types of criticism of this work are also possible. The different aspects of criticism reveal the discrete semantic areas encompassed in this

<sup>26</sup> Antony Giddens, *Sociology*, trans. Hassan Chavoshian (Tehran: Nashre Ney Publication, 2001), 184.

<sup>27</sup> Giddens, *Sociology*, 241.

<sup>28</sup> Stanley JR. O. Gaines, *Culture Ethnicity and Personal Relationship Processes* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 90.

<sup>29</sup> Mahmood Khatami, *Phenomenology of Art* (Tehran: Shad Rang Press, 2009), 70.

work. The text and performance of this opera have always confronted difficulties. However, according to the cumulative viewpoint of artistic heritage, new generations can always innovate to adapt works of art, especially in performance arts related to theater and opera. This opera can effectively revive a part of the political history of Iran and can make audiences aware of the cultural heritage of Iran in the Achaemenid era. Notably, this work is also an innovation in the domain of Iranian art. Therefore, its institutionalization requires people interested in theater and opera to produce and perform similar and different works for further advancement. In this manner, this category of social art may become elevated as an information tool.

It is valuable and vital to attend duly to Mirzadeh's intellectual paradigm vis-à-vis literature. He believed that "literature is prone to change and transformation." Therefore, different generations, especially the youth, can intercede to effect such transformations through innovations, just as Mirzadeh attempted to transfigure Iran's performing arts by producing musical theater. The production of this opera generates properties such as cultural and social awareness that become available to its audiences. Such features can always be traced in all literary histories, not merely the history of Iranian literature.<sup>30</sup> Mirzadeh's opera poses artistic problems; nevertheless, it is a very attractive tool for social and cultural awareness, especially concerning national and cultural identity.

However, performances of *Iran's Shahriaran Rastakhize Opera* would benefit from attention to several facets. First, we must know Iran's history. Knowledge of the historical process of the sociocultural shaping of Iranian society is integral to our understanding of the theme of cultural transformation on which the form of this opera is based.<sup>31</sup> Performances of *Iran's Shahriaran Rastakhize Opera* would become even more appealing and powerful if its producers could select real ancient sites such as Persepolis for their staging. However, such a proposal could be extremely difficult to execute.

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<sup>30</sup> Lesley Johnson, *The Cultural Critics*, Trans. Ziya Movahhed, (Tehran: Nashre Agah press, 1979), 53.


<sup>31</sup> Les Back, Andy Bennett and . . . , *Cultural Sociology: An Introduction*, (Jaipur: ABD Publisher, 2013), 275.

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# A Narratology of Early Operas in Iran and Türkiye: The Case Study of ‘Eshqi’s *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* and Edib-Adıvar’s *The Shepherds of Kenan*

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## ABSTRACT

From its inception, drama in Iran and Türkiye has not only relied on diegetic methods of narrating, but has also integrated music as an essential component. Following exposure to Western drama through translations and adaptations, writers in these two countries began exploring innovative approaches. This shift led to the development of new creative fields, including opera and operetta composition. The earliest examples of this shift are *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* by Mirzādeh ‘Eshqi (1915) and *The Shepherds of Kenan* by Halide Edib-Adıvar (1916). This comparative study examines these two early operas to determine their positions within the realm of diegesis and mimesis. By analyzing their narratives through the lenses of plot, characterization, and spatial-temporal elements, the study reveals that while these works maintain connections to their diegetic predecessors, their narrative discourse structures exhibit distinct differences.

**Keywords:** Dramatic Literature, Narratology, Opera, The Resurrection of Iranian Kings, The Shepherds of Kenan

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## Introduction

Narratology, the term denoting “the science of narrative,” initially focused on various forms of written literature, in novels and particular stories as individual narratives. It emerged in the second half of the 20th century. Classical narratology was predominantly shaped by a selective interpretation of Plato’s *The Republic* and Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which associated mimesis with mimics and gestures in dramatic literature and diegesis with narration in novels and fiction. Within this framework, the act of narrating and the presence of a narrator became essential for a text to be analyzed narratologically. Consequently, classical studies excluded drama and dramatic literature, concentrating only on fictional texts. This exclusion not only marginalized the narratological study of drama but also left unresolved the ongoing debate about whether drama can be studied through this perspective. However, the concepts of mimesis and diegesis are more complicated, and their distinction is less rigid than often portrayed. While diegetic narratives tend to diverge from the realm of mimesis, diegesis has always played an important role in dramaturgy.

Dramatic literature in Iran and Türkiye presents a compelling field of study for several reasons. In certain periods of post-Islamic history, storytelling was the most widespread form of popular entertainment. Additionally, *Naqqāli* and other traditional performing arts, before and after the advent of Islam, were deeply interrelated with diegetic narration. These performing arts, upon encountering Western drama through translation, adaptation, and emulation of European plays, embarked on a transformative journey toward theater and mimetic representation. Writers in Iran and Türkiye began experimenting with this unfamiliar field, which eventually led to the creation of the first original native operas in both countries. Music, an integral component of the performing arts in these neighboring regions, played a crucial role in this transformation. However, the adoption of Western drama introduced fundamental changes. Dramatists transitioning from diegetic narrative to mimetic representation had to rely on a written text, minimize improvisation in interactive space among the audience and performers, and adhere to new conventions of scenic representation. Key early examples include *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* by ‘Eshqi (1915), considered a seminal historical musical performance in Iran, and *The Shepherds of Kenan* by Edib-Adıvar (1916), a pioneering piece from the era of the Second Ottoman Constitutionalism. It should be noted that neither of these works aligns with contemporary definitions, techniques, or frameworks of opera. However, in the early 20th century, they were conceived as attempts at opera within their cultural contexts.

This interdisciplinary and comparative study explores the prevailing dominance of diegetic dramatic traditions without conflating Western-style texts with traditional forms. More precisely, it examines the positioning of these early operas within the realms of diegesis and mimesis by analyzing the dramatic narrative of *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* and *The Shepherds of Kenan* in relation to the diegetic and mimetic narrative discourses.

Despite the ubiquity of narration and the growing scope of narrative studies, the narratological analysis of drama remains underdeveloped, particularly concerning Iranian and Turkish drama. The most comprehensive work to date, *Narratology of Drama*<sup>1</sup> by Mohebbi (2019), is based on her Ph.D. dissertation and focuses on Persian drama from 1980 to 2010. Additionally, Mohebbi (2016), in collaboration with Ghahremani and Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari, authored “Development of Iranian Performance from a Diegetic World,” exploring the transition from diegetic to mimetic strategies. Similarly, Ersan (2019), in her master’s thesis, “The Trend of Narrative in the Theater Literature of Turkey,” examines narrative traditions in Turkish drama and analyzes some works from recent decades. However, the only comprehensive study addressing the evolution of drama in Iran and Türkiye from diegetic traditions to Aristotelian mimetic plays is Maneshi’s (2024) “A Comparative Narratological Analysis of the Dramatic Literature in Iran and Turkey (1900–1940).” This interdisciplinary study adopts a narratological perspective to investigate the emergence of modern drama in these regions and the transitional phase from diegetic to mimetic narrative forms.

## The Narratology of Drama

More than two thousand years ago, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato provided the first and, according to some scholars, such as Potolsky<sup>2</sup>, unquestionably the most influential account of mimesis. Plato references mimesis at various points in his work; however, his most important discussion appears in the third book of *The Republic*. Interestingly, he does not define the term explicitly, as if assuming the reader’s familiarity with the concept. Using an example from Homer’s *Iliad*, Plato distinguishes three types of poets based on how they relate their stories: diegetic narrative, mimetic narrative, and mixed narrative<sup>3</sup>. In diegetic narratives, such as historical accounts or dithyrambs, the poet speaks as

<sup>1</sup> Parastoo Mohebbi, *Revāyatshenāsi-ye Dram* (Tehran: Jāme Zarrin, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Potolsky, *Mimesis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 15, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Mohammadhassan Lotfi (Tehran: Khoosheh, 1974), 127.

himself. In contrast, mimetic narratives involve the narrator imitating characters through actions and gestures, as seen in tragedy and comedy. Mixed narratives, predominantly found in epics, combine elements of the other two types. On the other hand, Aristotle's *Poetics*, often regarded as the most influential text in Western tradition criticism, significantly shaped early understanding of mimesis and diegesis alongside *The Republic*. Aristotle neutralizes the contrast between mimetic and diegetic narrative modes, asserting the superiority of the dramatic mode<sup>4</sup>. He categorizes epic, tragedy, comedy, dithyramb, and even musical forms like reed and harp playing as mimetic, differentiating them only by media, object, and manner.<sup>5</sup>

These seminal works approach mimesis and diegesis differently, resulting in significant ambiguities in theorizing narratology. Revisiting these terms independently of Platonic or Aristotelian interpretations is therefore valuable. The term mimesis originates from the 5th century BCE and derives from the root "Mimos," which refers both to a person who imitates and a genre of performance that imitates stereotypical traits.<sup>6</sup> Diegesis, also of Greek origin, refers to narration or the narrated world.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the specific meanings of these terms have long been debated among scholars. In her influential analysis of the Greek text, Jong<sup>8</sup> examines the origins of misunderstandings surrounding the diegesis/mimesis distinction. She suggests that diegesis corresponds to moments when the narrator speaks as himself, while mimesis pertains to instances where characters speak in their voices. Although theorists and scholars throughout history have often sought to draw clear boundaries between literary genres, these classifications paradoxically imply the circulation of genres and the possible emergence of intermediary forms. This cyclical spectrum of genres thus becomes a compelling subject for further exploration.<sup>9</sup> Given the porous and unstable nature of the diegetic/mimetic dichotomy, it is evident that drama, like fiction or other literary genres, often combines diegetic and mimetic modes.<sup>10</sup> For example, in much non-Western drama, the narrator is a recurring element of the *dramatis personae*. Furthermore, even in Western drama, ranging from Greek tragedy or comedy to pre-Renaissance work, diegetic elements are often present despite the dominance of mimetic features.<sup>11</sup>

This means, as Percy Lubbock (1957) frames it in terms of the duality of "showing" and "telling," the debate revolves around whether narrative discourse prioritizes diegetic relating or mimetic representation. Rather than excluding drama, this distinction allows one to distinguish between the indirect, descriptive, or narrative representation of objects, peoples, spaces, and events through language and their direct presentation stage.<sup>12</sup> In other words, to quote Richardson, diegesis has always been "a basic and significant element of dramaturgy throughout the history of the stage."<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, many prominent a wide range of the most important theorists in the field of narratology, from the very days of the field to the present, have reduced narration to diegetic modes and confined the quality of narrative to the overt or covert presence of a narrator. For example, scholars such as Genette (1980), Prince (1982), Ryan (1992), Scholes and Kellogg (2006), and Schmid (2010) have approached story through a narrator's discourse. Consequently, drama, lacking an explicit narrator figure, has often been treated as a distinct "other" in their works. On the contrary, scholars like Chatman (1978, 1990) and Pfister (2008), who integrate narrative categories into the influential theory of drama, and Bal (2017) have partially or fully acknowledged the narrativity inherent in drama. Among these voices, Fludernik stands out for her argument that "drama is the most important narrative genre whose narrativity needs to be documented."<sup>14</sup> She firmly places drama within the narrative genres, highlighting its narrative and experimental structure. As she notes, "the fictional world is represented, and it is most obviously represented in different medial forms: verbal, performative, visual, and non-performative."<sup>15</sup> Fludernik argues that a play, as a whole, is a narrative, identifying narrative elements not only in dialogues but also in stage directions.<sup>16</sup> From a cognitive theoretical perspective, she highlights that acting, thinking, and feeling are constitutive to human existence within a fictional world. Consequently, she concludes that the existence of a human or human-like protagonist is a minimal condition for narrativity. Rather than basing narrativity only on a chain of causal or temporal events in the plot or the presence of a storyteller figure, she identifies the

<sup>4</sup> Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 163; idem, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Abdolhossein Zarrinkoob (Tehran: Book Translation and Publishing Company, 1964), 21, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction*, trans. Alexander Starritt (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Irene J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner Publishing Company, 1989), 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, 51. Also note that this approach can be traced back to Goethe's triad of *Epik*, *Dramatik*, and *Lyrrik*.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Richardson, "Voice and Narration in Postmodern Drama," *New Literary History*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2001): 691.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Richardson, "Point of View in Drama: Diegetic Monologue, Unreliable Narrators, and the Author's Voice on Stage," *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (1988): 196.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 24.

<sup>13</sup> Richardson, "Point of View in Drama: Diegetic Monologue, Unreliable Narrators, and the Author's Voice on Stage" 212.

<sup>14</sup> Monika Fludernik, *Towards a Natural Narratology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 260.

<sup>15</sup> Monika Fludernik, "Mediacy, Mediation, and Focalization: The Squaring of Terminological Circles," in *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses*, Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010), 125.

<sup>16</sup> Monika Fludernik, "Genres, Text Types, or Discourse Modes? Narrative Modalities and Generic Categorization," *Style*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2000): 282.

protagonist as central to narrativity. In addition, as human existence is inherently tied to a specific time and place, characters must also be anchored in a spatiotemporal framework. To summarize Fludernik's perspective: "A narrative is a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and/or visual medium, at whose center there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature who are existentially anchored in a temporal-spatial sense, who (mostly) perform goal-directed actions."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the enactment of these actions is an important aspect of the narrative, falling under the dual categories of diegetic report and mimetic representation. This duality is the primary focus of this essay, which examines two pioneering operas in Iran and Türkiye. However, before delving into this work, a brief review of the dramatic traditions in these countries is necessary.

### Dramatic Traditions in Iran

Before encountering Western drama and adapting its forms and structures, Persians had four main forms of performative arts: *Naqqāli*, puppetry, *Taqlid*, and *Ta'zīyeh*. *Naqqāli*, or Iranian storytelling, boasts a long history that dates back to the Gusāns<sup>18</sup> of the pre-Islamic era. This art form relied entirely on the narrating competence of the performer, or *Naqqāl*, and is thus considered not only as a branch of the performing arts<sup>19</sup> but also as the most ancient and foundational of all.<sup>20</sup> Persian puppetry, which today is divided into *Sāyeh-bāzi* (shadow play) and *Kheyime-shab-bāzi*, was historically seen as a unified genre. It featured a distinct style: one using the shadows of puppets cast in front of a light source and another showcasing puppets directly visible to the audience.<sup>21</sup> *Taqlid* originated from popular itinerant or court entertainers known as *Motreb(s)*, whose performances gradually evolved to include basic plots and structures. Among these, *Baqqāl-bāzi* and *Siyāh-bāzi* stand out as the most renowned types.<sup>22</sup> Finally, *Ta'zīyeh*, the most magnificent performative art in Iran, is believed to trace its roots to pre-Islamic mourning rituals.<sup>23</sup> Scholars such as Jannati-'Atāyi<sup>24</sup> consider *Ta'zīyeh* the first Persian tragedy, identifying its three defining elements: poetic verbalism, music, and movement.<sup>25</sup> A brief examination of Persian dramatic traditions reveals their shared qualities. In the post-Islamic era, an auditory culture,<sup>26</sup> characterized in narrative terms as diegetic forms of narration dominated and shaped dramatic practices. Consequently, Iranian traditional performances heavily relied on improvisation, direct engagement with the audience (later echoed in Western tradition as the alienation effect), stock characters, and a rejection of Aristotelian unities. These performances embraced temporal-spatial fluidity, abstract representations of time and place, minimal lighting or set design, and the integration of dance, music, and singing. These traits are particularly evident in *Taqlid* and *Ta'zīyeh*. In *Taqlid*, performers adhered only to essential storylines and frameworks, leaving the rest to spontaneous interpretation during the performance. Similarly, neither *Taqlid* nor *Ta'zīyeh* included formal characterization. Both forms disregarded spatial-temporal constraints, seamlessly shifting between locations, rendering such shifts not only possible but entirely convincing.

### Dramatic Traditions in Türkiye

Turkish popular drama, a significant aspect of Istanbul's city life before its encounter with Western drama, had four main subcategories: *Medahlık* (Turkish storytelling), puppetry, *Karagöz* (Turkish shadow play), and *Ortaoyunu*. *Medahlık*, with roots in pre-Islamic traditions tracing back to nomadic storytellers, or *Ozan(s)*, mainly relied on individual mimetic monologues and dramatized narratives.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, trans. Patricia Hausler-Greenfield and Monika Fludernik (Routledge: London and New York, 2009), 6.

<sup>18</sup> Parthian poet-musicians

<sup>19</sup> Beyzā'i believes *naqqāli* is a solo performance, whose performers are actor-*naqqāls*. Jannati-'Atāyi regards *naqqāls* as exceptional actors, and Fanā'iyān sees *naqqāls* as great solo actors (Bahram Beyzā'i *Namāyesh dar Irān*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition (Tehran: Roshangaran and Women Studies Pub, 2008), 81-2; Abolghāsem Jannati-'Atāyi, *Bonyād-e Namāyesh dar Irān*, (Tehran: Ibn-Sina Bookstore Publication, 1954), 53; Tājbaksh Fanā'iyān, *Honar-e Namāyesh dar Irān (tā sāl-e 1357/1979)*. (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 2007), 6).

<sup>20</sup> Farideh Shirjian, *Jāyghā-e Namāyesh-e Sonnatī dar Theatre-e Irān* (Tehran: Ān, 2001), 64; Beyzā'i. *Namāyesh dar Irān*, 64.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Jamshid Malekpour, *Adabiyāt-e Namāyeshi dar Irān: Nokhostin Kooshesh-hā tā Doreh-ye Qajar*. 1<sup>st</sup> Vol. (Tehran: Tus, 1984), 269.

These plays are also known as *Ruhowzi*.

<sup>23</sup> 'Enāyatollāh Shahidi, *Pazhooheshi dar Ta'zīyeh va Ta'zīyeh-khāni* (Tehran: Cultural Research Office, 2001), 67. See also: Āzhand, Ya'ghub. *Namāyesh dar Doreh-ye Safavid*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Tehran: Iranian Academy of Arts, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Jannati-'Atāyi, *Bonyād-e Namāyesh dar Irān*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Shahidi, *Pazhooheshi dar Ta'zīyeh va Ta'zīyeh-khāni*, 38.

<sup>26</sup> This auditory culture through Sattāri's reading is the natural product of words' enchantment, which covers a wide range from Shahrzād's stories in *One Thousand and One Nights* to the Muslim's holy book, the Quran (Jalāl Sattāri, *Zamine-ye Ejetmā-ye Ta'zīyeh va Theatre dar Irān* (Tehran: Markaz, 2008), 138).

<sup>27</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevgil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi* (İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2015), 11; Özdemir Nutku, *Medahlık ve Meddah Hikayeleri* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1978), 155.

Although its diegetic aspect has traditionally been more prominent, scholars hold varying views on this matter.<sup>28</sup> Turkish puppetry, despite its historical existence in certain rural regions of Anatolia, remains largely obscure and seldom categorized within dramatic traditions.<sup>29</sup> On the contrary, Karagöz is undoubtedly the most celebrated, popular, and notable form of traditional Turkish performance. It involves the movements of leather shadow figures on a white screen illuminated from behind.<sup>30</sup> Finally, *Ortaoyunu*, the most recent and evolved form of traditional Turkish plays, not relying on a pre-written dramatic text, performed in the center of a circle of spectators, the performers improved their performances based on thematic plotlines, entertaining the audience with lively mimicry and improvisation.<sup>31</sup> These traits are common across traditional Turkish dramatic performances. As And succinctly put it,<sup>32</sup> these plays were textless, lacked a Western-style scenic stage, and featured open structure driven by improvisation, creativity, and performer competence. Dance, music, and songs were integral components of these performances. Abstract representations of time and place were common, and the narratives typically consisted of a series of comic events leading to a happy ending. Characterization was unrealistic, featuring stock characters as a natural element. A notable aspect of these plays was their verbal features, structured as exchanges between opposing poles. Additionally, imitation was central, with the main conflicts, plot events, and character introductions heavily reliant on mimics and gestures.

### Opera in Iran and Türkiye: A Vague Encounter

Drama in the East has a unique and long-standing history rooted in native cultures; however, theater, as understood in the Western tradition, was introduced as an imported concept. For this reason, avoiding the term “theater” in discussions about the pre-Westernization era of Eastern countries, including Iran and Türkiye, seems more appropriate. With this context in mind, certain key points about the initial encounters of Persians and Türks with theater are worth mentioning.

During the reign of Sultan Selim III (1789–1807), Westernization became more prominent, reflecting his policies on cultural reforms. As a result, his era is widely regarded as the official beginning of the Ottoman Empire's engagement with Western theater.<sup>33</sup> According to historical records, while the Türks were not necessarily familiar with the concept of theater, they were already acquainted with the term<sup>34</sup> Another important window for exposure to the Western world was the experiences of Ottoman ambassadors abroad. Their report, which often detailed visits to operas, comedies, and other theatrical performances in Europe,<sup>35</sup> played a crucial role in introducing these forms to the empire. The first documented encounter with Western drama is attributed to an Ottoman ambassador in the early 18th century.<sup>36</sup> However, as with many other phenomena, theater largely remained confined to palaces and elites. Public interest and engagement were limited, except for some national celebrations. For instance, the first opera in Ottoman history, likely performed by an Italian troupe, dates back to 1797. However, the first opera open to the public was staged 44 years later, in the mid-19th century.<sup>37</sup>

In Iran, the theater underwent a parallel evolution. Westernization gradually intensified during the Qajar dynasty, facilitated by ambassadors, students, and even monarchs traveling to Europe. These encounters, which began in the early 19th century and continued into the 20th century, were meticulously documented.<sup>38</sup> It is believed that Mirzā Mostafā Afshār, a delegate to Tsarist Russia under Fath-Ali Shah (1797–1824), was the first to use the term “theater” in Iran.<sup>39</sup> Nāser al-Din Shah (1848–1895) also played a significant role in the Westernization of Iranian culture. His travelogues from his three major journeys to Europe (1873, 1877, and 1888) contain detailed accounts of his visits to ballets, operas, and theaters.<sup>40</sup> According to documented reports, the first dramatic performance Nāser al-Din Shah witnessed was

<sup>28</sup> Metin And, *Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu: Kukla, Karagöz, Ortaoyunu*, (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1969), 49. Also note that, Akı, regardless of the significant role of mimics and gestures, believes medahlık is some kind of a speaking story, rather than a solo-player drama. On the other hand, he sees medahlık along with karagöz and Ortaoyunu and categorizes this genre as a mono-drama among other Turkish traditional dramatic performances. Also, Nutku believes medahlık is closer to acting, instead of mere diegetic narrating (Niyazi Akı, *Türk Tiyatro Edebiyatı Tarihi I: Başlangıçtan Cumhuriyet Devrine Kadar* (İstanbul: Dergâh, 1989), 10; And, *Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu: Kukla, Karagöz, Ortaoyunu*, 68; Nutku, *Meddahlık ve Meddah Hikayeleri*, 64).

<sup>29</sup> And, *Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu: Kukla, Karagöz, Ortaoyunu*, 81-91.

<sup>30</sup> And, *Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu: Kukla, Karagöz, Ortaoyunu*; Cevdet Kudret, *Karagöz* (İstanbul, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004), 9.

<sup>31</sup> Cevdet Kudret, *Ortaoyunu* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1973), 1.

<sup>32</sup> And, *Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu: Kukla, Karagöz, Ortaoyunu*, 47-49, 276, 306.

<sup>33</sup> Metin And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908* (Ankara, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1972), 21.

<sup>34</sup> Sevensil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 100.

<sup>35</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*, 34.

For example, through the same documents, we realize that the people of Ottoman Empire knew the word ‘comedy’ in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sevensil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 99).

<sup>36</sup> Sevensil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 802; Also note that in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmet Efendi was ordered to settle a contract with Luis XV in France. His reports from 1737 are collected in a book called Paris Sefâretnâmesi, which in fact was the first source for the Türk intellectuals eager to discover Western manifestations (Sevensil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 93).

<sup>37</sup> Özdemir Nutku, *Dünya Tiyatrosu Tarihi: Başlangıçtan 19. Yüzyıla Kadar*, Cilt 1 (Ankara: Remzi Kitabevi, 1985), 356; Sevensil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 100-1.

<sup>38</sup> Malekpour, *Adabiyât-e Namāyeshi dar Irân: Nokhostin Kooshesh-hâ tā Doreh-ye Qajar*, 54.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 82.

<sup>40</sup> Ya'ghub Āzhand, *Namāyesh dar Doreh-ye Qajar* (Tehran: Mola, 2016), 424-5.

likely a ballet. His personal notes from this experience mark the earliest explanation of French theatrical terminology in Iran, including words like “scene” and “act.”<sup>41</sup> In these same travelogues, he describes opera as follows: “It was an opera hall, meaning they chanted and played music well.”<sup>42</sup> However, the broader public’s familiarity with such concepts emerged only later, during the Constitutional Revolution, when theater gained wider popularity. During this time, critics and audiences alike began coining native terms to describe opera and operetta as musical and semi-musical plays.<sup>43</sup>

Ultimately, native Persian and Turkish playwrights began creating operatic works. Two significant early examples include *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* (1915) by Mirzādeh ‘Eshqi and *The Shepherds of Kenan* (1916) by Halide Edib-Adıvar.

### *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings*<sup>44</sup>

This musical one-act play, written in verse, delved into ancient Persian history. The story begins with ‘Eshqi visiting the ruins of the Sassanid palaces in Ctesiphon, Mada’in, which evoke memories of Persia’s former glory. Grieving the past, he falls asleep. In his dream, Khosrodokht emerges from graves—a mournful girl adorned with ornaments. Soon after, a wall collapses, and Cyrus, a stalwart figure befitting a king, appears, followed by Dariush. Next, Anoushirvan, gracious yet sorrowful, steps forth from behind a wall and column. Upon his disappearance, Khosrow takes his place on stage, dressed in royal attire and ornaments. Shortly after, Shirin, dressed in black, appears close to Khosrow. Her face is beautiful yet sorrowful. One by one, these noble figures of Persia’s past enter the stage, delivering chants that echo their significance. As Shirin’s sobbing concludes, the kings cease their mourning, lower their hands in an ancient ritual, and chant in reverence to the pure soul of Zoroaster, heralding a bright future. Zoroaster appears, and following his exit, all other characters vanish as they enter. ‘Eshqi then awakens.

This one-act play is a significant cultural work, as it is the first opera composed and performed in Persian. In the introduction, ‘Eshqi emphasizes his avoidance of foreign words, opting for the term “fully musical play” over “opera.” The story partly draws on ‘Eshqi’s personal experiences during his journey from Baghdad to Mosul.<sup>45</sup> However, as noted before, this play diverges from conventional opera, portraying the emotional reflection of a dreamer rather than a linear, causally driven plot. Another noteworthy aspect is the designation of characters as “singers” in the introduction. When the curtain rises, the stage directions describe a “glorious ruin of a Sassanid palace in Mada’in, complete with graves, columns, and sculptures of gods and goddesses.” The directions culminate with the descriptive statement, “So, the curtain looks really mysterious.”<sup>46</sup> The play begins as ‘Eshqi enters and marvels at the spectacle, singing in Masnavi meter:

#### **‘Eshqi**

*Oh lord! What are these countless ruins of gateways and bulwarks?  
I have sworn never to desire another journey if I survive this one. . .  
Yet now, beholding this court, I forget the sorrows of the road. . .*<sup>47</sup>

The stage directions’ descriptive quality is striking, exemplified by phrases like “So, the curtain looks really mysterious.” The placement of scene elements and the melodic nature of ‘Eshqi’s monologues are conveyed through diegetic means. Although the specific time remains unmentioned, the melancholic and mysterious atmosphere suggests that time is irrelevant here. After another monologue by ‘Eshqi, accompanied by a brief action where “he holds his hand over his forehead. . . Mirzādeh succumbs to somnolence; he rests his head on his hands over his knees, as though dreaming, and he dreams.”<sup>48</sup> The ending mirrors the beginning. Following Zoroaster and the other characters’ disappearance, ‘Eshqi awakens and sings in a startled tone:

#### **‘Eshqi**

*My lord! What I just witnessed in this ruined palace was a dream or reality?  
I saw all the kings mourning Iran’s sorrows!  
Our ancestors would deem us a disgrace. Oh, my Lord, guide us!  
Fulfill Zoroaster’s promise. ‘Eshqi dreams, you make it come true.*<sup>49</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Malekpour, *Adabiyāt-e Namāyeshi dar Irān: Nokhostin Kooshesh-hā tā Doreh-ye Qajar*, 90.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, 92.

<sup>43</sup> Jamshid, Malekpour, *Adabiyāt-e Namāyeshi dar Irān: Melli-Garā’i dar Namāyesh (Doreh-ye Reza Shah Pahlavi)*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Vol. (Tehran: Tus, 2006), 54-7.

<sup>44</sup> The first performance of *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* was on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1922, in Tehran, Grand Hotel Theatre Hall (Āzhand, *Namāyesh dar Doreh-ye Qajar*, 467).

<sup>45</sup> ‘Ali-Akbar Moshirsalimi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e Mirzadeh ‘Eshqi*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition (Tehran: Amirkabir, 1979), 231.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*, 232.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*, 233.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, 234.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*, 241.

The drowsiness of the protagonist and the representation of his dreams, nightmares, or even delusions effectively extend his perspective and reflect his thoughts. This play, at its core, is a representation of 'Eshqi's mind. Consequently, the narrative unfolds along two parallel time axes: one begins with 'Eshqi's falling asleep and ends with his awakening, while the other exists within his dream, flashing back to the past. Interestingly, these two axes align with the stage timing. The play's opening, from 'Eshqi's entrance to his slumber, and its conclusion, from his waking up to the final curtain, function as a narrative frame for the central events of the story. As a result, 'Eshqi assumes the role of a narrator:

**'Eshqi**

*Now, after seeing the state of the homeland before my eyes,  
I see a woman coming out of a grave in a shroud.  
Out of the grave she is, looking around.  
I wonder what happened so suddenly that she started to wail.*<sup>50</sup>

For every vocal piece, the playwright specifies the musical modal systems, such as Bayāt-e Esfahān and Segāh. However, these notes remain within the diegetic realm of descriptions, leading to sparsity in mimetic and performative elements. In most cases, the characters' appearances are unaccompanied by stage directions<sup>51</sup> indicating movements, gestures, or actions. The audience is left without visual cues to enhance the performance. Consequently, the characters do not actively move or interact within the scene but instead appear, chant in classical Persian musical modes, and disappear in a repetitive sequence. These chants often express wistfulness over the past but occasionally provide descriptive content, such as delineating the borders of ancient Persia:

**Dariush**

*From China to Rome was under my rule;  
I left half the globe to my predecessors.*<sup>52</sup>

One notable moment involves Khosrow's monologue, followed by Shirin's. Unlike the rest of the play, these characters directly address the audience, breaking the narrative's spatial convention. While this technique affects the scene's spatial construction, it does not adhere to Western theatrical principles, such as breaking the fourth wall. Instead, it blends the diegetic and mimetic narrative realms:

**Shirin** [points at the audience]

*You Iranian, living on the ruins, recalling the testaments of the universe,  
Those were the days, and yet these are. . .*<sup>53</sup>

Following Shirin's monologue, the play reaches a crucial moment: Zoroaster's appearance. After the choral monologue,<sup>54</sup> "a wall with a vestibule underneath and a statue of a God over its vault disappears. The spirit of Zoroaster appears, dressed in white with waist-length gray hair. He acts prophetically, with a heavenly visage."<sup>55</sup> Zoroaster begins to chant and "wanders unearthly" around the stage. Unlike the other characters, described briefly, almost as singing sculptures, Zoroaster is described with greater specificity. Nonetheless, even his chant addressing the Iranian kings is monologic.

To summarize the narratological aspects of *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings*, while monologues' dominance links the play strongly to the diegetic narrative realm, some mimetic elements are present. For example, when a wall disappears and later reappears, or when a cradle decorated with flags and colorful lights descends from the ceiling to the floor, these moments mark significant strides toward mimetic representation within the predominantly diegetic discourse of the play.

### ***The Shepherds of Kenan***<sup>56</sup>

The story begins with Yakub's sons leading their flocks to the banks of the Jordan River. Consumed by envy, the brothers resent Yusuf, believing him to be their father's favorite. Seeking a resolution, they reach a consensus agreement: to sell Yusuf into slavery to pass Egyptian caravans. However, instead of a life of servitude, Yusuf rises to become Vizier of Egypt. He marries Asenat and saves Egypt during a devastating famine. Amid the famine, Yakub's sons travel to Egypt to purchase provisions. Yusuf recognizes them, but they fail to realize that the powerful Vizier is their brother,

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*, 234.

<sup>51</sup> For example, Khosrodokht rises from grave, Cyrus appears from the collapsing wall, and Anoushirvan shows up from behind a column.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*, 236.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*, 237.

<sup>54</sup> This piece is composed by Mirzā Hassan-Khān, who holds a diploma in music (Moshirsalimi, *Kolliyyāt-e Mosavvar-e Mirzadeh 'Eshqi*, 238).

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*, 239.

<sup>56</sup> *The Shepherds of Kenan* performed during 1916-1917 and in August 1918 (Halide Edib-Adıvar, *Kenan Çobanları, Maske ve Ruh*, 4. Baskı (İstanbul: Atlas Kitabevi, 1991), 9).

whom they sold for 20 silver. Yusuf inquires about their youngest brother, Bünyamin, and demands they bring him during their next visit to receive their share of goods. When all the brothers gather before Yusuf, he reveals his true identity. Overcome with remorse, they seek forgiveness. Yusuf sends them back home with the joyous news to their father, reuniting the long-separated family.

As noted earlier, *The Shepherds of Kenan* is the first opera written and composed by Turkish artists.<sup>57</sup> However, in terms of techniques and structure, it does not align with the classical opera tradition. Instead, this three-act play with a linear plot bears closer resemblance to a diegetic work with mimetic elements than to a traditional libretto. For example, the opening act begins with a vivid and detailed stage direction that reads more like descriptive passages of a novel than a conventional theatrical script. Here is an excerpt:

*The molten red sun blazes fiercely in the desert sky. This is the Dotan pasture. A few palm trees can be seen here and there. The sons of Yakub, shepherds, rest under these trees. The flocks graze by the Jordan River. The bells are silent, just as they were on the first days this pasture appeared on the face of the Earth. The surrounding area is an endless golden desert, covered by a bright blue dome of sizzling reddish rays. . . Boiling a temptation with heat and fire. A bit later, this temptation sets the stage for the first act of one of humanity's earliest disasters.*<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, the second act begins with a more concise introduction:

#### **Pharaoh's Palace**

Yusuf and his wife Asenat are talking

*Asenat's dancers perform while Yusuf is lost in thoughts.*<sup>59</sup>

Unlike the first act, this introduction omits a descriptive stage direction detailing the settings. The dancers, mentioned briefly at the beginning, are not referred to again throughout the act, even during crucial moments. For instance, when Yusuf sends Asenat to her room and calls for his servant, Yekşan, there is no reference to the dancers. Later, Yusuf soliloquizes alone; their absence is similarly unnoted:

**Yusuf** [alone]: *Father! Bünyamin! How long has it been since you last heard my voice?*<sup>60</sup>

Other instances blur the lines between exposition and stage direction. For example:

*Yekşan enters. He opens the door. Yusuf's ten brothers enter, bowing deeply. They greet Yusuf with respect and wait.*<sup>61</sup>

Or,

*Yusuf's brothers converse quietly. Simultaneously, Yusuf gestures and descends down from his throne. They arrest Şemun.*<sup>62</sup>

And finally:

*The brothers bid farewell to the Vizier, their eyes brimming with tears, while Yusuf watches them leave.*<sup>63</sup>

In the second example above, no explanation is provided regarding how the brothers' speech extends beyond the auditory range of the scene. Additionally, Yusuf's descent from the throne and Şemun's arrest are presented as diegetic descriptions. Similarly, the greetings in the third and first examples fail to fully integrate with the conversational floor of the scenes.

The beginning of the third act is also noteworthy. First, the characters' names are mentioned, followed by a descriptive paragraph. However, considering the overall structure of the work, its mimetic performance seems unlikely:

#### **Yusuf, Yekşan**

*[Once again, in the Vizier's palace. . . Yusuf awaits his brothers. After all, a secret way is now drawing Kenan and Egypt closer. Yakub's empty, ill-fated chest that confined Yusuf for years is breathing new life. Yusuf is scared. He has seen the other side of Jordan in his dreams. Has God. . . forgotten Yusuf?]*

**Yusuf** [by the window, deep in thought, as all the above assumptions pass before his eyes]: *Yekşan...*<sup>64</sup>

Regarding time and temporal aspects, the story spans Yusuf's journey from childhood to the disclosure of his identity. This period is contracted on both the discourse and performance levels. In the first act, given the continuity of time and the lack of mimetic actions, the duration of time aligns closely with the "scene" pattern described by Genette (1980). However, this pattern is not consistent in other parts of the play. The most significant example of narrative movement in terms of tense occurs in the third act, where Yusuf sends Yekşan to locate the Hebrews:

<sup>57</sup> Sevensil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 755.

<sup>58</sup> Edib-Adivar, *Kenan Çobanları, Maske ve Ruh*, 19.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, 25.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, 26.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 28.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, 28.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, 29.

**Yusuf:** Send someone to check for Hebrew caravans.

[*Yekşan enters*]

**Yekşan:** My lord, I bring good news: the Hebrews are here.<sup>65</sup>

Given Yekşan immediate return with the news after Yusuf's command, an "ellipsis" is evident. This pattern repeats when Yekşan, following Yusuf's instructions, brings the Hebrews to Yusuf's presence. After the brothers leave the scene to be catered to, Asenat enters, prompting a brief exchange of Yusuf's further plans:

**Asenat:** What is your plan, my lord?

**Yusuf** [without responding]: Go, send for Yekşan. [to Asenat] With God's will, there is light after darkness and joy after grief.<sup>66</sup>

At this moment, Yekşan enters immediately:

**Yusuf:** Are the Hebrews catered?

**Yekşan:** Yes, sir. They have even packed their caravans.

**Yusuf:** Place this silver cup in the youngest brother's luggage and bring him to me for the crime of thievery.<sup>67</sup>

After this directive, a brief dialogue occurs between Asenat and Yusuf. Then, [*Chaos is heard from outside*]: **All:** We are not thieves! We are not thieves!<sup>68</sup>

Some questions arise from the text, such as who Yusuf initially ordered to call Yekşan or how the silver cup came into Yusuf's possession. Was the cup present throughout the scene? Since this play has been staged, it can be inferred that some of these elements were addressed improvisationally during performances.<sup>69</sup>

Temporal deixes with varying frequency, ranging from "iterative narrative" to "singulative narrative," primarily established through diegetic features. A key strategy is "analepsis," referring to events before the story's commencement. For instance, in the first act, the brothers reflect on Yusuf being their father's favorite, recounting specific past moments. Yusuf recalls his last dream, and in the second act, he confides in Asenat about his experiences.<sup>70</sup>

The treatment of "dancers," briefly mentioned earlier, is another significant diegetic aspect, extending to the representation of the spatial positions. In the first act, the text provides no indication of the brothers' placement on stage, gestures, or attitudes, even though their character differences are significant:

**Cad:** Do not think Yusuf sees only your errors. He knows we are the children of a maidservant.

(...)

**Yehuda:** Yusuf? Who is he? A kid. Even if Israel loves him, what then?

(...)

**Şemun:** We are the sons of Lee, not of a maidservant.<sup>71</sup>

Despite these differences, the brothers often act collectively, functioning as a unified body akin to a choir. Their collective voice as "All" is evident in various moments, such as their denial of thievery and their earlier conspiracies against Yusuf.

### Comparing the Narrative in *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* and *The Shepherds of Kenan*

Before presenting the conclusions, Table 4-1 offers a concise summary of the analysis of the mimetic and diegetic aspects of the narrative in *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* and *The Shepherds of Kenan*.

<sup>65</sup> Edib-Adivar, *Kenan Çobanları, Maske ve Ruh*, 29.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, 31-2.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> It must also be the case with the musical parts of the play; although the composer, Vedî Sabrâ, is known, the details on the performing of the musical pieces are not provided, neither in the Ottoman Turkish version nor in the new Turkish version (Edib-Adivar, *Kenan Çobanları, Maske ve Ruh*, 4; Halide, *Kenan Çobanları: Opera (Three Acts)* (no place, Matbaa-yi Orhaniye Edib, 1916)).

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, 20-2, 24-5.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, 19-21



**Table 1.** Comparing Analysis of Narrative in *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* and *The Shepherds of Kenan*

Mimetic Narrative	The Resurrection of Iranian Kings	The Shepherds of Kenan
Diegetic Narrative		
Dialogue		
Monologue, Aside, Soliloquy		
Act		
Report of the Act		
Representative Characters		
Descriptive Types		
Absence of Reporting Agents		
Presence of the Reporting Agents		
Representation Of The Spatial-temporal Aspects		
Description Of The Spatial-temporal Aspects		
Representative Scenes		
Descriptive Scenes		

## Conclusion

The analysis of narration in 'Eshqi's *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* and Edib-Adivar's *The Shepherds of Kenan*, focusing on the narratological aspects of plot, characterization, and spatial-temporal features, illuminates the positions of these texts in the realms of diegesis and mimesis, addressing the central question of this study. The findings of this multidisciplinary comparative study demonstrate the significant influence of dramatic traditions on the narrative structures of these two early operas from Iran and Türkiye. Both texts exhibit strong ties to their dramatic predecessors, rooted in the diegetic narrative realm. This influence is reflected in the natural integration of plot structuring, characterization, and spatial-temporal elements within the plays. Notably, the cultural familiarity with storytelling through music and drama in the respective regions ensured that many narrative techniques were not borrowed from external traditions but organically evolved. However, this study reveals distinct differences in the narrative approaches of the two texts, particularly regarding their mimetic and diegetic features. *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* leans more heavily on diegetic narration techniques, such as employing dialogues or recounting actions rather than directly presenting them. In contrast, *The Shepherds of Kenan* relies more on speech exchanges and acting, emphasizing mimetic representation over narration. Interestingly, the approach to characterization diverges between the two texts. While *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* demonstrates a stronger inclination toward representation over description, *The Shepherds of Kenan* adopts a more diegetic method, favoring descriptive character development and relying more on narrative agents. Regarding spatial and temporal settings, *The Shepherds of Kenan* employs a more descriptive and diegetic style, while *The Resurrection of Iranian Kings* adopts a mimetic and representative approach. These differences highlight the diversity in narrative styles within early drama in Iran and Türkiye, showcasing their richness in storytelling techniques. This study underscores the significance of exploring such underappreciated yet valuable narrative elements in early operas. Examining these works individually or comparatively can deepen our understanding of the evolution of drama and provide inspiration for future authentic contributions to the field.

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# Advising Without the Element of Advice: Exploring the Application of Educational Theater for Adult Audiences in Iran through Deconstruction

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## ABSTRACT

Educational theater has been widely used internationally to teach various topics to young students in schools through performance and theater. This study raises a question about this medium: what would be the dos and don'ts of utilizing educational theater in Iran for an adult audience instead of young students? Drawing on the ideas of influential thinkers and philosophers such as Augusto Boal, Jacques Derrida, and Walter Benjamin, this research employs deconstruction to analyze conventional concepts of education and thought processes. By doing so, it seeks to propose a new perspective on the subject and outline the dos and don'ts for implementing such theater in Iran. This study aims to explore the potential of educational theater for adult audiences.

**Keywords:** Educational theater, deconstruction, Derrida, Iran, adult audience

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## Introduction

Since the time of Plato and Aristotle, the function of art, especially the art of theater, has been a topic of discussion regarding its role in its respective era. Plato envisioned art as having a committed and social role, suitable for his utopia ideals, whereas Aristotle advocated for artistic freedom, emphasizing catharsis and the therapeutic potential of theater. Although this discussion continued throughout history, it reemerged with renewed intensity in the 20th century through the educational and committed theater of Bertolt Brecht and the practical, legislative theater of Augusto Boal. According to Brecht, theater, adapting to the demands of its time, embraced didactic themes. He writes in “About Theater”:

*“The scene began to learn. Oil, inflation, war, social struggles, family, religion, wheat exchange, meat market, all topics were shown. The singers shed light on topics that remain unfamiliar to the viewer... The theater had become a subject for the attention of philosophers, of course, philosophers who, in addition to explaining the world, also wanted to change it.”<sup>1</sup>*

Modern theater, therefore, is intrinsically tied to themes that demand research and education. Brecht further notes: Modern theater, therefore, is intrinsically tied to themes that demand research and education. Brecht further notes:

*“For different strata of society, learning plays very different roles. Some people cannot imagine the situation getting better... but some people have not yet had their turn, who are unhappy with the situation and are very interested in getting information that will be useful in their lives.”<sup>2</sup>*

This perspective resonates with Augusto Boal and the pedagogical theater movement that emerged in the United States and Europe after the 1960s. In Germany, Hans Wolfgang Nichol was a prominent figure who used theater as a platform for teaching and learning among young people. Similarly, in Britain, the “Training in Theater” program introduced teacher-performers who brought theater to schools and educational centers, exposing children and young people to challenging problems and encouraging them to seek solutions.

Educational theater, therefore, can be defined as a functional, purposeful, or committed theater characterized by its educational themes, an active and engaged audience, and the presence of teachers/performers.

How can this type of theater be realized in our current social, economic, and political situation? How will it interact with =the successes and ruptures of our time? If we perceive the present as a continuum of the past, we must acknowledge that, despite the rapid growth of industry and modernity, we remain deeply rooted in our traditions and national identity. For instance, consider the transition from feudalism to capitalism and republican systems. Although feudalism in Iran differed somewhat from its European counterparts, folkloric tales passed down from parents and grandparents often recount the conditions of peasants and masters. These stories have inspired numerous local narratives, such as Gol Mohammad Kalmishi’s uprising in Khorasan, depicted in Mahmoud Dolatabadi’s novel *Kelidar*, and the tale of Rana in northern Iran, whose failed love amidst the tyranny of the masters class inspired regional songs.

This social structure was not merely an economic system based on serfdom; it embodied a worldview that permeated all aspects of life. Peasants depended on the land and the unpredictable forces of nature for survival. At harvest time, they submitted to their masters’ commands, mirroring the coercive dynamics of their environment. This hierarchical system extended into family life, where patriarchy dictated interactions, ultimately to governance, culminating in the Shah’s autocracy. Now consider the present time. Do some of our family behaviors still reflect tyranny and coercion? Are societal traditions and norms systematically imposed on us from an early age? Did the White Revolution of 1963 truly eliminate this specific form of feudalism?

These questions arise naturally when contemplating the role of educational theater in our society. Addressing them forms the core purpose of this study.

## Theoretical Considerations

Jacques Derrida’s ideas—often referred to as deconstruction or deconstructing—initially had a revolutionary impact on literary criticism and philosophy. In one of his early works on Edmund Husserl, *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), much of his views and theories on deconstruction are articulated. His ideas primarily address implications, desirability, concept, and meaning.

Derrida demonstrates that metaphysical, epistemological, moral, and logical systems are structured around conceptual oppositions, such as transcendental/experimental, internal/extrinsic, original/derivative, good/evil, and general/specific. In each of these dichotomies, one element is valued or principled, while the other is negated and marginalized. He explains:

<sup>1</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Darbare-ye Teatr*, trans. Faramarz Behzad (Tehran: Kharazmi, 2020), 136.

<sup>2</sup> Brecht, *Darbare-ye Teatr*, 137.

*“The superior term belongs to the presence and the logos; the inferior serves to define its status and mark a fall. The oppositions between intelligible and sensible, soul and body seem to have lasted throughout the history of Western philosophy, bequeathing their burden to modern linguistics: the opposition between meaning and word; the opposition between writing and speech takes its place within this pattern.”<sup>3</sup>*

Derrida contends that prioritizing one element over its opposite is ultimately indefensible. The privileged term derives its meaning specifically through its opposition to the other. In other words, it lacks existential necessity in itself. The dominant term is defined by what it suppresses or negates, and it relies on its counterpart for meaning and sustenance. Thus, the preferred term cannot achieve pure identity or conceptual integrity. Through his exploration of deconstruction, Derrida introduces the concept of the *trace* or *effect* by analyzing notions such as plurality, abundance, approximation, similarity, and the idea of full presence. These ideas, which have permeated intellectual thought for centuries, form the basis of his critique. Derrida’s reflections on the nature of signs draw from various important influences, including Freudian psychoanalysis, Heidegger’s analysis of existence, and Rousseau’s and Saussure’s critique of writing.

Derrida was influenced by other philosophers, including Sartre. Nevertheless, he chose to pursue his studies from a personal perspective.

*Derrida was determined to establish his intellectual foundation, doing so in contrast to the traditional practices of his time by focusing on Husserl’s philosophy of science. Husserl, an eccentric yet revolutionary thinker, produced a series of elegant, proportionate, and complex works starting in 1900. He argued that philosophy had lost its direction since the mid-19th century, disturbed by a range of dull, fragmented, derivative models of scientific inquiry that failed to justify their perceptual processes. According to Husserl, the task was to rejuvenate philosophy, reawaken it to its original mission, and provide a unified and comprehensive foundation for thought. This ambitious endeavor was phenomenology, from the Greek word “phenomena,” meaning “things as they appear to the senses.” Husserl defined the initial aim of phenomenology as the detailed explanation of how the world of experience, preceding individual psychology, becomes intelligible through what he termed transcendental consciousness. This concept sought to philosophically examine the conditions that make experience possible.<sup>4</sup>*

Considering Husserl’s influence on Derrida, it becomes clearer why Derrida focused on marginal cases and the necessity of doing so. By criticizing the prioritization of speech over writing, Derrida invites us to reevaluate the central logos of philosophy and literature, referring to this shift as moving beyond the logocentric era. From Derrida’s perspective, the clarity traditionally considered the hallmark of philosophy’s purpose was no longer paramount.

*In the “era of the sign,” which continues to this day, Derrida argued that the philosophical aspiration of “perfect clarity” must confront the challenges of the present, especially, the quest for unambiguous meaning. To paraphrase Derrida, this involves overcoming difficulties by addressing the dispersal of meanings (the notion of countless paths of interpretation) and reducing them to a manageable framework of distinct meanings. Traditional philosophers might contend that the issue lies not in a word or a sign, whether written or spoken, but in the meaning—the logos—which we grasp instantaneously when we hear and understand a word. They assert that meaning, at its core, must be singular and unified. However, Derrida challenges this view, for him, the task of philosophy is no longer to achieve maximum conceptual clarity in articulating meaning within this unified framework. Instead, it involves learning to navigate the overlooked aspects of daily experience, the implicit processes of day-to-day thought.<sup>5</sup>*

This perspective is precisely what this research aims to achieve: shifting the approach to analyzing structures not only in theoretical texts but also in everyday life. Derrida’s philosophy transcends structuralism and is therefore regarded as a post-structuralist framework. Structuralism originally emerged as a method of linguistics analysis proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure, later expanding into fields such as literature, philosophy, and sociology. Saussure distinguishes three levels of linguistic activity: *langage* (absolute language), *langue* (language), and *parole* (speech). *Langage* represents the broadest conception of language, encompassing all human capacities for speech—both physical and mental. Its vast and indefinable nature renders it unsuitable for systematic study. In contrast, *Langue* is a structured system, referring to what is typically meant when discussing a specific language, such as English or French. This linguistic system enables the production of comprehensible communication. Lastly, *parole* refers to individual utterances. Thus, *Langage* constitutes the possibility for speech, *Langue* embodies the linguistic system, and *parole* comprises specific instances of speech. Saussure posits that the primary focus of language study should be the linguistic system itself, which he argues is arbitrary because it arises as a social construct. While the potential for statements in any language is limitless, these expressions are grounded in a finite set of words and grammatical structures, which function as interconnected components of a unified system.

Another important contribution of Saussure’s linguistics is his innovative approach to language analysis. Before his work, linguistic studies emphasized the historical formation of words, tracing their origins and derivatives—a diachronic approach. Saussure introduced a synchronic perspective, focusing on the present structure of language and

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (The United States of America: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xix.

<sup>4</sup> Leslie Hill, *Moghademe-ye Cambridge Bar Jacques Derrida*, trans. Masoumeh Shahgardji (Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications, 2021), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Simon Golending, *Daramadi Bar Jacques Derrida*, trans. Mehdi Parsa (Tehran: Shund Publications, 2019), 63.

the conventional frameworks shaping its use. This paradigm shift redirected attention from historical evolution to the contemporary system of language.

Derrida's philosophy begins at this point, emphasizing the arbitrariness of structures, particularly as they pertain to antagonists and marginalized elements. This raises an important question: what is the connection between these theoretical issues and the problems encountered in everyday life? Language is a fundamental aspect of human existence and thought itself is mediated through language. Thinking governs a large part of human actions; without it, social institutions, governments, and ideological, social, and economic structures could not exist. Therefore, understanding the process of thought—or, as Derrida suggests, deconstructing it—requires attention to the structure of language, speech, and writing. This analytical method, alongside the synchronic perspective of structuralism, extends to other fields of thought, including politics and sociology.

The next philosopher considered in this study is Walter Benjamin. Initially recognized as a literary critic and essayist, the philosophical dimensions of his writings only became evident over time. It is not an exaggeration to claim that Benjamin, in a prophetic sense, foresaw many of the challenges characteristic of the postmodern era. Benjamin's intellectual contributions are diverse and complex; however, this research focuses on his approach to history. By examining German history, especially through his analysis of German mournful dramas during the Baroque period, Benjamin identifies gaps in dominant discourses and explores the potential to subvert systemic mechanisms in addressing historical ruptures.

As mentioned earlier with the diachronic and synchronic approaches, Benjamin proposes a synthesis of these methodologies in historical analysis. This integrated approach reveals inconsistencies within symbolic systems, uncovering their foundations in irregularity and irrationality. Such an analysis proves invaluable for addressing the themes discussed in this research.

### **Literature Review**

In the field of applied theater and educational theater, valuable articles have been published, and useful books have been translated. Since this field is still relatively new to Persian-speaking audiences, most of these articles and books aim to introduce this branch of theater and address its possibilities and potential. The following articles are excerpts from the above-mentioned body of work:

The article "Educational Theater (Pedagogic): A Comparative Study" by Dr. Majid Sarsangi and Dr. Rahmat Amini introduces educational theater, compares it to conventional and intellectual theater and highlights its importance and useful role in the education of children and adolescents. The researchers emphasize the need for proper infrastructure and greater attention to theater's role in education, advocating for Iran's theater to pursue generalization within the educational framework. This article is instrumental in introducing this type of theater and exploring its potential, making it a pioneering study in this field. However, although this article is highly useful, it does not discuss the generalization of this type of theater in the adult domain, which the present study intends to explore.

The article "The Effectiveness of Educational Theater Training on Responsibility and Moral Growth in Elementary Students" by Roya Zare, Somayeh Tavakoli, and Ozra Ghaffari employs educational theater as an intervention in education. By experimenting on a statistical community of fifth- and sixth-grade students of Ardabil primary schools, the study demonstrates the significant effect of this intervention on fostering responsibility and moral development in students. The results of this research are particularly important for counselors and psychologists. This article showcases one of the numerous potentials of educational theater and effectively demonstrates its impact in a practical context.

The article "Analysis of the Mechanism of Applied Theater in Education (Case Study: Language Teaching by TPR Method)" by Delaram Farhanak, Ghazal Eskandarnejad, and Hamed Asgharzadeh introduces and explains the principles and regulations of educational theater. It examines its application in teaching foreign languages using a special method called TPR (Total Physical Response). In this approach, theater transforms the traditional classroom, with the teacher assuming the role of a facilitator while learners strengthen their language skills through performance. According to the author, the importance of this study lies in showcasing another potential of this type of theater outside its traditional scope, which is expanding its applicability to all age groups, as foreign language learning is relevant for diverse demographics. The researchers also underscore the importance of educational theater in teaching various scientific disciplines.

The article "Drama in Education and Self-Directed Learning for Adults" by Carmel O'Sullivan and Athina A. Karavoltsoy, explores a form of educational drama known as Drama in Education, specifically designed for adults. Based on a research study that empowered adults to take control of their learning journey, this article examines how drama facilitates self-directed learning. It also delves into the dynamics of power relations within the learning environment, which aligns with the themes this present study seeks to address.

The Article “Popular Theater: A Useful Process for Adult Educators” by Reid A. Bates, highlights the use of popular theater in adult education and its effectiveness in teaching community problem-solving. This article is noteworthy as it demonstrates how theater can educate adults on social issues.

All the articles mentioned above are relevant to the themes of this study but remain insufficient in addressing the full scope of the topic. Therefore, this article aims to offer a new perspective on the subject.

### **Educational Theater for Adults**

In response to the first question of this research, the necessity of using educational theater for adults arises from the fact that adults sometimes need to learn new skills to address various life issues. Additionally, another crucial aspect is fostering new thoughts in people’s minds, which has a long-standing role in art. Theater, as a rich and profound art form, holds great potential for creating new methods of thinking. Siegfried Melchinger elaborates:

*“Where the theater represents people as agents, it can either exhibit the action as a result—the action in which the motives are visible—or the process within which the action takes place. Man as an agent is free to choose among various possibilities; he thinks of these possibilities unmistakably... In this thought process, the spectator also participates and contemplates. The question: ‘What would you do if you were him?’ sets these actions apart from pure psychological perspectives.”<sup>6</sup>*

This underscores the necessity of applied theater traditions, where education becomes both practical and thought-provoking for the audience. Furthermore, considering that theater in Iran is still often regarded as an entertaining luxury, the use of educational theater with its unique aesthetics could significantly reduce the public’s distance from this art form. Accepting the urgency of this matter, we can now explore the conditions further.

As introduced earlier about Walter Benjamin, his perspective on history and historical gaps resonates here. A similar gap is evident in contemporary Iranian history, requiring reflection on the past to build the future:

*“Only he who can view his past as an abortion sprung from compulsion and need can use it to full advantage in the present. For what one has lived is at best comparable to a beautiful statue which has had all its limbs knocked off in transit, and now yields nothing but the precious block out of which the image of one’s future must be hewn.”<sup>7</sup>*

Iran lacked a centralized, stable, and sovereign government until Reza Shah rose to power. Contrary to the common association of monarchy with totalitarian tyranny, the monarchy can paradoxically function as merely a formal superstructure for tyranny. In “Modern Iran History,” Abrahamian explains this regarding the Qajar monarchy:

*“The reign of this dynasty in the center was exercised by ministers, courtiers, mirzas, mustufis, and nobles with titles such as Saltanah, al-Dawlah, and al-Mamalek. However, other parts of the country were ruled by local lords, khans, merchants, and mujtahids, each wielding localized power sources. Despite half a century of imperfect attempts to establish state institutions, what remained after the end of Nasser al-Din Shah’s long reign in 1896/1275 was a skeleton central state comprised of just nine small institutions—bureaucracies without bureaucracy.”<sup>8</sup>*

This fragmented form of authority, divided into smaller pockets of petty power, contributed to the formation of raw, unsophisticated social classes. Relationships within and between these classes were rooted in irrational traditions. Notably, there exists a reciprocal relationship between the government structure at the top and societal structures at the bottom. Abrahamian’s “Iran Between Two Revolutions” examines these class dynamics and their contractions:

*“Although 19th-century Iran had hidden, objective socioeconomic classes, the dominant form of group bonding delayed the formation of open, subjective, and social-political classes. Moreover, powers were unequally distributed, and most individuals were confined from cradle to grave to one class. Court theorists posited that God created these social differences and entrusted the Shah with maintaining this order and assigning specific attire, enforcing loyalty to the aristocracy, and creating hierarchies of dignity. Class divisions often manifested as ostentatious displays of social status that even Queen Victoria’s tourists, like Murrie, found astonishing. ‘The explanation of etiquette in Iran is endless and found in trivial details,’ he observed. These customs, deeply entrenched and accepted from youth, wielded such influence on the social hierarchy that no individual, not even an average person, could escape their particular social residence or disrespect the respect demanded by these norms.”<sup>9</sup>*

These social class customs often led to conflicts between classes. However, these contradictions never evolved into political or directed consciousness. In essence, while a gap existed, it was not filled with anything constructive due to the absence of a coherent political attitude. People were deeply entrenched in traditional economic mechanisms and their corresponding worldviews, which Abrahamian points out were regarded as sacred. This reverence for social roles left no space for critical thinking. Although social groups shared similar ways of life, their cohesion did not foster liberation from the symbolic order:

<sup>6</sup> Siegfried Melchinger, *Tarikh-e Teatr-e Siasi (Volume Two)*, trans. Saeed Farhoudi (Tehran: Soroush: Publications of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, 2018), 227.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Kingsley Shorter (Great Britain, Lowe and Brydone Printers Limited, 1979), 50.

<sup>8</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Tarikh-e Iran-e Modern* (Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 2020), 29.

<sup>9</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran Beyn-e Do Enghelab*, 44.



“Group bonds—especially those based on tribal ancestry, religious cults, local organizations, and familial affections—strengthened vertical (hierarchical) groups and weakened horizontal classes (hierarchical influences), thus preventing hidden economic interests and desires from turning into overt political forces.” During the early modern period, many people shared similar lifestyles, held identical positions in the mode of production, and had comparable relationships with administrative institutions, forming potential socioeconomic classes. However, their ethnic and group ties, coupled with local obstacles and lack of transnational interests, prevented them from developing into socio-political classes.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, we observed how, for a significant period in Iran’s history, the kind of gap Benjamin described persisted but remained unaddressed. This gap can also be seen in the aftermath of World War I. Despite Iran declaring neutrality, powerful states coveted the country. A vacuum existed within the power structure, and tribal and local revolts played into German aims. In the south, the British, and in the north, the Russians, effectively took control, further diminishing the Qajar government’s influence. The situation was exacerbated by famine, drought, and disease, which claimed thousands of lives. Following World War I, as the Middle East transformed the influence of global powers, the Iranian government found itself powerless. While ostensibly neutral, Iran became a pawn in the geopolitical strategies of Britain and the newly formed Soviet Union. The Soviet Union sought to strengthen its forces in the region, while Britain aimed to counter Soviet Union influence, prevent the spread of communism, and maintain control over the Middle East. This environment saw the formation of the Socialist Party in Gilan. The fragmentation of power in Iran created a new gap—one that even the British could not fully control:

*“At the end of the war, Britain and British India had small forces at four Ayaran points. In the northeast and northwest, there were small military corps under General Malson and General Dunstroil, whose adventures we narrated in Russia (Rev. 38). On the Gulf coast, there were several English outposts with Indian soldiers. In the south of the country, during the war years, a native force called the ‘Musketeers of the South of Iran’ (Police of the South) was formed, commanded by British officers. However, revolts and nomadic rebellion against British domination, even before the end of the war, had reduced this force to almost zero.”<sup>11</sup>*

Considering these documented events and analyzing them through the diachronic and synchronic perspectives of history, it becomes evident that such gaps are likely repeat reoccur. These gaps provide fertile ground for deconstructing societal structures and education. Therefore, one of the necessary—though not sufficient—conditions for using educational theater for adult audiences lies in creating an appropriate historical, social, political, economic, and cultural context. Before moving on to the conditions, let us delve deeper into the concept of educational theater itself.

Applied theater, of which educational theater is a branch, refers to a form of theater that primarily falls under unconventional practices. As its name implies, it is theater that must have a practical application, often geared toward educational purposes. This type of theater addresses a variety of social issues, including political and social concerns, as well as the education of marginalized communities. Essentially, it brings the art of theater to everyday settings, reaching people who may not be accustomed to attending theater or cannot afford it. Consequently, this theater eschews traditional conventions such as ticketed entry, assigned sitting, curtains, and proscenium stages, instead moving into the street, alleys, schools, prisons, refugee camps, hospitals, and other public spaces.

In Iran, this type of theater is closely associated with Augusto Boal and his concept of “The Theater of the Oppressed.” However, it is worth mentioning that its socio-political orientation is just one aspect of its broad applications. For instance, a notable example with educational roots is the Theater in Education (TiE), a program established in the UK during the 1960s. In this program, teachers-performers introduced theater into schools and educational centers to familiarize children and young people with challenging issues and encourage them to seek solutions. Thus, whether addressing political topics or other concerns, the primary objective of the type of theater is to promote critical thinking.

A key concept relevant to educational theater is pedagogy. Understanding this term can help clarify the purpose of applied theater. Derived from the Greek words *paidós* (child) and *agógos* (lead), pedagogy originally referred to educating children or young people. Over time, its meaning evolved, leading to debates about its precise definition. Nonetheless, what is significant about applied theater is that it adopts a pedagogical approach emphasizing the teaching of practical knowledge. While this interpretation may not include the entirety of applied theater, it is fair to say that part of its purpose involves educating audiences on specific topics, highlighting issues, defamiliarizing them, and seeking practical solutions.

The effectiveness of applied theater is closely tied to educational methods. Augusto Boal, influenced by his mentor Paulo Frieré, delineated education into two contrasting approaches: passive and active. Passive education, the traditional method prevalent in most parts of the world, positions the learner as a passive recipient of information with little

<sup>10</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran Beyn-e Do Enghelab*, 46.

<sup>11</sup> David Faramkin, *Solhi Ke Hame-ye Solhha Ra Bar Bad Dad (Feroopashi Emperatoori Osmani Va Sheklgiri Khavar-e Miane-e Moaser*, trans. Hasan Afshar (Tehran: Mahi Publications, 2022), 442.

opportunity for critical engagement. Conversely, active education emphasizes active participation, enabling individuals to be influenced by influence within the learning process.

*Paulo Frieré argues that activating true education involves more than simply transferring knowledge from teacher to students, as though unloading a truckload or safeguarding wealth in a vault. A teacher possesses a certain amount of knowledge, shares it with the student, and simultaneously gains new knowledge from the student. This exchanges knowledge that students bring their own experiences and understanding to the learning process. The necessity of learning from the student highlights the individualized nature of how students acquire knowledge. Since students are diverse, their learning processes also differ. Education, in this sense, becomes an act of activation—rooted in democracy and dialogue. As an Argentine teacher from Cordua observed, "I taught a villager how to write the word 'plow,' and he taught me how to use it."<sup>12</sup>*

A crucial question then arises: why is education, especially active education, important? The answer lies in the degree of knowledge and wisdom embedded in every society. As the elders say, "Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it." By acquiring knowledge and cultivating critical thinking, individuals learn from past trials and errors a create a better future. This principle underpins Boal's assertion that knowledge is intrinsically tied to power. Knowledge enhances the ability to act, and when concentrated in the possession of a few, it consolidates power while disenfranchising the majority.

*Knowledge and health are often considered forms of power. Consequently, economic elites may seek to obscure knowledge and undermine health, as it is easier to dominate populations that are uneducated and unwell. Barry Goldwater, a reactionary United States senator, famously stated that poverty is essential to capitalism because it allows for leverage over wages and working conditions; workers, fearing unemployment, comply out of necessity. Historical patterns reflect similar trends: as early as 3000 BCE in Egypt, knowledge was accessible only to the powerful. Education primarily consisted of learning to carve stones or build pyramids. In India, education has historically been reserved for Brahmins and select members of the Kshatriya warrior class, while peasants, peasants, Vaishia merchants, craftsmen, and particularly the Dalits (the "impure" or outcast) were systematically excluded.<sup>13</sup>*

The process of interaction and dialogue is fundamental to active education, a concept Boal emphasizes fervently. Healthy dialogue forms the bedrock of democracy, a principle that has inspired human aspiration throughout history but remains elusive. Dialogue is crucial to counter demagoguery or coercion. As Boal articulated, "The theater of the oppressed is the cause of dialogue. By activation, it does not merely incapacitate but actively seeks engagement." This theater challenges its audience and demands honest responses,<sup>14</sup> mirroring the expectation of honesty in active education. The shared commitment to honesty underscores the transformative power of education.

*Through Paulo Freire's pedagogy, learning transcends reading and writing. It fosters an understanding and respect for others' differences. Freire's philosophy affirms that both teachers and students are co-learners and co-educators: "My kind looks like me, but I am not them, Yet, I resemble them, as they resemble me. We learn through dialogue: both teachers and students educate one another because we are all simultaneously students and teachers. I exist because they exist. To write on a blank page, we need a black pen. To write on a blackboard, we must use chalk of a different color. My being is interdependent with theirs."<sup>15</sup>*

This represents a different kind of teaching experience. The concept of education, established over centuries and deeply intertwined with other aspects of life, essentially involves negating the marginal elements Derrida discusses. We must consider what education might look like if it were approached differently today. The prevailing concept of education has, in many cases, alienated people from institutions that attempt to teach within a structured framework. The alienation is precisely what undermines the form of democracy embedded in the education of free-spirited and altruistic individuals, as Boal describes. Adults, having been free from the constraints of the formal educational system and attaining relative independence, often resist further education to preserve their autonomy. They tend to perceive reforms, including those related to education, as mere advice. In Iranian culture, advice has historically carried connotations of coercion, self-righteousness, and self-aggrandizement, which contribute to this resistance.

The title of this study intentionally incorporates the word "advice." This choice reflects the author's intent to demonstrate how even a single term can undergo deconstruction to reveal embedded concepts resulting from the negation of others. By applying this analytical method to fundamental concepts such as education, democracy, and altruism, new perspectives on these topics can emerge. This approach underpins the author's proposal for utilizing educational theater targeted at adult audiences. Initially, this type of theater equips audiences with critical thinking skills grounded in deconstruction, fostering dialogue and analytical reasoning. Subsequently, various applications of educational theater can be used to enhance decision-making, dialogue and compromise, constructive criticism, adaptability, and more.

<sup>12</sup> Augusto Boal, *Teatr-e Ghanoongozar (Estefade Az Honar-e Ejra Baraye Siasatvarzi)*, trans. Ali Zafar Ghahramaninjad (Tehran: Beidgol Publications, 2010), 56.

<sup>13</sup> Boal, *Teatr-e Ghanoongozar (Estefade Az Honar-e Ejra Baraye Siasatvarzi)*, 88.

<sup>14</sup> Boal, *Teatr-e Ghanoongozar (Estefade Az Honar-e Ejra Baraye Siasatvarzi)*, 57.

<sup>15</sup> Boal, *Teatr-e Ghanoongozar (Estefade Az Honar-e Ejra Baraye Siasatvarzi)*, 214.

Thus far, this discussion has emphasized historical gaps, the importance of educational theater, and the application of deconstruction. This raises key questions: Can the author's proposed method be effectively implemented in the present context? If not, how might it become feasible? A recurring concern in this research is the concept of setting. What type of theater setting is suitable for this approach? Does the current setting have the capacity to change into an appropriate setting? What characteristics should define an ideal setting for this purpose?

Let's continue the discussion by answering the last question. The appropriate setting should include several characteristics. First, the historical and social situation must necessitate the use of theater. This means that during a specific historical period, society and its people must be ready to embrace something innovative while preserving their traditional ways and methods, ultimately internalizing the new approach. However, any action that influences society is intricately tied to culture, requiring careful attention. This interplay introduces the complexity of cultural transition.

Aida Basiri, in her book *Cultural Continuity and Fragmentation in Iranian Theater*, emphasizes that culture must be communicative. She asserts: "For any communicative action, the existence of oneself and one other is inevitable. This self and the other are two different cultural systems—complex and heterogeneous signage systems, not monolithic and definitive generalities."<sup>16</sup> According to Basiri, one's self-perception is intertwined with the perception of the other. In essence, individuals recognize themselves through the lens of how others perceive them.

In other words, we perceive ourselves in another person's image. This is true not only concerning broad geographical boundaries like the border between a country and its different cultures but also with our daily interactions. That is, concerning education, we are faced with the same kind of communication because the learner sees the instructor as another. Interestingly, this "other" concept is also divided into synchronic and diachronic categories: "The other contemporaneous, as we have explained, perceives another culture as monstrous and always manifests itself in a war against it, but this war never destroys this other but rather represents the dependence of its definition on the definition of the other."<sup>17</sup> Basiri goes on to quote Farzan Sojoodi, explaining the other and the self as a "confrontation/identification relationship" in which traditions appear in a hypertextual way in their ideal form. The self attracts the other. Although presented as self, "the other is a historical ideal": "Here we see that the imperfect self is constantly dependent on the other, this time against the other, a historical ideal disguised, but in reality, the other is an ideal of the self which would be meaningless without it. Consequently, the other is simultaneously seen in two ways."<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, it is observed that to create a suitable setting based on historical and social factors, we need a historical perspective so that we can then take a synchronic and diachronic approach to measure and understand ourselves through an "other." The existence of such a setting is one of the necessary conditions for the use of educational theater for adult audiences. However, given the changes, the cultural prodigy in Iran has not yet been fully established, and perhaps Iran is currently in another historical gap. This is very promising because, as James R. Martel points out, it is from Benjamin's perspective that the gaps provide an opportunity to create alternatives. In his book, *Divine Violence: Walter Benjamin and the Eschatology of Sovereignty*, Martel uses Kafka's story as an example. The story is about the desire to build the Tower of Babel in order to reach heaven and possibly see God. Following Benjamin, he sees such desires as a form of idolatry and believes that today's rulers are also a form of idolatry. The Tower of Babel, this great and idealistic idol, will never be perfected and will continue to be built. During this time, people build urban towers around buildings and create socio-political systems:

We see here that when the tower builders were fantasizing about their city, the people of the city craved divine violence to overthrow the pagan building. This dream or sign that their participation in Fantasmogouria could potentially save them. It allows them to not be entirely determined by the desire to reach heaven, allowing them to feel their actions, at least potentially, neither independent nor wholly under the fantasies that essentially make them work.<sup>19</sup>

The presence of a gap can make it possible to obtain the correct setting. However, it requires collective will to reach the right setting through deconstruction. To achieve this goal, educational theater can simultaneously be active in creating appropriate settings. One of the tasks of this type of theater, at least until the creation of a fully appropriate setting, is to create a setting and simultaneously step in and work in it. The facilitator/teacher can help them create an appropriate context by teaching them a synchronic/diachronic perspective and the ability to identify and exploit historical gaps.

The second condition, after creating an appropriate setting, is that the facilitators/teachers should be ready for

<sup>16</sup> Aida Basiri, *Peyvasteği Va Gosasteği-ye Farhangi Dar Teatr-e Iran* (Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications, 2019), 121.

<sup>17</sup> Basiri, *Peyvasteği Va Gosasteği-ye Farhangi Dar Teatr-e Iran*, 186.

<sup>18</sup> Basiri, *Peyvasteği Va Gosasteği-ye Farhangi Dar Teatr-e Iran*, 186.

<sup>19</sup> James R. Martel *Khoshoonat-e Elahi* (Walter Benjamin Va Farjamshenasi Hakemiat), trans. Siavash Talaeizadeh (Tehran: Shabkhez Publications, 2020), 186.

training. The training discussed in this research is not equivalent to normal instruction, as mentioned earlier. The facilitator/teacher must have insight and ingenuity to perceive things differently, and teach their audience this other way of seeing. Boal in *The Legislative Theater* makes Archimedes and Freire an example of how they saw and discovered something obvious to them that no one had noticed before. The facilitator/teacher should be equipped with a critical vision and a thinking technique based on analysis, historical knowledge, and dramatic skills. He must seek to expose the secret of thinking systems that are ingrained in the minds with historical backgrounds. The characteristic of disclosure is a characteristic that Boal essentially expresses in his definition of educational theater:

*While advertising theater always dealt with the most pressing topics, educational theater, which was also experienced in popular cultural centers as well as in professional groups such as the Sao Paulo Arena, focused on the more general dilemmas. The purpose of this type of theater was to prepare people for a special event, such as a vote, strike, or demonstration, with practical and theoretical training. This type of theater embraces a theme called Justice. We knew that the ruling classes were always seeking to apply their moral values to their subordinates. So they try to convince everyone that justice is a universal thing while concealing the fact that they have entrusted the task of prescribing and executing this justice to them. The justice system, which, in their opinion, should be the only justice system there is.*<sup>20</sup>

The facilitator/teacher should also adopt behavioral techniques in which the audience does not feel that they are not acting on their own, or that they are in a lower position. The facilitator/teacher must also be successful in creating a democratic and dialogue-centric environment practically because dialogue as discussed earlier can easily become a persuasion contest. Therefore, it will be a huge burden on the facilitator/teacher. He will become a key member of this type of theater at the community level.

The third condition is that this type of theater should refrain from joining the education system and remain independent. This is because, as mentioned, the education system as an institution is also based on specific thinking assumptions and the negation of other assumptions. Iranian educational theater should be fundamentally opposed to any presuppositions and should be taught to deconstruct them. As a result, it must also exist without any preconception goals or ideologies. This type of theater must be a gap in itself to succeed in showing this gap. Another condition that arises following the previous condition is that this type of theater should use up-to-date and somehow avant-garde dramatic methods for its educational purposes. Applied theater is also an unconventional theater, but this uncommonness is somehow more exaggerated to be used for educational purposes. For instance, this type of theater can use the experiences of other artistic mediums or other applied theater categories and branches for its purposes. Democracy, among its usefulness in general, is useful for education, for the formation of educational theater, and its relation to other branches and majors of art. Democracy can help share ideas and opinions not only among experts but also among participants, and this could lead to an atmosphere of shared thoughts that work toward the same end.

The final condition is that the educational theater for its success and persistence must have a dynamic form, both in its superstructure and infrastructure. This type of theater must constantly be learning, deconstructing, improving, and building itself repeatedly. Trial and error are inevitable stages of learning. Boal and Freire also highlight active education, educational theater must teach and also learn.

Mentioning a practical example that complies with the standards mentioned in this research in Iran can be a challenging, if not impossible task. However, examples somewhat close to this have been found among the performances of theater for repressed individuals for prisoners, which have taken place in Iran. One prominent facilitator in the execution of theater in correctional centers and prisons is Fouad Ebrahimiyan. In his master's thesis entitled "Social Aspects of Theater for Suppressed Individuals in Iran," he reports on his efforts, with one example mentioned, which will effectively illustrate the elements mentioned in this research. In these examples, the author explains how he and his colleagues integrated the concept of education for adults into their practical work<sup>21</sup>:

The experience of performing artistic work with prison beneficiaries dates back to 2006. After completing my bachelor's degree, I was invited to collaborate with the Provincial Prison Administration in Hamadan. After about two decades of various artistic experiences with prison beneficiaries in several provinces and cities, one of the most impactful of them can undoubtedly be counted as the theater for repressed individuals.

During performing theater for repressed individuals among prisoners and with the presence of consultants, officials, guests, etc., we have witnessed many times that prisoners could critique the officials' views without self-censorship, present suggestions for improvement, and the prison authorities welcomed this issue. This significantly strengthens pre-action thinking, precisely targeting the missing link for those who have repeatedly returned to prison after regaining their freedom.

The execution method of theater for repressed individuals with prison beneficiaries was conducted in two ways. The

<sup>20</sup> Boal, *Teatr-e Ghanoongozar (Estefade Az Honar-e Ejra Baraye Siasatvarzi)*, 353.

<sup>21</sup> Fouad Ebrahimiyan, "Nemood Ha-ye Ejetmaee-ye Teatr-e Sarkoobshodegan Dar Iran" (Master's Thesis, Payame Noor University, 2023).

first method involved training five beneficiaries in a model theater with specific themes, all prepared for their challenges, crises, and tribulations. After preparation, the model theater was performed with the desired participation among the prisoners.

The second method involved the presence of a joker without an executive group, and the model theater was performed by the community in question.

### **-2-2-1-3-4 Writing Experiment: Performance of Oppressed in Prison with Violent Offenders - Coincidence**

In coordination with the Cultural and Educational Administration of Hamedan Central Prison, inmates convicted of violent crimes gathered in the meeting hall. At my request, rather than taking the stage, the actors and jokers arranged themselves in a large circle, creating a fieldwork-style performance within the circle of spectators. Two prison consultants and psychologists were present to observe the performance, and cameras were set up to film the session simultaneously. As the joker of the show, I entered the circle, which included about 70 individuals, and began the performance. I started by explaining the concept of the Theater of the Oppressed and asked everyone to stand up to begin the play. I chose a group game with a strong fantasy element to encourage full participation and engagement. I then asked each participant to recall the first word or sentence that came to mind regarding their crime. Almost all expressed regret, with only a very few exceptions. One young individual, however, did not express regret and even felt pride in his actions, believing he could be a suitable subject for future performances. Some participants chose to describe the memory of the day they committed their crime, and they were allowed to recount the details of those memories. Although the crimes shared similarities, they were sometimes surprised by the different methods each had used.

Continuing, I stated the following: “Sometimes we make decisions in life that influence us for many years. We might choose to elevate our lives to bring them down. The ability to make the right decision in critical moments or control ourselves during times of crisis can drastically change our lives. Conversely, a wrong decision made thoughtlessly can disrupt everything.” I explained that one such situation, reconstructed from reality by their peers, would be presented for them to carefully observe. The play was performed, and the audience watched attentively. Afterward, I summarized the “Pattern Theater” method for the actors and asked them to reflect on where the story went wrong, ultimately leading to murder. After some consideration, they began offering their thoughts. I invited one of them to step into the circle and specify exactly where they thought changes should be made. Though initially hesitant, with encouragement from the audience and fellow actors, they eventually joined the performance.

In the first show, several participants shared their perspectives by entering the circle and acting out their suggestions. After each participation, the rest of the group was asked for feedback on the individual’s contribution, and all opinions were subject to critique.

The audience was excited by the opportunity to actively engage in the performance, and their response was overwhelmingly positive. This session lasted for over 3 hours, exploring various aspects of anger and control, and effectively transforming these emotions into the performance. Before the start, we held a brief concern session with the group to gather their feedback on the format, but as their participation unfolded, those concerns dissipated.

### **-3-2-1-3-4 Observations Accepted by the group - Coincidence**

- Quick Contact with the police: It was commonly believed that contacting the police could alleviate psychological burdens on both parties involved.

- Proper Interaction with the Opponent and Patience: The group believed that when faced with aggression, individuals should encourage the opponent to remain calm and avoid escalating the confrontation. In case of excessive dispute, contacting the police promptly was recommended to signal that the individual was seeking to de-escalate the situation.

- Practice of Maintaining Calmness: This approach emphasizes the importance of maintaining calmness even in the most challenging circumstances. Techniques such as counting numbers or sending prayers were suggested as methods to practice calmness.

- Encouraging Calmness in others: Some participants believed that instead of provoking friends or companions, they should encourage them to remain calm. Most participants agreed that most conflicts escalate due to the reactions of bystanders. They emphasized that if friends, companions, or even supervisors act quickly and effectively, crises can be prevented.

- Criticism of Passersby Indifference: Some participants criticized the indifference of passersby, suggesting that if they had encouraged both sides to calm down at the outset, conflicts would have been resolved more swiftly.

- Handling Strong Disputes: In situations where the opponent strongly insists on arguing, the group recommended

not only contacting the police but also playing a role in de-escalating the situation. For instance, one could randomly dial a number and inform an imaginary person of the incident. Additionally, subtly suggesting that the opponent is expecting friends to arrive soon, friends who are aware of the incident, can often lead the opponent to calm down, knowing they are not alone and that others are on their way.

## Conclusion

This study explored the application of educational theater to adult audiences in Iranian society from a historical-social perspective, using deconstruction as a lens. By introducing Jacques Derrida's view and elements of Walter Benjamin's ideas as theoretical frameworks, and by examining a specific period of Iranian history, the study addressed two research questions: First, what element underscores the necessity of such a theater in Iranian society? Second, how and under what conditions can this type of theater be realized in Iran?

To explain its necessity, the author explained the appropriate form of education in educational theater through the perspectives of Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire, identifying a historical gap and outlining four essential conditions for the realization of this type of theater in Iran. These conditions are as follows:

- The historical and social context should inherently demand the use of this type of theater.
- Facilitators/teachers should be adequately trained and prepared.
- This form of theater should remain independent and avoid integration into the formal education system.
- It should employ contemporary and avant-garde dramatic methods for educational purposes.
- For educational theater to succeed and persist, it must maintain a dynamic structure, both in its superstructure and infrastructure.

Additionally, the researcher provided a practical example of theater performed in a prison setting, which closely aligns with the concept introduced in this study.

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## Studying the Zar ritual in Hormozgan and Its Correlation with Jacob L. Moreno's Theories in Psychodrama

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### ABSTRACT

Jacob Levi Moreno (1889–1974), an Austrian psychologist and psychiatrist, made significant contributions to his field through innovative therapeutic approaches. By integrating sociological research with clinical practice, Moreno developed psychodrama, a method inspired by the dramatic potential and immersive environment of theater. This technique fosters spontaneity and facilitates the patient's confrontation with their inner truth. Key principles of psychodrama, such as communication, emotional expression, and externalization, are crucial in therapeutic interventions. This study aims to explore Moreno's theories and their application to personality evolution during the Zar ritual practiced by the Ahl-e Hava community in Hormozgan. This study seeks to determine how personality development observed in patients and participants of the Ahl-e Hava aligns with Moreno's perspectives.

**Keywords:** Psychodrama, Zar ritual, Jacob Levi Moreno, Spontaneity, Creativity

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## Introduction

The “Zar” ritual has been practiced for many years as a therapeutic tradition in the southern, southeastern, and eastern regions of Iran. The origins of many physical ailments in these areas were often unknown to the general population, leading them to attribute these conditions to supernatural forces referred to as “wind.” In Hormozgan, it is believed that these winds manifest in various forms, including animals and objects, and they can possess individuals. Those who are physically weak are said to succumb to these forces, allowing their bodies to become vessels for the wind.<sup>1</sup> The methods used in the Zar ritual bear significant similarities to those used in psychodrama, particularly in their shared focus on personality evolution. Psychodrama, developed by Jacob Levi Moreno, is a therapeutic approach designed to address emotional dysfunctions by compensating for the limitations of verbal expression. Through techniques like “role switching,” psychodrama enables patients to look into their internal issues, establish connections between past and present experiences, and anticipate their influence on future events. The approach emphasizes creativity, spontaneity, dynamism, and sociometric principles, aiming to elicit intuitive, emotional, and behavioral responses during therapy. Although psychodrama shares commonalities with therapeutic theater, it is distinct in its exclusive application within psychotherapy. While therapeutic theater may be used in various contexts, psychodrama specifically addresses a patient’s life story and a defined situation. Furthermore, therapeutic theater typically involves the patient’s full awareness of the dramatic scenario and active participation, whereas psychodrama focuses on the psyche. In psychodrama, the patient may not be fully aware of their dramatic context and is introduced as a central character by the therapist. This study aims to analyze Jacob Levi Moreno’s perspective to underscore the importance of dramatic elements in therapy and their effect on the unconscious. Recreating specific scenarios or environments through dramatic elements facilitates memory recall and internal confrontation in patients. A similar unconscious process is observed in the Zar ritual, making it an important area of study for indigenous therapies. The study’s significance lies in its potential to enhance psychotherapy practices in indigenous regions like Hormozgan. Traditional treatments in such areas rely heavily on the patient’s psyche, and a lack of specialized knowledge in this field could lead to severe consequences. Incorporating psychodramatic principles into the local belief systems of Hormozgan may yield meaningful therapeutic outcomes. By transcending social traditions and conventional limitations, Moreno explored the various nature of human behavior and emphasized the importance of action in its various dimensions. This research underscores the importance of human action within ritual practices, analyzing it through the lens of psychodramatic philosophy. Emphasizing psychoanalysis as a therapeutic approach and exploring the evolution of personality among Ahl-e Hava participants provide valuable insights into indigenous therapeutic methods. This study aims to answer the following questions: What is the philosophy of personality evolution in psychodramatic therapy and among Ahl-e Hava participants in the Zar ritual? What are the fundamental differences between the patient-therapist relationship in psychodrama and rituals? How do local beliefs shape the collective wisdom of society, and in what direction do they guide it? In what ways do the study and application of psychodramatic techniques influence the ritual experience in the Hormozgan region?

## Theoretical Considerations

The study of therapeutic rituals, particularly the Zar ritual, emphasizes the individual and their relationship with the surrounding community. This study examines human interactions within the Ahl-e Hava society through the theoretical framework of Jacob Levi Moreno, specifically his philosophy of confrontation and mental purification. Moreno introduced psychodrama as a psychological treatment modality in the late 1920s, following World War I. The approach aimed to replace verbal expression with action as a means of therapy. Dissatisfied with traditional psychotherapy methods, which he deemed ineffective, Moreno focused on reconstructing truth by realizing the mind’s reality. This process, he believed, enabled patients to progress to new, beneficial stages of treatment by altering behavioral patterns through psychodrama techniques. His extensive work culminated in a three-volume series titled *Psychodrama*. Psychodrama, a branch of psychotherapy, externalizes the patient’s internal trauma through enactment, often in group settings. Giacomochi highlights the roots of group therapy,<sup>2</sup> crediting Dr. Joseph Pratt, who in 1905 organized sessions with 15 tuberculosis patients in Boston. These sessions, initially educational, revealed significant therapeutic benefits as patients shared experiences and successes. Pratt observed that this collective exchange was more impactful than individual therapy, particularly because healed patients inspired courage in those still undergoing treatment.

<sup>1</sup> Zahra Apaand; Zhila Moshiri, “Gone Shenasi-e Darmangaran-e Sonati Dar Navahi-e Jonubi-e Iran (Motalee Moredi Ostan-e Hormozgan).” *Journal of Medical History* 6 (2011), 142-143.

<sup>2</sup> Scott Giacomucci, *Social work, sociometry, and psychodrama: Experiential approaches for group therapists, community leaders, and social workers* (Springer Nature: 2021), 31.

As a pioneer in group therapy, Moreno initiated his sessions in 1913 with a small community of prostitutes. Following this experience, he recognized society's profound influence on individual emotions. His emphasis on group therapy was grounded in the belief that isolated individuals adopt fixed, one-dimensional roles. Moreno asserted,<sup>3</sup> "Group research is a necessary prerequisite for group therapy. In any therapeutic situation, there are at least two individuals involved, such as the therapist and the client. Therefore, the interaction taking place is the first point of consideration. Moreno regards community as the fundamental aspect of understanding the individual. This perspective is based on a specific viewpoint regarding humanity. According to Moreno, "the therapeutic potential of one group member helping another and of one group helping another" is central to human development. He considers society to be the most fundamental point of the individual's cognition. However, in his attitude toward humanity and society, Moreno expresses theories distinct from Freud's and, in some respects, offers substantial criticism of Freud's ideas. In his 1947 book, "The Spontaneous Theater," Moreno articulated his main concern: the enslavement of humanity to technology. He posited that activating individual creativity was the only means of confronting this issue. Unlike Freud, who asserted that sexual desire is the ultimate driving force in human affairs, Moreno introduced spontaneity and individual creativity as the primary human stimulus. He argued that humanity must establish a principled structure for societal progress to achieve a better quality of life. Rejecting Freud's notion that humans are savage animals beneath a thin veneer of civilization, Moreno described humans as social and altruistic beings who consistently strive for the welfare of others.<sup>4</sup> Based on these principles, it can be interpreted that Moreno prioritizes spiritual considerations in personality development over physical and instinctual aspects, interpreting human personality as deriving from the spirit. A review of Moreno's theories suggests that creativity represents the initial stage of human flourishing and self-awareness. Through creativity, individuals gain the opportunity to break free from mental frameworks and social conventions, advancing in line with their subconscious. The dominance of the subconscious in decision-making leads to a stage Moreno identified as spontaneity. Moreno's psychodrama therapy aimed to rekindle spontaneity and revitalize lost creativity while examining human social connection. In actions involving group interactions, the dynamics of action and reaction serve as critical points for research and investigation in psychodrama. The present study explores Moreno's ideas, interprets his theories about the human psyche, and examines similar elements in the philosophy of psychodrama and ritual.

## Literature Review

Despite the apparent similarities between psychodrama and rituals, there has been limited research specifically dedicated to this topic. Most studies have focused on the philosophy of rituals and their formation, often examining key elements, such as music, within the context of Ahl-e Hava's therapeutic practices. The earliest written documentation on ritual in Iran can be found in Gholamhossein Sa'edi's book *Ahl-e Hava* (1966), which explores the traditions and legends narrated by the inhabitants of southern Iran. This work specifically discusses the types of winds and the philosophy of the "Majles" in the Hormozgan region. Nasser Taghvaei's documentary "Bad-e Jen" (1969), filmed in Bandar Lengeh, serves as another critical reference, visually capturing the proceedings of the "Majles." Another notable contribution is Ali Riahi's book "Zar, Wind and Baluch" (1977), which delves into the historical background of the Baluchis in the Sistan and Baluchestan region. By classifying the winds associated with the "Majles," Riahi offers a detailed introduction to the ritual and its components. These two books are foundational due to their reliability and role in documenting the nature and practice of rituals in Iran for the first time. Additionally, Bahram Beyzaie's film "Bashu the Little Stranger" (1985) visually portrays elements of these ceremonies. In the field of psychotherapy, Jacob Levy Moreno's three-volume book "Psychodrama" (1972) comprehensively explains the philosophy and methods of psychodrama. Zand Moghaddam (1999) highlights the collective efforts of southern Iranian communities in treating individuals and emphasizes gender equality during the "Majles." Further contributions include Khabari et al.'s (2006) series of four plays: "Flowers and Jars," "Mirror in the Ceiling," "Turquoise Singing," "Moonlit Women," and "Sunny Men," which reflect ritualistic themes within their narratives. Appand et al. (2011) introduce the traditional therapeutic practices of southern Iranian healers, particularly the roles of Mam Zar and Baba Zar and their treatment approaches.

Zavieh et al. (2013) analyzed the cultural roots of the Ahl-e Hava, highlighting the perceived inefficacy of conventional science and the influence of religious beliefs on local healing practices. Raei (2014) examines the profound impact of supernatural beings on the customs of southern Iranian communities. Karelian et al. (2016) draw the first comparisons between the executive elements of rituals and psychodrama, presenting a preliminary algorithm for understanding their

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Levy Moreno, *Reflections on My Method of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama. Experimentation and Innovation in Psychotherapy*, 1963, 149.

<sup>4</sup> Giacomucci, *Social work, sociometry, and psychodrama: Experiential approaches for group therapists, community leaders, and social workers*, 31.

shared dramatic properties. Gharehsou (2019) investigated the therapeutic role of music within rituals, while Zavieh et al. (2020) expanded on the therapeutic aspect of rituals, linking them to a religious perspective.

This study aims to build on this foundation by introducing a new discussion that integrates Moreno's views into an understanding of the Zar ritual. While prior research has focused on the historical, cultural, and narrative dimensions of Zar rituals, there has been little emphasis on the scientific and philosophical aspects of personality transformation in possessed individuals. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the therapeutic elements of Zar rituals through the lens of psychodrama, offering a fresh perspective on this underexplored topic.

## Zar Ritual

As civilizations evolved, the philosophy of disease has often intertwined with local and religious beliefs. This connection imbued rituals with a sense of sacredness, granting mythical authority to local therapists over centuries. These rituals were conducted following a predetermined hierarchy, aiming to achieve common objectives, primarily healing and wellness.<sup>5</sup> Designed to unearth repressed desires, the rituals unconsciously drained emotional tensions, thus proving effective in alleviating mental illness. Among these, the Zar ritual emerged explicitly as a healing practice. As Gharasoo notes:

*Many scholars who have studied Zar in different parts of Africa believe that he is of Ethiopian origin. These scholars argue that during the 17th and 18th centuries, it was introduced by slaves, especially women, who were taken to other countries. As a migratory ritual, Zar spread to the Persian Gulf region in the east and the wealthy Egyptian courts in the north.<sup>6</sup>*

In Hormozgan, Zar rituals are rooted in the belief systems of the local inhabitants, particularly concerning the presence of supernatural forces, including jinn and ghosts. These entities, referred to as "wind" in southern Iran, manifest in different forms, with "Zar" being one of them. Traditional therapists, widely respected in Hormozgan and other southern Iranian regions, address illnesses by drawing upon cultural beliefs and employing medicinal plants native to the region. The enduring influence of shamanistic practices is evident in the typology of diseases and their treatments. Key figures in Zar healing practices are Baba Zar and Mama Zar, the indigenous healers who mediate between the Zar and the afflicted individual. These healers organize a ritual known as "Majles-e Bazi," presiding over it to ensure the afflicted individual's liberation from malevolent forces. This ceremony exemplifies the unique intersection of cultural, spiritual, and therapeutic practices.

## Music's Role in Majles-e Bazi

The "winds" in Zar rituals are categorized into two primary groups: Kafar (pagan or infidel) and Muslim. They can be further divided into three subgroups: African and non-Muslim, Noban (Egyptian and Muslim), and Shaykhs (Arab and Muslim). As these winds traveled from Africa to the Iranian coast, they carried their cultural narratives and rituals, which integrated with Islamic practices to create new traditions. For instance, the "Mutaharat" ceremonies of the Ahl-e Hava share noticeable similarities with the Islamic Muharram rituals. The influence of African culture is particularly evident in Hormozgan's collective wisdom and musical traditions. Many Mama Zars, Baba Zars, and elders of the Ahl-e Hava in this region are of African descent.<sup>7</sup> Their cultural heritage has significantly shaped the music, instruments, and native poetry associated with Zar rituals. The therapeutic power of music has been recognized for centuries; in ancient Greece, for instance, the god Apollo was believed to harmonize human health through music. Similarly, music holds a central role in the Zar ritual, harmonizing and balancing the spiritual state of the participants.

Daf and Dohol are the two main instruments of Majles-e Bazi. In Hormozgan, each "wind" has its music and only responds to that specific music. It is expressed in the form of the person whose body it has taken over. Mama/Baba Zar, through music, identifies the type of "wind" and chooses a specific method of coping or confronting, depending on whether it is good or evil. If the "wind" belongs to a Muslim group, Mama/Baba Zar mediates to achieve harmony with the "wind" and allows it to remain in the host's body. However, if the "wind" is associated with infidelity or malevolence, it must be expelled from the person's body permanently.

In the Zar ritual, music serves a crucial purpose. One essential condition for its proper effect is performing it within a ritualistic environment. The primary role of music in this ceremony is to affirm the ritual significance of the instruments and behaviors, signaling the commencement of the Majles. The second role is to summon the "winds." The Ahl-e Huva

<sup>5</sup> Saeed Zavieh, Mehdi Asl Marz, Iraj Dadashi, "Jaygah-e Ayinha Dar Darman-e Bimariha Ba Moghayese Araye Malinowski va Eliade Darbare Mahiat va Karkarde Ayin (Motalee Moredi; Hormozgan Va Khuzestan)," *Iranian Journal of Anthropological Research* 10 no.20 (2020): 81.

<sup>6</sup> Maryam Gharasoo, "Shenod-e Musighi Dar Ayin-e Zar," *Fine Arts* 24 no. 2 (2019): 68.

<sup>7</sup> Saedi Gholamhossein, *Ahl-e-Hava* (Tehran: Institute of Social Studies and Research Publications, 1966), 23-24.

believe that “winds” awake upon hearing music and enter the ceremonial space through the vibrations of the instruments. Consequently, during the ceremony, attendees are advised never to sit with their backs to the instruments. As part of the ritual, participants touched the instruments upon entering the chamber to receive blessings and then touched their faces. The most important and objective function of music in these sessions is its therapeutic role. By creating a distinct atmosphere, it induces a unique state in both the patient and the audience, which many anthropological studies refer to as an altered level of consciousness. This altered state closely resembles the trance state, further underscoring the transformative power of the Zar ritual’s music.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Zar Ritual as Performance**

The “Zar” is one of the types of wind with no material essence, which becomes tangible only when it possesses a body. Winds are believed to choose the souls and bodies of vulnerable individuals, inhabiting them. When someone exhibits diverse and persistent symptoms of physical or mental disorder and fails to find healing through conventional treatments, charms, or prayers, they are often said by many in southern Iran, especially in Hormozgan, to have become the “carriage” of one of these winds. These winds are categorized into various groups, which are generally divided into two main categories: Muslim and non-Muslim (infidel). Each category carries distinct characteristics and traits, which also reflect religious affiliation. The treatment of these winds is handled by a Mama/Baba Zar, who specializes in a particular type of wind, with each healer having specific expertise in driving out a particular wind and delegating a specific area of the body and causing harm at predetermined points. As a result, the selection of the Mama/Baba Zar and the way the ritual is conducted are influenced by the symptoms displayed by the afflicted individual.

Upon diagnosing Zar possession, the first step involves washing the afflicted person’s body and keeping them secluded for seven days. This seclusion serves to shield the person from external influence, particularly interactions with non-mahram individuals, as defined by Islamic principles. During this period, a special potion, prepared by the Mama/Baba Zar, is administered. After seven days of seclusion, a girl known as “Khizrani” from the community visits the homes of those suffering from Zar to invite participants to the ritual gathering. On the appointed day, large platters are arranged with a variety of foods, aromatic herbs, and the blood of the Zar sacrifice. This sacrifice is typically a goat, whose head is severed before the ceremony, and its blood is brought to the table. The afflicted individual is required to consume a small amount of this blood, which is believed to enable the Zar to speak through them during the ritual.<sup>9</sup>

Once the type of wind has been identified by the Mama/Baba Zar, music and songs related to the wind are played and sung throughout the ceremony. The afflicted person, wearing a white cloth, sits next to the Mama/Baba Zar as the music begins. Ahl-e Hava, the community members, sit in a circle around them. Gradually, the afflicted person’s movements become more intense, eventually reaching a point of trance. At this stage, they begin to speak in the voice of the wind that has possessed them, voicing their demands. Once these requests are met, the Mama/Baba Zar requests that the wind release the afflicted person and cease its harm. The wind then exits the body, and the person returns to their natural state.<sup>10</sup> The ceremony continues until the wind has spoken, which may require several consecutive days.

### **The Zar Ritual from a Psychological Perspective**

The Zar is regarded, in the popular opinion of the people of Hormozgan, as a force that primarily targets the weak and underserved members of society. According to local beliefs, economically and physically disadvantaged groups are more susceptible than others, making their bodies suitable habitats for the inhabitation of “winds.”<sup>11</sup> This perspective reflects an underlying acknowledgment of class differences. The subordinate stratum of Hormozgan society, often composed of the working class and labor crews, unconsciously views itself as lacking credibility and value compared to the wealthier strata. This self-perception can manifest as depression, isolation, or other forms of mental illness. One defense mechanism for coping with this isolation is to seek attention in spaces in order to gain social recognition. For the lower class of Hormozgan, who have often experienced rejection and a lack of spatial belonging, the ritual becomes a means of reclaiming status and value within the community. Central to this process is “role switching,” a crucial element in the formation of the Majles-e Bazi (ritual performance). A person afflicted with Zar adopts the role of the “wind,” possessing their body, allowing them to temporarily experience power and authority in a public setting. In the first stage of the ritual, the afflicted person imagines themselves as a powerful force to which human will must

<sup>8</sup> Gharasoo, “Shenod-e Musighi Dar Ayin-e Zar,” 71.

<sup>9</sup> Gholamhossein, *Ahl-e-Hava*, 44-45.

<sup>10</sup> Gholamhossein, *Ahl-e-Hava*, 47.

<sup>11</sup> Gholamhossein, *Ahl-e-Hava*, 9.

surrender. In the subsequent stages, they engage in a symbolic battle, either defeating and expelling the force from their body or reaching a peaceful coexistence with it. This coexistence transforms the “wind” into an inner strength that offers constant companionship and assistance. Both scenarios result in the individual gaining a renewed sense of identity and credibility.<sup>12</sup> The ritual ultimately serves as a psychological framework for personal transformation. By confronting and overcoming the Zar, participants experience a shift in their sense of self, evolving into individuals who feel empowered and capable. This evolution fosters the experience of living from a position of power, offering psychological relief and social validation.

### Founder of Psychodrama

The Austrian psychiatrist Jacob Levi Moreno was born into a Jewish family and raised in a traditional and religious environment. Religion played an important role in shaping Moreno’s thoughts, influencing his inclination toward divine ideas. As a child, Moreno portrayed the role of God in a group game, an experience he later regarded as his first close encounter with psychotherapy. The profound impact of World War I marked a turning point in his spiritual and religious experiences. Moreno’s interest in the primacy of personal experience and the role of action in understanding led him to embark on research in psychotherapy.<sup>13</sup>

In traditional psychotherapy sessions, dialogue between the patient and therapist typically forms the main focus of treatment, with therapeutic concepts conveyed primarily through speech. Over time, Moreno recognized the importance of the concealed dimensions of a patient’s psyche. He observed that humans are instinctively capable of movement from birth, even before acquiring language, using actions to interact and express their needs. Thus, he posited that analyzing personality development through the study of actions and behavior provided a closer approximation to psychological reality than verbal analysis alone. He viewed this as a critical shortfall of conventional psychotherapy methods and advocated for “showing” as a superior alternative to verbal expression. By reducing the reliance on language, a unique space is created for processing actions and their interactions with others. The exploration and analysis of these interactions in psychodrama underscores the importance of collective presence in shaping personality.

As Ronaghi Khamenei noted, “Moreno believed that the social dimension is a fundamental component of personality; personality is not merely an internal and isolated construct but also a set of social roles.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, defining an individual and their personality is inseparable from human interactions and societal context. Understanding personality requires analyzing societal structures and the relationships within them. Moreno emphasized the human psyche, identifying action as the primary means of understanding it, and coined this innovative approach as psychodrama. In traditional psychotherapy, the emphasis lies on explaining *why* an event occurred. In contrast, Moreno’s method emphasizes *how* events unfold. By reconstructing past events, the approach examines influencing factors and their formation, enabling a more precise reevaluation of characters and events. This process fosters new dimensions of understanding and perception for the patient.

### Psychodrama

As a medical student in Vienna, Jacob Levi Moreno began developing the idea that would later lead to the establishment of psychodrama therapy. He saw children as a source of inspiration for his vision of mental truth and social connections. In 1941, Moreno introduced psychotherapy at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, and three years later, he founded the American Psychotherapy and Group Therapy Association.

Time plays an important role in psychodrama therapy sessions. One key task of therapists is to help clarify the concept of time in the patient’s mind. Most psychodrama sessions are conducted in groups, where the elements aim to bridge the past, present, and future of the patient.<sup>15</sup> The relationship between these timeframes and their effect on the client’s behaviors and decisions is a central theme. Emphasizing the past and present serves the purpose of safeguarding a future that, although yet to unfold, is shaped by these dimensions. Treating psychological trauma in psychodrama significantly impacts future actions. The community and the relationships formed among individuals are critical points of focus in psychodrama therapy. Moreno sought to raise awareness of the dangers of adopting a singular perspective. In psychodrama, the patient’s performance within a communal setting is examined. This practice encourages clients to explore multidirectional relationships and rehearse interactions within a community. To deepen

<sup>12</sup> Mitra Khajeian, Mohammad Reza Khaki, Parviz Azad Fallah, “Psychodrama Dar Zare Motalee Tatbighi Do Shive Darmani Ayin-e Zar (Sonati) Va Psychodrama (Modern)”, *Theatre Journal* 67 (2016), 53.

<sup>13</sup> Moreno, “Reflections on My Method of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama. Experimentation and Innovation in Psychotherapy”, 13-14.

<sup>14</sup> Jafar Ronaghi Khamenei, “Karbord-e Goruh Sanji Dar Moshavere Va Rahnamayi-e Tahsil”, *Teaching Literature* 79 (1993), 26.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Daigneault, “Psychodrama: Review and Analysis,” Website: stars.library.ucf.edu, 16.01.1977.

their understanding of these dynamics, patients are often challenged by being asked to assume another person's role. This exercise enables them to experience the situation from a different perspective, facilitating new insights into their emotions and sub-personalities.

Creating a theatrical atmosphere with elements that reconstruct specific places or events allows patients to recall meaningful situations from their lives, transforming internal realities into tangible experiences within the therapeutic setting. The main difference between role-playing in psychodrama and acting in traditional theater lies in the intent: while acting involves identifying with an imaginary character, psychodrama focuses on psychological transformation. Patients play roles in uncovering unknown dimensions and motivations within themselves, aiding in the healing and purification process. Moreno suggested using circular or semicircular stages, inspired by classical Greek theater, to enhance communication and interaction between patients and therapists. Stage props are employed only when they contribute to recreating a particular setting or situation.

Moreno first viewed himself as a social worker and believed that humans mirror the divine essence within themselves. His philosophy diverged from certain psychoanalytic theories. Moreno argued that creativity and spontaneity are essential for effecting change, emphasizing that human actions drive insight and innovation. He often criticized Freud's methods, deeming them insufficient, and claimed to have started his work where Freud left off. According to Moreno, Freud's greatest limitation was treating patients in the artificial environment of his office, as Moreno believed therapy should occur in the natural settings of patients' lives. Moreno encouraged people to dream and described humans as "cosmic beings." Through his concept of human nature, he distanced himself from traditional pathological approaches and advocated for therapeutic groups to empower individuals. It can be argued that Moreno aimed to use theater as a vehicle for social transformation.<sup>16</sup>

### **A Study of Personality Development in the Zar Ritual Based on Jacob Levi Moreno's View**

The logic concerning the factors affecting the treatment of patients in psychodrama and rituals is largely similar. Thus, it is possible to consider the person affected by the disease as akin to a modern therapist and analyze changes in their formation through the philosophy of treatment from Moreno's perspective. In the initial stage, Moreno emphasized the need for a definite and accurate insight into the individual. He identified a human being within a group as the mediator of factors such as spontaneity and creativity, which activate its internal roles and guide actions. Moreno emphasizes the importance of dialogue, viewing words as a medium for self-confrontation and interaction with others.

The significance of collective gatherings is undeniable in the Zar ritual. Holding the ceremony in a group setting underscores the necessity of community involvement. The Ahl-e Hava (people of the air) find strength in plurality. These people see their greatest power concerning the defeat of supernatural forces in mass communication. The person with the disease seeks to play a role among the people who formed their habitat. Gaining a respectable place in Ahl-e Hava's society is linked to the mass communication of these people in Majles-e Bazi. Therefore, the affected person will exert their utmost effort to be proud and win in these Majles. Mama/Baba Zar is based on dialogue with Muslim or pagan forces. According to what happens in psychodrama, peace in ritual is also meaningful and a triumph in the formation of successful verbal communication. In psychodrama, this is a direct relationship between the patient and the therapist, but in ritual, the patient requires the presence of an intermediary to communicate with the "wind." The interactions and relationships formed between the patient and other factors in both treatments are the most essential elements for the treatment and treatment stages.

Moreno believed that humans are constantly moving toward self-actualization because, throughout their lives, they face the challenges of being and acting and thus have an innate desire to interact. Formed interactions directly affect human emotions, the soul, and the body and are considerable from this perspective. Moreno makes the universe a collection of interconnected atoms and knows that they form networks and a community.<sup>17</sup>

The human response to life stimuli is based on external and internal data derived from various experiences in specific situations. From birth, human beings experience an innate sense of dependency by going through stages of development. The infant takes and plays different roles in life without the ability to make informed decisions and then experiences a world in which the distinction between experience and representation is revealed. At this stage, the child has a relative awareness of their social roles and raises many questions concerning their existence. The child develops self-development and dynamics in the role of the child through the questions raised. Interactions are important in learning roles.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Giacomucci, *Social work, sociometry, and psychodrama: Experiential approaches for group therapists, community leaders, and social workers*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Jacob Levy Moreno, *Sociometry, Experimental Method and the Science of Society* (New York: Beacon House, 1951), 11.

<sup>18</sup> Norbert Apter, "The human being: J.L. Moreno's vision in psychodrama," *International Journal of Psychotherapy* 8, no. 1 (2003), 33.

The roles that people encounter throughout their lives can be divided into several categories. These roles can be physical, cultural, social, or dramatic, depending on the imagination. Moreno believes that the biggest contributor to mental health disruption is being placed in patterns that cause an uninterrupted repetition of a role. Relying on a fixed role eliminates the patient's action and creativity and renders them incapable of creating a new situation. In the Hormozgan region, due to cultural and economic conditions, most children who belong to the lower class of society engage in family business from an early age. Not spending childhood in the usual way destroys imagination to a significant extent. The games created by children prepare them to accept real roles in society, while the elimination of a large part of childhood and the adoption of heavy responsibilities at an early age will lead children to a large extent to become one-sided.

Therefore, the social chain of the Hormozgan underclass is limited to people who have experienced the same conditions and have the same priorities. According to Moreno's theories, these people are impaired from the perspective of mental health because they have been in the cycle of repetition throughout their lives and are limited to a few predetermined roles, so there has been no useful communication and interaction with them. The greatest loss for this group of society can be seen in their lack of experience in dramatic roles. The imagination in this stratum is largely destroyed by immersion into social roles. The importance of the ritual is that it creates a suitable platform for these people to experience dramatic roles. The special privilege that Ahl-e Hava receives at this event is to experience a new situation that does not exist in their daily lives. By changing their roles, a person with Zar recognizes gaps in their life and confronts them. In Majles-e Bazi, the affected person has the opportunity to have the vision of power by playing the role of a powerful force that has taken over their body. The imagination of these people peaks during Majles-e Bazi and is expressed in the form of the visualization of dramatic roles. The sick person in this chamber, by the power that they display against the wind, has a special place in a new society and finds them in a society whose types of interactions are very different due to new roles and shared experiences.

The changes that have occurred reveal a new dimension of the patient's personality that leads to internal confrontation. Similar to the process in psychodrama, the internal confrontation in the ritual reveals concealed truths and leads to a correct perception of oneself. Therefore, the mechanism of coping with psychological trauma in these two treatment methods largely follows the same logic. In both ways, patients want to improve their physical and mental conditions. In rituals, Ahl-e Hava wants a situation in which they experience a different social level; therefore, the process of disease and the stages of treatment in this ritual can be largely dependent on the element of indoctrination.

In psychodrama, the basis of therapy refers to individual roles. In this therapy, most of the actions are based on psychiatric and scientific propositions. In psychodrama, the therapist consciously places the patient in a position to experience a mental journey into the past and to predict the future based on the decisions made by the present. The therapist connects the roles of the patient's childhood to the present to recreate it in a different space. Through this technique, the patient can realize the hidden mental, physical, and behavioral dimensions. Moreno believes that psychodrama is an exercise in confronting the reality of life and provides a platform for experience and action. Just like Ahl-e Hava, who considers themselves responsible for the treatment process and has no judgment on the patient, the society in which the person is placed is important in psychodrama. Moreno emphasized creating a safe and reliable environment and considered the lack of judgment on the patient to be a fundamental principle in treatment. Thus, mutual understanding between the treatment agents and the individual patient was consciously considered in both treatment methods. Confrontation with multiple individual roles and creating a balance between them occurs intentionally in psychodrama and unconsciously in ritual.

Children in Hormozgan imitate the patterns of their parents from an early age. In this segment of society, where poverty plays an active role in lifestyle, survival is a top priority; children experience different tasks due to the financial needs of the family and enter the field of work from an early age and usually continue their family business with their fathers. This situation is largely confined to boys and girls who have been involved in housekeeping and domestic responsibilities since childhood. Therefore, the period of growth and maturity in these children can be assumed to differ from the standard definitions. Thus, it can be considered that the downtrodden children of the Hormozgan region have never had a chance to flourish and develop spontaneity.

Moreno places people who have never had the opportunity to experience spontaneity in a dramatic atmosphere. Moreno believes that the elements used in play regenerate qualities such as creativity and spontaneity because they are intrinsic and acquired in nature. In the theater, the patient is placed in a position to understand clearly through role switching. They are the ones who are true to themselves and others. The association and reconstruction of memories have a significant effect on paving the path to healing.<sup>19</sup> Majles also follows dramatic patterns in the Zar ritual. One can

<sup>19</sup> Apter, "The human being: J.L. Moreno's vision in psychodrama," 31-32.

see the sufferer as an actor/actress who simultaneously plays their true role and the role of the force that has conquered them, and through the technique of substitution, he/she encounters their dramatic roles. Imagination is formed, and in this situation, it reveals the hidden characteristics of the patient. In most cases, a person who performs rituals has an unhealthy mental state before suffering from a physical problem. The formation of this ritual is suitable ground for dealing with internal injuries and leads to psychological changes in refining the individual.

Moreno knew the value of words and actions equally. In the proposed psychodrama sessions, the therapist would recount their psychological trauma in the action they shared before speaking. The parts of the ritual play are dedicated to the movements of the possessed body through music. What happens in the ritual is based on experience and experimentation, and it follows psychology. The psychological evacuation of the possessed person by the movements brings them closer to experiencing spontaneity. Individual creativity is an important element that has the potential to flourish more in a dramatic atmosphere; therefore, the stimulation of imagination in the possessed person is the compensation for the lack of dreams and fantasies in the childhood of the sick person.

The interaction and improvised response concerning the created situations in psychodrama and ritual place the patient in the same situation. In both treatments, the patient changes from the reporter's position to the actor's position, thus their first encounter with the created situation involves all their feelings and memories and acts as an improvised action. Following the created actions, the reactions also matter. In psychodrama, these reactions are performed by a professional crew, but in the ritual, traditional therapists in the form of Mama/Baba Zar try to communicate with the patient through symbolic elements to empower their personality in the face of individual and collective experience.

According to Moreno's opinions, therapy relies on words to require a secondary process of interpretation that is itself a product of the therapist's philosophical orientation. Given the primacy of action during human evolution, language can be considered a late development. Moreno considers humans to be active actors in the realm of real life who interact with other actors and actresses. According to him, every human being is a reflection of their cosmic aspect, and thus they are considered beyond their biological dimension.<sup>20</sup>

Hormozgan's view of humans also extends beyond biological nature. The people who believe in rituals consider the world to be the dwelling place of unknown forces, and in this way, man is a creature from the perspective of these people who can make a connection to peace or confront the supernatural forces; therefore, man has a powerful and self-referential nature and relies on himself to defeat whatever has shaken him. Furthermore, Moreno considers man the only savior for his inner harm, and the only condition of his victory is an inner journey to confront the truth. In both of these cases, the goal is to balance mental reality and objective reality, and this balance is necessary to master spontaneity. Moreno's conception of treatment promotes creative flexibility and adaptability. In the ritual, all efforts are made to create harmony and balance between the patient and their mental realities.

The release of energy from a patient can be considered a key factor in treatment. Children drain energy through interaction and mobility in the form of play. Moreno believes that children can achieve creative expression by sharing their emotions through their special psychological and physical baggage, which is released through imagination. Creativity is a sign of good mental health. By reconstructing the elements of drama in therapy sessions, Moreno penetrates and gives objectivity to the patient's subjective truth through improvised dramatic plays. Creativity formed to objectivize mental images, although they can be deviated, opens doors to recognition and development. In psychodrama, the patient has the opportunity to become the main hero of the story and be defined as the center of events.

Creativity is also considered a central pillar of rituals. The patient is a reflection of an imaginary character called Zar. They appear in the role of a character who has no physical touch, and their obvious traits are hypothetical. The patient relies entirely on creativity to play the role of such a character. Creativity is formed through body movements, sound, and interaction. The sick person not only plays the role of the "wind" that has taken over their body but also confronts it by choosing motifs that represent strength and persistence. In this way, the patient actualizes aspects that were previously unknown and inactive. The process performed in the ritual puts the patient in a different and new position, unconsciously confronting them with the concealed layers of their mental state. According to Zarka Moreno: "Man will fear spontaneity until he learns how to train it."<sup>21</sup>

The mediating elements in psychodrama help reconstruct events and guide the patient toward a correct treatment course. The people who play in the play are not allowed under any circumstances to undermine the patient's personality or interfere in their decisions. All these people's focus is on the importance of the present. In this regard, the design of the scene may be used to instill memories or a special occasion to reveal hidden feelings. The psychological and physical structure of a patient's personality significantly affects how they perform and interact. Finally, the scenes

<sup>20</sup> Zarka Toeman Moreno, "Psychodrama, role theory, and the concept of the social atom." In *The Evolution of Psychotherapy: The 1st Conference* (Routledge, 1987), 344-345.

<sup>21</sup> Moreno, "Psychodrama, role theory, and the concept of the social atom," 342.



displayed by the patient share a pattern that is of particular importance to the therapist. During treatment, patients will confront and describe situations they have always avoided. In a theater, reality is reflected through a mental illusion. It can be assumed that in psychodrama, illusion and truth eventually meet at the same point.

Ahl-e Hava is a reflection of the ideal society of the sick person; these people have a lot in common and agree on their core beliefs. The most significant event of the ritual is the sense of collective identity. Similar to adjuncts in psychodrama, the presence of Ahl-e Hava helps form a chain of active connections. In Majles-e Bazi, dramatic elements are symbolically placed within the therapeutic atmosphere. The symbols used in this atmosphere have a special meaning for the people of Ahl-e Hava. Music is another important ingredient that contributes to atmosphere building in both therapies. Through music therapy, a large portion of the patient's energy is released, and the excitement formed through individual creativity is exhibited in action. The importance of the mental hallucinations of a sick person in Majles-e Bazi is palpable. According to Moreno's views, illusionary space is considered an instrument of self-expression, so it can be assumed that the therapeutic process formed in the ritual is largely in line with Moreno's theories of psychodrama.

### **Emotional Integrity Free from Organized Logical Regulations**

Emotional connections are explored in relation to the role of community in shaping personality. The performative context of the Zar ritual and psychodrama creates a space distinct from everyday life, where existing truths are either distorted or reproduced. In this setting, individuals encounter relationships that reflect the structured systems and patterns of their real-world experiences. These social frameworks, while contributing positively to personality formation, often entangle individuals in cycles of dominance, ultimately shaping their thinking, lifestyles, and responsibilities in predetermined ways. One beneficial aspect of rituals is their ability to produce new systems and laws born from collective interaction. In the Zar ritual, participants who share similar life experiences reach a shared understanding of the consequences of their social status and the harms associated with a lack of participation in communal gatherings. Together, they form a community referred to as Ahl-e Hava, meaning "people of the air." Within this community, they establish rules specific to their shared context—rules that lose relevance outside this group. In psychodrama, the therapeutic team strives to provide the patient with a new communal experience, one that compensates for the void of emotional connections in their lives. Through this process, patients revisit their relationships, gaining a unique perception of their dimensions and those of others. This exploration offers fresh insights into social relationships and fosters emotional growth. The performative context created in psychodrama challenges existing logic and truths by disrupting conventional notions of time and space. This disruption allows for the construction of individual roles, enabling patients to break free from oppressive relationships and engage with their realities in transformative ways.

### **Instinctive Response and Sensory Experience Rehabilitation**

In psychodrama, the patient has the opportunity to discover themselves in new and different situations. They can create moments on stage that are unlikely to occur in their ordinary lives. Through this process, the individual awakens their instincts through reactions stemming from their emotions and expresses themselves without fear of judgment or rejection, doing so without censorship. In these circumstances, the patient becomes closer to understanding their sensory experience and, as a result, better recognizes their motivations and inner feelings. In the Zar ritual, everything unfolds in the moment and follows the current situation. The Zar healer instructs the afflicted individual to let go and activate their instincts in response to the music and actions occurring in the gathering. Thus, when faced with music, an individual releases their body and allows themselves to express words and behaviors that arise from their unconscious. Therefore, the presence and readiness of both the physical and mental aspects in the psychodrama and the Zar ritual are of great importance, and both therapeutic methods provide a suitable environment for experiencing sensory awareness without feelings of fear and avoidance.

### **Embodiment as an Experience of Freedom**

In the Zar ritual, the body plays an enormous role. One may imagine that liberation and spontaneity are realized through the body. In the Zar ritual, the body becomes a medium that reveals and displays imagination and unconscious. The individual afflicted by Zar manifests their psyche in the form of an unknown entity within their body and, through the mediation of music, makes it accessible to the unconscious, going so far as to allow the body to act beyond conscious control and enter a trance state. Through this process, individuals experience a moment in which they perceive the essence of their body and become aware of it. This awareness is typically an experience that transcends their ordinary life experiences; before this, they viewed their body merely as a tool for personal duties and roles, failing to recognize

it as a means for self-expression. In psychodrama, based on Moreno's previously discussed theories, the primary focus is on the therapeutic process that occurs through the body, as words alone do not encompass all dimensions and aspects of the individual and are insufficient for expression. In psychodrama, the body provides a platform for playing another role, thereby facilitating the stage of understanding and awareness of another psyche through the body. Thus, in both cases, the patient gains a body experience that enables the realization of freedom.

## Conclusion

The Zar ritual is a ceremony practiced in many southern and southeastern parts of Iran. At first glance, the philosophy of treatment underlying the Zar ritual may appear incomprehensible when viewed through the lens of modern psychological and medical knowledge. However, a closer examination reveals striking similarities between these traditional methods and contemporary psychotherapy. Moreno's theories on psychodrama emphasize unconscious factors that are also at play in rituals, offering an explanatory framework for the treatment process. In both approaches, the patient is often trapped in a cycle of fixed roles, losing a clear perception of their inner dimensions. Through the therapeutic process, the patient gained a detailed understanding of these roles and, using imagination and creativity, released suppressed energy. This process enables psychological refinement and prepares individuals for social interactions by helping them confront their subjective reality and objectify it through action.

Despite these parallels, there are notable differences in the patient-therapist relationship in psychodrama and ritual. In psychodrama, treatment is conducted by a psychiatrist, whereas rituals involve traditional healers. Indigenous treatment in Hormozgan follows the cultural and environmental characteristics of the region, while psychodrama transcends cultural and geographical boundaries. The belief in the magical powers of traditional healers during rituals has a profound psychological effect on patients. The healer's unique position within the Ahl-e Hava community distinguishes them from other members, especially the patient. In contrast, psychodrama centers the patient as the primary focus, emphasizing their emotions and role in the therapeutic process.

The collective wisdom of the Ahl-e Hava plays a crucial role in patient treatment. A significant local belief in Hormozgan is the coexistence of supernatural forces, or winds, with humans. This belief system instills anxiety about being powerless against these forces, elevating the status of traditional healers who are thought to possess the power to confront them. A considerable portion of the healing process in this context relies on the power of the mind and indoctrination. It can be argued that these beliefs have unconsciously shaped profound mental constructs, influencing all aspects of life, including treatment approaches.

The shared techniques of psychodrama and the Zar ritual offer valuable insights for developing practical therapeutic measures for individuals with Zar in Hormozgan. Recognizing these similarities provides a foundation for integrating scientific advancements into traditional practices while considering the community's mental and cultural background. Studying psychodrama methods and adapting them to the Zar ritual represents a significant step toward addressing individual trauma and establishing foundational psychotherapy for the Ahl-e Hava community while preserving their cultural identity.

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## Teatrallığın Medyatizasyonu\*

### The Mediatization of Theatricality

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### ÖZ

Bu çalışmada teatrallik kavramı, medya aracılı iletişim biçimlerinin teatral icra üzerindeki etkisi üzerinden incelenmektedir. Bu doğrultuda öncelikle, teatrallığın tiyatro tarihi boyunca gelişen çoklu anlamsal karşılıkları ile bunların oluşma gerekçeleri özetlenecektir. Daha sonra ise, sözü edilen anlam bağlamı, sinema ve televizyon gibi medya aracılı teatral biçimlerin gelişimi ve teknik yeniden üretim teknolojisinin yol açtığı medyatizasyon süreciyle ilişkilendirilecektir. Tiyatronun 19. ve 20.yy. boyunca geçirdiği biçimsel ve düşünsel evrimin izi, medyatizasyonun insan hayatındaki kitlesel varlığı üzerinden sürülecek ve bunların birbirine etkisi, karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alınacaktır. Sözü edilen karşılaştırmalı analiz, teatrallik kavramına atfedilen farklı yahut karşıt anlamsallıkların gelişimi hakkında bir neden-sonuç bağıntısı sunmaktadır. Nihayetinde medyatizasyon, teatral icrayla birlikte teatrallik kavramının da anlaşılması ve açıklanmasını kolaylaştıran bir yardımcı araştırma disiplini olarak öne çıkarılmaktadır.

**Keywords:** Teatrallık, Medyatizasyon, Anti-Teatrallık, Teatral İcra, Canlılık

### ABSTRACT

In this study, the concept and understandings of theatricality are investigated through the mediatized forms of communication in theatrical performance. The multiple semantics of theatricality that developed throughout the history of theater and the motives behind their constitution will be summarized first. This semantic context will then be contextualized in the development of mediated forms of theatricality, such as cinema and television, and through the mediatization process prompted by reproduction technology. The study will trace the formal and intellectual evolution of theater during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries through the emergence of mass media in human life, and it will investigate their mutual influence on one another. This comparative analysis reveals a cause-and-effect relationship on the different and/or opposing meanings attributed to the concept of theatricality. Throughout, this article approaches mediatization as a sub-discipline of research that facilitates the comprehension and explanation of theatricality within theatrical performance and beyond.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Theatricality, Mediatization, Anti-theatricality, Theatrical Performance, Liveness

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Theatricality is a concept that is used to describe multiple artistic, dramaturgic, and notional ideas as both a metaphor and a phenomenon. It thus enjoys a wide range of references and approaches. The polysemy of theatricality is related not only to the thousands of years of history of the art of theater but also to the social, societal, or intellectual developments that have influenced theater. One relatively recent development are the reproduction technologies that have increasingly influenced human life since the beginning of the 20th century. The opportunity to technically reproduce theatrical performances in media, such as film and television, has triggered a transformation at both the artistic and aesthetic levels of theatrical performance, as well as in wider understandings of theatricality. Therefore, this study's analysis of theatricality as a concept is conducted through the mediatized forms of theatrical performance. Accordingly, the article first discusses the multiple semantic meanings of the term throughout theatrical history. These semantic meanings are then investigated through the mediatization process that has been caused by the emergence of reproduction technology.

Theatricality, much like the term mimesis, contains duality in its meaning. This duality derives from the perceived 'liveness' of imitation in theater and the semantics attributed to live communication. Plato and Aristotle's opposing views on the act of imitation led to the constitution of opposing approaches to theatricality, substantially linking the suspicion toward imitative arts with the term theatricality. In the recent development of modernist anti-theatrical thought, this suspicion again became emphasized, this time as the essential way of saving theater from illusionism. Thus, theatricality converted became a term explained through anti-theatrical tendencies. While anti-theatrical thought claims to promote reality over illusionism, the concept of theatricality is assigned to the idea of 'fake acting,' which is considered a 'false' way of expression.

The dominance of anti-theatrical thought in both theater and definitions of theatricality began to lose its influence only after Meyerhold's discourse of 'theatricalizing theater'. In step with the Avant-garde movement's claims of eliminating the text in naturalist drama to emphasize sound, rhythm, movement, or stage design, the term theatricality received an updated meaning in relation to these tools. Meanwhile, within the field of performance, which has distinguished itself as a unique art form since the 1970s, rituals and daily-life practices have been added to the semantics of theatricality alongside the meanings discussed above. As a result, theatricality has earned its polysemy by containing all these references in its meaning.

The opportunity presented by reproduction technology with the invention of the camera and the mediatization process that developed accordingly has brought increased diversity both in theatrical performance and in understandings of theatricality. This has created a debate of aesthetics between theater and cinema and given rise to theatrical variations in which both forms of representation are influenced by each other. The term theatricality has thus become a means to point out the oppositions of these two art forms.

Television began to stand out as a medium that made the reception of 'live' action possible on a screen. However, the widespread existence of television in human life has changed audience perceptions and challenged the correlation between illusion and reality. Television content is produced by drawing inspiration from both theater and cinema, but it transfigures them at the same time. Through the perpetual mode of spectacle, which is theatricalized by dramatizing representations, the meaning of theatricality mutates. As a result, theater now offers the 'here' and 'now' and the 'liveness' of performance as distinctive and unique features and tends to conserve its creative space from the surrounding mediatization. Thus, the act of performance and the opportunity of 'liveness' are internalized as essential determinants of the art of theater.

This article thus argues that mediatization has had a wide impact on both the form of theatrical performance and on contemporary understandings of what theatricality is. The theater has meanwhile reacted to mediatization by examining, rejecting, or challenging it, and all these reactions emerged as new theatrical forms on stage. Therefore, mediatization can be considered a sub-discipline of theatrical research and one of the most important developments to influence the art of theater since the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Giriş

Temelde “*tiyatro özelliği taşıyan*”<sup>1</sup> anlamında kullanılan teatrallik, bugün salt tiyatro tarihi üzerinden değil aynı zamanda tiyatronun ilişkilendiği her türlü estetik, dramaturjik, yazınsal, söylemsel, toplumsal ve hatta politik durum yahut koşul üzerinden tartışılabilen; birbirinden farklı görüş ve yaklaşımlar üzerinden açıklanabilen, bazen bir terim bazen de bir olgu olarak karşımıza çıkan ve dolayısı ile; anlam bağlamı oldukça geniş bir alanı kapsayan bir kavram olarak nitelenebilir. Kavram kapsamındaki bu genişlik, tümel olarak kavranışını zorlaştırmakta ve anlamsallığını değişken kılmaktadır.

Teatrallik kavramının anlamsal genişliği hem tiyatronun tarihsel gelişimi ile hem tiyatro düşüncesinin birbirine karşı yönelimleri ile, hem de teatral edimin biçimsel devinimi ile ilişkilendirilebilir. Teatrallığın anlam çoğalmasına yol açan bir etken de teatral icranın uygulama alanındaki çeşitlenme olarak kaydedilebilir. Sözü edilen çeşitlilik, bugün insan hayatının hemen her alanına tesir etmiş olan medya araçlarının gelişimi üzerinden şekillenmiştir. İcadı 20.yy başlarına tarihlenen kamera aracı ve bu sayede gelişen sinema ve televizyon gibi gösterim alanları, teatral icranın hem düşünsel hem de biçimsel evrimini yönlendirmiş ve teatrallik kavramının anlam bağlamındaki genişlemeye eklenmiştir. Medya aracılı iletişim sistemleri üzerinde teatrallik önce sinema perdesinde sonra televizyon ekranında, nihayetinde ise hemen her boyuttaki ekran yüzeyinde belirebilen bir edim haline gelmiştir. Elde edilen reproduksiyon olanağı sayesinde geçmişte gerçekleşmiş teatral icranın bir kopyasına erişmek, canlı teatral icraya mekân ve zaman ortaklığına ihtiyaç duymaksızın tanıklık etmek yahut teatral icra ile süregelen biçimde ilişkilenecek mümkün hale gelmiştir. Böylelikle, tiyatronun etki alanı sahnenin dışına taşmış ve çok boyutlu bir hâl almıştır. Teatral edim, her yeni mecranın kendi olanakları yahut kapsamı dahilinde değişip dönüşmüş ve kısmen başkalaşmıştır. Örneğin sinema, sahnenin canlı ve çok boyutlu mevcudiyetini iki boyutlu perde üzerinde yeniden yaratarak kullanmış; bunu yaparken hem tiyatrodan feyz almış hem de kendi gerekliliklerine hizmet etmeyen biçimsel öğeleri kaldırmış veya değiştirmiştir. Bu süreçte tiyatro sahnesi ise, medya aracılı iletişim biçimlerine bazen karşı çıkan bazen de bunları sahnelemeye entegre etmeye çalışan çeşitli ‘tepkiler’ geliştirmiş ve bu tepkilerin her biri, yeni bir teatral biçim iddiası olarak belirginleşmiştir. Dolayısı ile, medya aracılı iletişim biçimlerinin hem teatral icra üzerinde hem de teatrallik kavramının gelişim seyri üzerinde belirleyici bir etken olduğu iddia edilebilir.

Medya aracılı etkileşimin gelişimi, ‘medyatizasyon’ olarak genellenen süreç pratiği içerisinde değerlendirmeye alınmaktadır. David Deacon ve James Stanyer’in “Mediatization: Key Concept or Conceptual Bandwagon?” [Medyatizasyon: Anahtar Terim mi Kavramsal Trend mi?] başlıklı makalesinde medyatizasyon, “*yapısı gereği tarihsel bir değişimi ima etmek ve giderek daha ‘-leşen’ bir durumu açıklamak için*”<sup>2</sup> kullanılan bir şemsiye terim olarak ele alınır. Buna göre medyatizasyon terimi, çeşitli medya araçlarının gelişimi ile devinimini tümünden kapsamakta ve bunların insan hayatındaki halen gelişmekte olan konumunu, kendi süreci içerisinde ele alıp değerlendirmeyi sağlamaktadır. Dolayısı ile teatral icranın medyatizasyon sürecini anlamak ve açıklığa kavuşturmak, teatrallik kavramının çeşitli karşılıklarını anlamayı ve açıklamayı da kolaylaştıracaktır.

Tüm bu nedenlerle bu makalede teatrallik kavramı, yukarıda açıklanan etkenler kapsamında incelenmiş ve kavramın anlam bağlamı, teatral icranın medyatizasyon süreciyle birlikte düşünülerek değerlendirilmiştir. Bu doğrultuda öncelikle teatrallığın tiyatro tarihi içerisindeki devinimi ve farklı anlamsal karşılıkları ele alınmış, sonrasında ise bu anlamsallığın sözü edilen medya araçlarıyla olan bağıntısı sorgulanmıştır. Araştırmanın çerçevesi, 20.yy. boyunca insan hayatına yoğun biçimde etki eden sinema ve televizyon gibi medya ortamlarının gelişimi üzerinden şekillendirilmiştir. Medyatizasyonun teatral icra üzerindeki etkisi ve bu sürece tiyatro sahnesinden yükselen tepkinin ölçeği, karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alınmıştır. Böylelikle, teatrallik kavramının çok boyutlu anlamsallığını etkileşime girdiği medya aracılı teatral biçimler üzerinden tartışmaya açmak ve medyatizasyonun teatrallik kavramı ile olan bağıntısını açıklığa kavuşturmak amaçlanmıştır.

## Teatrallik Kavramı

Teatrallik, Aziz Çalışlar’ın “Tiyatro Kavramları Sözlüğü”nde “*dramatik ya da yazınsal metin dışındaki tüm sahneleme metni (ses biçimi, konuşma tarzı, ses yüksekliği, tempo, mekânsal devinim vb.)*” olarak tanımlanır.<sup>3</sup> Patrice Pavis ise “Dictionary of Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis” [Tiyatro Sözlüğü:Terimler, Kavramlar ve İncelemeler] adlı çalışmasında teatrallığı “*performansta yahut dramatik metinde özellikle teatral olan şey*”<sup>4</sup> olarak genellerken, ‘teatral olan şey’e yüklenen üç farklı anlamsallıktan söz eder. Bunlardan birincisi “*tiyatroyla ilgili olma*”, ikincisi “*sahne*

<sup>1</sup> .D.K. *Türkçede Batı Kökenli Kelimeler Sözlüğü*, Erişim tarihi: 22.03.2024, <https://sozluk.gov.tr/>

<sup>2</sup> David Deacon, & James Stanyer, “Mediatization: key concept or conceptual bandwagon?” *Media, Culture & Society* 36, no.7 (2014): 1036.

<sup>3</sup> Aziz Çalışlar, *Tiyatro Kavramları Sözlüğü* (İstanbul: Mitoş Boyut Yayınları, 1993), 193.

<sup>4</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 395.

gerekliliklerine uyarlanabilirlik”, üçüncüsü ise “seyirci üzerinde doğal olmayan bir etkiyi kolayca yaratmak amacıyla başvurulan yapaylık ve sahtelik” tir.<sup>5</sup> Buna göre, ‘teatral olan’ hem sahnelemenin gerekliliklerini karşılayan olumlu bir dinamik, hem de yapaylık göstergesi olarak anlaşılan olumsuz bir dinamik olarak nitelendirilebilmektedir.

Roland Barthes teatralılığı “*tiyatro eksi metin*”<sup>6</sup> biçiminde formüleştirenken, Josette Féral ve Ronald P. Bermingham teatralılığın “*seyirciyi (seyredilmekte olan) kişi ya da nesne ile ilişkilendiren algılama dinamiklerinin bir sonucu*” olduğunu ileri sürmüştür.<sup>7</sup> Féral ve Bermingham’a göre teatrallık “*içinden kurmacanın ortaya çıkabileceği bağımsız ve sanal bir öteki mekânı varsayan ve onu yaratan ‘bakış’ ile ilgili bir ‘süreç’tir*”.<sup>8</sup> Buradaki ‘süreç’ ifadesi, teatral eylemin ‘bakış’a yönelik olarak kurgulanan yapısına ve bu yapısallığın süreli bir zaman dilimindeki varlığına vurgu yapar. Dolayısı ile teatrallık, en geniş anlamı ile eyleyen ile seyreyleyen arasındaki etkileşime verilen ad olarak anlaşılabilir. Ancak bu genel kavrayış, Pavis’in sözlüğünde teatral kelimesine atfedilen karşıt anlamsallığı ve bunun getirdiği dikotomik<sup>9</sup> yapıyı açıklığa kavuşturmak için yeterli görünmemektedir.

Erika Fischer-Lichte, teatralılığın kapsamını tiyatrodaki temsil unsuru ve bu unsurun biçimlenişi üzerinden açıklar. Lichte’ye göre sahne üzerindeki tüm göstergeler birer temsil aracıdır ve bu nedenle hem somut varlıkları hem de temsil ettikleri soyut varlık yahut düşünce bazında bir anlam ifade ederler. Dolayısı ile burada “*S kişisi izlerken A kişininin X’i cisimleştirmesinden*”<sup>10</sup> türeyen bir anlam çokluğu, halihazırda mevcuttur. Teatrallık ise, tam da bu çok katmanlı anlamsallığın seyirciye aksettirilmesi sırasında gerçekleşir ve böylelikle, tiyatronun kendine has estetiğini biçimlendirir. Dolayısı ile eyleyen ve seyreyleyen arasındaki etkileşimin niteliği, sahne üzerindeki eylemselliğin yaratımıyla beraber bunun seyirci tarafından alımlanışını da içerir. Bu nedenle, teatralılığın yoruma açık bir anlamsallığa sahip olduğu iddia edilebilir. Ek olarak; teatral icranın temsil edildiği dönemin gerçeklik algısına tabi oluşu, onu kendi zamanına göre’li biçimde değerlendirmeyi de zorunlu kılar.

Marvin Carlson “The Resistance to Theatricality” [Teatralılığa Direniş] başlıklı çalışmasında teatralılığın “*tıpkı kendisiyle yakından ilişkili (ve aynı derecede karmaşık olan) mimesis terimi gibi, iki farklı türden gerçeklik arasındaki bir ikilik yahut oyunsallık üzerine inşa edildiğini*” belirtmiştir.<sup>11</sup> Carlson’ın sözünü ettiği bu ikilik, yanılısma ile gerçeklik arasındaki karşıtlığın bir ifadesidir ve tartışması Platon’dan beri süregelen illüzyon ile hakikat arasındaki gerilime -tıpkı mimesis terimi gibi- içkindir. Teatrallık kavramına bu şekilde yaklaşıldığında, kavramın anlamsal genişliği tiyatronun öz’ünü oluşturan mimesis ile olduğu kadar, ‘taklit’e duyulan genel şüphenin varlığı ile de doğrudan ilişkilendirilebilir ve Pavis’in sözlüğündeki karşıt anlamsallık hakkında bir ipucu sunabilir.

Taklit sanatlarına yönelik genel şüphenin izi, M.Ö. 4.yy. Atina’sına dek sürülebilmektedir. Platon “Devlet” adlı ünlü yapıtında mimesis’i “*taklidin taklidi*”<sup>12</sup> addederek sakıncalı bulurken, Aristoteles aynı unsuru “*insanda çocukluktan itibaren doğal olarak ortaya çıkan*”<sup>13</sup> bir öğrenme yolu olarak benimsemiştir. Ayrıca Aristoteles, tragedyanın seyirciye kötücül duygu ve düşüncelerden arınmasını sağlayan bir “*katharsis*” yaşatarak insanı sakıncalı davranışlardan uzaklaştırabileceğini de ileri sürmüştür.<sup>14</sup> Buradan da anlaşılabilen üzere taklit, mimesis ve nihayetinde teatrallık, en başından itibaren toplumsal gerçekliğin aynı anda hem değerli hem de zararlı bir parçası addedilmiştir. Bu temel tartışma, taklit sanatlarına yönelik tüm ikircikli yaklaşımlarla birlikte teatralılığın anlam haznesindeki dikotominin de kaynağını oluşturmaktadır.

Bu ikili anlamsallık hem tiyatro karşıtı düşünsel önyargıdan hem de tiyatronun yapısal seyrinden beslenmiştir. “The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice” [Anti-Teatral Önyargı] başlıklı çalışmasında Jonas Barish, tiyatronun tarih boyunca “*kürsülerden ve minberlerden öne sürülen gerçekliğin önceliğine karşı örtük bir tehdit oluşturduğunu*”<sup>15</sup> ileri sürmüş ve bu savına gerekçe olarak, tiyatrodaki mimesis’in seyircisi ile geliştirdiği canlı yakınlığı göstermiştir. Bu etkileşim kuvveti sayesinde tiyatro, seyircisi tarafından her an basit bir gerçeklik olarak kabul görebilme ihtimaline sahiptir.<sup>16</sup> Buradan yola çıkılarak, tiyatrodaki yanılısma ile gerçeklik arasındaki bağıntının bir tür liminal geçirgenlik ekseninde kurgulandığını ve teatralılığın, sözü edilen eksenin biçimlendirilmesinde kullanılan estetik seçimlerin bir toplamından

<sup>5</sup> Pavis, *Dictionary of Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis* 394.

<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, çev. Richard Howard, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Josette Féral and Ronald P. Bermingham, “Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language”, *SubStance* 31, no. 2/3 (2002): 105.

<sup>8</sup> Féral and Bermingham, “Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language”, 97.

<sup>9</sup> Dikotomi” sözcüğü TDK Türkçe Sözlük’te “ikileşim” olarak, “dikotomik” sözcüğü ise “ikileşik” biçiminde açıklanmakta ve ikili anlamsallığın varlığını ifade etmektedir. *T.D.K. Güncel Türkçe Sözlük*, Erişim tarihi: 10.04.2024, <https://sozluk.gov.tr/>

<sup>10</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theater*, çev. Jeremy Gaines & Doris L. Jones, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 140.

<sup>11</sup> Marvin Carlson, “The Resistance to Theatricality”, *SubStance* 31, no. 2/3 (2002): 243.

<sup>12</sup> Platon, *Devlet*, çev. Sabahattin Eyüboğlu – M.Ali Cimcoz, (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2010), 339.

<sup>13</sup> Aristoteles, *Poetika*, çev. A. Çokona – Ö.Aygün (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2020), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Aristoteles, *Poetika*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Jonas Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 79.

<sup>16</sup> Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice*, 79.

oluştugu öne sürülebilir. Bu noktadan bakıldığında teatrallik, tiyatrodaki yanılsama ile gerçeklik arasındaki gerilimi ölçülendiren temel unsur olarak da anlaşılabilir.

Sözü edilen gerilimin ölçeği, tiyatrunun biçimsel önermeleri üzerinden de okunabilir. Örneğin Wagner'in "Gesamtkunstwerk" [Bütüncül Sanat Yapıtı] ideali ve bu ideal üzerinden geliştirdiği illüzyonist tutum, bu gerilimi yanılsama lehine çözümlenmiş ve tiyatro sahnesini gerçek dünyadan tamamen kopararak seyircide özdeşleşme yaratmayı amaçlamıştır. Ancak bu yaklaşım, yanılsama ile gerçeklik arasındaki gerilimle birlikte teatrallik kavramının anlam bağlamını da kesintiye uğratar. Martin Puchner, "Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality and Drama" [Sahne Korkusu: Modernizm, Anti-Teatrallik ve Dram] başlıklı çalışmasında, teatrallik reddedilmesi yahut benimsenmesi gereken bir değer biçiminde ortaya koyan ilk kişinin Wagner olduğunu iddia eder.<sup>17</sup> Puchner'a göre Wagner'in bütüncül tiyatro fikri, Avrupa 19. ve 20.yy. kültür çevresini "teatrallik kavramı etrafında kutuplaştırmış"<sup>18</sup> ve kendinden sonra gelen yönelimlerin belirleyicisi konumuna yerleştirmiştir. Puchner'ın bu tespiti, Wagner'in illüzyonizmini tamamen reddederek karşısına alan Edward Gordon Craig'ın teatrallik kelimesine attığı anlamsallık üzerinden tartışılabilir. Craig, "Tiyatro Sanatı Hakkında" başlıklı eserinde teatrallik terimini şu şekilde kullanır:

"( . . . ) fakat genç nesillerin kulaklarında, sahneye adım attıkları andan itibaren eskilerin davul çalmaları tek ve yegane esas değildir. Bu, genç aktöre hemen hilelerde üstat olmayı öğretir. İnsiyaki (içgüdüsel) olarak bu hilelere kestirmeden sapıverilir, işte bu hile oyunları 'theatral' kelimesinin icadına sebep olmuştur."<sup>19</sup>

Craig'ın oyunculuk eğitimine duyulan gereksinimi açıkladığı bu savında, teatrallik terimi oyunculuktaki yapay ve yanlış bir meyil addedilerek Pavis'in sözünü ettiği olumsuz anlamı doğrudan yüklenmiştir. Bu durumun Puchner'ın konuya ilişkin tezini doğruladığı ve teatrallik kavramı etrafındaki kutuplaşmayı örneklediği düşünülebilir. Ayrıca kavramın bu yöndeki olumsuz okumasının, modernist düşüncenin gelişimiyle birlikte ortaya çıkan anti-teatral yönelime de temel teşkil ettiği iddia edilebilir.

Anti-teatral biçimsellik, özünde Wagner ile başlayan illüzyonist tutumun reddini ifade eder ve yanılsama ile gerçeklik arasındaki gerilimin bu kez gerçeklik lehine yeniden yorumlanışını içerir. Anne-Britt Gran, "The Fall of Theatricality in the Age of Modernity" [Modern Çağda Teatrallığın Çöküşü] başlıklı çalışmasında bu yönelimi "seyircinin teatrallikten koparılması" olarak nitelendirmiş ve "teatrallığın çöküşü" biçiminde adlandırmıştır.<sup>20</sup> Sözü edilen çöküş, teatrallığın tiyatrodaki sakınılması gereken bir yönelim olduğu görüşünden yola çıkarak oluşturulmuş ve tiyatro uygulayıcılarını, yaratım süreçlerini bu bağlamda değerlendirmeye itmiştir. Örneğin, en ünlü örnekleri Konstantin Stanislavski tarafından verilmiş olan natüralist tiyatro, sahne üzerindeki doğal eylemselliği bir gerçekçilik iddiası olarak benimser ve seyirciyi, olan bitene hayali bir dördüncü duvarın arkasından tanıklık eden bir konuma yerleştirir. Stanislavski'nin kendi sözleriyle doğalcı teatral biçim, "sahnedeki yapaylık ve sahtelikten uzaklaşarak canlılık ve gerçeklik üretmek"<sup>21</sup> amacını taşır.

Anti-teatrallığın bir söylem olarak benimsenmesi, teatrallik teriminin de Pavis'in sözünü ettiği olumsuz anlamıyla benimsenmesine yol açar. Ancak yine Puchner'a göre, anti-teatral yönelim esasen tiyatrodaki bir tür "direniş" halini tanımlamakta ve salt tiyatro karşıtı önyargıdan beslenen bir düşünselliğin değil, aynı zamanda "reddettiği şeye bağımlı olan ve bu nedenle reddini ölçülendirmeye çabalayan" bir motivasyonun ürünü olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır.<sup>22</sup> Puchner, tiyatrodaki yapaylık ve sahtelikten arınma ihtiyacıyla geliştirilen itirazların büyük oranda "tiyatrunun performans ile mimetik sanat biçimleri arasındaki gergin konumundan kaynaklanan belirli bir mimesis biçimi"<sup>23</sup> üzerine geliştiğini iddia eder ve Alan Ackerman ile birlikte hazırladığı "Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage" [Tiyatroya Karşı: Modernist Sahnede Yaratıcı Yıkımlar] başlıklı çalışmada, bu gelişimi şu şekilde özetler:

"Anti-teatrallik kesinlikle sadece tarihsel olarak olumsal bir tiyatroya değil, doğrudan tiyatroya karşı bir saldırıyı tanımlar. Ancak aynı zamanda, tiyatroya yönelik bu türden genel bir saldırı, çıkış noktasını tarihsel olarak spesifik bir tiyatro ediminin eleştirisinden alır ve buradan genel bir tiyatro anlayışı damıtır. ( . . . ) Örneğin Natüralist tiyatro için tiyatroyu temsil eden biçim melodramdır; Sembolist tiyatro ve opera için ise natüralizmdir."<sup>24</sup>

Puchner ve Ackerman'ın yukarıdaki tespiti; tiyatrunun kendi biçimsel itirazlarını yine kendisinden türeten devinimselliğini açıklığa kavuşturmakta ve buna bağlı olarak, teatrallığın çoklu anlamsallığına giden yolu görünür kılmaktadır. Bu devinin hali içerisinde, örneğin Meyerhold biyomekanik tiyatroyu "teatrallığın temel yasalarını

<sup>17</sup> Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 31.

<sup>18</sup> Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon Craig, *Tiyatro Sanatı Hakkında*, çev.Nureddin Sevin, (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1946), 37.

<sup>20</sup> Anne-Britt Gran, and Diane Oatley. "The Fall of Theatricality in the Age of Modernity." *SubStance* 31, no. 2/3 (2002): 258. (Burada Gran'ın "de-theatricalized viewer" olarak ifadelendirdiği durum Türkçeye "seyircinin teatrallikten koparılması" biçiminde çevrilmiştir.)

<sup>21</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *Sanat Yaşamım: Anılar*, çev.Suat Taşer, (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 1992), 180.

<sup>22</sup> Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner, *Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 12-13.



*kullanan*"<sup>25</sup> panayır tiyatrosunun biçimselliğinden türetmiş ve Stanislavski'nin natüralist yaklaşımının karşısına yerleştirmiştir. Antonin Artaud, 'vahşet tiyatrosu' adını verdiği biçimde tiyatronun jest, mimik, ritm ve ses gibi sahnelemeye has teatral unsurlarını "*tiyatronun ikizi*"<sup>26</sup> olarak adlandırırken; Erwin Piscator, teatral sanat yapıtının kendi dönemine ait politik gerçeklikle olan "*yakın bağıntısını*"<sup>27</sup> gündeme getirmiştir. Berthold Brecht, seyirci ile özdeşleşmeyi önceleyen Aristotelyen tiyatronun karşısına 'epik tiyatro'yu çıkarırken, Jerzy Grotowski, 'yoksul tiyatro' ile performans unsuruna odaklanmıştır. Böylelikle teatral edimin biçimselliği bir devinim hali içinde çeşitlenirken, teatrallığın anlam bağlamları da giderek çoğalmıştır.

Süreyya Karacabey'e göre teatrallığın kavranışındaki nirengi noktalarından bir diğeri, tarihsel avangard dönemde ortaya çıkan ve Meyerhold tarafından söylemleştirilen "*tiyatronun tiyatrosallaştırılması*" çabalarıdır.<sup>28</sup> Karacabey, modern sonrasında teatral kavramının "*tiyatronun kendine özgü araçlarına işaret etmek üzere*"<sup>29</sup> kullanılmaya başlandığını öne sürer ve "*edebi ve geleneksel temsil estetiğinin taşıyıcısı olan drama (dram sanatına) karşı çıkış*"<sup>30</sup> söyleminin temel argümanı olarak belirginleştiğini ifade eder. Böylelikle teatral kavramının anlamsallığı, modernist anti-teatral söylemin kendisine yüklediği olumsuz karşılığında yavaşça uzaklaşır ve bir başka bağlamda devinmeye başlar.

Thomas Postlewait ve Tracy Davis "Theatricality" [Teatrallık] başlıklı çalışmalarında, özellikle modern sonrası dönemde tiyatro eleştirmenlerinin ve akademisyenlerinin "*teatrallık kavramını uzun ve olumsuz mirasından kurtarmaya*" yönelik bilinçli bir hamle gerçekleştirdiğini ve "*teatrallık fikrini yeni modernist gelişmelerle sınırlandırmak yerine, onu herhangi bir yer ve zamandaki herhangi bir dramatik performansın temel niteliklerini tanımlamak için kullanılabilir*" bir terim haline getirmeyi amaçladığını öne sürmüştür.<sup>31</sup> Postlewait ve Davis'e göre bu bağlamdaki teatrallık, "*asgari bir 'sahnelenebilirlik' standardını karşılayan performans özelliklerini tanımlamak için*"<sup>32</sup> kullanılabilir ve tiyatroya temel teşkil eden bir anlamsal çerçeveye oturtulabilecektir.

'Performans'ın gündelik hayat pratikleri ile ritüelistik yapıyı tek bir gösterim formu içinde bir araya getirmeyi önceleyen biçimselliğinde ise, tiyatronun bir kez daha yanılısamacı bulunarak reddedildiği ve performatif edimin bu yanılısamının karşısına gerçeklik iddiası olarak çıkarıldığı görülür. Erika Fischer-Lichte'ye göre, performansta "*kendisinden ve alıcıdan bağımsız bir varoluş kazanan bir sanat eseri yerine, varolan her şeyi içine alan bir olay*"<sup>33</sup> yaratılmaktadır. Richard Schechner ise kendi çalışmalarında "*performansın gerçekliğini sahnelenen teatral olayın içine yerleştirdiğini*" ifade etmiştir.<sup>34</sup> Dolayısı ile buradaki teatral okuması bir yandan Postlewait ve Davis'in sözünü ettiği 'asgari sahnelenebilirlik' standardını karşılarken, diğer yandan da teatrallığı gündelik hayat pratikleri ile ilişkilendirmiştir. Bu kapsamdaki yaklaşım üzerinden teatrallık, performans sözcüğünün çok anlamlılığını da bünyesine dahil eder ve ritüeller, sosyal roller ya da bir performans ifade eden gündelik eylemler ile bağıntılanabilir hale gelir.

Burada kısaca özetlenen farklı biçimsel ve düşünsel yönelimler, teatral kavramının bugünkü çoklu kavranışında pay sahibidir. Tiyatronun bizatihi kendisi yanılısama ile gerçeklik arasındaki bağıntıyı yorumlayabilen ve türlü biçimlerde ifade edebilen bir yaratım alanı olduğu için, teatral kavramı da bu yaratım alanında devinmiş ve birbirinden farklı görüş, yönelim ve biçimselliklerin temel argümanı olarak kullanılagelmiştir. Sözü edilen devinim, teatrallığın kavranışında değişmeyen tek unsur olabilir. Bu nedenle, teatral kavramının terimsel, söylemsel, biçimsel yahut edimsel türlü anlamsallığına ulaşmak her daim mümkün olmuştur. Bu noktada medyatizasyon sürecini de teatrallığın farklı kavranışlarına yol açan gelişmelerden birisi olarak nitelendirmek mümkündür, ancak burada insan hayatına kitlesel ölçekte etki eden ve dolayısı ile, teatrallığın kavranışına da toplumsal ölçekte müdahil olan bir ilişkisellik mevcuttur.

## Medyatizasyon

Medyatizasyon Deacon ve Stanyer'in vurguladığı gibi 'giderek daha -leşen' bir sürecin ifadesi olarak anlaşıldığında, teatrallığın medyatizasyonu kamera aracının icadına tarihlendirilebilir. İcranın geçmişte gerçekleşmiş bir kopyasını kitlesel ölçekte paylaşımaya açmayı mümkün kılan o günkü bu yeni medya aygıtı sayesinde teatral edim, kendi tarihinde ilk kez teknik olarak yeniden üretilebilen bir edim haline gelmiştir. Bu opsiyon bir yandan icranın biçimselliğini

<sup>25</sup> Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Tiyatro – Devrim ve Meyerhold*, der. Ali Berktaş, (İstanbul: Mitoz Boyut Yayınları, 1997), 253.

<sup>26</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Tiyatro ve İkizi*, çev. Bahadır Gülmez, (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1993), 48.

<sup>27</sup> Erwin Piscator, *Politik Tiyatro*, çev. Mustafa Ünlü & Suavi Güney, (İstanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2010), 98.

<sup>28</sup> Süreyya Karacabey Çelik, "Modern Sonrasında Dramatik Metinler [Dramatic Texts in Postmodern Period]", *Tiyatro Araştırmaları Dergisi* 15 (Mayıs 2003): 36.

<sup>29</sup> Çelik, "Modern Sonrasında Dramatik Metinler", 36.

<sup>30</sup> Çelik, "Modern Sonrasında Dramatik Metinler", 37.

<sup>31</sup> Tracy C. Davis & Thomas Postlewait, *Theatricality*, (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2003), 21.

<sup>32</sup> Davis and Postlewait, *Theatricality*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Performatif Estetik*, çev. Tufan Acil, (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2016), 23.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, (New York: Taylor&Francis e-Library, 2005), 165.

kameranın olanakları ölçeğinde genişletirken, diğer yandan seyirciyi farklı bir alımlama sürecine tabi tutar. Sözü edilen gelişmeler, televizyon teknolojilerinin insan hayatına yerleşmesi ile farklı bir boyut kazanır. Televizyon sayesinde canlı teatral icra, ortak bir mekânsallığa gerek duyulmaksızın erişilebilen, seyircinin evine kadar getirilebilen ve süreğen bir akış içerisinde alımlanabilen bir yapıya evrilir. Nihayetinde bu yeni oluşumlar, teatral icranın evrimini de şekillendirir ve tiyatronun teatrallığında yeni tartışma alanları ve sorgulama biçimlerinin gelişimine yol açar.

Walter Benjamin “Teknik Olarak Yeniden Üretilebilirlik Çağında Sanat Yapıtı” başlıklı ünlü makalesinde, teknik reproduksiyon teknolojilerinin sanat yapıtındaki “şimdiliği” ve yapıtın “belirli bir mekândaki özgün mevcudiyeti”ni yok ettiğini iddia eder.<sup>35</sup> Sözü ettiği yokluk durumunu “aura” kavramı üzerinden açıklar ve teknik yeniden üretimi, sanat yapıtının “aurasını solduran” bir gelişme olarak kaydeder.<sup>36</sup> Bu yaklaşımın teatral icra üzerindeki karşılığı, icranın ‘şimdi’ ve ‘burada’lığı ile ‘canlılık’ olgusunun yitirilmesidir. Buna ek olarak Benjamin, sinemada kameranın “seyircinin yerini aldığı” ve dolayısı ile, icracıyı kendi icrasına yabancılaştırdığını öne sürmüştür.<sup>37</sup> Benjamin bunu, insanın aynadaki görüntüsüne yabancılaşmasına benzetir ama bu kez “aynadaki görüntü, görüntüsü aynaya yansıyan kişiden ayrılabilir ve taşınabilir hale gelmiştir.”<sup>38</sup> Ancak yine aynı kamera aracı sayesinde, teatral icra kitlesel olarak alımlanabilen bir erişim kuvvetine de erişmektedir ve bu nedenle, kamera karşısındaki oyuncu “aygıtın önünde dikilirken, nihayetinde karşısında kitlelerin olduğunun farkındadır.”<sup>39</sup> İcranın kitleselliği, onun geleneksel ve ritüelistik yapıdaki üretim biçimlerinden uzaklaşmasına ve kitle hareketlerinin siyasi, politik ya da sosyal katmanlarıyla her zamankinden daha fazla ilişkilenebilmesine yol açar. Benjamin bu durumu “geleniğin tasfiyesi” olarak açıklar.<sup>40</sup> Böylelikle, “sanat yapıtının iki kutbu arasında yaşanan niceliksel yön değişimi yapıtın doğasında niteliksel bir dönüşüme yol açmıştır.”<sup>41</sup>

Sinemanın tiyatroya hem benzeyen hem de ondan ayrılan bir teatral yapı olarak belirginleşmesi, konuya ilişkin hararetli bir estetik tartışmasını da beraberinde getirir. Bu noktada teatrallik kavramı, bu tartışmanın da belirleyici argümanını oluşturur. Charlie Keil, “All the Frame’s a Stage: (Anti-) Theatricality and Cinematic Modernism” [Tüm Kadraj Bir Sahne: Anti-Teatrallik ve Sinemasal Modernizm] başlıklı makalesinde, modernist anti-teatral düşünselliğin sinema ile tiyatro arasındaki estetik tartışmasına hangi biçimde hizmet ettiğini şu şekilde özetler:

“Sinemanın endüstriyel açıdan istikrarlı hale gelmesi ve kültürel açıdan yaygınlaşmasının eşliğinde olduğu 1907’ye gelindiğinde, kendini tanımlama sorunları daha belirgin hale geldi ve sinema filmleri için sosyal saygınlık ve ekonomik uygulanabilirlik sağlama çabaları, yeni ortaya çıkan ticari basın tarafından köriklendi. Tiyatro bu yeni mecra için estetik bir kimlik oluşturma girişimlerinde büyük bir rol oynadı. (...) Bir noktaya dek, tiyatronun sürekli olarak çağrıştırılması sadece iki form arasındaki bariz benzerlikleri kabul etti: Her ikisi de tipik olarak hikayelerin canlandırılmasıyla uğraşan oyuncular içeriyordu. Ancak, sinema aynı zamanda selefının sahip olduğu kültürel itibarı kendine mal etmeyi de amaçlıyordu ki, bu da film endüstrisinin çeşitli meşrulaştırma stratejileri izlemesine neden oldu.”<sup>42</sup>

Keil’in sözünü ettiği meşrulaştırma stratejisi, tiyatronun teatrallığının bir kez daha yapaylık ve sahtelik ile ilişkilendirilmesi ve sinemanın bu sahteliğe ‘karşı’ bir tutum addedilerek anti-teatral bir yönelimi benimseyişi üzerinden yaratılır. Bu yaklaşım doğrultusunda ve 1911 gibi erken de kabul edilebilecek bir tarihte bile “sinemanın için gerçekçiliği lehine tiyatronun yıpranmış yapaylığının terk edilmesi” savı kendini göstermeye başlamıştır.<sup>43</sup> Dolayısı ile burada, modernist anti-teatral söylemin sinemaya ait bir argüman üzerinden gerekçelendirilmesi yahut desteklenmesi durumu söz konusudur. Bu bağıntı üzerinden bakıldığında, tiyatrodaki anti-teatral söylemin gelişimi ile bunun teatrallik kavramına olan etkisinin salt tiyatronun düşünsel tarihi ile değil, aynı zamanda medyatizasyonun gelişim aşamaları ile de ilişkilendiği ve birbirini etkileyen ve birbirinden etkilenen bir anlamsallıkta devinmiş olduğu, rahatlıkla görülebilir.

Johannes Birringer, “The Theater and It’s Screen Double” [Tiyatro ve Onun Ekran İkizi] adlı çalışmasında “erken modern sinemanın belirgin estetik biçimselliğini sadece teatrallığı redderek edinmediğini” vurgularken, sinemanın “çekim ölçeği, kamera açısı, kurgu ve yakın plan gibi kendine has temel kaynaklarını geliştirmeden önce, bunları tiyatronun teatral estetiğinden, oyunculuk tekniklerinden ve hem gerçekçilik hem de anti-illüzyonizm teamüllerinden ‘ödünc’ aldığı” belirtmiştir.<sup>44</sup> Dolayısı ile tiyatronun teatrallığının, sinemanın özellikle ilk yıllarında düşünsel açıdan reddedilirken biçimsel açıdan benimsenen bir unsur olarak ele alındığı düşünülebilir ve tam da bu durum, teatrallik kavramının çok çeşitli anlam bağlamlarının oluşmasına gerekçe olarak gösterilebilir.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Teknik Olarak Yeniden Üretilebilirlik Çağında Sanat Yapıtı*, çev. Gökhan Sarı (İstanbul: Zeplin Kitap, 2020), 11.

<sup>36</sup> Benjamin, *Teknik Olarak Yeniden Üretilebilirlik Çağında Sanat Yapıtı*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Benjamin, *Teknik Olarak Yeniden Üretilebilirlik Çağında Sanat Yapıtı*, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Benjamin, *Teknik Olarak Yeniden Üretilebilirlik Çağında Sanat Yapıtı*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> Benjamin, *Teknik Olarak Yeniden Üretilebilirlik Çağında Sanat Yapıtı*, 38.

<sup>40</sup> Benjamin, *Teknik Olarak Yeniden Üretilebilirlik Çağında Sanat Yapıtı*, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin, *Teknik Olarak Yeniden Üretilebilirlik Çağında Sanat Yapıtı*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Charlie Keil, “All the Frame’s a Stage: (Anti-) Theatricality and Cinematic Modernism”, *Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage* içinde, ed. Alan Ackerman & Martin Puchner, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 77.

<sup>43</sup> Keil, “All the Frame’s a Stage: (Anti-) Theatricality and Cinematic Modernism”, 77.

<sup>44</sup> Johannes Birringer, “The Theatre and Its Screen Double”, *Theatre Journal* 66, no. 2 (2014): 208.

Sinema ile tiyatro arasındaki bu çekişme, filmlerin sesli olarak da çekilebilir hale gelmesiyle sönümlenmeye başlar. Kamera aracının ses ve söz ile de ilişkilendirilebilmesi, tiyatrodan ‘ödünç alınan’ unsurların sinemaya daha fazla dahil edilmesini zorunlu kılar ve tiyatro oyunculuğu sinemanın yapım malzemelerinden birisi hale gelir. Yine Charlie Keil’e göre “1950’lerin ve 1960’ların sanat sineması, teatrallığı sinemadaki gerçekçiliğin yanıltıcı doğasını ve kurgusallığı vurgulamanın ayrıcalıklı bir yolu olarak”<sup>45</sup> görmüş ve böylelikle anti-teatral düşüncenin sinema üzerindeki belirleyici etkisi yavaşça sona ermiştir. Buna karşın, söz konusu tartışmanın hiçbir zaman etkisini tamamen yitmediğini iddia etmek de mümkündür.

Gerek sinemanın kendisini tiyatrodan ayırma gayreti gerekse tiyatronun kendisini içinde bulduğu rekabet hali, tiyatro uygulayıcılarını sahneleme yöntem ve araçları üzerine yeniden düşünmeye iter. Bu süreçte, geliştirilen her yeni teknik ve yeniliğin tiyatro dünyasında olumlu yahut olumsuz anlamsallıklarda yankılandığı görülür. Örneğin Stanislavski, başından itibaren düşkün bir eğlence biçimi olarak gördüğü sinemaya karşı açıkça tavır almıştır. Oyuncularının “*ciddi amaçları olmayan*” filmlerde rol almasını yasaklamış ve hatta, ticari amaçlı bir filmde rol alan oyuncuları Evgeny Vaghtangov ve Olga Baklanova ile bir süre iletişimini kesmiştir.<sup>46</sup> Buna karşın, asistanı Leopold Sulerzhitsky’yi film yapımını öğrenmesi ve öğrendiklerini kendisine aktarması için görevlendiren de yine Stanislavski’nin kendisidir.<sup>47</sup> Dolayısı ile burada, varlığı açıkça reddedilen sinemanın yapabilirliğine yönelik bir merak duygusu sezilebilir. Meyerhold’un konuya ilişkin düşünceleri, sözü edilen tepkiselliğe başka bir örnektir. Meyerhold bir yandan sinemayı ticari kaygılar doğrultusunda hareket edişi ve “*seyirciyi melodrama ve grotesk tekniklerine alıştırmayı*”<sup>48</sup> gibi gerekçelerle eleştirir, diğer yandan ise tiyatro sahnesini “*teknik düzeyde sinemalaştırmayı*” önerir.<sup>49</sup> Meyerhold’un bu yaklaşımında da medya aygıtına karşı bir direnişin izleri görülebilir, ancak burada tiyatronun teatrallığını sinemanın önerdiği biçimsellikten feyz alarak geliştirmek gibi yenilikçi bir eğilim mevcuttur.

Kamera ile elde edilen aracılı teatral biçimler, ilk kez Erwin Piscator tarafından tamamen benimsenerek sahneye aktarılır. Piscator’un politik tiyatrosunda projeksiyon, fotoğraf ve film gibi medya unsurları politik gerçekliğin sahnede görünür hale getirilmesi için kullanılır ve seyircileri “*gerçek anlamda kendi kaderleri, gözlerinin önünde oynanan kendi trajedileri*” ile yüzleştirmek amacını taşır.<sup>50</sup> Piscator, bu amacı gerçekleştirebilmek için “*insan – insanüstü etkenlerin sınıflar ya da bireylerle nasıl karşılıklı etkileştiklerini ortaya koyabilecek araçlara gereksinim duyduğunu*” belirtmiş ve sahnelemede kullandığı medya unsurlarını bu araçlardan birisi olarak nitelendirmiştir.<sup>51</sup> Dolayısı ile Piscator’un bakış açısında; medyanın tiyatro lehine direniş gösterilmesi gereken bir unsur olarak değil, politik direnişin gerekçesini açıklığa kavuşturan bir karşı duruş argümanı olarak araçsallaştırıldığı öne sürülebilir.

Walter Benjamin, teknik reproduksiyonun tiyatro sahnesindeki en yaratıcı karşılığının Bertolt Brecht’in epik tiyatrosunda bulunduğunu iddia eder. Benjamin’e göre, Brecht’in dramatik eylemi kesintiye uğratma yöntemi ile film yapımında kullanılan montaj tekniği benzer bir mantıkla hareket etmektedir. Brecht’in bağlamı kesintiye uğratmak yoluyla ortaya çıkardığı yabancılaştırma efekti ve eleştirel düşünsellik, montaj unsurunun bağlama sürekli müdahalesi ile örtüşmekte ve böylelikle “*bütünlüklü, bitmiş sanat eserinin karşısına teatral laboratuvarı*” çıkarmaktadır.<sup>52</sup> Her ne kadar Benjamin’in bu görüşü Brecht’in kendisi tarafından doğrulanmış olmasa da montaj mantığının tiyatro yapımına etkisi bazında incelenmesi mümkündür. Ayrıca, yine Benjamin’e ait olan ‘geleniğin tasfiyesi’ hakkındaki tespitin hem epik tiyatro hem de politik tiyatronun biçimselliği üzerinden doğrulanması da mümkündür.

Piscator’un politik tiyatrosu ve Brecht’in epik tiyatro uygulamaları, teknik reproduksiyon çağındaki sanat yapıtının geleneksel üretim biçimlerinden nasıl kopmaya başladığını ve inanç ya da ritüel yerine kitle hareketleri ve siyasi oluşumlar ile hangi biçimlerde ilişkilenebilir hale geldiğini kapsamlı bir biçimde örneklendirmektedir. Buna göre tiyatro sahnesi, artık medya aracılı yaşantının bütün unsurlarıyla birlikte bu unsurların kitlesel varlığını da kabullenerek üretimine dahil etmekte ve onu sorgulamak, tartışmaya açmak ve politik açıdan dönüştürmek üzere gelişim göstermektedir. Dolayısı ile bu biçimdeki teatrallikte medya, içinde bulunulan durum ve koşulların kabulü yahut reddine karar vermenin ve gereksinimler ile yetersizliklerine karşılık vermenin bir yolu olarak araçsallaştırılabilmektedir.

Ancak sinemanın televizyona doğru evrimi, teatral edimin hem sözü edilen yeni kitlesel hacim içindeki hem de kişilerin bireysel hayatlarındaki varlığını bambaşka bir yönde şekillendirmiştir. Philip Auslander “Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture” [Canlılık: Medyatize Bir Kültürde Performans] adlı eserinde, televizyonun, sinemadan ‘canlı’ teatral icrayı mümkün kılmasıyla ayrıştığını savunur. Auslander’e göre televizyon “*teatral icrada*

<sup>45</sup> Keil, “All the Frame’s a Stage: (Anti-) Theatricality and Cinematic Modernism,” 86.

<sup>46</sup> Laurence Senelick “Seduced and Abandoned: When Hollywood Wooed the Moscow Art Theatre”, *Film History* 10, no. 4 (1998): 492.

<sup>47</sup> Senelick “Seduced and Abandoned: When Hollywood Wooed the Moscow Art Theatre”, 493.

<sup>48</sup> Meyerhold, *Tiyatro – Devrim ve Meyerhold*, 357.

<sup>49</sup> Meyerhold, *Tiyatro – Devrim ve Meyerhold*, 356.

<sup>50</sup> Piscator, *Politik Tiyatro*, 71.

<sup>51</sup> Piscator, *Politik Tiyatro*, 68.

<sup>52</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Brecht’i Anlamak*, çev. Haluk Barışcan – Güven İşsağ, (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1984), 113.

sinema tarafından taklit edilemeyen tek unsur olan ‘canlılık’ ögesinin sömürgeleştirilebildiği”<sup>53</sup> yegâne medya mecrası olarak ortaya çıkmış ve “teatral icranın seyirciye aktarılması amacıyla değil, onu ev tipi izleyici için baştan yaratarak canlı performansın yerini alması amacıyla” geliştirilmiştir.<sup>54</sup> Bu nedenle, televizyondaki canlı yayın opsiyonu da tiyatrodan ‘ödünç alınan’ bir nitelik olarak düşünülebilir. Ancak televizyonun insan hayatına süregelen biçimde yerleşmesini sağlamak, salt tiyatronun biçimselliği ile değil, aynı zamanda sinemanın biçimselliği ile ilişkilenmeyi gerektirmiş ve televizyon mecrası hem tiyatro hem de sinemadan alıntılıdığı teatral biçimleri TV ekranı üzerinde genelleştirmeye yönelmiştir.

Sözü edilen genelleştirme çabasında, farklı teatral biçimler bu kez TV’deki içeriğin oluşturulması için araçsallaştırılmıştır. Raymond Williams, televizyon ekranındaki teatral icranın natüralist tiyatronun teatrallüğinden özellikle faydalandığını ileri sürer. Natüralist biçimde icra ile seyirci arasına yerleştirilen hayali dördüncü duvar, televizyon seyircisinin icraya orada değil (-miş) gibi tanıklık etmesini kolaylaştırmış ve bu etkiyi, televizyonun sağladığı yakın çekim opsiyonları üzerinden genişletmiştir. Williams’a göre böylelikle, doğalcı dramatik biçim, yeni türden bir “TV draması”na dönüşmüş ve bu durum “kültür tarihinde eşi benzeri bulunmayan bir dramatik performans yoğunluğu ortaya çıkarmıştır.”<sup>55</sup> Williams’ın sözünü ettiği TV dramasının sinemadaki anlatsallık ile de benzeştiği iddia edilebilir. Burada TV’ye yönelen ‘bakış’, teatral icrayı imgesel bir ekran yüzeyi üzerinde alımlamakta ve onu seyirci adına önceden konumlandırılmış olan çoklu perspektifle takip etmektedir. Martin Esslin ise, “TV: Beyaz Camın Arkası” adlı çalışmasında televizyonun en başından beri dramatik bir medya mecrası olarak şekillendiğini savunur. Esslin’e göre “(TV’nin) aktardığı şeylerin büyük kısmı oyuncuların daha önceden hazırlanarak sunduğu kurgusal malzemeden oluşan ve oyunun konusunu, konuşmaları, karakterleri, kostümleri – kısaca dramatik ifade araçlarının hepsini- kullanan geleneksel drama biçimindedir.”<sup>56</sup> Tam da bu nedenle, televizyondaki -haber yahut tartışma programı gibi gerçeklik ifadesi olarak anlaşılan biçimler de dahil olmak üzere- her türlü içerik, yapımın türünden bağımsız olarak dramatiktir.

Esslin’in bu iddiası Williams’ın konuya ilişkin görüşüyle birlikte düşünüldüğünde, kültür tarihinde eşi benzeri görülmemiş olan dramatik performans yoğunluğunun kaynağı anlaşılır hale getirilebilir. Televizyonda beliren film, dizi, reklam, haber, tartışma programı yahut spor müsabakası gibi bütün içerikler dramatisasyon yolu ile teatralleştirilmekte ve seyirciye bu biçimiyle aktarılmaktadır. Böylelikle TV hem tiyatrodan hem de sinemadan alıntılıdığı teatral nitelikleri kendi olanakları ile opsiyonları ölçüsünde değiştirmekte, dönüştürmekte ve başkalaştırmaktadır. Sözü edilen başkalaşım, seyir rejiminin gelişimine de sirayet eder. Televizyon ekranındaki icra seyircisine “daha yakın mesafede ve daha özel, daha mahrem bir konumda”dır<sup>57</sup> ve dolayısı ile ‘her an basit bir gerçeklik olarak kabul görebilme ihtimaline’ oldukça yakındır. Bu medya aygıtının evlerin içine kadar girerek kişilerin bireysel hayatında akışkan bir işlev edinmesi de bu yakınlığın sebeplerinden birisidir; “bu akış sayesinde herkes istediği an, musluktan akan suyu alır gibi açtığı televizyonun malzemelerini alabilmektedir.”<sup>58</sup>

Televizyonun gündelik hayat üzerindeki bu hakimiyeti, doğal olarak insanın dünyayı algılama biçimine ve yorumlayışına da etki eder. Jacques Derrida, Bernard Stiegler ile gerçekleştirdiği “Echographies of Television” [Televizyonun Ekografisi] başlıklı söyleşisinde, ünlü “specter” [hayalet] kavramını TV imgesi ile de ilişkilendirmiş ve televizyonun insan hayatı üzerindeki dolaylı etkisini, hayalet metaforu üzerinden açıklamıştır. Derrida’ya göre ‘bakış’ın muhatabıyla göz göze gelemediği görme deneyimi bir an’ın somut gerçekliğine değil, ancak onun “hayaletine” aittir.<sup>59</sup> Derrida, bu yaklaşımını Hamlet oyununun giriş sahnesi üzerinden örneklendirir. Buna göre, tıpkı Hamlet’in Marcellus, Horatio ve Bernardo’ya kralın kendilerine yüzünü gösterip göstermediğini ve siperliğini kaldırıp kaldırmadığını sorarak bir karşılaşmanın gerçekten yaşanıp yaşanmadığını anlamaya çalışması gibi, TV üzerindeki ‘bakış’ da “aynı görüş alanındayken kendisine kimin baktığını göremeyen ve ‘öteki’ bakışla buluşamayan” bir durumu ifade etmektedir.<sup>60</sup> Derrida nezdinde bu koşuldaki durumsallık, hepimizi “televizyonun birer hayaleti”ne dönüştürmüştür.<sup>61</sup> Jean Baudrillard’a göre ise, TV’deki gerçeklik “lazer ışığının boşlukta oluşturduğu üç boyutlu bir reklam imgesi gibi bir hayalet dönüşen bir gerçek”tir ve televizyon imgesinin hakimiyeti altındaki hakikatin kavranışı

<sup>53</sup> Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture – Second Edition*, (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2007), 13.

<sup>54</sup> Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture – Second Edition*, 18.

<sup>55</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Taylor&Francis e-Library, 2004), 55.

<sup>56</sup> Martin Esslin, *TV: Beyaz Camın Arkası*, çev.Murat Çiftkaya (İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 1991), 14.

<sup>57</sup> Esslin, *TV: Beyaz Camın Arkası*, 34.

<sup>58</sup> Esslin, *TV: Beyaz Camın Arkası*, 38.

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, Röportaj:Bernard Stiegler, çev. Jennifer Bajorek, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 115. (Burada Derrida’nın ünlü “specter” kavramı Türkçe’ye “hayalet” biçiminde çevrilmiştir.)

<sup>60</sup> Derrida, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, 121.

<sup>61</sup> Derrida, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, 117.

imkânsızdır.<sup>62</sup> Bu noktada “yaşamla televizyon birbirlerinden ayrılması imkansız bir solüsyona” benzemiş ve bu nedenle, içinde yaşadığımız dünya bir “simülasyon evreni”ne dönüşmüştür.<sup>63</sup>

Sözü edilen dönüşüm, yanılısma ile gerçeklik arasındaki gerilime de yeni bir boyut kazandırmıştır. Bu gerilim, tiyatronun teatrallliğini oluşturan temel unsurlardan birisi olduğundan, gündelik hayatın gerçekliğine ilişkin algının dönüşümü, teatral icranın kavranışına da etki etmiştir. Dolayısı ile tiyatro sahnesi, sinemanın gelişimi kadar televizyonun yol açtığı dönüşümü de içselleştirmek ve yaratım alanını bu mecranın gereklilikleri doğrultusunda yeniden değerlendirmek durumunda kalmıştır. Ancak bu kez, medya aygıtına tiyatrodan verilen ‘tepki’, onu medyatizasyonun boyunduruğundan tamamen kurtarmak yönünde gelişir ve bu tepkinin öncül örnekleri, Jerzy Grotowski’nin yoksul tiyatrosu tarafından üretilir.

Grotowski çalışmalarını “Tiyatro nedir? Tiyatronun eşsiz yönü neresidir? Tiyatro, sinemayla televizyonun yapamayacağı neyi yapabilir?” gibi sorular üzerinden şekillendirmiştir.<sup>64</sup> Bu doğrultuda medya araçlarının sahnelemedeki kullanımına tümenden karşı çıkmış ve tiyatronun “canlı katımlı bir oyuncu-seyirci ilişkisi” oluşuna vurgu yapmıştır.<sup>65</sup> Grotowski’ye göre bu ilişkisellik, tiyatroya özgü olan nihai niteliktir ve tiyatronun teatrallliğini oluşturan temel unsurdur. Bu nedenle yoksul tiyatro, teknoloji desteğiyle sahneye aksettirilen bütün yardımcı unsurlar gibi makyaj ve kostümü de tiyatronun dışında bırakır. Oyuncunun eylemselliğini, sahnelemenin temeli olarak benimser ve performansı, “bir ihlal eylemi olarak” medya aracılı yöntem, sistem ve biçimselliğin karşısına çıkarır.<sup>66</sup>

Performans ögesinin bu kapsamıyla benimsenişi hem Avrupa hem de Amerika’da oldukça kuvvetli bir biçimde yankılanır ve performansın ayrı bir gösterim türü olarak belirginleşmesinde rol oynar. Yine Richard Schechner’e göre televizyon, “canlı tiyatro gibi çift yönlü bir etkileşim sistemi” olmadığı için, TV seyircisi icra ile karşılıklı etkileşime girme imkânından yoksundur ve tam da bu noktada, “bazı insanlar daha ‘gerçek’ bir sanat yapmak ve/veya bundan zevk almak yolu ile, gündelik yaşamdan koparılan müdahale ve geri bildirim hakkını estetiğin hizmetine sunan” çeşitli yol ve yöntemler geliştirmektedirler.<sup>67</sup> Performansın medya aracılı teatral biçimlere yönelik bir direnişe evrilen anlamsallığı, Peggy Phelan’ın “Unmarked: The Politics of Performance” [İzsiz: Performansın Politikası] adlı eserinde şu şekilde açıklanır:

“Performansın tek yaşamı şimdiki zamandır. Performans kaydedilemez, belgelenemez ya da başka bir şekilde dolaşıma katılamaz: Bunu yaptığı anda performanstan başka bir şeye dönüşür ve ontolojik niteliğini, bir yeniden üretim ekonomisine dahil edildiği ölçüde yitirir. Performans, ancak ve sadece kaybolmak yoluyla kendisi haline gelebilir.”<sup>68</sup>

Buna göre performans, özgünlük değerini teknik olarak yeniden üretiminin imkânsızlığı sayesinde edinmekte ve anlamsallığını Benjamin’in de sözünü etmiş olduğu ‘şimdilik’ değeri üzerinden geliştirmektedir. Ancak Phelan’ın bu çıkarımından sadece birkaç yıl sonra Philip Auslander, “hem canlı hem de medyatize performansın kaybolma üzerine kurulu olduğunu”<sup>69</sup> öne sürerek ‘canlılık’ unsuruna şu şekilde yaklaşmayı önermiştir:

“( . . . ), tarihsel olarak canlı olanın aslında medyatikleşmenin bir etkisi olduğunu, tersinin geçerli olmadığını öne sürüyorum. Mevcut temsillerin ‘canlı’ olarak algılanmasını mümkün kılan şey kayıt teknolojilerinin gelişmesiydi. Bu teknolojilerin (örneğin ses kaydı ve sinema filmleri) ortaya çıkmasından önce ‘canlı’ performans diye bir şey yoktu , çünkü bu kategori yalnızca karşıt bir olasılıkla ilişkili olarak anlam kazanabilirdi. Örneğin antik Yunan tiyatrosu canlı değildi, çünkü onu kaydetme imkanı yoktu.”<sup>70</sup>

Auslander’in bu önermesi salt konuya başka bir perspektiften bakmanın bir yolu olarak değil, aynı zamanda medyatizasyonun teatralite üzerindeki kapsamlı etkisini kavramanın bir yolu olarak anlaşılabilir. Auslander, teatral icranın başlangıcından itibaren medya aracılı etkileşim biçimleri ile doğrudan ilişkilendiğini ve dolayısı ile icranın ‘canlılık’ unsurunun, ancak ve sadece onun kaydedilmesi mümkün hale geldikten sonra bir anlam ifade ettiğini savunmuştur. Auslander’ın bu görüşleri tartışmaya açık bulunabilir, ancak teatrallığın medyatizasyonuna ilişkin geriye dönük bir kavrayış elde edilmesini kolaylaştırır. Buna göre medyatizasyon, teatral icranın biçimsel evrimi –ve dolayısı ile teatralite kavramının söylemsel gelişimi- üzerinde, genel kavranışı kendisinden öncesi ile sonrası biçiminde ayırmayı sağlayacak denli etkili bir süreç olarak belirginleşmiş ve teatrallığın anlamsallığı üzerinde dönüştürücü bir rol üstlenmiştir.

<sup>62</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simülaklar ve Simülasyon*, çev. Oğuz Adanır (Ankara: Doğu Batı Yayınları, 2020), 54.

<sup>63</sup> Baudrillard, *Simülaklar ve Simülasyon*, 56.

<sup>64</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, “Yoksul Bir Tiyatroya Doğru”, *Yoksul Bir Tiyatroya Doğru* içinde, der. Kolektif, çev. Osman Akınhay, (İstanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2016), 5.

<sup>65</sup> Grotowski, “Yoksul Bir Tiyatroya Doğru”, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Grotowski, “Yoksul Bir Tiyatroya Doğru”, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 165.

<sup>68</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, (New York: Routledge – Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 146.

<sup>69</sup> Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 50.

<sup>70</sup> Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 56.

Sözü edilen dönüşüm, Steve Dixon'ın "Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation" [Dijital Performans: Tiyatro, Dans, Performans Sanatı ve Enstalasyonda Yeni Medyanın Tarihi] başlıklı çalışmasında hem canlı teatral icraya hem de bunun kayıtlı versiyonlarına benzer mesafeden bakan bir yaklaşımla ele alınır. Dixon'a göre "*-en azından başlangıçta ve her zaman korunamasa bile-*", canlı teatral icrada "*farklı bir gerilim ve kırılma, hem oyuncuların hem de seyircilerin adrenalin ve sınırlarını etkileyen bir tehlike ve öngörülemezlik duygusu*" bulunmaktadır ve bu nedenle tiyatronun teatralligindeki canlılık vurgusunu, özgün bir değer olarak benimsemek mümkündür.<sup>71</sup> Ancak salt bu yönüyle öne çıkarılan yoksul tiyatronun, "*bir yandan canlı performansın medya hegemonyasına direnişini olumlayan bir dinamik olarak, öte yandan ise geleneksel teatral ve tarihsel öğelerin değişimine direnen bir aşırı muhafazakarlık olarak*"<sup>72</sup> anlaşılması da mümkündür.

Bu noktada Dixon, icranın canlılığını salt fiziksel mevcudiyetin varlığı üzerinden değil, aynı zamanda odak ve dikkat yönetimi üzerinden değerlendirmeyi önerir. Bu görüşünü, restoran vb. kamusal alanlarda genellikle bir köşede asılı duran televizyonların varlığı üzerinden örnekendirir. Buna göre, mekânda bulunan insanların ilgi ve dikkati kendi konuşmakta oldukları konuya odaklanmışsa yukarıdaki televizyon kimsenin ilgisini çekmeyecektir, ancak fiziksel mevcudiyetin uyarıcı olmadığı durumlarda, kişilerin odak ve dikkati kolaylıkla boşlukta asılı duran televizyona kayabilecektir.<sup>73</sup> Dolayısı ile Dixon nezdinde "*izleyici katılımı ve dikkatiyle ilişkili olarak mevcudiyet, canlılığa veya cismani üç boyutluluğa değil, görsel-işitsel faaliyetin zorlamasına bağlı*"<sup>74</sup> bir faktördür ve bu nedenle, "*canlılık tartışmasında salt bedensel canlılığın mevcudiyetin garantisi olmadığı unutulmamalıdır.*"<sup>75</sup>

Tüm bu farklı görüş ve yaklaşımlar, canlı teatral icra ile medya aracılı teatral icranın benzerliklerini ve ayrımlarını ortaya koymaktadır. Görünen o ki, canlılık unsurunun tiyatrodaki karşılığı ile medya aracılı teatral biçimlerdeki farklı karşılıkları, medyatizasyon sürecinin her aşamasında farklı yönleri üzerinden tartışılmış ve teatrallik kavramının anlam çokluğuna bu yönüyle de hizmet etmiştir. Teatral icranın sinema ile gelişen teknik reproduksiyon olanağı bir yandan reddedilmiş ya da eleştirilmiş, öte yandan tiyatro sahnesinde farklı düşünsel ve biçimsel kavrayışların ortaya çıkmasına vesile olmuştur. Televizyonun canlı icra olanağı ve yanılısma ile gerçeklik arasındaki gerilime olan etkisi, tiyatroyu kendi yaratım alanını yeniden değerlendirmeye yöneltmiştir. Sinema özellikle başlangıç yıllarında kendisini tiyatrodan ayırmaya yönelik bir gayret içine girerken, televizyonun ortaya çıkışıyla bu kez tiyatro kendisini medya aracılı etkileşim biçimlerinden ayırma çabası göstermiştir. Grotowski ve Phelan icranın canlılığını medyatizasyona bir karşı duruş olarak benimsemiş; buna karşın Auslander'ın tezinde, icranın canlılığı sadece kayıtlı medya teknolojilerinin varlığı üzerinden okunması mümkün olan bir olgu olarak betimlenmiştir. Dixon ise, canlılık ile kayıtlılık arasındaki genelgeçer önkabülleri bu ikisi arasında bir kutuplaşma yaratmaksızın ele alıp değerlendirmiştir. Bu noktada medyatizasyon, icranın teatralliginin farklı argümanlar üzerinden tartışılmasını sağlayan temel değişken olarak belirginleşmiş ve teatralligın anlam bağlamını bünyesinde devindiren bir katalizör olarak işlevlenmiştir.

## Sonuç

Burada medyatizasyon süreci ile bağlantısı kurulmaya çalışılan teatrallik kavramı hem tiyatro düşüncesi hem de teatral biçim üzerine geliştirilen farklı yaklaşımlar üzerinden ele alınıp değerlendirilmiştir. Kavram, tarihin bir noktasında gerçekliği açığa çıkarmak lehine yanılısmanın feshini önceleyen anti-teatral söylemin, bir diğer noktasında ise dramatik metnin hakimiyetine karşı çıkan biçimsel eğilimlerin temel argümanı olarak kullanılmıştır. Performansın tiyatrodan ayrı bir teatral form olarak varlık göstermeye başladığı 70'li yıllardan itibaren ise, teatrallik bu kez ritüeller ve gündelik hayatın performatif pratiğiyle ilişkilendirilmiş ve bu yönleri üzerinden okunmaya başlanmıştır. Nihayetinde teatrallik kavramı, birbirinden farklı tutum, kavrayış ve yönelimleri aynı anda bünyesinde barındırabilen bir anlam çokluğuna ulaşmıştır.

Sözü edilen anlam çokluğunun oluşumunda çeşitli medya araçlarının teatral icra üzerindeki etkisi de bir belirleyici etken olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. İcranın medyatizasyonu, teatralligın anlam bağlamını da çeşitlendirmiş ve dolaylı olarak temel eğilimlerini şekillendirmiştir. Örneğin, modernist anti-teatral yaklaşım hem sinemanın başlangıç yıllarında hem de tiyatronun 20.yy. başlarındaki biçimsel gelişiminde ortaklaşan bir yönelim olarak belirginleşmekte ve yanılısamacı tutumun reddini içermektedir. Benzer biçimde, tarihsel avangard dönemde ortaya çıkan tiyatronun tiyatrosallaştırılması çabaları ile 50'li ve 60'lı yıllar sinemasında ortaya çıkan kurgusallığın vurgulanması, teatralligın öz'cü bir yaklaşımla ele alınışı bazında benzeşir. Tarihsel açıdan bu gelişmelerin biri diğerinden önce ya da sonra gelebilmiştir, ancak nihayetinde, her birinin birbiriyle ilişkisi açıktır. Bu nedenle, tiyatronun kayıtlı medya

<sup>71</sup> Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 131.

<sup>72</sup> Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*, 125.

<sup>73</sup> Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*, 132.

<sup>74</sup> Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*, 132.

<sup>75</sup> Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*, 133.

teknolojilerinin ortaya çıkışından itibaren salt kendi üretimleri üzerinden değil, aynı zamanda teknik yeniden üretim olanağının getirdiği yeni yaklaşımlar üzerinden şekillendiğini düşünmek mümkündür. Bu noktada, teatralite kavramının çoklu anlamsallığını sözü edilen gelişmelerin bir parçası olarak nitelendirmek ve kavramın farklı anlam katmanlarını, geçirdiği medyatizasyon üzerinden tartışmaya açmak mümkün görünmektedir.

Bu türden bir yaklaşım, teatraliteğin hem çeşitli medya mecraları üzerindeki hem de doğrudan tiyatro sahnesi üzerindeki gelişimini bir neden-sonuç ilişkisi içerisinde ele alıp değerlendirmeyi mümkün kılabilir. Bu doğrultuda, örneğin medya öğelerinin tiyatro sahnesine dahil edilmesi, medyatizasyonun insan hayatındaki yerleşik varlığını sorgulamanın bir yolu olarak görülebilir yahut bu öğelerin reddi üzerinden geliştirilen farklı teatral biçimler, ortaya çıktıkları zaman diliminin medyatizasyon ile ilişkisi bazında araştırılabilir. Bu noktada medyatizasyon, teatraliteğin anlamsallığındaki dönüşümün tetikleyici unsurlarından birisi olarak ortaya çıkar ve kavramın anlam bağlamına nedensellik bazında katkı sunar. Böylelikle, teatraliteğin günümüzdeki anlam çokluğu, somut gerekçeler üzerinden açıklanabilir ve kavramın anlamsallığındaki devrimin kaynakları anlaşılır kılınabilir.

Kavram bu bağlamda tartışmaya açıldığında, teatraliteğin gelişmekte ve değişmekte olan anlamsal karşılıkları da medyatizasyon süreci ile bağıntısı ekseninde değerlendirmeye alınabilir. Böylece söylem, zamansal göre'lilikleri yok saymayan ve kendi sürecine dair algılama ile alımlamayı da kapsayan bir çevre içinde gelişebilir ve işe yararlığı bulunan biçimsel ve düşünsel önermelerin ortaya çıkması sağlanabilir. Tüm bu nedenlerle medyatizasyon, teatralite kavramının kapsamlı bir biçimde anlaşılması ve açıklanmasına yarayan bir araştırma disiplini olarak görülebilir.

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## Metatheatre and Love in Sarah Ruhl's *Stage Kiss*\*

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### ABSTRACT

Sarah Ruhl's *Stage Kiss* (2011) uses theatre as a metaphor for the condition of the contemporary individual, who is perpetually and fruitlessly in pursuit of an authentic self. The main characters, referred to simply as She and He, are actors performing both in *Stage Kiss* and in two plays. This layering causes identities, roles, scripts, relationships, and love stories to constantly merge and overlap. The destabilization of identities leads to a relentless, humorous search for stability and love, which Ruhl critiques by emphasizing the artificiality of her play's own construction. Themes such as identity, love, communication, and intimacy are central to the work, situating the audience in a self-aware, metatheatrical world that questions its own form. The characters' deep uncertainties about their identities preclude resolution, rendering authentic love and genuine connections unattainable.

**Keywords:** Metatheatre, Sarah Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, Contemporary Drama, American Drama

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## Introduction

A prolific voice in contemporary American drama, Sarah Ruhl is known for her innovative approach to dramatic form, blending historical periods, theatrical worlds, and dramatic genres. Her thematic interests often revolve around love, family, and interpersonal communication, to which she adds a witty, often comical twist. By employing diverse formal methods, Ruhl strikes an aesthetic balance, connecting these universal themes to a broader audience. For instance, in her adaptation of *Eurydice*, she revisits Greek mythology from a contemporary perspective, linking the present with the afterlife.<sup>1</sup> In *The Clean House*, she uses humour and unrealistic modes of representation to explore the possibility of human communication.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in *Passion Play*, she adapts the medieval dramatic tradition of passion plays, infusing it with a metatheatrical perspective to probe the boundaries between artificiality and authenticity.<sup>3</sup>

This study examines Ruhl's 2011 play, *Stage Kiss*, a formally ambitious work featuring two plays within the play. Thematically, *Stage Kiss* builds on motifs present in Ruhl's earlier oeuvre, such as the authenticity of identity, the pursuit of truth, and the possibility of love. These explorations are intricately woven into the play's acknowledgment of theatre as an artificial construct. The main characters, She and He, are ex-lovers and actors, cast in the revival of *The Last Kiss*, a fictional 1932 melodrama. The plotline traces their rekindled romance, despite their existing commitments to others. Ruhl poses the critical question: How do actors navigate the boundary between their roles and their identities? Leveraging metatheatre, she further interrogates the tenuous distinction between reality and fiction. In doing so, she uses theatre as a metaphor for the contemporary individual's ceaseless quest for stability and genuine connection, even as they are ensnared by pervasive uncertainties.

At the outset, She and He are cast in *The Last Kiss*, years after their romantic relationship ended. In this melodrama, She plays Ada Wilcox, a terminally ill woman who reconnects with her ex-lover Johnny Lowell (played by He), who lives in Sweden. Ada's husband, mockingly portrayed as a noble man, accepts that Johnny stays with them in Manhattan for a month,<sup>4</sup> while Ada's health improves under Johnny's care. However, Johnny falls in love with Ada's daughter, Millie, who visits from Paris. The melodrama concludes with Johnny going back to Sweden with Millie, leaving Ada "to pick up the pieces."<sup>5</sup> The director acknowledges the failure of the play in 1932 but hopes for a better reception in the present.<sup>6</sup> Following the production of *The Last Kiss*, She and He begin an affair, and start to live together. However, due to financial strain, they agree to act in another play titled *I loved you before I killed you, or: Blurry*, which She's husband, Harrison, commissions. In this second play-within-the-play, She plays a whore, while He plays an IRA soldier. They meet while listening to street musicians in Washington Square Park, New York. They plan an escape to Dublin, where they dream of establishing an eye clinic for children. However, when she tells her pimp of her intentions to leave, he murders her. On seeing her dead body, he tries to kill himself but is instead killed by an IRA soldier. This vicious circle, where life imitates art and art imitates life, unfolds across two plays. The main plotline is triggered by the first play, while the second play eerily mirrors the supposed "reality" of *Stage Kiss*. Among love triangles, humorous interludes, emotional entanglements, and violent romance plots, the audience is drawn into a complex web of imitation and inauthenticity in multilayered worlds constructed by Ruhl.

## Love in Liquid Times

The theme of love pervades all three plotlines in *Stage Kiss*. The characters frequently engage in affairs. In *Stage Kiss*, She and He betray their partners, while in *The Last Kiss*, She (as Ada Wilcox) and He (as Johnny Lowell) embark on an illicit relationship. This portrayal of romantic love reflects a broader response to disenchantment of love in contemporary culture. Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" aptly captures the context of *Stage Kiss*. According to Bauman, liquid modernity emerged from the dissolution of the solid belief systems in the aftermath of the modernist project. The subsequent loss of coherence, unity, and solidity "cast us into a state of uncertainty never before so agonizing."<sup>7</sup> These "liquid modern" times are characterized by uncertainty and fear concerning the present and the future. Bauman identifies key aspects of liquid modern life, such as "[t]he permanence of transitoriness; the durability of the transient; the objective determination unreflected in the subjective consequentiality of actions; the

<sup>1</sup> Deborah Geiss, "Sarah Ruhl," in *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary American Playwrights*, eds. Martin Middeke et al. (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), 262.

<sup>2</sup> Geiss, "Sarah Ruhl," 263.

<sup>3</sup> Geiss, "Sarah Ruhl," 264.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 2012), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, (Oxfordshire: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), 21.

*perpetually underdefined social role, or more correctly an insertion into the flow of life without an anchor of a social role.*"<sup>8</sup>

Within this context, disillusionment surrounds the sustainability of love. bell hooks states that "[n]owadays the most popular messages are those that declare the meaninglessness of love, its irrelevance."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Eva Illouz argues that "uncertainty and irony dominate the cultural climate of romantic relationships."<sup>10</sup> Korbinian Stöckl also emphasizes skepticism regarding contemporary representations of love, stating, "[t]he prototypical notion of romantic love, loaded with idealist qualities such as eternity, unconditionality, passion, and perfectness, is . . . regarded with due skepticism."<sup>11</sup> These perspectives suggest that traditional notions of love and commitment no longer resonate in the contemporary moment.

This skepticism partly stems from how love is perceived, marketed, and represented in consumer society. Catherine Belsey contends that, because love lacks direct economic value, it transcends the boundaries of capitalist consumerism.<sup>12</sup> She asserts that "the postmodern condition brings with it an incredulity toward true love."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the postmodern challenge to metanarratives extends to discourses of love. However, Belsey also notes that "love occupies a paradoxical position in postmodern culture: it is at once infinitely and uniquely desirable on the one hand, and conspicuously naive on the other."<sup>14</sup> Rita Felski notes:

*[t]he erotic and the economic . . . are now intertwined in new ways. Sexual relations are increasingly viewed in instrumental terms and conducted to maximize individual freedom and pleasure.*<sup>15</sup>

This intertwining reflects the commodification of intimate relationships, where they are seen as tools for personal gain. Consequently, the economic framing of romance fosters disenchantment. The excessive use of romantic themes to market products further reduces love to a mechanism that sustains consumerism. Eva Illouz argues that "[b]ecause of the ubiquitous use of romance to sell commodities, romance in real life has become an empty form, acutely conscious of itself as code and cliché."<sup>16</sup> Additionally, cultural representations of love reinforce discourses on class, sex, and race. Lauren Berlant critiques such representations, asserting that they "justify the economic and physical domination of nations, races, religions, gays, lesbians, and women by including the 'generic' subjects imagined in a love plot tend to be white, Western, heterosexual, and schooled to the protocols of 'bourgeois' privacy."<sup>17</sup>

Discussions on the role of fantasy invested in the object of desire reveal the lack of authenticity in romantic relationships. Lauren Berlant distinguishes between desire and love. According to her, "[d]esire describes a state of attachment to something or someone, and the cloud of possibility that is generated by the gap between an object's specificity and the needs and promises projected onto it."<sup>18</sup> Desire is paradoxical: "it is a primary relay to individuated social identity. . . yet it is also the impulse that most destabilizes people."<sup>19</sup> Love, on the other hand, "is the embracing dream in which desire is reciprocated: rather than being isolating, love provides an image of an expanded self, the normative version of which is the two-as-one intimacy of the couple form."<sup>20</sup> Both desire and love "destabilize and threaten the very things (like identity and life) that they are disciplined to organize and ameliorate."<sup>21</sup> Love cannot exist without fantasy,<sup>22</sup> and the object of desire becomes "a cluster of fantasmic investments."<sup>23</sup> Catherine Belsey emphasizes that "[t]he role of fantasy in the construction of desire cannot be overestimated."<sup>24</sup> Eva Illouz explains how fantasies are shaped within the context of consumer culture: "Consumer culture – which forcefully articulates an emotional project of personal self-fulfillment – organizes the private modern emotional subject around his or her emotions and daydreams and locates the exercise of one's freedom in an individuality to be achieved and fantasized."<sup>25</sup> Fantasies

<sup>8</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, (New Hampshire: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 147.

<sup>9</sup> bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), xvii-xviii.

<sup>10</sup> Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*, (Cornwall: Polity Press, 2012), 192.

<sup>11</sup> Korbinian Stöckl, *Love in Contemporary British Drama: Traditions and Transformations of a Cultural Emotion*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), 89.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Belsey, "Postmodern Love: Questioning the Metaphysics of Desire," *New Literary History* 25, no. 3, (Summer 1994): 683.

<sup>13</sup> Belsey, "Postmodern Love: Questioning the Metaphysics of Desire," 683.

<sup>14</sup> Belsey, "Postmodern Love: Questioning the Metaphysics of Desire," 683.

<sup>15</sup> Rita Felski, "In the Name of Love," in *Love, Etc.: Essays on Contemporary Literature and Culture*, ed. Rita Felski and Camilla Schwartz (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2024), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 293.

<sup>17</sup> Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love*, (New York: Punctum Books, 2012), 112.

<sup>18</sup> Berlant, *Desire/Love*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Berlant, *Desire/Love*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Berlant, *Desire/Love*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Berlant, *Desire/Love*, 112.

<sup>22</sup> Berlant, *Desire/Love*, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Berlant, *Desire/Love*, 76.

<sup>24</sup> Belsey, "Postmodern Love: Questioning the Metaphysics of Desire," 688.

<sup>25</sup> Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*, 203.

can also arise through idealisation. Sara Ahmed refers to Freud's formulation of identification: "*identification is the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person.*"<sup>26</sup> The person with whom the infant identifies becomes an ideal that the ego attempts to emulate.<sup>27</sup> Ahmed asserts that "[t]he idealization of the object is not 'about' the object, or even directed to the object, but is an effect of the ego."<sup>28</sup> She connects identification and idealisation to cultural issues, particularly race:

*identifying oneself as a white woman and as a white Aryan would mean loving not just men, or even white men, but white men who also identify as Aryan, who can return the idealised image of whiteness back to oneself. To love and to be loved here is about fulfilling one's fantasy image of 'who one would like to be' through who one 'has.'*"<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, love and desire involve projection rather than experiencing the truth of the other person in their entirety. Moreover, As Ahmed demonstrates, fantasy and idealisation operate within broader cultural frameworks.

In the epilogue of *Stage Kiss*, Ruhl includes a quotation from Iris Murdoch: "*Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real.*"<sup>30</sup> This definition resonates with philosopher Jean Luc Nancy's perspective of love. Nancy contends that "*love is the extreme movement, beyond the self, of a being reaching completion*"<sup>31</sup> and that "[i]t is always the beating of an exposed heart."<sup>32</sup> This openness stems from completely opening up to the Other

*who comes and cuts across me, because it immediately leaves for the other: it does not return to itself, because it leaves only in order to come again. This crossing breaks the heart: this is not necessarily bloody or tragic, it is beyond an opposition between the tragic and serenity or gaiety.*<sup>33</sup>

Thus, love is an experience wherein the Self is reminded of its vulnerability in the face of something greater. For Nancy, love is about recognizing one's ontological limits. While the play highlights the difficulty of opening up to the Other, Ruhl explores love in *Stage Kiss* from a different perspective, as the characters struggle to define their own identities, let alone open up to others. Consequently, this profound experience of love remains marginal, suggested by the placement of Murdoch's quotation solely in the epilogue. Ruhl constructs characters without names and assigns multiple roles to most actors. This implied plurality, however, is neither celebrated nor cherished. Amy Muse notes "[a]lthough *Stage Kiss* is farcical and bubbly, it also delivers some of Ruhl's most serious considerations of marriage and intimacy."<sup>34</sup> Beneath its humour, the play underscores the absence of genuine human connection.

## A Web of Plays

The play's thematic emphasis on inauthenticity and imitation is reflected in its form. The simple, almost cliché, main plotline parodies the melodramatic mode in that the villain – He – is defeated at the end, the husband takes his revenge, and everything reverts to "normal." Wylie Sypher asserts that "*the aesthetic category of melodrama becomes a modality of the 19th Century mind*"<sup>35</sup> and elaborates:

*[m]elodrama cannot admit exceptions, for they would immediately involve the action too deeply within the context of actuality and trammel the gesture. The types must behave with a decorum of extremes; the resolution must be vividly schematic.*<sup>36</sup>

The melodramatic mode, then, implies the existence of clear boundaries between opposites and reassures the restoration of accepted values. *Stage Kiss* deconstructs this ideal by merging melodrama with other forms and by drawing attention to its artificiality. In *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon argues that "[t]he auto-reflexivity of modern art forms often takes the form of parody and, when it does so, it provides a new model for artistic process."<sup>37</sup> Ruhl revisits the play-within-the-play to represent her thematic concerns. For Hutcheon, parody can serve diverse purposes, ranging "*from the ironic and playful to the scornful and ridiculing.*"<sup>38</sup> In *Stage Kiss*, Ruhl employs a combination of these modes. Its self-reflexivity and humourous undertones render the play ironic and playful, yet beneath the surface, it offers a bitterly humourous critique of the lack of authenticity in interpersonal relations.

<sup>26</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 125.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 125.

<sup>28</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 127.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 129.

<sup>30</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, n.p.

<sup>31</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, "Shattered Love," in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 87.

<sup>32</sup> Nancy, "Shattered Love," 90.

<sup>33</sup> Nancy, "Shattered Love," 98.

<sup>34</sup> Amy Muse, *The Drama and Theatre of Sarah Ruhl*, (London: Methuen Drama, 2018), 91.

<sup>35</sup> Wylie Sypher, "Aesthetic of Revolution: The Marxist Melodrama," *The Kenyon Review* 10, no. 3, (Summer 1948): 436.

<sup>36</sup> Sypher, "Aesthetic of Revolution: The Marxist Melodrama," 437.

<sup>37</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 5.

<sup>38</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 6.

Ruhl uses a commonly used dramatic tool to convey her thematic explorations and emphasizes the play's self-awareness of its constructed nature through metatheatrical devices. The play-within-the-play mirrors theatre's "dual reality" and acts as "an artistic agency of self-reference and self-reflection."<sup>39</sup> Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner assert that "the play within a play would seem to be a particularly apt device for the expression of playful self-referentiality of the post-modern condition."<sup>40</sup> Eugene McNulty furthers this by arguing that "[metatheatrical] is marked not simply by self-conscious (meta) plays, but by a strongly focused interrogation of the entire process of theatre in all its complexity."<sup>41</sup> Although self-reflexivity and metafiction are often associated with postmodernism, metatheatrical is not a novel formal tool. Earlier works also utilized it. A famous example is the mousetrap scene in *Hamlet*, where the metatheatrical move plays a role in getting at the truth by provoking a reaction from Claudius. Bill Angus, examining the use of the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet*, contends that "[a]t the discursive intersection that is early modern metadrama exists a complex interplay of legitimations and delegitimations of artistic, political and individual authority. . . based on the policing of representations of real situations and people. . . foregrounds the contemporary instability of authority as a concept."<sup>42</sup> Thus, the destabilization of authority, often associated with postmodernism, was also articulated in earlier drama through metatheatrical devices.

In 20th-century drama, metatheatrical is used for various purposes: to deconstruct dominant ideologies, challenge the authority of the playwright over the text, and underscore the instability of universally acknowledged truths. In Brechtian drama, breaking the fourth wall reflects the dramatist's political objectives, exposing dominant ideologies as mere constructs. Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) dethrones the author, dismantling the notion of the playwright as the sole generator of meaning. Timberlake Wertenbaker's *After Darwin* (1998) uses metatheatrical to challenge the supremacy of scientific discourse, and connects the past and the present to highlight the blind spots in the theory of evolution. The playwright "emphasizes how theater can be important in the ongoing 'search for justice' that must continue at all costs, and science can be a fertile ground for this search, given its potential for both harm and good."<sup>43</sup>

### A Web of Affairs

In *Stage Kiss*, the process of staging a play, preparing for a role, and making directorial choices are deliberately brought to the forefront. Both the characters and the play itself oscillate between reality and fiction, placing the audience in a world keenly aware of its artifice while staging a quest for solid, stable truths. *Stage Kiss* explores the condition of individuals who lack a stable sense of self. Although employing fluid and mutable identities is a common trope in contemporary drama, Ruhl amplifies this tendency by introducing an acute awareness of the slippery nature of identity. In doing so, she responds to the crisis of the contemporary individual in the present cultural moment.

As previously cited, Zygmunt Bauman identifies uncertainty as a defining trait of contemporary culture. Adina Soriano observes that "Bauman defines our times as precarious, because they are radically uncertain, ungraspable in their consequences, resulting in a cultural climate that he believes stifles or discourages any genuine ethical discourse."<sup>44</sup> In *Stage Kiss*, the impossibility of fostering genuine ethical discourse is mirrored by the creation of unstable characters. Recognizing the performative nature of identity, the audience perceives the characters as products of Ruhl's imagination and artistic quest. The unnamed main characters of Ruhl's play are fluid and they take on the roles which the scripts assign to them. Indicating to the artificiality of theatrical world, the young actress who plays Millie in *The Last Kiss* says:

*I'm actually twenty-three. People always cast me as teenagers. It's so annoying.*<sup>45</sup>

Both She and He grapple with attaining a sense of self, often experiencing confusion about who they are beyond the confines of their scripted roles. She states:

*This— here—this feels like my real life. I don't want to be me. I want to be Ada Wilcox.*<sup>46</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Csilla Bertha, "Theatre within the Theatre, Play within the Play—Self-Reflexivity in Jim Nolan's *Blackwater Angel*," in *Focus: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Maria Kurdi, (Pécs: University of Pécs Press, 2012), 93.

<sup>40</sup> Gerhard Fisher and Bernhard Greiner, "The Play within the Play: Scholarly Perspectives," in *The Play within the Play: The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection*, ed. Gerhard Fisher and Bernhard Greiner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), xiii.

<sup>41</sup> Eugene McNulty, "Parody, Metatheatrical, and the Postmodern Turn: A Secret History of Irish Drama," in *Drama and the Postmodern*, ed. Daniel K. Jernigan (New York: Jernigan, Cambria Press, 2008), 62.

<sup>42</sup> Bill Angus, "Metadrama, Authority and the Roots of Incredulity," in *Drama and the Postmodern*, ed. Daniel K. Jernigan (New York: Jernigan, Cambria Press, 2008), 55.

<sup>43</sup> Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, *Science on Stage: From Doctor Faustus to Copenhagen*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 50.

<sup>44</sup> Adina Soriano, "Living in Liquid Times: Precariousness and Plasticity in Forced Entertainment's *Tomorrow's Parties*," in *Of Precariousness: Vulnerabilities, Responsibilities, Communities in 21st-Century British Drama and Theatre*, ed. Mireia Aragay and Martin Middeke (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 151.

<sup>45</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 68.

Acknowledging that the role of Ada Wilcox has supplanted her sense of reality, She seeks a stable identity by immersing herself in the character. Similarly, He adopts the outdated language of the character he portrays in *The Last Kiss*, prompting Harrison to admonish him: “*Would you please stop talking like you’re in a 1930s drama.*”<sup>47</sup> The affair between She and He begins during rehearsals and their identities blend with their characters’ scripted actions. Despite their romantic entanglement, there is no genuine connection between them—they have previously experienced a failed relationship and continue to face miscommunication and discord outside their roles. As She’s husband observes, “*She always falls in love with whoever she’s in a play with.*”<sup>48</sup> This suggests that She blindly follows scripts handed to her, and “becomes” the character she portrays. Attempting to anchor her in reality, Harrison calculates the extent of their staged intimacy:

*You and—Johnny here—have kissed each other—let’s see—nine times a night, eight shows a week, four-week run, two hundred and eighty-eight times. That’s not love. That’s oxytocin.*<sup>49</sup>

Harrison’s remark underscores the biochemical underpinnings of romantic feelings, implying their insincerity. By referring to He as “Johnny,” Harrison emphasizes that the person She claims to love is merely a construct of the script. Under the influence of the script and performance, She falls in love with the character played by him.

Not only does Ruhl portray identity as fluid but she also creates various layers of reality using metatheatrical devices. The play’s self-referential nature amplifies the sense of uncertainty. The overlapping theatrical realms gradually merge into each other and evoke a sense of disorientation. The artificiality of the embedded plays is emphasized, as seen in a conversation between He’s girlfriend, Laurie, and She:

*Laurie: You must be so relieved. It must have been so exhausting. Night after night... all those lines.  
She: Once you know them, it’s not really very tiring to repeat them.*<sup>50</sup>

This exchange suggests that acting involves mechanical repetition. Initially, the boundary between the setting of *The Last Kiss* and the actors’ “real” lives is clearly delineated. A stage direction highlights “[t]he contrast between the fake world of their costumes and the real world.”<sup>51</sup> However, as preparations progress for the revenge play commissioned by Harrison, these distinctions dissolve. The director takes a picture of their apartment and replicates it for the set design of *I loved you before I killed you, or: Blurry*. Stage directions emphasize the lack of distinction between their staged and real environments:

*A tech rehearsal. Detroit.  
No set change.  
It is, oddly, an exact facsimile of He’s apartment from New York. But now it is a set. Maybe there are curtains above it. or a new lighting instrument above it.  
...  
She: It’s a little weird – don’t you think?  
...  
They even got the stain, on the couch.*<sup>52</sup>

The replica of their apartment creates a profound sense of disturbance for her. She finds herself in a facsimile, disrupting her perception of reality. The stage direction “no set change” and the word “oddly” underscore the crisis that the audience is meant to experience, placing them in a position where distinguishing between the levels of fictionality in the play becomes impossible. This unease also arises from the realization that identity and reality can be imitated and duplicated. The play challenges the notions of uniqueness and authenticity, both in terms of personal identity and external reality.

The absence of a solid, unified sense of self is further emphasized through the theme of love. In Ruhl’s play, love and intimacy devolve into shallow pursuits, as exemplified by the affair between the actors. Their relationships highlight the superficial and inauthentic nature of human connections. The artificiality is evident in the following dialogue:

*He: Hold me forever. Curl up with me in a ball and shut the rest of the world out forever and come live with me in an attic or basement—who cares—and pretend we’re the only people in the universe.  
She: . . . I thought it would be nice to reminisce with you one day but I feel like I’m drowning.  
He: It must be the hot and sour soup.*

<sup>47</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 80.

<sup>48</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 77.

<sup>49</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 77.

<sup>50</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 74.

<sup>51</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 51.

<sup>52</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 97.

*She: Yeah. Poor Angela. I feel terrible.*

*He: She'll be okay. Don't think about her now. Think about me.*<sup>53</sup>

He seeks refuge in fantasy and physical intimacy while remaining disconnected from She's deeper emotions. When She expresses regret over abandoning her daughter for him, He dismisses her concerns and shows no interest in exploring her genuine feelings, reducing their communication to superficial interactions.

Similarly, the idea that marriage provides security and happiness is deconstructed. She outwardly acknowledges contentment in her marriage:

*We're happy. My husband, I mean. And me. We're happy.*<sup>54</sup>

However, she goes on to confess her sense of disconnection from reality:

*Ever since I left you I thought that in some parallel ghost world we had kids we rowed by a canal . . . I thought part of me would be a ghost forever, without you. I was no longer real even when I was happy. I was no longer real especially when I was happy. But no, all along in real time you've gone on being you and I've gone on being me and yes I really love you enough to be ghosted by you my entire life but my God I left you for a reason.*<sup>55</sup>

Eva Illouz posits that “distance enables idealization [since] it activates the ‘other’ form of consciousness: that is, the memory which reminisces about good experiences, and anticipation which organizes it in aesthetic vignettes.”<sup>56</sup> Distance allows She to construct an aestheticized narrative of romance in her imagination, but this idealisation conflicts with the reality of their relationship. She recognizes that He remains unchanged and remembers why their relationship ended. Her realization—that she clung to an unreal image of love while feigning happiness in her marriage—reveals the gap between fantasy and reality.

The theme of inauthenticity is further explored through the metaphor of the stage kiss. Performing intimacy on stage blurs the boundaries between the private and public spheres. The repeated onstage kisses lead the actors to attempt a romantic connection in their lives. According to psychoanalyst Adam Phillips the kiss is intimately personal:

*[f]rom a psychoanalytic point of view, the kiss is a revealing sequence concerning personal history. The way a person kisses and likes to be kissed shows in condensed form something about that person's character.*<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, *Stage Kiss* complicates the notion of the kiss as a straightforward act of affection by emphasizing its performative dimension. During rehearsals, the characters experiment with ways to convey the intensity of the kissing scene:

*He as Johnny: To hell with the past and the future! To hell with all that!*

*They kiss.*

*She: I think it's more of a—*

*They do another kind of kiss.*

*He: Or I could sort of—*

*They do another kind of kiss.*

*She: There's no transition into the kiss, what if I, I don't know, slap him first?*

*Director: Try it.*<sup>58</sup>

For the audience of *Stage Kiss*, however, the act of kissing becomes deromanticized due to the explicit staging of the actors' effort to make it appear genuine. In popular representations, kissing is often considered to be the quintessential symbol of romantic connection. Marcel Danesi observes that “[r]omantic love and the act of lip kissing are now so intertwined in the popular imagination that people hardly ever stop to think not only why we do it, but also why we have developed a worldwide culture of lovemaking revolving around that act.”<sup>59</sup> Although widely seen as a token of affection, Danesi argues that the kiss possesses a subversive power, noting that “it can occur outside of marriage, providing an opening gambit for escaping a boring situation and for entering into a world of enticement.”<sup>60</sup> The characters in *Stage Kiss* toy with this potential. By performing kisses on stage, they temporarily escape their mundane realities. In the first play, the kissing scene between She and He rekindles their former relationship. However, through repeated rehearsals and staging, the act loses its symbolic weight as a gesture of genuine affection. The artificiality of intimacy is acknowledged in a commentary on staged kisses:

<sup>53</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 87.

<sup>54</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 53.

<sup>55</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 111.

<sup>56</sup> Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*, 222.

<sup>57</sup> Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1993), 96.

<sup>58</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 27-28.

<sup>59</sup> Marcel Danesi, *The History of the Kiss!: The Birth of Popular Culture*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15.

<sup>60</sup> Danesi, *The History of the Kiss!: The Birth of Popular Culture*, 23.

*She: Why do you think people enjoy watching other people kiss on stage, anyway?*

*He: They tolerate it because it signifies resolution which people like to see on stage but they don't really like to see the act of kissing on stage, only the idea of kissing on stage. That's why actors have to be good looking because it's about an idea, an idea of beauty completing itself. You don't like to see people do more than kiss on stage, it's repulsive.<sup>61</sup>*

He summarizes the audience's conventional expectations of art: resolution and beauty. Stage kisses fulfill these expectations, offering viewers a sense of solace. However, in Sarah Ruhl's play, the kisses subvert this convention by introducing complications, including infidelity and relational conflict. Through its metatheatrical commentary, the play disrupts its own assertions, challenging audience assumptions about intimacy and performance.

Furthermore, the stage kiss dissolves the boundaries between authentic and fake experiences and serves as a bridge between the playwright's thematic and formal explorations. At one point, She reflects on this blurred line:

*She: When I kissed you just now did it feel like an actor kissing an actor or a person kissing a person because I've kissed you so many times over the last few weeks I'm starting to not know the difference.<sup>62</sup>*

The lack of punctuation and the repetitive phrasing reflects her inability to make sense of her experience. In keeping with Ruhl's exploration of identity's fluidity, her words raise questions about the nature of acting and the requisite dissolution of self in assuming a role. Stripped of a stable identity, She struggles to differentiate between genuine intimacy and superficial infatuation based on physical attraction.

Through its intertwining plots of love triangles, which appear both in the frame play and the first play-within-the-play, Ruhl interrogates the possibility of forging and sustaining authentic connections. *Stage Kiss* concludes on a note of deliberate uncertainty. During the premiere of *I loved you before I killed you; or Blurry*, She notices her daughter in the audience, forgets her lines, and blurts out: "I miss my husband."<sup>63</sup> She and He end their affair, and Harrison reveals that he commissioned the second play as an act of "revenge" to "wake [her] up."<sup>64</sup> Although "waking up" suggests a revelation of truth, the play consciously rejects this resolution.

At the end, She reconciles with her husband, creating a semblance of closure. Yet the ending evokes a sense of suspicion about the viability of genuine love, as Harrison outlines his vision of their future:

*I want you to take me to a theater and kiss me once a week, and pretend I'm someone else. Once a week I can be whoever you want me to be, and you can be whoever I want you to be. Kiss me in a place with no history and no furniture.<sup>65</sup>*

Moving on from the affair, the couple resorts to becoming someone else for each other. This dynamic is strengthened by their decision to visit a theatre and perform their kiss. In *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, Zygmunt Bauman suggests that consumer life "favours light and speed" as well as "novelty and variety."<sup>66</sup> In reconciling, She and Harrison opt for familiarity while simultaneously allowing space for versatility in their relationship. On the surface, they appear to have rebuilt their foundation. On catching them almost kissing, He remarks:

*That was intimate. That was nice. I envy you.<sup>67</sup>*

Nevertheless, the insatiable search for novelty remains. The script, in a self-referential manner, describes the final kiss between She and Harrison as being "as simple as it is real."<sup>68</sup> Yet, as discussed earlier, the stage kiss is inherently unreal, and the resolution it symbolizes is illusory. The play thus negates the intimacy suggested by its final image. Furthermore, there is an implicit awareness of the difficulty in translating this direction into stage action. The play has already complicated the stage kiss, particularly through He's earlier observation that kissing on stage can never be conveyed as a simple, unambiguous gesture.

## Conclusion

In *Stage Kiss*, Sarah Ruhl explores the enduring search for love within the contemporary cultural landscape. While modern individuals continue to desire love, a sense of disenchantment surrounds their pursuit. In consumer culture, the perceived abundance of romantic options tends to destabilize individuals.<sup>69</sup> The idealised images of romance fail to

<sup>61</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 55.

<sup>62</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 68-69.

<sup>63</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 114.

<sup>64</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 119.

<sup>65</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 120.

<sup>66</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, 49.

<sup>67</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 121.

<sup>68</sup> Ruhl, *Stage Kiss*, 123.

<sup>69</sup> Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, 293.



align with real-life experiences. The fantasy inherent in romantic relationships raises questions about the authenticity of such connections. Ruhl's characters reflect the plight of individuals in a culture which distrusts love's viability.

Zygmunt Bauman observes that we are caught in an "endless, forever unfinished and frustrating, search for certainty."<sup>70</sup> Both the characters and the audience of *Stage Kiss* find themselves engaged in an unending quest for certainty. The characters grapple with their identities, adopting roles from the script as a coping mechanism for their uncertainty. In his *New York Times* review of *Stage Kiss*, Charles Isherwood concludes: "Honoring the conventions of romantic comedy, it concludes on a sweet note that feels both grounded in truth and wholly satisfying, with a parting of the ways and a reunion."<sup>71</sup> However, the review simplifies the play's complexities and focuses on the "happy ending" the play seems to offer by saving She and Harrison's marriage. Ruhl's objective is not to offer resolution to the audience. Rather, she is interested in probing issues of identity and the impossibility of love. She highlights the limitations of her formal approach, compelling the audience to engage with the performance on multiple levels. The audience must discern the actors' identities, navigate the layers of theatricality, and reflect on their own experiences with identity and love. However, the boundaries between reality and fiction remain elusive, as most distinctions exist only within the script. Ruhl's play resists delivering a comforting resolution, ultimately questioning the authenticity of love.

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<sup>70</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Isherwood, "'Stage Kiss,' a Sarah Ruhl Comedy, at Playwrights Horizons," *New York Times*, March 2, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/03/theater/stage-kiss-a-sarah-ruhl-comedy-at-playwrights-horizons.html>.

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## Çözülen Bir Dünyada Yeni Tiyatro Arayışları

### In Search of a New Theatre in a Dissolving World

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#### ÖZ

Melike Saba Akım'ın yirminci yüzyıl tiyatrosu bağlamında kaleme aldığı *Logostan Kurtulmak: 20. Yüzyıl Dramında Karşı-Anlatı* (2022) adlı eseri tiyatrodaki temsil sorusuna Derrida izleğinde yapı sökücü bir yaklaşımla cevap arıyor. Batılı anlamda tiyatroyun metin merkezli karakterini sorgulamaya çeken eserin temel özelliği, sadece tiyatroyun metinsel özelliğine yöneltilen başkaldırıyı incelemekten ibaret değil; Akım daha ziyade tiyatroyun logosentrik (söylem merkezli) yapısının özellikle yirminci yüzyılda karşılaştığı çözülmeye dikkat çekiyor. Yazar, Jacques Derrida'nın başını çektiği postyapısalcı felsefenin Elinor Fuchs ve Hans-Thies Lehmann gibi tiyatro kuramcıları tarafından benimsenerek dramatik bütünlüğün parçalanışını kuramsal zeminde tartışmaya açıyor. Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett ve Richard Foreman gibi tiyatroycuların eserlerine odaklanan yazar, incelediği vaka örnekleri üzerinden tiyatrodaki dil, temsil ve anlatı gibi kavramların geçirdiği dönüşümleri ele alıyor.

**Keywords:** Melike Saba Akım, Logostan Kurtulmak, Temsil, Derrida

#### ABSTRACT

Melike Saba Akım's *Logostan Kurtulmak: 20. Yüzyıl Dramında Karşı-Anlatı* (*Doing Away with Logos: Counter-Narrative in 20th Century Drama*) searches for an answer to the question of representation in theatre by employing the deconstructive approach of Derrida. The main focus of the work, which puts the text-centred character of Western theatre under scrutiny, is not only to examine the reaction against the textual character of theatre; rather, Akım draws attention to the dissolution of the logocentric (discourse-centred) frame of theatre, especially in the twentieth century. The author explores the disintegration of dramatic unity on the theoretical grounds of Derridean poststructuralist philosophy which was later adopted by theatre theorists such as Elinor Fuchs and Hans-Thies Lehmann. Focusing on the works of theatre practitioners such as Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett and Richard Foreman, the author examines the transformations of several concepts such as language, representation and narrative in theatre through case studies.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Melike Saba Akım, Doing away with Logos, Representation, Derrida

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Tiyatro ve felsefe arasındaki ilişkinin Antik Yunan medeniyetinden günümüze kadar uzandığı bilinen bir gerçek. Her ne kadar tiyatronun sistematik felsefede ilk olarak Plato tarafından (oldukça olumsuz bir çerçevede) ele alındığı düşünülse de, bugünün kuramsal tartışmalarını dahi derinden etkileyen Aristoteles düşüncesinin, Marvin Carlson'ın ifadesiyle, “batı tiyatro kuramlarının başlangıcı” olduğu “tartışma götürmeyen” bir husus<sup>1</sup>. Özellikle *Poetika* adlı eserinde Aristoteles, “Tiyatro nedir?” gibi metafizik/ontolojik soruları sormanın yanı sıra tiyatrodan anlamın ortaya çıkışı, sahneye aktarımı ve seyirci tarafından alınmasını da içeren bir dizi epistemolojik soruya cevap arar. Filozofun tiyatro felsefesine belki de en büyük katkısı, bugün de tazeliğini koruyan bazı kavramları tiyatronun kuramsal zeminini inşa ederken ortaya koymasındır. Günümüz tiyatro çalışmalarını da yakından ilgilendiren kavramların başında kuşkusuz onun yorum geleneğiyle özdeşleşen *mimesis* kavramı gelir. Kültürel, dilsel ve sanatsal *temsili* karşılayan *mimesis*, olgular ve anlam arasında mutlak bir dilsel örtüşmenin var olduğu savıyla işlerlik gösteren köklü bir yaklaşıma işaret eder. Taklit ve öykünme yoluyla performans/anlatı biçiminde vücut bulan *mimesis*, her şeyden önce dilin *merkezli* bir mekanizma olduğu varsayımından hareketle anlamı çeşitli ikilikler üzerinden bir çerçeveye almayı hedefler. Bu haliyle felsefenin çıkamazlarından biri olan dualistik (ikili) düşünme biçiminin kültürel/sanatsal havzada mimetik gösteri/anlatı olarak vücut bulduğu görülür. Peki, anlam tekil bir organize edici prensiple merkezli bir hale getirilebilir mi? Dil salt diyalektik uçların beslendiği durağan bir yapı mıdır? En yalın haliyle dil, gösteren ve gösterilenden mi ibarettir? Estetik nesne mutlak bir biçimde aynı zamanda bir temsil nesnesi midir? Tiyatrodan anlam mimetik anlatının durağan dilselliğine indirgenebilir mi?

Melike Saba Akım'ın yirminci yüzyıl tiyatrosu bağlamında kaleme aldığı *Logostan Kurtulmak: 20. Yüzyıl Dramında Karşı-Anlatı* (2022) adlı eseri bu ve benzeri sorulara Derrida izleğinde yapısökümcü bir yaklaşımla cevap arıyor. Batılı anlamda tiyatronun metin merkezli karakterini sorgulamaya çeken eserin temel özelliği, elbette sadece tiyatronun metinsel özelliğine yöneltilen başkaldırıyı incelemekten ibaret değil; Akım daha ziyade tiyatronun logosentrik (söylem merkezli) yapısının özellikle yirminci yüzyılda karşılaştığı çözülmeye dikkat çekiyor. Yazar, Jacques Derrida'nın başını çektiği postyapısalcı felsefenin Elinor Fuchs ve Hans-Thies Lehmann gibi tiyatro kuramcıları tarafından benimsenerek dramatik bütünlüğün parçalanışını kuramsal zeminde açığa vurduğunu belirtiyor. Logos, mitos, *mimesis*, anlatı, karşı-anlatı, sahnesele mevcudiyet gibi kavramları bahse açtığı giriş bölümünde yazar kitabın savını ana hatlarıyla tanıtlıyor. Özellikle Antik Yunan bağlamından başlayarak yirminci yüzyıla kadar uzanan süreçte dil ve hakikat ilişkisini logos merkezli “temsil” kavramı üzerinden okuyor. Yazarın kendi ifadesiyle bu çalışma “merkezi bir anlamlandırmayı reddederek dili sahnedeki tüm sözcücelendirmelerin (oyuncu, müzik, ışık, vb.) arasına dâhil etmekle” ilgileniyor<sup>2</sup>. “Logostan sıyrılmak” olarak adlandırdığı yaklaşımını yazar “yazıyı dışlamakla değil, aksine ancak yazının içinden açılacak gediklerle gerçekleşebileceği” savı üzerinden Jacques Derrida felsefesine yakınlaştırıyor<sup>3</sup>. Buna göre yazar, “dili bir yapısöküm stratejisi olarak sorunsallaştırmak” ve “dram sanatının tiyatro metnine dönüşmesi sürecini dil tartışması içinde yürütmek”<sup>4</sup> gibi kimi ortaklıklar üzerinden Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett ve Richard Foreman'ın oyunlarını incelemeyi hedeflediğini belirtiyor.

“Pedagojik Karşıtlıklar” adını verdiği birinci bölümde yazar kullandığı kavramların hangi bağlamda ve çeşitli dönemlerde hangi ilişkide neye karşı kullanıldığını belirlemeye girişiyor. Tahmin edileceği ve yazarın da belirttiği üzere bu tarz bir girişim bir “karmaşayla” başa çıkma ön koşulunu barındırıyor, zira postyapısalcı düşüncenin ve çoğu zaman ona eşlik eden postmodernizm tartışmalarının bir kavram bolluğu yarattığı açık. Bu bakımdan yazar bu bölümü dört temel karşıtlık üzerinden ele alıyor: “Anlatı / Karşı-Anlatı,” “Drama / Performans,” “Teatrallık / Karşı-Teatrallık,” “Postmodern Drama veya Postmodern/Drama.” Bahsi geçen kavramları Akım antik Yunan felsefesinden yirminci yüzyıl tiyatro kuramlarına uzanan geniş bir literatür taramasıyla ele alıyor. Bu haliyle yazar, okur için de “karmaşaya” dönüşmesi muhtemel olan bir okuma sürecini oldukça kolaylaştırıyor.

İkinci bölüm, “Dram Sanatında Dil Sorunsalı,” yazarın özellikle yirminci yüzyıl felsefe ve tiyatro kuramlarında karşılaştığımız kimi kavram ve isimleri ele aldığı kısmı oluşturuyor. Akım, dilin anlamı aktarmadaki mutlak hâkimiyetinin sorunsallaşmasıyla başlayan “temsil krizinin” Maurice Maeterlinck, Alfred Jarry ve Antonin Artaud gibi dramatik çözümlenin çeşitli biçimlerini sunan tiyatro uygulayıcılarında ne gibi ifadeler bulunduğunu ele alıyor. Bu bölümde yazar postyapısalcılıkla iyice belirginleşen dil sorunsalını Derrida'nın batı metafiziği eleştirisi üzerinden inceliyor ve Derrida'dan sonra dram sanatının geçirdiği dönüşümün altını çiziyor. Buna göre, Derrida'nın postyapısalcılık çatısı altında geçirdiği 1960 ve 1970'lerle birlikte tiyatro “dramatik metinle olan bağımlı artık başka

<sup>1</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present*, expanded edition (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Melike Saba Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak: 20. Yüzyıl Dramında Karşı-Anlatı* (İstanbul: Habitus Kitap, 2022), 20.

<sup>3</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 20

<sup>4</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 22

bir rotaya aktarmıştır. Batı düşün tarihinin *logos-merkezci* yapılanmasını açık eden ve söz/yazı hiyerarşisinin tüm bir geleneğe nasıl nüfuz ettiğini ortaya döken Derrida'nın önerdiği yapısökümcü strateji ile tiyatro/metin ilişkisinin yeni yönelimi arasında belirgin bir paralellik bulunmaktadır<sup>5</sup>. Bu gelenek kuşkusuz logos merkezli dram sanatıdır. Bu noktada Akım'ın Hans-Thies Lehmann'dan alıntılanarak verdiği tanımlaması epistemolojik olduğu kadar ontolojik sahaya da sıçrayan önemli bir dönüşüme işaret ediyor: “Avrupa tiyatro geleneğinde *logos-merkezcilik* salt sözle ilgili bir şey olmanın ötesindedir.” Logos, “Yapıyla, düzenle ve *telos*'la ilgilidir. Logosa tanınan öncelik ve atfedilen değer klasik tiyatro anlayışının özüdür ve *logos* tanrının, düzenin, mantığın, nedenselliğin, kökenin, baba imgesinin ve dünyanın kendine has bir karışımı anlamına gelmektedir”<sup>6</sup>. Görüldüğü üzere, dram sanatında meydana gelen çözümlenme tiyatronun sınırlarını çoktan aşarak dünyanın ve insan ilişkilerinin işleyişinde ortaya çıkan radikal bir dönüşüme de işaret etmekte. Logosun çözülmesi, bir yönüyle tüm ana akım hakikat rejimlerinin çözülmesi anlamına geliyor. Bu bakımdan, Akım'ın bahsi geçen çözülmeyi yirminci yüzyıl tiyatro düşünüyü üzerinden ele almasıyla bu bölümün kitabın kuramsal merkezini oluşturduğu görülüyor.

Kitabın “Karşı-Anlatı: Dram Sanatından Tiyatro Metinlerine” adlı üçüncü bölümünde yazar sırasıyla Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett ve Richard Foreman'ın oyunlarını ele alıyor. Akım, avangard estetiğin öne gelen isimlerinden olan Gertrude Stein'in çoğu zaman okunmak için yazıldığı görülen oyunlarının “dramatik konvansiyonun bütünüyle dışında” olduğunu ve “çizgisel olmayan olay dizisi, tekrarlanmalar, parçalı (veya bütünüyle tasnif edilmiş) karakterler, eşzamanlılık ve kendine özgü *sürekli şimdiki zaman*” temelinde “dilden” ve “metinden” vazgeçmeden ancak yine de “dramatik konvansiyonun altını açıkça oyarak” yeni bir teatralite arayışında olduğunu belirtiyor<sup>7</sup>. Yazarın ifadeleriyle Stein “anlatıyı parçalamakta, zaman kurgusunu dağıtmakta ve natüralist anlamda bir tablo oluşturmak nosyonunu öne sürdüğü *peysaj metin* [landscape text] kavramıyla [teatralite] yeniden ele almaktadır”<sup>8</sup>. Stein tiyatrosundan çeşitli örnekleri bu bağlamda inceledikten sonra Akım Samuel Beckett'i ele aldığı kısımda Beckett estetiğini “drama / performans eşiği” olarak adlandırıyor<sup>9</sup>. Yazar bir yandan farklı kuşaklardan Beckett eleştirmenlerinin (yer yer birbirleriyle çatışan) görüşlerini tasniflerken, diğer yandan da Beckett tiyatrosunun metin-merkezli dramdan performansa, diyalogdan monoloğa, varlıktan “namevcudiyete” evrilen teatral yaklaşımını ele alıyor. Örneğin ilk kuşak Beckett eleştirmenlerinin çoğu Beckett'i varoluşçulukla ilişkilendirerek okurken özellikle 1980'lerden itibaren yeni kuşak eleştirmenler arasında post-yapısalcı bir yönelimin yaygınlaştığı vurgulanıyor<sup>10</sup>. Benzer biçimde, yazara göre deneyselliğin çeşitli biçimlerini benimseyen “Beckett'in kendi oyun yazarlığı kariyerini hepten bir araştırma alanı olarak düşündüğünü söylemek” mümkündür, zira Beckett'in oyun yazmayı “bir oyun alanı/araştırma sahası olarak hep kendine has bir deneme/yanılma mottosuyla sürdürdüğü” görülür<sup>11</sup>. Diğer bir deyişle, “ilk dönem oyunlarının dramaturjik olarak stabil ve diyalog odaklı yapılanmasının ilerleyen yıllarda çözülmeye başlamasıyla, geç dönem Beckett tiyatrosunda drama ve performans arasında bir tür melezlik oluşturduğu” ortaya çıkmaktadır<sup>12</sup>. Beckett'in oyun yazarlığı kariyerinin olgun döneminde “performativite” ön plana çıkmakta, *Oyun* (1964) gibi eserlerde “öznenin iflas ettiği” ve “karakterin öldüğü” anlaşılmaktadır<sup>13</sup>. *Ben Değil* (1972) adlı oyununda ise oyun kişisi “bir nesne olarak bile sahnede [yer alamamakta]”, tüm bedeni “sahnedan dışlanmakta” ve sadece bir projeksiyon imgesi olarak konuşan bir “ağız” biçiminde “gerçeğin bir kopyası” olarak sahnede var olabilmektedir<sup>14</sup>. Bu haliyle Beckett tiyatrosunun son dönemi, Elinor Fuchs'un Derrida izleğinde çerçevlendirdiği “namevcudiyet estetiğine”<sup>15</sup> yakınlaşmaktadır. Bu bölümün son kısmında ise Akım, Amerikalı avangard tiyatro uygulayıcısı Richard Foreman'ın “modernist anlamda birtakım ekspresyonist unsurlar içermesine ve Brecht'e olan gönül bağına rağmen son toplamda tümüyle modernizmin ötesinde” ve hatta “karşı-modernist” bir hüviyette inşa ettiği Ontolojik-Histerik Tiyatrosuna odaklanıyor<sup>16</sup>. Yazar Foreman'ın “Batı metafiziğine sırtını döndüğü tiyatro anlayışıyla merkezin olmayışına, anlamın sürekli olarak yer değiştirdiğine [ve] öznenin dağıldığına dair postmodern tartışmaları estetik ve ontolojik bir sorunsal olarak sahnesine [taşındığını]” aktarıyor<sup>17</sup>. Dahası, yazara göre Foreman'ı çağdaşlarından ayıran temel unsur, “döneme özgü post-yapısalcı sorgulamaları doğrudan düşünsel bir zeminde ve tiyatronun ontolojisiyle ilişkilendirerek estetize

<sup>5</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 128

<sup>6</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 129

<sup>7</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 135-137

<sup>8</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 137

<sup>9</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 162

<sup>10</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 162

<sup>11</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 164

<sup>12</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 164

<sup>13</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 171

<sup>14</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 178

<sup>15</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 179

<sup>16</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 188

<sup>17</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 189

etmesidir”<sup>18</sup>. Akım özellikle erken dönem oyunlarda “Kartezyen düşüncenin mutlak kabul ettiği gerçek ve gerçeklik, varlık/yokluk tanımları, *cogito ergo sum* önermesi ve tüm bunlara bağlı olarak şekillenen zaman/mekân algısının” temel sorunsallar olduğunu ifade ediyor<sup>19</sup>. Bu bağlamda Foreman tiyatrosu yer yer Gertrude Stein’in peysaj metin estetiğinden ödünçlemeler yapıyor, *sürekli şimdiki zamana* odaklanarak “perspektifsizlik” temelinde “gerçeklik yanlısalarını” “bilinç, algı, zaman, bellek” örüntüsünde sorunsallaştırıyor<sup>20</sup>. Öte yandan yazara göre tüm bu avangard referanslara rağmen Foreman oyunlarında “dil ötelenmez, aksine hepten merkezdedir; fakat ‘işlevi radikal ölçüde değişmiştir’”, zira dil “tutarlı bir bütünü kurma gayesiyle yapılanmaz. Oyunların pek çoğu klasik *anlatının* temel öğesi olan diyaloglarla örülüdür”, ancak “*anlatının* çalışma prensibini diyaloglar oluşturmaz. Çünkü burada söz konusu yapılanma *anlatı* değil, *karşı-anlatıdır*; dil, tüm varlığıyla oradadır, fakat *anlatının* tersine bir mekanizmayla çalışmaktadır”<sup>21</sup>. Bu haliyle Foreman sahnesinde “dile ve algıya odaklanarak açılanan Batı metafiziği eleştirisi” belirgin hale gelir<sup>22</sup>.

Kitabın sonsözünü yazar “Logostan Kurtulmak Mümkün Mü?”<sup>23</sup> sorusuyla başlıklandırıyor. Çalışmasının amacını çeşitli “ölümlerin” ve “öldürme teşebbüslerinin” – “Tanrı’nın ölümü, dilin ölümü, temsilin ölümü, yazarın ölümü, karakterin ölümü, metnin ölümü”, vb.- biçim verdiği 20. yüzyılda bu ölümlerin ve öldürme teşebbüslerinin ne ölçüde tiyatrodaki gerçekleştiğini sorgulamaya açmak olduğunu ifade ediyor<sup>24</sup>. Yazarın vardığı sonuçlardan ilki “metni öldürme teşebbüsünün aslında *logosu* öldürme teşebbüsü” olduğu<sup>25</sup>. Yazara göre, “tiyatronun logos-merkezli yapılanması çökmek üzere[dir]” ve “temsil esasına dayalı dramatik yapıyı kuran tüm öğeler bu çöküş içinde ayrı ayrı çözülmekte[dir]”; “Neden-sonuç ilişkisine dayalı olaylar dizgesi, Kartezyen özne, bu akıl içinden konuşan tanrı-yazar ve bütünlüklü, anlamlı bir dizgeye oturtulmuş tüm anlatılar” gibi “Rasyonel akıl içinden kurulan her şey” çöküş halindedir<sup>26</sup>. Akım, ele aldığı vaka örneklerinden yola çıkarak hem Stein, hem Beckett, hem de Foreman’ın “hakikati dil yoluyla kavramanın imkânsızlığına, anlamın dünyasallıkla kurulduğuna” işaret ettiği sonucuna varıyor<sup>27</sup>. Ancak bu durum kökten bir “anlam yitimi” olarak okunmamalıdır; daha ziyade “*logos* dışında bir dünya mümkün” demeye getiren bir “anlatı” arayışı olarak görmek gerekiyor<sup>28</sup>.

Yazarın sonuç kısmındaki son sözlerinin tiyatro düşüncesi bağlamında değerli bir saptamayı yaptığı görülüyor. Logos çözülmeye başlamış, teklik yerini dinamik ve akışkan bir çokluğa bırakmıştır, peki karşımızda ham bir kaos, inceliksiz bir anarşi mi vardır? Tiyatro, logosentrik anlamın çözümlenmesinin ardından yalın bir düzensizliği, anlamsızca akan sahne görüntülerini mi yüceltmektedir? Yazarın düşünsel anlamda en önemli savlarından birinin (naçizane sorduğum) bu gibi sorulara verdiği cevapta görüldüğü kanaatindeyim. Akım, çağdaş felsefenin önemli temsilcilerinden Alain Badiou’nun tiyatronun nihayetinde “bir düşünce olayı olduğunu” ve düşüncenin “temsilde ve temsil vasıtasıyla boy gösterdiğini” belirten sözlerini anımsatarak çalışmasını şu şekilde sonlandırıyor: “temsili bozmaya, *logosu* dışlamaya çalışırken dahi tiyatro hala daha bir düşünce olayı, irrasyonel bir fikir, düzensiz bir düzenleme[dir]”<sup>29</sup>. Bu haliyle denilebilir ki, anlamın dilin sınırlarının dışında yer yer radikal formlarda aranması, bu arayışı ne anlamsız ne değersiz kılmakta, ne de bu süreci *düşüncenin* dışına itmektir. Aksine, düşüncenin sınırları zorlanmakta, anlam çoğalmakta, tiyatronun bilinen kimliği farklı bakış açılarıyla yeniden şekillenmektedir.

Özellikle Derrida izleğinde şekillenen postyapısalcı kuramların düşünsel zeminini oluşturduğu *Logostan Kurtulmak*, takip ettiği perspektifin kavramsal ve kuramsal zenginliğini fazlasıyla yansıtıyor. Derrida felsefesinin belki de en verimli eleştirel kavramları – “bulunuş metafiziği eleştirisi”, “logos eleştirisi”, “temsil eleştirisi”, “Kartezyen öznellik eleştirisi”, vb. – Akım’ın çalışmasında derinlikli biçimde kullanılıyor. Dahası, post-yapısalcı/Derridacı okumaların devinim kazandırdığı kimi tiyatro kuramları – Elinor Fuchs’un “karakterin ölümü” ve “namevcudiyet estetiği”, Hans-Thies Lehmann’ın “post-dramatik” anlayışı vb. - Akım’ın çalışmasında okuyucuya kavramsal açıdan yolunu kaybettirmeyecek biçimde ele alınıyor. Bu bakımdan kitap, Derrida felsefesine ve Derridacı tiyatro kuramlarına aşina olmayan okuru betimleyicilik tuzağına düşmeden bilgilendiriyor. Kavramları ele alış biçimiyle Akım, özellikle kuramları uyguladığı vaka incelemelerine yaratıcı yorumlar getirerek ilgi çekici bir bütünlük kuruyor. Diğer yandan, Beckett tiyatrosu gibi Türkçe çalışmalarda daha sık karşılaşılan bir akademik içeriğin yanına kısmen daha az bilinen Richard Foreman tiyatrosunun eklenmesi çalışmayı kuramsal anlamda olduğu kadar kapsam olarak da özgün ve değerli kılıyor.

<sup>18</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 189

<sup>19</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 190

<sup>20</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 191-193

<sup>21</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 206

<sup>22</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 213

<sup>23</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 215

<sup>24</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 215

<sup>25</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 215

<sup>26</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 215

<sup>27</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 219

<sup>28</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 219

<sup>29</sup> Akım, *Logostan Kurtulmak*, 220

Diğer yandan kitabın en güçlü yanını oluşturan Postyapısalcı/Derridacı kuramsal izleğin aynı zamanda eserin temel sınırlılığını da teşkil ettiği kanaatindeyim. Akım, “karşı-teatrallik” düşüncesini çoğunlukla “logosantrizm eleştirisi” biçiminde “dil” ve “metin” çerçevesinde okuyor. Elbette Derrida felsefesinin temel savının dil/metin/diskür üzerinden hayatın ve iktidar ilişkilerinin sorgulanması olduğu hatırlandığında bu yaklaşım anlaşılabilir. Öte yandan, her ne kadar post-yapısalcı düşünce biçimi 1970 ve 1980’li yılların düşün yaşamını derinden etkilemiş olsa da, özellikle 1990 sonrasında eleştirel kuram daha ziyade “maddeci” bir yöne evrilmiş ve “insan-merkezcilik eleştirisi”, “Antroposantrizm eleştirisi”, “insandıışı eyleyciliğin kabulü”, “Kartezyen öznellik eleştirisi”, vb. yaklaşımlarla dil ve maddi deneyimlerin arasındaki ‘ikilik’ ortadan kalkmaya başlamış, ‘anlam’ çoğul bir zeminde ‘insandıışı’ unsurların eyleyciliğini de kapsayacak şekilde ‘etik’ çerçevede ele alınmaya başlanmıştır. Diğer bir deyişle, post-yapısalcılığın kaçınılmaz biçimde kurguladığı ‘dil-maddi deneyim’ ikiliği insan-merkezli düşünceye karşı konumlanan ‘yeni maddeci’ ve ‘posthümanist’ felsefe tarafından sorgulanmaya başlanmıştır. Bu açıdan düşünüldüğünde “karşı-teatrallik” salt ‘dilde’ veya ‘metin karşıtlığında’ değil, aynı zamanda insandıışı unsurların ‘maddi eyleyciliğinde’ de ifade bulur. Karşıtlıklar üzerine kurulan ‘hümanist’ düşüncenin yerini ‘çokluk’ alır; bu noktada *karşı-teatrallik* belki de yerini ‘çoklu-teatrallik’ [multi-theatricality], ‘melez-teatrallik’ [hybrid-theatricality], ‘insandan-öte-teatrallik’ [more-than-human-theatricality], ya da ‘posthüman-teatrallik’ diyebileceğimiz bir estetik dışavurum biçimine bırakır<sup>30</sup>. Son yıllarda özellikle Beckett konulu çalışmaların bu doğrultuda şekillenmeye başladığı görülür<sup>31</sup>. Kuşkusuz böyle bir yaklaşım kitabın kuramsal anlamda analitik bütünlüğünü bozma riski taşıyor, bu açıdan yazarın tercihi anlaşılabilir, ancak yine de “karşı-teatrallığın” yazarın ele aldığı oyunlarda güncel zeminde insandıışı unsurları da kapsayacak şekilde neye evrildiğinden kısaca bahsetmesinin faydalı olacağı kanaatindeyim. Nitekim yazarın incelediği üç teatral yaklaşımda da eyleyici insandıışı nesnelere, akışkan uzam-zamansallıklar ve melezleşen öznellikler gibi insan-merkezciliğin uzağında kalan katmanların bulunması bu yönde okumaları mümkün kılıyor; yazarın da saptadığı gibi, ele aldığı üç tiyatrocunun da “anlamın dünyasallıkla kurulduğuna” yönelik inancının tiyatro düşününe getirdikleri “maddeci” yaklaşıma bir temel oluşturduğu söylenebilir. Bu saptamanın hem günceli yakalamak hem de takip eden araştırmalara ışık tutmak açısından önemli olduğunu düşünüyorum. Zaten Akım, kitabın yayımlanmasından kısa bir süre sonra kaleme aldığı “Karşı-Teatral Bir Düş: İnsansız Tiyatro” (2023) adlı makalesinde bu izlekte bir okuma yaparak bir yönüyle *Logostan Kurtulmak*’ta detaylandırılmayan ‘insan-merkezcilik’ eleştirisini karşı-teatral estetik bağlamında ele alıyor. Her ne kadar makalesinde ele aldığı vaka incelemeleri kitaptakinden çoğunlukla farklı olsa da Akım “karşı-teatrallığın” günümüzde salt dil odaklı deneyimsellikler yoluyla değil aynı zamanda insandıışı-eyleycilik üzerinden de yeniden ele alınması gerektiğine yönelik kuramsal bir bakış açısı getiriyor. Bu yönüyle yazarın makalesi kitabın tamamlayıcı bir unsuru olarak düşünülebilir.

Kitapla ilgili bahsetmek istediğim son husus kısmen teknik bir detayı ilgilendiriyor. Eserin her ne kadar güçlü bir kaynakçası olsa da dizin olmayışı göze çarpıyor. Postyapısalcılık gibi kavram yoğunluğu yüksek olan bir çerçeveyi benimseyen çalışmada dizin olmaması, okuyucunun kitabı kavramsal başvuru kaynağı olarak kullanmasını zorlaştırıyor. Bu açıdan ilerleyen baskılarda bu hususun mümkünse gözden geçirilmesinin çalışmanın temel bir referans olmasına katkı sağlayacağını düşünüyorum.

Melike Saba Akım’ın kişisel ve akademik anlamda son derece keyif alarak okuduğum eserinin özellikle Türkçe tiyatro literatürü açısından heyecan verici bir gelişme olduğu ve bu alana oldukça önemli bir katkı yapacağı kanaatindeyim. Akıcı, canlı ve zihin açıcı dili, kavramsal-kuramsal derinliği ve zengin kaynakçasıyla *Logostan Kurtulmak*’ın takip eden çalışmalara yol gösterici olacağını düşünüyorum. Hem tiyatro alanında çalışan akademisyen ve öğrenciler, hem de bu yönde ilgisi olan okurlar açısından oldukça faydalı bir başvuru kaynağı olduğunu söyleyebilirim.

<sup>30</sup> Bkz. W. Arons and T. J. May (editors), *Readings in Performance and Ecology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); M. Schweitzer and J. Zerdy (editors), *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); P. Eckersall, H. Grehan, and E. Scheer, *New Media Dramaturgy: Performance, Media and New Materialism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); U. Chaudhuri, *The Stage Lives of Animals: Zoosis and Performance* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017); L. Woynarski, *Ecodramaturgies: Theatre, Performance and Climate Change* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Bkz. A. McMullan, “History in Tatters: Bodies and Things in Samuel Beckett’s Theatre”, *Études britanniques contemporaines* 35 (2008); A. Dennis, “Introduction: Samuel Beckett and the Nonhuman”, *Samuel Beckett Today /Aujourd’Hui* 32 (2020); C. Lavery and C. Finburgh (editors), *Rethinking the Theatre of the Absurd: Ecology, the Environment and the Greening of the Modern Stage* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); C. Chen, “Revisiting the Absurd: Posthuman Affects in Samuel Beckett’s Theatre”, *New Theatre Quarterly* 37:4 (2021).

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