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Contemporary Iranian Dramatist, Eastern Visual Provocation, and Cultural Originality

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Abstract

The necessity of taking refuge in literary productions has been intensified due to the societies' severe involvement in the features of the modern world. Loss of identity and failure to maintain an integrated self are the repercussions of distancing from humanistic roots. Some attempts in modern art/literature appear to focus more on visual styles to represent the catastrophes of the modern universe and create the needed cultural shock. Contemporary Iranian Dramatist, Ali Rafi'ee, has chosen to potentialize historically originated texts by visual intensity of various types on stage to help audience develop critical thinking and rehabilitate their identities with the aid of cultural resemblances very akin to universal codes of humanity. Scrutinizing the visual techniques, one may see the footprints of Kabuki and Balinese performances, supporting the idea of the visual communicative power of stage and audience. Consequently, the significance of the study lies in salvaging the universal humanity through vision-based performances; the humanity which has been doomed to be disoriented within the disastrous modern era. Seeing through the lenses of cultural memory theories of Jan and Aleida Assman, one can consider vision-based performances as an appropriate modern means of helping the individuals to rehabilitate the lost culture and eventually to blur the geographical boundaries and highlight the transnational aspects of literature.

Keywords: Contemporary Iranian Dramatist, Ali Rafi'ee, Visual Provocation, Cultural Memory, Kabuki and Balinese Performance.

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Introduction

The re-enactment of reality in the guise of the flamboyance of words, rhetoric, poetics, and performance is considered as distinctive genres of literary productions within which men have been captivated. Among all literary modes, drama, as a genre presented through performance, is the most concrete of all genres due to its rehabilitation of life before the eyes of the enchanted audience. While other literary modes situate life within their manipulative terms and narratives, drama exhibits it in all the dimensions including motion, maneuver, vocalization and optical techniques besides the imaginative verbalization. Due to the fact that this artistic form makes a facsimile of human conditions, its tangible structure and performative potential give life to the hackneyed reality by ascribing dramatic forms to it. Since drama is the aesthetic portrayal of the real life in its full dimension, this literary mode's mimetic nature has made it domineering and eventually preferable for a majority of literary enthusiasts.

A source explains that drama, similar to any forms of literature, has traveled from its primitive modes to sophisticated ones, besides the fact that it undertakes the revelation of a story. Beginning with dancing, ceremonies, music, and magic, this specific form of human expression gradually got complicated and eventually assumed a definite shape (Clarke 10). The revelation of the mimetic impulses of reality in the form of a story has happened through dance, mask, action, and dialogue in different ways in accordance with the requirements of the society. Since the etymology of the word "drama" manifests its being extracted from the Greek verb "dran", which means to act, one can wittingly find different definitions of 'action' during different phases of dramatic performances; Having had a journey from its inchoate shape and been gradually developed and got sophisticated through ages, drama reaches its flourishing qualification in the Renaissance era. Being indentured to obeying the concept of unities and following the logical sequence of the plot, the dramatists placed the revelation of the story on the vise of action and dialogue which seemed to be a manageable framework for pursuing the sequential development. Additionally, with an awakened sense of nationalism, the increment in the focus on the verbiage and pomposity of art became centralized. The Renaissance society was ruptured by being informed of their cultural revival through the national verbosity and the exaggerated pride.

As time moved on, the steps of Modernism prostrated the traditional bonds and the powerful strings between the society and the individuals. The modern society proved itself impotent in satisfying the growing requirements of the people. Isolation and taking shelter within one's self became centralized ideas during the 20th century. Individuals' confusion resulted from their impaired identities necessitated different types of dramatic performances in comparison to earlier periods. In the view of the fact that drama is supposed to be the imitation of life, besides the later-on theories flourished about other missions of drama as in Brechtian angle, a tool for demonstrating social condition, the modern atmosphere actuated a type of performance not on the anchor of verbalization but on that of visualization as a substitute. Since visualization has the dominating power to quiver the audience deeply and resonantly, the modern viewers' confrontation with the tremulous performances can make them cautious of their ill-situated conditions and consequently motivate them to extract their cultural origin and eventually rehabilitate the torn bonds between their individual identity and cultural originality. Consequently, some modern dramatists as the influential members of social reforming committees comprehended the requirement to shock the audience and to thrust them to the conscious awakening of the futility of the world they inhabit.

Proportionate to the nature of theatre, etymologically denotes a place to see, the imminent influences upon the audience approximate to the stage is incontrovertible. The harbinger of those dramatists who used this capacity of drama to advertise its pure responsibility and to convey the visual elements of shock in the West is Antonin Artaud. "Instead of continuing to rely upon texts considered definitive and sacred, it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theatre to the text and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought" (Artaud 89). Theatre must be embraced by a new set of alphabets that conveys the ideas of "Creation, Becoming and Chaos" (90). Being informed of the potential effects of the newly-shaped performative alphabets on the viewers in an attempt to release their deeply suppressed anxiety and fear without the veneer of the affected civilization responsible for distancing the individuals from their cultural origin and humanistic root, Artaud acquired the technique of violence to shock the audience. Violence has been defined as an "unjust or unwarranted physical act, gesture, or word that makes clear the possibility of

physical violence, which inherently makes the victim aware of the precarious nature of his mortality and the quality of his life” (Walsh 19). By real violence, he doesn’t necessarily mean bloodshed or slaughtering, on the other hand, he means trembling concepts by which the audience will be triggered by and terrified of the abject on the stage with the hope of their better perception of the world. Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty diminishes the text by accentuating the symbols and the playfulness of visual effects. According to Clancy, Artaud, having been under the influence of Balinese Theatre, centralized his dramatic postulations on expressing strong branches of emotion and revealing their interconnected significances through visible and invisible symbols (397). Of those dramatists who have used similar shocking techniques in their modern performances, is the Persian dramatist, Ali Rafi’ée.

This unprecedented study tries to reveal that the dramatic traditions of Ali Rafi’ée resembles those of Balinese and Kabuki performances, as the mnemonic icons, center their existence on the vise of visual and performative aids. Since Modern era is stocked with the loss, confusion, pessimism, and futility, the need to disturb the audience by shocking techniques gets vividly shape. As an artistic option to instigate critical thinking, vision-based performances can be practiced to help the audience rehabilitate their damaged identities; therefore, the necessity to unfasten a visual vent among other branches of dramatic performance, to normalize a new option, is the incentive to contribute this survey to the studies of Persian modern drama. Navigating the boundaries induced by civilization, performance-centered plays bestow a sacred tryst for integration of humanity, regardless of the geographical borders, and a perspicuous status for the rehabilitation of the lost universal emotion. This study, in a unique way, pinpoints the need to promote the traditions of vision-based performances by penetrating through dramatic style of the modern Persian dramatist with the aid of cultural memory. As an apt approach to this kind of survey, cultural memory brightens the minds by providing cultural heritages as social tools to be used in accordance with the requirements of society. While a majority of other surveys on visual drama have just tracked down the influential traces of Eastern theatre on Western one, this study has significantly drawn upon Ali Rafi’ée, having revived the Oriental heritage, from different parts of the world to enlighten the possibility of a universal union through dramatic performances.

Review of Literature

Bahee Hadaegh (2017), in “Cultural Memory and Reshaping of Self through Dramatic Visual Provocations (French and Persian Visual Drama)” disentangled the affinity between Artaud and Rafiée's visual stylistic techniques fundamentally rooted in the ancient Eastern theatrical performances. Accentuating the piercing impacts of visualization on the audience regardless of their geographical borders, Hadaegh blurred the modern dividing lines by referring to the visual intensity of past performances as the roots for the cultural heritage of modernized people.

In an interview with Ali Rafiée (2013) in *Iran Theatre*, he propounded the idea of being influenced by the vivid visualization of Japanese theatre with the upshot of centralizing his performances on lightening, clothing, and musicality as a surrogate for a detailed textual aspect of drama. The coloration of the background and the actors' novel gesticulations, he argued, act as the mnemonic feature by which audience can posit the performance in his mind and be ecstatic and revitalized. Rafiée believes in the propelling forces of this sort of performance by which Brecht, Meyerhold, Craig, and Apia tried to rejuvenate European stage.

“Cultural Memory Studies and Literature: Applications in the Epic,” a dissertation proposal conducted by Seyyed Mehdi Mousavi (2017), has elaborated that *Shahnameh* and *Beowulf*, as works of epic literature, can act as carriers of cultural heritage and remind people of their cultural and communal origin. He argues that literature is good enough to attach past and present together and create the required unification in the present culture by re-presenting grandeur, affliction, pride, and generally collective emotions of the past. The creation of the collective identity through literary heritage is an apt approach to the representation of the preservation of the health of modern society through art.

Cultural Memory Studies edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (2008), as a compilation of articles on this novel approach, has incorporated Aleida Assman's “Canon and Archive.” She defines cultural memory in terms of remembering, forgetting, sanctification, canonization, and archive-orientation. She propounds the idea that past has been preserved in explicit canonical works and also in implicit archived ones. These two distinctive modes of past preservation for the current time and present preservation for

the future time are in arrears to cultural memory as the essential approach for cultural protection.

In *Cultural Memory Studies* edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (2008), Jan Assman through his article: "Communicative and Cultural Memory" has embarked upon the idea of the distinction between the sphere of communicative memory and cultural memory. By unraveling the broader and ulterior scope of cultural memory, Assman pinpoints the non-institutionalized and every-day sphere of the communicate memory in contrast to the institutionalized intra-scope of cultural memory. Drawing upon the notions of time, identity, and memory, this Egyptologist has illustrated them through the categories of personal, social and cultural conducting the reader to an understanding of the importance of considering cultural sphere as the umbrella concept for other terms and notions.

Methodology

Cultural memory as a unifying approach integrates the deep aspects of individuals' remembering power with the socio-cultural heritage of a given community. Being nascent and relatively incoherent, this beneficial integration has been interpreted and defined in various ways by different critics. Setting different boundaries for controversial keywords such as *memory* and *cultural*, critics have attributed multiple levels of personal, social and collective to the former and different definitions of the latter regarding the appropriate time span that culture can be identified with. Regardless of the critic's various analytical explanations, as Erll argues, cultural memory, in all its definitions, definitely has the "umbrella quality" in revitalizing personal experiences through new usages of memory (2). While memory in its biological connotation may be considered as a means to recollect pretty routine repertoire of knowledge in individuals, cultural memory offers different realms beyond this ordinary realization of memory. In non-cultural terms "memory is a form of temporal awareness more readily associated with traditional, nonindustrialized societies rather than with the globalized, mobile, and deracinated world of today", whereas a more recent and highly cultural definition has changed the borders of memory by stressing the fact that "the rise of a self-consciously postmodern, postcolonial, and multicultural society seems to have reanimated memory as a social, cultural, and political force" (Meusburger 3). The liberation of the contemporary

society in letting the individuals probe their past besides the expansion of the convenient as well as inclusive on-line researches have widened the limited borders of the surveys significantly. Accordingly, the current society has made plausible the intermingling of past and present which actually manifests itself in “individual act of remembering in a social context;” thus, cultural memory assimilates diverse fields including psychological, personal and socio-cultural domains (Erl 2).

Following the aforementioned points by which the realization of cultural memory as an integrating approach became plausible, one can figure out how difficult it is to define cultural and memory separately. However, having a general overview of these two terms one at a time will probably help to grasp their integration more effectively. The inclusive nature of cultural memory, as Erl has put forward, embraces “cultural” in its German tradition and in anthropological terminology as *Kulturwissenschaft* that defines culture as a community’s way of life (4). This source continues that culture, as it is defined in cultural memory, incorporates primarily the social aspect of a community with the concentration on people, social relations and institutions. Material aspect is the second focus; this side evaluates the cultural productions in the shapes of artifacts, media, and literature. Eventually, the mental aspect focuses on “culturally defined ways of thinking” and culturally shaped mentalities in individuals (4). Tracing the footsteps of the impacts that the power of time has had on a society and its people is complicated and demanding to follow. To clarify this sophistication one can think of the pluralistic forces alive in shaping each period of a society. Humanistic, social, political, artistic, commercial and several other power structures have had constructive and destructive influences on the shaping of a culture. History has actually observed incoming and outgoing agencies which determined the characteristics of their following time. Witnessing how inclusive this approach is, one can accentuate the importance of cultural memory’s capability in considering multifarious areas of study. Accordingly, this specific approach challenges boundaries, hierarchies and classifications due to its holistic nature; as Harth has shrewdly introduced the concept of “epistemology of relations,” and the necessity of considering the notion of “connection” and “dynamic relationship between passive as well as active attainments” of any sides in the realization of every single process (85). Consequently, the study of a community’s way of life through the

remembering power of individuals or a nation rests not only on considering the connection between culture and memory but also on the relationship among various cultural forces as well. The fundamental connections among several cultural disciplines embrace the blurring of the boundaries of separate areas in favor of the intermingling of various domains involved in the concept of cultural memory. If one wishes to approach the dynamics, processes, and influences of the specific ways of the lives of a nation, one needs to transcend his perspective from an exclusionary and biased side to an inclusionary and embracing one. This is the point where cultural memory's realm stretches itself to the transdisciplinary area in which the unity of concepts is the utmost target.

Having evaluated what cultural means through its inclusive nature, one might be curious about the traits of memory in this specific approach. According to Erll, in its commonplace and biological definition, memory is assumed to remember what it has stored in the context (5); in other words, memory remembers within a context due to the fact that it piles information up from an outside realm; it doesn't exist in a vacuum. The flowing processes in the society provide the memory with enough data by which it can prove its existence by remembering it later on. Consequently, memory, in this level, is the personal version of the external occurrences; the psycho-social attributes of each person play a crucial part in helping memory revitalize its given data.

While the aforementioned explanation is what basically memory in its biological sense means, the definition of memory in the cultural realm significantly differs. Erll goes on clarifying memory in cultural level by assuming a metaphorical basis for it. How the traces of an intricate culture are preserved within its material and literary artifacts is the metaphorical concept of memory; since the society doesn't remember in a way that biological memory does, it actually creates a version of what it needs and preserves it through social materials (5). The memory of the society is maintained within artefactual productions conserving the influences of the still-alive traditions, ejecting those which have been expunged and more importantly, demonstrating the alteration of the cultural codes during the course of history. Since the individual memory is partly shaped by the influences of the society's memory, people who have shared the same culture have more concepts in common comparing to those who come from different backgrounds. This specific definition of memory flies beyond the present or

recent past relying upon the incessant impacts of history and permanent evolution of the concepts that have resulted in the present situation of a system.

According to Jan Assman, identity is another concept intricately associated with memory. Since identity is interwoven with individual's mental power, the extent to which this concept is defined differs in different levels; in other words, the impacts of personal, social or cultural forces on memory lead to different levels of strength in identity discussion (109). While the notion of identity is closely connected to individuals' stability and eventually leads to the mental health of the community, the importance of empowering this concept through empowering memory gets vividly shaped. The more deeply memory gets attached to a firm basis, the more powerfully identity gets shaped and eventually, the more stable the societies will be.

Cultural memory, in this sense of interpretation, involves the preservation of the memory of a community within its human-made productions. These productions are value systems that shape some communal features of individuals and actually encompass the history of evolutionary processes of a community. Cultural memory, seeking unity among the involved disciplines and having the capability to probe into the hidden layers of a given culture, could be considered as an apt approach by which post-authoritarian societies should be scrutinized. Among the many practitioners of cultural memory, Jan and Aleida Assman have mostly focused on media studies and cultural history. They have developed their theories by putting emphasis on the representation of the memory of a given community through cultural symbols including films, literary productions, documents, and archeological remnants. Since this thesis considers itself among literature surveys, these two practitioners can be conducive in leading its arguments through the right path.

In his "Communicative and Cultural Memory", Jan Assman distinguished *collective* or in Assman's term *communicative* memory, a social concept propounded by Maurice Halbwach, with *cultural* memory. While Halbwach's collective memory centralizes social influences on shaping individual consciousness, Assman's cultural memory involves a wider time span with the impacts of "traditions, transmissions and transferences" (Assman 110) on the making of individual memory. Assman stresses the importance of cultural institutions of learning (111) whereby researches on

ancient communities has provided people with tangible pieces of information regarding their ancestral background. In these institutionalized centers, the traditional codes of a given culture are officially transferred to the contemporary generations. Since according to Assman the time span in which cultural memory can operate is almost 3000 years and is considered as an absolute past, (117) the need to establish serious research centers becomes evident. Tracing these tenets within the researches regarding cultural memory or communicative memory, one may notice the clear-cut distinctions between these two concepts by Halbwach's indication of collective consciousness stated in Marcel and Mucchielli's article:

Collective consciousness is a spiritual reality. [...] Its action and extensions may indeed be followed into every region of each man's conscience; its influence on the soul is measured by the influence exerted on sensitive life by the higher faculties, which are the means of social thought (141).

Of course, Halbwach considered individualistic differences that may be determinant in some ways, he seems to center his focus on the power of collective and social structures that can be constructive in people's actions, motives, aspirations and emotional states (141). While Assman thinks of social power structure's influences as limited and definitely temporal in long-term, it's been argued that Halbwach reasserted Durkheim's psychosociological theory that emphasized the autonomous effects of an unconscious social memory on the mental lives of individuals thereby the communities assume definite shapes by relying on the functioning individuals. (141-142).

Having been informed of the distinctions between collective and cultural memory which have been mistakenly used interchangeably, one can grasp how cultural memory is wider and more complicated than collective memory. Assman's suggestive definition of cultural memory is worth mentioning:

The characteristic store of repeatedly used texts, images and rituals in the cultivation of which each society and epoch stabilizes and imports its self-image; a collectively shared knowledge of preferably (yet not exclusively) the past, on which a group bases its awareness of unity and character (Graves 311).

According to Assman, people are in interaction not only with other individuals but also with cultural symbols of their own or others as well. Cultural symbols including “artifacts, objects, anniversaries, feasts, icons, symbols, or landscapes” are the carriers of ancient memory and responsible for transmitting past into future (111); in other words, these symbols are the embodiments of past that have been re-created based on the present needs of contemporary individuals. The crucial point in this phase is that the aforementioned cultural carriers do prove their existence by being received by contemporary individuals; ancient traditions are not recreated unless they are claimed to belong to the current society. This sense of possession is the major constructive force of the identity notion. We identify with the past as long as they are reminded to us as inseparable parts of our being. On the other hand, we forget what is excluded from our identification with the past. This process is how identity gets shaped and how individuals are attached to the binding strings of their background. Assman actually considers a fine line between identity and knowledge using the function of forgetting:

Cultural memory reaches back into the past only so far as the past can be reclaimed as “ours.” This is why we refer to this form of consciousness as “memory” and not just as knowledge about the past. Knowledge about the past acquires the properties and functions of memory if it is related to the concept of identity. While knowledge has no form and is endlessly progressive, memory involves forgetting. It is only by forgetting what lies outside the horizon of relevant that it performs an identity function (113).

Seemingly, the contemporary society relies on the institutions of learning where ancient traditions are transmitted through cultural symbols to the present society. According to Jan Assman, symbols are the incarnations of a given culture’s traditions. They are actually responsible for representing the ancient background of a nation and probably helping it in remembering how deep its essence is and eventually revitalizing the possibly shattered or lost identity.

That culture is the memory of the society that is not genetically transmitted but is done by external symbols is what Aleida Assman does believe in regard to the definition of culture; since generations do not begin their existence afresh and they “stand on the shoulders of giants whose

knowledge they can reuse and reinterpret,” the memory of a society belongs to the wide realm of culture which is beyond the horizon of the limited time span of history (97). Considering remembering and forgetting as the key concepts of cultural memory, Aleida Assman attributed an active and passive quality to the aforementioned notions. She proposed that active or in other words intentional forgetting involves “trashing and destroying” (97) whereas passive or unintentional forgetting embraces “losing, hiding, dispersing, neglecting, abandoning or leaving something behind” (98). Regarding the active side of remembering, A. Assman considers conscious selections and witting collections of the external symbols as the *working memory* of the society while she attributed accumulation and storage of socially undesirable symbols in the background and attics to passive remembering or what she actually calls *reference memory* (98-99). No doubt that remembering and forgetting in their both forms are inseparable parts of a society besides A. Assman states that remembering does necessitate active precautions but forgetting happens on a regular basis in the absence of the needed care. That’s why she considers forgetting as a social normality while remembering is actually a conscious exception (97-98). Consequently, she has attributed the discussion of the external symbols which are the means of transmitting culture to the generations to the notions of remembering and forgetting. While some symbols are socially persevered and communally known, as those in the category of active remembering, some others are hidden in the background of social vitrine and included in the class of passive remembering; therefore, they have remained outside the tangible realm of the society (97-99). Those symbols flowing in the surface of the society are placed in the category of “canonized” symbol (99). These are significantly advocated by power structure and sanctified by having been selected, valued and given duration (100). On the other hand, those external symbols fallen into oblivion due to unintentional carelessness or intentional subjugation are stored in the background or what A. Assman calls *archive* (98). She actually refers “to the actively circulated memory that keeps the past present as the canon and the passively stored memory that preserves the past past as the archive” (98).

Humanistically speaking, there is no hierarchical classification regarding canonized or archived symbols considering canonized ones preferable; what actually should be noticed is that archived external symbols are the storehouse of a society and the repertoire of cultural preservation. Considering the

requirement of the contemporary society, the power structure determines the existence or omission of a given symbol. Therefore, while canonized representations have been created and interpreted beforehand, archived ones are ready to be recreated and reshaped due to the changes and the needs of the current society.

Literary productions are the artistic symbols of a culture having been transmitted through the historical ages. Individuals' imaginations and fantasies are the fictional vehicles of each society that had better be transferred during diverse eras to help people of different ages befriend the imaginative realms of distant people. The emotional investments of human beings found in their literary creations are uniquely shaped and therefore are perfectly worth preservation. Literature is the sensational memory of a culture that bears transference through the history of a nation. This emotional bond unifies the people of the universe in different times and places in terms of fantasy. According to Meusburger who draws on Gadamer, the important status of writing material in A. Assman's terms is showing below:

[i]n the material process of cultural transmission, [writing] has a singular status. The remainders and ruins of past lives, of buildings, of tools, the equipment of tombs—all of this is shaken and eroded by the storms of time. Written texts, however, if they can be deciphered and read, contain a pure spirit that speaks to us in an eternal presence. The art of reading and understanding written traces is like a magic art. . . in which space and time are suspended. In knowing how to read what is transmitted, we are partaking of and achieving the pure presence of the past (7).

Actually, literary symbols do tolerate the social processes experiencing being welcome and refuted occasionally. Since there are always social structures that both dominate the sub-structures and determine their existence, both the presence and the duration of literary productions are controlled by authoritative agents of a society. Consequently, what is called literary canon is the assembly of those artistic works that have gained the approval of the power structure. It is definite that "changes in the hierarchy of values are not uncommon, and an objective indication of such changes are the canonical shifts that can be observed over time" (Grabes 311). However, a significant number of critics do believe that canons are determined by mostly political

cultural negotiations (312); the process of literary canonization, or centralizing certain works as the literary core of a society, leads to certain decisions in the present and the future of a society (312); since canons conspicuously influence the community and to a large extent are responsible for shaping the mindset of individuals especially through educational syllabus and literary markets.

The important point which is discussed by Grabes is that “though the literary works canons contain may be characterized by disinterestedness, the canons themselves are not.” He continues to shed light upon the biased attitudes canons may create by mentioning that “they {canons} serve societies to control what texts are kept in collective memory, are taken “seriously,” and interpreted in a particular way” (314). In other words, social forces change canons into literary tools that serve they own mostly prejudiced intentions. “Most historical narratives are provisional: continually reshaped by new experiences and new knowledge and positioned within shifting centers and asymmetries of power” (Meusburger 8). According to Max Saunders, every piece of writing can be regarded as an autobiography since authors choose personally important incidents to write about. Additionally, every reading is partial due to the fact that the shaped mentality of the reader reads and interprets relying on its own faculty of understanding. As a matter of the fact “Narratives are contingent and depend on particular cultural systems of meaning that vary in space and time” (8). He refers to Paul De Man’s “Autobiography as De-facement,” in which De Man stresses the fact that autobiography is not a genre but “a mode of reading,” the writer continues to assert that “life-writing is fundamentally intertextual” besides we can infer that writings are a complex of “intertextuality and inner-generity” (321). Consequently, literary canons are selected and established by social authorities that result in shaping the psyche of the individuals in the socially predictable ways. For instance, Max Saunders brought the example of William Wordsworth’s assertion in his *Prelude*; where he described that this piece is the sole experience of a young boy and claimed “subjectivity, interiority and personal memory.” As a matter of the fact, reading *prelude*, the reader gets to know how a young boy is shaped in this way in that particular society (323-324). Both the writers and the readers are deeply influenced by the dominant systems of a society and both are mentally

constructed according to the social atmosphere in which they have been brought up.

Therefore, the significance of literary canons as one of the essential symbols of a culture gets evident. Reviewing Aleida Assman's canon and archive distinction, we may notice that the past is not solely what is available in our current society but they are actually what has been selected as the canon by social authorities. Literature-wise, canonized works in our society inform us of the socially selected repertoire of our past, not our whole background. Since we have passed the authoritarian era in which authorities' selections were the only given choices of research for us, we can broaden our perspective significantly due to the democratic atmosphere that has made new adventures of past plausible.

Starting with the chaos of post-war Germany, the intervention of international discourses became the sheer result of the process of overthrowing of authoritarianism and denazification (Langenhol 164). The unchangeable political and social decrees were to be replaced by the integrational interference of worldwide dynamism:

The international contexts of transitions to democracy play a role as regulatory framework, whose presence or absence can be decisive in regard to the success of the transition, and as cultural frame of reference. International impact has led to the demise of many authoritarian regimes in the twentieth century... (165).

While Langenhole concentrated on political motives, process, and results, it is feasible to shift the focus and concentrate on the cultural results of the shift from authoritarian to democratic societies. Relying on the fact that researchers can have authorized freedom in democratic societies, they can widen their scope in surveying broader alternatives among external symbols. Instead of restricting themselves to the canonized literary productions, researchers can rummage the archived sections of literature looking for new symbols that are worth being unraveled considering the needs of the contemporary society. The universal route toward a more liberal and integrating community has created an opportune moment for the intellectuals to conduct more inclusive researches and introduce a possibility to help the individuals discover their background.

Discussion

The present study significantly applies the postulations of cultural memory, introduced by Jan and Aleida Assman, on an archived tradition of theatrical performance. While the canonized stage performances mostly embrace language-based works, this paper has investigated a less-familiar tradition which dates back to antiquity. Surveying contemporary Persian dramatist, Ali Rafi'ée's distinguished performances as cultural symbols, one can follow the traces of the ancient Kabuki and Balinese Theater. Considering the modern time, this study proves the era as an apt time to revitalize the hidden tradition of vision-based performances with the hope of making possibilities for further productions.

In the works of contemporary Persian dramatist, Ali Rafi'ée, the histrionic implementations and theatrical enactments are based on the visual representation of dramatic ideas. By colorful rendering of the concepts and the inclusion of nature on stage, Rafi'ée has the actors enact their roles through the synthesis of colorfully suggestive clothes and astonishing gesticulations. His motto is that theatre should be for primarily to the eyes and then to ears (Rafi'ée). According to his interview with *Iran Theatre*, Rafi'ée, having been inspired by ancient Japanese Kabuki Theatre, pronounced that the visualization of this type of drama has helped European theatre be released from the formal predicaments of standards; for instance, in his *Yerma* rendition, the lightning and the projection of the bright color are the manifestations of the world of fantasy; in other words Fantasy cannot be fully conveyed by mere words meanwhile, visualization offers a better comprehension of universal ideas.

Delving into the visual techniques tried out by him, one can see the impassioned traces of the Eastern Kabuki Theatre. It's been depicted in a source that basically, the fundamentals of what was called drama in Japan revolved around a drastic violent conflict between two characters till one dies (Toshio 12). Therefore, the strong visualized emotion was conveyed in the Eastern basic form of drama. Later on, Western theatre, specifically Greek theatre, took this merely dramatic situation and "by adding words, speeches and dialogue" (13) made the visual based work into a verbally dramatic one. Basing the concentration of the dramatic network on gesticulations, customs, makeup, and visual apparatus, Kabuki Theater coddles audience's eyes

without the barrier of language and touches the deep-rooted human characteristics for creating a harmoniously balanced world.

Having argued that Rafi'ée's dramatic style is considered as the welcome back of the traditional conventions closely related to natural and universal concepts, this study has embraced cultural memory so as to assess this Persian dramatist's techniques in the shade of the return of humanity in its original version. Considering the visually empowered productions as the heirlooms of culture and the true by-products of the history, one can travel to the realm of serenity by delving into the optical features of the performances under the surveillance of cultural memory and its peace-seeking conventions.

Ali Rafi'ée was born in 1938 in Isfahan. He is a skillful theater and cinema director, he does stage designing as well. He has been highly impressed by Kabuki styles of performances and attributed them to contemporary Iranian plays. Since the theater is not well-received and well-practiced in the society of Iran, Ali Rafi'ée and theater supporters tried so hard to place theater within Iranian art. Rafi'ée has complained about the cultural ignorance toward performative art in his country by stressing the notion that theater is as influential in the modern society as churches were in traditional ones.

The major difference between his dramaturgy and others is his insistence on actors' clothing, movements, and gestures. The idea of actors as living hieroglyphs is highlighted in Rafi'ée's art as well. He does believe in actors' liveliness as a part of the play and their creative contributions are worth being emphasized. For him, the presence of actors on stage is bound to his/her body and voice. Accordingly, they need to represent themselves through these beyond-lingual apparatuses. Not only is he attracted by the techniques applied to actors but also by the ones related to the shades of the stage. Lightning and coloring of the space add to the vitality of the performances (Rafi'ée). Evaluating his techniques by the viewpoints of cultural memory, one can see the traditions of theatrical usage of gesture, movements, clothes, and color as the revitalization of Japanese Kabuki performances. Since he has ascribed the impressive roles of churches to the theater, one can feel how stages are holy places to playfully handle the health of the society. Therefore, Rafi'ée is following the ancient Eastern Theater within which the exuberance of life has been placed. The cultural atmosphere of both Rafi'ée and the Kabuki society is marked by the disappointment caused by loss and destruction of the vital elements of life. Kabuki carnivalized life by reducing the usage of everyday

language and elevating defamiliarized traditions of shock. Rafi'ee, seeking to restore balance to the semi-ignorant theatrical population of Iran, revived Japanese conventions and rendered colorful performances filled with long-forgotten elements of nature.

In *Yerma* rendition, the lightning and the projection of the bright colors are the constructions and manifestations of the world of fantasy; in other words, Fantasy cannot be fully conveyed by mere words meanwhile, visualization offers a better comprehension of abstract ideas (Rafi'ee). In Rafi'ee's analysis of Lorca's *Yerma*, the Fascist suppression of national forces has been reflected in Juan's compulsory imprisonment of Yerma, the symbol of fecundity, in an encompassing circumstance with no single chance of any connections to outside world. Modern era's preoccupation with social, political and religious severe doctrines has suppressed natural forces within the individuals and evaded the population's attention from external natural energies. For the theater to be influential in these barren circumstances, the visual aids can come in handy.



Figure 1. *Yerma*- Yerma's Dream Staged

The ornament-less stages of his performances, very much resemble the Kabuki traditions, accentuate the focus of attention on the actors and the power of colors. The unlife-like stage, akin to the Brechtian notion of theater, stresses the illusion of a version of life hard to imagine. The physical intimacy of the audience with the bare stage besides the emotional distance they experience with it provides the needed shock to help the audience get deeper

in the concept of life. Seemingly, vision-based performances attempt to feature opportunities to the audience to think effectively and to get closer to beyond-materialistic notions. Lacking civilization's signs including earthly and familiar settings, his stage renders life in its nudest and purest form.



Figure 2. *Yerma*- Colorless Clothes of Socially Mechanical Women

Memories and Nightmares of the Jamedar from Mirza Taghi Khan Amir Kabir 's Life and Murder (1977, 2015) is the dramatic preoccupations of a Jamedar with the cruel murder of Amir Kabir. The amazement of the scene is its repletion with numerous liters of water. The only witness of the murder is Jamedar and he blames himself with his every single breath. The setting is in a bathroom in which the murder took place and his moral guilt is represented by every drop of water which is accompanied by horse-galloping voice-over. Nature seems to have embraced all mysteries and connotatively implies having the answers to unresolved questions.



Figure 3. *Memories and Nightmares of the Jamedar from Mirza Taghi Khan Amir Kabir 's Life and Murder- Inclusion of Natural Elements*

The involvement of water on the stage, likewise the Balinese performances where plants, soil, and water are welcome, shockingly induces the audience to embrace and desire natural inclinations and reanimate the buried emotion through murder and human tragedy all over again.



Figure 4. *Memories and Nightmares of the Jamedar from Mirza Taghi Khan Amir Kabir 's Life and Murder- Inclusion of natural Elements*

The artificial stage settings inspired by Western architectural perspectives have robbed the vitality the performances had better possess. The contrived re-making of real-life on-stage predominant within the theater around the world has turned lively acting into partly cinematic productions. According to Rafiée, the play is not intended to stage a historical tragedy rather; it aims to represent the tragedy of history. The mysteries of political corruptions accompanied by humanistic misconducts are interestingly hidden within the gallons of water on stage. The triggering elements including natural ones and ponderous concepts, as an example, the murder of Amir Kabir, can pave the way for restoring the memory of the culture, which is liveliness and vitality, to the modern society. According to Lachman, images are intense incentive signs by which the process of remembrance takes place. "Images heal what has been destroyed;" consequently, they help the individuals restore what their environment lacks. In other words, they represent the factors absent from the contemporary society and motivate the people to see beyond their everyday preoccupations (302).

The necessity to break with the traditional codes of theater is in line with the inevitable changes in history. Transformation occurs throughout life and confrontation with life necessitates awareness. As Kenyon has explained:

The strong Right is full of certainties, certainties which are abhorrent. The Left was full of certainties, certainties which proved to be bogus. So, to write these big political plays full of certainties and resolution is completely nonsensical in a time of fragmentation. When you want to create a political piece of drama, there's no point in mimicking the form of resolution and certainty in a time of complete uncertainty (qtd. in Urban 39).

The rehabilitation of new dramatic techniques is the consequence of the weakened and dysfunctional interactions between a person and his society. Unprecedentedly suitable techniques can be energized so as to help individuals in need and rescue the universal health. Kabuki and Balinese performances, as the agents of cultural memory, pushed their themes back in time to feature the authentic nature of humanity and transfer valuable traditions to the future. Since forgetting, oblivion, and ignorance are cruel to the integrity of humanity, these types of performances intercept insensibility to nature and the basic themes of pure humanity regardless of modern culture. Whereas

culture has to overcome nature to prove its dominance, mindful people can modulate this defeat by inviting the artful nature to their lives though. For the reason that civilization is evolving into technological sophistication, the ebullient modification is beneficial; with the spread of cultural memory, dynamism will be restored to culture and the members of the society can benefit from the created balance. By the help of this approach, nostalgia and sensitivity will have an established status and the utopian balance won't be unachievable. Ali Rafi'ee, as a modern dramatist, rehabilitated long-forgotten traditions in unique ways. Rafi'ee's invitation of nature and color on stage forsakes westernized dramatic traditions for the sake of effervescent enactment of life.

Being revived by the commiserative means of cultural memory, vision, used by this Iranian contemporary dramatist, has been practiced with the aim of revision. Reintegrating peaceful notions, cultural memory is potentialized to appear constructive in diverse fields by promoting the chance of creating a utopian universe. Rafi'ee's plays have the potential to act as cultural memory institutions preserving the golden discoveries of dead and buried traditions of performances; since future cannot be the only horizon in which individuals invest their energy to glorify it, cultural memory gives life to the bygone historical eras by attributing responsibilities to cultural carriers, in this case, performances. Finally, Rafi'ee increased the chances of visual and emotionally tactile experiences with the hope of prolonged remembrance. Another strong usage of his vision-based plays is their universal reverberation on the people all over the world. For instance, the plotlines of both Kabuki and Balinese performances are evident to all the spectators from different regions since meaning is not conveyed auditorily but visually; correspondingly, diverse national and cultural orientations cannot prevent the audience from grasping the messages of these performances.

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