

**Post-revolutionary
Iranian Theatre:
Three Representative Plays
in Translation
with Critical Commentary**

Seyed Habiballah Lazgee

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**I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that
appropriate credit has been given where reference has
been made to the work of others.**

Abstract

Post-revolutionary Iranian Theatre: Three Representative Plays in Translation with Critical Commentary.

Seyed Habiballah Lazgee.

This thesis gives a portrait of the theatrical activities in Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1978, and discusses how theatre works within the Islamic Republic of Iran. Firstly, in order to gain familiarity with the country's political institution, there is a brief political history of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Secondly, to understand the theatre's concerns and difficulties the general situation in post-revolutionary Iranian theatre is discussed. This includes sections on: Organization, Venues, Festivals, Islam and Theatre, Radio and Television, Theatre in the Universities, Theatre Publishing and Criticism, The Effect of War, Audience, Censorship, Statistics.

The third and major part of the thesis is the translation of three representative plays which have not previously been translated into English and belong to different periods of the Revolution, written by different playwrights.

1. *The Fence within the Fence*. By Mohssen Makhmalbaf. 1981.

2. *The Steps*. By Akbar Radi. 1989.

3. *The Tale of the Concrete City*. By Abdolhay Shammassi. 1990.

Critical commentaries accompany each play.

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Part One

Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Iran is located in Southwestern Asia with a 1986 population of 50 million. Its total land area is 634,000 sq. miles and is divided into 23 provinces. Tehran is the capital as well as the largest urban centre. The official national language is Farsi and the constitution of 1979 declares the official religion of Iran to be the Shi'a branch of Islam. The head of state is a religious leader and the head of government a president.

Indigenous theatrical activities have existed in Iran for many centuries and have undoubtedly had an important role in the cultural life of the country. In his epic book *Shahnameh*¹ (*The Book of Kings*) the Iranian Poet Ferdowsi notes that King Bahram Gur (AD 420-38) of the Sassanian Empire ordered the importation of ten thousands musicians and performers from India to Iran.

After the Islamic conquest of Iran in the 7th century AD, *Rowzeh Khani*, *Pardeh Dari*, *Naqqali*, *Shabih* or *Ta'ziyeh*, *Kheimeh Shab Bazi*, *Ru Howzi* and *Siah Bazi* became more popular.

Rowzeh Khani is the recitation of events surrounding the martyrdom of Imam Hussien, the 7th century AD Shi'a martyr (d.680). *Rowzeh Khani* is still performed at the public mosques and private houses and one can even buy video and tape cassettes of the work of famous performers. The purpose of the mourning (and the "performance") is to cause the people to weep, because Shi'a believe that to come to tears for Imam Hussien will bring heavenly reward.

Pardeh Dari (Screen Keeping) is the narration of religious stories which mostly end with the event of Imam Hussien's martyrdom. Visually these stories are aided by a large screen with static illustrations on it. In recent years it can be seen in the villages and occasionally at festivals.

Naqqali (Recounting) is the recitation of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* at the coffee-houses. In recent years, because of modern life and the destruction of the coffee-houses, *Naqqali* can only be seen occasionally at festivals or on television.

Shabih (Simulation) or *Ta'ziyeh* (Mourning), the religious epic drama of Iran, is a fully-fledged dramatic form. It has a script, a director (called Mo'in Al Boka) and actors but no actresses. Women's roles are taken by men who wear black and veil their faces. *Ta'ziyeh* is performed in the Islamic month of Moharram, particularly on Tasu'a (the ninth day of this month) and Ashora (the tenth day) which is the day of Imam Hussien's martyrdom. The good characters, on the side of Imam Hussien -

including Imam Hussien himself- wear green, black or white and chant their lines in musical modes. The bad characters who have come to kill Imam Hussien, wear red, orange or pink and speak their lines in stentorian tones. The performance has puppets, masks and live animals such as horses and camels, children acting a number of roles and musicians playing their musical instruments. In recent years *Ta'ziyeh* which was previously performed for a whole day in the open-air, has come to the theatres and like a modern play is performed for one or two hours and for a limited audience. Women's roles and some actual historical figures including the character of Imam Hussien have been deleted. This is because the representation of the prophets and saints on the stage is not allowed and it makes their characters more mundane rather than heavenly.

Kheimeh Shab Bazi (Tent-play in the Night) is the traditional puppet show of Iran for children. The main character of *Kheimeh Shab Bazi* is a black-face called Mobarak. In recent years due to invasion of western-style puppets, *Kheimeh Shab Bazi* has almost disappeared. There now remain only one or two experts occasionally putting on performances at festivals or abroad.

Ru Howzi (On the Pool -Referring to the place of performance which usually was a platform over a pool) and *Siah Bazi* (Black-face Play) are the comic improvisatory theatres of Iran. The main character is a clown or a black-face who tries to disgrace his master. His master is a moral and respectable person on the surface but underneath he is in fact both immoral and extremely unrespectable. In recent years *Ru Howzi*, which was performed in private houses without a written text, has come to the theatres in the form of a written text. The music, dance and sexual references usually performed by the clown have been deleted. Hussien Nasrabadi,² a theatre director, comments:

In *Siah Bazi*, these years, the clown has forgotten his sweet satiric tongue and tells just revolutionary slogans. The greedy old master has changed to an anti-revolution person who is the servant of foreigners. The first young man has completely disappeared and what has remained is a black-face and the face of *Siah Bazi* which has become black, as well.

The first western-style theatre was presented in Iran after the establishment of Teatr Melli (National Theatre) in 1911 and the constitutional revolution of 1912. The writers started to translate European plays (such as Moliere's) and original Iranian plays were also written. Kamal Al Vozara (1875-1930), Mirzadeh Eshqi (1893-1925), Qolam Hussien Sa'di (1935-1985), Bahram Beza'i (b.1938) and Akbar Radi (b.1938) are the most famous playwrights of the modern Iranian theatre from the time of Pahlavi's dynasty, 1925, to 1978.

The Islamic Revolution of 1978-9 stopped all the cultural activities of the Shah's regime including the theatre and started different kinds of cultural programmes with more Islamic standards. Imam Khomeini (1902-1989), the leader of the Islamic Revolution repeatedly made references to the arts in his speeches:

Those kind of arts and artist are acceptable that tell the story of the poor and poverty and fight with the capitalists who rape people's property. Art must challenge the modern capitalism and the blood-sucker communism and it must show both the social problems and the political, military and economic crisis.³

This thesis draws attention to the theatrical activities in Iran after the Islamic Revolution and discusses how theatre and theatre artists work within a religious (Islamic) system. First, I look at the political history of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the important events of this period. Secondly I examine the general situation in post-revolutionary Iranian theatre. This will include brief comments on: Organization, Venues, Festivals, Islam and Theatre, Radio and Television, Theatre in the Universities, Theatre Publishing and Criticism, The Effect of War, Women in Theatre, Audience, Censorship, and Statistics. In these sections, I shall look at the nature of difficulties surrounding the theatrical activities of the country.

It is necessary to recognize that theatre takes shape on the stage. So, the third part of this thesis is the translation of three representative plays which have not previously been translated into English:

1. *The Fence Within the Fence*. By Mohssen Makhmalbaf (b.1957). Staged in 1982.
2. *The Steps*. By Akbar Radi (b.1939). Staged 1984.
3. *The Tale of the Concrete City*. By Abdolhay Shammassi (b.1954). A post-war play, staged in 1990, a year after the death of Imam Khomeini.

These plays which belong to different periods of the Islamic Revolution and are written by different writers with different tenets, conceptions and styles, can illustrate the general face of modern playwrighting in Iran. And finally selected illustrations, including the names of the plays, playwrights, directors, halls, cities, the dates of the performances, the plot of each play, and the posters, present a visual view of post-revolutionary Iranian theatre.

1. Ferdowsi, Abolghasem. *Shahnameh*. Danesh: Moscow. 1966.
2. *Keyhan Newspaper*, No 13244, 1987.(P.16).
3. *Keyhan Farhangi*, No 85, June 1992. (P.164).

A Brief Political History of the Islamic Republic of Iran

"The Shah Is Gone", "Imam Came"; these were two big headlines of Iranian papers, the first on 16 January and the second on 31 January 1979.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the second king of the Pahlavi dynasty established in 1925, who was the commander of an army of 400,000 and a large police force and his secret police S.A.V.A.K with 4,000 full-time agents and many part-time informers, had left the country. He had a Parliament of yes-men and established a single royal political party called *Rastakhiz* (Resurgence) which all members of society were forced to join. Although the Shah had lost his power in 1953 and in 1963 and returned to power with the help of foreign countries such as America, this time the story was different. A large number of people had come to the streets and there was a year of political turmoil, demonstrations and clashes.

In fact, when *Ettelaat* (an afternoon paper) in January 1978, in a government-inspired article, insulted Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the spiritual leader of the people, demonstrations entered a new phase. Imam Khomeini had been expelled from Iran in 1963 for his attacks on the Shah and was living in exile in Iraq. There were demonstrations against this article in all parts of the country. However, in the holy city of Qom, police opened fire on the seminary students' demonstration and killed a number of them. This event sparked a series of mourning ceremonies across the country. These protests, led by clerics, were organized around mosques and religious events. The demonstrations became more radical. First slogans were aimed at freeing political prisoners, press freedom etc, then the people called for an Islamic government and the slogan was "Khomeini is our leader". On 8 September, although the government announced martial law, the people refused it and came to the streets. In Tehran's Jaleh Square troops opened fire on a demonstration killing a large number of demonstrators. That Friday became known as Black Friday in the culture of the revolution. After Black Friday, demonstrations continued.

In October strikes began. Employees of universities, schools, the oil industry, banks, newspapers, factories and everyone went on strike. In August 1978, a deliberate fire at the Rex cinema at Abadan city killed 477 people.

In response, the Shah removed his prime ministers, released some jailed clerics, permitted free debate in Parliament and arrested his former prime minister Hoveyda and former S.A.V.A.K chief General Nasiri. But it was too little, too late. The Shah was forced to leave the country and Imam Khomeini came to Tehran despite the airport having been closed by order of Bakhtiar, the last prime minister of the

Shah. That day millions of people from around the country went to Tehran airport to welcome Imam's return from fifteen years of exile.

In Tehran, Imam Khomeini appointed his own prime minister Mehdi Bazargan and on 11 February the Bakhtiar government collapsed and the revolutionary forces took control of the country.

Imam Khomeini was born in Khomein, a village 180 miles south of Tehran, in 1902. His father and grandfather were religious scholars. When he was five months old, his father was killed maybe in an argument over land and water. Imam Khomeini started his religious education in Khomein and then in Qom. In Qom, he was a seminary student studying Islamic sciences and ethics first and then became a teacher lecturing in ethics. But his lectures were different. He taught Islam as an ideology which took stances on political and social problems. In 1962, Imam Khomeini protested at the Local Councils Law and in 1963 the Capitulation Law by which the American residents in Iran were subject to the jurisdiction of American -and not Iranian- courts. After the passing of this law in Parliament, Imam said:

This is a document for the enslavement of Iran. Parliament has acknowledged that Iran is a colony.¹

After Imam's declaration against this law, the people went to the streets to protest. Police killed a large number of them. Imam Khomeini, himself, was arrested and went into exile first to Turkey and after one year to Iraq.

In exile, 1963-78, he taught and wrote and sent tapes and declarations protesting against the Shah into Iran. The important lectures that he gave to his students were in Iraq in 1969. Those lectures, published in a book called *Velayate Faghih*² (*The Government of the Islamic Jurists*), argue that monarchy is alien to Islam, that the people should overthrow the Shah and that the clerical class are the real leadership of the country.

In October 1978, the Iraqi government asked Imam to leave the country. Imam tried to go to Kuwait and they refused him. He then went to Paris where he gave many world-wide interviews and had excellent communication links with Iran and with the leaders of revolutionary movements. Moreover, those leaders flew to Paris to meet Imam and those meetings had an important role in the revolution, including selection of the Revolutionary Council's members and the new government. Then, as described above, Imam Khomeini returned to Tehran.

In March 1979 a referendum took place to decide the general form of the post-Pahlavi state. The different parties had different opinion. But Imam said:

What the nation wants is an Islamic republic, not just a republic, not a democracy, not a democratic republic. Do not use this term, democratic. That is the western style.³

So 98.2 percent of voters voted in favour of the Islamic Republic.

Young revolutionaries, with their guns taken from military arsenals on 10 and 11 February 1979, established the *Komitehs* (Local Revolutionary Committees) around mosques.

Dadgah Enghelab (The Revolutionary Court) gave death sentences to the high-ranking commanders, S.A.V.A.K members, army and police officials who had a hand in killing people during the demonstrations and street clashes and those who committed crimes against the revolution.

Also another organization called *Sepah Pasdaran Enghlab Islami* (The Islamic Revolution's Army or the Revolutionary Guard) was established as the revolution's own armed force, in addition to the regular army, and it was formed to protect the revolution from the leftist parties who had their own armed units.

Pop music and alcohol were banned. The women wore Hejab concealing their bodies and hair. The pubs, dance halls, night clubs, cabarets and casinos became closed. In fact Imam Khomeini renewed the spirit of Shiism (the branch of Islam to which 93 percent of Iranians belong). Moreover, the Friday prayer leaders, in the major cities, spread the Imam Khomeini's doctrine, emphasized martyrdom.

The first prime minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran was Mahdi Bazargan, a seventy-two year old man educated as an engineer in France. He had thirty years of political activities in the opposition and spent several periods in jail. However, he was not judged the right man for this job. He had criticized the revolutionary organizations and, although Imam Khomeini had many strong anti-American speeches and named America "Great Satan", Mahdi Bazargan had held discussions with American officials.

On 4 November 1979 the American embassy in Tehran was occupied by a number of students well known as the students of the Imam's line. There was a huge demonstration against America and Mehdi Bazargan. On 6 November Mehdi Bazargan resigned. President Carter, on 14 November 1979, responded by freezing over \$11 billion in Iranian assets held by America.

In the meantime, the Assembly of experts, elected by the people, convened on 18 August 1979 in order to write an Islamic constitution. The Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution was accepted by the people in a referendum in December 1979.

During the first year of the revolution, many political parties, from Islamic to Marxist-Leninist, rose. These included the Islamic Republic Party which had an important role in the political scene of the country and was founded by Ayatollah Beheshti, Mosavi Ardabili, Hashemi Rafsanjani, Bahonar and Ayatollah Khamenei the clerics closest to Imam Khomeini.

The first president of the Islamic Republic of Iran was Abol Hassan Bani Sadr, born in Hamadan city in 1933 and educated in Tehran studying law. In Paris he pursued but did not complete his doctoral thesis. He was a member of the Revolutionary Council and took office in January 1980 with 75 percent of the vote, a huge majority.

On 23 April 1980 the universities were closed for "Cultural Revolution" and on 23 September, Saddam Hussien of Iraq, who believed that Iran was weakened by the revolution, invaded Iran at Khorramshahr city, the heart of Iran's oil industry.

Abol Hassan Bani Sadr, the first president of the country, was also deemed not the right man for this job. He was not in the line with the Islamic Republic Party and was attacked for lacking faith in the principle of *Velayate Faghih* (*The Government of the Islamic Jurists*), for standing up to Imam Khomeini, for discrediting the revolutionary organizations and for leaving Iran naked in the war with Iraq as commander-in-chief of the army. While there were demonstrations and clashes in Tehran and other cities, where dozens were killed and hundreds injured, Parliament, in which Hashemi Rafsanjani was speaker, voted in favour of declaring Abol Hassan Bani Sadr incompetent. It was 21 June and Abol Hassan Bani Sadr secretly flew to Paris on 29 June 1981.

On 28 June 1981, a powerful bomb exploded at the central headquarters of the Islamic Republic Party killing 72 people including Ayatollah Beheshti the secretary general of the party and other important government officials.

On 30 August 1981, another bomb killed Raja'i, who was the replacement president, Bahonar, who was the new prime minister and Dastgerdi, the chief of the national police.

In fact the opposition had started a terror period in order to destroy the Imam Khomeini's regime and as a result, several government officials, the Friday prayer leaders etc -mostly clerics- were martyred.

In October 1981, Ayatollah Khamenei, the Islamic Republic Party candidate, was elected as president. The editor of the Islamic Republic newspaper of the party, Mir Hussien Mosavi, became his prime minister.

In January 1981, American hostages were released. By 1982 the universities started to reopen and the opposition had been broken.

On 2 May 1987 the abolition of the Islamic Republic Party was announced.

At war with Iraq , the people with great unity and self-sacrifice in loss of life and property, pushed back Saddam Hussien's troops from Iranian territory, ending the war in 1988.

In June 1987 about 400 Iranians were killed in a demonstration during the pilgrimage to Mecca ceremony in Saudi Arabia, regarded as America's ally in the region. Also in July 1988, an Iranian passenger plane was shot down by an American warship killing 290 people in the Persian Gulf. In February 1989 Imam Khomeini decreed a death sentence against Salman Rushdie the author of *The Satanic Verses*. These events closed the door of any negotiation with America and the west.

In July 1989, Imam Khomeini, after a protracted illness and a surgical operation, died. Millions of people from around the country went to Tehran, just as in his return in 1979. But this time it was for his funeral. There was a five-day public holiday and 40 days of national mourning. On the eve of his burial, June 6, at least 8 people had died and 500 others injured in crowd crushes.

Immediately, the Assembly of Experts elected Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei, who was president, as the leader of the country, replacing Imam Khomeini.

In July 1989, after an election Hashemi Rafsanjani took office as president. With a new Parliament and new government officials a rebuilding period started.

1. *Khomaeini Va Jonbesh (Khomeini and the Movement)*. 12 Moharram Publication.(P.30-31).
2. Khomeini, Ruhallah. *Velayate Faghih* (Najaf, Iraq, 1971).
3. *Guardian*, 2 March 1979.

General Information on the Theatre

Organization

The administration of theatre in Iran is under the control of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. This Ministry has a minister in the Cabinet.

Cabinet

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance

Art Under-secretary

The Centre of Dramatic Arts

The Office of Theatre

Venues

In fact the Centre of Dramatic Arts is the organisation responsible for theatre in Iran. The members of the Office of Theatre are the professional artists of the theatre, who have a monthly salary, and who are required to work on a minimum of one production a year. There is a separate budget for those people who are not members but who work for each performance. Each theatre also has a manager and employees, who have no responsibility for the selection of the programme, and merely service the production. The responsibility for the choice of production rests with the Centre of Dramatic Arts.

The Theatre Society, affiliated to the Centre of Dramatic Arts, has branches in 120 cities throughout the country with approximately 10,000 members, both professional and amateur theatre artists.

Other centres working within the Centre of Dramatic Arts include:-

- Centre of Women's Theatre. This unit stages productions in which all artists, and technicians are women.
- Centre of Religious and Traditional Performances. This centre works on *Ta'ziyeh* and *Ru Howzi* and performs *Ta'ziyeh* in the Islamic month of Moharram, and organizes the Traditional Theatre Festival, yearly.
- Puppet Theatre Workshop. This unit produce modern puppet shows for children.
- Emrouz (Today) Theatre Workshop. This centre stages contemporary Iranian theatre.
- Centre of Experimental Theatre. This unit produces more modern and new Iranian theatre.

-Centre of Theatrical Researches. In this centre researchers research into theatrical subjects.

-Dramatic Publications. This centre publishes Iranian and foreign plays and theatrical researches.

-T.V Group. This unit produces video tapes of theatres and theatrical activities.

Moreover, there are other organisations which have theatrical activities along with the Centre of Dramatic Arts:-

-Ministry of Culture and Higher Education (at the universities). This Ministry organizes theatrical productions at the universities, as extracurricular activities.

-Ministry of Education and Training (at the schools). This Ministry organizes theatrical productions at the schools including theatre festivals and art camps.

-Arts Unit of the Islamic Propaganda Organization. This unit stages and publishes Iranian plays with a more Islamic standard.

-*Jahad Daneshgahi* (Jihad at the Universities). This centre organizes the Student Theatre Festival yearly and publishes Iranian plays and theatrical articles.

-Student Experimental Theatre Centre. This unit stages the works of the University of Tehran's theatre students.

-Workers' House. This centre stages theatre by workers' artists. It also organizes the Workers' Theatre Festival yearly.

Venues

Tehran, capital of Iran, has a population of approximately ten million and is a big city with all the usual insupportable expenses. Normally all social movements in Iran start from this huge city. In fact all the potential of the country is gathered in this city. Enghlab (Revolution) Avenue in Tehran is indeed a centre of cultural life in Iran. The University of Tehran, a lot of good bookshops, many cinemas and Tatre Shahr (The City Theatre) are all situated on this Avenue. The City Theatre is the biggest and the best theatre in Iran, with a revolving stage, computer lighting and sound, and four auditoria called:-

-Asli (The Genuine)

-Charso Hall

-Ghashghaei Hall

-Hall No.2

Vahdat (The Unity) which was called Rodaki before the Islamic Revolution , is the next best theatre and close to the City Theatre. The other important theatre buildings in Tehran are:-

-Sangalaj

-Mehrab (The Altar)

-Honar (The Art)

Usually there is traditional theatre like *Ta'zieh* and *Ruhowzi* in Mehrab, children's theatre in Honar, while other types, for example modern or foreign theatre, are staged in the City Theatre and Vahdat. All these belong to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

The other active venues in Tehran are:-

-Molavi, which belongs to the University of Tehran, for student theatre.

-Tatre Kochak Tehran (A Little Theatre of Tehran), which belongs to *Bonyad Mostaz'afan* (a government foundation), for children's theatre.

-Kanon for puppet shows.

There are in total 413 theatre buildings in other cities throughout the country.

Festivals

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance organises the Fajr (Daybreak) National Theatre Festival every year in Tehran, on 12-22 of Bahman (February). This is the celebration of the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. All performances in this festival are from the provinces. The theatres of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance provide the venues for the performances. Usually these are in the evenings and there are discussions between artists, critics and audiences in the morning. Also, there are addresses on theatre topics and publications about the performances and events of the festivals. This festival is the best opportunity for

provincial artists to show their own performances and to see other performances and artistic events in the capital. The Fajr National Theatre Festival started in 1982.

Although the Fajr Festival is the biggest and most important festival in Iran, the professional theatre artists are not involved. They are not involved in the other festivals either. Iranian people are still angry after the Festival of Art of Shiraz (1967-77) because of some immoral performances in it. In a foreign performance there was a naked woman and a video showing her sexual organs. Later, this was used in almost all speeches against the Shah's regime. The Festival of Art was a professional theatre festival before The Islamic Revolution and has since been closed.

The first Student Theatre Festival opened very simply and without luxuriance in the Molavi Theatre in Tehran in 1985. The speeches of the festival were about the theatre's styles by the university's lecturers. The bulletins with the criticism of the productions -staged at the festival- theatrical articles, and interviews were published everyday. At the meeting of festival critics the performances were criticised. The performances were plain and attractive, mostly dealing with students' difficulties at the universities, so the audience admired the festival. *Jahad Daneshgahi* (Jihad at the University) organizes the Student Theatre Festival, and in order to participate artists must be either students of a university, or belong to a group affiliated to the *Jahad Daneshgahi*.

The first Traditional Theatre Festival was organized by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Tehran in 1989. This festival saw eleven performances of *Ruhowzi* from the cities of Tehran, Isfahan, Gorgan, Sari and Kashan. In this festival there were four kinds of *Ruhowzi*:-

-*Seah Bazi* (The Black-Face Play)

-*Baghal Bazi* (The Grocery play)

-*Haji Bazari Isfahani* (A Market-man of Isfahan)

-New plays with elements of traditional theatre

The Workers, the Prisons, the Air Force's and the schools' festivals are theatre festivals of less importance.

Islam and Theatre

Although the theatre has had a relationship with religion for a long time, Islamic art tended towards the decorative arts, to architecture and to literature rather than to drama. Also the Islamic scholars and scientists who had done much research into western culture and translated many books into Persian said nothing about theatre

and did not translate drama. Even when *Ta'zieh*, the religious epic drama of Iran, began, the Islamic scholars were opposed to it because of its distortion of historical facts and because of their dislike of the representation of the prophets and saints on the stage.

In Islam whatever leads man towards God and goodness is lawful and whatever leads them towards the devil and badness is unlawful. In this view it may be that a wealthy man who has no heed to his wealth, is saved. But a poor student who loves his books but not God might be at risk of punishment. So, we can not automatically say that the theatre is lawful or unlawful in Islam. In fact this depends on the theatre's message and content.

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran some theatre artists left the country because they believed that there would be no theatrical activity in the Islamic Republic. But some stayed and worked with a number of young artists, despite difficulties. Although there is no problem theoretically for theatre work in Iran, the problems arise from point of practice, like those created by woman on stage having to wear the Islamic veil and not being able to have any physical contact with men etc.

Indeed the clergy have differing opinions of theatrical activities. Imam Khomeini (1902-89) the leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, had a favourable opinion of artistic activities. He used to say that we must break the stockades of ignorance and superstition in order to reach the source of pure Islam. And when a number of clergy and Members of Parliament protested at the broadcast of films and music in television, he rejected their opinions and told them not to listen to the sanctimonious, illiterate, foolish mullahs. The following interview between a television manager and Imam Khomeini appeared in *Keyhan*:¹

Television Manager : There are a number of actresses in television films, as in cinema and the theatre, foreign-made and home-made. They sometimes do not have the Islamic veil, revealing the face, neck and hair, according to the situation. Also in some sports, such as football and wrestling, some parts of the men's bodies are not covered. I will clarify the matter, so that you may tell us your hallowed judgement on these points:

- 1. The broadcasting of these films which have women without the Islamic veil, revealing the face, neck and hair.**
- 2. The broadcasting of sports like football and wrestling which show some part of the men's bodies.**
- 3. Watching these films.**

Imam Khomeini : The watching of these types of film and drama raise no difficulties in Islamic law. Many of them are educational and there is no difficulty about the broadcasting of them. There is also no difficulty with the sport films and the music. There is sometimes,

though rarely, a small problem that requires care. Two points must be observed:

1. Make-up must not be applied by strangers (or by foreigners).
2. The audience must not look lustfully.

Radio and Television

The drama unit in *Sada Va Simaei Jomhoeri Islami Iran* (The Voice and the Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran - Radio and Television) was active after the Revolution.

There is a serialised drama on Tehran Radio at 10 pm each night. These are adapted from the classic literature both of Iran and of the rest of the world, such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace* etc. In addition there are a lot of short individual plays within other programmes on radio, on a variety of themes.

There is also individual and serialised drama on television on a weekly basis.

Drama on radio and television tends to be monopolised by a number of distinguished artists and it is difficult for other artists to find acceptance for their works.

Two successful television serials were:-

-*Saeih Hamsaeh* (*The Neighbour's Shadow*)

(Playwright: Ismaiel Khalaj. Actor: Eneaat Bakhshi.)

-*Aineh* (*The Mirror*)

(Actor: Javad Khodadadi)

The first was about social problems in a traditional quarter in Tehran and ran for thirteen episodes. The second used flashbacks to the causes of trouble within a marriage and proved so popular that it ran for fifty episodes.

Finance

The financial situation for theatre workers was made particularly difficult during the time of the war, by inflation in the free market and by the fixed nature of government sector salaries.

The government has often announced that there is no obstacle to the founding of private theatres and the banks have offered short-term loans for the arts, but the

private sector has still not revived. To put production on the stage is very expensive indeed.

In spite of the fact that the provision of costume and settings is the duty of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and also that there is some money from this source for further help, in the end the artists' (writer, director, actor etc) share of the ticket money is very small. So, many famous theatre artists have moved to cinema and others have to have a second job to earn a living. This situation creates a theatre of low quality and does not encourage young people to choose the theatre as a career.

Theatre in the Universities

The universities were closed from 1980 to 1983 for the Enghelab Farhangi (the Cultural Revolution) in Iran. Then the universities were reopened after some transformation of the lectures and removal of a number of lecturers. Only the Department of Music in the University of Tehran remains closed at this time.

There are two departments of theatre in Iran's Universities which offer a B.A., one in the University of Tehran and another in the University Complex of Arts also in Tehran.

Theatre students have staged a lot of world classics as part of their assessment in the Theatre Department of University of Tehran, for example *Yerma* by Lorca etc. These productions have been both powerful and successful on account of the students' knowledge and work and greatly appreciated by audiences throughout 1983 to 1986. A new generation of students and lecturers started work since this date trying to put more Islamic standards in their works.

Theatre Publishing and Criticism

The shortage of paper is the biggest problem facing the publishers, in both the government and private sectors, in Iran. As a result the publishers have chosen the best selling books for the rationed paper. The reprinting of all old theatre books has stopped and they have become unobtainable. The private sector publishers print very few new theatre works and those of the government sector only slightly more. In the government sector two publishers are active:

1. *Namayesh* (Theatre), belongs to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. The translations of *African Theatre Today* by Martin Banham, *The Born* by Armand Gatti and *An Eagle with Two Heads* by Jean Cocteau are among the first works of this publisher.
2. *Jahad Daneshgahi* (Jihad at the university), published about 150 theatrical books of which almost all were new Persian plays.

Also, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance opened a specialized theatre library and the Centre of Theatre Documentation in Tehran.

It is worth noting the works of Farhad Nazerzadeh Kermani (b.1947) , a lecturer at the Theatre Department of the University of Tehran. He has written and published a number of books in the field of theatre, including:-

-An Introduction to study of Theatrical Arts in Egypt.

-T.S. Eliot and Verse and Religious Drama.

-The Avant-garde, Experimental and Absurd Theatre.

-Styles of production in the Contemporary World's Theatre.

-Symbolist Drama in Theory and practice.

-Expressionism in Drama.

Influential theatre criticism does not appear in Iran, though the critics have written a lot of reviews for newspapers and magazines. These were not important to the destiny or popularity of a play. Out of 369² publications in Iran, including 32 newspapers, 15 weekly magazines, 221 monthly magazines, 108 Quarterly etc - Monthly *Namayesh* (Theatre) Magazine, Monthly *Tamashakhaneh* (Theatre) Magazine and *Faslnameh* (Theatre Quarterly) are the only magazines specifically for theatre. Bahram Abrahimi, an actor, has an interesting statement:³

The situation of theatre criticism in Iran during this decade (1980-90) was like a disturbed market. Theatre criticism has never been considered as a serious matter in this country and there is not any beneficial relation between the theatre critics and the theatre artist. I just read theatre criticism because I want to know who is the friend or enemy of who in the theatre world.

The Effect of War

The war between Iraq and Iran of 1980-88 resulted in great loss of life and property. The people suffered a heroic struggle and made terrible self-sacrifices, in the real world rather than in the rhetorical world of politics.

Preparation to send the young to the front, the tears of women and children, victory and happiness, loss and captivity, to fail and mourn, and to bury... these were the important themes and the deep meanings of life in the war, which were not reflected in theatre as well as they could have been.

Although many writers wrote plays about the war and staged them in the cities and at the front, a powerful theatre of war was not born out of those eight years. The

majority of these plays were intended either to mock the enemy or to encourage the people to go to war. During the bombardment of Tehran and other cities by Iraq, the people were forced to shelter in the basements, and theatre artists took theatre underground for them. Theatre in the shelter was a part of theatre of the war, but was limited to a few comedies. A theatre critic, Nasrollah Ghadari, writes:⁴

A playwright who writes play about war first must have some experience of war. Then he must know playwrighting techniques. We, in these years, have not been good learners. Furthermore, we have not allowed others to criticise us. We still have not created even one good quality play about war. We still have not believed that first we must reject the war itself, then we must support the holy defence. We have always been going to extremes in our art works.

Some examples of plays written during and about the war and which were performed at the front include:

1. *The Death Chariot*.⁵ Author (anon).

An Iranian is captured by two Iraqi soldiers who are afraid of death and do not take part in the war. They have instead come to a ruined place to hide. The Iranian captive has come to find a plant which is remedy for his father's illness. When the Iraqi soldiers are asleep, a snake bites one of them and another one escapes while the Iranian has a change of heart in favour of war and goes back to his family.

This play shows first that Iraqi soldiers are afraid of war, second that the flow of natural events are in favour of Iran and finally that in this war Iran is in the right. The message is "Go to the Front".

2. *The Lion at the Desert*.⁶ Author (anon).

The Iraqi army has occupied a village at the frontier localities. A mother hides her son in the oven in her home. Her house later becomes the Iraqi army's command headquarters. The Iraqi commander, in front of the mother, as she cries, puts the grandfather of the family into the same oven and turns it on. The day after, the Iranian army come to the village and Iraqi army are forced to retreat. Suddenly, the grandfather and the boy come out from another room and kill the Iraqi commander.

This play shows the brave resistance of the people living in the battle zone. A mother, her son and the grandfather are taken captive and tortured. But at last they are saved and take revenge on the Iraqi commander. The message is "Oppose the Enemy".

3. *Ababil*.⁷ By: Hasanali Fatehi.

Saddam Hussien of Iraq, in order to convey that he is a good Muslim, colludes with foreign reporters so that they show him practising his religious duties. But really

he performs his prayers wrongly. Then Saddam talks to those Iranian prisoners of war who have refused to be interviewed by the women reporters because of their not wearing the Islamic veil.

Saddam Hussien of Iraq was not a religious man before the war with Iran. During the war for political reason he deemed it necessary to portray himself as a good Muslim. But this play presents him as a liar and an insincere worshipper. The message is "The Enemy is an unbeliever". Therefore it is legitimate for Muslims to oppose him.

Women in the Theatre

Some women worked in theatre with the men in Iran after the Islamic Revolution, but performed only in the Islamic veil and without physical contact with men. The Islamic veil means a woman must cover herself in the company of men other than close relatives, only leaving free the face, and the hands as far as the wrist. Dancing and the wearing of thin or tight dresses is also forbidden for women.

There is a unit of women's theatre within the Centre of Dramatic Arts of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Tehran. This unit stages productions in which all artists, and technicians are woman.

Audience

The audience for theatre in Iran is not wealthy. They do not come to the theatre either to pass the time or to assume an air of fashionability. They come to learn and to reflect. Employees, shopkeepers, workers, students, teachers, soldiers, etc, come to the theatre quietly and receptively. They are ordinary people. They have profited from the opening out of political debate, especially in the early years of the Revolution. They saw a lot of political theatre, from the far left to the far right, in these years. For example a poet, writer and director, Sa'id Soltanpour, staged *Abbas Agha Kargar Iran Nasuonal* (*Abbas Agha the Worker of Iran Nasuonal*) -Abbas Agha is a name and Iran Nasuonal is a car assembly plant- on the streets of Tehran in 1980. He was also one of the leaders of a left-wing political group called the minority Fadayan Khalq.

During the struggle to remove President Bani Sadr, the left-wing groups including the minority Fadayan Khalq attacked strategic targets, overturning buses, burning tyres and clashing with the Revolutionary Guard on the streets of Tehran and other cities. Following this, Sa'id Soltanpour was arrested and executed in 1981.

However, people have a high regard for art and for the artists of the theatre. They sat in the theatres and often heard dialogue which was contrary to their own opinions, but they did not riot or destroy the theatres, although they had power.

People rush to see powerful theatre throughout the year, and especially during the festivals. Often they are left outside because the tickets have sold out. Once the eager audience broke down the door at the Molavi Theatre as a result of a sudden rush during the first Student Theatre Festival.

Censorship

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a religious (Islamic) system. So, everything within the system must be in agreement with Islam, particularly cultural works, and in this case, theatre. On the one hand, the leadership were cultured men and they knew the damaging effects of an oppressive censorship. They did not approve a specific law for censorship, and did not create an office for it. On the other hand, because there were not any rules and regulation for censorship, it caused self-censorship among the artists. I give an example of this under the heading "Performances" in my commentary to *The Tale of the Concrete City* (p.163), a play with two different endings.

However, within the Centre of Dramatic Arts of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the responsibility for the control of theatre was given to a handful of people and those individuals with authority to censor have changed many times and each has judged from their personal tastes.

Theatre censorship is in two parts, first of the text and then the performance, and usually these points are more important:-

- It must not be anti-Islam.
- It must not be communistic.
- It must not contain any sexual relationship or indecent words.
- It must satisfy the artistic judgment of the censor.

For the performance:-

- There must be no physical contact between men and women.
- The body and the hair of the actresses must be concealed and no tight dresses are allowed.
- There should be no dance or pop music.
- It must satisfy the artistic judgment of the censor.

In the issue 4, January 1985 of *Namayesh* (Theatre), the monthly magazine of the Centre of Dramatic Arts, there is an interview with the members of the committee who were in charge of theatre censorship at that time. Selected parts of the interview are as follows:

Q : When did you start your work and how are you doing it?

Committee : We started three months ago. First we receive the text from the Centre of Dramatic Arts. Then we read it and after consultation, we take the final decision. This decision from the Centre of Dramatic Arts is conveyed to the writer or the person who has suggested it.

Q : If you did not accept a play and the writer has an objection, do you explain to him why his work has been rejected?

Committee : Of course. We think it is our duty to explain our reasons for the rejection of a play to the writer. This is for resolving misunderstanding. This consultation and our guidance will then be helpful to the writer when he is writing his next play.

Q : And if the writer still is not satisfied?

Committee : In that case, we have to say good-bye to him, because the committee's decision is the final decision.

Q : It has been said that the committee has given permission to do masterpiece plays to directors who are beginners? Is this true?

Committee : We do not know anything about this horrible phenomenon! We give permission to do masterpiece to those artists who have enough ability to do them.

Q : Does poor spelling play a part in whether you accept or reject a play?

Committee : One or two mistakes are not important. But the committee can not accept a work with many literary mistakes. We think it is impossible to be a good playwright, at the same time as writing with mistakes.

Q : Do you give your reason for rejecting a play in an official letter to the writer?

Committee : No. But we can talk about it in his presence.

Q : It has been said that you give the time for rehearsal unjustly to each group. For example one director has two months for rehearsal, another has three months and one group even has four months...

Committee : This is false. Some directors are beginners. So, they need more time. Usually we give them a month to do a part of the play. Then we go and look at what is going on. If he is good and shows some creative power, we give him another two months. Otherwise we close the work.

Q : We know most of the plays that you receive are rejected. Why?

Committee : We do not think there is any particular reason for this. Maybe those plays which were rejected by the previous committee come again. But we need to remember that some people send a text just to see our decision and it is a test or experiment for their future works.

Q : What do you think about the situation of theatre in our country?

Committee: We think theatre in our country is like a dying person. Sometimes, somebody tries to help him. But, truly, we need a proficient doctor to treat him.

Q : In which direction do you think our theatre has to go?

Committee : We think, as we have a restoration to our real culture which is Islam, in theatre we have to go back to our roots and traditions in order to make a theatre with Iranian identity and Islamic contents. And in this way we must not forget to learn theatre of the other countries as a science but not for imitation.

Statistics

The following statistics appeared in *Keyhan Farhangi*⁸ magazine. These statistics show that compared with the first years of the Revolution, the theatre audience increased as society became more stable. During the same period the number of Iranian productions increased whilst that of foreign plays remained roughly at the same low figure. Sadly, in some provinces the number of productions, at times, was nil.

Theatre in Tehran

Year	No of Plays	Iranian	Foreign	Performances	Audience
1979	31	17	14	754	232776
1980	34	23	11	756	166106
1981	23	18	5	643	121219
1982	54	50	4	973	145405
1983	60	57	3	716	146870
1984	39	32	7	659	153330
1985	21	14	7	418	78061
1986	32	25	7	647	112914
1987	32	21	11	646	152758
1988	54	36	18	985	256265
1989	107	76	31	1702	207998
1990	159	138	21	1782	234673

Fajr National Theatre Festival

Year	No of Plays	Iranian	Foreign	Performances	Audience
1982	11	11	0	47	8279
1983	25	25	0	48	14691
1984	16	16	0	29	886
1985	42	38	4	79	19178
1986	38	34	4	75	9120
1987	45	45	0	86	48192
1988	46	41	5	171	38299
1989	20	19	1	155	72170
1990	36	36	0	166	32926

Theatre in Provinces

Khorasan

Year	No of Plays	Performances	Audience
1982	38	196	6591
1983	31	225	35775
1984	28	164	35666
1985	13	91	27775
1986	20	78	11971
1987	23	99	27110
1988	45	421	59860
1989	28	331	33280

Khozestan

1983	33	110	9490
1984	25	128	43260
1985	45	180	91130
1986	38	206	59806
1987	38	215	82654
1988	40	260	39533
1989	2	42	3727

East Azarbaijan

1983	9	65	10800
1984	7	62	23200
1985	3	9	?
1986	6	42	?
1987	5	61	14920
1988	8	81	10226
1989	4	71	5800

West Azarbaijan

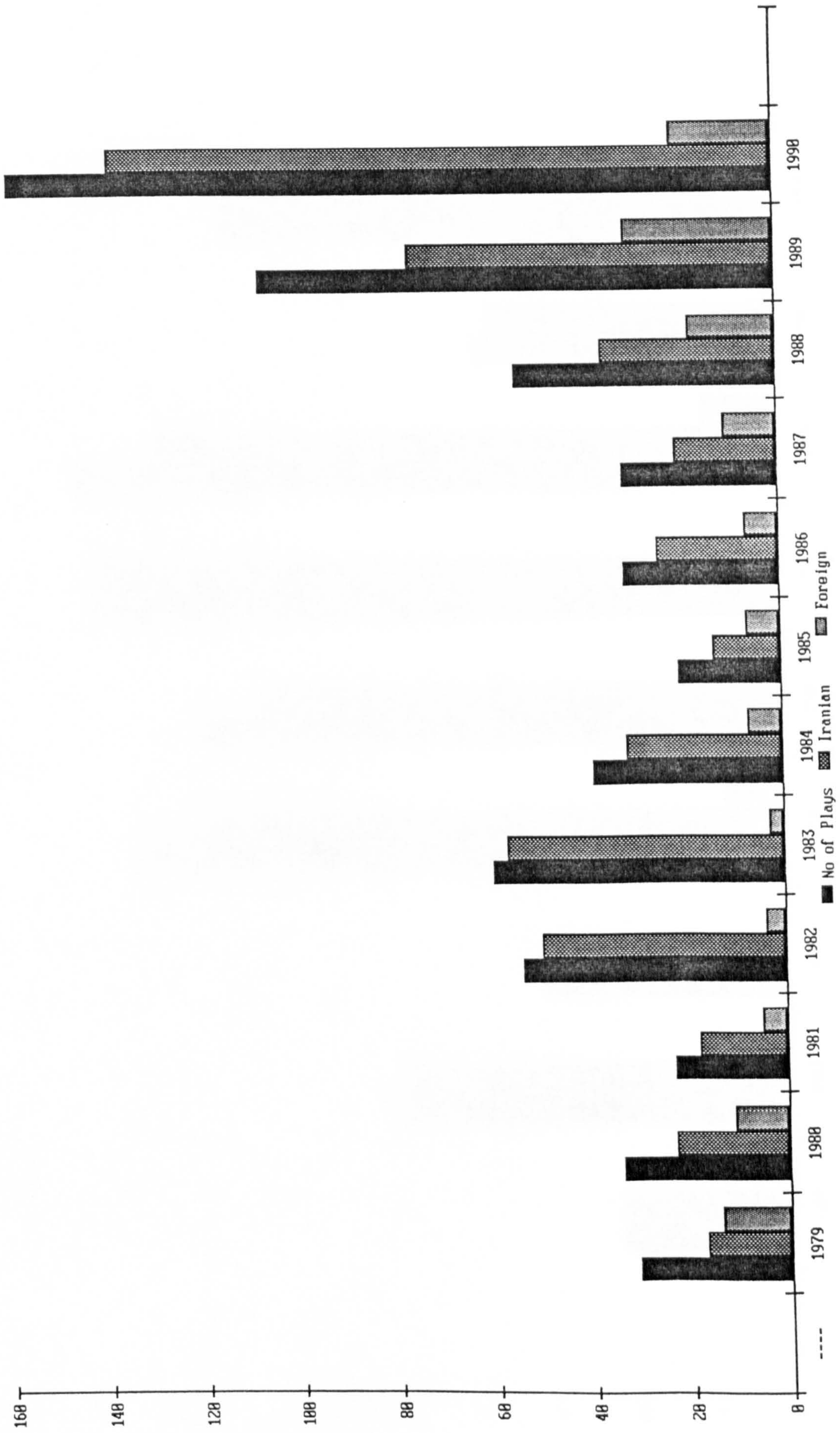
1983	2	9	?
1984	4	14	?
1985	8	47	13867
1986	4	27	4900
1987	10	135	39770
1988	7	55	5700
1989	2	11	1700

Fars

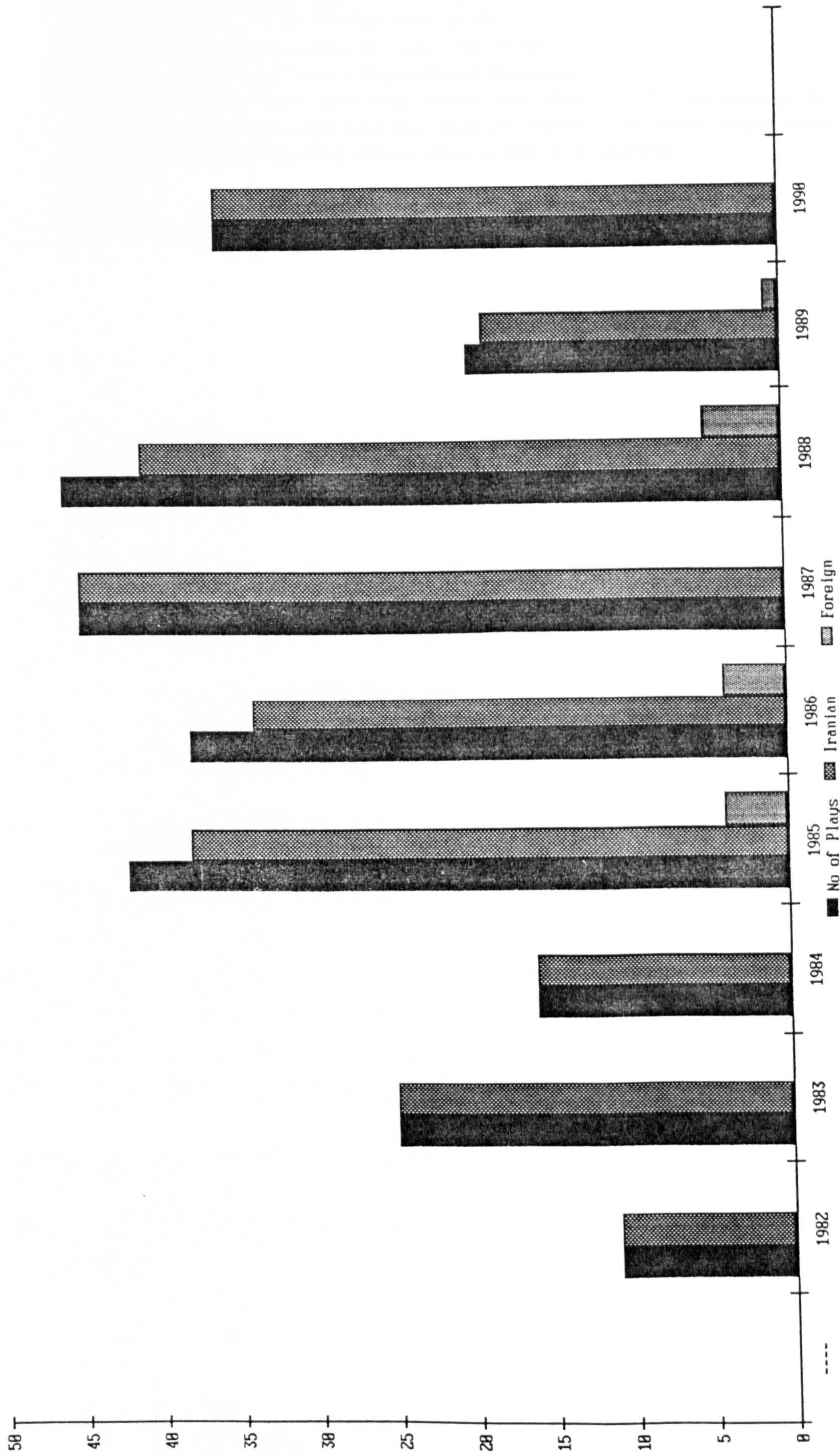
1983	6	37	8400
1894	7	78	24300
1985	1	10	?
1986	0	0	0
1987	2	3	1600
1988	3	124	1300
1989	2	42	3727
1894	7	78	24300

Kerman			
Year	No of Plays	Performances	Audience
1983	6	35	3030
1984	8	25	4450
1985	3	16	3154
1986	17	64	15236
1987	5	40	7250
1988	2	32	2069
1989	13	62	14970
Mazandaran			
1983	31	179	41666
1984	28	143	38578
1985	12	84	20206
1986	12	71	18282
1987	11	109	23640
1988	23	133	16363
1989	3	164	43662
Yazd			
1983	10	44	15800
1984	3	35	74800
1985	6	38	6000
1986	3	24	?
1987	5	45	39600
1988	6	71	2600
1989	10	27	4635
Isfahan			
1986	8	64	11200
1987	24	29	52780
1988	13	142	16600
1989	27	170	73480
Kordestan			
1983	1	6	3000
1984	7	22	3200
1985	5	27	7521
1986	0	0	0
1987	2	11	4400
1988	2	7	?
1989	11	169	10700

Theatre in Tehran



Fajr National Theatre Festival



1. *Kayhan Newspaper*, December 1987.
2. *Kayhan Havai Newspaper* , December 2, 1992.
3. *Namayesh Magazine*, No 49, October 1991. (P.69)
4. *Kayhan Farhangi Magazine* ,Issue 85, June 1992.(P.49)
5. Nosratpanah, Mehran and Asma'il Pourdehkordi Gholamali,
Tatra Jang (Theatre of War). Setad Jang: Ahwaz, Iran. 1988. (P.117). The names of the authors, directors and actors for these three plays are omitted in the source. Maybe theses plays were performed at the front without either posters or programmes.
6. Ibid.(P.126)
7. Ibid.(P.121)
8. *Kayhan Farhangi Magazine*, Issue 85, June 1992.

Part Two: The Plays

THE FENCE WITHIN THE FENCE

Commentary

Playwright

Mohssen Ostad Ali Makhmalbaf, born in 1957, is a famous and a productive artist in post-revolutionary Iran. Mohssen Makhmalbaf, who has no higher education, has written 3 novels, 20 short stories, 4 short screenplays, 14 long screenplays, 9 plays and 7 articles. He has made 10 full-length films for cinema as the screen-writer and director and also has published more than 20 books of his novels, short stories, screenplays, plays and articles. As an artist who has political and philosophical views, there are three stages in his work:

1. The Initial Stage

Reflecting society, all the works of Makhmalbaf are political in the years 1978-80. In this period he worked in *Hozeh Honary Sazman Tablighat Islami (Arts Unit of the Islamic Propaganda Organization)*. In *Hozeh* Moslem artists work on the novel, children's literature, poetry, painting, music, film and theatre. They try to put Islamic standards into their works. It would be true to say that *Hozeh* was a radical organization in the arts of the country in those years. Two examples of Makhmalbaf's work in this period are outlined below:-

-*Mosa*. Short story. 1979.

A village man, called Mosa, is brought to the prison. He has come to Tehran to work in a factory. He is arrested when he is waiting for his friend in a park. Because of his empty house and other things such as his coming from a village called Siahkal which is a centre for leftist partisans' activities, working in a factory which is a centre for leftist groups, and having had a meeting in a park, the S.A.V.A.K thinks he is a partisan. The villager dies on the heavy rack without having anything to say.

-*Anfajar (The Explosion)*. Short story. 1979.

There is an explosion in a house which belongs to a leftist group. A woman is arrested when she is trying to escape. On the rack of the S.A.V.A.K, she tries to resist for the sake of the workers and people. But she cannot. On thinking of God, she finds the power of resistance.

In this period most of Makhmalbaf's stories take place in the prisons before the Islamic Revolution. Makhmalbaf writes about materialist people who have no power of resistance in the prison, about religious people who do have the power of

resistance, and of the people who without any stimulus are drawn to fight. Makhmalbaf's works in these years are light-weight and "sloganly" in style.

2. The Moral Stage

In the years 1980-83 Makhmalbaf worked on the theme of Islamic ethics. He started to write plays and screenplays whose subjects are death, morality, war, and fighting. Some examples follow from this period:-

-Marg Digari (The Death of the other One). Play. 1981.

A commander is going to start a big military operation. However, death comes to him. He tries to escape but cannot.

-Tir Ghib (The Shot from the Invisible World). Play. 1982.

This is a play about war. The Iraqis are waiting for the Iranians' attack, but forces from the invisible world attack and kill them! Then Iranians come and capture the trenches.

-Towjih (The Justification). Play. 1980.

In a Marxist group there is a Moslem who does not believe the group's idea. He, called Ali, has put a bomb in a building to kill a number of government authorities, but the group changes the time of the explosion, so hundreds of members of staff will be killed too. The S.A.V.A.K arrests the group and Ali, for the sake of those members of staff, tells the place of the bomb to the S.A.V.A.K. They defuse the bomb and eventually Ali kills himself and others with another bomb.

-Shab Akhar (The Latest Night). Play. 1980.

In a prison, three political prisoners are waiting for execution. One of them is a leftist fighter who has fought for the sake of the people. The second one has fought for God. These two are not afraid of death. But the third man who has betrayed his friends, is afraid of prison and death. At last those two go for execution and later when the guards come to the third man to free him, he has died of fear.

-Zarorat Mo'arafi (Introducing Is Necessary). Play. 1980.

In Algeria, before the victory of the revolution, a sociologist, a partisan, a person who has been a political prisoner, a person who has been abroad, and a religious man are gathered together in a house, while there is fighting outside. They debate the leadership of the revolution and each one thinks he is the best leader for the revolution, but when the fighting comes into the house all of them duck.

-Rolet Rossi (Russian Roulette). Play. 1981.

A capitalist and a Marxist in Russia are going to have a duel. At last they make peace and kill the witness who is a servant.

-Shekh Shahed (The Martyr Shekh). Play. 1981.

This play is about constitutional revolution in Iran.

-Hasar Dar Hasar (The Fence Within the Fence). Play. 1981.

-Ghalah (The Castle). Play. 1981.

In the time of the Mongol invasion of Iran, the defenders of a castle resist the enemy.

-Tobeh Nasoh (The True Penitence). Screenplay. 1982.

Lotfalikhan, a member of staff at a bank, has a heart attack. During the shrouding and burial, he comes alive and takes a decision for true penitence. He understands that not to sin is easier than penitence. (Makhmalbaf made this screenplay into a film in 1983.)

-Do Chashm Biso (Two Sightless Eyes). Screenplay. 1982.

Mashhadi Iman, who has a blind child, decides to go to war with Iraq, but his son-in-law and his son go to the front before him. He therefore stays in the village. When his son-in-law is killed and his son is wounded, Mashhadi decides to settle in the village and not to go to the front. At last he asks help from Imam Reza.¹ With a miracle his blind child finds his sight. (Makhmalbaf made this screenplay into a film in 1983.)

-The Specialty of Islamic Story. Article. 1981.

-Islamic Story. Article. 1981.

-Some Notes on Story and Playwriting. Article. 1981.

-An Introduction to the Islamic art. Article. 1982.

In this period Makhmalbaf consolidates his position as a Moslem artist of Iran.

3. Taking Shape

In the year of 1983 and after, in addition to writing two novels, Makhmalbaf turned to film. His works are strong and powerful and their subject is social justice. Some examples (including the novels) are:-

-Hoz Soltun (Soltun's Pond). Novel. 1985.

This novel is about the life of a woman in the year 1963. She is in the grip of the society, politics and traditional religion. A man comes to help her and teach her a new way of life. The man is martyred and a new generation comes into existence.

-Bagh Bolor (The Crystal Garden). Novel. 1986.

Perhaps this novel is one of the best works of Makhmalbaf with a strong plot, new subject and fluent language. In a little part of a big house which is confiscated after the revolution, a new group of people live together. These people are the family of martyrs and the disabled of the revolution. The novel is about a year of their lives. In this house a wife of a martyr is raped by a man who has come to her to obtain a car from *Boniad Shahid (The Martyr Foundation)*. At last the landlord of the house comes back and repossesses the house. The people of the house, who are symbolic of the oppressed of the revolution, are compelled to go to a room in a hotel.

These two novels are about women. The women in Makhmalbaf's work are typically the mothers who live in bondage and are oppressed.

-Dastforosh (The Peddler). Film. 1986.

The Peddler is a film in three episodes which has a social context and at the same time is a philosophical journey through the relationships existing between members of the lower classes in society. In one of the stories, a peddler who collaborates with a band of petty smugglers is threatened because of being suspected of having betrayed them... Thus he is doomed.

-Bicycleran (The Cyclist). Film. 1987.

Nassim, an Afghan emigrant, is in a bad fix. His wife is ill and has no money to send her to hospital. In order to obtain money, Nassim accepts a wager: to stay on a bicycle for a whole week.

Although Makhmalbaf's films were successful both inside and outside the country, he was discharged from *Hoze* because of allegations of being an extremist. Makhmalbaf and a number of artists left *Hoze* in 1987 and it was reported in newspapers that he and his friend were martyrs of art. *The Peddler* was shown at London (1988), and in many film festivals. *The Cyclist* was the winner of the second Rimini Film festival as the best film and took the golden prize.

Now, Makhmalbaf works in Iran as an independent artist. His recent films, *The Time for Loving* and *Zaeandehrowd Nights*, both dealing with the taboo theme of love, and a third *Naseraddin Shah* are banned in Iran.

Context of *The Fence Within the Fence*

Synopsis

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1978-9) and the opening of the prisons by the people, two Marxist prisoners do not believe the revolution has happened. The people break down the prison's door and kill the guards and give guns to the prisoners. But the old prisoner throws away the gun and locks the door of the cell and the younger prisoner copies him. Although the people bring a feudalism, a capitalist, an American and a member of the S.A.V.A.K and execute them in the prison, these two prisoners stand firm in their own analysis of events and do not come out of the prison. At last the younger prisoner comes out but the old prisoner stays. A few months later the people come and see that the old prisoner's body is fallen to decay in his cell.

Background

Mohssen Makhmalbaf's *The Fence Within the Fence* or *The Invisible Fence* is an example of political theatre in Iran after the Islamic Revolution. As a good example, this play offers action, ideas, violence and debate.

From the point of view of politics the years 1978-81 are very important in the history of the Islamic Revolution. In these years there were many party activities, demonstrations and parliamentary movements. Also there were armed actions in Kordestan and other parts of Iran and the war with Iraq started in 1980. In 1981 the President of the country, Bani Sadr, was discharged and a period of terror started. The opponents went either for armed action or silence. The followers of the regime engaged in establishing Islamic ethics. The artists worked on this subject, too. In these years Makhmalbaf was perhaps the most important figure in the arts of the country and there was a lot of publicity about him as a Moslem artist. In the years 1980-82 he wrote nine plays and *The Fence Within the Fence*, the sixth one, was written in 1981.

Themes

The Fence Within the Fence condemns the limitations of the leftist groups. Although this play has been used as an anti-leftist play, there are some other themes in it, too. Because of the virtues of art, the play, like a mirror, tells us about the social problems and the important events of the early years of the revolution, matters

that we cannot usually find in the history books. One of these is the theme of ignorance and lack of information. In the first scene the two guards are ignorant of the revolution. They are easily killed. Because the main characters of the play, the two prisoners, have not enough information about their society, they stay in the prison and one of them dies. In fact all the characters of the play show ignorance, somehow. Because of his lack of information, the member of the S.A.V.A.K has not gone abroad into exile with the deposed authorities. He is executed. The feudalist in the prison wants to make a phone call to his highness Shahpour! He is executed, too. The capitalist, who had contact with Americans, is waiting for the American gunmen. But the American gunmen do not come. He is wrong and executed. Also, the American, who wants to eat Caviar in the prison, is executed. The point is, even in the real world, there are many people who live with the sickness of ignorance, either inside or outside the country. Perhaps the message is that these people must understand the political problems of their own country and they have to use their information in order to build a new society.

Another theme relates to the death of the characters. With the killing of two guards at the beginning of the play, the execution of the member of the S.A.V.A.K, the feudalist, the capitalist and the American, nothing is changed and it seems these deaths are useless. The tragedy is that they are not killed because of their crimes but on account of their bad luck. In the real world, there are many people like them who were easily saved and lived to work in society.

Characterisation and Analysis

It seems there is a little place for fully rounded characterisation in this play. Apart from the two main characters of the play -the old prisoner and the younger prisoner- the other characters are, in fact, stereotypes and we have not enough information to analyse them.

The death of the old prisoner is his own choice. He dies because of his closed ideology. Maybe he is an idealist or a dogmatist. Yet his friend, the younger prisoner, who perhaps represents another part of the old prisoner or another part of an ideology, returns to society. The old prisoner thinks he must sit and wait for the right time. He is afraid of the outside world:

Old Prisoner: ... When I put my foot out of this cell, I haven't any peace of mind.

And his wish is the coming of socialism:

Old Prisoner: Governments come and governments go. You must think about the next thirty years when they will push fifty workers into each

one of these cells. Think about that, comrade. The fifty workers will lean their thick arms on these bars and sing a song. What splendid days will come!

As a dogmatist Marxist, he has an answer for every question. For example when two guards are killed at the beginning of the play, he says:

Old Prisoner : I think they are playing a trick, I promise you that nothing has changed. I mean what has changed? During the twenty years I have been inside it is impossible that we have gone from feudalism to capitalism and from capitalism to socialism.

When the member of the S.A.V.A.K comes into the prison, he says:

Old Prisoner : Well, maybe you failed in your duty?

When the feudalist comes he says:

Old Prisoner : Don't think and dream without any reason, there is no news. When capitalism develops, it speaks in slogans. They excite a person to say the land belongs to the farmers.

When the capitalist comes he puts his finger into his ear. And when the American comes in, he says:

Old Prisoner : Don't listen to them. All of these things are phoney. It is impossible to put a feudalist, a member of the S.A.V.A.K, a capitalist and an American in jail together. Which class did it? Is it the farmers' doing? So, they must put the feudalists in the jail. It can't be the workers' doing, since they don't exist yet to put the capitalists in. It is a lie. Don't believe it.

The old prisoner could not believe in the execution of these new prisoners. In fact, as the younger prisoner says, he has become a fossil and cannot come out from behind his invisible fence. So the old prisoner dies and the younger prisoner who little by little has understood the situation, escapes to freedom. Yet, we do not know how and why these two prisoners were arrested and what their sentence is?

Makhmalbaf in *The Fence Within the Fence* is an optimistic revolutionary. He kills two guards, a member of the S.A.V.A.K, a feudalist, a capitalist, an American and an old Marxist prisoner on the stage, just as the slogans of the revolution were real life. Makhmalbaf thinks about an utopia in which there is no prison.

A person : ... My idea is to make this place [*The prison*] a museum.

But after 1983, the idea of an utopia is rejected in his works.

There are two further minor points in the play that are of interest:

The first one is in scene 3. The revolutionaries bring the bread and dates for the prisoners and ask them to say their prayers before eating! Of course nobody does it and they eat the bread and dates. The point is that we can see how a holy thing - saying prayers- under duress changes to an unholy thing.

The second one concerns some documents in the pocket of the member of S.A.V.A.K, in the prison. He tries to find a place to throw those documents away, but eventually is compelled to eat them! The question is how does he bring the documents, in his pocket, into the prison? Although he is executed, the revolutionaries did not search him!

Language

The language of the play is a colloquial, easy, clear and well-informed language that everybody from all classes of society can understand. In this language there are no figures of speech, philosophically complicated words or political jargon. The language of all characters is similar and there is no difference between the language of a member of the S.A.V.A.K and that of a feudalist or capitalist.

(It would be true to say that in the Persian text, there are some grammatical errors and the sentences are not always well constructed.)

Style

Although Mohammad Reza Honarmand the director of *The Fence Within the Fence* said in an interview² that the style of the play is surreal, there is no sign of this either in the play or in his production. In fact, the characters of the play are symbolic of the people of the society. The main basis of the play -the two prisoners staying in the prison- is imaginary yet the situation of the play, like the prison and the prisoners and their execution etc, is real.

Performances

The Fence Within the Fence as it was written by a religious writer, was an acceptable piece of theatre from the view point of the regime and had a successful run in Tehran and the provinces. It was shown on television and video tapes of this work have even been sent abroad.

The first performance of the play was staged in *Hozeh Honary Sazman Tablighat Islami (Arts Unit of the Islamic Propaganda Organization)*, in Tehran, in 1982. The names of the cast of this performance follow:

Director: Mohammad Reza Honarmand

Actors : Farajallah Salahshour (Old Prisoner)
Abbas Nozari (Younger Prisoner)
Ja'far Dehghan (American-Guard)
Hossein Gha'mpanah (Capitalist)
Sa'eid Iraghi (People)
Abraham Morshedshad (People)
Hameid Rafie'ian (People)
Ataallah Solimanian (People)
Ahmad Mollaghali (People)
Ali Omedwar (People)
Dawood Rahmati (Feudalist-Guard)
Farid Fallah (Member of the S.A.V.A.K)
Amir Zargham (Mullah)

In this production the stage design and acting style was realistic.

Criticism

Perhaps the main problem of the play is in characterisation. There is not enough information to analyse the feudalism, the capitalist, the American and the member of the S.A.V.A.K .

Also, when the play was performed, some of the audience could not accept the imaginary part of the play -the two prisoners staying in the prison- because of the realistic style of the production.

Among the comment which this play has attracted, a favourable critic³ makes an interesting point:

The problem is with the entrance of a mullah in the last scene of the play. At the end, after the defeat of the old prisoner's theory, the younger prisoner goes to the people. And a few months later the people with a mullah come to the prison and see that the old prisoner is decayed in the same cell. The question is, what is the role of the mullah, here? If we want to indicate that spirituality was the leader of the revolution , and we must make this point, unfortunately the expression and the image is very very poor! If we want to say that spirituality is with and next to the people, again this is not explained enough. So, it is better for our brothers to review this case.

1. Imam Reza is the eighth Imam of Shiism and his shrine is in the city of Mashhad.
2. Montazeri, Ali. *Saehhaieh Mandagar*. Barg: Tehran. 1988.(P.79)
3. Ibid.(P.74)

THE FENCE WITHIN THE FENCE

By: Mohssen Makhmalbaf

Characters :
Old Prisoner
Younger Prisoner
Member of the S.A.V.A.K¹
Feudalist
Capitalist
American
Guards
A group of the people

Scene 1

(There are two small cells at the back of the stage. Inside each cell there is a prisoner with a striped costume and fetters and chains on his feet. The prisoners are standing. There are two guards outside the bars. One of them has a few big keys in his hand. He is standing straight and has a handlebar moustache. The next guard with a whip is waiting beside the cell. The two guards and two prisoners are old, but one prisoner seems a little older. The hair of the two prisoners is long and white and seems uncombed for many years. Their beards and moustaches are long, too. The prisoners' uniforms are old and dirty. The prison bars are rusted and some of them are broken.)

Guard : Which one of you is the first to be whipped today?

Old Prisoner : It doesn't matter who is the first.

Younger Prisoner: He tells the truth. It doesn't matter.

Turnkey : Be quick. It is lunch time. *(He pushes the pot of food to the front.)*

Old Prisoner : The first years were a little hard but after fifteen years I've got used to it. I got whipped. A few whips for each day. But with too much whipping I get leg ache. A sharp pain.

Guard : Today we will start with this one. *(The turnkey comes straight to the front and opens the door of the first cell. The younger prisoner comes out and lies down. The guard beats him with a*

1. The Security and Information Organization of the Shah's regime.

whip across the bottom of his feet, ten times. After that the younger prisoner gets up with a little limping. He goes to the inside of his cell. The turnkey opens the door of the cell of the old prisoner. The old prisoner comes out and lies down. The guard hits. There is a tumult outside. Somebody knocks on the door.)

Voices : *(From outside)* Open the door. Open the door. Hurry up. Open the door.

Guard : I think the governor is coming for the inspection.

Turnkey : If he wanted to come, he would have told us before.

Old Prisoner : Maybe the prisoners have been taken to the medical centre.

Younger Prisoner: Surely this time is the time to go to bath? Three months have passed now. I think it was autumn when we went to the bath. Yes, it was autumn. *(To the Old Prisoner)* Do you remember? The leaves were turning yellow.

Old Prisoner : Even I remember some of them crunching under my feet. What pleasure I had. I've always preferred autumn to spring or summer.*(The guard whips him.)*

Voices : Open the door! Surrender! Otherwise we will break down the door!

Guard : Turnkey, who is making the noise behind the door?

Voices : The revolution has happened. Open the door. The revolution has happened. Open the door.

Old Prisoner : *(He laughs.)* I think the prisoners are joking.

Voices : Hurry up. Open the door.

Turnkey : Without permission, I have no right to open any door. For the door of the cells, the guard gives permission and for the door of the prison, the governor.

Voices : We have killed the governor of the prison. Hurry up. Open the door. Otherwise we will kill you too. Everybody has

surrendered. Only you remain. Deliver yourself to us. That's better for you.

Guard : Who is making such a loud noise?

Turnkey : I haven't heard anybody shout like this in twenty years here.

Old Prisoner : I haven't heard anybody shout for twenty two years, except the guard, of course. *(The blows on the door are heavy, now.)*

Voices : When we do break the door, we will kill all of you. Executioners. Open the door. Let the prisoners alone.

Old Prisoner : I am getting tired. Get it over with, I want to go back into my cell.

Guard : *(He is frightened, now. He has brought up his whip and looking at the door.)* Maybe they are crazy prisoners?

Turnkey : I don't know these voices, since I started over-time three years ago I haven't heard voices like these.

Younger Prisoner: *(Shouts)* Quiet! What is the meaning of this?

Guard : In the twenty years that I have been the guard of this prison nobody knocked at the door like this. Even the governor knocks at the door quietly.

Younger Prisoner: I don't think a prisoner would dare to knock at the door like this. Surely they are the guards.

Turnkey : Last year when my son came to see me, he used to tell me there were things happening outside. Maybe that's true.

Voices : The door is going to break. We've freed the prisoners. Only this prison is left. Open the door!

A Voice : They say their dungeon is here. Break the door.

Old Prisoner : They are wrong, we have no dungeon here.

A Voice : Shut up you hireling executioner. We will break the door and kill you, now! *(The door is breaking. The people come in. They have guns. The guards try to stop them. The people kill them by firing the guns.)*

People : God is great. God is great. They are dead. Come out. We killed them. God is great, Khomeini is the leader.² *(For a moment the people cannot see very well because their eyes are not used to the darkness.)*

A Person : Look! They were whipping this poor man!

Next One : Where are the others? *(The two prisoners are frightened and quiet. The old prisoners stands and runs away into the cell.)*

A Person : It seems there are no prisoners except these two. Well, be happy and come out. God saved you. *(The two prisoners are clinging at the end of the cells and don't come out.)*

Next One : Don't wait here. There are a lot of places to search. We must go to the other prisoners. *(One of the people who has a number of guns opens the door of each cell and puts a gun in the front of the cell.)*

A Person : Come out, both of you. We took these guns from the guards of the prison. All of them are dead, now. *(He goes out like the other people.)* God is great! *(The two prisoners look at the guns, amazed. The younger prisoner goes toward the gun and wants to take it.)*

Old Prisoner : Don't touch it. Throw it away. *(The old prisoner throws away the gun. The younger prisoner copies him. The old prisoner comes out from the cell He takes the key from the dead turnkey. Then he locks the door of his cell from inside, and throws the key toward the body of the turnkey. The light goes out.)*

Scene 2

(The same. One of the people comes in.)

Man : Oh... Are you still here? Imam³ has come, the revolution has happened. The Americans escaped. *(He sees the bodies of the guards and drags them off stage with difficulty.)* Don't be afraid. Come out. The other prisoners have come out and collaborated with the people. They reveal the names of the members of S.A.V.A.K. May God preserve them, they are in

2. This is a slogan of the revolutionary time.
3. Imam Khomeini.

good health. They shout with happiness: God is great and Khomeini is the leader. *(He is happy.)* Come out. Who locked the door? *(He is shocked.)* Maybe the guards are alive. Who closed the door on you? *(He comes back.)* Where are the keys?

Younger Prisoner: There it is, sir.

Man : Where? *(He takes the keys with care, looks around watchfully.)*
Hurry up. No more of that. Come out soon and I'll ask my friend to have a look everywhere. *(The old prisoner laughs. The younger prisoner laughs, too. The Man is a little scared, then tries to laugh. Little by little their laughter stops, except for the old prisoner.)*

Man : Hey! Children! Where are you? Come here. Come here. *(A number of people come. They have beards and green cloth tied around their heads.)*

Man : Somebody had closed this door and now these people don't like to come out. I think they are frightened.

A Person : Don't be afraid. Come out.

Next One : Maybe they don't know that the revolution has happened. Did you tell them that Imam has come?

Man : No, I didn't. *(To the prisoners)* Look! The Shah went. There isn't any Shah here. All of them are finished. All gone. Don't be afraid. Come out.

Next One : Poor people! Surely they don't know what has happened.

Next One : Come to the people and see what happened. All of the police stations, garrisons and gendarmeries are in the hands of the people. Everywhere and everything.

Old Prisoner : All of these words are false. We observe the prison regulation.

A Person : What prison? You are free now!*(He opens the door.)* Come out. There isn't any prison.

Old Prisoner : These events have happened many times. This is the fifth time that I have seen the guards kill each other.

- Next One : The guards? Which guards? We are from the people.
- Old Prisoner : You killed each other because you have clashing ideas. It is not advisable for us to interfere between you. *(To the younger prisoner as if they can't hear.)* We can only use their argument for our benefit.
- A Person : It seems they are mad, otherwise they wouldn't stay in the prison without any reason!
- Old Prisoner : Don't insult us, Guard. Do not forget that it is necessary for you to respect the prisoners.
- Next One : May the creator be glorified! They really are mad. When I came before he whipped you. What respect?
- Old Prisoner : The prison regulations are different.
- A Person : Maybe he is one of them? Those people had collaborated with the Shah's regime. Listen to what he's been saying.
- Next One : Dear friends, you can't believe that the revolution has happened? It is easy. Give me your hand! *(The old prisoner draws back.)* And put your feet outside here. Then you can see with your own eyes how many barriers the people have made in the front of the mosques.
- Old Prisoner : We know all about it! We don't need to go outside.
- A Person : I am willing to take an oath that these men are crazy! They are not political prisoners. Look, their feet have been in fetters and chains!
- Next One : He tells the truth. A sane person never puts himself in prison! Release them. We are going. *(To the younger prisoner)* Are you staying as well? *(The younger prisoner looks at the old prisoner and is quiet. The people go out. The two prisoners close the doors of the cells.)*
- Voices : *(From the outside)* Leave the door open. They will come out at last.
- Old Prisoner : I think they are playing a trick! I promise you that nothing has changed. I mean what has changed? During the twenty years I

have been inside it is impossible that we have gone from feudalism to capitalism and from capitalism to socialism!

Younger Prisoner: But it seems something new has happened.

Old Prisoner : It doesn't matter what it is. The news that we are waiting for, is different! Maybe the feudalists are fighting with each other?

Younger Prisoner: You are right. We can't expect socialism so soon. It will take a long time for capitalism to get going in Iran! And then it needs to grow up.

(The light goes out.)

Scene 3

(The two prisoners are sleeping. The old man snores. A few people, who have captured a new prisoner, come in.)

Sound : Throw him into these cells. This is that place where they used to put the others.

S.A.V.A.K : Have mercy, have mercy by god! It is dreadful here! I would never dare to come to this place alone, never!

A Person : As you sow, so shall you reap.⁴

Next One : Well. That's enough. Come out. We want to jail these people. Some more are coming. They are just like rubbish!

Old Prisoner : Wasn't it arranged that a new prison would be built?

A Person : Don't haggle! Stand up. come out. What a good time he has in this place! Stand up! We are really busy, sir.

Younger Prisoner: You can put him in my cell if you haven't room. It doesn't matter. But with this condition; he must not touch my things. This is a private towel.

A Person : Ah! Come out please! What a sad plight! *(They put the member of the S.A.V.A.K inside the cell of the younger prisoner.)*

Next One : Let them alone. They will come out at last.

4. In the text it is: Do not dig a pit for someone. If you do, you are the first who will fall in it and someone else is the second.

Next One : *(To the member of the S.A.V.A.K)* Concentrate your mind. If you think about escaping, these two together will drown you! They are sick of you and people like you! Be careful and don't act unwisely. *(They close the door and go out.)* We put you with the right People!

Younger Prisoner: Comrade, you are welcome!

Old Prisoner : Which group are a member of? *(Silence.)*

Younger Prisoner: He means why you were arrested? He and I were in one group together. He had been in charge of me. Of course I was arrested a few years later. But our relationship remains in force.

Old Prisoner : Don't rush comrade. Don't give to him so much information. First let us get to know him.

S.A.V.A.K : Are you prisoners, too?

Old Prisoner : Do you think we are the governor of the prison? Can't you see these chains on our feet?

S.A.V.A.K : Woe to me! My God! Will they put these chains on my feet, too? Look, do you know a way to escape?

Old Prisoner : Escape? You are in hurry! Let us suppose you did escape, what can you do by yourself? What role has one man in history? Sit and wait for the right time! Just try to stay with the group.

S.A.V.A.K : But these people give no warning to anyone! They will execute us, immediately! Do you have a hairpin? I want to open the door!

Younger Prisoner: He is very pessimistic. How many years have you been in the prison?

S.A.V.A.K : Years?

Old Prisoner : It is three years since I saw a prisoner who had been in the prison less than ten years. But I don't think you were in more than five years.

S.A.V.A.K : Five years? But I came to the prison just now.

Old Prisoner : Just now?

- S.A.V.A.K : They took me from the house of my father-in-law. The people are searching everywhere. They capture anyone who they recognise.
- Old Prisoner : Which people? You mean the peasant or the plebs?
- S.A.V.A.K : All. From the workers to the members of staff. They capture the government officials, from here and there. *(He weeps.)* But as God is my witness I was a simple clerk. Only a simple member of the S.A.V.A.K, I entreated them. I yelled. I said this is the truth that I was the so-called assistant manager of an office in a small province. But as God is my witness I was no different from a simple member.
- Old Prisoner : Well, maybe you failed in your duty? Do you know Mr... Mr... Mr Sadeghi? He was a member of the S.A.V.A.K, too. He stayed here a few times. Because of him our situation improved. I remember we had a bath seven times a week. My body became sore. Well, it was twelve years since my body had been used to the water. *(Silence. The old man is absorbed in his memories.)* So, you said you belong to them. Oh I remember that time.
- Younger Prisoner: So, there is some news outside.
- Old Prisoner : You are rushing again! There is no news. Perhaps the government has announced that they are reforming. Some times they do that. We can either believe it or not. Well, it will be gone. But there is no news until the growing up of capitalism and the workers. That's what we are waiting for. *(There is noise from outside and then a new prisoner is brought in.)*
- A Person : *(To the new prisoner)* You ungodly man! You made all the farmers wretched! You sat in the city and stole from the peasant! Your era is finished! You anti-Moslem!
- Next One : *(To the younger prisoner)* You are doing wrong! Come out soon! Out! Out! If you want the lunatic asylum, go somewhere else! We are going to jail these people.
- Old Prisoner : Put him here. In my cell. There is still room here. We can be in a cell together.

- A Person : Next time I'll have to throw you out! I don't know why they had guards for these people? *(The people go out.)*
- S.A.V.A.K : *(To the new prisoner)* Are you a member of the S.A.V.A.K, too?
- Old Prisoner : For five years I have been waiting for a day like this. Sooner or later. It had to happen. The contradictions of feudalism would have produced such a day at last. It had to.
- Feudalist : I want to make a phone call to his highness Shahpour.⁵ What does this all mean? I am respected among the people. In fifty villages nobody can mention my name without honour. And then a few peasants and labourers who came out of the mosque, are shouting at me: "God is great!" Where is a telephone, sir?
- S.A.V.A.K : A phone call is useless now. The people that you want to contact are either escaped or arrested. It is better to think about something else.
- Old Prisoner : Don't worry. You will get used to this situation. The first years in the jail are a little hard. But it will pass. After ten years you will get used to it. You know, life is hard for me without these bars now. When I put my foot out of this cell, I haven't any peace of mind. All around me is closed with bars. Anyone who likes to oppose me, must come from here *(Points to the door of cell)* We and you are alike but we have one difference.
- Younger Prisoner: Our difference is that your time is finished but our time is still to come!
- Old Prisoner : Well-done comrade. Well my dear friend, how is the situation of industry? I heard that commerce has advanced well? *(Silence for a short time.)*
- Younger Prisoner: *(To the member of S.A.V.A.K)* Could you please go away from the bars. My heart is becoming sad. *(The member of the S.A.V.A.K goes to the side.)* By the way if they put a lot of people here, the situation will be very difficult. Then, like in the past, we will suffocate. The food will be less too.

5. From the royal family, the brother of the Shah.

- Old Prisoner : Governments come and governments go. You must think about the next thirty years when they will push fifty workers into each one of these cells. Think about that, comrade. The fifty workers will lean their thick arms on these bars and sing a song. What splendid days will come!
- S.A.V.A.K : You are wasting your time! When they all get together, they will come to kill us. There is blood in their eyes. They are not frightened of America or Russia. They curse the old and young. These people are savages. We must think about escaping. Can you open these locks somehow? With a hairpin or something?
- Feudalist : I won't let these people alone. I complain about them to the court.
- S.A.V.A.K : In my pocket I have some documents which are dangerous for all of us! where can I throw them? (*He starts to tear up the documents.*) Have you any document in your pocket? Dear friend?
- Feudalist : I can't understand the meaning of these movements. From a year and half or from two years ago I can't understand the meaning of these movement and these words. Do you know, one day the overseer came to me and said the villagers have gathered and say that Agha⁶ has said the land belongs to anybody who has worked seven years on it, and we want the land. I said to the overseer, go and tell them I have worked on these lands seventy years. To work is not only to shovel and to irrigate. To work is not only to harvest. They gathered again and said Agha has spoken. I said who is this Agha who can speak against my words? I saw suddenly they had gathered all around me and wanted to kill me. I complained about them to the authorities. A hundred times I said to you and the like, and those higher than you and to this foolish overseer, stop them saying God is great. I said again and again, think about this problem. Really think about it...
- Younger Prisoner: Oh... It seems there really is some news outside.

6. Imam Khomeini.

- Old Prisoner : Don't think and dream without any reason, there is no news. When capitalism develops, it speaks in slogans. They excite a person to say the land belongs to the farmers. The land is good for nothing! A year to work and just seven percent interest! This is the capitalists' work. What's the matter? Why are you unhappy? Be happy! When capitalism develops, it means there is one step to socialism! Be happy. Laugh! Laugh comrade!
- S.A.V.A.K : Now, here's a better way to destroy the proof. They are very cruel. If they found something on you, they will make you wretched. *(He eats some of the papers. To the feudalist)* Could you please help me and eat some of these papers?
- Feudalist : Never, sir! I am collecting proof, you know! I beg to ask have you a pen? I must report this bad behaviour towards me. Please give me a sheet of paper. Don't tear that paper, sir. Give it to me. I will write in the back of it. I will shut these peasants up!
- Old Prisoner : Did you see? The clash of capitalism and feudalism is clear, now. At most it is a farming revolt, but it is not a solution. It opens the way for capitalism!
- S.A.V.A.K : I can't eat this evidence! I'll be ill. Oh! How much of the paper have I got to eat? Haven't you somewhere I can throw them away?
- Younger Prisoner: Keep them until they let you go to the toilet. Throw them inside the toilet, then!
- Old Prisoner : But the regulations of the prison don't allow you to put paper in the toilet. Why do you insist on bothering the guards?
- S.A.V.A.K : Gentlemen, if each person would eat some, the problem will be solved! Please! *(Nobody eats. He turns toward the younger prisoner.)*
- Younger Prisoner: I must take counsel with the person in charge of me.
- Old Prisoner : These days everything is uncertain. We must wait and look for new policy. It is fifteen years since I had any communication with them!
- Younger Prisoner: So, what do we do?

Old Prisoner : Nothing! I must analyse events by myself. *(To the feudalist who has taken hold of the bars)* Please take your hands from here. I want to think! I can't think without holding these bars! *(There is the noise again and another prisoner is brought in.)*

A Person : I am coming to throw you out. We have a new guest.

Younger Prisoner: No, there is still room, take him here.

Next One : You are either crazy or playing a trick! Oh! Nobody puts himself in prison! How can you be happy in this prison? Maybe you are scared to take these chains from your feet? Well, well, you must go to the people. You have stayed in here for what? Now, go to one side, I am going to put this one in. *(He puts the capitalist in the cell.)*

Capitalist : Excuse me, could you tell me how long I must stay here?

A Person : *(Scornfully)* If you want come out and put this *(He points to the gun.)* in your hand and I'll go inside the cell!

Capitalist : Can I make a phone call?

Feudalist : It is my turn! If you want to make a call, I am the first. I asked about the telephone an hour ago.

A Person : For all my life you have tormented me in the factory, now you ask me for the telephone? If they gave you to me, I would execute you immediately. *(The people close the door and go.)*

Old Prisoner : Don't believe his words! They want to make you doubt your thinking and your analysis. *(To the capitalist)* Did they arrest you just now? *(The capitalist doesn't answer.)*

Younger Prisoner: What did you do? *(The capitalist doesn't answer.)*

Old Prisoner : Are you satisfied with the situation?

Feudalist : *(To the capitalist)* Is that what you want, dear sir? You made this situation! We with the gendarmeries stifled the villagers in the end. But what about you? You spoiled the citizens until they poured and made the barriers in the street. If you didn't spoil the workers...

Old Prisoner : Everybody has got together to make us believe that this guy is a capitalist! They want to fill us with doubt!

Younger Prisoner: Why have they arrested you, sir?

S.A.V.A.K : For nothing. He is a guiltless man like me. I know him. He is not guilty.

Old Prisoner : All of these are a lie! I have been in jail all my life because I don't want to be a dupe! Now the period of capitalism is started and maybe in fifty years time we will put here the first bloated capitalist.

Younger Prisoner: But maybe there is a clash of ideas between the capitalists themselves?

Feudalist : Didn't I say to you that we must find a solution for this problem?

Capitalist : When there was the strike in the factories the workers poured into the street in order to demonstrate, I was in touch with the security authorities all the time. The people understand that they have to engage in sabotage, now. What about the foolish villagers? You could divide the land between them and mobilize them in order to suppress the cities.

Feudalist : Why didn't you divide the factories in order to suppress the villagers?

S.A.V.A.K : There is no difference between the city and the village, sir! Save me from the mosques. I have asked the general office to stop giving permission for building these mosques for many years. They built the mosques again and again. Well! This is what happened in the end.

Capitalist : Certainly, certainly! I said the same thing to the security authorities many times: If you want progress in this country, don't hang about. The solution to this problem is to close all the mosques in the cities and villages and to execute all the mullahs, too.

Old Prisoner : Don't listen to their words. They have joined their hands together to make us doubt our beliefs and our analyses. From

the point of view of science it is impossible to suppress capitalism and feudalism at the same time. But the grand capitalists will suppress the petty capitalists.

Capitalist : When I, myself, saw that the security authorities didn't hear my words or, as they said, they would do nothing, I informed the American authorities directly.

Old Prisoner : Did you see how, when he heard our words, he changed his argument? They are all in it together to make us believe a great change has happened. I can't believe that this man is even a petty capitalist!

Younger Prisoner: What about going outside when they come? We can see our children and find out what's happening.

Feudalist : Things don't look good, sir. They have put us in the prison. They pay no attention to the powerful or the wealthy. They are not afraid of the gun. Is the situation worse?

Capitalist : It is like a jungle. Maybe the American gunmen have come by now.

S.A.V.A.K : If the American gunmen have come, they could not find us. What about keeping the guards as hostages? When they come this time? Otherwise they will kill us. And I am sure that America doesn't feel sorry for us.

Feudalist : I am loath to clash with these dirty, ragged people.

Capitalist : It is not to our interest to clash with them, sir! Suddenly they scream God is great, and this make me nervous!

Old Prisoner : If you think their words are making an impression on you, put your fingers in your ears! (*He puts his fingers in his ears. There is the noise outside.*)

S.A.V.A.K : I think they've come to execute us.

Feudalist : They shouldn't do it. It is a mistake. Overseer! Overseer! Where have these thick-necked parasites gone?

Capitalist : (*To the old prisoner*) What do you think? In your opinion what are they going to do to us?

- Old Prisoner : Don't speak nonsense to me! I don't hear your words. (*The people have arrested an American and bring him in.*)
- A Person : This is your master, If you need him!
- Next One : Now then, you are all together, why not have a party?
- A Person : (*To the old and younger prisoner*) Didn't you decide to come out?
- Next One : They want to stay in jail in order to finish their sentences! Then they will come out.
- Another One : So, come and wash at least, the sun is going down. Your prayer will be late.
- Younger Prisoner : Guard! you forgot to give us our food today.
- A Person : He calls us the guard again! We are not the guards. (*To the next one*) Run and take the bread and dates from the children and give them to these to eat. Well, if you want you can come out and eat as you like. They drive us crazy. (*The next one goes and come back with some bread and dates. He wants to give it to the prisoners, but the first one takes them.*)
- First One : No, It is not right! If one of them wants the bread and dates, he must say his prayers, three times! The country is the country of Imams. (*Nobody does it.*)
- First One : Won't do it? It doesn't matter! I will put this food in but I tell you if someone eats these things without saying his prayers, he will bring the wrath of God upon himself. (*They go.*)
- Younger Prisoner: What do you do, comrade! (*In the Persian text, the American can't speak Persian. The prisoners can't speak English. They try to speak with him, but they only make the Persian more confused and comic.*)
- S.A.V.A.K : He is not an Iranian.
- Younger Prisoner: So, where does he come from?
- S.A.V.A.K : Made in America!

Old Prisoner : *(Surprised)* An American? This is a pack of lies! It is impossible!

Younger Prisoner: What is his job?

S.A.V.A.K : What do you do?

American : Oil! Oil!

S.A.V.A.K : I think he is an oil technician.

Feudalist : What a silly job, sir! Plant beet. It is and has more interest.

Capitalist : *(To the American)* Dear friend, didn't I see you at OPEC with the Iranian delegation?

American : OPEC? Oh, yes! *(The two prisoners eat the bread and dates voraciously. The member of the S.A.V.A.K eats, too. The American eats but he doesn't like it.)*

American : Excuse me! Caviar! Caviar!

Capitalist : I don't know why you are waiting? *(To the member of the S.A.V.A.K)* If you know his language ask him when the American gunmen will come? Ask has he seen them? Ask him if he has news?

S.A.V.A.K : Let me ask him one at a time. *(To the American)* When you came here didn't the American gunmen come? *(He speaks Persian. So, the American can't understand.)*

American : What do you say?

Capitalist : You are not talking English ! I can speak like that, sir!

Feudalist : Let me ask him.

S.A.V.A.K : Don't make so much noise. He will not understand. *(The American laughs.)* Oh! Look! Oh guy! I am speaking to you. Look at him. He understood! I tell him, now. The Iranian people threw the Shah out. The Shah is friend of America. Didn't America send the gunmen to help him?

American : I can't speak Persian.

S.A.V.A.K : No he doesn't understand. Let me speak about things that he knows. Oil! Oil!

American : Oh, yes! The oil is very good!

S.A.V.A.K : Mullah! Mullah!

American : Mullah? Oh, Mullah is very very bad!

S.A.V.A.K : Well, I'll explain to him, now. Mullah cut the oil, closed it. Like this. *(He shows his hand like the scissors.)*

American : I am very sorry.

S.A.V.A.K : Haven't they sent the American gunmen, yet?

American : *(He shakes his head and shows that he can't understand.)*

Old Prisoner : Don't listen to them. All of these things are phoney. It is impossible to put a feudalist, a member of the S.A.V.A.K, a capitalist and an American in jail together. Which class did it? Is it the farmers' doing? So, they must put the feudalists in the jail. It can't be the workers' doing, since they don't exist yet to put the capitalists in. It is a lie. Don't believe it. Don't trust your ears. They have united in order to make everything confused. They want to destroy our revolution which will be in the next hundred years! Don't believe them. When capitalism develops the workers will come into existence and they will take complete vengeance on capitalism. All these things are false. The guards will come and make these people free. It is not certain that they really are the capitalist, American and feudalist. Go to sleep a while and wait.

(The light goes out.)

Scene 4

(The same. A day after.)

Capitalist : So, where are these gunmen? Now it is one whole day since I've been in this jail.

Feudalist : I will change him. I will hire another overseer. He had phone numbers of all the authorities. Inefficient man! He saw that they arrested me. He has done nothing from yesterday till now.

Think about that. Just think about that! If Mr Amozgar⁷ knew we were here, how would he have felt?

S.A.V.A.K : After all, our job is done! You are waiting for them, in vain. I, myself, took them to the airport two months ago. I wish I could have gone with them.

American : How long are we supposed to stay here? (*Nobody understands.*)

S.A.V.A.K : What are you saying? They will come and kill all of us. (*Noise comes from the outside and the people come in.*)

A Person : Stand up, and tell your credo. Your job is finished. (*They take all outside the cell, except the two prisoners.*)

Next One : Someone explain to this dumb man (*He points to the American*) that he must say his credo! Look! Hey! Guy! Say: There is no God but Allah! Say! Otherwise you will go to the hell. You poor sod! And there, your punishment will be heavy!

A Person : Let him alone. Even if he said that, it is useless.

Next One : (*He takes out a paper from his pocket.*) In the name of Allah who is the smasher of the tyrants.⁸ These people: Jabbarzadeh, Hassan Khan, Yazdani, and Gourg. Because you have slaughtered innocent people, you have plundered the property of the people and the treasury, you have collaborated with the S.A.V.A.K and C.I.A., you have oppressed the weak people, you are condemned to death. The issued command is religious and lawful and it must be done immediately.

A Person : Stand straight! (*Two or three people from the crowd shoot them, shouting: "God is great." All four men fall. The people take their hands and feet and drag them off the stage.*)

A Person : Well! You don't want to come out, yet? (*The two prisoners are scared and stuck at the end of the cell, staying mum.*) We are going now. If you would like to come, the doors are open. Come! Do you need something for now? (*Silence. The people go out. The doors of the cells are open. The other doors are*

7. He was one of the Shah's Prime Ministers.

8. An Arabic sentence from the Koran.

open, too. There is silence for some time. Then the old man gets up carefully. He shuts the door of his cell.)

Younger Prisoner: They killed all of them!

Old Prisoner : It is a lie! They were not the capitalist, American or feudalist. All of them were simple officials. As a matter of fact it is not certain Who they were! Maybe they were revolutionaries just like us!

Younger Prisoner: But if they were revolutionaries, they would have told us at least.

Old Prisoner : All of these things are just playing a trick on us. These people want us to believe their words, to go outside.

Younger Prisoner: So, we go outside. What's wrong with that?

Old Prisoner : Don't make a mistake! If you put your foot out of the door, they kill you. And then they will say that you were trying to escape. Don't worry. Close the door. Close the door and have a doze!

Younger Prisoner: But they killed the guards, too! This guy, the American, they killed him too! I say... I say... What about going outside, carefully? If we saw it was a trick, we could come back to the cell as soon as possible.

Old Prisoner : Don't act stupidly. After eighteen years, you can't understand the distinction between good and evil? Younger Prisoner: Maybe I don't know what's happening, but I am sure that there is something over there! Perhaps the workers have revolted. Maybe socialism has come into being!

Old Prisoner : Which workers? An un-industrialised country is not ready for the revolution. Didn't you see these people who poured in? The way they spoke? They talked about God, prophet and Imams! This is the peasant culture. The workers don't talk about these things. Did you hear: Long live the proletariat?

Younger Prisoner: Maybe we have been a bit wrong all along? Is that impossible? You know, sometimes, I think maybe our analysis of events is false.

Old Prisoner : Why?

Younger Prisoner: Well, I don't know. Let's say it is possible. (*He is going out of the cell.*)

Old Prisoner : Don't break the prison regulation, comrade! Don't go out!

Younger Prisoner: But the doors are open. All doors are open. Come and have a look from here. I can see the sun! Look what a wind is coming from the door. Come! Come out!

Old Prisoner : With those chains on your feet wherever you go, they would understand that you have escaped from the prison.

Younger Prisoner: No! I will take off these chains. They are rusted. All of their rings are separated from each other. Look. (*He sits on the ground and separates the links from each other and scatters them around.*) For many years I have been trying to stop these links separating.

Old Prisoner : Don't do that! The guards get nervous! I can do that but I was rubbing the fat from our food on the chains to stop them rusting. But my foot has got thinner and it can slip out of the chains. But I never break the prison regulations. To make haste is wrong. These chains will break, someday, by themselves. Come back to your cell! You can come and use my chains. Put your foot in this one and the other is mine. Don't do that, comrade!

Younger Prisoner: I won't come back to that cell again. You have become a fossil. If there was a mirror here and you could see yourself in it, you would understand what I am saying. Come out! Come out from that filthy damned cell! Come out from that invisible fence. I can see it now. I know what it is truly. I hate it! I can't live inside this hard iron cage again! (*He goes forward.*)

Old Prisoner : No. Don't go. Don't be a fool. Don't rush. It is no use. You kill yourself! It is dangerous to go outside!

Younger Prisoner: (*He breathes pure air and laughs.*) Look what fresh air comes in! What a beautiful sun! I am telling the truth. All of the doors are open! Surely something has happened outside! I can see the

blood on the snow. There are no guards any more. I can see all these things. Come out and see with your eyes comrade.

Old Prisoner : As for me, I can see nothing!

Younger Prisoner: Come out from there, you will see. I am seeing with my eyes all of these things.

Old Prisoner : Don't trust your eyes. You are going wrong. Close your eyes and come back in comrade. In that cold air surely you will catch cold. Come back son!

Younger Prisoner: I'm going! I am free! I am free!

Old Prisoner : No! No! *(He shouts a heart-rending shout, several times. It seems his shouts come from the bottom of a well. Silence. He walks in the cell and then looks for the dish of food.)* Guard! Guard! Food time is gone. I am going to die of hunger. Guard, I am not breaking the prison regulation by going out of the cell and looking for the dish of food. Come and give me food..... Guard..... I wish when he went out I had told him to give me my food, at least. *(He coughs from the back of his throat and leans on the wall of the cell. The light goes out.)*

Scene 5

(The stage is dark. Some people come with a flashlight. There is a mullah in the front of them.)

A person : Haji,⁹ my idea is to make this place a museum, too. It is a very dreadful place. A few months ago when we came here there were two prisoners in these cells, still.

Next One : When we came here, the guards were whipping one of them.

Mullah : Can you smell something?

A Person : *(He smells.)* Yes. Yes. There is a smell here. *(He turns his flashlight and it stops on the corpse of the old prisoner.)*

Next One : Oh, this is the same old man! Phew! phew! That is why there is a bad smell.

9. A man who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Mullah : How has he died? Had he been freed? Hadn't you searched here well?

A Person : Yes we did. Look Haji, the door of his cell has been open. The doors of the prison are open too. He wouldn't come out by himself.

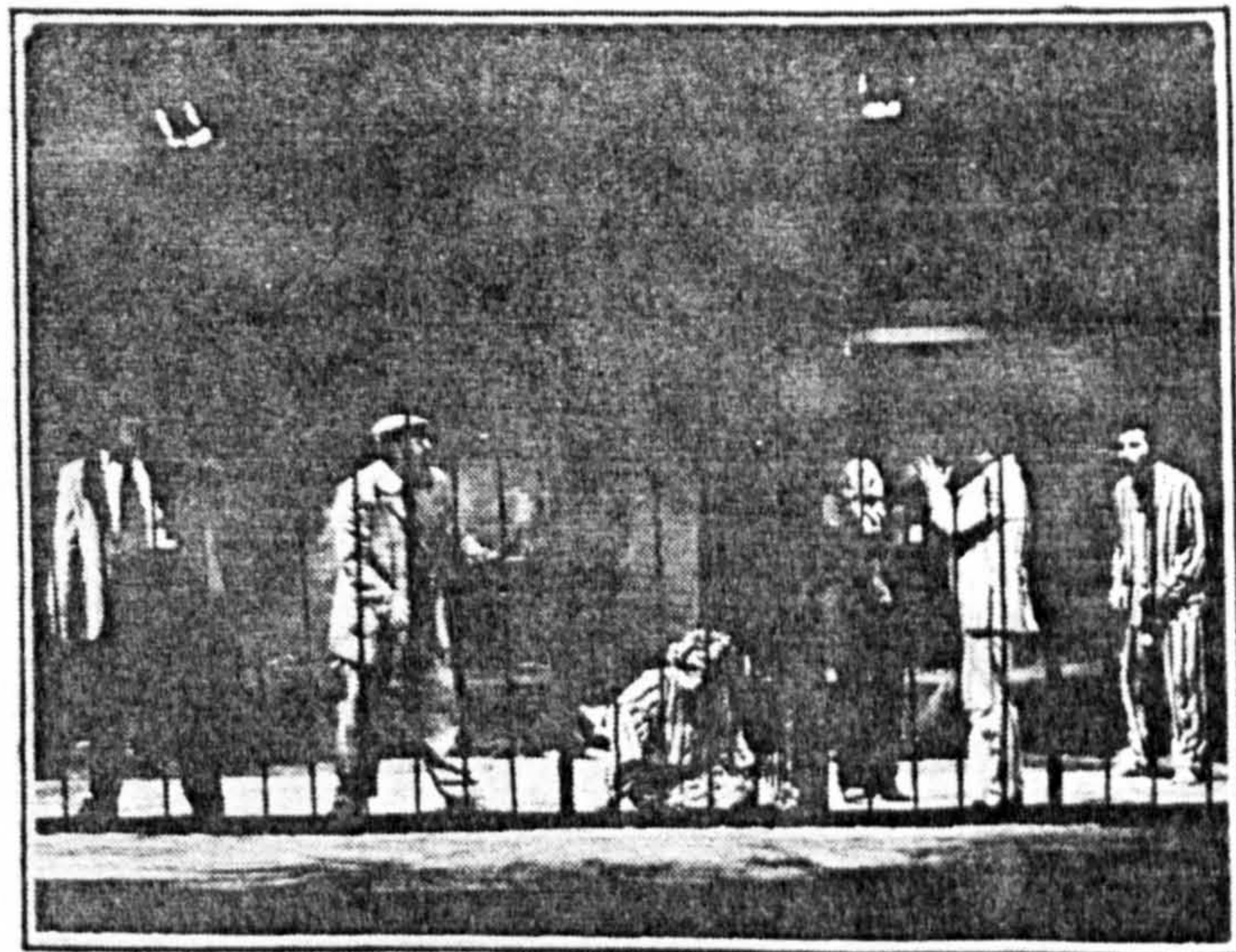
Mullah : Call the children to take him out. There is a horrible smell here.

Next One : *(He has put the light of his flashlight on the body of the old prisoner.)* Haji, his body is decayed!

The end. February 1981.



Mohssen Makhmalbaf



The Fence Within the Fence
Hozeh Honary, Tehran, 1982.

THE STEPS

Commentary

Playwright

Akbar Radi, a major playwright of the Iranian theatre, was born in Rasht city in Gilan in 1939. His father, a factory owner, became bankrupt and they went to Tehran as a poor family in 1950. In Tehran Radi went to primary school, high school and university and with a B.A in sociology became a teacher in 1961 and settled there.

Radi started writing short stories while he was in the high school. In 1962, he saw Ibsen's *The Dolls House* at the Jam'eh Barbad Theatre. Under the influence of this Radi started his playwriting. Some examples of Radi's works are described below:-

-Rozaneh Abi (The Blue Opening). Play. 1961.

Pileh Agha is an old man who has a fish shop and lives with his wife Khanomi, his daughter Afshan, his son Ahsan, his maidservant Goldoneh and his shop-boy Ali in Rasht city. Pileh Agha, who after many difficult years has made a good life, wants his daughter to marry Homayon from a rich family and his son to go to Qom city to become a mullah. But his daughter is in love with Anosh, a teacher in their neighbourhood, and his son goes to Tehran to become an agricultural engineer and then wants to go to Germany. Pileh Agha goes on an unplanned journey hoping that his children will accept his orders later. When he comes back he sees that Ahsan is going to go to Germany. Afshan and Anosh will marry soon and Homayon wants to run away and become a world traveller. *The Blue Opening*, the first of Radi's plays, explains the conflict of the generations and Radi, in this play and his early plays, is influenced by his own life and Ahsan, Anosh, Homayon who have Radi's characteristics, represent the radical intellectuals of the years 1950-60 in Iran. This play was published in 1962 and was staged in 1966 in Tehran at the Iran and America association's hall.

-Ofoul (The Setting). Play. 1963.

In a village in Gilan, Ahmad Fashkhami, the headman and landlord, lives with his daughter Mersadah, his son-in-law Jahanger Me'raj and his maidservant Kokab, while his other daughter is staying in Tehran. Jahanger who is an engineer and has drilled a well, wants to build a new school in the village. Meanwhile three people are killed and Gholamali Kasmaei the other headman of the village does not agree with the building of this new school and thinks it is a base for anti-establishment thinking. Gholamali Kasmaei, who had a hand in these killings, spreads words that Jahanger is

responsible for the events. Also Ahmad Fashkhami is against the new school because Jahanger wants to use his money and land. Jahanger starts to build the school and after some occurrences the villagers want to help him. But, at last, Ahmad Fashkhami sells his land to Gholamali Kasmaei and with his family leaves the village and the school remains incomplete. In this play Jahanger, alone, wants to put the past behind him and make a new world. But society's conditions do not allow that and he is defeated. The play which is influenced by Ibsen's *The Enemy of the People*, was staged in Tehran in 1970.

-Az Poshte Shishahha (From Behind the Glass). Play. 1966.

The play is set in a flat in which most things are coloured grey. Bamdad who has only one leg, lives in this flat with his wife Maryam who is a teacher. Bamdad is writing something that he thinks he may finish during the next thirty years! Sometimes Mr and Mrs Darakhshan come to their flat as guests. Mr Darakhshan works in a bank. Mrs Darakhshan is the schoolmistress of the school in which Maryam works. During the play, which takes place over thirty years, Mr and Mrs Darakhshan who are looking for titles and wealth, progress. Mrs Darakhshan becomes an under-secretary and Mr Darakhshan establishes a factory. They break off their relationship with Bamdad and Maryam. At last, after thirty years, Bamdad produces his writing which begins like the beginning of the play and is also called *From Behind the Glass*. This play is based on the experience of Radi's private life as an artist.

-Ersiieh Irani (Iranian Legacy). Play. 1967.

There is an old house in Tehran. On the second floor of this house a family - Agha Bala the sickly father, Ghisar his wife, Mehdi his little boy, Golzar his daughter who is a teacher- are tenants. At the first floor, another family - Mosa the father who is a mullah, Anis his wife, Aziem his son who is the breadwinner of the family, Jalal another son who is a law student, Shokoh his daughter who is a marriageable girl- are the owners. Agha Bala wants to take back money owing to him from Mosa and leave the house. But Mosa and his son Aziem have no money. Mosa plans a trick. He wants Aziem to marry Golzar. But Golzar has a fiance. After some events we learn that Mosa has another wife. At last Ghisar -Agha Bala's wife- has an affair with Aziem and everyone stays where they are. Radi in this play show the decline of a traditional religious family.

-Saiiadan (The Fishermen). Play. 1969.

The play explores the relation between the fishermen and Ramiar, the director of the fish distribution foundation in Gilan. Biyoke -a fisherman- steals some fish from the foundation at Ya'ghob's -another fisherman- instigation.

Ramiar sacks him and employs Isma'1 instead of him. At the same time Ramiar wants to open a club for the fishermen. During the play the fishermen, in order to obtain better positions, spy on each other. At last Ramiar who has opened a cooperative for fishermen, hires Ya'ghob who has broken the fishermen's solidarity. Radi in this play tries to show the situation of the intellectuals in 1961. The intellectuals instead of having unity are fighting each other. The compulsory monopoly in the fish distribution foundation, usually accompanying corruption, is referring to the political situation of the country in those years.

-Labkhand Bashokoh Aghei Gil (The Magnificent Smile of Mr Gil). Play. 1973.

The play happens at Aligholikhan Gil's house. He is a capitalist who has cancer and lives with his daughters Foroghazzaman -a lecturer- and Mehangiz and his sons Jamshid, Dawood and Noraddin. Also Taher is his young servant and Toti is Taher's sister. In order to become well Dawood suggests that his father must marry a virgin! Mr Gil thinks about Toti but his condition becomes worse and he goes into hospital and there he dies. At last, Dawood who has raped Toti, kills himself and Jamshed leaves the house. Radi in this play ironically explores the destruction of the old aristocracy.

-Marg Dar Paiez (Death in the Autumn). Play. 1965.

The Waning of the Moon, The Travellers and Death in the Autumn are three connected one act plays. The events occur in a village in Gilan.

In *The Waning of the Moon*, Molok is a girl who has escaped from her capricious husband and comes to her father Mashdi and her mother Gol Khanom. Mashdi's son Gas Agha has escaped from the military service to the town of Rodbar.¹ Mashdi, with his dying horse, returns to his house. At first, he does not see his daughter but when he sees her demands that she go back to her husband.

In *The Travellers*, Molok's husband is in a coffee-house. Mashdi's horse is dead and he comes to the coffee-house in order to go to Rodbar to see his son, despite the snow and darkness. A driver comes and tells them that a landslide has broken the bridge. But Mashdi goes on anyway.

In *Death in the Autumn*, which occurs in Mashdi's house, Mashdi is brought in from the snow and cold. Nobody can help him and little by little he dies.

Radi wrote this play after the Shah's land reform, which gave some small tracts of land to the farmers. Mashdi is the symbol of all farmers of that period. His son, the pillar of the economy of the family, has escaped. He fears the compulsory military service. Mashdi's horse, another pillar of his life, dies and at last the snow and cold,

the problems of nature, kill him. This is the story of unlucky farmers living in the poor conditions without having any health care, education etc.

-Dar Meh Bekhan (Read in the Fog). Play. 1975.

In a village in Gilan, six teachers live with a custodian. One of these teachers, Nasser, is different from the others who are capricious and pleasure-seeking. Nasser thinks about the needs of the villagers and their children. Also he writes stories and leads a normal life. A girl called Aniseh who works for the teachers and her father Mashdi come to the teachers' house. Houshang who is the head teacher wants to sleep with Aniseh. But Aniseh who is a bashful girl, and Nasser are in love with each other. Houshang rapes Aniseh and Aniseh's father kills himself. At last, when the five years service of the teachers is finished and they want to leave the village, Nasser in order to work for the village, stays there.

In this play, for the first time, Radi offers a positive character -Nasser- and some optimism.

Other works by Radi, with the publication dates are as follows:-

-Jaddeh (The Road). Short Stories. 1970.

-Dasti Az Dor (A hand from a Far). General writing on the theatre. 1973.

-Namehhaei Hamshahry (The Fellow Citizen's Letters). General writing on the theatre. 1977.

-Hamlet Ba Salad Fasl (Hamlet with the Season's Salad). Play. 1978. A poor intellectual man wants to marry a girl from an aristocratic family. The play shows the controversies between these two classes of society and at last the aristocrats kill the intellectual.

-Monji Dar Sobh Nmnak (The Saviour in the Damp Morning). Play. 1989. The main characters of the play, Mr Shaigan, is a writer and the play deals with the situation of the writers in Iran.

-Pellekan (The Steps). Play. 1989.

-Ahesteh Ba Gol Sorkh (Slowly with the Red Rose.) Play. 1989. Jalal is a poor student who has come to Tehran to study at university. He lives in his aristocrat uncle's house and it is 1978, the revolution year. Jalal who has suffered great hardships in his life, is not in agreement with his uncle's opinions. At last, while his cousin is prepared to go West, he, trying to save his cousin's fiancée, is shot in the street clashes and dies.

The play is strongly against the generation which Radi calls "the religious fascist aristocrats of Iran".

Context of *The Steps*

Synopsis

The Steps is a play in five acts which follows the fortune of one character, Bolbol, from rags to riches. Each act sees Bolbol in a different condition of life, increasingly exploiting his fellow men.

Act 1. In a village in the north of Iran, Agha Gol's cow, his only means of livelihood, is stolen. The police do nothing for him and he, helpless and broken, has to go to Rasht city to find his daily bread. Bolbol, a vagrant young man of the village, who has no father and whose mother works as a servant in the house of Masolehei the master of the village, is tired of his dog-like existence and wants money to start a business. With the help of the master and his overseer Kasali, Bolbol has stolen the cow and its calf and sold them to a butcher far away.

Act 2. Two years later Bolbol has opened a small shop for selling roasted livers. Every night, he brings Haj Amo, the old rich man of the village, into his shop and gives him free dinner. Bolbol wants to marry Haj Amo's older daughter Mohtaram who is an old maid and has only one eye. In fact Bolbol wants to have Haj Amo's empty house in Rasht city in order to sell it and to buy a bicycle repair shop. Bemani, the poor girl of the village and Bolbol's fiance, understands what is going on. She throws herself into the river and drowns.

Act 3. Six years later, Bolbol, who has married Mohtaram, has opened a bicycle repair shop in Rasht city. With help of two professional brokers, Pokhdoz who is a long-standing junkie and Haji Nor who is a retired blackmailer, Bolbol buys bicycles and motorcycles and sells them to gullible people. Meanwhile Askanadr, Bolbol's worker in the shop, needs money in order to put his wife in hospital for a surgical operation. Although Bolbol can help him, he does not and Askandar's wife dies.

Act 4. Nine years later, Bolbol has a construction office in Rasht city and a contract to build houses. Among his forty workers there is a saboteur and Bolbol in order to find him, has imprisoned Soliman -an innocent old worker- in a cold lavatory. The workers have stopped working and Bolbol believes that the saboteur will come to him out of compassion for Soliman. A worker called Balajeh comes but Bolbol finds out that he is also innocent. Two policemen - on Bolbol's order- come and open the lavatory door. Soliman is dead, the workers are angry and Bolbol has a heart attack.

Act 5. Seven years later, Bolbol, having assumed the name and description of Mas'od Taj, a contractor and capitalist, is in his big house in the north of Tehran. He with his wife Mohtaram force their son Sa'id who is studying in America, to marry a girl who belongs to another rich family. Bolbol who has sensed the smell of the plague of the revolution, has written a will and divided his huge wealth between his family. At last when he is playing with his diamonds, he remembers his crimes and dies.

Background

In his early plays, Akbar Radi is a poet and literary man who writes long dialogues full of philosophical and political points more suitable for a book or a speech. But in *The Steps*, as the result of experience, he has become a playwright who knows the meaning of dramatic dialogue and dramatic action. I think *The Steps* is Radi's best work because of its strong and effective dramatic construction. For instance, in this play, the main character, Bolbol, washes his hands many times. First we may think it is an ordinary gesture. But the writer is playing with this and creates an interesting pattern:

In act 1, Bolbol is responsible for the destruction of Agha Gol's family. At the same time, Agha Gol's son, Enayat, works for him. When Bolbol has completed his crime -by selling the cow- he wants Enayat to pour water on his hands. With the help of Enayat, he washes his contaminated hands. In this act, we do not know why Bolbol does this, but it is the first of a growing refrain of action concerned with the washing of hands.

In act 2, Bolbol is responsible for Bemani's suicide. At the same time, Bemani's brother, Mir Hossein, works for him. When Bolbol has completed his crime -by driving Bemani to suicide- he wants Mir Hossein to pour water on his hands. With the help of Mir Hossein, he washes his contaminated hands. When Bolbol drives Bemani away and washes his hands we begin to consider it more fully and with an understanding of Bemani's death, we know exactly what is going on.

In act 3, Bolbol is responsible for Askandar's wife's death. At the same time Askandar works for him. When Bolbol has completed his crime -by not giving the necessary money- he wants Askandar to pour water on his hands. With the help of Askandar, he washes his contaminated hands. This act begins with the washing hands and thus we know that Bolbol has already committed a crime. This provides an element of suspense until the end of the act and our understanding that the poor woman, Askandar's wife is dead.

In act 4, Bolbol is responsible for Soliman's death. At the same time Soliman's son, Hassan Jout, works for him. When Bolbol has completed his crime -by imprisoning Soliman in the lavatory and so killing him- he wants Hassan Jout to pour water on his hands. With the help of Hassan Jout, he washes his contaminated hands. In this act, we are waiting for the washing of hands and when Hassan Jout pours water on Bolbol's hands, we understand that Soliman is dead.

In act 5, the situation is little different. This time Bolbol himself, or maybe his son Sa'id, or both are the victims! Bolbol wants Yahya -the symbol of the oppressed- to wash his feet! Then Yahya by not giving Bolbol's syrup, helps Bolbol's death.

Perhaps Bolbol with the hand washing, especially with the help of the remaining members of his victims' family, tries to wash away his sin. But by the order of natural justice, he cannot.

Themes

The Steps is a play which moves between two main related themes, human nature and the nature of contemporary society. Firstly, the play shows a horrible transformation in the nature of a human being. Bolbol, a vagrant young man, transforms himself into a successful capitalist. Secondly, the play moves from depicting the lowest class of society, a village in the north of Iran, and goes to show the uppermost class of society, people inhabiting a glorious house in the north of Tehran. Who is this Bolbol? And how has he travelled on this long journey? Is he a naturally talented man or a monster of cruelty? Is this the creeping of a lizard on a spiral staircase? And what are the real characteristics of this society? The play has an answer for all of these questions.

As in the earlier plays, Radi explores the problem of migration and the movement of villagers to the township, the town-dwellers to the capital and citizens abroad. The characters of Radi's plays, hidden or openly, are wanderers and strangers to themselves and their past, a symbol of confusion in all classes of society. They are like caged birds who have been moved to a bigger cage and when they return to the first cage, they feel claustrophobic. In *The Steps* Bolbol and his son Sa'id, who is studying abroad and returns to Tehran, are good examples of this confusion and disorientation.

Real love has no place in this corrupt society. Bolbol, in order to go to Rasht city and start a business, needs money and he has to reject love. Bemani, the symbol of real love kills herself and Bolbol goes to the city with someone else who can give him money. In Bolbol's world love dies for ever. Even later in act 5, when he is a capitalist, he forces his son to marry a rich girl in order to secure his future. In order

to progress in this society, there is no other way but to lie, to steal, to collude, to defraud and to kill others. In act 1, Bolbol is a thief. In act 3 as a tradesman, the symbol of the middle class of society, he is a con-man. In act 4, he is an anti-worker murderer. In act 5, Bolbol is a capitalist who has no occupation but to exploit others.

Characterisation

Radi in his early works has depicted many people from all classes of society, and done so creatively and accurately. In *The Steps*, Bolbol is the main character and Radi has observed him perfectly. In act 1, Bolbol is such an unlucky man that other people swear at him and he can do nothing in response:

Seyed : *[To Bolbol]* You are incapable, fart-breath!

And at the same time he is "a tasteful beggar":

Bolbol : Say your prayers, if Solomon's peacock came to this dome and laid a diamond egg, I'd give you thirty Tomans. I am your obedient servant, you know!

Mashdi Agha : What a tasteful beggar! You have an answer for everything!

And at the end of act 5, Bolbol is playing with the biggest diamond of Iran.

In act 2, Bolbol has a glib-tongue and cleverly entices Haj Amo:

Bolbol : I am your servant, dear Haj Amo! I will come and sweep your shop! I will make smoked fish for you! I will be your daughter's slave! I will have great consideration for her! What does smallpox matter? To have decency is what is important for a girl!

In this act, also, we have a picture of Bolbol as a good lover:

Bemani : *[To Bolbol]* What about your whistling behind our fence? Did you forget that? Those afternoons you used to get Kasali's bicycle and follow me to the riverside road? Those Hafta Bijar pickles? And those Kaskoli baskets? What about that day you gave me a violet and sat me in the lorry and took me to Rasht?

Bolbol believes that with money he can do everything. He sends away his girl friend, Bemani, and tells her:

Bolbol : *(Angry)* What did I do wrong? Did I sleep with you? I made a mistake and gave you a violet and took you for a walk. Now, at

this time of the night, you come here and attack me for what? What do you want me to do? Do you want me to put my hand under the cleaver? Or maybe I must give you a present? Very well! *(He throws the knife into the shop and takes a bunch of bank notes from his money bag.)* Two fifty? Is it enough? *(He separates two notes.)* For everybody the hawk flies but for us the night owl! Come and take it and go! Don't stick to me like a leech!

But Bemani without looking at the money goes out and kills herself.

In act 2 and 3, when Bolbol is going to do something important, he sends his shop-boy out of the shop. In act 3, Bolbol does not speak much and works in collusion with the brokers to whom he gives a fee. Still, he believes this kind of work is not good enough for him. In act 4, Bolbol who is a contractor, bribes the police and takes complete vengeance on the workers. He is a clever man who has a plan for every eventuality. He has locked up Soliman in the lavatory saying:

Bolbol : Yes... I know that this dying man is innocent. He has said something wrong and from last night till now he has licked his shit in the corner of that lavatory. Anyway, I push this dead body with all of my power, because I know these three won't allow Soliman to suffer. Out of sympathy they will come forward. One of them will come.

He has plans for the others, too:

Bolbol : I give you everything I could. You said half an hour for lunch is not enough, I gave you an hour. You said the wooden scaffold is dangerous, I put up metal.

But Balajeh, a protesting worker, tells him in front of the police:

Balajeh : ... Did you really worry for our hands and feet or were you thinking about something else! For instance, what will happen when a worker falls from that rotten scaffolding and breaks his foot? Because it happened.

But the tragic event, Soliman's death, is shocking and Bolbol has a heart attack at the end of this act.

In the concluding act, Bolbol, is a mature man who has everything as he wants. But he cannot forget his crimes and suffers for them:

Bolbol : *[To Yahya]* You had a cow which was stolen. Your poor sister killed herself. Your wife died in the morning of her life. Your poor father was frozen in the corner of the lavatory. It seems you had a baby as well.

And this is the time for revenge. At last, Bolbol frightened by the knife in Yahya's hand, under the pressure of his guilty conscience, dies and Yahya , the avenger, does not need to kill him.

The other characters of the play offer a panorama of roles as befits the wide-ranging context of the plot; they include:

-Mashdi Agha: A tradesman with two wives.

-Agha Gol: A naive villager man.

-Kableh Da'i: A coffee-house keeper.

-Enayat in act 1, Mir Hossein in act 2, Askandar in act 3, Hassan Jout in act 4, and Yahya in act 5 are Bolbol's victims.

-Seyed: A rogue.

-Kasali: An overseer.

-Haj Amo: A rich religious man.

-Bemani: A young girl.

-Mosyou: A clever man who imports bicycles.

-Pokhdoz: A junkie broker.

-Aliof: A foolish customer.

-Haji Nor: A professional broker.

-Alias: A worker.

-Balajeh: A revolutionary worker.

-Sa'id: Bolbol's son.

-Mohtaram: Bolbol's wife. In act 2, 3 and 4 the characters speak about her but she does not appear on the stage. In act 5, we can see her at last!

Language

Radi, in his earlier works, attempts a consciously literary and poetical style. He also uses local and innovatory words and phrases in his works. In addition, Radi has a special language which we might call a language of "roguishness". It is something like the language of market people or of people in a special haunt or cafe. This language is not simple either to follow or to translate. It meanders, is full of hidden signals, is laconic, short and telegraphic. Radi is by nature playful with language.

In *The Steps*, Radi, using these qualities, tries to develop a dramatic language and I think he is comparatively successful. The translation of some of the nuances of this language is difficult. For example, In act 3, Bolbol says: "Now, lets talk about the price." In the Persian text it is: "HALA CHETORY BERIM LABE AB?" which means: "Now, how can we go to the water's bank!". "To green your daughter" means "to marry off your daughter". "Your situation is ball" means "your situation is very good". In fact the characters talk to each other indirectly and the audience must try hard to find the hidden signals behind the words. Radi's plays are quite complicated and serious and not easy to follow. Radi has no experience in acting or directing and his only weapon is the language and he gambles everything on it. The critics have always accused him of having too much talking in his plays.

On the whole, I think Radi has found a naturalistic style in the Persian language which is very much his own.

Style

Ibsen and Chekhov have influenced Radi's past works and we can call him a realistic writer. But in *The Steps*, Radi has something more. In acts 1, 2 and 3 because the characters are rather introverted and unhappy with themselves and the playwright employs rain, fog, river, tree etc to create atmosphere we are reminded of Chekhov's work. But in act 4, when the problems of the workers are discussed and Soliman's tragedy takes shape we think of Brecht's revolutionary leftist workers. Radi in this play has progressed dramaturgically in comparison to his earlier works. There are also some symbolic ideas in the play such as Yahya's presence in act 5, as the symbol of oppressed people. But in the play as a whole, Radi tries to show the people and the world scientifically and accurately. We can see people's misfortunes and their swearing, lying, cheating, stealing, killing and rising. And this is represented in Radi's "roguish" language.

Performances

The Steps, which was written by a playwright from the generation before the Islamic revolution in 1982, was staged at the main-house of the Tatr Shahr (The City Theatre)

which is the biggest and best theatre in Iran, in July and August of 1984. It had 28 successful performances and an estimated audience of 80232 in Tehran. These performances were an important event in the art of the country. On the one hand because it was the first work of Akbar Radi after the Islamic revolution, and on the other because of the work of Hadi Marzban, the director and Fardos Kavyani the lead actor of the play and the rest of the cast who were experienced artists of the Iranian Theatre. The artists who could easily have left the country after the Islamic revolution. But they stayed and worked on the difficult situation. For this reason it was interesting for the opponents of the regime to see how artists can work within the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and for the followers of the regime to see how the Islamic Republic could arrive at a compromise with these artists. Perhaps for the same reason the writer could use prohibited and taboo words and phrases such as "Son of a bitch"! "You have fucked us off"! either in the text, published by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, or on the stage.

The names of the cast of the production are as follows:

Director: Hadi Marzban

Assistant director: Nazi Hassani (Female)

Actors: Fardos Kavyani (Bolbol)

Akbar Sangi

Mehdi Wosoghi

Soror Raja'i (Female)

Sadreddien Hajazi

Loghman Naziri

Khalil Mosavi

Atash Taghipour

Ali Ormoz

Nazi Hassani (Female)

Hossein Afshar

Akbar Ghodsi

Gholamreza Teiabatab

Mas'od Hashmat

Azatallah Ramazanifar

Hormoz Sirati

Mohammad Amrani

Mohammad Paiami

Mostafa Pandgir

Set Design: Reza Rahmani

Costumes: Bahieh Khoshnawisan (Female)

In this production the stage design, costumes and acting style were naturalistic. The interesting thing was that the same actor, Mehdi Wosoghi, played Enayat in act 1, Mir Hossein in act 2, Askandar in act 3, Hassan Jout in act 4, and Yahya in act 5. As we know, these five young men are Bolbol's shop-boys or servants. All are barefoot and appear on the stage with a black second-hand waistcoat. Although these people are five different persons in five different times and places, in act 5 Bolbol believes that they are the same:

Bolbol : [*Enayat*] You had a cow which was stolen. [*Mir Hossein*] Your poor sister killed herself. [*Askandar*] Your wife died in the morning of her life.

 [*Hassan Jout*] Your poor father was frozen in the corner of the lavatory.

So, the director cleverly cast one actor as these five characters.

Another difference between the text and the performance was in the ending of the play. When Bolbol dies and Yahya goes toward the window , the audience hears revolutionary slogans which are not in the text. I do not know whether this was the director's idea or the control board's decision in order to support the political situation of the country.

Criticism

The names of the characters in Radi's past plays are not incidental and most of them have special meanings connected with their personalities. In *The Steps*, Radi does the same. He, like a good parent, gives name to his children:

Bolbol: Nightingale.

Mohtaram: Honourable.

Sa'id: Lucky.

Yahya: John the Baptist.

Enayat: Favour.

Mir Hossein: The name of 3rd Imam of Shiite, martyr.

Askandar: Alexandria.

Jout: Stammerer.

Haji: A man who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca, rich and religious.

Seyed: Descendant of the prophet.

Mashdi Agha, Agha Gol, Kableh Da'i, Kasali: Villagers' names.

Bemani: Stay! Don't die! A village name for a child in a family who has had children who have all died.

Mashallah: What God has willed!

Perhaps with this selection of names, either the audience will forecast the events or an idea imposes itself on their mind, and it seems to me this may be a weakness. In the natural world a name does not normally show the characteristic or qualities of a person. For example we might have a number of friends with the same name of Sa'id (Lucky), but it does not mean that all of them are lucky or unlucky. A naturalistic writer shows us the characteristic of a person with his action not with his name.

Radi in all of his works, including *The Steps*, despite their wide subject matter, selects the places and characters for his plays from his own birthplace Gilan province in the north of Iran. This is a strong point for Radi, as he knows this area very well. Although Radi's characters come to Tehran, they remain Gilaian like their creator. In *The Steps*, characters are from Gilan and act 1, 2, 3 and 4 take place in

Gilan. In act 5 which is in Tehran, Bolbol, as a man from Gilan, still thinks about his birthplace:

Bolbol : I gave five million Tomans to the university of Gilan's project for what? Don't say anything. Because when you come back, you can have a chair there and teach with the honour and reverence due to my dignity.

In his earlier works, Radi hides himself in his characters. In *The Steps* he tries to keep aloof from the characters, but some times he cannot. For example when Bolbol, in act 5, says that he likes his homeland and the people are not lice etc, this seems to be in disharmony with Bolbol's otherwise anti-national character and perhaps it is Radi's own opinion.

In *The Steps* each act (or tableau as the writer wants) of the play has a name and a date:

Act 1: That Rainy Night. 1954.

Act 2: At the End of the Fog. 1956.

Act 3: The Winter of our City. 1961.

Act 4: The Sun for Soliman. 1971.

Act 5: The Pause. 1971.

Although these titles are interesting and have intriguing meanings, they are not part of the staging and stay in the text.

Another strong point in *The Steps* is the comedy in it. Although *The Steps* is a serious play, it has some comic scenes. In act 2, Bolbol speaks about Mashdi Agha who has two wives and eats sheep testicles:

Bolbol : ... Every sunset he comes and makes trouble for me. He orders sheep testicles for the end of his evening. And then he puts the sheep testicles in his hand and weighs them!

In act 3, Bolbol wants to tell Askandar that he has not enough money:

Bolbol : Let me see. There is thirty in the till. (*He counts the notes out of the till.*) When I am telling you I haven't... Here are thirty. (*He puts two fingers into his inside breast pocket and brings out a folded bank note.*) Five! (*He puts his hand in his jacket's right*

hand pocket.) I am telling you I haven't, It means I haven't! This is my handkerchief. (*He puts his hand in his jacket's left hand pocket.*) Twenty! (*He brings a few notes from his left hand trouser pocket.*) And this is my knife! (*He brings a note from his back trouser pocket.*) And this is a ten! (*From his hat's brim, he brings a few notes.*) And this is a fifteen! Do you think I have the money and I don't give it to you, intentionally? (*He takes his shoes and empties them on the table.*) This is two. (*He counts all the notes.*) Ninety nine! That's all! All of our wealth! (*He puts his hands up.*) If you want, search me again!

Also in act 2, Mosyou with his Armenian accent and Aliof with his Turkish accent make for more comedy. The comedy in Radi's works is broad and inventive.

Among the criticism which *The Steps* has attracted, a critic.³ Ali Montazeri, has an interesting point:

In the first act, Radi makes a religious character of Haj Amo. Even if we believe that this kind of person who abuses the religious life exists, at the same time we must say that those people were not and are not symbols of the religious. Also in the whole of the play the poor people's movement and their role, which is shown in the character of Enayat, Mir Hossein, Askandar, Hassan Jout and Yahya, make a poor picture. Except for the fifth act, these people are submissive, whereas this is not a correct report. The challenging by the people of different kinds of oppression, which is one day in the village and another day in a palace, has not started since the year 1978. The challenging started from the first day of this treason. Whereas in *The Steps* there is not any sign of these challenges. Except in the fifth act and the year 1978. It seems Mr Radi has forgotten these many challenges which we believe clearly started in the year 1963. Or maybe he has not deemed it advisable to show this in his work. Yes, in his work some of the reality of the Shah's cruelty time is shown but to forget the fact that the people were not always submissive to the system of cruelty and that challenges, hidden or open, were made, is a big mistake.

This critic wants Radi to write the play directly in favour of the revolution. This it is not an easy task because if a playwright did so, the play would be a sloganising and the playwright would be branded a puppet. On the other hand Radi has not written an anti-revolutionary play. Politically, some people think that the revolution can easily digest this kind of artist and we must respect freedom of thought under the constitution of the country. But some people do not think so. Instead, they want pure revolutionary artists who support the revolution directly. However, Radi, who has written 12 plays of note since 1962, is the most serious and concerned playwright in Iranian theatre. During the Shah's time, Radi, who was not a supporter of the regime, was known as an intellectual playwright who tended to the left. Because of this background, after the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran (1978),

the question was, what would he do? Radi did not leave the country. He stayed in Iran and continued to work. Why? Perhaps this is Radi's answer to the question from tongue of Bobbol in *The Steps*:

Sa'id : Why don't you leave like the others?

Boblol : No, I don't leave this country. I'd rather put an aquarium here and watch the fish reproduce than move from this country! I am not like the others wishing to live like a prince. ... I like my home land!

The Steps was the first of Radi's play's which was staged and published within the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, in the Islamic Republic of Iran. From a political point of view this play and its performances had different aspects. The showing of the poor situation of people during the Shah's time and confirmation of the revolution, were the positive aspects. In the play, the headman, thief and police collude to plunder the people of the village. In the cities, the market of lying, bribery, cheating and killing is brisk. So, there is no way forward but the revolution. The negative aspect was the treatment of religion, Islam, in the play. Radi's religious characters, in this play and in his earlier plays, are narrow-minded and sanctimonious. In *The Steps* Seyed, Haj Amo, Haji Nor are examples of this kind of person. Although Radi tells us in act 5 that the revolution is an Islamic revolution, he has not one single depiction of a revolutionary Moslem in the whole of the play. Because of this and other aspects of the play such as the swearing, talk about wine, labour revolution etc, the extremists were not in agreement with it. But despite these ideas, the play was staged and published. The Islamic Republic of Iran has Radi and Radi is not affiliated with the regime and the audience takes pleasure from his works.

1. A place in Gilan.
2. According to the Ministry of Culture statistics.
3. Montazeri, Ali. *Saehhaieh Mandagar*. Barg: Tehran, 1988.(p.210).

THE STEPS

By: Akbar Radi

Act 1

That Rainy Night

Characters: Mashdi Agha

Agha Gol

Kableh Da'i

Bolbol

Enayat

Seyed

Kasali

Summer. 1954. Pasikhan, a village in the north of Iran. The awning of a wooden coffee-house. Sunset.

(Agha Gol in a felt hat and a threadbare jacket, is sitting on a couch on the right hand of the stage. He is leaning on the wall of the coffee-house and crouching on one knee. He is sad and quiet and drinking tea from a saucer. Mashdi Agha who, is a mean man with a tiny moustache, is sitting on the edge of another couch on the left hand of the stage. He smokes the hookah with happiness. There is the sound of tinkling glasses, laughing and domino games from inside the coffee-house.)

Mashdi Agha : Look! What a clear sky! It is just like a mirror.

Agha Gol : *(He starts out of his nap.)* Yes, winter was not a blessing. Two or three times snow came but only a little.

Mashdi Agha : Be happy Agha Gol. Winter is over and in the spring we were water-logged with rain which was very good for you.

Agha Gol : I had a small holding. It was well-matured. By mistake I planted peanuts instead of onions and tomatoes. That week I and Enayat and Mones took baskets and went to collect peanuts. By God, from those many peanuts, there was not even a single nut! The pods were empty. *(He puts the cup of tea on the couch with*

sadness.) We had no interest Mashdi Agha! That was the land, completely useless! And my only wealth was a cow!

Mashdi Agha : In nature, you know misfortune. It never rains but it pours. Now, think about me. What can I say to the customers tomorrow?

Agha Gol : I am sitting and waiting for Enayat. Maybe he will come with some news!

Mashdi Agha : A bucket of milk, more or less! But I loved your Tala.¹ In these two months her milk was the mainstay of my shop. I don't know where she used to graze. Her milk was just like cream. As you know my customers come for milk but then they buy some other things as well. Anyway, what a skin she had! It was golden! The fuzzy silk...

Agha Gol : I went everywhere. I went to Masolehei's garden. I said to myself she is friend of Masolehei's cows and maybe she is there. Kasali said: "We are picking the walnuts and from today the garden is reserved and even a cow must not put its feet into the garden."

Mashdi Agha : *(He loops the hookah snake.)* God is great! Misfortunes seldom come singly. When they steal a cow, they come to your cow! I don't know why they don't go to Masolehei's cows? From sunset his garden is reserved. And who can steal his cows? All destitutes, officials and blackmailers are under his control. Now think about me! Who can I buy milk from today? *(Quietly)* I have heard that Masolehei puts water into the milk! *(Kableh Da'i with a moist bathrobe over his shoulder and two cups of tea in his hand comes from inside of the coffee-house. He is a nimble man.)*

Kableh Da'i : Last night, when I was going to close up, from that forest road which goes behind Agha Gol's hut... *(He puts the cups of tea in front of the men.)* And these are two first class teas!

Agha Gol : Behind of our hut? *(Attention)* What happened next, Kableh Da'i?

1. It is the name of Agha Gol's cow. It means "Gold".

Kableh Da'i : I think there was the sound of an engine. It seems there was a lorry.

Mashdi Agha : A lorry?

Kableh Da'i : By God, it seems so, yes! But I didn't see it! I think it went in low gear.

Mashdi Agha : What about its lights? Were they visible?

Kableh Da'i : No. I think they were off!

Mashdi Agha : In the darkness? It is impossible!

Agha Gol : Well, carry on!

Kableh Da'i : As I said, at that time of night, at the side of that reserved garden, it was meaningless! There was a stool here. I put it on this couch and stood on it to have a look. But if you want the truth, I saw nothing! Why must I tell you a lie? I didn't see well. I mean the wind rolled up between the trees and also it was raining heavily. It was dark as well.

Mashdi Agha : You were scared Kableh Da'i! Surely it was stormy and you made a mistake!

Kableh Da'i : Upon your life Mashdi, no! Bolbol saw it, too! Go and ask him.

Agha Gol : (*Attention*) Who? Bolbol? What did he say?

Kableh Da'i : He says it was a lorry, as well. He says when it came from the lane into the road, it went at 80!

Agha Gol : What time was it Kableh Da'i?

Kableh Da'i : Nine, half past nine, maybe ten! I can't remember well. (*He takes the hookah and the cups of tea which are empty.*) It was the middle of the night, you know! Seyed and Mirmammad were playing dominoes. I was going to close the coffee-house little by little...

Agha Gol : Oh, nine or half past nine... (*Kableh Da'i goes into the coffee-house. Mashdi Agha takes a note book from his pocket and adds some numbers. Agha Gol is disturbed and looking into space.*)

Agha Gol : Last night it was nine or half past nine. I put the lantern on the ledge and turned it off and went to bed. It was raining cats and dogs. I was too tired. I was going to sleep while Mones sat on the bed. She listened a while and then said: "I think there's a voice." I said: "It is stormy. Maybe the storm is hitting the gate against the wall." She said: "No, the voice came from the stable. " I put the quilt over my head and came to the porch. I saw Tala had come and wanted to go to the stable. But she couldn't. She was soaking wet. She was kicking the stable door. But the door was closed. Also her calf seemed restless and was mooing constantly. I jumped up and opened the door and put her in the stable. With the quilt, I made her dry and put the rope on her horn and settled her down on the straw. She licked her calf and then with that steamy black snout turned back and looked at me. Her look was a sad and lonely look. I couldn't understand it at the time. *(With sadness)* And then early in the morning, you wake up and take the bucket and go to the stable. Now you can understand the meaning of that look!

Mashdi Agha : *(Playing with his note book)* Twenty two... Twenty three...*(Bolbol and Enayat enter. Bolbol is a young man about twenty eight years old. He is dressed in a short sleeve saddle cloth and has a tattoo² on his arm. He is bald and the skin on his head is peeling. He has hung a small bag of leather around his neck. Enayat, barefoot, is dressed in a black second-hand waistcoat. He is carrying a big tray on his head. Bolbol says hello and goes into the coffee-house.)*

Bolbol : Greetings to Mashdi Agha, the good old man of Pasikhan!

Mashdi Agha : God bless you, what have you got in that tray, man?

Enayat : *(He puts the tray on the couch.)* We have some raspberries!

Mashdi Agha : Are you the slave of this foolish bald man these days?

Agha Gol : Enayat, What did you do?

Enayat : Nothing! It was useless!

Agha Gol : Did you go to the police station?

2. The figure of Rostam, a hero of ancient Iran.

Enayat : The sergeant said: "Cattle rustling is none of our business"!

Mashdi Agha : They are the partners of thieves! What do you think, man!
(*Bolbol with a pail of water comes out from the coffee-house. He puts the pail beside the couch on the left hand of the stage.*)

Bolbol : Mashdi Agha, why have you closed your shop and cast anchor here at the beginning of sunset?

Mashdi Agha : I've come here to smoke a hookah and then I must find out what we will do for milk tomorrow.

Bolbol : (*To Agha Gol*) I give my condolences, Agha Gol. I heard.

Agha Gol : Oh!

Bolbol : It is only a cow, you know! It falls, dies and thieves steal it. Just forget it!

Agha Gol : She wasn't just a cow, Bolbol! She was my worker as well!

Bolbol : (*At once, he drinks Mashdi Agha's tea!*) With your permission!
(*And then puts the glass on it's saucer.*)

Mashdi Agha : Ignoble person! You look like a parasite!

Bolbol : (*He laughs and gets away.*) No I am not!

Mashdi Agha : Bald man! Don't you want to work and pay your debt?

Bolbol : Upon your life Mashdi, it is one month since I had any money!

Mashdi Agha : When you get behind the wheel and drive and look proud, think about your debt!

Bolbol : Say your prayers, if Solomon's peacock came to this dome and laid a diamond egg, I'd give you thirty Tomans³ I am your obedient servant, you know!

Mashdi Agha : What a tasteful beggar! You have an answer for everything!

Bolbol : (*He squats on the edge of the couch.*) Yes, our turn will come Mashdi! What are you thinking about the state of the world?

3. Toman is 10 Rials. Rial is the monetary unit of Iran.

Maybe we can do something as well! *(To Enayat) Pour! (Enayat pours water from the pail into Bolbol's hands.)*

Mashdi Agha : If you were good, you'd stay on the land and help your poor mother. Like Enayat! Look at him. He is only half your size!

Bolbol : *(He laughs and shakes his hand dry and put his hands on his knees.)* We are not like this good boy Mashdi! We are rootless!

Mashdi Agha : Certainly you are rootless!

Bolbol : Oh... Please don't carry on!

Mashdi Agha : One day, you put fish on Chancho⁴ and go to the Friday market. Another day, you are carrying passengers on a bicycle! One day, you go to hunt at Kapoorchal. Another day, you take the wheel and show off. And one day, you go to the field and throw a shower of dung into that man's shop! What more can I say? At last, this tray of raspberries is your business! I don't know why you can't stay in one place!

Bolbol : *(He gets down from the couch.)* That's right, Mashdi. But I don't know why there is such fire in your bottom.

Mashdi Agha : You are an evil-doer, Bolbol! And an evil-doer will be caught one day! Look at me, when I am talking to you! Don't laugh!

Bolbol : Oh... really?

Agha Gol : *(He rolls a cigarette for himself.)* Bolbol did you see a lorry around our house?

Bolbol : A lorry? *(Pause)* Who said that?

Agha Gol : Da'i said you've seen it as well.

Bolbol : Oh, yes! It was last night. *(Seriously)* There was a miserable rain, you know! I saw nobody on the road, either. I was going down the lane, with the tray on my head, when a huge thing appeared in front of me!

Enayat : Was it the lorry?

4. A soft wood which farmers put it on their shoulders and carrying things with .

Bolbol : Yes, it was. It was going in the direction of Masolehei's garden.

Agha Gol : Carry on!

Bolbol : Without thinking I stepped aside, and it went past. After a moment it turned onto the main road. I saw its headlights come on and it went off at 80!

Enayat : I wish you had written down its number!

Bolbol : God bless you! In that darkness? It was pouring down. After all, I didn't know that there was something wrong. Are you saying that Tala and her calf were in the lorry?

Enayat : Maybe they were! Who knows!

Bolbol : The lorry had a tarpaulin as well!

Mashdi Agha : What? Tarpaulin?

Bolbol : I think so.

Mashdi Agha : Then, surely Tala was in the lorry!

Enayat : How many were they?

Bolbol : How many of who?

Mashdi Agha : Thieves!

Bolbol : I don't know how many there were! (*He is irritated.*) I made a mistake and told you something, why are you splitting hairs? So, if you like ask me to tell you where it has gone? I don't know! In the morning I came here to drink a cup of tea and start my miserable day. Da'i said that he had heard the sound of an engine behind Agha Gol's hut. I said yes, I have seen it too. That's all! Please don't disgrace me further.

Mashdi Agha : I say whoever has taken Tala was known to us! What do you say Agha Gol?

Agha Gol : What can I say? God knows!

Enayat : Maybe Masolehei's men did it!

Mashdi Agha : It is not impossible! We don't know! (*Confidentially*) From the day Tala give birth to her calf, Haj Amo Kolochehpaz used to swear that Masolehei puts water in his milk!

Bolbol : Don't tempt me Mashdi!

Mashdi Agha : I don't like to say anything about it! Well, I know Masolehei is not the kind of man who can endure these words!

Enayat : The garden was guarded for ten nights to protect the harvest. Also there was a heavy rain. Now, tell me how a big lorry can go round the garden without being seen? Was it invisible or what?

Mashdi Agha : That's right! We all know that Kasali guards the garden. He doesn't allow you to even touch Masolehei's turkeys. Do that, Kasali kills you! Guarded means guarded! It means behind each tree there is a guard! Kasali puts the worm on the hook, you know!

Bolbol : Now , what do you want me to say? Are you saying that they took Agha Gol's cow in a lorry and the lorry belongs to Masolehei?

Mashdi Agha : In God's name, I don't know! We have had everything but we haven't had cattle rustling by lorry!

Bolbol : Don't say it Mashdi! Don't! Don't say it again, never ever! If the wind carries your words, your shop will go into the sky just like smoke, tonight!

Mashdi Agha : (*He is afraid and changes his words.*) It is none of my business. I came to get a pail of milk and go to sort my goods. After all, the matter does not concern me and I am not under obligation to anybody! Agha Gol knows it!

Agha Gol : Whatever I think, I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't jump from somebody's hedge. I didn't pull watermelon from somebody's patch. I didn't fight for land and water. My head was down and I kept digging. I didn't bother anybody. I was the good man of the village. Why has this happened to me? I don't know!

- Mashdi Agha : Nothing will happen with this attitude! Stand up man! Stand up and do something!
- Agha Gol : *(He stands up.)* My peanuts have died. Tala has been taken. I am in a bad fix here, Mashdi! What can I do now? *(With slumped shoulders he puts his hand to the pillar of the awning and for a moment he is quiet, feeble.)* If I can't find Tala, I will go to the Rasht city. I don't care what will happen there. I can unload cargo at the garage. If I can't do that, I will sell sherbet in the market. If I can't do that, I will go on the streets and sell old clothes. God is the provider of daily bread. *(Agha Gol goes out, helpless and broken. Enayat goes out, too. Bolbol takes a few raspberries and puts them in his mouth carelessly.)*
- Mashdi Agha : God is great!
- Bolbol : He is upside down... I am talking about Agha Gol.
- Mashdi Agha : It was a cow, man. For the people of Gilan, the cow is like a worker. It is not a joke, you know. You took it to the stable at night, put on the rope and dried it. And then in the morning, when you woke up, woe! There is no cow! And what a cow! She was like a buffalo!
- Bolbol : Son of a bitch.⁵ They have no honour!
- Mashdi Agha : What a noble cow she was! When you put your hand on her rump, she gave you all of her milk. She didn't steal even a ladle of milk! Never! What a pity! It was her first calf as well.
- Bolbol : It is still a cow, Mashdi! It is a cow not a human being, sometimes it falls, sometimes it dies and sometimes it is stolen. I think Agha Gol exaggerates too much! *(He points to the tray.)* And my job is raspberry selling. Am I crying and wailing for you? You have given me thirty Tomans. Do you forget it? Of course not!
- Mashdi Agha : You are a single man, Bolbol. You haven't any family. You are imposing on your mother as well. She is working as a

5. In the Persian text, the writer has played on words in this case. Bolbol, instead of saying (MADAR GHAHBEH) which means (Son of a bitch) says (MADAR GHAHWEH) which means (Son of the coffee! Meaningless). But the Iranian audience can understand it and it is very funny for them. Also, it tells us that Bolbol is an illiterate person, too.

maidservant in Masolehei's house for two sacks of rice, a year, for your stomach! And you are a carefree person. During the day you waste your time and at night you fall down like a pig and snort! (*With compassion*) But What about Agha Gol? He has a family. He is respectable. What can he do? He was content with a few peanut plants and this cow, you know!

Bolbol : Why don't you think about me? I put a tray of raspberries on my head and from morning till now I have been wandering in Rasht's streets and back streets. Run, run and run! I was harassed. How much business did I do? Seven Tomans! One take-away for the journey there and back, three for the permission to pick them, and one for Kasali's bribe. From beginning to end, there are just two Tomans left for me!

Mashdi Agha : And you spend these two Tomans on your stomach! That's different.

Bolbol : But why do you stop me everywhere and ask for your thirty Tomans? Where should I get them from ? Do you think I have the money and I don't give it to you? No! I haven't! Am I a grocer like you? You have a shop and your daily earnings are coming in and your biggest sorrow is whether or not you have the milk for tomorrow!

Mashdi Agha : (*He stands and laughs.*) You are a bald man, you know! And I beg to bring to your attention that the bald men have three virtues! And all those three are luck!

Bolbol : Go away!

Mashdi Agha : Tell your stomach to go!

Bolbol : If I had any luck, I would not be here in front of you!

Mashdi Agha : So, what did you want to do? Do you want to go to the coffee-house and play dominoes with Seyed and Mirmammad?

Bolbol : Oh, dear!

Mashdi Agha : What about going with Kasali under the bridge to drink Armenian water.⁶

Bolbol : Right!

Mashdi Agha : Do you want to take the wheel and drive a car to show off for Pasikhan's girls?

Bolbol : That's enough! Don't say any more! *(He tickles Mashdi Agha and laughs.)*

Mashdi Agha : *(He laughs, too.)* Monster! unfortunately you are not beautiful and I don't want to have an affair with you.

Bolbol : *(Long laugh)* No! I hope luck will come to me! If it should, first I would give you your thirty Tomans and shut your mouth!

Mashdi Agha : Ouch! I cross my fingers for it!

Bolbol : And then I will open a bicycle repair shop here! And as soon as I open it, I will be in the bicycle industry!

Mashdi Agha : You are talking nonsense, man! Maybe you have had a dream!

Bolbol : These days horse-riding is out of fashion, Mashdi! Everybody wants to sell his horse and buy a bicycle. Mirmammad, Chechelas, Kasali... I tell you Mashdi, a man, called Mosyou, has appeared in Rasht and imports bicycles. Well, as you know, bicycles need repairing. And who can do it? The answer is the bicycle industry!

Mashdi Agha : But what about you? You are wasting your time for nothing, man! You want to open a bicycle repair shop?

Bolbol : *(He points to the coffee-house.)* Don't repeat these things to Seyed! He has put a golden tooth in his mouth and a clasp-knife in his pocket and thinks that he is a pure man! But I think he is just a big mouth, you know! If you tell him, he will mock me. Then I have to fight him. You know me!

6. Another play on words. Armenian water means alcoholic beverage. Also it tells us that the people like Bolbol who wants to drink, get it from Armenians who are free to have drink in Iran.

Mashdi Agha : Oh! Oh! What a stupid thing to do! You know, baldy! You are a wily Bolbol!

Bolbol : Yes Mashdi, we know these things as well!

Mashdi Agha : But with what money? What about capital?

Bolbol : I thought about that! The key-money and the tools...

Mashdi Agha : What can I say? Come and open a rice boiling shop in front of my shop!

Bolbol : I am thinking about that, too!

Mashdi Agha : And you are bald, you know! You think about everything!

Bolbol : *(Seriously)* My plan is a bicycle repair shop Mashdi. But in order to find the capital, maybe having a mobile shop would not be bad! Boiling rice and perhaps selling roasted livers and that sort of thing.

Mashdi Agha : For these, you need, at least, three hundred Tomans! Where can you find it? From your father's grave?

Bolbol : Who knows Mashdi? Maybe tonight I will find three hundred Tomans to start with!

Mashdi Agha : By the soul of your father, yes! Perhaps you are waiting for that peacock to sit on your mangy head and to shit a diamond egg for you!

Bolbol : You can mock me, now. But remember it! I bet you! *(Bolbol pushes forward his little finger in the sign of a bet. At the same time Kableh Da'i and Seyed come out of the coffee-house. They are talking to each other. Seyed who has put half a cigarette in his lips and a jacket on his shoulder, is a rogue. Kableh Da'i has a cup of tea in his hand. He puts it on the couch near Mashdi Agha, when he speaks. With Seyed's arrival Bolbol goes quiet.)*

Kableh Da'i : I don't think so. Whoever he was, I think he has sold the cow and the calf, now. Maybe he has taken them to that side of Rasht. I mean Khomam, Lakan...

Seyed : But he was very mean! I don't know who could steal Agha Gol's property!

Mashdi Agha : We are yours truly, Seyed!

Seyed : Nice to see you Mashdi Agha!

Bolbol : *(Reluctantly)* Hello!

Seyed : *(Upset)* Oh, baldy! You took your hat off, the sky became clear.⁷

Bolbol : We are your servant Seyed!

Seyed : You mean! I don't know, why do you have shit smell? *(Mashdi Agha laughs.)* When you wear the nappies of Masolehei's children, little by little you smell of them! Yes, that's why!

Bolbol : Da'i, Seyed doesn't accept us, why don't you give us a cup of tea?

Seyed : You are incapable, fart-breath!

Bolbol : We didn't dare, Seyed! We want a cup of tea, that's all! Why do you beat us?

Seyed : *(He throws away his cigarette.)* We can't beat a beggar, you know! You fool! Why are you standing over there and showing off your tattoo to us? *(He puts his feet, one by one, on the edge of the couch and inserts his finger at the heel of his shoe and puts the shoe on⁸. He is angry.)* I have outfaced a hundred men like you...

Kableh Da'i : You have drunk fifty cups of tea and I have closed your account Bolbol! It means I can't give you more tea. First you must pay your debt, then I will give you tea.

Mashdi Agha : *(To Bolbol)* If you are desperate for a cup of tea come and drink my tea!

Seyed : *(To Bolbol)* Rubbish!

7. This is a joke.

8 His shoes are not properly on. This is what a rogue, like him, usually does.

Mashdi Agha : *(To Seyed) Forgive him Seyed. (To Da'i) Put it on my account Da'i. We are going. It stands at 23 cups. (To Seyed) Come with me Seyed. (He, peacefully, takes Seyed's hand and goes out with him. Bolbol, ashamed and hurt, brings some money out of his bag which is hung on his neck.)*

Kableh Da'i : Drink! This is over the fifty. Drink! I am looking what you will do next!

Bolbol : *(Gives some money to Da'i.)* Take it!

Kableh Da'i : Very well! I can't say no to you! *(He takes the money.)*

Bolbol : We are clear, aren't we?

Kableh Da'i : That's right. Pay your debt on time!

Bolbol : If you wouldn't be brazen-faced.

Kableh Da'i : The words offended you!

Bolbol : Yes! If you, a coffee-house keeper, don't trust me for a cup of tea, of course that dishonourable wicked man, Seyed, would insult me in front of the people!

Kableh Da'i : Let it alone, man!

Bolbol : I don't like you to make a face at me in front of this son of a bitch! Do you understand or I must put a suppository up your arse? *(He seizes Kableh Da'i by the collar roughly.)* I would cut his main artery, if someone said that I was smelly!

Kableh Da'i : Why do you tell me this? If you are a man, answer him!

Bolbol : *(He releases the collar, slightly.)* I will. Not later than tomorrow I will answer him. *(He takes the tray and throws the remaining raspberries away, quickly and with disgust.)* That's the end of that!

Kableh Da'i : Why did you waste the raspberries? Are you crazy, man?

Bolbol : Yes. Tomorrow I will show you! I will answer all of you! I will outface all of you! You! Mashdi! This unprincipled Seyed! You will see! *(He kicks a raspberry with his toe.)* I am tired of running! That's enough! Now. I want to stay somewhere! I

want to open a shop in this locality. In front of your bloody eyes! All of you! When I open it and give out kebab smoke in the direction of the coffee-house, then I will tell you who has the smell of shit! (*Kasali enters. He has put one hand in his trouser pocket. He comes quietly, without greeting, sits on the right hand couch. Kableh Da'i who is amazed by Bolbol's words speaks to the newcomer.*)

Kableh Da'i : How are you Kasali? (*Kableh Da'i goes into the coffee-house, looking uncomfortable. Bolbol without looking at him, sits on the left hand couch, next to Kasali. Now these two men are looking at the audience and speak secretly and softly.*)

Kasali : Well?

Bolbol : I took it Khomam.

Kasali : Is it finished?

Bolbol : Yes. I passed it on to the butcher.

Kasali : How much?

Bolbol : With the calf, five hundred and fifty.

Kasali : Fifty Tomans is my share.

Bolbol : And I laid aside two hundred, the cost of the lorry, for the master.

Kasali : There is three hundred left for you.

Bolbol : Not too bad. (*He brings out a wad of bank notes from his sock.*)
You said how much I must give you?

Kasali : Keep quiet! Not here! Come to the garden!

Bolbol : I will come at night.

Kasali : Under the cedar tree.

Bolbol : I will bring a bottle of wine as well!

Kasali : I think duck eggs isn't bad for a snack! (*He brings two big eggs from his pocket.*)

Bolbol : Turkey's eggs?

Kasali : Keep quiet! (*Loudly*) No! Tomorrow we lift the garden reservation, and that's all! (*Kasali stands and puts his hand in his trouser pocket, again. Silence. Laughing. The sound of tinkling of glasses.*)

Act 2

At the End of the Fog

Characters: Haj Amo
Bolbol
Mir Hossein
Bemani (A young girl)
Mashdi Agha
Kasali

Autumn. 1956. Pasikhan. A small shop for selling roasted livers, light by an oil-lamp. The end of the evening.

(Bolbol with a woollen hat and cloth round his waist, is standing behind the counter fanning the coals. On the coals there are skewers of heart and sheep testicles. When he comes out, the audience can see his tapestry money bag which is hanging from his waist. Haj Amo Kolochehpaz, a simple small man, with a white skull-cap and small beard, is sitting on a couch on the right of the stage. He has a long pipe in his hand and a ring with a big agate stone which is shining between his fingers. Mir Hossein who has a second-hand black waistcoat, barefoot, is washing the skewers.)

Haj Amo : What a thick fog! Come here and sit for a moment dear Bolbol.

Bolbol : I am serving you dear Haj Amo.

Haj Amo : This is the end of evening and I want to go home.

Bolbol : Upon your life, I won't let you go. Now the shop is empty and I am free.

Haj Amo : You have power. You are healthy. If you stood working till late, nothing would happen to you. But we have become tired and must go home soon and sleep.

Bolbol : Instead, I have prepared for you a fat heart. Eat it and you will gain weight. *(He brings the heart skewers in a tray. He speaks to Mir Hossein.)* These four are for Mashdi Agha.

- Haj Amo : Why are you doing this, dear Bolbol? I don't have teeth, you know!
- Bolbol : *(He puts the tray on the couch.)* It doesn't need teeth. Put one in your mouth, it will dissolve. It is like cotton! *(He sits on a stool near Haj Amo.)*
- Haj Amo : What can I say to my wife? I said, last night I was in Mashdi Mohammad's house. The night before, I said, we had worked late in the shop. But what about tonight? Do you want her to sweep me out of house with the broom stick?
- Bolbol : What's the matter Haj Amo? We are sitting a little while to have a chat! *(He opens a lemonade bottle.)* And this is iced Lemonade. I had hidden it just for you! Drink it and make me happy, sir.
- Haj Amo : I hope you are not tired of working.
- Bolbol : *(Haj Amo offers him the pipe. He takes it and smokes.)* I am not tired, dear Haj Amo. I am displeased.
- Haj Amo : *(He eats a piece of the heart with a morsel of the bread.)* Why Bolbol? May God preserve you from the evil eye, your situation is very good.
- Bolbol : Oh! Do you think selling roasted livers is a good job? I said I will open this shop to earn bread. But after going and coming and a lot of effort, the price of a skewer is only one Rial! It is like begging, Haj Amo! Unfortunately, everyone is my friend and wants something. Mashdi Agha is one of them! Every sunset he comes and makes trouble for me . He orders sheep testicles for the end of his evening. And then he puts the sheep testicles in his hand and weighs them!... Mir Hossein, didn't you bring the sheep testicles for Mashdi Agha? They will get cold, you know...
- Mir Hossein : I was looking for lemonade. I thought we had one. `
- Bolbol : I took it for Haj Amo. What does it matter if Mashdi Agha doesn't drink for one night? *(Mir Hossein goes out with the tray.)*

Bolbol : And this is our shop-boy! A simple boy ! I sent him to the slaughterhouse in the morning, he came back at night empty handed! I want to put him behind the counter, but I don't trust him. But if I sack him and bring in someone else, he will have no means of livelihood. *(He puts the pipe on the couch.)* Each day we cut seven or eight sets of livers. In short it is a job for an ant, Haj Amo!

Haj Amo : I started with an ant-like job, dear Bolbol. But there was something in my head, you know!

Bolbol : You bake three thousand cookies every day! Also, you have costumers like travellers and so on. If I were like you, I would have hidden a jug of golden coins underground by now!

Haj Amo : *(He laughs, uneasily.)* Dear Bolbol, you are talking nonsense! Do you think that baking cookies is a piece of cake? For instance, I have five workers. A baker, his helper and three boys. At sunset, like hungry dogs, they come to my till demanding money. Also, we have guests from Rasht in our house all the time! My wife's tribe, you know! When they come, they cast anchor here. More than that, as you know, the children are getting older. This one wants leather gloves and boots and galoshes! That one must go to the school on a bicycle! And these two girls... You know! You are not a stranger to us, they are grown up and have stayed unmarried in the house! And at last, my wife's turn comes. She spends all of my money to buy things for the trousseau of these two girls!

Bolbol : No problem!

Haj Amo : I, myself, have had bad dreams every night! Especially last night's dream distressed me too much.

Bolbol : What was that?

Haj Amo : In my dream I was lying on the grass. It was foggy. There was a small shop, like your shop, in front of me! I was snoring. Suddenly a mangy goat who had a big pair of testicles, came from that small shop towards me, limping! I wanted to stand but the goat jumped on me and grazed on my beard! Then I woke

up! All my body was wet from shock! (*He coughs and puts the bottle on the tray.*) It has too much fizz!

Bolbol : The meaning of your dream is that you will be free of care very soon, Haj Amo!

Haj Amo : (*He sits on the edge of the couch.*) Oh! Dear Bolbol!

Bolbol : Haj Amo, why don't you make space around yourself?

Haj Amo : How dear friend, how?

Bolbol : Do you want to make your daughters old maids? Why don't you let them go to try their luck?

Haj Amo : Are you saying I must put them out to auction?

Bolbol : Why an auction! Your daughter, I take the liberty of saying, although she is not beautiful, her dignity is priceless! And she has a dear father who is a chief, religious and rich! These things are the assurance for a girl, dear Haj Amo!

Haj Amo : (*He takes a cut of heart from the skewers.*) You are speaking about who? Mohtaram or Ahteram?

Bolbol : It doesn't make any difference. Both of them grew up under your protection.

Haj Amo : There is some difference. You are not a father and you don't know what my situation is. (*He puts the skewers on a tray.*) Now, Ahteram has four suitors that come every day to our house. But I don't know how to pick one of them, dear Bolbol. One of them is a civil servant who I don't like! A fop! The other one is the son of Mirza Agha Noghandar. He is no good either! His lips and mouth show that he is an opium smoker. One of them works in Forestry Protection. But I have heard that he colludes with Navagholi to sell the forest lumber. And the fourth one is Abraham Masolehei's brother-in-law's sister's child! The son of Mashdi Mohammad Allaf.

Bolbol : The one who is bald?

Haj Amo : No! He is the accountant for a commercial firm. But this one has a wholesale grocery in Rasht. His business is good. He

sends honey and Siamizgi cheese, hour by hour, to our house. In short, I like this one dear Bolbol. But if you want the truth, Masolehei has opened a pig sty near Ghal'eh Rodkhan and because of this I don't relish this family.

Bolbol : No rose without a thorn, Haj Amo.

Haj Amo : Anyway, my wife has refused all of them!

Bolbol : *(Surprised)* But why?

Haj Amo : I think she is right! We can't marry the younger one and keep the older one.

Bolbol : Of course! That's right!

Haj Amo : If we do that, people will start talking!

Bolbol : So, why you are not trying to marry off Mohtaram!

Haj Amo : ...?...

Bolbol : You know many people here, Haj Amo.

Haj Amo : The problem is her eye. We took her to Dr. Akhondof. He said: "It is smallpox. We can do nothing. But if you want, we can take her eye out and put an artificial eye in instead." But our women don't like the thought of that. Because of her eye, this girl remains an old maid on our hands. And the younger one, poor child, like the sun, is waiting for nothing!

Bolbol : God give you honour! We don't know how long we will live! We can die any time! Don't you want to marry off your girls in your lifetime?

Haj Amo : Oh, what are you saying, dear Bolbol! Don't speak like that, I am sick to the heart of it! *(Mir Hossein comes and under the hard gaze of Bolbol goes behind the counter.)*

Bolbol : Where have you been? It was just one footstep away!

Mir Hossein : Mashdi Agha was counting on his abacus and said: "Stay!".

Bolbol : He has been counting from the rising of the sun till now! I think he is dealing in his imagination!

Mir Hossein : And at last, he said: "Go and come back later!"

Bolbol : (*He stands.*) Yes. He goes to his second wife every other night. His cash is for her but his credit is for us! He had a pair of sheep testicles the night before last night as well.

Haj Amo : (*He fills his pipe.*) I am confused, too! I don't know whether to look after the shop, work on the land or repair the house. Once I was a reasonably clever man. But now, I can't even look after the cookie bakery. I haven't planted my land for two years, either! My house in Rasht is empty and dropping in price! My wife has made me wretched! She grumbles all the time: "It is the smoked fish season. Why don't you make thirty or forty smoked fish?" (*He coughs.*) And this is my story!

Bolbol : May you be in good health, dear Haj Amo! I will do everything for you. The smoked fish, Siamizgi cheese, Haft Bejar pickles.

Haj Amo : (*With deep desire*) Oh... Oh... If I could find a fine well qualified gentleman for my eldest daughter...

Bolbol : You can. But you must have an eye which can see. (*He turns and looks.*) Mir Hossein, what are you doing there?

Mir Hossein : I am gathering these things.

Bolbol : Leave it. I will do it. Go and bring the tray from Mashdi Agha's shop. No! Don't go! (*He frowns.*) Leave him to do it. You go to Kasali and tell him: "I am coming, don't forget the medicine!"

Haj Amo : The medicine? Is something wrong?

Bolbol : No! It is a tonic!

Haj Amo : If it is a tonic, please give me a bottle! I am weak, too!

Bolbol : Okay! Okay! (*In Mir Hossein's ear*) Tell him to bring Mina! It drives away the after effects of intoxication! And come back soon! (*Mir Hossein goes out. Bolbol goes behind the counter and for a moment peeps at Haj Amo. Haj Amo smokes his pipe, thoughtfully.*)

Bolbol : What will you do if I show you a fine well qualified gentleman for your daughter?

Haj Amo : Where?

Bolbol : Here! In your neighbourhood!

Haj Amo : Dear Bolbol, I don't think you can show me that man among these farmers!

Bolbol : What about someone who is not a farmer!

Haj Amo : At this desolate spot everybody is a farmer!

Bolbol : But a farmer is still a human being!

Haj Amo : But it is useless!

Bolbol : Of course you are right! (*He comes from behind the counter.*) But how about if he was a tradesman and desired your older girl?

Haj Amo : (*Suddenly he takes his pipe from his lips.*) Who?

Bolbol : Who? Well... Oh... For example a seller of roasted livers!

Haj Amo : What? A seller of roasted livers? (*He stands, involuntary.*) God save me!

Bolbol : Not just a seller of roasted livers, but a fine well qualified and useful gentleman!

Haj Amo : Ah! So now I see what you're getting at!

Bolbol : (*He goes near, carelessly.*) I will hire the workers and plant tobacco in your land. I will repair your house. I will do everything as you want.

1. Wine. Haj Amo is a religious man and Bolbol does not like him to know that he drinks. So, he uses the words Mina and Medicine instead of wine.

Haj Amo : *(With himself)* God bless you! *(He empties the pipe and puts it in his pocket.)* Now I understand why you were lying in ambush for me every night, here.

Bolbol : I am your servant, dear Haj Amo! I will come and sweep your shop! I will make smoked fish for you! I will be your daughter's slave! I will have great consideration for her! What does smallpox matter? To have decency is what is important for a girl!

Haj Amo : Why are you talking nonsense? It is complete nonsense!

Bolbol : Haj Amo. May I be sacrificed in your place! Do me a favour and say YES! Don't let the younger one be a spinster because of the older one! *(He kisses Haj Amo's beard!)* Your daughter's star is fallen in front of my foot, dear Haj Amo! Bend! Bend and take it!

Haj Amo : In front of your foot? Oh...*(He brings out a coin to pay for the food.)*

Bolbol : *(He doesn't take the coin.)* No! You are my honoured guest!

Haj Amo : *(He puts the coin in his pocket and keeps aloof a little.)* By God! Well! I don't know what to say. You are not a good-looking man! And these are all your wordly-goods. Also your mother was a servant in Masolehei's house, till last year. Now, think about this. My wife visits with Masolehei's wife. They are very close. They go to Masoleh every year to breathe pure air. Well, What will they think of this!

Bolbol : I will marry your daughter quietly and take her to Rasht.

Haj Amo : Maybe you have a three floor building in Rasht!

Bolbol : If you allow...

Haj Amo : No! We can't marry my daughter off to a seller of roasted livers, man! My wife has a big tribe in Rasht. You know what kind of people they are! What will they say! "Was there a famine in human beings that Khanom² Sadat gave her daughter

2. Khanom means Mrs. But in this case it is a part of her name.

to a seller of roasted livers who works in front of the bridge of Pasikhan!"

Bolbol : *(Ashamed but still persistent.)* If you accept me as a bridegroom, I will give up this small shop for your sake.

Haj Amo : *(Allusively)* Perhaps you would like to open a cookie bakery!

Bolbol : No! I am thinking about something else.

Haj Amo : Like what?

Bolbol : Your house in Rasht is empty and ruined and dropping in price. Well, if you make a present of it for your girl, I will sell it and buy a shop. A bicycle repair shop! We can rent two small rooms. And this is the beginning. I think we can earn our bread. We will spread a little serenity on it and time will pass. What do you think? Come and take a leap in the dark! Decide! *(Haj Amo is uncertain. He sits on the couch and brings out his beads.)*

Bolbol : I opened this stall with three hundred Tomans. I put out one Toman by one Toman. Now I have three thousand Tomans. But unfortunately this is a village. *(He sits in front of Haj Amo, entreatingly.)* Your daughter's fortune is with me, dear Haj Amo. And my fortune is with that shop! *(Bemani enters. She is Bolbol's girl-friend. She is dressed in a floral chintz dress and has a pale scarf. She is a dark melancholic lanky girl. She has heard Bolbol's entreating words and because of that she is greatly upset. Haj Amo stands. He is ready to go.)*

Haj Amo : Good evening dear Bemani.

Bemani : Good evening dear Haj Amo.

Haj Amo : Dear girl, what are you doing here at this time of the night?

Bemani : I came to get some quince seed from Mashdi Agha.

Haj Amo : How is your mother? Is her leg better?

Bemani : No, she is a crippled woman, dear Haj Amo. She is stuck to the ground like a bobbin.

Haj Amo : When I went to Astaneh Ashrafiiah.³ I said prayers for your mother.

Bemani : Her chest is bad and she coughs all the time.

Haj Amo : This is the autumn, you know! *(He coughs.)* I have had a cold for a few days. *(He covers himself.)* Now then, I have a little medicine from an Egyptian mummy which is supposed to be good for bad legs! Come tomorrow to the shop. I will give it to you. I think it is very good for your mother's leg.

Bemani : Oh! May God bless you!

Haj Amo : It is foggy and my clothes have got wet.

Bolbol : *(He is tidying up at the counter, carelessly.)* There is something wrong about this fog. *(He goes with Haj Amo a few footsteps.)* It is up to you, dear Haj Amo.

Haj Amo : Give me time to think. Maybe I will speak with the women... God knows! *(Haj Amo goes out. Bemani is standing, disturbed. She looks to the right and left. Bolbol's face has become hard.)*

Bemani : I don't know what to do, now.

Bolbol : Didn't you want to go to Mashdi Agha's shop?

Bemani : Yes I do. Kocheik Khanom said seed quince is good for my mother.

Bolbol : Go! Mashdi Agha is going to close his shop!

Bemani : *(She changes the subject.)* Where is my brother, Mir Hossein?

Bolbol : He will come soon.

Bemani : I don't know what to do! My mother is like a child who has measles!

Bolbol : *(He takes the tray from couch.)* Do you want me to heat this up for you?

3. The name of a city, also a place of pilgrimage.

Bemani : I had some rice and fish⁴ in the morning but I ate nothing else till now!

Bolbol : There is half a loaf of bread. Do you want to eat it with these?

Bemani : *(Her look stays on the tray.)* No! I don't eat the left overs!

Bolbol : From the time you came here, I have felt suffocated! *(He goes to the counter coldly. Mashdi Agha with empty skewers in a tray, enters.)*

Mashdi Agha : Ah! What are you two flirting about?

Bolbol : I am not in a good mood Mashdi Agha!

Bemani : I came here to get some seed quince from you Mashdi.

Mashdi Agha : Allow me to say...*(He puts the tray on the counter.)*... We haven't any seed quince, at the moment!

Bemani : What about Kaflameh Ghoddomeh?⁵

Mashdi Agha : Allow me to say that we haven't that one, either!

Bemani : So, what do you have?

Mashdi Agha : We have jujube, chicory, sebestan and these kinds of things! *(Bemani sits on the couch helpless.)*

Bolbol : Do you have our account or not?

Mashdi Agha : I have. A pair tonight and a pair the night before last night. On your account, eight skewers, that's two Tomans. *(He brings some coins from his pocket.)* But it is wrong that...

Bolbol : What's wrong?

Mashdi Agha : As you know, I eat my food with lemonade. *(He throws the coins on the counter.)*

Bolbol : How many lemonades do I bring? Sometimes we haven't lemonade, you know!

4. This is what the people who live in the north of Iran usually eat.
 5. Pulverized peas mixed with sugar and spices.

Mashdi Agha : *(He points to the bottle of Lemonade which is half empty. Haj Amo's Lemonade.)* What about this one? First put this lemonade away, then tell a lie!

Bolbol : That was the last one, you know! Anyway, I don't give it free! I gave it at its price!

Mashdi Agha : You gave this Lemonade to Haj Amo free! Why do you deny it? Do you think I didn't see it from my shop?

Bolbol : Well, well, well! You are sitting there to spy on me!

Mashdi Agha : Every night you bring Haj Amo here and cook heart and kidney for him! You give him Lemonade and have a party, with him! And this is your kindness to me! Your neighbour! I want you to give me a pair of sheep testicles and a lemonade every other night! No more! But you don't! Yes, he is the friend and I am the stranger! *(He goes out offended. Bolbol grumbles.)*

Bolbol : Son of a bitch! He is dying just for these two Tomans!

Bemani : Why is Haj Amo coming here every night?

Bolbol : Nothing! On his way home, he comes here, stays a while and then goes! That's all!

Bemani : He said that he will talk to his wife?

Bolbol : Yes! It is about a shop!

Bemani : A bicycle repair shop!

Bolbol : Oh! I think you want to keep on at me!

Bemani : So, Haj Amo is the man who can resolve your difficulties!

Bolbol : What are you saying? I am not feeling well. *(He cleans the counter.)*

Bemani : No! Haj Amo is in his wife's pocket. First you must have her satisfaction!

Bolbol : In the name of God! I think you have a jinn inside you, tonight!

Bemani : A jinn? Do you think I was making suggestions to Haj Amo? Perhaps that was the jinn who entreated and said: " Your daughter's fortune is with me, dear Haj Amo!"

Bolbol : *(He puts his finger to his lips, panicking.)* Hush! Mashdi Agha is listening. He's hiding in the fog! Don't you know he is a gossip? Tomorrow he will disgrace me everywhere!

Bemani : What? *(She stands rebelliously.)* Do you want to shoot me and make a feast out of it? Tell me, what did I do wrong? Why? Because Ahteram has a trousseau and I haven't? Because Ahteram is a fat white lady and I am like turmeric and collect the dung? Because Haj Amo will give his house in Rasht to her and I have a straw hut which is falling on to our heads?

Bolbol : Damnation on the devil!

Bemani : I put my heart in front of you! But your eye was looking at me and your heart was for someone else! You are not to be trusted!

Bolbol : I don't know what to say?

Bemani : Oh, God! What do you want to say? What can you tell?

Bolbol : I told you not to shout! Can't you hear? Couldn't you see Mashdi Agha suspects and is loitering about? Let him go, then shout as loud as you want!

Bemani : *(Lower)* You are right! Nobody must know! You have respect!

Bolbol : I can't have a claim on Haj Amo's wealth. And anyway, who for? For a girl who is older than me?

Bemani : Oh! So, it is lady Mohtaram who has taken my place!

Bolbol : Unlucky girl. Her face is pitted with smallpox and she has just one eye, as well!

Bemani : And you pity her? And for God's sake, you went to do good! So, what about your whistling behind our fence? Did you forget that? Those afternoons you used to get Kasali's bicycle and follow me to the riverside road ? Those Hafta Bijar pickles? And those Kaskoli baskets? What about that day you gave me a violet and sat me in the lorry and took me to Rasht?

Bolbol : That's enough!

Bemani : When your hand was on my shoulder and we were coming from behind Pirsara mosque, what were you saying to me then? *(Tauntingly)* Are you becoming forgetful?

Bolbol : I said: "In the spring I will buy you a ring and a pair of bracelets and take you to my house!" Yes, I said! That's right! *(He threatens her with knife in his hand.)* But, unfortunately this is my business! Can you see it! I am in a bad fix, myself! Why must I have you here and add one difficulty to another?

Bemani : Yes! It doesn't work with this small stall! You must have a big shop! A bicycle repair shop! A big house! Who is Bemani? What use is she? *(She weeping.)* You have made me shamed! And now, you are saying something else!

Bolbol : *(Angry)* What did I do wrong? Did I sleep with you? I made a mistake and gave you a violet and took you for a walk. Now, at this time of the night, you come here and attack me for what? What do you want me to do? Do you want me to put my hand under the cleaver? Or maybe I must give you a present? Very well! *(He throws the knife into the shop and takes a bunch of bank notes from his money bag.)* Two fifty? Is it enough? *(He separates two notes.)* For everybody the hawk flies but for us the night owl! Come and take it and go! Don't stick to me like a leech! *(Mir Hossein comes. Bemani, without looking to him departs, weeping. Mir Hossein stays, astonished, looking after Bemani, then turns to Bolbol, looking at him, questioningly. Bolbol is frowning and puts the money in his bag. Then he squats and stretches out his hand. Mir Hossein goes and takes the bowl from the shop and comes and pours the water in Bolbol's hands, slowly and quietly. Mashdi Agha comes back.)*

Mashdi Agha : Mir Hossein, tell your sister, I looked again, we haven't those things! Neither seed quince nor Ghodomeh. Good night, I am going, man! *(He exits.)*

Bolbol : Today was a bad day for me. Did you see Kasali?

Mir Hossein : Yes. He said he will come soon.

Bolbol : In the morning come early. You must be in the slaughterhouse on time. I must go to the market to Asaf for fish! Haj Amo wants smoked fish!

Mir Hossein : So, what about Bemani?

Bolbol : Bemani? *(He pauses.)* Nothing!

Mir Hossein : Is that all?

Bolbol : Yes! Tell her to let me alone!

Mir Hossein : Do you want to desert her?

Bolbol : *(He dries his hands with a cloth.)* That's good! I have found another claimant!

Mir Hossein : She is shamed now!

Bolbol : I said what I had to say to her. Don't stir it!

Mir Hossein : But you had given your word to her! It's not fair!

Bolbol : *(Rash)* What word? What is fair? What are you talking about? Do you want me to take her to a mad-house and to starve her?

Mir Hossein : Think what her situation is, now!

Bolbol : She can still go to the rice field! She can knit gloves and socks and mats and brooms and those kind of things. Do you think I can't manage this small stall by myself? I said you are an idler and that it's better to bring you here, well, to help your mother and sister... But I think I was wrong!

Mir Hossein : *(For a moment, he looks at Bolbol, impudently.)* You are two-faced, Bolbol!

Bolbol : And I think you are talking too much! *(He takes the bowl from Mir Hossein's hand and throws it behind the counter.)* That's it! If you can't stand it, don't come here from tomorrow!

Mir Hossein : I won't come!

Bolbol : Don't come!

Mir Hossein : But I won't leave it at that!

Bolbol : *(He puts his hands on his waist.)* What the hell can you do, eh?

Mir Hossein : That's a matter between me and Haj Amo!

Bolbol : *(Suddenly, he goes to Mir Hossein and with all of his power slaps him.)* Don't! If Haj Amo suspected, I would kill you, here. *(He throws two coins on the ground.)* Take it and go. I don't want to see you here any more. Neither you, nor your sister! *(Mir Hossein who has put his hand to his face, stays for a moment, quiet and hurt. Silence. Tumult, and rising tumult. And then there is much scattered yelling from near and far. Kasali with the bicycle enters panting.)*

Kasali : Mir Hossein, Bolbol, run! run!

Bolbol : What's that? What's the matter? What is this yelling about?

Kasali : Bemani! Bemani!

Mir Hossein : Bemani what? What has happened?

Kasali : She threw herself into the river!

Mir Hossein : The river?

Kasali : It is dense fog! The water is carrying her away! Come! Come! *(Mir Hossein goes two footsteps and suddenly runs. Kasali goes behind him on the bicycle. Bolbol stays in the middle of the stage. He is amazed and staring in the tumult's direction.)*

Act 3

The Winter of Our City

Characters: Askandar

Bolbol

Mosyou

Pokhdoz

Aliof

Haji Nor

Winter. 1961. Rasht city. Pirsara, a quarter in Rasht city. A bicycle repair shop. The morning.

(Askandar with a black second-hand waistcoat and no shoes is pumping up a bicycle tyre. His expression shows he is disturbed. For a moment he stops the work. The pump falls from his hand. With agitation he goes to the door, on the right hand of the stage. He looks out from the window. Involuntarily, he moves to the money-till on the left hand of the stage. Suddenly he puts his hand on the drawer of the till. Shaking, he looks inside the till and disturbs the bank notes and coins, quickly. Then he takes the coin tray and looks under it. There is nothing there. Helpless, he looks into the till. His face is gloomy. Silence. There is an indistinct sound of two men walking outside the shop. Askandar puts back the tray and closes the drawer. He throws himself on the bicycle and pumps the tyre again. After a moment he stops and cleans the perspiration from his forehead with his hand. Bolbol enters. He has a jug in his hand and wears a winter jacket and leather shoes. He has a skin hat on his head. He puts the jug on the ground.)

Bolbol : Son of a bitch! I asked Shatghi for a little hot water. But it seems he is giving me gold! In front of Famararz and Asmal Chomagh, he made a face at me and said: "The samovar's water is for the teapot, Bolbol!" He wants to mock me! Why? Because I said: "I don't give bicycles, in instalments, to disreputable people like him!" *(He takes some hot water from the kettle which is on the heater.)* Did anybody come?

Askandar : No.

Bolbol : *(He squats and stretches out his hand.)* Water! *(Askandar pours the water on Bolbol's hand.)* Did you repair Ahmad Sigari's brake?

Askandar : I was pumping up the tyre.

Bolbol : From morning till now you were pumping up the tyre? May the evil eye be averted! *(He stands and dries his wet hands with a handkerchief.)* I don't like your work If you don't think about us, think about your family! Don't you want to earn bread for your family? I don't like this! You didn't repair that one, either! The guy will come and want his bicycle. *(Askandar puts down a bicycle.)* I don't know what has happened to you? For two or three days, you have been useless!

Askandar : My wife is ill, Bolbol Khan.¹

Bolbol : Well, that's not unusual!

Askandar : I am out of my mind!

Bolbol : So, you want money?

Askandar : *(He stops.)* The night before last I bought two loaves and went to my house. I saw my wife had put her hand on her side and was groaning!

Bolbol : This is winter, you know. Maybe she has got a cold!

Askandar : No! It is not a cold, Bolbol Khan.

Bolbol : *(He makes a cup of tea for himself, using a flask.)* Now, then! You carry on with your work and talk at the same time! Why are you feeling so hopeless?

Askandar : She said, when she was working in Gaskari's house, she carried a sack of rice up the steps and then, suddenly, her back twisted.

Bolbol : Well, of course! It weighed her down!

1. Here, Khan means something like Sir or Master.

Askandar : Yesterday, she was writhing on the ground for the whole day and I didn't know!

Bolbol : You had to do something, get medicine to help.

Askandar : I put her on my back and took her to the hospital, that night.

Bolbol : Do your work and talk as well!

Askandar : When the doctor saw her he said: "She needs an operation!"

Bolbol : Is that so?

Askandar : So I brought her home.

Bolbol : You brought her home?

Askandar : At the hospital, they wanted a deposit of five hundred Tomans for the operation.

Bolbol : Do your work!

Askandar : Again I put her on my back and took her to Puorsina.

Bolbol : You did right. From the beginning you should have gone to the government hospital!

Askandar : And there, the nurse said: "We have no empty bed and the operating theatre has a big waiting list!"

Bolbol : *(He throws away the leftover tea from the cup.)* Dreadful!

Askandar : *(He stands, worried.)* I don't know what to do, Bolbol Khan! She is in a bad condition. This morning I've given our child to the farrier's wife to look after, but without giving her any milk.

Bolbol : If you want, go home for a moment. It is near by. Come back soon. Otherwise, you can stop work for two or three days, if you think it is necessary.

Askandar : I don't know! I don't know what to do?

Bolbol : Come. *(He brings out a bank note.)* Put it in your pocket. You need it. Take it. We will account for it later!

Askandar : It is not enough for me, Bolbol Khan!

Bolbol : Well, as you want! (*He puts his money back in his pocket.*)

Askandar : (*He goes to Bolbol, helpless.*) Bolbol Khan! My wife is dying. My pockets are empty. If you could find five hundred for me... Please help me! (*He wants to kiss Bolbol's hands.*)

Bolbol : (*He brings back his hands with disgust.*) Why are you doing this? Five hundred! It's three months salary!

Askandar : I will pay!

Bolbol : And what will you eat during those three months?

Askandar : Take it from my salary in six months!

Bolbol : Are you sure that you can stay in one place for six months?

Askandar : I... I must! Today... Now... I must take her to hospital!

Bolbol : I know. You said that last night. And I said I haven't got the money! By God, I haven't! By the prophet I haven't! Can't you understand? Look! This is our day's cash in the till! By God, we are tantalizing ourselves! For one week, I have been trying to sell a Herkol to this mean Aliof. On! Off! Still, the sale is uncertain! What are you saying? Yes, I know. Your wife is ill. She must go to the hospital. You are in trouble. I know these things very well. But as you know, the shop is empty. It is bloody winter! Shit! There are no customers. Our business is to fix punctures and do repairs!

Askandar : (*Helpless, looking at the door.*) So, where must I go?

Bolbol : Now then! How much do you want, exactly?

Askandar : Five hundred Tomans.

Bolbol : Dreadful! Let me see. There is thirty in the till. (*He counts the notes out of the till.*) When I am telling you I haven't... Here are thirty. (*He puts two fingers into his inside breast pocket and brings out a folded bank note.*) Five.² (*He puts his hand in his jacket's right hand pocket.*) I am telling you I haven't, It means I haven't! This is my handkerchief. (*He puts his hand in his*

2. In the Persian text, Bolbol, as a market man, enunciates the numbers in an especial way, usually with mistakes. It shows us that he is an illiterate person, too.

jacket's left hand pocket.) Twenty! (He brings a few notes from his left hand trouser pocket.) And this is my knife! (He brings a note from his back trouser pocket.) And this is a ten! (From his hat's brim, he brings a few notes.) And this is a fifteen! Do you think I have the money and I don't give it to you, intentionally? (He takes his shoes and empties them on the table.) This is two. (He counts all the notes.) Ninety nine! That's all! All of our wealth! (He puts his hands up.) If you want, search me again!

Askandar : No! It is not enough for me!

Bolbol : So, wait a moment till Haji Nor's come.

Askandar : Haji Nor? When will he come?

Bolbol : He has gone to bring Aliof here. Maybe he can sort out our business. To sell a bicycle to Aliof would be a golden opportunity for us. But as you know Aliof is an unnatural man! We haggled a lot but when we were going to finish the deal he went back on a bargain and said he wants a Philips. Now, how can I find a Philips? In the whole of the Rasht city there is just one agency for Philips. And that's Mosyou Hartoon's agency. And he, the pimp, says he will bring a few Philips for us. But this is the tenth day that he hasn't done so! We entreat and he demurs. One night I even went mad and paid his bill, fifty Tomans, at the Agha Reza Mahtab cafe. But it seems that didn't help. *(He puts the notes in his pocket.)* Now, think about this! If Mosyou sell a bicycle to Aliof, it is like putting fire in our anus! *(He brings out a cigarette and beats it on his thumb nail and lights it.)* I don't know why Haji Nor doesn't come? I wish he could trick Aliof and bring him here somehow! Then I will stuff a Herkol up him! Have a look and tell me is Pokhdoz open?

Askandar : *(He looks through the window.)* Yes. He is ironing a pair of trousers.

Bolbol : If Haji Nor brought Aliof here, perhaps I would be prepared to give that money to you!

Askandar : How much is the price of this Herkol?

Bolbol : Don't think about its price. I will tell Haji Nor to give you the rest of the money.

Askandar : Haji Nor... But...

Bolbol : Be happy, if he does it! What are you thinking about? She is your wife, you know! She is dying. If I were you, I would have sold my carpet as well! Son of a bitch! They are wicked. First you must give them the five hundred and then they will ask what's the matter! *(He puts the cigarette in the corner of his lips and sits near a motorcycle.)* Give me the screwdriver! You have a look at that one. Put the valve in that racing bicycle as well. *(Askandar pushes the screwdriver box toward Bolbol. Bolbol takes a screwdriver and wants to work but there is the sound of a motor tricycle outside. The sound comes nearer and it stops in front of the shop. Bolbol stands and with curiosity goes to the door and looks out. Suddenly there is a wave of happiness in his face.)*

Bolbol : Mosyou Hartoon has brought them for us! Askandar go and help him. *(Askandar goes out. Bolbol clears the middle of the shop. Mosyou enters. He is a large Armenian man with a beret on his head. After him Askandar brings in three new bicycles, one by one, and puts them in the middle of the shop. A moment later, the sound of the motor tricycle goes away.)*

Mosyou : Hello, Bolbol! What are you doing³?

Bolbol : Hello, your excellency! Sir Hartoon Gharapyan! Hello your highness!

Mosyou : And here are three Philips.

Bolbol : May I be sacrificed in your place! You've brought light to my life!

Mosyou : Stand here and just look! Jet-black!

Bolbol : You've brought them, just look at them! Upon your life, I have not any new bicycles in my shop. But why just three?

Mosyou : So, how many did you expect?

Bolbol : You promised six!

3. In the Persian text, Mosyou, like an Englishman who tries to speak Persian, has a special accent and he also changes the words and the order of verb and noun etc. For the Iranian audience it is very funny and interesting.

Mosyou : Oh! It is clear that you are very ignorant! Philips? They are unobtainable!

Bolbol : What about motorcycles? Do you remember we were at the Agha Reza Mahtab cafe?

Mosyou : If you sell five in a month, I am with you. Do it!

Bolbol : May I put the gold in your mouth, come and sit, you are tired, my brother! Askandar, serve a first class cup of tea for our Hartoon. (*Askandar makes a cup of tea.*) And then go to the butcher. Look! If N'mat [the butcher] has the back bone, buy one kilogram to take to our home. Tell Mohtaram not to send lunch here. I shall go home at lunch time. You can go to your wife as well. (*He gives two bank notes to Askandar.*) Take ten quinces and some radishes and olives as well. Be quick! Look! Say to N'mat [the butcher] that Bolbol said: "May I put the gold in your fingers!" He knows what I mean! (*Askandar goes out. Mosyou is sitting behind the table and takes the cup of tea with pleasure. Pokhdoz enters. He is a thin man with a muffler round his neck and a military great coat on his shoulders. Grumbling he comes to the heater. He puts his feet beside it and bends himself over it to get warm.*)

Pokhdoz : I don't know what has happened to Askandar? Has he gone mad? He saw me but, ignorant boy, didn't take any notice of me... I am your obedient servant, Mosyou!

Mosyou : How are you Pokhdoz?

Pokhdoz : Not bad! We patch coats and trousers and that's all! It is a living, you know! Our oil is finished as well! (*He rubs his hands together.*) Did you mend my bicycle's puncture?

Bolbol : Today, our shop is strewn with flowers, have you seen them, Pokhdoz?

Pokhdoz : Well-done! You've brought the bride Mosyou!

Mosyou : The bride, but without the veil!

Pokhdoz : Are all three Philips?

Mosyou : So, what did you want?

Pokhdoz : Raleigh, Herkol, and so on! The shop's goods need variety.

Mosyou : *(He puts the cup of tea on the table with discomfort.)* Bolbol said Philips and I was helpful and brought them. What's your business here, anyway?

Bolbol : No, Pokhdoz! Hartoon is our ally! Everything he brought, any price he put on them that's all right! Upon your life Pokhdoz, we haven't had any argument with him!

Mosyou : A tree is known by its fruit.⁴

Bolbol : Dear friend! *(He laughs.)* Now, let's talk about the price.

Mosyou : Because you are our good friend Bolbol... *(He scratches his chin in pensive mood.)*... Well, what about seven hundred?

Pokhdoz : What God has willed! Are you selling antiques? This is the Pirsara quarter, you know! Do you know what is the meaning of the seven hundred, here?

Mosyou : *(To Pokhdoz)* Shut up!

Bolbol : Well, seven hundred is a large figure. Say something that we can pay.

Mosyou : That's all, Bolbol! It is fixed, by Hazrat Abbas.⁵

Pokhdoz : And the chain frame is bent, as well!

Mosyou : *(He stands impatient.)* Do you suggest these bicycles are worthless Pokhdoz?

Pokhdoz : Upon my life, upon your life, by this Ghableh⁶ I am telling the truth!

Mosyou : What a pity!

Pokhdoz : Look! It is broken, why are you angry!

Mosyou : Yes. It is broken! But it doesn't matter! Anybody may be damaged, somehow! Aren't you? I am damaged as well! Look!

4. In the Persian text it is: "The black or white anus will be known in the water!"

5. A sacred Imam of Shiite. And this Christian man swears by him!

6. Direction to which Moslems turn in praying.

(He shows the tear of his sleeve.) It caught in the motorcycle!
Anyway, it is none of your business!

Pokhdoz : No! He can't understand!

Bolbol : No! Upon your life Pokhdoz, Hartoon is our friend! Don't talk like that to him!

Mosyou : He talks nonsense! He doesn't know what he's talking about! I have the new Japanese made bicycle. Those are Philips as well. But they haven't the strength. After just one journey they will be ruined. Are you a child? Do you call these bicycles? These are Chieftain tanks, by Seyed Sajjad.⁷

Pokhdoz : Bolbol Khan, I think Mosyou is haggling! You give him five hundred. It doesn't matter that this one is damaged. And you don't act coyly, Mosyou! You know very well that nobody likes a broken bicycle!

Mosyou : If you don't want them, I will take them back! *(To Bolbol)* Where is your shop boy? Tell to him to get a lorry for me. I can't do business like this!

Bolbol : *(He puts his feet on a stool and brings out a bunch of big bank notes from his sock.)* Don't worry Hartoon. You said you are our friend. Take the money and finish it.

Mosyou : *(He takes the money and count it and gives it back to Bolbol.)* It is not enough, Bolbol!

Bolbol : I will put the rest on the table, Friday night, like that other time! Do you remember the wine and Caucasian kebab?

Mosyou : Well, what interest do I have in this business?

Bolbol : *(With happiness, he pats Mosyou's back.)* My dear man!

Pokhdoz : He is very clever!

Bolbol : Now then! And this is another five hundred, deposit, for the motorcycle... Do you understand? *(He brings a notebook and pencil from the drawer of the table and puts them on the table.)*

7. A sacred Imam of Shiite.

And give me a beautiful receipt and finish the business. Put the date on it. Please bring the motorcycles at the end of this week!

Mosyou : You can't sell these three!

Bolbol : For one or two months I shan't sell these motorcycles. Then I will tell you the secret!

Mosyou : You want to hoard them and double the price? What a clever man you are! What we can see of you is the tip of the iceberg, Bolbol!

Pokhdoz : And you are two of a pair, Mosyou!

Mosyou : Yes! Yes! (*Mosyou goes to the table and starts to write the receipt. Pokhdoz goes to Mosyou and guides his writing. Bolbol puts the rest of the money in his sock. Aliof and Haji Nor enter. Aliof has a big paper bag of fish in his hand. He is wearing light boots and has put a cowl on his head. His moustache and eyebrows are thick. Haji Nor looks like a retired blackmailer.*)

Aliof : Hello⁸... Hello... Mosyou!

Mosyou : Aliof! Hello! How are you?

Aliof : Hafaz⁹ says: "The lover is in the jug but we are looking around the world."

Mosyou : Well-done!

Bolbol : And this is the Philips! What more do you want Aliof?

Haji Nor : (*He makes a cup of tea for himself.*) We have finished the business, Bolbol. He has brought you a present, as well.

Aliof : I came to break the ice. (*He gives the paper bag of fish to Bolbol.*) Please take it.

Bolbol : Oh! Sim fish! Why have you brought this, my brother?

8. Aliof is speaking with a Turkish accent which is very funny for the Iranian audience.

9. Hafaz is a well-known Iranian poet. But Aliof reads the poem with mistakes. In fact, it is: "Water is in the jug but we are wandering thirsty. The lover is at home but we are looking around the world."

Pokhdoz : The tail of Sim fish is very tasty! You know! Especially with kebab and some garlic and a saucer of strained yoghurt! Eat and then go under Korsi.¹⁰ That's great!

Mosyou : *(He throws the pencil on the table. To Aliof)* You don't bring a present for us?¹¹

Aliof : What did you do for us? I wanted a bicycle from you. You said that you haven't got one. But you are selling them three by three!

Mosyou : I had just three bicycles at the bottom of the store!

Aliof : It doesn't matter. I want one!

Mosyou : Anyway, I have another one! But you must pump its tyres up!

Haji Nor : *(To Mosyou and Aliof)* What are you talking about?

Pokhdoz : *(Who was reading the receipt, slowly for Bolbol, with Bolbol's pointing goes toward Mosyou.)* Oh Mosyou, what a bad tear you have in your jacket!

Mosyou : Could you darn it?

Pokhdoz : Of course I can! Bolbol, I am going for a moment!

Mosyou : *(To Aliof)* Do you want the bicycle or not?

Aliof : Let me think about it!

Pokhdoz : *(To Mosyou)* Come with me Mosyou! *(Pokhdoz and Mosyou go out. Bolbol is sitting behind the table and playing with the notebook and money. Haji Nor is looking to Aliof , disappointed.)*

Haji Nor : Is this right? You made me sick for one week. You come and You go! You said you want Philips! Well, this is Philips! Why you want to buy from Mosyou?

Aliof : I didn't give you a document! I just want to buy a bicycle!

10. A square table covered with quilts and blankets with a brazier under it to heat the legs and body.

11. Mosyou and Aliof talk in the Turkish language. Bolbol can't understand it. Also the audience can't understand it and only guess what they are talking about.

Haji Nor : So, what about me? Did I sing you a lullaby? There you said yes! Now you say no! You brought three fish for Bolbol! I thought the business is finished!

Aliof : I didn't see any forced business!

Haji Nor : A curse upon the unreasonable!

Aliof : I just want a bicycle, I don't want to fight!

Haji Nor : Oh! You, good man, incomparably! Didn't you want Philips? There it is. You gave word! Bloody...

Aliof : Why do you swear Haji Nor? For a week you made me sick! And today, you've come to force me to buy a bicycle! (*He takes his cowl and pounds it on the ground, in anger.*) I don't want a bicycle! It is none of your business! Did you take a captive? (*He takes the cowl.*) Bastard!

Bolbol : Don't upset him Haji!

Haji Nor : I don't!

Bolbol : If he wants a bicycle, we present one to him. If not, he is still welcome. It doesn't need argument. (*He goes near Aliof and changes the subject.*) These days we are in winter and the fish market is bright! Isn't it? Why are you standing, my brother? Have a seat, please! (*Pokhdoz comes, grumbling.*)

Pokhdoz : The guy, Mosyou, he is a tormentor. I say: "Take your coat off and go and come back in the evening." He says: "No! I won't do it!" I say: "Mosyou, your coat needs a lot of work. It is not groundless, put it here, go and back!" No, I couldn't prevail upon him. I said: "Go, sir." Stupid man! He said: "If I take off my coat, I will catch cold!" I am saying he makes a mistakes. Did you put the pedal on my bicycle, Bolbol?

Bolbol : Let Askandar come, okay! (*With a gesture shows Aliof to Pokhdoz.*)

Pokhdoz : (*He sits near the heater.*) It is very cold! Our oil is finished, as well! (*He brings a cigarette and puts it to his lips. To Aliof*) It is a good bicycle, man! Very good!

Aliof : What are you saying, Pokhdoz?

Pokhdoz : I say why are you waiting? Buy the bicycle!

Haji Nor : He is not sure!

Pokhdoz : For a good business like this? No! Buy it!

Aliof : How much is the price?

Bolbol : The price is known, Aliof!

Pokhdoz : (*He stands up.*) Be sure there is no cheating in this shop!

Aliof : Mosyou has put aside a bicycle, like this, for me!

Bolbol : It is different. We buy wholesale!

Pokhdoz : Yes. Do you think Mosyou will sell you a bicycle at a wholesale price?

Haji Nor : Don't be a fool!

Aliof : Now, how much I have to pay, reasonably?

Bolbol : We have put on each one two hundred and ninety, by Hazrat Abbas!

Pokhdoz : This Philips is made in England, you know!

Aliof : Did I say it is made in India?

Pokhdoz : You are not well-informed, you know! Japan has made bicycles as well. Its trade mark is Philips, too. But it hasn't the strength. What do you think? I am telling you the truth. Last week the son of that glazier bought a new bicycle from Mosyou. Are you listening to me? Why don't you listen to me ? By my honour, when he made just one journey from Challeh Khaneh to the shop, do you know what happened to him? No! You don't! The bicycle bent like a piece of tin! why?

Haji Nor : Because it was made in Japan!

Pokhdoz : Are you awake, man! This is the situation. If you are not well-informed, don't say anything!

- Haji Nor : The bicycle that Mosyou wants to sell to you is not like this! Firstly, that's a tricky one!
- Pokhdoz : And secondly, it is lame! It is wounded! And you know about wounded things! If you buy it, you would be short changed! And you can't say that we didn't tell you!
- Haji Nor : Look at that nice bicycle!
- Pokhdoz : Look at these three bicycles? You don't know how Bolbol bought them from Mosyou! It was really a hard job! You know Mosyou, very well! Mosyou can cheat you easily! Are you a simple man?
- Haji Nor : Have a look into the street. You can see plenty of Raleighs, Herkols, Three Guns... But where are the Philips?
- Pokhdoz : Lift it, if you can! Do it if you can! It is a Chieftain tank, By Seyed Sajjad! I am saying this just for you, you know! If not you, somebody else will buy it. I am sure that they will come and take them. And the benefit will be for them!
- Haji Nor : One of them is Shapour. That modeller. Another one that little boy, the novice of Asmal Chomagh.
- Pokhdoz : I am telling you it is better to benefit a friend! Otherwise for what? Do you think I have the benefit out of it? I said you are a friend, a comfort, companion. It is unjust if Mosyou cheat you. Are you awake, man! Listen! These are priceless, you know! *(To finish)* Now, the cut price is two hundred and ninety! Pay it and say finish! Is it agreed?
- Haji Nor : Agreed?
- Pokhdoz : Agreed! Congratulations! Dear Bolbol, take the money, man! *(He goes to the heater.)*
- Aliof : *(Confused and defeated brings a number of bank notes from his small bag and gives them to Bolbol.)* I want that one, the second!
- Bolbol : *(He counts the money.)* Hell! It doesn't matter! You are our Aliof and we will do as you say. Take that one! Haji, help him.

If you brought the duck and Sardabi fish, tell us as well. Give the right to Haji Nor as well. He has worked hard!

Haji Nor : Ride! It is like a ship! *(Aliof takes the bicycle from Haji Nor. Haji Nor opens the door for him. Aliof puts a few coins in Haji Nor's hand. Aliof goes out of the shop with bicycle, bitten and burnt. Pokhdoz is quiet near the heater. He is crouching on the heater and napping. Haji Nor releases the door and looks at the coins. With the closing door, Pokhdoz moves slightly and starts napping, again.)*

Haji Nor : Shit! He gave me just one Toman! I can buy all of his wealth right now!

Bolbol : *(He gives a bank note to Haji Nor and puts another in Pokhdoz's pocket. This time Pokhdoz awakes and puffs his cigarette.)* To rob Peter to pay Paul¹²! I have no interest in this business! We must start, again! What are you saying Haji Nor?

Haji Nor : I am so tired, now. I want to go to Karim Farashteh and eat a bowl of beans, there. Then I will come back and bath and sleep till night.

Bolbol : What about you, Pokhdoz? Are you exhausted as well?

Pokhdoz : Yes. I talked a lot. I am not well. I am going out.

Bolbol : And this is our Pokhdoz!

Pokhdoz : *(He throws down his cigarette from his lips.)* I was thinking of going myself, but I see my feet don't like to go in this cold weather!

Bolbol : It is useless! This job is not good enough for us, as well!

Haji Nor : Have patience! Tonight I will go to Agha Reza. Yesterday Agha Reza said that he wants to buy a bicycle for himself.

Bolbol : That's not enough for me Haji! How much do you think remains for us?

Haji Nor : Today was a lucky day, Bolbol Khan!

12. In the Persian text it is: "We gave the dog and took the puppy."

Bolbol : Forget it! The guy has built a house just like that (*He snaps his fingers.*) for us just in three months and his interest is twenty thousand! (*Askandar comes, broken and shattered with dishevelled hair and his shoulders are wet with rain and snow. He stays in front of the door and looks at nobody.*)

Bolbol : Surprise, you are not late! Did you do the shopping?

Askandar : No. I went to my house.

Bolbol : You went where? You left my family without its daily bread and went to your own house?

Askandar : ...

Bolbol : I said go at lunch time, not now!

Askandar : ...

Bolbol : By God, you're a strange human being!

Pokhdoz : He was angry with me from the morning, as well! What has happened to you?

Bolbol : Nothing, man! He wants some money. (*To Haji Nor*) Do you have some to give him?

Haji Nor : How much does he want?

Bolbol : He wants five hundred for six months.

Haji Nor : Are you standing surety for him?

Bolbol : He has his identity card in my hand.

Haji Nor : I give five hundred for eight hundred!

Bolbol : Come and take it. You have fucked us off!

Askandar : I don't need it, now!

Bolbol : So, why have you talked my head off for these two days? Didn't you say that your wife... (*Askandar, quiet, sits. He puts his hand on his knees and his head in his hands. He becomes crumpled, sad and uncomfortable. Bolbol who has understood that there is something wrong, takes a screwdriver and sits near*

a motorcycle trying to turn the nuts and screws. Pokhdoz after napping, is looking through the glass of the door to the outside. He is astonished.)

Pokhdoz : A heavy snow is coming! Bloody cold!

Haji Nor : Bolbol, I am going to Karim Farashteh and I'll be back soon.
(He lifts up his coat collar and opens the door and goes out.)

Act 4

The Sun for Soliman

Characters: Bolbol

 Haji Nor

 Alias

 Hassan Jout¹

 Balajeh

 Two Policemen

 Soliman

 Mashallah

Spring. 1971. Rasht. Golsar, a newly constructed buildings complex. A construction office with a window at the front. Morning.

(Bolbol with a cap and a leather coat and smart trousers which are tucked into his shining boots, is sitting straight at the corner of the table and making a phone call.)

Bolbol : No... No... One policeman is enough. And that's just to make sure... Yes... He must come here and takes hold of a guy's ear and take him out... Okay... Two... *(He laughs.)* You are the flower of Rasht colonel, your excellency. Our Golsar is not good enough for you... What my dear? ... By chance there is one more tract left! Yes... Yes. That's the corner one... But unfortunately it is not in the plan this time. We'll make it next time... Okay... I'll look at the draft... No problem...*(He pushes the bell button.)* Just a little hurry, your excellency colonel... Thank you very much for your support.*(Without concentration he puts down the receiver. Haji Nor enters. He comes from left hand of the stage and goes near, well-mannered.)*

Haji Nor : What can I do for you, sir?

Bolbol : Did you bring the tea?

1. Jout means stammerer.

Haji Nor : I brought it, sir. Oh, there it is.

Bolbol : Very well, tell Alias to come.

Haji Nor : Hassan Jout wants to come as well.

Bolbol : Is he the cub of that son of a bitch, Soliman?

Haji Nor : Yes. He says he has something important to say.

Bolbol : Stay behind the door and don't let the others come through.
(Haji Nor goes out. Bolbol lights a cigarette and goes behind the table and sits on the chair. He takes the cup of tea. Alias and Hassan Jout enter and stand in front of Bolbol like guilty men. Alias wears galoshes and an old military hat on his head. Hassan Jout is without shoes and wears a second-hand waistcoat. Bolbol is looking at Alias and slowly tastes his cold tea.)

Bolbol : I said one person, you are two!

Hassan Jout : I... I... I am Soliman's son, m... m... master!

Bolbol : Oh, the seed of Soliman!

Hassan Jout : M... M... Master...

Bolbol : You haven't even got a tongue!

Alias : Your excellency engineer, Hassan Jout was cowering beside the lavatory door for the whole of last night!

Bolbol : Alias, you used to take your hat off in front of me!

Alias : *(He takes off his hat.)* Please show greatness and forgive Soliman for the sake of this poor child.

Bolbol : No! *(He puts down the cup of tea with gravity.)* It is true that Soliman empties shit but it was not an arrangement for him to eat shit! Now, he can eat shit in the lavatory, as much as he wants!

Alias : Soliman spoke a little harshly, that's right sir. But I swear by God he is not an evil man. He has made a mistake and that's

all. He has six dependants of which the biggest is this Hassan. Look at him, in the cold weather his foot has become like beet!

Bolbol : Oh, did you bring him here to bring out my tears?

Alias : I beg you if it is possible, please be merciful and give us the lavatory key.

Bolbol : The key is here. On the table. (*He stands up and pauses for a moment.*) But only a policeman may open the lavatory door!

Alias : But... Engineer, if there was an agreement to punish Soliman, he has been punished enough. He can't stand the cold, sir. Although it is the first day of spring, there was an icicle on our drain pipe this morning because of the cold.

Bolbol : You are on which side, Alias?

Alias : One person must make peace, sir!

Bolbol : Do you think he can say anything he likes? And then you come to make peace? Simple as that?

Hassan Jout : M... M... Master, what said my... my... my father? He said: "Eigh... Eigh... Eighteen Tomans i... i... is not enough e... e... even to buy bread!"

Bolbol : It doesn't matter what Soliman said, Jout. The important thing is he has incited the others. This is the matter, Alias. You can't make peace, either. (*Near the window he opens one of the slats of the venetian blind and looks outside.*) There! Forty miserable men have sat on the foundations of that house for what? They want to hold up my work? The sun is shining magnificently, but for more than two hours they have sat there and not moved. Whereas this sun is like the gold for me! (*He is walking slowly.*) I have contracted to build ten houses in six months. I even started one month early because we can't go on to the autumn. There will be rain. Because it is a contract and I must deliver the house in due time. (*To Alias*) Well, do these miserable men know these things and still sit there? It's not important for them! But even If I have to cut off my hand, I will refuse their wishes!

Alias : By God...

Bolbol : But I will build Golsar's houses.

Alias : The matter is not like that, sir!

Bolbol : These things are not new to us, Alias! Don't fence about with questions. I have eyes in the back of my head as well!

Alias : But your excellency engineer you must believe that Soliman is an unlucky man. He is reasonable, he is not one of the pickets. I mean there is a mistake here, sir!

Bolbol : No. *(He puts out his cigarette.)* There is no mistake here. I wanted proof and I found it.

Alias : Proof?

Bolbol : *(He brings a piece of rubble from the table drawer.)* Do you recognise this?

Alias : No. Should I ?

Bolbol : You really don't know? Very well! *(He pushes the bell button and waits while looking at Alias. Bolbol throws the stone in the air and catches it. Haji Nor arrives. Bolbol puts the piece of rubble in his palm and brings it forward.)*

Bolbol : Haji, where did you bring this rubble from?

Haji Nor : Mashallah gave it to me, sir.

Bolbol : What did Mashallah say to you about it?

Haji Nor : He said: "It was in the bend in the pipe."

Bolbol : This stone has cracks, why?

Haji Nor : Because it was hammered into the pipe.

Bolbol : Well! *(He puts the stone on the table and brings a water pipe - about half a metre- from the table drawer.)* What is this Haji?

Haji Nor : That's a pipe which is corroded by lime.

Bolbol : What will happen, if the pipe is corroded by lime? You say Jout!

Hassan Jout : Lime e... e... eats the pipe.

Bolbol : And the pipe decays. It cracks. Is that a fact?

Haji Nor : It is inevitable, sir.

Bolbol : So, a stammering labourer knows it. (*He puts the pipe on the table and brings a piece of sacking smeared with tar.*) Now, tell us what is this?

Haji Nor : It is a piece of sacking, sir.

Bolbol : What's the use of this sacking smeared with tar, Alias?

Alias : It is for putting under the pipe in order to stop water seeping onto the floor.

Bolbol : Where was it Haji?

Haji Nor : It was above the pipe, sir!

Bolbol : Above the pipe? (*He puts the sacking in the drawer.*) You go! (*Haji Nor goes. Bolbol looks to Alias distrustfully.*)

Bolbol : Three tricks in ten days! I can forget the sacking. The bricklayer was responsible for it. We got rid of him. But what about the stone? This pipe? (*He puts his hands in his trousers pockets haughtily.*) We thought the punishment of the bricklayer was a good lesson for the others. But, three days later, we saw that there was a stone inside the pipe. We kept quiet about it. We said: "It is just a phase and will pass soon". But they watched us and corroded the pipe, not more that a week later. And then Soliman's foolishness. And now they sit in a picket line in the sun and smoke cigarettes... Son of a bitch! Have they any conscience? You know me very well. There was a day that I put the skull-cap on my head and like a simple worker, I worked. Why? Because I don't want to postpone the people's work. So, they are making faces at who? Who is malicious? You?

Alias : ...

Bolbol : You are saying he is not in this picket. Very well. I admit it. But what about the others? They want to destroy my work!

Alias : ...

Bolbol : Maybe it is a mouse! A naughty mouse who has big teeth and wants to damage my houses. I don't clean the sin of all. Among these forty men there are a few upright men like you. You are a religious man. Because of that I want you to tell me the truth. Who is he? *(He stands in front of Alias, slowly and with emphasis talks.)* Tell me. It is on the tip of your tongue. Anything you say, will go no further, who is he?

Alias : Oh... How... Sir... I don't...

Bolbol : No, no! I mean if you are really worried for Soliman... *(He brings some money and puts it in Alias's pocket.)* You can save him. Will you? *(He takes the water pitcher and gives it to Hassan Jout.)* Shit, pour the water! *(He leans a little and Hassan Jout pours the water on his hands.)*

Alias : *(He puts the money on the table.)* I can't do it, sir.

Bolbol : *(Laughs)* I agree that the lavatory is not a good place. Especially when there is an icicle on the drain pipe. But I think, at least, it is better than the prison!

Hassan Jout : *(Frightened)* P... P... Prison?

Bolbol : Well... *(He looks at his watch.)* If we haven't this mouse in our trap within an hour, the stone, pipe and sacking will be on Soliman's record. *(To Alias)* You see, the record is a heavy record. Especially for someone who has six orphans!

Alias : But your excellency engineer...

Bolbol : Within an hour. Now go. *(Alias and Hassan Jout start to go.)* By the way! *(They come back.)* I will give the workers another opportunity. If they want to work like human beings, they will be here tonight to compensate for the wasted time. Otherwise I will stop their work today and bring another forty in tomorrow. Tell these things to them as well. *(He orders them to go with his hand. Alias and Hassan Jout go, heads down and humble.)*

Bolbol dries his hands with tissues. And then goes to the window and looks outside... Haji Nor comes.)

Haji Nor : I put the "No Entry" sign on the back of the door, sir.

Bolbol : What do you think Haji?

Haji Nor : I suspect two or three of them.

Bolbol : Is one of them that tall man?

Haji Nor : Yes. It is him, sir. Gholam.

Bolbol : Lizard!

Haji Nor : *(He goes to Bolbol)* Early in the morning he put his hands in his pockets and went to Jalal. They gabbled a while and then they went together over there, under the scaffolding and sat. After that Gholam went near Jalal and it seemed said something to him. Then both of them burst into laughter and I lay in waiting for them.

Bolbol : Well.

Haji Nor : A moment after, I saw that Kotah Pa had put his cigarette to his lips and was looking for the matches. He stayed a moment and looked around. Then he went to those two at once. After that those three started gabbling.

Bolbol : *(He turns to Haji, curious.)* Are you saying they are guilty?

Haji Nor : These three are allies, sir.

Bolbol : Well, it is not the proof for us. Why here? Why under scaffolding? They can do it in a coffee-house as well.

Haji Nor : They were planning, sir. You didn't allow me to say...

Bolbol : Very well, tell me.

Haji Nor : I saw that I couldn't understand what they are saying like that. I told Mashallah to go near the lavatory and look around. I, myself, closed the pantry door from inside and went to the corner window and spied on those three. When Mashallah went

near them, Jalal coughed and then stood and took the jug and went!

Bolbol : *(He walks, thoughtfully.)* Is Jalal that lame man that you said, Mashallah said... *(He can't remember.)* What did he say?

Haji Nor : It was about last night, sir. When we locked the lavatory door. Mashallah said that Jalal said in front of them all: "Why are they doing this to Soliman? What did he say wrong? He just said that eighteen Tomans is not enough even for to buy bread. If you go to the street, you can find three times as much."

Bolbol : Son of a bitch!

Haji Nor : And after that he said: "Because Friday is a holiday we want double wages." He was very angry!

Bolbol : Very well! Bit by bit it is coming together!

Haji Nor : *(He is near to the conclusion.)* I don't say that he was one thing or another. But, sir, about the pipe, one night when everybody had gone I took the lantern to have a look around. I saw Jalal coming limping, with his lame leg, from behind this house. He had a jug in his hand to show that he had been to the lavatory.

Bolbol : Well!

Haji Nor : In short, if you listen to me, the poison is between these three sir!

Bolbol : The problem is that these three are not simple workers. We can't find workers like them, easily. And they know it. They are technicians. They have skills. And they know it, too.

Haji Nor : They must be broken, sir.

Bolbol : Not all of them in one place. I have a contract Haji. We can't stop the work even for one hour.

Haji Nor : Anyway, What are we waiting for? One way or another. You must finish it.

Bolbol : Yes I will finish it within the next hour. If within an hour... *(Looking at his watch)*... -which is fifty four minutes now- the

mouse is not found, the police will come and... I will give Soliman to them with bound arms.

Haji Nor : But, sir, Soliman...

Bolbol : Yes... I know that this dying man is innocent. He has said something wrong and from last night till now he has licked his shit in the corner of that lavatory. Anyway, I push this dead body with all of my power, because I know these three won't allow Soliman to suffer. Out of sympathy they will come forward. One of them will come. This is useful for all of us! Me, Soliman, the others. *(In front of window)* Anyway, somebody must lance this poisonous boil! *(He stares at the outside.)* One of them who has thought about Soliman more than the others, will come forward. For instance that lame man, Jalal. *(Balajeh enters. He goes to the table, slowly and stays in front of it. He is a short man and has a strong face. Bolbol turns back. He looks to Balajeh for a moment and then goes behind the table sternly.)*

Bolbol : Don't you have fingers to knock at the door!

Haji Nor : Didn't you see the "No Entry" sign behind the door?

Bolbol : I think he is the one who has been hired instead of the bricklayer?

Haji Nor : That's right sir, Balajeh.

Bolbol : *(He sits and takes a folder from the drawer.)* See what he wants!

Haji Nor : Let's go to the pantry. Here we are an annoyance to his excellency engineer.

Balajeh : I won't waste his excellency engineer's time, too much!

Bolbol : You have come into my office without permission! What do you want?

Balajeh : Alias brought your message!

Bolbol : Well?

Balajeh : You wanted a mouse. I am that mouse!

Bolbol : *(He arises his head, amazed.)* You?

Balajeh : Yes I placed the stone. I corroded the pipe as well.

Bolbol : *(He stands involuntarily and leans forward with his hand on the table.)* So you were that naughty mouse who was eating my pipe!

Haji Nor : Can I bring the rope, sir?

Bolbol : Stay!

Haji Nor : Maybe he will run away, sir!

Bolbol : *(With a penetrating look at Balajeh and putting his hands behind his back.)* If he wanted to run away, he wouldn't come here in the first place.

Balajeh : I came here to get Soliman out from that lavatory. Let him have some blood in his hands and feet in the sun.

Bolbol : Are you serious? Are you worried about Soliman?

Balajeh : He needs sunlight, sir!

Bolbol : When you were putting that stone into the pipe, did you think about the sunlight for Soliman? *(He comes out from behind the table, haughtily.)* Didn't you think it would become obvious and somebody would pay for it! Now, we have flushed out the poison and it is finished. But I want to know why you did it? *(Near to Balajeh)* Why?

Haji Nor : Some people are naturally mean, sir.

Bolbol : *(He starts to walk behind Balajeh.)* I don't understand! Really I don't understand! It has become a riddle... I stooped to all of you as much as I could. I gave you everything I could. You said half an hour for lunch is not enough, I gave you an hour. You said the wooden scaffold is dangerous, I put up metal. You even wanted an advance -he is my witness- upon the life of my one child, I was moved with compassion. I said it is the feast night and it is not good for you to be ashamed in front of your

family. All of you are indebted to the cash office. You, yourself. You are one of them. Within these two weeks... *(Behind the table.)* How long is it you have been here?

Balajeh : Two weeks, I think.

Bolbol : How much advance did you receive?

Haji Nor : He has a debt of three hundred Tomans.

Bolbol : *(He turns over the pages of a folder and stops at a page.)* Yes. Naghi Sangari, known as Balajeh. Twenty four of Asfand² three hundred Tomans. Three days! Just after three days! You came on the twenty first and by the twenty fourth got the advance. What kindness is greater than that? *(Pause)* The twenty first? *(He looks at the folder.)* Which day did you come?

Balajeh : I can't remember the exact day.

Bolbol : The twenty first! *(He turns over the pages of the folder and pauses on another page.)* We sacked the bricklayer on the seventeenth. Three days after that, on the twentieth the stone came out of the pipe. And you were hired on the twenty first. *(As if he discovered a secret, he drums with his finger on the table and laughs with a feel of cleverness.)* It is impossible! How could you put the stone in the pipe before the twentieth When you started work on the twenty first! *(He close the folder with a rancorous laugh.)* No! You haven't played your role very well, Balajeh! You didn't put the stone in the pipe. And you didn't infect the pipe, either! So, my guess was right. You have come out of sympathy!

Haji Nor : Do you came out of sympathy, believer?

Bolbol : But why you? We were waiting for somebody else.

Haji Nor : He is a conspirator as well, sir.

Bolbol : Of course. *(He stares at Balajeh.)* But his crime starts from when he came to my office and wants to cheat us! And this, makes you accessory to the crime! But I won't hurt you! I'll sack you from now!

2. An Iranian month. March.

Balajeh : What about Soliman?

Bolbol : Nothing! (*He goes to Balajeh.*) By the way, because of your debt your identity card will remain in pledge here. Now , you can go!

Haji Nor : Go man! Go and don't stay here!

Balajeh : If I knew that leaving would help Soliman, I would go now!

Bolbol : Well you want to go with the hearse! Very well! (*He sits on a chair and puts his feet on the table.*) Haji Nor, where is Mashallah?

Haji Nor : He is keeping watch in front of the lavatory, sir, to keep the others away!

Balajeh : I don't know what generosity is, sir! But I know what Soliman's suffering is!

Bolbol : I know as well! It's hunger? Isn't it? (*He puts a cigarette in the corner of his lips.*) I didn't force you to work! If he is in pain, he must go to the hospital!

Balajeh : Where can he go? I can hang a plumb line and lay bricks, but what about Soliman?

Bolbol : You are talking too much!

Haji Nor : Don't talk too much, Balajeh! Leave!

Balajeh : (*He stays, strong.*) Do you know why Soliman has tied his head with a piece of cloth?

Haji Nor : Because he struck his head on a girder. So what?

Balajeh : Do you know that Soliman can't see things which are more than a few metres from him?

Haji Nor : This is a well sinker's disease, you know!

Balajeh : Yes. Because from having been too much in the bottom of the well, his eyes have cataracts.

Bolbol : If I had known that he was blind, I wouldn't have had him even hauling bricks.

Balajeh : That's right. And because of that he didn't tell you.

Bolbol : *(He stands, angry.)* I pay the money and I want the work. More than that is irrelevant. I didn't open a poor-house. If he can't work, he must go on the street and put a begging bowl in front of him. If he comes here, he must work.

Balajeh : He has been working for you more than two years, sir. Because of that all of this winter he has been working in a tomb and blood was coming from his anus. And you were in Tehran enjoying yourself for half of the winter!

Haji Nor : Don't talk nonsense. Are you a public prosecutor? He has come here without permission and dares talk to back!

Bolbol : *(With a sharp look at Balajeh)* Hush... Let him talk!

Haji Nor : He is talking irrelevancies, sir.

Bolbol : Talk!

Balajeh : And you saw his son Hassan Jout. He had an audience with you before me.

Bolbol : Well?

Balajeh : That boy used to go to school like the other children. Do you know why he has forgotten everything and come here to labour? Because Soliman has borrowed five hundred for eight hundred from this Haji Nor to solve his problem. Yes, he could sit on the street and put a begging bowl in front of him and beg. But he doesn't do it. He brings Hassan Jout from school here to pay his debt to Haji Nor. And then, this Haji Nor, on your orders, locked Soliman up in that lavatory for which he has dug the pit and laboured. Haji Nor thinks it is even not enough! He orders Mashallah to tie Soliman's hands and feet with rope and put him on the floor of the lavatory, in that cold! Why? Because he complained and said that eighteen Tomans is not enough even to buy bread! *(A knock at the door and two policemen enter and stand near the door with respect.)*

Policeman 1 : Mr, Engineer Pasikhani?

Bolbol : You are just in time gentlemen!

Policeman 1 : Is this the man, sir?

Bolbol : No, he is not here. *(He takes the key from the table.)* Be careful. We have watched him from last night till now. *(He gives the key to Policeman 1.)*

Policeman 1 : Mr, Engineer you can relax!

Bolbol : Haji Nor, you go with him as well.

Haji Nor : Very well, sir.

Bolbol : *(To Policeman 2) Please stay here! (Haji Nor and Policeman 1 go. Policeman 2, who has understood that there is something wrong in the office, has put his hand on his truncheon, watching Balajeh.)*

Bolbol : *(With a poisonous laugh puts his cigarette out. Balajeh has stood still.)* Tell me more, I am listening!

Balajeh : ...

Bolbol : You don't speak in front of this policeman!

Balajeh : ...

Bolbol : So, it is my right to press you. We show you courtesy and you give us back the stone and lime. But when a policeman comes, you shit in your trousers!

Balajeh : I don't want your bloody courtesy!

Bolbol : Do you hear sergeant?

Balajeh : You give us an hour for lunch and drinking a cup of tea. But on the other hand you put Mashallah to watch us and we can't even speak together till sunset!

Bolbol : Speak! Your words will be on the record!

Balajeh : What can I say more, sir? I have tried to be polite in front of a policeman. Especially in the presence of courteous people like

you who have given us metal scaffolding and spent a lot of money for it... With your permission... *(He takes the pitcher which is half full of water. He drinks all of the water at once!)* But we are not strangers, did you really worry for our hands and feet or were you thinking about something else! For instance, what will happen when a worker falls from that rotten scaffolding and breaks his foot? Because it happened in the first days! I think you can remember Mamtaghi!

Bolbol : I paid for his hospital costs.

Balajeh : You even gave him a pair of boots. *(He puts down the pitcher.)* But the incident is very bad for the workers, sir! You knew it. You knew what would happen if forty workers stared at Mamtaghi's foot! So you sat behind the table and found a good idea! The cash advance! After one or two days, there was the smell of the advance here!

Bolbol : You benefited from it as well, ungrateful!

Balajeh : I had no choice, sir. It was feast night and blood was coming from Soliman's anus. I have no family, as you know. So, I took this money... Well... I always look at the bottom of the water, sir! When I took the advance, do you know what I saw? Yes, with the advance the worker is in your grip! He must speak a little! He must come and go slowly! Yes you gave us an hour for the lunch time, but we must go home late at night, like ghosts! *(He looks at Bolbol for a moment.)* This much courtesy is for what, sir? Because you don't want anybody to see Mamtaghi's broken foot! Do you want to give these houses to their owner before the autumn for the people's sake? Or do you want to have the big money in your pocket? The money which is defiled with the blood of Soliman! *(Bolbol hits Balajeh's face. Balajeh and Bolbol look at each other hatefully. Policeman 2 puts his hand on Balajeh's chest and pushes him back slowly. There is a noise outside, then shouts and cries. Haji Nor and Policeman 1 bring in Soliman in a wheelbarrow and put the wheelbarrow in the middle of the stage. Soliman, tied up, in a sitting position is frozen dead. Bolbol like a dumb man who has had a bad dream, looks at Policeman 1, Haji Nor and then at the disaster.)*

Haji Nor : He has frozen to death in the lavatory, sir!

Bolbol : Undo the rope! *(To Balajeh)* You did your job, at last! *(To Policeman 2)* Put handcuffs on his wrists. *(To Policeman 1)* And you write what I am saying... *(Bolbol goes behind the table. Policeman 1 brings out a ball-point pen and a paper. Meanwhile Policemen 2 puts the handcuffs on Balajeh's hands. Haji Nor undoes the rope from Soliman's body. The noise from outside comes nearer and nearer and suddenly Mashallah who is a big man is thrown inside.)*

A Voice : I corroded the pipe!

A Voice : I put the stone in the pipe!

A Voice : I put the sacking under the pipe!

Bolbol : *(With a cry he jumps from his seat.)* Control them! *(Policemen with their truncheons in their hands are ready in front of the door. Bolbol has dialled a number on the telephone.)*

Bolbol : Your excellency colonel... yes... I am Pasikhani... Sir... *(He laughs.)* Yes... I saw that draft, we can take that corner track into this plan... Yes... Sir... Are you coming on Friday night?... Really? ... You can hear the noise?... Well, it doesn't matter... Just... Yes... Yes... If it is possible, please send more policemen ... Be quick... Just hurry your excellency colonel... I thank you! *(Bolbol puts down the receiver. Then he puts his hand in his heart. With a suffering face of pain, he claws his heart. And sinks slowly behind the table. The noise from outside is in highest point now.)*

Act 5

The Pause

Characters: Bolbol
Sa'id
Yahya
Mohtaram

Summer. 1978. Tehran. Farmaniieh, an area for rich people in the north of Tehran, next door to the Shah's palace. The guest hall of Bolbol's house. With an antique chair facing the audience. After a dinner party.

(Bolbol, in an evening dress, is standing in the corner by the window on the left. His bald-head is shining. He has a cup of a medicine [pussy willow syrup] in his hand and is looking at the garden. Sa'id, with summer trousers and shirt, is sitting on an armchair and reading a newspaper. About half of him is hidden behind the newspaper. Yahya, in a black second-hand waistcoat, without shoes, is collecting the rest of the food etc. When the sound of a car engine breaks the silence, a sweet smile appears on Bolbol's fat face. He brings up his cup, a gesture of farewell, and looks outside. Car goes. The dog's bark. And Bolbol has a kind look at the car which moves away on the garden drive.)

Bolbol : Without the glasses, she is exactly like Gogosh¹ the same eyes and eyebrows, the same size, colour and freshness!

Sa'id : Yes, she is a delicate girl!

Bolbol : Delicate, tiny but smart. Exactly like Gogosh...

Sa'id : You are talking about Gogosh as if you have seen her!

Bolbol : Yes. I have seen her. *(To Sa'id)* Two years ago. It was the summer of 1976. The same as now, on a Friday night, with the General and a number of friends. We had gone to Bakara.² That night I bought her French champagne and on the stage she tasted it and sang the song "Mountainside" in my name. She

1. A well-known singer during the Shah's time.

2. A well-known night club during the Shah's time.

was very delicate that night. With a black dress and silvery shawl. *(He drinks a gulp of his syrup and to the cup)* Do you know what I said to her? *(Laughs)* Well, that time I still used to drink and sometimes, you know... What a draft is coming from the window! *(He goes away from the window.)* Yahya, come and shut the window. In short this girl is very much the same, especially her eyes and eyebrows!

Sa'id : So, because of this likeness, you presented a flower to her!

Bolbol : The likeness and the differences! This girl, Soraiia has nobility, you know! *(He drinks another gulp.)* Ahanchi.³

Sa'id : Yes, this family is well-known even abroad.

Bolbol : And after all, you must swallow the fig when it is imported, otherwise the crow will do it!

Sa'id : Of course, your appetite is well-known in our family!

Bolbol : I was always the greedy one!

Sa'id : But to swallow a fig like that will upset your stomach!

Bolbol : You are talking too cleverly for me! *(He laughs.)* But you misunderstood me, dear Sa'id! It is true that you have inherited my brain, but I didn't see you use it even a little bit in your life... *(He brings up his left hand, heavily to his head.)* God's miracle! And this makes me worry about your future. In fact I am worrying about the fortune that I will leave to you! Yes, fifty two years old is too late even to have a daughter-in-law and to be a grand father!

Sa'id : *(Involuntarily, he brings out his head from behind the newspaper.)* What did you say?

Bolbol : Well, what must I do when this girl reads a poem in English and you become panicky and drop ice cream on your trousers? So I, instead of you, must get ahead and present a flower to her. Who? Me, who can't understand either the poem or English! Well, it is not my fault! When I was thirty years old, I got married and you are my only son, so, at the age of twenty

3. It is the family name of the girl, meaning ironmonger.

one I must put the lollipop in your mouth? *(He falls on the antique chair and takes a fresh breath.)* When a human being is young his hair is black and curly. But after that... No... Nobody likes a bald bridegroom. *(To Yahya who has collected the rest of food in a tray and is going out)* What was that that fell over, boy?

Yahya : *(He turns back and looks.)* The fruit knife, sir! *(He wants to take it.)*

Bolbol : Don't take it! When you come back, clean these shoe-prints with a rag. *(Yahya goes. Sa'id throws away the newspaper and stands up.)*

Sa'id : Now I understand why you asked me to come here!

Bolbol : You were away for three years! It is a long time!

Sa'id : I am here now!

Bolbol : But how ? You went to Greece for a week to drink mineral water! And now, you have come here with two bearded guys and want to entertain them!

Sa'id : These two were my best friends in America. They entertained me in their family, and they showed me Greece's ancient monuments.

Bolbol : Yes, I was in a hospital for a week and you were looking at the ancient monuments!

Sa'id : How could I know you were in the hospital? You didn't tell me.

Bolbol : *(With reproach)* Did you want me to say: "Quick, quick, I am dying!" You don't know even a phone call's protocol!

Sa'id : Any way, you are in good health and for two days I haven't moved from your side.

Bolbol : You are welcome, sir! You are decorated our Farmaniieh!

Sa'id : In fact, I didn't think that being here was important for you.

Bolbol : *(He puts his cup on a little table beside chair.)* Did you read the newspaper headlines?

Sa'id : No! I was looking for the seaside weather.

Bolbol : Where do you want to go? The coastal village or Masoleh?

Sa'id : It doesn't matter, really. Whatever is snuggest.

Bolbol : Perhaps you are going with your two friends!

Sa'id : I must take them somewhere!

Bolbol : The coastal village is more pleasant, though it is not as beautiful as Greece!

Sa'id : What were the headlines?

Bolbol : (*Sad and muttering*) The price of iron has gone up a Toman!

Sa'id : Not bad news, obviously!

Bolbol : Cement is unobtainable as well!

Sa'id : Your stores are full of iron and cement!

Bolbol : Qom is crowded, Sa'id! In Tabriz⁴ the market has been closed for three days. It will come here as well, if things carry on. Just a week ago, there was an assembly of the people in Dazashib, near our house! They had said it is Ramazan⁵ mourning. But only God knows what's behind the curtain. The police, instead of stopping them, are staying and looking on! (*He stands distressed.*) Meanwhile I am in the middle of building a town and I must use construction materials which cost the price of gold in this country! And I must give the completed town to the Ministry of Housing in the autumn. (*As he walks, he takes the knife from the ground.*) Yet, these things are not important! (*Mohtaram enters. She has a pock-marked face, with dark glasses and meek demeanour. She is old and infirm, more so than Bolbol.*)

Mohtaram : You two, why didn't you come downstairs to say goodbye?

Bolbol : (*He puts the knife on the small table.*) I have an excuse with these hands and feet.

4. An important city of Iran, the centre of Azarbaijan province.
 5. The holy month of fasting.

Mohtaram : I pointed to Sa'id!

Sa'id : I Didn't want to bother Mr Ahanchi!

Mohtaram : He was really kind to you!

Sa'id : I really have great respect for him, too!

Bolbol : Anyway, I think we had a good time tonight!

Sa'id : I thought your discussion is just about iron and cement!

Bolbol : Although we are drowned in iron and cement, we need emotion sometimes, dear son. Mohtaram, give me my stick.

Mohtaram : *(She gives the stick to Bolbol.)* After all, Soraiia showed off tonight! Did you see her? What a demure girl she was tonight!

Bolbol : With that poem which she read in English in front of those two Greeks and with that prize which I gave to her, If I were her, I would be demure of course!

Mohtaram : So, she upset the tray and the ice cream went all over the floor! But when she stayed beside Sa'id, I saw what a good pair they are! As our Sa'id is shy and tongue-tied, Soraiia is graceful and sociable. She is a rich and clever girl!

Bolbol : Tiny but smart! She is well-shaped as well!

Mohtaram : *(She is looking at Sa'id, sagely.)* In short, she can tidy up Sa'id very well!

Sa'id : That's interesting! My family learning is increasing!

Bolbol : What did you say?

Sa'id : I don't know what plan you have for me! But as I know, I must tell you something. I am to return next week!

Bolbol : *(In the perplexed)* Did you hear that Mohtaram? He arrived yesterday and returns next week! *(Shouting)* Yahya! *(To Mohtaram)* Maybe the girl has imagined that our dear Sa'id Khan has come to Iran because of her love! Perhaps she thinks that he is crazy over her eyes! But she doesn't know that... *(Yahya comes with a rag to clean the floor. Bolbol brings up*

two fingers, the sign for a cigarette. Yahya takes a small golden statue from a small table and goes forward and opens the lid. Bolbol takes a cigar from it.)

- Bolbol : You want to return for what? As a matter of fact, what are you doing there? Writing a letter is a hard job for you! Isn't it? Just with a five minute phone call each week, I can't understand your situation there! I haven't even got a sense of your daily life! (*Yahya strikes a light for him.*) What was that that fell, boy?
- Yahya : The fruit knife, sir. (*He takes the knife and puts it on the round small table.*)
- Mohtaram : Taj⁶ you musn't smoke cigars. Didn't the doctor say so?
- Bolbol : He makes me angry!
- Mohtaram : I must hide this lighter somewhere. Give it to me. (*She takes the lighter from Yahya and goes out through the right hand door. A phone rings in the adjoining room.*)
- Bolbol : You return next week! (*Calling to the adjoining room loudly*) I am not here! (*To Sa'id*) I didn't spend so much money, to make you stubborn!
- Sa'id : What do you think I am doing with the little money you send me in a city like Chicago? Am I buying lottery tickets? Or perhaps I am giving aid to the student union!
- Bolbol : (*He becomes fiery.*) I don't know these things. I've sent you to become a specialist and have manners! And after that to come back to your homeland. I've sent you to become a heart specialist so that when you come back, you will be good -not for me- but people who if they had -like me- a heart attack, wouldn't have to bring the doctor from Belgium! (*He puts his hand on the chair and shakes his body like a rich man.*) And this is just for us! We have money. We have wealth. We can give thirty thousand Tomans to a surgeon just to take out Roshanak's fibrosis from her womb, and after that we drink cold water and say: Charity! But what about the others? The

6. Bolbol's surname in this act, means crown.

middle class? *(He beats Yahya's bottom with the stick. Yahya is cleaning footprints from the carpet.)* Like this Yahya who hadn't your luck to be educated in a rich family. The poor and beggars who have fallen into the city over these years, move everywhere like lice!

Sa'id : What must I do, now? I must mourn for them!

Bolbol : I gave five million Tomans to the university of Gilan's project for what? Don't say anything. Because when you come back, you can have a chair there and teach with the honour and reverence due to my dignity.

Sa'id : What if I don't want to teach at the University of Gilan?

Bolbol : You can't do any another job!

Sa'id : Because I don't flatter! I can't defraud or cheat someone!

Bolbol : And more than that because you are so stupid and fragile!

Sa'id : You've made me, sir! And because of this I don't want to come back to Iran!

Bolbol : If you don't want what I want *(with the stick, he beats Sa'id's shoulder.)*, you can't even leave this house, dear son!

Sa'id : Even if my study is incomplete?

Bolbol : Even if you would open a stall in the street!

Sa'id : When the lice move everywhere in this city, yes, I must open a stall as well!

Bolbol : *(With reproof)* Sa'id, they are not lice!

Sa'id : You, yourself used the word!

Bolbol : I said it! But you have no right to say it! *(He points to Yahya.)* These are not lice. These are toilers. *(He takes Sa'id's belt and drags Sa'id to himself.)* I am telling you this because you must know I've toiled but I am not a louse. *(He releases Sa'id.)* Do you know me? I snatched the contract to build Evin town⁷ from

7. An area in the north of Tehran.

a Dutch company! Do you know me? Me, who have settled here, manage a slaughterhouse, a pasteurized milk factory, three passenger services and a silk spinning factory and created with these hands and feet! Do you know me? The money changers think I have a hundred million deposited in a Swiss bank! The jewellers spread word everywhere that the biggest diamond of Iran is buried under a tree in my house! Do you know me? Me, Engineer Mas'od Taj, the well-known contractor and capitalist! Every minute three hundred Tomans enter in my account! And then, when I had a heart attack, do you know what I was doing at the building? No! No, of course you don't know! But I was working there! To die there was a glory for me! Because I was in working clothes and you must learn something from this! (*Mohtaram comes in from the right hand door.*)

Bolbol : Who was calling?

Mohtaram : It was Mrs Ahanchi. They have reached home and they rang to thank us for tonight's hospitality!

Bolbol : Oh... A sharp pain has started from my big toe. The pain is coming to the back of my head.

Mohtaram : You should take care of your blood pressure, Taj. (*She snatches the cigar from Bolbol's lips and puts it in the ash tray.*) What is your diet for? The cooked food, weak tea, cheese without salt... Don't you know that cigar is increasing your blood pressure?

Bolbol : Something else is increasing my blood pressure, Mohtaram!

Mohtaram : Why don't you leave speaking about this until tomorrow?

Bolbol : Tomorrow is the day he departs for the coastal village!

Mohtaram : The day after that, next week, next year, I don't know!

Bolbol : The next week, he goes back. The next year is too late!

Mohtaram : I don't know what is the meaning of all these words? Dear Sa'id if you are tired, go and take a rest my darling!

Bolbol : (*He knocks the stick to the ground.*) Stay in your place!

- Sa'id : *(He stays.)* I want to go to the garden and walk for a short time!
(Silence. Rain hits the glass of the window.)
- Mohtaram : It is raining.
- Sa'id : I think my friends are still sleeping downstairs.
- Bolbol : *(He walks slowly.)* I will be brief. I have here a safe-deposit which is the proof of my last twenty five years. You know this, Mohtaram. All of my life is in this safe- deposit. Plus you, Sa'id and Roshanak. But there is a secret which I am going to reveal to you tonight! *(He pauses.)* Someone who has mummified twenty five years of his life and kept it in a safe-deposit and sleeps beside this mummy, he definitely has a sharp nose. And I, with this same nose, have smelled bad smells! From myself and from the world! From myself because it is my second heart attack. Although the result of this is that I am half paralysed, a third attack will send me directly into the next world!
- Mohtaram : I don't like listening to this! *(With reproach)* After three years, your son has come to be with us for a few days. Is this the time to say such things?
- Bolbol : But the world is restless Mohtaram. Happy are you who have a scarf on your head and know nothing. But when the dollar becomes agitated, when Ahanchi buys all iron coming to the country at the customs, when I can't lean on my car and go to the party-meeting without fear of terrorists, these are bad signs! And I, like a horse who before the earthquake feels it under his feet and neighs confused, have heard the cracking voice!
- Mohtaram : What will happen next? What do you think?
- Bolbol : I don't know, but one thing is clear. If the situation changed, *(to Sa'id)* you can't carry on your study, inevitably. All of us will become extinct!
- Mohtaram : *(Worried)* So, are you saying we are in trouble?
- Bolbol : Trouble? *(He brings a letter from his pocket and gives it to Sa'id.)* Read it!

Bolbol : Now the workers of Evin town have become professors!

Mohtaram : Well, what are they saying?

Bolbol : That same old disease, more wages!

Mohtaram : This is not new. It has always been the same!

Bolbol : This time they have put a five days deadline on it!

Mohtaram : A deadline?

Bolbol : If I don't accept it, they will stop work. And leave my town as a skeleton!

Mohtaram : (*Fearful*) Taj, don't make trouble for yourself.

Bolbol : They make trouble for me, Mohtaram.

Mohtaram : But if there was some more wages for them...

Bolbol : Do you think that is the problem?

Mohtaram : Are you saying the wages...

Bolbol : Always it starts with the wages.

Mohtaram : But you must do something at least!

Bolbol : The country is turning upside down! What can I do? When the law was on my side, I ruined these sons of bitches! But today even the government is unstable! The slogans come out of the lavatories and have gone on to the street walls and doors! They scatter the night bulletins, here and there! They put bombs in the night clubs. I went to hospital and they put a letter on my table! (*He takes the letter from Sa'id.*) Yes, and the result is this! The night when the first group came from the mosque, they were just forty of them! If they had been struck two slaps on the nape of their neck on the same night, things would not be as sticky as it is now! Stay, the situation will get worse! The country will become a blood bath!

Sa'id : Mr Ahanchi said that he wants to change his capital into foreign currency and send it abroad.

- Sa'id : Mr Ahanchi said that he wants to change his capital into foreign currency and send it abroad.
- Bolbol : In this city, the distinguished and respectable men, the grandees and nobles are collecting their things to escape! The plague! There is the smell of the plague everywhere!
- Sa'id : Why don't you leave like the others?
- Boblol : No, I don't leave this country. I'd rather put an aquarium here and watch the fish reproduce than move from this country! I am not like the others wishing to live like a prince. I will stay and ruin these workers!
- Sa'id : But if something happened, your situation-
- Bolbol : -Which situation? I like my home land!
- Mohtaram : I think you are daydreaming, Taj! This illness has distressed you. And you have to take twenty drops from this medicine. *(She brings out a small glass and puts the drops into the syrup.)*
- Bolbol : When I got out of the hospital and saw this desperate situation, I held a meeting with my legal adviser and we wrote a will and put it in the safe-deposit. Yahya, bring my jug and basin!
- Yahya : Yes sir. *(He goes out and Bolbol paces, heavily.)*
- Bolbol : For instance the villas, with their nice cosy feel, I think will appeal to Sa'id. The house for Mohtaram. I will sell the passenger services and pasteurized milk factory and with the rest of the money that I have which I have in my bank account, I will open an account in Switzerland for all of you. The slaughterhouse remains for me. And I will give the silk spinning factory which is the biggest centre for silk production in Gilan, to your wife, Soraiia!
- Mohtaram : Oh Taj, when were you thinking about this and why didn't I know ?
- Bolbol : And I must present this carpet to the local mosque.⁸ You are quiet!

8. Bolbol pronounces some words mistakenly, such as Mosque, Key, Belgium, Project...

Sa'id : You have thought of everything! What can I say?

Bolbol : With this marriage your future is secure, son!

Sa'id : My future?

Bolbol : Yes, your future. But remember, we have to learn from the past!

Sa'id : What is the use of the past?

Bolbol : The past is a lesson for the future.

Sa'id : Do you know I need ten more years more to become a specialist?

Bolbol : I know! And you must go with Soraiia!

Sa'id : Why?

Mohtaram : No objection! We are not talking about two or three years! You need somebody!

Sa'id : I can't! I can't...

Bolbol : Very well! That's enough! Think about these for a few days, and then tell me yes or no! I have made every thing clear. *(Yahya brings a jug and basin and towel and puts them beside the chair.)*

Bolbol : *(To Mohtaram) Give the villa key to Sa'id. (Bolbol sits on the antique chair, slowly and dictatorially. And with this action, he signals Sa'id and Mohtaram to leave. Sa'id and Mohtaram go out. Yahya comes with a small chest. He puts it on the small table and goes back two footsteps and stands in front of Bolbol. Bolbol hangs the stick on the chair's arm, tired.)*

Bolbol : Oh Yahya, are you here again like every night? But tonight is a special night in the life of both of us. You must remember tonight. Because I took the final decision for everyone. And now, just you are left. But I am not so uncharitable as to forget you. For many years you have been my companion. You have no family. You had a cow which was stolen. Your poor sister killed herself. Your wife died in the morning of her life. Your

poor father was frozen in the corner of the lavatory. It seems you had a baby as well.

Yahya : ...

Bolbol : *(He opens the small chest's lid and brings from it a cashmere bag.)* You passed only closed doors, Yahya. You didn't enjoy your life. But I am not an uncharitable person, you know. I know what the meaning of unhappiness is. Open the window. *(Yahya opens the window.)* I want to hear the rain. I want to be kind. Are you barefooted?

Yahya : I am used to it, sir.

Bolbol : You can start now! *(Yahya turns the light on and immediately a deep red light comes onto the stage. Then Yahya comes and kneels down at Bolbol's feet. He takes a bag full of diamonds from Bolbol's socks and gives them to Bolbol. Bolbol plays with the diamonds, amorously.)*

Bolbol : I have a smallholding in the Pasikhan area. I have not seen it for ages. It must be a forest now. But if an afflicted man like you would work on it, grow onions and tomatoes and so on, I will give you the money to buy a cow as well... Be careful! *(Meanwhile Yahya takes a big shining piece of diamond from inside Bolbol's sock and gives it to him, with two hands. Then he puts Bolbol's feet on the basin and starts washing them. Bolbol has taken the big diamond between his two fingers and stares at it in the red light, greedily.)*

Bolbol : Or, if you didn't want it, go to Rasht city. At Pirsara, you can buy a shop. You can cut ten or twenty sets of livers everyday, oh how tasty they are! But there is a condition Yahya...

Yahya : I don't want go from your presence, sir.

Bolbol : Well done! I knew you'd say this. You are a good person! Rub my feet boy!... No, I don't send these diamonds abroad! If only it was possible to make a rosary out of these diamonds! These diamonds are so soft just like tear drops! Do you hear Yahya? What a sad voice this rain has! It reminds me of night. A rainy night. A foggy garden and a cedar tree whose roots stood out of the ground. And we used to sit on those washed roots and drink

wine from the bottle! The smell of violets... I remember it well. I do not forget. Yahya... You showed me your gratitude. I value it. You, Mohtaram, (*The dog barks outside.*) Even Roshanak. And that's my loyal dog. Always, it comes to me and smells my shoes... Oh what a fine coolness... What was that that fell?

Yahya : It is the fruit knife, sir. (*He takes the knife.*)

Bolbol : These diamonds are lovely. They warm me to the heart! Especially this one!(*He puts his feet on the towel.*) I can smell it boy! Dry my feet... (*He smells the diamond and closes his eyes with pleasure.*) Oh, such a scent! Can you see it Yahya? It is red like a drop of blood! (*He turns to Yahya who is standing without moving and holds the knife in his hand.*) Why you are astonished? Dry my feet! (*Because of Yahya's fixed look, he shakes and pulls himself back.*) Go away! I said go away! What are you doing? (*He hides the diamonds in his hands, afraid.*) No, don't do that! I will give them to you. These... Yours... Take it... (*He stands involuntary. The diamonds pour from his leg to the ground. And then as his torn eyes are staring at Yahya, his hand goes toward the stick with a tremor, but suddenly with convulsion he bends and puts his closed hand on his heart. And humbly at his throat:*) Syrup... A drop of syrup... (*He stretches his hand toward the cup on the table. The big diamond falls from his hand.*) Save... Me... Yahya... (*Bolbol falls on the chair. And the drowned voices, imploring, come out of his throat. Yahya, quietly and without moving, stands and stares at Bolbol. The latest resistance, the latest convulsion... Bolbol, little by little, becomes quiet and with sigh dies.*)

Bolbol : Stars! (*The knife falls from Yahya's hand. Little by little his back becomes straight. Then with tall body, he goes to the window soft and firm. And there, he stays for a moment and takes a deep breath in the clean air of night. The rain.*)

The end. Tehran 1982.



Akbar Radi

مرکز سراسری آذین
دانشگاه علامه طباطبائی

سازمان تبلیغات اسلامی

پهلوانان

اکبرزادی

کاورخوان

هادی مرزبان

بازنگران به ترتیب: حروف الفبا :
 حسین افشار آتش تقی پور، صدرالدین حجازی، نازی حسینی، سرور رجستانی
 علی زامهر، عزت‌الله رمضانی فر، اکبرسنگی، هومن سهرابی، غلامرضا طباطبائی
 محمد عمرانی، اکبر قدیمی، فردوس کاویانی، سیروس کرجستانی، خلیل موسوی
 آسمان نظیری، مهدی ونوفی

اجرای مجدد از ۱۰ تیرماه ۶۳، عید فطر در شهر قمشهر (سالن اصلی) تلفن ۵-۶۶۰۵۹۲

شروع ساعت ۱۵ بعد از ظهر

شنبه ها تعطیل است

The Steps's poster

THE TALE OF THE CONCRETE CITY

Commentary

Playwright

Abdolhay Shammassi, a young talented playwright of the modern Iranian theatre, was born in Shiraz in 1954. When he was 13, his father - a businessman interested in gnosticism - died at the age of 54, after a long term illness, and his mother¹ became guardian to him and his brother and two sisters. They went to Tehran and Shammassi finished high school and the Faculty of Dramatic Arts with a B.A in dramatic literature. In 1980 Shammassi started to work in *Hozeh Honary Sazman Tablighat Islami (Arts Unit of the Islamic Propaganda Organisation)*. In 1981, he became a teacher in High school. In 1982 he worked as a member of a committee to make the new arts textbook for Iranian primary and middle schools.² In 1985, he was employed as a member of the *Farabi* Foundation which is a centre for supervising film-making activity in Iran, affiliated to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

In 1986, Shammassi became supervisor of the board of control and assistant manager of the Centre of Dramatic Arts which is the body responsible for theatre activity in Iran, affiliated to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

In 1987, he returned to High school teaching. In 1988, he worked on an independent publication, and in 1989 joined the Centre of the Revolutionary Music, affiliated to the Ministry of Culture, as the editor of *The Music Quarterly*.

In 1990, he came back to the Centre of Dramatic Arts as the assistant manager of the Theatre Office which is the headquarters of professional theatre artists.

Shammassi has published 8 books for children and young adults :-

-*Ghorbagheh Sabz (The Green Frog)*. Fiction. 1980.

Two little frogs, beside a brook, think how the water got to the mountain and how it comes down. They follow the brook and at last one of them goes into the sea.

-*Kakoly Parandeh Ashagh (Kakoly the Lover Bird)*. Fiction. 1983.

A boy, called 'Adel, finds a little wounded bird. He puts medicine on it and makes the bird well. 'Adel and the bird escape to the mountain and in a tempest they reach the top and go beyond to a peaceful sea.

-*Awai Bolbol (The Nightingale's Voice)*. Fiction. 1985.

At the middle of night, people hear a nightingale's voice and try to find it.

-*Mehmani Gonjeshkha (The Sparrow's Party)*. Fiction. 1986.

-*Namayashnameh Nawisi Ba Zaban Sadeh*. A textbook on playwriting. 1988.

-*Roze Mosabehghah (The Competition Day)*. Fiction. 1990.

-*Hezomshakan wa Mard Jawan (The Woodcutter and the Young Man)*. Fiction. 1991.

-*Otoyeh Shakasteh (The Broken Iron)*. Short plays. 1991.

Shammassi has two books for adults :-

-*Shash Tablow (The Six Tableau)*. Short stories. 1981.

A collection of six short stories generally about human problems and people in trouble.

-*Nashan Akhar (The Last Mark)*. Short stories. 1984.

And his plays :-

-*Gharardad 1919 (The 1919 Agreement)*. Play. 1989.

A play about the agreement between England and Wosoghaldoleh the prime minister of Ahmad Shah, the last Shah of Ghajar dynasty, in 1919.

-*Khoshehayh Khakestari (The Grey Clusters)*. Play. 1986. A young man, in order to get to his work on time, goes to an old watch-maker who is friend of his father. The watch-maker's watches are broken, rusty and without hands. In this play Shammassi explores real and false time, showing people who are lost and without identity living in false time and looking for real time. This play was selected as the best play in *Fajr* National Theatre Festival and student Theatre Festival in 1986.

-*Bazgasht Lokomotiveran (The Return of the Train Driver)*. Play. 1987.

A retired train driver comes back to his home but nobody knows him and even his home is occupied by an old monster and is ruined. The train driver thinks he was gone for two or three days but his neighbours think he has not come home for thirty years. Shammassi mixes imagination and reality in his plays and shows how people become strangers to their own lives. This play was applauded as the best play in the Student Theatre Festival in 1990.

-*Hekayat Shahre Sangi (The Tale of the Concrete City)*. Two plays. 1990.

The second play of this collection is called *Gohar Penhan (The hidden Jewel)*. In a ruined house a man has hidden his jewels in a box under the ground. The landlord, who wants to rebuild the house, and an architect discover the man's secret and decide to steal the box. But before taking the box, they fight each other to death. A traveller finds the box and takes the jewels and puts some ordinary stones in it. While the traveller gives the jewels to a baby as a gift, the man returns and finds his box and is pleased, but he fails to look inside it. Essentially this is intended as a moral tale about the sin of greed.

Context of *The Tale of the Concrete City*

Synopsis

A concrete city is going to be destroyed. A cacophonous machine, brought in to dig out waste matter, destroys the foundation of the city and the buildings collapse as a result. In a civil engineering office a draftsman is seeking a remedy and trying to find a place to design a green park. His colleague, a surveyor, loses a little spring from his tachometer and is looking for it all the time. The noise of the machine stops and the draftsman and surveyor think that the driver is dead. A young man enters. They think he is the driver. But he is not. The young man has lost his way home. The draftsman finds the young man's address from a map and the machine starts work again. The strange young man goes and again the machine stops and a smelly blind man enters. He is the machine's driver. Suddenly a young woman with her baby comes. She is looking for her husband who has not come home and for a safe place for her baby. The blind man tells her that a person who is in charge will come soon. The young woman with her baby exits. Again the young man comes but the draftsman wants him to go to find his wife. An ugly lame old woman who turns out to be the cause of these difficulties comes. At the end the city has completely vanished and the surveyor, who has found his spring, goes with the blind man and old woman to a new place. The draftsman who is not obeying the old woman any more, stays in the city where there is the voice of the young woman who is looking for a saviour.

Background

Shammassi, a sensitive and irritable artist, resigned or was discharged from nine different jobs since 1980. This plus the problems and difficulties of his country, such as the war with Iraq, etc, have created a deep sense of disillusionment in his work.

The world of lies, fear and foolishness, the cold and lifeless situations and the filthy, wicked characters in his plays have roots in Shammassi's experiences in his society. He wrote *The Tale of the Concrete City* in 1989. This was the year in which Imam Khomeini died, a year after he " had drunk a poison cup " (his explanation of peace

with Iraq in 1988), the most disappointing year in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Shammassi's concrete city is a city that people have filled with waste matter and in order to be released from waste matter, they have destroyed the foundations of the city. So, the city will collapse and there is no way for the people but to drown in their waste matter or to escape. In this city the people have lost their human identity. There is no place either for a green park or for love, and one has to close one's eyes and ears, otherwise one will be buried in the sewage.

Themes

Shammassi's main idea in his plays is to show lost and unidentified people who are captive in their absurd lives. He says that if people contaminated the city, they have fallen into their own mess. In his concrete city "leaving shit means having life" and "you can count the number of heads by their shit" and in fact the filth has become a virtue. In this kind of city there is a blind man who always obeys the satanic powers to destroy the city. But why? Where is this city? Because "The earth couldn't hold that much waste matter and we must pay for it, we must atone for our sin". Where is the place of intellectuals in this city? They are either obedient like the surveyor or accepting death like the draftsman.

The people? They are lost like the young man, looking for a saviour like the young woman, or running away from this city like the others.

Characterisation

Shammassi in his plays has created three different sorts of characters. The first are those who have an identity crisis. They are lost, wandering, disturbed, living in a truthless world and like puppets in the hands of the evil powers (the surveyor, the blind man and the young man). The second are those who think and question and make decisions at the end of the play. They choose humanity and they offer a ray of hope (the draftsman, the young woman). The third are those who are wicked, evil and dirty. They abuse people for their own satisfaction (the old woman). All these characters grow and change during the time of the play. They have no names and no specific identities.

Shammassi's plays are not realistic psychological exploitations. The events are dreamlike rather than real. In *The Tale of the Concrete City* from the beginning the draftsman feels something:

Draftsman : I have a bad feeling. What's going to happen at last ?

But the surveyor does not like to hear that:

Surveyor : I think you are daydreaming.

Both of them have problems:

Draftsman : My problem is that whenever I try to design a green park, I can't.

But the problem of the surveyor is different. All the time he is moving about on all fours, like a dog, in order to find the little useless spring from his tachometer. When the problem of the city with its waste matter comes up the surveyor explains everything away:

Surveyor : The important thing is to keep the city clean .

The draftsman is aware of the situation:

Draftsman : It is important for me to know where I am standing. I wouldn't like to stay at a place which is hollow underneath.

But for the surveyor it does not matter :

Surveyor : I have to do my duty anyway, what will happen next does not concern me.

The draftsman lives in a limbo of the conscientious and the conscienceless, doubt and certainty, selfishness and philanthropy, almost amphoteric, looking for a "green park". But the surveyor has a dogmatic conservative logic and is a follower of the status quo. He has an aggressive appearance but his position is vulnerable. Careless of everything happening around him, he spends his time looking for his little spring.

Language

Shammassi uses simple and plain language in his plays. His dialogues and monologues are short and straightforward without any literary pretensions. Despite its simplicity, the language sometimes has a particular meaning. For instance, the draftsman says:

When there is no window in a place, it must be dark.

...Something dreadful is lurking behind this silence... Maybe the roar of an explosion.

I wouldn't like to stay at a place which is hollow underneath.

These dialogues, more than telling the story line, have some other meanings such as referring to the political situation and to the condition of countries under totalitarian regimes.

The dialogue illustrates the misunderstanding between the characters . They can't understand each other's words. *The Tale of the Concrete City* starts in this

manner. It seems the draftsman and the surveyor are strangers and each one lives in his own world. As the play goes on this strangeness increases. Shammassi tries to show that the words are not necessarily a good means of communication. Language creates misunderstanding rather than understanding.

Style

Shammassi's plays are full of symbols. In *The Tale of the Concrete City*, the spring is the symbol of the self-centred nature of the surveyor. The green park represents deliverance. The waste matter is the symbol of corruption. The young woman and her baby stand for love and fertility. The young man is symbolic of the lost people. The blind man is the perpetrator of evil.

Beyond the symbolism, the concrete city and its corrupt situation, its destruction and the manner in which the characters are drawn, gives the play the quality of an expressionist painting.

Shammassi, as evidenced in this play is a pessimistic playwright. In the whole of the play there is just one optimistic moment. When the young woman is trying to find a safe place for herself and her baby, the blind man says "there is just one place".

Draftsman : Where is it ?

Blind Man : I don't know. But I couldn't destroy the foundation of that place with all of my power.

They do not know where that safe place is. In fact there are a lot of illogical points in this play. For example, the coming and going of the young man. When he exits the draftsman thinks " It was a dream ", "I am beginning to suspect everything, even our existence " etc.

Shammassi freely uses symbolism, expressionism and absurdism in his play, without being bound by a specific style.

Performances

The Tale of the Concrete City, written by a playwright from the generation of the revolution, was published by *Namayesh* publication of Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in 1990. The play was staged at the Charso (the minor-house of the Tatr Shahr) in November and December 1990. The names of the cast of this production were as follows:

Director : Parwaneh Mojdeh (female)

Actors : Bahram Abrahimi (the surveyor)

Ali Gohari (the draftsman)

Bahador Abrahimi (the boy)

Farhad Sharifi (the young man)

Ahmad Kawiean (the blind man)

Actresses: Mina Saremi (the young woman)

Mehri Mehrinica (the old woman)

The difference between the manuscript text and the performance was in the ending of the play. The text ends with the collapse of the buildings and darkness. But the performance had an extra scene and a happy ending:

The stage lights up again with the sound of a spring and a child laughing and the sun rising. The young woman and the draftsman are on the stage. The young woman says that her son is near the spring. The draftsman says that he can design a green park now.

Although this end was a positive and hopeful scene from the viewpoint of politics, most of the critics called it a bungled scene, an example of the self-censorship.

When I asked the playwright about this extra scene, he said that the director was very afraid of the first ending. She thought putting this ending onto the stage could be very problematic from the political point of view. So, they wrote a positive scene for the end of the play, together. But after the performances he deeply regretted adding this scene.

This play is not ostensibly referring to a particular country or a particular historical period and the message is suggested as being international. So, the audience can take it as it wishes. Talking about a city which is going to be destroyed, buildings which collapse, and people who are lost and have no hope and no saviour, may have some political overtones. A hopeless ending makes the situation more risky for the playwright and the performers. But a hopeful ending offers a promising future to the audience and puts the play in a safer context.

Parwaneh Mojdeh, the director of the play, is an educated woman with a Ph.D from England and 27 years teaching in the university. The style of her production was absurdist and it included a Devil and some satanic dancing. After the revolution, the theatre was the only place where the dancers could dance. In the programmes, posters and criticism, dance was called "Rhythmic Movement" and the dancers called "Enforcers of the Rhythmic Movement".

The designers of the Rhythmic Movement of this play were:

Nader Rajabpour

Farzaneh Kaboli (female)

And the Enforcers of the Rhythmic Movement :

Nader Rajabpour

Farhad Sharifi

Mohammad Hossein Parvin

Seyed Hamed 'Aghili

Seros Hammati

Mohssen Hatami

Criticism

The audience of *The Tale of the Concrete City* showed different reactions. Some of them admired the play. Some of them called it an imitation of western theatre and a few protested about it and tried to break up the show - because they thought there is not any direct message supporting the revolution in the play. The media had different reaction, too. In order to become familiar with the writer's aims and clarify the subject, *Sorosh*³ - a weekly magazine - had an interview with Shammassi about the play. Selected parts of the interview are as follows:

Q : The draftsman and the surveyor as the main characters of the play are present all the time. What do you think about them?

Shammassi : In this time when truth is hidden behind the concrete houses, they can be any one. From the beginning the draftsman tries to create a green park whereas the earth is decaying from inside.

Q : Is this earth the symbol of our earth?

Shammassi : The meaning of this earth is that it is the place of today's human being who is trying to destroy its foundations.

Q : What is the meaning of the waste matter?

Shammassi : In this play the waste matter is the symbol of the negative corruption that humans create. We've called it corruption. Prostitution, lies, robbery, hypocrisy etc. Unfortunately they are overcoming us. Corruption has many faces and clothes. In this time the true relationships disappear day by day.

Q : What do you mean by relationships?

Shammassi : It means to respect others not for their position but because they are human.

Q : But *The Tale of the Concrete City* is not like that?

Shammassi : The draftsman and the surveyor try to do that sometimes. But because of the hardship of the situation they can't. For example when the bulldozer stops, they feel sorry for the driver as a human being. However, their feelings become funny and absurd.

Q : Why do these two become funny and absurd?

Shammassi : Because we don't know where we are standing and what is our destination. In these dialogues there is either fear or absurdity. In fact there is a kind of uncoordination because everything is in the wrong place.

Q : What about the young man ? He has lost his way home...

Shammassi : The young man who has lost his way home doesn't know that his house is buried under the waste matter. He doesn't know that he has lost his human identity. In this situation everything is possible. There is no truth. By the way, to be lost for the young man is a big human tragedy.

Q : The blind man is the symbol of what? And from where does he come?

Shammassi : He comes from a world of darkness. The world which has not even a small hole to the light. He is the symbol of a blind wicked force which we employ to destroy humanity. In fact we used him to keep our offences secret.

Q : In the end an old woman comes. Is she the symbol of Judgment Day?

Shammassi : Exactly. Also, this subject is in the holy books in different ways. This witch is the symbol of the faithless world.

Q : As the writer what do you think about the play as a whole?

Shammassi : This play is my belief. Basically, I didn't write it with a specific story. With a thought, with a belief, this play was written.

Q : But why is it that some people could not understand your play or your message?

Shammassi : Maybe this comment will offend somebody, but I think this play is like a mirror that has shown some dark, deserted angles of life and some people do not like this.

Q : What do you think about the style of the play?

Shammassi : Some critics have called it symbolism, some said it is expressionism and some examined it as an absurd play. But it is not important for me to accept or refuse them. For me the important thing is that, for the time being, I see the people and their relationships in these terms.

Clearly, the play has two sides. The first side is, the simple story of a concrete city full of waste matter. The second relates to the meaning hidden behind the story. Shammassi's objective in this interview is the justification of these meanings. The danger is if the audience compares the play with the political situation of the country. So, in this interview, for instance, the old woman is examined as a symbol of Judgment Day and a faithless world but not a particular figure. The play as a whole is a pessimistic play reflecting the playwright's mood and society's situation in 1989, as I have described it above. In the interview Shammassi says that some people do not like to see the dark and deserted angles of life, but prostitution, lies, robbery, hypocrisy etc are in front of our eyes and surrounding us. In this situation how can one be optimistic? However, the play with its happy ending goes onto the stage and its qualities, message and problems make it a good and intriguing example of post-revolutionary Iranian theatre dealing delicately with political realities.

1. Shammassi has dedicated *The Tale of the Concrete City* to his devoted mother .
2. These textbooks have changed again and again .
3. *Sorosh*, No 547, Saturday February 9, 1991 .

THE TALE OF THE CONCRETE CITY

By: Abdolhay Shammassi

Characters :
Draftsman

Surveyor

Blind Man

Young Man

Young Woman

Old Woman

(Night. The cold, misty moonlight shows the background of a dry, unproductive, endless salt desert. At one side of the stage there is a civil engineering office with some drawing and surveying instruments, including a surveying tripod, a drawing table and many rolled up plans. At the other side of the stage there are two beds, two chests of drawers, two armchairs, a stove and some dishes.)

Draftsman : Hell... Bloody hell... You've upset me.

Surveyor : What a nuisance! This damned thing is out of order ! Hey... Come and hold the screw for me, I want to fix the spring.

Draftsman : Shut up you bastard!

Surveyor : *(Protesting)* Did I say something wrong?

Draftsman : You? No!

Surveyor : But I said something and you said shut up!

Draftsman : *(Doing his work, slowly.)* I didn't mean you!

Surveyor : *(He looks around.)* There is nobody here but us. Is there?

Draftsman : Yes, there is... This bloody noise which seems to be endless. It makes me mad.

Surveyor : Just don't listen to it. Bit by bit you will get used to it.

Draftsman : I am beginning to be frightened of it.

Surveyor : I said to you, don't pay attention to it.

Draftsman : It is impossible!

Surveyor : You have no other choice.

Draftsman : The noise is closer to us, tonight...

Surveyor : Is it? I didn't notice it.

Draftsman : Why didn't you notice it?

Surveyor : I was doing my work. I was busy. Do the same, you'll find it helps. Do you understand? Now come here and help me fix the spring.

Draftsman : *(He goes toward Surveyor.)* But I pretend. It's not there.

Surveyor : Just like that. Now , come and help me.

Draftsman : Very well... May be you are right. I will try my best.

(Draftsman goes to his work and tries to work. But with the noise he can't. He crumples up a drawing paper and throws it to the bin.)

Draftsman : I can't... I can't work with this noise.

Surveyor : *(Putting the tachometer down, miserable.)* I can't... I can't repair it.

Draftsman : Because of the noise?

Surveyor : *(He picks up the tachometer again.)* What?

Draftsman : Nothing... *(He gets up and comes to the centre of the stage. He is upset. After a pause.)* I am uneasy...

Surveyor : Take it easy. Busy yourself with your work.

Draftsman : I can't... I don't feel like working. I have a bad feeling.

Surveyor : What ? A bad feeling?

Draftsman : I have... I have a bad feeling ... What's going to happen, at last? What do you think?

Surveyor : I must repair it. We have too much work to do tomorrow.

Draftsman : I feel danger.

Surveyor : Danger?

Draftsman : Yes...*(He looks around carefully and gets near Surveyor.)* We must take care of ourselves.

Surveyor : I think you are daydreaming ... Ah ... it's escaped.

Draftsman : Escaped? What?

Surveyor : *(He puts the tachometer down and begins to crawl about on all fours.)* I wasn't concentrating... It jumped out of my hand. Now, how can I find such a little spring?

Draftsman : You should have been more careful.

Surveyor : I was. But the screw was not fixed properly. *(He is moving on all fours looking for the spring.)* If I can't find it...

Draftsman : Where do you think it is?

Surveyor : I don't know...

Draftsman : I think it's close.

Surveyor : I know, that's why I am looking for it here.

Draftsman : For what?

Surveyor : It's obvious, for the spring.

Draftsman : But I wasn't talking about the spring.

Surveyor : So, what do you think I am looking for?

Draftsman : The bulldozer... It must be so near.

Surveyor : *(He puts his ear on the floor.)* That's right. It seems it is just underneath us.

Draftsman : *(He sits behind his drawing table.)* That's why it sounds so loud.

Surveyor : *(He is looking for the spring on all fours, again.)* It should be somewhere here.

Draftsman : I think so. Have you ever seen it?

Surveyor : Do you think I am a blind? It was in my hand just now.

Draftsman : Why do you mock me?

Surveyor : I was answering your question.

Draftsman : *(He concentrates on a drawing.)* If I could make it...

Surveyor : It is impossible. It will come up , when it wishes.

Draftsman : But it has to...

Surveyor : It won't come up , unless it destroy the foundations of the city, completely.

Draftsman : I have nothing to do with it. My problem is that whenever I try to design a green park, I can't.

Surveyor : *(He is moving about on all fours.)* Where is it?

Draftsman : Haven't you found it yet?

Surveyor : No.

Draftsman : Neither have I. I wish I could see it. As yet we can only hear it. It is so strange!

Surveyor : Why is it strange?

Draftsman : I don't know really. But it is strange that a man is trying to destroy the foundations of the city with his bulldozer. *(He crumples up his drawing paper and throws it to the bin.)* No... No... I can't. There isn't even an inch of land left for the green park.

Surveyor : But it needs a green park.

Draftsman : I can't do anything about it. I think the measurement is wrong.

Surveyor : Are you telling me that I have made a mistake?

Draftsman : Maybe...

Surveyor : Are you serious?

Draftsman : Yes.

Draftsman : Because you think you never make mistakes, you always make a mistake.

Surveyor : What the hell do you want of me now?

Draftsman : Nothing. There is enough noise here, just don't start shouting.

Surveyor : *(Gently)* You don't like loud noise?

Draftsman : No! It takes my head off!

Surveyor : Me too.

Draftsman : No... It makes no difference to you.

Surveyor : It does . But I just don't care.

Draftsman : *(He is tearing up another plan.)* Oh, I can't do it. It's because of this noise.

Surveyor : Don't worry about it.

Draftsman : I can't help it. Especially when this horrible noise is the ground emptying away underneath me.

Surveyor : The city needs sewers , you know.

Draftsman : I don't care. It is driving me mad.

Surveyor : Sewers are needed for waste matter.

Draftsman : To live on the top of them! Is this what you mean?

Surveyor : There is no choice, otherwise the city will be buried under the sewage.

Draftsman : In this way the only thing which remains of man is their waste matter, either on or under the ground, what is the difference?

Surveyor : I think, there is a big difference. The important thing is to keep the city clean.

Draftsman : The important think is a human being and what remains!

Surveyor : What about you, yourself?

Draftsman : Me?

Surveyor : Yes, you, don't you leave shit?

Draftsman : Well...

Surveyor : I do it too. Only dead people don't leave waste matter. Leaving shit means having life.

Draftsman : Oh...

Surveyor : You will have to accept it.

Draftsman : *(He draws a few lines.)* No. It is not right. *(He crumples up his drawing paper and throws it to the bin.)* I must find some other way.

Surveyor : For what?

Draftsman : To design a green park.

Surveyor : What about the waste matter?

Draftsman : The waste matter?

Surveyor : Yes. *(He picks up the tachometer and puts it down again carefully.)* The amount of shit everybody leaves is the measure of his life.

Draftsman : So what?

Surveyor : I mean the longer you live, the more shit you leave! That way you can tell a person's age by the amount of shit they've left.

Draftsman : *(He puts another drawing paper on the table.)* I must do it, this time.

Surveyor : *(He is on all fours, opposite the audience, turns his face to the audience.)* In fact, you can count the number of heads in a city, by their shit.

Draftsman : *(He writes out the paper on the table.)* There is no room left. The earth has a finite capacity, you know. *(The horrible collapsing sound of a building rolls over the stage. Draftsman and Surveyor take shelter in the corner of the stage. The noise of bulldozer is heard, still.)*

Draftsman : What was that?

Surveyor : What was that?

Draftsman : I think something collapsed.

Surveyor : Where?

Draftsman : *(He looks down at the floor, horrified.)* Oh.. Here... Beneath the floor!

Surveyor : No, it is impossible!

Draftsman : But yes. I think... The sewer's roof... It fell in...

Surveyor : But... Why is the bulldozer still going? It is. Isn't it?

Draftsman : We must dig him out somehow.

Surveyor : Nobody can, now. The accident has happened. We don't know how to get there, either.

Draftsman : It is all for the people's waste matter.*(He lies down on the floor with his ear on the surface.)* No. There is nothing but this damn noise of the machine.

Surveyor : I've found it, at last! Right here!

Draftsman : *(He gets up horribly.)* What?

Surveyor : *(He is holding up the spring.)* I will never let it escape again.

Draftsman : *(He sits on his chair behind the table feebly.)* What do you think is going on under the ground, now?

Surveyor : *(He starts repairing his tachometer.)* Where?

Draftsman : Under the ground. I asked you what's going on under here?

Surveyor : *(He is trying to fix the spring.)* Just a minute...

Draftsman : I think all the bad smells of the world came together there.

Surveyor : Ah...

Draftsman : Are you disgusted?

Surveyor : No... I am getting angry with it.

Draftsman : To me it is nauseous.

Surveyor : This bloody spring is killing me. I don't know why it won't fix?

Draftsman : Can I help you?

Surveyor : No, I can manage.

Draftsman : As you wish. I thought you might need help.

Surveyor : No, just be quiet and let me do my work.

Draftsman : Am I a burden on you?

Surveyor : No, but when you speak, it distracts my attention.

Draftsman : Take it easy.

Surveyor : I don't believe it!

Draftsman : What happened?

Surveyor : It's escaped again ! It is your fault!

Draftsman : My fault?

Surveyor : *(He is looking for the spring on all fours.)* Yes. You talk too much.

Draftsman : I am horrified.

Surveyor : What the hell can I do for you? If you want, come and look for the spring.

Draftsman : *(He starts drawing.)* No... Everything is mixed up... By the way...

Surveyor : What?

Draftsman : The bulldozer is still going under the ground.

Surveyor : I can hear it.

Draftsman : So the man in the bulldozer must be alive.

Surveyor : *(He is pointing to the ground.)* Yes... I think he must be somewhere under here.

Draftsman : *(He leaves his drawing board and sits down on the floor. He finds the spring and after playing with it, throws it away and then he puts his ear on the floor and pauses for a moment.)* Don't move. I think I heard something. He is moving.

Surveyor : Don't worry about him , he is all right.

Draftsman : What if he's not? Maybe he is injured and the machine is working by itself?

Surveyor : It doesn't matter.

Draftsman : Yes, it does! It is very important. Maybe he is dead.

Draftsman : So where did the collapsing sound come from?

Surveyor : I think it was not too far.

Draftsman : But we have to know where it was.

Surveyor : That's just what we need! We will have to find it now, and rebuild it tomorrow.

Draftsman : Now?

Surveyor : When then?

Draftsman : Wait until tomorrow. Everywhere is dark now.

Surveyor : Yes, we can't see in this darkness.

Draftsman : I wish the sound would stop by morning somehow.

Surveyor : We have no other choice. You must accept that the bulldozer guarantees our comfort.

Draftsman : Comfort?

Surveyor : If it stops working, we will all be sunk in our sewage. Because of this sound the city is clean. *(The noise of the bulldozer stops.)*

Draftsman : Ah... It's stopped. I am free at last!

Surveyor : What? Has it stopped?

Draftsman : Now, I can get down to my work in complete peace of mind.

Surveyor : *(Disillusioned)* He must have stopped to have a rest.

Draftsman : How do you think he can see in the dark?

Surveyor : You are right, it must be too dark there.

Draftsman : When there is no window in a place, it must be dark.

Surveyor : So he must be very sharp-eyed.

Draftsman : Is it possible? What a strange guy!

Surveyor : I think it is impossible to work underground with ordinary eyes.

Draftsman : I'd love to meet him.

Surveyor : So would I. But how can we find him?

Draftsman : He is under here, isn't he?

Surveyor : Yes.

Draftsman : So let's call him.*(Stamping on the stage.)* Hey! Do you hear us?
(He puts his ear on the floor.) No, there is nothing.

Surveyor : I've found it. *(He pick up the spring and looks at it.)*

Draftsman : *(He turns to Surveyor.)* Where was it?

Surveyor : Just here. *(He takes the tachometer and resumes repairing it.)* It was just at my feet. I found it by accident.

Draftsman : *(Upset)* There is no sound at all.

Surveyor : You were disturbed by the sound, weren't you?

Draftsman : But... But this deep silence. It is strange. It hurts me.

Surveyor : Silence is silence, it doesn't make any difference.

Draftsman : Maybe it is better to busy myself with my work. *(He sits behind his drawing board and starts working. But he can't.)* It doesn't work. I can't. Perhaps the weather is the problem. The more I try, the less I make progress. I think there is something wrong somewhere.

Surveyor : If I manage to fix the spring, it would be all right. That's the problem.

Draftsman : *(He stands up and moves about.)* Nothing can be heard, as if... As if something dreadful is lurking behind this silence.

Surveyor : *(He is trying to fix the spring.)* What? For example?

Draftsman : I don't really know... Maybe the roar of an explosion.

Surveyor : Please shut up!

Draftsman : I can't... I have to speak.

Surveyor : Ah, it has escaped again!

Draftsman : Well, fasten it to your finger with a piece of string.

Surveyor : I will, if I can find it. *(He is crawling on the floor, on all fours.)*

Draftsman : Maybe he is hurt?

Surveyor : I don't think so, he might be having a rest.

Draftsman : But it's been a long time.

Surveyor : Is it possible...

Draftsman : ... That he is killed underground?

Surveyor : Maybe.

Draftsman : In that case we should dig him out.

Surveyor : But how? We have no tools...

Draftsman : Poor fellow. He is buried alive under people's waste matter.

Surveyor : Still, it's not certain.

Draftsman : Why is the bulldozer silent then?

Surveyor : He has probably fallen asleep.

Draftsman : No... He laid down his life for clearing the city, clearing the people's waste matter.

Surveyor : What a great man!

Draftsman : *(He is banging the floor with his fist, excited.)* Hey... Answer me, if you are alive. Do you hear us?

Surveyor : Be quiet.

Draftsman : There is no hope. I think he is dead.

Surveyor : *(He puts his finger on his nose.)* Shush... *(He puts his ear on the floor.)* I think I heard something.

Draftsman : Did he say something? *(He rushes toward Surveyor, lies down beside him and puts his ear on the floor.)* Hey... You... Mr... Say that you are alive.

Surveyor : Shush... I said be quiet. Ah... Do you hear the footsteps?

Draftsman : Yes... So he is still alive.

Surveyor : They've stopped. *(Young Man enters.)*

Young Man : Excuse me sir...

Draftsman : His voice. I heard his voice. He said excuse me.

Surveyor : I heard him too , Hi!

Young Man : Sorry... I... *(Surveyor and Draftsman notice him.)*

Draftsman : So , you are here.

Young Man : Yes I have just arrived.

Surveyor : How wonderful.

Young Man : Did you know that I was coming?

Draftsman : Well... We thought you were dead.

Young Man : Me? Why?

Surveyor : Never mind... We are glad to see you quite well.

Young Man : Thank you. It is very kind of you, but...

Surveyor : Why don't you come in? *(He helps him.)* Please come in, this way.

Young Man : Thank you...

Draftsman : Are you sure you are all right?

Young man : No ! Yes... I am just a little tired.

Surveyor : You had a break. Didn't you?

Young Man : Break? No. How can I have a rest in such a confusion?

Draftsman : Yes. It is impossible to take a nap with all this noise. We were nearly going mad in here.

Young Man : As a matter of fact, there was no noise, but...

Draftsman : But it was so loud, specially in closed places.

Young Man : No. I heard nothing.

Surveyor : Maybe you have got used to it.

Young Man : Got used to it? To what?

Surveyor : To the noise...

Young Man : I got used to nothing. I don't like noises at all.

Draftsman : Maybe there is something wrong with your ears!

Young Man : As a matter of fact they are very healthy.

Surveyor : Your eyes? What about your eyes?

Young Man : (*He rubs his eyes.*) Well... My eyes...

Surveyor : I mean they must be so strong.

Draftsman : If you were late, we would have searched for you.

Young Man : Searched for me?

Draftsman : Yes. But it is good that you came yourself.

Young Man : Spare my blushes.

Surveyor : So would you please do me a favour?

Young Man : Just as you say, whatever it is.

Surveyor : Please find my spring.

Young Man : Your spring?

Surveyor : Yes. I lost it. I am sure you can find it.

Young Man : Me? Why do you think I can?

Surveyor : It is a tiny spring. I suppose it must be somewhere over there.

Young Man : Well...*(He looks around.)* It is dark here.

Surveyor : Then how could you see there? In the darkness?

Young Man : There was moonlight.

Draftsman : It is impossible. Are you saying there was moonlight there?

Young Man : Yes. Why should I lie to you?

Draftsman : *(To Surveyor, whispering)* He is speaking nonsense. I think he has been disturbed by the loud noise.

Surveyor : *(Looking from the corner of his eyes.)* In fact he is very clever, he is trying to dodge work. *(To Young Man)* You said there was moonlight down there?

Young Man : Yes.

Surveyor : Do you think I am a fool? You are a fool! *(Shouting)* How can you say that there was moonlight under the ground?

Young Man : It was not my fault that it is a moonlit night.

Surveyor : I'll teach you a lesson. *(He throws him on the floor.)* Hurry up. Start looking for it.

Young Man : For what?

Surveyor : I told you, find the spring.

Young Man : *(Yield)* Alright. I will. *(He takes his glasses out from his pocket and puts them on.)* I can see better with these.

Surveyor : You wear glasses?

Young Man : *(He takes his glasses off, quickly.)* No... No... It is not necessary.

Draftsman : *(He gets near Surveyor.)* Calm down. Be nice to him.

Young Man : *(He is moving on the floor on all fours.)* But I don't know where it is?

Draftsman : *(He goes to Young Man and sits down beside him.)* Don't take it to heart. He has a strange temper and is a little impetuous but he is kind as well. *(He points in a direction.)* Maybe the spring is there.

Young Man : I looked , it wasn't there.

Surveyor : Why didn't you answer our shouts?

Draftsman : From now on we make an arrangement, whenever you hear us calling, blow the horn.

Young Man : For what?

Surveyor : To see whether you are alive or not.

Young Man : Is it important for you?

Draftsman : Of course it is. If you blow the horn, we will be sure you are alive.

Young Man : But how? I haven't got a horn.

Surveyor : We know. I mean blow the bulldozer's horn.

Young Man : *(Puzzled)* Bulldozer?

Draftsman : It has got a horn, hasn't it?

Young Man : I don't really know! Which bulldozer are you talking about?

Surveyor : The one you drive!

Young Man : Me? I don't know how to drive at all.

Draftsman : You were there. I mean under the ground, weren't you?

Young Man : No! I was just looking for my house.

Draftsman : *(He goes to Surveyor, horrified.)* We have mistaken him. He isn't the bulldozer driver.

Surveyor : I see...

Draftsman : So apologize to him quickly.

Surveyor : What shall I do?

Draftsman : Soothe him.

Surveyor : *(He goes toward Young Man and helps him to stand, kindly.)*
Sorry... Sir... Please stand and come with me.*(He seats him on a chair.)* Forgive me sir, I treated you badly, in fact I had mistaken you for someone else.

Young Man : Never mind, you must be tired. I didn't mean to bother you. I was looking for an address.

Draftsman : I knew...*(He goes to a corner.)* I knew that man is dead.

Surveyor : What can we do for you, now?

Young Man : I have lost my way.

Surveyor : You are lost! Where do you want to go?

Young Man : My house... I am looking for my house. I can't find it.

Surveyor : What is your house's address?

Young Man : I don't know, but I think it must be somewhere near here!

Surveyor : You must be tired.

Young Man : Yes... I am tired. I looked everywhere. There was nobody to help me. I am so tired.

Draftsman : *(He goes to Surveyor, whispers.)* I would say , it is not advisable to let a stranger come into our room.

Surveyor : But he has lost his way home.

Draftsman : I don't care, we don't know him. I think it is better to put him in the office.

Surveyor : I didn't mean to take him into our bedroom.

Young Man : I am sorry. I didn't mean to cause you any trouble.

Surveyor : No, it is no trouble at all. Please relax.

Young Man : The city is too crowded.

Surveyor : Yes...

Draftsman : There isn't even an inch of land left for the green park.

Young Man : Building! Everywhere building! You lose your own house among all these building... It is so strange.

Draftsman : *(He sits down and bangs the floor with his fist, several times and pauses.)* No... I can't hear anything.

Surveyor : Stand up! Can't you see we have a guest?

Draftsman : What a helpless man!

Young Man : *(Ashamed)* If I was not helpless, I would not be wandering about at this time of night.

Surveyor : Don't get insulted, he didn't mean you.

Draftsman : *(He looks at the floor.)* Hey, sir, do you hear me?

Young Man : *(Astonished)* Excuse me, who is he talking to?

Surveyor : To a helpless man whose voice we could hear just a few minutes ago.

Young Man : But he is talking to the floor!

Surveyor : No. He is talking to the man who is trapped under the floor. If he is alive of course.

Young Man : Where?

Surveyor : *(Pointing to the floor.)* Just here. Under the ground.

Draftsman : He is dead. Nobody helped him. He is buried alive.

Young Man : *(Horried)* What? Buried alive? Under here? *(He jumps up.)*

Draftsman : Yes. We are sure he was alive a few minutes ago , but now , God knows.

Young Man : *(He goes forward and looks at the floor.)* How do you know?

Draftsman : From his bulldozer's noise.

Young Man : *(He looks at them horried.)* With... With his bulldozer?

Draftsman : Yes. He was buried alive with his bulldozer.

Young Man : *(He looks at them hesitatingly, then a bewildered smile appears on his face.)* You... It is impossible!

Draftsman : Yes. At first we thought he had turned off his engine to have a rest, but it took a long time and we aren't so sure.

Young Man : Well... I... I don't think...

Surveyor : That's right. A break wouldn't be so long.

Draftsman : Then we came to the conclusion. He is dead!

Young Man : Who buried him alive?

Surveyor : But I don't think he is dead!

Draftsman : I am quite sure that he is dead.

Surveyor : I think, maybe he has fallen asleep... Yes, he has fallen asleep. First he had a cup of tea then he lit a cigarette and now he is taking a nap.

Young Man : *(He stands up, frightened.)* Sorry sirs. I think I had better leave.

Surveyor : Stay there! *(He takes a step forward.)* Stay there, otherwise the spring will jump again.

Young Man : *(He stands with caution.)* Yes!

Surveyor : Watch the spring... Don't move... *(He goes forward towards the Young Man, slowly. He stops near Young Man and as if he is trying to catch an insect, catches the spring from the floor, while he lets out a loud shout.)*

Young Man : *(He shouts and jumps back.)* What happened?

Surveyor : I found it. I will never let it escape again. I will fix it now.

Draftsman : I say you had better throw your tachometer away!

Surveyor : My tachometer?

Draftsman : I think it is worn out, it is useless.

Surveyor : What about you? With all those wrong plans!

Draftsman : It is because of your tachometer. It is because of your tachometer. It does not function properly and makes my work wrong.

Surveyor : If I can fix the spring, it will be right. *(He starts repairing the tachometer.)*

Draftsman : So , be careful.

Surveyor : I caught it...

Draftsman : Fasten it to your finger by a piece of string.

Surveyor : Where the hell can I find a piece of string, now ? *(He is trying to fix the spring.)*

Young Man : I am very sorry to hear that a man is buried alive in his bulldozer.

Draftsman : Yes. Although we couldn't see him, his devotion will live for ever. He died for us.

Young Man : *(Depressed)* What a noble man!

Surveyor : For me, for you and to keep the earth clean...*(He points to the floor.)* He is dead now. Under here. But still we are not sure!

Draftsman : *(To Young Man)* A devoted man who died for us. Peace be upon him. *(He goes near Young Man.)* A great man who died alone and helpless and nobody heard his cries. Now, he is under your feet.

Young Man : *(He goes to the other side of the stage, horribly.)* Under my feet? But ... But the place is undug, still...

Draftsman : That is the problem. If we know how he got there, we could have saved him.

Young Man : *(He smiles, frightened.)* You... You are kidding me.

Draftsman : *(He stands face to face with Young Man.)* Look at me carefully. Have you seen me before?

Young Man : *(Trying to withdraw himself.)* No... No... I haven't.

Draftsman : So, there is no reason for kidding.

Surveyor : Well-done! I fixed it at last.

Draftsman : *(He looks at the floor, regretfully.)* What a pity! *(Surveyor puts down his tachometer gently and goes to the other side of the stage and makes three cups of tea and brings them.)*

Surveyor : It's tea time! Forget it, we will soon know what has really happened.

Young Man : Thank you very much, but I must go home.

Draftsman : In this darkness? You can't. You will get lost.

Young Man : I am lost already. But I have to go. I have nowhere to go but my house.

Draftsman : *(He is drinking his tea.)* Nowhere?

Young Man : I have lived in this city for ages, but... But I don't know why I lose my way home these days.

Surveyor : *(Drinking his tea.)* Have you lost your way before?

Young Man : Yes, but I would usually find it at last. But I don't know why I couldn't find it tonight.

Draftsman : Did you look well?

Young Man : Yes. I went the same way as normal.

Surveyor : Maybe there is something wrong with your eyes?

Draftsman : You should have asked for help.

Young Man : There was nobody. I was lucky to find you.

Surveyor : Are you happy now?

Young Man : Happy?

Draftsman : Happy to find us.

Young Man : Yes, but it would be better, if I was in my own house.

Surveyor : Ah ! The damn thing ! It's escaped again !

Young Man : *(He turns, surprised.)* What?

Draftsman : I think this thing is no longer a tachometer!

Surveyor : But I should fix it. We have plenty of work tomorrow.

Draftsman : I don't care. What is the point ? Are you worried about the city which is hollow underneath?

Surveyor : What is happening under the ground doesn't concern me. I must complete the plan of the city.

Draftsman : I can't do it any longer. It is important for me to know where I am standing. I wouldn't like to stay at a place which is hollow underneath.

Surveyor : *(He follows the direction which he thinks the spring should have jumped.)* I have to do my duty anyway, what will happen next does not concern me.

Young Man : *(To Surveyor)* I think the spring jumped over there.

Surveyor : No sir, I don't think so.

Young Man : It is there anyway.

Surveyor : I don't need your help. If you had a sense of direction, you wouldn't have lost your way.

Young Man : Excuse me. I only wanted...

Surveyor : Don't apologise. Why don't you go home?

Young Man : I have lost my way.

Surveyor : I know that. Go and find it.

Young Man : I went. But I couldn't find it. I came here to ask your help.

Surveyor : Why didn't you say that earlier?

Young Man : I wanted to. But one word leads to another.

Surveyor : We have the map of each point of this city.

Young Man : Even my house?

Surveyor : Even your house. If I find the spring, I will fasten it to my finger.

Young Man : Very well. So, I will come here every night!

Draftsman : *(He stops his drawing.)* What if you can't find your way here?

Surveyor : *(He is looking at the floor.)* No... It seems the earth has swallowed it.

Young Man : I don't know.

Draftsman : Something fundamental must be worked out.

Young Man : For example?

Draftsman : Many people lose their way home nowadays.

Surveyor : If I can find it this time...

Draftsman : As long as that screw is loose your spring will not fix.

Young Man : I must mark my way from home to work.

Surveyor : What a good idea.

Draftsman : What if everybody does it?

Surveyor : Then, there would be a funny confusion in the city, everybody going to the wrong house! I think the spring must be over there. *(He points in a direction and walks there.)* No! It seems the damn thing has vanished away.

Young Man : Please find it for me somehow.

Draftsman : But how? Give me your address.

Young Man : There it is. *(He gives a piece of paper to Draftsman.)* The 79th floor. Building 803214. 547 street.

Surveyor : A definite address! How big is your house?

Young Man : It is nearly 20 square meters in area.

Draftsman : Just a moment. I will find it.

Young Man : Thank you very much.

Surveyor : Don't worry. The whole map of the city is in our hands. Anywhere you want, we find it immediately. (He is looking for the spring on all fours.)

Young Man : Yes , sir...

Draftsman : Ah... I found it.

Surveyor : (*He is looking for the spring, still.*) It is impossible...

Draftsman : No , not the spring!

Young Man : Perhaps my house is not in your map.

Draftsman : Of course it is.

Young Man : You know, I have peace only in my own house. If I lose it, I will be wandering for ever. I will die.

Draftsman : Everybody should have a place to live in. A secure place.

Young Man : That's right.

Surveyor : (*He is moving on all fours.*) Where is it?

Young Man : (*He points in a direction.*) Over there...

Surveyor : (*Without looking to Young Man.*) It is impossible! It should be over here. (*He is rubbing the floor.*)

Draftsman : I am afraid I can't find it.

Young Man : (*Embarrassed*) You can't?

Draftsman : At least not in this map. I must look for it on the other maps.

Young Man : I have caused you so much trouble.

Draftsman : Do you think you can find your house in this darkness?

Young Man : I will try.

Surveyor : I would find it, if there was more light here. (He rubs the floor.)

Draftsman : But I think you can't find it in this situation.

Young Man : Don't say that... Please help me.

Draftsman : Just a moment... I will do my best , and you must be careful not to get lost like all the people who have lost themselves among the concrete.

Young Man : Where?

Draftsman : In this concrete forest. The forest which has grown out of the land. Everybody in this city lives within the hollow trunks of these concrete trees. The trees which have no roots. Their foundations are empty. There are lots of sewers to carry off the people's waste matter, but there aren't enough, yet.

Surveyor : I have to look for it.

Young Man : Who has made this city?

Draftsman : The city is collapsing. We have to prepare a new map for the city.

Surveyor : New map! So we can find an unoccupied place to plant one of those concrete trees in it.

Young Man : But what about my house?

Surveyor : Be quiet...

Young Man : Please help me.

Draftsman : Help you to hide yourself among the concrete?

Young Man : To hide myself? From who?

Draftsman : From each other... From yourself...

Surveyor : I asked you to be quiet! You are distracting me. (*He is still moving on the stage, on fours.*)

Young Man : Why should I hide myself? I have done nothing wrong.

Draftsman : If you are innocent, why do you feel comfortable among all that concrete?

Young Man : No... I have done no sin!

Draftsman : But you have. All of you are sinners.

Young Man : Please, please find the way to my house.

Surveyor : *(He is crouching down, hopeless.)* There is no sign of it.

Draftsman : *(He puts aside another map.)* It's not here, either.

Surveyor : *(He starts searching.)* It must be found.

Young Man : Try again. You will find it, unless you are wrong.

Draftsman : No, I am not wrong. I know why they hide themselves among the concrete.

Surveyor : Where is the spring? Why can't I do it?

Draftsman : *(To Young Man)* Do you know why? Do you know why they hide themselves among the concrete? Because they leave too much shit! That's why they have caused so much trouble for themselves and for other people.

Young Man : That's right. The people's waste matter is increasing.

Draftsman : And it is increasing everyday... Ah... I found it at last.

Surveyor : *(He is crawling backward on all fours.)* No, I can't.

Young Man : Thank you very much sir... *(Trying to see map.)* I knew... I knew my house would never get lost.

Surveyor : *(He is lying on his stomach, he leans his chin against his hands.)* I think I have lost it for ever.

Draftsman : *(He is pushing Young Man back.)* Get out, let me see!

Young Man : Thank you! Is my house too far from here, sir?

Draftsman : *(He stands up and points in a direction.)* You must go straight that way, then turn to the right, keep on going, there is another turn in the road, again turn right, there you will find an 84 floor building. That's your house!

Young Man : That's it! Thank you very much, sir. *(The noise of the bulldozer is heard again.)*

Surveyor : *(Leaping up)* He is alive!

Draftsman : He is not dead! There it is, the noise again! (*He rushes to the centre of the stage, sits down and speaks to the floor.*) Hey! Are you alive?

Surveyor : We are glad to hear you again!

Draftsman : No, I am not glad!

Surveyor : Why?

Draftsman : Because he is hollowing out the ground underneath us, now.

Surveyor : I think, you have forgotten the problem of the waste matter.

Draftsman : And because of it we must be ready for everything?

Surveyor : (*To Young Man*) Do you hear it? He is digging a sewer for you.

Draftsman : To save you from drowning in your own waste matter.

Young Man : Who is he?

Surveyor : Who ? He?

Draftsman : He is the man that we thought was buried alive.

Surveyor : Now, the sound shows that there is life there.

Draftsman : This sound... This sound is the sound of death...

Surveyor : Listen how loud it is! Don't say that it bothers you?

Draftsman : No, it scares me.

Young Man : I see something is going on here. (*He goes back.*)

Surveyor : No. It is the symbol of life and power.

Draftsman : He is like a mole.

Surveyor : A mole?

Draftsman : Yes, a mole. (*Young Man exits.*)

Surveyor : No. He can't be a mole.

Draftsman : How do you know that? Have you seen him?

Surveyor : No. But I know a mole can't drive a bulldozer!

Draftsman : So, what is he?

Surveyor : What? He...

Draftsman : He is a giantlike mole who is destroying the foundation of the city.

Surveyor : *(He notices that Young Man is not there.)* He is gone!

Draftsman : What?

Surveyor : The man, he is gone.

Draftsman : It's as if nobody was here. It was a dream.

Surveyor : It was not a dream. He was really here.

Draftsman : He had lost his way. Did you see him arrive?

Surveyor : Yes!

Draftsman : But none of us saw his departure. *(He counts the cups of tea.)*
There are three cups.

Surveyor : It means, there must have been another person here.

Draftsman : Not definitely.

Surveyor : But we saw him come, didn't we?

Draftsman : Look... Two of cups are empty and the third is untouched. So, nobody has been here!

Surveyor : Maybe he was here but he didn't drink it.

Draftsman : I am beginning to suspect everything, even our existence!

Surveyor : *(With great horror.)* You mean that we do not exist?

Draftsman : Why are we here, after all?

Surveyor : Look... Please don't say these things... I am afraid.

Draftsman : Afraid of what?

Surveyor : Of your words. You speak so strangely!

Draftsman : Which is more strange, my words or our work? (*The bulldozer's noise is cut.*)

Surveyor : It has stopped again!

Draftsman : Everything is so strange, here. I feel I am crushed under a thousand cold eyes!

Surveyor : Be quiet!

Draftsman : We are being buried under the cold glare. Look! (*He takes Surveyor's hand and shows him around the stage and points in different direction.*) Look! Do you see all those eyes? (*Blind Man who is tall and thin, enters. He is wearing black glasses and a long dusty black garment covers his body. He brings a bad odour onto the stage.*)

Surveyor : No... I don't want to see.

Draftsman : You must see.

Surveyor : I can't... (*He releases himself from Draftsman's hand and walks backward. His back touches Blind Man. He sends out a loud shout and pulls himself away.*) What a horrible smell!

Blind Man : How terrifying it was!

Surveyor : (*He cleans up himself with his trembling hands.*) Who are you?

Blind Man : So, you are here! (*He goes to the centre of the stage.*)

Draftsman : (*He is covering his nose with his hand.*) Who are you?

Blind Man : ...

Surveyor : What do you want?

Draftsman : Have you lost your way?

Blind Man : ...

Surveyor : If you have lost your way, we can help you too.

Blind Man : ...

Draftsman : Do you hear us?

Blind Man : Why did you stop working? *(He sits down on a chair, imperiously.)*

Surveyor : My tachometer's spring...

Blind Man : You don't need it any more!

Surveyor : *(He takes a few steps toward him.)* But my work is not finished, yet.

Blind Man : Don't come near me... Keep away... Your work is finished. My work is finished, too.

Draftsman : Who are you?

Blind Man : Don't you really know me? I am your neighbour! *(He points to the ground.)* I was there.

Surveyor : So, you are the bulldozer driver. Are you? I am Surveyor...

Blind Man : I know who you are. Keep away from each other.

Surveyor : You heard our shouting. You don't know how pleased we were when we realized you were alive.

Blind Man : Alive?

Draftsman : Yes . We thought you were dead.

Surveyor : But I knew you were alive. You were just taking a rest, weren't you?

Blind Man : No... I went to have a look around at that time.

Draftsman : Is there anything interesting to see under the ground?

Blind Man : The whole underneath of the city is hollow. Tell me is it day or night?

Draftsman : You can see yourself.

Blind Man : *(Imperiously)* I said is it day or night?

Draftsman : It is night. So, your eyes...

Blind Man : I don't need them. It is too dark under the ground. Yes I am blind. What did you think? *(He laughs loudly.)* But I did a wonderful job

with my bulldozer. There is no place left. By the way, is somebody here apart from you?

- Surveyor : No. Everybody is sleeping in their own house at this time of night.
- Blind Man : You fool! No! There is somebody else here!
- Draftsman : You can't see. What are you talking about!
- Blind Man : A person is near by here. *(A terrible sound is heard. Draftsman and Surveyor rush to the corner and take shelter. Blind Man is sitting, careless and indifferent.)*
- Blind Man : Another one!
- Draftsman : What?
- Blind Man : You should come under the ground and see with your own eyes. It is worth seeing. What a pity that I am not there, now.
- Surveyor : But you are blind. How can you see?
- Blind Man : I told you... You don't need eyes under the ground.
- Draftsman : What's going on there?
- Blind Man : Nothing! It is just hollow. *(Laughs)* I am finished with my work. We have all finished. We are not safe here. Be careful when you are walking, otherwise the ground under your feet will collapse.
- Draftsman : *(He tiptoes to a safe place, with great horror.)* I... I knew it would end up like this.
- Blind Man : Don't try to escape, there's nowhere to go.
- Surveyor : *(He runs to the other side of the stage.)* I found it...
- Draftsman : Are you crazy? Can't you walk slowly?
- Surveyor : *(He stops and picks up something from the floor.)* No... It is not the spring... *(He notices Draftsman.)* What?
- Draftsman : I said, try to walk slowly.
- Blind Man : Everywhere will collapse inevitably... I Know there is someone else here.

Surveyor : Who can see? Us or you?

Blind Man : Sight is a useless thing. It deceives you.

Surveyor : I thought...

Draftsman : Of course for you...

Blind Man : When everywhere is dark, sight is useless.

Surveyor : You think everywhere is like under the ground?

Blind Man : Everywhere will collapse down to the darkness of underground, soon... Into the waste matter...

Draftsman : Even us?

Blind Man : Nothing will remain on the land ... The ground under your feet is empty, too! *(He laughs loudly.)*

Draftsman : No! *(He attacks Blind Man, angry.) Shut up! (He seizes Blind Man by collar and lifts him up, Blind Man is still laughing.)* I said shut up...

Surveyor : *(Trying to separate them.)* Leave him alone! Come here...

Blind Man : *(Laughing)* We are all finished... *(A terrible sound rolls into the stage. Draftsman releases Blind Man.)*

Draftsman : Something collapsed!

Blind Man : You should go to have a look!

Surveyor : No!

Blind Man : Your turn will come soon.

Draftsman : We should warn everybody!

Blind Man : It's too late, now. *(Young Woman with a baby at her breast rushes to the stage.)*

Young Woman : Where is he ? He hasn't got home, yet!

Draftsman : Who are you looking for?

Young Woman : My husband. He hasn't got home, yet!

Surveyor : Maybe he is at home by now!

Young Woman : Home? *(She sits on the ground with her baby pressed to her breast.)* Sleep my boy... You can't sleep in your cradle again...

Draftsman : Where is your husband? I can go and find him for you.

Young Woman : My husband? *(She pats her baby.)* Don't worry my dear... Daddy will never leave us alone... He will come soon... But if... No...! He will come here to take us ... Sleep my dear... Sleep...

Draftsman : *(He is trying to console Young Woman.)* Don't worry...*(To Surveyor)* We should help her.

Surveyor : But how?

Young Woman : Daddy will come soon to take us to a nice place.

Draftsman : She musn't stay here.

Surveyor : Where shall we take her ? Nowhere is safe!

Young Woman : *(She looks up.)* Have you seen my husband?

Draftsman : How can we recognize him?

Young Woman : He looks like my boy! *(She looks at her baby, the collapsing sound of another building is heard, the horrified woman presses her baby to her breast and squats on the floor.)*

Blind Man : It will go on until morning.

Draftsman : Shut up you big mole! It is all your fault.

Blind Man : My fault? I just drove the bulldozer. Someone else is responsible for it. The one who controls all of us. You are guilty, too. I made the sewer with your plans.

Surveyor : You are a liar.

Blind Man : No... We have been working under the supervision of someone else.

Draftsman : Who?

Blind Man : You can learn a lot of things under the ground. A blind man like me is always making use of his ear. Tell that woman her husband is alive. He is looking for his house. He will come again. However, she musn't wait here for her husband. The ground under her feet will collapse at any moment.

Young Woman : *(It seems she hasn't heard Blind Man's remarks.)* He is too late, tonight. He used to get home at this time. I think he has lost his way again... *(To herself)* But he can't find it tonight.

Draftsman : Leave here lady... Don't stay here...

Young Woman : Aren't you going to help him?

Surveyor : We? We can't.

Draftsman : Take your baby and leave here, go somewhere where there are no buildings built! Maybe you can find a clean place.

Young Woman : Do you think I can find a place in which my baby will be safe?

Draftsman : I don't know?

Blind Man : There is just one place...

Draftsman : Where?

Blind Man : Not for us! We must wait here.

Surveyor : Wait for who?

Blind Man : The person who is in charge of all this!

Draftsman : Where is he... or she?

Blind man : I don't know, I came across that person under the ground, but I don't know about up here!

Surveyor : How will we know the person?

Blind Man : Who?

Surveyor : The person who is in charge of all this.

Blind Man : I don't know. But when we have finished our work, that person will come here.

Draftsman : *(Throwing away his maps.)* No! There isn't any place!

Blind Man : You should try to find it somewhere else.

Surveyor : Is it too far from here?

Blind Man : For you and me, yes!

Draftsman : Where is it?

Blind Man : I don't know. But I couldn't destroy its foundations with all of my power!

Draftsman : *(To Young Woman)* You should go and find that place. *(The sound of a building collapsing rolls into the stage. Draftsman and Surveyor take shelter at a corner of the stage. The horrified woman looks round. Blind Man is sitting indifferently.)*

Blind Man : Another one...

Young Woman : Very soon, the city will fade away from the surface of the earth. And then the earth will tell its tales.

Surveyor : *(He goes toward Young Woman slowly. Then stops there. To Draftsman)* What did she say?

Young Woman : *(She arranges the blanket over her baby.)* Sleep my innocent sweetheart... Sleep... Lully, lolly my dear boy... Lull, lull, lull... Sleep till morning... You don't know anything about tonight... Sleep... Sleep... You don't know what will happen tomorrow... Sleep...

Surveyor : She is speaking in delirium.

Blind Man : I don't know what she says, But it is not delirium.

Draftsman : We should help her.

Blind Man : It is darkness, nobody can help her. *(A confusion of men , women and children is heard. Draftsman follows the tumult off stage.)*

Blind Man : Where did he go?

Surveyor : This tumult...

Blind Man : They are the townspeople. (*Draftsman comes back in a confused state.*)

Draftsman : Everybody is running away...

Surveyor : How long should we wait?

Blind Man : Until the boss arrives.

Draftsman : I can't wait. I must go.

Blind Man : You have no other place to go unless the boss arrives and shows you the way. (*The sound of two collapsing buildings is heard.*)

Blind Man : Two buildings...

Surveyor : Shut up...

Blind Man : Okay. But what about these sounds?

Young Woman : My husband went, too. He got lost. (*She stands up and goes to the end of the stage.*) We are lonely strangers in this city. We should travel together. (*She exits.*)

Draftsman : How funny!

Surveyor : What is funny?

Draftsman : That I was trying to design a green park in a land which was empty.

Surveyor : The spring... The tachometer's spring...

Draftsman : The earth couldn't hold that much waste matter. It was us who caused this and now we must pay for it. We must atone for our sin. (*The sound of several buildings collapsing is heard.*)

Blind Man : I couldn't count them this time.

Surveyor : (*He is looking at the floor.*) Where is it?

Blind Man : It is useless, now.

Draftsman : There is no sound. I think everybody has left the city.

Blind Man : Only we have remained.

Draftsman : *(To Blind Man)* You think the woman can save herself?

Blind Man : ... If she could find a safe place, yes.

Surveyor : Ah... Why can't I find it? *(He is looking for the spring on the floor.)*

Draftsman : How can we find that place?

Blind Man : I don't know, but it shouldn't be too far.

Surveyor : *(He is still looking for the spring.)* It must be near here, but I don't know why I can't see it?

Blind Man : Forget it, save yourself!

Draftsman : I don't care any more, maybe I have no right to save myself.

Surveyor : No. I can't go on. *(He is squatting on the floor.)* When will I find that bloody thing?

Blind Man : Very soon.

Draftsman : I don't want to see the person.

Blind Man : But the person has always been here ordering us.

Surveyor : *(He takes his tachometer and examines it carefully.)* It is impossible...

Draftsman : Yes. But we were unaware of the person's presence. Yes. You were quite right. We have always been in hands of that person like puppets. We were so immersed in our business that we even forgot ourselves.

Blind Man : You will see the person tonight. *(The collapsing sounds of other buildings are heard. Draftsman, horrified, goes to a chair and crouches on it, gazing at the floor. Surveyor and Blind Man show no reaction. After a few seconds the collapsing sound of more buildings is heard. Draftsman, trying to keep off the ground, squeezes himself in his arms more and more.)*

Blind Man : You can't count them any more... It means the person is approaching.

Draftsman : The sounds came from near by.

Surveyor : *(He tries to find the spring, but he can't.)* It is not here!

Blind Man : It will be our turn very soon. *(Young Man enters. There is a sad, disappointed, sick smile on his face.)*

Young Man : *(Choked with tears)* I found it! *(He goes to Draftsman.)* Thank you, your address was quite right. *(With split words)* Thank you...

Draftsman : *(Horried)* No!

Young Man : Yes, my house was safe.

Draftsman : *(Crying with horror)* No... Poor man... Your house is ruined.

Young Man : *(He puts his finger on his nose.)* Shush... Don't say anything... But what about my wife my little boy? They should be asleep by now.

Surveyor : *(He looks around.)* It should be somewhere here.

Blind Man : You must search...

Draftsman : *(To Young Man)* Don't stay here... Go and find them.

Young Man : No...*(Kneeling down)* Where should I go?

Draftsman : Don't stay here... The ground is not safe.

Young Man : *(To himself)* Where shall I go? My wife and my little boy were asleep. I couldn't wake them.

Draftsman : They are awake, they are looking for the safe place, now.

Young Man : Are they?

Draftsman : Your wife was worried about the baby . She was trying to save him.

Young Man : Because my boy is still innocent.

Draftsman : He will surely be saved. Go to them. I mean, you should be able to rescue them.

Young Woman : *(Calling from far)* Is there any one to help me?

Young Man : Her cries!

Surveyor : *(He is looking for the spring without any attention to the others.)*
No! It is not on the ground... I must look for it somewhere else.

Young Woman : *(From far but another direction.)* Is there any one to help me?

Draftsman : She is alone.

Young Man : *(Smiling)* No! She is not alone! There is somebody to save my boy.
(Young Man exits, hurriedly.)

Blind Man : The person is about arrive.

Young Woman : *(Calling from far)* Is there any one to help me?

Draftsman : *(He gets up from the chair cautiously and looks off stage.)* The woman's voice will go on all night. What a resurrection!

Surveyor : *(Still , he is looking for the spring.)* I should have known from the start that this would be the result of carelessness. *(The collapsing sound of buildings is heard. The sounds are so near that even Blind Man is shocked. Draftsman begins to run about and Surveyor gets up from the floor.)*

Blind Man : A person is coming!

Draftsman : It is disgusting...

Blind Man : Someone is about to appear!

Surveyor : *(He is searching the floor, disappointed.)* What if I can't...

Blind Man : Don't worry, the person will come to save us.

Young Woman : *(Calling from far)* Is there any one to help me?

Draftsman : She is alone. It seems nobody can hear her cries, even her own husband. *(The collapsing sound of a near by building is heard.)*

Blind Man : It was very near...

Surveyor : *(He is still trying to find the spring.)* It is so strange, what has happened to it?

Draftsman : It might be our turn at any moment!

Surveyor : *(He runs to Blind Man cheerfully and picks up the spring from the floor, near his feet.) I found it! I found it at last!*

Blind Man : *Shush... Be quiet... (He stands up.) The footsteps... (After a few seconds, a terribly ugly hump-back old woman limps into the stage.)*

Old Woman : *It is finished... (Draftsman avoids looking at her. Surveyor with a smile on his face, fastens the spring to his finger by a piece of string. Blind Man is standing still.)*

Old Woman : *Come near... We are finished... Finished ... (Blind Man and Surveyor walk to her unwillingly. Draftsman is standing, still.)*

Young Woman : *(Calling from far) Is there any one to help me?*

Old Woman : *(Gets near Draftsman.) It is too late now, you have obeyed me all your life...*

Draftsman : *Go away...(He crouches on the floor.) No... Not any more...*

Old Woman : *Yes... Poor thing... You have been under my control all your life... You can't live without me! (The collapsing sound of buildings is heard.)*

Old Woman : *(Casually) Let's go...*

Blind Man : *To establish a new city for the people... (Following Old Woman, Blind Man and Surveyor exit. The horrible collapsing sound of several buildings echoes through the stage as the whole stage sinks into a deep darkness.)*

Young Woman : *(Calling from far) Is there any one to help me?*

CURTAIN.

Castles

The 1970s Revolution of 1979 is less a story of the Islamic revolution of the 1970s and more a different perspective with more Islamic standards. By the 1970s "Islamic standards" I mean, for instance, the revolution was not the Islamic revolution, classical contacts between Iran and the West are not a novel, and modernization is not a novel. The revolution was a different perspective, a different way of looking at the world and a different way of looking at the world.



The Crisis of Democratic Revolution in the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education in the organization of the revolution. The revolution was a different perspective, a different way of looking at the world and a different way of looking at the world.

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The Tale (Daybreak) National Theatre, Tehran, 1980. The revolution was a different perspective, a different way of looking at the world and a different way of looking at the world.

Abdolhay Shammassi



**The Tale of the Concrete City
City Theatre, Tehran, 1990.**

Conclusion

The Islamic Revolution of 1978-9 in Iran stopped all the theatre activities of the Shah's regime and started a different programme with more Islamic standards. By the term "Islamic standards" I mean, for instance, that actresses must wear the Islamic veil on stage, physical contacts between men and women are not allowed, and communistic, capitalistic and anti-Islamic plays are banned. Sexual references, indecent words and any immoral points may not be included.

The Centre of Dramatic Arts, a section of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, is the organization responsible for theatre activities in Iran. All the performance venues are owned by this Ministry and the private sector has still not revived.

The traditional theatres such as *Ru Howzi* (On the Pool) and *Siah Bazi* (Black-faced play) are still performing but must accept the standards of the revolution.

The Fajr (Daybreak) National Theatre Festival is the most important theatre event in the country, held every February in Tehran.

The financial situation is very difficult for actors and most of them have a second or even third job.

The shortage of paper is the biggest problem facing the publishers and as a result only a few theatre books are published each year.

In the first play translated for this study, *The Fence Within The Fence* written by Mohssen Makhmalbaf in 1981, we saw an example of Political theatre in the early years of the revolution. Although this play was an "acceptable" piece of theatre and the playwright was a Moslem in good standing, his recent work is banned in Iran.

The second play *The Steps* written in 1989 by Akbar Radi the most serious and concerned playwright in Iran, as we saw is a well-crafted work. Unlike many other theatre artists Radi has stayed in Iran and continues his work there. He is not specifically a religious playwright and as a result creates conflict with the extremists who are not in agreement with his work.

In the third play, *The Tale of the Concrete City* written by Abdolhay Shammassi in 1990, we see how theatre artists use symbolism and "happy endings" to deal with the political realities of the country.

Although all three plays were opposed by certain ideological groups, all went onto the stage and were seen by the public.

The translation of these plays, not the literal translation of the words but the accurate representation of the mood of the characters and the atmosphere of the plays, was not an easy task. For instance, in *The Steps*, in the first act, we are talking about the people of a village in the north of Iran in 1954. The state of the people, the poor conditions of the village, and the background that an Iranian audience knows are not obvious in the play. These are hidden behind the words and in translation those descriptions, and literary references usually are missed. However I have tried my best to find a viable equivalent rather than the literal translation.

Some problems facing the translator included the followings:

-Idioms. The idioms, jokes and proverbs which are specific to Iranian culture, are difficult to translate. I have tried to find a similar word or phrase without additional meanings. In case of proverbs, I have put the literal translation of the proverb in the footnotes.

-References. Specific references to historical events, contemporary incidents and political problems are not easy to follow by a non Iranian audience. Especially when the references are made by the playwright in an artistic way.

-Compliments. Persian language is full of complimentary words. For example, if we ask an Iranian "Do you want a cup of tea?", he will say "No" even if he wants the tea! And this "NO" is a compliment. There are such compliments in these plays that in translation appear strange for an English audience.

-The translator's own confidence in language. Although a translator in order to translate a play uses his language knowledge and dictionaries and many other books, he cannot be entirely sure of his translation. The second language is not his mother tongue.

-Production. The plays need to be rehearsed by actors on the stage in order to get their final form. The dialogues must be suitable for the actors to say, the audience to hear, and in harmony with the style of the play. In performance inevitably cuts would have to be made for purely artistic reasons. *The Steps*, for instance, is exceedingly long. However, in this translation I have thought it important to offer the complete text as the playwright wrote it, leaving cuts to the discretion of any future director.

In Iran the long and costly war with Iraq; the Western credit trade sanctions; the influx of 3-4 million refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq; the perennial recession and the political turmoil are at the forefront of the authorities' agenda rather than the world of arts, entertainment and theatre. Therefore the theatre is treated in the country as a secondary matter. Sohel Sa'ni, a theatre critic, comments:¹

Without any doubt, the theatre of our country is in a serious crisis. New plans for theatre are advertised widely but are forgotten quickly. The festivals come and go without genuine role for the theatre and artists, especially those who live in the townships. The actors who are faced with the finance problem, prefer to work in the cinema rather than in the theatre. The authorities must pay attention to these problems.

Jamshed Malkpour, a theatre director and researcher, describes the work of the committee in charge of theatre control:²

All the theatre activities in Iran are centred in the Centre of Dramatic Arts. This Centre which has established the committees in charge of theatre control, has monopolised not only the theatre productions, but also the aesthetics of the theatre. I am against the work of these committees and I think they must change their method. If government will not take the theatre seriously and offer more encouragement the collapse of the theatre is inevitable.

As we discussed previously, there is no specific law governing the theatre, so those individuals in charge of censorship, for instance, judge from their own personal tastes. For example while a play is banned in one city, the same play is permitted in another. While women are allowed to go onto the stage in Tehran, in some cities women are not allowed to act at all.

The latest news coming from Iran is not very encouraging. Metra Merhashemian, a theatre critic, writes:³

The state of the theatre in the provinces is in a serious decline. For more than ten years we have read in the newspapers that the light of the theatre in the provinces is going out, but there is nobody to go and discover talented artists. Last year was the 7th of the Student Theatre Festival. But the lack of technical equipment has made it very poor. This shows that the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is not committed to this festival. The only theatre magazine of the country, *Namayesh*, has not been published for eight months and nobody seems to care. An excess of form, heavy symbolism, the alienation to *Ta'zieh* and bad criticism are aspects of the decline of the theatre in our country.

The post-revolutionary Iranian theatre has faced many difficulties. However, there has been light in all the theatres of Iran. It is, mainly, through the hard work of the devoted theatre artists. But I think it is a miracle! Many problems of our country are solved by miracles.

1. *Hamshahri Newspaper*, No 28, January 1993.
2. *Keyhan Newspaper*, No 13226, November 1987.
3. *Keyhan Havai*, No 1027, April 1993.

Selected Illustrations



Khoshehhayh Khakestari (Grey Clusters).

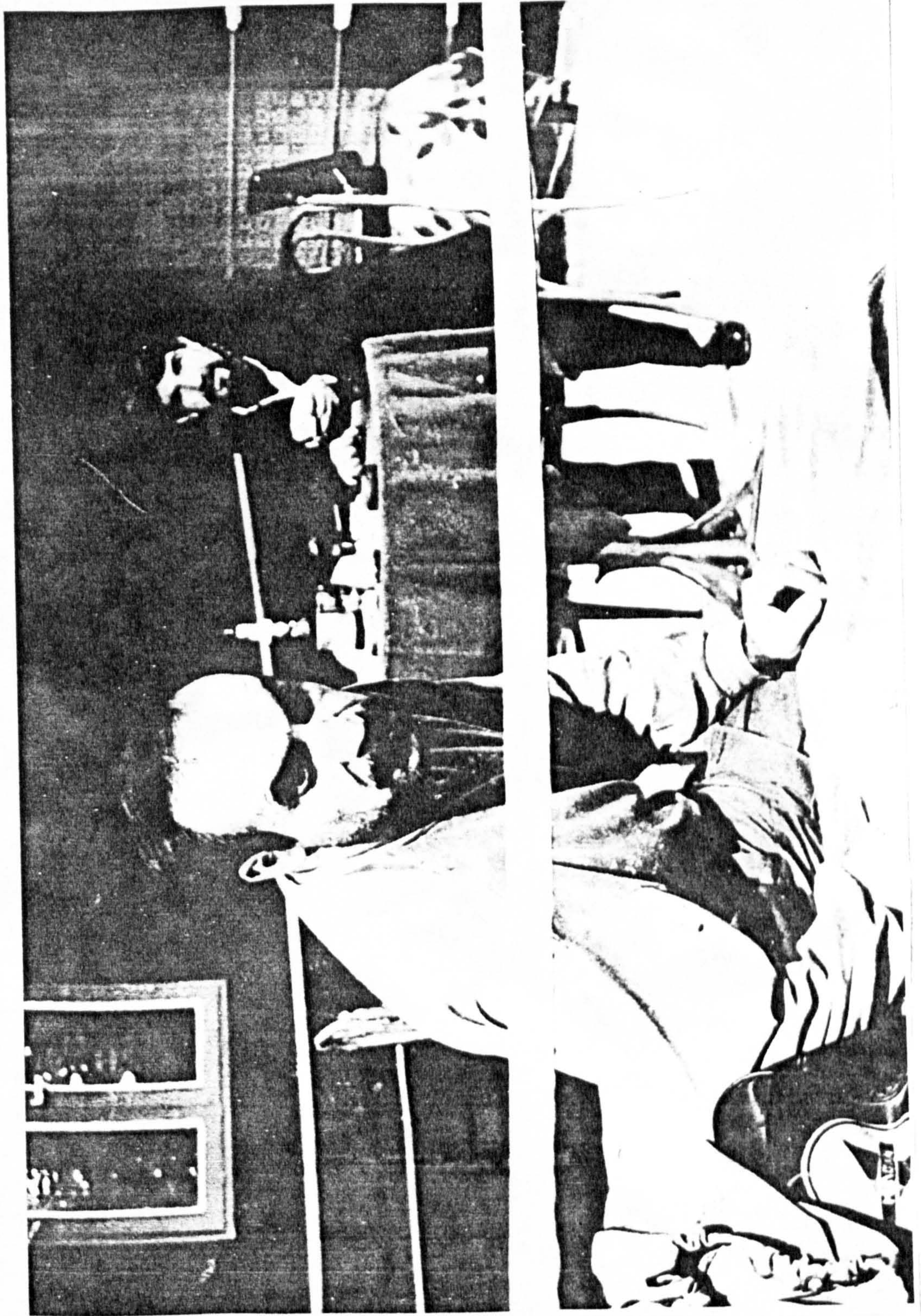
Playwright: Abdolhay Shammassi.

Director: Abbss Ranjbar.

Molavi Hall, Tehran, 1986.

Photo: Kamaloddin Shahrokh.

Plot: A young man , in order to get to his work on time, goes to an old watch-maker who is friend of his father. The watch-maker's watches are broken , rusty and without hands. In this play Shammassi explores real and false time.



Otaq 13 (Room 13).

Playwright: Massood Sami'i.

Director: Mostafa Abdollahi.

City Theatre, Tehran, 1989.

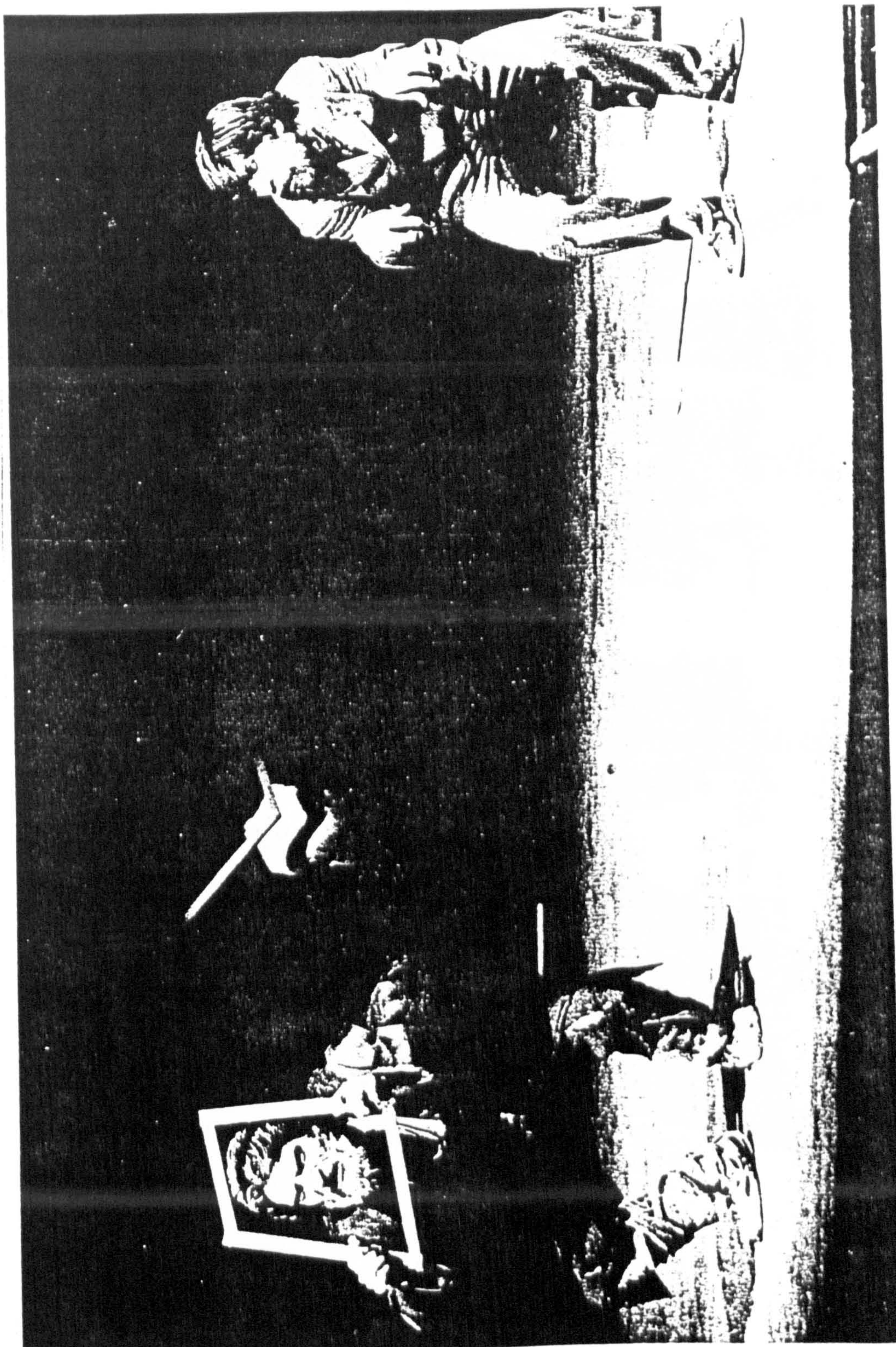
Photo: Heshmat Panahi.

Plot: In the room 13 there is a boxing ring. Two people, a boxer who has always been a loser and a judge who has been sacked, are fighting. They try to show the injustices of society.



Qwhaieh Whshi (Wild Swans).
Playwright: Enayatallah Hooshmand.
Director: Ahmad Sepasdar.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1989.
Photo: Heshmat Panahi.

Plot: Porsafa and Mohajer are two old actors. Their greatest wish, to be the best actor, has never come true. The play is the story of their disappointments both on the stage and in real life.



Bazgasht Lokomotiveran (The Return of the Train Driver).

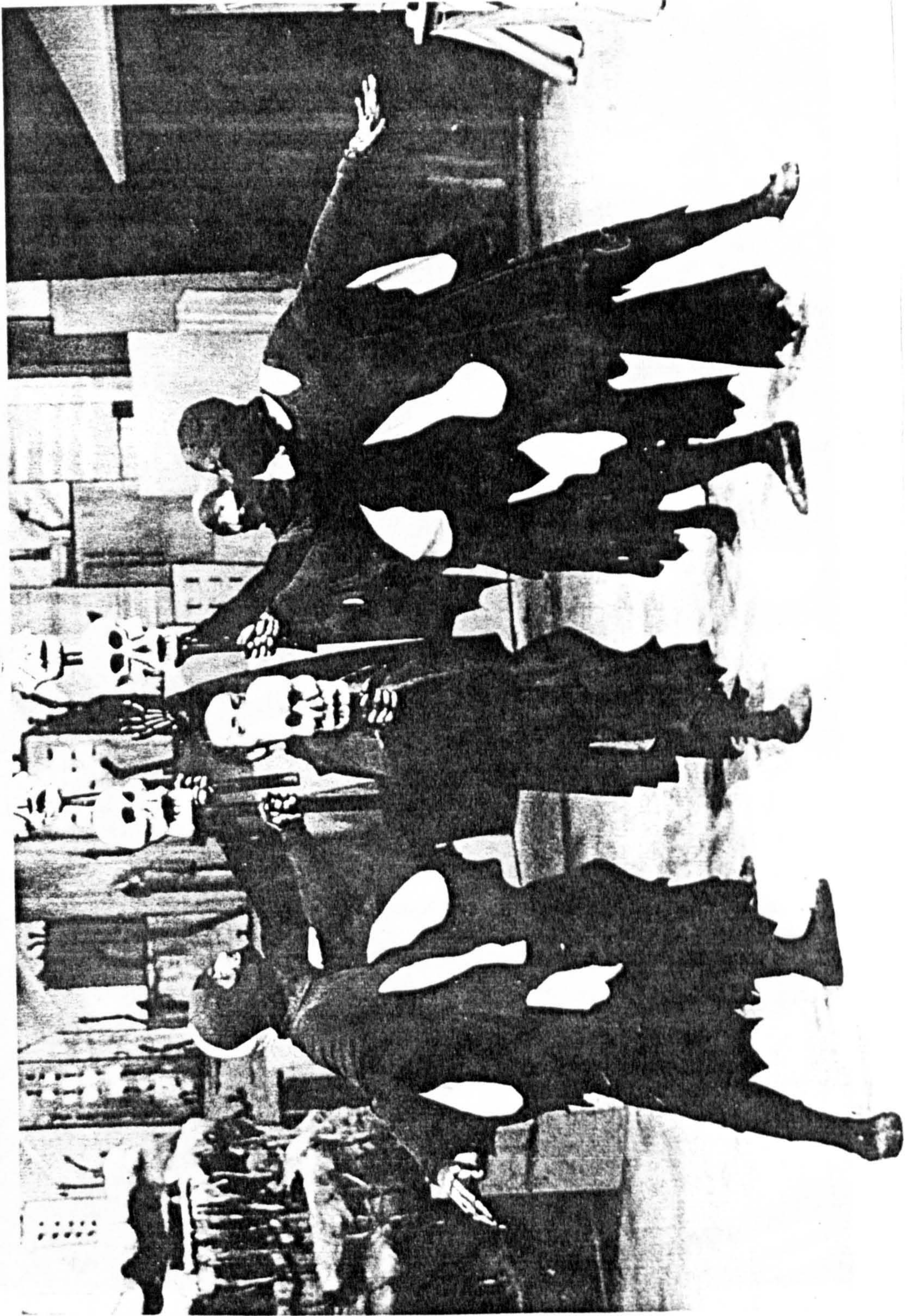
Playwright: Abdolhay Shammassi.

Director: Tooraj Attari.

Molavi Hall, Tehran, 1990.

Photo: Mass'od Morad Salimi.

Plot: A retired train driver comes back to his home but nobody knows him and even his home is occupied by an old monster and is ruined. The train driver thinks he was gone for two or three days but his neighbours think he has not come home for thirty years.



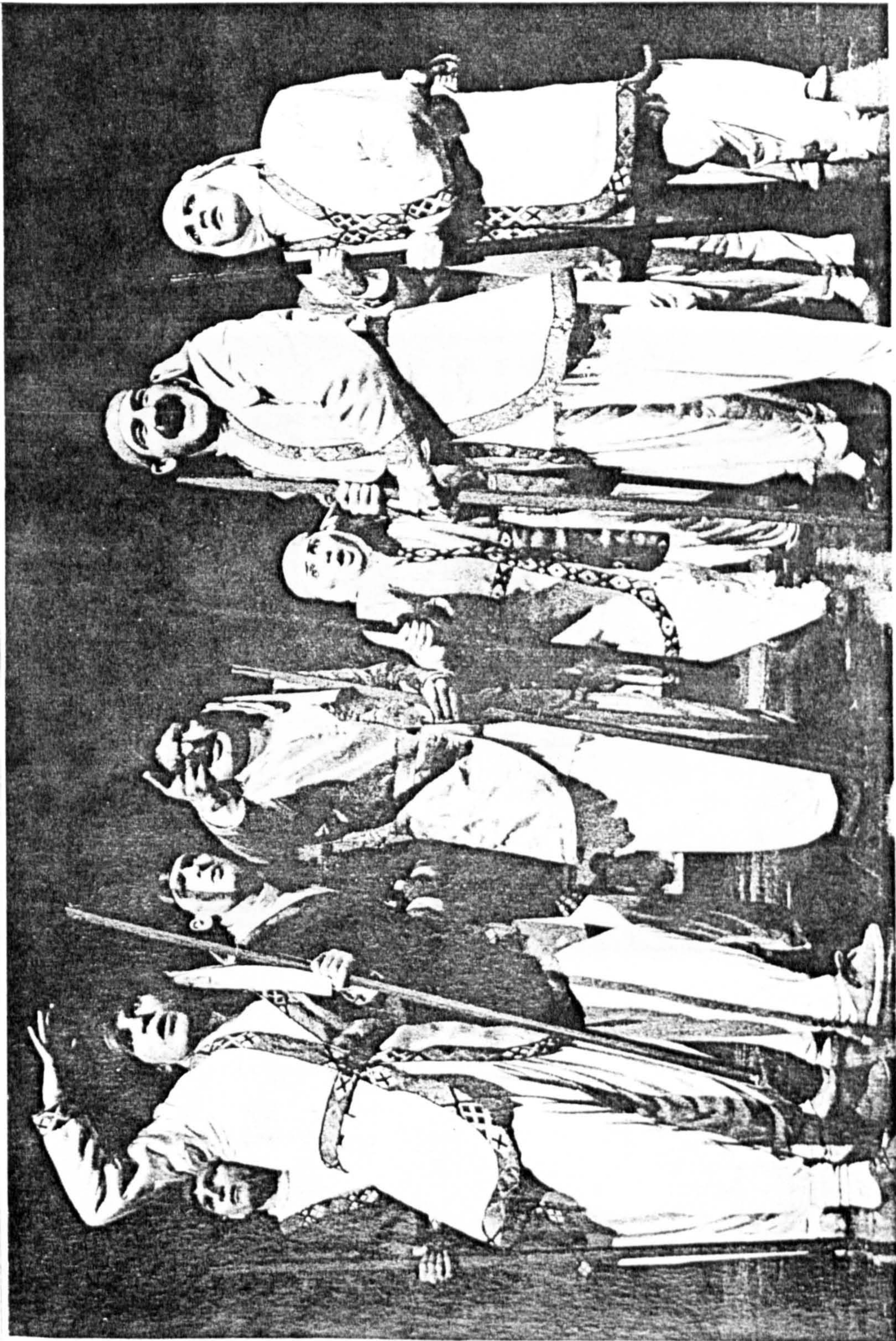
Hekayat Shahre Sangi (The Tale of the Concrete City).
Playwright: Abdolhay Shammassi.
Director: Parwaneh Mojdeh.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1990.

Plot: An imaginary concrete city is going to be destroyed. A cacophonous machine, brought in to dig out waste matter, destroys the foundation of the city, and the buildings collapse...



Si Morgh Wa Simorgh (Thirty Birds, Simorgh).
Playwright and Director: Qotbeddin Sadeqi.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1990.
Photo: Siyamak Zomorodi Mtlag.

Plot: This is an old story from Iranian literature. All the birds of the world get together to find their King. In order to do that, they start a long journey which has seven stages and at each stage some birds stop. At last thirty birds reach the final destination and instead of the King, they find themselves.



Si Morgh Wa Simorgh (Thirty Birds, Simorgh).
Playwright and Director: Qotbeddin Sadeqi.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1990.
Photo: Siyamak Zomorodi Mtlag.



Bolbol Sargashteh (Bewildered Nightingale).

Playwright: Ali Nasiriyani.

Director: Sadreddin Hejazi.

Sangalaj Hall, Tehran, 1990.

Photo: Heshmat Panahi.

Plot: This is an old folk story. The mother of a family dies. The father marries another woman. The step mother falls in love with his son, but he rejects her. The step mother provokes her husband to hate his son. The father kills his innocent son.



Mardha Wa Ahowan (The Men and the Gazelles).

Playwright: Hoshang Amiri

Director: Maryam Mo'taref.

City Theatre, Tehran, 1990.

Photo: Majid Khamseh.

Plot: Mah Moner is a girl who must marry her cousin traditionally, but she and he are not in love and they do not want to do that. There is a disagreement between two families and at last Mah Moner shoots her uncle.



Matoori

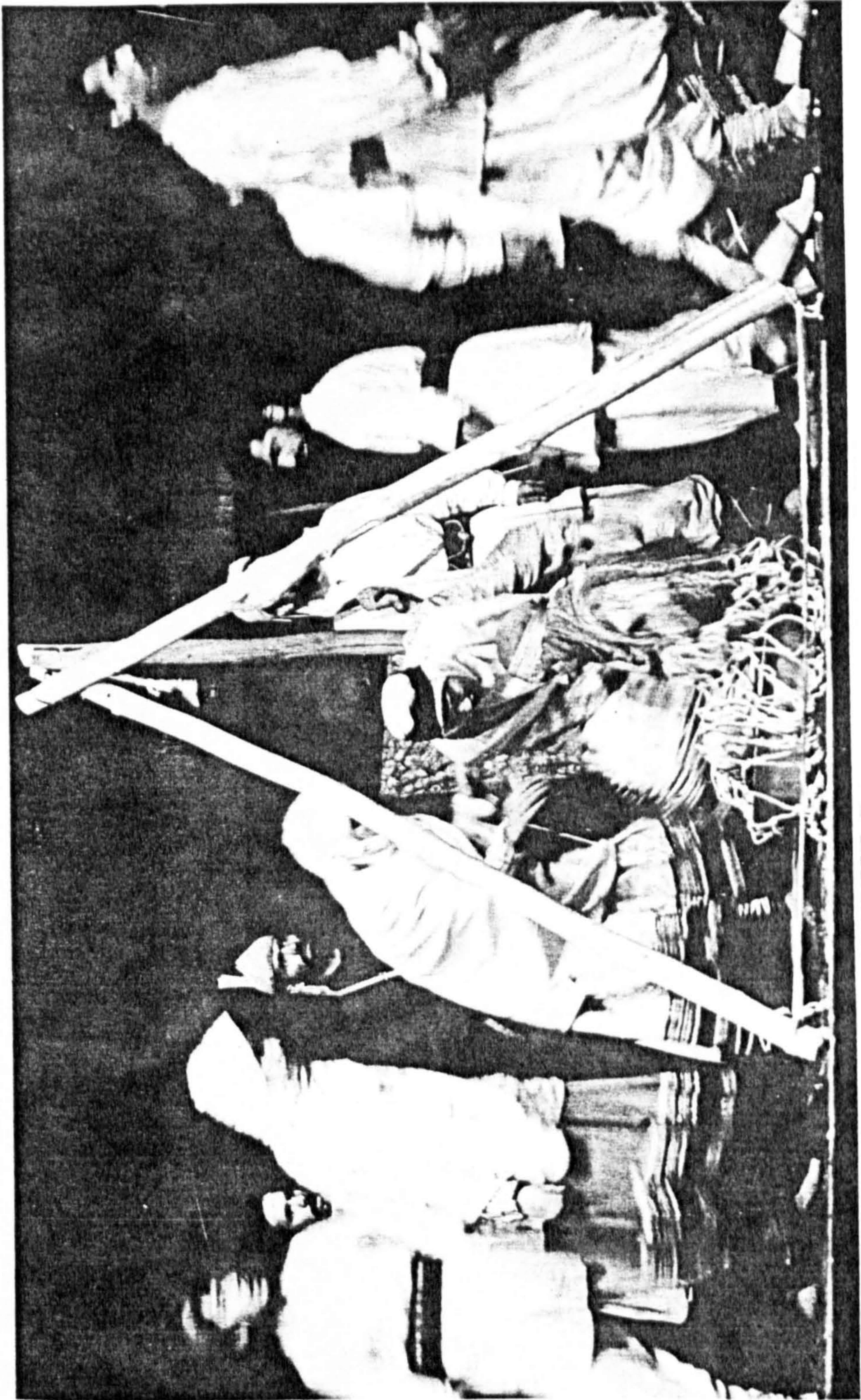
Playwright: Mohammad Charmshir.

Director: Shohreh Lorestani.

Tehran University, Tehran, 1990.

Photo: Siyamak Zomorodi Mtlag.

Plot: In the South of Iran, when demons go inside the body of a man he becomes ill. The illness is called Zar. In order to cure him a special ceremony must be set up with dance and songs. In this play a man called Matoori has got Zar and a ceremony is set up for him.



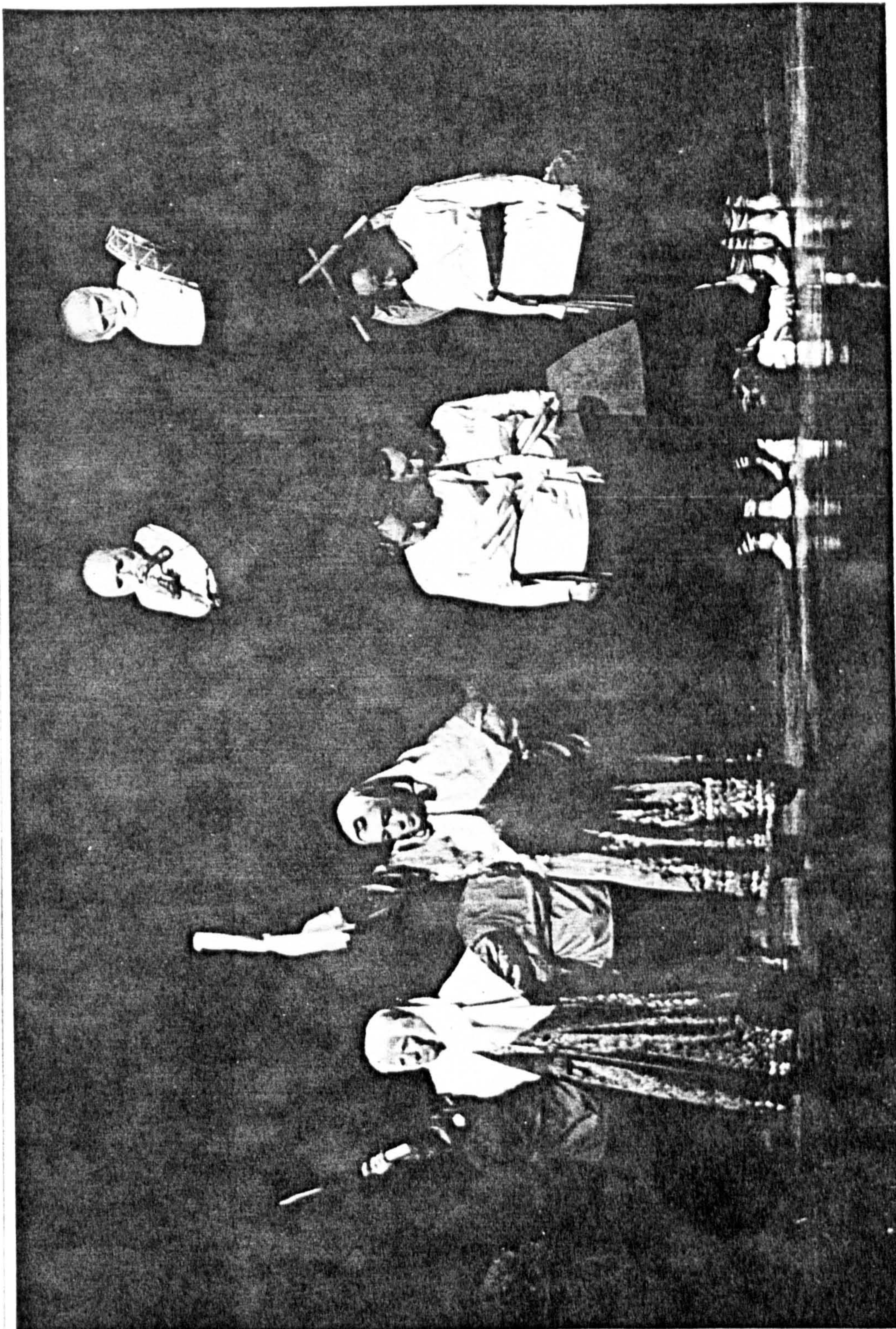
Shaqayeq Darreh (Corn Rose of the Valley)

Playwright and Director: Ali Azadnia.

Mashhad City, 1990.

Photo: Ahmad Khademolhosini.

Plot: In a tribe, a young man called Yashar is in love with a young girl called Maral. traditionally, Yashar has to marry another girl and Maral another man called Arta. Yashar and Maral however, decide to get married. On the wedding day, Yashar fights Arta. Maral who thinks Yashar is dead, goes to the endless horizon and Yashar who is badly wounded, goes behind her.



Tawallodi Digar (Another Birth).
Playwright and Director: Houssien Kargari.
Vahdat Hall, Tehran, 1990.
Photo: Heshmat Panahi.

Plot: This is a play without words. On the wedding day of a young couple Moguls attack and kill a large number of people, including the groom. The survivors decide to fight back. At last the Moguls are defeated and a baby, the symbol of a new generation is born.



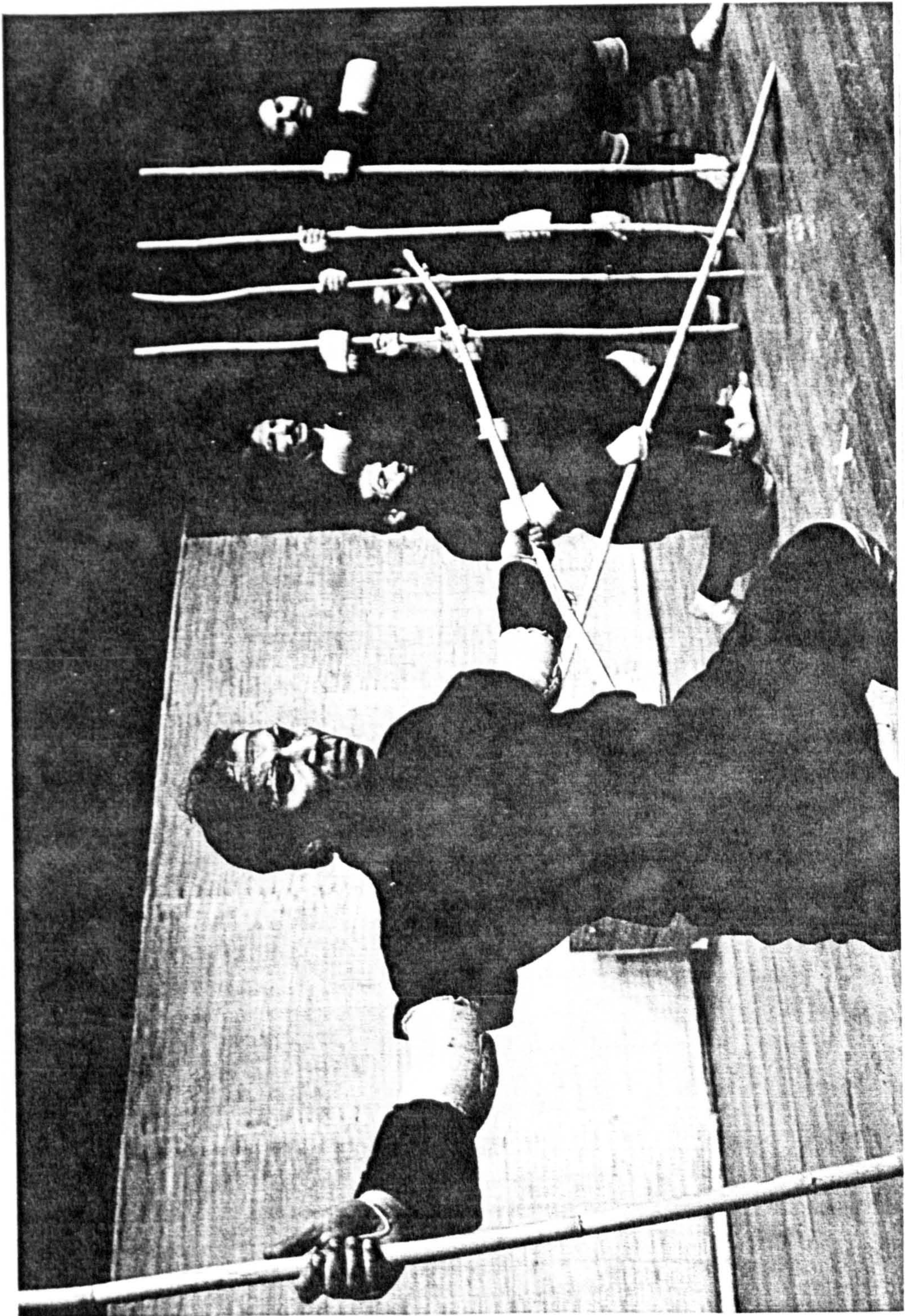
Fasten Android Telegraphs As Daiquiri Sham
(Legend of the Heart-rending Sadness of Ill-luck).
Playwright and Director: James Malekpour.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1990.
Photo: Mohammad Esma'il Affatrokh.

Plot: This is an adaptation of *King Oedipus*. Oedipus is the captain of a ship in the South of Iran.

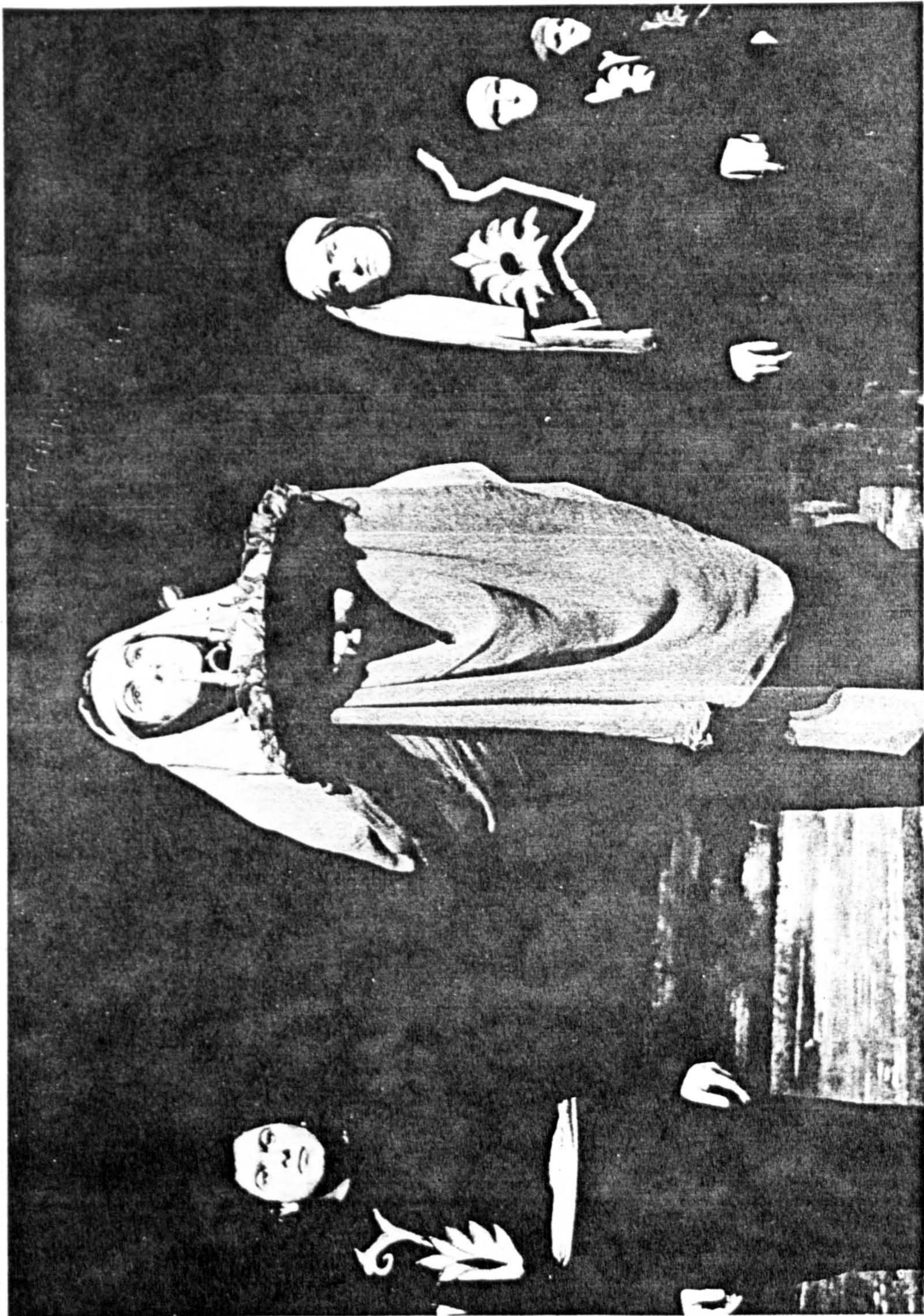


Taqlid Majles Haft Khan
(Imitation Scene of the Seven Khan).
Playwright and Director: Atila Pasyani.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1991.
Photo: Hamid Jebelli.

Plot: This is an ancient Iranian story from *Shahnameh* (*The Book of Kings*). Rostam, the hero of *Shahnameh*, in order to purify himself must travel through the seven stages. In each stage he has to solve a different problem.

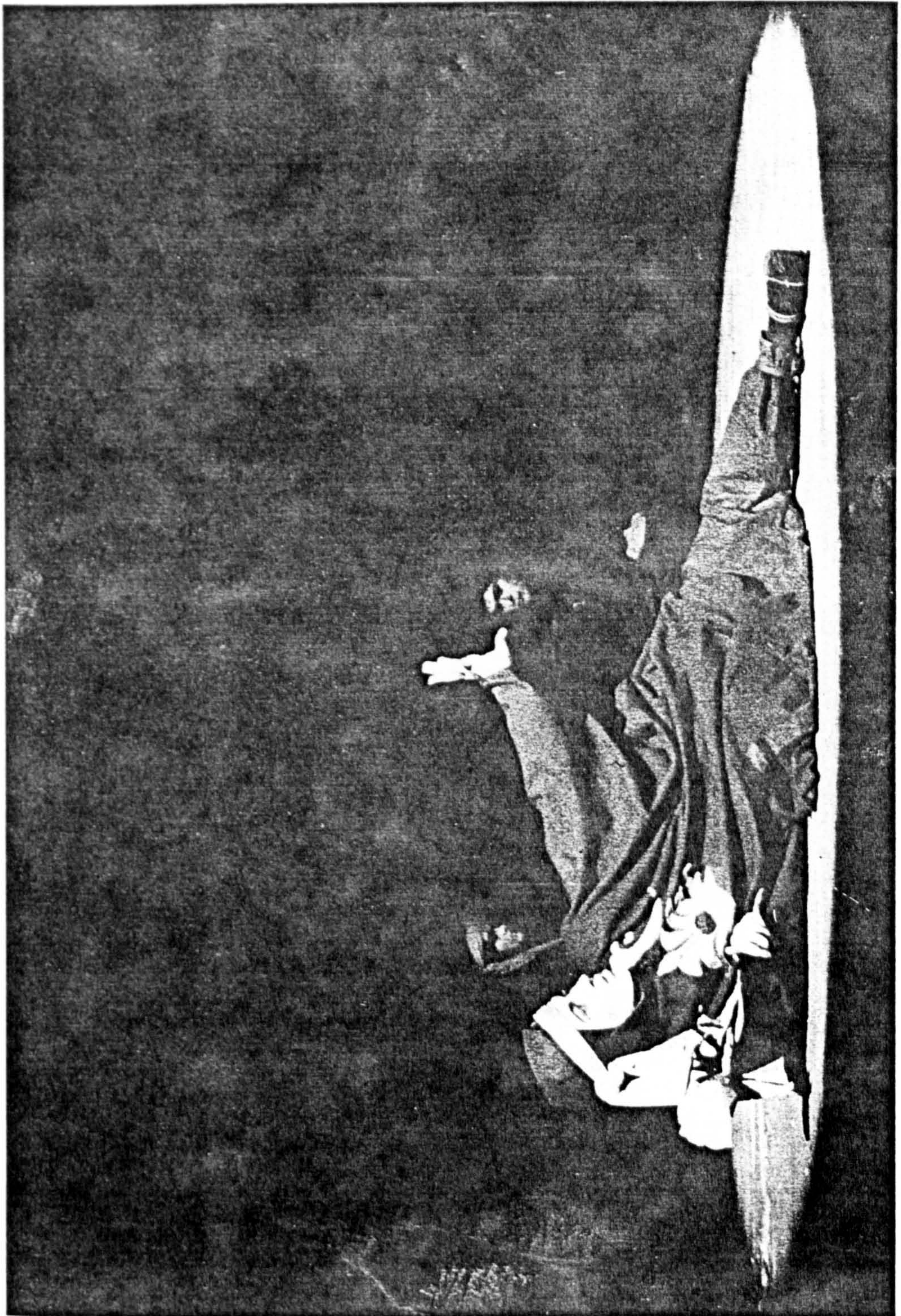


Taqlid Majles Haft Khan
(Imitation Scene of the Seven Khan).
Playwright and Director: Atila Pasyani.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1991.
Photo: Hamid Jebelli.



Zibatarin Golhah Qali
(*The Most Beautiful Flowers of the Carpet*).
Playwright and Director: Amir Dezhakam.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1991.
Photo: Hassan Rahimi.

Plot: A Woman called Rokhsareh tells a story to her little boy. This story, which is her real-life story, is about the owner of a carpet-making workshop. This man exploits the young and needy workers. A young man Called Yoysof revolts against the owner and at last sets the workshop on fire and escapes with Rokhsareh, a worker girl who is in love with him.



Zibatarin Golhah Qali
(The Most Beautiful Flowers of the Carpet).
Playwright and Director: Amir Dezhakam.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1991.
Photo: Hassan Rahimi.



Wasleh Bar Fanos Neawekhteh As Ien Derkhat Zetoon
(A Patch on the lantern not Hung from this Olive Tree).
Playwright: Mohammad Charmshir.
Director: Hussien Atef.
Roudbar City, 1991.
Photo: Hamid Jebelli.

Plot: This play is about the earthquake in the north of Iran in 1991. It was created for the victims of earthquake in Roudbar City.

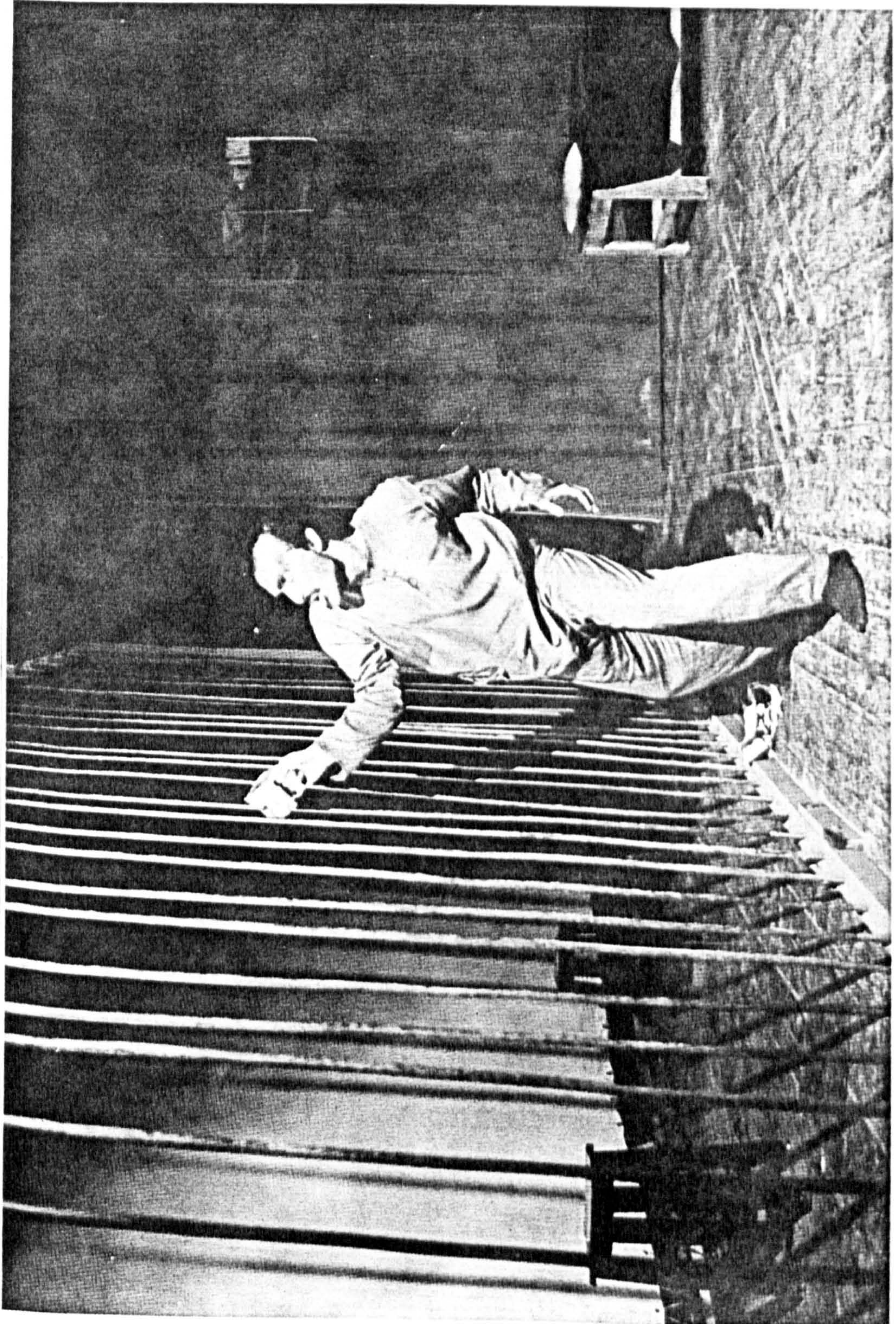


Esfandiyar Tragedy
Playwright: Ali Chraghi.
Director: Hussien Farrokhi.
Vahdat Hall, Tehran, 1991.
Photo: Majid Khamseh.

Plot: This is an ancient Iranian story from *Shahnameh (The Book of Kings)*. Goshtasb, in order to get more power, wants to kill his son, Esfandiyar.



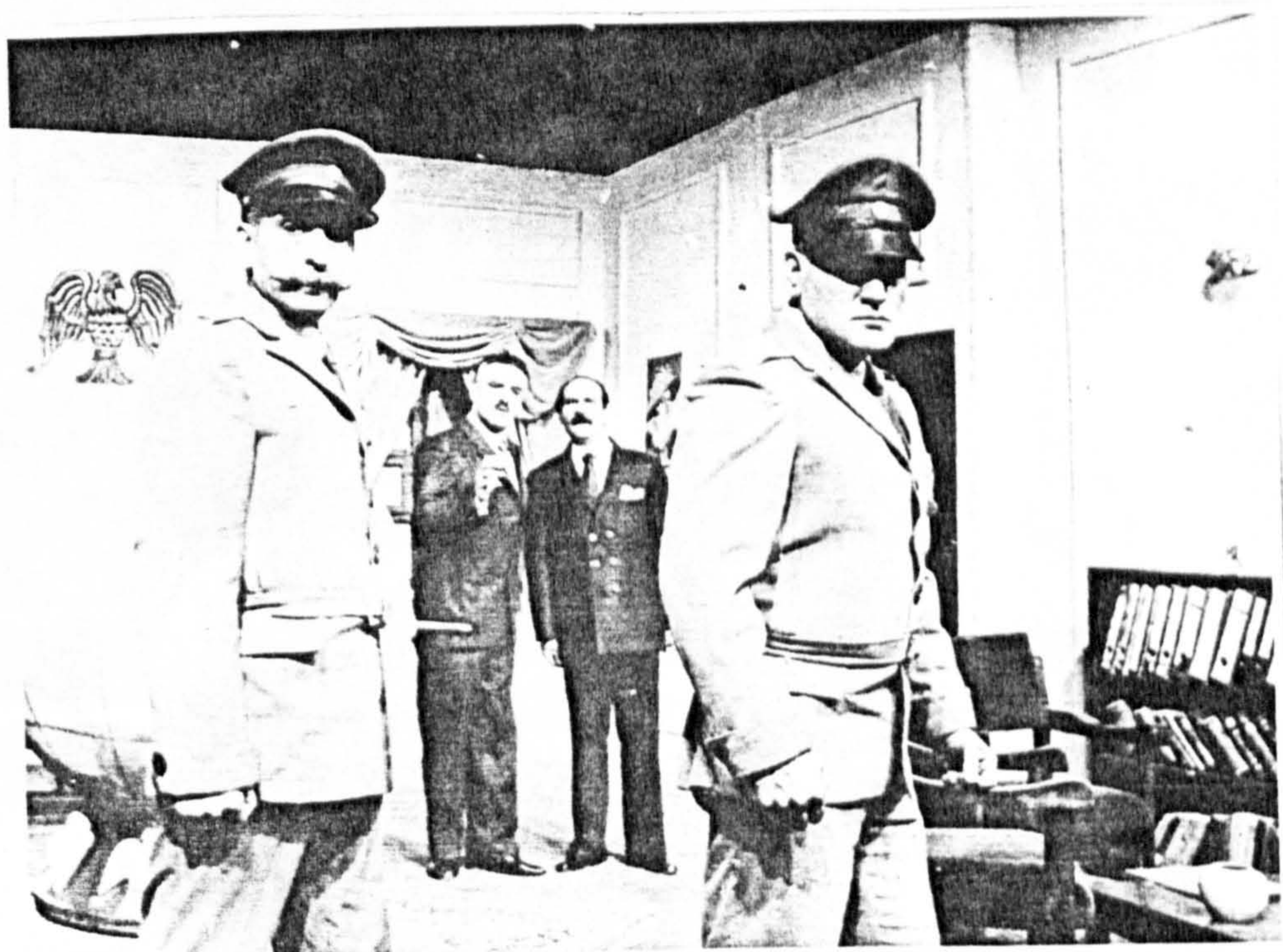
Antigone
Playwright: Sophocles.
Director: Majid Ja'fari.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1988.
Photo: Sadeq Tirafkan.



The Island
Playwright: Athol Fugard.
Director: Mahmmoud Qobeh Zarrin.
Tabriz City, 1988.
Photo: Abbas Al Yasin.



Indira's Judgement
Playwright: Don Kopal Mokreji.
Director: Farhad Mohandespour.
Molavi Hall, Tehran, 1989.
Photo: Majid Khamseh.



Embassy
Playwright: Slawmir Mrozek.
Director: Ferdows Kaviyani.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1989.
Photo: Heshmat Panahi.

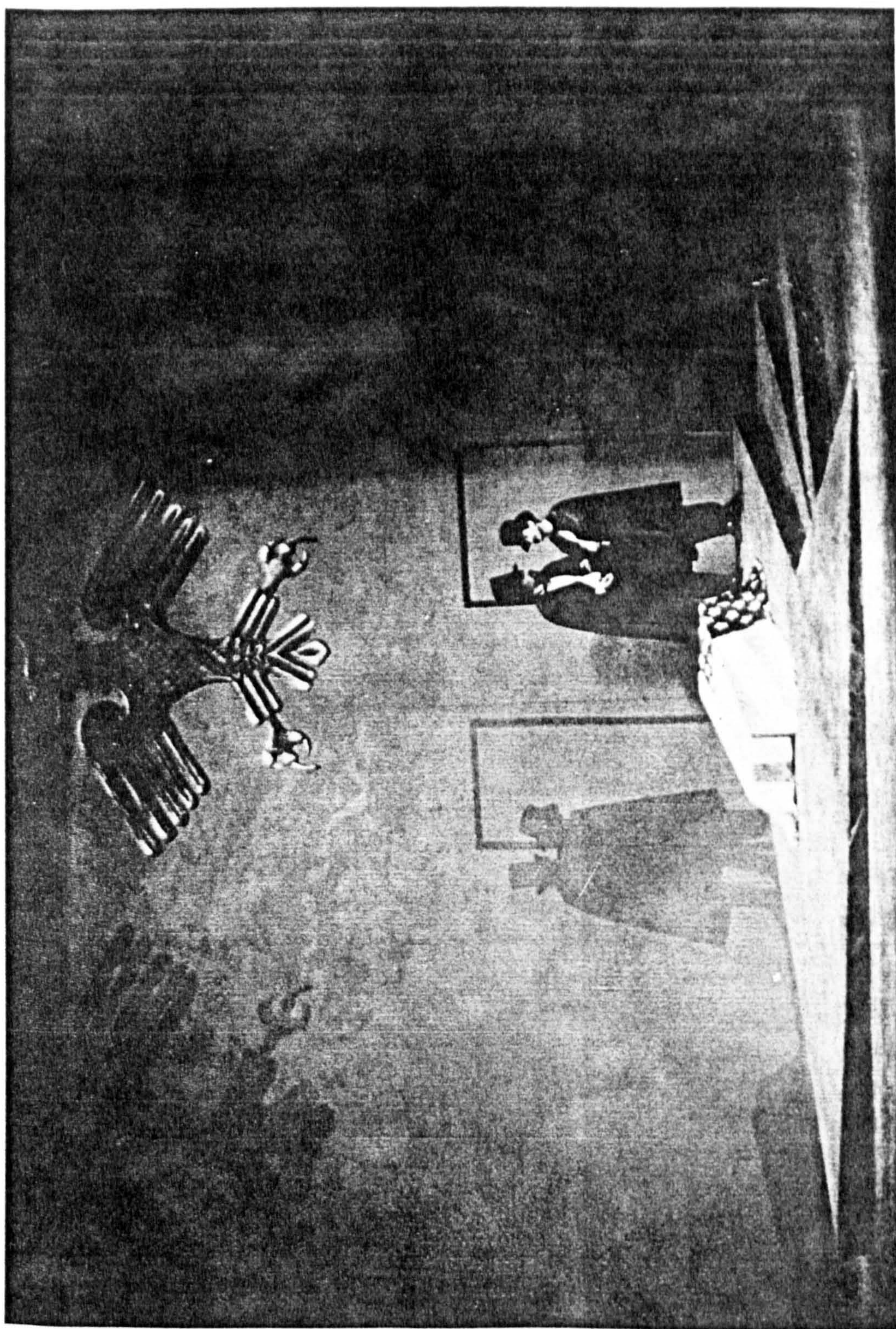


Antigone
Playwright: Jean Anouilh.
Director: Shohrah Lorestani.
Molavi Hall, Tehran, 1989.
Photo: Majid Khamseh.

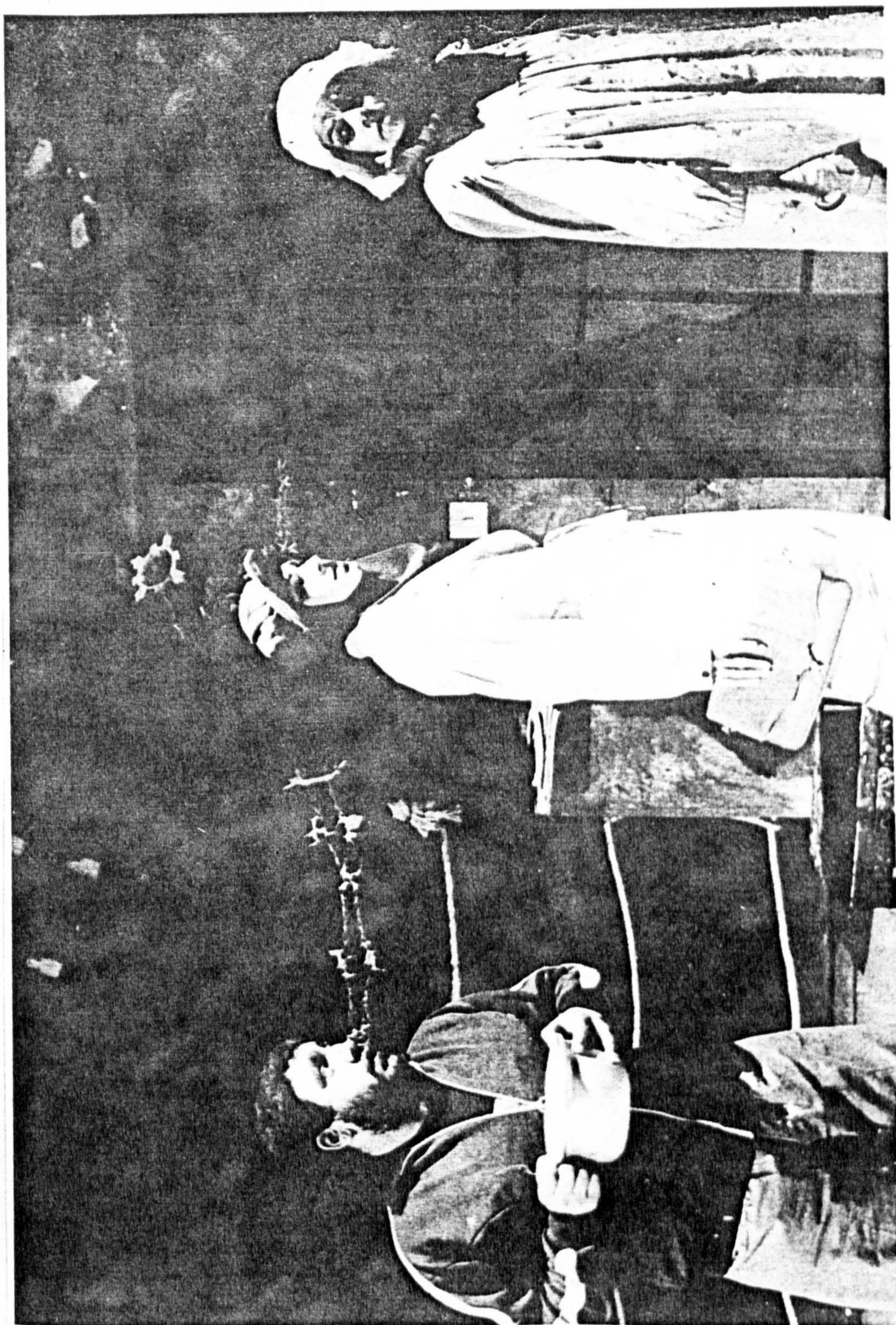


Medeh

Playwright: Jean Anouilh.
Director: Qotbeddin Sadeqi.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1989.
Photo: Sorena Mohammadi.



Mac Beird
Playwright: Barbara Garson.
Director: Tajbakhsh Fanaiyan.
Vahdat Hall, Tehran, 1989.
Photo: Mohammad Ahmadi.



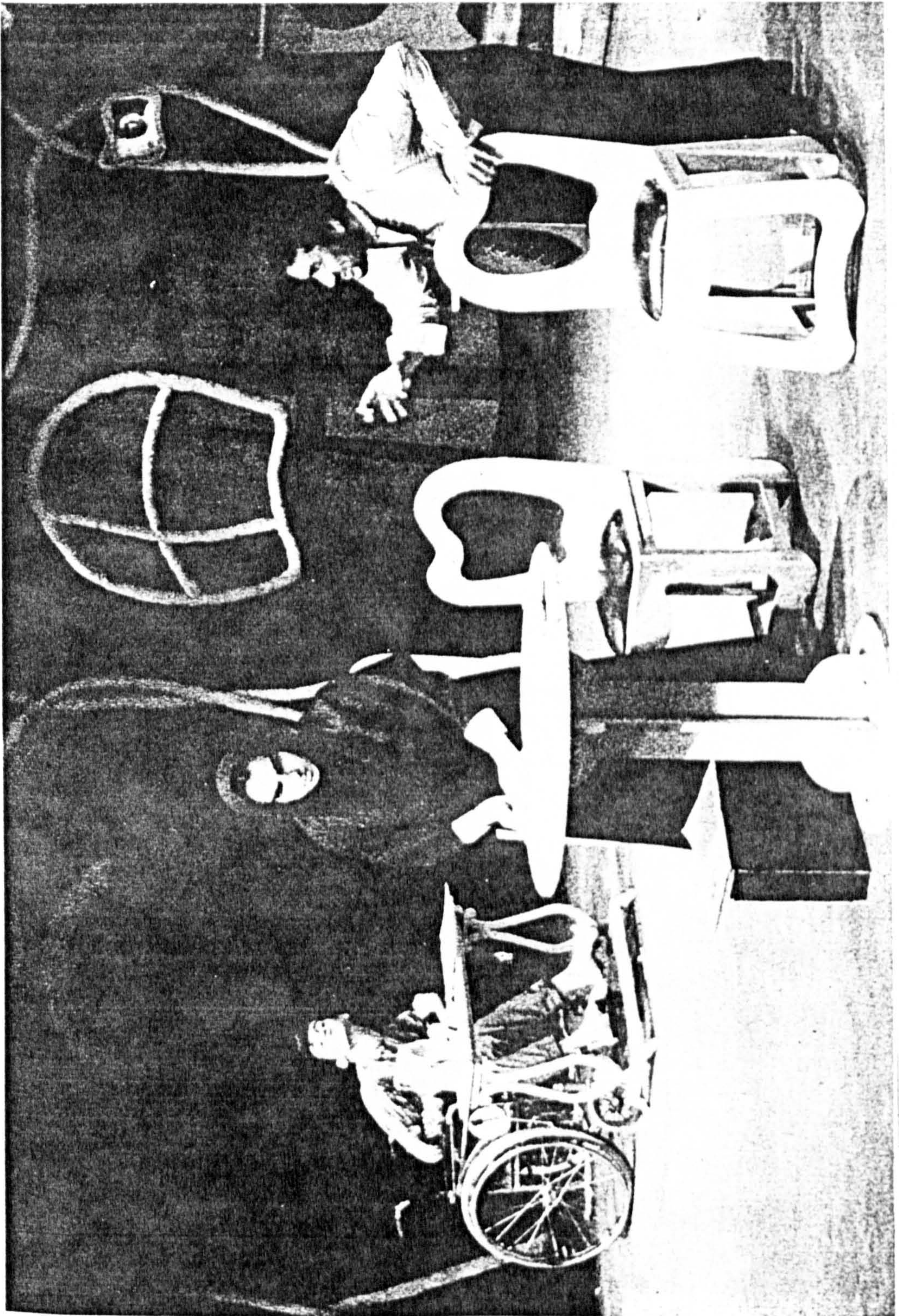
They are Alive
Playwright: Athol Fugard.
Director: Hamid Reza Qotbi.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1989.
Photo: Heshmat Panahi.



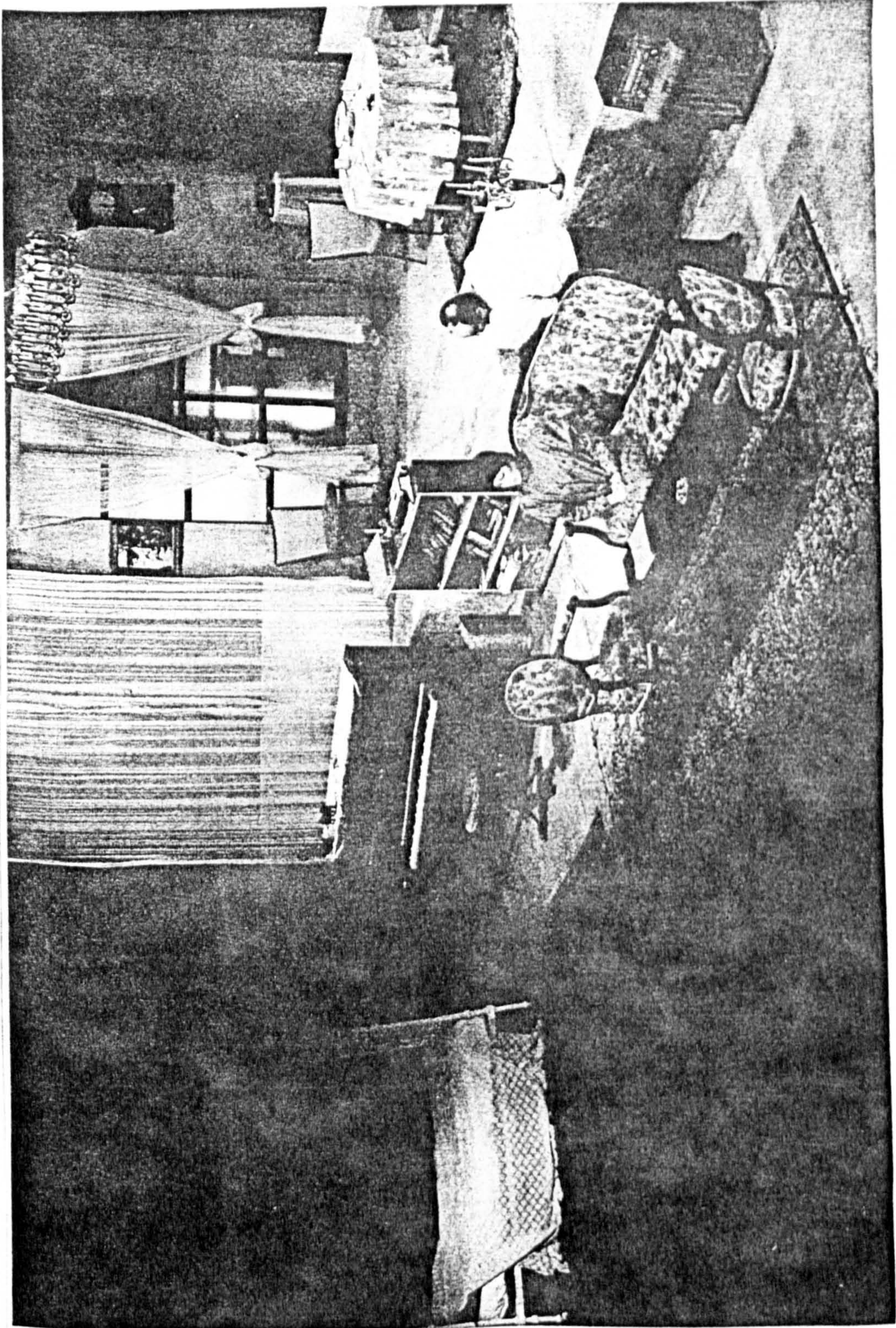
Koholin
Playwright: William Butler Yeats.
Director: Mahdi Rezakhani.
Molavi Hall, Tehran, 1990.
Photo: Majid Khamseh.



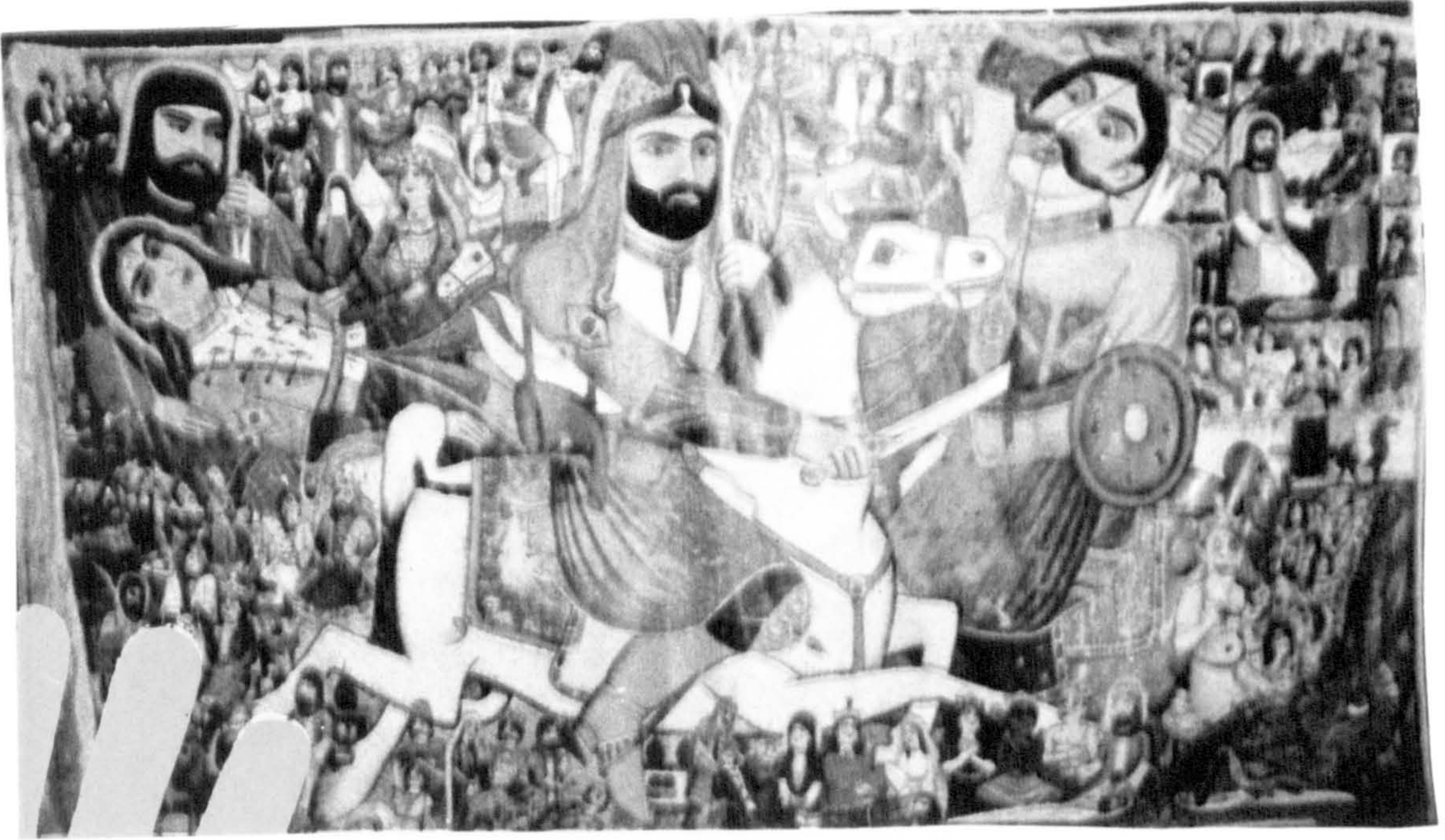
Endgame
Playwright: Samuel Beckett.
Director: Parwaneh Mojdeh.
City Theatre, Tehran, 1990.
Photo: Mahmood Raisolmohaddesin.



The Rose
Playwright: Maria Fraky.
Director: Jahangir Taheri.
Molavi Hall, Tehran, 1990.
Photo: Saleh Safavi.



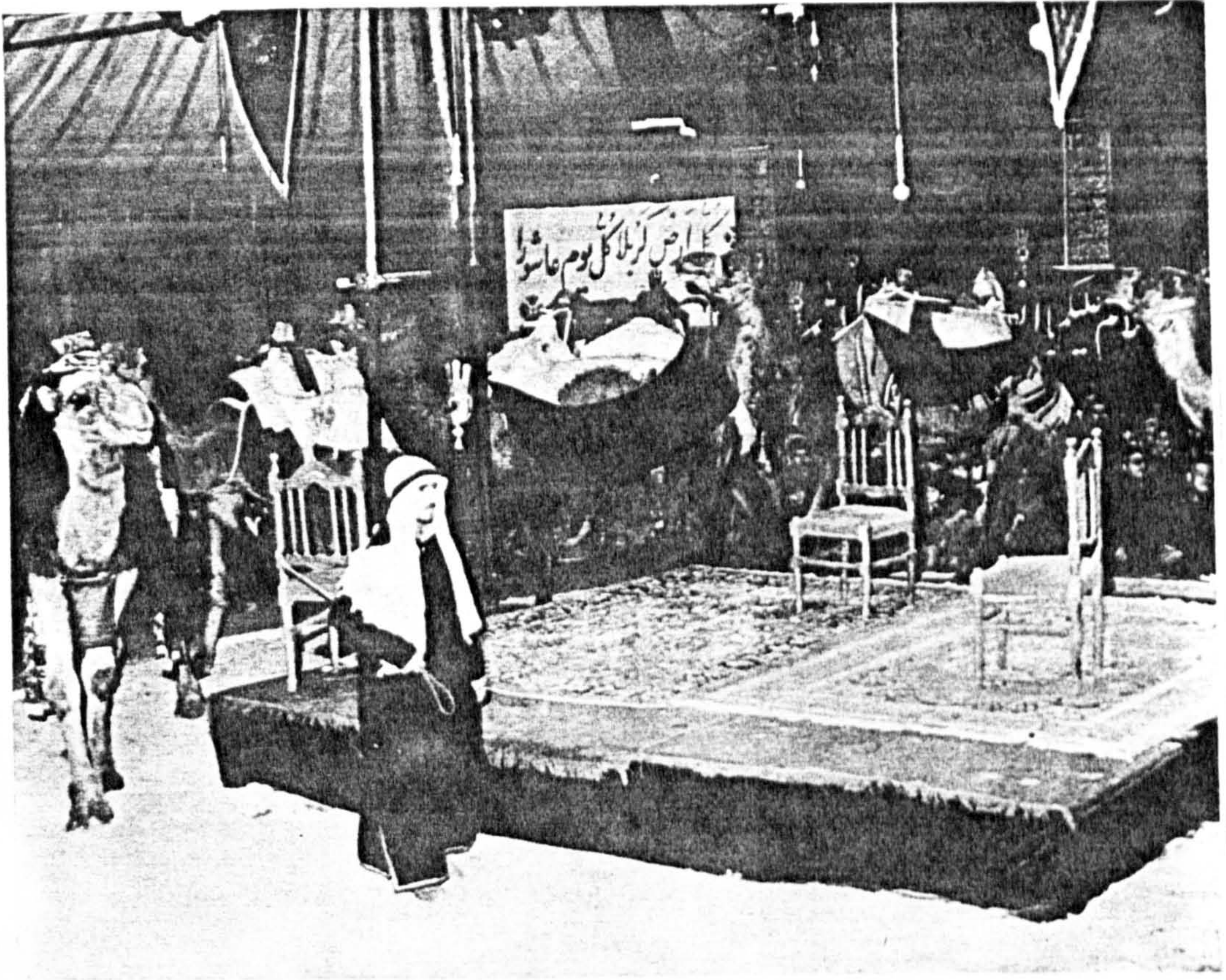
Glass Menagerie
Playwright: Tennessee Williams.
Director: Khosrow Shoja'zadeh.
Vahdat Hall, Tehran, 1989.
Photo: Saleh Safavi.



Pardeh Dari (Screen Keeping)
Mehrab Hall, Tehran, 1987.



Naqqali (Recounting)
Narration: Morshed Torabi
Mehrab Hall, Tehran, 1990.
Photo: Azardokht Bahrami.



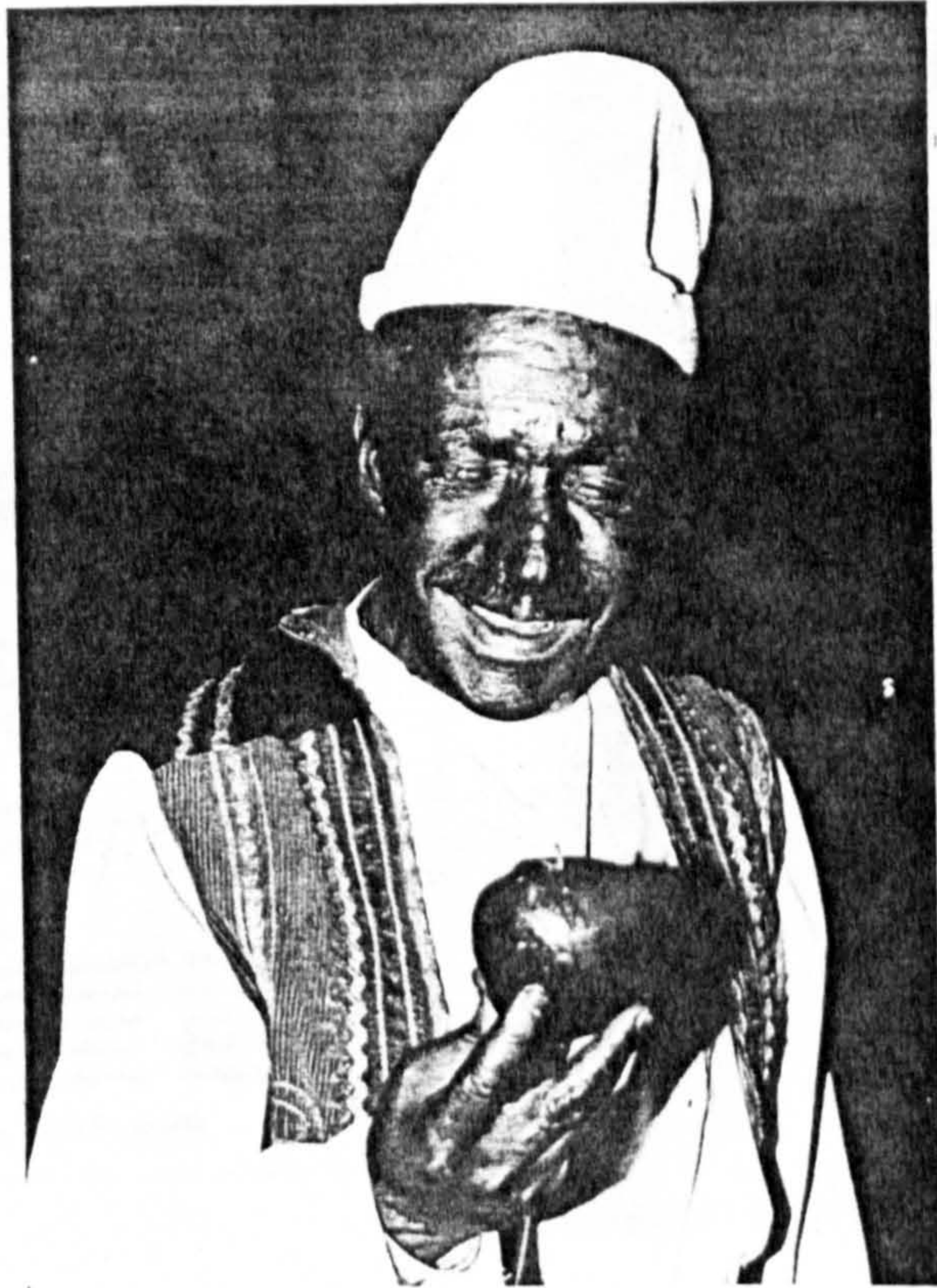
Ta'ziyeh (Mourning)



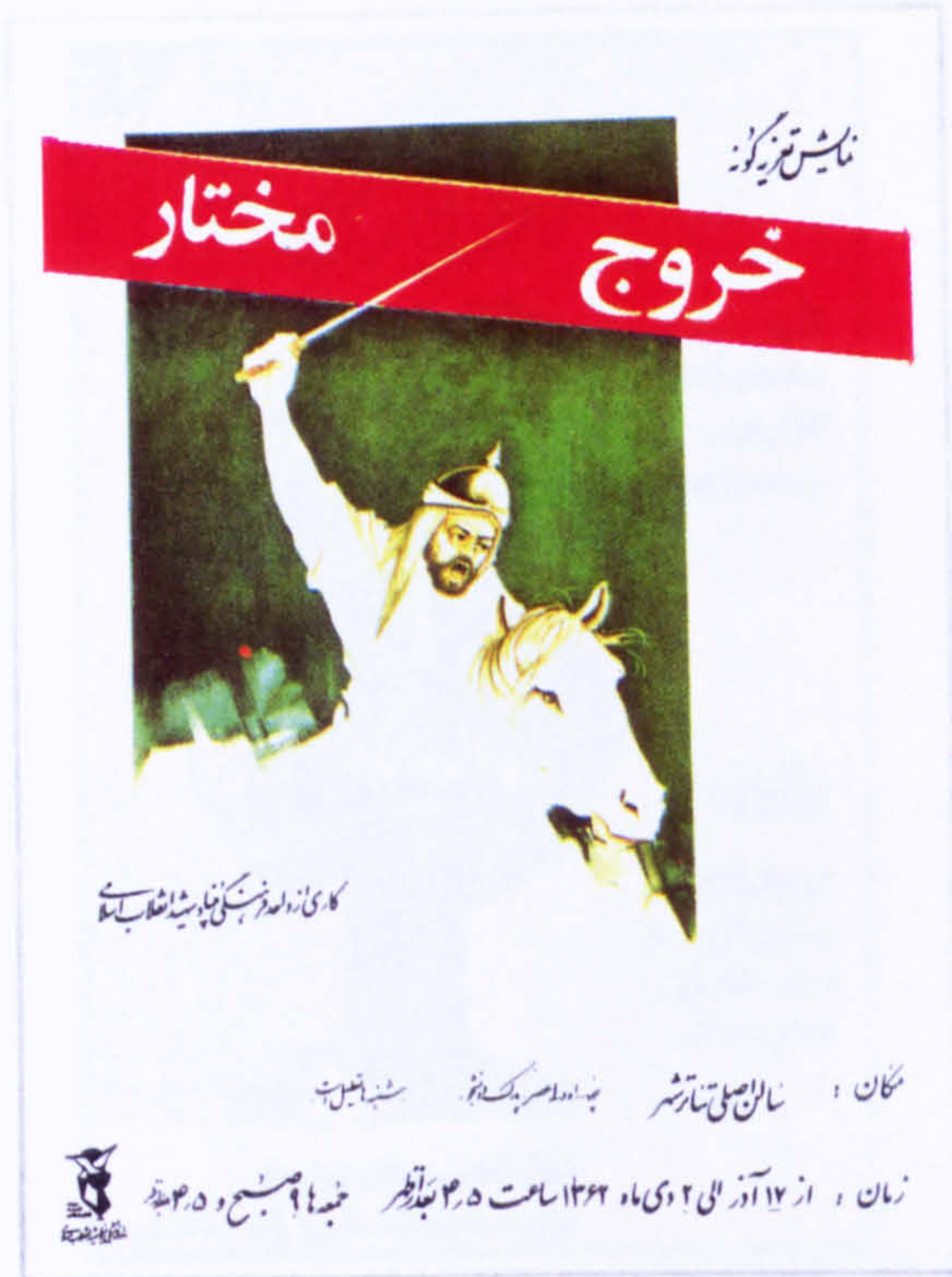
Ta'ziyeh (Mourning)
Director: Hashem Fayaz and Dawood Fathalibeigi
City Theatre, Tehran, 1990.
Photo: Heshmat Panahi.



Kheimeh Shab Bazi (Tent-play in the Night)
The Wedding of Farokh Khan
By: Asqar Ahmadi
Avignon, France, 1991.



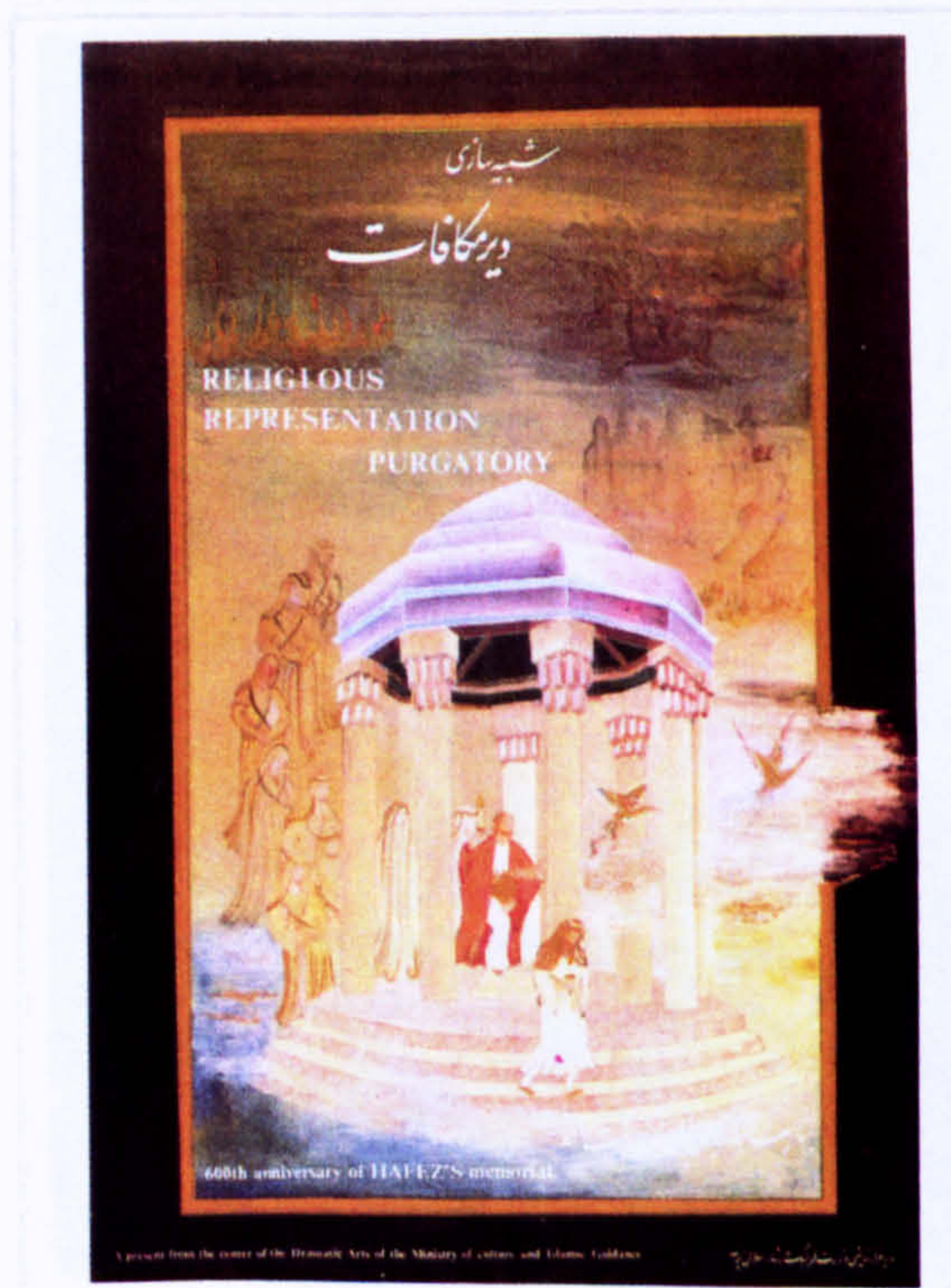
Siah Bazi (Black-face Play)
The Sword of Salomon
Playwright and Director: Hassan Azimi
Nasr Theatre, Tehran, 1991.
Photo: Asma'il Affat Rokh.



Designer: anon



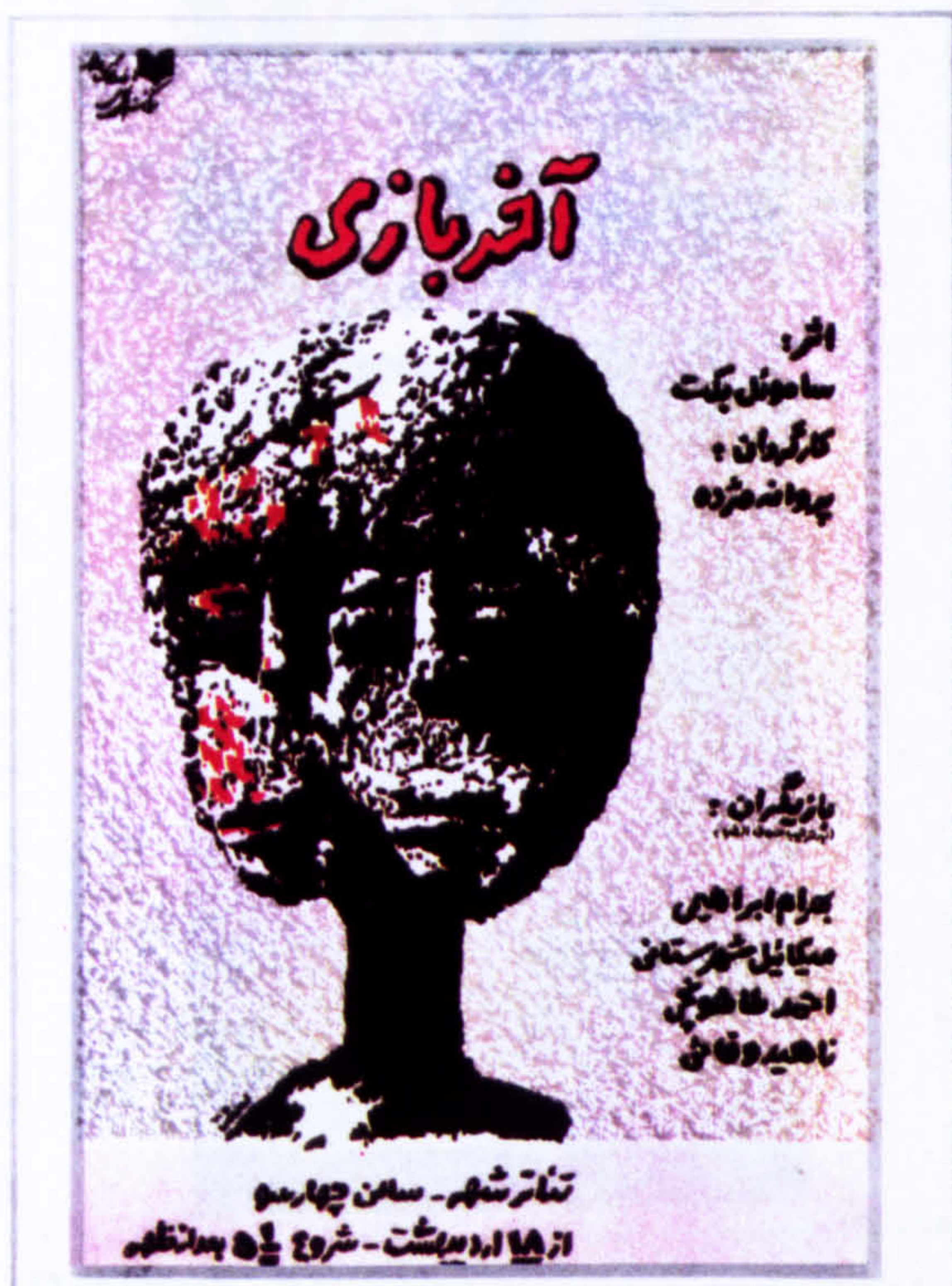
Designer: Mohammad Wojdani.



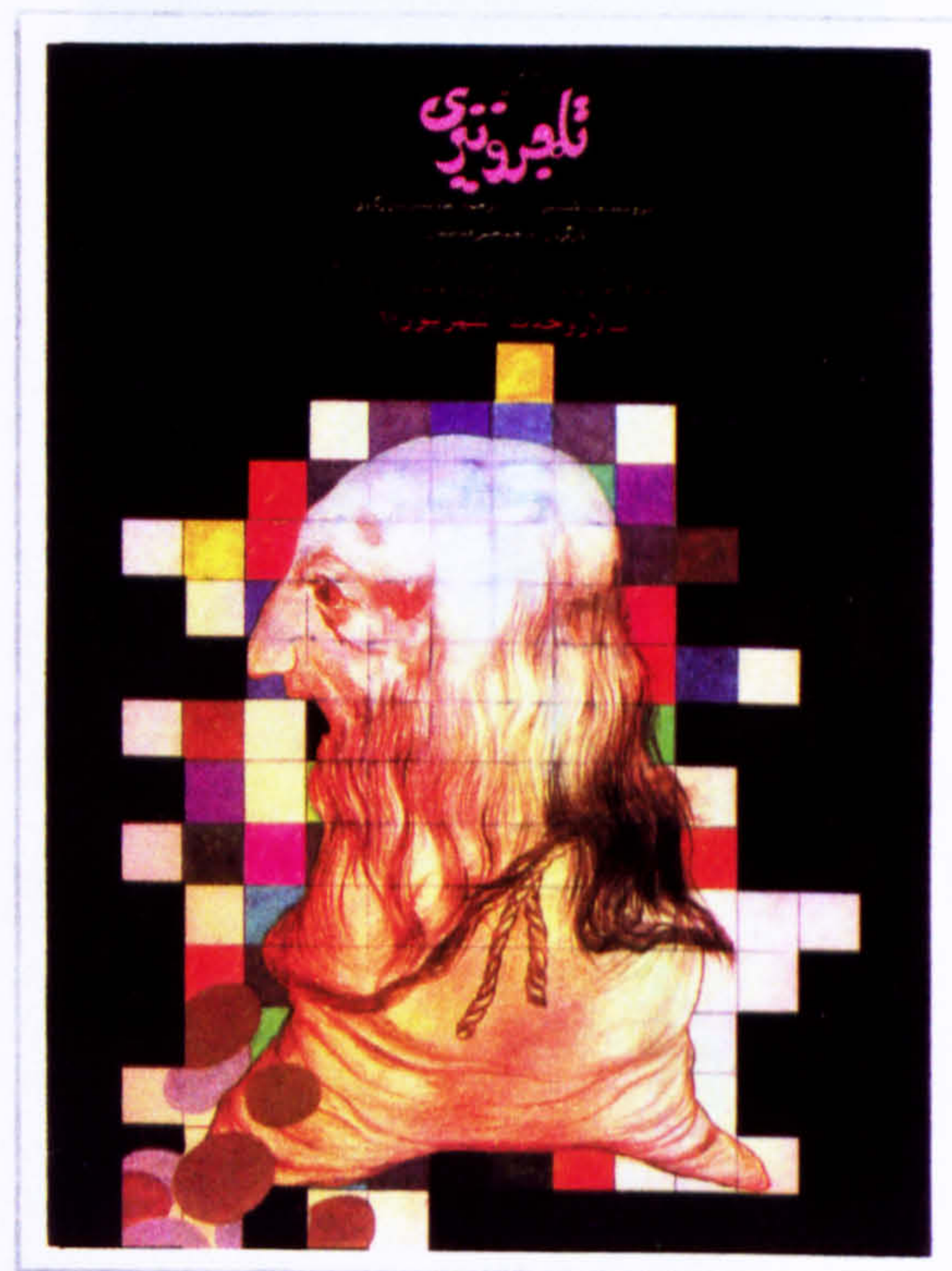
Designer: anon



Designer: Mohammad Wojdani.



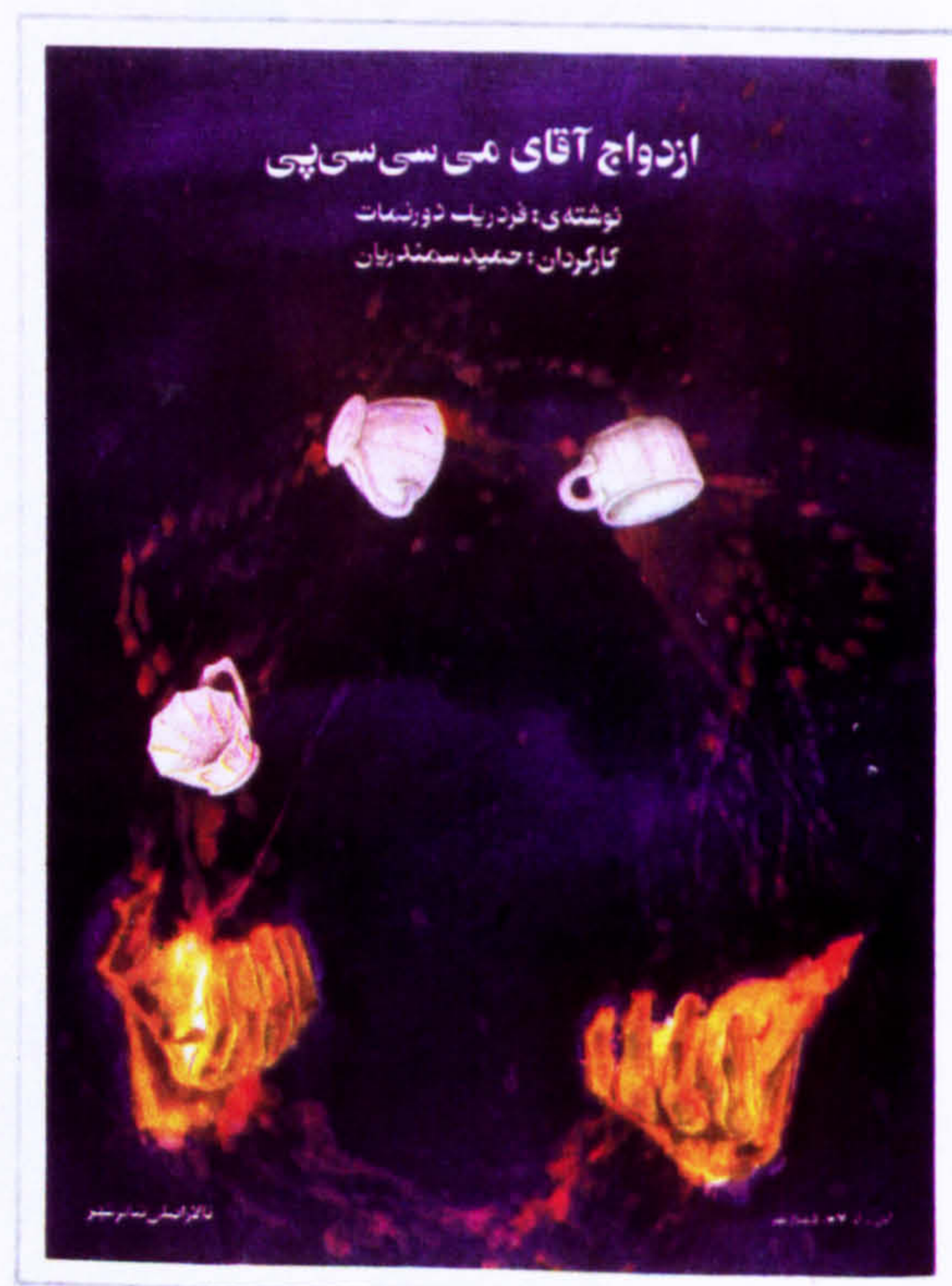
Designer: Hamid Amani.



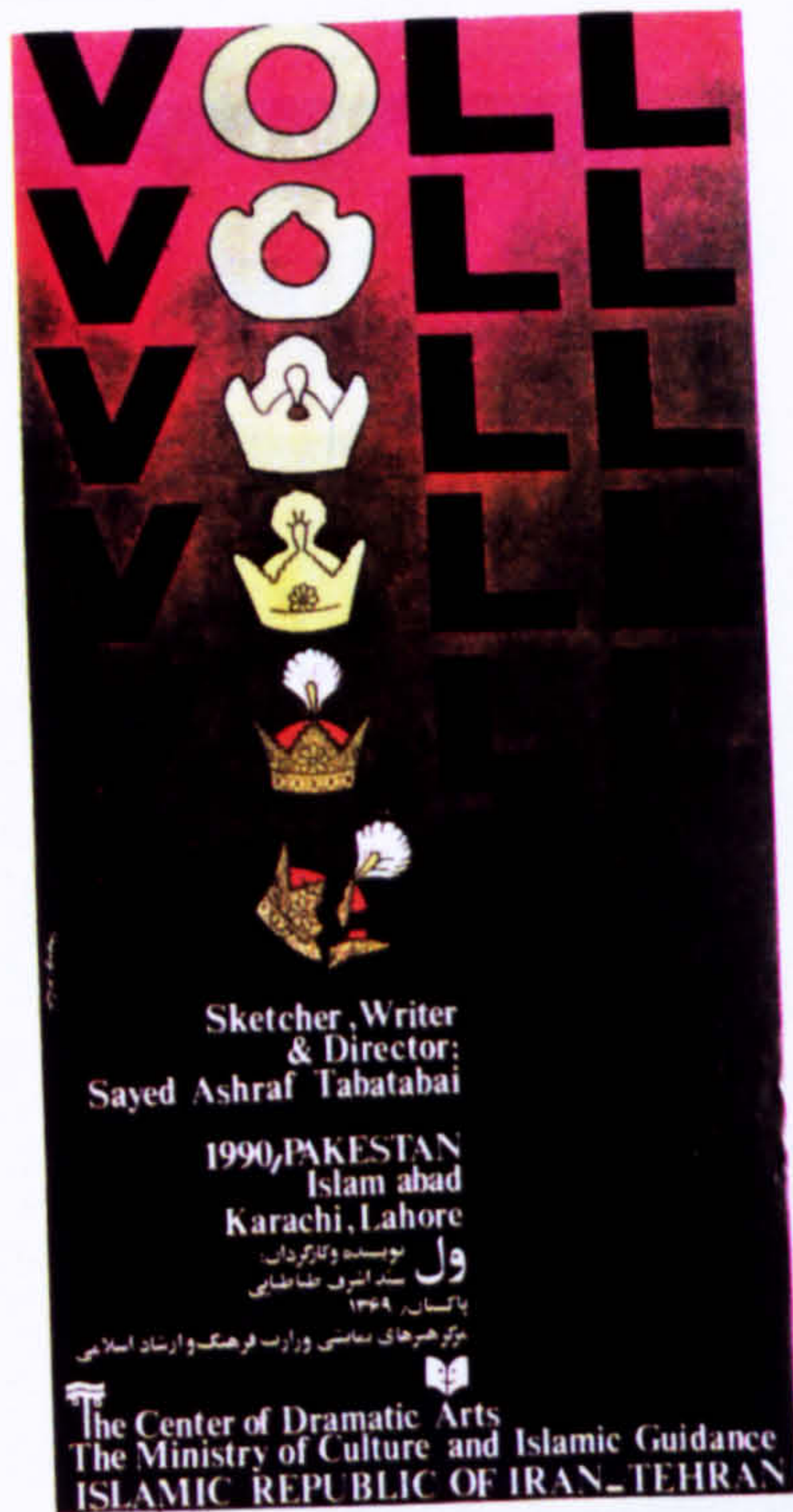
Designer: Mohammad Wajdani.



Designer: Shahpour Shahadi.



Designer: Hamzeh.



Designer: Ali Sami'i.



Designer: Howman Mortazawi.



Designer: Mohammad Faraji.



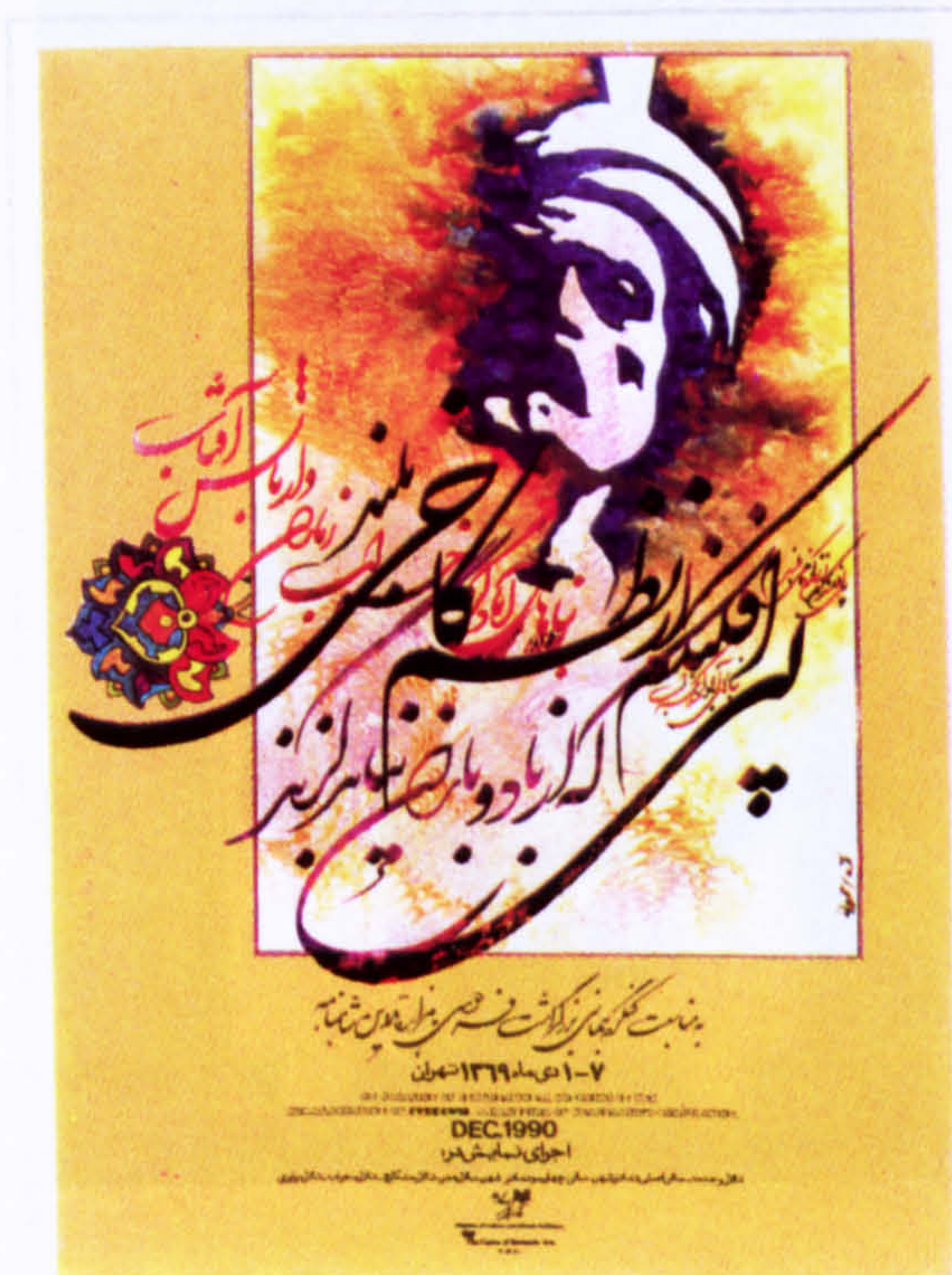
Designer: Ali Mosazadeh.



Designer: Asbati.



Designer: Anosherwan Mirza'i.



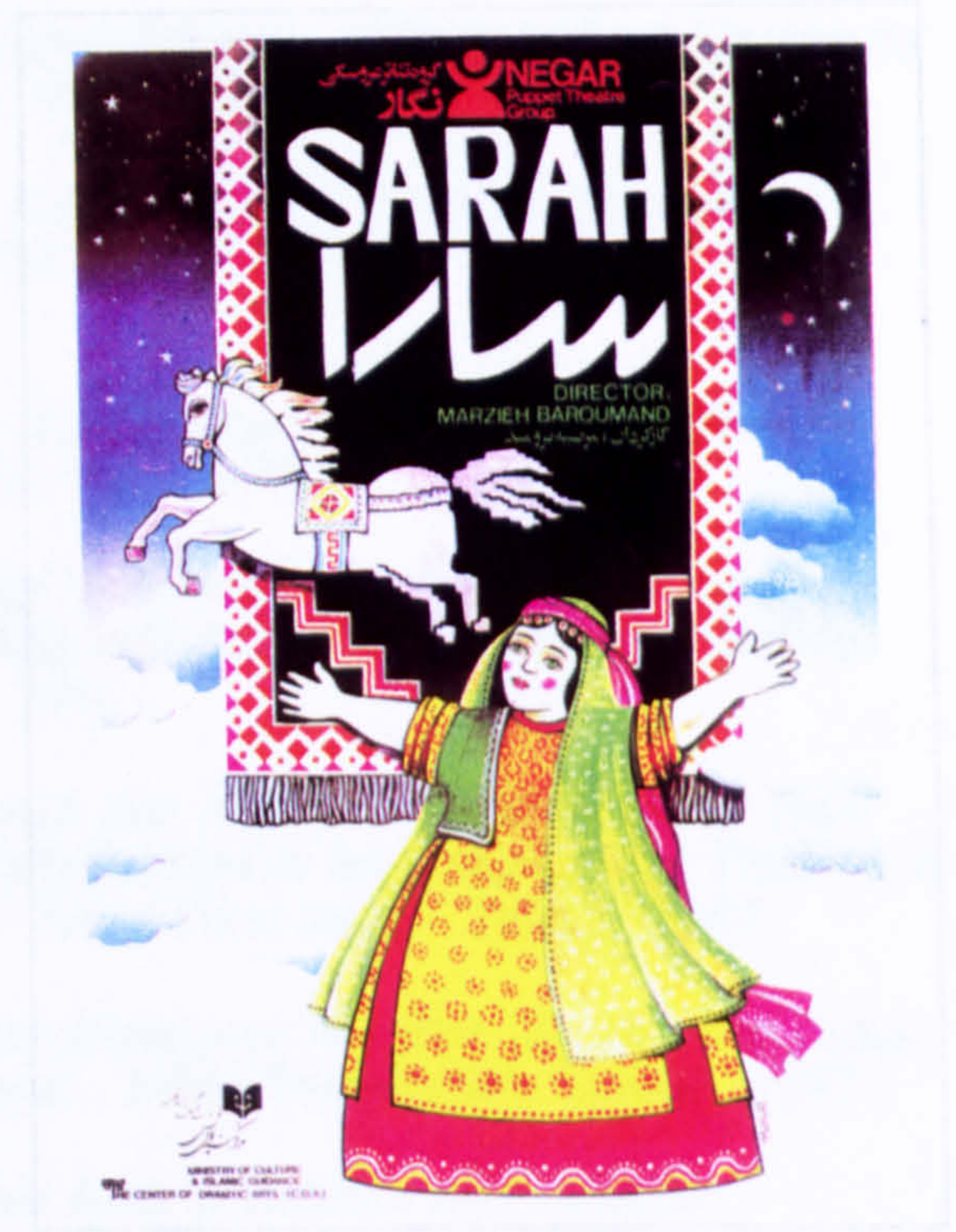
Designer: Mohammad Wajdani.



Designer: Morteza Momaiiaz.



Designer: Wafa'i.



Designer: Asbati.

Artist: Farid Motamed

Artist: Ya'qub

Artist: Ya'qub



Designer: Qaribpour.



Designer: Mas'od Sadeqian.

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