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RITUAL AND DRAMA

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to study the nature of the ritual relationship and theater on the example of the Muslim ceremonial theatrical performance of the Ta'ziah – the Shi'i passion play. The chosen problem caused the broad context of the study. In particular, the author draws attention to the peculiarities of the combination of ritual and theater in ancient Greece, as well as in the European and American culture of the twentieth century. In addition, the specificity of ritual and theater connections in other cultures, including Chinese and Japanese, is monitored. Considering the ancient ritual action in terms of theatricality and perception of the seen, the researcher turns to the artistic practice of the American avant-garde theater of the 1960's and 70's. Particular attention is paid to the influence of the Muslim ritual theater on the European theatrical culture of the twentieth century: the famous director Peter Brook's impression from the revival of the ceremony in Iran in the 1970's. At the same time, the author insists that Ta'ziah is practically impossible to adequately perceive outside the social, cultural and religious context. One of the reasons for this is that viewers become part of the action as well as performers, while a detached skeptical public cannot take part in the action which is deprived of faith. Focusing on contemporary non-religious tendencies in European and American theaters, the researcher comes to the thought of the German theater critic Ericks Fischer-Licht, who views non-rationality in the context of contemporary performative culture. In this regard, he resorted to the general characteristics of performative, outlining the ideas of Antonina Arto, Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brooke and others. **The research methodology** is mainly based on the comparative method, which involves comparing the archaic rituals of different cultures from the ancient to the Far Eastern, as well as the features of the combination of ritual and theater in these events. An important theoretical basis for the study was the work of the performance theorist Richard Schechner and his mentor Anthropologist Victor Turner. In addition to cultural anthropology, the researcher uses the theoretical works of contemporary European theater critics, in particular Ericks Fischer-Lichte advocating the exclusive influence on the spectator of the ritual performance of the Ta'ziah. **The novelty of the work.** For the first time in a complex way involving a broad context, using a comparative approach, based on cultural anthropology and based on the study of art, the connections of ritual and theater have been investigated on the example of the Muslim ceremonial theatrical performance of the Ta'ziah. **Conclusions.** We have shown that ritual and theatre are not identical, though they may be similar.

Keywords: ritual; theater; ritual drama; Arabic world; Muslim religion; performative culture

Relevance of research topic

The *ta'ziah*, which will be discussed in this article, is the Passion Play performed annually by Shi'ite Muslims, notably in Iran and Syria. It is the only significant theatrical manifestation in the Islamic world that came into being before European influence

began to stimulate the pioneers of modern Arabic drama. This tragic drama, which is at once a religious ritual and a dramatic performance, recounts the martyrdom of Hussein, son of Ali the fourth Caliph of Islam and the Prophet's son-in-law. Although intensely controversial because Sunni Muslims do not accept the Shi'ite veneration of Hussein, the *ta'ziyah* can be regarded as in some ways an indication of one possible direction an authentically Islamic theatre could take. Certainly it cannot be emulated because of the unique circumstances surrounding its inception and development, but since it is beyond doubt the most important example of a native drama uninfluenced by Western models, it cannot be ignored.

Analysis of the previous researches and research methods

The problem of links between theatre and ritual was best characterized in the research works by Eric Csapo, Christopher Innes, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Margaret Miller. Also any discussion about Islamic theatre must involve a discussion of the nature of Islamic culture, and it is obvious that, depending on the viewpoint adopted, the term "Islamic" has had, and can have, a wide variety of distinct though related meanings. This is too vast a subject to be thoroughly explored in this study, but it will be argued later that a theatre that can legitimately be described as Islamic as well as Arab is possible, and might even become popular. Many aspects of Islamic culture – or, rather, Arab culture – may be brought within the realm of the theatrical arts, including folk tales, and the daily life of Arab people. More specifically Islamic subjects might include clashes of religious opinion and their social effects and, more esoterically, the drama of the Soul's relationship with God. To give one example, Attar's *Conference of the Birds*, a celebrated Sufi text, has been given a theatrical presentation albeit by a European director, Peter Brook.

The purpose of the article

This article will consider the possibilities of a theatre that could be said to be Islamic – in a broad sense – as well as Arabic. In order to understand certain aspects of serious Arabic theatre, especially the phenomenon of the *ta'ziyah* or Shi'ite Passion Play, an understanding of the nature of the relationship between ritual and theatre is important. Also, since many of the influential pioneers of theatre in the last century saw Ancient Greek theatre (among others) as in some ways a model for their own practice, it is necessary to consider the nature of theatre (specifically Tragedy) in Greece, and particularly the effects of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century theories on these pioneers. The article also discusses the attempts of the performers, especially in the USA, to create forms of "ritual theatre" within the context of an oppositional and transgressive avant-garde, since it is important to understand how the notion of an avant-garde has influenced the development of the great variety of experimental theatre now being practised not only in the West, but at prestigious festivals throughout the Arab world, despite assertions on all sides that the avant-garde is dead.

A renewal of the theatre is long overdue in the Arab world. Serious theatre scarcely exists outside institutes of theatrical arts and has been in decline since the late 1970s

for a variety of reasons. This is partly due to the lack of an Arabic or Islamic theatre tradition. In the Arab world theatre has never enjoyed the high status given to poetry and, later, to the novel. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, it was seen by some practitioners and critics as having the potential to become a powerful force for social change after the disaster of the Six-Day War against Israel, but this promise was not fulfilled. Never as popular as cinema or, later, television drama, theatre is now largely but by no means exclusively a matter of spectacular commercial entertainment. The dramatic tradition imported from the West, particularly the ideas, styles and modes of such very different playwrights as Ionesco, Sartre and Brecht, while it stimulated and diverted a relatively small intellectual elite, did not appeal to the majority of Muslims. Attempts were made to adapt these modes for Arab audiences, but without lasting success.

Apart from the *ta'ziyah* there is virtually nothing that can be called drama in the Western sense before the advent of a European- influenced theatre in the mid-nineteenth century, but since many critics have denied the status of drama to the *ta'ziyah*, seeing it instead as a religious ritual, it seems useful to consider here the relationship between ritual and theatre, which is a controversial one. And while the *ta'ziyah* is not central to Islam, and is religious rather than sacred, as the Iranian scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr asserts, it' points to the nexus between Islamic spirituality and Islamic art (1987, p.10).

The main material presentation

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While the origins of the European dramatic tradition may be found in the rites of the ancient Greeks, it does not follow that the theatre itself involves ritual except according to a very loose definition. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to define "ritual" with a formulation that is universally acceptable a rite may be defined strictly as "a formal procedure or act in a religious or other solemn observance" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1973, p.1837). To say that theatre is, or should be, a phenomenon of this kind is to distort the meaning of the word "rite" or to entertain unrealistic hopes, if the intention is to unite performers and audience, though a sacred art, in a closer apprehension of the divine. Theatre of this kind cannot simply be willed into being, although a "religious" theatre that draws on the faith of a community of believers is possible today, as can be seen in the *ta'ziyah* of the Shi'a Muslims. Sacred rites can be intensely theatrical, however, and this observation may have encouraged certain practitioners to seek to make of the theatrical experience a kind of religious or even sacred rite. Some critics and scholars, too, have attempted to equate theatre with religion, although such attempts are often founded on questionable assumptions. A rite requires a space in which to be performed. There can be no ritual without communal participation, whether of a small elite of initiates or the adult population of a city. Ritual spaces depend on contexts, cultures, and locations. Perhaps what these spaces have in common is that they are realms of power. The gathering of believers leads to a community sharing an event that often brings together art, architecture and people.

Jamsheed Chosky connects ritual spaces to individual desires and collective interpretations of communally held conceptions of and attitudes towards life and

death: "Notions of ritual space, and patterns of behaviour within such spaces, seem to be intrinsic to individual aspiration and collective resolution as sectarian groups organize means of rationalizing life and death. Ritual spaces are assembled so believers may be conditioned to comprehend a religious belief" (Malekpour, 2004, p.21). They are designated as "pure, holy, and sacred" and thus are intended to promote a sense of order. The world as imagined and the world as it exists may be bridged by the ritual space and the symbols contained within it; the ritual allows the human and the divine to meet. Chosky also regards ritual spaces as a means towards the accomplishment of an event of significance for the community. To phrase it another way, ritual spaces serve as locales of forced dynamics in which spatial cues trigger a series of concepts and events directed at the hope of achieving an aspired goal (Malekpour, 2004, p.22).

By performing in the ritual space, believers learn "how to deal, accept, and move with the unknown" (Deslauriers, 1992, p.192). Rituals allow them to enact and experience sacred knowledge. A large aspect of this enactment is not merely the remembrance of the sacred but also how the "personal, communal, and spiritual intentions and purposes and their sacred connection are reaffirmed". One relives the revered and participates within the divine narratives. Crucial to rituals is how the person communicates and unites with others' intentions and affirms community; thus ritual spaces connect people and establish relationships, roles and positions. Through ritual, unity among believers is attained (Deslauriers, 1992, p.192).

In the Islamic tradition, or rather the tradition of Sufism, which its initiates regard as the heart of Islam, we find the esoteric practice of the *Santa* or spiritual concert, which Nasr explains as follows:

The *Sama* must be performed with a "closed" audience where the members participate in the spiritual ambience created through the power of their own inner forces. To a mere onlooker without faith and spiritual discipline a session of *Sama* would turn into something else: [...] we are faced with an important and basic principle related to the sacred: that is, to understand and fully appreciate the sacred in all its manifestations, including the artistic, man must believe in the sacred and participate in it. Otherwise the sacred hides itself behind an impenetrable veil that the man's carnal soul – the *nafs* of the Sufis – draws around the immortal core of man's being, thus cutting it off from the vision of the sacred. (Nasr, 1987, p.80).

Theatre today, while not a religious ritual (allowing certain exceptions such as the *ta'ziyah*), has features which connect it to ritual. Certainly a theatrical performance may be an event of significance for the community it serves. It may address matters of life and death, but without necessarily seeking to bring about a resolution. It may be a space where intentions are communally affirmed, or it may seek to challenge the audience's assumptions, building and then undermining connections between individuals and the community in order to provoke critical thought, as in Brecht's Epic Theatre¹.

¹ For many of Brecht's statements on the Epic Theatre see John Willet, *Brecht on Theatre* (Great Britain: Methuen Publishing Limited, 2001); see also Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 86-88).

The great variety of possibilities open to the theatre provides opportunities to create a theatre that seeks to reaffirm “personal, communal spiritual intentions and purposes” and even “their sacred connection”, but in present conditions this attempt to return to the roots of the drama will only be successful if all the participants share common beliefs. An Islamic theatre would at least enjoy the advantage of speaking to the audience united by faith, however much their individual experiences and opinions might differ. In this loose sense such a theatre could become a ritual, uniting spectators and actors in celebration of one living experience. The *ta'ziyah* could be a model for this kind of theatre, but as it is a unique phenomenon in the Muslim world, the result of highly specific political, cultural and social conceptions, it cannot be imitated.

As an example of a powerful theatrical experience that not only grips and educates the spectator but also helps unite and sustain the community, however, it may serve as an inspiration to the theatre artist. But it must be emphasised that a “ritual theatre” such as the *ta'ziyah* (whose practitioners certainly do not conceive it in such terms) cannot be created by the will of the artist, but must emerge from, and be developed by, the community. Moreover, it would be impossible to attempt to create a “ritual theatre” of the kind attempted (with a very limited degree of success) by the avant-garde in the USA, because such a theatre, especially one incorporating elements of Islamic ritual, would inevitably be seen as an insult to Islam. Even if this were not the case, ritual theatre of the kind practised in the 1960s and 1970s has been proven to be a dead end, and so this study in no way advocates its revival in the twenty-first century.

Moreover, strictly speaking, theatre and religious ritual are not the same. Where the theatrical phenomenon is strongly ritualistic – or to put it in another way, when the ritual is powerfully dramatic, as in the *ta'ziyah* – there is disagreement about whether it is theatre or ritual. As we shall see later, many scholars and critics deny that the *ta'ziyah* is theatre at all. This controversial state is one reason why the *ta'ziyah* is such an interesting example of tragic drama, but it also helps to explain why it has as yet had little discernible influence on theatre in the Muslim world.

Religious rituals tend to communicate meanings that do not permit individual interpretation beyond an orthodox understanding, but drama is fundamentally characterized by its means of expression, which enable it to communicate to each individual within the audience, and allow the spectators, during their encounter with the play, to create meaning, their own meaning, the meaning of the play had – both intellectual and affective – for each of them.

In East Asian theatre ritual drama or dramatic ritual may be observed in “magical plays” or “shamanic plays”. In these, ritual is presented on stage, and involves the “exorcisation” of evil spirits and demons. In one performance, an actor dressed as a white tiger chases a black-clad “demon” away. The audience must keep its distance and not speak to the white tiger; otherwise they will commit taboo. These performances are clearly considered to be important rituals. As well as driving away demons, they may also lure good fortune; here the power of the dramatic ritual performances brings luck, wealth, and prosperity (Bell, 1997, p.165). Such ritual performances, Bell notes, are always given in temple settings as dances, and in order to “re-enact sacred events” which may vary from the creation of the universe to the movement of ancestors, others

being “narrative tales presented to entertain the gods” and thus involving sacrifices as the bridge between the human and divine worlds (Bell, 1997, p.111). We should note here that the *ta'ziyah* as drama, and the religious practises of which it forms a part, are centred on the self – sacrifice of Hussein as hero and martyr, and call on his devotees to sacrifice themselves in the cause of justice and for the sake of Islam².

Thus, in other cultures, the concepts of ritual and theatre are not as distinctive as in the Western perspective. Bell comments that “If traditional Chinese theatre is full of ritual, it is not surprising to find that traditional Chinese ritual is full of theatre”. (Bell, 1997, p.166). In many traditions, such as these of Chinese theatre, the temple becomes a stage and a ritual precinct in festivals; the stage is even considered “an extension of the temple” and so the actors and other performers see to it that they pay their respects to the deities by dedicating the performances to them: “The whole acting troupe participates in the public offerings that accompany the temple festival”. Before the troupe approach the stage, they stop by a backstage shrine dedicated to their patron deity in order to pay their due respects (Bell, 1997, p.165). It is not rare in Chinese culture to invite acting troupes to Daoist rites of the dead; the actors perform rituals to prevent demons and malevolent spirits from interfering in the journey of the deceased.

The two most celebrated forms of Japanese theatre – No and Kabuki – both originated in shamanic ritual³, (Ortolani, 1990, pp.91-92; p.163-165) but whereas no developed as an aristocratic art that in no way challenged the ethics of fourteenth – century society, Kabuki from the first was a theatre of social outcasts that scandalised the ruling elite of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). The aim of No, according to its perfecter and chief theoretician, Zeami, (1363–1443) is to create in the audience “an enraptured forgetfulness of itself. The art of the performance will then have the quality of being inexhaustible in its depth and constantly elegant” (Ortolani, 1990, p.112). The Master actor has the spiritual power to place the audience in a state of trance, for his mind has spontaneously “reached unity with *mu* (nothingness) and *Ku* (emptiness)” (Ortolani, 1990, p.133). While the spiritual quality of no, whose shamanic power operates “in the gray area between Shinto and Buddhism” (Ortolani, 1990, p.92) had a considerable influence on Yeats (Innes, 1981, p.7). Kabuki had no influence on the later European or American avant-garde, despite its association with violent contestations of the Tokugawas' Confucian codes and embodiment of protest against the established order (Ortolani, 1990, p.152). Its shamanistic features are evident in the figure of the *hito-kami* or “man-god” a superhero possessed by a divine power. The audience would throw coins on to the stage when the great actor Danjuro portrayed a divine being, as they believed him to be truly possessed by the spirit of the god (Ortolani, 1990, p.164-165)

² Erika Fischer-Lichte has written a study of ritual and sacrifice in the theatre of the twentieth century which is pertinent to this study but cannot be considered in detail here. See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2005).

³ See Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre: From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism* (Leiden & New York: E. J. Brill, 1990), pp. 91-92, 163-165.

Having considered briefly the *ta'ziyah*, to which we shall return shortly, and other examples which demonstrate that in certain cultural contexts theatre and religious ritual can be so close as to be indistinguishable, or that theatre can be infused with religious and ritual elements, we shall now turn to discuss the case of ancient Greek tragedy, which has had an enormous influence on European culture and on its theatre, whether "ritual" or not. Hugh Hunt remarks that "Aristotle's explanation of the origins underline the principle that, wherever theatre appears, it does so as a development of a ritual" (Hunt, 1962, p.62). While Tragedy's origins in the Dithyramb were undoubtedly religious, it is doubtful that by the time of the "classical moment" of Tragedy in the fifth century BC witnessing a tragedy was not a "ritual" in the strict sense given above. But it was certainly part of the rites of Dionysus, in which the god was honoured with music, poetry, dance, song, and poetic drama.

In Athens the festival reached its climax with the three-day competition among producers, performers and poets of tragedies. The victor gained instant fame, status and prestige. The audiences would have known the titles in advance, and as Christopher Collard points out, the plot would have been taken from a familiar myth; "but each fresh dramatisation nevertheless invited variations in detail and emphasis, with continuing scope for surprises to both emotions and intellect" (Aeschylus, 2003, p.15).

While the Dionysia was beyond doubt ritual in nature, the celebration being strongly formalised, besides being traditional it was "political" in that it demonstrated the communal values of the *polis*, and through the middle of the fifth century "the Great Dionysia came increasingly to focus and display the ethos of a proudly democratic but frequently selfquestioning city" (Aeschylus, 2003, p.16).

The three great tragic poets of the period – Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides – treated myth, politics, and social and moral issues differently, and Tragedy thus was, in this sense, more dynamic than the *ta'ziyah*, which we must nevertheless recognize as tragic drama. Moreover the Dionysia also presented comedy, which was a drama of political satire and travesty. Thus the Greek achievement was richer than the term "ritual theatre" might imply today.

Tragedies became rituals of purification, an attempt to restore order and "communal solidarity" as the audience shares the suffering of the character. Tragedy was indeed a "collective and theatrical experience" which then become present and intervening in the lives of the Ancient Greeks. M.S. Silk further theorizes that the ritual of tragedies "reaches out to the spectators in its inclusiveness" in order that they should take part in the lamentation that the ending inevitably brought about. Silk argues for "a sense of closure" that did not involve an acceptance or a resolution, but audiences were able to feel sympathy for the tragic hero and might be moved to carry on his legacy; (Michael ed., p.157) this tragic effect is also found in the *ta'ziyah*. Thus solidarity was shared among the performers and the spectators as the theatre embraced the audience. At the end of the performance the spectators were enabled to reflect and contemplate on what they had witnessed.

Dionysus was clearly central to the Ancient Greek theatre, but thus centrality has been conceived in different ways during the past century. Ronald Vince cites the theories of Gilbert Murray regarding how the god Dionysus functioned in that theatre and how

his rituals were translated to drama. Murray's argument is that the theatre's origin lay in ritual:

1. Tragedy is in origin a Sacer Ludus, a ritual dance, representing normally the action or the supposed historical cause of some current ritual practice.
2. The dance was originally or centrally that of Dionysus, performed at his feast, in his theatre.
3. Dionysus was the Eniautos-Daimon or vegetation-god, who, like Adonis and Osiris, represented the cyclic death and rebirth of the world, the tribe's lands, and the tribe itself.
4. Tragedy and comedy represent different stages in the life of this vegetation-god or "Year-Spirit"; tragedy leads to his death and threnos (lamentation); comedy to his marriage feast and komos (celebration) (Vince, 1984, p.14; Murray, 1957, p.34).

As the anthropologists Eric Csapo and Margaret Miller point out, Murray was a member of the co-called Cambridge Ritualists, a diverse group of scholars mainly inspired by the work of Jane Harrison, whose *Themis* (1912) showed her "genius for amalgamating the most disparate currents in the intellectual environment of her day". (Csapo and Miller, 2007, p.25). She combined, among others: Nietzsche, who traced the birth of tragedy to the ritual representation of the "passion" of Dionysus, who was torn apart by the Titans; and Frazer, whose theory of the "dying god" formed part of his ultra-rationalistic anthropology. The Cambridge Ritualists deserve mention not because their notions are still taken seriously by scholars, but because their ideas had an enormous impact on subsequent generations, and particularly on the development of theatre.

It is important to emphasise here that it cannot be assumed that drama developed out of ritual. Contemporary anthropology is, in any case, "much more interested in the theoretical and synchronic relations between ritual and theatre than in any genetic or historical relationship" (Csapo and Miller, 2007, p.1). The Cambridge Ritualists, however, asserted that while ritual was universal, drama appeared to be a uniquely Greek achievement; and indeed "Greece still maintains a privileged position in universal theories of the origin of drama. It is not yet possible to say whether this position is justified" (Csapo and Miller, 2007, p.2).

While the comparative approach of the Cambridge Ritualists was influential among the wider public, it was received coldly by Hellenists, who tended to see the notion of a close connection between ritual and theatre – especially tragedy – as tarnishing their "pride in the unique splendour of the Greek miracle itself" (Csapo and Miller, 2007, p.3). Now, however, scholars have reasserted the ritual character, contents and function of Greek drama, with the result that it looks much less like drama as we know it. "This has implications for the broader exercise of crosscultural comparison, opening the door to a less overtly Hellenocentric and Eurocentric approach to the comparative study of the question of drama's origins". (Csapo and Miller, 2007, p.3). Csapo and Miller go on to articulate a general statement which is extremely useful for our understanding of not only the *ta'ziyah* but also theatre as a cultural phenomenon: There is [...] no longer any question of "quantum leaps" from ritual to drama. The categories of ritual and drama are not so much divided as joined by a continuum, and, indeed, anthropology has generated a third term that marks the middle range of this continuum, namely,

"ritualdrama". It is hard to conceive of ritual without some element of drama or drama without some element of ritual (Csapo and Miller, 2007, p.4).

A detailed examination of the origins of drama in Greece lies beyond the scope of this study, which will therefore not consider the contribution of Aristotle to the debate. A few points can usefully be made here, however. First, it is hard to draw the line between religious and secular in any premodern culture, especially in the case of Greek drama, which was religious insofar as it was based on myth. Second, drama at Athens was participatory; most male citizens participated in the dramatic *choroi* at some time in their life. This "created a bond of community and empathy between audience and the majority of performers" (Csapo and Miller, 2007, p.5). Thus the choral function was both a ritual element within drama and a symbolic extension of the audience within the drama. Third, Greek tragedy seems to have been considered in terms of its "efficacy" and not of its aesthetic value; Aristotle describes the pleasure of drama "either in ritual terms, notoriously as *Katharsis* [...], or it is a cognitive pleasure linked to moral and political education" (Csapo and Miller, 2007, p.7).

Eventually, the fall of Athens would bring about the demise of ritual theatre in Greece. As other city states were building their own theatres and drawing on the culture and tradition of Athens, Athenian theatre was transported outside Greece. The destruction of the civic pride that Athenians held dear also destroyed the faith in their gods, including Dionysus. "Faith in the gods began to give way to scepticism; patriotism and idealism degenerated into materialism" (Hunt, 1962, p.25). This seems that without "faith in the gods" ritual theatre cannot survive or be created. As we noted, Nasr's view is that to fully appreciate the sacred, man must believe in the sacred and participate in it.

By far the most important manifestation of a truly Islamic drama is the *ta'ziyah*, which was the only form of serious drama to have developed in the Islamic world before the advent of a theatre inspired by European models. Therefore we will here merely outline some of the salient features of the *ta'ziyah* as an example of ritual drama or dramatic ritual.

The *ta'ziyah* is a form of ritual theatre stemming from the mid-eighteenth-century fusion of ambulatory and stationary rites that had coexisted for over a thousand years. At first these plays were performed in market places and town squares, later in private houses among other places. Finally special buildings known as *takiyas* or *Husseiniyyas* were constructed for their staging. These buildings may certainly be categorised as "ritual spaces" (Gibb ed., 1960).

The traditional attempt to distance the actors, who are both amateurs and professionals and are all male, even those playing female parts, from their roles in a manner that might, albeit anachronistically, be called Brechtian has been abandoned in many recent productions. Under the influence of styles of acting used in the cinema and television, the actors identify with their roles to such a degree that they become carried away, with potentially explosive results. This danger to the actors comes from the spectators, whose emotional involvement with the drama is extremely intense, especially on the final day of the proceedings, when the events of "*ashura*", the tenth day of the month of Muharram are enacted.

It was on this day in 680 CE that the Prophet's grandson Hussein was martyred by the force of Caliph Yazid at Karbala in present-day Iraq; his suffering and death

are mourned by Shi'ites worldwide. In Persia the rituals of mourning came under royal patronage when Shi'ism was established as the state religion in the sixteenth century under the Safavid dynasty. More recently, after a forty-year period of eclipse during which the *ta'ziyah* survived only in the countryside, the revolutionary authorities in Iran encouraged performances and it is now well established.

The physical form of the *takiya* enhances the dramatic interplay between actors and spectators and makes of the *ta'ziyah* a true manifestation of ritual theatre. This is theatre-in-the-round. The main performing area is a stark, curtain-less raised platform in the centre of a sandy circle; the circle is used to portray battles, journeys and changes of scene. The action sweeps from the central stage into the surrounding audience and back from the periphery, enveloping and drawing in the spectators, who often become active participants in the drama (Gibb ed., 1960, pp.406-407).

The core of the repertory is the plays devoted to the Karbala tragedy. The passage of Hussein from Medina via Mecca to his martyrdom and those of his sons and followers is represented in some ten plays in as many days. This extended period of performance can be compared to the three-day festival of tragic drama experienced by the ancient Athenians, but the experience of the devotees of the Shi'a ritual is perhaps even more intense, since it is charged with extreme emotion which reaches its greatest pitch on the tenth day. The reenactment of Hussein's martyrdom is presented in such a passionate style that even a nonbeliever may be profoundly moved. Peter Brook was one of the more recent western witnesses of the drama, which he saw in 1970. He was greatly impressed by its dramatic qualities and wrote enthusiastically of its virtues (Brook, 1994, p.38).

In order to understand the *ta'ziyah* it is necessary to understand the notion of *al-shahadah* (martyrdom), for it is *al-shahadah* that drives the characters to their tragic destiny. Hussein and his followers went to war knowing that victory was impossible and death was certain. Yet Hussein was shown as consenting to, even welcoming, martyrdom in order to protect the basis of Islam. His death made him a living symbol and role model for those who seek truth and justice in this world. In Iran his name is synonymous with such virtues as a self-sacrifice, purity and justice, and he is regarded as the peerless tragic hero of Shi'a Islam.

Shi'ites consider the *ta'ziyah* to be a "holy theatre" that reflects not only religious but also cultural and political life, especially in Iran (Malekpour, 2004, p.28). Despite Brook's enthusiasm, it is difficult to see how the *ta'ziyah* could be performed without some distortion or loss of significance outside its social, cultural and religious contexts, although this has been attempted, with controversial results. Unlike Greek tragedy, it is unlikely to be able to travel outside the milieu that gives it meaning. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the eminent Iranian scholar, is adamant that theatre which has a religious meaning relating to sacred truths and events loses its power and significance when taken out of its context. He argues that the *ta'ziyah* can have efficacy and meaning only in the traditional context for which it was meant. The audience is as much a part of the play as the actors, and both participate with all their body and soul in the events of sacred history that are retold on the stage. A sceptical audience, which because of lack of faith cannot participate wholeheartedly in the tragedy of Imam Husayn and his companions,

already destroys through its presence the drama's spiritual climate. [...] destroys that unity between performer and onlooker that belongs to the very essence of the *ta'ziyah*. How much more would this climate be destroyed by directors and actors whose interest in these matters is purely external, people who have sufficiently fallen out of their own tradition to consider it as "interesting" (Nasr, 1987, pp.79-80).

Nasr, who is an authority on the spiritual and religious meanings of Islamic art and especially the art of Persia, is uncompromisingly extreme in his view of the value of tradition, yet in this case his words are powerfully persuasive and seem pertinent to the decline of ancient Greek tragedy. They may also give pause for thought to those who might seek to revive "ritual theatre" according to their own lights in our own time. Such a project is fraught with difficulty, especially when it is based on ways of thinking and feeling which are not easily communicated to an audience used to the conventions of naturalism or who regard such experiences as no more than "interesting".

In the last century many Western theorists and critics, playwrights and directors became dissatisfied with the condition of theatre and sought to revolutionise the naturalistic tradition by abolishing the fourth wall, experimenting with other innovations, or creating a new type of theatre altogether on radically different principles. Some of these innovators sought to recreate a way of performing and receiving that might be called ritual theatre.

Whatever the particular conception, many contended that in the nineteenth century or even long before, with the decline of Greek theatre, something essential and of fundamental value had been lost. Some of these innovators de-emphasised the literary text or abandoned it altogether, viewing the body as the basis of a new language of theatre that could connect directly with the spectator. Some looked to dreams and visions, seeing in them a metaphysical reality transcending logic and reason. Where text was used, it often consisted of poetic utterances and eschewed plot development and characterisation. In all these cases naturalism is abandoned as inimical to the potential of theatre to bring together performers and spectators in a powerful collective experience. Their successors have continued this vision in a variety of ways.

Any discussion of ritual theatre in its recent or current manifestations must acknowledge that the term itself is conceived in such a variety of ways that any positive definition will be almost meaningless. It is easier, looking at the various manifestations of commercial theatre, musicals, spectacles and revivals of the drama of earlier periods, to say what it is not. Nor is it the same as "experimental" theatre, which may contain few elements of ritual or none at all. It should not be confused with the ritual of the theatre, which concerns the particular pleasures, of the mind as well as the emotions, to be gained by witnessing a powerful drama. Hugh Hunt's comment could be applied to an Athenian audience as well as to a modern one: The ritual of the theatre is, then, a meeting-place between our imagination and our reason. Perfect harmony between those two aspects of our minds provides the greatest experience (Hunt, 1962, p.5).

By contrast, some conceive theatre as a "magical ritual" that will have a "healing" and curative effect on the spectator. Theatre as ritual reconnects man with nature, which provides sustenance and replenishment. This view harks back to a time when theatre and ritual were indistinguishable, and "man found himself indivisible with

Nature and the so-called gods were natural subtle powers" According to Erika Fischer-Lichte, ritual theatre has the power to heal a humanity suffering from the harsh, chaotic conditions of rationalism, logocentrism and civilization. Banishing "the gods" from the theatre and stripping the theatre of its capability to "recreate life and humanity in the spectator" cause theatre to lose its essence and significance (Fischer-Lichte, 2005, p.296). Many would disagree with Fischer-Lichte's formulation, but it seems that this twentieth-century phenomenon cannot be separated from a disillusionment with the ideals of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on progress, reason and civilisation; and it is undeniable the West in that century witnessed a great deal of retrogression, unreason and barbarism.

Theatre in the Arab world now consists of two main branches: commercial theatre and experimental theatre of the kind that is performed at international festivals. But while "ritual theatre" is nowhere to be found, the experimentalism currently in fashion appeals only to an educated elite. It would not be true to say that challenging theatre is absent, but it is only challenging in the context of the political and religious conditions of the Middle East, where censorship is still a fact of life – although there are some reasons to hope that the more democratic societies are making progress in this regard. But experimental Arabic theatre, generally speaking, is without any kind of theoretical underpinning, and is all too often an exercise in style. In this respect it is similar to much that is produced in the rest of the world. As Aronson remarks, the avant-garde has, in a sense, achieved its goal, since its "visual style and rhythmic structures [...] have been absorbed into and permeate fashion, music, graphic art and a variety of media, which in turn feed back into multimedia performances, performance art, and the hybrid theatre of clubs and discos" (Aronson, 2000, p.211). This transformation has come about largely through the combined forces of technology and popular entertainment.

While Fischer-Lichte sees performance as a transformative process and even finds the possibility for tragedy in the exploration of the relationship between the individual and the community, she does not consider such a theatre as religious. Others see religion everywhere in the theatre.

As we have noted, the ideas of the Cambridge Ritualists had a huge impact on twentieth-century intellectuals. Jane Harrison's evolutionary scheme, which was based on the emergence of an individual as leader (*exarchos*) of the worshipping collective, emphasised, through a simplistic set of oppositions, reason over emotion, science over religion, and the individual over society. The Cambridge Ritualists identified "ritual" with the second term of these oppositions, but paradoxically, as Csapo and Miller point out, it was their ambivalence to "the iconic values of nineteenth century anthropology (namely, rationalism, individualism, Western science, and progress)" (Csapo and Miller, 2007, p.26) that accounted for their influence on those writers, directors and drama theorists who, disenchanted with bourgeois theatre, seized upon the primitive underside of the link they established between theatre and ritual. This trend culminated in the theatre of the late 1960s through the 1980s with the work of, among others, Grotowski, Brook and Schechner, but the impact can be seen much earlier, in the 1930s. The most important theorist of this period is generally considered to be Antonin Artaud.

Artaud's theories, if they can be so called since his writings are notoriously obscure, have had an enormous influence on theatre, whereas his practice has been neglected. We cannot discuss either in any detail here, but he was above all concerned with the primitive ritual function of theatre. He was not the first to emphasise this, but as Innes notes, "with Artaud the focus on dreams and the primitive levels of the psyche becomes extended to include savage roots and primitive cultures" (Innes, 1981, p.58). At first influenced by Alfred Jarry, he took the Balinese theatre (mistakenly) to be an example of the kind of theatre he was seeking to create. Artaud sought to reintroduce magic, thereby destroying logic and reason and replacing them with irrational spontaneity and delirium, which would bring about an emotional purgation analogous to catharsis in Greek tragedy. This was to be accomplished through a process of "sympathetic magic", a concept borrowed from Frazer. This delirium would, like the plague, exorcise repressive behaviour patterns in society as a whole by affecting the tiny audience of Artaud's theatre and then infecting the population at large. Theatre would have to "develop a ritual language by rediscovering universal physical signs, or "hieroglyphs", while verbal expression became incantation" (Innes, 1981, p.59). These are the basic elements of Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty", which also inverted the values of good and evil – a characteristic of the avant-garde since Strindberg. While Artaud's own practice exemplified a total control of all the elements of production, his theories have led to his being regarded as a prophet, tragic visionary and hero, and shamanic reinventor of theatre, principally because they are, in Innes's words, "closely associated with our existential uncertainties" (Innes, 1981, p.60).

20 Because Artaud was apt to exaggerate to an extreme degree, his writings promise something much grander than could ever be achieved in practice. It is their inspirational quality that influenced Peter Brook and Charles Marowitz in the 1960s, and his many self-proclaimed disciples in the USA, including Schechner, Beck and Malina. The fact that Artaud's audience, the sophisticated Parisian bourgeoisie, was rarely shocked and never transported to a state of delirium by his theatre in practice has not prevented his admirers from taking his ideas as a blueprint for their own creative work (Innes, 1981, p.62; p.99). This is not to say that Artaud's work does not contain vital and imaginative elements, but its inherent weaknesses have been obscured by his power to create enormous enthusiasm among those who wish to abolish the bourgeois theatre and replace it with a liberating theatrical ritual. Brook, who presented Artaud's *Spart of Blood* in 1964, and Grotowski, whose theatre is predicated on the self-transcendence of the actor, epitomise this approach. And yet, as Innes remarks, "the basic problem facing all the inheritors of Artaud who seek to affect spectators directly by using rituals" is that they have no choice but to do this "in the modern secular context where these have no religious significance and therefore no subjective value for the public" (Innes, 1981, p.135).

In the Arab world, as we noted earlier, the problem is not that the context is secular but that it is religious, and so a ritual theatre that is imposed from outside is an impossibility, although there is currently a plethora of experimentalism which has failed to attract a broad public.

In the USA Artaud's theories, together with the work of Brook, Grotowski, Mnouchkine and others, influenced avant-garde creators and directors to embrace ritual ideas

precisely for their revolutionary potential. Ritual theatre offered a means to change society through the building of a community that would come into being through “the active sharing of collective emotions, group katharsis, and [...] the chance to experience other humans concretely”. It “also implied the efficacy of performance, an efficacy which extended beyond the individual psyche and offered a tonic to society at large” (Csapo and Miller, 2007, p.27). In 1968 Richard Schechner (a trained anthropologist and a student of Victor Turner) presented *Dionysus in 69*, the key work of American ritual theatre. The play, a version of Euripides' *Bacchae*, was “hyperritualized with such non-Euripidean extras as an initiation by the god of the audience, a New Guinea birthing ritual, and a death ritual” (Csapo and Miller, 2007, p.27). Schechner's stated aim was to rediscover the efficacy of performance as a ritual experience.

Dionysus in 69 influenced a host of theatre artists and Schechner's articulation of performance theory has had an even greater impact. Performance theory sees performance as fundamentally destructive of social norms and a form of popular empowerment, and while ritual theatre ceased to be a vital force at the end of the 1980s, interest in performance theory remains strong, and continues to influence avant-garde and experimental theatre. The idea that a community can be created through ritual theatre, however, has prone to be a false hope; or, at least, the nature of that proven “community” has come to be conceived differently.

Erika Fischer-Lichte is concerned with the power of performance to transform an audience. Briefly, theatre can bring about this transformation through a reversal of the hierarchy between text (myth and drama) and performance (ritual, theatrical performance), and a community is created by the physical acts of the “phenomenal body” of the actor rather than by his or her “semiotic body”. The spectator experiences the actor as an “embodied mind”. She thus contrasts a “textual culture” with a “performance culture”, and finds in the latter a means of creating a community; but that community is an aesthetic one which will not cohere after the performance is over. Her theory rests not only on Turner's conception of “liminal time” but also on the idea of the “rite of passage” first formulated by Arnold van Gennep, another anthropologist who had a great influence on twentieth-century theatre.

Van Gennep's theory concerns the transgression of boundaries in the process of transformation. Fischer-Lichte summarises as follows: This scheme consists of three phases: (1) the separation phase in which those who are about to undergo a change are alienated from their everyday life and their social milieu, i. e. are removed from their former place, time, social status; (2) the threshold or transformation phase, in which the people concerned are transposed between and betwixt all possible realms, between different worlds which allows for completely new, partly rather disconcerting experiences – the phase, Turner would later call “liminal”; and (3) the integration phase, in which the newly transformed are reintegrated into society and socially accepted in their new status (Fischer-Lichte, 2005, p.36).

Fischer-Lichte argues that although van Gennep's theory applies to ritual, there is no reason not to apply it to theatre, which is not a ritual experience but can be similar. The main difference is that in ritual, liminal experience is irreversible and socially recognised; in theatre, it is neither. Nevertheless a process of transformation

has been undergone by the audience. Despite the attempts by Schechner and others to introduce ritual elements into the performances, Fischer-Lichte argues that these are unnecessary to create an aesthetic community. To demand more is unrealistic and, moreover, calls for sacrifice on the part of the spectator. In current conditions it is enough that the new performative culture of postindustrial societies should create temporary communities "that do not ask for any longer-lasting commitment nor for a collective identity to emerge" (Fischer-Lichte, 2005, p.257). Fischer-Lichte's view contrasts strongly with the ideals of Schechner and his contemporaries such as Beck and Malina of the Living Theatre, as well as with the evident aims and effects of the *ta'ziyak* but it articulates a contemporary reality.

What of the avant-garde in this situation? After the demise of ritual theatre in the USA figures such as Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman emerged, and both are still working, but according to Arnold Aronson their work has become so thoroughly assimilated as to have become classical (Aronson, 2000, p.211). Avant-garde theatre began as a radical movement influenced in the USA by Stein and Cage as well as Artaud and Turner, but the experiments of forty years ago are now part of cultural history. Wilson's hallucinatory productions can now be harnessed to fashion shows and rock videos, and Foreman, who wished to dissolve coagulated thought and feeling and unblock paradise through the sophisticated use of postmodern irony, has become an establishment figure. If, as Innes argues, "the base root of all avant-garde theatre is an uncompromising rejection of contemporary civilisation and existing social structures", (Innes, 1981, p.188) then it appears that "there is very little in today's theatre that can be considered avant-garde" (Aronson, 2000, p.205). Norman Bert, Professor of Theatre and Drama at Texas Tech University, directly equates theatre and religious ritual as though both perform virtually identical functions and are similarly organised. Bert argues in a recent article, "Theatre is religious", that "theatre is best understood, practiced and criticized" as religions and not as poetry, rhetoric or entertainment (Bert, 2002, p.1). Bert defines religions as "the creation and re-enactment of myth for the purpose of realizing – in both senses of that word as "perceiving" and "making actual" – and celebrating the relationship of human beings with superhuman, spiritual forces" (Bert, 2002, p.2). This is fairly unobjectionable, but Bert goes on to explain that these spiritual force include not only the deity or deities, but also "the *Zeitgeist*, the organizational power we call natural law, the world-wide network of consciousness that Teilhard de Chardin called the *nousphere*, and perhaps even national and ethnic "spirits" such as "el Raza" (Bert, 2002, p.3).

One does not have to be a rigid rationalist to see difficulty here, and the article continues to find analogies for every aspect of religion, as he defines it, in every aspect of the theatre. He too looks back to the Greeks for the last true manifestation of "the sacral nature of acting" (Bert, 2002, p.9). There is much more in this vein, all designed to prove Bert's hypothesis. However Bert never raises the question of the differences between religion and theatre because in wishing to minimise them he assumes there are none or that they are, or should be, insignificant.

The novelty of the work. The modern Islamic theatre can fulfil a useful social role by presenting experiences that will encourage spectators to become more aware of, and consider more deeply, their relationship with their religion and their society. It cannot

be a sacred art but it can be a religious one, commenting on every social issue just as the imam may do in his Friday sermon. It does not, of course, follow from this that such a theatre must be tied to naturalism. Indeed, the theatre artist should be free to experiment boldly regarding text, acting styles, and scenography. The theatre must look forward, not backward. Islamic theatre is fortunate in that it has no golden age or canon of revered texts, always excepting the Qur'an. It may therefore confidently seek inspiration from its own heritage without rejecting the productions of other cultures as long as they are compatible with its purposes, and it should not fear to create new forms.

Conclusions

This article has considered the nature of the link: between ritual and drama, focusing particularly on phenomena in ancient Greece, the Arab world, and twentieth-century Europe and America. It discussed the meaning of the ritual space and the activities performed in such spaces, nothing that the ritual allows the human and the divine to meet, thus creating unity among the believers. The ritual is only efficacious, however, when all participants share common beliefs. A ritual theatre such as the *ta'ziyah* must emerged from, and be developed and sustained by, the community. It cannot be created individuals seeking to build a sense of community through exploiting theatre's perceived revolutionary potential. The destruction of social norms, as we saw in the case of Artaud and his successors, does not necessarily lead to the efficacy of performance as a ritual experience.

In the Arab world there is a community of believers united by faith, however much they may be divided in other aspects of their lives, and so it might be possible to develop a theatre that might be both Islamic and popular with an Arab audience. Such a theatre would address issues of social importance and encourage spectators to consider their relationship with their religion and their society. It could seek inspiration from its own heritage without being enslaved by naturalism. The staging of the *ta'ziyah* could be a useful model in this respect, since it shows that an Arab-Muslim audience can respond to symbolic, anti-illusory drama. A theatre that could characterised as Islamic might also serve as an example to makers of experimental theatre, now ubiquitous at international festivals in the Arab world.

This theatre could not be a "ritual theatre" of the kind created by Schechner, however, since to bring together elements of Islamic ritual with elements drawn from other cultures would be incomprehensible to a broad Arab-Muslim audience; moreover, such an attempted synthesis would be seen as an insult to Islam. Even a "ritual theatre" restricting itself to the incorporation of elements of Islamic ritual alone would be condemned for the same reason. It would be more useful to consider Fischer-Lichte's noting of the performative as a transformative process when thinking about what an Arab-Islamic theatre could be. Although she is concerned with the experience of an audience who are not a community. The Arab-Muslim community is not so homogeneous and unified that her notion of a "temporary community" does not apply. It would be one of the tasks of an Arab-Muslim theatre, whether or not it incorporated "ritual elements", to bring together and help sustain the community it serves. It should be clear, however, that

I am not advocating a soothing theatre that avoids contentious issues, since I believe that the theatre should challenge and educate as well as entertain.

We have shown that ritual and theatre are not identical, though they may be similar. The question for the Arab Muslim artist is whether Islam can be a fruitful source of themes for the contemporary theatre, and whether an "Islamic" theatre – in a loose sense – can inspire not only forward-looking theatre artists but also audiences, and engage in the dialogue between the individual and the Muslim community, which is everywhere in need of such a theatre.

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РИТУАЛ І ДРАМА

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Анотація

Метою статті є дослідження природи зв'язків ритуалу й театру на прикладі мусульманського обрядового театрального дійства те'зіє – шіїтської пасійної п'єси. Обрана проблематика

обумовила широкий контекст дослідження. Зокрема, автор звертає увагу на особливості поєднання ритуалу й театру в античній Греції, а також в європейській та американській культурі ХХ століття. Крім того, простежуємо специфіку зв'язків ритуалу й театру в інших культурах, зокрема китайській та японській. Розглядаючи старовинне ритуальне дійство з погляду театральності та сприйняття побаченого, дослідник звертається до художньої практики американського авангардного театру 1960–70-х рр. Певну увагу приділено впливові мусульманського ритуального театру на європейську театральну культуру ХХ століття: йдеться про враження відомого режисера Пітера Брука від перегляду обрядового дійства в Ірані, в 1970-ті роки. При цьому автор наполягає, що те'зіє практично неможливо адекватно сприйняти поза соціальним, культурним і релігійним контекстом. Однією з причин цього є те, що глядачі стають частиною дійства, як і виконавці, тоді як відсторонена скептична публіка, позбавлена віри, не може брати в дійстві повноцінну участь. Приділяючи увагу сучасним неоритуальним тенденціям в європейському та американському театрах, дослідник пристає до думки німецької театрознавки Еріки Фішер-Ліхте, яка розглядає неоритуальність у контексті сучасної перформативної культури. У зв'язку з цим він вдається до загальних характеристик перформативності, окреслюючи ідеї Антонена Арто, Єжи Гротовського, Пітера Брука та інших. **Методологія дослідження** переважно базується на компаративістському методі, що передбачає порівняння архаїчних ритуалів різних культур (від античних до далекосхідних), а також особливості поєднання ритуалу й театру в цих дійствах. Вагомим теоретичним підґрунтям дослідження стали праці теоретика перформансу Річарда Шехнера та його наставника антрополога Віктора Тернера. Крім культурної антропології, обстоюючи винятковий вплив на глядача ритуального дійства те'зіє, дослідник послуговується теоретичними працями сучасних європейських театрознавців, зокрема Еріки Фішер-Ліхте. **Новизна роботи.** Уперше комплексно, із залученням широкого контексту, використовуючи компаративістський підхід, спираючись на культурну антропологію та послуговуючись мистецтвознавчим аналізом, досліджено зв'язки ритуалу й театру на прикладі мусульманського обрядового театрального дійства те'зіє. **Висновки.** Ми показали, що ритуал і театр не ідентичні, хоча можуть бути подібними.

Ключові слова: ритуал; театр; обрядова драма; арабський світ; мусульманська релігія; перформативна культура

РИТУАЛ И ДРАМА

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Аннотация

Целью статьи является исследование природы связей обряда и театра на примере мусульманского ритуального театрального действия та'зия – шиитской жалобной пьесы. Выбранная проблематика обусловила широкий контекст исследования. В частности, автор обращает внимание на особенности сочетания ритуала и театра в античной Греции, а также в европейской и американской культуре ХХ века. Кроме того, прослеживается специфика связей ритуала и театра в других культурах, в частности китайской и японской. Рассматривая старинное ритуальное действие с точки зрения театральности и восприятия увиденного, исследователь обращается к художественной практике американского авангардного театра 1960–70-х гг. Определенное внимание уделено влиянию мусульманского ритуального театра на европейскую театральную культуру ХХ века: речь идет о впечатлениях

известного режиссера Питера Брука от просмотра ритуального действия в Иране, в 1970-е годы. При этом автор утверждает, что та'зия практически невозможно адекватно воспринять вне социального, культурного и религиозного контекста. Одной из причин является то, что зрители, как и исполнители, становятся частью представления, когда отстраненная скептическая публика, лишена веры, не может принимать в действие полноценного участия. Уделяя внимание современным неоритуальным тенденциям в европейском и американском театрах, исследователь придерживается убеждений немецкого театроведа Эрики Фишер-Лихте, которая рассматривает неоритуальность в контексте современной перформативной культуры. В связи с этим он прибегает к общим характеристикам перформативности, обозначая идеи Антонена Арто, Ежи Гротовского, Питера Брука и других. **Методология исследования** преимущественно базируется на компаративистском методе, предусматривая сравнение архаических ритуалов различных культур (от античных до дальневосточных), а также особенности сочетания ритуала и театра в данных действиях. Весомым теоретическим основанием исследования стали работы теоретика перформанса Ричарда Шехнера и его наставника антрополога Виктора Тернера. Кроме культурной антропологии, отстаивая исключительное влияние на зрителя ритуального действия та'зия, исследователь пользуется теоретическими наработками современных европейских театроведов, в частности Эрики Фишер-Лихте. **Новизна статьи.** Впервые комплексно, с привлечением широкого контекста, используя компаративистский подход, опираясь на культурную антропологию и пользуясь искусствоведческим анализом, исследованы связи ритуала и театра на примере мусульманского обрядового театрального действия та'зия. **Выводы.** Мы показали, что ритуал и театр не идентичны, хотя могут иметь сходство.

Ключевые слова: ритуал; театр; обрядовая драма; арабский мир; мусульманская религия; перформативная культура

