



PROJECT MUSE®

Ta'ziyeh as Theatre of Protest

Hamid Dabashi

TDR: The Drama Review, Volume 49, Number 4 (T 188), Winter 2005, pp. 91-99 (Article)

Published by The MIT Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/191157>

Ta'ziyeh as Theatre of Protest

Hamid Dabashi

Some two decades before the 20th century came to an end, a massive revolution shook an ancient land to its foundations. What was later to be called the “Islamic Revolution” in Iran took much of the world by surprise. The surprise lay not so much in the event but in the manifestly religious signs of its mobilization. The Revolution was led by a high-ranking cleric, Ayatollah Khomeini, and organized by the clerical class, which demanded the establishment of an Islamic Republic. Some two centuries into “Enlightenment Modernity,” a project that had extended its colonial shadow to the four corners of the globe, a religious revolution of sudden and inexplicable ferocity brought a corrupt monarchy and its military to their knees. Why and whence a religious revolution? Why now, at this particular juncture in history, when God was long since proclaimed dead at the European site of Enlightenment Modernity? In a series of articles published in the Italian daily *Corriere d'ella Sera* (1978), Michel Foucault sought to explain the Islamic Revolution to himself and to the rest of the world.¹ The leading critic of modernity had come to see how, in his estimation, it was being challenged at one particular periphery of its European origin.

Shi'ism As a Religion of Protest

By the early 1980s an Islamic Republic was established in Iran and an all-out war was under way with neighboring Iraq. As the ravages of the war wreaked havoc on both nations, the institutions of an Islamic Republic were consolidated in Iran. Some 200 years into the Iranian colonial encounter with modernity, and almost 100 years after a constitutional revolution that had established a secular monarchy, the organs of a repressive theocracy were now solidly put in place. The defining moment of the Islamic Revolution in Iran was the political rehabilitation of Shi'ism by a succession of revolutionary ideologues. As a religion of protest, and as an ethos of speaking truth to power, Shi'ism was put to full revolutionary use to overthrow a corrupt government and then to mobilize the masses against the invading Iraqi army. Finally, it was used to consolidate a theocracy. That today the Islamic Republic of Iran is a discredited state apparatus, held together by a combination of militant repression, an entrenched clerical clique, and the contradictory consequences of nonsensical rhetoric such as “The Axis of Evil,” is nothing less than a historical testimony to the doctrinal paradox at the heart of Shi'ism. Shi'ism is a religion of protest. It can only speak truth to power and destabilize it. It can never be “in power.” As soon as it is “in power” it contradicts itself. Shi'ism can never politically succeed; its political success is its moral failure. And that paradox is at the very soul of its historical endurance.

At the end of the 20th century, Shi'ism was thus put to immediate and enduring



1. With the victory of the Revolution in Iran in 1979, there was a national referendum resulting in a landslide victory for the Islamic Republic. The ballots were in two colors: green for the Islamic Republic and red against the Republic. The authorities cleverly borrowed the color symbolism of the *ta'ziyeh*. This stamp was issued from 1980 to 1988. (Courtesy of Peter J. Chelkowski)

which a preacher/cantor ascends a pulpit and melodically recalls the sufferings of the Shi'i Imams); or mobile like *dasteh* (in which bands of mourners march through the streets and squares of a city, singing and self-flagellating in sympathy with Shi'i martyrs). It invariably extends to mild or brutal rituals of self-flagellation in the form of *sineh-zani* (beating rhythmically on the chest), *zanjir-zani* (rhythmically hitting the shoulder with chains), and in extreme cases *qameh-zani* (cutting the shaved head with a sharp saber). *Ta'ziyeh* is the constellation of all these variations on mourning the death of the Prophet's grandson, Seyyed al-Shuhada, Hussein ibn Ali, "the Prince of Martyrs" (d. 60/680). It is in that thematic sense that *ta'ziyeh* became a paramount mode of mobilization during the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and immediately following, during the war with Iraq (1980–1988).

Ta'ziyeh As Theatre of Protest

Ta'ziyeh is a Shi'ite ritual drama. Although its dramatic and ritual roots are traced to such pre-Islamic Iranian practices as *Seyavashan* (the mourning of Seyavash, a legendary hero in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*), today it is a thoroughly recodified dramatic act that is a specifically Shi'ite practice. It can be found in South Asia, Iran, the Arab world, and even the Caribbean, where it was taken by South Asian émigré communities and then mixed with Latin American carnival. *Ta'ziyeh* is also a theatre of protest, based on the most dramatic event in early Islamic history. As a theatre of protest, *ta'ziyeh* is integral to Shi'ism and its paradox of power. Regardless of its dramatic or ritual roots in ancient Iranian or Mesopotamian practices, *ta'ziyeh* has now become an Islamic and, more specifically, Shi'ite practice. The defining aspect of *ta'ziyeh* is its destabilizing dramatics, which keep the nascent charismatic moment of Shi'ism (when it was historically born, theologically articulated, and dramatically conceived) thematically alive through mimetic rep-

use in order to topple a monarchy, consolidate an Islamic Republic, and institutionalize an outdated theocracy. True to its doctrinal paradox, Shi'ism has been instrumental in the first and the second task, and entirely useless in the last. In both its suggestive symbols and enduring institutions, Shi'ism has been the paramount ideological force in revolutionary and military mobilization, before being categorically abandoned by a clerical establishment bent on continuing their illegitimate reign, at the cost of their professed religion.

Nowhere is the central paradox of Shi'ism, in both its mobilizing and demobilizing contradictory forces, more vividly evident than in its most spectacular visual manifestations, namely in the thematics of *ta'ziyeh* and all their visual and performing variations. By *ta'ziyeh* I do not only mean a Shi'ite version of the Christian passion play similar to the miracle plays of Oberammergau, though the forms have striking similarities. *Ta'ziyeh* is more a performance of mourning—as its name clearly indicates—that has historically spread over a whole constellation of dramatic and ritual performances. *Ta'ziyeh* must be considered in its more generic and thematic sense, which includes the location-based *ta'ziyeh* proper; extends into the less elaborate recitatives, like *shabih-khani*; includes one-man or two-men recitations in front of an illustrated canvas, such as *shamayel-gardani* and *pardeh-dari*; and can be stationary like *rawzeh-khani* (in

resentations and symbolic suggestions. Today it is impossible to understand ta'ziyeh outside its Islamic and Shi'ite context. To exoticize it as "Traditional Theatre," the way classical Orientalism has done; to isolate and sever it from the rest of the creative culture that generates and sustains it, the way contemporary anthropology has done; or to trace it back to its possible Iranian roots in Seyavashan, as the Iranian nativist reading is wont to do—all rob ta'ziyeh of its integral location in the entirety of its immediate cultural universe.

The central thematic of ta'ziyeh as drama is the notion of *mazlumiyyat*, which is the defining aspect of Shi'ism itself. *Mazlumiyyat* constitutes the moral/political community in terms of justice and its aberration. *Mazlumiyyat* is the absence of justice that signals the necessity of its presence.

For Shi'ites, the original promise of Islam to deliver earthly and eternal justice to the world is kept doctrinally alive in the charismatic figure of the Imam. In ta'ziyeh, Yazid and Imam Hussein, the two principal nemeses, have emerged as metaphoric representations of unjust power and the revolutionary mobilization against such tyranny. *Mazlumiyyat* is more an assumption than a notion. It means "having been wronged." Hussein's epithet is "Mazlum"; he is called "Hussein-e Mazlum," or "the Hussein who was wronged." But the trilateral Arabic root of *mazlumiyyat*, ZLM, means "tyranny" and "injustice" at one and the same time, combining the political and the moral. Thus two paradoxical principles are instantaneously summoned and metaphorically collapsed in the assumption of *mazlumiyyat*. First, it is a weakness that constitutes power, a passivity that entails active agency; and second, it is a morality that surmises the political, a politics that summons the moral. As the supreme symbolic figure of Shi'ism, Hussein as a historical figure is morally sublated into the cosmogonically Mazlum. He is a permanent revolutionary. He can never be *in* power, because that, ipso facto, makes him a *Zalem*, a tyrant, and that can never be; that would be a contradiction in terms, the undoing of Hussein, and with Hussein, Shi'ism. Ta'ziyeh is the dramatic register, the suggestive symbol, of that doctrinal paradox at the heart of Shi'ism.

As an Islamically recodified drama, ta'ziyeh carries within its dramaturgical tension the central paradox of power constitutional to the Qur'anic revelation itself. The Qur'an consists of two major parts, each at narrative and normative odds with the other. The 114 *surahs* or chapters of the Qur'an are divided into those revealed in Mecca between 610 and 622 (or 12 years before the commencement of the Islamic calendar with the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina), and those revealed in Medina between 622 and 632 (or from year 1 on the Islamic Calendar to year 10). The Meccan *surahs* correspond to the rising crescendo of the Prophet's mission and are revolutionary and destabilizing in their moral defiance of injustice and tyranny, as the Prophet Muhammad brings the Meccan pariahs and the downtrodden together through his insurrectionary revelations. The Medinan *surahs*, on the contrary, are the record of the Prophet consolidating his power in Medina and establishing a political community. Between the Meccan and the Medinan chapters of the Qur'an—the moral uprising of a revolutionary movement and the political consolidation of its power—there is thus a narrative and normative tension. This tension has remained definitive to Islamic doctrine and history.

The transformation of the Prophet's charismatic authority into the institution of the Islamic caliphate following his death is the most immediate and suggestively metaphoric expression of this definitive paradox at the heart of Islam. The Sunnite branch of Islam includes the overwhelming majority of Muslims who opted for the eventual institutionalization of Muhammad's charismatic authority in the juridical institution of the *ulama* (the Muslim jurists) and the political power of the *caliph* (the Muslim ruler). A small minority of Muslims, however, sought to perpetuate that charismatic aspect and doctrinally transfer it from the

institution of Prophethood to that of the saintly figures they called imams, the descendents of the Prophet they consider collectively infallible and divinely ordained. The Shi'ites, as they came to be identified, related to the figures of their infallible Imams with the same charismatic spontaneity as they once did to the Prophet himself. While in Sunnite Islam the paradox of power constitutional to the nascent faith was disentangled and pacified in the dual institutions of the ulama and the caliphs, in Shi'ism the charismatic indecisiveness of the faith was kept allegorically alive. That charismatic spontaneity, holding the community of believers around a figure rather than allowing it to settle around a set of normative laws, is centered on the principle of justice (*adl*) as the defining moment of the faith. The imam personifies the principle of a divinely promised justice—upholding the Meccan spontaneity of the Qur'an over and against the Medinan propensity for institution-building—and tends toward the Prophet's prophetic spontaneity rather than his political prowess in the consolidation of power.

This historical proclivity toward spontaneous charisma over enduring institutions of legitimate power has given Shi'ism a politically paradoxical disposition reflective of the doctrinal tension hidden in the very heart of Islam and inherent to the Qur'anic narrative itself. Shi'ism, as a result, has encapsulated the insurrectionary aspect of nascent Islam and remained categorically a religion of protest. The constitutional paradox at the heart of Shi'ism—always protesting against power but never being in power—is first and foremost theorized in its doctrinal articulation of *Imamah*, or the succession of a series of infallible saintly figures, but also dramatically staged in *ta'ziyeh*. *Ta'ziyeh*, as a result, carries within its dramatic tension the central paradox of Shi'ism, and in turn the principal doctrinal anxiety of Islam itself. Carrying within itself the very seed of Islam and Shi'ism as a religion of protest, *ta'ziyeh* combines the dual suppositions of the moral and political communities, disallowing the narrative and normative separation of the two. In the same vein, reality and fiction are counternarrated, bringing the tragedy of Hussein home to bear on the moment of its actual performance. This in turn merges the creative and critical dimensions of the drama much closer together than ordinarily allowed. The two moments of the act, its historical roots and its momentary remembrance, are equally collapsed into each other, preventing a sympathetic distancing of the audience from the fact of the event. The habitual bifurcation of the diachronic and synchronic axes of history and reality are equally fused into each other, making art and politics almost impossible to separate, making the world a performing stage.

This doctrinal tension at the roots of *ta'ziyeh* as ritual drama gives the nature and disposition of its mimesis an entirely different modulation from that of the Aristotelian Greek *mimesis* or “imitation,” which is tantamount to onomatopoeia, or the actual making (*poiein*) of the naming (*onoma*) of the mimetic act. We have no such presumptions in *ta'ziyeh*. Quite the contrary. In *ta'ziyeh*, acting is not mimetic; it is entirely suggestive—with a full contractual agreement, dramatically articulated, between the actors and the audience that they are *just* acting. Actors hold their script in their hands, not because they don't know the lines but because they want to demonstrate distance and suggest a dissimilitude. If the Aristotelian mimesis is based on similitude, *ta'ziyeh* is predicated on dissimilitude. The director of *ta'ziyeh* is always present on the stage, not because the actors don't know what to do, but because the audience needs assurance that this is just acting. The stage is not really a stage, not because the villagers and townspeople who staged the *ta'ziyeh* are poor and could not afford an amphitheatre, but because the stage must be an extension of the rest of the physical habitat of the actors and the audience. In fact the actors come onstage directly from their houses, alleys, streets, and markets. The stage never loses sight of its not-being-the-stage. Nonactors have easy access to the stage area; actors move in and out of character at will. There

is fluidity between reality and acting because the actors are performing no act of fiction. They are acting reality. Imam Hussein and his 72 companions were really killed in the battle of Karbala by Yazid and his cohorts in the year 60/680. You cannot perform that historical fact as if it never happened; and yet you cannot pretend that you are Imam Hussein either. That would be sacrilegious. This, as a result, necessitates an active vigilance on part of the audience to discern when you are acting and when you are not. This is substantially facilitated by the fact that ta'ziyeh actors are not really actors. They ordinarily have other professions. At one point the actors were greengrocers, butchers, and carpenters, and now they may be dentists, lawyers, and teachers. If one sees a ta'ziyeh with a built-in Aristotelian conception of mimesis, one is terribly disappointed. One has to understand how, in the doctrinally charged collapse of the then and the now, the moral and the political, and the real and the ideal, the charismatic paradox at the heart of Shi'ism informs the dramatic tension at the heart of ta'ziyeh and all of its suggestive symbolics of acting, staging, showing, and representing.

As a performing art, though, ta'ziyeh is never totally under the control and authority of its invocation of an historical memory. There is a historical memory (the actual events of Karbala in the year 60/680) in ta'ziyeh to which its performing drama refers but to which it is not dramatically obligated. This is the performing paradox at the heart of the ta'ziyeh, which is itself located within the memorial paradox of Shi'ism as a religion of protest, which in turn is located within the narrative and normative paradox of the Qur'an, as the textual anamnesis of Muhammad's prophetic charisma. Ta'ziyeh is thus a theatre of protest whose moral parameters break and intrude on the boundaries of the political. The result is the peculiar status of ta'ziyeh, which is neither fictive theatre nor stylized ritual, neither real nor unreal. It is located on a tertiary plane between the real and the unreal, from which both the real and the unreal sustain their relevance.

Shi'ism and Ta'ziyeh As Religion and Drama of Protest

The fact that ta'ziyeh as a universe of creative imagination should lend itself to political uses is immediately rooted in its character as a theatre of protest, a performance of the most dramatic moment—the very historical birth—of a religion of protest. As a theatre of protest, ta'ziyeh is coterminous with Shi'ism, commemorating its very doctrinal disposition as a religion that was born at the death of its saints, first and foremost Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law and one of his staunchest supporters, and then the death of Ali's son, Hussein. Ta'ziyeh remembers and reenacts a doomed battle between a small band of revolutionaries and an entrenched and deeply corrupt political power. There is a universality to the battle of Karbala that can easily be extrapolated to include any small band of revolutionaries fighting against any entrenched political power. Ta'ziyeh, in effect, provides revolutionaries across time and space with the opportunity to change the course of history, as it was unjustly determined in the battle of Karbala. "We are not the people of Kufa," read some slogans during the revolutionary mobilization that invited Khomeini back to Iran, meaning that this time around these Muslims were not going to betray their saintly leader Imam Hussein/Imam Khomeini by inviting him to Kufa/Tehran and then not helping him to fight against Yazid/Shah.

The characters of ta'ziyeh drama are not just metaphorical, they are metamorphic—they easily mutate into contemporary historical figures. The transfiguration of ta'ziyeh characters is historically multimetamorphic, from historical to metaphorical, and from metaphorical to historical. That multimetamorphic aspect of ta'ziyeh characters makes them at once extremely potent allegories of cosmic significance and yet instantaneously accessible to contemporary remodulations.

During the Islamic Revolution, the figure of Khomeini was immediately iden-

2. During one of the weekly patriotic parades that took place while the war was being waged, a banner declared, "We are not the people of Kufa!"—inspired by the events of the *ta'ziyeh* in which Hussein was invited by the people of Kufa to come and be their leader, and was then betrayed by them. Other posters declared, "We shall fight to the end!" (1984). (Courtesy of Peter J. Chelkowski)



tified with that of Hussein, or even more poignantly with a conflated figure of Muhammad, Ali, and Hussein—which is to say with the most combatant saintly figures in the Islamic universe of creative imagination. By the same token, the Shah was identified with Yazid, a usurper of power, corrupt, tyrannical, banal, and demonic. The configuration of the protagonist and the antagonist in this drama transformed the battle between Khomeini and the Shah into the simulacrum of the battle of Karbala, in which a new generation of Muslims could actually participate. We have to remember that *ta'ziyeh* is much more than a mere passion play commemorating the battle of Karbala. There is a profound element of redemptive suffering involved in its multifaceted self-flagellation that can assume mild forms of *Sineh-zani* (rhythmic beating of the chest) to very violent forms of *Qameh-zani* (cutting your shaved head with a saber). There is a real sense of angry regret in *ta'ziyeh* in which Muslims mourn their historical inability to aid their Imam. *Ta'ziyeh of Hor*, for example, is replete with a potential participation in the actual dramatic event though in absentia, with which contemporary Shi'ites vicariously identify. Every time forces of good and evil face each other, the extension of *ta'ziyeh* thematics into real time history provides the Shi'ites with an opportunity to participate in the battle of Karbala and help Imam Hussein win the battle against Yazid. There is a scene in the battle of Karbala, when one of Imam Hussein's companions asks him why he does not solicit divine intervention in his fight against Yazid. He opens his proverbial fingers in a V-shape in front of the interlocutor and asks him to look. Armies and armies of angelic and demonic forces are visible through the Imam's fingers, mounted on their celestial horses and ready at his command. But, he says, he will not summon them because this battle is a historical test of his followers. In any kind of revolutionary mobilization of the forces of good against forces of evil (suggested and constituted), there is an immediate, trans-metamorphic identification of the band of revolutionaries with the forces that the living Imam Hussein is summoning to the

battle. There is a Manichean element of cosmic forces at war in the battle of Karbala that gives it its enduring metamorphic potency.

The invoking of the metamorphic battle of Karbala in revolutionary mobilization against the Shah soon after the success of the Islamic Revolution was gradually co-opted into building the war mobilization against Saddam Hussein. While Saddam Hussein could only invoke the battle of al-Qadesiyyah (in which the Sasanid² army was defeated by a band of Muslim warriors in 637) for his war against Iran, Khomeini could invoke the battle of Karbala (which was a far more potent metaphor, judging by the tens of thousands of young Iranians who lost their lives in the course of Iran-Iraq war [1980–1988]). It is a telling example of the power of these two respective metaphors that Saddam Hussein had to hire some Egyptian filmmakers to aid and abet him in his propaganda to make a film about al-Qadesiyyah, while Khomeini's propaganda was made much easier by the generations of ta'ziyeh performances that had paved the way for his battle of Karbala. The physical location of Karbala in contemporary Iraq, with Mesopotamia being the actual battleground between Imam Hussein and Yazid, made the identification of Saddam Hussein with Yazid and, by implication, Khomeini with Imam Hussein, that much stronger. Given the more regional and global context of the Iran-Iraq war, such figures as Menachem Begin, then the Prime Minister of Israel, and Jimmy Carter, then the President of the United States, were equally drawn into the cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil fought on the frontline between Iran and Iraq.

Somewhere halfway through the Iran-Iraq war, the legitimizing grace of ta'ziyeh began to abandon Khomeini and his cause. Here we need to refer to the Iranian notion of "divine charisma," *farrah-e izadi*, as the best possible mode of explanation, with the legendary king Jamshid in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* as the one who first received and then lost this gift of grace. Jamshid was one of the earliest kings in legendary Iranian imagination who built a civilization and made life as we know it possible. He lived a very long life and achieved many marvelous deeds, and precisely because of the wonders he had brought about, including the secret of immortality, which he shared with his subjects, arrogance overcame him and led him to proclaim himself Divine. Precisely at that moment, the Divine gift of grace abandoned him and the evil king Zahhak invaded his kingdom and ultimately destroyed him. The Divine gift of grace can be as arbitrarily given as it can be instantly taken back. In the Islamic universe of the same imagination, Shi'ism as a religion and ta'ziyeh as a theatre of protest have a legitimizing force only to the degree that a small revolutionary band of rebels are rising up against tyranny. The moment Khomeini refused to agree to a ceasefire, when young Iranians were being brought back in their shrouds in the thousands to be buried and all voices of reason and dissent were suppressed, neither Shi'ism as a religion nor ta'ziyeh as a theatre of protest could further lend themselves as a doctrine or a drama of legitimacy.

Today, close to three decades into the repressive consolidation of power by the entrenched clerical establishment in Iran, both Shi'ism and ta'ziyeh have categorically abandoned the organs and institutions of the Islamic Republic. As the dramatic nucleus of Shi'ism, the thematics of ta'ziyeh served the revolution to delegitimize the Pahlavis, by identifying it with the historic enemies of the Shi'i



3. During the Iranian Revolution, the Shah was portrayed as Yazid, Hussein's enemy. During the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq, Saddam Hussein was equated with Yazid. In this cartoon from 1980 to 1988, Saddam Hussein prepares a coffin for himself labeled "Saddam Yazid." (Courtesy of Peter J. Chelkowski)



4. The Revolutionary guards and the regular armed forces were not strong enough to fight the Iraqi aggressors and often incited teenagers to join the “mobilization forces,” inspiring them to see themselves as the youth of Karbala. In the weekly patriotic parades of the mid-1980s, young boys carried plastic grenades, but soon they were sent to the frontlines with real ammunition. (Courtesy of Peter J. Chelkowski)

saints, and then wage a defensive war against Saddam Hussein. But long before Khomeini died in June 1989 it was obvious that ta'ziyeh (as the dramatic leitmotif of Shi'ism itself) could do absolutely nothing to legitimize a discredited theocracy. Shi'ism is a religion of protest. It can never succeed politically without failing morally. As a cosmic carnival of a constitutional injustice, ta'ziyeh is the mourning of a loss that must always fail in its stated objective if it is to be successful. No mourning could or should ever be successful. The success of mourning is its failure. Mourning is successful only to the degree that it fails, acknowledging the enormity of the loss, the incomprehensible dimensions of the tragedy. The success of mourning means the eradication of the central trauma that has caused it, and no such eradication of a trauma definitive to a culture is possible—without nullifying that very culture. Shi'is are condemned/blessed forever to remember the central trauma of their history, but never so fully that they can then forget it. The act of remembrance will have to remain always incomplete—like a dream that keeps haunting a people, forcing them to try to remember it, but never successfully. In commemorating the death of a martyr, Shi'is are seeking to identify with absolute Otherness; with saintliness in the midst of sin and death at the moment of living; with dual, absolutely incongruent, Otherness; with the face and the body, miasmatic memory and creative incantation, of the saintly and the diseased. In that impossibility, mourning choreographed and staged, ta'ziyeh is made possible.

Shi'ism as a religion of protest has now diminished to a practice of private pieties, and ta'ziyeh has been on a tour of the “Great Satan,” as the U.S. used to be called in revolutionary Iran. Ta'ziyeh has been thematically theatricalized, overtly aestheticized, Orientalized, anthropologized, and ultimately museumized. But this is not the destiny of either Shi'ism or of ta'ziyeh. Institutional powers—political or religious—have always sought to appropriate Shi'ism (as did the Pahlavis and now the clerics), and then either ban or neutralize ta'ziyeh (as did Reza Shah

and now, paradoxically, the clerics). During the Shah's time Shi'ism was officially neutralized and ta'ziyeh overtly theatricalized at the Shiraz Art Festival. As Shi'ism retreated to private pieties in Iran, in exile Ayatollah Khomeini prepared his followers for a massive political showdown. As ta'ziyeh was staged at the Shiraz Art Festival, ta'ziyeh leitmotifs were fomenting revolutionary mobilizations in the streets and alleys, markets and squares, of Iran. Shi'ism and ta'ziyeh are found today neither in the circles of the ruling clerics in Tehran nor indeed in the circus ring at Lincoln Center Damrosch Park in New York, where it was staged for a slightly bemused and altogether indifferent audience in Summer 2002. Both Shi'ism and ta'ziyeh are both to be detected and celebrated smack in the middle of a student-led uprising that was ruthlessly suppressed in the summer of 1999—and yet its anniversary every July 9th threatens anew whoever happens to be the reigning Yazid and all his cohorts in Tehran.

Notes

1. These articles and other writings by Michel Foucault on the Islamic Revolution in Iran are now the subject of a critical analysis by Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson (2005).
2. The Sasanids were the last Iranian dynasty to reign in Persia before the Arab conquest. Their reign lasted from 224 to 651 C.E.

Reference

- Afary, Janet, and Kevin B. Anderson
2005 *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hamid Dabashi is Professor of Iranian Studies and Associate Director of the Center for Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University in New York. Among his publications is *Staging Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, with Peter J. Chelkowski (New York University Press, 1999).