At thirty-five, Ivanov feels aged beyond his years. He is torn apart by his own paralysis. His wife is dying. He is deeply in debt. Society is changing, and new social and cultural movements are vying for public attention. Revolution is in the air and on the lips of everyone. Ivanov meanwhile cannot decide what to do, either with himself or with the world in which he lives. He used to love his wife, yet he cannot make up his mind to travel with her to the Crimea in order to stall her tuberculosis. He has no money, he tells himself and others, in order to justify what in reality is a profound personal apathy. Mainly, Ivanov’s problem is that he doesn’t know what he wants. He is paralyzed by boredom. Ivanov is the so-called superfluous man of nineteenth-century Russian literature, the stereotypical intellectual in an age with no use for intellectuals.¹

Such is the plot of Ivanov (1887), Anton Chekhov’s first commercially successful play. As I show in this essay, the story has more global appeal than this casual summary might suggest. Although set in nineteenth-century Russia, Ivanov has resonated profoundly in twenty-first century Tehran, thanks to the recent Persian adaptation by Amir Koohestani (b. 1978), one of Iran’s foremost playwrights and director of the Mehr Theater Group, founded by Koohestani in 1996. When it was staged in Tehran in 2011 and 2016, Koohestani’s Ivanov generated much interest among the theatregoing public.² Performances were sold out, and reviews were exuberant.³ Like other major Russian writers, Chekhov is held in high
regard by educated Iranians, but the meaning of Ivanov in Iran today cannot be explained with reference to Russian-Iranian literary connections alone.4

The reaction of one Iranian with whom I attended a 2016 performance of the production illustrates the extent to which Iranians are interested in Chekhov’s play, less for the light it sheds on provincial Russia, and more for its depiction of the challenges they face in their marriages, careers, and cultural aspirations. During the intermission between the second and third acts, my friend expressed his identification with the play’s depiction of a troubled marriage specifically. “Every Iranian can relate to this story!” he exclaimed. “It’s only the taboos in our culture that prevent us from talking about these things, which affect us all.” My companion’s projection of his experience, and that of his fellow Iranians, onto the main characters was striking, particularly because he was not an active theatregoer. In the play, Ivanov is torn by his conflicting feelings for, on the one hand, his dying wife Anna, and on the other hand, for Sasha, a young woman whom Ivanov hopes to marry following Anna’s death. As the play progresses, Ivanov’s contempt for his wife becomes increasingly evident. He treats her brutally. Yet my companion identified with Ivanov, just as the play demands.5

In Iran in 2016, I came to learn about the many ways in which Ivanov’s story resonates with young Iranians today. Like Ivanov and his contemporaries, they want change but don’t know how to translate their political and social ideals into reality. Like Ivanov, young Iranians are torn between revolutionary idealism and political and cultural apathy. A telling comment on this state of affairs is offered by Leila Daryoush, who reviewed the play during its 2011 premiere. Daryoush quoted a Facebook post by an Iranian actress who declared: “we [Iranians] are all Ivanov.”6

If all Iranians are Ivanov, then Ivanov is in a deep sense Iranian. And the implications of this refraction—the process whereby Ivanov has become a reflection and possession of the Iranian people and their culture—call for further investigation. This essay will thus explore the intersection between the Iranian stage and the Iranian public sphere through Chekhov’s play and its Iranian adaptation, tracing how the play has been received and interpreted by Iranian artists and audiences. I argue that Koohestani’s Ivanov reveals the tragic paralysis faced by Iranians who desire to make a
mark on the world, even as they gaze into a destitute future that seems to crush all of their ambitions and dreams; at the same time, the production highlights, I argue, the critical role of women in finding a way out of this cultural paralysis.

Despite the distinctive impact of his work on contemporary Iranian culture, Koohestani is not the first artist to translate and adapt classic texts for the Iranian audiences. Indeed, his production of *Ivanov* reflects a dramatic culture defined in large part by the adaptation of such texts. I therefore also consider what this adaptation means for the ability of translation studies to migrate across media, cultures, and languages, expanding our understanding of the peculiar capacity of drama translation to confer new life on old texts. Following the success of the first production of *Ivanov* in 2011, Koohestani was invited by Playhouse Theatre (*Tamashakhaneh*) on Iranshahr Street to stage his adaptation a second time, with minimal modifications. Playhouse Theatre is one of Tehran’s most important artist’s collectives. Housed in Artist’s Park (*park-e honarmandon*), a striking venue full of outdoor Pahlavi-era sculpture, where Iranian visual artists display their art and offer their creations for sale to the public, Playhouse Theatre regularly features plays in translation, avant-garde classics, and new productions. In prior seasons, I have attended staged versions of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *Love in the Time of Cholera* (2015), David Mamet’s *Oleanna* (2015), and Shakespeare’s *Richard III* (2012) in this complex. I have also watched performances in the nearby City Theater (founded in 1972), such as *Death of a Salesman* (2015).

The opportunity to watch Koohestani’s adaptation of Chekhov in a packed theatre many times larger than the smaller stages on which I had seen the earlier plays performed offered me a new lens on Iranian cultural life. Two weeks after watching *Ivanov* in Tehran, I had the opportunity to see an adaptation of *Ivanov* London’s National Theatre by playwright David Hare, performed alongside Chekhov’s earlier plays, *The Seagull* and *Platonov*.* Comparing the different versions by Chekhov, Hare, and Koohestani, I was struck by the radically different interpretation of the play proposed by each text. In what follows, I thus consider, not only *Ivanov*’s cultural resonances in contemporary Iran, but also the effects of Koohestani’s production on the meanings of Chekhov’s text. Specifically,
I consider how the play’s characters metamorphose across the three versions, with particular attention to what these differences mean for the cross-cultural pollination of different theatrical traditions. While my analysis is oriented primarily towards the Iranian Ivanov, I consider this work alongside its Russian and English counterparts, and have pointed to their divergences and similarities where relevant. Each performance can be compared to a prism that refracts the narrative differently. In the process of this refraction, we witness a text from one world acquire an entirely new life and meaning when transported into another world.

Koohestani himself has reflected at length on what censors fail to understand when they modify his work: “Even the most trivial words, when pronounced in front of an audience that is numerous, well-informed, angry and enthusiastic, can give rise to interpretations of the work that can go way beyond even the will of its creators.” Koohestani is referring to the autonomous life of his plays, a life in which his plays acquire meanings Koohestani himself could never have anticipated in

(Figure 1) Playbill for Iranian Production of Ivanov, August 2016.
Rebecca Gould

the Iranian public sphere. Koohestani’s insight correlates with translation theorist André Lefevere’s account of the role of misreading in literary history: a work “gains exposure and achieves influence mainly through ‘misunderstandings and misconceptions,’” according to Lefevere, “or, to use a more neutral term, refractions.”  

12 Iranian drama tends to favour just such modes of translation, modes in which, as Azadeh Ganja has put it, “characters, names, places and personalities” are “appropriated in such a way that the text was ultimately more Persian than a simple translation would have been.”  

13 This domesticating process substantiates Lefevere’s account of the productivity of misreadings and refractions within literary cultures constructed as peripheral to the world literary system. Koohestani’s production of Ivanov goes beyond even this mode of translation in Iranian drama, creating a new aesthetic experience for the Iranian viewer.

Before embarking further on the play’s Iranian trajectory, a few words on Chekhov’s place in Iranian dramaturgy are in order. The first recorded performance of a Chekhov play in Iran is the one-act “The Proposal,” which was staged in Mashhad during the 1940s.  

14 Alongside Shakespeare and Arthur Miller, Chekhov is among the most popular playwrights in Iran. Like many Russian authors, he exists for Iranians on a border zone between East and West, and represents a culture that has experienced many of the same revolutionary processes that have shaped modern Iran, albeit several decades earlier. Hence, the Orientalist epistemologies that often inform European accounts of Iranian performances of European plays must be reconfigured when examining Iranian engagements with Russian theatre.  

15 As these pages show, the Iranian Ivanov is striking, not because of his distance from contemporary Iranian social realities, but because of his complete assimilation to them.

Superfluous Men

The Iranian production of Ivanov was both scripted and directed by Koohestani. The dramaturgy bears his imprint as much the dialogue. On the official playbill (figure 1), the production was publicized as “Anton Chekhov’s Ivanov,” with Koohestani listed as author (nevisandeh). In Iranian media outlets, Koohestani’s role was similarly given as “author
Comparative Drama

and director [nevisandeh o kargardan].” This is a play, one might say, with two authors. Koohestani’s text combines elements from David Hare’s 1997 script with the Persian translation of Ivanov by Said Hamidian. When framed for an international audience (as in its European productions), Koohestani’s Ivanov is presented as an adaptation of Hare’s adaptation. In many respects, however, Koohestani’s Ivanov is an original work, particularly with regard to its staging and set design, as well as its ending, for which no parallel exists in Chekhov’s text.

The props are strikingly modern. With a dark background and psychedelic lighting gracing the stage, the atmosphere at times seems to gesture towards an automated future suffused with technological devices and devoid of human contact. In the middle of the play, for instance, the audience is presented with an empty yellow sofa, where Ivanov leaves his tape-recorder. After he exits, the recorder plays on auto-repeat; as English words are intoned by impersonal voices uttering the language lessons, their Persian equivalent flashes on the sofa in a blood-red script (figure 2). Other props similarly evoke the alienating effects of technology on the characters, from Ivanov’s headphones (figure 3), which isolate him from his surroundings; to the other characters’ iPhones; to Ivanov’s English-language recordings, his primary and apparently futile means of self-improvement. It is no accident that one of the English words repeated by the automated voice in the scene with the yellow sofa is “alienation.”

(Figure 2.) Yellow Sofa with Persian Inscriptions, from Koohestani, Ivanov (via YouTube; 1:08 min)
The headphones and language tapes, as well as other props like the bed in the middle of the stage (figure 3), likewise suggest a surreal or allegorical mode of representation, whereby the “images are not necessarily those that are presented to public view on stage, but the ones the spectators see in their mind’s eye.” These words, through which Koohestani describes his strategy for dealing with censorship, speak volumes for his dramaturgy, which, in this play as elsewhere, tends towards allegory rather than direct signification. Finally, the sense of desolation and alienation is exacerbated by the costume design, which includes ample use of birthday party hats (figure 4), for a party that is anything but a celebration. The irony accentuates the characters’ isolation from each other.

Chekhov’s *Ivanov* exists in two versions. The first was performed in Moscow’s Korsh Theatre in 1887; the production was widely reviled as
“deeply immoral” and as a “disgusting mess” in early reviews. A second heavily revised version was staged as a tragedy in St. Petersburg in 1889 to great acclaim. Unlike many productions, including Hare’s, Koohestani does not follow the revised 1889 version of the play, which ends with Ivanov committing suicide. Instead, he takes his cue from the first version, in which Ivanov dies of a heart attack on his wedding day. On that basis, Koohestani crafts a dénouement unique to his version, which concludes without any deaths. In the Iranian context, this can be interpreted as an accommodation to state censorship, but it has major implications for the play’s overall impact, including its gender politics. Ivanov’s suicide has been criticized as clichéd and melodramatic, but the decision to dispense with it entirely represents, nonetheless, a sharp departure from the canonical version.

Koohestani has linked his rejection of the second version’s ending to the Iranian cultural context. He explained in an interview that a suicide by the play’s hero would have no traction for the Iranian audience he wants to address: “Contrary to Chekhov,” he states, “I think that Ivanov in Iran would be unable to find his way, not even the path to death. All Ivanovs in my country observe the situation, they suffer but remain static. Even intellectuals do not have the courage to react: they remain in life to suffer more.” Although the ending varies according to different iterations of the play, Ivanov’s character is passive across the Russian, British, and Iranian versions. In particular, Ivanov’s primary affliction—his intellectual paralysis—is a constant theme. Koohestani goes even further than his Russian and British predecessors: the ennui of his Ivanov is so complete and profound that it even excludes the possibility of suicide. As reporter Farzaneh Ebrahimi commented in Persian in Sharq newspaper during an interview with Koohestani: “the Ivanov whom you brought to life on stage is even more passive than Chekhov’s Ivanov.”

The cause of Ivanov’s affliction is also constant throughout the different versions: too much education, or, more precisely, an inability to translate erudition into action. In the Iranian version, Ivanov’s paralysis is manifested in his obsession with learning English, a language that is a gateway to opportunity and upward mobility, and which enables migration out of Iran for many young and ambitious Iranians. English, as conveyed to Ivanov through audiocassettes, represents a world of learning he longs
to attain. Yet he does not know what to do with this learning once he attains it. Similarly, in Chekhov’s text and Hare’s script, Ivanov repeatedly emphasizes the uselessness of the knowledge he has spent his life trying to acquire. His unsolicited advice, for instance, to Anna's doctor, a recent graduate, tells of his own experience of failure. Ivanov references the archetype of all literary dreamers, Don Quixote: “Don't tilt at windmills. Don't waste your time bashing your head against brick walls. . . .[and] at all costs stay away from progressive education . . . It's a killer. Just pull your little shell up over your head and get on with your life.” 24 Elsewhere, the doctor, who despises Ivanov for his failure to help his wife, describes him as an “over-educated Tartuffe.” 25

Alongside Tartuffe and Don Quixote, Chekhov’s play exists in an intertextual relationship with another figure from world literature who symbolizes futility, Hamlet. Ivanov invokes Hamlet on two occasions in the course of his surreptitious romance with Sasha, as Anna approaches death. First, to Sasha’s insistence that “love alone can help you,” Ivanov invokes his self-contempt: “There are men,” he says, “I’ve met them, men who long to be Hamlet, it’s all they want, to play the outsider, the superfluous man. To them it’s glamorous . . . To me, it’s failure.” 26 Second, in the final act, just before he kills himself, Ivanov returns to the same theme in his conversation with Sasha: “We’ve been acting. I’ve been playing Hamlet and you’ve been playing the missionary. Shall I tell you? Performance over!” 27

Whether trapped on stage or in the classroom, the Russian and Iranian Ivanovs share in common a sense of having been prepared for fates more glorious than the lives they lead. Ivanov and Sasha’s father Lebedev were students together in Moscow. Back in their student years, they considered themselves liberals and shared “ideas and values in common.” 28 Because of their shared experiences and values, Lebedev proposes to lend Ivanov the money that the latter owes his wife. Although education sets them apart from their surroundings, it has also led them into a condition of hopelessness. In a lengthy monologue, Ivanov laments: “I search for faith. I spend days and nights in idleness, in doing-nothingness, my mind, my body in permanent revolt . . . I have no hope, no expectation. My sense of tomorrow is gone.” 29 He then laments his lost love for his wife, and his indifference to her illness.
Diatribes like this are Chekhov’s indictment of the pre-revolutionary Russian intellectual class that has devoted itself to an education that serves no social purpose. Ivanov is yet another figuration of the superfluous man, who typifies this class that dominated Russian literature during the second half of the nineteenth century. Although not denominated as such, the figure of the superfluous man has also shaped modern Iranian literature, particularly the fiction of Bahram Sadeqi and Bahman Sholevar. As an archetypal superfluous man, Ivanov’s character resonates strongly in contemporary Iran, a country with a highly educated population and an even higher unemployment rate, a demographic reality that has the effect of making education appear like a waste, just as it did for the highly—and superfluously—educated Ivanov.

Although Ivanov’s superfluity to himself and to society is among the most widely commented on aspects of the play, Chekhov’s hero is no mere epitome of self-pity. Reminding us of “Chekhov’s stated intention to kill off once and for all the self-indulgent melancholy which he believed disfigured Russian literature,” David Hare argues that Ivanov represents a critique, and not merely an embodiment, of the superfluous man tradition in Russian literature. He points to a passage from Chekhov’s letter to his friend and editor Alexei Suvorin in which the former declares his intentions to bring the Russian literary tradition of superfluous complaint to an end with this play: “I have long cherished,” writes Chekhov, “the audacious notion of summing up all that has hitherto been written about complaining and melancholy people, and would have my Ivanov proclaim the ultimate in such writing.”

Although the trope of the superfluous man features heavily in Ivanov’s plot and characterizations, the Ivanov we encounter on the stage goes beyond prior treatments of this theme. Ivanov is a new type of superfluous man: he stands in judgment on himself, even (in some versions) to the extent of bringing about his own death. As Hare argues, Ivanov is so repelled to find himself the victim of his own depression that he ends his life. While this plot twist may appear contrived, it is the only moment in the entire play when Ivanov asserts his will. Suicide is among others things a rejection of a superfluous existence. Briefly departing from his persona as a superfluous man, Ivanov acts, if only to bring about his own destruction. Koohestani’s reworking of the plot thus sharpens, paradoxically, Ivanov’s
status as a superfluous man: he can’t even bring himself to end his life. And by sharpening Ivanov’s superfluous nature, Koohestani encourages his audiences to look elsewhere for solutions to the cultural and political problems embodied by the character. Viewers seeking an answer to the old revolutionary question—most famously posed by Lenin—“What is to be done?” must turn their attention away from the men of Chekhov’s play and consider the strategies the women in the play have devised for coping with life amid political and social constraint.

**Revolutionary Women**

If the men in *Ivanov* are listless and unproductive, the women also operate in a context of limited life options. And yet it is in the domain of women’s agency that the Iranian version diverges most sharply from its Russian and British counterparts. Strong though she is, the Russian-British Sasha can only envision living for love. The Iranian Sasha rejects this gendered paradigm. The Russian-British Sasha declares to Ivanov her readiness to sacrifice everything for love. “For men, love is just how-are-you-darling?” the Russian-British Sasha declares, “It’s just a stroll in the garden. One day, it will be a few tears at the graveside. But for us? No, it has to be life itself. If you climb a mountain, I’ll climb with you. Jump over the cliff: I’ll jump.”

Sasha gives voice to a kind of strength in these words, but here it is a stereotypically feminine strength that is also aligned with weakness. Even her father perceives the limitations of Sasha’s proposed sacrifice. When Sasha insists that it is her “job in life” to understand Ivanov, her father retorts: “That’s not a calling. It’s a prison sentence.”

In rejecting the second version of the play which ends in Ivanov’s suicide, Koohestani clears a space for a different, and uniquely Iranian, Sasha. As a result of the changed plot, the concluding drama is given over to Sasha in the Iranian version, rather than to the lackluster Ivanov. Once it has been determined that they will not marry, Ivanov asks Sasha where she plans to go. Sasha responds in one word. Evading his quest for specifics, she states that she is leaving in a “general sense” (*kullan*). Unsatisfied, Ivanov probes further. He asks her whether she is leaving “this home, this city, or this country.” Sasha responds elliptically to Ivanov’s interrogation. “Away from you [az *pish-e to*],” she says simply when Ivanov inquires...
further. Sasha repeats this phrase a few minutes later, and the play draws to a close. As the scene acquires momentum, the Iranian Sasha becomes the star of the play.\textsuperscript{37}

By contrast with the Iranian focus on Sasha at the end, the Russian version retains its focus on Ivanov as it draws to a tempestuous close. In the Russian version, it is Ivanov who tells Sasha to “get away from me [\textit{ostav’te menia}]!” just before he shoots himself. Sasha is relegated to the background as the doctor, Ledebev, Ivanov’s uncle, and other assorted characters try to figure out what to do about Ivanov. Koohestani by contrast gives the most important concluding lines to Sasha. His version of the play concludes with stage directions that focus the audience’s attention on her as the curtain falls: “Sasha places herself opposite the bed and leans against the exit’s threshold.”\textsuperscript{38} These directions clarify the centrality of Sasha’s role. Instead of closing with Ivanov’s suicide, Koohestani closes with Sasha’s departure. We do not know where Sasha has decided to travel to, but her very elusiveness—her decision to withhold details about her plans from those closest to her—is itself a manifestation of her will.

In all versions except the Iranian one, the eponymous hero is the star of the play. Although they are appealing and paradoxical to varying degrees, the lead female roles never eclipse Ivanov in importance or dramatic focus. In the Iranian version, the two leading women, Anna and Sasha, arguably drive the play. Negar Javaherian (b. 1983), the actress who plays the Iranian Sasha, is more mature and experienced than the young twenty-year-old of Chekhov’s script, and her role thereby acquires a gravitas lacking in the original.\textsuperscript{39} The plot twist whereby Sasha leaves for Europe after her marriage to Ivanov is called off is also unique to the Iranian version. Koohestani explained his reasons for introducing this change to the plot in a 2011 interview: “Sasha represents a contemporary young woman who believes in the future. She has her own voice, she believes she can change everything and refuse her family’s conservativism . . . Sasha in Iran refers to all Iranian women, whether students—who represent more than sixty percent in the universities—film-makers, business women, hard-working women, all of them were in the front lines of the riots in the summer of 2009. They have all become Sasha to me and I couldn’t show a pessimistic Sasha who easily accepts her fate and her family’s decisions.”\textsuperscript{40}
The importance of the Green Movement to Koohestani’s own biography is further revealed in an interview he gave in 2014. After receiving an MA from the University of Manchester in documentary filmmaking and embarking on a PhD at the same university, Koohestani abruptly decided to return to Iran in July 2009. Protests were spreading throughout the country, and he felt that he should participate. As Koohestani recounted to an interviewer, “There was a presidential election crisis in Iran at that time and several of my friends whom I follow on Facebook posted photos of themselves in the streets, fighting for a better life. And I thought, ‘I’m in Manchester. What am I doing here?’”

Although it is not explicitly signaled in the text, the link between the play and the Green Movement was widely recognized by Iranian audiences. In making Sasha the voice of this new movement, Koohestani engages with a long tradition of Iranian women who led revolutionary struggles, dating back to the Hurufi movement with Kalemat-Allah al-‘Olya (d. 1442) and the Babis with women such as Qurrat al-‘Ayn (d. 1852).

The Green Movement has been gendered most famously through the martyrdom of Neda Agha-Soltan, a twenty-six year old student, who was shot in the chest by paramilitary Basij forces while walking to her car after a protest over the recent elections. Koohestani felt compelled to create in the Iranian Sasha an essentially new character, not found in Chekhov’s text, who is responsive to his political and historical situation. “I didn’t like the role played by Sasha,” he recounted in 2014. “Chekhov has her firmly entrenched in passivity. I couldn’t see an ‘Iranian Sasha’ in this character. I had to think of the Green Movement, in which Iranian women were at the forefront of the protests; they were the most radical of all the demonstrators. This is why Sasha is courageous and self-confident in my production; she leaves Ivanov.” The gender dynamics Koohestani observed during the 2009 protest were demonstrated even more acutely during the protests of 2019, when, as Iranian officials acknowledged, women played an even greater role in resisting the state.

The Iranian Sasha is strong because of, rather than in spite of, her situation. The revolutionary condition (post-1979 as well as post-2009) compels her to express her freedom. Whereas the Russian-British Sasha can only express her strength through passivity after the prospect of
Comparative Drama

marrying Ivanov is destroyed by his suicide, the Iranian Sasha acts with a will of her own. Across all versions, Sasha demonstrates considerably more agency than Ivanov. Yet it is only as an Iranian woman that Sasha discovers her full potential to bring about political change. In the aftermath of a suppressed political movement, Sasha becomes a vehicle of hope for a lost generation of superfluously educated women and men. This gender reversal is consistent with Koohestani’s broader dramaturgic agenda. As he stated during an interview at the Festival d’Avignon in 2018: “if any changes happen in Iran [it] would be [due to] the strength of women . . . I think if there is a passiveness and stillness, it’s in the male society, because of economical problems, because of the war, post-war time, and unemployment.”

How Censorship Works

Frequently, Iranian productions of non-Iranian drama transpose the time and place of the foreign country or contexts of the original play, either to a contemporary Iranian setting or else to a timeless utopia. Viewers are expected to construct imaginative allegories from the proceedings on the stage. Budget restrictions, aesthetic preferences, and political exigencies imposed by the censorship regime converge on each production in different ways to push staging, set design, and other aspects of production in experimental directions, and to confound any expectation of verisimilitude. Censorship, in other words, can be as generative as it can be reductive, as any attentive reader of Soviet literature knows. In his study of Iranian performances of Hamlet, Mirsajadi underscores this point when he insists that censorship plays “complex and multifaceted roles in Iran” and that these roles “do not easily conform to established narratives in which Shakespeare and Western modes of theatre act subversively to dismantle authoritarian power.”

Koohestani’s own comments about censorship challenge the assumption that it prevents the production and consumption of art. As Koohestani stated in 2016, the Mehr Theater Group which he directs has found ways to circumvent the censor in ways specific to the post-2009 environment. After the Green Movement, “audiences pre-buy tickets, and to that contribution are added funds provided by small-investors-turned-producers who noticed culture is profitable.” By restructuring
the economy of theatre culture so as to make it less reliant on the state, the Mehr Theater Group manages to rehearse plays even when they have yet to be approved by the censorship regime.

While acknowledging the ubiquity of censorship in Iran, Koohestani asserts that “in my particular case, it isn’t an obstacle . . . there is no freedom of expression in Iran, but since as a director, I’m not interested in the explicit, I’ve always more or less managed to work around it.” Koohestani’s account of censorship contrasts with the views of earlier Iranian playwrights in the diaspora, such as Mahmood Karimi-Hakkak and many other scholars who offer more unilaterally negative accounts of the role of censorship in Iranian culture. Another Iranian writer whom I interviewed disagreed with Koohestani. “So art can be produced under censorship,” he said, “So what? that doesn’t mean that we aren’t oppressed.” As we know from these sources, censorship in Iran comes in many different forms. It can be retroactively mandated by the state or preemptive, based on expectations about what will be permitted to be included. Each perspective illuminates the Iranian situation differently, but Koohestani brings necessary nuance to a frequently oversimplified issue.

In an important essay entitled “What We Do Not Say but Is Still Heard” (2015), Koohestani forthrightly opposes those who maintain that “censorship prevents a given work from achieving the fullness of expression it would achieve in a free society.” Koohestani challenges this point by outlining in sophisticated detail the strategies he has devised to work with and around the censorship regime. “The failure of so many artists in exile,” he argues, “shows that total freedom is not a necessary and sufficient condition for creation. What artists need above all is to know the society in which they are living and the audience they want to address.” In his adaptation of Ivanov, Koohestani uses his awareness of Iranian society—its gender norms and its current malaises—to give a new life to Chekhov’s text.

Another difference between the Iranian and the Russian version that sheds light on the role of the censor is the differential treatment of Jewish identity. In Chekhov’s version, Sasha’s family gossips among themselves about Anna’s Jewish origins. The family suspects Ivanov of having married her for her dowry (which her parents subsequently denied to her after
she married Ivanov, a Christian). These details (which foreground the theme of antisemitism in Chekhov’s nuanced and indirect style) are missing from the Koohestani’s version. They are included in the Persian translation of Said Hamidian, who notes in the preface to his translation that Anna converted from Judaism (din-i yahudi) to Christianity in order to marry her husband. Whereas we know from Chekhov’s play that Anna converted from Judaism to Christianity in order to marry Ivanov, Koohestani’s version simply states that she changed her religion.

How should we account for the omission? I mentioned the omission of Anna’s religion to my Iranian friend who attended the Ivanov production with me and he speculated that the omission of the specific religion was due to censorship. The role of the censor in determining the omission was confirmed by Koohestani in his interview in *Sharq* newspaper. When he was asked whether he had omitted Anna’s religion due to censorship, he acknowledges that it was, and adds that when Ivanov was staged in Iran by Akbar Zanjanpur in 2003, this detail was included. In this same interview, Koohestani’s also indicates that, although he had turned to adapting Chekhov in the hopes that a production of a foreign play would be more quickly approved by the censor (momayezi), to his surprise he had to wait longer and work harder for the censor to approve his version of Chekhov than he did even for his own plays.

The omission of Anna’s Jewish faith due to censorship illustrates Koohestani’s account of how censorship works in the Islamic Republic. When an audience knows that a certain theme, such as Judaism, is forbidden, then censorship has more than a purely repressive function; it also, perhaps unconsciously, stimulates the viewer’s imagination, reminding them of what is not there. While it is certainly permissible to talk about Judaism within the Islamic Republic, a play that foregrounds the idea of religion conversion could potentially be seen as risky by the state. Omitted and forbidden details are reconfigured in viewers’ imaginations as they craft their own aesthetic experience. Whereas Anna’s Judaism could have been treated as mere local color from a distant provincial Russia, as was done in Akbar Zanjanpur’s 2003 production, the omission of this detail by Koohestani (or by his censor) heightens the political implications of her religious conversion for an Iranian audience. We see here that censorship can be productive within a tightly regulated literary economy,
not least through what it forces an author to omit. In a censorship regime, aesthetic goals are achieved through allegory and innuendo rather than direct statement. Far from being undermined, the literary force of the text in question is intensified.

The Iranian staging of Ivanov has given the play new layers of meaning through its refractions. Koohestani intuitively sensed how he could make Chekhov’s play relevant, not only within Iran, but within a contemporary world in which most viewers, whether British, Russian, or Iranian, no longer see marriage as the primary goal of a woman’s life, and where society recognizes, in theory if not practice, that women should conduct their lives with the same autonomy as men. Koohestani activated these potentialities, which remained latent and unrealized within Chekhov’s play and even within Hare’s adaptation. He did so to great critical acclaim within Iran, and afterwards across Europe. Most importantly, Koohestani adapted the text in such a way that enabled Chekhov’s story to enter the hearts and minds of thousands of Iranian viewers, for whom it revealed new aspects of their own culture and lives.

**Translation, Adaptation, Refraction**

Since European-style dramas began to be performed in Iran during the 1870s, Iranian theatre has favored adaptation over the precise reproduction of foreign settings. Of the first European plays staged in Qajar Iran, largely by Molière, Willem Floor has written that these were “not so much translations as adaptations of the original text.” The first known Persian translation of Molière’s *The Misanthrope* (1666) was completed by Mirza Habib Isfahani and published in Persian in 1869 at the renowned Tasvir-i Afkar printing house in Istanbul, a center of reformist activity where Mirza Habib was living as a political exile from Iran. Mirza Habib’s translation, *Guzarish-i Mardum-guriz* (literally, “the report of the one who flees the people”), carried the subtitle “translation of *Le Misanthrope*, from the works of Molière [*tarjama-yi Mizantrup az asar-i Muliyer*].” M. R. Ghanoonparvar has observed of this work that “much liberty [was] taken in the rendering of the characters’ names and personalities, so that the play was more Persian than French.” Maryam Sanjabi documents many departures from the original French
that were done in order to create a text that would resonate with Persian audience.\textsuperscript{59} Overall she regards Mirza Habib’s translation as an example of metaphrase, involving “word-by-word and line-by-line translation the original.”\textsuperscript{60} As Sanjabi notes, the methodology of metaphrase coexists in this case with significant departures from the original, including the incorporation of verses and paraphrases of Hafez into the Persian text. This symbiosis between metaphrase and domestication has characterized much subsequent Iranian dramaturgy up to and including Koohestani’s \textit{Ivanov}.

Like Mirza Habib’s Molière, Koohestani’s \textit{Ivanov} is less a translation in the narrow sense than an adaptation, which is a specific kind of refraction. There are major differences between the Iranian, British, and Russian versions of \textit{Ivanov}, and in particular between the Iranian versions and other productions. The drastic differences between Koohestani’s version and Chekhov’s text may make it seem inaccurate to consider it a translation in the strict sense of the term. Indeed, Iranians described Koohestani’s version of Chekhov to me as an \textit{iqtibas} (“paraphrase, imitation,” derived etymologically from the act of “lighting a piece of wood from a fire”).\textsuperscript{61} This term, of Arabic origin, originally referred to citations from the Quran, but is now the most general term in Persian for any kind of theatrical adaptation.\textsuperscript{62} The standard Persian term for translation, \textit{tarjumeh}, does not appear in the Persian-language production notes associated with Koohestani’s version. In my brief interview with him following the production in 2016, Koohestani agreed that \textit{iqtibas} is the best way to describe the relation between his text and that of Chekhov’s, but added that he considered the debate around terminology obscure.

While it is not deployed to describe Koohestani’s adaptation, \textit{tarjumeh} is used to describe Persian versions of the plays of Chekhov, such as those by Said Hamidian and Simin Daneshvar, that are based on other translations of Chekhov into European languages such English and French. Although the reliance on an intermediary language may seem unusual at first glance, it fits within the norms of theatre even within Europe, especially for the production of Russian plays. Many Anglophone playwrights have adapted Chekhov without knowing Russian.\textsuperscript{63} No European critic has complained about David Hare’s ignorance of Russian; his scripts clearly state that they are based on literal cribs by individuals who are not credited anywhere else, which Hare has then adapted according to his artistic sensibilities.
While it is hypothetically possible to explain any changes to Chekhov’s text with reference the demands of state censorship, Iranian refractions of Chekhov hold in tension many different factors. Alongside the pressures of censorship, there are economic reasons for Iranian dramaturgy’s drive towards domestication: it is cheaper to design a stage set in the twenty-first century Iran than to design one set in sixteenth-century England or nineteenth-century provincial Russia. Iran’s economic crisis, alongside the imperative to keep ticket costs low so as to keep the theatre accessible, have also shaped the dramaturgical drive towards domestication within Iran. (Although this point is counterbalanced by the fact that Zanjanpur’s productions of Chekhov have endeavored to reproduce the Russian setting.)

The Iranian version of *Ivanov* goes considerably further than the British version in terms of adaption to a local audience. When I asked an Italian friend who attended the London production of *Ivanov* with me what he thought of the performance, his response differed strikingly from my Iranian companion with whom I watched *Ivanov* in Tehran. “My reaction to the play? While watching it, I felt that the world from which those characters come from is not my world,” he said. “I am trying to live my life differently. It’s not as though I don’t like literature. I respond to Brecht and Beckett. But Chekhov—too melodramatic for my taste.” He then added, as if to ameliorate the harshness of his criticism, “I did enjoy the production. The acting was first rate.” While for my Italian friend, watching *Ivanov* could only ever be a remote aesthetic experience, destined to be forgotten as soon as he left the theatre, for my Iranian colleague, watching *Ivanov* was a deeply personal experience, which he immediately applies to contemporary Iranian life. “I know so many couples just like Ivanov and Anna,” he said after the performance, “there are so many taboos in our culture, so many things that we can’t talk about because we are afraid.”

Although anecdotal in nature, these comparisons are revealing of the differing dramaturgical methodologies that governed these respective productions. When non-English plays are performed in Anglophone contexts, an effort is generally made to preserve at least some basic features of the foreign cultural context. When non-Iranian plays are performed in Iran, at least under Koohestani’s direction, the plays are adapted as much as
possible to blend into an Iranian environment. This differing reception can be traced in the varying relations between power and culture that obtain in each translational context. Continuities between pre-revolutionary Russia and post-revolutionary Iran have made Russian texts easily adaptable to the Iranian context. As Lefevere reminds us, “a refraction . . . which tries to carry a work of literature over from one system into another, represents a compromise between two systems and is, as such, the perfect indicator of the dominant constraints in both systems.”

**Refraction in the Literary System**

Having examined the adaptation of Chekhov’s first commercially successful play for an Iranian audience, I will close by reflecting on how this example of literary refraction can advance our understanding of the role of audience reception in literary production generally. Often when divergent translations are compared, the medium in question is poetry or narrative prose. When discussed at all, with few exceptions, drama is treated as a world apart rather than as part of a broader literary system. The marginality of theatre translation in most major works of translation theory has prompted Susan Bassnett to call it “one of the most neglected areas of translation studies.” Yet even while it is empirically marginalized, the metaphor of theatrical performance is conceptually central to our understanding of translation. In 1998, Robert Wechsler described the translator as “a performer without a stage.” In the Iranian context, modernist poet Bijan Elahi distinguished between the translator as performer (‘amil) and the translator as teller (naqil). He regarded the first as unambiguously superior to the second, inasmuch as it involves greater agency on the part of the translator.

Literary studies has in recent years moved away from its fixation on literature as text, and come to embrace an understanding of literature as a system of production and reproduction, in which, in the words of Lefevere, “the central point is no longer the literary text,” but rather the text’s placement within a system, their reception, and their refraction. The migration of Chekhov’s *Ivanov* from Russian to English to Persian—each time undergoing radical changes—fits well with literary studies’ reception-oriented turn. As Floor documents in meticulous detail, across
Iranian theatre history, translators have “assimilated . . . drama to the contemporary Iranian context.” These improvisations have enabled Chekhov, Arthur Miller, Shakespeare, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez to acquire new lives in Persian by means of which they enter into Iranians’ lives.

Venuti’s controversial model of foreignization and domestication is a *locus classicus* within a long-standing tradition within translation studies that favored fidelity to the source texts. On Venuti’s account, an excessively domesticated text serves imperial ends and prevents us from understanding the source culture on its own terms. Yet, it is not only imperialists who domesticate source texts in translation: so too do colonized and marginal writers, the pioneers of the minor literatures, who, according to Deleuze and Guattari, subvert larger and more powerful languages from within. As a methodology, domestication is too heterogeneous and variously motivated to be reduced to a mere instrument of empire, particularly in the context of theatre translation. Further, domestication on the stage, in the passing moment, has a different meaning and function than does domestication in a fixed text. In the context of theatre translation, the audience’s needs and desires cannot easily be deferred.

Any theory of theatre translation will need to place refraction in Lefevere’s sense at its conceptual center and assume that as the norm, rather than treating deviations from the original as abnormalities or failures in translation. The mandate to create a new life for a text in performance is the single determinative consideration in drama production, and it everywhere supersedes authorial intention. The life of a play on the stage is the measure of its success, and it is in this moment too that we can observe a creative synthesis between a foreign original and a domestic refraction. The key question, according to Lefevere, is “the need that [the] native system has of him in a certain phase of its evolution.”

What made Chekhov necessary for an Iranian audience during the 2010s? As I have suggested throughout this article, the necessity of Chekhov at that particularly historical moment was linked to his psychological insight into the character of the superfluous man. (Koohestani stressed the fascination that Ivanov’s passivity has for him in his interview for *Sharq* newspaper.) Yet Koohestani took this Chekhovian insight in a
direction that Chekhov could not have envisioned. He made Sasha the anchor of hope within the play, and the locus of the viewers’ aspirations. She became a representation of a new generation of women, who would carve out a fate for herself separate from that of the man she once thought she loved. It was this revolutionary dimension of the play—revolutionary with regards to the state by virtue of its position with regards to gender and human freedom—that caused it to resonate so powerfully in Iran during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Critics of Venuti’s model note that he bases his account on a predominantly Anglophone context that has less traction for literatures outside imperial centers. Since Iranian theatre is even more reliant on foreign texts than European theatrical traditions, domestication in an Iranian context opens up possibilities lacking in European or North American productions. Whereas a domesticated production of a foreign play in New York or London might serve to merely reaffirm existing prejudices or to erase the foreignness of the source culture, a domesticated production of a foreign play in an Iranian context can give new life to a text that would otherwise be experienced as alien (precisely as my Italian friend dismissed the Chekhov production from his own life).

The resonance of a play is a function of its refraction. Given the preponderance within Iranian dramaturgy of plays originating in languages other than Persian, especially for non-contemporary material, we need an approach to translation that accepts the inevitability of variation rather than seeking a single standard invariant text. In the Iranian context, there will never be a definitive Chekhov, or Shakespeare, or Arthur Miller. Plays by these authors are reinvented every time they are performed on the Iranian stage. Iranian dramaturgy should be viewed, like modern Iranian literature generally, in the context of the decisive role of translation within Iranian modernity. Iran’s translational modernity has generated an audience preference for translational methods that tend towards domestication rather than those which treat the text as a sacrosanct object. Venuti’s sweeping categorization of all acts of domestication as politically reactionary and culturally insensitive has rightly been criticized with reference to non-European literatures which thrive on translation to a greater degree than the Anglophone and European tradition on which Venuti based his theories. As I have argued here in the context of an Iranian refraction of Ivanov, dramaturgical adaptation can be an act of
socio-cultural liberation.

While he changes key aspects of the plot and characterization, Koohestani’s Ivanov is a translation in the sense of being faithful to spirit, if not the letter, of the original. As Koohestani stated in 2011, “Ivanov is a classic and I wanted to preserve this dimension of the play.” As he stated to me during our brief interview, “In spite of all its differences from the original, an Iranian who has seen my adaptation has still seen Chekhov’s Ivanov.” In his efforts to convey the “classic” dimension of Chekhov’s text, Koohestani reshapes the original at the level of theme and plot. Koohestani recounts how, in order to bring the classic dimension of the original to life in Persian, he “reduced the sentences” to their bare minimum. “I wanted,” he explains, “to have as few conversations as possible.” This minimalism produces an intimate connection between the audience and the stage, Koohestani’s minimalism also exposes the limits of the loquacious Chekhovian superfluous man, who is so absorbed in his mental cogitations that he ignores the world around him.

In radically altering the source text, Koohestani gives new life to a crucial aspect of the original—what he calls its classic status—and enables it to crystallize everyday tragedies that, while first articulated in Russia a century ago, have profound relevance for Iranians today. By refracting Ivanov through translation, adaptation, and trans-creation, Koohestani realizes within Chekhov’s text a potential that was latent already in the Russian version but which was hidden from view until it was transferred to a Persian environment. He enables Sasha to discover herself as an independent woman who does not need a man in order to make her way in the world. Ivanov as well may be said to have discovered himself for the first time as well in twenty-first century Iran, for this is the first successful production of Chekhov’s play in which the hero does not kill himself.

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Notes

1 A few sentences from pp. XXX are adapted from “Watching Chekhov in Tehran,” which was awarded runner-up in the Beechmore Books Arts Journalism Competition (2021), available at https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/lcahm/departments/languages/news/2020/gould-watching-chekhov-tehran.aspx. Research for this article has been supported by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under ERC-2017-STG Grant Agreement No. 750346 Except where noted, all translations from Persian and Russian are my own.

I would like to express my deep debt to Kayvan Tahmasebian for his critical insights.
Ellen B. Chances offers an overview of this literary archetype in *Conformity's Children: An Approach to the Superfluous Man in Russian Literature* (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1978).

2 A video recording of the production was subsequently added to the YouTube channel of the music company Beethoven and is viewable there: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3nZhCFVUb&t=1555s (accessed 24 January 2021).


4 Among Iranian luminaries who have engaged with Chekhov, the novelist Simin Daneshvar published a translation of Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* (1904) under the title *Bāgh-i ālbalūcī: namāyishnamah dar chahār pardah* (Isfahan: Vahād, 1370/1991–2). As with all the Iranian translations of Chekhov, these are done from intermediary translations rather than from the Russian versions.


6 See “About the Play,” at https://www.mehrtheatregroup.com/ivanov. "We are all Ivanov" is also the title of a review of the production that appeared in *Etemad* newspaper (archived at https://www.magiran.com/article/2394390).

7 Translation practices have attracted increasing attention within Iranian Studies, as signalled most notably by Esmaeil Haddadian-Moghaddam’s *Literary Translation in Modern Iran: A Sociological Study* (John Benjamins, 2014). Whereas Haddadian-Moghaddam focuses primarily on Iranian translations of the novel, this essay seeks to contribute to the adaptation and translation of European theatre. On Iranian drama in the context of world literature, see the work of Saeed Talajooy, including comparative studies such as “Intellectuals as Sacrificial Heroes: A Comparative Study of Bahram Beyzaie and Wole Soyinka,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 52.2 (2015): 379–408.

8 My discussion of the Persian text is based on the script for the 2016 production, supplied to me in a 66-page PDF by Amir-Reza Koohestani, for which I wish to express my gratitude. The unpaginated text is quoted below as Koohestani, *Ivanov*.

9 Hare’s versions were published together under the title *Young Chekhov: Platonov, Ivanov, The Seagull* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015).

10 For a theoretical exposition of the concept of prismatic translation, see Matthew Reynolds’s introduction to *Prismatic Translation*, ed. Matthew Reynolds (London: Modern Humanities Research Association 2019), 1–18.


14 Floor, *The History of Theatre in Iran*, 277.

15 The Orientalist approach is most notable in connection with European treatments of Iranian productions of Shakespeare; one prominent example is Stephen Greenblatt, “Shakespeare in Tehran,” *New York Review of Books* (April 2, 2015), critiqued in Ali-Reza Mirsajadi, "Reading Hamlet in

16 David Hare, *Ivanov* (Royal National Theatre, 1997), later reprinted in Hare, *The Young Chekhov* (unless otherwise noted, I cite from this edition) and Anton Chekhov, *Ivanov* trans. by Said Hamidian (Tehran: Nashr-i Qatreh, 1382/2003). (Another translation, by Nahid Kashichi [Tehran: Javaneh Tus, 2013], is not mentioned by Koohestani.) Typically of most Iranian translations, the translator does not indicate which text, or even which language he is translating from. The “Brief Words from the Translator” (“Kutah sukhani az mutarjim,” 5—7) which preface the volume is devoted exclusively to summarizing the plot and venturing comparisons with other Chekhov plays.

17 The English version of the Mehr Theater Group page for Ivanov (http://www.mehrtheatregroup.com/ivanov) describes the authorial situation as follows: “text by Amir Reza Koohestani based on the English adaptation by David Hare.” That Hare’s adaptation is mentioned in the English versions, but not mentioned in the Iranian ones may reflect Koohestani’s reliance on different versions of the text.

18 The voices consist of a female and male voice. According to Kayvan Tahmasebian, the female voice recites from Jack C. Richards’s *New Interchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), a textbook that describes itself as “one of the world’s most popular and successful English courses.” This textbook was in wide use among Iranians engaged in the study of English and would have been familiar to many in the audience. In the audio accompaniment to the textbook, a male voice comments on the instructions given by the female voice. While retaining the female voice from the earlier pedagogical recording, Koohestani introduce a new male voice into the play, and the voice’s idiosyncratic word choices function as a surreal commentary on the female voice.

19 Koohestani,”What We Do not Say.”


21 That text is available online at http://lib.ru/LITRA/CHEHOW/ivanov.txt, which reproduces the edition in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 9 *P’esy*, 1880–1904, ed. V.V. Ermilov (Moscow, 1963). I refer to this edition in this article.


24 Hare, “Ivanov,” 169 (corresponds to Russian text on pp. 228—9). I have quoted directly from Hare’s script (even when it departs from the Russian) because this script is signalled as the basis of the Koohestani’s version in the production notes. I have, however, compared Hare’s script to the Russian and highlighted relevant divergences.


26 Hare, “Ivanov,” 198. In the Russian text, the equivalent passage reads: “‘There are pathetic people who are flattered when they are called Hamlets or superfluous men [Gamletami ili lishnimi], but for me this is shameful! It is an insult to my pride, shame overtakes me, and I suffer” (act 2, scene 6).

27 Hare, “Ivanov,” 243. Chekhov has “exalted damsel [vozyvishonaia devitsa]” in place of “missionary.”


29 Hare, “Ivanov,” 220.

30 For an overview of the superfluous man in Russian literature, was popularized by Ivan Turgenev’s novella *The Diary of a Superfluous Man* (1850), see Ellen Chances, “The Superfluous
Comparative Drama


31 Bahram Sadeqi’s short story “The Trench and the Empty Canteens” (1958) and Sholevar’s novel, Night Journey (1968) pick up on this theme, with their male protagonists unable to identify a purpose for their lives.

32 As noted by Elhum Haghighat-Sordelleni: “the unemployment rate in the region for both men and women is among the highest in the world, indicating a high demand for and a low supply of jobs” (“Iran within a Regional Context: Socio-Demographic Transformations and Effects on Women’s Social Status,” Gender in Contemporary Iran: Pushing the Boundaries, ed. Rokhsana Bahramitash and Eric Hooglund [London: Routledge, 2011], 180).

33 David Hare, “Introduction,” Young Chekhov, xv.

34 Letter from Chekhov to Alexei Suvorin (January 7, 1889). Quoted in Hare, Ivanov, x.

35 Hare, “Ivanov,” 227.

36 Koohestani, Ivanov, 64.

37 Further, the physical appearance of the Iranian Ivanov also contributes to the sense of him as an overrated character. In contrast to the Ivanov in the London production (Geoffrey Streatfeild), the Iranian Ivanov (played by Mohammad Hassan MAjooni) is overweight and unkempt; his sense of the meaninglessness of his own existence seems to be embodied in his physical appearance.

38 Koohestani, Ivanov, 66.

39 Sasha’s age is specified by Chekhov (Sochinenia, 218), and carried over by Hare. No age is specified in Koohestani’s version, but she is clearly older than twenty.


42 For some reflections on this tradition, see Farzaneh Milani, Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992).


44 “In Iran, Art Fills a Void,” Interview by David Siebert Qantara.de 2014 Translated from the German by John Bergeron https://en.qantara.de/content/interview-with-the-iranian-theatre-director-amir-reza-koohestani-in-iran-art-fills-a-void.

45 For example, Ramezan Sharif, IRGC spokesman commented on the new experience of women leadership in the protests (https://www.radiozamaneh.com/476175), and Ali Fadavi, the second highest IRGC commander, warned of “enemies” are mobilizing women against the Islamic Republic (http://tnews.ir/site/e29a145579778.html).

46 “Gender Questions Take Centre Stage at Avignon’s Theatre Festival,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvaieTfC3GI (quote at 10:40).

47 An example of the latter is the production of Love in the Time of Cholera that I saw in the Playhouse Theatre in 2015.

Interview with Amir-Reza Koohestani conducted by Francis Cossu and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach (Le Festival d’Avignon, 2016).


Koohestani, "What We Do not Say”.


From 2013 to 2016, Koohestani’s Ivanov was staged in Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Portugal, as indicated on the reverse side of the playbill in Figure 1.

Willem Floor, The History of Theatre in Iran, 219.


Iqtibas has a long history alongside other words for translation and authorship in Arabic theatre. Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898–1987), the architect of Arabic drama, has described how the term iqtibas was understood in his literary circles in terms that bear comparison with the Iranian situation: an "Egyptianized" foreign play used to be described as iqtibas, just as a foreign novel, freely translated…was described as ‘Arabization’…in common usage [iqtibas] meant that the play was neither pure creation nor pure translation. It consisted rather of transferring the topic from one milieu to the other” (al-Hakim, Sijn al-‘umr [Cairo, 1988], 914; cited in Pierre Cachia, “Translations and Adaptations, 1834–1914,” Modern Arabic Literature, vol. 3, ed. M. M. Badawi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 32.


See for example David Mamet’s translations of Chekhov’s The Three Sisters (1991), Uncle Vanya (1988), and The Cherry Orchard (1987), based on literal versions by other translators.


One of the few texts to treat drama translation in depth is Sirkku Aaltonen, Time-sharing on Stage: Drama Translation in Theatre and Society (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2000).


73 Lefevere, “Mother Courage’s Cucumbers,” 7.


75 This is the subject of Kayvan Tahmasebian’s forthcoming monograph *Modernity in Footnotes: The Invention of Critique in Modern Iran*.

