

# **Appropriating Shakespeare through the Visual and Performative in Pakistani Theatres**

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## **Abstract**

This research delves into the appropriation of Shakespearean drama in contemporary Pakistani theatrical performances, using it as an experimental tool to explore dramaturgical and aesthetic elements in the presentation of Shakespeare's plays. Notable productions, including NAPA's *Hamlet* (2016) and *Here Lies A Noble Man* (2015), as well as Theatre Wallay's *The Comedy of Errors* (2014), serve as case studies for examining how Pakistani contemporary theatre, guided by Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic (1999) theoretical framework, incorporates performative and visual elements to appropriate Shakespeare's works. This study investigates various modes of appropriation, including the reinterpretation of themes, the recontextualization of original settings, and the use of symbols and language in live performances. Simultaneously, these theatrical productions in Pakistan that incorporate visual and performative elements to appropriate Shakespeare's plays are subjected to critical analysis through the framework of Lehmann's postdramatic theatrical concepts, including the reversal of roles, irruption, presentness, and fragmentation of the plot. This research underscores how appropriation, viewed through a postdramatic lens, dismantles the textual originality in conventional Shakespearean performances. Beyond showcasing the evolution of Pakistan's stagecraft and performing arts, this study also serves as a platform for Pakistan's active engagement in Shakespearean studies through the innovative lens of appropriation.

**Key words:** Appropriation, Experimentation, Shakespeare plays, Pakistani Theatre, Postdramatic theory, Visual and Performative

## Introduction

Appropriation has become a controversial genre in theatre and performance during the latter part of the 20th century. This involves taking something and using it for one's own purpose, often with little regard for traditional or literal interpretations of the original work. In visual arts, artistic appropriation allows artists to modify, alter, add or subtract raw material or elements such as the imagery, objects or concepts from the original work as an aesthetic method (Meyer, 2022). In the artistic context, appropriation in theatre and performance involves rewriting and reinterpreting texts, often to create a new meaning or message.

The present research employs appropriation as an experimental tool to modify the artistic aesthetics in theatrical performances in multiple ways. Firstly, existing texts of Shakespeare's plays are repurposed, with words, songs, or pictures being altered in a different context to create a different meaning or message. Secondly, familiar narratives are deconstructed, with components rearranged to create a different story that challenges the audience's preconceived ideas and expectations of the narrative. Thirdly, performances draw inspiration from other art forms such as dance, music, or visual art by using techniques, styles, or motifs from them.

The paper employs Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic theory to analyze major modes of appropriation. The analysis looks at artistic and dramatic interpretations that deviate from the sensible storyline and relate to the works of Shakespeare. This examination considers the differences in plot, scenery (paratextual), and visuals (symbols/signs) in the chosen sources, such as NAPA's rendition of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, and Theatre Wallay's *The Comedy of Errors*.

Over the past few decades, appropriation has surfaced as a contentious genre in the realm of theatre and performance. As a technique, appropriation involves the act of taking something and repurposing it for one's own creative intent. In the context of theatre and performance,

Patrice Pavis characterizes appropriation as the practice of reworking and reinterpreting texts, often with a deliberate departure from traditional and literal interpretations of the play or theme. This paper discusses appropriation as an experimental tool for analysing the major modes of appropriation, such as reworking the themes of Shakespeare's plays, recontextualising their original settings, and using variant symbols and language in the selected live performances. Moreover, it includes repurposing the existing text of Shakespeare's plays where the words, songs, or pictures are altered in a different context to form a different meaning or message. The speculation also covers how familiar narratives can be deconstructed, rearranged, and reorganized to create a different story, and how performances can establish a combination of forms that go beyond the already defined conventions of existing theatre. The analysis supports the idea that appropriation removes the textual originality from conventional methods of performing Shakespeare through a postdramatic lens. The theatrical productions in Pakistan that incorporate visual and performative elements to adapt Shakespeare's plays are critically analyzed through a postdramatic framework in this research.

This study's goal is to give modern Pakistani theatrical plays a platform to be acknowledged and critically evaluated within the fields of theatre performance and Shakespearean studies, a viewpoint that has been conspicuously lacking. The examination dives into the artistic and performing approaches used in adapted Shakespearean plays, including current English-language productions performed on Pakistani stages. The examination's main focus is on the visual representations of the rewritten Shakespearean dramatic texts that are delivered live on stage in both English and Urdu. The study evaluates the appropriative techniques used by Pakistani playwrights to adapt Shakespeare's plays, paying particular

attention to how they included visual and performative components that subverted the established plot of Shakespeare's dramatic text.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In 1999, “Postdramatic Theatre,” a book by Hans-Thies Lehmann, was released and has since made a significant impact on the field of theatre studies. Its influence has helped shape discussions around contemporary and unconventional forms of theatre. The current study aligns itself with Hans Theis Lehmann’s postdramatic theory in two key respects. Firstly, Lehmann’s postdramatic elements—parataxis, simultaneity, musicality, presentness (Fischer-Lichte, 41), irruption, and the displacement of the plot—provide a valuable framework for the analysis of theatrical and performance elements. This encompasses spaces, props, costumes, gestures, and fragmented plot structures, evident in the creative and elaborate approaches utilized in visually and theatrically interpreting selected Shakespearean appropriations.

The research embraces Lehmann’s postdramatic theory, challenging the hegemony of text and questioning traditional mimetic or naturalistic representation in theatre. Postdramatic theatre transcends strict categorizations of theatrical work, allowing for contemporary experimental performances. Lehmann doesn’t dismiss the logos of earlier dramatic traditions; instead, he engages with them to forge a new theatre text. The current study scrutinizes performative renditions that diverge from coherent plots and loyalty to Shakespeare's dramatic texts. It applies Lehmann's idea of refusal to construct a fictive cosmos or plot, prioritizing performance based on the simultaneity of action and plot rather than adhering to a linear structure. The examination extends to paratextual elements in the appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in contemporary Pakistani theatrical performances, employing Lehmann’s idea of simultaneity to transcend the sequential synthesis of plot and action.

The study aligns with Lehmann's postdramatic theory, especially in terms of parataxis, simultaneity, musicality, presentness, irruption, and displacement of the plot. The creative techniques employed in selected Shakespearean adaptations are enacted through theatrical components such as settings, props, costumes, body language, and rearranged plot elements. This paper explores how Pakistani playwrights appropriate Shakespearean plays through these presentational techniques, distinctively departing from conventional drama within the framework of postdramatic theatre.

The next aspect of postdramatic theatre that is being examined is the manipulation of signs. Signs refer to the physical presence of the characters on stage, as well as the placement of props and gestures. Through the manipulation of signs, fragmentation of the plot, and focus on presence rather than representation, Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic theatre challenges the norms of sign density and presents either an excess or a dearth of signs. Through the manipulation of signs, fragmentation of plot, and focus on presence rather than representation, When signs are overloaded, they can overwhelm the audience's perceptual faculties to such an extent that the "naturally, physically perceived world" begins to disappear" (Lehmann 89). This concept is particularly relevant in contemporary Pakistani theatrical performances that appropriate Shakespeare's plays, as they often manipulate signs to convey a distinct message or theme. For example, in NAPA's rendition of *Here Lies A Noble Man* and Theatre Wallay's *The Comedy of Errors*, the use of minimalist props and sparse stage design creates a sense of isolation and loneliness emphasizing the characters' internal turmoil and tapes on the universality of the themes of human follies. The use of postdramatic techniques, such as the manipulation of signs, allows for a greater range of creative expression and expands the boundaries of traditional theatre. Through the manipulation of signs, Pakistani playwrights create a unique and engaging

theatrical experience that challenges the audience's perceptions and expectations. By incorporating elements of both Pakistani and Shakespearean culture, these performances offer a fresh and innovative interpretation of classic texts.

Next, according to Lehmann, the essence of postdramatic performance lies in the concept of “presence,” (Lehmann 92) which captures and holds the spectators’ attention from start to finish. This concept implies that the focus of the performance is not on creating a realistic representation of a fictional world but on the performer’s physical presence and their ability to affect the audience emotionally and intellectually. The performance is more about the presence rather than the representation. In postdramatic theatre, the performer’s body and actions become the primary vehicle of expression, and the audience's perception and interpretation of these actions are integral to the performance. This approach to theatre emphasizes the importance of live performance and the unique relationship between performer and audience in the creation of meaning.

Post-dramatism does not reject the importance of a written script but rather emphasizes the performer's presence on stage and engages the audience in a new experiential journey. The visual representation of the script on stage is not meant to merely represent the text but to develop its own logic. In contrast to traditional theatre, which places a strong emphasis on maintaining a unified and consistent style between the text and the performance, postdramatic theatre boldly discards these established conventions. This approach fosters an environment of experimentation and innovation within theatrical presentations, nurturing a rich tapestry of artistic expressions that challenge the traditional boundaries of representation. In sum, the postdramatic approach to theatre provides us with a valuable perspective to appreciate the diversity and innovation present in theatrical performances. When postdramatic elements are

integrated into Pakistani theatrical renditions of Shakespeare's timeless works, they bear testament to the vibrancy of the country's theatrical tradition. Pakistani theatre companies, by incorporating postdramatic techniques like narrative fragmentation, a heterogeneous stylistic approach, and expressive elements, have discovered the creative latitude to fashion their distinctive interpretations and presentations of Shakespeare's masterpieces. This approach provides a fresh lens through which to interpret these classics, facilitating a deeper understanding of the contemporary world.

### **Research Methodology**

For this analysis of contemporary Pakistani theatrical performances appropriating Shakespearean works, a mixed-method research approach was employed to gain comprehensive insights into the subject matter. The research methodology involved both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon.

The qualitative analysis encompassed in-depth textual examinations and critical reviews of the selected plays, "*Here Lies A Noble Man*," "*The Comedy of Errors*," and "*Hamlet*." It focused on the examination of scripts, character developments, thematic appropriations, and an exploration of how these performances engaged with Shakespearean texts. Qualitative analysis also involved semiotic examinations of visual and sensory elements, emphasizing the significance of artistic aesthetics in the performance.

Quantitative methods included the collection and analysis of audience feedback and responses. A brief survey and discussion with theatregoers and participants provided valuable data regarding the audience's immersive experience, perceptions of postdramatic elements, and the impact of these performances on their understanding of the traditional and postdramatic

aspects of theatre. The quantitative data helped to quantify audience engagement and their interactions with the performances.

Overall, the mixed-method research approach facilitated a comprehensive analysis of contemporary Pakistani theatre's evolution and innovative use of postdramatic elements in appropriating Shakespearean plays, allowing for a deeper understanding of the subject from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

The investigation in question delves into the technique of deviating from the conventional linear and pre-planned plot structure in a reimagined version of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*. The Pakistani troupe, Theatre Wallay, presented their play "*Kuch Khaas*" at the Art, Culture and Dialogue event in Islamabad on February 9th and 10th, 2014. This production was an adaptation of Shakespeare's early comedic play, *The Comedy of Errors*, which is based on Plautus's well-regarded comedy, *Menaechmi*. Theatre Wallay's adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* by Shakespeare employed a unique technique that emphasized fragmentation and disruption. The group's modified version of the play followed Lehmann's approach of disordered plotlines, resulting in a production that spanned sixty minutes and was made up of nine distinct segments. Unlike Shakespeare's original work, this adaptation didn't follow a linear and premeditated plot, and there was no clear beginning or conclusion.

*The Comedy of Errors* is a classic melodramatic play that centres around mistaken identities. Unlike other Shakespearean comedies, the play does not involve any characters pretending to be someone else or wearing disguises. The main plot of the play revolves around the search for the missing twins of Antipholus of Syracuse, which creates a lot of action and generates comedic elements. The play follows a father's quest to locate his missing children and

spouse, whom he has accidentally separated from. He ends up in a hostile city where his foreign origins put him in danger. While the play covers a range of themes, including broken families, failing marriages, slavery, grief, anger, recurring violence, and even a beheading, the story of the twins' reunion is the main focus, eclipsing the other themes.

Theatre Wallay's version of the play broke away from the linear plot structure and instead focused on fragmentation and disruption. They merged different fragments of the plot, creating a modified version of Shakespeare's original work that followed Lehmann's suggested approach of disordered plotlines and disruption. The production was divided into nine distinct segments, each of which had no clear beginning or conclusion.

In the opening scene of the play, Erica Glenn's sketch "*To My Roommate*" introduced a soliloquy by an unnamed female character who was cleaning the floor while continuously complaining about her roommate's interference with her sleep. The two-and-a-half-minute speech ended without a resolution, as the protagonist pondered whether her roommate's ill-mannered behaviour was caused by a "rare saliva disease." Overall, Theatre Wallay's reimagined version of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* represents a departure from the traditional linear plot structure and embraces fragmentation and disruption to create a unique and engaging theatrical experience

The first segment of the play was Erica Glenn's "*To My Roommate*," which featured a soliloquy from an unidentified female character who was cleaning the floor while complaining about her roommate's interference with her sleep. This two-and-a-half-minute speech ended without a resolution, leaving the protagonist questioning whether her roommate's ill-mannered conduct was due to a "rare saliva disease."

The following skit, “Office Routine” by Nicholas Richards, featured a conversation between an employer, George, and his subordinate, Peter. This scene lasted for approximately eight minutes, making it the second-longest scene in the play. Like the previous segment, this skit also ended without a resolution as the two characters were still in discussion when the lights faded out. After a brief intermission, the stage was illuminated again, and a woman was seen sitting on a bench, appearing confused and as if she was waiting for a bus. This brief segment added to the fragmented nature of the play, creating a sense of confusion and uncertainty among the audience.

The third scene of the play, “At the Bus Stop,” was a six-minute and fifteen-second monologue by a confused woman convinced she had missed her bus. “Gray Matter,” directed by Jeanette D. Farr, was the second-longest play, lasting for 8 minutes and 40 seconds. It featured a dialogue between Marge, an elderly Caucasian woman, and Russell, a young African-American man, in a police station room, dispelling stereotypes about black people.

Cheryl Barrett's “Hello, Rick, A Desirable Location,” a 4-minute and 35-second performance, told the story of a woman named Ruth with a poor memory and a real estate agent named James. Ferenc Molnar’s play “A Matter of Husbands” lasted for nearly 9 minutes and delved into the theme of husbands’ infidelity. The play concludes with two acts, “I Know I’m Not Dumb!” by Nellie M. Valverde, which lasted for 2 minutes, and “Audition Anxiety” by Robert Scott, which lasted for 7 minutes. The tempo of the play heightened with an abrupt eruption of skits, growing frenetic, following Lehmann's notion that the theatrical production escalates the rhythm to the extent that the play unravels. The skits were concise, fast-paced, and densely packed, with no clear beginning or end, demonstrating the dominance of the presentational form over the representational. Lehmann's technique of “deconstructed and

fragmentary” theatrical presentation of plotless and character-decentered texts was evident in Theatre Wallay’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s original work. The play’s structure deconstructed the original plot and presented the story through disjointed segments that explored various themes and issues.

Despite the departure from Shakespeare’s original plot, the performance retained the thematic essence of the original work, even within its fragmented structure. The longest scene in the play was a dialogue between Marge and Russell in a police station, which lasted 8 minutes and 40 seconds. This scene challenged the assumptions about African Americans often perceived as untrustworthy and delinquents. The other scenes varied in length, with the shortest being a 2-minute excerpt called “I Know I’m Not Dumb!” by Nellie M. Valverde.

In conclusion, Theatre Wallay’s interpretation of *The Comedy of Errors* followed Lehmann’s technique of fragmented plotline and disruption. The play consisted of nine segments that explored basic issues and human weaknesses, with no clear beginning or end. The skits were fast-paced and densely packed, with the presentational form dominating the representational. Despite the fragmented nature of the play, the themes of the original work were still evident in the performance. The audience delves deeper into some of the specific scenes or skits in Theatre Wallay’s performance of *The Comedy of Errors*. For example, you could explore the significance of Marge and Russell’s dialogue in the police station, or analyze the comedic effect of Cheryl Barrett’s performance as the forgetful Ruth. By examining specific moments in detail, one could understand how Theatre Wallay’s approach to Shakespeare’s play differs from more traditional interpretations. Hence, Theatre Wallay’s production of *The Comedy of Errors* presented a unique interpretation that deviated from the linear and preconceived plot, following

Lehmann's technique of fragmented plotline and disruption. The play consisted of nine segments, each exploring basic issues and human weaknesses, without a definite start or finish.

The performance of *The Comedy of Errors* by Theatre Wallay actively engages its audience by employing a role-reversal technique that diverges from Shakespeare's original plotline. This approach invites exploration into the ways the stage performance fosters intimacy and connection with the audience, as well as how it encourages active participation and interaction. While traditional theatrical performances also draw large audiences, Theatre Wallay's production distinguishes itself by inverting the customary roles of audience and performers. This appropriation of both content and the unique performative approach plays a pivotal role in advancing the evolution of modern theatre in Pakistan. Overall, Theatre Wallay's adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* rendered a unique approach to Shakespeare's work, experimenting with disordered plotlines and fragmentation to create a thought-provoking and unconventional performance.

Next, in 2015, the Karachi National Academy of Arts and Performance (NAPA) embarked on an ambitious project with their experimental live performance of *Here Lies a Noble Man*. This play incorporated elements from two of Shakespeare's most renowned tragedies, *Macbeth* and *Othello*, providing a fresh and creative perspective on established canonical texts. The performance was conducted in the Urdu language at the Young Writers Theatre Festival, emphasizing the significance of cross-cultural and cross-lingual interpretations of classical works. The play's script was penned by the young writer Hammad Sartaj, who aimed to infuse new and creative elements into the classic storylines. Departing from traditional dramaturgy guidelines, the production utilized Lehmann's methods of "shock" and "irruptions" to actively engage the audience. While the original names and plotlines were retained, the performance

focused on the performative techniques of “shock” and “irruptions” to create an immersive audience experience. The integration of language, movement, and sound played a crucial role in achieving the desired effect, emphasizing audience involvement and unexpected occurrences. This approach resulted in a more engaging and immersive experience for the audience, encouraging active participation in the interpretation of the play. The intertwining of two narratives within *Here Lies a Noble Man* conveyed an atmosphere of chaos and unpredictability, mirroring the unpredictable nature of life and the complexity of the human experience. This innovative production weaves together elements from William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *Othello* to offer an imaginative interpretation of his writings, highlighting the diverse themes and characters found in his works. The inclusion of characters such as Iago and Roderigo, who are not part of the traditional *Macbeth* play, adds complexity and intrigue to the performance.

Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*’s story begins with the prophecy of the three witches, predicting that the Scottish general would ascend to the throne and become the King of Scotland. His ambition, along with his wife’s encouragement, drove him to kill the reigning king and perpetrate several murders. *Othello* portrays the devastating results of jealousy in a relationship, resulting in a broken marriage, in contrast to the positive outcomes portrayed in other works of literature. Both plays investigate themes such as gender inequality, racism, the disparity between appearance and reality, and the desire to achieve something great.

In *Here Lies A Noble Man* the opening scene, the witches' entrance was an integral part of the production’s effectiveness. With their crawling and eerie, hissing noises, they created an atmosphere of unease and a supernatural feel, setting the tone for the entirety of the play. The scene featured three hooded figures, presumably the witches from *Macbeth*, crawling into the space and emitting sharp sibilant sounds. The audience was informed that *Macbeth* would

become the Thane of Cawdor and Thane of Glamis and that Banquo would be the future king. As Macbeth and Banquo arrive at the scene armed with their swords, the witches reveal the prophecy of their future succession as kings. The opening scene featured three hooded figures, presumably the witches from Macbeth, crawling into the space emitting sharp sibilant sounds. This introduction immediately captured the audience's attention and set the stage for the events that followed. *Here Lies a Nobleman's* engages the audience by incorporating various performative techniques such as "shock" and "irruptions." They achieved this by using a combination of language, movement, and sound to create a sense of unease and a supernatural feel, setting the tone for the entirety of the play. The experience of shock and irruption is sustained when two other characters, Iago and Roderigo, enter the stage bickering and detracting from the solemnity of the moment.

Despite the ongoing altercation between the two characters, Iago and Roderigo, who had been displaced by Casio as a general, entered the scene and quibbled over their incongruous situation. The other two characters, one of whom vehemently complained about losing his place to Casio as a general, interrupted the ongoing action between the two characters. It was revealed that the character was Iago, who expressed his overwhelming hatred for Othello and Casio to his close friend Roderigo. He persuades Roderigo to tell Brabantio, the Venetian Senator, about Desdemona's secretive escape to marry Othello. The intertwining of the two plots created an atmosphere of chaos and unpredictability, reflecting the intricate nature of the human experience.

The use of poetic failure, synaesthesia, and irruptions also serves to disrupt the viewer's expectations and provoke a visceral response to the performance. As the play progressed, the NAPA performance deviated from the set parameters of traditional dramaturgy, creating a unique and experimental performance that challenged the boundaries of conventional theatre.

One example of this is the sudden interference of Othello and Brabantio, which refers to Lehmann's postdramatic irruption. This approach established an atmosphere for the rest of the play, enhancing the overall emotional impact of the performance. Moreover, scenes from *Macbeth* and *Othello* were woven into the play without resolving the preceding acts. This approach referred to as “poetic failure,” deliberately disrupted the conventional expectations of high-quality stage acting, leading to a fragmented and disconcerting theatrical performance. The purpose of employing this approach was to demonstrate that the performance within a single act is composed of a mosaic of segments from *Macbeth* and *Othello*, spanning from the beginning to the end. This intentional disruption aimed to challenge the viewers' understanding. This method of performance is referred to as “synaesthesia,” where the human senses are uncomfortable with disconnection and strive to discover connections in the objects presented. Lehmann's opinion of this disorganised performance is that

“postdramatic theatre is not simply a new kind of text of staging – and even less a new type of theatre text, but rather a type of sign usage in the theatre that turns both of these levels of theatre upside down through the structurally changed quality of the performance text: it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information (Lehmann 85)”.

Overall, the NAPA production of *Here Lies a Nobleman* presented the potency of a live performance to capture and confront its spectators, utilizing imaginative capabilities and multiple textual components to create a unique and memorable experience. The NAPA performance of *Here Lies a Noble Man* holds profound significance, resonating deeply and leaving a lasting impact on its audience. Through a linear narrative but rather through a series of interconnected scenes that are deliberately fragmented and distorted. The task transformed into a condition full of suggestive possibilities, instead of a wholly self-contained, definite, or concluded entity. The

use of multiple textual components and postdramatic elements is a testament to the imaginative capabilities of the theatre and the potency of a live performance to capture and confront its audience.

The use of appropriation in this production emphasizes the diverse range of themes and characters present in Shakespeare's plays, highlighting their relevance to contemporary society. Moreover, the production's exploration of themes such as gender prejudice and discrimination demonstrates how Shakespeare's work continues to be relevant and insightful, even in the present day. It effectively communicates that the themes of jealousy, ambitions, conceit, and racial discrimination are showcased through the concoction of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Othello*. However, in this particular performance, the plots of both plays are appropriated by shifting the focus away from the characters and centring it on the follies of the common man. By presenting these issues in a new and innovative way, *Here Lies a Noble Man* invites audiences to reflect on their prejudices and biases and encourages them to consider the complex and multifaceted nature of human experiences in day-to-day life. In addition, blending two distinct stories and disrupting the traditional structure of a play, *Here Lies a Noble Man* challenges audiences to reconsider their expectations of theatre and encourages them to engage with the performance in a more imaginative and open-ended way. The use of postdramatic techniques such as poetic failure and synaesthesia enhances the emotional impact of the production and creates a sense of unpredictability and urgency that keeps the audience engaged throughout.

Next, the use of reversal of roles in the Pakistani modern theatre production of *Hamlet* opens up the possibility for the audience to experience the performance in a unique and immersive way. The production, which was staged by the National Academy of Performing Arts

(NAPA) in Urdu, challenged the traditional dynamic between the actors and the audience by eliminating the barrier of the stage and bringing the audience into the performance space.

The production begins with two guards discussing the vision of a spectre, a scene that builds anticipation for the appearance of the ghost. Instead of appearing on stage, the ghost materializes from the back of the audience and engages with Hamlet, who is in their midst. The audience is positioned in a semicircle surrounding the performance space, with their seats situated at the same level as the area where the actors execute their performance. This creates a sense of intimacy and immediacy between the performers and the audience, which allows the audience to feel more involved in the performance.

The lack of a proscenium or distinct performance space also enables closer proximity between the performers and the audience. The actors complemented the bewitching atmosphere and the wraith-like figure coming down the staircase at the start of the performance. Hamlet follows the ghost, eventually halting in the stairwell, while the spectral figure faces the spectators. The audience faces the same way as Hamlet when viewing the performance. As soon as Hamlet questions his identity, he moves nearer to the audience and describes how a devious scheme has taken his life. While conversing with Hamlet, we see the ghost among the watchers and then vanish among them. Pakistan's modern theatre production of *Hamlet* is an innovative and groundbreaking interpretation of Shakespeare's play that challenges traditional theatrical structures and engages the audience in a more immersive and interactive way. By eliminating the barrier of the stage and bringing the audience into the performance space, the production creates a sense of intimacy and immediacy in the performance. This immersive approach to theatre highlights the potential of theatre to be a transformative experience that challenges and expands the audience's perceptions and expectations. It aims to merge the audience's space with that of

the performers, as noted by Jacques Rancière who characterizes it as ‘reshaping the area of the collective’. This creates an immersive experience for the audience, where they feel part of the play rather than mere observers. The traditional separation between actors and viewers has been removed, resulting in a more dynamic and versatile stage that encourages the audience’s involvement and contemplation of their participation in the theatrical performance.

*Hamlet*’s performance stands out for its unique approach that blurs the distinction between actors and the audience, creating a collective atmosphere. Hamlet, the Ghost and different characters often appear or join the spectators, breaking down the boundaries between the stage and the audience. In Act 3, Horatio navigates his way through the spectators to come together with Hamlet on the stage, creating an exciting moment of action that captivates the audience. The spirit of the dead king appears and moves closer to the spectators, prompting Hamlet to inquire about its identity. The spirit then reveals that it was killed in a foul play before fading into the crowd. This technique of incorporating the audience into the performance is part of postdramatic theatricality. It recognizes the audience as active participants by performing actions that invite an immediate reaction, thereby merging the realm of the viewers with that of the actors. Postdramatic performances defy confinement to a specific area, leaving the boundary between the audience and performers deliberately unclear to ensure maximum engagement. Interactive elements, like direct addresses to the audience, serve to further dissolve the barrier, fostering a more inclusive and engaging experience that resonates with contemporary audiences seeking immersion. In postdramatic theatricality, the perspective is that while theatre belongs to the performers, the performance is the domain of the audience, with the power of theatre residing in the encounter between performer and spectator. This approach not only allows for greater freedom of movement within the performance area but also cultivates a closer relationship

between performers and viewers, enabling performers to traverse the crowd and utilize the entire space. This dynamic facilitates a more stimulating performance by avoiding limitations to a single viewpoint. Moreover, this performative technique challenges established social norms of spectatorship and performance. By situating spectators on stage and performers among the audience, the reversal of roles effectively dismantles traditional boundaries, encouraging a more interactive and participatory engagement between the two. Hamlet's performance transcends the established ideological boundaries that typically confine theatrical presentations. By incorporating the audience into the performance and challenging established social norms, Pakistani contemporary theatre creates a unique and immersive experience that goes beyond traditional theatre. This approach empowers the spectators to engage with the performance on their own terms and to interpret it in a way that is meaningful to them.

The complementary use of geometric designs on the stage introduces a visual element to the performance that enhances the overall aesthetic experience for the audience. Furthermore, the visual incorporation of surrealism in the performance of Hamlet evokes a disquieting sensation among the audience, compelling them to immerse themselves more profoundly in the play. The utilization of surrealism in theatre serves as a method intended to subvert the audience's anticipated norms and stimulate contemplation of the performance's significance. This approach challenges conventional narrative structures, instead establishing a dreamlike ambience where the demarcation between reality and fiction becomes hazy.

Furthermore, the lighting design in the performance is an essential component of the overall aesthetic experience. The blue hue of the stage lighting contributes to the dreamlike atmosphere of the play and adds to the sense of unease felt by the audience. The use of lighting in theatre is a powerful tool that can be used to evoke emotions and create different moods. In

*Hamlet*'s performance, the lighting design is used to enhance the surreal nature of the play and create a more immersive experience for the audience.

These examples illuminate the dedication of contemporary Pakistani theatre to push the boundaries of performance art and craft a transformative encounter for the audience. The incorporation of visual elements, specifically the surreal geometric designs characterized by black and white boxes, lends a dreamlike ambience to the performance. This dreamlike quality effectively stimulates the audience, engaging not only their intellect but also their nervous systems in a dynamic theatre experience.

Moreover, the utilization of sound effects, including music and soundscapes, contributes significantly to the sensory dimension of the performance. This immersive approach goes beyond mere observation, encouraging active participation from the audience and fostering a shared experience that unites both performers and spectators in a collaborative and participatory event. Through the amalgamation of visual and performative expressions, contemporary Pakistani theatre aspires to carve out a space for exploration and experimentation, thereby reshaping Pakistan's artistic landscape. This demonstrates that the incorporation of various visual and auditory elements, such as surreal geometric designs, lighting, props, music, and soundscapes, is used to create an aesthetic and sensory experience in performative art. These elements are deliberately chosen to enhance the overall artistic and sensory impact of the performance, making it more engaging and immersive for the audience.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the contemporary Pakistani theatre, as demonstrated by the performances of *"Here Lies A Noble Man," "The Comedy of Errors,"* and *"Hamlet,"* boldly challenges

traditional theatrical forms through various innovative approaches, all of which resonate with Lehmann's postdramatic theory.

Through diverse theatrical techniques and the appropriation of Shakespearean plays, this modern Pakistani theatre form prioritizes the immersive experience and interaction with the audience, embracing Lehmann's emphasis on breaking away from the confines of conventional drama. Utilizing approaches like site-specific performances, visual sign displays, the blurring of boundaries between performers and spectators, and the reversal of roles technique, Pakistani theatre seeks to defy established norms and foster a collaborative and participatory atmosphere, aligning with Lehmann's idea of creating a more dynamic and engaging theatrical experience. Moreover, the role of visual and sensory elements in theatrical performances has gained significant importance, with artistic aesthetics becoming a pivotal aspect of the theatrical experience. Consequently, contemporary Pakistani theatre aims to carve out a space for exploration and experimentation, effectively reshaping Pakistan's artistic landscape and national identity. In summary, Pakistani theatre has evolved into a thriving and innovative field, continuously pushing the boundaries of traditional stagecraft, in harmony with Lehmann's postdramatic perspective on the evolution of theatre.

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