

Summary of the Dissertation

THE REWORKING OF SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET* IN THE ARAB POLITICAL  
THEATRE AFTER 1970:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN ARAB *HAMLETS* IN POST-NASSERISM  
(1970-2009) AND THE PERIOD OF THE ARAB SPRING (2010- PRESENT)

By

ZIAD MOHAMMAD ABUSHALHA

PhD Dissertation

Submitted to

Department of Comparative Literature

Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies

University of Szeged

Szeged, Hungary

Supervised by

Prof. Katalin Kürtösi

&

Prof. Vera Kérchy

Spring 2022

## Introduction

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has constantly been thrust into political conflicts by different playwrights and stage directors. This fact is evinced by the abundant number of political reworkings produced in variable ways to serve as commentaries on political oppression or as reflections on people's aspiration for freedom. The German nationalist Ferdinand Freiligrath, in 1844, started one of his poems by the "Deutschland ist Hamlet" (translated as Germany is Hamlet) to criticize and castigate the inaction of his German people in facing the Napoleonic rule at that time.<sup>1</sup> The Russian Arthur P. Mendel once said that Hamlet, after Stalinism, became "a brother in-arm" in the Soviet society and "an assault on the remnants of that dreadful era."<sup>2</sup> R. S. White mentions how Hamlet became a Polish prince whose "famous question, 'To be, or not to be,' became Polish because the Poles understood it as a burning political issue, 'To fight or not to fight' for the country's independence from usurping rulers."<sup>3</sup> Margaret Litvin believes that "following Hamlet's Arab Journey," or what she calls the Arab prince, "helps clarify one of the most central and widely misunderstood preoccupations of modern Arab politics."<sup>4</sup>

One of the geographical spots in which the play is numerous and variously reworked is the Arab World: The Middle East and North Africa (MENA.) After 1970, Arab playwrights and stage directors produced more than twelve adaptations and rewritings: like *Ophelia Is Not Dead* by The Moroccan Nabil Lahlou (1968), *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* by the Syrian Mamdouh Adwan (1976), *Forget Hamlet* by the Iraqi Jawad Al-Assadi (1994), *The AL-Hamlet Summit* by the Kuwaiti Suleiman AlBassam (2002), *Following the Footsteps of Hamlet* by the Palestinian director Kamal El-Basha (2010), *Goodbye Hamlet* by the Egyptian Mohammed Farouq (2012), and *Hamlet After A While* by the Jordanian director Zead Kahleel Mustafa (2020). The play has been exposed to divergent degrees of alteration, contraction, and extension by Arab playwrights and stage directors in an attempt to make it more

---

<sup>1</sup>Michael Hattaway, Boika Sokolova, and Derek Roper, eds., *Shakespeare in The New Europe*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 78.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur P. Mendel "Hamlet and Soviet Humanism," *Slavic Review*, 30, no. 4, (December 1971): 733–747, 734.

[https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/2493845?seq=2#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/2493845?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents). (accessed May 24, 2020).

<sup>3</sup>R. S. White, *Avant-Garde Hamlet: Text, Stage, Screen*, (Fairleigh Dickinson University, 2017), 46.

<sup>4</sup>Litvin, Margaret, *Hamlet's Arab journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 2.

appealing to Arab audiences. Still, the Arabic reworkings of *Hamlet* were mainly influenced by the geopolitical vagaries that happened during the last seventy years, and it is almost difficult to understand the journey of Hamlet in the region far from the Arab modern political history.

The journey of Hamlet in the Arab World after 1970 is classified into two main periods: i.e. Post-Nasserism (1971-2009) and the period of the Arab Spring (2010-2020). After the death of Jamal Abdul Nasser in 1970, the Egyptian Leader then, the Arab World entered a period of political gloominess and despair generated by the Arab –Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973 and by the oppressive and dividing policies adopted by the succeeding Arab regimes. The following forty years were marked by oppression, strict surveillance, economic depression, and cultural and artistic decline. Arab nationalists accused their leaders of neglecting Nasser’s national dream of uniting Arab lands against Western hegemony and Western support to Israel. Nasser was resided in the collective memory as an Arab national hero, while most Arab leaders were seen as anti-heroes, apathetic and oppressive.

A good number of adaptations and rewritings of *Hamlet* have intentionally been produced, but this time they were all dark reworkings, and full of mockery and sarcasm. They became indirect critiques of the existing anti-heroic Arab regimes. Plays like Hakim Marzouqi’s *Ismail/ Hamlet*, Kazal al Majidi’s *Hamlet without Hamlet*, Jawad Al-Assadi’s *Forget Hamlet*, Mamdouh Adwan’s *Hamlet Wakes Up Late*, and Nabil Lahlou’s *Ophelia Is Not Dead* satirized the inaction of the Arab rulers who forgot their father Nasser. The ghost in these dramas is a symbol of the Nasser figure haunting the stage and demanding remembrance. Hamlet became a representation of the apathetic leaders and their pro-state intellectuals. He became an alcoholic who intoxicates his mind to forget the apparition in Adwan’s play, a detached and indifferent intellectual in Al-Assadi’s drama, and physically paralyzed in Lahlou’s play. The new Hamlets in Post-Nasserism became good-for-nothing characters, anti-heroic, and devoid of nobility.

After 2010, *Hamlet* has been reworked differently. This time a sense of political hope accompanied the Arab Spring that started early 2010. The Arab uprisings started in Tunisia and succeeded to overthrow the oppressive regimes in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, and Algeria. Other countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Syria had their springs, but the regimes have already suppressed them. Arab youths demanded political change, more political

representation, fixing the corruption, and ending Western hegemony. Despite the loss of many lives and the massive displacement, the uprisings created a sense of unification, maintained hope, regained Arabism, and achieved political changes. This sense of hope is regained even in theatrical productions. Hamlet is rendered a hero in works like Haider Abdullah Alshatri's *In Waiting for Hamlet* (2010) and Mahmoud Farouq's *Goodbye Hamlet*. He became an image of the Arab youth who went down to the streets to end political oppression. Ophelia is dramatized as a tough female character in Evan Daraji's *Hamlet vs. Ophelia* to depict the image of the strong Arab women and their leading role in the revolutions. The sense of unification that replaced the previous division is clearly delineated in *Following the Footsteps of Hamlet* by the Palestinian Kamel El-Basha. In this adaptation, the chorus performs collective speech, dancing, and movement to preach solidarity among Arabs facing tyrannical regimes.

*Hamlet's* journey in the region post-1970: the periods of Post-Nasserism, and Arab Spring, can be framed in two points. First, the presence of *Hamlet* in the Arab World is purposefully political, and it is rather hard to fathom the Arab *Hamlets* in isolation from the political situations that occurred in each period. Secondly, Arab *Hamlets* are loaded with communal rather than particular messages; they can resonate in all Arab countries and express most Arab political concerns. Saying that, the attempt to generalize the political function of the Arab *Hamlets* on the entire Arab World, which consists of twenty-two countries, is not erroneous here. The Arab World has always been grasped as a homogeneous entity, and Arab countries shared many geographical, religious, political, linguistic, cultural, and historical commonalities.

### **Aims and Objectives**

This dissertation aims at investigating why and how Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been reworked in the Arab political theatre after 1970. The dissertation starts from the assumption and wants to prove that *Hamlet* has political significances in the region that extends from North Africa to the Middle East. It reads Arab *Hamlets* against the main political incidents in two periods, namely Post-Nasserism (1970-2009) and the period of the Arab Spring (2010- Present). The study starts by tracing the journey of *Hamlet* in the Arab World. Then, it analyses the political aspects in eleven reworkings for the play by Arab Playwrights and stage directors; Four main reworkings produced

in the Age of Post-Nasserism, and seven in the Period of the Arab Spring. Finally, the study will conclude with a comparison and contrast between the reworkings in terms of content and form.

The study tries to answer the following main questions:

- Why does Hamlet receive all that attention from Arab playwrights and stage directors after 1970?
- How is Hamlet influenced by the Political status quo in the two periods?
- What are the main similarities and differences in reworking Hamlet in the two periods?

### **The Methodology:**

To achieve its goals, the dissertation focuses on eleven main stage adaptations and rewritings produced in the two periods. It analyses the political aspects, allegories, and symbols in each work and reads them against the political realities. The study relies on dramas, stage performances, interviews, reviews, videos, magazines, reports, newspapers, primary and secondary resources and contextualizes all that in the political sphere in the region. The nature of the study is a comparative one. It compares and contrasts the reworkings of *Hamlet* in the two periods.

### **The Significance:**

The thesis's significance comes out of the need to allocate a critical base to the Arab *Hamlets*. The number of adaptations and rewritings produced by Arab playwrights and stage directors after 1970, and the lack of a detailed critical and analytical framework necessitate this study as I believe. The critical responses about Arab *Hamlets* are insignificantly humble. Two critical responses were made by non-Arab writers, i.e. Margaret Litvin in her seminal book *Hamlet's Arab Journey*, where she deals with Arab *Hamlets* before 2002, and Graham Holderness' article 'Arab Shakespeare' which tackles *Hamlet* in a broad sense. The Jordanian Mahmoud Al-Shetawi is the only Arab critic whose short article 'Hamlet in Arabic' became the primary resource for all later studies about the play in the region. Other responses to the plays appeared in some critical collections, but in a brief way too. Saying that, the thesis is a detailed analysis of the Arab *Hamlets*, and it is a continuation of Litvin's book. It assumes its significance in the belief that studying the journey of the play in

the Arab World after 1970 will help understand the political atmosphere in the region, and will help the reader to understand the history of the Arab political theatre, hoping this study will add something to Hamlet's heritage worldwide.

### **The Theoretical Background:**

Since the critical background produced by Arab critics about the play is modest, the study relies heavily on Western critics and theorists of theatricality like Bertolt Brecht, theorists of adaptations like Linda Hutcheon and Julie Sanders, psychoanalysts like Freud and Lacan, post-colonialists like Edward Said, and feminists like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Other Western philosophers and critics like Plato, Aristotle, Foucault, Nietzsche, and Coleridge, will be referred to from time to time.

### **The Dissertation Design:**

The Dissertation has the following design:

The first chapter offers a theoretical background. It starts with defining adaptation and rewriting and highlights the main similarities and differences between the two practices. The second part briefly traces the reworking and critical responses for the play through times. It tries to answer why the play received all that attention since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Then, the chapter deals with some examples of the political *Hamlets* produced in different regions, especially Europe. This should help envision the Arab political *Hamlets* within an international concern that always tries to use the play for political reasons. The last part narrows down the discussion to the play's journey in the Arab World, the translation, and the performative and textual reworkings by Arab dramatists.

Chapter two is a profound analysis of four main Arab *Hamlets* produced in Post Nasserism. The first subchapter is about the aspect of anti-heroism in Mamdouh Adwan's *Hamlet Wakes Up Late*. This part shows how Adwan's play mocks Anwar Sadat's Camp David Accord with Israel. The second Subchapter deals with the crises of Arab intellectuals in the Arab World, particularly in Iraq and under Saddam Hussein's oppressive regime. In the third part, the thesis deals with the Moroccan Nabil Lahlou's *Ophelia Is Not Dead* as an example of the Moroccan authority's censorship applied on artists and playwrights. The last subchapter tackles the 'War on terrorism' that shaped the political atmosphere in the Middle East after 2001. It reads Suleiman AlBassam

*AL-Hamlet Summit* as a stage performance that aims to decolonize Western terms like ‘Islamic Terrorism’ and Islamophobia.

The third chapter is concerned with the reworking of *Hamlet* in the Arab Spring. The first work is *In Waiting for Hamlet* by the Iraqi Haider Abdullah Alshatri. This rewriting bears similarities in its structure to Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. The story revolves around two characters waiting for Hamlet, who will liberate them from political oppression as soon as he comes. The second subchapter deals with the theme of unification and solidarity in *Following the Footsteps of Hamlet* by the Palestinian Kamel El-Basha. The stage performance employs the chorus, which collectively acts as one body and performs one death, to catch the spectators’ consciousness about the necessity to end the divisions created by Arab regimes previously. After that, the chapter tackles the theme of artistic freedom in two stage performances: *Hamlet! Leave My Head* by the Saudi Fahad ALHoushanei and *Hamlet After A While* by the Jordanian director Zead Kahleel Mustafa. The two plays summarize the longing of Arabs for the freedom of speech restricted in Post-Nasserism. The last part is a profound analysis of the new political role of Arab women in the Arab Spring. It shows how women unprecedentedly fought for social changes and political representation. It reverses cultural misconceptions, like virginity, from Ophelia’s perspective in Evan Daraji’s *Hamlet vs. Ophelia*.

The conclusion summarises the differences and similarities between reworking *Hamlet* in the two political periods. It zooms in four contrastive themes: division vs. solidarity, anti-heroism vs. heroism, censorship vs. freedom of speech, and the passive vs. the active political role of Arab women. Finally, the conclusion designates the study’s limits and maps out its recommendations for upcoming studies.

### **Discussion and Outcomes:**

The reworking of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in the Arab World in Post-Nasserism and the period of the Arab Spring bears many similarities and differences. In general, the Arab *Hamlets* in both periods gained political relevance and weight through handling political affairs in the region. Since 1970, the Arab World attested political vagaries that impacted the way theatre operates. It became a principal element in the geopolitical struggles and a tool to cast Arabs’ hardships under dictatorship and reflect their aspiration for true democracy. Arab *Hamlets* in both periods can be compared and contrasted in content and form.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was intentionally utilized to reflect the bleak gloominess and desperation felt by Arabs, and one cannot keep a blind eye on the entire political atmosphere that shaped the Arabic reproduction of Shakespeare's play in Post-Nasserism. The agreement Claudius makes with Fortinbras, the enemy of the Danish, in Adwan's *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* is a mocking parallel to Anwar Sadat's Camp David Accord coexisted with the production of the play around 1975. Claudius's "guillotine" that "has crushed people near and far,"<sup>5</sup> in Jawad Al-Assadi's *Forget Hamlet* represents the stifling atmosphere of intellectualism under the Ba'athy regime in Iraq and Syria. In Suleiman AlBassam's *AL-Hamlet Summit*, Fortinbras, invading an Arab country "armed with millions of dollars of foreign equipment,"<sup>6</sup> echoes the American weaponry support for the Israeli state occupying Arab lands, Claudius praying for more petrodollars in the second scene resembles the leaders pocketing people's money by the oil agreements signed between Arab Gulf countries and Western superpowers, and the English Arms Dealer pushing the Arabic King to sign military accords mirrors the Western hegemony over MENA. The sense of despair also persists in Nabil Lahlou's *Ophelia Is Not Dead*, but more adjusted to reflect the artistic claustrophobia applied on artists in Morocco and other Arab countries.

In all these reworkings, Claudius, the representation of Arab leaders, is ruthlessly empowered by the passiveness of the inactive Hamlet, a symbol for all Arab intellectuals, clergymen, politicians, and academics who were paralyzed by their fears and desires and evaded their obligations towards their nations. In all these plays, Hamlet shows deliberate indolence in fulfilling the ghost's commandment. Revenging his dead father and rescuing Denmark are his last concerns. He is not fatigued by procrastination or delay, but his plight is caused by his desire to have a peaceful life. He is addicted to alcoholism and morally corrupted in Adwan's play, detached and busy reading theologies in Al-Assadi's *Forget Hamlet*, paralysed and afraid of the pain afflicted on him by Claudius's police in Lahlou's *Ophelia IS Not Dead*, and derived by extremism that destroys his country in AlBassam's *Al-Hamlet Summit*. He is always acted upon by Claudius before he can act. Adwan and Al-Assadi's plays end

---

<sup>5</sup>Jawad Alssadi, "Forget Hamlet," in *Four Arab Hamlet Plays*, trans. Marvin Carlson, Margaret Litvin, and Joy Arab (New York: Martin E. Segal Theatre Center Publications, 2015), 271.

<sup>6</sup> Suleiman AlBassam. *AL-Hamlet Summit*. Suleiman AlBassam Theatrical Company. Accessed August 10, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zs3TMtsLBD0&t=2920s>. 5:33.

with Hamlet being easily liquidated by Claudius, Lahlou's play ends with Hamlet growing up in his flat afraid while the unstoppable Claudius remains free outside, and in AlBassam's adaptation, he regrets all his unwise violent actions that ruined Denmark more and immerse it in a civil war.

Also, Hamlet's relationship with the apparition of his father, a representation of Nasser's figure demanding the remembrance of his national dream and rescuing the Arab World from the oppressors, cannot be any worse. The absence of the ghost in Lahlou, Al-Assadi and AlBassam's plays, while the refusal of Hamlet to meet and listen to it in Adwan's play, all echoed the gap between the apathetic Arabs and their father, Nasser. Hamlet does not only avoid the ghost in these plays but deletes all testers of truth because he does not want to know it. He does not believe Ophelia's story when she informs him about seeing the murder from her window in Al-Assadi's play, he cancels the *Mousetrap* that might help him discover the truth in Adwan's *Hamlet Wakes Up Late*, and neglects the play about the poisoning of Socrates by which Hamlet can catch the conscience of Claudius and make him feel guilty of killing the wise people in *Forget Hamlet*. Even the solo performance he acts in *AL Hamlet Summit* is not wisely done, and his essential aim is to enrage his uncle and make his mother shameful of her marriage. Among Hamlet's corruption, apathy, paralysis and unwise behaviour, Denmark, a symbol for the corrupted Arab countries, remains corrupted and ruined.

With the advent of the Arab Spring after 2010, the political paralysis and stillness felt in Post-Nasserism was gradually replaced by a sense of hope and persistence to change the political status quo. A close political change and economic improvement are felt during the uprisings; despite the serious causalities occurring here or there. A sense of Pan-Arabism and unity was renewed. The Arab Hamlet registered a new presence on Arabic stages, but this time as a hero. Seven adaptations, except for Daraji's *Hamlet vs. Ophelia*, idolized the heroic Hamlet and saw a parallel between his heroism and the brave Arab youths fighting and enduring pain to re-establish justice in the revolutionary Arab countries. The image of the absolutely powerful and ruthless Arab leaders, seen before in the image of Claudius, is challenged by Hamlet's persistence and yearning for justice. Claudius is ruthlessly executed by Hamlet in Urwa Al-Araby's *The Syrian Hamlet* and Hani Affefi's *I'm Hamlet*, and Hamlet performed noble actions equal to his revenge, and his procrastination and madness were still monitored to achieve his heroic conclusion; i.e. putting things right again in

the rotten country. The revenge, fulfilled in the end for his father, echoes the successful overthrowing of many Arab leaders and regimes. Hamlet fighting for justice in the previous two adaptations, dying bravely in Mustafa's *Hamlet After A While*, and combating state corruption in Fahad ALHoushanei's *Hamlet! Leave My Head*, were not painless, but his ability to maintain values and morals among all that corruption and fear is the base of his heroism.

The symbolic significance of Hamlet exemplifies in his ability to resemble the ordinary Arab female and male more than princes this time. Hamlet, in post-Nasserism, is of courtly blood and a representation of the high ranking people, but Hamlet in the Arab Spring is also one of the poor Arabs, the one who went down to the streets and managed to overthrow the corrupted regimes. The characters could not express their agonies in his eloquent speeches in Mohammad Farouq's *Goodbye Hamlet*, but they can perform his noble actions even without words. The characters, coming from the poor districts in Egypt, do not have problems miming Hamlet's role to rescue the country. Another image of the commoner and poor Hamlet is seen in Hani Affefi's *I'm Hamlet* in which the poor riders of the train act Shakespeare's heroes and heroines. Also, Hamlet's tragedy in the Arab Spring is not mainly a personal one, it is a state tragedy and re-establishing justice is the most important goal. In Hayder Abdullah AL-Shatery's *In Waiting for Hamlet*, the Ghost announces that Hamlet's responsibility "is greater than the issue of a throne, even though they stole it from him. I did not come for that... The throne was not his first concern, even though he is the legitimate heir to it."<sup>7</sup>

Hamlet's Arabic journey is a journey from anti-heroism to heroism. This is even reflected in the titles of the plays that completely reflect the attitude towards Hamlet. *Hamlet Wakes Up Lately* and *Forget Hamlet* are full of irony and satire, while titles like *In Waiting for Hamlet*, *I'm Hamlet*, *Following the Footsteps of Hamlet*, and *Hamlet After A While* reflect the persistent heroism of Hamlet. Another difference is the active role of the ghost which disappeared in most of the Post-Nasserists *Hamlets*. Its permanent existence in Kamel El-Basha's *Following the Footsteps of Hamlet*, his main role in *In Waiting for Hamlet*, and his appearance in *The Syrian Hamlet* and *I'm Hamlet* reflect Hamlet's readiness to take revenge.

---

<sup>7</sup>AL-Shatery, "في انتظار هاملت".

Another political aspect discussed in the Arabic *Hamlets* produced in the two periods is the state censorship applied on cultural means in general, and theatres in particular. Theatres and theatre workers were perhaps among the most observed, challenged, and marginalized. They suffered from economic hardships, and their dramas were controlled and monitored by the states. No adaptation of *Hamlet* in Post Nasserism is void of the theme of oppression inflicted on artists. In Adwan's play, Claudius orders Polonius to observe Hamlet's play, *Shahrayar*, after he hears from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about Hamlet's adjustment for the play. In *Forget Hamlet*, Hamlet does not consent to the idea of staging a play about Socrates's massacre by the authority because he is afraid of Claudius's punishment. Lahlou's *Ophelia Is Not Dead* is the most important play that focused on this aspect by dramatizing both Hamlet and Macbeth's state of paralysis resulted after touring them by the state's police. The period also witnessed the proliferation of theatres and comedies void of any political and social role. Such theatres were supported and encouraged by the authorities for their harmless topics. These insignificant dramas that did not touch upon people's concerns are ridiculed when Hamlet says, in Adwan's play, "I feel like we're playing in a vacuum, ignoring what's going on around us."<sup>8</sup>

The story is slightly different in the Arab uprising, which brought more freedom for theatres. We can see that theatres began to flourish in those countries where the uprising succeeded, especially at the beginning of the Arab uprising between 2010 and 2013. This is seen in the direct criticism to the authorities adopted in the adaptations of *Hamlet* in Egypt between 2011 and 2012, and the performing of the play in Syria for the first time. Even in those countries where the uprisings were suspended, a sense of freedom is granted when the regimes lessened censorship fearing the expected revolutions. In KSA, *Hamlet* is perhaps performed for the first time in *Hamlet! Leave My Head* that tackles the theme of censorship applied by the authorities and religious institutions on theatres and actors. The public performance of *Hamlet* in Jordan by Mustafa in his *Hamlet After A While* is unprecedented. The play also touches heavily on the theme of theatrical surveillance. Even in the time of the

---

<sup>8</sup>Mamdouh Adwan, "Hamlet Wakes Up Late." in *Four Arab Hamlet Plays*, edited by Marvin Carlson, Margaret Litvin, and Joy Arab, 63–154. New York: Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, 2015. 93.

Arab Spring, censorship is still generating problems for actors but in a less dangerous manner than before.

Another remarkable difference between the two periods is the role of Arab women in politics. Women in the Arab World have generally suffered from oppression, lack of representation, and the cultural belittling of their physical and mental capacities. This deprived them of assuming high-ranking jobs in Arab countries. The dissenting image of women persisted in the Arabic adaptations of *Hamlet*, produced in Post-Nasserism, through the image of the oppressed and weak Ophelia. For instance, Ophelia, in Adwan's play, commits suicide after becoming mad due to the death of her father. In Lahlou's drama, Ophelia's significant role comes out of the sexual and physical pleasure she gives to Hamlet and Macbeth. In *AL-Hamlet Summit*, she is turned into a terrorist person committing suicide by bombing her body in the civilians. There was little effort to speak for Ophelia in these reworkings produced by male playwrights. Even in *Forget Hamlet*, when Ophelia is dramatized as a strong female character able to confront Claudius and threaten him to uncover the murder she has seen from her window, she ends up restricted by males' power, and incapable of releasing her brother Laertes from the sanatorium or rescuing her beloved Hamlet from death. However, on no occasion Ophelia could escape male dominance and free herself in these reworkings.

The first time that Ophelia appears as a tuff character who can celebrate victory over men was in Daraji's *Hamlet vs. Ophelia*, which is considered the first reworking by an Arab female dramatist. The image of the strong Ophelia in the play was incited by the new political role women took in the uprising. They accompanied men, harnessed social media, and led the demonstrations sometimes. In fact, the success of the Arab Spring in some countries, between 2010 and 2013, could not be achieved without the essential participation of women. In *Goodbye Hamlet*, the male and female characters performing the silent dance together shows this collaboration between the Egyptian women and men in dethroning Mubarak in 2011. Ophelia defends Hamlet and acts nobly against Polonius and Claudius in *Hamlet After A While*. Hamlet is hanged at the end after being caught plotting to perform a play-within-a-play. What is common between these three adaptations is the ability of Ophelia to survive and stay alive at the end.

Another point that can be contrasted between the reworking of *Hamlet* in the two periods is the dramatic form and style. Sarcasm was the domineering tone in the Post-

Nasserist *Hamlets* and Hamlet was at the centre of this sarcasm. Hamlet's shortcomings and vices are heavily held up in Adwan's play, and his anti-heroism is bitterly mocked and ridiculed by other characters in the play. Rosencrantz mocks Hamlet's verbal distraction when he asks him: "Why is your talk jumping around like a fish?"<sup>9</sup> Horatio ridicules Hamlet's ignorance of all that is happening around him. He recalls how "events have always preceded him."<sup>10</sup> Gertrude reacted to his verbal threatening in front of Fortinbras as "No [worries]! He's drunk."<sup>11</sup> Similarly in *Forget Hamlet*, Claudius mocks Hamlet's lack of concentration by saying: "[He] is so absent-minded,"<sup>12</sup> and Ophelia belittles his manhood accusing him of being "just a dumb kid. That's how I see you now."<sup>13</sup> Macbeth, in *Ophelia Is Not Dead*, insults his ignorance by saying, "You know nothing."<sup>14</sup> It is not only that, Hamlet mocks his inaction, and he is self-aware of his dilemma like when he announces that he has two personalities: "one vicious, pledged to the dagger, dreaming of salvation and killing Claudius and revenge; the other, a Hamlet disillusioned and full of anxiety,"<sup>15</sup> or when he says "I have no passions for death, nothing heroic, nothing repulsive"<sup>16</sup> in *AL-Hamlet Summit*.

Hamlet's stillness is ridiculed in different methods in these drams: irony in Al-Assadi's *Forget Hamlet* as the title indicates, burlesque and comic inversions like the fencing match in Adwan's play in which Hamlet perceived the heroic fencing as a sport incident, or parodies like the time Hamlet's carries a wooden horse and announcing his farewell cry to war in *AL-Hamlet Summit*. In these reworkings, light and bitter humour are also utilised for political satire that analogically refer to specific historical moments like Sadat's Camp David or political figures like some Arab leaders. The sarcasm significance comes when directness and political criticism are forbidden and inapplicable under state censorship.<sup>17</sup> Analogical satire is adopted when "the artist is seeking simultaneously to take risks and escape punishment for his

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, 104.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, 111.

<sup>12</sup>Al-Assadi, "Forget Hamlet," 250.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 254.

<sup>14</sup>Lahlou, "Ophelia Is Not Dead," 21

<sup>15</sup>Adwan, "Hamlet Wakes Up Late," 122.

<sup>16</sup>ALBassam, *AL-Hamlet Summit*, 42:14.

<sup>17</sup>In John Shillington, *Grappling with Atrocity: Guatemalan Theater in the 1990s*, (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 77-78.

boldness.”<sup>18</sup> However, there is an inverse relationship between satire and liberalization. When censorship is lessened, satire becomes effete. This is seen in the adaptations produced in the post-2010 era. Satire is replaced by explicit mockery like when an actor, in *Goodbye Hamlet*, quotes directly from Mubarak’s resignation speech delivered before stepping down. Furthermore, in these adaptations, Hamlet is exempted from this mockery, and it was more directed to Claudius as a symbol for the defeated Arab leaders. Self-mockery is also seen in *Hamlet! Leave My Head* by the actor who revolts against the director, and in *Goodbye Hamlet*, when the characters mock their miserable life. This sarcasm is mixed with humour to lessen the political and economic pain and to turn the painful situation into a ludicrous one.

The scope and shape of reworking *Hamlet* also diversified in the two times. It is observed that rewriting is the prevailing method in the Post-Nasserists time, while stage adaptations thrived in the uprising time. This different tendency in presenting *Hamlet* to Arab receivers was not arbitrary but directed by decisive political and artistic factors as mentioned above. The stifling censorship and political surveillance, applied on theatres and actors by the states, restricted the local stage performances of *Hamlet*, and paved the way for the less observed written dramas in Post-Nasserism. Adwan’s *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* remained outside the boundary of attention as a text until Margaret Litvin removed the dust over the play in her book *Hamlet’s Arab Journey* in 2014. The stage adaptations of Lahlou and AlBassam appeared as performances for the first time in France and Britain, respectively, before arriving at the Arab land. Al-Assadi also wrote *Forget Hamlet* abroad when he fled Ba’athy Iraq to Bulgaria.

The proliferation of *Hamlet*’s stage performances in post-2010 time is not peculiar only to the Arab’s interest in the play, but a whole interest in live theatrical performances was noticed with the advent of the uprisings. The passionate interest in theatres is probably attributed to the whole sovereignty that appears in the region and being snatched by force. What is additionally observed, and again not peculiar to *Hamlet*’s productions only, is the director’s aptitude to avoid linguistic sophistication found in the classical Arabic that was employed heavily in the Post-Nasserists *Hamlets*. The use of dialects that dominated the linguistic style of *I’m Hamlet*,

---

<sup>18</sup>Cited in Dustin Griffin, *Satire: a Critical Reintroduction*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 139.

*Goodbye Hamlet*, and *Hamlet After A While*, is attributed to the desire of the stage directors to engage more audiences coming from different backgrounds into the show. The dialect is more successful in achieving theatrical effects like humour and satire than the Arabic standard. The humour is highly sensed in *Goodbye Hamlet* and the different Egyptian slangs, used by the characters, helped in delivering that sense.

The theatrical adaptations in the Arab Spring are full of postmodern theatrical aspects, and the playwrights adopted different styles inside the same play. We see how language is relegated to a minor position in *Following the Footsteps of Hamlet* and *Goodbye Hamlet*. The attention was given more to performative movements like the silent mask-dance performed at the end in *Goodbye Hamlet*. El-Basha in *Following the Footsteps of Hamlet* is much more interested in this physical performativity than the verbal expressivity, and the collective movements of bodies on the stage to create unity among Palestinians was more important to achieve his goal. These postmodern theatrical aspects adopted by Arab adapters aspired to rethink the traditional linguistic and literary aspect of Arabic dramas found in Post-Nasserism.

Another difference from the pre-2010 *Hamlets* is the inconsistency in the performances. By the inconsistency, I mean the heterogeneous style in the same play seen in the post-2010 adaptations; like the different strategies of the theatrical self-reflexivity. Metatheatricality is also seen in *Hamlet! Leave My Head*, *Goodbye Hamlet* and *In Waiting for Hamlet*, and *Hamlet After A While*, breaking the fourth wall is seen in *The Syrian Hamlet*, transgressing the border between the fiction and the real by addressing the audience directly is demonstrated in *Hamlet! Leave My Head* and *Goodbye Hamlet*, realistic and stylized acting were adopted in using the big statue of the ghost in *Following the Footsteps of Hamlet*, the speaking head in *Hamlet vs. Ophelia*, and Hamlet's multiplied characters in *Hamlet vs. Ophelia*. The difference between these adaptations and previous rewritings is the ability to sense the effect of theatrical self-reflexivity and to see how the performative aspects of the mise-en-scene step forward to convey the political message. The postmodern strategies have political aims and influence the audience to make changes in their own real life. The plays sacrificed the authenticity of their traditional theatrical aspects and undertake a different dimension to capture the audience's conscience quickly.

The reworkings are also different in their closeness to Shakespeare's text. The Post-Nasserist reworkings of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* are closer to Shakespeare's text

from the adaptations produced later. In most of the reworkings in the period between 1970 and 2010, the attempt to follow Shakespeare's plot and structure is hugely marked. This closeness to the Shakespearean text, disregarding the few changes that occurred here or there, was perhaps due to Jabra's influential translation or to the intention of the Arab dramatists to introduce Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to their audience without much alteration at that time. Except for Lahlou's *Ophelia IS Not Dead* that has its own different linguistic style and structure, Adwan, AL-Assad and AlBassam's dramas relied heavily on Jabra's translation. It is not only that, but they maintained almost the same plot with some alterations, remarkably seen in Hamlet's character, adding one or two characters (like the Actor in Adwan's play or The Arms Dealer in AlBassam's play,) and omitting a few minor characters like in AL-Assadi or in AlBassam's dramas. In later dramas, like *In Waiting for Hamlet*, *Goodbye Hamlet*, *Hamlet vs. Ophelia*, *Hamlet! Leave My Head*, and *Hamlet After A While*, only the title of Shakespeare's play with few lines are used. This method gave the dramatist more space to adjust the play to their political atmosphere.

## Publication and Participation

- Abushalha, Ziad. 2022. "Dramatising Solidarity and Unification in Divided Palestine: The Chorus and the Ghost in Kamel EL-Basha's *Following the Footsteps of Hamlet* (2013)" *Humanities* 11, no. 1: 3. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h11010003>
- Abushalha, Ziad. "Shakespeare and Intellectual Castration in the Arab World: Hamlet as a Detached Arab Intellectual in Jawad Al-Assadi's *Forget Hamlet*." *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation* 5, no. 1 (2022): 238–46. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.1.28>.
- Abushalha, Ziad. 2021. Not a Stranger Anymore: Shakespeare's Hamlet and the Politics of the Arab World after 1950. In *The Strange(r) in Literature, Art, and Culture*. Edited by György Fogarasi, Zoltan Kelemen and Akos Toth. Szeged: University of Szeged, vol. 24, pp. 12–26. Available online: <https://www.complit.u-szeged.hu/szokoz/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/02-SZK-Stranger-Ziad-Abushalha.pdf>
- Abushalha, Ziad. "The Adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet in Different Cultural and Historical Contexts." *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics* 59 (March 31, 2019): 18–24. <https://doi.org/10.7176/JLLL/56-04>.
- Abushalha, Ziad. "The Reworking of Shakespeare's Hamlet in the Arab Spring: The Hero Hamlet as a Symbol for the Arab Youths." *International Journal of Literature and Translation* 4, no. 10 (2021): 200–210. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.10.24>.

### -Upcoming Publication:

Dramatizing the Paralyzed Bodies under Censorship in the Arab World: A Study in Nabil Lahlou's *Ophelia is Not Dead* (1968) (Contemporary Theatre Review, Rutledge.)

### - Participation:

The Mellon Summer School for Theatre and Performance Research, 2019/ Harvard University.

### Conferences:

- Hungarian Society for the Study of English, Pannon University, Veszprem , Hungary 31 January, 2019- 2 February, 2019.
- Stranger Conference, Szeged University, Hungary (20-24 December, 2019).

**Bibliography:**

The most quoted and cited references:

- Bloom, Harold. *Hamlet*. Edited by Brett Foster. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008. Carlson, Marvin, Margaret Litvin, and Joy Arab, eds.. *Four Arab Hamlet Plays*. New York: Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, 2015.
- EL-Basha, Kamal. *On The Footsteps of Hamlet*. Watan TV, December 21, 2010.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlyVxihpMqY>.
- Farouq, Mohammad and Ahmad Rassem. *ونداعا هاملت*. Media Baladi, 2012.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ru8v9af\\_-Eo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ru8v9af_-Eo).
- Foakes, R. A. *Hamlet Versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art*. Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Gordon, Joel. *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2012.
- Hattaway, Michael, Boika Sokolova, and Derek Roper, eds.. *Shakespeare in The New Europe*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Theory of Adaptation*. Taylor and Francis, 2014.
- Kott, Jan. *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1964.
- Lahlou, Nabil. "Ophelia Is Not Dead." Essay. In *Four Arab Hamlet Plays*, edited by Marvin A. Carlson, Margaret Litvin, and Joy Arab, 1–62. New York: Martin E. Segal Theatre Center Publications, 2015.
- Mendel, Arthur P. "Hamlet and Soviet Humanism." *Slavic Review* 30, no. 4 (December 1971): 733–747.  
[https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/2493845?seq=2#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/2493845?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents). (accessed May 24, 2020).
- Mustafa, Ziad Khalil. "Hamlet After A While." *YouTube* video, 1:05:16, The Royal Jordanian Cultural Center, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQTRARMpPoY>
- Owen, Ruth J. *The Hamlet Zone: Reworking Hamlet for European Cultures*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012.
- Said, Edward W. *Representations of the Intellectual : the 1993 Reith Lectures*. London: Vintage Books, 1996.
- Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Shakespeare, William, Paul Prescott, Spencer T J B., and Alan Sinfield. *Hamlet*. London: Penguin Books, 2015.
- Shakespeare, William. *Arden Shakespeare Third Series Complete Works*. Edited by Ann Thompson, David Scott Kastan, H. R. Woudhuysen, and G. R. Proudfoot. London, UK: The Arden Shakespeare, 2021.
- Welsh, Alexander. *Hamlet in His Modern Guises*. Princeton University Press, 2001.
- White, R. S. *Avant-Garde Hamlet: Text, Stage, Screen*. Fairleigh Dickinson University, 2017.