



The literary Significance of Hamlets...

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Abstract

Jawad Al Assadi's *Forget Hamlet* constitutes confusion for readers/audience. In fact, the title is an invitation to see Hamlet from an Arabic standpoint. The play offers an indication to many Arab countries under bad controlling regimes. This indication creates a specific analysis for the character of Hamlet as a philosopher and a coward. Hamlet symbolizes Arab people, not the revolutionary, but the intellectual ones who explain more than act. Thus, *Forget Hamlet* provides the findings of the author to employ them with the creative reinterpretation for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Keywords: Hamlet, Jawad Al Assadi.



الأهمية الأدبية لمسرحية هاملت في فيلم "انسوا هاملت" للمخرج جواد الأسدي

أ.م.د/ آمال الكوري

حيدر جليل حسن

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية - كلية التربية - جامعة القادسية

الملخص

مسرحية جواد الأسدي أنسوا هاملت تشكل اضطراب لدى المشاهدين والقراء. في الحقيقة، عنوان المسرحية هو دعوة لرؤية هاملت من وجهه نظر عربي. المسرحية تقدم إشارة إلى البلدان العربية التي هي تحت نظام الحكم السيئ هذه الإشارة تخلق تحليل دقيق لشخصية هاملت ك فيلسوف وجبان. هاملت يرمز إلى الشعب العربي، ليس الثوري منهم، ولكن المثقفين الذين يشرحون أفعالهم بدلاً من أن يقوموا بها. وهكذا فإن مسرحية أنسوا هاملت تقدم نتائج الكاتب لكي يوظفها مع إعادة الفهم المبدع لمسرحية شكسبير هاملت.

كلمات مفتاحية: هاملت، جواد الأسدي.



1-Theory of Adaptation

Adaptation in its simplest form is a process of rewriting, reforming, and adjusting a certain text for specific time and place to fit the modern context and audience's temperament. Adaptation can be presented as a translation strategy that involves a method used in translation process. Thus, the ongoing argument about the fidelity of adaptation as an independent process follows different forms and styles. It has been noticed that each text has its context and changing this context results in changing the contents and the structures of the text due to what others can receive from this new context. (Shuttleworth, 1997, p.3).

Although the definition of adaptation is not an easy task, scholars attempt to provide a suitable and comprehensible definition for the term. Linda Hutcheon defines it as "an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works" (2006, p.7), while Julie Sanders extends its definition to "a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of revision in itself." (2006, p.18) It can be denoted from the previous definitions that adaptation is a process which engages in offering commentary on the source text including addition, expansion, interpolation, and accretion.

In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) Linda Hutcheon confirms the author's responsibility to reflect a personal style in proposing a text as an employment of his experienced utilities. For Hutcheon, adaptors are supposed to analyze the text in a more comprehensive way and by this they can adapt certain limitations as a process of reworking. The use of adaptation enables the writer to master the source texts such as (drama, novel, or a short story) for the sake of fitting a certain culture. By using the adaptation method, adaptors can include more details about their works to produce an amalgamate piece of work such as expansion, subtraction, or drawing a vision referent to the source text. (p.18-9).

The use of adaptation elaborates some critical analyses that raise controversial concern of various views of scholars who handle adaptation to its problematic definition. For example, Phyliss Frus and Christy Williams in *Beyond adaptation: Essays on Radical Transformation of Original Works* (2010) propose adaptation as a transformation in which that the relation between the adapted text and its original may be left unnoticed. In this sense, audience/readers see the objective of this transformation as providing



them with new perspectives related to their reality. Additionally, the theory of adaptation can draw noticeable inspiration that leads to a newer, more wide-ranging understanding of depicted events. (p.3).

Furthermore, adaptation, as a process of recreation, is limitless. It covers trans-mediality when a drama can be turned into opera or ballet, or it can be trans-generic like an epic into a novel. Hutcheon assures this by stating adaptation to signify "a shift in ontology from the real to the fictional, from a historical account or biography to a fictionalized narrative or drama." (2006, p.8) The purposeful use of adaptation has an artistic drive of making a prior work more relevant to receivers through the process of updating. In other words, adaptors might tend to contradict and offer a revised ideological point of view to subjugate the text's possible meaning and its cultural impact.

2. Hamlet's Adaptation in Arabic Drama

William Shakespeare, in Arabic literature, has been received much treatment both as a poet and a playwright. His Hamlet has been a significant aspect for Arabs' endeavor to define their slogan by adopting Hamlet's lexicon "to be or not to be". Hamlet's adaptation in Arabic literature highlights on application of political dominance to help people to reflect their ordeal. Hamlet's adaptation in the Arabic culture provides adapters and translators a perfect context to suit the requirements of Arabic environment. To attract readers' / audiences' attraction, adapters resort to cut and add parts of the original play to suit Arabic context. Arab writers, however, choose Shakespeare's Hamlet to modify their captive freedom and to transfer documented pictures for Arab reality as a result of authoritative regime (AlGaberi, 2018, p. 1).

Hamlet maintains remarkable existence in the Arab world among many adaptations and rewritings produced and directed by Arab playwrights. The appearance of the play in the Arabic region attribute to the cultural, religious, and political factors. The main factor is the Arabs are not acquainted with the concept of adaptation as a significant source of play writing. However, the appearance of Hamlet among Arab world gains currency to shed light on political colonization and cultural properties. The rationale of Arab Hamlet has the interest to dramatize a violent struggle between a throne usurper and a revolutionary character (Al-Ghabri, 2018,p.10).



The end of nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century witnessed the emergence of new series Shakespeare's adaptations in the Middle East and North Africa. Other than Macbeth, Richard II, and Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet is popularized in the Arab world for what its appropriation can be resided to discuss different political and social conflicts. The Arab adapters rewrite Shakespeare to express their response to a local change. They adopt Shakespearean vocabularies to undertake a resonance of various political and social movements and to allow Hamlet to stand for a particular group as part of Arab community. Arab writers tackle Hamlet with more cultural aspect. They do not trace the original text step by step, they modify and rectify. Hamlet's adaptation invokes Arab culture with reference to different religious sections and patterns, and by this, Arab writers respond to varied concepts and beliefs and form aesthetic horizon that is effectively emphasized away from Shakespeare's text (Litvin, 2016, p.227).

Hamlet has been adapted as thrust into political, social, and instructional fields. This fact is evinced out of the recurrent reflections on Arab writers' inspiration for freedom, identity, and personal impressions. The insistence to export Hamlet in a new shape to the audience/readers and to the world is a result of the fact that Hamlet has been grasped as a catalyst in the process of spreading freedom. The freedom subject is dominated in the Arabic literature which confines the bitter reality to manifest its purest support for national upheaval. Arabic literature pictures Hamlet as a sobbing character who staggers to take an action and spoofs the authoritative powers which draw an empty path for people to walk aimlessly.

The text of *Hamlet* is a myriad of allusions and biblical figures such as the ghost of king Hamlet which symbolizes the resurrection day and the cock's crow that represents hour of down. These allusions and symbols enhance the play's dramatic significance as a biblical, historical, and an ideological work. This significance leads Mohamud Baqir Twajj to present in Shakespeare in the Arab World (1973) how the Arabs tend to embrace myths and religious allusions which are represented by the existence of a ghost as a resemblance element of Arabs' folklore tradition. The theme of revenge in Hamlet enhances the value of adaptation. Arabic literature pictures violence as an endeavor for gaining a social respective power reflected individually. Another reason for adapting Hamlet in Arabic literature is the tremendous psychology represented by Hamlet's madness.



The psychological issue of Hamlet adds an impressive touch for producing an emotional theatre that represents a melodramatic relevance (Al Shetawi, 1999, p.44).

Hamlet's journey in the Arab world grasps a new dramaturgical technique as a post-modern play. The existence of Hamlet in Arabic literature purveys Arab writers with a realistic response to launch an attack on the reign absorber. Additionally, Hamlet represents a focal point in Shakespearean drama for the form and content of its dramatic rhetoric and linguistic invention. As an adaptation, Arab writers consider these characteristics of Hamlet to expand in their interpretation concerning social and political management of Middle East (Gadomski, 2016, p.68).

Other than *Macbeth*, *Richard II*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* popularized in the Arab world for what its appropriation can be resided to discuss different political and social conflicts. The Arab adapters rewrite Shakespeare to express their response to a local change. They adopt Shakespearean vocabularies to undertake a resonation of various political and social movements and to allow Hamlet to stand for a particular group as part of Arab community. Arab writers tackle Hamlet with more cultural aspect. They do not trace the original text step by step; they modify and rectify. Hamlet's adaptation invokes Arab culture with reference to different religious sections and patterns, and by this, Arab writers respond to varied concepts and beliefs and form aesthetic horizon that is effectively emphasized away from Shakespeare's text (Litvin, 2012, p. 227).

The adaptation of *Hamlet* enables Arab writers coincide their nationality with the current destruction representing by Hamlet's inactive energy and Claudius's fetish manipulation. The Arab writers and adapters use Shakespeare's Hamlet to develop a postcolonial theater that respond to the Arabic political proceedings. Hamlet's Problem mirrors Arabs' problem in concerning the existentialism of their identity and, at the same time, it is a message to criticize a postcolonial era in a more subversive way. This modification brings the Arabic literature a vivid view of describing the Arab culture politically and intellectually.

The adaptation of *Hamlet* continues to include new trends and groups of various approaches toward Shakespeare's works. These new versions of Arabic Hamlet have resulted in the presence of different Hamlets. Two adaptations of *Hamlet* take part in Egyptian occurrences as a symbol for heroism Mohammed Faruq's *Goodbye Hamlet* (2012) and Hani Affefi's *I'm*



Hamlet (2012). These two adaptations use the theme of resistance to describe the image of violence that spread out of the 2011 uprising to dislocate Hosni Mubarak's regime. Faruq and Affefi observe the youth emergence to focus on political changes and social development. They both employ in their *Hamlet* the insurrection technique to facilitate for Egyptian people a radical change in the political system of a state. Consequently, they provoke an act of sedition which is incitement for an elaborated election and for more prosperous life (Mohammed, 2021, p.201).

Other adaptations of *Hamlet* are made to suit local cultural conditions. *Hamlet* steps inside Arab gulf in Sulyman Al Bassam *The Al-Hamlet Summit* (2004). In this play we have a different context in which Al Bassam tries to locate it as a tragic incident and, at the same time, a terrorist act. *The Al-Hamlet summit* is a link of two decades that reflect the Islamic radicalism of nineteenth and twentieth century. Al Bassam steps outside intellectuality and psychology and produces a figure of Hamlet representing an old stereotype of Arab tradition. Margaret Litvin in her article "Sulyman Al Bassam 's Al –Hamlet Summit in the Arab Hamlet tradition" argues that "Al Bassam's Hamlet is not the fractured non-protagonist of recent Arab plays but rather recalls the hero Hamlets of 1960s and 1970s". *The Al-Hamlet Summit* employs Hamlet as a practical character in destroying Claudius's rule by establishing a terrorist movement verses Islamic pattern. Thus, Al Bassam reflects the terrorist activities in Arab world by spreading radical ideas and see how Arab peoples respond. This bold technique in *The Al-Hamlet Summit* enriches its dissent to recent assaults on the Arab countries and its initiation to ridicule the Arab authorities by following the repression policies (Holderness, 2007, p .145).

In Syria, Urwa Al Araby's *The Syrian Hamlet* (2012) is close to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by its content and structure except for changing some strategies according to the director's styles. *The Syrian Hamlet* is based on Jabra Ibrahim Jabra' translation and it adopts the concept of breaking the fourth wall between actors and spectators. However, *The Syrian Hamlet* is a symbol for Syrian people to represent heroism and insistence in a world of corruption. Al Araby gives a vivid description to the current state of stiff greed of power. *The Syrian Hamlet* repeats the same tragedy of *Hamlet* with reference to first sin of history. Al Araby employs biblical reference as a sign of warning to unexpected calamity. She represents Hamlet more actively than Shakespeare. In *The Syrian Hamlet*, Hamlet the actor desires



his pure enmity for despotism to take revenge. This shape of Hamlet maintains his morals and wisdom and he employs his agitated state as a weapon to confront political treachery and to maintain his values (Mohammed, 2021, p.206).

The adaptation of *Hamlet* enables Arab writers to coincide their nationality with the current destruction representing by Hamlet's inactive energy and Claudius's fetish manipulation. The Arab writers and adapters use Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to develop a post-colonial theatre that responds to the Arabic political proceedings. Hamlet's problem mirrors Arabs' problem in concerning the existentialism of their identity and, at the same time, it is a message to criticize a postcolonial era in a more subversive way. This modification brings the Arabic literature a vivid view of describing the Arab culture politically and intellectually.

3. Forget Hamlet

Jawad Al Assadi's *Forget Hamlet* (1994) is a largely adaptation of Shakespeare's original text of *Hamlet*. It consists of seventeen scenes that express some modulation as a satirical confrontation with politics against intellectuals. The title of *Forget Hamlet* as translated in Arabic "انسوا هاملت" has its dramatic significance. The play first staged as *Ophelia's Window* but later retitled to *Forget Hamlet* by the Al Assadi to create a dramatic irony by asking audience/readers to forget the hero Hamlet and remember the hapless one at the same time. The word "forget" does not mean to deny the existence of character named Hamlet, but to develop it, to adapt the notion of *Hamlet* and apply it strongly in readers'/spectators' thinking. In *Forget Hamlet*, Al Assadi draws much attention to a certain point of Hamlet as a character. He depicts Hamlet as an indifferent character who has no thrill towards his father's death by showing Hamlet's intellectualism rather than revenge (Makki, 2021, 549).

In his introduction to the theory of adaptation, Al Assadi proposes his argument towards consideration of classical texts. He clarifies the role of adaptation as an epitome to fit current reality and modern publicity that could situated in any nation and expressed in any language. His concept of "sweeping away the holiness of literary texts" is to lessen the significance of classical sources and to initiate a new beginning for a generation of writers. He argues that literary texts should provide general aspects accepted for all human beings and do not admit excavation or varied reading (Mahfouz, 2016, p.12).



The significance of adapting Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is to indulge Al Assadi's literary senses in re-telling the story. Al Assadi discovers Hamlet's inaction instead of his act by elaborating the meek and futile character of Hamlet. Al Assadi shows Hamlet as an autistic character who searches for serenity by locking himself in his chamber reading theologies. Al Assadi employs his dramatic style as an intellectual by declaring the contrastive side of intellectualism that stops Hamlet from taking revenge. Horatio informs Hamlet that he has seen a ghost that resembles the king Hamlet, but he carelessly accuses Horatio of forging that to ruin his spiritual peace:

Horatio: I swear I saw him.

Hamlet: What did you see?

Horatio: The new king.

Hamlet: Don't ruin my peace with your nonsense (Al Assadi, 1994, p.21-22).

Al Assadi manipulates the characters either by increasing, decreasing, or even omitting their characterizations to fulfill his aim via the indirect reference of the text. Furthermore, Al Assadi uses his dramaturgical intellectuality in keeping the general narrative thread so he can dramatize and modify by his literary attraction. For example Hamlet's disengagement compels other characters to stand firm against Claudius's regime and confront him: we are ready for blood, O master of Denmark! (Al Assadi, p.19) Al Assadi remodels the sequence of events such as adding scenes and omitting others to manipulate the development of the characters in the play according to some local reasons and personal creation. Through the focus on Laertes's role, Al Assadi symbolizes Hamlet as the essence of affectation that draws life with natural colors away from the dark castle of Denmark.

In *Forget Hamlet*, Hamlet is presented with his desire for philosophy that makes him afraid from responsibility. He pretends that his solitude is a result of his wish to avoid the corruption of power. The power, as he describes, is "an eternal curse, a wild animal that opens its mouth greedily to positions of rank and blinding lights" and as "a spiritual person has no business with it". (Al Assadi, 1994, p.38) By doing this manipulation, Al Assadi shifts the focus from Hamletism, as the prince of revenge, to the prince's intellectual dilemma caused by his desire to have a peaceful life. In his preface of the play, Al Assadi states the aim of this manipulation:

I wanted my dramatic text *Forget Hamlet* to pull the curtain from some characters suffering the edge of madness and to open the door of the text to their desires and their rancor, postponed in the face of Claudius, the state barbarian who swallowed up both his brother and sister-in-law at once to send the former to the gravediggers and the latter to his own bed and his boorish unmanly haste (Al Assadi, 1994, p.5).



Al Assadi mocks the fruitless Arab intellectuals by presenting Hamlet's passive reaction to his father's murder. Hamlet's detachment from courtly issues and involving himself in theology, as Ophelia announces: he turns his back on the murder and keeps contemplating and philosophizing (Al Assadi, 1994, p.28), invent excuses to defend his detachment. Hamlet's intellectual stillness is a symbol for apathetic peoples who have chosen to protect themselves in an ivory tower and start moralizing about life. In this sense, Hamlet's cold reaction to Claudius's bad treatment of people and his obsession with isolation empowers Claudius more and leads to Hamlet's death at the end.

The dramaturgical analysis of a play focuses on the factors of time and place. The dramaturgy searches to survey methodology that is used by the writer or the adapter to produce a valuable performance that can be seen and touched. Many features gather in one work to create a landscape of either pleasure or grief. The attributes of dramaturgy participate in presenting the play from many sides such as setting, performance, and décor. (Proehl, 2008, p.10) Al Assadi's *Forget Hamlet* applies dramaturgy in its way of showing the incidents. Al Assadi rearranges the play by using his expertise as a director which helps him in producing a revised work in a dramaturgical sense. The social and political environment of *Forget Hamlet* take place in its thematic concern as well as its technical consideration as a piece of writing.

Forget Hamlet has been staged as "*Ophelia's Window*" in Cairo in 2000. With the later change of the title to *Forget Hamlet*, the play takes place in different areas. It staged in New York Theatre workshop, Australia in Brisbane, and recently in Iraq. Al Assadi, out of his exile, intends to show *Forget Hamlet* not only for Arab, but also for foreign countries. He wishes to make access to other cultures to reflect Hamlet's presence in the Arab world and to draw a picture of enmity representing Arab leaders and their advocates. The performance of *Forget Hamlet* is a reaction to a local malignity abused the people decade after decade for greed and authoritative desire (Makki, 2021, p.549).

The performance of *Forget Hamlet* enhances its value in considering the writer's point of view of describing live images of his life. The dramaturgical evidence of *Forget Hamlet* is the writer's intervening of remodeling and reinterpreting thematic concern and structural root. The text forms a conviction towards all those who worship mimicry either in style or script, and the performance is a literary trick guided by the writer to discover his acute deviations. The dramaturgical performance of *Forget Hamlet* fulfills its role as a comprehensive exploration of the play context.



The performance of *Forget Hamlet* can be seen inside and outside Arab world. The play has its dramatic technique to be presented such as setting, décor, lightening, script, and actors. In Kuwait, the play staged on Al Gulf theatre by the director Issa Dhiab. The play performed as a motivation for young actors to take advantage of such immense works. The director of the play uses the geographical place of the stage to control the dramatic event and move his actors from one area to another. Issa Dhiab adds the ghost of king Hamlet, although it is not existed in *Forget Hamlet*, as a symbol of royal family and as an indication to the most important theme of the play. Body language is used in the performance since it expresses Hamlet's psychological shift from one character to another. The actors did well on the stage, but the acoustic installation was not good because all the actors' voice was monotonous. Besides, the high musical effects had the role of covering some of the actors' dialogues which make most of them not understandable.

In Iraq, *Forget Hamlet* staged as *Ophelia's Window* by the director Monadhil Dawood. He is an Iraqi expatriate director specialized in directing Shakespeare's plays and adaptation like *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Al Hamlet-Summit*. *Ophelia's Window/ Forget Hamlet* staged as one act on the National theatre in Baghdad. The play stopped performing out of October demonstration and Corona virus (2020). Then the play resumed the performance which lasted a year and five months. The play begins with a dancing scene which is not mentioned in the text, yet it produces a group of actors who succeeded in presenting an artistic work that is filled with conflict and conspiracy. The performance is empty from violent scenes, in the sense that the murder of King Hamlet does not appear on the stage, it has been spoken. The vocal and musical effects between the scenes reflect the vitality of the actors and director's skill.

Consequently, *Forget Hamlet*, as a stage direction, calls for empty pictures frames, old masks, creaky chairs, and hanging beds. The play has been handled by different directors and producers. Some of them delete scenes and some add theatrical expression to suit the dramatic occasion. Yet, *Forget Hamlet* remains an expression against tyranny and the destruction for humanity, moreover, it is a symbol for the innocents who victimized their lives as a cost of their weakness and cowardice.

Conclusion

Forget Hamlet is a representation for the statues of many Arab countries. The play discusses the social ills and political abuses that dominate citizens and lead to their destruction. In this play, Al Assadi identifies the role of intellectuals toward the abusive policy which negotiates more and rebel less.



Al Assadi produced *Forget Hamlet* while he was in exile out of the Ba'ath regime that traced many intellectuals and expelled others. According to the concept of adaptation, this play provides an image about the passive nature of Hamlet. It calls to forget Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and think of new Hamlet whose philosophy is beyond taking revenge.

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