AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

OPHELIA’S ARAB JOURNEY: SHAKESPEARE’S WOMEN IN TRANSLATION AND APPROPRIATION

by
SARA ZUHEIR BAALBAKI

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Department of English
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
at the American University of Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon
September 2019

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

OPHELIA'S ARAB JOURNEY: SHAKESPEARE'S WOMEN IN TRANSLATION AND APPROPRIATION

By
SARA ZUHEIR BAALBAKI

Approved by:

David Currell
Dr. David Currell, Assistant Professor — Advisor
Department Of English

S M-Atassi
Dr. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, Associate Professor — Committee Member
Department of English

Robert Myers
Dr. Robert Myers, Professor — Committee Member
Department of English

Date of thesis defense: September 2019

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THESIS, DISSERTATION, PROJECT RELEASE FORM

Student
Name: Baalbaki Sara Zuheir
Last First Middle

X Master's Thesis Master's Project Doctoral Dissertation

☐ I authorize the American University of Beirut to: (a) reproduce hard or electronic copies of my thesis, dissertation, or project; (b) include such copies in the archives and digital repositories of the University; and (c) make freely available such copies to third parties for research or educational purposes.

☒ I authorize the American University of Beirut, to: (a) reproduce hard or electronic copies of it; (b) include such copies in the archives and digital repositories of the University; and (c) make freely available such copies to third parties for research or educational purposes
after: **One ---- year from the date of submission of my thesis, dissertation, or project.**
Two ---- years from the date of submission of my thesis, dissertation, or project.
Three X years from the date of submission of my thesis, dissertation, or project.

SaraB Sept. 13, 2019

Signature Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the help and kindness of my graduate committee, for which I am incredibly grateful. I want to thank my thesis advisor Dr. David Currell for his encouragement and belief in me as a scholar. Thank you for all the feedback on countless drafts and for your invaluable advice while I was working on this thesis. Thank you to Dr. Robert Myers for welcoming me into your office and listening patiently to my ideas as well as supplying me with valuable resources and research suggestions. Thank you to Dr. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi for always seeing the good in me, reassuring me, and offering heartfelt advice and constructive criticism when I needed it most. I could not have done this without you, and I have blessed with having you as mentors and role models. Thank you for showing me the value of humility in academia. I would also like to thank Rebekah Maggor at Cornell University as well as Sahar Assaf at AUB for supplying me with the necessary resource materials I needed to complete my research. Finally, I would like to thank Nabila Shehabeddine and Nadine Knesevitch at Jafet Library for assisting me with citations and thesis formatting issues.

I also thank my family for being patient with me as I worked, for encouraging and listening to me despite not being familiar with the subject matter. Thank you for supplying me with Shakespeare articles and quotes whenever you came across them (regardless if they were related to my thesis or not). I thank my brother Ihsan for his encouragement and generally just living with me during this crazy time. To my sister Taima, thank you for making my first thesis schedule to help me manage my time. I could not have done it without all of your support.

To my friends, thank you for your love and kindness. First and foremost, I thank Vanessa for giving me the gentle push to start writing. I thank Rola for helping me overcome my paralyzing writer’s block, and for volunteering to be my study buddy. May and Shelby, thank you for always being there for me. Our weekly dinners were my happy place. You are the best thesis support group I could ever ask for, thank you for giving me the chance to discuss thesis ideas with you. Maria, Ratiba, and Franjie thank you for reminding me to eat, checking up on me, and for keeping me sane while I was writing. Gina and Sarah Khalil I thank you for your wit and humor, for without it I couldn’t have kept going. I also thank Maya, Hasan, and Pegor for their constant support and encouragement to keep on writing. To Anna, Rawan, Jeeda, Claudia, and Sarah Enayeh thank you for your calls from across the globe to check in on me. To Allison, Hannah, Lukas, Denise, Bettina, and Daniel, and Danny Khoury thank you for reminding me that unconditional love exists.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Sara Zuheir Baalbaki for Master of Arts
Major: English Literature

Title: Ophelia's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Women in Translation and Appropriation

This thesis is an inaugural study of adaptations and appropriations of three Shakespeare plays in the Arab world that examines the plays primarily through the lens of gender. It addresses gender among characters and theater practitioners alike: both theatrical representation and the field of cultural production. It thematizes the issue of female agency in the Arab plays and productions and examines how female characters are different compared to their Shakespearean counterparts and how their agency changes in the processes of translation, adaptation, and performance in Arabic and subsequent translation of some of the Arabic plays into English and their performances in a non-Arab context. It contributes to the knowledge of the growing field of Arab Shakespeare and Arab theater. It finds that female characters and the power they possess can change because of changes in translation. They can become more or less dynamic depending on how much dialogue they have in the play. Female agency also changes with the genre change from tragedy to comedy as comedy offers more space for subversive behavior. This study also briefly looks at the role of women in the cultural production of Arab Shakespeare and the changes they made to the texts they directed. Overall, the thesis breaks new ground in presenting a more nuanced view of the role Arab women play in their societies and the changes they are trying to implement despite the challenges they face in a patriarchal society but offers no easy solution to the problems the patriarchy produces for women in particular.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS…………………………………………… v

ABSTRACT……………………………………………………… vi

Chapters

INTRODUCTION: THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN ARAB SHAKESPEARE ……………………………………… 1

I. OPHELIA RISES; GERTRUDE WAKES UP LATE: FEMININE ROLE REVERSAL IN ARAB HAMLET PLAYS…………………………………………….…..... 24

II. VIOLA’S AND OLIVIA’S PROGRESS SUBVERTED: GENDER DYNAMICS IN AN ARAB TWELFTH NIGHT……………………………………………………..73

III. EDITING KING LEAR’S DAUGHTER’S IN LEBANESE ARABIC……………………………………………..108

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH…………………………….....132

Appendix

I. LIST OF PLAYS AND PLOT SUMMARIES...138

BIBLIOGRAPHY……………………………………………..143

Dedication

In loving memory of my late grandfather, Dr. Ahmad Tarabein

(1936-2017)

Thank you for being the one who showed me the power of stories, believed in me, and volunteered to discuss and later read my thesis when it was still an inchoate mass of ideas all in my head. I wish you could read it now. I hope I made you proud.

In loving memory of Dr. Antoine Khabbaz

(1953-2018)

For without you, I would not be here nor, frankly, would this work even exist. Thank you for believing in me and pushing me to move forward. I'm forever indebted to you and grateful for your unparalleled kindness and empathy. As you always used to say:

Qui craint de souffrir, il souffre déjà de ce qu'il craint.

"He who fears suffering is already suffering that which he fears."

-La Fontaine

INTRODUCTION

THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN ARAB SHAKESPEARE

> Set you down this,
> And say besides that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and turbaned Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by th' throat the circumcised dog/And smote him—thus!
> *Othello* (5.2.30-35)

It is an auspicious moment for a critical study of the place of women within the burgeoning creative and critical field of Arab Shakespeares. Since this field's inception, much of the scholarship in the field has dealt with the Arab reception of *Hamlet*; understandably so as *Hamlet* has been the most translated play across the globe (Litvin 3). In addition, Arabs have been fascinated by his character because they could relate to his crippling confusion as the rot spreads throughout Denmark. They also empathized with Hamlet's existential despair as they witnessed their own world turned topsy-turvy, especially after the Arab Naksa in 1967 (Litvin 137).

Rather than focusing on the Arab Hamlets and other male figures, however, this study aims to provide a cogent reading of the different portrayals of the women in Shakespearean appropriations in Arab drama to provide a scholarly contribution to the field. It will also examine the intersection of gender with cultural productions of Shakespeare. I will examine female characters in tragedies such as Ophelia, Gertrude, Regan, and Cordelia as well as characters in comedies like Viola, Maria, and Olivia. In doing so, this study will address gender among both characters and theater practitioners, thereby looking at the representation of women on stage as well as in cultural/theater production. I hope to provide a fresh perspective on Arab Shakespeare rather than augmenting the exclusive focus on Hamlet and other male characters by studying the Arab adaptations of *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, and *King Lear* through a gendered lens. The Arab Hamlet is a politicized, ineffectual masculinist figure as he exists in an existential bubble of crisis and is powerless when faced with the turmoil in his country. In contrast, the Arab Ophelia and the Arab Gertrude are desperately trying to find solutions to curtail the rampant corruption around them. Thus, Hamlet is reduced to a stock character as the women around him rally him to action, and when all fails, take matters into their own hands.

Recently, there has been an influx of scholarship surrounding what is now called Global Shakespeare as scholars have gradually become interested in studying the reception of Shakespeare in the Global South. Under that broad designation, Shakespeare reception studies have commonly focused on countries that were previously under the control of the British Empire, where Shakespeare was an integral part of the imperial educational system. [1] This study, however, is primarily concerned with Shakespeare's reception in the Middle East. Much of the current research on Shakespeare in the Arab world has been conducted by non-Arab scholars, but that trend is changing as more Arab scholars are drawn into the field.

Arab Shakespearean scholarship has been more focused on the political and cultural motives driving Arab writers when staging Shakespeare or Shakespearean appropriations in the Middle East. Margaret Litvin's landmark book *Hamlet's Arab Journey* looks at how *Hamlet* affects Arab dramatists and how they use Hamlet to discuss the political and cultural crises that plague the Middle East. She looks at reception in what she calls a "global kaleidoscope" approach, where each reading/adaptation of *Hamlet* is in constant dialogue with previous readings, and they should not be treated as separate entities. Arab playwrights have looked at Hamlet in four different ways depending on the political mood of the time. Thus, Hamlet was used to elevate "international standards," explore "psychological depth," look at "political agitation" and later used for "intertextual dramatic irony" (10). Litvin looks at a variety of different plays by different playwrights to elaborate her argument, and one of those contemporary playwrights is Sulayman Al-Bassam, whom she discusses in the last chapter of the book. In addition, articles such as Mark Bayer's "*The Merchant of Venice*, The Arab-Israeli Conflict, and the Perils of Shakespearean Appropriation" are concerned with and limited to the political overtones and/or implications of the reception of Shakespeare's work. In parallel, there has been a marked emphasis on the style and accuracy of translations of Shakespeare's original work into Arabic and later into adaptations in dissertations like Mohammad Tounsi's *Shakespeare in Arabic: a study of the translation, reception, and influence of Shakespeare's drama on the Arab world*. And, while I acknowledge the importance and the appeal of studying Arab Shakespeare reception from these angles, the emphasis on politics and translation has narrowed the field of inquiry, overshadowing equally important and fascinating dimensions in the field, notably, gender.

---

[1] India has received especially detailed and illuminating attention from postcolonial Shakespeare studies: See Singh's article, "Different Shakespeares: The Bard in Colonial/Postcolonial India" for more on this topic.

Gender itself is, of course, a fundamentally political category. Thus, I aim to approach the politics of gender as it conditions Arab Shakespeares through the following kind of questions: how are women represented in the different Arab adaptations of Shakespeare? How is that different from the way Shakespeare represented them on stage in the Elizabethan era? If there are indeed differences in characterization and representation, what does that say about the position of the female in patriarchal Arab contexts? And how does translation complicate the representation of women in Shakespearean appropriations? To answer these questions, I will be comparing how representations of women, and the factor of gender more broadly, differ in translation across four adaptations. I will examine how gender was translated and represented on stage in Shakespearean appropriations and what that shows about the operation of gender in various Arab societies. While looking at how gender operates more generally, the study will also look at and discuss the roles that women have played in both the translation and production aspect of the Arab Shakespearean adaptations.

The Nahda and Revival of Arab Theater

What exactly constitutes the 'Arab World'? This blanket phrase covers a large area of land and peoples each with different dialects, customs, and cultural values despite being, often, neighboring countries. Looking back at history, one can see that parts of the region were previously British mandates (Iraq and Palestine) or protectorates (Egypt). Thus, the increased influence of Shakespeare on Arab literature in these countries is quite fitting. [2] This interest in Shakespearean reception has also extended, however, to parts of the Arab world that were under the French Mandate, which includes territories such as modern-day Syria and Lebanon. This shows how pervasive Shakespeare's influence was on not only the British, but the French as well, and that interest spread across linguistic, imperial, and national boundaries in various ways to the Arab world and its literature.

So, when exactly did Shakespeare become an important marker in Arab culture? Shakespeare began to be translated during the Arab Nahda. The Nahda, sometimes translated into English as “Renaissance” or “Awakening,” occurred in the second half of the 19th century and lasted well into the twentieth century. At first one of the Nahda’s goals was translation for military reasons and reform, it then spread to the cultural realm to promote the spread of cultural and scientific knowledge to the Arab world (Hourani 53). One of the ways that Arab scholars hoped to promote dialogue between the two cultural worlds was through the translation of Western foreign works into Arabic, and one of these foreign writers was Shakespeare. Arab translators of Shakespeare were very liberal with the translations specifically tailored to appeal to an Arab audience (Tomiche, “Nahda”).[3] The fidelity of the Shakespearean translations to the original plays would later become a subject for debate by literary enthusiasts, language purists, and the theater directors and producers who were concerned with increasing their ticket sales and revenue (Bayer, “Martyrs of Love” 3).

---

[2] In the aftermath of WWI, the League of Nations (the precursor to the United Nations), awarded both Britain and France Ottoman Arab territories in accordance with the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1918; these lands were considered mandates. Protectorates are like mandates in that they are under foreign control, but they were acquired by force rather than bestowed upon the European powers as remuneration.

Consequently, scholars have argued that Arab writers utilized Shakespeare in different ways for different purposes. For example, some realized Shakespeare’s capacity to be subversive and used him to evade censorship and discuss sensitive political issues. For example, Sulayman Al-Bassam’s *Richard III, an Arab Tragedy* was performed in 2008 in Damascus with President Bashar Al Assad in attendance, even though the play foregrounded issues of “internecine and bloody struggle” and questioned the legitimacy of Arab rulers (Al-Bassam 70). Syria’s censorship apparatus is immense, and it is highly unlikely that a play that implicitly criticizes Arab rulers would be staged and performed. However, the association with Shakespeare was probably what allowed the play to pass the test. Furthermore, in 2008, Damascus was voted the cultural capital of the Arab world, and at times, the regime would allow oppositional art to be showcased and performed to show other countries and the people how great, liberal, and modern it is (Cooke 72).[4] Therefore, the regime's own self-interest could be another reason that allowed Al Bassam's play to be performed at the time. The Syrian regime is not alone in using oppositional art and Shakespeare for their own gain. Other Arab writers realized Shakespeare's appeal and cultural capital and hoped to use this to their own advantage, as well thereby attracting people to the theater and attaining prestige. Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser loved Shakespeare-themed plays and encouraged the production of Shakespearean plays like *Hamlet* as he considered Shakespeare part of a 'world-class theater' that would help put Egyptian theater on the map (Litvin 38). These examples are representative of how scholarship revolving around the Arab appropriation of Shakespeare has been very focused on the political capacity of Shakespeare. And when one discusses political theater, one must discuss the concept of subversion and containment. "Subversion and containment" is a phrase coined by Stephen Greenblatt in his seminal essay, "Invisible Bullets," where the presence of political power—in both politics and theater—and the resistance to that power is quickly quelled before the audience is aware of what transpired. Shakespeare's works contain plenty of subversive energy that can be woven into the appropriations so as to send encoded messages to the audience. All the while this subversiveness is successfully contained by the medium of drama or the literariness of the Shakespearean language, not only in English, but also when translated and further adapted into Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic.

---

[3] Recently the discourse around on the Nahda is breaking out of the dichotomy of East and West and the translation of Western work into Arabic. For more on the resurgence of Nahda studies in Arab political thought see Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss’s recent volume *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda*.

---

[4] For more information on oppositional art in Syria see and Lisa Wedeen's book *Ambiguities of Domination: Politic, Rhetorics, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*.

Other scholars have been interested in how the Arab appropriation of Shakespeare has resulted in a genre of drama and literature concerned with or considered as "writing back" to the British Empire. [5] Some of the plays that are most frequently appropriated by Arab writers because of their political content are *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, and *Julius Caesar*. Other plays like *Othello, Anthony and Cleopatra*, and *The Merchant of Venice* are appropriated because they deal with the idea of a person as the Other by exploring themes such as race and class. *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear* have also been adapted to be performed on the Arab stage as they deal with the theme of familial relations and obligations. However, much of the scholarship concerning Shakespearean reception has revolved around Shakespeare's tragedies such as *Hamlet*, with some emphasis on *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Richard III*, and *The Merchant of Venice*.

In this study, I am comparing how the representation of women differs in translation across three Arab appropriations of *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *and King Lear*, as each of these plays exists both in Arabic and in English. In doing so, I will explore how "local Shakespeare" in the Arab world differs from the globalized Anglophone Shakespeare that Britain wanted to export to the Global South by looking at translations of Shakespeare's plays and their "frames of cultural reference and poetics" (Damrosch 5). By looking at both tragedies and comedies, I am exploring how genre affects the representation of gender on the stage. This is especially significant given that only a few studies in the Arab world focus on Shakespeare's comedies, although that is slowly changing. More scholars have become interested in Arab Shakespearean comedies, such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. The latter has been particularly interesting because it tells the story of Katherine, an unruly woman who refuses to get married. She later marries Petruchio and is tamed in the eyes of society. The narrative of unruly women allowed Arab audiences to discuss their own opinions about marriage and the importance of maintaining order by fulfilling gender roles. In addition to looking at how genre may or may not affect female agency, I will be analyzing female characters in each of these appropriations by Arab dramatists with a focus on how such texts and the tradition of translation that lie behind them create different and potentially subversive opportunities for representations of female agency than were present in the Elizabethan Shakespearean texts. From the analysis of the texts, I will then be able to further reflect upon the relationship that exists between Arab women, the female characters on stage, and women involved in cultural production.

---

[5] Appropriation is a term usually laden with negative and often political connotations, but I want to use it more neutrally. I might use the word, along with the word adaptation interchangeably, but I prefer the term appropriation because it signifies that something is being taken from somewhere or someone more clearly than adaptation. I am using Stephen Greenblatt's 'subversion' to mean challenging or threatening the current source of both political as well as patriarchal authority. He establishes the dialectic of subversion and containment to be better able to discuss works of art in authoritarian regimes but does not give a concrete definition of the term.

Shakespeare and Arab Female Agency

Shakespearean appropriations may contain subversive political messages, but they might also be socially and culturally subversive, particularly if they feature strong female characters that resist the patriarchy. By the play's end, however, all this subversive energy is "contained" by the same power that produced it in the first place. Moreover, many of the appropriated texts feature powerful Ophelia and Gertrude characters, and they stand in stark contrast to the subdued Ophelia in the Shakespearean version of Hamlet. For example, in Al Assadi's *Forget Hamlet*, originally titled *Ophelia's Window*, it is Ophelia who figures out that Claudius killed the late king because she saw the old king's murder. This Ophelia is very different from her Shakespearean counterpart, as she is the one who tells Hamlet to get himself to a "monastery" and ridicules him, and thus the two characters' undergo a role reversal in this play. Ophelia, here, has more agency or the ability to make choices and act on them. The audience identifies and is encouraged to cheer for Ophelia as she tries to uncover the truth about Old Hamlet's murder and stir Hamlet to action. Even Gertrude has a more fleshed out and less complacent character. For example, she frequently says that the "feeling of shame is killing [her]" and is thus very unlike her Shakespearean counterpart, who is painted to be a shameless adulteress by Hamlet (Carlson et al. 262). One ends up feeling more sympathy for Gertrude as she appears remorseful and more human.

In *Twelfth Night*, the female characters do possess a surprising level of agency as Olivia is able to choose her own partner/husband, unlike Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, for example. Shakespeare has fun playing around with gender as he does in most of his comedies, and Sulayman Al-Bassam uses that to his advantage in his work *The Speaker's Progress* to show how bending the limits of gender frees people using metatheater. Having no nuance or tolerance for different categories of gender and sexuality other than the heteronormative model stifles people and prevents them from expressing who they are. In this work, the strict Arab notions of what it means to be feminine or the masculine are subverted, which is especially evident in the play within a play where the characters on the stage become actors and play different parts regardless of their gender, in order to reenact a theatrical piece from the "Golden Age of Theater" (which unbeknownst to characters is an Arab adaptation of *Twelfth Night*) for state records (Al Bassam 195).

Unlike the other two works, the modern Lebanese adaptation of *King Lear*—my third case study—does not deviate in content from the original Shakespearean plot. Instead, this adaptation focused mainly on adapting Shakespearean language to the Lebanese vernacular. The collaborators on the production, Sahar Assaf, Robert Myers, and Nada Saab wanted to make Shakespeare more accessible to the everyday Lebanese public and not only elite connoisseurs of literature. Their other goal was to make literature, and by extension, Shakespeare, appear universal as he wrote about common woes. King Lear’s abdication and the turmoil that ensues is especially relevant to a Lebanese person because his divided kingdom is reminiscent of the sectarian divisions that emerged and permeated almost every aspect of Lebanese society during the Lebanese Civil War which lasted from 1975-1990. One of the things that I particularly enjoyed about the translation was that the translators were not hesitant to use both Arabic and English to the fullest to produce wordplay that was not originally in the play. And, given Shakespeare's love of punning and wordplay, such multilingual wordplay felt natural and tremendously added to the play. Frequently, I would be listening to the actors speaking, but my eyes would be on the English surtitles projected on the stage. It was these moments of multilingual wordplay that made me pay more attention to the vernacular Arabic. The idea that children should honor, respect, and take good care of their parents when they grow older is also important in Arab culture, and so the audience would deeply sympathize with King Lear especially after both his daughters disrespect him, and they would understand the gravity of Lear’s curse of sterility upon Goneril. However, they would also understand the burden that Goneril and Regan must bear when taking care of their father, who has ceased to be responsible for the kingdom and the actions of his retinue. Therefore, Goneril and Regan’s resentment is also understandable, but the degree to which they disrespect and humiliate their father might seem deplorable to an Arab audience. Therefore, by analyzing the different portrayals of Shakespeare’s female characters and the considerable power they wield on stage, perhaps one can extrapolate how much power and agency Arab women have over their own lives.

But what happens to *Hamlet* and other Shakespeare plays if there is no prince or hero? Would the plays still be *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, or would they change? Furthermore, what does the presence of women with a sense of agency tell us about women and politics in the Middle East? I hope that my research makes a contribution to revitalizing and redirecting feminist research to new avenues to avoid what Kathryn Schwartz calls a "static center" ("Just Imagine" 17). Schwartz's essay is focused on "bodily lines of descent" and what effect matrilineal lines of descent have in Shakespearean history plays (15). She is very much concerned that the subfield of feminism within Shakespeare Studies will become overly obsessed with cementing its place within Shakespearean scholarship and will become blind to opportunities and questions that might pop up when one starts looking at things differently. That is why I decided to look at Arab Shakespeares beyond just the lens of politics. While the appropriations can be a battleground for political "subversion and containment," I find that they can be a battleground for feminist subversion and containment as well, mainly because feminism and politics are very much intertwined, as Phyllis Rackin points out (8). The Arab Ophelias and Olivias and Cordelias can be more powerful than the men around them and can try to resist male characters' control, but their threat to the Arab patriarchal order is still contained at the end of the plays. And the question still stands: can we reclaim Shakespeare on our own terms?

Shakespeare, Arab Theater, and Translation

The field of Shakespearean Studies has become more open to non-traditional approaches such as studying Shakespearean adaptations and appropriations from other parts of the world, not just Britain, and rightly so. Shakespeare frequently used the cosmopolitan environment around him to his advantage as integrated different cultures and peoples of different races, ethnicities, and/or belief systems in his plays to alert his audience to the diverse nature of the world around them. Stephen Greenblatt claims that this inclusion of a diverse array of characters that represent the Other could have had subversive potential, and therefore allowed the audience to interrogate the social and cultural norms that governed Elizabethan England ("Invisible Bullets" 65). Arab dramatists, whether they are writing in Arabic or in English are often aware of his plays' potential and used this potential to their advantage to show their audiences that the world that they are privy to is more complicated than it seems.

Modern Arab theater as we know it today only started to develop after the translation of foreign European works from French and Italian to Arabic. Before that, Arab theater consisted of "passion plays, marionette and shadow plays, mimicry and other popular farces" (Landau et al. "Masrah"). However, after Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to Egypt translated and adapted foreign plays, they allowed a different type of drama to emerge, with Egypt at the center. *Hamlet* was first staged in Arabic in Cairo by Iskandar Farah in 1901. Farah commissioned Tanyus Abdu to translate *Hamlet*, and the theater audience loved his translations even though Abdu made very liberal changes to the text. Much of the research on Shakespearean appropriation has been conducted through the lens of translation. When his plays got into the hands of Arab scholars from French sources, they translated them from French into Arabic in 1884 (Ghazoul 1). The French language even during Shakespeare's time was more technical and precise than Elizabethan English, and that may be why the Shakespeare that so many Arabs are familiar with is more flowery and sometimes stylistically more operatic than the lines of iambic pentameter and blank verse that the Anglophone audience is used to (Litvin 3).

Furthermore, many lines of Shakespearean plays could have been mistranslated and/or altered because the translator also wanted to write the Arabic version of one of Shakespeare's plays in blank verse (Tounsi 93). Shakespeare's language is difficult enough for modern English speakers, so one can imagine how difficult it would be for Arab translators to invoke the same level of meaning present in plays like *Hamlet* in Arabic. Ferial J. Ghazoul's article, "The Arabization of *Othello*" discusses how translators of Shakespeare wanted to make him more relatable to the Arab audience. For example, some translators change Othello's name to 'Utayl, while others keep the character as Othello, and that has different implications for Othello's character. Others would change minor things, like European money into dinars and dirhams, to make the play more accessible to an Arab audience. Ghazoul notes that translators were also interested in criticism, and they sought to find ways to claim that Othello was, in fact, an Arab play, or that Shakespeare was an Arab (which may be why the Sheik el Zubair joke finds its way in most articles that discuss the Arab Shakespeare), to validate their sense of worth. While focusing on translation in Shakespearean scholarship is an entirely valid approach, research on translations should not only focus on the fidelity and quality of Arabic translations of the English and compare the two languages to one another. Scholars could also look at how the differences in the translations affect the characterizations of the different characters on stage. They could also look into how the audiences received different translations and what reception reflects about the social and cultural values in which the translations emerged.

Some of the renowned translators of Shakespeare are Khalil Mutran and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra. Khalil Mutran (1872-1949) was an Arab poet who translated both *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* into Arabic (Al-Shetawi 12). Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1919-1994) was a

Palestinian author, painter, and literary critic who later settled in Baghdad. Each translator used his own knowledge and intuition when translating Shakespeare. According to Sameh Hanna in his article “Decommercialising Shakespeare: Mutran's Translation of ‘*Othello*,’” Mutran’s translations were received favorably by Arab literary critics and helped maintain Shakespeare’s association with high culture. Mutran was also very concerned with “Arabizing” his Shakespeare plays and promoting the cause of Arabism. Jabra, on the other hand, favored the literal approach, which emphasized word for word translation (Al-Thebyan et al. 64). Jabra’s approach is problematic because people unfamiliar with the English version would have a difficult time understanding the metaphors, puns, and allusions that are replete in Shakespeare’s plays. However, his translations have been praised for the depth of his knowledge and subtle feeling for language. The fact that Arab translators made their own stylistic choices when translating Shakespearean texts supports Charles Martindale's theoretical claim of translations being themselves interpretations of the original text (13). He argues that texts are always "in production" and—in a Derridean sense—leave traces of themselves that are continually changing depending on the context that one reads it in (16). Claire Colebrook also looks at texts and the contexts in which they are written through a Derridean lens, and thus she points out that “any sense or understanding of context would be different than the context itself” (“The Context of Humanism” 706). Thus, translations and adaptations of Shakespeare gave rise to and inspired the creative process in the Arab world more generally, dramatists used and interpreted Shakespeare's works to match their current state of affairs and to help the audience reflect about their lives, which were of course, very different from Shakespeare’s context in Elizabethan England.

No matter what approach translators used1, their translations inspired many Arab authors and dramatists to use Shakespeare in their own work. For example, *Romeo and Juliet*’s adaptation into Arabic influenced the Arab novelist Tawfiq al-Hakim; thus, Shakespearean appropriations contributed Arab literary tradition by galvanizing the imagination of different Arab writers (Bayer, "The Emergence of the Arab Cultural Consumer" 7). One adaptation that Egyptian audiences loved was the same one that influenced Tawfiq al-Hakim –"The Martyrs of Love" by Najib Haddad, a musical adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Even though this play was very different from the source text, the blending of Eastern and Western motifs helped make Shakespeare accessible to an Arab audience. This play also influenced Arab writers such as Tawfiq al Hakim. Thus, appropriations of Shakespeare helped spur the growth of Arab writers, who would contribute greatly to the Arab literary tradition (Bayer, "Emergence" 7).

Furthermore, the extensive research done on Shakespearean plays such as *Othello* that deal explicitly with the theme of race shows how much of the scholarship available on Shakespeare appropriations has been conducted from a postcolonial perspective, very much concerned with how Arab Shakespearean plays have been writing back to the English. Mahmoud Al-Shetawi, in his article "Arab Adaptations of Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory," analyzes three contemporary Arab adaptations of *Othello* after also giving the reader a historical background into Anglophone adaptations of Shakespeare. He adequately sums up the three main reasons that Arab authors used Shakespeare (that recur in other books and articles on the subject): they strove to honor him and elevate themselves in the process, or they used him to" condemn colonization," or they used him when discussing political repression and the ineffectuality of governments in their own countries (8). My research, although it acknowledges the postcolonial perspective, differs from most of the scholarly work done in that it aims to look at Shakespeare from three different angles and widens the base of evidence relating to

Shakespeare's influence on the Arab world in terms of gender and translation—and in conjunction with those two aspects—women in cultural production.

Shakespeare and Arab Cultural Values

Although he was very much aware of how Shakespeare's status as a cultural icon targets the elite, Mark Bayer chooses to look at reception differently in "The Martyrs of Love and the Emergence of the Arab Cultural Consumer." He examines why Najib al-Haddad's 1890 translation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* called the *Martyrs of Love* (*Shuhada al Gharam)* was successful among Egyptian audiences despite it not being completely faithful to Shakespeare's version. Instead, translators and theater directors syncretized the Shakespearean text with Arabic music and themes like "Sufi mysticism" (7). Bayer acknowledges that Arab dramatists and producers were aware of the literary elites in Egypt who judge Shakespearean performances according to their faithfulness to the Elizabethan play. But theater patrons wanted an Arab middle class who could afford to go to the theater to be able to relate to the material that was being presented to them, and that is why the Shakespeare adaptations of the time featured themes that emphasized the values of family and religion.

Even though adapting Shakespeare to an Arab context is part of a longstanding tradition, it was still a major concern in the 20th century. Arab filmmakers in Egypt were primarily concerned with how to use Shakespeare to reaffirm their values.[6] Other Arab Shakespearean films like *Ah Min Hawwa* were mainly concerned with the place of women in society. When analyzing an Arab film adaptation of the comedy "The Taming of the Shrew," Yvette Khoury illustrates how Faten Abdel Wahhab's film *Ah Min Hawwa*—also known internationally as *Beware of Eve*— "validates aspects of the sociopolitical environment of Egypt in the 1960s" (147). She also draws parallels between the status and state of women in Elizabethan England and women in 1960s Egypt and finds it surprising that the East and the West are very similar to one another. In the article, she demonstrates how Shakespeare has been tailored to appeal to Arab and Islamic values, showcasing the consequences of women being disrespectful and forgetting their place in a male-dominated world. Wahhab's film is the one clear example of how Arab filmmakers and playwrights use Shakespeare's plays to reinforce how women should comport themselves to maintain Arab cultural and social norms. I briefly mention films here because they play an important role in the sphere of adaptations; furthermore, both films and the theater serve to entertain and educate simultaneously.[7]

---

[6] Some films like Youssef Chahine's trilogy: Iskanderiya, Leh? (Alexandria, Why?), Haddouta Misriya (An Egyptian Tale) and Iskanderiya Kaman wa Kaman (Alexandria, Now and Forever) used Shakespeare, and *Hamlet*, in particular, to discuss themes such as nationalism and express anti-colonial sentiments. It is interesting to note that both Gertrude and Ophelia are absent in the films. For more on Shakespeare in film, see Stauffer 42-43.

In the more recent and modern Arabized Shakespearean appropriations, the Ophelias, Cordelias, Violas, and Gertrudes do not fulfill their required gender roles and go beyond what Arab society might deem as acceptable female behavior. Sometimes, these female characters have even more agency to rebel against the male characters that try to limit their actions but miserably fail to do so. Thus, one can see how historical and social context that an adaptation is situated in could affect and/or change it. However, Mamdouh Adwan's play *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* was produced only fifteen years after *Ah Min Hawwa* came out. Perhaps geography plays a role here, but Syria is just as conservative as Egypt. The question that most interests me is: when extrapolating from theater, why have female characters been portrayed with considerable agency to oppose their male counterparts?

---

[7] Due to the limited scope of this study, I will be sticking to analyzing theater, rather than discussing Shakespearean film adaptations. However, the number of films that have been adapted from Shakespeare's works deserve recognition.

Shakespeare and the Politics of Language Translation

Translators worked painstakingly hard to make sure that their translations of Shakespeare were either suitable for the reader or suitable for a stage audience, and translations were written in fus' ha or Classical Arabic rather than ‘ammiyeh or colloquial Arabic. This is because fus' ha Arabic with its elevated status as the language of the Quran and the Divine was considered the language register that was most apt for literature and translation, especially for Shakespeare’s plays, which retained a marker of cultural significance in Arab theater. ‘Ammiyeh, often called the language of the streets, was, however, considered vulgar and deemed an inappropriate medium for cultural exchange, except in the case of local Egyptian theater, which depended heavily on ‘ammiyeh productions to boost audience attendance and remain viable in the market.

The move to writing and staging plays in colloquial Arabic is not a recent phenomenon, but it is one that is often met with an attitude of disapproval. Egypt was at the center of drama translation and production during the Nahda and produced plays in fus’ha Arabic, so it is not surprising that the move toward the translation and staging of plays in ‘ammiyeh started there as well. According to Sameh Hanna in his book *Bourdieu in Translation Studies: The Socio-cultural Dynamics of Shakespeare Translation in Egypt*, the first European plays to be translated into ‘ammiyeh were not Shakespeare but Racine’s tragedies and Moliere’s comedies translated by Muhammed Uthman Jalal in the 1870s and 1890s (180-181). The failure of his tragedies compared to the success of his comedies established ‘ammiyeh as the language of comedy plays, which cemented its reputation for being the vulgar, everyday language of the people. That same year the British Arabist William Willocks was one of the first people to translate extracts of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Henry IV* into ‘ammiyeh, but he was either ignored by cultural circles or met with great suspicion as a foreigner who wanted to impose an imperial agenda through his radical ideas about the use of ‘ammiyeh not just in comedies, but as a legitimate literary medium (Hanna 182).

In the early 1980s, the Shakespearean comedies, *The Merry Wives of Windsor, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *As You Like It* were translated and staged in ‘ammiyeh and the playhouses were fully booked. However, the translations were not well received by journalists who wrote scathing reviews in newspapers concerned with the “degradation” of Shakespeare and his language (Selaiha). This is ironic because Shakespeare wrote in the vernacular and his plays targeted both his patrons and the general populace of Elizabethan England, there was no elitism in his plays. It was not until 1984, that Nu' man Ashur, an Egyptian playwright published his translation of *Othello* in ‘ammiyeh that Shakespeare tragedies were once again translated into the colloquial, but not without great uproar. In 1988, Mustafa Safwan published another translation of Othello in the vernacular and denounced the designation of Classical Arabic as the better language for cultural and political exchange, pointing to the social and cultural isolation of the lower classes from that of the elite happening all across Arab societies because of the different language registers (Selaiha). After Ashour, Safwan, and many other Egyptian playwrights popularized the vernacular in their plays, it became a more acceptable cultural medium that served to bridge sociocultural gaps at least in Egypt.

Other Arab countries have yet to contend with the glowing halo that surrounds Shakespeare’s works and the possibility of translating them into other colloquial dialects. In Lebanon, Sahar Assaf along with Nada Saab and Raffi Feghali translated, produced, and staged *King Lear* into Lebanese ‘ammiyeh as part of the celebrations of the 400th anniversary of

Shakespeare’s death. The performance of *Al Malik Lear* was met with mixed reviews. People were surprised by the use of colloquial Arabic, and they were either comparing it to Shakespeare’s Elizabethan English, lamenting that the language lost much of its aesthetic or they were impressed by the tremendous undertaking to make Shakespeare more accessible to a local Lebanese audience.

The Global Kaleidoscope and the Reception of Women in Arab Shakespeares

Once again, it is important to note that appropriation is a term usually laden with negative and often political connotations, but I want to use it more neutrally. The appropriations I analyze here have taken Shakespeare and when staged have produced something entirely their own, something they can call Arab rather than a rendition of Elizabethan drama. Therefore, I claim that theater in the Arab world acts as a societal mirror for the perpetuation or subversion of cultural norms. As such, theater as much as any other art form contributes to the field of cultural production. Here, I use Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of cultural production as a field that takes into account the “material” and “symbolic” production of cultural works of art which includes the “producers of meaning” and the “conditions for social production” that surround the work of art (Bourdieu 37). I look at how women as "producers of meaning" and at how the drama they produce challenges the current conditions for the production of social and cultural norms that have been predominantly informed by the opinions of men, who are looked up to as agents of culture.

I use Margaret Litvin’s global kaleidoscope theory as a theoretical framework for my study. It looks at the relationship between Shakespearean plays and the forces that have shaped the Arab adaptations of Shakespeare while considering the sociocultural practices and intertextuality present between the two texts. Culture and the written word are no longer looked at in binary terms of "East" vs. "West" or "colonizer" and "colonized" because they are not simple, discrete categories. Culture and the different factors that influence literature are fluid and ever-changing. Most critics working with what is now called Arab Shakespeare have advanced the claim that Shakespeare has been used as a gimmick for political commentary and this is widely and implicitly understood by various Arab audiences, who recognize the cultural and political value of Shakespeare. This has conditioned the dominant narrative of the political analysis of Arab Shakespearean appropriations. While Litvin looks at the relationship between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the diverse array of Hamlets that Arabs have been introduced to and how they interacted with these Hamlets since Gamal Abdel Nasser's rise to power in Egypt in 1952, I want to pivot from her political analysis by addressing the issue of gender in translation in the field, rather than devoting more research to the political implications of Arab Shakespeare.

To study the reception of particular Arab Shakespeares, I chose three Shakespearean plays: *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, and *King Lear*, and I analyze one or more Arab appropriations of each of these plays. All these plays have an unspecified setting but are undoubtedly influenced by different sociopolitical Arab contexts. I chose multiple authors from different Arab countries because I want to include dramaturgy from various places in the Arab world. Due to the limited scope of this study, however, I have chosen to focus on authors like Mamdouh Adwan, who hails from Syria; Jawad Al-Assadi who is an Iraqi playwright and has lived in both Syria, Lebanon, and most recently Morocco; Sulayman Al Bassam, who is a half-British half Kuwaiti playwright currently living in Kuwait, as well as the co-translated Lebanese adaptation of *King Lear* into Lebanese Arabic.

In this study, I use an intersectional feminist framework to examine how translation and gender converge in the text of the adaptations as well as the field of cultural production to open new modes of inquiry here. It struck me while doing research that before 2004, there were very few female translators of Shakespeare into Arabic, yet I would always hear and read names of male translators like Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and Mohammad Enani. In the West, according to feminist critics Luise von Flotow and Sherry Simon, translation is frequently considered a feminine task and thus given little importance (12). In the Arab world, translation was never explicitly gendered, but as a field has remained in the clutches of men. After some research, I found that Fatma Moussa Mahmoud, an Egyptian literary scholar, translated *King Lear* into Arabic in 1985. Her translation was staged at the National Theater of Egypt in 2002 with Egyptian actor Yahya El Fakharani in the title role (Donaldson). In 2015, Margaret Litvin began in collaboration with Joy Arab to translate some Arab adaptations of Shakespeare into English, and with Marvin Carlson, published their book-length collection of Arab Shakespearean drama *Four Arab Hamlet Plays*. *King Lear* seems to be a favorite among Arab female translators as another Arab Shakespeare translation project of *King Lear* was underway with the collaboration of the Professors Sahar Assaf, Nada Saab, and Robert Myers. *Al-Malik Lear* was performed in honor of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death in Al Madina Theater in the first week of December in 2016. Throughout this study, I hope to show how involved women are in the field of cultural production in the Arab world because it cannot be reduced to an androcentric field.

Structure of the Present Study

The next chapter will discuss adaptations of *Hamlet* because it has been the most appropriated Shakespearean play in the Arab world since *Hamlet* deals with the problem of succession, which is still very relevant today. Alternatively, perhaps Arab dramatists were attracted to Hamlet's paralysis and indecision because it reflected the political helplessness that the dramatists, and society writ large, felt after the humiliating Arab loss in the Six Day War. This chapter briefly glosses over the historical background of Arab theater and Arab translators of Shakespeare like Jabra Ibrahim Jabra. The bulk of the chapter, however, will focus on the intersection of gender in *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* (*Hamlet Yastayqidh Muta'akhiran*) by Mamdouh Adwan and *Forget Hamlet* (*Insu Hamlet*) by Jawad al-Assadi. More specifically, I want to examine how both Ophelia and Gertrude's presence in these Arabized plays, complicate, if at all, the action in the play. Chapter three will focus on the intersection of gender in Sulayman Al-Bassam's adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, called *The Speaker's Progress*. The fourth chapter deals with *King Lear* being translated from Shakespearean English and adapted into the Lebanese vernacular ('ammiyeh) and staged with the actors speaking not Modern Standard Arabic, as Shakespearean translations often are, but rather Lebanese Arabic. I will comment briefly on the heteroglossic nature of the Arabic language and compare how the translation into 'ammiyyeh differs from the Modern Standard Arabic version–with Jabra's translation acting as the primary source of material – and what this means for the future of Arabic as a language in performance. What was censored in the translation and where does the translation silence Cordelia, Regan, or Goneril or give them agency? Throughout all the chapters, I examine how women are represented in the different Arab plays. What does that say about Arab females and the society that they need to contend with? How is carnality, for example, represented (in some of the plays), if at all, and how does the female body figure/change in the translations?

CHAPTER ONE

OPHELIA RISES, GERTRUDE WAKES UP LATE: FEMININE ROLE REVERSAL IN ARAB HAMLET PLAYS

"Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size."

–Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

Shakespeare's reception in the Global South has become a focus of modern Shakespeare scholarship in association with the umbrella term Global Shakespeares, which became popular after the Globe to Globe Festival in 2012 (Litvin et al. 2015). This study is concerned specifically with what scholars now call Arab Shakespeare, a field that rose to prominence after 2007. Within the field, scholarship has primarily focused on the political and cultural motives driving Arab writers when staging Shakespeare or Shakespearean appropriations in the Middle East. In a region tormented by fragmented politics and constant foreign interference and one where politics is a common subject of discussion among different strata of the population, it is understandable that the theater it produces should be political and that this would draw the majority of "first-generation" critical interest. But even if Arab theater is designated as political theater or some plays are considered political allegories, there is more to Arab theater, and many aspects await fuller exploration.

Partly as a result of its orientation towards national and international politics, the young field of Arab Shakespeares has focused primarily on Arab adaptations of *Hamlet* as well as other tragedies—plays that most obviously resonate with the Arab audience's familiarity with politics and the power struggles that ensue as a result of challenges to the status quo. Before that, scholars who gave Arab Shakespeare any attention tended to study Shakespearean reception by focusing on the topic of translation and examined how Arab appropriations differed from the Shakespearean original and how the Arabization of Shakespeare catered to specific audiences and the class differences between them by Arabizing the character's names or avoiding references to Roman gods, for example. While focusing on translation in Shakespearean scholarship is a valid approach, research on translations need not only concern itself with the fidelity and quality of the Arabic translations. Gender is one example of a topic that is understudied needs to be addressed with regards to translation in Arabic.

Since its inception, dramaturgy has almost always been an androcentric enterprise. For example, when the ancient Greeks invented the dramatic arts, women were not involved in public acting nor the commercial theater-making process. That exclusion continued well into Shakespeare's time, and it was only after the Restoration in 1660 that women became directly involved in public theater as actors and writers (Cockin 19). It comes as no surprise then that when European theater was introduced to the Arab world via colonialism through the works of Moliere and Shakespeare that women did not take part in it. That is not to say that theater or Arab drama did not exist in different forms before the Arab Nahda.

On the contrary, "indigenous genres" of Arab drama include, according to Roger Allen, the ta'ziya play, a ritualized performance of mourning that grieves the loss of Husain during the battle of Karbala' in 680 A.D. (195). In addition to ta'ziya plays, another example of public performance includes shadow plays, mostly attributed to an Egyptian author known as ibn Daniyal where puppets were manipulated behind a screen, and the audience could see their shadows as their story unfolds (195). Despite a theater tradition of their own, nineteenth-century Egyptians were wary of everything European or foreign, they looked down on European theater, accusing people, most often of elite society who attended theater of wasting their time or pandering to European tastes and betraying their Arab identity and religion (Hanna 30-31). After theater became less of an elite activity and was available to middle-class consumers during the Nahda, religious scholars and other proponents of culture thought about how theater could help their cause to bridge the gap between the West and the Arab Muslim world. Thus, they turned to drama because many people in the Arab world were illiterate or uneducated, and the spectacle was the perfect way in which to communicate and reinforce national and cultural values. Shakespeare proved a sturdy yet adaptable bridge. Theater also provided the opportunity for women to become more active in the performing arts. The next section provides a brief discussion of the issue of gender and the difficulties women faced when they participated in Arab theater and the public sphere at large.

Women in Arab Theater

In 1870, when Syrian dramatist Abu Khalil Qabbani wanted to cast a woman in his play, his playhouse was shut down. Said al Ghabra, a prominent Syrian sheik at the time, strongly condemned women being in the theater and spoke personally to the Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid saying, “We have realized, O Commander of the Faithful, that immorality and debauchery have spread in the Levant, [family] honor has been destroyed and the virtue has died, and the women have mixed with men” (Ismail 2009). As in Elizabethan England, women in the Arab world were discouraged from acting onstage because having women singing and dancing unveiled onstage was antithetical to Muslim values as “nothing in Islam permits women to participate in this art form" (qtd in Allen, *A Period of Time*, 369). Cultural values that confined women to the private sphere rather than the public sphere encouraged women to stay away from acting in theater. Thus, the gender landscape of Arab adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare has been male, whether we are looking at the stage or the mechanisms of cultural production.

A career as a stage actress was not something many women aspired to because they had to deal with the societal pressure that encouraged women to remain at home and raise children, to maintain the status quo. Moreover, acting did not have the greatest of reputations because women who did act in the theater came from poor, disadvantaged backgrounds and did what they could to support their families. Therefore, before Arab women were able to act on stage, they wrote for the stage. Zaynab Fawwaz was one of the first female dramatists and her play Love and Faithfulness (الهوى و الوفاء), published in 1892 only eight years after the translation of *Othello* into Arabic, was the first play written in Arabic by a woman (Ali). She was also a novelist and newspaper columnist and regularly conducted literary salons managed by her husband, and attendees could discuss important and contemporary social issues, especially the emancipation of women. Eventually, women who came from a Christian background in the Levant like Marie Soufan, Milia Dian, and Esther Chakkah decided to take up acting in Egypt (Ali). Muslim Egyptian women were able to perform on stage with their male counterparts after the revolution of 1919, which ended the British occupation of Egypt, with female singers such as Munira al Mahdiyyah, who usually sang accompanied by a small ensemble, taking the lead (Ali). After al Mahdiyyah rose to stardom, other women followed in her footsteps.

Furthermore, Egyptian actresses frequently had other roles that contributed to women's participation in public life. For example, Rose (Fatma) al Yusuf was a journalist and founded a political magazine she named after herself; Fatma Rushdi (nicknamed the Sarah Bernhardt of the East) was a pioneer in both Egyptian theater and cinema (Ali).[8] When I looked through the reviews of the different plays that were staged at the time, the reviews rarely mentioned women. Even books that discuss modern Arab theater only cover the playwright who translated and/or adapted the Shakespearean adaptation and the male actors or singers in it like Sheikh Salama Hijazi, who was renowned for his singing voice and a favorite among audiences of the time. And even though women ran salons and became more involved in public life, writing in newspapers or writing novels and poetry, people involved in cultural production, usually men, chose not to focus on female narratives in theater.

When looking at the names of women in Shakespeare now, a few names come up. One of these names is the theater critic Nehad Selaiha (1945-2017), wife of renowned Shakespeare translator Mohamad Enani, known in Egypt by her epithet, The Lady of Criticism. She encouraged the rise of local Egyptian theater by funding the first independent theater and helping establish acting troupes. An academic by training, she wrote multiple books such as *Adwaa' Ala Al Masrah Al Englizy* (*Lights on English Theater*) and *Shakespeariyat* (*Shakespearean Snippets*). Another name that stood out was Fatima Moussa Mahmoud, an Egyptian literary scholar, who translated *King Lear* into Arabic in 2002. A decade later, a non-Arab female scholar Margaret Litvin became interested in translating not Shakespeare, but Arab Shakespeare adaptations. In 2015, Litvin in collaboration with Joy Arab and Marvin Carlson translated some

---

[8] Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) was a popular French stage actress who gained notoriety for being the first woman to play Hamlet in 1899 bending gender roles and receiving much criticism for her performance. She performed in a production of *Hamlet* at the Abbas Theater in Cairo in 1908.

Arab adaptations of Shakespeare into English and published their book-length collection of Arab Shakespearean drama *Four Arab Hamlet Plays*.

To begin the study, I first examine Shakespeare's reception in the Arab world, analyzing how Arab playwrights and audiences in different parts of the Arab world interacted with Shakespeare, not simply as a playwright but more as a cultural medium that helped Arab audiences reflect upon their social conditions. I will also discuss the processes of Shakespearean adaptation and appropriation in the Arab world. To provide a basis for the argument I put forward, I will refer to Margaret Litvin's theory of the "global kaleidoscope" as presented in her book *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghos*t. However, I pivot from Litvin's political focus to look at the theater as a specifically gendered space. Each of the chapters in this thesis aims to establish two goals. First, I explore the diversity among female characters in literary appropriations of two Hamlet plays, how those characters differ from their Shakespearean counterparts, and how they offer a different perspective on Shakespeare in the Arab world. Second, I examine how women contribute to and change Arab Shakespeares in cultural production. I discuss each aspect through the lens of gender, which has been crucially lacking in early work in Arab Shakespeares. According to Susan Bassnett, a scholar in both translation and comparative literature working on women and their participation in British theater history, the "changing status of women" who are involved in theater "still needs to be addressed," but scholars such as Katherine Hennessey, Yvette Khoury, and David Moberly are working to rectify that (87). I hope that the historicized and detailed philological analysis of female characters in translation as well as women in the cultural production of Arab adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare that my work provides will open up new avenues for research in Arab Shakespeare.

I intend to explore and examine the intersection of gender, women, and theater, arguing that paying attention to both female characters and women involved in the theater-making process can change our perception of the Arab theatrical landscape. This is pertinent to a field that has long focused on the political nature of Arab theater and how Shakespeare offers metaphors or allegories or pretext to shed light on the public affairs of Arab countries. Because of the recent political developments with the Arab Spring that analytical trend continues; those same events, however, are changing the gender relations and demographics in the region. Women are increasingly participating in the public sphere, stepping out of the shadows, and using theater as one of their tools. The strength of such an approach is that it provides a new angle into Arab Shakespeare scholarship where the conversation has been dominated by masculinist discourse.

In the Shakespearean *Hamlet*, Hamlet’s father's ghost tells him that he has been murdered by his uncle Claudius and calls upon Hamlet to avenge him. To prevent Hamlet's ascension to the throne, Claudius also married Hamlet's mother Gertrude and became king instead. Hamlet decides to verify the ghost's claim by feigning madness around the castle. He then contemplates the complexity of life and death while trying to grieve over his father's loss and finally takes action by resolving to kill his uncle. But Claudius also decides to kill Hamlet because he is a threat to his rule. Each character's plan backfires, and everyone except Hamlet's friend Horatio ends up dead. Ophelia, Hamlet’s love interest, appears whenever it serves the male characters like when her father Polonius wants her to entrap Hamlet. Unlike *Hamlet’s* Ophelia, the primary function of women in Arab Shakespearean theater is not simply to foster the male protagonist's development throughout the play. In Arab Hamlet plays, versions of both major female figures, Ophelia and Gertrude, are well-rounded characters who are often more aware of what is happening around them than Hamlet himself.

In this chapter, I argue that the female characters in the Arab Hamlet plays are dynamic characters that contribute significantly to the plot of the play, and in some cases, are the focal point around which the play revolves. Unlike Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, in these Arab versions, the female characters change as Ophelia and Gertrude switch roles. Furthermore, the Arab Ophelia, the Arab Gertrude, and even the female Arab Polonius that emerge in these adaptations and appropriations result from an amalgamation of a mix of multiple female Shakespearean characters. These character changes also lead to changes in the women’s characterizations and representation as they now have more lines and try to speak their mind. Their presence animates both the textsa and the productions as they do whatever is in their power to effect change in their lives and the lives of those they care about. The analysis of these plays reveals that despite common misconceptions regarding their lack of agency, Arab women are trying to make a difference in their societies despite the challenges they face.

Shakespeare and the Development of Arab Drama

Modern Arab theater as we know it today was significantly affected by the translation of foreign European works from French and Italian to Arabic. Before that, Arab theater consisted of “passion plays, marionette and shadow plays, mimicry and other popular farces” (Landau et al. “Masrah”). Plus, there is a long-standing tradition of Shakespearean adaptations, especially in

Egypt, ever since the initial translation of Shakespeare from French to Arabic in 1884 (Ghazoul 1). Shakespeare's influence is so pervasive that his work provided not only material for adaptations but also fueled the translation industry already at its peak during the Nahda. Translations of his plays range from being faithful to the original text to adaptations with minor references to Shakespeare recurring in the literature. In addition, Egyptians and the rest of the Arab world read and watched Shakespeare not translated from English, but from a combination of French, Italian, and Russian translations that pervaded the region (Litvin 3). However, after Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to Egypt translated and adapted foreign plays, they allowed a different type of drama to emerge, with Egypt at the center. *Hamlet* was first staged in Arabic in Cairo by Iskandar Farah in 1901. Farah commissioned Tanyus Abdu to translate Hamlet, and the theater audience loved his translations even though Abdu made liberal changes to the text.

Eventually, translations and adaptations of Shakespeare gave rise to and inspired the Arab creative process. One adaptation that audiences loved was "The Martyrs of Love" by Najib Haddad, a musical adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Even though this play was very different from the source text, the blending of Eastern and Western motifs helped make Shakespeare accessible to an Arab audience. This play also influenced Arab writers such as Tawfiq al Hakim. Thus, appropriations of Shakespeare also helped spur the growth of Arab writers, who would contribute greatly to the Arab literary tradition (Bayer, "Emergence" 7). For the sake of space, I will not provide a survey of the most popular adaptations and appropriations, especially those dealing with Hamlet in the Arab world. Margaret Litvin does an excellent job of that in her book *Hamlet's Arab Journey*. Instead, in this study I will examine two Arab Hamlet plays in detail, *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* by Mamdouh Adwan and *Forget Hamlet* by Jawad Al Assadi, focusing on gender and the roles the female characters play in these plays. For each play, I will devote a section to a female character to illustrate how different the Arab Ophelias and Gertrudes are from their Shakespearean counterparts and explore different ways they try to gain or use their agency through the course of the play.

Hamlet Wakes Up Late

The Syrian playwright Mamdouh Adwan (1941-2004) was a prolific writer well known within the Arab world. He wrote poetry, drama, four novels, and scripts for T.V. series. He also translated many works of literature from English to Arabic and regularly wrote for various newspapers in the region. In 1975, he adapted Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* into his own political satire *Hamlet Wakes Up Late*. In it, Hamlet is an ambiguous character because he is an intellectual and an artist, but he is politically uninvolved in his country's affairs. He is oblivious to the political corruption around him and is nonchalant about his uncle's ascension to the throne, obsessing only about his ethereal father's spirit. Meanwhile, Claudius is the conniving tyrant who will stop at nothing to further his own interests, and Polonius is at his beck and call, leaving the play’s women, Ophelia and Gertrude, free to try and take matters into their own hands.

Even though *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* is included in Litvin’s politicized Hamlet play category, I want to begin with it because it was one of the principal plays that precipitated the conversation around politicized Arab Shakespeare, but the account needs expansion to encompass women’s roles. Above all, it was the character of Hamlet and his circumstances that, Litvin argued, proved a fruitful source of recognition and reflection at the hands of Arab playwrights. Arab theater professionals have frequently considered their work political because the drama they produced tackled the political crises that emerged during their time. Therefore, Arab playwrights have used *Hamlet* to tackle issues related to collective suffering either as a result of political crises or under a belligerent dictator where Hamlet either emerges as the hero or helpless victim (Litvin 9). Agency related to matters of gender in Arab Shakespeare plays has only been briefly mentioned in the literature. Litvin mentions a couple of observations about Ophelia's character in the Arab Hamlet plays. She calls Ophelia the "moral light" of the Hamlet plays as well and points out that her empowerment in the plays, which she describes as "reluctant" is the result of the "failure of masculinity" in the world within which the plays operate (234-244). I have a slightly nuanced, different view of Litvin's claim that Ophelia's empowerment is the result of men's impotence in the face of violence. I posit that the men's lack of agency highlights Ophelia as well as Gertrude's ability to push for change around them. And rather than attributing a sense of hesitation and fear to the women's empowerment, I argue that the women are quite bold and operate as freely as they can while being conscious of society's grip on them.

Adwan's Ophelia

From the moment she interacts with Hamlet onstage in the first scene, one can tell that Adwan's Ophelia is bolder and more socially aware than her Shakespearean counterpart. After barging in on Hamlet and Horatio's conversation about the ghost of Hamlet's father, Ophelia vocalizes her displeasure and calls Horatio "annoying" when she hears Horatio refer to her as "flesh and blood" (لحم ودم), unlike the ghost that haunts Hamlet, thereby refusing the men's objectification of her (83). Once Horatio leaves them alone, Ophelia becomes more vivacious, kisses Hamlet on the cheek and asks how he is. He responds to her question dryly and moves away from her. Ophelia's bold behavior stands in stark contrast to Hamlet's withdrawn and distracted demeanor, and this characterization is unexpected, given that the Shakespearean

Hamlet approaches and starts conversations with Ophelia. Furthermore, Ophelia speaks to him in a cajoling manner and feels no qualms about persuading Hamlet to do what she wants, which shows she is the one who possesses most of the power in the relationship. When Hamlet forgets that he and Ophelia had a date the day before, Ophelia is not shy about expressing her feelings of disappointment. She scolds him for forgetting their rendezvous at night. Meanwhile, Hamlet is annoyed because Ophelia is oblivious to his bad mood, but Ophelia thinks Hamlet's indifference is a ploy to avoid her.

Ophelia's increased presence in Adwan's play causes her to develop as a character. Unlike Shakespeare's Ophelia, Adwan's Ophelia is bold, has excellent social skills, and can adapt to uncomfortable situations quickly. For example, when Ophelia hears the King and Queen approaching, she feigns a look of "terror" because she knows she is not supposed to be alone with Hamlet (86). She only does that to keep a cover of innocence around her father. Ophelia is very well-informed of how court affairs in Denmark work when she tells Hamlet, "No one will notice anything" if she and Hamlet sneak away from the castle festivities because the people at the court will all be drunk. When Claudius and Gertrude question what Ophelia is doing alone with Hamlet, she deflects their question. Furthermore, Ophelia is aware (مستدركة) of what Hamlet alludes to when he says, "I was telling her where children come from" (86). [9] She notes Hamlet's wordplay when he says "children," and she deftly changes the conversation by deflecting Hamlet's sexual innuendo and directing the conversation back to Hamlet's play and the children who are coming to watch it. Later, when Ophelia exits this scene, there is a clear difference in how Ophelia exits the stage between Adwan’s and Litvin's versions of the text. In the Arabic text, Ophelia exits the scene with her father in silence, whereas, in Litvin's text, Ophelia exits the scene accompanied by her father and brother, who is not present in the Arabic version. Before they all leave, however, Laertes asks Ophelia, "Are you coming?" to make sure that she does not stay with Hamlet as Claudius and Gertrude talk to him. Ophelia says, "Yes," but lingers for a minute before glancing at Hamlet, noticing his indifference to her presence and decides to leave. This slight change to the ending adds more depth to Ophelia's character as she tries to capture Hamlet's attention right under her family's nose.

---

[9] The stage direction (mustadrika) that indicates that Ophelia is perceptive enough to steer the conversation away from its potential sexual connotations is not present in the English translation. If included, it would enrich her character as the Arabic version signals early on in the play that Ophelia is alert and knows that nothing is as it seems in Denmark.

Even though both Ophelias have patriarchal figures instructing them on how they should comport themselves appropriately, Ophelia’s change in characterization causes her to respond to her family differently than Shakespeare’s Ophelia would. For example, when Ophelia and Laertes discuss the perils of her love for Hamlet in Act one Scene three of the Shakespeare play, she emerges as a self-aware, goal-oriented woman who is lusting for power. [10] When Ophelia does not listen to him, Laertes warns her that her lust for the throne will cause her to “Los[e] [her]self and [her] future” (109). His is reminiscent of what Laertes tells Ophelia in *Hamlet* before he leaves for France except that his warning has more to do with Ophelia’s honor and reputation than anything else because she might “lose [her] heart or [keep her] chaste treasure open/To his unmastered importunity” (1.3.35-36). But unlike her Shakespearean counterpart who will keep his advice as "watchman to her heart," Adwan’s Ophelia scoffs at his advice and mocks his fear of the people rising against them (1.3.50). One of the only times the Shakespearean Ophelia stands up for herself is when she asks her brother to practice what he preaches:

---

[10] Litvin does not mention the change in setting from a salon (parlor) in the castle to Polonius' house that is mentioned in the Arabic version perhaps because this detail would not interest the English reader. Names of characters, centered and in capital letters, act as scene divisions.

> Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
> Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven
> Whiles, like a puffed and reckless libertine,
> Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads
> And recks not his own rede (1.3.51-55).

And even if she asks her brother to apply the advice he gave her to himself, Shakespeare's Ophelia has no choice; she has to obey her father and brother within her patriarchal society—a society in which men hold a significant amount of power over women where they try and control them—which limits her agency. In contrast, Adwan’s Ophelia’s does not listen to him, and even mocks her brother and exposes him in front of their father saying, “Laertes says we should reconsider our idea” (107). This thought horrifies Polonius, of course, and he and Ophelia band together against Laertes, united because they both want Ophelia to one day be queen. The exact opposite scenario occurs in *Hamlet*, where father and brother join forces and dissuade the love-stricken Ophelia from accepting Hamlet's love. This united father-daughter front in *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* does not last for very long. Right after he reprimands his son for being a disgrace, he cuts Ophelia off when she starts speaking and commands her to “Let [her brother] speak!” (108). His interruption immediately subverts the moment of agency she experienced when her father supported her ambitions to marry Hamlet. Thus, at times, one can see that even though women can wield some power within their families, it can be contained when a man reasserts himself as the primary agent in any relationship.

Despite her father subverting that one moment of agency, Ophelia pushes back and reclaims it. Ophelia refuses to become a puppet and takes control of her destiny, rather than depending on her father to ensure it for her. Thus, instead of saying, “I shall obey,” Ophelia retorts, "I have some plans too, Father," and she does not wait around for Polonius' plan for her to secure the throne and become queen (112). Adwan’s Ophelia has her own ideas, which she does not divulge to him, which is completely unlike Shakespeare's Ophelia. In addition to keeping her secrets, she also challenges Polonius saying, “Your old head wouldn't understand what goes on in the mind of a woman” (112). This is a far cry from the timid Ophelia who readers are familiar with, the “green girl” living in naïveté who should also "think of herself a baby" and listen to what her father tells her to do and say (1.3.110, 115). Instead of letting her father take control and setting her up as bait for Prince Hamlet, Ophelia shows that she can make up her own mind. She is not a helpless baby, flailing around, crying, nor is she a “girl”; instead, she is a “woman” who can make decisions for herself about her future regardless of what these choices may be.

Both Ophelia and Polonius are conscious of where she stands in this patriarchal kingdom, and this grants Polonius control over his daughter's affairs. However, Ophelia still tries to take matters into her own hands, even though she is under her father's sphere of influence. When Polonius laughs at her certainty because he is unsure that she can implement her plan, Ophelia uses humor to ask him, “Are you worried for your daughter?” (112). Taking the cue from her, Polonius laughs and says, “Everything except your honor. Right?” His flippant comment is ironic considering that a woman's honor is a grave issue for women both in Elizabethan England and the Middle East. A woman's reputation depends on her chastity, and it is most often incumbent upon women to preserve the family honor because of the patriarchal nature of Middle Eastern societies. The cultures revolve around the family as a collective; thus, family honor is essential, and anyone who tarnishes the family's reputation is ostracized or sometimes killed. The oppression and violence perpetrated against women because they have to preserve their honor prevent them from making individual life choices. By repeating her father's phrase, “Everything except my honor,” she emphasizes the gravity and societal control surrounding the matter of a woman’s honor (112). But Ophelia is a smart, capable woman, and she knows a scandal would cost her the crown. However, her plan to become a future queen does not stop her from exploring her options. In Act two, Ophelia becomes interested in Fortinbras, the country’s enemy-turned-investor and Ophelia’s sudden interest in him calls her loyalty to Hamlet into question, especially since the audience knows that she is purely looking out for her own self-interest with regards to marrying Hamlet. This self-interestedness has implications for Litvin’s claim of Ophelia functioning as a “moral light” of the play (243). In contrast, in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Ophelia does not even think about marrying a man other than Hamlet. The fact that she is evaluating other potential suitors/husbands makes her a smarter character.

After the banquet scene with Fortinbras, where Ophelia tries to offer Hamlet moral support because she knows how betrayed he feels, and fails in her efforts, Ophelia does not appear onstage. Instead, the men around her make decisions on her behalf when Laertes returns from abroad ashamed that his sister is pregnant, and both their honors are now “stained” since Hamlet has murdered Laertes’ father (145). The king reassures him she is well cared for by the queen. However, Laertes is focused on “how to conceal the scandal” of Ophelia’s pregnancy rather than her well-being after their father’s death (146). No one pays any attention to the fact that Ophelia wanted to have a child with Hamlet, and they would most prefer to hide the fact that it is Hamlet's child because then it would have a legitimate claim to the throne, and Ophelia would gain a considerable amount of power. To pacify Laertes, the King tells him that Guldenshtern, his longtime friend, will marry Ophelia because he has "loved her for a long time" (70). Guldenshtern, taken aback by the king's revelation, is forced to go along with the plan. Laertes is satisfied because they have salvaged his honor, but Ophelia does not even get a say in this arrangement even though it is her future they are planning. Therefore, despite the continual development of Ophelia's character during the play, her agency is once again subverted by men who feel it is within their power to control the course of her life.

Adwan's Gertrude

Like Adwan's Ophelia, Adwan's Queen Gertrude is different from her Shakespearean counterpart as her character is more fleshed out and one can see that she is concerned for her son. She asks about Hamlet repeatedly and inquires after changes in his behavior, indicating that she is genuinely concerned about his well-being. When we first meet Gertrude, she is surprised and asks her son, "Since when do you drink?" (86). While the Shakespearean Gertrude asks about Hamlet, she does not press on any further. Adwan's Gertrude, by contrast, is concerned about the changes in his behavior and her question leads the audience to assume that Hamlet's drinking is a recent development and that she cares for her son and is concerned about his well-being. She also expresses her happiness and approval of his resuming work on the play he was working on before his father's death because she is concerned at how he is handling his father's loss. Furthermore, her increased number of lines gives her a chance to become a well-rounded character. In Adwan's play, Gertrude is the one who asks Hamlet why his face is "clouded over," a line attributed to Claudius in Shakespeare's version whose tone is incredulous as he asks, “How is it that the clouds still hang on you?” (1.2.68). In contrast, here, Gertrude’s tone is sympathetic; one can see how she cares for Hamlet because she wants to understand why her son is still grieving. She later commends him for being a “loyal son” while trying to console him as she knows he is bereaved (89). Indeed, when Claudius is alarmed by his anger and inflammatory rhetoric, Gertrude defends her son because she knows he is still grieving.

Not only is Gertrude concerned about her son Hamlet, but she also cares for Ophelia. When Ophelia disregards protocol and does not wait for her father or brother to go and see Hamlet, Gertrude defends her. She asks Laertes not to “reproach her” for coming to see Hamlet alone instead of waiting for them. She explains, “the wings of love are swift and do not stand on ceremony,” so they cannot blame Ophelia for wanting to see Hamlet before her family arrived, thereby shielding her from future blame that her brother and father might thrust onto her (86). Gertrude's ability to empathize with Ophelia's behavior and protect her makes her a more three-dimensional character. Gertrude also supports Ophelia when they blatantly subvert the king’s orders and violate “protocol” by coming to the banquet together despite Claudius telling them not to come (112).

At the banquet welcoming Fortinbras, Gertrude proposes an innovative idea to Claudius. They should start their own business venture because she likes the fabric that Fortinbras is wearing, and she suggests that they produce the fabric locally. However, Fortinbras jumps in and suggests that he could arrange for the fabric to be exported to them. Gertrude agrees that they should start with a gesture of "goodwill," and the king does not “object” to that (118). The interesting thing about this whole exchange between Gertrude, Fortinbras, and Claudius is that Gertrude is able to insert herself into the conversation thus disrupting the talk about politics from which the women were most likely going to be excluded. Not only does she intervene in a conversation spearheaded by men, but Gertrude also participates in it as an equal. When Fortinbras proposes to export his fabric to them, the queen does not hesitate when accepting the deal, even though it is a risky endeavor, and as they do not have anything to offer Fortinbras in return for his exported fabric. She even approves of the deal before the king does, and it is her enthusiasm that motivates Claudius to accept the idea as well. Even though when it comes to political matters, it is Claudius who is in control; in the meeting with Fortinbras, the queen's powers of diplomacy shine. It is evident that when it comes to receiving foreign dignitaries and discussing common goals, especially economic ones, the queen has the upper hand. However, at the end of the discussion, the queen is sidelined from the deal when Fortinbras nominates Polonius to be his advisor because he likes “Polonius’ style of dealing,” and fails to credit the queen for her idea.

To smooth things over between Hamlet and Claudius, Gertrude comes up with the plan to calmly talk things over with Hamlet. In Shakespeare's play, it is Polonius who suggests that they should let "his queen-mother all alone entreat him/To show his grief," and Polonius later informs Gertrude of his plan and tells her what to say (3.1.196-197). She sends for Hamlet and is sure that he will “listen” and “respect” her (137). To retain some control of the situation, however, Claudius assigns Polonius to keep watch and meet Hamlet with Gertrude. She tells Polonius to leave them alone because she does not “want him to see” Polonius with her (137). Polonius is reluctant to do so but because of Gertrude's insistence, he hides behind “a curtain as a precaution” since he does not want to disobey the king's orders (137).

The infamous mother and son scene in the Shakespeare play that allows the Queen Gertrude character to develop somewhat as she feels guilt and remorse allows even more character development here, and the audience sees that Gertrude is strong, willful, and observant, and not passive and ambiguous like Shakespeare's character. After Hamlet explains that the source of his anger is indeed Gertrude's marriage to Claudius a mere month after his father's death, she asks him why he did not tell her that he “was against the marriage” (138). Instead of responding to her question, Hamlet says, “He didn't come ask me for your hand,” which is ironic since Gertrude did do that, but Hamlet did not say anything that indicated that he was against the marriage (138). His concerns would not be unfamiliar to a Muslim audience because when a woman is widowed, her son is expected to take care of her financially. And because he controls his mother's finances, a son usually has immense control and influence over his widowed mother's life. In Islam, no law dictates that a widowed woman needs to ask anyone for approval when she wants to remarry. She can remarry after she observes the traditional mourning period for widows, called ‘iddah in Arabic, which lasts for four months and ten days. Because Gertrude did not observe the traditional mourning period, society would also accuse her of marrying too quickly. In comparison to Shakespeare's play, the adaptation gives a distinctive religious and cultural answer as to why Hamlet is angry at his mother, which suggests how the process of adaptation adds something to the original play. And, because of this cultural transposition, the audience may sympathize with Hamlet’s frustration.

During the mother and son scene in *Hamlet Wakes Up Late*, Gertrude is aware that Hamlet is hurting, but is also assertive enough to tell him to stop making her feel guilty or angry. In contrast, Shakespeare’s Gertrude who, upon realizing the gravity of her marriage to Claudius, pleads with Hamlet and begs him to stop talking and find a solution. She then asks Hamlet what she should do, and when he reminds her that he must go to England, she is resigned to the fact because “tis concluded on” (3.4.224). Adwan’s Gertrude, in contrast, is the one making the decisions in the scene. She refuses to let Hamlet bring her down, matter-of-factly stating, “what's happened has happened” (138). In this instance, she sounds less like Gertrude and more like Lady Macbeth when she says, “Things without all remedy/Should be without regard. What's done is done” trying to ease Macbeth's guilt after he kills King Duncan because of his lust for power (*Macbeth* 3.2.13-14). Trying to save his life, Gertrude asks her son to leave the castle. She even comes up with a plan to send him away, saying, “My child. I beg you. Go explore the country you'll be ruling one day” (138). The short imperative sentences indicate the urgency of Gertrude’s command, and it is only then that Hamlet realizes that Claudius wants him dead. Here Adwan’s Gertrude is much more direct and displays much more emotion than her Elizabethan counterpart does at the end of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

And Gertrude’s reactions becomes much more dramatic when she realizes both she and her son are doomed as a result of Polonius’ murder. Gertrude screams, “Hamlet, my child!” in desperation, but she knows she cannot save him (141). After this spectacle, neither Gertrude nor Ophelia appear on stage. The audience only hears about what happens to them through the king. Once Hamlet is taken away, their power and agency is as well because it was through him and because of him that they have felt emboldened to confront the status quo.

Forget Hamlet

Jawad Al Assadi (1947) is an Iraqi playwright and director who is also renowned in the Arab world for directing plays by Arab playwrights such as Saadallah Wannous as well as writing and directing his own plays such as *Hammam Baghdadi* (*Baghdadi Bath*). Influenced by Shakespeare, he decided to write a Hamlet-based play whose original title was *Ophelia’s Window*. It was staged under that name in Cairo’s Hanager Theater in 1994, but in 2000, it was published under a different title: *Forget Hamlet* (Litvin 208). The change in the play’s title is significant because it shifts the focus off of Ophelia, who is quite central to the plot of the play, to Hamlet once again. Even though the title urges us to forget Hamlet because he is an ineffectual hero, it has the exact opposite effect. Unlike Adwan and Shakespeare's Hamlet, in *Forget Hamlet*, Ophelia has seen Claudius murder the late King Hamlet through her bedroom window; there is no ambiguity there. In this Hamlet play, Claudius is a powerful tyrant who gets what he wants and unlike his Shakespearean counterpart, feels no qualms, not even for a second, about killing the king. Gertrude and Claudius have a complicated relationship as Gertrude expresses remorse for her part in her late husband's death. And at one point, Claudius desires Ophelia, but she manages to rebuff his advances. Hamlet seems to have lost interest in her and everything else around him, and the news of Claudius' murder of his father fails to provoke any reaction in him. Therefore, both Al-Assadi's and Adwan's Hamlets, are depressed, demotivated, and have no interest in politics. In *Forget Hamlet*, the women are the opposite. They are very aware of the events going on around them and want to try to change and better their future.

Al Assadi's Ophelia

Like Adwan's Ophelia, Al Assadi's Ophelia has more stage presence and lines in the play. She also appears bolder than her Shakespearean counterpart because she has a mind of her own. For example, even though Laertes asks Hamlet not to dance with his sister in the first scene, both Hamlet and Ophelia ignore Laertes. She even complains to Hamlet about Laertes because she feels constrained by his authority and control over her as he needs her help moving around because he is blind in this play. Ophelia says, "If my brother weren't so vicious and rough I would take you away to the sea and there beside the waves I would let you hear the flute of my pain" (232). Al Assadi's Ophelia is conscious of the control her brother has over her and feels “pain” which she would only share if she were far away from the castle because there is no one she can trust.

Moreover, in the Shakespearean version, Hamlet is the one who gives Ophelia gifts and letters, but in *Forget Hamlet*, Hamlet and Ophelia's roles are reversed. She gives him presents, and she even physically puts a necklace on his neck. In *Hamlet*, Polonius asks Ophelia to give him the letters that Hamlet had written to her, and she “in her duty and obedience” does so (2.2.115). She also returns the gifts that Hamlet has given her, and he denies even giving them to her, but she manages to return them saying, “Take these again, for to the noble mind/Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind” (3.1.110-111). In contrast, in *Forget Hamlet*, Hamlet has never given her gifts. In scene nine, Ophelia decides that she wants Hamlet to return the letters and gifts she has given him, but Hamlet refuses to do so. He refuses to give them to her and even admits that he has “perfumed” them and “hidden” them in a “treasure chest” because they mean so much to him (254). Ophelia persists with her request saying, “Hamlet! Give them back to me! I want to tear up the words that I inscribed once upon a time with such impassioned feelings” (254). In Shakespeare’s play, she gives Hamlet back his gifts, but she never asks or demands that he return anything to her. In addition, Hamlet was the one who has written letters to Ophelia that contain “words of so sweet breath composed,” but unlike the letters in *Forget Hamlet*, the Shakespearean letters have “their perfume/ lost”(3.1.107-108). Hamlet claims that because the letters are written for him, they must be “his property” (254). Ophelia, exasperated, says a line given to Hamlet in Shakespeare, “I did love you once. But now, no more” (254). Al Assadi’s Ophelia is the angry one, lamenting Hamlet's passivity, especially when it comes to helping her brother. Hamlet refuses to believe that she does not love him anymore and ridicules her saying, “Don't be in such a hurry. Soon your fire will die down and you'll return to your old promises” (254). She, however, is unaffected by his disparaging tone.

Al Assadi’s Ophelia is strong, and she will defend her family, namely her brother if she sees others treat them unjustly. In scene eight, Ophelia berates Polonius for allowing Laertes to leave to the sanatorium instead of defending and protecting him from harm, and her father's neglect amounts to “slaughter” in her eyes (252). Polonius, however, believes that Claudius did the right thing because Laertes needed to “pay the consequences of his actions” (252). Ophelia is so furious with her father that she says, “You are not my father” (252). This is a very bold statement for her character, especially when compared to Shakespeare's Ophelia who would have never dreamed of yelling at her own father, much less disowning him or calling him names such as Claudius’ “dishrag” (252). Ophelia reveals, “I don't care about the dead king or the living king. What bothers me is that you betrayed my brother” (252). Family and maintaining family ties are extremely important in Arab culture. Therefore, Polonius' actions are outrageous given that Laertes is his son and sons are especially valued in Arab culture. Even though Polonius was pleading that Claudius forgive his son in the previous scene, now he is forsaking his family to win Claudius' favor, and his actions are unforgivable in Ophelia's opinion. Polonius threatens her. If she follows Laertes’ “example” by meddling in political affairs and critiquing the king, he will “have her banished” (252). Laertes was banished and exiled to a “sanatorium,” and banishment is a typical punishment for a political dissident in the Arab world, so Arab audiences would be familiar with the term. Al Assadi himself went into a self-imposed exile after the rise of Saddam Hussein. Ophelia is outraged that her father would not hesitate to “kill his children for a rotten kingdom,” and she, in turn, threatens to “renounce” her father (252). That is an even bolder statement than the first one she made at the beginning of this scene, so she is not afraid of her father and his threats, and she will not “shut [her] mouth” despite what he says (252). Angry at both Hamlet and her father, Ophelia decides to stand up for herself and take her life into her own hands.

Another example of Hamlet and Ophelia reversing roles occurs during the infamous nunnery scene. The reversal signals how strong she is while highlighting Hamlet’s inefficacy. In Shakespeare, Hamlet is the one who tells Ophelia, “Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be/a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest,/but yet I could accuse me of such things that it/were better my mother had not borne me” (3.1.131-134). In *Forget Hamlet*, Ophelia is the one who tells Hamlet, “Get yourself to a monastery; that would be more merciful. There you can focus your body and your mind on the pressing theological questions. There you can have more peace and quiet to ask and re-ask your question, ‘to be or not to be’” (255). Because of Ophelia, the audience knows that Hamlet has constantly asked himself “to be or not to be” one of the most famous lines in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and part of Hamlet’s soliloquy meditating about death and the futility of life. Hamlet feels that the tables have turned and tries to appeal to Ophelia’s emotions saying, “I love you even if the world has stumbled and fallen on its knees,” (255). In this moment, Hamlet is aware that all is not right with the world because he personifies it as weak and fallen but chooses to do nothing about it. He simply pleads with Ophelia to love him despite his feebleness (255). Ophelia, however, will only be able to love him if he “searches for the cause of his father’s death” and “his killer,” only then will his “manliness” return, and he will go back to be the man that Ophelia loved. That is why she is unmoved when Hamlet says, “I love you” again (255). Interestingly, in the Arabic text, Al Assadi has an extra line after Hamlet's declaration of love that Litvin did not translate and chose to omit. In Arabic, it reads (حضري جسدك اسقي زرعك بمائي) which when translated to English would be, “Prepare your body, water your crops with my water” (Al Assadi 45). After hearing him telling her to prepare herself to sleep with him, Ophelia’s outrage makes much more sense than it does in the English translation. She tells him, “Who do you think you are? You’re presumptuous" because that comment was completely inappropriate (255). In the English version, she calls him an idiot twice for good measure, and there is no mention of his brazen comment. In the Arabic text, Ophelia calls his existence a loss for Denmark, which Litvin translates “catastrophe for Denmark,” lamenting that he is not a true “prince” who will take the reins and lead the country properly as the rightful heir to the throne; instead he has become Denmark’s “little lamb” a metaphor that foreshadows his death at the end of the play (255). She then orders him to “Get out of her sight” because she can no longer bear his numbness and indifference to the state of his country and the world at large. Al Assadi’s Hamlet leaves the scene at Ophelia's request. In the Arabic version, Ophelia says, “Get out, Hamlet, get out!” (Al Assadi 45). The repetition of the phrase, “get out” drives the message home and Hamlet leaves without saying a word. Litvin's slight change of the line lessens the intensity of Ophelia’s words. In the Arabic version, “get out of my sight” is implied and that makes her character and her words have even more of an impact as the audience/reader can interpret the implications of this command more freely.

In contrast to the men around her, Horatio listens to Ophelia and gives her room to speak her mind. When he comes in with a letter from Laertes, hoping to alleviate her concern and fear for her brother's welfare, she bursts with emotions as she confides in him saying:

> Oh Horatio! Everything has collapsed on us at once. Hamlet's defeat, Laertes' madness. Denmark has become one big prison, Horatio. A basin of rot! Or how else could Claudius, the ignorant, appoint himself king over us, and take possession of us? Then he mocks our heritage, laughs at our deaths. He is turning the country into a general graveyard (255).

He empathizes with Ophelia because he, like her, is no stranger to the bleak reality of life in Denmark. Therefore, he understands her when she feels as if the whole country has become a "prison" that she cannot escape from because men on which she depended for help, Hamlet and her brother, are helpless themselves. In Shakespeare, Hamlet is the one who says that Denmark is a "prison" after learning that his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are spying on him for the king, but that alone does not push him to act against Claudius (2.2.262). In addition to saying Hamlet's line, Al Assadi's Ophelia also gets to say an adapted version of a famous Shakespearean line traditionally attributed Marcellus, the guard who after seeing the Old Hamlet's ghost appear twice at one of the castle's towers before dawn, says, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.4.100). And, unlike in Shakespeare, it is not "something" that is "rotten," but the entire country is "a basin of rot," or corruption and weakness, which is why Claudius rose to and is still maintaining his power, while the rest of the country is deteriorating.[11] The Arabic word for basin (مغطس) makes the metaphor "basin of rot" even more bleak and powerful because it indicates that Denmark is not just rotten, but immersed in rottenness, and now it is turning into a "general graveyard" because of the prevalence of deaths by execution or otherwise.

---

[11] Al Assadi frequently mentions basins in his plays whether they are metaphors representing stagnant countries or props for the characters to bathe in so they can cleanse themselves of filth. For example, in his play *Hammam Baghdadi* (*Baghdadi Bath*), the entire play takes place in a traditional hammam or bathhouse. In addition, the two main characters, Majid and Hamid, use a basin/tub when bathing.

Ophelia, fed up with ineffectual men who will do nothing to help her save Laertes, takes it upon herself to try and save him by talking to Claudius, something Shakespeare's Ophelia would have never dared to try. She begs Claudius to pardon her brother Laertes; however, Claudius says that Laertes "brought that curse upon himself" and he tries to change the subject to her and Hamlet's upcoming wedding (258). When she remains persistent, the king asks Ophelia what favor she would do for him in exchange for Laertes' pardon. She replies, “I'd give you a lotus flower” (258). Al Assadi's Claudius, however, was hoping for sexual favors and asks if she would "kiss" him at least spend "the night drinking" with him in exchange for Laertes' pardon (258). Ophelia agrees because she would “do anything” in exchange for Laertes' freedom with her only condition being Claudius “issu[ing] the pardon first,” and he obliges (258). As they raise their glasses toasting to each other's health, Claudius comments, “I have never looked into your eyes so deep before. What eyes!” (259). Ophelia feels uncomfortable and is not afraid to speak her mind when she asks, appalled, “Do you speak to Gertrude in the same manner, my lord?” (259). Claudius tells her to “forget Gertrude” as he focuses on her, but Ophelia does not stop asking questions as she tries to think of ways to extricate herself from the situation. She stands in solidarity with Gertrude as she says, “Do you want me to forget my queen? Your support in the crown and state?”(259). Ophelia does not want to compromise her integrity; she is also very much aware of the injustices she faces in this patriarchal system as a woman; as a result, she wants to empower Gertrude not demean her. Thus, she reminds Claudius of the reasons he should not betray Gertrude's trust as she helped him secure the crown, become king, and rule over a nation.

Despite her being in a highly tense situation with Claudius lusting after her, Ophelia tries to confront Claudius about Old Hamlet’s murder. She does so carefully when she asks, “Isn’t Hamlet the son of your brother, whose father was murdered?” (260). Ophelia's language here is reminiscent of Hamlet's language in Shakespeare when he gathers more evidence to prove Claudius murdered his father, and he says, “the son of a dear father murdered," (2.2.612). Here, Ophelia is given a line that is traditionally attributed to Hamlet, and this shows how powerful her character is. Claudius, not wishing to implicate himself with a charge of any sort, plays dumb. Ophelia, however, sees right through his act, and sarcastically tells him, “Are you saying that the king went mad and slit his own throat, or that a servant went mad and killed him?” (260). Considering the king signed Laertes’ pardon just a moment ago, it is brave of her to try to catch him in the act. She then bravely reveals to him that she saw the “whole scene” from her bedroom window with "these two eyes" that he was busy admiring just a moment ago, possibly risking her and her brother’s lives (260). Claudius, now having drunk more wine is intent on sleeping with Ophelia. Once again, Ophelia remains surprisingly calm and alert as she hopes to dissuade Claudius from pursuing her further. But Claudius, unable to control his desire for her any longer, then pounces on her, kisses her, and begins “attacking her like a wild buffalo” (260). Ophelia, thinking quickly in a stressful situation, once again tries calling for Gertrude because the “king requests her presence immediately” (261). Her plan works, Claudius stops assaulting her, and she manages to run off before Gertrude comes rushing into the bedroom. Despite her bravery and the risks she has taken confronting Claudius, Ophelia is, unfortunately, unable to change anything as, unbeknownst to her, Laertes was already dead.

As chaos is engulfing the castle grounds at the end of the play, Ophelia tries to rouse Hamlet to action against Claudius once again because he is the only person capable of standing up to him. She says,

> Hamlet, I'm pleading for your help, don't desert me! My strength has collapsed. Claudius the butcher promised to pardon my brother. Imagine, he pardoned him and killed him at the same time. He tricked me! How should I get revenge on him? How can we get rid of this barbarian? Hamlet, Laertes' corpse was left lying in the street in the middle of a big crowd of people! (278).

She does not want to give up the fight against Claudius, but Hamlet cannot help her because Claudius' soldiers murdered him. As she approaches Hamlet, she realizes that he has been stabbed to death and left floating in a bathtub. She runs to alert the castle of Hamlet's murder, and when the king enters, Ophelia is not shy about confronting him as she says, "You've murdered Hamlet and slaughtered Laertes," but the king does not respond to her accusation (278). Ophelia abruptly meets her demise after she witnesses Laertes' ghost avenge himself upon Claudius. Al Assadi's Ophelia dies a very Gertrude-like death when she drinks from a poisoned chalice, and unlike most female Shakespearean deaths, she dies onstage. Therefore, even though Ophelia is unable to change the bleak reality around her, her bold and confrontational character never gives up hope for change.

Al Assadi's Gertrude

Like Al Assadi's Ophelia, Al Assadi's Gertrude also has more lines and stage presence in *Forget Hamlet*. Her relationship with Old Hamlet is also much different in Shakespeare's play, which could explain why later on she and Claudius collaborate when killing him. For example, when a feeble Old Hamlet comes in onstage on a moving hospital bed and orders drinks, Gertrude tells him not to drink, but Old Hamlet ignores her advice. Whereas in the Shakespearean play, Hamlet mentions that his father and mother were so devoted to one another that his father would not allow “the winds of heaven/Visit her face too roughly” and Gertrude would “hang on” his father's every word (1.2.145,148). For example, when she dances with a blind Laertes who comments lewdly on her body, Gertrude is deeply hurt. However, instead of defending her, the king admonishes her for dancing with someone other than him, and she responds with silence. As the first scene progresses, however, one sees that the Old Hamlet and Queen Gertrude's relationship as marked by indifference as Gertrude distances herself from her husband, and he pays no attention to her.

Al Assadi’s Gertrude results from the act of mixing different Shakespeare female characters, particularly Gertrude and Lady Macbeth. After Claudius murders the king, Gertrude enters screaming, “they slaughtered the king,” and repeats it several times as if in shock. Claudius emerges on the scene, grabbing a servant who is holding a bloody knife and swears at him. The servant tries to run away, but Claudius chases him and kills him, asking the servant's corpse, “Who bribed you to kill the king? Who?” (237). Claudius acts much like Macbeth does after he murders King Duncan, blaming the king's murder on servants and killing them before they have a chance to speak. Gertrude also insults the dead servant, calling him a “lowlife” and corroborates Claudius' accusation by affirming that the servant “slaughtered her husband” (237). Lady Macbeth faints at the news of Duncan's murder to remove any suspicion from her and her husband as the ones orchestrating the murder. Gertrude is more brazen as she screams and swears at the servants, and no one dares question her about what happened.

In *Forget Hamlet*, one can see Gertrude’s character develop through her interaction with and relationship with Claudius, an interaction one is barely privy to in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. In scene seven of the play, one can see the nature of Claudius and Gertrude's relationship, which is more and more like the Macbeths than their Hamlet prototypes. The new king and queen care for one another, but the queen is uneasy and feels the guilt of her late husband's murder. When Claudius asks her, “What's wrong?” She replies, “I feel uncomfortable. Something is pressing on my chest” (249). When he suggests going out to the garden, she declines. He then asks her again, “What's bothering you? We carried out our plan successfully. The kingdom is calm. No one but you is sitting on the throne” (249). He tries calming Gertrude down, but to no avail, and through his revelation, the audience knows that they were conspiring against the king together. Unlike the Shakespearean Gertrude, who knew nothing of Claudius' involvement in old Hamlet's murder, this Gertrude knows all the details and was involved in the plan, much like Lady Macbeth. Contrary to Lady Macbeth, however, the guilt is eating her up soon after they implement their plan. Because Lady Macbeth never verbalizes her feelings, her guilt manifests through her sleepwalking and handwashing rituals in Act five. Gertrude, on the other hand, wants to change the bed, change her wardrobe, and remove all the mirrors to assuage the guilt that is overwhelming her. Claudius, wanting to calm her down, complies with every request she makes, but Gertrude is still not satisfied.

Gertrude uses her position as queen to convince Claudius to lessen Laertes’ punishment because she feels guilty about that as well. Laertes is a touchy subject for Claudius because he defied and ridiculed him, so he declines her request, telling her “not to interfere in his decisions” (251). She protests “his decisions,” and thinks Claudius will treat her decisions as equal to his because she is “his wife, the queen of Denmark” (251). To diffuse the situation, Claudius affirms the fact that she is his wife but “in [his] bed” (251). This statement affirms how Claudius sees Gertrude: his wife, but not his equal, and as his wife has to fulfill certain duties like sex. He continues by saying, “she is his queen”, and exclaims, “Oh God! How I love you” (251). Gertrude does not fall for his grand declaration of love and is hurt because Claudius does not respect her and views her as a sexual object, subverting her moment of agency. Nevertheless, she still tries to continue discussing Laertes. When Gertrude asks about Ophelia, who had screamed for Gertrude when Claudius sought to assault her, the king merely tells her that Ophelia was asking him to pardon Laertes, which he did, but it was too late because he is already dead. Gertrude is concerned that Laertes’ return in a coffin will spark a “fire” of revolution all over again, but Claudius assures her that no one would dare oppose him because he has frightened his enemies into submission (261).

In this scene, Gertrude reveals how similar she is to Lady Macbeth. While Gertrude gives Claudius the dagger he uses to kill his brother, Lady Macbeth takes the daggers away from Macbeth after he kills King Duncan because he is in a state of shock afterward. Gertrude overcome with guilt reveals that she “regrets” helping him “seize the crown,” but Claudius says, “I would have seized the crown with your help or without it” (261). He is not grateful to Gertrude for trying to help him. He completely dismisses her help because his lust for power would have driven him to become king using any means available to him. He then thinks that Gertrude has “lost her head,” and he does not hesitate to question her sanity, which is very insulting and paternalistic behavior. But Gertrude does not tolerate it, telling Claudius to leave her alone and not come to her bed. This response puzzles Claudius, who innocently asks, “Aren’t you my wife?" but Gertrude pays him no attention as she says, "I remember the moment I gave you the dagger. I took part in the crime, that's all there is to it" (261).

Since the guilt of supplying the murder weapon eats her up, Gertrude breaks down and says:

> I can't imagine your face and his. What a difference between your looks. Your smiles. Even your caresses in bed make me more depressed. I am afraid. Afraid of myself because I'm filthy, nasty, my hands are stained with blood (262).

She does not need Hamlet to compare the two men and tell her what she had done wrong as her own guilt leads her to this conclusion. In this scene, her lines are an abridged version of Hamlet's speech comparing his father who had "grace…seated on his brow" and seemed to be like a "fair mountain" versus his uncle in Shakespeare who Hamlet compared to a "mildewed ear" and a "moor" (3.4.66, 74, 76, 77). Gertrude clearly sees the differences between her late husband and her current one. Also, she, like Lady Macbeth, feels dirtied by taking part in the king's murder. The difference between them is that Gertrude is admitting her guilt and shame to her husband, while Lady Macbeth divulged nothing of her worries to her husband. She kept them repressed, but the guilt had to come out somehow, and it manifested itself in Lady Macbeth sleepwalking, talking to herself, and rubbing her hands to rid them of imaginary blood she says, "Out damned spot, out I say" and she continues obsessing over the bloodstain saying, "Here's the smell of the blood still. All/the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little/hand. O, O, O!" (*Macbeth* 5.1.37, 53-55). Like Lady Macbeth, Gertrude also complains of having not a spot of blood on her hands, but "hands stained with blood," and because of her guilty conscience she feels like the stains will never wash off until she confesses to a priest. Claudius is outraged and tries to convince her she is crazy and in need of a doctor to control her. When Gertrude tells him she wants to “go to her room,” he forbids her from moving even “one step” from where she is standing (263). However, she knows that it is not within his power as king or husband to force her to stay in place, and not go to her room at least, so she challenges him and says, “You can't prevent me. You shouldn't do that” (263). Gertrude is brave to call his authority into question right after she threatened to go to a priest and tell him of their crimes. She is right. He has no authority over where she may go in the castle. Claudius tries to diffuse the situation by using flattery, thinking all will be forgiven. He says, “My darling, my beautiful wife. You were and still are the closest thing to my soul” (263). Once again, Claudius focuses on two things, her beauty and the fact that she is his wife to convince her that he sees the best in her. But Gertrude sees past his effort at manipulating her into forgiving him and tells him firmly not to “talk to [her] like that” and to “leave” her alone. To make her point final, she exits the scene.

Unlike all the men around her, Gertrude tries to tell Ophelia the truth about Laertes’ death instead of hiding it from her. When Ophelia hears of a coffin being carried in a carriage, Gertrude tries to calm her down and asks her to “have a rest and sit down” because she knows Laertes is in that coffin (268). She wants to make sure Ophelia is seated when she hears the news because she knows how it will devastate her. Ophelia, however, is unaware that Laertes is dead. She then turns to Hamlet and asks him to “tell” her what is going on because despite how he treated her, she still respects him, even though she could have asked the queen. Hamlet refuses to tell her, and Gertrude decides that she will “tell” Ophelia whose coffin it is but asks her to “sit down” once again (268). Gertrude, however, never gets the chance to speak because Polonius and Horatio enter the scene. Ophelia asks them if they have heard anything about the “coffin with no name on it” (268). Polonius answers her questions, saying, “No, nobody wants to say anything about the funeral or the name of the dead man” (269). The scene ends with none of the men willing to answer Ophelia's questions because they are afraid of Claudius. Gertrude is silenced and instead of giving Ophelia clear information, all the men do is deflect, deny, and remain silent.

Gertrude once again tries to talk to Claudius and use her position to try and get justice for Laertes. She tells him he must “announce the name of the deceased” although he has just threatened her (273). The king, however, dismisses her request, calling it “frivolous” in front of Polonius but Gertrude decides that she will reveal the “name of the deceased” anyway. When Polonius exits, Gertrude tells Claudius she is afraid of him because he is killing people left and right, and she does not know when it will be her “turn” (273). He tries to soothe her by assuring her that she is his “queen,” so no harm could befall her, but she cries and tells him, “You're lying” because she knows that he will spare no one in his quest to maintain and strengthen his power (273). Claudius then suggests that Gertrude leave the castle or perhaps she should “go and rest” before they have dinner together. Gertrude exits the scene without a word perhaps because she realizes that with Claudius there can be no dialogue, only threats and false flattery.

In the original Arabic, the scene is different. Claudius still tries to flatter the queen, calling her his “darling queen” to calm her, and she tells him point-blank that he is “lying” to her. Before suggesting that she leave the castle to stay by the sea for a few days, he says to her, “I loved you and I still love you,” and Gertrude says, “You're lying,” but she does not cry. Then Claudius suggests that she leave the castle for a couple of days or at least rest before dinner and Gertrude exits. It is unclear why Litvin left these two lines out because they add more nuance to the scene. When Gertrude says the second “you're lying,” she has stopped crying and appears stronger. Claudius' suggestion to go away makes more sense in the Arabic version because he wants to appease her. As soon as Gertrude exits, Claudius asks the two soldiers to kill Hamlet. So, one can see that Gertrude's threat has rattled Claudius, and he plans to thwart her plans and teach her a lesson by taking away the only other masculine authority she can rely on in this patriarchal society: her son.

During the mother/son scene in this play, Gertrude readily confesses her guilt to her son while also berating him for doing nothing to stop Claudius' viciousness towards the people of Denmark. She says, “I tell you that I am guilty and that my sin is unforgivable,” and unlike the Shakespearean Gertrude, it does not take Hamlet any effort to explain to her how wrong she was when she married Claudius. Hamlet and his mother reverse roles here as she is ashamed of his passivity in the face of Claudius' rule. Whereas in Shakespeare, when Hamlet meets his mother in her room, Hamlet is angry with her and says, “And (were it not so) you are my mother” after she accuses him of having “forgot” her (3.4.18, 21). Hamlet wishes that Gertrude was not his mother because he is ashamed of her swift marriage to Claudius, and in Al Assadi's play, Gertrude is ashamed of her son because he is doing nothing to protect his kingdom and his people from Claudius' bloodthirsty rampage against regime dissidents. In response to Gertrude's anger, Hamlet says, “I am silent because I have been too slow to kill you” and Gertrude replies, “You want to kill your mother?” shocked at this revelation (274). Instead of wanting to kill Claudius, Hamlet directs all of his frustration at his mother and wants to kill her because he sees her marriage to Claudius as a stain on the family honor. Gertrude's shock is understandable because she expected Hamlet to be more forgiving towards her after she confessed that she is “guilty” (272). And being a mother grants a woman a great amount of respect in Arab culture, so even thinking about killing one’s mother is a great offense. Unlike in Shakespeare, Hamlet and Gertrude do not have time to air their grievances to one another as someone knocking interrupts their conversation. Gertrude exits, not knowing that this will be the last time she will see her son alive because Claudius has sent the two men to kill him to deprive her of any power she might hope to have had Hamlet stayed alive.

The Female Gravediggers

In Shakespeare, the gravediggers appear once in the final act, but in *Forget Hamlet*, they appear earlier in the play. Although they serve the same function as Shakespeare’s gravediggers in *Hamlet*, providing comic dialogue that balances out the previous dramatic scenes, in this play, the gravediggers are not men, but women. Al Assadi likes to have characters in pairs in his plays because he plays on the character and its double and the female gravediggers are one example of this using of pairs since as they do not compliment one another but point out each other’s flaws. They are working-class women, unlike Ophelia and Gertrude, and provide fresh insight into the political corruption in Denmark that people in the castle are not privy to. And even though they have not witnessed the murder of the king, they are witnesses of the country’s changing political climate and are active agents in it; for if they do not help perform the burial rites for Old Hamlet, Claudius’ marriage to Gertrude and the coronation cannot occur. When they are burying the late King Hamlet, they talk about Gertrude and Claudius' marriage, calling her an “old hag” (238). Interestingly, the gravediggers do not blame Gertrude for the “o’erhasty” marriage. The second gravedigger points to the king’s insatiable desire for both women and power as she says, “He won’t just marry the hag-queen. He’ll marry you, he’ll marry me, he’ll marry all of Denmark” (238). In scene four, the gravediggers appear yet again and comment on how “sad” Claudius and

Gertrude look now that the king is dead. Claudius did not shed a tear, but their description of Gertrude is what is interesting because her eyes they say, are “blank,” as if she were a “mummy,” and she is distant and emotionless and does not want the ceremony to proceed (241). One can see that the king’s murder deeply affected her.

In another scene, the gravediggers’ comment on the political tension in Denmark as the “citadel prison is filled with the opposition” (257). Their position as gravediggers in Denmark and workers on the castle grounds makes them privy to all sorts of gossip, including the latest rumors going around the castle. The first gravedigger does not mind the increasing number of deaths because it means that they will have steady employment and will soon be able “to get rich” if the “guillotine keeps working at this rate” (257). The gravediggers’ characters are, on one level, a vehicle for pointing out the allusions to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in Al Assadi’s own work. For example, one of the gravediggers says, "Don't be a fool. Ophelia is purer than pure" (257). They allude to the characterization of Shakespeare's Ophelia, who is young and innocent, unaware of the harsh realities that surround her until Hamlet impetuously kills her father. The gravediggers also parallel Shakespeare’s own gravediggers. Scene fourteen starts with the first gravedigger character speaking, “Cover him, shroud him…” just like Shakespeare’s gravediggers (267). And, both *Hamlet* and *Forget Hamlet* characters speak about contraptions that cause deaths. In Shakespeare, the gravedigger asks his companion, “What is he that builds stronger than/either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?” He answers, “The gallows-maker; outlives a thousand tenants” (5.1.142-145). In Al Assadi’s play, one gravedigger asks the other, “He doesn’t build bridges, he doesn’t write constitutions, he doesn’t assemble boats, he doesn’t light fires, but they call him the chief of builders. What does the chief of builders build in Denmark?” and the other gravedigger answers, “The guillotine, ha, ha, ha, ha!” (267).

The play ends with a nod to the original gravediggers’ scene in Shakespeare’s play with the gravediggers examining a violinist’s skull while standing in the graveyard. They come across Hamlet’s skull along with his tongue and admit he died a horrible death. They also find a book, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and they read an excerpt from it, which is an abridged version of Hamlet's soliloquy in Act two scene two, “O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I…” where he berates himself for his indecision and takes action against Claudius. After reading this passage, they put Hamlet's tongue in between the pages of Hamlet and toss the book into the air (281). The play's message is clear; one must take action against injustice instead of tossing fancy, empty words into the air. Interestingly, the book that the gravediggers are reading is not just any translation of *Hamlet*, it is Jabra Ibrahim Jabra’s translation, which Al Assadi also used when writing *Forget Hamlet*. Jabra was born during the Nahda and continued to be inspired by it especially when translating texts like Shakespeare’s plays because they were extremely popular during the Nahda as they helped galvanize Arab theater and literature writ large. Jabra translated Hamlet in 1960, a time when the Arab world was searching for the best avenues for progress and modernity and choosing sides. Countries either sided with Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser’s ideas of pan-Arabism and anti-imperialism or with Saudi Arabia and other monarchical states that relied on U.S. support. Perhaps Al Assadi chose this translation because other than Jabra’s fidelity to the Shakespeare text, it echoes the problem that the Arab world still faces today. Using this translation was a nice self-reflexive gesture that indicates how Shakespeare’s texts and his adaptations are all intertwined but can be considered separate works in their own right.

Coda: Hamlet Wakes Up Late in Ithaca, New York

In this section, I want to highlight the place of women in bringing these Shakespearean adaptations to life. I will first discuss Arab Shakespeare adaptations like *Hamlet Wakes Up Late*, performed in 2017 outside the Arab world. I will then transition into other Arab Shakespeare adaptations performed in the Arab world such as *King Lear*. This comparative exercise looks at how the plays change and how audiences receive them when they are performed in foreign contexts. In the following subsection, I will examine the American production of *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* in New York, looking at the how director Rebekah Maggor adapted Adwan's play and Litvin's translation to tailor the play to an American audience.

Adwan's *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* was performed in Damascus, Syria in 1978 with Mahmoud Khaddur directing the production. It is the first of a series of collaboration between Adwan and Khaddur, as Khaddur later directed two other plays by him *The Queen's Visit* (زيارة الملكة) in 1984 and *The Maid* (الخادمة) in 1985 (Ismat 125). The Arab Hamlet production featured famous Syrian actors and is considered a part of Syrian nationalist theater, an era that dates from 1959 (Ziter 5). Adwan was able to use Hamlet's story to talk about important sociopolitical issues in Syria, such as the occupation of the Golan Heights by Israel in 1967, authoritarian regimes, foreign involvement under the guise of investment in the Middle East, and the widening wealth gap between the different socioeconomic strata of the population. Adwan used Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's translation of *Hamlet* and worked it into his adaptation without including lines directly from the Shakespeare play. Instead, he adapted Shakespeare's soliloquies and language, giving some of Hamlet's lines to other characters because Adwan realized that some people in the audience might not have read Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and wanted the play to be accessible to everyone in the audience. It is a provocative play that looks at a tumultuous period of liberalizing the economy. When priorities were changing, government and business changed to match them. It provokes questions, such as whether democracy and capitalism are compatible with one another. These questions are still relevant today, which is why *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* was and still is very popular among college-age students in the Arab world.

Almost forty years later, in November 2017, Rebekah Maggor, a theater professor at Cornell's Department of Performing and Media Arts, adapted and directed the first English language production of *Hamlet Wakes Up Late*, based on Margaret Litvin's translation, which premiered at Cornell University in New York. Maggor saw how Adwan used the play to discuss important sociopolitical issues and used the play to tackle U.S. politics, which is especially relevant given that the U.S. election took place last November. Maggor turned the play from an allegory about Syrian politics into an allegory about Trump. And one can see the parallels between Claudius and Trump as they are both interested in business and ruthlessly hold onto power, not caring who they damage in their wake. She updated Litvin's language, which was faithful to Adwan's Arabic, and reworked Shakespearean lines into the play to make the play more accessible to a contemporary American audience who most likely expected to hear some vestiges of Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* According to the director's production notes, the inclusion of original text from Hamlet creates an "appropriately disjointed feel that highlights the dazzling ways in which Adwan comments on and criticizes Shakespeare's text" (1). In addition to adapting the language of the play, she also wove in lines from Boris Pasternak's poem *Hamlet* into her adaptation. Hamlet sings it onstage towards the end of the play as he continues to be tortured by the Ghost, who is portrayed by two silent, dancing woman in the production. And instead of the play ending with Horatio's brutal arrest, the Queen recites the entire poem in the original Russian at the end of the play, paying homage to Litvin who is also Russian and adding yet another language and poetic dimension to the ending of the play. The cast and crew involved in the production came from international backgrounds but performed the play in English. The actress who played the Queen, Janilya Baizack, chose to recite the poem in Russian, but it can be performed in English or the language that the actor playing the Queen speaks (Maggor 108). The costumes integrated Elizabethan styles, Syrian textiles, and modern-day business attire; the combination hints at the origins of the play as well as the forces of globalization at work in the modern world. By incorporating all of these different elements, Maggor reminds the audience that they are watching a foreign and specifically Arab Shakespearean adaptation, but she shows them how the themes present in Shakespeare's plays speak to different cultures in different ways.

The most striking aspects of Maggor's production are the changes she made to her characters. She felt that the women in both Shakespeare's and Adwan's play are "pawns in the larger machinations of the men characters," and characterized Shakespeare's women as weak, with the Queen as "a fragile and disposable acolyte" and Ophelia as "a shallow ingénue who obeys her father's orders" (1). To give women a stronger presence in her production, she changed Polonius' character from that of a father to that of a mother. Only Polonius' gender changed, and she retains the qualities that Adwan's Polonius possessed, so she is now a shrewd, cunning politician. Her costume is also very reflective of her character as she dresses in black. As a result of Maggor's changes, Polonius is now the first woman to appear in the story after the rigged fencing match as Horatio is narrating Hamlet's story. It is clear that Hamlet's friends, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Horatio, and Lorenzo, are intimidated by her because they change the subject as she enters the scene, asking about Laertes' whereabouts. After she exits the scene, Lorenzo spits at the spot where she was standing and says, "I can't stand the sight of that woman" because "all she can think about is profits and investments" when the nation is in peril (Maggor 18-19). By looking out for her and her family's self-interest, she is actively participating and perpetuating the oppression people feel under an authoritarian, patriarchal societal structure. But she would not be the first woman to do that; in order to be a high-ranking official in the government, especially one who is the king's closest advisor, she would have had to make a lot of sacrifices and decisions about what is best for her, without necessarily thinking about other people.

Most of Shakespeare's plays do not have a mother who offers words of wisdom to her daughters (exceptions include *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Winter's Tale*). Therefore, his female characters grow up without having someone to rely on who can empathize with their struggles as women and instead they have to rely on themselves, but they also rely heavily on men to explain how women should behave in any given situation. And men would naturally see their role as to teach their women to remain within the bounds of the patriarchal order, as Laertes does with Ophelia when he warns her not to trust Hamlet's love for her. Thus, changing Polonius' gender drastically changes her relationship with her children, especially her relationship with Ophelia. This change in Polonius and Ophelia's relationship subverts Shakespeare's masculinist-driven narrative. Now that Ophelia has a mother, she becomes a more confident person because she has someone she can depend on who can understand her struggles as a woman in a patriarchal society. In scene twenty-six, Ophelia confides in her mother because Laertes' warning about the people's revolution "scared" her (56).[12] But Polonius tells Ophelia not to worry because “they are the system,” and as long as Polonius is the king’s top aide, she will continue making the decisions that make the “system” serve her family. Even though Laertes is against Ophelia’s marriage to Hamlet, the idea behind the marriage is reasonable as Polonius wants to secure Ophelia’s future. As the wife of the future king of Denmark, she will want for nothing and live a lavish life, which may be a far cry from Polonius’ own experience. What Polonius and Ophelia know for sure is that Ophelia will never have to struggle to maintain a position of power like her mother. The notion of “marrying up” to improve one’s social status would not be foreign to Arab audiences, just as it was not foreign to Elizabethan audiences in Shakespeare’s time.

When Polonius explains that she “made” the people chant in support of the king with “delight,” that she is the one in charge of organizing and orchestrating all of the pro-Claudius regime propaganda, Ophelia is surprised because she was so convinced by it all, and the effectiveness of the propaganda is a testimony of Polonius cunning and power (56). Here, she is setting an example for her daughter, that she too can do whatever she sets her mind to. Polonius then tells her daughter, “That young head of yours can’t understand these things yet. But you’ll reap the fruits of your mommy’s genius. The important thing is that you follow through with our plan to get you married to Hamlet” (57). When her mother says that she “can't understand” the way her “mommy” runs the affairs of the kingdom, it does not sound as condescending as when Polonius, the father, says it, because her mother does not mean that she is unintelligent. She means she is inexperienced in the world of politics, but if she remembers the plan to marry Hamlet and executes it well, then she will gain that shrewdness. Ophelia, however, reassures her mother that she “has plans too” and that the “marriage is guaranteed,” indicating that she knows much more about seducing Hamlet and is not as innocent as her mother thinks she is (57). It also shows solidarity between the two women as they both know that they are limited in what they can do to improve their circumstances, but will improve them nonetheless, the only way that is available to them, through marriage to royalty. And when Polonius asks Ophelia what her plans are, she refuses to divulge them but assures her that marriage is guaranteed, her reason being that Polonius' "old head…can’t understand what goes on in the mind of a young woman”(57). Polonius laughs along with Ophelia at the irony because they both know full well that Polonius fully understands the mind of a young woman. There is now a pact between a mother and daughter to support each other to reach their goal, a pact that would not have existed if Polonius were a man. He would be supporting her, but not in the same way because as a man, he does not know what a woman's experience is like. And, when Polonius tells her daughter to be careful, they have another moment when they discuss and joke about her honor because they both know the gravity of her situation but decide to joke about it to reclaim ownership of their "honor" and their bodies (57). It is the only thing they can do in a patriarchal society that strictly revolves around policing female behavior and protecting their “honor.” Feeling confident, Ophelia sets off on her mission to accede to the throne by becoming pregnant with Hamlet's baby. However, her plans are thrown aside after the death of Hamlet and her mother. The loss of Polonius as a knowing and supportive female conspirator creates conditions where men once again arrange Ophelia's destiny. Laertes steps in and demands that the king cover up the scandal. When Rosencrantz proposes Guildenstern as a husband for Ophelia, Laertes immediately agrees to that arrangement without consulting his sister. She is offstage when that discussion happens, and her decision will not affect the matter. The one consolation is the audience knows through Claudius that the Queen is taking care of Ophelia after her mother's death. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the Queen does not support Hamlet or Ophelia. She only reports Ophelia's death on stage, and during her funeral, Gertrude laments that Ophelia did not become Hamlet's wife. Thus, Ophelia is still supported by a mothering figure: the Queen, and having another woman supporting her may be one of the reasons why Ophelia does not contemplate or commit suicide as she does in Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*

---

[12] Maggor adds scene divisions and changes in setting in her script for the sake of clarity, but they are not present in Adwan’s text.

Although she did not have as big a role as Polonius did, Maggor's Queen also becomes more developed in this *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* adaptation. When the play begins, the Queen is "happy" that her son has returned to work, but she is ignorant of the pain she has caused her son because she married Claudius. She is focused on her son's theater production and acting skills and brags about them to other people like Fortinbras, but forgoes focusing on her son's emotions, which causes Hamlet to explode in anger during the banquet scene eventually. After Hamlet angers Fortinbras, the Queen realizes that Hamlet is in danger and becomes afraid for him and begins to understand the horror and brutality behind Claudius' rule. Even though she did not attend the secret meeting between Fortinbras and the king, she knows her son is in danger. The king grants her permission to speak to Hamlet to appease her, and one can feel her desperation as she encourages Hamlet to go explore Denmark and rule over another "state" far away from the castle, but it is too late. Hamlet provokes the king because he kills Polonius and by declaring that he can also be king, and Rosencrantz arrests him in front of his mother. The only thing she can do is scream, "Hamlet, my child!" (92). It is the only thing she can do to try and save her son. It is only after Hamlet has been sentenced to death that the Queen speaks up. Instead of ending with Horatio's arrest, the play ends with her shedding her ostentatious Elizabethan-inspired gown. She is now barefoot, dressed in simple black clothing, bemoaning Hamlet’s loss onstage. She is finally given a chance to speak and express her grief properly and openly. She recites Boris Pasternak’s poem *Hamlet*, the same poem her son sang on stage while he was alone with the Ghost before he was interrogated and sentenced to death.

> “Hamlet” by Boris Pasternak (1946) (translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky)
>
> The hum dies down. I step out on the stage.
>
> Leaning against a doorpost,
>
> I try to catch the echoes from far off
>
> Of what my age is bringing.
>
> The night's darkness focuses on me
>
> Thousands of opera glasses.
>
> Abba Father, if only it can be,
>
> Let this cup pass me by.
>
> I love the stubbornness of your intent
>
> And agree to play this role.
>
> But now a different drama's going on,
>
> Spare me, then, this once.
>
> But the order of the acts has been thought out,
>
> And leads to just one end.
>
> I'm alone, all drowns in pharisaism.
>
> Life is no stroll through a field (Maggor 108).

The poem unites both mother and son, who each recite the poem when they finally comprehend how sheltered they have been inside the castle walls and their duty to rid their country of corruption. As she recites the poem, the Queen gains strength and rises, surrounded by the ghosts of the people Claudius wrongfully killed: Lorenzo, Hamlet, and Horatio. Maggor remarks that the coda she added for the Queen "hints at her rejection of the new 'development' regime and her desire to connect with the growing revolutionary movement outside the palace walls"(4). The play ends as she rises, standing in solidarity with the ghosts of the people who were murdered while calling for change, she now knows that "life is no stroll through the field." She wants to play a role in ending Claudius' rule. In this Arab Shakespeare adaptation, the Queen's voice is not subverted by another man or the structure of the play itself, but it is contained as the play ends without giving the audience a chance to see what the Queen is going to do as the country spirals into chaos.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen how full attention to the function of gender in Arab Shakespeare complicates the political angle that scholars have typically highlighted in Arab Hamlet plays. Although women in both the Shakespeare plays and the Arab adaptations and appropriations of them do not have a lot of personal and political power over their lives, in the Arab plays, the women do what they can to take charge of their lives to preserve some of the agency they possess, and try to use it to change their situation by convincing the men to wake up and look closely at how "rotten" the state is and how "out of joint" the men are about life in the public sphere. At other times, women rise to power while maintaining the status quo, manipulating the system in order to preserve their power. In the next chapter, we will examine gender and crossdressing in a different generic context: not another tragic Arab *Hamlet*, but an Arab *Twelfth Night*. In light of the strict heteronormative structure of society where men and women know their place, we shall see what Olivia and Viola, as well as the actors and actresses playing them, do to foster their own agency under more fluid conditions.

CHAPTER TWO

VIOLA’S AND OLIVIA’S PROGRESS DERAILED: GENDER DYNAMICS IN AN ARAB *TWELFTH NIGHT*

Too well what love women to men may owe.
In faith, they are as true of heart as we.

Viola (2.4.116-117)

In the previous chapter, I focused on the female characters in *Hamlet,* one of the most adapted Shakespearean tragedies. Pivoting slightly from further examining female roles in Arab Shakespearean tragedies, I will explore an adaptation of a Shakespearean comedy, namely *Twelfth Night*. To do so, I look at how a difference in genre affects the characterization of female characters and the function and performance of female characters in comic Shakespeare adaptations and appropriation. With the increase in the Arabic translations of Shakespearean comedies such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, adaptations of Shakespearean comedies have also increased. One comedy, in particular, *The Merchant of Venice*, has been quite popular in the Arab world (as elsewhere) because Shakespeare portrayed Shylock, a Jewish moneylender as avaricious and self-serving. Other than *The Merchant of Venice*, most of the work on Arab Shakespearean comedy has focused on *The Taming of the Shrew*. This is because the plot of the play involves a proud woman who does not want to get married, but she is “tamed” by the end of the play and settles down into married life. It was a popular play because it was performed in 1930 in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, featured Fatima Rushdie, and Egyptian theater critics used the play to promote their own ideas about marriage and traditional gender norms (Moberly 9). Most recently, adaptations of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* have also been popular in Egypt and Palestine. Like *The Taming of the Shrew*, it also opens up the issue of male dominance, but it does so within a magical forest realm where anything is possible, a realm not bound by societal norms of gender and sexuality. All the characters forget their antics in the forest when they leave it, and as is typical of Shakespearean comedies, the play ends with the two couples getting married.

***Twelfth Night*, Politics, and Gender**

However, it is another play, *Twelfth Night*, a major Shakespearean comedy, which has become central to modern Arab Shakespeare thanks to a high-profile adaptation by Sulayman Al Bassam. Al Bassam is a Kuwaiti British playwright, theater director, and founder of Zaoum Theatre Company (London 1996-2001) and its Arabic arm Sulayman Al-Bassam Theatre Kuwait (SABAB) in 2002. His theater engages with contemporary issues facing the Middle East and produces work in Arabic and English. He has been awarded the Kuwait State Arts Encouragement Award, Edinburgh Fringe First Award, and the Best Director and Best Performance Awards (Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre) for his unconventional plays that seek to subvert the stereotypes surrounding the Arab world. In 2007, an explosion during an amateur production of *Twelfth Night* inspired Al Bassam to write *The Speaker's Progress* based on the Shakespeare play (Holderness and Loughrey 2007). Further galvanized by the "Arab Spring," a play revolving around state politics and revolution began to emerge.

Twelfth Night's major themes revolve around gender and cross-dressing as Viola, shipwrecked in Illyria, presumes her twin brother Sebastian to be dead when he is very much alive. She serves the ruler of Illyria, Duke Orsino and to do so, she dresses up as a man and goes by the name Cesario. At the duke's court, Viola discovers that the duke loves a certain lady, Olivia, who is in mourning and will receive no suitors. Nevertheless, her uncle Sir Toby Belch has found her a suitor, a rich but dimwitted man, Sir Andrew Aguecheek in hopes that she will change her mind about marriage. Orsino sends Viola as Cesario to woo Olivia on his behalf. However, despite Viola’s efforts to convince her of Orsino's love, Olivia falls in love with Cesario instead, unaware he is actually Viola, a woman in disguise.

Meanwhile, Sir Toby and Olivia's puritanical steward Malvolio are at odds with one another because Sir Toby's late-night drinking and carousing disturbs the peace at Lady Olivia's house. As a result, Sir Toby, Maria, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Feste the fool, and another servant named Fabian all take part in a plot against him. Maria writes a letter claiming to be Olivia and in it confesses her love to Malvolio; she then plants a letter in his path. When Malvolio follows the instructions in the letter to win over Olivia, she declares him mad and allows the others to lock him up in a dungeon where Feste enjoys tormenting him by pretending to be a priest. At the same time, it turns out that another ship captain named Antonio rescued Sebastian. He volunteers to go back to Illyria with Sebastian, risking his life because of his affection towards him. When Viola as Cesario, is challenged to a duel by Sir Andrew at the behest of Sir Toby, Antonio comes to her aid mistaking her for Sebastian. Thus, he gets arrested by the authorities. When Sebastian comes looking for him, Olivia, mistaking him for Cesario, confesses her love to him and urges him to marry her in secret. When Duke Orsino summons Olivia to his court, Viola and Sebastian finally meet, and people marvel at how alike they look. Viola then sheds her disguise as Cesario, and Olivia reveals that she has married Sebastian, thus ending the confusion surrounding the twins’ identities. Orsino then asks Viola to marry him, and she accepts. Joining in on the festive celebrations, Sir Toby and Maria have also decided to get married. A furious Malvolio, finally released from his prison, confronts Olivia about her horrible treatment of him as a prisoner and vows revenge on all of them. However, Orsino sends Fabian to try to placate him.

None of these intricate details from the Shakespearean play appear explicitly in the framework of Sulayman Al Bassam's *The Speaker's Progress*, yet that play is tightly bound up with and thoughtfully reflects upon the Elizabethan original. *The Speaker's Progress* is one play that is part of the Arab Shakespeare trilogy by Sulayman Al Bassam, which includes his two other plays: *Al-Hamlet Summit* and *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*. In this play, the Speaker, played by Al Bassam himself, steers the course for the reconstruction of the play as the 1963 version plays on a projector. Al Bassam also wrote and directed the 1963 version, making it a play within a play. The actors and actresses in this production play envoys from different bureaucratic departments of the government. In the reconstructed play, they are instructed to act out certain roles corresponding to different characters in *Twelfth Night*. Sometimes one envoy can play more than one *Twelfth Night* character depending on what the scene needs. Cross-dressing occurs even when it is not scripted in the Shakespeare play. For example, if a male envoy is busy onstage, a female envoy can don a disguise and step in for him and vice versa for the sake of continuity. With a camera watching them, the envoys begin the reconstruction. The doubling and even tripling of characters acting in a mise en abyme makes the action of *The Speaker's Progress* difficult to follow. While some envoys are reconstructing the 1963 play, a revolution begins on stage as a former actress invents the revolutionary signal. The Speaker also adds a few subversive lines to the play. As the plays bleed into one another, an envoy who plays a mullah tries to restore order but to no avail. He is put in a cage and tortured by the rest of the actors/envoys/*Twelfth Night* characters as they rebel against the established order. The cast bends the rules of gender and the segregation associated with it as they cross-dress and mix freely with one another, dancing and singing onstage. The Representative of the National Tourist Board/Mullah/Malvolio character becomes suspicious and interrogates the entire cast to figure out who incited them to rebel. The Speaker finally confesses that he is the one to blame, and the entire cast promise not to speak of what happened, taking the camera offstage. The play ends with the Former Actress and another female envoy changing the ending of the Shakespeare play and the Speaker's play reciting something that the Representative of the Writer's Union wrote instead. As they talk openly about their dreams, the stage disintegrates and the women wonder, "How shall we live?" (196).

Gender is central to the plot of *Twelfth Night* and *The Speaker's Progress*, and Al Bassam uses the Shakespeare play as a tool to broach controversial subjects in his own society. It has mostly been avoided in the Arab world because it deals with themes of cross-dressing and the fluidity of gender and sexuality, which are controversial topics. *The Speaker's Progress* reflects Al Bassam's Arab roots and engages with the conflict of artistic censorship in a state that polices artistic representation to produce a specific brand of nationalism. In addition to regulating art and other cultural resources, the state also prescribes rules governing the relations between men and women because gender, like art, is intertwined with national politics and nationalism especially in the Arab world. The "woman question" has placed the fate of woman's emancipation with that of the nation, and unfortunately, women's bodies were often the subject of that debate. Thus, in this chapter, I aim to answer questions such as do women have agency in a repressive state government that is inundated with rules about conduct in gendered spaces? How do gender dynamics change when the rigid environment breaks down? Can women truly resist the heteronormative patriarchal structure of society, or will they remain complicit in it?

As men project their ideas of modernization, nationhood, and progress onto the women and their bodies in the play, the comic genre grants the female characters in both Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Al Bassam's *The Speaker's Progress* the capacity and space to resist these associations, a resistance unattainable by the tragic figures of Ophelia and Gertrude. Comic women can more subversively use theatrical tools to express themselves in a society where the patriarchal state sanctions and controls all. The female characters are silent, obedient, and bound by rules of gender segregation, but use the Shakespearean intertext to flout the rules, bend the norms of gender and sexuality by cross-dressing, express their sensual desires, and speak their minds, subverting the stereotypical representation of Arab women and the patriarchal norms that surround them. Hanan Hajj Ali, a Lebanese actress, plays herself in this production, connecting the characters in the production to women in the Arab world who are trying to reclaim their agency and move forward despite the strictures of their patriarchal society.

***The Speaker's Progress*: Modernity, State Control, and Gender Segregation**

Al Bassam uses the framework of *Twelfth Night* to set up a play within a play where the characters in *The Speaker's Progress* are working on restaging a state-sanctioned reproduction of a 1960s Arab adaptation of *Twelfth Night* set somewhere in the Gulf region. The Speaker introduces the play to the audience, breaking the fourth wall, adding a metatheatrical element to the play. The Speaker's primary role is narrating what is going on onstage, providing the audience with background information, and continuously assuring the envoys and the camera set up by the state to record their every move, downstage center, that this production does not support the establishment of theater in any shape, way or form. The envoys are people sent out by the government from different ministries or organizations, and each of them plays a character in the 1960s Arab production, which the characters denounce as full of debauchery and decadence. The Speaker narrates the play in the language of the host venue (English) while the envoys speak to each other in Arabic. All of Al Bassam's plays are performed in Arabic with one or two characters speaking in English, marking their foreignness, but unlike the other plays in the trilogy, this one is the most ambitious with its mixing of Arabic and English.

In order to further maintain the authenticity of the performance, the Speaker introduces Hanan Hajj Ali, a former actress from the Golden Era who was involved in the original production and asks her to weigh in on the reconstruction. Hanan Hajj Ali appears as herself in this production. She is a former Lebanese actress, teacher, researcher, and activist. Hajj Ali is currently the chairperson of al Mawred al Thaqafy (Cultural Resource), a non-profit organization that supports artistic creativity and intercultural exchange in the Arab world. She, unlike the envoys and other people on stage, is a champion of the theater and is not afraid to speak her mind, calling theater "the temple of truth"(145). The Speaker cuts her off and says, “in the age of falsehood, perhaps.” He then asks, “What was it like to be an actor in those days?” She responds poetically, describing acting in the 1960s as hope and clarity amidst all the chaos. Hajj Ali comments on the state of drama now and says, “Now? The theaters are closed. Music, like masturbation, is a secret habit; women are the guardians of tribal values, show me a mouth that's not been filled with gold or silenced with sound… Let's leave it to God” (145). The Speaker cuts off her speech because he is afraid that the play he has set up will get censored or worse, even shut down. Her speech gives a sense of the extent to which society has become repressive such that people do everything secretly, and dissenters are bribed to maintain the status quo. Even the Speaker interrupts her as she speaks and silences her for fear of retribution from the state censors. The fact that "women are the guardians of tribal values" indicates that this society is ruled by primitive traditions. Women are expected to be the guardians of traditions and social mores, and this notion of protection gives them a greater sense of value and importance in society. Also, returning to a tribal state connotes backwardness in an Arab context, so tribal social norms are outdated. Having women fight to keep these social values in place, no matter how outdated they may be is detrimental to everyone in society. But by giving women a specific role in society, men pacify them into thinking they are influential while relegating them to positions of lesser power and influence to control them.

After Madame Hanan’s speech, the audience is introduced to Thuraya (ثريا), not as a character on stage but rather through the eyes of the Duke. She is a rewriting of Olivia’s character and based on the Duke’s characterization of her, and is a woman who wields a considerable amount of power, like her Shakespearean counterpart. She, much like Olivia, is mourning the loss of her brother; however, unlike Olivia, who was mourning for seven years, Thuraya, according to Muslim tradition, is in mourning for forty days. As the reconstruction starts, the Ruler/Orsino describes himself as a victim of Thuraya’s love. He claims she is a seductress while also projecting onto her the idea of modernity when he says that his “soul is hanging like ripped meat from the beak of the predator named Thuraya! Music is the food of love and love is the blood of freedom and freedom is the mother of progress…and she this woman, Thuraya, is the heart of progress!” (142). He then asks his cousin to announce a lovesong writing competition, in which the winner will earn forty days of the country’s oil revenues and insists that the prize be named after her. Thuraya refers to a cluster of stars known as the Pleiades, which are one of the nearest clusters to Earth. Her name can also mean chandelier; in either case, it gives her the qualities of someone who shines brightly, so it is fitting that he uses the metaphors of freedom and progress to describe her because it would indicate that the future the ruler is dreaming of is full of hope. Her name is also a pun on the word "thawra" (ثورة) or revolution in Arabic. If one looks at it from the context of the word “revolution,” the connection between the words “love,” “freedom,” and “progress” becomes even more apparent. The repetition of the words emphasizes the importance of the three concepts and their interrelatedness to one another. For without love, there can be no freedom, and without freedom, there can be no progress, and without a revolution, none of these could exist, especially in a totalitarian-like state. The ruler combines all three abstract concepts, thinking that one woman can embody them. That stands in sharp contrast to her being the predator who ripped out the Ruler’s soul and leaves it hanging in her beak. The comparison of women to birds of prey is not uncommon in Shakespeare, though, and one can find examples of that in the next chapter. By deeming her the predator, the ruler is acknowledging the immense amount of power Thuraya has over him, but he links the power to something violent, so it does not represent the empowerment of women in a positive light.

After hearing the Duke’s description, one would expect to be introduced to Thuraya onstage, but the audience first meets Fawz (فوز) instead. Fawz is a rewriting of Viola’s character. The reconstruction of the play resumes from Act one scene two of *Twelfth Night*, where Viola is rescued by the Sea Captain and enquires about her whereabouts as well as the ruler of Illyria. This is when she learns from the ship captain that Duke Orsino is in love with a woman named

Olivia. The former actress, Amal, plays Fawz, while the Representative of the Student Union, Nassar, plays the role of the Sea Captain. The name Fawz is gender-neutral in Arabic and has multiple meanings such as triumph, victory, winning, and success. Fawz, like Viola, learns that she is in a foreign land known as Ilyaal (the Arabized form of Illyria) which is ruled by a kind ruler. In *The Speaker's Progress*, however, Fawz does not have a twin, and there is no Sebastian character equivalent.[13]

Once she arrives in Ilyaal, Fawz decides to serve the Ruler, who is not a count or a duke, but rather a Shaikh as is fitting for an Arab adaptation. After her exchange with the sea captain, Fawz begins dressing up like a man, as Viola does in *Twelfth Night* when she dons her new identity as Cesario in order to better serve the duke. It is also appropriate for her to dress up as a man in an Arab context as well because homosocial relationships are acceptable in Arab society. However, the Representative of the National Tourist Board tries to stop her as he objects to the idea that a woman can dress up as a man and finds it offensive. When the Speaker tries to explain that this is part of the production, however, the Representative of the National Tourist Board interrupts the Speaker's explanation, saying that this was "not shown to the committee," and feels the need to clarify that cross-dressing is not a "tourist attraction" in this Arab country nor is it on the list (149). The Speaker also shows him his license stamped by the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And with the former actress dressed up as a man, she takes her place on the platform to act out the reconstructed scene based on Act one Scene four of

---

[13] Sebastian's character has been removed from the adaptation; therefore, there is no need for Antonio's character to be present in *The Speaker's Progress* because in *Twelfth Night* he interacts primarily with Sebastian. With the removal of these two characters, Al Bassam removes the possibility of discussion around the homoerotic relationship between the two characters. His reasons for the two characters removal might stem from him not wanting to offend Arab cultural sensibilities or governments which might tolerate a woman being attracted to another woman but not a man attracted to another man.

Twelfth Night where Fawz and the Shaikh ruler discuss Thuraya, and they hatch a plan to use Fawz to communicate his love for Thuraya like Orsino uses Cesario (Viola in a man's attire) to convince Olivia how much he loves her. In both plays, Viola and Fawz have been in a foreign country for three days, but their conversation about Thuraya (Olivia) is slightly different. For example, when Orsino is speaking to Cesario, he says, “Stand you awhile aloof.—Cesario, /Thou know’st no less but all. I have unclasped/To thee the book even of my secret soul” (1.4.13-15). He uses the metaphor of an unclasped book to describe how much he trusts and has opened up to Cesario, telling him his secrets. In *The Speaker’s Progress*, the ruler says, “Whether it’s the honesty I sense in your soul or the skill of your tongue, whatever it is, I have opened up my heart to you like a woman” (150). In the adaptation, the unveiling of secrets is not a metaphor, but a simile, and the ruler compares himself to a woman when he bears his soul to Fawz. This comparison is telling because it indicates what men and society at large think of women and hints at stereotypical differences between the sexes. Women are not the only ones who have secrets and confide in one another, but perhaps the simile justifies the speed with which the ruler confided in Fawz, which is ironic because Fawz is a woman

When discussing how to win Thuraya over with the ruler, Fawz makes some lewd jokes, and although the jokes are part of the script, some envoys still object to them. The ruler who has tried to woo Thuraya multiple times is unsure of how Fawz's plan will work because he thinks she is immune to men's charm and “is as dry as a desert” (151). Fawz retorts, "If there's moisture in her, I'll feel it," and this lewd humor causes a bit of an uproar among the envoys because of its homoerotic undertones (151). The Speaker cuts in with, “we despise filth” silencing Fawz (151). Even though Fawz is a playing a man's part, the state forbids any nonconforming expression of sexual identity, and the play within this play is allowing the envoys to subvert the binary notion of gender and sexuality much to the Representative of the National Tourist Board's dismay. In the play, the Ruler objects to Fawz's comment for a different reason. Fawz, as a woman playing a man, threatened Thuraya's honor, which is a grave offense which I also discussed in the second chapter. As a result, the Ruler warns Fawz not to touch Thuraya, or he will "blacken [Fawz's] face with tar" (151). Fawz forgetting for a moment that she is playing a man realizes that “[her] metaphor undid [her]” (151). However, the ruler changes his tone because he wants to marry Thuraya, and Fawz could be the key to that plan succeeding.

Fawz and Thuraya are not the only women who play major roles in the play. The Young Woman who is a rewriting of Maria's character also plays a significant role in the play, even more than her Shakespearean counterpart does in *Twelfth Night*. Initially described by the Speaker as “young and confused” because she refuses to introduce herself onstage, she blossoms into a new woman as she embodies the character of Nishami, the housemaid (144). The audience sees her up on the platform in a scene that takes place in Thuraya’s courtyard where Nishami (Maria) and Thuraya’s uncle, Tagtiga (Sir Toby Belch) converse with one another with the radio transistor between them.[14] He, visibly annoyed with the recitation, wants to switch the radio channel to play a love song, Nishami however, swats his hand away from the radio multiple times. One can see that she is a strong female character because she has the audacity to berate him for his drunkenness and “caterwauling,” which is unusual given her position as a housemaid (154). Tagtiga, in turn, complains to Nishami about Thuraya’s extensive mourning; he insists that not even the Hussein was the subject of such “blubbering,” alluding to the mourning rituals of Ashura (154).[15] Tagtiga unconsciously likens Thuraya's grief to that of a noisy child crying, which not only makes light of her grieving process but also essentializes Thuraya because she has become a child in his eyes. Nishami then informs Tagtiga that Thuraya complained to Mullah Farhan about his behavior. The Mullah (Malvolio), played by the Representative of the National Tourist Board, is Thuraya's confidante, and Nishami blames Tagtiga for Thuraya and the Mullah's close friendship. Tagtiga tries to absolve himself from the blame by mentioning that he was the one who brought and introduced Faris, a "true prince" to Thuraya and the rest of the household hoping to get her to abandon her mourning rituals (155). The audience learns from the Speaker that Faris' money has been financing uncle Tagtiga's lifestyle. The drunken uncle lures Faris who is played by the Representative of the National Student Union, with the promise of Thuraya's hand. It appears that Tagtiga is the one who decides whom Thuraya will marry, or at least he thinks he does because he is her male relative. Again, neither an Arab audience nor an Elizabethan one would not find this strange because the patriarchal social customs that assign a male relative as a woman's guardian if her father or brother is absent or has passed away. Nishami, however, considers him to be an "idiot prince" and a "bad poet" (155). If she were not playing Nishami, the Young Woman would not have the audacity to disparage a man she does not know because her comments flout the rules of respect established between men and women in the Arab world, especially if those men are guests in one's household.

---

[14] Tagtiga is the phonetic Gulf spelling of the word taqtaqa (طقطقة) which is Arabic for a sharp noise or blow, usually a crackle or a pop. Sir Toby Belch's name is also based on a noise, and both names are used for comedic effect indicating how noisy and cheerful the characters can be in the midst of a somber environment.

Politics and the Woman's Place

---

[15] Ashura or the 10th day of Muharram commemorates the martyrdom of Hussain bin Ali, the grandson of the prophet Mohammad at Karbala. Shias participate in various mourning rituals throughout the month of Muharram, but the largest display of mourning occurs on Ashura.

The Young Woman/Nishami is not the only audacious female character in the play, the Representative of the Women's League is even more daring than her fellow envoy. The Representative of the Women's League, who plays Thuraya, holds a silk gloved hand in the air and mimes a gesture with her hand that the other envoys will later emulate, a signal that sparks a revolution. The atmosphere of the theater gives her the agency to create a signal that will become the start of change. On stage, the gesture is confusing, and it is only after the Speaker associates it with "the object of so many desires," a line that hearkens back to the Ruler at the beginning of the play, referring to Thuraya whose name is a pun on the Arabic word for revolution, does it all fall into place (157). The people "desire" change and a woman is brave enough to start something, a signal that might inspire others to do something about the oppressive environment in which they live. The woman remains on the platform with her hand raised because the crew has run into technical difficulties, and it looks like the theater itself is trying to strip the Representative of the Women's League of her agency. Everyone else in the scene also remains on the platform, mindlessly repeating the gestures they were performing earlier until the problem is resolved. Freedom is a foreign concept to the envoys who cannot fathom doing anything onstage other than repeating gestures without thinking, and the men in power try hard to maintain order have striven to disempower the population, but one woman is changing that.

The Representative of the Women's League's act of defiance against the state and her desire to push for change seeps into her performance as Thuraya in the reconstruction. After the musical-free "musical interlude," the other envoys begin to reconstruct scene four, which takes place inside Thuraya's house where Thuraya expresses her desire to enter into politics. It begins with Nishami, Thuraya, and the Mullah all discussing the different suitors that have visited

Thuraya seeking her hand. As Nishami reminds her of the different suitors and their gifts, Thuraya asks Mullah what he thinks of them instead of taking Nishami’s advice or even trusting her own feeling about them. Mullah Farhan dissuades her from accepting any of their gifts. At the same moment, Feylooti, the blind fool (Feste), enters and Thuraya berates him for leaving her alone for five days. As the Mullah and Feylooti argue about Feylooti’s drunkenness, the blind fool calls the Mullah’s rigid attitude to other people’s behavior a “prelude to dictatorship” (160). Thuraya gets excited because he is “speak[ing] of politics,” something outside of what a woman hears typically in the private sphere. When she makes it clear to the men that she wants to “enter into politics” and she is adamant that there is “nothing” she lacks to speak of politics as well as any man” they discourage her from pursuing that path (160). Feylooti the Fool thinks she cannot participate in politics because she “lack[s] a husband,” reinforcing the societal notion that a woman’s worth depends on her relation to other men (160). Unlike the fool, the Mullah does not provide a clear reason why she should not take part in politics. However, he says that it is “not in [her] interest to think like that” as if he is the authority on where Thuraya’s best interest lies (160). His comment also reinforces the idea that a woman's interests belong to the private sphere, and she should devote her thoughts to something other than politics. An envoy reading stage directions onstage indicates that “two females advance” towards Thuraya every time she mentions she wants to become involved in political affairs. The two women draw nearer to her to intimidate her into silence, but they are ordered to do so by someone else. The women's actions show women can be forced to be complicit in perpetuating misogyny against other women, and how, by doing so, women sabotage their chance for agency and freedom. They have either internalized the misogyny or honestly believe that they cannot exercise their agency outside of the private sphere.

After discussing where a woman’s place should be, the people’s attention is directed to Tagtiga as he enters the scene and introduces Fawz to the others commenting on her androgyny. He says, “There is a boy leading an army outside” (161). The idea of a boy leading an army is absurd, so Thuraya asks, “What kind of boy?” to make sure she has heard correctly and to try to verify who the individual is, questioning how a boy can lead an entire army and wondering who entrusted him with a mission that would require an army of men to approach her household. Tagtiga does not divulge any further information; he only says that the boy standing outside is a “boy-like boy” (161). The rhetorical repetition of the word “boy” draws our attention to the ambiguity surrounding the boy's character because he is being played by a woman masquerading as a man. When Thuraya refuses to see any more of the Shaikh's men, her uncle expresses his disapproval. Thuraya, however, stands up for herself when she says, “You are not to interfere with my personal life uncle,” knowing full well that she is allowed to have a say in whom she invites into her house and whom she wants to marry (161). Tagtiga is staying at Thuraya's house at her expense, so he knows he has little power over her, so he leaves, but not before calling her a “stubborn wench” (161). The Mullah then steps in and weighs in on the suitors because all the men think that they have a right to have an opinion on this issue that does not even concern their future. He tells Thuraya not to see the boy, but she ignores his advice and invites the “boy” in, purposefully defying the Mullah’s advice reminding Nishami to bring in their veils which Olivia asks Maria to do in *Twelfth Night* as well. What follows is then a rendition of Act one Scene five of *Twelfth Night* where Cesario meets Olivia and tells her of the Duke’s love for her ending with this plea, “Lady, you are the cruel'st she alive/If you will lead these graces to the grave/ And leave the world no copy” (1.5.240-242). And as Fawz is detailing her plans to "make a willow cabin" at Thuraya's gate she stops mid-speech and continues by reading a subversive excerpt from the red notebook that the Speaker had given her earlier:

> I’d turn myself into a fruit seller
> And set my body aflame in the square
> I’d scratch your initials on the school walls
> Take a bullet to the chest and turn the gash
> Into a spring millions flock to drink from
> I’d chant your name through a year of Fridays
> Thuraya, Thuraya, Thuraya:
> Huriya, Huriya, Huriya!!! (163).

This speech alludes to the beginning of the Arab uprisings in 2011 that started in Tunisia with the self-immolation of the street vendor Mohammad Bouazizi. The call for freedom (huriya) spread throughout the Middle East, and some movements outed leaders from power. In other Arab states, the call for revolution was met with violent repression and a move to silence those calling for change just like the state represented in *The Speaker’s Progress* does. The Representative of the National Tourist Board is an agent of the state who wants to maintain the status quo. Fawz (Former Actress) is effectively rebelling against the state, and the Representative of the National Tourist Board chokes her when she finishes her speech and obscures her from the camera and the audience. He is so afraid and outraged by her boldness at calling for freedom that he decided to abuse her physically to dissuade her from trying anything else. After that assault, the Former Actress, flustered and humiliated, tries to defend herself but she is interrupted by the Speaker who is trying to smooth things over. By interrupting the Former

Actress, he is disempowering her because she is not given a chance to explain herself; she is silenced. In order to calm things down and distract the Representative of the National Tourist Board, the Speaker announces that it is time for the "Tourist Board presentation," which is nothing but state-approved propaganda. Once the presentation is over, the former actress, trying to defend herself, says, "Allow me to clarify…" (164). Fearing no one would hear her pleas and realizing that there is strength in numbers, the female envoys all join in together demanding that the Speaker and the Representative of the National Tourist Board "allow her to clarify" why she chose to recite this speech instead of her prescribed lines (164). However, instead of giving the Former Actress a platform to speak, all the female envoys chant, "Our Guardian knows best," and smile. Once again, here, women are implicitly involved in silencing other women instead of helping one another. At the same time, however, the women are saving her from further punishment at the hands of the state.

The Former Actress knows that she will pay for her defiance after she was physically abused earlier; thus, she chooses not another man, but another woman to continue her mission. While the reconstruction of Act five Scene one of *Twelfth Night* proceeds on the raised platform, the Former Actress passes the red notebook to the Representative of the Women's League discreetly before presenting herself for the interrogation headed by the Representative of the National Tourist Board. As the reconstruction continues and Thuraya says the Mullah's cue, the Speaker motions for the Young Woman to step in and play the Mullah. It is hypocritical of the Mullah to be critical of Fawz donning a man's attire but be completely fine with the Young Woman wearing his beard just because he is busy investigating on behalf of the state, but no one argues with him. The Young Woman is "hesitant" at first but dons a beard and plays the part until it is the Mullah’s cue to exit and then steps off the platform and hands the Mullah his beard back (165). Then Thuraya raises her hand and performs the revolutionary signal, proudly expressing her desire for freedom and change. The Representative of the National Tourist Board is busy interrogating the Former Actress and “fumigat[ing] her” behind the projector screen to notice the signal. It is as if cleansing and purifying her would dissuade her from seeking freedom and justice. While Thuraya is still on the platform, the Representative of the Council of Virtue ascends the platform as Feylooti the blind fool (166). Although their bodies cannot touch in real life, they both walk across the raised platform until their shadows, visible on the screen, touch and show their hands clasping each other. Both envoys use the theater and the roles they are playing as an opportunity to bend the rules and make use of theater as a subversive tool. No action is taken against them because their bodies were not physically touching one another, and they broke no laws.

After the interrogation and fumigation take place, the Former Actress and the Representative of the National Tourist Board resume their roles as Fawz and the Mullah. The Mullah humiliates Fawz, but she refuses to let him intimidate her. They begin the reconstruction of the next scene, which corresponds to Act two scene two of *Twelfth Night* in which Malvolio runs after Viola/Cesario and gives them a ring that Lady Olivia claims they forgot at her house. In *The Speaker’s Progress*, Fawz ‘forgets’ a pearl, and the Mullah throws it at her. He then insults her, calling her a liar and a “menace” who excites “both men and women” and even calls her a "transvestite" (168). The Mullah’s insults only highlight the irony of the situation because she is not a man dressed in woman's clothing, but rather the opposite. He is extremely uncomfortable around her because he is also attracted to her and is confused by her androgyny.

His fury grows during their exchange, however, when Fawz mentions religion, assuring him that she “fears Allah,” and she points out that “transvestites” and “delinquents” do not have their own religion, even though the Mullah believes that they are deluded because they do not follow his strict brand of Islam. When Fawz tries to challenge his claim, he becomes incensed insults her calls her a “gelding” once again drawing attention to her androgyny. The Mullah cannot fathom how people can worship God in different ways regardless of their gender and sexual orientation (169). A Muslim audience would relate to the Mullah’s anger at nontraditional expressions of gender and sexuality because there is plenty of literature that cautions against non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality in Islam. However, that expression should in no way be a benchmark for someone's faith or lack thereof. When an effeminate man was brought to the prophet, and someone suggested that they should kill him, the prophet said, “I have been forbidden to kill those who pray” (Rowson 674). It is courageous of the Former Actress/Fawz to challenge the Mullah on this controversial issue, especially when the Mullah is considered the source of religious authority and she is playing the role of a marginalized, effeminate man in Arab society.

Not only does Fawz challenge a very narrow-minded view of religiosity and faith expression, but she also challenges the notion that she, as a woman, needs to fulfill her biological role and have children. After the Mullah leaves, Fawz realizes, just like Viola does in *Twelfth Night* that Thuraya (Olivia) is in love with her. But while Viola calls on Time to “untangle” the “knot[s]” that have bound Olivia and Viola together, Fawz sees a vision of her future self (2.2.40-41). She sees herself “in a wedding dress; me with my first child, me with my second child; me, stooped with my children grown tall around me, me dead… And there’s another life waiting for me…” (169). Here, Fawz sees herself fulfilling her social and biological role as a woman, getting married and having children, but she also feels that she can choose another path in life, one that is unconventional and unclear, but Fawz feels more drawn to it than the traditional path she is expected to follow. After she finishes her speech, undeterred by the Representative of the National Tourist Board’s interrogation, she and not the Representative of the Women’s League/Thuraya, relays the revolutionary signal to the Representative of the Council of Virtue.

In the next scene, a role reversal ensues with the Representative of the Council of Virtue/Ruler dressing up as a famous Egyptian singer, Umm Kulthum, entertaining the guests at Thuraya’s house. While the Representative of the National Tourist Board is offstage interrogating the Speaker, a very drunk Representative of the Writers’ Union takes the Speaker’s place. He encourages the envoys to act from the heart, and he gets excited because a "man is disguised as a woman" in the scene (171). Having a man dress up as a woman is more exciting and subversive than having a woman do the same because of the harsh injunction against men acting like women. Cross-dressing for both genders is looked down upon in the Arab world, but this affects men more than women because of the notions of masculinity that men are required to uphold. Historically, effeminate men (mukhanathun) were also frequently ostracized in early Islamic society because they were thought to corrupt moral values and were often banished elsewhere, and that association has trickled down into Arab society today (Rowson 672-3). Sure enough, when they begin the reconstruction the Representative of the Council of Virtue enters in a bright sequined dress and dark glasses everyone begins to sing and dance as the sound technician plays music for once. Even the Young Woman finally begins to get more comfortable in her own skin, and everyone is having a good time, at least until the Representative of the National Tourist Board shows up on stage again with a disheveled Speaker and a copy of *Twelfth Night* in tow. The Speaker "denounces" himself for producing seditious content in English, but the Representative of the National Tourist Board wants him to do so in Arabic, and the Speaker obliges. The envoys resume the reconstruction, singing, and dancing, but the Mullah rebukes them saying, "Are you mad?! This is dancing, this is bending, this is transvestitism! Will blatant filth encroach on our beds and no man stir?" (174). Again, for the Mullah, any non-normative expression of gender combined with singing and dancing is a sign of "filth" and decadence, and men are supposed to "stir" or rise against this nonconformity, protect the others from it and maintain order, not encourage it as some male envoys have done.

The Representative of the National Tourist Board then punishes the Young Woman for the group's disregard for the rules instead of the men on stage because she is an easy target. Descending from the platform, the Representative of the National Tourist Board notices a headscarf obscuring the camera onstage and deduces that it belongs to the Young Woman and decides to punish her for dancing and singing even though it was the Representative of the Writers' Union's idea. Outraged, he stabs her with his meter rule but exits the stage when he realizes he is outnumbered. Then the Young Woman in character as Nishami, curses him saying, "Sting me! Slap me! Burn me! I'll make you regret the day you first tasted your mother's milk" (175). Nishami's character gives her the space to say things she would not dare to say or do as herself, and she embraces that.

The Ruler is not the only male character who projects his ideas of nationhood onto Thuraya's body; the Mullah does that as well. The Mullah claims, "[Thuraya's] ill and I am the cure: she’s lost, and I’m her guide. Historical opportunity crossed with individual genius– *this* is how revolutions are made. Thuraya’s breast in one hand, the keys to the state in the other: no contradiction anywhere.” (180-181). Thuraya is living in her house on her own income, paying for male relatives who live with her and does not need the Mullah to guide her through anything. Furthermore, Thuraya's body becomes loaded with signifiers, and the focus becomes her sexuality where her “breast” is equivalent to “the key to the state.” Her body becomes the object and the place upon which the revolution is performed, and she is not in control of her body, the Mullah is. So even when women or rather women's bodies are involved in a revolutionary act, it is men who control them and decide what happens to them, but the female envoys are trying to do away with that notion by initiating the revolutionary acts themselves.

Thuraya and Fawz in the orange grove conversing together is another example of how women are silently complicit in and abide by patriarchal rules. With Fawz still in a male disguise, Thuraya unaware that Fawz is a woman asks her, “Do you know how to cast spells [on women]?” hinting at her attraction to Fawz (181). Fawz desperate to avoid Thuraya falling in love with her, turns to her and launches into a speech that exposes the operation of patriarchy in their society as she says,

> Women have a spell cast on them from birth….However hard a woman tries, she will always be the prey, never the predator…If they’re pretty they’re the prey of men, if they're ugly, they're the prey of other women, and if they’re clever they are their own worst enemy…You are exploiting the class difference between us. You are a lady: I am a servant. You are merely replicating the forms of male predation in the social sphere. In this garden you are the man, I am the woman (181-182).

She tells Thuraya that both men and women perpetuate the imbalanced power dynamics involved in patriarchy and other women are victims of that. Fawz has experienced discrimination caused by the patriarchy firsthand and internalized the misogyny as a result of her experiences. That is why she apparently believes that a woman is her “own worst enemy” because she is “clever.” She does not realize that she can use her cleverness to her own advantage and resist the impositions that men place on her to look or behave a certain way. And when Thuraya tells Fawz in her eyes that Fawz is a man, and she intends to prey on him, Fawz dismisses her by attributing her attraction to him and her sexual agency to the class differences between them. Fawz brings Thuraya's attention to the fact that she is participating in these power dynamics, and because Thuraya has more social prestige and wealth, she can afford to act like a man. However, Fawz’s gender does not matter to Thuraya because she explicitly says, “Do you think it would matter to me if you were a woman?”(182). At the same time, however, she urges Fawz not to answer her question. The tension between the two heightens, but the Mullah’s entrance onstage interrupts their conversation, prompting them to quickly move to another scene to avoid discussion around the issue of same-sex couples and attraction (182).

The Young Woman then turns the Mullah's entrance into an opportunity to avenge herself when the Mullah becomes part of the orange grove scene. The scene they are reconstructing corresponds to Act three Scene four of *Twelfth Night* where Malvolio meets Lady Olivia and believes that she will fall even more deeply in love with him when he shows her his changed self. Like Lady Olivia, Thuraya is bewildered by the changes in the Mullah’s behavior as he is beardless, clad in a purple suit and orange tie, and clutching a hairdryer. The Mullah, believing Thuraya’s shock to be a good sign, proceeds to impress her with his supposed knowledge of foreign languages with the help of the other envoys who unbeknownst to him want to lure him into a trap. The envoys proceed to feed him phrases in French and Chinese, which he dutifully repeats. The Young Woman feeds him the next couple of lines in English, “Your love is oppression…I cannot live under oppression… I want to… defect” (184). The Young Woman s feeds him the most subversive lines knowing full well that the state will punish him because he is admitting to defecting from the regime and collaborating with the enemy on camera. The Representative of the National Tourist Board does not understand what “defect” means, so he asks the other envoys for the definition, and they trick him into believing that "defect" means having sexual intercourse. Ecstatic, the Representative of the National Tourist Board says he wants to "defect" with Thuraya multiple times, screaming every time he says the word "defect." The other envoys then clarify that he has become an enemy of the state and his words have been caught on camera. He then realizes that he was tricked, but it is too late, the other envoys gather around him, blindfold him, and shove him into a cage that has been brought to center stage. It is then revealed that the laboratory is seeking its own revenge and counterrevolution to quell the rebel envoys: stage equipment begins falling on the envoys intending to hurt/kill them.

After the envoys put the Representative of the National Tourist Board/Mullah in a cage, the Young Woman as Nishami decides to inflict punishment on him, reversing their roles earlier in the play. The torture scene equivalent to Act four Scene two in *Twelfth Night*, what the Speaker calls a truly Shakespearean moment where Feste dresses up as various characters and psychologically tortures Malvolio in a darkened room. Here, the Young Woman/Nishami physically abuses the Mullah and has no qualms about it. She comes in the name of the “people” who want to “exact justice without pity” on the oppressor (186). This is one of the rare instances where the woman is not a symbol for the nation, but she represents the people, and the people, unlike the nation, are not a gendered construct. She beats him with his own whipping stick, and in doing so, she slowly regains ownership of her body and takes back her freedom and agency that the Mullah took away from her when he stabbed her with the meter rule. The Mullah has now become the person that symbolizes state repression and oppression instead of the traditional role that men assume as protectors of the nation. Women are now the ones who want justice and are actively striving for a better future.

Women Resisting Containment and Reclaiming Themselves

The Representative of the National Tourist Board/Mullah desperate to contain the Young Woman’s subversive behavior, so he is quick to point the blame not on himself and the heteronormative norms of the state but on women claiming that “women and foreigners have deceived us all” (187). The theme of the deception of women is a prevalent one in Arab societies because of the presence of that theme in religious books such as the Bible and the Quran. The association of women with deception and temptation could be traced back to Eve in Genesis who convinced Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. One example of the theme of deception in the Quran, women's deceit is described as "great" in Surah Yusuf after the people ascertain that it was Zuleika, his stepmom and wife of Potiphar (who is not named in the Quran but referred to by his honorific title of Aziz) who tried to ensnare him and the other way around.[16] This idea of women as deceivers is inherently misogynistic because it places the blame of deception solely on them and absolves the other party of blame. It also justifies the perpetuation of the patriarchy to control women who are evildoers. And the Mullah tries to absolve himself from blame by denying the charges, but the Young Woman, now improvising reminds him of the time he acted lewdly onstage and how he stabbed her with the meter rule as well as his obsession with maintaining a ninety-centimeter distance between members of the opposite sex. Empowered by her character, Nishami, who confronts the Mullah, the Young Woman dares to speak her mind confronting the Representative of the National Tourist Board for his puritanical attitude, something she would not have done had the two of them been in another context. After the Mullah infuriates her, Nishami whips him. The Mullah decides he has had enough and rises, removing the headscarf that was blindfolding him. As he swears that he is going to avenge himself upon the envoys, the Young Woman takes off her boots, wraps her headscarf around her face leaving only her eyes visible, and leaves the stage looking like an Arab freedom fighter. The Young Woman's departure from the stage is her way of reclaiming her character's story as well as her integrity as she takes her future into her own hands rather than wait for instructions from men on how to proceed with the reconstruction or her life.

---

[16] See Quran 12:28 “So when he saw his shirt torn from behind, he said: Lo! This is of the guile of you women. Lo! The guile of you is very great.” (Marmaduke Pickthall’s translation)

The Young Woman's unexpected exit causes confusion among the envoys as they no longer know how to continue with the reconstruction. The envoys argue among one another about the ending of the play, with the consensus being that the Representative of the Writers' Union should come up with a new ending, but they are interrupted by a bell signaling the start of a reconstructed scene. Tagtiga and the Ruler are onstage together with the Ruler telling Tagtiga how important his niece is to him as "Thuraya is central to [his] agenda…she is the text of [his] desire" and this hearkens back to the beginning of the play where women's bodies are synonymous with the nation (190). It appears like the Ruler has given up on Fawz. He has hatched another plan with Tagtiga, and he appeals to Tagtiga's status as Thuraya's uncle and current male guardian to ask him not for her hand, but for Tagtiga to bring Thuraya to him and make her “succumb to [his] will”(191). Because women's bodies metonymically stand for the nation and are viewed as property, the Ruler assumes that Thuraya will succumb to his will because her uncle commanded her to do so. Tagtiga, however, knows that his status as her uncle does not give him any power over her. He cannot force Thuraya to do anything she does not want to do, and he has little to no power over her. Instead of admitting that, however, Tagtiga tells the Ruler that Thuraya has “shamed” him because she has fallen in love with Fawz, a mere servant and not someone like the Ruler who is more fitting considering her status and social class. Even though he has no power over her, Tagtiga still considers that Thuraya has shamed him because she did not meet his expectations.

As the play is drawing to a close, the Former Actress and the Representative of the Council of Virtue work together to finish the reconstruction, but he later leaves the stage, leaving the Former Actress in charge of the play's ending. He first tells the Former Actress to get into position for the last scene, and she obliges, and they then reconstruct the final scene of *Twelfth Night* where Duke Orsino finds out that Cesario is actually Viola, a woman. He agrees to marry her, leaving the audience with a happy ending. In *The Speaker’s Progress*, however, once the Ruler realizes that Fawz is a woman named Fawzia, the Representative of the Council of Virtue/Ruler decides to change the ending. Instead of marrying Fawzia, he puts his hand on her neck, resisting when the Former Actress/Fawz attempts to take his hand in hers. He then strangles her, and the Former Actress does not resist at first because she thinks it is part of the script. However, the Representative of the Women’s League realizes that the Former Actress is in danger and askes the Speaker for help. The Speaker, “paralyzed” by the scene unfolding in front of him, is unable to help her (193). The Representative of the Council of Virtue eventually releases his grip on the Former Actress' throat and exits the stage taking the surveillance camera with him. He warns the others that no one should practice art, politics, or theater or he will go after them and kill them. The Speaker exits the stage after delivering a long monologue, followed by the Sound Technician, so only two women are left onstage. Both women have become the character who delivers the epilogue at the end of a Shakespeare play, and it is unusual to have a woman, much less two women, do that. The one exception to that would be Rosalind in *As You Like It*, another Shakespearean comedy, where the actor playing Rosalind points out that he is not a woman at the end of the play.

With the two of them left onstage, the Representative of the Women's League and the Former Actress decide to stage the ending that the Representative of the Writers' Union wrote for them instead of following the script. They call it "the dream," and the Former Actress encourages her colleague to try to act it out from memory (195). The Representative of the Women's League does not see why they should end the play with everybody gone, but she agrees to do so despite the stage darkening and collapsing around them. The two women exchange names, birthplaces, mother's names, and things they do not know "without shame, without fear" (195). The two women's dialogue then intertwines even though each woman is speaking about something different, but it fits together seamlessly. When placed together all the lines from each woman's dialogue makes sense. The Former Actress says, "Have you tasted love? I'm drowning. I thought I could recreate myself, lose myself in the city... Live a hundred lives in the passage of a night…I thought life was an orchard of pomegranates—And time, a basket in my hand ..." (196). And when the Former Actress interrupts her monologue because she has a song stuck in her head, the Representative of the Women’s League encourages her to sing it. While the Former Actress used elaborate metaphors to describe life and time, the Representative of the Women’s League speaks of freedom. She says, “We will step out of this tower, beyond the line of the sun ... Past the men with patches on their eyes—And wear our freedom like a new spring dress—It’s material as thin as butterflies’ wings ... untouched by knives. I want to fly” (196). Unencumbered by the presence of men on stage, the two women encourage each other to express themselves freely and openly without fear of retribution by anyone else. As a result, the two women form a deeper connection with one another as they reveal personal details and talk about their deepest desires together. While the Former Actress is less optimistic about the future because she had tried to "recreate" herself when she arrived at the city aided by the anonymity and hustle and bustle of urban life, she has not succeeded yet. When she first came to the city, the Former Actress wanted to start over with the world as her oyster because life was an “orchard” of “pomegranates,” a symbol for rebirth and renewal. She thought she could control her life because the Former Actress held onto time like a “basket,” but she quickly discovers that one cannot hold onto time. The Representative of the Women's League presents a brighter picture of life, one where she will step out of the tower and into the outside world. Once she walks past the men that have patches on their eyes, who do not have the vision of the world that she has, she will be free. She will wear freedom like a spring dress, alluding to the Arab Spring, but the freedom she longs for is untouched by knives and violence which speaks to hope for a more peaceful future. The Representative of the Women's League speaks the last line of the play, giving her a voice to say the last word. She yearns for change and freedom because flying symbolizes letting go of the past and letting go of boundaries and social norms. While the two women's intertwined dialogue can be a bit confusing and lends the ending a bit of an absurdist air, it is full of hope in a time of chaos and upheaval and hopes to reach a point in time where people can tell their own narratives “without fear” and “without shame” (195).

Women in Theater Up Close: Hanan Hajj Ali

In the coda to the previous chapter, I briefly discussed the role of women in the field of Arab cultural production before focusing on an example of cultural production of Arab Shakespeare outside the Arab world, in the United States. Here, I will focus on the professional life Hanan Hajj Ali, a Lebanese actress who was involved in *The Speaker’s Progress*. Hanan Hajj Ali was born in South Lebanon and subverted family expectations and cultural norms when she pursued a career in acting in the 1960s and 1970s, to the chagrin of her father who wanted her to become a doctor and have a “respectable” job, not become an actress. He, like many people in the Arab world, judged the profession to be disreputable, especially for a woman. In an interview for *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Hajj Ali recalls that her family felt that an actress was a woman who was "sinful" and "fallen" (Nkrumah 2004). However, she continued to study acting, following the footsteps of Lebanese actresses such as Nidal Al Ashkar, who also made significant contributions to Lebanese theater during the 1960s. Hajj Ali had always pushed the boundaries of acceptable social norms, not only when she became an actress but also when she married Roger Assaf, her acting mentor. Before that, they worked together on several plays, and in 1979 she joined the Hakawati Theater Company which he helped found. Most recently, in 2014, she wrote, directed, and starred in a monodrama called "Jogging: Theater in Progress" about the things a Lebanese woman might encounter when jogging in different Beiruti neighborhoods. Even at venues when the play was performed around the world, Hajj Ali performed the play in Arabic with English surtitles. One of the main characters she plays is similar to Euripides Medea, but instead of killing her husband's new wife, she kills her son, as she tries to make sense of the world around her and take charge of her destiny.

Hajj Ali makes an appearance as herself, playing the role of an actress who played a role in the 1963 version of *Twelfth Night* that the envoys are trying to reconstruct in a scientific manner in order to avoid getting pulled into what the Speaker and the other envoys' term “decadent” values (143). The Speaker asks her what she thinks of theater and, as an actress from the Golden Age of theater, the 1960s, Hajj Ali compares theater to “a temple of truth” and decries the level of censorship present in the reconstruction (145). The Speaker does not give her a chance to speak for a long time, however, because he is afraid that the reconstruction will be censored and forced to shut down by the state. The metaphor of the theater as a temple of truth also rings true for Hajj Ali in her daily life as a Lebanese actress and theater practitioner as she is a member of the Censorship Observatory, which promotes free speech in Lebanese theater.

Hajj Ali’s casting adds yet another layer of self-reflexivity and irony to *The Speaker’s Progress* because although she plays a former actress in the play, Hajj Ali has never stopped acting. In addition, Al Bassam cast her in the play, instead of a famous male actor to highlight how theater and the involvement of women in the Arab world has changed. There were times when theater was free from the restrictive measures applied by the state, and when women had more freedom when acting on stage. Putting a celebrity in her own persona onstage serves to link the imaginary world created in the theater to the world outside it, and helps the audience pause and reflect about the future of theater in their own world. While someone unaware of her career would miss the ironic potential that appears on film, an audience who is familiar with her would say her fame also gives *The Speaker's Progress* more importance and weight in the Arab world because she is an established theatermaker. When the production was staged in Beirut at the Sunflower Theater in 2011, however, only one article mentioned that Hajj Ali was in the play, preferring to focus on the leading members of the cast. It describes Hajj Ali's appearance in the play as "unique" (فريدة اطلالات), whereas newspapers in English make no mention of her when the play was staged internationally (Menassa et al. 2011). Al Bassam wove her part seamlessly into the story as she, as a former actress, provides the scripts and director's note for the 1963 play. For someone aware of her career, her appearance and brief commentary about censorship in theater would cause them to ponder the gravity of increased government involvement and restriction of theater given that she supports free speech. By silencing her, the Speaker provides the audience with a direct example of what happens if censorship becomes more extensive in theater. Hajj Ali's involvement makes a point about the social function of theater and its ability to be able to engage with and provide avenues for discussion about controversial topics.

In the next chapter, I move from *The Speaker's Progress*, a play that takes account of Hanan Hajj Ali's pioneering and ongoing contribution to Arab theater, to a production that featured her partner and collaborator Roger Assaf. The high-profile production of *King Lear* mounted by a theatrical team centered around the American University of Beirut in 2016 was pioneering in its choice of Lebanese vernacular Arabic as the language of production. In its translation of Shakespeare play about a domineering royal father and his daughters into an Arab context and an Arabic language, this production serves a fitting representation of the present-day sophistication with which Arab Shakespeare addresses questions of gender.

CHAPTER THREE

EDITING KING LEAR'S DAUGHTERS IN LEBANESE ARABIC

> I yet beseech your majesty—
> If for I want that glib and oily art
> To speak and purpose not—since what I well
> intend,
> I'll do ‘t before I speak
> Cordelia (1.1.257-261)

King Lear in Lebanese Arabic

In December 2016, the Theater Initiative at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in collaboration with Falcon Theatre, a London-based theater company, presented a production of *King Lear* at Al Medina Theater: It was the first performance known to have been staged in colloquial Lebanese Arabic (also called ‘ammiyeh or darija). The Shakespeare play was performed in Beirut as part of the celebrations that took place in honor of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. It was translated into Lebanese Arabic by Sahar Assaf, assistant professor of Theater at AUB and Nada Saab, associate professor of Arabic Studies at the Lebanese American University (LAU) in addition to Raffi Feghali, a fellow Lebanese actor. It was co-directed by Sahar Assaf and Rachel Valentine Smith of Falcon Theatre and produced by Robert Myers, Professor of English at AUB.

In the eponymous play, King Lear is ready to divest himself of his land and titles and distribute his lands and wealth among his daughters. Before he does so, however, he asks his daughters to demonstrate the extent of their love for him, which Goneril and Regan, his two eldest daughters do effortlessly. His youngest and favorite daughter Cordelia refuses to flatter her father obsequiously, and in return, she falls from her father’s good graces. Without a dowry, she chooses the King of France to be her husband and is banished there. Goneril and Regan eventually prove their love was mere flattery as they dismiss their father from their houses and leave him to wander alone during a violent storm.

The subplot of the play also involves siblings, this time the legitimate and illegitimate sons of the Earl of Gloucester: Edgar and Edmund. Edmund is jealous of his brother and contrives a plot to make Gloucester believe Edgar is conspiring to kill him, which the Earl does, leaving Edgar a fugitive. Edgar later disguises himself as a mad, homeless beggar named Poor Tom and comes to his father’s aid when Edmund turns on him to become the next Earl of Gloucester. Meanwhile, a battle between France and England ensues because Cordelia wants to save her father. Combined forces under the leadership of Goneril and Regan’s husbands are initially victorious, and Lear and Cordelia are jailed and sentenced to death by Edmund. When Edmund and Edgar duel, Edmund reveals his crime, and Lear comes in onstage carrying a lifeless Cordelia in his arms. Heartbroken at her death, he too dies moments later, and the kingdom falls into Edgar’s hands after both Kent, Lear’s adviser and the Duke of Albany, Goneril’s husband refuse to rule it.

I chose to include *King Lear* as part of my study on the theme of female agency in Arab Shakespeare plays because Lear’s daughters are the catalyst for and later drive the events of the play. If Cordelia had not rejected flattering her father, nothing would have transpired. The audience would never get to see Regan and Goneril in charge of their households or Cordelia marrying someone who values her as a person rather than for the possessions her father had given her. The women’s husbands would have managed their affairs, and everything would be in order. Also, in the Beirut *Lear*, despite having fewer lines, the female characters are striking onstage and connect with the audience as they speak not Shakespearean English but Lebanese Arabic. In the following sections, I will address the theme of gender in *Al Malik Lear* by analyzing each daughter of King Lear and the differences in her characterization compared to the Elizabethan daughters of Lear.

The choice of *King Lear* was quite fitting for the Lebanese context given that Lebanon, like King Lear's Albion or ancient England, suffers because of the selfishness of those in power. In an interview with *Agenda Culturel*, Sahar Assaf, who not only translated and directed the play, but also played the role of Cordelia, King Lear’s youngest daughter, says she chose that play in particular because “the drama and the events of the play represent our current world that is on the brink of falling into an abyss, not just in Lebanon, but our world as a whole” (Helou 2016). In another interview, she mentioned that Shakespeare speaks to “our reality” and added that the “chaos and madness” that are present in *Al Malik Lear* “are very similar to the chaos and madness” that are a part of our lives” (Alghad TV 2016). The actors also had something to say about the play’s selection. When asked what he saw in *King Lear*, Roger Assaf, who plays the lead role, said, “I saw a crumbling society, divided, with people arguing and killing each other. What more do you need for it to coincide with the reality that we’re living in? And all that because of the king who is in charge, because of the way he runs things couldn’t care less. Because he is selfish, the kingdom collapsed…that is why we say Shakespeare is our contemporary” (Alghad TV 2016).

When the concept of a Lebanese *Al Malik Lear* originally came about, the play was going to be set in a Lebanese village in the mountains, with the characters speaking different dialects and wearing costumes indicative of that locale and time period; however, that idea was scrapped as the theatrical process changed (Hamoui 2016). The characters in *Al Malik Lear* onstage kept their Shakespearean names; they were not Arabized. Also, the costumes the actors were wearing did not give the play a particularly Arab feel because Sahar and the rest of the production team did not want to limit the play to a specific setting. Cordelia was wearing a more period-appropriate or demure dress compared to her sisters who were dressed in wide-leg pants foreshadowing the differences between the three sisters, with Cordelia being the ideal example of the dutiful daughter. The stage was mostly bare, except for three moveable horizontal benches and three movable vertical pillars present onstage, the use of space was reminiscent of Shakespeare's Globe. The only indication that this was an Arab Shakespeare play was the characters speaking colloquial Lebanese Arabic, much to some audience members' surprise.

Although performing Shakespeare in vernacular Arabic has become more popular thanks to the intervention of Egyptian authors who wrote Arab drama in the Egyptian vernacular in the 1950s, notably Nu' man Ashur and Alfred Farag, it is still not looked upon too favorably in other Arab countries (Selaiha 2016). When I first started researching this project, people looked at me in either confusion or horror. Shakespeare in the vernacular? Won't the play cease to become Shakespeare or lose its status and importance? These questions drove me to continue my research, and I discovered that the Arabic vernacular has gradually become an acceptable medium for drama performance especially for Shakespeare since the translation of three of Shakespeare's plays in the 1980s into Egyptian Arabic despite the initial public uproar.

***Al Malik Lear*'s Reception**

Al Malik Lear was widely covered by both newspapers and TV outlets in Lebanon and the Arab world because it was performed in Lebanese Arabic. According to a reportage shown by multiple media outlets, one of the attendees, Lina Jaroudi, described the play being “wonderful” and noted that “many people are familiar with the play” and they “might have read Shakespeare in English but they barely understood it.” Because this production was in Lebanese Arabic, however, the audience would have “understood the play very well” (Alghad TV 2016). Another audience member, Farouk Jabr, said that the production was a “tremendous” feat, and he was especially impressed by the language quality of the play because he did not expect it to measure up to Shakespearean English, but he thought the performance in colloquial Arabic was “good, great even” (Alghad TV 2016). One review of the play claimed that Shakespeare in spoken Arabic was refreshing because it did away with the “artifice” and elitism now associated with Shakespeare and brought theater back to its more “egalitarian” roots and proved that we could make Shakespeare our "own" (Abi Saab 2016). Not all reviews responded positively to the language change, however. May Menassa from *Annahar* wrote that the “Lebanese Arabic did not achieve the same level of aestheticism that Shakespeare’s English does except when Lear was angry, desperate, and mad” (2016). Mona Merhi from *Al Akhbar* described Lebanese dialect as “versatile” in the sense that it was “flexible” and “intermittently elaborate” but also capable of being “coarse,” however, she felt that the colloquial Arabic "emptied" the play of its “tension" and “tragedy” (2016).

Other than writing about the language, various newspaper articles also wrote about the actors and actresses’ performance. Articles mentioned Roger Assaf because he played the title role, with some articles mentioning Rifa’at Torbey’s performance as Gloucester in addition to

Sany Abdul Baki's performance as the Fool. In contrast, articles barely commented on the actresses' performances. One article described Sahar Assaf as playing a very "emotional" and "sensitive" Cordelia (Al Taki 2016). Regan and Goneril got even less attention as the women in the play were mentioned when providing the reader with a summary of *King Lear*, with the majority of the articles focusing on Regan and Goneril's wickedness, cruelty, and adultery onstage. This points to a larger trend: men get more representation in Arab media compared to women. If women's performances do get recognized, not much is written about them, especially if a man is at the center of a production like *King Lear*. Plus, it does not help that Regan and Goneril, the women who are center stage in the play, are evil because the audience will typecast and label them as such. My research attempts to provide alternative narratives of female representation in cultural production. By re-examining female characters and their counterparts in adaptations and translations, I hope to change the narrative that Shakespearean female characters inhabit within Arab Shakespeares as forces that must be tamed.

Since one of the main objectives of my study is to look at how gender operates across translations and adaptations, I will focus my analysis on Lear's daughters. This chapter will also have a different shape than my previous chapters, which included codas on women in cultural production. Here, the study of a contemporary production case is at the center of my argument, thereby combining the separate discussions of textual and performance contexts that have underpinned my methodology thus far. This is because Sahar Assaf, one of the directors of *Al Malik Lear*, also plays the role of Cordelia in the play itself, so she was responsible for the translation as well as bringing one of the play's most iconic characters to life on stage.

In this chapter, I argue that the analysis of different choices made by Arab translators, including the choice of Arabic dialect, show a range of critical responses to crucial questions of women's political and familial power and agency at the center of *King Lear*. This is especially reflected in *Al Malik Lear* as there are clear differences between it, the Jabra translation, and the Shakespeare text. It omits many of the women's lines, leading to a subtle but significant change in characterization as the female characters become less dynamic. Unlike many Arab translations and productions of Shakespeare, this translation does not shy away from representing carnality on stage; however, it may serve as a warning against female desire for love and power, which is successfully contained at the end of the play. In contrast to most of Shakespeare's plays, *King Lear* portrays different examples of rich, complex female characters on stage; however, none of the women accomplish any of their goals because they were the victims of a patriarchal society. In contrast to some of the plays I studied, *Al Malik Lear* offers a more pessimistic representation of constricted agency and offers no easy or idealized solutions to the trenchant problems of patriarchy in contemporary Arab societies post Arab Spring.

Lear’s Daughters

Goneril

Goneril’s lines are altered in *Al Malik Lear,* making her character slightly different than her Shakespearean equivalent, and these changes add nuance to her character. In Arabic, she sounds even more grandiose than the English version. When the eldest daughter begins expressing how much she loves her father in the Lebanese play, she repeats the phrase “I love you” (بحبك) four times throughout her speech at the beginning of every line. Here, the anaphora creates an emphasis on that word/phrase which magnifies her love. In the Shakespeare play, Goneril uses the phrase “I love you” only at the beginning and at the end of her speech to emphasize her point. Even though the colloquial translation is much simpler because it does not replicate the Shakespearean blank verse. It makes up for such changes by adding more emphasis on certain words or phrases to create depth of feeling, which is what Goneril is aiming for to satiate her father’s need for attention. That is not the only difference in Goneril’s speech. For example, the phrase “beyond what can be valued, rich or rare” changes to “أملاك في شي كل من أكتر” or (more than all that can be possessed) in the Lebanese text whereas Jabra’s translation remains faithful to the Shakespeare text (*King Lear* 1.1.63).[17] In the English text, Goneril’s focus is that her love goes beyond anything that has great material value whereas the slight translation change in the colloquial Arabic text shows that Goneril loves her father more than any of her possessions. The word “أملاك” (possessions) also means “properties,” but I use the word “possessions” because it was more in line with the general meaning behind the Shakespearean text and because it is a particular term. The colloquial Arabic text shows that Goneril is concerned about what she owns, so she has a vested interest in appealing to her father’s emotions as she wants to own the largest portion of the kingdom, and assumes Lear will not divide his kingdom equally among his daughters. Another phrase that was changed was the phrase “As much as child e’er loved, and father found;” becomes “بيا حبت بنت أكتر ما من أكتر” or (more than the daughter that loves her father the most) (1.1.65). While Jabra's translation leaves the word "child" unchanged, the Lebanese text changes the word "child" to "daughter" which is gender-specific and obscures the parallelism that will emerge later on in the play between the main plot of Lear's daughter's loving their father and that of the subplot of Gloucester's sons loving him.

---

[17] The translations of the colloquial Arabic into English are my own. The Shakespeare text was added as surtitles projected onto the stage in the production.

The change makes sense because Goneril wants to focus on her daughterly love of her father and set herself above her sisters to gain her father’s favor. The change also highlights the fact that King Lear has no sons that are set to inherit him.

As the play progresses, some of Goneril’s lines are not changed slightly but instead excluded from the text, and these omissions change Goneril’s character. One example of the omission of lines from the text occurs in Act one Scene three when King Lear is staying at Goneril’s castle with his men as per their agreement in exchange for giving his daughters parts of his kingdom. She complains about Lear’s fussiness and his rowdy men to her servant Oswald and then urges him to be remiss when performing royal duties so Lear can leave for Regan’s castle. In the ‘ammiyeh translation, lines 13-29 where Goneril hatches a plan to make him leave her household are cut out. The audience sympathizes with her character because she is mad that Lear and his men are acting like they own the castle instead of being polite guests in someone’s home, and his actions justify her annoyance. Also cut out are her descriptions to her father as an “idle fool” and “idle old man” who should be treated as if he were a baby rather than a figure with wisdom and respect (17, 20). These omissions make room for Goneril’s character to be less cruel towards her father. It would also make her more palatable for an Arab audience because they can understand that one can be annoyed with their parents, but they would take issue with open disrespect towards them because one's parents are a crucial fixture in Arab life and culture. Therefore, because that part of her speech is removed in Scene three, no knight points out her unkindness towards Lear in Scene four of Act one, so she appears malicious than Shakespeare’s Goneril.

Throughout *King Lear*, Lear’s interactions with his daughters, especially Goneril, are unstable and filled with anxiety about his own masculinity. After Goneril complains to her father about his and his men’s behavior Lear takes offense at his daughter’s criticism of his men after she suggests that he either control them or decrease the number of men in his retinue. Lear takes her criticism as a jab at his authority, which is directly linked to his masculinity and starts railing against her. He calls his eldest daughter a “degenerate bastard,” following it up with “Yet have I left a daughter” (1.4.263-264). It is as if challenging the king strips Goneril of her legitimacy and calls into doubt her paternity. By stripping her of any relationship to him and calling her a bastard, she ceases to become his daughter legally and has no right to inherit his property. Each of the Arabic translations translated the phrase “degenerate bastard” differently, thus emphasizing different elements Lear’s characterization of Goneril. Jabra’s translation calls Goneril a (vile bastard) “حقيرة حرام إبنة” whereas the Lebanese translation called her “منحطة” (degenerate) leaving out the part that raises claims of her birthright as illegitimacy is a taboo subject in Lebanon and the rest of the Arab world. The play already examines the notion of legitimacy and inheritance with Gloucester’s sons, so it would make sense if the translators decided to leave it out. However, it is interesting to note that Shakespeare explores that concept with Lear’s daughters who have a legitimate right to his inheritance. After Goneril takes action and dismisses men from Lear’s retinue, he curses at her and cries saying, “I am ashamed/that thou hast the power to shake my manhood thus” (1.4.313). In Lebanese Arabic, Lear is not "ashamed" that Goneril's actions made him feel less like a man; it is more than that. He feels (humiliated) “دنيء” that she dismissed half his knights without consulting him. Humiliation is a much stronger emotion than shame, and Goneril's action effectively emasculated Lear. Both

Lears responses show how the concept of masculinity is also fundamentally important in Elizabethan England and the Arab world.

In both *King Lear* and *Al Malik Lear*, Goneril threatens Albany's masculinity less than Shakespeare's Goneril does. In Shakespeare, Goneril also makes jabs at her husband's masculinity frequently throughout the play. For example, she accuses him of having a "milky gentleness" about him because he is concerned for Lear and is not standing by her decisions, likening him to a woman (1.4.364). When Albany likens her to a "tiger" because he cannot believe that she can be so cruel towards her own father, she, in turn, calls him a "milk-livered man" or coward (4.2.49, 64). In *Al Malik Lear,* all of Goneril's insults are omitted because Albany's misogynistic lines such as, "See thyself, devil!/Proper deformity shows not in the fiend/ So horrid as in woman," are condensed to one line and/or omitted. These concisions and omissions give more room for Goneril's character to be less vilified and more moderate in nature rather than sticking to the evil woman archetype. In the Lebanese text, she shuts her husband up, dismisses what he says, and calls him "أهبل" (foolish) (Assaf et al. 47). However, honoring one's husband is extremely important in Middle Eastern culture so an Arab audience would likely find Goneril disrespectful although her insults are milder than that of her Shakespearean counterpart. Thus, the concisions makes Goneril's character slightly less disparaging of her husband and less deplorable of a character.

King Lear is not only anxious about his own masculinity, but he also is afraid of Goneril's femininity and seeks to control it, and he does so by cursing her and calling upon "Nature" to either make Goneril barren or bear a "thankless child," Here, the translation amplified the element of tragedy in the play because children and virility are very important in the Arab world. Most Arab women dread being barren because they have been socialized to want to have children, and that would make the king's curse more potent. Having a "thankless child" is an even worse punishment than sterility, which both Arabic translations translated as (*‘aaq*) عاق. Both translations also use the word (*‘ouqouk*) عقوق for the word "ingratitude," which is only one aspect of the word (1.4.270). The term is a loaded one as it can also mean disloyalty, disobedience, and disrespecting one's parents, and it some consider it to be a grave sin in Islam. Therefore, some people in the audience would be sensitive to the term and then consider Goneril's offense to be disrespectful, thus damning and unforgivable, and they may characterize her as such.

Unlike most Arab Shakespeare plays performed in the region, the Lebanese *Lear* does not shy away from openly showcasing female desire onstage. For example, in Act four Scene two Goneril kisses Edmund as like she would in Shakespeare’s play. In Jabra Ibrahim Jabra’s translation, however, he completely removes the stage direction in which Goneril kisses Edmund and foregrounds the “قلادة تعطيه” (gives him a favor) direction instead because he knows that he is writing for Arab readers who would be surprised by Goneril’s public display of affection especially in front of Oswald, her servant. He keeps the kiss as part of Goneril’s speech because he wants to remain faithful to the Shakespeare text and indicates that Goneril might have kissed Edmund in a footnote, which explains why she would tell him to “decline [his] head” (4.2.26). Even though the audience knows that Goneril loves Edmund, her love for him is less genuine and shallower than Shakespeare’s Goneril because many of the lines where she talks about him being a better husband for her are omitted due to censorship. For example, after they kiss and he exits the scene, she has a couple of lines where she compares him to her husband Albany who “usurps her body”, but in the Lebanese version she only says the first line of the speech, “للفرق يا ورجل رجل بين” (O! The difference of man and man) and does not get the chance to say, “my most dear/Gloucester” showcasing the depth of her love for Edmund (4.2.31-33).

Furthermore, the reference to Albany as a "fool" who shares her bed translated in Jabra's version to "جسدي يغتصب” (raping my body) is removed probably because marital rape is a controversial topic in Lebanon, and the rest of the Middle East and the translators did not want to cause an uproar as Goneril committing adultery with a younger man is controversy enough. The audience only gets to see how much Goneril loves Edmund when they see her stewing with jealousy when she and Regan both try to curry favor with him after Albany reminds him of his place and rank. In Shakespeare, however, the audience would have been able to tell that Goneril’s jealousy appeared in Act four Scene two when Albany learns of Gloucester’s horrific blinding. In an aside, she tells the audience that Cornwall's death is good and bad news as she and her husband are now more powerful than Regan. However, his death does not bode well for Goneril's budding romance with Edmund as Regan, who is in his company may try to pursue him as well; she then exits the scene. In *Al Malik Lear*, Goneril leaves the scene after the messenger hands her Regan’s letters, and the audience can only guess what Goneril is feeling, making her exit less dramatic than the one in Shakespeare’s *Lear*.

Regan

In *Al Malik Lear*, Regan is just as cruel as her Shakespearean counterpart, and her dialogue omissions throughout the play make her seem even more unlikable and ruthless than her sister Goneril. For example, Regan’s declarations of love are similar in the Arabic and English King Lear, however, what the audience does not know is the reason she forms the conclusion that her father does not have sound judgment because that line is left out in the Lebanese version. Without Kent's banishment to bolster Regan's claim that her father is losing his mind that judgment seems even crueler. Regan’s cruelty is shown more and more in the play but is especially showcased when she suggests an even worse punishment for the Earl of Kent (who is in disguise because he is banished from the kingdom) who had kicked and insulted Oswald than her husband the Duke of Cornwall does, keeping him in the stocks not just “till noon” but “till night and all night too” (2.2.147). When Kent asks her why she proposes this punishment in Shakespeare’s *Lear*, he calls Regan “madam” out of respect because he knows that she is of higher rank. In *Al Malik Lear*, Kent addresses Regan using the word “بنتي” (my daughter) which is a term that suggests a kinship between a much older man and a younger woman usually used affectionately, and regardless of the woman's rank, an older man is always treated with respect. Kent's respectful attitude makes Regan's suggestion for his punishment even more appalling because he considers her family and is trying to be gentle when speaking to her and she completely disregards him, and that behavior is something an Arab audience would most likely not approve.

In *Al Malik Lear* and *King Lear*, the end of the second act is slightly different, and that affects the portrayal of the cruelty of Regan's character. In *King Lear*, Regan purposefully leaves her father out in the storm, denying him shelter; her husband, the Duke of Cornwall, agrees with her plan. In the Lebanese play, Act two ends with Lear's speech when he rails against his daughters when they refuse to allow even one man from his retinue into Gloucester's house, and he fears that he will "go mad" (3.4.327). This omission leaves out about twenty-five lines of dialogue between Regan, Cornwall Goneril, and Gloucester where Gloucester entreats them to allow King Lear to stay in his home, but Goneril suggests that they deny him entry to Gloucester’s home. Regan goes even farther than her sister when she says to Gloucester, “O sir, to willful men/The injuries that they themselves procure/Must be their schoolmasters,” portraying her father like an errant child instead of granting him the respect and care he deserves in old age, especially during a storm (2.4.346-348). Here Regan appears heartless and unconcerned about anyone but herself because even if one’s elderly father committed terrible wrongs, one would not cast him out of his/her house and leave him in the cold. The Beirut *Lear* leaves more room for interpretation because one does not know if Lear declined to stay in Gloucester’s castle because of his pride or because Regan denied him entry; thus, Regan appears less vindictive at this moment in the production.

Furthermore, not only do differences between the Arabic and English plays affect Regan’s character, but differences between the Jabra’s fus’ha and Assaf’s ‘ammiyeh Arabic translations do so as well. One can see this in Act four Scene seven when Regan and Cornwall punish Gloucester for helping Lear escape to Dover and for supposedly aiding the French troops against the British army. As she and her husband sit him down and his own servants unwillingly bind him to a chair, he urges them not to break the rules of hospitality, but they do not listen; instead, Regan hurls insults at him. She calls him a “filthy traitor” (3.7.39). In the Shakespeare play, Gloucester calls her an “unmerciful lady” and “naughty lady,” and retains some composure when speaking to her but these lines are left out of the Lebanese play because the Lebanese Gloucester is much more distraught and frantic saying, “قلب بلا يا” (you are heartless) (Assaf et al. Act 42). Jabra’s text makes Gloucester appear even more respectful than Shakespeare because he does not call her an “unmerciful lady” (3.7.40, 45). Instead, he says, “لست أنا سيدة، يا قسوت مهما

بخائن" (No matter how cruel you are, my lady, I am no traitor) (42). Jabra's Gloucester refuses to violate the rules of hospitality and speaks to Regan with grace and the contrast between his speech and hers makes her appear even more ruthless than calling her "heartless" or "unmerciful." Another example of the differences between the two registers of Arabic affecting her characterization occurs in the same scene where Regan calls Gloucester "false" because she thinks he is lying to them about the letters he received from France which he insists came from one with a "neutral heart/ and not from one opposed," i.e., Cordelia (3.7.58-59, 61). Jabra's translation renders "false" as "غدار" (treacherous) while Assaf et al.'s translation render it as "كذاب" (liar). While both words do mean deceitful, Jabra's translation of the word implies that Regan does not trust Gloucester because he would go behind her back and betray her. The Lebanese Regan calls him a liar, which is less intense than calling someone treacherous, so she appears less harsh than Jabra's Regan. In Shakespeare, Regan and Cornwall exit after Cornwall gouges out both of Gloucester's eyes and casts him out of his own home.

Then three servants help Gloucester and try to find something that will soothe his wounds and one servant says, "If she live long/And in the end meet the old course of death,/Women will all turn monsters," an inherently misogynistic comment (3.7.122-124). In the Beirut *Lear*, the ending is slightly different, as the scene ends after Regan and Cornwall exit; no servants appear on stage, leaving Gloucester blind and alone. The servant's line is edited out and what the audience remembers of Regan is her brief moment of humanity and compassion when she asks her husband, "How is 't, my lord? How look you?" (3.7.115). The omission of the servant's line frees Regan's character from the misogyny that is present in Shakespeare's text and grants her subjectivity rather than damning her as a "monster."

Moreover, Regan’s death is staged differently in *Al Malik Lear*, which may create some sympathy for her character. Except for Desdemona's strangulation in *Othello* and Cleopatra’s suicide in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare’s women always die offstage, and a messenger informed us of their deaths towards the end of the play. In doing so, Shakespeare shifts the focus away from the female characters. Therefore, the choice to have Regan and Goneril die onstage is a subversive act, and death by suicide, although terrible, is one way a female character can reclaim her agency because she decides how and when she wants to die and does not leave her fate in the hands of men. In Shakespeare’s *Lear*, Regan is in excruciating pain and is later helped offstage by one of the servants to rest. In Act five, a gentleman comes in onstage with a bloody knife that Goneril has just used to kill herself and tells everyone that Goneril poisoned Regan because she was jealous of her sister, who also loved Edmund. In the Lebanese play, Regan and Goneril are fighting with one another on stage in the background as Edmund and Edgar duel. As they fight, Regan kills Goneril, stabbing her with a knife before succumbing to Goneril's poison and falling on top of her dead sister's body. Their deaths are an allusion to how the sisters die in Peter Brook's 1971 film *King Lear* except in Brook’s version: Goneril kills Regan by bashing Regan’s head against a rock (Brooke "King Lear (1971) Directed by Peter Brook CLIP #9"). Then Goneril, overcome by shock, sits on the ground and sways back and forth until she hits her own head against a rock. In Brook’s film, the Goneril and Regan’s death was karmic retribution and gives the ending a semblance of justice. In the Lebanese *Lear*, Goneril’s violent death at the hands of her sister elicited a visceral reaction of shock in the audience because it was one of many moments in the play that was unbelievably brutal. Her death in the Beirut production gave the Lebanese Regan more agency than the Elizabethan Regan as she exacted her revenge on her sister, but it gave the audience no catharsis. The Lebanese Lear is set in a world similar to our own, but bleaker still where injustice and misery prevail.

Cordelia

Regan and Goneril are not the only sisters whose lines are edited out of the Lebanese Shakespeare text; Cordelia has fewer lines in *Al Malik Lear* as well. Cordelia has about 116 lines in *King Lear*, much less than her sisters Goneril and Regan who have 192 and 182 lines respectively. Although Cordelia does not appear much onstage, in the moments when she is onstage, Assaf succeeds in portraying a resolute Cordelia, who knows what her sisters are hoping to accomplish with their servile flattery. In Shakespeare's *Lear*, one does not delve into Cordelia's character as much as one does her sisters' characters, but one difference is clear: Cordelia's refusal to be obsequious is combined with her kindness and mercy towards her father even though he cruelly cast her out of his family.

The audience does not see Cordelia's character develop as much as a Shakespearean audience would and that in turn, has an impact on the interiority of her character. *Al Malik Lear* is a heavily edited version of the play, with most of the lines either being cut out or shortened because the linguistic medium of colloquial Arabic calls for simplicity and directness. For example, Cordelia's aside after Goneril's grandiose speech, "What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent" is cut out, while people who are unfamiliar with the play will not make much of Cordelia's silence, it might make her silence puzzling to others who are familiar with the text and expect to see Cordelia's uncertainty about how exactly she should express her love and that makes her character more human and colloquial (1.1.68). Another line that was removed, which affected Cordelia's character was when she speaks to her father and says, "You have begot me, bred me, loved me" (1.1.106). While in Shakespeare's *Lear* she is grateful for all of Lear's care and love for her, Assaf's Cordelia does not appear thankful and that combined with her silence and the utterance of her famous line "Nothing," without the Shakespearean "my lord" gives a sense of finality to the line. Her character appears headstrong even though one can see that she is pained and conflicted about what she should do next because she has angered Lear (1.1.96).

Sometimes the lines that are edited out of the Lebanese version affect not only Cordelia's character development but also affect her agency. For example, another set of lines that are removed in the Lebanese *Lear* are "Peace be with/Burgundy./Since that respect and fortunes are his love, /I shall not be his wife" (1.1.285-288). While in Shakespeare's *Lear*, she refuses to marry the Duke of Burgundy because of his concern for material wealth and she had the freedom to do so, in the adaptation, France immediately jumps in to save her and her moment of agency is gone because that line is omitted. In Shakespeare, Cordelia confronts her sisters saying, I know you what you are,/And like a sister am most loath to call/Your faults as they are named," but these lines are removed in the Beirut production which makes Cordelia's character less aware of her sisters' machinations unlike her Shakespearean counterpart (1.1.312-314). Furthermore, Cordelia bids farewell to her sisters just as she does in Shakespeare, but in the Arab play her lines "Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides, /Who covers faults at last with shame derides. /Well may you prosper" are omitted, making her a weaker character who is unable to articulate how she feels (1.1.325-327).

In addition to changes to Cordelia's speeches, the way other characters such as Lear describe Cordelia varies slightly between Jabra's fus' ha translation and Assaf et al.'s translation. This manner, in turn, changes her character and relationship with her father. For example, after

Cordelia refuses to flatter her father even though he gives her another chance to “mend her speech a little” in case she changes her mind, she stands by what she said before: Cordelia cannot give all her love to her father because she also has to give some love to her future husband. Startled by her revelation, Lear then angrily accuses her of being “so young and so untender,” (1.1.118) which Jabra translates literally as “وقاسية هكذا، أفتية” (233). Whereas in the Lebanese translation, the line changes to “جاحدة و صغيرة” (young and ungrateful) (Assaf et al. Act I 4). Both Shakespeare and Jabra use the word “untender” or “cruel” to describe Cordelia, while the Lebanese version uses a milder, different term: "ungrateful." The word “cruel” suggests that Cordelia was unconcerned about her father and purposefully causing him pain and suffering, which was never her aim, but his reaction this is an early hint of Lear’s mind unraveling in the play. Cordelia being ungrateful would resonate more with Arab audiences because honoring one’s parents is extremely important in Arab culture, but Cordelia gives credit where it is due because she acknowledges that her father has loved her and cared for her, and this acknowledgement makes Lear’s claim unreasonable. One could argue that Lear and not Cordelia is cruel because he says, “Better thou/Hadst not been born than not t’ have pleased me/better” after she acknowledges that she, unlike her sisters, does not have a way with words (1.1.269-271). These harsh words are present in all of the Arabic versions of King Lear and are present in other Arab adaptations of Shakespeare like Jawad Al Assadi’s *Forget Hamlet* when Polonius is angry at his daughter for standing up to him. Every time a daughter confronts her father, and he does not like it, he wishes that his daughter was never born because he expected complete obedience from her. However, unlike Ophelia, Cordelia’s words get her banished from her kingdom, and her moment of agency is subverted.

In addition to Cordelia and Lear's relationship changing, the Earl of Kent's relationship with Cordelia also changes in *Al Malik Lear* because of textual editing. In both *King Lear* and *Al Malik Lear*, Kent defends Cordelia in front of King Lear despite Lear threatening his life, and as a result, King Lear banishes him from the kingdom. Kent also addresses Cordelia before he leaves the stage and tells her she did the right thing, but he does not address her sisters as in the Jabra and Shakespeare texts. Thus, his lines to Regan and Goneril, "And your large speeches/ may your deeds approve,/That good effects may spring from words of love" are cut out (1.1.209-213). The omission of these lines from Kent's speech makes it less rousing and dramatic. In the Shakespeare play, Kent's acknowledgment that the sisters are in the wrong gives Cordelia strength to warn them before she leaves the stage, but that never happens in *Al Malik Lear*, and Cordelia draws strength from herself and from France who is supportive of her. Kent and Cordelia eventually meet again in Act four Scene seven when Cordelia is looking after her exhausted father, but their meeting and exchange is cut out of the scene in *Al Malik Lear*. The omission changes Cordelia's character because the Lebanese audience would not see her the kindness and gratitude she shows to Kent because he served her father faithfully even though the king mistreated him earlier in the play. Once again, the omission makes Cordelia's character less expressive as the audience does not get much insight into what or how she thinks. One of the only aspects of Cordelia's character that they can see is that she is worried about her father and would like to see her sisters, but because her character speaks very little despite her virtue, she appears less relatable than her sisters do.

Like her sisters' deaths, Cordelia's death at the end of the play is more dramatic in both Arabic translations of Shakespeare than in the English version. As is typical of female

Shakespearean deaths, Cordelia dies offstage. But when King Lear says the line, “And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life? ” as he walks in on stage holding a dead Cordelia in his arms, the English and Arabic texts differ (5.3.369). Both Jabra’s translation and the Lebanese Arabic translation use the word البهلولة, which is the feminine form of the word fool. In Shakespeare, however, it is not clear who the “fool" in Lear's speech is. The Fool is present as a character throughout King Lear, and he accompanies Lear from his court to Goneril's home, to the heath during the storm, but then he disappears as Cordelia reappears in the play, so they are different characters united by their love and care for Lear. Jabra made a choice when he was translating the play just as the production did, to refer to Cordelia as the "poor fool," and that choice makes one feel Lear’s profound sense of grief as he tries to make sense of the events that transpired as well as what is going on around him. The Lebanese translation also adds the word “حبيبتي” (my beloved) to the line, so it becomes "my poor, beloved fool is hanged” (Assaf Act V 7). This small addition intensifies Lear’s anguish and pain even more because of the relation of love that binds them. After this pronouncement, Lear's heart cannot take any more pain, and he dies, thereby leaving his kingdom not in his daughter’s hands, but rather in Edgar’s.

Although Assaf’s Cordelia does not have as many opportunities to assert her agency as much as her sisters’ do, her character is central to the plot of King Lear. Despite that, the process of adaptation and translation has an impact on her characterization and her relationship with other characters. In the 2016 Beirut production, Cordelia appears less aware of her sister’s machinations and lust for power than her Shakespearean counterpart, but one thing is clear: both Cordelias stand for the truth. As a result, she stands alone as Kent cannot help her, and her father thinks she is ungrateful. By shifting agency and attention away from Cordelia, traditionally hailed as a paragon of selflessness, the production urges the audience to think about female agency in other ways. Cordelia chooses the truth, but that leads to her tragic demise. Moreover, since the ‘ammiyeh production reflects today’s hectic, modern world, women should not strive to be like Cordelia, but more like her sisters. Regardless of their cruel ways, Regan and Goneril use their agency effectively and do as they please. The production invites the Lebanese audience to reflect upon and become more active when pursuing what they want rather than remaining passive victims of their corrupt sociopolitical system. It is time for a change.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at a contemporary production of *King Lear* in Lebanese Arabic, which is one of the first attempts to perform Shakespeare using a language register that was considered appropriate for low culture. By analyzing the differences between the Lebanese Arabic, fus' ha Arabic, and Elizabethan English *King Lear*, I showed how the differences in the language, as well as the dialect of the play, affected how Lear's daughters were portrayed on stage. Because the Lebanese Lear was written for the stage, it was more condensed than Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's translation of Lear, and this concision affected the women's character development throughout the play. The line omissions also affect the women's sense of agency as the edited text silences the women while all of the men around them sought to control them. By dividing his kingdom among his daughters, Lear thinks he can guarantee their love for him as well as their presence in his life. Cordelia resists because she does not believe love can be bought, while Goneril and Regan play along with their father's spiel in hopes of obtaining more power. When Cordelia refuses to use the “glib and oily art” of flattery, she is banished from the kingdom, and when Goneril and Regan refuse to grant their father's every wish, he curses them.

As Regan and Goneril try to find their own way, a storm ensues signaling their deviance from the established order. Also, when the two sisters compete for Edmund's love and attention with Goneril blatantly revealing her desire for him in front of her husband, it leads to both sisters' deaths. Hence, their deaths serve as a warning for all women who choose to pursue unsanctioned desire and seek unbridled political power. With the death of all of Lear's daughters, the kingdom is eventually restored as the men resume power. Thus, unlike most of the plays I have looked at in this study, in *Al Malik Lear*, patriarchy prevails, and the women who have tried to subvert the status quo in various ways are contained, their agency quelled. However, if this production invites the people in the audience to strive for change, how can the women be more like Goneril and Regan? Does the fight for women's freedom of choice go hand in hand with being bitter, resentful, and hostile about being victims of patriarchy? Can women operate from a place of power rather than victimhood? These are all questions one needs to consider if women are to truly move forward with their fight towards gender equality and increased agency.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The aim of this study was to look at the reception of Arab Shakespeare through three categories: translation, representations of gender, and women in cultural production. Throughout the thesis, I have analyzed how female characters and female agency in Arab Shakespearean adaptations and appropriations change in multiple texts and performances of two Shakespeare tragedies, *Hamlet* and *King Lear* and one comedy, *Twelfth Night*. The plays are: Mamdouh Adwan's *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* and Jawad Al Assadi's *Forget Hamlet* inspired by *Hamlet*, Sulayman Al Bassam's *The Speaker's Progress* adapted from *Twelfth Night*, and AUB's Theater Initiative and Faction Theatre 2016 production of *Al Malik Lear*, a translation and performance of *King Lear* in colloquial Arabic.

In addition to examining female characters on the page and the stage, I also looked at how women have contributed to the cultural production and translation of Arab Shakespeare because little research has been done on Arab women's contribution to Shakespeare's cultural tradition. To do so, I analyzed Rebekah Maggor's production of *Hamlet Wakes Up Late,* which featured a multicultural cast and was geared for an American audience and investigated how her female characters differ from Adwan's. I also looked at the dramatic potential of Hanan Hajj Ali's appearance in *The Speaker's Progress* as herself and her contribution to Arab theater. Finally, I looked at Sahar Assaf's involvement in *Al Malik Lear* as co-director, co-translator, and actress.

My study addressed the theme of gender among characters and theater practitioners as well as the interaction between the two and devoted a chapter to each Shakespeare play and its Arab adaptations and appropriations. The first chapter was a brief overview of the current state of Arab Shakespeare studies. In the second chapter, I continued on the path that Margaret Litvin and other scholars have created by starting with Arab Hamlet plays. In place of national politics, however, I focused on the effects of the changes in the characterization and representation of female characters, principally Ophelia and Gertrude, and discussed their agency as part of the gender politics of the plays. I found that there was a marked difference between the agency of the Ophelia and Gertrude in Shakespeare's Hamlet and their Arab counterparts. The difference in the representation of women on stage offers significant insights into the roles about women in Arab society who just like the Arab Ophelias and Gertrudes are trying their best to effect change in their capacity as much as they can despite what they hear from the patriarchal society around them. In the third chapter, I hoped to contribute to the shifting focus of Arab Shakespeare scholarship from tragedy to comedy focusing on how the change in genre affects the representation of women and female agency in a play within a play about *Twelfth Night*. Scholars are now paying more attention to Shakespeare’s comedies and writing about plays like *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but there is still more work to be done. In the fourth chapter, I looked at how changes in translation affect female representation and agency on the stage. To do so, I compared Shakespeare’s *King Lear* to Jabra Ibrahim Jabra’s translation of the play into Classical Arabic and to a Beirut production of it into colloquial Lebanese Arabic translation as well. In this play, unlike the other ones I have examined, I found that the female characters’ agency tended to decrease throughout the play as strategic cuts constricted these roles. When Regan and Goneril use whatever power they have as rulers of the kingdom, their influence is subverted as men regain their control over the kingdom after Lear's and his daughters' deaths. Because of the changes in the fus'ha and 'ammiyeh Arabic translations Regan and Goneril's characterization as malevolent females and did change slightly, and this gave them more space to become more human and less monstrous that the men often claim they are. Cordelia's character changes as the audience obtains less insight into her character. Her agency decreases as well, but her love for her father remains the same. Her death devastated the audience who were then confronted with an unhappy ending in a bleak, miserable world. Perhaps Cordelia's death could push others to try a different approach when confronting the men in power and act more purposefully like Regan and Goneril in order to move forward with their lives.

There are several different lines of questioning one could take to pursue this research further and continue to look at Arab Shakespeare through the lens of gender departing from Margaret Litvin's Arab Hamlet tradition. My research has covered Arab Shakespeare plays by a few authors in Arab countries like Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, so one could further look into the gender politics of plays from other countries in the region and compare them to one another. How does the social role of theater challenge prevailing notions about gender politics in the Middle East? In doing so, I look at the different ways theater can serve women in the Middle East and how it can further empower them and represent them and their struggles more accurately and open up theater from a masculinist perspective to include a more gender-balanced approach.

In most of the plays I have examined, the women were daughters or wives. How does theater play a role in subverting gender stereotypes and present women in a more active and positive role where women are not defined by the place they occupy within their families? I began looking at these questions when I discussed the female gravediggers in *Forget Hamlet.* They are the only women with occupations, but they are of a lower social class than Ophelia and Gertrude. In *The Speaker's Progress*, the women are envoys working for different organizations in the government, but the audience never learns about their jobs as they are undercut continuously by men. Moreover, the Young Woman is never named in the play, nor is she given an occupation. What does that say about young women's place in Arab society, especially younger women in the workforce? Conversely, what happens when theater includes a broader representation of powerful women when characters like a female Polonius have a high ranking position and respect in society? What happens if the theater does not contain women and their subversive energy? Further exploration of these questions would add to the discourse on Arab theater. Female representation is at the core of these questions as the discussion needs to move beyond women's appearance and how they bolster the men around them. By focusing on women with alternative voices in drama who represent working women from different classes of society like Mistress Quickly in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Bianca in *Othello* one can broaden female representation in Shakespearean drama.

Moving away from conventional theater, one could look at how theater has become an accessible medium to people outside of the elite and working classes. Because Shakespeare has been performed in refugee camps, one could also look into Shakespeare performed by refugees also adds to the Shakespeare tradition in Jordan, Katherine Hennessey's concept of “the new local" theater in which theater groups and companies use Shakespeare to blur the divide between theater produced by citizens, expatriates, or other groups in Arab society to establish a sense of community in a region that abides by divisions of class, race, and ethnicity (32). Can we extend the concept of "new local" to include marginalized groups like refugees? Could their work be considered part of the local oeuvre, or will their status prevent their performances from being a part of the Arab Shakespeare tradition? A project like this one is relevant to today's world because the number of refugees is on the rise, and it would reopen the question of what Arabs consider to be national theater. Would theater produced outside the Arab world still be regarded as Arab, or would it be part of a global more international theater? This study would also address the accessibility of theater to marginalized groups. It would provide a space for dialogue and community among refugees and the citizens of the countries in which they are living.

Due to the scope of the study, I only discussed women in the field of cultural production in a coda at the end of each chapter. One can expand on this work and continue looking into Arab women's contribution to Shakespeare in theater and the history of adaptation and translation. Pivoting from Shakespeare, it would also be interesting to look at the clear Greek intertext and analyze the role that Greek tragedy plays in Arab theater, especially how female characters in Greek plays are different from or similar to Arab women in a play like Hanan Hajj Ali's monodrama, *Jogging*. While exploring the intertextuality between Western and Arab texts, it would be interesting to delve deeper into how Hajj Ali forges her identity in the play as an Arab woman who contend with cultural concepts such as family and religion and produces her own narrative of what it means to be an Arab woman. There has been a lot of scholarship on Arab identity, gender, and among Arab American women, who struggle to reconcile their Arab roots with their American ones, but identity remains understudied among women in the Arab world because they do not have to negotiate their identity in the same way that Arab American women in a hostile or prejudiced environment do. Despite that, the idea of selfhood among Arab women and the factors that shape it still deserves to be addressed in detail.

On a final note, throughout this study, I have shown how female representation in Arab theater, as well as female theater practitioners, have had critical roles in Arab Shakespeare and how they drove the action in and illuminated the plays in which they took part. Despite the restrictive patriarchal norms that surround them, the women still do the utmost to change their circumstances for the better. This is true not just for Arab women in theater, but all of the women I have known throughout my life. As I have studied Shakespeare in the Arab world, in Beirut, today, I hope to inspire other Arab scholars to explore what this region has to offer and to further look at how Shakespeare is still a relevant and important marker in Arab literature and theater. By trying to make sense of the tradition of Arab Shakespeare present in the region in relation to the expanding field of Global Shakespeares, I have shown how the Arabs have taken Shakespeare and made him their own, like Shakespeare did when he drew from other sources and cultures to write his own plays. Through my work, I call for a more nuanced representation of women in Arab theater, and I hope to empower women to focus on how they can use the agency they have to better themselves and becomes agents of change.

APPENDIX: LIST OF PLAYS AND PLOT SUMMARIES

Table 1.1 Arab Shakespeare Plays

Play	**Author**	**City of Publication/ Production**	**Date of Publication/ Performance**	**Directed By**
Hamlet Wakes Up Late	Mamdouh Adwan (Syrian)	Damascus	1976 - published 1978- performed	Mahmoud Khaddur- Damascus, 1978 Rebekah Maggor- Ithaca, New York, 2017
Forget Hamlet	Jawad Al Assadi (Iraqi)	Cairo	1994 - performed 2000 - published	Jawad Al Assadi
The Speaker's Progress	Sulayman Al Bassam (Kuwaiti/British)	Kuwait, Beirut, New York, Boston- 2011 Tunis, Cairo Kuwait, Amsterdam- 2012	2011- performed 2014- published	Sulayman Al Bassam
Al Malik Lear	Sahar Assaf, Nada Saab, and Raffi Feghali (Lebanese)	Beirut	2016- performed	Sahar Assaf and Rachel Valentine Smith

LIST OF TRANSLATIONS:

(Primary texts are in bold)

Margaret Litvin's *Forget Hamlet* (2015)

Margaret Litvin's *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* (2015)

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's Hamlet (1960)

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *King Lear* (1968)

Sulayman Al Bassam's *The Speaker's Progress* performance in Arabic (2011)

Note on Jabra's translations:

The book I used when reading and *Hamlet* and citing *King Lear* in fus'ha Arabic, *Al Ma'asi Al Kubra: Hamlet, Utayl, Al Malik Lear, Macbeth [The Great Tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth]*, by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra was published in 2000. However:

- Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's translation of *Hamlet* which Al Assadi refers to in *Forget Hamlet* was first published in 1960.

- Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *Al Malik Lear* (*King Lear*) was first translated in 1968 just one year after the Arab Naksa in 1967, a particularly significant date in the Arab world. Therefore, a play like King Lear which portrays Lear's defeat would have fit the zeitgeist of the time because Arab people felt hopelessness and despair, much like Lear did after Cordelia's death.

PLOT SUMMARIES

Hamlet Wakes Up Late by Mamdouh Adwan

Prince Hamlet is a theater director who silently acquiesces to his uncle Claudius ascending the throne and marrying his mother after his father's death. Haunted by his father's ghost, he becomes an alcoholic and ignores all of the political corruption and destruction going on around him. Ophelia, his lover, is consumed with the idea of ascending the throne. Queen Gertrude tries to warn her son that Claudius will kill him after he ruined a foreign dignitary reception meant to celebrate the upcoming peace and to improve trade relations with their once sworn enemy Fortinbras, but Hamlet does not listen to her. After Hamlet accidentally kills Ophelia's father and his closest advisor, Polonius, Claudius arraigns him in court but does not give him a chance to enter a plea and sentences him to death.

Forget Hamlet by Jawad Al Assadi

Claudius and Queen Gertrude kill Old Hamlet, but unbeknownst to them, Ophelia witnesses the murder when she looks out her bedroom window. Ophelia urges Hamlet to search for his father's murderer and bring him to justice, but Hamlet does nothing. Meanwhile, Laertes, Ophelia's blind brother, speaks out against Laertes and is taken away to a sanatorium where he is tortured and killed. Claudius continues killing anyone who opposes him, despite the Queen's and Ophelia's pleas for him to stop the killings as they try and pressure him to free Laertes. To further secure the throne, Claudius orders two soldiers to murder Hamlet. As the people scream and killings around the castle resume, Ophelia and the Queen drink from two poisoned goblets and fall to the floor dead. Suddenly, Laertes ghost appears. He duels with Claudius, and after he kills him, Laertes sits on the throne.

The Speaker's Progress by Sulayman Al Bassam

A group of government envoys and a former theater director, the Speaker, have been assigned the task of reconstructing a 1960s production of an Arab play to justify to the audience why theater must remain banned by this unidentified authoritarian Arab state. As the play progresses, the envoys discover what a compelling subversive tool theater is. Then they begin to engage with the play text actively. Only one of the envoys, The Representative of the National Tourist Board, who is playing the Mullah refuses to engage in what he calls "debauchery" and "filth." He struggles to control the rest of the group, including the Speaker, as they refuse to perform the play according to state standards. Instead, the envoys use the reconstruction to engage in activities forbidden by the state and feel empowered enough to call for a revolution. As the play descends into chaos, two female envoys remain onstage dreaming of a time where they can be free.

Al Malik Lear by Sahar Assaf, Nada Saab, and Rafi Feghali

Lear, an aging king, decides to divest himself of his land and titles and distribute them equally among his daughters. But first, they must prove to them how much they love him. The two eldest daughters, Regan and Goneril, flatter and assure Lear that they love him and they each get their share of Lear's land. When Cordelia, the youngest daughter, refuses to flatter her father, he disowns and banishes her from the kingdom. Cordelia then leaves with her new husband, the King of France. After she leaves, the king decides to live with Regan and Goneril, but they refuse to grant him lodgings in their home because of his reckless behavior. After his daughters leave him out in a storm, Lear slowly descends to madness until Cordelia returns. In a subplot, Edmund, the Earl of Gloucester's bastard son devises a plan to get rid of his older legitimate brother Edgar so that he can inherit his father's land. When Edmund betrays his father in search of even more power, Edgar, disguised as a mad beggar comes to his aid.

Meanwhile, Goneril and Regan fall in love with Edmund despite being married. In a fit of jealousy, Regan kills Goneril before succumbing to Goneril's poison. King Lear dies because he cannot handle the pain of Cordelia's unfortunate tragic death, which Edmund orchestrated. Later, Edmund dies at the hands of his brother, Edgar, in a duel. With everyone dead, the fate of the kingdom then rests in Edgar's hands

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adwan, Mamdouh. *Hamlit Yastayqiz Muta'khkhiran [Hamlet Wakes Up Late]*. Beirut: Dar Ibn Rushd lil-Tiba'ah wa al-Nashr, 1980.

Adwan Mamdouh. “Hamlet Wakes Up Late.” Translated by Margaret Litvin. Carlson, Marvin, et al., editors. *Four Arab Hamlet Plays*. Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, 2016, pp. 63-153.

Al Assadi, Jawad. *Insu Hamlet [Forget Hamlet*]. Dar al-Farabi, 2000.

Al Assadi, Jawad. “Forget Hamlet.” Translated by Margaret Litvin. Carlson, Marvin, et al., editors. *Four Arab Hamlet Plays*. Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, 2016, pp. 227-281.

Assaf et al. “الأول الفصل لير الملك [King Lear Act I].” 24 Oct. 2016. AUB Theater Initiative. Play script.

--- “الثاني الفصل لير الملك” [King Lear Act II].” 24 Oct. 2016. AUB Theater Initiative. Play script.

---“الثالث الفصل لير الملك” [King Lear Act III].” 22 Oct. 2016. AUB Theater Initiative. Play script.

--- “السادس المشهد الفصل لير الملك” [King Lear Act III- scene VI].” 16 Nov. 2016. AUB Theater Initiative. Play script.

--- “مجموعين والسادس الرابع المشهد الفصل لير الملك” **[**King Lear Act III- scene V and VI combined].” 16 Nov. 2016. AUB Theater Initiative. Play script.

--- “الرابع الفصل لير الملك” [King Lear Act IV].” 25 Oct. 2016. AUB Theater Initiative. Play script.

--- “الخامس الفصل لير الملك” [King Lear Act V].” 28 Oct. 2016. AUB Theater Initiative. Play script.

Al-Bassam, Sulayman. *The Arab Shakespeare Trilogy: The Al-Hamlet Summit, Richard III, an Arab Tragedy, The Speaker's Progress*. Edited by Graham Holderness. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014.

Alghad TV. يوم جديد | مسرحية "لير الملك" بالعامية اللبنانية في ذكرى وفاة شكسبير [New Day | King Lear in Lebanese Arabic in Honor of the Anniversary of Shakespeare's Death]. YouTube, 8 Dec. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdVydw66Kew.

Ali, Atheer Mohammad. “المرأة و المسرح العربي، بدايات و تقاطعات حداثية [Women and Arab Theater, Beginnings, and Modern Intersections].” الحوار المتمدن [*Modern Discussion*], 27 Mar. 2006, www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=58320&r=0.

Al-Shetawi, Mahmoud F. "Arabic Adaptations of Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory." *Critical Survey*, vol. 25, no.3, 2013, pp. 4-28. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.3167/cs.2013.250302.

Al-Thebyan, Qusai A., Nazmi T. Al-Shalabi, Fahd A. Salameh, and Kifah M. Al-Omari. "A Critique of Jabra’s Arabic Translation of Shakespeare’s The Tempest." *Canada Social Science* vol.7, no. 6, 2011, pp. 64-74.

Al Taki, Yakzan. “«لير الملك» إخراج سحر عساف على «مسرح المدينة»: روجيه عساف في قمة تألّقه الفني [King Lear Produced by Sahar Assaf at Al Madina Theater: Roger Assaf at the Height of His Artistic Brilliance].” *Al Mustaqbal*, 20 Dec. 2016, mustaqbalweb.com/v4/article.aspx?Type=NP&ArticleID=725918.

Bayer, Mark. “The Martyrs of Love and the Emergence of the Arab Cultural Consumer.” *Critical Survey*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2007, pp. 6–26. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41556230.

--- “The Merchant of Venice, the Arab-Israeli Conflict, and the Perils of Shakespearean Appropriation.” *Comparative Drama*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2007, pp. 465–492. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1353/cdr.2008.0000.

Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings*. “The Task of the Translator.” Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael William. Jennings, editors. Belknap, 2004, pp. 253-263.

Brooke, Peter, director. *King Lear (1971) Directed by Peter Brook CLIP #9*. *YouTube,* Lance Whipple, 19 May 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ff0vFSXlGzs.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Edited by Randal Johnson, Polity Press, 2016.

Cockin, Katharine. “Introduction to Part One.” *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, edited by Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay, Routledge, 1998, pp. 19–24.

Cooke, Miriam. *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official*. Duke Univ. Press, 2007.

Damrosch, David. “Introduction” *What Is World Literature?* Princeton UP, 2003, pp. 1-37.

Davidian, Edgar. “Tous De Pitoyables « Roi Lear », Dupes De La Flagornerie ? [All Pitiful King Lear, Dupe of Sycophancy].” *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 5 Dec. 2016, www.lorientlejour.com/article/1021959/tous-de-pitoyables-roi-lear-dupes-de-la-flagornerie-.html.

“Drama.” *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*, by Roger M. A. Allen, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 193–215.

Edited by Peter S. Donaldson, *MIT Global Shakespeares - Video and Performance Archive,* Massachusetts Institute of Technology, globalshakespeares.mit.edu/.

Folger Shakespeare Library. *Hamlet* from Folger Digital Texts. Ed. Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, 10 September 2018. https://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/Ham.html

--- *King Lear* from Folger Digital Texts. Ed. Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, 24 June 2019. https://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/Lr.html

--- *Twelfth Night* from Folger Digital Texts. Ed. Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, 10 December 2018. https://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/TN.html

Ghazoul, Ferial J. “The Arabization of Othello.” *Comparative Literature*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1998, pp. 1–31. *EBSCOhost*, 10.2307/1771217.

Greenblatt, Stephen. “Invisible Bullets.” *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, Clarendon Press, 1988, pp. 21–65.

Hamoui, Faten. “سحر عسّاف تقدّم «لير الملك» عاللبناني [Sahar Assaf Presents a Lebanese King Lear].” Assafir, 1 Sept. 2016, assafir.com/Article/506107.

Hanna, Sameh. *Bourdieu in Translation Studies: The Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Shakespeare Translation in Egypt*. Routledge, 2018.

--- “Decommercialising Shakespeare: Mutran’s Translation of Othello.” *Critical Survey*, vol. 19, no. 3, Jan. 2007, pp. 27–54. *JSTOR*, doi:10.3167/cs.2007.190303.

Helou, Nelly. “Le Roi Lear: Une Tragédie Immortelle à l’Image De Notre Monde. [King Lear: An Immortal Tragedy in the Image of Our World]” *Agenda Culturel*, 5 Dec. 2016, www.agendaculturel.com/Scene_Le_Roi_Lear_une_tragedie_immortelle_a_l_image_de_notre_monde.

Hennessey, Katherine. *Shakespeare on the Arabian Peninsula*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Holderness, Graham and Bryan Loughrey. "'Rudely Interrupted': Shakespeare and Terrorism." *Critical Survey* 19, no. 3, 2007, pp. 107-23. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41556235.

Hourani, Albert. “First Views of Europe.” *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*. Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 34-66.

Ismail, Samer. “مسيرة شموع «معارضة» إلى بيت أبي خليل القباني [Candlelight Vigil at Abu Khalil Kabbani's House].” Al-Akhbar, 27 Mar. 2009, al-akhbar.com/Literature_Arts/142991.

Ismat, Riyad. “Mamdouh Adwan, Mahmoud Diyab & Naguib Surur.” *Artists, Writers and the Arab Spring*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 123–135, link-springer-com.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/book/10.1007/978-3-030-02668-4.

Jabra, Jabra Ibrahim. “Al Malik Lear [King Lear].”*Al Ma’asi Al Kubra: Hamlet, Utayl, Al Malik Lear, Macbeth [The Great Tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth]*. 2nd ed. *Al Mo’assa al Arabia lil Dirasat wal Nashr*, 2000, pp. 217-378.

Khoury, Yvette K. "'The Taming of the (Arab-Islamic) Shrew': Fatin 'Abdel Wahab Re-Frames Shakespeare's Comedy for the Egyptian Screen." *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2010, pp. 147–162. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43797669.

Landau et al. "Masrah." *Encyclopedia of Islam*. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, editors. 2nd ed. 2012. *Brill Reference Works Online*.

Litvin, Margaret. *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost*. Princeton University Press, 2011.

Litvin, Margaret, et al. "Full of Noises: When 'World Shakespeare' Met the 'Arab Spring.'" *Shakespeare*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2015, pp. 300–315. *Taylor & Francis Online*, doi:10.1080/17450918.2015.1066842.

Maggor, Rebekah. "Hamlet Wakes Up Late." 10 Mar. 2018. Cornell University. Play script

Martindale, Charles. *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993.

Menassa et al. "The Speaker's Progress Arabic Press Dossier." SABAB Theatre, 2011

Moberly, David C. "The Taming of the Tigress: Fatima Rushdi and the First Performance of Shrew in Arabic." *Critical Survey*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2016, pp. 8-26. *ProQuest*, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/docview/1911197232?accountid=8555, doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/10.3167/cs.2016.280302.

Nkrumah, Gamal. "Hanane Hajj-Ali: Breaking Barriers." *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Dec. 2004, weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2004/720/profile.htm.

Rackin, Phyllis. “Why Feminism Still Matters.” *Shakespeare in Our Time: A Shakespeare Association of America Collection*. Dympna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett, editors. Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016, pp.7-14.

Rowson, Everett K. “The Effeminates of Early Medina.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 111, no. 4, 1991, pp. 671–693. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/603399.

Schwartz, Katherine. “Just Imagine.” *Shakespeare in Our Time: A Shakespeare Association of America Collection*. Dympna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett, editors. Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016, pp.14-18.

Selaiha, Nehad. “Shakespeare in the Vernacular.” *Al-Ahram Weekly Online,* May 2016, weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/16339.aspx.

Simon, Sherry. *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*. Routledge, 1996.

Stauffer, Zahr Said. "The Politicisation of Shakespeare in Arabic in Youssef Chahine's Film Trilogy." *English Studies in Africa* vol. 47, no. 2, 2004, pp. 41-55. *Taylor and Francis Online*. doi: 10.1080/00138390408691321.

Tomiche, N. “Nahḍa.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam.* P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, editors. 2nd Edition. 2012. *Brill Reference Works Online*.

Tounsi, Mohamed Mohamed . “Shakespeare in Arabic: a Study of the Translation, Reception, and Influence of Shakespeares Drama in the Arab World.” *University of Northern Colorado*, 1989.

Ziter, Edward. *Political Performance in Syria: from the Six-Day War to the Syrian Uprising*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, *Springer Link*, link-springer-com.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/content/pdf/10.1057/9781137358981.pdf.