

The Reworking of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the Arab Spring: The Hero Hamlet as a Symbol for the Arab Youths

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating the theme of heroism in four reworkings of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* produced in the early period of the Arab Spring. It briefly traces how *Hamlet* is dramatized as a hero in Hayder Abdullah AL-Shatery's *In Waiting for Hamlet* as a rewriting in Iraq, Mohammad Farouq 's *Goodbye Hamlet* and Hani Affefi's *I'm Hamlet* as stage Adaptations in Egypt, and Urwa Al-Araby's *The Syrian Hamlet* as stage adaptations in Syria. The study then analyses how the four plays were impacted by the sense of political hope and heroism that accompanied the Arab uprisings and seen in the Arab youths fighting their oppressive regimes for political change. The study gives a brief overview of the political situation in the region after 2010. Then, it reads the four plays in the scope of the political optimism in the four Arab countries. Finally, it intends to highlight how the Arab *Hamlets* are meant to be dramatic icons and symbols for the brave Arab revolutionaries fighting to achieve justice.

1. Introduction

One of the impressive attributes of the Arab Spring is the acute sense of political positivism and hope regained among Arabs after a lean period of political despotism and economic discomfort. Arab youths unprecedentedly signaled ruthless determination and sheer persistence defying police brutality in different Arab countries. The regimes spared no effort to crush the mass uprisings; arming themselves with live ammo and tear gas that was extensively fired on the exposed crowds in countries like Egypt and Tunisia. In Yemen, Syria, and Libya, the clash was more deadly when the regimes used tanks and aircraft systematically and deliberately to annihilate the rebellions. Civilians devised their own defending armies and guerrillas in facing the pro-regime murderers. The aggressive acts of violence in the Arab Spring diversified, but all the upheavals were gory and hard-fought.

Despite the atrocities, deaths, and massive displacements that unevenly occurred, Arabs in these countries were determined to alter the political status quo and dethrone their current leaders. The accomplishment of the spring in Tunisia and Egypt in overthrowing Zin el-Ábidín ben Ali and Mohammad Hosni Mubarak's regimes successfully, early in 2011, inspired fervent and contagious hope in the Arab nations observing closely the outcomes of the revolutions. Soon, the protests went viral in the Middle East and reached unexpected countries. Najeeb Jarad (2013) comments on this heroism, saying: "The Arab Revolutions 2011 surprised the world and caused a turning point in history. It breathed into the body of the Arab-Islamic World a spirit of change and instilled in the oppressed nations a hope of liberation from the captivity of the tyrannical regimes." (p. 17).

The bravery and true heroism demonstrated by Arabs in enduring pain for the sake of freedom and justice were celebrated and praised in Arabic poetry, music, and theatre. Dramas produced post-2010 echoed the sense of hope in the region, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* had its share in the political optimism through textual rewritings and stage adaptations by the pro-demonstration Arab playwrights and stage directors. The Jordanian Sami Al-Ardeh, for instance, draws the connection between *Hamlet*'s choices between (To be, or not, to be) with the Libyans facing crossroads of whether to act or react against Muammer Kadhafi in 2011. He compliments the Libyans' heroism by saying: "Here are the Libyan people carrying the slogan "to be or not to be" in their struggle with the regime that was established 42 years ago." (Al-Ardeh, 2011). The Egyptian Eman Ali also spotlighted the same analogy in her report 'Hamlet in Tahrir Square,' but this time between *Hamlet*'s courage and the brave Egyptian males and females who went down to streets demanding the dethroning of Mubarak. She starts her report by asking: "In what picture

can we imagine Hamlet in the heart of Tahrir Square?" (Ali, 2016). Ali later in her report hints at the fact that Hamlet is a real symbol for the Egyptians who slept in Tahrir square for weeks fighting heroically the oppressor to set things right in rotten Egypt.

2. Hamlet in Egypt

The utilization of Shakespeare's prince as a signifier of the Arab heroes in facing oppressive regime is seen in two-stage adaptations, *Goodbye Hamlet* and *I'm Hamlet* that were produced in Egypt a few months after the outset of the Egyptian spring. The Egyptians started their spring against Mubarak in January 2011, and they were faced with firm resistance by the regime. Thousands of soldiers targeted people in different cities by throwing tear-gas canisters and rubber bullets to divide them. The authority also cut electricity and internet lines to stop people from gathering. Nevertheless, the revolution quickly expanded to other cities, and the 'Tahrir Square' in the middle of Cairo became the gathering point where Egyptian males and females slept for weeks. This quick expansion of the revolution made the police and the army more aggressive in using tanks and live ammunition this time. Upon the youth's insistence, the regimes' police started withdrawing from main cities, and by February 11th, people reached the presidential palace in Cairo and surrounded it, calling out slogans like *Yasqut, Yasqut Hosni Mubarak* (Fall, Fall Hosni Mubarak), and *Alshaeb yurid eisqat alnizam* (People want to overthrow the regime.) Mubarak was forced to step down on February 11th, 2011 due to the Egyptians' determination.

During the Egyptian uprising, music, dancing, and performative shows were seen in the streets and squares aiming to satirize the regime, inspire the youths, and show the police people's insistence. Theatres, also, had their role in inspiring Egyptians, and most of the dramas performed were sarcastic, short, and acted in the Egyptian vernacular to suit the public. Alike, *Wda'an Hamlet* (*Goodbye Hamlet*), a one-hour-twenty-minute stage adaptation directed by Mohammad Farouq and Ahmad Rassem early in 2012 at the House-appear Theatre in Cairo, was acted in the Egyptian slang, and except for some lines uttered occasionally from Hamlet's speeches, the play bears no similarities to Shakespeare's play.

The actors are dressed in modern clothes. The stage is poorly designed as a graveyard with four graves and one shovel. A cross, a representation for Christen graves, and a crescent, a symbol for Islamic graveyard, are hung on the stage's back wall.



Figure 1: The stage is arranged as a Graveyard. Taken from the performance 7:08.

The performance starts with nine actors and actresses rehearsing Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for a forthcoming performance. The rehearsing in the play begins from the Gravedigger scene in Shakespeare's play when Hamlet asks one of the gravediggers "whose grave's this?" Hamlet is told that the grave and the skull belong to Yorick, the old King's jester. The rehearsing, then, is continuously interrupted by other actors making the main actor, who is supposed to play Hamlet, angry. The main actor left the stage. After his departure, the director requires other actors to pick one who can play Hamlet and rescue the upcoming show, "One of you must do Hamlet" (Farouq & Rassem, 2012). The director then leaves the actors perplexed as they recognize that no one will be competent enough to memorize all Hamlets' speeches in a short time. The play then proceeds as the actors and actresses alternatively struggle to act Hamlet's role, but they miserably fail.

During their search for the appropriate actor, they engage in comic and sarcastic dialogues in which they tease one another. The play takes another direction when they earnestly start reflecting on their miserable lives in the stifling political and economic atmosphere in Egypt. This turns the play into a psychodrama in which all of them spontaneously dramatize their problems before the audience, and it turned out from the dialogues that most of the actors decide to join the performance only as a source of secondary income to support their low-income families. A couple of the performers are husband and wife who feel desperate that

the play might not be performed. The actress asks: "Won't be there any payment?" and her husband answers, "It seems no" (Farouq & Rassem, 2012). Another actor is a farmer from Upper Egypt who came to act as a background actor in the play to support himself after the government refuses to compensate for his damages. Other issues like love, marriage, and female problems in suffocating Egypt are also sarcastically reflected on during the dialogues. An actress comments that she lost her lover by the difficult economic situation and after she had already married a rich man. She regrets her decision as she believes that money should not be everything in this life:

انا ممكن كنت حتجوز احسن جوازة. بتحلّم بيها اي بنت. حاسة حالة تجارة رخيصة. بيعه وشروه للبيدفع اكثير.

I could have married in the best way a lady can dream of. I feel that I became a silly trade, sold and bought for the one who pays much (33:27-33:44).

When the male actors fail to act Hamlet, one of the actresses suggests that Hamlet can be played by a female, "why not an actress plays the hero?" (19:54). She starts playing Hamlet in her Egyptian accent, but she fails to memorize the whole speech. What is also remarkable in the play is that all the characters only memorize the same few prompts of Hamlet's soliloquies. They find themselves stuck in the same lines like "I will take revenge," "Who could bear the whips and scorns of time," and "who's grave is this?" These are the only few lines of Hamlet's speech stuck in their memories, but the words reveal what is also stuck in their subconscious. Their mastering of these lines exclusively proves their revolutionary awareness and their willingness and passionate enthusiasm to rebel.

When some characters became desperate of doing the show towards the end, an actor comes up with a clever idea to get over the verbal issue. They can perform a miming play in which all of them will wear masks and silently dance. All of them will play the role of Hamlet, and the dance will be enough to rescue the show and deliver the essential message of a revolutionary hero who terminates the usurper king.



Figure 2: The Mask dance at the end, 1:12: 50.

The play's conclusion transmits an important message for the Egyptian audience. Anyone from the Egyptians can act like a rebellious hero despite the difficulties he/she might face. The mask-dancing is a coded message of that, and the Egyptian Hamlet must be everywhere fighting to rescue Egypt from the claws of the corrupted regime.

A similar message is duplicated in Hani Affefi's *Ana Hamlet (I'm Hamlet)* but in a different method. The play is a one-hour- thirty-minute stage performance that also appeared in 2012. Affefi employed cinematic features at the beginning by using a backstage screen and taking the audience outside the stage to the main actor's house. We can see the poor actor in his modest house doing some of his daily routines like waking up in the morning and listening to the early news. Two voices are heard: one from the TV broadcasting a football match mixed with a voice from the radio broadcasting news about the Egyptian revolution. The main actor leaves his modest house then, eats his breakfast from a cheap food wagon in the street, and sits in a café chatting with the poor people. Nothing is heard of their talks. The camera moves in different angles capturing the faces of the poor Egyptians who seem unemployed and agonized. It also shows street sailors waiting for someone to buy their goods, a few people pushing a broken old car, and a crowd running to catch the bus. The actor heads to the subway, and during his walk, he comes across an old book exhibited in a bookshop. The camera comes closer, and we can see the title *Hamlet Amir al-Denmark (Hamlet: Prince of Denmark.)*

The actor buys the book and rides a crowded train cabin where he starts reading the book among the crowds. Suddenly, the cabin turns into a stage, and the riders become the main actors in the play. It is this time that the play moves to the stage. The screen video is stopped, lights turned on, and the audience finds the actors immediately acting in Shakespeare's first scene. The play then follows Shakespeare's plot and almost the same structure except for the Egyptian Arabic slang that replaces Arabic Fushah, the classical Arabic. Other alterations can be seen when Polonius reads Hamlet's love messages to Ophelia in front of Claudius and Gertrude from a mobile phone. The play-within-the-play in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is also altered to a break-dance.



Figure 3: The Pictures show the camera following the main actor in the street, taken from the first three minutes of the show, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HCxaps6wGY>.

The tone in the play is mostly sarcastic. Hamlet mocks the King in most of his speech, and Polonius, acted by the comedian Bayoumi Fouad, is also the most sarcastic figure in the play, especially in his description of Hamlet's probable madness. Sometimes, the sarcasm is overtone to the extent that some critics disliked this sarcasm for degrading the seriousness of Shakespeare's tragedy. Qasem Madee (2010) commented on the language used in the play as:

It is assumed that the author of this elegant and expressive work should not play with such a calculated poetic work and reformulate it in the vernacular Egyptian dialect, moving away from the beauty of the Arabic Fusha, as if we are in an Egyptian village.

Madee's hostility to this theatrical dialectism, that replaced the classical Arabic in the play, does not prevent him from seeing the significance of the play as a political one:

Away from that, it was successful. It began with the dream of "Hamlet" as he is struggling with himself on his bed, with voices emanating from behind the curtain asking him to get rid of what is going on in our Arab World of killing/destruction / and control by the West. He rejects all the falls slogans pursued by the Arab regimes.

I agree with Madee's idea of the shortcoming of the Egyptian dialectic to reflect the beauty of the poetic text, but from another point, if we look at the play and the type of audience who attended theatres in and after the time of the Egyptian revolution, we can excuse Affefi for this linguistic alteration. Theatre houses began to be visited by the majority of the public at this time as a celebration of artistic freedom and as a way to see dramas that touch upon their social and political issues. Besides, the Egyptian dialect is the domineering dialect spoken by the public in the street, and Affefi intends to simplify language instead of making it a barrier. It is not only Affefi who used this dialectic, but most of the theatrical performances in Egypt did the same in a try to bring theatres closer to the commoners and release it from the hand of the elites. The Moroccan theatrical critic AL-Jabari (2003) defended this dialectism used in social dramas as this:

Writing [and acting] the play in the vernacular receives a wide response from the audience who sees in it his actual life and his real issues; since it is the language of his daily life, and because the modern play, if written in the classical language, will

not receive from the contemporary audience the response and the sympathy that it receives if it is staged and written in the vernacular (p. 21).

It is not only theatrical dialectism used by Affefi to reflect Egyptians' everyday life in the play, but the employment of the camera in such cinematic aspect at the beginning, which I see as a new strategy in the Arab theatre, is also an attempt to connect theatre to the Egyptian's real-life after 2010. The actor who played Hamlet is one of the commoners whose life looks like any poor Egyptians struggling to achieve a better life. The actor's readiness to act *Hamlet* does not come from his love for theatre only, but from his potential to create justice in corrupted Egypt. *Hamlet* would resonate with the Egyptians more than any of Shakespeare's plays because it materialized the Egyptian struggle against Mubarak's regime, who, as many believed, wrecked Egypt, destroyed its basic infrastructure of health and education, and forced millions of Egyptians to migrate to countries where they find more proper life. It is not only that Mubarak changed Egypt from a republic into *jumrumalaky* (turning the republic into a kingdom by inheriting the throne) and was preparing one of his sons to inherit the ruling, but he also gave absolute authority to the army and the police who widely abused such authority and oppressed people under false slogans of Arabism and nationalism.

Even though Hamlet is killed in the last scene in Affefi's play, he still demonstrates heroism in his fighting the tyrannical Claudius. This conclusion is a lamentation of the hundreds of the heroic Egyptians killed by the regime in 2011, and Hamlet demanding Horatio to tell his story in the Egyptian slang at the end, *Sadikkee Horatio, Akber Annas a Qesaty*, (translated as; My friend Horatio! Please tell people about my story) shows how he believes that the story of the heroic Egyptians should be narrated to the next generations.

3. Hamlet in Syria

The Syrian Hamlet by Urwa AL-Araby (2012) is another Arabic adaptation produced in Syria in the same year the Syrians decide to revolt against Al-Assad's Alawaite regime in 2011. Unlike the Egyptian adaptations, AL-Araby's play is a very close adaptation to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and it is performed in Arabic verses based on Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's Arabic translation. Except for the entrance of the main actor from the audience's gate, breaking the fourth wall between the actors and the audience, the play closely adheres to Shakespeare's plot and structure. Some famous actors participated in the show like Wassem Kazez in the role of Hamlet, Yousef AL-megbel as Claudius, Mohammad Jarah as Polonius, and Arwa Amreen as Gertrude and Batool Mohammad as Ophelia. The scenery and dress, done by Zahra Al-Araby, are almost analogous to the Elizabethan time. A catwalk stage is added to the front part of the main stage giving more space to the characters.



Figure 4: Hamlet is delivering one of his monologues in the catwalk stage, 20:14.



Figure 5: Hamlet meets his father's ghost, 11: 35.



Figure 6: The actors are performing the *Mousetrap* in front of Claudius and Gertrude, Part 1. 51:15.



Figure 7: Hamlet and Laertes having a fencing match in the last scene. Part2: 39:07.

Even though the play is a restaging of Shakespeare's play as it is, the chief influence of the performance can be attributed to the fact that the performance is one of the few Syrian adaptations staged in the Ba'ath Syria after 1963. The play's revolutionary theme and the story of throne usurpation that could mimic the Ba'athist coup d'état in 1963 made it distasteful by the Ba'athists. However, the Syrian Spring brought much freedom for theatres when the Syrian Free Army expelled Al-Assad's army from some cities. At that time, theatrical performances became a tool to express the gained-by-force freedom and a way to reflect on the Syrian's struggle for liberty from the regime's control.

The restaging of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* without alteration by AL-Araby still carries a message of heroism to the Syrian audience. Even though the Syrian Hamlet is still suffering procrastination and madness, he is considered a hero whose action is agitated by his pure enmity for despotism and his desires for revenge. His heroism is seen in maintaining morals in a time that is 'out of joint' in ruined Syria and among all the corruptions. He is inclined to annul "all trivial fond records" from the table of his memory (*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5, Line 99). His revenge and action are guarded by wisdom, not impulsion, by his deliberation, not procrastination, and madness for him is a weapon not a hindrance in a world full of political madness and treachery. He is confronted by one of the ancient crimes and sins that afflicted humanity; a brother kills his brother for power. Among all these hardships, Hamlet, like all Syrians, demonstrates morality, behaves wisely, and holds values.

The Syrian Hamlet is not a personal tragedy only; it is a state tragedy in a country ruined by greed and ambition. The tragedy repeats itself since the creation of man and enrages heaven to the extent that ghosts return from purgatory to inform how such sin is the most unnatural one. When greedy people assumed the throne through history, they do not spare any effort to preserve it. They plot, exile, and kill their opponents. The restoration of peace and the throne from the hands of such tyrannical rulers is not an easy task. That was clearly seen in Syria before and during the Syrian Spring. It is full of blood, torture, and displacement.

The success of the Syrian Spring at the beginning was different and more surprising for the Arabs than other Arab springs. The Syrian Ba'athists were well known for their tight grip over Syria and many Syrian Alawite supporters who share the same religious factor as Al-Assad. This makes the Syrian Spring closer to a sectarian religious war between the revolutionary Sunnis and the Alawite regime that has been supported by the Shiat Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah who share almost the same religious belief. The Syrian nation was seen as a brave nation to fight all these powers and bear all the atrocities for more than ten years. Ibrahim Hamamy praised this heroism in his words, saying: "The revolution of the heroic Syrian people is the longest and fiercest among the revolutions of the Arab peoples, and it is capable of bringing down the schemes of the conspirators" (Hamamy, 2015). *The Syrian Hamlet* resonated with the heroic atmosphere at that time even though the Syrian Spring is the most aggressive and longest one in the region. Hamlet's accepting death at the end only to rescue his country symbolizes the Syrians who accepted death to fix what is rotten in Syria. The journalist Abdullah AL-Otaybe declares in his article, 'Something Rotten in Syria' how the regimes brutally targeted the exposed civilians by barrel bombs: "The tile is borrowed from a famous line said by Hamlet, a famous character from Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, but the talk here is about the reality that is stranger than the imagination of the novelists and playwrights: A regime in the twenty-first century is killing his nation by all kinds of weapons in front of the world that does not move a finger" (AL-Otaybe, 2013). Hisham Al-Zaouqy also asserts how Hamlet's heroism is still residing in the minds of some Syrians in his article 'The Ghost of Hamlet Roaming the Ruins of Aleppo City.' He speaks about how three actors found a text of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* under the ruins of one of the buildings destroyed by Al-Assad's bombing caskets in Aleppo city. They decide to dramatize the play, but one of the actors is killed later. The other two actors ran to Beirut in Lebanon and made a movie called *Jeld* (means Skin), in which they talked about their experience when they decided to perform *Hamlet* before the death of their friend.

4. Hamlet in Iraq

The earliest reworking of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the period of the Arab Spring was by the Iraqi Hayder Abdullah AL-Shatery in his *Fee Intzar Hamlet (In Waiting for Hamlet)*, 2010. Even though the Iraqis did not have their spring until 2015, the revolution and sense of optimism that accompanied the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt immediately resonated in Iraq and other Arab countries. The Iraqis, perhaps, are the most oppressed Arab people disregarding the fact that Iraq is one of the richest oil countries in the region. Their political miseries are the most abject in the modern Arab World, starting from the control of the Ba'ath regime of Saddam Hussein (1969-2003), the Gulf War 1 & 2 in 1991 and 2003 respectively and the frequent economic blockades imposed by the USA on Iraq. After the death of Hussein in 2003, Iraq had entered a period of internal political struggles over power between the two biggest Islamic branches, Sunnis and Shiats, fighting to rule Iraq. The external and internal wars immersed Iraq in poverty ruined health and education systems and caused massive displacement of Iraqis to nearby Arab countries and Europe.

Still, the Iraqis have always fantasized about the hero savior who can save and unite Iraq from all kinds of oppression. The image of the expected savior is persisted in most Iraqis' consciences, especially the Shiats who believe in the legend of the AL-Mahdi AL-

Muntazer (The Expected AL-Mahdi)² and who, as they believe, will appear soon to rescue them. No one can tell exactly when and from where he will appear, but AL-Mahdi is an essential part of their religious belief and his coming is always dramatized in their *Tashabeh* and *Ta'zeyh* Theatres in Iraq.³ Even the fact that some Iraqis do not believe in such popular legend, and believe, instead, that it makes the Iraqis complacent and inactive in changing political realities by their hands, the myth has a positive side in generating hope among Iraqis. This legend of the expected savior was awakened more with the advent of the Arab Spring when the heroic Arab youths broke silence for the first time and revolted against oppression.

AL-Shatery's *Hamlet* comes in this type of Tashabeh Theatre in that it dramatizes Hamlet as the upcoming savior like AL-Mahdi, and his coming will solve the problems of the characters and re-establish justice. The play is a one-act-two-scene Arabic prose rewriting that appeared for the first time in *Markez Anour Online Magazine*. It is one of the shortest Arabic rewritings, and it has never been staged up to this moment. Though it is a reworking of Shakespeare's play, it is completely different from Shakespeare's story and dramatic structure. Nothing is similar to Shakespeare's play except for the ghost and the few lines of Hamlet's speeches that were mentioned in the rewriting. It also resembles Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in its structure. Four characters are waiting for the coming of the hero Hamlet: The Actor, The Ghost, The Man, and his Son. It begins with The Actor, alone on the stage, rehearsing Hamlet's soliloquy "To be, or not, to be" for a stage performance in English. The Actor expresses his admiration for Hamlet and his desire to act him. He likes Hamlet's heroic personality and brave struggle "to fix the disorder of time" and Hamlet, for him, is a model for a hero and a noble youth burdened by "the huge responsibility placed on [his] shoulder" and "bowed [his] back until [he] barely stood tall." At the same time, he pities Hamlet, who is "a pure, noble character who lacks strength and the nerves necessary to bear great calamities." (AL-Shatery, 2010) He comments:

Oh, Hamlet! Where are you? ... You have never known comfort any day. What justice is this? And What a burden is that you have been shouldered? I can't bear these burdens, nor I can imagine them. You carried a heavy load that bowed your back until you were hardly ever being able to stand tall.

Oh, Beautiful spoiled prince! Who dares break your sensitive heart and jam your head? You don't deserve all that. Oh my God! A great tragic crime and a pure noble character who lacks the needed strength to withstand great calamities. It's an uneven comparison! How can you handle that and fix the disorder of time? This is a great responsibility that will destroy any of us if being exposed to it.

So, I don't know how I'm going to play this role and draw these feelings. I can't do that, but at the same time, I want to play his role as I always loved him and dreamed of this big opportunity for years (AL-Shatery, 2010).

ترى أين أنت؟ ... يا من لم تعرف الراحة يوماً... أية عدالة هذه؟ وأي عبء ذلك الذي وضع على كاهلك. أنا لا أستطيع تحمل هذه الأعباء ولست قادراً حتى على تصورها. لقد حملت حملاً ثقيلاً أحنى ظهرك حتى لم تكذ تقف بطولك .
أيها الأمير الجميل المدلل. من ذا الذي يجرؤ على كسر قلبك الرقيق وتشويش رأسك وأنت لا تستحق كل هذا . يا ألهي جرم مأساوي كبير وشخصية نبيلة نقية تنقصها قوة العصب الضرورية لتحمل المصائب الكبيرة.... إنها مقارنة غير متساوية... فكيف لك تحمل ذلك وإصلاح اضطراب الزمن... فهذه مسؤولية عظيمة لو تعرض لها أي واحد منا لقضت عليه. لذلك لا أدري كيف سأقوم بأداء هذا الدور ورسم هذه المشاعر والأحاسيس... إنني لا أقوى على ذلك... ولكنني في الوقت نفسه أريد أن امثل دوره فلطالما أحبيته ولطالما حلمت بهذه الفرصة لكبيرة منذ سنين.

After the Actor delivers his speech, he is surprised by the appearance of a ghost on the stage. He becomes frightened, but the ghost ensures him that he means no harm. The Actor then asks The Ghost about his purpose in haunting the stage, and The Ghost replies, "I'm waiting for my son to deliver a message to him." (AL-Shatery, 2010). After The Actor discovers that the apparition is Hamlet's dead father waiting for Hamlet, he agrees to wait with the ghost since he also has "many questions to be answered," and "no one else can answer them" except Hamlet (AL-Shatery, 2010). Both characters engage in a long dialogue during their waiting for the appearance of Hamlet, talking about Hamlet's significance at all times. The Ghost informs him that Hamlet has a necessary role to perform, and there is "no one else can do this role." (AL-Shatery, 2010). The Ghost quotes from Hamlet's speeches:

² AL-Mahdi AL-Muntazer is a legendary person and part of the Shiats' Islamic belief. He will appear to rescue the Shiats from all of their miseries. No one can tell when he will appear.

³ These are public religious tragic theatres popular among Shiats people. Tashabeh, means image, and Tazeyah, means consolation, were popularized in the ninth century when Iraqis used theatres to remind themselves of AL-Hussein Ben Ali, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, who was killed by Yazeed Ben Muawieh, a Sunni rivalry who wanted to be the Caliphate. The dramas in these theatres take place in streets, schools and mosques up to this moment. The Expected AL-Mahdi is always presented in these dramas as a revengeful hero who will revenge AL-Hussein's murder, but the way and whom he will take revenge from is not known.

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles?
This is what I came for... and this is the message that
should reach him. It is greater than the issue of a throne,
even though they stole it from him. I did not come for
that... The throne was not his first concern, even though
he is the legitimate heir to it (AL-Shatery, 2010).

من ذلك الذي يقبل صاغرا سياط الزمن ومهانا
ته..ويرضخ لظلم المستبد ويسكت عن زراية
المتغطرس؟
هذا ما جئت به...وتلك هي الرسالة التي يجب أن
تصل إليه . إنها اكبر من قضية عرش رغم إنهم
سلبوه منه. وأنا ما جئت من أجل ذلك...ثم إن العرش
لم يكن همه الأو...رغم انه الوريث الشرعي له.

The Ghost says that he ascended from the purgatory, not for the sake of the throne, but re-establishing justice is his priority. The Ghost also is aware that the orders will problematize Hamlet's life and "will be an impenetrable dam against the kingdom of his dream" (AL-Shatery, 2010). However, it believes that Hamlet is up to that task and will consent to the commands as soon as he hears them. He has a universal task to do, and "as long as crime has incubators," his appearance is necessary and urgent, and "for all the times there must be a Hamlet" (AL-Shatery, 2010).

It is not only Hamlet who has responsibility, but The Ghost should keep appearing to deliver his message in all oppressive times: "I am from all the times that reproduce and repeat themselves without a solution" (AL-Shatery, 2010). The Actor asks if The Ghost expects to see a solution for the Iraqis' problems, "When will the solution come?" and The Ghost answers: "When we stop needing him and everyone is Hamlet" and when "every human is treated as a human" (AL-Shatery, 2010) :

During their conversation, another man with his son enters the stage terrified. As called in the play, the Man tells them that he found the theatre house a shelter to hide after a bomb has exploded near his son's school. The Actor thinks he is Hamlet asking, "Are you Hamlet?" and The Man answers in mockery, "Is a person like me fits to be Hamlet? I barely could be Othello" (AL-Shatery, 2010). The Man is hopeless to find any solution soon and does not know when the random bombing will stop: "How many circles we are stuck in and we do not know the way in or out. It is like the story of the egg and chicken. We do not know who's first" (AL-Shatery, 2010). Another sound of an explosion is heard, and the man's son becomes more terrified. The Ghost tries to tranquil the child asking him about his name, and the child answers that his name is Hani, which ironically means a happy person in Arabic. The Man then asks the two characters if they are hiding like him, but they answer that they are waiting for Hamlet. The Man then asks about the reason behind waiting for Hamlet, and The Ghost replies that Hamlet is the one who will find a solution for the Iraqis' miseries.

The Man ridicules the Ghost's words, and he doubts if a person like Hamlet can fix the Iraqis' problems: "What makes you sure of his ability to change the situation here?" The Ghost assures him: "Because I see him differently. I know him very well" (AL-Shatery, 2010). The Man then asks, "If what you say is true, then, why did he leave us like this?" and The Ghost replies that Hamlet "cannot leave us like this." But "it's his duty to come and scream against this time of errors" (AL-Shatery, 2010).

However, The Ghost also says that people, themselves, must do something against these calamities "Our waiting should be accompanied by work." It is not only that, but they have to believe in the coming of that savior: "People have to believe in [Hamlet] and his capacities" (AL-Shatery, 2010). In the end, the characters suddenly hear a sound outside. The Actor looks from the window expecting to see Hamlet coming, but the sound appears to be coming from the tanks in a military convoy heading towards the theatre. The Man informs the Ghost about his plan to leave the theatre with his son before the coming of the tanks. They cannot wait for Hamlet with the Ghost anymore. The Ghost agrees with them and encourages them to exit and do something since Hamlet did not come:

THE GHOST: (*Disappointed*):
It looks like a military convoy. It's the rumble of tanks,
and Hamlet is not with them.

الشبح(بخيبة امل):
يبدو انه رتل عسكري. انها اصوات سرف الدبابات والتي
لا يمكن ان تحمل معها هاملت.
الممثل:

THE ACTOR (*Looking from the Window*):
Oh my God! What to do? Are we going to keep giving
up like this? I kept my promise, but he did not come.

ياالهي...ما العمل هل سنبقى مستسلمين هكذا...لقد
وفيت
بوعدى ولكنه لم ياتي.

THE GHOST:
But he cannot break his promise.

الشبح:
ولكنه لا يمكن ان ينقض وعده

THE ACTOR:
But when...?

الممثل:
ولكن الى متى ...؟

THE GHOST :

الشبح:

| | |
|---|--|
| He might have come and gone, and he might not come yet. | ربما قد أتى وذهب وربما أتى ولم يذهب. الممثل: |
| THE MAN: | وماذا تعني؟ |
| What do you mean? | الشيخ: |
| THE GHOST (<i>With Stress</i>): | لا يمكن الانتظار أكثر من ذلك! |
| You can't wait any longer... The tragedy does not wait any longer. | الممثل: |
| The ACTOR: | نعم... أحسه قريب مني |
| Yes! I smell him everywhere ...I feel him close to me. We have to do something. | الشيخ: |
| (<i>They exit, leaving the Ghost alone</i>) (AL-Shatery, 2010). | لا يمكن للوقت ان يستطيل أكثر من ذلك والمأساة لا تنتظر أكثر من ذلك. الممثل: |
| | نعم! اني اشم رائحته في كل مكان. انه يملاني من راسي حتى اخمص قدمي. |

Although Hamlet does not appear at the end of the play, his heroism is the focus of the discussion. Hamlet's importance here is not in his coming as a savior for Iraq but as a symbol that every Iraqi should imitate. The Actor's saying, "I smell him everywhere ...I feel him close to me" (AL-Shatery, 2010), shows that Hamlet must inhabit and haunt every Iraqi. AL-Shatery highlights the parallel between AL-Mahdi's legend and Hamlet's story. Both will fight oppression, and both are motivated by their revenge. The importance of AL-Mahdi is not to rescue Iraq only, but to take revenge from those who killed AL-Hussien Ben Ali a thousand years ago, as Shiats believe.⁴ Still, the disappearance of Hamlet at the end is an implied criticism for those Iraqis who still believe in this old legend and are distracted from reality. The Ghost's saying, "We can't wait any longer... The tragedy does not wait any longer" (AL-Shatery, 2010), is a call for the Iraqis to unite and fight the regime bravely for their rights instead of waiting for a legendary hero. Every Iraqi can be Hamlet or AL-Mahdi if he has the potential and strength to act nobly like them.

It is not until 2015 that Iraqis had their own hard spring. The regimes used the army to suppress people and their revolution, and the uprising was suspended by force. However, a sense of unity between Shiats and Sunnis was felt in the uprising and both parties decide to stop the civil war for a while, fight the oppressive authority and stop the Western exploitation of their land. However, it is hard to tell when the revolution can start again in Iraq. Iraqis still believe that political changes did not happen and the government is still ignoring their political demands.

5. Conclusion

The heroic pictures of Hamlet in the previous four adaptations and rewritings resonated with the sense of hope and optimism that marked the early three years of the period. The attempt to present Hamlet as a hero in these adaptations comes out of the need to motivate Arab people, and from the fact that Arabs, in most of these countries, fought their regimes bravely. The ruined Egypt, Syria, and Iraq are similar to Denmark that is ruined by the greedy and ambitious Claudius, whose policy in ruling Denmark and killing his brother for the sake of power resembles the atrocities done by many of the Arab regimes. The image of a brother killing his brother for the sake of the throne is replicated in most Arab countries and evoked hatred and revenge among Arabs. Also, Hamlet's death to bring justice at the end in *The Syrian Hamlet* and *I'm Hamlet* resembles the people's willingness to bear pains and deaths for the sake of ending the abuse of their countries. The Arab Hamlets are courageous in this period, can act, and terminate the usurper, and despite the fact the two of these adaptations only used the title of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, they still talk about Shakespeare's prince in a bright image. The adaptations demonstrate the role of the Arab political theatre, in general, and Shakespeare's play, in particular, in solidifying the feeling of hope among theatre goers early in the Arab Spring. The playwrights and stage directors found a parallel between Hamlet's story and the story of the Arabs fighting for freedom.

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⁴ The Shiats believe that AL-Hussien Ben Ali, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad, was massacred by the Sunni Caliphate Muawieh Ibnu Abe Sufiyan before 1300 years ago. The legend says that AL-Mahdi will take revenge from the killer's ancestor when he comes. How and whom he will take revenge from is still unknown.

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