

# Hamlet as an Arab Intellectual: A Marxist Reading of Mamduh Adwan's Play *Hamlet Wakes Up Late*

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## Abstract

The paper aims at reading Mamduh Adwan's play *Hamlet Wakes up Late* (1978) from a Marxist perspective to broadly examine how life under a Capitalist system along with its foreign investments and trading services can easily destroy the political, social as well as the cultural surroundings of a certain nation. Throughout his play, Adwan brilliantly adapts Shakespeare and offers a Marxist point of view to comment on how the West continues to dominate the East with its economic power. Importantly, in employing Shakespeare's portrayal of Hamlet as a tragic hero, Adwan uses him as a dramatic archetype to comment on one of the Shakespearean's famous political quotes "something is rotten in the state of Denmark". Seen from this perspective, the paper will read Adwan's play from a Marxist viewpoint to demonstrate how he has in fact used Hamlet's lack of intellectualism to criticize the Syrian policy of "The Six Day War" defeat to Israel.

**Keywords:** Marxism, Syria, Hamlet, intellectual, Mamduh Adwan

## 1. Introduction

One of the basic tenets of Marxism revolves around how ideologies form a certain structure of perception that helps to determine the power of a particular social class over another. To some extent, one may say, such a basis can easily form a contradictory as well as a complex vision about how an individual can view the world in general and society in particular. For instance, in his book *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976), Terry Eagleton assumes that Marxists have largely contributed to the understanding of an ideology throughout the analysis of relations between different classes in society; as they concluded that social classes ought to stand first and foremost in relation to the mode of production (Eagleton, 15).

In other words, it is worth mentioning that Marxism, as a theory, looks at how the production of materialism serves to simultaneously destabilize the social, political and intellectual life in the process in general. To elucidate further, one must bridge the gap between Marxism and literature to explain extensively how the issues of classes can have a certain impact on the economic, political and social orders of a particular society. As Eagleton puts it, "the question of partisanship in literature is bound up with the problem of how works of literature relate to the real world" (61). Such statement can be very well demonstrated in drama and theatre where the playwright takes the audience into what Bertolt Brecht calls "an alienation effect", which is precise "an alienation with the power of critical judgement" (60). Moreover, according to Eagleton, the task of theatre is merely to "reflect" a certain reality, for it is an attempt to unveil how characters and actions are historically produced. As a consequence, the play in this context becomes itself a kind of process of mode of production, which present "discontinuous, open-ended ends with internally contradictory conflicts" (Brecht qtd in Eagleton, 60).

To refer to one of Shakespeare's adaptations of *Hamlet*, Mamduh Adwan, as an Arab Syrian dramatist adapts Shakespeare in his play *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* (1978). In fact, through adapting Shakespeare, Adwan presents a new generic context that focuses mainly on the corruption of the Arab regime. As he provides a Marxist point of view to comment on how the West continues to dominate the East with its foreign investments and trading services. To put it differently, in her book *Hamlet's Arab Journey* (2011), Margaret Litvin argues that, Arab writers' basic use of Hamlet is simply an archetype of dramatic interiority to demonstrate "a political melodrama" (115). Indeed, in his play, Adwan depicts Hamlet as a drunk intellectual in order to show how he is unable to see or change the corrupted world around him. Seen from this perspective, the paper will focus on this argument to uncover how the playwright uses Hamlet as a dramatic archetype to criticize the Syrian policy of the post 1967 defeat, particularly under the rule of

President Hafez Al Assad.

## 2. Shakespeare, Marxism and Cultural Materialism

Marxist scholars of Shakespeare have brilliantly contributed to the understanding of how Shakespeare's plays offer this Marxist insight about what caused the collapse of feudalism and the rise of capitalism. According to these critics, Shakespeare's plays notably his comedies and tragedies set out general themes that are still present in contemporary society, for the audiences are mostly faced with the idea of seeing an economic system based on obligation. Concerning the themes, Marxist scholars like Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield highlighted the idea of "cultural materialism", which is a Marxist approach championed by Raymond Williams. Interestingly, "cultural materialism" looks at the transformation of society in terms of social orders which generally exploit people on grounds of race, gender and class. (Holderness, 2). Cultural materialism thus aims at revealing the belief that literature can somehow disrupts the social order of society; "it has attended to the relations between literature and culture; and it has theorized patterns of subversion and containment" (Harris, 178). In fact, it demonstrates this Marxist vision that a literary work cannot be created only by an intention but produced under certain conditions (2). As Eagleton states, "any work of art should be symmetrically complete in itself, but like any social product should be completed 'only' in the act of being used" (Brecht qtd in Eagleton, 63). Therefore, Eagleton notes that, the stage of development of a mode of production includes certain social relations of production; and the stage becomes at the end a set for revolution (Brecht qtd in Eagleton, 57).

## 3. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the Arab World

To bridge the gap, Mamduh Adwan's play *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* is a strong revolutionary play that exposes "a contemporary political debate, behind the loudspeakers of Nasser's revolutionary Egypt, into the experimental theatres of post-1967 Egypt and Syria" (Litvin, 19). In this play, Hamlet is given the image of an alcoholic character who represents the disgruntled Arab intellectual in the aftermath of the "Six Day War." Depressed and disappointed, Hamlet is unable to see or face the world around him. As Litvin puts it, "his unexpected words and silences will help illuminate some aspects of Arab literary and political culture, and also, he seems to have an interesting thing to say" (20-21). In addition, it may be convenient to say that Hamlet has always been strong presence in the Arab contemporary and culture productions (Awad and Dubbati, 3). For this specific reason, through adapting Shakespeare, Adwan focuses on "the demoralized mood of the post 1970s Syrian society" (Kott qtd in Litvin, 165). Indeed, after the 1970's, Arab playwrights were mostly disappointed with their regimes, which is one of the reasons why they preferred to address their talks to the audiences to help them get involved in the act of revolution (Litvin, 146). Thus, by presenting Hamlet as a drunk character, unaware of what's going around him; Adwan depicts him as the rebellious hero who is forced "to become a martyr in order to speak the truth" (165). Clearly, through the intense focus on Hamlet's portrayal, Adwan provides his Marxist point of view to comment on the absence of intellectualism in a world where everything seems corrupt.

To read *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* from a Marxist point of view is also a way to bring "deeper insights into the merits and limitations of the global kaleidoscope metaphor as a means of investigating the dynamics of the socio-political forces that influenced the Arab world" (Litvin, 2). In this play, Adwan finds it necessary to adopt the Marxist theory of hegemony to discuss in detail the issues of classes in an outwardly socialist society. Adwan is one of the playwrights who believes that Capitalism remains one of the monstrous systems that continues to exploit the rest of humanity (Moreno, 7). Certainly true, as a system first attained by Western countries, Capitalism still contributes in the distribution of new markets and the exploit of new workers in the dominated and conquered countries (Lenin qtd in Parson, 2019). For example, Gramsci's ideas constantly examine the mechanisms of ideological transmission, which emphasize first how "the international situation should be considered in its national aspect" (Rosengarten, 16). For Gramsci, international relations are interrelated fundamentally with social relations and his view of state struggle are viewed as terrains of struggle. Apparently, this could underline wisely how "global bourgeoisie" play an important role in producing a cultural and ideological hegemony that is first established by international laws and institutions. In regards to this, one needs to recall the dynamics of imperialism, the domination of the new global ruling class that was notably exercised by the more powerful Western states (Europe and America) over the weaker states (Arab World). To stress, Gramsci's centrality of the "consensus" is ideologically concerned with the ruling elites in the third world. The latter upholds through hegemony the idea of multilateralism to their people to the point that they exercise it to purposely gain profits from the existence of the international system of Capitalism. As a result, Gramsci was mainly interested in constructing a unique form of Marxism to scrutinize the role of intellectuals in rationalizing systems of political control and domination. (Rosengarten, 16). With his theory, he equally seeks to spread revolutionary struggle to establish a new order in society in accordance with the principles of socialist

democracy (17).

In her book *Hamlet Arab Journey*, Litvin argues that, “*Hamlet Wakes Up Late* bitterly spoofs the Arab hero Hamlet tradition of the early 1970s. The premise alludes transparently to contemporary politics” (180). Indeed, in the late 1970s, Egypt had known a quick reconciliation with Israel, which is one of the reasons why it had led to a disastrous destruction of the Arab unity (180). Specifically, at that time, most Arab playwrights focused on representing Gamal Abdel Nasser as the ghost father of Hamlet to express their mourning, because at some degree they were really frustrated at Al-Sadat and Al Assad’s betrayal of Nasser’s principles (Litvin, 158).

It has been noted from a development point of view, between the 1970s and the 1990s, the Middle East region suffered as a whole from sizeable crisis. This was due to “Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita stagnated, and most MENA countries scored relatively low on the Human Development Index (HDI) in relation to their per capita income” (Bonfatti, 2017). Syria for example was best known for its regional dynamics in terms of political economy, class and state formation. More importantly, during that period of time, Syria shifted from “a traditional agrarian base to an economic country controlled by the service, industrial and commercial sectors” (Collello 1978). In addition to that, it had known a quick dramatic rise of world oil prices from 1973 to 1974, which had led to a huge economic growth. Beside the fact that it shifted from a traditional to an economic base control, it also relied on foreign aids such as “financing the growing deficits both in budget and in trade” (Collello, 1978). Syria, as a country involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, also went through political crises and issues. For this reason, it relied on “Arab aids transfers and Soviet assistance to support mounting defence expenditures” (Bonfatti, 2017). Not to forget to mention that, the relationship between Syria and the Soviet Union has played a major role in establishing new Marxist ideologies. For instance, in his work *Bitter Legacy: Ideology and Politics in the Arab World* (1994), Paul Salem argues, “the thought of the Arab communities was scarcely original. It drew, often imperfectly, from the thought of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin as articulated by the Comintern and other Soviet institutions” (164). Salem also adds, over time, after the Comintern, Arab communist leaders worked their own insights into a Marxist analysis of the conditions of their countries in particular and the Arab world in general (164). For Salem thus, what was in common during that period is that the majority of Arab communists have shared the same basic interest which focused on “class awareness, the dynamics of imperialism and the imperative of economic justice and progress” (164). As a result, for Salem, the main principle of ideological contribution of Marxism in the Arab world is that it resulted in “replacing the complacency toward poverty with a modern explanation of its causes and fiery commitment to its alleviation through political agitation and economic progress” (169).

In Syria, after the Baath Party’s coup d’état in 1963, most of the developmental drive of the country “focused on land reforms and state-led development” (Bonfatti, 2017). The party was notably inspired by Gamal Abdel Nasser’s agenda in Egypt who decided to put the state economy under extreme pressure since his aim was to provide “free education, undertaking large industrial projects, and promoting state interventionism in the state economy without solving the issues of low productivity and high corruption” (Bonfatti, 2017). Unfortunately, the neopatrimonial structure of the Syrian regime always sought to maintain corruption at high levels through decades. During the times of Hafez Al Assad in particular, the regime gave major prominence to loyalty by seeking consolidation of power, as the Baath party became a main influence vehicle for patronage. The corruption thus became strongly associated with following a Soviet model, which focused mainly on adopting a strict ruling system in leading the society.

Viewed from this perspective, the corruption of the Arab-regime that Adwan points at in his text informs the readers about the development of Capitalist forms of production that results in the emergence of sectors of “the bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie and privileged workers.” (Moreno, 24). In criticizing the Syrian political system under the rule of Hafez Al Assad, Adwan reflects on the dominant role played by the Marxist ideology which was brought from the Soviet Union, and which transformed the country from a pan Arab rhetoric to a country ruled under severe repression. This is clearly shown in a conversation between Lorenzo, Hamlet and the actor. The actor declares to them astonishingly: “corruption is everything, they have reached a point where we are about to reconcile with Fortinbras” (105). He adds, “I swear to you it’s all people talking about it” (105). Lorenzo responds back to him, “and the arrests are at their worst...they are arresting those who show their discontent with the deal” (105).

As a Marxist and a pan-Arab leftist, Adwan pays a special attention to “the liberalisation from external exploitation and on considering imperialism as the basis of the blight” (Al Bunni, 3). In parallel, he also provides a clear meaning that discusses how Arab political leaders became much more interested in strengthening the relation with other foreign countries to help establish a new economic base for their own inner interest. As Litvin puts it, “*Hamlet Wakes Up Late* gave voice to Syria’s criticism of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat just after his November 1977 peace-making trip to Israel; as the second meaning of the play implies critique of Syrian government brutality that is

less subversive than it seems” (192). In this view, it may be convenient to say that Adwan finds it evident to write internal monologues to help the readers/audiences imagine the miserable life that they are enduring under a strict communist regime. As he reveals between textual lines, “our times were interesting. Therefore, we suffered and sunk under the pressure of the interesting time’s concerns” (72). As Bonfatti has mentioned earlier, Syria has notably followed a strict Soviet model and a centralized ruling system in leading the country. Half the leading party monopolized the political life and drove its legitimacy from national and pan Arab rhetoric to a severe constraints and repressions. Unfortunately, by the time then, the Syrian regime started to pay much more attention to economic rights and advancing development, rather than formulating a trustworthy relation with its citizens (Al Bunni, 3).

In his book *The Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (1979), Nahuel Moreno argues, there is no way to escape from the ideas of bourgeois and petty bourgeois, even if it will take several decades. He evidently believes that, the freedom of political organization should be granted all those, including pro-bourgeois elements, who in actual practice respect the constitution of the workers’ state and not to engage in violent actions to overthrow workers’ power and collective property. Truly, one must not forget how imperialism in particular, as a form of conquest has brutalized and changed the whole dynamic of world revolution because of its way of its exploitation of the backward countries. In fact, imperialism is still considered as one of the highest expressions of Capitalism that has aristocratized important sectors of the working class and maintained a strong middle class in the metropolis. Workers and working class across the world have been divided “into two distinct, and often antagonistic sectors: one privileged; and the other, exploited more heavily” (Moreno 89). Capitalism, by its richness and its economic dominance under imperialism, retires from the historical scenario just as it entered: winning over a sector of its class enemy. Besides, the latter has in fact helped to divide the workers’ ranks in the social cause of all phenomena. On this basis, one may say that imperialism exports not “only” its capital and its goods to dependent countries, but also its capitalist crisis which becomes the chronic crises of backward countries.

In his book *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Raymond Williams provides a clear understanding of art as an aesthetic form. According to Williams, art in its meaning represents a human generality; a sort of meditation between subjectivity and universality. In his book *Literature and Revolution* (1924), Leon Trotsky defines revolutionary art in two kinds: the first one belongs principally to the artist’s work. That is to say, the kind of art that carries certain themes of reflection of revolution. The second revolutionary art involves how a literary text can mutually connect with revolutionary themes that are thoroughly “colored by the new consciousness arising out of the revolution” (1). This no doubt justifies that Adwan’s portrayal of Hamlet as an Arab national hero is related specifically to the revolution of the 1952 and its leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser (Litvin, 56). As he states openly in one of the passages, “Hamlet’s father was leading the nation in its wars. And war, as you know, means everything: it means victory and defeat...” (72). Litvin also asserts in her book *Hamlet’s Arab Journey* (2011), the Arab Hamlet tradition ensures directly how Arab playwrights responded brilliantly to “Nasser’s anticolonial revolution and the hopes it first inspired and then disappointed” (56). In this sense, it would be safe to say that the play *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* in its general context reflects exactly a political critique that concerns mainly the failure of pan-Arab nationalism.

#### 4. Adwan’s Hamlet as an Arab Intellectual

Adwan’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* introduces first the idea of how Arab playwrights have used Shakespeare’s creative play “to differently explore themes pertaining to Arabic culture” (Al-Shetawi, 50). Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is after all so popular as a play; its main content offered diverse variety of themes that were later on interpreted and adapted by different modern Arab playwrights. Mamduh Adwan, as an Arab dramatist of his own time has amazingly borrowed so many thematic motifs and themes from Shakespeare to express “his concerns about the political repression and corruption in his native Syria” (50). Interestingly, in re-writing Shakespeare’s play, Adwan focused on “the dilemma of the divided individual who is torn between his desire to take revenge and the fear that the ghost could be an evil spirit which is tempting his soul to fall into an abyss” (47). At the opening scene of the play, the audiences are directly faced with the death of Hamlet. Laertes kills Hamlet with a sword, and Hamlet cries out in despair to his friend Horatio: “they are all going to survive and I die? that’s not justice; the whole mob survives and I die? (70). Horatio on the other hand, informs and asks Hamlet; what kind of justice he is expecting from them. From the very beginning of the play, the playwright wants his audience to think critically about the main events of the play. Ironically, unlike Shakespeare who used the Aristotelian feeling of Catharsis, Adwan on the other hand chose to employ the Brechtian technique of “alienation effect” to distance the audience from the feeling of pity and fear, and this is how he technically deviates from Shakespeare. In adopting the alienation effect, Adwan uses narrative devices; that is, he presents Horatio as the main narrator who himself recounts the story of Hamlet, and that is a technique he uses in order to convey discursively his political point of view. Thus, in adapting Shakespeare, Adwan thinks that it is important to think critically about what’s going on specifically in the Syrian society. In this

case, one may say that unlike Shakespeare who thinks that theatre is an imitation of reality, Adwan, on the other hand, believes that theatre should change reality, and that is one of the main points that defines his status as a revolutionary a socialist thinker.

In their article “The Syrian Revolution and the Role of the Intellectual”, Nader and Ziad succinctly proclaim that, some Marxist leftists were deeply surprised after the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 and the collapse of the Soviet Union. According to these critics, Mamduh Adwan is one of these Marxist intellectuals who profoundly knew how to portray the difficulties of changes in the Arab world in general and the Syrian society in particular (2013, Al Jumhuriya). To combine, after Nasser’s death, Assad established a new project called “the new corrective movement” that had led to serious issues in the state reform. According to Patrick Seale for instance, at the very beginning, Assad was influenced by the model of Nasser; as he borrowed “his sense of dignity and the panoply of government” (180). Unfortunately, unlike Nasser who fought deeply for Arab nationalism, Al-Assad was much more interested in building new “economic and military plans” (181). The establishment of privatization and new market liberation had led to a social decline. In fact, it had led to political, economic and social crisis, which resulted in dividing the citizens into two different classes. A large segment of poor people started to get poorer, and rich people started to get richer (Al Bunni, 1). To reflect this specific reality, Adwan used Shakespeare’s antagonists mainly Claudius and Polonius to comment on how they are both responsible for splitting the nation into classes. Polonius in particular did not only split the nation, but also benefited from the money donated for the war victims (75). Polonius, Laertes’s father, is depicted as a thief and a greedy creature, as Lorenzo asserts, “he only cares about deals and profits” (75). Beside the fact that he is a thief, he also attempts to turn his daughter Ophelia against Hamlet and send his son Laertes to dwell outside the country to build a career on business and trading. In a section, he advises his son, “Go, go abroad; study hard, focus on your education. Prepare for your glorious future career as a school teacher or a petty officer; the kind who gets excited for wars and dies in them” (108). Here the audiences are directly aware that Adwan tries to uncover how the Syrian political system is based on corruption and greed.

In his article “The Syrian Left Realities”, Von Akram Al-Bunni argues, Syria has witnessed “many political discussions and splits” (1). According to him, some of the Marxist leftist who were inspired by the Soviet model have struggled to keep the outcome of colonial West. They have witnessed that Syria started to apply a Capitalist system, which resulted in putting the ruling elites as the main criteria. In their observance of reality, these Marxists have noted that these ruling elites began slowly to forget about the exaggerating memories of its old days when “it faced traditional feudal structures and developed a strategy for development and for improving the infrastructure” (1). In describing these difficulties in the Arab world, Adwan agrees with revolutionary Marxists including Lenin and Bukharin, and how they both reject the system of exploitation. For them, the system of exploitation of foreign investments and trade was firstly inherited from the “the inter-imperialist rivalry”, which increased the power of domination between the bourgeois class and the proletariat. In their theory, they sustain that, this raises the construction of clashes between great powers, and gives the opportunity to these great powers mainly Western countries to benefit from the raw materials of the dominated countries.

The statement above indicates that Adwan has heavily relied on Shakespeare’s themes mainly the themes of “class struggle, avarice of the power and the victimization of the weaker” (Royanian and Omrani 3) to criticize the Syrian political system. In his play, Adwan endeavours to show how the King wants Hamlet to be obedient to his rules, which is one of the reasons why he wants to suppress him as much as possible so he would not ruin his meeting with Fortinbras. For this reason, he encourages Hamlet in writing a play in order to keep him busy. He declares to him, “pay attention to your work and yourself, it would be wrong to neglect your gifts from an excess of an emotional upset. *To the Queen*, let’s go dear—we need to go to greet the delegations coming to congratulate us” (92).

Hamlet in return, just like in Shakespeare’s play, is mostly preoccupied by the recent death of his father, and the hasty marriage of his mother to his uncle, which in fact he sees as a betrayal of memory of his good father. However, it is important to note that in Adwan’s play, Hamlet does not really see his father’s ghost; he only imagines that he had seen one, and that is because the playwright adds a new dimension to deviate from Shakespeare. In Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet is represented as a mad/crazy sensitive hero, while in Adwan’s play, Hamlet is depicted as an alcoholic character. Ironically, Adwan portrays him as such, for he wants to show through him the image of the Arab intellectual who is always disoriented and lost in a world of greed and corruption.

At the cultural level, Syria under Al Assad had witnessed a fascist control; strict laws were established to prevent intellectuals from speaking for their own rights. Al-Assad’s regime in particular was a regime based on corruption and greed, and this what led so many intellectual thinkers including the Marxist leftists to stand against his power. Adwan, as an Arab intellectual knew that Al-Assad was mostly interested in establishing international relations for

his own good. For this reason, in re-writing Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Adwan confronted the regime by representing Hamlet as an Arab intellectual who "rebels against corruption and tyranny and dies in pursuit of justice" (Al Shetawi, 47).

Following the events of the play, the king delivers a welcoming speech to the audience, as he says: "...and let me repeat that we wish to welcome our honoured guest, prince Fortinbras, as a brother and a friend visiting his family and friends" (166). The meeting between King and Fortinbras opens an important discussion concerning Adwan's refusal of Capitalist exploitation. In a direct talk, Fortinbras informs the king that the relation between the two countries will be built on "a foundation of mutual interests and on an agreement whose financial worth will be in the millions" (133). The king agrees in return and let Fortinbras set up his project, as he reveals to him: "I will not conceal from you that our main investors welcome our agreement, and they are prepared to invest substantial Capital in these projects" (133). As a consequence, the King and Polonius agrees on the new project proposed by Fortinbras, but in return they have to keep Hamlet out of the picture. In a clear section, Fortinbras threatens them, "Hamlet... is a dangerous element... and the Capitalists will hesitate to invest their millions if he reacts. They informed me of their worries before I left for this visit" (134-135). Lucidly, it becomes evident that Adwan attempts to demonstrate throughout his play how Hamlet is becoming a threat to "the political regime of Claudius and the vital interests of Fortinbras in Denmark" (Al-Shetawi, 51). In delineating Hamlet as a nationalist hero, Adwan criticizes Al Assad's regime since after the post 1970s, his people discovered that he was not really interested in building a new Syria, but rather to govern a new Syria under foreign affairs (Seale, 180). Adwan's attack on the new project held by the King and Fortinbras is clearly demonstrated when Hamlet shouts in his acting of the play,

"You have turned my father's house into a den of thieves, merchants, traitors, and enemies. You have turned my father's house into a nest of prostitution, trade and treachery. You have turned my father's blood into a deal of profit from and a throne to sit on..." (p.124).

The quote above indicates clearly that, Hamlet represents the resisting intellectual who refuses the status quo. Specifically, he refuses opening up the country to Fortinbras and foreign investors and this is quite clear in his heavy criticism of Claudius's open market policy, a policy championed by Al Sadat in contradiction to Nasser's pro-proletariat policies. Interestingly, in the early 1971, Egypt considered Syria as an ally in building a new "bedrock of secret planning" (Seale, 200). For many years, Damascus and Cairo were the two pivots of Arab history. When they were united, there was a sense of Arab nationalism, but when they were apart "the Arabs became weak and vulnerable" (Seale, 200). Nasser for instance was able to dominate the region; part of him had the hope to confront Israel and the great powers just with his union with Syria. Unfortunately, all the secret planning fell apart, simply because Al Assad was much more interested in establishing himself on the world stage. In his mind, he wanted nothing, but to steal Nasser's sense of dignity.

In re-writing Shakespeare's *Hamlet* thus, Adwan criticizes specifically this hypocrisy in the Arab world. Between textual lines, he demonstrates through characters how Al Assad's new regime have only "empowered a network of traitors, petty crooks, and informers" (Litvin, 180). The best exemplar is presented in Shakespeare's portrayal of women. For example, Ophelia is represented as an "innocent woman, victimized by political strife" (Al Shetawi 51), yet in the Arabic drama, the role is reversed; she is delineated as a "whore". She seduces Hamlet in order to keep him away from the meeting of the King with Fortinbras. On a late night, she murmurs to him: "I was waiting for you with nothing on" (84). Besides the fact that she wants to keep him from the traitorous meeting; she also wants Hamlet to get her pregnant in order to force him to marry her, and she takes the throne. It becomes obvious when Laertes mocks her, "don't you think that this throne, that's blinding you and blinding your father will be the trap that kills you both" (107). The Queen's role on the other hand does not change; it remains the same as in the Shakespearean tragedy. She worries about her son, and wants the king to understand Hamlet's melancholy. Although, she shows her deepest worry toward her son, Adwan does not hesitate in depicting her as a materialist woman; manipulated by a suspicious and a dishonest king. He shows such fact in her negotiation of the agreements with Fortinbras. As she asks him, "it seems that your sartorial advisor enjoys a good taste... do you produce this type of fabric here?" (118). He responds to her with a tone of a profound interest, "if you need new clothes, it does not have to be an exchange, we sign our agreement for it. And if we need this commodity, we will think of ordering it from you" (118). Adwan portrays the Queen as someone who is engrossed in consumerism; she encourages her husband's plans of partnership with Fortinbras, because at a certain point she hopes that such partnership will help her satisfy her consumerist passion. Hence, the representation of women in Adwan's drama indicates that he wants to attack through them the greedy, manipulative dictator, Al Assad. As Litvin argues, "Ophelia and Gertrude are not presented as a triumph for womankind, but rather as a failure of masculinity in a world that forces men to become either impotent or monstrous" (221)

In his article “Hamlet in Arabic”, Mahmoud Al-Shetawi argues, “by juxtaposing Hamlet’s rotten world with the Arabic situation, the dramatist tries to highlight the causes of defeat and comment on the malady blighting the Arab intellectuals” (50). Therefore, in portraying Hamlet as a drunk Arab intellectual, Adwan shows through him the image of “the educated Arab intellectual who is always taken by surprise” (51). In the proceeding acts, Hamlet starts to realise slowly that the regime is attempting to eliminate him because they see him simply as “a threat to the peace treaty signed with Fortinbras” (51).

Viewed from this perspective, one may argue that Adwan presents throughout his work the dilemma of how Al Assad’s regime seems to be much more corrupted than the Egyptian regime under Anwar Al Sadat. On this basis, one may say that, the play of *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* can be read as a political satire that highlights specifically this conflict. To connect, after Nasser’s death, Al-Assad’s basic re-union with Egypt had led him to think about how to regain his power again. Actually, both of them knew that they needed to empower their countries with huge quantities of armaments. For this reason, they held many secret meetings in Moscow, and started to think about how to make a peace making with Israel. The only basic assumption in this conflict is that the world was watching Al Sadat instead of Al Assad, for he was promising that he would in fact make a decision in his conflict with Israel. The Israelis took a great opportunity, because they believed that Al Sadat had no pan-Arab ambition. Thus, it was known very shortly after Nasser’s death that Al Sadat has sent a private message to the United States telling them that he was interested in peace making with Israel. Although it was not that obvious, Al Assad and Al Sadat shared the same divergence of aims, which was strengthening the ties with Israel and the United States for their own personal interest. Brilliantly, in borrowing Shakespeare’s famous quote “something is rotten in the State of Denmark”, Adwan focuses on depicting “the dilemma of Arab intelligentsia relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict and comments on the decadence of Arab societies” (Al-Shetawi, 50). As a result, when he brings Hamlet into the stage, Adwan shows through him “the corruption engulfing the state of Denmark, and he vows to cleans it” (48). In the final scenes of the play, Hamlet’s slow soberness and madness will drive him to kill Polonius, instead of the King himself. He stabs him unexpectedly, and declares to his mother: “this one went, instead of the really dangerous one, but that’s alright, he is a butcher too” (140). He adds: “Polonius was a filthy man, but he was cleaner than all of you” (140). Adwan insists throughout his play that the Syrian political leader Al Assad is much more corrupted than Al Sadat. He demonstrates this clearly when the King accuses Hamlet of damaging his ties with Fortinbras. As he says, “you tried to damage our ties with Fortinbras in order to hinder the country’s economic growth and to impede the developments projects that will take place in collaboration with him” (150)

Despite the fact that they both have hoped to establish new economic base, Al Sadat was much more under pressure than Al Assad since he was threatened by the US government. According to Jesse Greenspan (2019), glimmers of hope started to appear around the time of Jimmy Carter who took office in 1977. Historical records reveal that, Carter demonstrated great interest in the Arab Israeli conflict, which is one of the reasons why he thought of spending a very good time trying to convince Al Sadat and the president of Israel Begin to come mutually in peace. In doing so, Carter hoped to arrive at what he believed to be a mutually beneficial deal (Greenspan, 2019)

When Hamlet finally realizes that Fortinbras came to intentionally sign the peace of treaty, he goes to his mother and shouts right through her face,

“My father dies! My mother marries my uncle a month later. The war stops. The enemy enters the palace. Friends becomes spies against me. Ophelia goes off the pills and gets pregnant to force me to marry her... You are traitors, all of you” (p.139).

Hamlet feels himself detached from the regime of Claudius; he refuses to stand with their corruption and tyranny and assumes openly to Fortinbras, “I act alone!” (122). Fortinbras on the other hand, wants Hamlet dead because he sees him as “a hero who sets out to fight corruption and dies for the cause of justice” (Al- Shetawi 49). Evidently, through his refusal of foreign investments in his country, Hamlet adopts a resisting position that rejects Capitalism and its growing influence in his country. As an intellectual, he adheres to Marxist’s principles of resistance and rejects interventions, and eventual control of foreign financiers in his country’s economy for the disastrous effects it will have on wealth distribution and turning Syria into a consumerist society. Seen from this perspective, one may argue that Adwan’s portrayal of Hamlet as an Arab intellectual introduces an important analytical framework that concerns mainly the idea of how Arab playwrights interpolated the Shakespearean literary text to change or deconstruct the binary opposition that is between influencer/influence, colonizer/ colonized; and more specifically Arab/West. To clarify, partly of what Gramsci scrutinizes in his theory of the intellectual resides in the way he contributes to the understanding of an advance cause of world communism movement. As a political activist, he believes that the intellectual is the one who confronts the power with a certain body of ideas that serve to “legitimate a given class

structure and set of power relations” (Rosengarten, 137). This eventually explains why Adwan presents Hamlet as an Arab educated person who looks for the well-being of the state, rather than someone who “immerses himself in the affairs of the state” (117). It is important to note that, Adwan is not the only writer/intellectual who opposed Assad’s regime at that time, but writers all over the country were seeking a certain political liberalism. For instance, between the 1979 and the 1980, a popular Syrian intellectual “Yassine Hadj Salleh” was given the name of the “conscience of the Syrian revolution” has confronted several Western fears and constructs about Islamist intervention and the development of the uprising” (Postel and Hashemi, 2014). Salah and many other non-dogmatic Marxists decided to come up with a better understanding of social and cultural situations in Syria. For this reason, by confronting the 1970’s euro-communism, which was tied up to the Soviet Union, these intellectuals were recognized as political activists who fought deeply against “the tyrannical rule of Hafez Al Assad” (Postel and Hashemi, 2014).

In a section of the play, Horatio rises to the audience to tell them about Hamlet’s story, and to announce to them: “Hamlet was among us drowning in fun, quarrels, rupture and drink; he didn’t know that he was going to face the dark interesting times that his father had left him” (72). In this passage, Adwan approaches the idea of “time is out of joint” to discuss in details the major political crisis that is affecting the Arab world in general. In her work *Hamlet’s Arab Journey* (2011), Margaret Livin asserts, Adwan just like other Arab playwrights tries to bring Hamlet into the stage to warn about the Arab/Muslim identity that is under threat. Indeed, the notion of “time out of joint” raises specifically the image of how An Arab playwright in a post-colonial society has brilliantly encountered a Western iconic playwright of all times. To say it differently, in adapting Shakespeare’s play, Adwan hoped to convey throughout his play his message to the Syrian citizens. The final words by Horatio clearly affirms that,

“Oh, crying women of the cities, don’t cry for Hamlet, cry for yourselves and your children. For the time is coming, when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed’ if they did this to a moist reed, what happens to a dry reed?” (152).

In this extract, Adwan warns the Syrian upcoming generation about Assad’s regime, and hints to the notion that there are more interesting facts that needs to be taken into account. As Litvin puts it: “In rewriting Hamlet, Adwan focuses highly on the ‘regime’s official revolutionary’ and this play in particular can be read as a way to reinforce the regime’s dominance by dwelling on the importance of critics (154). Indeed, throughout his play, Adwan hopes to affect the audience to think about a new departure, a new revolution, and a new change in the Syrian society, because as an intellectual thinker himself, he wants nothing but to attack the politics of Al Assad.

Adwan, as a revolutionary thinker expresses his suffering through Hamlet’s voice, “I am alone as a wounded wolf in the storm, and here are the wolves that smell the scent of blood and come... with their jaws dripping with greed and treachery” (50). In representing Hamlet as a centre of attention in his society, Adwan focuses on the *maladie* that is affecting Arab intellectuals around the world. As Abdallah Laroui puts it in his book *The Crisis of Arab intellectuals* (1976), “the intellectual in the Arab world is the one who knows how to make his contribution to public life more effective” (11). In this respect, one may say that, Adwan’s portrayal of Hamlet as an Arab intellectual challenges the idea of how he sees him as a character who attempts to resist to the world’s turmoil. As Litvin states, “Hamlet is understood as a visionary activist, a fighter for justice brutally martyred by an oppressive regime” (36). In confronting the Syrian corrupted regime of the post 1970’s, Adwan demonstrates how Arab/Muslim’s lack of consciousness is destroying the minds of great intellectuals. As an Arab intellectual himself, Adwan expresses his suffering through depicting Hamlet as an Arab intellectual who is unable “to cope with the political realities of the Arab world” (Al Shetawi, 49). In the light of this, one may argue that *Hamlet Wakes Up Late* (1978) reflects exactly the challenge to find what is “to be” or “not to be” to maintain an Arab identity. By the end of the play, Horatio mourns openly to the audience: “they have killed Hamlet and hanged him. In a rigged duel or on the guillotine, they suffocated him or dissolved him in a cellar” (152). Clearly, Adwan’s deception appears by the end of the play when he displays how Al Assad’s/Claudius remains in power, and Hamlet “loses his life having achieved nothing” (Al Shetawi, 51).

In conclusion, one must say that in re-writing Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Adwan offers clearly his Marxist point of view to criticize the Syrian policy of the post-1970s under the rule of President Hafez Al-Assad. As a Marxist scholar himself, he uses Shakespeare’s main themes “to discuss cultural legitimacy, and the project of capitalist-empire building in the Arab world” (Litvin, 22). Mamduh Adwan, as an Arab playwright of his time chooses Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* to critically respond to the modern Arab politics. Specifically, in delineating Hamlet as an Arab intellectual, he criticizes through him the hypocrisy not only of the Syrian regime, but of the Arab world in general. It would be safe to say that throughout their works, Adwan and many other Arab playwrights have intelligently relied on Shakespeare’s play to hopefully affect the critics, and help them to get involved in the act of revolution.



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