

## The Throne As a Coffin in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Al-Majidi's

### Hamlet Without Hamlet

Assist. Ins. Fawziya Mousa Ghanim

College of Islamic Sciences

University of Baghdad

doi: [10.23918/vesal2019.a13](https://doi.org/10.23918/vesal2019.a13)

### Abstract

Shakespearean Theater has a great impact on Iraqi stage performance . Many of Iraqi dramatists have adapted the Shakespearean texts, and reproduced them. The paper exposes the differences and similarities in both plays. It aims at analyzing the theme of death through the recurrent images of the grave digger and actions. Showing the explicit and implicit references to the throne. The first section is an introduction , shedding light on the influences of Shakespearean Theater on Iraqi 's playwrights' perspectives and stage directions. The second section discusses the issue of death and how Shakespeare dramatizes it in the play. Death is a powerful threat to all of the characters and Shakespeare's mind as a dramatist ,and how he dramatically justifies it. The third section studies critically the idea of death representing by a throne which is transformed into a coffin along the whole play. It compares the sharing and counterpoints in the two plays. It explores the world of authority and its relation with death. It discusses the characters' mobility and their own guide- line towards the throne of power and death at the same time. The conclusion sums up to the findings of the study.

**Key words:** death, throne, Hamlet, Laertes, authority and honor .

### INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare 's Hamlet has attracted the attention of many directors in the West and the East. They have tried to experiment their different visions and to present new approaches and interpretations of the play ;events, characters and spaces. The question that is often aroused : what does drive these directors to redirect the play , weather it is purely the desire for renewal or the genuity of the text itself. Otherwise, the text is opened to boulder less contemporary readings and approaches ,as well as various trends and experimental visions. If these directors are motivated by Shakespeare's texts , there are dozens of modern texts that fill their desires of renewed . But they seek deeply in the humanitarian , and political questions that conditioned the complexities of time, Intertwined interesting , conflict and ideologies. So as , they regard Hamlet as an open text to endless political, psychological , social and anthropological interpretations(Ali, 2016,p.1)

Hussein Ali Harif, an Iraqi artist claims that the Iraqi theatre has introduced Shakespeare in a creative way. And Shakespeare 's works were dealing with tyranny and mysticism. The environment of Iraq encourages the Shakespearian metaphors as they presented in the works of Sami Abdul Hamid . His works are like secret messages about tyranny and the former regime in Iraq. These messages reveal the tyrannical authority and its corruption. Hatif also mentions that Shakespeare was not a historian who dealt with the facts of history but he was a philosophical historian. He did not deal with history as historical facts, but was concerned with the philosophy by its people who represented kings, leaders and nobles. He presented them in the human way in their most vulnerable situations. He has the ability to empathize with what he

represents in the last scene and his understanding of history based on his understanding of the human soul (Ibrahim, 2016, p.1)

The director, Dr. Sami Abdul Hamid, agreed with the play critic, Abbas Latif, that the Iraqi theater is one of the best Arab theaters that presented plays of Shakespeare in both quantity and quality. Since the mid-1940s, and perhaps even earlier, Al-Shibli was the first who performed Shakespeare's plays like Merchant of Venice at the High Teachers' House in the mid-1940s and Julius Caesar at the Institute of Fine Arts. The director Hameed Mohammed Jawad directed Hamlet at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad. He reproduced it in a surrealism way. Seven years later, Sami Abdul Hameed directed the play which entitled Hamlet As Arab. In 1980, Salah al-Qasab directed Hamlet in the context of what was known as "the scene of the picture". There were many of Iraqi directors who directed the play according to their visions and approaches. While there were three Arab dramatists had rewritten the play as they did with the text of Oedipus. The plays which were recomposed such as ; Crazy Thoughts in Hamlet's Book by Naguib Sorour, Hamlet Wakes Up Lately by Mamdouh Adwan and Hamlet Without Hamlet (1991), by Khazal Al-Majidi. Al-Majidi in his play, Hamlet 'entire personality was removed from the play. The dramatist tried to prove that bad people were falling due the sins that they had committed. so that, they lived in the hell of life, because of their inner defects that led them to death (Ibid, p.3)

3

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET

William Shakespeare (1564-1616), an English dramatist, poet and actor. Hamlet (1599-1602) was one of Shakespeare's prominent works. It depicted the story of a prince who is struggled to fulfill his question, "to be or not to be:" (Shakespeare, 2001, p.63). Death and its consequences is introduced by the appearance of Hamlet's father ghost. The political and social order is violated by the "unnatural death" of Denmark's king, and followed by a series of murder, revenge, suicide and coincidence deaths. Hamlet as a character becomes an agent of death, "because he thinks that he was "born to set it right" (1. 5. 351) and avenges his father's death. Throughout Hamlet's conflict with the idea of death, Shakespeare reveals the philosophy of death when it happened in all its shapes and motives.

Death portrays man's relation with the world around him/her. Once it is shown when Claudius murders his brother and marries his wife. This situation becomes an opening coffin to most of the characters in the play included Claudius himself. Death presents as a divine quest in Hamlet's case particularly when he meets his father's ghost. The ghost's speech reflects the horror of murder and the way that is used by Claudius:

Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole  
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,  
And in the porches of my ears did pour  
The leperous distilment, whose effect  
Holds such an enmity with blood of man  
That swift as quicksilver it courses through  
The natural gates and alleys of the body,  
And with a sudden vigour it doth posset  
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,  
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine,  
And a most instant tetter bark'd about,  
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust

6

All my smooth body. (1.5, 30)

The king's body is destroyed by the poison. This poison symbolizes not only the king's death, but also the distraction of the whole kingdom. The uncertainty of death and its unapproachability dramatize clearly in Hamlet's speech: "the undiscover'd country from whose bourn / No traveller returns" (3.1.p.63). Hamlet in his earlier state regards death as a refuge or an escape from the problems, pain and grief. But, he accepts it as a quest for honor. He is ready to sacrifice his own life and defends his honor: "When honor's at the stake. How stand I then, / That have a father kill'd (4.4.99): "while to my shame I see / The imminent death of twenty thousand men, / That for a fantasy [...] / Go to their graves [...]" He compares himself with the courageous Fortinbras and his army. They fight for a piece of land and fame, while he is hesitated to fulfill his quest.

It is not easy for Hamlet to manage the idea of death. After a mediated and contemplated journey, he lastly takes his step physically and spiritually to death. When he meets the two gravediggers, how they are jesting in the mid of the graveyard and Ophelia's death. Helen Phelps Bailey (1964,p.3) describes the paradoxical sense of Hamlet's and the gravediggers' feeling: "[A] grave is dug on the stage; some gravediggers, holding skulls in their hands, make bad puns worthy of their sort; to their abominable scurrilities, Prince Hamlet makes nonsensical replies that are no less disgusting". When Hamlet enters the graveyard, he admits the idea that death is fatal and universal. Besides, No one can escape it. The two gravediggers conversation ironically criticizes the religious arrangement according to human's level in society, while all people are subject to decay. They expose death's absurdity, inevitability and fatality. Death to them is their daily time of work. Hamlet in his

7

speech with the first gravedigger proclaims his final attitudes towards death as a worm that eats human's body. In his earlier speech with Claudius about Polonius:

In response to the King's demand, "where's Polonius?" Hamlet replies, "At supper", and goes on to clarify, "Not where he eats but where 'a is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him" (4.3.96). His fear of death after life is transformed. He concludes that man's life is captured by 'providence' and fate. Otherwise, Hamlet discusses with Horatio people's "vicious mole of nature" (1.4.25). This nature causing them to be a victim of fate such as Claudius, Polonius, Laertes, and others. The throne, which represents the authority, power, policy and high position becomes a grave and a worm eats bodies.

Hamlet looks like a universal plead against treason, hate, violence, murder corruption and self-centered. Characters' death are divided in three groups: Hamlet with his indecisive action, Claudius, Polonius and Laertes in their Machiavellian actions and spirits, and Ophelia with her passive and depressed soul and personality. All of them are destined to die unwillingly, but in different destinations. The throne represents the untenable and tempted place. Claudius's meanness and pride are ironically manipulating on behalf of the crown. His lustful love for power and disloyalty become the sole essence of his downfall. When he commits his crime, he is not satisfied. He follows it by his conspiracy against Hamlet. While he prepares to kill Hamlet, a grave is prepared for him.

8

### **KHAZAL AL-MAJIDI'S HAMLET WITHOUT HAMLET**

Khazal Al-Majidi is an Iraqi poet, researcher and a playwright. He is a researcher in ancient civilizations and Theology. Al-Majidi was born in Kirkuk (north of Iraq) in 1951. He completed his study in Baghdad, and got his doctoral degree from the Institute of Arabic History of Higher Studies in Baghdad 1996. The writer worked in Ministry of Iraqi Culture The Office of Cinema and Theatre till 1998. Between (1973-1996), he worked in the Iraqi Broadcast, magazines, newspapers, the Union of Iraqi Writers. Then he became a professor at University of Derna in Libya in (1998- 2003), taught ancient history and the history of arts. In 2003, he came back home, and worked as a manager of Iraqi Center of Civilization and Religions Dialogue. He was a lecturer of ancient history, Civilization and theology at University of Leiden in (2007-2014) and worked at many of open universities in Poland and Europe. Al-Majidi is a playwright and an author of fifty books in mythology, history, poetry, theatre and the history of religions. Hamlet Without Hamlet was published in 1991 and performed at different places in and out of Iraq. The play dealt with treason, corruption, death, decay, honor, honesty and love.

Hamlet Without Hamlet dramatizes Hamlet as a voice from a far place: "A voice from (the heart of the scene) , Oh .. I hope this strong and solid flesh would transform into a dew"(Al-Majidi,1,p499. Hamlet knows that his father is dead, and he comes back to Denmark. Accidently, he is drown in the sea and dead. The conflict in the play is strength by Polonius 's claim that he should be the king instead of Claudius or the late king. Ophelia has an active character and personality, she wishes to revolt against the new king and avenge Hamlet's father and Hamlet's death. She asks Horatio helping her in this quest, but he prefers to leave the country. The whole events take place where the throne becomes the place of power, corruption, violence

9

and death. Abdull-Ameer Naji, the director of the play produces the play on a stage shapes as a throne and a coffin at the same time. Claudius kills his brother and being the king. He marries his brother's wife. When she hears about the death of her son, she becomes sad and furies . She speaks with a bitter tone with Claudius:

King: All things become yours.

Queen: And yours too, while I lost two my husband and my son is in my hands.

King: And Denmark Kingdom.

Queen: It is in my hand too.

King: So you denies our love .

Queen: Where is it ?(5.523)

He insinuates that they shared the secrets of love by her self-denial and his sacrifice. She assumes that their love is a corrupted relationship. Gertrude announces that their illegitimate relation and treachery against the king will lead to a series events of murder: "Do you know what a death of an honest man will do to the whole kingdom? A man who was killed unfairly. Oh , Claudius , we killed ourselves".( 5.524) As a reaction towards her regret and remoras , Claudius hangs her. Then he was killed by Laertes who also killed his father to ascend the throne. He steps towards the throne and sits calmly: "And now, I want rain.. oh, this is rain, it waters me..Oh, I want the sun, this is the sun, it dries me". Laertes ascends the throne and at the same time he determines his tragic flaw. He goes to the gravedigger by his own self. There is no one who will avenge or murder him. Laertes goes to the gravedigger without a support of anyone. While the gravedigger prepares a grave to him and buried him alive:

Laertes : I am the only king and no one after me.

Gravedigger: (laughing), listen .. this palace filled by kings and whatever I buried of them. Another new king will appear and there is no need to a king like you to denote this role for them.

Laertes: But I am the king, look at my clothes and you.

10

Gravedigger: You are a clown because you wears this clothes.. you will take the place of the clown my friend , but he is kinder than you.

Laertes: I will be crowned as a king , and I will punish you in front of people.

Gravedigger: If that will be real, you should thank me because I path the you for you. Before you , the tombs of five

throne.

