Shakespeare in Arabic Poetry: an Intercultural Study

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Abstract

Though Shakespeare as poet was sporadically translated into Arabic, the Bard has been a major influence in Arabic poetry. This paper attempts to investigate the multifarious treatment of Shakespeare in Arabic poetry, pointing that Shakespeare is strongly represented in Arabic poetry. Therefore, three aspects of the reception of Shakespeare in Arabic poetry will be fully examined: first, dedicatory poems addressed to Shakespeare; two, Arabic poetry based on or ‘inspired’ by the plays and poems of Shakespeare, including verse renditions of pieces and songs from the plays; and, three, translations of Shakespeare’s poems and sonnets. Arabic criticism on Shakespeare’s poetry, which is rather meager compared to the large corpus of critical writings on the plays, will be adequately cited in passing in the course of the paper.

It is commonly known that Shakespeare’s reputation in the Arab world is established as a playwright because all his plays were translated into Arabic and often performed in Arab theaters. Therefore, most academic studies dealing with the reception of Shakespeare in Arabic literature have been concerned with the multifaceted treatment of the plays in the Arabic language such as problems of translating them into Arabic or adapting
them into Arabic culture (Alshetawi, 1989; Tounsi, 1989). However, as poet, Shakespeare is not widely commented on in Arabic. Hence, this paper attempts to investigate the literary influence of Shakespeare in Arabic poetry, pointing out that Shakespeare has been strongly represented in Arabic poetry. Though Shakespeare’s poetry was sporadically translated into Arabic over a very long period of time, Shakespeare has been a major influence in Arabic poetry not only because his poems and sonnets were translated into Arabic, but also for other reasons which will be treated in the paper. This paper deals with three aspects of the reception of Shakespeare in Arabic poetry: one, dedicatory poems addressed to Shakespeare; two, Arabic poetry based on or ‘inspired’ by the plays and poems of Shakespeare, including verse renditions of pieces and songs from the plays; and, three, translations of Shakespeare’s poems and sonnets. Arabic criticism on Shakespeare’s poetry is rather meager compared to the huge amount of criticism written on the plays, a matter to be illustrated in passing in the course of the paper.

Because Shakespeare first entered the Arab world via the stage, most of his plays were first adapted to the local color to meet the needs of native theater companies that were burgeoning across the Arab world in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Increasingly the Arabs began to recognize the literary achievements and aesthetic values of Shakespeare. Arab critics writing on Shakespeare, his works and age realized that accurate translations of Shakespeare were to be
targeted, and faithfully rendered into Arabic. For instance, Sami al-Juraydini (1912) translated *Julius Caesar* as Yulius Qaisar which he serialized in *al-Zuhur*, a cultural literary magazine. The play was also translated by ‘Ayshah al-Khalafawi (1929) publishing it in installment in the weekly magazine *al-Siyasah al-Usbu‘iyah*. Both translations were favorably reviewed for being faithful translations of the Shakespeare play. The Bard was received through other channels as well. For instance, 1916, and despite the conditions of World War I, the Egyptian University (later Cairo University) hosted an international festival to commemorate Shakespeare’s third centenary. This particular event created some sort of cultural commotion in Egypt that was duly reported in *al-Muqtaṭaf* (1916) and other literary magazines of the day (Habib, 1916; 1919; ‘Awad, 1986).

More significantly, major Arab poets of the day recognized the poetic importance of Shakespeare and paid tribute to him in their dedicatory poems. Hafiz Ibrahim, the renowned Egyptian poet (better known as the Nile Poet), wrote a verse dedication addressed to Shakespeare. Literary sources indicate that Hafiz Ibrahim translated *Macbeth* in verse, but unfortunately the manuscript was lost (Alshetawi, 2002). What is left of the translation is Ibrahim’s versification of the ‘dagger scene’ which will be discussed later. It seems that Ibrahim along with a host of other poets from around the world were commissioned to write poems on the theme of the Shakespeare festival that was held in London in 1916 to celebrate the tricentenary of Shakespeare’s death, an
event that was simultaneously observed in Egypt. Ibrahim contributed a dedicatory poem to the English festival entitled, “dhikra shakisbir” (to the memory of Shakespeare). It is a 37-line mono-rhymed verse written in accordance with the metric system of classical Arabic poetry, the qasida. Ibrahim eulogizes Shakespeare as follows:

You are saluted by a poet from Egypt’s land who is infatuated by and enamored with the sayings of the people of genius.

He is delighted that on the day of your remembrance, kings of speech, Arabs and aliens, have come to you (1948, pp. 72-75).

Hafiz Ibrahim praises Shakespeare for his deep understanding of human nature; that is, he depicts in his poetry and drama the essence of mankind. In the poem, Ibrahim refers to Shakespeare’s master-pieces, noting the gist of each work in one line or two: Macbeth is the epitome of prejudice and hatred; Shylock embodies greed; Hamlet is complex and difficult to understand; and Romeo and Juliet are deeply appreciated by lovers. As to Shakespeare’s poetry, Ibrahim suggests it is genuinely poetic; it sounds like being excerpted from the Bible. In brief, Ibrahim looks at Shakespeare as befitting all ages, and that he never dies. He compares Shakespeare’s works to the Pharaoh’s monuments that still stand as hard evidence of human genius; time proves that Shakespeare excels both ancients and moderns alike.
Since this eulogy is an occasional poem read at the Shakespeare festival held during World War I, Hafiz Ibrahim proposes that Shakespeare’s memory be observed as a day of peace to honor Shakespeare because, in his view, the man is the poet of mankind:

O, the remembrance of Shakespeare appears to us like a herald of peace who is smiling.

If they (i.e., the warring parties) do justice to their heroes they should have a truce and salute his poetry and sing it.

Nor would they fire their cannons on the day of his remembrance, or wage war, and cause souls to perish.

Ibrahim refers to the periods in which Shakespeare was neglected in England, saying in effect that though Shakespeare was ignored for some time, people could not endure this for so long because they always discovered his genius and significance. Ibrahim associates the negligence of Shakespeare in England to what happened to other great poets in ancient times and in the East who had enlightened their own time. The eulogy ends with these lines addressed to England:

O, tell the people of the Thames while this assembly is meeting that Shakespeare is being eulogized in pearly verses.

If you have pride in your great fleet, your pride in this unique poet should be greater.
This last line echoes Carlyle’s renowned comment on Shakespeare’s fame, that were England to choose between the Empire or Shakespeare it would better go for Shakespeare.

Thematically Hafiz Ibrahim achieves different purposes in this eulogy. First, by paying tribute to a fellow poet, he associates himself with the world famous poet William Shakespeare. Second, the Arab poet seizes the opportunity of commemorating the death of Shakespeare during the War to call for peace; the world at large celebrates Shakespeare because he is seen as the poet of mankind; that is, he embodies the unity of man in terms of common humanity. Hence Shakespeare transcends national borders and political differences. Third, Ibrahim identifies with Shakespeare having recognized an affinity with the English poet in the calling of poetry.

In 1927 an English stage company visited Egypt and performed a repertoire of Shakespearean plays that included *Hamlet* and other plays. This visit was covered in the local literary magazines (al-‘Aqqad, 1979). For example, Shakespeare’s fame and aspects of his life and works were reviewed in an unsigned article in *al-Muqtataf* (1927; Lahib, 1927) that comments on the Bard’s reputation. *Al-Hilal*, another leading literary magazine, took note of the visit and published reviews on the company’s program. For instance, Habib Thabit (1927) considered in a review entitled “*shakisbir fi misr*” (Shakespeare in Egypt) the reception of Shakespeare in Egypt, pointing that Shakespeare is better received in
Egypt than any other foreign dramatist. In the main, Arab reviewers appreciated the way Shakespeare was performed by the visiting Shakespearean troupe, and deplored the distortion of Shakespeare by Arab translators and men of the theater.

The year 1927 was also important as far as Shakespeare in Arabic is concerned in yet another way. In this year the Shakespeare Memorial Theater was renovated after it had been burned down. A certain poetry society in London promoted this event internationally. Egyptian poet Ahmed Zaki Abu Shadi was among the foreign dignitaries who were invited to attend the festival. It should be noted that Abu Shadi founded *Apollo*, the literary mouthpiece of the Arabic Romantic Movement in the 1930s. Abu Shadi also translated *The Tempest* as *al-‘Asifah*, which was first published in *al-Muqtataf* (1929/1930). Though Abu Shadi is a poet of note, he, however, rendered the play into literary prose as he intended it for students who read the play in their curriculum. The translation was fully documented and commented upon by the translator. He provided his translation with pictures and drawings to illustrate the play. Abu Shadi’s translation generated a lot of critical flak written on the way Shakespeare should be translated in Arabic (Mazhar, 1929; al-Shayeb, 1929).

Abu Shadi’s contribution to the festival consists of three dedicatory poems: a sonnet in emulation of Shakespeare’s sonnet form; a quatrain poem that could be inscribed on the walls of the theater; and a general poem of 108 lines written in stately Arabic diction and meter of
classical Arabic *qasida*. In the preface he writes for the poems Abu Shadi explains that he dedicates his verses to Shakespeare for these reasons: (1) to pay homage to Shakespeare who depicts humanity in his poetry; and (2) to do his moral duty as an Egyptian to participate in this international affair which touches Egypt, pointing that King Fu’ad I of Egypt had already expressed his appreciation of Shakespeare in the form of a generous donation to the Shakespeare Memorial Theater (1927).

In his longer poem on Shakespeare entitled the "*qasida*", Abu Shadi is close to the conventions of the ode in English in terms of using lofty language and stately style. The poem is generally paraphrased as follows. Abu Shadi says that Shakespeare has attained fame all over the world: therefore, his praise to him does not add much to the already existing fame of the Bard. And yet, he feels that he is bound to praise Shakespeare. In the course of the poem Shakespeare is being compared to the sun, suggesting that his poetry is a never-ending source of light for mankind. Shakespeare is compared to Christ in being an example of giving and forgiving. Shakespeare creates living characters like Falstaff, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Caesar, Othello and others who are different from each other and yet so much alive and real. The last two lines in Abu Shadi’s poem allude to Shakespeare’s famous lines inscribed on his epitaph in which he wishes to be left alone:

You wished your grave to be a quiet house, and yet you have remained an observer to be called out again.
You have never left us, and truly you never died; and if you are dead, this (i.e., the festival) gives you a new birth (p. 33).

Shakespeare has also been lauded in no less measure by Ahmed Shawqi, poet laureate and verse dramatist, whose tragedy *Masra‘ Kliubatra* (The Death of Cleopatra) is based on Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* (S. Ibrahim, 1986; Alshetawi, 1987). Shawqi recognized Shakespeare’s influence early in the twentieth century; Shawqi’s “‘ala lisani hamlit” (as spoken by Hamlet), a lyric which was frequently sung in Salama Hijazi’s performances of an arabicised version of the play, will be discussed later. Shawqi pays homage to Shakespeare in yet another manner; his dedicatory poem “shakishbir” (Shakespeare), a 45-line mono-rhymed eulogy, is a case in point. In this poem Shawqi recognizes Shakespeare as a poet of genius who deserves to be immortalized in verse. Shawqi praises Shakespeare’s deep understanding of human nature and strength of his verse. Shakespeare presents the world in his theater (obviously an obvious allusion to Jaques’ speech, “All the world’s a stage, …/And all the men and women merely players; …” in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (1974, p. 381). In another line Shawqi says that though Shakespeare is dead, his spirit still lives among us in his works. Shakespeare is not to be blamed for depicting bloodshed in his tragedies because he just describes bare human nature, for when you look around you see bloodshed everywhere. Clearly Shawqi refers to the Great
War which Hafiz Ibrahim has also pointed to in his dedicatory poem.

The following is a fair rendition of some lines from Shawqi’s *qasida*:

Their (i.e., the English) constitution is the wonder of the world, and their Bard is blessed by God.

No other country has ever given birth to a person like Shakespeare, and no bower has had a more honored bird like him.

England has gained honor by Shakespeare alone; no other star has ever reached a higher firmament like him.

His tales are like the book of Time encompassing laughter and crying.

The world is staged in his works which, when read, sound like being quoted from the Bible (pp. 6-8).

These prose renditions of Shawqi’s verse do not adequately express the stately diction of the poem and its intricate imagery. For instance, Shawqi believes that Shakespeare is divinely inspired, and that his works reach the status of holy scriptures.

In his 46-line dedicatory poem entitled “*shakishir*” (Shakespeare), ‘Abbas Mahmoud al-‘Aqqad expresses his appreciation of Shakespeare’s genius as a world poet. Like other Arab panegyrists, al-‘Aqqad uses the techniques of conventional Arabic poetry in his
dedicatory verse, forcefully using Arabic poetic discourse to elevate Shakespeare. He calls Shakespeare the poet of nature in the sense that Shakespeare holds the mirror up to nature by making people see themselves the way they are depicted in his plays. He describes Shakespeare as the father of verse, paper and pen. People may not understand him, but he understands them all. The following is a rendition of some lines:

You are the father of poetry, a miracle of speech for Arabs and non-Arabs.

You make legends alive and real so that we think they are created by God not by fancy (al-‘Aqqad, n. d., pp. 267-270).

The last line echoes Hazlitt, as al-‘Aqqad justly acknowledges in a footnote to his poem. Al-‘Aqqad also admits in the same footnote that he has borrowed the meaning of the following line from Emerson: “You are like nature in making the sun shine high above in the skies.”

Al-‘Aqqad has motivated another Arab poet of the classical school, ‘Aziz Abazah, to respond to his eulogy on Shakespeare in writing another eulogy, entitled “fi dari shakishir” (at Shakespeare’s house). It seems that upon his visit to Shakespeare’s home-town Stratford-upon-Avon in July 1950, Abazah was moved by the memory of Shakespeare as well as by al-‘Aqqad’s panegyric mentioned earlier. Hence he contributed his own tribute to Shakespeare in a 43-line verse dedicated to al-‘Aqqad (Abazah, n. d.). Like other earlier poets of the
classical school, Abazah uses the common conventions of the classical *gusida*, and the rhetorical devices of traditional panegyrics in composing this stately poem which is invoked by the place where Shakespeare was born and spent his early life. Consisting of seven stanzas of varied length, the poem deals with issues relating to the house of Shakespeare and the legacy Shakespeare has left for mankind.

In the first stanza Abazah calls the house the cradle of the miracle of all times, Shakespeare, who was endowed with a probing mind and talented speech in which he excels the ancients and moderns alike. In the second stanza the 3-roomed house where Shakespeare was born is compared to the cave of *hira* where the Prophet Mohammed used to meditate just before he received the revelation. In associating Shakespeare’s place with this holy cave in Arabia, Abazah is suggesting that Shakespeare is an inspired poet-prophet, and that his poetry is divinely inspired. Hence Shakespeare probes the deep recesses of human nature which he depicts in beautiful language. In the third stanza Abazah reiterates that Shakespeare reveals human nature though man is a puzzle difficult to explain: “O, you have revealed mankind, though man is a puzzle hard to resolve” (p. 26). Abazah elaborates that man combines both good and evil, and that he has all sorts of contradictions. Indeed Shakespeare must have been a prophet to have been able to delve into this puzzle and truly depict it.

In the fourth stanza Abazah refers to Shakespeare’s plays, saying that he has delineated in them life as we
really experience it in its happiness and misery. And in the fifth stanza Abazah alludes to the controversies raised about Shakespeare's genius and authenticity, saying in effect that Shakespeare is truly unique in all times, and he is the greatest of all poets who are dwarfed by the genius of the Bard. In the sixth stanza Abazah refers to the great legacy of the Elizabethan Age, especially the Armada and the great victory of the English fleet in that famous sea battle. But all have evaporated like evanescent dreams except Shakespeare who remains an everlasting monument for all ages to come. And finally in the seventh stanza Abazah bows to Shakespeare, invoking him for guidance and inspiration. Though Shakespeare has said it all, the leftovers of his 'table' are sufficient to make us fly high up and reach the sublime; that is to say, Shakespeare remains a kind of a light-house for poets to be guided by his genius in writing poetry. In short, Abazah's poem is just another evidence of Shakespeare's influence in Arabic poetry, and exemplifies the diverse ways of acculturating the Bard into Arabic literature.

The last dedicatory poem to be considered in this section is by poet Mohammed 'Abdel-ghani Hasan, which was also written on the occasion of the poet's visit to Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's home-town. Entitling his work "ard shakisbir" (the land of Shakespeare), the poem consists of five three-line stanzas, each having a different rhyme scheme. The poem is addressed to Stratford where Shakespeare was born and buried. Obviously the Arab poet is moved by the place and what it invokes. There, the poet remembers
Shakespeare, the greatest poet of all times. The place is charged with the imagery and poetry of Shakespeare, and the Arab poet is just infatuated by it:

Here a poet lived and sang, pouring in the censor of nature his tunes.

When he plucked the strings of his lyre and sang, he filled the world with art (1939, p. 200).

The Arab poet is overwhelmed by the beauty of the place which is charged with the memory of Shakespeare. The poet suggests that no wonder that Shakespeare became an artist for the beauty of the place would have made him one. Compared with the preceding eulogies, this poem is a simple lyric inspired by the visit to the place. Poetically the poem does not match the sublime diction and lofty language of the previous poems.

These dedicatory poems show the high esteem Shakespeare has achieved among Arab poets who place him on a pedestal and pay him homage as poet of mankind. Arab poets humble themselves to Shakespeare and recognize an affinity with him in terms of poetic creation. They believe that Shakespeare is like a prophet whose words are addressed to mankind and whose soul is so much alive in his works. Indeed these examples are another evidence of Shakespeare’s prophetic vision implied in the last couplet of sonnet no. (18) to the effect that the poet never dies because he lives in his own ‘lines’, that is, poetry.

Then Shakespeare has been hailed by major Arab poets who express in different dedications their respect
for him as a fellow poet. Ahmed Shawqi, al-‘Aqqad, Abazah, Hafiz Ibrahim and others are considered the most influential poets of the early twentieth century. As pointed out, Shawqi is also a renowned verse dramatist and he renovates modern Arabic poetry alongside the lines of classical Arabic versification. Abazah follows the steps of his mentor, Shawqi, in writing verse drama including his verse play *Qaisar* which is an arabicised version of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* (Jawdat, 1963). Al-‘Aqqad is known for the austerity of his style and philosophical bent of mind. Al-‘Aqqad’s book on Shakespeare al-*Ta’arif bi Shakishir* (1958) (An Introduction to Shakespeare), and his other writings on Shakespeare just indicate how strongly this Arab writer has espoused the cause of Shakespeare in Arabic. Abu Shadi’s literary contribution to modern Arabic poetry is pervasive, and his *Apollo* was the lighthouse of innovation in Arabic poetry in the 1930s. The Arab poets are so respectful of Shakespeare because they recognize that he is not just an English poet but also a fellow poet who depicts in his poetry and drama humanity at large.

Arab poets agree that Shakespeare is the poet of mankind and they view him as a world heritage who belongs to Arabs as much as he belongs to the English-speaking world. They see Shakespeare’s depiction of human nature as real and genuine crossing national borders and linguistic barriers to embrace mankind. Therefore, Arab poets appreciate the English poet and comment on his penetration of the human mind. Shakespeare’s influence in Arabic culture is so pervasive
as shown in the dedicatory verses as well as in the other works that are based on the works of Shakespeare. These five dedicatory poems written in honor of Shakespeare prove that idolizing Shakespeare goes beyond the national borders of his native country. The Arab poets have given another case of what is historically known in English as boradolatry, that is, worshipping the poet. The fact that Shakespeare was praised by a galaxy of distinguished Arab poets shows how much Shakespeare has been enmeshed into modern Arabic poetry.

However, Shakespeare has influenced Arabic poetry and inspired Arab poets in other ways. For instance, Arab poets have poetically rendered certain speeches or excerpts from the plays and poems into Arabic verses. This sort of literary treatment of Shakespeare is relatively popular in Arabic poetry as will be shown in the different examples that will be discussed in the paper. It has already been pointed out that the Egyptian poet Hafiz Ibrahim translated Macbeth in verse and that the translation was lost. What is left is a 25-line piece of poetic versification of the dagger scene entitled “khinjar makhir” (Macbeth’s dagger), with an explanatory note appended to it, saying that the piece is translated from Shakespeare (Ibrahim, n. d.). Upon comparing the Arabic poem with Macbeth’s speech in the dagger scene (Macbeth. Act II. scene 1. 33-64), we realize that Ibrahim uses Shakespeare’s meaning given in the soliloquy, but the Arabic poem expresses the meaning of the whole act in which Macbeth debates the assassination of King Duncan in his mind. The poem is not a direct literal
translation from Shakespeare, but it renders the meaning of Shakespeare’s text and the drift of Macbeth’s soliloquy in a way that sounds native Arabic. The Arab poet uses Arabic poetic style without paying attention to the demands of accurate translation. Clearly the poem shows Ibrahim’s deep understanding of this part of the play, especially of Macbeth’s inner conflict as he is driven to assassinate his beloved king. Macbeth’s inner conflict, anxiety and fear are rendered in a language that is genuinely equivalent to Shakespeare’s poetic discourse. Ibrahim’s work is an example of creative translation as much as it is a close rendition of the meaning of Shakespeare in an original poetic utterance that naturally flows out of the heart of Macbeth, showing the horror of this man as he is about to kill the King, his guest and cousin.

Similar to Hafiz Ibrahim’s rendition of the dagger speech is Fakhri Abu al-Sa‘aud’s poem “‘utayl” (Othello) in which Othello is used as a persona who is brought forth to render his heart open, revealing a troubled spirit ridden with grief and pain (Abu al-Sa‘aud, 1934). Abu al-Sa‘aud’s Othello ‘piece’ is not a translation of any part of the play, nor is it an arabicised version of any excerpt or scene. It is a soliloquy which is said by Othello revealing his dilemma and distress as he is determined to murder his wife, Desdemona, because he believes that she has betrayed him. The poem encapsulates the dilemma of Othello: he sleeps very little and he feels like someone sitting on fire; he is torn by suspicion that his wife loves another man of her race. Othello believes Iago’s
calumnies against Desdemona. Being blinded by jealousy and suspicion he becomes so prejudiced against his wife and her assumed lover. Othello determines to kill her though he still loves her. Abu al-Sa‘aud’s persona is an injured soul who feels that he has been betrayed by the woman he loves. His jealousy and suspicion make him so conscious of his bodily defects—for example, he begins to see his blackness and the disadvantages of his body that could have induced his wife to have a lover. The poem reveals the weakness of this great military commander who is so proud of his military achievements. Domestically Othello proves to be a novice who is characteristicly rash and inexperienced. Abu al-Sa‘aud treats Othello as an Arab from Morocco, and this is the way Shakespeare’s play is duly considered in Arabic literary culture. For example, in the early twentieth century the play was adapted into Arabic in such a way that makes it sound like a native Arab work, and Othello was delineated as an Arab from North Africa. Khalil Mutran entitled his translation of the play ‘Uṭayl, claiming that the name Shakespeare uses is probably based on an Italian version of Arabic ‘Atta’alah, which means the gift of God. (Mutran, 1974; Ghazoul, 1998).

‘Isa Afandi Iskandar al-Ma‘alouf’s poem “ta’ bin mark antonius li-julias qaisar” (Mark Antony’s obituary on Julius Caesar) is a verse arabicization of Antony’s famous oration in which he laments his dead friend, Caesar, and by means of rhetoric he turns the table against Brutus and the other conspirators. Al-Ma‘alouf’s poem consists of 53 lines that correspond to lines 72-230 in Act Three, scene
two of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Al-Maʿalouf has rendered a fairly close version of the Shakespeare text making minor changes when it is deemed linguistically necessary (al-Maʿalouf, 1909). However, the Arabic poem which is highly poetic and charged with tense feelings is verbally equivalent to the Shakespearean piece. Antony's verbal manipulation of the audience turns the tide against his enemies and triggers the masses to storm them. Al-Maʿalouf has done a good job in arabicising a dramatic speech which is not always easy to translate without losing the forcefulness of Shakespeare's rhetoric.

*Julius Caesar* has also appealed to another Arab poet who renders parts of it effectively in verse. Brutus' soliloquy (*Julius Caesar*. Act II. scene i. 77-85) on conspiracy is poetically rendered in a 9-line lyric entitled "al-dasisah", (1934) that is, conspiracy, by Sheikh Fuʿad Basha al-Khatib in which he maintains the intensity of Shakespeare's language and effective rhetoric. Al-Khatib's verse could be read independently without reference to the play because it is rendered so poetically following the rules of classical Arabic poetry. However, on comparing the Arabic poem with its original Shakespearean source we realize that it is a literary match written in Arabic.

Shakespeare's influence in Arabic poetry is also manifested in diverse verse translations of other excerpts and songs from the plays. As a case in point these examples will be cited in passing. Tantawi Jawhari's "adab al-insan fi nafsih wa ma'a aqaribih" (cited in
‘Abdel-hai, 1976) is a verse translation of Polonius’ admonition to his son Laertes (Hamlet Act I. scene iii. 57-81); and Mohammed Ibrahim Hilal’s “əfana’un wujuduna amm baqa’u” (cited in ‘Abdel-hai, 1976) is another verse translation of Hamlet’s soliloquy that begins with “to be or not to be…” (Hamlet. Act III. scene i. 55-87). ‘Abbas Mahmoud al-‘Aqqad has also condensed the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet in a 7-line verse entitled “la tala’a al-sabah”, which literally means “may morning never rise!”, a love poem said by Juliet addressing Romeo (al-‘Aqqad, n. d.). Al-‘Aqqad’s poem is not a translation as such; it is a versified arabicization of Juliet’s heart-felt feelings towards Romeo rendered in a manner similar to traditional Arabic love poetry. Juliet begs her lover Romeo to stay, and wishes that morning may not come. ‘Abdel-malik Nuri “‘ala al-jidar” (1949) (on the wall) (Love’s Labor’s Lost. Act V. scene ii. 912-929); Kamil Kilani’s “ughnıyat aryal” (1933) (Ariel’s song) (The Tempest. Act I. scene. 397-405); and Mohammed Abu al-Fateh al-Bashbishi’s “marthiyat shakishbir” (1933) (Shakespeare’s dirge) (Cymbeline. Act IV. scene. 258-280) are other cases in point. These verse translations are rendered in the style of classical Arabic poetry using the techniques of Arabic traditional poetry such as monorhymed scheme and metric systems. These translators deal with their source materials the way al-Ma‘alouf and al-Khatib have done; that is, they write Arabic verses poetically corresponding to Shakespeare texts.

However, this is not all. A new wave of Arab poets use modern European verse forms in replacement of the
metric systems of Arabic *qasida* which they begin to see as restrictive, hampering free expression. This is not the place to discuss this matter which has already been considered in other venues (Moreh, 1969; Jayyusi, 1977). What matters here is to look at other innovative ways of rendering Shakespeare into modern Arabic verse. As a case in point, let us consider Mubarak Hasan al-Khalifah’s poem “‘awdat shayloukh” (1967) (The Return of Shylock), which clearly relates to Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and the stage image of Shylock in particular in English literature. Consisting of 3 stanzas, the poem draws on the stereotypical image of Shylock as a vindictive blood-thirsty Jew who is misanthropic by nature. The poem is written in the aftermath of the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War in which Israel defeated Arab countries and captured vast areas of the Arab land. The poet sees Shakespeare’s Shylock as an epitome of evil and a beast of destructive nature. It should be pointed out that Arab writers have always interpreted Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* especially his depiction of Shylock in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict; hence they believe that Shakespeare has given an evidence of the evil nature of Jews in his play and that the Jew throughout time is summed up in the person of Shylock (Alshetawi, 1994). It is in this context that ‘Ali Ahmed Bakathir from Yemen wrote his two-part play *Shayloukh al-Jadid* (The New Shylock) and it is also in the same spirit that Shylock is represented in this poem. The following translation of the first stanza of the poem is evidence of the point I have just made:
Have you come back, O Shylock,
Carrying in your hand the ‘bond’,
To mock the justice of our age?

True to the image of the Elizabethan Shylock, al-Khalifa, and very much like Bakathir’s Shylock, draws up Shylock as an evil monster who carries the knife in one hand and the bond in the other hand, insisting all the time on his right for the pound of flesh from the living body of Antonio. This is the permanent image of Shylock in Arabic poetry; he is also a usurer and money-lender who devours the poor, taking advantage of their needs as shown in Mustafa Wahbi al-Tal’s poem “ila al-murabin” (To the Usurers) which attacks the usurers in his native Jordan, associating them with Shakespeare’s Shylock:

Money-lenders are brothers of Satan, ...

O Shylock’s group, whoever supports you

Defames rights, ethics and religion (1988, p. 94).

Shakespeare’s most used play in Arabic poetry is *Hamlet*. The treatment of the play in Arabic has already been discussed in other works of criticism which consider the reception of the play in Arabic drama and poetry (Alshetawi, 1999). It has already been said that Ahmed Shawqi wrote lyrics which were inserted in the Arabic copy of *Hamlet* performed by the famous Arab actor-singer Salamah Hijazi in the early twentieth century. One of these lyrics entitled “‘ala lisani hamlit” still survives, a song attuned by the bereaved Hamlet in Hijazi’s arabicised version of *Hamlet* (Shawqi, 1979). Hamlet
sadly laments his lot and pours out his grief for the death of his father and the hasty marriage of his mother in this song. The lyric consists of eleven lines written in lofty language using the metrics of conventional Arabic poetry. The poem is not a translation of any speech in *Hamlet*; it is a dirge conceived by the Arab poet whose version of *Hamlet*, his persona in the poem, is conceived after traditional Arabic love poetry, a helpless lover beset by problems of all sorts. Shawqi follows the romantic characterization of Hamlet, conceiving him to be blighted by the marriage of his mother and the treason of his uncle. He is driven to the brink of madness having lost the will to obey the orders of the ghost of his father. True to the romantic image of Arab lovers in traditional Arabic poetry (for example, Majnun Layla), Shawqi’s Hamlet yearns for death which he sees as a refuge to escape to from the tormenting realities of his life.

Shawqi’s example has opened the door for other innovative uses of *Hamlet* in Arabic. These poems will be discussed thematically to illustrate the tremendous impact of this play in particular on modern Arabic poetry. The first of these is significantly entitled “*shakishir bi-duni hamlit*” (Shakespeare without Hamlet) by the Egyptian poet Mujahid ‘Abdel-Mun‘im Mujahed written in free verse (1972). Mujahid’s poem can be paraphrased as follows: here we have the persona of a young Arab Hamlet whose father is mysteriously dead. We do not know how this happened. The persona’s father was a working man (not king) who toiled day and night to earn a decent living and raise a family. For this he endured
humiliation and lived indigenously, but he never complained. He did not own an orchard like Shakespeare's Hamlet (a reference to the point that Hamlet's father was poisoned while he was sleeping in his garden), and after his death no ghost has ever come back to seek revenge from his killers. In other words, Hamlet is an ordinary citizen whose father has been murdered by some oppressor. However, Hamlet does not conceive of himself as a hero, like Hamlet in Shakespeare's play and he realizes his helplessness and this is the end of it.

Obviously the poet perceives of Shakespeare's Hamlet as an ideal romantic hero who sacrifices his life for the sake of justice, and fights political corruption. This is indeed how Shakespeare's Hamlet is conceived in Arabic letters, juxtaposing him with the image of the modern Arab intellectual who is narcissistic and self-defeated. In contrast with Shakespeare's romantic hero (i.e., Hamlet), Mujahid presents a defeated Hamlet who feels impotent to act or do anything:

What can I do O Hamlet and I
Fall dead on his corpse, killed,
But with no poison poured into
My ears or a bullet in my heart.

Shakespeare's Hamlet is universally viewed as a hero crushed by forces beyond his power, and he stands alienated from society to depict the oppression of man (probably in the poet's native country). Shakespeare's
Hamlet finally takes some sort of action, though it comes rather late. Mujahid’s persona is so depressed and ineffectual to act. By reading this poem in the context of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* we realize the fears and worries experienced by the modern man in Arab society and his inefficacy to fight the forces of repression.

The image of Hamlet as a confused Arab intellectual, unable to act positively and assume a constructive role in society is taken up by Mohammed Yusuf in his free verse poem “hamlit wa ufiliya” (Hamlet and Ophelia) published in *al-Mawqif al-Adabi* (1972). In this lyric written in free verse Hamlet and Ophelia are treated as personas representing the predicament of Arab intelligentsia and of mankind in modern society at large. The poem consists of two sections entitled “mourning becomes Hamlet” and “Ophelia”. Hamlet is delineated as a desperate and melancholic persona. However, Ophelia is treated differently. She is the voice of hope that will be born out of Hamlet’s despair. In the first section the poet expresses Hamlet’s sorrow; in the second section he just gives the reverse side of the picture, that is, Hamlet’s desperation is counterpoised by Ophelia’s faith in mankind. The persona of Hamlet in Yusuf’s verse laments his fate as follows:

I cry for my weakness,
I cry for the split inside myself,
I cry for my lost paradise.

The ghost of Ophelia is heard urging Hamlet to cast away his dejection. In Shakespeare’s play Hamlet is driven almost to the brink of madness and self-
destruction, being perplexed by the message of the ghost that urges him to free himself from doubt and fear. The Arab poet suggests that Hamlet can restore his equilibrium only if he is free from suspicion and hesitation. Ophelia indicates that it is through love that Hamlet can be healthy again--love purges the soul and teaches wisdom.

Yusuf develops a self-defeated Hamlet who remains depressed to the end, though Ophelia reminds him of the value of love, harmony with the self and the value of sacrifice. In other words, Yusuf's persona is a lost youth desperate for having failed to see any glimpse of hope. However, Yusuf changes the role of Ophelia. In the Shakespeare play, she goes mad and finally commits suicide. In the Arabic poem she is dead (we do not know how), but her ghost appears to Hamlet, urging him to get rid of his doubts and suffering and regain confidence in mankind (not revenge as in Shakespeare's play). In brief, Yusuf borrows from Shakespeare the names of his characters Hamlet and Ophelia for their universal significance, but he develops them rather differently.

Finally Hamlet has been used thematically in Mohammed 'Abdel-hai's lyric "hamlit yarthi ufilia" (1971) (Hamlet laments Ophelia). This poem is based on the assumption that Shakespeare's Hamlet loves Ophelia and that his genuine sentiments toward her are expressed in his outcry:

I lov'd Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum (*Hamlet*. Act V. scene i. 269-271).

‘Abdel-hai highlights this theme. In his poem, Hamlet’s love for Ophelia and his sorrow for her death are conveyed in imagistic language:

I behold thee, O Ophelia,

A willow that blooms in spring (p. 52).

Ophelia is associated in Hamlet’s mind with trees and flowers, and the rejuvenation of nature. She is a ‘white tulip’ and an ‘apple got not from paradise’, suggesting Eve’s sin, and a metaphor of purity. This is rather interesting especially when we remember that Ophelia in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* has been associated with impurity and treason (e. g. the nunnery scene). ‘Abdel-hai stresses Ophelia’s grace and innocence and does her justice even after her death; her chaste body radiates in the darkness of the grave; it is ever green, connoting the everlasting purity of her soul.

When juxtaposed with *Hamlet*, the poem highlights Hamlet’s true love for Ophelia. That is, despite Hamlet’s apparent cruelty towards Ophelia, he still loves her. Perhaps Hamlet finally accepts death because he has got nothing to cherish in life after the death of Ophelia. Therefore, death becomes a ‘felicity’ rather than the fearful abyss and,

The undiscover’d country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have.
(Hamlet. Act III. scene i. 78-80)

Shakespeare’s Hamlet has been acculturated in Arabic poetry in more ways that can be completely checked in this limited study. For example, Bushrui (1971) finds that the poet Yusuf Ghadub echoes the grave diggers (Hamlet. Act. V. scene i. 55-60) in his collection of poems al-Qafas al-Mahjur (The Deserted Cage).

Space does not allow us to consider all uses of Shakespeare in Arabic poetry. It suffices to mention that Bader Shaker al-Sayyab alludes to Shakespeare in his poem “al-asliyah wa al-tfal” (arms and the children) (al-Sayyab, 1971). Al-Sayyab incorporates Romeo’s speech to Juliet (Romeo and Juliet. Act III. scene v. 1-10) in his lines: “O, let me (say)... it is not the lark/ Let me say it is the nightingale/ And that morning has not yet risen” (p. 567); he also repeats the same lines in page 578. Al-Sayyab also refers to Avon and Shakespeare in the same poem as follows: “Peace be upon Avon that watered Shakespeare’s veins, the roses and the vines/ O wake up you poet of the light for the sun-rise is being threatened by a dark cloud/For Macbeth walks under it stealthily/ to murder sleep/to murder the innocent sleep” (p. 588), which is a clear allusion to Macbeth’s hallucinatory outcry: “Sleep no more!/ Macbeth does murther sleep- the innocent sleep,” (Macbeth. Act II. scene ii. 32-33).

In another poem entitled “min ru’ya fokai” (Fokai’s vision) al-Sayyab alludes to Ariel’s song, “Full fathom five thy father lies,/ Of his bones are coral made:/ Those are pearls that were his eyes:/ Nothing of him that doth
But doth suffer a sea-change/ Into something rich and strange./ Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:” (The Tempest. Act I. scene ii. 397-404), obviously echoing Eliot’s The Waste Land in which the same lines have been thematically incorporated to suggest life through death. However, al-Sayyab alters Shakespeare’s lines as follows: “Your father, the sea captain, lies at the bottom:/His eyes are turned into pearls sold by the merchants” (p. 356), that thematically serves the purpose of his poem, which suggests that the world is destroyed by the merchants of war. In a footnote to the poem, al-Sayyab explains that Fokai was a member of the Jesuit mission to Hiroshima and that he lost his mind struck by the massive destruction of the atomic bomb.

Shakespeare’s Venus and Adonis has been poetically treated by ‘Abbas Mahmoud al-‘Aqqad, whose poem “finus ‘ala juthati adunis” (Venus on the corpse of Adonis) is a redaction of Shakespeare’s poem written in line with Arabic elegiac poetry (al-‘Aqqad, n. d.). The poem relates to Shakespeare in two ways: first, it is about Venus and Adonis in some sort; the poet summarizes in a lengthy note the myth of Venus and Adonis as used in Ovid and William Shakespeare, and indicates that his poem is an arabicised version of Shakespeare’s. Second, the theme of the poem, that is, Venus’ love to Adonis, is based on Shakespeare’s poem, too. However, while Shakespeare’s poem runs in 1194 lines, al-‘Aqqad’s poem consists of 32 lines, and there is no story told except what is sketchily suggested that Adonis is killed by a wild boar and Venus stands on his dead body
lamenting his death. Hence, al-‘Aqqad begins where Shakespeare ends his story. At the end of Shakespeare’s long poem Venus discovers that Adonis has been gored by the wild beast, and she laments him in heart-felt lines. Al-‘Aqqad’s poem offers literal translation of Shakespeare’s lines 1125-1165. Al-‘Aqqad renders these lines into Arabic versification; he is not translating verbatim, but he uses the Shakespeare text freely while maintaining the meaning of each line in a poem that stands on its own as a dirge spoken by a woman who laments her dead lover. For instance, the opening line of al-‘Aqqad’s poem reads as follows: “She looks at his lips while she is in tears, and she is frightened by their paleness” (p. 51), which is an arabicisation of Shakespeare’s line: “She looks upon his lips, and they are pale,” (Venus and Adonis, 1123). Al-‘Aqqad uses traditional Arabic versification giving himself poetic license to make Shakespeare’s verses befit the characteristics of Arabic language. This kind of arabicisation has already been used by Hafiz Ibrahim in his verse rendition of the dagger scene and by other Arab poets who translated Shakespeare in verse.

Al-‘Aqqad’s version of Venus and Adonis is a bold attempt at rendering a difficult poem so rich and intricately poetic into Arabic verse. Venus and Adonis has also been rendered into prose summaries and some parts of it were translated in prose and verse. For example, the poem was summarized extensively in Sha‘ir al-Kawn Wiliyam Shakibsr (1944) by Mustafa Taha Habib and Salamah Hammad. Large sections of the poem are
rendered in blank verse being closely faithful to the Shakespeare text. The translators have given a fairly good idea about the poem by way of summarizing the plot and translating sections that coherently maintain the continuity of the plot and flow of events. While al-‘Aqqad poetically renders some sections of the poem using metric Arabic versification, the other translators stick to the original text without giving free reign to their imagination. It is worth comparing al-‘Aqqad’s arabicisation of Shakespeare’s lines (Venus and Adonis, 1123-1128), with the following prose translation of the same lines in Sha‘ir al-Kawn Wiliyam Shakibsir:

Her eyes have seen a sight that brings sadness and lips that have turned pale. She lifts a hand which is already cold and dead, and the speech she pours into his ear is lost, for the ear will not hear her or recognize her. She opens his lids to see eyes that cannot see, for death has already robbed them of their light, and therefore, they cannot see love any longer (pp. 168-176).

This prose translation of the Arabic text shows how closely the translators followed the Shakespeare poem. Al-‘Aqqad, on the other hand, conceives of the idea which is Venus’ reaction upon discovering Adonis dead, but he allows his imagination to work out a poem which is tensely poetic, having translated Shakespeare in terms of a poet translating another poet.

Venus and Adonis has also been creatively treated by another Arab poet, Habib Thabit, a doctor by profession
from Lebanon. Thabit believes that the story of Venus and Adonis is remotely connected with the Orient, especially Lebanon; that is, Venus is Ashtorite, the goddess of beauty and love in ancient Phoenician civilization, and that Adonis is the same god of beauty worshipped in ancient times in Lebanon. Thabit translates in poetic prose the first 260 lines of Shakespeare’s poem and his translation shows how well he appreciates Shakespeare’s poetic imagination. Interestingly like the poet Khalil Mutran who translated the plays of Shakespeare in prose, Thabit translates parts of the poem in prose perhaps because he believes that poetry is untranslatable into poetry and to translate poetry in verse means to rewrite the original work or compose a new work which is not exactly the same as the original work of Shakespeare. Therefore, Thabit uses prose and his rendition of Shakespeare into pure Arabic prose is so close to Shakespeare’s text and at the same time accessible to the general Arab reader.

Thabit has also been influenced by Shakespeare’s poem imaginatively; his epic poem ‘Ashtarut wa Adunis (1948) (Ashtorite and Adonis) suggests that Thabit has conceived of the Shakespeare poem on a larger scale by writing an original poem inspired by Venus and Adonis. In his poetic work, Thabit sketchily adheres to the outline of Shakespeare’s narrative story in the sense that both poems are love poems and that Adonis is killed by a wild boar. Venus laments his death and Adonis’ blood transpires into a purple flower cherished by Venus and lovers thereafter. However, true to his theory that Venus
is Ashtorite and that the myth originally started in the Orient, the episodes of his epic occur in Lebanon. Thabit’s work is another example of Shakespeare’s creative influence on Arabic poetry and illustrates the diverse ways the English Bard has been received in Arabic.

At last *Venus and Adonis* appeared in a complete Arabic translation in 1987. In his preface to the translation of the poem the poet-translator ‘Abdel-‘aziz Tawfiq Jawid gives an introductory note on the life of Shakespeare and his place in English literature and summarizes the plot of the poem. The translator claims that he has rendered the poem in verse accessible to Arab readers. Jawid’s translation is important for different reasons. First, it is the only complete translation of *Venus and Adonis* in Arabic. Second, the translator translates the notes and annotations given in his source text (he does not mention which edition). Third, the translation on the whole is a faithful rendition of Shakespeare, using Shakespeare’s arrangement of lines and internal verse structures that equally correspond to the varied length of Shakespeare’s lines.

The translation is not deficient in terms of poetic imagination; the translator faithfully renders Shakespeare’s imagery without amending it to suit the literary discourse of Arabic. At the same time, the translation is poetic and the diction used is smooth, the texture of the translation simple and beautiful, making the reading of it a worthwhile experience without hardships. Jawid is to be applauded for rendering into Arabic a long
poem which is not easily accessible to the modern reader being written in Elizabethan verse forms. Jawid has done what his predecessors, Thabit and others, failed to do; that is, translating the complete text of Venus and Adonis into Arabic. Jawid’s translation has filled up a gap in the Arabic Shakespeareana that has been left vacant for so many years. Now the general Arab reader can enjoy reading Shakespeare’s poetry in Arabic.

The poems of Shakespeare have generated meager criticism compared to the large body of criticism written on the plays. Venus and Adonis has drawn up very little criticism which mainly consists of short summaries of the plot of the poem and sketchy commentaries as is the case of Sha‘ir al-Kawn Wiliyam Shakishir. The only full-length study of the poem is given by Badi‘ Mohammed Jum‘ah’s Isturat Finus wa Adunis (1981) (The Myth of Venus and Adonis), a book which is devoted to the treatment of the myth in European literature and in Shakespeare. The sections on Shakespeare explain how Shakespeare is different from his sources, and give a detailed summary of the poem itself.

Shakespeare’s other narrative poem, The Rape of Lucrece, has also been received in Arabic though at a lesser scale than Venus and Adonis. The plot of the poem is summarized in Shai‘r al-Kawn Wiliyam Shakishir along with translations of some short snatches from the poem. Safa’ Khulusi translates excerpts from the poem publishing them in al-Adab wa al-Fann (cited in ‘Abdelhai, p.141). However, the poem has not been rendered
completely in any translation and the work still waits to be fully translated.

"The Phoenix and Turtle" has been more lucky, so to speak, than The Rape of Lucrece in the sense that it has been rendered in full in two Arabic translations. ‘Abdelwahid Lu’lu’ah, translated the poem in literary Arabic under the title "al-‘anqa’ wa al-yamamah", included in his critical book al-Bahih ‘An Ma’na (1983) (In Search for Meaning), subtitled "Critical Studies". Lu’lu’ah has to his credit other translations from English, especially his respectable translation of Shakespeare’s Timon of Athens and T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land which he published along with relevant critical studies in a book entitled al-Ard al-Yabab, completely devoting it to explicating the poem to the Arab reader. His translation of "The Phoenix and Turtle" is a fairly accurate rendition of a poem which is rather slippery. Lu’lu’ah provides his translation with a lengthy critical study of the poem based on diverse English criticism of the poem.

The other translator of the poem is Safa’ Khulusi who wrote extensively on Shakespeare and translated several sonnets. Some of his critical ideas on Shakespeare are rather funny such as promoting the idea that Shakespeare was probably an Arab whose name is derived from Arabic Shaykh Zubayr. However, Khulusi’s far-fetched opinions of the genealogy of Shakespeare are rather amusing, scoffed at in academic circles. But Khulusi espoused the cause of Shakespeare in the Arab world, and for this reason the man wrote extensively on Shakespeare and translated some of his works. Khulusi translated "The
Phoenix and Turtle” as “al-‘anqa’ wa al-qomariyah”, publishing it in the widely circulating monthly magazine *al-‘Araby*, which is an esteemed journal of cultural and literary studies published in Kuwait (1981).

“The Phoenix and Turtle” has intrigued Arab translators the way it intrigued English commentators. It is rather strange that this particular poem, which is slippery and difficult to understand, has been translated in Arabic twice. In comparing the two translations with the original text one realizes how difficult it is to render the complexities and ambiguities of the Shakespeare text into literary Arabic. The translators have succeeded somewhat to transform the intrinsic aesthetic aspects of the poem and maintain Shakespeare’s power of imagination. However, the translations also show how hard it is to translate the shades of Shakespeare’s meanings, the things that are suggestively said by reference and allusion or read between the lines. In other words, where it is feasible to translate word-for-word or phrase-for-phrase or even create metric structures linguistically equivalent of the original, it is, however, most difficult if not impossible to transform into the target language those associative things embodied in a certain culture which are immediately lost when the text is translated into the language of a different culture.

The Arabian tree and the Phoenix are loaded with cultural associations relating to the Elizabethan view of the Orient which was introduced to them via tales of merchants, pilgrims and travelers, tales that were invented for public consumption (Chew, 1974). For
instance, this poem in particular is associatively related to Arabic culture in two ways. First, Shakespeare uses an Arabian bird, the Phoenix, hence associating the poem with Arabia and the myth of the Phoenix. Second, the bird is also associated with an Arabian tree, which is not identified by name. Both the bird and the identity of the tree have been differently interpreted in academic studies and the identity of the tree remains controversial to the present (Holmer, 1980; Levin, 1984). This is not the place to discuss Shakespeare’s uses of the Phoenix and the Arabian tree which have also been used in other works by the Bard. What matters is to see how the Arab translators render into Arabic both elements and whether their translations have given the mystical ambience and remoteness embodied in the Shakespeare poem.

Both translators translate the Phoenix as “al-‘anqa”, a mythical bird related to Arabia, and sometimes Egypt. However, the mythical bird suggests in Arabic something completely different from its uses in Latin cultures. The Arabic aphorism which says “the three impossible things are the ghoul, the phoenix and the true friend” means then that the Phoenix in Arabic culture is a mythical bird. However, in Arabic cultural heritage the bird is associated with revenge. In ancient times the bird was believed to hover over the grave of a murdered person until revenge for that person’s death is fulfilled. In English, especially in Shakespeare’s canon which is based on Ovid, the bird is believed to burn itself to death in the fire set to the twigs it gathers to be reborn from the ashes after five hundred years. Shakespeare
metaphorically wedded the Phoenix to the turtledove in a sort of spiritual union that is constantly renewable. Shakespeare uses the bird to suggest rejuvenation and eternity such as in the poem. In his plays Shakespeare uses the bird to suggest other meanings: singularity, uniqueness, etc. and in *Henry VIII* (Act V. scene iv. 40-42) Queen Elizabeth I is compared to the phoenix to the same effect. However, for the Arab reader who is not versed in Shakespeare this meaning is completely lost and he may find the uses of the Phoenix in this poem unintelligible. But for the English reader the Phoenix and the sole Arabian tree denote remoteness and exoticism, for both items are culturally and geographically associated with the Orient. Shakespeare perhaps tries to create a field of romance which is fanciful, far-fetched and mythical (Alshetawi, 2002).

Now when rendered into Arabic, the poem loses these associations. For instance, Shakespeare remains vague about the identity of the tree not only in this poem but also in *Othello* and *The Tempest*. But in the context of Shakespeare’s Elizabethan culture both items are culturally associative of the East and the foreign and they arouse a sense of the bizarre and denote the other. In the Arabic translations the Arab reader would be completely at a loss at reading “*min ‘ala ash-shajarah al-‘arabiyah al-faridah*” (On the unique Arab tree) in Lu’lu’ah’s translation; strangely Khulusi omits this line altogether! What Arab tree? The Arab reader would ask. In Shakespeare’s poem the ambiguity is thematically and aesthetically meant to work out the imagination of readers
to think of the Orient vaguely; after all, this has been the stereotypical image of the Orient in Elizabethan literature: dream-full, fanciful, exotic, and remote. Perhaps having very little knowledge of Arabia, Shakespeare and the other fellow Elizabethan dramatists would have associated the Arabian tree with the date or palm tree which is native of Arabia, or some other tree, for example, myrrh that is widely grown in Yemen. However, in the Arabic translation the Arabian tree is just meaningless as a cultural emblem; what is being associated with the Orient is completely lost because the Arab reader of the translation does not connect with the cultural association of the poem. Therefore, this poem in particular exposes the kind of cultural problems that translating Shakespeare into Arabic would raise.

In other words, Shakespeare may have written a work beyond the domain of translation and the poem has to be translated poetically in an equivalent indigenous poem that transforms the meaning and aesthetic power of the Shakespeare poem and at the same time stands on its own intrinsic merits as a poem born out of the womb of Shakespeare’s poem, an offshoot like al-‘Aqqad’s arabicised version of parts of *Venus and Adonis* or Abu al-Sa’aud’s ‘Othello’ and Hafiz Ibrahim’s Macbeth ‘piece’.

Like Shakespeare’s poems, the sonnets were ignored in Arabic during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, though Shakespeare’s major plays were translated and arabicized and often performed in the Arab world.
Shakespeare’s sonnets have been sporadically translated into Arabic over a long period of time. The sonnets were first translated into Arabic back in the early 1930s, though on a very small scale and quite intermittently. Taha ‘Abdel-hamid al-Wakil published his translations of sonnets nos. (30), (64) and (71) in the local Egyptian weekly magazine al-Balagh al-Usbu‘i in prose (1930). Al-Wakil gives his translations titles based on the theme of each sonnet. For example, he entitles sonnet sonnet (30) as “al-dhikra” which means “the memory”, sonnet (64) as “al-zaman wa al-hub” which means “time and love”; and sonnet (71) as “intisar al-mawt” which means “the triumph of death”, obviously differing from Shakespeare who does not give titles to his sonnets; and even the numbering of them, as given in the different editions, has been controversial. Al-Wakil’s technique of entitling the sonnets stems from two things: one, he translates each sonnet separately having made no connection with the sonnet sequence; and two, al-Wakil follows the traditions of Arabic poetry in which an individual poem is usually given a title that denotes its theme. Anyway, al-Wakil paraphrases the sonnets more than translates them and he just renders the meaning of each line at the expense of losing Shakespeare’s rich imagery and aesthetics. Al-Wakil’s translations of sonnet no. (64) and others have probably prompted Taha ‘Abdel-fattah to adapt Shakespeare’s sonnets nos. (64) and (65) into a mono-rhymed verse of 37 lines entitled “al-dahr wa al-hub” (time and love), written in stately diction that embodies the ‘meaning’ of Shakespeare’s two sonnets.
which are obviously dealing with the theme of time and love (1936). And poet Elias Abu Shabbakah echoes Shakespeare’s sonnet no. (71) in his poem “ughniyat al-mawt” (death song) in his collection of poems Qitharah (Bushrui, 1971).

Among his other renderings of Shakespeare into Arabic that include translation of excerpts from The Rape of Lucrece, as well as writing a lot of critical things on the Bard, Safa’ Khulusi translates two sonnets giving them Arabic titles: he translates sonnet no. (132) as “al-samra’ al-majhulah” (the unknown dark lady) and sonnet no. (154) as “ft ghafwati ilah al-hub”, a title which literally means “while the god of love is having a siesta” (1965). Interestingly Khulusi translates the sonnet as muwashahah which is a form of lyrical poetry popular in Andalusian poetry. Khulusi strangely associates the sonnet with this particular love poetry of Moslem Spain and he speculates that the form could have been imported into Italy and then into England through troubadour poets of the Middle ages. Khulusi’s far-fetched suggestions are far from the truth, for such matter has never been verified by scholars, and hence Khulusi’s ideas just express the man’s zeal for Shakespeare by associating him with Arabic culture and even identifying Shakespeare as an Arab. Khulusi attempts to translate the sonnets into Arabic verse but he ends up adapting the originals rather than giving close literary renditions of them.

Shakespeare was somewhat promoted in Arabic studies in the 1940s and thereafter as testified by the large bulk of criticism written on him as well as the appearance
of better quality translations of the plays. Moreover, Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* was translated and commented on by poet Habib Thabit and local literary magazines published translations of some sonnets. In the first place, two full-length books on Shakespeare came out: the aforementioned *Sha’ir al-Kawn Wiliyam Shakishbir* and *‘Abqariyat Shakishbir* (1960) (Shakespeare’s Genius) by Jerius al-Qosus which offer comprehensive coverage on Shakespeare including translations from the plays, *Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece* and also the sonnets. The sonnets were commented on and exemplified by translating some of them into Arabic in prose and verse. For example, translations of sonnets nos. (1), (2), (18), (29), (57), (60), (138) and others are included in *Sha’ir al-Kawn Wiliyam Shakishbir*. These sonnets are rendered into Arabic versification of the classical type and each one is given a title suggesting the gist of each sonnet. For instance, sonnet (60) is entitled “*thawrah*” (revolt), sonnet (138) “*al-kazib al-hai*” (the living lies) and so on. Being translated by poet Tawfiq Ahmed al-Bakri these sonnets are closely rendered into classical Arabic verse maintaining to a great length the aesthetic sense of the Shakespeare sonnets. They are literary translations closely following the imagery and fabric structure of Shakespeare who is clad in Arabic. However, al-Qosus’ translations of the sonnets are given in Arabic literary prose though their language is highly tense and made closely compatible to the language of Shakespeare. Al-Qosus’ book includes translations of these sonnets: (18),
(29), (33) and (73), respectively. And he ends his book with a translation of Arnold’s dedicatory poem “To Shakespeare”, which he finds most suitable to conclude his book on Shakespeare.

Eventually the sonnets began to draw serious attention from literary translators and men of letters. This is clear in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra’s translations of 10 sonnets at one go published under the title “‘ashrat anshad li-shakisbir” in a highly respectable literary journal, al-Adib (1949). Jabra here translates the word ‘sonnet’ as “anshad” (pl. of unshudah), but he later uses the term “sonitat”, an arabicised form of ‘sonnets’. Jabra rendered ten sonnets in prose and he obviously worked hard to make them true versions of their originals. The sonnets are: (18, 29, 30, 55, 64, 106, 116, 129) and others. It seems that Jabra was fascinated by the sonnets and hence he was determined to translate them on a large scale into Arabic. This made him translate forty sonnets, the ten included, and he published them in book form under the title al-Sonitat (1983) (The Sonnets). This time Jabra provides his translations with an extensive critical introduction and ample annotations to explain them to the Arab reader, and he also includes the text of each sonnet in English next to the Arabic translation for the purpose of comparison. Indeed Jabra’s attempt is the first of its type to translate the sonnets on a large scale and to draw the attention of Arab readers to the importance of Shakespeare as a poet. Jabra’s translations of the sonnets have been appreciated in Arabic criticism for their accuracy, literalness and poetic sense. Jabra grasps the sense of the sonnet and
renders it aesthetically in Arabic in a way that beautifully conveys the spirit of Shakespeare’s sonnets (al-Raba’, 1985).

Though Jabra is Shakespeare’s translator *par excellence* (he translated several plays and books on Shakespeare and wrote many studies on Shakespeare), he, however, translated only forty sonnets. We do not know why Jabra did not translate the complete sonnets especially that he knew that no one else before him had ever attempted to translate them at such a large scale. The task has finally been achieved by the Egyptian poet-translator Bader Tawfiq whose translation of the complete sonnets *Sonitat Shakisbir al-Kamilah* came out in Cairo in 1988. From the note given at the beginning of this translation of the sonnets, Tawfiq seems to be qualified to do this arduous task which a host of Arab translators feared to do, that is, rendering the complete sonnets into Arabic. Tawfiq translated English and American poetry including Dryden, Coleridge, Eliot, Dickinson, Whitman and others. He is also a poet of some sort.

In his preface to the translation the translator says that he has taken up the thorny task of translating Shakespeare’s sonnets because the sonnets are a deep source of great human values and the Arabs are so behind other nations in this regard (for example, in France the sonnets were translated more than twenty different times between 1821-1970), etc. Tawfiq comments on the poetics of the sonnets and the different issues raised about them throughout time; for instance, the identity of the
person for whom the sonnets were dedicated, his unfaithful mistress and so on. The importance of Tawfiq’s translation of the sonnets is twofold: it is the first complete translation of the sonnets in Arabic; hence Tawfiq has filled up a gap in Arabic Shakespeare studies which has been left open for so long; and the translation supersedes all other previous translations of individual sonnets in terms of high quality and literary value. Indeed Tawfiq is faithful to Shakespeare’s sonnets and even renders them in a highly suggestive Arabic language closely matching the language of the original sonnets.

As verse form the sonnet has no equivalence in native Arabic poetry and hence the word ‘sonnet’ has been rendered differently as “ughniyah” (song), and “unshudah” (ballad), etc., and yet some translators still use the Latin word in Arabic having realized that it is untranslatable. Moreover, the sonnet form which is mainly a 14-line lyric following either Petrarch or Shakespeare is characteristically European verse form and its internal structure in either forms as well as its poetic purpose is completely foreign in Arabic poetics. Therefore, the Arab translator often explains in introductory notes the sonnet form and its verse features. Besides, the sonnet sequence which is popular in Elizabethan poetry is not widely emulated in Arabic poetry. The sonnet has exerted little influence on Arab poets by way of composing a body of poetry similar to it or emulating it in terms of structure, metrics and aesthetic values. However, recently the renowned Arab Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darweesh has experimented with the
sonnet form. Darweesh has composed a sequence of sonnets numbering them as follows: sonata I, sonata II, sonata III, sonata IV, sonata V, and sonata VI included in his collected poems titled *Sarir al-Gharibah* (1999) (Bed of a Stranger). In these sonnets Darweesh uses the form of the Shakespearean sonnet i.e. three quatrains and a couplet, in nos. II, V, VI; in the others he uses variations on the Petrarchan sonnet i.e. an octave (8 lines) and a sestet (6 lines). Thematically, however, Darweesh’s sonnets are not related to Shakespeare’s sonnets; they express Darweesh’s preoccupation with the tragedy of Palestine.

In conclusion, the study illustrates that Shakespeare has been diversely acculturated into Arabic poetry, and that a fairly large corpus of Arabic poems and lyrics are directly based on some plays or influenced by them thematically. Aspects of the treatment of Shakespeare in Arabic poetry may be summed up as follows: assimilating Shakespeare’s works in indigenous Arabic poems; writing original Arabic poems that are thematically drawn on Shakespeare’s poems and sonnets; and translating Shakespeare’s poems and sonnets into Arabic. Moreover, Shakespeare’s verse form blank verse has been assimilated in Arabic verse drama (Alshetawi, 1987); and the sonnet form has also been emulated in Arabic poetry. Shakespeare’s acculturation in Arabic belles-lettres needs to be further investigated especially in fiction. For example, Shakespeare’s *Othello* has been thematically treated in Tayeb Saleh’s novel *Mawsim al-Hijrah ila al-Shamal* (Season of Migration to the North) to delineate
the conflict between the North and South and the question of race and other related issues (Harlow, 1979).

شکسپیر في الشعر العربي: دراسة في التلقي الثقافي

المخصص

من المعروف إن شهرة شکسپیر في العالم العربي مبنية أساسا على أعماله المسرحية المترجمة إلى اللغة العربية، وعلى بعض المعالجات المسرحية لها على خشبة المسرح العربي. وقد اعتنت معظم الدراسات التي تناولت استقبال شکسپیر في العربية بالمسرحيات ومشاكل ترجمتها إلى اللغة العربية. غير أن شکسپیر كشاعر ومدى تأثيره في الشعر العربي لم يتم طرحه سابقا، ولذا فإن هذه الدراسة تهدف إلى دراسة استقبال شکسپیر في الشعر العربي في سياق استقبال هذا الشاعر المسرحي الإنجليزي في الأدب العربي والثقافة العربية. فعلى الرغم من أن شکسپیر كشاعر قد تم التعامل معه في الشعر العربي على فترة مقطعة وعلى مدى فترة زمنية طويلة، إلا أن أثره في الشعر العربي أصبح واضحًا ليس فقط لأن أشعاره المعروفة (بالسونيتات) وقصائده الأخرى قد ترجمت إلى اللغة العربية. بل أيضاً لأسباب أخرى سيتم طرحها في سياق هذه الدراسة التي تتناول ثلاثة أوجه لاستقبال شکسپیر في الشعر العربي وهي: أولاً، القصائد التي قيلت في مدح شکسپیر وأمديت له في مسارات مختلفة؛ ثانياً، الأشعار العربية التي استوحيت من أعمال شکسپیر المسرحية وقصائده بما في ذلك الترجمات الإبداعية لبعض أغانيه وقصائده التي جاءت في المسرحيات؛ ثالثاً، الترجمات العربية لقصائد شکسپیر وسونيتاته. وتعبر الدراسة في ثناها بعض النقد العربي لشعر شکسپیر وتدعو إلى دراسة أوجه أخرى لاستقبال شکسپیر في الشعر العربي والأدب العربي على النمط كالأرواية مثلًا.
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“shakisbir: dala’il shuhrateh wa lamhah min nash‘ateh”.


