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## **Shakespeare in Tehran City Theater: A Study of Appropriation in *Hamlet: The Retribution Affair***

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### **Abstract**

Focusing on the cultural significations and artistic capacities of *naqqali*, this article examines the comparative workings of this Iranian popular genre in Hossein Jamali's *Hamlet: The Retribution Affair*. Being among the first in an experimental juxtaposition of *naqqali* and a Western play, Jamali's production as an artistic entity reflects both cultural evolution and inadequacies of Iranian society. Since *naqqali* has historically played an adaptive role in Iranian literature, it is worthwhile to investigate what utilities it finds in the young director's adoption of it as a medium to narrate Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Considering the fact that adaptive works are typically sites to express minor literature, this study is concerned to see to what extent the indigenized *Hamlet* deterritorializes the source text.

**Key words:** Jamali, *Hamlet*, *naqqali*, adaptation, minor literature

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### **Introduction**

It is now an axiom that adaptation is a ubiquitous phenomenon. As Linda Hutcheon remarks, “Adaptations are everywhere today: on the television and movie screen, on the musical and dramatic stage, on the Internet, in novels and comic books, in your nearest theme park and video arcade” (2). This widespread and popular undertaking has not skipped Shakespeare’s plays. The playwright has been adapted as early as the Restoration, 44 years after his death. According to Julie Sanders, “From 1660 onwards playwrights such as Nahum Tate and William Davenant changed plotlines, added characters, and set to music Shakespearean scripts for performance” (46). This has happened to most of Shakespeare’s plays to date, in spite of “the cultural taboo on presuming to alter them” (Fischlin and Fortier 1).

Similar to other countries, Iran has witnessed an abundance of Shakespearean adaptation from the beginning of its modern history of performance. Following Hosseinqoli Salur’s translation of *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1900, the Bard attracted considerable attention nationwide (Ganjeh 13). The reasons for the passionate reception of Shakespeare’s plays in Iranian cultural scene, which appeared in all forms including translations, performances, and faithful and free adaptations, were the simultaneously philosophical and popular plots and dialogues that could satisfy all tastes, their presentation of universal human traits, their potentiality to reflect and criticize topical issues, and, undoubtedly, the dramatist’s canonized figure. In the last three decades, the reception has come to its acme by dramaturgists who experiment with new contents, concepts, and forms. Gholam Hossein Saedi, Atila Pesyani, Mohammad Charmshir, Naghmeh Samini, Ali Rafiei, and Kiomars Moradi are some of the prominent figures who have adapted Shakespeare in Iran. In addition to them, there are some minor figures who have experimented with Shakespeare’s plays. What is noteworthy about both the groups is the fact that despite the large number of their productions, they have received few scholarly attentions.

While a study of major figures can lead to invaluable results such as the process and workings of canonization in a culture, a probe into minor figures can

contribute to critical findings including the discovery of experimental voices, the manner of their struggles to be canonized, and an exploration of the workings of the classics to give the fledging writers credibility. Having considered such cultural significance, cultural theory inveighed against the conservative studies to be solely concerned with established men of letter. As Terry Eagleton avers, “In some traditionalist universities not long ago, you could not research on authors who were still alive” (12). It was an unforgivable insult “if your chosen novelist was in rude health and only thirty-four” (12). Eagleton celebrates the present consideration of “the everyday” and concludes “[one of the] historic gain of cultural theory has been to establish that popular culture is also worth studying” (12). Applying such “gain” to the contemporary Iranian theater through a cursory look at the list of the numerous minor adaptations of Shakespeare, it is possible to deem Hossein Jamali’s 2015 production as standing out in that the young playwright and director adapted *Hamlet* in the context of one of the oldest popular dramatic genres, called *naqqali*.

A narrative and dramatic art, *naqqali* is an act of relating an event or a story, in poetry or in prose, with appropriate movements, moods, and expressions in front of the public. In Iranian cultural and literary heritage, it broadly signified reading and relating all kinds of stories (including heroic, historical, lyrical, religious etc.) (Aydenloo, “Moqaddame” 36). However, in the late Safavid times and especially in Qajar era, *naqqali* became predominantly concerned with recounting *Shahnameh* stories (Aydenloo, “Resale” 8-9), appearing in its form of secular entertainment (Mahdavi 490). Though this popular genre has undergone major and minor changes to its form and content in its long history, some general features can be enumerated for it: it does not intend to instill certain ideology by resorting to any argument; it emphasizes audience’s sensibility rather than their sense; it adopts as its subject supernatural and exaggerated stories and heroes; it aims at entertaining the audience and instigating their passions and feelings through fascinating tales, rhetoric, mental dominancy over the public, suggestive and dramatic actions of the narrator (Beyzai 60).

When *naqqali* with these potentialities becomes a medium to narrate *Hamlet*, it is possible to explore the cultural significance of such amalgamation,

the technical potentials that two traditions give each other, and the extent of the director's divergence from tradition to be the spokesperson of minorities. Since *naqqali* has traditionally been a reflector of the cultural and political codes of the time, the present study aims to investigate what the implications are when the genre is applied in the twenty-first century in an adaptation of a Western play. To this end, this article develops a unique theoretical background in which *naqqali* as a cultural touchstone and as a potential genre for adaptation is explored. Having explored the adaptor's appropriation of the Persian genre and the Western play, the present study aims to discuss whether the play becomes a representative voice for minority groups or remains conservative within the traditions out of which it emerges. This research is significantly worth undertaking in that it explores the evolutionary course of Iranian theater through the cultural touchstone of *naqqali*, giving finally a picture of the current practices of adaptation in Iranian theater by emergent young dramatists.

### Literature Review

Compared with the large number of Shakespearean adaptations in Iranian theater, there have appeared few critical works to study them. Parviz Partovi Tazeh Kand's "Adaptations of *Hamlet* in Different Cultural Contexts: Globalisation, Postmodernism, and Altermodernism" (2013) is a PhD dissertation defended at the University of Huddersfield which approaches "seven theatrical adaptations of *Hamlet* in Turkish, Russian, Arabic and Persian cultural contexts, from the perspectives of postmodernism, globalisation and altermodernism" (2). Of the seven adaptation studied, four are Iranian, including Mahmud Sabahi's *Hamlet Narrates Hamlet*, Atila Pesyani's *Gajari Coffee*, Mostafa Rahimi's *Hamlet*, and Akbar Radi's *Hamlet with Season Salad*. Coining the terms homointertextuality and heterointertextuality, the researcher concludes, "The Persian *Hamlets* demonstrate Iranians' historical passion to adapt the best thoughts and ideas, in order to enrich their own culture" (258). Defended at Universität Bern, Azadeh Ganjeh's "Performing *Hamlet* in Modern Iran (1900 - 2012)" (2017) is a PhD dissertation that discusses the reception of *Hamlet* in three Iranian governing system from 1900 to 2012 through nine selected

adaptations of the play. This study “tries to find out why Western theatre had always been an important and critical subject for Iran’s political systems, and what happened to “Hamlet” while passing cultural borders and dealing with impediments of the destination country” (IV-V). Some of the contemporary adaptations have been the target of critical readings in such websites as honaronline.ir and theater.ir. In honaronline.ir, Jamali’s play is discussed as an experimental attempt in which the adaptor amalgamates Iranian theatrical techniques with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* with the ultimate aim of arguing that tragedies are so outworn that they have now grown ridiculous and that laughter is the best critical stance against social injustice (Hazhir Azad). In honaronline.ir, Arash Dadgar’s *Hamlet* is seen as a satire with no deep application of the term. The review sees the application of contemporary tools to the play as irrelevant and inconsequential. It believes the lovely personage of the play is lost with no valuable contribution to the original text (Parsayi). In theater.ir, Kiomars Moradi’s *Hamlet, Tehran, 2017* is studied in the light of psychological, social, structuralist, and poststructuralist readings. The review calls Moradi’s work a postmodern adaptation of the original text where signification is frequently deferred and the classic features of the original work are violated (Ashofteh).

### ***Naqqali* as a Cultural Touchstone**

Due to its long-standing presence in Iranian narrative and dramatic scene, *naqqali* has witnessed slight and radical changes to its form and content. In the pre-Islamic Iran, it was frequently accompanied by music (often a harp), while in the post-Islamic era it had to eliminate the instrument because of religious restrictions on music. To compensate this lack, the genre resorted to acting to preserve attraction for the audience, an attempt that led to the enrichment of its dramatic dimension (Beyzai 60). In the Safavid period, though the genre was beginning to experience the acme of its boom and popularity, there were some religious voices that forbade it. For example, Seyyed Nematollah Jazayeri, a prominent Shia scholar, decreed that “listening to fabricated tales is an act of worshiping Satan unless it is done for the obviation of tedium and acquisition of vitality for studying as well as becoming ready for Divine obedience” (Jafariyan

148). To keep the genre going, the storytellers followed the religious discourse by emphasizing the entertaining aspect of *naqqali* and added Islamic elements, figures, and themes to it (Aydenloo, “Moqaddame” 40). In sum, what is noteworthy about *naqqali* is its dexterous attempts to adapt itself to new situations in order to preserve the tradition and prepare the ground for its evolution along the way.

The preceding two examples indicate that *naqqali* as a literary practice can act as a barometer to study historical and cultural facts of a given time in Iranian history. This means that through Jamali’s application of the genre, it is possible to pinpoint and discuss what changes Iranian cultural and literary scenes have undergone. The very fact that the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnesses a fusion of an olden Persian genre and a classic Western drama is highly significant. As was mentioned, religious discourse was at times an authoritative force to eradicate *naqqali*. In the Safavid period, the coffee houses where *naqqali* was practiced were called “Satanic schools”, the storytellers were labelled as “one of spurious idols”, and the spectators were seen as “worshippers of Satan” (Jafariyan 149). In spite of such detractions, the genre persisted in the Safavid coffee houses (Jafariyan 148) because its long and rich cultural heritage rooted in Iranian collective mind could withstand resisting forces. On the other hand, the genre itself showed occasionally some resistance of its own, acting as a counterculture against foreign cultural invasion. According to Beyzai, relating national tales by storytellers had been one of the strategies to fend off Arab cultural invasion. Beyzai points out that this strategy was so successful in creating pessimism in foreign races that states had to fabricate a genealogy to associate themselves with Iranian ancient kings and heroes (62). Yet, in an act of adaptation, some centuries later, *naqqali* softened itself and broadened its content scope to create a religious branch for propagating Islam (Beyzai 65). In contemporary Iran, the genre has shown another flexibility to host a Western play, with some social indications that suggest a promising movement towards a more democratic cultural scene.

The juxtaposition of *Hamlet* and *naqqali* in Jamali’s production is rewarding in many respects. One of the significant indications is the removal of religious

concerns about imaginative literature in general and such a quality in *naqqali* in particular. As mentioned before, religious authorities of the Safavid period forbade the genre because they considered the fabricated nature of its content as a hindrance to truth. Similar argument is seen in the subsequent royal dynasty, Qajar. Sajjad Aydenloo (“Resale” 26), a *naqqali* scholar, points to a pamphlet written by Javad Isfahani, a Qajar authority, in which the writer spurns the genre on the account of its propagation of idleness, its negative effects on the audience, and its fabricated quality. Remarkably, similar to his predecessors, Isfahani buttresses his argument through religious discourse by averring that storytelling is a legacy of Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, a loathsome figure in Shia (26). When the past and the present of Iranian history is compared and contrasted, the democratic progression in the country’s cultural scene is seen by the fact that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Iran when an Islamic state reigns the country and can exert institutionally religious power, no disparaging comment is seen against the imaginative aspect of Jamali’s *naqqali* production. In addition, the insertion of a Western work in the content sphere of *naqqali* acts as another significant indication of progression towards democracy. While on occasion the genre repelled foreign influences by steadfastly practicing Persian literature, it now embraces a Western imaginative literature at a time when political conflicts between Iran and the West is at its zenith. The final indication of democratic progression is the very attempt of staging *Hamlet* in Iran. The Pahlavi era (1921-78), the dynasty prior to the Islamic Revolution, prohibited the publication and performance of the play merely because the king is slain in it (Hoveyda 94). In contrast, in the Islamic Republic, a system that is occasionally criticized for being patriarchal, *Hamlet* is frequently staged through *naqqali* and other performance techniques, indicating an evolutionary movement towards a more democratic cultural arena.

### ***Naqqali* and Potentials for Adaptation**

When *naqqali* is approached as a medium for adaptation, the question that may arise is the genre’s potentials for such an undertaking in its modern sense. With the rise of such contemporary theoreticians as Linda Hutcheon, Julie

Sanders, and Kamilla Elliott, adaptation studies diverted its course from the predominantly-practiced “fidelity criticism” to cultural and social questions of reception. This transition meant that a given adapted work is not solely to be assessed in terms of its relationship with the source text; rather, it is considered as an autonomous product since, in the words of Hutcheon, “an adaptation has its own aura” (6). Stylistically speaking, *naqqali* keeps in line with the modern trends in adaptation studies partly because it has predominantly been an adaptive attempt.

Due to their attempts at retelling and reproducing well-established tales, practitioners of *naqqali* were essentially practitioners of adaptation. Considering the centuries-long history of *naqqali*, it is no exaggeration to say that it is among the first practices of adaptation in history. With the introduction of Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*, *naqqali* began to experience its acme of adaptive practice. In the first place, in its most salient adaptive attempt, the genre began to transform the originally versified stories into prose. While the original poem was frequently recited in high societies such as literary coteries and courts, the simplified text in prose was primarily intended to entertain ordinary people in coffeehouses (Aydenloo, “Moqaddame” 36). In the second place, because of its emphasis on dramatization of stories, it began to present a distinctive “mode of engagement” in which telling and showing were both existing. Finally, in the third place, the genre made major and minor changes to the storylines and contents of the original text. Remarkably, all these changes were carried out to adapt texts to the tastes of time, undertakings which were essentially in the realm of adaptation.

The adaptive nature of *naqqali* is a feature that both practitioners and audiences of the genre were fully conscious of. The practitioners, who were simultaneously narrators and actors, carried with them their own distinctive texts. It is noteworthy that to become a practitioner, or in technical term a *naqqal*, one had to learn instructions from a master of the field. When qualified to practice *naqqali*, he was authorized to compose a scroll, *toomar*, a handwritten treatise in which *naqqal* wrote his idiosyncratic story (Rostami 125). An important feature of scrolls was their adaptive nature. Inspired by *Shahnameh*, national and heroic subjects appearing in historical sources, and preceding scrolls, *naqqal* added his

imaginative power (Aydenloo, “Vizhegi” 2) to present a unique “free adaptation” (Aydenloo, “Chand nokteh” 14) of previous stories. On the other hand, audiences’ expectations registered in historical sources reveal that they were well-aware of the malleability of stories in the hands of *naqqal*. The acme of this awareness happens in the famous *Shahnameh* scene in which Sohrab is killed by his father, Rostam. Historical evidences indicate that those who could not withstand the scene gave various presents (from money to sheep and cattle) to *naqqal* to change the storyline and keep Sohrab alive (Mirshokrayi 62). Thus, both acts of practicing and watching *naqqali* were necessarily acts of participation in an adaptation.

### Jamali’s *Hamlet*

Jamali’s experimentation with indigenous dramatic forms is a continuation of a trend beginning in the mid-1950s. At this time, pioneering practitioners including “Abbas Javanmard (1929–), Ali Nasirian (1934–), Bijhan Mofid (1935–84) and Bahram Beyzaie (1938–) produced plays that combined indigenous forms with Iranian mystic, mythic and folk perspectives to reflect on contemporary issues.” (Talajooy 498) Jamali’s innovation in this vein lies in his juxtaposition and amalgamation of a classic Iranian genre and a classic English play, *naqqali* and *Hamlet*, leading to a novel narration of the latter through the experimental nature of the former. While *naqqali* is predominantly concerned with transcoding telling into simultaneous telling and showing, Jamali’s adaptation is an attempt to transcode showing into both telling and showing. In other words, while the traditional *naqqal* had to dramatize a narrative text, Jamali has to some extent narrativize a dramatic text in order to give it a balanced “mode of engagement” which is expected of a *naqqali* narration. In addition, Jamali keeps balance in other aspects. All through his production, the director makes changes to each sides in order to approximate them and to present his unique reading of *Hamlet* with “its own aura.”

In the first overall glance through the play, the first important question that may arise is Jamali’s choice of dramatic structure. Since *naqqali* is influenced by Iranian dramatic tradition and differs from that of typical European plays, it is

interesting to discuss how Jamali reconciles the difference. Contrasting the two traditions, Nikkhoo and Jalali argue that Iranian drama is characterized by “episodic” and “story in story” structure whereas climactic drama, the dominant narration of European plays, features a straight line ascending towards a climax (39-40). Confronted with this discrepancy, *The Retribution Affair* inclines towards the European narration, adapting *naqqali* to preserve the structure of the source text. The inclination for a faithful representation of the narrative structure of the source text is also present in the number of the characters. Since *naqqali* has traditionally had a single character, who had to be both the actor and narrator, and lacked many of modern scenic and dramatic elements, it has hardly been regarded as a dramatic genre in its European classical definition (Ghahremani, Mahmoudi, and Mohebbi 17). To rectify the shortcoming, Jamali evolves *naqqali* to the stage of having as many characters as is needed through his experimental trilogy. He begins with an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* with a single character. Then, he proceeds to an adaptation of *King Lear* with five characters. And, finally in his *Hamlet* the director contains all the characters of the source text. When it comes to the question of dialogue, Jamali frequently applies a minimalistic approach. It seems the director believes that the long soliloquies and dialogues does not suit *naqqali* audiences’ tolerance.

Similar to a typical *naqqali* performance, Jamali’s *Hamlet* is self-consciously audience oriented. As it was pointed out, *naqqali* is a popular genre aiming mostly at commoners as its addressees. In order to have a better conception of the audience, it can be compared with reading *Shahnameh*, the act of reciting the original text. Due to the versified and complicated language of the poem, literate people from high society were typically participants of reading *Shahnameh*. On the other hand, those masses who had difficulty grasping all words, lines, and allusions of the poem were interested in *naqqali* (Aydenloo, “Moqaddame” 36). Therefore, whereas a *Shahnameh* reader concentrated mostly on the original text with little concern for addressees, a *naqqal* had to be partly concerned with his audience by presenting stories mostly in prose and by spelling out ambiguous and incomprehensible parts. When such an analogy comes to staging *Hamlet*, it can be argued that performing the original *Hamlet*, i.e. being

faithful to every aspect of the text, can be compared to reading *Shahnameh*, while staging *Hamlet* through *naqqali* means being watchful to the presence of audience. Therefore, when Jamali chooses *naqqali* as the medium to read Shakespeare's play, the tradition propels him into having high consideration of audience in mind.

To discuss the centrality of audience in Jamali's adaptation, one has to explore both the text and the performance, because there are significant differences between the two. A key point about the issue takes place in the opening of the text where Jamali describes the stage direction in this way: "Roles are to be judged by the actors" (29). This results in the fact that nothing exists in the text in which the adaptor points out the characters' roles. The reason for the passivity of the text seems to be lying in Jamali's consideration of characters as practitioners of *naqqali*. In his adaptation, each character is partly a *naqqal* with the freedom that the tradition has allotted them. When the text is staged, the actors are seen in constant relationship with audience, a thing that is reflected in peculiar costumes they wear. All the characters are half dressed with Iranian costumes and half with the Danish ones. When speech is added to them, it can be argued that characters have triple parts: the first is their *naqqali* I, symbolized in their Iranian costumes; the second is their roles, symbolized in their Danish costumes; and the third is their speech, symbolized in their narrating role. The first and the third are in fact directed at the relationship between the stage and the audience. Therefore, since the text gives authority to actors to be narrators of the story in an Iranian background, the result is a performance in which audiences are frequently invited to be involved with the story of Hamlet.

An obvious beginning attempt at giving centrality to the audience is the removal of the fourth wall in the performance. This invisible, imagined wall that dramatic tradition has envisioned for players is constantly undermined through characters' eye contacts and direct addressing of the audience. As a solid beginning step, Jamali's adaptation opens with a speaker's recitation of Rumi's introductory lines of *Masnavi-i Ma'navi* and his all-demanding eyes directed at the audience to accompany him. The amalgamation of the speaker and the audience's voices and the harmonic reverberation of Rumi's poem in the hall

clearly force the contractual wall to disappear. In addition, the violation of the wall becomes more palpable when in the middle of his recitation the speaker shakes hand with an audience. This act is in fact the beginning of a contract between the cast and the audience to abrogate a long-standing tradition. It indicates that the stage is not the sole focus of attention; rather, the audience are frequently observed by the stage. The resultant interaction is an essential feature of *naqqali*. The play, from the onset, gives hints and codes of the genre in an attempt to indigenize the English play and to remind the audience that they are watching an Iranian antiquated performance whose tradition is grounded in immediate interaction between the cast and the audience.

The centrality of the audience in *naqqali*, as it was pointed out, is grounded in a literary tradition that does its best to spell out difficult texts for commoners. The tradition assumes the role of a teacher for *naqqal* and authorizes him to prepare his own text and performance based on the needs of addressees. On the other hand, audiences have been aware of their own centrality and this is why they at times expected *naqqal* to make changes to storylines. Having this interacting tradition in mind, the speaker in Jamali's *Hamlet* reminds his addressees of the cast's training presence and shakes hands on a dramatic tradition to provide an easy-to-understand *Hamlet*. At this point, Jamali's implied audience is determined: commoners who need a simplified reorganization of the difficult, philosophical text; and the result is the insertion of familiar codes throughout the play. Rumi's poem is one of the beginning attempts at providing such codes. Based on its needs, the production selects eight lines from different parts of introduction to *Masnavi*, proving once again its adaptive strategy. The first four lines, "Now listen to this reed-flute's deep lament / About the heartache being apart has meant: / 'Since from the reed-bed they uprooted me / My song's expressed each human's agony", are followed by "A greedy eye is never satisfied, / Shells only when content grow pearls inside"<sup>1</sup>, concluding with "If you have even a grain of intelligence, give way to spirit; / only then you can be

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<sup>1</sup> translated by Jawid Mojaddedi

qualified to undertake the spiritual journey”<sup>2</sup>. While the familiar lines indigenize the adapted play, they remind the audience they should activate their insight for a didactic play.

Didacticism, as a plan in Jamali’s adaptation, is another effort by the director to alter *naqqali* for modern spectators. Traditionally, as it was mentioned, sensibility and entertainment outweighed sense and instruction in the exercise of the genre. However, implied in Jamali’s interview with Tiwall, *Hamlet: The Retribution Affair* reverses the tradition by being a strong reminder for contemporary spectators. The director emphasizes, “the society’s potential for anger has soared. Relatives and friends should be reminded to stay calmer. Shakespeare wrote the play during the Age of Reason. Humans are always in need of reminder. The end of irrationality is nothing but annihilation and extermination” (Tiwall). Jamali’s emphasis on didacticism in *naqqali* is soon established in the selected lines of *Masnavi*. The lines contain an invitation to heeding to the *naqqal*, a presentation of a proverb of sin, and a request for contemplation. The title of the production as well as the hints provided by the director’s interview determine the object of didacticism, that is retribution. In the same interview, Jamali emphasizes, “*Hamlet* is a text similar to a sea into which one can dive as they wish, as an actor, as a director, as a researcher, or as a designer. [...] It is a proper medium for doing research that is for trial and error” (Tiwall). All these signs and comments takes one to conclude that Jamali’s *Hamlet* is an experimental play, aiming at being didactic on the issue of retribution.

The emphasis on retribution is soon established through the first dialogue that follows the speaker’s recitation. Jamali’s adaptation begins with a soliloquy of the ghost of Hamlet’s late father, whereas the original text opens with Francisco, Bernardo, Horatio, and Marcellus who discuss and then encounter the silent ghost. The sudden beginning is followed by direct expressions: “I am a ghost, the ghost of Hamlet’s father, [...] a mother ... his son’s uncle. They kill the son’s father. Suddenly, the father comes to his dear son from the afterworld

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<sup>2</sup> translated by M. G. Gupta

and asks him to seek retribution ... retribution, everything begins here ... where? The grave of Hamlet's father" (30-31). The ghost's expressions explicitly contain Jamali's "dive" as an experimentalist. To further underscore the retribution theme, the young director keeps the ghost on a corner of the stage all through the performance, unfalteringly reminding the audience of Hamlet's motivation. Though the retribution is manifestly the most important theme of Shakespeare's play, Jamali's contribution is in spelling it out by maneuvering on and narrativizing the pertinent parts of the original text. To this end, the production minimizes the encounter between Hamlet and Ghost and promptly presents the central question asked by Ghost: "How are you with retribution? Does it seem black or white to you?" (43). Hamlet's answer in Jamali's play is one of the rare occasions in which a word by word translation of the original text is presented: "Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love, / May sweep to my revenge" (43). The word by word translation is in fact another indication of the emphasis on the retribution theme, indicating the production's fidelity to Hamlet's central motivation.

In addition to the dramatic exchange of dialogues between characters, a great deal of events is narrated by actors in Jamali's play. The narrativizing tradition of the play is first initiated by the early words of the ghost. Then, all the characters are simultaneously actors and narrators, predominantly giving weight to the second role. Following the ghost's introduction of himself, "I am a ghost, the ghost of Hamlet's father" (30), nearly all other characters, except Claudius who is presented by the speaker, introduce themselves: "I, Horatio [...] [I and Hamlet] are sworn friends" (31); "We! Marcellus and Bernardo, we! sentries of the Danish royal castle" (31); "I! ... Hamlet ... I feel blue!" (33); "I, Gertrude! and it was a mistake [...] to go to bed with my son's uncle [so soon]" (37); "I, Ophelia! the nice daughter of Polonius, the Chief counsellor to the former and present king" (39); "I, Polonius! I give news of the return of the dispatched ambassadors to Norway" (49). In addition to the initial introduction, there are occasions in which the actors introduce their roles for the second or third times. Rooted in *naqqali* tradition, this strategy has double functions in this play: first, it minimizes the story and dialogues; second, it spells out the relationships and provides

compendious information about the characters. When it comes to the presentation of events, again all the characters are seen involved in the narration including Claudius and Hamlet. For instance, in a critical scene in the middle of the play, there is a point where the king, accompanied by Bernardo, narrates about himself:

**Claudius [narrates]:** Before this, Claudius had seen and heard strange behaviors from Hamlet. By hearing the report of Polonius and her daughter Ophelia, he feels comfortable because hamlet's strange behavior is related to a Farhad-like practice. He orders Polonius to be more careful about Hamlet and observe all his behaviors, though in giving information and such inquiries about others' affairs, Polonius sometimes does more than his duties.

**Gertrude:** I, Gertrude, my motherly feelings make me apprehensive, distress ... makes a worried mother's heart a salt marsh! distress ... be careful of Hamlet, reward, or whatever you want is present, be careful of my Hamlet, souvenir of the Great Hamlet and the prince of Denmark ... Claudius, I'm worried about my son. My son?!

**Bernardo:** Claudius orders two people to be always around Hamlet. A security situation and an understanding of his knowledge can be utilized for the interests and decisions of the court. Special situations require special techniques ... For the sake of the country, I announce my readiness. (48-49)

Similar to these dialogues, there are many other syntheses of dramatic and narrative scenes. While the adaptation tries to preserve the dramatic attractions of the source text, it is highly mindful of the audience's understanding of the events and characters through narrating them as simply as possible. In addition to giving centrality to the audience, such a technique leads inevitably to distance in Brechtian terms. When Claudius is seen narrating about Claudius, there follow a distance between the actor and his role as well as a prevention of the audience from identifying with the character. The distance in question seems to be conscious considering its frequency in the play. Horatio, as another instance, is simultaneously seen as narrating about himself and playing his role: "Horatio!

Before anyone should know about the ghost, he should confine the issue with Hamlet ... [to Hamlet] Your father, King Hamlet! ... He was a great man!" (39). Also, Hamlet, the most potential character to be identified with, directly refers to the practice of playing a role:

**Hamlet:** I! ... Hamlet ... I feel blue!

It is not simple to play the role of someone who is astounded in the crossroad of the most important questions of life. I don't know if there is anyone among you who is tangled in the dilemma of an important decision? Doubt ... It is perplexing when your most intimate person has changed herself into a lustful witch. Lust is the very evil!

It is difficult when people around you feel differently ...

I, hamlet! I feel blue ... (33)

These examples indicate that Jamali takes his adaptation into the realm of metatheatre. The feature is slightly and marginally present in the source text in the exchange between Hamlet and Polonius about the latter playing the role of Julius Caesar in the university (Shakespeare 58). However, Jamali's adaptation gives centrality to it because, as *naqqali* tradition requires, metatheater is a proper way to spell out characters and events, and to keep the planned distance in Jamali's production:

**Actor [narrates]:** William Shakespeare's emphasis on the correct way of acting was expressed by Hamlet. Many years passed until a Russian man swallowed the method and brought about realistic acting without narrative overtones. Possibly Stanislavski exported the method to the US in this way and Meyerhold turned narration into Professor Stanislavski's method through biomechanics. (60)

The narrator's emphasis on theater and acting methods is a strong reminder for the audience to keep conscious of the theatrical nature of what they watch. Though Jamali's implied audience may not know theatrical figures like Stanislavski and Meyerhold, these names, when juxtaposed with discussions about drama, can contribute to the understanding that the director is preoccupied

with the theatricality of the production. It is noteworthy that, to a lesser degree, the discussion on theater is a part of the source text when Hamlet is seen running a theatrical show and commenting on the genre. However, the Iranian director's overemphasis and his criticism through Horatio that "Claudius is the very person who disturbs plays" (63) can mean he indirectly refers to the current state of theater in Iran and censures the existing obstacles and censorships. However, in contrast to the general policy of spelling out the story and themes, Jamali's criticism is hardly communicated. In fact, in terms of Jamali's concern for Iranian society, all theatrical techniques are at work to insinuate a relatively unclear topical cause.

In general, Jamali's adaptation is faithful to the overall storyline of the source text. Everything in the production is predominantly subservient to communicating the events of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Though Jamali indigenizes the play, his attempts remain at the level of style and are not extended to content. This means that the adapted play does not, in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's term, deterritorialize the source text and remains Eurocentric. In their prominent definition of minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari argue that minor literature does not necessarily refer to the literary productions of ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority groups. Rather, it signifies the self-imposition of a given work in the literary tradition with the aim of disrupting it. By drawing a distinction between minoritarian and majoritarian, Deleuze and Guattari maintain that literature finds its genuine power when it is minoritarian, i.e. when it conceives a space for what is not given, a "people to come" (Colebrook 104). In this sense, Jamali's adaptation remains majoritarian because the director does not conceive that a "people is missing" and does not deploy his literature to summon that people.

Jamali's production can be properly called conservative and Eurocentric since it merely resorts to a tradition to spell out another tradition. Remarkably, the Eurocentrism in question is a case, which exemplifies a collective defect in Iranian literary and academic scenes. The 1970s to 1990s "spirit of the age" in Western countries caused both literary productions and studies to enter into the phase of multiculturalism. Finding themselves a representative of emergent

forces in the European canon, a host of postcolonial writers repeated and distorted classic texts in order to express new voices for future concerns. For example, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) rewrote Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) rewrote Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) (Colebrook 120). To keep in line with the trend, the canon shed its conservatism and opened itself up to new writers regardless of their race or gender. While the twenty-first century has witnessed such a thorough substitution of Eurocentrism with multiculturalism, a significant part of Iranian academic and cultural arenas suffers from Eurocentrism. As Anushiravani observes, "Eurocentric discourse is the dominant policy of English studies in Iranian universities and it should be changed in the multicultural and polyphonic contemporary world" (37). Because of such an outdated policy, it is not surprising that Jamali's case is Eurocentric. Since the trends of Iranian literary productions and studies are still conservative, the tradition has not provided a proper model for the young director to penetrate into tradition to voice solicitudes of a "people to come." In fact, this can be one of the paradoxes of Iranian society that in foreign policy it is "neither East nor West" while in literature it is still partly Eurocentric.

### Conclusion

As a cultural event, the staging of *Hamlet: The Retribution Affair* reflects some truths about both positive and negative aspects of Iranian culture and society. Compared with the Qajar and Safavid eras, the twenty-first century Iran has left behind some previously-held religious and political dogmas. The fact that in contemporary Iran a young director stages a Shakespearian trilogy with no detractors disparaging the possible corruptions of imagination or the representation of a foreign work of art indicates a progression towards freedom. Nonetheless, the production's mere repetition of the English play with few or no alteration to the storyline for particular objectives is a proof of the dominancy of Eurocentrism in Iranian cultural scene. Though Jamali conceives no room for the "people to come," his production is worth attending because it revives two traditions. Through Shakespeare, he revives, revises, and updates *naqqali* and

through *naqqali* he presents his impression of Shakespeare and makes the Bard more accessible to Iranian audience. At this point, boundaries vanish and traditions are merged to represent a reader-oriented production. The director seems to be stating that he, as an Eastern director, has his own share of *Hamlet* and he aims at spelling it out for his implied spectators. While the method is worthwhile, the objective of sheer narration is its biggest foible. This shows that the director's undertaking of adaptation is in its inchoate stage and needs to be developed for the maturity of content.

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