

Shakespeare as an Icon of Peace and Human Coexistence in Mahmoud Darwish's Shakespearean Appropriations

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Abstract This essay examines the conceptualization of pacificism in William Shakespeare's oeuvre through Mahmoud Darwish's lens. The Arab Palestinian Bard shares Shakespeare's condemnation of war and glorification of humanistic values of peace and toleration. In many of his poems, Darwish shows admiration and identification with Shakespeare as a humanist poet, belonging to the Arab culture. Darwish's appropriation of Shakespeare includes several references to Shakespeare as an icon of peace and a "comrade," in Loomba's and Orkin's terminology. Even though Shakespeare's position to pacificism is controversial among modern scholars, Darwish views the British Bard as a pacifist and anti-war icon. This study bridges the gap left in modern scholarship, which either focuses on analyzing Darwish's poetry from a postcolonial vantage or refers to Shakespeare in Darwish's poetry in passing, overlooking the Darwishian perception of Shakespeare's pacificism. For Darwish, Shakespeare is a symbol of peace and a means of coexistence. Darwish's employment of Shakespeare, on one hand, varies between direct appropriations, as manifested in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1600), *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), and *Hamlet* (1603), and, on the other, implicit appropriations, as revealed in Shakespeare's *3 Henry VI* (1595) and *Troilus and Cressida* (1601–02). Darwish revisits Shakespeare's oeuvre to philosophize on peace, war, and love.

Keywords Shakespeare; Appropriation; Mahmoud Darwish; Comparative Literature; Peace

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Introduction

This study aims at demonstrating how Mahmoud Darwish recreates William Shakespeare as a poet of peace rather than terror. Darwish's fascination with Shakespeare as a humanist poet is clear when he defends Shakespeare against accusations of militarism. In one interview with Darwish, the Palestinian poet refused to compare the former Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, as suggested by the interviewer, to Shakespeare's Macbeth: "Begin laisa Mākbiḥ" ("Begin is not Macbeth"; my trans.; 104).¹ Darwish believed that Begin did not only commit war crimes against the Palestinians, but also he would become one day an enemy to all Jews ("Al-Shahādah" 104). Darwish's exoneration of Macbeth, a Machiavellian usurper, of villainy reflects Darwish's idealization of Shakespeare as a humanist and pacifist. This essay sheds light on the luminous aspects of peace and anti-war sentiments in Shakespeare and Darwish, showing the unique influence of Shakespeare on Darwish's formation of humanistic pacificism.

Modern scholarship has addressed the significance of *al-Tanāṣ* (intertextuality) in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish in terms of references to the Holy Qur'an, religious figures like Jesus Christ, legend, history and historical figures, folklore,

1 See Mahmoud Darwish, "Al-Shahādah al-'Ola" [the first testimony], interview by Sherbill Dager. *Mahmoud Darwish: Ḥāṣir Ḥiṣārak: Ḥiwarāt wa Shahadāt*, edited by Mohammad Shaheen (Beirut: al-Mu'sasah al-'Arabiyya lil Dirasāt wal Nashir, 2019), pp. 93–109.

and literary figures.¹ Most scholars overlook *al-Tanās* in the poetry of Darwish with Shakespeare in a detailed discussion. This essay, however, does not aim at showing only the cases of Darwish's appropriation of Shakespeare, but it seeks to show cases of commonality between the two Bards in demystifying legendary wars, such as the Trojan War, as an example of the futility of wars in general. Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (1601–02) might have been a main influence on Darwish's condemnation of wars in general and the Trojan War in particular, as expressed in his poem "Saya'tī Barābira 'Ākharūn" (Other Barbarians will Come). Moreover, Shakespeare's *3 Henry VI* (1595) might have inspired Darwish to depict the chaos of war-times, having a soldier shooting his brother to death thinking falsely that he kills the enemy, as shown in his poem "Bunduqiyya wa Kafan" (A Gun and a Shroud). Such tragic scenes of family members murdering are intensified in Shakespeare's *3 Henry VI*, having a soldier killing his father and another soldier murdering his son by mistake in time of war. According to Julie Sanders, appropriation unlike adaptation entails indirect relocations and borrowings from other texts: "But the appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signalled or acknowledged as in the adaptive process. They may occur in a far less straightforward context than is evident in making a film version of a canonical play" (26). Darwish's implicit appropriations of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and *3 Henry VI* are examples of the "far less straightforward context," in Sanders's terminology. This essay shows that the origin of Darwish's disillusion of wars is Shakespearean.

Love is endangered during the time of war, as shown by Darwish's appropriations

1 See for instance Murdiyya Zāri'Zurdīni, "Zāhirat al-Tanās fi Lugat Mahmoud Darwish al-Shi'riyya" [the phenomenon of intertextuality in the poetic language of Mahmoud Darwish], *Al-Tur āth al-'Dabi*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1968, pp. 79–100; Ali Nazari and Yūnis Wal'i, "'Istid'ā' Shakhṣiyyat al-Shu'arā' fi Shi'r Mahmoud Darwish" [invoking poets in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish], *Dirasāt al-'Adab al-Mu'āsir*, vol. 4, no. 15, 1971, pp. 21–42; Hassan Al-Banddāri, et al., "Al-Tanās fi al-Shi'r al-Filastīni al-Mu'āsir" [intertextuality in the contemporary Palestinian poetry], *Journal of Al Azhar University–Gaza for Humanities*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2009, pp. 241–302; Mohammad Al-sultān, "Al-Rumūz al-Tārīkhiyya wa al-Dīniyya wa al-'Austūriyya fi Shi'r Mahmoud Darwish" [the historical, religious, and mythical symbols in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish], *Al-Aqsa University Journal for Humanities*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1–36; Nader Qasem, "Tajaliyyāt al-Tanās al-Dīni wa Jamāliyyātuh fi Jiddāriyyat Mahmoud Darwish" [the aesthetic manifestations in the religious intertextuality in *Jiddāriyyat Mahmoud Darwish*], *Majalat al-'Ulūm al-Insāniyya*, no. 24, 2014, pp. 239–69; Ahmad Rahahleh, "Tajaliyyāt al-Tanās fi Diwān Mahmoud Darwish al-'Khīr lā 'Orīd li Hādhiheh al-Qaṣīdah 'An Tantahī" [intertextual manifestations in the last collection of Mahmoud Darwish entitled *I Don't Want This Poem to End*], *Dirasat*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2015, pp. 463–73.

of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) in his poem "Kāna Yanqusunā Ḥādir" (We Were without a Present) and prose work *Fī Ḥaḍrat al-Ghiyāb (In the Presence of Absence)*. Dalya Cohen-Mor refers to the contrast between, on the one hand, the love of Darwish and his Jewish beloved, Rītā, and, on the other, Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: "While the tendency to compare Darwish and Rita to Romeo and Juliet is irresistible, there is a sharp contrast between these two couples: neither Darwish nor Rita was prepared to sacrifice everything for each other" (79). For Cohen-Mor, Darwish prioritizes his love for Palestine over his love to Rita (68). The failure of the incarnation of *Romeo and Juliet* in Darwish's poetry or the "contrast," as observed by Cohen-Mor, can be seen as another example of Darwish's idealization of Shakespeare's dramatization of love, as will be discussed. Furthermore, just as Darwish exonerates Macbeth of villainy, he defends Shakespeare's dramatization of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* (1600), showing the humanistic aspects of the Jew figure (Shylock), as expressed in his long poem "Ḥālat Ḥiṣār" (*State of Siege*).¹ Even though modern scholarship has not resolved the controversy about Shakespeare's pacificism and anti-Jewish delineations, Darwish stands as an admirer of Shakespeare, defending him against accusations of militarism and anti-Semitism, as also will be explained later. Finally, Darwish identifies himself with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603) to signify the state of madness and irresolution during wartime, as expressed in one interview with him and in his prose work *Dha:kira li-I-Nisya:n (Memory for Forgetfulness)*. Darwish recreates Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Hamlet* in a new context of an anticipated peace between the Palestinians and Israeli Jews. Sanders explains that "appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (26). Darwish accompanies Shakespeare on a new "journey" to exile, humanistic coexistence, and peace.

Pacificism in Shakespeare

Modern scholars like Steven Marx, Theodor Meron, and Robert S. White argue that Shakespeare's plays call for peace or pacificism and condemn wars. Marx shows that Shakespeare between 1599-1603 developed "from a partisan of war to a partisan of peace" (50). Such transformation was influenced by the change of politics of Queen Elizabeth I during her last years and the accession of James I. After the triumph of Elizabethan England over the Armada, Queen Elizabeth

¹ In their study, "Modern Literature: Common Themes and Intersections," *The Routledge Handbook of Muslim-Jewish Relations*, edited by Josef Meri (New York: Routledge, 2016), Masha Itzhaki and Sobhi Boustani refer briefly to Darwish's sympathy with Shylock (144-45).

was no longer interested in pursuing more wars, especially when she refused to give a further support for new wars against Catholic France: “A few years later, Shakespeare, like the queen, seems to have shifted ground and to have adopted some controlled ambivalence toward Essex’s bellicosity in particular and toward the problem of war in general” (Marx 64). The execution of Essex in 1601 by Queen Elizabeth I marked the end of Elizabethan England’s tendency to pursue more wars. The accession of James I to the English throne brought new aspirations to peace, as emphasized in his first speech to the Parliament:

I found the state embarked in a great and tedious war and only by my arrival here and by the Peace in my person is now amity kept where war was before, which is no small blessing to a Christian Commonwealth, for by Peace abroad with their neighbors the towns flourish, the merchants become rich, the trade doth increase and the people of all sorts of the land enjoy free liberty to exercise themselves in their severall vocations without peril or disturbance. (qtd. in Marx 57–58)

Unlike Marx, Theodor Meron seems to be more defender of Shakespeare, claiming that Shakespeare’s characters condemn wars and applaud peace through the use of irony: “Irony and sarcasm are deployed to advocate prior resort to diplomatic negotiations and peaceful settlement, oppose aggressive and unjust wars, criticize self-serving and hypocritical assertions of just war, highlight the futility of war, and emphasize its inevitable cruelty and cost” (7). For Meron, Shakespeare resorts to the medieval codes of chivalry such as mercy and honor to discourage wars, being “fully aware of the decline of chivalry in his lifetime” (22). Shakespeare reshapes the Christian and pre-Christian heroes to behave according to the chivalric codes. For example, Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* deviates from Homer’s *Iliad*, showing a greater dramatization of chivalry: “To be sure, chivalric or humanitarian values play a lesser role in the *Iliad* than in Shakespeare” (64). Meron shows that Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* satirizes Homer’s version of the Trojan war: “In *Troilus*, war was reduced from the epic to the satiric, and from chivalric to the simply bloody and chaotic” (46).

Robert S. White explains that Shakespeare’s “radical ambiguity” contributes to Shakespeare’s philosophical engagement with the Renaissance framing of the concept of peace, as defined by the advocates of pacificism, such as Erasmus and Sir Thomas More: “It is my argument that Shakespeare is both a symptom of this phenomenon, reflecting the element of pacifism already existing in his society and

intellectual tradition, and a further cause of the process of popularisation” (142). Shakespeare’s genius displays exceptional ability to form a dramatic “dialectic” of war and peace, showing pro-war and anti-war characters in the same play: “despite the apparently overwhelming naturalisation and glorification of war in his plays, there are opposing voices who challenge war from a variety of broadly pacifist standpoints, and that this operates right from the beginning of his dramaturgical career” (143).

Shakespeare in the Arab World

Shakespeare has been incorporated in the Arab world since the nineteenth century through different forms of renderings in adaptation, translation, and appropriation.¹ In her book *Hamlet’s Arab Journey: Shakespeare’s Prince and Nasser’s Ghost* (2011), Margaret Litvin elucidates that Shakespeare has resided in the Arab world through different means of artistic transportations and penetrated into the Arab literature via various languages: “Arab audiences came to know Shakespeare through a kaleidoscopic array of performances, texts, and criticism from many directions: not just the ‘original’ British source culture but also French, Italian, American, Soviet, and Eastern European literary and dramatic traditions” (2). Shakespeare has been “Arabized” and “indigenized” to address Arab local concerns related to politics and art.² Graham Holderness explains that Arab writers have different reformulations of Shakespeare: “Received in the Middle East as a great icon of classical theatre, Shakespeare is there for writers to admire, emulate, imitate or challenge” (1). Mahmoud Al-Shetawi explains that Arab poets show fascination with Shakespeare as “a world heritage who belongs to Arabs as much as he belongs to the English-Speaking world” (“Shakespeare in Arabic Poetry” 15).

Arab poets such as Hafiz Ibrahim (1817–1932) viewed Shakespeare as a symbol of humanistic values rather than colonialism. During the British colonialism to Egypt in 1916, Hafiz Ibrahim was appointed as a representative of Arab poets to write in the commemoration of the tercentenary Shakespeare’s death, which was held at Cairo University in 1916, presenting a poem entitled, “Dhikra Shiksbīr”

1 See Mahmoud Al-Shetawi, “Hamlet in Arabic,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1999, p. 44.

2 I am borrowing the term “Arabization” from Ferial J. Ghazoul, “The Arabization of *Othello*,” *Comparative Literature*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1998, pp. 1–31. Also, the term “indigenized” has been taken from Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia, eds. *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008).

(To the Memory of Shakespeare).¹ Ibrahim, who was called “the poet of the Nile,” celebrates the greatness of Shakespeare as an epitome of peace: “O, the remembrance of Shakespeare appears to us like a herald of peace who is smiling” (qtd. in Al-Shetawi, “Shakespeare in Arabic Poetry” 5). Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin reveal that intellectuals of colonial/postcolonial contexts have various positions to Shakespeare:

Sometimes they mimicked their colonial masters and echoed their praise of Shakespeare; at other times they challenged the cultural authority of both Shakespeare and colonial regimes by turning to their own bards as sources of alternative wisdom and beauty. In yet other instances, they appropriated Shakespeare as their comrade in anti-colonial arms by offering new interpretations and adaptations of his work. (2)

Even though Al-Shetawi does not analyze the influence of Shakespeare on the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, it is clear that Darwish just like Ibrahim and Ahmad Shawqi looks at Shakespeare as a “comrade,” in Loomba’s and Orkin’s terminology, of humanism and pacificism.

Darwish’s Appropriations of Shakespeare

Darwish employs Shakespeare in three levels of appropriation. Firstly, a direct reference to Shakespeare as a genius and exemplary poet; secondly, a direct appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays, such as *The Merchant of Venice* (1600), *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), and *Hamlet* (1603); thirdly, an implied appropriation of Shakespeare’s perceptions of the futility of wars in general and the Trojan war in particular, as reflected in Shakespeare’s *3 Henry VI* (1595) and *Troilus and Cressida* (1601–02).

In his poem “Bait al-Qaṣīd” (The Essence of the Poem), Darwish perceives Shakespeare as a source of inspiration and a great model for mimicry: “I walk among the verses of Homer, al-Mutanabbi and Shakespeare, and / stumble like a trainee waiter at a royal feast” (*A River* 120). Darwish shows humility towards great poets like Shakespeare: “A great poet is one who makes me small when I write, and great when I read” (*A River* 119). In his poem “Lā Ta’tadhir ‘Amā Fa’alt” (Don’t Apologize for What You’ve Done), Darwish refers to his possession of Shakespeare’s works in his room since they provide him with self-confidence

¹ See Mahmoud Al-Shetawi, “Shakespeare in Arabic Poetry: An Intercultural Study,” *Abhath Al-Yarmouk*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2004, p. 4.

and humanistic knowledge: “Father’s picture / The Encyclopedia of Countries / Shakespeare” (*The Butterfly’s* 189). The speaker, who makes a soliloquy with himself, seems detached from outer world and hesitant of his real existence. Whenever he looks at Shakespeare and his father’s picture, he reclaims his memories and existence. In his poem “Faras lil Gharīb: ’la Shā’ir ‘Irāqī” (A Horse for the Stranger: For an Iraqi Poet), Darwish appropriates Shakespeare to condemn the Iraqi War, which led to the death of many Iraqi people and transformed Iraq to “Ṣaḥrā” (desert):

A desert for sound, a desert for silence, a desert for the eternal absurdity
and for the tablets of scriptures, for schoolbooks, for prophets, scientists
and for Shakespeare a desert, for those searching for God in the human.
Here the last Arab writes: I am the Arab who never was I am the Arab
who never was. (*If I were Another* 97)

Darwish also elegizes the effects of Iraqi War on humanistic arts, showing that poetry is no longer able to find muse and inspiration in wartime: “There is no room left in the land for the poem, my friend / but is there room left, in the poem, for the land after Iraq?” (*If I were Another* 94). Darwish laments the loss of the land, peace, innocent people, and Shakespeare. For the Palestinian poet, Shakespeare shares Darwish and Arabs their agonies and local concerns.

In his prose work *Dha:kira li-I-Nisya:n* (*Memory for Forgetfulness*), which appeared in 1986 to reflect upon the Israeli siege on Beirut from 14 June to 23 August, 1982 (Muhawi xxiv), Darwish philosophizes the humanistic ideals of peace and love through the means of Shakespeare. Darwish reminisces his love to a Jewish woman and devotion to Shakespeare during the time of war and siege, inviting Arabs and Jews to transcend political limitations and be united as humans:

She said, “A little. But you haven’t told me if you love Jews or hate them.” I
said, “I don’t know, and I don’t want to know. But I do know I like the plays
of Euripides and Shakespeare. I like fried fish, boiled potatoes, the music of
Mozart, and the city of Haifa. I like grapes, intelligent conversation, autumn,
and Picasso’s blue period. And I like wine, and the ambiguity of mature poetry.
As for Jews, they’re not a question of love or hate.” (*Memory* 124–25)

For Darwish, the Arab-Jew encounter is not to be judged by matters of love or hate because wars lead them to forget their shared humanity and common love

of Shakespeare. War deprives the Palestinian and Jewish lovers the chance of physical encounters that may last several hours and days in peace time: “There’s no time except for quick love and a longing for transient eternity. No time for love in a war from which we can’t steal anything beyond sucking up the sources of life itself” (*Memory* 129). Like Shakespeare in his sonnets, Darwish promises his Jewish beloved to be commemorated in his poetry: “You will be sung in my poetry” (*Memory* 131). For Shakespeare and Darwish, poetry challenges the authority of wars and death and prospers the chances of romantic mystifications.

Darwish like many Arab writers has a recourse in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* to reflect on the agonies of lovers.¹ Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* was first adapted and translated into Arabic in the late nineteenth century (Khoury 52). According to Sameh F. Hanna, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* was the first Shakespearean play to be translated into Arabic since the early Arab translators were more interested in translating tragedies more than comedies or histories (31; 49). The first Arabic translation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* was by Najīb Ḥaddād as *Shuhadā’ al-Gharām* (*The Martyrs of Love*) around 1890 (Bayer, “*The Martyrs*” 6). In his poem, “Kāna Yanqusunā Ḥādir” (We Were without a Present), the speaker addresses his beloved that war and exile cause the tragedy of their love, reminding her of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*:

In a while we’ll return to our tomorrow, left behind,
there, where we were young and first in love,
like Romeo and Juliet learning the language of Shakespeare.
Butterflies fluttered out of sleep, as if they were
the spirits of a swift peace, giving us two stars,
but killing us in the struggle over a name
between two windows.
Let us go, then, and be kind. (*Unfortunately* 102–3)

Darwish’s appropriation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* can be seen as another

1 For example, the Syrian novelist Samar Attar recreates new Arab Juliet character, who is subversive to gender marginalization (see Ghazoul, “The Arabization of *Othello*,” pp. 22–3; Hussein A. Alhawamdeh, “She is no Desdemona A Syrian Woman in Samar Attar’s Shakespearean Subversions,” *Middle Eastern Literatures*, vol. 21, no. 2–3, 2018, pp. 160–63). Hussein A. Alhawamdeh, in his article “‘Shakespeare Had the Passion of an Arab’: The Appropriation of Shakespeare in Fadia Faqir’s *Willow Trees Don’t Weep*,” *Critical Survey*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2018), refers to Arab women writers’ subversive reformulations of Shakespeare’s female characters (Juliet, Desdemona, and Innogen), transforming them from submission to empowerment (3).

idealization of the Shakespearean perception of love. For Darwish, the present time no longer suits pure love or Shakespeare because it is tainted with wars and politics. The Palestinian poet/lover bemoans his harsh reality, where there is no space for peace for the fulfillment of love:

We did not have time to grow old together,
to walk wearily to the cinema,
to witness the end of Athens' war with its neighbors
and the banquet of peace between Rome and Carthage. (*Unfortunately* 101–2)

The speaker/lover laments the lasting war between Athens, which symbolizes the State of Israel, and Arabs, as noted by Cohen-Mor (69). Even though Darwish's Jewish beloved, Rītā, is not mentioned in this poem, the poem alludes to the tragic end of the love story between Darwish and Rītā.

In his prose work *Fī Ḥaḍrat al-Ghiyāb (In the Presence of Absence)*, Darwish declares that he fails to incarnate Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: "I do not want to see Romeo and Juliet, or Qays and Layla grow old before me. Love has an expiration date, just like life, canned food, and medicine" (*In the Presence* 88). For Cohen-Mor, the Palestinian lover and the Jewish beloved deviate from the Shakespearean concept of love vs. sacrifice: "neither Darwish nor Rita was prepared to sacrifice everything for each other" (79). I think Darwish defends the age of Shakespeare as utopian and idealistic, creating a dichotomy between the Shakespearean delineation of love and the current Palestinian situation, where there is no time for spiritual love. The Palestinian lover suffers from exile, occupation, and oppression more than family feuds, as in Shakespeare's play.

In Darwish's thinking, while love in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is immortal, it is temporal in the Palestinian context. For Paul N. Siegel, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* mixes the tenets of both passionate love and the religion of love "that Love is an all-powerful god" (373). In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo glorifies Juliet with religious titles such as "saint" (1.5.100) and "angel" (2.1.68), while Juliet describes him as "good pilgrim" (1.5.94). For Romeo, love means challenge and power: "With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls, / For stony limits cannot hold love out" (2.1.108–9). In Shakespeare's play, love triumphs over parental conflicts and achieves immortality. At the end of the play, the Prince informs the quarrelsome fathers, Montague and Capulet, that the everlasting love of Romeo and Juliet should end family feuds and achieve "peace": "A glooming peace this morning with it bring. / The sun for sorrow will not show his

head” (5.3.304–5).

The Palestinian Romeo (Darwish) looks at love and exile from a realistic point of view. In Shakespeare’s play, exile for Romeo is despicable because it sets him apart from Juliet and predicts their death. Hearing the news of his exile by the orders of the Prince of Verona for murdering Tybalt, Romeo opts for death rather than exile: “Ha, banishment? Be merciful, say ‘death’ / For exile hath more terror in his look, / Much more than death. Do not say ‘banishment’” (3.3.12–14). For Romeo, exile means estrangement from Juliet: “’Tis torture, and not mercy. Heaven is here / Where Juliet lives” (3.3.29–30). Betty Prohodskey comments on Shakespeare’s handling of the concept of exile in *Romeo and Juliet*: “The use of exile in this play also does not involve any moral problem or an individual’s love of country; instead, it concentrates upon the passion and sensuality of the two young lovers.” (20). For Darwish, Shakespeare’s Romeo, as a utopian lover, may balk at standing the harsh reality of the Palestinians and prefers exile over land’s occupation and oppression. In his poem “Kāna Yanqusunā Hādir” (We Were without a Present), the speaker informs his Jewish beloved that their love will not flourish during wartime, accepting the hard reality of departure: “Let us go together on our separate paths” (*Unfortunately* 101). The Palestinian lover apprises his Jewish beloved that he cannot perform miracles to sustain their love or to change the reality of occupation: “Who am I to give you back the Sun and Moon of the past?” (*Unfortunately* 102). While Shakespeare’s Romeo cannot control his anger towards exile, the Palestinian Romeo is clam enough to declare that exile is their new destiny:

Soon we shall have another present.

If you look behind you, there is only exile:

your bedroom, the willows in the garden,

the river behind the buildings of glass,

and the cafe of our trysts.

All of them, all, are preparing to go into exile. (*Unfortunately* 101)

Unlike Shakespeare’s Romeo, the Palestinian Romeo resorts to philosophy to alleviate the agonies of exile and to find a metaphysical reunion of the lovers in moments of physical departure and separation: “Let us go as we are, separately and as one. / Nothing causes us pain” (*Unfortunately* 101). For Shakespeare’s Romeo, even philosophy fails to compensate for his love in exile: “Unless philosophy can make Juliet, / Displant a town, reverse a prince’s doom, / It helps not, it prevails not. Talk no more” (3.3.58–60). However, the Palestinian lover finds Shakespeare as a

good companion on his way for exile.

In his poem “Ḥālāt Ḥiṣār” (*State of Siege*), Darwish appropriates Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* to reflect upon his humanistic approach towards the Jew figure, Shylock. Arab writers revisualize Shakespeare’s controversial delineation of the Jew character Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* in order to condemn Zionism, the Balfour Declaration in 1917, and the phenomenon of usury in the Arab world.¹ Mark Bayer shows how both Arabs and Israelis utilize Shakespeare’s dramatization of Shylock to address local politics of victimization: “both Israelis and Palestinians can (and do) claim legitimate historical grievances and both understand themselves as victims of various forms of European colonial oppression” (“*The Merchant*” 468). For Bayer, while the Israelis perceive Shylock as an allegorical victim of Nazism, Arabs identify Shylock with Zionism. The theatrical performance of Khalīl Mutrān’s translation of Shakespeare’s play first appeared at Cairo in 1922 after five years of the Balfour Declaration in 1917, ushering a new Arab interest in resorting to Shakespeare’s Shylock to warn against the British and Zionist colonial project in Palestine and the Arab region (Bayer, “*The Merchant*” 473). Al-Shetawi explains that the Arab literary repertoire before the Balfour Declaration lacks “any significant representation of the Jews,” leading many Arab writers to borrow archetypal models of the Jews from Western literature (“*The Merchant*” 16). However, Bayer and Al-Shetawi overlook Darwish’s unique model of idealizing the British Bard, transforming Shakespeare’s Shylock from an anti-Jew archetype to an emblem of peace and humanistic coexistence. The Arab poet Maysoon Awni, who dedicated a poem entitled, “Maḥmūd Darwīsh” (Mahmoud Darwish), in the memory of the Palestinian Bard, ignores the Darwishian perception and appropriation of Shakespeare’s Shylock by persisting the use of Shylock as an incarnation of Zionism: “Shiksbīr, ‘Alam tasma‘ bi Shiksbīr, sayyukhbirak ‘n jadek, wa ghadruh bi tājir al-bunduqīyya / ‘Inahu shabīh safālatikum, wa yumathel jasha‘kum, fa’ntum lā tashba‘ūn” (“Shakespeare, have you ever heard of Shakespeare? He will inform you about your grandfather Shylock and his deception to the Merchant of Venice. He [Shylock], who is similar to your baseness, represents your greed. You never get

1 See Salih J. Altoma, “The Image of the Jew in Modern Arabic Literature 1900–1947,” *Al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 11, no. 1/2, 1978, pp. 60–73; Mahmoud Al-Shetawi, “*The Merchant of Venice* in Arabic,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1994, pp. 15–28; Mark Bayer, “‘The Merchant of Venice’, the Arab-Israeli Conflict, and the Perils of Shakespearean Appropriation,” *Comparative Drama*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2007, pp. 465–92; Hussein A. Alhawamdeh and Ismail S. Almazaidah, “Shakespeare in the Arab Jordanian Consciousness: Shylock in the Poetry of ‘Arār (Mustafa Wahbi Al-Tal),” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2018, pp. 319–35.

satisfied”); my trans.).

For Darwish, Shylock is an allegorical representation of ordinary Israelis, who are manipulated by the politics of war by their conflicting parties. Darwish wrote his long poem “Ḥālāt Ḥiṣār” (*State of Siege*) during the Israeli siege on the West Bank town Rāmallah and Yāsir ‘Arafāt’s compound for more than five months, starting from the end of 2001.¹ In the poem, the speaker, who suffers from the pains of the siege and loneliness, reminds a “*quasi-Orientalist*” that they share humanity despite all of the Orientalist’s false misrepresentations of the Arabs: “If you were not you and I were not I / We might be friends / even agreeing to our need for a certain stupidity” (*State of Siege* 135). The speaker is self-confident of his humanity despite all accusations of “stupidity” and ignorance of “new technology” (*State of Siege* 135). Once more, Darwish recalls Shakespeare in moments of the painful siege, emphasizing the humanity of Shylock in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*: “For hath not the stupid one ‘hear, bread, / and eyes full of tears,’ like the Jew / in *The Merchant of Venice*?” (*State of Siege* 135). The resonance of the Jewish Shylock in Darwish’s poem indicates that Shylock shares the Palestinians the harsh experience of oppression and exclusion of the siege. The speaker informs the “*quasi-Orientalist*” that Shylock just as all Palestinians has the same human senses of hearing, tasting, and crying. In Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock reminds the Venetians of the humanity of the Jews:

Hath not a
 Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses,
 affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the
 same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the
 same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and
 summer as a Christian is? If you prick us do we not bleed? If
 you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die?
 And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? (3.1.49–56)

Darwish philosophizes the brutal experience of the siege, evoking Shylock to speak allegorically on the behalf of the besieged Palestinians and to defend the Palestinian cause. The Palestinian Shylock like Darwish emphasizes the need of prioritizing the values of justice, equality, and peace over wars and oppression.

¹ For more information about the Israeli siege, see Chris McGreal, “US Forces Israel to Lift Siege of Arafat,” *The Guardian*, 30 September 2002. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/sep/30/israel>

In a Shylock-like eloquence, the Palestinian speaker addresses one Israeli guard, urging him to seek humanistic commonalities with the besieged Palestinians and to sympathize with their plight:

You might find there's
 an accidental likeness between you and me:
 you have a mother,
 I have a mother.
 We have one rain and one moon. (*State of Siege* 129).

The Palestinian speaker, associating himself with Shakespeare's Shylock, revives the memory of victimization of the Jews by the Nazi system and warns the Israeli soldier not to play the role of the killer or to believe in the dogma of the "rifle" because Palestinians just like Jews have one human origin and similar "passions," in Shylock's word:

To a killer:
 if you had looked into the face of your victim
 and thought carefully,
 you might have remembered your mother in the Gas Chamber,
 and freed yourself from the rifle's prejudice
 and changed your mind. (*State of Siege* 43)

The Palestinian speaker, who incarnates the victimized Shylock, resorts to Shakespeare's wisdom as a means of resisting the Israeli siege on the city of Rāmallah.

Darwish's identification with Shakespeare's Shylock is similar to Shakespeare's association with the Jew figure. Kenneth Gross illuminates that Shylock stands as a "covert double for Shakespeare": "Shylock's singularity translates Shakespeare's singularity, which includes his chameleon-like capacity for disguise and his fascination with extremes of ambiguity, his ability to transmute pain and pleasure, his skill in marrying the general and the particular, and his ruthless way with audiences" (x). Darwish's "singularity," echoing Shylock's and Shakespeare's, enables the Palestinian poet to empower the Jewish character (Shylock) to speak on behalf of the Palestinian cause. Shakespeare's Shylock is "repositioned,"¹ in

1 I am borrowing the term "repositioned" from Thomas Cartelli, *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Thomas Cartelli's terminology, as a Palestinian Shylock, who calls for peace and reconciliation. For Darwish, peace can be achieved only when the victimizer acknowledges and regrets his sins committed against the victimized people: "Peace, when the stronger apologizes to the weaker, / who are weaker only in weaponry" (*State of Siege* 175). Peace can be obtained only when the Israelis ignore the politics of the "sword" and seek commonalities of coexistence with the Palestinians: "Peace, the victory of natural beauty over swords— / iron shattered by dewdrops" (*State of Siege* 175).

Darwish makes direct references to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603) to reflect upon the state of Palestinians' and Jews' hesitation and irresolution in making peace. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* first appeared in the Arab world in the Arabic translation by Tanius 'Abdoh and was staged in Cairo around 1893 (Al-Shetawi, "Hamlet" 44). Litvin explains that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the Arab world is "cited more often than any other Shakespeare play (*Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice* are distant seconds) and probably more than any other literary text at all" (15). For Litvin, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been appropriated by Arab writers of different ideological affiliations, including "religious as well as secular figures; by liberals, nationalists, and Islamists; by critics who write in obscure journals; and by cultural authorities" (15).

In his prose work *Dha:kira li-I-Nisya:n (Memory for Forgetfulness)*, Darwish appropriates Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to indicate the state of madness of the besieged Lebanese and Palestinians in Beirut: "Nothing is left for us except the weapon of madness. To be, or not to be. To be, or to be. Not to be, or not to be. Nothing is left except madness" (*Memory* 118). Even though Litvin does not analyze the significance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, she identifies four thematic patterns of Arab writers' appropriations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "nonbeing versus being, madness versus wholeness, sleep versus waking, and talk versus action" (16). Darwish's appropriation of *Hamlet* can be categorized within the second pattern of "madness," as defined by Litvin. Darwish perceives the trauma of the Israeli siege on Beirut as the cause of the state of "madness" of the Palestinians and Lebanese since no action was made whether by Israelis or the world to end the agonies of the besieged people. The state of Hamlet's no action designates not only the Israelis but also the whole world that peace between the Palestinians and Jews should not be procrastinated anymore. Darwish warns the Jews and Palestinians against the transformation to Hamlet's madness in case no serious efforts are taken by both sides to prioritize the philosophy of peace rather than war as the only means of survival and coexistence.

In an interview with Darwish by the Israeli Helit Yeshurun, Darwish identifies himself with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Abu 'Abdallah al-Saghīr (c. 1460–1533), who was the last Muslim ruler of Granada:

I identified myself with the man who was the Hamlet of Andalusia. He doesn't know [what to do]: To fight or not to fight? So his mother recited the famous poem: "You cry like a woman over a kingdom that you did not defend." She knew that he would lose, and pushed him to fight. That is exactly what is happening now. Truth doesn't have only one face. No historian can judge him. His fear, hesitation, and defeat are understandable. There were those who said to him: Kill yourself. Be valiant. So between being valiant and being pragmatic, this man became the Arab Hamlet. And every generation curses him. Granada was finished. All of Arabic culture ended there. So how does a man respond to such a trial? He saves himself. They allowed him to flee. They promised him a small kingdom, but they betrayed him. ("Exile" 68)

Abu 'Abdallah al-Saghīr, who was known as Boabdil in Europe, opted for peace rather than war with the Catholic Monarchs Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, to whom he surrendered the keys of the Muslim city of Granada in 1492, as was rumored, in a humiliating way by trying to kiss the hand of Ferdinand's hand (Drayson 62). Boabdil's character remains controversial in history, being viewed simultaneously as a traitor to the glorious history of the Islamic Al-Andalus, which lasted for seven centuries, or as a pragmatic diplomat. Because the Granadan Muslims were left alone against the powerful artillery of the Spanish army, surrender for Boabdil became an inevitable fact to secure the lives of not only Granadan Muslims but also Granadan Jews (Drayson 105–7).

Boabdil, who could not wage war against the Catholic monarchs to protect Granada, transformed to "the Hamlet of Andalusia" in Darwish's perception. Darwish, indentifying himself with Boabdil and Hamlet, is afraid of accusations of treason, hesitation, and surrender. The double parallel to Boabdil and Hamlet signifies Darwish's/Boabdil's intention of saving not only Arab Palestinians/Granadan Muslims but also Israeli Jews/ Granadan Jews from the atrocity of war. For Darwish, while peace relates to logic and survival, war leads to ghostly ends. However, Darwish leaves his legacy to be judged by new generations, reminding the Arab Palestinians and Israeli Jews of their shared history of victimization by the expulsion from Al-Andalus and by the Arab Muslims' defense of Granadan Jews. Darwish, sympathizing with Boabdil's and Hamlet's agonies of irresolution and

weakness, transforms them to icons of peace.

Darwish shares Shakespeare the theme of the futility of wars in general and the Trojan war in particular. In his poem “Saya’ tī Barābira ’Ākharūn” (Other Barbarians will Come), Darwish satirizes the worthless cause of the Trojan war in Homer’s *Illiad* as a war for the “emperor’s wife” (*Unfortunately* 20). The speaker grieves the death of a large number of soldiers for the sake of bringing Helen back to the emperor’s “bedroom”: “From his bedroom he will launch a military / assault to return his bedmate to his bed. Why should we be concerned? / What do fifty thousand victims have to do with this brief marriage?” (*Unfortunately* 20). In Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, Hector opposes the Trojans’ purposeless sacrifice to die for the sake of Helen: “If we have lost so many tenths of ours / To guard a thing not ours—nor worth to us” (2.2.20–1). Hector believes that it is against “moral laws” to keep a married woman away from her husband, opting for sending Helen back rather than waging a meaningless war: “As it is known she is, these moral laws / Of nature and of nations speak aloud / To have her back returned” (2.2.183–85). Meron explains that Shakespeare deviates from Homer’s justification of the “failure of peace” between the Greeks and Trojans: “In Homer, the malice of the gods frustrates the settlement; in Shakespeare, it is the foolishness of men” (69). In other words, Shakespeare looks at wars as a man-made absurdity away from any divine orientation. In this context, Darwish’s conceptualization of the Trojan war is closer to Shakespeare than Homer, indicating the possibility of Darwish’s reading of Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*.

In his poem “Bunduqiyya wa Kafan” (A Gun and a Shroud), Darwish depicts a tragic story of a “security man,” who shoots his brother to death by mistake, thinking that he has killed “his imaginary enemy” (*A River* 41). When the man goes home, he “found the house crowded with mourners and smiled because he thought they thought he had been martyred” (*A River* 41). Ironically, the dreams of heroism and martyrdom of the “security man” turn to be a tragic illusion when the crowd “informed him that he had killed his brother” (*A River* 41). The “security man,” despising his gun, decides to “sell it to buy a shroud” for his dead brother (*A River* 41). For Darwish, wars are nothing but an elusive ambition of victory over other human beings, who may be one’s relatives or family members. For Darwish, the absence of peace leads to destructive wars and losses, as shown in the tragic story of the “security man,” who “was seeking his own private war since he hadn’t found a peace to defend” (*A River* 41). Peace restores natural human coexistence and fosters survival and prosperity.

Shakespeare’s play *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Good*

King Henry the Sixth (3 Henry VI) (1595) dramatizes the fatal effects of war on the state and subjects. One soldier slays another man “hand to hand” (2.5.56) in the battle, hoping to plunder his “store of crowns” (2.5.57). To his surprise, the soldier is shocked to perceive that he has killed his father by mistake:

Who’s this? O God! It is my father’s face
 Whom in this conflict I, unwares, have killed.
 O, heavy times, begetting such events!
 From London by the King was I pressed forth;
 My father, being the Earl of Warwick’s man,
 Came on the part of York, pressed by his master;
 And I, who at his hands received my life,
 Have by my hands of life bereaved him.
 Pardon me, God, I knew not what I did;
 And pardon, father, for I knew not thee.
 My tears shall wipe away these bloody marks,
 And no more words till they have flowed their fill. (2.5.61–72)

King Henry VI, who stands as an observer to the calamities of war, pities the tragic scene of patricide: “O piteous spectacle! O bloody times!” (2.5.73). A second soldier kills another man in a fight, desiring to loot his “gold” (2.5.80). Again, the second soldier finds out that he has committed the crime of filicide against his only son in a state of ignorance:

But let me see: is this our foeman’s face?
 Ah, no, no, no—it is mine only son!
 Ah, boy, if any life be left in thee,
 Throw up thine eye! [Weeping] See, see, what showers arise,
 Blown with the windy tempest of my heart,
 Upon thy wounds, that kills mine eye and heart!
 O, pity, God, this miserable age!
 What stratagems, how fell, how butcherly,
 Erroneous, mutinous, and unnatural,
 This deadly quarrel daily doth beget!
 O boy, thy father gave thee life too soon,
 And hath bereft thee of thy life too late! (2.5.82–93)

Just as the soldier in Darwish's poem sells the gun to buy a shroud for his dead brother, the second soldier decides to dedicate his "arms" as a shroud for his dead son: "These arms of mine shall be / thy winding sheet" (2.5.113–14). For King Henry VI and the speaker in Darwish's poem, no one achieves victory in wars except losses. King Henry VI philosophizes the elusive victory in wars: "Yet neither conqueror nor conquered. / So is the equal poise of this fell war" (2.5.11–12). The speaker in Darwish's poem declares likewise that "Nobody will ever defeat me, or be defeated by me" (*A River* 41). The resonance of Shakespeare's anti-war delineations in *3 Henry VI* indicates also the familiarity of Darwish with Shakespeare's play.

Conclusion

Darwish's appropriations of Shakespeare can be categorized into three basic patterns: Firstly, a direct reference to Shakespeare as a symbol of peace and reconciliation; secondly, a direct appropriation of Shakespeare's plays, such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet*; thirdly, an implied appropriation of Shakespeare's plays *Troilus and Cressida* and *3 Henry VI*, as examples of anti-war sentiment in general and the Trojan war in particular. The Darwishian mystification of Shakespeare renders him as an admirer and defender of the British Bard. Even though Shakespeare's position to wars is controversial among modern scholars, Darwish stands in a clear position towards Shakespeare as a universal phenomenon that transcends political and regional limitations. Through Shakespeare, Darwish offers new aspirations of peace and coexistence among the Israelis and Palestinians since there is no victory in wars. Darwish's appropriation of Shakespeare is like an invitation to read the British Bard as an icon of peace or a "comrade," in Loomba's and Orkin's terminology.

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