

# Ibsen in Modern Arabic Drama and Theater

**Hanan K. Al-Jezawi**

Department of English Language and Literature  
Al Balqa Applied University Irbid City/ Jordan.

Email: Jeezawi@bau.edu.jo

**Mahmoud F. Al-Shetawi**

Department of English Language and Literature  
University of Jordan, Amman/ Jordan.

Email: alshetawi\_m@ju.edu.jo

**Abstract** This essay argues that the playwright Henrik Ibsen was a head of his time and his thoughts had anticipated ours at the present time. The paper accentuates Ibsen's revival in modern and contemporary Egyptian drama. As a dramatist who discussed social and political problems in his plays, it is implausible to dissociate him from the political and social problems of the Arab World, especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. The aim of this essay is to show how Prominent Egyptian dramatists such as Tawfiq Al-Hakim, Rashad Rushdi, and No'man Ashur have been influenced by Ibsen's social drama and theatrical techniques. On the other hand, Egyptian playwrights and Arab theater directors are influenced by him; consequently, they have adapted and appropriated some of his plays into Arabic. The essay concludes that Ibsen has an impact on modern and contemporary Egyptian drama and theater in terms of themes and techniques, and that the revival of his plays and themes in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries correlates with the political and social upheavals across the Arab World. The essay is informed by Julie Sanders' theoretical underpinnings of adaptation and appropriation in an effort to show the significance of adapting and appropriating Ibsen's plays by Arab dramatists and theater directors.

**Key words** adaptation; Arab Spring; Arabic Theater; Egyptian Dramatists.

**Authors** **Hanan Al Jezawi**, Dr. in English Literature at Al Balqa Applied University. Her Main search interests are comparative literature and African American literature. **Mahmoud Al Shetawi**, Full Professor in English Literature at University of Jordan and Dean of Faculty of Foreign Languages (206-2018). His main interest are comparative literature, Shakespeare, and Postcolonial studies.

## Introduction

The emergence and development of Arabic drama from the second half of the Nineteenth Century to the beginning of the Twentieth Century was influenced by Western drama and theater. The latter provides an inspirational platform for Arab playwrights, especially those who have been in direct contact with Western cultures. Modern Arab dramatists explored different Western theater theories. As an illustration, the Lebanese dramatist Maroun al-Naqqash established the first Arabic theater based on Western plays. After spending years in Italy and being affected by the stage art, he adapted Moliere's comedy, *L'Avare*, under the title [*al-Bakhl*] (1848). Sabry Hafez (2017), points out that Al-Naqqash devotes his attention to drama and his work in this genre is a development of Arab culture. Furthermore, the father of the Syrian theater, Ahmed Abou-Khalil al-Qabbani, who is considered the founder of Arabic musical drama, followed the same trend in adapting European plays. His visits to different European countries allowed him to adapt the French dramatist Corneille. Western theater schools, namely the classical, romantic, realistic, and symbolic, were most influential in the Arab theater. It is believed that the adaptation of European dramatic texts constituted the basis of Arabic theater because of the translation and performance of Western plays in Arab countries.

Henrik Johan Ibsen (1828-1906) is one of the most influential Norwegian playwrights. His global significance has exceeded the borders of Norway and Europe; his plays are received not only in Europe but in the Arab world as well. On the other hand, Ibsen refers to Arabs in some of his works and letters. He became interested in Islam and the Arabs after his visit to Egypt in 1869. He accepted an invitation from Khedive Ismail of Egypt to attend the opening of the Suez Canal (1869) where he spent two months (Fischer-Lichte et al. 126). During his visit to Egypt, he learnt more about Arabic culture and history. However, Ibsen's imagination was roaming this land long before his visit to the country. His play *Peer Gynt* (1867) is set in a North Africa Arab region (Morocco in particular) and Egypt.

Ibsen's journey into the Arab World in terms of adapting his plays and translating them into Arabic has not yet been adequately considered. He has been extensively translated into Arabic perhaps more than any other European dramatist with the exception of William Shakespeare; therefore, this study attempts to explore Ibsen's journey into the Arab World in terms of the reception of his drama in Egypt and in other Arab countries.

Ibsen's plays have been frequently performed in the world, and the Arab World

is no exception. On that account, he has achieved a worldwide fame as his plays represent ordinary people and everyday life, which stimulates Egyptian dramatists to follow his techniques and themes such as blending realism with symbolism, and highlighting political and realistic issues. By examining the realities that lay beneath the social facades, his drama becomes a rich material for performance, appropriation and adaptation. Moreover, Ibsen's revival is aligned with political and social issues in modern and contemporary Arabic drama and theater. His revolutionary propositions in his plays have contributed to the revival of his drama in the Arab Spring countries.

In her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders uses different terms to describe adaptation such as interpretation and continuation. The interpretations and the different points of view make the new version different from the original one. Sanders (2006) suggests that adaptation attempts to make the original text suitable to new audiences by updating it to address issues of concern to them and their time. Therefore, adaptation is a revised version of the original text.

Sanders diagnoses the relationship between adaptation and appropriation. She defines adaptation as (2006), "a highly specific process involving the transition from one genre to another: novels into film; drama into musical; the dramatization of prose narratives and prose fiction; or the inverse movement of making drama into prose narrative" (19). She uses "appropriation" to identify the kind of adaptation that transposes the source culture to a different culture. In appropriation there is a shift in setting and language into a new context.

Sanders (2006) adds that intertextuality is a form of adaptation and appropriation. She cites different critics who have already discussed intertextuality or imitation. For example, Sanders refers to Edward Said who states that the writer considers rewriting more than writing originally. She also refers to Ronald Barthes who argues that "any text is an intertext" (2). Claude Lévi-Strauss interprets rewriting a text as "repeating structures across cultures" (qtd. in Sanders, 2006). Compatible with these opinions, Sanders maintains that adaptation and appropriation are, "endlessly and wonderfully, about seeing things come back to us in as many forms as possible" (160) In discussing the influence of Ibsen in modern Arabic drama, the present study will be critically informed by Sanders' theorizing pronouncements and critical views.

### **Ibsen in Twentieth Century Arabic Drama**

Ibsen wrote many social realistic plays which focus on social dilemmas and criticize the values of society. Therefore, he is known as the father of realism. In

*Ghosts* (1881), Ibsen highlights the concept of sins; in *Pillars of Society* (1877), he discusses wars and business, and in *Hedda Gabbler* (1890), he deals with the role of women. As admirers of Ibsen, Egyptian dramatists have revived him in their literary works. Although it is known that “before the 1950s [Ibsen] was virtually unknown in Egypt; very few had heard of him, and even fewer had read him” (Fischer-Lichte et al. 119), some Egyptian playwrights were influenced by him long before this time. Ibrahim Ramzi (1884-1949), who was an important playwright of the modern Arab theater in Egypt, was influenced by Ibsen. He translated Ibsen’s play *An Enemy of the people* for the first time in (1932); this was probably the first work for Ibsen to be translated into Arabic.

The Egyptian playwright, Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987), played a pivotal role in the development of Arabic drama. Al-Hakim was introduced to French theater during his sojourn in France for several years to obtain a degree in law. The opportunity of living in France allowed him to immerse in the aesthetics of the new movements in European theater represented in the plays of Ibsen and Bernard Shaw. The Egyptian critic Muhammad Badawi (1987), mentions that when al-Hakim was in Paris, he turned away from the farce, and the popular comedic theater and operettas he used to see in Cairo to “developing an overwhelming interest in the French *avant-garde* theatre of the time: the stage productions of plays by Ibsen” (qtd. in Allen 103).

Ibsen is known for his unique style of blending symbolism with reality. Realism in Ibsen’s realistic plays criticizes the ills of his society and Ibsen has extensively dubbed them with symbolism, a dramatic technique that has become a hall mark of his plays. The mechanism of his symbols is based on the idea that the symbol stands for either a character of a play or the meaning of the play as a whole. At the same time, this symbol is presented in a realistic way. For instance, in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, the title symbolizes the dehumanized wife, Nora, whose soul is the stage of the real action of the play, and at the same time, the symbol stands for the play itself. Nora explains to Torvald: “I have been your doll wife, just as at home I was Daddy’s doll child. And the children in turn have been my dolls. I thought it was fun when you came and played with me, just as they thought it was fun when I went to play with them. That’s been our marriage, Torvald” (Act III). This is why she has become dissatisfied with her life. Moreover, the male protagonist has a double meaning, which is realistic symbolic. He is trapped by traditional gender roles; however, by the end of the play the traditional ideas are put to the test. In the play, Ibsen rebels against social realism, and the realism of the ordinary life is converted to the symbolic of spiritual happenings.

In *Ghosts*, Ibsen employs disease as symbol of corruption of the body and the mind; he makes the symbol as something real. This corruption is inherited from the raked dead father. When Oswald confesses to his mother that he carries syphilis which he inherits from his father, he repeats the doctor's proverb: "The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, and the children's children" (Act II). The significance of sickness lies in its relation to the play's main theme of hauntings; this proves Mrs. Alving's theory that Oswald is haunted by his father.

Similar to Ibsen, Al-Hakim blends realism with symbolism in different works. For instance, in his work *Isis* (1955), he juxtaposes the modern social and political conditions of Egypt with the Pharaonic history of Egypt. Besides, Isis is an Egyptian woman who stands as a symbol of the unity of Egypt. In this work the remains of Isis symbolize Egypt waiting for someone to unite it and gather its people. Al-Hakim blends symbolism with realism to show the sufferings of Egyptians at that time. Moreover, his play *Awdat al-Ruh* [The Return of the Spirit] (1933) is another work that follows Ibsen's style of blending realism with symbolism. It is the story of a nationalistic Egyptian and his family that ends with events around the 1919 revolution which explodes for the sake of the Egyptian revolutionary Saa'd Zaghloul and his companions who were exiled. The 1919 revolution that is said to be for Zaghloul, symbolizes their rebel against colonization. Similar to Ibsen, he reveals psychological facts, and moral problems through characters that symbolize different ideas. Al-Hakim intentionally blends the history of his childhood and youth with the history of Egypt in a way that shows his creativity. This work is considered a semi-autobiographical fiction; Muhsin, the protagonist, is based on Al-Hakim himself. Al-Hakim's adaptation of Ibsen's style goes in line with Sanders' explanation (2006) of adaptation which involves several distinct practices such as imitation, rewriting, echo, and pastiche. Sanders explains that in art and literature, pastiche means imitating the style and character of a certain literary work, or the style of an artist or writer. She adds (2006), that pastiche can be used to show admiration of the literary style of a particular writer.

Additionally, Ibsen has inspired al-Hakim to write what is known as "Drama of Ideas." Before al-Hakim, Ibsen was known for the "Drama of Ideas," or drama of social criticism. Martin Puchner refers in his book *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocation in Theatre and Philosophy* to Bentley's definition of the drama of ideas as follows (2010), "in drama of ideas, [...], the ideas are questioned, and it is by the questioning, and could only be by the questioning, that the idea becomes dramatic, for seldom or never is there drama without conflict" (93). It deals with social issues through debates between characters on the stage, who represent conflicting points

of view. Characters and plot are offered to discussion and argument. Meena Sodhi demonstrates that drama of ideas and problem plays are synonymous to each other; the latter was popularized by Ibsen. His aim was to “make the people think intelligently about the problems which he discussed through his “mouthpieces” or through the evolution of the plot” (66). Sodhi adds that such plays have a tragic tone since they discuss “painful human dilemmas” (66). For instance, in Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People*, Arthur Miller suggests that a central theme of the play is “the question of whether the democratic guarantees protecting political minorities ought to be set aside in times of crises” (8). Moreover, the main characters Thomas Stockmann, Peter Stockmann and Thomas’s wife, Katherine — each has special constraints of his or her role. Ibsen offers multiple arguments that appeal to the economic interests of the town.

Al-Hakim introduces his “Drama of Ideas” in different plays such as *Ahl Alkahf* [The People of the Cave] (1933), *Shahrazad* (1934), *al-Malik Udib* [King Oedipus] (1949) adapted from *King Oedipus* (1949), and *Suliman al-Hakim* [Solomon the Wise] (1934) which tackle Egyptian social themes and conflicts that the audience need to examine and resolve. Al hakim leaves questions such as “what if?” for the audience to answer. [The people of the Cave] is the story of the sleepers of Ephesus who, in order to escape the Roman persecution, take refuge in a cave. They sleep for three centuries, and wake up in a different era. Al Hakim assumes that the first man leaves his sheep; the second man leaves his family; the third leaves his beloved. The question that al Hakim leaves is: would they accept this reality and live it? It is a study of humans struggle against time. In *Shahrazad*, Al Hakim supposes that shahrazad becomes tired after spending his life moving from one place to another although his travels are not real, but fictional. Al Hakim leaves a question which is: can Shahrazad live a comfortable life after all what he has suffered? Drama of ideas discusses a social or political problem without offering a solution, which may give satisfaction to the audience to consider a way to solve the problem.

The famous Egyptian dramatist No’man Ashur, the founder of social realistic drama in Egypt, was also influenced by Ibsen’s mode of writing and he introduced Ibsen into the Egyptian theater. In *Global Ibsen: Performing Multiple Modernities*, Fischer-Lichtepoints out that Ashur is not the only writer who presented Ibsen to the Arab world. Kamel Yousef, who translated *A Doll’s House* and Aziz Suliman, who translated *The Pillars of Society* introduced Ibsen to the Egyptian readers (118). These plays reflect social hypocrisy and the exploitation of classes. For example, Ibsen’s *The Pillars of Society*, represents the middle-class Norwegian society, which is characterized as materialistic, hypocritical, and full of corruption. Although

Bernick is guilty of attempted murder, he successfully addresses the community and demonstrates that the powerful and rich are often selfish. In the play, Dina tells Rorlund how depressed she feels among people who do not appreciate her since she is from a lower class:

RORLUND. Could you not try to alter your nature?

DINA. No.

RORLUND. Why not?

DINA. (Looking at him): Because I am one of the “poor fallen creatures.”

RORLUND. My dear Dina, I can quite understand that you feel repressed here.

DINA. Yes, if only I could get right away from here. (Act I)

Similarly, Ashur's plays *al-Nas Elli Taht* [The People Downstairs] (1956) and *al-Nas Elli Fauq* [The People Upstairs] (1958) reflect the influence of Ibsen and Bernard Shaw in terms of characterization and dramaturgy. Hadle Andersen mentions in his article ‘The Brand Poet Strikes Back: *Peer Gynt* as Part of a Norwegian Duel of Satires’ (2014), that *Peer Gynt* is a satire on Norwegian culture. Moreover, this play refers to different cultures and deals with universal issues. For instance, *Peer Gynt*, as a representative of the Norwegian culture, is arrogant and self-deceiving, a character who has been presented by Ibsen in a satirical way in order to criticise some Norwegians. The socio-political elements in these plays mark a beginning of a new era in which the writers start bringing to light social issues. Ashur's two plays mirror class conflict and highlight realism in modern Arabic drama. Molefi Asante points out that in his plays, Ashur highlights political and social struggles in his country, and most of his plays are tragicomedies since they feature the ironical situations in his country as seen, for example, in his play *al-Maghnatīs* [The Magnet] (1950), in which he deals with the hardships that result from social classes in his society (146). [The People Downstairs] is the first play to permeate the social issues in Egypt by discussing the conflict between social classes in a satirical way. Ashur poses different questions such as: to what extent is a man capable of constructing a society based on equality? The play criticizes the social ladder which stimulates people to compete for ‘room at the top’. [The People Upstairs] rejects the reconciliation between the governing class and other classes in order to build a classless society.

Rashad Rushdi (1912-83) is one of the prominent Egyptian playwrights who was also influenced by Ibsen: “the nearest anyone came to writing what could be called a typically Ibsenite drama was Rashad Rushdi” (Fischer-Lichte et al. 119). In

writing *al-Farashah* [The Butterfly] (1959) which talks about the annihilation of an artist by a rich woman. Rushdi becomes close to Ibsen. Rushdi mentions in his criticism book *Fann al-Drama* [The Art of Drama] that we can summarize Ibsen's modern ideas in different trends. The first is that the past obscures the present and the future, and the second is that the past prevents us from progression. Ibsen applies his ideas first in *Ghosts* which is pervaded with the figurative ghosts of the past. The dying son Oswald screams saying that he wants the sun:

OSWALD. [*Sits in the arm-chair with his back towards the landscape, without moving. Suddenly he says:*] Mother, give me the sun.

MRS. ALVING. [*By the table, starts and looks at him.*] What do you say?

OSWALD. [*Repeats, in a dull, toneless voice.*] The sun. The Sun. (Act III).

This represents not only his need for opium to dispel the pain, but the fact that living people are invaded by the phantoms of the dead ones who live with them to poison their present. To scrutinize Rushdi's writings, one may notice that he adapts the same idea of the past in his play *Khayal al-Zil* [The Shadow Puppet] (1965). The main character is Adel who investigates the death of al-Alfi. Al-Alfi's ex-wife's betrayal shakes his confidence and causes him psychological problems. The past confuses his present life, and leads him to accuse Al-Alfi's wife for the death of her husband. Different characters in the play illustrate the conflict between the past and the present. In his play *Rihlah Kharij al-Sur* [A Trip Outside the Fence], the past plays a distinct role; the hero who embraces new thoughts encounters a society with its rotten past. The past obstructs the way of his progress; therefore, the only way to bring about change is to face the past with its negative aspects. In the present, the will is the weapon to face the past and to be responsible for the *status quo*.

Rushdi focuses in his plays "on the inner truth of individuals as seen through the experiences and conflicts of the human psyche" (Rubin ch.4). Fate chases the individual through the present and into the future and cannot be escaped. In *The Butterfly*, the story that portrays the destruction of an artist by a rich woman, we see the conflict between the modern ideology that the hero, Ramzi, who belongs to the working class embraces and the values that are embraced by his aristocratic wife, Samiha, along with her family. The Syrian critic, Riad Ismat (2018), states that Rushdi's play and its issues are still applicable in today's life after the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011 and that the main concerns of the play are about democracy and justice.



### **Ibsen in the Twenty-First Century Arabic Drama**

The theater performance, translations and adaptations of the plays of Ibsen have made this Norwegian playwright widely known in the Arab World in the Twenty-first Century. For example, *Hedda Gabler* and *Ghosts* were performed in English at the American University in Cairo and directed by Mahmoud al-Louzy. Moreover, *Ghosts* was rendered into Arabic as *Egyptian Ghosts*. Like Ibsen who criticizes the Norwegian society and morality of his time, the director Abeer Ali has been inspired by Ibsen's plays to represent conflicts in Egyptian Society. That is why she decides to establish a theater troupe in 1989 that relies on calling into question the conflicts and social ills existing in the Egyptian society and engages audiences in a variety of ways.

The influence of Ibsen in the Arab World appears in Arab experimental theater which deals with critical issues such as revolutions, the Arab Spring, religion and the position of women in Arab societies. Ibsen's global recognition of his plays is the outcome of the timeless issues treated in them; they still exist in different societies all over the world like women's status, the "decay of the bourgeois family life and value, venereal diseases, religious matters, industrial pollution and search for identity" (Fischer-Lichte et al. 40). Adapting Ibsen's plays should not be dealt with only from a Eurocentric perspective; the performance of his plays should suit the world audience to consider the multiple perspectives included in his plays.

The adaptation of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* has been performed in different Arab Spring countries such as Egypt, Libya, and Syria. With the exception of Syria, the play received positive views for portraying the political climate. In *An Enemy of the People*, Ibsen addresses corruption and hypocrisy which remain relevant in today's society. The play shows how the majority is oppressed by a minority of powerful people who control society. One main message of this play is that the individual, who stands alone, is more often honest than the mass of people, who are depicted as ignorant. The notion Ibsen challenged is the belief that the community can be trusted.

In her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders uses different terms to describe adaptation such as interpretation and continuation. She suggests that adaptation attempts to make the original text suitable to new audiences by updating it to address issues of concern to them and their time. Therefore, adaptation is a revised version of the original text. Sanders describes adaptation as having an infidelity toward the original text. She explains that in many adaptations there are things that are added or taken out. In order to be considered adaptation, one needs to

deviate from some original ideas or twist them.

This classical play was adapted into Arabic as *Ado al-Sha'ab* and the play was produced and directed by the Egyptian director Nora Amin in the context of the Arab Spring and contemporary revolutions. The play is rendered into colloquial Egyptian language to make it close to the emotions of the common people. It is worth mentioning that the play has also been translated and performed in different Arab countries in which people are protesting against their oppressive governments and rulers. The protagonist is a doctor who discovers that the water is contaminated by the local tannery. He expects to be praised for saving the town from the nightmare of infecting visitors with disease, but instead he is declared an 'enemy of the people' by the locals, who band against him. The play ends with his banishment.

The performance of the Arabic adaptation of the play tends to heighten the social awareness of the social and political problems in the Arab countries that are plunged into political turmoil. The director of the play, Nora Amin, states that her troupe 'Lamozika' performed *An Enemy of the People* in different Arab Spring countries. The performance began in Egypt after the Egyptians' protest against their presidents Mubarak in 2011 and Morsi in 2013. In an interview Nora Amin declares that the first performance outside Egypt was in Libya. She adds that while the original text consists of five acts, her Arabic adaptation is composed of only one act in which she has made dramatic text alterations and concentrates on the crux of the issue, which is the conflict between the hero and the society.<sup>1</sup>

Nora Amin deals with the dramatic text from a political perspective by relating it to the political upheavals and revolutions in the Middle Eastern countries in general and Cairo in particular. She remarks that she has changed nothing in the dialogue. Sanders (2006) asserts that "in appropriation, the intertextual relationship may be less explicit, more embedded, but what is often inescapable is the fact that a political or ethnical commitment shapes writer's, director's, or a performer's decision to re-interpret a source text" (2). She postulates that this may include the personal vision of the director or the cultural relocation of the original text. Moreover, she uses "appropriation" to identify the kind of adaptation that transposes the source culture to a different culture. In appropriation there is a shift in setting and language into a new context. Sanders explains that "appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (26). This is why, as she believes, the appropriated text is not always "acknowledged as in the adaptive process" (26). Hence, appropriation shows more independence than adaptation.

1 All interviews are translated from Arabic to English by the authors

Although the director, Nora Amin, has altered the original dialogue of *An Enemy of the People* by adding some dramatic elements to make the adaptation appealing to the Egyptian audience. These alterations include cutting lines and recontextualizing the original text. In order to rewrite Ibsen's play to suit the Egyptian and the Arab culture, as Fischer-Lichte et al. suggest, the original names of the characters and Christianity are to be substituted by Arab ones and Islam, respectively. She calls this concept "indigenizing," which is used in an attempt to avoid alienating the audience.

Different Arab intellectuals and artists admire Ibsen and adopt his thoughts and dramatic style. For example, Alaa al-Aswany, an Egyptian writer and a founding member of the political movement in Egypt called "Kefaya," has been inspired by Ibsen. In an interview, he mentions that his stories take place in Egypt, but the reader would easily relate them to Ibsen's characters. Like the director of Ibsen's play, Nora Amin, Al-Aswany believes that Ibsen's plays are suitable for the present time because they address situations and issues similar to those in Egypt and Arab countries.

The Egyptian dramatist Sa'ad al-Din Wahba, whose early plays expose the oppression of the police, has also been influenced by Ibsen. In this sense, Jennie Sowers points out that Wahba reprinted many of the letters written by the public who wrote to *al-Ahram Newspaper* in order to document the degradation and pollution of Alexandria. These letters were collected in a book entitled *The People's Enemy* in Alexandria. In his opening article, «Enemy of the People: A story of Assassinating a City," the author illustrates that the title derives from Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People* (76), in which a doctor, Thomas Stockmann, a medical officer of the Municipal Baths of the town, discovers that the water supplying the public baths is polluted with a micro-organism. The images of dirt and the polluted baths that are full of bacteria throughout the play symbolize moral corruption. Dr. Stockmann, as Mordecai Roshwald explains in his article "The Alienated Moralist in An Enemy of the People," is "estranged from his brother and the upper social class he represents, as well as from the politicized liberal sector, [he] stands as a defiant Prometheus doomed to suffering, but faces the enemy, the modern god of popular opinion." Hovstad, a publisher from the lower class, finds out that the rich are the real corrupters of the land. He states: "The idol of Authority must be shattered in this town. This gross and inexcusable blunder about the water-supply must be brought home to the mind of every municipal vote" (156). Hovstad plans to use this issue as a weapon against the elite of the town. In the city, Thomas insists on fighting the ills of his society until the end; he is warned by the authorities

and is considered the enemy of the people by the populace. In his diary, Wahba attacks the problems of the sewage system in Alexandria. He combines “simplistic political analysis with a keen eye for critiquing Egyptian decision-makers and their American counterparts, written in a satirical, lively style that attracted readers” (Sowers 76). Sa’ad al-Din Wahba comments on the corruption and contamination of the Egyptian urban regions.

The revival of Ibsen in the Arab World is not just confined to political issues. The social issues of Ibsen’s drama play a significant role in adapting his works in the twenty-first Century. One of these issues is the treatment of women in society. Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* demonstrates the way Nora breaks away from the authority of her husband. She discusses the position of women in Victorian marriage. The play draws attention to the double standards of morality for women and men. Nora describes her husband: “he’s so proud of being a man — it’d be so painful and humiliating for him to know that he owed anything to me. It’d completely wreck our relationship” (36). She discovers that their marital relationship is based on the patriarchal role her husband has been playing. This play was adapted by the Lebanese director and actor Ziad Abou Absi in 2015 at a time when women are still oppressed in most Arab societies. Nora who believes that she has been a voiceless doll in her house, decides to remove the shackles of social conventions at the end. The Arabic adaptation of the play illuminates the pride of Arab men nowadays. AbouAbsi engrafted local cultural Lebanese elements onto the original text to make it appealing to the audience. In an interview, AbouAbsi says that the realities that Ibsen portrays in his play still exist in Arab societies. He explains that Nora rebels at the end of the play because she wants to free herself from the social traditions that have been stifling her as a human being.

In Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, Nora is represented as “a doll” under the dominance of the patriarchal authority of her father, husband and children. Ignoring herself and her existence as a human being can be likened to the situation that Arab women still face today. Her sacrifices are similar to the sacrifices that Arab women are making today. *A Doll’s House* deals with domestic issues which do not exist anymore in Europe. However, the play appeals to the Arab audience, especially Arab women in the Twenty-first Century who begin to ask questions about their position as ‘dolls’ in Arab societies.

Zakiyya Kherhom al-Shanqity is a Moroccan-Norwegian writer, and an admirer of Ibsen. In an interview published in *Middle East Transparent*, she observes that Ibsen’s plays speak to us today though they were written in the late nineteenth-century and that Ibsen is renewed as if he had escaped from his time

to live among us nowadays (2009). Al-Shanqity adapted Ibsen's play *The Pillars of Society* under the name *AyyamDhae'ah* [Lost Days]. In *The Pillars of Society*, Ibsen concentrates on the corruption of ruling classes. Ibsen also suggests that the Nineteenth-Century middle class is characterized by hypocrisy and corruption. In the play, Bernick is marrying a woman for her money, as he is in love with an actor's wife. Ibsen illustrates how Bernick abuses his industrial power and threatens his workers, and how commercial and sexual oppression are inevitably linked together. Ibsen's play serves as an inspiration for al-Shanqity to depict in her adaptation a world which is full of corruption and terrorism. Al-Shanqity says that we live in a world of "democratic dictatorship" and "duplication of conscience" where "we have converted into cannibalism" (2009).

Ibsen's plays are widely read today not in the Norwegian language, but in translations and adaptations. Sanders refers to Susan Basnett who argues that (2006) "all translation is a form of rewriting and cultural negotiation" (4). Aware of the significance of translation, Sanders offers a definition of adaptation that correlates with the process of translation: "adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating" (19). For Sanders, adaptation can be considered as an attempt to make a text appropriate and relevant to new audiences by the process of updating it. In a similar vein, J, C Santoyo corroborates that adaptation is "a form of 'naturalizing' the play for a new milieu, the aim being to achieve the same effect that the work originally had, but with an audience from a different cultural background" (qtd. in Baker 4). The text is given the characteristics of its new surroundings to make it more suitable to the new culture. The motivation of rendering Ibsen's plays into Arabic is induced when the Egyptian broadcasting service starts its 'Second Cultural Program'. Many translators such as Aziz Suliman and Nai'mGaballa worked together with a team of radio drama directors and "treated listeners to excellent radio versions of many of Ibsen's best-known plays" (Fischer-Lichte 118)). For instance, the novelist Bahaa Tahir worked for the same program and directed some of Ibsen's plays such as *Little Eyolf* and *When We Dead Awaken* (118).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we may safely state that Ibsen has exerted a considerable impact on modern and contemporary Egyptian drama and theater in terms of themes and techniques. The revival of Ibsen's plays and themes in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries correlates with the political and social upheavals across the Arab

World. The Arab Spring has instigated Arab playwrights to translate, appropriate and adapt Ibsen's plays. Tawfiq al-Hakim, the prominent Egyptian writer, cogently states that "the reformer [Ibsen] died, but Ibsen the artist remained" (qtd. in Allawi 106). Therefore, Ibsen remains very much valid for contemporary Arab readers and audiences; Ibsen deals with a wide range of topics such as the position of women, social and political corruption, and the perennial conflict between the individual and society. His plays address the kind of social and political problems that Arab audiences are facing in their societies. Therefore, Arab writers who believe that revolutions and rebellions are a precondition to end corruption, political despotism and social injustices have used Ibsen's drama as a vehicle to debate the oppressive situations prevalent in most Arab countries and criticize their own societies.

### Works Cited

- Abou-Absi, Ziad. "Returns after a Long Absence in *A Doll's House* at the Monroe Theater: An Interview with OTV Lebanon." Available at [www.youtube.be/j9tRUGePfBK](http://www.youtube.be/j9tRUGePfBK). Accessed February 17, 2015.
- Al Hakim, Tawfiq. *The Return of the Spirit*. Egypt: Dar Al-Sharq, 2005.
- Allawi, Hamid. *Theorizing Theatre of Tawfiq Al-Hakim*. PhD dissertation, University of Algeria, 2005.
- Allen, Roger. *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography*. Germany Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010.
- Al-Shanqiti, Zakiyya. "The Master Work for Henrik Ibsen 'A Doll's House': An Interview with Middle East Transparent." Available at YouTube. [http:// metransparent.net](http://metransparent.net). Accessed January 29, 2009.
- Amin, Nora. "The First show of 'An Enemy of the People' in Libya: An Interview with Aljazeera Arabic." Available at [youtu.be/jGewSNXLQ2U](http://youtu.be/jGewSNXLQ2U). Accessed September 24, 2005.
- Andersen, Hadle. "The Brand Poet Strikes Back: Peer Gynt as Part of a Norwegian Duel of Satires." *Ibsen Studies* 25 (July 2014): 71-88.
- Asante, Molfie. *Culture and Customs of Egypt*. London: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- Baker, Mona. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. UK: Psychology Press, 1998.
- Fischer-Lichte, E, Gronau, B. and Weiler, C. *Global Ibsen: Performing Multiple Modernities*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Hafez, Sabry. "Cultural Journals and Modern Arabic Literature: A Historical overview." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 37, 2017. Available at: [www.jstor.org/stable/26191813](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26191813). (accessed November 3, 2020).
- Ibsen, Henrik. *Henrik, Ibsen, Plays Collection*. Trans. Edmund Gosse et al. US: Createspace Independent Pub, 2014.
- . *The Correspondence of Henrik Ibsen*. Trans. Mary Morison. New York: Haskell House

Publishers Ltd., 2018.

Ismat, Riad. *Artists, Writers and the Arab Spring*. US: Springer, 2018.

Miller, Arthur. *Adaptation of an Enemy of the People*. US: Penguin books, 1950.

Puchner, Martin. *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocation in Theatre and Philosophy*. UK: Oxford UP, 2010.

Roshwald, Mordecai. "The Alienated Moralist in An Enemy of the People." *Modern Age* (Summer 2004): 227-233.

Rubin, Don. *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre Volume 4: The Arab World*. Routledge, 2003.

Rushdi, Rashad. *The Art of Drama*. Egyptian General Authority, 1998.

Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. UK: Routledge, 2006.

Sodhi, Meena. *Shaw's "Candida": A Critical Introduction*. UK: Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 1999.

Sowers, Jeannie. *Activists, Experts and the State: Environmental Politics in Egypt*. UK: Routledge, 2013.