

Shakespeare's Contemporary Resonance in Iran: Historical Context and Contemporary Representation

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Abstract

This article examines the reception and interpretation of Shakespeare's works in modern-day Iran, beginning with an overview of the Qājār Dynasty (1789–1925) and focusing on Post-Revolutionary Iran. The study aims to illuminate an often-overlooked aspect: a significant shift in attitudes toward Shakespeare's plays between pre- and post-Revolutionary Iran, shaped by the dominant policies and ideologies of each era. Prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, adaptations of Shakespearean works such as *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* demonstrated discernible political orientations. In contrast, post-Revolution adaptations, including *Tardīd* and *Mortal Wound*, adopted a more sophisticated moralistic perspective. This transformation extended not only to thematic content but also to the medium of adaptation. During the pre-Revolution period, Shakespeare's plays were primarily translated into dramatic performances. However, the post-Revolutionary era saw a shift toward visual adaptations, including cinematic productions and home-video renditions. The contrast between these periods offers insights into Iran's contemporary outlook, revealing the interplay between historical power structures and the reception of Shakespeare's works. This study highlights the extent to which prevailing systems of authority shape the acceptance and adaptation of cultural expressions across distinct historical contexts.

Keywords: Shakespeare; adaptation; contemporary Iran; Iran's history; sociopolitical context

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1. Introduction

The theater, as a vital branch of the arts, has significantly influenced Iranian culture in recent years. This modern art form has intertwined with Anglo-European civilization. The development of theater in Iran traces back to the early 19th century, a period when the first Iranian students migrated to the West and became familiar with Anglo-European culture and traditions. The Qājār Dynasty (1789–1925) facilitated numerous cultural exchanges, including the introduction of theatrical traditions (Kuhestaninejad 2003: 9–10). During this era, several European works were translated into Persian for stage performances. For instance, the first Persian translations of the literary works of French playwright Molière (1622–1673) emerged during this time (Bozorgmehr 2000: 50). Shakespeare's plays were also translated during this period, reflecting the global appeal of his works. As one of the most celebrated playwrights, Shakespeare's literary productions have been warmly received in various countries, with numerous writers, directors, and actors translating, performing, and adapting his plays.

The reception of Shakespeare's works across different historical periods in Iran reflects the dynamic relationship between textual elements and their contextual dimensions. This paper provides an overview of the major social and political trends during pre-Revolutionary Iran, examining their impact on Shakespeare's reception and comparing these influences with those in post-Revolutionary Iran. While a few studies have been published on the adaptation of Shakespeare's works in Iran, most have focused on the translations of his plays in the pre- and post-Revolutionary eras or adopted an overtly political lens to analyze his post-Revolutionary reception. However, these studies often lack a comprehensive analysis of the visual adaptations of Shakespeare's works in post-Revolutionary Iran. Furthermore, previous academic discussions have not thoroughly explored the shift in attitudes toward Shakespeare's adaptations between pre- and post-Revolutionary Iran, particularly in terms of how historical power structures have influenced the reception and reinterpretation of his works.

2. Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to provide an analysis of Shakespeare's reception, acceptance, and engagement in Iran across various historical periods, with a particular focus on translations, performances, and visual adaptations. The research seeks to demonstrate the impact of contextual factors on the interpretation and adaptation of Shakespeare's works. By examining the distinct shifts in attitudes toward Shakespeare's plays before and after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, this study underscores how political and social transformations have influenced the thematic and medium-specific evolution of these adaptations. Specifically, it highlights how pre-Revolution adaptations were imbued with political undertones, whereas post-Revolution adaptations embraced a more refined moralistic perspective, marking a transition from dramatic translations to visual forms such as cinema and home-video

productions. This study aims to discuss how Shakespeare's works have been shaped to align with the dominant ideologies and policies of each era in contemporary Iran.

3. Significance of the Study

The primary significance of this article lies in highlighting the distinct shift in attitudes towards Shakespeare's plays in pre- and post-Revolutionary Iran, shaped by the prevailing policies and ideologies of each era. This focus sets our study apart from previous research on Shakespeare's influence in Iran, as this particular aspect has been largely overlooked. The paper provides an overview of the major social and political trends during the pre-Revolutionary period and examines their impact on Shakespeare's reception, comparing this with his treatment in post-Revolutionary Iran.

Although a few studies have explored Shakespeare's adaptations in Iran, they have primarily focused on translations from the pre- and post-Revolutionary periods or taken an overly political lens when analyzing his post-Revolutionary reception. None have offered a comprehensive analysis of the visual adaptations of Shakespeare's works in post-Revolutionary Iran. Furthermore, previous research has failed to address the broader shift in attitudes towards Shakespeare's adaptations across these two distinct periods, neglecting the critical relationship between historical power structures and the reception of his works.

4. Methodology

This study explores the reception of Shakespeare in contemporary Iran across four distinct historical periods. Its primary aim is to examine the shifts in attitudes toward Shakespeare in pre- and post-Revolutionary Iran. The periods under analysis include the Qājār Dynasty (1789–1925), Pahlavi I (1925–1941), Pahlavi II (1941–1979), and post-Revolutionary Iran (1979–present). The first three periods are examined to provide context for understanding the evolution of attitudes toward Shakespeare in the post-Revolutionary era. The research begins with the Qājār Dynasty, focusing on the era of Crown Prince Abbas Mirza, who initiated the tradition of translation in Iran. The study also examines the translations, performances, and adaptations of Shakespeare's works. The data is primarily drawn from a variety of sources, including articles, reports, reviews, and newspaper columns discussing Shakespeare's works and their reception in Iran. It is important to note that, as the findings of this study are based on a comprehensive analysis of prior research, this article does not include a separate literature review section.

5. Research Questions

1. What defining characteristics of Shakespeare have contributed to his varied reception across different periods in contemporary Iran?
2. How has the reception context in Iran – shaped by audience expectations

and interpretations – influenced potential changes in the style and medium of Shakespearean plays?

3. In what ways have the shifts in Iran's political and ideological landscapes, particularly before and after the 1979 Revolution, impacted the thematic and stylistic adaptations of Shakespeare's works?

6. Shakespeare in Iran

6.1. The Qājār Dynasty: From the Social Background to Textual Evolution

The Qājār Dynasty (1789–1925) played a pivotal role in the birth and evolution of theater and dramatic literature in Iran. Crown Prince Abbas Mirza (1789–1833) started to “modernize” Iran. He initiated this transformation by reforming his military forces based on the Ottoman Empire's model. He established Iran's first diplomatic missions in London and Paris and sent Iranian students to England to study military science, gun manufacturing, typography, and modern languages. Concurrently, he set up a translation office to translate military and engineering manuals (Abrahamian 2021: 50–52). These early translations and the ensuing cultural exchanges were driven by the political ambitions of the Iranian crown prince.

The Qājār era also saw the establishment of Dār al-fonūn, Iran's first modern school, in 1851, founded by decree of Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh and implemented by Amir Kabir. Approximately forty of its first graduates were sent to France for further education (Abrahamian 2021: 55–57). Inspired by France's industrial, social, and cultural progress, they sought to integrate these advancements into Iran, albeit with some reservations. Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh ordered the translation and teaching of numerous European literary works at Dār al-fonūn, as well as their performance in the school's theater hall. This initiative ultimately led to the creation of Tehran's first theater (Kuhestaninejad 2003: 11). In essence, the Qājār Dynasty laid the foundation for the emergence and evolution of artistic endeavors in Iran, particularly through the establishment of early theaters.

Shakespeare was relatively unknown in Iran before the Qājār Dynasty and during the initial years of Dār al-fonūn, which was founded in 1851. Despite a growing trend of translating foreign, primarily European, works into Persian by translators such as Mirzā Ḥabib-e Eṣfahāni (1835–1893), Mohammad Taher Mirzā (1871–1938), and Hosseynqoli Salur (1869–1933), among others (Horri 2003: 89), Shakespeare's works were not immediately embraced. Mirzā Abu'l-Qāsem Nāṣer-al-Molk (1865–1927), a prominent figure of the Qājār era and one of the first Iranians to study at Oxford University, translated *Othello* in 1914. The elegance of his prose in this translation remains undisputed to this day (Horri 2003: 83–85). In 1917, he also translated *The Merchant of Venice* (1598). However, as Bozorgmehr (2000: 41) notes, his translations were often free interpretations, with little fidelity to the original texts and occasional omissions of certain parts of the plays.

The Constitutional Revolution (1905–1907) marked a transformative period in Iran. For the first time, a constitution established legal frameworks and defined the rights of both society and the state (Katouziān 2011: 756). Reformers, many of whom were educated in European institutions, sought to limit the monarchy’s power and create a nation-state grounded in democratic principles (Farhadi 2020: 4). This era also witnessed a surge in the publication of magazines, books, and translations, introducing Anglo-European literary and cultural forms to Iranian audiences. Politicians viewed literature as a powerful tool for shaping societal morality and culture (Yāhaghī 2000: 220–222). The push for democracy was accompanied by extensive social and political efforts to advance this ideal. Shakespeare’s works, celebrated for their exploration of democratic themes, played a significant role in this movement (Ganjeh 2017: 7). Culturally, theaters and dramatic works became central to fostering a modern dramatic ethos, and theatrical arts inspired by Anglo-European traditions were enthusiastically adopted in Iran.

In Iran, “Modern theater” – in its westernized sense of the word - emerged in Rasht and through performances by Armenian actors in Isfahan and Tabriz (northwestern Iran). Tabriz, in particular, made substantial contributions to the development of Iranian theater in its modern form (Pourmohsen *Tarikhirani*). While many plays were translated for stage performances, records of Shakespearean productions are scarce. The earliest documented performances include *Othello*, staged in Azeri by Armenian actors in Tabriz in 1879 (Kuhestaninejad 2003: 11). Two other Shakespearean plays, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Merchant of Venice*, were directed by Rezā Āzarakhshi and were performed in Tehran at the Farhang or Pars Theater between 1902 and 1920 (“Pars Theater” 2013). Some studies suggest that the number of Shakespearean translations in Iran did not reflect his global prominence. One reason for this limited reception was the complexity of Shakespeare’s language compared to that of other writers (Horri 2003: 68). Additionally, bilingualism, a key to scholarly proficiency, was not widespread among Iranians in the 19th century. Nevertheless, the initially reserved reception of Shakespeare’s works during the Qājār Dynasty gradually diminished in the subsequent years, coinciding with the transition to the Pahlavi era.

6.2. Pahlavi I: The Effect of Political Attitudes on Art and Literature

Rezā Shāh (1878–1944) ascended to the throne of Iran in 1926. During his reign, he implemented a series of civilian changes, particularly in the areas of education, language, literature, and culture. For example, the number of educators increased significantly during this period (Abrahamian 2021: 144–145). Rezā Shāh was deeply committed to “modernizing” and westernizing the country. As part of this effort, he sought to transform Iranian theater, banning the performance of *Ta’zieh*, a traditional religious play, which he viewed as backward and incompatible with his vision of modernization (Ganjeh 2017: 21–24). He frequently attended theatrical performances,

primarily comedies directed by Seyed Ali Nasr (1891–1961). Although the number and quality of Iranian theaters improved under the Pahlavi Dynasty, they operated under strict limitations. The regime prohibited dramatic works with overt political themes (Shafie 2012: “Translation of the Dramatic Works”). Rezā Shāh, supported by court patronage and the military, wielded absolute power over the political system (Abrahamian 2021: 136–138). His authoritarian rule led to extensive censorship of literary works that did not align with his agenda. Published or performed works were expected to avoid social and political commentary, focusing instead on themes like love and family (Shafie 2012: “Translation of the Dramatic Works”).

Rezā Shāh's reign was marked by the propagation of radical nationalist sentiments and anti-Arab attitudes, which influenced many writers and translators. He attributed Iran's perceived backwardness to the so-called centuries of Arab Muslim domination (Abrahamian 2021: 123–124). Despite his nationalist fervor, his autocratic policies created significant barriers for the theater. The regime allowed the translation and staging of works that glorified exemplary kingship but banned those depicting the downfall of a king or chaotic political affair (Shafie 2012: “Translation of the Dramatic Works”). His ideological agenda emphasized the legacy and grandeur of Iran's past, a rejection of foreign influences, the idealization of kingship, and the revival of national values (Bozorgmehr 2000: 109–110).

Several Shakespearean works were translated during the Pahlavi era, including *Julius Caesar* by Mirzā Mohamad Khān Bahador, *Hamlet* (1601) and *Macbeth* (1605) by Soltān Hamid Amirsoleymani, and *Romeo and Juliet* by Aziz-Allah Sāmān (Bozorgmehr 2000: 130–138). Rezā Shāh's radical nationalism shaped the policies governing contemporary writers and translators, leaving a lasting impact on Iran's cultural landscape.

6.3. Pahlavi II: Development of Theater and Dramatic Literature in Iran

Iran's art and theater entered a transformative period following Rezā Shāh's abdication and the ascension of his son, Mohammad Rezā Shāh (1919–1979) in 1941. The social climate and the new king's cultural attitudes significantly influenced the direction of literary and artistic creations during this time. Iran's indirect involvement in World War II further contributed to a politically charged atmosphere. This era is characterized by the rapid growth of theaters and an unprecedented surge in the number of performances. Many former political activists returned to the theater, enhancing the quality and diversity of productions. Public enthusiasm for stage performances led to the establishment of several new theater halls, including Sa'di Theater Hall (1951), Ferdowsi Theater Hall (1946), and Nobahār Theater Hall. During this period, Shakespeare's works gained popularity among the political elite, with numerous plays being staged by Persian casts (Mossaki and Fadaei 2018: 7). Statistics show that over five hundred plays were translated and performed during this time (Jalayer and Anushiravani 2017: 56). In two volumes, Ala-ed-Din Pāzārgadi translated

Shakespeare's plays, encompassing all his tragedies and comedies, excluding his historical works (Partovi 2020: 141). The king's political outlook played a decisive role in shaping artistic choices during the reign of Pahlavi II.

Mass media became widely available. Recognizing the power of books to inform and influence public opinion, the Pahlavi II rule implemented strict policies to control and censor book content as a key aspect of its governance. Book censorship was intensified after the king consolidated his power following the 1953 coup. From 1963 to 1978, the government enforced its most severe censorship measures. This crackdown was largely driven by the emergence of a new wave of opposition that posed a threat to the monarchy ("Books and Press Censorship 2018," *Etemād*). During this time, Shakespearean plays such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* were banned because the regime viewed depictions of kings or princes being killed or dethroned as insulting to the royal family and a potential threat to the sovereign's authority (Jalayer and Anushiravani 2017: 56). Such themes, which portrayed abnormal or destabilizing social situations, were seen as metaphorical critiques of the ruling ideology.

The growing interest in European literary works extended beyond the younger generation, captivating audiences across all age groups (Hambly 2011: 140). To meet this demand, the number of translations increased significantly, and Shakespeare's plays were no exception. Many of his works gained widespread popularity, with multiple translations and frequent performances. Notable translations from this period include *Julius Caesar* by Farangīs Shādmān, *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Masoud Forozān, *Romeo and Juliet* by Ala-ed-Din Pāzārgadi, and *Richard III* by Rezā Barāheni in 1962. However, during both the first and the second Pahlavi, there were no significant adaptations of Shakespeare's plays and the focus remained primarily on translations and stage performances.

6.4. Post-Revolutionary Iran: The Emergence of a New phase of Adaptation

The fall of the Pahlavi regime in 1979 and the subsequent Revolution in Iran ushered in a new wave of translations and engagement with Anglo-European canonical works. While the first decade after the revolution saw a decline in stage performances, the following years witnessed a significant increase in translations and performances (Partovi 2020: 142). The cultural landscape of Iran underwent profound changes after the Revolution, reshaping the nature and scope of artistic and intellectual activities.

Between 1981 and 1991, Iran experienced a significant surge in its literary and cultural output. The annual number of published book titles jumped from 3,500 to 8,600, while periodicals increased from 100 to 501. Additionally, the number of public libraries grew from 415 to 550, and library users soared from 4 million to 14 million during the same period (Irfani 1996: 13). This period saw a remarkable surge in both readership and the volume of printed works (1996: 14). This rapid growth in publications during the early post-Revolutionary years reflected a heightened interest in literature and a new intellectual awareness among Iranians. The era provided fertile

ground for intellectual development, fostering a deeper appreciation for literature beyond its surface-level appeal. Audiences from diverse backgrounds grew rapidly, and their varied needs led to a substantial increase in the production of both original and translated works. Alongside the translation and performance of Anglo-European works, visual media adaptations and new genres expanded the ways in which Iranians engaged with these canonical texts.

The post-Revolutionary era also saw the development of Iran's film industry, introducing a new dimension of adaptation: visual media. Unlike pre-Revolutionary Iran, when such adaptations were rare, the post-Revolutionary period embraced visual media, including television, cinema, and home-video productions, as integral to cultural expression (Brujerdi and Hadād 1996: 218). As cultural products, visual media have played a crucial role in shaping and reshaping Iranian values, becoming an essential part of everyday life. In post-Revolutionary Iran, a wide array of Anglo-European plays and novels were adapted for visual media, with Shakespeare's works occupying a prominent place in this trend. Studies highlight a movie adaptation, a TV broadcast comic drama, and a recent home-video production as notable examples. Given the significance of media adaptations in this period, the following section will focus on three specific Shakespearean adaptations, examining the changes made and the motivations behind them.

Tardīd (*Doubt*, 2009), written and directed by Varuzh Karim-Masihi (b. 1952), is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Karim-Masihi reimagines certain characters and plot elements to reflect socio-cultural issues and aspects of Iranian society. The film features Siyāvash, a character analogous to Hamlet, and Mahtāb, who serves as Ophelia's counterpart. Other characters also have their equivalents: Siyāvash's friend Garo represents Horatio. While Siyavash and Hamlet share traits like passivity, Mahtāb diverges significantly from Ophelia in characterization (Ghandeharion and Heydari, "When Shakespeare Travels," 2017: 66–67). Unlike Ophelia, who descends into madness, famously declaring, "I do not know, my lord, what I should think" (Shakespeare, 1.3:113), Mahtāb remains resilient and proactive, striving to improve her circumstances. She is portrayed as intelligent and independent, refusing to conform to Siyāvash's passivity. This shift from Ophelia's submissiveness to Mahtāb's strength is one of the most notable changes in Karim-Masihi's adaptation. While Ophelia becomes fragile after losing her father and fiancé that expresses her despair with the line, "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!" (Shakespeare 3.1:163), Mahtāb embraces her solitude and demonstrates inner strength. Though a flat character, Mahtāb actively works to protect her family (Ghandeharion and Heydari, "When Shakespeare Travels," 70–71). This transformation from a dependent, fragile Ophelia to a strong, supportive Mahtāb reflects a new discourse on Iranian women, portraying them as socially active and empowered rather than passive and reliant.

As an adaptation of an English drama into Iranian cinema, *Tardīd* involves significant changes in language, setting, and time, necessitating culture-specific

alterations. For instance, the ghost scene from *Hamlet* is reimagined to fit into Iranian cultural sensibilities. The adaptation naturally deviates from the original as it recontextualizes *Hamlet* within a new cultural framework, particularly in its reinterpretation of self-doubt (Ghandeharion and Heydari, 2017: 75). Karim-Masihi indigenizes *Hamlet* at multiple levels—plot, characterization, setting, and even the ending. Ghandeharion and Heydari note that Karim-Masihi reinterprets the ghost scene while introducing Iranian culture to a global audience, blending it with references to iconic Persian poets like Khayyam (1048–1131) and Ferdowsi (940–1025) 2017: 80). The film’s happy ending, designed to resonate with Iranian audiences and shaped by its different socio-political context, may surprise those familiar with Shakespeare’s original tragedy.

Shakespeare’s works have also been adapted in *Kolāh Ghermezī*, a popular Iranian TV series directed by Iraj Tahmāsb. A staple of holiday programming on Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) for over two decades, *Kolāh Ghermezī* appeals to both children and adults. Tahmāsb incorporates Shakespearean plays into certain episodes, re-enacting characters while infusing them with cultural relevance. Though the series is rooted in an original concept, it interweaves various canonical works, creating an intertextual product. Among IRIB’s programs, *Kolāh Ghermezī* stands out for its emphasis on moral values and didactic tone, making it a favorite for families of all ages. In adapting Shakespeare, Tahmāsb focuses on social, moral, and cultural themes, deliberately avoiding the political undertones of the original plays. This distinguishes his work from the translations and performances of the Qājār and Pahlavi eras.

Tahmāsb’s adaptations transform Shakespeare’s tragedies to suit a new context, making them accessible to children by removing violent elements and highlighting some moral lessons. While at times mimicking Shakespeare’s poetic language and essence, Tahmāsb alters the tragic plots to surprise audiences familiar with the originals. These changes engage viewers who may have read or known the stories. In various episodes, characters from *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet* are reimagined with a comic twist to appeal to younger audiences. For example, the romance between Romeo and Juliet is restaged humorously, with puppets pausing to impart moral lessons, such as the dangers of gluttony. As Juliet poignantly expresses, “My only love sprung from my only hate!” (1.5:138), Tahmāsb’s focus on moral values follows his goal of educating children, and, to this end, he selects Shakespeare for the universal themes inherent in Shakespeare’s works. By removing the political undertones of Shakespeare’s plays and highlighting social and moral values, Tahmāsb crafts a distinctive adaptation tailored to the genre and audience of his puppet show. The *Kolāh Ghermezī* series provides a lens through which Iranian cultural values and societal norms are vividly articulated. It attempts to portray family dynamics and moral education by addressing contemporary issues like social responsibility and ethical behavior. For example, its humor and light-hearted tone allow it to tackle

serious themes from Shakespeare's works – such as jealousy and honor – in a way that is accessible to both children and families. Through this approach Tahmāsb aims to both preserve the essence of Shakespeare's narratives and at the same time recontextualize them, making them meaningful to Iranian society.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* inspired Mahmud Hosseynizād, a contemporary Iranian writer and translator, to write the novel *Twenty Mortal Wounds* in 2017. Known for his admiration of Shakespeare, Hosseynizād's adaptation is filled with moral qualms and hesitations, reflecting his deep engagement with Shakespeare's worldview. The novel tells the story of a family committing sins without remorse. They are greedy, envious, and adulterous, yet they outwardly present themselves as virtuous. In *Twenty Mortal Wounds*, Hosseynizād explores the deadly sins that lead to the downfall of the main characters. Mirroring *Macbeth*, the novel depicts a man's insatiable lust for power. He begins by killing an older man, a counterpart to Duncan, and continues on a path of murder and deceit for personal gain. Initially hesitant to commit even a minor sin, the protagonist becomes increasingly wicked, ultimately leading to his own destruction. The novel reimagines the themes and ideas of *Macbeth*, driven by Shakespeare's original plot.

Partially inspired by Hosseynizād's novel, *Mortal Wound* (2021), a recent home-video production written and directed by Mohammad-Hossein Mahdaviān, is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The title is drawn directly from a line in the play: "With twenty mortal murders on their crowns, / And push us from our stools" (Shakespeare 3.4: 80–81). The series is structured as a single episode divided into 20 sections. The protagonist, Malek, mirrors *Macbeth*, who famously contemplates, "I am in blood / Stepped in so far that should I wade no more" (Shakespeare 3.4: 131) that represents his entrapment in a cycle of violence. His wife, Samira, is a recreation of Lady *Macbeth*, portraying a character who is both manipulative and ambitious. Other characters from *Macbeth* also find their counterparts in *Mortal Wound*. Mahdaviān uses the central themes of *Macbeth* – ambition for power and familial strife – to reflect the social and cultural issues of contemporary Iran. The series depicts a chain of murders, much like *Macbeth*, with Haj-Amu (Duncan's counterpart), Malek, and other characters meeting their demise. Samira, like Lady *Macbeth*, descends into madness. While Mahdaviān's adaptation includes some alterations, the core plot and characters remain largely faithful to the original.

Samira's characterization closely parallels that of Lady *Macbeth*. Her personality is revealed through her ruthless actions, as she supports her husband, Malek, in his crimes. She persuades him to kill Haj-Amu and other relatives to secure their power. This resonates Lady *Macbeth*'s chilling words: "Look like the innocent flower, / But be the serpent under 't" (Shakespeare 1.5: 65–66). Samira is portrayed as a cunning and calculating woman, devoid of romantic feelings for her husband. While Malek is plagued by doubt and hesitation, Samira remains resolute, pushing him to carry out their violent plans. This dynamic mirrors Lady *Macbeth*'s manipulation

of Macbeth, as she deceives him with promises of a glorious future and the throne of Scotland, stating, “What’s done is done” (Shakespeare 3.2: 14). Both couples are driven by vanity and ambition, ultimately leading to their downfall. The endings of both the adaptation and the original tragedy are identical, highlighting Mahdaviān’s fidelity to Shakespeare’s text in this regard.

Mahdaviān employs Shakespeare’s universal themes to critique contemporary social issues, particularly focusing on the nature of relationships within families and between couples. The series portrays most male characters as womanizers. Haj-Amu, an older man, is depicted as Samira’s former lover. Malek, meanwhile, has a romantic relationship with his cousin, Mansureh, who is also Haj-Amu’s daughter. He has an affair with his much younger assistant as well. Minor characters exhibit similar behavior, further emphasizing the theme of infidelity. Female characters, with few exceptions, are portrayed as materialistic and emotionally detached from their husbands, prioritizing wealth over personal connections. The series repeatedly highlights fractured family ties, with little evidence of genuine affection or loyalty among family members. Women are not depicted as nurturing figures but rather as seductive and manipulative, using their sexuality and intelligence to control men.

Mahdaviān adapts themes from *Macbeth*, such as greed, ambition, envy, and the destructive consequences of fractured family relationships, while introducing new elements like disloyalty to underscore the disintegration of familial bonds. These additions enhance the contextualization of the source text, transforming the adaptation into a social critique. In this post-Revolutionary work, moral, social, and cultural issues take precedence over political concerns. Mahdaviān’s primary focus appears to be addressing the moral challenges of his era, with no overt political undertones in *Mortal Wound*. The series ultimately delivers a moral lesson: envy, greed, and irresponsibility toward one’s family lead to failure and ruin. Despite their differences, both Hosseinyzād’s novel and Mahdaviān’s series share a key feature: they focus on the social and moral themes of *Macbeth* rather than its political dimensions.

7. Conclusion

An examination of contemporary Iran across its distinct historical periods—the Qājār Dynasty, the Pahlavi I and II Dynasties, and post-Revolutionary Iran—reveals a dynamic evolution in the reception and adaptation of European literary works, particularly those of Shakespeare. During the pre-Revolutionary era, Shakespeare’s works were predominantly received through direct translations and theatrical performances, with minimal alteration to their original medium. These adaptations, though constrained by strict censorship and state surveillance, often carried subtle political undertones, reflecting the socio-political anxieties of the time. Translators and playwrights selectively engaged with Shakespeare’s texts to critique undemocratic governance and underscore the moral responsibilities of rulers, albeit within the limitations imposed by the regime.

In stark contrast, the post-Revolutionary period witnessed a significant transformation in both the form and content of Shakespearean adaptations. A new wave of creative reinterpretation emerged, characterized by the integration of Shakespeare's works into visual media. Over the past four decades, Iranian artists and writers have reimagined his plays through films, television series, home-video productions, and even novels, marking a departure from traditional theatrical performances. This shift in medium was accompanied by a parallel shift in thematic focus. While pre-Revolutionary adaptations often grappled with political themes, post-Revolutionary works increasingly turned their attention to social, cultural, and moral issues. Shakespeare's plays were adapted to explore themes such as the complexities of child-rearing, the evolving roles and challenges of men and women in contemporary society, and the intricacies of familial relationships. This transition not only reflects the changing priorities of Iranian society but also demonstrates the versatility of Shakespeare's works in addressing universal human experiences across different cultural and historical contexts. Through this lens, the adaptations serve as a mirror to the shifting values and concerns of Iran, bridging the gap between global literary traditions and local cultural narratives.

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