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The Taming of the Unruly Arab Shrew: El-Degheidy Reframes Shakespeare's Comedy for the Arab Screen

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Abstract

The Taming of the Shrew (1623) has been the subject of debate regarding the portrayal of Katherina as a submissive female character. In the Arab world, where patriarchal values are predominant and submissiveness is regarded as an essential trait in women, the play has undergone various adaptations. This paper aims to address an academic gap in the existing literature by closely examining El-Degheidy's cinematic adaptation, *Esstakoza [Lobster]* (1996), which decontextualize Shakespeare's play in the modernized Egyptian society. The paper draws on Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory, which postulates that adaptations are not mere reproductions of the original text but rather creative responses that transform the source material. Hutcheon's theory is particularly relevant to cinematic adaptations involving the translation from a telling mode to the showing mode, i.e., visual medium. By analyzing *Lobster*, the paper demonstrates how the adaptation both challenges and reinforces patriarchal values. The character of Esmat, the Arabic Shrew, is compared and contrasted with Katherina to reveal how the former reconceptualizes the latter in the light of contemporary social codes. The study finds that El-Degheidy utilizes modern Arabic social codes to reinterpret Shakespeare's play in a manner that is pertinent to contemporary audiences. It also reveals that *Lobster* reconfigures gender relations in a way that is distinct from the original play, without entirely rejecting patriarchal values. These findings highlight the complex and dynamic relationship between the adaptation of *Taming of the Shrew* and the cultural contexts in which *Lobster* is produced.

Keywords: Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, El-Degheidy's *Lobster/Esstakoza*, Cinematic Adaptation, Arabic Social Codes, Patriarchal Values, Gender Roles, Power Dynamics.

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1. Introduction

William Shakespeare (1564- 1616) is widely recognized as the greatest dramatist of all time, owing to his skillful and compelling plays. His works, which were produced in the 16th century, continue to captivate the audiences of the 21st century. Over time, many playwrights have attempted to revive Shakespeare and have created numerous reinterpretations of his plays. Similarly, contemporary screenwriters from around the world seek to adapt Shakespeare's plays into their local languages. The Egyptian film industry has also made significant contributions to the legacy of Shakespeare, particularly with its five adaptations of *The Taming of The Shrew* (1623): *Al-Zawjat al-Sabi'a (The Seventh Wife, 1950)*, *Banat Hawwa (Daughters of Eve, 1954)*, *Ah Min Hawwa (Beware of Eve, 1962)*, *Al-Mutamarrida (The Unruly Female, 1963)*, and *Esstakoza (Lobster, 1996)*. Among these, El-Degheidy's *Lobster* stands out as the most captivating, as evidenced by its depiction of Katharine (Esmat), the female director, the star quality, and its popularity in the Arab World.

This research paper examines the 1996 Egyptian film adaptation *Lobster*, directed by Enas El-Degheidy and starring Ahmed Zaki, Raghda Mahmoud, and Mamdouh Wafi. By relating *Lobster* to Shakespeare's comedy, the paper aims to demonstrate how this Arabic adaptation validates certain aspects of the socio-political environment of 1990s Egypt. It argues that the plot, themes, and storytelling mode of Shakespeare's comedy can be appropriately modified to fit Arab social culture. Additionally, the paper contends that El-Degheidy's portrayal of the female protagonist (Esmat) highlights the class and sexual tensions between Esmat (Katherina) of the Egyptian elite and engineer Abbass (Petruccio), a middle-class decoration specialist. *The Taming of The Shrew* is particularly adept at capturing the domesticity of Arab patriarchal societies, where "women should be chaste, silent, and obedient" (Dolan, 1996, p. 4). The film will be analyzed and compared to the play in a general manner to provide a comprehensive understanding of the differences between these two mediums.

Shakespeare's *The Taming of The Shrew* (1623) has garnered significant critical attention and has been adapted into various languages and cultural contexts. Khoury (2010) notes that the play has elicited strong reactions since its inception, with *The Shrew* being the first of Shakespeare's plays to be rewritten for the restoration theatres (p. 3). Costa (2012) similarly argues that critics and scholars have often denounced the play for its perceived barbarity, offensiveness, and misogyny and that its core theme of a man "taming woman has been widely criticized" (p. 1). Ursa (2012) adds that *The Taming of The Shrew* is representative of the folkloric trope of a male partner domesticating an unruly woman, depicting

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marriage as a battlefield between the sexes (p. 98). Moberly, (2016) argues in his “Critical Survey” that “Few scholars have addressed Arabic adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew*, though it remains among the most popular Shakespearean comedies in the Arab world” (p. 2). Whereas Baysal in his paper “Un-taming the Shrew” (2021) mentions that *The Taming of the Shrew* “can be considered a distinct play when compared to Shakespeare’s other plays. [Known] as the most adapted play [that] cannot be performed straight due to the ambiguities in the wife-taming plot and the mysterious silence of the female protagonist” (p. 116).

In a separate context, Ahmed Al-Reidy (2005) reviews the movie *Lobster* and notes that the lead actor, Ahmed Zaki, initially rejected the movie because of a scene where the female protagonist hits him in a sensitive area. However, the female director Enas Al-Degheidy insisted on keeping the scene as a pivotal plot point driving subsequent events in the movie. In the wake of the sudden demise of the renowned Egyptian star in 2005, the film *Lobster* witnessed a remarkable surge in critical attention. In subsequent years, a growing number of writers, journalists, and directors engaged with the film in various ways, particularly through the lens of the star’s death and legacy.

In a recent publication, journalist Mona Abdulsalam (2021) underscores Ahmed’s versatility as an actor, highlighting his portrayal of diverse characters on screen. Notably, she draws attention to his portrayal of the tamer of shrew in *Lobster*, a character that he embodied with great skill and nuance. Abdul Salam also notes that Ahmed was popularly known as “the black panther” and “the emperor”, two titles that attest to his enduring impact on the Egyptian cinema industry (p. 2). This growing body of critical analysis attests to the lasting impact of Ahmed’s contributions to the film industry and his cultural legacy. As such, the continued attention to *Lobster* and other films in which he appeared, serves as a testament to his enduring influence on the arts in Egypt and beyond. In “Egyptian Movies, You Didn’t Know Was Based on Literary Classics”, Nada Abdulqader (2021) writes: “Shakespeare’s fine comedy *The Taming of The Shrew* is one literary work you will love to see adapted, [Despite the previous well-done *Ah Min Hawa* adaptation], another attempt would not hurt...It gave us the best of Ahmed Zaki in *Lobster*” (p. 2).

Despite the substantial volume of literature that has been published on the adaptation of Shakespeare’s iconic comedy, *The Taming of The Shrew*, within diverse theoretical frameworks, it has come to attention that the Arabic adaptation of the play, *Lobster*, has been relatively overlooked in existing scholarship. Therefore, the principal objective of this paper is to undertake a meticulous analysis and comparison of these two mediums focusing on the characterization shifts that

have been employed by the renowned Egyptian filmmaker, Enas El-Degheidy, in her adaptation. The research questions that will guide this analysis include investigating the adaptive techniques that have been used by El-Degheidy to relate *The Taming of The Shrew* to *Lobster* and examining the portrayal of Shakespeare's Shrew within the Arab world, as well as the explicit variations added to the film in terms of appropriation, indigenization, and salvaging.

To adequately address these research questions, this paper will draw on the adaptation aspects developed by Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013). The study will utilize Hutcheon's adaptive techniques, which encompass six questions: What? Who? Why? How? Where?, and When?. This approach will illustrate how adaptation should be regarded as another form of art. In addition to the primary sources of *Lobster* and *The Taming of The Shrew*, this paper will also draw on academic articles, book and film reviews, and critical perspectives to present a more objective conclusion while highlighting the differences between the two mediums. Hutcheon (2013) posits that adaptation is a creative process that involves more than simply replicating the original work in another medium. Thus, this paper will demonstrate the applicability of Hutcheon's adaptive techniques in exploring how El-Degheidy transformed *The Taming of The Shrew* into *Lobster*.

2. Linda Hutcheon's Transformative Impact on Adaptation Studies

Linda Hutcheon has made significant contributions to the fields of literary theory, postmodernism, and adaptation studies. In her book, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013), Hutcheon explores the concept of adaptation as a creative process that involves both the transformation and the preservation of the source material. She argues that adaptation is not a new phenomenon but has existed since ancient times. She defines adaptation as "the process by which a literary source is transformed in the creation of a new work" (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 2). According to Hutcheon (2013), adaptation involves a complex interplay of continuity and change, as the adapted work both preserves and transforms its source material. She contends that adaptation is not simply a matter of copying or imitating the original text but requires a creative engagement with it, as well as an awareness of the historical and cultural context in which both the original and the adaptation are produced (p. 20).

Hutcheon theorizes that adaptation is always a form of interpretation, as the adapter must make choices about what to include, omit, or change from the source material. She argues that the process of adaptation involves a negotiation between fidelity to the original and the need for creative innovation. In this sense, Hutcheon (2013) sees adaptation as a form of "metafiction" a term she uses to describe self-reflexive works that draw attention to their fictional status (p. 18). According to

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her, the self-reflexivity of adaptation allows it to comment on the process of adaptation itself, as well as on the cultural and historical context in which it is produced.

She claims that adaptation is always intertextual, that it is always in dialogue with other texts, whether they are literary, cultural, or historical. Hutcheon contends that adaptation creates new meanings by placing the source material in a new context or by juxtaposing it with other texts. In this sense, adaptation is not only a creative process but also a critical one, as it allows the adapter to comment on the original text and its cultural significance. Hutcheon's work on adaptation has been influential in the field of adaptation studies.

A Theory of Adaptation (2013) is a groundbreaking work that has had a significant impact on the field of adaptation studies. Her emphasis on the creative and critical potential of adaptation, as well as her focus on its intertextual and historical dimensions, has opened up new avenues of inquiry and has challenged traditional notions of fidelity and authenticity in adaptation. Hutcheon's work has been instrumental in expanding our understanding of the complex processes involved in adaptation and has helped to establish adaptation as a legitimate and important field of study.

Hutcheon (2013) argues that each artistic medium has its unique features and limitations, which impact the adaptation process. She notes that when adaptations involve a change of medium, questions arise about the nature of the original work and its relationship to the new medium (p. 33). She further discusses the concept of "telling" versus "showing" in adaptation, where the source material may rely heavily on narration or description, which can be challenging to translate into a visual medium. She also explores the challenge of adapting between different modes, such as from telling to showing or vice versa, and discusses the issues posed by the current trend of novelizations, where adaptations must dramatize the novel's description, narration, and represented thoughts into speech, actions, sounds, and visual images (p. 38).

Hutcheon (2013) focuses on the adapters themselves and why they choose to adapt certain works. She explores the various motives behind the adaptation, including economic incentives, legal constraints, cultural capital, personal and political motives, and more (p. 85). She also discusses intentionality in adaptation and how the adapter's choices can impact the meaning and reception of the adapted work (p. 105). Hutcheon delves into the role of the audience in the adaptation process. She explores the different pleasures of adaptation, including recognition, nostalgia, and intertextuality, and notes the importance of knowing and unknowing audiences in the reception of adaptations as well as the different modes of

engagement with adaptation and the different degrees of immersion that audiences can experience (Hutcheon, 2003, pp. 120-133). Further, she explores the vastness of the contexts in which adaptations are created and received. She delves into transcultural adaptation and the challenges of adapting works across different cultures and languages (p. 145). She discusses the concept of indigenization, where an adapted work is modified to reflect the culture and values of a specific location or group (p. 154).

Throughout the book, Hutcheon emphasizes the importance of analyzing actual practice to question commonly held theoretical generalizations about adaptation. She highlights the unique constraints and possibilities of each medium and how they impact the adaptation process and notes the importance of considering the intentions of the adapter and the expectations of the audience in the reception of adaptations. (Hutcheon, 2013, pp. 72-95)

3. From Script to Screen: Approaches to Analyzing Film Adaptations

Film analysis involves examining various approaches, such as those outlined in Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film*. The process of adapting a novel or play to the screen can be broken down into two parts. The first part involves literary components that can be easily transferred, such as the main confrontation or plot. These components are not tied to one particular semiotic system and can be readily translated to the screen. The second part involves more complex aspects that require adaptation, such as characterization, which is closely tied to the semiotic system in which it is manifested.

McFarlane classifies the elements of a novel into two categories. The first category comprises transferable elements, which can be easily adapted from the written word to the screen, such as narrative. The second category involves elements that require intricate adaptation processes, as their effects are closely tied to the semiotic system in which they are manifested (McFarlane, 1996, p. 145). For example, the way a character speaks, or the setting of a particular scene may require various adaptation techniques to be effectively translated to the screen. One of the most significant challenges in adaptation is the compression of time. While a book may take hours or days to read, a film typically has a runtime of around two hours. This necessitates that the dialogue between characters is condensed or even omitted altogether. Sometimes minor and significant changes to the plot and characters may also be necessary to ensure the story is effectively translated to the screen.

In summary, film analysis involves examining the various aspects of a film, including its adaptation from written works to the screen. The process of adaptation

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can be divided into two parts, with some elements easily transferable and others requiring intricate adaptation processes. The compression of time is a challenge in adapting a written text to film, and this often requires the condensation or omission of dialogue and changes to the plot and characters.

3.1. An Egyptian Twist on Shakespeare

Adaptations are often harshly criticized and evaluated as mere copies of their source material. The 20th and 21st centuries have been dubbed the age of adaptation, thanks to modern devices that allow for a wide range of adaptations, such as radio plays, films, and online games. However, adaptations have existed since ancient times. Shakespeare borrowed ideas for his works from various authors of his day, and the copyright was not an issue then. Several factors influence the process of adaptation, such as the transference between media, the individual contributions of each production member and actor, and the individual perceptions of the audience.

Each medium has its unique attributes and though the translation from one medium to another is necessary there are inevitable disadvantages in every medium. Therefore, Hutcheon (2013) explains that “Transferring to another medium (or even within it) always means change: there will always be both gains and losses” (p. 16). In the case of film adaptations, the production team (including the director, actors, cinematographers, and staff working behind the scenes) plays a crucial role. Each individual involved in the production brings a unique perspective, which affects the final product.

Theatrical performances of plays can also be considered as adaptations, with each performance being unique and influenced by the specific individuals involved. A crucial difference between creating a film and a play is that the former involves the collaboration of many people, while the latter is the creation of a single person. Therefore, it can be more challenging to represent an original author’s idea during a shoot, as each person involved in the production may perceive and imagine it differently.

Another critical factor in how an adaptation is perceived is the audience. Audiences’ experiences, thoughts, and preferences play a vital role in shaping their feedback, and gender, and racial politics, as well as national, cultural, or temporal changes, can also influence the reception of adaptations (Hutcheon, 2003. p. 48). Familiarity with the original work is also a significant factor. If the original work is unfamiliar to the audience, the production team has more freedom to make significant changes to the adaptation. However, if the original work is well-known, certain audience expectations must be met, and failure to do so can lead to negative

feedback. Adaptations offer a fresh perspective on the original material and should be evaluated objectively based on its merit. Filmmakers must also be aware of the popularity of the work they are adapting and the consequences of making significant or minor changes.

Shakespeare's renowned play, *The Taming of The Shrew* (1623), portrays "describes the volatile courtship between the shrewish Katharina (Kate) and the canny Petruchio, who is determined to subdue Katharina's legendary temper and win her dowry." (Bevington, 2023. para.1) As the eldest daughter of a wealthy merchant, Katharine's ferocity and commanding speech have driven away many suitors, hindering her younger sisters' prospects for marriage. Bailey and Dillon contend that Petruchio ultimately rescues Katharine from a bleak future, as Dillon suggests that without him, she "would [have become] a witch or a madwoman" (Costa, 2012, p. 1). However, this perspective has faced criticism from feminist scholars who argue that it reduces Katharine, a woman living in the 16th century, to a mere dependency on men and suggests that marriage is the only option for her. Despite her two sisters being equally beautiful, Katharine stands out as the most fierce and authoritative, and according to tradition, as well as certain cultural practices such as those found in the Arab world, the eldest daughter must marry first. In the play, Katharine's father offers a substantial dowry to any man who may win her hand in marriage, while in El-Degheidy's adaptation, Esmat is already engaged.

When Katherina receives a marriage proposal from a wealthy young man who is well-known for his love for money, as usual, she rejects the proposal, but the young man does not give up and continues his plans telling her father she is contesting: "Father, 'tis thus: yourself and all the world, That talk'd of her, have talk'd amiss of her [...] Moreover, to conclude, we have 'greed so well together, That upon Sunday is the wedding day" (II, ii. ll. 280-289). Through a variety of techniques that some critics deem cruel, Shakespeare's Petruchio successfully subdues the shrewish Katherina, until she transforms into a submissive wife. This transformation highlights the societal norms of the 15th and 16th century where women were oppressed and marginalized. Shakespeare's use of words like "serve", "obey" and "kneel" (V, ii. ll.170-185) reveals the limited options available for women in terms of asserting their rights, as any attempts to do so were considered as creating unnecessary conflicts.

Despite its potential limitations, the film serves as a crucial addition to the history of Western adaptations of *The Taming of The Shrew* and Arabic Shakespeare studies. Its use of imaginative scenes, treatment of Shakespeare's plot, performances, and music offers valuable insights into the reframing of Shakespeare

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in Arabic. In contrast, *Lobster*, directed by Enas El-Degheidy, marks a departure from her usual realistic and socially themed films, known for their controversial explicit scenes. However, the film stands out for its depiction of a financially independent Shrew (Esmat). Released on February 20, 1996, the film revolves around Abbass (Petruccio), an interior designer from Hurghada, who intends to marry Adila, an athletic sports instructor. Before the marriage is consummated, Abbass faces trouble with Esmat (Katherina), the owner of the villa he is decorating. Esmat's attack on Abbass leads to his inability to function as a man; then other events accumulate to shape a comedy: a series of comical quarrels, a happy ending for Ahmed and Raghda, and the union of Donia and Mamdouh Wafi. In the end, Esmat's aunt, Zahira Hanim (Baptista), convinces her to marry Abbass to avoid imprisonment for her actions. However, the real motive behind this persuasion is to have Esmat tamed, echoing the desire of Katherina's father in the original play.

3.2. From Shakespeare's Padua to El-Degheidy's Hurghada: The Indigenization and Recontextualization of *The Taming of The Shrew*

In Egypt, particularly in the coastal city of Hurghada in 1996, women were generally expected to adhere to traditional gender roles and social codes that emphasized their submissiveness to men. This was influenced by both religious and cultural factors. Women were often expected to dress modestly, covering their hair and bodies, in public spaces. This was particularly true in more conservative areas, such as rural villages or small towns. In urban areas, such as Hurghada, there was more diversity in the way women dressed and behaved in public, but there was still an underlying expectation that women should be respectful and modest.

In terms of family life, women were generally expected to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers above their own personal goals or aspirations. This often meant that they would be responsible for managing the household, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children. In more conservative families, women were often discouraged from pursuing higher education or careers outside of the home. These expectations extended to interactions between men and women in public spaces. Women were often expected to be polite and deferential to men and to avoid behaviors that could be perceived as flirtatious or provocative. This could include avoiding eye contact, keeping a distance from men, and speaking softly and respectfully.

It is worth noting, however, that these expectations varied depending on factors such as socio-economic status, education level, and religious beliefs. In

Hurghada, for example, there were many women who worked in the tourism industry and had more exposure to Western cultural norms. These women may have had more freedom to dress and behave as they chose, but they would still have been expected to be respectful and modest in their interactions with men. While there may have been some variations depending on individual circumstances, the social codes of submissiveness to men were generally present in Egyptian society and in Hurghada in 1996.

El-Degheidy situates *Lobster* within contemporary 1990s Egypt, specifically in Hurghada. The protagonist, Esmat, is portrayed as the owner of a villa, in which the middle-class engineer Abbass is putting the finishing touches on the decoration. Esmat's apparent Westernized style and dress could be the result of her exposure to different cultures and fashion trends during her time living in Europe. It is possible that she was able to experience more freedom in terms of expressing herself through fashion and style than she had previously, leading to a shift in her personal aesthetic. In the opening scenes of the movie, Esmat is shown as being very particular about the decorations being done for a special occasion. It is possible that she had a clear vision of how the decorations should look and felt that Abbass's initial work did not meet her expectations. Alternatively, it is possible that there were specific cultural or personal elements that she wanted to see in the decoration, and she may have felt that they were not being adequately represented in the original design. Whatever the reason, Esmat's dissatisfaction with the decoration underscores her attention to detail and high standards for the final product; thus, she demanded that the entire job should be redone. Meanwhile, Abbass is waiting to receive payment for his work from Esmat, who is making things difficult for him. Esmat's superiority complex is evident in her desire to marry before her perceived inferiors, such as Adila and Abbass, who are planning their nuptials. This behavior recalls the traditional custom of the eldest sister marrying first, as seen in Shakespeare's comedy through Baptista's insistence to have Katherina wed before Bianca (I.ii. 1. 270).

El-Degheidy employs Esmat's smooth and quick karate kick as a crucial element in the movie's development, highlighting the power dynamics and tensions between sexes. Despite Abbass's recent decoration of Esmat's villa, their initial meeting is fraught with tension and unfriendliness. Esmat's stubbornness exacerbates the situation, despite the presence of her cousin and future husband, Tawfiq. The altercation reaches a violent climax when Esmat assaults Abbass with a dangerous karate move, causing him to fall to the ground and cry out in pain. This pivotal scene serves as a turning point in the plot, ultimately leading to Abbass's diagnosis of a permanent disability that renders him unable to marry and have

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children. The inclusion of this plot point underscores the impact of Esmat's actions and the consequences of violence and aggression. It is worth noting that this scene is controversial for its portrayal of violence and disability, especially in terms of Arab social codes and what is expected from women's submissiveness to men. However, it also serves as a powerful example of the ways in which film can explore complex themes and issues and elicit strong emotional responses from audiences.

After Abbass is diagnosed with a permanent disability, his doctor recommends that he undergo physical therapy and adhere to a prescribed treatment plan (El-Degheidy, 1996, 00.28:15). As part of his recovery process, the doctor suggests that he consume seafood such as *Lobster*, which is then used as the inspiration for the film's title (El-Degheidy, 1996, 00.32:08). In response to Abbass's injury, his fiancée travels abroad to seek treatment for him. While she is away, Esmat's aunt suggests that she visit Abbass in the hospital and apologize for her previous violent outburst (El-Degheidy, 1996, 00.34:03). However, Esmat stubbornly refuses, stating that "it is impossible; there is no way that I apologize to a man" (El-Degheidy, 1996, 00.32:26), but Esmat's unyielding refusal to apologize not only reveals her stubbornness but also highlights her unwavering sense of pride and conviction.

Throughout the film, other characters refer to Esmat as a "shrew," emphasizing her fierce and sometimes abrasive personality. While this term could be seen as derogatory, it also serves to highlight Esmat's strength and determination in the face of adversity. Similarly, Abbass's lawyer describes Esmat as "more ferocious than a shrew" during court proceedings (El-Degheidy, 1996, 00.42:32). While this description could be seen as negative, it also serves to emphasize Esmat's ability to stand up for herself and take charge in difficult situations.

El-Degheidy employs Hutcheon's concept of salvaging techniques to maintain a strong connection with the original text while also presenting her own unique interpretation. This is particularly evident in her portrayal of Esmat as a fierce and uncompromising character, often referred to as a shrew. One particular scene that exemplifies this characterization occurs during the court proceedings where Abbass is suing Esmat for causing him permanent disability. Abbass's lawyer delivers a powerful speech, vividly describing Esmat's violent attack on Abbass and painting her as a fearsome and ruthless creature. The lawyer implores the judges to observe his client, who "once a potent man, now stands powerless before a woman, or rather, a creature more ferocious than a shrew" (El-Degheidy, 1996, 00.42:32). By including this reference to the original text, El-Degheidy establishes a clear connection between her adaptation and Shakespeare's play.

However, she also adds her own unique interpretation, emphasizing Esmat's strength and independence as a woman. This serves to update and modernize the original text while still staying true to its core themes and messages.

To further support El-Degheidy's use of salvaging techniques, Hutcheon's concept of recontextualization in the form of "historiographic metafiction" can be applied. According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction involves "the use of metafictional elements in historical fiction" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 5). By employing salvaging techniques to maintain a close connection with the original text, El-Degheidy is engaging in historiographic metafiction.

Furthermore, Esmat's characterization as a shrew can be seen as a commentary on gender roles and societal expectations in Egypt during the 1990s. In this patriarchal society, women were often expected to be meek and submissive, and Esmat's behavior goes against these expectations. El-Degheidy's portrayal of Esmat as a strong and independent woman challenges these societal norms and highlights the need for more gender equality. One scene that exemplifies this claim is when Esmat refuses to apologize to Abbass for her violent attack on him, despite the urging of her aunt. This refusal to apologize can be seen as a form of resistance against societal expectations of female subservience.

El-Degheidy skillfully explores the theme of gender roles in *Lobster* by highlighting the power dynamics between Esmat and Abbass in court. Despite her fierce personality, Esmat finds herself at a disadvantage when the ruling favors Abbass. Her aunt becomes aware of the gravity of the situation and the possibility of Esmat facing imprisonment if she fails to comply with Abbass's demands. In a bid to lessen the sentence, Abbass proposes that Esmat marries him, and in return, he would reduce the term to three months. This deviation from Shakespeare's *The Taming of The Shrew*, where Petruchio is motivated by the reward of marrying Katherina as offered by her father, Baptista, showcases the complexities of the situation in *Lobster*. Unlike Petruchio, Abbass is not motivated by material gains but by his desire to teach Esmat a lesson for her haughty demeanor. In Arab societies, manhood, social status and reputation hold great significance, and an individual's behavior is often judged based on how it conforms to society's expectations. This is particularly true when it comes to gender roles, where women are expected to behave with modesty and humility, especially towards men. Thus, Esmat's behavior in the movie can be seen as a violation of Arab social codes of conduct as she refuses to apologize to Abbass and behaves in a haughty manner towards him. However, Abbass's motivations in the movie can also be understood in the context of Arab social codes. Abbass's desire to "tame" Esmat can also be linked to the idea of patriarchal control, where men are seen as having the power to

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control women's behavior and actions. This idea is deeply rooted in Arab societies, where patriarchal structures and gender roles are deeply ingrained. Thus, Abbass's desire to marry Esmat to "tame" her and to "teach her a lesson" can be seen as a reflection of these societal norms and expectations. In addition to the cultural norms surrounding the value of humility, Arab societies place a great emphasis on the role of men as providers for their families. It would be considered shameful for a man to be motivated solely by material gains in pursuing a woman, as it could be perceived as a failure to uphold his responsibilities as a provider. Therefore, Abbass's motivation to teach Esmat a lesson for her haughty demeanor rather than to seek material gain is consistent with traditional Arab social codes that emphasize the importance of male honor and responsibility. It is also noteworthy that Abbass's proposal to Esmat is met with resistance due to the class differences between them. In Arab societies, social class is a significant determinant of marriage eligibility, and marrying outside of one's social class is often viewed with skepticism or disapproval. El-Degheidy's portrayal of Abbass's motivation to tame Esmat as driven by his desire to uphold traditional values of male responsibility and honor, rather than material gain, is in keeping with Arab cultural norms. It also highlights the complexities of gender and class dynamics in Egyptian society during the 1990s, which were shaped by both traditional values and modern social changes.

El-Degheidy uses this plot twist to draw attention to the class differences between Esmat and Abbass, which further complicates their relationship. Despite this shift, El-Degheidy does not entirely abandon the theme of taming. Instead, Abbass retorts to Esmat's rejection by suggesting that marrying him is the best way to tame her, comparing it to the "rehabilitation of criminals in prison" (El-Degheidy, 1996, 00.50:40). This statement highlights the director's intention to explore the theme of taming in a different context. Furthermore, El-Degheidy's use of this theme provides insight into societal expectations of gender roles in Egypt during the 1990s, where men were expected to exert control and dominance over women. Abbass's desire to "tame" Esmat can be seen as a reflection of these societal norms and expectations. However, it is important to note that El-Degheidy's portrayal of Abbass's motivation to "tame" Esmat is not driven solely by material gain, as it would be considered shameful in Arab culture for men to be drawn to women based on their wealth (El-Degheidy, 1996, 00.23:07). Instead, Abbass's actions can be understood in the context of traditional Arab social codes that emphasize the importance of male responsibility and honor. Therefore, El-Degheidy's use of the theme of taming in the movie serves as a commentary on the complexities and nuances of gender and class dynamics in Egyptian society during the 1990s. It highlights the societal expectations placed on men to exert control

over women, while also acknowledging the significance of traditional Arab values such as male honor and responsibility.

Esmat demonstrates her stubbornness by displaying defiance even during her wedding ceremony. While in Shakespeare's *The Taming of The Shrew*, Katherina declares her obedience to her husband by saying, "Place your hands below your husband's foot: In token of which duty if he pleases. My hand is ready; may it do him ease" (V.i.L.189-191), Esmat behaves quite differently. She places her hand above Abbass's. This act demonstrates Esmat's unwillingness to submit to the patriarchal norms of Egyptian society during the 1990s. Furthermore, Esmat's agreement on black attire for the wedding ceremony is also significant. Traditionally, brides in Egyptian culture wear a white dress symbolizing their purity and happiness. However, Esmat wears a black dress instead, which symbolizes grief and mourning. This choice of attire can be seen as Esmat's rejection of the societal expectation of women to be happy and grateful on their wedding day. Instead, she chooses to express her true emotions, which are not in line with what is expected of her as a woman in Egyptian society. These acts of defiance by Esmat during her wedding ceremony demonstrate the complexities of gender roles in Egyptian society during the 1990s. El-Degheidy uses these actions to highlight the issues of gender roles and societal expectations in Egypt during that time.

The film's adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy is further emphasized when Zahira Hanim informs Abbass that Esmat's father had always desired a son and treated Esmat as if she were one. This upbringing, unfortunately, led to her becoming an angry shrew, a character flaw that only her husband can resolve (El-Degheidy, 1996, 01:32:10). El-Degheidy uses this as one of many various techniques to recontextualize Shakespeare's original. Esmat's father does not play a role in the film, but his position is replaced by Esmat's aunt, Zahira Hanim. Over time, Esmat's feelings towards Abbass begin to change, and she starts to develop feelings for him. Following his recovery from the assumed permanent disability caused by Esmat's assault, Abbass decides to seek revenge by accusing her and her cousin of theft. Zahira Hanim intervenes to resolve the issue, allowing Abbass to take revenge and tame Esmat. Esmat willingly agrees to marry Abbass and travel to Paris to seek treatment for his disability.

El-Degheidy's adaptation of *The Taming of The Shrew* is a unique take on the original play that highlights the story's timeless themes of gender, power, and transformation. Through the character of Esmat, El-Degheidy explores the effects of societal expectations on gender roles and how they can lead to problematic behavior. In the film, Esmat's father's desire for a son creates a situation in which Esmat is raised as a boy, leading her to develop a fiery temperament that eventually

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earns her the label of a shrew. Her behavior creates problems in her relationship with men, and it is only through her marriage to Abbass that she learns to tame her shrewish tendencies and become a more obedient and loving wife.

The recontextualization of Katharine's father as Esmat's aunt, Zahira Hanim, is a significant departure from Shakespeare's original play. It allows for a more nuanced exploration of the gender roles at play and how they affect Esmat's character development. Zahira Hanim serves as a wise mentor to Esmat, guiding her through the process of transformation and helping her to correct her errors of judgment. The film's ending, in which Esmat willingly agrees to marry Abbass and travel with him to Paris for the treatment of his disability, is also an interesting departure from the original text. In Shakespeare's play, the ending is more ambiguous, with Katherina's final speech often interpreted as ironic or subversive. El-Degheidy's adaptation, however, emphasizes the idea of transformation and redemption, with Esmat and Abbass's marriage symbolizing a newfound harmony between the sexes (El-Degheidy, 1996, 01:22:15).

El-Degheidy's adaptation explores the theme of taming, which is also present in Shakespeare's original comedy. Abbass's role as the one who tames Esmat is parallel to Petruchio's role. However, the film also deviates from the original play by incorporating new characters such as Zahira Hanim and exploring the idea of revenge and its consequences on relationships. Despite these differences, El-Degheidy manages to capture the essence of Shakespeare's comedy in her film adaptation.

Zahira Hanim's revelation of Abbass's noble actions contributes to the increasing intimacy between Esmat and Abbass. When Esmat learns that Abbass had waived the large sum of money awarded to him by the court as compensation for her actions, her opinion of him changes. Unlike Petruchio's greedy pursuit of wealth, Abbass shows no signs of cruelty towards Esmat and treats her with kindness despite her demeaning behavior. This realization alters Esmat's perception of Abbass and prompts her to consider him as a suitable life partner. She recognizes that a luxurious lifestyle devoid of love holds no value compared to the genuine affection and passion shown by Abbass, a poor engineer (El-Degheidy, 1996, 01:22:15). However, their love is not without obstacles. When Esmat discovers Abbass's romantic involvement with his ex-fiancée Adila, she requests a divorce, which Abbass grants. Esmat then marries her cousin Tawfiq, while Abbass decides to marry his previous fiancée, only to later discover that Adila is already married to his friend Marzouk. These events highlight the theme of transformation and how people can change their behavior and attitudes toward love and

relationships. Despite the obstacles, the film ultimately ends on a positive note, with Esmat and Abbass finding true love and happiness with each other.

El-Degheidy's *Lobster* highlights the theme of power dynamics and manipulation to achieve one's desires. In the film, Zahira Hanim, Esmat's aunt, plays a pivotal role in ending Esmat's forced marriage to her cousin Tawfiq and reuniting her with Abbass. Zahira Hanim's request to Abbass's lawyer for the return of the dowry he had previously waived serves as a clever tactic to create a situation where Abbass must act to reclaim Esmat. This cunning move is a nod to the original play, where Petruchio's manipulation and control over Katherina is seen as a form of taming. Abbass's abduction of Esmat and his refusal to let her marry Tawfiq without her consent highlight the idea of male dominance and control present in the original play. Esmat's eventual submission to Abbass and her vow to treat him better signify her transformation from a shrew to a tamed woman, another central theme of the play.

In the film, there is a pivotal moment when Esmat realizes her true feelings for Abbass and recognizes that her previous behavior towards him was unjustified. This realization prompts her to reevaluate her actions and consider how she can treat him better. Esmat reflects on the importance of having the right man in her life and yielding to him to find true happiness (01:43:22). This moment highlights the theme of power dynamics and control that runs throughout the film. Esmat's willingness to yield to Abbass represents a shift in their relationship and marks the beginning of a more equal partnership. It also underscores the idea that true happiness in a relationship comes not from dominance or control but from mutual respect and understanding.

El-Degheidy's reinforces the message that Shakespeare's original play sought to convey regarding the importance of mutual respect and understanding in a relationship. Despite the changes and additions to the plot and characters, El-Degheidy's adaptation remains true to the essence of Shakespeare's comedy. The use of revenge as a plot device and the incorporation of new characters adds a fresh perspective to the story while still maintaining its original themes. By highlighting the theme of power dynamics, El-Degheidy's adaptation portrays a complex view of relationships, where both parties must learn to navigate the power struggle to find love and happiness.

This ending serves as a culmination of the themes present throughout the film. It highlights the power dynamics present in relationships, particularly those between men and women. Abbass's actions demonstrate his desire to have control over Esmat, and his willingness to take drastic measures to achieve it. Additionally, the film's portrayal of gender roles and societal expectations is further emphasized

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by this ending, as it depicts Esmat breaking free from the constraints of a passionless marriage and finding true love with a man who treats her with respect. Furthermore, the role of Zahira Hanim in Abbass's plan illustrates the importance of community and familial support in achieving one's goals. El-Degheidy's use of this cunning ruse to end *Lobster* serves as a powerful conclusion to the film, highlighting its themes and providing a satisfying resolution to the complex relationships portrayed throughout.

3.3. Investigating the Parallels: Stronger Women in Modern Egypt

The portrayal of female characters and their domestication in El-Degheidy's *Lobster* and Shakespeare's *The Taming of The Shrew* reveals stark differences in the way women are presented in both works though both mediums have male protagonists, who dominate their female counterparts. In *The Taming of The Shrew*, Katherina is mistreated and belittled by Petruchio. She is essentially forced to submit to Petruchio's will and adopt a submissive and obedient attitude toward him. Petruchio's process of domestication is depicted as cruel and violent to the verge of domestic violence. This violence is intended to break Katherina's spirit and force her to submit. Shakespeare's portrayal of Katherina's domestication is problematic, as it reinforces the idea that women are inferior to men and need to be controlled and tamed. Emily Detmer, (1997) notes "Feminist and cultural historians have convincingly demonstrated that rebellious women were a concern for Englishmen during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (p. 1).

El-Degheidy's portrayal of Esmat is vastly different. Esmat is depicted as an independent and free-spirited woman who ultimately decides to stay with Abbass out of love and passion. Esmat's intimate feelings are what ultimately tame her, as she realizes that her arrogance towards men does not bring her true happiness, which she eventually finds with this middle-class engineer. Devoid of domestic violence, *Lobster* depicts Esmat's willingness to be tamed. This adaptation challenges the traditional portrayal of female characters as being inferior and in need of male control. Moreover, El-Degheidy's portrayal of the female characters in terms of dress codes highlights their liberation of choice, which was not necessarily applicable to Shakespeare's comedy. The way the characters dress in *Lobster* shows that they have the freedom to choose how they want to present themselves to the world, and they are not restricted by societal norms.

Furthermore, how the male characters tame their female counterparts differs in these two works. While Petruchio's taming of Katherina occurs after their marriage, Abbass only agrees to keep Esmat once she has fallen in love with him.

This contrast is indicative of the different attitudes towards women's agency and autonomy in the two works, with El-Degheidy presenting a more empowering portrayal of women. Despite these differences in how the characters are depicted, both the literary and cinematic works offer a comedic and satisfying ending for Abbass and Petruchio, which reinforces the idea of male dominance. However, it is worth noting that El-Degheidy's portrayal of Esmat challenges this idea by highlighting her agency and freedom of choice in the process of domestication, ultimately offering a more delicate and empowering portrayal of female characters.

In *The Taming of The Shrew*, the character of Katherina is portrayed as a headstrong and independent woman who resists the authority of men. She is described as having a sharp tongue and a fiery temper, which often leads her into arguments and fights. Katherina's behavior is seen as unacceptable in the patriarchal atmosphere of the play, where women are expected to be obedient and subservient to men. Throughout the play, Katherina is subjected to various attempts of taming. Petruchio, the man who ultimately marries her, takes on the task of breaking her spirit and metamorphosing her into a meek and obedient wife. He uses various techniques such as starvation and sleep deprivation to wear her down and make her more compliant. However, Katherina's transformation is not portrayed as a positive development. While she does become more subservient to Petruchio, her spirit is also broken, and she is forced to abandon her own desires and ambitions. This is a reflection of the oppressive nature of the society in which she lives, where women are not allowed to express themselves freely.

In El-Degheidy's adaptation, the character of Esmat shares many similarities with Katherina. Like Katherina, Esmat is initially portrayed as a strong and independent woman who resists the authority of men. She is also seen as having a fiery temper and a tendency to engage in arguments and fights (El-Degheidy, 1996, 1:32:45). However, Esmat's story diverges from Katherina's in some significant ways. In contrast to Katherina, Esmat's transformation is portrayed as a positive development. When Abbass decides to seek revenge on Esmat by accusing her and her cousin of theft, Zahira Hanim intervenes to resolve the issue, allowing Abbass to "tame" Esmat. Unlike Petruchio, Abbass does not resort to abusive or manipulative tactics to achieve this goal (El-Degheidy, 1996, 1:38:20). Furthermore, Esmat's transformation is portrayed as a result of her own choice rather than external pressure. She comes to realize that her initial resistance to Abbass was misguided and that she is actually in love with him.

El-Degheidy's adaptation incorporates the Arabic social codes to show how Esmat's transformation is brought about in a culturally appropriate way. In Arabic culture, there is a strong emphasis on respect for authority and submission to elders

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and superiors, especially for women. Esmat's initial resistance to Abbass is seen as a breach of these codes and therefore unacceptable. Through the character of Zahira Hanim, who plays the role of a wise and respected matriarch, El-Degheidy shows how these social codes are used to "tame" Esmat. Zahira Hanim intervenes to resolve the issue between Esmat and Abbass and convinces Esmat that her initial resistance was misguided. This intervention is culturally appropriate and acceptable since it comes from a respected elder who commands authority in the community. Esmat's realization that she needs to conform to these social codes is portrayed as a positive development. She comes to understand that her initial resistance to Abbass was wrong and that submitting to him is the only way to live a happy life within the cultural norms of her society. This realization is significant because it shows that Esmat is not merely a victim of patriarchal oppression, but rather an active participant in her own transformation. Through Esmat's story, El-Degheidy also highlights the limitations of a strong-headed and independent approach in a patriarchal society. Esmat's transformation is portrayed as a necessary step towards achieving happiness and fulfillment within the cultural norms of her society. This message is in line with the cultural values of Arabic society, which prioritize social harmony and conformity over individualism and independence.

To summarize, the contrasting portrayals of female characters in El-Degheidy's *Lobster* and Shakespeare's *The Taming of The Shrew* underscore the significance of divergent methods in the representation of women in literature and film. It is crucial to challenge established gender roles and provide more subtle and empowering depictions of female characters. This approach can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive portrayal of women in media.

4. Concluding Remarks

El-Degheidy's *Lobster* provides a compelling analysis of the patriarchal social norms that existed in Muslim society during the 1990s in Egypt, highlighting the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western cultures. The film portrays the protagonist, Abbass, trying to tame Esmat, his wife-to-be, who is depicted as a stubborn and headstrong woman. While the film alludes to Shakespeare's *The Taming of The Shrew*, there are notable differences in the taming techniques and the depiction of women. In contrast to Petruchio's abusive tactics, Esmat is never mistreated or belittled; instead, she is shown as an independent woman who chooses to stay with Abbass out of love and passion. El-Degheidy's portrayal of the taming process emphasizes the importance of mutual respect and understanding between partners, highlighting the need for equality in sustainable relationships.

The film also reinforces the patriarchal norms of Muslim society, where men are expected to be in control and women who resist their authority are portrayed as problematic. This is evidenced in Esmat's aunt's insistence upon Abbass's taming of her tough niece, which reflects broader cultural attitudes toward gender roles in Egypt. Women are often expected to be submissive and obedient to men, perpetuating gender inequalities in society. *Lobster* further highlights the materialistic culture of the characters, showcasing the similarities and differences in visual aesthetics and social values between Eastern and Western cultures. Despite its departure from Shakespeare's original vision, *Lobster* offers a unique perspective on contemporary Egypt's cultural nuances and the tensions between tradition and modernity. The opulence of Esmat's villa and the lavish parties she hosts contrasted with Abbass's middle-class background and revealed social and economic inequalities. The film suggests that Egypt's most powerful and traditional families are embracing new norms that require women to be publicly accepted into the current social order.

In short, El-Degheidy's *Lobster* is a thought-provoking film that explores the themes and motifs of Shakespeare's *The Taming of The Shrew*, providing insights into the patriarchal norms and gender inequalities that persist in Arab societies. The film emphasizes the importance of mutual respect and understanding between partners, while also highlighting the need for greater gender equality and individual freedom. *Lobster* represents a clash of civilizations, revealing the tensions between traditional Arabic values and customs and Western ideas of gender equality and individual freedom, and offers valuable insights into the cultural nuances of contemporary Egypt.

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