

Chapter 22

Shellyseer: A Literary Evolution



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Abstract The dramatic elements that are in *Shellyseer* have traveled for a long period of time and have been affected by dramatic elements from different cultures, which means that *Shellyseer* is a result of the evolution of drama. This chapter draws attention to the effect that the East and the West have on each other, by pointing out the effect that Aristotle’s *Poetics*—Western Theory—had on Ghanem Al-Suliti’s *Shellyseer*—Eastern Literature. This chapter combines comparative literature with literary theory and criticism in order to give an example of a globalized view of how drama evolves where there are no borders that limit influence. This chapter traces back drama back to its oldest documented sources to show how it evolved throughout history and offers deeper knowledge of Middle Eastern drama, the importance, and strength of political satire, and how strong of a mutual influence Eastern and Western literature have on each other.

Keyword Shellyseer • Blockade • Literature • The Gulf • Theatre • Political Satire

22.1 Introduction

Shellyseer is a political satire series that was created in the beginning of the blockade in Qatar. The series reflected the reactions and concerns of the Qatari people. Beside it reflecting the political and social situation of those times, it is also a product of thousands of years of literary evolution. Taking a deeper look at *Shellyseer* will reveal the influence of Greek Theatre and particularly the teachings of Aristotle. Aristotle’s parts of a tragedy, specifications for a tragedy and tragic hero, and unities were all present in *Shellyseer*. Harold Bloom, an American literary

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critic, explains criticism as “the art of Knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem” (Bloom, 1973). In this chapter, I will be tracing back dramatic works, to point out the effect of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, to find the hidden roads and development that lead to a Middle Eastern series that was uploaded on YouTube called *Shellyseer*, which aired at the start of the Arab Gulf blockade. However, by connecting these works I will also be proving that T.S Eliot’s theory of the effect of previous works on newer works can be applied on a larger scale than he envisioned.

A few theorists have explored the processes through which literary works evolve over time. For example, Bloom in his *The Anxiety of Influence* argues that a poem is a misinterpretation of an older poem. Applying it to other genres of literature like drama would mean that people will take their understanding of an older drama and try to create a new piece of drama based on their understanding of older work. T. S Eliot stresses the fact that literary works are products of a literary heritage of a culture in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*: “If we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously” (Eliot, 1919). Eliot mostly connected tradition to a group of people from a certain background when he says: “Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is even more oblivious of short comings and limitations of its critical habits than of those of its creative genius” (Eliot, 1919). One might say that both Bloom and Eliot are speaking within a specific literary tradition—Western theory. So, can these ideas be applied to a dramatic work from Eastern literature? Comparative literature has the answer, in an Inaugural lecture for comparative literature at Oxford in 1857, Matthew Arnold said: “Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures” (Arnold, 1993). What is comparative literature? Susan Bassnett defines comparative literature as: “the study of texts across cultures, that it is interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space” (Bassnett, 1993). So, if literatures are connected, theories can be applied as well.

22.2 The History of Drama in the Middle East

To understand how *Shellyseer* could be connected to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and how Eliot’s theory of influence can be taken on a more global level, it is important to look at the effect that East and the West have on each other. The Middle East has always been a rapidly changing region because of its long history of being the heart of the old world and one of the most strategic areas today. In the past, the silk and spice routes passed right through the area, which meant it was an oasis and mixing medium for many civilizations and kingdoms. Being an area of mixed cultures made it the perfect place to develop new ideas. They turned to literary works from Ancient Rome and Greece for the knowledge and inspiration, and led it to produce literary works

that were the basis for many contemporary works and art. Muslims consider Islamic philosophy to be the most affected by ancient Greece. In Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali's *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, he criticizes Muslims like Al-Farabi and Avicenna, and Greek philosophers for believing that they can understand God and the metaphysical world with logic. Al-Farabi even considered Plato and Aristotle to be prophets sent by God, and called them the grand masters (Almayadeen, 2015). As for an example of the Middle East's effect on the West, one that almost every person in the world today has heard of the *Arabian nights* and the imagery from its magical world which inspired Walt Disney's *Aladdin* in 1992. The Middle East continues to produce inspiring literary works and schools of literature that are parallel to other ones around the world. For example, Abdul Rahman Munif studied in Belgrade and was influenced by the modernist style of writing, which led him to write the five novel series *Cities of Salt* in the eighties using techniques inspired by the European modernist movement. Most of Abdul Rahman Munif's works give the reader the feeling that the characters suffer from the loss of identity, because of all the changes that were happening after the discovery of oil in the region (Aljazeera, 2014). Arab writers have used the techniques inspired by others in order to produce brilliant literature, and to find new ways to share their thoughts and feelings.

In his book called *The Islamic Theater*, Professor Ahmed Qassim brings to attention the fact that many critics and historians believe that the ancient Egyptians were the first people to produce and perform plays. The supporters of this theory support it by bringing into attention the similarities between Greek and Pharaonic myths and plays. Also, considering the fact that Pharaonic Civilization started about 3000 years prior to the Greek Civilization, meaning that Greek theater was most likely inspired and influenced by the ancient Egyptians (Qassim, 1980), Kurt Sethe in 1928 published the oldest sources of ancient Egyptian drama that are from about 2600 BCE (The Creeks may have, 2003). The documents are referred to as the Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus, and seem to have been written during the Middle Kingdom. The documents were found in Ikhernofret's stela, and contain his description of a festival play done under the rule of Senusret the 3rd. Ikhernofret also addresses the visiting of foreign writers. "This text contains what has been interpreted as staging instructions concerning the actors for a grandiose play where a great number of performers including supernumeraries, props such as statues, and backdrops were used. Symbolic dances which may have been holy rituals and ballet scenes formed part of the performance" (The Creeks may have, 2003).

Moving forward to the pre-Islamic period which is called Jahiliyyah or 'Age of Ignorance', Arabs had connections with the Romans and Persians, and had admiration for thinkers like Aristotle and Plato (Qassim, 1980). However, we cannot be sure if they knew about Greek poetry and plays. They could have known about it but that it was lost because Arabs did not tend to document works by writing them down; they depended on memorization and the art of reciting poetry and stories. But this does not mean that the Arabs were not dramatic; the Arabs held literary markets. In certain seasons, Arabs from all over the peninsula would gather in a market and recite stories, epic poetry, and speeches. At some point, poets would have dramatic dialogs playing roles speaking to each other using only poetry (Qassim, 1980).

The Abbasid Caliphate was the golden age for science and arts. Two plays were documented during the Abbasid Caliphate, the first was called *Ibn Bisher's Court* and the second one was *The Pains of Alhussain*. Abdulrahman Bin Bisher is considered the pioneer of Islamic drama. His play is called *Ibn Bisher's Court* in which he played the part of a judge who goes through all the Muslim caliphates that have ruled since the death of Prophet Mohammed. He sends all prophet Mohammed's companions that ruled to heaven. Then he moves on to the Umayyad Caliphate and sends all the rulers of that Caliphate to hell except Umar bin Abd Al-Alaziz who was known to be a just ruler. After that he brings the rulers of the Abbasid Caliphate but does not send them to heaven or hell, instead he names all of their accomplishments (Qassim, 1980). It seems to be a political play that draws the Caliphate's attention to the importance of being a good ruler, so the people will remember them in a good way, and so God will send them to heaven. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt would plant the first seeds of a formal Arab theater in 1799; he built many theaters for the entertainment of his troops. They would be burnt down and rebuilt under the rule of General Menou (Shaeer, 2017). However, theater was neglected for a while till its golden age starting in 1869 when Ismail Basha ruled in Egypt and ordered the house of Opera to be built for when his guests would visit from Europe and would come along with the Egyptian National Theater. It opened its doors and would hold many plays for the next 139 years.

Egypt, being the pioneer in acting and theater, attracted drama lovers from the Arabian Peninsula. Elements like Arab teachers from Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine moving to the Gulf looking for jobs, and countries like Kuwait sent their brightest students in the beginning of the twentieth century to Egypt to look for higher education (Fahmy, 1993). This led to theater taking a more important place among Gulf literature and the people became more interested in it. And as a result of Kuwait being the first Gulf country to send its students to Egypt, it had its first official play group in Al-Mubarakiya school in 1938. The group was made up of students, and they performed their first play called *The Conversion of Umar*.

The Qatari theater started small as well. All the way back until 1959, only small satire plays would be performed in people's guest rooms. The plays mostly dealt with community issues. But after that, sports clubs started holding musical events and between performances young actors would find the opportunity to show their skills and perform small plays. Schools became interested in plays and the Doha school held many plays, two of which were *Bilal bin Rabah* in 1959 and an adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* called *The Merchant of Al Basra* in 1963 (Alraya, 2008). Throughout the sixties many acting groups appeared. One of them was "The Populist Group", founded by Mussah Adulrahman and Yaqub Almass that held many plays like *Ali Baba's Dream* in the early eighties. Then in 1972, the Qatari theater band appeared on stage. It was made up of students that graduated from Mohammed Abdullah Al-Ansari's Dar Almualimeen. The pioneer actors in the band were Sayyar AlKuvari and Ali Meerza; they became popular for plays like *The Falcon of Quraish* and *The Garment Looks the Best with a Patch from its Own Material* (Alraya, 2008).

22.3 Background and Inspiration

One of the graduates of Mohammed Abdullah Al-Ansari's Dar Almualimeen was Ghanem Al-Sulaiti—the future writer of *Shellyseer*—who joined Dar Almualimeen to follow his dream of becoming an actor. He acted for the first time in the play called *The Garment Looks the Best with a Patch from its Own Material* in 1971. Later on, when the acting team of Dar Almualimeen became a separate acting group and called themselves the Qatari theater band in 1972, Ghanem found himself excluded from any acting parts. He asked one of the organizers of the team for the reason, and the man answered: “You are not fit for acting” (Gazal, 1998). Ghanem did not accept that he was not fit for acting, so he teamed up with a few of his colleagues and started their own group called “The Student Acting Band”. Their first play was written by Ghanem and was called *House of Phantoms* in 1973. Ghanem and the rest of his colleagues performed on the stage of Alsaad club for four nights, and *House of Phantoms* was a great success (Gazal, 1998). After Ghanem graduated from Dar Almualimeen in 1974, the minister of Mass Communication had promised to send him to get his bachelor's degree abroad. So, Ghanem was first sent to Kuwait where he spent a semester trying to major in acting but did not succeed because one of the administrators told him that he was a better drama writer and critic, and so he organized a transfer to Egypt. Ghanem passed his first three years but when it came time to choose a major once again, he was not chosen to be an actor, but again a drama writer and critic. So he went to find the person responsible, and he found out that it was the same man who told him that he should be a critic and writer. Ghanem accepted the man's opinion and graduated from the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Cairo in 1978, with a Bachelor's degree in Dramatic Art Criticism (Gazal, 1998).

Ghanem continued to write during his studies at the institute, in 1975, he wrote and performed in *The Bachelor's Club*. *The Bachelor's Club* is about a group of young men who decide to never get married because marriage is so expensive. However, the founder of the club falls in love and changes his mind, but his club members become angry, and the bride's family asks for a large dowry which causes big problems. He tries to forget about marrying his loved one. The play ends with all sides compromising and him getting married. The play came out at a time when young men were struggling to get married because of the large dowries set by brides' families. After Ghanem's graduation, he wrote and acted in many plays. Most of them were about problems in the society. For example, Ghanem acted in a play named *Girls Market* that was written by Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah and Assem Twfiq in 1981. The play dealt with the issue of men taking advantage of women by marrying them for their money. As for Ghanem's political plays, the two famous ones are: *Monster of the Night* that was performed in 1993 and *Hello Gulf* in 1995. *Monster of the Night* is based on the Turkish writer Aziz Nesin's novel *The Monster of Taurus*. *The Monster of the Night* was a critique of the American dominance of the world after the Soviet Union lost the Cold War (Gazal, 1998). Ghanem continued criticizing American dominance policies in a

play called *Hello Gulf*, where he pictures the gulf leaders as obedient servants of the American government.

Ghanem had always been a critic of political and social problems and that is why when the gulf crisis started on the 5th of June 2017, he looked for a way to respond to the countries of the blockade. Qatar was cornered and put under a blockade by its neighboring countries: The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, The Kingdom of Bahrain, and Egypt. The Qatari people were in shock because they never expected to be turned against by their GCC sister states. The people of the Gulf had always felt that they were one nation, and no other Arab countries were as close and united as they were. Ghanem Al-Sulaiti was one of the first Qatari artists to react to the crisis (Aljazeera, 2017). Considering that his mother was Bahraini and his father was Qatari, his whole belief system of the one great Gulf nation was ripped apart. And from the shock of crisis, *Shellyseer* was created. *Shellyseer*, which translates as ‘What is Going On’, is a political satire that gained popularity among the Qatari people because of how it reflected their feelings and thoughts, while drawing attention to all the problems caused by the blockade.

Unlike other works of siege literature like the epic texts *Jerusalem Delivered*¹ by Torquato Tasso, and *The Iliad*² by Homer, *Shellyseer* is a satirical drama. *Jerusalem Delivered*, *The Iliad*, and *Shellyseer* all share the same feature of documenting events, problems, and feelings of the people. However, popular culture affected their genres. So, what is popular culture? According to John Storey: “popular culture is simply culture that is widely favoured or well-liked by many people” (2008). Applying this definition of popular culture to *Shellyseer*, we can understand that it is a satire drama because it is popular among the people at this time.

Political satire was known from the time of the Ancient Greeks. They used comedy to criticize events and personalities in Athens. The only complete comic plays that have survived are those of the Greek comic playwright Aristophanes. He especially seemed to dislike a politician named Kleon, who he harshly beat down in play after play. It is most obvious in a play called *Knights*, where he created a dishonest politician named Paphlagon that is a proxy Kleon (Long, 2016). Elizabethan play writers followed the same method in criticizing politicians. For example, *Measure for Measure* is a political satire written by William Shakespeare to criticize the way governments put corrupt individuals in power sometimes. Moving to political satire on television, the first television show aimed at criticizing politics was in the United States. Its title was *The Smothers Brothers*. The show was broadcast in the 60 s around the time of the Vietnam War (U.S President Donald Trump’s, 2017). The aim of the show was to criticize the American government’s involvement in Vietnam. The Middle East also has a considerable number of political satire plays.

¹Jerusalem Delivered is a verse epic by the late-Renaissance Italian poet Torquato Tasso (1544–95).

²Homer’s Iliad describes the final year of the Trojan War, a legendary conflict between an alliance of Greek cities and the city of Troy in Anatolia.

Two of the most popular plays in the 90 s were *Sword of the Arabs* and *The Chief*. *Sword of the Arabs*, is a Kuwaiti political satire written in 1992 by Abdullhussain Abduredha, Hayat Al-Fahad, and Ruqayya Al-Kutt. The play was written to criticize the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. *The Chief* is an Egyptian play that was performed in 1993 and written by Farouk Sabry. It is about a young man who looks very similar to the dictator who runs their country. One day the dictator dies and is replaced by the young man with the help of the dictator's advisers. It turns out that the dictator is just a face, and his advisers are the actual cause of country's suffering. The play is a criticism of the way Arab countries' governments are run.

Artists use political satire to criticize political events and figures for many reasons. Anthony Thai draws attention to the fact that the popularity of political satire has risen significantly in recent years. He also states: "Satire has made politics more accessible, leading to more informed viewers who have the potential to form more educated opinions and discuss those views with others" (Thai, 2014). In other words, people feel more involved with politics if it is presented in a comic way, because they feel that the block between them and politics has been removed. Thai says that more people watch political satire than actual news reports because comedians are able to connect with the audience more effectively than news reporters. He explains that because people use satire in their everyday life, it easier to relate to, while normal news reports are separate from daily life. Danagal Young has done research on psychology and influence on political entertainment and has drawn attention to the power and danger of political satire. She explains that it has a strong effect on politics and positions, because of its ability to weaken counter arguments. However, she adds that it is only successful if seen as a joke first, then political (The National, 2017).

22.4 Shellyseer Meeting Aristotle's Elements

After understanding why the author chose to make *Shellyseer* a political satire, it is essential to draw attention to the fact that *Shellyseer* is connected to ancient Greek theater. But how can that be? It was built on dramatic elements that were documented during the time of Classical Greece. To understand this more clearly, we must simply look at the author's education. It was previously mentioned that Ghanem Al-Sulaiti went to the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Cairo, which means that he studied the basic history of drama, and learned all the techniques that have been used and their effects throughout documented history. And for a person to be able to say that they have majored in Dramatic Arts, he or she must have studied Aristotle who was the author of the first systematic work of drama theory in the Western tradition. Aristotle documented the elements of tragedy drama in his *Poetics*, and tried to pin down what makes a good tragic play. The broad guidelines for any dramatic work follow these elements. In Michael Tierno's book *Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters: Storytelling Secrets from the Greatest Mind in Western Civilization*, he comments on the importance of Aristotle's work

by saying: “In fact, I think it’s safe to say that Aristotle, besides being the greatest mind in Western civilization, was the world’s first movie story analyst!” (Tierno xix). This means that poetics are not just important for tragedies in theaters, but also, for any movie story in the modern era. Taking a closer look at the elements that Aristotle pointed out, we can see that there are six of them: plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle (Aristotle, n.d). This brings us to the next question which is how many of Aristotle’s guidelines did Ghanem actually follow? To find the answer, I will point out how each of the six elements were used in *Shellyseer*.

According to Aristotle, plot is the most important dramatic element. “So, the plot is the representation of the action: by (plot) here, I mean the construction of the incidents” (Aristotle, n.d). What is understood from this definition that can be applied to modern day drama is that plot is the order of events in a dramatic work like plays, movies, etc. Aristotle divided the plot into three main parts, which are beginning, middle, and conclusion. He also points out what everyone of the three parts should contain. The beginning of a plot—usually referred to as the exposition—should give the background of the story, and introduce the characters. The middle of the story is the part where the characters’ normal routines change, and finally, the conclusion, where the characters’ new routines are established. *Shellyseer* is made up of many episodes and each one has its own plot. Episode 4 titled *The Council at the Market Place* is a good example for explaining how Ghanem followed Aristotle’s guidelines. The beginning of the plot shows the main character at an auction, and there are wealthy looking bidders waiting to buy something. The middle of the plot is when the audience finds out that the main character is selling the Gulf Cooperation Council’s belongings. He tells the bidders that it is all worth 90.000 Qatari Riyals. One of the bidders asks him how much every piece would be worth if sold separately. He tells him that everything without the music tapes is 5000 Qatari Riyals. However, he pointed out that the music tapes alone are 85.000 Qatari Riyals. The bidders were surprised and asked him how that is possible? He answers saying: “What is the Gulf Cooperation Council but a bunch of songs?”. He continues saying that whoever buys the tapes would possess all 37 years of the committee. He points to a chair and says that whoever buys the tapes will be given a certain chair for free also. The bidders ask to whom the chair belongs, and he answers that it belongs to the secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The conclusion (end) starts when a bidder asks him why he wants to sell the Gulf Cooperation Council? Ghanem answers: because it is expired, and so they need a new one. Many drama writers write plots with beginnings, middles, and ends. Even maybe without reading Aristotle, but following Aristotle’s plot guidelines in what every part should include makes it more complete. Some artists produce beginnings, middles, and ends that make the audience feel they are missing something, and that is possibly due to the lack of inclusion of all the things associated with the plot, that Aristotle has pointed out.

Aristotle ranked character as the second most important element. He defined it as: “Character is that which reveals decision” (Aristotle, n.d). This means that actors must present the decisions that their characters make, and the actions that

they have performed. The characters should have four main qualities. When Aristotle wrote *Poetics*, women's parts were played by men, so he put emphasis on the importance of the characters acting appropriately for the character's gender (Childs, 2015). However, nowadays women appear in movies, theater, and television shows with no problem, so Ghanem let women play their own roles. The famous Qatari actress Hadiya Saeed played the main character's wife in episodes: 6, 9, 10, 16, and 18. Other women play different roles as well. Next, Aristotle said that the characters must have believable personalities. That is why Ghanem gave Qatari people the leading roles because he knew that their acting would seem more realistic, because they would be showing real emotions. It is clear from episode 1 called *Rumors* that all the characters in the show are Qatari, and they all seem to be acting realistically. Ghanem plays the main character in the episode. He is called Abu Salmeen. Abu Salmeen represents the generation of Qatari people who grew up believing that the Gulf countries are one nation, and that a blockade is unbelievable. His guilt trips another character because he thinks that the other character is spreading rumors about the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain having cut ties with Qatar. The same episode is a good example of another point, which is that every character must act consistently throughout the play. That means that they cannot do or say anything that is not part of their character; in other words, "acting out of character" is unacceptable. It is clear in the episode that every one of the actors sticks to their character and keeps the same attitude, which makes their acting very convincing.

Thought, reasoning, or moral are the synonyms for the third element. Aristotle's explains: "Reasoning, on the other hand, is that with which people demonstrate that something is or is not, or makes some universal statement" (Aristotle, n.d). The moral is the message that is sent to the audience through the play. Aristotle says that a message should be sent at each moment of the plot. And by that he means that other than the overall moral, there should be meaning behind every action. Episode 5, called *Sympathizing*, is a great example of having deep meaning behind every sentence. The episode starts with an old handicapped woman being put on trial for being suspected of having sympathy for her relatives in Qatar, the beginning itself sends a powerful message that says: the government officials of the blockade countries have no mercy for anyone, not even the old and weak. The jury says that sources have revealed to them that she has been known to visit Qatar four times a month, and to speak up. This part gives the impression that the people living in the blockade countries are being constantly watched. When she does not speak up, they threaten to use violence to make her speak, which sends the message that they use their authority to intimidate the powerless. She tells them to back off, and that she is not stupid to sympathize with her sister Maitha in Qatar, or her sister's children Sara, Hamda, and Maryam that she adores. This part tells the audience that the people living in the blockade countries do not agree with their governments. Then she asks one of the jury—and refers to him as the one with the bulging eyes—if he would sympathize with any of his relatives? Then she answers him and says: of course not, and if we did sympathize with anyone, it would be with strangers whom they do not know and with whom

they have no relationships. After that one of the members of the jury starts asking the others if she is serious, or just being sarcastic. She says: “just being sarcastic? I swear that you are smart”. This part tells the people watching that even the weakest citizens in the blockade countries are smarter and stronger than their governments, and will not submit to their governments. She yells at them to listen to her and tells them that they can keep the people from traveling or interacting with their relatives in Qatar, that they can cut off sending them yoghurt and milk, and possibly even cut off their air, but that they are not capable of stopping her and others from loving their families in Qatar. Unless they can erase their history emotions, and can find a machine that is able to separate the blood that runs in their veins, and only then, can they judge the people for having sympathy for their families in Qatar. After watching this episode, the audience should have understood that no matter what the blockading governments do to the Qatari people, they cannot stop their people from loving, supporting, and having sympathy for their relatives in Qatar, because at the end of the day, they are one big family.

“Diction is fourth. By “diction” I mean, as we said earlier, communication by means of language, which has the same potential in the case of both verse and [prose] speeches” (Aristotle, n.d). Aristotle believes that the words and language used in a play must be chosen wisely, and a good playwright makes up lines that are meaningful, and so well constructed that the audience can leave the play quoting the lines exactly. All Ghanem’s lines send strong messages, and in order to make it easy to quote and be powerful, he used phrases that are used in all the Gulf countries. For example, he uses a saying that is popular in the Gulf, which is: “A nail will never release from the flesh”. This saying as used in episodes 8 and 15 suggested topics that encourage unity among Gulf people. Ghanem also used words that are connected to the Gulf culture, for example, “yoghurt” in episodes 5 and 9, because it is an important part of the Gulf diet.

The fifth element is melody, or in other words the music that is used in the play. When it comes to music Aristotle says: “song is the most important of the embellishments” (Aristotle, n.d). He puts significant importance on music, even though he says that it is an addition, and that melody must blend in with the play appropriately. In *Shellyseer*, many songs were used for different reasons. For example in episode 10, called *Your Blockade is Cool*, the song *Ahbabona Seero* that was in the Arabic version of *Sesame Street* was a collaboration among the Gulf Countries. Ghanem kept the rhythm but replaced the lyrics. The original lyrics say: “Our beloved—referring to children—walk to the lovely river” with new ones that say: “Your blockade is cool -esthetic-”. Another song that Ghanem includes in the show is one that came out after the beginning of the blockade called *Hinna Bekhair Fee Deerat Al-Ezz*, which means: We are doing Well in the Home of Mightiness. Ghanem sings it as a sign that he is glad that Qatar and its people stand united as one, and they are all doing well during these hard times.

The sixth, and final element is spectacle. Aristotle says: “spectacle is something enthralling, but is very artless and least particular to the art poetic composition” (Aristotle, n.d). Spectacle is the visual element of a drama, and Aristotle says that it should be appropriate to the theme of the play. It is very important for the setting

to be fit for what the play is about. If the setting is not fit for the subject of the play, it could cause confusion and discomfort for the audience. Ghanem simply based his scenes in places that fit the theme, but at the same time did not take much effort to prepare. By doing this, the audience recognized the places where filming was done and that made it seem more natural and saved time, because the show produced an episode each time a new event happened. Souq Waqif was the setting for episode 1, and it is fitting because Souq Waqif is a traditional market that is very well known to anyone who has visited Qatar. It represents Qatari heritage, culture, and tradition. Episode 4 called *Sympathy*, took another turn because Ghanem wanted the audience to feel uncertain and concentrate on what is being said. So they made it simple: everything but where the characters were sitting was black which gave the scene a mysterious aura.

Shellyseer might not be a tragedy, however, it has an episode that can be considered a tragedy. The main character of this episode meets Aristotle's criteria for a tragic hero. "Such a person is one who neither is superior [to us] in virtue and justice, nor undergoes a change to misfortune because of vice and wickedness, but because of some error" (Aristotle, n.d). Aristotle makes it clear that a tragic hero must cause the audience to feel pity for him, because this misfortune does not come from becoming a bad person, but from this false judgment caused by the lack of knowledge. Episode 17, titled *Creating the Enemy*, can be considered a tragedy. It is about a young boy named Khaled, whose father is Qatari, and his mother is from one of the blockading countries. He is stuck in his mother's country because of the blockade, and slowly becomes influenced by the media and family there to believe that any Qatari person is a terrorist. So, he ends up being angry with his father and saying that he is not his father, but that he is his enemy. Because the main character is a child—that is innocent—he fits the category of being virtuous. Then because there is no certain information that we are given to make us assume that he is in some way superior to anyone, he meets the second requirement. And finally, the boy turns from loving his father to hating him and calling him a terrorist, which is his turn to misfortune. This turn is caused by a misunderstanding that he has, which is caused by what he hears and sees around him. This character's flow is the misunderstanding that is why the young boy Khaled can be considered a tragic hero.

Khaled met the requirements of a tragic hero, but did Ghanem follow Aristotle's instructions for the fate of characters in a tragedy? "Since the construction of the finest tragedy should be not simple but complex, and moreover it should represent terrifying and pitiable events (for this is particular to representation of this sort), first, clearly, it should not show (1) decent men undergoing a change from good fortune to misfortune; for this this is neither terrifying nor pitiable, but shocking. Nor [should it show] (2) wicked men [passing] from misfortune to good fortune. This is most untragic of all, as it has nothing of what it should; for it is neither morally satisfying nor pitiable nor terrifying. [1453a] Nor, again, [should show] (3) a thoroughly villainous person falling from good fortune into misfortune: such a structure can contain moral satisfaction, but not pity or terror, for the former is [felt for a person undeserving of his misfortune, and the latter

for a person like [ourselves]" (Aristotle, n.d). First, a good character must not go from having good fortune, to bad fortune. Khaled's father seems to be a good man whom Khaled loves. But when Khaled's mother is speaking with him on the I-pad, he tries to speak to Khaled and he tells him that he fed the pigeons at Souq Waqif, because he knows that he used to love feeding them. Even when Khaled refuses to speak to his father and shouts at him, his father stays a good man, which means that his fortune stays the same. The next two points are connected; no wicked people's fortune should change to the better, or change for the worst. In the show, we see Khaled's uncles speaking badly about Qataris, including Khaled's father's side of the family, but their fortune remains the same: we do not see any kind of change in their fortune.

It is important to mention that Aristotle also speaks about the unities, because the difference between drama and other forms of art are the unities. The unities are unity of time and the unity of action. Many people add the unity of place, but he does not mention it; it was added at the time of the renaissance, because medieval drama kept the unity of place.

The unity of time refers to the idea that the drama's plot must follow the normal timing within a day or 24 h, so it should not jump back and forth in time. And if the drama is not restricted to the time limit, he considers it to be an imperfect drama. Aristotle says: "Again, with respect to length, tragedy attempts as far as to keep within one revolution of the sun or [only] to exceed this a little" (Aristotle, n.d). Ghanem achieved unity of time since the episodes do not move back and forth in time. The only exception is *Creating the Enemy*, where events are fast forwarded.

Aristotle speaks of unity of action and says: "Therefore, just as in the other representational arts a single representation is of single [thing], so too the plot, since it is a representation of action, ought to represent a single action, and a whole one at that; and its parts (the incidents) ought to be so constructed that, some part is transposed or removed, the whole is disrupted and disturbed" (Aristotle, n.d). So, Aristotle means that all the events must be connected, and also be part of the main plot. In Aristotle's point of view, there should not be any smaller useless plots, they should all be part of the larger one. Ghanem achieves this as well; all his plots are simple and direct. Episode 6 titled *Qatar the Terrorist* is a good example, the protagonist simply speaks of many topics in the same setting, which we can consider to be smaller plots. The main character's wife is depressed and in bed saying that she wants to see her sister, brother, and uncle before she dies. Her husband answers and says that it is impossible because the borders are closed, and even animals are blocked off. Then he says that even a Qatari camel wanted to cross the border and they told it that it is not allowed in, so it turned around and came back. This can be considered the first small plot. Then the wife asks the husband why they are doing this to them, and he tells her that it is because Qatar is a terrorist nation. She is shocked and says: "Qatar is a terrorist nation?", he replies: yes, yes, yes Qatar is a terrorist nation, that Qatar is behind all the destructive wars in the world, and Qatari people were the ones who blew up the world trade center in America. He says 26 Qataris did it, then his wife says no 19, 19. The husband

says no, because there were 7 Qataris for backup. That ends the second small plot. Then he says that Hulagu Khan—a Mongolian leader that invaded Muslim lands and killed many people—was actually Qatari, the man who killed many Muslims is originally from Al-Khour. The main character gives Hulagu an Arab name and says that people used to see him and say: “Whowa ko” which is the Qatari dialect meaning “There he is”, and by running the two words together it sounded like: Hulagu. That is the third smaller plot. Qatar invaded the Korean islands, and Qatar was also behind the division in Sudan. He adds that a few of his close friends heard rumors that Qatar was preparing to invade the United States, and he also saw a bunch of war tanks big and small on the Corniche. His wife says: “May God damn us, all of this, what have we, the people of Qatar done?”. That all can be considered smaller plot number 4. The husband turns to his wife and says: yes, and adds that terrorism is in the Qatari people’s blood. He tells her that her grandfather was the biggest terrorist. He adds that normal children say: “mom”, and “dad”, while Qatari children say: “blood”. And during Karankao—a traditional Gulf celebration, the children of the Gulf go around asking for candy, meanwhile, the Qatari children go around repeatedly saying: “let’s go blow things up...”. This is small plot 5. In the 6th and final smaller plot, the husband turns to the camera and says that there is only one thing that he does not understand. That is, if Qatar has done all of this? How is it, that they have just now come to the conclusion that Qatar is a terrorist nation? In this way, Ghanem created smaller plots that are all part of one larger one that calls out the countries of the blockade on their lies. It is simple and interesting, and the person watching does not feel overwhelmed by the changing events.

22.5 Conclusion

The dramatic elements that are in *Shellyseer* have traveled for a long period of time and have been affected by dramatic elements from different cultures, which means that *Shellyseer* is a result of the evolution of drama. Following the movements of drama from ancient Egypt to Qatar in the present day makes it clear that it is a product of the influence of many civilizations, and not just Qatari heritage. To prove this point, the dramatic elements of the show were compared to the ones in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which is the oldest known European dramatic analysis of the requirements of a good drama. The show was proven to follow most all of the requirements successfully like: Aristotle’s 6 elements, unities, and requirements for characters of a tragedy, which proves T. S. Eliot’s point when he said: “If we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously” (1919). Looking closely at Ghanem Al-Sulaiti’s *Shellyseer*, we find that Aristotle’s theories live on, and give him the immortality, in Eliot’s words. And it is also suggesting that the best parts of an artist’s production are not necessarily a product of his or her ancestors from

the same racial and geographical background, but a product of the human literary heritage. This study is expected to offer deeper knowledge of Middle Eastern drama, the importance and strength of political satire, and how strong of a mutual influence Eastern and Western literature have on each other.

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