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Ophelia's terror: anatomising the figure of the female suicide bomber in *The Al-Hamlet Summit*

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**Abstract**

2002: three months, three Palestinian women, three bombs. Sulayman Al-Bassam premiered *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, his political appropriation of *Hamlet*, Darwish's Palestinian poetry, and Müller's *Hamletmachine*, at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Mapping the politics of anger and despair onto Shakespeare's play, he suggests that terrorism from Palestine to the US is rooted in colonialism and Western military interventions in the Middle East. Hamlet is a jihadist, Horatio becomes a British Arms Dealer and Ophelia, a suicide bomber. This paper explores the politics of representation in the body of Ophelia, who is anatomised as she detonates herself under the palace orange trees.

**Keywords**

Shakespeare, Hamlet, Adaptation, Arab Shakespeare, Terrorism, *The Al-Hamlet Summit*

In the first four months of 2002, four Palestinian women took on their final roles, previously the preserve of men in that region, and turned their bodies into bombs. The first, in January, was twenty-seven-year-old Wafa Idris, a former Red Crescent worker. With a backpack full of explosives and her 'pretty face'<sup>1</sup> she walked through a busy Israeli shopping district and detonated her bomb-laden body outside a shoe shop. In February, at a checkpoint, it was Darin Abu Aisha, a twenty-two-year-old university student studying English Literature, whose brother and ex-husband had both been killed by Israeli forces.<sup>2</sup> Then in March, an academically able schoolgirl with ambitions to be a journalist 'left for Bethlehem high school as usual ... but never returned'.<sup>3</sup> In a news story that shocked the world because of the similarities between the perpetrator and one of her two victims, recorded in the documentary *To Die in Jerusalem*<sup>4</sup>, eighteen-year-old Ayat Al-Akhras from a nearby refugee camp took with her into death seventeen-year-old Israeli schoolgirl Rachel Levy, who had popped into the same supermarket as Al-Akhras that fatal morning. In April it was the turn of Andaleeb Takatka, a seamstress, who blew herself up at a busy bus stop, stating in her farewell video:

When you want to carry out such an attack, whether you are a man or a woman, you

don't think about the explosive belt or about your body being ripped into pieces. We are suffering. We are dying while we are still alive.<sup>5</sup>

Between them, these 'Brides of Palestine' killed nine people in addition to themselves and injured many more. At the Edinburgh Fringe Festival later that summer Anglo-Kuwaiti Sulayman Al-Bassam premiered *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, his political appropriation of *Hamlet*. Approaching the second anniversary of the 9/11 attack on New York, the West was on heightened alert to the threat of Islamist extremism and violence, these fears breeding Islamophobia in Europe and North America. In Al-Bassam's uncompromising play, he mapped the politics of anger and despair onto Shakespeare's iconic play, forcing its spectators to resist the temptation to Other the perpetrators they read about daily in their newspapers. Whilst refusing to condone or glorify terror, *The Al-Hamlet Summit* suggests that acts of outrage from Palestine to the US are rooted in part in Western European colonialism, Western military interventions in the region, and the resultant displacement of peoples, including the displacement of the Palestinian people after the end of the British Mandate and the creation of the state of Israel. Hamlet was a radicalised jihadist, recently returned from university in Europe for his father's funeral,<sup>6</sup> Claudius was a secularised and corrupt dictator of a non-specific Middle Eastern country, the Horatio figure was a British/European Arms Dealer<sup>7</sup>, and Polonius' daughter had become a suicide bomber, taking into her own abused body the identity of the Palestinians and all the suffering of the Arab peoples, claiming that their 'silence bleeds' from her mouth as 'the world forgets'.<sup>8</sup>

Margaret Litvin and Katherine Hennessey explain that

Arab theatre artists seeking to metabolize recent Arab-world events in or for the West have turned persistently to Shakespeare in particular – both from personal interest and in quest of a vocabulary their audiences ... can understand.<sup>9</sup>

So, in the light of the headlines from earlier in the year, the portrayal of Ophelia as a terrorist is not as strange as it might at first sound.

In order to contextualise my thesis, within this essay I will situate the Ophelia of *The Al-Hamlet Summit* within significant inter-texts: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (circa 1601), Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* (1977), a poem from the 1970s by Palestinian poet Mahmoud

Darwish, and the research into the reporting of the 2002 Palestinian female suicide bombings in the Western and Arab media.

In this paper, I explore the politics of representation in the body of *The Al-Hamlet Summit* Ophelia, who is literally anatomised as she detonates herself under the palace orange trees. In this paper I explore the conflation of real-life political terrorists with the symbolic meanings of Shakespeare's Ophelia in the context of Western European secular myths of female Muslim victimhood. I address whether *The Al-Hamlet Summit* Ophelia can be reassessed as a figure of agency as she reclaims her body for herself to be disposed of as she deems fit in a cause that she sees as just, as Ayat Al-Akhras's heart-broken mother would later claim for her daughter<sup>10</sup>. Yet this, too, can be seen as another convenient myth — this time of martyrdom. I argue that Sulayman Al-Bassam, working closely with his dramaturge, Georgina Van Welie, negotiates and engages with both narratives, the victim-perpetrator and the heroic freedom fighter, in order to break down the borders between the audience and 'the Othered' female on the stage, anatomising terror to reveal the human beneath. In her influential feminist essay from 1985 on Ophelia, Elaine Showalter explores how Shakespeare's heroine is reduced to a 'piece of bait' by Jacques Lacan, with mid-twentieth century French psychoanalytic theorists seeing

Ophelia's speech thus represent[ing] the horror of having nothing to say in the public terms defined by the court. Deprived of thought, sexuality, language, Ophelia's story becomes the story of O – the zero, the empty circle or mystery of feminine difference.<sup>11</sup>

Al-Bassam, adapting a play by a male playwright, and engaging with inter-texts also by male writers, simultaneously participates in and subverts this representation of Ophelia, and by extension the problematic and much theorised representation of the phenomenon of female suicide bombers, when he presents her as manipulated by the state in the figures of Claudius and Polonius, rejected by her newly Islamist ex-boyfriend, and metaphorically and near-literally raped by the character of the Arms Dealer who sells her the belt of explosives. *The Al-Hamlet Summit* premiered a full decade before Magda Romanska's overtly feminist rejoinder to Müller's play, which she pointedly entitled *Opheliemachine*. Nonetheless, although his Ophelia is in some ways still refracted through androcentric ideas of 'feminine

difference', he also highlights how it is the Western orientalist gaze as much as the male gaze that distorts her and the women she reflects who commit violence for political ends in his Middle East context. Through his Ophelia, Al-Bassam challenges the media representation of women such as Idris, Abu Aisha, Al Akhras and Takatka as simply 'bad' or 'mad', providing instead a sustained discourse on the conflicts in the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular.

### ***From melodious lay to muddy death***

Al-Bassam acknowledges Müller as a key influence. He positions himself as analogous to the Eastern Bloc political theatre-makers of the Cold War era and says that he, too, uses Shakespeare to explore politics because of Shakespeare's 'slipperiness' in the face of censors, in his case censors who may be unhappy with his take on Arab-world politics.<sup>12</sup> Rooted in the traumas of post-war communist Europe, but also open to new meanings in new contexts such as gender wars in the USA,<sup>13</sup> Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* is overtly political theatre. Jonathan Kalb described Müller's Ophelia as 'a dormant germ in the body politic, a female fifth column waiting silently for an advantageous moment to attack the patriarchy from within'; 'resistance can appear in the world only as terror', he concludes of her characterisation.<sup>14</sup> So it was a small step, even in terms of a literary and theatre heritage, for Al-Bassam to transform his Ophelia from Shakespeare's tragically suicidal, apolitical heroine into a politically motivated suicide bomber or martyr. *Hamletmachine's* Ophelia was a joint protagonist with Hamlet. Whilst Hamlet struggled to break free from 'a paternal heritage that supports a violent status quo socio-political structure',<sup>15</sup> Ophelia had no such qualms. 'Yesterday I stopped killing myself', she says, 'I am alone with my breasts my thighs my womb. I smash the tools of my captivity, the chair the table the bed. I destroy the battlefield that was my home'.<sup>16</sup> Müller himself locates her in the current affairs of his time. 'Ophelia has to do with Ulrike Meinhoff [sic] and the problem of terrorism in Europe, a complex issue that was very much, and in a very ambivalent way, on my mind while I wrote that piece'.<sup>17</sup> <sup>1</sup> The house that Ophelia/Ulrike destroys may be the divided Germany of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ulrike Meinhof (1934-1976) was a radical West German left-wing journalist who became involved in the propagation of the ideas and later actions of the anti-capitalist, anti-establishment Red Army Faction terrorist group, also known as the Baader-Meinhof Group. After she joined the outlawed group she tried to kidnap her

Cold War, in particular the German Democratic Republic, in Müller's play, but it is also anywhere else where oppression resides. Müller claimed that theatre could only be a political agent in that it 'represents'<sup>18</sup>, and what he represents is a world where violence breeds violence and nobody should be surprised at this. However, his Ophelia's rage is specifically gendered, perhaps drawing on ancient metaphors of the land as female, too often occupied and raped. Thus Ophelia's destruction is not mad, but pointed; a silent rage that can be silent no more:

I fling open the doors so the wind gets in and the scream of the world. I smash the window. With my bleeding hands I tear the photos of the men I loved and who used me on the bed on the table on the chair on the ground. I set fire to my prison. I throw my clothes into the fire. I wrench the clock that was my heart out of my breast. I walk into the street clothed in my blood.<sup>19</sup>.

Müller takes this anatomy of the political violence of women further, as Ophelia is amalgamated with another real-life 'radical'/'extremist'/'unwell' woman, Squeaky Fromme of the Manson family. Her final lines in the play are Fromme's, from the latter's trial for the attempted assassination of President Ford: 'when she walks through your bedrooms carrying butcher knives you will know the truth'.<sup>20</sup> 'This is Electra speaking', Ophelia concludes, clearly positioning herself as the revenger.

In *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, Al-Bassam resonates Müller's play with another equally important cultural inter-text. Shortly before her suicide/martyrdom, Ophelia appears in a pre-recorded video message as is customary in the Palestinian suicide bombings. She opens her farewell message with words that immediately remind us of the refugee camp schoolgirl bomber, Al-Akhras, whom I mentioned at the beginning: 'The one who has turned me into a refugee has made a bomb of me'.<sup>21</sup> These words are not Ophelia's own, nor Al-Akhras's, nor even Al-Bassam's, but Mahmoud Darwish's, the exiled Palestinian poet, who is considered by many to be the poetic voice of Palestine. This poem was written in response to the Black September struggle, led by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) against the Israeli state in the early 1970s. '... Darwish attempted to explain the feelings of desperation that

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twin children from their father as she wanted them educated in a camp for Palestinian children. At that time the Palestinian struggle was more closely associated in the West with radical left wing anti-colonial politics than radical interpretations of Islam.

drove the acts of terrorism', Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami suggest in their guide to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.<sup>22</sup> Al-Bassam likewise uses Darwish's line in the mouth of Ophelia to make his audience connect the actions of the suicide bomber with the actions that are done to her first by the state. Susanne Dahlgren, in her chapter 'She Kissed Death with a Smile: The Politics and Moralities of the Female Suicide Bomber' explores how this phenomenon can be situated in a radical discourse of last resort:

Islamic jihad, Hamas, and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, which use suicide missions, motivate these acts as a reply to F-16s and Apache helicopters that the Palestinian combatants does not possess[sic]. In this kind of asymmetric warfare, instead of high-tech weapons, they are left with only a human body loaded with explosives to send in reply, as the narrative has it.<sup>23</sup>

Through the use of these two inter-texts in relation to Ophelia, Al-Bassam creates a silent echo between Müller and Darwish — silent because the actual words from either text are not verbally enunciated. Darwish's poem continues, in a patterning and tone that can also be seen in Müller's lines, although Ophelia does not say these lines out loud,

'That is why I carry it to your streets, your homes, and your  
bedrooms  
Palestine is not a land, gentlemen of the jury  
Palestine has become bodies that move  
They move to the streets of the world, singing the song of death'.<sup>24</sup>

Instead of quoting these lines or the lines of Müller's Ophelia directly in his appropriation, these sources are transformed: polemical words become embodied actions, 'bodies that move', as Al-Bassam's Ophelia shatters her body in the palace gardens, her 'melodious lays' now the 'song of death', with the audience acting as the 'gentlemen of the jury'.

### ***A document of madness***

Unlike *Hamletmachine*, however, *The Al-Hamlet Summit* is not a free adaptation, but a much more closely observed reworking of Shakespeare's play. Using *Hamlet* as the main

palimpsest over which Al-Bassam writes, each act, each character, each soliloquy or exchange has a clear equivalent in its source, following the structure tightly, both in terms of plot and of theme. For the remainder of this essay, I shall explore how *The Al-Hamlet* Ophelia, as a radical re-imagining of Shakespeare's character, engages with and disrupts the conceptions of women, madness and death, both in Shakespeare's play and in most Western journalists' representation of female terrorists.

Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, the editors of the latest Arden Shakespeare *Hamlet* editions, argue in their introduction that 'More than any other of Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet* has attracted psychoanalytic critics, and Hamlet and Ophelia have become respectively the iconic representatives of male and female instability'.<sup>25</sup> Showalter noted that Ophelia had become 'a potent and obsessive figure in our cultural mythology' and suggests that 'her madness may stand for the oppression of women in society'.<sup>26</sup> Al-Bassam combines this cultural mythology with the extreme anxiety in Europe and America at the dawn of the new millennium about Islamist terrorism and the 'new' phenomenon of the Muslim female suicide bomber: in 2002 a *USA Today* article, for example, asked its readers to imagine the possibility of a 'slight young woman ... praising Allah ... commit mass murder',<sup>27</sup> suggesting that the transgressive nature of this act is magnified by her betrayal of accepted gender roles through a fanaticised religious fervour.

At the opening of *The Al Hamlet Summit*, Ophelia is interpreted conventionally as a young, pretty and sheltered daughter of a politician, in love with the prince. Her hair is long and loose, her outfit Western but modest. There is nothing to hint that she will become his major foil, other than the fact that her table at the summit set-up mirrors the position of Hamlet's. Yet both she and Hamlet have changed whilst he was away at university. He tells her that she is 'a woman now', that his 'blood is not what it used to be' and he cannot look at her.<sup>28</sup> Polonius accuses her of 'lurking in orchards with the Prince Hamlet as the sun goes down',<sup>29</sup> foreshadowing when and where she will later explode her bomb. However, that is a long way hence. For now her father commands her to place her footsteps 'at all times' in the 'orbit' of his hearing: 'Don't walk at dusk, don't walk at night, don't walk at dawn and don't walk at noon ...; right now my love describes the boundaries of your universe'.<sup>30</sup>

Much interpretation and analysis of Ophelia in Shakespeare's play concentrates on the relationship between her mental state and her sexuality, with the intense scrutiny of the



status of her virginity by her brother and her father echoed by generations of directors and critics. Whether she is explored as an early modern or post-modern woman, she is presented by them as confined and abused, a victim of her circumstances and her society. Al-Bassam's confinement of Ophelia adds another layer. Although articles such as that in *USA Today* made female terrorists monstrous, much of the Western media Othered them in more subtle ways, presenting Palestinian women as marginalised, silenced and made invisible by the patriarchal culture into which they were born: 'According to gender stereotypes in times of political conflict, the masculine has a principal and directly violent role, and the feminine a peripheral, non-violent one'.<sup>31</sup> This orientalising meant that when female militants began to act out of type the usual descriptors used for male bombers, who were mostly depicted as angry young men, did not fit. 'Violent women ... transgress *both* the norms of disallowed violence and gender'.<sup>32</sup>

However, neither did the word 'evil' seem to apply when faced with the footage of a nervous schoolgirl reading rapidly from her notes for her farewell video, as in the case of Al-Akhras, apparently not out of fear but out of an earnest desire to express her disillusion with her leaders and the depth of her people's suffering. But if not 'bad', then she must be constructed as 'mad' to explain her transgression of the norms of femininity: 'While male bombers are sometimes 'explained' through socio-economic traumas, reactions to female bombers reflect the marginalisation they face *as women*'.<sup>33</sup> The Western media set about diagnosing the women:

Female suicide bombers are discussed first and foremost as women. Their reasons for participating in suicide missions are sought in their gendered personal history. These accounts discuss the female bomber bodily in terms of both her mental state, as in narratives of despair and suffering or guilt and shame, and her physical attributes, such as smiles, eyes, and exploding body parts.<sup>34</sup>

American, Israeli and European media became obsessed with the personal lives of the bombers, arguing that they were women who were already vulnerable to suicidal tendencies. Idris's depression was linked to her failed marriage and 'barrenness', which was then put forward as reasons for her actions: 'it is striking that Western journalists seem to be looking above all for clues within Wafa Idris's biography and her private life, in order to find some rational arguments to explain what was to them inexplicable'.<sup>35</sup> Al-Bassam's

Ophelia is, to some extent, portrayed as such a victim-perpetrator, but there is ambivalence to his portrayal that forces his audience to challenge these stereotypes, too.

As Thompson and Taylor demonstrate in relation to the psychoanalytical approach to understanding Hamlet and Ophelia respectively, 'Men may go mad for a number of reasons, including mental and spiritual stress, but women's madness is relentlessly associated with their bodies and their erotic desires'.<sup>36</sup> At the end of Act 1 Ophelia and Hamlet, alone on stage, hold each other and she declares her love for him before the lights black out. When they go up again in Act 2 she is sitting alone at her desk, wearing hijab, until her father rips it from her head: 'what the hell is this? Are you mad?'.<sup>37</sup> It is unclear what has transpired between Ophelia and Hamlet the night before, but instead of love tokens, Polonius finds that Hamlet has left her People's Liberation Front leaflets. The details of her later suicide mission link back to her relationship with the prince and her father. She will kill herself at sundown in the very orchards her father has forbidden her to visit. In her farewell video, she opens with the plight of the refugee, but ends with a statement in the belief that she will go to her God 'pure in my soul in my dignity'. This echoes perhaps that, 'Alack and fie for shame / Young men will do't if they come to't: / By Cock they are to blame'.<sup>38</sup> In this interpretation, Al-Bassam presents to his European/International audience a narrative where Ophelia is gendered as victim, an unstable young woman, oppressed by a patriarchal system, and vulnerable to manipulation and radicalisation as a result. However, Ophelia's video message interrupts the action on the stage between Claudius and Laertes as the country disintegrates into civil war, also divided against itself. Here, in a scene which conflates the two scenes where Ophelia would usually interrupt the court in Shakespeare's play, Claudius responds bluntly with the explanation 'She is mad, Laertes'.<sup>39</sup> Whereas on the one hand this could just be an expression of 'Poor Ophelia,/ Divided from herself and her fair judgement',<sup>40</sup> it is also a way to shut her down. The madness here is much more in question than in Shakespeare's play. Al-Bassam's Ophelia is not dishevelled; her speech is rational and clear, her quotation of Darwish's poetry precise and she has the presence of mind to record herself in advance. The madness Claudius refers to is not a form of psychosis, therefore. The subtext of his words is 'Don't listen' because her words are dangerous. Thus, in another reading of this scene, Ophelia, reframed as a member of the resistance, is a political threat.

Significantly, in Western reporting of the female suicide bombers' actions, not only were their personal problems foregrounded, but their words in the farewell videos were often omitted, as in the case of Andalib Takatkeh: 'I have chosen to say with my body what Arab leaders have failed to say ... My body is a barrel of gunpowder that burns the enemy'.<sup>41</sup> Dahlgren goes on to note that 'Despite this political message in the video recording that [she] left behind, news reports mainly depicted her as a 'school dropout' who supported her poor family by working in a textile factory in the nearby town'.<sup>42</sup> The result of omitting these words was to depoliticise the female suicide bombers' actions and to take away ideological meaning. Through his highlighting of Ophelia's video as the play reaches its climax, I suggest that Al-Bassam is contextualising the act of Ophelia, and the recent female suicide bombers she represents, in the political and social circumstances of their lives rather than 'rendering them incomprehensible'<sup>43</sup> if only seen through the lens of their personal trauma.

### ***There with fantastic garlands did she come***

Linked to the questions raised about Ophelia's agency in Al-Bassam's play and in the media at the time of its genesis is a broader cultural debate about women's bodies and women's clothing. The representation of Ophelia through her clothing and props goes back to the First or 'Bad' Quarto, in which she is described as entering dressed in white, her hair loose and dishevelled, playing a lute. Later, dressing Ophelia in black suggested a stronger equivalence with Hamlet and his madness. The appearance of *The Al-Hamlet Summit* Ophelia in her video projection as the play climaxes, dressed in black and taking revenge for the death of her father makes her, as I suggested earlier, the most significant foil to Hamlet in this production, as she takes on the role of Electra. Western commentators note how several of the Palestinian women bombers had previously dressed in a Western style and worn make-up before appearing in their farewell videos in hijab. Rani Salimi argues that when the female suicide bombers chose to consciously 'perform' their farewell videos in hijab, they were deliberately costuming an ideology: 'The triangulation of body, resistance, and performance is embodied in the Palestinian female fighter's hijab: Conservative apparel, much like militarization, empowers the paramilitary .... In the farewell videos, both the set (the display of armoury) and the costumes of the performers (hijab) function to portray these women as powerful members of a vast, growing, and global community of Muslim fighters'.<sup>44</sup>

Ophelia's clothing is most vividly represented, however, in the equivalent of Gertrude's elegy and this is where Al-Bassam's representation of her becomes considerably more ambivalent. In Shakespeare's play, the flowers become inseparable from Ophelia's physical self, so much so that the woman underneath almost disappears under the weight of their description. As Al-Bassam's Gertrude staggers onstage, her face half blown away by Ophelia's bomb, she too creates an intense series of images of Ophelia's death, evoking the natural imagery of sunset in the palace gardens and her clothing:

Your sister, Laertes. She came into the palace when the sun fell into the trees. When the guards were warm and droopy like the oranges her eyes were blazing and alive, her dress swollen with the wind as if with a phantom child, with fantastic wailing she moved beyond the guards into the courtyard, a swollen angel against the black sweep of the tarmac ...<sup>45</sup>

Again, an analysis of the language that describes the clothing of female suicide bombers in Western media shows a fascination with that clothing, the floating fabric, described as 'flowing', 'billowing robes'.<sup>46</sup> Whereas the flowers increased the sense of Ophelia's innocence/madness, the descriptions of the robes have the opposite effect. Although intensely feminising, they are also subversive images: 'The very cultural artifacts [sic] that once made these women a non-threat become menacing symbols when linked to the female suicide bomber'.<sup>47</sup> The word 'swollen' has connotations of drowning and infection as well as pregnancy, and the child is only a 'phantom child', like the 'dead-men's fingers' foreshadowing the imminent moment of death. Anxiety around female bombers hiding their explosives under abayas or even through feigned pregnancy was high.<sup>48</sup> So here, Ophelia is an 'angel' but an 'angel of death'.<sup>49</sup> Although Ophelia in her video farewell claimed, 'I have tried to speak ... I have tried to forgive ... I want people outside to know this/that I will express with my body what is not/able for to express politics and mighty nations',<sup>50</sup> in Al-Bassam's play, Gertrude goes on to describe 'the rolling flesh in the twitching limbs' to an emotionally shattered Laertes who only moments before has been cradling his dead father's body. 'Her body was a well I washed myself in', says Gertrude, her shaking arms extended helplessly: 'how hot it felt across my face, how hot her lungs, her

intestines how hot?'.<sup>51</sup> Ophelia does not have the final word. The shattering of her body is not glorified. Through his complex negotiation of Shakespeare's play with its contemporary politics, through the rhetoric and performance of terror, Al-Bassam leaves the audience with Gertrude's conclusion on the matter. Until this moment, Gertrude has been in opposition to Ophelia but finally she sees the interrelatedness of their situations:

No one is exempt.

Exemption is impossible.

I carry my guilt, I carry it.<sup>52</sup>

At the beginning of this essay, I set out to address whether *The Al-Hamlet Summit* Ophelia can be reassessed as a figure of agency. I have sought to understand where Al-Bassam's representation of Ophelia leaves us when thinking about the headlines we read in the papers about a female suicide bomber: is she a victim-perpetrator or the heroic freedom fighter, or just a representation of our times? Al-Bassam's play does not in fact answer this. Rather it contrives to bring about a radical transformation of his audience's understanding of the political and gender circumstances that lay behind the suicide bombings in the year of its genesis. Through his transformation of Ophelia, a culturally recognisable and empathetic figure, he is able to break down and reject the idea that these women are somehow abject, so different from his audiences in the West that comprehension is not possible. What Ophelia has achieved, perhaps, is to have 'represented' the world, as Müller's Ophelia did before her, and as Darwish's poems did for the peoples she represents.

### Author biography

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currently working on appropriations of Shakespeare's Hamlet in China, Poland and the Arab world. She has published and presented on intercultural Shakespeare. Vickers Walkling was included as one of the eleven York-based researchers cited in the successful bid for York to become a UNESCO City of Media Arts 2015.

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