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The Complex Panorama of "Shakespeare" in Turkish Theatre Historiography

Melis Günekan
Koç University, Türkiye
centuar@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8195-564X

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Abstract

In Turkish theatre history, the name "Shakespeare" reflects a long-surviving "anxiety of influence," embodying a continual aspiration for Western dramatic traditions that have extensively shaped theatrical conventions in the late Ottoman Era and Republican Türkiye. Following the late nineteenth century in particular, the means of access to and engagement with Shakespeare's work were closely linked to theatre's role as a political agent in the projects of modernism and nation-state building. In contrast to the legitimating authority that *Shakespeare* provides theatre practitioners today, Shakespeare's incipient legacy in the late Ottoman period flourished via a fragmented, changing pattern of dramatic texts and performances in various languages. Borrowing Margaret Litvin's theory of Shakespeare appropriation in the Arab world, we see that Shakespeare entered the Ottoman theatrical scene through a "global kaleidoscope of indirect experiences". Whereas the name Shakespeare wavered around different connotations such as a canonical playwright who influenced non-Muslim dramatic literature, a marker of knowledge, or an influential dramatist whose works were paraphrased or adapted in the late Ottoman Era, the playwright acquired a preserved, authorial status in modern Turkish theatre. In my article, I evaluate Shakespeare's complex entry to the theatre scene in the late Ottoman Era and Republican Türkiye by looking at the critical work of the playwright by prominent figures such as İnci Enginün and Muhsin Ertuğrul and address the need for a new vocabulary and methodology with which to evaluate the ambivalent place that Shakespeare has occupied within this complex historical panorama.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Turkish theatre historiography, cultural hegemony, "global kaleidoscope", Shakespeare's legacy

Introduction

In Turkish theatre history, the name "Shakespeare" reflects a long-surviving "anxiety of

influence," as described by Harold Bloom (1997), embodying a continual aspiration for Western dramatic traditions that have extensively shaped theatrical conventions in the late Ottoman Era and Republican Türkiye.[1] Following the late nineteenth century in particular, the means of access to and engagement with William Shakespeare's work were closely linked to theatre's role as a political agent in the projects of modernism and nation-state building. The development of theatre practice and criticism in Türkiye was closely associated with political and cultural reforms, especially visible through purpose-built theatres modelled on Western examples during the late Ottoman Era (Faroqhi, 2014, p. 48). The foundation of what we today call "Ottoman theatre" and "Turkish theatre," both of which reference theatre practices in a Western framing, dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, the Era of the Tanzimat (reform and reorganization) of the Ottoman Empire.[2] The projects of modernization from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic emphasized the hierarchical relationship between East and West by approaching Western literary figures as markers of knowledge, and as Nalan Turna (2014) notes, "although there are a few exceptions, most historians of Ottoman theatres still write within the intellectual framework of the Turkish nation-state" (p. 327). Writing about Turkish theatre history, then, effectively requires that one write simultaneously about Turkish theatre historiography.

The Tanzimat Era witnessed an outburst of written literature and theatrical activity, and experimentation with the Western genres and literary movements of the time. Shakespearean drama was central to this development, and access to the playwright's work was mediated by the fact that the circulation of textual material was quite dispersed. Western art was acknowledged and translated through scattered intermediaries, encounters, and sources, and this familiarity gradually turned into a fascination with Western culture.[3] The documents to which playwrights and theatre artists could have access ranged from commentaries, letters, diary entries, book introductions, and newspaper articles not only in Ottoman Turkish but also in Greek, Armenian, and foreign languages, mainly French. By the 1880s, around ten periodicals were being published a year in İstanbul, but even as newspapers, periodicals, and literature publications were becoming more professional, numerous publications lacked proper issuing dates.[4] In their pioneering works on the Tanzimat Era, the historiographers and scholars İnci Enginün and Metin And both underline the difficulty of determining the exact dates of some sources. On the practice of translation, for instance, Enginün remarks that it was a disorderly practice at the time as the translations were published in newspapers and periodicals, adding that it is still possible to encounter new Shakespeare translations (1979, p. 3).

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[1] This article is derived from the writer's doctoral dissertation, *Shakespeare and Authority: The Intersection of Theatre, Locality and Politics in Türkiye* (Boğaziçi University, 2021).

[2] Known as the era of reorganization, the Tanzimat (1839-1876) was a period of military, administrative, fiscal and judicial reforms that took place during the mid-nineteenth century and that were inspired by and modeled on European examples. The interest in the West had already been in the agenda in the eighteenth century Ottoman Empire, which had begun to occupy a politically weaker position within international politics by the beginning of the following century. For more, see Zürcher, E. J. (2004). *Türkiye: A modern history* (3rd ed.). London and New York: I. B. Tauris, and Ahmad, F. (1993). *The making of modern Türkiye* (2003 ed.). London and New York: Routledge.

[3] For a detailed consideration of this issue, see Melis Süloş's "Performance as Politics of Westernization in the Late Ottoman World" in *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World* (2014, p. 433).

[4] The Tanzimat Era was also marked by the spread of the Ottoman press, the first glimpses of which can be found during Sultan Mahmud II's reign, when *Takvim-i Vekai*, the first bulletin-like newspaper, was published in 1840. Another notable example was the newspaper called *Tercüman-i Ahval* that was published in 1860, with the poet, translator and writer Ibrahim Şinasi Efendi as its head chief, whose famous play *Şairin Evlenmesi* [*The Poet's Marriage*, 1860] is recognized as the first Western-style play in Turkish (Zürcher, p. 67).

The interaction with Shakespeare's works was mainly part of the theatre's role as an operative agent in the realization of Westernization. Yet, the playwright's influence on Ottoman writers was often indirect and limited to thematic borrowing (And, 1972, p. 292). As Metin And (1999) points out, the rising interest in Shakespeare in the second half of the nineteenth century had to do with the close attention devoted to the English playwright by French romantics and melodrama writers (p. 175), as the popular productions of the day mainly consisted of melodrama and vaudevilles. Ottoman texts recycled these conventions: Metin And takes Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan's play *Finten* as an example and underlines the scene in which a contemplative young girl holds her own head between her hands thoughtfully, reminding the audience of Hamlet's soliloquies through the bodily movement of the young girl. Following the 1860s, the number of Shakespeare productions, adaptations, and translations increased in number, and oftentimes *Romeo and Juliet, Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear, and The Merchant of Venice* were being staged. The first known Turkish production of Shakespeare is that of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1871 and 1874, but the dramatic text has not survived. Unfortunately, this is the case for most of the Western productions of the time. *Romeo and Juliet* was the most influential Shakespeare play during the Tanzimat Era, and it was included in the same repertoire with *Leyla ile Mecnun*, *Tahir ile Zühre,* and *Arzu ile Kamber,* which have similar plots to Shakespeare's famous tragedy of star-crossed lovers. The balcony scene became the most frequently mentioned part in the drama and prose of the time (Enginün, pp. 227-28). The writers of the time experimented with the play's subject matter and adapted the issues of thwarted romance and the lovers' suicide more than any other motif or theme from Shakespeare (p. 252). İbrahim Şinasi, Namık Kemal, and Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan were among the prominent literary figures of the Tanzimat upon whose works *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello,* and *Macbeth* had great impact.[5] Enginün interprets the tendency to be influenced by tragedies, especially *Macbeth*, as an outcome of the reaction against autocracy at the time (p. 253).

The dynamics that constituted the understanding of Shakespeare were quite changeable as well and thus the *originality* or *coherence* of a unitary playwright figure was often not at stake. The second production of Shakespeare known to be staged in Turkish was *Othello*, and this production allows us to ask what constituted the understanding of Shakespeare and his work at the time since it was translated from a French adaptation of the original play. The co-translators Hasan Bedreddin and Mehmet Rıfat translated *Othello* in 1876 from Jean-François Ducis' French adaptation, and included no mention of Shakespeare's name in the publication, supposing that the story had first been represented in Italy as an opera and then translated into French by Ducis (Enginün, p. 22). It was staged at the famous Gedikpaşa Theatre sometime between the years 1876-77, and it is the only Turkish-language Shakespeare production of the time whose dramatic text has survived (p. 19). Because Ducis did not know English, used the 1745 La Place translation of *Othello* for his adaptation, and earned a reputation for altering Shakespeare's play greatly, the Turkish audience became acquainted with a rewriting of *Othello*. Ducis' version, which dominated the French stage in the second half of the eighteenth century, has a different storyline, and altered character names and scenes. For instance, Loredance (Cassio) was Othello's rival and tried to convince Hedelmone (Desdemona) to leave Othello and marry him instead. The evil doings of Pezzare (Iago) were only revealed in the last act, and Hedelmone kept secrets from Othello, who had reason enough to doubt her infidelity.

In this period, the name "Shakespeare" functioned as an umbrella term gathering together a

[5] See İnci Enginün for more information on the influence of Shakespeare on Tanzimat writers: *Tanzimat Devrinde Shakespeare,* II. Bölüm: Tesirler, pp. 115-238.

variety of practices. For an attuned audience who had seen or known about Shakespeare's *Othello* in advance, and had access to it through other languages, Ducis' *Othello* may have been experienced as an adaptation of Shakespeare. On the other hand, for those who saw *Othello* on stage for the first time or learned about the play through the Ducis adaptation, the name Shakespeare might have sounded irrelevant to *Othello*. By this time, theatres had begun to reach wider audiences due to increases in the number of theatre companies and stages, and the widespread usage of the press. The Ducis case indicates that within the larger framework of the heterogeneous "Ottoman theatre," Shakespeare -as a playwright, as a marker of knowledge and intellect, as a great romanticist, or as Ducis- entered the cultural domain through different mediums and languages.

Even though the work of Shakespeare entered the Turkish scene for the first time during the second half of the nineteenth century, non-Muslim communities and European residents in the empire had already been interested in Western theatre and staging plays in their native languages during the early nineteenth century. By the eighteenth century, for instance, visiting troupes from Europe were staging plays in their native language for their respective embassies or consulates in İstanbul (Turna, p. 320). Thus, the European influence was already present before the Tanzimat Era and the bureaucrats and notables could enjoy it as they increased in number. The Ottoman attempts to put Western theatre into practice were first of all carried out by non-Muslims, notably Armenians. As Hasmik Khalapyan (2014) notes, being the founders of "the modern-style Ottoman theatre," Armenians approached theatre both as a marker of national pride "in being the 'importers' of European-style performances into the empire" and "an effective way of raising funds for the poor and educational institutions" (p. 380). For this reason, Shakespeare productions initially circled around Armenian players and writers, alongside the productions by Italian, French, and English travelling troupes. İnci Enginün (1979) directs our attention to the fact that in the 1840s, the playwrights Sırabyan Hekimyan, Petros Minasyan, and Tomas Terziyan revealed the influence of Shakespeare on their plays (p. 14). According to the theatre researchers S. N. Bilga, Aşot Madatyan, and Arslan Kaynardağ, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* were staged in Armenian in 1842, and between the years 1850-62, Atamyan and Fasulyeciyan, who were well-known Armenian actors of the time, appeared in Shakespeare plays -the former as Othello and King Lear, and the latter as Othello (p. 16). What is more, Armenian women played male roles in this period, and one of the most notably recorded cases was that of the famous actress Siranuş (1857-1932), who became the first Armenian woman to play the role of Hamlet in 1901 (And, 1972, p. 148; Öğütcü, 2023, p. 2).[6]

Towards the end of the Tanzimat Era, there were almost 100 translations from European works and 8 were from English Literature. Among these, 7 were from Shakespeare and this reveals that the playwright was almost the only figure acknowledged from English Literature (Enginün, pp. 19-20). In the 1880s, there were other important examples of Shakespeare translations from English, and this preoccupation was limited to the accessibility of the published English translations of the time. Working on *Tales from*

[6] Women had a second-class social status in the Ottoman world, and non-Muslim women seemed to enjoy the privilege of acting compared to Muslim women. This privilege of acting did not translate itself to an empowering, liberating experience, however, since non-Muslim women had been subjected by not only the ethnicity politics in the Ottoman world, but also by the gender politics in the Christian community itself. For more on the gender politics in theatre in the late Ottoman Era and within the Armenian society, see Dinçer, Fahriye. "Questioning Female Identity in Theatre: Late Ottoman and Early Republican Modernization Processes". *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*. Seagull Books: London, 2014. 393-406.

Shakespeare by Charles and Mary Lamb, Mihran Boyaciyan translated *Romeo and Juliet*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors,* and *Othello* in 1884, and had them published only in 1912 when she could, at last, have official permission to do so (Enginün, p. 57). Until this time, there had been no published translations of *Hamlet* in Turkish, although Mehmet Nadir had translated several excerpts from the play in 1881. Nadir provides commentaries and information about the play along with the excerpts he translated. His other translations of and on Shakespeare include Robert Greene's *Pandosto* in 1882, various excerpts from the plays *Troilus and Cressida*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, more than 40 sonnets, and excerpts from the narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* in the late 1880s. Nadir's translation of Robert Greene resembles the case of Ducis in the sense that he adapted *The Winter's Tale* into a Turkish novel, but this was the translation of *Pandosto*, the source text provided by Robert Greene. This was how Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* was introduced to the reader for the first time, which again shows that the Ottoman intelligentsia's recognition of and engagement with the playwright occurred through diverse and dispersed means of translation and adaptation.

Margaret Litvin's model of literary appropriation, "the global kaleidoscope," provides an illustrative approach to the way I conceptualize Shakespeare's complex entry into the Ottoman world and the ambivalent place he occupies within this complex historical panorama. Considering the recognition and perception of *Hamlet* in the Arab world, Litvin (2011) remarks that Shakespeare entered the Arab scene through a "global kaleidoscope of indirect experiences," a variety of dispersed sources, which makes it impossible to consider a one-to-one relationship between the playwright's original texts and their appropriations. A similar experience took place in the late Ottoman period as Shakespeare entered the Ottoman stage through a scattered medium of different sources such as French adaptations and melodramas, excerpts from productions by English and European theatre troupes, and local Armenian and Greek productions. This was also true for a range of Western writers; Ottoman intellectuals and artists would read works by writers and playwrights such as Victor Hugo, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (known by his stage name Molière), and Eugene Scribe in French (Enginün, 1979, pp. 2-3). For instance, Namık Kemal was among the intellectuals of the time who learned about Shakespeare through French romanticism, especially utilizing Victor Hugo's work. Enginün notes that Kemal displays his preference for romanticism over classicism, and in his introduction to his work, *Celal* (1881) includes a section informing the reader about Shakespeare's life, works, and success as a great playwright (p. 124).

The primary agency of French language and culture in learning about Western literature was in part associated with the reforms related to Ottoman education and the empire's central bureaucracy. By the 1860s, France had such an influence on the reforms that a regulation advised by the French Ministry of Education was issued for Public Education in 1869. Following the European pattern, former scribes became bureaucrats for whom knowledge of European languages and presence in social circles with foreign officials and intellectuals were important determinants of their newly adapted administrative positions (Zürcher, 2004, p. 66). A more significant reason for French domination of the access to Western theatre was that French embassies had staged French and Italian operas and plays such as Molière's *Cocu Imaginaire* and Corneille's *Cid* as early as the seventeenth century, and had a theatre building constructed within the grounds of their embassy in İstanbul (And, 1972, p. 38). This reinforces the fact that Western theatre had already been practised in the Ottoman Empire within the social and political circles of foreigners and non-Muslims.

The perception of Shakespeare in the late Ottoman Era was thus formed through a

continually changing and scattered pattern of stage productions, translations, adaptations, excerpts, and summaries. For Litvin, "the would-be appropriator typically receives a text through a historically determined kaleidoscope of [such] indirect experiences," and responds to this global kaleidoscope of diverse sources and precedents through an interaction that is much more complex than "the dichotomy between a colonizer's "source" culture and the "target" culture of the colonized" (p. 36). Rather, the appropriator is surrounded by a complex web of relations in which historically specific political and cultural dynamics shape the idea of "Shakespeare". In this regard, Litvin argues, it is vital to recognize the continually changing pattern of the relationship between a Shakespearean "original" and Arab "appropriations." Similarly, Shakespeare's complex entry to the Ottoman theatre scene indicates the indeterminate and fragmented relationship between the dominant "Western culture" and the "local" Ottoman one, a relationship that further involves the complex heterogeneity of Ottoman dramatic literature and concerns over cultural hegemony.[7] Although the idea of the "West" is first and foremost associated with "international influence" in Turkish theatre historiography, it is at the same time deeply interwoven with local diversity" in the sense that Ottoman Armenian and Greek intellectuals were already reflecting on Western dramatic conventions long before Muslim Ottomans dominated the stage.[8]

During the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1920), Shakespeare's works were still part and parcel of theatre's role as a political agent in the twin projects of modernism and nation-state building. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, there was a lull in theatre practice because of the bans and censorship practised under the autocratic rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909).[9] The playwrights of the Second Constitutional Era thus built their artistic creations on the works of Tanzimat theatre practitioners and playwrights but by this time, theatre productions and works of drama were influenced by not only Western examples but Turkish works written during the era as well. İnci Enginün remarks that the plays *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear,* and *Othello* were censored in the 1880s under the reign of Abdulhamid II. At the time, the Italian actor and playwright Ernesto Rossi was invited to the palace to perform in the presence of Abdülhamid II, but due to censorship, he could only stage *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* under the title "Shylock" (1979, p. 17). This is related to the sultan's disposition to ban plays that revolved around or alluded to "disloyalty

[7] There were complex hierarchies in the Ottoman performative traditions. Before the emergence of an interest in Western performing arts in nineteenth century Ottoman culture, various dramatic forms and entertainment arts such as *ortaoyunu*, shadow plays, puppetry and were being practiced in the empire. On this subject, see Öztürkmen, A. (2014). "Performance in the Ottoman world". in S. Faroqhi & A. Öztürkmen (Eds.), *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World* (pp. 3-23). London: Seagull Books.

[8] In Turkish theatre criticism, the issue of reproducing or abandoning traditional, local material mainly revolved around the conflict between "international influence" and Ottoman dramatic literature (Pekman, 2002, pp. 86-87). The tendency in theatre criticism to regard the traditional material as a homogenous entity rendered the theatrical practice of non-Muslim communities only tangentially related to discussions on Ottoman dramatic literature. Metin And directs our attention to the importance Güllü Agop gave to correct pronunciation of Turkish by the Armenians, who were already performing plays in Turkish before the establishment of "Ottoman Theatre". And notes that at the time there was rising criticism against considering Turkish performances by Armenians under the roof of Ottoman theatre, while at the same time the incorrect use of the language by Turkish artists was also criticized (1992, p. 75).

[9] Under Sultan Abdulhamid II's reign, there was significant economic decline and the emergence of strong political opposition by the Young Turks, who were a group of Muslim bureaucrats and officials that criticized the regime, especially the strict autocratic rule of the sultan. They managed to force the sultan to adopt a constitution in 1876 that aimed at relieving the repercussions of free trade on depressed classes (Ahmad, p. 28). Yet, the sultan shelved the constitutional regime in 1878 and froze developments in the areas of economy and ownership for thirty years (p. 29).

to the regime, spreading a negative image of the Ottomans or troubling political relations both on the local and the international levels" (Turna, p. 331). The constitution was restored in 1908, and with the beginning of the Second Constitutional Era, censorship was removed, and political exiles began to return to the empire. As the period of autocracy inhibited the development of theatre for a time, there was still a need for gathering theatrical practice and education around an institution.

Theatrical activity was especially concerned with attempts to revive theatre as a disciplined practice and institution, and this era witnessed institutionalization from outside. For the foundation of a drama and music conservatory, Ottoman officials and intellectuals again turned their gaze to Western experts who were officially employed and funded. In this regard, Muhsin Ertuğrul's theatrical career epitomizes the *foreign* institutionalization of theatre and the increasing disengagement with the Ottoman theatrical heritage including the cultural heritage of non-Muslim communities.[10] Muhsin Ertuğrul made a great effort to publicize contemporary Western and European theatre conventions, especially Shakespeare's work. In the wake of this transitional period, Ertuğrul's tight engagement in European dramatic traditions and Shakespeare in particular incongruously led him to assume the role of the "Western expert" he is so eager to learn from. When Ertuğrul went to Paris in 1911 to study the theatrical conventions upon Vahram Papazyan's advice, and there he watched Mounet-Sully's performance of Hamlet at the Comédie Française. When Ertuğrul came back in 1912, he staged *Hamlet* and performed the young prince for the first time.[11] Commenting on his first Hamlet role, Ertuğrul refers to his interest in Shakespeare's work as an "infatuation", a life-long passion he feels to the bone; that he endeavoured to *acknowledge* his other works one by one (as cited in Nutku, 1969, p. 10). Ertuğrul's retrospective account reflects the issue of self-recognition through the authorial position he occupies as an expert on Shakespearean drama, which is also revelatory of the binaries of Turkish theatre historiography. This case effectively exemplifies the paradox of *foreign* institutionalization through the name "Shakespeare," as Ertuğrul spent a lifetime staging, directing, and performing in Shakespeare's works through the influence and knowledge he gained through European examples. Ertuğrul's approach to the modernization of theatre replicated, in a renewed fashion, earlier generations' dispersed means of accessing Shakespeare.

The fact that today Ertuğrul is acknowledged as representative of his generation for introducing contemporary Western and European theatre conventions is especially observed in his trips abroad and theatre career under Darülbedayi-i Osmani, the first Ottoman theatre and drama school established in 1914.[12] Darülbedayi-i Osmani was founded under the

[10] The constitutional revision in the Second Constitutional Era affected theatrical practice in no time as numerous amateur companies and troupes were formed after 1908. Among the newly-formed companies, the Burhanettin Company was the longest-lasting one, and it was where Muhsin Ertuğrul, today recognized as the founder of modern Turkish theatre, appeared on stage for the first time in 1909.

[11] This production used Abdullah Cevdet's translation of *Hamlet,* which is the first known published version of the play in Turkish. After the success of this production, Ertuğrul went to Paris again for a couple of months in 1913 and attended the Lugné-Poe Theatre that was under the provision of André Antoine at the time (Ertuğrul, 1989, p. 157).

[12] In 1914, the İstanbul Town Council allocated funding from its budget for the establishment of a Music and Drama Conservatory. When it was opened in 1914, Darülbedayi-i Osmani offered courses on pronunciation, prosody, history and literature, verse, drama, swordplay, tragedy and comedy, and dance. Whereas the music conservatory was divided into a Western Music Department and a Turkish Music Department, the drama conservatory was rather Western in its organization. 197 students applied to the institution and there were only 8 women among the applicants, all of whom were non-Muslims. 63 candidates could pass the first elimination,

supervision of the French director André Antoine, who had established the first independent theatre in Paris. Antoine, as the "Westerner" who was commissioned to initiate this institutionalization, dealt with a series of different negotiations, as he was requested to establish a conservatory and a national theatre based on the conventions of the Comédie Française. Oddly enough, Antoine was the founder of the Paris-based Théâtre Libre, one of the earliest independent theatre institutions. That a theatre-maker who challenged the centralized theatrical institutions of his time and favoured less popular and more improvisational productions was commissioned to establish a theatre resembling the Comédie Française was one of the many ambivalences that marked this period in Turkish theatre history.

In 1914, Ertuğrul received acceptance from Darülbedayi-i Osmani, passing the preliminary examination with a performance he prepared from *Hamlet* (Nutku, 1969, p. 24). He thus followed in the footsteps of Antoine and led the theatrical activities and training in the drama conservatory, seeking to establish a disciplined theatre for the public.[13] Rather than recognizing Antoine's aforementioned background in establishing independent theatre institutions in France, Ertuğrul preferred to occupy a leading role in the establishment of a centralized *national* theatre based on Western dramatic conventions. Ertuğrul's passion for becoming competent in Shakespearean drama disclosed itself in his professional field trips, which he wrote about extensively in his memoir. Influenced by pioneering figures like Jean Mounet-Sully, Max Reinhardt, and Konstantin Sergeievich Stanislavsky, Ertuğrul spent years studying the conventions, productions, and theatrical activity of the period to come back and apply what he had learned as an administrator, director and a lead actor in Darülbedayi-i Osmani. Recalling the time he watched *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1925, Ertuğrul remarks his deep admiration for the production by comparing it to earlier stage adaptations of *Hamlet* that he considers as praiseworthy:

> The embedded traces of Shakespeare's plays I saw in central and remote cities of Europe rose from the depths of my memory when I watched *Hamlet* in Moscow. In my mind, the things I previously observed and considered about *Hamlet* became layered and I sensed that my skull almost cracked as it broadened. From Comédie Française's traditional and majestic *Hamlet* to performances at small, shabby sites, I reviewed all the productions of the play I had seen and admired so far. Starting with Mounet-Sully, I recalled the final images of great figures like Sarah Bernhardt, Suzanne Deprés, Edouard de Max, Alexander Moissi, Raoul Aslan, and Oscar Marek, all of whom were the pride and joys of their societies … Eventually I also pieced together everything I could observe and remember in relation to this tragedy [of *Hamlet*] … the way it was envisioned by world-renowned directors like Max Reinhardt from Germany, Gordon Craig from England and Lugné-Poe from France. The sum of all these stood aghast the *Hamlet* production at the Moscow Art Theatre. (1989, p. 381)[14]

Ertuğrul's narration of the time he was overwhelmed by the success of the Moscow Art Theatre offers a condensed panorama of the leading European theatre artists that he set as exemplary figures of authority in his field, in this case, Shakespearean drama. On this

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and most of these applicants were theatre practitioners who were already performing and working in various companies at the time (Nutku, 1969, pp. 16-32).

[13] In the wake of the First World War, Antoine had to leave İstanbul in August 1914 without completing his schedule and plans, and thus he was not present when Darülbedayi-i Osmani was opened in November 1914.

[14] All of the translations from Turkish to English, including this excerpt from Ertuğrul's memoir, are my own unless otherwise stated.

subject, however, Ertuğrul does not provide the reader with a detailed assessment of the theatrical conventions and distinct dramaturgical choices that he claims have shaped his comprehensive understanding of staging *Hamlet*. A list of the pioneering figures is mentioned almost like side notes at this point in his memoir even though they constituted an extensive part of his theatrical negotiations, being major markers of expertise and intellect he drew upon.

In his account, Ertuğrul romanticizes the enriching experience of studying numerous stage performances of *Hamlet* on site, and in this way, he simultaneously concretizes his own position as an authority in stage arts and Shakespeare in Turkish theatre, which plays a crucial role in shaping "the anxiety of influence" over Shakespeare that still haunts theatre artists today. Ertuğrul successively foregrounds the European role models as points of reference that served to cultivate and anchor his reputation in Türkiye. His own bewildered state of mind in the face of all of the *Hamlet* productions he tries to grasp in their totality also discloses "the anxiety of influence" he experiences over Western literary figures as markers of knowledge. Ironically, Ertuğrul's engagement with Shakespeare's work presupposes a unilateral encounter with the playwright as he juxtaposes distinct dramatic conventions from the "West" as his layers of access to Shakespearean drama and disregards the complex set of hierarchies that flourish from within the heterogeneous theatrical dynamics of the previous era. It is evident in the above excerpt that Ertuğrul's narrative of his theatrical apprenticeship with Shakespeare turns a blind eye to the contribution of non-Muslim citizens to the practice of theatre in the late Ottoman Era.

During the Second Constitutional Era, Ertuğrul's theatrical career effectively reveals that the means of access to and engagement with Shakespeare's work continues to take place through a "kaleidoscope of indirect experiences", making it impossible to have a direct, unilateral relationship with the playwright. This time, however, the heterogeneous and hybrid nature of dealing with Shakespeare's work in the earlier generation leaves its place for a complex identification of theatre practice with Western dramaturgical and theatrical conventions. In return, Shakespeare gradually gained a preserved, authorial status in modern Turkish theatre, and issues of legitimacy, fidelity, and self-authorization became vital concerns for future theatre artists.

During the early years of the Turkish Republic, there was great attention paid to the development of theatre within the scope of secularism, Kemalist ideology, and Republicanism, and Shakespeare became associated with this new ideal of nation-state building. Muhsin Ertuğrul witnessed the transition from autocracy to the Second Constitutional Era (1908) and from the Ottoman Empire to Republican Türkiye (1923). Ertuğrul himself exemplifies the issue of overlooking the theatrical heritage in that even though he achieves artistic maturity by collaborating with non-Muslim theatre practitioners, his career is largely remembered concerning his passion for European and Western trends in drama and his trips abroad.[15] Ertuğrul's theatrical choices in the Darülbedayi-i Osmani, which transformed into the İstanbul City Theatre in 1931, exhibit the first traces of the common understanding of Shakespeare in twentieth-century Turkish theatre. Shakespeare had become the most staged playwright of the İstanbul City Theatre under Ertuğrul's administration (Nutku, p. 10). At this point, Ertuğrul's career had become synonymous with his continual trips to Europe, and his desire to build a national, public theatre in Türkiye often meant staging plays from canonical European figures in line with Western theatrical

[15] For more on theatrical projects of Ertuğrul, see *Başlangıcından 1983'e Türk Tiyatro Tarihi* (2004) by Metin And and *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın!* (1989) by Muhsin Ertuğrul.

conventions. In time, Shakespeare was not only viewed as a greatly influential canonical figure, a marker of modernism and elite culture, and the authorial brand name in proving mastery in stage arts but his name and legacy were embraced with nationalistic pride.

Especially visible through his endeavours and works in the Republican Era, Ertuğrul came to be known as the sole expert in Western-style training, directing, and acting. When he was the director of Darülbedayi, the plays by Western canonical figures such as Shakespeare, Pirandello, Schiller, Ibsen and Strindberg were always at the forefront, although plays by Turkish playwrights were staged as well. One of Ertuğrul's main goals was to become more disciplined and professional such that the new regulations he set up for Darülbedayi included imposing fines for those who were absent at rehearsals and productions with no valid excuse (Nuktu, 1969, p. 65). In 1927, he went on a field trip to Russia, where he observed and learned about the theatre of Stanislavsky and Meyerhold. In the next season, the most striking success of the establishment was Ertuğrul's production of *Hamlet*, in which Ertuğrul also performed Hamlet. Following this period, it became a tradition to open each season of the İstanbul City Theatre with a new Shakespeare production (Halman, p. 18), which also turned into a strict shaping of the repertoires to include plays by Shakespeare as a rule. Among the countless Shakespeare plays he staged and performed, Ertuğrul is first and foremost associated with *Hamlet*, having worked on more than a dozen productions and numerous different translations of the play.

Muhsin Ertuğrul's theatrical choices were rather marked by the nation-state-building ideal of the newly established Republic, and the growing authoritarianism that came along with it. In this context, Ertuğrul, who spent a lifetime staging Shakespeare's work, embodies the dualities of East/West and dictatorship/liberty displaced by the republican ideology in setting and practising its reforms. As İlker Ergün notes, Ertuğrul "claimed that he staged *Hamlet* in the line of secularist and Kemalist dramaturgies and links [sic] Shakespeare to universalist humanism, as a milestone which will introduce the deepest parts of the human soul to the Turkish audience" (2020, p. 48). This new ideal of Westernization was experienced as an imitation that disregarded Ottoman cultural and traditional heritage, and it rather strictly relied on the notion of national identity in establishing Turkish theatre.[16]

That "Muhsin Ertuğrul" has become the authoritative reference point for thinking about "Shakespeare in Türkiye" is also due to his dominating, one-man attitude in taking vital steps and decisions on the institutionalization of theatre from outside. In evaluating the contribution of Ertuğrul to Turkish theatre, Metin And emphasizes the director's singular stature, even as he underlines his enthusiasm for cultivating new theatre artists (1973, p.12). From this perspective, as Ertuğrul's elitist "infatuation" with Shakespeare in the realization of cultural transformations permeated through the nation's broader secularist, republican ideals, it found expression in the still-valid national pride reflected in the playwright. A striking example of this discourse is seen in the way the scholar, writer, and diplomat Talat Sait Halman (1931-2014) celebrates Shakespeare's 450th birthday and praises the

[16] On this subject, Nutku (1969) notes that the Westernization movement, which dates back to the Tanzimat Era of the Ottoman Empire, imitated and emulated the Western canon at face value. Once it turned out to be a unilateral cultural exchange, it moved away from national identity and culture, and failed to become a synthesis between "self" and "other" (pp. 3-4). Here, Nutku refers to the traditional theatre practices of shadow play, *meddah* and *ortaoyunu* on which various intellectuals of the Tanzimat wrote criticism, emphasizing the way that they are neglected in attempts at Westernization. Nutku's criticism was to the point to a certain extent, in that Westernization was experienced as an imitation that disregarded Ottoman cultural and traditional heritage, but also his firm reliance on the notion of national identity presupposes a homogeneous Ottoman tradition and thus he turns blind to the simultaneous erasure of the non-Muslim heritage.

playwright's place in Turkish culture and theatre in "Shakespearean Art in the Turkish Heart: The Bard in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic" (2014):

> We Turks adore Shakespeare. We have translated him over and over again since the second half of the 19th century. By January 2003, the complete tragedies, comedies, histories, and sonnets had been translated into Turkish – some of the major plays nine, ten, and eleven times. No mean achievement. Not all languages are that fortunate. So, Shakespeare is not a passing fad in Turkish life – not a fashion, but a Turkish passion and compassion. (p. 11)

Halman's rhapsodic expression around the practice of translating Shakespeare's work into Turkish echoes the way Ertuğrul characterizes his passion for Shakespeare –an "infatuation". Through the glorification of the name Shakespeare, we see here the discourse around Shakespeare's authority and the accompanying issue of self-authorization. In Halman's words, Shakespeare is not any playwright who occupies a fleeting place in the cultural practices of modern Türkiye, but a "Turkish" passion, symbolized by the artistic and cultural achievement of having translated the totality of his works into the vernacular. The national pride here is further connected to the aforementioned republican ideals of nation-state building, as Halman includes a poem in his rhapsodic account of Shakespearean art in Turkish culture: "Shakespeare, like Atatürk, condemned those who make spears:/ They both sang loving praises of those who break spears./ Our nation is Atatürk's but also Shakespeare's" (2014, p. 16). Here, Halman approaches both figures as mythical embodiments of the secular, liberating ideals of the republic and underlines Shakespeare's "local" reputation as a symbol of Western-influenced Turkish modernity and an authorial figure praised with national pride in Republican Türkiye.

Conclusion

Throughout the final decades of the Ottoman Empire and Republican Türkiye, rulers, officials, and the majority of the intelligentsia treated theatre practitioners as vital contributors to the social and political changes of their time. An overview of the history of Turkish theatre shows that the interest in translating, adapting, and staging Shakespeare took place as part of broader movements of modernization and Westernization in both the Ottoman Empire and Republican Türkiye. Looking at the diverse means of access to and treatment of Shakespeare's work in the Tanzimat Era complicates the issue of grappling with Shakespeare's authority, which comes to the surface as an inextricable concern in the twentieth-century theatre scene in Türkiye. The changing pattern of dramatic texts and performances in various languages were the determinants of Shakespeare's incipient legacy in the late Ottoman period, and thus the dynamics that shaped the understanding of Shakespeare were variable and oblique, making it impossible to bestow "Shakespeare" with a legitimating authority and to impose a foundational essence to the way theatre artists engage in his work. Even though Shakespeare's name initially oscillated between distinct dispositions, we see that in the twentieth century, Shakespeare gradually gained a preserved, authorial status in modern Turkish theatre, and his name gathered concerns over legitimacy, fidelity, and self-authorization.

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