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Turkish Shakespeare Studies: An Origins Story

Abstract: Shakespeare is among the most important non-Turkish authors in Turkey and has become an indispensable part of the theatre repertory and the educational curricula. Yet, the origins of Shakespeare studies have a complicated legacy dating back to the imperialistic motivations of foreign schools in Ottoman Turkey. However, starting with the republican period, Shakespeare productions and studies were utilised to spread the progressive reforms of the republic that were maintained through the theatres and the various universities primarily set in Istanbul and in Ankara. Accordingly, this article will explore the origins of the academic study of Shakespeare in Turkey.

Keywords: Turkey, higher education, Shakespeare studies, curriculum

The origins of Shakespeare studies in Turkey cannot be traced to a single continuous institution or school because the integration of Shakespeare into educational institutions coincided with a turbulent transition from the Ottoman Empire to the modern Turkish state. The origins of Shakespeare studies in Turkey are instead a multi-layered and palimpsestic continuity of many discontinuities. As a result, Turkey has a long tradition of reading, translating, and staging William Shakespeare's plays as part of the country's modernisation process. Ranging from faithful productions to free adaptations, Shakespeare has become one of the most important non-Turkish authors and an indispensable part of the theatre repertory and the educational curricula. Academic studies of Shakespeare in Turkey in higher education have paralleled and were integrated into the progressive reforms of the republic. Led and encouraged by the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), this instrumentalisation was maintained through the theatres and the various universities or faculties, primarily in Ankara and in Istanbul. The study of Shakespeare in survey courses and separate courses in higher education had two aims: studying English language and culture and enhancing the use of theatre to exhibit and teach

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progressive forms of egalitarian gender relations that encouraged equitable social opportunities.

Rather than mimicking Western forms and contrary to other nations once part of the British Empire (Bhatia 99-103; Ritter 17-46), the founding principles of Shakespeare studies under Atatürk were largely anti-imperialistic. Given that Shakespeare studies in the pre-republic period were maintained by missionary schools that aimed at cultural imperialism and the creation of Anglophilic comprador classes in a nation whose governing institutions were undergoing a period of rapid and overwhelming transition, utilising Shakespeare for the formation of a national progressive agenda could be considered one of the earliest examples of writing back against the Anglophone empires of the U.K. and the U.S. In this article, I will explore the origins of the academic study of Shakespeare in Turkey, concentrating on how the foundation of the Republic of Turkey has continued and transformed the study of Shakespeare in Turkish academia.

Origins of Ottoman Shakespeares

The earliest documentary evidence for Shakespeare performances by Greek and Armenian theatre companies located in Istanbul dates to 1842 and the earliest printed version of Shakespeare dates to 1876 when *Othello* became the first play translated into Turkish from an abridged French version. Before then, most of the written references to Shakespeare in Turkey consisted of scarce and intermittent notes on otherwise lost performances (Enginün 23-24).¹ The reason for the relative lack of discussion of Shakespeare in Turkey during this period resulted from the popularity of French literature, which overshadowed Shakespeare's presence until 1866 when Ira Aldridge (1807-1867) successfully performed *Othello* in Istanbul and 1871 when Shakespeare was performed for the first time in Turkish through a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* by the Gedikpaşa Theatre Company, again in Istanbul (And 30; Enginün 24-26; Forrester 278-284). Both performances established Shakespeare's popularity whose works would also attract attention through the formal establishment of foreign and missionary schools that used literature and Shakespeare to leverage their largely imperialist agenda. These schools establishing Shakespeare as a cultural imperial icon designed to emphasize the superiority of the English tongue, literature, and culture. The imperial motivations of especially British and American schools for promoting Shakespeare are by now familiar and cast a long shadow on the reception of Shakespeare in Turkey.

¹ Namık Kemal is a notable exception whose notes on Shakespeare in 1874 instrumentalised Shakespeare's works like *Julius Caesar* for his own republican cause that caused him much trouble later especially during Abdülhamid II's (1842-1918) autocratic reign (1876-1909) (Enginün 126-127).



Figure 1: Ira Aldridge as ‘Aaron the Moor’ in *Titus Andronicus*, British Library (2300.h.5.).
<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/ira-aldridge-as-aaron-the-moor-in-titus-andronicus>

Among the most important British Schools were those of the English High School for Girls that was founded by Jane Walsh in 1857, and the English High School for Boys, founded by the General British Consul Mr. Waugh under the headmastership of W. J. Wolfsberger in 1905 in Istanbul (Pears 95; Vahapoğlu 76, 116; Polat Haydaroglu 117-120; Göknel 30; Ertuğrul, *Azınlık* 190-191). As a 1906 document reveals, the curriculum of the schools had courses on “English Grammar and Composition, English Literature, History, Turkish, English and French language teaching” where Shakespeare was studied as part of the English Literature course (Göknel 34). The 1888 Indenture of the school for girls maintained that the school aimed at “educating young girls on liberal English principles without any restriction as to race or religion” (qtd. in Göknel 24), which implies that Shakespeare was possibly used as a progressive educational tool in these schools.

On the one hand, this statement could be considered a façade to deflect criticisms that Turkish students at these institutions in 1881 were being brainwashed by the western and Christian curricula and towards both schools’ initial missions to spread the Protestant religion in Istanbul (Ertuğrul, *Azınlık* 202-203). On the other hand, British schools were influential in the spread of Shakespeare studies by educating future influential Turkish scholars who maintained their own national identities while studying and teaching English literature and culture, like Berna Moran, Mehmet Ercüment Atabay, Oya Başak, Dilek Doltaş, or Esin Akalın, to name a few, along with other Anglophone institutions.

While the first school to teach Shakespeare in Turkey was a British one, the schools under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), founded in 1810, were among the most effective missionary schools. Beside many other subjects, American schools utilised Shakespeare for both the cause of spreading Christianity and the Anglophone culture in Ottoman Turkey.² The most influential of these schools was Robert College. Established first as a theology school as the Bebek Seminary in 1840, Robert College (for boys) was formally established by Cyrus Hamlin, the college’s first president, and Christopher Rhinelander Robert, its principal financier, in 1863 (Freely 37-67; Greenwood 3-27).

² Because Ottomans ruled over many holy sites for Christians and were comparatively tolerant towards religious minorities and foreigners, the ABCFM turned its major interest towards Turkey (Vahapoğlu 76; Polat Haydaroglu 120-122; Ertuğrul, *Azınlık* 64-65). Directing its energies primarily to convert the Armenian (and unsuccessfully the Greek) population into Protestantism, the Board built schools and hospitals in five key areas from the 1860s onwards; namely in European Turkey, Western Turkey, Central Turkey, Eastern Turkey, and in Syria (Kocabaşoğlu 9-22, 102-112; Polat Haydaroglu 128-32; Tekeli and İlkin 112-118).



Figure 2: Robert College, Wikimedia Commons.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_College_\(14243596745\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_College_(14243596745).jpg)

Famous for its progressive and innovative curriculum, Robert College became a hub in Istanbul for the study of the natural sciences, engineering, and the humanities from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.³ In 1871, the American College for Girls was established at Gedikpaşa as a sister establishment to widen the college's aim to reach out to the Christian community in Ottoman Istanbul (Kocabaşoğlu 167-168, 203-4; Freely 131-136; Jenkins 29-49; Childress 554). Aiming at the conversion and education of non-Protestant Christians in Ottoman Istanbul, the first students of both gender divisions of the college consisted predominantly of Armenian, Greek, and Bulgarian pupils who, through their versatile education, became prominent figures in their communities, ranging from ambassadors to businesspeople and to educators themselves in the upcoming years (Freely 67, 136-148). Given that the Robert College Rare Books Library contains Lionel Booth's transcription of Shakespeare's Folio from 1864, it is highly likely that Shakespeare was part of the curriculum from the beginnings of the college.⁴

³ Gradually moving to the Hisar district, now which hosts the main campus of Boğaziçi University that was until 1971 part of the college, the principal language of instruction at Robert College has been English.

⁴ I am thankful to Cara Murphy Keyman, the Head Librarian of Robert College, for providing me the catalogue entries of their collections.

While “The Annual Examinations of Robert College” (1868) refers to grammar and declamation as means to assess the students (Greenwood 101-2; Freely 66-67), the 1883-1884 catalogue of the college provides a more detailed account of the courses where it specifies that a separate Shakespeare course was taught in sophomore classes (*Catalogue of Robert College: 1883-84* 22, 25). Likewise, a report by the Consul H. N. Jewett on 15 September 1887 reveals that Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* was taught at senior level where students analysed the text, sentence structures, and general historical background (Polat Haydaroğlu 132-133). Beside the said folio transcription, two other collected works of Shakespeare edited by Americans Henry Norman Hudson and Hamilton Wright Mabie from 1872 and 1900 were used in Robert College, apart from the many copies of individual plays and secondary sources on Shakespeare from 1904 to 1928 located at the college’s library. Judging from the library collections, the acquisition of first collected works and then individual plays indicate the college’s gradual move into a more nuanced and specialised education of Shakespeare that also had a positive impact on the quality of future Shakespeare scholars in Turkey.

These high standards were maintained by several eminent professors who taught Shakespeare courses and delivered periodical seminars. Some of the scholars who taught Shakespeare included Earnest H. Watson, Mr. Griffiths, and Ernest Bradlee Watson, who established the Hisar players (Freely 220; *Report of the President of Robert College 1902-3* 53; *Report of the President of Robert College 1916-17* 11, 31; *Robert College Record (1919)* 56, 58; *Robert College Record (1920)* 20, 30-31). With these curricular and extracurricular activities, the college became central in the dissemination of Shakespeare and establishing Shakespeare as an academic field in Ottoman Turkey.

The case of Halide Edip Adivar is noteworthy as she was first clandestinely enrolled in the college in 1891 by her father who was a court official when there was a ban that prevented Muslim students to attend foreign schools because they taught the Bible (Fincancı May 43-46; Kocabaşoğlu 167; Jenkins 132-133; Childress 555; Vahapoğlu 122). While Halide Edip was later dismissed from the school because of an informant that also prevented her father’s advancement in the court, the incident illustrated the eagerness of Turks to have their children obtain education at Robert College because of the quality of education (Jenkins 132; Özdemir 65-66). Gradually and after the ban that prevented Muslim students to attend foreign schools was lifted by Ottoman authorities, Turkish students were also admitted to the college including Halide Edip Adivar (Freely 157). Steadily, Robert College became an important centre for the children of progressive Turkish families who wanted their children to receive a high-quality modern education in a foreign language, increasing both the recognition and the impact of Shakespeare in Turkey (Jenkins 142-152).

Despite the overwhelming impact of foreign schools in the study of Shakespeare and English literature in Ottoman Turkey, Ottoman schools tried to incorporate Shakespeare as part of their language teaching programmes. The instrumentalisation of Shakespeare in language education was possibly influenced by the rising pre-eminence of Shakespeare in Turkey due to several factors: the rise of Turkish Shakespeare theatre productions and the translations of Shakespeare either as full-length books (like *The Comedy of Errors*, translated by Hassan Sırrı in 1887), instalments in literary magazines or excerpts between 1876 and 1891, and the printing of short Shakespeare biographies or analyses of his plays from 1891 to 1900 (Enginün 434-438).

With the reopening of Ottoman language schools within the higher education system as the *Elsine Mektepleri* in 1866, later in 1879, and again in 1883, especially to meet the needs for recruiting the Translation Chamber of the Ottoman court, the Ottoman government tried to form a national alternative to foreign schools which they perceived as imperialist institutions (Balçı, “Osmanlı” 84-93; Işıklar 29; Balçı, *Babîâli* 168-169). Although there is scarce documentary evidence about which books were used in these schools, it is likely that Mehmed Ali Nüzhet Paşa’s *Elsine-i Garbiyye Edebiyat ve Üdebası*, that is, *Literatures and Authors of Western Languages* (1888-1889), was assigned as a handbook (Özdemir 40-41). Being among the first recorded Turkish instances of the study of the English language and literature along with a special section on “Shakespeare and his Works,” which featured a biography and the earliest examples from Shakespearean texts in Turkish (Nüzhet 44-56), the work shows the probable importance given to Shakespeare in these Ottoman language schools. Yet, the impact of the book and the curriculum were minimal on the academic level because of the overwhelming success of foreign schools and the relative lack of Turkish educators. The publication of a short article on how Shakespeare created a barrier for language acquisition in 1892, the same year when the Languages Schools were dissolved (Enginün 437; Balçı, “Osmanlı” 93), outlines the failures of the first attempts at nationalised foreign language education and the use of Shakespeare to further that goal. Most Ottoman language schools were discontinued; by 1908 none of the public schools in Turkey taught English and there were no serious measures to recruit English teachers at these schools (Özdemir 81).

The failure of Shakespeare in Ottoman schools is ironic because political activists like Abdullah Cevdet were simultaneously writing full-length translations of Shakespeare’s hitherto censored *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* to further the republican cause during the tumultuous period between 1908 and 1909 that saw the establishment of the Second Constitutional

Monarchy and the dethronement of the autocratic Sultan Abdülhamid II.⁵ While the rather progressive administration of the leading İttihat ve Terraki Party envisioned employing graduates of the American College for Girls as teachers in public schools, there are no references that this was realised (Özdemir 81). Similarly, the failed attempt of Tevfik Fikret (1867-1915)—who was among the most important progressive intellectuals of his time and taught at both Galatasaray High School and Robert College—to establish nationwide bilingual schools, where Turkish and English would be taught simultaneously (Kaplan 99-102; Freely 159-150; Özdemir 40-41), illustrates how the first attempts at Shakespeare studies by Turkish institutions and scholars were unsuccessful.

The Republic Era: Our Shakespeare

The study of Shakespeare in foreign schools as a means to further a political agenda, however, was utilised later by the early republic to increase literacy in English language and literature and further the nationalised agenda of emancipating women in Turkey. While the primary aims of foreign and missionary schools were to convert students (and their families) to Protestant Christianity and create an Anglophilic cadre to expand the (imperial) control of their homelands over Turkey's regions, these schools nevertheless had a positive impact on the quality of teaching of English language and literature in Turkey (Kocabaşoğlu, 81-83; Polat Haydaroğlu, 207-211). Besides prioritizing the education of girls, foreign schools made significant contributions to fashion “progressive” Turkish women (Kocabaşoğlu, 85-87; Polat Haydaroğlu 210; Jenkins 142-152, 250-256; Childress 554-556; Stone 76-77), who became part of the modernisation project initiated by Atatürk in the first fifteen years of the Republic (1923-1938). Halide Edip Adivar and Mina Urgan's foreign school backgrounds are of particular interest as they became the leading figures of Shakespeare studies in Turkey from the 1920s until the 1970s.⁶

Halide Edip Adivar, in particular, illustrated the bifurcated reception of Shakespeare in Turkey following the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Similar to subsequent debates on the function of Shakespeare in Turkey, Halide Edip had a love-and-hate relationship with Shakespeare, as a reflection of her traumatic experience of westernisation as a conservative person and the invasion of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I by the victorious European powers.

⁵ Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil's article series published at the *Serveti Fünun* journal in 1909 on Shakespeare entitled as “A Gift to University Students” is noteworthy for underscoring Shakespeare and his work as academic subjects in Turkey (Enginün 439).

⁶ Urgan's Turkish books on *Shakespeare* and the *History of English Literature* are still used as supplementary materials in English Language and Literature departments.

Partly to alleviate this trauma, she published several articles on Shakespeare and his works, including a piece on how *Julius Caesar* could be read from a nationalistic lens during 1914 and 1916 when she was also active in the struggle for the cultural and political independence of Turkey. In her famous Sultanahmet Meeting Oration against British and European imperialism in 1919, she cited from *Macbeth* to respond to justifications for the invasion of Turkey by allied powers: “Those who call us Turks sinful are so sinful themselves that the ocean’s waters cannot cleanse them” (Enginün 441). Reflecting the frustration with the West and the Turk’s efforts to become part of it, Halide Edip Adıvar wrote back at the imperialist British by appropriating Shakespeare to criticise them. Her speech was indicative of how a British Shakespeare would be fashioned as “our Shakespeare” in post-republican Turkey.



Figure 3: Halide Edip Adıvar during the Sultanahmet Meeting (1919), Bosphorus Review. <https://bosphorusreview.com/being-hundreds-of-birds-at-once>

The first efforts to acculturate Shakespeare into Turkish were spearheaded by Muhsin Ertuğrul (1892-1979) who almost single-handedly brought Shakespeare to a wider audience. Being the first Turk to perform Hamlet in Turkish in 1912, he was a dramatist, artistic director, educator, and producer, who through his intermittent directorships of the Istanbul City Theatre and the State Theatres created a legacy on how Shakespeare has been interpreted in Turkey (Ertuğrul, *Benden* 302-306; Enginün 289-298). Through his educational visits to productions in countries like France, Germany, the U.K. or the U.S.S.R., Ertuğrul had a great impact on the modernisation and flourishing of Turkish theatre where Shakespeare became the backbone of his repertory (Ertuğrul, *Benden* 207-458). Through his productions of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Comedy of Errors* and *Romeo and Juliet* in the 1920s and 1930s, which used a variety of theatre techniques ranging from avant-garde costumes and scenery to those trying to recreate historical accuracy, Ertuğrul created interest in Shakespeare both within and without the academia (Enginün 296).



Figure 4: Muhsin Ertuğrul as Hamlet (1912), İstdergi.
<https://www.istdergi.com/sehir/yasam/muhsin-ertugrul-130-yasinda>

The theatre, among many artistic forms, was used to naturalise the progressive revolutions of the republic to a wider audience and eventually legalised female Muslim performers. The theatre therefore became an important forum for exhibiting and teaching modern and progressive egalitarian gender relations. While problems about the participation of women in public life persisted into the 1920s, with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's personal insistence, laws were passed to allow Muslim women to perform in public spaces. Bedia Muvahhit (1897-1994) became the first officially sanctioned Muslim female performer and performed Desdemona in December 1923, directed by Muhsin Ertuğrul (Nutku, *Atatürk*, 39-43, 302-306; Nutku, *Darülbedayi'den* 183). Consciously chosen to create a comparison and contrast between the toxic masculinity associated with the past and the progressive ideals of the republic, *Othello*, which was an already popular play in Turkey, illustrated how women could become Desdemonas if patriarchal restrictions continued. This progressive idealism was not only used in domestic politics. To express early republican Turkey's progressivism in the international arena, Muvahhit reprised her role in the 1930s in a diplomatic mission in Greece, performed both in Turkish and Greek (Uluskan 339-340; Akçura 55, 90-91). Thereby, Shakespearean drama at this time constituted an educative medium in line with the general nationalisation of education in Turkey from 1924 onwards.



Figure 5: Bedia Muvahhit (1930s), Biyografya.
<https://www.biyografya.com/biyografi/292>

The use of Shakespeare in the repertory for the national agenda of educating present and future generations about progressive gender models and naturalising the presence of women in public life was effective in considering Shakespeare as a nationalised tool for propagating the ongoing and subsequent progressive reforms of the early Turkish Republic. As an extension of this nationalisation, the real rise of academic studies of Shakespeare in higher education started after the 1924 Law on the Unification of Education (*Tevhidi Tedrisat Kanunu*), which centralised all foreign language learning schools under the Ministry of Education, and the advent of widespread education of French, English and German courses in Turkish schools (Vahapoğlu 140-143, 151-157; Freely 230-239; Greenwood 250; Jenkins 226-250; Sezer 177-181; Childress 555). Shakespeare was also put to progressive ends through the state-sponsored translation campaign conducted by several institutions like the Istanbul City Theatre, which even distributed free copies of their translations, the Ministry of Education, and the departments of English Philology in higher education from 1924 until the 1950s and beyond (Enginün 344-353).⁷

The demand for experts in English language and literature in Turkey as part of the 1924 law necessitated the establishment of Turkish high school and undergraduate programmes through which Shakespeare became central in Turkish academic studies through the Gazi Education Institute (1924), The Faculty of Languages History and Geography in Ankara (1936), and the English Philology Department at Istanbul University (1940). After the enactment of the Law of Unification of Education in 1924, foreign schools were either closed down or taken under strict control as part of the law and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). With the 1924 law, the principles of “national education” were established and foreign language education were incorporated into secondary and high schools through compulsory courses which necessitated a rise in the number of Turkish graduates from English Philology Departments (Demircan 92).

⁷ As stated earlier, not everybody agreed upon the use of foreign literature to refashion national cultural identities, and there were many heated debates. For instance, Vedat Nedim Tör’s 1929 critical talk about the function of Shakespeare as a modernisation tool generated many responses between 1929 and 1930 (Enginün 444-445), which were repeated in the 1940s and 1950s. Starting with 1934, when the British Council and its extensive library was established in Turkey, the authorship question around Shakespeare became another means to defend or criticise the use of Shakespeare as a tool for a nationalised modernism in Turkey (Enginün 446-459).

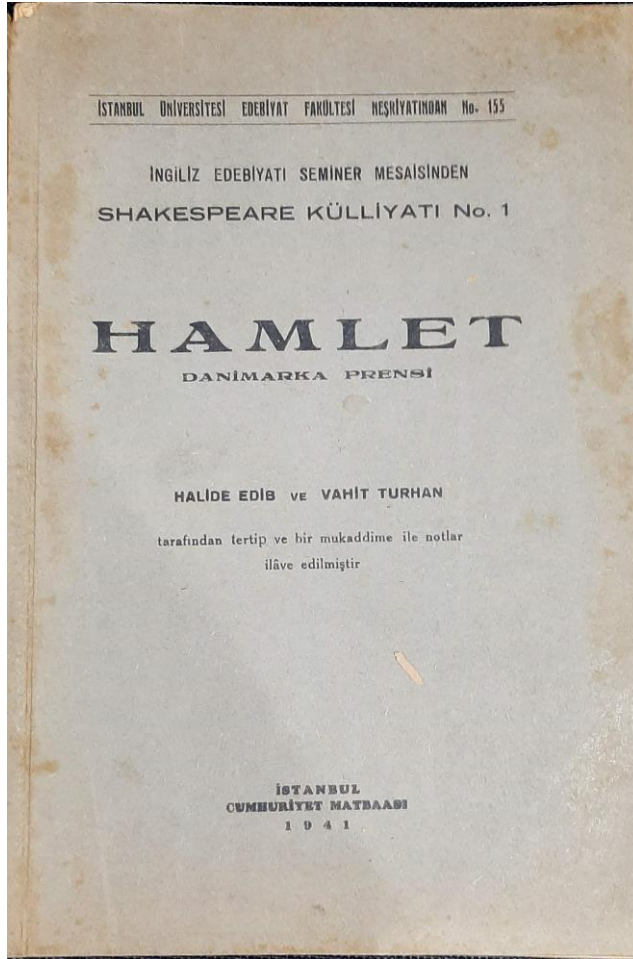


Figure 6: Adıvar and Turhan's translation of *Hamlet* (1941) in the Shakespeare Külliyyatı, personal library

The foundation of the Gazi Education Institute as a boarding school in 1925-1926 in Ankara was one of the important moves to nationalise education by training future teachers that also included foreign language teachers (Altunya 11-22, 157, 162, 270). The number of students at Philology Departments and language schools in Istanbul and Ankara increased, new teachers from high school graduates of the Galatasaray High School or former American or English schools were employed, and competent and hardworking students were sent abroad to be trained as foreign language teachers from at least 1928 until World War II (Altunya 790-804; Özdemir 93-97). These measures increased the quality of educators, as seen in the 1935 translation of the *Tempest* by Mustafa

İşksal, a teacher at a village institute, as part of the Gazi Education Institute publications.⁸

Gazi Education Institute had many valuable scholars who were also highly influential in the study of Shakespeare in Turkey. Oxford alumni Saffet Dengi and Hadiye Sayron were two important female figures of the 1930s who shaped the study of Shakespeare not only at Gazi Education Institute, but also later at Ankara University (Altunya 829). The two-year programme of the English Department at Gazi Education Institute was established in 1944 by Sayron along with figures like E. V. Gatenby, John Bell and Namdar Rahmi Karatay. The programme eventually expanded and changed into a three-year programme in 1962 and a four-year programme in 1978 (Altunya 804-818; Demircan 103; Davis 202; Uzmen 44; Özdemir 97-98). The initial course outline for the 1944 two-year programme shows that Shakespeare was taught as part of a two-year Survey of English Literature course that possibly made use of Halide Edip Adıvar's survey book from 1943 and other related sources that could be found in Ankara following the establishment of the British Council in 1934 and The Faculty of Languages History and Geography in 1936 (Altunya 812, 820, 829).⁹

The most decisive development for the study of Shakespeare in Turkey was the foundation of the Faculty of Languages History and Geography in Ankara in 1935 as a personal project of Atatürk himself to promote the study of the humanities in Turkey (Aytür 59; Uzmen 43). As part of this vision, the Department of English Philology was established in 1936 entirely by Turkish Shakespearean scholars like Hamit Dereli (1909-1993), Saffet Dengi [later Saffet Korkut] (1909-1946), Orhan Burian (1914-1953) and İrfan Şahinbaş (1913-1990) (Aytür 59-60; Uzmen 43). Among the many carefully chosen and hardworking students of the early republic, Dereli, Dengi, Burian and Şahinbaş were sent to English Departments to study for their PhDs at the universities of Cambridge and Oxford and received their education from eminent scholars and literary critics like I. A. Richards (1893-1979) and F. R. Leavis (1895-1978) who became to be known as the forerunners of Practical Criticism (Aytür 60). These young Turkish scholars applied the teaching methods of I. A. Richards

⁸ For details on village institutes or *Köy Enstitüleri* that run from 1940 to 1954 and aimed to "modernise" rural life with progressive education, see Aysal 267-282.

⁹ Unfortunately, the present library catalogue and holdings of Gazi University do not give a clear picture of which resources were used in the past for teaching Shakespeare. It is likely that some of the resources have been discarded, or transferred to the National Library, or that resources, especially from 1934 onwards have been used from the British Council Library and the libraries at The Faculty of Languages History and Geography. See Davis who argued that the number of the books at Istanbul and Ankara were "rapidly increased with the help of the British Council" (201).

with their own fascination with Shakespeare when they formed the curriculum of the four-year undergraduate programme (Aytür 60-61).

Possibly having brought the majority of the resources from their stay in the U.K., the faculty's extensive library has one of the best and most well-preserved repositories of global and contemporary Shakespeare criticism from the 1890s onwards in Turkey—ranging from English, French, and German secondary works and multiple copies of individual plays that were functional and influential in both the studies and the research on Shakespeare in the department.¹⁰ Particularly, apart from the many courses that encompassed all literary periods and genres of English literature, and more general courses like “Outlines of English Literature,” “Readings from Literature,” or “Modern Prose,” the department, which had first a year-based structure, had in total three Shakespeare courses until junior level (Aytür 60-61; Uzmen 45). There was one “Introduction to Shakespeare” course at freshman level, where students analysed selected passages from Shakespearean plays and poetry line by line and commented on their significance (Aytür 60-61; *Selections from Shakespeare* 3). Two subsequent courses until junior level on “Shakespeare” analysed each year a comedy or a tragedy from several viewpoints (Aytür 60-61). As an exam sheet from 1952 indicates, students were asked to identify the speakers of twelve passages from the said Shakespeare play and comment upon the overall significance of the passages (Aytür 61). In separate poetry courses, the relationship between Spenserian, Shakespearean, and Miltonian sonnets was also analysed (Aytür 61), contextualising Shakespeare in his time and beyond.

Apart from being outstanding scholars at the department, which would become part of Ankara University in 1946, Dereli, Dengi, Burian and Şahinbaş contributed to the dissemination of Shakespeare in Turkey through other means. They taught at village institutes, a project that aimed to raise the intellectual level of rural people, and at the State Conservatories (Aytür 62-63). They delivered public lectures on Shakespeare, wrote articles and books on Shakespeare, and became founding members of the Translation Committee, *Çeviri Kurulu*, where several of Shakespeare's works were translated for the first time into Turkish (Aytür 62-63; Dengi, “Shakespeare Trajedisi” 3-25; Dengi, *Shaksipeare Kimdi* 7-31). Saffet Dengi's public speeches as a female professor were also revolutionary to illustrate progressive gender roles that were beyond their time when even in some European universities Shakespeare was still reserved as a male domain.¹¹ These scholars established Shakespeare as both an

¹⁰ The library has today several works on and about Shakespeare and 145 of them are individual titles on Shakespeare from the 1890s until the 1950s.

¹¹ For instance, in 1938, when Dengi's study on the authorship question was presented publicly and circulated widely in print form, women at Oxford Union were not allowed to participate in debates (Lewis 59). Likewise, the first female professor at

academic discipline and a means to spread progressive and humanist education within and without academia with events and research that faced the public.¹²

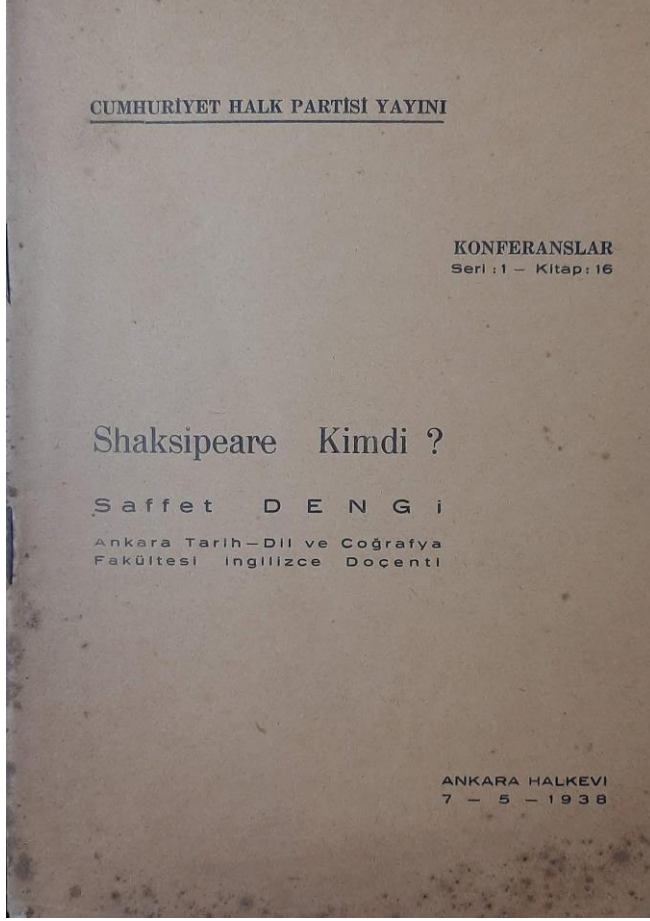


Figure 7: Titlepage of *Shaksipeare Kimdi* (1938), personal library

Oxford University, where Saffet Dengi received her PhD, was Agnes Headlam-Morley in 1948 (Stöckmann 289). Given that Halide Edip Adıvar, Saffet Dengi, and Hadiye Sayron became the first female professors in English departments before 1940, and there were several female translators before and around that time, like Kamurân Şerif, Seniha Bedri Göknıl, Seniha Sami, or Belkıs Boyar, the presence of many female academics and translators around the 1930s and 1940s indicate how Shakespeare studies were quite progressive in early republican Turkey.

¹² This can be also seen via the faculty library that holds several works of the first scholars of the department along with works on or about Shakespeare written or translated by faculty members at Istanbul University illustrating the close relationship and cooperation among the first departments of English philology in Turkey.

İrfan Şahinbaş, who was renowned for dramatizing passages he taught in his Shakespeare courses and beyond, was also crucial in the establishment of the first Theatre Department in Turkey in 1958 (reopened later in 1964) that allowed Shakespeare to be studied from a different perspective than those utilised by the conservatories (Aytür 62; Uzmen 43-44). Dereli, Dengi, Burian and Şahinbaş have raised several generations of Shakespeareans in Turkey through which their now conventional teaching methods have been well preserved and are used even in today's English Language and Literature Departments.

Interrelated with the nationalisation and reformation movement in Ankara, the gradual transformation of the *Darülfünun* in Istanbul, then the only modern university in Turkey, expanded its use of Shakespeare in the higher education curriculum. Following changes in laws in 1924 and in 1933, the university, later renamed Istanbul University, introduced first general courses on English Literature and then courses in Departments of Modern Philology (Başkan 25). The Department of Modern Philology, later renamed as the Department of Western Languages and Literatures, was established in 1933 where English courses were taught. The general migration of scholars from Nazi Germany into countries like Turkey, who welcomed Jewish scientists, proved to be influential in the newly established university's transformation into a Western-style scientific institution (Yücebaş 264-265; Urgan 174-177). Erich Auerbach (1892-1957), known worldwide for his seminal works on comparative literature, accelerated this transformation after becoming the head of the Department of Western Languages and Literatures from 1936 until 1947.

When Halide Edip Adıvar joined the department and delivered the opening speech to the Faculty of Letters in 1939 with a talk on Shakespeare (Enginün 450), Istanbul University's subsequent emphasis on Shakespeare studies was firmly entrenched. Reflecting the progressive gender ratio in early republican Turkey, Adıvar shortly became the head of the Department of English Philology in 1940. When she formally established the four-year undergraduate programme in the same year, the quality of Shakespeare studies in Turkey increased, especially through the publication of many critical secondary works on Shakespeare and his time by department members. The libraries of both the department and the faculty have an extensive list of books ranging first from collected works to individual works and secondary sources showing the gradual specialisation of the department's resources and focus on Shakespeare.¹³

¹³ The library has today several works on and about Shakespeare and 118 of them are individual titles on Shakespeare from the 1890s until the 1950s. Like the department in Ankara, the libraries at Istanbul University hold copies of works by faculty members of The Faculty of Languages History and Geography that proves the reciprocal cooperation between the departments.

Moreover, the department gathered and trained eminent academics in the 1940s like Vahit Turhan, Mina Urgan and Berna Moran, all of whom either wrote full-length studies on Shakespeare and/or translated his works into Turkish (Urgan 65, 199, 203; Uzmen 45). Translation workshops resulted in the series *Shakespeare Külliyyatı*, the Shakespeare Collection, where several plays, like *Hamlet* (1941), *As You Like It* (1943), *Coriolanus* (1945), or *Antony and Cleopatra* (1949), were translated into Turkish by Adivar, her assistants including Turhan and Urgan, and their students (Araboğlu 992). The zenith of these efforts would result in the three-volume English Language and Literature Survey Book that had an entire volume devoted to Shakespeare and his works (Adivar 117-268), which became the first thorough and in-depth academic analysis of Shakespeare written in Turkish. Along with the Gazi Education Institute and the Department of English Philology in Ankara, the Department of English Philology in Istanbul shaped the basics of the curricula, the canon, the pedagogy and the methodology of the proper studies of Shakespeare in Turkey—the impact of which can be still felt.

With the establishment of extensive studies of Shakespeare in Turkey, Shakespeare became a central part of the curriculum of secondary schools well into the 1990s, which have been influential in cultivating even greater interest in the academic study of Shakespeare in Turkey.¹⁴ Nowadays, most students get their first taste of Shakespeare at universities. Adivar's successors, like Mina Urgan and Cevat Çapan formed the next generation of Shakespeareans at Istanbul University. Engin Uzmen, Ayşegül Yüksel, and Özdemir Nutku, the last of whom later continued to work at various universities in İzmir, became the leading Shakespeare scholars at Ankara University. Through the establishment of Hacettepe University in the 1960s and Boğaziçi University in the 1970s, more academic hubs were established within the English Language and Literature departments of these universities. With Engin Uzmen, who moved to Hacettepe University, Himmət Umunç, Bülent Bozkurt, and Gülsen Canlı, a great deal of the scholarship about Shakespeare at Hacettepe University was shaped by these scholars from the 1970s onwards. Süheyla Artemel, Oya Başak and Cevza Sevgen from Boğaziçi University were important figures that influenced Shakespeare studies in Istanbul around the same time. Starting with the 1990s,

¹⁴ Although there are language sections in almost all high schools, only a few including Robert College and TED colleges teach Shakespeare. Yet, the institutions who still teach Shakespeare at middle and high school level have been quite influential to create interest in future Shakespeare scholars like İnci Enginün and Deniz Bozer from TED Ankara College established in 1953, or Talat Halman, a Robert College alumnus, who was not only the first Minister of Culture in Turkey but also a lifelong Shakespeare enthusiast who translated several of his works into Turkish.

with figures like Laurence Raw, the transcultural aspect of studying Shakespeare in Turkey was foregrounded along with Shakespeare's traditional position in higher education curricula to teach the English language and culture.

From a historical perspective, most of these studies were conducted initially through conventional methods of teaching like close readings, school performances and translation workshops (Öğütcü 94). Yet, gradually, scholars began to use eclectic methodologies and teach several plays in one term. Over the last ten years, new media have also been incorporated into the teaching of Shakespeare in most of the curricula of the now 200 English Language and Literature Departments and dozens of Theatre Departments in Turkey.

Since the early 2000s, there has been much progress and change in the study of Shakespeare in Turkey through the incorporation of spatial, gender, racial, linguistic, translational, ecological, and posthuman perspectives in these studies by both senior scholars and early career researchers. Yet, the obscure aftermath of the dissolved Turkish Shakespeare Association (founded in 1964),¹⁵ the rather short-lived Centre for Studies on Shakespeare and His Age (1990-1998) at Hacettepe University, İnci Enginün's meticulous but widely unknown account of Shakespeare in Turkish, and the several conferences on Shakespeare in Turkey,¹⁶ all of which have had relatively little impact on Global Shakespeare studies, illustrate the opportunities that have been missed to further Shakespeare studies in Turkey.

Learning from and building upon these experiences, the Turkish Shakespeares Project attempts to both document and add to Shakespeare studies in Turkey through its ongoing digital archive of the Turkish Shakespeare Bibliography and the performance history of Shakespeare in Turkey. Conducted by an overwhelming majority of female researchers, studies at the Turkish Shakespeares Project are also reflective of the overall progressive social agendas of studying Shakespeare in Turkey where the rising trend of the share of woman scholars can be understood as a direct consequence of the origins of Shakespeare studies that have been utilised for the emancipation of women in early republican Turkey. Building upon these origins, Shakespeare studies in Turkey have a promising future that demand attention by non-Turkish scholars, as well.

¹⁵ For a recent study on this association, see Firidinoğlu.

¹⁶ Notable events have been "Shakespeare and His Time" at Bilkent University (1989), the Oya Başak Conference at Boğaziçi University (2004), the "ShakesYear 450 Conference" at Hacettepe University (2014), and the "Shakespeare Konferansı" at Yaşar University (2016).

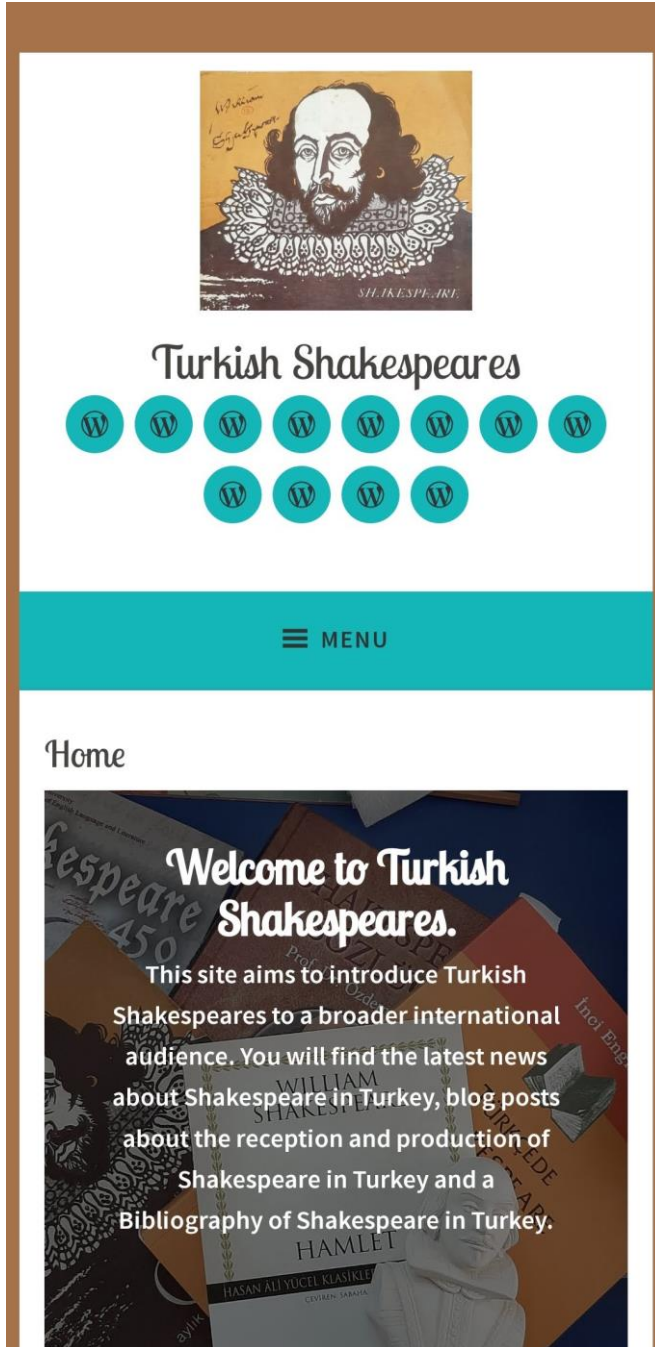


Figure 8: Screenshot of Promotion Video, Turkish Shakespeares

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