



CHAPTER I

Shakespearean Art in the Turkish Heart: The Bard in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic

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This happens to be, as Shakespeareans happily call it: Shakesyear. It was 450 years ago, in 1564, that the Bard was born. How inspired that this great University - Hacettepe - with one of Turkey's most distinguished Departments of English Language and Literature has organized this Shakesyear 450 conference.

This Shakespeare year is a year of glee in Turkey. In a nationwide celebration, we shall be doing scores of productions of Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies. Already in January 2014 *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Tempest* were presented to 16,000 spectators.

What a great love affair this is! Turkish theatregoers, young and old, are paying tribute to their beloved Shakespeare.

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, 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.

Since the middle of the 19th century, Turkish Literature and Theatre have been in a feverish quest for innovation. The earlier part of this process was dominated

by French culture, followed (from the 1950s onwards) by the increasing impact of Anglo-American values. Of all literary figures from abroad, Shakespeare has been the most potent and enduring source of inspiration – certainly the most pervasive influence on modern Turkish theatre. The Shakespearean art is vibrant in the Turkish heart.

Our theatres have presented countless productions in the past 140 years. Shakespeare is Turkey's most beloved playwright. Courses in Shakespeare are staples in the curricula of most of our major universities.

More Shakespeare productions have graced the Turkish stages than all of the Muslim nations combined – more in Turkey than in most European countries.

Except for French, German, Italian, Spanish, Scandinavian languages, Russian, and Japanese, there are few, if any, languages into which all of Shakespeare's plays have been translated and published. Turkish is proud of having achieved this – of the Sonnets and some of the Bard's shorter narrative poems, too.

The only gap we had consisted of such long Shakespeare poems as "Venus and Adonis," "The Rape of Lucrece," and "A Lover's Complaint." Translating these heavily rhymed, difficult poems – "Venus and Adonis" 1194 lines, "Lucrece" 1855 lines, "A Lover's Complaint" 329 lines, plus poems of more dubious authorship like "The Passionate Pilgrim," 338 lines, and several others, like "The Phoenix and The Turtle," "Shall I Die?," etc. add up to a total of 3,947 lines.

That was the huge gap. No one had the intention of closing it.

I had the gumption to tackle it. For my sabbatical in the past academic year, I chose it as my project. From September 2012 to September 2013 I was busy in New York City, affiliated with CUNY (Graduate Center of the City University of New York). In 8 months I translated all of them in meter and rhyme; with its scholarly apparatus, notes, bibliography, etc. the book, including the English originals and Turkish translations on facing pages came to about 420 pages and was published in May 2014.

With that publication, everything by Shakespeare, every single line, is now available in Turkish translation. How many other languages can make a similar claim?

The first Shakespeare play in Turkish was *Othello* – not a translation, but a version of the libretto of an *Othello* opera in Italian – 1876.

It sounds anomalous that most of the Shakespeare translations into Turkish prior to the 1940s were done not from the English originals, but from other languages, principally French.

As Ottoman power was waning, some sultans developed a passion for Shakespeare. Sultan Abdülhamid II, who ruled about 34 years and earned fame as a despot, was a theatre buff with an intense interest in Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies. It was rumored in the late 19th century that when *The Merchant of Venice* was presented at the special exclusive palace theatre in İstanbul, and Shylock began to sharpen his knife to take his revenge, the Sultan became apprehensive, actually so scared that he ran out screaming and caused the play to come to an abrupt end. The Sultan later reportedly said: "Abandon such frightening scenes; instead, present performances that will make us laugh".

Abdülhamid knew some Italian. The Italian Shakespearean actor Ernesto Rossi was in İstanbul in 1889. He hoped to do *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. But censors did not permit these. He did obtain permission to do an abridged version of *Othello*. Sultan Abdülhamid watched a performance at the palace theatre with considerable excitement. Rossi mentions in his memoirs that the Sultan had tears in his eyes in Act V when Desdemona is killed and Othello commits suicide.

More than a century ago, a foremost Turkish intellectual, and Shakespeare translator Abdullah Cevdet asserted: "Shakespeare is the second greatest creator after God Almighty."

In the Turkish experience, Shakespeare has grown in respect and admiration since the earliest productions in the 1840s. The first performances took place in 1842 in İstanbul's Concordia Theatre, but not in the Turkish language. 1885 saw the first printed Turkish translation: *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare's major tragedies were staged by the enterprising Armenian director Güllü Agop.

The first *Othello* performance in English presented in İstanbul featured the renowned African-American actor Ira Aldridge. He read his lines in English, of course, but the rest of the cast in French.

(Another oddity came in the 1970s when the prominent Turkish director Tunç Yalman, who later served for five years as the Artistic Director of the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre and staged two plays on Broadway as well, used two Iagos in his *Othello* production.)

Later came the translations of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1884 and *The Comedy of Errors* in 1887 by Hasan Sırrı who did his translations directly from English.

Also in 1884 Mihran Boyacıyan published three chapbooks of Charles and Mary Lamb's stories of *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

1884 also saw the first sonnet translation (“Sonnet 132”) done in prose by Hüsnü Osman of Salonica. In 1888 Mehmet Nâdir, a mathematician and educator, published his prose translations of 41 sonnets and small sections of “Venus and Adonis,” “The Rape of Lucrece,” and “A Lover’s Complaint.”

Another Armenian theatrical personality, Bedros Atamyan, gained renown as Hamlet. He was so conscientious that to gain insights into Hamlet he went from İstanbul to Elsinore ... to study Othello he traveled to Venice and Cyprus, to learn about Romeo to Verona.

Shakespeare made his debut in the Ottoman capital İstanbul in the 1840s. Late compared with Germany, Italy, and France. But early compared with China and Japan.

Armenians and Greeks of the Ottoman state as well as travelling Italian troupes were the pioneers of productions in their own languages. Some Armenian priests took a special interest in Shakespeare. In the mid-19th century they wrote and presented plays in the Shakespearean vein relating to the early Armenian history (Minasyan, Hekimyan, Terziyan, Baronyan).

Hekimyan stated that he read and was influenced by Shakespeare. Terziyan’s historical play *Santuh* bears similarities to *King Lear*, a play by Baronyan shows the influences of *Othello*.

Turkey’s first woman Hamlet was also an Armenian: Miss Siranuş Nigosyan. Decades later, two Muslim actresses appeared in the role of Hamlet. Once, in a late 19th century production of *Macbeth*, a funny thing happened. The Armenian actor Güllü Agop was in the role of Macbeth. In one scene, he got carried away and took a few steps upstage. The musicians thought he wanted to do a musical number - and started to play a vibrant polka.

Macbeth is notorious for funny incidents. Believe it or not, great cowboy John Wayne once wanted to appear as Macbeth. From the moment he stepped on the stage, the audience kept giggling. A while later, he couldn’t stand it any more - he walked upstage, shrugged his shoulders and blurted out: “Hell, I didn’t write this crap!”

Richard Burton, too, did Macbeth. For the battle-scenes he wore an armor. He had to pee. He couldn’t hold it - and passed water into the armor. The cast and the entire audience heard the noise of running water. Everyone broke into laughter.

There is a hilarious episode from a *Macbeth* production in Rumelihisarı, İstanbul. In 1962, there was a major production in the open-air rotunda of the

mid-15th century fortress, overlooking the Bosphorus. The site is majestic - and the space used for the performance quite expansive. The Director understandably wanted scores, hundreds of extras, especially for the battle-scenes. But where were they going to find so many extras? Somebody had a bright idea: Why not the nearby 66th battalion? They managed to obtain the approval of the military authorities. 400 soldiers came to the fortress the evening of the premier. The Director said to the Major, their commanding officer: “We’ll give your men sack-cloth costumes and wooden shields and swords. They’ll be lined up, waiting to run down the slopes. When the time comes, I’ll give you a flying cue. You’ll command them to run down and confront each other at the rotunda below. They’ll engage in mock-battle. But, please tell them to run down vigorously and fight dynamically.” The commanding officer tells his men about all this.

Late in the evening, as darkness descends, *Macbeth* starts. Turkish soldiers are all lined up. Act V. Scotland. Macbeth’s men and Macduff’s soldiers will fight. The Director sends his flying cue to the Major... and the Major gives his order: “All right, men! Do your best, run down there and fight!” 400 eager Turkish soldiers start running down the slopes with their traditional Turkish-Islamic battle-cry:

Allah! Allah!
Allah! Allah!
Allah! Allah!

That way, our City Theatre turkicised Shakespeare. They say, *Hamlet* is in the heart of every actor. By the same token, Shakespeare is in every Turk’s heart. I have tried to express this fact in a doggerel of my own:

The Bard is “the” playwright for Turks of all ages:
In Turkey, “all the world’s a stage” on all stages.
Our lullabies are from the folio pages . . .
Desdemona’s willow song, Macbeth’s rampages
Mesmerize our babes in the woods, and our sages.

To Corneille, Racine, Noh Plays we might say “Niet!”
But we love and mourn Romeo and Juliet.
As soon as Richard the Third’s evil starts to lurk,
Our emotions stir, our eyes pop out, our ears perk
With our countless full-dress productions of *Hamlet*,
We have a princely boom or a royal boomlet.

He fought against Turks, but we adore Othello:
He lets out a bellow, and our braves turn yellow.

Queen Elizabeth is Liz Taylor to some Turks;
Yet, Shakespeare scholarship is one of our great quirks.
To us, the music from the spheres is from *Twelfth Night*.
We eat the stuff dreams are made on: Turkish delight.
People claim Turks are macho, but Lady Macbeth
Scares patriotic, patriarchal Turks to death.

It belongs to Turks: this scepter'd isle of John Bull,
Stratford on Avon is as dear to us as İstanbul,
We're involved: Lear can blame us, Richard can maim us;
Iago can defame us, the shrew can tame us.
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.

In the Turkish experience, Shakespeare has loomed large in the Ottoman imperial city of İstanbul as well as in the metropolitan areas and rural villages of modern Turkey.

Last year, in the "New Yorker" magazine, the talented young Turkish-American writer Elif Batuman, told the fascinating story of uneducated village women in Adana, southern Turkey, doing Shakespeare to assert their identity in defiance of male chauvinism. So, Shakespeare also serves as the foremost propagator and hero of Turkish feminism.

Turks love the Bard. Is this a mutual feeling? Does Shakespeare hold good thoughts or at least neutral feelings about us Turks? Or is the Turkish love for Shakespeare unrequited?

Well, we think he is great, but he is an ingrate. He makes about 33 references to us Turks. Not one is complimentary. Sometimes he uses dreadfully disparaging adjectives: lustful (maybe that's not too bad)! But, barbarous, infidel, cruel, malignant. Othello boasts: "I took by the throat the circumcised dog and smote him thus."

Iago, too, scandalizes us: "Nay, it is true, or else I am a Turk."

Before he becomes King Richard III, Duke of Gloucester says: "What, think you we are Turks or infidels?"

We love Shakespeare although he felt no love for us.

Sometimes he characterized us in terms of cruelty: In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Lafeu puts this curse on us Turks: “If they were sons of mine, I’d have them whipped; or I would send them to the Turks to make eunuchs of.”

In *King Henry IV*, Prince Henry who is about to become King Henry V, defames the Ottoman Sultan Murad who, upon his accession in 1574, executed his five brothers. Henry praises the smoothness of accession at the English court as if nothing nasty occurred there:

Brothers, you mix your sadness with some fear.
This is the English, not the Turkish court;
Not Amurath an Amurath succeeds,
But Harry Harry.

Perhaps our only consolation is that the Bard has many of his characters say nasty things about other nations and ethnic groups as well. In Ottoman productions they used to expunge the negative references to Turks.

They went beyond that: Sometimes *The Merchant of Venice* was censored on the grounds that “it might offend the feelings of the Jewish minority.”

In *King Lear*, Edgar hands the macho Turks a wonderful back-handed compliment: “Wine lov’d I deeply, dice dearly, and in woman out-paramour’d the Turk.”

Hamlet, as everywhere else, is the jewel in Turkey’s Shakespearean crown. In the past 100 years there have been 20 full-dress productions - and in 2004 a ballet version entitled *Naked Hamlet*. Nine different *Hamlet* translations have been published in book-form.

When İstanbul’s venerable City Theatre did its first *Hamlet* in 1914, there were seven men in the audience, one of them the hapless chauffeur of a rich spectator. Less than fifty years later, at the same theatre, Engin Cezzar gave 170 consecutive performances. A total of 70 thousand people watched his energetic Hamlet. 170 consecutive performances became a world record, which was broken six or seven years later by Richard Burton on Broadway.

A fanciful, eccentric film version of *Hamlet* in which Metin Erksan used a female Hamlet.

“Globe” was the name of Shakespeare’s theatre – significantly. Because Shakespeare created the world on the stage. And there is global respect and fondness for Shakespeare.

But he has had detractors, too. Remember, Voltaire dubbed him “barbaric” - and added: “His works are like a garbage-dump. To find one grain you have to keep digging into it.”

In Turkey people from all walks of life enjoy Shakespeare. In İstanbul, there was the Captain of a Police Precinct who was a great Shakespeare fan.

There is an old story: In 1936, Tatar Refik, a two-bit actor with a touring company, was doing his six-week military service in a rural town. When he returned home, a friend asked: “How was military service, Refik, what did you do?” Refik grinned: “I did Shakespeare for six weeks.” Astonished, his friend asked: “How come? In the army?” Refik told the story: “Our Colonel was a Shakespeare enthusiast. When he found out I was an actor, he made me do Othello twice and Hamlet once in 45 days. Who am I to play Othello or especially Hamlet? But you have to obey orders. Ay, ay, sir! So, I did Othello and Hamlet.”

Our City Theatre of İstanbul had a marvelous tradition: From 1927 on –throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s – of opening each season with a new Shakespeare production. This became for young and old İstanbul residents a brave new education in Shakespeare and in the theatre. It was started by the great mentor of modern theatre in Turkey - Muhsin Ertuğrul - who was a distinguished Shakespearean actor and director. He and his colleagues did not have it easy. Some of the leading critics were writing in the 1930s: “Even if playwrights like Ibsen, Schiller and Shakespeare are geniuses or more powerful than geniuses, even if they are world-renowned, they are detrimental to our theatre at this juncture. They are destroying our nation’s refined taste.”

Shakespeare pioneers in Turkey had to brave so much. They had to be ingenious and innovative. Sadi Tek was a popular actor who headed a touring company. In 1946, I attended Sadi Tek’s production of *Hamlet* on the Asian side of İstanbul. Before the curtain was raised, Sadi Tek addressed the audience: “Ladies and gentlemen, my fellow-actors who play Horatio and the Ghost are unable to appear tonight due to illness.” (Obviously Tek was not able to pay their salaries, so they were refusing to take the stage.) So the veteran actor announced: “With your permission, besides Hamlet, I shall play Horatio and the Ghost as well.”

The curtain went up. Act I, Scene V. All three – Horatio, the Ghost and Hamlet – are supposed to be on the stage. Sadi Tek speaks Hamlet’s lines ... runs out ... wraps himself up in a sheet and runs into the stage as Ghost ... Exits as Ghost, comes back as Horatio... In and out – as Hamlet, Ghost, Horatio. At that time Tek is past fifty, already slightly old for Hamlet and Horatio. Also, he’s on the fat side.

He keeps running on and off stage, out of breath, panting, his tongue hanging out. Despite all, he manages to do his triple threat, a “historic” first.

There is more to this. 25 years later, I was serving as Turkey’s Minister of Culture. One day, my Under-Secretary said: “Sadi Tek would like an appointment.” “By all means,” I said, “I’d love to see him.” He came. He was now close to eighty, but sprightly. Half-way into the conversation, I said to him: “I wonder if you remember the occasion: 25 years ago you had done three roles in *Hamlet* – even in the same scene.” He paused for a moment, then he smiled, and responded: “Of course I remember. But, it was even more interesting the following night: Horatio and the Ghost didn’t show up. Also, the Queen and Ophelia failed to come.”

In the closing decades of the Ottoman state as well as in the 90 years of the Turkish republic, Shakespeare was a powerful influence on Turkish literature. The list of our literary figures who were somewhat, in some cases strongly indebted to Shakespeare includes Namık Kemal, Abdülhak Hamit (Tarhan), Ebüzziya Tevfik, Samipaşazade Sezai, Yahya Kemal Beyathı, Ahmet Haşim Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, Halide Edib Adivar, Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar, Reşat Nuri Güntekin, Peyami Safa, Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Turan Oflazoğlu, Turgut Uyar.

We Turks have pronounced his name as “Şekispir” or “Şehakes/piare” or “Şekispiyer”. And always revered him. *Othello*, for us, was compelling. Travelling troupes and circuses presented it for many decades as “Black Man’s Revenge”. Many actors achieved fame with names from *Othello*’s cast: Iago Lütfi, Othello Kâmil, Brabantio Fuat, Cassio Ahmet... Circuses did abbreviated and altered versions of it. Following the tight-rope walking act, a fearsome Othello, face blackened with charcoal, used to come out, gesticulating wildly, speaking his lines in a deep declamatory style and grandiloquently playing on the audience’s emotions. Iago would get booed and cursed vehemently.

Old ladies used to call out to Desdemona: “You, poor little thing. They are slandering you.” And as Desdemona and Othello were dying, most adults would weep profusely... Children would scamper about in fear.

Circuses and touring companies gave countless *Othello* performances at hundreds of locations in Turkey through many decades. In view of that fact, it is safe to assert that *Othello* stands as the most performed play ever in Turkey’s history of the theatre.

The Bard’s Sonnets have exerted a deep impact on Turkish poetry lovers.

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death and all oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth: your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom.
So, till the judgement that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

Now, the same "Sonnet 55" in Turkish:

Ne yaldızlı hükümdar anıtları, ne mermer
Ömür süremez benim güçlü şiirim kadar;
Seni pasaklı Zaman pis bir mezara gömer,
Ama satırlarımda güzelliğin ışıldar.
Savaşlar tepetaklak devirir heykelleri,
Çökertir boğuşanlar, yapı demez, sur demez,
Ama Mars'ın kılıcı, cengin ateş selleri
Şiirimde yaşayan anını yok edemez.
Ölüme ve herşeyi unutturan düşmana
Karşı koyacaksın sen; yeryüzünü mahşere
Yaklaştıran çağların gözünde bile sana
Bir yer var övgüm seni çıkarttıkça göklere.
Dirilip kalkıncaya kadar mahşer gününde,
Yaşarsın şiirimle sevenlerin gönlünde.

Such is the euphony, the music of the Sonnets. Poetry's melody. Music is paramount in Shakespeare. That plays a major role in the way Turks are enamored of the Bard.

The man that hath no music in himself
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils,
The motions of his spirit are dull as night.

Richard III is such a man – an unadulterated villain. He annihilates countless human beings. Near the end of the tragedy, he has become afraid of himself:

What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by:
Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. – yes, I am.
Then, fly, what, from myself?

It's as if there is a stirring in Richard's conscience. Does a monster like him possess a conscience? He denies and defies it as a sickness:

Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls:
Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
Devised at first to keep the strong in awe:
Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.

Finally, Richard III desperately decides to flee and shouts: "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

As some of you may know, there is a funny story about this: In the 19th century, the Irish actor Barry Sullivan was a well-known Richard. When he was screaming "A horse, a horse!" a man in the audience shouted back: "We have no horse! Will you take a donkey?" Barry Sullivan retorted: "Yes, certainly, why don't you step up to the stage."

Pity we know so little about Shakespeare's life - or even exactly who he was. Shakespeare scholarship is virtually an industry with thousands of studies published in scores of languages. The Shakespeare identity crisis is truly spectacular. So many claims and arguments have been, and are still being advanced. One of the earliest insists that the real author was the renowned philosopher, essayist and statesman Francis Bacon. Another argues that the distinguished playwright Christopher Marlowe wrote all the plays and the sonnets. Another speculation holds that Edward De Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, used the pen-name of Shakespeare. Maybe, says another, the Earl of Rutland used the code name of Shakespeare or the real Bard was an Irishman called Patrick O'Toole.

Even Muammer Qaddafi once argued that Shakespeare was an Arab Sheikh from Libya, and his name was “Sheikh al-Zubayr.” In 2003 at a “Shakespeare and Islam” Symposium held at the Globe Theatre, the well-known scholar of Islamic mysticism Prof. Martin Lings claimed that Shakespeare was probably a Muslim Sufi leader. According to an Indian theory his original name was “Pir Prickly Pear.” The great film director Peter Brook heard from an Uzbek that the derivation of the name is from “Sheiks’ Peer.” There is also the claim that Shakespeare is simply the English translation of the Italian name Michelangelo Florio Crollanza.

Some individuals spent or wasted a whole lifetime to prove that the Bard was this or that person rather than a second-rate actor named William Shakespeare. There have even been those who dug up the grave of some person or other.

Speaking of grave-digging, one recalls a witty anecdote by W. S. Gilbert, a famous 19th century British actor. Gilbert always denigrated the renowned Shakespearean actor Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Once, he quipped: “Do you know how best to solve the “Shakespeare / Bacon” controversy? Open up their tombs and take the two coffins out. Bring Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree there to play Hamlet. Whichever dead man becomes enraged and kicks up a storm in his coffin, that is the real Shakespeare.”

I am not sure if “who Shakespeare was” is a matter of life and death. Does it matter who Homer was? Turkey’s great mystic Yunus Emre, who composed magnificent humanistic and humanitarian poems in the late 13th and early 14th century, is unknown and undocumented as to his life. So long as the plays and the poems exist and endure, what does it matter if it’s Shakespeare or Bacon or Earl of Oxford?

The tribute suffices. How wonderful is the call of admiration by Ben Jonson:

Soul of the Age,
The applause, delight and wonder of our stage,
Rise, my Shakespeare!

Love is miraculous in Shakespeare’s sonnets.

Now, “Sonnet 18” first in English, then in Turkish:

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair some time declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Seni bir yaz gününe benzemek mi, ne gezer?
Çok daha güzelsin sen, çok daha cana yakın:
Taze tomurcukları sert rüzgârlar örseler,
Kısacıktır süresi yeryüzünde bir yazın:
Işıldar göğün gözü, yakacak kadar sıcak,
Ve sık sık kararır da yıldız düşer yüzünden;
Her güzel, güzellikten, er geç yoksun kalacak
Kader ya da varlığın bozulması yüzünden;
Ama hiç solmayacak sendeki ölümsüz yaz,
Güzelliğin yitmez ki, asla olmaz ki hurda;
Gölgesindesin diye ecel caka satamaz
Sen çağları aşarken bu ölmez satırlarda:
İnsanlar nefes alsın, gözler görsün, el verir,
Yaşadıkça şiirim, sana da hayat verir.

The Sonnets are unforgettable... Forgetting reminds me of actors forgetting their lines. Being an actor, Shakespeare must have been aware of that problem. He occasionally mentions it:

Like a dull actor now,
I have forgot my part, and I am out,
Even to a full disgrace.

As you probably know, there have been innumerable instances of forgetting lines in Shakespeare performances. When John Barrymore was doing Richard III, the actor playing Ratcliff was about to say:

My lord, 'tis I. The early village-cock
Hath twice done salutation to the morn...

But got stuck after “the early village-cock.” Started again, no use. Once more. Couldn’t get it. Again...Barrymore blurted out: “Why the hell don’t you crow, then?”

A funny thing happened to Julia Marlowe when she was doing Olivia in *Twelfth Night*. She turned to the friar and delivered her first line perfectly: “Then lead the way, good father – And heavens so shine...” But Julia Marlowe drew a blank on the next line...Somehow, she came up with a rhyming line of her own in iambic pentameter: “Then lead the way, good father – And heavens so shine, I can’t recall another blessed line.”

Actors are an amazing bunch...Edmund Kean, who dominated the London stage in the first three decades of the 19th century, was doing Othello - he roughed up Iago mercilessly. After the performance, a friend of his said to Kean: “You nearly killed the chap. This is what I call enthusiastic acting.” Kean looked at his friend in amazement and said: “What are you talking about? I was really trying to kill the chap. He was upstaging me all the time.”

Audiences, too, can be amazing... There was a charismatic Turkish author, Cevat Şakir, who used the pen-name of The Fisherman of Halicarnassus. Oxonian. Polyglot. Irreverent. Eccentric. He was famous also for his “*Merhaba*” “Hello!” He even said “Hello” for “Goodbye.” Once he went to see *Macbeth*! A little tipsy. They seated him in the front row. When he heard “Hail, Duncan!” “Hail, Macduff!” “Hail, Macbeth!” “*Merhaba* Macbeth!” he jumped to his feet and gave the cast a big “*Merhaba!*”

In the 19th century, there was a prominent Shakespearean actor-director by the name of William Charles Macready. Once, in his new *Hamlet* production, he had a King Claudius whom he found quite inferior. So, he decided to keep the man in the rear of the stage. And he instructed Claudius to die at a spot way back on the stage. Macready himself was going to die all the way in front, as close to the audience as possible. Opening night, King Claudius, stabbed, came staggering and fell right into Macready’s spot. Macready was taken aback and furious. He whispered: “What are you doing here? Go back. Die in your own spot.

Go on!” Claudius, almost dead, straightened up, and said to Macready at the top of his voice: “Look here, Macready! I did everything you asked me to do at the rehearsals. Now, I am the King. I shall die wherever I please.”

At another London performance, at the end of *Macbeth*, something similar occurred. Macduff and Macbeth were at it, brandishing their swords. Although he is supposed to die, Macbeth gave his all, refusing to be defeated, to die. As Macbeth kept swinging his sword, poor Macduff nearly collapsed of exhaustion. He kept begging: “Stop it, cut it short. Please die. Enough of this, now.” No use. Macbeth almost managed to emerge victorious, to keep alive, to change the end. But a while later, he took pity on

Macduff - and Shakespeare - and died. The audience loved all this. During the sword-fight they clapped rhythmically to encourage Macbeth. Giving him a thunderous applause, they made dead Macbeth rise to his feet, and gave him another round of wild applause.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am one Turk who believes in the natural superiority of women - and I feel that Shakespeare had been partial to his male characters. Now, Lady Macbeth, Desdemona, Cleopatra, Portia, Gertrude, Ophelia notwithstanding, his most memorable protagonists are men. Perhaps that is why Shakespeare has stolen the hearts of Turkish men.

Well, for me, Katherina the Shrew is memorable. Taming her was a formidable task. In Turkey, *Taming of the Shrew* was seldom successful - probably because all Turkish girls are angelic. There has never been a Turkish shrew. The only passage that all Turkish men agree with is...

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,
And for thy maintenance commits his body
To painful labour both by sea and land,
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;
And craves no other tribute at thy hands
But love, fair looks, and true obedience,—
Too little payment for so great a debt.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Shakespeare scholars and enthusiasts, Do you agree with me, for instance, that the Bard gave Romeo better lines? At any rate... Let me tell you an anecdote. There is a venerable American school in

İstanbul, Robert College, İstanbul's American College. Established in 1863, it is celebrating its 150th anniversary. That College produced many plays every year - amateur performances of almost professional caliber. In 1950 they did *Romeo and Juliet* in English. A sophomore, who is now arguably Turkey's richest man, had a bit part, First Watchman, with very few lines. He was going to enter, see Juliet and Romeo lying dead, and say: "Oh, what a pitiful sight!" He swaggered in and said: "Oh, what a beautiful sight!" The audience roared with laughter ... the entire cast was in guffaws including the 'dead' Romeo and Juliet.

So, that is Shakespeare – and the Turks. We cherish him as our cultural and theatrical hero.

Perhaps, ladies and gentlemen, no one in the past four centuries has surpassed Shakespeare's sonnet sequence. The universal appeal of the Sonnets has taken hold of Turkish poetry-lovers as well.

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
The rich proud cost of outworn buried age;
When sometime lofty towers I see down-raz'd,
And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;
When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
And the firm soil win of the watery main,
Increasing store with loss and loss with store;
When I have seen such interchange of state,
Or state itself confounded to decay,
Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminat:
That Time will come and take my love away.

This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,

And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

O, wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave
new world, That has such people in't!

