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TRACING POLLYANNA IN TURKISH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE* TÜRK ÇOCUK EDEBİYATINDA POLLYANNA'NIN İZİNİ SÜRMEK

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Abstract

Eleanor H. Porter's eponymous Pollyanna with her famous glad game has undoubtedly become a phenomenon denoting an attitude and perspective rather than simply being a literary character. Pollyanna is a prototype of well-behaved, modest, and content children in children's literature, and she embodies not only an adult nostalgia for the naivety and pure goodness of childhood but also the merry and kind child that is wished for. Pollyanna has, in time, transformed into a cultural icon which has found different names in literatures of different cultures. Porter's novel's far-reaching influence can also be seen in Turkish children's literature and screen adaptations through child protagonists that voice ideas surrounding Pollyanna. This can be related to the development of Turkish children's literature that has occurred on the same axis with children's literature in Western countries. Modern Turkish children's literature started with the translations and adaptations of classics in Tanzimat Era (1839-1876) and this tradition continued almost until the mid 20th century. Therefore, Anglophone as well as French children's classics became a model for modern Turkish children's literature where the writers adopted and adapted outstanding themes, motifs and characters for Turkish child readers. This paper explores the intersections of Anglophone and Turkish children's literature by tracing the influence of *Pollyanna* in Turkish children's literature through the analyses of selected texts.

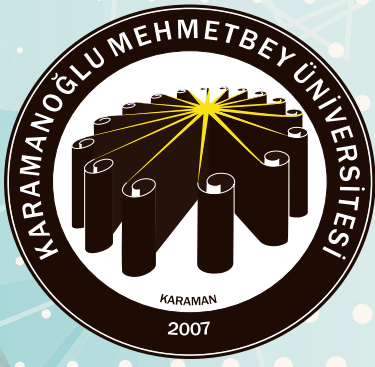
Keywords: *Pollyanna*, Turkish Children's Literature, Anglophone Children's Literature, Cultural Adaptation

Öz

Eleanor H. Porter'ın eserine de ismini verdiği karakteri Pollyanna, meşhur mutluluk oyunu ile salt bir edebi karakter olmaktan öteye gitmiş bir duruş ve bakış açısını temsil eden bir fenomene dönüşmüştür. Pollyanna, çocuk edebiyatında resmedilen iyi huylu, alçakgönüllü ve memnuniyet duygusu yüksek çocuk temsillerinin bir prototipi olmakla birlikte çocukluk döneminin saflığı ve iyiliğine karşı hissedilen yetişkin nostaljisini ve arzu edilen mutlu ve nazik çocuk imgesini kendinde barındırmaktadır. Pollyanna farklı kültürlerde farklı isimler bularak zamanla kültürel bir ikona dönüşmüştür. Porter'ın eserinin geniş çaplı etkisi Pollyanna ile ilişkilendirilen fikirleri temsil eden çocuk karakterler aracılığı ile Türk çocuk edebiyatında ve çeşitli ekran uyarlamalarında da görülür. Bu durum Türk çocuk edebiyatının gelişimini Batı ülkelerinin çocuk edebiyatlarıyla aynı ekseninde gerçekleştirmesiyle de ilişkilendirilebilir. Modern Türk çocuk edebiyatı, Tanzimat Döneminde (1839-1976) klasiklerin çevirileri ve uyarlamaları ile başlar ve bu gelenek yirminci yüzyılın ortalarına kadar devam eder. Özellikle Anglofon ve Fransız çocuk edebiyatı klasiklerinin model teşkil ettiği modern Türk çocuk edebiyatında yazarlar öne çıkan tema, motif ve karakterleri Türk çocuk okuyucular için benimseyip uyarlamışlardır. Bu çalışma, Anglofon çocuk edebiyatı ve Türk çocuk edebiyatı arasındaki kesişim noktalarını *Pollyanna*'nın Türk çocuk edebiyatındaki etkisinin izini sürerek seçili metinler üzerinden irdeler.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Pollyanna*, Türk Çocuk Edebiyatı, Anglofon Çocuk Edebiyatı, Kültürel Adaptasyon

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INTRODUCTION

First published in 1913 in the USA, Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* is one of the most read and loved children's classics in the English-speaking world. Its title protagonist became an icon with her famous glad game and has come to represent an attitude and mindset. As in many other countries, *Pollyanna* has become one of the most selling children's classics in Turkey "undergoing numerous print translations and reincarnations, even inspiring theatric and cinematic adaptations" which all "reflect their respective time periods socially and politically" (Tunç, 2014, p. 246).¹ As Taner Emin Tunç indicates, "in Turkey, *Pollyanna* has similarly gained social currency as an empowering icon who, over a number of generations, has conveyed a message of acceptance, optimism, and forgiveness that has provided young Turkish readers with personal motivation and inspiration" (2014, p. 246).

As Tunç hints, *Pollyanna*'s popularity in Turkey and its influence in Turkish culture and children's literature did not simply occur as a result of readers' attention to and embracement of the story after its first translation. *Pollyanna* and its titular protagonist as well as the values they represent have pierced Turkish readers, writers, and eventually Turkish culture at a gradual pace through many acts of translation and adaptation. Today, there is even an idiom that is commonly used in modern Turkish, "to play *Pollyanna*", which proves the influence of the novel in Turkish culture. The idiom is used in both negative and positive context depending on the case. Apart from emphasizing the optimism of a certain individual, the phrase is also used pejoratively to refer to those people who cannot see the reality and are sure to fail or end up disappointed because they are extremely and unfavorably optimistic. *Pollyanna*'s reception in Turkey since its first translation and its influence in other original works of Turkish children's literature were in close relationship with the ideological, historical, and social background of the translation activities at a certain time. Therefore, in order to trace *Pollyanna*'s reception in Turkey since its first arrival, we first need to look at the development of Turkish children's literature.

The birth and development of Turkish children's literature cannot be considered separate from children's literature of the Western countries. Turkish children had already been consuming literature for a very long time but there was not a literary production specifically for children until the mid-nineteenth century. Before that period, children were enjoying traditional oral pieces such as Turkish fairy tales, riddles, folkloric stories, and Nasreddin Hodja jokes (Genç and Yalınkılıç,

¹ All of the quotations from Turkish sources were translated by the author of this study.

2011, p. 99). There were also some examples of verse, conduct books, and alphabet books written for children such as *Hayriya and Sümbülzade* by Nabi and *Nuhbetü'l Eftal* (1859) by Rüştü (Koyuncuoğlu, 2001, p. 9).

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire yet entered a new period, called Tanzimat Era, which caused changes in many areas including literature. Inspired by the French Revolution, Tanzimat Era (1839-1876), which is also known as the Ottoman Reform, was a period of modernization and innovation in various fields including justice system, human rights, culture, and other social issues. During this period, the Ottoman Empire turned its face to the European countries to reorganize its legal, cultural, and social activities. In accordance with this Westernization project, Turkish literati started to translate the classical works of Western countries specifically that of France and England into Ottoman Turkish. The purpose of these translations was first to create models for literature which was national but modern and Western at the same time. The first translations made in this period included works that were written for children, that were associated with children, or that were adapted for children in Europe.

One of the earliest translations made in this period was the fables of *La Fontaine* by Şinasi. Other significant translations included the translation of *Robinson Crusoe* by Ahmet Lütü Efendi and the translation of *Gulliver's Travels* by Mahmut Nedim ("Türk edebiyatında ilk çeviriler"). According to Necdet Neydim, that "*Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* were the initial works to be chosen for translation from among so-called children's literature" was "an attempt to follow in the trajectory of western Enlightenment" (2020a, p. 48). Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island* (1869), *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1889), *Two Years' Vacation* (1891), *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1885), *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (1888) were also among the children's books translated in this period ("Türk edebiyatında ilk çeviriler"; Koyuncuoğlu, 2001, p. 10). With such translations, the idea that children need literature that was specifically produced for them and literature is an important factor in the education of children emerged in the Ottoman Period. In order to emphasize this, the critics, writers, and educators such as Satı Bey and Ali Nusret wrote articles, which emphasized the necessity of children's literature in the education of children (Koyuncuoğlu, 2001, p. 10). As Neydim writes, "These works, published as a result of an increasing interest in European culture, industrialisation and the enlightenment processes, were evidence of an effort to create a new culture within a given society and furthermore, to educate generations in this new culture" (2020a, p. 49). As a result of these developments, a new culture of children's literature was born in Turkish culture, but it was a slow-going process as the Ottoman

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Empire was being dragged into a dissolution period, and the geography was in political and economic turmoil.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922 and the foundation of Turkish Republic were followed by reforms in education and language in modern Turkey. Around this period, Turkish children's literature saw works with nationalistic undertones, and there were also works about historical characters, as well as social problems especially in rural areas. The period also witnessed the revival of Turkish folklore. The highlight of the early twentieth century was the Alphabet Reform of 1928 which replaced Arabic alphabet with Latin alphabet. Westernization, modernisation, and secularism were still key words in literary production including children's literature and "westernization efforts were rooted in state ideology" in this period (Neydim, 2020a, p. 52). Accordingly, with modernization and refinement in Turkish language and the Alphabet Reform, literary translations gained a dramatic impetus in modern Turkey (Yıldız, 2016, p. 438). Genç and Yalınkılıç argue that for about one hundred years, Turkish literature did not produce many original works for children, and most of the written materials remained to be translations or cultural adaptations (2011, p. 100). According to Neydim, children's authors "tried to produce original pieces" but they were composing their works "mimicking the repertoire of the West" (2020a, p. 52). In both cases, Turkish literature was creating its very own tradition in the field of children's literature.

Only after the 1950s, Turkish children's literature entered a new period with the emergence of texts with socialist and political undertones (Genç and Yalınkılıç, 2011, p. 100). However, the history of Turkish children's literature which was rooted in Western literature had already shaped much of Turkish children's literature thematically and technically. Children's writers borrowed didacticism, as well as certain themes, morals, character traits from the classical works of Western children's literature and combined them with cultural, social and folkloric elements of Turkey and the values of Islam. As Neydim emphasizes, "One of the most important developments in the 1970s was a prevailing tendency to publish translation, adaptations and original works advocating or embodying leftist ideologies" (2020a, pp. 52-53). In a period of political and economic chaos, Pollyanna's egalitarian and participative character would be more than appropriate for such a leftist propaganda, indeed.

Turkish children's literature has been producing original works since the 1990s portraying child characters that are sophisticated and changeable. Moreover, it engages with varied contemporary themes such as environmental problems, technological developments and its manifold effects. However, the majority of Turkish children's books still follow a strict

didacticism and prioritize moral education and moral consistency, which may stem from the country's political, social and economic agenda, as well as its demography and its tendency to preserve Islamic values. This also explains the ongoing popularity of certain classical works of Anglophone children's literature in Turkey including *Pollyanna*. Specifically, *Pollyanna* has enabled translators and writers to reinscribe it in ways that may serve different ideologies due to its celebration of universal morals, engagement with universal themes, as well as its portrayal of a protagonist who can be cherished by everyone. Therefore, the following section traces *Pollyanna*'s various translations and cultural adaptations and examines some original works of Turkish children's literature with the aim of showing the role of historical, social, cultural, and ideological background of Turkey in its reception.

POLLYANNA'S INFLUENCE IN TURKISH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Even though Elanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* saw significant popularity in Turkish culture in the 1970s, its entrance to the Turkish scene was much earlier than that period. *Pollyanna*'s Turkish translation came only fourteen years after its first publication in the USA in 1927 and it was "the first work from American literature to be translated into Turkish" (Karantay, 1995, p. 154).² This first translation was in Ottoman Turkish with Arabic letters. In 1931, three years after the Alphabet Reform of 1928, *Pollyanna*'s first translation in Latinized Turkish script was published with the title of *Poli Anna* (Tunç, 2014, p. 252). Two other translations appeared in 1948 and 1958 under the supervision of the Turkish Translation Bureau which was functioning "as a tool of the state-governed modernizing force" in Turkey (Kansu-Yetkiner, 2011, p. 83). However, "a major shift occurred between the 1930s-1950s and 1970s" (Kansu-Yetkiner, 2011, p. 79). This was a shift from "foreignization" and "westernization attempts" to "domestication" in the translations of *Pollyanna* (Kansu-Yetkiner, 2011, p. 79).

In 1973, *Pollyanna* with its proper names and locations was adapted to Turkish culture by Kemal Bilbaşar. New York became İstanbul and *Pollyanna* became Gülenay Haksever, which literally means "Smiling Moon Justice-Lover" to indicate her optimism as well as her just nature. As Kansu Yetkiner notes, this specific adaptation was the beginning of the literary "Turkification and Islamization process" with which *Pollyanna* has become a "glocalized product" and "Christian positivism is substituted by Islamic tolerance" (2011, pp. 85-87).

² The second literary translation into Turkish from American literature was "The Mask of the Red Death" by Edgar Allan Poe (Karantay, 1995, p. 154).

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What brought Porter's *Pollyanna* a significant recognition in the 1970s was actually a loose film adaptation of the novel. In 1971, Turkish musical drama, *Hayat Sevince Güzel*, the title of which can be translated as *Loving Makes Life Beautiful* or *Life is Beautiful When You Love* became very successful and it turned out to be one of the classics of Turkish cinema. The film portrays Ayşe or Ayşecik as an extremely optimistic and cheerful girl who starts to live with her wealthy and aggressive aunt after the death of her parents. In the 1960s and 1970s, film adaptations of children's classics were quite popular in Turkish cinema. In most of these films, Ayşecik appeared as the main character; and played by the same child actress, Zeynep Değirmencioğlu, Ayşecik had become a kind of icon in Turkey. Like *Pollyanna*, Ayşe or Ayşecik was characterized by her optimism, endurance, tolerance, and cheerfulness in all of these movies featuring her.

Hayat Sevince Güzel (Loving Makes Life Beautiful) follows the same plotline of Porter's novel only with cultural adaptations and minor changes. Ayşe is older than *Pollyanna*, and she is a peasant girl with local clothes and a distinct local countryside accent for which she is constantly mocked by the elite youngsters. In Turkish film adaptation, "religion is deemphasized and class difference, modernity, and the country/city divide are emphasized far more than in the original novel" (Tunç, 2014, p. 249). The film is full of scenes which highlight certain elements unique to Turkish culture. When Ayşe is found dirty and possibly with flea, she is sent to a traditional Turkish bath and when she is invited to a party by the wealthy young people, she dances to a folkloric music with traditional costumes. Such changes may be read as part of the Turkification project followed by Westernization of the previous period; but, despite the changes in the scenery, details and the language, the film preserves the main messages in *Pollyanna* proving the universal and timeless nature of the values it promotes. As such, the film celebrates "not only an ideology of forgiveness [...] but also one of modernity, suggesting that personal transformations – whether they involve sentiments, or even class standing and comportment – are possible and even desirable" (Tunç, 2014, p. 251). In the end, Ayşe achieves to make a change in people's lives in her environment like *Pollyanna*, and she also matures and becomes a young woman who is more aware, educated, and refined.

Values such as contentment, gratefulness, humbleness as well as the celebration of the peasantry, and hard work as offered in *Pollyanna* seemed to be a perfect formula for Turkish children's literature in the 1970s as proven by the success of the film adaptation, *Hayat Sevince Güzel*. 1970s was a period of military coup attempts, economic regression, and domestic migration in Turkey. Amid such chaos, Turkish children's authors produced children's books where didacticism was combined with the values of Turkish culture, and which gave references to the

political and social turmoil of the country at the time. Unsurprisingly, the child protagonists created around this period in Turkish children's literature were reminiscent of Pollyanna.

In 1971, the same year *Hayat Sevince Güzel (Loving Makes Life Beautiful)* came to the theatres, Gülten Dayıoğlu, an acknowledged Turkish children's author, published her first novel, *Fadiş* (1971). *Fadiş* stands out with its eponymous child character's content and cheerful nature under harsh circumstances. Even though the novel is not an adaptation of *Pollyanna*, or there is not a statement as to it was inspired by *Pollyanna*, Fadiş, as a character, is a Pollyanna. Her parents are absent, and she has to live with her relatives. Even though she is exposed to verbal and psychological abuse, she remains optimistic, and she is also able to change her environment.

Fadiş, the name, is a shortened version of traditional Turkish name Fadime or Fatma. Fadiş is intentionally used in the novel to indicate the young age as well as the cuteness, loveliness, and happiness of the character. Even the title and the cover of the book remind the reader of Porter's *Pollyanna* emphasizing the background of Fadiş who was born in the village and who loves and appreciates every living being. Having to live in some of the metropolitans in Turkey such as İstanbul and Ankara, Fadiş can feel that she does not speak and behave like the children of the rich and cultivated people and her clothes are not proper. Fadiş is never ashamed of her background and appearance; but she often mentions her desire to receive education.

By portraying characters from different layers of society, the novel yet promotes the dignity of being peasant and the dignity of poverty: "those who know to share turn out to be poor people" (Şengül, 2018, p. 77). Fadiş is loved by her neighbors; because she helps the old and the disabled with shopping and she carries water for them from the shared top (Dayıoğlu, 2021, p. 77). Just like Pollyanna meets with the coldness and arrogance of rich and intellectual people like Aunt Polly and the Doctor, Fadiş is abused by some of the rich people of the city. In one case, Fadiş is abused and treated badly by the spoiled son of a doctor, called Aydın, which literally means intellectual in Turkish. Fadiş can make real friends only in the village. In the village, Fadiş and her friend Hasan change 'work' to a game, which is also comparable to Pollyanna's glad game. The question "whose harvest should we go to help?" equals "who do you want to play with?" in the novel (Şengül, 2018, p. 77). They consider working at a farm not a burden but an opportunity to spend time with friends while helping them. As such, the novel juxtaposes children's commune in the village with the arrogant children in the city, which eventually reverberates the ideological conflicts of the period, namely the conflict between the capitalist city and the laboring farmers as well as the conflict between the intelligentsia and the peasantry.

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Fadiş does not have a glad game, but her reactions reveal that she “plays Pollyanna” as it can be put in Turkish. When she has to walk too long, she comforts herself with the idea that walking is good for the legs (Dayıođlu, 2021, p. 61). When it is cold inside the house, she says that cold keeps her awake and when she recognizes that her dress is too small for her -for she does not have any other dress- she rejoices at the thought that she has grown up (Dayıođlu, 2021, pp. 85-129). When Fadiş's mother sends her some other children's old clothes, she again finds a reason to be happy about: “When her mother sent Fadiş various stuff, she rejoiced. She used to kiss, smell each and every item, in this way, she fulfilled her longing for her mother. She did not feel a bit disappointed by the fact that the clothes, the shoes sent by her mother were worn out or faded (Dayıođlu, 2021, p. 49). Fadiş's mindset as well as her ability to find goodness in everything make her much closer to her Anglophone counterpart, Pollyanna. In the meantime, they help highlight the sensibilities and values of Turkish culture. As Sinar ılđın points out, “Despite all these negative circumstances, Fadiş remains optimistic. She loves people, she helps them, and she never escapes from work. The only thing she desires turns out to live in a single place with people to whom she feels attached” (2005, p. 40). After all, Dayıođlu's novel exemplifies a children's literature culture which emulates a tradition that receives worldwide acknowledgement while it simultaneously tries to create and preserve its own identity.

Six years after *Pollyanna's* Turkified movie adaptation and Dayıođlu's *Fadiş*, in 1977 Kemalettin Tuđcu (1902-1996) - the prolific author of melodramatic children's novels - wrote *Küçük Besleme*, the title of which can be translated as *Little Handmaid*. The novel was about an orphan girl, Bilge, who finds herself as a servant in the house of a cruel wealthy woman when she thinks that she is being adopted. Tuđcu's novel draws heavily on the values that are celebrated in *Pollyanna*, and his protagonist, Bilge resembles Pollyanna in many ways.

Even though *Küçük Besleme* is quite different from *Pollyanna* in terms of its plot, there are distinct similarities between two books. Just like Pollyanna, Bilge cherishes her memories with her family, which gives her strength. She also builds a very close relationship with the main servant of the house, which is comparable to the relationship between Nancy and Pollyanna. When Bilge first starts school, she is mocked by her friends; but, she is even able to change her school friends' perception with her loving nature as is the case with Pollyanna. One significant similarity between Pollyanna and Bilge turns out to be their compassion for other orphans. Bilge's care for Esmâ, the orphan servant, parallels the relationship between Pollyanna and Jimmy Bean. In short, Tuđcu's novel advocates endurance, patience, optimism, gratefulness, and forgiveness through Bilge, and shows that these assets not only help one increase one's economic and social status, but they also

create changes in their environment. The similarity between Porter's *Pollyanna* and Tuğcu's novel cannot be considered a coincidence because Tuğcu was also the creator of Ayşe/Ayşecik character, the Turkish counterpart of *Pollyanna* and he wrote scripts for some of Ayşecik movies. Therefore, Tuğcu was not only a significant figure in the formation of children's literature culture in Turkey, but he was also a writer who directly contributed to the popularization and circulation of Porter's *Pollyanna* in Turkey.

Tuğcu has become "one of the most read and also controversial writers of Turkish children's literature" (Şirin, 2018, p. 9). Tuğcu's novels were also adapted to the television between 1990s and 2000s. Even though the television adaptations were huge success at the time, they also received harsh criticism putting Tuğcu's novels under scrutiny for the scenes of physical and psychological violence (Kılıçkaya, 2021, p. 66). Although he created lovable memorable child characters and helped incorporate Anglophone children's literature into Turkish culture through his adaptations and scripts, his works continue to be remembered with their extremely melodramatic and tragic scenes.

Pollyanna has become one of the most translated children's classics between 1960-2010 in Turkey (Neydim, 2020b, p. 862). It has become much more popular among the 90s children in Turkey with the Japanese anime adaptation by Nippon Animation in 1986 (Demirhan, 2018, p. 9). In 2005, Ministry of National Education in Turkey shared a list with schools, publishers and the general public titled the *MEB's 100 Fundamental Works* for primary school students.³ MEB encouraged educators to incorporate these books into their curriculum and also parents to help their children reach and read those books. That Porter's *Pollyanna* was also included in this list proves not only its educational quality and its universality but also the fact that the novel has been found quite relatable to Turkish culture and its values.

According to a recent research on the role of award-winning Turkish children's books since 2007 in sensitivity education, the majority of the award-winning books primarily tend to inculcate in children the happiness, in other words, the contentment of the individual (Çinpolat, 2021, pp. 868-869). It is followed by sensitivity to nature and environment, and sensitivity to family members (Çinpolat, 2021, pp. 868-869). This research also explains the reason behind ongoing popularity of *Pollyanna* in Turkey as well as the reason why Turkish children's literature is full of characters that are reminiscent of *Pollyanna*.

³ There is also another list of *100 Fundamental Works* for secondary school students recommended by MEB.

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Indeed, staying content and happy under difficult circumstances and being grateful are assets that are also highly valued in Turkish culture specifically when we consider the close history of Turkey which witnessed a bloody independence war, and then a couple military coups, and periods of economic depression. In addition to this, the demography of Turkey - which simultaneously includes an elite and privileged class in metropolitans and people who live in the countryside engaging in agriculture - makes *Pollyanna's* content quite familiar for the Turkish readers from different sections of the society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as the examples given above show, *Pollyanna*'s reception has usually been in interaction with the social agenda of Turkey. While its first translations served modernization project, its localized translations and cultural adaptations were aimed to create a national identity in the field of Turkish children's literature, which found its source in Anglophone and Francophone tradition. Additionally, its loose adaptations as well as original works which adopted thematic concerns of *Pollyanna* successfully represented ideological concerns of their periods. In the meantime, they brought *Pollyanna* to the fore as a text of all times, all cultures, and all purposes. It is without doubt that every culture in the world would appreciate morals and values in *Pollyanna* as they are universal and timeless; but there seems to be a special bond between *Pollyanna* and Turkish children's literature considering *Pollyanna*'s contribution to the development of Turkish children's literature and its influence in Turkish cinema, children's culture and even contemporary Turkish cartoons. *Pollyanna*'s countryside background as well as verbal and psychological abuse she witnesses in Aunt Polly's house yet her endurance, self-confidence, and ability to make a change continue to seem and sound quite authentic and encouraging for the Turkish readers even today who still glorify the peasantry, the poor or any individual who works hard and achieves to remain modest, virtuous and grateful even in the face of corruption. To sum up, approaching the hundredth-anniversary of *Pollyanna*'s arrival to Turkey, *Pollyanna*'s influence still resonates in Turkish children's culture and it is still one of the classics Turkish children read and love. I anticipate that this preliminary study will evolve into other studies which discuss what has become in the last decade as the publishing houses continue to publish abbreviated versions of the novel for different age groups or continue to make changes in line with their ideological standing.

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