

**EXCLUDED BY INCLUSION: THE TURK IN
SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS**

**МАРГИНАЛИЗИРОВАН ПУТЁМ ИНКЛЮЗИИ :ОБРАЗ
ТУРКА В ПЬЕСАХ ШЕКПИРА**

**DAHİL EDİLEREK DIŞLANMIŞ: SHAKESPEARE'İN
TİYATRO OYUNLARINDA TÜRK**

Mustafa ŞAHİNER*

ABSTRACT

Reference to the Turk was a common practice in early modern plays. There were, in fact, a large number of plays dealing with the Turks by major playwrights of the period such as Shakespeare, Marlowe, Greene, Peele and Dekker. Apparently, the Turk was a safe subject to write about for the book market as it guaranteed sales. Thus, in a way, they were included in the lives of the theatre audience as well as the rest of the nation that knew about the Turk through broadside ballads. However, this inclusion of the Turk in the lives of the English nation did not necessarily mean that they were well received. Most of the works dealing with Turks drew a negative picture of the Turk as strong and menacing enemy whose religion was a threat to Christianity. Although recent scholarship has shown multi-dimensional readings of Shakespeare's plays, his approach cannot be held separate from the common notion of the Turk prevalent among the playwrights of the period as well as the English nation as a whole. This paper aims to analyse the inclusion of Turkish race as well as references to them in some of Shakespeare's plays to understand to what extent they are actually excluded from the English society as the other.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Turk, Early Modern Drama, History Plays, Shakespearean Turk

ÖZ

Erken modern dönem İngiliz tiyatro oyunlarında Türklerden bahsetmek oldukça sıradan bir hal almıştır. Shakespeare, Marlowe, Greene, Peele ve Dekker gibi bir çok önemli tiyatro yazarı Türklerle ilgili eserler üretmişlerdir. Görünen o ki, Türklerle ilgili eserler üretmek satış garantisi olduğu için kitap piyasasında güvenli bir konu olmuştur. Bu şekilde de, sokak balatları sayesinde sıradan halkın hayatına girmiş olan Türkler tiyatro izleyicilerinde hayatına dahil edilmiş oldular. Elbette Türkler'in edebiyat aracılığı ile İngiliz halkının hayatına dahil edilmeleri, onlar hakkında pozitif bir bakış açısına sahip olmaları anlamına gelmiyordu. Üretilen eserlerin çoğu Türkleri dinleriyle Hıristiyanlığa tehdit oluşturan güçlü ve kötülük dolu bir düşman şeklinde göstermektedir. Her ne kadar son dönem çalışmalar Shakespeare'in eserlerinin çok katmanlı okunabileceğini göstermiş olsalar da, o'nun yaklaşımını da dönemin klişeleşmiş ve yaygın Türk algısından farklı görmek mümkün değildir. Bu makalenin amacı Shakespeare'in oyunlarında ortaya çıkan

*Doç. Dr., İnönü Üniversitesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, sahinermustafa@gmail.com.

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referansların analizleri sonucunda Türkler'in İngiliz toplumunda ne derece dışlanarak ötekileştirildiğini irdelemektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Shakespeare, Türk, Erken Modern Tiyatro, Tarih Oyunları, Shakespeare'in Türkü

АННОТАЦИЯ

Турки упоминаются в ранних современных английских пьесах и оно стало довольно обычным явлением. Многие известные писатели пьес, такие как Шекспир, Марлоу, Грин, Пил и Деккер в своих произведениях описывали турков. Произведения, включая в себе вопросы по поводу турков, гарантированно продавались на книжном рынке. Таким образом, тема турков, которая вошла в обычную жизнь людей через уличные продажи, была включена в жизнь театральной аудитории. Конечно, включение турок в жизнь британцев через литературу не означало, что они должны были иметь позитивный взгляд по поводу них. В большинстве произведений, касающихся вопросу турков, показан сильный и злой враг, который угрожает христианству своей религией. Хотя, недавние исследования показали, что произведения Шекспира можно читать с разных точек зрения, всё таки, подход не отличается от широко распространенного стереотипа турка того времени. Цель этой статьи, на основе пьес Шекспира, проанализировать как турки маргинализированы в английском обществе того периода.

Ключевые слова: Шекспир, Турки, ранний современный театр, исторические пьесы, песнь Шекспира

A ghost haunted the early modern England, a ghost that was both feared and anticipated in his symbolic presence and physical absence, the ghost of the Turk¹². Although a distant yet potential enemy, Turks were introduced to English nation through sermons, ballads and theatrical activities as well as other forms of writings. They were included in the social and cultural lives of people in order to be differentiated and thus excluded. The theory of inclusion/exclusion holds that “any instance of differentiation and demarcation entails forms of inclusion and exclusion” (Bohn, 2009, p. 42). Elaborating on Luhmann’s theory¹³, Bohn argues that regimes of inclusion and exclusion are historically varying and strictly related to societal mode of differentiation (p. 46), and the modes of differentiation are rules for repeating differences. The premodern Europe used:

Excommunication, bans, infamy and dishonorability, damnation, dehumanization through labeling or stigmatizing, formation of ghettos, formation of lower-ranking ethnic classes, lack of rights, politics of settlement, nostrification or waiving of nostrification, privileging or disprivileging conferment of a status, corporations, protection by the king (Königsschutz), hospitality, positions with direct access to the monarch (Immediatstellungen), denial of the status as person, expulsion of strangers, galley-slavery,

¹² This is a reference to Jerry Brotton’s very first line in his article “Shakespeare’s Turks and the spectre of ambivalence in the History Plays” (2014) that reads “A spectre haunts Shakespeare – the spectre of the Turk.”

¹³ For Luhmann’s theory of Inclusion and Exclusion, see Luhmann, Niklas “Inklusion und Exklusion”, in Luhmann, Niklas (1995), *Soziologische Aufklärung. Vol. 6. Die Soziologie und der Mensch*. Opladen: Westdt. Verl., pp. 237-265. There is no English translation of this book, hence this paper relies basically on Bohn’s personal translation.

death penalty, banishment from the city or country, outlawry, deportation, and many others as modes of exclusion (p. 50).

The Jews, for example, during the middle ages in Europe, were included into the urban area yet excluded from all political and religious affairs (p. 49). Giving the example of Jews in Europe, Bohn proceeds to claim that when one conceives inclusion and exclusion “as a structure of differentiation in an historical type of society, this is not without consequence for the theory of differentiation itself,” since in this case, “if conditions for inclusion specify the form of the social order and the excluded embody the opposite eventuality, exclusions carry a constitutive reference to this order” (p. 51). In our case then, if we take the figurative presence of the Turk on London stages that are differentiated and thus excluded through dehumanization and labelling, we may also claim that their exclusion reinforces nationalistic feelings among the English nation. So it may further be argued that the Turks’ exclusion by inclusion “carry a constitutive reference” to the social order in early modern England.

Bohn also mentions the “realms of exclusion” in the “form of institutions of including exclusion or in the form of social space” which will exhibit symbolism to be examined by sociological research” (p. 52). It has become a well-known fact that reference to the Turk was a common practice in early modern plays. There were, in fact, a large number of plays dealing with the Turks by major playwrights of the period such as Marlowe’s *Tamburlane Parts I and II*, and *The Jew of Malta*; Robert Greene’s *Alphonsus, King of Aragon and Selimus*, George Peele’s *Battle of Alcazar and Soliman and Perseda*; Thomas Dekker’s *Lust’s Dominion*, Thomas Goffe’s *Couragous Turk*, and *The Raging Turk*; and Robert Daborne’s *A Christian Turned Turk*. All these plays had no problems attracting large number of audiences. Apparently, the Turk was also a safe subject to write about in the book market as it guaranteed sales. Thus, in a way, through representations on stages Turks were included in the lives of the theatre audience as well as the rest of the nation that already had relative knowledge of them through sermons in the churches and broadside ballads on the streets. However, this inclusion of the Turk in the lives of the English nation did not necessarily mean that they were well received. Most of the works dealing with Turks drew a negative picture of the Turk as strong and menacing enemy whose power was a threat to all Christendom and whose religion was a threat to Christianity in general. Theatres in this case, as the realms of exclusion by inclusion, played a significant role in the creation of a negative image of Turks.

Compared with his contemporaries, however, Shakespeare’s position in the handling of Turks requires a completely different approach. Contrary to the above mentioned playwrights who brought Turkish characters onto the stage, there are no Turks in Shakespeare’s plays. It is extremely interesting why Shakespeare did not use any Turkish characters while his fellow playwrights were bombarding the stages with them. The answer may lie in the fact that Shakespeare was not straightforward with the themes and messages in his plays. As recent scholarship has shown, ambiguity lies at the heart of his plays, especially his histories, which makes possible multi-dimensional readings of them. Even earlier famous critics like Willliam Hazlitt, A. P. Rossiter and Norman Rabkin saw Shakespeare’ history plays ambiguous, denying the plays a single, unifying end. They point to dramatic ambiguities and ironies in the history plays that continuously challenge their “pretensions to martial valour and celebrations of dynastic or national unity. These plays are defined by doubleness, multivalency and what Rossiter famously called Shakespeare’s ‘two-eyedness’” (Brotton, p. 522). More recent critical works such as Matthew Dimmock’s *New*

Turkes: Dramatising Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England, Daniel Vitkus' *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean* and Linda McJannet's, *The Sultan Speaks: Dialogue in English Plays and Histories about the Ottoman Turks* focus on re-readings of early modern plays and point to multiple meanings that exist. For Mark Hutchings the references to Turks could be "best understood as inward-looking, in the direction of the world of the play, rather than gesturing outwards to a hostile foreign power present only as an abstraction" (p. 165). In this perspective this paper aims to analyse the absent presence of the Turk in Shakespeare's history plays in order to attempt to understand their ambivalence.

In at least sixteen of Shakespeare's plays, the Turk is referred to. Around a third of these appear in history plays. Jerry Brotton claims that the audience simultaneously loved and dreaded Turks. "Whatever the religious or political anxieties created by the spectre of the Turk, the Elizabethan audience wanted to see them on stage" (p. 525). It would only be appropriate if Shakespeare's histories and other plays are dealt with separately in two groups regarding references to Turks. The references to Turks in Shakespeare's other plays are either stock words or phrases used as fit for the situations, hence we will be focusing on the history plays where the Turk plays a relatively more significant role without even being there.

The first mention of the Turk is in *Henry VI Part I*, when Sir William Lucy asks for the dead body of valiant Talbot after a list of honorary titles he attributes to him. Joan answers: Here is a silly stately style indeed! / The Turk that two and fifty kingdoms hath / Writes not so tedious style as this (IV, vii, 73-75). John W. Draper assumes Joan's words to be a reference to Sultan Murad III's threatening proclamation against the German Emperor Rudolph which apparently took place a few months before Shakespeare revised this play (p. 526). Regardless of the possible references, which includes the common practice of Turkish Sultans whose addresses started with a long list of honorary titles they held, her comparison implies a respected and feared Turk. But perhaps what is more important is that it also shows Shakespeare's knowledge of Turkish Sultan's letters which always carried a long list of titles attributed to the Sultan. The reference in this case is rather obvious and straightforward: Lord Talbot was a courageous and respected commander who won many battles in France, but Joan of Arc illustrates the absurdity of stately attributions to him by comparing Sir William Lucy's address to that of a Sultan. Of course the point being made here is anachronistic, and it is Shakespeare rather than the Joan of 1453, who is bringing on stage the contemporary knowledge of the Turks. The year 1453 was the year Turks conquered Constantinople, and the reference to 'two and fifty kingdoms' would be used in the description of the Turk much later (Hutchings, p. 160).

However, the next play that includes Turks requires a detailed look. In *Richard III*, the Machiavellian Richard who is the Duke of Gloucester and the Duke of Buckingham plot and kill Lord Hastings for his devilish advancement to English throne. When the Mayor sees the amputated head of Hastings, Richard, in order to defend his act, blames Hastings for treason, which is a lie. Richard says: What, think you we are Turks or infidels? / Or that we would, against the form of law, / Proceed thus rashly to the villain's death, / But that the extreme peril of the case, / The peace of England and our person's safety, / Enforced us to this execution (III, v, 40-45). The Elizabethan audience knew quite well from the historiographical works that Richard III was one of the most evil kings England had. Edward Hall's and Raphael Holinshed's histories, no matter how biased they were, already depicted Richard III as a mean character in the public opinion. Brotton claims that "the

spectre of Islam and the Turk are used for a variety of different dramatic purposes. The focus turns primarily on an interest in the establishment of political legitimacy around the struggles over the English crown” (pp. 527-528). So, a comparison of the Turk and Richard works not only to strengthen the public hatred of the Turks but also makes sure that Tudor legitimacy stays on by blaming Richard for the evil deeds. This kind of representation of the Turk, then, “appears to be designed to introduce an ironic perspective, the historically-jarring comparison all too readily supplying the tools of critique for those (then and now) sceptical of straightforward hagiographies of English monarchs” (Hutchings, pp. 156-157). Richard’s question, ‘think you we are Turks or infidels’, would, in fact, be immediately answered as yes, even worse, by the audience who already identified him with Turks.

The next play that refers to Turks is *Richard II*. When Bolingbroke, by force, persuades King Richard II to name him as his heir, the Bishop of Carlisle gives a long speech to prevent any intervention in God’s providence: And if you crown him [Bolingbroke], let me prophesy: / The blood of English shall manure the ground, / And future ages will groan for this foul act; / Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels (IV, i, 136-139). Among the Turks as devils incarnate¹⁴, the Bishop assumes, there is chaos, and peace is far from them. Only if Christians lose their true faith will the Turk have peace, as it is the Devil’s ultimate aim to turn true believers against Christian God. The Bishop of Carlisle denounces Bolingbroke’s accession to English throne “as an act of religious and political apostasy, the kind of fratricidal and illegitimate usurpation familiar to Elizabethan audiences exposed to a range of ‘Turkish’ plays throughout the 1590s on precisely these subjects” (Brotton, p. 528). This usurpation of the crown will bring England close to what she dreads to become; ‘Turks and infidels’. This is a typical reference to Turks as infidels and a threat to Christianity and Christian lands. But what happens is that Bolingbroke actually does intervene and become the next king, and the audience already knows it.

We find the next reference to Turk appearing as a dualism in *Henry IV, Part I*, when Falstaff claims at the Battle of Shrewsbury that he had killed Henry Percy: “O Hal, I prithee, give me leave to breath a while. / Turk Gregory never did such deeds in arms as I have / done this day. I have paid Percy, / I have made him sure” (V.iii, 45–48). This is a typical and indeed very familiar protestant action of conflating Catholic and Turk. We know from history that the Catholic Pope was considered as the Devils head and Turks its body¹⁵. So the conflation of the two is some invincible evil capable of the most dreadful actions. “Falstaff evokes either Pope Gregory VII or, more anachronistically Pope Gregory XIII, infamous among Protestant polemicists for his celebration of the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre (Brotton, p. 529). Considering the context of this scene Brotton finds the conflation of the Turk and Pope even more complex, he asks:

Are Henry’s forces a more righteous and ferocious version of Turkishness, or simply an extension of it? Has the Marlovian bombast of Percy been defeated by Christian righteousness, or Turkish valour? It is of course a comical revelation of Falstaff’s self-

¹⁴ For a thorough discussion of Turks being seen as devils incarnate, see my earlier article on *Selimus* and *Richard III*: Şahiner, Mustafa (2012). “Hellish Discourses: Shakespeare’s *Richard III* and Greene’s *Selimus*”. *Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 29, (2), 157-166.

¹⁵ For a detailed analyses of protestant concept regarding the conflation of Turk and the Catholic Pope, see Şahiner, Mustafa (2016). *Yüce Türk’ten Zalim Türk’e: Erken Modern Dönem İngilteresi’nde Türk Algısı*. Ankara: Siyasal Yayınevi, s., 50-60.

aggrandisement, but it is a peculiarly undecidable moment that is only intensified in the second part of the Henriad. (529)

In the *Second Part of King Henry IV*, we have another reference to Turk in the form of a comparison between Turkish Sultans and English kings. When Henry becomes the king, namely Henry V, following his father's death, he assures his sad and fearful brothers that, "Brothers, you mix your sadness with some fear: / This is the English not the Turkish court; / Not Amurath, an Amurath succeeds, / But Harry Harry" (V, ii, 46-49). This refers to the Ottoman tradition of killing siblings when the son of the Sultan becomes the new sultan. The critics have generally tended to believe that the above lines were a common reference to Turkish tyranny (Hillman, pp. 161-162). The ambiguity lingers. King Henry V claims that English court is not like the Turkish Seraglio but the truth, as known to both his brothers and Shakespeare's audience, is that his father Henry IV usurped the crown from Richard II. An act considered as one of the biggest sins against God in Christianity. So how can the two courts be different when they are so much the same? It is obvious that Shakespeare is pointing to the similarities between the two courts of England and the Ottoman Empire by creating an ironical situation. After all, usurping the crown and killing a king is not that different from killing siblings to reach the crown.

Perhaps, one of the most intriguing references to Turks is found in *Henry V*. After he conquers France, Henry V, the most heroic king of England, woos the French Princess Katherine whom he actually marries later: "Shall not thou / and I, between Saint Dennis and Saint George, / compound a boy, half-French half English, / that shall go to Constantinople and take the / Turk by the beard? Shall we not?" (V. ii. 218-222). For Henry's part, this sounds like a call to holy war which never takes place. But Shakespeare was well aware that Henry V died at least 21 years before Turks conquered Constantinople in 1453. So why does he conflate two different historical periods? Perhaps to show the impossibility of the thing in question. Or perhaps he was criticising his own history because Henry and Katherine's son ruled an England which was full of civil strife ending in civil war as the wars of the roses. After all, the compounded boy did not take the Turk by the beard in Constantinople but he saw the fall of it to Turks. Furthermore, in the epilogue of *Henry V* the Chorus tells us that Henry VI even lost what his father conquered in France, "they lost France and made his England bleed" (414). The absent presence of the Turk in this case seems to serve Shakespeare's criticism of the English Royalty, the ambiguity is still there.

Another play that problematically includes allusions to Turks is Shakespeare's *Othello*. Many scholars, mostly Turkish, take *Othello* as their reference point for their analyses of Shakespeare's handling or representation of Turks on stage. I tend to disagree with this because there are no Turkish characters in *Othello* but only references to them. Othello himself is a Moor, not a Turk. While the Turks are often mentioned in *Othello*, they never appear as characters. It is either some news of Turkish advances or some comparisons between characters. Iago, at one point, when he is accused of slander, claims that: "Nay, It is true, or else I am a Turk" (II, I, 114). This is a typical reference to Turks as being "false" and "devilish". Since the audience knows Iago to be one of the most despicable characters, it is not surprising to see such a comparison. Even Othello's last words about a Turk he met in Aleppo sound rather meaningless:

..... Set you down this,
And say besides that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and turbaned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,

I took by th' throat the circumsized dog,
And smoted him thus. [Stabs himself].
(V, ii, 50-55)

Some critics like Jerry Brotton to claim that right before Othello dies, Shakespeare makes him a Turk. But, just because he likens himself to a Turk he killed once, does not mean he is a Turk. It is only the action when he says 'I smoted him thus', I believe, that has an analogy to the past. Besides, Shakespeare knew very well the differences between Turks, moors, Tartars and so on.

To conclude, it is obvious that Shakespeare's approach to Turks is ambiguous compared to the Turkish plays of his contemporaries mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Nevertheless, this does not mean that he had high opinion of the Turks. On the contrary, he probably shared the same negative view of Turks with his contemporaries. The Turks were not a physical threat present at the doors of England, but their presence was felt deeply as a ghost threatening their religion and existence, just like the ghost of the Turk haunting English stages through Shakespeare's plays without even being there. But what is different about Shakespeare is that he seems to have made references to Turks in order to criticise his own time as well as the past history of England. If, then, according to inclusion/exclusion theory, we consider Shakespeare's stage as a realm of exclusion by differentiation, yes, the Turks are excluded by inclusion for the sake of constitutional references to order, but so are some of the English monarchs excluded for the same reason.

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