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The Reception History of Heinrich Kleist in the Context of the Turkish National Discourse

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Abstract

The literary figure of Heinrich von Kleist occupies an often contested position within the Germanophone canon. The reception of Kleist in Turkey presents a case for examining how a canonical German writer is mobilized within a national literary discourse that has itself undergone profound transformations – particularly in relation to questions of modernity, identity, and cultural belonging. While Kleist's presence in Turkish intellectual circles dates back to the early Republican period, his works have gained renewed attention since the late 20th century, especially among scholars and translators interested in the intersections of trauma, resistance, and political subjectivity.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to trace the historical trajectory of Kleist's reception in Turkey, focusing particularly on how his literary works have been interpreted and instrumentalized within the evolving framework of Turkish national discourse. Drawing upon critical translation studies, literary sociology, and the theory of cultural transfer, this study seeks to illuminate how Kleist has been translated, taught, and critically framed in Turkish academia and print culture from the early 20th century to the present. By analyzing translations, academic publications, and cultural policy documents, this research endeavors to uncover the ideological and hermeneutic strategies that have shaped Kleist's place in a non-European literary field. Ultimately, the study contributes to broader debates on the politics of literary reception, the transnational circulation of canonical texts, and the ways in which foreign literature can be recontextualized to serve local discursive needs.

Keywords Heinrich Kleist · Turkish nationalism · literary reception · translation history · national identity

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Introduction

Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811) was among the most renowned writers and dramatists of the early nineteenth century. His works, which engage in reflections on themes such as justice, state authority, individual freedom, and national consciousness, have occupied a prominent position not only in German literary history but have also found considerable resonance in various international contexts. Particularly in Turkey, a country that underwent its own history of national identity formation, Kleist attracted growing interest from the twentieth century onward.

The present study examines the reception of Heinrich von Kleist within the Turkish cultural context, with a particular focus on his significance for Turkish nationalism. This study specifically explores to what extent Kleist's works, often characterized by national and patriotic motifs, have influenced the intellectual engagement with Turkish national consciousness and how his ideas of nationalism have been instrumentalized. Turkish nationalism, which gained prominence in the twentieth century, particularly through the founding of the modern Republic under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, reveals parallels to the themes addressed in Kleist's writings: the struggle for independence, resistance against external oppression, and the formation of a national self-understanding.

The reception of Kleist in Turkey developed in several phases closely intertwined with the political and cultural developments of the country. The first translations of his works into Turkish appeared in the early twentieth century, reflecting the growing interest in German literature amid the reform movements that gained importance after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and during the formation of the Republic. In particular, Kleist's works that address issues of national identity and resistance against foreign domination received special attention in this context. The engagement with Kleist's writings should therefore be understood not merely as a literary-historical phenomenon but as part of a broader cultural process through which the ideas of the Enlightenment and "European nationalism" entered the intellectual discourse of the young Turkish nation.

This study is structured into several chapters that trace both the chronological and thematic development of Kleist's reception in Turkey. The second chapter analyzes the early translations of his works into Turkish and their relevance to the country's literary scene, with particular attention given to the translators and intellectuals who perceived Kleist as a model for articulating a distinctly Turkish sense of national consciousness.

The third chapter constitutes the main part of the study and is devoted to a detailed analysis of Kleist's influence on the Turkish national discourse. Using the works *Die Hermannsschlacht*, *Der Prinz von Homburg*, and *Michael Kohlhaas* as focal points, this study examines how Kleist's dramas and narratives were received by Turkish authors and intellectuals and in what ways they contributed to the ideological formation of Turkish nationalism. Particular attention is given to how Kleist's national and patriotic motifs were integrated into the Turkish political context and productively instrumentalized.

The fourth chapter summarizes the essential findings and discusses the implications of Kleist's reception in Turkey as analyzed so far. Academic works such as master's theses and dissertations were deliberately excluded from the analysis to maintain focus on the immediate connections between Kleist's oeuvre and nationalism. The aim of this study is to provide a precise insight into the relevance of Kleist's writings to the Turkish national discourse and to reveal the literary as well as political implications of this process of reception.

The first Kleist translations in Turkey

Turkey's engagement with the works of Heinrich von Kleist began in the early twentieth century, when the first translations of his texts into Turkish appeared. This initial encounter with Kleist's oeuvre coincided with a period of significant social and political transformation within the late Ottoman Empire and the emerging Turkish Republic. The translation of his dramas and narratives – among them *Die Hermannsschlacht*, *Der Prinz von Homburg*, and *Michael Kohlhaas* – marked the beginning of an intercultural exchange in which themes such as justice, resistance, and national identity assumed a central role.

Table 1,[1] taken from Mehmet Tahir Öncü's bibliography *Türkçe Çeviriler Bibliyografyası. Dünya Edebiyatından Çeviriler*, provides a detailed overview of the translations of Heinrich von Kleist's works into Turkish. Spanning a period of more than seventy years, it illustrates the enduring engagement with Kleist's literary production within the Turkish literary scene.

According to Öncü, the first translation of a Kleist work into Turkish dates back to 1945: *Kırık Testi* (*Der zerbrochene Krug*), translated by Hayrullah Örs and published by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Education (MEB). This early publication, appearing immediately after the end of the Second World War, marked the beginning of the systematic reception of Kleist in Turkey. In subsequent years, MEB continued this translation effort, releasing additional works by Kleist, including *Michael Kohlhaas* (1946), translated by Necip Üçok, and *Hikayeler* (1952), translated by Melahat Togar. The fact that all these publications appeared under the auspices of the MEB Press indicates that the ministry played a key role at that time in introducing German literature to Turkish readers.

During the 1950s, Kleist's dramatic works increasingly came into focus within Turkish translation practices. In 1955, two of his most prominent plays were published: Prens von Homburg (*Der Prinz von Homburg*) and Schroffenstein Ailesi (*Die Familie Schroffenstein*), both translated by Burhanettin Batıman and issued by the Maarif Publishing House. After a period of relative pause, a new phase of reception began in the 1970s: in 1971, Betik Yayınları released a new translation of Ademin Kavuğu (*Der zerbrochene Krug*), translated by Haldun Marlalı. The engagement deepened further in the 1990s – Locarno Dilencisi (*Der Bettler von Locarno*) was published in 1992 by Can Yayınları in Alev Yalnız's translation, followed in 1995 by *Amphitryon*, translated by Ahmet Cemal for Yapı Kredi Yayınları. These publications demonstrate both the diversity of Kleist's oeuvre – spanning dramatic and narrative forms – and his sustained literary influence in Turkey.

[1] See attachement.

Kleist's works continued to attract attention in the new century as well. In 2004, another version of Locarno Dilencisi (*Der Bettler von Locarno*) was published by Say Yayınları, this time translated by Ayalp Talun İnce. Another important milestone was the comprehensive collection Kırık Testi – Kukla Tiyatrosu Üzerine: Toplu Oyunlar (*The Broken Jug – On the Puppet Theater: Collected Plays*), released in 2010 by Mitos Boyut Yayınları in Ayşe Selen's translation. This edition underscores the significance of Kleist's oeuvre not only as a literary legacy but also within the field of theater studies. The most recent known translation dates from 2016: Üç Romantik Hikaye (*Three Romantic Stories*), which includes *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*, translated by the renowned Turkish author Sabahattin Ali and published by Yapı Kredi Yayınları.

However, Mehmet Tahir Öncü's bibliography exhibits two significant shortcomings. First, it fails to acknowledge that the very first translation of a Kleist work into Turkish actually occurred in 1928 – *Die Hermannsschlacht*, rendered in Arabic-Ottoman script.[2] Although the writing system may have served as a pretext for this omission, it does not diminish the cultural and historical importance of this early translation. *Die Hermannsschlacht* holds particular relevance in both German and Turkish historical contexts, as it reflects the aspiration for national self-determination – a theme that was central to the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. The parallels between these two historical processes make this translation a valuable document of intercultural encounter, and its omission leaves a considerable gap in Öncü's account (cf. Ardıç, 2013, p. 249 ff.).

This neglect raises a fundamental question: is it merely a research gap, or does it indicate a deliberate selection process that excludes certain phases of the reception history? The use of Arabic script in Turkish in 1928 cannot serve as a sufficient justification for its exclusion – after all, the language remained the same, with only the orthography differing. Such an omission suggests either a lack of source awareness or a selective methodological approach that arbitrarily shifts the beginning of Kleist's reception in Turkey to a later period. This contradicts the principles of systematic

[2] Before Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's script reform, the Ottoman Empire did not use the Latin alphabet for the Turkish language but the Arabic script.

bibliographic documentation, which should, if it aspires to completeness, include precisely such precursors. Furthermore, the temporal proximity of this translation to the founding of the Republic demonstrates that the adoption of Kleistian themes into Turkish literary culture was by no means accidental but ideologically and historically motivated – an aspect that Öncü not only overlooks but effectively obscures through his selection.

A second point of criticism concerns the absence of all translations produced up to 2017, despite the fact that Öncü's bibliography itself was published that same year. Later, Arif Ünal sought to fill these research gaps; nevertheless, the omission of such data casts serious doubt on the completeness and reliability of Öncü's work. This becomes particularly troubling when one must assume that similar deficiencies may exist in the documentation of other authors as well.

Even more problematic than the mere chronological gap is the absence of any reflection on the criteria for selection. Öncü provides no explanation as to why certain translations are explicitly mentioned while others are completely omitted. Especially concerning postwar and contemporary reception, one would have expected that the development of Kleist's reception in Turkey would be presented as a dynamic rather than a static process – one that includes new translations, theatrical adaptations, and academic discourses emerging after 2016/2017. Yet Öncü's bibliography remains limited in scope and internally discontinuous in its structure, creating the impression that the engagement with Kleist has been recorded only up to the point of his publication. As a result, the development of the subsequent reception is not reflected. Moreover, the methodological principles guiding the selection and collection of the material are not specified, which leaves open whether the restriction of the corpus is deliberate or arises from incomplete research. Overall, the compilation functions less as a comprehensive scholarly record and more as an early-stage assemblage that does not fully correspond to the complexity of its subject matter.

In contrast, the list of Turkish Kleist translations compiled by Arif Ünal (Table 2[3]) provides an important supplement and correction to Öncü's bibliography. Ünal's list contributes to a more complete and nuanced representation of Kleist's reception in Turkey (cf. Ünal, 2020, pp. 102–104).

A central element in Ünal's documentation is the inclusion of the translation Hermann Muharebesi (*Die Hermannsschlacht*) from 1928. This version, rendered in Ottoman script by M. Nermi and published by Devlet Matbaası, represents – as noted above – a significant addition because of its national thematic relevance, given that it is absent from Öncü's bibliography. Furthermore, Ünal's table includes several translations published from the 1990s through 2019. One notable example is *Michael Kohlhaas*, which was translated anew in 2013 and 2014 by Tayfun Özkan and Selçuk Ünlü for Mitra Yayınları and Palet Yayınları respectively. These repeated translations of the same work highlight the continuing relevance and interest in Kleist's narratives within the Turkish literary landscape.

Another significant addition is the 2019 translation of *Amphitryon* by Mahmure Karaman, published by İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları. This most recent translation demonstrates that Kleist's works have continued to attract attention throughout the 2010s and are still being translated into Turkish, indicating an ongoing engagement with his literary legacy.

The third table (Table 3[4]), prepared by the present author, contains additional important translations of Heinrich von Kleist's works into Turkish that were not included in either Öncü's or Ünal's compilations. These additions are essential for constructing a comprehensive picture of Kleist's reception in Turkey up to 2023/2024. The supplementary table encompasses translations published between 2010 and 2023, revealing that Kleist's works continue to receive sustained attention and have been repeatedly translated into Turkish in recent years. The works listed in this third table complete the mosaic of Kleist's reception in Turkey, showing that his oeuvre continues to be translated and published through 2024. The absence of these translations from

[3] See attachement.
[4] See attachement.

both Öncü's and Ünal's bibliographies underscores the need for a more exhaustive and methodologically rigorous documentation of literary translations into Turkish. Only such comprehensive cataloging can provide an accurate and reliable picture of the dissemination and reception of Kleist's works in Turkey. Accordingly, Table 4 below presents a consolidated overview of all Kleist translations into Turkish published to date.

Table 4

Complete Translations of Kleist's Works into the Turkish Language (Tekin, 2025, pp. 210–212)

First Published	Turkish Title	German Title	Translator	Publisher
1928	Hermann Muharebesi (Translation into the Ottoman script)	*Herrmanns Schlacht* (Translation into the Ottoman script)	M. Nermi	Devlet Matbaası
1944	Michael Kohlhaas	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Necip Üçok	MEB
1945	Kırık Testi	*Der zerbrochene Krug*	Hayrullah Örs	MEB
1946	Michael Kohlhaas	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Necip Üçok	MEB
1952	Hikayeler	*Die Marquise von O.... Das Erdbeben in Chili Der Findling Die heilige Cäcilie oder die Gewalt der Musik Der Zweikampf*	Melahat Togar	MEB
1955	Homburg Prensi	*Der Prinz von Homburg*	Burhanettin Batıman	Maarif Yayınları
1955	Schroffenstein Ailesi	*Die Familie Schroffenstein*	Burhanettin Batıman	Maarif Yayınları
1971	Ademin Kavuğu	*Der zerbrochene Krug*	Haldun Marlalı	Betik Yayınları
1992	Locarno Dilencisi	*Das Bettelweib von Locarno*	Alev Yalnız	Can Yayınları
1994	Locarno Dilencisi	*Das Bettelweib von Locarno*	Alev Yalnız	Can Yayınları
1995	Amphitryon	*Amphitryon*	Ahmet Cemal	Yapı Kredi Yayınları
2004	Locarno Dilencisi	*Das Bettelweib von Locarno*	Ayalp Talun İnce	Say Yayınları

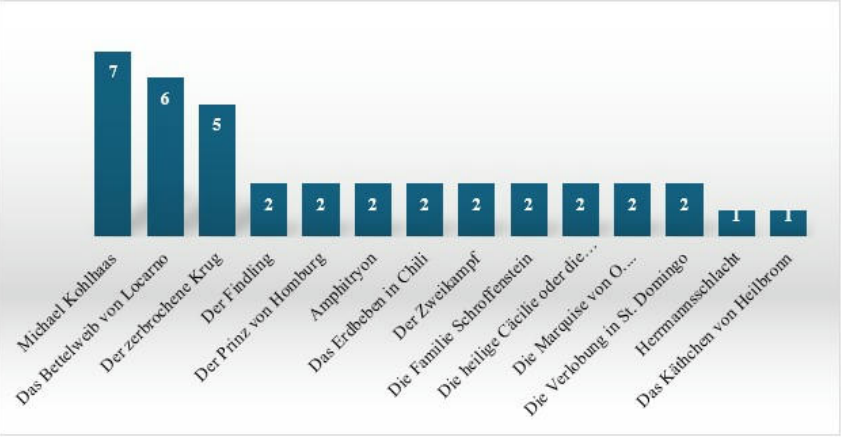
First Published	Turkish Title	German Title	Translator	Publisher
2010	Toplu Oyunları I	*Der zerbrochene Krug*	Ayşe Selen	Mitos Boyut Yayınları
2010	Düello – Bütün Öyküler – Hasan Âli Yücel Klasikleri	*Der Zweikampf Michael Kohlhaas Die Marquise von O.... Das Erdbeben in Chili Die Verlobung in St. Domingo Das Bettelweib von Locarno Der Findling Die heilige Cäcilie oder die Gewalt der Musik*	İris Kantemir	İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları
2011	Michael Kohlhaas: Eski Bir Vakayinameden	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Bilge Uğurlar Tunçbilek, Türkis Noyan	Can Yayınları
2011	Toplu Oyunlar II	*Der Prinz von Homburg, Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*	Ayşe Selen	Mitos Boyut Yayınları
2013	Michael Kohlhaas	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Tayfun Özkan	Mitra Yayınları
2014	Michael Kohlhaas	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Selçuk Ünlü	Palet Yayınları
2016	Üç Romantik Hikaye	*Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*	Sabahattin Ali	Yapı Kredi Yayınları
2019	Amphitryon	*Amphitryon*	Mahmure Karaman	İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları
2019	Michael Kohlhaas	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Bilge Uğurlar and Türkis Noyan	Can Yayınları
2019	Michael Kohlhaas	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Tarık Kayakan, Figen Sile Kösebay	Ezgi Matbaacılık
2020	Locarno Dilencisi	*Das Bettelweib von Locarno*	Kadir Kıvılcımlı, Mehmet Yekta Düzgün	Cem Yayınevi

First Published	Turkish Title	German Title	Translator	Publisher
2021	Locarno Dilencisi	*Das Bettelweib von Locarno*	Türkis Noyan, Bilge Uğurlar	Can Yayınları
2022	Kırık Testi	*Der zerbrochene Krug*	Mehtap Şirin Kazar and Ayhan Ece	İlgi Kültür Sanat Yayınevi
2022	Kırık Testi	*Der zerbrochene Krug*	Barış Gönülşen	İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları
2023	Schroffenstein Ailesi	*Die Familie Schroffenstein*	Gülbahar Kültür	İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları
2024	Michael Kohlhaas	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Necip Üçok	Telemak

The diagram presented below, which illustrates the most frequently translated works of Heinrich von Kleist into Turkish, provides a quantitative insight into the reception and significance of his oeuvre within Turkish literature. It reveals which of his works have received particular attention over the years and have therefore been translated multiple times.

Dia 1

Most Frequently Translated Works of Heinrich von Kleist into Turkish *prepared by the author*



At the top of the list stands *Michael Kohlhaas* with a total of seven translations. This high number indicates that the work is particularly valued in Turkey for its profound

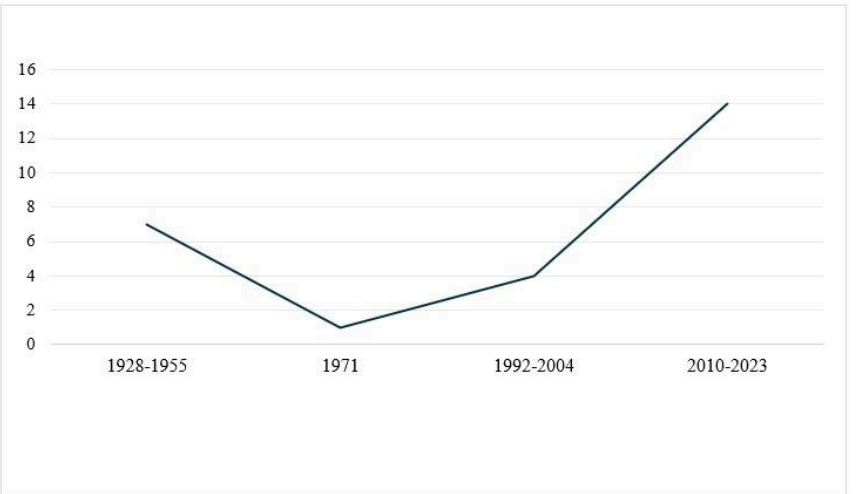
engagement with themes of justice and morality – topics that hold considerable significance in Turkish literary discourse as well. The sustained interest in this text may also be linked to its historical and social resonance, as it has been repeatedly reinterpreted and adapted across different periods.

In second place follows *Das Bettelweib von Locarno*, with six translations. This narrative likewise finds a strong echo in Turkish literature, which can be attributed to its poignant depiction of fate and human cruelty. The frequency of its retranslation suggests that the work has maintained a consistent appeal to Turkish translators and readers over the decades.

Der zerbrochene Krug, translated into Turkish five times, ranks third among the Kleist works most frequently received in Turkey. This play – an exemplary instance of Kleist's ironic and comedic treatment of the themes of justice and injustice – has been positively received within Turkish literary circles. The enduring resonance of the text lies in its universal subject matter: the problematics of justice and human fallibility. These themes possess a timeless relevance in Turkey, where questions concerning judicial ethics and moral failure continue to be perceived as unresolved and therefore remain persistently topical.

Dia 2

Chronological Distribution of the Kleist Translations into Turkish *prepared by Tekin*



The diagram illustrates the chronological distribution of the translations of Heinrich von Kleist's works into Turkish, revealing marked fluctuations in the publication frequency over the decades. Particularly striking is the long interval between 1955 and 1992, during which virtually no new translations appeared, – except for a single one in 1971. By contrast, the period between 1928 and 1955 saw the publication of seven translations in total. This early phase marks the beginning of Kleist's reception in Turkey and coincides with a period of intense cultural and educational transformation following the founding of the Republic in 1923 (cf. Gronau, 1994, p. 125; Bulut, 2008, pp. 665–684).

The reform initiatives of that era led to an increasing openness toward Western literature, and German authors such as Heinrich von Kleist were gradually integrated into the Turkish literary canon. The relatively high number of translations during this period reflects the strong interest in German literature, which was closely tied to the processes of modernization and secularization within Turkish society (Gülbeyaz, 2004, p. 187; Rill, 1985, p. 118).

From 1955 to 1992, however, there was a pronounced decline in translation activity, interrupted only by the aforementioned publication of 1971. This prolonged hiatus can be attributed to the political and social upheavals that characterized the country during this period. The 1960s and 1970s in Turkey were marked by considerable political instability, military coups, economic crises, and social tensions (cf. Sakallıoğlu, 1996, pp. 231–251; Landau, 1974). The first military coup in 1960 led to the ousting of Adnan Menderes's government and inaugurated an era in which political order and stability were severely undermined. This instability persisted in subsequent years, culminating in the so-called "memorandum coup" of 1971, which further aggravated the political situation.

By the late 1970s, internal conflicts had reached their peak. Fierce clashes between the left- and right-wing factions, deepening economic difficulties, and rising inflation defined the decade. These developments culminated in the military coup of 1980, which established an authoritarian regime with far-reaching consequences for the country's

cultural and intellectual life. Numerous intellectuals, writers, and translators faced persecution, censorship, or exile, while cultural production was subjected to strict state control. Such repressive conditions severely hindered literary translation work and led to a drastic decline in the publication of international literature, – including the works of Heinrich von Kleist.

A new phase of Kleist reception in Turkey began in 1992, marked by four new translations of his works. This revival can be understood in the context of the country's political and economic stabilization following decades of turbulence. With the re-establishment of civilian governance and the accompanying atmosphere of political normalization, Turkish cultural life regained vitality. During this period of renewal – characterized by a heightened openness to international influences – the conditions were created for Kleist's works to be translated anew and made accessible to a broader readership (cf. Gülbeyaz, 2004, p. 211).

Between 2010 and 2023, a significant increase in the translations of Kleist's works into Turkish can be observed: during this period, a total of fourteen new translations were published. Consequently, Kleist's reception in Turkey experienced a remarkable revival only in the new millennium. This late resurgence can be attributed to several factors. On the one hand, Turkey entered a period of relative political stability and economic security in the early 2000s, which created the conditions for a more intensive engagement with literature. These improved circumstances fostered not only a more vibrant cultural exchange but also a more open intellectual discourse. On the other hand, increasing globalization played a decisive role in facilitating access to international literature and thus contributed to strengthening intercultural dialogue. These developments enhanced interest in European literary traditions in general and in Kleist's oeuvre in particular.

During this phase, many of his texts were published by well-established Turkish publishing houses, indicating both a growing recognition of his work and a deeper engagement with his literary legacy. The abundance of new translations thus not

only documents the continued relevance of Kleist's themes but also underscores the enduring significance of his oeuvre within the framework of Turkish literary discourse.

Kleist's Influence on the Turkish National Discourse

Heinrich von Kleist has repeatedly attracted scholarly attention, particularly with regard to his role in nationalist discourse. Acar Sevim, a renowned Turkish Germanist (†2018) who devoted much of his research to the study of nationalism, assigned a central position to Kleist's work in his investigations. In his book *Yalnız Kurt* (The Lonely Wolf), Sevim highlights Kleist's political influence on the German nation while simultaneously emphasizing the parallels between Kleist's nationalist ideas and the developments within the Turkish Republic.[5]

The title *Yalnız Kurt* (Sevim, 2016) itself symbolizes Kleist's position as an isolated visionary – a person who, like a lone wolf in the wilderness, moves outside political structures yet remains committed to a higher national ideal. This metaphor reflects Kleist's independence and determination to defend German nationalism against both internal and external threats. As Sevim notes: "Milli dava için sorumluluk üstlenmeye hazır olan şair henüz kendisine ihtiyaç olmadığını anlayamamıştı. 'Yalnız Kurt' durumundaydı." (Sevim, 2016, p. 213) – "The poet, who was ready to assume

[5]Acar Sevim included several German-language authors within his research corpus, and it is particularly striking that, for all of them – such as Herder and Arndt – the concept of the national idea forms the central focus of his scholarly analysis. (See: Sevim, A. (2008). *Herder: Halk Milliyetçiliğin Öncüsü* (Herder: The Pioneer of Popular Nationalism). Bilge Kültür ve Sanat; Sevim, A. (2020). *Alman Filozofu Ernst Moritz Arndt'ın Partikülarizme Karşı Mücadelesi* (The German Philosopher Ernst Moritz Arndt's Struggle against Particularism). Bilge Kültür ve Sanat; Sevim, A. (2013). *Heinrich Von Kleist'da Alman Birliği Fikri* (The Idea of German Unity in Heinrich von Kleist), *Diyalog, 1*(2), 1–15.

Furthermore, Sevim served as the chairman of the *Türk Ocağı* (Turkish Hearth) in Kadıköy, one of the oldest and most influential civil society organizations in Turkey. Founded in Istanbul in 1912, the *Türk Ocağı* originally aimed to promote Turkish identity, culture, and nationalism. It played a significant role in the intellectual and cultural development of Turkey, particularly during the late Ottoman period and the early years of the Republic. The organization advocates for the preservation and promotion of Turkish culture, history, and language while supporting national values. Its orientation is both patriotic and conservative, with an emphasis on themes such as Turkish unity and tradition. Today, the *Türk Ocağı* remains active throughout Turkey, maintaining regional branches in various cities. (See: "Acar Sevim, Kadıköy Türk Ocağı Başkanı Prof. Dr. Acar Sevim Vefatı," *İstanbul Türk Ocağı*, https://www.istanbulturkocagi.org/istanbul_turkocagi/kadikoy-turk-ocagi-baskani-prof-dr-acar-sevim-vefati/534/ (accessed 12 September 2024)).

responsibility for the national cause, had not yet realized that he was not needed. He was in the situation of a 'lonely wolf.'"[6]

This sense of isolation can also be applied to Kleist's position within Turkish scholarship, where he is often regarded as a nationalist writer who acted against the prevailing intellectual currents of his time. It is important to note, however, that the expression *Yalnız Kurt* (lonely wolf) carries a politically charged meaning in Turkey, as it is associated with the "Gray Wolves" (*Bozkurtlar*), an ultranationalist movement that adopted the wolf as its emblem. Through this association, the symbol has acquired a specific political connotation in Turkish society, which complicates any neutral interpretation of the term and, consequently, the reception of Kleist within a cultural and political context where such symbols are deeply rooted (see Lääts, 2015). While Sevim employs the metaphor in a literary and historical sense, its political implications remain unmistakable.

A central element of Sevim's analysis concerns the role of Prussia, which for Kleist symbolized the unity of Germany. During Kleist's lifetime, Germany consisted of numerous small states and principalities that often competed with one another. According to Sevim, Prussia held the pivotal position in Kleist's vision as the state capable of uniting Germany and serving as a bulwark against external threats. As Sevim explains: "Prusya, Almanya'yı bu parçalamadan kurtaran devlettir." (Sevim, 2016, p. 25) – "Prussia is the state that rescued Germany from this fragmentation." This conception of Prussia as the dominant force responsible for national unity finds a parallel in the foundation of modern Turkey, which, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, faced the challenge of overcoming ethnic and regional fragmentation. Just as Prussia represented the unifying power for Germany, Turkey emerged as the central agent tasked with forging a new national identity from the ruins of the Ottoman state (cf. Thadden, 1981, p. 67).

Another crucial aspect of Sevim's analysis of Kleist's thought is his emphasis on national unity as a superior force that must transcend regional divisions. Kleist was a strong

[6] All quotations from Turkish are translated into English by Habib Tekin.

advocate of cooperation among the German-speaking states, particularly between Prussia and Austria. He regarded internal unity as a necessary condition for Germany to successfully resist its external enemies, and – above all, Napoleon. Sevim notes that Kleist considered the conflicts between Prussia and Austria counterproductive and dangerous for the national idea: "Kleist, Avusturya'yla Prusya arasındaki çekişmeyi tasvip etmiyordu." (Sevim, 2016, p. 55) – "Kleist disapproved of the conflict between Prussia and Austria."

This emphasis on unity – despite Austria's status as a multiethnic state – beyond regional or political interests is also central to Turkish nationalism. Following the dissolution of the multiethnic Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey faced the challenge of creating a cohesive national identity that could unite diverse ethnic and cultural groups under one flag. Much like Kleist demanded unity for Germany's survival and sovereignty, the consolidation of national cohesion was vital for the newly founded Turkish Republic to secure its independence and stability.

Sevim also points out that Kleist had a distinct conception of the role of education in building and strengthening national identity. Kleist was convinced that a nation could only be strong if its citizens were intellectually and morally prepared for the national cause through education. Sevim explains that Kleist perceived the uprising against Napoleon as a kind of pedagogical project, in which the population had to be ideologically and morally educated by a patriotic elite: "Bütün Almanların Napoleon'a karşı bir olup ayaklanması onun için eğitimle ilgili bir şeydi." (Sevim, 2016, p. 216) – "For him, the common uprising of all Germans against Napoleon was a matter of education."

This conviction finds a clear parallel in the early Turkish Republic, where education was considered essential for creating a modern and unified nation. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, likewise placed great emphasis on education as a means of shaping a new national consciousness and preparing citizens for their responsibilities as members of the nation.[7]

[7] In this context, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk appointed Hasan Âli Yücel as his new Minister of Education, entrusting him with the task of reforming the newly founded Republic along national principles and in

Die Hermannsschlacht and Turkish Nationalism

The following section examines how Heinrich von Kleist's works – most notably *Die Hermannsschlacht*, *Der Prinz von Homburg*, and *Michael Kohlhaas* – were received and interpreted by Turkish intellectuals, and how they contributed to the ideological formation and development of Turkish nationalism.

It is particularly noteworthy that, to this day, only one translation of Kleist's *Die Hermannsschlacht* into Turkish exists, published in 1928 in the Arabic-Ottoman script. This translation appeared at a time when the young Turkish Republic was undergoing extensive reform. The year 1928 marked a turning point in Turkish history, as the adoption of the Latin alphabet was officially enacted (cf. Rill, 1985, p. 100). This reform was a key element of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's efforts to modernize Turkey and to create a deliberate rupture with the Ottoman past (Zürcher, 2004, p. 188). The fact that Kleist's play was nevertheless rendered in Arabic-Ottoman rather than Latin script can be attributed to the transitional nature of that period, in which the Arabic script was still widely used in administration and cultural life while the Latin alphabet was only beginning to be introduced (cf. Lewis, 1999, pp. 31 f.). Moreover, the translation was explicitly directed at a readership familiar with the Ottoman script, seeking to convey the nationalist and militaristic themes of *Die Hermannsschlacht* to a generation that had directly witnessed the political and social upheavals of the early Republic. Hence, this translation functioned not only as a literary adaptation but also as an ideological instrument, introducing Kleist's nationalist vision into the contemporary Turkish discourse on patriotism, independence, and military self-assertion.

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accordance with the ideals of modern Western education. Yücel became one of the key figures of the Turkish Enlightenment period, shaping the intellectual and cultural landscape of the Republic through his comprehensive educational reforms, his support for translation projects, and the foundation of the Village Institutes (Köy Enstitüleri). His policies aimed to harmonize national identity with humanistic and universal values, establishing an educational system that promoted both patriotism and intellectual independence.

For further reading on Yücel's role in the modernization and cultural transformation of Turkish education, see: Şengör, C. (2001). *Hasan-Âli Yücel ve Türk aydınlanması.* Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları; Coşkun, A. (2007). *Hasan Âli Yücel: Aydınlanma devrimcisi.* Cumhuriyet Kitapları; Başaran, M. (2009). *Öğretmenim Hasan Âli Yücel.* Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları; Bora, T. (2021). *Hasan Âli Yücel.* İletişim Yayınları; Çıkar, M. (1998). *Hasan Âli Yücel ve Türk kültür reformu.* Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları; Sönmez, Ş. (2000). *Eğitimde ve siyasette Hasan Âli Yücel.* Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları.

In *Die Hermannsschlacht*, Heinrich von Kleist adopts the idea of nationalism and fuses it with a dramatic narrative that, as Acar Sevim observes, represents the author's first conscious attempt at political and nationalist expression: "Bu eser Kleist'ın hayatında siyasi milliyetçi edebiyata ilk yönelişidir." (Sevim, 2016, p. 274) – "This work marks Kleist's first turn toward political nationalist literature." Kleist pursues two central aims in the play: the rejection of French domination and the creation of a unified German nation through the alliance of the Germanic tribes. For Kleist, national unity could only be achieved through a common struggle against the external enemy (see Press, 1993, pp. 35, 38).

A particularly controversial element emphasized by Sevim in his analysis concerns Kleist's justification of morally questionable means in the service of the national cause. According to Sevim, *Die Hermannsschlacht* portrays the idea that success in a national war justifies even immoral actions: "Kleist bu eserinde vatan uğruna verilen savaşta başarıya ulaşmayı sağlayabilecek ahlak dışı yolların da acımasızca kullanılmasının bir kutsal görev olduğunu anlatmaya çalışmıştır." (Sevim, 2016, p. 291) – "Kleist shows in this work that it is a sacred duty to pursue even immoral means ruthlessly in order to achieve victory in the war for the fatherland." In the drama, Hermann goes so far as not only to defeat his enemies but also to mock their symbols and mercilessly kill defenseless, surrendered opponents. As Sevim remarks: "Görüldüğü gibi Hermann Türk felsefesinden bakıldığında fazla mert bir prens imajı oluşturmaz. Yenilen düşmanın sembolleriyle alay eder, hatta teslim olan silahı elinden alınmış savunmasız düşmanları da acımadan öldürür." (Sevim, 2016, p. 299) – "From a Turkish philosophical perspective, Hermann does not convey the image of an honorable prince. He mocks the symbols of the defeated enemy and kills without mercy even the disarmed and defenseless who have surrendered."

This pragmatic and brutal mode of warfare contrasts sharply, in Sevim's view, with the virtues of Turkish nationalism, which emphasizes bravery, honor, and respect toward the defeated. During the Turkish War of Independence, courage, sacrifice, and respect

for the adversary were central moral tenets, even when the defense of the homeland was at stake (cf. Yıldız, 1998, pp. 84 f.).

Another central motif in Kleist's drama is the search for a national leader who can unite a fragmented Germany in the struggle against a common foe (see Iwanowa, 1942, p. 22). Sevim identifies this as a clear expression of nationalist thought: "Bu eserde milli önder (Führer) arayışı göze çarpıyordu." (Sevim, 2016, p. 57) – "In this work, the search for a national leader becomes evident." The notion of a unifying leader emerging in times of crisis later resonated strongly within German nationalism, particularly during the Third Reich (see Breuer, 2009, p. 77; Press, 1993, pp. 47, 51). In the Turkish context, too, the figure of the national leader holds a central place – most notably embodied by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who, in contrast to Hitler, led the Turkish people in their struggle for independence. Atatürk epitomized the virtues of courage, bravery, and self-sacrifice that Hermann in Kleist's play lacks, becoming a symbol of national unity and the defense of the fatherland (cf. Ortaylı, 2018, pp. 43 ff., 155 ff., 391 ff., 423 ff.).

Prinz von Homburg and Turkish Nationalism

Heinrich von Kleist's *Prinz von Homburg* is another work deeply embedded in German nationalism and Prussian identity. In this drama, Kleist explores central national values such as duty, obedience, and self-sacrifice – concepts that also held significant importance in the formation and moral framework of the Turkish nation. Particularly after Austria's defeat in 1809, when it lost much of its political influence, the attention of German nationalists turned toward Prussia, which presented itself as the last hope for the salvation of Germany. Sevim explains: "Prusya nispeten bağımsız kalabilmiş ve Almanya'yı kurtarabilecek tek Alman devletiydi." (Sevim, 2016, p. 307) – "Prussia remained relatively independent and was the only German state capable of saving Germany." This shift in perception is reflected in the play, where Prussia is depicted as the embodiment of national hope and renewal.

The play's central motifs – namely the duty of the individual toward the nation and the state – were crucial in shaping the national consciousness in nineteenth-century Germany. Sevim writes: "Bu eser bireyin milletine ve devletine olan görevleri

üzerinde durmaktadır." (Sevim, 2016, p. 309) – "This work focuses on the duties of the individual toward his nation and his state." This message finds clear parallels in Turkish nationalism, in which obedience and self-sacrifice for the fatherland are likewise considered fundamental virtues. Both in Kleist's drama and in the Turkish context, the idea of subordinating the individual ego to the collective national cause is of central importance.

Prinz von Homburg also played an important role in German education and contributed significantly to the promotion of national consciousness. Sevim emphasizes that the play helped cultivate a sense of national identity in Germany and served a distinctive pedagogical function, as German unity – unlike in many other European nations – was not achieved through a bourgeois revolution but through military victories and external interventions: "Prinz von Homburg adlı piyes Alman okullarında milli şuuru yaratma konusunda yardımcı olma fonksiyonuna sahipti." (Sevim, 2016, p. 317) – "The play *Prinz von Homburg* served an educational function in German schools by helping to create national consciousness." This historical process, in which the state created the people rather than the people creating the state, stands in contrast to the Turkish experience, where national identity was consciously constructed under the leadership of a central figure such as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Nevertheless, parallels exist insofar as the military victories of the Turkish War of Independence also played a pivotal role in the establishment of the national state (cf. Gronau, 1994, pp. 125 f.).

A striking difference between *Prinz von Homburg* and *Die Hermannsschlacht* lies in the development of their protagonists. Whereas Hermann is depicted from the outset as a selfless patriot, the Prince of Homburg undergoes a clear moral and ideological transformation. Sevim describes this distinction: "Prens von Homburg başlangıçta bencil bir adamken daha sonra olumlu bir değişim göstermiştir." (Sevim, 2016, p. 329) – "The Prince of Homburg is initially a selfish man but later undergoes a positive transformation." This progression from self-interest to devotion to the national cause conveys a message that resonates with both German and Turkish nationalism: the

willingness to relinquish personal ambition for the sake of the common good and the fatherland.

Michael Kohlhaas and Turkish Nationalism

Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* is the final work to be analyzed and is deeply rooted in the political and social reform ideas of nineteenth-century Prussia. In this narrative, Kleist addresses the injustices of the feudal order and emphasizes the necessity of reforms to achieve social justice and national unity. Sevim explains that Kleist drew on the reformist ideals of the Prussian statesmen, whose aim was to strengthen the state and restore national independence and honor: "Kleist, Prusyalı reformcuların politikasını iç siyasette de onaylıyordu. Amaç vatan, bağımsızlık ve milli şeref gibi duyguları tekrar canlandırmaktı." (Sevim, 2016, p. 81) – "Kleist supported the domestic policies of the Prussian reformers, whose goal was to revive sentiments of fatherland, independence, and national honor" (see Vierhaus, 1990, pp. 83 ff.).

Michael Kohlhaas tells the story of a man who rises up against the injustices of a feudal power structure. This system, as Sevim notes, is upheld by the privileged Saxon princes and the ruling Junker class, who exploit the common people: "Bu kesim Kleist'ın da içinden çıktığı toprak sahibi taşra soylularıdır (Junker)." (Sevim, 2016, p. 179) – "This social stratum consists of the landed rural nobility (Junker), from which Kleist himself originated." Kleist depicts a society in which individuals are oppressed by this privileged caste and can only attain freedom through reform or revolutionary upheaval. The social injustices Kleist describes mirror those of early twentieth-century Turkey, where the reforms of the nascent Republic sought to dismantle entrenched power structures and establish a modern and equitable society (cf. Eisenstadt, 1984, pp. 3–16; Ozelli, 1974, pp. 77–92).

However, in *Michael Kohlhaas*, Kleist not only underscores the necessity of reform but also warns against the perils of radical rebellion. Sevim explains that Kleist aligned himself with the moderate Prussian reformers who sought change within the existing framework rather than through outright revolution: "Kleist bu eseriyle (Kohlhaas) de devrim değil reform isteyen Prusyalı reformculara yakın olduğunu göstermiştir." (Sevim,

2016, p. 180) – "With this work, Kleist demonstrates his affinity with the Prussian reformers, who advocated reform rather than revolution." This stance closely parallels the reformist approach of early Republican Turkey, where Atatürk and his followers likewise called for a decisive break from the Ottoman system but remained committed to creating a structured and stable national order.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present analysis demonstrates that the works of Heinrich von Kleist – particularly *Die Hermannsschlacht*, *Prinz von Homburg*, and *Michael Kohlhaas* – have attracted significant attention not only in Germany but also in Turkey. Nationalist-oriented Turkish intellectuals adapted Kleist's ideas and transferred them to their own historical and cultural context, drawing parallels between the national struggles in Germany and those in modern Turkey. Kleist's recurring themes of justice, duty, national unity, and resistance to foreign domination proved particularly relevant to Turkey in the twentieth century. *Die Hermannsschlacht* and *Prinz von Homburg* provided a framework for reflecting on obedience and leadership – values central to Turkish nationalism under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk – whereas *Michael Kohlhaas* explored questions of social justice and reform. In this narrative, Kleist portrayed the individual's struggle against a corrupt system, mirroring the early Republic's reformist efforts to dismantle outdated power structures and create a modern, just society. This thematic resonance explains why *Michael Kohlhaas* became the most frequently translated of Kleist's works into Turkish.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that Kleist's oeuvre served not only as a literary reflection but also as a political instrument for strengthening the nationalist discourse in Turkey. Academics such as Acar Sevim viewed Kleist's writings as a means of consolidating national ideology and highlighting the historical and ideological connections between Germany and Turkey. Kleist's ideas of national unity and collective resistance against external threats were integrated into discussions of Turkish nation-building, particularly in times of political transformation. His reflections on obedience, duty, and national sacrifice resonated strongly with the ideals of early Turkish nationalism, in which devotion to the fatherland and national solidarity were regarded

as defining virtues. In this sense, Kleist's works provided both a foundation and an intellectual inspiration for reconsidering the role of the individual within the nation.

It also becomes evident that Kleist's ideas – especially his notion of national unity – remain relevant in the contemporary context. The type of nationalism reflected in his works continues to hold significance in Turkey and has been periodically revitalized in times of perceived national crisis or instability. Such ideology has remained embedded in Turkish education, where national symbols, oaths, and patriotic values have long been emphasized as the central components of civic instruction. Scholars engaging with these ideas have recognized the pragmatic value of a coherent national identity, which fosters social cohesion and acts as a stabilizing force in an ever-changing global environment.

However, nationalism in its extreme forms carries inherent dangers that can undermine a country's social, political, and cultural stability. An overemphasis on nationalist ideology tends to suppress diversity within society. Strongly nationalistic states often promote a homogeneous identity grounded in idealized notions of history, culture, and ethnicity. This invariably leads to the marginalization of minorities and the rejection of the pluralistic and inclusive values essential to modern democratic societies. Rather than viewing diversity as a source of strength, excessive nationalism risks fostering exclusion and discrimination, which can result in social tension and internal conflict.

Another problematic dimension of nationalism is its propensity to construct enemy images. To reinforce a sense of collective identity, perceived external or internal threats are often invoked and instrumentalized to justify authoritarian measures. This dynamic is clearly illustrated in *Die Hermannsschlacht*, where the depiction of external enemies serves as the foundation for national unity. In contemporary terms, such rhetoric can be translated into nationalistic discourses that emphasize external dangers and portray the nation as perpetually under threat. This, in turn, may encourage isolationism and an aggressive foreign policy, leading to international tension and conflict. Furthermore, nationalism often idealizes obedience and submission to state authority – a theme

powerfully dramatized in *Prinz von Homburg*. The glorification of discipline and sacrifice can pave the way for authoritarian systems in which individual freedom and critical thought are suppressed. In such societies, citizens are expected to subordinate personal autonomy to collective national goals, weakening civil society and democratic institutions that are essential for a healthy political culture.

A further risk associated with excessive nationalism is the militarization of society. In many nationalist ideologies – including those reflected in Kleist's works – military virtues such as bravery, sacrifice, and combat readiness occupy a central role. In the modern context, this may contribute to the glorification of the military and the normalization of violence as a legitimate means of defending national interests. As a result, peaceful and diplomatic approaches to political conflict may be overshadowed by confrontational or belligerent tendencies.

In conclusion, nationalism – particularly in its extreme manifestations – can lead to a range of problematic developments, from the suppression of diversity and the creation of enemy images to the promotion of authoritarian structures and the militarization of society. It is therefore crucial that any engagement with nationalist ideologies remain critical and nuanced. While nationalism can, under certain conditions, contribute to national cohesion, it risks devolving into isolationism, authoritarianism, and social division if not firmly rooted within a balanced and democratic framework. In this spirit, Heinrich von Kleist's works should be read, interpreted, and received as both literary masterpieces and critical reflections on the promises and perils of nationalism.

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Appendix

Table 1

Kleist Translations into the Turkish Language according to Öncü

Year	Work	Translator	Publisher
1945	*Kırık Testi*	Hayrullah Örs	MEB
1946	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Necip Üçok	MEB
1952	*Hikayeler*	Melahat Togar	MEB
1955	*Prens von Homburg*	Burhanettin Batıman	Maarif
1955	*Schroffenstein Ailesi*	Burhanettin Batıman	Maarif
1971	*Ademin Kavuğu*	Haldun Marlalı	Betik Yayınları
1992	*Locarno Dilencisi*	Alev Yalnız	Can Yayınları
1995	*Amphitryon*	Ahmet Cemal	YKY
2004	*Locarno Dilencisi*	Ayalp Talun İnce	Say Yayınları
2010	*Kırık Testi – Kukla Tiyatrosu Üzerine: Toplu Oyunlar*	Ayşe Selen	Mitos Boyut Yayınları
2011	*Michael Kohlhaas: Eski Bir Vakayinameden*	Bilge Uğurlar Tunçbilek und Türkis Noyan	Can Yayınları
2016	*Üç Romantik Hikaye (Kleists „Die Verlobung in St. Domingo")*	Sabahattin Ali	YKY

Table 2

Kleist Translations into the Turkish Language according to Ünal

Year	Work	Translator	Publisher
1928	*Hermann Muharebesi Übersetzung in die osmanische Schrift*	M. Nermi	Devlet Matbaası
1944/46	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Necip Üçok	MEB
1994	*Das Bettelweib von Lacorno*	Alev Yalnız	Can Yayınları
2010	*Toplu Oyunları I (Der zerbrochene Krug)*	Ayşe Selen	Mitos Boyut Yayınları
2011	*Toplu Oyunlar II (Homburg Prensi, Küçük Katherine)*	Ayşe Selen	Mitos Boyut Yayınları
2013	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Tayfun Özkan	Mitra Yayınları
2014	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Selçuk Ünlü	Palet Yayınları
2019	*Amphitryon*	Mahmure Karaman	İşbankası Kültür Yayınları

Table 3

Extended Translations of Kleist's Works into the Turkish Language

Year	Work	Translator	Publisher
2010	*Düello - Bütün Öyküler - Hasan Ali Yücel Klasikleri*	İris Kantemir	İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları
2019	*Michael Kohlhaas*	Tarık Kayakan und Figen Sile Kösebay	Ezgi Matbaacılık
2020	*Locarno Dilencisi*	Kadir Kıvılcımlı und Mehmet Yekta Düzgün	Cem Yayınevi
2021	*Locarno Dilencisi*	Türkis Noyan, Bilge Uğurlar	Can
2022	*Kırık Testi*	Mehtap Şirin Kazar und Ayhan Ece	İlgi Kültür Sanat Yayınevi
2022	*Kırık Testi*	Barış Gönülşen	İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları
2023	*Schroffenstein Ailesi*	Gülbahar Kültür	İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları