

# Without Islam, there would be no Shakespeare

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19794238>

Article History	Abstract
<p><b>Original Research Article</b></p> <p><b>Received: 06-03-2026</b></p> <p><b>Accepted: 11-04-2026</b></p> <p><b>Published: 26-04-2026</b></p> <p>Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p> <p><b>Citation:</b> Guru Dev Teeluckdharry. (2026). Without Islam, there would be no Shakespeare. <i>UKR Journal of Education and Literature (UKRJEL)</i>, 2(2), 98-101.</p>	<p><i>“In essence, William Shakespeare used Islam and Islamic figures as dramatic tools to explore ethicality, morality, spirituality, humanity, justice, prejudice, unrighteousness, and righteousness, often reflecting and challenging the polarized views of his time. William Shakespeare’s knowledge of Islam was the result of a direct engagement with The Glorious Quran. The genuine justification behind this analogy can be substantiated via the Islamic representations in his plays such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Titus Andronicus: Features Aaron the Moor, a villain embodying early modern fears of the ‘infidel’ and ‘barbaric’ Muslim who is unethical, immoral, and unspiritual because he is regarded as being unrighteous in the Islamic jargon for not following the Traditions and Teachings (Sunnah) of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).</i></li> <li>• <i>Othello: The most complex depiction; Othello, a ‘Moor’ is linked to Islam and presented as an outsider, with his inner turmoil framed by Christian-Muslim tensions, though he is a Christian convert.</i></li> <li>• <i>Henry VI: Contains one of William Shakespeare’s rare direct references to Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), often used to contrast with Christian figures like Joan of Arc.</i></li> <li>• <i>The Merchant of Venice: Portrays the Prince of Morocco and explores mercy as a Divine Attribute, a concept resonant with the Islamic Theology: Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim.”<sup>1</sup></i></li> </ul> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>William Shakespeare, Islam, The Glorious Quran, Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).</i></p>

## Introduction

William Shakespeare’s understanding of English Literature was enshrined in the direct knowledge of Islam since he understood the Islamic Theology: Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim to such an extent that he portrayed it in *The Merchant of Venice*. He also made direct references to Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) in *Henry VI*.<sup>2</sup>

Matthew Dimmock states that William Shakespeare included “around 150 references to Islamic motifs in 21

*plays – to Turks and Saracens, to ‘Mahomet’, Morocco and Barbary.”*

“William Shakespeare (1564-1616), England’s most famous playwright and symbol of Britishness, made heavy use of Muslim figures, objects and places in his works.

Due to Elizabeth I’s alliances with the Muslim world, which saved England from economic collapse; the influence of the Muslim culture on England was immense and this penetrated into literature and theatre.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> AI Overview

<sup>2</sup> AI Overview

<sup>3</sup> AI Overview

Historian, Mathew Dimmock, (Professor of Early Modern Studies (English) at the University of Sussex) matter-of-factly states: ‘Without Islam there would be no Shakespeare’. He adds: ‘Without Tudor and Jacobean England’s rich and complex engagement with Islamic cultures the plays written by William Shakespeare would be very different, if they existed at all.’

Theatre in England was starting to grow in popularity in Elizabethan England. The first commercial playhouse opened in 1576, and stories that involved the Islamic world and its Muslim characters turned out to be massive crowd-pullers.

### Power of Speech

“ALLAH’s speech stands unparalleled in its eloquence and absolute precision, transcending all forms of expression. This supremacy encompasses the linguistic miracles of The Glorious Quran, which remain unmatched in their beauty and depth, and no one has ever been able to produce even a single passage comparable to it.”<sup>4</sup>

“Surah Ar-Rahman 55:4 of The Glorious Quran: *“and taught them speech.”*

ALLAH reminds us in The Glorious Quran in Surah Ar-Rahman 55:4 of the extraordinary human ability to communicate through complex languages, articulate ideas, and express emotions. The gift of “Bayan” (clear and expressive speech) refers to a divine favour that sets humanity apart from other creations.

In the domain of mankind, William Shakespeare elevates your mastery of the English Language, deepens your understanding of the human condition, provides transformative insights and expands your perspective on timeless concepts and ideas.

A more recent assertion made by Academics is that William Shakespeare (1564-1616), England’s most renowned playwright who is taught up and down in schools in the country to date and is a symbol of British cultural identity, maintained a profound connection to the Islamic world through his vast corpus of work.”<sup>5</sup>

### Othello

“William Shakespeare’s most famous depiction of a character with Muslim heritage is in *Othello*, where the protagonist is referred to as a “Moor” from Venice. The play suggests that Othello may have converted to Christianity, though alternative theories suggest he might not have changed his faith at all.

A 2018 production of *Othello*, directed by Richard Twyman for the English Touring Theatre, presented a reinterpretation of the character as a practising Muslim. Twyman, in an [interview](#) with Al Jazeera, revealed that historian Jerry Brotton’s research on the subject had broadened his perspective.

‘We were aware of the history of the Moorish kingdom of Spain, where Spanish Muslims or Moriscos were forcibly converted to Christianity in 1492. But it wasn’t until I explored this further that I realized the term ‘Moor’ might also reference Othello’s spiritual and cultural identity,’ Twyman explains.

Similarly, Ambereen Dadabhoy in her book ‘Shakespeare through Islamic worlds’ writes, ‘Furthermore, the play’s first scene is as much preoccupied with the military threat of the Ottomans in the eastern Mediterranean as it is with the elopement of Othello and Desdemona’.<sup>6</sup>

### The Merchant of Venice (Act IV, Scene 1)

“The following speech is delivered by Portia, who is disguised as a lawyer, as she appeals for mercy over strict justice in a court scene:

*‘The quality of mercy is not strained,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.  
It is an attribute to God himself;  
And earthly power doth then show likest  
God’s  
When mercy seasons justice.’*

Although the suggestion being made here isn’t that William Shakespeare was a closet Muslim; it is fascinating to observe that his depiction of divine mercy closely aligns with the Islamic understanding of it.

Surah Al-A’raf 7:156 of The Glorious Quran states: “Ordain for us what is good in this life and the next. Indeed, we have turned to You ‘in repentance’. ALLAH replied, ‘I will inflict My torment on whoever I will. But My mercy encompasses everything. I will ordain mercy for those who shun evil, pay alms-tax, and believe in Our revelations.’” This verse illustrates the universality of ALLAH’s mercy, extending to all things, while emphasizing its special connection to the believers.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> ‘Without Islam there would be no Shakespeare’ by Nadia Khan

<sup>5</sup> ‘Was Shakespeare inspired by Islam’ by Ayesha Malik

<sup>6</sup> ‘Was Shakespeare inspired by Islam’ by Ayesha Malik

<sup>7</sup> ‘Was Shakespeare inspired by Islam’ by Ayesha Malik

## The Subtle Symphony: Islam's Influence on William Shakespeare's Language and Ideas

William Shakespeare's works resonate across time, capturing the essence of human emotions, desires, and flaws. But what if the brilliance of his art was not merely a product of his genius, but also a reflection of a world enriched by diverse cultural currents? Among the many threads that may have shaped his work is the influence of Islamic culture - a subtle yet significant force that expanded the boundaries of art, philosophy, and language in Elizabethan England.

As the Renaissance brought Europe closer to the intellectual wealth of the Islamic Golden Age, William Shakespeare would have encountered translations of Arabic philosophy, mathematics, and poetry. These works carried not only knowledge but also an aesthetic - a rhythm and depth - that aligned with his own instinct for language as an art form."<sup>8</sup>

### Fatima Ebrahim, "Shakespeare's Algerian Witch: Islamic Representation and Suppression in The Tempest"

"Until recently (2016), critics have offered limited interpretations of "hoop" to signal either Sycorax's age (hunched over with a bent spine) or to reflect the cyclical nature of the play. However, an important amendment in Notes and Queries by Walter Evans and Blaire Zeiders has alerted us to the fact that "hoop" could also denote the bird, "hoopoe", especially considering the preceding adjective "foul", which appears as "fowle" in the First Folio. The avian metaphor, Evans and Zieders, argue, supplies a range of meanings rooted in European folklore traditions associated with witchcraft that could inform our reading of Sycorax. Likewise, others have looked to the classics (i.e. Medea and Circe) as possible sources for William Shakespeare's banished witch. Enriching as these readings are, they center on Occidental sources that overlook Sycorax's Algerian heritage. For William Shakespeare's audience in 1611, Algeria would have been known to be governed by "Mahometism"; we should thus open our interpretation of her by considering the Islamic tradition in which hoopoes are specifically linked to 'black magic' and 'spirits'.

The Glorious Quran is explicit about 'black magic' and 'spirit' via the following verses:

Surah Al-Baqarah 2:102: "They 'instead' followed the magic promoted by the devils during the reign of Solomon. Never did Solomon disbelieve, rather the devils

disbelieved. They taught magic to the people, along with what had been revealed to the two angels, Hârût and Mârût, in Babylon. The two angels never taught anyone without saying, "We are only a test 'for you', so do not abandon 'your' faith." Yet people learned 'magic' that caused a rift 'even' between husband and wife; although their magic could not harm anyone except by Allah's Will. They learned what harmed them and did not benefit them—although they already knew that whoever buys into magic would have no share in the Hereafter. Miserable indeed was the price for which they sold their souls, if only they knew!"

Surah Al-Falaq 113:4: "and from the evil of those 'witches casting spells by' blowing onto knots,"

Surah An-Nas 114:1-6:" Say, 'O Prophet, ' "I seek refuge in the Lord of humankind, the Master of humankind, the God of humankind, from the evil of the lurking whisperer - from among jinn and humankind."

Surah Al-Isra 17:85: "They ask you 'O Prophet' about the spirit. Say, "Its nature is known only to my Lord, and you 'O humanity' have been given but little knowledge."

While critics connect the play to Islam through its geographical and racial underpinnings of the play, there is a deeper connection to Islam by focusing on Sycorax's relationship with the Islamic conception of black magic as it was understood through early modern travel literature. In doing so, the investigation of how and why *The Tempest* negotiates the two seemingly opposite perceptions of Islam: a respectable, albeit feared, expansionist empire and devil-worshipping witchcraft, is carried out."<sup>9</sup>

### Henry VI

"In William Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, the reference to Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) is brief and part of a larger Elizabethan view of Islam, where "Mahomet" is linked to heresy and false prophecy, specifically in *Henry VI*, Act 1, Scene 2, with the line 'Was Mahomet inspired with a dove?'. This reflects common Medieval Christian beliefs portraying Muslims negatively, but William Shakespeare also shows awareness of Islamic culture through other plays.

The Glorious Quran and Islamic Tradition reject this notion, stating that revelations came from ALLAH via the Angel Gabriel (Peace Be Upon Him) to Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)."<sup>10</sup>

But one thing is true. There is a spiritual relationship between doves and Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

<sup>8</sup> 'Was Shakespeare inspired by Islam' by Ayesha Malik

<sup>9</sup> Seminar 40: Shakespeare and Islam David Currell and Islam Issa

<sup>10</sup> AI Overview

“In Islamic Tradition, doves are respected animals for an entirely different reason: they are believed to have helped protect Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) during the Hijra (emigration) to Medina.

According to the story, as Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and his companion Abu Bakr hid in the Cave of Thaur, ALLAH sent a spider to spin a web and a pair of doves to build a nest and lay eggs at the entrance. When his Meccan pursuers arrived, they concluded that no one could have recently entered the cave because the web and nest were undisturbed, thus sparing the two men from capture. There is no mention of a dove inspiring him in any authentic Islamic Hadiths.”<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) was not inspired with a dove, but was protected with doves.

## Conclusion

Matthew Dimmock states that William Shakespeare included “*around 150 references to Islamic motifs in 21 plays – to Turks and Saracens, to ‘Mahomet’, Morocco and Barbary.*”

The fact is that William Shakespeare and the English people at that time knew the Muslim world, and were aware of its riches and power. They most likely met Muslim people who came to England as diplomats or traders. They certainly knew the goods and indulgences that came from the Muslim world including carpets, exotic foods and coffee.

These facts from history destroy the mainstream narrative that Muslims are alien to the western world, and only arrived in the United Kingdom as part of the immigration waves of the 1950s and 1960s. This is a myth, and belies the depth of interaction that the west had with the Muslim world. And also, the influence that the Islamic world exerted on this small, once insignificant island.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> AI Overview

<sup>12</sup> ‘Without Islam there would be no Shakespeare’ by Nadia Khan