

NOTES AND DISCUSSION

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SHAKESPEAREAN STUDIES IN THE USSR

1. SCHOLARSHIP

There is no need to explain the difficulties connected with the scholarly study of Shakespeare in a foreign country. In this respect Soviet scholars are in much the same position as other scholars outside England and the USA, which possess the most source material, books and manuscripts. However, thanks to the rich collections in the public libraries in Moscow—the Lenin Library—and Leningrad—the Saltykov-Schedrin Library—and in the Arts faculties of the universities as well, practically all of world *Shakespeareana* is available to Soviet students. They also profit by communication with such important centers of scholarship as the Shakespeare Institute at Stratford-on-Avon and the Folger Shakespeare Library at Washington.

During the early Soviet years rather much attention was given to the problem of authorship. A stir was made in 1924 by F. Shipulinsky when he published *Shakespeare-Ruthland*, an exposition of the theory proposed by the Belgian Demblon, who

held that the Works were written by the Earl of Ruthland. Our outstanding literary scholars at the time, Anatoly Lunacharsky and Vladimir Fritche, immediately subscribed to that theory, and the latter based his book on Shakespeare (1926) upon the assumption of the playwright's aristocratic origin. The Ruthland vogue, however, was short-lived, and Fritche himself intended to rewrite his book, this time with an impersonal Shakespeare in view, but death stopped his work in its first stages. Lunacharsky also returned to the orthodox view, and Professor Alexander Smirnov in his *Shakespeare's Art* (1934) in a brief chapter gave a scholarly refutation of all the anti-Shakespearean theories. That settled the matter. Some of the more recent anti-Shakespearean conceptions were dealt with by the present writer in the magazine *New Times* (1957. N° 20).

The biography of Shakespeare for Russian readers was written by the late Professor Mikhail Morozov. Published in the series "Lives of Eminent Men" (1947) it appeared in a second edition of 50 thousand copies in 1956. This also comprises a critical review of Shakespeare's works. Shorter sketches accompany the several editions of Shakespeare's works published during the last three decades. Professor Alexander Smirnov of Leningrad, who edited most of these editions, wrote the accompanying brief biographical sketches of the poet. Shakespeare's biography for the first edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia was written by Ivan Aksenov, and for the second edition by I. Wertsman and myself.

Problems of Shakespearean textology have been briefly reviewed at different periods by M. Morozov, A. Smirnov and myself. Professor A. Smirnov's suggestion concerning a more active study of the original texts has so far found no response.

From the very beginning Soviet scholars have been greatly interested in problems of the theatre during Shakespeare's lifetime. The start was made by B. Silverswan in his essay "The Theatre and the Stage in Shakespeare's Time" (published in *Sbornik Istoriko-Teatralnoi Sektsii* [A Miscellany of the Section on Theatre History] in 1918). His lead was followed by W. Müller in his monograph *The Drama and the Theatre in the Age of Shakespeare* (1925). Another study was published a few years later by A. Bulgakov as *The London Theatres and their Social*

Environment during the Epoch of Merchant Capital (1929). Needless to say, these authors profited greatly from the monumental *Elizabethan Stage* by E. K. Chambers. However, they put forward some original ideas about theatrical practices in Shakespeare's time. Bulgakov's work, as its title suggests, was a sociological study of the Renaissance theatre in England. Professors Smirnov and Morozov paid due attention, in their general studies of Shakespeare, to the theatrical conditions. The latest study in this field is my chapter in *The History of the Western European Theatre*, edited by Prof. S. Mokulsky (Vol. 1, 1956).

The most important studies of Shakespeare's language were done by Prof. Morozov (see, for instance, his essay on "The Individualization of Shakespeare's Characters through Imagery," in *Shakespeare Survey*, 2, 1949. Linguistic studies of Shakespeare are pursued at some of our philological Institutes and appear in the form of Candidate's theses.

2. CRITICISM

By far the largest is that branch of our Shakespearean studies which deals with criticism of the plays and the dramatist's art and philosophy. Although all aspects have come under discussion, one stands out, namely the problem of Shakespeare's social outlook.

I have had opportunities to discuss this with my foreign colleagues, and have heard opinions which in the main tended to disapproval. It is still thought by some that this emphasis on the social significance of Shakespeare's work is a kind of Marxian much ado about nothing. But, to our satisfaction, we Soviet scholars find that some Shakespearean studies produced both in England and America no longer avoid social issues connected with Shakespeare's plays (T. Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*; P. Siegel, *Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise*; G. Salinger's introduction to *The Age of Shakespeare*, ed. by B. Ford in *The Pelican Guides to English Literature*, to cite the first that come to mind). But since this preoccupation with the social and political problems of Shakespeare's works is still misunderstood in some scholarly circles, an explanation of this might perhaps be in place here.

One had to live here, in the USSR, during the last four decades in order to feel that the interest of Soviet scholars in Shakespearean sociology was born out of the tumultuous social and political history of the country. There are some who still think that the social emphasis was only due to a desire to apply Marxian principles of class struggle to Shakespeare. But this is only a part of the truth. In fact, the life of the country during the first years of Soviet power was characterized by such acute social and political conflicts that it was only natural they were reflected in literary criticism, as they were in literature in general. Young as I was at that time I still remember the atmosphere of those years of struggle to abolish the last remnants of the former exploiting classes. Thinking in terms of the class struggle was natural in that period, and this, more than anything else, explains the turn of mind which led our critics to regard Shakespeare in relation to the class struggle of his time. The Marxian theory of class struggle had its influence upon the first critical works but its application was rather primitive, owing to the neglect, or lack of knowledge, of Marxian esthetics.

The positivist school of Taine was the first to show the links between Shakespeare and the social and cultural environment of his time. Long before Soviet criticism, the German G. Rümelin claimed that Shakespeare's work for the theatre expressed the mood of the aristocratic youth who frequented the Globe. The Dane G. Brandes based his explanation of Shakespeare's tragic period largely on the assumption of the influence which the unhappy Essex revolt produced upon the mind of the dramatist.

I cite these examples to show that Soviet scholars were not the first to point out the influence of social and political conditions on Shakespeare. Even before the October Revolution, Peter Kogan and Vladimir Fritche suggested, in their histories of Western European literature, certain social and cultural factors that had influenced the plays of Shakespeare. The first study of Shakespeare from the point of view of class struggle was written by Vladimir Fritche in 1926 (its title was simply *Shakespeare*). According to his view, Shakespeare's plays presented the world outlook of the decaying nobility of Elizabethan and Stuart England. Socially and culturally it had certain links with the rising bourgeoisie, which in Fritche's opinion explains,

for example, the juxtaposition of Antonio and Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, the former representing a noble bourgeois patrician, the latter the capitalist. The tragic mood of Shakespeare, according to Fritche, is an expression of the ideology of the aristocratic class doomed to destruction by the progress of capitalism. It is not difficult to see why Fritche so badly needed a Ruthland to support his conception from the biographical point of view as well. Peter Kogan in his *William Shakespeare* (1931) also explained the aristocratic meaning of Shakespeare's work.

The aristocratic conception was opposed by Alexander Smirnov in his *Shakespeare's Art* (1934, translated into English in 1937 as *Shakespeare, A Marxist Interpretation*), who pointed out the undoubtedly Renaissance nature of Shakespeare's work and explained its meaning as an artistic expression of the humanist ideology. In his opinion at that time, Shakespeare was a writer whose standpoint was that of the humanist bourgeoisie of the Renaissance.

Later, due to the new conditions which arose in the country after fulfillment of the First Five-Year Plan, a closer view was taken of the works of the classics of Marxism; many writings were re-discovered. Examples of such critical analyses were studied together with Lenin's articles on literature, with the result that the former approach was condemned as being a vulgarization rather than truly Marxist.

A new criterion of literature and art has been brought to the forefront. It can be summed up by the Russian word *narodnost'*. This word has no exact equivalent either in English or in French. Literally it means "popularity," but still that does not convey the meaning. Perhaps, "folk quality" comes nearest of all. The German *Volkstümlichkeit* would be almost exact, and yet I suggest that you adopt *narodnost'* as we have subscribed to almost all your literary terms, merely transliterating them.

The term was coined by Russian critics in the first half of the 19th century and suggested a return to original national folk poetry, as the most suitable basis for literary writing.

The first aspect of *narodnost'*, then, is that literature and art must have roots in the history, culture, traditions and customs of the given nation. Secondly, it is based on the presumption

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that what we for brevity's sake shall call the spirit of the nation finds its clearest expression in the cultural mode of the folk, the mass of the people, and their view of life. This brings us to the third aspect, which considers *narodnost'* to be an expression of the real social interests of the people, that is, knowledge of the needs of the people and affirmation of the people's human and social right. Finally, the conception is topped by the conviction that all great literature and art, with some qualifications, fall within *narodnost'*.

It was suggested that the greatness of Shakespeare, alongside with other writers whom the nation considered as their classics, was due to the fact that he expressed the aspirations, as well as the view of life, characteristic of the English people at the critical period of the Renaissance. Vladimir Kemenov was the first to attack the vulgar sociologists in Shakespearean criticism and to postulate Shakespeare's *narodnost'* (essays "Shakespeare in the Embrace of a Sociologist" in the magazine *Literaturny Kritik*, 1936, No. 1 and "Class Characteristics and *Narodnost'* in the Work of Shakespeare" in the newspaper *Sovetskoye Iskusstvo*, 1936, August 5, both reprinted in amended form in the author's *Essays on Art*, 1958).

With this begins the new era of Soviet Shakespearean criticism, which includes its present-day activities. To sum up, all the Soviet critics of the last quarter of a century regard Shakespeare as a writer of the English people, who in his works gave artistic utterance to the people's view of life in the period of the change from feudalism to capitalism. He combined the views and tastes and aspirations of the people with the fruits of Renaissance humanistic culture. The latest view, suggested by I. Wertsman and myself, is that Shakespeare is to be regarded as a synthesis of all the progressive forces of the nation at his time. Soviet critics subscribe to Jonson's dictum that Shakespeare, while being the soul of his age, was essentially not of an age but for all time. To us Shakespeare's art is one of the greatest peaks in world literature. It gave expression to the humanist view of life. As a Soviet critic put it, using the expression of Romain Rolland, to us Shakespeare is "a great brotherly soul."

These ideas inspire numerous works of Soviet Shakespearean criticism, leaving complete freedom for subjective interpretation

of his plays and poems. Among the most important publications I give pride of place to the writings of Alexander Smirnov, who willingly accepted the criticism of his book, and in his later essays proved how fertile was the application of the principle of *narodnost'* to Shakespeare. His introductions to the 1938-40, 1939, 1950 and 1957 editions of the works of Shakespeare form a body of progressively deepening critical pronouncements and analyses. Morozov's *Shakespeare* stands equally as high in popular estimate. After them comes the work of the others, including the well-known Soviet critics N. Berkovsky, A. Djivelegov, S. Krzhizhanovsky, I. Wertsman, A. Shtein, L. Pinsky, G. Kosintzev (film and stage director), etc.

One finds in their essays all the usual topics of Shakespearean criticism: the sources and influences, psychological and philosophical problems, dramatic method and poetic style—I need not enumerate them all. I should only like to add that it would be a mistake to infer from the above that present-day Shakespearean criticism in this country concentrates upon social problems only. After the main issue was settled, Soviet critics went on to explore all the aspects of Shakespeare's work. It is too early to say they have covered all of them, or have come to decisive findings in the various fields, but the work continues.

Soviet Shakespearean scholars and critics wanted to have their own periodical long ago. M. Morozov laid the foundation by editing, in collaboration with G. Boyadjiev and M. Zagorsky, a *Shakespeare Miscellany* (1947), which was supposed to become an annual publication. Various obstacles, chief among them being the death of Morozov in 1952, prevented the continuation of this plan until recently when, with the help of A. Shtein, I edited a new issue dated 1958. The next *Shakespearevski Sbornik*, as it is called in Russian, will soon go to press, and essays for another one are being collected.

Another publication that should be mentioned is the new edition of the works of Shakespeare supervised by A. Smirnov and myself. Of its eight volumes six have already come out, while the remaining two are in preparation. A subscription edition, it drew 225 thousand subscribers. This edition includes a general introduction by A. Smirnov, long enough to be counted as a small book, and separate essays on all the plays, written alter-

nately by the two editors. When this edition is completed, it will practically contain within itself a monograph on Shakespeare, which in size, at least, will be bigger than any previous book on the dramatist published by Soviet critics.

3. THEATRICAL CRITICISM

There are some 600 theatres in the USSR based on the repertory principle. Shakespeare is one of the dramatists standing at the head of our repertory lists. Between 1945 and 1957 there were 265 productions of his plays, and the pace has not slowed down.

I think we can boast of something which Shakespearean scholars all over the world would appreciate. We have succeeded in bridging the gap between Shakespearean scholarship and the stage. The credit for this is due to the late Professor Morozov, who combined a profound knowledge of the texts with a real sense of things theatrical. He prepared stage versions of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *All's Well that Ends Well* and several other comedies. Even more important was his practical work in advising the theatres on various matters connected with Shakespeare productions. He was the head of the Shakespeare Cabinet of the All-Russian Theatrical Society, which offered all kinds of help to theatres engaged in Shakespeare productions. The Cabinet continues its work as an advisory body extending its activity to all foreign playwriting, while problems pertaining to Shakespeare only are dealt with by the Shakespeare Commission of the Society. Its members will travel to any distant city to offer consultation on problems connected with the staging of a Shakespeare play, such trips being financed by the All-Russian Theatrical Society. Theatres often ask for a public discussion of their Shakespeare productions and theatre critics willingly participate in them, giving a detailed analysis of all aspects of the stage-manager's, actors', artist's and composer's part of the production.

Day-to-day press reviewing of Shakespearean productions sometimes gives rise to heated controversies, of which the most notable were those connected with the production of *Hamlet* at the Vakhtangov Theatre (1934), *Othello* at the Maly Theatre (1935), and with the staging of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Maya-

kovsky Drama Theatre (1955). While the first two were concerned mainly with the problem of character interpretation (is Hamlet weak or strong? Is Othello a warrior or a humanist?), the latter aroused mainly a dispute over the methods of stage production by N. Okhlopkov (theatrical conventions *vs.* stage realism). The fullest, if somewhat subjective, account of the latest developments in the theatrical field may be found in an essay by B. Emelyanov in the *Shakespeare Miscellany* (1958). If I were asked to name an example of Soviet criticism of Shakespeare in the theatre I would suggest Y. Youzovsky's book *The Image and the Epoch* (1948), which practically covers the golden era of Shakespeare stage productions, giving an interpretation of the major achievements of Soviet actors and stage directors in the thirties and early forties, together with a discussion of the vital problems of the Soviet theatre of that period. Essays by G. Boyadjiev, B. Alpers, B. Singerman and other notable theatre critics offer the reader thoughtful reviews of Shakespeare performances deserving of remembrance.

I should like, in conclusion, to say a few words about the work of Soviet translators. We have inherited from the 19th century a treasury of translations of the plays of Shakespeare. Their language, style and method were that of the time, and with all their merits they could not satisfy modern demands for a closer rendering of the text. The 1930's witnessed the rise of a new school, which aimed to give a more exact text. Equilibrium translations were brought forth with a literal rendering of the imagery and metaphors that had not been even approximated by the 19th century translators. At first some of the results were rather clumsy, and Kornei Chukovsky had every right to criticize them, Anna Radlova's translations in particular, in his book *The High Art* (of translation—A.A.). But when the translators learnt the true measure of exactitude the results were really marvelous, as in the work of Mikhail Lozinsky, Tatyana Schepkina-Kupernik and others. Professor Smirnov, who acted as editor, helped greatly both with his knowledge of the original texts and his stylistic taste. The major achievement was that of M. Lozinsky, who had every right to publish his rendering of *Hamlet* parallel with the original text.

In the forties two outstanding Soviet poets entered the field.

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Samuil Marshak made a translation of the *Sonnets* which, despite the existence of some half dozen pre-revolutionary renderings, for the first time revealed to the Russian reader the beauty and poetical magic of Shakespeare's lyrical poetry. Boris Pasternak took up the great tragedies and produced a *Hamlet*, a *Romeo and Juliet*, a *Lear*, a *Macbeth*, an *Othello*, an *Anthony and Cleopatra*, and the masterpiece of histories, *Henry IV*. As he put it himself, when publishing his *Hamlet* he asked that his translations be regarded as original Russian dramatic works. He deliberately avoided transmitting into Russian some of the more clustered metaphors of Shakespeare, modernized the vocabulary, Russified the language, and made cuts in the text, omitting classical allusions. This resulted in a very readable Shakespeare, and particularly in a Shakespeare easily delivered by actors on the stage—an opportunity immediately seized by the theatres. But, all in all, it is not Shakespeare but rather Shakespeare-Pasternak. The great paradox of his translations is that Pasternak, complicated and intricate in his original poetry, becomes simple when he takes the part of Shakespeare's mouthpiece.

In the latest edition of Shakespeare's works all the trends of modern Shakespeare translation are represented—A. Radlova, T. Schepkina-Kupernik, S. Marshak, B. Pasternak, M. Morozov, W. Levik—and they are supported by some new talent discovered and fostered in Leningrad by the indefatigable A. Smirnov, who is well over 75. To name a few, there are M. Donskoi, C. Korneyev and T. Gnedich.

With all our achievements we are always conscious of what is not yet done. And, eager to learn, Soviet Shakespeareans regard the present as a foundation for the immense work ahead.