

ШЕКСПИРОВСКИЕ ШТУДИИ

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Shakespeare in Russian Political Discourse*

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Shakespeare remains topical in politics under various regimes, both authoritative and democratic. A few recent events have reminded us of this unique phenomenon. In 2012, Gregory Doran staged his Julius Caesar against an 'African' setting and brought the play to a festival in Moscow. The performance contained a warning against a popular leader's abuse of authority, and in view of Russian politics sounded as a hint at Vladimir Putin's running for a third presidential term.

We do not mean to say that Russia leads in Shakespeare-related excesses, but there is a special coloring to it. For instance, a 10-year-old boy reciting Hamlet's monologue To be or not to be was detained by the police in the center of Moscow, allegedly for begging; and then there were accusations of theatre director Kirill Serebrennikov (staging A Midsummer Night's Dream at Gogol-Center in Moscow), and theater manager Aleksei Malobrodsky was charged with embezzlement, following which public protests were organized in their defense.

All these incidents bring to mind Tsar Alexander II's disapproval of Shakespeare's 300th anniversary and the plans of its celebration in the Russian Empire. In this paper, I try to trace the history of 'involving' the playwright in current politics, and the myths emerging along the way.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Russian Political Discourse; Tsar Alexander II; Gregory Doran; Kirill Serebrennikov

Shakespeare has often caused discomfort to political authorities in all cultures and under various regimes of government, both authoritarian and democratic. Just look at some recent events associated with the playwright's name. In the West, they again seek to bowdlerize his works, to make them politically correct, groomed, and less controversial, without much success. Thus, in the USA Oskar Eustis staged *Julius Caesar* in the Public Theater, where the titular hero is a tyrant wearing make-up that looks as close as possible to the nation's president who is currently in office. In due course, he is brutally murdered before the audience. Caesar's wife Calpurnia is dressed in stylish designer clothes and speaks with a strong 'Slavic' accent. Donald Trump's son tweeted an angry post about wasting the pro-

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duction money: “I wonder how much of this “art” is funded by taxpayers? Serious question, when does “art” become political speech & does that change things?”¹ The awed sponsors (*Bank of America and Delta Airlines*) refused financial support for the project. Police force of New York arrested a 24-year-old activist Laura Loomer who ran out onto the stage shouting, “Stop the violence”². The Public Theater was immediately threatened by pro-Trump audiences. Moreover, other theatres throughout the country came under threat just because of having Shakespeare’s name on their billboards. For example, the Texan company *Shakespeare Dallas* received about 90 letters, and the Shakespeare and Company troupe received over 50 messages and calls wishing imminent death to their actors³. To be fair, we should remember that in 2012 the same play was performed with an actor very much resembling Barack Obama. In the same year, Gregory Doran put on his “African” *Julius Caesar* and went on a tour that included Moscow. His warning that an authoritarian ruler might try to usurp more powers for himself clearly hinted to Russian spectators that Putin would run for another term as president.

In Russia, the situation is no less scandalous than in other countries: the Moscow police detained a 10-year-old boy (allegedly for begging, while he was merely reciting Hamlet’s soliloquy *To be or not to be* in Novy Arbat Street; and then there were accusations of theatre director Kirill Serebrennikov (staging *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at Gogol-Center in Moscow), and theatre manager Aleksei Malobrodsky was charged with embezzlement, following which public protests were organized in their defense⁴.

Such incidents bring to mind Tsar Alexander II’s disapproval of Shakespeare’s 300th anniversary and the plans of its celebration in the Russian Empire. In particular, E. L. Kovalevsky, the chairman of the Literary Foundation, was notified on April 5, 1864, by minister V. F. Adlerberg that the reformer-tsar found it “inappropriate to celebrate an anniversary of a foreigner, with government involvement. Therefore, His Majesty did not approve the provision of the Imperial Theatre building for this purpose, allowing, however, to the admirers of Shakespeare, Russian citizens and foreigners living here to celebrate his birthday among themselves” (Cit. ex: *Shakespeare and Russian Culture*, 1965: 411).

The poet Nikolay Nekrasov responded to the imperial verdict with an angry epigram (nor was he alone):

Britons, Germans and the French
All resound the fame of Shakespeare.
Yet the Russian muse will keep silent,
For fear of being whipped again⁵.

M. D. Elson suggested that such emotional reaction of Nekrasov was not only due to the poet’s deep love of the British playwright, but also to the difficult situation of Nekrasov’s journal *Sovremennik* and to other circumstances related to the censorship committee’s bans of new publications⁶. In any case, we do not have documentary proof showing whether Nekrasov himself took part in this small meeting.

However, though the government refused to celebrate the anniversary, Russian society did not, and no prohibitions followed, in fact, the celebration expenses were eventually covered by the Emperor’s order. The report of A. V. Golovnin addressed to E. P. Kovalevsky, dated April 29, 1864 under No. 3688 indicates that «following my report of April 25, His Imperial Majesty benevolently allowed: to give the Society <...> one thousand roubles in silver from the budget of the Ministry of Public Education”⁷.

We can draw a curious parallel from the reports of Russian newspapers, writing about how the Shakespearean tercentennial was celebrated in Britain, Germany and France. While in the homeland of the playwright this was conducted celebrated on a large scale, in Germany they the events were fairly quiet, and in France a ban was imposed on the celebrations (Cf. *Golos*, 1864, April 23 Issue 111; *St. Petersburg News*, 1864, April 24, Issue 89). In Russia, after all, the government agreed to refund the celebration of Shakespeare's anniversary.

On April 23, 1864, I. S. Turgenev's *Speech about Shakespeare* was delivered in a literary and musical assembly in St. Petersburg; public events were held at Moscow University; Professor N. I. Storozhenko marked the anniversary with five public lectures on Shakespeare. Newspapers and journals published articles about the great playwright and poet; there were solemn speeches in his honor. Much was done in the line of translations and publication of his works, their staging on the Russian stage, publication of monographs and collections of articles. The playwright A. N. Ostrovsky, the composers M. P. Mussorgsky (cf. Letter to M. Balakirev about participation in the Shakespearean anniversary), A. N. Serov (Letter to Apollon Grigoryev), and others took part.

For comparison with a century before that, the total "Shakespearean text" in Russia for year 1764 consists of only one publication: a long quotation from *Henry IV*, embedded in a translation from English, "Letters to a friend, making it clear that people often masque their indecent actions with their rank and position" (Well-Intended journal, M., 1764, June, pp. 267–268). And then we found 68 bibliographic records in year 1864: these are translations of plays and excerpts from Shakespeare (*Timon of Athens*, *King Henry VIII* and *Othello*, *Moor of Venice* by P. I. Veinberg; *Romeo and Juliet* by A. Grigoriev; *King Lear* by V. Lazarevsky; *Julius Caesar* by D. L. Michalovsky; act I of *The Tempest* by L. Mey; excerpt from the 3rd part of *King Henry VI* (act I, sc. 4) by D. Averkiev; monologues of Lavinia and Tamora by F. N. Ustryalov; monologue of *King Richard II* before his death in prison by Dm. Minaev, Sonnet 60 by I. Mamuna, etc.), translations of V. Hugo's and N. Hawthorne's essays, reviews of performing actors (I. Aldridge and G. Samoilov in *King Lear*, "Performance of Othello in America"; reviews of new translations; reports on the celebration of the tercentennial of the birth of Shakespeare (*Shakespeare's Anniversary in St. Petersburg*; N. S. Tikhonravov's speech delivered at the public meeting of Imperial University on April 11 (23), 1864; biographical essays by Dm. Averkiev on Shakespeare and his epoch, articles by A. Galakhov *Hamlet's Initial Image*, *Descendants of Shakespeare*, *The Name of Shakespeare*, *Shakespeare in Russia* and on the significance of Gervinus' study, and many other publications. Reflections on the works of Shakespeare and his heroes could be found in original works of Russian writers: the novel by K. N. Leontyev *In his Land*, the story of the actor I. E. Chernyshev *Actress. Places in the Theatrical World*, and others. Following the example of I. S. Turgenev, the name of Shakespeare's heroine was alluded to in N. S. Leskov's fiction (*Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, 1864).

In the future, celebrations of Shakespeare's anniversaries would always trigger new productions, translations, books, monographs, articles, etc. In 1964, the four-hundredth year since Shakespeare's birth, the bibliography includes 465 entries. It is interesting to calculate how many bibliographic records appeared in the past anniversary year of 2016. I estimate them to be at least 1,500 in Russia alone (see: Zakharov, 2015b).

In the year of 1864, Nekrasov's *Sovremennik* published two of the playwright tragedies: *Julius Caesar* (in Issue 4) and *King Henry VIII* (Issue 9).

As likely as not, the above epigrammatic quatrain was the poet's response to the news of the "supreme resolution" in early April, when the Shakespearean celebration was threatened⁸. Nekrasov expressed his first emotional impression, but in reality no one threatened to whip Shakespeare's Muse in Russia.

A most straightforward political interpretation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* was given by foreign theatre critics during the tours of the Moscow Drama Theatre named after A. S. Pushkin in the UK (2015) and the USA (2018). The press of both countries toured unanimously declared that the time and place of the action had been transferred from Shakespeare's conventional Vienna to modern "totalitarian" Moscow. At the same time, they all ignored the interpretation of the director of the play, Declan Donnellan, who stated in a recent interview: "We did not set *Measure* in modern Moscow. The play is played on stage, and the stage space leads [to] thoughts of an imaginary modern world. It can be anywhere. The corruption depicted in the play can happen anywhere and at any time"⁹.

Donnellan explained that this was not the first time he encountered such politically biased interpretations of his work: "When we staged *The Tempest* in 1988, the part of Duke Prospero was given to a woman. In the United Kingdom, this was often perceived as a satire on [Prime Minister Margaret] Thatcher, and in Romania we were almost banned, because in Bucharest, the audience was shocked and talked in whispers, because they decided that we intended to ridicule Helen Ceausescu [the wife of the president and the Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party]. They thought that we had meticulously copied the manner in which she closed her purse"¹⁰.

The director said that this is not an appropriate approach to theatrical work: "I would never have attempted to transfer the real world or a real person to the stage, but I'm more than happy if the spectators do, it's their choice. I don't have any hidden meaning that the public have to figure out. My work only transfers itself. The rest depends on the audience"¹¹.

Perhaps skeptics will not believe Donnellan's assurances (since "God marks the crook"), especially since the perception of the Russian performance as anti-Putinist reached even the American academic environment. In particular, Steve Mentz, professor of English at St. John's University in New York wrote in his blog: "No freedom in Vienna, or in modern Russia, which this brilliant production represents"; "An authority that in this production's Moscow context, has a particular sinister cast"¹². In fact, the truth seems to be in between: "there is no freedom anywhere in our crazy modern world".

At one time, the outstanding British actor Frank Barrie, glory of Laurence Olivier's National Theatre Company, the Old Vic, who in his long career played in 36 of Shakespeare's plays in 67 countries around the world, talked about his performance as Macbeth in Baghdad. This happened under Saddam Hussein. At first, the audience did not take the performance seriously: they shouted, walked in front of the stage and hardly reacted to the acting. However, when they realized what the performance was about and how closely it was connected with their own lives, they became quiet, and at the end there were loud cheers. The next day, crowds of people came to see the play, as rumors had quickly spread among the townspeople. Unfortunately, this time the secret police appeared in the hall, and the troupe was forbidden to perform the "cursed" Scottish play, as it was considered too dangerous. It was a sign of the extraordinary power of Shakespeare's influence on the modern foreign audience¹³.

Similar effects of Shakespeare's influence on public minds, culture and political thought occur in the former Soviet republics (cf.: Zakharov, 2015a).

ПРИМЕЧАНИЯ

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⁴ Dyakova E. (2017) Was there A Midsummer Night's Dream? Novaya Gazeta, no. 66, 23 June [online] Available at: <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/06/22/72879-a-byli-li-son-v-letnyuyu-noch> (accessed: 24.06.2017).

⁵ Хвала Шекспиру загремит
От брита, немца и француза,
И только русская смолчит
Кнутом засеченная Муза.

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⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Director Declan Donnellan prepares new projects in Russia (2018). ITAR TASS, 12 October [online] Available at: https://tass.ru/kultura/5666751?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop&fbclid=IwAR3E3zZfjSF0-KvqAL49n57QnoIgTgTPywygz9p7bsZwbNdhAbr5NoGVak (accessed: 16.10.2018).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Mentz S. (2018) Cheek by Jowl & Pushkin Theatre's Measure for Measure (BAM) The Bookfish, 17 October [online] Available at: http://stevementz.com/cheek-by-jowl-pushkin-theatres-measure-for-measure-bam/?fbclid=IwAR3phg8TkVcW61-RuM94EhBI1Zx11YnAtameQH7_cHJGS5LhQ6YlszHH_ns (accessed: 17.10.2018).

¹³ Canterbury Marlowe Day 2018. Marlowe-society.org, Saturday, 12th May [online] Available at: <http://www.marlowe-society.org/2018/05/26/canterbury-marlowe-day-may-2018/> (accessed: 22.10.2018).

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ШЕКСПИР В РОССИЙСКОМ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОМ ДИСКУРСЕ

Н. В. ЗАХАРОВ

МОСКОВСКИЙ ГУМАНИТАРНЫЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ

Шекспир политически актуален во все времена и во всех культурах, при разных формах правления — авторитарных и демократических. Достаточно вспомнить недавние события, связанные с именем драматурга. В 2012 г. Грегори Доран выпустил своего «африканского» «Юлия Цезаря» и побывал со спектаклем на гастролях в Москве. Его предупреждение о том, что авто-

ритарный правитель может попытаться узурпировать всю полноту власти, было воспринято как намек на возвращение В. Путина на очередной президентский срок.

В России ситуация не более скандальная, чем в других странах, но имеет свой колорит: задержание полицией на Новом Арбате якобы за попрошайничество 10-летнего мальчика, декламировавшего монолог Гамлета «Быть или не быть», полукриминальная ситуация вокруг спектакля «Сон в летнюю ночь» режиссера Кирилла Серебренникова, обвинения в хищении средств театрального менеджера Алексея Малобродского, гневные выступления в их защиту общественности.

По этому поводу можно вспомнить, как в свое время Александр II неодобрительно высказался о планах празднования 300-летнего юбилея Шекспира в Российской империи. В своей статье я попытаюсь проследить эволюцию политизации творчества британского драматурга, реальную и мифическую.

Ключевые слова: Шекспир; российский политический дискурс; Александр II; Григорий Доран; Кирилл Серебренников

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