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The Main Trends in Russian Shakespeare Criticism: 1960–1980s

Though Russian Shakespeare criticism originated in the middle of the 18th century, but as far as Russian Shakespearean **academic** scholarship (in the direct sense of the words) is concerned, it has been appeared at the end of the 19th century and has already more than a centennial history. This history has not been written yet, but on the threshold of the third millennium it may be reasonable to observe the main stages of its development in retrospect. In the Russian post-war cultural history, 1960–1980s must be regarded as one of those important stages.

It began during the so-called period of the *Thaw* (1954–1964) and came to an end on the eve of the Soviet Union's collapse, which happened at the end of 1991. Therefore this period may be also considered as the final one in the development of Soviet Shakespeare criticism. (A traditional definition *Soviet* is used here in a strictly conventional, historical sense).

The earliest phase of the Soviet Shakespeare studies (1920–1930s) was marked by the indisputable predominance of the Marxist sociological school in its Soviet variant. Even the most prominent literary and theatrical scholars could not avoid the impact of this methodology (Smirnov 1934). During the late 1930s the first rare, but distinct protests against dictatorship of those methods in investigating Shakespeare had been heard, but in the first post-war decade (1945–1955) the oversimplifying interpretations still prevailed in Shakespeare studies in the Soviet Union.

After Stalin's death came a period (*Thaw*) of a certain revival of intellectual and spiritual life in the country. Changes in various realms of the people's life became apparent in culture on the whole, and in Soviet Shakespeare criticism in particular. I mean appearance of the new editions of Shakespeare, new Russian translations, theatrical and critical interpretations, etc. (Sokolyansky 1998).

In 1957–1960 a new edition of the complete works of Shakespeare in Russian translation was issued (Shekspir 1957–1960); to this day that has still been the most authoritative edition of Shakespeare for Russian readers. The critical attempts to use the name of Shakespeare for the purposes of Soviet *agitprop* began to pass away. The collection of critical essays "Shekspirovskij sbornik. 1958" (Shekspirovskij Sbornik 1959; see also Anikst 1959) differed essentially from other publications of the times by its scholarly originality. The new and freer ways of interpreting Shakespearean works and performances in literary and theatrical journalism were established. For example, Alexander Anikst's essay "Leo Tolstoy as an Overthrower of Shakespeare" (Anikst 1960) can be mentioned here. It was published in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Leo Tolstoy's death. One of the most controversial questions in the history of the reception and interpretation of Shakespeare was touched there, and the author of the article made an attempt to accentuate the constructive components as well as controversial points in Tolstoy's attack against cult of Shakespeare. Although the essay of Alexander Anikst was sharply criticised in the Moscow officious press (Astakhov 1960), it had initiated the studying of this and some other tabooed or half-tabooed themes in Soviet Shakespearology.

In the beginning of the 1960s the preparations for Shakespeare's 400th anniversary were gaining strength in the USSR. There appeared more books, dissertations and articles on Shakespeare, than in the preceding years. Among them there were the posthumous edition of the last book by Professor Alexander Smirnov (Smirnov 1963), the new collections of Mikhail Morozov's works on Shakespeare (Morozov 1964), the books by Alexander Anikst (Anikst 1963), Israil' Vertsman (Vertsman 1964), Roman Samarin (Samarin 1964), Mikhail and Dmitry Urnovs (Urnov M., Urnov D. 1964), and other scholars, conceptual essays by Naum Berkovsky (Berkovskij 1960) and Leonid Pinsky (Pinskij 1961), etc. In 1964 various Shakespeare surveys and collections of articles were published in Moscow, Leningrad (now Saint-Petersburg), L'vov (L'viv), Gorky (Nizhnij Novgorod), and other cities of the USSR. All those books varied both in size and scholarly value, but then the quantity could also be considered an index of quality.

The collection of articles issued by the leading academic publishing house of the Soviet Union ("Nauka") at the beginning of 1964 deserves

special attention. The preface to the book was written by Professor Roman Samarin in a very traditional, orthodox Soviet popular manner and contained no original ideas; to the author's mind, the highest merits of Shakespeare were his *realism, folk character* (*narodnost'*) and pathos of *heroic enthusiasm* (Samarin 1964: 14–15). Several essays in the book were written in the same anachronistic spirit. But side by side with them, we could read there (in Russian translation) Marko Minkoff's original work on the tragic in Shakespeare and interesting essays on "Hamlet" written by the British explorers Kenneth Muir and Arnold Kettle. The publication of the foreign authors' works reflected the new for Soviet liberal arts trend to the wider acquaintance with the achievements of the Western scholarship and to the break through the notorious *iron curtain* between Soviet and World-wide Shakespeare studies. That was very important pre-condition for the further development of academic Shakespearean scholarship in Russia and other republics of the former USSR.

The real changes in the theoretical basis of Russian literary and art criticism may be considered another pre-condition for stirring up of Shakespeare researches. At the beginning of the 1960s half-forgotten works of Mikhail Bakhtin were re-issued in Moscow, while some of his unknown books and essays were issued for the first time (Bakhtin 1965). These works had a great impact on Russian and Western philology and theory of culture. In particular, Bakhtin's theoretic views of comic and laughter had a great impact on some investigations of Shakespeare's comedies and comic characters.

Besides, some new books and editions were of great importance for the further development of Shakespeare studies in the country. Leonid Pinsky's book "Realism of the Renaissance", (Pinskij 1961), must be mentioned in the first place. Furthermore, in the 1960s, the prominent psychologist Lev Vygotsky's book "Psychology of Art" (Vygotskij 1965, 1968) was published, and many seminal works of the outstanding Russian formalists (Boris Eikhenbaum, Yurij Tynyanov, Vladimir Propp, Pyotr Bogatyryov and others) were re-published. In 1960–1970s many works of Yurij Lotman and his widely-known school of structural-semiotic investigations of literature and art became widely known and influential. The whole enlivenment of theoretical studies in literary and art criticism stimulated Russian Shakespeare scholarship's progress towards more analytical researches.

It must be also mentioned, that the descriptive studying of Russian Shakespeareana for more than two centuries became thorough. In 1965 the basic monograph "Shakespeare and Russian Culture", edited by Mikhail Alekseev, appeared (Shekspir i Russkaja Kul'tura 1965). Later, this volume was successfully followed by several substantial works of Professor Mikhail Alekseev himself and his academic school (Levin 1989). The rather regular

publications of Russian Shakespeare bibliography (Levidova 1964; Levidova 1978; Levidova and Fridstein 1986) could be added to this list.

In 1970–1980s the critical process was rather active and many accomplishments of Soviet Shakespeare scholarship of the 1960s were consolidated and exploited. New books of A. Anikst, L. Pinsky and other authors, a number of dissertations on Shakespeare, annual (since 1978) All-Union Shakespeare symposia in Moscow, more or less regular publications of "Shakespeare Readings" („Shekspirovskije Chtenija") proved wide and stable interest of Soviet scholars and critics in Shakespeare. This interest was being intensified by numerous Shakespearean performances on stage and screen.

All the number of quite the different Shakespeare Studies, which were published in the USSR for 1960–1980s, can be classified, at least, into **three** main and the most productive trends.

The **first** one is represented by the works of the most authoritative Russian and Soviet connoisseur and researcher of Shakespeare Alexander Anikst and his school. Being an author of six books and a lot of essays on Shakespeare, Anikst often declared his adherence to Marxist methodology in literary criticism. However, it was widely comprehended pure Marxism as a modification of the sociological method, without Lucács' Hegelianism, Lenin's class restrictions, and the vulgar-sociological simplifications which were peculiar to theorists' of the so-called *proletarian culture* in the 1920–30s.

The expansion of theoretical basis and apparatus criticus, which included the most important foreign works on Shakespeare, was one of the greatest achievements of Anikst. Since 1960s Russian Shakespeare Criticism could no longer be based only on the books by Nikolaj Storozhenko and other compatriots as well as on the *gentleman's small set* of German and British works of the 19th century. The expansion of the critical basis was characteristic not only of Anikst himself but of the essays in the collective works he edited, numerous dissertations, etc.

The access to the World-wide Shakespeareana led logically to the greater diversity of themes, subjects and genres of investigations. Aleksander Anikst himself created the best Russian compendium on Shakespeare (Anikst 1963), wrote books and essays about some separate plays (Anikst 1986a), and on theatre of Shakespearean epoch (Anikst 1965). Quite evident are links between the theme of the last book with the numerous reviews of the current theatrical productions written by Anikst. He was also an author of the first thorough works on Shakespeare's biography, authorship and textual studies (Anikst 1962, 1964, 1974b) in the recent Russian criticism; these works helped the new generations of Russian students to come to the better understanding of widely discussed facts, having separated them from quasi-Shakespearean mythology.

Anikst's monograph "Shekspir: Remeslo dramaturga" ("*Shakespeare. Craft of Playwright*") may be distinguished from all his works on the British poet and dramatist. Till nowadays that is the only book in Russian Shakespeareana, which is completely devoted to Shakespeare's dramaturgic *technique*. "Basing upon the world Shakespeare criticism" (Anikst 1974a: 600), the author precisely described the main structural elements of Shakespearean plays.

In the 1980s the scholar published also several original essays about the relationship of Shakespeare's drama and poetry to various styles and art movements of his time (Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque) and came to the conclusion that "Shakespeare's art had absorbed various ideological and artistic trends of his transitive epoch and synthesized them [...]" (Anikst 1986b: 66).

Having brought Russian Shakespearology to the channel of the world scholarship and having widened the main areas of researches, Anikst and his school were not stopped by difficulties of the complicated, paradoxical themes, including the most pressing problems of biography and authorship, reception of Shakespeare by such his *overthrowers* as Voltaire, Leo Tolstoy or Bernard Shaw, neoclassical interpretation of Shakespearean plays, etc. This school's activities made Russian Shakespeare scholarship's returning to old dogmatic and isolationist positions of the 1920–50s impossible, and, perhaps, that was its most important achievement.

The **second** important trend in Soviet Shakespeare studies of 1960–1980s was represented by some works of the especially original and independent thinkers. It can be associated with the process of overcoming dogmatic traditions in fuller measure, with real independence from the Marxist doctrines, with the wider philosophical orientations and the closeness to current theories of culture, though without scholarly following some only one direction. No doubts, this trend did not appear all of a sudden; it had, of course, the predecessors in Soviet Shakespeare scholarship of the earlier time including Lev Vygotsky as an author of two original, but almost unknown till the middle of the 60s, essays on "Hamlet" (Vygotskij 1968: 209–246, 339–498), Sigizmund Krzhyzhanovskij, Georg Meri, the above-mentioned Naum Berkovsky and others, but since 1960s it has become more evident and influential, indeed.

Leonid Pinsky (1906–1981) was a central figure of this trend. During Stalin's anti-Semitic campaign of the late 1940s – early 1950s the gifted literary scholar was expelled from the teaching staff of Moscow State University and oppressed; he had to spend five years in prisons and camps. On his release he had no regular position at any university or research institute, and therefore could not form his *school*, in spite of his obvious vocation for teaching. However, his own works, like the books of his

outstanding colleague and frequent interlocutor Mikhail Bakhtin, had impressed many original literary scholars and critics as well as theatrical and film directors.

Well-known are three books by Leonid Pinsky: "Realism of the Renaissance" (1961), "Shakespeare: Main Foundations of Dramaturgy" (1971) and posthumously published collection of essays "Main Plot" (Pinskij 1989), which includes several studies of Shakespeare's comedies. The title of the last book was chosen quite precisely. Pinsky introduced a new *key category* – "main plot" (*magistral'nyj sjuzhet*) – to describe the plot invariant of Shakespearean dramas. In his profound monograph "Shakespeare: Main Foundations of Dramaturgy" the main plot of the histories and tragedies is investigated; the latest work, which was included into the posthumous volume, is devoted to the main plot of the comedies.

The main plot is comprehended by the scholar as "the basic, substantial foundation in the fabula, characters, structure etc., that allegedly stands behind concrete works of some entity, becoming apparent in the *phenomena*, modifications, variations of the genre [...]" (Pinskij 1989: 51). As a matter of fact, the plot invariant of every literary genre is meant here. Comparing different works within every genre group, Pinsky distinguishes concrete genre modifications and thus offers a new way of generic approach to Shakespeare's literary heritage.

Combination of synchronistical and diachronic researches was the great merit of Pinsky's works. For instance, describing the variants of the histories' and tragedies' main plot, he takes into consideration also the historical evolution of each genre in Shakespeare's dramaturgy. So the scholar based always on the real links between different motifs, plots, separate plays and dramatic cycles.

Pinsky's scholarly researches were not limited by the generic problems. His areas of investigation covered also the problems of artistic time in Shakespeare's dramas, correlation of Renaissance theatre and medieval history, character of Sir John Falstaff, *poetic theatricality*, etc. He had not written special works on the sonnets or on Shakespearean poetic speech, but he had a subtle perception of poetic conventionality in the world created by the great playwright. In this connection it can be added that the title of Pinsky's first book ("Realism of the Literature of Renaissance") was dictated by the publishers. In Soviet literary and art criticism of that time the out-of-date tradition to identify all the *art* only with *realism* was still persisting.

The scholar's understanding of *theatricality* was presented in the laconic chapter "Life is Theatre", concluding his main book on Shakespeare. But as far as his meditations on the nature of this phenomenon are concerned, he meant only the English theatre of Shakespeare's time, perceived in the

light of literary and historical sources. As distinct from Alexander Anikst or a famous Polish critic and scholar Jan Kott, Leonid Pinsky did not express any special interest in modern theatrical art and the newest stage interpretations of Shakespeare. Perhaps, therefore his works have been continued to be very popular mainly in a rather limited circle of scholars and students. It is a great pity that these works are so far available only for Russian-reading audience. Zdenek Střibrny is absolutely right, regretting that "Pinsky has remained unknown in the West" (Střibrny 2000: 98). We can say that Pinsky's ideas' inclusion into the international Shakespeare criticism is obviously delayed.

The **third** important trend was first of all represented by Grigorij Kozintsev. The world-famous film director and creator of several theatrical interpretations of Shakespearean dramas, he was also a prominent Shakespeare critic. His analytical essay on "King Lear" was first published in Moscow magazine "Teatr" (*Theatre*) in 1941 and later in "Shekspirovskij sbornik. 1958"; this work impressed many scholars and students by its depth and originality. In 1962 his book *Our Contemporary William Shakespeare* (Kozintsev 1962) appeared, and later on was re-published several times. It must be noted, that just so entitled in English translation and second Polish edition Jan Kott's work (Kott 1964,[1] 1965) was issued in 1964–65, i.e. in two-three years after Kozintsev's book.

Kozintsev's criticism differed essentially from the usual artistic essays: in his works the brilliant and easy style harmonized with excellent knowledge of Shakespeare criticism and penetrating reading of Shakespearean texts. Kozintsev's correspondence with Leonid Pinsky gives an idea of a very wide range of his knowledge and depth of his thoughts. Being impressed by Leonid Pinsky's research, nonetheless Kozintsev was approaching Shakespeare in his own, original way.

This way had passed not only through *close reading* of Shakespearean texts and studying various critical works on Shakespeare, but also through the director's concrete attempts to perform Shakespeare on stage and screen. As a result of such complex searches, quite the original Shakespeare criticism appeared. That can be classified as a piece of literary scholarship, because it contains the basic knowledge of the text and its history, as well as keen analysis of this text's structure. That is also a bright example of literary criticism, because Shakespeare's works are interpreted in the light of the modern readers' and spectators' social and aesthetical experience. That is a work of art criticism, too, because we can find in the essays and books of the famous director numerous significant associations with the theatrical and

[1] In English translation the book was entitled "Shakespeare, Our Contemporary," (Kott, 1964).

cinematographic productions of Shakespearean tragedies, comedies and histories.

Kozintsev's book, as well as the meditations on Shakespeare in his subsequent works *The Space of Tragedy* (Kozintsev 1977) and *The Deep Screen*, served as a sui generis bridge between the new, conceptual scholarship (e.g., Pinsky's works) and living practice of the world theatre and cinematography. In this aspect his books' and essays' importance is still underestimated in Russia itself, as well as in the Western countries. It may be added that in spite of the frequent comparisons between Kozintsev's and Kott's books on Shakespeare, their approaches to Shakespeare's works were totally different. Comparing the books of the two prominent critics Zdenek Střibrny remarks that "Kozintsev, however, felt the closeness not in Shakespeare's similarity to the theatre of the absurd but in his capacity to stir our conscience, to defend man against all forms of inhumanity, to discover 'the unmasked face of Virtue and of Scorn' in individuals and the whole society [...]" (Střibrny 2000: 106).

There is no doubts that the above-mentioned three trends do not cover all the range of Russian and Soviet Shakespeare studies, but they represent its top phenomena. Due to the most significant accomplishments in studying and critical interpretation of Shakespeare, the 1960–1980s can be regarded as a distinctive and most productive period in the whole history of Russian and Soviet Shakespearean scholarship and criticism up to date. That period appeared to be a determinant in the process of the full and certain inclusion of Russian Shakespearology to the world literary and theatrical scholarship, expanded its scope of critical and scholarly approaches to Shakespeare, stimulated appearance of a number of new works on Shakespeare, which would be free from the remnants of dogmatism and based upon the best national and world traditions.

Speaking of the *Soviet* Shakespeare scholarship, I would like to stress once more, that the period under study was the last one in its history: in 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed. The truth is that the further development of Shakespeare studies took place within absolutely new and very unstable political and economic reality. There were no more state restrictions and censorship of book-publishing, theatrical and cinematographic productions, etc. On the other hand, the state support of publishing houses, theatres and film studios was sharply reduced, and book circulations, quantity of new performances, films (and spectators!), art exhibitions and their visitors became considerably less because of the state's and populations' impoverishment. The annual Shakespeare symposia (readings) are not hold any more, the issues of "Shakespeare Readings" stopped to be published, etc.

One of Soviet Shakespeare studies' great advantages was its international and intercultural character. The original critical works and theatrical perfor-

mances could appear not only in Russian cities, but also in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine, Baltic republics; they made a positive impact one upon another, and this process led not to the unification, but to the mutual cultural enrichment. Regretfully, all that became a thing of the past. As every *time of troubles*, the present-day political and economic situation gives full play for all sorts of dilettantish speculations and theatrical gambling on the tastes of mass audience. For example full of mistakes non-professional book of Ilja Gililov on the problem of authorship (Gililov 1997) can be mentioned; this book, which is full of mistakes, was criticised by several scholars (see, e.g.: Balashov 1998; Sokolyansky 2000: 117–137). Regretfully, Gililov's book is not the single example of the newest speculations on the most complicated and controversial questions of Shakespearean life and works.

Nevertheless, the best achievements of Shakespeare studies of 1960–1980s will certainly serve as a compass for the younger generations of students as well as literary and theatrical scholars in the Russian-reading area. As to the newest period in the development of Russian Shakespearology (1990s – 2000s), perhaps, it is not yet the time for substantial discussion about it. Obviously, that will be the task for a coming generation of Russian Shakespeare scholars.

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