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Kheraskov's *Gonimye*: Shakespeare's Second Appearance in Russia

Some seventeen years ago, P. N. Berkov wrote: "The least-known aspect of the still comparatively unexplored field of Anglo-Russian cultural relations in the eighteenth century is that of the history of the stage and of stage-plays." The statement is hardly less true today. Berkov went on to say that a single question—"that of how far the Russian reader and theatergoer was familiar with Shakespeare's work"—had attracted the lion's share of scholarly attention. Even in this area, however, work remains to be done, and it will be the aim of the present essay, by demonstrating the relationship between Kheraskov's drama Gonimye and Shakespeare's The Tempest, to add a small but necessary link to the chain of our knowledge of Shakespeare in Russia.

The gradual process by which Shakespeare entered the consciousness of educated Russians has been traced by several writers.² The pattern is similar to that in the rest of Europe: Voltairean condescension toward a drunken savage of genius yielding at last to the unreserved admiration of the romantics, who raised the name of the great Elizabethan as a banner in their struggle against a moribund classicism.

Up to the present time it has been generally accepted that the first adaptations of Shakespeare to appear on the Russian stage were Sumarokov's Gamlet (1748) and Catherine II's version of The Merry Wives of Windsor, Vot kakovo imet' korzinu i bel'e (1786). As is well known, Sumarokov transformed Shakespeare's tragedy into a blameless model of classical correctness, which, apart from the names of the principal characters and the Danish setting, has very little to do with Shakespeare. Sumarokov was quite justified, when accused by Trediakovskii of having "translated" his Gamlet from a French prose version, in asserting that there was little similarity between his tragedy and Shakespeare's—apart from the monologue at the end of the third act (a pale echo of the "To be or not to be" soliloquy) and the scene where Claudius tries to pray.³

^{1.} P. N. Berkov, "English Plays in St. Petersburg in the 1760's and 1770's," Oxford Slavonic Papers, vol. 8 (Oxford, 1958), p. 90.

^{2.} Notably by André Lirondelle, Shakespeare en Russie (Paris, 1912); and A. S. Bulgakov, "Rannee znakomstvo s Shekspirom v Rossii," Teatral'noe nasledstvo: Sbornik pervyi (Moscow, 1934), pp. 47-118.

^{3.} A. P. Sumarokov, "Otvet na kritiku," Polnoe sobranie vsekh sochinenii, vol. 10 (Moscow, 1782), p. 117.

It would be naïve to suppose that in turning to Hamlet Sumarokov had any notion of enlightening his countrymen by acquainting them with the work of a great writer. No mention of Shakespeare is made on the title page of Gamlet, either in the first edition of 17484 or in the Polnoe sobranie vsekh sochinenii brought out by Novikov in 1781;5 as his response to Trediakovskii makes clear, Sumarokov wished his play to be regarded as an original work. Sumarokov's "Epistola I" of 1747 had somewhat reluctantly admitted the "untutored" (neprosveshchennyi) Shakespeare to the company of famous writers of all ages and climes on Mount Helicon. The Russian poet thought it necessary to add a footnote informing his readers that "Shekespir" was an "angliiskii tragik i komik, v kotorom i ochen' khudogo i chrezvychaino khoroshego ochen' mnogo,"6 a formula that neatly summarizes the received view of Shakespeare at this time—a view repeatedly expressed by Sumarokov's idolized preceptor and the literary arbiter of the age, Voltaire. The prefatory letter to Voltaire's adaptation of Julius Caesar, La Mort de César, had described the Elizabethan dramatist as a "poète anglais, qui a réuni dans la même pièce les puérilités les plus ridicules et les morceaux les plus sublimes."7 Sumarokov might be said to have gone beyond Voltaire only in his indication that Shakespeare was a writer of comedies (komik) as well as of tragedies of Voltaire it has been remarked that from his writings "no one would get the slightest inkling of the fact that Shakespeare ever wrote a single comedy."8

If Sumarokov had followed Voltaire's example in regulating Shake-spearean tragedy to suit the taste of a more civilized age, it was to one of the lesser comedies that Catherine turned. By 1786, the year in which Vot kakovo imet' korzinu i bel'e was first performed, Shakespeare was well on the way to becoming the vogue in Europe, and his admirers were beginning to adopt a decidedly less apologetic tone. One of these admirers was the young Karamzin, who in the preface, dated October 15, 1786, to his translation of Julius Caesar (the first reasonably faithful version of a Shakespeare play in Russian, although translated through the medium of French) did not disguise his disdain for Voltaire's efforts to dim the glory of a writer immeasurably his

^{4.} Svodnyi katalog russkoi knigi XVIII veka 1725-1800, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1966), p. 184.

^{5.} A. P. Sumarokov, Polnoe sobranie vsekh sochinenii, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1781), p. 59.

^{6.} A. P. Sumarokov, Isbrannye proizvedeniia (Leningrad, 1957), pp. 117 and 129.

^{7. &}quot;Lettre de M. Algarotti sur la tragédie de Jules César," Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire, vol. 2 (Paris, 1877), p. 313. Although this prefatory letter, which first appeared in the edition of 1736, is attributed to Algarotti, it is most likely from the pen of Voltaire himself. In a "Preface" to the same play, avowedly by the dramatist himself, we find essentially the same view expressed: "Shakespeare était un grand génie, mais il vivait dans un siècle grossier; et l'on retrouve dans ses pièces la grossièreté de ce temps beaucoup plus que le génie de l'auteur (ibid., p. 309).

^{8.} T. R. Lounsbury, Shakespeare and Voltaire (New York, 1902), p. 3.

superior. Since the powerful advocacy of Lessing, Germany had been in the vanguard of the movement to reevaluate Shakespeare, and Catherine read her Shakespeare in German, preferring the thirteen-volume translation of Eschenburg which appeared between 1775 and 1782¹⁰ to the truncated French versions of La Place (of which more later). The imperial authoress did not content herself merely with adapting Shakespeare, but also produced two loosely constructed chronicle plays—Iz zhizni Riurika and Nachal'noe upravlenie Olega in what she fondly imagined to be the manner of the English dramatist (they bear the subtitle "podrazhaniia Shekspiru, bez sokhraneniia teatral'nykh obyknovennykh pravil").

For all this, it must be admitted that Catherine's version of *The Merry Wives* is not much closer in spirit to Shakespeare than Sumarokov's *Gamlet*. It is, indeed, closer to the letter—the external action of the play is adhered to fairly closely—but Shakespeare's generous and essentially nondidactic humor is betrayed by the transformation of Falstaff into Iakov Vasil'evich Polkadov, one of those Frenchified St. Petersburg fops who are such a staple of eighteenth-century Russian comedy. Catherine turned Shakespeare's play into a conventional satirical comedy on the theme of gallomania, in accordance with the classicist notion that the aim of comedy was to instruct and improve.¹¹

Between these two classicizing Shakespearean travesties there appeared another which paid tribute to a more current literary fashion—that of sentimentalism. This is Kheraskov's "sleznaia drama" *Gonimye*, which was produced with considerable success in 1775.

In the course of the 1770s, the sentimentalist drama established itself firmly in St. Petersburg as well as Moscow, in spite of Sumarokov's anguished protests against the "novyi i pakostnyi rod sleznykh komedii." In 1773 M. I. Verevkin produced in his Tak i dolzhno the first native Russian sentimentalist drama, with the typical theme of "dobrodetel' i obiazannost' cheloveka." Kheraskov's two "sleznye dramy" quickly followed, Drug neschastnykh in 1774 and Gonimye in the following year. Kheraskov's previous dramatic productions had been four tragedies (Venetsianskaia monakhinia, Plamena, Marteziia i Falestra, and Borislav), the "geroicheskaia komediia" Bezbozh-

^{9.} N. M. Karamzin, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, vol. 2 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1964), pp. 79-82.

^{10.} A. Lirondelle, Shakespeare en Russic, p. 34.

^{11.} As Sumarokov wrote in his "Epistola I" (Isbrannye proizvedeniia, p. 121): Svoistvo Komedii—izdevkoi pravit' nrav; Smeshat' i pol'zovat'—priamoi ee ustav.

^{12.} In the preface to *Dimitrii Samosvanets* (A. P. Sumarokov, *Polnoe sobranie vsekh sochinenii*, vol. 4, p. 62). The outburst was occasioned by the success enjoyed by a Russian version of Beaumarchais's sentimental drama *Eugénie* in Moscow in 1770.

^{13.} M. P. Alekseev, "D. Didro i russkie pisateli ego vremeni," XVIII vek, vol. 3 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1958), p. 424.

nik, and the first original Russian classicist comedy in verse, Nenavistnik. Although certain of these works (notably Venetsianskaia monakhinia and Bezbozhnik) reveal "bourgeois" tendencies, they hardly prepare us for the full-fledged, one might almost say zestful specimens of the sentimentalist theater which Kheraskov produced in these "tearful" dramas. The model is clearly the Diderot of Le père de famille and Le fils naturel, 14 and Kheraskov is only too successful in reproducing the characteristic features of Diderot's "drames"—the scenes carefully contrived to wring the heart, the eternal harping on morality (the word "dobrodetel" and its derivatives occur no less than thirty-two times in the course of Drug neschastnykh), the high-flown sententious lingo spoken by master and servant alike, and the reliance on extraordinary revelations concerning parentage to bring about a denouement. Drug neschastnykh and Gonimye are, it must be said, tedious examples of a tedious genre.

Goninye, however, stands somewhat apart from the run of sentimentalist dramas in the exotic nature of its setting; instead of contemplating the usual bourgeois interior, we find ourselves transported to a desert island. The situations too are suitably extreme for this wild setting—shipwrecks and armed battles, suicide and murder contemplated if not actually committed—so that the play approaches pure melodrama.

The most interesting thing about *Gonimye* for a modern reader must be the source of its curiously familiar plot. V. N. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross has stated, somewhat vaguely, that Kheraskov borrowed his plot "iz skazanii vremen Karla Velikogo ob izvestnom kavalere Reno." Presumably this assertion, for which there seems to be no solid foundation, stems from the fact that one of the characters of the play (who, moreover, appears only in the third and final act) bears the name of Don Renod. One cannot but be struck, however, by the close parallels between *Gonimye* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; indeed, the plot of *Gonimye* is essentially that of *The Tempest*, divested of supernatural and comic elements. Needless to say, Kheraskov has covered the bare bones that Shakespeare wrapped in the shimmering tissue of his later style with a cloth incomparably inferior—the transformation is the reverse of a sea change—but the bones are not the less plainly discernible for that.

Shakespeare's Prospero, erstwhile Duke of Milan, becomes in Kheraskov's version a Spanish nobleman, Don Gaston. Like Prospero, Don Gaston

^{14.} A spate of translations from Diderot's dramas appeared in the course of the 1760s. Each of Diderot's two dramas was translated several times, Le fils naturel by an anonymous hand in 1764 as Pobochnyi syn, and again by S. I. Glebov in 1766; Glebov likewise translated Le père de famille as Chadoliubivyi otets, and both plays were translated by B. E. Elchaninov.

^{15.} V. N. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka (Moscow, 1960), p. 142.

has sought refuge from his enemy, Don Renod (an amalgam of Shakespeare's Antonio and Alonso) on a desert island (cf. Shakespeare: "The Scene, an uninhabited island,"16 Kheraskov: "Deistvie na pustom ostrove"17), where he lives in a cave ("peshchera"18—cf. Prospero's "full poor cell"19). Al'fons, Don Renod's son (Shakespeare's Ferdinand), is, like Ferdinand, shipwrecked and cast up on the island. Gaston saves him, only to learn from him that his wife has died of grief and that his daughter Zeila (Miranda), whom Al'fons loves, and with whom he was fleeing from his father, has perished in the shipwreck. After a highly emotional scene, Al'fons and Gaston make peace with each other. Renod, we now learn, has landed on the island with an armed band. Zeila, not drowned after all, appears, and there is a joyful reunion. After some misunderstandings and skirmishes, Renod is revealed as the most virtuous villain imaginable. Having thoroughly repented of his evil ways, he has come to the island to bring Gaston a full pardon from the king and to seek reconciliation. Gaston, having saved his former enemy's life from an overzealous servitor (much as Prospero saves Alonso from the dastardly plot concocted by Antonio and Sebastian), forgives him. Renod, Al'fons, and Zeila kneel before Gaston in tribute to his nobility of soul. The young lovers are united and all prepare to set sail for Spain.

Such, in brief, is the action of Gonimye. Certain divergencies from The Tempest will be noted. For example, Zeila, unlike Miranda, is separated from her father in order to provide the opportunity for a pathetic scene of family reunion, entirely in the spirit of the sentimentalist drama. The reference to the death of Gaston's wife, which has no analogy in The Tempest, is another attempt to heighten pathos. Gaston is by no means as awesome a figure as Prospero, who, by the power of his wisdom and magic arts, is always in control of events, godlike and omniscient. Although a figure of extraordinary virtue, Gaston is always humanly involved in the action; he is not aware of Al'fons's identity until it is revealed to him (while Prospero has conjured up a storm with the purpose of bringing Ferdinand to the island). If we are to seek anything as utilitarian as a "moral" in The Tempest, it is surely that:

... the rarer Action is In vertue, than in vengence.²⁰

Prospero, all-wise, all-powerful, refrains from wreaking justified vengeance on his enemies. The moral of *Gonimye* is clearly spelled out, and it is a commonplace one: "Dobrodetel' rano ili pozdno voznagrazhdaetsia."²¹

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16. The Tempest, act 1, sc. 1.
17. M. M. Kheraskov, Tvoreniia, vol. 6 (Moscow, 1796-1800), p. 58.
18. Ibid., p. 59.
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10. Tha., p. 55.

19. The Tempest, act 1, sc. 2. 20. The Tempest, act 5, sc. 1.

21. M. M. Kheraskov, Tvoreniia, vol. 6, p. 112.

Shakespearean scholars have not succeeded in finding a source for the plot of *The Tempest*, and it seems that in this play the dramatist departed from his usual practice and devised an original plot instead of reworking an already existing one.²² It may therefore reasonably be concluded that Kheraskov derived his drama from Shakespeare's, rather than that both plays can be traced to a common source. There is no evidence to show that Kheraskov had any knowledge of English—a rare accomplishment in his day—and the fact that he translated Pope's *House of Fame* from the French²³ and that he followed Lomonosov in transliterating Newton's name as "Nevton,"²⁴ rather than "Niuton" (as did the more linguistically accomplished Kantemir) would seem to indicate the contrary.

It may be concluded with reasonable certainty that Kheraskov's knowledge of *The Tempest* was derived from the prose summary of the play contained in La Place's *Le Théâtre Anglois* (1746),²⁵ a popular work in its day, from which, it is generally agreed, Sumarokov had quarried material for his *Gamlet*.²⁶ If Sumarokov's play, for all its distance from Shakespeare, does contain a few unmistakable verbal echoes of its source which are absent from *Gonimye*, it may be explained by the fact that La Place presented *Hamlet* in a far less summary form than *The Tempest*, translating many of the more famous speeches in full, while in the case of the later play (at this time regarded as one of Shakespeare's minor pieces) he contented himself with a bare outline of the plot.

It is significant that in his account of *The Tempest*, La Place gives no more than a brief mention to the play's comic subplot, adding dismissively: "Ces scènes sont des espèces d'intermèdes, dont Shakespeare faisait usage dans plusieurs de ses pièces, pour égayer la populace."²⁷ This typically French and eighteenth-century attitude to the earthy humor with which Shakespeare did not scorn to leaven his most sublime poetry was one that Kheraskov certainly shared; indeed, it was even shared by so enthusiastic a devotee of the English dramatist as Karamzin, who wrote that what had seemed witty to Shakespeare's contemporaries had now become tedious and disgusting.²⁸ It

^{22.} See the introduction to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, ed., F. Kermode (Cambridge, Mass., 1958).

^{23.} P. N. Berkov, ed., Istoriia russkoi literatury XVIII veka: Bibliograficheskii ukazatel' (Leningrad, 1968), p. 397.

^{24.} M. M. Kheraskov, "Piligrimy," *Tvoreniia*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1796–1800), p. 171; "Ody nravouchitel'nyia," *Tvoreniia*, vol. 7, p. 373.

^{25.} P. A. de La Place, Le Théâtre Anglois, vol. 4 (London, 1746), pp. 297-304.

^{26.} V. N. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, Russkii teatr ot istokov do serediny XVIII veka (Moscow, 1957), p. 204.

^{27.} P. A. de La Place, Le Théâtre Anglois, p. 304.

^{28.} N. M. Karamzin, "Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika," *Izbrannye sochineniia*, vol. 1 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1964), p. 573.

is no surprise, then, that Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban disappeared without trace from Kheraskov's play, to be replaced by one of those devoted retainers typical of sentimentalist drama—a dull race, quite lacking the *brio* of servants in classical comedy. Comic incursions, moreover, would have broken the unified earnestness of tone characteristic of Diderot's kind of sentimentalist drama. Other unities dear to classicism—those of time and place—were still observed in these plays,²⁹ making *The Tempest*, with its unusually compact (both spatially and temporally) action, eminently suitable for adaptation. The great theme of *The Tempest*—reconciliation and forgiveness—was, of course, peculiarly suited to sentimentalist treatment.

A notable feature of *Gonimye* is the exploitation of visual and mechanical stage effects that enable it to escape at once from the airless palace chambers of classical tragedy and the domestic interiors of bourgeois drama. The first act is prefaced by the following stage directions:

Teatr predstavliaet na morskom berege, posredi lesa peshcheru; v volnakh vidny ostatki razbitogo korablia.³⁰

The second act is even more striking, with mysterious chiaroscuro effects and the spectacle of a ship in motion:

Teatr predstavliaet noch'; v more vidno ne bol'shoe morskoe sudno, napolnennoe plavateliami, osveshchaiushchimisia ne bol'shim fonarem.³¹

Such effects as these look back to the elaborate stage machinery of opera seria as well as forward to the spectacular melodramas of the nineteenth century.³²

It is interesting to note that the first opera seria staged in Russia—Francesco Araja's La forza dell'amore e dell'odio—included among its stage effects the spectacle of a ship in full sail.³³ There is, however, a more immediate source for the setting of Gonimye—an opera on the "desert island" theme, L'isola disabitata, with libretto by Metastasio and music by the Nea-

- 29. In later sentimental dramas written in the 1790s—when Kotzebue was his model—Kheraskov introduced comic episodes and ignored the unities.
 - 30. M. M. Kheraskov, Tvoreniia, vol. 6, p. 59.
- 31. Ibid., p. 76. Kheraskov must have been pleased with the success of this effect, since he introduced a similar one in his comic opera *Dobrye soldaty* (1779): ". . . na reke iavliaiutsia suda ubrannyia raznotsvetnymi fonariami i tsvetami. V nikh sidiat Soldaty v zelenykh venkakh, imeiushchie v rukakh vozzhennye fakely" (*Dobrye soldaty* [Moscow, 1782], p. 62).
- 32. In 1821 the indefatigable theatrical entrepreneur Prince Shakhovskoi produced, with great success, his own version of *The Tempest—Buria*—which he described as a "volshebno-romanticheskoe zrelishche (. . .)s khorami, peniem, mashinami, poletami i velikolepnym spektaklem." The romantics (Zhukovskii in particular) had made the supernatural fashionable, and it was this aspect of the play, omitted by Kheraskov, that Shakhovskoi chose to exploit for his spectacular extravaganza (for a description of *Buria* see A. S. Bulgakov, *Rannee znakomstvo*, pp. 78–81, 91–100).
 - 33. Iu. V. Keldysh, Russkaia muzyka XVIII veka (Moscow, 1965), p. 80.

politan composer Tomaso Traetta, then resident in St. Petersburg. L'isola disabitata was first performed in the capital in 1769,34 and was revived there in 1772,35 that is, during the very period (1770-75) of Kheraskov's residence in St. Petersburg as vice-president of the Berg-kollegiia. The scenic effects specified by Metastasio's libretto are very similar to those in Gonimye: the curtain rises in the first act to reveal "a pleasant part of a small and uninhabited Island with a prospect of the sea: several trees of a foreign growth, rude caves and grottoes, with shrubs and flowers."36 Here, too, a ship in motion is among the stage effects—"A ship appears at a distance under sail."37 Although the action of L'isola disabitata has nothing in common with that of Gonimye, the general tone of the opera is distinctly sentimentalist: after many tribulations a long-separated couple are joyously reunited. The plot makes use of the curious device, twice employed by our dramatist,38 of having a lover discover his mistress's presence by noticing an inscription in her hand. Clearly this minor work of Metastasio was known to Kheraskov and must be included with The Tempest as a source of Gonimye.

A few words on the rather large subject of the borrowings from foreign authors made by Russian dramatists of this period are perhaps relevant here. Such purloining—wholesale or piecemeal, acknowledged or unacknowledged—was the common practice of the age. The most notorious practitioner was Kniazhnin (deservedly dubbed "pereimchivyi" by Pushkin), a number of whose plays are "lifted" almost in entirety, and without apology, from the French. Kheraskov seems to have relied more on his own invention than did Kniazhnin, but he too sometimes reworked other men's plays, either openly, as in his adaptation of Pierre Corneille's Le Cid (Tsid), or covertly, as in his Marteziia i Falestra, a free adaptation of Thomas Corneille's Ariane. Sometimes single scenes are identifiable from other plays. In the context of borrowings from Shakespeare, it is of interest that the scene in Kheraskov's tragedy Idolopoklonniki ili Gorislava (1782) in which Vladimir makes the curiously tardy admission to Sviatopolk, who has been plotting against him, that he is

^{34.} R. A. Mooser, Annales de la musique et des musiciens en Russie au XVIIIme siècle, vol. 2 (Geneva, 1948), pp. 92-93.

^{35.} Ibid., p. 154.

^{36.} Dramas and other Poems of the Abbe Pietro Metastasio, translated from the Italian by John Hoole, vol. 2 (London, 1800), p. 393. For a succinct account of Metastasio's popularity in Russia, see David J. Welsh, "Metastasio's Reception in 18th Century Poland and Russia," Italica, 41, no. 1 (1964): 44-46.

^{37.} Dramas and other Poems of the Abbe Pietro Metastasio, p. 398.

^{38.} In his comic opera Milana (ca. 1785) and his sentimental drama Izvinitel'naia revnost' (1790s).

^{39.} Kniazhnin's early tragedies Vladimir i Iaropolk and Ol'ga are closely adapted from Racine's Andromaque and Voltaire's Mérope respectively; his comedy Khvastun is based on de Brueys's L'Important.

his father and shows him a letter in his mother's hand to prove it,⁴⁰ is clearly based on a similar scene between César and Brutus in Voltaire's "improved" version of *Julius Caesar*.

Gonimye, then, is evidence of the steadily growing interest in Shakespeare in eighteenth-century Russia. It was Kheraskov who, as editor of the journal Vechera, had been responsible for the first Russian translation of Shakespeare's poetry (an excerpt from Romeo and Juliet),⁴¹ and we must now recognize that through him a muffled echo of Shakespearean drama reached the ears of Russian theatergoers for the second time.

^{40.} Voltaire, La Mort de César, act 2, sc. 5 (Oeuvres complètes, vol. 3, p. 340); Kheraskov, Idolopoklonniki, act 4, sc. 3 (Tvoreniia, vol. 4, pp. 401-2).

^{41.} Vechera, 1772, no. 2 (P. N. Berkov, "English Plays in St. Petersburg in the 1760's and 1770's," p. 97).