

Shakespeare in Russia : Sumarokov's Hamlet and After

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Shakespeare in Russia*

– Sumarokov's Hamlet and After –

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The name of Shakespeare was known to Russian intellectuals of aristocracy of the 18th century when Aleksandr Petrovich Sumarokov (1718-1777) published in 1748 separately his *Two Epistles* (Dve Epistoly).

And in the second issue of the *Epistle* Sumarokov advised prospective authors to master their grammar and the art of versification before setting out on their professional careers. Sumarokov has it :

Rhyme must not imprison our reason; but she should be our slave. There is no need to pursue her frantically. She should meet reason of her own accord and, arriving when required, be subject to command.

“Constrained verses, “he added,” give the reader no joy; but this aim cannot be achieved by zeal alone, but by diligence and hard work.”¹

Sumarokov went on to enumerate with celebratory zeal great writers and poets of the past and present.

Let us climb Helicon and gaze on the authors who are truly worthy of fame. There Homer reigns, Sappho is there, Theocritus, Aeschylus, Anacreon, Sophocles and Euripides, Menander, Aristophanes and raptured Pindar, sweet Ovid, incomparable Virgil, Terence, Persius, Plautus, Horace, Juvenal, Lucretius and Lucan, Tibullus, Propertius, Gallus, Malherbe, Rousseau, Quinault, the famed choir of the French; Milton, and *Shakespeare, though unenlightened*; Tasso is there and

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1. Lang, D.M., “Boileau and Sumarokov-The Manifesto of Russian Classicism-”, *Modern Language Review*, vol. 43 (1948), p. 501.

Ariosto, Camoens, and Lope de Vega; Vondel and Gunther are there, and witty Pope. Let us follow such great writers as these.² (*italics mine*)

Sumarokov added an index of proper names to his *Epistle*, the title of which was “Primechanyakh na Upotreblenye v Sikh Epistolakh Stikhotvortsev Imena.”

In the *Index* Sumarokov wrote of Shakespeare: “Shakespeare, English writer of tragedy and comedy; there is much of poor stuff and much more of good stuff. Died on the 23rd of April in 1616 at the age of 53.”

Although Sumarokov had thorough knowledge of French literature and a good command of French, he seemed not to have learned English³ in a gymnasium for cadets in the city of St-Petersburg, capital of Imperial Russia.

At any rate Sumarokov cites the date for the death of Shakespeare, and it seemed that he had obtained this knowledge from some dictionary or directory of west Europe. With no knowledge of English and with no first-hand knowledge of the writer of the great tragedy, he did not get correct even the name of the author of *Hamlet*. He wrote in Russian “‘*Shekespir*’ although not enlightened.” Correct Russian transliteration for Shaekskeare is ‘*Shekspir*’.

Besides Sumarokov seemed to have pronounced this Shakespearean tragedy as (hæmlet), not as (hæmlét) with a stress on the last syllable of the name of the title and of the protagonist of this most famous play of Shakespearean production.⁴

This pronunciation, (hæmlet) was for long used and heard in a stage

2. D.M. Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 501. Lang quotes this passage and the preceding one from Sumarokov’s work, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii* (2nd ed. Moscow, 1878), vo. 1, p. 336, ll. 21-5 & 26-28.

3. Lang has it that “Sumarokov, who knew French extremely well, ever learnt English or read Shakespeare otherwise than in translation.” (*op. cit.*, p. 67-8), but I take side with Burgakov’s view that “Sumarokov, *who had not known English*, borrowed his tragedy from a French retelling translation of de La Place (*italics mine*). (A. S. Burgakov, “Ranee Znakomstvo s Shekspirom v Rossii,” *Teatral’ noe Nasledie* Sb. I, L., 1934, s. 48-9.

4. M. P. Alekseev, “K Istorii Napisaniya Imeni ‘Shekspira’ v Rossii,” *Problemy Sovremennoj Filologii*, 1965, M., s. 306.

for *Hamlet* in the eighteenth century of Imperial Russia.

Sumarokov's pronunciation (hæmlet) with stressed first syllable seems most likely to show that Sumarokov's knowledge of 'much of poor stuff' in Shakespeare (in the above cited Sumarokov's 'Note' (Primechanie) for his *Two Epistles*) was not of a French but of a German origin. M. P. Alekseev rightly guessed that Sumarokov took the date and age of Shakespeare's birth and death from *Jöcher's Comendiösos Gelehrten-Lexicon* (1733, 1st edition), since there is a passage in this *Lexicon* which relates:

"Shakespeare (Wilh.) = English dramatist. Born in Stratford in 1564; was poorly educated; did not know Latin but reached eminence in poetry (brachte er aber in Poesie sehr hoch). He was merry of nature, but could also be serious; excels in tragedy. He died at Stratford on 23rd of April in 1616 at the age of 55.⁵ The name of *Hamlet*, a seminal Shakespearean tragedy, follows that of its author."

Sumarokov's indictment of Shakespeare; 'There is much poor stuff and much more good stuff in Shakespeare' seemingly stems from Voltaire's preface to his tragedy, *Semiramid*. (1746)⁶

Jöcher's Lexicon takes its root in the biography of Shakespeare authored by Nicholas Row, dramatist. Row made a preface of this biography for his seven-volumed edition of *The Works of Shakespeare* (London, 1702).⁷ The true date of Shakespeare's birth and death, however, appeared in French dictionaries only some ten years after Row's work, and Row in his turn took this data from the tomb inscription of Shakespeare.

Voltaire's ignorance of this fact is well attested by his remark in his *Lettres philosophiques sur l'Angleterre* (1734) to the effect that Shakespeare worked approximately at the same time when Roper de Vega did.⁸

5. M. P. Alekseev, *Shakespeare i Russkaya Kul'tura*, M-L., 1965 (824 pp.) s. 20.

6. M. P. Alekseev, *ibid.*, s. 20.

7. M. P. Alekseev, *ibid.*, s. 21.

8. M. P. Alekseev, *ibid.*, s. 20. "Shakespeare, qui passait pour Corneille des Anglais, fleurissait à peu près dans le temps de Lope de Vega." Raymond Naves (ed.) Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, Paris: Garnier Frères, 1964, p. 104.

The name of Shakespearean tragedy *Hamlet* had not obtained its currency among Russian intellectuals of the mid-eighteenth century until Sumarokov's *Hamlet: A Tragedy* was published in 1748 in the city of St -Petersburg. This was the year for the publication of his *Epistles* cited at the head of this paper.

This *Hamlet* was first performed on the stage at the court theater by a gang of military cadets of Shlyakhet Corps in 1750. This was the first performance of *Hamlet* in Russia.⁹

Alexander Petrovich Sumarokov was one of the prominent figures of the Russian neo-classical school. He was the first professional belletrist, and in his thirty years of literary life he produced a steady stream of tragedies, comedies, operas, epistles, odes, epigrams, fables, eclogues, satires and elegies.¹⁰

Contrary to Vasili Kirillovich Trediakovsky (1703-69), who hailed from a priest' family, and to Mikhail Vasilievich Lomonosov (1711-65), a living encyclopedia of a fisherman's descent, Sumarokov was of an aristocracy. His father was a high-ranking government official, which had promised him a bright career in the court of Imperial Russia. But Aleksandr Petrovich took to a literary profession.

For some time as a young man he served the Imperial Army and in 1756 he took a post of a newly founded theater director. In 1761 he retired from the government office and devoted himself to a work of literary profession.

He was a dramatist in the earlier days of his careers and then he put his hand to every genre of literature. He participated in the foundation of the first Russian journal for belles-lettres, *Trudolubimaya Pchela* in 1759. For the publication of the journal, which lasted less than a year in life, Sumarokov engaged the efforts of many of his pupils and followers for contributing articles. He himself had managed to write 113 poems out of 130 poems which were printed in the short-lived *Pchela*.

He strived to have the works of writers and the performances of the

9. D. M. Lang, "Sumarokov's 'Hamlet' : A Misjudged Russian Tragedy of the Eighteenth Century," *MLR*, vol. 43 (1948) p. 67

10. D. M. Lang, (Voileau and Sumarokov: ..., " *MLR*, vol. 43 (1948), p. 500.

actors engage the attention of the educated public of these days. He sent actors of the newly-founded theatre to a privileged school of aristocratic class to have them receive a good education. and later he managed to have them wear a sword as a member of the nobility in the court did.¹¹

Sumarokov knew Sakespeare's *Hamlet* through a prose translation of P-A. de la Place's prose translation of the tragedy (cf. fn., 3), which appeared in the 2nd book of *Le Théâtre Anglois*¹² In this introductory article to the second book of *Le Théâtre Anglois* he defended Shakespeare against criticisms levelled from the camp of strict adherents of a theory of classicism.¹³

In his life Sumarokov wrote nine tragedies, and in 1747 he published his first tragedy, *Khorëv*, written in strict adherence to the rules of the drama of European classicism of those days.

His second tragedy *Hamlet* published in 1748, as stated above, had no lines which mentioned the name of Shakespeare. That explains the extent with which Sumarokov had taken great liberties with the original Shakesperean *Hamlet*.

The idea of writing *Hamlet-A Tragedy* (in Russian; *Gamlet -Tragediya*), most probably had occurred to him when he was reading la Place's prose translation of this tragedy. Sumarokov had the compunction to have his *Hamlet* conformed to the stage rules of French neo-classicism, and eliminated many *dramatis personae* from his 'Gamlet', including the Ghost and the Grave-Diggers.¹⁴ A famous rule of trinity has it that one act should be performed in a play in one place and be acted out in the passage of 24 hours.¹⁵ On the other hand philosophy of enlightenment of the 18th century forbids the appearance of a ghost.¹⁶

So that Hamlet, prince of Denmark, in Sumarokov's version, did not

11. D. D. Blagoj, *Istoriya Russkoj Literaturyi XVIII Veka*, M., 1945, s. 155.

12. de La Place wrote a preface entitled "Discours sur le Théâtre Anglois" to his *Le Théâtre Anglois* (T. 1 ; 1745-1748) and in the 2nd book a prose translation of *Hamlet* was published as part of a collected work of English dramatists.

13. M. P. Alekseev, *op. cit.*, 1965, s. 22. & A. S. Burgakov, *op. cit.*, s. 49.

14. D. M. Lang, "Sumarokov's Hamlet...", 1948, p. 68.

15. D. D. Blagoj, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

16. *ibid.*, p. 165.

see his father Ghost 'on a platform before the castle in Elsinore,'¹⁷ but in his dream in a bed.¹⁸

Sumarokov threw Hamlet and Ophelia into agonizing conflict of love against duty, and to make the best of this love versus duty ambivalence into full relief, he drastically cut the number of *drmatiss personae* and retained main characters only.¹⁹ He introduced confidante(s) for the protagonists in conformity with the texture of classical tragedy.

The characters for the *Gamlet-Tragediya* are; Claudius, usurper of the Danish throne; Gertrude his wife; Hamlet (Gamlet), son of Gertrude; Polonius; confidant of Claudius; Ophelia, daughter of Polonius; Armance, confidant of Hamlet, Flemina, confidante of Ophelia, Ratuda, nurse of Ophelia, Hamlet's page and warriors.

Sumarokov's *Hamlet*, which had been in rhyme of Alexandrine, opens with the scene of Hamlet talking of his dream in which he had met with his father., who had called for Hamlet to revenge for his murder. Sumarokov had aided by rationalist philosophy of the age of enlightenment, and did not allow his Hamlet to see a ghost of his father in his waking hours.

The death of father king had already been told to Hamlet by his friend, confidant, Armance. Hamlet had also had the knowledge that Polonius, father of his beloved Ophelia had been a culprit in the murder of his late father.

Hamlet, thus trapped in the iron claws of his fate, falls prey to the classical Corneilleian conflict between love for Ophelia and duty for his late father. In tune with a manner of a classical tragedy Hamlet's role is to call for pity and commiseration in the heart of the spectators.

Hamlet in declamation renounces Ophelia: "I will prove by my misfortune that I can overcome passion. I love Ophelia; but a noble heart must be upright whether in chain or at liberty."²⁰

17. *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene I, Stage Description.

18. Blagoj, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

19. "To have spectators' attention focus on the acts of a play Sumarokov boiled down the chacters for a play. *For Sumarokov's tragedies main characters are not more than six to eight in number.*" (Blagoj., *ibid.*, p. 159. italics is mine.)

20. D. N. Lang, "Sumarokov's 'Hamlet'...", 1948, p. 68.

Gertrude appears and repents of her accomplice in the murder of her former husband. Hamlet spares her because she is his mother.

On the other hand another protagonist in agony is Ophelia, love of Hamlet. She suffers so between her love of beloved Hamlet and her filial duty toward Polonius, her father.

Hamlet and Ophelia are represented simply as virtuous characters, and diametrically Claudius and Polonius are shown evil ones;²¹ there are no 'round and flat characters', as E. M. Forster has it.²² in Sumarokov's *Hamlet*. Claudius, for instance, is portrayed as evil incarnate.

When Nature brought me into the world,
She put all ferocity into my heart.
To eradicate me out my inborn evils,
O ! Upbringing ! you could not do it.²³

Claudius and Polonius overhears Gertrude's confession for repentance of her too soon marriage with Claudius.

Claudius falls on his knees and prays. This scene, Sumarokov himself was to confess, recalls distantly Act 3, Scene 3 of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Polonius, confident and accomplice of evil Claudius, promised to marry Ophelia with Claudius out of his mercenary-minded motive. Polonius also persuades Claudius to murder Gertrude for Ophelia's hand.

Ophelia knows the black scheme of her father, and frantically opposes against her marriage with the aged usurper. Unable to force her into his evil design Polonius put his daughter in custody of guards.²⁴

Claudius' kneeling repentance in prayer is sincere:

'O God, before Thee lies this loathsome man, who has filled the country with his wickedness, an assailant of truth, defender of shamelessness, enemy of Thee, of my neighbour, a murderer and a tyrant ! I can no longer endure my own evil deeds; compel and force me to forgiveness ! Instil the

21. A. S. Burgakov, (Ranee Znakomstvo s Shekspirom v Rossii," *Teatral'noe Nasledie*, Sb. 1, Leningrad, 1934, s. 51.

22. *Aspects of the Novel*, 1927; 1962 (Pelican Books) p. 75

23. Act I, Scene I of Sumarokov's *Gamlet-Tragediya*: quoted by A. S. Burgakov in his "Ranee Znakomstvo...", 1934, s. 50. The quotation is in Russian; (translation is mine)

24. A. S. Burgakov, "Ranee Znakomstvo...", 1948, p. 51.

desire to seek Thy grace towards me; I cannot find this longing within myself, filled as I am with all ungodly passions. No spark of goodness is in my conscience. How can I conceive a way to bring about my repentance? I cannot abandon my kingdom. How can I atone and escape Hell if my thoughts remain far from Thee?²⁵

For comparison I quote the same kneeling scene of Claudius from Shakespearean original;²⁵ with abridgement of part which does not seem fit for comparing with Sumarokov's *Hamlet*.

O my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
It has the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder ! Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will.
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;

—

— What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow?

—

My fault is past. But O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder" ?
That cannot be, since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardon'd, and retain the' offence ?

—

There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd,
To give in evidence. what then what rests ?
Try what repentance can. What can it not ?
Yet what can it when one can not repent ?
O wretched State ! O bosom black as death !

25 D. M. Lang, "Sumarokov's *Hamlet*," 1948, p. 68.

O limed soul, that struggling to be free
 Art more engag'd ! Help angels make assay :
 Bow stubborn knees; and, heart with strings of steel,
 Be soft as sinews of the new born babe !

A casual glance over both versions of the Scene for Claudius kneeling in prayer would drive it home that the differences are so great that Sumarokov's passage seems to be a creation in its own right.²⁷

Glaring villain that he is, Claudius desires but hesitates in winning the heart of Ophelia, but Polonius reassures him.

Grey hairs pass unnoticed beneath a crown; and you, O King, are thus of the same age as my daughter.²⁸

Ophelia, however, is firm in her love of Hamlet, and would not obey Polonius, and as stated earlier for this violation of filial duty she is thrown in custody for opposing the king's will.

Hamlet in the meanwhile vainly endeavours to renounce his love of Ophelia and utters the famous monologue of 'To be or not to be'. This monologue is, according to Sumarokov himself, reminiscent of Shakespearean monologue by Hamlet at the stage of Act 3, Scene 1.

...To open the door of the tomb and my miseries ? or still to suffer in this world ? When I die, I shall fall asleep - fall asleep and slumber ? But what dreams will haunt this night ! To die - and sink into the grave - a delightful repose; but what will follow sweet slumber? We cannot tell. We know what a generous God promises to us; there is hope, the spirit is cheerful; but nature is weak. O death ! hour of adversity ! most terrible moment !...But if life here in misery were eternal, who would wish not for this calm sleep ? And who could bear the persecution of ill-fortune, sickness,

26. *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene iii p. 98 (Tokyo, Shinozaki-Shorin, 1959)

27. "His (Sumarokov's) *Hamlet* is by no means the vulgar pastiche which his detractors represent it to be; it was the best independent treatment of the subject which a dramatist could hope to make acceptable to Russian audience in the middle of the eighteenth century," D. M. Lang, "Sumarokov's 'Hamlet'---," 1948, p. 72.

28. D. M. Lang, *ibid.*, p. 68.

poverty and the assaults of the mighty, the injustice of unscrupulous judges, robbery, insult, wrath, the infidelity of friends, the venom which the lips flattery pour into the hearts of the great ?
...

Consolation ! why didst thou raise false hopes in my mind ? I may not die, but must do what truth has today commanded my conscience to accomplish.²⁹

Sumarokov's Polonius is not stabbed by the sword behind a curtain, but gives a helping hand to Claudius to kill Hamlet, the king.

This Polonius of Sumarokov's persuasion is infuriated with Ophelia being adamant in her refusal of marriage with Claudius, and in a fit of temper nearly killed her but Hamlet enters in time to save her.

Polonius is carried off by guards and is placed in custody in his turn.

In the words of Hamlet we, spectators, are informed that Claudius and Polonius have sent a gang of assassins to murder Hamlet and Gertrude.

Hamlet drove away the gang and then killed Claudius. He is now striving to get an opportunity to kill Polonius, accomplice of Claudius.

Ophelia knows what Hamlet is brewing for and she declares that she would leave him for the love of her father unless he renounces his scheme.

Again the dilemma, an equivalent of which one could find in *Le Cid*, is set in relief, but luck has it that on the last scene a soldier enters and announces that Polonius has killed himself.

The *Hamlet* of Sumarokov's creation ends with the scene where Hamlet and Ophelia are preparing for their marriage and coronation for the Danish throne.

In Sumarokov's *Hamlet* love is praised and duty fulfilled. Sumarokov conformed rigidly to the formulas of tragedy in classicism, and aided by the rules of trinity. He gave as much space to the narration of what main characters have been and is doing as to actual performances of the protagonists. This is another trait of the classical staging in the middle of the eighteenth century.

29. D. M. Lang, *ibid.*, p. 69.

As I related earlier, Sumarokov had to take much liberties with Shakespearean *Hamlet* because of the temper of the time and place under which he had to be working.

Sumarokov was severely criticized by Trediakovsky of his *Gamlet - Tragediya* for the license he had had with the original of Shakespeare.³⁰

Trediakovsky wrote a letter of criticism in 1750 entitled 'From Friend to Friend' (Ot priyatelya ku priyatelyu) and in it Trediakovsky demolished Sumarokov's works starting at his first tragedy, *Khorëv* (1748).

Khorëv was the first tragedy in Russia composed in Alexandrines and conforming to the three unities.

Osnel'da loves Khorëv, but he is a brother of Kiy, who has usurped a throne off her father Zakhlokh. Osnel'da refuses to be a wife of Khorëv. Khorëv loves Osnel'da but he is to wage war against Zavlov by his brother's command.

Khorëv was typical of classical tragedy, and quite rightly Trediakovsky disparaged *Khorëv* saying that it had been written solely on the pattern of a French tragedy. He set out next to Sumarokov's second tragedy, *Hamlet - Tragediya*, Trediakovsky put it: "*Hamlet* was translated, as authoritative witnesses affirm, into prose from English Shakespeare and from this prose translation our honourable author made his verse work." Trediakovsky persists: "No, read for a while; there are none of his own in his work that are not of others. His caustic comedy is not his, but Golbergov's and *Hamlet*, it is Shakespeare's."³¹

'Authoritative witnesses' must have recollected de La Place's French prose translation of *Hamlet* in their minds when Trediakovsky wrote of 'a prose translation of English Shakespeare.'

De La Place's translation was published in 1745 in London, so that Trediakovsky seems not to have access to this French prose of Shakespeare. That is because he wrote vaguely of 'authoritative witnesses'.

Trediakovsky wrote in 1735 *Epistle of Russian Poesie to Appolo*,

30. M. P. Alekseev, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

31. *loc. cit.* & fn. 12

which was later bound in his *The way of Writing Russian Poetry*.

In this *Epistle* Shakespeare's name was not mentioned. For Trediakovsky the only British muse was Milton in his *Paradise Lost*.

Enraged with this criticism Sumarokov retorted on Trediakovsky with his "Answer to the Critic" (Otvét na Kritiku). "Khorëv," Sumarokov wrote, "he said, I took all from Corneille, Racine and Voltaire; especially from Racine's *Phédre*. This is not right. Even if there are any imitations, these are five or six verses and translations, which I took unawares. I am not ashamed of these little bits. Even Racine, great poet and famous tragedian, imitated translation from Euripides for his 'Iphigénie' and for 'Phédre' poetry. However nobody accuses him of weaknesses; that is impossible."³²

Sumarokov goes on, "I do not know from whom he heard, but Trediakovskij said, my *Hamlet* is translated from a French prose version (i. e. de La Place's) of an English tragedy by Shakespeare. In this he is mistaken. My *Hamlet*, excepting a monologue at the end of Act 3 and Claudius kneeling on his knees, is not at all similar to Shakespearean tragedy."³³

Sumarokov's *Hamlet* is undoubtedly his own creation and deserves to be judged on its pretension to literary merits as the first Russian tragedy of neo-classicism persuasion.

In having established St-Petersburg theatre Sumarokov and his collaborators, Volkov and Dmitrievsky, had to ensure the patronage of the Empress Elizabeth. For this reason and for other historico-political complications of mid-18th century in Russia a French styled neo-classical tragedy was the only one that was congenial and enjoyable to courtiers and grandees in the court.

In recent years there have been endeavours to show that in the teeth of the traditional views so far held by European and, for that matter, by Russian scholarship of Shakespeare Sumarokov's *Hamlet* is more true to Shakespeare's original.³⁴

32. V. G. Belinsky, *Sobranie Sochnenij*, T. 2 (v 3 tomakh) 1948, M., s. 384.

33. *loco. cit.*

34. Yu. V. Semenov, "Report" in the Shakespearean Convention of BTO in April in 1946: "On Earlier Shakespeare in Russia," Quoted by M. P. Zagorsky, "Shakespeare in Russia" ("Shekspir v Rossii," *Shekspirovsky Sbornik*, 1947, M., s. 102, fn. 1.)

A riddle remains for the source of the original of Sumarokov's *Hamlet*. What sort(s) of text(s) Sumarokov used for his *Gamlet - Tragediya*? There was no German translation of *Hamlet* available in Russia in the mid-eighteenth century. So that Sumarokov is said to have used Voltaire's translations of *Hamlet*. One is a free translation in verse form and the other is a prose translation which is faithful to the original.

The latter was the one which Sumarokov used for his *Gamlet*. To be exact, the famous monologue of *Hamlet*; 'To be or not to be' is translated by Voltaire and included in the 18th book of his *Lettres philosophiques* (1734) under the subtitle of "Sur la tragédie."

M. P. Aleseev relates in his encyclopedic book on *Shakespeare and Russian Culture* (*Shekspir i Russkaya Kul'tura*, 1965, p. 24) that

Voltaire's translation of the famous monologue is "free style verse in rhyme' and has some digressions to clerical and atheistic themes.

Voltaire in his turn boasts that 'Ne croyez pas que j'aie rendu ici l'Anglais mot pour mot; malheur aux faiseurs de traductions littérales, qui en traduisant chaque parole énervent le sens !"³⁵

There is, however, no unmistakable evidence that Sumarokov had read Voltaire's prose translation or versified one, although late Alekseev sided with the former's possibility.

And now with no scrutiny of collation and comparison of Sumarokov's *Gamlet* with French equivalents by Voltaire and by de La Place, it is a common knowledge that Sumarokov's *Hamlet* takes its rise at his acquaintance with de La Place's abridged prose translation of this tragedy, which was put in the second volume of *Théâtre Anglois*.

In sum although Sumarokov's *Hamlet* has nothing common in structure and substance with the original Shakespearean tragedy, it is a superb work of creation, and in revealing Shakespeare's genius Sumarokov's *Gamlet* is a pioneering breakthrough for Shakespearean scholarship in the mid-eighteenth century Russia.³⁶

It is a wonder in surprise that his play was performed in 1750 full

35. Raymond Nave (introd., notes, choix de variantes et rapprochements), Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques ou Lettres anglaises avec le texte complet des remarques sur les Pensées de Pascal*, (Paris: Garnier Frères) 1964, p. 107.

36. M. P. Alekseev, *op. cit.*, p. 28, fn. 30 & 31.

nineteen years before the first French dramatic version of *Hamlet*, that of Ducis, was acted which was quite as un-Shakespearean as Sumarokov's.³⁷

Stage history of Sumarokov's *Hamlet*, on Alekseev's testimony³⁸ is little known. The fame of the Russian *Hamlet* in the contemporary literature must not be accepted at its face value.

A court theatre at St-Petersburg city was opened on the 29th of February in 1750 and, on the 15th of September in a chamber at the court *Hamlet* was rehearsed; actors were cadets of military corps of the nobility. And on the 6th of November in 1755 *Hamlet* was staged on the Opera House; on the 22nd of January in the court theatre, and in October in 1760 in the Opera Theater in Moscow *Hamlet* was produced on the stage.³⁹

However Shakespeare's name came to be widely known to the Russians in the 18th century when in 1787 Karamzin (1766-1826) wrote on Shakespeare to his translation of *Julius Ceaser*.

Nevertheless it was on the 22nd of January in 1837 that Shakespearean *Hamlet* was performed and acclaimed on the stage of Petrovsky Theatre with Mochalov acting as Hamlet, prince of Denmark and protagonist.

Belinsky (1811-1848), along with Dobloljubov and Chernyshevsky, is now in the Soviet Union highly made much of as a revolutionary democrat.⁴⁰ He died in the prime of his life at the age of 37 from tuberculosis, as a Greek poet Menander has it: 'Those whom God love die young.'

Belinsky was working for the editorial board of 'Moskovsky Nabljudatel', (Moscow Spectator) and as a literary critic, he attended first on the premiér and secondly on the performance on the 27th of January

He wrote to his friend A. A. Kraevsky (1810-1889) a letter dated the 4th of February of 1837.

"Soon I will send you an article on Hamlet on the stage of Moscow. Print the article from the first to the last. The subject for the article is very interesting. We saw a miracle; Mochalov acting 'Hamlet', which he

37. D. M. Lang, *op. cit.*, "Sumarokov's 'Hamlet'---," 1948, p. 70.

38. Alekseev, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

39. M. P. Alekseev, *op. cit.*, 1965, p. 25.

40. Baler'yan polyansky (P. I. Lebedev), *Tri Belikiye Russkikiye Demokraty*, M., 1938, s. 3.

had performed superably. The audience was in ecstasy. Two times the theater was a full house. After the close of each performance of the play Mochalov was called two times into the stage."⁴¹

After this first performance in Russia of 'Hamlet' on the stage of the Petrovsky (of the later *Malyj T'eatr*) Shakespeare's works were translated and performed throughout in Russia and the Soviet Union in succession with ever increasing width and breadth.

For the years 1837 through 1848 twenty-two new translations appeared and six of them were performed on the stage.

Mochalov's 'Hamlet' was based on the translation of *Hamlet* from Shakespearean original.

Characterization of 'Hamlet' has also seen vicissitudes.⁴² Goethe asserts that 'the impossible was not ordered to him, that was not the impossible in itself, but what was impossible for him.'⁴³

Turgenev wrote: "He completely lives for himself; he is egoist, but even an egoist can not but believe in himself. To believe is possible only so far as one believes beyond us and above us."⁴⁴ ("Gamlet i Don kixot")⁴⁵

41. "V. G. Belinsky: Iz Pis'ma A. A. Kraevskomu," in *Pavel Stepanovich Mochalov: Zametki o Teatre, Pis'ma, Stikh, Poesy & Sovremenniki o P. S. Mocharove*. Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 'Iskusstvo': Moskva, 1953, s. 148. (Translation from Russian is mine)

42. In West Europe Goethe in his *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795) wrote of 'Hamlet' as "Great deed which had been lain on the soul which was incapable of carrying it out," In Russia excepting Sumarokov's *Hamlet* (1748) Pushkin took to the theme in 1836 in his poem *Pindemonti* when he quoted "word, word, word". from Shakespearean *Hamlet* (Act II, Scene II.). For the theme of Russian Hamlet interpretation. Ju. D. Levin, "Russkij Gamletizm," in M. P. Aleseev, (ed.), *Ot Romantizma k Realizmu*, L., 1978, p. 189-236.

43. "----- jede Pflicht ist ihm heilig, diese zu schwer. *Das unmögliche wird von ihm gefordert, nicht das unmöglich an sich, sondern das, was ihm unmöglich ist.* Wie er sich windet, dreht angstigt, vor und zurück tritt, immer erinnert wird, sich immer erinnert und zuletzt fast seinen Zweck aus dem Sinne verliert, ohne doch jemals wieder froh zu werden," *Goethes Werke: Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Leipzig & Wien: Bibliographisches Institute, 1929, Bd. 9, s. 270.

44. Turgenev states in the beginning of this lecture that "the first edition of the tragedy of Shakespeare, *Hamlet* and the first part of Cervantes' *Don-Quixote* were published in the same year in the very beginning of the 18th century." He remembered incorrectly; the fact is that *Hamlet* was published in 1603, *Don-Quixote* in 1605.

45. *N. S. Turgenev: Sobranie Sochinenij v Dvenadtsati tomakh*. Izbrannye Literaturno-kriticheskie Stat'i, Rechi, Vospominanija (1843-1881), M: Kudozh. Lit., 1979, Tom 12, s. 196. (Translation from Russian is mine)

The subject of the fate of Shakespearean plays and performances of them in Russia and in the Soviet Union requires another scrutiny in Russian historiography of Shakespeare, and a full-fledged book for which I am now in preparation.

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* Photographic reproductions which stand at front of this paper are the following.

1. A Poster for the staging of *Hamlet*, in which Mochalov appeared as 'Hamlet'.
2. A title page of I. A. Aksenov's *Hamlet* (Moskva, 1930)
3. A gravure of Vissarion Grigor' evich Belinskij by F. I. Jordan (1859).
4. A title page of B. G. Belinskij's "*Hamlet*" *Drama Shekspira : Mochalov v Roli Gamleta* (Moskva, 1956).