Women in Europe read and translate Shakespeare

Kobiety w Europie czytają i tłumaczą Szekspira

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Abstract
Ben Jonson (1573‑1637), in his eulogy published with the First Folio in 1623 and entitled 'To the memory of my beloved, The AUTHOR Master William Shakespeare', created a prophetic image of Shakespeare as an omnipresent influence 'To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.' In the seventeenth century, thanks to the entrepreneurship of English Comedians, the word of the Bard penetrated Northern and Eastern Europe. However, it was the eighteenth century, with its heated debate over the 'merits' and 'faults' of Shakespearean works going on both sides of the English Channel, which generated massive interested in the Elizabethan playwright. This, in turn, paved the way for the first translations of Shakespeare into French, German, Polish or Russian that allowed the Bard to 'speak' other languages and for good anchored his works in the rich cultures of Continental Europe. Shakespeare found his translators among French enlightened elite, German romantics, Polish aristocracy or Russian royalty. The aim of this article is to highlight crucial contribution of women into Shakespeare criticism and translation of his works. It shows pivotal role that Shakespeare Ladies

Club played in propagating the Bard's repertoire in London theatres, analyses critical essays written by the renowned members of the Bluestocking society and presents women of Continental Europe who either encouraged translation of Shakespeare or made their own attempts at it.

Abstrakt

Ben Jonson (1573–1637), w swoim poemacie opublikowanym w Pierwszym Folio w 1623 i zatytułowanym „Ku pamięci mojego ukochanego, AUTORA Mistrza Williama Szekspira", stworzył proroczy wizerunek Szekspira jako wszechobecnego wpływu „któremu wszystkie sceny Europy hołd są winne"[1]. W XVII wieku, dzięki przedsiębiorczości angielskich komediantów, twórczość Barda trafiła na tereny Europy Północnej i Wschodniej. Jednakże to w wiek XVIII, w którym po obu stronach Kanału La Manche rozgorzała debata na temat 'zalet' i 'wad' twórczości Szekspira, wykreował niebywałe wręcz zainteresowanie tym autorem. To z kolei stworzyło ogromne zapotrzebowanie na tłumaczenia jego sztuk, które powoli zaczęły się pojawiać w języku francuskim, niemieckim, polskim czy rosyjskim. Szekspir znalazł tłumaczy wśród francuskiej oświeconej elity, niemieckich romantyków, polskiej arystokracji czy rosyjskiego rodu królewskiego. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest podkreślenie istotnego wkładu kobiet w rozwój krytyki Szekspirowskiej oraz tłumaczenie jego twórczości. Artykuł odwołuje się do ważnej roli jaką odegrały członkinie Shakespeare Ladies Club w propagowaniu repertuaru Szekspirowskiego w londyńskich teatrach, analizuje eseje krytyczne autorstwa znanych reprezentantek stowarzyszenia Bluestocking a w końcu omawia twórczość i działalność tych kobiet, które albo aktywnie wspierały projekty tłumaczeń twórczości Szekspira albo same się tym parały.

1 Translation mine

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In 1730s Shakespeare was the central figure of English literary debate. Moreover, he, as the 'Poetical Church and State' of England, as John Dryden had previously labelled him in 1693, was at that time as frequently read as he was seen. His complete works had been edited by Rowe in 1709, Pope in 1725, and Theobald in 1733, and this was only the beginning of an explosion of editorial and critical interest in Shakespeare in the eighteenth century. Publishers such as Jacob Tonson were also beginning to bring out versions of the individual plays that were within the financial means of those who could not afford the expensive editions. The price of such editions was further lowered by the copyright war raging between Tonson and Robert Walker. In addition, the reading public was expanding at this time as a result of an increase in literacy among the middle classes, so more and more readers would be familiar with Shakespeare's plays and would naturally be inclined to want to see them on stage as well as read in the study (Ritchie, 2008: 58).

The growing reverence to his text led to deep dissatisfaction with the radical adaptations produced by the Restoration theatre. They drastically altered Shakespearean text to conform to the tastes and sensibilities of the times. It was Sir William D'Avenant who conflated *Much Ado about Nothing* with *Measure for Measure* thus supplying the Restoration theatre with the first adaptation of Shakespeare. However, the most infamous example is Nahum Tate with his 1680 revision of *King Lear*, which surprised audiences with a resolute happy ending: Cordelia being reunited with her father and conveniently married to Edgar. Similar eviscerating changes were performed by Tate on his adaptation of *Richard II*. The all too much skillful and concerned adaptor went to great lengths to make Richard a good king and even gave him a loving wife as a proof of his goodness. All in a desperate attempt to present Richard as a 'Prudent Prince, Preferring the Good of his Subjects to his own private Pleasure' (qtd.Vickers, 1995, vol.1: 4–7).

Although relatively few new adaptations were written in the late 1730s, Shakespeare's plays were staged in increasing numbers. After the passing of the Licensing Act of 1737, which limited the London theatre world to two patent houses and stipulated that all new plays and additions to old plays had to be approved by the Lord Chamberlain, theatre managers deliberately turned to Shakespeare to avoid all the licensing procedures. The Lord Chamberlain's office proved particularly keen to exercise its right of censorship and suppressed several new plays. Thus, the production of new drama became

a risky business and managers tended to rely on stock plays, which were safer (Ritchie, 2008: 58).

As Fiona Ritchie argues convincingly, these factors are undoubtedly essential for understanding why there was a resurgence of interest in presenting Shakespeare plays in the theatre in their original form during this period but there is one more crucial factor to be accounted for, namely the women in the theatre audience. The existence of the Shakespeare Ladies Club is a tantalizing detail of eighteenth-century theatre history. This group of women seems to have formed towards the end of 1736 and actively pressed London theatre managers for two theatrical seasons to include more Shakespeare plays in the repertoire and even raised subscription to achieve the aim (2008: 59).

There is comparatively little evidence or information about this organization. Michael Dobson addressed this issue in his book *The Making of the National Poet* (1992) and succeeded in uncovering three members of the club including its leader. That was possible thanks to a poem by Thomas Cooke full of praises for the for a certain 'Lady of Quality' which could be clearly identified as the leader of the Ladies' Club, a manuscript poem and a published play by two the than contemporary writers who openly admitted to be among the Club's fervent supporters (148). Thomas Cooke's poem *An Epistle to the Right Honourable The Countess of Shaftesbury, with a Prologue and Epoligue on Shakespeare and his Writings* (1743) identifies Susanna Ashley Cooper, wife of the fourth earl of Shaftesbury, as the leading figure of the Shakespeare Ladies Club, as 'the supreme benefactress behind Shakespeare's canonization' (148). Cooper is credited with inspiring other women and teaching them 'what they should admire' (qtd in Dobson, 1992: 148). She emerges here as a 'Guardian Angel', a shining example of aesthetic taste and judgment (qtd in 148). Fiona Ritchie notices that Cooke in his poem attempted to memorialize Cooper just as she had helped to memorialize Shakespeare (2008: 59).

Elizabeth Boyd and Mary Cowper are the two remaining Shakespeare Ladies uncovered by Michael Dobson. In her 'On the Revival of Shakespeare's Plays by the Ladies in 1738', Cowper painted an utopian vision of future society where, as Dobson concludes:

intelligent women, leading the way to a proper valuation of native literature and demanding a high level of intellectual achievement from their suitors, will redeem Britain from its servile cultural dependence on the Continent (1992: 150).

Cowper's recommendation given in the poem to the Ladies that they should lift their eyes to Shakespeare and revive British stage was strengthened the following year by Elizabeth Boyd, a poet and novelist. In her sole play, *Don Sancho or The Students Whim,* Boyd clearly recognizes the plan to erect Shakespeare's statue. The efforts of the Shakespeare Ladies in popular-

izing Shakespeare's repertoire in the contemporary theatre made commissioning of the monument both desirable and financially possible. Between 1738–39 two performances, *Hamlet* in Drury Lane Theatre and *Julius Caesar* in Covent Garden were put up by Charles Fleetwood and John Rich respectively towards raising the funds for the public subscription (Ritchie, 2008: 66). However, it was not until 29 January 1741 (1740 in Old Style dating) that a memorial statue of Shakespeare was finally placed in Poets' Corner. It was designed by William Kent and executed by Peter Scheemakers. Michael Dobson points out that so astounding was the success of the whole enterprise that some newspaper commentators gave the Ladies sole credit not only for the enormous increase in Shakespearean performances but also for the entire project of erecting the monument. Eliza Heywood diligently noted in the *Female Spectator* that:

Some Ladies indeed have shown a truly public Spirit in rescuing the admirable, yet almost forgotten Shakespeare, from being totally sunk in oblivion: – They have generously contributed to raise a Monument to his Memory, and frequently honour his Works with their Presence on the Stage: – An action which deserves the highest Encomiums, and will be attended with an adequate Reward; since, in preserving the Fame of the dead Bard, they add a Brightness to their own, which will shine to late Posterity. (qtd in Dobson, 1992: 147)

Shakespeare Ladies Club, this important cultural initiative had its distinct motives. First of all, Shakespeare was a native alternative to the extravagancies of foreign opera. Secondly, he was the embodiment of the British national character and the representation of 'manly genius' of the Elizabethan era, recognized as being more purely British. Thirdly, he was perceived as the defender of domestic morality against the libertine indecencies of Restoration comedy. A poem in the praise of the Ladies from 1738 embraces all the above mentioned arguments:

> When worse than barbarism had sunk your taste,
> When nothing pleased but what laid virtue waste
> A sacred band, determine wise, and good,
> They jointly rose to stop th'exotick flood,
> And strove to wake, by Shakespeare's nervous lays,
> The manly genius of Eliza's days. (qtd in Dobson, 1992: 154)

In the late 1730s, reviving Shakespeare became a patriotic duty and a sign of good taste. Thus, almost the entire Shakespearean canon was staged, much of it unaltered. Statistics collected by Ritchie, although they need some clarification, indicate that there was clearly the vogue for restoring Shakespeare's chronicle plays to the stage. At Covent Garden, in the season of 1737–38, out

of 34 Shakespeare's performances 24 were English history plays (2008: 64). At the peak of the revival, in 1740–41, Shakespeare constituted almost one fourth of London's theatrical bill (Bristol, 2001: 67; Marsden, 1995: 75–76). The commitment and determination of the Shakespeare Ladies Club was already highly praised by their contemporaries. On 10 February 1738, *The London Daily Post* published a prologue which gives an important indication as to the extent of the impact that the Ladies had.

Prologue Occasion'd by the Encouragement several ladies of Quality have lately to the Revival of SHAKESPEARs *Plays, at the Theatre-Royal in Covent-garden.*

> Ye shining Circles of the Fair,
> Who take our good old Shakespear to your Care!
> Beneath the powr'ful Influence of your Eyes,
> We hope once more the *British* Stage may rise;
> Nor can we doubt Protection, and Applause,
> Where so much Beauty joins, to plead our Cause:
> Beauty, whose Smiles, or Tears, ne'er fail to move!
> The Brave maintain, what'er the Fair approve:
> There's no Mæcenas like the God of Love,
> While thus bright Umpires of our Scenes ye sit,
> Good Sense, sound Reason, Sentiment and Wit,
> Must charm the Boxes, and delight the Pit.
> The meaner Stratagems we shall not need
> To catch Spectators Hands, while these succeed;
> And Poets, henceforth emulous of Bayed,
> Shall with our Author vye, to win in your Praise.
> O, cou'd the Bard Divine from Realms below,
> These Honours, paid his dear remains, but know,
> Elysium with his grateful Songs wou'd ring,
> And to the list'ning Shades your Charmes he'd sing!
> (qtd in Ritchie, 2008: 67)

The elevated the Shakespeare Ladies Club to the position of "umpires", aesthetic judges and the guardians of good taste under whose watchful eyes theatre becomes home of good sense, reason and wit. The work done by the Ladies Club on behalf of Shakespeare undoubtedly paved the way for David Garrick, his championing, later in the century, of the Shakespearean repertoire and innovative approach to its acting. In 1769, Garrick crowned Shakespeare in his *Jubilee Ode* as a 'god of our idolatry' and did not fail to pay due respect to the Ladies: ' It was You Ladies that restor'd Shakespeare to the Stage, you form'd yourselves into a Society to protect his Fame and Erected a Monument to his and your own honour in Westminster Abbey' (qtd in Dobson, 1992: 148).

At the same time when the Ladies propagated Shakespeare as the source for the reform and revival of the British stage, the Elizabethan playwright also received warm attention on the other side of the English Channel from Luise Gottsched (1713–1762), who was one of Europe's leading intellectuals. Although in older literary histories simply referred to as "die Gottschedin", she was the first major woman writer and translator in 18th century Germany. As Johann Gottshed's wife, she saw her name and reputation indissolubly linked with his. She deserves, however, a place in her own right, possessing a mind and talent of her own. It is she who gives any luster to the Gottsched's Shakespearean studies.

Luise Gottsched seems to have had a special passion and interest for theatre. When she turned to literary translation she frequently reached for plays and all together translated ten of them in their entirety and some sections of two others. To the literary critics, she is first and foremost known for her translation/adaptation of Bougeant's *Femme docteur* and her contribution of a number of translations of French plays to her husband's six-volume literary compendium *Die Deutsche Schaubühne* (Brown, 2012: 108).

In the 1730s and 1740s, she translated *The Spectator* and *The Guardian* and this way she offered German readers their first fragments from Shakespeare. She reproduced, for example, in blank verse, short speech of Theseus from Act IV of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which appeared in *The Spectator*. Luise Gottshed passes all the translator's tests well. She shows the way and she renders more challenging kinds of English verse than her contemporary male translators ever did. She does the three passages from *Hamlet* into prose "'To be or not to be', 'Alas, poor Yorick"and "Look my lord, it comes.'

Her translations rightly deserve mention because she did not tamper with the original text as the French translators had done. With *The Spectator* available in German, the reception of Shakespeare in Germany could begin in earnest.

The first half of the eighteenth century also had its female representative in Shakespeare criticism. In 1753 Charlotte Ramsay Lennox published two volumes of her *Shakespeare Illustrated*[2]. Contrary to arising tendencies in Shakespeare criticism, where all objections concerning his works were described as 'petty' or 'trifling', Lennox held that the playwright's faults exceeded his beauties. The aim of that publication was to locate Shakespeare's sources for twenty of his plays, translate them and parallel them with the play. Lennox was very critical of the dramatist's treatment of his materials and ar-

[2] Lennox's *Shakespeare Illustrated* deserves a lengthier analysis here as it is one of few English works of literary criticism that found its way to Polish libraries in the eighteenth century see: 76 and 111.

gued that in almost every the source was superior to Shakespeare's version[3]. The criticism she contributed was not innovative, derived from classical principles. At some stages it was even unacceptable as she sounded self-confident and brusque. With remorseless industry, Lennox delivered a full catalogue of Shakespeare's 'absurdities' and 'improbabilities'. Charlotte Lennox's approach to Shakespeare was explained by Jonathan Kramnick in 'Reading Shakespeare's Novels' (1999) and Jonathan Bate in *The Genius of Shakespeare* (1998). As they claim, Lennox analysed Shakespeare from the point of view of a novelist. Thus, the probable unfolding of the narrative and the probable delineation of character became for her the generic standards to evaluate Shakespeare. Exasperated, she looked for logical plot development and long-term psychological motivation in each of Shakespeare's plays and found them lacking (Bate, 1998: 146; Kramnick, 1999: 47)[4]. Venting her dissatisfaction with the playwright in her critical essay, Lennox took her readers back to the times when classical structures dominated the discussion of Shakespeare. Indeed her criticism was not much different than that by Rymer, whom she followed obediently in her analysis of *Othello* (Lennox, 1753, vol.1: 127–134). Similarly to Rymer she stressed the violation of poetic justice, lamenting for example that Cressida escaped punishment whereas Hamlet killed himself (Lennox, (1753), vol.2: 267–274, vol.3: 98–100).

The study of sources, an important and up until that time practically neglected move in Shakespeare criticism, was undoubtedly undertaken at the suggestion of Samuel Johnson.[5] Obviously the labour–intensive task of locat-

[3] Contrary to Charlotte Lennox, Dodd believed that 'there is scarcely a topic common with other writers on which he [Shakespeare] has not excelled them all' (Dodd, (1752), 1818: v).

[4] One hundred and fifty years after Mrs Lennox, a far more distinguished novelist was equally vexed by Shakespeare's missing motives and the absurdity of his plots. Leo Tolstoy (1820–1910), in reading and rereading Shakespeare in Russian, English and German over the span of fifty years invariably experienced the same feelings of 'repulsion, weariness, and bewilderment.' Finally, at the age of seventy-five, he expressed in the essay 'Shakespeare and the Drama' (1906) a firm conviction that 'the unquestionable glory of a great genius which Shakespeare enjoys […] is a great evil' (Tolstoy, [1906], 1970: 217). Both Lennox and Tolstoy, in their Shakespeare criticism, failed to make an allowance for the operation of theatrical illusion (Bate, 1998: 147).

[5] How and when Charlotte Lennox first met Samuel Johnson has to date not been determined. Johnson, who enjoyed the company of clever women, highly estimated the intellect and literary talent of Lennox. By the autumn of 1750 he was doing all he could to advance her career as a novelist. In a letter of the third of February 1752, Lennox, who was then in a miserable financial condition requested Johnson's help in finding employment as a translator (Redford, 1992: 46, 59).

ing the sources and translating them must have taken so much of her time between the publication of her famous novel *Female Quixote* in 1752 and *Shakespeare Illustrated* in 1753/54, that she had little opportunity for deeper and more detailed critical research. The work was greeted respectfully by most of her contemporaries, the exception being the novelist Richardson, who contrary to the generally favourable appraisals of Mrs. Lennox's efforts, claimed that the book had attempted 'to rob Shakespeare of his Invention' (qtd. Vickers, 1995, vol.4:6). Apparently, Richardson understood that the aspect of theatrical illusion completely missed the attention of Charlotte Lennox. Iago and Leontes were compelling stage presences exactly because not a single motive could be pinned upon them. It was for this very reason that they absorb the attention of spectators, forcing them to concentrate on the unfolding action and on understanding a character as a process (Bate, 1998: 147).

Elizabeth Robinson Montagu (1718–1800) was the wealthiest woman in England and the leading Bluestocking figure. In her luxurious London houses she gathered the literary society of the capital city, acquiring fame as a patroness of the arts. Montagu published her much meditated *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* anonymously in 1769[6]. The book consists of two expository chapters setting out interpretative and theoretical principles, followed by six lenghty, detailed discussions of individual plays. Although Dr Johnson did not find 'one sentence of true criticism' in her *Essay,* it was published in six further editions with the latest appearing in 1810, and was additionally translated into German (1771), French (1777) and Italian (1828). In 1816 Izabela Czartoryska, with much admiration, mentioned Elizabeth Montagu in the account of her journey through Silesia. Izabela was much inspired by Montagu's passionate defence of the Bard (Gołębiowska, 2000: 173). Montagu and her essay were also mentioned in an article about English literature published in the first issue of *Zabawy Obywatelskie* in 1792.

This work was also acclaimed by other critics who found it to be a sound and witty judgment of the playwright. Moreover it received favourable reviews in the magazines and newspapers of the period. Michael Bristol in 'Shakespeare: The Myth' argued that Montagu was more indebted to Voltaire than to her contemporary fellow critics. Her opening statement, included in the title, that she was revealing and refuting Voltaire's 'misrepresentations' definitely contributed to the popularity of her work (1999: 493). However, Montagu owed much to Samuel Johnson, whom she referred to in her *Essay*

[6] The full title of the Montagu's work is: *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare, Compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets; With some Remarks upon the Misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire.*

as the one who 'obviated all that can be objected to our author's neglect of the unities of time and place' ([1769], 1810: xviii)[7].

Montagu attacked Voltaire's criticism of Shakespeare and his promotion of Corneille as an expression of court culture. In her opinion, each English gentleman listened to the 'tragic muse' eagerly and could discern without much difficulty when she spoke 'natural language' moving human hearts or when she used 'artificial dialect [...] acquired from the prejudices of a particular nation, or the jargon caught from the tone of a court'. Elizabeth Montagu regarded highly codified, almost fossilised, French classical principles as a major limitation enforced on each nation and stage. However, at the same time, she agreed with Voltaire that Shakespeare's plays lacked 'delicacy and politeness' but promptly excused the Bards deficiency in this respect with the well- known argument that it was due to 'unpolished' times in which he wrote (Montagu,(1769), 1810: VI-XII)

The queen of Bluestockings joined Dryden, Shaftsbury, Johnson and the Lord of Kames in the commendation of Shakespeare characters. The theatre audience was constantly moved by Hamlet, Othello, Lear and Macbeth because they spoke 'with the human voices' and were motivated by 'human passions'. That was possible because Shakespeare's knowledge of the human heart was formed not in the 'library' but 'in the street, the camp, or village' (Montagu, [1769], 1810: xx). Throughout his introductory sections, Montagu stressed that the main aim of the poet was to 'touch the heart' and to 'excite sympathy'. That could be achieved through adequate 'representations of an action', which Elizabethan tragedy excelled at (Montagu, [1769], 1810: 10–11 and 19).These concepts of 'character', 'feeling' and 'action' established new critical standards that broke with the older school of Shakespeare criticism and foreshadowed the direction to be taken by almost all criticism for the rest of the century and much of the nineteenth century. The new standards allowed the critics to praise Shakespeare's works, successfully avoiding the formalism long associated with classicsm (Marsden, 1995: 132–133; Vickers, 1981: 11–21)[8].

7 Unfortunately, as in the case of the Johnsonian *Preface*, many of Montagu's remarks included in the section on dramatic poetry or historical drama are the common for the age.

8 Although Montagu's *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* was well, if not enthusiastically, received by her contemporaries, in the twentieth century it was initially either forgotten or ridiculed. David Smith ironically claimed that Montagu's work was only a 'well-meaning but shallow reply' and additionally very much unnecessary as Johnson had already defended the national pride (1963: xxi). Fortunately, Montagu's critical endeavours received due justice in the writings of Michael Dobson *The Making of the National Poet. Shakespeare, adaptation, and Authorship, 1660–1769.*

Michael Dobson rightly recalls that Elizabeth Montagu's work was proudly mentioned in the printed introduction to Garrick's *Ode* of Shakespeare Jubilee (2001: 224). There, the great Shakespearean actor passionately recommended that 'those who are not sufficiently established in their dramatic faith' should:

Peruse a work lately published, called *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of* SHAKESPEARE, by which they will with much satisfaction be convinced, that *England* may justly boast the honour of producing the greatest dramatic poet in the world (Garrick, [1769], CH, vol.5: 344).

A new refreshing approach to Shakespeare was introduced into French criticism by Anne Louise Germaine de Staël-Holstein (1766–1817). Germaine de Staël, the daughter of Jacques Necker, Louis XVI's influential and reforming finance minister, was certainly the most remarkable woman of her time and she remains unique – both for the scope of her artistic and intellectual achievements, and for the force of her political influence. Maria Fairweather, the author of Madame de Staël's recent biography claims that writing about her 'is a little like trying to control a coach driven by several horses each on pulling in a different direction' (2005: 2). De Staël, born of Swiss Protestant lineage, brought up in her mother's Parisian salon amidst the philosophers of the French Enlightenment and married to a Swedish diplomat, was a woman of penetrating intellect, remarkable courage and an indefatigable traveller, who had great impact on literary tastes in Europe at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Christopher Herold in his monograph devoted to Germaine de Staël firmly stated that 'few women left so deep an impression on their time. In her lifetime she held a position comparable to Voltaire's fifty years earlier' (2002: 191).

Madame de Staël was appreciated at the Puławy residence of the Czartoryski family. Her early poems together with letters to prince Adam Czartoryski and his daughter Zofia Czartoryska (1778–1837) enriched the collection of memorabilia gathered at Puławy (Aleksandrowicz, 1998: 351). Similarly to Germaine de Staël Czartoryska seems to have been impressed by Shakespeare's outstanding ability to create varied and human characters.

The interest in Shakespeare shown by the Czartoryski family was absorbed by their offspring. Maria Wirtemberska (1768–1854), the author of the first Polish sentimental novel, nourished a particular admiration for Shakespeare's female characters. She prepared a collection of her favourite fragments from the Bard's plays and, clearly following in her mother's footsteps, prefixed it with the short essay 'The Appraisal of Shakespeare.' Wirtemberska referred there to almost religious like cult of Shakespeare and trying to explain the playwright's timeless appeal, she compared him to a 'painter' of intriguing personalities. At that point, Maria Wirtemberska enlisted in her

essay the most fascinating characters created by the Elizabethan dramatist. Shakespeare was also read and in fragments translated by Zofia Czartoryska. Her translation exercises date back to 1794, unfortunately nowhere did she indicate which fragments from which plays she attempted to render into Polish. We are only left with a casual remark that one of the entries was a description of a morning from Shakespeare.

Before leaving the eighteenth century, however, we should look at the most surprising, as Zdenek Stříbrný names her, translator of Shakespeare: Tsarina Catherine II, the Great. Although Byron satirized her in Don Juan as a 'bold and bloody' empress who was giving most of her 'juicy vigour' to 'love' and 'lust' she also admired and studied such grave men as Voltaire, Diderot or Locke. Besides a number of treatises, satires, and tales for children she found time to write fourteen comedies, five comic operas and three historical plays. German by origin she read Shakespeare in German prose translation (2000: 29).

Inspired by them the Russian empress also tried her hand at Shakespeare. She adapted *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* published and performed in 1786 under the title *This is What it Means to have a Buck-Basket and Linen.* Cathrine's playful title reflects master Ford's both frantic and comic exclamation at the close of Act III of *The Merry Wives* "This 'tis to be married! This 'tis to have linen and buck-baskets" (29).

Cathrine introduced her adaptation with a disarmingly frank description: 'a free but weak translation from Shakespeare'. That was the first time that Shakespeare's name had appeared on a Russian title page. On the whole, however, Catherine's choice of the merry Wives for her adaptation was clever because the play's prose could be rendered more satisfactorily than the dramatic poetry of the great plays. Stříbrný jokingly mentions that the Tsarina liked to be flattered by the saying that 'while Peter the Great created human beings in Russia Cathrine the Great gave them a soul'. It is only fair to agree with the Czech researcher that 'soul is too great a word' but the Tsarina definitely managed to introduce 'touches of Shakespearean humour and her own sharp wit' into Russian culture.

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