

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY POLAND: CRITICISM, FIRST TRANSLATIONS AND THEATRE ADAPTATIONS

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The groups of English strolling actors reached Poland as early as 1587, when they gave performances in Gdańsk, a wealthy and populous international port with a large English colony. The visits of strolling companies to Poland were frequent, particularly in the periods 1600-1619 and 1636-1654 (Limon 1985, p. 10-19, 37; Stříbrný 2000, p. 7-10; 15). Thanks to the neutral policy of Sigismund III during the Thirty Years' War and the peace treaty with Sweden, concluded by his son and successor, Vladislaus IV in 1635, Poland avoided the plight of Germany, denuded at that time by the foraging armies and with its peace and stability seemed to English Comedians a perfect choice (Limon 1985, p. 30-33; Stříbrný 2000, p. 13-15)

Additionally, the Warsaw royal court with a new theatre hall opened in 1637 awarded the visiting artist a certain level of prestige. English actors found permanent shelter there and were able to make good use of technically advanced stage properties. The repertoire of those English companies comprised mostly plays that had been staged previously in London playhouses. In 1626, the John Green company, among others, played the following Shakespeare plays: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear* (Limon 1985, p. 22). Out of necessity those dramas were represented in horrendously simplified versions and either in English or German. Therefore, the questions whether Polish audiences were aware at that time that they watched the plays by the best playwright of the Elizabethan stage will remain unanswered.

Without doubt, it was the eighteenth century that introduced Shakespeare into the Polish cultural consciousness. Shakespeare was read and discussed by such members of the enlightened elite as king Stanisław Poniatowski (1732-1798), bishop Ignacy Krasicki (1735-1801), prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski (1734-1823) and his wife Izabela Czartoryska (1746-1834). Thanks to their interest in English literature, the Bard was ushered into the Polish literary criticism and theatre what consequently induced first attempts at translating his plays. The royal admiration that the Elizabethan playwright received in Poland is particularly well documented. Stanisław August Poniatowski in his letter dated 17th December 1755 to

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Charles Yorke exclaimed that he loved Shakespeare and found *Julius Caesar* more appealing than anything that had been created by French regularity or Greek fertility (Butterwick 2000, p. 93). Poniatowski’s mention of *Julius Caesar* was not coincidental as he had translated the first three scenes of the play from English into French but the king never attached much attention to his translation efforts and treated them merely as an exercise of a schoolboy.¹

Poniatowski not only read Shakespeare but also saw him performed in London theatres during his visit to England. Jarosław Komorowski counted that from March to June 1754 there were seventeen Shakespeare stagings which included: *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Richard III*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* (2002, p. 13). One of these productions triggered the following comment upon the nature of French and English theatre:

Lord Strange Strange was the first to take me to a performance of one of Shakespeare’s tragedies (...) I felt involved, amused and more than once even edified: and I inferred from this that I might gain pleasure and even profit from seeing a play whose action lasts longer than one day and whose setting changes from one place to another, as long as the author possesses a thorough knowledge of the customs, passions, defects and even virtues of which people are capable; and as long as he causes his characters to speak in a manner which raises, in our eyes, the value of virtue, goodness and wisdom, and everything is presented in the most probable manner (...) Without illusion you have no pleasure in the theatre. But the pleasure of talking about Shakespeare would take me too far (Stanisław Poniatowski, quoted in Helsztyński 1965, p. 9-10).

Stanisław August was yet another critic who, while commenting upon English theatre in general and Shakespeare plays in particular, emphasized the importance of theatrical illusion. It cannot be forgotten, though, that the king wrote his *Mémoires* twenty years after the journey and they were published as late as 1885, so his judicious and penetrating remarks about the Elizabethan playwright for long remained in the realm of his private papers. However, he was the engine behind the initiative that resulted in the emergence of Shakespeare’s name for the first time in print in Poland.

In 1764, Stanisław August Poniatowski designated Ignacy Krasicki (1735-1801), his chaplain at the time, to prepare an outline of a national magazine that would on its columns promote the cultural and political achievements of the Enlightenment, press for the need to reform the country, encourage innovatory economic enterprises and lastly call for the creation of cultural institutions. The first issue of *The Monitor* appeared in March 1765 and the periodical was in circulation for twenty years. Although it was modelled on *The Spectator*,

¹ The translation entitled “Essay de traduction du *César* de Shakespeare” can be found in the Czartoryski Library in Cracow, BCz call no. 911, p. 81-95.



extremely popular both in England and abroad, it was far from being a mere imitation of its forefather.

Krasicki and his co-workers used the French translation *Le Spectateur*, as no one from the editing team, except the king and A.K. Czartoryski, knew English (Rudnicka 1995, p. vi-vii). On total, the Bishop is attributed with the authorship of 240 articles which cover a wide spectrum of problems including education, customs, literary genres, language, social problems, political system and finally theatre (Bernacki 1933, p. 133). Krasicki’s first essay, where he sketched the importance of the theatre, which was to fulfill the role of a “school of social virtues”, appeared in *The Monitor* on 3rd July 1765. Similar opinions were repeated in his essay of 22nd September 1765 published shortly before the opening of the National Theatre in Warsaw. Again, Krasicki referred to theatre as the “school of the world”, propagating necessary social and political changes. Additionally, he presented a short history of the theatre mentioning Shakespeare alongside with Addison, Voltaire, Molière, Racine and Corneille as the playwrights who gained immortality (Rudnicka 1995, p. 26-31).²

With such remarks, the way for the next publication was prepared and consequently on 13th August 1766 *The Monitor* presented, to the acute judgment of its public, a letter on unities in the theatre signed Theatralski. In the first lines the author politely opposed the idea of unities and referring to Dr Johnson as an authority on editing Shakespeare, presented excerpts from Johnson’s *Preface* (1995, p. 37-40). Theatralski’s letter was yet another voice in a discussion in which, through reference to Shakespeare, adherence to three unities was described as “incomprehensible” and “against reason” (Żurowski 2007, p. 61 and 63). Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize here that thanks to Theatralski’s letter, the campaign against unities and the discussion of theatre illusion in Polish criticism was from the very beginning linked with the Stratfordian. Additionally, Theatralski offered Polish readers a glimpse of the most current and the best available piece of literary criticism. Shakespeare’s name appeared in the context of Johnson’s *Preface*, which masterly brought a close to classical attitudes to drama and heralded new, romantic ones.

In the Poland of 1766, there was one more source where a literature lover could come across Shakespeare, *Historia nauk wyzwolonych*, the manual used by the students of the exclusive School for Cadets.³ The readers of that popular work in Europe were taught that

² For *The Monitor* texts I refer to the collection compiled by Jadwiga Rudnicka ed., *Ignacy Krasicki. O języku ojczystym, teatrze i edukacji. Wybór z „Monitora” (1765–1772)*.

³ *Historia nauk wyzwolonych*. Przez Jmc P. Juvenel de Carlencas francuskim językiem pisana, na polski przełożona ad usum Korpusu was the translation of Félix Juvenel de Carlencas’ (1679-1760) work: *Essai sur l’histoire des science, des belles – lettres et des arts* first published in Lyon in 1740. Carlencas based his

although “peculiar beauty” could be found in Shakespeare’s tragedies it is “very rare” and so “we can’t read even one decent work by the author”. Further, it was argued that Shakespeare’s tragedies, written with total disregard of the unities, were just mere compilations of vulgar conversations and sublime verses, full of cruel scenes introduced to hold the attention of the audience (Bernacki 1925, p. 157-158; Pawłowiczowa 1967, p. 113-114).⁴ Such were the comments on Shakespeare that young Wojciech Bogusławski (1757-1829), the father of Polish theatre and director of the first Polish *Hamlet*, read while at School for Cadets. The juxtaposition of excerpts from Johnson published in *The Monitor* with *Historia nauk* clearly shows that initial Polish acquaintance with Shakespeare was of a dual nature, both classical and romantic (Lasocka 1993, p. 98).

Critical discussion on Shakespeare’s works was not limited to Warsaw. In this respect the capital of Poland found strong competition in Puławy, the residence of the powerful Czartoryski family. In the 18th century the Czartoryskis reached the peak of their wealth and political power, simultaneously exerting tremendous influence on the development of national culture. Beginning in 1785, when Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski (1734-1823) and his wife Izabela Czartoryska (1746-1834) made Puławy their family home, the residence performed the role of cultural and political centre for a duration of almost fifty years. Indeed, the importance of Puławy in Polish cultural life cannot be overestimated, especially after 1795, when Poland lost its independence, generous royal sponsorship ceased to exist and artists became totally dependant on the patronage of aristocracy.

Anglophile attitudes of the Czartoryskis were best reflected in the intellectual and literary sphere and well documented by a vast collection of books, written and published in Britain, which were gathered at the Puławy library. The collection of English publications amounted to 2476 and Shakespeare was represented by the subsequent complete editions of 1757, 1774, 1790, 1791, 1793, 1803 and 1821.⁵ The Puławy library was also in possession of editions of single plays such as: *The Tempest*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *King Henry V*, *As you like it* and *King Lear* with alterations introduced by David Garrick. In Puławy, a passionate

compendium on Luigi Riccoboni’s *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les différents théâtres d’Europe* (1738). Initially, it was believed that Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski was the translator but studies show that he only supervised the undertaking, provided the foreword and wrote fragments about the development of the Polish language (Pawłowiczowa 1967, p. 113 -118).

⁴ Both Bernacki and Pawłowiczowa reprinted from *Historia nauk wyzwolonych* excerpts related to Shakespeare. The English translation of the fragments are mine.

⁵ According to the register, the Czartoryski library in Puławy possessed editions of Shakespeare works prepared by Lewis Theobald (1757), John Bell (1774) Samuel Ayscough (1790), George Steevens (1791), Samuel Johnson and George Steevens (1793), Isaac Reed (1803), James Boswell jr. (1821). The register is now available at the Czartoryski Library in Cracow call no. 2442 (also compare: Gołębiowska 2000, p. 172, Gołębiowska 2002, p. 146).

Shakespeare reader could even reach for a guide to Stratford or the *Journal de Theatre* which included critical essays on Shakespeare plays.

Richard Butterwick, having studied the letters of Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski to his English friends, concluded that the prince had achieved unprecedented mastery of the language (2000, p. 166). It is not surprising then that the prince’s profound interest in theatre and excellent command of the language finally resulted in the discovery of Shakespeare. Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski played a significant role in introducing Shakespeare into both Polish literary circles and Polish literary criticism. Ludwik Bernacki enumerates the prince among the admirers of the playwright in his study on Shakespeare in eighteenth century Poland, which was included in *Teatr, dramat i muzyka za Stanisława Augusta* (1925, p. 158).

However, the attitude of Czartoryski towards the Elizabethan is not straightforward in the strict sense of the word. The comments articulated in his foreword to *Panna na wydaniu. Komedia we dwóch aktach*, seem to be an amalgam of English, French and German Shakespeare criticism.⁶ The foreword is widely regarded as Czartoryski’s first manifesto discussing the tasks and aims of Polish national theatre (Zahrajówna 1955, p. 26). There the prince firstly referred to Shakespeare and Addison as those authors who, by their works, had made themselves “immortal”. Next he added that “great souls” never travelled across “ordinary paths” and could “raise themselves above the rules”. He was clearly influenced by the English critics, Johnson in particular, who in his *Preface* equated violation of the rules with genius. Unfortunately, a few lines later the critic did an about-turn and resorted to the rhetoric of French classicism. In line with Voltaire’s *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, he admitted that nature endowed the English playwright with outstanding talent and praised the Stratfordian for the “power of his thought” but he also stressed Shakespeare’s lack of formal, academic training. For that reason *Hamlet*, *Othello* or *Macbeth* were deficient in “regularity and order” which always came from “education and reasonable application of the rules.” However, with the next sentence, Czartoryski as a critic surprises the reader even more, exclaiming that the complexities of human nature had been portrayed by Shakespeare in a “wonderful” way (Czartoryski 1771, p. 38). Similarly to German critics of that time, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) in particular, Czartoryski discovered the beauty of Shakespearean characters.⁷

⁶ It was the Polish adaptation of David Garrick’s play *Miss in her Teens or the Medley of Lovers* published in Warsaw 1771 (Zahrajówna 1955, p. 26).

⁷ German theatre and literature were not alien to the prince. In his last publication on drama *Kalendarz Teatrowy* (1780), Czartoryski mentioned Weisse, Lessing and Goethe as those who enriched German culture with spectacular plays. Additionally, this was the only innovative comment that the prince included in his works on

The foreword is greatly indebted to Jean Baptiste Du Bosa’s *Réflexion critique sur la Poésie et la Peinture* (1719), something to which the prince himself admitted in his subsequent work “List o dramatyce” (1779).⁸ The first part of the foreword is nothing other than a short lecture on the three unities and other rules of classicism. The general part about theatre, however, was adapted to the needs of the Polish reader. It was Czartoryski’s practice to use the ideas of Western criticism and modify them according to the cultural policy of his country (Kostkiewiczowa and Goliński 1993, p. 92; Zahrajówna 1955, p. 29). Marta Gibińska claims that Czartoryski, at least in one respect, included his own opinion which “modified the French views to a considerable extent.” Namely, the prince tried to establish the relationship between English theatre practices and the character and temper of the nation (2003, p. 57-58). However, such argumentation is traceable back to Dryden and reoccurred frequently in French critical works. It also appeared in *Essai sur l’histoire des science, des belles-lettres et des arts* by Felix Carlenca, which Czartoryski knew as he himself recommended the work for the School for Cadets. Adam Bar’s opinion that Czartoryski’s essays on drama and theatre are devoid of any originality and do not go beyond a skilful compilation of Western authors is well-substantiated. However, they still deserve attention as they were the first works in a field of literary and theatre criticism completely neglected in 18th century Poland (1930, p. 482).

Despite detectable tentative influences of English and German critics, Adam Czartoryski took a definite stand in his opinions about theatre and throughout his life remained a staunch supporter of French classicism. In *Panna na wydaniu*, he solemnly declared that the major function of theatre was to educate through presentation of decorous and decent plays. The prince reiterated that opinion as late as in 1801 in *Myśli o pismach polskich* together with ardent commendation of French classicism, which he genuinely regarded as the ultimate achievement of theatre (1801, p. 144).

Czartoryski, a sworn classicist, could have found Shakespeare a formidable private read but it was not to be championed on the newly founded Polish national stage. The readings of Thomas Rymer’s critical works that the prince immersed himself in only

theatre and drama (Bar 1930: 481-482). Although the influences of foreign criticism on Czartoryski’s Shakespeare comments are obvious, it would be wrong to assume he did not bother to acquaint himself with the works of the dramatist. The eighth volume of *The Works of Shakespeare* in Lewis Theobald’s edition (1757), where Czartoryski made notes in French on pages eleven, thirteenth and the cover of the book can be found in the Czartoryski library (BCz. call no.109068).

⁸ The essay was attached to his comedy *Kawa*. There, the prince openly acknowledged that before he had started writing he sought advice of “famous masters”. As Adam Bar convincingly proves, Du Bosa was not the only master that Czartoryski consulted as he also summarised or translated essays by Diderot and Calvel from *Encyclopédie littéraire* (1930, p. 477).

confirmed his opinion.⁹ For Czartoryski, Shakespeare constituted the same dilemma as for Voltaire. On the one hand the works of the Elizabethan were tantalizing while on the other hand they were unacceptable as they did not exhibit “a single Spark of good Taste” or even “one Rule of the Drama” (Voltaire 1733, p. 166).

Shakespeare had a special place among numerous interests of princess Izabela Czartoryska. This prominent woman of the turn of the 18th century was a writer, the author of one of the first language coursebooks in Poland, a founder of the first museums and parks, and expressed her admiration for the playwright in many ways. During her extended journey through England in 1789-1791, she attended an exhibition at Shakespeare’s gallery in Pall Mall with paintings displaying motifs from his plays, entered a subscription to his works for herself and her daughter Maria Wirtemberska (1768-1854), visited the house of the late David Garrick and was in Stratford-upon-Avon.¹⁰ Following the fashion prevailing in the literary circles of eighteenth century aristocracy, she also collected numerous mementos of her favourite author.

Far from indiscriminate sentimentality, Izabela Czartoryska had a well-developed interest in literature. Her reading list was not limited to the popular romances of the time, but it comprised works by such renowned authors as Milton, Pope, Young, Stern, Thomson, Goldsmith, Richardson, Byron, Racine, Rousseau, Petrarca, Metastasio, and many others (Aleksandrowicz 1998, p. 8-9; Gołębiowska 2000, p. 167-168; Gołębiowska 2002, p. 145). She not only read Shakespeare but was also aware of the then contemporary criticism of his works, which is reflected in her sound judgement of the playwright. During her journey through England, the princess made many entries in her diary where she referred to or even evaluated Shakespeare’s works. On her return to Poland she edited and transcribed her remarks giving them their final shape.¹¹ In the account of her visit to the playwright’s house in

⁹ *The Tragedies of the Last Age Considered and Examin’d and A Short View of Tragedy*. Copies of those dissertations, both in one volume, are accessible in the Czartoryski Library in Cracow. Again, this volume was annotated on the cover by the prince (BCz. call no. 53339/53340 I).

¹⁰ Pall Mall or Boydell’s gallery was an enterprise aiming to gain profits from the overseas tourist trade. John Boydell (1719-1804) was an engraver turned print seller. He conceived the idea of publishing “the National Shakespeare edition” with engravings accompanying each play. Thirty three of the best artists in the kingdom, supervised by Sir Joshua Reynolds, were commissioned to produce between them one set of large paintings and one of small. The larger were to be reproduced as illustrations to a massive folio edition in six volumes issued serially beginning in 1791. The smaller set of paintings illustrated Steevens’s edition of 1791 which was also published by Boydell (Wells 2003:241). That smaller Boydell is recorded in the Puławy library register. BCz call no. 2442.

¹¹ Indeed, Shakespeare was one of Czartoryska’s life-long fascinations. In her diary, apart from her memories and thoughts, she also included excerpts from the works she studied and admired, Shakespeare plays among them. Later, she gave her diary to her protégée Zofia Matuszewiczowa (BCz call no. 6070T.2).

Stratford, she recalled that in her imagination she had seen Shakespeare’s characters (Hamlet, Miranda, Romeo and Juliet, Desdemona, Ophelia) and added:

I do remind myself of other works by famous Shakespeare whose genius is so distinct, whose talent so brilliant and outstanding that he would have reached perfection if it had not been for the unlearned age he lived in.¹²

Here, she seems to agree with Voltaire, pitying the playwright on numerous occasions for belonging to Elizabethan England so deprived of taste, and the English critics who from Dryden through Rowe, Johnson to Montague, tried to excuse Shakespeare’s faults by pointing to the unpolished times in which he had written.

In her next entry, Czartoryska gave a more detailed assessment of the playwright:

England has not had before or after him a dramatic poet whom it would be possible to compare with Shakespeare. In his works it is possible to observe, as a matter of fact, a union of the most beautiful thoughts with the vilest expressions. His plays are of a wonderful beauty, interspersed with absurdities, which show a clumsy inability and unseemly vulgarity; but all this is peculiar to the age rather than the author. The genius of Shakespeare, fiery, powerful, abundant, full of the most sublime thoughts, never bridling the imagination, never hindering the vigour which sometimes carries him too far, this genius often offends the delicacy of taste which is the privilege of our time (Izabela Czartoryska, quoted in Helsztyński 1965, p.13).

This particular fragment bears a slight resemblance to Voltaire’s *Letters on the English Nation*. Both of them praised Shakespeare for his powerful and fiery genius, emphasizing his naturalness and sublime thoughts. Voltaire found “such beautiful, such noble, such dreadful scenes in this Writer’s monstrous farces” whereas Czartoryska wrote of “wonderful beauty, interspersed with absurdities” and “a union of the most beautiful thoughts with the vilest expressions”. Thus far, they seem to have been speaking in the same voice. However, to Voltaire, Shakespeare’s plays were deprived of a “single Spark of good Taste”, while Czartoryska observed that it was rather her times with their “delicacy of taste” that found Shakespeare’s vigour offensive, whereas on the other hand, to the Elizabethan audience, it had been acceptable and natural.¹³

¹² The account comes from the manuscript entitled ‘Katalog pamiątek złożonych w Domu Gotyckim w Puławach’ BCz. call no. 2917 - I, p. 37-42. The translation of the above fragment is mine.

¹³ Following Samuel Johnson and the English critics prior to him, she explained that all awkwardness, vulgarity and clumsiness of the playwright’s works were rather due to the unpolished age than to the author.

In opposition to French classicism, Czartoryska realized that difficulties in appreciating Shakespeare were not caused by “ignorant” Elizabethan times but by the social and cultural constraints of her own world. Therefore, in her comments she remarked that Shakespeare:

[...] did not observe accepted rules and unities. The merit of his works depended on powerful and acute thoughts; excellent knowledge of human nature; fiery and vivid imagination and representation which only he was able to create; and not on harmony of structure and superficial elegance. These are everlasting beauties, true in all countries and times, which never change and do not depend on the whim or fashion. These are not mere glitters of wit that soon become boring but representations so beautiful, so accurate and so varied that it becomes easy to forgive sometimes noticed mistakes and all the oversights in the structure.¹⁴

Similarly to Shaftsbury, Johnson and German critics, Czartoryska seems to have been impressed by Shakespeare’s outstanding ability to create varied and human characters. Overpowered by Shakespeare’s excellence in portraying real life, she diverged from the classical approach to the Bard and embraced newly emerging tendencies in Shakespeare criticism.

Czartoryska acknowledged that Shakespeare had disregarded the rules, but for her they were only unnecessary constraints. The rules were nothing but sheer products of “whim or fashion” which would not last a century, contrary to the beautiful images created by Shakespeare, which are true and moving in all times and to all peoples. Referring to rules and unities as “superficial elegance”, the princess sounded like Samuel Johnson who had observed that they created more difficulties to the author than pleasure to the audience. The notions of genius and imagination dominate in Czartoryska’s essay, which clearly indicates her openness and indebtedness to German criticism. She was just a step behind Herder and Goethe who exclaimed that it was Shakespeare, the Nordic genius, who was our guide and the best interpreter of the world.¹⁵ Yet, the princess did not entirely escape the eighteenth century “beauty and faults” framework of criticism. Referring to all that seemed absurd, vulgar and clumsy in Shakespeare’s works as a plain “oversight”, additionally, far outweighed by his “other merits”, she expressed a definitely more favourable opinion of the dramatist than the average criticism circulating among the Polish enlightened class of her times. Furthermore, in Poland of the late 18th century her approach to the rules was fresh and innovative. Krystyna

¹⁴ The account comes from the manuscript entitled ‘Katalog pamiątek złożonych w Domu Gotyckim w Puławach’ BCz. call no. 2917 - I, p. 37-42. The translation of the above fragment is mine.

¹⁵ Johann Herder was known and particularly admired at Puławy. That admiration was reciprocated by the prominent German philosopher, who frequently wrote about great political and intellectual predispositions. Herder also knew well the translation of his *Der Cid nach spanischen Romanzen befunden* done by Izabela Czartoryska (Aleksandrowicz 1998, p. 352).

Kujawińska-Courtney rightly observes that it is Izabela Czartoryska who should be given the palm of precedence in Polish Shakespeare studies (1996, p. 24).

The interest in Shakespeare shown by the Czartoryski princess was absorbed by their offsprings and associates. Ignacy Bykowski (1750-1819), a second-rate writer of numerous tragedies and novels connected with the Czartoryski circle, commented on Shakespeare in his essay “Poeci Angielscy” published in *Wieczory wiejskie* (1790). His short entry is nothing but a gist of the first and last few sentences about the playwright from Voltaire’s *Letters Concerning the English Nation*. Thus, the essay offered not a single word of innovative criticism but rather showed a total dependence on Voltaire. Bykowski, who made numerous translations from French and Russian, must have used as his source the French version of Voltaire’s work *Lettres philosophiques sur les Anglais* published in 1734. *Lettres philosophiques* were translated into Polish in 1793 by a mysterious S-ka. As a translator of Voltaire, he was simultaneously one of the first Polish translators of Shakespeare, as in *Lettres* the French philosopher included his rendering of Hamlet’s speech (Bernacki 1925, p. 172-173; Żurowski, 2007, p. 114-115). Five years earlier, Stanisław Trembecki (1739-1812) had translated a monologue but it remained in manuscript form for decades and was published posthumously as late as 1820 (Bernacki 1925, p. 173; Żurowski 2007, p. 114-115).

The opinions expressed by both Czartoryski and Bykowski clearly indicate that Voltaire had permeated Polish theatre and literary criticism long before his *Letters Concerning the English Nation* were translated into Polish. It seems that between 1771 and 1790 not much changed in Polish reception of the Bard although so much happened in Europe. Goethe and Herder crowned Shakespeare as a Nordic giant, Ducis prepared another adaptation for the Comédie-Françoise, Pierre Le Tourneur introduced the Shakespeare canon into the circulation of French literary life together with the word “romantic”, and German theatre suffered from “Hamlet-fever”. Yet, Polish audiences were not oblivious to those events. Le Tourneur’s translation was present in major Polish libraries, Shakespeare adaptations of Ducis, Weisse and Schröder were frequently presented by German and French groups but Poland was still not fully ready for Shakespeare if not corralled within tight classical strictures.

Even Wojciech Bogusławski, the director, leading actor and translator of text for the first staging of *Hamlet* in Polish, which took place in Lvov in 1798, complained in his “Uwagi nad Hamletem” that the play was full of “disgusting” and “immoral” scenes which violated

the classical rule of poetic justice.¹⁶ He prepared his translation collating several German adaptations and did not even read the original. Such translation additionally filtered through the rigorous rules of French classicism and was substantially different from the original. Nevertheless, it was a huge success and remained in the repertory of the Bogusławki’s company for decades.

The staging of *Hamlet* in Lvov coincided with momentous historical event, namely, the death of Stanisław August Poniatowski, the last king of Poland. The myth of the protagonist of the play and the tragedy itself, so deeply rooted in the Western tradition and culture, became “transformed” from its original literary space and found its way into the new specific space of Polish history, absorbed into national and specifically Polish elements.

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¹⁶ The essay “Uwagi nad Hamletem” (“Some Remarks Upon Hamlet”) was included in Bogusławski’s *Dzieła Dramatyczne* (*Dramatic Works*) and published much later in 1823.

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