

ЛІТЕРАТУРНІ ТРАДИЦІЇ: ДІАЛОГ КУЛЬТУР ТА ЕПОХ

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IVAN AKSENOV – THE TRANSLATOR OF JOHN WEBSTER: INTERTEXTUALITY OF LIFE AND LITERATURE

I. Aksenov's translation features of J. Webster's play «The White Devil» are investigated in the article. Mysterious and even mystical component in the essence and narrative of the play is often connected by investigators with the complicated process of Webster's comprehending of the historical events of that somber history of the Italian XVI century. The dramatist let them through his own consciousness in reconstructing not only the sensational history of Vittoria Accorambona but mostly studying a universal problem of man's confrontation with evil, in himself, first of all. That proves the very title of the tragedy – «The White Devil» where «white devil» means «hypocrite», «traitor», «werewolf». In the case with I. Aksenov – the first Russian translator of «The White Devil» – the most interesting and important thing concerns the phenomenon of the «shifted text», the very fact of its imperfect translation that leads far beyond the limits of a mere philological studies.

Key words: drama of post-Shakespearean epoch, translation, mannerism, baroque, intertextuality.

For today Ivan Aksenov is the only Russian translator of John Webster's (1580–1634) drama «The White Devil» (1612).

Both the drama of post-Shakespearean epoch and its author are mysteries for the contemporary literary science. There is no one portrait of that «man-enigma» [1, p. 6]. His own literary heritage (written not in the co-authorship with other playwrights) counts according to the supposition of literary historians only three works among which «The White Devil» takes the first place. The popularity of that play is confirmed by the fact of numerous theatrical interpretations in the course of four centuries. But nevertheless neither the idea nor the subject-matter of that work is deciphered. That is the conclusion of all those who made special attempts to investigate the drama. The scholars see in its motives and heroes' behavior some «haziness, vagueness, obscurity» [2, p. 73]; they also notice «gaps» and «loose ends» which, as it seems, are impossible for the play based on a historical chronicle and absolutely inadmissible in the genre of tragedy [3, p. 143].

Mysterious and even mystical component in the essence and narrative of the play is often connected by investigators with the complicated process of Webster's comprehending of the historical events of that «somber history of the Italian XVIth century» [3, p. 145]. The dramatist let them through his own consciousness in reconstructing not only the sensational history of Vittoria Accorambona but mostly studying a universal problem of man's confrontation with evil, in himself, first of all [4, p. 206]. That proves the very title of the tragedy – «The White Devil» where «white devil» means «hypocrite», «traitor», «werewolf».

The history of Vittoria Accorambona – the basis of Webster's play – is as known as unknown in the historical annals. It becomes coated with myths and conjectures [5]. But the essence of the bloody events remains fearful and instructive. It seems that that was the point Webster wanted

to comprehend in the context of his own time as well as Kleist and Stendhal did it in the context of theirs. In their turn the famous writers of the XIXth century created their own versions of the Venetian courtesan's history. It was one of love and betrayal, of the unknown springs that push from inside out a devilish part of man's nature.

In reality Vittoria Accorombona as far as it is known was born in February, 1557, not far from Rome. Being of 16 she was married to Francisco Peretti, a young nephew of cardinal Montalto. But Vittoria fell in love with Paolo Orsini, duke of Bracciano (born in 1533), who had been already married to Isabella Medici and had 3 children. In 1578 Bracciano learns that his wife has a lover and, as many historians state, kills the disloyal spouse. In 1581 being in love with Vittoria Accorombona he kills her husband and secretly becomes engaged with her. But their union is protested by the Pope Gregory XIII who instituted proceedings against Vittoria as her husband's murderer. The accused is imprisoned and is set out only after the Pope's death. By that time Bracciano openly declares his love to Vittoria and marries her.

Nevertheless the end of the story is tragic: Vittoria falls seriously ill. Her relatives compete for the heritage of now official duchess and as the result of the family feud Vittoria is killed. But by whom?

In his drama Webster changes somehow the plot turns of the real events because he subjugates everything to his own tasks. The main of them is to show the world as an assemblage of «white devils» where one plays one's own meaningful role.

Vittoria Corombona (Webster's version of the name) is a wife of Camillo (the name chosen by the playwright for Peretti) but she passionately loves duke of Bracciano married to Isabella Medici. The lovers joined in a conspiracy to free themselves of all the obstacles on the way to their union. They have an assistant, a helpful Flaminio – a secretary to Bracciano and brother of Vittoria. His cunning, devilish skill of play-acting lead all the participants of the events to the death, him included.

The translation of John Webster's play into Russian, done by Ivan Aksenov – is the only attempt to convey drama problem and style peculiarities to the Russian-speaking readers. Why was not this attempt ever renewed? There are not a few explanations of that. One of them (may be the simplest) is like that: hardly is somebody encouraged nowadays by a laborious work of a translator who deals with such an incomprehensible and obscure text difficult even for native speakers – not to mention the Russian-speaking readers! But there is one more supposition that needs many proofs and factual confirmations. And all the same I'll take the risk of advancing it.

It is not a secret that investigator's or translator's interest to some work of art is very often defined by his intuitive attraction to it either according to its closeness (in different senses) or quite contrary – according to an absolute incompatibility of the worlds of the writer and investigator/translator. The more one penetrates into the depth of I. Aksenov's manner as a translator of Webster's «White Devil» the more one realizes some mystic ties between two men of different epochs and cultures, between their two worlds where dominated «a fearful mixture of good and evil» [6, p. 26]. The art of John Webster, Shakespeare's junior contemporary, linked in a mystic way all those who were somehow contiguous to it and underwent its influence though in a various ways. In Russia besides I. Aksenov the art of Webster attracted Pavel Muratov – a famous art critic of the beginning of the XXth century¹. The dramatist's artistic world frightened

¹ A Russian reader could learn about John Webster and his tragedy «The White Devil» before the publication of I. Aksenov's translation in 1916. The information about the English dramatist and his work appears in 1911 in the first issue of the book by Pavel Pavlovich Muratov (1881–1950) «Images of Italy», called «a perfect investigation and the supreme literary achievement of the writer and art critic» (См.: Гращенко В.Н. Комментарии / В.Н. Гращенко // Муратов П.П. Образы Италии: в 3 т. – М.: Галарт, 1993. – Т. 1. – С. 290). In this book P. Muratov gave his estimation to the personality of John Webster («the strangest enigma of the brilliant epoch of the English theatre». P. 210) and his tragedy «The White Devil» («Белая дьяволица» – in such a way he translates the title of the play) which the art critic made equal with the works of Shakespeare. The third edition of the 1917 mentions already Ivan Aksenov as both the translator of «The White Devil» and as an author of the book «The Elizabethans». We'll add that P. Muratov's interest to Italy and its images was not accidental. In many aspects it was defined by a specific role in his life and destiny of one of the brightest demonic women of the beginning of the XXth century, an Italian by birth. The matter concerns Eugenia Vladimirovna Muratova, born Paganuzzi (1884–1981), P. Muratov's first wife, a beloved of Vladislav Khodasevich. Inna Andreyeva – the author of the contemporary memoirs about the life and destiny of Eugenia Muratova and about her surrounding – calls Eugenia Paganuzzi an indicator that helped to feel the colouring of the epoch (See: Андреева И. Неуловимое создание. Встречи. Воспоминания. Письма / Инна Андреева. – М.: Совпадение, 2000. – 208 с.).

and enchanted one of the «last metaphysics» – a mysterious English poet of the beginning of the XXth century Rupert Brooke (1887–1915) who tragically perished at the fronts of the World War I. He left one book – «John Webster and The Elizabethan Drama» published in 1917. Here he said about Webster's world as a one populated by people who are run as well as animals by instincts but much more recklessly and shatteringly [7].

The mannerism-baroque world of the English playwright drama with a shifted projection of the world and man representation revealed the reality in its incomprehensible polysemantics. It gave rise to chaos in the soul and consciousness of those who plunged into it. Everything Webster spoke about strengthened the feeling of the world universal disharmony. The conjugation of the past and present which happened while one started reflecting over «The White Devil» led to impressive discoveries about the essence of man and reality.

I. Aksenov's interest to Webster, as it seems, was in many respects caused by some ethic-psychological consonant of the far-distant XVIth century with his own time². Besides, in a mannerism way he himself was a receptacle of heterogeneous qualities of man's character and thinking. Elevated and base, dramatic and comic – everything got mixed up in the destiny of that man. N. Berdyajev calls him «a revolutionary Khlestakov» in his book «Spirits of Russian revolution» [8, p. 10]. And the contemporary investigator sees in I. Aksenov «a Renaissance immoralist, a man from Elizabethan playwrights' tragedies – not for nothing Ivan Aksenov translated them» [9, p. 285]. This «white devil» of the beginning of the XXth century was able for heroic deed – to stand solitary confinement, tortures and not to betray his comrades. But simultaneously he was able for the vilest traitor's actions which were described with an unhidden squeamishness in the memoirs of his contemporaries. Vadim Shershenevich, for example, in such a way characterizes one of «the black reviewers» of his book «Horse as horse»: «Aksenov, once being a brilliant staff officer, who always decorated his eye with monocle, found in the book, as it was expected, nothing but counter-revolution and proposed to annihilate the manuscript and to do away with the author morally and physically. Dear Ivan Alexandrovich! It's bad that the offended has always better memory than the offender. How many times you smiled on me so nicely!» [10, p. 447]. S. Yesenin who turned out to be «the accused» at the Imaginist literary trial in 1920 countered to I. Aksenov, his «civil plaintiff», in such a way: «Who judges us? What has done in the literature the civil plaintiff, that fellow drowned in his beard?» I. Grusinov depicted this scene in details in his memoirs where he noticed that the expression «fellow drowned in his beard» sounded like a shot. After that the public kept silence for a while and in a minute burst out in laughing and applauses. «The civil plaintiff was killed on the spot» [10, p. 687]. The man who headed the All-Union committee of the struggle against deserters himself had no aversion to the role of deserter and informer!

Without any doubt it is our Ivan Aksenov who appears in Bertrand Russell's recollections about his visit to Russia and the trip along the Volga. At that time the famous English mathematician, philosopher makes acquaintance with some Mrs. Harrison – «a rich American who sailed with us along the Volga. She was obviously frightened by something and tried to get out from Russia but the Bolsheviks kept her under supervision. She was followed by a supervisor by name Aksenov, who had been engaged in this business already under the old regime; he followed her each step and listened to each of her word. He had a long beard (!), a melancholic countenance; he wrote in French some decadent verses – rather elegant» [11, p. 198].

² I. Aksenov writes about his time as about the beginning of «the world grief» in the verse «PAL MAL BAL» (1914):

«Благодетели! Зовите пожарных:
Начинается мировая скорбь»,

And in 1916 in the poem «Каденца из прошлого» («Cadence from the past») he speaks about the historical events in Russia and in the world as follows:

«О потрясении основ
Безотносительной отчизны»

(See: Аксенов. И.А. Стихотворения / И.А. Аксенов. – [Электронный ресурс]. – Режим доступа: http://az.lib.ru/a/aksenow_i_a/text_0010.shtml (Последнее обращение 10.02.2016).

Nowadays in a fascinating way the similar hidden life is discovered in the case with John Webster! In the famous Oscar-winner film «Shakespeare in love» by John Madden there is one personage – «a blood-thirsty big-eared ragamuffin-informer» in whom, as Vadim Rudkovskij considers, an educated spectator surely recognizes «John Webster, another well-known English dramatist» [12].

Beyond all questions I. Aksenov's valuable contribution as a translator and interpreter is in the fact that he was the first of the home lovers of literature who ventured to enter «the dark Webster's alley» [4]. What did he look for in it? I think that not only the specific interest of the professional philologist led him. Otherwise.... otherwise his translation would have not been so imperfect!

Surely one can hardly overestimate the creative attempts of I. Aksenov even from the point of view of the reader entering the XXIst century. Though Aksenov's language of translation is characterized as archaic («...a mixture of Trediakovsky and Mallarme», – in the definition of I. Grusinov [13, p. 121]), one can notice in it the translator's attempts to convey the difficulty and flowery of the original language and style, to catch Webster's play upon words. But only attempts, the results of which were for I. Aksenov, as it seems, not of so much importance. Carelessness, lack of co-ordination and logic in the meaning and style, «gaps» – all that possibly was the consequence of some other, not philological, but existential process in which the translator was involved while working over the story told by John Webster³. To such a conclusion one may come after comparing this imperfect translation of «White devil» and the original literary works by I. Aksenov which were highly estimated by the writer's contemporaries as well as by literary critics of our time. Thus, the author of the concluding remarks and comments to I. Aksenov's book about Sergey Eisenstein N. Kleiman names him «the brilliant personality... a good, clever and gifted man» [14, p. 128].

The imperfectness of Aksenov's translation of «The White Devil» manifests itself first of all in the obvious gap between text and historical-literary context. In the original their interconnection is the main condition for playfulness, irony, polysemantics. The hidden or open polemics with the history, manners and ways of the epoch verbal embodiment gives birth to a specific meta-plot of «The White Devil» that endows it with meaningfulness and significance.

Webster's drama is saturated with different allusions, references to various spheres of the XVIth century life. It contains many realia which help to reconstruct the historical coloring not only of Italy or England in undercurrent but to convey some universal meaning of the surrounding world. Without taking into account all that many aspects of the design and idea of the drama dissolve in the superficial layer of the plot.

The «laconic brevity» of I. Aksenov's translation originates, as it seems, out of the translator's following the plot, actions: that obviously dominates over his desire to deepen inside the polysemantic play of style and to decipher its nuances in each episode. Hence there appear absolutely incomprehensible and seemingly absurd heroes' remarks, cues. Here are some of the textual oddities demanding explanation:

«...Дарю вас бубенцами» [15] («I'll give you the bells» [16, 4.2, p. 57]).

The bells were put on hawk's little paws. Their sound frightened a pursued prey. By «the bells» one of the central personages means a protection which he may render to his mistress.

«...дьявола храню в бокале» («I beheld the devil in crystal», 4.2, p. 57).

Webster's contemporaries believed that spirits can appear in crystal plates and dishes. «The devil in crystal» means treachery, deception.

³ In 1916 I. Aksenov translated «The White Devil» simultaneously with «The tragic histories» by Francois Rosset – a poet and writer at Margarite Valois's court. Thinking about the time of drama events the translator with the help of de Rosset's words formulates his own perception of the epoch: «Our century is the outflow of various loathsome things of all other centuries. The proof of that are the stories that follow and, in particular, the one I am going to tell now (See: де Россе Ф. Из «Трагических историй» / Франсуа де Россе // Новые забавы и веселые разговоры. Французская новелла эпохи Возрождения. – М.: Правда, 1990. – 608 с. Translation from French, Introductory article and Comments by A. Michailov).

«...в пустырях ирландских» – in the original the matter concerns Irish funerals which were widely known for extreme manifestation of participants' emotions.

The mentioning of some Swiss at Medici court or the «last Jubilee year» contributed as additional strokes to the historical picture recreated by Webster. But for the Russian-speaking reader it was necessary to comment the essence of these historical-cultural details. In Webster's time Swiss mercenaries were hired as guards at the European royal courts⁴ and «the last Jubilee» means the Jubilee year stated by Pope Boniface VIII in 1300 as the time for getting indulgence for virtuous deeds. The Jubilee year repeated each first year of a new century and then each 50-th or 25-th year. Thus «the last Jubilee» in Webster's play is 1600.

Translating all that literally, without any comment or any adaptation to the perception of the fellow-countrymen, I. Aksenov hardly counted on his readers' erudition, information of these spheres. His only variant of the translation left for today is the first and the last attempt to master Webster's manner. There may be a supposition that the attractive force of the English dramatist and his language inaccessibility would make I. Aksenov, the participant of the futuristic movement, if he lived longer, turn back (and not once) to creating some new variants of translator's interpretation. In the articles about Elizabethan drama he himself marked Webster's language difficulty, and wrote about his speech as a «dark and loaded with notions ...he (Webster – T.P.) seems to make his mind to contain into ten – eleven steps of a verse the greatest number of nouns» [17, p. 46].

Everything that we have for today was edited after the translator's death without his possible finishing off process. Though according to Ju. M. Gelperin's article about I. Aksenov in the Biographical Dictionary one could read about the first issue of «The Elizabethans» already in 1915 [18, p. 41–42].

Je.Ju. Rapp, a relative of N. Berdyajev, recalls that already in 1919 it was known about the translation of Elizabethans done by «the colonel A.» – I. Aksenov [19, p. 378].

The fact that the work over the translation and his own style could be continued is proved by Aksenov's sever self-criticism. In one of his letters to S. Bobrov he himself points to errors in his literary works which appeared as he wrote «due to my style, which I find disgusting but which doesn't depend on me...» [10, p. 687]. But no correction or improvement of the language and style of «The White Devil» was done in the period between 1915 and 1934!

Those who are acquainted with the «The White Devil» in original will undoubtedly realize the polysemantics in every element of its poetics. There is nothing in it with one and transparent meaning. Everything is vague, kaleidoscopic and ready to turn into something opposite. That concerns the love for which Vittoria Cirrombona, Bracciano, his wife Isabella struggle and die. It is the love that contains in itself lofty and base simultaneously⁵.

The courtesan turns out to be able to burn herself in the flame of passion. Her love elevates a man and plunges him into the abyss of vice and lustful desires. All the participants of the tragedy are both great and vicious, heroic and worthless⁶. Any of person's nature appearances, his deeds are in equal measure hyperbolized, «painted». But there is a great desire to «take off the mask» and be as one is in reality with all his sins and virtues. In that case the sensual love must be interpreted as a manifestation of a man's natural essence and thus as one worthy of respect. That's why very often removing the pathos of the drama scenes Webster mockingly clashed «lofty» with «low» – a natural physiological feeling. An elevated, high-flown rhetoric is not sel-

⁴ Isaak Asimov tells in details the history of how and why the image of Swiss appeared in Shakespeare's plays (See: Азимов А. Путеводитель по Шекспиру. Английские пьесы / Айзек Азимов. – М.: Центрполиграф, 2007. – 820 с. – С. 140).

⁵ My detailed analysis of «The White Devil» see: Потницева Т.Н. «Белый дьявол» Джона Уэбстера: *Discordia Concors / Т.Н. Потницева // Від бароко до постмодернізму: Зб. наук. праць.* – Дніпропетровськ: Дніпропетровський державний університет, 1999. – С. 16–27.

⁶ Nowadays R. Samarin's judgment about Webster's «bloody tragedies» seems to be not very accurate. As the scholar states, «there reigned the atmosphere of an irreparable despair, the feeling of doom; a man in these tragedies was losing his spiritual beauty, ceased to be a person in the Shakespearean sense and turned to be a pitiful, worthless creature who came to the world only to suffer and make suffer other people» (See: Самарин Р.М. Этот честный метод / Р.М. Самарин. – М.: Изд-во МГУ, 1974. – С. 56).

dom interrupted by «a voice of a man's nature», which was so distinctly heard in Webster's art by Oscar Wilde [20, p. 113]⁷, but I. Aksenov (who most likely heard it) tried to damp it down and mix up. It happens already in the very beginning, in the Preface («To the reader») where Webster speaks of the theatrical audience as of «ignorant asses» («asses» having a double meaning here). In the translation of I. Aksenov the word «asses» is omitted and only «ignorant» («невежественные») remains.

There are many causes of such a change. One of them is the very time the translator lived and worked in. Quite obviously there were some secret ethic «norms» which concerned the artistic creation as well as social-political spheres of life. The «former staff officer», a man whose mind was formed in the atmosphere of strict discipline obeyed them surely. I think that may explain why, for example, in the enumeration of the tragedy persons I. Aksenov follows not the principle of the role importance and the heroes place in the drama but the principle of their social and class position. His list of persons starts with cardinal Monticelso, royal court persons (men, first), but not Vittoria Corrombona as it is in Webster's variant.

All that is only a supposition about the variant of the translation which as it seems remains under fulfilled. But why did I. Aksenov get down to the translation of Webster's drama where the most important is the play upon words and meanings?

There are two tendencies in the translator's manner. On the one hand he quite obviously opposes the mannerism style of Webster, as if neglecting and simplifying its complicated image-stylistic tissue. Somehow that corresponds with I. Aksenov's famous resistance to «budetlyanstvo», experiments with rhyme and form⁸. On the other hand, he is as though afraid to destroy something in the complicated encounter of the form and sense in the English word-image. Hence is the predominance of literal, word for word translation leading to nonsense, absurdity⁹.

I. Aksenov's version: «Я льщу себя, наедине с собою. / Сослужить. Запечатлеть» (4.1, p. 138) with a very dim sense corresponds to original – «I am so used to frequent flattery / That, being alone, I now flatter myself; / But it wilt serve, 'tis sealed» (4.1, p. 54)¹⁰. In the Russian variant Vittoria answers to Bracciano's appeal to join their hands in an illogical way: «Убирайся!» («Go away», 4.1, p. 144), though in the original she expresses consent: «Hence».

The Russian-language reader could hardly understand such literal translation of Flaminio's words: «Я переменою обличий занял / Ростя, прохвост великих обезьянит» (4.1, p. 146). In the original: «But this allows my varying of shapes. / Knaves do grow great by being great men's apes» (4.2, p. 62). And absolutely ridiculous seems to be the translation of the word «choleric» in Flaminio's remark (5.1, p. 73): «Are you choleric?» The key character of the play addresses to Marcello meaning his violent temperament. But I. Aksenov deciphers it as a remark about some illness: «Холера у тебя?» (5.1, p. 158). The English «gests in progress» that means «landmarks, signs on the monarch's route» is understood as «ходить гусем» («to give oneself airs», «to plume oneself», 5.1, p. 158).

In the tragedy final scene Flaminio being at the death door pronounces such words in the spirit of Webster's play on concepts and images: «My life was a black charnel: I have caught / An everlasting cold. I have lost my voice / Most irrecoverably» (5.6, p. 99). In the literal translation

⁷ Gorbunov A.N. is just when he notices mannerists' two incompatible halves – «spiritual and carnal». Namely that, as the scholar thinks, conditions the presence of two poles of that art – a sensitive spiritualism that refers one to the old centuries' way of thinking and a skeptical hedonism bordering upon the refined exotica (See: Горбунов А.Н. Джон Донн и английская поэзия XVI–XVII веков. – М.: Изд-во МГУ, 1998. – С. 88).

⁸ It's known that I. Aksenov accused V. Маяkovskij's «budetlyanstvo» and his playing with rhyme and verse form (See: Аксенов И. О Маяковском / И. Аксенов // В.В. Маяковский: pro et contra. – СПб.: Издательство Русской Христианской Гуманитарной Академии, 2006. – С. 829–831).

⁹ This precedent had place in the case with V. Nabokov's translation of «Alice's Adventures in Wonderland» by L. Carroll. Having an inclination to a free interpretation of the famous English book in Russian language V. Nabokov-aesthete tried not to destroy the playful character of Carroll's word image. But paradoxically it resulted in the appearance of the literalism like «взять время», «наполовину испугавшись» and so on, which struck by their absurdity and discrepancy with the norms of the Russian language.

¹⁰ This playing is masterfully conveyed by A. Sergeev in his translation of Donne's «Ecstasy»: «Так и душа к душе плывет / Сначала приобщаясь к телу».

of I. Aksenov these words are taken for the hero's complain about his catching cold (Навек / Я простудился. Голос потерял / Невозвратимо (5.6, p.185).

John Webster playing with key words and epoch concepts (for example, with such ones typical of Shakespeare and J. Donne – «sea storm», «crushing ship») converts them into another, erotic sphere which seems to be disregarded by I. Aksenov deliberately. So, Camillo, Vittoria's husband who betrayed her complains:

We never lay together, but ere morning
There grew a flaw between us.

The polysemantics of the words «lay» and «flaw» is revealed and played upon by Webster. I. Aksenov ruins the cue metaphorical meaning which helps to realize the dramatist's connection with his literature background. In Russian one reads:

Мы спим, но с раннего утра
Меж нами ссора.

(«We sleep but from the early morning / We are in quarrel)

The ambiguity of the original phrase is lost in the translation and with it does the play upon meanings in the definition of Bracciano, Vittoria's lover, as a «bowler». In the Russian version «bowler» turns into «жонглер» («juggler»). A very strange association which tangles up the meaning of the episode in the translation. In reality the game with bowls was a popular one in Webster's time and it often served as a ground for euphemism definitions of lovers relations. The similar loss happens in the episode when the main heroine – Vittoria Corrombona – tried to justify herself before her «comrade-in arms» Flaminio. She assures him that she never wanted to upset her husband but in reality her words reveal an unhidden mockery over Camillo which is brightly manifested in the ambiguity of the key verb «to carve» meaning both «to cut something» and «to castrate»:

«I did nothing to displease him; I carved to him at supper time».

Flaminio catches Vittoria's irony and replies as follows:

«You need not have carved him in faith, they say he is a capon already».

I. Aksenov translates everything in his own way:

Виттория: «Я выбирала ему лучшие куски».

Фламиньо: «...нечего... его откармливать было; он, говорят, и так каплун»¹¹.

(Vittoria: «I choose the best pieces for him».

Flaminio: «...there was no need to fatten him up; they say he is a capon in any way»).

The well-known idiomatic expression «tale of a tub» (Swift's «Tale of a Tub» comes to mind first) includes one more meaning in the context of Webster's drama. It is a «sweating tub», a notion connected with the erotic plan of the subject-matter, in other words, it is a means to treat for the venereal disease. I. Aksenov looks for some softening variants of the phrase to escape the slippery topic. But as a result he invents something absurd.

The Great Duke of Florence Francisco de Medici blames Bracciano for his unfaithfulness to Vittoria Corombona:

«..... but we fear

When Tiber to each prowling passenger

Discovers flocks of wild ducks, then, my lord –

'Bout moulting time I mean – we shall be certain

To find you sure enough and speak with you» (2.1, p. 20).

In the Russian version we read:

«..... Одною теперь боюсь:

На Тибре видит каждый проходящий

Стада из диких уток. Государь –

Минует линька, будете спокойней,

Увидимся и переговорим» (Д. 11, сц. 1, с. 105).

¹¹ As I. Asimov states, the jokes about a capon or a woodcock being castrated were typical of the Shakespearean epoch (See: Азимов А. Путеводитель по Шекспиру. Греческие, римские и итальянские пьесы / Айзек Азимов. – М.: Центрполиграф, 2007. – С. 596).

Why «линька» («moulting»)? Whose moulting? And why does one become calmer («спокойнее») after it? The answer is found in the original text which reveals a refined playing with a spectrum of semantic shades. The phrase «shed hairs» means «to loose one's hair», that is – to acquire an obvious appearances of the venereal disease – bald spots – as a result of dissipated way of life. «Flocks of wild ducks» has a figurative meaning – whores. And the phrase «stags grow melancholic» means stags-males that become calm in their after-breeding period. In Aksenov's version everything sounds funny. «Stags grow melancholic» turns into «когда утихнет пламенный олень» (very alike to some lines from revolutionary song). The loss of hair on the head of Webster's profligate is represented in Russian translation with one simple meaning: «Самым хитрым силкам не вырвать столько перьев, сколько он потерял волос, если послушать его доктора» (Д. 1, сц. 2, с. 92) («The most skillful trap can't tear out so many feathers as he looses hairs if to believe his doctor»). In comparison with the original text the mentioning of the doctor here has quite another situational and linguistic motivation. In Webster's variant everything is interconnected: one gets up into mischief, discovers an awful illness and calls a doctor.

It's very difficult to «force one's way» trough the meaning of Flaminio's monologue translated word for word. He calls an unhappy Vittoria's husband «an Irish gamester that will play himself naked, and then wage all downward at hazard, is not more venturous. So unable to please a woman that like a Dutch doublet all his back is shrunk into his breeches» (1.2, p. 8). In translation – «голый ирландский гуляка, который нравится женщине так же мало, как и голландское трико, стягивающее ему задницу в штанах» (Д. 1, сц. 2, с. 92) – «a naked Irish libertine who is liked by women as much as is a Dutch tricot that tightened his ass». Webster treats ironically both the literal and figurative meaning of the phrase «wage all down» that is a gambler's readiness to pawn even his genitals in the case of failure. And in the polysemantic «shrunk» the author accentuates a hint at the popular expression «a weak back» – powerless, with the signs of man's impotence.

Throwing a challenge to the standards of the Renaissance understanding of a harmonic person Webster creates such an amplitude swinging from high to low points and vice versa that their contrast could be taken for a stage trick, theatrical effect. The author didn't hide such intentions of his. In the very beginning, in the stage direction of the Scene 1, Act 1 there is a certain indication of «play in play», a realized theatricality of everything going on. This indication is embodied in the remark: «A sennet sounds». Sennet is a trumpet signal which proclaims an actor's appearance at the stage. I. Aksenov omits this remark and by that removes an important condition which defines the adequate perception of the drama, its playful, theatrical character with the elements of the author's estrangement and reckoning on effect and effectiveness. Namely that as if an overdoing in theatrical effects attracted B. Shaw's attention. The dramatist who was mastering quite different aesthetic principles rained down his biting sarcasm on the art of the Elizabethans. He named them «a company of mediocrities and dullards» and accused them of adherence to «senseless and loathsome rhetoric» [21, p. 171, 444]. The great wit was undoubtedly prejudiced in his estimations. Besides, as he wrote himself, «in reasonable dimensions he also was ready to do honour to Shakespeare» [21, p. 270].

The element of play and theatricality in J. Webster's drama help to reveal one more meaning of it: the great Shakespearean epoch was reaching its final stage causing the literary men's necessity to think over its «results». «The White Devil» presents this literary reflection in the parody modus which illuminates the recognizable Shakespearean motives, images, appearances of style. It has its own jealous husband who like Othello is ready to strangle his unfaithful wife. It also has its own insane Ophelia – Cornelia – who like her prototype in Shakespeare's tragedy sings a flower ditty with a certain symbolical meaning of each of the flower. It has its own «Hamlet's father shadow» – ghost of Bracciano. Like Shakespeare in «Macbeth» the author of «The White Devil» develops the topic of a husband/wife assassination plot. And at last there is its own philosophizer – a jester, Flaminio.

The dramatic work by J. Webster possessing many-sidedness is in itself a certain kind of 'white devil'. The author's intention, as it seems, was not only to puzzle his reader and spectator by the seriousness of the problems put forward but to entertain them and first of all by the play with Shakespeare.

It's not difficult to notice that I. Aksenov destroys the playful, two-dimensional character of the drama poetics and in particular of its dialogues which in the original are always connected

with the conflict of «visible» and «real». But in the translator's interpretation one can feel another kind of dialogue-polemics with the Russian author's time and literature. Omitting or reproducing the unintelligible in the mannerism style I. Aksenov to all appearances tried to comprehend the orientation of the contemporary art to the non-classical paradigm. He was one who shared this orientation idea with the participants of «Centrifuga». It is the «illogic, sense incorrectness which become as a matter of fact one of the embodiments of the alternative world view» [22, p. 131] which was sought for by them.

I. Aksenov sympathized in Webster's art with that «merry horror» which was correlated by Alexander Block with the Russian futurism and the very essence of Russian soul [23, p. 221].

Admitting the fact that the translation of «The White Devil» is imperfect and with many mistakes that are conditioned by both objective and, as it becomes obvious, subjective causes we agree with the point of view worded by V. Nabokov. It's the truth that no matter how masterly the translator is he can't avoid mistakes and shortages. And the only guilty in this case is in many respects «the very spirit of the language». One can add that in no less degree the blame may be put on «the spirit of time» under which influence the shifting of accents, and the angle of perception happens. But nevertheless the most important is the fact that I. Aksenov ventured to enter Webster's «dark alley». The translator marked the way for other translators-investigators who in their further work will be keeping in sight the word image and all the shades of its semantics.

But in the case with the first Russian translator of «The White Devil» the most interesting and important thing concerns the phenomenon of the «shifted text», the very fact of its imperfect translation that leads far beyond the limits of a mere philological studies.

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У статті досліджуються особливості перекладу п'єси Дж. Вебстера «Білий диявол» І. Аксьоновим. Таємничий і навіть містичний компонент у сутності та наративі п'єси часто пов'язується дослідниками зі складним процесом розуміння Вебстером тяжких подій історії Італії XVI століття. Драматург відновлює у власній свідомості не тільки сенсаційну історію Вітторії Аккорамбона, але й, в основному, вивчає універсальну проблему протиборства людини зі злом у собі, передусім. Це доводить сама назва трагедії – «Білий диявол», де «білий диявол» означає «лицемір», «зрадник», «перевертень». У випадку з І. Аксьоновим – першим перекладачем «Білого диявола» російською мовою – найважливішим та найцікавішим для дослідження є феномен «зміщеного тексту».

Ключові слова: драма постшекспірівської доби, переклад, маньєризм, бароко, інтертекстуальність.

В статье исследуются особенности перевода пьесы Дж. Вебстера «Белый дьявол» И. Аксеновым. Таинственный и даже мистический компонент в сущности и нарративе пьесы часто связывается исследователями со сложным процессом понимания Вебстером событий мрачной истории Италии XVI столетия. Драматург восстанавливает в собственном сознании не только сенсационную историю Виттории Аккорамбона, но и, главным образом, изучает универсальную проблему противоборства человека со злом, в себе, прежде всего. Это доказывает самое название трагедии – «Белый Дьявол», где «белый дьявол» означает «лицемер», «предатель», «оборотень». В случае с И. Аксеновым – первым переводчиком «Белого дьявола» на русский язык – наиболее важным и интересным для исследования является феномен «смещенного текста».

Ключевые слова: драма пост-шекспировской эпохи, перевод, маньєризм, барокко, интертекстуальность.

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