

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

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". 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.

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. 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".

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. 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 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.