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## GUMILEV-TRANSLATOR AS A GUIDE TO THE WORLD CULTURE

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### Abstract

The article is devoted to the principles of Nikolay Gumilev as a translator and a guide to the world culture. The poet wrote an article about the translation principles in 1919, in which he insisted on the necessity for the translator to accurately follow the text of the original. The comparison between two texts – one made before this articulation and another written after his program article – showed that the poet followed his own principles. Two texts were taken for the analysis – “Phèdre” by Oscar Wilde and “Némée” by José-Maria de Heredia. It is also interesting to note that both texts have links with ancient Greece and allude to significant moments in myths. The translation made before formulating translator’s principles is rather free: Gumilev did not reflect the main idea of the text by Oscar Wilde in his work. Another translation, Heredia’s sonnet, was made by Gumilev with the accurate care for the allusions and the text itself. The interesting moment is the transformation of original poems’ most significant ideas in relation to major principles of Gumilev’s work and his formulation of the main ideas of acmeism as a poetic school. Heredia’s sonnet was translated in the context of post-acmeism and drastically differs from the translation of Wilde. In both texts Gumilev also acts as a guide to the world culture and antique allusions.

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## 1. Introduction

N. S. Gumilev is the author of an extensive series of poetic translations from European languages and at the same time a prominent theorist in translation matters. Gumilev's recommendations to the authors of poetic translations come down to the maximum respect for the letter and spirit of the original (Bagno, 2019, p. 7). Vs. Bagno mentions debates between N. S. Gumilev and K. I. Chukovsky on the basic principles of translation: Gumilev proposed to adhere to certain rules (to comply with the rhythm of the original, enjambement, images, etc.), Chukovsky advocated their complete absence. At the same time, Gumilev often violated his own principles (Bagno, 2019, p. 8; Filicheva, 2015; Timofeeva, 2019). The theoretical postulates of translation were formulated by the poet in 1919, and the analysis of N. S. Gumilev's poetic translations in comparison with the original texts is of great interest, as well as the analysis of the innovations which he introduces into the text, before he himself formulated the principles of translation and after.

## 2. Problem Statement

Let us consider Nikolay Gumilev's translation practice in its interaction with the world cultural tradition as the main problem of this study.

## 3. Research Questions

The posed research problem involves studying the following questions:

**3.1.** Comparison of the original text with N.S. Gumilev's translation of the poems which have extensive semantic connections with the world culture. Two sonnets translated by Gumilev were selected as the material for the study: Oscar Wilde's "Phèdre" (1881) sonnet dedicated to Sarah Bernhardt, and José Maria de Heredia's sonnet "Némée". Wilde's sonnets were translated in 1912 at the request of Chukovsky (Gumilev, 2019, p. 643). Translation of Heredia had been carried out in 1920 as a part of the collective work of a translation studio organized by M. L. Lozinsky: several authors were translating Heredia's book "Trophies", and Gumilev translated four sonnets, including "Némée" (Bagno, 2019, p. 11). It is Heredia who is mentioned twice in Gumilev's article on the principles of translation as an example for preserving the principles of constructing a poem's imagery. Oscar Wilde's and José Maria de Heredia's texts are also interesting in that they are both riddled with references to antique realities: Oscar Wilde is talking about the heroine of antique mythology and drama Phèdre, while also mentioning Academus, Pan and Odysseus. Heredia describes a labour of Hercules – the victory over the Nemean lion;

**3.2.** Comparison of early and late period's translation techniques through the example of the translator making changes to the texts of the poems mentioned above;

**3.3.** Revealing the evolution of Gumilev as a translator in his interaction with the world culture.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the interplay between the principles of translation theory formulated by N. S. Gumilev, and his practical experience in their implementation, and a description of the creative evolution of Gumilev as a translator.

This implies a number of specific tasks:

- 4.1. Analysis of changes that Gumilev-translator made to the translation of Oscar Wilde's sonnet;
- 4.2. Analysis of changes that Gumilev-translator made to the translation of José Maria de Heredia's sonnet;
- 4.3. Comparison of Gumilev-practitioner's strategies with his own translation theories in the context of their formulation;
- 4.4. Consideration of the translated text's interaction with the context of the world culture.

## 5. Research Methods

The study uses the method of comparing the text of the original with the text of the translation, identifying the allusions to the antique culture used by the author and the translator, as well as the method of semantic analysis of the innovations introduced by the translator.

## 6. Findings

Oscar Wilde's poem was written in 1881, two years after the sensational premiere of "Phèdre" by Racine with Sarah Bernhardt in the lead role (1879). The image of Sarah Bernhardt in this performance was captured in a painting by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec in 1893.

In Wilde's text, the main idea is the following: Phèdre was bored of being in the underworld, so she returned to the living, but she was "mistaken by the epoch". She should have talked with Mirandola in Florence, or wandered in the groves of Academe, gathered the reed with the goat-footed Pan, or played with the girls who had awakened the Odysseus. However, she returned to the "boring world" – "to this common world" (Wilde), which clearly explains Wilde's position: he believes that Phèdre returned to "this" modern world in the form of Sarah Bernhardt. "This common world" becomes the refrain of Wilde's text, it is mentioned both at the beginning and at the end of the text – it's fundamentally important for the poet to show that Phèdre came to us, to our world, contemporary to him.

Wilde's text contains a certain violation of chronology: while discussing the potential resurrection of Phèdre, he suggests her to incarnate, among other things, among the girls on the Phaeacian land – that is, in the events of "The Odyssey". The myth about Odysseus is deeply archaic, and the events of "The Odyssey" definitely occurred earlier than the events of Phèdre myth. Thus, Theseus – Phèdre's husband – was the king of Athens, and the events of the Trojan War and subsequent Odysseus's wanderings had occurred even before Athens emerged as a polis.

Coming out of the kingdom of Hades, Phèdre, as it were, travels the worlds, she does not reincarnate, but moves freely through history, falling into the past or the future. This is a prototype of a peculiar aeonic

time – an important concept in acmeism (Kikhney, 2017, p. 45). Aeon is “folded” time, at the same time the past and the future, connected at one point (Filatov, 2018).

Selection of the characters with whom Phèdre is suggested to communicate is significant. Thus, the first among them was the humanist Pico della Mirandola, who became famous in particular for his commentary on the Love Song. Love Song is a sonnet by Girolamo Benivieni dedicated to Pico della Mirandola, with whom Benivieni was in love but did not receive reciprocity (Semprini, 1922, p. 361). In other words, Mirandola was an object of the same unrequited love, just like Phèdre’s stepson Hippolytus became for Phèdre. Nausicaa experienced unrequited love to Odysseus. This concept also refers to Academus, the hero who pointed to Castor and Polydeuces where Helen was, kidnapped by Theseus – Phèdre’s husband (after the events of the myth of Phèdre). Due to Academus’s actions Theseus lost Helen, also finding himself love-lorn. It should also be noted that the name of Academus is most often associated with Plato, who placed his school in an olive grove dedicated to Academus – Wilde refers specifically to the grove, since Phèdre is suggested to roam “through the cool olives of the Academe” (Wilde). Plato is the author of a philosophical dialogue “Phaedrus” (the name of the protagonist is compliant with Phèdre (Phaedra), which explains the essence of love, including the unrequited love.

After mentioning Mirandola and Academus (who chronologically followed Phèdre), Wilde as though “sends” Phèdre to the past, plunging her into archaic myths about Pan and about Odysseus and Nausicaa – the princess who was in love with Odysseus. All the characters specified by Wilde are associated with the idea of unrequited love, notably a love for a very beautiful person – both Pico della Mirandola and Helen of Troy, whom Theseus loved, were characterized by an amazing physical beauty. Pan is also quite appropriate in this context: he was in love with the beautiful nymph Syrinx, frightened of his ugliness. Wilde’s Phèdre “should have collected the reed with Pan” – this is a clear reference to the myth about Syrinx who turned into reed. Odysseus, as it is mentioned in the myth about Nausicaa, was given an amazing beauty by gods. Hippolytus, Phèdre’s unrequited love, was also beautiful.

The logic of Wilde’s text, therefore, is as follows: Phèdre could have travelled through time, communicated with those who, just like her, had an unrequited love for someone beautiful – however, she preferred to appear in “this world”, at a boring and ordinary time. Phèdre’s wanderings in times and epochs are described as “should've talked”, “should've gathered” – that is, a construction is used that a priori implies the improbability, impossibility of the described: she “could ...” – but did not and came to our world instead.

In Gumilev’s translation, the opposition is smoothed. Firstly, the Russian language does not have such a grammatical tool, and the translator has to use the construction “You, who should have been”, and then again turn to the probabilistic register, claiming that Odysseus “sail / could”: that is, the probability is so to speak attributed not to Phèdre but to Odysseus. This erodes the allusion to Nausicaa: if Wilde clearly speaks of the girls who woke Odysseus up (therefore, we are talking about the appearance of Odysseus in the land of the Phaeaces), then Gumilev mentions the girls by the sea, by whom Odysseus could have sailed – in such a context, these could be, for example, the sirens. The reference to Academus as a hero is also lost – Gumilev’s Phèdre could have wandered “in the olive walks of the academies”.

At the end of the poem, Wilde repeats the negative suffix -less: Phèdre after all came into a boring world, because she does not like “sunless day”, “scentless asphodel” (odorless asphodels) and “loveless

lips” (lips without love) (Wilde). In Gumilev’s text these are respectively, “fetters of gloom”, “dull asphodels” and “cold lips” – and Wilde’s main idea is lost in translation. In the original text Phèdre prefers to return to the living world, since the world in which she resides is described as “sunless, scentless, loveless” (Wilde) – she probably hopes to find reciprocal love after all (that is why she is not interested in communicating with others unrequitedly in love), however, the world turns out to be “common” – “conventional, ordinary”, she seems to have chosen the wrong time, and the myth of Phèdre is repeated again: again she will not be able to experience mutual feelings, the world she came into is too boring and ordinary. The poem is extremely important for Wilde, who admired the outer beauty – at the same time when he wrote “Phèdre” he also created “The Picture of Dorian Gray”, glorifying the exceptional outer beauty and unrequited admiration for it.

Gumilev’s Phèdre finds herself in a “boring world” in which she is “bored, vain,” while Gumilev’s motivation for Phèdre’s actions is less clear than Wilde’s: since the translation does not mention two of three myths (in fact, the reference to unrequited love is only the image of Pico della Mirandola and Pan), it is not clear why Phèdre chose to appear “in a boring world.” At the same time, Gumilev’s text contains some hints of physical closeness: Phèdre should “be in Italy with Mirandola” (and not “talk” like in Wilde’s text), “break” the reed with Pan, and not just “collect” it – that is, Phèdre could get into that virtual world in which Pan “broke the reed” (took advantage of Syrinx), but eventually ends up in that boring world in which she is now. Despite the changes made by the translator, the general logic of the image’s development still can be traced: Phèdre, who hated the cold of Hades, happened to find herself in a no less boring and unpleasant world in which she was unlikely to satisfy her passion.

Wilde’s choice of this particular text is not accidental: in 1912, when Gumilev was translating “Phèdre”, his program article, “The Legacy of Symbolism and Acmeism,” approving the principles of the new poetic school, was published, the concept of aeonic time was developed, combining both the past and the future (Lipovetsky, 2018; Safiulina, 2018). The theme of unrequited love is also important for him: for many years the poet was in love with Anna Akhmatova who repeatedly refused him. By the time of translating Wilde, Gumilev and Akhmatova were already married, and their son Lev was growing up, but the poet was being tormented by his beloved’s coldness and the lack of reciprocity for many years. In general, translating Wilde’s text, Gumilev to a large extent tries to reflect the logic and imagery of the original, but loses some significant ideas.

In 1920, when Gumilev was working on translation of “Némée” by Heredia (1893), he had already formulated his ideas about poetic translations. Heredia’s sonnet is dedicated to the first labour of Hercules – the victory over the Nemean lion. In Heredia’s poem, Hercules appears in the perception of a shepherd – an accidental observer who initially mistook a man carrying the body of the defeated animal for a lion – a monster, “human beast”, in Gumilev’s translation. The labour itself – the fight with the lion – is not described in the poem: Hercules goes to forest, the lion’s roar is heard from there indicating its death, and then Hercules leaves the forest, carrying the lion’s body on himself. The background for the unfolding scene is the sunset: the sun disappears with the last roar of the lion, and the hero emerges from the forest amid twilight.

Translating Heredia, Gumilev retains the general outline of the plot – he describes the state of “before” (Hercules goes into forest) and “after” (Hercules leaves forest) too, but there are some differences

from the original, which seem semantically important. Heredia gave Hercules the name “Dompteur”, “tamer”, and this word is capitalized as a proper name. In Gumilev’s text “the chasseur hid in the forest” – the lexical unit used by him is connected with a fundamentally different context: his Hercules seeks to “capture” the lion, and Heredia’s Hercules seeks to “pacify, tame”.

Further in Heredia’s text Hercules follows the lion’s trail which is described as “formidable” (Heredia): this word means “remarkable, noteworthy”, but not “spreading”. In Gumilev’s text we see: “bowing head to a spreading trail.” It can be assumed that Gumilev, relying on the antique plot, captures the moment when the lion rushes about and then runs away from a person, therefore his trail is spreading. Heredia’s Hercules is a tracker following the trail of an animal, Gumilev’s Hercules is a hero who has already turned an invulnerable monster to flight, and now he is pursuing him further. The same semantic line continues further. It is fundamentally important for Heredia that the struggle between Hercules and the lion was carried out in complete silence, and “only growl betrayed their embrace” – that is, only the sound of strangled lion indicated that there was a struggle in the cave. In Gumilev’s text “only roar meant victory” – the fight had already ended, its outcome is foregone, but the phrase is formulated in such a way that it is not clear who won: the man or the lion.

This moment of not understanding, not knowing the outcome of the battle is important for the central image of Heredia's poem – the shepherd is horrified to see a lion standing on its hind legs against the sky, and only then realizes that it is not a lion that is approaching him, but Hercules. Gumilev’s shepherd is “ready to believe delirium”, that is, it seems to him that a beast is approaching him, and at the same time he realizes that this vision is delusional. In Heredia’s text the shepherd’s eyes are “élargi par la crainte” (Heredia), “widened with fear” – he sees not a delusional monstrous vision, but takes the approaching figure for the Nemean lion himself.

In Heredia’s text, the silhouette of a lion, indicated by a fanged mouth and a mane, appears against the background of a “bleeding sky”, “sur le ciel sanglant” (Heredia) – as if the nature merges with the labour, the lion’s blood flows through the sky as well. In Gumilev’s texts “on a bloody sunset the gaze is more awful / than bared fangs and golden mane” – the word “gaze” appears, which is absent in Heredia’s text. Further, in the last tiercet, when it is explained that it was not the lion itself approaching the viewer after all, but Hercules in the lion's hide, the following logical connection can be found in Gumilev’s text: “the gaze is more awful ... because there ... there was a human beast, a monstrous Hero.” “More awful” is the gaze of Hercules who gained the victory over the lion. And it is “more awful” than the picture that initially appeared to the observer – the “scared shepherd” thought that he was seeing a lion, and only later he figured out that he was seeing a man. Taking into account that Gumilev uses the word “delirium” in the description of this scene, then the following logic emerges: the gaze of the hero who achieved his first fantastic incredible victory, is even more awful than the delusional vision of the Nemean lion standing on its hind legs.

Gumilev’s translation follows the original in form and rhythm, both the imagery and the syntactic breakdown of the text are observed – that is, it is fully consistent with the canons declared by Gumilev. At the same time, Gumilev introduces a semantically significant point into the text: due to the slightly modified construction of the phrase, the focus is not on the opposition of the phantom and the real, as it was with Heredia, but an image of a man – a hero who accomplished a feat.

In 1920, when the translation of "Némée" was created, Gumilev wrote poems that describe the space of "delirium", the world on the verge of reality and delusion – for example, in the works "Amongst Gypsies", "Lost Street-car" the lyrical hero appears in some twisted, changed world which does not live according to the usual logical laws (Kulikova, 2015, 2017; Serdechnaya, 2019; Zavel'skaya, 2017). A reference to this world is the mention of "delirium" in the translation of Heredia: if the character of the original is just scared, then the character of the translation as if for a moment falls into this delusional space, and immediately realizes that he is not in the world of delirium, but in the real world, and the man approaching him who defeated the lion is even more monstrous than what he first imagined.

## 7. Conclusion

Analysis of two translations made by N. S. Gumilev allows one to show the evolution of the poet-translator: adhering to the original and trying to reflect its content to the fullest extent possible, Gumilev, however, introduces semantic tones into the texts that were not present in the original. In the translation of Wilde made in 1912, changes emasculate the text: it loses the image of unrequited love, attraction to beauty, contrasting the lifeless Hades, the hypothetical worlds that the heroine could fall into, and the boring world of modernity. In the translation of Heredia made in 1920, after a polemic about translation methods and Gumilev's clear articulation of his position regarding the relationship between the translation and the original, the changes made by the translator enrich the text, make it deeper, as it were, more firmly "rooting" the ancient myth into it. Thus, Gumilev accomplishes the mission of a guide to the world culture for the Russian reader. In both cases, the choice of the text for translation itself is significant: Gumilev refers to those texts that are interesting to him in the context of his own creative evolution, the theoretical and creative ideas formulated by him.

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