

“LEAVES OF GRASS” BY WALT WHITMAN: FREE VERSE PRINCIPLES AND THEIR ROLE IN RAISING ACCURACY OF RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS

The paper explores major principles underpinning *verse libre* by Walt Whitman, the focus on which is expected to improve the quality of translation and assess the extent of accuracy achieved by some famous Russian translators belonging to different epochs unequally distanced from the times of Walt Whitman. The research rests on comparative literary studies as one of its pillars and examines the translations from Walt Whitman by Konstantin Balmont, Korney Chukovsky, Andrey Sergeev, and Vladimir Britanishsky. The study aims to show if the translators managed to preserve Whitman's parallelism (“the rhythm of thought”), including envelope composition, phonetic reiterations, as well as catalogues and imagery. The analysis undertaken herein proves that it is so far hardly possible to talk about the translation of “Leaves of Grass” that would take account of all the principles underpinning Whitman's free verse.

Keywords: Walt Whitman, free verse principles, translation accuracy, comparative analysis of translations.

И. В. Пивень (Никитина)

ПРИНЦИПЫ ВЕРЛИБРА У. УИТМЕНА И ИХ ВЛИЯНИЕ НА ТОЧНОСТЬ ПЕРЕВОДОВ «ЛИСТЬЕВ ТРАВЫ» НА РУССКИЙ ЯЗЫК

В статье рассматриваются ключевые принципы, лежащие в основе верлибра У. Уитмена, который считается новатором свободного стиха и реформатором стихосложения. Цель настоящего исследования заключается в том, чтобы показать, что ориентация на эти принципы позволит, во-первых, судить об их практической пользе при переводе, а во-вторых, оценить границы точности, достигнутые некоторыми известными российскими переводчиками, по времени разноточными от эпохи У. Уитмена. Новизна исследования, которое предполагает опору на основы сравнительного литературоведения, определяется тем, что в нем рассматриваются переводы из У. Уитмена, выполненные К. Бальмонтом, К. Чуковским, А. Сергеевым и В. Британешским, на предмет сохранения в них уитменовского параллелизма (“ритма мысли»), в том числе конвертной композиции, фонетических повторов, а также приема каталогов и образной системы. Проведенный анализ показывает, что говорить о переводе «Листьев», учиты-

вающем все принципы, на которых основан верлибр Уитмена пока преждевременно.

Ключевые слова: Уолт Уитмен, основные принципы верлибра, точность перевода, сравнительный анализ переводов.

Introduction

Among the main types of American free verse translated into Russian, the verse standing in contrast to or being the direct opposite of traditional forms comes first, according to Russian philologist Evgeniya Vetrova. She refers to this type of verse as Whitmanian [Vetrova, 1983, p. 169]. In addition to her own observations, she relies on descriptions by W. Sutton [Sutton, 1973], A. Zhovtis [Zhovtis, 2013], Yu. Orlitsky [Orlitsky, 1995] to identify typological convergence of American and Russian free verse based on Walt Whitman's verse variety and on the analysis of existing translations. Apart from the scholars mentioned above, we should also base ourselves on the works of Chukovsky [Chukovsky, 1966], Gachev [Gachev, 1998], Probstein [Probstein, 2019], and Demetskaya [Demetskaya, 2013].

Walt Whitman is an American poet who pioneered a unique type of free verse, an open form of poetry that has no consistent meter patterns, rhyme, or any musical pattern, but combines spontaneous, prosaic rhythms with incantatory repetitions resembling the Bible. Vetrova assumes that Whitman's kind of American free verse is mastered the best in Russian poetry [Vetrova, 1983, p. 170]. Still, this fact says nothing about the extent of accuracy achieved by translators of free verse of the first type. This extent is vague enough and any attempts to outline its boundaries require a significant amount of work, which is beyond the scope of this article. However, the analysis proposed herein of how accurate some Whitman's translations are will help to get a completely reliable idea about positive and negative results achieved by the translators as well as to assess how cunning this type of free verse is and how complicated the issues facing translators are.

Research methods and principles

For the purposes of clarification, we need to point out that we will not deviate from the tenth testament of Russian poet and translator Vasily Trediakovsky: verse should be smooth with poetic license [in verse translation] being limited, if otherwise not possible [Trediakovsky, 1849, vol. 1, p. XIII–XIV]. Thus, the accuracy of translation will be assessed in terms of

faithfulness to the author and the source text (without taking into account socio-cultural aspects of the country of the target language). Since it is almost impossible to translate all the elements of a poem accurately, we need to opt for a translation method (according to Valery Bryusov [Cit. ex Gasparov, 1988, p. 203]) and decide what must be rendered into the target language, and what is allowed to be neglected.

Rhythm is highly relevant when translating Whitman's free verse. According to the poet himself, the poetic quality of his poems, the main principles of his poetics are determined by his rhythmical style [Demetskaya, 2013]. Of undoubted interest is a statement by American professor Bliss Perry¹, which is of high practical value for translators: "essential model [for Whitman] <...> was the rhythmical pattern of the English Bible <...> [in which he] found the charter for the book he wished to write" [Perry, 1906, p. 96].

The Old Testament avails us of such rhythm-formative principles that provide an opportunity to analyze and interpret Whitman's prosody and which we reckon shall determine the ultimate approach to translation of "Leaves of Grass" [Allen, 1935, p. 220–221].

Analysis and discussion: Translations by Balmont, Chukovsky, Sergeev, and Britishsky

Parallelism is the first and fundamental rhythm-formative principle. Whitman's line is a rhythmic unit: each line balances the previous one, completes or complements its meaning. According to American academic and writer Gay Wilson Allen, this type of parallelism is "the rhythm of thought" [Allen, 1935, p. 221]. After all, reiteration of thoughts following a certain pattern is indeed a rhythm, and it will be perceived as such if the mind is prepared for its perception [Allen, 1935, p. 229]. A translator's task in this case is not only to preserve the communicatively relevant semantic core of the source text, but also, if possible, to accurately reproduce all the "building blocks of meaning" [Lederer, 1981], without breaking their sequence and hierarchical relationships. Each line should be treated as a functional unit — a linguistic unit characterized by a communicative intent incorporated into the situation or text rather than as an integral unit of the arrangement [Allen, 1935, p. 221–222]. In this context, it is not only the text of a poem that we analyze, but also the text space of "Leaves

¹ According to G. W. Allen, there is much evidence that Professor Bliss Perry was right [Allen, 1935, p. 220–221].

of Grass” as a whole. It should be pointed out that such foregrounding of the line requires thematic-rhematic structuring of its content.

Line-by-line parallelism plays a crucial role in “Leaves of Grass”. However, internal parallelism is not an accidental phenomenon in Whitman’s poetry: it contributes to a bigger final effect of creating some rhythmic pattern of a poem. Thus, Whitman’s rhythm of thought is a complex rhythmic structure; from a broader perspective, it is line parallelism, the type of which is determined by the character of a link between lines; from a narrower one, it is internal parallelism determined by the way the content within the line develops [Allen, 1935, p. 224–225].

The character of a link between the lines in “Leaves of Grass” is indicative of an opulent similarity to the poetry of the Old Testament: Whitman’s free verse is characterized by the same four types of parallelism: 1) synonymous, 2) antithetic, 3) synthetic or cumulative, 4) climactic or ascending rhythm. Let us analyze the complexity of Whitman’s rhythmic pattern based on his short poem “Once I Pass’d Through a Populous City”.

Once I Pass’d Through a Populous City

¹Once I pass’d through a populous city imprinting my brain for future use with its shows, architecture, customs, traditions,

²Yet now of all that city I remember only a woman I casually met there who detain’d me for love of me,

³Day by day and night by night we were together — all else has long been forgotten by me,

⁴I remember I say only that woman who passionately clung to me,

⁵Again we wander, we love, we separate again,

⁶Again she holds me by the hand, I must not go,

⁷I see her close beside me with silent lips sad and tremulous.

[Whitman, 2002, p. 94]

The first two lines illustrate line-by-line antithetic parallelism: the second line negates the first one (once — yet, populous — only, city — woman); lines 3 and 4 display synonymous parallelism: line 4 strengthens line 3 by reiterating the same thought; lines 5, 6, 7 are linked by climactic parallelism or ascending rhythm: the thought unfolds acquiring new details, becoming more and more visible from line to line. In line 3, Whitman makes effective use of internal antithetic parallelism. His persistent “I say” in line 4 acts as a special stress bearing the impress of some emotional emphasis. The way content moves and develops in line 5 suggests internal synthetic parallelism. So, the poem has all the four types of parallelism making up a complex rhythmic structure. A translator should con-

vey all the aspects of Whitman's rhythm of thought so that Russian readers (those that are prepared, of course) could hear this rhythm.

Let us analyze the translation by Russian poet Korney Chukovsky, one of Whitman's first and most prolific translators²:

Однажды, когда я проходил городом

¹Однажды, когда я проходил по большому, многолюдному городу, я пытался внедрить в свою память его улицы, здания, обычаи, нравы,

²Но теперь я забыл этот город, помню лишь некую женщину, которую я случайно там встретил, и она удержала меня, потому что полюбила меня.

³День за днем, ночь за ночью мы были вдвоем, — все остальное я давно позабыл,

⁴Помню только ее, эту женщину, которая страстно прилепилась ко мне,

⁵Опять мы блуждаем вдвоем, мы любим, мы расстаемся опять,

⁶Опять она держит меня за руку и просит, чтобы я не уходил,

⁷Я вижу ее, она рядом со мною, ее грустные губы молчат и дрожат.

[Whitman, 1982, p.114-115]

Let us turn to line-by-line analysis, focusing on thematic-rhematic relations.

It is plain to see that by introducing a subordinate clause of time, the translator distorted topic-comment relations in the first line and, thereby, interfered with the way its content moves, with its rhythmic-melodic arrangement, its intonation.

The translator builds the rheme of the second line on the antithesis “забыл — помню” (remember — forgot), i. e. with the help of the predicate “забыл” (forgot), which has no equivalent in the source text, Chukovsky creates internal antithetic parallelism in the second line. As a result of such transformations in the first two lines, line-by-line antithetic parallelism in the target text no longer produces the same effect as the source text.

Line-by-line synonymous parallelism of lines 3 and 4 in the source text is conveyed by the translator, including internal antithetic parallelism of line 3. However, in line 4, the translator neglected Whitman's “I say” and introduced his own rhematic signal — demonstrative pronoun “ее” (her), thus distorting the inner rhythm of thought, the intonation of the line. As a result, Chukovsky diminishes the productivity of line 4, its role in line-by-line synonymous parallelism. Moreover, “I say” intensifies the rhematic predicate “remember” in the source text and spills over the next three lines, strengthening the memory of the persona, who is able to reproduce the events of the past in the present in full detail. Chukovsky fails to render this nuance.

² No other translations of this poem have been found by the author of this research.

The translation conveys climactic parallelism of the source text (lines 5, 6, and 7), i.e. the semantic rhythm at the interlinear level is preserved. Internal synthetic parallelism of line 5 is conveyed as well (its second and third parts complete the first one). In line 6, the implicit message coming from the woman and perceived by the persona as “I must not go” was explicated by the translator: “и просит, чтобы я не уходил” [Allen, 1935, p. 226]. As a result, the rhythm of thought in this line turned out to be different from the original.

Line 7 of the target text starts with the main statement: “Я вижу её” (I see her), which is then supplemented with “она рядом со мною” (she is next to me) and “её грустные губы мочат и дрожат” (her sad lips are silent and trembling). This way the translator created synthetic parallelism inside line 7, which is absent in the source text [Allen, 1935, p. 226] and which changes the way its content develops.

The above analysis of the target text allows for the following conclusion: Chukovsky often changes the way the content in the original line moves. For example, subordinate clauses make the syntax heavier (lines 1, 4, 6), internal parallelism that is absent in the source text pops up in the target text (lines 2 and 7). Such transformations affect the quality of rendering line-by-line parallelism.

“Leaves of Grass” just like the Old Testament offers another means of parallelism — envelope (the term is widely applied by scholars of biblical poetry). The envelope composition of semantic parallelism looks like this: the first line is a statement or claim, the following lines express thoughts parallel to the first line, and the final line recaps the above (framed or circular composition). An introduction or a conclusion may take two or three lines instead of one. In most cases, “Leaves of Grass” has the so-called “incomplete envelope”, which, unlike the complete one, omits either the introduction or the conclusion.

Here is the example of an ideal envelope.

Weave in, My Hardy Life

¹Weave in, weave in, my hardy life,

²Weave yet a soldier strong and full for great campaigns to come,

³Weave in red blood, weave sinews in like ropes, the senses, sight weave in,

⁴Weave lasting sure, weave day and night the weft, the warp, incessant weave,
tire not,

⁵(We know not what the use O life, nor know the aim, the end, nor really aught
we know,

⁶But know the work, the need goes on and shall go on, the death-envelop'd
march of peace as well as war goes on,)

⁷For great campaigns of peace the same the wiry threads to weave,

⁸We know not why or what, yet weave, forever weave.

[Whitman, 2002, p. 403]

Please note that lexical reiterations in an envelope composition may or may not occur, the main thing is the rhythm of thought.

We have the only translation of this poem into Russian made by Vladimir Britanishsky (apparently, neither Konstantin Balmont nor Korney Chukovsky translated it). Britanishsky (as a poet, translator, researcher) was mainly engaged in translating an intermediate type of modern American free verse, which includes elements of rhyme and cadence. However, he translated ten poems, including the above, for the first complete Russian edition of “Leaves of Grass”.

Тки, труженица жизнь

¹Тки, труженица жизнь,

²Тки кропотливо плоть и дух солдата для грядущих битв,

³Тки в жилах кровь, тки мышцы, как канаты, сознание, зрение тки,

⁴Тки прочно и надежно, день и ночь, основу и уток, тки без конца, тки неустанно

⁵(Мы не знаем ни смысла, о Жизнь, ни конца, ни цели не знаем, а быть может, и знать не должны,

⁶Но мы знаем свой труд изо дня в день, ныне и впредь, в грозящую окруженьем смерть, марш мира, вечный, как марш войны),

⁷Для великих мирных кампаний тки такие же крепкие нити,

⁸Мы не знаем, что и зачем, но тки, все время тки

[Whitman, 1982, p. 407].

Without going deep into detail, we can state that the envelope composition of semantic parallelism in the target text resembles the original one, the way the content develops within the lines is also conveyed rather accurately. So Britanishsky managed to render the core underpinning Whitman’s verse, something this verse needs in order to “live and breathe” (Mikhail Lozinsky): unlike his predecessors (Balmont, Chukovsky), Britanishsky, being a professional translator of a later time, focused a lot of rendering Whitman’s “rhythmic style”, his rhythm of thought.

The envelope composition in “Leaves of Grass” is often used to link the lines that Whitman picked up separately since he perceived this device as a means to form stanzas. For example:

¹Ah more than any priest O soul we too believe in God,

²But with the mystery of God we dare not dally.

³O soul thou pleasest me, I thee,

⁴Sailing these seas or on the hills, or waking in the night,

⁵Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space and Death, like waters flowing,
⁶Bear me indeed as through the regions infinite,
⁷Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me all over,
⁸Bathe me O God in thee, mounting to thee,
⁹I and my soul to range in range of thee [Whitman, 2002, p. 351–352].

The circular composition of this stanza at the semantic level rests on the first two and the last two lines while uniting five lines in between that are separated from the first and the last ones in terms of meaning.

Parallel thoughts in “Leaves of Grass” tend to give rise to phonetic repetitions, i. e. Whitman’s parallelism, like the parallelism of biblical texts, needs such a formal device as phonetic repetitions [Allen, 1935, p. 227], which, in fact, is the second main rhythm-formative principle of “Leaves of Grass”. According to G. W. Allen, the combination of Whitman’s rhythm of thought and phonetic rhythm (in his best poems) follows the principles as clear and precise as in “Paradise Lost” or “Samson Agonistes” by J. Milton [Allen, 1935, p. 230].

Whitman uses all kinds of repetitions and reiterations: initial, median, and final. There are cases when a repetition in a stanza takes several different positions at once, for example:

¹Of the interminable sisters,

²Of the ceaseless cotillions of sisters,

³Of the centripetal and centrifugal sisters, the elder and younger sisters,

⁴The beautiful sister we know dances on with the rest.

[Whitman, 2002, p. 186]

Among the reasons why phonetic repetitions were used in “Leaves of Grass”, one can point out Whitman’s strive to unite lines into a stanza to achieve a purely oratorical effect. Much more important to Whitman, however, is the fact that repetition creates a cadence, i. e. musical rhythm of a line. Joseph Brodsky, pondering over what made Whitman’s verse possible and what it is based on, concludes: “On the biblical verse, on the Puritan Bible <...> the length of Whitman’s verse, its cadence rests on the biblical intonation” [Volkov, 2002, p. 66].

Whitman is known to have made some attempts to explain his poetic technique. He gave a clue by saying that he was very attentive and accurate when determining the length of lines [Allen, 1935, p. 220]. The key lies in the rhythmic sound pattern of Whitman’s verse created by phonetic repetitions. For example, the initial repetition creates some sort of a cadence that extends over the entire line, and its rhythmic-melodic arrangement will depend on the length of this line. Being careful and accurate when choosing the length of a line, Whitman basically

recreates some biblical intonation. This is challenging for translators, especially bearing in mind that Whitman shows great talent in interweaving various cadences.

Apart from the rhythm of thought and the rhythm of sound, Whitman creates the so-called grammatical rhythm. These are repetitions of a part of speech or a grammatical structure that are generated, like phonetic repetitions, by the rhythm of thought; i. e. the rhythm of thought remains Whitman's main and fundamental principle.

Parallel grammatical structures are built on the basis of a common grammatical feature. It can be an infinitive with specific and vivid semantics, for example:

¹To walk with erect carriage, a step springy and elastic,

²To look with calm gaze or with a flashing eye,

³To speak with a full and sonorous voice out of a broad chest,

⁴To confront with your personality all the other personalities of the earth.

[Whitman, 2002 p. 117–120]

Or a vivid and expressive imperative:

¹Sound out, voices of young men! loudly and musically call me by my highest name!

²Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the actor or actress!

³Play the old role, the role that is great or small according as one makes it!

[Whitman, 2002, p. 139]

Using rhetorical exclamations in the last example, Whitman thereby increases the intensity of speech.

When working with “Leaves of Grass”, we should be guided by Whitman's statement about how careful he was about selecting words: “I take a good deal of trouble with words: yes, a good deal: but what I am after is the content not the music of words. Perhaps the music happens — it does no harm: I do not go in search of it” [Traubel, 1906, p. 163]. However, it is hard to believe that part of his statement where he says that he does not care about the music of words. It is enough to compare first editions with later ones to see that many of the corrections he made were hardly aimed at changing the meaning.

Whitman's “An American Primer” should be of immediate interest to translators since it is a veritable treatise on artistic mastery for American orators and poets. In almost every passage of his primer, Whitman defines the meaning of words the way he understands them. The objects that he names are simple and concrete. Each of the names bears some emotional experience: “Names are magic. One word can pour such a flood through the soul,” says Whitman [Allen, 1935, p.219]. Whitman seems to have

created his own context, at least this is what Russian poet Osip Mandelstam writes: "... and he [Whitman] like a new Adam, began to give names to things, provided a standard for a primitive, nomenclatural poetry to match that of Homer himself" [Mandelstam, 1977, p. 73].

To convey his emotional experience, Whitman simply sings the names of objects associated with this experience. Hence Whitman's long catalogues.

Speaking of lexical imagery permeating "Leaves of Grass", first of all, we should point out the metaphor and figures of speech. Whitman's poems, according to G. W. Allen, "are all metaphor, all suggestion, are scarcely intelligible to many readers <...> What, after all, is *Leaves of Grass* but a composite parable to which the reader must supply his own interpretation and conclusion?" [Allen, 1935, p. 238]. Thus, the analysis of Whitman's poetic technique again brings us to the Bible and translators will invariably face the issue of translating biblical intertexts [Piven, 2022].

Contemporary Russian poet Mikhail Fainerman notes that in the case of Whitman's verse, euphony generally recedes into the shadows while intonation comes to light [Fainerman, 2004, p. 292]. Vocabulary plays an important role in forming intonation patterns. This partly explains Whitman's careful choice of words.

Ukrainian scholar Vladislava Demetskaya offers an interesting approach to the translation of Whitman's lexis. According to her, a relic cliché of lyrical genres originating in romanticism, which are preserved in separate structural elements, makes up the framework of free verse in general and Whitman's free verse in particular [Demetskaya, 2013]. She discovers the legacy of romanticism, including the genre memory of an elegy, in Whitman's poems "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking". By the way, G. W. Allen referred to the first poem as "great elegy" [Allen, 1970, p. 86] while the second received the following comment: "Long regarded as an elegy, it is now usually interpreted as a symbolical account of how the little boy listening to a mocking bird lament the loss of its mate became a man and poet, a "solitary singer" himself, the burden of whose songs would be "unsatisfied love" [Allen, 1970, p. 62]. Professor of English Literature at Yale University Charles N. Feidelson Jr., having in mind both the poems, points out deep symbolism of Whitman's poetic approach [Feidelson, 1962, p. 84-86].

The most illustrative poem in terms of assessing the accuracy reached by translators of "Leaves of Grass" is "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd". This poem was translated by Korney Chukovsky: about a sixth of more than 380 texts in the first complete Russian edition (including key poems) is published in his translation. Let us comment on the analysis made by

Demetskaya who compared Chapter 4 of the source text and the target text. It is of interest from the point of view of lexical-semantic transformations.

¹In the swamp in secluded recesses,

²A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

³Solitary the thrush,

⁴The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,

⁵Sings by himself a song.

⁶Song of the bleeding throat!

⁷Death's outlet song of life — (for well, dear brother, I know

⁸If thou wast not granted to sing, thou would'st surely die.)

[Whitman, 2002, p. 277]

Here is Korney Chukovsky's translation:

¹Вдали, на пустынном болоте,

²Притаилась пугливая птица и поет-распекает песню.

³Дрозд одинокий,

⁴Отшельник, в стороне от людских поселений.

⁵Поет песню, один-одинешенек, -

⁶Песню кровотокающего горла,

⁷Песню жизни, куда изливается смерть. (Ибо хорошо, милый брат, я знаю,

⁸Что, если бы тебе не дано было петь, ты, наверное, умер бы.)

[Whitman, 1982 p. 285]

We can agree with Demetskaya: the imagery of the original is distorted in the translation. However, this hardly relates to the translator's inattention to some genre-specific vocabulary, to the genre canons of a romantic elegy. Most probably, the reason lies in poor attention to Whitman's ability to create images [Feidelson, 1962, p. 83]. There is deep symbolism about his poetic approach. Whitman is interested in studying the feelings much less than in studying the process during which the surrounding world is born. He finds an antonym to reason in symbolism rather than in feelings [Feidelson, 1962, p. 88]. Symbols, being elements of action, behave like characters in a drama. The significance of the bird symbol stems from its role: a poet and a bird, a poem and a song, life and death are just an absolute process of singing" [Feidelson, 1962, p. 86].

The symbolic status of the bird contravenes Chukovsky's choice of words ("притаилась" (lie low), "пугливая" (timid / fearful), "поет-распекает" (sing exuberantly / warble), "один-одинешенек" (all alone)), which, as expected, have nothing to do with the original. Moreover, the image of "притаившаяся пугливая птица" (a timid bird lying low) implies no possibility of renewal. In the original, a diffident bird hiding in

a secluded place starts singing softly by himself but after meeting the poet, the bird transforms, becomes confident (“And the singer so shy to the rest receiv’d me” [Whitman, 2002, p.281]) while her songs are getting louder (“Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown bird” [Whitman, 2002, p. 282]).

Speaking about the last line in Chapter 4, according to Demetskaya, it contains obsolete vocabulary (one of the most important genre-forming features of an elegy). Its loss in translation leads to heaviness and rhythmic amorphism, loss of elegiac intonation [Demetskaya, 2013]. Indeed, “wast” is an obsolete form of the verb to be. However, rendering obsolete vocabulary into a different language while preserving its original function is undoubtedly challenging and sometimes even impossible (Demetskaya failed to offer her own translation). It may well be that Whitman used “wast” to enhance euphony: “If thou wast not granted to sing thou would’st surely die”. If we take into account reiteration of “thou” (another outdated poetic form), *s* and *t* alliterations, we may see dramatic sound expressiveness of the line. In his translation, Chukovsky tries to compensate for Whitman’s phonetic game.

Stanzaical inaccuracy of Chapter 4 in Chukovsky’s translation comes into notice: two stanzas instead of three in the original, and one interlinear pause instead of two. Each stanza in the original is a complete sentence, consisting of clauses connected by commas. Whitman strives to make sure that verse boundaries coincide with strong syntactic pauses because this guarantees deep communication with the reader (indeed, in free verse, this effect is achieved through coincidence of verse intonation with syntactic intonation [Gasparov, Skulacheva, 2005]). Chukovsky apparently neglects this crucial feature of Whitman’s verse.

The translation of the final line generally conveys the essence of the bird’s role, but it would be better without “куда” (where), “что” (that), and instead of “наверное” (perhaps) Whitman gives a much more categorical “surely”.

Jan Probstein, a New-York-based Russian professor of English and American literature criticized Chukovsky’s translation of this line: “for well dear brother I know, // If thou wast not granted to sing thou would’st surely die” — this line was taken by Whitman from a Quaker psalm [hence obsolete vocabulary], therefore, there should be no “милый брат”, while all the rest is literalism [Probstein, 2019]. Unlike Demetskaya, Probstein proposes his own translation of this line:

¹Ибо мне ведомо, брат дорогой,

²Когда бы не был дан тебе песенный дар, ты бы умер бесспорно.

[Probstein, 2019]

Let us look at translations that in terms of the language resonate with present-day audiences better than those by Chukovsky and Balmont. For example, translations by Russian writer and translator Andrey Sergeev were recommended to Russians readers by Joseph Brodsky: “He [Sergeev] recreates rather than translates English-language literature with the help of our own language culture” [Volkov, 2002, p. 176]. Here is another, more specific remark by Brodsky: “All of his [Sergeev’s] translations are somewhat dry... He works with restraint, not because he is lacking expressive means, but because he is unwilling to be juicy” [Volkov, 2002, p. 115].

All in all, there are 30 Whitman’s poems translated by Sergeev. Let us consider a small nine-line poem “Had I the Choice”:

Had I the Choice

- ¹Had I the choice to tally greatest bards,
- ²To limn their portraits, stately, beautiful, and emulate at will,
- ³Homer with all his wars and warriors — Hector, Achilles, Ajax,
- ⁴Or Shakespeare’s woe-entangled Hamlet, Lear, Othello –Tennyson’s fair ladies,
- ⁵Meter or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in perfect rhyme, delight of singers;
- ⁶These, these, O sea, all these I’d gladly barter,
- ⁷Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick to me transfer,
- ⁸Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,
- ⁹And leave its odor there [Whitman, 2002, p. 431].

Below is the translation by Andrey Sergeev that was included in the first complete Russian edition of “Leaves of Grass”:

Если б я мог

- ¹Если б я мог приблизиться к величайшим бардам,
- ²Живописать их лица, прекрасные, величавые, и состязаться с вами —
- ³Гомер и Гомеровы войны и воины, Гектор, Ахилл, Аякс,
- ⁴Шекспировы горем объятые Гамлет, Отелло, Лир и прекрасные дамы Теннисона, —
- ⁵И в совершенстве стиха к восторгу певцов сплавил бы воедино безошибочный ритм, остроумие и изысканность, —
- ⁶Все это, все, о море, я бы с радостью отдал тебе,
- ⁷Только бы ты шевельнулось во мне хоть одной прихотливой волной
- ⁸Или вдохнуло свое дыхание в мои песни
- ⁹И оставило в них свою свежесть [Whitman, 1982, p. 433–434].

Restraint is the general impression produced by the translation (according to Brodsky). Still, the rhythm of thought is preserved: envelope (lines 1–5) and cumulative parallelism (lines 6–9). Indeed, line 1 is a state-

ment, lines 2, 3, 4 convey thoughts parallel to the first one, line 5 draws some sort of a bottom line; lines 7, 8, 9 complete line 6. The movement of the content inside the lines is rendered as well. The translator managed to do without any subordinate clauses that make the rhythm heavier. By the number of syllables, the lines in the target text are as long as those in the source text, intonation patterns in the translation do not differ much from the original. Thus, Sergeev's translation has no shortcomings typical of Chukovsky's translations. The professional translator displayed higher proficiency than his predecessor.

To ensure greater objectivity when comparing Sergeev's translation with those of his predecessors, let us consider the version by Balmont (Chukovsky did not translate this poem):

Если бы выбор имел я

¹Если бы выбор имел я сходствовать с лучшими бардами,

²Нарисовать их портреты, красиво и стройно,

³И по воле моей состязаться

⁴С Гомером, со всеми его бойцами и битвами, с Ахиллесом, Аяксом и Гектором,

⁵Или с пленными скорбью Гамлетом, Лиром, Отелло Шекспира,

⁶С Тэннисоном, с прекрасными лэди его,

⁷Напеть и измыслить лучшее, замысел избранный влить в совершенную рифму, усладу певцов, –

⁸Это, все это, о, море, все это охотно б я отдал,

⁹Если бы дало мне ты колебанье единой волны,

¹⁰Ухватку ее,

¹¹Или вдохнуло бы в стих мой дыханье свое, единое,

¹²И оставило в нем этот запах [Whitman, 1911, p. 203–204].

To start with, Balmont fails to observe the equilinearity principle: 12 lines in the target text against nine in the source text. He introduces three short lines (lines 3, 6, 10), resulting in a discrepancy with the intonation pattern of the original. Second, the translation has a tendency towards metric verse. Third, Balmont's euphonic talent manifests itself in almost every line, sometimes blocking the author's phonetic game.

However, in terms of rendering images, Balmont is at times more accurate than Sergeev. For example, Sergeev lost the ideas of choice and will. And in Balmont's translation, the persona, following the original, chooses the greatest bards for himself and competes with them at will, i. e. he is more active than in Sergeev's translation. And this is important. After all, Whitman's persona symbolizes the process of becoming a poet whose evolution and mode of existence reflect the author and his literary method.

The way the symbol of sea is perceived relates to the evolution of a poet, Whitman's persona goads the sea to action (in fact, the sea is an element of action). That is why the word "ухватка" (grip) used by Balmont when describing the wave is more accurate than "прихотливая волна" (whimsical wave) in Sergeev's version, although Sergeev's translation corresponds closely to the original: instead of describing a reality, he represents the way it is put to life.

The poet thinks in terms of images. That is why even today Balmont's symbolic interpretation and rendition of Whitman is highly valuable, including at the lexical level. To make our point more convincing, let us turn to his poem "Quicksand Years".

Quicksand Years

¹Quicksand years that whirl me I know not whither,

²Your schemes, politics, fail — lines give way — substances mock and elude me;

³Only the theme I sing, the great and strong-possess'd Soul, eludes not;

⁴One's-self must never give way — that is the final substance — that out of all is sure;

⁵Out of politics, triumphs, battles, life — what at last finally remains?

⁶When shows break up, what but One's-Self is sure? [Whitman, 2002, p. 376]

Here is the translation by Vladimir Britanishsky, which was included in the first complete Russian edition of "Leaves of Grass":

Годы — зыбучий песок

¹Годы — зыбучий песок, влекущий меня в неизвестность,

²Про валиваются планы, рушатся строки и фразы, идеи смеются и ускользают,

³Только главная моя тема, героическая и неистовая душа, не ускользает,

⁴Наше Я не рухнет — ибо это есть истиннейшая идея — та, что всего надежней.

⁵От политики, от успехов, сражений, от жизни что в конце концов остается?

⁶Если видимости исчезают, что надежно, кроме нашего Я?

[Whitman, 1982, p. 380]

We will not dive deep into the analysis of this translation but will focus on "One's-Self", one of the crucial concepts for Whitman. To our mind, Britanishsky's translation is not good enough: "Наше Я" (Our I) while Balmont's translation is strikingly accurate: "Самость" (Self):

Когда вся видимость ломается, тогда, что остается, как не эта Самость?

[Whitman, 1911, p. 181]

Russian philosopher and literary critic Georgy Gachev was obviously not familiar with this translation by Balmont. When analyzing Chukovsky's translation of Whitman's poetic manifesto "One's-Self I Sing", Gachev remarked: "I would disagree with K. Chukovsky's translation: "Одного я пою". No, the key word here is "Self", similar to German "Selbst", which means "Самость"... So it should be: "Самость каждого я пою" [Gachev, 1998, p. 197].

Balmont also translated Whitman's manifesto, but musical primacy in his translation distorted the semantic function of the word "One's-Self": "Одного воспеваю я, личность простую, отдельную" [Whitman, 1911, p. 3]. So, instead of "Самость" filled with special meaning, there is an indefinite pronoun "одного".

Results and conclusions

Based on our own analysis and the conclusions drawn by Jan Probststein, we offer a list of reasons that reduced translation accuracy achieved by Chukovsky:

1. Whitman's rhythm of thought, a complex rhythmic pattern, is lost in the target text. The rhythm is often heavy (mainly because of too many subordinate clauses), the rhythmic-syntactic structure gravitates toward prose.

2. There are cases of redundancy in the target text. When translating the poem "Once I Pass'd Through a Populous City", the translator introduced some extra words that have no correspondence in the source text and which could be done without: "когда" (when), "большому" (large), "я пытался" (I tried), "забыл" (forgot), "некую" (some), "просит" (begs), "чтобы" (to) [Probststein, 2019].

3. The translation is at times tautological:

Вечной, на всю жизнь, любовью товарищей³ [Whitman, 1982, p. 120]

Jan Probststein notes that eternal love obviously lasts for a lifetime [Probststein, 2019].

4. Some semantic errors are pointed out by Jan Probststein. For example, in Chapter 26 of "Songs of Myself" Chukovsky writes: "Колокола, что возвещают пожар, грохот быстро бегущих пожарных машин с бубенцами и цветными огнями"⁴ [Whitman, 1982, p. 71]. One cannot but agree that apart from inappropriate bells that remind of a gypsy

³ With the life-long love of comrades [Whitman, 2002, p. 100-101]

⁴ The ring of alarm-bells, the cry of fire, the whirr of swift-streaking engines and hose-carts with premonitory tinkles and color'd lights [Whitman, 2002, p. 49].

romance, heavy syntax with a that-clause, fire trucks simply did not exist in Whitman's time [Probstein, 2019].

The above evaluation of translations by translators close to Whitman's era (Balmont, Chukovsky) and those quite distant from it (Sergeev, Britanishsky) allows for the following conclusion: it is premature to talk about the translation of "Leaves of Grass" that would take account of all the principles underpinning Whitman's free verse. Although the works of Sergeev and Britanishsky (and other contemporary professional translators that remained outside the scope of this research) generally convey Whitman's "rhythmic style", most large poems were translated by their predecessors. Besides, Sergeev and Britanishsky failed to duly appreciate the language of Balmont and Chukovsky, which is more in line with Whitman's era and is of undisputable value even today.

It stands to mention that the conclusions drawn from the above are not intended to sound pessimistic, on the contrary, they are expected to contribute to further literary studies of Whitman's works and verse libre in general and may serve as a guide when translating free verse of other poets.

Sources

- Whitman, W. (1982). *Leaves of Grass*. Transl. from English by K. Chukovsky. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura Publ. (In Russian)
- Whitman, W. (1911). *Leaves of Grass*. Transl. from English by K. Balmont. Moscow: Skorpion Publ. (In Russian)
- Whitman, W. (2002). *Leaves of grass and other writings: authoritative texts, prefaces, Whitman on his art, criticism*. Ed. by M. Moon. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

References

- Allen, G. W. (1935). *American Prosody*. New York: American Book Company.
- Allen, G. W. (1970). *A Reader's Guide to Walt Whitman*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Chukovsky, K. I. (1966). *My Whitman*. Moscow: Progress Publ. (In Russian)
- Demetskaya, V. V. (2013). Free Verse and Translation: Elegy as a Genre Tradition. Case study of W. Whitman's Works and Their Translations. *Repository Dspace*. Available at: <http://ekhsuir.kspu.edu/handle/123456789/207> (accessed: 10.06.2022). (In Russian)
- Fainerman, M. (2004). On Free Verse. *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1 (65): 292. (In Russian)
- Feidelson, C. F. (1962). *Whitman as Symbolist. Whitman: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. by R. H. Pearce. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.

- Gasparov, M. L. (1988). *Bryusov and Literal Translation. Case Study of "The Aeneid"*. Moscow: Raduga Publ. [Reprint. from: Gasparov, M. (1971). *Mastery of Translation*. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel' Publ., 1971)]. (In Russian)
- Gasparov, M. L., Skulacheva, T. V. (2005). *Papers on the Linguistics of Verse*. Moscow: Languages of the Slavic Culture. (In Russian)
- Gachev, G. D. (1998). *National Images of the World. Lecture Course*. Moscow: Akademiia Publ. (In Russian)
- Lederer, M. (1981). *La traduction simultanée: expérience et théorie*. Paris: Minard.
- Mandelstam, O. (1977). *Selected Essays*. Transl. from Russian by S. Monas. Austin: University of Texas Press. Available at: <https://books.google.ru/books?id=znxKDQAAQBAJ&dq> (accessed: 10.07.2022).
- Orlitsky, Yu. (1995). Russian Verse Libre: Myths and Opinions. *Arion*, 3: 85–91. Available at: https://imwerden.de/pdf/arion_007_1995__ocr.pdf (accessed: 30.12.2022). (In Russian)
- Perry, B. (1906). *Walt Whitman. A Biography*. Houghton: Mifflin and Company.
- Piven (Nikitina), I. V. (2022). Redefining Approaches to Translation of Biblical Intertexts in Whitman's "Leaves of Grass". *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 125: 452–461. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2022.03.55>
- Probstein, J. (2019). Possibility of the Impossible. *Foundation "Liberal Mission"*. Available at: <https://liberal.ru/newyork-room-by-jn-probstein/7451>. (accessed: 20.06.2022). (In Russian)
- Sutton, W. (1973). *American Free Verse: The Modern Revolution in Poetry*. New York: New Directions.
- Traubel, H. (1906). *With Walt Whitman in Camden. March 28 — July 14, 1888*. Vol. I. Boston: Small, Maynard & Boston. Available at: <https://whitman-archive.org/archive2/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/1/med.00001.50> (accessed: 30.11.2022).
- Trediakovsky, V. K. (1849). *Writings*. Publ. by A. Smirdin. In 3 vols. St. Petersburg.
- Vetrova, E. I. (1983). *Free Verse in US Poetry: 1960–1970*. PhD thesis. Kyiv. (In Russian)
- Volkov, S. (2002). *Dialogues with Joseph Brodsky*. Moscow: Eksmo Publ. (In Russian)
- Zhovtis, A. L. (2013). *Selected Papers*. Comp. by S. D. Abisheva, Z. N. Polyak. Almaty. (In Russian)