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Esoteric Metaphors in W.B. Yeats' Early Poetry and Its Russian Translations

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ABSTRACT. The paper dwells on idiostyle of William Butler Yeats, a renowned Anglo-Irish poet, famous for his interest in esoteric doctrines. We analyse the influence of several esoteric motifs on the stylistic device of metaphor employed by the poet. Besides, we focus on the specificity of the metaphorical contexts in the Russian translations of Yeats' verse.

Keywords: W.B. Yeats; G.M. Kruzhkov; poetic stylistics; poetic translation; esotericism; metaphor; translation transformations.

INTRODUCTION

Esotericism can be defined as a syncretic system of religious/philosophical doctrines and practices, usually hidden from the eyes of the non-initiated. It is well-known that in his early years William Butler Yeats paid much attention to the esoteric thought in general, being a devoted follower of Helena Blavatsky's theosophical conception in particular. In his *Occult Notes and Diary* Yeats remarks: "I believe that Mme Blavatsky's teachers are the most righteous and enlightened ones, and I trust them as deeply as an apprentice can trust a master" [1. 234]. Another well-known fact is that in 1890 Yeats joined *The Order of the Golden Dawn*, members of which propagated Hermetic philosophy and actively exploited Rosicrucian rituals [2. 8–15]. We shall focus on three esoteric doctrines – as they were crucial for early Yeats: namely, Theosophy, Hermetism and Rosicrucianism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We constructed a model of esoteric influences within the frame of early Yeats' poetic system. Regarding the early poems as the bilateral linguistic sign, we analyse the signified (the esoteric motifs) and the signifier (the stylistic device of metaphor).

Motif is a recurring formulaic verbalisation of a certain idea [3. 12]. According to Mikhail Epstein, lyrical motif can assume the form of individual images or widely accepted stylistic devices, but, regardless of the form, the idea remains the same and it is the idea that generates the motif [4. 45–47]. One of the frequent devices Yeats uses to formulate the esoteric motifs is metaphor. This fact corresponds to Mme Blavatsky's gnoseology: in *The Secret Doctrine* she repeatedly declares that symbols, metaphors and allegories are the only possible media that can be chosen to denote the inconceivable and transcendental categories of esoteric philosophy [5. 48–89]. We divide Yeats' metaphors into two categories: a) closed metaphors, or metaphors proper; b) open metaphors, or symbols.

Closed metaphors are characterised by the clear connection between the comparant (the object of comparison) and the comparator (the subject of comparison), e.g. "the golden apples of the sun", where "the sun" is a comparant and "golden apples" is a comparator. The mechanism of the metaphorical nomination is clear: the sun is compared to the golden apples. Open metaphors contain no connection between the comparant and the comparator. We can only guess – relying on the textual and intertextual connections – what is meant by this or that word used in a figurative meaning. Thus, "rose" is one of the best-known symbols in Yeats' early verse. We understand that the poet speaks of something more sophisticated than just a simple flower; but the notion it expresses varies from the traditional romantic imagery to the Rosicrucian concept of ascetic love and suffering (the powerful symbolic potential of the Rose is demonstrated by A.E. Waite in *The Real History of the Rosicrucians* [6. 5–27]).

DISCUSSION

3.1. Esoteric Motifs and Metaphors

We distinguish the following traces of esoteric philosophy in early Yeats' lyrical work.

1. Interaction between The Seen and The Unseen.

Material and spiritual layers of the universe are tightly connected and based on the similar principles. The Material imitates the Spiritual, and vice versa. As Jonathan Allison puts it, "the attempt to represent the supernatural in human terms, or to portray the human as irresistibly attached to the supernatural, is a constant in Yeats' early verse" [7. 356]. The principle of universalism and interconnection of material and spiritual was formulated by Helena Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* [5. 50]. We find the similar statement in Hermetic manifesto *The Kybalion*: "The Universe is mental. Nothing rests, everything vibrates. As above, so below. As below, so above" [8. 9–15].

Closed metaphors frequently power the motif of overall similarity and interconnection in Yeats' early verse. For example, the earth is compared to a "flaming troubling word", love and hate – to the boughs, sorrow – to a mysterious human being: *The wandering earth herself may be/ Only a sudden flaming word,/ In clanging space a moment heard,/ Troubling the endless reverie (The Song of the Happy Shepherd); I find under the boughs of love and hate,/ In all poor foolish things that live a day,/ Eternal beauty wandering on her way (To the Rose upon the Rood of Time); I build a boat for Sorrow:/ O swift on the seas all day and night/ Saileth the rover Sorrow,/ All day and night (The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes).*

2. Necessity of self-improvement in order to reach some kind of enlightened state of mind – inner peace, or reconciliation.

This motif reflects the practical aspect of esotericism. The nature and the ultimate goal of such self-improvement can be understood in different keys, but several conditions remain constant: a) the permanent change, or even transfiguration – this goes back to the oriental belief in reincarnation as the cycle of rebirths leading to the final liberation of the spirit; b) the permanent motion. According to *The Kybalion*, both the spiritual and the material is constantly "breathing and moving", and it is important to keep it going [8. 75–78]. One of the Rosicrucian manifestoes, *Fama Fraternalitatis*, claims that the "breath of God is wisdom" [9. 402].

Yeats employs numerous open metaphors (symbols) to verbalise this idea. "White birds" in the eponymous poem embody a lyrical hero's dream about escape from the time and the sorrow of common existence: *A weariness comes from those dreamers, dew-dabbled, the lily and rose;/ Ah, dream not of them, my beloved, the flame of the meteor that goes,/ Or the flame of the blue star that lingers hung low in the fall of the dew:/ For I would we were changed to white birds on the wandering foam: I and you!* White bird is a symbol of transfigured body, or, following the ancient Egyptian symbolic tradition, a human soul free of its bodily confinement [10. 348]. (Yeats' keen interest in ancient Egyptians and Tarot is mentioned by Susan J. Graf in a monograph *W.B. Yeats: Twentieth Century Magus* [11].) *The Upanishads* – another source of inspiration for early Yeats – also generate this image to symbolise the individual spirit [5. 350].

Another example of symbolic cipher is "hill" – the open metaphor of permanent motion: *Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill: For there the mystical brotherhood/ Of sun and moon and hollow and wood/ And river and stream work out their will... (Into the Twilight); Though I am old with wandering/ Through hollow lands and hilly lands,/ I will find out where she has gone,/ And kiss her lips and take her hands (The Song of Wandering Aengus).* The image of hilly lands is not used for direct comparison, but it accompanies the poet's reflections on the necessity to move along seeking truth and beauty. This may again go back to ancient Egyptian tradition where hill was an icon of spiritual quest, as well as to the Tarot system employing this image to depict a path to the sky and self-perfection [12. 142].

3. Sacralisation of the Beauty (visual and acoustic harmony).

Helena Blavatsky believes the Beauty to be the absolute Truth and the absolute Sooth, as it is the direct consequence of the divine creation act [5. 230]. In *The Rose of the World* Yeats constructs the closed metaphor of the world as "a grassy road before the wandering feet" of the beauty. We cannot help mentioning that Sacred Beauty – the gift of the divine Creator – is a permanent motif for the Irish Literary Revival in general. George Russell (A.E.), famous for his mediumism, contemplates over this idea in his poem *Creation: Sacred thy laughter on the air,/*

Holy thy lightest word that fell,/ Proud the innumerable hair/ That waved at the enchanter's spell./ Oh Master of the Beautiful,/ Creating us from hour to hour,/ Give me this vision to the full/ To see in lightest things thy power!

4. Attempt at integration of the world religions and cults; the syncretic approach to the religious and philosophical legacy.

Theosophical ontology relied mainly on the oriental beliefs; Hermetism developed Gnostic traditions; the Rosicrucians followed Hermetic tradition mixed with Christian ethics, preaching "love, help, comfort and strengthening of our Neighbours" [9. 410].

Yeats' early poetic language contains allusions to different religious practices. For example, the poem *The Indian upon God* refers to Hinduism. In this imitation of the oriental parable the flower imagines God to be a Big and Mighty Flower, the Moorfowl presents the image of God as "the undying moorfowl", the Roebuck speaks of God as "a gentle roebuck", etc. The poet constructs an extended metaphor of God as ubiquitous one, possessing spirits of all the creatures that ever existed. In other words, everything is God, the Hinduist Parama Puruṣa, the universal divine consciousness.

3.2. Yeats' Metaphors in Russian Translations

In this part of the paper we will share observations on the specificity of Yeatsian metaphorical contexts in the Russian translations accomplished by Grigory Kruzhkov.

The comparison of the original metaphorical contexts to those in Russian translations demonstrates a high degree of translation equivalence. Kruzhkov carefully reproduces early Yeats' style – intensely metaphorical, "glamorous" and "hauntingly beautiful" (the mentioned characteristics of the poet's style were coined by Ezra Pound [13] and Prof. Cedric Watts [14. 12]). Nevertheless, the detailed analysis fishes out some significant transformations concerning the esoteric motifs as well.

1. Firstly, Kruzhkov tends to extend the original metaphors. The universalist metaphor of the earth ("only a sudden flaming word in clanging space a moment heard") in Russian interpretation of *The Song of the Happy Shepherd* acquires an expressive emphasis by means of such extension. The earth is not only a suddenly spoken word, but also a cry, or rather a shout: *А может, и сама Земля/ В звенящей пустоте Вселенной –/ Лишь слово, лишь внезапный крик...* (*And, perhaps, the earth/ In the clanging space of the universe/ Is nothing but a word, nothing but a sudden cry...*). Interestingly, the attribute of the comparator – "word in clanging space" – in the Russian translation becomes the attribute of a comparant – "earth in clanging space". This transformation also makes the metaphor more expressive, visual, global.

Similarly, Kruzhkov extends the "white birds" standing for the transfigured purified soul. While Yeats' context speaks of transfiguration and escape followed by stasis (oblivious floating on the "wandering foam of the sea"), the Russian translation is coloured with more dynamic hues (the lyrical hero dreams of the white birds "flying into the darkness"): *Давай в белых птиц превратимся и в тёмный простор улетим* (*Let us turn to white birds and fly away into the darkness*). Thus, the translator's extension neglects the esoteric motif of transfiguration followed by liberation of the spirit. Kruzhkov creates the passionate image of dark motion, which, however, has little to do with the original poem's melancholy atmosphere.

The poem *The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes* is an extended metaphor of Sorrow represented as a human being (which, as we mentioned above, may reflect the esoteric notion of universalism). In Russian translation the metaphor becomes, so to say, "superextended". Grigory Kruzhkov adds the new epithet and the new comparison to the image of personified Sorrow: the sails of the Boat of Sorrow are white, "whiter than the seagull's wings": *А парус ладий для чего?/ Для корабля Печали./ Чтoб, крыльев чайчьих белей,/ Скитался он среди морей/ Под парусом Печали* (*"What are you making these sails for?"/ „They are for the boat of Sorrow,/ So that, whiter than the seagull's wings,/ It would roam across the seas/ Under the sails of Sorrow"*).

2. The second type of transformations is addition. Apart from extending the metaphorical contexts, Kruzhkov tends to omit the original tropes and construct the utterly new ones instead. For example, in his translation of *To the Rose upon the Rood of Time* "the boughs of love and hate" metaphor is simply replaced by the irregular use of the plural – "среди любвей и зол" ("among loves and hates"). Moreover, the next stanza contains the metaphor coined by translator – „мелкие

пузыри людской тщеты” (“the small bubbles of the people’s vanity”): *Приблизься, чтобы я, прозрев, обрёл/ Здесь, на земле, среди любвей и зол/ И мелких пузырей людской тщеты,/ Высокий путь бессмертной красоты* (Come closer, so that I, having awakened, could find/ Here, on the earth, among loves and hates/ And small bubbles of the people’s vanity,/ The lofty way of the eternal beauty). Grigory Kruzhkov neglects the typically Yeatsian image of the boughs. Still, the bright metaphor of the human vanity somehow preserves the esoteric motif of the overall similarity; though this coinage is again more expressive and less abstract than the original metaphor.

3. The third “Russian trend” is the translator’s inclination to substitute the original comparators by more expressive and concrete words. These substitutions visualise the poetic context and make it perhaps even more elaborate and “hauntingly beautiful”. Thus, the above-cited metaphorical context in the *Rose of the World* (“he made the world to be the grassy road before her wandering feet”) in the Russian translation transforms to the meadow spread before the feet of the Beauty: *...Узрел скитальцу, и мир, как луг, ей постелил у ног* (He saw the wanderer and spread the meadow of the world before her feet). The original comparator – the grassy road, path to the ultimate goal – is replaced by the static noun “луг” (“meadow”), which mitigates the esoteric notion of wandering. According to the dictionary of contemporary Russian, “луг” is a grassy space rather than a grassy road [15. 521]. At the same time, the image of meadow makes the metaphor more visual, concrete and easily perceivable. Besides, Grigory Kruzhkov emphasises the act of creation by using a more vivid verb “постелил” (“spread”) instead of the broad and polysemantic „made” preferred by Yeats.

“Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill” – this stanza from *Into the Twilight*, ciphering the esoteric motif of permanent motion, undergoes the similar substitution in Kruzhkov’s version: *Сердце, уйдём к лесистым холмам...* (Heart, let us come to the woody hills...). The original metaphorical context portrays the picture briefly; Yeats speaks of several hills “heaped” upon each other. Russian translator omits this, decorating the poem with the epithet “лесистый” (“woody”). Whilst Yeats simply uses one of his preferable symbols to denote an idea, Kruzhkov visualises the abstract reflections by creating a sort of poetic landscape – hills covered with woods.

In short, Yeats’ metaphors undergo three types of transformations in Grigory Kruzhkov’s translations: a) extension of the original metaphor; b) addition of the utterly new metaphor; c) substitution of the original comparator for a different one. As a result, the lyrical texture becomes a bit more expressive, as well as more visual and less abstract. Kruzhkov seems to pay attention to style and emotive colouring of verse, rather than to its general ideas including the esoteric motifs. Yeats, on the contrary, claimed that “style is almost unconscious. I know what I tried to do, little what I have done” [16. 527].

3.3. Why Transformations?

We can figure out the following reasons behind these transformations.

1. Russian lexis effectively verbalises concrete, material and natural denotata. Yet the smooth flow of abstract ideas, arguments, rebuttals is not quite Russian “cup of tea”.

Vladimir Nabokov mentioned and explained this fact in his *Postscript to the Russian Edition of Lolita*: “Landscapes, the torpor of trees, odors, rains, the melting and iridescent hues of nature, everything tenderly human comes out no worse in Russian than in English, perhaps better; but the poetry of thought, the instantaneous resonance between most abstract concepts, the natural sciences and unnatural passions in Russian becomes clumsy, prolix and often repulsive in terms of style and rhythm... This discrepancy reflects a basic historical difference between the green Russian literary language and English – ripe, as a bursting fig: between a young genius, but not yet sufficiently well-educated and at times rather tasteless, and a venerable genius who combines a motley erudition with absolute freedom of spirit” [17. 133].

2. Russian mentality and cultural concepts affect language and idiostyles. Anna Wierzbicka cites Clyde Kluckhohn’s monograph, according to which Russian people tend to be very emotional and impulsive. Wierzbicka claims that language reflects this feature of national character [18. 34]. Chekhov’s short stories and Tsvetaeva’s letters contain a great number of verbs denoting emotions, as well as words used for categorical evaluations, both positive and negative [18. 79–81]. Many of these words and syntactic structures do not have exact equivalents in English, which is a

considerable impediment on the translator's way. The same happens with English-Russian translations: Grigory Kruzhkov unconsciously enriches Yeatsian metaphors with emotional hues.

Interestingly, Valentina Ryapolova (a contemporary Russian literary scholar) comments on Yeats' style in a slightly reproaching way: "Йейтс – художник интеллектуальный, оперирующий идеями, а не образами зримого мира... Йейтс не обладает слухом на бытовую речь" ("Yeats is an intellectual poet; he operates ideas rather than images of the visible world... He does not have an ear for the everyday speech") [19. 60]. The citation illustrates the Russian mode of perceiving English poetic discourse, especially that of the modern period.

3. The translator's conscious strategy may also have stipulated the higher degree of emotionality. Grigory Kruzhkov published a profound monograph devoted to the comparative analysis of Yeats and poets of "The Silver Age of Russian Poetry" – Alexander Blok, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Osip Mandelstam and even Alexander Vvendsky (whose utterly experimental poetry is the least expected to be like Yeats') [20]. Kruzhkov openly states that he seeks similarities in order to make the translations of an Anglo-Irish poet more understandable to a Russian reader [20. 12]. The search for parallels may have resulted in the intensification of Russian echo as well.

CONCLUSIONS

Four esoteric motifs (the interaction between The Seen and The Unseen; the necessity of self-improvement; the sacralisation of the Beauty; the syncretic approach to the religious and philosophical legacy) find expression in both closed and open metaphors employed by W.B. Yeats. These metaphors undergo a number of transformations in the Russian translations: namely, extension, addition, and substitution. The mentioned transformations may be caused by linguistic, cultural and cross-cultural factors.

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Эзотерическая метафорика в ранней лирике У.Б. Йейтса в её русскоязычных переводах

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются особенности идиостиля Уильяма Батлера Йейтса, англо-ирландского поэта, известного своим интересом к эзотерическим доктринам. Мы анализируем отражение некоторых эзотерических мотивов в метафорических контекстах лирики У.Б. Йейтса, а также трансформацию метафорики в русскоязычных переводах Г.М. Кружкова.

Ключевые слова: У.Б. Йейтс; Г.М. Кружков; стилистика художественного текста; художественный перевод; эзотеризм; метафора; переводческие трансформации.