SPECIFICITY OF I.A. AKSENOV’S LITERARY-CRITICAL PERCEPTION OF THE WORKS OF THE PLAYWRIGHTS OF THE ELIZABETHAN ERA

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The article analyzes the literary-critical publications of I.A. Aksenov in the 1930s, devoted to the comprehension of the life and work of playwrights of the Elizabethan era, in particular, Ben Johnson, John Fletcher, John Marston, Thomas Decker and George Chapman. Methods: In the process of analysis, cultural-historical, comparative-historical, historical-typological, historical-genetic approaches, as well as methods of problematic, comparative analysis of artistic works were used. Findings: In his literary critic and theatrical articles of the 1930s I.A. Aksenov focused on the work of Ben Johnson and John Fletcher. I.A. Aksenov was the first of the Russian researchers, who carried out a thorough examination of the entire heritage of Ben Johnson, highlighting the tragedies of «Sejanus», «Catiline», the comedy «Volpone» among the most significant works. Among the heritage of John Fletcher, the special attention of a literary critic was attracted by the comedy «The Spanish Curate», considered in the context of the Russian theatrical tradition. Some other of «Elizabethan» playwrights, in particular, the reformer of the tragedy - Christopher Marlowe, the participants of the «war of the theaters» – John Marston and Thomas Dekker, and inclined to theatrical experiments George Chapman, whose lyrical philosophies anticipated the appearance of certain plays of Ben Johnson, are in the articles of I.A. Aksenov. Novelty: Perception of the Elizabethan dramatic art in Russia in the early 20th century was rather limited in view of translation selectivity, conditioned by preferences of individual authors, genres and emphasis on specific ideas, themes, and motives. For the first time thanks to I.A. Aksenov, Elizabethan England appeared in Russian literary and theatrical criticism in all variety of names, facts, and events.

Keywords: I.A. Aksenov, Ben Jonson, драматургия, Elizabethan era, literary translation, Russian-English literary connections, reception, tradition, intercultural communication, artistic detail.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking about I.A.Aksenov as a popularizer of the Elizabethan playwrights’ creativity, one can not but see the great role, played by his organizational, editorial, and literary activity, promoting the heritage of Shakespear’s junior contemporaries among the Russian readers. In Russia when the first translations and articles by I.A. Aksenov were published, the works of the secondary playwrights of the Shakespeare era were only known by separate interpretations of plays by Ch. Marlowe («The Tragic History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faust», «The Jew of Malta», «Edward II»), some fragmentary translations of play «The Atheist’s Tragedy» by Cyril Tourneur, «The White Devil» by John Webster, «Epicoene, or the Silent Woman» by Ben Johnson as well as the very meager biographical materials. I.A.Aksenov focused on the work of Ben Johnson, the interest to whom arose as far as in the pre-revolutionary years, which is reflected in a letter to S.P. Bobrov on September 13, 1916: «If you knew how eager I am getting down to Johnson, and how depressed I am by the fact that Dekker and Heywood separate me from him! My gods! Just think that no one knows Volpone. I also love the Alchemist, but less» [1, p. 110]. I.A. Aksenov analyzed in detail the works of the Elizabethan playwrights of different generations in the publications of
the 1930s that went together with the translation and publication of «The Dramatic Works» by Ben Johnson.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Issues of literary criticism on the creativity of the playwrights of the Elizabethan era are considered in the works dedicated to comparative literary criticism, to the Russian-English literary and historical-cultural relations, and to the theory and history of literary translation. Along with the works of I.A. Aksenov, who made the greatest contribution to the translation and literary-critical advancement of Elizabethan dramaturgy in Russia [2; 3; 4], one can mention the monograph of A.T. Parfenov «Ben Johnson and his comedy “Volpone”» [5], the articles of A.N. Gorbunov «Dramaturgic Art of Shakespeare’s Junior Contemporaries » [6], M.B. Meilakh «Aksenov – translator of the Elizabethtans» [7], M.G. Tarlinskaya «Rhythmic literalism? How Ivan Aksenov has been translating the Elizabethtans?» [8] and others.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
As the material for analysis there were chosen the literature-critical and theatrical publications of I.A. Aksenov in the 1930s about the drama of the Elizabethan era. According to the principle of historicism, certain facts and circumstances have been considered in connection with others, taking into account the historical, literary and cultural experience. In accordance with the subject of study, the comparative, comparative-historical, cultural-historical, historical-genetic and historical-typological methods, and methods of problematic, and comparative analysis have been used.

RESULTS
But the translation of Horace, performed by Johnson, possibly influenced by Chapman, was destroyed by the God of fire on the day of its completion, so it could not stand on our shelves next to the Iliad, set forth by the English ballad verse and next to Odyssey in rhymed couplets by Chapman

I.A. Aksenov derived the creative genealogy of Ben Johnson from George Chapman, who transmitted his contempt of intrigue in drama to his follower, the contempt, caused by the inability of subordinating the scope of his lyrical philosophizing to it: «... they were both first-rate humanists, they were both lovers of philology, they were both translators of ancients, but the translation of Horace, performed by Johnson, and possibly influenced by Chapman, was destroyed by the God of fire on the day of its completion, so it could not be placed in our shelves next to the Iliad, set forth by the English ballad verse and next to Odyssey in rhymed couplets by Chapman» [9, p. 17]. However, Ben Johnson, according to I.A. Aksenov, well mastered the technique of interweaving intrigue in the course of the play. Taking his creative interests in the tragedy, Ben Johnson wrote a lot of works that showed him a first-rate master of the romantic genre, however, later he abolished a lot of his works, not wishing to follow a well-trodden path; his favorite business was «to discover the unknown», that is why he «looked at his tragedies with a great contempt» [9, p. 17]. The scale of the destruction can be estimated from the conversation between Johnson and Drummond in 1618, from which one can judge that the folio, that could include the nine plays, contained only half of the playwright’s works. Of the nine printed plays, only two comedies – «A Tale of a Tub» and «The Case is Altered» have survived up to this day, which made I.A. Aksenov to conclude that there were at least seven tragedies, and they were highly appreciated by the public: «listing in the “Palladis Tamia” the names of English playwrights who should be as proud of, as the Greeks were proud of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, Meres named Ben Johnson next to Shakespeare and Marlowe» [9, 18].

Assessing the creativity of Ben Johnson, I.A. Aksenov began from the history of the creation of the comedy «The Isle of Dogs», in which, basing on the methods of F. Rabelais, satire was used to depict the individual circumstances of the capital and provincial life in England. Thomas Nash, having written the first act, refused to work further and went «to the depths of Norfolk», thus having left the theater without a play. The play was completed by Ben Johnson, who added «such a fierce look» to the description that the punitive measures were taken against the authors of the «rough and rebellious» play and against the actors, who played the premiere performance.
Johnson’s work on «Sejanus», a tragedy of a classic plot, a story about the fall of the all-powerful favorite, a story, based on the Essex case, had a chance of success among the public. However, the play could not be completed for the reasons unknown to us, and therefore, according to I.A. Aksenov’s assumption, Ben Johnson turned to George Chapman, who completed the last scenes. The premiere took place on the stage of the «Globe» at the opening of the theatrical season of 1603, and quite unexpectedly, it provoked some after-effects along with the success, i.e. the play suffered «from the local people just like its hero from the furious people of Rome» [9, p. 47]. The glory of the pamphleteer, even of the libeler had stuck to Ben Johnson as a result of a «war of the theatres» and prompted his contemporaries to seek in the text, largely composed of quotations, some immediate hints of reality; in particular, the fact that «Sejanus was elevated to the highest positions from the darkest gentry» was correlated with the propensity of King Jacob to erect new noblemen. Ben Johnson was charged with papalism and treason, and when the Privy Council began to study the charges, the playwright took full responsibility for the whole text and apparently undertook to remove the particularly harsh characteristics of the unlimited power, which were written, as to I.A. Aksenov, by «the second pen», namely, by G. Chapman, as evidenced by the involvement of Suffolk – the Chapman’s «tested patron» – in the course of a trial.

The researcher named three authors of the comedy «Eastward Ho», noting the unity of two former opponents – Marston and Ben Johnson – and involvement of Chapman in the work. In his opinion the play discloses the highest aspects of every playwright: «... it is easier than anything that is signed by Chapman, devoid of cumbersomeness, which is the weak side of Johnson’s technique, and the rudeness, in which Marston tried to hide his pampered Epicureanism» [9, p. 52]. The play, had been supplemented with several politically daring scenes during the staging, was ridiculing the Scots and, in part, King James. Though it was a success, it was banned when there were found some of the «dangerous» episodes: Chapman and Marston were accused of insulting His Majesty and were arrested; Johnson arrived in the prison himself, pronounced to be equally responsible, and demanded to take the same penalty. Johnson regretted that the play was « so misunderstood, <...> perverted, misquoted» [9, p. 52]. The Scots, who had great influence at Court, did not understand the jokes of the playwrights, who were in for serious trouble, but in the end the «jokers» escaped penalty due to some circumstances.

I.A.Aksenov noted the phenomenal ability of Ben Johnson to develop some minor episodes in full-fledged plays, which, in particular, can be seen in the comedy «Epicoen, or the Silent Woman». While working on the first act of «Volpone» and making the image of a talkative woman Johnson resorted to a quotation from Sophocles: «Silence is the best ornament of a woman»; this quotation was taken from the words of a husband who wanted to divorce a girl who faked her taciturnity when he married her. On the basis of this farcical motif, a comic play was created, which, first played in 1609, summed up the long arguments about satire in Johnson’s dramaturgy.

The comedy «The Alchemist» became the new triumph of Johnson in the autumn of 1610, its plot is devoid of the romantic beauty of the Venetian environment of «Volpone», but the composition of intrigue was so consistent that S.T. Coleridge believed that it was one of the two examples of this kind in English literature along with «The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling» by Henry Fielding [see: 9, p. 58]. Here, according to I.A. Aksenov, Ben Johnson was forced to resort to an aesthetic aversion of vice, to all that the author himself considered disgusting; the playwright tried to make the viewers desire the «best life», without determining what this «best life» consisted of. The researcher emphasized that Johnson remained within the overall construction of the Elizabethan drama, which he considered erroneous and harmful throughout his long creative career. His position was reflected by his endless throwing from one form of presentation to another: from comedy to mask, from mask to tragedy; however, the general concept of morality remained, in the opinion of I.A. Aksenov, inaccessible to the playwright, as for most of his vicious heroes.

In the meantime, Ben Johnson created his second Roman tragedy – «Catline (His Conspiracy)», which turned out to be «much more lively» than «Sejanus», but inferior to it «in the grandeur of the historical
The comedy «Bartholomew Fair» by Ben Johnson is noteworthy to I.A. Aksenov because, while creating it, the playwright had to give up its life purpose, namely, to keep the reputation of a moralist and a moral corrector. The comedy, despite the large number of actors, had no protagonist: its main character was the fair. «Bartholomew Fair» did not have a long intrigue: certain elements of the comedy, having arisen and barely having time to become concrete, were dissolved in the stream of the general movement of the fair. In the end of the performance, all the images of the heroes were shown from the side opposite to the beginning. I.A Aksenov noted that in his comedy, Ben Johnson managed to solve the problem of «intense action, devoid of intrigue, it was built around a national theme and around the fair that combined the festive movement with the everyday life of contemporaries rather than around a dance in aristocratic style» [9, p. 73].

The premiere of the «Bartholomew Fair» was held in October 1614 on the stage of the «Hope» Theatre. Despite the success of the play in public, Ben Johnson was disappointed: the comedy was perceived as a farce, and the audience rejoiced at the rude jokes that the play was mocking; some scenes were left outside the stage in order to weaken the attention of the «raging» Puritans; as a result, «the theater ceased to be an intellectual center of the city, a popular spectacle, a place of serving the interests of the broad masses of the population» [9, p. 74–75], having become a class enterprise.

Ben Johnson, who was trying in vain to leave the theatre, presented his new comedy «The Devil is an Ass», the bright satire of which, according to I.A.Aksenov, was dispersed in three directions: first, against the growing desire of the theatre to renew the old comedy with the devils, the theatre, that, having completely lost the public, tried to resort to the old recipes in order to return spectators to the halls; second, against the general interest in devility, encouraged by the King’s weakness for demonology; third, against the growing ingenuity of the government in the field of the inventions of the monopolies and speculative project-mongering.

Preferring Ben Johnson, I.A. Aksenov was reflecting on other Elizabethans as well. For example, in the article «Thomas Heywood and Thomas Dekker» he characterized the play «Phaethon» by T.Decker as «a mythological tragedy with faery interpretation» [10, p. 141], which being very typical of a playwright, could not be considered his achievement. «The Shoemaker’s Holiday», written by Dekker in 1600, «if not in prison, then soon after release from it», was, according to the researcher, «one of <...> the masterpieces» of the playwright. I.A. Aksenov appreciated the rigorous construction and thoughtfulness of the composition of the play, not inherent in Dekker’s creativity; he noted that Ben Johnson was probably involved in its creation. «he looked after the ends to be tied up and none of the actors wandered about the play» [10, p. 142]. I.A.Aksenov estimated the comedy-pamphlet «Satiromastix» as a «bad play», the author of which was not able to cope with the aim of ridiculing Ben Johnson («it was not very angry, and satire was rather innocuous»), and the co-author – Marston – could not save the composition of the play from being formless. The researcher took interest in the political and Protestant play «The Whore of Babylon», which glorified Queen Elizabeth for the victory over the Catholics. Among the tales of T. Dekker, I.A.Aksenov preferred the folklore-lyrical play «Old Fortunatus», «a big, confused and, eventually, turning into a crude allegory, in which the poet’s imagination mixes all dramatic forms and too often loses the thread of the plot, so as not to damage the beauty of the individual episodes», herewith combining «wonderful poems that are close to the texture of “Tamerlane” by Marlowe» [10, p. 146].
The four Prentises of London» – the first everyday romantic comedy by T. Heywood, according to Aksenov, despite some absurdity in the development of the plot, was a success, owing to its addressing to apprentices, a social group of the population of Elizabethan England idealized by T. Heywood and depicted only in positive tones: «... the valor of a tailor, a shoemaker, a wool maker and a clerk are superior to all the Knights of the Crusaders, they commit countless feats, receive duchies and kingdoms, but they are insignificant to the great happiness of being an apprentice in the city of London» [10, p. 151].

In his review «J. Fletcher’s comedy about the Spanish curate, how it was first played by the actors of the Second Moscow Art Theater», published in No. 3 of the journal «Theater and Dramaturgy» dd. 1935, I.A. Aksenov noted that, in spite of the earlier Leningrad productions of «A Yorkshire tragedy» by T. Middleton and the completely original «alteration of the German adaptation» of Ben Johnson’s comedy «Volpone», the comedy «The Spanish Curate» by J. Fletcher, represented on the scene of the Moscow Art Theater II, can rightly be considered the first staging of Elizabethan dramaturgy on Russian scene. According to the researcher, among the works of the former epochs, only the plays, reflecting the era of social uplift, were able to evoke a response of the modern viewer, while the author’s personal characteristics were of secondary importance. To adequately reflect his era, the author does not need to belong to the estate, which is the bearer of the social novelty and capable of making a revolution in the near future. According to I.A. Aksenov, the nobility has acquired the courage to criticize the sanctity of religion and the godly self-sufficient enrichment, the «sanctity of every power», and the unconditional concept of the state, they relied on the class nature of state principles and predicted that «the basis of the order, initiated by the bourgeoisie, will inevitably take the unformulated by Hobbes rule – “man to man is a wolf”» [11, p. 15]. I.A. Aksenov noted that the era of baroque, which, in his opinion, John Fletcher belonged to, was full of these contradictions, while the revolutionary character of the Elizabethan period in comparison with the views of the future period made the impression of «terry reactionary», especially in the places where it was expressed most consistently. This certainly did not mean, that there were no «reactionary» plays in the works of J. Fletcher; I.A. Aksenov referred to them, in particular, the comedy «The Knight of the Burning Pestle». At the same time, Fletcher, in the opinion of I.A. Aksenov, left the possibility of non-interfering in relation of the «estate which he came from and which he left» [11, p. 15].

According to I.A. Aksenov, the contemporary creativity of Fletcher was appreciated more than that of Shakespeare, due to the preference given to the drama of the Baroque in comparison with the art of the Renaissance, rather than to the fact that «the language of Shakespeare is outdated and Ben Johnson’s wit yields to Fletcher’s». Though both playwrights were associated with the troupe of Berbage, that by the time of flourishing of the work of J. Fletcher had become a personal troupe of the King, I.A. Aksenov found an important difference between them: Shakespeare was creating for the public in the fenced courtyard of the «Globe» Theatre, while the plays of J. Fletcher were staged in the closed hall with rows of chairs and a balcony. The construction of plays changed as well, for example, the proscenium, so popular with the public of the «well», disappeared; the text of the play began to absorb the interludes of jesters, turning them into comic actors and participants of the intrigues of the play. I.A. Aksenov noted the difference in the construction of the plays of the two English playwrights – everything was externally the same, the drama contained both melodramatic and comic intrigues, but in Shakespeare’s the intrigues were united in the lyricism of the presentation and the proscenium clownery, while Fletcher, having refused to do the same, used a complex system of mutual reflection of both intrigues and their unification with the same relation to the theme of the play. The changes also affected the hero of the play, which was no longer the bearer of the «self-sufficient value of the human person», but the conductor of concrete actions and relations [see: 11, p. 15–16].

The Fletcher’s comedy «The Spanish Curate» developed according to the old canons of the Elizabethan drama depicted an ancestral domestic love story of the noble young man Don Enrique and the commoner belle of Jacinta, followed by wedding, birth of a child, his satiety and the expected divorce; after that there was the next wedding – the hero married the equal-class girl and lived 16 years with her without having children. But Fletcher, who generally accepted the concept of Ben Johnson, ingeniously sketched the
intricate relationships of his characters: sixteen years later, Don Enrique brought his public repentance in the court, stoically listened to the insult of his first wife, recognized himself as a father of a teenager and assigned him the right to inherit the fortune, that he gained together with his second wife. Noble Don Enrique scornfully rejected the lawyer’s idea to use the perjurers, who were able to say «even the truth, for a change, although it is unusual for them» [11, p. 16]. But does this testify to the scrupulous conscience of Don Enrique, his kind heart, his lofty character? The public of the court did not doubt that, but the spectators of the comedy knew something different, they knew the true selfish intentions of the hero; his second marriage was childless, and that the younger brother of Don Jaime, who was angry with Don Enrique for the undue favor of fate to him, would become the heir of the riches. Being just one year older than his brother, Don Enrique not only inherited the whole fortune, but also tried to control the behavior of Don Jaime, without any reason for this.

J. Fletcher «plays» with the audience, alternately showing them the false nobleness of both brothers. Patronizing Ascanio, the son of Don Enrique, Don Jaime pursues the goal to lime his elder brother, to quickly get his fortune, then to squander it. Don Enrique commits his «noble» deed by agreeing to his legal relationship with his son, who he had never seen before, in order to humiliate his younger brother, to deprive him of his hope of inheritance, to break his disobedience. Noting that the comedy «The Spanish Curate» was not limited to the sketch of the intricate relations of characters in the spirit of the traditions of Ben Johnson, I.A. Aksenov pointed out that Fletcher outperformed his teacher, giving the comedy a complex sequence of dramatic and theatrical positions. So, the meeting of Don Enrique with an unrecognized son is an example of a dramatic situation, while his accusation in court is an example of a scenic situation, supported by the dramatic situation of Jacinta, who was accusing the former spouse and attacking the abuser, only playing along to him in reality. Fletcher not only builds his positions, but also plays with them: the story of Don Enrique should show the complete conventional and arbitrary meaning of the main sacred objects of the nobility, such as patrimonial law, impartial court and secular justice; it is ridiculous to follow these norms, because, when you follow them, you will be deceived, as were the spectators of the Don Enrique trial.

I.A. Aksenov saw an additional object of the playwright’s satire in the comedy «The Spanish Curate» – those who carelessly applauded the production, the numerous public who built their own existence on the enrichment, justifying it with the fortress of family customs and by the Puritan religion, and who contrasted their virtue with the vices of the nobility. They perceived the religious leadership of authoritative clergymen, who were chosen from among the most worthy of the citizens and most capable of serving. The curate, Lopez, who proved most suitable to this role, after many years of service, realized that pimp was much more profitable than the priesthood, but continued to be a priest, descending to the pleas of his beggar flock, hammered by «noble» Don Enrique. The lawyer Bartoles, who wielded a very miserable existence before joining the frauds of Don Enrique, kept his beautiful wife Amaranth locked up, being jealous without any reason and stating that his sacred duty was to guard his honor; It was only the rich Leandro to appear, sent to a lawyer, after a slight prompt of Don Jaime, under the mask of a student, offering him a fair amount of money for science, as the scrupulousness of the lawyer was completely disappeared.

The satire of Fletcher, aimed, according to I.A.Aksenov’s observation, against Puritanism, affected the family as the main pillar of the doctrine, as well: the beautiful Amaranth, having fallen in love with Leandro, feignedly protested against the presence of another man in the house, being, however, convinced in the different reaction of her husband Bartoles, who demanded a kind of attitude to the guest, who brought money. The curate Lopez, aware of the affection of Leandro and Amaranth, actively promoted lovers and later was unmasked by Bartoles. According to I.A.Aksenov, the main philosophical idea of the comedy «The Spanish Curate» was «money, profit-seeking, greed and petty tyranny equally rule the society in both of its competing halves»: «Like the sun, they both rise over the Nobles and over the Puritans. Attracted by money, the gold-bound heroes do the things that lead them to shame and destruction, they trust people, who should not be trusted, they bring their enemies closer and push friends
away. They deceive themselves with their tricks, because they direct their activities in the wrong way. The more consistently do they go their way the more likely they are to perish» [11, p. 16–17].

In this way, both secular and spiritual laws appeared to be unable to help and rethink the life of mankind, directly subordinated to everyday feelings: fraternal fidelity making don Jaime even save his brother from the revenge of his enraged second wife Violante; empathy for the beloved, which gave a pretty face even to the deceiver Lopez; the love, answering to love and making the recluse Amaranth happy. I.A. Aksenov stressed that according to Fletcher, these feelings, in fact, inherent in a person, create the value, «the attitude towards which is the criterion of rightness and wrongness of the heroes of his comedy together with the society itself, the comedy is directed to» [11, p. 17]. The work of Fletcher, according to I.A. Aksenov, is relevant for a society, in which «people can really build their personal relations on the basis of their natural feelings»; therefore, Fletcher’s plan is «really realized <...> not on the stage, but in <...> auditoriums» [11, p. 17].

In his review I.A. Aksenov appreciated the translation of M.L. Lozinsky that served the basis for the production, which required the re-creation of distant and unusual images. The researcher was sure of the successful scenic fate of «The Spanish Curate», the text of which «had an encouraging formula – “difficult is perfect”, but cheek brought success» [11, p. 17]. I.A. Aksenov considered the participation of V.A. Favorsky who allowed conquering lots of content difficulties, being the main success of the production. The director S.G. Birman used the «picturesque riot» of A.V. Lentulov, but did it not without prejudice to the effects of the artist, the description was put in the strict framework of the architectural composition and built-up scenery, carrying out the task of «dismembering the scenic space and determining the place of the performance» [11, p. 18]. In addition Aksenov considered a merit of Berman his prudent shortening of the intrigue Enrique – Violanta; the image of the latter was realized by V.L. Yureneva, who presented only «a part» of it: «it seemed that Violanta was acting in some other play, not in what her partners took part, ... she seemed to be going past and away from them, without supporting them, without relying on them, and without finding any reflection in them» [11, p. 20]. According to the observation of the researcher V.L. Yureneva continued acting in a «brilliant solitude», «not for a moment weakening the tension of her acting, “holding her part” in the best manner from the beginning to the end»; «her acting was strong enough to fall out of the plan, but not enough to withdraw the action from it» [11, p. 20], but the technique of separating the intrigues of the Elizabethan drama in this case was justified. Thus V.A. Popov, who was acting as the curate Lopez, had a difficult task – «picking up the broken lines of presentation», «playing with the image, already created rather than playing for creating an image » [11, p. 20]. I.A. Aksenov noted that the person and his craft were separated by the actor with greatest fidelity: Lopez by V.A. Popov «is cute mainly because the priest is shown hideous», in fact, «this good-natured person could be a very useful member of society, if not for the seminarian education and the long career of the priest, that made him a professional parasite and exploiter of a poor peasantry» [11, p. 20].

I.A. Aksenov drew attention to the musical nature of the overall construction of the play: this energetic and passionate scherzo assumed to have a slow melodious part with a gradually increasing dynamics; however S.V. Giatstintova, who was holding this melody, refused this increase, proposed by Fletcher, and began to expound the amorous story of Amaranth with a flash of indomitable passion. From the first steps of this interpretation, the image was complete, and the viewer had to observe the further actions of the creator of the image rather than its constructing. I.A. Aksenov rejected S.V. Giatstintova’s doubts about an excessive ennoblement of the image of the created by her heroine, saying that «Fletcher would have recognized in it the product of his fantasy» [11, p. 21]; the deliberate rudeness of Amaranth was addressed to the «velvet and silk public» of the front rows of the Blackfriars Theater, and corresponded to its requests. In his opinion, S.V. Giatstintova turned out to be braver than a playwright, having enriched the text of the comedy with «such subtle and graceful mimetic comments, that the teenagers who performed this role in the troupe of Burbage would not surely have been able to do » [11, p. 21]. The scene of the game of chess performed by S.V. Giatstintova, «who refused even facial expressions, nuancing with the successive falling of horses and pawns from her weakening hands» was «a magnificent invention of our
contemporary» [11, p. 21]. The image of Amaranth was sounding like a triumphant song of love throughout the comedy, love that had unfolded all of its beauty and wealth some centuries later.

**DISCUSSION**

In some cases, I.A. Aksenov’s interpretation of the individual events of the Elizabethan era differed from the established ideas, in particular, concerning the significance of «war of the theatres». While AA Anikst in his monograph «Shakespeare», based on the excerpts from the second scene of the second act of the tragedy «Hamlet» [see: 12, p. 59], called this phenomenon insignificant [13, p. 220-222], I.A.Aksenov considered the «war of the theatres», that started with an awkward attempt of John Marston of pleasing his teacher, a key moment in the fate of Ben Johnson and in the history of Elizabethan drama in general. According to I.A.Aksenov, although John Marston was glorifying Ben Johnson in verse, and pretended to be his pupil and a humble admirer («subservient like poets who realize the failure of their works and who hope to learn from a celebrity»), he was still «of the highest opinion of himself», firmly convinced, that the famous playwright, praised by him, would help to awaken his «dormant» genius. Marston initially explained the lack of help from Johnson by his reluctance but then by his concern on the possible emergence of a competitor with a huge talent. When editing the text of the old well-known play «Historiomastix», Marston decided to remake the play for the glory of the teacher, having transformed the pedagogue and the scholastic, named Christoganus, into a true scientist, a fighter with ignorance, who resembled Ben Johnson both externally and in nature. However, Marston lacked the talent to cope with this task; he left the old name of the character – Christoganus. The public, who used to think of Christoganus as a caricature hero, took the play as a mockery of Ben Johnson, who, in turn, responded with a public humiliation of Marston, finding «a full catalog of illiteracy» [9, p. 31] in his works. After that, Marston wrote a satirical parody «Jack Drum’s Entertainment» directed against Johnson. Ben Johnson responded with the comedy «Cynthia’s Revels», in which, along with Marston, he firmly besieged T. Dekker, who was planning to write a new play together with Marston.

I.A. Aksenov emphasized the unique success of the «Cynthia’s Revels»: it was «the success of the scandal, it was the first time when London was watching the battle of the two playwrights, who were hitting each other with comedies» [9, p. 33]. According to I.A.Aksenov, Ben Johnson not only took out scores with his opponents, but also focused on «the narcissism and idleness of the rivals, the idiotic stupidity of their entertainment»; he focused on Cynthia as well, clearly depicted from Elizabeth, who used to edify subordinates, in particular, Actaeon – a character copied from Lord Essex, a generous philanthropist who fell into the royal disfavor. Ben Johnson was the only one who openly supported the Queen; he did it in order «to have the opportunity to make clear his point of view on the social and political significance of his poetic activity, rather than for reward, foreseeing, and perhaps knowing about the sad outcome of Lord Essex» [9, p. 34]. He urged the playwrights to instruct humanity, at the same time, «was persecuting and denouncing Marston as a defender of the theory of art as entertainment and fun» [9, p. 34].

Anticipating the answer of Marston and Dekker, Ben Johnson created scenes of the comedy «Poetaster», the action of which took place in the same conditional Rome. Marston was portrayed as graphomaniac Crispinus, Dekker – in the image of Demetrius, and Johnson himself – under the guise of Ovid. According to I.A.Aksenov, only modesty prevented Johnson from calling himself Horace, and in the fate of Ovid there was something in common with the fate of the author of satire: «like Ovid, Ben refused the career, his father had prepared for him; like Ovid, he suffered persecution from the adored monarch; like Ovid, he tried to prove his unshakable fidelity to him» [9, p. 34]. With the comedy appeared, Ben Johnson was left without support. The military were dissatisfied with the excessively eloquent manner of Captain Tooky, considering it a libel on their estate, and therefore they filed a complaint with the Supreme Court of Justice against the author. That complaint was soon followed by a complaint of lawyers. They were offended by Ovid’s negative judgments about the legal career, despite the fact that the preference of poetry before the jurisprudence was presented by genuine quotations from Ovid.
With «Satromastix» by T. Dekker at last appeared, it did not become a complete response to Johnson: the play was too lengthy; its plot was complicated by some side intrigues so much, that it lost the sequence of actions. Compared with the confusion of the impersonal characters of the play, even the voluntary fantasies of Ben Johnson on the comedy-game, devoid of intrigue, contained in the «Cynthia’s Revels», seemed an example of a strong composition. However, the public was not tired of the war of the theatres, that was involving more and more new playwrights. Some anonymous author released a pamphlet called «The Whipping of the Satyre» signed «V.I.», in which he recollected Marston of the time when he, «no worse than Johnson, considered himself the corrector of morals». Marston answered with a pamphlet «The satirist repents in a shirt», followed by a pamphlet by Nicholas Breton, who tried to reconcile the parties of the conflict.

During the theatrical struggle, Ben Johnson did not have any support from those who were expected to be on his side; on the contrary, he turned many jurists, classically educated young people, against him, they did not forget his position in the Lord Essex case. Having realized the futility of his desire to give a talented mentor a good lesson, Marston considered it necessary to reconcile, which took place in one of the taverns (this episode was later recreated by Beaumont and Fletcher in the third scene of the fifth act of the comedy «A King and no King»).

CONCLUSIONS
For a long time Russian literary critical and translational thought was concentrated on understanding the life and work of Shakespeare and Ch. Marlowe. I.A.Aksenov was one of the first to draw his attention to the works of the little-known contemporaries of these playwrights, contributing to the Russian reader’s acquaintance with the traditions and cultural features of England in the Elizabethan era, which in many respects remained unfamiliar to Russia of the first third of the 20th century. In his literary critical articles, devoted to the dramatic works of Shakespeare’s predecessors and contemporaries, I.A.Aksenov has introduced the concept of «Elizabethans»; he has also presented a detailed analysis of the Elizabethan dramatic art, allowed drawing attention to the rich legacy of a number of playwrights, that had not been perceived before (C. Tourneur, J.Webster, J.Ford and others).

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