
In the Workshop of a Translator: Pains and Gains of Poetic Translation

IRINA AVERIANOVA

The article presents a critique of the translation into Russian of five of Maya Angelou's poems, performed by V. Averianov, a Russian-speaking writer and poet from the Ukraine. The selection included "Alone", "Touched by an Angel", "The Lesson", "These Yet to Be United States" and "The Caged Bird". The critic had an access to the drafts of the translations and the opportunity to probe the translator about the rationale of the choices he made in the process of translation. While the article is built on the analysis of these choices and the resultant losses and gains, its overall emphasis lies on the assessment of the degree of equivalency achieved by the translation and its potential effect on the target readership.

The translation of poetry is perhaps the most difficult and ungrateful undertaking of a translator: his or her task is to transfer the original multifaceted entity as a logical, aesthetic and operative unit into a different linguistic and cultural milieu, while preserving most of its meaning, form, and function. In poetry, the hierarchy of what must be preserved does not follow the order in which the basic characteristics of the text have been mentioned, as form-centered types of texts, focusing on the sender, predominate. The more distant the languages and cultures are, the more difficult it is to faithfully render the formal properties of a poetic source text (ST), and the difficulty is further increased by the need to conform both to the author's intent and to the readership or to choose between the two, when the former is not attainable. In any case, the losses are inevitable, while the gains are latent with forged authorship.

Such were the challenges faced by the Russian poet and writer Vladimir Averianov while translating five poems by Maya Angelou, one of America's leading poets and writers. The need for such an undertaking was born out of both the appreciation of the aesthetic value of Angelou's artistic perception and expression and of the fact that the Russian-speaking readership has not yet been introduced to the poetry of the famous African-American writer, film director and public figure. In fact, Angelou's literary activity, including her most acclaimed novel, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, is not known in the Ukraine as none of her works has been published in either Russian or Ukrainian translation¹. While in the United States Angelou is recognized as the most prominent contemporary African-American author and her writings are included in school curriculum, this void in the Russophone framework of modern American literature is rather conspicuous. Thus, it is quite timely that V. Averianov has ventured on a mission of high responsibility – to introduce a new noteworthy author and poet to a quite perceptive, demanding and critical audience. Being a seasoned poet himself², the translator certainly shares the view of V. H. Pedersen, to whom the translation

¹ The only exception, to the best of my knowledge, is the translation of the *Phenomenal Woman* by an anonymous writer placed on the Russian-language amateur Internet site "Magical Fellowship Forum" .

² The prose and poetry of V. Averianov have been published in 38 books and journals on creative writing.

of a literary text means the production of a literary text itself, which not only must render a fair proportion of the original content but also do justice to the splendor of the original: “the translation should above all be a work of art” (Pedersen, 1999, p.54). Such was the agenda of the translator, as stated by himself, and with such an objective in mind, I will try to analyze, explain and evaluate the resultant translations both in terms of their fidelity to the original and their aesthetic orientation to a new readership.

The first work of Angelou to be presented, the poem *These Yet to Be United States*, is remarkable for its passionate denunciation of the internal and external policies of her country and bitter criticism of the aggressive ethnocentrism, pursued at the expense of the nation itself.

These Yet To Be
United States

Соединенные Штаты еще не состоялись

Tremors of your network
cause kings to disappear.
Your open mouth in anger
makes nations bow in fear.

А сеть твоя дрожит, дрожит,
и короли вдруг пропадают.
И рот во гневе твой открыт,
и в страхе нации склоняет.

Your bombs can change the seasons,
obliterate the spring.
What more do you long for?
Why are you suffering?

А бомбам изменить сезоны
не сложно, весны исчезают...
Что ждешь ты, в чем твои резоны?
И от чего же так страдаешь?

You control the human lives
in Rome and Timbuktu.
Lonely nomads wandering
owe Telstar to you.

Ты жизни держишь под контролем
от Рима стен до Занзибара.
Скитальцам одиноким, вольным
твоя горит звезда Тельстара.

Seas shift at your bidding,
your mushrooms fill the sky.
Why are you unhappy?
Why do your children cry?

И сдвинутся моря подвластно.
Грибами небеса закрываю...
Но отчего же ты несчастна?
Своих детей в слезах забыла?

They kneel alone in terror
with dread in every glance.
Their nights [“rights”? - Schrift
nicht lesbar] are threatened daily
by a grim inheritance.

Ночам их снова угрожает
твой каждый день и мрак наследья.
Их ужас на колени ставит.
Во взлядах-царства страха тени.

You dwell in whitened castles
with deep and poisoned moats
and cannot hear the curses
which fill your children’s throats.

Ты проживаешь в замках белых,
И рвы отравлены, глубоки.
Не слышишь ты-проклятий гневных
твоих детей полны уж глотки.

Rich in metaphors, the rhythmically-structured and partially-rhymed text presents a particular challenge for the translator, starting from the title itself. The English title is characterized by a clear iambic meter, which, although popular in Russian poetic diction, cannot be preserved in this particular case. In

fact, any other rhythmic pattern is equally impossible, since the translator has to use the direct equivalent *the United States*, which in Russian is much longer (*United* is a six-syllable word), while no replacements, such as *USA*, *US* or *States* are viable. Here the name of the country is the central meaningful axis of the poem in its denotational and connotational entity, meaning “the country joined together by a common feeling or aim”. The translator has to use the equivalent toponym, even though the secondary meaning of “unity”, implied by the author, is most likely to be missed by the Russian reader since the meaning “unified” in Russian has a different equivalent, “объединенные”, which is not present in the Russian proper name. Thus, the title, being of necessity a literal translation, deviates, in the aesthetic perspective, from the original and belongs more to journalism than to poetry.

Such is the complex nature of proper names, which being monosemantic and thus not burdened with layers of interrelated meanings, still are not that simple and often entail powerful connotations. There are three other proper names in the poem, which were subjected to the careful scrutiny of the translator - *Rome*, *Timbuktu* and *Telstar*. While *Rome* and *Telstar* were preserved (*Rome* in its Russian equivalent and *Telstar* in transliteration), *Timbuktu* was replaced by *Zanzibar*, and each of these decisions is thoroughly justified by the following considerations. The essence of poetry is in its ultimate fusion of meaning and form to the extent, that it is impossible to say whether the poetic effect comes from *what* the poet says or the *way* it is said. According to J.S. Holmes (1970), four types of form and approaches to form - extraneous, organic, analogical and mimetic - can be distinguished both in the original and in translation. Of these, the translations under consideration demonstrate only two – the mimetic approach, which attempts to retain the form of the ST, and analogical, which seeks to frame the target text (TT) in a form whose function is the same as that of the original. As the forms are not retained in passing from one language to another, the rhythmic build-up of which does not always allow the form of the original to be imitated, the choice between the two will depend very largely on the assessment of purpose and value, in other words, on the balance between text, matter and readership. Solutions to the problem, as was emphasized by L. Kelly, depend on resolving the Saussurean contradiction between the necessity and arbitrariness of the *significant-signifié* linkage in the linguistic sign, that is, to determine whether the sign is sacramental or non-sacramental, whether the features of the *significant* are part of the meaning of the *signifié* and thus, so inseparable from it that there are only identical and not functional equivalents possible (Kelly, 1979, p.203). Unlike *the United States* of the title, the two other toponyms, *Rome* and *Timbuktu*, are not “sacramental” and are used by the author to accentuate the enormous range of the US geocentric interest and influence, the effect reinforced by the allusion to the American idiom *From here to Timbuktu*, meaning “very far away”. Since there is no equivalent phrase in Russian and the target audience has very little, if any, knowledge of the place, the translator has decided to replace it with the similarly exotic toponym *Zanzibar*, which rhymes in Russian with *Telstar*. The latter is preserved in the translation in its transliterated form, and though not many of the readers are aware of the first American active communications satellite, *Telstar*, the morpheme *tel-*, present in the compound, is also used in Russian and can prompt the reference to some sort of telecommunication device. As for *Rome*, it fits perfectly into the TT structure, and thus is preserved, though with little concretization : *from the walls of Rome to Zanzibar*.

The original poem is quite consistently rhymed with what looks like a stress-time dactyl dimeter, thus certain additions, omissions and replacements are inevitable in the translation, which also presents a rhymed text following, however, an iambic tetrameter pattern. For instance, the opening phrase about the tremors of the network, that *cause kings to disappear* is rendered by an equally, if not more, sinister phrase with repetition *your net is trembling, trembling*, and the causal effect *And kings suddenly disappear* is implied in the coordinated sentence. The *nomads* in the translation are not just *lonely*, but also *free*. While the translator manages to render the content of the poem with a surprising degree of line-to-line fidelity, he has to resort to partial transposition and redistribution of information in the fourth stanza – the content

of the last two lines of ST is rendered in the first two lines of the translation, and vice versa. With regard to the form, both the original and the translation have six quatrains (four-line verses), where only two lines - the second and the fourth - are rhymed in the original, while the TT follows the repetitive *a-b-a-b* pattern. However, realizing that not every element of the original can be preserved in translation, poetic in particular, it is hardly proper to judge a translation by picking out a few items to comment on. In overall, a detailed comparison reveals that, in the translation of this poem, the translator has managed to closely render both the form and the content of the original. Even all of the metaphors of the original - *the mouth opened in anger*, the isolation of the country *in white castles with deep, poisoned moats*, its *children, crying and terrified* and others - are closely rendered. With a thoroughly structured and rhymed organization added, this translation seems to achieve a high degree of both types of equivalence - formal and dynamic (Nida, 2003).

There is one problematic place in the original - illegible print (script) of the word *nights*, which can also be read *rights*. It is not quite clear whether the remark about illegibility was made by the author or the editor. But even assuming that it is the author's note, the translator failed to recover its poetic meaning and decided to choose *nights*, as this choice seems to be supported by the presence of antonymic opposition: *their nights are threatened daily*. In the translation, this phrase literally means "your every day and gloom of inheritance threaten their nights".

The second poem under consideration, *Touched by the Angel*, presents a different translation challenge, as it has no clear rhythmical or rhymed pattern. Only a few of its lines are rhymed, while the syllabic structure is ragged and the cadence varies from verse to verse. Under such conditions the translator has chosen to reject rhyme altogether and resorted to what J. Holmes (1970) would call the "organic" form of equivalence. Organic form arises when the translation deals with free verse and renders the imagery of the original within its own poetic structure.

Touched by the Angel

We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love
leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity
In the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see

Ангела прикосновение

Мы к смелости не привыкли,
И изгнаны из восторга,
И в раковинах одиночества
Живем, свернувшись, своих.
Покуда любовь не предстанет
Пред нами, свой храм покинув
Святой и высокий, чтобы
Освободить нас в жизнь.

Приходит любовь,
Вслед экстазы за ней возвратятся,
И память о наслаждениях прошлых,
И боли прошедшей давно.
Но, если смелы мы,
То в душах любовь разобьет цепи страха,

От робости нас отлучая
вспышками света любви.
Внезапно мы храбрыми станем,
Увидев, любовь того стоит,

that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

Что есть мы,
Что есть мы и будем...
Любовь лишь
свободу нам даст.

Being a free verse, the translation still has a very coherent rhythmic pattern, which differs from the original and can be interpreted as the “embellishment” of the original. When confronted with such criticism, the translator, however, remarked that his intention was not to stylistically improve the poem, but to create a new poem, which appeals with an equal force to the new readership, accustomed as it is to the consistently structured poetic forms. His fidelity to the author was realized in the faithful rendering of the rich imagery of this “ode to love” with very close or often almost identical correspondences. Moreover, the first stanza of the original contains alliteration of the [l] sound, while in the translation alliteration of the same verse is based on the [s] sound. Whether deliberate or not, this case falls under the category of parallel compensation, which, according to K. Harvey (1995, p.84), occurs at exactly the same place in the TT as the effect that has been lost in the ST. It should be noted, however, that the targeted effect is only a potential and an assumed one, as it is equally impossible both for the translator and the critic to state the intention and define the effect of the original. Thus, the translator has to resort to the “interpretative hypothesis about the effect programmed by the original text” and to deduce the “intention of the text” (Eco, 2003, p.56). Under such conditions, if the translator remains faithful to the original, “the decision about what to reproduce and how is truly negotiable” (ibid).

R. de Beaugrande and W. Dressler view any text as “a document of decision, selection and combination. (Thus) ... many occurrences are significant by virtue of other alternatives which could have occurred instead” (1981, p.35). As the author makes her choices, so does the translator, and in his case all the choices should be informed and “motivated” (Hatim & Mason, 1990, p.4), rather than random. An interesting case of observing the choices made by the translator and his motivation behind these choices is presented by the translation of the poem *Alone*.

Alone

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires
With money they can't use

Одна

Лежала ночью,
Думая о том,
Как для души найти мне дом,
Где утолю водою жажду,
Не камнем ломоть хлеба ляжет.
Я к выводу пришла тому,
И, думаю, не ошибаюсь,
Что никому,
Ну никому
Не выжить в мире одному.

Одна, совсем одна,
Но никому
Не выжить в мире одному.

Миллионеров много есть
С деньгами, что нельзя и счесть.

Their wives run round like banshees
 Their children sing the blues
 They've got expensive doctors
 To cure their hearts of stone.
 But nobody
 No, nobody
 Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
 Nobody, but nobody
 Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely
 I'll tell you what I know
 Storm clouds are gathering
 The wind is gonna blow
 The race of man is suffering
 And I can hear the moan,
 'Cause nobody,
 But nobody
 Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
 Nobody, but nobody
 Can make it out here alone.

Их жены, как банши, снуют,
 А дети, дети блюз поют.
 Есть доктора, что подороже-
 Спасти сердца из камня можно.
 Но в мире нет
 Того, кому
 Удастся выжить одному.

Одна, совсем одна,
 Но никому
 Не выжить в мире одному.

Скажу тому, кто слушать станет,
 Скажу о том, что точно знаю:
 Ненастье тучи собирает,
 И ветер дует завывая,
 И род людской опять страдает.
 Я слышу стон и точно знаю,
 Что в мире нет того,
 Кому
 Удастся выжить одному.

Одна, совсем одна,
 Но никому
 Не выжить в мире одному.

By its form, the poem reminds of a spiritual, a vocal form favored by the African-Americans. Its song-like rhythm is enhanced with every second line being rhymed and the presence of a refrain after each stanza. A comparable format is preserved in the translation, which, similarly to the original, is comprised of three two-quatrain stanzas, each followed by the refrain. Though the euphony of the original is based on an *a-b-c-b* and the translation on an *a-a-b-b* rhyme pattern and the TT refrain is rhymed not on the repetition of the word *alone*, but on the possibility in Russian of rhyming *alone* and *nobody*, the translation still renders the form very closely, conveying the emotional anguish and lamentous mood of the poem. Another challenge concerns the rendering of the metaphors of the poem, which are the cornerstones of its poetic diction. While this was not difficult with such trite ones as the *hearts of stone* and the *loaf of bread, which is not a stone*, the more original metaphors were partially lost. The first loss resulted from the linguistic differences between the SL and TL: the novel image of the *water* that is *not thirsty* is quite difficult for adequate rendering in Russian, since the word *thirsty* in this context cannot be an adjective. In Russian, it is a verb “to want to drink”, so the translation, literally meaning “home, where I can quench my thirst with water” does not reproduce the original metaphor of the ST. Another metaphoric loss is caused by the difference in cultural background of the SL and TL audiences with regard to the word *banshees*. This figure of Irish folklore, denoting a female spirit, usually seen as an omen of death, may not be known to all American readers, but at least it is fairly familiar to the Irish audience. As for the Russian-language readership, only very few will know who or what banshees are, so the comparison of millionaires' wives to banshees, which builds an image of messengers of inevitable doom and death, will be lost in the translation. One of the options was to replace the word with another unit of the same semantic field, the way it was

done with *Timbuktu*. Such violation of the “referential duty of the translator” (Eco, 2003, p.64) is widely accepted, since “when a given expression has a connotative force it must keep the same force in translation, even at the cost of accepting changes in denotation” (Eco, 2003, p.63). In case of *banshees*, however, the only image of a female clairvoyant present in the Russian culture is that of Cassandra from the Greek mythology, but its use in other contexts is highly restricted. So the translator decided on leaving the original image in the translation, although this decision raises the problem of its explication.

Here we have a typical situation of dealing with non-equivalent culture-specific lexicons, words denoting objects, customs, and so forth specific to the SL culture and therefore absent in the TL. According to E. Gutt, “for a text to communicate a particular meaning it is necessary not only that the text meets certain requirements, but that the audience’s background knowledge, too, must be of a certain kind. Otherwise the necessary interaction between the text and background knowledge cannot take place, which means that the intended meaning cannot be recovered by the audience” (Gutt, 2005, p.17). Gutt suggests two principled alternatives for resolving such problems: a) if the receptor’s background knowledge is considered to be fixed, then successful communication can only be achieved by adapting the meaning of the translated text to it; or b) if the meaning of the original is considered as fixed, then the receptors’ background knowledge will need to be adjusted to ensure communicative success” (ibid). With *banshees*, the translator chooses to “adjust” the knowledge of his readership to the perception of a new image. The way the translator does it is perceived by P. Fawcett as a delicate balancing act – “either the translator patronizes the target audience by treating them as if they know nothing and lack the means to find out, or the translator leaves them in the dark by not supplying what is needed to make sense of the text” (Fawcett, 2003, p.125). V. Averianov assumes that his target audience hardly knows what is being talked about and some information must be passed on with a minimum disruption of the expressive form. Though K. Reiss considers insertion of brief explanatory material, which provides the information needed to understand the text, the most appropriate technique for the form-centered texts (Reiss, 1971, p.79), it is hardly feasible in poetry with the fixed line format. So the translator chooses to use a footnote, which is a rare device in poetry as it interferes with its holistic perception. The translator, however, sides with V. Nabokov, who thoroughly supports it even in poetry: “I want translation with copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers” (Nabokov, 1985, p.143).

There is one more problematic issue in the translation of *Alone*, that of colloquialisms *gonna* and ‘*cause*. While these might be perceived as mere adjustment to the rhythmic pattern of the poem, there is a possibility that the use of colloquialisms was intentional – to add to the poem the flavor of an informal, oral recitation. Again, whether intentionally or just for the sake of the rhyme, the translator also includes some words of the colloquial stratum: *счесть, ломоть, чуют*. Again, if this was the motivated choice, we witness compensation, a technique for dealing with “any loss of meaning, emotional force, or stylistic effect which may not be possible to reproduce directly at a given point in the target text” (Baker, 1992, p.78). Whether of semantic, stylistic or pragmatic nature, its purpose is to make up for the loss of a ST effect. But the question of the effect, in this particular case, depends on how closely the reader will read the text and if we indeed can know what the effect of the text will be on the reader (Gutt, 1991). Clearly, this pertains to the on-going debate on whether an authorial intention can be recovered from a text or whether the effects on readership can be gauged, which is beyond the focus of this article.

There is, however, one poem in the selection under consideration, which in translation is sure, in my opinion, to produce a similarly powerful effect on the reader, as the original, presumably, does, *The Lesson*.

The Lesson

Урок

I keep on dying again.
Veins collapse, opening like the

Я продолжаю умирать,
И вены рвутся, разрушаясь,

Small fists of sleeping
Children.
Memory of old tombs,
Rotting flesh and worms do
Not convince me against
The challenge. The years
And cold defeat live deep in
Lines along my face.
They dull my eyes, yet
I keep on dying,
Because I love to live.

И кулачками раскрываясь
Детей, что спят и будут спать.
И память о гробницах древних,
О червях и гниющей плоти
Не отпугнет – мой выбор сделан.
И годы поражений холод
Удержат весь в лица морщинах.
Глаза мои тускнеют... Все же
Я продолжаю смерть свою,
Все потому,
Что жить люблю.

The bilingual readers can appreciate high degree of equivalence in rendering the content of the original text, even though the translator has to resort to some transformations and additions. Thus, *veins* in translation do not just *collapse* and *open*, but also *burst*; *not convince me against the challenge* of the original is rendered in the translation as *cannot frighten me as my choice is made*; the original *The years and cold defeat live deep in lines along my face* in the translation means “the years will keep the cold of defeat in lines of my face”. All these transformations are accounted for by the fact that the translation is a rhymed verse, while the original is not. This again brings us back to the problem of “improving” the original, about which U. Eco strongly admonished: “One should never try to make the source text literarily better” (2003, p.51). However, in another place of the same manuscript, he emphasized that “in translating poetry one should render as much as possible the effect produced by the sounds of the original text, even though in the change of the language a lot of variations are unavoidable. One can miss the real *body* of discourse, but try at least to preserve ... rhythm and rhyme” (Eco, 2003, p.137). It was a very crucial decision of the translator to rhyme his translation, where he definitely shifted his loyalty from the author to the reader. In translation criticism, there is no unanimous opinion with regard to such decisions of translators. Some believe that the translator’s duty “is above all to the author and the SL culture rather than to the TL reader and the TL culture. We have to assume a sensitive and imaginative reader with some awareness of the SL culture rather than make concessions to the TL reader” (Connolly, 1999, p.151). Contrary to this opinion, L. Venuti, a professional translator and eminent cultural critic, states that “in practice the fact of translation is erased by suppressing the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text, assimilating it to the dominant values in the target-language culture, making it recognizable and therefore seemingly untranslated. With this domestication the translated text passes for the original, an expression of the foreign author’s intention” (Venuti, 1998, p.31). Since free verse is not as widely spread and appreciated in the Russian-language milieu as it is in modern American poetry, certain “domestication” applied by the translator to the poem can be justified. It has certainly brought to the foreground the emotional and passionate undertones with which the poem is charged and has intensified its aesthetic impression.

Finally, there is one more poem by M. Angelou to be presented in the translation by V. Averianov, *The Caged Bird*. This poem is the poetic interpretation and further development of the motif first introduced in her best-selling novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, in which Angelou, with great poignancy and effect, retells the experiences of her turbulent childhood. While in the novel the answer to the question “Why does the caged bird sing?” is left for the reader’s interpretation, in the poem it is stated overtly: “the caged bird sings of freedom.”

The Caged Bird

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks
of another breeze
and the trade winds soft
through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting
on a dawn-bright lawn
and he names the sky
his own.

But a caged bird stands
on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts
on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped
and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat
to sing.

Птица в клетке

Птица вольная скачет
На спинах у ветров
И с течением парит
Вниз почти до конца.
Окуная крыло
В луч оранжевый солнца
И отважно присвоив себе небеса.

Но сердит птицы шаг
Коль он в клетке унылой
Ничего не увидев
Через ярости сеть,
И обрезаны крылья
Ноги связаны туго
Глотку птах открывает для того чтобы
петь.

Птица в клетке поет
Трелью робкой своей
О вещах неизвестных,
Но все же желанных
И напев ее слышен
На холмах самых дальних
Потому что она
О свободе поет.

Ну а вольная птица
О бризе мечтает ином
Нежных в спину ветрах
Во вздыхающих кронах
И о жирных червях
На залитых рассветом лугах,
И о тех, что своими зовет,
Небесах.

Птица в клетке стоит
На могиле мечты
И кричит ее тень
В полуночном кошмаре
И обрезаны крылья
Ноги связаны туго
Глотку птах открывает
Для того чтобы петь.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Птица в клетке поет
Трелью робкой своей
О вещах неизвестных,
Но все же желанных,
И напев ее слышен
На холмах самых дальних,
Потому что она
О свободе поет.

The fact that the central image of the poem “the caged bird” is also present in the title of Angelou’s novel, determines its interpretation in the translation by introducing the intertextual context. In his treatment of the context and its importance for the translation, E. Nida emphasizes that “in addition to the immediate or remote syntagmatic and paradigmatic contexts, a translator must always consider the contexts that are prior to the formation of the source text” (Nida, 1999, p.80). Since, in the title of the Russian translation of the novel, *the caged bird* is translated literally as *the bird in the cage*, the translator was left with little choice but to keep to the same collocation. Within the framework of the poem this equivalent destroys the consistent parallelism between *the free bird* and *the caged bird*, which could have been preserved with the help of the word *ПЛЕННАЯ*. This choice, however, was not possible because of the “prior text considerations”, which, according to Nida, are critical for many translation decisions, “whether in the choice of particular words or in the organization of an entire discourse” (Nida, 1999, p.79). Therefore, in the translation, the contrast between *free* and *caged* is not lexically expressed by the antonymic pair but semantically implied “in the cage = not free”.

There are other replacements in the translation, which, however, are of different nature. A major one is the gender change of the pro-forms, i.e. pronouns referring to the personified image of the bird: in the original, they are masculine (*he, his*), while in the translation they are of necessity feminine (in Russian, nouns are gender-defined, and *bird* is feminine). Other replacements were dictated by the rhythm and rhyme of the TT, but semantically they are almost identical to the original and do not depart from the imagery of the ST. For instance, in the original, *a bird stalks his cage*, while in the translation, *bird’s pace is angry*; *the narrow cage* of the original *is gloomy, somber*; the winds are not *soft*, but *tender*. These replacements, however, are insignificant, as the translator faithfully recreates the poetic thinking of the author and produces a well-rhymed poem, in form and content equivalent to the original.

Concluding my analysis, I dare to say that the translations made by V. Averianov should be recognized as successful. Other critics may consider many of the translator’s choices erroneous, but “errors do not diminish a translation’s reliability, its power to communicate and to give pleasure” (Venuti, 1998, p.32). With this effect in mind, I will even dare to quote P. Newmark, who said:

The more important the words and their order in the original, the more closely the original should be translated. Since the genre where words and their order are most important is poetry, you would expect the translation of poetry to be the closest form of translation. Far from it. This is not possible since the language of poetry includes so many additional factors ... which are missing or not so important in other types of writing. Nevertheless, poetry translation is always worth attempting, and I think the best poetry translations are miracles of closeness (1995, p.13).

Whether such appraisal is true or not of this particular endeavor, a Russian reader will no doubt benefit from the acquaintance with Angelou’s poetic work offered in the interpretation of V. Averianov, whose own assessment of his product was: “Feci quod potui faciant meliora potentes”³.

³ “I did all I could. Let him, who can, do better” (Lat).

References

- Angelou, M. (1994). *The Complete collected poems of Maya Angelou*. New York: Random House.
- Angelou, M. (2007). "Alone", "Touched by an Angel", "The Lesson", "These Yet to be United States" and "The Caged Bird". Translated by V. Averianov. *Krilia. The Literary Almanach* 34, 29-32. (In Russian).
- Baker, M. (1992). *In other words. A course book on translation*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Beaugrande, R. de, & W. Dressler (1981). *Introduction to text linguistics*. London & New York: Longman.
- Connolly, D. (1999). Translating prismatic poetry: *Odysseus Elytis* and *The Oxopetra Elegies*. In G. Anderman, & M. Rogers (Eds.), *Word, text, translation*. (pp.142-156). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Eco, U. (2003). *Mouse or rat? Translation as negotiation*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Fawcett, P. (2003). *Translation and language. Linguistic theories explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Gutt, E. (2005). On the impossibility of practicing translation without theory. In J. Peeters (Ed.), *On the relationships between translation theory and translation practice* (pp.13-21). Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Harvey, K. (1995). A descriptive framework for compensation. *The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication* 1 (1), 65-86.
- Hatim, B., & I. Mason (1990). *Discourse and the translator*. London & New York: Longman.
- Holmes, J. S. (1970). *The Nature of translation: Essays on the theory and practice of literary translation*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Kelly, L. G. (1979). *The True interpreter. A history of translation theory and practice in the West*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Nabokov, V. (1985). Problems of translation: *Onegin* in English. In J. F. Graham (Ed.), *Difference in translation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Nida, E. A. (2003). *Toward a science of translation*. Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Nida, E.A. (1999). The role of contexts in translating. In G. Anderman, & M. Rogers (Eds.), *Word, text, translation* (pp.79-83). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Newmark, P.P. (1995). Paragraphs in translation. *The Linguist* 34 (3), 112-113.
- Pedersen, V. H. (1999). Accuracy in translation. In G. Anderman, & M. Rogers (Eds.), *Word, text, translation* (pp.47-55). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.