RED COLOUR AND ITS TINTS IN TRANSLATION: "THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH" BY EDGAR ALLAN POE

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Abstract: This article is devoted to the comparative analysis of four texts: Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Masque of the Red Death" and its three Russian translations – those made by N.V. Shelgunov (1874), K.D. Balmont (1901) and R.N. Pomerantseva (1976). Special attention is going to be paid to the translation of the colour terms denoting red and its tints. Colour terms have proved to be a highly important element of an artistic text: in quite a few works of verbal art it is their repeated use that helps a careful reader to penetrate into the author's purport. In this article we focus on the red colour as it has already been shown to be dominant in the short story under discussion – the colour of blood, fear and danger; moreover, it clearly stands out in the text of the story, even though a variety of other colour words is used by the author. What we are after is to see whether the texts of translations preserve the connotations meant by the author and to discover if the resultant impression produced by the Russian texts corresponds to that of the original.

Keywords: colour terms, the red colour, Edgar Allan Poe's prose, comparative analysis, translation studies

The present article focuses on the comparative translation analysis of colour terms denoting tints of red in the short story "The Masque of the Red Death" by Edgar Allan Poe. The most vivid element of the expression plane of the story is, obviously, the red colour – it appears even in its title. That is the reason why this particular novel is of great interest for our purposes.

We shall not dwell too much on the personality of the author – Edgar Allan Poe is a well-known American wiriter belonging to the romantic movement of the XIX century. The most distinctive features of his works of verbal art include originality and unexpectedness, hopeless melancholy and sense of futility, the combination of the horrible and the comic, special interest to death and torture, and the so-called 'crisis world-view'[1]. The elements widely used by Edgar Poe in his novels are borrowed from the European Gothic tradition[2]; moreover, he not only uses these elements, but also elaborates them, creating "a remarkable investigation of abnormal psychological states and obsessional behaviour" [3].

"The Masque of the Red Death" (1842) is one of the most famous short stories by Edgar Allan Poe. Its plot perfectly fits into the picture described above: the scene is set at the abbey where Prince Prospero and his noblemen flee the Red Death – a terrible desease spread in the country. One night Prospero holds a masquerade ball in seven rooms, each of them of a different colour – blue, purple, green, orange, white, violet and black. At midnight a stranger appears: its robe resembles a funeral shroud and his mask is that of the stiffened corpse with

[1] Solovyova, N.A. (coord.) (1991) *Istoria zarubezhnoy literatury XIX veka*. Moskva: Vysshaya shkola, p. 378.
[2] Whitley, John S. *Introduction* in Poe, E.A. (2000) *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. London: Wordsworth classics, p. XV.
[3] Ibid.

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the traits of the Red Death. Prince Prospero pursues the figure, but fails to capture it: when the stranger turns to face him, Prospero falls dead. When the mask and the robe are removed from the figure, the noblemen see no solid form underneath. They suddenly realize that is was the Red Death itself and, contracted, all the guests die of this horrible disease. "And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all."[4]

As has already been shown, the text is reach in colour terms, both direct and indirect[5]. Obviously, the dominant colour in the story is red – the colour of blood and death – occurring in the text of the original 19 times. The aim and purpose of this article is to see whether the general atmosphere of the story is rendered and whether the associations and connotations meant by the author are preserved in the texts of Russian translations.

In so far as we have chosen the colour term *red*, its tints and their translation for the analysis, we should first concentrate on the general picture – i.e. to present the correlation of the colour terms in the English original and their Russian equivalents in the translation in tabular form. The three Russian translations chosen for this purpose are those by N.V. Shelgunov (1874)[6] – 1, K.D. Balmont (1901)[7] – 2 and R.N. Pomerantseva (1976)[8] – 3. In the tables that follow the texts of the translations are arranged chronologically, from the earlier to the latest ones:

Table 1. Translation 1.

the original / the translation	red	scarlet	ruddy	blood	purple
krasny	5	3	1	1	–
aly	1	–	–	–	–
krovavy	–	–	–	2	–
purpurovy	–	–	–	–	2
puntsovy	–	–	–	–	1

[4] Poe, E.A. (2000) *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. London: Wordsworth classics, p. 201.
[5] Polozova, A. (2013) *The red colour in "The Masque of the Red Death" by Edgar Allan Poe* in Branişte, Ludmila, Nimigean, Gina (coord.) (2013) *Diversitatea lingvistică şi dialogul intercultural în procesul de comunicare*. Vol. 2. Iaşi: Editura Vasiliana, Chişinău: Editura Universităţii Pedagogice de Stat "Ion Creangă".
[6] Poe, E.A. (1874) *Maska Krasnoy smerti* (perevod Nikolaya Shelgunova): http://bookmate.com/r#d=L6uIN4ic (consulted on 25.11.13).
[7] Poe, E.A. (1901) *Maska Krasnoy Smerti* (perevod K.D. Balmonta) in *Sobranie sochineniy Edgara Poe v perevode s adgliyskogo K.D. Balmonta.* Tom pervy. Poemy, skazki. — Moskva: Knigoizdatelstvo "Skorpion".
[8] Poe, E.A. (2010) *Maska Krasnoy smerti* (perevod R.N. Pomerantsevoy) in Edgar Allan Poe. *Maloye sobranie sochineniy*. Sankt-Peterburg: Azbuka.

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Table 2. Translation 2.

the original / the translation	red	scarlet	ruddy	blood	purple
krasny	6	–	1	–	–
yarko-krasny	–	3	–	–	–
aly	–	–	–	2	–
krovavy	–	–	–	2	–
purpurny	–	–	–	–	3

Table 3. Translation 3.

the original / the translation	red	scarlet	ruddy	blood	purple
krasny	5	–	–	1	3
bagrovy/bagryany	2	3	1	–	–
purpurny	–	–	–	–	1

Thus, it is not difficult to see that the texts of the three translations differ greatly in the choice and variety of the colour terms. In the present article we shall try and analyse the cases where these translations differ in this respect and arrive at some conclusions concerning the impact produced on the reader and the colour image created in his or her mind's eye.

Our next step would be to analyze the functioning of the colour terms under discussion in the text of "The Masque of the Red Death". However, before proceeding to *red* and its tints, we shall adduce a passage from the story and see how various colour terms function in the text. The first example comes from the opening passage of the story in which the plague ravishing the country and the symptoms of the deadly disease are described:

> *The "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal—the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress, and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour. The scarlet*

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stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men.

The author introduces the plague theme at once. Obviously, the general purport of the passage is to impress the reader with the horror of the situation and, to a certain extent, to fill him with fear. To create this effect the author chooses the type of rhythm that can be described as *jerky*: the syntagms are short and vary in their length. However, the syntagm *the scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim* is much longer than the preceding ones; thus, we may conclude that this was done deliberately in order to bring out the passage. As can be seen, here the colour term *scarlet* is the first stressed syllable in the contour, its first step which is (according to the rules of the Descending Scale, the basic intonational contour of the English language) produced on a fairly high note and is, therefore, quite prominent. The result is that the word which opens the contour is bound to attract the listener's attention.

It should also be pointed out that in this sentence the author uses alliteration by repeating the sound [s] (*scarlet*, *stains*, *especially*, *face*). This produces the effect of hissing and makes the narration even tenser.

Let us now proceed with the confrontation of the English text with its Russian translations.

Table 4. The Masque of the Red Death.

The original	Translation 1 N.V. Shelgunov	Translation 2 K.D. Balmont	Translation 3 R.N. Pomerantseva
*The **scarlet** stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men.*	***Красныя** пятна, появлявшіяся на тѣлѣ и преимущественно на лицѣ и на рукахъ, исключали жертву изъ человѣчества и лишали ее всякой помощи и сочувствія.*	***Ярко-красные пятна**, распространявшиеся по телу, и в особенности по лицу жертвы, были проклятием, которым эта моровая язва мгновенно лишала больного помощи и сострадания его ближних* […]	*Едва на теле жертвы, и особенно на лице, выступали **багровые** пятна - никто из ближних уже не решался оказать поддержку или помощь зачумленному.*

As we can see from the confrontation table, the colour term *scarlet* is translated in three different ways: *krasny* (1), *yarko-krasny* (2) and *bagrovy* (3). At first sight *yarko-krasny* is the closest correspondence here to *scarlet*: as our study of the English explanatory dictionaries has shown[9], it indicates a colour that is not just red, but bright red. However, there are two reasons why this choice seems to be debatable.

[9] The present dictionary analysis was based on four explanatory dictionaries – Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, Longman Exams Dictionary, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

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On the one hand, in terms of the cultural associations and connotations the tints of red under discussion are meant to produce, *bagrovy* is markedly more negative than *krasny* or *yarko-krasny*. In this sense it is stronger emotionally and better suited to create the atmosphere of fear and danger. On the other hand, the author himself prompted a particular tint of red that he associated with the colour term *scarlet*. It should be specially emphasized that *scarlet* occurs in the opening paragraph of the story and it 'sets the scene', so to speak, from the very beginning. Nevertheless, it is preceded by a very meaningful combination of words in the first sentence of the passage – *the redness and the horror of blood*. Since the mentioning of *blood* comes first and *scarlet* follows it, the colour term is involuntarily connected with the latter and the careful reader will not fail to notice this connection and to form a particular picture of the tint of red that the author wanted to use here. Furthermore, two passages later, the word *blood* occurs again - this time directly and unambiguously indicating a tint of scarlet colour: *The panes here were **scarlet**—a deep **blood** color.* Thus, the author imposes his own view of the tint under analysis and deliberately darkens it so as not to mistake it for a cheerful bright tint which in Russian corresponds to *aly*.

As far as the prosodic organization of the extract is concerned, the colour term of the second translation acquires additional strength because of its complexity: it is a complex word consisting of two parts that are both stressed since the colour term is the first member of the contour. As for the third translation, it even changes the place of the colour term in the sentence. This results in the shift of accent from the colour term *bagrovy* to the word *pyatna*.

The next passage chosen for the analysis describes the Red Death passing slowly and solemnly through the different rooms where the horrible masquerade was held:

> *But from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumptions of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him; so that, unimpeded, he passed within a yard of the prince's person; and, while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centres of the rooms to the walls, he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the **blue** chamber to the **purple**—through the **purple** to the **green**—through the **green** to the **orange**—through this again to the **white**—and even thence to the **violet**, ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him.*

In this passage we draw our attention to the rhythmical organization of the sentence and the syntactic parallelism of the part of the sentence where the colour terms appear (*through the blue chamber to the purple, through the purple to the green, through the green to the orange, through this again to the white, and even thence to the violet*). The rhythm of the sentence can be described as jerky since it consists of both small and extended rhythm units. However, at the end of the passage, in the part where the colour terms appear, the rhythmical units become similar in length as well as in their rhythmical organization.

Let us analyse the texts of the translations:

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Table 5. The Masque of the Red Death.

The original	Translation 1 N.V. Shelgunov	Translation 2 K.D. Balmont	Translation 3 R.N. Pomerantseva
*But from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumptions of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him; so that, unimpeded, he passed within a yard of the prince's person; and, while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centres of the rooms to the walls, he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the **blue** chamber to the **purple**—through the **purple** to the **green**—through the **green** to the **orange**—through this again to the **white**—and even thence to the **violet**, ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him.*	*Принцъ стоялъ въ голубой залѣ, окруженный поблѣднѣвшими царедворцами. Вначалѣ въ толпѣ замѣтно было движеніе по направленію къ призраку; онъ-же медленнымъ и торжественнымъ шагомъ приближался къ принцу. Безумная смѣлость маски навела паническій страхъ на все общество и никто не рѣшался схватить ее, и, заставляя разступаться передъ собою, маска изъ голубой залы прошла въ **пунцовую**, потомъ въ зеленую и т. д. Никто не осмѣливался задержать ее.*	*Но какой-то неопределенный страх, внушенный безумной дерзостью замаскированного, охватил всех, и в толпе не нашлось никого, кто осмелился бы наложить на незнакомца свою руку; таким образом он без помехи приблизился к принцу на расстояние какого-нибудь шага; и покуда многолюдное собрание, как бы движимое одним порывом, отступало от центров комнат к стенам, он беспрепятственно, но все тем же торжественным размеренным шагом, отличавшим его сначала, продолжал свой путь, из голубой комнаты в **пурпурную** — из **пурпурной** в зеленую — из зеленой в оранжевую — и потом в белую — и потом в фиолетовую — и никто не сделал даже движения, чтобы задержать его.*	*Беспрепятственно прошел он мимо принца, - гости в едином порыве прижались к стенам, чтобы дать ему дорогу, - и все той же размеренной и торжественной поступью, которая отличала его от других гостей, двинулся из голубой комнаты в **красную**, из **красной** - в зеленую, из зеленой - в оранжевую, оттуда - в белую и наконец - в черную, а его все не решались остановить.*

Here we see three different variants of rendering the word *purple*: *puntsovy* (translation 1: *маска изъ голубой залы прошла въ **пунцовую***), *purpurny* (translation 2: *продолжал свой путь, из голубой комнаты в **пурпурную** — из **пурпурной** в зеленую*) and *krasny* (translation 3: *двинулся из голубой комнаты в **красную**, из **красной** - в зеленую*).

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Moreover, we should point out that in the text of Shelgunov's translation the word *puntsovy* is used only once, while in the other variants, including the original, the colour term is mentioned twice, which doubles the impression. It is clear that all the three Russian colour terms denote different tints – *purpurny* is colder than *krasny* and *puntsovy*. The difference here is also at the level of associations: *purpurny* is associated with a high social status, it is largely perceived negatively, while *krasny* is more neutral from that point of view; at the same time, *puntsovy* is used to describe the colour of cheeks of a young person who is embarrassed; in the Russian language its connotations are meliorative in most cases. Thus, in the Russian culture the most negatively perceived one of the three colour terms is *purpurny*; on the contrary, *puntsovy* does not maintain the atmosphere of fear which dominates in the original.

It is important to mention here that colour can be expressed indirectly by words of different parts of speech[10]. We shall now analyse two passages where the colour is rendered by verbs. The first example we adduce describes the moment Prince Prospero sees the Red Death:

> *When the eyes of the Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image (which, with a slow and solemn movement, as if more fully to sustain its role, stalked to and fro among the waltzers) he was seen to be convulsed, in the first moment with a strong shudder either of terror or distaste; but, in the next, his brow* ***reddened*** *with rage.*

As far as the rhythmical organization of the first part of the sentence is concerned, the rhythm is enclosing – the majority of the rhythmical units are short, apart from two – at the beginning and at the end (*when the eyes of the Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image; in the first moment with a strong shudder either of terror or distaste*), which are much longer. However, after the semicolon there follow three small rhythmical units (*but, in the next, his brow* ***reddened*** *with rage*). Such rhythmical organization produces the impression of fury and anger; small rhythmical units resemble hard breathing.

In the final syntagms of the sentence there is another case of alliteration – the repetition of the sound [r] (*brow, reddened, rage*). The word *reddened* that denotes the colour under discussion is one of the words bearing this sound, thus we assume that is the colour here is additionally brought out. Moreover, the syntagm under discussion appears at the end of the paragraph, thus, it is to be followed by a long pause.

The translations of this extract are presented below.

[10] See Shkhvazabaya, T.I. (1985) *Tsvetooboznacheniya v yazyke i rechi (na materiale angliyskogo yazyka)*. Doctoral thesis. Moskva.

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Table 6. The Masque of the Red Death.

The original	Translation 1 N.V. Shelgunov	Translation 2 K.D. Balmont	Translation 3 R.N. Pomerantseva
When the eyes of the Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image (which, with a slow and solemn movement, as if more fully to sustain its role, stalked to and fro among the waltzers) he was seen to be convulsed, in the first moment with a strong shudder either of terror or distaste; but, in the next, his brow ***reddened*** *with rage.*	*Когда принцъ Просперо замѣтилъ маску, тихо и торжественно проходившую между танцующими, онъ сначала вздрогнулъ отъ ужаса и отвращенія, но потомъ* ***вспыхнулъ*** *отъ злости.*	*Когда взгляд Принца Просперо обратился на это видение (которое прогуливалось в толпе, между пляшущих, медленно и торжественно, как бы желая полнее выдержать роль), все заметили, как в первую минуту лицо его исказилось резкой дрожью страха или отвращения; но в следующее же мгновение чело его* ***вспыхнуло*** *от гнева.*	*Но вот принц Просперо узрел этот призрак, который, словно для того, чтобы лучше выдержать роль, торжественной поступью расхаживал среди танцующих, и все заметили, что по телу принца пробежала какая-то странная дрожь - не то ужаса, не то отвращения, а в следующий миг лицо его* ***побагровело*** *от ярости.*

Here we should point out that the colour term *red* occurring in the original text in the form of the verb *redden*, is rendered as *bagrovy – pobagrovet'* only in Pomerantseva's translation (*а в следующий миг лицо его* ***побагровело*** *от ярости*). In the other two texts the idea of *red* is rendered by the verb *vspyhnut'* (translation 1: *онъ сначала вздрогнулъ отъ ужаса и отвращенія, но потомъ* ***вспыхнулъ*** *отъ злости*; translation 2: *но в следующее же мгновение чело его* ***вспыхнуло*** *от гнева*). As for its position in the sentence, it does not change, still being accented at the end of the sentence. However, the word *bagrovet'* better renders the idea of anger and rage. Moreover, by using this word Pomerantseva creates the repetition of the sound [p] in the Russian text as well (*побаг**р**овело*, *я**р**ости*), thus contributing to the impact produced by the passage.

Having analyzed the colour terms in both texts and the resultant coloured picture and the readers' cultural perception of it, we shall formulate some conclusions as a result of our research:

colour words are an indispensable part of Edgar Allan Poe's prose; they not only create a vivid picture in the mind's eye of the reader, but also produce a particular kind of atmosphere – that of fear, horror and the grim sense of foreboding;

as far as the story "The Masque of the Red Death" is concerned, the colour term *red* turns out to be of special importance here; it symbolizes death itself and is regularly referred to as the colour of blood;

the confrontation of the original text and the text of the Russian translations has shown that the colour terms in the translations are not always directly correlatable with those of the original; this can be explained by the fact that, in some cases, translators see one and the same colour differently; sometimes the translator's choice of the word can be provoked by the

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lexical environment: in order to bring out the sequence by means of alliteration; another reason for such discrepancy can be the individual literary style of the translator and the poetic cliches;

however, our research has shown that in some cases such deviations from the text of the original help the translator to preserve the associations and connotations of a colour term of the original text; on the contrary, if the translator seeks to most accurately render the tint of the colour not paying attention to the connotations of the colour term he is about to use, he risks to evoke opposite associations in the reader's mind, which can result in the blurring of the general picture of the original text; as far as "The Masque of the Red Death" is concerned, the author deliberately chose all colour terms in order to impress the reader and to create a specific atmosphere; in the texts of the translations, however, the impression is not infrequently lost by simply using a word with positive connotations for Russian speakers;

it follows from what has just been said that the study of the original text and the text of the translation cannot be conducted without discussing cultural differences concerning the general perception of a certain colour term; our research has shown that the cultural associations of the colour term *red* differ in the English and the Russian cultures, thus, obviously, when used in a text of verbal art, it is to produce a different impact on the English and the Russian reader.

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