

Elena Shvarts and Boris Ostanin's Translation of Life in the Theatre

by David Mamet for BDT in the Context of Georgy Tovstonogov's Ideas

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Introduction

This paper depicts four main figures who are extremely important for understanding the interconnections between American and Soviet theatre and stagecraft on the eve of Perestroika: the playwright David Mamet, the translator Elena Shvarts, and the prominent director Georgy Tovstonogov. All of them literally spent (or would spend) their entire life in the theatre. The main goal of this investigation is to prove that Tovstonogov's ideas about different forms of "translation" on stage had a long-lasting impact on Elena Shvarts's translating strategies and resulted in the first Russian translation of David Mamet's comedy *A Life in the Theatre*. At the same time, my study reveals some inevitable limitations and transformations regarding the director's concepts, Russian language, and Soviet censorship. Furthermore, I would like to show how Tovstonogov's influences affected the playwright himself. Of course, this very issue needs more detailed additional research.

The Theatrical and Translating Experience of Elena Shvarts

Elena Shvarts (1948–2011) was a crucial figure of Leningrad underground culture in the USSR, a poet, a member of a variety of underground artistic communities, and a part of the Soviet bohemian world. As she herself stated, she spent her childhood in the theatre and on tours surrounded by prominent actors and directors (Shvarts 2008: 17–180). Her mother, Dina

Shvarts, was the legendary head of the Literature Department in the Gorky Bolshoi Academic Theater (now the Tovstonogov Bolshoi Drama Theatre), colloquially known as BDT (Great Drama Theatre). She was responsible for the new plays chosen for production on this stage and was also Tovstonogov's right-hand person during rehearsals and on tour. Elena Shvarts grew up in the atmosphere of creativity and aesthetics of the Theatre, which affected her entire body of writing. She graduated from the Theatre Studies Department of Leningrad State Institute of Theatre, Music and Cinema in 1971. Since her poems could not be published officially until after the collapse of the USSR, she earned money translating plays for Leningrad theatres, as she was proficient in several languages including English and German. According to witnesses, she translated under a pseudonym even poems by Indian poet and short story writer Mahadevi Verma, but from English only. Her later translating career embraced, for instance, a new original translation (transposing verse into prose) of Friedrich Schiller's historical tragedy *Don Carlos* (2009) for the 90th anniversary of BDT, the novel *Gog and Magog* (2002) by Martin Buber, and some fragments for her biographical book about the Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio (2010).

If it comes to her own experience in the theatre, it is worth mentioning that despite being a part of acting community, Elena Shvarts only twice participated in a performance by Tovstonogov (the Soviet play *An Irkutsk Story* by Aleksei Arbuzov) – in very early childhood. Later she described her impressions in a tiny novella *A Girl with a Bun* (*Девочка с булкой*), which is a part of her stunning memoirs *The Visible Side of Life...* (*Видимая сторона жизни...*) about the years

spent in the BDT. Shvarts, who played a cameo role, did not like her acting experience in Kyiv and Leningrad at all and confessed that she had never intended to become an actor, but rather a playwright (Shvarts 2008: 180). As she explained, her first deep emotional shock in the theatre was connected with Innokenty Smoktunovsky's performance in the *Idiot* based on Dostoevsky's novel. Shvarts came to the conclusion that she had met a genius for the first time and compared these feelings to her later experience in Kabuki theatre (Cfr.: Shvarts 2008: 179). It goes without saying that childhood memories of the theatre as a happy home had a long-term impact on her life, her interests and her writing.

Although her poems gained worldwide fame, it would not be a mistake to say that Shvarts also succeeded on stage. There have been several performances based on her poems and short stories: for instance, *The Story of the Fox* (*Повесть о Лисе*) in the St. Petersburg theatre "The Actor's Refuge" ('Приют комедианта') and directed by Yuriy Tomoshevskij (1992); in the Chamber Theatre of Belgrade; and in the Théâtre des Tafurs in Bordeaux, France, directed by François Mauget; and *Kinfia* (*Кинфия*) staged in the workshop of Yuriy Tomoshevskij (2009) at the State Philharmonic Society for Children and Youth in St. Petersburg. A few years later, in 2013, Tomoshevskij directed *The Abbess's Lessons* (*Уроки аббатисы*) for the festival "Monocle". *The Visible Side of Life...* mentioned earlier and *Definition during Bad Weather* (*Определение в дурную погоду*) were material for an extremely successful solo performance directed by Boris Pavlovich (2014) in the Tovstonogov Bolshoi Drama Theatre. Thus, the issue of "translations" of poetical and prosaic works by Elena Shvarts for the stage demands further investigation.

Moreover, analyzing the poet's entire body of work, the researcher cannot help noticing elements of theatrical aesthetics and dramatic forms. The stunning example of this is the novelette *Concert for Reviews* (*Концерт для рецензий*) which consists of fragments written in different genres of which one of the key subjects is a short play about Leo Tolstoy (Vorontsova 2019). Shvarts also wrote a play *The Story about Ivan Antonovich, the Russian Emperor, about What Comes First – the Riot or the Rebel, as well as about Two Young People of Ordinary Appearance,*

Vasily Mirovich and His Friend Apollo Ushakov, and How They Were All Unlucky (*История об Иване Антоновиче, русском императоре, о том, что первое – бунт или бунтовщик, а также о двух молодых людях обыкновенной наружности, Василии Мировиче и его друге Аполлоне Ушакове и о том, как всем им не повезло*) and a small theatrical novel *The Comedy Ruler* (*Комедийный правитель*). Among other things she edited a book of memoirs written by her mother, Dina Shvarts, *Diaries and Notes* (*Дневники и заметки*) about her collaboration with Tovstonogov and prominent Soviet actors and playwrights.

It therefore does not seem a coincidence that it was Elena Shvarts who became the first Russian translator of David Mamet's play with such an ironical and visionary title.

By that time the American author had already gained success as a playwright and filmmaker in the US and abroad thanks to his off-Broadway plays, such as *The Dark Variations* (1972), *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (1974), *American Buffalo* (1975), and screenplays like *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981). In 1984 he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Mametian comedy has become a trademark due to its dramaturgical techniques, which create "a baroque image of life" (Buezo 2004: 249). In 1977 Mamet wrote the play *A Life in the Theatre* as a great homage to the acting community and his own experience on the stage. As Catalina Buezo claims, this meta-dramatic production could be treated as a "parody autobiography" (*ibidem*: 249) in 26 scenes. The title of the play invokes Constantin Stanislavski's volume of memoirs *My Life in Art* (1924), and it is worth mentioning that the Stanislavski System in its practical aspect underlies the whole body of literature by Mamet. The author constantly repeats that he started writing plays in order to teach his students how to act.

In *A Life in the Theatre* the chief dramatic moments between a young actor, John, and his ageing colleague Robert are portrayed, and the whole narrative consists of backstage interactions and onstage snippets from shows supporting the main plot. It is a light comedy with elements of wordplay and even sitcoms, but deeply tragic in the subtext and existentially universal, as far as its problematics and hidden quotes from Shakespeare are concerned.

David Mamet's Play in the USSR

The story of the very first Russian version of Mamet's *A Life in the Theatre* is quite original and fits the pattern of Leningrad underground culture, the aesthetics of which was compared by critics and scholars with theatre itself. According to Boris Ostanin (1946–), a poet, writer, editor, translator, and close friend of Elena Shvarts, who helped her with the translation and witnessed the whole process, it took them approximately 3 nights to finish the work. As he wrote to me in private correspondence, “nothing was shared: we translated together, with a bottle of vodka on the table, all night long (Lena was a total ‘night-owl’, as I am too). I came to her place on Shkolnaya Street around midnight and we translated until the morning, until the first metro train.”

But how did an American play come to appear in the USSR? While in the US (presumably in October 1978 (Losev 2007: 582), when a Soviet delegation was sent to become familiar with American theatre life in New York, San-Francisco, Los Angeles, Providence, Minneapolis, and Washington), Georgy Tovstonogov, the artistic director of the Bolshoi Gorky Academic Theater, became personally acquainted with David Mamet, watched the show, and was really inspired by the play. As a sign of recognition of Mamet, he promised to produce *A Life in the Theatre* in Leningrad for a Soviet audience. The BDT had got (and still has) a Small Stage for diverse artistic experiments, and Mamet's play was supposed to be staged there. Enchanted with the idea and out of respect for the prominent Russian director, the author provided Tovtonogov with the text absolutely for free. Through Dina Shvarts, the play was assigned to her daughter, Elena Shvarts, who, as we stated, involved Boris Ostanin in it. He was not paid for this job. According to Ostanin, it was only a first draft, which they were intending to improve in the future, but it never happened.

Unfortunately for everybody involved in the process, all the ambitious plans around this performance never materialized for several reasons; nevertheless, Shvarts' and Ostanin's translation was published first in 1983 in the famous and influential samizdat magazine «The Clock» («Часы»), edited by Boris Ostanin and Boris Ivanov, and, later, after some revisions, in 2018 in the collection *Who Will Be Broken First.*

Language Theatre (Кто сломаётся первым. Языковой театр). The play appeared again in 2019 with a tiny circulation in the collection *Theatre in the Theatre: Foreign Avant-garde Plays of the 1940s-1970s (Театр в театре: зарубежные авангардные пьесы 1940–1970-х годов)*, containing translations of plays by Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Genet, and Eugene Ionesco. As the editor affirms, it was never sold to the general public. Several years after translating the work, Shvarts contributed her text to Leningrad State Theatre Library. *A Life in the Theatre* was produced only in 2008 in the Liteiny Theatre in Saint Petersburg but in another translation made by Galina Kovalenko.

As David Mamet himself repeatedly confessed in different theoretical essays and books on stagecraft, Tovstogov had a life-long impact on his creative work, aesthetics, and philosophy of theatre. One may therefore assume that for the playwright this acquaintance was of great importance. It is Tovstonogov, as a successor of Stanislavsky, who defined the whole stylistics of Mamet's vision of the scene:

There is a wonderful book called *The Profession of a Stage Director*, by Georgi Tovstonogov, who writes that a director may fall into one of the deepest pits by rushing immediately to visual or pictorial solutions. This statement influenced and aided me greatly in my career as a stage director; and, subsequently, in my work as a screenwriter. If one understands what the scene means, and stages that, Mr. Tovstonogov was saying, one will be doing one's job for both the author and the viewer. If one rushes, first, into a pretty, or pictorial, or even descriptive staging, one may be hard-pressed to integrate that staging into the logical progression of the play (Mamet 1992: 14).

As David Mamet himself explained,

I grew up reading a lot of theoretical books on stagecraft. I devoured everything written by and about Stanislavsky. I gobbled up the books by his proteges Vakhtangov and Meyerhold, and later by their students and devotees.

Books on directing by Tovstanogov, Nemirovich-Danchenko, and the rest of the Reds had me burning the midnight oil, nodding in grateful appreciation, and making up the margins. <...> It took me many years as a director to acknowledge that not only did I have no idea what the above were talking about, but that, most probably, they didn't either. (Mamet 2010: 144)

Yannis Tzioumakis, among other key figures for Mamet's principles of creative work, points to the film theorist Sergei Eisenstein and in particular,

theatre practitioners (mainly Constantin Stanislavsky, but also Yevgeni Vakhtangov, Richard Boleslavsky, Sanford Meisner, and Georgi Tovstonogov) (Tzioumakis 2006: 88). Regarding influences of Russian theatrical culture, it is worth mentioning that Mamet was always fascinated with Chekhov, so that he demonstrated delicate craftsmanship in two new Chekhov-adaptations for the stage: *Uncle Vanya* (1988) and *The Three Sisters* (1990). Both adaptations were produced for BDT as well and directed by Tovstonogov himself. It seems plausible that both had the same views on diverse issues and especially on contemporary experiments on the stage, so that their acquaintance could be extremely fruitful in future. For example, in scene 15 of *A Life in the Theatre* Robert depicts emotionally his feelings toward such new shows:

Robert We should do this whole frigging thing in rehearsal clothes, you know? Eh? Do it in blue jeans and T-shirts and give it some life, you know?

John Yes.

Robert Eh? And give it some guts. (Pause.) Give guts to it. (Pause.) And to hell with experimentation. Artistic experimentation is shit. Huh?

John Right.

Robert You're frigging well told. (Pause.) Two actors, some lines... and an audience. That's what I say. Fuck 'em all.

(Mamet 1977: 75 – original emphases)

Р о б е р т. Ты слышал, мы будем играть это старьё в свитерах и джинсах! И соблюдать при этом достоверность. Представляешь?

Д ж о н. С трудом.

Р о б е р т. Каково? Лезть из кожи – ради естественности. (Пауза.) Провались они пропадом с этими экспериментами. Верно?

Д ж о н. Верно.

Р о б е р т. Загнёшься с ними. (Пауза.) По-моему так: два актёра, несколько реплик и зрители. Вот и всё. А эксперименты – в задницу!

(Mamet 1983: 111)

Comically, Tovstonogov in 1968 was in Yugoslavia (Losev 2007: 580) at the festival of avant-garde theatres with a classical BDT performance *The Philistines* by Maxim Gorky which was extremely realistic, unlike the other participants. The director attended a production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* before his play and criticized the interpretation sharply: the performers acted in jeans as depicted in the above quotation, sweated, and lowered their legs into the auditorium. It seemed “wild”. After all this, the BDT troupe

received a well-deserved storm of applause with their old-fashioned production (Makarova 2006: 213–214) in contrast to all the “experimentation”. Moreover, Robert's line about “Two actors, some lines... and an audience” meta-textually describes *A Life in the Theatre* itself.

Translating Transformations in the Context of Tovstonogov's Ideas

Let us now focus on the translating strategies chosen by Elena Shvarts and Boris Ostanin in order to transfer Mamet and compare them with traditional Russian theory on Theatre. Georgy Tovstonogov was not only compared to Stanislavsky because of his influence on the troupe, but also he was straightforwardly called by some scholars a translator of Stanislavsky's system into the relevant language of drama (Rudnitskii 1984: 4) and, in general, he used the word “translation” during his lectures for future directors and on the stage of his own theatre in a very wide meaning. He taught his students to translate any observation of their lives into the language of actions, and especially to translate literature into stage language, to analyze every book they read, to ask questions, and to seek a new code (Losev 2007: 327). Every theatre production was supposed to be such a translation from the language of literature into the language of performance. He believed every epoch needed new translations because images were not static, and they must be transformed in the context of ideas of the given period of time.

Being one of the most audience-orientated artists in the USSR, Tovstonogov also pragmatically encouraged his students, the actors of BDT, and, for sure, people who were responsible for the texts, “to translate” all complicated notions and words unfamiliar to the average member of the audience. He led the theatre in an extremely difficult period of time and made it economically profitable very quickly thanks to this strategy of being understood and admired by unsophisticated working-class people as well as by the Soviet intelligentsia. A prime example of this translation into language of ordinary people can be found during the rehearsals of Nikolai Gogol's prominent comedy *The Gamblers* when Tovstonogov required explanations from his students of all the card-

game terms (Losev 2007: 71).

Being aware of this requirement, Elena Shvarts was driven to choose one variant and avoid another which might have been closer to the primary source. Sometimes this choice was motivated by Soviet realities of the early 80s. For instance, famous Robert's lines from scene 5 with a key metaphor about style:

<p>Style is <i>nothing</i> /... / Style is a paper bag. Its only shape comes from its contents.</p> <p>(Mamet 1977: 59 – original emphasis)</p>	<p>Стиль – это ничто! /.../ Стиль подобен целлофановому пакету, который лишён собственной формы и принимает форму того, что внутри него.</p> <p>(Mamet 1983: 97)</p>
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It is quite obvious that the traditional American “paper bags” for shopping did not exist in the USSR while ‘целлофановый пакет’, or a “plastic bag” (literally a “bag made of cellophane”) was familiar to every viewer. Moreover, for the meaning of the metaphor and the whole sublime speech of the old actor the image of a “plastic bag” works even better. But the translator preferred more detailed explanations: literally “which has no own shape and takes the shape of what is inside it.” This amplification might have been done for different reasons. Firstly, a detailed explanation could have been chosen for better understanding by average members of the audience in order to fit in the requirements of Tovstonogov. Secondly, the whole structure of Russian syntax and Russian vocabulary implies longer sentences. And last but not least, it is possible to translate “its only shape comes from its contents” into shorter but sparser sentences in Russian, but these are associated with colloquial speech and have nothing in common with Robert's eloquence every time he speaks about his understanding of the theatre. In the Russian variant the audience can feel the character's fascination with the theatre through these emotionally charged lines formulated in a higher style. There are numerous examples of such transformations done in order to be “closer to the people” in the text of the translation. To illustrate, in scene 14 the word “audition” was replaced by “a morning performance”, as a result of which the whole scene and motivation of the characters undergo changes:

ROBERT and JOHN *eating at the make-up table between shows.*

Robert You had an audition this afternoon. Eh?

John Yes.

Robert How did it go?

John Well, I thought.

Robert Yes?

John (*Pause.*) They were receptive. I thought it went well.

Robert How did you feel?

John I felt good; they liked it.

(Mamet 1977: 74)

Роберт и Джон в антракте едят за гримировочным столиком.

Роберт. Ну как публика на утреннем спектакле?

Джон. Ничего.

Роберт. Как он прошёл?

Джон. Кажется, нормально.

Роберт. Да?

Пауза.

Джон. Хорошо смотрели. Мне показалось, нормально.

Роберт. Как ты себя чувствовал на сцене?

Джон. Хорошо. И принимали хорошо.

(Mamet 1983: 109–110)

Although auditions (Russian ‘пробы’, or ‘прослушивание’) were commonplace in the Soviet Union, the whole system of hiring in theatres and film production was completely different from Broadway and Hollywood. In the USSR entertaining industries that dealt with performers (as well as other industries in general) were controlled by the government and state committees. The majority of the best and most recognizable actors worked in Moscow and Leningrad, or in prominent metropolitan theatres in the Republics (e.g. the Rustaveli Theatre in Tbilisi, the Azerbaijan State Academic Opera and the Ballet Theater in Baku or the Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre in Kyiv), while talented and promising actors from provincial troupes were transferred to the capitals upon official requests from directors. Being a part of a Soviet creative union and receiving their salaries monthly, they were unable to understand John's worries about role approval.

Shvarts changed the whole scene in order to fit the pattern: “an audition this afternoon” was replaced with ‘утренний спектакль’, “a morning performance” for schoolchildren as an element of cultural education, which was a normal part of theatre life in the USSR. Furthermore, in the

Russian translation, it was the audience who evaluated John, whereas in the original text it must have been some casting panel:

Robert If they hadn't liked you, that would not have signified that you weren't a good actor.	Роберт. Если ты им не понравился, это ещё не значит, что ты – плохой актёр.
John No. I think I know that.	Джон. Ну, разумеется, я так не думаю.
Robert Yes. I think perhaps you do. (<i>Pause.</i>)	Роберт. Я знаю. (<i>Пауза.</i>) Всё же очень рад, что ты им понравился.
Yes. I'm glad they liked you, though.	Джон. Благодарю.
John Thank you.	Роберт. Думаешь, возьмут тебя на новый сезон?
Robert You think they're going to hire you?	Джон. Не знаю.
John I don't know.	Роберт. Надеюсь, возьмут.
Robert Well, I hope they do.	Джон. Я тоже.
John I hope so, too.	Роберт. Для тебя это было бы хорошо.
Robert That would be nice for you.	Джон. Да.
John Yes.	Пауза.
(<i>Pause.</i>)	Роберт. (сам себе). Хорошим музыкантам – хорошие скрипки.
Robert Good things for good folk.	(Mamet 1983: 110–111)
(Mamet 1977: 74–75)	

Interestingly, the original version with the audition was restored by Boris Ostanin in 2018 in the collection *Who Will Be Broken First* (*Кто сломается первым*) at the request of the publishers, but there is an old translation with a “morning performance” in 2019. Currently, the whole casting process might be more understandable for the audience.

Not only did the choice of words differ in translations and in the primary source, but also some significant features of so-called “mametspeak” were omitted. For instance, in the first samizdat version there were no stage directions in parentheses, which constitute distinctive subtexts and convey the innermost feelings of the character. These were added after the revision in 2018 and 2019 with a note for actors: “The parenthesis highlights those places in the dialogue where the speaker seems to be more immersed in himself” (Riasov 2018: 213; Ostanin,

Shaposhnikova, Shvarts 2019: 148). While other elements of Mamet’s recognizable dialogues, such as ellipses, pauses, repetitions, and fragmented thoughts, were kept from the very beginning, this omission can be considered to be more than simple negligence in the context of Russian theatre with its long tradition of lines asides and Chekhovian subtexts.

Furthermore, as scholars claim, all the elements of mametspeak are supposed to establish a particular and regular rhythm and that’s why actors who take part in Mamet’s plays admit the problems linked to dialogues which are: “difficult to memorize [because it] is so finely tuned that improvising is nearly impossible. If you paraphrase it, it suddenly becomes very clunky in your mouth, as if you stumbled over the carpet” (qtd. in Wilmeth 2004: 148). In his earlier career path in stagecraft, David Mamet even used a metronome during rehearsals to make sure that performers had figured out the appropriate rhythm and kept it. According to Douglas Bruster,

To listen to Mamet’s works means hearing his speakers engaged in functional dialogue that succeeds not in spite of unorthodox silences, repetitions, and awkward vocabulary, but because of them (Bruster 2005–2006: 180).

Elena Shvarts, as a prominent 20th-century poet, could not help noticing this artistic and formalistic device, and hence changed some lines fractionally but consciously in order to save the rhythmic structure of the play. As a vivid example I can point out the following line of Robert:

My hat, my hat, Шляпа, шляпа, шляпа... (Mamet
my hat... (Ma- 1983: 93)
met 1977: 54)

So, it is obvious that Russian word for “hat” – ‘шляпа’ is longer and consists of two syllables, as a result of which the translator chose to avoid the possessive pronoun “my”. Despite the fact that the stress is different, in the whole line with its repetitions the rhythmic structure is almost the same.

Sometimes the original text had been preserved accurately if it matched the target language’s musical structure and helped transfer the rhythm with no additional difficulties. For example,

Robert Epheris, **Р о б е р т.** Эфемериды, epheris. (*Pause.*) 'An эфемериды. (Пауза.) actor's life for me' «Актёра жизнь по мне!»
(Mamet 1977: 95). (Mamet 1983: 128).

Robert's speech at the *grande finale* is as ceremonial as usual but it also has a note of quiet self-irony: an old actor quotes *Hi-Diddle-Dee-Dee*, also known as *An Actor's Life for Me*. It is a famous song from the soundtrack of Walt Disney's animated film *Pinocchio* (1940), which is supposed to be an American classic. It is difficult to say if Shvarts and Ostanin were familiar with this context but their translation with poetical inversion. According to Ostanin's testimony they were in a hurry and did not pay much attention to details. Furthermore, Russian dubbing on the cartoon with translated songs was released only in 2003, and there this line was translated by Lilia Korolova as “в актёры ты иди” (literally, “become an actor!”).

In addition, in all three versions of the translation, the original author's emphasis is omitted. According to Boris Ostanin, they omitted this element with no specific purpose, only because they were “bohemia, gypsies”, “careless people”. In Mamet's text Robert's most meaningful words are in italics, lines which he supposes to be extremely significant and imposing for John. The younger actor, however, does not always react properly, the way his old colleague expects him to respond, and, hence, a slapstick effect is created: Robert's lines in italics sometimes seem too pretentious and literally too theatrical. In the Russian text with no phrases in italics performers and directors have more freedom of interpretation, though the rhythmic structure of the play does not permit them to go beyond the limits the author defined. Moreover, in the BDT performers were trained “to translate any philosophical, psychological state into a precise physical action” (Losev 2007: 324) according to Tovstonogov's views, so that after proper analysis of the play they might decide to accent some other lines in order to highlight different aspects of the conflicts between Robert and John.

Numerous changes were made in order to avoid examples of foul language because of Soviet censorship: it was not possible to produce such a performance without acceptance by a board of artistic directors. Thus, translators were often forced to cut out profanity or adapted the original scene completely. In mametspeak obscene language

plays a particular role, being a rare marker of some climatic points in the emotional interactions between characters. For example, in scene 8 some tension between Robert and John arises, and the previous patterns of mentor-student relationship stop working when the old actor asks his younger colleague to “do less” (Mamet, 1977, 63) in tonight's performance and not outshine Robert's acting. The conflict develops gradually. Infuriated and irritated, John demands some explanations when Robert breaks his zipper and has no time to change before the curtain rises. John has no choice but to help his partner with a safety pin. The atmosphere is heating up under the pressure of time as well and the young actor cannot help piquing his companion even a little bit knowing full well Robert's painful attitude towards own ageing appearance:

Robert Come on, come on.	Р о б е р т. Давай скорее!
<i>John attempts to pin Robert's fly.</i>	Джон пытается скрепить молнию.
Robert Put it in.	
John Just hold still for a moment.	Р о б е р т. Прикалывай!
Robert Come on, for God's sake!	Д ж о н. Постой смирно минуту.
John Alright. Alright. You know, I think you're gaining weight...	Р о б е р т. Скорее же.
	Д ж о н. Сейчас, сейчас. А знаешь, ты потолстел...
Robert Oh, fuck you. Will you stick it in? (Mamet 1977: 65 – original emphasis)	Р о б е р т. Да ну тебя к чёрту! Приколешь когда-нибудь? (Mamet 1983: 102)

In the Broadway production of 2010 with Patrick Stewart and T.R. Knight, after Robert swearing the audience bursts out laughing, because it is a sign that the conflict between generations has switched from its acute form to a comical one. If something bad is going to happen, it will not happen just now. The audience has a moment of relief, and also there is room for “some slapstick innuendoes underscored” (Collard 2010: 40). In Russian translation, however, this “go to hell” line after the substitution is less emotionally charged and cannot be considered as the sharp end of a pivotal scene.

Whilst scene 15 about experiments in the theatre ends up with Robert's swearing, and it seems a logical conclusion to the whole idea. Shvarts and Ostanin used the daring word “ass” allowed by the

ensorship. However, feeling that it is not enough, the translators turned a full stop into an exclamation mark:

Robert You're frigging well told. (Pause.) Two actors, some lines... and an audience. That's what I say. Fuck 'em all.

(Mamet 1977: 75 – original emphases)

Р о б е р т. Загнёшься с ними. (Пауза.) По-моему так: два актёра, несколько реплик и зрители. Вот и всё. А эксперименты – в задницу!

(Mamet 1983: 111).

So, it is obvious that the translators had no choice but make these substitutions in order to avoid having the play banned by Soviet censorship.

Conclusions

To sum up, the very first Russian translation of Mamet's *A Life in the Theatre* by Elena Shvarts with the assistance of Boris Ostanin made for the Bolshoy Drama Theatre is a prominent example of attempts to adapt an original text to Tovstonogov's ideas, despite all the limitations of language and Soviet censorship. Taking his influences on Mamet's whole body of literature into account, these strategies seem logical and appropriate. Issues of these influences need further investigation as well as more detailed close reading of all the versions of this translation available nowadays.

Among all the translating transformations substitutions seem the most suitable given the conditions mentioned before. The translators had to change even whole fragments of the original text in order to comply with Soviet conventions and expectations of the audience of the BDT.

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