

## THE CONCEPT OF SHAKESPEARE'S PERSONALITY AND CREATIVITY IN THE LITERARY-CRITICAL WORKS OF I.A. AKSENOV

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The article analyzes the literature-critical publications of Aksenov of the late 1920s and the first half of the 1930s with the aim of examining the personality and creativity of Shakespeare via socio-cultural, comparative-historical, historical-genetic, socio-cultural and biographical methods.

**Methodology:** In accordance with the subject of study, comparative-historical, cultural-historical and historical-typological methods, methods of problem and comparative analysis were used.

**Main Findings:** As a result, Aksenov systematically destroyed the widespread misconception of the epoch that Shakespeare was almost the only pillar of Elizabethan drama. In conclusion, Aksenov considered literary flair a special merit of Shakespeare, with which he was editing the material, without hiding the merits of his predecessors and without correcting or giving realistic contours to mysterious characters.

**Applications:** This research can be used by literary students, from universities and other literary centers.

**Novelty/Originality:** In this research, Shakespeare's personality and creativity were studied from his literary-critical works.

**Keywords:** *Shakespeare, Thomas, Dramaturgy, Artistic Detail.*

### INTRODUCTION

I. A. Aksenov, began to interpret Shakespeare's personality and creativity in the late 1920s. In 1930, the "Federation" publishing house released his book "Hamlet and other experiments in promoting domestic Shakespeareology, which refers to bear haunting, pirate publications, generic revenge, Mr. Hanslow's counting books, the insolvency of formal analysis, the golden inflation in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, a thematic analysis of the time composition, about the changing of plays, about the German romanticism, about the fencing of land ownership, about the life and death of the English folk theater, about the class essence of the dogma about divine predestination as well as many other curious and edifying things", which included the papers "The Thematic Analysis of Shakespeare's Hamlet Dramatic Composition" and "The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd as a Dramatic Example of the Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark", read in the State Academy of Arts in 1927 and 1929. In No.9 of the magazine "The Soviet Theater" dd. 1932, I. A. Aksenov published his response to the production of "Hamlet" by N. P. Akimov – "The Tragedy of Prince Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and the way it was played by the actors of Vakhtangov's Theatre".

In "The Literary Gazette" dd. September 11, 1933, there appeared the article "Curly, simple speech of Shakespeare" by I. A. Aksenov; in the same year, he, among other authors, was recruited to write the sections "Biographical Essay" and "Authoring Question" of the article "Shakespeare" for "The Great Soviet Encyclopedia". In 1934, two works by I. A. Aksenov were published that were devoted to Shakespeare: the article "Twelfth Night" – in No. 2 of the journal "Theater and Drama", and a review of the new translation of "Hamlet" by M. L. Lozinsky – in "The Literary Gazette" (No. 14 (329) of February 8). After the death of I. A. Aksenov, his Shakespearean articles continued to appear on the pages of literary and art criticism publications – "Shakespeare's Faces and Characters" ("Theater and Drama", Nos. 8 and 9, 1935), "The First Tragedy of Shakespeare" ("The Literary Gazette", May 10, 1935), "Romeo and Juliet" ("International Literature", No. 8, 1935), "The Origin of the Shakespeare's Drama" ("International Literature", Nos. 11 and 12, 1935), "Othello" ("International Literature", No. 10, 1935). Among other things, it is necessary to name the translation of the tragedy "Othello" by I. A. Aksenov, as well as the scenario of the "Hamlet" opera, which did not reach us, "perfectly conveying the concept of Shakespearean time". In 1937, the "Fiction" publishing house released the book "Shakespeare" by I. A. Aksenov, which included both previously published Shakespearean articles "The Tragedy of Prince Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and the way it was played by actors of Vakhtangov's Theatre", "Shakespeare, "The Origin of the Shakespeare's Drama", and the unpublished ones, devoted to Shakespeare's studies ("What is the question?", "Romeo and Juliet", "Shakespeare's dramatic chronicles").

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The questions of literary criticism on the life and works of Shakespeare in Russia were considered in the field of history of English literature, in comparative literary studies, and in studies related to Russian-English literary and historical-cultural ties. Along with the books “Hamlet and other experiments in promoting domestic Shakespeareology...”, and “Shakespeare” by I. A. Aksenov, we should also mention the books “Shakespeare’s creativity”, “Shakespeare’s Tragedy Hamlet” by A. Anikst, “Shakespeare” by A. A. Smirnov, and “Shakespeare. The main principles of the drama” by L. E. Pinsky, “The Shakespeare Theater”, “Shakespeare (1564–1616)”, and “Shakespeare, Burns, Shaw...” by Morozov. There are also some observations that are of interest to our study in the articles “Shakespeare and the problem of synthesis in the literature of the Renaissance” by R. M. Samarin, “Who wrote Shakespeare’s plays?” by V. Kovalevsky, “On the chronicles of Shakespeare” by S. S. Dinamov, “Language and Style of Shakespeare”, “Shakespeare on the Soviet Scene” by M. M. Morozov, etc.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials for analysis were the literary critic and theater studies published by I. A. Aksenov in the 1930, devoted to the study of Shakespeare’s life and creative activity. According to the principle of historicism, separate facts and circumstances were considered in conjunction with others, as well as taking into account the historical, literary and cultural experience. In accordance with the subject of study, we used comparative-historical, cultural-historical and historical-typological methods, methods of problem and comparative analysis (Kovalevsky, 1964).

## RESULTS

In his articles, I. A. Aksenov formulated some holistic, and at the same time very subjective human look of Shakespeare. The researcher called the English playwright a declassed person, arguing that “coming from a noble environment” he was far from the ideology of the middle ages, leading the life that connected him to the class that replaced the outdated feudalism, though “his connection with the bourgeoisie was determined by the degree of his participation in the class struggle”. Shakespeare did not participate in the “elaboration of the moral formulas of the advancing class, he prepared the ground for them, criticizing the old world view”. He was neither a merchant who had to defend his rights from the privileges of others, nor a factory man who fought with the arbitrary taxation of production and with the competition of serf labor, – being “a free profession person who served the most progressive layers of the old class and most of the cultural segments of the new one”, he strove after the latter, with whom he was connected by “both the acquired nature of income and, perhaps, the participation in the use of his savings”.

By his inner mood, Shakespeare, in the opinion of I. A. Aksenov, was a new formation of a bourgeois, who did not consider himself as a class representative: “...as soon as he made some money, he immediately invested in a profitable business –The Globe Theater, <...>spending the net profit from this enterprise to buy a real estate <...>. He first bought houses in London, and then, when the agricultural crisis was over, he also began to lay his hands on the land in the vicinity of his native Stafford. Having enough gained, he quietly abandoned writing, scene and London”. It was the enrichment, which, according to the researcher, was Shakespeare’s main task, which he realized, thanks to the ingenious intuition, “without much difficulty, without the need of someone’s help to protect his personal interests”. The idea of enrichment, as observed by I. A. Aksenov, was most clearly expressed in Shakespeare’s “The Merchant of Venice”, being a “solid proof of the mutual benefit acquired by the nobility top of the union with the top of urban estates”. At the same time, the inner harmony, achieved by the playwright, allowed him to “set reasonable limits to the well-being concerns” and having reached them, he “did not want further success and retired in full extent” ([Anikst, 1963](#); [Smirnov, 1934](#); [Hassan & Din, 2019](#)).

I. A. Aksenov did not reject an alternative version – the assumption that under the name of Shakespeare some other person was hiding, but he did not have a complete understanding of whoever it might be: “<...> it was not a lord, the owner of the castles and latifundia”; “but I still think that Lord Rutland was the author of Shakespearean texts”; “<...>he was not a lord, as he was developing an ideology that was not suitable for lords, and did not pour water on their mill”. Basing on the widespread opinion of Shakespeareologists about the direct impact of “The Spanish Tragedy” by T. Kyd on Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”, I. A. Aksenov considered it necessary to formulate his own position when writing the report “Hamlet, Prince of Denmark”. Referring to the first (1592) and subsequent, supplemented (1602) editions of “The Spanish Tragedy”, I. A. Aksenov saw in late editions the intervention of Ben Jonson, who made “new additions to the role of the painter”. I. A. Aksenov found the basis for this in the records of Hanslow’s expense book dd. September 25, 1601 (“To Benjamin Jonson under his record of his additions to Jeronimo the sum of XXXX shillings”) and on June 22, 1602 (“To Benjamin Jonson for a book, called Richard Hunchback, and for new additions to Jeronimo the sum of X

pou<nds>“). The records of Hanslow allowed I. A. Aksenov to suppose that much of the amount was attributed to the role of the painter, an episode, very popular, “which existed in the free recitation of the actors of the Hanslow troupe, but which remained unauthorized”. Emphasizing the specifics of the record “his additions to Jeronimo”, in which the last word was used with a lowercase letter, I. A. Aksenov noted that the unexpected preposition and the lowercase signified the role of Marshal Jeronimo, performed by Ben Jonson himself, the poetic tastes of whom did not go with the text of Kyd; in this connection, he supplemented his role with verses that were different in construction, saturated with psychology, and filled with romantic pathos. The second order record, in the opinion of I. A. Aksenov, came at the time of the publication of the play, when it was discovered that not all the additions were preserved (in particular, there was no scene of Jeronimo and the artist), thus the text had to be reworked ([Aksenov, 1937](#)).

The first edition of Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” dates back to 1604, but “The tragedy of Hamlet, re-written by Shakespeare”, was already in the repertoire of “The Curtain” Theater in 1596-1598, which led to I. A. Aksenov’s reasonable question: “If the text of the first quarto of Hamlet already existed in 1598, how could the addenda to “The Spanish Tragedy”, published only in 1602, be influenced by it?”. There could only be one rational explanation: so-called “additions” existed “almost long before their publication and could have influenced the texts of “Hamlet” before 1602”. In the opinion of I. A. Aksenov, T. Kyd wishing to make the most of the popularity of “The Spanish Tragedy”, decided to rework on it using the prologue of “Jeronimo” to logically unify the parts with the subsequent psychological treatment of the characters’ motives and actions; the additions having not been requested by the Elizabethan public, the tragedy was not published. The surviving manuscripts of the tragedy do not give a complete picture of the degree of its compositional difference with the successful source ([Aksenov, 1937](#)).

The play, “Revenge of Hamlet”, based on the plot of Saxo Grammaticus’s chronicle “about the revenge of Amled, or Amalot, the Prince of Denmark”, was perceived by I. A. Aksenov as a mirror image of “The Spanish Tragedy”, which represented the son’s revenge for the death of his father, directed against the king. Comparing the dates of “Revenge of Hamlet” productions at the Theater in Shoreditch (most actively in 1587–1589) and its “revised edition” on the stage of “Newington Butts” (June 9, 1594), the researcher called the years of 1598–1599 as the final date, when “Kyd’s text in its Shoreditch variant, was in the hands of Shakespeare, <...> given to him for a dramatic massacre”: “he did not treat it like Jonson. The author’s name disappeared, replaced by a note: converted by Shakespeare (more precisely and newly written)”. As a result, the Shakespeare version of the tragedy “Revenge of Hamlet” entered the repertoire of “The Globe Theater”, while the name of Thomas Kyd disappeared from the repertoire; his manuscript was not printed and disappeared from circulation ([Samarin, 1967](#)).

The Shakespeare variant of the tragedy, “Revenge of Hamlet” gives I. A. Aksenov the basis for speaking about the significant influence of Kyd’s play on “Hamlet”, which can be seen both in the plot, in the composition, and in the name of the main character. The “The Spanish Tragedy” did not “directly affect” Shakespeare’s work; however, it pushed him into a special genre – the tragedy of revenge – with its characteristic plots and methods of constructing. And even the coincidence of the “scene in the scene” (the execution of a tragedy that repeats the situation and the actions of the villains) does not give grounds to speak about borrowing precisely from “The Spanish Tragedy”: this episode could also be present in the “Revenge of Hamlet”, since the playwrights of Elizabethan era did not refuse to fully repeat the successful techniques. In addition, Kyd is primarily concerned with “the situation of revenge” and “the direct ways of its most public exercise”, while Shakespeare’s scene serves as “a test of the already made disclosure and the warning of the crime makers about the revenge that threatens them”. I. A. Aksenov points out to the other “parallel” moments of the plot, they are as follows: the presence of two conflicting royal courts, the connection between them supported by the ambassadors; heirs of the throne as bearers of tension; one court is introduced periodically by the playwrights, in which the drama of vicissitudes is developed; a representative of the secondary courtyard, although present at the final of the play, does not actively participate in it. A special role is played by the ghosts of the murderers, who create revenge, and a reception description in the main courtyard. The parade of the victorious troops in “The Spanish Tragedy” opens the action, while in “Hamlet” it concludes it. The removal of undesirable characters from the scene also has a similar character: in “The Spanish Tragedy” by the absence of the promised letter, in “Hamlet” through a fake letter ([Morozov, 1941](#)).

The “scene in the scene” does not serve as a psychological representation of criminals, since, as noted by I. A. Aksenov, “psychology is not characteristic of Kyd, as it is not a characteristic of the then investigating process”. In the Elizabethan drama, all evidence is material, for example, the bleeding of a corpse, a personal testimony of the offender, a revealing letter from a collaborator or witness. In “The Spanish Tragedy”, Kyd uses a stage action to mask a real murder by the main character, while in “Hamlet”, Shakespeare “applies a ready-made canon for purposes that are completely alien and

hostile to its inventor". There appears the feeling of a certain pile-up, while reading "Hamlet", which is not due to the influence of Kyd's plays, but the specifics of building Elizabethan tragedies according to the canon of revenge. "Hamlet" not only did not destroy "The Spanish Tragedy", but even strengthened its place on the stage platforms. According to I. A. Aksenov, "it is appropriate to relocate the issue and no longer talk about the influence of "The Spanish Tragedy" on the tragedy of Hamlet the Prince of Denmark, on the contrary, about the secondary perception of the old model in its new improved reproduction" ([Morozov, 1967](#)).

In the review, "The Tragedy of Prince Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and the way it was played by the actors of Vakhtangov's Theatre", I. A. Aksenov noted Shakespeare's preservation of Kyd's interpretation of the image of the Queen as quickly repentant and actively helping Hamlet's revenge in the edition of Hamlet 1602. The publication had traces of hasty cuts, being printed from a tour copy, used by the troupe of Shakespearean actors, who decided to correct the cash deficit by out-of-stage means. The second edition of the tragedy (1604) turned out to be better than the first, according to I. A. Aksenov, but some details disappeared, and the Shakespearean text began to deviate from Kyd's source; the expanded critique of the notion of generic revenge, presented as three retributions of three sons for three slain fathers, suppressed the Queen's role, only preserving her passive nature of repentance in the revelation scene, classical for the tragedy of revenge ([Pinsky, 1971](#)).

I. A. Aksenov, believed that Shakespeareologists were deeply mistaken for treating the protagonists as certain historical personality, whose actions or words should be interpreted through the historical realism prism. It was unacceptable for a researcher to search for one or another person among Shakespeare contemporaries, whose historical biography was similar to the dramatic fate of the character: "Hamlet, the Danish Prince, is not a historical person's biography, but a tragedy of some imaginary person, acting on the stage", the situations in which he is set are "not life, but scene" and "his speeches have not really been recorded, but pronounced on the stage". It was not the literary work that reached the next generation, but its stage interpretation, which went through numerous directorial and actors' revisions ([Zhatkin et al., 2015](#); [Parvizian et al., 2015](#)).

Having refused to use the Russian formal analysis of Shakespearean tragedy, I. A. Aksenov attempted to comprehend the experience of a thematic analysis of musical works in the plays of the English playwright, which made it possible to reduce the variety of "text material" to a certain number of "conditional" principal and secondary themes. At the same time, the theme meant the "verbal definition of a stage assignment, establishing a consistent series of personages' actions throughout the composition (the main theme) or its individual moments (arbitrary and additional themes)", which were able "to sound simultaneously (combining comedians and tragedies), while different in character ("tonality"), without the reduction to a general tonality". I. A. Aksenov saw a significant dependence of Elizabethan drama on the preferences of the public, which required the presence of certain genre components from "tragedies or even poems according to all Aristotle rules". In his opinion, "Shakespeare was not an experimenter, nor was he a man who worshiped the use of a three-part composition, "which often led to the complete dismembering of the dramatic work into three separate parts: "1) lyrical love drama (salon), 2) drama of vicissitudes (adventure), 3) intermedia - clownish (highly comic)". Through the creation of "unifying" scenes, capable of combining multi-tonal stage themes, Shakespeare sought to unite all the components of the drama. The scenes that united all three plans of the work became a prerequisite for the development of a particular plot, and one of the actors was required to participate in all the three plans, "the narrative interest of the three fantasies crossed in him, his role, <...> wining triple interest", – the character himself eventually turned out to be central to the play (for example, Shylock in "The Merchant of Venice", Benedict and Beatrice in the "Much Ado About Nothing" comedy). According to I. A. Aksenov, having achieved the unity of the parts of the drama (especially in "Timon of Athens" and "Coriolanus"), Shakespeare returned "to the three-part composition <...>, or rather to the compromise combination of three plans practiced by Fletcher" ([Aksenova, 1937](#)).

Observing that the action in "Hamlet" is slower than in "Othello" and "Macbeth", I. A. Aksenov drew attention to the difficulties of transmitting the plot of this tragedy, which brought "criticism in despair", serving Voltaire as "an excuse for pulling out the author's barbarities" and capable of "cheering up the bored readers of poster librettos of our theater magazines". As a tragedy of revenge, "Hamlet" develops within the framework of the traditional canon, which provides "conversation with the ghost, the argument about life fatalism pronounced over the symbol of death, the revenge plan's development and execution being unpredictable, the avenger being known, the revenge being inevitable and not only affecting the body of the enemy, but also depriving his soul of the eternal blessing" ([Aksenov, 1937](#)).

Comparing the specifics of the three themes of revenge in "Hamlet", namely the Fortinbras revenge, which opens the plan of "drama of vicissitudes", Hamlet's revenge, developing the tragedy's central part, and Laertes's revenge, which

continues the transported comic plot of the tragedy, I. A. Aksenov compares the original positions of the main characters and their relation to the cause of revenge, their coming to the stage in the tragic composition and their individual characteristics. I. A. Aksenov notes the regularity of the emergence of the characters of the tragedy (Fortinbras – Hamlet– Laertes), which corresponds to the heroes' themes related to the tragedy's general development: "... the author deliberately established this order of appearance of these three heroes. They are equally entitled to the main theme: generic revenge – and everyone has to fulfill his revenge. Everyone in the tragedy must have an equal arena of activity, and each one must be the protagonist of his plan". While the themes of Hamlet's and Laertes's revenge are covered in detail, the theme of Fortinbras's revenge is greatly reduced: "...only fifty-three verses. This is a strange greed of place for the plan of the drama of vicissitudes"; while, Fortinbras surprises the researcher with a strange awareness of Hamlet's life and actions ([Anikst, 1986](#)).

Thinking about what the contractions of the Fortinbras theme are connected with, I. A. Aksenov sees it, along with purely theatrical reasons, as the lack of an appropriate actor for such a responsible role, the director's reluctance to refuse a single lyrical heroine, the indecisiveness of Shakespeare's struggle against feudal morality, and the feudal world-view, correlated with generic revenge. Since "the audience is always demanding and not always grateful to the playwright for the difficulty of the tasks he sets himself", the emergence of a new world outlook in the circle of obsolete, not abandoned concepts seems like a "great insolence, and morals derived from it – immorality, while the author himself being the corrupter of minds". Shakespeare had to voluntarily assume responsibility for the statements; however, being a cautious person, he was looking for a positive formulation of a new morality ([Morozov, 1984](#)). The conclusions he reached were not so attractive as to accept responsibility for them, recognizing them as true, that is why, according to I. A. Aksenov, did Shakespeare confine himself to the skeptical analysis of the normative prescriptions of a new world outlook. I. A. Aksenov also saw Shakespeare's caution in the veiled interpretation of Fortinbras's image: it was important for the playwright that the viewer, perceiving the anti-feudal views of the character, did not emphasize his feudal activity. However, in the report "The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd as a Dramatic Example of the Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark", I. A. Aksenov noted that in Elizabethan England, which left the medieval world outlook, the discrediting of the dogma of generic revenge was not at all difficult, that the blood revenge tradition could be easily destroyed – "it turned out to be less than Shakespeare supposed".

In the opinion of I. A. Aksenov, the three heroes of "Hamlet" represent a certain unity of action, revealing the shift from the absurdity of Laertes's old feudal thinking ("To this point I stand,/ That both the worlds I give to negligence,/ Let come what comes; only I will be revenged/ Most thoroughly for my father") to the verbal critique of the feudal world view by Hamlet (for example, in the famous monologue "To Be or not to be: that is the question...") and, finally, to the new concept of Fortinbras morality: "He immediately obeyed/ heard the rebukes of the king and then/ swore to his uncle that he would not from now on be/ raising his arm to you".

## DISCUSSION

The systematic work of Shakespeareologists to define the original authorhood of individual plays, started in the second half of the 19th century, led to the fact that Shakespeare was declared not only the author of his written and reworked works, but also the creator of "Titus Andronicus" – a work that, in the opinion of I. A. Aksenov, he did not even touch. The investigator considered the positive results of the predecessors as follows: the complete removal of the three parts of "Henry VI", almost complete withdrawal of "Richard II" and "Richard III"; he only recognized the monologue in the "Henry V" chronicles, written by Shakespeare, due to the possible development of several prose scenes. As to the authorhood of "Henry VI", I. A. Aksenov assumed that the first two parts of the trilogy were mainly developed by R. Green with the help of J. Peele and Ch. Marlowe; the third part belonged to Ch. Marlowe with a small participation by T. Kyd and two scenes (Richard's love confessions to Anna and Elizabeth) were written by T. Heywood. I. A. Aksenov finds Shakespeare's creative handwriting in the text of the speeches of Buckingham and Richard in the seventh stage of the third act, in the final seven verses of the first stage of the fourth act, pronounced by Queen Elizabeth, and in the final ten verses of King Richard from the third stage of the fourth act, as well as in the fourth stage of the fourth act, beginning with the replica of the Duchess of York "Why is sorrow so full of words?" and ending with the subsequent answer of Elizabeth, consisting of five verses. According to I. A. Aksenov, the individual Shakespeare's verses are scattered over the historical chronicle of "Henry V" in order to somewhat ennoble the scenes of proscenium jests (in particular, the scenes of Mistress Quickly); Shakespeare also wrote the scene of the King with the soldiers and the subsequent monologue ("Everyone to the king!") at the end of the first stage of the fourth act. Using the stylistic and metrical analysis "Richard II" chronicle is recognized as the creation of J. Peele and Ch. Marlowe, with few signs of editing individual poems by Shakespeare. The chronicle of "Henry VIII", being one of the later works of Shakespeare, is a

completely new period of his work, characterized not by the editing of his predecessors' works, but by a collaboration with the younger generation of playwrights like J. Fletcher. The following works were recognized as purely Shakespearean: the chronicle "King John" (the direct reworking of the old play, "The Troublesome Reign of King John") and both parts of the Henry IV chronicle, written over the old text, so unbreakable that the typographer, as observed by I. A. Aksenov, typed Oldskel in some places instead of Falstaff, the name, Shakespeare gave to the popular figure of a landless knight.

The similarity of views on the question of Shakespeare's authorship can be also traced in the arguments of A. A. Smirnov, who saw Marlowe's "The Jew of Malta" traditions in "The Merchant of Venice", "Richard III" and "Titus Andronicus"; he noted that "Richard III" was "the tracing-pencil of Edward II in its most significant features", and found "something from Tamburlaine" in "King Lear" and "Macbeth". Considering the Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare, [Jivegov & Boyadzhiev \(1941\)](#) admitted that Shakespeare "did not start in an empty place <...> that all that was the fruit of Marlowe's turbulent creativity, was well digested by him", in particular, he "learned to work on the white verse" in the Marlowe texts, he perceived "the skill of distributing the material in the play and the complex art of stacking figures, which, with all grandeur, were endowed with real human qualities", having also borrowed the very idea of a humanistic problem drama. The views of the collective authorhood of Shakespeare's works are still relevant; in particular, in the study "The origin of the category of authorship in the golden age of English literature". [Peshkov \(2017\)](#) put forward the hypothesis that "Shakespeare was conceived as a series of the best literary works of his time. Although the idea of the collective project was not fully realized, it could be traced in several dramas, in which multiple Shakespeare collaborators were added, whether it was Peele, Middleton or Fletcher, as well as several so-called apocryphal plays of Shakespeare in which Shakespeare's participation was denied by the scholars".

A. A. Smirnov suggested that the tragedy of "Titus Andronicus" might be a remake of the play of Marlowe – "much like Marlowe in its style and figurativeness". In his letter to G. G. Shpet of March 15, 1934, he expressed a more radical opinion: "... having studied Titus Andronicus under a microscope, I am strongly inclined that this play was written by Marlot, Shakespeare having only retouched it! I earlier treated this hypothesis skeptically".

In his literary critique, I. A. Aksenov systematically destroyed the widespread misconception of the epoch that Shakespeare was almost the only pillar of Elizabethan drama. According to his observations, Shakespeare, both during his lifetime and for a long enough period after death, had "no glory, but popularity", that is, Shakespeare "was very well known, loved and respected in a fairly tight literary circle, but the general public did not distinguish him from a number of his contemporaries". Shakespeare's productions in "The Globe", though carefully staged, have not become the main ones in the repertoire: "Until the end of the existence of The Globe Theater, Old Jeronimo remained the most profitable performance. Very close to this were the box-office returns from the tragedies of Beaumont – Fletcher and Ben Johnson's best comedies".

## CONCLUSION

Adhering to the popular, in the 1930s, views of F. Fleigh and J. M. Robertson of the collective character of Shakespeare's creativity, and confirmed by his extraordinary fruitful literary work, "giving out at least six works per season, which exceeds even the standard norm of collective output of academics", I. A. Aksenov formulated his own position on the role of Shakespeare in the creation of plays: "This writer has essentially never considered himself a poet, a self-sufficient creature, <...> this poet did not present all his work on white paper, but on paper, written by others, <...> overwriting the already written texts, completing the works of a number of poetic generations with his genius poetry". I. A. Aksenov considered literary flair a special merit of Shakespeare, with which he was editing the material, without hiding the merits of his predecessors, without correcting or giving realistic contours to mysterious characters, often not existing either in life, or in the most strange fantasies, as well as the voluntary responsibility of Shakespeare for the diverse style of collective creativity. The very preservation of his dramatic works that came to us only through the connection of the play with his name. Now-a-days, Aksenov's views on the Shakespearean issue are considered shallow and unprofessional, but one cannot help but realize that futuristic esthetics, which was critical for the critics in the early 20th century, had a great influence on them, based on which his outlooks and creative principles were formed (Courtney, 2018; [Selomo & Govender, 2016](#); [Novikova et al., 2018](#); [Ingavale, 2013](#); [Barreto & Alturas, 2018](#)).

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