Title: On Vasilii Aksenov's Translation of E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*

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For *Ragtime* E.L. Doctorow devised a style that has been described as a "negation of style" (Fowler 1992). Its short, declarative sentences, absence of quotation marks, and flat tone contribute to a deceptively simple style that is used to relate the complex story of America's development at the beginning of the twentieth century. The juxtaposition of sentences such as "Teddy Roosevelt was President," and "There were no Negroes," demonstrates how the "mock historical-pedantic" voice of the novel relates both history and fabrication, requiring an attentive reader to recognize how America's self-conception, viewed through the experiences of three "typical" families, shifts as the narrative progresses.

The novel's style would seem not to pose a great challenge for the translator, and Soviet critics readily perceived the ideological role of the novel's irony and didacticism. In this light, Vasilii Aksenov was an interesting choice of translator for *Ragtime*, having recently published his travelogue *Kruglie sutki non-stop* (1975), the first Soviet work to portray America in exclusively positive terms, while simultaneously writing "for the drawer." His 1978 translation of *Ragtime* reveals few ideologically motivated modifications to the text, perhaps in part due to Soviet authorities' endorsement of *Ragtime*'s political vision. However, Aksenov introduced subtle changes that do not so much indicate he was engaging in the common practice of self-censorship, but drawing attention to Doctorow's understated strategies for undermining the self-mythologization of a nation.

The first part of my paper will contextualize Aksenov's translation within his oeuvre and Soviet editorial policy toward publishing translations of American literature in the late 1970s. The second will present an analysis of Aksenov's translation, with emphasis on the implications of the changes he introduced to his text. The last section will focus on reception, contrasting the silence of literary critics with the positive popular reception of Soviet readers.