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ENGLISH ROMANTICISM. THE POETS OF THE "LAKE SCHOOL". THE EVOLUTION OF THE ROMANTIC HERO IN BYRON'S WORKS

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Abstract:
The article examines the main stages of the development of English Romanticism, the creative peculiarities of the representatives of the "Lake School" of poets, and the contribution of George Gordon Byron to the formation of the image of the Romantic hero. The key ideas, aesthetic principles, and philosophical motifs that determined the originality of English Romantic literature at the beginning of the nineteenth century are analyzed.

Keywords: Romanticism, romantic poets, "Lake School", Byron, romantic hero, individualism, freedom, nature, rebellion.

Introduction

English Romanticism arose at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century as a reaction to rationalism and the aesthetic principles of classicism. It was closely connected with the social and political changes of the epoch — the Great French Revolution, the industrial revolution, and the crisis of traditional spiritual values. At the center of Romanticism's attention stood man — his inner world, feelings, and striving for freedom and the absolute.

England can be considered, to a certain extent, the birthplace of Romanticism. Early bourgeois development there gave rise also to the first anti-bourgeois aspirations, characteristic of the Romantics. During the previous century in English literature there appeared many essential features of the romantic worldview: ironic self-assessment, anti-rationalism, ideas about the "inexpressible," and a longing for "antiquity."

The impetus for the emergence of English Romanticism came both from external and internal events — in England at this time occurred the industrial revolution. Its consequences were not only the replacement of the spinning wheel by the weaving machine and of muscular power by the steam engine, but also deep social shifts: the disappearance of the peasantry, the appearance of the industrial proletariat, and the establishment of the bourgeoisie as the "masters of life."

Approximately over the course of half a century, three generations of Romantics succeeded one another in English literature. The elder generation is represented by Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Walter Scott; the middle — by Byron, Shelley, Keats; the younger — by Carlyle. The internal distinctions in English Romanticism run mainly along socio-political lines; English Romantics are distinguished by the unity of their aspirations, which places them in the position of people constantly resisting the course of time.

Along with socio-historical preconditions, special significance for the formation of English Romanticism was held by the turning to the traditions of oral poetic creativity. An enormous role in awakening the interest of the English Romantics in folklore was played by the collection Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, published in 1765 by Thomas Percy (1729–1811), which included various samples of English folk ballads. Later Percy's edition influenced Walter Scott, the poets of the "Lake School," and Keats. Interest in folklore gave rise to imitations and mystifications. European fame was gained by the so-called Poems of Ossian, composed by the Scotsman James Macpherson (1736–1796). Macpherson, who studied Scottish folklore, used certain motifs and names in the creation of his works. Their author was declared to be the bard Ossian, and Macpherson called himself the translator. The authenticity of the poems, published from 1760 to 1765, was repeatedly questioned; however, this did not prevent their success. Instead of the orderly ancient mythology arranged by the classicists, Macpherson introduced readers into the misty and ghostly world of the North. Mystery and vagueness of outlines, melancholy, which made up the lyrical basis of the poems, later became the property of Romanticism. In the nineteenth century Byron would pay tribute to the Poems of Ossian.

The first vivid phenomenon in English Romanticism was the creative work of **William Blake (1757–1827).** In the drawings and verses which he did not print, but, like the drawings, engraved, Blake created his own special world. From early childhood he told of marvelous visions in broad daylight, and in later years he said that he conversed with Christ, Socrates, and Dante. The aim of Blake as an artist and poet was the creation of an original mythology based on pagan and Christian components. The task of this peculiar religion was universal synthesis. Blake wished to unite heaven and earth, and to make the deified man the crown of faith.

Fame came to Blake through works created in the eighteenth century: Songs of Innocence (1789), Songs of Experience (1794), The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790). "To see eternity in an instant and heaven — in a cup of a flower" — this is the central idea of Blake's lyric poetry. In every grain of sand he sought to discern a reflection of the spiritual essence. Therefore, all of Blake's activity was a protest against empiricism, the leading tradition of British thought. In his poems there is much that is consonant with the Romantics: universalism, pantheism, striving for an all-embracing spiritual comprehension of the world. Nevertheless, Blake did not meet understanding among his contemporaries, who considered such mystical symbolism excessive.

The recognized initiators of English Romanticism became **William Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Samuel Coleridge (1772–1834),** the founders and leaders of the "Lake School" or "Lakism" (from lake — lake). As often happens, the name was given by opponents (Wordsworth settled in his native land, in Cumberland — the Lake District) and contained mockery of the excessive verbosity of the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, who was attributed to the "Lakers." Yet the "Lake School," as a certain spiritual kinship, did exist — all English Romantics in one way or another oriented themselves toward it.

The establishment of Wordsworth's poetic reputation began after the jointly published with Coleridge Lyrical Ballads (1798). The preface to the collection, written by Wordsworth, became the manifesto of Romanticism in poetry. Wordsworth demanded to bring the language of poetry closer to living colloquial speech, renouncing rhetorical ornamentation and poetic conventionality. Only such a poetic language could become a means of conveying emotions and spiritual moods.

Wordsworth placed feeling so much above reason that he saw the most complete expression of "natural" humanity in children and mentally deficient people, for they, in his opinion, express feelings in the purest and most direct form. Wordsworth believed that poetry is more capable of comprehending life than science, for it penetrates more deeply into the essence of nature and the human soul, since poetic art "absorbs also that which science gives, but all knowledge must be spiritualized, and without poetry this cannot be achieved."

Romantic also became the image of the poet presented by Wordsworth. The poet is distinguished by the quickness of thought, the strength of passion, but above all — by the sense of unity with the life of the world. The Romantic poet, unlike the classicists and the Enlighteners, does not dissect the world into separate elements, but sees the universe as an organic whole, an immense living being. People possess a sense of unity with nature, and through it — with the whole world. The poet feels more strongly than others that which others are capable of feeling, and possesses a special gift to embody with the greatest expressiveness the **vision** of the world in artistic images.

A special creative merit of Wordsworth was that he, as it were, began to speak in verse — without visible effort and without generally accepted poetic conventions. "We wanted to present ordinary things in an unusual light," explained the conception Coleridge. Lyrical Ballads opened with Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey — the foremost works of the poets, which became an epochal phenomenon. Unlike the preceding epochs, the poets painted not only what they saw and thought, but wished to capture the very process of experiencing. Wordsworth needed no special "poetic" conditions in order to find poetry in any phenomenon. The poet depicted in his verses an unpretentious life, called people from the confinement of cities to the eternal peace of nature, in which was manifested the characteristic romantic negation of rationalistic "progress."

The leading poetic idea of Coleridge is the constant presence in life of the inexpressible, the mysterious, the incomprehensible. The poet's creative contribution to the development of romantic literature became psychological insight. All means of representation — from verbal colors to the author's commentary — are used for the expressive reproduction of experiences, whether they are hallucinations or purely physical sensations, with each spiritual state conveyed in dynamics. Particularly perceptible is Coleridge's influence in the formation of the genre of the romantic confession.

General romantic notions of the "inexpressible" are tested in the best works of **Robert Southey (1774–1849).** His creative path began with ballads devoted to the fates of the destitute ("The Complaints of the Poor," "The Funeral of the Beggar"). Using as the basis of his works folkloric and semi-folkloric plots, Southey focused attention on the "marvelous." Thus, the main character of the ballad "The God's Judgment upon a Bishop" (1799), known in the translation by V. A. Zhukovsky, for his greed is overtaken by the judgment of higher powers. The appeal to "antiquity," however, did not free it from an ironic evaluation (as, for example, in the ballad The Battle of Blenheim (1798), where the official and the genuine pictures of the battle that entered history collide).

Unlike the romantics who dreamed of the bygone times with which they had no hereditary connection, the Scottish baronet **Walter Scott (1771–1832)** rightly regarded history as a kind of part of the national heritage. Moreover, through self-education he acquired extensive historical and ethnographic knowledge. Scott's legacy is vast: a volume of poetic works (among his ballads the most remarkable are The Castle of Smailholm (1802), Marmion (1808), The Lady of the Lake (1810)); forty-one volumes of novels and tales, and an extensive epistolary heritage. His historical novels are divided according to national subject matter into two groups: the "Scottish" — among them the most important are Old Mortality (1816) and Rob Roy (1818); and the "English" (Ivanhoe (1819), Kenilworth (1821), and others). Some novels are created from the material of the history of other countries (Quentin Durward (1823); Count Robert of Paris (1832)), yet their plots still intersect with English history.

Concreteness — this is what distinguishes Scott's novels from the "misty antiquity" of other romantics. These differences were emphasized by the author himself. For example, the epigraph for the novel Rob Roy was taken from a ballad by Wordsworth. But whereas for the poet this name was an emblem and a semi-legend, Scott depicts "antiquity" in all its details and draws conclusions concerning it. To the full measure of his artistic possibilities, Scott sought to comprehend popular life and through it the general laws in the change of times and morals.

It is necessary to note the general artistic features of Scott's novels that became canonical. Above all, the presence of a narrator — almost faceless, but constantly present: he in the literal sense conveys the past, serving as a connecting link between the past and the future. In the novels about the recent past, the narration is presented to the reader all the more as an oral truth about former deeds. The writer avoided drawing parallels between the past

and the present; the past is not a parallel, but a precedence, a source of modernity. Relying on the experience of Shakespeare and Defoe, Scott did much in his own way. Thus, he changed the proportion in the arrangement of fictional and real characters: the foreground and the greater part of the narrative are occupied by fictional figures. Whereas Shakespeare followed the plot of the legend, Scott created the eventful canvas himself, representing legendary heroes anew. The author created more than 2,500 characters, all subordinated to one task: to create a convincing history of human destinies within the bounds of a certain epoch. In other words, the goal consisted in showing why "people of past centuries acted so and not otherwise under the pressure of circumstances and political passions." The method of creating characters and circumstances in Scott's historical novels would be adopted by the historical novel of the nineteenth century.

Next to Walter Scott — as his reader, admirer, and later friend — stood **George Gordon Byron (1788–1824),** the greatest figure both in English and in European Romanticism. In Byron's fate the same situation was repeated again and again, which later became the core of all his creative work: trampled dignity, disfigured beauty, constrained strength, a sense of loneliness among those close to him.

Defining the traits that astonished his contemporaries in Byron's poetry, Lermontov emphasized "a sad, unaccountable tone, an impulse of passions and inspirations." Unaccountable sadness, doubts, an impulse into nowhere — all these general features of romantic poetry found expression in Byron's creative work with particular force. Already in the poet's first verses there appears the image of a lyrical hero possessed by a mixed feeling of wounded pride, thirst for life, and early bitterness.

The poem Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (begun in 1809, published in 1812–1818), which made Byron famous, took shape without a preliminary plan; therefore, the fragmentariness of the poem at first had the most direct character. Later, as the work on the poem proceeded, this "fragmentariness" became a consciously maintained compositional and stylistic feature. The author gained the possibility of freely passing from the epic plane to the lyrical one and back again. The narration becomes unrestrained, which allows, in numerous authorial digressions, an address to the most diverse questions — from historical-philosophical to deeply personal.

By its genre, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage represents a travel diary, which as it were is simultaneously kept by both the author and the main hero. However, after the first stanzas explaining the fate and mental state of the hero, he becomes merely a name. He is displaced by the author himself — more precisely, the distance between the author and the hero is not maintained at all. The author's attitude toward the hero may be the most diverse: from sympathetic to condescending. Byron became one of the founders of indirect self-observation, which would later be cultivated by Romantic poets.

Equally important for the formation of both English and European Romanticism were the **"Eastern Poems"** (The Giaour, The Bride of Abydos, The Corsair, The Siege of Corinth, and those close to them in spirit — Lara and Parisina). It was precisely in these that the

image of the true "Byronic" hero was formed — not by chance did Pushkin call Byron "the singer of the Giaour." The conflict in each poem is created by the special position of the central hero. This is a vivid, colorful, and mysterious figure, living in constant solitude, even among people (as, for example, Conrad in The Corsair). The inner forces of such a hero are directed toward the achievement of a single goal — as a rule, vengeance for desecrated love. Such a hero remains faithful to only one oath, capable of experiencing "one, but a flaming passion." Ultimately, any motivation for the hero's actions is weak — he is possessed by a spirit that knows no reconciliation and is not subject to reason.

Reflecting on the "inexpressible," Byron, unlike Walter Scott, peers not into history but into individuality. Recreating the Eastern color, the poet displaces it with a flood of emotions: whether it be the coast of the Adriatic or Lake Geneva, the reader sees the same seething of passions, to which it is cramped in any time and space. Thanks to Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and the Eastern Poems, world literature receives the concept of the "Byronic type" — "with his immoral soul, / self-loving and dry, / to dream devoted boundlessly, / with his embittered mind, / boiling in empty action," as Pushkin characterized him in the seventh chapter of Eugene Onegin. The influence of this tradition spread to many countries and made itself felt at least until the 1840s.

Changes in the position of the "Byronic" hero occur in the poetic dramas. In the poems the hero has long been in conflict, before the beginning of the work. The spiritual state of the main character of the poetic drama Manfred (1817) is still characterized by unrest and dissatisfaction, but they become even more inexpressible. In the author's commentary to Manfred, the poet emphasized that the causes of this state must remain incomprehensible. Yet this very "inexpressibility" is revealed as the exhaustion of the soul.

The motif of self-destruction intensifies in the tragedy Cain (1821). The rebellion of the main hero is not only a revolt against human laws, but against man as God's creation. The equality of evil and good — of this Lucifer speaks to Cain, appearing in the poem as the disturber of consciousness, leaving the hero in a state of truly Cain-like emptiness.

The hero of Byron's last work — the poem Don Juan (1818–1823, unfinished) — is deliberately faceless. Unlike his literary prototypes, Byron's Don Juan does not subjugate hearts and circumstances but, submitting to them himself, passes from Spain to Turkey, from Russia to England. Beside him stands unremittingly the author, boldly invading the narration with his own commentaries. The vividness of the eventful background — no longer fantastic but deliberately authentic — is achieved through the expressiveness of concrete everyday details and characters; thus, a transition to the realism of characters and circumstances is outlined. This greatest work of Byron played an essential role in world literature, echoing in many outstanding works of the era — for example, in Eugene Onegin.

English Romanticism became the most important stage in the development of world literature, opening new horizons of the human soul. The "Lake School" laid the foundation of poetic Romanticism by turning to nature and the inner world of man. Byron, however, transformed the romantic ideal into the drama of personality, creating the image of a hero

for whom freedom and suffering became inseparable. The evolution of the Byronic hero — from Childe Harold to Manfred — reflects the path of humanity itself: from contemplation to rebellion, from despair to self-affirmation.

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