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THE WORLD OF ENGLISH FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ALLITERATIVE DREAM VISIONS

The paper researches into the dream vision genre in late-medieval English literature. The author compares three alliterative anonymous poems – «Pearl», «Winner and Waster» and «The Parliament of Three Ages» – by analyzing some peculiarities of their problems and poetics.

Key words: dream vision, dispute, «Pearl», «Winner and Waster», «The Parliament of Three Ages», English literature of the fourteenth century.

One of the most popular genres in English literature of the second half of the fourteenth century was dream vision. In this period of about thirty major poems no fewer than a third belong to this literary genre [5, p. 22]. The vision had arisen under the influence of antique literature and the Bible, which provided readers with stories about people receiving some important information in a dream. At the earlier stages of development the vision existed as a religious genre but in the thirteenth century the French «Roman de la Rose» became the first secular dream vision in medieval literature. Its appearance resulted in considerable changes in the structure of the genre, in English literature in particular.

In Ukrainian literary studies dream visions in English literature of the fourteenth century have received very little attention. In Soviet literary studies general peculiarities of the dream poems by Langland, Chaucer and Gower were considered by M.P. Alexeyev and A. Dzhivelegov in «History of English Literature» [1]. Among Russian researchers who have taken interest in this sphere we can mention M.I. Nikola whose dissertation for the Doctor's degree focuses on the issue of formation of tradition in English poetry and prose of the fourteenth century [2]. In the context of the allegorical tradition several dream visions have been analysed by M.K. Popova [3]. These works, however, do not settle the whole range of problems connected with functioning of the genre.

This paper considers three anonymous allegorical poems written in alliterative verse – «Pearl», «Winner and Waster» and «The Parliament of Thee Ages». The object of analysis is genre peculiarities of each poem, their set of problems and imagery.

Traditions of the religious vision are developed in the poem «Pearl» approximately dating back to the 80s-90s of the fourteenth century [11]. It survived in one copy in the manuscript Cotton Nero A. x. which also includes the alliterative poems «Cleanness», «Patience» and «Sir Gawain and the Green Knight». The four works are assumed to have been created by the same poet. Analysis of their dialect led to determining the place of origin of the poems as the north-west Midlands. Spearing, however, emphasized the fact that «Pearl» «is no less courtly than Chaucer's [dream poems], being composed perhaps for some great baronial court» [12, p. 111].

The action of the poem is set in the other world. The narrator grieved by the loss of his pearl comes to the place where it fell into the grass. At first he seems to be speaking about a material treasure («So rounde, so reken in uche araye, / so smal, so smothe her sydes were» [7] – «So round and radiant in each display, so small and smooth were her sides»[1] [7]). But then the narrator mentions the Pearl's purity and its being under the earth now («Ther such ryches to rot is runne» [8] – «where such wealth has fallen into decay» [8], «Ther hit doun drof in moldes dunne» [8] – «There it (i.e. the pearl) sank into the brown mould» [8]). So, the author implies that the narrator is mourning the death of his small daughter. When he lies down near the grave mound, he falls asleep and in his dream finds himself in heaven. The narrator realizes it at seeing fantastic unearthly landscape. The author depicts it in bright colours: indigo trunks of the trees, silver leaves, a beryl bank, golden sand, emeralds and sapphires on the river bottom. Accentuating the radiance produced by the nature around the dreamer, the poet mentions bright crystal of the cliffs, the shine of the silver leaves, gleaming colours of birds, glitter of pearls on the ground and gems under the water. The splendor of the picture is repeatedly emphasized. The author's pictorial mastery does not contradict the canon and his description of heaven is based on the tradition – for instance, starting from antiquity a river and sweet-smelling meadows were a feature of the other world [3, p. 43–44].

At the bottom of a crystal cliff separated by the river the dreamer sees a maiden in white shining clothes embroidered with pearls and in a pearl crown. In the maiden he recognizes his loss transfigured in a wonderful way. The author contrasts the fact that the dreamer remembers the Pearl as a child and the royalty of her present appearance.

The excited dreamer is happy to have a conversation with the Pearl. Her role is close to that of Beatrice in the «Divine Comedy». In both poems a dear person transfigured after her death is a guide to heaven, she explains the meaning of the dreamer's observations and brings him to understanding of religious truths. In «Pearl» the dreamer appears a simpleton who tries to measure his tragedy and the heavenly organization with earthly categories. His reactions to the maiden's words – misunderstanding, inappropriate questions – create a mixture of the comic and the touching [12, p. 124].

The Pearl explains to her father that it is not worth while lamenting the loss of a perishable person because now she has eternal life. She dwells on the necessity of accepting everything given by God, on divine grace, on salvation of the soul of an innocent child. The Pearl also retells the biblical parable about workers in the vineyard, which should help the dreamer to understand why a two-year child without any merits has been rewarded with celestial bliss.

Further, basing on the text of the Apocalypse, the author describes Heavenly Jerusalem which the dreamer is honoured to see from afar. He enumerates all the gems used for building the city, mentions its square form, the twelve gates, the absence of churches. The city itself is radiant:

> Sunne ne mone schon never so swete
> As that foysoun flode out of that flet;
> Swythe hit swange thurgh uch a strete
> Wythouten fylthe other galle other glet'
> Kyrk therinne was non yete
> Chapel ne temple that ever was set:
> The Almyghty was her mynster mete;
> The Lombe, the sakerfyse, ther to refet [9].

(Neither sun nor moon ever shone so sweetly as that copious flow out of that ground; swiftly it rushed through each street without dirt or impurity or slime. Yet there was no church in that place, neither chapel nor temple was ever built: the Almighty was her noble church; the Lamb the sacrifice there for (the soul's) refreshment) [9].

The narrator sees a long procession of maidens in white clothes and pearls headed by the Lamb. Noticing his Pearl among the maidens, the delighted dreamer whose reason failed him

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[1]The poem is cited in the original and in the prose translation into Modern English by Bill Stanton [7–10].

tries to cross the river: «Delyt me drof in yye and ere, / my manes mynde to maddyng malte» [10] – «Delight assailed both eye and ear, and my mortal mind was reduced to a frenzy» [10]. However, it is not for the dreamer to reach Heavenly Jerusalem and he finds himself plunged down into reality. At the end of the poem the narrator describes his changed state: now he humbly accepts anything given him by God. This detail alongside with the fact of visiting the other world and seeing God testifies that the poem preserves the traditional structure of the vision [3, p. 45].

We agree with Spearing's opinion that «Pearl» «is related in complex ways to a complex structure of literary traditions» [12, p. 113]. In the poem scholars trace influences of different kinds. M.K. Popova insisting on the presence of traditional plot elements of the genre of religious vision points out to their interweaving with chivalric literature motifs. For instance, the appearance of the Pearl resembles an idealized portrait of a heroine of a courtly romance: she has golden hair, grey eyes, light skin like ivory and whale-bone. Besides, in the poem the Virgin Mary is named the Queen of Courtesy [3, p. 46]. The poet's interest in chivalric culture is also revealed in his attention to details of the Pearl's refined attire inspired perhaps by apparels of noble ladies of his time.

Observing that in «Pearl» many scholars see Dante's tradition, M.I. Nikola makes a supposition about its closeness to English mystical ornamental prose: «The idea of mystical ascension to Heavenly Jerusalem, the character of movement, the psychic processes being experienced, the questions which became the object of discussion in conversation with the Pearl – these and many other things make one recollect the motifs of R. Rolle, Julian of Norwich and others» [2, p. 279].

Spearing stresses that «Pearl» is immediately based the Apocalypse and also owes to early Christian visions. But the researcher also mentions the influence of the «Roman de la Rose», which becomes noticeable in the poem because «it makes use of a dramatic projection of the Dreamer and his point of view in the highly sophisticated way», which was peculiar to secular visions originated by the Roman [12, p. 113]. In his opinion, there are similarities with the «Divine Comedy» in the structure and imagery of the poem. Besides, Spearing writes about the influence of fashionable French art of that time with its interest in colour and light effects of transparency, translucency and reflection [12, p. 111].

Researchers have noticed that the genre of «Pearl» is an organic fusion of an elegy and an allegorical vision. The poem demonstrates all the four levels of allegorical meaning: «not only a pearl as an aesthetically perfect object of the material world but also an allegory of cleanness and light, a symbol of moral stainlessness, a form of anagogical participation in the transcendent and sacred world» [4, p. 3–4]. The heroine of the poem appears in different incarnations: as a two-year child, a queen, the Lamb's bride. The motif of pearl is many times repeated in the poem. Alongside with «Pearl in pearls», it mentions pearls on the river banks, in the decoration of Heavenly Jerusalem, in the Lamb's attire. The heroine also tells the parable about a merchant who sold everything he had to buy one priceless pearl which symbolizes the Heavenly Kingdom. The motif of pearls renders the symbolic meaning of perfection and cleanness. The semantic field of jewels involves the image of the dreamer who is called a jeweler. This detail does not simply specify his social status; it serves as a means of internal characterization of the dreamer. The jeweler as an expert in material values is contrasted to the merchant who bought the Heavenly Kingdom [12, p. 126]. The image of the jeweler becomes an allegory of attachment to earthly values.

While the spiritual problems raised by «Pearl» are regarded by the poet as timeless, the poems «Winner and Waster» and «The Parliament of Three Ages» concentrate on social problems which are of topical as well as universal character. Shifting attention from salvation of the soul to the social reality, their authors refuse from depicting the other world. However, these works also contain «an appreciable religious and didactic message», which is typical of the majority of the fourteenth-century alliterative poems [2, p. 269].

The only known copy of «Winner and Waster» and one of two copies of «The Parliament of Three Ages» are from Robert Thornton's collection, compiled in about 1450. The first poem is considered to have been written not earlier than 1352, the second poem – between 1352–

53 and 1390. They were created in the Midlands but there is no unanimity among researchers as to a more precise attribution [16].

«Winner and Waster» has elements of topical satire and comments on the political events of 1348–1349. «The poem's perspectives are truly dizzying: on the one hand, economics, politics, ethics, and social relations are seen as an interrelated set of universal, timeless principles; on the other, they appear as actual, contingent conditions that have resulted from specific acts in history» [16]. The images of Winner and Waster personify two contradicting views on the proper way of living that can be typical of people no matter in what historical period they live. Besides, the opinions expressed by the allegorical figures reflect manners of two social groups and they also allude, as some researchers think, to the tension between the two main departments of Edward III's household – the lord chamberlain and the lord steward [16].

The dream is preceded by a frame traditional for this genre: the narrator was wandering on his own somewhere in the west and then lied down «one ane hill ane hawthorne beside» [15] near a brook. The nature is not quiet (he hears loud voices of thrushes and jays, noise of woodpeckers and wild geese, rushing of the stream), which makes a parallel to the action in the dream itself. «The roar of the deep water and the racket of the birds» [14] («dyn of the depe watir and dadillyng of fewllys» [15])[2] kept him awake till dusk when he finally fell asleep. In the dream he finds himself in a place which can be recognized as England of the poet's time.

The dreamer sees a green plain «encircled by earthworks extending a mile» [14]. This is the only thing separating two armies ready to fight. On the top of a cliff there is a red pavilion decorated with gold medallions and pictures of blue garters. The pavilion is embroidered with the words «Dishonoured be the knight who suspects without cause!» [14] alluding to the motto of the Order of the Garter founded by Edward III. On one knight's attire the dreamer notices pictures of leopards and fleurs-de-lis – emblems constituting a part of the English coat of arms of the fourteenth century. The king sitting in the pavilion sends to the armies a knight whose task is to persuade them to dispute before the king instead of fighting. The armies send their representatives – two personified figures of Winner and Waster. The author does not provide the reader with their portrait allowing the figures themselves to characterize one another.

Winner's view on life is close to that of a merchant's. He praises being thrifty and industrious, not wasting time and money on luxurious entertainment. Waster adheres to the knighthood's position. He accuses Winner of stinginess, of unwillingness to share with the needy. Waster takes interest in the art of battle, feasts, courting ladies. Some arguments in the altercation are suggested by the religious faith. Each character thinks that his opponent will go to hell for his sins: Winner for avarice, Waster for prodigality and dislike for labour. Winner argues that the Virgin Mary had much simpler clothes than contemporary fashionable ladies. In confirmation of his words about the importance of field works he alludes to the story of Cain and Abel. Waster insists that his generosity to the poor «gives pleasure to the prince who created Paradise» [14] («It es plesynge to the Prynce that Paradyse wroghte» [15]).

Having heard the arguments, the king gives his judgement. He advises Winner to go through Paris to the pope, which satirizes the financial policy of the papal court of that time. Waster should go to Cheapside – a rich London district. The end of the poem is lost but nevertheless it is clear that the king does not prefer one disputant to the other. The king explains to Winner that sometimes this character is to accompany him and in the lost final fragment he may be telling Waster something similar.

We can make a conclusion that the poem displays the author's closeness to knighthood. He takes pleasure in describing clothes and arms, shows competence in enumerating dishes at a magnificent chivalric feast, points to the social position of the fighters depicting their banners with heraldic emblems on them (for example, the pope's banner is black with three white bulls, lawyers' banner is «with a band of green, / with three white-haired heads wearing hoods» [14], etc.). The brightness of the image of the world in the poem is dictated by heraldic colours. Despite the traditional character of representing a debate as a battle, the use of this form shows a point of view typical of knighthood, because battling is knights' occupation, not merchants'.

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[2]The poem is cited in the original [15] and in the prose translation into Modern English [14].

In «The Parliament of Three Ages» the dream is also framed by the narrator' description of what preceded his dream and what followed it. He narrates about his deer hunt in May and about his falling asleep with weariness. The social status of the dreamer is not defined but his behaviour makes researchers think that he is a poacher. He hides the remains of the deer's carcass in the forest to prevent the forester or a hunter from finding them, and leaves the place hastily not to be caught. The dream finishes when the dreamer hears the sound of a horn in the forest and then he hurries to town.

The author shows expertise in describing habits of deer, the shape of their horns, hunting methods, cutting the carcass. Scholars have often praised technical precision of the description and realism of the details [13].

In his dream the narrator saw a heated debate of three persons who allegorically represent three human ages. Timeless problems become closer and more comprehensible for a reader of that time because the figures of ages look like representatives of three social groups. The author begins with portraying each character, creating a kind of emblem, and then gives his name. He also mentions the age of each character: Youth is thirty, Middle Age is about sixty, Old Age is one hundred or even older. Youth is described as «a hathelle on ane heghe horse with hauke appon hande» [13] («a knight on a noble horse, a hawk on his wrist» [6, p. 136][3]). The poet dwells on the beauty of his figure, depicts his garland with red roses, pearls and a carbuncle, his green and gold clothes arrayed richly with gems. This character seems to be admired by the poet.

Middle Age was «a renke alle in rosette that rowmly was schapyn, / In a golyone of graye girde in the myddes, / And iche bagge in his bosome bettir than othere» [13] («a man all in russet, corpulent of shape, / In a gray tunic, girt about in the middle / And every bag on his belt was better than the next» [6, p. 136–137]). He was busy thinking of his wealth and household. The author shows him as a rich land owner good at managing his manor.

Old Age dressed in black looked «ugly»: he was «croked and courbede, encrampeschett for elde» [13] («crooked and curved and contorted with age» [6, p. 137]), white-haired, bald, blind, toothless, with thick lips. His only matter of concern was his crutch and his bed. The poet singles out spite as the main feature of his character. Old Age had beads in his hands, «and cried kenely one Criste and his crede sayde, / With sawtries full sere tymes to sayntes in heven» [13] («cried aloud to Christ and repeated his Creed, / And he said psalms over and over to heaven's saints» [6, p. 137]), which gives him resemblance to clergy.

Each character advocates his values. Youth pledges not to wear a hood or a hat until he accomplishes a feat of arms in honour of his beloved lady. Middle Age argues that feasts and jousting are foolish and disapproves of the knight's having no assets besides his attire. He gives a piece of advice that sounds ridiculous for Youth: «Bye the stirkes with thi stede and stalles thaym make, / Thi brydell of brent golde wolde bullokes the gete, / The pryce of thi perrye wolde purches the londes» [13] («Buy heifers with your steed; make stalls for them; / Your bright gold bridle would buy you well-bred bullocks; / The price of your jewelry could purchase you lands» [6, p. 138]). Youth returns that Middle Age's life is all worry and woe and contrasts with it his description of falconry and other chivalric pleasures. It is rich in realistic details, thus resembling the dreamer's hunt. Middle Age refuses to continue the debate and Youth's story is balanced with Old Age's story. Middle Age's lack of arguments as compared to his opponents might be explained by the fact that eloquence was a duty of knighthood and clergy but not of the social group embodied by him.

The main religious and didactic message of the poem is expressed in Old Age's words. In contrast to Youth's story, his story is of bookish character. Old Age outlines the deeds of the worthiest people of the past – the famous warriors, sages and lovers – in order to convince his opponents in temporality of earthly fame and riches. The story is concluded by biblical quotations reminding of the need to be concerned about one's soul.

M.K. Popova believes that in «Winner and Waster» and «The Parliament of Three Ages» the features of dispute dominate the features of vision. According to her observation, the difference between them is as follows: if the author is «interested in what he *hears* and he reproduces in detail the debate of the allegorical characters leaving only little room for the landscape

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[3]The poem is cited in the original [13] and in the prose translation into Modern English [6].

background, his work belongs to the genre of dispute. If it is more important for the author what he *saw* in his dream and if he gives detailed pictures of the other or fantastic world, the poem should be attributed to the genre of vision, though it may contain a dialogue» [3, p. 37].

We would like to add that in the two latter poems the dreamer is only a speechless observer and hearer. He reminds of his existence only by the phrases of the type: «I saw» or «I heard», and by his promises to continue the narration. In his dream he keeps in the background, completely transferring the right to speak to the allegorical characters. The dream becomes a «justification» for narrating the story. On the other hand, in the religious vision «Pearl» very important is the dreamer's image, which is also revealed in the dream. It is the dreamer who participates in the debate, which exposes his psychological and moral state.

Thus, the poems under consideration bring us to the conclusion about enrichment of the genre model of the dream vision in the English poetry of the fourteenth century. Still influential is the religious tradition though the vision absorbs secular motifs, becomes suitable for expression of not only general human but also topical contents. We support M.I. Nikola's idea that the period is characterized by «search for form more suitable for reflecting the world view of the changing epoch, the epoch to a certain extent looking back but even more showing readiness for renewal» [2, p. 226].

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В статье исследуется жанр видения-сна в поздней средневековой английской литературе. Автор сравнивает три аллитеративные анонимные поэмы – «Жемчужина», «Накопитель и Растратчик» и «Парламент трех возрастов», анализируя некоторые особенности их проблематики и поэтики.

Ключевые слова: видение-сон, жанр словопрения, «Жемчужина», «Накопитель и Растратчик», «Парламент трех возрастов», английская литература четырнадцатого века.

У статті досліджується жанр видіння-сну у пізній середньовічній англійській літературі. Автор порівнює три алітеративні анонімні поеми – «Перлина», «Накопичувач і Розтратник» та «Парламент трьох віків», аналізуючи деякі особливості їх проблематики та поетики.

Ключові слова: видіння-сон, жанр сперечання, «Перлина», «Накопичувач і Розтратник», «Парламент трьох віків», англійська література чотирнадцятого століття.