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MYTH AND BEAUTY IN THE INTERTEXTUAL STRUCTURE OF JOHN KEATS' POETRY

The article is devoted to the use of ancient myths and the category of the beautiful in mythopoetical poems of John Keats. The authors examine the poet's search of truth and beauty, his identification of love with poetry and the formation of his poetic credo.

Key words: Romantic poet, ancient myth, mythopoetical works, symbolic interpretation, Hellenism, poetic credo, poetic imagination.

During the recent years there has been a growing interest of literary critics, readers and translators in this country in the creative work of John Keats, universally acknowledged as one of the greatest Romantic poets.

Such linguists as N. Dyakonova, N. Solovyova, H. Haltrin-Khalturina, Ye. Vitkovskiy and others highlighted the personality of Keats and his poetry in their works. Among the translators of Keats' poetry we can mention K. Tchukovskiy, B. Pasternak, V. Levik, S. Marshak, S. Sukharev, S. Alexandrovskiy, Y. Kruzhkov and many others.

The poet lived a very short life of 25 years (1795–1821), yet in that time he enriched the English language with some of the greatest poems. Had he never written a line of verse, Keats would still be remembered for his enthralling letters. So, on the one hand, one could speak about the brevity of Keats' life, and on the other, about the greatness of his achievement.

John Keats, the poet of the young generation of Romantics, brought into the English Romanticism a new, Hellenistic element and the cult of beauty and harmonious enjoyment of life. Keats' mythopoetic works based on ancient plots attract special attention of literary critics and translators. A. Zinovyeva examined the issue of antiquity in the works of the English poet in its connection with romantic irony, having identified different stages of Keats' perception of ancient Greek poetry and the development of creative intuition as a source of inspiration [4, p. 24].

The desire to contrast the ideals of harmony, purity and beauty with the reality of the surrounding world forms the basis of Keats' aesthetics. The poet was looking for ideas in ancient times (Endymion, 1817; Ode to a Grecian Urn, 1820); in the Renaissance epoch (Lamia, 1820; La Belle Dame Sans Merci, 1819); in the beauty of nature (Ode to a Nightingale, 1820). Hellenism, in all of its power, can be seen in his "Ode to a Grecian Urn" and his two large poems "Endymion" and "Hyperion".

The verses written by the poet in late 1816 prepared the appearance of his poem "Endymion". In one of them, "I Stood Tiptoe", the image of Moon-Cynthia, the inspirer of poets and patroness of lovers, appeared for the first time. The attraction to ancient Greek myths, perceived mainly through literature of the English Renaissance, leads Keats to symbolic interpretation of beautiful phenomena of nature.

Endymion, enamoured with Moon, is a Poet for Keats (a Poet, sure a lover too) whom love inspired for composing verses which conquered the heart of the remote goddess. The radiance

of her beauty exceeds everything around her, thus the story about her should be more beautiful than anything written earlier. Endymion's joining Cynthia brings happiness to lovers and inspiration for poets.

In Endymion, developing the myth about the love of the goddess of Moon for a poet-shepherd, Keats demonstrated an unlimited power of imagination and fantasy, interweaving many ancient Greek legends and adding more complicated spiritualistic mood to them. A handsome young Endymion is plunged into an eternal sleep by the goddess Cynthia who was visiting him in a cave for thirty years.

The intricate plot and sophisticated episodes make the reading of the poem difficult, but some passages, mainly the lyrical ones, belong to the best examples of English poetry. The hymn of praise to Pan is remarkable in this respect, as well as the song of an Indian girl, which is changing from the singing of sadness to the tempestuous praising in the honour of Bacchus.

Irrepressible attraction of Endymion to an unknown goddess who came in his dream, melancholy and estrangement from earthly connections, temporary attraction by an earthly belle (beauty), who appeared to be the incarnation of his immortal female friend and the final union with the latter – all this symbolizes for the poet the history of human soul which preserves reverently the image of eternal beauty and is looking for an embodiment of its ideal on the Earth.

The reader can find the myth of love and beauty in "Endymion". And the poem represents Keats' ideal of serving beauty.

– A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness;
but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health,
and quiet breathing...

– Прекрасное пленяет навсегда.
К нему не остываешь. Никогда
Не впасть ему в ничтожество.
Все снова
Нас будет влечь к испытанному крову
С готовым ложем и
здоровым сном...

(Перевод Б. Пастернака) [6].

English Romantic poets unanimously claimed that poetry is the manifestation of a certain creative power – imagination. But in depicting the beautiful each poet found his own style. John Keats also depicted beauty in his own way.

N. Dyakonova writes that in his early verses the poet focuses on corporeal beauty, thus defying romantic time – the time of incorporeal ideals. Keats glorifies the luxurious objects of art and generous gifts of nature. He describes admirably the intricate scenes on the Grecian urn, the canvases of Titian remarkable for their warmth of colouring and luxuriance of bodily forms [2, p. 274].

Keats believes that beautiful things had to be described in an expressive manner. To his mind, the creation of the corporeal-beautiful is the main purpose of creative imagination and the ultimate goal of poetry. In one of his letters Keats compares poetic imagination with the sleep of Adam, using this biblical allusion and referring to John Milton's "Paradise Lost". Milton's story about the birth of Eve served for Keats as an impetus to create many of his characters (Moon-Cynthia, "Endymion"; Apollo and Mnemosyne, "Hyperion").

The laconic style of Milton also inspired Keats' imitation. The landscapes of the young Romantic became more "elevated", described in a high-flown style. Keats also imitates the panoramic point of view of Milton and praises the endless expanses, disappearing over the horizon. He borrowed the general idea of building a narrative from Milton, as well.

"Hyperion" is Keats' another poem based on the mythological plot. Here, he uses the myth of struggle, an ancient Greek myth of the Titan's defeat. Apollo, a young god of Sun, comes to replace the last of Titans, Hyperion, a dark and tragic character. The birth of beauty out of the spirit of tragedy.

Keats starts writing his poem in a Greek manner, the poem about the victory of Olympian gods over the former rulers of the Earth, immortal Titans. Ancient myth was transformed into the system of symbols conveying the reflection of Keats on the greatest upheavals of modern times.

The poem begins with the description of the deities who sustained a defeat, the gods of the first generation – Saturn and Titans. The poet portrays the consequences of the universal war, Ti-

tanomachia, and divides his personages into the residents of an old (Golden) century and those of a new (Beautiful) age. And as the god of the old generation Oceanus, who put up with the course of history, says: "The future belongs to the beautiful" (Bk II, 1 s).

In "Hyperion" Keats depicts one detail after another, the image of Apollo, a new god of Sun, the most brilliant embodiment of the beautiful, who is destined to oppose Hyperion, the god of Sun from the generation of Titans. Apollo is the embodiment of the Romantic beautiful and Keats emphasizes the contrast between Apollo and Hyperion on the level of portraits from the very first lines of the poem.

As it is noted by H. Haltrin-Khalturina, Keats described Titans in the tradition of classicism, and the Olympian gods are depicted in the manner of Romantic aesthetics. The speech of Titans is characterized by deliberateness, their thinking is conservative, but their oratory is perfect. They remind of the ancient stone idols captivating by their shapely beauty of lines, the expressiveness of poses, their grandeur and massiveness [5, p. 317].

Intending to stress that Titans belong to the past, Keats not only makes references to ancient history and mythology, but he also resorts to the literary devices considered outdated at his time because they were used by classicists. Sometimes the poet used the inserted poetic forms, like an inserted unrhymed sonnet which opens the poem and is devoted to the all-absorbing silence and is crowned by the allegory of silence in the image of Naiad (a female spirit who lived in a lake, stream or river according to ancient Greek stories). Apollo, unlike Hyperion, is the intangible spiritual light. The new god of Sun seems almost immaterial. The first description of Apollo is presented in the second book of poem and it gives a vague idea of his appearance. Clymene, the daughter of Oceanus, tells Titans about Apollo, though she never saw him. Clymene heard his music and she was deeply moved by its charming sounds, having experienced a mixed feeling of anguish and admiration. The author of "Hyperion" believes that only the contrasting states were familiar in the Golden Age: the states of joy and sorrow, of absolute power and complete dependence.

Apollo appears before the reader for the second time in the third book. The author compares Apollo with the "golden theme" which does not have physical incarnation but it influences all the happening events. Apollo is compared to the gust of wind, which brings the aroma of flowers and fragments of beautiful melodies. His music is filling in the surrounding world. Apollo is very young and he knows nothing about the structure of the universe, the history of the world and about his origin. He needs someone to teach and instruct him, and he meets Mnemosyne, the goddess coming from Titans and personifying memory and conscience. Mnemosyne is the only resident of the old "Golden" age who predicted and accepted unconditionally the coming of a new "Beautiful" age.

Apollo learns about the tragedy of Titans from Mnemosyne and he realizes that the idea of historical progress is connected with idea of the departure of the old generations. Accepting the sacrificial side of life as an inseparable part of it, Apollo becomes wiser and more mature. And here the poet introduces the third portrait of Apollo. A reader can witness his metamorphosis. Learning the mystery of the external and inner world, Apollo is changing. Lightening the world, Apollo becomes visible for the first time. His features are coming forward from darkness: the blushing face of the Sun God, his fluttering curls, slender neck – the beautiful is starting to embody – a perfect embodiment of beauty which Clymene took for a sound in her half-asleep. But the poet breaks his narrative and finishes neither Apollo's description nor his poem. Two variants of the poem, "Hyperion", the first one and the second "The Fall of Hyperion" remained unfinished.

Two gods of Sun are contrasted in the poem. One of them, ancient Hyperion, is losing his power, an antagonist in the poem; and another, young Apollo is gaining his strength and power, full of spiritual, internal brilliance, becomes a protagonist.

E. Vitkovskiy highlighted that the poem "Lamia" (1821) is considered to be the most perfect poem of John Keats. **In the conditions of poetic language changing, genre and stylistic transformations**, Keats made a conscientious artistic choice in favour of imagination and intuition intending to convey his complicated creative experience and emotions to a sagacious reader. "Lamia", like many verses of Keats (Ode on melancholy; Ode to Psyche) gives evidence of the poet's interest in the issue of psyche, irrational phenomena and the ways to describe them in an artistic work [1, p. 169].

T. Zhuzhgina maintains that in “Lamia” Keats focuses on the thoughts about fatal essence and the pernicious effect of passions, about illusive nature of beauty and brevity of personal happiness. He used the means of mythological fantasy and combined allegory with the gothic symbols of violent phenomena. The poet filled the mythological matrix with romantic irony and emphasized the intertextual medieval connection of his poem with prototext – ancient and biblical. Romantic irony increased significantly the scope of metaphoric meaning of beauty, not confining to key notions of ancient myths [3, p. 217].

“Lamia” of John Keats is not a mechanical copying or imitation of ancient stories. The Romantic poet renewed the mythological image of a woman-snake. The mystery of birth and reincarnation is in the centre of the romantic illusion created by the poet: a wide mythopoetic and color range of fantastic transformations of a snake into a woman symbolizing the circular motion of natural elements.

Endowing with romantic features an ancient legend, Keats approaches nearer to the mystic idea of the beautiful and the ideal of beauty expressed in his “Ode to a Grecian Urn”: “Beauty is truth, truth is beauty”. “Lamia” should be seen as the poet’s text about love for ideal and perfect things and, at the same time, as aesthetic existence of confusion by ideal, perfect things possessing magic tempting power of transformation and reincarnation.

Keats was looking for truth and beauty, which were inseparable in his conscience, as he considered beauty to be the true essence of any phenomenon. If it is distorted and darkened in its present state, it is the task of a poet to discover beauty and make it visible. This is what poetic imagination needed for. The charm of John Keats beauty is indebted to the accuracy of the selected tropes and to the diversity of rhyme and stanzas.

The poet emphasizes that only imagination can perceive truth and beauty. And he opposed beauty in the manner of Romantic poetics to rational conscience governed by reason. He believes that a poet must think about truth and beauty, not being distracted by the extraneous circumstances. Then his creation will be “... a friend / To soothe the cares and lift the thoughts of man” (Sleep and Poetry).

The poetic credo of John Keats was formed within the framework of the aesthetics between two eras – the XVIII and the XIX centuries. He was gradually changing from the singer of corporeal beauty which really exists, but it is not noticeable for bodily eyes.

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Ключевые слова: поэт эпохи романтизма, древний миф, мифопоэтические произведения, интерпретация символики, эллинизм, поэтическое кредо, мыслительный образ поэта.

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Ключові слова: поет епохи романтизму, древній міф, міфопоетичні твори, інтерпретація символики, елінізм, поетичне кредо, образ мислення поета.

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