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Critical reception of Charles Reade's fiction in Russia in the 19th century

The present article examines critical reception of the works by Charles Reade, the English writer of the Victorian period, in Russian literary studies in the 19th century. It is established that the writer's literary activity has not received the in-depth and thorough critical comprehension in Russia despite Reade's significant contribution to the formation of the native literary process.

Key words: critical reception; Charles Reade; mass reader; popular literature; fiction writer; genre fusion

In spite of the tense political relations between Russia and Great Britain in the second part of the 19th century, the cultural and literary interaction between two countries did not cease and even gained a new momentum in its development. In the 1850s–1870s, Russian literary magazines keenly published translation versions of numerous novels by English writers of the Victorian era, future famous classics as well as a whole galaxy of authors who satisfied the needs of the so-called mass reader. Thanks to such writers, the readership «layer» was significantly expanding at that time both in England and in Russia. Foreign translated literature composed a repertoire basis for such a reader in our country and represented mainly entertaining adventurous novels with a detective-melodramatic plot. Such works undoubtedly affected the mass reader's interest in fine literature becoming the most crucial factor in the formation of the native literary process.

Russian-English literary connections have been comprehended and covered in numerous works by outstanding Soviet and Russian scholars. First and foremost, it is necessary to mention the research papers by Yu.D. Levin in which the detailed study of the literary interaction between Russia and Great Britain is presented and the reception of English literature in our country is analysed [2]. A significant contribution to the study of English literature in general and Victorian novels in particular is made by the established literary scholar N.P. Mikhalskaya dedicating her research to the authors who set the genre canon, method and style [3]. In this regard, N.P. Mikhalskaya, reflecting upon the English realistic novel of the 19th century, writes: *«having absorbed the achievements of the enlightenment novel, the discoveries of the romanticism and the experience of creating the historical novel by W. Scott, the realistic novel achieved an epic multi-faceted scale in the depiction of society which was combined with a deepening mastery of illustrating a human personality determined by circumstances and interaction with the environment. The mastery of psychological analysis has significantly increased»* [3, p. 157].

The proposed article examines critical reception of the literary works by the English novelist Charles Reade (1814–1884) in Russia in the 19th century. Charles Reade was a striking and fairly popular writer both in his homeland and in Russia within specified time. Holding a degree in jurisprudence, Reade, however, devoted himself to the literary activity embarking his writing career as a dramatist. In 1851, he wrote his first theatre plays «The Ladies' Battle» and «Angela» but they were not successful with the theatre public. In 1852, the author presented one more theatre work «Masks and Faces», which, according to critics, became Reade's best stage play. Nevertheless, Ch. Reade found his true calling in creating popular prose. Thus, being a representative of a group of Victorian writers whose works belonged to belletristics, Charles Reade gained popularity in the fiction, addressed to the mass reader. Furthermore, the writer was known as a master of a genre fusion successfully combining the features of a historical and educational novel, a detective and sensation fiction, an adventure novel and melodrama, expanding the possibilities of the novel narrative and thus entering a certain «mainstream» of the English literature. Therefore, it should be highlighted that it was Charles Reade who established such a genre modification as a «matter-of-fact romance». Besides, along with Wilkie Collins, Reade stood at the origins of the sensation fiction and also created a reformist novel within the aesthetics and poetics of the historical fiction.

Ch. Reade attracted close attention of Russian translators in the 1850s–1870s, i.e. in the same two decades related to the establishment of the Russian novel, belonging both to classical and to popular literature, and the active formation of the native mass reader. In addition, the interest in Reade's literary activity in Russia

during the aforementioned decades stemmed from the writer's desire to comprehend the features of realistic narration and introduce new principles of depicting action and reality into popular literature that fully coincided with the tendencies of the Russian literature, both classical and popular. I. A. Gurvich wrote in that regard, *«The dependence between the assertion of realistic principles and the establishment of the Russian classics, its rapid flourishing, is striking. However, the same circumstance also caused the rise of the popular literature. Realism put the criterion of vitality at the forefront, a direct word about reality comprehended in all its manifestations, fundamental and particular, stable and transient, and this could not but enhance the role of the current literary work. Therefore, only a fiction writer is able of depicting «from life»; only an «ordinary talent» is able to promptly respond to the acute topic of the day, to survey the surroundings, to demonstrate a variety of people, occupations, and ways of life. Where the «discovery of the world» occurs, the fiction writer is always ahead»* [1, p. 22].

Charles Reade's creative legacy has been and is currently being studied by English and American literary scholars. Particular attention in their studies is paid to the genre peculiarities of Reade's novels, compositional and stylistic features of his literary works, the creation background for the writer's novels are analyzed, as well as the consequences of the publication of his most controversial and notorious novels. The corpus of foreign criticism and bibliography of Reade's literary activity is quite extensive. Taking into account the specific character of the proposed research being dedicated to Russian criticism of Reade's fiction, it is necessary to mention only a few foreign scholars who made the greatest contribution to the study of the English novelist's work in the 19th century. Among them are the English writer and literary critic Th. Purnell and his book *«Dramatists of the Present Days»* (1871), the famous English poet A. Ch. Swinburne and his article on Reade's work in the magazine *«Miscellanies»* (1886), the English literary scholar D.Ch. Murray's monograph *«My Contemporaries in Fiction»* (1897) and others [9, 10, 8]. For example, A.Ch. Swinburne put Ch. Reade on a par with J. Elliot and A. Trollope, the grand masters of the Victorian novel. The author of the article commented on his own view of Reade's work as follows: *«The brilliant industry of Mr. Charles Reade, his vivid and vehement force of style, his passionate belief and ardent delight in the greatness of his calling, would have conferred a certain kind of interest of a literary figure of less serious pretensions to regard. It is not at all wonderful that on the marrow of his death these should have arisen in the little world of letters a little noise of debate as to the proper station and definition of so remarkable as a writer. Whether he was or was not a man of genius – whether his genius, if he had such a thing, was wide or narrow, deep or shallow, complete or incomplete, became at once, for the moment, a matter in some quarters of something like personal controversy»* [10, p. 287].

Reade was definitely sought-after in Russia in the 1850s–1870s mainly as a writer who eloquently and expressively revealed pressing social problems of the Victorian society reflected in his «matter-of-fact romance». However, in Russian literary criticism, Reade's novels were classified as social or sensation. Moreover, the English novelist attracted Russian mass readers' attention with the straightforward introduction of taboo topics such as bigamy, prison morals, abuse and corruption in private insane asylums into his novels that were banned (either in part or in whole) in both Russian and English cultures in those times. It is also worth noting that traditions of depicting the above-mentioned taboo themes were just beginning to be laid in both European and Russian literature in the second part of the 19th century. Nevertheless, the problems raised in Reade's novels were in many ways coincided with the issues of the works written by both the established Russian novelists of that time and the authors who addressed the mass reader.

In Russian literary criticism, Ch. Reade's creative activity, as well as the Russian translations of his novels and his critical reception, have been barely unstudied. The name of the English fiction writer was first mentioned in the literary magazine «Otechestvennye Zapiski» («Native Notes») in 1856, in the «News» section, where an announcement for Reade's novel «It's Never Too Late to Mend», which had recently been published in England, was placed. The anonymous author of the announcement presented the content of the novel as a very brief summary. Meanwhile, he mentioned that the novel was based on the stage play «Gold» which had considerable success with the English theater public and called the novel entertaining and, at the same time, moralistic [4].

Several years later, in 1862, the same literary magazine published the first chapters of the translated version of Reade's historical novel «The Cloister and The Hearth». The chapters appeared in the volume No. 141 along with a short critical review about the given novel. An anonymous critic placed Reade apart from the galaxy of established English novelists and defined the writer's prose as follows: «*Do not look for a psychological analysis of the characters in his works. No, he is primarily a realist and depicts a living, brilliant picture of people with their virtues and passions in the midst of life's events and worries, catching, so to say, on the fly the external and internal features of a human nature, without going into subtleties, without being engaged into psychology*» [5, p. 91]. Meanwhile, the author of the critical review gave a high appraisal of the novel «The Cloister and The Hearth» and, referring to Western critical assessments of the work, mentioned that in the novel «... *there are places that you will not find equal even in the novels by Walter Scott*» [5, p. 92].

The next publication mentioning Ch. Reade was an article by A. Regnard, the London correspondent of the Russian magazine «Vestnik Evropy» («Annals of Europe»), who was a columnist of the rubric «Science and Literature in Modern England». Here in 1878 Regnard published an article dedicated to

several English literary figures. In the section about Ch. Reade, the author presented a short biography of the English writer. Regnard considered Reade's prose as something distinctive, staying outside the traditions of «high literature»: «... *they (Reade's novels) constitute a special kind in which the literary element plays a secondary role, which should not be the case. Nevertheless, he (Reade) won a special place for himself in the English modern school and enjoyed too much popularity*» [6, p. 257].

In 1899, an article about Ch. Reade appeared in Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary. The encyclopedic paper presented a short summary of the writer's biography, listed his novels in a chronological order indicating two Russian translations. In conclusion, a general description of the writer's novel legacy was given: «*All of Reade's novels are distinguished by an entertaining plot; they reflect urgent issues of the day, describing the shortcomings in the organization of hospitals, investigative units, insane asylums, etc., and pointing out desirable reforms*» [7, p. 690]. That article became the last in the more than modest critical reception of Ch. Reade's literary activity in Russia in the 19th century.

Summarizing the above, the obvious tendency could be seen: almost all authors of the critical articles appearing in the Russian magazines of the 19th century unanimously emphasized the fictional and innovative nature of Reade's novels. The critics associated this tendency with the writer's appeal to the pressing social problems of Victorian England, his attention to «factuality» and attempts to combine all this with sensation scenes, plots and characters that make a strong emotional impression on the mass reader.

In conclusion, it should be noted, that with a fairly intensive study of Charles Reade's creative legacy in the English-language literary criticism, the significant gaps are observed in the Russian literary criticism of the 19th century in this regard. Reade's novels, the strategies chosen for their translation, were definitely compliant with the general direction of the native prose development, including popular literature, towards realism, epic genres, primarily, the novel as epic literature of modern times. Reflecting the interest to England in Russia, English literature and the Victorian novel in particular, the process of translation reception of Reade's novels was boosted by the formation of a new reader type in Russia, born due to the expansion of the Russian reading audience. Nevertheless, despite Reade's significant contribution to the formation and development of the Russian novel, the writer's literary activity did not receive adequate consideration in native literary criticism. In essence, this can be explained by the obvious fact that Ch. Reade belonged to the writers of the so-called «second tier» and his overly frank and sometimes scandalous depiction of taboo topics and genuine social concerns in his novels, which sometimes went beyond the bounds of what was acceptable in both European and Russian societies.

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Лексема «образ» и ее производные в романе Ф.М. Достоевского «Подросток» и переводах К.К. Гарнетт и Д. О’Брайен

С позиции концептологического подхода рассмотрены функции комплекса, сформированного лексемой «образ» и ее дериватами, в поэтике и проблематике романа Ф.М. Достоевского «Подросток». Выявлена специфика воспроизведения этих функций в двух переводах романа на английский язык – К.К. Гарнетт (1916) и Д. О’Брайен (2016), охарактеризованы смысловые потери.

Ключевые слова: Ф.М. Достоевский; роман «Подросток»; К.К. Гарнетт; Д. О’Брайен; рецепция; художественный перевод; русско-английские литературные связи.