

E. L. VOYNICH'S ROMANTIC HERO IN THE CONTEXT OF NEOROMANTIC FICTION

The work offers the analysis of certain characteristic and specific traits of the main hero in the novels "The Gadfly", "The Interrupted Friendship", and "Put Off Thy Shoes" by E.LVoynich. It reviews the evolution of Voynich's main hero within the period of 1897—1945 and registers the changes he undergoes along with the changes in the author's views and interests. The trilogy, divided in space and time, but united by one hero, offers unique opportunity to compare and draw conclusions about some characteristic features of neoromantic fiction and the development of the writer's individual style.

E. L. Voynich's name appeared in British literature in the end of the XIX-th c. Her first and best known novel *The Gadfly* published in 1897, had great success among readers and rather questionable praise from literary critics. Further novels, four all in all, written by Voynich are now almost forgotten, and

undeservedly so, for the skill of the writer grew in force and subtlety, and her last work *Put Off Thy Shoes* (1945) may be considered her best one [1, 2, 3, 4].

Here we will speak about three of E. L. Voynich's novels united by their direct or indirect relation to one character — the Gadfly. *The Gadfly* (1897), *The Interrupted Friendship* (1910) and *Put Off Thy Shoes* (1945) are the best illustration of the evolution the romantic hero of E. L. Voynich undergoes as the interests and experiences of its author change [3,4].

Arthur Burton (Felix Rivarez, the Gadfly) of the first novel is a curious mixture of the XIX-th c. romantic hero and the romantic hero of the coming XX-th c. He has the typical XIX-th c. supreme dominance over the other characters in the novel and over the storyline. The life of the Gadfly is overshadowed by a dark mysterious power, the sort we regularly come across in the XIX-th c. romantic novels, the fatality which drives the life of the main hero to its tragic end. *Thefm-de-ciecle* romantic hero is more likely to be the victim of his own passions — his author is much more realistic and prosaic [5, 6, 7]. Moreover, the neo-romantic writer tends to show us the development of his hero's character under the burden of some psychological trauma, while Voynich in *The Gadfly* presents (as many XIX-th c. romantics do) just the starting point and the result, the stages which have led to it being left out as immaterial. Finally, the means of description in this novel are principally based on contrast: the characters are either heroic or satirical, elevated or sneered at — the author's attitude to both kinds being far from impersonal. The neo-romantic writer, on the contrary, tends to distance himself from his hero and seem objective; black and white colours, consequently, are out of fashion [5, 8].

This first novel by E. L. Voynich blends in its plot social criticism and the pathos of the revolutionary struggle with the personal tragedy of the hero — and the personal dissolves into the background with the Gadfly's heroic death. He dies the winner. This is not the sort of the victory a neo-romantic hero, who is chiefly preoccupied with his personal problems, can hope to have. Remember the death of Lord Jim? How much bitter irony in that!

Now, we can find in *The Gadfly* some landmarks that indicate neo-romantic influence. The most prominent of them is the attempt to judge the hero by the average moral standards, which was bad manners from the point of view of a XIX-th c. romantic. The shift in the accents is evident. The personal tragedy of Felix Rivarez also smacks of the new times — his loneliness is not a mystery, but the result of treason and cruelty on the part of those he loved and estimated above all [5, 6, 7].

The next novel we take up, *The Interrupted Friendship*, shows us drastic changes in the author's objectives and, consequently, in the author's approach

to her hero. The work becomes typically neo-romantic when the accent shifts from social to personal. We see the Gadfly — Felix Rivarez — with new eyes, because we see mainly the private side of his life. He has not lost his excellent qualities: courage, intellect, ingenuity, but his exceptional status is gone — he is no longer the only one, he is the first among equals — a typical place for the neo-romantic hero. There is still no development of character, though the novel covers some years of the Gadfly's wanderings, which were left out in *The Gadfly*, but there is a sort of very curious experiment the author conducts by gathering in her novel several characters with similar psychological problems and letting their stories run head-to-head throughout the novel.

Actually, we meet the Gadfly only halfway through the book. First his part is played by Rene and Marguerite de Marterel, whose father liked his peace and his books too much to care about his children after their mother's premature death. Marquis de Marterel sends Rene and Marguerite away to the houses of his relatives — the children feel betrayed and abandoned, later on they are unable either to forget or to forgive the shock. As we see, the psychological injury is familiar to us; the trouble of the similar kind — a betrayal of those most dear — haunted the Gadfly throughout his life.

A few chapters later Dr. Marchan joins the story and presents us another variant of the same psychological problem: his wife betrayed him with his colleague, ruined his life and career and then committed suicide, We see the plot moving to its climax — to the appearance of Felix Rivarez, the Gadfly.

All these people have strong character and personality, all of them are shown in the moments of extreme tension, all of them fight with loneliness and despair to their utmost, none of them in this book wins.

In *The Interrupted Friendship* you will not meet the indefinite threatening fatality of Voynich's first novel; it is quite "neo-romantically" replaced by passions. If for a romantic hero of the beginning of the XIX-th c. passions were the instruments of understanding and asserting oneself as an individual, for a neo-romantic hero the unrestricted passions became the instruments of destruction [5, 8].

As the author of *The Interrupted Friendship* is experimenting with her heroes, she has to distance herself from them and play the part of an objective observer. She can still allow herself white and black colours and sarcasm with the background characters but the description of the main ones gains in strength and persuasion as their author grows less partial, and the story of the human soul eaten away by pain and distrust becomes even more formidable.

The last novel to be mentioned here, *Put Off Thy Shoes*, written 35 years later, describes the life of

Beatrice Rivers, the Gadfly's grandmother. This is unquestionably stylistically the most elegant and subtle of E. L. Voynich's novels. The initial conflict is still the same: young Beatrice Rivers's life is crushed in early youth by the voluptuousness of her step-father, who actually attempted to rape her, and silly pettishness and jealousy of her mother. Beatrice sees people in the distorted mirror of her own soul, full of terror, distrust, and hatred. Passions rage inside her soul, she desperately fights for at least moral independence and freedom, her frightened gaze does not discern what she sees — all people seem the odious "jehu" of Hulliver's stories. In this novel the character develops before our eyes, and though there are no breathtaking adventures of Voynich's previous novels, the skill of the author and the emotional tension are so great, that the novel absorbs you like the most thrilling adventure story.

The events of the novel, as it was already mentioned, are shown mainly through Beatrice Rivers "stream of consciousness", where several sides of her individuality are speaking and arguing, growing richer as the voices from the outward reality blend into the in-

ner monologue. The writer is cunning in her technique. She makes us see with Beatrice's eyes. First, it is a blurred picture, which grows clearer and more objective as Beatrice's conscience gropes for the way towards inner peace.

This, perhaps, is the only neo-romantic novel, where the personality wins the duel between the individuality and morality without crushing one or the other. Moreover, this may be the unique example of a neo-romantic hero accomplishing his major objective — finding the way back to society without losing his individuality.

E. L. Voynich's trilogy, due to the similarity of the psychological background and psychological characteristics of her protagonists, affords us a unique opportunity to watch not only the development of a romantic hero, but also the development of the author and of the author's approach to her hero. These novels, from *The Gadfly* (1897) to *Put Off Thy Shoes* (1945), are, figuratively, the grain which can put us wise to some processes that were going on in the world literature during the first half of the XX-th century.

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ГОЛОВНИЙ ГЕРОЙ ТВОРІВ Е. Л. ВОЙНІЧ У КОНТЕКСТІ НЕОРОМАНТИЗМУ

Ця робота пропонує аналіз характерних рис головного героя Е.Л.Войніч в трьох романах трилогії: "Овод", "Перервана дружба", "Зніми обув твою"; досліджує, як еволюціонував образ головного героя з плином часу та, відповідно, зі зміною інтересів, позиції, цілей письменниці. Трилогія, що об'єднана єдиним героєм, дозволяє чітко простежити етапи розвитку світогляду письменниці та зробити узагальнюючі висновки щодо деяких характерних рис романтизму XIX ст. та романтизму XX ст.