

Tracing Byron's Influence on Nikolay Nekrasov

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*The article investigates various facets of George Gordon Byron's influence on Nikolay Nekrasov. Traditionally, scholars have viewed these two poets as antipodes, belonging to different literary movements, Nekrasov to Realism and Byron to Romanticism. However, an analysis demonstrates that the themes and problematics of Byron's poetry, as well as the classic Byronic hero and motifs, remained relevant to Nekrasov throughout his entire literary career, beginning with his early collection *Mechty i zvuki* (1840), up to his poem *Komu na Rusi zhit' khorosho* (1877). Particularly the latter's structure was influenced by the structure of Byron's long poems.*

Keywords: Russian poetry / romanticism / Nekrasov, Nikolay / literary influences / English poetry / Byron

The influence of the poetry of Lord George Gordon Byron on the poetic systems of Nikolay Alekseyevich Nekrasov has yet to be described by researchers. The reasons behind this are understandable: Nekrasov knew Byron's work exclusively through Russian-language translations, he didn't read English, and thus, his Byronism was mediated, inherited from others, including Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Vasiliĭ Zhukovskii, Vladimir Benediktov, and Alekseĭ Pleshcheyev. In addition to this, the peak of Nekrasov's artistic productivity came during the years when Byron and the Romanticism that he embodied had long been considered anachronistic, while the Realism-orientated discussion of social issues exemplified by Nekrasov's own poetry was viewed as its antipode. Contemporaries counterposed Nekrasov with Pushkin and Lermontov, and the line in the sand ran directly through the earlier poets' Byronism. There was a famous scene at Nekrasov's funeral, described by Dostoyevsky in his *Dnevnik pisatelya*. In this respect, among poets (that is, those who arrived with the 'new word'), Dostoyevsky quotes from his own eulogy,

“Nekrasov’s rightful place is behind Pushkin and Lermontov.” When I voiced this, it set off a small incident: a lone voice from the crowd cried out that Nekrasov was *above* Pushkin and Lermontov and that the latter had been mere “Byronists.” Several voices joined in, shouting, “Yes, above!” (Dostoevskii 112–113)

Even so, Nekrasov and Byron can be seen as poets who share a deep affinity (see Miller 29–130). Many of Nekrasov’s poems quote classic texts by Byron (Miller 150). Although there is no foundation for a discussion of Byron’s direct influence on Nekrasov, studying Nekrasov’s Byronism will allow us to clarify our ideas about the literary evolution of Nekrasov as a poet. The aim of the present paper is to outline the most potentially fruitful themes related to Nekrasov’s Byronism that will serve to deepen our understanding of his overall artistic path.

Byronism in early Nekrasov (collection *Mechty i zvuki*)

Byronic themes and intonations, running rife throughout the poetry of Lermontov, Pushkin, and the other aforementioned poets, remained critically relevant to Nekrasov at the very beginning of his literary journey, while he was writing the poems that would later be collected in *Mechty i zvuki*. In this collection, it is not difficult to identify a far-reaching constellation of motifs that, by the end of the 1830s, had been canonized as “Byronic” and was considered Romantic by the broader reading public.

The lyric hero who had been rejected by the world, disappointed in himself and in humanity, an eternal exile, doomed to death rather than life, is a key figure in many of the poems in the collection (see *Beznadezhnost’* 1, 191¹; *Moiā sud’ba* 1, 193; *Izgnannik* 1, 198), and others. The disunion of dreams, “of an azure land” and “offspring of the Earth” (*Zemliaku*, 1, 214. See also *Noch’*, *Somnenie*, *Razgovor*, *Pes’niā*), the important purpose of the poet (*Tot ne poēt*), the “dark and wild beauty” of the mountains, the splendor of a “young houri” (*Gory*, *Turchanka*) – all of these are variations on Byron’s pet themes which had had such a powerful influence on Russian poetry in the 1820s and 30s, and whose influence on *Mechty i zvuki* has been, at the present, thoroughly documented (see, for instance, Vatsuro and Gavkari 640–679).

¹ Hereafter I cite the edition Nekrasov Nikolai, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ i pišem v 15 tomakh*, Leningrad/St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1981–2000. I give the volume number followed by the page number.

In his early poems, Nekrasov applies the mask of the disappointed Byronic hero not only to his lyric speaker, but also to himself, thereby blurring the boundaries between literature and reality – at that time, a fashionable new trend in literature. In a letter to his sister E. A. Nekrasova from November 9, 1840, the 20-year-old Nekrasov tells of his struggles in language, typical of the classic Byronic hero and, while doing this, characteristically switches from prose to verse.

Yesterday, I was bored all day. In the evening, my boredom grew stronger... I was tormented by an unaccountable sadness. I couldn't understand what was happening to me. All of my pursuits disgusted me, all propositions seemed meager ... I was chagrined to be so swallowed up by empty cares. I wrote:

I'm sad... completely drowned in care
 I gave my poor heart no fresh air
 It's hard... why have I myself so deceived...
 And given myself up to dark unease?

I wondered, why is there such a void in my soul? Why am I so rarely and weakly gladdened by things that make others happy and gay... Why am I so indifferent to the success and failure of endeavors that, for others, would send them into seventh heaven or throw them into fits of anger and despair?

This is because, I answered myself, everything seems small and pathetic to me... And if I were to strive for it, I would have to entangle myself in a bright crowd of people who do not share the same goals. I would be pulled into the mainstream and be forced to keep up, fuss, do my business in the marketplace of the world ... It's sad! It's better not to rouse the soul, to throw no sparks onto the ash, and live simply, by instinct, like many others do, the way that many are destined to live and that they even like. (14–21, 29–30)²

Naturally, it is not that there is a direct Byronic influence here, although this passage readily reveals the intonations and themes of Pechorin's diary and, likely, this is no accident. In November 1840, Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time* was still relevant reading in the capital. The novel was published as a separate tome in April that year, and by June and July, it had already been analyzed by the admiring V. G. Belinskiĭ in *Otechestvennye zapiski*.

² All English translation of Nekrasov's extracts are by Bela Shaevich.

Byronism in mature and late Nekrasov

The Byronism of the author of *Mechty i zvuki* is more or less apparent and does not demand much proof. It's more interesting that the semantic aura of Byronic images and themes continues to influence Nekrasov's poetry not only in the early 1840s, but also much later in his literary career. This continuation is a much less obvious component of our topic. It was not only in the era of *Mechty i zvuki* but in subsequent years that Nekrasov's lyric hero would wrap himself in Childe Harold's cloak, which trailed long list of concomitant motifs. These included the heart's early corruption, oversatiation with pleasure, the attempt to find solace in perfect love, the premonition of an early death, and the idea of love as the only antidote to death and disappointment. See: *Ia za to gluboko preziraiū sebiā* (1845), *V nevedomoj glushi, v derevne poludikoj* (1846), *Poslednie èlegii* (1855), *Bezvesten iā, iā vami ne stiāzhal* (1855), *Odinokiū, poteriannyi* (1861); *Umru iā skoro. Zhalkoe nasledstvo...* (1867); *Tri èlegii (A. N. Pleshcheyevu)* (1874). Because the references to Byron in the abovementioned texts have never been explicated by the author, we can presume that these traits of literary Byronism were not conscious on the part of the author.

On the other hand, in certain instances Nekrasov would explicitly reference Byron. For example, in his poem *Prekrasnaia partiia* (1852), everyday Byronism becomes the subject of special reflection. The lyric hero is described as follows:

He revealed Byronic traits
 In his jaded manner:
 He didn't believe in books or dreams,
 Nor in the ballroom, either.
 (1, 110)

Behind each "Byronic trait" referred to in this poem there are tangible elements of everyday life (Dussault's restaurant, playing cards and billiards, going to dances – here we can also recognize allusions to *Evgenii Onegin*) and thus the poem transforms into a caricature, worth irony. Nekrasov uses a similar strategy in two late poems. In *Tri èlegii*, the protagonist's disappointment and sorrow, which in his early years had been elements of a literary game and had echoed what had been fashionable in poetry, are now projected onto real life situations, taking on autobiographical specificity, and the literary mask becomes a true face:

Every attachment – severed, and the reason
 Has long since turned to show its ugly face
 I look at life, my eyes still disbelieving
 That it's all over now! My hair is going gray
 (3, 130)

Naturally, the eternally-young hero of Romantic poetry cannot go gray, but it is his very shadow that looms over these autobiographical verses. Finally, Byron's as well as Nekrasov's lyric poetry is distinguished by the autobiographical character of the lyrical protagonist, the ultimate proximity of the speaker and the real poet (e.g., Nekrasov's *Rytsar' na chas*). This tendency can be observed in the love poems of both, where the lovers are not abstract characters but specific, actual individuals, what imbues their poetry with a touch of intimacy.

In addition to Byronic images and themes that marked Nekrasov's poetic system, Byron's poetry also influenced the formal elements of Nekrasov's poetic epos, which can be seen, first and foremost, in the structure of his poem *Komu na Rusi Zhit' khorosho*.

Byron's *The Corsair* in Nekrasov's reading

In Nekrasov's late autobiographical writings, which he dictated in 1877, shortly before his death, Nekrasov remembers how as a teenager, as a student at the men's gymnasium in Yaroslavl, he read V. N. Olin's adaptation of Byron's *The Corsair*.

In our library, I found two poems: Byron's *The Corsair*, translated by Olin, and Pushkin's ode *Svoboda*. "When the midnight star sparkles / On the dark Neva / And sleep gently weighs down / The head freed of its cares," and so on. In gymnasium, I fell into phrasemaking, started reading magazines, and, around the same time, I started writing satires on my school friends. (Lebedev-Polianskiĭ 147)

When citing *Svoboda*, Nekrasov is probably referring to Pushkin's ode *Vol'nost'*. A similar story is recounted in another autobiographical sketch from the same period, which points to the fact that the names Nekrasov mentioned are no accident.³ (See also Lebedev-Polianskiĭ 153)

³ In Nekrasov's poem *Russkie zhenshchiny*, the names of Pushkin and Byron also appear in close proximity. Pushkin is depicted as a "Byronist" – Princess Maria Volkonskaya says about him: "He took English lessons / From my sister Lena / In those days, he adored Byron" (4, 168).

The adaptation of Byron's *The Corsair* into prose noted by Nekrasov is the work of the poet, translator, and publisher Valerian Nikolaevich Olin. It was published in 1827 with a rather flamboyant subtitle: "*The Corsair: A Romantic Tragedy in Three Acts with a Choir, A Romance, Two Songs, One Turkish and One Arabic, Adapted from the English-Language Poem of the Same Name by Lord Byron*" (St. Petersburg, 1827). The critics more or less unanimously panned Olin's "Romantic tragedy," calling it confused, citing the absence of plot and its stylistic indulgences, comparing the verse to "an angry rooster walking on stilts" (Maslov 76–77). In an unfinished sketch, Pushkin, an admirer of the tragedy, wrote that "Byron's charming and deep poetry" had been replaced by Olin's "overblown and hideous prose, worthy of our poor imitators of the deceased Kotseb" (Pushkin 64). He further accused the author of bad taste. His criticisms are, in part, a response of Olin's review of *Bakhchisarajskij fontan* (Olin 198–202) and make up part of the context of the literary polemics surrounding Byron's poem, which are outside of the scope of the present study.

Valerian Olin remained almost entirely faithful to Byron's plot. In his tragedy, as in Byron's, the somber, mysterious Conrad, of aristocratic Italian origins, becomes a criminal after he finds himself disappointed in humanity. "But I began suffocating in the intolerable constraint of people's society! Involuntarily, my heart would rage! People – slaves and tyrants – insulted me; my wounded ambition roused, ignited, grew furious, and I declared war on man" (Olin 14). The only thing that connects the well-bred criminal to the world of "men" is his passionate love for Medora, who returns Conrad's love and yearns for him during his frequent travels. Unexpectedly, Medora finds a rival in a Turkish beauty named Gulnare, a favorite courtesan of the Turkish Pasha in Greece, Seid. Conrad valiantly rescues Gulnare from a sure death in a fire, and she in turn saves him from bondage. Conrad remains faithful to Medora, but when he reaches the island where his beloved awaits him, he finds her dead. Several hours before his appearance, Medora had perished, unable to stand the distance and mystery any longer.

Olin attempted to push the most effective episodes from Byron's poem into the foreground of his tragedy. He amplified the dimensions and rich imagery of the battle scene between the pirates and Seid's soldiers, the fire in the harem, Conrad's miraculous rescue of Gulnare, and Conrad and Gulnare's escape by sea. Unlike the critics, the young Nekrasov was not only not disgusted but also quite taken by Olin's descriptions of his mysterious and valiant hero, his nobility, his yearning for freedom, his capacity for love, and his fidelity. According to

Korneĭ Chukovskii, who, admittedly, did not cite a source,⁴ Nekrasov still knew fragments of this book by heart many years later:

In that pompous book, you could find the following words, “He must die, that tyrannical monster! ... May freedom be pierced from his blood, may he be stabbed through the heart! ... Love and freedom, fortify Gulnare’s hand!” These appeals for freedom apparently greatly impressed Nekrasov because even thirty-five years on, he could recite them for his friends from memory. (Chukovskii 569–583; English translation by Bela Shaeovich)

What he means by thirty-five years and to which point in time they should be added remains a mystery. By all accounts, it should be when Nekrasov was in gymnasium, that is, in the 1830s. From this, we may draw the conclusion that in the middle of the 1860s, the plot of *The Corsair* had not been forgotten.

With much more certainty we can claim that Olin’s tragedy remained interesting to Nekrasov while he was working on his early poems. The protagonist of the 1840’s poem *Turchanka*, which was included in *Mechty i zvuki*, has the same name as the heroine of *The Corsair*, Gulnare.

Gulnare, young houri,
How many flames and rays
Of love, music, and words,
Greetings, caresses and songs of heaven,
Smoulder in the fire of your eyes. (1, 221)

We also know with complete certainty that Nekrasov had not forgotten Olin’s book in 1877, when he mentioned it twice in his memoirs. From this, we will allow the conclusion that it was the “Romantic tragedy” of *The Corsair* that influenced Nekrasov’s ideas about the ideal poem.

Komu na Rusi zhit' khorosho and The Corsair

Olin adapted Byron’s poem to the language of drama, and in this regard, his version of *The Corsair* was not completely a tragedy, it was a tragedy with a poem in the anamnesis. *The Corsair* was comprised of memorable, effective numbers, which can be gleaned from its subtitle, *A*

⁴ In the broad corpus of published reminiscences about Nekrasov that was analyzed for this study, there was no other description of any such episode (see *Nekrasov v vosponinaniĭakh i pis'makh sovremennikov* 545–559).

Romantic Tragedy in Three Acts with a Choir, Romance, And Two Songs, One Turkish, One Arabic. There really is a choir of pirates, then a love romance from Medora that echoes Medora's song in Byron's poem. The Turkish and Arabic songs that Seid's courtesans sing in honor of Gulnare are Olin's own invention, as is the transformation of the monologue opening Byron's poem about the lot of the pirates into a pirates' choir.

The choir, the songs, the romances, originally in the frame of a poem, and then a tragedy – is it a stretch to say that the delight of the young Nikolay Nekrasov before this flamboyance and diversity of forms is reflected in the composition of *Komu na Rusi zhit' khorosho?* There is no sense in seeking out parallels between the contents of Nekrasov's poem and Olin's tragedy. However, the formal structure of *Komu na Rusi* allows for at least posing the question of drawing possible parallels.

Komu na Rusi is a poem in the form of a drama, presenting a chain of scenes, including mass scenes, monologues, dialogues, and songs. The latter are especially numerous in the *Krest'ianka* section. In the *Pesni* chapter, there is a choir of wayfarers, "Pletka svistnula, krov' probryznula," and other songs, including "Golodnaia," "Soldatskaia," "Barshchinnaia," "Solënaia," and finally, Grisha Dobrosklonov's song "Rus'."

You're terrible
 And you're bountiful
 You're mighty
 And you're powerless
 Mother Russia! (5, 233)

This manifest oxymoron, a union of mutually-exclusive descriptions, seems to correlate with the formal diversity of the poem itself, which brings together many different genres, including musical genres, which, in turn, correlate to the many faces and bright features of the world of Russian folk culture.

Of course, this very marked dramatization of the poem *Komu na Rusi* might be considered the logical culmination of Nekrasov's long journey. In the beginning of the 1840s, he was forced to write vaudevilles, which he was later embarrassed of, and were hence not included in his collected works. However, it is possible that these early theatrical experiments were the source of one of Nekrasov's favorite devices. Nekrasov often theatricalized the action in a poem. Many of them are dialogues, live scenes (see for instance *V doroge*, *Ogorodnik*, *Delovoi razgovor*, *V derevne*, *Utro*, *Izvozchik*, *Zabytaia derevnia*, *Ubogatai i nariadnaia*, *Poët i grazhdanin*). The tendency toward theater can also

be seen in his long poems (including *Korobeĭniki*, *Krest'ianskie deti*, *Russkie zhenshchiny*, and *Moroz krasnyĭ nos*) which, in the framework of this genre, seems much more justified.

The entirety of Nekrasov's satire *Zabakovannye* (1859) may be seen as a genre parody on Olin's *The Corsair* and the tragedy presented in it. Nekrasov's satire carries the subtitle, "A Tragedy in Three Acts with an Epilogue, Folk Songs and Dances, and A Terrific Bengal Flame" (6, 190). The girls' dance in this play has some parallels with the harem scenes in *The Corsair*; *Zabakovannye* also features a hay fire (6, 205) that is reminiscent of the harem fire in *The Corsair*. However, it should be mentioned that by the end of the 1850s, fire had already taken on a canonical role in melodramas.⁵ It is important that in *Komu na Rusi* there is absolutely no satire. The many voices, mass scenes, and polyphony of genres carry no ironic subtext. This is because for the world of folk culture, the depiction of which forms the central meaning of the poem, choral singing and polyphony are organic and natural.

The ballet version of *The Corsair* was likely also instrumental in resurrecting Nekrasov's literary impressions from his youth. It was staged in St. Petersburg based on Byron's poem with music by composers Adolphe Adam and Léo Delibes, Riccardo Drigo and Cesare Pugni. The first choreographer was Jules Perrot, who was then replaced by Marius Petipa. The premiere was on January 12, 1858 at the Bol'shoĭ Kamennoi Theater. At that time, Nekrasov was in Rome, but the ballet was shown 14 more times and he had the opportunity to see it (Pleshcheyev 164). Petipa's production debuted on January 24, 1863 at the Mariinskiĭ Theater. Although in Perrot's production Medora had been played by the famous dancer Carolina Rosati, she did not fully satisfy the hopes of her admirers (Pleshcheyev 170). Petipa's production had much more resonance. The part of Medora was played by crowd favorite and Petipa's wife. For her, Petipa wrote a separate comic number about a little corsair which enjoyed great success. The public greeted her with much applause, a multitude of bouquets, and presented her with expensive jewelry.

There are no direct testimonies about whether Nekrasov actually saw *The Corsair*, but it's very unlikely that he would have missed such a lauded premiere. He was a regular at the ballet, judging not only by his 1866 satire *Ballet*, which reveals the author's deep knowledge of

⁵ For instance, Ducagne's famous melodrama *Thirty Years, or the Life of a Gambler* ended in a fire. By the end of the 1850s, it had been canonical for a long time, having been present in many productions.

the ins and outs of theater (“You well-mannered people should know / That I myself love ballet / ‘I’m struck by cupid’s arrow’ / No joke – it’s a heartfelt hello!”), but also from the memoirs of his contemporaries.⁶

According to a contemporary ballet researcher, with *The Corsair*, Petipa created variations that differed from one another, but developed one extravagant theme of movement.

As in a virtuosic musical episode, fast tempos are followed by slow but no less difficult passages, the flying leaps of one variation were followed by the minute, intricate movements of the next. Then, bold fluid figures were traced over the stage in the next. In the simplest ‘program’ of a discrete number, the dance theme developed polyphonically, corresponding to the celebratory mood of the act as a whole. (Krasovskaia 243)

It is important to mention that the second production of this ballet was staged in 1863. Accordingly, the idea for the polyphonic structure of *Komu na Rusi* originates in the middle of the 1860s.

Olin’s tragedy may have played a certain role in Nekrasov’s structural decisions, although we should not exclude, as in the case of *Zbrakovannye*, that for Nekrasov, *The Corsair* represented a much broader literary tradition, namely, of the Byronic Romantic poem as such. In its essence, Byron’s poetry tends toward dramatic composition, as “it is ruled by a striving toward completed scenes and stand-alone images” (Zhirmunskii 62). Insertions in the form of songs are characteristic of Byron’s poems as well as of Pushkin’s so-called Southern poems that follow them (Zhirmunskii 91, 327). In *Kavkazskii plennik*, Pushkin inserted a Cherkessian song, in *Bakhchisaraiskii fontan* a Tatar song (the influence of this poem on the description of the harem in Olin’s tragedy is apparent), in *Tsygany* a song about a bird and a Moldovan romance.

Nonetheless, the fact that it is not the Southern poems of Pushkin but *The Corsair* that Nekrasov recalls in his later years, as well as the timing of the productions of *The Corsair* in St. Petersburg (the end of the 1850s and beginning of the 1860s), along with the testimony from

⁶ “I never got into the gastronomical society, but Nekrasov did manage to drag me to the ballet once, and it was the only time I had ever gone to the ballet. ... Ballet attracted him with the same three aspects: it was beautiful, it was important to know, and it allowed him to get closer to the people he needed to get closer to. If anyone wants to take issue with any of these arguments, claiming that good food and the beauty of ballet come first, this would be vain quibbling. Nekrasov never even pretended to have contempt for the ‘fleeting comforts of life’” (Mikhailovskii 290). See: Vazem 194. On the role of ballet in Nekrasov’s poetry, see Makeev 162–165.

Chukovskii, allow for the supposition that the influence of V. N. Olin's "Romantic tragedy" on Nekrasov is very likely. Another important but underestimated factor of influence is the interest in the figure and poetry of Byron in Russian literary circles at the end of the 1850s and beginning of the 1860s, including the circle around Nekrasov's journal *Sovremennik*, which was always very sensitive to contemporary cultural phenomena. The reception of Byron's poetry in Russian society and Nekrasov's *Sovremennik* in particular are the final subject that should be addressed in this discussion.

Byron in Nekrasov's journal *Sovremennik*

The interest in Byron's poetry in *Sovremennik* began in the 1850s. For instance, in 1850, in the "Arts and Sciences" section, the magazine published a long piece by P. I. Redkin entitled "George Gordon Byron" (*Sovremennik* No.1, No. 2–5). After several years, in the late 1850s, a number of articles demonstrating an abiding interest in Byron's poetry appeared. In 1858, *Sovremennik* published a translation of the poem *Mazeppa*, translated by D. L. Mikhailovskii (No. 5); in 1859, a translation of *Parisina* by Apollon Grigor'iev, with a dedication to Nekrasov (No. 8). In 1860, fragments of *Childe Harold* translated by M. I. Mikhaïlov (No. 10); in 1863, *Beppo*, translated by D. D. Minaev (No. 8); and in 1864, *Hebrew Melodies*, translated by Nikolay Gerbel. 1865 and 1866 saw the publication of *Don Juan* translated by D. D. Minaev, and then, in Nekrasov's *Otechestvennye zapiski*, in 1868, Byron was published in translations by Mikhailovskii. A noticeable break followed. However, in the beginning and middle of the 1860s, there was almost no issue of *Sovremennik* without a translation of Byron (the only exception to this was in 1862, a tragic year for the journal).

In the 1860s, the ideologically similar periodical *Russkoe slovo* published Byron nearly as often as *Sovremennik*. Translations of Byron were also regularly published in *Otechestvennye zapiski*, *Vek*, as well as *Vremiâ*, where Apollon Grigor'iev printed his seminal article entitled "O Bairone i o materiakh vazhnykh" (1862, No. 10). In it, the critic affirmed the enduring relevance of the poet. An important watershed in the history of Byron's reception in Russia was the release of the five-volume collection compiled by the poet and translator N. V. Gerbel, *Bairon v perevodakh russkikh poetov* (Gerbel). This collection included what he considered to be the best translations of Byron's long and short

poems. The book was well-received and reviewed in journals including *Golos*, *Knizhnyi vestnik*, *Russkii invalid*, *Otechestvennye zapiski*, *Sovremennik*, in the newspaper *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* and others (Tiulina 294).

Today, despite its popularity among researchers (Liusova; Byron; Nebol'sin), the history of Byronism in Russia is documented only fragmentarily. The era of the greatest attention paid to Byron by the Russian literary establishment, namely the 1820s and 1830s, is rather well-studied, as well as the Russian interest in the author of *Childe Harold* at the turn of the twentieth century (Nebol'sin 187–199). However, Byronism in the 1860s seems improbable to the majority of Russian specialists. Probably, that is why in two separate monographs that are mostly devoted to the subject of Byron's reception in Russia, his place in Russian letters and culture in the 1860s and 1870s is practically passed over.

Meanwhile, by the 1860s, Byron has taken on the status of a classic author, albeit one who had been banned by the censors on more than one occasion (Oksman 256–257). He had a reputation as a freedom fighter who had given his life for his convictions. For obvious reasons, such a figure was particularly attractive at the time of liberalization, especially in the eyes of the intelligentsia supporting this cultural shift.

The characteristics of a classic Byronic hero, be it Childe Harold or Don Juan or the protagonists of the oriental poems include disappointment, theomachy, loneliness, the sense of being chosen, and an alienation from the overwhelming majority of society. These must have been particularly attractive to the new element in Russian society that emerged on the stage of history in the beginning of the 1860s, the *raznochintsy* (literally “people of various ranks”), liberal and radical positivist admirers of natural sciences coming mainly from a stratum of Russian society that is not directly associated with any existing Russian social class and derives from families of priests, doctors, merchants, and impoverished nobility. Their strangeness and status as outsiders must have, paradoxically, overlapped with the Byronic models of behavior, despite the latter's aristocratic origins. It is no accident that Nekrasov's revolutionaries, mourned in his elegiac poems, are so reminiscent of Byron's protagonists. Austerity, firmness of spirit, and a strong commitment to ideas unite Conrad and Dobrolyubov in a poem dedicated to this famous Russian critic's memory.⁷

⁷ See the following story about Conrad: “Whenever asked an indelicate question, he always had the same answer: an angry look, or a condescending smile. Although it

Nekrasov's supposed interest in Byron corresponded with the mood of his epoch, which he was always sensitive to. At the same time, Byron apparently always remained an exemplary author who, along with Pushkin, had ushered Nekrasov into the world of major literature at a young age.

Conclusion

We have followed the evolution of Nekrasov's Byronism. We were able to show that during the composition of *Mechty i zvuki*, Nekrasov mastered the adapting of Byronic themes and literary formulas. Later, Nekrasov would adopt some of these themes and heroes and adapt them to his poetic system, while, at the same time, actively parodying them. Thus, both Byron and Nekrasov's poetry are distinguished by their reflective and autobiographical narrators, who hate violence and tyranny and dream of freedom – both personal and political – for all the oppressed. The direct consequence of the speakers' disillusionment with the imperfections of the world around them is skepticism and a satirical depiction of reality. Both authors regularly employed satire and irony.

In his poem *Komu na Rusi zhit' khorosho*, he attempted to reproduce several formal elements of Byron's poetry. It is possible that topics related to Nekrasov's Byronism, as outlined in this paper, will also be useful for studying the evolution of the long poem in the history of Russian poetry in general.

was a smile, it would paralyze whomever it was addressed to. Never does the chalice brimming with boiling grape juice approach his lips, and Conrad's food is so simple, that even the strictest faster or ascetic couldn't refuse it. He rejects all crude sensual indulgences, for which, it seems, his spirit torments him through his restraint" (Olin 12–13). And also Nekrasov's *Pamiāti Dobroliūbova*: "You were severe in your young age / You could control your passion with your reason. / You taught to live for glory and for freedom / And most of all, you taught all how to die. / Intentionally, the world's indulgences / You would reject, your purity preserve, / You would not sate your heart's great thirst; / You loved your Motherland as one loves a woman, / And thus your efforts, hopes, and thought" (2, 173). On the similarities between Nekrasov's depictions of revolutionaries and the Romantic poetry of Zhukovsky see Nemzer 542. Vestiges of the traits of a Romantic hero can also be found in the *Komu na Rusi*'s character Grisha Dobrosklonov. He is a poet, practically a Romantic "singer," and loneliness and exile loom in his future ("consumption and Siberia").

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Sledenje Byronovemu vplivu na Nikolaja Nekrasova

Ključne besede: ruska poezija / romantika / Nekrasov, Nikolaj / literarni vplivi / angleška poezija / Byron

Članek preučuje več vidikov vpliva Georgea Gordona Byrona na Nikolaja Nekrasova. Znanstveniki omenjena pesnika običajno dojemajo kot antipoda, pripadajoča različnim literarnim gibanjem – Nekrasov realizmu, Byron pa romantiki. Kljub temu analiza pokaže, da so teme in problematike Byronove poezije pa tudi klasični byronovski junak in motivi ostali relevantni skozi celoten opus Nekrasova, začenši z zgodnjo zbirko *Sanje in zvoki* (1840) pa vse do epa *Kdo v Rusiji dobro živi* (1877). Zlasti na strukturo tega epa je vplivala struktura Byronovih dolgih pesnitev.

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