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**ROMANTIC AESTHETICS IN THE PARODY «MISS MIX» BY**  
**BRET HARTE**

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**Abstract**

This article is dedicated to the study of the artistic originality of "Miss Mix", the parody by Francis Bret Harte, from the "Condensed Novels" cycle (1865). The author transforms the novels by the 19th century English writers, the Brontë sisters, into a short parody novel and uses the stylistic technique traditional for the parodies of this cycle – closeness to the original. The images of characters, storylines, a special Gothic atmosphere of parodied works are reproduced in the parody. To construct a comic image of the artistic reality of the novels by the English writers, Bret Harte uses burlesque and travesty hyperboles. The resulting comparison of the material of the works by the Brontë sisters and their style makes it possible, in a refracted form, but quite authentically, to reflect the artistic reality of the parodied works, to reveal the originality of the phenomenon of the work of the English writers, which is characterized by innovative, realistic features, but which is not free from the influence of the romantic tradition. The parody interpretation of the creative heritage of the Brontë sisters anticipated the conclusions of modern researchers about the national specifics of the development of English literature in the first half of the 19th century, which consisted in creative refraction of evolutionary processes, special attention to moral and aesthetic problems, and belief in the triumph of reason.

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## **1. Introduction**

The critical potential of literary parody, its cognitive, creative, constructive capabilities are of interest to modern researchers in the context of studying the formation and development of new directions in literature and art. Parody has established itself as a powerful weapon in literary polemics and the struggle to establish new aesthetic principles.

The parody cycle "Condensed Novels" (1865) by F. Bret Harte played an important role in the writer's creative biography, anticipating his success as a short story writer. The phenomenon of parody works by F. Bret Harte is an important stage in the history of the formation and development of the genre of literary parody in American literature of the second half of the 19th century.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The research is devoted to the study of the artistic originality of the parody "Miss Mix" by F. Bret Harte from the "Condensed Novels" parody cycle. Bret Harte's parody rethinking of the Brontë sisters' legacy focuses on creatively refracting romantic and realistic tendencies in the writers' aesthetic system.

## **3. Research Questions**

The main questions of this study are:

**3.1.** What is the specificity of the parodic system of argumentation by F. Bret Harte, used by him to evaluate the creativity of the Brontë sisters?

**3.2.** What techniques does the author use to create a comic image of the writers' artistic style?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to study the critical possibilities of literary parody as a means of fighting for the establishment of new aesthetic principles and discrediting the principles of romantic aesthetics in the process of literary development.

## **5. Research Methods**

The main methods of this research are historical-genetic, cultural-historical, and biographical commentary.

## **6. Findings**

The phenomenon of a multifaceted, complex, essentially elite genre of literary parody is an object of careful study in modern literary criticism. The theoretical foundation of current research was the classic works by Yuri Tynyanov on the nature of the parody genre (Tynyanov, 1977). Of particular interest to scientists is the closeness of parody and literary criticism. This strong relationship and an arsenal of unique tools for realizing the critical potential of parody is explored in a number of works (Calasso, 2018; Falikov,

2019; Fedotova, 2019; Ivanova, 2016). The creative, constructive possibilities of parody poetics in the context of the formation of new aesthetic systems are considered in works dedicated to the study of new literary trends, directions, schools and the artistic originality of the creative heritage of outstanding writers (Kuznetsova, 2017; Rejtlat & Ulanov, 2019; Stone, 2017). The genre specificity of parody and the nature of its interaction with various genre models are actively studied (Anisimova, 2019; Lushnikova, 2011). Parody becomes an important aspect in the study of the pragmatic features of special texts (Dubrovskiy, 2014).

A striking example of the embodiment of the critical capabilities of literary parody was the parody cycle "Condensed Novels" (Bret Harte, 1899) by the outstanding American writer of the second half of the 19th century, Francis Bret Harte, which was first published in 1865 in the literary periodical "The Californian" in San Francisco. The work by the sisters Charlotte, Emily and Anna Brontë has become the target of the parody criticism of the parody "Miss Mix" of this cycle. The title of the parody "Miss Mix" (from English "to mix") refers the reader to the work of the English writers, hinting at a certain similarity, commonality of their aesthetic principles. The object of the parody by F. Bret Harte is the artistic originality of the works of the Brontë sisters, without whose creative heritage it is impossible to imagine 19th century English literature. The storyline of the parody is based on the fate of the main character of Charlotte Brontë's novel "Jane Eyre" (1847). Then again, the collisions of other works of the writers, for example, the first novel by Anna Brontë "Agnes Gray" (1847), the only novel by Emily Brontë "Wuthering Heights" (1847) are quite recognizable. These works refer the reader to the well-known facts of the biography of the writers, who were tested by poverty, illness, and hard work. It is known that the sisters Charlotte, Emily and Anna Brontë were forced to work as governesses and teachers.

The heroine of the parody, Miss Mix, is a poor governess who bravely resists life's adversities. Here's what she tells the reader: «Our family was a family of governesses. My mother had been one, and my sisters had the same occupation. Consequently, when, at the age of thirteen, my eldest sister handed me the advertisement of Mr. Rawjester, clipped from that day's "Times," I accepted it as my destiny» (Bret Harte, 1899, p. 103). A collective comic image of the heroines created by the writers in their works is formed before the reader.

These ordinary women are fighting for their independence and human dignity, for the right to work freely and to earn an honest living, for the right to love and to have a happy family life. They are able to think about life seriously, to feel deeply, to stoically resist the blows of fate. This female character is based on an innovative, bold approach to portraying a contemporary woman. The rebellious spirit, unwillingness to submit to an unjust social order, a new look at the role and the place of women in modern society, inherent in the works by the Brontë sisters, made their works the property of English literature. Bret Harte practically anticipated the conclusions of modern researchers about the peculiarities of the evolution of female images in English literature at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Sadomskaya & Lashtabova, 2020). The artistic practice and aesthetic principles of the Brontë sisters became the point of intersection of romantic tendencies, which is clearly felt in a certain overlap of their work with the images created by Byron and Shelley, and the realistic traditions laid down by the works of Dickens and Thackeray, and also largely determined the prospects for the development of the novel in the second half of the 19th century, embodied in the works of George Eliot, George Meredith. The creative refraction of the evolutionary

processes of literary development determines the artistic originality of the Brontë sisters' novels, their strengths and weaknesses.

Bret Harte masterfully conveys the artistic originality of the writers' creative heritage in the "Miss Mix" parody. The parodist exaggerates the new type of a heroine; as noted above, the image is largely autobiographical. This is the governess Miss Mix, who fearlessly makes her way to her new duty station in the gloomy residence of her new owner, Mr. Rawjester, bravely making her way through the impassable thicket of trees. She is not afraid of the bad weather, the chilling howl of the wind, the ghostly mysterious creatures flying in the air. In the castle of Mr. Rawjester, the brave and fearless Miss Mix does not allow the nightmarish despot Mr. Rawjester to insult herself and humiliate her human dignity. He flies into the castle through the open window, and does not use the door, as is customary among ordinary people. Then he suddenly flies out of the window into a storm and soars in the air, arms outstretched. Miss Mix learns about the existence of Mr. Rawjester's three previous wives, they are locked up, and their names are No. One, No. Two, No. Three. Mr. Rawjester regularly asks the domestic staff about their health, whether they are well fed, what mood they are in:

"Have you fed No. One?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said a gruff voice, apparently belonging to a domestic.

"How's No. Two?"

"She's a little off her feed, just now, but will pick up in a day or two!"

"And No. Three?"

"Perfectly furious, sir. Her tantrums are ungovernable."

"Hush!" (Bret Harte, 1899, p. 108).

Amazingly, one of the wives breaks free, it is No. One – an angry black woman of a gigantic height. She breaks into Mr. Rawjester's bedroom and tries to start a fire. It was only thanks to the vigilance and courage of Miss Mix that Mr. Rawjester was saved from a terrible death in the fire.

The rather unsightly image of the parody character of Mr. Rawjester refers the reader not only to the character of Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" novel, Edward Rochester. Quite recognizable in him are the features of the character of Emily Brontë's novel "Wuthering Heights" – the gloomy, embittered, vengeful Heathcliff. Both of them are a type of a Byronic hero – a tribute to the romantic tradition, comically rethought in the parody. Here is how the heroine describes her first impression of meeting Mr. Rawjester: «He had never once looked at me. He stood with his back to the fire, which set off the herculean breadth of his shoulders. His face was dark and expressive; his under jaw squarely formed, and remarkably heavy. I was struck with his remarkable likeness to a Gorilla» (Bret Harte, 1899, p. 105).

Both of these novels by the Brontë sisters are also related by a kind of gloomy atmosphere of a "gothic nightmare", which takes place against the background of gloomy landscapes of moorlands, a riot of nature, in a secluded manor or in the walls of a gloomy castle. Bret Harte consistently recreates this dire Gothic atmosphere in the parody, describing the ferocity of the nature, the groan and eerie howl of the wind in the alleys of the park and the high gloomy towers of the castle, a mysterious figure hovering in the air, the rumble of demonic laughter: «Blunderbore Hall, the seat of James Rawjester, Esq., was encompassed by dark pines and funereal hemlocks on all sides. The wind sang weirdly in the turrets and moaned through

the long-drawn avenues of the park. As I approached the house I saw several mysterious figures flit before the windows, and a yell of demoniac laughter answered my summons at the bell» (Bret Harte, 1899, p. 104).

Preparations for the next wedding of Mr. Rawjester begin in the castle. His bride is the charming Lady Blanche. On the day of the wedding, the eccentric groom suddenly leaves the guests, declaring: «Make yourselves merry, idiots!» (Bret Harte, 1899, p. 111). A couple of moments later, Mr. Rawjester appears in front of the guests in a robber's costume, threatens them with a pistol, demands to give him their watches and jewelry: «Now, ladies, please to pass up your jewelry and trinkets» (Bret Harte, 1899, p. 112). Poor Miss Mix throws herself on her knees before the terrible robber with a plea: «O sir, I am nothing but a poor governess, pray let me go!» (Bret Harte, 1899, p. 112). Mr. Rawjester has no idea what mistake he is making, exclaiming: «O ho! A governess? Give me your last month's wages, then. Give me what you have stolen from your master!» (Bret Harte, 1899, p. 112). In vain did he allow himself such imprudent statements about an emancipated, independent woman who can earn a honest living. Forgetting the fear, not noticing the gun pointed at her, Miss Mix proudly replies: «I have stolen nothing from you, Mr. Rawjester!» (Bret Harte, 1899, p. 112). Not hiding his rage, threatening to punish Miss Meeks, who unwittingly betrayed him, Mr. Rochester leaves the guests. Suddenly a terrible fire engulfs the castle. Some unknown force snatches Miss Mix out of the raging flames, she finds herself at the top of the hill. Her savior turns out to be Mr. Rawjester, the rescue is followed by a declaration of love and a marriage proposal. After all, all three crazy wives of Mr. Rawjester burned down together with the castle, and he became completely free. Miss Mix immediately agrees: «I fell, without a word, upon his neck» (Bret Harte, 1899, p. 112).

Bret Harte manages to bring the peculiarities of the writers' creative manner, which, in his opinion, violate the artistic integrity of the novel, to the point of absurdity: “Gothic” motifs, melodramatic scenes, unjustified accidents that are woven into the plot, fatal secrets, chance encounters that help to safely resolve life collisions.

A true and reliable reflection of the artistic reality of the works by the Brontë sisters arises in the parody as a result of a comparison of the material and style of the novels: the originality of these works, which are characterized by innovative, realistic features, but are not free from the influence of romantic aesthetics, is revealed. It is quite obvious that the parodist's task is not to discredit, humiliate or insult the parodied authors. The parody by Bret Harte is an experience of a deep, thoughtful analysis of artistic phenomena in the context of the process of literary development.

## 7. Conclusion

Analysis of the parody novel "Miss Mix" by Bret Harte confirms the idea of a strong relationship between parody and literary criticism. The parody is an appreciation of the creative heritage of the Brontë sisters. Exaggerating the images, motives and storylines of the original, Bret Harte characterizes and evaluates the parodied novels. It is obvious that the parodist's task is close to the tasks of literary criticism. Critical assessment must be reasoned, and in this sense, the parody proposes a unique system of argumentation, the basis of which becomes a special way of proof – artistic. Parody is an act of creative criticism that requires a parodist to master artistic skill; it is a genre open for reflection, experimentation, mastering new art forms and creative polemics.

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