

**PERAET 2021****International Scientific Conference «PERISHABLE AND ETERNAL: Mythologies and Social Technologies of Digital Civilization-2021»****BENJAMIN DISRAELI'S LITERARY HERITAGE IN BRET HARTE'S PARODY "LOTHAW"**

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Elena.Zhukova@novsu.ru**Abstract**

This article examines the experience of Bret Harte's parody rethinking of the literary heritage of the outstanding British statesman and talented writer Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), whose works became a definite milestone in the formation of critical realism in the history of 19th English literature. The title of Bret Harte's parody "Lothaw" refers the reader to one of Disraeli's later novels "Lothair" (1870). The storyline and heroes constructing the foreground of the parody are presented in an exaggerated form. Lothaw also embodies the features of the protagonist of Disraeli's first novel "Vivian Gray" (1826). In the background of the parody novel, there appears a capacious image of the genre of a socio-political novel, one of the founders of which in world literature is Disraeli. Disraeli's complex, utopian views on the realities of the political life of England in the mid-19th century are interpreted in a parodic vein. The interaction of the first and second planes of parody gives rise to its deep meaning, which determines the ideological and emotional assessment of the parody works. The comparison of the material and style of Disraeli's works that arises in the parody reflects the creative evolution of the writer and the artistic reality of his novels, the critical, accusatory beginning of which is combined with a romantic-utopian attitude to reality. The parody of Bret Harte is an experience of comprehending Disraeli's creative searches and artistic discoveries in the context of the historical and literary process.

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## 1. Introduction

The uniqueness of the personality of the outstanding British politician, skillful orator, poet, novelist and publicist Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), Earl of Beaconsfield has such inexhaustible intellectual and creative potential that the interest of modern researchers in studying various facets of his political activity and creative heritage does not wane, since allows us to better understand and explain the trends and phenomena of political history and the historical and literary process. Particular attention is paid to the classic works about Disraeli as one of the key figures of the Victorian era and a significant phenomenon in the history of English literature of the 19th century (Blake, 1967; Braun, 1981; Vincent, 1990). In the focus of modern researchers, Disraeli, the writer, appears as an innovator, the creator of new genre modifications of the English novel (Ermakova, 2016; Zenkin, 2018). The ambiguity of assessments and insufficient study of his novelistic work determined the topic of works devoted to the study of the problem of perception of various aspects of Disraeli's literary heritage (Azhel, 2019; Matveenko & Khruleva, 2019; Mironova, 2018). The object of research interest of modern authors is the potential of parody poetics, which makes it possible to consider the problems of perception and interpretation of innovative experience from a specific parodic point of view (Rejtblat, 2019; Stone, 2017). The promise of such an approach is supported by the conclusions about the critical possibilities of literary parody in a number of studies (Falikov, 2019; Fedotova, 2019; Ivanova, 2020).

In the context of the actual problematics of receptive aesthetics, the interaction of cultures and literatures, the attempt of the American writer, journalist, parodist, contemporary of Disraeli Francis Bret Harte (1836-1902) to comically interpret Disraeli's creative manner based on a detailed analysis of artistic phenomena in the process of literary development deserves special attention. The parody collection of the outstanding American writer Francis Bret Harte "Condensed Novels" (Harte, 1899) was a successful literary debut of the author, anticipating the success of the stories of the famous "California" cycle, thanks to which the young Bret Harte gained worldwide fame. An appeal to the parodies of Bret Harte opens up an interesting facet of his work and offers a view from a specific parodic angle of view of outstanding literary phenomena, among which the novel heritage of Benjamin Disraeli is presented, the significance of which is still subject to comprehensive study of modern literary criticism.

## 2. Problem Statement

The work is devoted to the study of the critical and cognitive potential of the parody of F. Bret Harte "Lothaw" from the cycle "Novels in a Concise Presentation" from the point of view of the objectivity of the ideological and emotional assessment of the artistic originality of Disraeli's works. Retrospective perception of parody, taking into account current aesthetic assessments and accumulated literary experience, offers a new look at parodied works and parody itself, provides an opportunity to compare modern ideas about the literary work of Disraeli and the point of view of a parodist. This approach seems to be especially relevant in the context of modern research on cognitive and pragmatic aspects of perception and interpretation of literary text (Ivanova, 2018; Maslennikova, 2018) and text as a subject of linguistic and stylistic analysis (Besedina et al., 2019; Osiyanova & Kuleshova, 2019).

The title of one of the parodies of this collection is "Lothaw or, The Adventures of young gentleman in search of a religion" and the subtitle "By Mr. Benjamins" directly point the reader to the object of parody. Bret Harte clearly has in mind one of the novels of the period of mature creativity of Disraeli "Lothair" (1870), the moral and philosophical problems of which are succinctly formulated in the second part of the title. This is one of the most frequently used parodist tricks in Condensed Novels - contrasting the volumes of parody and original. A work of considerable size, in this case a novel, turns into a laconic short story. The swiftness, conciseness of the parody gives its author a certain advantage over the object of parody and acts as a method of artistic understatement - litotes, subjecting the verbosity of the parodied author to ridicule.

Further acquaintance with the text of the parody allows the sophisticated reader to get to know the heroes, plot collisions and problems of the key works of Disraeli, in which the worldview and poetic dominants of the main stages of his work are focused. In particular, this is the first novel "Vivian Gray" (1826), and the famous political trilogy "Coningsby, or The New Generation" (1844), "Sybil, or The Two Nations" (1845), "Tancred, or The New Crusade" (1847). Such a large-scale transformation of the parody object in terms of volume is harmoniously combined by Bret Harte with the closest attention to the peculiarities of the author's creative manner, allowing him to reproduce the artistic originality of the parodied works in an exaggerated form. Thus, in the parody of Bret Harte, one of the most important conditions for the existence of the genre is realized - the unity of transformation and reproduction. As a result of the interaction of these two principles, the comic image of the artistic world of Disraeli's novels arises.

### **3. Research Questions**

The main questions of this study are:

- 1) What is the artistic originality of Bret Harte's parody as a unity of two principles at the heart of parody - reproduction and transformation of an object in order to create its comic image?
- 2) How does the parodic assessment of Disraeli's works compare with modern ideas about the meaning of his literary heritage from the point of view of objective historical justice?

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

The purpose of this research is to study the cognitive and creative potential of literary parody as a genre. This genre is open to experimentation, comprehension of new artistic forms and creative dialogue.

### **5. Research Methods**

The main methods of this research are cultural-historical, comparative-historical and intertextual analysis. We also used receptive aesthetics method and biographical commentary.

## 6. Findings

Based on the material and internal logic of Disraeli's novels, Bret Harte invites the reader to look through the prism of a parody of Disraeli's contemporary social structure. Bret Harte's attention is focused on a nation of the rich, whose material wealth is meticulously depicted in the smallest detail. The reader is told about the incredible wealth of the protagonist: "Lothaw was immensely rich. The possessor of seventeen castles, fifteen villas, nine shooting-boxes, and seven town houses, he had other estates of which he had not even heard" (Harte, 1899, p. 180). The parodist further notes: "His stables were near Oxford, and occupied more ground than the University" (Harte, 1899, p. 182). Lothaw chooses a pearl thread from a jeweler as a gift for his beloved: «About half a cable's length» (Harte, 1899, p. 185).

The rest of the parody characters are recognizable representatives of the nation of the rich. The venerable family of the duke is represented by his beautiful wife and three daughters, who are not inferior to the beauty and grace of their mother's manners:

*One dexterously applied golden knitting-needles to the fabrication of a purse of floss silk of the rarest texture, which none who knew the almost fabulous wealth of the Duke would believe was ever destined to hold in its silken meshes a less sum than L1,000,000; another adorned a slipper exclusively with seed pearls; a third emblazoned a page with rare pigments and the finest quality of gold leaf. (Harte, 1899, p. 178)*

The burlesque hyperboles that construct the comic image of the nation of the rich contrast with the travesty hyperboles that Bret Harte uses to describe the protagonist's overtly Dandyism antics: "He managed to acquit himself creditably, and avoided drinking out of the finger-bowl by first secretly testing its contents with a spoon" (Harte, 1899, p. 181). This episode seems to be almost a direct quote from the novel "Vivian Gray", the manner of the protagonist of which is sometimes quite unceremonious. It should be noted that this particular novel by Disraeli is considered one of the likely literary sources of Oscar Wilde's novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray" (1890). In this sense, Lothaw's reasoning of this kind is also quite characteristic: "I certainly think that polygamy should be limited by isothermal lines" (Harte, 1899, p. 181).

"A crowd, apparently of the working class" (Harte, 1899, p. 184) represents in a parody a nation of the poor. The myth of the possibility of harmony in the social order that existed, as the author of "Sybil, or The Two Nations" believed, in pre-capitalist England is debunked in the scene of Lothaw's visit to one of his many estates:

*On the steps of the baronial halls, were ranged his retainers, led by the chief cook and bottle-washer, and head crumb-remover. On either side were two companies of laundry-maids, preceded by the chief crimper and fluter, supporting a long Ancestral Line, on which depended the family linen, and under which the youthful lord of the manor passed into the halls of his fathers. Twenty-four scullions carried the massive gold and silver plate of the family on their shoulders, and deposited it at the feet of their master. (Harte, 1899, p. 184)*

The master is ready to take care of the representatives of the nation of the poor: "When I come into my property I should like to build some improved dwellings for the poor" (Harte, 1899, p. 180).

## 7. Conclusion

The comic image of the unique artistic reality of Disraeli's novels appearing in the parody reproduces in an exaggerated form a critical, accusatory beginning, coexisting with an openly romantic-utopian vision of reality. The cognitive and creative potential of Bret Harte's parody "Lothaw" suggests that parody poetics can be a key factor on the path of comprehending and assimilating unique artistic phenomena and discoveries, intense creative searches, which allowed the parodist to comprehend the full depth and complexity of Disraeli's phenomenal aesthetic system, which is still only to be done by modern researchers. Bret Harte, being an attentive reader, a true connoisseur of outstanding works of art and an astute critic, in a parody manner formulated the main characteristics of Disraeli's work in conceptual and ideological terms, considering the writer's legacy as an ideological and artistic whole in a literary context, and outlined the prospects for further comprehension of poetic features the artistic world of the writer.

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