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LIDMILA PANTŮČKOVÁ

V. G. BELINSKY, KARL MARX AND W. M. THACKERAY
ON EUGÈNE SUE'S "LES MYSTÈRES DE PARIS"

The confrontation and comparison of the literary judgments of two or more contemporary critics on a single literary work is not a method frequently used in literary history, for its scope is necessarily narrow and the results it provides are more often insignificant details than important discoveries. It would be a pity, however, to refuse this method in such a case, when the compared critics are unmistakably great personalities and when the confrontation promises to throw light upon their critical principles from an unusual angle. Such a rare opportunity offers itself in the case of three great representatives of the European culture and thought of the last century, the founder of Marxism, Karl Marx, the Russian revolutionary democratic critic, V. G. Belinsky and the great English critical realist, W. M. Thackeray, who all almost at the same time reviewed or analysed the same novel, namely Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*. In comparing the evaluations of Marx and Belinsky we are not opening up new ground, as this has already formed the subject of Soviet studies; Thackeray's opinions however have never been analysed in this connection. There is no doubt that the comparison would bring more fruitful results, if the literary work in question were an outstanding work of art or at least reached an average literary standard. But even if the low artistic level of Sue's novel detracts somewhat from the value of our research, the greatness of his critics guarantees at least interesting results.

I.

Eugène Sue's novel *Les Mystères de Paris* was published in instalments in the *Journal des débats* during 1842—3. It was the first of the two social novels (the second was *Juif errant*, published in 1844—5) in which Sue followed in the footsteps of the French progressive romanticists, especially George Sand and Victor Hugo, and by which he earned his place in the history of French literature. Nowadays we regard this novel as a literary work of inferior artistic quality, by itself not worthy of critical notice, justly degraded with other works of the type, as Antonio Gramsci pointed out, "to the caretaker's flat and the basement floor"¹. At the time of its publication, however, and for some decades afterwards, the novel enjoyed world-wide popularity, was translated into most European languages,² was hungrily read by masses of common readers and excited the interest of progressive intellectuals in France and other European countries. As the Soviet literary historians emphasize,³ *Les Mystères de Paris* were especially highly appreciated by the French Fourierist critics, who welcomed Sue's convincing depiction of the seamy side of capitalist society and saw in him their

follower, and by Frederick Engels, who in his early article *Continental Movements* (1844) took notice of the deep influence exercised by the novel upon public opinion in Germany and praised Sue's endeavour to draw the attention of the public to the condition of the people.

It is not altogether uncommon in the history of literature for a second-rate novel of adventure and mystery like *Les Mystères de Paris* to achieve widespread popularity; what required to be explained was the interest the novel excited among the more advanced members of the working classes and progressive intellectuals. This explanation was amply provided by V. G. Belinsky, one of the most clear-sighted progressive critics of his time. He took notice of the great success of the novel in France and Russia in 1843,⁴ promised to write at length about it in some of his forthcoming contributions and fulfilled his promise the next year by writing the review of the novel.⁵ Belinsky feels a great responsibility as a critic towards Russian readers, misled and confused by the panegyrics on the genius of Eugène Sue published in some periodicals, and, to enable them to understand the extraordinary success of Sue's novel, presents an acute and profound analysis of the underlying "local and historical reasons". In his sharply outlined characterization of the contemporary social situation in France he pays special attention to the condition of the working masses during and after the French bourgeois revolution of 1830, because that condition is "so closely connected with the content of 'Les Mystères de Paris'" (*Stati i recenzii* 2, 632 [further = *Stat'i*]). He arrives at the historically correct conclusion that the victory of the French people in the revolution brought them nothing but exclusion from the rights of the Charter for which they had fought, and distressful conditions surpassing "the most daring flights of fantasy" (*ibid.*). As the Soviet commentators on Belinsky's review emphasize, his analysis is pervaded by his firm faith in the French people as the only bearers of progress and rightful heirs of the future of their country. He points out that the French people have profited from their recent political lesson, are beginning to educate themselves, have "their own poets who show them their future" (*ibid.*) and also new genuine friends who raise their powerful voice on their behalf (Belinsky has in mind the Utopian Socialists). Eugène Sue, however, as the critic emphasizes, is not a real friend of the people, he belongs to the newly appeared host of false friends, who see in the people only a suitable means for seizing power and enriching themselves in the process. Sue skilfully made use of the special situation in France, where the people became "a social, political and administrative problem" (*ibid.*) and made the first advantageous literary speculation of choosing the people as the hero of his novel. His lucky choice put in motion interest in important social problems among the masses of the reading public and is the root, as the critic concludes, of his amazing success.

The above conclusions of the great critic concerning the popularity of the French novelist are not the only positive results of the introductory part of his review. He also profoundly analyses "the spirit of speculation governing French literature" (*ibid.*), reveals that the universal standard by which success in bourgeois society is measured is money, and demonstrates the corrupting influence of the commercial character of literature upon the development of some contemporary French writers. Eugène Sue, for instance, started his literary career as the follower and imitator of Byron, but when he received a large sum for his *Mystères de Paris* and was offered one hundred thousand francs for his next novel

yet unwritten, he ceased to look upon the world through dark spectacles and changed into “a respectable bourgeois in the full sense of the word” (ibid., 633).

W. M. Thackeray's response to the popularity of *Les Mystères de Paris* in some points approaches that of Belinsky but he does not penetrate so deeply, because he ignores the social conditions in which the novel originated and seeks the roots of its success only in the sphere of the literary convention and tradition which it continued. The reason for this essential difference between the two critics must be sought for in the more advanced social and political views of the Russian revolutionary democrat. Nevertheless Thackeray, like Belinsky, had followed with interest the great success of the popular French romantic writer even before writing his review and during the whole time when Sue was at the zenith of his fame, and his attitude, like that of his Russian contemporary, had always been highly critical. Thus for example in his journal of 1841 he wrote with contempt of Sue's novel *Mathilde* as of a work “the extreme fashionableness of which will form a good subject for imitation”.⁶ In his review of Reybaud's novel *Jérôme Paturot*⁷ he again ridiculed the fawning servility of Eugène Sue's attitude towards the fashionable life of the French aristocracy, as it is manifested in *Mathilde*, and his untruthful depiction of reality in *Les Mystères de Paris*, from which, as he emphasizes, the future generations will get a very queer notion about French society. In 1845, a year after his unfinished attempt to translate *Les Mystères de Paris* (see note 2) he was asked by the publisher of the *Edinburgh Review* to write a short article on Sue's literary career, but refused the offer, for to go through a course of Sue's novels would take up more time than he was willing to sacrifice. In the same letter he briefly summed up the development of the French novelist in the following words, in some respects reminding us of Belinsky's evaluation, but differing from it by their strong moralistic colouring:

“Eugène Sue has written a very great number of novels, beginning with maritime novels in the Satanic style so to speak: full of crime and murder of every description. He met in his early works with no very great success: he gave up the indecencies of language and astonished the world with “*Mathilde*” three years since, which had the singular quality among French novels of containing no improprieties of expression. In my mind it is one of the most immoral books in the world. “*The Mysteries of Paris*” followed with still greater success, and the same extreme cleverness of construction and the same sham virtue. It has been sold by tens of thousands in London in various shapes, in American editions, and illustrated English translations.”⁸

Also in his later works Thackeray several times took notice of Sue's novels, as for instance in *Barry Lyndon*, in his review of Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve*, in his preface to *Pendennis* and elsewhere. What concerns us most here is however his review of *Les Mystères de Paris*, published in 1843 under the title “*Thieves' Literature of France*” in the *Foreign Quarterly Review*. Thackeray reviewed the novel in the French original, after the issuing of the sixth volume, but the fact that he had not read the novel as a whole does not detract from the value of his criticism. Like Belinsky, he evaluates Sue's novel as a literary work of “calculation and trade”, intentionally adapted to the current literary fashion and especially prepared to suit the wants and taste of French and foreign readers. According to Thackeray, Eugène Sue is a literary merchant and quack, who sells his talent for three francs a line, and for whom money is the main point. So long as he receives it, he will be, as Thackeray emphasizes, “pretty careless

as to the rest", "will not be deterred by any scruples of taste or conscience, or be induced to alter his course from any desire for reputation, or indeed for any consideration whatever, unless, of course, that of *four francs per line*". Thackeray admits, however, that the French novelist is one of the most successful literary merchants of his day and "one of the cleverest quacks now quacking",⁹ for he can make his novels so interesting that all the world is eager to read about his heroes and heroines. It is obvious from the above that Thackeray, like the Russian critic, was conscious of the commercial spirit pervading literature in bourgeois society and of its deteriorating influence upon some mediocre writers.

Karl Marx does not expressly refer to the popularity of *Les Mystères de Paris*, but the very fact that he levelled his critical weapons against the enthusiastic German apologists of the novel, speaks for itself. Marx's aim was more ambitious, however, and his criticism is therefore double-edged. In answer to the apotheosis of Eugène Sue's genius, published in the Berlin paper *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* and written by Szeliga,¹⁰ in which Sue's philanthropic reforms were welcomed and the charitable deeds of the hero of the novel extolled as something "more fruitful for mankind than all the experience gained by mankind during the whole period of its history",¹¹ Marx devoted two parts of his early work "*Die Heilige Familie*" oder Kritik der "*kritischen Kritik*" (1845) to a thorough analysis of Sue's novel and of Szeliga's criticism. The purpose of "*Die Heilige Familie*", the first work Marx wrote in collaboration with Engels,¹² was the criticism of the philosophical programme and literary activity of the whole group to which Szeliga belonged, the so-called Young Hegelians (including besides Szeliga the brothers Bauer, Faucher and Jungnitz). This general aim is also strongly manifested in Marx's criticism of Sue's novel, the sharpest shafts of his irony being always directed against the speculative philosophy of the group as it shows itself in Szeliga's article, although he does not spare Sue's philanthropic sociology, which has much in common, as Marx revealed, with neo-Hegelian doctrine. A detailed analysis of Marx's criticism as a whole is beyond the scope of this article: in the following discussion we shall deal only with his criticism of Sue's novel itself.

II.

As far as the critical analysis of the ideological content, characters, plot and composition of *Les Mystères de Paris* is concerned, the three critics set out from different premises and their arguments follow different routes, but they all arrive at a completely negative final evaluation. The standpoints of Belinsky and Marx are nearer to each other than either is to the standpoint of Thackeray and their evaluations agree in several important points both in praise and censure.

As Belinsky correctly points out, the basic idea of *Les Mystères de Paris* is truthful and noble: the writer intended to reveal to the egotistical Mammonite French society the sufferings of the poor and unhappy, who are "condemned to ignorance and poverty, and by ignorance and poverty doomed to vices and crime" (*Stat'i* 2, 629). But although the critic gives ungrudging tribute to this democratic and humanitarian tendency in which he sees the main positive value of the novel, he is not blind to the many weaknesses of Sue's creative method. He

clearly understands that although the novelist's original intentions were praiseworthy, the value of his depiction of the disastrous condition of the working masses is considerably limited by his failure to create a convincing and truthful picture of the French people. Belinsky demonstrates that this essential weakness of Sue's creative method is rooted in the limitations of his approach to the working people he depicts, as it is in its substance a genuinely bourgeois attitude. The French novelist sees in the people only "a hungry and ragged mob", does not know their genuine virtues and vices, does not see in them a social class to which the future belongs and depicts them as passive victims resigned to their inevitable fate, whose only hope is the charity of the rich, and whose only defenders are rich princes of the type of Rodolph, the hero of the novel. In his penetrating analysis of the main ideas of *Les Mystères de Paris* Belinsky succeeded in revealing the two-faced and questionable outlook of the novelist, who expressed compassion for the distress of the oppressed (although the critic rightly suspects that the motives underlying this compassion were not disinterested, for Sue was aware that such an attitude would bring him reliable profits), but who was unable to propose or imagine any revolutionary change in the society which gave rise to such evils. Belinsky comes to a correct conclusion that the only change Sue coveted was the change of the hungry, miserable and ragged mob into a well-fed, happy and orderly mob, but that he could not imagine the people in the rôle of the masters of France, the rôle which was, as he saw it, forever allotted to the French bourgeoisie.

The social abuses which occupy the foreground of the novelist's interests are first and foremost criminality and prostitution. Belinsky points out that Eugène Sue shows to the reader many skilfully written and convincing scenes of the moral deterioration and criminality characteristic of contemporary French society and that he even reveals how in some cases these abuses are supported by the existing French laws. But in spite of this clear-sightedness in individual cases the novelist is totally unable to see, as the critic emphasizes, that the real roots of criminality are embedded not in isolated laws, but in the whole system of French legislation, in the whole system of society.

Marx, too, presents a profound analysis of the poverty and weaknesses of the main ideas of *Les Mystères de Paris* and criticizes in detail the social and political programme proposed by the novelist as a remedy for the abuses he depicts. He pays special attention to Sue's endeavours to solve in his novel the basic contradiction of bourgeois society — that between labour and capital, sums up the proposed solution in six points and reveals that it is founded upon the following principles: private property is sacred and untouchable; the rich have a moral duty to use their wealth justly, wisely and generously to the welfare of all the people living around them and to account to the workers for how they use it; the state must organize labour and form an association of capital and labour which would bind up the bourgeoisie and proletariat together by mutual sympathy and ensure perpetual peace in the state. Upon the detailed analysis of the concrete realization of this programme in the novel (the bank for the poor and the model farm founded by Prince Rodolph, etc.), Marx demonstrates that Sue's social and political doctrine is a typical example of bourgeois reformism, which proclaims the unity of the interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and is nothing but a Utopian dream unrealizable under the existing economic and social conditions in France. The theoretical premises of Sue's doctrine are

founded upon the "poor discarded rubbish of socialist literature"¹³ and bear witness to the novelist's entire ignorance of the existing economic relationships in bourgeois society. As Marx reveals, in some of his theories (on marriage, emancipation of women, philanthropy) Eugène Sue was influenced by the teaching of Fourier but he lacks the originality and strength of his master's thoughts. The same dependence upon old theories may be observed in Sue's reforms in the field of criminal justice and legislation, which contain nothing new, as Marx shows, but only warm up the theory of criminal law of the Catholic Church, explained by Bentham in his work *Rationale of Punishments and Rewards* (first published in France in 1811).

It is worth noticing that Thackeray, contrary to Marx and Belinsky, takes no notice at all of the social and political programme propagated by Eugène Sue, nor of his pictures of the seamy side of French bourgeois society, and only in a passing remark criticizes the novelist's idealized depiction of the model farm founded by Rodolph. He does not analyse or even mention the theoretical premises upon which this picture had been founded, nor refer to the whole system of Sue's social reforms of which his model farm was only a part. The reason for this may be perhaps sought for in Thackeray's deeply negative and disdainful attitude to the main principles of Sue's creative method, which is fully in agreement with his familiar resentment against romanticism in general and French romanticism in particular. He obviously does not consider it worth while even to consider the doctrine proclaimed and put into practice by such improbable and unconvincing creations as are Sue's characters.

The most interesting and suggestive parts of all three critical analyses discussed are those dealing with the evaluation of the characters of *Les Mystères de Paris*. The personages of the novel are the usual black-and-white portraits typical of romantic fiction and fall into three distinct groups, the moral contrasts among which are not worked out from the view-point of class origin: the positive characters (Prince Rodolph, the *grisette* Rigolette, Madame George, the manageress of Rodolph's model farm, the marquise Clémence d'Harville, the working-class family of the Morels etc.), the characters recruited from the criminal underworld and reformed by Rodolph (Fleur de Marie, Chourineur) and finally the detestable and incorrigible villains, whether inhabitants of the Parisian underworld, or members of the French bourgeoisie (Maître d'école, Chouette, abbé Polidori, the Martials and the main villain of the novel, the notary Jacques Ferrand). Eugène Sue's schematic outlook on reality, seen through the prism of fixed moral categories of good and evil, is most penetratingly analysed by Karl Marx and also aptly characterized by Thackeray.

Marx convincingly shows that Eugène Sue as a genuine bourgeois, wishing to ingratiate himself with his own class, distorts, idealizes and falsifies the social reality he depicts, changes the real world into a dream world, which he peoples not with real, living human beings but with pale embodiments of the ideas of good and evil. Marx pays attention especially to the main protagonist of Sue's black-and-white vision of mankind, his hero Rodolph, and the relationships of this character to the other personages of the novel. Rodolph classifies all the people he meets during his wanderings through the haunts of criminals and the palaces of aristocracy into two rigid categories, corresponding to the abstract Christian conceptions of good and evil, and sees in himself an instrument of Providence, whose task is to reform the not entirely corrupted, punish the evil,

reward the good and organize the world according to the novelist's ideas. Marx reveals that the result of the "miraculous cures" Sue performs through the medium of his hero upon the chosen representatives of the Parisian *lumpenproletariat* is a change of "real people" into "abstract standpoints", artificial embodiments of Christian morality. He demonstrates this procedure of the novelist upon the characters of the prostitute Fleur de Marie and the criminals Chourineur and Maître d'école, who are originally attractive and distinctly individual characters but who lose all their vitality when the novelist obliges them to undergo a Christian conversion and adapts them violently to his own purpose, which is not inherent in the characters themselves or in their social environment, but is stuck upon them like a label from the outside. Marx demonstrates that such an approach to the creation of character is in its essence a "speculative" method which excludes realism in art, just as speculative methods in philosophy preclude the recognition of the real world. In his detailed analysis of these characters Marx succeeded in removing the artificial exterior given them by Sue and in revealing their real human substance conditioned by the social reality in which they lived. As the Soviet commentators of Belinsky's review emphasize, only Marx was able to do this, because he was intimately acquainted with the life of the French proletariat and "was already penetrating to the recognition of his future historical role" in preparing the end of capitalism (*Star'i* 2, 908).

In the opinion of Belinsky, which is in its final conclusions near to, that of Marx; the realization of Sue's ideas in the personages and action of his novel is the weakest point of *Les Mystères de Paris*, which is in this respect "the poorest and most untalented work" (*ibid.*, 637). By means of a detailed critical examination of the main and subsidiary characters of the novel, the relationships among them and their actions as they are revealed in the plot, Belinsky comes to the correct conclusion that *Les Mystères de Paris* is not a novel but a banal story of the *Arabian Nights* type. The hero and heroine upon whom the whole composition of the novel is built up (Rodolph and Fleur de Marie) are "unnatural and in all respects impossible persons" (*ibid.*, 641), most of the subsidiary characters are untruthful to life, melodramatic or at least lacking in unity and all the characters are placed into "violently created mutual relationships" (*ibid.*, 643) and surrounded with theatrical effects. The plot of the novel is built upon lies and fantasies and is extremely silly and banal, "the events develop unnaturally and their solution comes through the medium of a *deus ex machina*" (*ibid.*, 642). As Belinsky emphasizes, the novel as a whole, though it contains some relatively successful characters and convincing episodes, is the height of clumsiness and bears witness that Eugène Sue is a "professional writer who had written himself out" (*ibid.*, 644). Belinsky discusses in detail especially the two main personages of the novel and, like Marx, succeeds in penetrating through the thick layer of artificial colours smeared upon their faces to their real appearances, although he does not achieve the depth and width of Marx's generalizations. Very near to that of Marx is his evaluation of the development of the character of Fleur de Marie. He points out that the young prostitute is "sufficiently natural and even interesting" at the beginning of the novel, but after her reform "suddenly becomes an 'ideal' and 'unearthly' girl, ceases to be natural and becomes banal and dull" (*ibid.*, 640). Belinsky's attitude to this character is not so generous, however, as that of Marx. Whereas Marx points out that the dirt of contemporary society touched the girl only on the surface,

Belinsky is convinced that her way of life left upon her indelible traces of corruption which would not be washed off so easily as the novelist pretends.

As far as Sue's criminal characters are concerned, Belinsky distinguishes among them two distinct groups: the criminals whom the author depicts as the victims of inevitable circumstances, finding in them at least some traces of humanity (Chourineur, Martial), and the monsters of evil (Maître d'école, Chouette, Polidori and Cecily). Whereas he regards, unlike Marx, the criminals of the first group as relatively well delineated figures, the incarnations of evil do not find mercy in his eyes, and he condemns them as unnatural, exaggerated and melodramatic characters surrounded with theatrical effects. In his opinion the most successfully drawn criminal character is that of the notary Jacques Ferrand, about whom he writes that "the very idea of depicting a loathsome villain, who enjoys in society the reputation of a moral man" (*ibid.*, 642) is worth noticing. But even this character lacks unity and is sometimes melodramatic, writes the critic, and therefore some of the episodes in which he plays the leading part seem to the reader exaggerated and do not inspire his confidence and interest. The most serious objection Belinsky raises against Sue's criminal characters is, however, that they are not original creations, but only unsuccessful and unskilful imitations of the characters of Charles Dickens. The critic correctly emphasizes that whereas Dickens, as a genuine artist, "truthfully represents criminal and evil characters as the victims of a bad social order" (*ibid.*, 654), Eugène Sue, as a mediocre artist with a very small talent, makes only a few feeble attempts in this respect.

Whereas Marx and Belinsky admit that Eugène Sue's creative method is not entirely devoid of some positive aspects, W. M. Thackeray takes notice only of its weaknesses and finds nothing to praise in the novel except its clever construction and undeniable interest. After summing up the plot of the first volume of the novel and giving a *resumé* of the events depicted in the following five volumes, he comes to the conclusion (very near to that of Belinsky) that the plot "passes all the bounds of possibility" and that the novel as a whole is "a gross, detestable, raw-head-and-bloody-bones caricature, fit to frighten children with, unworthy of an artist". The protagonists of the plot are such absurdly caricatured and unreal figures that Thackeray does not consider it worth while to discuss them in detail. The small attention he pays to the analysis of Sue's characters and his neglect of their background in social reality are the main reasons why his evaluation does not achieve the depth of Marx's criticism and the penetrating clear-sightedness of that of Belinsky. But — as well as in his final conclusions about the essential untruthfulness of Sue's personages to life — he approaches the standpoint of the Russian critic also in his assessment of the character of Fleur de Marie (even though his attitude is more strictly moralistic and he does not see this figure in its development) and is also near to Marx when he maintains that most of the characters are rigidly schematic portraits in black-and-white. As he aptly expresses it, the "exciting contest between the white-robed angel of good and the black principle of evil" is the main motive power of the development of the plot and one of the reasons, why the novel possesses such a breathtaking interest for the masses of common readers. Thackeray points out, however, that although the plot of the novel is constructed upon the moral contradictions of good and evil, it does not express any, real moral tendency. He especially resents those criminal characters in which the French

novelist discovers some positive traits (and in this aspect his evaluation markedly differs from that of the other two critics) because he fears that such figures might excite in the reader interest and sympathy and thus indirectly lead him to sympathize with their crimes and vices. As Thackeray saw it, the task of the novelist who chooses criminal and evil characters for his depiction is to tell the reader the whole truth about them and to make him “heartily hate them at once, as Fielding did, whose indignation is the moral of his satire”. He does not deny that some criminals and prostitutes may have preserved good human qualities even in their adverse circumstances, but the writer who wishes to do a service to society has no right to depict only this agreeable aspect of their nature and make them “bearable by sweetening them and perfuming them, and instructing them how to behave in genteel society”. The coarse truth of life, as it was depicted by Fielding, is according to Thackeray less dangerous to the morals of the readers than “the mock modesty” of Eugène Sue and other writers of criminal fiction. Thackeray admits, however, that in depicting criminality and vice the French novelist has one advantage over his English brothers of pen, who are restricted by the moral prejudices of the squeamish Victorian bourgeois society, “he is allowed to speak more freely”. And in consequence of this, as Thackeray emphasizes, the best achievement of Sue is his “vigorous, terrible description” of the monstrous villain Jacques Ferrand, who does not leave the reader in any doubt about his criminality and does not lead him “to a guilty sympathy for villainy”. Thackeray’s evaluation of this character in some points agrees with that of Belinsky, but the English critic pays greater attention, as he always does in evaluating a literary character, to the effect of Ferrand upon the morals of the reading public.¹⁴

Thackeray’s review of Sue’s novel clearly demonstrates that the main criterion he uses in his evaluation of Sue’s characters is the question of their probability, of their truthfulness to life. Even if he does not take into account the historical substance and social roots of these characters, like Marx and Belinsky do, and examines their truth to reality only from the point of view of general laws of human psychology and morals, this aspect of his criticism is its most positive asset. An undeniable fact, however, is also the moralistic colouring of his evaluation, familiar from all his critical papers and in his review of Sue’s novel even more striking than in his criticism of English criminal fiction. From Thackeray’s correspondence we learn that this strengthening of the moralistic tendency was intentional. In January 1843, when he requested the publisher of the *Foreign Quarterly Review* to order the review of Sue’s novel, he wrote:

“Eugène Sue’s last novel *Les Mystères de Paris* must be done with some such title as ‘Thieves’ Literature in France’ — in a moral tone, with thanks for the cessations of the kind of thing in England.”¹⁵

This quotation also suggests the main reason for Thackeray’s stronger moralistic attitude; in 1843 he had almost brought his fight against the novelists of the “Newgate school” of fiction to its victorious end and naturally feared the possible revival of this literary fashion in England under the influence of the enormous popularity of *Les Mystères de Paris*.¹⁶

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The confrontation of Belinsky’s, Marx’s and Thackeray’s criticisms of *Les Mystères de Paris* enables us to arrive at the conclusion that in spite of the

considerable and essential differences in their critical methods and in their conclusions, the three critics agree in one important point: that the characters created by Eugène Sue in this novel are unconvincing and untruthful figures, not depictions of living, real people but embodiments of abstract standpoints (Marx), impossible and clumsily ugly creations (Belinsky), absurd caricatures of human beings (Thackeray). In distinction to Marx and Belinsky, Thackeray does not do justice to the novelist's democratic protest against contemporary social abuses and to his proposals for their removal, even if the latter are Utopian fantasies, as Marx demonstrates. And, finally, in comparison with Marx's generous and noble attitude to human individuals, even to those who are degraded and downtrodden into the mud of bourgeois society, Thackeray's moralistic attitude seems too narrow-minded, even if it may be to a great extent explained and apologized for by the specific situation in English literature and the social conditions in which Thackeray lived.

Notes

¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Sešity z vězení [Prison Notebooks]*, Czech translation by Jaroslav Pokorný, Československý spisovatel, Praha 1959, p. 83.

² The first Russian translation of *Les Mystères de Paris* (by V. Stroyev) was published in 1843. In England the translation was started in 1844 by W. M. Thackeray, continued by other translators when Thackeray threw up the job because he was not promptly paid, and published by Chapman and Hall in weekly numbers during 1844. See V. G. Belinsky, *Stat'i i recenzii*, ed. by S. P. Bychkova, Gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo chudozhestvennoy literatury, Moskva 1948, vol. II, p. 906, and *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, ed. by Gordon N. Ray, London, Oxford University Press, 1945, vol. II, pp. 139–140, note 4. (Cited hereafter as *Letters*.)

³ See *Istoriya frantsuzskoy literatury*, vol. II, Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, Moskva 1956, p. 296.

⁴ See his survey *Russkaya literatura v 1843 godu [Russian Literature in 1843]*, published in "Otechestvennye zapiski", 1844, vol. XXXII, No. 1, pp. 1–42. *Stat'i i recenzii*, p. 622.

⁵ The review was published in "Otechestvennye zapiski", 1844, vol. XXXIII, No. 4, pp. 21–36.

⁶ *Letters* II., p. 32.

⁷ The review was published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1843.

⁸ *Letters* II., p. 202.

⁹ *The Oxford Thackeray*, ed. by George Saintsbury, 17 volumes, Oxford 1908; vol. V, pp. 461, 462. (Cited hereafter as *Works*.)

¹⁰ The pen-name of Franz Zychlin von Zychlinski, 1816–1900, also called Vishnu.

¹¹ Karel Marx—Bedřich Engels, *O umění a literatuře [On Art and Literature]*, Svoboda, Praha 1951, p. 363, Szeliga's judgment cited by Marx.

¹² The greatest part of this work, including the analysis of *Les Mystères de Paris*, was written by Marx alone, as all the commentators on "Die Heilige Familie" show.

¹³ Karel Marx—Bedřich Engels, op. cit., p. 392.

¹⁴ For the quotations in this paragraph see *Works* V., pp. 471, 470, 469, 471.

¹⁵ *Letters* II., p. 92.

¹⁶ For a more detailed evaluation of W. M. Thackeray's criticism of the English novels of crime see my studies "W. M. Thackeray jako kritik protirealistické literatury v letech třicátých" ["W. M. Thackeray as a Critic of Antirealist Literature in the Eighteen-Thirties"], *Sborník prací filosofické fakulty brněnské university*, D 4, 1957, pp. 33–41, and "The 'Newgate School' of Romance and its Place in the English Literature of the Eighteen-Thirties", *Brno Studies in English*, vol. I., SPN, Praha 1959, pp. 103–117.

V. G. BĚLINSKIJ, KAREL MARX A W. M. THACKERAY
O ROMÁNU EVŽENA SUE „LES MYSTÈRES DE PARIS“

Autorka článku konfrontuje a srovnává kritické soudy tří velkých představitelů evropské kultury minulého století, ruského revolučního demokrata V. G. Bělinského, Karla Marxe a anglického kritického realisty W. M. Thackerayho, o svého času velmi populárním románu francouzského romanopisce Evžena Sue „Les Mystères de Paris“. Úvodem podotýká, že konfrontace tohoto druhu je pro svůj omezený dosah literárními historiky málo používaná, že však v daném případě poskytuje možnost osvětlit z neobvyklé stránky literární soudy W. M. Thackerayho, které v této souvislosti nebyly ještě zkoumány.

V první části článku osvětluje autorka příčiny masové popularity uvedeného podřadného literárního díla v širokých vrstvách čtenářů i v kruzích pokrokové evropské inteligence v době jeho vydání a všimá si podrobně zejména pronikavého rozboru kořenů Suova úspěchu, jak jej podal V. G. Bělinskij. Jak autorka ukazuje, Thackerayovo hodnocení popularity francouzského romanopisce je v některých bodech shoduje se stanoviskem ruského kritika: oba zaujmají negativní postoj ke komerčnímu duchu ovládajícímu literaturu v buržoasní společnosti a k jeho zhoubnému vlivu na některé spisovatele prostřední velikosti.

Hlavní část článku je věnována konfrontaci kritických soudů V. G. Bělinského, Karla Marxe a W. M. Thackerayho o základních principech tvůrčí metody francouzského romanopisce. Autorka podrobně rozebírá a srovnává jejich hodnocení ideového obsahu, charakterů, sjetu a kompozice románu, poukazuje na zásadní rozdíly mezi kritickou metodou Marxe a Bělinského na jedné straně a Thackerayho na straně druhé, zejména pokud jde o hodnocení ideového obsahu románu, a dochází k závěru, že přes tyto podstatné rozdíly se kritikové shodují v jednom konečném závěru. Všichni shodně poukazují na to, že charaktery vytvořené francouzským romanopiscem nejsou obrazy skutečných, živých lidí, nýbrž jsou to bledá ztělesnění abstraktních idejí dobra a zla (Marx), nepřirozené a nejspíše figury obklopené teatrálními efekty (Bělinskij), absurdní karikatury lidských bytostí (Thackeray). Thackerayovo hodnocení postav románu nedosahuje hloubky Marxova rozboru ani pronikavosti kritiky Bělinského a je silně zabarveno moralisticky. Autorka dokumentuje, že toto zesílení moralistické tendence bylo u Thackerayho záměrné: v r. 1843 již takřka dobojoval svůj kritický a polemický boj proti anglickým romanopiscům tzv. newgatecké školy do vítězného konce a obával se recidivy této literární módy, která podle jeho názoru působila zhoubně na morálku čtenářů, vlivem velké popularity Suova románu v Anglii. Ve srovnání s Marxovým šlechtěným, velkorysým a hluboce lidským postojem k lidem, a to i k lidem ponížným do bahna mčšťácké společnosti, se Thackerayův moralistický postoj jeví jako úzkoprsý, i když jej lze do značné míry osvětlit a omluvit specifickou situací v anglické literatuře jeho doby a společenskými podmínkami, v nichž Thackeray žil.

В. Г. БЕЛИНСКИЙ, К. МАРКС И У. М. ТЕККЕРЕЙ О РОМАНЕ
Э. СЮ „ПАРИЖСКИЕ ТАЙНЫ“

В статье сопоставляются и сравниваются критические суждения трех великих представителей европейской культуры и мышления прошлого века — русского революционного демократа В. Г. Белинского, К. Маркса и английского критического реалиста У. М. Теккерей о весьма популярном в свое время романе французского романиста Эжена Сю „Парижские тайны“. В введении замечается, что сопоставления этого рода из-за ограниченности своего значения мало проводятся историками литературы; в данном случае, однако, возникает возможность осветить литературно-эстетические взгляды У. М. Теккерей с той стороны, с какой они до сих пор еще не рассматривались.

В первой части объясняются причины массовой популярности названного второразрядного романа в широких кругах читателей и передовой европейской интеллигенции в период издания; особенно подробно рассматривается данный В. Г. Белинским проникновенный анализ причин успеха романа Сю. Далее показывается, что объяснение Теккереем популярности произведения Сю в некоторых пунктах совпадает с точкой зрения русского критика. Оба они отрицательно относятся к духу коммерции, господствовавшему в литературе буржуазного общества, и к его губительному влиянию на некоторых писателей среднего дарования.

Основная часть статьи посвящена сопоставлению критических высказываний В. Г. Бе-

линского, К. Маркса и У. Теккерея о главных принципах творческого метода французского писателя. Подробно рассматривается и сравнивается оценка ими идейного содержания, построения характеров, сюжета и композиции романа, показываются основные различия между критическим методом Маркса и Белинского с одной стороны и Теккерея с другой стороны, особенно что касается анализа идейного содержания романа. Автор статьи приходит к заключению, что, несмотря на существенные расхождения, критики согласны в общих выводах. Все они указывают, что характеры, созданные Эженом Сю, не являются характерами живых людей, встречающихся в действительности, а только бледным воплощением абстрактных идей добра и зла (Маркс), неестественными и нелепыми фигурами, окруженными театральными эффектами (Белинский), до абсурда доведенными карриатурами людей (Теккерей). Оценка Теккереем образов романа не достигает ни глубокого анализа, сделанного Марксом, ни проникновенности критики Белинского, причем она сильно моралистически окрашена. Автор доказывает, что такое усиление моралистической тенденции у Теккерея умышленно. В 1843 г. он уже почти победоносно закончил полемическую борьбу с английскими романистами т. наз. юггейтской школы и опасался рецидива этой литературной моды, которая, по его мнению, отрицательно действовала на мораль читателей, находившихся под большим влиянием популярного в это время в Англии романа Эжена Сю. В сравнении с благородным, великодушным и глубоко человеческим отношением к людям К. Маркса, включая людей, затоптанных в грязь буржуазного общества, моралистическое отношение Теккерея носит отпечаток узости, несмотря на то, что его можно в значительной степени объяснить и оговорить специфическим положением в английской литературе данного времени и общественными условиями, в которых Теккерей жил.

Л. П.