

THE LONGER LYRIC NARRATIVE POEM IN ROMANTICISM AND NEOROMANTICISM

Russian-Czech Parallels

The *longer lyric narrative poem (poema)* is one of the most popular genres of European Romanticism. It was widespread both in Russian and in Czech literature, although at different periods and under different names. In comparing 19th-century Czech and Russian poetics it is clear that the tale in verse developed differently in the two literatures and that the concept itself appeared in Czech verbal art at a rather late period — not until the Seventies of the 19th century, that is to say at the time when this genre began to flourish in native Czech literature. While the poetic tale is widely represented in Russia in the first third of the 19th century, only a single Byronic lyric narrative worthy of a place in European literature appeared in the Czech Lands in the Romantic period — namely *Machá's May*, which was misunderstood by its contemporaries. The reason for this misapprehension must be sought outside literature itself — in the circumstances of the Czech national Renaissance, when literature was expected to carry out the function of arousing the nation, a function incompatible with the exotic Byronic or philosophical *poema*.

According to the theory of modern genological research the longer lyric narrative poem is interpreted as a *structure of many strata*, the separate constituents of which are in continual movement, both horizontally (within the spheres of two or more literatures at the same period of time) and vertically (within a single literature at different periods). For this reason the method of research employed was that of *synchronic* and *diachronic* study and combinations of the two. With regard to the considerable number of Romantic poems of this nature in Russian literature and their consistent methodological treatment, the Russian Romantic longer narrative poem showed itself to be capable of providing the basis for a profounder structural analysis. The Russian *poema* can be assigned to two basic types, the *serious, romantic, Byronic* and the *comedic*. It would seem that generally speaking a closer connection with the preceding literary development at home and abroad, in particular with the period of the Enlightenment and French *poésie légère*, is shown by the Russian *comedic poem* (V. L. Pushkin, A. A. Shakhovskoi, A. S. Pushkin, A. I. Pole-

zhayev, M. Y. Lermontov. The development of the Russian *ironic* *poema* of the Ariosto-Byronic type culminates in Lermontov, clearly tending towards prose in its anecdotal formulations as well as towards realism and the grotesquely absurd. It is typical for Slavonic literatures that the comedic longer narrative is affected also by the national folk tradition (A. S. Pushkin, *Bova, Ruslan and Ludmila*). This swing towards traditional folk literature is even stronger in the serious longer lyric narrative, as is shown particularly clearly in the literatures of the Eastern and Southern Slavs (M. Y. Lermontov, T. Shevchenko, P. Njegoš), bound up as they are with the genre of the historical folk lay. A clearer link with Western literature, above all with Byron, can be seen in the *exotic* longer lyric narrative (A. S. Pushkin, Y. A. Baratinski, M. Y. Lermontov), and in the philosophical (Lermontov — Byron, Moore, A. de Vigny, Lamartine). Russian took over certain stylistic procedures from the Byronic lyric narrative, such as the confessional soliloquies of the heroes or the transference of the hero's mood into description of nature. At the same time however a further development took place: the Russian heroes are all more decided in their national and social attitudes, the exotic milieu is at times less strongly stressed (Baratinski), the theme of love retreats into the background (Lermontov, *Mtsiri — The Novice*). The creative work of M. Y. Lermontov, which with regard to its importance in European Romanticism has received most attention, is analysed from several aspects: 1. *Diachronically* — within the context of native literature (Lermontov — Blok); typological comparison of an interdisciplinary nature (Lermontov — Nietzsche); 2. *Synchronically* — typological comparison with the contemporary Czech literature (Lermontov — Mácha). The results of this comparison on the one hand show how the stimuli of Romantic literature are transformed into Neoromantic formulations, including the contemporary humanistic philosophy, and on the other confirm that analogical literary works appear in a parallel way under comparable conditions given the influence of the European context even when any mutual contact is entirely eliminated, as it is in the case of Mácha and Lermontov.

Besides the Russian poets of the turn of the century, the protagonists of the *first phase* of Czech *Neoromanticism*, Svatopluk Čech, J. Vrchlický and J. Zeyer, also show a reaction to the works of Pushkin and Lermontov. Their creative work precedes the *modernistic* tendencies of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20 century, *Decadence, Symbolism, the Secession and Impressionism*, for which in many ways Neoromanticism is a common denominator. Czech and Russian poetry at this period balance each other. A factor contributing to this is the comparable awareness of the participation of both literatures within the context of contemporary Europe, brought about also by a similar trend in translation. A certain displacement in contrast to Russian literature appears in the Czech realistic

longer lyric narrative of the Nekrasovian type, favoured by one generation later than was the case in Russia (J. S. Machar), and followed up by the *ironic* narrative lyric of V. Dyk. Characteristic of Russian literature at the close of the century is the strongly *lyrical allegoric poema* (Gorky, V. Bryusov, A. Blok). Social problems remain the domain of prose. Some of the ballads of Antonín Sova in Czech literature can be termed allegorical lyric narratives. The traditional folk literary genres cultivated in Romanticism: the *ballad*, the *romance*, the *tale*, the *echo* of the folk lay, are so ornamentally stylized that they frequently acquire the structural features of the *poema*. For the purpose of stylization much use is made of fairy-tale motives and figures.

With regard to the parallel study of the relationships of Romanticism and Neoromanticism a comparison of an interdisciplinary nature was also employed: the study of the overlapping of literature with the field of philosophy, of the visual arts and music with that of literature. Thus some of the components of the research go beyond the purely genealogical aspect and enter fields of wider philosophical or aesthetic validity. The study of the individual problems had to be approached in a differentiated manner and those structural constituents had to be followed up in the works analysed in which the indicated series of problems appear most clearly. While the philosophical aspect influences above all the stratum of ideas and themes, it is the visual art and musical aspects which are most prominent in the poetics itself: in the structure of tropes, particularly of metaphors and metaphorical epithets, in composition, in style generally. These of course are constituents which together create the general character of the work of art, just as the philosophical and thematic aspect to a large extent determines its aesthetic formation. In the study of *New Art* elements in the Russian poetic tale as well as in its comparison with Czech literature one further interesting point appears. With regard to the fact that the *New Art style*, important for its period, absorbed a number of stimuli from the field of literature and philosophy, above all from *Decadence* and *Symbolism*, raising them by means of its regard for the visual arts to a new aesthetic level and frequently augmenting in this way their effectiveness — we can also detect reflex reactions. The new metatexts are the result of this complex overlapping of literature and the visual arts and simultaneously themselves its new reflection. Even more marked is the expression of the *syncretic* tendency of this particular period in the field of *music*, which in Neoromanticism acquires a dominant position among the arts in general. The *Symphony* of A. Bely is used as a model to demonstrate the endeavour of the Symbolists to attain the absolute overlapping of poetry and music. With Bely this appears primarily in the field of composition based entirely on the sonata form, while in Khlebnikov it led to attempts at creating a special metalanguage, termed "*zauma*" ("non-semantic"). The work of V. Khlebnikov was deliberately chosen as a basis for the investigation

of the relationship of Neoromantic and Romantic formulations, as being that of an author who is already traditionally connected with the Post-symbolic-Futuristic movement. Detailed analysis of a number of his longer narrative lyrics and dramatic formulations from various periods and their typological comparison with the work of A. S. P u s h k i n has shown that this is a dynamic relationship expressed positively as well as antithetically.

With regard to the present state of research, in which the study of the Russian longer lyric narrative of the turn of the century has not yet been systematized or concluded, while so far no attention has yet been paid to the Czech Neoromantic lyric narrative, it is difficult to come to any definite judgment. On the basis of the comparative analysis carried out we can however state that in both literatures at this period the poetic tale did exist, even if in Czech literature it appears under a great variety of terms. In both literatures it was influenced by similar stimuli from philosophy and visual art and showed similar reactions to inspiration from Western European literatures. The prevalent lyricism led to the rise of the *lyricized allegorical* longer lyric narrative and to the revival of the *poema in dialogue*, which had been popular in the period of Romanticism. The Decadent and Symbolist drama of the period is also close to this genre.

From the typological comparison of the Czech and the Russian Romantic and Neoromantic longer lyric narrative it follows that *Neoromanticism*, under the influence of the pessimistic philosophy of the time, sublimates certain *Preromantic* stimuli, which however under the pressure of contemporary *realism* expand into new and *non-idealized* attitudes. The neoromantic heroes are transformed from daemonic titans into sober intellectuals, the noble bandits and outlaws become footpads, the value of love, still absolute in the first phase of Neoromanticism, has doubt cast upon it (especially in those authors who are influenced by Decadence). For this reason Romantic *irony* and *grotesquerie* are close to Neoromanticism, anticipating, just as in Romanticism, the moments of self-destruction. It would seem that the Neoromantic longer lyric narrative is more conservative in its *formal* features. Radically new formal features are not introduced into Russian literature before the *Postsymbolic* period. (This is striking in V. K h l e b n i k o v, who in some of his works destroys the existing rhythmical and compositional canon.)

The typological comparison of the Russian and Czech longer lyric narrative poem in the Romantic and the Neoromantic periods, carried out from various angles of approach, has demonstrated profound *structural correlations* and *contradictions*. The structural changes noted result from the dynamic development of the genre and its transformations, depending on the absorption of the most varied cultural, literary and extra-literary stimuli. Comparison has shown that both the literatures within the sphere of the genre studied in spite of all their national specificity remain an integral part of the European literary context.

Translated by Jessie Kocmanová