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**Pushkin and Byron in British Pushkin studies:
strategies of communication and imagological
mechanisms**

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Abstract. The article describes the place and major components of the question of Byron's influence on Pushkin in British Pushkin studies at the stage of its formation (1910s–1940s). It argues that in the context of 'turning to Pushkin' and orientation toward the 'horizon of reader's expectations', one of the two leading communicative strategies in British books about the Russian poet occurred to be the strategy of combating the stereotype of him as a consistent 'Russian Byron'. At the same time, starting with M. Baring, British researchers include this issue in the strategy of bringing Pushkin closer to the British reader. The two identified strategies are, to one degree or another, combined in the Pushkin – Byron problem with the principles of historical periodization (historicization of narrative) and aesthetic evaluation, as well as with an imagologically charged cultural approach. The article reveals convergences and divergences in this issue of two key works of the highlighted period – *An Outline of Russian Literature* (1914) by M. Baring and *A History of Russian Literature* by D.S. Mirsky (1926). It is argued that Baring declaratively emphasizes Pushkin's innovation in the re-creation of Byron's genre forms, the hero and the features of poetics, highlights the depth of 'Russianness' of Pushkin's works and

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asserts the superiority of the Russian poet over the English one in poetic skill and worldview. Mirsky, relying on the well-known work of V.M. Zhirmunsky and largely following Baring, fights the stereotypical idea of Pushkin's imitation of Byron from the position of philological accuracy. It has been established in the article that in the context of the Cold War, orientation towards the 'horizon of reader's expectations' in J. Lavrin's book *Pushkin and Russian Literature* (1947) formed the vector for 'exalting' Pushkin as a way of 'justifying' Russian culture and history. The tangible center of such an imagologically colored rapprochement was Lavrin's analytical analysis of Pushkin's polemic with Byron based on the material of his lyrical-heroic poem *Poltava*.

Keywords: British Pushkin studies, M. Baring, D.S. Mirsky, J. Lavrin, the question of Byron's influence on Pushkin, formalism, V.M. Zhirmunsky

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Пушкин и Байрон в британской пушкинистике: коммуникативные стратегии и имагологические механизмы

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Аннотация. В статье определено место и содержание вопроса о влиянии Байрона на Пушкина в британской пушкинистике на этапе ее становления (1910–1940-е гг.). Доказано, что в контексте резкого «поворота к Пушкину» и ориентации на «горизонт читательских ожиданий» одной из двух ведущих коммуникативных стратегий в британских работах о русском поэте становится стратегия борьбы со стереотипным представлением о нем как последовательном «русском Байроне». В то же время, начиная с М. Бэринга, британские исследователи вписывают этот вопрос в стратегию приближения Пушкина к британскому читателю. Две выявленные стратегии в той или иной

степени сочетаются в освещении проблемы Байрон – Пушкин с принципами исторической периодизации (историзации нарратива) и эстетической оценки, равно как с имагологически заряженной культурологичностью подхода. В статье выявлены схождения и расхождения в этом вопросе двух ключевых работ выделенного периода – монографии М. Бэринга «Очерк русской литературы» (*An Outline of Russian Literature*, 1914) и книги Д. Мирского «История русской литературы» (*A History of Russian Literature*, 1926). Определено, что Бэринг декларативно подчеркивает новаторство русского поэта в пересоздании байроновских жанровых форм, типа героя и черт поэтики, выделяет глубину «русскости» пушкинского творчества и утверждает превосходство русского поэта над английским в поэтическом мастерстве и мировоззрении. Мирский же, опираясь на известную работу В.М. Жирмунского и во многом следуя Бэрингу, борется со стереотипным представлением о подражательстве Пушкина Байрону с позиции филологической точности. Установлено, что в контексте ситуации холодной войны ориентация на «горизонт читательских ожиданий» в книге Я. Лаврина «Пушкин и русская литература» (*Pushkin and Russian Literature*, 1947) задала вектор «возвышению» Пушкина как способу «оправдания» русской культуры и истории. Ощутимым центром такого имагологически окрашенного сближения стал аналитический разбор Лавриным полемики Пушкина с Байроном на материале его лирико-героической поэмы «Полтава».

Ключевые слова: британская пушкинистика, М. Бэринг, Д. Мирский, Я. Лаврин, вопрос о влиянии Байрона на Пушкина, формализм, В.М. Жирмунский

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Introduction

British Pushkin studies represent a special vector in the study of A.S. Pushkin's personality and creativity. The peculiarity of Pushkin studies development in England is caused, among other things, by the fact that it was for British criticism (of all its Western European variants) that

the Russian poet remained “little known and alien” throughout the 19th century. Pointing at this fact M.P. Alekseev in his work *Pushkin in the West* (Alekseev, 1937, p. 148) stipulates that “the first English translations from Pushkin date back to 1827” and that “critical literature about Pushkin in English <...> is not so poor” (Ibid., p. 149).

British Pushkin studies can be traced back to the period of the 1910s–1940s – the time when “under the influence of the international success of the Russian novel”, on the one hand, and the results of two Russian revolutions of 1917, on the other, not only the general “interest in Pushkin” developed among English-speaking readers (which was pointed out by A.L. Grigoriev in his work *Pushkin in Foreign Literary Studies* (Grigoriev, 1974, p. 224)), but the number of publications of the poet’s works and studies about him in English raised tremendously (Pushkin in English..., 1937, p. 6). In the context of this particular ‘turn to Pushkin’ in the English-speaking world, two strategies became most significant for British Pushkin studies at the stage of its formation: 1) to identify and trace the closeness (genetic, spiritual, aesthetic) of Pushkin’s work to English culture and, at the same time, 2) to remove accusations of epigonism, to defeat the established idea of the poet as a passionate and consistent ‘Russian Byron’. In addition, publications about the Russian poet by English (Russian-British) researchers during this period reflect the principle of aesthetic evaluation (Efimov, 2018, p. 17) characteristic of British literary criticism as a whole.

These strategies and this principle, in different variants, are clearly visible in the most influential English works on Pushkin of this period: sections about him in Maurice Baring’s *Outline of Russian Literature* (1914) and in the first volume of D.S. Mirsky’s *History of Russian Literature* (1926). In the first of them, the strategy of bringing Pushkin’s creativity closer to English culture is carried out particularly consistently and comprehensively.

The question about Pushkin and Byron in M. Baring’s works

Maurice Baring – an English diplomat, journalist, poet, writer, translator, earnest Russophile (Volodko, 2018; Koroleva, 2023; Suprun, 2007), who lived in Russia for about seven years (from 1905 to 1912), – played an important role in the formation of Pushkin studies in England at the beginning of the 20th century. He highlighted the personality of Pushkin and the issues of Pushkin’s creativity in two of his popular science works devoted to the history of Russian literature: *Landmarks in Russian*

literature (1910) and *An Outline of Russian Literature* (1914). The first of them formed the basis of Baring's preface to the Oxford anthology of Russian poetry (*The Oxford book of Russian Verse*, 1925), compiled by him for the "Oxford Anthologies" series of national poetry. During the 1920s–1960s it went through 3 reprints in the first edition and 5 reprints – in the second one. Accordingly, not only in the academic sphere, but also in the educational, Baring had the opportunity to express, discuss and transmit his literary views.

Traces of Baring's concept of Pushkin's work, his method of presenting literary information, his combination of the two mentioned above strategies can be traced, in particular, in the works on Pushkin by D.S. Mirsky, "the main specialist in Russian literature for Anglophones" (Efimov, 2019) and by J. Lavrin, a professor of Slavic studies at the University of Nottingham and a friend of Mirsky since the early 1920s (*Pushkin and Russian Literature* (1947) and *From Pushkin to Mayakovsky. A Study in the Evolution of a Literature* (1948)).

Baring's Pushkin studies influenced, in particular, articles on Pushkin by such outstanding professors of Oxford University as C.M. Bowra (the editor-compiler of an anthology of Russian poetry translated into English and published at least four times: in 1943, 1947, 1971 and 1976) and John Bayley (author of first detailed English monograph on Pushkin (*Pushkin: a Comparative Commentary*, 1971)). The fact that the earliest of these articles was published in 1950 (*Pushkin*, in *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 1950, vol. 1. See: (Golysheva, 1970, p. 206–207)), and that the second one was issued in 1983 (Bayley, 1983), speaks of Baring's large-scale role in the development of English Pushkin studies.

Meanwhile, both of Baring's books (and, accordingly, his preface to *The Oxford book of Russian Verse*) treat the history of Russian literature not so much from the position of literary criticism, but from the position of cultural approach to literature, in its special version, which can be called 'ethnophilosophical'. In his *Outline...*, a brief description of Pushkin's personality and works is given in the key of those general features of Russian culture, Russian mentality, which M. Baring discusses in detail in his historical and cultural works of the same period: *The Russian People* (1911) and *The Mainsprings of Russia* (1914). Beginning with the statement that "Russian poetry <...> is based on and saturated with sound common sense" (Baring, 1912, p. 25), Baring points at "the greatest Russian poet" Pushkin. Unlike the European geniuses of this time, Shelley and Musset, he can "extract poetry from the daily life" and finds for it a "perfectly

balanced” form: “this sense of balance and proportion blent with a rooted common sense” (Ibid., p. 27).

This generalization regarding the characteristics of Russian poetry in general, and Pushkin’s work in particular, at the point of ‘common sense’ echoes Baring’s observations on the character of the Russian person, set out both in *The Mainsprings of Russia* and in *The Russian People*. In the latter (dedicated to G. Chesterton, with whom Baring shared many years of friendship and Catholic faith), the name of Pushkin appears alongside the names of Suvorov and Peter the Great in connection with another observation: that Russians are capable of working miracles, overcoming all possible obstacles and limits (“...He will recognize no obstacles and no limits. He will accomplish miracles”), since the Russian people in general (and Russian geniuses in particular) have an amazing feature of extraordinary energy (“extra flip of energy”) (Baring, 1911, p. 49). Among the special features of the Russian people, Baring in this work also highlights “humaneness” and “all-round adaptability” – signs that, along with realistic clarity as well as proportionality and balance, he lists creativity among the main characteristics of Pushkin in his *Landmarks...* (Ibid., p. 40).

Baring concludes his preface to *The Oxford book of Russian Verse* with words about Russian poetry as an exponent of the Russian soul: “Russian poetry expresses the Russian soul. <...> What it expresses is a spiritual flame, a fraternal sympathy, a great-hearted wisdom...” (Baring, 1971, p. xlv). In the mouth of an Englishman who converted to Catholicism at the age of thirty five (Koroleva, 2023, p. 145), these characteristics express not only the highest appreciation of the essence of Russian culture, but also the conviction that spiritually (through Christianity and Christian values) it is essentially close to European culture in general and English culture in particular.

The view of the essence of Pushkin’s genius – through the prism of peculiarities of Russian poetry and Russian mentality and, at the same time, the proximity to European, English culture – is ardently argued in *An Outline of Russian Literature*. In Baring’s relatively detailed narration about Pushkin’s work, carried out on 45 pages of his second and last book on Russian literature, the major idea is that of the poet’s greatness, with emphases on his universality and, simultaneously, the peculiarity of his works and their enduring value for the world. Bringing the Russian poet closer to the English reader, Baring, in particular, compares his image of Tatyana Larina with heroines of W. Shakespeare and J. Austen, G. Fielding and J. Meredith (Baring, 1915, p. 75).

A special place in Baring's reflections on Pushkin and European culture is occupied by Byron. Baring describes Byron's influence on Pushkin's poetry both on the material of 'Southern Poems' and in relation to *Eugene Onegin*, as well as (very schematically) in respect of *Poltava*. Noting that in his southern exile Pushkin "learnt Italian and English" (Ibid., p. 61), Baring points at some influence on the Russian poet by Chenier and some significant – by Byron. However, instead of analyzing artistic features, images and ideas of Pushkin's 'Southern Poems' Baring briefly explains that the images of the protagonists in *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* and *The Gypsies* go back to the image of Childe Harold: like Byron's hero, they, being young, feel old and, "tired of life", seek "for consolation in the loneliness of nature" (Ibid., p. 62). Commenting on some Byronic features ("Byronic in some respects") (Ibid.) of *The Fountain of Bakhchisaray*, retelling the plots and brief judgments about the beauty of descriptions of nature and common life in 'Southern Poems' in general, Baring's observations on Pushkin's texts are, in fact, exhausted. As for a sort of general passion for Byron's poetry, characteristic of the poets of 'Pushkin circle' and of 'Pushkin era' in general (a passion so strong that in a letter of 1819 Vyazemsky, as is quite well known, promises to pay with his life "for every verse of Byron" translated from English into Russian (Ostafievsky archive, 1899, p. 326–327)), Baring does not touch on the topic. In his book Pushkin's work, as well as, in fact, texts of all other Russian poets and writers, is described in the aspect of general development of Russian culture and literature, and not in the space of literary processes.

What is more important for Baring than analytical calculations and literary context is the justification of Pushkin as an original poet. His allusions include the oppositions of classicism to romanticism, the French garden to the English one, the unnatural to the natural; and the key name to these oppositions is Byron. Starting from the idea established among English (or, rather, European) readers – that Pushkin's poetry is strongly and essentially shaped by Byron's influence¹ – and opposing it, he states that "Byron revealed to him his own powers, showed him the way out of the French garden <...> to fresh woods and pastures new. <...> Pushkin is never imitation of Byron; but Byron <...> did for him what Chapman's Homer did for Keats" (Baring, 1915, p. 63).

¹ Against this stereotype, which has not been completely defeated in the minds of common British readers even today, the author of the article entitled *Russia's Byron?* objects in an expressive form: "So often hailed as the Russian Byron, that description in fact pays scant justice to Pushkin, who was a far greater poet than his English counterpart." (Russia's Byron? *The Irish Times*. January 10, 1999. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/russia-s-byron-1.194184>).

In relation to *Poltava* and *Eugene Onegin* Baring acts in the same way: briefly pointing in the first case at the polemics between Pushkin's poem and Byron's *Mazeppa*, and in the second – at *Beppo*, *Don Juan* and partly *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* as the sources of the poem, Baring emphasizes that Pushkin creates original works, in many ways different in content and poetic form from Byron's. *Eugene Onegin*, in Baring's description, is neither a humorous poetic short narrative poem (like *Beppo*) nor an adventurous satirical and descriptive epic (like *Don Juan* and *Pilgrimage*), but a “realistic novel” (“It is a realistic novel; as real as Tolstoy”) (Ibid., p. 74). *Poltava* tells not so much about Mazepa and his dramatic fate, but about the historical role of Peter the Great in the rise of Russia as a mighty European empire.

Moreover, pointing out the features that in *Eugene Onegin* go back to Byron's *Don Juan* (depiction of modern times and characters, digressions, frequent changes of intonation) (Ibid., p. 79), Baring completes the coverage of the problem of Pushkin and Byron with an aesthetic assessment of their work: “There is another difference – a difference which applies to Pushkin and Byron in general. There is no unevenness in Pushkin; his work, as far as craft is concerned, is always on the same high level. You can admire the whole, or <...> any single passage <...>; whereas Byron must be taken as a whole or not at all – the reason being that Pushkin was an impeccable artist in form and expression, and that Byron was not” (Ibid., p. 80).

To Pushkin – Byron problem Baring turns again, for the last time, towards the end of the chapter, when he tries to sketch a psychological portrait of the Russian poet. Arguing that Pushkin was neither “rebel nor reformer”, neither “liberal nor conservative”, Baring compares the Russian poet in terms of worldview with Goethe (with a reservation regarding Pushkin's ardent temperament) and contrasts him to Socrates, Shelley and Byron (Ibid., p. 62–92): “He was like Goethe in his attitude towards society, and the attitude of the social and official world towards him resembles the attitude of Weimar towards Goethe” (Ibid., p. 93). This characteristic is deepened by a reference to Dostoevsky's famous “Pushkin Speech”: “And it is just this all-embracing humanity – Dostoyevsky calls him πανάνθρωπος <...> which makes him so profoundly Russian” (Ibid., p. 96). For Baring, with his religious worldview, this meant, of course, ‘preference’ of Pushkin's worldview over Byron's one.

Thus, the question of Byron's influence on Pushkin is resolved by Baring through emphasizing the Russian poet's innovation in re-creating poetic features borrowed from Byron, as well as through highlighting the deep ‘Russianness’ of Pushkin's creativity and asserting the superiority of

the Russian poet over the English one in poetic mastery and (not so straightforwardly) in worldview.

D.S. Mirsky on Byron and Pushkin (in dialogue with M. Baring and V.M. Zhirmunsky)

D.S. Mirsky, who formed “a kind of canon of Russian literature for the Western world” (Efimov, 2018, p. 3), had had a personal acquaintance with Baring since both of them lived in St. Petersburg. Mentioning Baring’s “delightful” prose translation of Pushkin’s *Prophet* (in the chapter on Pushkin from *An Outline...* commented above) in the first volume of his *History of Russian Literature* (Mirsky, 1926, p. 98), Mirsky makes his benevolent attention to the book evident. It is not surprising that the strategies chosen by Baring as key ones to characterize Pushkin’s poetry – including its relation to Byron’s works – found positive response in Mirsky’s chapter on Pushkin.

In 1926 Mirsky published one of the earliest Western monographs on Pushkin, in a biographical vein (*Pushkin*, 1926). However, unlike his two-volume work on the history of Russian literature, this book, according to Emeritus Professor at Oxford University Gerald Smith, did not play a significant role in the perception of Russian literature in Britain: “For almost ninety years now, *The History of Russian Literature* written by Mirsky in English has had the status of a classical work. At the same time, the rest of Mirsky’s English-language books (it’s enough to name the two most significant ones – *Pushkin* and *Russia: A Social History*), although they were republished from time to time, remained peripheral for Western readers” (Smith, 2014, p. 5)². In addition, the issue of relations between Byron’s and Pushkin’s poetry is discussed in detail in Mirsky’s *History...*, so turning to it in this aspect seems justified.

Unlike Baring, Mirsky does not compare Pushkin’s style or images with the style and characters of English poets and writers. However, he also partially implements the strategy of bringing Pushkin closer to the English reader, but in a different form: he describes at length the peculiarities of Pushkin’s perception of Byron, mentions the influence of Shakespeare on the Russian poet in connection with the tragedy *Boris Godunov*, and also highlights the role of English sources – B. Cornwall, W. Chanston, J. Wilson – on ‘Little Tragedies’, concluding an introductory word about

² The translation from Russian into English here and elsewhere is made by me. – S.K.

them with the following remark: “Thus the Little Tragedies may be regarded as largely due to the English suggestion” (Mirsky, 1949, p. 96).

Moreover, relying on the “fashion for everything Russian” and especially on the popularity of the Russian novel, which established itself in England in the 1920s, in the strategy of ‘bringing Pushkin closer’ to the English reader he relies on this and the corresponding background knowledge. Thus, characterizing the significance of *Eugene Onegin* for Russian literature, he singles out in it the “type of realism”, “style of character drawing”, “characters themselves” and “construction of the story” as determining factors (fountainheads) for “the later Russian novel” (Ibid., p. 88). He expands this general remark into an extensive paragraph, especially highlighting among the Russian novelists known to the English reader if not the most recognized, then the least vulnerable from an aesthetic point of view, Turgenev.

Apparently, Baring’s influence prompted the ‘ethno-aesthetic’ remark regarding the ‘Russianness’ of Pushkin’s *The Stone Guest*. The idea that the “realism” and “classical simplicity” of Pushkin’s creativity is the highest expression of the Russian spirit, the Russian character, sounds repeatedly in Baring’s works (with the addition of some other features). With Mirsky it acquires a slightly different quality, switching from “spirit” to “language” and national “poetry”, and is expressed only once, precisely in connection with this ‘little tragedy’. However, the influence of Baring’s thought is obvious. Considering *The Stone Guest* “the most Russian” of all Pushkin’s works, Mirsky explains: “...It achieves what can be achieved only in Russian, in being at once classical, colloquial, and poetical, and because it embodies in their perfection all the best aspirations of Russian poetry – its striving towards selective, unornamental, realistic, and lyrical perfection” (Ibid., p. 97).

Following Baring, Mirsky, describing Pushkin’s perception of Byron’s poetry, persistently pursues the idea of creative independence of the Russian poet. Moreover, his introductory statements, in their logic and syntactic models, are similar to Baring’s ones, cf.: “When talking about Byron’s influence on Pushkin, it is necessary to draw a dividing line” (Baring, 1915, p. 62) – “But the nature of this [Byron’s] influence must be understood correctly” (Mirsky, 1949, p. 85).

Just like his predecessor, Mirsky fights against the stereotypical idea of Pushkin’s imitation of Byron, but fights from the position of philological accuracy. Indicating the boundaries of the influence of the English poet on the Russian, Mirsky immediately identifies the stylistic line (contrasts the “exact and logical style” of Pushkin’s poetry with the “untidy rhetoric” of

Byron's poetry: "His exact and logical style is poles apart from Byron's untidy rhetoric") as well as the genre line ("Byron's influence is limited to the narrative poems of this period, and in these it was the choice of subject and the disposition of the material that are due to Byron") (Ibid., p. 85). As for the chronological framework, he gradually expands it, speaking about Byron's influence on *The Gypsies* and *Eugene Onegin*, on *Poltava*, and *The Little House in Kolomna*. However, only referring to the 'Southern Poems' Mirsky examines in some detail the peculiarities of Pushkin's perception of Byron's poetics.

In addition to the strategy of combating the stereotypical idea of the secondary nature of Pushkin's poetry and a certain touch of 'culturalism', Mirsky shares Baring's tendency to give an aesthetic assessment to works of literature: Mirsky's Pushkin 'rises' above Byron as the poet who reached the heights of poetic perfection and freedom – yet this idea, as well as the cultural approach, is expressed in the book very carefully, as if by a hint. It can be read in the comparative characteristics of Pushkin's and Byron's styles commented above. It also 'flickers' in the selection of "descriptive fragments" in *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* and *The Fountain of Bakhchisaray* as the "most original" and "most beautiful" parts of these poems (Ibid., p. 86).

At the same time, Mirsky describes the forms of Pushkin's acquisition and transformation of certain Byronic features in much more detail and with much more accuracy than Baring. Being "an interested reader of formalists and an interpreter <...> of their historical and literary practice in his English-language works" (Efimov, 2018, p. 17) of the early 1920s, conducting intensive correspondence with V.M. Zhirmunsky during the same period, Mirsky, of course, could not pass by the work *Byron and Pushkin*, published two years before the publication of his *History ... and Pushkin*. Moreover, he expresses his high opinion of Zhirmunsky's book in a review written for "Sovremennyye Zapisky" and published there in June 1925 (Svyatopolk-Mirsky, 1925) and mentions it in his monograph *Pushkin* (Mirsky, 1963, p. 236). Zhirmunsky's precise observations of the form and content of Pushkin's works in their relation to the adaptable elements of Byron's poetry, as well as Mirsky's general attention to the achievements of Russian formalism, contributed to the development of his view on the problem of Pushkin and Byron.

Presenting this view in his characteristic essayistic manner, Mirsky lists, among the "elements"-images borrowed by Pushkin, the "oriental beauty" "with her fierce or devoted love", the "disillusioned hero" "with strong passions in the past", "the oriental potentate, grim and silent", and oriental flavor ("the hot atmosphere of 'the clime of the East'").

He particularly specifies the features of Byron's "narrative manner" also adopted by Pushkin: fragmentary composition, which imparts a special drama to the story ("fragmentary and dramatic manner of presentation"), "beginning in medias res", "abrupt transitions from one episode to another", "lyrical epilogues" (Mirsky, 1949, p. 86).

Unfortunately, Mirsky's accurate observations of the peculiarities of Pushkin's poetic form do not touch such aspects (covered in Zhirmunsky's book) as the lyrical manner of narration, the techniques characteristic for describing the appearance of the hero and heroine, the motivation and the very nature of the hero's alienation, the nature of idealization and the psychological portrait of the heroine. Unlike the Russian-Soviet scholar, Mirsky does not touch upon the question of the relationship between the 'oriental' in Byron and Pushkin either. In general, what concerns the forms of transformation of the Byronic features in Pushkin's 'Southern Poems' remains outside the field of Mirsky's vision. He limits himself to brief remarks about the "classicality" of Pushkin's style, the experimental nature of *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* and *The Fountain of Bakhchisaray* as "exercises on a borrowed theme", and stresses the "superficial" character of Byron's influence on Pushkin ("But the Byronic spirit was only superficially assimilated by Pushkin") (Ibid.).

Philological accuracy and detailed view are practically lost when it comes to Pushkin's later works, 'suggested' by Byron – *Eugene Onegin*, *Poltava*, *The House in Kolomna*. Regarding the latter, Mirsky briefly mentions its genre and strophic (*ottava rima*) similarity to Byron's *Beppo*. As far as *Poltava* concerns, he states that it goes back to Byron's works only in its genre form and in its fragmentary composition ("narrative in verse with a lyrical coloring", "abrupt passages from episode to episode"), completely ignoring the obvious polemics of the poem with Byron's *Mazeppa* (Ibid., p. 90). Regarding the relationship of the 'novel in verse' to *Don Juan*, Mirsky points out that it was thanks to Byron's poem that Pushkin was inspired by the idea of "writing a long narrative poem in stanza" and on a theme "taken from contemporary life", with changes of intonation "from serious to cheerful" ("a tone mingled of gravity and gaiety") (Ibid.). And, moving on to describe the content and poetics of *Eugene Onegin*, he adds: Pushkin's work does not have the key characteristics of Byron's poem – its "sea-like sweep" and "satiric power" (Ibid., p. 87).

Questions about the poetics of lyrical digressions, about the relationship between the voice of the author and the hero, about playing with the Byronic hero and at the Byronic hero, about some correlation between the image of Eugene Onegin and the image of Byron's Don Juan, about the

similarity of works in terms of stylistic diversity and stylistic play, Mirsky leaves aside. It can be supposed that such a sharp change in the perspective – from a comparative (comparative-historical) analysis to a blurred view, capturing only the most general features of similarity – is due to the lack of scholarly support in comparative studies. While treating the ‘Southern Poems’, Mirsky could use the material of Zhirmunsky’s book; with Pushkin’s later works the literary critic did not have such support.

This supposition is confirmed by the fact that Mirsky, following Zhirmunsky, mentions the extraordinary popularity of the genre form of the lyric epic poem in Russian literature in the 1820s. Moreover, pointing to numerous imitations of Pushkin’s ‘Southern Poems’, he singles out Kozlov’s *Monk* as a highly influential work of this time, in many of its features going back directly (and not through Pushkin, like many other Russian poems) to Byron’s ‘Eastern Tales’ (Ibid., p. 99).

Imagological message and communicative strategies in J. Lavrin’s book about Pushkin and Russian literature

The strategies chosen by Baring largely determine the description of relations between Pushkin and English culture, Pushkin and Byron in the post-war educational book *Pushkin and Russian Literature* (1947), written by Janko Lavrin, Professor of Slavic studies at the University of Nottingham and a friend of Mirsky since the early 1920s. Lavrin, like Baring, strives to bring Pushkin closer to the English reader and affirm the originality of his works, highlighting innovation and recreation as essential features of perception of Byron’s poetry in them. Moreover, in the context of a new round of confrontation between Britain and Russia (USSR) at the initial stage of the Cold War, Lavrin, obviously, sets himself the task of pointing out every fact that brings Russian and English cultures closer to each other (or rather – that brings Russian culture closer to English), to level out in the educational and cultural fields those acute contradictions that have emerged in the political sphere. At the same time, in solving the Pushkin – Byron problem, the scholar apparently takes into account works of his other ‘predecessor’ Mirsky.

As early as in the introductory note, the author states the key role of Pushkin for positive relations between English and Russian cultures, explaining his own “special attention” to the Russian poet by the “most vital connection” of his work “with English literature” (Lavrin, 1947, p. ix). Having argued this, Lavrin begins his chapter on Pushkin by comparing the role of Peter I in the historical development of Russia with

the role of Pushkin in the development of Russian culture – regarding Europe and European culture: “If Peter I ‘annexed’ Russia to Europe and at the same time turned her into a Great Power, Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin <...> achieved <...> something similar with regard to Russian literature and, for that matter, Russian culture in general” (Ibid, p. 17). Lavrin explains this parallel not so much by the psychological similarity of the two geniuses, not so much by the nature of their talent, but by the “ethnopsychological” basis of their personalities, and in this desire to single out the essential features of the “Russian national character” in Russian geniuses, an echo of Baring’s writings is ringing.

With implicit and later with explicit reliance on Dostoevsky’s “Pushkin Speech” (and, apparently, on Merezhkovsky’s ideas about Pushkin and Peter), the scholar explains the similarity between the personalities of the tsar and the poet: “They resembled each other in their broadness, their assimilative power, their intuitive awareness of the *Zeitgeist*, as well as in their Russian character; <...> their cosmopolitan sympathies did not <...> interfere with what was essentially Russian in both” (Ibid.).

Like Baring, following Dostoevsky, in Pushkin’s ability to “assimilate what is alien”, as well as in his responsiveness, Lavrin sees forms of manifestation of the Russian national character. At the same time, he diligently turns the features of Pushkin’s creativity he has captured towards England and the English reader. According to his interpretation, Dostoevsky “meant <...> that Pushkin’s work as a whole embodied the nearest approach to that cultural synthesis between Europe and Russia which Dostoevsky himself saw as one of the tasks to be aimed at and perhaps achieved by Russia.” He leads this ‘variation on Dostoevsky’s theme’ to a conclusion demanded by the chosen communicative strategy: “And since among those Western elements which helped to shape his work and his genius English literature played a most important part, he is among other things a vital cultural link between Great Britain and Russia” (Ibid., p. 76).

Applying this thesis to the relationship between Pushkin and Byron, in the ‘Southern Poems’ Lavrin points out their lyro-epic genre (“new pattern of poetic narrative”; “its lyrical tonality”), their fragmentary composition (“fragmentary character”), their “romantic themes” as features borrowed from Oriental tales. Surprisingly ignoring the type of hero, he concludes this fragment with the statement that from this borrowed material Pushkin creates original works (“But having done this he went his own way...”) (Ibid, p. 94). He fills the gap regarding the type of hero in his monograph published a year later, *From Pushkin to Mayakovsky*, which

argues, in particular, that “in *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* and in *The Gypsies* he introduced into Russian literature the uprooted Childe Harold type” (Lavrin, 1948, p. 21). Clarifying that this “essentially romantic hero is shown in a realistic setting” by Pushkin, he gives a brief description of the dynamics of the the Byronic hero in the Russian poet’s works: “Later, in *The Gypsies*, he debunked not only his egotism, but also the fallacy of any Rousseausque-Byronic “back to nature” tendency. <...> Finally, Pushkin debunked the Byronic poseur, fashionable in those days also on the banks of the Neva, in his famous *Eugene Onegin*” (Ibid.).

In his first monograph, Lavrin limits himself to general phrases about “Byronic touches” in *The Gypsies* and *Eugene Onegin* and immediately moves on to a generalized judgment in which both Baring’s and Mirsky’s assessments echo: “Pushkin made use of Byron only as a stepping-stone towards his own originality <...> Neither Byron’s rhetoric nor Byron’s pose could ever infect him” (Lavrin, 1947, p. 95).

Dwelling in more detail on the contact connection between Pushkin’s *Poltava* and Byron’s *Mazeppa*, Lavrin synthesizes the strategies of ‘justification’ and ‘exaltation’ of Pushkin with the strategy of bringing him closer to the English reader. In general, in the context of his implicit pathos of opposition to the ideology of the Cold War, all the chosen strategies merge in his book into one common line of ‘justification’ of Russian culture and Russian history. Noting that Pushkin takes an excerpt from *Mazeppa* as an epigraph to his poem, the scholar points out the fundamental difference in the poets’ depictions of the protagonist: “...whereas Byron described one of Mazepa’s youthful adventures in a romantic halo, Pushkin portrayed him at the height of his career and truth to history: as a cruel, vainglorious old intriguer plotting with the Swedish king Charles XII against Peter the Great” (Ibid., p. 107–108).

Conclusion

A general conclusion to the article about the peculiarities of constructing a narrative about the essence, aspects, degree and dynamics of Byron’s influence on Pushkin in British Pushkin studies in the 1910s–1940s could be the following: starting with Maurice Baring, British researchers had consistently solved this problem involving such communicative and research strategies as to bring Pushkin closer to the British reader and to combat the stereotype of the imitability of his work. These strategies were, to one degree or another, combined with the principles of historical periodization and aesthetic evaluation of Pushkin’s work, as well as with

more or less evident (and imagologically charged) cultural approach. Taken in the sequence of being written and published, British Pushkin studies of this period reveal the feature of accumulating and processing research experience, including not only the domestic (that is, British) one, but also that of Russian (Soviet) scholars. Its orientation towards the “horizon of reader expectations” manifested itself in the choice of the described communicative and research strategies. In the socio-political context of the Cold War, these strategies set the general vector for ‘justification’ and ‘exaltation’ of Pushkin as a way of ‘justifying’ Russian culture and history for the British reader. The tangible center of this metonymic rapprochement was Janko Lavrin’s analytical analysis of Pushkin’s polemics with Byron in *Poltava*.

Surprisingly (or not), this Pushkin’s text became, perhaps, the hottest point for a new ideological and imagological turn at the beginning of the 21st century. Nowadays, through postcolonial discourse, the narrative of ‘accusation’ of Pushkin’s *Poltava* in the distortion of history, and a parallel ‘justification’ of Byron’s *Mazepa* penetrates British Pushkin studies. Closely connected with these two related to each other tendencies is sharp criticism of the history of Russia as a history of cruel colonialism. This is exactly what Connor Doak, a Lecturer in Russian literature and Comparative studies at the University of Bristol, does in his article on Pushkin’s *Poltava* published in the journal “Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies” (Doak, 2010). In the ‘new reality’ of this text, Pushkin writes a parody of Byron’s poem (“the poem’s primary function is to parody Byron” (Ibid., p. 88)) and thereby ‘denigrates’ Mazepa (“The poem’s vilification of Mazepa” (Ibid., p. 83)), while Russians, sharing Pushkin’s assessments, become colonialists who mock the colonized people (“how should a colonized people respond to traditional commemorations of colonial victories?” (Ibid., p. 84)). In this article, Byron’s Mazepa rises above Pushkin, *Poltava*, Russian culture, and at the same time – the Ukrainian people. As a universal role model the author of the article directly identifies the courageous and calm acceptance of defeat demonstrated by Byron’s hero.

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