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John Keats' and William Holman Hunt's *Isabella; or the Pot of Basil*

Синкретизм поэзии и живописи заключается в стремлении поэтического слова к изобразительности, а живописного полотна – к повествованию. В этом контексте нами проанализированы романтическая поэма Дж. Китса и картина прерафаэлиты У. Ханта по мотивам короткой новеллы Боккаччо. Как поэт, так и художник, каждый своими средствами, раскрывают идею верности подлинной любви не только до гробовой доски, но и после смерти.

Ключевые слова: широкий круг стилистических приемов, средневековой, древние грамматические формы, намеренно грубые поэтические детали, влажный белый грунт, в натуральную величину

Poetry and painting syncretism lies in the striving of the poetic word for imagination and the painting – for narration. In this context, we have analyzed J. Keats' romantic poem and W. Hunt's painting based on the plot of a short Boccaccio's novel. Both the poet and the painter, each of them by his means, reveals the idea of the fidelity of genuine love not only till the graving day but also after death.

Keywords: a vast range of stylistic devices, mediaeval, ancient grammar forms, pointedly rough poetic details, wet white ground, life-sized

Once made-up plots attract the attention of other creators living in different times and countries, adding to the original the hue of their art and time. In Boccaccio's "Decameron" we find rather a short story of unhappy Isabella who had to keep the head of her slaughtered beloved in the garden-pot. John Keats (1795-1821), a romantic British poet of a new wave, who unlike his predecessors Shelley and Byron believed that poetry should not be made a direct expression of political creeds, but strive to eternal passions and to beauty [2, p. 156]. Keats describes all the events in the poem at large "to make old prose in modern rhyme more sweet ... to stead ... a verse in English tongue" [6] (further on the poem is quoted from this source). They are narrated from aside for the reader to have a full picture of the love in its bud, efflorescence of it, rude intrusion into it, devotion to it till the graving day and after the death.

Isabel, characterized by the synonyms *fair*, *poor*, *simple* and Lorenzo from Florence represent different layers of the society, Lorenzo works for her brothers. *Poor* is equal to *naïve*, as the girl is unaware of the conventions of the society. The

boy and the girl meet at meals feeling ‘*stir of heart, some malady*’, the symptoms of love. The comparative degree contributes to the growing feeling of love: “*With every morn their love grew tender,/ With every eve deeper and tenderer still.../ ... his continual voice was pleasanter to her, than noise of trees*”. The mediaeval instrument lute is in line with Boccaccio’s time: “*Her lute-string gave an echo of his name*”. The poet uses a wide range of stylistic devices profusely. Metaphors reveal Lorenzo’s longing for seeing Isabel: “*...gentle hand was at the latch/ Before the door had given her to his eyes; /... from her chamber-window he would catch the beauty*”. Ancient grammar forms point out the remote period of time: *thee, thy lips, thou didst, thou art leading, thou ledest, thy hand, thine eyes, brethren, Lorenzo came not, the little sweet doth kill much bitterness* alongside with syncopated endings: *coffin’d, marr’d, ceas’d*.

For about two months Lorenzo hesitates to confess his feelings to the girl but watching her turning unwell he comes to the decision to “*drink her tears*”. It is the heart where love-work is made, so the word is repeated many a time: “*His heart beat awfully against his side*”; “*And to his heart he inwardly did pray/ For power to speak*”. Luckily the beloved understand each other without words: “*Lorenzo!*” – *here ceas’d her timid quest, / But in her tone and look he read the rest*. The confession makes them happy and cheerful, that is expressed through the simile: “*Great bliss was with them, and great happiness / Grew like a lusty flower in June’s caress*”. They’ve acquired the inhuman possibilities expressed through the metaphors: “*tread upon the air*”; “*Twin roses by the zephyr blown apart / Only to meet again more close, and share / The inward fragrance of each other’s heart*”. Isabel and Lorenzo could meet only secretly, the night being their witness which is expressed metaphorically: “*before the dusk had taken from the stars its pleasant veil*”. But her brothers “*enriched from ancestral merchandize*”, proud of their status could not agree to Lorenzo’s low origin and income. They intended to marry their sister to “*some high noble and his olive trees*”, the zeugma points out the brothers’ standards mocked by the poet. Paraphrasis ‘*these money bags*’ is opposed to “*the hunted hare*”, meaning Lorenzo. They look down at “*the servant of their trade designs*”. J. Keats often refers to paraphrasis to characterize Isabel’s brothers: “*these men of cruel clay*”, to pointedly prosy metaphor “*these serpents’ whine*”. These devices reveal the brothers as evil creatures. Ordering Lorenzo “*to spur three leagues towards the Apennine*” actually they send him to death as “*they resolved in some forest dim / To kill Lorenzo, and there bury him*”. Anticipating a three hours’ absence Lorenzo was eager to have a look at Isabel, to part with her. None of them suspected it was their last meeting.

Lorenzo was slain and buried next to Florence “*where Arno’s stream / Gurgles through straiten’d banks*”. The poet points out with mockery that the brothers became “*each richer by his being a murderer*”. Nevertheless, they soothed their sister that “*Lorenzo had ta’en ship for foreign lands*” as far as they trusted namely him. Instinct prompted Isabel sadness, and in some months “*sweet Isabel / By gradual decay*

from beauty fell". Once she had a vision of Lorenzo as a pale shadow from the forest tomb under the dark pine roof. He asked her to shed tears over his grave. Isabel put two and two together and got four – her beloved had been killed by a brother's bloody knife. She took an aged nurse with her and started for the dismal forest. They laboured to find Lorenzo's earthy bed. Isabel's grief and sadness described at large are opposed to her resoluteness: "*Work through the clayey soil and gravel hard, / To see scull, coffin'd bones, and funeral stoke*". Keats is baldly introducing to English literature antipoetic and even ugly details. Actually, he was the first who introduced pointedly rough poetic details as he believed in the ability of art to unite Truth and Beauty [1]. It is obvious that "discovery of beauty was to Keats a discovery ... of the core of things... It was the way of learning the truth about reality..." [2, p. 156].

Isabel is in raptures finding "*each form that hungry Death hath marr'd*". The simile "*Upon the murderous spot she seemed to grow, / Like to a native lily of the dell/ She kissed it with a lip more chill than stone*". Isabel together with her nurse worked for three hours to cut the head of "*no formless monster*", but one "*whose gentleness did well accord with death, as life*". Isabel kissed it and with great secrecy took it home. She combed its wild hair with a golden comb, pointed each fringed lash, wept and washed it with her tears. To keep it away from her brothers Isabel placed the head of her beloved into a garden-pot and planted some sweet basil over it. "*And she forgot the stars, the moon, and the sun, / And she forgot the blue above the trees, / And she forgot the dells where water run,/ And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;/ She had no knowledge when the day was done,/ And the new morn she saw not; but in peace/ Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,/ And moisten'd it with tears unto the score*". The plant grew profusely. Describing Isabel mourning over the garden-pot, the author addresses Melancholy to linger, Music to breathe, Echo from an isle, spirits in grief to smile. Due to his adherence to romanticism Keats is aware that "*simple Isabel is soon to be/ Among the dead*". Pointing out the futility of Isabel's death the poet compares her to a palm "*cut by an Indian for its juicy balm*".

The brothers got interested why the sister treated the Basil pot as a nest to which she flew "*as a bird on wing to breast its egg again*". After examining the pot and finding out the sister's secret, being aware of the blood on their hands, they immediately left Florence taking the pot away from the sister. Isabel couldn't stand that cruelty. There was no life for her any more. Again, the author addresses melancholy, music, echo, spirits of grief to mourn over Isabel's death, too lone and incomplete.

John Keats enriches Boccaccio's plot with the tragic experience of the new social epoch. The poet feared that beauty could not be found in contemporary society, he searched for it in the world created by the poet.



Illustration – W. H. Hunt.
Isabella or the Pot of Basil

It is widely known that poetic word is striving for imagination as the painting to narration, their syncretism is revealed in it [3, p. 235]. There is no doubt, why the romantic poem by J. Keats gave rise to the paintings of Millais, Waterhouse, John White Alexander. From our view point William Holman Hunt's canvas is the best and the brightest representation of the plot and deserves special analysis. W. H. Hunt (1827-1910) is one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB). It was natural for the PRB artists to look for the themes of their canvases in the Italian Renaissance, as they considered that Raphael's followers had distorted the principles of the great painter while they were striving to the bright and dynamic style, to the detailed natural similarity of the depiction with its origin. Keats' poem stirred Hunt's imagination for a long time. He started with drawings of Lorenzo as a clerk at work while Isabella's brothers studied their accounts in 1848.

Shortly after his marriage in 1866 travelling with his pregnant wife Fanny to Italy he chose another plot – Isabel caressing the pot of Basil in her bedroom with Fanny as a model (Illustration) [5]. Tortured by insomnia, unable to fall asleep the girl is dressed in a semi-transparent nightgown. In the background of a big and richly decorated bedroom the girl's bed is visible with the cover turned over. In the foreground bare-foot Isabel drapes herself over an altar created by her to Lorenzo. The elaborately inlaid prie-dien is covered with a richly embroidered cloth. The majolica pot decorated with skulls reposes on it. The pot contains Isabel's treasure – Lorenzo's head. The girl's abundant hair flows over the pot and around the flourishing plant of Basil. Hunt took pains to turn his painting to a memorial of his wife who died soon after giving birth to their son. He took Fanny's features for Isabella. Using thin sable brushes the painter achieves photographic similarity between Isabel and her model, his wife Fanny. It was a new technique for that period of time. Symbolic skulls on the pot express both Isabel's mourning for Lorenzo and Hunt's mourning for Fanny. The painter worked on the canvas for months after his wife's death and completed it in

1868. The dimensions of the painting are rather big 187 / 116 cm. It gives the opportunity to create a life-sized portrait. Wet white basis makes the colours extremely bright [4], [5].

W. H. Hunt remains true to the esthetic principles of PRB. He makes the emphasis on sensuality, rich colours and elaborate decorative objects. Though the Brotherhood existed for less than ten years it effected the development of the Victorian epoch for more than a century. Bright plots and symbolic images gave them a possibility to reveal the power of the man's spirits.

John Keats narrated his romantic poem in such a way that William Holman Hunt couldn't help depicting poor Isabella's sad love-story with his brush. Due to them we learn that the wonderful genuine feeling is worth to be true not only to the graving day but also after death.

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Сатира на порок в поэзии И. М. Долгорукова (обличение эгоизма)

Статья посвящена критике одного из наиболее распространенных общечеловеческих пороков – эгоизма – в творчестве известного поэта-моралиста рубежа XVIII–XIX веков князя Ивана Михайловича Долгорукова (1764–1823). В сатирической поэзии Долгорукова соединялись высокий дидактический пафос с автобиографическим содержанием, что сообщало его стихам интимную, домашнюю интонацию.

Ключевые слова: И. М. Долгоруков, сатира на общечеловеческие пороки, обличение эгоизма