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The impact of Civil War on American Literature

The conflict between the South and the North has been aging for a long time, and throughout the 1950s literature has been an active participant in the struggle of ideas. Verbal battles were fought on the pages of newspapers and magazines, abolitionists fought with the apologists for slavery, romantic writers in the North glorified freedom and sympathized with blacks, and in the South, they described idyllic life on cotton plantations. The split and the war were not a surprise, but nevertheless posed new ethical and aesthetic problems for the artists and forced them to look for special approaches to reflecting political events.

Military topics were not developed in the United States fiction. The few novels about the War of Independence, most of them episodically imitated Walter Scott, sinned with romantic clichés. Journalism gained much more experience, which came to the fore in the days of trials due to the speed of reaction to what is happening and its propaganda potential. Along with it, other “operational” genres, such as satire and poetry, also experienced an upsurge, differing in general similarities: topicality, laconicism, and emotional impact. It was they who demonstrated the ability to influence the spiritual state and mood of the nation (Montville105). Epic canvases are rarely created near the battlefields the roar of guns does not lead to calm analytical comprehension and abstract philosophical generalizations.

Most American writers, in one form or another, took part in the Civil War, fighting in the army, serving in hospitals, speaking political essays, affirming or exposing the ideals of warring parties by journalistic and poetic means. The confrontation of the northern and southern states stimulated the intellectual life of the nation, the self-consciousness of which developed under the conditions of the existence of various cultures that have their own regional characteristics.

The reasons for the clash between the North and the South were predominantly political and economic in nature. The North wanted to create a powerful industrial state with a single market and government, which was hindered by the slave, feudal South. The latter, not wanting to put up with historical inevitability, tried to maintain the status quo by leaving the Union. But not these prosaic motives were recognized by the parties as the main thing. First of all, they appealed to morality and culture, sought support in the ideals of the past, peculiarly mythologizing history. Many southerners, even not being apologists for slavery, extolled the virtues of their region, considering it an outpost of ancient European civilization in the New World. And the northerners, descendants of the zealous Puritans, recalled the missionary zeal of their ancestors in eradicating evil and their willingness to make a sacrifice on the altar of justice. Even those of them

Even before the outbreak of the military conflict, representatives of both regions were critical of the literary products of their opponents as a lower order phenomenon and considered their own works as examples of high culture. In fact, both the North and the South had their literary successes and failures, although the priority of the North, which gave a constellation of brilliant names, is obvious here. In all latitudes of America, the key positions were occupied by romanticism, which generated both genuine art and helpless crafts. By the 60s, it had reached its peak and for at least two decades did not leave the stage of national life. But the war, exposing the weak and strong sides of romanticism, served as an impetus for its internal evolution and transformation towards other forms of development of being.

The literature of the prewar South as a whole was weak, secondary, dependent on English influence and aimed at the romanization of slave life. Graceful literature was not considered a worthy occupation for a gentleman; most writers considered themselves lovers. Not popular among the rather poorly educated population of the region, literary works received support only from a thin layer of the elite, who had hopes for their role in the future cultural advancement and the preservation of the spiritual identity of the southern states. "Criticism, supporting the idea of creating southern literature, made every effort to put the artistic imagination at the service of the strictly prescribed social task - to protect slavery or, in any case, southern society from any incitement from outside" .

Isolationist ideas were substantiated by the theory of a special slave-owning democracy of the Greek type, which will be the successor to European history and culture. In the novels of the representatives of the so-called "plantation tradition" - W. G. Simms, J. P. Kennedy, W. Carusers, N. B. Tucker, J. E. Cook - idealized life on the southern plantations and the relationship of masters and slaves, and the inhabitants of the South were portrayed as noble knights following the code of honor. Most of these works belonged to the genre of historical prose, where the original specificity and perfection of the southern order created by the "Virgin Cavaliers" was proved. (Lundberg373).

According to most writers, the withering away of slavery should have occurred gradually, without outside interference, as the natural evolution of society has taken place. Beecher Stow’s book, Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852), which was followed by a series of publications defending the region’s honor, was received as a challenge. In William John Grayson's "Mercenary and Slave" (William John Grayson. The Hireling and the Slave), written in the style of classical English poetry in the 1950s, slavery is justified in terms of social expediency. The author assures that for blacks it is the best device for their life in a given place and at a given historical time.

Freedom is possible only after blacks become civilized, otherwise it will lead to anarchy and disorder. Grayson resorts to the argument that was widespread among apologists then, comparing slave labor with the labor of wage workers in England and finding it no more difficult. He calls the northerners, who in the recent past traded in live goods, hypocrites, whose indignation over the moral perversity of slavery is caused by its economic disadvantage for their business. Half of the poem is dedicated to the depiction of a plantation life represented by an idyllic pastoral.

Similar ideas are contained in the books of George Fitzhugh "Sociology of the South" (George Fitzhugh. Sociology for the South, 1854) and "Cannibals all! Or Slaves without masters" {Cannibals AN! or Slaves Without Masters, 1857), where English newspapers are abundantly cited to assess the fate of American blacks, writing about the brutal exploitation of workers in European industrial enterprises. The advantage of slaves, according to Fitzhugh, is that they are free from caring for themselves and are under the care of owners who are interested in their well-being.

The South has always reacted painfully to criticism of the existing orders and mores, especially from the outside. Many writers did not turn a blind eye to the shortcomings of their homeland, its economic backwardness, inertness and prejudice, but assigned the solution of all problems exclusively to the southerners themselves. Therefore, they welcomed the split of the Union and indignantly perceived the invasion of federal troops on their territory as an invasion of barbarians. From the very beginning of the war, the attitude of the southern public towards the North was irreconcilable, which was reflected in the literature of the war years, primarily in journalistic genres. Dissent was not allowed in numerous newspapers and magazines, and military censorship existed against pro-proverbial publications.

Poetry has also become close to journalism, which has turned mainly to patriotic themes in its desire to inspire people and maintain morale in them. Many prominent poets belonged to the poetic circle formed in the 50s in Charleston, the cultural center of South Carolina. One of them was Henry Timrod (1828-1867), who had changed several professions during his life and served as a war correspondent during the war.

In the prewar years, he was very critical of his region as a backward province and urged his compatriots to abandon obsolete traditions. In the essay "Literature in the South" ("Literature in the South", 1859), Timrod bitterly stated that Southerners ignored their writers, even those whom the North had to recognize. The poet considered the sober, self-critical satire a cure for ignorance and bragging. "The time has come for the destruction of their complacency. And as the best weapon we offer satire, as this is the only effective remedy against vanity.”. But at the beginning of the war, Timrod, like many of his colleagues, leaped for patriotic feelings, and he unconditionally sided with the Confederation and became her singer.

Now the civilization of the South seemed to him a paradise and a model of the future for all mankind (the poem "Ethnogenesis"), and white cotton became a symbol of peace and humanism spreading from the American southern states throughout the earth ("Cotton Box"). In verses of this content, Timrod’s style was pompous, inclined toward biblical allusions and traditional romantic imagery. Here, the patrons of the South are nature and the sun, and ocean winds are "on his premises."(Giles18). The South is also a beautiful woman, a pure and innocent lily, while the North is the product of the devil.

However, later, taking part in hostilities and experiencing all the horrors of the bloody massacre, Timrod took a more balanced position, and the themes of the world sounded in his works. In the poem "Spring" nature is no longer depicted as a comrade-in-arms, not a symbol of the coming prosperity of the South, but a suffering party, an embodiment of the mortality of earthly life. According to K. Maislinger, a scholar of literature of this period, “nature was no longer evidence of a brilliant future, a warlike force fighting on the side of the South in its battle with evil; nature became capricious, it was now a manifestation of the passage of time and the accompanying withering, an expression of fragility of hope for the future " (Maislinger, 1830)

As the doom of the Confederation became apparent, Timrod’s lyrics filled with more and more gloomy motives, fighting spirit was replaced by elegiac moods. In the poem "Unknown Dead", written in 1863, the author laments the abandoned soldiers' graves and ruined young lives. Timrod rarely goes beyond normative romantic poetics, and his Ode (1866), dedicated to the Confederate soldiers buried in Charleston, is filled with images typical of poetry of the time - images of the laurel crown of glory, heavenly angels, virgins with bouquets of flowers. (Clapp-Itnyre153)

The romantic poet was Timrod's friend, Paul Hamilton Hayne (1830-1886), who was also a member of the Charleston circle and edited the Russell Magazine. Hein was not a fanatical adherent of the “cause of the South,” he was loyal to the culture of the North and was friends with some New England poets, although the atrocities committed by federal forces in his region and the loss of his own property during General Sherman’s raid through South Carolina made him understandable bitterness and outrage. As a result, southern civilization rose in his eyes as a carrier of moral truth, subjected to the invasion of vandals. (Maislinger 37).

Therefore, all his works from the time of the war urge compatriots to bravely "meet their fate" and stand up for religion, laws, wives and daughters, like the heroes of antiquity ("My Homeland")(Richards145). The city of Charleston is personified in the image of the "Queen of the Ocean", which bows in grief with a burning torch over the fallen citizens and calls for revenge. In the Battle of Charleston Harbor poem, soldiers are compared in their stamina to solidified marble, stone statues clutching their guns in strong hands only sparkling eyes betray their human feelings.

Traditional romantic images abound in all of Haine's poetry. For example, in the Ode written after the defeat of the South (1866), there are antique allusions, and Glory, crowning with flowers of the living and the dead, and angels, and a voice that comes from heaven and proclaims the nation “free among the most free and great among the most powerful. " The poems “Replacement” and “Little White Glove” are permeated with pathetic sentimentality (Allen23)

It must be said that many Southerners tried to circumvent the dark side of slavery, recognizing its ethical vulnerability. Most preferred to emphasize the need to preserve the cultural specificity of the South and appealed to the patriotic feelings of fellow citizens. The problem of slavery most often broke away from a concrete reality and moved into a certain ideal, theoretical context. By virtue of the prevailing view of the world, when war, history, economics, and social relations were evaluated through the prism of a romantic attitude, the South overcame romanticism in artistic work with such difficulty, while remaining faithful to it as a means of aesthetic expression of aging ideals.

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