

ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НАРОДОВ МИРА / LITERATURE OF THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD

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THE TOPIC OF BRITISH NATIONAL HISTORY IN J.R. KIPLING'S POETRY AND PECULIARITIES OF ITS LEXICAL EMBODIMENT

Review article

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Abstract

The article describes and discusses the revealing of British national history topic in the poetic texts by one of the most prominent English-speaking authors at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries – Joseph Rudyard Kipling. Kipling's subjective position, expressed in the desire to strengthen the national-patriotic sentiments of compatriots, especially children, is emphasized and described in the article. Lexical peculiarities of the poems (abundance of archaic and historical words) are highlighted and analyzed as well. Based on the materials of Kipling's works, the author describes a change in the interpretation of national history topic in English literature at the turn of XIX and XX centuries, a deeper and more meaningful attitude towards it. The materials and results of the study can be applied in the course of teaching the History of Foreign Literature, special courses in British poetry of XIX – XX centuries at the university.

Keywords: historical poetry, Joseph Rudyard Kipling, British national history, literature for children, historical words, archaisms.

ТЕМА БРИТАНСКОЙ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИСТОРИИ В ПОЭЗИИ ДЖ.Р. КИПЛИНГА И ОСОБЕННОСТИ ЕЕ ЛЕКСИЧЕСКОГО ВОПЛОЩЕНИЯ

Обзор

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Аннотация

В настоящей работе характеризуется и исследуется поэтическое творчество крупнейшего британского автора рубежа XIX – XX веков – Джозефа Редьярда Киплинга, а именно – воплощение в нем темы британской национальной истории. Авторская позиция Киплинга, выражающаяся в стремлении укрепить национально-патриотические настроения соотечественников, особенно детей, находит свое отражение в выборе тематики, лексики стихотворений его исторического цикла (историзмы, архаизмы). На материале творчества Киплинга описывается изменение трактовки темы национальной истории в английской литературе, более глубокое и осмысленное отношение к ней. Материалы и результаты исследования могут быть применены в курсе преподавания истории зарубежной литературы, спецкурсах по английской литературе XIX-XX веков в вузе.

Ключевые слова: историческая поэзия, Джозеф Редьярд Киплинг, британская национальная история, детская литература, историзмы, архаизмы.

Introduction

Joseph Rudyard Kipling, alongside with Walter Scott, William M. Thackeray, and others, is a prominent English-speaking author who brightly revealed national British history topic in their works.

The topic of patriotism and pride for the native country, its culture and history, stands out in Kipling's creative activity. In the lyrical texts of his historical cycle, which are discussed below, the author addresses younger audience of readers, emphasizing the fact that patriotic upbringing of British children, knowledge of national history is immensely important.

However, the embodiment of this subject in Kipling's texts has never been studied in detail or analyzed properly, and this preconditions the relevance and novelty of the given research.

The material of the research is represented by poems from J.R. Kipling's dilogy ("Puck of Pook's Hills"; "Rewards and Fairies").

The aim of this article is to describe how the topic of national history is revealed in J.R. Kipling's poetic works with the help of certain lexical means (obsolete lexemes and constructions).

To achieve this aim, the following tasks should be solved:

- 1) to characterize J.R. Kipling's poetry of historical cycle in the literary context;
- 2) to describe and discuss contents, characters and plots of the aforementioned poems;
- 3) to find out specific lexical means (obsolete lexemes and constructions) in the analyzed poetic texts, give statistic and linguistic characteristic of them.

Methods and principles of the research

In this research we employed the method of contextual analysis, statistic analysis, and elements of linguistic stylistic analysis.

Discussion

Researchers of literary works on a historical topic created in Britain during the Victorian period noted the lack of a deep approach or accuracy of facts in the study of the depicted era, compared with similar works of the beginning of the century [4, P. 19], [8, P. 20]. The authors of the second half of the XIX century (W.M. Thackeray, W. Bulwer and others) were rather focused on the problems of a social and moral nature than on vivid embodiment of historical period depicted.

In the mid XIX century there appeared several poems with historical plots in English literature (R. Browning, "My Last Duchess", "Andrea del Sarto"; D.G. Rossetti, "Dante at Verona", and others). But these poems were not devoted to national British history, and the prototypes of the main characters were not British as well [12].

In the 1880s Pre-Raphaelite poet A.Ch. Swinburne in his lyrical works reminded to his compatriots that England's mission in the world could be great [4, P. 166]. Swinburne turned to the topic of the unique mission of his country, he was attracted by the bright events of national history, military victories, and ideal image of the poet for him was embodied in Sir Philip Sidney (poet of the Elizabethan era).

The strengthening of the positions of the Russian Empire in the world in the last third of the 19th century caused utter concern in Britain. British authorities were in fear of a blow to the Empire's colonial system from the outside – from the Russian Empire, the USA, Germany. Thus, the necessity for historical and patriotic trends in English literature was growing.

During this controversial period, bright historical poetry and prose texts were created by Joseph Rudyard Kipling (1865 – 1936), an outcomer from a family of an Englishman serving in India, a former journalist who traveled a lot around the world and admired the power of the British Empire, the future Nobel Prize laureate in literature. Like A.Ch. Swinburne, the writer was patriotic, he was proud of his compatriots and his country, "the mistress of the seas" [2, P. 227].

Kipling turned to the national history topic, being already a famous author. Settling in Sussex in 1890s was of great importance for his future work [3, P. 18].

The county of Sussex lay at the crossroads of historical events. Numerous conquerors sailing from the continent landed here, traces of their conquests having been preserved until Kipling's time. For example, when the author was digging a well, he found a spoon from the time of Cromwell, below a part of a horse harness from the time of the Romans was discovered [6, P. 8]. Gradually, the idea of a book about this land and its great past began to be formed.

In 1906 Kipling's collection of fairy tales "Puck of Pook Hill", was published, four years later – second part of the dilogy, "Rewards and Fairies". The main character of dilogy, Puck, was borrowed from W. Shakespeare's texts [5, P. 97].

The books are a series of short stories with a cross-cutting plot. Historical tales are closely connected with British mythology in them [3, P. 19]. The readers themselves must guess the dates from the hints left in the texts, and it helps to revise knowledge of native history [6, P. 7].

Kipling's dilogy can be considered a kind of history textbook, written in a lively and entertaining way. Each fairy tale is preceded by a small poetic epigraph on historical topic. Later many of those poems were included in collections of Kipling's verse [1, P. 13].

Kipling's interest in the history of England at that time also manifested itself in co-authorship in writing a book devoted to history. In 1911, together with the historian C. Fletcher, he published an illustrated "A History of England", which included verse epigraphs from the aforementioned dilogy. The main purpose of the textbook was to trace the development of England from the Roman period up to late XIX century. In the preface, it was announced that the book was intended "for all boys and girls who are interested in the history of Great Britain and its empire" [9, P. 53].

It is worth discussing the most impressive works included in Kipling's dilogy, as well as in "A History of England". For instance, in the poem "The Roman Centurion's Song" the author describes the devotion of the Roman centurion to England. After long service in Britain he received an order to go with a cohort to Rome. The character asks his legate to let him stay in this province:

Here is my heart, my soul, my mind – the only life I know.

I cannot leave it all behind [10, P. 150].

Another poem narrating about the facts from the British history is "The Dane-geld". Danegeld, or Danish money, was a tax that was paid to Scandinavian invaders in medieval England between 991 and 1014:

... you've only to pay 'em the Dane-geld

And then you'll get rid of the Dane [10, P. 151]!

Kipling described the attempts of the English king Ethelred II to "buy" peace with the Vikings. However, in a modern context, this could also mean the author's criticism of current international politics which made Britain lose its position on the world stage in favor of Russia, Germany, and the United States.

The poem "Norman and Saxon" reflected Kipling's ideas about the British national character, which, he believed, had developed even before the Norman Conquest and remained unchanged for centuries. The writer dates the dying monologue of the old Norman to the year of accession to the English throne of the Norman king Henry I (A.D. 1100). In those tomes feudal structure of English society was established.

"My son", said the Norman Baron, "I am dying, and you will be heir

To all the broad acres in England that William gave me for my share

When we conquered the Saxon at Hastings" [10, P. 152].

Another memorable work is the poem "My Father's Chair". Kipling says in it that it is impossible for a monarch to sit on a throne without at least one of the four legs (Priests, Lords, People and Crown).

... Sit on all four legs, fair and square,

And never be tempted by one-legged stools [11]!

The next Kipling's "page" from the history of Great Britain is dedicated to James I (King of England and Scotland). He succeeded to the Scottish throne in 1567 as a result of the forced abdication of his mother, Mary Queen of Scots; and to the English throne due to the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, thus uniting the two crowns.

The logical conclusion of the poem is revealed in the lines that mention the son of James – Charles I. He inherited from his father bad relations with Parliament, which eventually led to Civil War and his own execution, thus refuting his father James' belief that "king's power is divine":

He wrote that monarchs were divine,
And left a son who proved they weren't [11]!

Images of the XVII century also appear in the lines of the author's poem "The Edgehill Fight", subtitled "Civil Wars, 1642". The Battle of Edgehill (October 23, 1642) was the first battle of the English Civil War (1642 – 1649). It was a clash between the Roundheads (under the Earl of Essex' command) and the Cavaliers (under Prince Rupert's command). The soldiers face each other, waiting to kill or be killed by people they have been friends with in the past. Regardless of which side wins, this day will be worse than death [10, P. 154].

The aforementioned texts are also interesting from the viewpoint of their lexical peculiarities, precisely, abundance of various obsolete words. As it's well known, two categories of such words are distinguished: historicisms (historical words) and archaisms; the groups being different functionally.

Archaisms are obsolete names for objects and concepts [7, P. 331]. This category also includes morphological forms belonging to the early periods of language development. In English, these are such pronouns as thou and its forms thee, thy and thine; the corresponding verb ending –est and the verb forms art, wilt; the ending -(e)th instead of -(e)s and the pronoun ye.

Historicisms are expressions of the corresponding concepts relating to the past of the English [7, P. 332]. Having passed into the category of historicisms, the word is used only for special purposes in scientific literature: thane, yeoman, goblet, baldric, mace.

Historical words do not have synonyms, while archaisms can be substituted by modern synonyms. However, both groups are used in historic literature: archaisms for bringing certain solemnity, especially in poetry; historicisms mostly for creation of realistic coloring while depicting previous epochs.

In the works of Rudyard Kipling on historical topic studied by us we found lexemes from both of the aforementioned groups (59 lexical units, 22 of them used repeatedly).

However, historicisms (legate, cohort, thane, dane-geld etc.) in a quantitative ratio (45 (76%)) significantly prevailed over archaisms (14 (23%)). The latter were mainly found in texts as part of direct speech replies by historical characters ("Gramercy, yeoman!" said our King. "Thy council liketh me" – "King Henry VII and Shipwrights", [11]).

We may conclude that while writing these texts the author was primarily interested in the creation of historical coloring, realistic depiction of the depicted objects and concepts (due to repeated use of historicisms), and secondly, in making the poems sound more solemn and sublime (the main function of archaic vocabulary).

As a matter of fact, the poems on historical plots created by Victorian poets mentioned above (R. Browning, D.G. Rossetti, A.Ch. Swinburne) contain much more archaic lexemes and constructions than historical words. The latter are met by us in these texts only sporadically, and can be hardly called obsolete (words like knight, spear, arrow and the like) [12].

Thus, having acquainted with the works on historical topic by Rudyard Kipling, the readers can expand their knowledge in this regard. The author's fairy-tale dilogy contains a lot of educational material, but these are not just "dry facts", but talentedly written stories and poems that can interest both children and adult readers, taking them to world where fantasy is interwoven with real events of the past, thereby instilling love for native history.

Conclusion

Having described and discussed the texts by J.R. Kipling in the cultural context of his age, we may admit that in the writer's works the traditions of deep historical approach to literary texts, started by Romantic authors, were developed. At the same time, the historical and patriotic topic, which was put forward in Kipling's works, was urgent and actual.

Obsolete lexical units, especially historical words, are multiple in the analyzed Kipling's poems. It is possible to assume that they play the same role in Kipling's historic lyrics that jargonisms and slangisms played in his "Barrack-Room Ballads", professional engineering or shipbuilding terminology – in poems about navigators and builders of the British Empire, and exoticisms of Indian origin – in poetry of his Anglo-Indian cycle. We mean the accuracy and realism of what is depicted, the creation of a "presence effect".

It is worth noting that words from the mentioned lexical groups (jargonisms, soldier's slang, professionalisms, exoticisms) are practically not found in Kipling's historical poems. They were not necessary for what Kipling aimed at, namely, educating the readers, especially the younger ones, broadening their knowledge about national history.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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