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### THE CONTINUITY OF BYRONISM IN LERMONTOV'S LYRICS

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#### Abstract

This publication examines the impact of George Gordon Byron's literary heritage on the artistic world of Mikhail Lermontov. It emphasizes that the Russian classic creatively adapted key elements of Byronic aesthetics: the cult of the rebellious individual, the thirst for independence, and the pathos of civic duty. At the same time, Lermontov's originality was inextricably linked to his national roots and was shaped by the realities of Russian society of that era.

**Keywords:** Tradition, romanticism, Byronism, poetics

#### ПРЕЕМСТВЕННОСТЬ БАЙРОНИЗМА В ЛИРИКЕ ЛЕРМОНТОВА

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#### Аннотация:

В данной публикации анализируется воздействие литературного наследия Дж. Г. Байрона на художественный мир М.Ю. Лермонтова. Подчеркивается, что русский классик творчески адаптировал ключевые элементы байронической эстетики: культ мятежной личности, жажду независимости и пафос гражданского служения. Вместе с тем самобытность Лермонтова была неразрывно связана с национальными истоками и определялась реалиями российского общества того времени.

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**Ключевые слова:** традиция, романтизм, байронизм, поэтика

### Introduction

In the chronicles of Russian Byronism, the figure of George Byron served as a standard for a whole galaxy of writers, but his ideas received the most profound and organic embodiment in the legacy of M. Yu. Lermontov. This question found a lively response both in the works of Soviet classics of literary criticism and in the research of our contemporaries. In particular, a significant contribution to the development of the topic was made by A. N. Veselovsky, V. P. Vorobyov, A. D. Galakhov, L. Ya. Ginzburg, N. Ya. Dyakonova, A. M. Zverev, E. N. Mikhailova, S. I. Rodzevich, M. N. Rozanov, V. D. Spasovich, B. V. Tomashevsky, B. M. Eikhenbaum, M. L. Semyonova, V. V. Lipich, Yu. V. Lyusova and others.

Their research interests cover a wide range of topics: from the specifics of Lermontov's poetics and aesthetic views to the textual criticism of specific works, the typology of images and genre structure of his works, and direct literary parallels. Nevertheless, the question of the role Byronism played in the development of Lermontov's unique authorial identity remains of scholarly significance. The purpose of this article is to explore the mechanisms by which the Byronic tradition influenced the artistic system of the Russian classic.

The influence of the British Romantic poet Lord George Gordon Byron on the public mood of the 1820s and 1830s was extremely powerful. This was determined by the fact that he was the poet who most uncompromisingly conveyed the idea of rejection of state despotism. The English writer gained the greatest number of adherents in the cultural milieu of France and Russia.

Byron's poetic expression gained particular popularity in Russia at the dawn of the 1820s. Literary thought of the time focused on comparing the Russian Romantic school with its British source. The presence of a significant Russian diaspora in Italy at the beginning of the century was a significant factor in the spiritual rapprochement between Russian readers and Byron's work. Evidence of

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Byron's personality and his direct involvement in the revolutionary movement in Europe was rapidly penetrating Russia. At the same time, translation activity increased, making English-language originals more accessible. Leading periodicals such as *Vestnik Evropy*, *Russkaya Mysl*, *Vremya*, and others regularly published analytical essays on the poet. However, it is worth emphasizing that not every critical study passed the censorship filter. In particular, strict restrictions were imposed on the satire "The Bronze Age" and the chapters of *Don Juan* concerning the Russian Empire.

Russian critics' views on Byron were extremely heterogeneous. The pages of journals often became the site of biased and controversial discussions. For example, the April 22, 1820 issue of *Russkoye Slovo* published a damning letter from the conservative official D. P. Runich to the editors of *Russkiy Invalid*. In it, the author refused to acknowledge the extent of the poet's talent, dismissively calling him an "atheist poet" [7]. In contrast, V. G. Belinsky enthusiastically described Byron as a "proud, indomitable, titanic spirit" [2, p. 281]. Clearly, Lord Byron, as a poet-fighter and creator of the "Byronic hero" archetype, became for a long time a central image in the intellectual and socio-political life of 19th-century Russia. Even during the decline of Byronism as a dominant movement, the name of the English classic did not disappear from the national cultural code. Mikhail Lermontov is rightfully considered a key figure in Russian Byronism. Not fluent in English in his early years, the young author became acquainted with the lord's work through French and Russian translations. He was familiar with V. A. Zhukovsky's version of "The Prisoner of Chillon" (1822), as well as "The Monk" (1825), "The Bride of Abydos" (1826) by I. I. Kozlov, and "Parisina" by V. Verderevsky (1827). Desiring a deeper understanding of the original source, Lermontov began studying English at the age of fifteen and independently attempting to translate his idol's poems. The Russian poet felt an inextricable connection with the British poet, drawing parallels not only between their texts but also between their lives, which left a profound imprint on his worldview. "We

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share the same soul, the same torment," Lermontov noted in his poetic address "To \*\*\*" (1830) [4, p. 133]. This continuity is most clearly evident in the early period of his work, when his youthful lyric poetry was largely imitative, borrowing key motifs and imagery from Byron's poetry. It is important to add that the English tradition significantly enriched the toolkit of Russian poetics, introducing fresh rhymes and complex stanzas.

At the same time, the Russian genius strove to preserve his authorial autonomy, a fact noted by scholars as early as the 19th century. Thus, V. G. Belinsky argued that Byron's influence was not overwhelming; it merely served as a catalyst for the revelation of Lermontov's distinctive qualities. The critic emphasized the national originality of his lyric poetry: "...he is a Russian poet at heart—the past and present of Russian life live within him..." [1, p. 275]. In turn, Yu. N. Elagin viewed the Byronic craze in Russia as a "fleeting fad" [3, p. 288], pointing out the impossibility of reducing the work of Russian authors to simply copying the English model. Lermontov himself, in his manifesto "No, I am not Byron" (1832), declared his own uniqueness and difference from his British predecessor. It is more reasonable to speak of organic historical continuity.

In his lyrical epic novel "Litvinka" (1832), Lermontov, for the first time within the framework of Russian Romanticism, evokes the image of a proud loner, towering above society like an oak tree—"the king of the oak grove" [5, p. 240]. The protagonist Arseniy is endowed with a rebellious temperament and a habit of domination, and the disappointment he experienced in love leads to an existential crisis, which the author characterizes with the phrase: "... the heart, struck by melancholy, was already dead, although alive in the chest" [5, p. 235].

Such iconic works as "Duma," "Mtsyri," "The Demon," "I Go Out Alone on the Road," and "It's Both Boring and Sad" embody the contradictions and harshness of life for a solitary romantic. The protagonist of these texts emerges as an exceptional individual, a rebel and fighter, embodying the author's position. Here, Lermontov's character is typologically aligned with the autonomous rebels of

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Byron's poems. Remarkably, the concept of "The Demon" is dual: thematically, it alludes to Byron's mysteries (for example, "Cain"). This work by Lermontov most fully demonstrates a dialogue with the English tradition. The image of the Demon echoes Manfred and Lucifer—characters characterized by alienation, radical individualism, theomachism, and a fatal attachment to an earthly woman. "The fundamental (and rather traditional) features of Lermontov's Demon stem from the author's underlying desire for absolute freedom" [6, p. 16], emphasizes contemporary literary scholar V. Paperny.

At the same time, Lermontov's oeuvre includes a distinct layer of works that demonstrate his complete independence from British canons. In "The Song of the Merchant Kalashnikov," "Borodino," "A Hero of Our Time," and his civic lyric poetry, the poet's national identity is evident, writing about his homeland and the people's destiny. The central focus here is not on the abstract individualist, but on the common man (the comparison of Pechorin and Maxim Maksimovich in terms of their philosophies of life is characteristic). It is worth noting that Byron rarely addressed the theme of the "common man," limiting himself to a collective image of a struggling people in "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage." Herein lies the fundamental difference between the artistic worlds of the two poets. In summary, scholarly interest in Byron's influence on Lermontov remains consistently high. Lord Byron was an iconic figure whose work reflected the spirit of the times in Russian culture at the beginning of the 19th century. His role in the development of the Romantic poem genre and the evolution of the individualist hero in Lermontov's work is undeniable. In his works, the Russian classic brought to the forefront the struggle against the oppressive socio-political system of the empire. Following his English predecessor, he celebrated exceptional characters striving to overcome the narrow boundaries of the established world order.

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