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Vladislav Surkov

*A. M. Gorky Institute of World Literature
of the Russian Academy of Sciences*

THE POWER OF TIME IN LYRICAL POETRY BY PER ATTERBOM AND VIKTOR RYDBERG

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The article focuses on the concept of time in human and global perspective in the poetry of two Swedish authors of the 19th century: Per Atterbom and Viktor Rydberg. These two poets belong to different branches of the Romantic movement. Atterbom represents the early mystic Romanticism and he is one of the first Romantic authors in Sweden. Rydberg is a post-Romantic poet: his poetic works contain features that are characteristic of the literature of Romanticism, but they were written in the last decades of the century. The theme of the power of time is one of the most important for both authors, it determines characters of lyrical heroes and poetics in many of their poems but in different ways. Atterbom represents the destructive power of time. Thus, the main characters of his fairy tale play “The Isle of Bliss”, Hyperborean king Astolf and nymph Felicia, live on a magical island and aspire to escape from Time, but Time overcomes them. Atterbom shows in his poetry that time hasn't its limits in the world beyond. Rydberg represents the characters who try to apprehend the rules of time. The immortal mythological creatures in his poems (the Tomten, the elf of a river) cannot explain why time has such an influence on man and mankind. This theme corresponds with a philosophical matter of the meaning of human life. The humans in Rydberg's lyrics do not try to overcome time as they perceive the nature and its rules throw their senses.

Keywords: Romanticism, time, Swedish literature, lyrics, Rydberg, Atterbom.

The History of Swedish Romanticism started at the turn of the 1800s and 1810s. There is not any specific date that marks the end of the Romantic period. In major European literatures, Romanticism was replaced by

Realism. But in Sweden, Realism was not developed as a literary movement. Only a few examples of Realistic literature (novels by Frederika Bremer, Sophia von Knorring) began to appear in the 1830s. At the same time, Romantic tendencies continued to exist in Swedish literature until the 1880s, when Romanticism was replaced by Naturalism represented by the group called “Young Sweden”, members of which adopted ideas of a Danish literary critic Georg Brandes. However, in the 1890s the neo-Romantic tendencies started to develop (poems by Verner von Heidenstam, Oscar Levertin and Gustav Fröding, novels by Selma Lagerlöf). But there are some post or late Romantic writings in the end of the 19th century, and the question is: can they be regarded as Romantic?

Our analysis is devoted to works of two authors, who belong to two different branches of Swedish Romantic movement: Per Atterbom, the leader of the Aurora League — the first Romantic literary group in Sweden; and Viktor Rydberg, whose poetic works relate to the end of the century. We will be assessing the concept of time in their works, because it is one of the important themes in Romanticism. The task is to define which common characteristics and differences the two authors had in their approaches regarding this matter. The problem of the power of time has intrigued writers and philosophers of all centuries. In the literature of Romanticism this topic is particularly well developed because the Romantic poets paid special attention to exceptional characters and the inner world of a human being.

Swedish Romanticists adopt the ideas of German Romantic philosophy. They were also influenced by the concept of Swedish philosopher C. J. Boström; his ideas have something in common with German Romanticism. Philosophy of the personal being is central to Boström's concept. He comes to the conclusion that true reality is subjective, and that it is always determined by self-consciousness. At the same time in the art of Romanticism the personality which is opposed to society comes to the fore. A Romantic character stands against a hostile environment. He aspires to freedom, which is one of the most important Romantic ideals. There is a point in the Romantic worldview that time limits freedom. A person (as well as all mankind) feels the impact of time, even when he tries to hide away from it. Freedom is one of the most important Romantic ideals.

Per Daniel Amadeus Atterbom (1790–1855) led that branch of Romanticism, which is characterized by a mystical perception of reality.

He regarded poetry as a special form of spirit, which arose from nature. Poetry was a religious language for him. The ideas of pantheism are inherent to poets of his circle who were raised on German Romantic philosophy. Atterbom considers time as a part of nature.

The destructive power of time is represented in the poem “Ruins of Stegeborg” (“Stegeborgs ruiner”, 1813). The central image of the poem is the destroyed castle called Stegeborg. The first lines praise the firmness of its last remaining tower. It is compared to the greatness of will, which aspires to rise. The strong will, which is able to challenge nature and fight against fate, is one of the most important features of a Romantic character.

The next stanzas express sadness about bygone times:

<i>Ej längre ljuder du af fröjd och sorg,</i>	‘You no longer ring for joy and sadness,
<i>Ej hvimlar du af väpnare och svärd.</i>	You don’t teem with weapon and sword.’

[Atterbom, 1813, s. 70]

The contemplation of the castle leads the observer to “the shadows of the heroes” (“hjelteskuggor”). In the fourth stanza the image of Disa appears. She is a heroine from a Medieval legend. In the poem, the motif of recollection of the past is also associated with her.

Then, in several stanzas, the deeds and battles of the knights are described, crusades in particular. The latter evoke biblical images in the mind of the lyrical hero. Thus, the events that took place in the castle fit into the global context. There is heroic and patriotic pathos in the part of the text describing battles of knights. The description is complemented by images of Svea — the symbolic personification of Sweden — and King Carl X Gustav, who owned the castle in the 17th century.

Another focus in the poem develops the concept of time. All presented events belong to bygone centuries. Abstract nouns related to the semantics of time are repeated in the text: eternity (“evighet”), infinity (“oändlighet”), memories (“minnen”). The ruins of the castle become an indication of past events.

There is also a motif of overcoming time in the text. First of all, it is the keeping of these events in memory, which belongs to the world beyond. At the beginning and at the end of the poem an image of heaven appears. In the first stanza, it is associated with the image of the last remaining tower of the castle. In the last stanza, a collective image of Northern Saints observes all events in the castle and keeps them in

memory. At the same time, the Saints are associated with legendary and historical figures who were mentioned earlier. They seem to live on top of the last tower of the castle, and all these events are preserved only for them. So, it turns out that overcoming time is only possible in the world beyond.

In the fairy tale play “The Isle of Bliss” (“Lycksalighetens Ö”, 1824–1827) the poet introduces the image of personified time. This story is based on a French medieval legend. While hunting Astolf, the king of the Hyperboreans, is lost and finds himself in the cave of the winds. He learns about the fabulous Isle of Bliss from the Western wind Zephyr. Then Zephyr helps the king to get to this island. Soon Astolf meets the queen of nymphs Felicia, who descended from the sphere of heaven. The characters develop a romantic relationship one with each other, and they eventually get married. Astolf drinks from the fountain of youth and lives on the island for three hundred years. In fact, he is out of time. One day the king realizes that he must return home. Upon his return, he discovers that a constitutional republic has been established in the Kingdom of the Hyperboreans. Astolf is unable to find a place for himself in the renewed state and is going to return to the Isle. Along the way, time overtakes him, and the king dies. The Isle of Bliss perishes. This is the plot of the play.

This play contains a multifaceted literary expression of the author’s views on Romantic poetry, as well as a satire on contemporary liberalism. The ideas in the text have already been analyzed in works of literary critics¹. We will not focus on this matter in detail. We are primarily interested in the image of Time in the last act of this play.

Time in this text is presented as relentless. It is, in fact, associated with death as it takes Astolf. This is how Time speaks about himself:

Mig en högre makt beväpnar och jag för dess vilja ut!

<...>

Jag det sköna kan förkrossa.

[Atterbom, 1985, s. 503]

‘The highest power arms me and I fulfil its will!’

<...>

I can crush beauty.’

¹ First of all, in the work “Tecknets tragedi: Symbol och allegori i Atterboms sagospel ‘Lycksalighetens ö’” by O. Fischer [Fischer, 1998].

Astolf and Felicia are Romantic characters who struggle with their fate and defy Time. The Isle of Bliss becomes a way to hide themselves from it. But the island itself is not eternal. Eventually, the perishing of the island symbolizes the death of sensual poetry. However, Felicia still does not die. She returns to her sphere of heaven, where rules of Time do not work. In fact, this means that the power of time has its limits, but these limits are beyond the earthly perception.

Viktor Rydberg (1828–1895) also addresses the theme of time and its influence on man and mankind, but his poetics is significantly different from Atterbom's.

Poetic works of Viktor Rydberg relate to the last decades of the 19th century. His poetry consists of two collections, published in 1882 and 1891. We lack an unambiguous definition of to what tradition we should relate his works. Some literary critics call him a Romanticist. Thus, the Swedish researcher Karin Nykvist notes that “[Rydberg] was a Romanticist in his views on children and childhood despite his biography” [Nykvist, 2008, s. 141]. Then she adds that “There is [in his poetry. — V.S.] the Romantic sadness for bygone times that was typical for Romanticism” [Nykvist, 2008, s. 142]. Rydberg has been described in “Cyclopedia of World Authors” as “one of the last of Romanticists, and certainly, one of the first idealists of the period” [Magill, 1958, p.928]. Meanwhile, Hans Granlid underlines ambiguous position of Rydberg's works in literature: “Rydberg's lyrics is a heart of Swedish poetry of the 19th century. The dark venous blood of Romanticism flows into it, but the light arterial blood of Christian liberalism, realism and expressionism flows out of it” [Granlid, 1973, s. 159].

Rydberg's lyrics indeed contain features that are characteristic of the literature of Romanticism. Thus, he often refers to the Middle Ages, as well as to national folklore and Scandinavian mythology. Motifs and images from Antiquity often appear in his poems as well. At the same time, the poet criticized the literature of Swedish Romanticism of the beginning of the century, in particular the work of the Aurora League.

On the one hand, Rydberg denounces the aspirations of Romanticists to return to the medieval way of thinking. He said the following about the idea in question: “Reason was mocked without shame, cultivated with tenderness and observed with admiration the weeds of superstition, generated by the spirit of the people, which the Enlighteners could not eradicate, and sowed new ones where they could” [Warburg,

1913, s. 120]. As the Swedish literary critic Karl Warburg rightly notes, “His perception is dictated rather by a political and cultural position than by an aesthetic one” [Warburg, 1913, s. 122].

On the other hand, Rydberg criticized the poetic principles of Atterbom and the poets of his circle. He was convinced that a poetic work should contain some idea related to real life, therefore he criticized the Romanticists, for whom poetry was intrinsically valuable. In accordance with this attitude, Rydberg does not present exceptional characters in his works related to the concept of time. The central element in these poems is an attempt to explain reasons established by nature (and by time as a part of it). Rydberg’s characters unlike those by Atterbom do not try to overcome the power of time.

Poem “Tomten” (1881) presents to us a character from Swedish folklore. Tomten is a household spirit who lives in the yard and takes care of people and their household animals. In the poem, he lives in a home-stead. At night when all the human and nature kind fall asleep, Tomten goes around to make sure everything is in order in the yard. He takes care of peasants and their animals. The main philosophical idea is contained in the question, which Tomten asks to himself. It is the question about the significance of replacing one generation by another:

*Så har han sett dem, far och son,
ren genom många leder
slumra som barn; men varifrån
kommo de väl hit neder?
Släkte följde på släkte snart,
blomstrade, åldrades, gick... men vart?
[Rydberg, 1996, s. 70]*

‘So has he seen them, sire and son,
Year by year in that room there
Sleep first as children every one.
Ah, but whence did they come there?
This generation, to that was heir,
Blossomed, grew old, and was gone — but where?’²

Tomten as a mythological creature cannot understand the rules of the human world. The mystery, which he tries to solve is, in fact, the matter of the meaning of human life. The entire poem is imbued with

² Translated by Ch. W. Stork.

the motif of the cyclic movement of time. This motif relates to the image of alternation of day and night, and as for the composition of the text. The last stanza is almost identical to the first one. All activities of Tomten are shown as recurrent actions: “tittar, som många vintrar förr” [Rydberg, 1996, s. 115] (‘Looks, as oft he has looked before’).

Tomten does not find an answer to his question, but the cyclical nature of mankind’s existence is presented in the poem as a harmonious part of the world.

Rydberg develops the same matter in another poem with the self-explanatory name “Where from and where to?” (“Vadan och Varthän?”, 1876). There is antithesis in the first two stanzas of the text. The first of them presents an idyllic spring landscape with images of a rural house and its inhabitants:

<p><i>När sist jag färdades denna led, då smyckade våren lund och hed, med spegeln bäcken till blommor sprang, och rymden fylldes med klockors klang, och solen lyste ur morgonsky, och stugan vid grinden där var ny.</i></p> <p>[Rydberg, 1996, s. 47]</p>	<p>‘When I traveled this way the last time, Spring adorned the grove and the heath, The stream like a mirror ran to the flowers, And the space was filled with the ringing of bells, And the sun shone from the morning sky, And the new hut was at the gateway.’</p>
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The lyrical hero of this poem is a traveler. In the place described above, he meets a young peasant and his bride. They cheerfully greet the stranger and ask him where he comes from and where he is going. The question does not possess any philosophical context yet.

In the second stanza, the traveler returns to the same place, but the life-affirming atmosphere is replaced by desolation. This change is expressed in the system of images: spring replaced by autumn, the river and the sky turn dark, and the house turns gray. Instead of a young couple, the traveler observes a funeral procession. The question from the title is repeated by the traveler but with a different meaning: this is a philosophical question about life and death.

This idea is developed in the third stanza:

<p><i>[Jag] hör Tiden rulla ut sin ked, han mäter sekundernas snabba fart med pickande hjärtan, som brista snart; han mäter skeden av år vid år med släkten, som trampa varandras spår...</i></p> <p>[Rydberg, 1996, s. 48]</p>	<p>‘[I] hear Time unreel his chain, He measures the rapid flight of time by pricking hearts which will soon burst; He measures periods year by year by generations which trample each other’s trails...’</p>
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Here the motif of the movement of time is corresponded with the question about the meaning of human life. Rydberg uses the word “Time” (“Tiden”) with a capital letter and applies the pronoun “he” (“han”) to it. Like Atterbom he creates an image of Time as a personification.

The last two stanzas describe the dreams of the lyrical hero, who tries to find an answer to an unsolvable question. In these dreams the traveler enters the world beyond. He sees himself among many suns. He hears his question about the human race from the stars, but the answer remains hidden.

In the last stanza, an image of a mother with a child appears:

<i>Jag drömde mig sen i den bästa hamn: jag var ett barn i min moders famn. På frågan, jag hört från stjärnorna nyss, gav hon mig svar med en ljuvlig kys.</i>	“Then I dreamed of the best haven: I was a child in my mother’s arms. She answer with a lovely kiss For the question I heard from the stars.”
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[Rydberg, 1996, s. 49]

It could be seen as a Christian image. But the character of the poem does not associate himself with Jesus Christ. Moreover, in this stanza Rydberg describes feelings, which every man is apt of experiencing. The lyrical hero looks at his mother and sees the infinity of the universe in her eyes. Time stops for him at this moment. So, it is impossible for Rydberg’s character to find the answer to his philosophical question in a logical way. The idea is that the meaning of human life, as well as the movement of time, is only comprehensible by the senses.

A similar idea is reflected in the poem “The Elf to the Girl” (“Älvan till flickan”, 1881). Rydberg uses a mythological image again. The main character of this poem is a female natural spirit. She is a personification of a forest river. The elf tries to figure out the mystery of human existence. She looks at a young girl bathing in the river and compares the destiny of a human being with her own. The elf realizes that the life of the girl will repeat the life of every other human who lived before her.

The contraposition of the elf and the girl is represented in the composition of the poem. The text includes three stanzas, and every stanza consists of twelve lines: two short tetrapodies are followed by a long octonarian: this structure is frequently repeated in the poem. The long lines describe the elf’s thoughts and feelings about her own being. Short lines, on the other hand, depict her thoughts about the girl’s life. The repetition of the last line in every stanza and the invariability of the rhyme in the octonarians underlines the static nature of the elf’s life.

The symbolism of water and fire also represents the role of antithesis in the poem: water is directly related to the image of the elf, and a metaphor of fire and burning corresponds with the image of the girl. A human “lights up” with a feeling and “burns out” when he dies, while water remains indestructible. Thus, the elf is an eternal creature, who lives for centuries without any changes. In fact, she is free from the influence of all-consuming time, while the girl, on the contrary, grows old. The elf gets to observe all stages of this process. In the first stanza, the girl’s youth is described. In the second stanza, the elf contemplates the woman’s adult life. The third stanza is about the death of the woman. The elf is jealous of the girl and asks a question about the meaning of human’s life. The answer is in her own reflections: she perceives that *målet* <...> *av livets fröjd förklarad och förklarad av dess kval* (‘The purpose <...> is explained by the joy of life and explained by its sorrows’).

Rydberg expounds the concept of freedom in a new context, which is not typical for Romanticism. The elf as an immortal creature is not confined by time, but as a personification of a river, she is destined to live an eternal life in a static condition. This independence from time does not mean freedom for her — on the contrary, this is a kind of imprisonment. A human being undergoes changes day by day due to the influence of time. And these changes ensure free existence for mortals. The girl in the poem is the one who is capable of experiencing emotions and turning from one state into another. Eventually she has more freedom than the elf of a river. As a result, the matter of overcoming the power of time is not mentioned at all.

So, although we have discussed only one theme which is common for Atterbom’s and Rydberg’s works, the analysis of their lyrics shows the difference between the two authors’ poetic principles and views. Atterbom presents the problem of the influence of time on a man from the point of view of mystical Romanticism. Characters of his lyrics try to escape from the destructive power of time. They aspire to free themselves from the latter, but this freedom turns out to be possible only outside the earthly world and everything that has been created by man.

Viktor Rydberg uses mythological imagery, but his main intention is conveying the theme of time and man is to search for answers to perennial issues. His characters attempt to answer the question: why does time have such an influence on man and mankind? He shows mythological characters who have not ever experienced the power of time

and who cannot explain why mankind is dependant on it. In the artistic world of the poet, only mortal men understand nature, and time in particular. But these poems present no logical answers for philosophical matters of the human being. Rydberg's characters realize the meaning of life through their senses.

To conclude, Rydberg's and Atterbom's understanding of time differ from one each other. Which is a manifestation of the distance between the poetics of a post-Romantic author and the poetics of Romanticism. Certainly, Rydberg was influenced by Romantic poets, but still he represents a new period in the history of Swedish literature.

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Владислав Сурков

Институт мировой литературы им. А. М. Горького РАН

ВЛАСТЬ ВРЕМЕНИ В ЛИРИКЕ ПЕРА АТТЕРБУМА И ВИКТОРА РЮДБЕРГА

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Статья посвящена концепции времени с точки зрения человека и человечества в поэзии двух шведских авторов XIX в.: Пера Аттербума и Виктора Рюдберга. Поэты принадлежат к двум разным ветвям романтической традиции. Аттербум принадлежит к традиции раннего мистического романтизма, являясь одним из первых авторов-романтиков в шведской литературе. Рюдберг — постромантический поэт: его стихотворения содержат ряд особенностей, характерных для литературы романтизма, но написаны они в последние десятилетия века. Власть времени — одна из важнейших тем в творчестве рассматриваемых шведских поэтов. Она определяет различия в характерах лирических героев и

в поэтике стихотворений двух авторов. У Аттербума представлена разрушительная сила времени. Так, главные герои его сказочной пьесы «Остров блаженства», король гиперборейцев Астольф и нимфа Фелиция, живут на волшебном острове и стремятся скрыться от Времени, но оно настигает их. Аттербум показывает, что время утрачивает свои границы в запредельном мире. Виктор Рюдберг представляет персонажей, которые пытаются понять законы времени. В его поэзии представлены бессмертные мифологические существа (такие как домовый и речная фея), которые стремятся понять, почему время оказывает влияние на человека и человечество, но они не могут найти логическое объяснение законам мироустройства. Данная тема связывается с философским вопросом о смысле человеческой жизни. Персонажи-люди в лирике Рюдберга не пытаются преодолеть время, поскольку они на уровне чувств понимают природу и принимают ее законы.

Ключевые слова: романтизм, время, шведская литература, лирика, Рюдберг, Аттербум.

Vladislav Surkov

Postgraduate Student, Junior Researcher,
A. M. Gorky Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences,
25a, Povarskaya ul., Moscow, 121069, Russian Federation
E-mail: surk.vladislav@yandex.ru

Сурков Владислав Витальевич

аспирант, младший научный сотрудник,
Институт мировой литературы им. А. М. Горького РАН,
Российская Федерация, 121069, Москва, ул. Поварская, 25а
E-mail: surk.vladislav@yandex.ru

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