The hermeneutic meanings of love in Russian culture of the first half of the 19th century

Tamara Lipich^{1,*}, *Vasiliy Lipich*¹ and *Elena Danilova*¹

¹Belgorod State University, Belgorod, 308015, Russia

Abstract. Addressing the problems of philosophical hermeneutics is determined by the need to reconstruct the theme of love in Russian culture in the first half of the XIX century. Russian romantics in their comprehension of love focused their attention on the spiritual component. For European romanticism, sensual love acquired a sacred meaning. Moreover, the understanding and interpretation of love by German romantic authors gradually turned into gender equality issues, women's emancipation and liberation. F. Schlegel believed there was no difference between a man's and a woman's mission. Each epoch leaves its imprint and offers specific meanings for further generations to understand and interpret. Love is always a driving force for human activity and socialization. This is why our contemporaries should be able to analyze Romantic literature and philosophy which gave birth to the philosophy of love reflecting the cultural specifics and national identity.

1. Problem statement and analysis of recent achievements

In his “Grundfragen der Hermeneutik”, Emerich Coreth, the famous XX-century theologian describes hermeneutics as a major issue of contemporary science. We believe it is connected, in the first place, with various interpretations of what hermeneutics is. Some scholars treat hermeneutics as humanitarian research methodology, while others consider it to be a universal cognition method or even an ontological basis for any cognition. Great interest in this issue was displayed throughout the whole of the XX century, though, in the Soviet Union it was not until 1970s-1980s that hermeneutics attracted scientists' attention. Among the scholars who studied hermeneutics were P.P. Gaidenko, G.I. Ruzavin, R.M. Gabitova, A.M. Korshunov and others. The XXI century bears evidence of increased attention to philosophical hermeneutics, in particular, to research by M. Heidegger, H.G. Hadamer and the Russian philosopher G.G. Shpet.

*Corresponding author: lipich@bsu.edu.ru

2. Results and discussion

Hermeneutics was interpreted by ancient Greek philosophers as explanation, interpretation and translation. Gradually, the term expanded its scope of use. Apart from the interpretation of the holy Bible texts, today it may also refer to belles-letters. The contemporary view of hermeneutics implies that it is not only the science of text interpretation, but specific understanding of another identity. In late XVIII and early XIX centuries Romanticism emerged in European culture to replace the Enlightenment traditions. Along with the development of Romantic aesthetics and linguistic philosophy, the hermeneutics problem became a universal one, encompassing the art of understanding and interpretation.

F. Schleiermacher, being a representative of the German Romanticism, contributed to the comprehension of this process significantly. In the first place, it was possible due to his understanding of the historicism principle. In particular, he described his hermeneutic method as a method of historical interpretation. This method became the main methodological principle for the interpretation of texts representing different cultures and spiritual worlds. It was this principle that Romantic poets shared, as they advocated cultural identity and insisted that different cultures could not be reduced to each other. Both Schleiermacher and Romantic poets considered the psychological component to be a major characteristic feature of the hermeneutic method. This component was clearly displayed when the readers were looking for grounds enabling them to understand texts by other authors. F. Schleiermacher and poets of the Romanticism believed it was necessary to get in tune with the author, to enter the context of his/her ideas, his/her concepts and psyche, to step into his/her shoes and to contemplate the author's identity from the inside. It is F. Schleiermacher's psychological approach to understanding and interpretation that has become a subject of discussion in contemporary philosophy.

Schleiermacher considers genuine knowledge to be only an "idea" toward which we can make progress, not something that we can ever actually achieve [1, 2]. A thorough analysis of his works enables the reader to conclude that "interpretation is a much more difficult task than is generally realized: contrary to a common misconception that "understanding occurs as a matter of course", in fact "misunderstanding occurs as a matter of course, and so understanding must be willed and sought at every point" [2].

At the same time, the term of hermeneutic interpretation may only be referred to a specific attitude to a literary work which implies that its cultural content transforms into functional images and forms of culture which are contemporary for the interpreter. It also includes the experience of comprehending such transformations.

Representatives of Romantic hermeneutics used the above approach to the full. In response to the scholastic science, they suggested that language of poetry and works of literature should be studied as a universal means of the reality cognition. They saw a work of art as a specific objectivization of the epoch's cultural tradition. An important concept of romantic hermeneutics is the idea of penetrating into the author's identity and the unity of the author's creative work and its interpretation by the reader.

F. Shleiermacher, among others, said that the art of hermeneutics made it possible to understand the writer better than he or she understood him/herself. It means that hermeneutic analysis focuses on what the writer creates unconsciously. Thus, it enables the interpreter to understand a text deeper than its author does. In this respect, G.G. Shpet, the Russian philosopher, acknowledged the significance of Schleiermacher's insight into the correlation between hermeneutics, thinking and intellectual intuition. However, according

to G.G. Shpet, “the interpreted must be not quite alien to us and at the same time not quite ours” [3]. It enables us to explain a subjective approach in interpreting a work of literature.

Romantic poets were guided by the principle of irrational and instinctive cognition of the world. This principle applied to love theme and a woman’s image. In Romantic discourse, love is contemplated in terms of comparing the Profane love and the Sacred Love.

In her analysis of the way women were portrayed by Novalis and F. Schlegel, Veronica Freeman describes a woman’s image as “idealized and poeticized”, “the woman’s essence” as “harmony”, and “the inner nature of women” as “poetry” [4]. The romantics consider a woman to be a part of the unknown world. A woman is idolized, and she becomes an object of worship. Still, “our association with romantic love fringes on future-oriented ideas, hopes and dreams, but seldom one of enduring reality” [4]. Romantic love cannot last forever. For representatives of Romanticism it becomes almost mystical. There is a number of life stories to illustrate this, including D. Venevitinov and his feelings toward Princess Z. Volkonskaya, Novalis and Sophie von Kühn, M. Pogodin and his love for Princess A. Trubetskaya, F. Tyutchev who loved E. Denisyeva, I. Turgenev and his feelings toward Pauline Viardot etc. A man ascribes features of the earthly and of the unknown and ideal world to his beloved one. As a result, an image of a woman from another reality emerges. Russian romantic prose and poetry describes superhuman women’s characters.

D. Venevitinov was among the first Russian philosophical poets. His contemporaries, including A. Khomyakov, described him as the one who started a new era in Russian poetry, where “the external beauty yields precedence to the beautiful and high-minded content”. As for love lyrics, by 1826 Venevitinov had completed a cycle of poems addressed to his beloved, Princess Z. Volkonskaya. The key poem in this cycle was “To My Goddess”, where the poet expressed his attitude to life and to human through his love toward a woman. He pondered on happiness and wondered if it was achievable for a human, coming to a conclusion that happiness was unavailable in ordinary parlance.

D. Venevitinov strived for a high level of generalization. His speculation on love is not intimate or private. Instead, it was more of a spiritual nature.

Romantic suffering often leads to a disappointment with life. It is especially strong when the beloved one dies or when the character’s love is undivided. This state of despair makes the main character desperate and frequently results in escape or a crime. Suffice it to recall Alexander Pushkin’s romantic stories including “Prisoner of the Caucasus” and “The Fountain of Bakhchisarai” et cetera. Describing these stories, V.M. Zhirmunsky specifies two women types in Pushkin’s works which were allegedly inspired by G. Byron. These include a black-haired and dark-eyed Oriental woman, a vivid and vigorous one, and a fair-haired and blue-eyed Christian woman, who is modest and virtuous. Two types of love result from these images, one representing earthly passion which “takes no prisoners”, and the other one personifying an ideal Madonna who is above the world of desires. Based on this, love can be treated as a breakaway from God, a break in the link of times, or vice versa, as an “alliance with God”. Gradually Alexander Pushkin begins to treat love as a source of inspiration. It is especially noticeable in his works written in Mikhailovskoye estate, in 1824 -1826. He correlates love with inner freedom and with understanding of love as something deeper than just passion. For example, his poem “Ya Pomnyu Chudnoye Mgnovenye” (“I Remember a Wonderful Moment”) contains an ideal love image which represents the highest human value. Pushkin had several stages of understanding love, from the so-called calf-love, or youthful enthusiasm he had during his time in the lyceum, to passion during his exile in the south and finally to understanding love as a highest

expression of human being and alliance with God. The latter was typical of his Mikhailovsky period. In the years to follow, he coupled love with supreme feelings of freedom and patriotism. Significantly, other Russian poets embraced these traditions and used them in their own way. Among the examples are patriotic poems by N. Nekrasov “V Pamyat Dobrolyubova” (“In Memory of Dobrolyubov”) and Silver Age poetry, including “Rossiya” (“Russia”) by A. Blok, “Pismo k Tatiane Yakovlevoy” (“The letter to Tatiana Yakovleva”) by V. Mayakovsky etc.

On the whole, we can agree with many researchers that Pushkin’s view of love is a positive one, unlike that of M. Lermontov.

Pushkin’s philosophy of love was sense-making for Lermontov’s romantic poems which were full of tragedy and despair. Being a restless and tragic person and a genius, Lermontov was unable to fill the void in his soul with love. Instead, it could only push the poet to his death. It reeked of loneliness and eternal cold. Trying to compensate for the pain of bereavement, Lermontov escaped from the reality into a world of fantasy, which is typical of the romantic world vision. Interest in life and the reason for being was lost, which left the poet pondering on philosophical issues of freedom and lack thereof, of his place in life and of the heavenly and celestial.

Romantic stories by N.V. Gogol were also connected with his specific attitude to love theme, although it was not the main motif in his works. While in his early works Gogol contemplated love through the prism of unity between the ethical and the aesthetic aspects, later his concept of love displayed their divergence or even contradiction. A collection of stories “Vechera na khutore bliz Dikanki” (“Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka”) is of interest in this respect. Love between the main characters is the main theme. However, in these stories love is connected with extramundane evil spirits. Separate details are incorporated in the narration which describe the writer’s understanding of love, using devilry to help the lovers overcome all obstacles. The extramundane represented by devils and witches is typical for Gogol’s breakaway from the godhead, which the story characters often have to atone for. The collection includes “Noch Pered Rozhdestvom” (“Christmas Eve”), “Vecher Nakanune Ivana Kupaly” (“St John’s Eve”), “Mayskaya Noch, ili Utoplennitsa” (“A May Night; or the Drowned Maiden”), “Sorochinskaya Yarmarka” (“The Fair at Sorochintsi”) and other stories. The most vivid manifestation of love ambivalence is described in “Viy”. It is the fatal and destructive character of beauty and desire. Straying away from God, sin and succumbence lead the main character to his death. Likewise, a strong love feeling becomes ruinous for Andriy, one of the characters in “Taras Bulba” story.

Thus, N. Gogol conscientiously separated the ideal of love and its personification in reality. According to Mann, love theme was not a cornerstone in Gogol’s works. Evolution of the author’s views of love may be traced from his stories, beginning with worship of women’s beauty, followed by speculation on whether love is necessary and doubts in its value, and finishing with fear, escaping from love and acknowledging its fatal character.

In his romantic fairy-tale, “Opal”, I. Kireevsky described the love of a Syrian tsar toward a maiden, Music of the Sun, whom he met on a distant planet: “all of a sudden, the light doors opened, and a maiden came out, wearing a dress of sunbeams and a belt of rainbow” [5]. As you can see, this extraterrestrial image of a girl inspired by romantic fantasy, especially by German authors, contains a number of associations, both theological and mystic and masonic ones. The relationship between a man who is in love and an extraterrestrial girl cannot result in an accord of hearts. The aesthetics of Romanticism suggests a possibility of such love only in the extramundane world.

Another example is the image of the celestial Cloud Maiden in K.S. Aksakov's "Oblako" ("The Cloud") (1837), a woman who cannot give happiness to the main character, Lotariy. Quite a number of Russian literary works are devoted to the theme of mystic love, a fatal love-hate relationship where extramundane women's images guide us to another world and at the same time the core of this world. For example, In Konstantin Aksakov's "Walter Eisenberg (Living in a dream)" this theme was in the foreground: "so it seemed to him that he saw the sun, the sky, the field, the grove, but he saw it all through Cecilia's eyes: behold! it seemed to him that a sylph was sitting in every flower, bathing in the sun and in the evening dew, washing its flower and looking it over" [6].

The same theme was touched upon by V. Odoevsky, a major ideologist of Russian Romanticism, in his "Sylphida" ("The Sylph") story. The inaccessibility of the romantic ideal of happy love was shown in all romantic novellas. Bi-worldness and mythological personification of the extramundane in women's characters displayed the essence of romantic love philosophy, thus revealing the correlation of the world and the human character, which was driven to the foreground by understanding love. Romantics saw the essence of the world order in love which was understood not in terms of religion or erotism, but on a Universal scale. [7]

For instance, F. Tyutchev described the dual character of love, its unity and struggle which was typically cosmic: it was "a sun beam" and "a fatal passion" at the same time, as in the poem "Ya vstretil vas – I vse buloye..." ("We met — and all the past came flooding...") [8], and "Ya pomnyu vremya zolotoye ("A golden time still haunts my senses") [8].

Tyutchev's lyric verses dedicated to E.A. Denisyeva arouse a great interest. The main theme is the feeling of guilt and making one's beloved suffer. The woman, who is the main character of the poems, is honest. As she suffers, she becomes superior to the male character. The poet idealizes the woman. When Denisyeva dies, it becomes a real tragedy for him. But at the same time, love can be an object of worship and an admirable source of inspiration for a poet. Love can refine, or make one think of suicide, it may turn out to be a "hellhole". Many feelings stem from the poets' suffering at different times during his life. He appeals to God asking him for help, hoping that memories of his love would last.

3. Conclusion and further research prospects

In Romanticism, a human soul is comparable to the Universe, and the infinity of this world consists in true live. In their understanding of love, Romantic authors attached significance to its spiritual component. While European Romanticism ascribed a sacral meaning to erotic love, Russian romantic literature and philosophy, inter alia, focused on interpretation and re-interpretation of basic categories, love being one of them. It provided an opportunity to make "secondary texts" (for example, ones by romantic philosophers), where love theme was more of an abstract character. Moreover, the understanding and interpretation of love in German romantic authors gradually turned into gender equality issues, women's emancipation and liberation. F. Schlegel believed there was no difference between a man's and a woman's mission. This issue was not discussed in Russian romantic literature and philosophy.

The above enables us to conclude that love theme will always be timely in the cultural heritage of writers, poets and philosophers. Each epoch leaves its imprint and offers specific meanings for further generations to understand and interpret. Love is always a

driving force for human activity and socialization. This is why our contemporaries should be able to analyze the historical continuum and interpret Romantic literature and philosophy which gave birth to the philosophy of love reflecting the cultural specifics and national identity.

References

1. F. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik*, hrsg. und eingeleitet v. M. Frank, **76** (1995).
2. M. Forster, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher. Information on: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/schleiermacher/> (2017).
3. G. Shpet, *Selected Works*, (1995).
4. V. Freeman, *Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature*, The Poetization of Metaphors in the Work of Novalis, **78**, 137-140 (2006).
5. I. Kireevsky, *Opal, Russian fantastic prose of the era of romanticism (1820-1840)*, 218 (1990).
6. *Mysticism of the Golden Age in Russian literature*, 294-329 (2013).
7. T. Lipich, *Man. Questions of literature to philosophy*, **2**, 150-158 (2010).
8. F. Tyutchev, *Selected Poems. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by John Dewey*, **3**, 11 (2014).