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THE “WILDERNESS” MOTIF IN N. HAWTHORNE’S TALES

The article examines the motif "wilderness" in N. Hawthorne's short prose in order to identify the characteristic features of his works, to develop the possibilities of understanding the phenomenon of American Romanticism. The “wilderness” motif is considered to be one of the basic motifs in American literature since its origin and together with motifs of providence, industry, freedom, and some others plays an important role in its development. The author emphasizes the fact that wilderness perception by the first settlers, Puritans, and the views of American Romantic writers (who, to some extent, were their descendants) concerning wilderness varied greatly. Special emphasis is put on the similarities between views on wilderness of Transcendentalism followers and N. Hawthorne’s perception of it.

Key words: the motif of “wilderness”; Puritans; N. Hawthorne; American Romanticism; nature; Transcendentalism.

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Е. И. Благодёрова

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МОТИВ «ДИКАЯ МЕСТНОСТЬ» В МАЛОЙ ПРОЗЕ Н. ГОТОРНА

В статье рассматривается мотив «дикая местность» (“wilderness”) в малой прозе Н. Готорна в целях выявления характерных особенностей его произведений, развития возможностей понимания феномена американского романтизма. Мотив «дикая местность» считается одним из основных мотивов американской литературы с момента ее возникновения и наряду с мотивами предопределения, трудолюбия, свободы и некоторыми другими играет важную роль в ее формировании. Автор акцентирует внимание на том, что восприятие дикой местности первыми колонистами пуританами существенно отличалось от ее интерпретации представителями американского романтизма (среди которых были и потомки пуритан). Особое внимание уделяется сходству между идеями представителей трансцендентализма о дикой местности и ее восприятием Н. Готорном.

Ключевые слова: мотив «дикая местность»; пуритане; Н. Готорн; американский романтизм; природа; трансцендентализм.

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Introduction. The “wilderness” motif has been one of the main motifs of American literature since its origin and, along with other motifs (providence, industry, freedom, and others), plays an important role in its formation. The Russian researcher K. M. Baranova identifies 7 main motifs, which in addition to the 4 abovementioned include innocence, worthiness, equality [1].

Etymologically, “wilderness” means “the place of wild beasts” [2, p. 2]. It should be noted that in the first translation of the Bible from Latin into English made by Oxford University professor John Wycliffe at the end of the 14th century, “wilderness” referred to the uninhabited, arid, barren lands of the Middle East, in other words, the desert. Subsequently, this designation was fixed in translations of biblical texts and not only. So, for example, Samuel Johnson in the English Dictionary of 1755 defines “wilderness” as a “desert; a tract of solitude and savageness” [2, p. 3].

In the modern dictionary, “wilderness” is interpreted as “a large area of land that has never been developed or farmed” [3]. The absence of people and the presence of wild animals is implied. This definition focuses on a geographical description, however, the existence of various types of wilderness (rocky mountains, deserts, forests, prairies, etc.), as well as the introduction of various characteristics and meanings into this concept, depending on the subjective point of view, complicates the formation of a universal definition for the concept of “wilderness” even in the original language, not to mention translation into other languages.

For a deeper understanding of the “wilderness” motive in N. Hawthorne’s works, it is necessary to turn to the perception of “wilderness” by the first Puritan colonists, as well as to the interpretation of this motive among writers of American Romanticism period.

Methodology and research methods. The basis of the work is the systematic approach to the analysis of prose employing the historical and contextual method as well as the comparative-historical one.

The results of the research and their discussion. The Belarusian researcher G. Sinilo justifiably points out that the Bible played an important role “*in the genesis of the American civilization, culture and literature erected by Europeans*” (“в генезисе воздвигнутой европейцами американской цивилизации, культуры и литературы”) [4]. In the 17th century American literature, allusions and reminiscences to biblical texts, the comparison of their [American] history with the history of the Israelites, especially with the history of the “*Exodus of the Sons of Israel from Egyptian slavery under the leadership of the Prophet Moses, as well as the history of the new Exodus from the Babylonian captivity and the revival of Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah*” (“Исхода сынов Израиля из Египетского рабства под предводительством пророка Моисея, а также к истории нового Исхода из Вавилонского плена и возрождения Иерусалима под руководством Эзры (Ездры) и Нехемьи (Неемии)”) are most noticeable [4]. This fact is also pointed out by the Russian researcher L. Mishina, who notes that the Puritans “*key idea*” was “*the comparison with the God chosen people*”, which subsequently “*shaped the idea of the American exclusivity*” (“ключевой идеей”, “сравнение с Богом избранным народом”, “сформировало идею избранности американцев”) [5, p. 6].

Thus, it is not surprising that the understanding of “wilderness” by the 17th century American Puritans is based on biblical texts. In the Bible, the term “wilderness” includes several meanings. Firstly, it is considered as a damned, abandoned land, the possessions of Satan, in contrast to Eden, the Paradise Garden, the territory of God’s blessing. Secondly, it is interpreted as a refuge from a depraved society and from constant religious persecution, where it is possible to hear God, to become more spiritually perfect. In addition, the wilderness is understood as a kind of challenge, where the chosen people could be cleansed of sins, learn what humility is and become worthy of the Promised Land [2, p. 23—43; 6]. In the 17th century American literature, the term “wilderness” is used in all these senses. The theme of wildlife as opposed to a cultivated garden or paradise could be often heard in the sermons of New England priests in the middle of the 17th century. Unlike the Puritan ideal of “City on the Hill”, an area of divine influence, the wilderness was associated with the kingdom of Satan. Cotton Mather, an American preacher and writer of the second half of the 17th — the first half of the 18th centuries, in his work “The Wonders of The Invisible World” (1692) called the New England colonists “*a People of God, settled in those, which were once the Devil’s*

Territories” [7]. It makes sense to say that partially that opinion concerning wilderness was caused by the fact that Indians lived in the forests of New England, and they did not want to adopt Christianity, thereby causing anger among the Puritans and becoming the object of their persecution. In addition, Puritans believed that the indigenous population was possessed by evil spirits. This opinion was based on the prevailing beliefs of the period that the wilderness poses not only a physical threat to humans (for example, a death or injury from wild animals or wild people), but also a spiritual one, that is, the closer one lives to wild places, the more temptations they have, the greater the danger of losing one’s way. Since the Indians originally lived in the wilderness, they were considered followers of Satan. In another no less famous work “*Magnalia Christi Americana*” (1702) C. Mather points out that the wilderness is a temporary trial that must be passed in order to get to the Promised Land [8, p. 378]. William Bradford, one of the first Puritan colonists, later the governor of the Plymouth colony, in his work “*Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620—1647*” described their surrounding nature as “*a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men. ...the whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hue*” [9]. The wilderness motif as a barbaric, frightening, hostile to humans phenomenon can be found in the works of John Winthrop, Samuel Sewall, Mary Rowlandson and other representatives of the 17th century puritanical literature.

However, by the end of the 18th — beginning of the 19th centuries attitude to nature changed dramatically largely due to the influence of European ideas. In particular, in England the work of E. Burke (“*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*”, 1757) appeared [10], where he suggested that, while contemplating the splendor of natural landscapes (mountain ranges, waterfalls, vast forests, etc.), a person experiences strong emotions, including reverent awe or a sense of “sublime”, which is nothing but a manifestation of infinite divine power. Thus, the wilderness no longer terrified, but became an object of admiration. In American minds wild nature acquired a deep spiritual meaning and they began to correlate the landscapes of their country with the new Eden.

The wild American nature became a favorite object for praising in the works of writers, poets, the New World artists, who focused on its uniqueness. William Cullen Bryant, James Kirke Paulding, James Fenimore Cooper, Robert Montgomery Bird, Timothy Flint, William Gilmore Simms were ones of the first American writers who turned to the “wilderness” motif in their works and considered it as a positive phenomenon.

Transcendentalism, the literary and philosophical movement that appeared in the first half of the 19th century played an important role because it offered a new view on nature. The essay “*Nature*” (1836) written by R. W. Emerson, the spiritual leader of the transcendentalists, became the basis of a new vision and formed a different system of values. In contrast to his ancestors, R. Emerson believed that forests were “plantations of God”, where a person gained faith and felt safe [11]. American writers of the Romanticism period (H. W. Longfellow, W. Irving, H. Melville, N. Hawthorne as well as the writers mentioned above) admired the greatness of their country’s nature, praised its beauty, found the divine in nature, considered it a place of self-knowledge and self-improvement. Let’s look at the passage from the preface to W. Irving’s “*The Sketch Book*” as an example, where the writer, describing the wild nature of America, mentioned “*...her mighty lakes, like oceans of liquid silver; her mountains, with their bright aerial tints; her valleys teeming with wild fertility; her tremendous cataracts, thundering in their solitudes; her boundless plains...; her broad, deep rivers, rolling in solemn silence to the ocean; her trackless forests where vegetation puts forth all its magnificence*” [12, p. 24].

N. Hawthorne was also characterized by a reverent attitude towards American nature. One of the peculiar features in his early works (the 1830s) is a description of nature, mainly that of New England, at different times of the year. Sketches by N. Hawthorne “*My Visit to Niagara*” (1835) and “*Foot-prints on the Sea-shore*” (1838) best reflect the writer’s perception of nature, as one of the representatives of the American Romanticism period.

Niagara Falls was one of the most frequently visited landmarks in America in the 19th century, and visitors often referred to themselves as pilgrims. In the 19th-century America, the prevailing opinion was that Niagara Falls was the most majestic and beautiful creation of nature, a phenomenon that could have a profound impact on a visitor and evoke a sense of awe [13]. It makes sense to say that the author of the sketch experiences exactly such feelings during his visit to Niagara Falls: *“The golden sunshine tinged the sheet of the American cascade, and painted on its heaving spray the broken semicircle of a rainbow, Heaven’s own beauty crowning earth’s sublimity”* [14, p. 250]. The author is convinced that a person needs to abandon earthly problems, worries, vanity, so that nothing and no one distracts from contemplating the beauty of nature: *“The solitude of the old wilderness now reigned over the whole vicinity of the falls. My enjoyment became the more rapturous <...> the spot, so famous through the world, was all my own!”* [14, p. 250]. Due to the peculiarities of his character, N. Hawthorne shared the views of transcendentalists on the need to stay for some time alone, and on nature, as an ideal environment for being alone: *“Perhaps it is necessary for the health of the human mind and heart that there should be a possibility of taking refuge in what is wild, and uncontaminated by any culture”* [15].

The essay “Footprints on the Sea-shore” (1838) also characterizes the writer’s attitude to solitude in the bosom of nature. N. Hawthorne says that quite often he feels a desire *“to plunge into the cool bath of solitude”*, when *“the forest and the ocean summon me — one with the roar of its waves, the other with the murmur of its boughs — forth from the haunts of men... to derive all that day’s enjoyment from shore, and sea, and sky, ...and from fantasies, and recollections, or anticipated realities”* [14, p. 561]. The writer does not hide his joy when he manages to move away from the vain world and spend the whole day in solitude on the ocean shore. N. Hawthorne personifies the ocean, describing it as an old friend who meets, greets and blesses him. The writer does not feel bored staying alone, he emphasizes the beneficial effect of loneliness, allowing *“track our own nature in its wayward course, and steal a glance upon it”* [14, p. 563]. N. Hawthorne points to freedom from conventions, the ability to follow the dictates of one’s heart without fear of being misunderstood or ridiculed. So, a person can scream at the top of his voice, without risk of being heard, can write down all thoughts and desires on the sand, knowing that the coastal waves will wash them away. The writer concludes that, despite his apparent loneliness, he did not spend the day alone, since the ocean was his companion, the seabirds were his friends, and the wind was telling its secrets. N. Hawthorne believed that such friendship has the beneficial effect on a person’s character.

N. Hawthorne, as a true representative of his time, shared the views of other American Romanticism writers on nature, but in some of his tales the Puritan view of the wilderness is used as a symbol for reflecting the moral state of a person.

Going into the woods or wilderness and wandering through thick forests is one of N. Hawthorne’s main symbols, showing moral estrangement from other people because of the impossibility to put up with the burden of guilt for their deeds, or due to the sin of pride, which encourages people to avoid others and shows a symbolic immersion in their moral nature. It should be noted that the characters of some N. Hawthorne’s tales set out for this peculiar “journey”, which is a study of their human nature, but most of them can not achieve eternal beauty, light and peace, but remain in darkness instead. Such characters can be seen in the following tales: “The Hollow of the Three Hills” (1830), “Roger Malvin’s Burial” (1832), “Young Goodman Brown” (1835), “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1836), “The Man of Adamant” (1837), “The Great Carbuncle” (1837), “Ethan Brand” (1850).

For the first time a trip to a deserted, abandoned area as a symbol of alienation from other people and a deeper understanding of one’s moral nature can be found in N. Hawthorne’s early tale “The Hollow of the Three Hills” (1830). A young woman with a heavy burden of guilt met at the end of the day with an old witch to find out about the fate of her parents, husband and child — all those people whom she once left. Although her journey is not described in detail, it is obvious that the meeting place was secluded: *“In the spot where they encountered, no mortal could observe*

them” [14, p. 7]. At the beginning of the tale there is a description of the hollow, which was characterized as gloomy, desolated and despondent. Although the sun had not gone down yet, not a single ray illuminated the hollow of the three hills, on the contrary, it became darker every time the witch showed the young woman what happened to her family through her fault. Thus, it can be assumed that the hollow is a reflection of the moral state of a young woman who made a serious mistake and suffered from a sense of guilt.

Wandering in the woods as a symbol of alienation due to feelings of guilt and immersion in one’s moral nature is also found in the tales “Young Goodman Brown” (1835) and “Roger Malvin’s Burial” (1832). As in the “The Hollow of the Three Hills” nature reflects the state of mind of the characters. So, the deeper they go into the forest, the thicker the darkness, which doesn’t let the rays of the sun to illuminate their path, and they themselves become gloomy, tormented by remorse. John Brown realizes the ungodly purpose of his journey, and *Reuben Bourne* feels guilty for saving his life and leaving his friend alone to die in the wilderness, albeit at his (friend’s) insistence.

In the tales “The Man of Adamant” (1837), “The Great Carbuncle” (1837), the characters went into a wild, uninhabited area, deliberately depriving themselves of the society, due to their incredible pride and sense of superiority over others. In “The Man of Adamant”, natural phenomena showed the evil inherent in the main character, Richard Digby. The sun illuminated the village that he left, but where he was walking, “*the gloom of the forest hid the blessed sky*” [14, p. 422]. The place that he chose as a new dwelling was one of the most abandoned and gloomiest in the forest: “*If Nature meant this remote and dismal cavern for the use of man, it could only be, to bury in its gloom the victims of a pestilence, and then to block up its mouth with stones, and avoid the spot forever after*” [14, p. 422]. Those surroundings fully corresponded to the state of his mind, burning with hatred for the whole human race and requiring solitude: “*Here my soul will be at peace; for the wicked will not find me*” [14, p. 422].

Conclusion. Thus, based on the Puritan view of the “wilderness”, as untamed, full of dangers and likely to belong to the devil, N. Hawthorne turns it into a symbol of the human soul, dwelling in darkness due to a committed sin. Besides for the characters of such tales as “Roger Malvin’s Burial”, “Young Goodman Brown”, “The Man of Adamant”, “The Great Carbuncle” “*wilderness was a place where temptation was to be met*” [8, p. 379], to test one’s faith and, in the event of a favorable outcome, become worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. It should be noted that almost no one was able to pass this test, with the exception of the character in the tale “Roger Malvin’s Burial”, who nevertheless atoned for his guilt, but at a price too high to bear — the life of his only and beloved son.

The “wilderness” motif has undergone significant changes since its origin in the works of American writers — from a dangerous (in physical and spiritual senses), hostile phenomenon (in American literature of the 17th—18th centuries) to the sphere of divine influence, place for self-knowledge and self-improvement (the American literature of the Romanticism period). This motif in N. Hawthorne’s works is endowed with all the meanings that the Puritans attached to this concept, but at the same time, the writer agreed with the view on wilderness shared by the writers of American Romanticism.

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