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JOSEPH ADDISON
AND THE FORMATION OF THE THEORETICAL POETICS OF THE ESSAY
GENRE

ДЖОЗЕФ АДДИСОН
ТА ФОРМУВАННЯ ТЕОРЕТИЧНОЇ ПОЕТИКИ ЖАНРУ ЕСЕ
ДЖОЗЕФ АДДИСОН
И ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКОЙ ПОЭТИКИ ЖАНРА ЭССЕ

Вивчено ранній етап формування теорії жанру есе та маловідому роль Дж. Аддісона (1672–1719) – родоначальника англійської літературної критики – у процесі кристалізації головних поетикальних категорій літературної критики ХVІІІ ст. Спостереження Аддісона над есе, романом позначені конкретикою, яка уточнює загальноестетичні концепції. Термін *criticism* охоплював значення терміна естетика, який у той час англійцями не вживався. Аддісон звертається до аналізу свого есеїстичного методу, структури своїх есе у співвідношенні з творчістю Монтеня, намагаючись осягнути природу естетичного смаку, розпочинаючи в Англії дискусію про статус жанру есе. Відбувався одночасний процес критичної саморефлексії жанру есе й практичне освоєння усіх його виражальних можливостей. Однак, осмислюючи літературну практику свого часу та свою власну, Аддісон не тільки позитивно орієнтується на попередню традицію есе, але й акцентує його принципово нову природу та створює справжній маніфест жанру в «Глядачі» 124. Жанр есе не був притаманний свідомості епохи як сукупність правил, тому Аддісон створював свою теорію, виводячи її емпірично під впливом домінуючих в естетиці рекомендацій, які часто заперечував.

Ключові слова: есе, літературна критика, естетика, поетика, ліризм, інтимність

Изучен ранний этап формирования теории жанра эссе и малоизвестная роль Дж. Аддисона (1672–1719) – отца литературной критики – в процессе кристаллизации основных поэтологических категорий, формирования литературно-критического сознания ХVІІІ столетия. Литературно-критические наблюдения Аддисона над эссе и романом полны литературной конкретики, уточняющей общеэстетические концепции. Термин *criticism* покрывал значение термина эстетика, в то время англичанами еще не употреблявшегося. Аддисон обращается к анализу своего эссеистического метода, структуры своих эссе, соотнося свое творчество с эссе Монтеня, пытается постигнуть природу эстетического вкуса, открывая в Англии дискуссию о статусе жанра эссе. Шел одновременный процесс критической саморефлексии жанра эссе и практического освоения всех его выразительных возможностей. Однако осмысливая литературную практику своего времени и свою собственную, Аддисон не только положительно ориентируется на предшествующую традицию развития эссе, но и акцентирует принципиально новую природу жанра периодического эссе, создает настоящий манифест в «Зрителе» № 124. Эссе не

был заложен в сознании эпохи как свод готовых правил, и Аддисон сам создавал теорию жанра, выводя ее эмпирически, под влиянием господствующих в эстетике рекомендаций, часто им оспариваемых.

Ключевые слова: интимный эссе, литературная критика, эстетика, поэтика, лиризм, интимность.

The paper considers the early stage in theoretical approach to the essay genre and the place of Joseph Addison (1672–1719) – the father of literary criticism – in the process of framing poetological categories, and shaping the XVIII century critical consciousness. His critical judgments concerning the essay and the novel include literary observations that specify and elaborate general aesthetic principles. In that period the term «criticism» entailed the meaning of the term «aesthetics» which was not in current use. Addison traced the specificity of his essays, their structure with reference to Montaigne’s genre, initiating in English culture the discussion on the status of the essay genre. His theoretical involvement with the essay genre is salient throughout his essayistic prose. For him this was a simultaneous process: genre self-reflectiveness is inseparable from art of essayistic writing with all expressive possibilities of the genre. Addison analyzed his essayistic experience as well as the existed tradition of essay writing, exploring the notions such as conversationality, familiarity, personality, lyricism, formlessness, spontaneity. He conceived «The Spectator»No. 124 as a theoretical manifesto on essay writing, bringing into discussion issues of form, style, length. The theory of the essay genre was in *statu nascendi*, far from being a collection of prefabricated conventions and it was Addison who introduced the essay genre into the mainstream English literature.

Keywords: familiar essay, literary criticism, aesthetics, poetics, lyricism, familiarity.

Over the recent years there has been an explosion of academic interest in the theory and history of the essay as a literary form [6, 9] which for long periods was almost ‘the invisible’ and treated as an adjunct to ‘major’ genres or ideas – not as literature in itself. The historical surveys of this genre were few with focus on general intellectual history disregarding it as an intrinsic literary phenomenon with its rich potentials and highly self-conscious generic strategies.

In literary criticism the very term ‘periodical essay’ has acquired connotation of non-artistic, moral and didactic. The reasons for the earlier neglect were due to the precarious fortunes of the older texts and a lengthy period of antihistoricism in literary studies as well as to the prevailing ‘novel-centred’ concepts of literary development. But now the essay genre seems a vibrant problem of literary studies, both theoretical and historical: suffice to mention the deconstructivists’ interest in it nowadays [3, p. 7].

The paper focuses on the formation of the theory of this genre from its outset at the beginning of the 18th century. The main objective of the paper is to consider Joseph Addison’s place in the formation of the essay theoretical poetics. In English literature the rise the essay genre is connected not so much with F. Bacon, as with intellectual, psychological prose of J. Donne. R. Burton. T. Browne. J. Earle, A. Cowley. T. Traherne. In the 18th century this genre entered a new **formative phase** of its development known as a golden age of essay writing. The specificity of its poetics, the analysis of how the essay ‘constructed’ its own theory in terms of old and new rhetorical strategies and the very place of this genre in the literary process of the epoch have not yet become the problem of scholarly interest [1].

The ‘explosion’ of the essay genre at the beginning of the 18th century and the development of its inner genre modifications (the essay-sketches, the essay-meditations, lyrical, philosophical, scientific, critical essays), the appearance of essayistic prose (di-

aries, memoirs, essayistic novel), the very quantity of the essays (A. Chalmers's anthology consists of 48 volumes, written by the so-called 'essayists of the centre'), the tremendous popularity of this genre, its obvious authoritativeness (essays are written by the leading writers: Defoe, Swift, Fielding, Johnson, Goldsmith) prove the genre's importance and priority. It gives grounds to suspect that the theory of 'peripheral' genres advocated by A. Fowler [5, p. 5], in which the essay genre is listed as a formless 'plasma', is hardly valid. Such situation reveals an obvious incongruity in estimating this genre.

Some scholars demonstrate historical perspicuity tracing its origin to non-periodical essays of Montaigne and Bacon, but they turn surprisingly unhistorical in asserting that the essay genre disappeared as the century came to its close. George S. Marr, an authority on the eighteenth-century essay, believes that this genre unlike the sonnet, cannot be viewed as merely a literary form for its close connection with the life of the society and extra-literary influences that modelled its growth [8, p. 21–64]. The present paper challenges this view.

The essay of this century is analysed as the genre that entered a new historical stage of its development with explicated theoretical self-reflexiveness and as a distinct literary kind that created its own theory. It is noteworthy that the essayists began to 'construct' the theoretical poetics in terms of new ideas from the very outset of essay development. J. Donne's «Devotions upon Emergent Occasions»; R. Burton's «The Anatomy of Melancholy»; T. Browne's «Religio Medici»; T. Traherne's «The Centuries of Meditations» represent a literary form of personal psychological essayistic prose, that reveals the picture of mind in *statu nascendi* with imaginative excesses of thought, with spontaneity, familiarity, intimacy, lyricism [4] (the features which are usually connected with 'high' literature). In contrast with this vision there prevails a stereotypical concept that the 18th century essay is predominantly moral and didactic. Such an approach is responsible for the deformity of the historical picture of genre development. A familiar personal essay, which was born in the 17th century [1], is usually viewed as being extinct in the next. However, the aesthetic significance of the essayistic writing of this period and the very intensive process of theoretical self-reflectiveness (especially strong in connection with the problems of familiar style and compositional freedom) prove otherwise. Throughout the century it has been a central and a leading genre even in the periods when the novel, this 'king of genres', dominated the literary stage. It is noteworthy that the essay was outside the system of neoclassical generic hierarchy. Having no real precedent in the generic system of classical Antiquity, it created its own criticism and theory, deducing it empirically from its own literary practice and under the influence of old and new aesthetic orientations. Hence the strict neoclassical conventions have not been spread on it.

The essayists conceptualized the results of genre development during the 17th century, and outlined the perspectives of its further growth, its influence on the novel, and the possibilities of new synthesis in the story genre. Addison's and Steele's essay-sketches were not a raw material, but a forerunner of a novel. The beginning of the 18th century was the first stage in conceptualizing new type of the essay – a **familiar essay**, as opposed both to an objective essay and to the notion of 'familiar' as 'ordinary', 'common'. Addison was the first to draw attention to this important quality of the genre when he reflected on Montaigne's essayistic manner: «He strains his little verse, and writes in a loose familiar style» («The Spectator» No. 487 [2]). By comparing it with poetry, he ob-

viously demonstrated that he uses the attribute 'familiar' with new meaning. It is felt not only in the attribute «loose», not only in the connotative meaning of the word «strain», but in the very mentioning of the object of description – the personal and psychological essays of Montaigne. The «dispersed meditations» on the nature of the essay by the writers of the previous century (R. Burton's, T. Browne's, A. Cowley's initial impulses) gave way to Addison's theoretical generalisations and poetological discussions. An acclaimed father of English literary criticism started to formulate his ideas on the nature of the essay genre, theoretically differentiating two generic types – the familiar and the formal essay. His concept of this genre was formed under the influence of the essays of T. Browne (whom he called an «ingenious writer» – «The Spectator» No. 487 [2]) and under the influence of Montaigne, whose influence was still considerable in this age. He observed: «Perhaps the most eminent Egotist that ever appeared in the world was Montaigne, the author of celebrated *Essays*. This lively old Gascon has woven all his bodily Infirmities into his Works...and publishes the World how it stands with himself in that Particular. Had he kept his own Council he might have passed for a much better Man, tho' perhaps he would not have been so diverting an Author» («The Spectator», No. 562 [2]). In this half-ironic attitude to Montaigne M. Watson [11] detects a sharp distinction between the personal essay of the 17th Century and the objective formal essay of the 18th century, between Montaigne and Addison and Steele. What is left unnoticed here is Addison's approval of Montaigne's manner, and Addison's essayistic self-reflectiveness which so much resembles Montaigne's! The neoclassical regime did not approve of the extreme outflow of emotions and it explains why Addison's praise of Montaigne's 'psychological' frivolities was so much reserved and 'clad' with half-irony and why his own literary practice was so diverse and aesthetically unequal. For Addison and others Montaigne was first of all an entertaining writer, but this entertainment is of different quality, it is 'higher' than for the 'mob': it is elitist, intellectual. For Addison, Montaigne is a witty and paradoxical writer, though with some unpleasant traits (a gossip, an egotist etc.). Addison constantly accentuates the entirely new nature of the essay genre he is introducing. He created the real manifesto of the *periodical* essay in «The Spectator» No. 124 entitled «Difficulties of periodical writing, increasing demand for the work; *Spectator* not written for 'moles'». These essays were not only the 'journalistic' productions; they were artistic, literary essays as well, in which the process of literary self-reflection of the genre had started – a fact that remained overlooked by many scholars. Addison initiates his defence of the essay by accentuating the advantages of this small form in comparison with the novel: the essay is never dull as the creations of the «voluminous writers». In this professed contrast with the novel there is the same paradox of a new, intellectual and 'elite' entertainment. He questions the nonfictional status of the essay and proclaims that it is more entertaining than the novel. Addison finds the artistic literary significance of the essay genre in this **intellectual entertainment**, in the absence of tiresome narratives, in the new quality of indeliberateness and freedom. Addison expresses his own personal attitude to this genre, when in «The Spectator» No. 451 [2] with an intonation which resembles verse, he remarks: «...my papers ... are like Fairy Favours which shall last no longer than while the Author is concealed». Here the euphonic metaphor «fairy favours», the musical rhythm, and the poetical connotation of the verb «conceal» register the personal subjective feeling in the process of critical analysis of the phenomenon. Thus using poetical paraphrases, Addison singles out the fictionalising opportunities of the genre – the self-developing world which is juxtaposed to

moral didacticism. Thus, having started with the empirical observation on the poetics of his essays, Addison, underlines new dominant features: irregularity, looseness, freedom of plot and composition, ‘uncolloquial conversationality’, digressive style, formulating the descriptive theory of familiar genre as a free developing phenomenon. Addison introduced the essay genre into the system of leading forms of mainstream literature. His theoretical observations manifest that the concept of the essay genre was changing. It is not viewed any more as an «unworked gathering» (as it is in F.Bacon’s definition), but is proclaimed as an accomplished leading genre of the mainstream. This defence of the essay genre with theoretical considerations will be even more energetic in the second half of the Eighteenth Century by such writers as O. Goldsmith, S. Johnson, J. Boswell.

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