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**Andrey Korovin**

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

## NEO-ROMANTIC HERO: VITAL CHARACTERS IN HOLGER DRACHMANN'S SHORT STORIES

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The article focuses on the specific type of literary hero that is common in the short stories of Holger Drachmann, who was considered the most prominent Danish writer in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. His first books, “Poems” and a collection of short stories, “With Charcoal and Chalk”, were published in 1872. At the time, Drachmann belonged to the modernist movement and was one of Georg Brandes’ students, but later he changed his political and aesthetic preferences and moved away from the group of Brandes’ followers. Drachman’s artistic style is very special because it has features of Naturalism, Romanticism, Impressionism and Symbolism. But it is possible to conclude that his artistic manner can be called “neo-romantic” according to the contemporary terminology. The characters in his early collections of short stories are vivid, honest, and strong, and they represent the common type of neo-romantic hero that is inherent in other texts related to Neo-Romanticism. Very often Neo-Romanticism is seen as a “reaction” to Naturalism and a return to the principles of Romanticism, but it seems that Neo-Romanticism is much more like Naturalism than Romanticism. The type of neo-romantic hero is closer to naturalistic characters than to romantic characters, because it is a courageous and extraordinary person, an outsider and a rebel, his life is full of desire, risk and adventure, and it looks like a romantic hero, but a neo-romantic hero is a physically and mentally healthy person, and this character is determined by nature and genesis, which is the main feature of Naturalism. Drachman creates a new type of hero in Danish literature: the vital, strong character who struggles with nature and circumstances. His characters have the healthy genetics of ordinary people. Neo-Romanticism in Danish literature was strongly influenced by Naturalism and was the original phenomenon of national literature.

**Keywords:** Holger Drachmann, Danish literature, short story, Neo-Romanticism, Naturalism, literary hero.

The Danish writer Holger Drachmann was a significant figure in the modernist movement. His poetry, drama and prose were well known during his artistic career, and he was considered one of the most important authors in Danish literature. After Drachmann's death, however, his place in national literature was underestimated, and today his name is mostly associated with literary and art history as one of the Skagen Painters (*Skagengsmalerne*). If at the beginning Drachmann's personal style is limited to the principles of Realism and Naturalism, he later tries to find his own way in literature, and it can be said that it is only Neo-Romanticism according to contemporary terminology (Scandinavian scholars began to use this term, *nyromantisme*, in a broad sense in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). P. M. Mitchell wrote: "Drachmann is a good example of how ill a literary-historical label fits a poet. If we try to apply the traditional categories, he is at once a naturalist, a romantic and an impressionist" [Mitchell, 1957, p. 181]. The English scholar was right when he spoke of the complicity of Drachmann's individual way of writing, but this complicity fits Neo-Romanticism as a fact of cultural development at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Nowadays, the term "Neo-Romanticism" is often understood as a broad, boundary-crossing movement in the arts that sought to revive the principles of Romanticism throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An example of this understanding of Neo-Romanticism is the Encyclopedia of British Neo-Romanticism website: "Neo-Romanticism is a broad tendency in the arts. It is not confined to the British Isles and can be found in other nations as well. The high art form is particularly strong in Eastern Europe, while a powerful hybrid form of pop culture has developed in symbiosis with Japanese culture" [Encyclopedia of British Neo-Romanticism]. In "The Dictionary of Literary Trends of 20<sup>th</sup> Century", V. B. Zuseva-Özkan wrote: "In general, Neo-Romanticism is such a broad phenomenon (as mentioned above, it is more the spirit of the epoch, 'psychological unity' (Vengerov), than a style with its own poetics) that it is not possible to clearly separate it from related or incorporated movements". [Zuseva-Özkan, 2023, p. 753]. As a result, Neo-Romanticism is not regarded as a specific artistic style or school. But it seems that such a "broad" understanding of Neo-Romanticism is not adequate when we talk about concrete cultural facts. We can certainly find the origins of most phenomena of modern culture in Romanticism, and this is quite normal, because Romanticism as an aesthetic and cultural programme

was universal in its essence. I propose to understand Neo-Romanticism as an artistic and literary movement of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All historical and cultural phenomena exist in a concrete time and cannot be extended indefinitely to avoid blurring of concepts and loss of meaning. The current dominant view is as follows: Neo-Romanticism is a reaction to Naturalism and Realism, and it goes back to the aesthetics and poetics of Romanticism. But the first of the neo-romantic tendencies in Scandinavia can be seen in the period of Naturalism's popularity, when Georg Brandes led the modern breakthrough movement and waged war against Romanticism, which had been the main literary school in Denmark until the end of the 1860s, thanks also to Hans Christian Andersen. Between 1871 and 1876, Brandes lectured on aesthetics at the University of Copenhagen and wrote the seminal work "Main Currents in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Literature" ("Hovedstrømninger i det 19 Aarhundredes Litteratur", 1872–1890), in which he analysed the contemporary literary process in Europe and formulated the principles of the modern school of "Naturalism" in opposition to the outdated Romanticism. At the time, Brandes' ideas played an important role in intellectual life not only in Denmark, but in Scandinavia as a whole, and they actually set the direction for the development of modern Scandinavian literature. Brandes was at the centre of a group of young writers who were looking for new ways in literature linked to Realism and Naturalism and who rejected Romanticism: Jens Peter Jacobsen, Henrik Pontoppidan, Karl Gjellerup, and Holger Drachmann.

Both Realism and Naturalism demonstrate a different aesthetic and value system from Romanticism. Neo-Romanticism, as a distinct aesthetic movement in Scandinavian culture, appears to be a phenomenon rather different from Romanticism in its genesis and principles. There are more differences than similarities between Neo-Romanticism and Romanticism. On the one hand, Neo-Romanticism grew out of the rejection of Naturalism; on the other hand, Neo-Romanticism largely inherited Naturalism and, together with it, opposed Romanticism as a previous cultural epoch.

The life and work of Holger Drachmann is a good example of the strong connection between Neo-Romanticism and Naturalism. His first volume of poetry, "Poems" ("Digte"), and a collection of short stories, "With Charcoal and Chalk" ("Med Kul og Kridt"), were published in 1872, and under the influence of Ivan Turgenev he wrote the social novel

“An Overcomplete” (“En Overcomlet”) in 1876. Drachmann established himself as a writer of everyday life, creating images of ordinary people whose characters are determined by the environment, conditions, origins, and nature around them. At that time, his style of writing was fully connected with the philosophical and aesthetic principles of Naturalism; there is a specific regionalism in his works, which became common in Danish literature in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and very popular at the end of the century. Danish writers tried to reflect the way of life of the people in the part of Denmark where they grew up: Jutland, Bornholm, Zealand. The principle of “couleur locale” was a Romantic innovation, but the Realists and later the Neo-Romantics also practised it actively. Drachmann idealised the national past, a simple, healthy peasant way of life, and described the destructive influence of modern civilisation and social relations on people. The elements of exoticism, fantasy and an extraordinary hero bring his work closer to Romanticism, but this is only a formal resemblance, for in fact his writing style is largely opposed to Romantic poetics.

Very often, a neo-romantic hero is understood as “a courageous and extraordinary person, an outsider and a rebel, whose life is full of desire, risk and adventure”. And it is possible to agree with these characteristics, this type of hero is very similar to a cliché of the Romantic hero, but it is only an external similarity, because the neo-romantic hero shows completely different appearances from the Romantic one: this is a physically and mentally healthy person, whose character is determined by nature and genesis. He strives for success and happiness at the end of all adventures. He has no part of the self-reflection which is a common feature of Romantic characters.

In Romantic literature, the expression of an “idea” (world view) is much more important than the form of a text. We can see this in the works of the early German and English Romantics, who called for the destruction of genre and practised fragmentation and incompleteness. The most important thing in Romanticism is to show the strange, contradictory hero who stands apart from society, who exists only in opposition to a hostile environment — that is the essential Romantic opposition. This type of hero is supposed to be at a distance from the world around him, but this “distance” is illusory because he is in constant struggle with that world. One of the aims of Romantic literature is to study and describe the interaction between the individual and socie-

ty. In fact, Romanticism focuses on social problems as well as Realism, which follows Romanticism, but in Realism the most important thing is to study how the social environment influences a person. The hero of realists very often changes and deteriorates under the pressure of the environment.

In Naturalism, unlike Romanticism and Realism, the focus is not on the interaction of the individual and society, but on the individual and objective forces, the most important of which is nature. Naturalists show the critical vision of reality that goes back to Realism, but generally the naturalistic conflict lies outside the sphere of human relations. Usually, in this kind of conflict, a hero has to prove himself and expose himself by entering into a struggle, but this struggle is with nature as the only real force in this world, and it requires much more of a person than a struggle with people. This struggle shows all the vices and virtues inherent in man. It seems that we can find the same pathos in neo-romantic works. Exoticism, fantasy, and unusual circumstances are not just entertainment for the reader, but they serve exactly this pathos in neo-romantic literature. H. van der Liet mentioned: “In the context of Drachmann’s oeuvre as a whole, they can be seen as the first evidence of the vivid style that characterised his prose throughout his career and, not unimportantly, these early pieces also show the importance of travel as an essential source of inspiration for his writing as such” [van der Liet, 2007, p. 131].

It seems that Neo-Romanticism as a literary style is much more closely related to Naturalism than it is usually claimed. If Neo-Romanticism is a reaction to Naturalism, this reaction can only be seen in the choice of material: the neo-romantic writer tries to get away from the ordinary and inexpressive events of life, because reality should be bright and colourful. His hero is an attractive image, who does not fight with the world of ordinary people, but with the universe as a whole.

Drachmann wrote his first collection of short stories, “With Charcoal and Chalk”, according to the principles of the Brandes school and Naturalism, but it is possible to recognise his desire to reflect reality in a specific way and to create his own special hero. L. P. Rømhild notes: “From the very first book and in collections such as *I Storm og Stille* 1874 (but with the year 1875 on the title page; SPS I) and *Paa Sømands Tro og Love* 1878 (SPS III) he cultivated this milieu and its naughty types — often, but not only, in an entertaining direction with a certain humorous and

picturesque typification. There is speed and narrative mood in them, sometimes even a sentimental touch; it is their weakness and strength that Drachmann, who was more democratic than most contemporary writers, was very reluctant to see the human animal in the figures of the people. But Drachmann's fishing stories were not as idyllic as the older village and peasant stories of the century, not even — despite the greater dose of pathos — those he wrote in verse. In prose, his fresh style and vividly moving narrative paved the way for a storyteller like Martin Andersen Nexø, especially in his short stories" [Rømhild].

The short story "The Floating Coffin" ("Den svømmende Ligkiste") is an excellent example of the sea tale genre, which focuses on the description of adventure. The hero-narrator and his friend Ole, an experienced sailor, set out on a voyage from the island of Zeeland to Jutland in a small boat. Along the way they come across a strange ship, battered by storms, and apparently abandoned by its crew. Ole gets very excited, takes the oars, and tries to get away from the ship as quickly as possible. Ole calls it a "floating coffin" and tells a story that happened to him many years ago when he was sailing on ships carrying lumber from Canada to the USA. The structure of the short story is based on the principle of *mise en abyme*. The main character in this text is a chief mate who was a cynical and dishonest person. Once he managed to appropriate the ship he was sailing and became a pirate. But he failed in his plans: the ship lost control in a storm and was discovered by Ole's crew. They found all the sailors who had followed the captain dead on board. The ship was named "The Floating Coffin". On the one hand, this is a completely realistic story: there are no elements of mysticism, which are often inherent in such stories of retribution — it is just the story of a strong person, unable to resist circumstances. On the other hand, this text takes on new meanings: there are all the elements of the Gothic tale, with its mystery and amusement, as well as a clear allusion to the Flying Dutchman, but Drachman avoids romanticising the situation. There is a contrast between the evil, mentally defective person — the chief mate — and the vital types — real sailors, of which Ole is one — honest and strong. Their characters are determined by their nature and background.

A similar composition, the principle of *mise en abyme*, is used in the short story "From the Lighthouse" ("Fra Fyrtaarnet"). The plot is based on the drama of true love. The narrator visits an old lighthouse keeper and sees a portrait of a very beautiful girl in his room. The old man tells

his story: many years ago, he rescued a girl from a ship that had sunk in a storm. She was from England and her name was Edith. She stayed with him for several months, waiting for an answer from home. When she wanted to leave him, the hero realised that he loved her and proposed to her, but Edith left him for her home and gave him her portrait as a last gift. The lighthouse keeper kept this love in his heart and never married. The author describes his hero:

The honest narrator's furrowed face had cleared up under the announcement of what had given his life its content and its beauty. I nodded smilingly at him, and he continued, the radiance of the mind still spreading, rejuvenating and softening the hard, sorrowful features [Drachmann, 1906, s. 53].

Here they are — Drachmann's heroes — strong and mentally healthy people, able to be themselves in spite of all circumstances. Their loyalty to duty and their fidelity in love make them reminiscent of romantic figures, but the situations in which they show dignity are very prosaic, without a hint of melodrama.

In other collections, Drachmann continues to paint realistic pictures of the lives of ordinary people, but all his stories have adventures as a necessary element. In the book "I Storm og Stille" (1875), adventures in everyday life are sometimes tragic and sometimes funny, as in the short story "Journey to America" ("Flugten til Amerika"). Two teenagers decide to go on a boat trip, but they get into a storm and have to land on the other side of the strait — in Sweden. Their real adventures begin as in novels about shipwrecks: the heroes avoid danger at sea but face it on land. The natives are very hostile and do not want to help the wet and cold sailors, and the heroes are also accused of attacking one of the locals, who was drunk to death and simply fell down and broke his leg.

The sailors' world is described in detail in the collection "A Sailor's Faith and Love" ("Paa Sømends Tro og Love", 1878), where everyday risk, death and heroism are all part of everyday life. Many of the stories in this collection are about Björn Sivertsen and his relatives, and the narrative form seems to be a family chronicle — a very popular genre in the period of Naturalism. Drachmann's heroes are hard workers who live their lives honestly and do not think of great achievements, even though every day of their lives is filled with struggle and hope. In the story "The Saga of Our Days" ("En Nutids Saga"), Drachmann tells of an absolutely extraordinary event: three sailors miraculously escaped death

in an overturned ship, and that time they considered the most important thing for themselves not to save lives, but to be faithful to their duty. The main character and narrator Ole Christoffersen says:

As it swept past us in the darkness and the storm's toss, we all thought in our poor little boat of one and the same thing: namely, that it would have been the easiest thing in the world for us to jump over to the foreign sailboat. We all knew that where we were, nothing good awaited us. But we also knew that this ship had been entrusted to us and we had given our word to carry it out. A sailor must neither go from his word nor from his ship, as long as there is any possibility of keeping both [Drachmann, 1906, s. 94–95].

These words contain the main pathos of the whole collection, in which the author celebrates human courage, loyalty to the word and honesty. This situation seems extraordinary, unbelievable only for city dwellers, bourgeois, people far from the sea and everyday risks.

Drachmann creates images of ordinary people without romantic exclusivity, they look like realistic types, but in fact his characters are genetically determined and closely related to family, nature, the heritage of their ancestors. He describes the world of Jutlandic sailors, whose images appear in the heroic aureole. The author uses “couleur locale” as an essential part of the poetics of his short stories, which can also be seen as a neo-romantic feature. Everyday life, healthy, simple, and natural, becomes the object of high poetry in Drachmann's artistic system, and he chooses the form of the short story that is most suitable for reflecting ordinary events of reality, extraordinary situations and exotic adventures. In fact, in his first short story collections, Drachmann created a new type of hero and laid the foundation for all Scandinavian Neo-Romanticism. H. van der Liet wrote: “He often used topics of this kind in his work, describing heroic maritime endeavours performed by honest, ordinary people, simply doing their work to the best of their abilities yet rarely receiving proper appreciation from their superiors. Drachmann found these ‘authentic’ working-class heroes in remote, picturesque coastal villages, notably Skagen and Hombeek, north of Copenhagen. In effect, erecting literary monuments for real-life mariners such as Kruse from Skagen or Peder Andersen (‘Store Bjørn’) from Hombeek. Thus, by writing dozens of popular maritime stories, poems, and plays Drachmann ensured his immense popularity in maritime and working class milieus” [van der Liet, 2017, p. 115].



In the end of 1870, Drachmann broke with Brandes and began to promote nationalist ideas in his works: in 1877, he published a book about the Danish-Prussian war of 1864, “Over there from the border” (“Derovre fra Grænsen”). As a result of his new ideological orientation, he became interested in folklore forms and images, which is very typical of Neo-Romanticism. In his work, Drachmann drew on Danish folk tales, beliefs and medieval legends. He wrote fairy tale plays: “The Princess and Half the Kingdom” (“Prinsessen og det halve kongerige”, 1878), “East of the Sun and West of the Moon” (“Østen for Sol og Vesten for Måne”, 1880), “Once Upon a Time” (“Det var en gang”, 1885). The fairy tale novel “Mermaid’s Daughter” (“Vandenæs Datter”, 1881) goes back both to folk ballads and legends and Hans Christian Andersen’s “Little Mermaid”. Short stories from the collection “Troll’s Clothes. Folk legends in Our Time” (“Troll tøj. Folkesagn i Nutidsliv”, 1889–1890) are mostly based on folklore plots and establish the closest connection between the past and the present. The style of these texts is usually very unpretentious, the images are obvious and simple. Drachmann’s gradual departure from Naturalism does not mean that he refuses to describe the lives of ordinary people, but the principles of this description change: the writer increasingly turns to the symbolism and poetics of folklore [Korovin, 2023, p. 38–40].

In fact, it is possible to say that Drachmann was one single Danish Neo-romantic poet, but his work apparently influenced Johan Villem Jensen, who clearly manifested his neo-romantic aspirations in the book of lyrics “Poems” (“Dikte”, 1906) and the collection of short stories “Himmerland Stories” (“Himmerlandshistorier”, 1898–1910). As a writer, he searches for healthy, normal, natural forces rooted in the common people. In this search, he addresses both the biological origins of the nation trying to penetrate into prehistoric times and the patriarchal traditional relations kept in village. Jensen’s heroes are similar to personages from Drachmann’s early short stories: vital persons who are fighting for the happiness and life success.

It can be concluded that Drachmann was a neo-romantic writer who created a new type of hero in Danish literature: the vital, strong character who struggles against nature and circumstances. This type is different from the Romantic hero, who is often thoughtful, unhealthy, and unhappy. It goes back to Naturalism, because the characters are determined by nature, but that nature is the healthy genetics of ordinary

people. Neo-Romanticism as a phenomenon of Danish literature was formed under the direct influence of Naturalism and was the important fact of the literary development from the Modern Breakthrough to modernism.

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**Андрей Коровин**

*Институт мировой литературы им. А. М. Горького РАН*

### НЕОРОМАНТИЧЕСКИЙ ГЕРОЙ — ЖИЗНЕУТВЕРЖДАЮЩИЕ ХАРАКТЕРЫ В НОВЕЛЛАХ ХОЛЬГЕРА ДРАКМАННА

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Статья посвящена исследованию специфического типа литературного героя, получившего свое развитие в новеллах Хольгера Дракманна, считавшегося

в начале XX в. самым выдающимся датским писателем. Его первые книги — лирический сборник «Стихотворения» и сборник новел «Углем и мелом» — вышли в 1872 г. В то время Дракманн был одним из писателей движения прорыва и верным последователем Георга Брандеса, но позже он изменил свои политические и эстетические предпочтения и отошел от Брандеса и его сторонников. Художественная манера Дракманна достаточно своеобразна, поскольку в его произведениях можно найти черты натурализма, романтизма, импрессионизма и символизма, но в целом его творчество может быть отнесено к неоромантизму, если использовать современную терминологию. Герои его ранних сборников новелл предстают полными жизни, честными и сильными, что соотносимо с типом неоромантического героя, присущего и другим текстам, традиционно причисляемым к неоромантизму. Принято считать, что неоромантизм является «реакцией» на натурализм и возвращением к принципам романтизма, но, очевидно, он имеет значительно более общего с натурализмом, чем с романтизмом. Тип неоромантического героя ближе к натуралистическим персонажам, чем к романтическим: хотя он смелый и неординарный человек, аутсайдер и бунтарь, а его жизнь полна страстей, риска и приключений (что напоминает романтического героя), но в неоромантической литературе доминируют физически и душевно здоровые персонажи, чьи характеры определяются природой и происхождением, а это является важнейшей особенностью натурализма. Дракманн в своих новеллах создает новый тип героя в датской литературе: жизнеспособный, сильный характер, борющийся с природой и обстоятельствами; его персонажи обладают здоровой генетикой простых людей. Фактически на датский неоромантизм сильнейшее влияние оказал именно натурализм, что стало отличительной чертой национальной литературы.

**Ключевые слова:** Хольгер Дракманн, датская литература, новела, неоромантизм, натурализм, литературный герой.

### **Andrey Korovin**

PhD in Philology, Associate Professor, Senior Researcher,  
A. M. Gorky Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences,  
25a, Povarskaya ul., Moscow, 121069, Russian Federation  
E-mail: avkorovin2002@mail.ru

### **Коровин Андрей Викторович**

кандидат филологических наук, доцент, старший научный сотрудник,  
Институт мировой литературы им. А. М. Горького РАН,  
Российская Федерация, 121069, Москва, ул. Поварская, 25а  
E-mail: avkorovin2002@mail.ru

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