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GOTHIC AURA OF THE SEA IMAGE IN IRIS MURDOCH’S NOVEL “THE UNICORN”

The study delves into the gothic features of the sea image in I. Murdoch’s novel “The Unicorn”. It examines the latest research into this literary work (by H. Bokshan, E. Kornilova, A. Matiichak, S. Farhadi Nejad, J. Jarzab and S. Pavlychko), which indicates that this image has not been a subject of thorough investigation that makes the topic of the paper relevant. The study aims at establishing the peculiarities of the sea image in the novel “The Unicorn”, identifying its relationships with the main characters and major motifs, and its correlation with mythological ideas about water as a primordial element. The article underscores that the sea image as an element of gothic landscapes accumulates ambivalent semantics pertaining to mythopoetic texts. It emphasizes that the sea image correlates with many characters of the novel, manifesting various connotations in these relationships. The study highlights that its correlation with the main character, Marian Taylor, is depicted most vividly. It is conveyed in this personage’s reflections. Such correlation with the female character seems natural since there is a gender association with water inherent in a mythological picture of the world. The paper analyzes the features of visualizing the sea image consisting in the use of a variety of colors to emphasize its controversial and dynamic nature. It characterizes the personification of this image and its correlation with the motif of death that generates the tragic modus of the literary work highlighted with a poetic intertext – Paul’s Valery poem “The Graveyard by the Sea”. The analysis allowed us to draw a conclusion that the polyvalent sea image manifests ambivalent semantics through the relationships with the female and male characters and also with the motif of death. These accents link it with mythological ideas about this primordial element whose attributes are chaos, hostility, and danger. The sea image in “The Unicorn” evolves in the traditions of a Gothic novel with immanent menacing landscapes which serve as a background of mysterious and enigmatic events.

Key words: sea motif, gothic novel, mythological ideas, motif of death, tragic modus.

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ГОТИЧНА АУРА ОБРАЗУ МОРЯ В РОМАНІ АЙРІС МЕРДОК «ЄДИНОРІГ»

Статтю присвячено особливостям образу моря як елементу готичного простору в романі А. Мердок «Єдиноріг». Здійснено аналіз попередніх досліджень твору (Г. Бокиань, А. Матійчак, С. Павличко, J. Jarzab, S. Farhani Nejad), який дозволив з'ясувати, що цей образ не становив окремого предмету вивчення, що надає актуальності темі нашої розвідки. Мета статті – визначити специфіку образу моря в романі «Єдиноріг», виявивши його зв'язки з головними персонажами і провідними мотивами, а також його кореляцію з міфологічними уявленнями про водну стихію. У дослідженні підкреслено, що образ моря як елемент готичного простору акумулює амбівалентну семантику, суголосну міфопоетичним першотекстам. Акцентовано, що образ моря корелює з багатьма персонажами роману «Єдиноріг», оприявнюючи в цих зв'язках різні конотації. Зауважено, що найвиразніше окресленою у творі А. Мердок є його взаємодія з головною героїнею – Меріан Тейлор, через сприймання якої він переважно візуалізується читачеві. Така його кореляція з жіночим персонажем видається закономірною з огляду на гендерну співвіднесеність із водною стихією, властиву міфологічній картині світу. Схарактеризовано специфіку візуалізації образу моря, що полягає у використанні розмаїтій палітри відтінків для відображення його полісемантичності, контрроверсійності й динамічного характеру. Окреслено персоніфікацію цього образу, його містичну і демонічну природу та кореляцію з мотивом смерті, що генерує трагічний модус твору, підсилений поетичним інтертекстом – віршем Поля Валері «Морське кладовище». Зроблено висновок про те, що полівалентний образ моря в романі А. Мердок «Єдиноріг» через зв'язки з жіночими і чоловічими персонажами, а також із мотивом смерті оприявнює амбівалентну семантику, в якій домінує здатність до спустошення, руйнування і знищення. Згадані акценти споріднюють його з міфологічними уявленнями про цю стихію, атрибутами якої є хаос, ворожість і небезпека. Образ моря в «Єдинорогу» витримано в традиціях неоготичного роману з характерними похмурими пейзажами, на тлі яких відбуваються загадкові й таємничі події.

Ключові слова: образ моря, готичний роман, міфологічні уявлення, мотив смерті, трагічний модус.

Problem statement. I. Murdoch inherited and originally developed that powerful tradition of free interpretation of mythology, which in English-language literature originated in the pre-Romantic era and was reflected in the poetics of mythocentric gothic novel. One of the central mythologeme in her literary works is the mythologeme of water, which the author interpreted in a neo-gothic way to create mysterious landscapes. Visualizing the sea image in I. Murdoch's literary works seems natural given the author's Irish origin and geographical features of the island country washed by the Atlantic Ocean and the Irish Sea. This topos occupies a special place in the fictional space of her prose, namely, in the novel "The Sea, the Sea" manifested as a title, in "The Sandcastle", and also in "The Unicorn". Readers' interest in Gothic prose as a timeless genre category led to its evolution into neo-Gothic literature, which necessitates the study of typological phenomena in it and the author's originality of interpreting mythological intertexts that constitute its genological specificity.

Analysis of the latest publications. The sea image is poly-functional in the writer's works of different genres. We are mainly interested in its specificity in the neo-gothic novel "The Unicorn", which has been thoroughly researched both in

Ukrainian and foreign literary studies. For instance, A. Matiichak considered this work in terms of genre models, highlighting elaborate stylization of gothic in it and also the philosophical and ethical components (Matiichak, 2009). Moreover, the researcher characterized the game phenomenon in "The Unicorn" focusing her attention on the paradigm of the dream as a combination of reality and unreality (Matiichak, 2004). E. Kornilova made a significant contribution to examining the main patterns of I. Murdoch's neo-gothic novels comprehensively studying spatiotemporal elements and villain/victim characters in this literary work (Kornilova, 2022). S. Pavlychko delved into the novel "The Unicorn" as the embodiment of the author's concept of human destiny and freedom (Pavlychko, 2001). J. Jarzab analyzed the significance of space in this literary work as a twentieth-century Irish gothic novel (Jarzab, 2014). S. Farhani Nejad examined various representations of female identity in "The Unicorn" (Farhani Nejad, 2021). We considered the specificity of interpreting the Celtic fairy mythologeme in it performing a comparative analysis with H. Pahutiak's novel "The Enchanted Musicians" (Bokshan, 2018). However, despite the availability of multifaceted studies on I. Murdoch's novel "The Unicorn", we

can state that the sea image remains without the due attention from scientists. It allows for considering our research topic relevant and encourages us to contribute to filling the existing gap.

The research aims to identify the specificity of the sea image in the novel “The Unicorn”, establish its correlation with the main characters of the literary work and the primary motives, and reveal its relationships with the mythological ideas about water as a primordial element.

To achieve the aim, it is advisable to apply the following methodologies: contextual (to consider I. Murdoch’s novel in the context of traditional mythology), intertextual (to deconstruct the text to identify and analyze mythological intertexts and the author’s discourse), semiological (to define the meaning of mythological motifs and characters), psychoanalytical (to outline the archetypical foundations and psychological features of the characters), and poetological (to study the mythopoetics of “The Unicorn”).

Research materials. The recurrent sea image in I. Murdoch’s novel “The Unicorn” is part of gothic landscapes, other elements of which are the topoi of gloomy Gaze and Riders Castles, giant coastal cliffs of black sandstone, huge crags and dolmens, and mystical marshes with flashing green lights. This image accumulates ambivalent semantics that aligns with mythopoetical ideas about water in general and salt water in particular. The sea image correlates with many characters of the novel manifesting different connotations in these relationships.

The interaction of the sea image with the main character, Marian Taylor, is depicted most clearly, and it is articulated to the reader through her perception. Its correlation with a female character seems natural since such gender correlation with water as a primordial element is inherent in the mythological picture of the world. The depictions of the sea at the beginning of the novel when it appears in front of Marian as “a luminous emerald green streaked with lines of dark purple” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 9) and when she gets to know it further are contrasting: “She found the vast dark coastline repellent and frightening. She had never seen a land so out with sympathy with man” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 11). It is this changeable tone that determines the character of the sea image in the novel.

The poly-semantic sea image is visualized through a rich palette of shades: calm and friendly,

it is depicted in “peacock blue” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 17) colors. Polar characteristics are depicted through the combination of contrasting colors: “It was the sea here which seemed black, mingling with the foam like ink with cream” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 11). The ambivalence of the sea image is emphasized by the repetition of the binary opposition “white–black”: “Beyond the wild snowy curl and retreat of the foam the sea now looked, in the bright sunlight, inky black” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 32). Black colors also dominate in the depiction of the coastline along which Marian liked wandering: “The black wall of the cliff rose sheer beside her. <...> The beach too was black, with gritty sand at the base of the cliff, and black pebbles at the water’s edge” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 32). The contradictory semantic volume of the sea image is reflected in its dynamic character: it can look calm, but after a while, it can turn into a series of enormous waves “which sudden violent acceleration came tearing in to destroy themselves” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 32).

The sea image is personalized: Gerald Scottow imagines this primordial element as a treacherous and cold-blooded killer. Therefore, he strongly warns Marian against swimming in it. Gerald also talks about the terrible storm that devastated everything a few years earlier. A stranger on the shore warns the lady about the possibility of drowning, recalling the recent deaths of two Germans at sea (Murdoch, 2000, p. 33). The owner of Riders Castle also discourages Marian from swimming. Jamesie told the young lady about a powerful stream of water that once washed a car with all its passengers into the sea. This episode highlights the correlation of the sea image with the motif of death that emphasizes the semantics of the tragic in it, which is enhanced by the poetic intertext – Paul Valery’s poem “The Graveyard by the Sea” proposed to be read by the mistress of Gaze Castle – Missis Crean Smith (Murdoch 2000, p. 42). The sea image in I. Murdoch’s novel aligns with many mythological texts in which this primordial element appears as a destructive force used by the gods to punish those who committed a crime against them (McHardy, 2008).

“The towers of grey rock” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 9) appear as elements of ominous sea landscapes: their images are also mystified and demonized. When Marian first saw them, they seemed to her “huge fossilized monsters” (Murdoch, 2000,

p. 12). The rock images in the novel correlate with the emotion of fear, which generates the tragic modus of the literary work. The sea image has similar semantics associated not only with anxiety, danger, and disaster, but also with something mysterious and incomprehensible: “Marian had never been afraid of the sea. She did not know what was with her now. The thought of entering the water gave her a frisson which was like a kind of sexual thrill, both unpleasant and distressingly agreeable” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 32). In this context, the researcher’s observation that “the sea is associated with otherness, with the unknown, chaos, evil forces and danger” (Knotková-Čapková, 2006, p. 7) seems relevant.

The sea image acquires characteristics of a voracious monster capable of swallowing anyone: “The beach shelved very steeply, creating an undertow, each retreating wave being sucked with positive vicious violence back beneath the tall uncurling crest of its closely following successor” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 32). Even a seal in such water frightened Marian because it seemed an evil sea god. The demonic nature of the sea image is emphasized by the topoi of the Devil’s Causeway, Gaze and Riders Castles, which, after all the events that happened there, were imagined by Effingham Cooper as Scylla and Charybdis. The depleted landscape of the valley near Gaze Castle after the storm (wide debris of stone and bushes, the bedraggled corpse of a sheep, “dad salmon lying broadcast upon the hillside” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 246–247) emphasizing the meaning of devastating power: the house “lay above the rushing waters like a stranded and abandoned ship” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 247). The death of Peter Crean-Smith in his car, which was washed away into the sea, adds vivid accents in the interaction of the sea image with the motif of death, which gives it the role of a genre-creating factor.

The emotion of fear is dominant in the correlation between the main character and the sea image, which is related to the motif of a human’s struggle with a primordial element. The girl did her utmost to cope with anxious feeling that gripped her: “Marian was by now thoroughly frightened of swim-

ming but determined to swim. <...> It was a matter of pride; and she felt obscurely that if she started now to be afraid of the sea she would make some crack or fissure in her being through which other and worse fears might come” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 32). In the episode when Marian challenges the treacherous sea, we observe a change in the gender association of the sea image underscored by G. Bachelard: a fierce battle begins between the man and the sea, water becomes angry. It changes its gender acquiring its masculine characteristics (Bachelard, 1983). The young lady gave in to the formidable power and gave up trying to swim in the sea.

Another female characters, Alice Lejour, correlates with the sea image. Effingham Cooper saw the young lady as a creature from another world: “The scene, wrapped about by the loudly roaring waves, had a weird stillness, as if Alice had lain there already a long time, a fish-like sea goddess, brooding since antiquity in some watery hole” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 194). The portrait characteristics of this character are allusively related to the mythological nereids, particularly Thetis, Amphitrite, and Galatea. This mythopoetical arrangement of the sea image contrasts with its visualization described earlier.

Conclusions and prospects of further research. Thus, the polyvalent and dynamic sea image in I. Murdoch’s novel “The Unicorn”, through its connections with female and male characters and the motif of death, manifests ambivalent semantics, in which the ability to destroy and annihilate predominates. These accents make it similar to the mythological ideas of this primordial element, whose attributes are chaos, hostility, and danger. Hence its personification as a monster seems natural. The sea image in “The Unicorn” aligns with the traditions of a gothic novel with its characteristic gloomy, intimidating landscapes in which mystical and mysterious events occur. The prospects of further research can be seen in studying the specificity of this image in other I. Murdoch’s novels, in particular, in “The Sea, the Sea” and “The Sandcastle”.

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