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MICHAEL MOORCOCK'S "LUNCHING WITH ANTICHRIST": A POSTMODERNIST PSYCHO-MYTH

МАЙКЛ МУРКОК «ОБІДИ З АНТИХРИСТОМ»: ПОСТМОДЕРНІСТСЬКИЙ ПСИХОМІФ

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The paper considers the highly disputable issues of the theory and history of British science fiction – the problem of literary ventures that had been launched by the New Wave science fiction writers (Michael Moorcock, Brian Aldiss, James Ballard) in the 1960s and 1970s. At the end of the century, new explorations have been directed toward the nature of the mind in the relationship with the world, not limited to individual consciousness. The Universe, created by Michael Moorcock at the end of the century, is not a physical, but a psychic world, and it functions according to the inner rules of human nature. The breakthrough into the new is noticeable in his collection of stories "Lunching with Antichrist" (1993) in the shifting of the center of the fantastic into the inner space of the individual, into the internal world of the psyche. Not man and humanity, but man and the randomness of the world are revealed to Begg, the Antichrist. At the end of the XX century, Moorcock joined the discourse that scholars call "naming the Antichrist", and offered an unexpected perspective for the creative deconstruction of this image. The emphasis is laid on the hero's repudiation of present reality, and creation of the inner space governed by imagination and fantasy. It has become the defining feature of science fiction and fantasy in post New-Wave history. The poetics of the genre is based on the discovery of the new subjects introduced by psychiatry and psychology (the nature of dreams, amnesia, madness, etc.) and their new understanding. This interiorization of the universal patterns of the archetypes (faith, truth, happiness, inspiration, and even punishment) is the main intellectual and aesthetic principle in depicting Begg as an Antichrist. He is the rebel, who in his desire to reform the world has overcome this inert world with his imagination, illuminating his death with the expectation of a miracle. The main idea of Moorcock's provocative bestseller "behold the man" (1969) found new artistic development in the genre of postmodern psycho-mythological fantasy.

Key words: New Wave, "The Lunching with Antichrist", Michael Moorcock, interiorization, miracle, psychomyth, post-modernism, fantasy.

У статті розглядаються дискусійні питання теорії та історії британської наукової фантастики – проблема художніх відкриттів «Нової хвилі» у творчості Майкла Муркока, Браяна Олдісса, Джеймса Балларда (1960–1970 рр.) та їх подальшого розвитку наприкінці ХХ століття в осягненні суб'єктивного світу людини, не обмежуючись зображенням індивідуальної свідомості. Творчість Муркока 1980–1990-х років, хоч і не пов'язана безпосередньо з «Новою хвилею», яка наприкінці 1970-х пішла на спад, позначена подальшим розвитком відкриттів, зроблених раніше. Художній експеримент Муркока пов'язується із постмодерністським баченням суперечливих релігійних та етичних питань, які трансформували традиційні параметри фантастичного наративу.

Всесвіт, створений Майклом Муркоком, не є фізичним – це світ психіки людини, і функціонує він згідно з внутрішніми правилами людської природи. Прорив у нове помітний у книзі оповідань «Обіди з антихристом» (1993) у переміщенні центру фантастичного у внутрішній світ психіки, у зміні концепції людського життя та людського шляху. Антихристу Беггу відкривається не складність людини і людства, а випадковість світу. Наприкінці ХХ століття Муркок приєднується до дискурсу, який науковці називають «іменуванням Антихриста», і пропонує несподіваний ракурс творчої деконструкції цього образу. Акцентується увага на відмові героя від теперішньої реальності, створенні внутрішнього простору, керованого уявою та фантазією. Це стає визначальною рисою наукової фантастики та фентезі в історії літератури після Нової хвилі і було пов'язано з дослідженням нових явищ, введених

психіатрією та психологією (природа сновидінь, амнезія, божевільня тощо), та їх новим розумінням. Інтеріоризація стає основним інтелектуально-естетичним принципом у зображенні Бегга як антихриста, який зумів подолати цей убогий реальний світ власною уявою, освітлюючи навіть свою смерть очікуванням дива. Головна ідея провокаційного бестселера Муркока «се людина» (1969) знайшла нове художнє втілення.

Ключові слова: Нова хвиля, «Обіди з антихристом», Майкл Муркок, інтеріоризація, диво, психоміф, постмодернізм, фентезі.

Statement of the problem and its connections with important academic issues. The paper considers Michael Moorcock (b.1939) as one of the most prolific and controversial English writers of the New Wave in science fiction who, together with Brian Aldiss, James Ballard, etc., has been exploring new spaces of the fantastic. However, his literary innovations in science fiction have not yet received the adequate critical response they deserve.

In the paper, Moorcock's artistic experiment at the end of the XX century is associated primarily with a postmodernist vision of controversial religious and ethical issues that have transformed the traditional parameters of fantastic narrative. In the paper, the problem of science fiction status concerning Moorcock's writings is approached in terms of new artistic possibilities of this literature.

Analysis of recent publications. A first approach to the fantastic indicates that the number of studies on science fiction and fantasy abroad far exceeds the number of works published in our country (T. Todorov, S. Lem, R. Scholes, D. Suin, J. Bailey, W. Bainbridge, D. Broderick, C. Greenland, etc.). In Ukrainian literary criticism, this problem is attracting increasing interest (A. Niamtsu, O. Stuzhuk, O. Kovtun, O. Stuzhuk, Yu. Zaichenko, S. Khorob, Ye. Shkurov, etc.). From a historical and literary point of view, it is obvious that there is still insufficient knowledge of the main trends in the development of foreign science fiction and, foremost, British science fiction and fantasy, which for a long time was represented exclusively by G. Wells.

K. Greenland in the monograph "Entropy Exhibition. Michael Moorcock and the British "New Wave" in Science Fiction" (1983) considers this literary phenomenon in the most general terms as "anarchic" [4, p. 9]. A different level of analysis and generalization is characteristic of the work by W. Bainbridge, where the New Wave science fiction is considered in the aspect of general trends in the development of modern science fiction [1]. The most characteristic feature is an emphasis on a content-thematic approach without elucidating the artistic and aesthetic features of Moorcock's fiction, as it is demonstrated in the monograph by Mark Scroggins "Michael Moorcock Fiction. Fantasy and the World's Pain" (2016) [12].

Main research material. Moorcock's writings in the 1980s and 1990s, although not directly

related to the New Wave, which was on the wane in the late 1970s, are also marked by the further development of the discoveries made in the 1960s and 1970s. Shortly after publishing his provocative novel "behold the man" (1969), the writer attracted more critical interest, which became more objective in accentuating Moorcock's talent and extraordinary imaginative ability [12; 14; 15].

During this period, in addition to continuing cycles of heroic fantasy, new cycles are created ("Mother London", 1982; "The Brothel in Rosenstrasse", 1982), that have changed the image of the fantasy writer in the direction of postmodernist agenda in art.

In the 1980s, Moorcock published studies on the nature of fantastic fiction and the fantasy genre: "Aspects of Fantasy" and "Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy," which he has been refining over ten years. He considers the fantasy genre to be the boundless world of metaphor, which reveals rich hidden territories and depths of our consciousness [11, p. 17]. The concept of fantasy formulated by Moorcock has much in common with the theory of Ursula Le Guin. The American writer reduces the entire nature of fantasy to the process of translating non-verbal images into worlds-symbols [6, p. 15], and she, like the New Wave writers, sees her goal as an artist in studying the worlds of imagination – internal spaces ("to explore imaginative worlds: the Inner Lands" [6, p. 17]). This is vividly represented in the story "A Trip to the Head," in which the hero, who has lost his name, goes in search of it. Finally, he experiences even greater despair when he finds his loss. Fantasy in her interpretation is nothing more than the author's worldview ("writer's vision of the world" [6, p. 18]).

Fantasies for Moorcock are also "psychomyths" that are outside history, outside time, and real space, in the realm of living consciousness. For him, the fantastic is similar to a hallucination or nightmare; it opens the "floodgates of the unconscious" [8, p. 7–35] and floods the whole world in the writer's mind. This psychomythology far outpaces reality. Moorcock has proclaimed these ideas in his main historico-theoretical studies: "Aspects of Fantasy" (1985), and "Wizardry and Wild Romance" (1987).

The type of postmodern fantasy-psychomyth Moorcock created in the story "Lunching with the Antichrist" (1993), gave the name to the book. In

this book, the stories are grouped around the Von Bek family who move between everyday and fantastic, looking for some kind of fulfillment in their lives [10].

The story "Lunching with the Antichrist" does not fall under any genre definition of science fiction or fantasy which Moorcock has been writing before. The plot is based on the drama of "discovering oneself" and the inability to be satisfied with what one knows. The fantasy and originality of what is happening to the hero highlight the writer's thoughts about the deadly inertia of the minds of those who surround the hero.

Thus, the vicar of a small London parish becomes an urgent orator, saying things of which the Church does not approve when he admits that he had a vision-inspiration in the image of Rose, a beautiful young lady. That is why he is called the Clapham Antichrist and finally becomes a traveling passionate preacher of goodness and inner freedom of man.

The story reveals that life acquires meaning and value only when a person discovers new feelings and possibilities in himself when he suddenly begins *to see*. "I took the train down the coast. The sun had given the olive trees and vines an astonishing sharpness and the white limestone glared so fiercely that it became for a while unbearable. The sea lacks the Atlantic's profundity..." [10, p. 20].

And this new quality of his soul is a real miracle for him. Rose, a beautiful young lady, enters his inner space as a precious miracle. For Begg, the reality of this miracle was so vivid that he even built up his own "plot" of his relationship with Rosa (marriage, birth of a daughter). It confuses the interlocutor, who begins to think that Begg is a drug addict or a psychopath.

Moorcock creates not an allegorical, but a fantasy-poetic image of Rose, a beautiful young lady. For Begg, Rose was sent by God, "she was flesh. A miracle" [10, p. 100]. But she is also seen as a real woman: "about my own height, with graceful beauty and the air of peace I associate with the Virgin. My unconventional madonna stood in a mannish, confident way, a hand on her hip, clearly amused by me" [10, p. 83]. Moorcock creates a lyrical and poetic image of a magical phenomenon that seems real to the hero: "She appeared to have emerged from the earth or from the tree. Shadows of bark and leaves still clung to her. There was something plantlike about the set of her limbs, the subtle colors of her flesh, as if a rose had become human and yet remained thoroughly a rose" [10, p. 83].

The comparison of a beautiful woman with a tree and nature can be traced in world literature. In the

story, this image-symbol is marked by lyricism and a smile, reinforcing the mythological plot. For Begg, Rose is more than a miracle of beauty. For him, she is the discovery of truth and new feelings ("A discovery of new senses" [10, p. 102]), the quintessence of life at large, like trees, flowers, animals, etc.

Thus, in the story, two versions of life collide: one is romantic and mythological, full of entries into worlds of fantasy (Rose for Begg is not only a beloved dream-woman, but also faith, truth, happiness, inspiration, and even punishment), where the supernatural of what is happening does not surprise the hero, and the other -rationally skeptical approach, that is prevailing in the world, and according to which any fantasy is either a disease or the devil's tricks.

Here the author wants to touch on another important problem – the dialectics of freedom and service, which has always been Moorcock's concern. The press made Begg a monster, Antichrist, attributing to him black magic, sexual perversion, sorcery, sacrilege, witchcraft, only because he, having become a passionate preacher of goodness and Christian virtues, called on parishioners to act according to their principles and sacrifice their material ambitions to the common good, "to take a risk on God being right" [10, p. 68], instructing them how to become equal with the angels. In its mission of universal love [10, p. 69]), he is decries vice and the decline of morality, and announces that if those who commit evil are called Christians, then he is rather the Antichrist. The clerics did not forgive him for such an attack.

At the end of the century, Moorcock joins the discourse that scholars call "naming the Antichrist" [2, p. 10], and offers an unexpected sacralizing perspective on the image of Antichrist. The emphasis is laid on the hero's repudiation of present reality, and creation of the inner space governed by imagination and fantasy.

The main idea of Moorcock's provocative bestseller "behold the man" has found a new artistic manifestation. The story reveals another important concept for the organization of the Universe – the idea of "a multiverse". Moorcock's hero views the world order not as a linear set, but as randomness and variability ("a naturally turbulent universe, the swirling cosmos" [10, p. 80]). "We have scarcely glimpsed any more of the multiverse than a toad under a stone" [10, p. 81]. Like the Great Conqueror of his heroic fantasies, he cannot imagine progress without confrontation with Chaos and Anarchy ("Only through Chaos and Anarchy could the Millennium be achieved" [10, p. 82]).

Significantly, the plot of this psychomyth is based on conversations between the narrator, who writes

the story of the Antichrist for a London newspaper, and Begg during their lunches together. This story-conversation, text-discourse, fits into the modern panorama of postmodern literature, where there is no story in the traditional sense. The features of fantasy as psychomyth are manifested in the elements of the incredible and unexpected that are projected through the perception of the hero. This narrative strategy but not the depiction of a character, dominates over other components of the text's poetics.

There is an opinion that in science fiction and fantasy, characters, as a rule, are conventional and schematic. Major masters of science fiction are criticized for the fact that their characters are "two-dimensional" (flat) [3, p. 132]. However, it seems that this quality of science fiction is explained not by a lack of talent on the part of the writers, but by the conventions of the genre itself, the poetics of which consists of the models of the world and not of character-drawings. Any deviation towards psychological detail can destroy the main principle of the structure of the text.

M. Green, studying the scientific and literary basis of science fiction, believes that it is precisely this property of science fiction that scares talented writers away from it [3]. However, he still finds in this genre not only the inherent contradiction between the conventions of form and the artistic capabilities of the writer but also a hidden force capable of the development and production of new genres.

Michael Moorcock has artistically demonstrated that this dilemma can be resolved in the fantasy genre as psychomyth.

Conclusions. Michael Moorcock's fantasy writings, with distinctly metaphorical and multidimensional messages, addressed moral

psychology and the humanitarian sciences. His writings were distinctly different from "cosmic" science fiction, moving away from the cosmic horizons to the microcosm of the human soul and psyche and creating a new generic synthesis. An individual fantastic idea, and not a scientific concept, not a scheme-action, now determines the specifics of new literature. The plot itself is developing according to a different scheme – mental, rather than logical laws. His hero, the Antichrist, is the rebel, who in his desire to reform the world has overcome this inert life with his imagination, illuminating his death with the expectation of a miracle. The innovations in Michael Moorcock's science fiction and fantasy writings are viewed as a radical transformation, representing the general situation in culture since the mid-twentieth century.

Among the problems that require serious analysis, it is necessary to highlight the area of fantastic literature in which the process of violation of science-centrism is artistically reflected, and the process of the birth of new fantastic genres is underway.

Moorcock, indeed, accomplished this plan; he did everything to restore the artistic quality of science fiction and fantasy as great literature. When asked by a journalist about how the nature of the fantasy genre is changing in his writings, Moorcock replied that he evaluates this genre as escapist, rejecting today's nightmare of reality but not life at large. His goal is to reverse this genre into a simple humanistic parable ("to produce simple, humanitarian fables...to celebrate human strength and weakness" [9, p. 352]). This writer's program reflects the changes that take place in literature today, which Ihab Hassan defines as the search for a postmodern "aesthetics of faith" [5, pp. 199–213].

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