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MYTHOLOGICAL TIME AND THE REAL WORLD IN MICHAEL MOORCOCK'S ELRIC OF MELNIBONÉ

МІФОЛОГІЧНИЙ ЧАС І РЕАЛЬНИЙ СВІТ У РОМАНІ МАЙКЛА МУРКОКА «ЕЛРІК ІЗ МЕЛЬНІБОНЕ»

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In Michael Moorcock's novel *Elric of Melniboné*, mythological time intersects with historical and empirical reality, creating a complex temporal structure in which eternal and cyclical dimensions converge. The protagonist, Elric, represents the Eternal Champion—a recurring metaphysical figure condemned to fight across temporal and spatial boundaries. Although Elric appears to exercise free will, his destiny is ultimately shaped by higher cosmic forces that govern the mythological universe of the narrative. As the Eternal Champion, Elric embodies a single spirit reborn repeatedly in parallel worlds, perpetually engaged in the struggle between Chaos and Cosmic Order. This article examines the temporal organization of the novel and its mythopoetic framework. It argues that Moorcock constructs a multilayered concept of time that combines cyclical, recurring, and empirical temporal dimensions. Mythic time operates beyond linear chronology, positioning Elric within an archetypal narrative of eternal return. At the same time, empirical time situates the character within tangible historical and narrative events, creating a fusion of myth and reality. Through this structure, Moorcock reinterprets the heroic archetype, presenting Elric as both a tragic antihero and a mythological instrument of cosmic balance. The study further demonstrates that the opposition between Chaos and Order functions not merely as a thematic device but as a metaphysical principle shaping the narrative universe. Elric's identity is defined by his role in this eternal and inevitable conflict, rendering him both autonomous and predetermined. By blending mythological motifs with philosophical reflections on destiny and freedom, Moorcock constructs a modern epic in which time itself becomes a central narrative force. The novel thus redefines heroic mythology within a contemporary literary framework.

Key words: Michael Moorcock; Elric of Melniboné; Eternal Champion; Mythological Time; Chaos and Order; Cyclical Narrative

У романі Майкла Муркока *Elric of Melniboné* міфологічний час перетинається з історичною та емпіричною реальністю, формуючи складну часову структуру, у якій поєднуються вічний і циклічний виміри. Головний герой, Елрік, уособлює Вічного Чемпіона – повторювану метафізичну постать, приречену вести боротьбу крізь часові й просторові межі. Хоча Елрік нібито має свободу волі, його доля зрештою визначається вищими космічними силами, що керують міфологічним всесвітом твору. Як Вічний Чемпіон, Елрік втілює єдиний дух, який знову і знову народжується в паралельних світах, постійно беручи участь у боротьбі між Хаосом і Космічним Порядком.

У статті аналізується часова організація роману та його міфопоетична структура. Доводиться, що Муркок вибудовує багатопланову концепцію часу, поєднуючи циклічний, повторюваний та емпіричний часові виміри. Міфічний час функціонує поза межами лінійної хронології, розміщуючи Елріка в архетипній наративній моделі вічного повернення. Водночас емпіричний час пов'язує персонажа з конкретними історичними й сюжетними подіями, створюючи синтез міфу та реальності. Через таку структуру Муркок переосмислює архетип героя, представляючи Елріка водночас як трагічного антигероя і міфологічний інструмент космічної рівноваги.

Дослідження також демонструє, що опозиція Хаосу і Порядку функціонує не лише як тематичний прийом, а й як метафізичний принцип, що формує наративний всесвіт. Ідентичність Елріка визначається його роллю в цьому вічному й неминучому конфлікті, що робить його водночас автономним і зумовленим. Поєднуючи міфологічні мотиви з філософськими роздумами про долю та свободу, Муркок створює модерний епос, у якому сам час стає центральною рушійною силою оповіді. Таким чином, роман переосмислює героїчну міфологію в межах сучасної літературної парадигми.

Ключові слова: Майкл Муркок; *Elric of Melniboné*; Вічний Чемпіон; міфологічний час; Хаос і Порядок; циклічний наратив.

Introduction. The contemporary English writer Michael Moorcock draws upon both fantasy and myth in order to pose questions concerning human, divine, and mythological nature. In doing so, he expands artistic reality in his works, bringing together mythological time and the real world. The author turns to ancient myths and mythological thinking, transferring mythical time into modernity and interpreting it within the context of historical time. This distinc-

tive feature constitutes the central line of Moorcock's творчество and clarifies the concept of mythological time through reinterpretation and re-understanding of myth in his works.

Moorcock's creative work is grounded, on the one hand, in modern systems of belief that deny the supernatural essence of reality, and on the other hand, in ancient conceptions of the origin of the world. This dual foundation is related to the fact that modern myth

is oriented toward an ideal future, whereas ancient myths are directed toward an ideal past. Moorcock employs fantastic and mythological elements to supplement the objective reality familiar to the modern reader with supernatural details. Relying on ancient myths and mythological thinking, he explains the laws of the mythical world through the prism of historical reality.

Moorcock wrote six books about Elric of Melniboné, which may be arranged according to their internal chronology as follows: *Elric of Melniboné*, *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*, *The Weird of the White Wolf*, *The Vanishing Tower*, *The Bane of the Black Sword*, and *Stormbringer*. It should also be noted that Elric first appeared in the novella *The Dreaming City*, after which the aforementioned series of novels was developed.

Moorcock does not merely turn to myth as the ideological core of his works; he also attempts to construct a principle of mythological thinking. In his writing, myth does not simply subordinate the structure of the text to itself, but rather creates an entire world. For this reason, the author adopts the associative content of myth and foregrounds its essence. In other words, through elements of magical realism, he achieves a mythological perception of reality. In this respect, he can be compared to Borges and García Márquez. The Elric series also operates on the principles of magical realism. Magical elements interact with the everyday reality of the narrative. Mysterious and supernatural details construct the mythic space of the work. The extraordinary events and behaviors associated with them do not create the impression of fiction; on the contrary, the sense of miracle intensifies as the narrative progresses. Magical details diminish the logical perception of reality, and thus miracle and magic become a subtextual expression of the hero's sorrow, pain, and loneliness.

Discussion. Moorcock's novels are concerned with a reality in which eternal, perpetually recurring time intersects with empirical time. For this reason, time travel does not astonish his characters, nor does the transition from one temporal dimension to another appear as an intervention into the natural laws of the world. The existence of dual reality reproduces the real within serial and multidimensional time, while empirical time itself is repeated within an invented world.

Elric is a complex character. He is solitary and constantly burdened by inner tension. Elric feels alien within his own world and remains distant from the customs and traditions of his people. His nation does not understand compassion or mercy, and for this reason they do not accept the contemplative and

perpetually hesitant Elric as an ideal emperor. The inhabitants of neighboring lands fear him and are wary of him because he is a sorcerer. Elric is excessively compassionate, well-read, and feels most comfortable among books. At the same time, however, he commits merciless killings. He is brave and courageous, yet condemned to a life he does not desire. Elric is a tragic hero who embodies the image of a lonely individual without like-minded companions.

Unlike his ancestors, Elric possesses a conscience. He perceives the decline of Melniboné and is troubled by the rise of neighboring countries. Because he refuses to embrace the traditional values of Melniboné, his cousin considers him a coward, interpreting his behavior as weakness.

Elric is the last ruler of Melniboné, known as the Dragon Isle. He is a sorcerer who survives through magic and enchantment: "By magic potions and the chanting of runes, by rare herbs had her son been nurtured, his strength sustained artificially by every art known to the Sorcerer Kings of Melnibone. And he had lived—still lives—thanks to sorcery alone, for he is naturally lassitudinous and, without his drugs, would barely be able to raise his hand from his side through most of a normal day" [4, p. 12]. Born sickly and sustained only through herbs and magical potions, Elric is misunderstood by those around him. His greatest enemy, his cousin Yyrkoon, is also a sorcerer. It should be noted that the inhabitants of Melniboné themselves are sorcerers and do not resemble ordinary humans. They lead cruel and savage lives and are therefore merciless. They kill their enemies ruthlessly and, according to ancient customs, dismember them.

Of ancient Melniboné, only the city of Imrryr remains; the rest have fallen into ruin. Beneath the island, dragons sleep eternally, awaiting the ruler's command for war.

A crucial distinction between magical realism and traditional realism is reflected in the novel. The mysterious and fantastical elements of magical realism function as a vehicle for conveying philosophical ideas. In this sense, the character of Elric embodies the defining features of works written in the genre of magical realism. Elric's dual nature should not be interpreted merely as the opposition between Good and Evil hidden within human nature, but rather as realities that generate and define one another. Elric forgives his cousin, who betrays him and attempts to kill him; in one of the novels, he even relinquishes his throne and departs. However, subsequent events compel him to become ruthless toward his enemy.

The woman who sustains Elric in life is his beloved Cymoril. As a true Melnibonéan, Cymoril herself is

cautious about Elric's behavior. She wishes him to be more resolute and decisive. At times, however, she is frightened by the demonic power she perceives within him: "for it seemed to her in that second that the gentle scholar she loved had been transformed by the elements into a hell-driven demon, into a monster with barely a semblance of humanity. His crimson eyes had flared from the whiteness of his skull like the very flames of the Higher Hell; his hair had been whipped upward so that it had become the crest of a sinister warhelm and, by a trick of the stormlight, his mouth had seemed twisted in a mixture of rage and agony" [4, p. 14].

The Melnibonéans are the last representatives of an empire that ruled the world for thousands of years. Through the power of magic and the sword, they conquered neighboring lands, annihilated rebellious peoples, and enslaved the defeated. By relying on sorcery, they achieved extraordinary dominance and maintained their supremacy for centuries. The rulers of Melniboné entered into pacts with supernatural forces and with lords who governed the elements of nature, accumulating arcane knowledge over millennia.

Yet even an empire sustained by magical power gradually declines. The country loses its former strength, and the events connected with Elric occur during the final years of the empire. Only the city of Imrryr preserves its ancient grandeur, and it is through the aid of prevailing magical forces that the empire continues to be governed.

As is evident, magic constitutes an inseparable component of the Melnibonéan world. The rulers of Melniboné can invoke sorcery and enchantment in two primary ways. One involves ritual summoning of the Higher Powers—forces embodying the elemental principles of Fire, Water, Air, and Earth. According to the ancient pacts forged by their ancestors, Melnibonéan sorcerers are entitled to call upon these elemental entities first and foremost, drawing upon longstanding agreements that bind supernatural forces to their imperial will. Elriki döyüş meydanında xaincəsinə öldürüb dənizə atan əmisi oğlundan fərqli olaraq ona köməyə Sular Hökmdarı gəlir. Son nəfəsində ölmək üzrə olan beynində sehrlili duanı kortəbii olaraq təkrarlayan Elrik: "Death, it appeared, took a long time to come and, while he died, he dreamed. The leading figure had a turquoise beard and hair, pale green skin that seemed made of the sea itself and, when he spoke, a voice that was like a rushing tide. He smiled at Elric.

"Straasha answers thy summons, mortal. Our destinies are bound together. How may I aid thee, and, in aiding thee, aid myself?" [4, p. 18]. Having

entered the mysterious and magical realm, Elric realizes that he has returned from the brink of death. He becomes aware that he is beneath the sea. Yet at the same time, he perceives himself as standing upon land. The seabed resembles the terrestrial world he inhabits: "And Elric felt the water vanish from his lungs and stomach and he breathed. Could it be that he had actually been brought to the legendary plane of the elemental folk—a plane which intersected that of the earth and in which they dwelled, for the most part?" [4, p. 24].

The Lord of the Waters speaks to Elric of intertwined and intersecting destinies, asserting that everything that happens to a human being is written by Higher Powers. The English researcher Anne Hegerfeld, in *Lies That Tell the Truth*, convincingly argues that fantasy can be created even in places illuminated by the clarity of daylight. Knowledge and reality cannot be reduced merely to facts; human imagination and fears, ideas and beliefs must be considered equally [2, p. 28]. Hegerfeld's reflections on magical realism resonate strongly within the conceptual framework of the novel. In other words, reflections on destiny—believed in by humans as firmly as tangible reality—appear suspended between fiction and actuality in the narrative.

"And remember that our brothers of the air and of fire will try to aid you also. And remember the beasts—they, too, can be of service to you. There is no need to suspect their help. But beware of gods, Elric. Beware of the Lords of the Higher Worlds and remember that their aid and their gifts must always be paid for" [4, p. 26]. This crucial warning from the Lord of the Waters determines the course of Elric's later life. Confronted with death on several occasions, Elric ultimately places his final hope in Arioch, the Lord of Chaos, and calls upon him for assistance. Arioch grants him the Hell-blade—a sword that endows Elric with immense strength and power. It is this sword that provides him with extraordinary might, yet in return it consumes the souls of those he slays. This mysterious and magical trap ultimately ensnares even those whom Elric loves most.

Cymoril's abduction and her prolonged disappearance from the world of Melniboné compel Elric to take a decisive and irreversible step. He turns to Arioch, the Lord of Chaos and one of the most powerful rulers of Evil, seeking his assistance. For sorcerers, appealing to the forces of Chaos is almost an ordinary practice. Yet Elric has always remained distant from that realm and does not consider its aid acceptable. The Higher Powers of Order, who represent cosmic balance, generally refrain from intervening in earthly affairs. The forces of Chaos, by

contrast, remain perpetually in ambush, awaiting the moment when a human being calls upon them. Such an invocation provides them with an opportunity to enter the closed and fragile world of humankind. The powers of Evil stand ready to assist—but the supplicant must pay with blood and life.

Elric, too, falls into the snare of Chaos. In order to rescue Cymoril, he summons Arioeh:

“Arioeh! I summon thee.”

Runes, both rhythmic and fragmented, howled now from Elric’s throat. His brain had reached the plane on which Arioeh dwelt. Now it sought Arioeh himself. “Arioeh! It is Elric of Melnibone who summons thee.”

Elric glimpsed an eye staring down at him. The eye floated, joined another. The two eyes regarded him.

“Arioeh! My Lord of Chaos! Aid me!”

The eyes blinked—and vanished.

“Oh, Arioeh! Come to me! Come to me! Aid me and I will serve you!” [4, p. 45].

S. Garayev writes that chaos may be understood as a realm in which the causes of mysterious cosmic events and the loss of life’s light are concealed. In this sense, the concept of chaos represents an intellectual construct, signifying a parallel world standing in opposition to cosmos and order [5, p. 25]. Arioeh emerges precisely from such a parallel dimension, crossing into Melniboné—the human world. It is for this reason that Elric fears him; he is fully aware of Arioeh’s immense and unpredictable power. Yet his desperate search for Cymoril compels him to enter into a pact with this lord of Chaos and to draw upon his formidable strength, despite the inevitable and tragic cost that such an alliance entails.

Elric enters into a pact with Arioeh, the Lord of Chaos, placing himself under his protection. As if this were not enough, Arioeh bestows upon him the Black Sword. This sword grants Elric seemingly boundless strength and transforms him into a formidable warrior. In magical realism, extraordinary and inconceivable events are often described in meticulous detail. At the same time, realistic narration constructs an invented world that resembles empirical reality. On the one hand, the detailed depiction of events continues the tradition of realism; on the other hand, the introduction of miraculous and mysterious occurrences—such as Elric’s death and subsequent revival by the Lord of the Waters, his communication with inhabitants of Hell, and his passage into parallel worlds—opens the narrative to the magical realm.

Elric’s persistent despair and helplessness distinguish him from conventional fantasy heroes. Each encounter with supernatural forces deepens

his isolation and intensifies his inward withdrawal. The enchanted mirror described in the novel further contributes to the revelation of Elric’s character. This magical mirror erases the memories of those who gaze into it and drives them to madness; yet it cannot “break” Elric. When he ultimately shatters the mirror, he hears, amid terrifying voices rising from Hell, a prophecy foretelling his death. Magical realism presents the natural and the supernatural as an integrated whole, so that what is natural appears extraordinary, and what is extraordinary appears natural.

Unable to find a path forward, Elric repeatedly turns to Arioeh for assistance. However, any bargain with Arioeh inevitably results in servitude to Chaos. Elric becomes suspended between Good and Evil, at times fighting on one side and at times on the other. Empowered by the Black Sword, he overcomes any external obstacle, yet simultaneously wages an internal battle against himself. His moral aspirations conflict with the imperatives dictated by Evil, exerting opposing forces upon his consciousness. As researcher R. Safaraliyeva observes, the “self” symbolizes order (cosmos), while the “other” represents disorder (chaos). The opposition between “one’s own” and “the alien” in traditional mythological thought corresponds to the confrontation between cosmos and chaos [7, p. 9]. Elric exists within precisely such a conflict, and it is this very opposition that ultimately defines his identity.

Unlike heroes who willingly assume responsibility for defending their homeland, Elric does not seek such a burden. Though he is the ruler of a vast empire, he does not struggle to preserve power for its own sake. He engages in battle with magical entities but also seeks their assistance, negotiating alternately with the Lord of the Waters and the Lord of the Earth. Ultimately, however, it is Arioeh, the Lord of Chaos, who determines his fate. Dependent upon magical herbs to sustain his life and enslaved by the dreadful Black Sword, Elric survives through forces that simultaneously empower and destroy him.

Moorcock endows this seemingly inhuman character with distinctly human qualities. Elric is as compassionate as he is cruel. This duality profoundly affects those closest to him. At times, Elric fails to make the right decisions; at other moments, under the influence of the Black Sword, he betrays or even kills those he loves without fully intending to do so. Elric embodies both Good and Evil simultaneously. In this sense, he is, by his very essence, condemned to destruction. Yet he cannot be defined as a negative character. Elric never pursues wealth or power for its own sake; his primary aim is simply survival.

Elric also represents Moorcock’s concept of the Eternal Champion—a hero in whom the same spirit is

repeatedly reborn across parallel worlds, perpetually destined to struggle between Chaos and Cosmos. In other words, he embodies the eternal and inevitable conflict between Chaos and Order. As S. Rzayev observes, this struggle forms the very foundation of what we describe as our “ordered” world, which in fact arises from a deeper, seemingly disordered reality [6, p. 8]. Elric thus becomes the living synthesis of opposing forces, a unified whole through which cosmic balance is negotiated.

In his final story, Elric uses the Black Sword to destroy Arioch, the Lord of Chaos, and to bring about the creation of a new universe. However, before Arioch’s servant fully assumes his true demonic form, he pierces Elric’s chest, destroying him. Although death marks Elric’s final encounter within this world, he is reborn in a parallel dimension and continues to fight in new battles as Chaos once again confronts Cosmos.

K. Abdulla aptly writes that Chaos not only signifies disorder but also determines the harmonious transition of the world’s processes and structures. Chaos is formlessness and, at the same time, the origin and foundation of form. It represents both disintegration and the basis of organization [1, p. 14]. In this regard, the perspective of the young researcher E. Imamaliyev is also noteworthy: creation itself presupposes death; creation passes through destruction. Thus, before the act of creation, there must inevitably be death—the end of a previous state—namely, a condition of chaos. This signifies the emergence of cosmos from chaos [3, p. 10].

Through Elric’s cyclical death and rebirth, Moorcock illustrates precisely this mythological and philosophical principle: destruction is not an end but a transitional state within an eternal cosmic process. Elric’s fate, therefore, transcends individual tragedy and becomes an expression of universal metaphysical law.

Conclusion. In Moorcock’s artistic universe, dual reality and time travel are realized through the principles of magical realism. This is primarily manifested in the interpenetration of reality and imagination, as well as in the association of empirical existence with miracle and extraordinary events. In the novel *Elric of Melniboné*, the protagonist Elric travels across past centuries, converses with the dead and with supernatural beings, and offers them assistance. At times, he also relies upon their aid.

An analysis of *Elric of Melniboné* demonstrates that, through the use of magical realism, Moorcock structures the narrative around recurring, cyclical, and empirical dimensions of time. Within the novel, mythological time is presented as sacred, while real time is conditioned by the lived experience of human existence. Prince Elric dies, yet he is reborn; in his rebirth, he repeats the trajectory of his previous life. He fights, and this struggle continues eternally—at times Good prevails, at other times Evil gains victory. Only through this cyclical and repetitive temporal structure does it become evident that Moorcock, employing the principles of magical realism, presents the eternal conflict between Good and Evil as a state that reveals the unity and wholeness of being itself.

In this sense, the confrontation between Chaos and Order is not merely a thematic opposition but a structural and metaphysical foundation of the narrative. The fusion of sacred mythic temporality with empirical historical time allows Moorcock to construct a multilayered conception of reality in which death and rebirth, destruction and creation, are interconnected phases of a continuous cosmic process. Thus, magical realism serves not only as an aesthetic strategy but also as a philosophical framework through which the novel articulates the inseparability of opposites and the cyclical nature of existence.

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