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THE ONEIRIC PARADIGM AS A MODEL OF ARTISTIC THINKING IN THE PROSE OF NEIL GAIMAN

The article analyzes the oneiric paradigm in the prose of Neil Gaiman as an interdisciplinary phenomenon that integrates philosophical, psychological, sociocultural, and aesthetic dimensions. The relevance of the study is due to the growing interest of contemporary literary scholarship in the interaction between the real and the imaginary, particularly within the context of postmodern and post-postmodern narratives. The focus is placed on the idea that the oneiric paradigm in the writer's work performs not only an artistic-aesthetic but also a cognitive function, becoming an instrument for comprehending identity, the nature of reality, and the limits of human knowledge.

The paper systematizes approaches to the interpretation of the oneiric developed within literary studies, philosophy, and psychology (in particular in the works of Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, and Mircea Eliade), and outlines the significance of archetypal criticism and the mythopoetic approach. It is emphasized that the oneiric paradigm functions as a flexible analytical model capable of integrating the individual and the collective, the conscious and the unconscious, the rational and the irrational, thus enabling a multilayered reading of the text. It is demonstrated that in Neil Gaiman's literary works, dream structures play not only a structural-compositional but also a conceptual role, forming a multidimensional model of reality in which mythological, psychological, and social codes interact. The oneiric space in his prose emerges as an autonomous semiotic dimension that functions as a "mediator" between the everyday and the fantastic, as well as a driver of plot development and the internal evolution of characters. Such textual organization orients the reader toward active interpretative engagement and the co-creation of meaning.

The comparison of the oneiric paradigm with the concept of "mundane science fiction" makes it possible to identify the specificity of Gaiman's approach, which lies in restoring the symbolic, archetypal, and metaphysical functions of the fantastic, as opposed to its rationalization. As a result, the study argues that the oneiric paradigm is an effective tool for interpreting contemporary literary texts, opening new possibilities for analyzing the interaction between the real and the imaginary and contributing to a deeper understanding of the nature of literary thinking in contemporary culture.

Key words: *oneiric paradigm, oneiric narrative, Neil Gaiman's prose, archetype, mythopoetics, dream, interdisciplinarity, fantasy.*

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ОНІРИЧНА ПАРАДИГМА ЯК МОДЕЛЬ ХУДОЖНЬОГО МИСЛЕННЯ У ПРОЗІ НІЛА ГЕЙМАНА

У статті здійснено аналіз оніричної парадигми у прозі Ніла Геймана як інтердисциплінарного феномена, що поєднує філософські, психологічні, соціокультурні та естетичні виміри. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена

зростанням інтересу сучасного літературознавства до проблеми взаємодії реального та уявного, зокрема в контексті постмодерних і постпостмодерних наративів. Увагу зосереджено на тому, що онірична парадигма у творчості письменника виконує не лише художньо-естетичну, а й пізнавальну функцію, стаючи інструментом осмислення ідентичності, природи реальності та меж людського пізнання.

У роботі узагальнено підходи до трактування оніричного, сформовані в межах літературознавства, філософії та психології (зокрема у працях Зигмунда Фрейда, Карла Густава Юнга, Мірчі Еліаде), а також окреслено значення архетипної критики й міфопоетичного підходу. Наголошено на тому, що онірична парадигма функціонує як гнучка аналітична модель, здатна інтегрувати індивідуальне та колективне, свідоме й несвідоме, раціональне й ірраціональне, забезпечуючи багаторівневе прочитання тексту. Доведено, що в художніх текстах Н. Геймана сновидні структури відіграють не лише структурно-композиційну, а й концептуальну роль, формуючи багатовимірну модель реальності, в якій взаємодіють міфологічні, психологічні та соціальні коди. Оніричний простір у його прозі постає як автономний семіотичний вимір, що виконує функцію «медіатора» між буденністю та фантастикою, а також як чинник розвитку сюжету й внутрішньої еволюції персонажів. Підкреслено, що така організація тексту орієнтує читача на активну інтерпретаційну діяльність і співтворення смислу.

Зіставлення оніричної парадигми з концепцією «*tpindane science fiction*» дозволяє виявити специфіку гейманівського підходу, що полягає у відновленні символічної, архетипної та метафізичної функцій фантастичного на противагу його раціоналізації. У результаті дослідження доведено, що онірична парадигма є ефективним інструментом інтерпретації сучасного художнього тексту, який відкриває нові можливості для аналізу взаємодії реального й уявного та сприяє глибшому розумінню природи літературного мислення в умовах сучасної культури.

Ключові слова: онірична парадигма, оніричний наратив, проза Ніла Геймана, архетип, міфопоетика, сновидіння, інтердисциплінарність, фантастика.

Problem Statement. Contemporary literary studies demonstrate a growing interest in exploring the interaction between the real and the imaginary in literary texts, particularly through the lens of oneiric structures. The prose of Neil Gaiman represents a unique example of integrating dream experience, mythopoetic archetypes, and philosophical concepts into the artistic narrative. The oneiric paradigm in his works performs not only an aesthetic but also a cognitive function, raising fundamental questions about identity, the nature of reality, and the limits of human knowledge. Despite the existence of numerous studies, the problem of comprehensively interpreting the oneiric paradigm as an interdisciplinary phenomenon in Gaiman's prose remains insufficiently developed. Of particular relevance is the examination of its epistemic, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions within the context of contemporary postmodern and post-postmodern narratives.

Literature Review. A synthesis of scholarly research by both Ukrainian and international academics indicates the multiplicity of interpretations of the concepts of the oneiric and the oneiric paradigm. The development of approaches to the interpretation of oneiricity has been addressed by such literary scholars as D. Baltimore, H. Bergman, J. Gordon, R. DiYanni, T. Kuhn, N. Andreychuk, F. Batsevych, R. Hromyak, A. Zaraiskyi, Yu. Kovaliv, and S. Krymskyi. Particularly significant are works that combine literary-critical methods with philosophical analyses of the phenomenon of dreaming (Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, Mircea Eliade, Jean Baudrillard), as well as theories that conceptualize myth and archetype as fundamental categories for interpreting literary texts (Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, Claude

Lévi-Strauss). The theoretical richness of these philosophical and literary-critical foundations allows the oneiric paradigm to be interpreted not only as an aesthetic strategy but also as a means of transcending the boundaries between reality and fiction, logic and irrationality. In this context, the works of Neil Gaiman illustrate how contemporary literature can construct new models of being by engaging with universal and timeless values.

An interdisciplinary approach to the oneiric paradigm positions it as a key concept in literary studies, focusing attention on the relationship between human consciousness and the artistic world. The paradigm functions as an analytical tool that reveals mechanisms of interaction between the individual and the collective within the space of the imaginary. Contemporary interpretations emphasize its flexibility, which allows it to be applied to dynamic literary phenomena, including the oneiric narrative (Manchul, Marchuk, 2012: 77). The prose of Gaiman exemplifies the adaptability of this concept: his works combine traditional literary forms with innovative approaches to constructing dream worlds. In his oeuvre, the oneiric paradigm not only structures the plot but also serves as a mode of cognition – of identity, reality, and memory – within the literary text.

The aim of the article is to investigate the oneiric paradigm in the prose of Neil Gaiman as an interdisciplinary phenomenon that integrates philosophical, psychological, sociocultural, and aesthetic dimensions, as well as to identify its role in shaping artistic space, narrative structure, and the semantic organization of the text.

Results and Discussion. The dimensions of the oneiric paradigm in the prose of Neil Gaiman reveal

the complex and multidimensional nature of his artistic thinking, which integrates profound philosophical concepts, the psychology of the unconscious, and symbolic interaction with mythopoetic archetypes. In the works of the English writer, the oneiric paradigm functions not only as a tool for artistic modelling of the world but also as a means of posing fundamental existential questions, such as the search for identity, the nature of reality, and the limits of human cognition.

In an interdisciplinary context, the scientific paradigm is a complex concept that encompasses philosophical, social, psychological, and literary-critical aspects. It is not static but transforms under the influence of new philosophical and cognitive theories. Within this framework, the anthropological approach emphasizes the role of the human factor, highlighting the influence of consciousness on the formation of literary structures. In literary studies, a paradigm serves not only as a theoretical foundation but also as an analytical instrument that enables the study of a text through the prism of perception, revealing its meaning and structure and, consequently, the mechanisms of the formation of artistic space and its impact on the reader.

The concept of paradigm in the works of Neil Gaiman can be understood as a synthesis of several of these meanings. His narratives function both as models of imagined reality (constructing oneiric worlds) and as lessons that demonstrate the moral ambiguity of human choice. A key aspect of this phenomenon is the use of images that are symbolic in nature yet maintain a connection to archetypal cultural patterns. With respect to the oneiric component, the paradigm manifests itself both as a means of constructing the artistic world and as a mechanism for transforming the reader's experience. In other words, it encourages the reader's participation in the reconstruction of meaning, prompting active engagement in the interpretative process. In this context, the oneiric paradigm may be described as a specific mode of organizing seemingly chaotic textual material into a unified model that emphasizes the inseparability of dreams and reality. In Gaiman's work, this is particularly evident in his experimental approach to genre, where the oneiric space becomes not merely a backdrop but a fully-fledged "character," influencing both plot development and the inner world of the protagonists.

In ancient and medieval philosophy, the paradigm reflected the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds within the framework of cosmocentrism. The individual was viewed as part of a unified whole in a state of constant renewal (Kuibida, Olishchuk, 2021). Plato employed the concept of the "paradigm" to denote ideas that form enduring models of

things. In his philosophy, true being consists of ideal forms, while the material world is their reflection. The highest principle of this order is the idea of God as absolute good, existing beyond the limits of sensory perception (Andreychuk, 2008: 254). Neoplatonism further developed this concept, interpreting the paradigm as a mediator between transcendent and material reality. In this context, oneiric reality (dreams and imagination) appears as a reflection of higher levels of being, emphasizing the hierarchical structure of the universe (González, 1995: 8).

In literature, particularly in the prose of Neil Gaiman, philosophical and aesthetic ideas acquire renewed resonance. The writer's literary text functions as a kind of "paradigm," in which ideas and images drawn from mythology, philosophy, and religion are combined into complex, multilayered models of reality. Thus, in the novel "American Gods", the author constructs an artistic universe in which deities and mythological beings appear as projections of human belief, imagination, and collective experience. This device may be interpreted as a transformation of the Platonic concept of *eidos*, reconfigured into a oneiric structure where the real and the imaginary interpenetrate.

Particularly significant is the way in which the ideas of the oneiric paradigm in Gaiman's prose interact with postmodernist tendencies. In his works, dreams function not merely as a secondary reflection of reality but as an autonomous space in which reality is reconstructed and the limits of perception are expanded. This corresponds to Plato's notion of the sensory world as a "mixture of being and non-being"; however, in Gaiman's interpretation, this world becomes a space of infinite possibility. His works demonstrate how classical ideas are transformed under new cultural conditions, becoming the foundation for the creation of complex, multilayered models of the artistic world that simultaneously function as aesthetic, philosophical, and cultural paradigms.

In this regard, the issues addressed by I. Anikina and T. Melnyk in their article on American postmodernism and its key authors (from Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Richard Brautigan to David Foster Wallace) are significant for the conceptualization of this research topic (Anikina, Melnyk, 2022: 4). Their analysis of defining features of the postmodern paradigm – such as intertextuality, genre pluralism, fragmentation, and the deconstruction of the authorial position – makes it possible to comprehend the ideological and aesthetic context in which Gaiman's artistic thinking is formed. Although his texts transcend the boundaries of postmodern aesthetics, they demonstrate continuity with it through a playful model of

the world that is transformed under the influence of humanistic and metaphysical tendencies. Thus, the aforementioned study provides a theoretical framework for understanding the mechanisms of post-post-modern narrative, within which oneiric strategies become not only an artistic device but also a means of philosophical reflection on human experience, identity, and reality.

The oneiric paradigm plays an important role in contemporary literary studies, as it enables the exploration of the relationship between reality and the imaginary world in literary texts. In the works of Gaiman, it serves as a key to understanding dream motifs that structure the narrative, reflecting the deep psychological processes of the characters – such as coping with trauma, the search for identity, and the integration of the unconscious. The interdisciplinary nature of the oneiric paradigm is manifested through its connections with philosophy, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies, making it a universal analytical tool. It functions as both a methodological and an aesthetic category that allows for the interpretation of texts through symbols and archetypes interacting within the dream space. This enhances the autonomy of the literary work and opens new possibilities for multidimensional analysis.

In the prose of Neil Gaiman, dream motifs perform a structural and compositional role. They shape the atmosphere of the works, determine plot development, and influence the interaction among characters as well as between the text and the reader. The oneiric space in Gaiman's oeuvre functions as a kind of bridge between everyday reality and fantasy, endowing his texts with multidimensional meaning. The sociology of everyday life, by examining both external interactions and the inner world of the individual, opens up possibilities for analyzing literary works through the prism of social and psychological factors. In this context, dreams serve as a means of knowing and reinterpreting reality. They make it possible to reveal the deeper layers of consciousness, where fears, desires, and subconscious experiences intertwine.

In the prose of Neil Gaiman, this interaction acquires particular expressiveness. For example, in "Coraline", the fantastical world of the alternative home reflects the fears and hidden desires of the protagonist, while in "The Graveyard Book", the oneiric space becomes a means of personal formation. Such narratives demonstrate how dreams and artistic imagination shape the understanding of reality, making the two worlds – the everyday and the imaginary – inseparably interconnected. Thus, a sociological approach to the analysis of the oneiric paradigm makes it possible to trace how conceptions of everyday life are

transformed through artistic imagination. In Gaiman's works, this approach contributes to the creation of unique models of interaction between the conscious and the unconscious, thereby expanding the possibilities for interpreting literary texts.

The oneiric paradigm as an interdisciplinary category enables the exploration of the intersection between the real and the imaginary in literary texts, incorporating sociocultural, psychological, and aesthetic approaches to understanding the structure of literary experience. In this context, a comparison with the concept of "mundane science fiction" (MSF), examined in the research of N. Krynytska, is methodologically relevant, since both models – MSF (earthbound, everyday, skeptical science fiction) and the oneiric prose of Neil Gaiman – seek to reconsider the genre conventions of fantasy and its worldview potential. MSF, as a genre strategy, aims to reduce the fantastic to the limits of what is scientifically possible and plausible, grounded in contemporary techno-rational perspectives (Krynytska, 2021: 60). Such an approach entails a rejection of escapism and emphasizes a critical rethinking of everyday life as a space for utopian projection.

In contrast, the prose of Neil Gaiman demonstrates an opposite tendency: the fantastic, myth, and dream reclaim their function as a deep symbolic code through which not only individual psychological states but also cultural archetypes, social imaginaries, and ontological questions of being are interpreted. However, this dichotomy does not constitute a rigid opposition; rather, a productive tension emerges between the pragmatic rationalism of MSF and Gaiman's metaphysics, allowing for the delineation of the boundaries of the contemporary post-utopian imaginary. In both cases, what is at stake is the destabilization of traditional genre frameworks: MSF strives for a hyper-realistic reconstruction of the future without the "marvelous," whereas Neil Gaiman reconstructs the mythological, psychoanalytic, and oneiric as a paradigm of alternative knowledge that transcends the limits of the material world.

The application of the sociological paradigm of everyday life to the analysis of the prose of Neil Gaiman reveals a unique artistic synthesis of the ordinary and the fantastic. In such texts, the oneiric does not displace reality but coexists with it within a dynamic field of interaction, forming a distinctive oneiric landscape. This allows fantasy to be interpreted not as escapism but as an instrument for understanding and transforming reality—much as, in mundane science fiction (MSF), the fantastic emerges as a critique of the everyday. In Gaiman's works, however, the fantastic acquires symbolic depth and articulates

the psycho-ontological essence of both the protagonist and the world they inhabit. Thus, within contemporary scholarly discourse, the oneiric paradigm appears as an open, flexible model that integrates the personal and the collective, the everyday and the metaphysical, the real and the imaginary, contributing to a deeper understanding of the nature of the literary text within the postmodern tradition.

The integration of various fields of knowledge facilitates the identification of deep connections between textual elements, social reality, and reader reception. The oneiric paradigm combines epistemic and social aspects, reflecting its multidimensionality in literary studies. It draws on the ideas of Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996), who interpreted a paradigm as both a system of knowledge and a social phenomenon that unites a scientific community around shared methods and values. In a literary-critical context, this manifests itself in the interaction between the text and its interpretive community, which shapes the understanding of its meanings (Kuhn, 1996; 2001). George Ritzer identified several paradigms for analyzing social reality, among which the concepts of “social facts,” “social definition,” and “social behavior” are particularly significant for the study of oneiric space (Ritzer, 2001: 70–74). These frameworks make it possible to trace how social factors shape individual consciousness and influence the perception of literary dreaming. The epistemic dimension of the oneiric paradigm explains how dreams and fantasy become means of expressing complex philosophical and social ideas. This, in turn, allows the oneiric narrative to be understood as a mechanism for decoding latent meanings that arise from the interaction between the real and the fantastic, the everyday and the timeless.

Conclusions. The oneiric paradigm functions as a distinctive analytical tool that enables researchers to delve into the deeper layers of artistic reality, uncover hidden meanings, and examine the impact of dream experience on the structure and content of a literary work. In particular, in the works of Neil Gaiman, dreams become a means of revealing the inner conflicts of characters and a key to understanding their spiritual development. Thus, understanding the essence of the oneiric paradigm as a specific approach within literary scholarship involves identifying a generalized model, pattern, or configuration of oneiric elements employed in the process of artistic creation, thereby defining the direction of scholarly inquiry.

Such an approach provides a foundation for analyzing complex narrative structures in which reality and fantasy interact within a unified textual space.

Furthermore, the research demonstrates that the oneiric paradigm performs an essential cognitive function: it enables a rethinking of the boundaries of human experience, revealing the interconnections between the conscious and the unconscious, the individual and the collective, the empirical and the metaphysical. Through its interdisciplinary nature, the paradigm integrates philosophical, psychological, sociocultural, and aesthetic dimensions, which contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how contemporary literature models alternative ontologies and epistemologies.

The study also highlights that the oneiric paradigm in Gaiman’s prose serves as a mechanism for reconstructing meanings within postmodern and post-postmodern contexts, where the interplay between dream and reality becomes a strategy for destabilizing traditional narrative patterns. By employing archetypal motifs, mythopoetic structures, and symbolic imagery, Gaiman transforms the dream space into an autonomous semiotic system that shapes narrative logic and reader perception. This feature positions the oneiric paradigm as a productive interpretive framework for analyzing literary texts that challenge linearity, rationality, and conventional realist representation. Additionally, the analysis affirms that the oneiric paradigm enhances the dialogic relationship between text and reader. Dream structures stimulate active participation in meaning-making, inviting readers to engage in interpretative co-creation and to negotiate multiple layers of symbolic and philosophical content. Consequently, the paradigm expands the methodological potential of literary studies by enabling scholars to explore how imaginative constructs reflect, reinterpret, or critique contemporary cultural anxieties, identity transformations, and existential dilemmas.

Ultimately, the findings of the study suggest that the oneiric paradigm is not merely an artistic device but a powerful conceptual model for understanding the dynamics of modern narrative. Its application opens new avenues for examining the fluctuating boundaries between reality and imagination in contemporary culture, illuminating the role of dream experience as a catalyst for narrative innovation and as a medium for articulating complex humanistic, ethical, and metaphysical questions.

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