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**СТРУКТУРА ПРОСТОРУ Й ЧАСУ В ІРЛАНДСЬКОМУ ЕПОСІ**

Досліджено просторово-часові виміри «картини світу» в епічній (міфологічній, героїчній та казковій) традиціях Ірландії. Проаналізовано бінарну і трійкову концепції структури світу. Розглянуто структурно-семантичну асиметрію опозиції «світ людей — інший світ» і асиметрію самого «іншого світу». Особливу увагу приділено проблемі успадкування концепцій міфологічного простору й часу героїчним епосом і казковим фольклором. Наведені приклади свідчать про те, що фольклорна традиція успадкувала від міфологічної свідомості поняття дуалізму і трійковості всесвіту, асиметричну опозицію «центр — периферія», концепцію неподільності простору й часу, символізм кола.

**Ключові слова:** простір, час, міфологія, епос, казка, опозиція, асиметрія, шлях.

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**СТРУКТУРА ПРОСТРАНСТВА И ВРЕМЕНИ В ИРЛАНДСКОМ ЭПОСЕ**

Автор исследует пространственно-временные параметры «картины мира» в эпической (мифологической, героической и сказочной) традициях Ирландии. Представлен анализ бинарной и троичной концепций структуры мира. Рассмотрены структурно-семантическая асимметрия оппозиции «мир людей — иной мир» и асимметрия самого «инога мира». Особое внимание уделено проблемы унаследования концепций мифологического пространства и времени героическим эпосом и сказочным фольклором. Приведенные примеры свидетельствуют о том, что фольклорная традиция унаследовала от мифологического сознания понятия дуализма и троичности вселенной, асимметричную оппозицию «центр— периферия», концепцию неделимости пространства и времени, символизм круга.

**Ключевые слова:** пространство, время, мифология, эпос, сказка, оппозиция, асимметрия, путь.

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**SPACE AND TIME STRUCTURE IN IRISH EPIC TALES**

The article explores the spatial and temporal world-image dimensions in Irish epic (mythological, heroic and wonder tale) traditions. Binary

and threefold world concepts are analyzed. The author also examines the structural and semantic asymmetry of the 'human world — the Otherworld' opposition and the asymmetry of the Otherworld itself. Special attention is paid to the problem of inheriting mythological space and time concepts by epic tales. The paper gives examples showing that the epic tradition inherited from mythological consciousness the notions of dualism and triplism of the universe, asymmetric 'centre — periphery' opposition, inseparability of space and time, and the symbolism of the circle.

**Key words:** space, time, mythology, epic, wonder tale, opposition, asymmetry, journey.

Mythological thinking describes the world-image in terms of binary oppositions which determine its structure. The following are the examples of some oppositions connected with the structure of space and time: 'finite–infinite', 'discrete–continuous' (the characteristics of extension or duration), 'right–left', 'north–south', 'centre–periphery', 'top–bottom', 'internal–external' (the characteristics of orientation in space), 'closed–open' (the structure of space), 'cyclic–linear' (the structure of time). The same perceptions based on natural bearings of space and time can be seen on the 'physical phenomena' level, too: 'day–night', 'visible–invisible', 'sky–earth', 'earth–underground kingdom'; on the social level: 'friendly–hostile', 'protected–unprotected'; the oppositions of good and evil, happiness and unhappiness, life and death belong to the ethical (spiritual) level. All the left members of these oppositions are marked as positive, all the right ones are negative. The idea of 'the sacred — the profane' polarity can be applied to time, too: the primitive man clearly distinguished between sacred time (time of gods, first ancestors, cultural heroes) and profane (human) time. In a generalised form the contrast of mythological perceptions of positive and negative is described by the opposition of 'sacred (holy) — profane (ordinary, earthy)'.

At the earliest stages of development the primitive man did not place the souls of his ancestors anywhere in particular. The localisation of the otherworld at a certain point of space is, probably, a later development. So, in the developed mythological systems the sacral space grows narrower; the sacral sphere of the dead ancestors is removed to the other, transcendental world, whereas in the earthly, real life it is represented by sacral points — *sídhe (sí)* or 'tumuli' in Ireland. According to Ó hÓgáin, the ancient Celtic idea of the ancestors still living in their burial places was later confused with beliefs about otherworld communities, different from the human race [5, 185].

Gods as absolute powers of the nature are in another spatial and temporal dimension, too. The contacts with them in the profane space is limited to sacral points in space (sacred forest, stone, hill, megalithic structures, temple, etc.). The sacral points of profane space are nothing but the points of communication of the conditionally closed human world with the conditionally closed world of ancestors or 'otherworlds'. Moreover, the rupture of these transcendental worlds takes place at some definite «sacral moments» of profane time, or the peaks of sacral activity (e.g. seasonal festivals). In the idea of communication of the worlds (generations) we can see a reflection of the ancient notion of cyclicity and triplism of time (birth — death — new birth or resurrection).

In the folklore and everyday life consciousness of various peoples there is still a belief that the spirits of ancestors come back from the otherworld from time to time to communicate with their descendants. Samhain in Ireland is the end of the old and the birth of the new Celtic year, the moment of the highest concentration of sacral energy, of bridging the gaps between the real and fantastic realms. The laws of real, earthly time have no power during that festival. Only at Samhain did the epic and folk tale heroes Cú Chulainn, Aenghus have a chance to meet their beloved women from the fairy world [1, 185-186].

The symbol of the Tree of Life can be seen as a confirmation of the threefold world concept. This image symbolises the three spheres (heaven, earth and the otherworld), the past, present and future, as well as the three seasons (spring, summer and winter), i.e. unity of space and time. Triadic groups represented part of the Irish pantheon; take, for instance, the three Mór-Ríoghains, a triad of Irish war-goddesses, the three Machas — three divinities but only one identity. The concept of threeness symbolised eternity (endlessness) and completeness (order), as well as unity of space and time: past (before and there, behind), present (now and here) and future (later and there, ahead). The shamrock (the emblem of Ireland) with its threefold structure might have been interpreted in this way. It should be noted that, according to popular belief, St. Patric had used this little trefoil plant as a means of explaining the Trinity [5, 361].

Vertically, the Tree of Life is structured according to the natural landmarks (sky, earth) and spatial 'top-bottom' bearings. The top part of the tree (the branches) symbolises the celestial kingdom (the realm of supreme gods), the middle part — the earth (the world of humans), and the bottom part — the underground kingdom (the sphere of ancestors or lower divinities — chthonic demons). It is possible to regard the Tree of Life as a symbol of structuring space and time: from the chaos

of primary element (water) to the regular system of the celestial sphere (fire, the sun), from the past (the lower level) to the future (the upper level). The veneration of tree in ancient Ireland [5, 178] probably also goes back to the same notion.

It was quite logical that the Irish, being island dwellers, placed their Otherworld far away in the ocean.. «In early Irish myth the otherworld was thought of as an overseas realm [...], and the survival of such a mythical idea in folk belief is instanced by the fancy that there was a mystical island called Uí Bhreasail somewhere off the west coast.» [5, 177]. The Otherworld was perceived by the Celts as the 'promised land' of eternal youth and happiness. It was considered to be located on a group of islands to the west of Ireland, beneath the ocean or under mounds. At the same time, these islands are as close, or as far, as you can imagine them to be [2]. They are on three levels or dimensions; they stretch through the material planes to the non-material world of pure spirit, from Tir nan Og (Land of Youth) to Ireland and Tir fo Thuinn (Land Under Wave) [4], thus cutting across spatial boundaries. Time in the Otherworld can be considered as non-existent, condensed or slowed-up: a year spent in the Land of the Living could be equivalent of several centuries or only a few minutes in the human world. In some legends ('The Destruction of Da Derga's hostel') the Otherworld is represented as sombre bruidhne, or hostels in the countryside. Only the dead or those destined to die could enter this house [1, 74]. There are evidences that the Otherworld itself had two sides, two aspects: a dark and dangerous one to those seeking to get there on their own initiative, and a happy one to those invited by the inhabitants of the islands of wonder [1, 168]. Here we can speak of an asymmetry of 'the human world — the Otherworld' opposition in Irish epic tradition.

Thus, the world-image in Irish mythology and epic tales acquires characteristics of a three-dimensional spatial model constituted by two oppositions: vertical ('top-bottom') and horizontal ('east-west'). This is accompanied by loose localisation of the transcendental worlds — a feature characteristic of epic and folk tale spatial models, whereas in religious tradition the 'worlds' are fixed in place (take, for instance, the idea of Ascension which is based on the presupposition that Heaven is physically above the Earth).

In modern Ireland the Otherworld concept has been revived as a cultural myth, a spiritual category opposed to rational thinking, as an ethnic folklore symbol and a component of national awareness.

Orientation in space ('top-bottom', 'right-left', 'east-west') as well as in time ('beginning-end', 'before-now') presupposes a certain reference

point, the presence of a centre. The idea of a sacral centre is on the whole inherent in mythological perceptions of the universe. Located in the sacral centre is the Tree of Life; its picture in the horizontal plane also testifies to the existence of a centre. These are probably beliefs in an expansion of cosmic space-time from the inside to the outside, from the centre to the periphery, from the beginning to eternity. On the other hand, the sacral centre compresses space and time, symbolising the highest sacral values. In the later, epic tradition, the centre signifies order in the state, the unity of the ethnos and eternity of its existence, the safe and reliable 'our' world, beyond which there begins the periphery — a strange and threatening 'alien', hostile world. It was Temhair (Tara) that served as a centre of that kind in medieval Ireland. The ocean was regarded as the periphery. Because of its danger and unpredictability, the ocean was believed 'to take its own share' [5, 177]. In epic legends mixing fantasy with historic reality, they are the realms of human invaders and supernatural monstrous beings.

Like the Otherworld, the ocean in Irish epics could have two faces, two sides — hostile and friendly. The saga is always polarized [6, 135], but this polarity is asymmetric. The 'centre — periphery' dualism reflects the opposition and interdependence of mythological archetypal concepts of life and death, good and evil, positive and negative, sacred and profane. In the early 8th c. 'Voyage of Bran' the sea-god Manannán mac Lir, being the protector of Ireland, encloses the island with his own element which guards it. In the 'Voyage of Bran', the ocean is the scene of a lucky journey to the happy Otherworld [1, 139].

In the Celtic tradition, the idea of the centre is emphasized by the solar symbol of the spoked wheel popular in ancient Ireland. It is quite possible that the rim of the wheel symbolised the idea of journey — the beginning and a happy return. In the «Mythological Cycle» of medieval Irish chronicles and, first of all, in *Lebor Gabála* ('The Book of Invasions'), the island is described in terms of the magic symbolism of the circle: 'our (friendly)' closed space surrounded by 'alien (hostile)' elements of the ocean.

Unlike mythological time ('the time of gods') that can be defined as indeterminate past, epic time ('the time of heroes') can be termed as quasi-determinate past. There is one more difference: the events of mythological past are believed to shape the present and the future, while epic past belongs to the 'bygone days', the irrevocably lost 'Golden Age'.

The sombre world of Irish epic legends is represented, in particular, by the Fomhóire, a race of anthropomorphic demonic beings able to simultaneously stay in two dimensions — in the world of humans and

on their islands to the north of Ireland (in the 'south-north' opposition the mytho-poetic consciousness associated the dark forces with the north). The image of the Fomhóire is the personification of peripheral powers, the embodiment of chaos.

The 'Book of Invasions' is centred around the poetic image of Ireland as the 'Island of Destiny'. The journey to the 'promised land' is filled with mystical content. This is the repetition of the sacral motion of the Sun from east to west, the eternal quest of the other, happy world. The unique geographical situation of Ireland (further to the west lies only the hostile element of the ocean) makes it the final goal of migratory processes. In the long run, Ireland is transformed from a land on the fringe of the world into the centre of the visible universe, thus acquiring characteristics of sacral centre. The 'Book of Invasions' describes six successive migration waves. Each group of immigrants (led by gods or cultural heroes) contributes to the 'cultivation' of the island filling it with 'sacral points' — mountains, wells, lakes. Each invasion is accompanied by battles with the Fomhóire and culminates with driving them beyond the boundaries of the sacral space. However, each rise is followed by a downfall, the Fomhóire occupy Ireland again, forcing people to leave the island. Some time passes, and their descendants come back to eliminate the monsters once again.

Here, again, the 'centre — periphery' relationship is asymmetric. On the one hand, the 'central' forces of the cultural heroes do battle with the Fomhóire (the 'periphery'), which culminates in the second great mythic battle of Moytirra and the Victory of the divine Tuatha Dé Danann (the people of the goddess Danu). On the other hand, there are family bonds between the two enemy races (for instance, Lugh the god is grandson of the Fomhóire tyrant Balar [5, 232]).

Thus, in the epic picture of the struggle between light and dark powers, temporal cyclicity is combined with centrifugal and centripetal motion within the land. With the start of the cycle the forces of good fill in the vacuum or overcome the chaos inherited from the previous cycle. After conquering or creating a centre of the sacral space there follows a peak of sacred time, and the demonic forces are ousted to the periphery. A cyclic expansion/compression of the sacral space takes place; in this case we have probably to do with a mythological-poetic pulsating space model combined with a cyclic-linear model of time.

An example of a compromise between the mythological-poetic image of the world and the medieval realia can be seen in the epic model of the fivefold division and twofold centre of Ireland. A legend says that Fionntan the hero brought five magic berries from the Otherworld

and planted them in five different valleys which had been thoroughly cleaned by preceding settlers. That was done according to the laws of the Fomhóire and the Tuatha Dé. Thus, the division reflects magical determinism, the continuity of generations and an indirect connection with the realm of 'non-humans'.

In the wonder lore tradition the 'sacred-profane' opposition gives place to the 'fantastic-real' opposition (the human world — 'the other land' of non-humans or dead ancestors). «The magic in the folk tale originated in the myth, the source of the real is life. The magic arises from a shaky, declined but still not yet destroyed archaic consciousness» [3]. The 'friendly-alien' opposition remains unchanged, though it acquires some new meaning. The mythological man associated the notion of 'friendly' with his own tribe, his gods, his spirits; the term 'alien' meant other tribes, hostile gods, chthonic demons. In the folk tale tradition, 'friendly' was associated with the real world, with the hero's relatives and friends, grateful animals and fantastic helpers; regarded as 'alien' were not only hostile fantastic beings, but also the evil-doers in the hero's own world. However, the Irish Otherworld has two faces and can appear to the hero as friendly or hostile, depending on circumstances .

Both in the spatial and ethical plane the relationship of the 'worlds' in the wonder tale fits into the 'centre — periphery' system. The wonder tale spatial structure can be seen as a system of concentric circles; the hero's world is in the centre (the innermost circle), the next is the intermediate frontier zone (the sea, mountains, dark forest, etc.); the last, and outermost circle (the periphery) symbolises the otherworld. The hero's journey connects the centre with the periphery, thus transcending the worlds. The journey can be regarded as the aggregate of spatial and temporal milestones (space filled with events) and as the temporal sequence of the events taking place during the journey, that is to say, the journey means overcoming space in time.

The structure and dynamics of the wonder tale journey generally looks like this: point of departure in the 'real world' — crossing place — point of entrance to the other world — the other world itself. On the hero's return to his kingdom, the sequence of the elements of the journey is repeated in reverse direction. Thus, the mythological symbolism of the circle is repeated in the folk tale tradition in a transformed form: the circle represents a) the whole fairy tale world, b) the hero's kingdom, c) the otherworld, d) the hero's journey.

During the journey the idea of the centre is concentrated in the 'centre — I' notion. The static centre gives way to a dynamic mobile centre: the hero identifies himself with the centre which probably gives

him some magic power (the echo of ancient beliefs in sacred power of the centre). Unlike the mythological centre, the folk tale centre is rather an ethic than cosmic notion.

In Celtic folk tales it is exactly when you are going nowhere that you arrive at your destination [2]. Whether his destination is certain or vague, the hero may choose any direction; nevertheless, he invariably gets at his destination. The chaos of the open space of the frontier area is overcome by folk tale determinism (the phenomenon of a continuous wonder tale information field which takes its origin in the determinism of mythological thinking). In Irish lore we find the same 'being led astray' motif: the sí cause mortals to lose their bearings; cf. the motif of a 'magic fog' descending around a person, causing him to stray interminably until light or day brought release from the ordeal [5, 178]. It probably means that the 'frontier area', like the Otherworld itself, defies the real world's laws of time and space.

The duration of the journey in the wonder tale is normally described in terms of indeterminate, abstract time. To the hero his destination is a point not in time but in space. Future is determined by space landmarks («we must be yonder tonight»); tonight does not exist without yonder. The space on the journey is either absorbed (in which case it does not exist) or 'experienced'; the symbol of the wonder tale journey is not a straight line but a circle.

The conflict between real and fantastic time and space is sometimes fatal to the hero. The heroes' rapid ageing after their return from the Otherworld (e.g., 'Oisín in the Land of Youth', 'The Voyage of Bran') is a kind of punishment for the carefree centuries spent there, for the rupture of stopped time and closed space. According to an Irish saga, king Bran and his men spent, what they thought, a year on the Island of Women, though it was in fact many centuries. The text is undoubtedly based in part on pre-Christian ideas of the Otherworld [5, 50].

The mythological triplism reappears in the wonder tale as a threefold repetition motif: three sons, three tasks, three seas, three islands, three bridges (copper, silver, gold). Three is the maximum number of men and objects which occur in traditional narrative [6, 133]. From the symbol of a threefold world it is transformed into a stylistic device of 'escalation of tension' combined with the symbolism of magical power. At the same time, the folk tale contains vague allusions to the earlier mythological symbolism: the third bridge of gold means the Sun, the third palace of crystal denotes a spell-bound place, etc.

As a conclusion, one can say that the epic tradition inherited from mythological consciousness (in a negated, transformed state) such

fundamental notions as dualism and triplism of the universe, asymmetric 'centre-periphery' opposition, inseparability of space and time, symbolism of the circle. The same concerns the wonder lore models of fantastic space expansion and compression.

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