

# MYTHOLOGICAL INTERTEXT IN NEIL GAIMAN'S «AMERICAN GODS» AND IN LIUBKO DERESH'S «THE LAST LOVE AFFAIR OF ASURA MAHARAJ»<sup>1</sup>

Ivan Pasternak

Postgraduate student,  
Department of World Literature and Comparative Literary Criticism,  
Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University (UKRAINE),  
76018, Ivano-Frankivsk, 57, Shevchenko str.,  
e-mail: ivan.pasternak@pu.if.ua

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** The article deals with the problem of mythological intertext functioning in postmodern prose. The aim of the article is to reveal the mythological sources of L. Deresh's novel «The Last Love Affair of Asura Maharaj» and N. Gaiman's novel «American Gods», to discover the specificity of the functioning of different mythoelements in the analyzed texts, and to make its comparative analysis. **Methods.** In the article there has been applied the system approach by using the cultural and historical method and the genetic method. On the basis of the genetic study of the analyzed novels there has been investigated the main mythological pretexts which have served as a source for creation the texts. The applied methods made it possible to analyze the system of characters in N. Gaiman's and L. Deresh's novels, to study various mythological motives and mythologems in these novels. **Results.** In the article there has been given an exhaustive analysis of the functioning of interfigural elements, motive of Apocalypse, mythological concepts in the novels. There has been studied the connection of the motive of Apocalypse, binary opposition life / death, concepts of reincarnation and resurrection and mythologems of travel and search with the timespace characteristics of the mythopoetic picture of the world. There has also been done the comparative analysis in terms of sources of borrowings, i. e. mythological pretexts, and the demand of the readers' background knowledge for the proper text understanding. **Scientific novelty.** The article is aimed at creating the basis for the comparative study of mythological intertext functioning in English and Ukrainian postmodern literature. There has been made an attempt to find the typological similarities and differences in the specificity of using the mythological sources by N. Gaiman and L. Deresh. **The practical significance.** The article may serve for the further investigation of the problem intertextuality, in particular the functioning of mythological elements in postmodern texts.

**Key words:** intertextuality, mythological intertext, English postmodern literature, Ukrainian postmodern literature.

## РЕФЕРАТ

**Іван Пастернак. Міфологічний інтертекст в романах Ніла Гаймана «Американські боги» та Любка Дереша «Остання любов Асури Махараджа».**

**Мета.** У статті розглядається проблема функціонування міфологічного інтертексту в постмодерністській прозі. Метою статті є виявити міфологічні джерела романів Н. Гаймана

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<sup>1</sup>Translation by L. Deresh.

«Американські боги» та Л. Дереша «Остання любов Асури Махараджа», дослідити функціонування різних міфоелементів в аналізованих романах. *Дослідницька методика.* У статті використовується системний підхід із застосуванням культурно-історичного та генетичного методів. На основі генетичного вивчення творів було визначено основні міфологічні претексти, які послуговували джерелом створення романів. Застосовані методи дозволили дослідити систему образів та міфологічні мотиви в аналізованих романах. На основі компаративного аналізу досліджено вказані міфоелементи в романах Н. Гаймана та Л. Дереша, оскільки саме вони становлять основу цих творів. *Результати.* У дослідженні здійснено аналіз функціонування інтерфігуральних елементів, мотиву Апокаліпсису та інших міфоелементів в романах Н. Гаймана «Американські боги» та Л. Дереша «Остання любов Асури Махараджа». Досліджено зв'язок мотиву Апокаліпсису, універсальної бінарної опозиції життя/смерть, концептів перевтілення та відродження з часопросторовими характеристиками міфопоетичної картини світу в аналізованих романах. Також здійснено аналіз на предмет виявлення спільних міфологічних джерел романів, а також проаналізовано ступінь залучення авторами фонових знань читачів. *Наукова новизна.* Стаття спрямована на створення основи для дослідження функціонування міфологічного інтертексту в українській та англійській постмодерній літературі. Вперше здійснено аналіз романів Н. Гаймана та Л. Дереша саме на предмет специфіки функціонування міфологічного інтертексту. *Практична цінність.* Стаття може послуговувати основою для подальших досліджень проблем інтертекстуальності, зокрема тих, що стосуються функціонування міфологічних елементів у постмодерністській прозі.

**Ключові слова:** інтертекстуальність, міфологічний інтертекст, англійська постмодерністська література, українська постмодерністська література.

Understanding the essence of the postmodern literature is impossible without the analysis of the classical myth interpretation specificity, as its formation is connected with the authors' constant usage of the mythological material. Comprehension of the mythopoetic layer of the postmodern fiction is, to some extent, the reconstruction of the certain universal positions laid into the constant myth functioning. The permanent appeal of the literature to the original sources which are inexhaustible [ref.: 9, p. 245] causes the perpetual «endless restorative return» [4, p. 146] that, according to N. Kornienko, is one of the fundamental positions of the art culture [ref.: 4, p. 146]. A. Niamzu points that regular usage of the mythological plots and their «activity» is caused by the fact that they are well-known, by the polysemy of their «structural and content characteristics» and by the «emphasized actualization of the timeless coordinates of the traditional plots» [7, p. 6]. Taking into account the timelessness of the mythological plots unraveling and the intercultural potential of the myth to building the interpersonal relations it can be considered the metatext of the culture. Being rooted in the human psyche structure and absorbing individual and social experience the myth is embodied in fiction [ref.: 9, p. 246]. That's why the mythological background of the postmodern literature and the authors' appeal to the basic sources of literature are becoming the subject of the literary criticism discussions more and more often. The

investigations of Mircea Eliade, Nellia Korniienko, Oleksii Losiev, Yeleazar Meletynskiy, Anatolii Niamzu and Volodymyr Toporov make it possible to work out the methodology of the analysis of the texts presenting mythological worldview both in its original and transformed forms. It also seems helpful to involve the linguistic theories, namely the «Scenario-Mapping Theory» worked out by the British linguists E. Sanford and C. Emmot [ref.: 10, p. 377–378] and developed by K. Mikkonen [ref.: 5]. Appeal to this theory makes it possible to argue that through the use of intertextual elements in the texts realizes itself the conception of the postmodern pluralism. In his work «Our postmodern modern»<sup>2</sup>, devoted to the philosophy and aesthetics of the postmodernism, the German philosopher Wolfgang Iser, who is considered to be the author of the conception, states that one of the key features of the postmodern culture is its pluralism. According to him its essence is in erasing the boundaries between the high and low genres which is possible due to the phenomenon of intertextuality. Perception of a certain work as a mass or an elite one depends on the level of background knowledge of the readers and whether they can find out and decipher the intertextual ties necessary for understanding of the work [ref.: 12, p. 303-305].

This applies not only to separate texts of a definite kind but also to the comparative analysis of the modern literature phenomena belonging to different national literatures. In general analysis of the definite material presupposes recourse to intertextual methods and to the groundwork of Professor A. R. Volkov's Chernivtsi school in the sphere of traditional plots and images theory.

Interesting for the analysis in scope of mythological intertext is Neil Gaiman's Liubko Deresh's oeuvre, as in their works these authors draw the mythological motives, figures and other mytho-elements. In the texts it takes different forms.

First of all it goes about interfigural elements (term introduced by W. G. Müller in 1991 [ref.: 6, p. 101–121]). In N. Gaiman's novel «American gods» such elements appear in the form of re-used figures<sup>3</sup> (one more term by W. G. Müller introduced to replace Th. Ziolkovski's term «figures on loan» [ref. Müller, p. 102]), i.e. the writer uses the already existing figures from mythology in the original (identical to pretext) variant, e.g. images of Chernobog and Bielobog, or in the transformed (modified according to the author's needs) variant, e.g. images of Odin and Loki [ref. 8]. Nevertheless, the author considers the possible lack of the readers' background knowledge and

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<sup>2</sup> Germ. – «Unsere postmoderne Moderne» (hereinafter our translation. – I.P.).

<sup>3</sup> Here «figure» is used in the meaning «a person or an animal in a drawing, painting, etc., or in a story» to avoid tautology, which would be possible in case of the use of the term «character».

gives some explicit characteristics of the figures, still making them much shorter than they could possibly be.

In L. Deresh's novel «The last love affair of Asura Maharaj» only the names, but not the whole figures are used as an interfigural element pointed at hinting the reader at the full image understanding. Reference to the names of the traditional images from the Indian mythology takes in the novel two forms: 1) the first form presupposes preservation of both the name and all the characteristic features typical for it in the pretext (image of Adi Hada Pandit<sup>4</sup> - Asura's uncle. In the text the author presents him as the «*prominent scientist and ascetic*» [1, p. 10], «*powerful yogi*» [1, p. 96], who «*has always been famous for his detachment that has, certainly, given him the authority among his colleagues. And now, in his old age he has let his ascetic nature fully manifest itself*»<sup>5</sup> [1, p. 10–11]. So characterizing this figure the writer fully sticks to the original meaning of its name); 2) the second form is the full preservation of the name, but only partial characteristic features preservation (in word for word translation Asura Maharaj means the Prince of Asuras. In Hinduism Asuras were the dragon-like evil demons who were constantly fighting with the Devas (gods) for power, but in the novel the writer rejects the evil bad nature of the figure making a remark that «*they were mistaking calling him an evil dragon*» [1, p. 104], sticking to his demonic nature, but showing his longing for the Truth and Love through his deeds). Such form of interfigural elements demands a greater level of the background knowledge on the part of the reader, as the author never gives the references to the original sources of the figures used in his text and in most cases he characterizes them implicitly.

Another form of mythological intertext realization in the analyzed novels is the use of various mythological motives concepts, archetypes etc.

Both writers actualize the motive of the Apocalypse. In «American gods» N. Gaiman makes the transformation of the model of the end of the world from the Scandinavian mythology. According to it the Apocalypse – Ragnarök – is the series of events including the battle between the gods and their rival in the result of which a number of gods should die. The prediction about Ragnarök tells that in the end the gods have to face the evil forces. A unique feature of Ragnarök as the Armageddon is that all the parties of the conflict know their destiny and they realize that it impossible to avert the disaster, but everyone is ready to meet their fate [ref.: 13]. In the British writer's interpretation the battle should be between

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<sup>4</sup> Pandit – «a scholar and a teacher, particularly one skilled in the Sanskrit language, who has mastered the four Vedic scriptures, Hindu rituals, Hindu law, religion, music, and / or philosophy under a Guru in a Gurukul or has been tutored under the ancient Vedic Guru-Shishya academic tradition» [13].

<sup>5</sup> Укр. переклад: «відомий науковець і аскет», «могутній йоґ», «завжди славився зреченістю, чим, безумовно, завоював авторитет серед колег. Тепер же, на схилі життя, дядько дозволив аскетичній натурі проявитися повною мірою».

the gods of the old generation (brought to America by different nations) and the gods of the new generation (the ones, who appeared in America in the process of history). In the text the author repeatedly hints the reader at guessing that the old gods have to die, in this way the final battle is a symbolic moment of transition from the old model of the Universe to the new one.

L. Deresh uses a different model of Apocalypse, calling it the «Harvest time». In the Ukrainian writer's interpretation it has to cause the death of a bigger part of the whole mankind. Those who survive have to build a new world, but first they have to reject the old misconceptions and accept the new Truth. So, the author uses the Biblical model of the Great Flood in his own transformed version. As can be seen from the above in both novels the writers use the motive of Apocalypse as a transitional moment that has to change the old model of the world into the new one.

Directly related to the motive of Apocalypse is the universal binary opposition life / death combined with the concepts of reincarnation and rebirth. The main characters pass through the process of their personal transformation at least two times. For both of them the first transformation takes the form of reincarnation and is the ritual of their initiation, i.e. the process causes the expansion of consciousness and a qualitative change of the mental level.

Shadow, the main character of N. Gaiman's «American gods», who in the novel is Odin's son, goes through the reincarnation process indirectly through presence at the transformation of gods, including Odin [2]. Having taken part in the ritual of the gods' transformation, the character, who, according to the plot, doesn't know about his divinity, nevertheless begins to identify himself as one of the gods. In his analysis mythological archetypes C. G. Jung compares such a form of individual transformation to the participation in the Mass or some other ritual when the presence is enough for a sense of God's grace [ref.: 3, p. 253].

In L. Deresh's novel *Asura Maharaj* goes the process defined by C. G. Jung as «renovatio», i. e. «reincarnation in the direct meaning of the word, revival within the individual life» [3, p. 253]. According to the Swiss psychologist, such a form of reincarnation can be associated with the transition from a state of immortal to the state of mortal or vice versa [ref.: 3, p. 252–253]. Thus for *Asura Maharaj* his rejection of immortality combined with his love to Dasha are the process of initiation as they lead to the expansion of his mental level.

The second individual transformation of the main characters in both novels takes the form defined by C. G. Jung as «rebirth itself or resurrection» [ref.: 3, p. 253]. In this case the authors actualize the mythologem of death as an element necessary for the final transformation. The common features are that in both novels it is the resurrection of the main characters that makes it possible to prevent the Apocalypse and that both Shadow and *Asura* sacrifice their lives willingly, Shadow dies directly before Ragnarök after mourning the Odin's body

[2] and Asura dies to meet the Commander and to convince him to stop the Harvest time [1, p. 255–256]. Though the death of both characters is almost the same by its nature, their resurrection is completely different. Shadow's return to the earth is forced and it has been caused by the gods [2] and Asura comes back from the underworld to save the humanity and to seek the Truth [1, p. 260].

In the process of the novels analysis it has also been found that the authors draw the cosmogonic myths and ideas, as the ones taking a special place in the system of other myths, because they describe the timespace characteristics of the Universe as they were imagined by the people who have lived in the old ages [ref.: 11, p. 293]. In the novels «American gods» and «The last love affair of Asura Maharaj» such characteristics are directly connected with the mytho-elements analyzed above. The motive of Apocalypse, the opposition life / death and the concepts of reincarnation and rebirth bring us to the description of the time as both linear and cyclic simultaneously. The binary opposition life / death defines the time as linear as it shows the flow and the fatality of the human life. The characterization of the time as cyclic is predetermined by the mythologems of Apocalypse, reincarnation and resurrection as they indicate the end of one and, respectively, the start of the next period symbolizing the constant return to the beginning.

As the in the novels the writers depict a kind of initiation process the leading place is also given to the mythologems of travel and search which are considered as a necessity on the way to the Truth. In «American gods» travel and search have two different but interrelated forms. First, Shadow together with Mr. Wednesday (Odin), travels through the country in order to organize the gods for Ragnarök. The second form of travel and search is connected for Shadow with his search of the way to bring his wife back from the world of the dead. It is a reminiscence of the Greek myth about Orpheus and Eurydice.

Asura Maharaj during the novel travels in the search of Dasha, who symbolizes the Truth and Ideal «*Having stumbled across the ubiquitous mention of the Absolute as a marginal, complete, exhaustive answer, say, the Truth, he hit on a new idea: what if to try and find the embodiment of the Absolute among the humans? For if the Absolute, has under its own definition, its expression in everything, therefore it should also be found among the humans ... He had hardly adjusted the tenth of indicators in maximum position when the machine displayed the picture of Dasha*»<sup>6</sup> [1, p. 89]. Searching for Dasha Asura meets the Commander, who at a first glance is perceived by the

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<sup>6</sup> «Направивши на повсюдні згадки про Абсолют як певну граничну, довершену, вичерпну відповідь, сказати б, Істину, він загорівся новою ідеєю: а що, як спробувати віднайти вираження Абсолюту серед людей? Адже Абсолют має, згідно власного ж визначення, своє вираження в усьому – отже, він має знаходитись і серед людей ... Він виставив заледве десяту частину показників у максимальне положення, коли пристрій вивів на екран зображення Даші».

reader as a God, but later on the writer makes it obvious that he is just God's representative «– Tell me, Your Holiness, and are You...He?

*The Chief smiled gently.*

*– I am I, and He is He, – said the Chief looking somewhere into the distance and smiling inscrutably. Sometimes he comes here and saunters through these woods ... I always think of Him»<sup>7</sup> [1, p. 259]. So, according to the author's interpretation God and absolute Truth are unattainable.*

The drawing of mythologems of travel and search is also directly connected with the usage of cosmogonic myths, namely the spatial characteristics of the mythopoetic picture of the world. N. Gaiman uses in «American gods» the model of Universe from the Scandinavian mythology. According to this model the Universe consists of nine worlds which are located on horizontal and vertical axes. All the worlds are divided into central and peripheral and lower worlds and upper ones. All the nine worlds are connected by the tree of life Yggdrasil [13].

The model used by L. Deresh presupposes the existence of two separate Universes. The author omits the description of the lower Universe, only hinting at its essence «Look down, Asura. There, where one can see the outside darkness... No one knows what is there. And only there in the darkness, exists the unpredictability, only there the law loses its force. There is the real freedom! Only there in the darkness our light becomes bright enough to give light to the others. Only yogis powerful enough, like your uncle, know that the darkness can crush you, but it can give you a fabulous reward. And your reward is freedom – from birth and death, from oldness and illness, from fortune and misfortune, from knowledge and ignorance»<sup>8</sup> [1, p. 96-97]. The upper one is made up of three worlds: Heaven, Earth and Hell. In this way through the opposition of the real, sacred, world, the characteristic feature of which is, according to V. Toporov its strict timespace organization and, the space beyond the horizontal and vertical axes the author actualizes one more mythological concept – «chaos», which was called by V. Toporov «the kingdom of accidental» [11, p. 294].

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<sup>7</sup> «– Скажіть, Ваша світлюсте, а Ви... це Він?

*Шеф лагідно усміхнувся.*

*– Я – це я. А Він – це Він, – сказав Шеф і подивився кудись вдалину, загадково усміхаючись. – Іноді Він приходить сюди і гуляє цими лісами... Я постійно думаю про Нього...».*

<sup>8</sup> «Погляньте вниз, о Асуро. Туди, де видніється зовнішня п'ятьма. Не кожен наважиться розбити уявлення про вище і нижче. Тільки хоробрі, такі як ваш дядько, наважуються в кінці життя стрибнути в темряву. Ніхто не знає, що там. Тільки там, у темряві, існує непередбачуваність, тільки там перестають діяти закони. Там справжня свобода! Тільки там, у п'ятьмі, наше власне світло стає достатньо яскравим, аби світити іншим. Такі могутні йоги, як ваш дядько, знають, що п'ятьма може розсвітити, а може казково винагородити. І нагородою буде свобода – від народження і смертей, від старості й неугів, від щастя і нещастя, від знання і незнання».

In the novels the characters often move between different parts of the depicted worlds. The common feature of both novels is the change of the world causes the change of time perception of the main character.

So, the mythology makes the intertextual basis of the novels «American gods» and «The last love affair of Asura Maharaj». The most common way of the mythological intertext embodiment is the usage of interfigural elements. In their novels authors draw the figures from mythology in two different ways, N. Gaiman takes both the name and the character, while L. Deresh uses only the names of traditional figures. The authors also actualize the motive of Apocalypse, binary opposition life / death, concepts of reincarnation and resurrection and some other mythologems. The usage of this mythoelements is connected in the texts with timespace characteristics of the mythopoetic picture of the world.

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## **ХУДОЖНЯ МОДЕЛЬ ЧАСОПРОСТОРУ В ДЕТЕКТИВНИХ РОМАНАХ І. РОЗДОБУДЬКО І Д. Л. СЕЙЕРС: ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АСПЕКТ**

**Тетяна Гуляк**

Аспірант,

Кафедра світової літератури і порівняльного літературознавства,  
Прикарпатський національний університет імені Василя Стефаника (УКРАЇНА),  
76018, м. Івано-Франківськ, вул. Шевченка, 57,  
e-mail: taniushahuliak10@rambler.ru

**UDC: 82.091**

### **РЕФЕРАТ**

**Мета.** У статті розглядаються особливості часопросторової організації жіночих детективних романів І. Роздобудько і Д. Л. Сейерс. Мета дослідження – виокремити спільні й відмінні ознаки функціонування хронотопу в українському і британському детективному