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**SCANDINAVIAN NEO-MYTHOLOGISM  
AS THE PRINCIPLE OF THE LATE XX –  
EARLY XXI C. LITERATURE (BY THE EXAMPLE  
OF «AMERICAN GODS» BY NEIL GAIMAN)**

*Автори звертаються до неоміфології як актуальної літературознавчої проблеми, зокрема, своєрідності функціонування скандинавської міфології у сучасному постмодерному дискурсі. У статті досліджується феномен реміфологізації; причини появи міфологізованого постмодерністського роману, його особливості; виділяються основні принципи скандинавської міфології. Автори, аналізуючи творчість письменників, які використовують мотиви скандинавської міфології, виокремлюють суттєві риси неоміфологічного дискурсу; визначають своєрідність міфотворчості англійського письменника Ніла Геймана на прикладі відомого роману «Американські боги».*

**Ключові слова:** міф, реміфологізація, скандинавська міфологія, постмодерна література, фентезі, Один, Ніл Гейман, «Американські боги».

*Авторы обращаются к неомифологии как к актуальной проблеме литературоведения, в частности, своеобразию функционирования скандинавской мифологии в современном постмодерном дискурсе. В статье исследуется феномен ремифологизации; причины появления мифологизированного постмодерного романа, его особенности; выделяются основные принципы скандинавской мифологии. Авторы, анализируя творчество писателей, которые используют мотивы скандинавской мифологии, выделяют особенности мифотворчества английского писателя Нила Геймана на примере известного романа «Американские боги».*

**Ключевые слова:** миф, ремифологизация, скандинавская мифология, литература постмодернизма, фэнтези, Один, Нил Гейман, «Американские боги».

*The article refers to neo-mythology as to an actual problem of literature studies, especially peculiarities of Scandinavian mythology functioning in contemporary postmodern discourse. Returning to myth becomes one of the important aspects of the modern literature process. Mythologization in the literature of the XX–XXI c. took place under the influence of the post-modern traditions and mass culture, and the sophistication of the plot. Thus, an author's playing attitude appears in the novels, which is represented as the attempts of creation of mythological world view. Modern myth is not an unconscientious phenomenon. It bears reflective character. It leads to a robust relationship with philosophy and demands erudition and intellectual approach to a writing.*

*A new literary myth is faced to modern problems and doesn't bear those concentration on cosmism and universalism that were characteristic for ancient myths. As a rule, several myths that belong to different systems execute the function of a «code» in the works of neo-mythology. That is why there are so many reminiscences, allusions and a great number of quotes in the texts of the XX–XXI c.*

*Investigating the phenomenon of remythologization the authors clarify the reasons of a new post-modern novel appearance, its peculiarities. Remythologization – is the process of revival of mythological perception in cultures which have lost their alive connection with mythology on some way of their evolution. In the modern period of literature evolution the source of neo-mythology is history. It is represented with kaleidoscope of heroes, events, absence of logical connections.*

*The main principles of Scandinavian mythology are clarified in operation. Analyzing the writers' works who use the motives of Scandinavian mythology, the neo-mythological discourse fundamental characteristics are marked out. Scandinavian mythology became the basement for the English literature, in particular, for «The Lord of the Rings» by J.R.R. Tolkien – the founder of fantasy, and, especially, it defines the peculiarities of the English writer Neil Gaiman myth-making by the example of his well-known novel «American Gods». Neil Gaiman is one the most outstanding English writers. The critics on more than one occasion noticed that myth plays a great role in the writer's work. The process of remythologization can be traced nearly from the very beginning of his work, beginning with comic book series «The Sandman» (1989–1996), continuing with «Neverwhere» (1996), «American Gods» (2001), «Coraline» (2006) and «The Graveyard book» (2009).*

*A great focus on such a peculiarity of the novel «American Gods» as coexistence and intersection of modern american culture and ancient mythologies (Scandinavian, Ancient Egyptian, Slavonic, etc) is placed in the work. But in such a case remythologization happens with the help of particular images and events, in particular, gods and heroes of the ancient myths, allusions to definite events; the importance of the heroes' myth-structure study of the novel is emphasized and, in prospect, modern literary neo-mythological features.*

**Key words:** *myth, remythologization, Scandinavian mythology, postmodern literature, fantasy, Odin, Neil Gaiman, «American Gods».*

Returning to myth becomes one of the important aspects of the modern literature process. The period of demythologization, characteristic for the literature of the XVIII–XIX c., as E. Meletynskiy says, was caused by transfer of focus to the realistic motives. But at the end of the XIX c. outstanding artists, literary artists as well as musicians, direct to the myth-problem. Thus, the phenomenon of «remythologization» is observed.

Remythologization – is the process of revival of mythological perception in cultures which have lost their alive connection with mythology on some way of their evolution. The theorists of this process are supposed to be F. Nietzsche and R. Wagner. Later the phenomenon of remythologization found its place in the works of G. Marquez («One Hundred Years of Solitude»), F. Kafka («The Castle», «The Trial»), J. Fowles («The Magus») etc [8].

Theoretically methodological peculiarities of the phenomenon of neo-mythology were examined by such authors as R. Bart, V. Yevsiukov, V. Kanevskaia, L. Yaroshenko and others.

The peculiarities of usage of Scandinavian mythology by world culture and literature remains one of the leading themes in modern humanitaristics, especially more attention is paid to the north civilizations' study. All the explorations can relatively be divided into two groups: the first one deals with the realization of this phenomenon in the context of translation and the second deals with different aspects of the analysis of Scandinavian mythology.

Speaking about the first group, we should mention those people under whose direction the translation of «Prose Edda» and «Heimskringla» by Snorri Sturluson occurred. In particular, we should note A. Hurevych and O. Smyrnytska [9; 6]. The theorist of literature and Scandinvist N. Budur in his research papers places a great focus on the north nations – vikings [3]. B. Bohoiavlenskyi contemplates Scandinavian mythology and its influence on modernism through the prism of today's world [1; 2]. It is advisable to note that this problem was analysed not only by the scientists but also musicians. A Norwegian musician Varg Vikernes is among them. In his book he gives the main themes of the Scandinavian mythology in details, accompanied by author's interpretations. He described the most important elements of the ancient Germans' culture [4].

Our research *aim* is the analysis of the display peculiarities of the remythologization phenomenon in the Neil Gaiman works by the example of the novel «American Gods». The aim can be achieved by execution of the following *tasks*: to discover the peculiarities of remythologization in the Neil Gaiman's «American Gods»; to analyse myth-making of Neil Gaiman (specifically, the novel «American Gods»).

The reasons of remythologization appearance in literature were the following: general myth character; its cosmology, myth presence in the surrounding world that can not be explained in the terms of rationalism [11, c. 27].

Mythologization in the literature of the XX–XXI c. took place under the influence of the post-modern traditions and mass culture, and the sophistication of the plot. Thus, an author's playing attitude appears in the novels, that is

represented as the attempts of mythological world view creation (E.g., V. Pelevin «Chapayev and Void», A. Slapovskyi «First Second Advent», N. Perumov «Hjorward Chronicles», R. Zelazny «The Mask of Loki», L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt «The Compleat Enchanter»).

The myth of the XX–XXI c. is characterised by the following features.

1. A modern myth is not an unconscious phenomenon. It bears reflective character. It leads to a robust relationship with philosophy and demands erudition and intellectual approach to a writing.

2. A new literary myth is faced to modern problems and doesn't bear those concentration on cosmism and universalism that were characteristic for ancient myths.

3. As a rule, a few myths that belong to different systems execute the function of a «code» in the works of neo-mythology. That is why there are so many reminiscences, allusions and a great number of quotes in the texts of the XX–XXI c.

4. As the modern myth appears in the state of solitude and subtraction, mythologism intertwines with psychologism and the «stream of consciousness» literature.

5. In the myths of the ancient world the transcendental power that leads a person was nature. In the XX–XXI c. this power is represented by the civilization created by a man. That is why the texts are not heroic; they are rather tragic.

6. New mythology creates the hero opposite to the one of the classical myth. He is a kind of antihero who neglects general rules of morality (E.g., A. Camus «The Myth of Sisyphus») [7, c. 37–48].

In the modern period of literature evolution the source of neo-mythology is history. It is represented with kaleidoscope of heroes, events, absence of logical connections. In that way, conversion from rationalism to postmodernism takes place. One of the characteristic features of the postmodern neo-mythology is the existence of two worlds of reality – actual and ideal. In the actual reality there is no place for a «miracle», it is represented as flat and monotonous. Whereas in contrast in the ideal world the reader stays in the «golden age» of the traditional society. It looks like heroic, various, develops dynamically. So, the interinfluence of two worlds can be seen, herein the influence of mythology on real world is greater [10].

Scandinavian mythology became the basement for the English literature, in particular, for «The Lord of the Rings» by J.R.R. Tolkien the founder of fantasy. The image of the damned ring was borrowed from the heroic songs in Edda.

In the middle of the XX c. the first novella «The Roaring Trumpet» from the omnibus collection «The Compleat Enchanter» by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt goes out. It tells about a scientist who decides to change his life and wants to travel, not in our world, but to other realities. So he appears among gods-Olympians, later on – in the world of Scandinavian myths. There he travels

with Thor and Loki to the world of jotunns in order to find Thor's hammer – Mjölfnir. The story is based on the legend about one of the Thor's travel.

In the late XX – early XXI c. the genre of fantasy becomes actual all around the world, as well as in the countries of the former Soviet Union. An outstanding Russian fantasy writer, Nick Perumov, begins to write the trilogy «Hjorward Chronicles». One of the main characters of the cycle is Odin, but he is difficult to recognize. This is connected with the fact that he is called one of his little-known name – Chroft. Only when he leads his eight-legged horse out and calls him «Sleipnir», we can truly say that under the name of «Chroft» one of the supreme aesir is hidden.

The image of Odin appears in the book of a Ukrainian fantasy writer Max Frei «My Ragnarok». A distinctive feature of the book is that Odin works closely with the gods-Olympians, moreover – he is in love with the goddess of war strategy and wisdom – Athena. But in contrast to the other books of this genre Odin is represented in his traditional image – the supreme god, god of war, the adept of runes, the master of Valhalla. In the novel the author gives a reader a great number of Odin's names. Among them: Igg, Vidur, Gaut, Char, Votan, Chroft. Loki is present here as well. But in opposition to the traditional image, in the book he is Odin's brother, though he is Thor's brother.

The list of the authors in whose books gods and motives of Scandinavian mythology figure can be added. Poul Anderson «The Broken Sword», Alan Garner «The Wierdstone of Brisingamen» and «The Moon of Gomrath», Guy Kay «The Last Light of the Sun», Joanne Harris «Runemarks», Ursula Le Guin «Earthsea Novels», Roger Zelazny «The Mask of Loki», Neil Gaiman «Odd and the Frost Giants», Lars-Henrik Olsen «Erik, Son of a Man» are among them.

A demonstrative example of the late XX – early XXI c. literature is the work of the English writer Neil Gaiman.

Neil Gaiman is one the most outstanding English writers. The critics on more than one occasion noticed that myth plays a great role in the writer's work. The process of remythologization can be traced nearly from the very beginning of his work, beginning with comic book series «The Sandman» (1989–1996), continuing with «Neverwhere» (1996), «American Gods» (2001), «Coraline» (2006) and «The Graveyard book» (2009). In all the works a line of myth-restoration is greatly defined with the help of which the author not only creates his own world, but also renews the main principles of mythological consciousness. It is realized in the searching of oneself process and as a result – renewal of mythological consciousness, search of one's essence that is realized in his name.

In «American Gods» modern American culture and ancient mythologies (Scandinavian, Ancient Egyptian, Slavonic, etc) coexist and intertwine. But remythologization happens with the help of particular images and events. These are gods and heroes of ancient myths, allusions to definite events depicted in the cultures of one or another country.

The novel tells about an ex-prisoner, Shadow Moon, who was hired by a mysterious Mr. Wednesday for travelling about the USA. Later, it turns out that Mr. Wednesday is none other but Odin who travels around the world in order to rally the Old Gods for the last fight. Besides Loki and the Norns appear in the book. Gaiman in his book hints at the point that Shadow Moon is Baldr – Odin's son. Later, in «The Monarch of the Glen» this fact is confirmed.

The plot is displayed around the protagonist Shadow whose name says that he is an unnoticable man, he does not stand out from the crowd except for his appearance: «He was big enough and looked don't-fuck-with-me enough that his biggest problem was killing time ... Shadow tried not to talk too much» [12]. He has to undergo a terrible ordeal before he finishes his mission.

Such a game with heroes' names is one of the first displays of text remythologization, return to the sacralization of the name as the representation of man's essence. Such heroes' namelessness is the proof of inseparability of a man as the bearer of myth-consciousness from nature world.

So, search of one's essence that is hidden in the name – is the first motive connected with myth in Neil Gaiman's work.

The second way of myth-penetration is the presence of mythological events and images. First of all this is fable where the main character is told to travel in order to revive justice and to fulfil himself. Shadow's travel can be reviewed in two meanings – direct and allegorical. In the direct meaning he and Mr. Wednesday (Wednesday is the day of Odin which gives reader a hint to the idea who is hidden under this name) has travelled nearly all over the American continent. In the allegorical meaning this is a travel inside himself, an attempt to fulfil himself, his inner man, an attempt to find his destiny.

Thirdly, the phenomenon of remythologization can be seen in the main plot – the end of the world which the main character has to prevent. Nearly in all cultures this event is an integral part of mythology. Thus, it is present in the believes of ancient Scandinavians – Ragnarok – the death day of all the gods and the world, Apocalypse in the Bible etc. In the novel of Neil Gaiman Ragnarok echoes with forgotten charms, the world of fantasy and unreal.

But still, the main feature of the novel is the mix of national cultures. So, it is displayed with the following characters – gods and heroes of ancient mythologies. In particular:

– Mr Wednesday – the supreme god in Scandinavian mythology. «His hair was a reddish gray; his beard, little more than stubble, was grayish red. A craggy, square face with pale gray eyes ... An old man came striding across the hillside toward him: he wore a dark gray cloak, ragged at the bottom, as if he had done a lot of traveling, and he wore a broad-brimmed blue hat, with a seagull feather tucked into the band at a jaunty angle. ... The old man was ridiculously tall. ... «You are Odin», said Shadow. The man nodded thoughtfully. «... yes, I am Odin, Bor's son», he said» [12];

– Low-Key Lyesmith/Loki – the god of fire, craftiness and lies in the mythology of Scandinavians. «Jesus. Low Key Lyesmith», said Shadow, and



then he heard what he was saying and he understood. «Loki», he said. «Loki Lie-Smith» [12]. He is a cellmate of the main character. He is always talking, joking and making fun of other.

– Czernobog – the dark god of misfortune in the beliefs of the Slavs: «Who is it?» A man's voice, old and cigarette-roughened. «An old friend, Czernobog». ... The man in the dusty bathrobe was short, with iron-gray hair and craggy features. He wore gray pinstripe pants, shiny from age, and slippers. He held an unfiltered cigarette with square-tipped fingers, sucking the tip while keeping it cupped in his fist – like a convict, thought Shadow, or a soldier» [12].

– The Zorya Sisters – sisters in the Slavonic mythology who are represented with the Morning Star, the Evening Star and the Midnight Star: «Are they gypsies?» asked Shadow. «Zorya and her family? Not at all. They're not Rom. They're Russian. Slavs, I believe» [12]. They replace each other in the morning, in the evening and at night that symbolizes change of day, evening and night. This is depicted in ancient mythology as well as in the novel.

– Mr. Nancy/Anansi – a character in the mythology and folklore of the West African nations who is connected with the appearance of sun, rain, the origin of wisdom and tales: «Shadow, this is Mister Nancy», said Czernobog. The old man got to his feet and thrust out his yellow-gloved right hand. «Good to meet you», he said with a dazzling smile. ... Anansi, with lemon-yellow gloves and silvering hair, shook his head» [12]. Anansi is one of the most important characters of West-African mythology who is connected with tales, jokes and craftiness. So, just like Loki he often has fun and plays jokes on others.

– Mr. Ibis/Thoth – an Ancient Egyptian god of wisdom and knowledge: «I'm Mr. Ibis», said the man in the gold-rimmed glasses. ... Bast was standing there beside the thing that was no longer Mr. Ibis, and she held Shadow's heart in her right hand. It lit her face with a ruby light. «Give it to me», said Thoth, the Ibis-headed god, and he took the heart in his hands, which were not human hands, and he glided forward» [12]. Present in the modern world, Thoth is noted in biographies of people who have brought mythologies to America.

– Mr. Jaquel/Anubis – an Ancient Egyptian god of death, balsamation, another world, the keeper of poison and drugs: «Jaquel ignored them. He took a big scalpel and made a deep incision in a large V that began at both collarbones and met at the bottom of her breastbone, and then he turned the V into a Y, another deep incision that continued from her breastbone to her pubis. He picked up what looked like a small, heavy chrome drill with a medallion-sized round saw blade at the business end. He turned it on, and cut through the ribs at both sides of her breastbone. ... Anubis put Shadow's heart on the other pan of the scales» [12]. As he is a god of death and afterlife, in the modern world he does what he has always been doing – balsamation.

– Bilquis/Queen of Sheba – Queen of Sheba, half-jinn who devours men via her vagina. She is represented as a prostitute in the novel: «What's your name?» he asks her. «Bilquis», she tells him, raising her head. «With a Q».

... «Will you call me goddess? Will you pray to me? Will you worship me with your body?» ... «I worship you with my body», he whispers [12].

As we can see, all the characters are depicted in their classical way they were in the mythologies – either outer appearance or what they do in modern world. The author uses classical beliefs of ancient people as the basis and transfers them into the modern world without any changes.

At the end of the novel there is an allusion to the fact the main character, Shadow, is the reincarnation of Baldr – the Scandinavian god of spring and beauty. According to the myths Baldr is Odin's son and this connection between the main character and Mr. Wednesday is observed through the main ordeal – to be suspended for 9 days on a tree. Odin did the same – he hung for 9 days on Iggdrasil fastened to it with his spear. But this is the main difference between them. Odin did this to get the knowledge of runes, and Shadow – to cognize himself: «... Odin, the All-Father, who was sacrificed to himself as bravely and as nobly as others were sacrificed to him. ... the nine days that the All-Father hung from the world-tree, his side pierced and dripping from the spear-point's wound, and he sang them all the things the All-Father had learned in his agony: nine names, and nine runes, and twice-nine charms» [12].

The author describes the process like this: «He climbed the nine steps. Then, at their urging, he stepped onto a low branch. ... they began to knot the ropes, intricate and elegant knots, and they wrapped the ropes first about the tree, and then about Shadow. ... they removed his T-shirt and briefs, then they bound him, never tightly, but firmly and finally. ... The ropes went under his arms, between his legs, around his waist, his ankles, his chest, binding him to the tree. The final rope was tied, loosely, about his neck. ... His feet were five feet above the ground. The tree was leafless and huge, its branches black against the gray sky, its bark a smooth silvery gray. ... and they left him there. They left him there alone» [12].

Thus, there is difference not only in the aim of being on a tree but in the process as well. Odin fastened himself of his own volition to a tree with a spear to get the knowledge of runes, and Shadow was tied to a tree with ropes.

Two categories of heroes are clearly distinguished in the novel – old and new gods. Old or American Gods is the incarnation of all gods and beings who were brought to the American continent by the first immigrants, but they became forgotten in the world of «easy money» and rapid development. They were replaced with so-called New Gods who are still leading people – technical development and scientific achievements. They are represented with the following heroes: the Technical Boy – New god of computers and Internet, Media – New goddess of TV, the Black Hats – work for the Technical Boy, the Intangibles – New gods of the modern stock market. The creators of New Gods are people themselves – they transferred all their power and myth-consciousness to the phenomena and things of the outside world which were created personally by themselves. Just this became the reason of their materialization and desire of war with the gods of the Old world. That is what Media says about the Old



and the New Gods: «Look at it like this, Shadow: we are the coming thing. We're shopping malls – your friends are crappy roadside attractions. Hell, we're on-line malls, while your friends are sitting by the side of the highway selling homegrown produce from a cart. No – they aren't even fruit sellers. Buggy-whip vendors. Whalebone-corset repairers. We are now and tomorrow. Your friends aren't even yesterday anymore... [12].

According to the main features of the XX – early XXI c. literature we can make the following conclusions:

1. The novel «American Gods» by Neil Gaiman has a reflective character. So, to understand the text fully the reader has to be intelligent.

2. Having analyzed the text we can claim that a new myth is faced to the problems of reality, it is a kind of «code» of the modern world (the appearance of new gods and their every day actualization).

3. There is a great number of quotes, allusions, intertwining of modernity and Ancient world, but only in the context of one culture. There is coexistence and cooperation of some cultures' representatives.

4. The leading modern power is represented with the civilization created by a man, instead of nature.

Neo-mythology is one of the leading problems of modern literary studies. The study of myth-structure and neo-mythological features of the modern discourse are perspective.

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