

# Intertextuality as a Mirror of American Culture in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*

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## Abstract

*Intertextuality is a productive means to enrich a literary text and establish a unique dialogue with the reader. The present study aims to identify and look into intertextual elements in Neil Gaiman's American Gods that reflect American culture and history and immerse the reader into the author's fictional world. The study expounds intertextual elements in Neil Gaiman's American Gods to allude to typical cultural and historical phenomena and engage with the reader by fully immersing them in a fictional world.*

**Keywords:** *intertextuality, text, culture, allusion, quotation, adaptation*

## Introduction

The vast world of literature is prodigious, stipulating connections between various texts. By alluding to, affecting, and referencing each other, literary pieces form a web of connections, known in literary studies as intertextuality (Vudakin 2019: 39). Intertextuality is an array of approaches that analyze and interpret the relationships between texts, their interconnections, and the ways they integrate the components of other texts, enriching their depth and meaning. In literary studies, the concept of intertextuality (Julia Kristeva) gained momentum in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with multiple literary scholars and linguists exploring and expanding it. Nowadays, an array of perspectives and new approaches are utilized to give further insight into it. With its noteworthy effect on online communication and technological advances, intertextuality remains a focus of scholarly interest. By utilizing intertextual elements, authors add infinite layers of meaning to their works, establish a dialogue with other texts and make their reader an active participant in this communication.

## Intertextuality: Definition and Classification

Studies of intertextuality can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s when the most prominent literary critics such as Kristeva (1986), Barthes (1981), and Genette (1997), put forward an idea that the author does not directly communicate the meaning of the text to the reader. Instead, a variety of cultural codes known to both arise from prior texts to serve as a mediator (Vudakin 2019).

Hastings defines intertextuality as “the nature and extent to which other texts are referred to or implied in the text under scrutiny” (Hastings 2012: 193). As a concept, it highlights “the ways texts endlessly refer to other texts, either accidentally or deliberately, and reciprocally influence each other’s meaning” (Hintz 2019: 528). Intertextuality is dialogical, referring to the meaning likely to be derived from reading a later text relevant to an earlier one and vice versa. Since any text can be interpreted through its connection with other texts, we observe how the meaning “can be decentralized or expanded beyond the text itself” (Alkier and Moffitt 2022: 205-206). Consequently, it may emerge during the reader’s acknowledgement of the interrelation between several texts, regardless of the author’s design.

Stefan Alkier (2009) argues that a text does not provide meaning per se but contains a meaning, fully understood only through the prism of intertextual relationships. Furthermore, he determines intertextuality as a combination of three intertextual directions, e.g. production-oriented, reception-oriented, and experimental perspectives (Alkier 2009: 9). In his turn, Dale Allison (2000) recognizes the significance of the reader's perception, claiming that, in essence, intertextuality is subjective, and the implicit nature of allusions cannot guarantee their accurate reconstruction in intertexts. The research into intertextuality must consider shared elements, word choice, and structural elements (Allison 2000: 10-13).

Scholars are hardly unanimous when it comes to distinguishing intertextuality types and intertextual elements. The first attempt to classify intertextuality was made by an Italian scholar Gian Biagio Conte in 1974. In his study *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, he separates five groups of intertextual elements (Conte 1986).

G rard Genette (1997) recognizes intertextuality as one of the five types of transtextual relationships, reducing it to issues of quotation, plagiarism, and allusion. The other types, to which he compares intertextuality, include paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality. Genette's classification is crucial for intertextuality studies as many other scholars have based their taxonomies based on his.

Jonathan Hardy differentiates corporate and non-corporate types when discussing commercial intertextuality, or "the production and interlinking of texts like blockbuster films or TV series with allied paratexts and products, such as spin-offs, reversionings, promos, online media, books, games and merchandise." (2011: 7) In this respect, intertextuality accelerates profits by engaging and interacting with the audience. Corporate intertextuality includes "controlled" content such as trailers, promos, advertising, social media texts, and star interviews, whereas non-corporate refers to independent previews, commentary, celebrity stories, fan publications, and other consumer-generated content (Ibid: 8-9).

Based on intertextuality studies, proposed by Nathalie Piegay-Gros, Mariana Shapoval suggests the following intertextual elements' taxonomy:

- 1) The co-existence relation (mono-textual reference (our translation of the term)): semantic forms (intertextual motifs, traditional plots, traditional images, reference, collage), stylistic forms (quotation with and without attribution, paratextual quotation, plagiarism, allusion, reminiscence, cento), coded intertextuality (our translation of the term) (topoi, idioms);
- 2) the derivation relation (system-text reference): technique borrowing (our translation of the term), paraphrase, emulation, parody, travesty, stylization, pastiche, architextuality (2013: 64-66).

Hanna Vivat (2011: 7) pointed out four types of intertextual connections:

- 1) Touch (paroemias, aphorisms, an allusion to a well-known event, situation, or image, figurative analogy);
- 2) intersection (contamination, epigraph, dedication, preface, afterword, certain types of reminiscence and allusion, pastiche, etc.);
- 3) superposition (genre allusions, adaptation, variation, translation, imitation, nationalization, parody, retelling, etc.);
- 4) combined interdependence.

We can also outline adaptation that often involves a change of medium, but this is not always the case. Writers often use adaptations of ancient legends, myths, folklore stories or historical events. Hutcheon (2006: 6) on this matter suggests the following:

If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly. When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works.

When adapting a story in their work, the author frequently recreates and reinterprets it. In the case of a myth, the author may use it as a starting point for the story or by using main themes, characters, or other elements to develop a new one.

### **Novel Trends in Intertextuality Studies**

With the rise of digital media, online content, and new modes of communication, scholars are exploring new ways of researching intertextuality. It is not rare for a certain media product or item to be related to other media content online. Hence, it is worthwhile to look into the modern application of intertextuality throughout digital space.

There are multiple levels to explore intertextuality. When thoroughly examined, the selection of a particular title, a certain kind of music, or a specific manner to move the camera in a movie may all be seen as examples of intertextuality. It should be noted that pieces of media are generally referred to as *texts*, including visual and audio aspects. Liesbet van Zoonen argues that anything can be approached as a *text* when it is “seen, acknowledged and interpreted by a human being” (2017: 4). In the same way, any film is nothing more than words with audio and visual support until it is seen and perceived by a human. It is highly unlikely that a work of content will be self-contained, especially when it comes to commercially produced media culture. This applies to certain music genres, specifically R&B, sci-fi films, internet memes and first-person-shooter games. Some stand-alone works may be connected to others of such kind by the same genre. On account of that, capable viewers can identify the TV show genre only by snippets, through the visuals, acting, etc. (Ibid: 5).

An integral part of online communication, internet memes represent a new genre within digital culture. Therefore, we find it essential to understand and study not only their creation, circulation and influence on both online and offline communication, but also the way they intertwine, interact and get mixed with other media content developing intertextual references and relations. In many cases, the humorous effect of a meme is achieved with its commenting on earlier text(s) in parody. Frequently, memes constitute a visual aspect that may display a scene from a film, TV show, or cartoon. Internet memes are culturally marked referring to historical, and political events and situations, or cultural peculiarities of a specific nation. However, with worldwide access to the internet, many memes are being remixed, translated or locally adapted. Accordingly, internet users establish an active cross-cultural dialogue: “Memes and virals, all in all, offer a current, up-to-date and poignant public commentary of important events, employing a universal language relying on popular culture” (Mammadov and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2022: 27-28).

Technological breakthroughs allowed researchers not only to explore intertextuality in emerging discourses but also to develop new methods and approaches that would facilitate their research work. Nowadays, an opportunity arises to develop digital approaches to

intertextual study. Coffee et al. (2012) at Buffalo University created a free online tool for the automatic detection of parallel phrases. The Tesserae tool can recognize numerous previously recorded and unrecorded intertexts. It was tested by comparing Vergil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *Civil War*. The findings have shown the tool adds about a third of the parallels previously unrecorded and recovers around the same amount of those that had been tracked by traditional commentators. Thus, computational investigation of intertextuality offers a new large-scale perspective as well as a more thorough and approachable outlook on the phenomenon of intertextuality.

In addition, some researchers (Schubert 2019) propose new approaches to text analysis by applying algorithm-based procedures with intertextuality theory. An algorithm-based search can provide the quotation and paraphrase classification types, revealing deeper levels of meaning in the text. It provides a form of intertextual aggregation by measuring the semantic field of numerous relationships between texts without making any subjective judgments or selection biases.

### **Intertextuality as a Pillar of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods***

Neil Gaiman is an accomplished English writer of prose, poetry, cinema, journalism, comics, song lyrics, and theatre, and is ranked as one of the top ten living post-modern writers in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. One of his most famous works *American Gods* is a highly acclaimed Hugo and Nebula award-winning novel, which remains one of the favorites among Gaiman's fans.

To portray a multicultural, pan-pentheistic land, Gaiman abundantly exploited intertextuality throughout the novel. A myriad of mythological, folklore, cultural, and historical allusions can be found in the text, and all of them serve the purpose of a precise description of the cultural background and history of the USA.

### **Intertextuality as a Means of Reflecting American Culture and History**

America in Gaiman's eyes is a pastiche of diverse voices representing different cultures, religions, nationalities, and ethnicities. Being a melting pot, the USA is exceptionally complex and divergent, constantly trying to bring all kinds of people together. This is exactly what we see through the images of Old Gods, all being brought to the new land by their believers and all equally struggling to stay alive against the background of changing times. Neil Gaiman masterfully utilizes religious, mythological, and folklore allusions in the forms of proper names, associated objects, events, rituals, etc. to make the reader see and feel the diversity of the USA in its religious, racial, and ethnic sense.

### **Methodology and Findings**

We have selected the modern fantasy novel *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman as illustrative material for our study. Using theoretical source analysis, we examined intertextual elements in the novel *American Gods* and employed critical discourse analysis and contextual-interpretive analysis to compile a corpus of examples. We refer to the contexts where intertextual elements can be found as *intertextually marked contexts* (our term). We have analysed 736 pages and compiled a 367-page corpus of intertextually marked contexts. The number of intertextual elements in the contexts comprises 252, out of which 222 (88%) are

allusions, 24 (10%) are quotations, and 6 (2%) are adaptations. 42% are mythology and folklore allusions, 6% to religion, 12% historical allusions, 25% to culture, 7% to literature, and 8% to music. Moreover, 46% of quotations have a literary source, 33% have a song as a source, and 21% are quotes taken from other sources. 189 elements describe the national, religious, and ethnic diversity of the USA. We refer to the contexts where intertextual elements can be found as intertextually marked contexts.

## Mythological and Folklore Allusions

Gaiman is a true master of retelling and appropriating myths and tales from folklore all over the world. In *American Gods*, we get to see deities, cultural heroes, and mythical creatures from Scandinavian, African, Slavic, Irish, Arabic, Egyptian, Native American, and other folklore and mythologies that directly trace the migration of peoples throughout history to the territory of America:

When the people came to America, they brought us with them. They brought me, and Loki and Thor, Anansi and the Lion-God, Leprechauns and Kobolds and Banshees, Kubera and Frau Holle and Ashtaroth, and they brought you. We rode here in their minds, and we took root. We travelled with the settlers to the new lands across the ocean.

(Gaiman 2017: 150)

Most of the mythological allusions in the novel were made to Scandinavian mythology. The total number of them is 19, which is 20% of the total amount of this type of allusion. It can be explained by the fact that the main character, Shadow, is supposedly a son of the Norse god of war Odin, who is in the center of the novel alongside Shadow. Odin introduces himself to Shadow as Mister Wednesday and throughout the narrative is named *Odin, Glad-of-War, Grim, Raider, Third, One-eyed, Highest, True-Guesser, Grimmir, the Hooded One, All-Father, Gondlir Wand-bearer, Oldfather, Old guy, the gallows lord, the Lord of Asgard*.

Several allusions are made to the myths directly regarding the All-Father. During the ride on the World's Largest Carousel, Shadow envisions Wednesday with two wolves and ravens accompanying him. These animals are believed to be Odin's attendant spirits assisting him in daily tasks: "My ravens are *Huginn* and *Muninn*, *Thought* and *Memory*; my wolves are *Freki* and *Geri*; my horse is the gallows" (Ibid: 145, our emphasis). Besides wolves and ravens, some other references made to Odin include the Valkyries, Valaskjalf (Odin's Hall), a single eye (the other is replaced by a glass one), and the eighteen charms, which Wednesday enumerates in Chapter Ten.

Many references in the text allude to the myth of Odin sacrificing "himself to himself" by hanging from the tree at the center of the cosmos to gain knowledge and power: "His tie was dark grey silk, and the tie pin was *a tree, worked in silver: trunk, branches, and deep roots*" (Ibid: 23, our emphasis). "Call me a freeloader, will you, you doomed old creature? You cold-blooded, heartless *old tree-hanger*" (Ibid: 45, our emphasis).

Some other briefly mentioned mythological creatures and gods include Ymir, Alvisson of Vindalf, Loki, Thor, Tyr, the eight-legged horse, and the Norns – entities, who shaped the fate of all beings. It is believed that there are three of them, although only one – Urd – appears in the text: "'Now,' boomed Wednesday, over the mechanical music, 'at the start of any quest or enterprise it behoves us to consult *the Norns*. So let us designate this Sybil our Urd, eh?'" (Ibid: 132). Another reference is made to the Well of Fate (Urðarbrunnr): "The

water of time, which comes from the spring of fate, Urd's Well, is not the water of life.” (Ibid: 535).

Slavic deities are alluded to eight times in the novel, which comprises nine percent of the total number of mythological allusions. In Chapter Four, the reader gets to know Czernobog, meaning the ‘black god,’ and Bielobog, the ‘white god,’ who is briefly mentioned as a brother of the former. The text alludes to the dual nature of the brothers and at some point, it is unclear whether the two are the same person:

I dreamed that I am truly *Bielebog*. That forever the world imagines that there are two of us, *the light god* and *the dark*, but that now we are both old, I find it was only me all the time, giving them gifts, taking my gifts away.

(Ibid: 458-459, our emphasis)

Alongside Czernobog, the three sisters Zorya Utrennyaya, the goddess of dawn, and Zorya Vechernyaya, the goddess of dusk, and Zorya Polnochnaya, the goddess of midnight live in the apartment. Such Slavic folklore creatures as Rusalka, vila, and Wampyr appear in the novel as well.

Arabic figures are presented by Bilquis, Queen of Sheba, and the jinn working as a taxi driver. Bilquis is an ancient goddess of love and is portrayed in the novel as a woman who needs to be worshipped through sex and, therefore forced to become a prostitute to survive. The jinn is said to have eyes burning with flames, but not being able to grant wishes as usually expected: “They think we grant wishes. If I could grant wishes, do you think I would be driving a cab?” (Ibid: 203). During the dialogue between the jinn and a character named Salim, such Arabic mythological creatures are brought up as ifrits and marids. They are often mistakenly confused with the jinn. Together they comprise 4% of mythological and folklore allusions.

Egyptian gods occupy a special place in the novel. First of all, some excerpts in *American Gods* are written and narrated by Mister Ibis, who appears to be an embodiment of the ancient Egyptian god Thoth. Thoth is the god of writing and knowledge, usually depicted with the head of an ibis: “The smoke cleared, and the boatman was once more a *half-human creature with the head of a river bird*.” (Ibid: 522, our emphasis). In the novel Mister Ibis works with a mortician Mister Jacquel, a personification of the god of the dead Anubis recognizable for the jackal head: “He was as naked and as open as a corpse on a table, and dark Anubis the jackal god was his prosecutor and his prosecutor and his persecutor.” (Ibid: 524).

The Egyptian goddess of the sun Bast at first appears in the form of a cat and takes human form during the Shadow’s dream. Some other gods’ destiny is revealed by Ibis: ““There were more of us, in the beginning. But Set left us to explore, what, two hundred years ago? [...] While poor Horus...’ he trailed off, in a sigh, and shook his head.” (Ibid: 217)

Later, *Horus* spends most of the time flying in the sky as a hawk: ““Horus,’ he said. ‘I am the falcon of the morning, the hawk of the afternoon. I am the sun, as you are. And I know the true name of Ra. My mother told me.’” (Ibid: 505-506).

Egyptian gods Hershef, Ra, Lion-God, and Ammet (the Eater of Souls) are alluded to nine times, which is ten percent. References to the African culture can be found in the text as well. A central figure of African mythology in the novel is presented by Mister Nancy or Anansi – the god of wisdom, stories, and trickery, who can take the form of a spider, in the West African folktales:

He was looking at Mr. Nancy, *an old black man* with a pencil mustache,[...]; and, at the same time, in the same place, he saw *a jeweled spider* as high as a horse, its eyes an

emerald nebula, strutting, staring down at him; and simultaneously he was looking at *an extraordinarily tall man with teak-colored skin and three sets of arms*, wearing a flowing ostrich-feather headdress, his face painted with red stripes,...]; and he was also-seeing *a young black boy*, dressed in rags, his left foot all swollen and crawling with blackflies; and last of all, and behind all these things, Shadow was looking at *a tiny brown spider*, hiding under a withered ocher leaf.

(Ibid: 144, our emphasis)

However, allusions to African mythology are not limited to Anansi. Throughout the narrative, we discover references to other African gods e.g. Elegba, Great Mawu, Ogu, Shango, Zaka, Aido-Hwedo, the Gédé, the Loa, Baron Samedi (the Voudon lord of death). Moreover, in one of the “Coming to America” chapters, the author draws on elements from African mythology, e.g. Wututu and her brother Agasu. In general, Gaiman drew inspiration from the Fon culture, as twins are seen by the Fon as a single individual and a direct link to their ancestors. Accordingly, Wututu felt like she lost a significant part of herself when Agasu passed away, which makes up 14%, 13 allusions in total.

By creating a novel about the USA, Neil Gaiman could not forget about Native-American folklore. The author utilized 6 allusions (6%), including references to thunderbirds (also referred to as the Wakinyau), which appear in Shadow’s dreams, and by some indigenous tribes are seen as an omen of war, clearly foreshadowing Wednesday’s intention to start a war:

Shadow pulled down some books and sat in the window seat: In several minutes he had learned that *thunderbirds were mythical gigantic birds who lived on mountaintops, who brought the lightning and who flapped their wings to make the thunder*. There were some tribes, he read, who believed that *the thunderbirds had made the world*.

(Ibid: 317, our emphasis)

In “Coming to America”, the first people arriving in the land of America worshipped the mammoth-skull Nunyunnini: “They had a god, who was the skull of a mammoth, and the hide of a mammoth fashioned into a rough cloak. Nunyunnini, they called him” (Ibid: 445).

A famous figure from Native-American folklore presented alongside the historical figure of Johnny Chapman is Wisakedjak (Whiskey Jack in the novel). It is also implied that Whiskey Jack is the same as Inktomi, the Lakota spirit. Moreover, he is often depicted as the trickster hero in the folktales of Northeast Indians, just as Blue Jay which the character named Harry Bluejay alludes to: “They found *Harry Bluejay* in the rec hall, at the pool table, doing trick shots to impress a group of several girls. He had *a blue jay* tattooed on the back of his right hand...” (Ibid: 383, our emphasis).

Delving into the beliefs of the American indigenous peoples, Gaiman creates a character that embodies the main ideology of the pre- and post-Columbian mindset of Native Americans – the buffalo man. He is a symbol of the land which has been cherished by the Native-American peoples from ancient times.

There are three references (3%) to the American folklore. A typical figure of American folklore is Johnny Chapman, also known as Johnny Appleseed. Johnny Appleseed became a figure in American mythology, due to his eccentric nature and journeys around the Midwest, where he established nurseries and orchards. The man was renowned for his unusual lifestyle and appearance, appreciation for the environment, and humanitarianism. Gaiman preserves these features in his character, making him a primitive man of nature.

In the conversation, Wednesday discloses the fate of Paul Bunyan, an American mythical hero symbolizing strength and vitality:

Nobody ever told Paul Bunyan stories. Nobody ever believed in Paul Bunyan. He came staggering out of a New York ad agency in 1910 and filled the nation's myth stomach with empty calories.

(Ibid: 378).

Often associated with the figure of Paul Bunyan, hodags are mentioned in the novel as well.

We have discovered that Cornish folklore secures the second position, right after Scandinavian mythology, in the number of allusions. 13 mythological and folklore creatures and figures are mentioned in *American Gods*, which is 14%, including the piskies, the spriggans, the Black Dog of the Moors, the seal-women, the knockers, the Bucca, the Apple Tree Man, Raw-Head, Bloody Bones, tales of Jack: Jack up the Beanstalk, Jack Giant-killer, Jack and his Cat and the King, Cornishman, or a Cousin Jack:

Phyllida's children would come to Essie for tales, and she would tell them of *the Black Dog of the Moors*, and of *Raw-Head* and *Bloody-Bones*, or *the Apple Tree Man*, but they were not interested; they only wanted tales of *Jack-Jack up the Beanstalk*, or *Jack Giant-killer*, or *Jack and his Cat and the King*.

(Ibid: 111, our emphasis)

Additionally, allusions to the mythologies and folktales of such origin have been found: Irish – 9% (the Bean Sidhe, Finn, Oísín, Conan the Bald, Macha of the Morrigan, Cluracans, Banshees), Hindu – 4% (Kali, Kubera, Ganesh, the demons Rakshasas), German – 2% (kobold, Frau Holle), Mesopotamian – 1% (Hubur), Iranian – 1% (Mithras), Hungarian – 1% (Isten), Greek – 1% (Bacchus), Welsh – 1% (Gwysion), Swedish – 1% (Swedenborg).

### **Religious Allusions**

Since the USA is portrayed as a pantheistic country Neil Gaiman could not overlook the issue of religion. Numerous religious personalities, places, etc. are depicted in an ironic manner, for instance, in the novel, Jesus has the same status as other gods in the country: “Jesus does pretty good over here. But I met a guy who said he saw him hitchhiking by the side of the road in Afghanistan and nobody was stopping to give him a ride” (Gaiman 2017: 223). A clear reference is made to the origin of Christmas, as a Christian holiday: “Hell, it's not even his birthday, you know that? He took it from Mithras” (Ibid: 223). What is interesting to see is a personified image of Easter. The goddess struggles as her power diminishes due to modern society moving further and further away from traditional religious beliefs: “Find out how many passers-by know that their Easter festival takes its name from Eostre of the Dawn? Let's see – I have it. We shall ask a hundred people” (Ibid: 333). In the Hall of the Death, it is obvious that Shadow is inclined to believe in the Christian idea of what happens after death: ““So is this where we find out what I get?” whispered Shadow to Bast. ‘Heaven? Hell? Purgatory?’” (Ibid: 525) In the following fragment, we can observe an allusion to the Bible story: Paradise as a place of rest for the deceased, and the two prominent apostles Peter and Paul: “There was only one guy in the whole Bible Jesus ever personally promised a place with him in Paradise. Not Peter, not Paul, not any of those guys. He was a convicted thief, being executed” (Ibid: 475). In Chapter Eighteen, during his conversation with Wednesday, Shadow says: “You were the



Judas Goat” (Ibid: 577). The phrase alludes to Judas Iscariot, a biblical apostle of Jesus Christ who betrayed him. In addition, there is a reference to Islam in *American Gods* as well: ““There are the angels, and there are men, who Allah made from mud, and then there are the people of the fire, the jinn,’ says Salim”” (Ibid: 202). Therefore, 13 religious allusions have been found in the novel, 11 (85%) of which are made to Christianity, and 2 (15%) to Islam.

### **Historical Allusions**

Apart from mythological, folklore, and religious references, the novel has ample historical allusions to 1) historical events – 12 (46%); 2) historical figures – 14 (54%)

These include the stories about people coming and settling on the territories of America. Specifically, the idea of Columbus being the first to discover America is heavily criticized: “Columbus did what people had been doing for thousands of years. There’s nothing special about coming to America” (Gaiman 2017: 211). Mister Ibis gladly tells Shadow about all the times that the American land was discovered by other people from different races and nations, e.g. the Ainu, Polynesians, the Hopi, the Irish, the Welsh, the Vikings, the Africans, the Chinese, and the Basque. In Chapter Eight Shadow recollects Mr. Wood’s words when he ponders the circumstances under which US President John Kennedy died: “How can we be certain the CIA wasn’t involved in the Kennedy assassination?” (Ibid: 227). Another historical allusion is to Independence Day, or the Fourth of July, which commemorates the passage of the Declaration of Independence in 1776: “Well, he shot it, and grandmama made cherry pies enough that they were still eating them come the next fourth of July...” (Ibid: 409).

A reference to a famous gambler and card sharp in Canada and the US Canada Bill Jones can also be found in the novel:

‘You know,’ says the man in the light gray suit, when his drink arrives, ‘the finest line of poetry ever uttered in the history of this whole damn country was said by Canada Bill Jones in 1853, in Baton Rouge, while he was being robbed blind in a crooked game of faro.’

(Ibid: 306)

Wednesday retells ‘it’s the only game in town’ story to highlight the nature of gamblers and confidence tricksters, which itself is another historical allusion to the real situation.

In one of the “Coming to America” chapters, Mister Ibis writes a story about two siblings getting sold and enslaved in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before telling the story, he portrays a nameless man devoted to his job only for the reader to find out that the man exterminates Jews:

So, efficiently and good-naturedly, he exterminates Jews: he appreciates the music that plays in the background to pacify them; [...] Our man supervises the detail taking the bodies to the ovens; and if there is anything he feels bad about, it is that he still allows the gassing of vermin to affect him.

(Ibid: 346)

Hence, we have a reference to the Holocaust during World War II. In the same chapter such historical events as the slave revolt of 1791, the Haitian Declaration of Independence on 1 January 1804, and historical figures such as Sanité Dédé, Marie Saloppé, Marie Laveau (the Widow Paris) and her daughter Marie Laveau II (the Widow Glapion) – the New Orleans Voodoo queens – are mentioned.

Yet another historical reference appears soon in the story. This time Gaiman delves into the history of a forced relocation of Native-American people in the 1830s:

In the 1830s Andrew Jackson's Indian Relocation Act exiled them from their land – all the Choctaw and Chickamauga and Cherokee and Chickasaw – and U.S. troops forced every one of them they could catch to walk over a thousand miles to the new Indian Territories in what would one day be Oklahoma, down the trail of tears: an act of casual genocide.

(Ibid: 528)

In the next paragraph, the focus is on the American Civil War of 1861-1865 between the United States and 11 Southern states that formed the Confederate States of America, specifically the Battle Above the Clouds and the figure of General Grant are highlighted:

In the Civil War, the War Between the States, there was a battle there: the Battle Above the Clouds, that was the first day's fighting, and then the Union forces did the impossible and, without orders, swept up Missionary Ridge and took it. The troops of General Grant won the day, and the North took Lookout Mountain and the North took the war.

(Ibid: 528)

In Chapter Thirteen Sam tells Shadow about several historical events, alluding to the Tasmanian genocide during the Black War (1824-1831) and the extinction of the thylacines due to excessive hunting:

Sam told them how all the aboriginal natives of Tasmania had been wiped out by the British, and about the human chain they made across the island to catch them which trapped only an old man and a sick boy. She told him how the thylacines – the Tasmanian tigers – had been killed by farmers, scared for their sheep, how the politicians in the 1930s noticed that the thylacines should be protected only after the last of them was dead.

(Ibid: 421)

## **Cultural Allusions**

Such a voluminous story about the USA would be incomplete without cultural references and allusions. These are primarily allusions to media, brands, landmarks, and celebrities. In Neil Gaiman's novel, we can point out the following groups of cultural allusions:

1) 43% of allusions to American media, e.g. *Reader's Digest*, *Turkey Hunting People*, *Sports Illustrated*, *the Weekly World News*, *Newsweek*, *Washington Post* – the newspapers and magazines; *Flip*: an episode of *M\*A\*S\*H*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, Disney's *Hercules*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Scooby-Doo*, *Addams Family*, *I Love Lucy*, *The Man from UNCLE*, *Get Smart*, *The Fugitive*, *Mister Ed*, *Kissing Cousins*, *The Tonight Show*, *Cheers*, *Carrie*, *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* – TV shows and films;

2) 13 celebrities and eminent figures in the US culture, which is 23% of all cultural allusions: *Charles Atlas*, *Gutzon Borglum*, *Marilyn Monroe*, *Louise Brooks*, *Liz Taylor*, *Judy Garland*, *Cary Grant*, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, *Harry Houdini*, *Tony Curtis*, *Jay Leno*, *Elvis Presley*, *Sharon Stone*;

3) American landmarks, e.g. *the Statue of Liberty, the World's Largest Carousel, Disneyland, Mount Rushmore, Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, Grand Central Station, House on the Rock*. They make up 13% of cultural allusions;

4) allusions to famous American brands tackling worldwide globalization and pan-Americanization: "Can you believe it? Fifty miles from McDonald's. I didn't think there was anywhere in the world that was fifty miles from McDonald's" (Gaiman 2017: 476). Among other American brands are *Burger King, KFC, Wal-Mart, F.W. Woolworth, Jack Daniel's, Burma Shave, Old Spice, Oshkosh B'Gosh, Chrysler, Chevrolet, and Ford*. In total, it comprises 21% of cultural references.

Overall, we have uncovered 189 allusions utilized by Neil Gaiman to accurately depict the cultural diversity of the USA, display some of the most prominent history chapters, and engage the reader in the active author-reader dialogue.

### **Intertextuality as a Technique to Immerse the Reader into Neil Gaiman's Fictional World**

Intertextuality may be utilized as a powerful tool not only to engage the readers in a deeper active reading of the text but also to make them feel the story on as many levels as possible, and better understand the characters, their personalities and intentions, and hence to fully immerse them into the fiction created by the author. In *American Gods*, Gaiman resorts to musical and literary allusions, quotations and adaptation as a form of intertextuality.

#### **Quotations**

The first thing that attracts attention in the novel is the epigraphs. Epigraphs are a great way to create a sense of depth by implying an intertextual or intermedial connection between the works. They may provide a foreshadowing of the themes or plot twists, set the mood for the following chapter, or establish a historical or cultural context. Every chapter of *American Gods* begins with an epigraph coming in different forms, including sayings, prose, poetry, and song lyrics. For instance, Chapter Two begins with the lyrics of an old song:

They took her to the cemet'ry  
In a big ol' Cadillac  
They took her to the cemet'ry  
But they did not bring her back.

(Gaiman 2017: 35)

This is the chapter in which Shadow attends his late wife's funeral, and this song sets the right melancholic gloomy tone making the reader more attached to the character. In the next chapter, we can see an old saying: "Every hour wounds. The last one kills" (Ibid: 61). Here the main character for the first time meets Laura as a living dead, therefore the saying perfectly illustrates Shadow's complex feelings of grief, incredulity, and a peculiar inner sense of joy.

Chapter Eight suggests the lines from Robert Frost's *Two Witches*, yet again providing a hint for the main themes in the following chapter:

He said the dead had souls, but when I asked him  
How that could be – I thought the dead were souls,  
he broke my trance. Don't that make you suspicious

That there's something the dead are keeping back?  
Yes, there's something the dead are keeping back.

(Ibid: 207)

This is the chapter where Shadow stays at Mr Ibis and Mr Jaquel's, observing their work at a funeral home, learning about the Egyptian idea of death, and pondering it himself. This is also when Mad Sweeney dies and reappears as a ghost for some time. The former tells Shadow about the ka, or soul, which can be bound to a body for five thousand years.

In general, eight out of 20 epigraphs occur as quotations from books and poems, including *The American Joe Miller's Jest Book*, *The Unguarded Gates* by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty's *Hindu Myths*, *Two Witches* by Robert Frost, *A Policeman's Lot* by Wendy Cope, Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*, *Times and Tendencies* by Agnes Repplier, [*in Just-*] by Edward Estlin (E.E.) Cummings. However, the last chapter referencing E.E. Cummings' poem does not provide the name of the poem, so the readers have to do their research if they are interested in knowing more.

Seven epigraphs quote the songs, three of which do not state the singer. Two of them are said to be simply some old songs, and the one in Chapter Four is *The Midnight Special*, traditional – a well-known folk song that is believed to have been created by the prisoners in the American South.

The remaining five epigraphs are sayings, statements, and commentaries by well-known people in the past and a passage from the "Notebooks of Mr. Ibis". It is unusual for an epigraph to come from the book's character. However, this may also be considered a peculiar kind of intertextuality. The frame narrative and excerpts from Thoth's diary as epigraphs in Chapter Nineteen create an impression that the author quotes a separate work. "The Coming to America" chapters acquaint the reader with fictional people, although all the stories are set in a particular historical and cultural context, closely intertwined with myths and tales. Such technique takes Gaiman's fiction closer to the reader. By describing individual stories, the author helps us to connect with each character on a deeper level and fully live their personal experience, for according to Gaiman:

Fiction allows us to slide into these other heads, these other places, and look out through other eyes. And then in the tale we stop before we die, or we die vicariously and unharmed, and in the world beyond the tale we turn the page or close the book, and we resume our lives.

(Ibid: 347)

Looking at the beginning of Chapter Sixteen, the reader notices a quote by Canada Bill Jones: "I know it's crooked. But it's the only game in town" (Ibid: 511). It is expected for the reader to spot the reference to the story retold by Wednesday in Chapter Ten and remember it, as the same words will be repeated in Chapter Eighteen when the truth about the true intentions of Wednesday is revealed:

'It was crooked,' said Shadow. 'All of it. None of it was for real. It was just a setup for a massacre.'  
'Exactly,' said Wednesday's voice from the shadows. 'It was crooked. But it was the only game in town.'

(Ibid: 575)

Another quote present in the text references *The Second Coming* by W. B. Yeats:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold...

(Ibid: 482)

In some cases, a particular intertextual element may combine a quote and an allusion. Such instances may occur when it comes to quotation allusions or when the author mentions the name of a song (which is considered an allusion) and later on a character sings the lines from the song mentioned (which is considered a quotation). Some of such cases are mentioned later in our research work.

## Allusions

Aside from quotations in the epigraphs to the chapters, the novel abounds in other intermedial allusions and references. Very often the chapters have a kind of ‘musical accompaniment’ i.e. the songs mentioned setting the mood and complementing the atmosphere of the scene described. For example, while enjoying themselves in Jack’s Crocodile Bar, Shadow and Wednesday get to listen to some songs playing on the jukebox. The readers face a choice either to play the songs while reading the chapter and fully immerse themselves into the atmosphere or simply ignore it and continue enjoying the story without any ancillary means. Throughout the story we get an opportunity to ‘hear’ *Walking after Midnight*, *Iko Iko* by the Dixie Cups, the Velvet Underground’s *Who Loves the Sun*, the Beatles’ *Fool on the Hill*, *Help*, and *Octopus’s Garden*, *Walking in a Winter Wonderland*, *What’s New, Pussycat?*, *The Way You Look Tonight*, *Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood*. Bob Dylan and the Indigo Girls are referenced, although none of their songs are named in the text. *Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood* is sung by Shadow, specifically the following lines:

Baby [...] Can you understand me now? [...] Sometimes I feel a little mad. Don’t you know that no one alive can always be an angel [...] I’m just a soul whose intentions are good [...] Oh lord, please don’t let me be misunderstood.

(Gaiman 2017: 593)

This song enables the reader to sympathize with Shadow’s grief after preventing the war and losing both his wife and father. Sometimes it might be too complex to understand the character’s feelings when we have never experienced anything similar to what they did. However, Gaiman masterfully utilizes musical allusions and references to show and not tell the characters’ thoughts and emotions.

An interesting ironic effect is achieved by letting Technical Boy twist the words of a famous Madonna’s song *Material Girl*:

And then he sings, in a voice not made for singing, ‘*You are an immaterial girl living in a material world.*’ There is something rehearsed about his words as if he’s practiced this exchange in front of a mirror. [...] And then he sings, once again, in his tuneless nasal voice, ‘*You are an analog girl, living in a digital world.*’

(Ibid: 404, our emphasis)

At the very end of the book, an attentive reader would notice another musical allusion made to the song *That's All She Wrote* by Ernest Tubb: “‘And that’s all there is,’ he said, displaying it between finger and thumb. ‘That’s all she wrote’” (Ibid: 635). In addition to pop music, some classical pieces are mentioned as well, e.g. *Ravel’s Bolero, a Strauss waltz, the Blue Danube waltz, and the Emperor Waltz*.

Literary allusions and quotes from well-known literary pieces add complexity to a text by referencing other works of literature or cultural elements that are widely recognized and understood by the reader, and they add meaning and depth to characters, revealing their character features, education level, etc. In the first chapter, Low Key and Shadow discuss Herodotus’ *Histories*. The main character quotes Herodotus: “Call no man happy, until he is dead” (Ibid: 590) and this very quote is mentioned in the text a few times more permeating the novel from beginning to end with a sole idea. To achieve a similar effect, Gaiman uses quotation allusion in Mr. Ibis’ notebook: “No man, proclaimed Donne, is an Island...” (Ibid: 346). The choice of allusion is explained by the fact that it was necessary for the development of the main idea in the chapter. Mr Ibis refutes the relevance of John Donne’s idea:

If we were not islands, we would be lost, drowned in each other’s tragedies. We are insulated (a word that means, literally, remember, made into an island) from the tragedy of others, by our island nature, and by the repetitive shape and form of the stories.

(Ibid: 346)

Some other allusions include Shakespeare’s *Julius Cesar* (“As an opening statement it wasn’t *Friends, Romans, countrymen*, but it would do” (Ibid: 582, our emphasis)), E.A. Poe’s poem *The Raven* (“Say ‘*Nevermore*’...” (Ibid: 173, our emphasis)), Charles’ Dickens *Oliver Twist*, and *Bleak House* (“Mad Sweeney just stood there, holding out his gold-filled cap with both hands like *Oliver Twist*.” “...he had sat in his hotel room through the whole long nightless night alternately reading a guidebook and *Bleak House*...” (Ibid: 235, 631, our emphasis), *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (“Darkness; a sensation of falling-as if he were tumbling *down a great hole, like Alice*. He fell for a hundred years into darkness” (Ibid: 176, our emphasis)), *War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells (“...we’ll all be wiped out by the common cold like the Martians in *War of the Worlds*.” (Ibid: 424)), Robert A. Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, and *What My Heart Meant* by Jenny Kerton. Other than that the names of some other writers appear in the narrative, e.g. John Grisham, Robert Ludlum, Jenny Kerton, and Danielle Steel.

## Adaptations

Productive use of adaptation as a form of intertextuality is observed in *American Gods*. Adaptation of an already existing work may be used to accommodate a specific audience. If a myth is being retold in a book, for instance, the author may change certain aspects of the original tale to match the plot, narrative structure, and themes of the fictional story. Neil Gaiman frequently employs this technique. For instance, the myth in which Odin hangs himself from the World Tree to gain immense power is retold in the novel three times:

Nine nights I hung on the bare tree, my side pierced with a spear’s point. I swayed and blew in the cold winds and the hot winds, without food, without water, a sacrifice of myself to myself, and the worlds opened to me.

(Gaiman 2017: 310)

Later in the plot, the same myth is appropriated as a sacrificial ritual, where Shadow played a central role, for Wednesday to ‘resurrect’ and gain more power than before:

He climbed the nine steps. Then, at their urging, he stepped onto a low branch. [...] 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.

(Ibid: 492)

Yet another adaptation was utilized by Neil Gaiman during the scene in the Hall of the Dead. Making Mister Ibis, Jacquel and Bast weigh Shadow’s heart on golden scales the author adjusts the Egyptian myth:

In Egyptian religion, the heart was the key to the afterlife. It was conceived as surviving death in the Netherworld, where it gave evidence for, or against, its possessor. It was thought that the heart was examined by Anubis and the deities during the weighing of the heart ceremony. If the heart weighed more than the feather of Maat, it was immediately consumed by the monster Ammit.

(Carelli 2011: 86)

Furthermore, we have found an adaptation of a religious story in the novel. By the end of the story, the reader learns that Shadow was sacrificed by his father which may be a clear parallel with the fate of Jesus. Moreover, three women help Shadow undress, get onto the tree and then hang him there and mourn on the ground. It is hard not to notice the resemblance to The Tree Marys who see Jesus be crucified:

At first glance, Shadow thought that they were the Zorya, but no, they were three women he did not know. They looked tired and bored as if they had been standing there for a long time. Each of them held a wooden ladder. The biggest also carried a brown sack.

(Gaiman 2017: 490)

In addition, the holiday in honor of the resurrection of Jesus is called Easter, and in the novel Easter is the one to help Shadow come back to life.

Thus, we have discovered 63 intertextual elements that help the author fully immerse the reader into his characters’ feelings and thoughts.

## **Conclusions**

Intertextuality can be defined as the relationships between several texts and how a particular text integrates components of any other text(s). The intertextual studies go back to the late 1960s when such literary critics as J. Kristeva, R. Barthes, and G. Genette, laid the foundations for further studies of intertextuality and its elements. There is no unanimous opinion regarding the forms of intertextuality and the classification of intertextual elements. In our study, we have distinguished the main intertextual elements that appear in fictional literary works, namely allusions, quotations, and adaptation. Following the classifications proposed by the abovementioned scholars, allusions have been divided into several groups, namely mythological and folklore, religious, historical, cultural, literal, and musical.

With advanced technologies and prevailing online communication, there emerge new approaches to interpreting and exploring this concept. Not only are elements of a literary text intertextual, but visual and audio elements as well. With unlimited access to the internet, people inevitably experience the phenomenon of simulacra or hyperreality. Some new types of online communication, e.g. memes, brim with intertextual connections to other texts and media. Besides, technological advances enable the development of digital approaches to intertextual study, such as the Tasserae tool.

In the present study, we attempted to consider and explain intertextual elements in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*. As the study findings suggest, Neil Gaiman employed 189 allusions to describe the national, religious, and ethnic diversity of the USA, its cultural peculiarities and most prominent symbols, historical events and outstanding personalities. 33 literary and musical allusions, 24 quotations, and six adaptations are utilized to engage with the reader, immerse them fully into the story and make them sympathize with the characters. *American Gods* encompasses 252 intertextual elements, out of which 222 (88%) are allusions, 24 (10%) are quotations, and 6 (2%) are adaptations. 42% of allusions are made to mythology and folklore, 6% to religion, 12% to historical events and figures, 25% to culture, 7% to literature, and 8% to music. Moreover, 46% of quotations have a literary source, 33% have a song as a source, and 21% are quotes taken from other sources. The author succeeded in depicting the entirety of American cultural values, the decline in traditional religions and growing consumerism with the help of a plethora of intertextual elements which make a picture of American reality whole.

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*In SKASE Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies [online]. 2023, vol. 5, no. 2 [cit. 2023-12-29]. Available on web page <http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/SJLCS11/04.pdf>. ISSN 2644-5506*