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Modern Myth for a Global World: Neil
Gaiman's *The Sandman* and Mythic Bricolage

**MODERN MYTH FOR A GLOBAL WORLD: NEIL GAIMAN'S
THE SANDMAN AND MYTHIC BRICOLAGE**

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and Mythic Bricolage**

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgements | 1 |
| Table of Contents | 2 |
| Summary | 3 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| 1. Feminist Storytelling: 'Tongue Meats' | 21 |
| 2. Intertextuality: Fan Fiction | 54 |
| 3. Cultural Amalgamation: 'I and the Father Are One' | 86 |
| Conclusion | 116 |
| Notes on 'The Sandman' Citations | 119 |
| Endnotes | 120 |
| Works Cited | 123 |

Summary

Mythic narratives have endured even till the twenty-first century, constantly made relevant to appeal to contemporary audiences. This thesis explores the ways in which the respective areas of feminist storytelling, intertextuality and cultural amalgamation have shaped or complicated Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* as a modern myth. It addresses the role of myth and stories in the contemporary world, and the way this complex body of myths and stories form a kind of epic bricolage for the modern, global world.

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INTRODUCTION

Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* is a graphic novel with a narrative that is beautifully woven together with the threads of classical mythology, folk tales, theology and historical events. My paper will explore the ways in which the respective areas of feminist storytelling, intertextuality, and cultural amalgamation have shaped or complicated *The Sandman* as a modern myth. Why is there a need for a modern myth? What qualifies *The Sandman* as a modern myth? What is lost in the re-creation of this modern, global myth? The introduction below offers a range of perspectives from various authors and scholars of myth. Within the diverse commentary, there is a common thread: myths are produced by the human condition and deeply embedded in the human consciousness. The modern myth then, as *The Sandman* narrative exemplifies, is no longer a myth only for a specific audience, but for a global audience. It challenges conventional structures of power through mythic bricolage and re-creates a mythic narrative made of narratives from various different sources. Feminist storytelling refers to the stories told by women, about women, and for women that challenge traditional androcentric storytelling. The area of

intertextuality is concerned with the issues of authority when privileging 'canon' narratives. Lastly, cultural amalgamation deals with the way *The Sandman* narrative is a mythic bricolage created from different cultural and religious narratives and the implications of attempting to re-create a modern myth that appeals globally.

In Mikal Gilmore's introduction of *The Wake* (the tenth and final collection in *The Sandman* series), he wrote:

With Sandman, Gaiman aimed to use a comic-based mythos to expand on, interact with, and deepen classical legends of mythology and popular history. On one hand, this approach might seem like merely another clever postmodern ruse, taking old Greek and Norse myths, European and Asian and Islamic folk-tales, plus scenarios from Dante, Blake, Milton, and Dore, and mixing them with 20th century comics and horror elements . . . At the same time, it was as if you had discovered a timeless trove of fascinating lost legends and mysteries: missing vellums that revealed how many different people shared so many similar patterns of fable and providence in their disparate histories of storytelling. (10)

Gaiman makes references to and bases his narrative on different myths and stories from all over the world, weaving them together to form one complicated and intricately constructed narrative of mythic proportions. Bricolage, a concept French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss discusses in his book *The Savage Mind*, is used to describe patterns of mythical thought. Lévi-Strauss argues that the 'bricoleur' works transgressively, "the rules of his game are always to make

do with ‘whatever is at hand’ . . . to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of the previous constructions or deconstructions” (17). Unlike the engineer, who is limited by the “availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project” (17), the ‘bricoleur’ puts existing things together in new ways — “putting new wine in old bottles, and in some cases, old wine in new bottles” (*Shaking a Leg*), in Angela Carter’s words. However, Lévi-Strauss’ concept of the engineer is criticised by Jacques Derrida due to the impossibility of being the “absolute origin of his own discourse” (231). “If one calls bricolage the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined,” he asserts, “it must be said that every discourse is bricoleur” (231). Indeed, the argument can be made that every text is bricolage, though Gaiman is one of the few (as with Carter) who consciously makes it a point to draw from vastly different sources in order to remake these narratives into something new. Mythic bricolage, then, in *The Sandman* consists of old myths and stories coming together to re-create a narrative that speaks to contemporary audiences.

In his interview with Robert Elder, Gaiman comments that *The Sandman* “really is *not* a religion . . . it is an inclusive religious structure. Everything is welcome. Nothing is untrue. All is true. In theory, you think the whole structure would collapse under a neatly eroded suspension of disbelief. But in actual fact, it worked fairly well” (78). While myth and religion are often considered separate from the other, *The Sandman* narrative provides an interesting angle to view the complex relationship between myth and religion. The way in which *The Sandman* presents myth and religion reveals the inherent

connections between them, especially in terms of the way the religious narratives can evolve into myth over time. For example, Greek mythology, which is heavily referenced and rewritten in *The Sandman*, comes from the religious beliefs of the ancient Greeks. *The Sandman*'s overarching theme of the power of storytelling to unite humanity transforms the entire narrative into a global myth. C. G. Jung describes his theory of myth, the foundation upon which many theorists like Joseph Campbell have built their analyses, as follows: "Myths are original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings, and anything but allegories of physical processes" (154). Despite having a similar approach to their theory of myth, Jung and Campbell disagree when it comes to the universality of myth. In his introduction of *Jung on Mythology*, Robert Segal explains their differing arguments:

A myth is not merely a myth in its own right. It is a myth for someone. The meaning of a myth is more than its general meaning for all humanity. One must understand the person or the society to understand the myth . . . [For] the Jungian-oriented Joseph Campbell, the meaning of myth is exclusively the universal one. But for Jung himself and for Jungian analysts practicing today, the meaning is the particular one as well as the universal one. (13)

In order to understand the myth, one must understand the context from which the myth evolves: according to Jung, "the context is not only a myth but an individual anamnesis" (189). His argument that myth is specific to the culture of individuals, time and place works for a less connected world, one that we

have left behind after the advent of technology and globalisation. In this contemporary age where we are connected to the rest of the world with the push of a button, ‘individual anamnesis’¹ — or, context — cannot be so easily defined and held distinct from another. Technology has changed the world into an increasingly connected place, and it is only natural that myth should reflect that interconnectedness of the modern world.

For Campbell, myth is panhuman. His stance on the universality of myths differs from Jung, in that he believes in the continuous phenomenon of myths that relate to and affect all humanity. Speaking of the role of artists in creating mythologies, he writes: “Myth must be kept alive. The people who can keep it alive are artists of one kind or another. The function of the artist is the mythologization² of the environment and the world” (*The Power of Myth* 107). He further reiterates that “It is the function of the artist to do this. The artist is the one who communicates myth for today. But he has to be an artist who understands mythology and humanity and isn't simply a sociologist with a program for you” (*The Power of Myth* 122). There is the general expectation that it is the role, and perhaps even responsibility, of artists to keep myth alive and to communicate it to the rest of humanity. Campbell sees a “transcendent ecstasy” (*The Power of Myth* 122) that comes from interpreting the unseen mystery of the world into the creation of art or literature. He proposes that there are four functions of myth: the mystical function, the cosmological dimension, the sociological function, and the pedagogical function. The mystical function of myth reveals the wonder of the universe, and the wonder of our existence in it. Myth also “opens the world to the dimension of mystery, to the realisation of

the mystery that underlies all forms” (*The Power of Myth* 38). The cosmological dimension gives us an image of the universe that is seen through the lens of science, but “showing it in such a way that the mystery again comes through” (*The Power of Myth* 39). The sociological function is the didactic element to myth, validating certain systems of power and instructing people on how to behave according to the social order. Lastly, there is the pedagogical (also known as psychological) function of myth, “of how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances” (*The Power of Myth* 39). Campbell’s functions of myth help to frame the way Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* may be considered a modern myth. In his conversation with Campbell in the latter’s *The Power of Myth*, Bill Moyers argues that:

Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance. We all need to tell our story and to understand our story. We need to understand death and to cope with death, and we all need help in our passages from birth to life then to death. We need for life to signify, to touch the eternal, to understand the mysterious, to find out who we are. (4)

Moyers understands myth as a story, or stories, coming together to form a larger story. Roland Barthes reinforces this concept in *Mythologies*, showing how a myth is not one solid entity, but a diverse range of stories like an open-ended conversation between people of different times and from different places. This concept of myth aptly describes Gaiman’s *The Sandman*, with its emphasis on the importance of stories and storytelling.

In his 2016 collection of nonfiction essays *The View from the Cheap*

Seats, Gaiman writes, “I learned that we have the right, or the obligation to tell the old stories in our own ways, because they are our stories, and they must be told” (196). Adaptation and appropriation of old stories in order to create new ones that make sense of the contemporary world we live in, he suggests, is the responsibility of a storyteller. He compares stories and myth to the fertile ground that is fundamental to humanity:

Myths are compost. They begin as religions, the most deeply held beliefs, or as the stories that accrete to religions as they grow. . . . And then, as the religions fall into disuse, or the stories cease to be seen as the literal truth, they become myths. And the myths compost down to dirt, and become a fertile ground for other stories and tales which blossom like wildflowers. . . . New flowers grow from the compost: bright blossoms, and alive. (55)

These new stories grow and blossom into the foundations on which contemporary culture is built, an amalgamation of the old and the new that takes on a life of its own and evolves into something altogether different.

Gaiman’s choice of working on *The Sandman*’s in the form of a comic (or, as some prefer *The Sandman* to be labelled, a ‘graphic novel’) has been subject of some discussion. The problem with labelling Gaiman’s work a ‘comic’ is that comics are still generally regarded as a children’s medium. In an interview with Tim O’Gline, Gaiman explains, “There are battles that have been long since won in fields such as art and literature. If not won, at least we know whose side we are on, which have not yet been won in comics”. *The Sandman* is far from the likes of children’s comics such as Archie or Teenage Mutant

Ninja Turtles. Still, Gaiman “eschew[s] the more august term of ‘graphic novelist’”, and is also a staunch supporter of the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, an American nonprofit organisation that protects the First Amendment rights of comic creators, publishers and retailers. For Gaiman, the issues with form are not exactly problems to be concerned with: his passion for creating comics stems from his venture into uncharted territory, “untouched ground . . . [where he] got to write in places and do things nobody had ever done before”. He makes no secret of his agenda as an artist and storyteller to always create old stories anew, in as many different ways as possible. *The Sandman*’s comic form, then, is another dimension that Gaiman brings to his re-creation of the old myths and stories.

Like many of his other works, Gaiman’s *The Sandman* is a narrative where myths and stories are so deeply intertwined there is no telling one from the other. What makes a myth not a story, and a story not a myth, is a complicated attribution of ritual and meaning to myths. Frank Kermode, a distinguished critic of English literature, analyses the theory of fiction with works from Plato to Shakespeare. In his book *The Sense of an Ending*, he analyses the differences between myths and fictions:

Fictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive. . . . Myth operates within the diagrams of ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were; it is a sequence of radically unchangeable gestures. Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the need for sense-making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change.

Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent. Myths make sense in terms of a lost order of time, *illud tempus* as Eliade calls it; fictions, if successful, make sense of the here and now, *hoc tempus*. It may be that treating literary fictions as myths sounds good just now, but as Marianne Moore so rightly said of poems, ‘these things are important not because a / high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are / useful’. (39)

The notion that fictions are supposed to be useful because they make sense of the contemporary simultaneously speaks to and disagrees with Gaiman’s oeuvre. Drawing upon myths to re-create his fiction, Gaiman uses myths as a foundation to create fiction that is not only useful in making sense of the modern world we live in, but also to speak about the stories of our past and how we are still inextricably linked to it. As Marina Warner suggests, “Evidence of conditions from past social and economic arrangements co-exist in the tale with the narrator’s innovations” (xix). Rewritings are capable of speaking to both the past and the present — for example, Angela Carter’s retelling of *Beauty and the Beast* is modernised: Beauty’s father loses her to the Beast at a game of cards rather than as a punishment for the theft of a rose³. Situating these tales in a contemporary context is what Warner calls “a modern variation on an ancient memory” (xix), making old stories new for a modern audience whilst keeping them true to the spirit of the original story. Gaiman’s work calls attention to “our links to each other and the mythic past while challenging us to make new connections with ideas and to defy societal expectations” (L. Porter 19). His fiction is one that is “perennially renewed and recontextualized” (Fisher 21),

“perennially fresh because of the ongoing reinterpretation in the light of our evolving culture, and yet it stands as a perpetual reminder of where we came from” (Fisher 21). It is this remembering and re-creation of myth in fiction that forms mythic literature. Fairy tales and mythic stories are also “in itself a genre of protest; at the level of content it could describe wrongs and imagine vindications and freedom” (Warner 163). Retelling the old stories anew gives the storyteller the power to address or subvert current social hierarchy, and to offer alternative perspectives.

Myth and fiction cannot be excised from the other because, according to Laurence Coupe’s critical guide on myths, “‘mythology’, the body of inherited myths in any culture, is an important element of literature, and that literature is a means of extending mythology. That is, literary works may be regarded as ‘mythopoeic’, tending to create or re-create certain narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of the world” (4). Fiction, or literature, as an extension of myth is very much entrenched in “‘mythography’, or the interpretation of myth, given that the mythic is an important dimension of cultural and literary experience” (Coupe 4). Thus the rewriting of myth in literature, and with it, remembering and recreating the old stories, is one of the ways myth is able to live on. As Gerald Prince suggests, in his foreword of *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, “Any text is hypertext, grafting itself onto a hypotext, an earlier text that it imitates or transforms; any writing is rewriting; and literature is always in the second degree” (iv). The implication is that there is nothing ‘pure’ in stories, any text is borrowed from another text, any transmission has to be studied in the context of the other sources it came

from. It is not dissimilar to translation. With translation, there is always meaning lost, but there is also meaning gained: elements the translator chooses not to include and elements incorporated in order to make a statement. In Jack Zipes' introduction to Angela Carter's translation of *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, he writes:

Translating is not a mechanical art. Every time a work is translated it is re-created in many different ways, not only to communicate the 'original' meaning of an author's work, but also to communicate the translator's personal view of what an author may have meant and what she thinks will make that particular author's work most accessible and meaningful in a different period of time and in another culture. (xxv)

While Gaiman is not literally translating a text from one language to another, he is, in a sense, translating, and transforming old stories into new ones. He re-creates new narratives from old narratives, interrogating and undermining conventional structures of power to produce a modern myth that attempts to respectfully deal with essential differences in terms of gender, stories and cultures.

For the most part, *The Sandman* is the story of Dream, who is also known by a variety of other names such as Sandman, Morpheus, The Dream King, and Oneiros. He is the anthropomorphic personification of dreams, and is one of the seven Endless. The Endless — Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, twins Desire and Despair, and Delirium (who used to be Delight) — have existed since the beginning of time. They are not born and will not die like gods do. They exist as functions, as “manifestations of consciousness” (Rauch 18). It

is fascinating that Gaiman has chosen the personification of dreams, The Dream King, to be the protagonist of a narrative so entrenched in mythic lore. For Jung, the analogue to myth is dream: “Like dreams, myths arise from the unconscious, serve to restore connection to the unconscious, and must be interpreted symbolically” (Segal 21). While there are several differences between dreams and myth that Jung contends with, there is no doubt that there is a connection between dreams and myths. As Campbell interprets Sigmund Freud’s analysis of myth and dreams in his speech titled “The Impact of Science on Myth”, “Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths” (*Myths to Live By* 14). That *The Dream King* is the vehicle through which *The Sandman* narrative communicates the value and relevance of myths to modern audiences speaks of the way dreams and myths are perennially embedded in the human consciousness.

The narrative begins with Dream, having escaped from a seventy-two year imprisonment: after being mistaken for his sister Death, he is captured in her stead by Roderick Burgess, who had been attempting to bind Death in order to attain immortality. Dream returns home to The Dreaming and has to resume command of his kingdom after it has fallen into disrepair in his absence. Unlike traditional myths where the trajectory of the narrative has the hero starting off as a man and becoming a godlike figure, Dream begins seemingly otherworldly, embarks on a journey that teaches him to develop a human heart, and ultimately dies (and is eventually reborn). Gaiman’s *The Sandman* also brings to mind E. T. A. Hoffmann’s 1816 short story of the same title “The Sandman”. Originally written in German and translated into English, Hoffmann’s short story revolves

around the protagonist's fear of losing his eyes to the Sandman. Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny" reads the protagonist's fear of the Sandman stealing his eyes as castration anxiety, arguing that "A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated" (230). These recurring ideas of losing one's eyes and castration anxiety correspond to Dream's imprisonment at the beginning of *The Sandman* narrative; his imprisonment by Burgess, a human magician, can be read as a symbolic castration that emasculates him and leaves him powerless. After this symbolic castration, Dream needs to reconstruct his way of seeing, as well as his sense of self, and he does so through mythic bricolage. His journey is crafted from stories from different authors and different origins: narratives from his life before his imprisonment; world stories he played a role in shaping.

Along Dream's journey, he meets various mythological and historical characters, begins to question some of his previous decisions and suffers the consequences of those decisions. One of such turning points is in the volume *Dream Country*, when one of Dream's former lovers, as well as the mother of his child, Calliope, calls to him for help. Having been imprisoned and raped, she has no choice but to ask him for help despite their past animosity towards each other. His rescue comes to her as a surprise, and Calliope actually tells him, "You have changed, Oneiros. In the old days, you would have left me to rot forever, without turning a hair" (1.478, #17). It is implied that Dream's suffering during his seventy-two year imprisonment has changed him for the better. Another similar situation in which Gaiman depicts Dream's growth into

a more relational figure is during *A Season of Mists*, when he realises the cruelty of his past decision to sentence his former lover, Nada, to hell as a punishment for her rejection of him. His determination to rescue her from hell only comes after his favourite sister, Death, reprimands him for his unjust punishment. When he succeeds in rescuing her from hell, his poor attempts to apologise anger Nada further and she slaps him. He splutters furiously, “You struck me. No one may strike me; and here—here at the heart of the Dreaming... I should... I... I ought to...” (1.193, #28). Despite his fury, he does not retaliate and realises the enormity of his mistakes, finally sincerely apologising to her. Given that in an earlier scene, Dream was enraged when someone touched his cloak, Nada slapping him would have certainly provoked a more violent reaction had he not matured as a character. *The Sandman* narrative begins with Dream as a callous, abstract personification of a function, and charts his growth into a more human character. The last volume, titled *The Wake*, illustrates how Dream’s story has come full circle when he takes responsibility for his past misdeeds, and allows the avenging Furies to kill him in order to take justice. He dies, and then, is reborn through Lyta Hall’s son Daniel.⁴ Daniel is transformed into Dream: what was mortal of Daniel was burned away, with what was immortal of Daniel transfigured into Dream. When Lyta asks if losing her son is her punishment for leading the Furies to the old Dream, the new Dream forgives her for her part in his death — in a stark contrast to his wrathful predecessor. Kissing her on her forehead, he tells her that “[vengeance] is a road that has no ending” (4.416, #72) and allows her to leave in peace.

The 76 issues of *The Sandman* chart his development from a cold and callous godlike being, to someone almost human — someone who feels, cares and loves. Gaiman shows how he matures from an abstract, incomprehensible being into someone literally part-human. His journey, that culminates in his being reborn as this relational being, reveals the way he interacts with humanity and, on occasion, visually takes on characteristics of the characters he meets. By appropriating aspects of various cultures, Dream becomes this bricolage of human stories and cultures. Gaiman destabilises Dream's identity and function as an anthropomorphic personification of dreams, and in doing so, blurs the line between abstraction and humanity. In his book *Neil Gaiman's The Sandman and Joseph Campbell: In Search of the Modern Myth*, Stephen Rauch writes, "If we are to accept the idea that we live in a desacralized world, and the religious institutions that once provided meaning are no longer working, then perhaps love is the way out. . . . This sense of the importance of love and closeness fits into both the sociological and psychological functions of myth" (58). In *The Sandman*, Gaiman constantly emphasises the importance of humanity and love, and the critical role of myth in articulating this to the world. As Rauch sees it, "Under the prodigious craft and showmanship of manipulating so many characters and myths lies a very human heart" (19). *The Sandman* is, ultimately, a story about what it means to be human and how to live a human lifetime.

After he is weakened and symbolically castrated by his imprisonment, Dream's journey throughout *The Sandman* narrative is, hence, also a re-writing of himself and of his own narrative. This paper reads Dream's journey as a

form of self-constitution through feminist storytelling, intertextuality and cultural amalgamation. The women-centred stories are important to his narrative because Gaiman uses them to show Dream's growth from a narcissist into a character that is empathetic and more human. For example, Dream has to learn to read Nada without speaking for her or imposing his interpretation on her. Instead of merely existing as an object of his affections, Dream learns to see her as an autonomous subject capable of making her own decisions. Gaiman uses Dream's behaviour, and subsequent growth, to illustrate for readers what Dream has to learn — and in doing so, subtly comments on issues of gender politics. Dream also crafts his own narrative with stories from other literary and religious texts. For instance, Gaiman writes Dream as Shakespeare's patron, and depicts him interacting with Lucifer. The practice of intertextuality therefore makes him more accepting of another's story. As with his treatment of Nada, he learns to accept the integrity and authority of someone else's story, in a way that does not diminish his own. This corresponds with Ernst Jentsch's reading of "The Sandman": Hoffmann's short story explores the anxiety of losing one's eyes, with Freud's analysis bringing up Jentsch's point of "intellectual uncertainty" (229). Freud argues that it is not intellectual uncertainty that losing one's eyes symbolises, but castration anxiety. Dream's predicament, however, not only resembles Freud's concept of castration anxiety but also resembles an intellectual uncertainty that he has to learn to overcome through his intertextual self-crafting of his narrative. Along with Dream's adventures set in places like China and Baghdad, Gaiman's use of cultural amalgamation allows Dream to regain his eyes, so to speak, by expanding his

way of seeing. His journey makes him learn to develop sense of self that reads other genders, stories and cultures without silencing them by speaking for them, or imposing his interpretations on them. Where he was once indifferent to such differences between genders, stories and cultures, Dream now becomes this encompassing figure of humanity that Gaiman uses to model for his readers what they should learn as well.

Gaiman's narrative subverts dominant structures, and this mechanism works towards building a heterogeneous and inclusive mythology that does not privilege one version of a story over another. Instead, it encourages multiplicity from difference and showcases the way all these stories come together to form a diverse expanse of myth that celebrates humanity as a whole. A chapter each will be dedicated to the aforementioned areas of feminist storytelling, intertextuality and cultural amalgamation. First I will explore how feminist storytelling subverts typical androcentric traditional myths, thereby shaping *The Sandman* as a modern myth. Some feminist elements in *The Sandman* include women-centred folktales told only to women and by women, as well as stories reflecting women's lived realities and experience. Secondly, *The Sandman* is a narrative that is replete with references from popular culture to historical documents to fiction, and this intertextuality is what makes it a myth for modern readers. It dismantles the binaries between the grand narratives and smaller stories, authorised 'official' stories and (the often misunderstood) fan fiction. I will investigate how Gaiman intervenes, rewrites and makes allusions to various other texts like Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as well as minor elements from

Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Jewish Midrash. Along with the material from Shakespeare and Milton, Gaiman also intervenes and adds his own interpretation, creating a space for conversation between the texts and transforming them into a mythic bricolage for modern audiences. Lastly, Gaiman's fusion of dominant and minority culture, and reclamation of cultural appropriation into a form of cultural amalgamation in the narrative is vital to establishing *The Sandman* as a modern, global myth. I would like to examine the way that, while the undermining of boundaries between cultures *may* be seen as an appropriation of minority culture and religions that diminishes their authority, at the same time, Gaiman establishes a common ground (one that does not diminish their differences) between different religions and cultures so as to allow dialogue to begin. While his intentions were to be inclusive, there is the problem of essentialising the minority cultures that he attempts to represent. Despite Gaiman putting old narratives together in a way his audiences have not seen before, there are limits in using the oldest texts to re-create a modern myth for the global world.

1. FEMINIST STORYTELLING: 'TONGUE MEATS'

One of the most compelling stories in *Angela Carter's Book of Fairy Tales* tells of a Sultana growing thinner and wasting away while a poor man's wife thrives in the village. When the Sultan demands to know the secret behind the Sultana's happiness, the poor man replies, "Very simple. I feed her meat of the tongue" (223). At once, the Sultan sends for the tongues of all the animals slaughtered in town, to be prepared for the Sultana. Despite her rich diet, she

grows weaker still, so the Sultan proposes an exchange: the poor man's wife will live in the palace while the Sultana will stay in the village with the poor man. The poor man's wife immediately deteriorates in the palace while the Sultana begins to thrive, becoming healthier and happier. She refuses the Sultan's summons to return to the palace, so he visits her in the village to find her a changed woman. For instead of the expensive food at the palace, the poor man feeds her with funny anecdotes and stories about his day. It is then the Sultan understands the true meaning of 'meat of the tongue'.

These 'tongue meats' that not only sustain the women but allow for them to thrive are fairy tales, songs, stories — immaterial nourishment that allow them to live healthily and happily. This Swahilian tale depicts, quite literally, the way storytelling and stories sustain us, royalty and villagers alike. No doubt this tale demonstrates the indispensable nourishment of stories, but what of the implications of this kind of storytelling? Stories are told to women so that they may thrive, the tale suggests, but what about stories told by women, stories told about women and stories for women? I will begin with discussing in more detail the importance and power of storytelling, its implications especially with regards to myth. This chapter will then hone in more specifically on aspects of Gaiman's feminist storytelling, and will be loosely divided into three main sections: firstly, the feminist oral traditions that *The Sandman* explores as a challenge to the myth; secondly, Gaiman's issues with storytelling and authorship, and his interrogation of dominant androcentric narratives hinged on the exploitation of other smaller narratives; lastly, stories about women negotiating issues like gender identity and mythic archetypes, and the

implications of such issues.

In Warner's examination of fairy tales and the tellers of fairy tales, she writes:

Storytelling has proved an arena of resistance to tyranny, as well as a site of reconciliation and reversal for ostracized and condemned figures. . . . Storytellers can also break through the limits of permitted thought to challenge conventions . . . offer a way of putting questions, of testing the structure as well as guaranteeing its safety, thinking up alternatives as well as living daily reality in an examined way. (411)

Gaiman's *The Sandman* is as much a destabilising force that challenges reality and subverts conventions as much as it reconciles different sources of myths, history and literature. Warner explains the significance of examining one's reality with Irish poet Eavan Boland's quote: "Only a subversive grasp on the private reality, it seemed to me, could guarantee the proper tension with the public one" (Warner 411). She suggests that resistance to the conventions of the status quo starts from one's private reality, thereby making storytelling imperative in influencing audiences to start questioning, and not to take conventions and social structures at face-value. "Different listeners, different readers will pull the storyteller," Warner writes, "Every work is 'a link in the chain of speech communion', and is made by source, narrator, receiver acting in conjunction. The [narrative] becomes the arena where beliefs struggle for ascendancy" (Warner 412). In a narrative where nothing is 'pure', storytelling is influenced by the sources, the adaptation of sources, the narrator and the audience. Everything has the potential to be true; what makes it true is our faith

and belief in it. Being able to potentially believe in anything implies that we have to create our own meaning in this increasingly secularised world. Gaiman's conviction that these values should stem from a love of the world and of life, of putting humanity at the forefront, is reflected in *The Sandman*.

Gaiman's storytelling transcends the limitations placed on the craft of storytelling, in various ways and dimensions. Dream, the narrative's protagonist, is often portrayed as weaving together stories of mortals and myths, and can be considered as a storyteller in his own right. The manner in which Dream is presented is widely considered to be an amalgamation of Gaiman, Robert Smith and Peter Murphy. Gaiman bases Dream's appearance on the aforementioned goth musicians: the dark unkempt hair, pale skin and skinny physique. While he claims that Dream was not modelled after him consciously, the physical similarities between Gaiman the author and Dream as the storyteller underscores the connection between the creator of *The Sandman* and the creator of dreams. As Ewan Wilson mentions in his article, "His status as the nigh-omnipotent storyteller is easily read as a reflection of the author and his role in the telling of Sandman's tales". Dream is not the only storyteller in *The Sandman*, Gaiman portrays a variety of storytellers from a fictional representation of Shakespeare to Destiny (Dream's older brother). He is depicted as a monk from the Middle Ages, carrying an old, leather-bound book chained to his wrists. This book contains the destinies of every living creature, mortals and immortals alike. The comparison of life events to stories is made more explicit at the end of *A Season of Mists*, when the closing scene reveals that Destiny's book narrates the events that just occurred in the volume.

“Happily ever after, in hell” (2.210, #28) the page reads, simultaneously referencing and mocking the ubiquitous fairytale ending. Gaiman ends the volume with a quote taken from a fictional book found in Dream’s Library of Dreams:

October knew, of course, that the action of turning a page, of ending a chapter or of shutting a book, did not end a tale. Having admitted that, he would also avow that happy endings were never difficult to find: ‘It is simply a matter’, he explained to April, ‘of finding a sunny place in a garden, where the light is golden and the grass is soft; somewhere to rest, to stop reading and be content’. (2.210, #28)

His storytelling is one that is always self-aware of its construction, never shying away from acknowledging that they are merely stories. It does not detract from their significance, however, as one of the major themes throughout *The Sandman* series is storytelling and stories: their importance, power and authority that they can wield. Gaiman’s depiction of the character Destiny (the anthropomorphic personification of destiny), as well as destiny (the abstract function), as being made up of stories ties into the overarching theme of the series. Not only is this connection a comment on free will or lack thereof, it is also Gaiman’s way of suggesting that stories form the basis of life. At its most basic, the world we live in is made up of stories: the power that these stories have in shaping our world and in cultural production is what Gaiman aims to convey in his works. He situates himself in the traditions of storytelling, negotiating between canon and innovation in order to challenge canonical authority from the perspective of gender and genre, medium and form. In *The*

Sandman, he follows in the fairy tale tradition by challenging conventions of daily reality, and further subverts ‘official’ storytelling by presenting the narrative in the form of a graphic novel. While the aforementioned major storytellers are distinctly not women, there are several notable occasions in *The Sandman* narrative where the stories told by women and the stories about women are presented in a feminist perspective that opposes and stands apart from traditional androcentric myth and stories.

1.1 *Oral Traditions*

The Doll's House, collecting issues #9-16, is a reference to Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play *A Doll's House*. Eliciting much controversy at that time, *A Doll's House* criticised the conventions of marriage in the nineteenth century and serves as an intertext to Gaiman's *The Doll's House* narrative, exploring the domestic space of the house and relationships of the people living in them. The ninth issue acts as a prologue introducing the theme of relationships — romantic or otherwise — as well as the issues of social expectations and the way they confine human and superhuman characters.

The volume of *The Doll's House* begins with issue #9 and starts off with an African folk tale that has been passed down for generations by the men in the tribe. An old man and his grandson are in the desert to complete his coming of age ritual. The grandfather tells his grandson the story that was once told to him by his uncle. The story begins with these tribesmen as the direct descendants of a glass city ruled by the queen Nada. She was never able to find a husband, but took a liking to Dream and hunted him down to his castle in the Dreaming to declare her feelings for him. Her love was reciprocated, but when

she realised he was Kai'ckul, the Dream Lord, she rejected him because it was forbidden for a mortal to love one of the Endless. He relentlessly pursued her and they spent a night together. Upon waking, Nada found her city destroyed by a fireball from the sun and killed herself. Dream then followed her into death and gave her an ultimatum: to be his bride or to suffer in hell forever. The grandfather ends the story here, and his grandson is perplexed at the lack of a real ending to the story. When pressed for an answer, the grandfather tells him that Nada turned Dream down.

Before and after the end of the grandfather's tale, the narrator's caption repeats that there is a different version of this tale, and it is one that is shared among the women, "in their private language that the men-children are not taught, and that the old men are too wise to learn. . . . that is a women's tale, and it is never told to men" (1.264, #9). Gaiman implies that there are different versions of the same tale being told to men and women; there is always a different perspective that is no less true, or even, truer and more accurate than the public myth. He confirms the implication that there is more to the tale in issue #4, where he depicts Dream encountering Nada in hell ten thousand years later, in modern times. She begs to be released from her eternal torment, but he only replies, "It has been ten thousand years, Nada. Yes, I still love you. But I have not yet forgiven you" (1.117, #4). Dream's cruelty towards his former lover shows how entirely inhuman he is, a stark contrast to his character by the end of the narrative. Further into *The Sandman* narrative, Dream grows into a more human and empathetic character, and finally rescues Nada from hell in *A Season of Mists*. He apologises and once again offers her a place with him, only

for Nada to make a counteroffer, asking him to give up his kingdom to go with her. Dream declines, citing his responsibilities to the Dreaming that he cannot abandon. This time, they part amicably, with Dream walking with her into her new life as a reincarnated baby boy.

Spanning over several volumes, Nada's story consists of various versions of the tale narrated to the audience from different perspectives. Gaiman uses this oral storytelling tradition to comment on the way such stories influence, as well as are influenced, by society. Walter Benjamin's rumination on the figure of the storyteller argues that the rise of the novel led to the decline of storytelling:

The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times. . . . What can be handed on orally, the wealth of the epic, is a different kind from what constitutes the stock in trade of the novel. What differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature — the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella — is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience — his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. (87)

His interpretation of storytelling is more literal and organic, insisting on a conception of storytelling that is verbally transmitted and relies more on life experiences for the storyteller's craft. Gaiman's *The Sandman*, however, demolishes all these categories — his storytelling incorporates different forms

of stories from African oral traditions to Grimm's fairy tales, all of which are reflections of the different experiences and culture from different parts of the world. *The Sandman's* 'graphic novel' form itself is, to a large extent, subversive because it cannot be considered prose literature. Gaiman's storytelling not only relies on prose to get his message across, but also incorporates visual storytelling to emphasise the different cultures and settings in his narrative. In his introduction to *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*, Zipes attempts to briefly trace the history of storytelling in all its forms — both oral and literary tales. He contends that there were many kinds of storytelling that existed in antiquity before the oral tradition became a genre on its own: "We cannot say with historical precision when the literary fairy tale evolved, but we can trace motifs and elements of the literary fairy tale to numerous types of storytelling and stories of antiquity that contributed to the formation of a particular branch of telling and writing tales" (xi). Although he is speaking specifically of the history of literary fairy tales, the evolution of storytelling follows a similar trajectory. While it may be true that traditional storytelling (Benjamin's conception of storytelling as verbal recounts of lived experiences and wisdom) is in decline in the modern world, there are other forms of storytelling that have evolved and could serve the same functions as Benjamin's storytelling used to. The nature of stories is, after all, "promiscuous, and omnivorous and anarchically heterogenous, absorbing high and low elements, tragic and comic tones . . . Motifs and plotlines are nomadic, travelling the world and millennia, turning up on parchment in medieval Persia, in an oral form in the Pyrenees, in a ballad sung in the Highlands, in a fairy story in the

Caribbean” (Warner xvii). The genre of stories and storytelling is only as predictable as it is changeable, and attempting to define it within such restrictive boundaries limits our understanding of its mutable nature and the way it only evolves in response to society’s sociocultural conditions. Given the power of stories, their didactic functions and the way they help us to see the world in new ways, Gaiman shows that Benjamin’s concept of storytelling can be adapted for the modern audience.

What the women’s tale consists of is never explicitly revealed to the audience, but there always is the implication of there being more to the story, more that perhaps should even be privileged over the public myth. Considering that the public myth is part of the ritual that signifies the maturing of boys into manhood, it seems strange that Gaiman would exclude Dream’s own mistakes during the course of his own maturation: his cruelty and temper in his younger days that has him condemning his lover to hell for rejecting him. It is only in these secret women’s versions of the tale that speak of the imprisonment and objectification of women. The didactic public version, which is supposed to guide young men into adulthood simply erases Dream’s treatment and condemnation of Nada. As Gaiman wrote in the script for issue #14, the stories are “about women, and men’s attitude to women; about the houses and walls that people build around themselves and each other, for protection, or for imprisonment, or both; and about the tearing down of those walls” (Bender 41). The implication is that Gaiman excludes Dream’s mistakes from the ‘official’ version of events in order to comment on the public myths we tell ourselves and our children. These public myths, the stories around which we build our lives,

are fundamental to how we learn to view ourselves and other people around us. A complete erasure of women's experiences from the public myths is not only limiting but also damaging in the kind of gender asymmetries they perpetuate. Having a secret women's version of the public myth can be exclusive: the feminist storytelling in *The Sandman*, whispered among the women in their private language, challenges the authority of the androcentric public tale that has been passed down from generation to generation. Gaiman does not portray the women's version of the tale as one that is subordinate to, or even based on, the foundations of the public myth. Instead, it is a version that elucidates greater horrifying truths that might even be beyond wise old men. Gaiman's feminist storytelling is portrayed to have the power of holding onto meaning and the agency of speaking out should people choose to do so. As Jane Caputi suggests, "the contemporary feminist movement is the quest to reclaim renaming/symbolizing power" (425), and this women's folktale showcases their authority to name and symbolise meanings. They are, in Alicia Ostriker's words, no longer the "thieves of language" (69), but owners of it in their own right. These versions of the tale work in tandem to form a larger and more complex body of myths and stories that humanity structures their lives around.

Diane Purkiss, however, argues that rewriting or retelling feminist stories on the foundations of androcentric stories cannot be separated from the gender asymmetries of traditional myths, asserting that "attempts to produce positive role models and tell feminist stories will repeatedly founder if we assume that stories can be excised from text, culture and institution, that their meanings are not circumscribed by their histories" (442). There may be a limit

to re-creating old stories in ways that subvert conventional structures of power because Gaiman is still using old narrative structures that are meant to stay the same. This African folk tale that is passed down for generations is, essentially, a story about the African queen Nada. Aside from the private women's story that is passed down in secret, Nada's story is only publicly passed down by the men in the tribe. Echoing the way the women's tale seems to be not only considered private, but to a certain extent, silenced, her name Nada means 'nothing' in Spanish. It is her story, and yet, the public myth about her erases almost all of her experiences, making the meaning of her name a very apt choice indeed. The narrative's depiction of her is often through another character's perspective of her. The audience is first introduced to her (then unknown and nameless) through Dream's eyes when he travels to hell in issue #4 and she begs to be rescued; later on, her story is told by the old man to his grandson in a coming-of-age ritual. The last scene when she rejects Dream for the final time is the only occasion she speaks directly for herself. Nada's story is mostly told to the audience second-hand, told for her by someone else. The paradox of using old structures to tell new tales is problematic because, eventually, Gaiman seems to run up against the constraints of using the old texts. Warner makes a thought-provoking comment in her analysis of the tellers of fairy tales: "There is a distinction between a woman telling a story, and telling a story as a woman, though both run up against the difference their femaleness makes" (188). As much as this is meant to be Nada's story, it cannot seem to escape the issues of gender asymmetries in traditional storytelling.

1.2 *Storytelling/Authorship*

“Calliope”, issue #17 in *Dream Country*, is Gaiman’s blunt and brutal exploration of dominant forms of storytelling in relation to stories by women and centred around women. This small storyline centers around Calliope, one of the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne in Greek mythology. The nine daughters are commonly known as the Muses, goddesses who preside over literature, the arts and sciences, offering inspiration in those creative realms. Calliope was assigned the realms of eloquence and epic or heroic poetry by later poets, and is sometimes believed to have been Homer’s muse for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* — a rumour that Gaiman briefly mentions in his narrative. It begins with Richard Madoc struggling with writer’s block as he attempts to start writing his second novel almost nine months past the deadline. Not only is he under intense pressure to produce a successful second novel to live up to his bestselling debut novel, his publishers are also threatening to sue him for a breach of contract. In desperation, he gets hold of a bezoar made of human hair that is said to have healing powers. Madoc gives this to another writer, an old man by the name of Erasmus Fry, who give him Calliope in return. Fry tells the story of how he came to possess Calliope: she was bathing in a stream on Mount Helicon when he caught and bound her with magical rituals. She has been in his possession for sixty years, and during that time, Fry has achieved all the fame and glory he desired with his successful novels, poems and plays. When told that she belongs to Madoc now, Calliope is devastated, having believed Fry’s promise of freeing her before he died. Madoc takes her back to his home, and the first thing he does is to rape her, dehumanising her despite

her crying in obvious pain. It is then revealed, rather horrifically, that Fry and soon, Madoc, achieve their inspiration and literary acclaim through the literal raping of the muse. In her despair, Calliope calls on the three original Muses, but they are unable to help her. Not even Dream, the father of her son, would be able to free her, as he is imprisoned as well. A few years pass, and through a visual montage of book launches, television interviews and public speeches, the narrative shows Madoc growing increasingly successful. Eventually, Dream is able to respond to Calliope's calls for help, and Madoc has a nightmare of Dream demanding for her release. The confrontation ends with Dream flooding him with dreams, ideas, and stories, so much so he goes insane with the excess of inspiration and gives in, setting Calliope free. Upon her release, she requests that Dream releases Madoc and he acquiesces. Madoc is left with nothing, no ideas at all and seemingly an empty husk of himself.

In this short storyline, Gaiman delves into the issues and pitfalls of authorship, exploring the way the dominant androcentric narrative is premised on objectifying and othering women, as well as women's experiences. Although it may seem like he does not stray from dominant narratives and structures, Gaiman is, in fact, subjecting canonical stories and storytelling to scrutiny. Calliope represents feminist storytelling and the expression of women's experiences: her rape, made literal in the narrative, is Gaiman's way of alluding to the conceptual and intellectual rape of marginalised storytelling. As Simone de Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex*, "He attains himself only through the reality that he is not" (159). In order to establish the legitimacy and authority for androcentric narratives, storytelling by women and stories centred

around women are regulated and perhaps even revised to perpetuate patriarchal ideals. The figure of the woman “is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her . . . He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other” (Beauvoir 6). This is reflected in “Calliope” when Madoc attempts to justify raping her by telling himself that “she’s not even human” (1.463, #17), placing them in a subject-object relationship in binary opposition: he is the subject and the center of being, and the woman is defined not in herself but in relation to him. Madoc constantly asserts his authority over Calliope by objectifying her as a possession that belongs to him. He reminds her, “You’re my possession . . . You’re my *personal* muse” (1.466, #17). She is objectified, dehumanised and confined to patriarchal ideals — all of which Gaiman symbolically depicts in “Calliope”.

Calliope is not just an object in Madoc’s possession, she is a sex object defined by her body. When Madoc confronts her about the nightmares of Dream, Calliope retorts, “I am more than a receptacle for your seed, or an inspiration for your tales” (1.473, #17). While Madoc is defined so clearly by his writings and his mind, Calliope is relegated to her body, yet another binary that he confines her to. His hierarchal authority over her and the way she is defined by her body is illustrated through rape and her perpetual nudity. Hélène Cixous’ influential “The Laugh of the Medusa” criticises the androcentric nature of storytelling: “Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory

phallogocentrism” (350). This phallogocentrism, as Cixous calls it, keeps women from telling their own stories, and by extension, their experiences. She explains, “By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display (Cixous 350). Women-centred storytelling is a way of reclaiming the body from the possession of an androcentric history of writing and storytelling — though it has to be noted that Gaiman’s feminist storytelling is not interchangeable with women reclaiming their bodies through their own writing.

Cixous’ comments on the woman’s body being turned into an object on display highlights the way the body is her and not her simultaneously; she has no autonomy over her body and is other to herself. Calliope’s naked body is, indeed, always on display, her lack of autonomy making her a stranger to herself. The suggestion that “woman must write her self . . . woman must put herself into the text — as into the world and into history” (Cixous 347) indicates that Calliope’s freedom from Madoc and his exploitative, phallogocentric storytelling should not be the only goal. She should exceed her passive function as a mere Muse who inspires creativity, and actively contribute to discourse. As Angela Carter argues:

If women allow themselves to be consoled for their culturally determined lack of access to the modes of intellectual debate by the invocation of hypothetical great goddesses, they are simply flattering themselves into submission (a technique often used on them by men). All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are

consolatory nonsense; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway. (*The Sadeian Woman* 5)

Carter's agenda as a storyteller has been in the demythologising of women, and the stereotypes that society expects of women — in her essay “Notes from the Front Line”, she declares, “I am in the demythologising business” (*Shaking a Leg*). Even ‘nice’ myths, like those of the healing mother, are dangerous because they are still in danger of objectifying women. While much of her oeuvre demythologises such myths, Gaiman likewise deconstructs, but also re-mythologises myths through his rendering of female characters. Calliope in Greek mythology is meant to offer inspiration to poets; she is the passive object to their androcentric traditions of storytelling, a dynamic which Gaiman undermines by highlighting the element of exploitation, punishing the perpetrator and showing the need for feminist storytelling — or rather, a non-exploitative kind of storytelling that puts humanity at its forefront. In Mary Borsellino's argument, “Gaiman's books [do not] reinforce gender stereotypes. . . . Some of his characters are male, and some are female, but they're all people” (52). She suggests that Gaiman's narrative places humanity at the forefront by respecting essential differences, prioritising it over gender politics through the narrative's subversion of gender stereotypes and the expectations that come with such labels. Calliope is also a character one would categorise under the ‘Manic Pixie Dream Girl’ trope that pervades media. According to the Youtube video “Tropes vs. Women: #1 The Manic Pixie Dream Girl” by Feminist Frequency, the ‘Manic Pixie Dream Girl’ is often a young and cheerful (and usually white) woman whose sole purpose in the

narrative is to teach the brooding hero how to be optimistic and enjoy life. The narrative is focused on his self discovery, with nothing about the ‘Manic Pixie Dream Girl’ — she exists only to be his muse and inspiration, much like the figure of Calliope in *The Sandman*.

“Calliope” is steeped in irony, most notably when one of Madoc’s fans says, “I loved your characterization of Aileen. There aren’t enough strong women in fiction”, and he proclaims, “I do tend to regard myself as a feminist writer” (1.467, #17). Madoc’s proclamation should not be as shocking as it is, for readers have been warned by Erasmus Fry earlier in the narrative: “Writers are liars . . . Surely you have realized that by now?” (1.462, #17). Fry’s unrepentant response to Calliope’s horror at his lies is Gaiman’s way of reminding readers that stories are made out of lies. This is one of the instances throughout *The Sandman* narrative where Gaiman self-reflexively comments on the construction of stories, that they are narratives made up — lies, in a sense — to suit the author’s purposes. In a lecture on the future of libraries and reading in 2013, Gaiman argues that “fiction is the lie that tells the truth” (*The View from the Cheap Seats* 18). Much of his speeches, lectures and writing constantly circle back to his opinion that it is the storyteller’s responsibility to tell stories that we can structure our lives around, stories that can change our preconceived notions of the world for the better. In Gaiman’s words, we have “an obligation to make things beautiful, to not leave the world uglier than we found it” (*The View from the Cheap Seats* 19). The issue of morality with regards to authorship and storytelling plays out in Gaiman’s depiction of Madoc, who is a celebrated ‘feminist’ writer but also a morally reprehensible

character with no qualms about regularly raping Calliope for literary acclaim, and is subjected to ironic punishment for his transgressions. Gaiman's criticism of Madoc's immorality and hypocrisy stem from his belief in the power of stories; with this power, then, storytellers have to be responsible for the stories they tell. While Madoc's stories are considered 'feminist' to his audience, his rape of Calliope, taken literally, as well as his metaphorical rape of women-centred storytelling, are shown to be actions of an irresponsible (to say the least) storyteller. Gaiman's support for responsible storytelling, storytelling that is not premised on the exploitation or hierarchal domination of another narrative, comes through in his attempt to respectfully and sensitively handle various narratives throughout *The Sandman*.

Another exploration of androcentric storytelling, Gaiman's award-winning⁵ issue #19 "A Midsummer Night's Dream", is his take on Shakespeare's genius and the dark side to his storytelling. Shakespeare makes a deal with Dream, writing two plays about dreams for him in exchange for his legacy which is to be remembered by future generations. The first play being "A Midsummer Night's Dream", and the second "The Tempest", featured in the final issue #75 of *The Sandman*. Gaiman explains in his interview with Hy Bender, "I'm basing a lot of it on what I personally find scary about being a storyteller . . . That's the kind of disconnectedness I wanted to explore" (Bender 77). Gaiman's Shakespeare unknowingly sacrifices his relationship with his family for the fame and renown the success of his plays bring him. Hamnet, Shakespeare's son with whom he has a strained relationship, describes his father's disconnect with reality: "It's like he's somewhere else. Anything that

happens, he just makes stories out of. I'm less real to him than any of the characters in his play . . . Judith — she's my twin sister — she once joked that if I died, he'd just write a play about it. 'Hamnet'" (1.518, #19). Hamnet's comments gives an insight into the distant, even callous, way Gaiman's Shakespeare sees his son as fodder material for his plays. Like the androcentric storytelling Gaiman explores in "Calliope", this is yet another instance of how callous and selfish androcentric storytelling can be. His depiction of androcentric storytelling is dismal, yet his examination of women-centred storytelling is not wholly optimistic. Gaiman seems to suggest that androcentric storytelling needs to be complemented by women-centred storytelling, not because it is unflawed, but simply to act as a counterpoint that allows for more voices in the equation.

"24 Hours", issue #6 of *The Sandman*, explores women-centred storytelling through Bette Munroe, a waitress who fancies herself a writer pretending to be a waitress. As with Gaiman's Shakespeare, she sees people as a source of stories: "They weren't just customers. They were raw material" (1.167, #6). While this further highlights the disconnect between writers and life, Munroe's storytelling differs from Madoc's and Shakespeare's in that it is always kept a secret. In Gaiman's depiction, androcentric storytelling comes with fame and posterity; Munroe's storytelling, however, is "her secret" (1.164, #6). The narrator describes Munroe's thoughts: "They look at her and just see a waitress; they don't know she's nursing a secret" (1.163, #6). Like the women's version of the public myths in Gaiman's rendition of the African folktale (issue #9), women's storytelling is once again something

secret, something private that challenges patriarchal authority from the sidelines. Rather than exploitative, the outlook on women-centred storytelling seems to be lacklustre and bleak, with the ending revealing the violent deaths of everyone in the diner, the final, brutal silencing of Munroe and her stories. Munroe's storytelling, while seemingly uninspired, is to a large extent, more moral and responsible than Madoc's or Shakespeare's. Madoc achieved success and fame through his rape of Calliope; Shakespeare made a deal with Dream so his words would live on; Munroe, almost boringly, writes her stories "in longhand on yellow legal pads" (1.163, #6), dreams to send them to popular newspaper columnists Dear Abby, Earl Wilson, or Jackie Collins, and gets her inspiration from her customers — whom she does not rape or make shady arrangements with in a desperate attempt at immortalising herself and her stories. This is not to say there are no issues with her storytelling, as Gaiman makes a quick allusion to the perpetuation of phallogocentric ideals by women on other women when Munroe is confronted with a lesbian: "She isn't small-minded; a writer can't afford to be. What those girls do is a sin against God, and unnatural, but still... Bette feels sorry for them. In her stories she's already married both of them off to fine young men" (1.164, #6). It is made explicitly clear that Munroe writes as a form of escape, her way of seeking "happy endings" (1.166, #6) and fixing the unhappiness she encounters in her dreary life. She gives her customers happy endings in her stories, and while her intentions are good, enforcing heterosexual marriage as the solution is problematic especially when viewed through the lens of reclaiming women's identity and autonomy in storytelling. In Judith Butler's influential *Gender*

Trouble, she argues that heterosexuality is a “regulatory ideal . . . a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe” (Butler 173). It is worth mentioning that her name, Bette Munroe, is an amalgamation of Bette Davis and Marilyn Monroe — the two extremes of ‘femininity’ in the golden age of Hollywood. This is especially telling of the kind of androcentric narratives that Munroe seems to subscribe to, despite her status as an authorial subject. Munroe may be writing her own stories, and through that, reclaiming her autonomy as a subject, but Gaiman questions how much of women-centred storytelling — as empowering as it may seem — perpetuates phallogocentric ideals in disguise, that instead of describe, in actuality prescribe regulations on women.

1.3 *Stories About Women*

The fifth volume of *The Sandman, A Game of You*, is one of the larger storylines spanning over issues #32-37. Gaiman describes it as “an antifan story about the nature of fandom and why people seek out fantasy. It also deals with girl versus boy fantasies, and the idea of gender versus the reality of gender” (Bender 118). It is largely considered, in Gaiman’s words, “a female story . . . about women, fantasy and identity” (Bender 117), dealing with what it means to be a woman, in terms of gender and sex. This volume tells the story of Barbie, newly divorced from Ken and living in a New York apartment building with a pre-operative transsexual named Wanda, a witch called Thessaly, a lesbian couple Hazel and Foxglove, and a man named George. During the events of *The Doll House*, Barbie dreamt that she was a princess of a fantasy realm. Now she no longer dreams, but is pulled back into her fantasy world

when Martin Tenbones, one of the characters in her dream, enters the real world to ask for her help, giving her an amulet called the Porpentine, before he is shot by the police. Barbie's dreamworld, she learns, is threatened by the Cuckoo⁶ and when she falls asleep later that night, she finds herself back in her fantasy world as Princess Barbara, reunited with her imaginary friends. In the real world, Thessaly, Wanda, Hazel and Foxglove find Barbie unconscious in her apartment, a victim of the birds George unleashed on the occupants of the building. Thessaly kills George for it, and resurrects his face to get him to admit that he is a servant of the Cuckoo, unleashing the birds (the children of the Cuckoo) so as to consume the apartment's occupants and destroy the Porpentine. To find Barbie and the Cuckoo, Thessaly uses menstrual blood to call upon the Three-Who-Are-One, and with their help, uses the moon to take them into the land of dreams. Wanda, unable to travel by the moon as she is not physically a woman, stays behind to watch over Barbie's unconscious body. The three women, the lesbian Foxglove, pregnant Hazel and the thousand year old witch Thessaly, represent the archetypal image of the maiden, the mother and the crone, walk the moon's road into Barbie's dreamworld. In Barbie's dreamworld, she is eventually captured by the Cuckoo. The villainous Cuckoo turns out to be a six-year-old version of Barbie with ribbons in her pigtails, claiming to be a part of Barbie. She wants to grow up and leave the dreamworld, but she cannot do so until the world dies. By hypnotising Barbie, the Cuckoo makes her destroy the Porpentine, inadvertently summoning Dream. He dissolves the dreamworld and grants Barbie a boon, which she rejects asking for the Cuckoo's death as a favour for delivering her and her

friends back home, safe and sound. He agrees, and the Cuckoo realises that she is finally free. Running off the cliff, and transforming into a large bird, she flies off in search of bigger and more wondrous worlds. Back in New York, a hurricane causes the apartment's collapse, killing Wanda and narrowly missing Barbie's unconscious body. Wanda's family see her death as divine retribution for being a transsexual; they cut off her hair and dress her as a man for her funeral. Barbie is horrified. Before she leaves, she crosses out Wanda's given name 'Alvin' on the headstone, writing 'Wanda' in bright pink lipstick.

As the title of the volume suggests, *A Game of You* is about negotiation of identity, women's identity in particular, with regards to issues like transsexuality and growing up. In his interview with Hy Bender, Gaiman comments that "One of the key points of *A Game of You* is that nobody is a stereotype, and nobody is what he or she seems on the surface, once you get to know the person. Every single one of us has glorious, weird, majestic, stupid, magical worlds inside us" (Bender 122). His emphasis on humanity, on seeing the human instead of all the labels and social constructs that come with it, resonates strongly through his depiction of Wanda. When she does not understand why she had to be left behind, the dead but still animated George explains: "It's because you're a *man*. That stuff they did with the uh moon. That was a women thing" (2.381, #35). He tells Wanda that "Even if you had uh had the operation it wouldn't make much difference to the uh moon. It's chromosomes as much as uh anything. It's like uh gender isn't something you can pick and choose as uh far as gods are concerned" (2.381, #35). Not surprisingly, George's explanation has caused controversy amongst the trans

community, but as mentioned in Gaiman's annotations of *The Annotated Sandman*, Gaiman responded to this in a private conversation with his editor, saying, "Gods are not in a privileged position in the universe of the Endless. They have opinions, but Wanda's opinion is as valid as any god's, and I'm on her side" (2.381). It all boils down to opinions, he suggests, and one opinion is no more valid than the other; there is no moral (or in this case, divine) high-ground that should validate one's opinion over another's. No doubt Gaiman presents this essentialist viewpoint to show the spectrum of opinions regarding transsexuality. He does not, in any way throughout the narrative, pass judgement on the Gods' opinion, neither does he do so for Wanda's. The implication is that everyone is entitled to their choices, and in turn, should respect the choices others have made for themselves. He undermines binary constructs of gender and sex, putting choice and respect for other human beings at the forefront of his narrative. Despite her estrangement from her family, and then the moon's rejection, Wanda does not give in, furiously proclaiming, "I am not a man. Inside I'm a woman . . . I know what I am" (2.381, #35). She is depicted to have found her closure in her death: Barbie has a dream of Wanda where, in death, her spirit is represented as a beautiful and elegant woman, free from the shackles of human social construction and free to pursue whatever afterlife there is for her. She may have been buried a man by her scornful family members, but Gaiman makes it clear that Wanda knows who she is — and Death too, recognises her for who she is. At the end of the volume, Barbie's defiant rewriting of Wanda's name in lipstick is very much a subversion of dominant phallogentric narratives the way most feminist

rewritings aim to be, and can certainly be seen as an empowering and sympathetic representation of the struggles that women on all ends of the feminine spectrum face.

While Gaiman may not have consciously set out to do so, this volume is heavily entrenched in Judith Butler's gender theory: in the words of Ally Brisbin and Paul Booth, *A Game of You* "serves as a paradigm of complex Butlerian theory, made accessible through the graphic novel medium" (21) — a "pedagogical artifact" (21) that casts aside "the shroud of academia and making the theory accessible to a larger population" (21). First published in 1990, Butler's *Gender Trouble* contends that sex and gender are tools used in ideological oppression, where gender performativity are gestures and enactments one is unconsciously compelled to repeat. The body is subject to institutionalisation, and begins to regulate itself by performing acts of gender everyday, thinking it is second nature. Butler writes, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 33). By arguing that there is nothing behind gender expressions, she suggests that there is no core of identity beneath the surface performance, thereby dismantling gender binaries. Similarly, Gaiman illustrates this deconstruction of binaries in his narrative, explaining that what is truly progressive is "to represent *any* sort of woman, regardless of sexual orientation, as nice, cool, and sensible, when the tradition in comics was to portray a woman as either a damsel in distress or a man with tits" (Bender 124). He does away with gender binaries, and through his depiction of Wanda as a pre-operative transsexual,

destabilises the inherent assumptions about gender identity and exposes what Butler calls ‘gender performativity’. According to Butler, “Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (173). These assumptions about gender identity are, to Butler, fabrications that are made up to compel and regulate women.

The ninth volume titled *The Kindly Ones* (consisting of issues #57-69) is another story about women. Written as a Greek tragedy, it is the climax of the series and its largest storyline, illustrating the end of Dream at the hands of the Furies. The image of the Three-Who-Are-One, also known by many other names such as the Fates or the Furies, is ubiquitous throughout *The Sandman*, appearing in almost every volume, however briefly, and playing a major role in this volume. Much of their conception Gaiman based on Greek mythology: the Fates, as their name suggests, are a fundamental force in the universe that shape the lives of humans — weaving threads into the tapestry of life and then cutting it short to signify death. *The Sandman* also depicts them in the guise of the Triple Goddess: the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone. These are archetypes that are not present in Greek mythology. By conflating the pagan imagery of the Triple Goddess with the Greek myth of the three Fates/Furies, Gaiman re-invents and creates his own mythos, going as far as to depict these images repeatedly throughout his oeuvre. The Fates are always seen as the shapers of the story, the storytellers of the narrative rather than part of the story itself. Whether in the guise of the Fates or the Furies, they are akin to the destiny that

governs the human universe. Also known as the Furies, they are symbolic of female vengeance and unrelenting wrath, they “who persecute the transgressions of men and gods — never do the goddesses cease from their terrible wrath until they have paid the sinner his due” (Hesiod 9). The Fates or the Furies are exceedingly appropriate names for the executors of justice, and it is this strange conflation of ‘kindly’ goddesses and avenging furies that Lyta Hall calls to get her revenge on Dream for killing her son.

The Kindly Ones is the culmination of various subplots throughout the other issues, with the main plot focusing on Dream’s abduction of Lyta Hall’s son, Daniel. During the events of *The Doll’s House*, the Hall family resided in the Dreaming for most of Lyta’s pregnancy — because of this, Dream considers Daniel to be his, leading Lyta to believe that Dream is behind her son’s kidnapping. While he does not threaten Lyta with the intent of kidnapping Daniel, his warning understandably frightens Lyta enough to believe he would kidnap her son: “The child you have carried so long in dreams. That child is mine. Take good care of it. One day I will come for it” (4.91, #59). After the real culprits trick her into thinking Daniel has been killed, Lyta seeks out the Furies to exact justice on Dream for his supposed crime. They tell her that Dream is not guilty of killing her son, and even if he was, they would not be able to do anything about it because they are only allowed to avenge blood debts. They could, however, seek vengeance for Dream’s mercy killing of his son, Orpheus. The Furies storm into the Dreaming and begin their rampage on the inhabitants of Dream’s domain, killing those who encountered them. This attack on Dream is made possible by the grudges held against him by various

other characters over the course of the narrative: the witch Thessaly, the Norse trickster god Loki, the Furies themselves. Dream does not retaliate, not even to restore the destroyed victims of the Furies — one of Dreaming’s inhabitants, Nuala, remarks that it is almost as though he wants to be punished for killing his son, a comment which Dream does not reply to. When the Furies finally confront Dream, they strike him with a whip made out of scorpions, scarring him on the face. They will not stop their merciless and unrelenting rampage on the Dreaming, not until Dream is dead. With that, Dream relinquishes his helm and his sand pouch⁷ and asks to meet his sister Death. Although Death tries to dissuade him, Dream is determined to die. He takes his sister’s hand, and with that, his death is felt everywhere. Back in the Dreaming, where Daniel is, after being retrieved by Dream’s raven, he holds the same emerald that used to belong to Dream. It flashes and changes into a pendant on a chain, just as Daniel changes into the new Dream.

Gaiman’s depiction of the Furies illustrate the unrelenting violence and bloodshed they are unafraid to cause in the name of exacting justice and vengeance. As Borsellino writes, “Femininity is very much an elemental force, most commonly seen in triad: maiden, mother, crone” (52). There is no doubt that the most prominent depiction of the triad is the Furies. But Gaiman’s narrative also features various recurring images of the maiden, mother and the crone — from a panel showing the cover of *People* magazine with the headline “3 Most Powerful Women” and featuring “Madonna as the virgin, Roseanne Barr as the matron and Elizabeth⁸ (then a new grandmother as the crone” (4.85); to Rose Walker, one of the minor characters in the narrative,

“writing about the images of Triple Goddess in sitcoms” (4.107); to the three old ladies at the nursing home acting out the roles of the classical Three-in-One when Rose visits (4.151); to the inclusion of the three Gorgons, Stheno, Euryale and Medusa, whom Lyta meets during her journey to find the Furies. These recurring images of the triad indicate that Gaiman depicts the Furies not as an entity on its own, but aspects of a larger mythos. Lyta, upon finally meeting the Furies, asks if they are truly who she seeks and the Furies reply, “Are we the Furies? Are you a hand? Or an eye? Or a tooth?” (4.188, #63). She responds, “No, of course not. I am myself. But I have those things within me...” (4.188, #63). Here Lyta confirms that the Furies are only one aspect of the Three-Who-Are-One.

In this case, the Furies as a force of female vengeance and violence is interesting in that it is so firmly entrenched in the concept of family. When Lyta goes to the Furies seeking vengeance on Dream, they call her “daughter” (4.192, #63). The Gorgons, too, invite Lyta to be their sister: “Would you like to be our sister? . . . There should be three of us. You could be the mortal one” (4.110, #60). Considering the rule that the Furies are only allowed to seek vengeance on those who have spilt their family’s blood, it speaks of how seriously this community of women protects the sanctity of families, their fearsome reputation acting as a deterrent to any who would harm their own family. Dream explains, “The ladies are empowered to hound those who spill family blood” (4.274, #67). Gaiman depicts this policing of the domestic space as “rules that were old when time was young” (4.274, #67). This overzealous policing of the domestic space is given context when the

Gorgons (another incarnation of the triad, one that is missing a sister⁹) ask Lyta if she dreamt of her father, to which she replies, “I never knew my father” (4.121, #61). The Gordons respond, “Ah. Probably a god. They never seemed to care where they spurt their seed. Not keen on their responsibilities as fathers, gods” (4.121, #61). It is in this absence of the father figure that the mother figure takes on an almost monstrous role of violence and unchecked aggression. Their threat to Dream shows the lengths the Furies will go to in order to get their revenge: “We will destroy your dreamworld, Morpheus. We will destroy everything you have ever loved. Anything you have ever cared for. And, in the end, we shall destroy you. . . . You have spilled the blood of your family, Morpheus. You killed your son. That makes you our legitimate prey” (4.212, #64). They call Dream their ‘prey’, suggesting a kind of animalistic rage and thirst for blood that is not human in the least. If he is their prey, then the Furies are the hunters, the predators; it is natural and in accordance with the laws of the world that he should be hunted. Despite their violent threats and their capability to carry them out, they prefer not to be called the ‘Furies’ because it is “such a nasty name” (4.189, #63). The Furies explain this to Lyta: “It’s one of the things they call women, to put us in our place... Termagant. Shrew. Vixen. Virago. Witch. Bitch” (4.189, #63). Gaiman alludes to the damaging stereotypes of women that pervade society; women are often seen as the ‘angel in the house¹⁰’ or relegated to being the ‘witch’. These labels, Gaiman shows, regulate women, dehumanising those who do not fit into the ‘socially acceptable’ categories. This is a heavily skewed perspective of women who resist being compelled or contained into socially acceptable roles. When

Lyta realises that her son is alive and within the Dreaming, she snaps out of her rage and tells the Furies that they have to rescue him. Surprisingly, they disagree: “We don’t rescue. We revenge” (4.289, #67). This unwillingness to act beyond their stereotype is when the Furies lose their authority and power. They become little more than murderous women bent on the senseless destruction of Dream and Dreaming’s inhabitants. When they agreed to help Lyta, they may have seemed like empowered women able to seek revenge on those who would spill family blood, acting as a beacon of strength and empowerment one might look to for aid. But their mindless thirst for revenge strips them of their agency, and Gaiman hints at the way the Furies’ desire for Dream’s death is merely part of Dream’s machinations. In other words, “apparent female power turns out to be merely a tool for male composition” (Laity 66). The monstrous feminine, instead of transgressing boundaries and disturbing the order of systems, turns out to be acting according to androcentric systems of power. Gaiman comments in the script that by the end of the narrative, the “war between the sexes that’s been the subtext of *The Kindly Ones* is over, or at least in a state of truce” (4.334). This battle between the sexes, is certainly less overt than it appears to be: it is not so much the battle between the Furies (including Lyta) and Dream, but rather, the conflict lies in the Furies’ supposed empowerment that turns out to be only acting in accordance with conventional androcentric systems of power.

The concept of the monstrous feminine is most popularly represented by Medusa, a monstrous creature called a Gorgon, who while not featured in Gaiman’s narrative, still has a strong presence. Her two surviving sisters,

Stheno and Euryale, are depicted inviting Lyta to join them and complete their triad. As one of the incarnations of the Three-Who-Are-One, the concept of the monstrous feminine is inextricably linked with the Furies. Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* speaks of the way these myths of the monstrous feminine are created to represent, and maybe even an attempt to explain, a masculine fear of women. Creed states that she is "not arguing that simply because the monstrous-feminine is constructed as an active rather than passive figure that this image is 'feminist' or 'liberated' . . . [as] the presence of the monstrous-feminine . . . speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or subjectivity" (7). Creed discusses the way Freud chose the myth of Medusa to speak about his theory that women are castrated, arguing that "the head with its hair of writhing snakes is a symbol of the castrated female genitals" (110). Typically, the image of the 'witch' is represented by the 'crone' aspect in the Three-Who-Are-One. In Gaiman's representation, however, the maiden and the mother are also portrayed in a grotesque manner. In the script, he describes the maiden: "She looks scary and sullen . . . She's a psycho slut: She looks slightly stoned, too much smudgy eye shadow, with deep red glossy lips twisted up into a really nasty smile. . . . She's got a spear, too, and she's holding it with the end near her crotch, like a parody of an erect penis" (4.289). This image of the grotesque maiden speaks directly to Freudian psychoanalysis about the woman's castrated state as a cause for anxiety and fear in men. The mother, too, is no less horrifying: "She looks pretty damn scary, too — she's every mother who ever killed her baby for the sympathy, every mother who drove her children into a lake or whipped them into

insensibility for their own good. She's the bad mother, the wicked stepmother . . . holding a sword that might just be a long carving knife, fingering the blade" (4.289). Not surprisingly, the crone is described as a horrifying wizened creature: "She looks nastier than she has before, these sharp eyes and sharp teeth . . . She's every nasty old lady you've ever met, heart and soul all eaten up and wizened, and liable to live forever and make her family miserable forever" (4.289). This incarnation of the Three-Who-Are-One as the Furies are all monstrously depicted, it is not only the image of the crone that is monstrous as Gaiman undermines the mythic archetypes of the naive maiden and the nurturing mother to blur the lines between traditional myths and fiction. In this way, he extends mythology through his subversion of the conventional Three-Who-Are-One, as well as his conflation of the Fates/Furies of Greek myth with the pagan Triple Goddess, in his fiction.

2. INTERTEXTUALITY: 'FAN FICTION'

Due to technological advances in the twentieth century that lowered production costs of printing and distribution of reading materials, fans of Jane Austen started publishing Austen-inspired fan magazines (also known as 'fanzines' or 'zines') with the first published work of Austen fan fiction *Old Friends and New Fancies* appearing in 1913 by a literary community which called themselves the Janeites. Approximately a century later, fan fiction is no longer limited to physical books, but can, in fact, refer to self-published works on the Internet and even remakes of a story into another medium. In Gaiman's 2017 TV adaptation of his novel *American Gods*, he breathes new life into his

narrative with what Bryan Fuller (the executive producer of the TV adaptation) calls “fan fiction” (Wigler) of Gaiman’s own work, expanding or adding new storylines to update and make his narrative relevant to the current socio-political climate of modern day America. The transgressive act of making things anew is a large part of Gaiman’s oeuvre, and like Angela Carter, he does this to interrogate these old texts in order to subvert traditional structures of power. In her essay “Notes from the Front Line”, Carter writes, “Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new reading of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode” (*Shaking a Leg*). Fan fiction, as a subversive act of undermining ‘canon’ narratives, began as a way of retelling stories and reclaiming narrative authority.

The earliest origins of fan fiction can be traced back to traditions of oral storytelling, where in the retelling of the story the audience is able to change or add on to the story, becoming authors in their own right. This concept of retelling stories in another way appears again in the seventeenth, eighteenth and even early nineteenth-century, where Samuel Richardson and Jane Austen fans wrote letters and inspired works to each other, and in the process, formed communities that give rise to the modern day ‘fandom’. Modern ‘fandom’ can be traced to 1920s and 1930s science fiction magazines where authors could publish their response to literature and other forms of media, and to the more recent ‘profics’ like Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (the prequel to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*). ‘Profics’, unlike normal fan fiction, tend to refer to

‘professional’ published fiction that the author is able to profit from. Oftentimes, it comes in the form of a prequel or a sequel to an already established novel, like Donald McCaig’s 2007 *Rhett Butler’s People*, a sequel to the well known *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell. Interestingly, McCaig’s sequel chose to disregard the earlier sequel *Scarlett* published in 1991 by Alexandra Ripley because McCaig felt, as with many critics and fans of *Gone with the Wind*, that Ripley’s sequel did not live up to the literary standards of the original novel. Being able to blatantly disregard a piece of fiction, yet endorse another as the ‘official’ sequel adds an interesting dynamic to the narratives we privilege as ‘canon’. Like normal fan fiction, ‘profics’ are also upfront about the canonical text it is based on, blurring the line between what can be considered ‘canonical’ fiction and fan fiction. For example, an argument could be made that even the Bible may be considered fan fiction because of the gospels that it consists of are written by different authors — Matthew, Mark, and John, to list a few — retelling the same story from their perspectives about the same character known as Jesus Christ. There also exists different versions and ‘sequels’ of the Bible: the Torah, the New Testament, the Qu’ran and the Book of Mormon. There are different versions popularised by different religions and cultures, and so what is considered ‘official’, then, is merely which version is chosen to be privileged.

Examining Gaiman’s use of intertextuality through the lens of ‘fan fiction’ allows for a reading of *The Sandman* that brings across the structures of power involved in the privileging of ‘canon’ narratives and its implications. I will begin this chapter with a discussion on the origins of fan fiction, followed

with the detailed analysis on the intertexts Gaiman makes references and allusions to in *The Sandman*. The analysis will be categorised according to the type of intertexts he includes: firstly, religious texts mostly consisting of the Christian Bible and the works inspired by it; and then lastly, various other famous works of literature like Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, as well as William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*.

In her article examining the defence of fan fiction, Bronwen Thomas organises her analysis of the origins of fan fiction into three 'waves': the first wave, which "tended to assume a simple dichotomy of power" (3) where fan fiction acts as a site of resistance against the power of the corporations and franchises; the second wave is more complex, "preoccupied with the responding to the emergence of new media forms . . . that facilitated all sorts of new possibilities and interactions between fans (4); and the third wave as greatly impacted by poststructuralism, "distinguished by a greater self-reflexivity about the theorist's own motives and positions and by a shift in emphasis toward exploring the contributions of fans to contemporary culture" (4). A common denominator in the first and the second waves is the issue of power and fan fiction's complex relationship with it. As discussed in the previous chapter, Marina Warner contends that storytelling is a site of resistance to absolute power, and can be seen as a subversion of 'official' narratives. Thomas explains with Michel de Certeau's concept of the 'poacher':¹¹ "To write about fans not as dupes of dominant ideologies but as renegades and subversives able to undermine commodification and corporatization through their collective power" (3). Warner also writes that as

much as storytelling is subversive, it is also a space for reconciliation, which is very much in line with Thomas' third wave: "Third-wave theory turns its attention to fandom's paratexts and attempts to examine fan engagement as part of an ongoing experience" (5). Fan fiction becomes less about the struggle for power, the dichotomy of the 'canonical' versus 'fan fiction', and more about the experience and conversation that these interlinked texts bring. In the words of Sara Day, it becomes a kind of "narrative intimacy . . . [that] provides a representation of what narrator-reader relationships model and evoke in terms of readers' reading experiences and post-reading desires" (202). Essentially, the basis for fan fiction evolves from the attempt to undermine narrative authority to the more passive preoccupation with the fans' relationship with the fan fiction. The emphasis on the author moves to the reader (and fan) instead, speaking to Roland Barthes' 1967 essay "The Death of the Author":

A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost . . . he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.

(148)

Barthes' essay rejects the notion of authorial intent, and instead, is preoccupied with the reader's relationship with the text. His use of the term "quotations" imply that a text is not made of original ideas but an arrangement of references

to existing ones. This suggests that there are no original texts, thereby dismantling the binary between ‘canonical’ fiction and fan fiction. As many texts are constructed from multiple cultures and sources, they could, arguably, be said to be a bricolage.

2.1 *Religious Texts*

Season of Mists, collecting issues #21-28, is very much about life’s bigger questions — free will, change and death. This volume draws heavily on John Milton’s seventeenth-century epic poem *Paradise Lost*, as well as elements from Voltaire’s *Candide*, Jewish Midrash and Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*. While Gaiman does not discuss in detail his use of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as an intertext, he comments briefly on his depiction of Lucifer’s hell in his interview with Hy Bender, mentioning that he “was just following Milton, and what details had already been established in the DC comics” (Bender 109). The volume begins with a visit from the three Fates, to warn Destiny of the major events that will come to pass in his realm. Destiny calls for a family meeting, the first reunion in the last three hundred years, which quickly devolves into petty arguments and sibling rivalry among the six Endless.¹² The conflict reaches its climax when Desire sarcastically asks after Dream’s love life, provoking him about killing his girlfriends or sentencing them to hell. Desire is referring to Nada, Dream’s lover whom he punished by sending to Hell for rejecting his advances. After talking to Death (the sibling whom he is closest to) about the way he treated Nada, Dream resolves to rectify his grievous mistake by returning to hell to free her. Destiny declares the purpose of the gathering fulfilled, and Dream prepares to enter Hell. He braces himself

for battle, only to find that the main gate of Hell is already open and unguarded. He is unable to find Nada at the place he last saw her, and notices that Hell is empty. Baffled, he calls out to Lucifer. The King of Hell informs Dream that he has decided to abandon his duties — he chooses not to rule Hell anymore, and perhaps as a way of punishing Dream for crossing him in the past, Lucifer gives Dream the key to the empty Hell. As the key is symbolic of ownership and responsibility to Hell, Dream finds himself the new ruler of Hell. Despite his lack of interest in ruling Hell, Dream cannot simply give the key away to the other powerful beings clamouring to own Hell. He is saved from having to make a difficult diplomatic decision when the Creator of the Silver City (and its reflection, Hell) decide to reclaim Hell. The angels Remiel and Duma are made responsible for it, which is devastating news for them as they would have to leave the Silver City to rule Hell.

With the ownership of Hell finally settled, Dream tries to apologise to Nada for condemning her to Hell for ten thousand years. Not surprisingly, she does not accept his apology immediately. But they eventually reconcile, and once again, Dream offers her a place by his side. Nada declines, although she suggests that he could choose to give up his duties to the Dreaming to be with her. Dream declines again. At an impasse, Dream and Nada part ways. Dream's dedication to his responsibilities is contrasted with Lucifer's decision to abandon his realm and responsibilities. The narrative then shifts to depict Lucifer, suntanning himself on a beach in Australia. He meets an elderly man who confides in him that, despite the hardships in his life, he still finds it in himself to admire the sunsets every evening. He tells Lucifer, "Most every

night it's a bloody *beaut*. And every night it's *different*. And I think, well, I've had a shit of a life, all things considered. . . . But I think, any God that can do sunsets like that, a different one every night . . . 'Strewth,¹³ well, you've got to *respect* the old bastard, haven't you?" (2.205, #28). After the elderly man leaves, Lucifer smiles and agrees out loud. Back in Hell, Remiel and Duma are trying to come to terms with their new situation. Duma is silent, while Remiel tries to make the best out of it, telling himself, "This is all part of the plan, is it not? Then how could it *not* be for the best, in this, the best of all possible worlds? Perhaps events have ended happily, after all" (2.209, #28). Here, Gaiman makes a brief reference to Voltaire's *Candide*, a French satire first published in 1759, the Age of Enlightenment. Voltaire played on Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's phrase "the best of all possible worlds" from Leibniz's doctrine of optimism, where Leibniz attempted to justify catastrophic events of the world by claiming it was all for the best because God is a benevolent, all-powerful and all-knowing deity, who would not have chosen to create an imperfect world if he knew of a better world. Disillusioned by the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, tsunami and resulting fires on All Saints' Day, Voltaire wrote *Candide* in response to Leibniz's optimism, satirising not only Leibniz's theodicy of optimism, but also certain aspects of Enlightenment philosophy. *Candide* also contends with the problem of evil in the world, an issue that Gaiman, too, grapples with in his portrayal of Hell and its inhabitants.

Remiel's closing sentence also brings up issues of free will (and the lack of it) that are repeatedly brought up throughout the narrative, a theme that Milton's *Paradise Lost* also revolves around. The allusions to Milton's poem

are overt, most notably when Lucifer quotes what must be the most well-known line from *Paradise Lost*: “Better to reign in Hell than to serve in heaven” (2.55, #22). But Lucifer continues, “*We* didn’t say it. *Milton* said it. And he was *blind*” (2.55, #22). This scene features a close-up of Lucifer’s dark expression, with his eyes hidden in the shadows, a play on the double entendre ‘blind’. Gaiman is referring to the fact that Milton composed the epic poem while blind and impoverished, simultaneously alluding to the way his narrative reinforces and challenges Milton’s take on the devil. *Paradise Lost* itself is a text that can be, arguably, considered a ‘profic’ based on the religious stories from the Bible. Milton’s purpose of writing the poem, as stated in Book I of the poem, is to “justify the ways of God to men” (356). Joakim Jahlmar argues that “Gaiman draws upon the ambivalent theological dimensions of *Paradise Lost* not to present his own concept of good and evil but rather to discuss the freedom to change and the damnation inherent in the inability to change as part of the human condition, while re-reading Milton’s epic and the character of Satan” (269). Written during the seventeenth century, before the period of Enlightenment, it is expected that *Paradise Lost* depicts a traditional story of the Fall of Man. Lucifer is called Satan and is clearly positioned as the adversary, the angel who rebelled against God and continues to lead his army of fallen angels against the forces of Heaven. Though he tells the story of Lucifer by drawing on the contents of the Bible, Milton does not depict any ambiguity in Lucifer’s stance against God. He tells Lucifer’s story, but makes it clear that he is the adversary, the origin and source of evil. Gaiman draws on Milton’s character of Lucifer, makes distinct references to Milton’s poem, but portrays

Lucifer with more nuance. He is not just the adversary, the blind opposition to God's rule. Instead, he is humanised — he is capable of self-reflection, one that dismantles the binary between good and evil.

Lucifer wonders aloud before Dream: "I *still* wonder how much of it was *planned*. How much of it *he* knew in advance. I *thought* I was *rebellious*. I thought I was *defying his* rule. No... I was merely fulfilling another *tiny* segment of *his* great and powerful plan. And if *I* had not rebelled, *another* would have, in my stead. *Raguel*, perhaps, or *Sandalphon*" (2.75, #23). The suggestion is that Lucifer, too, is a pawn in the grand scheme of things; there is nothing inherently evil about him as it could have happened to other angels. As Rauch argues, "The idea of pure evil is one that no longer functions: we see that there is no evil, only people trying to meet their own needs, and suffering undergone" (78). It is no doubt a controversial argument, the suggestion that our perception of the devil and of evil is too absolute for our contemporary society, but it is an argument that serves to make sense of the complex modern world we live in. Morality can no longer be perceived as black and white, it is always a complicated negotiation between different perspectives, and it is Gaiman's bold exploration of problematic issues like this that makes *The Sandman* a modern myth. Gaiman is writing a narrative for the contemporary audience, and it is in his nuanced portrayal of Lucifer that prominently shows the way intertexts work to build on each other, and to adapt to the audience they are meant for. Milton shows Lucifer's side of the narrative, but it is Gaiman who makes him relatable to the audience. Gaiman reveals an element of humanity to Lucifer that is contrasted with Dream's own lack of humanity. To a

large extent, *The Sandman* charts the course of Dream gradually learning what it means to be human. At the beginning, not only is he capable of condemning Nada to hell without feeling much guilt, later on in this volume *Season of Mists*, he also is unable to rise above his function. Nada offers him the opportunity to leave his responsibilities behind, just as Lucifer and Destruction (his brother) leave their duties behind to live a life among humans, but he declines, “My answer has not changed. I have my responsibilities. I cannot abandon them” (2.194, #28). Considering how the trajectory of *The Sandman*’s plot ends with Dream’s death (and eventual resurrection), Gaiman seems to equate stasis with death and change with life.

In constructing *The Sandman* as mythic bricolage, Gaiman draws on various mythologies and religious texts — most prominently, in this volume, he draws on Jewish Midrash. Midrash seeks to interpret the Hebrew Bible so as to uncover the deeper meaning behind the text. Halakhic Midrash “tries to determine issues related to practices commanded by the Torah” (Porter 180); while Aggadic Midrash “delves into non-legal materials including theology, ethical teaching, exhortation, popular philosophy, imaginative exposition, legend, allegory, animal fables and so on” (Porter 180). Adam Porter posits that it was Aggadic Midrash that Gaiman drew on in his narrative, because of the way it developed over a long period of time in every place Jews lived, accruing local stories and meaning to form a diverse narrative. In his argument, Porter notes, “the rabbis created new stories and retold (and embellished) older ones in a continual process. The resulting collection of stories is not internally consistent” (183). Aggadic Midrash, much like Gaiman’s *The Sandman*, is

multi-faceted and fluid. Perhaps not surprisingly, both Halakhic Midrash and Aggadic Midrash evolved from oral storytelling cultures; their organic and fluid way of developing is reminiscent of Gaiman's style of storytelling as well. As with the way the Midrash incorporates local elements from the place it developed, Gaiman's postmodern narrative is "an intricate metamyth around the very subject of myth" (Bender xii), styled after a kind of postmodern aesthetic where as Sándor Klapcsik notes, "perspective becomes doubled or multiplied, while the narrative style evokes the postmodern attitude of turning against a unified discourse and consciously distancing from a center Gaiman's fiction can easily be associated with our contemporary tendency to distrust the naivety of traditional, straightforward storytelling" ("The Double-Edged Nature" 204).

Gaiman also grapples with the significance of Hell, and attempts to reconcile various perspectives on being condemned to Hell. In *Season of Mists*, he introduces Hell as essential in defining Heaven: "There must be a Hell, a place for the damned. Hell is Heaven's reflection. It is Heaven's shadow. They define each other. Reward and Punishment; hope and despair. There must be a Hell, for without Hell, Heaven has no meaning" (2.168, #27). Similarly, Lucifer, as the Adversary, has to exist in opposition so as to give meaning to the angels in heaven. Gaiman presents Heaven and Hell in a binary system, and then proceeds to undermine this dichotomy by having Lucifer give up his position as the ruler of Hell. With the angels Duma and Remiel co-ruling Hell, Gaiman depicts Hell as under the rule of Heaven, challenging the binaries of Heaven/Hell and good/evil. Lucifer manages to escape his duties in Hell, but

the devil in Milton's poem remains the Adversary. Unlike Milton's interpretation that Hell is a place one seems never to be able to leave, Gaiman has a more ambivalent concept of Hell. A scene in *Season of Mists* between two boys at boarding-school depicts Gaiman's exploration of Hell and what it possibly means in different perspectives: the first boy states, "I think Hell's something you carry around with you. Not somewhere you go . . . They're doing the same things they always did. They're doing it to themselves. That's Hell" (2.133, #25); the other responds, "I think maybe Hell is a place. But you don't have to stay anywhere forever" (2.133, #25). The implication is that unwillingness to change is what leads to eternal damnation; the ability to adapt, to evolve and leave one's version of Hell is what allows you to transcend. This would mean that Hell is something one does to oneself, and as Gaiman demonstrates in his descriptions of Hell, it is because sinners expect to be condemned that keeps them in Hell. He writes, "It was not considered a pleasant place by the majority of its inhabitants; however, being dead, and being there (as they imagined) against their will, their opinions counted for little. And indeed, had Hell been pleasant, they would have felt cheated: they were there for the pain, for suffering, for torment" (2.35, #22). Echoing this concept of Hell, C. S. Lewis writes in *The Problem of Pain*, "I willingly believe the damned are . . . successful, rebels to the end; that the gates of hell are locked on the *inside*. They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved" (129). It is this self-enslavement that keeps them in Hell, and as one inhabitant of Hell justifies his punishment to Lucifer (who commands him to leave Hell) with a litany of his crimes:

I am receiving punishment for my crimes committed while I was alive. For my crimes were monstrous things . . . *I am Breschau*, and when my mistress was unfaithful, I cut the nose from her face, and wore it around my neck. As for the woman, I had her sewn to her lover, and, skin to skin, I left them in the desert to be eaten by ravens, and laughed as I heard them *scream*. *I am Breschau*, and *this is my punishment*. (2.71, #23)

The damned expect the torment, and to an extent, they want to be punished and to have their crimes acknowledged and judged. It is clear from Breschau's repetition of his name and the list of his crimes that this is how he has come to identify himself. Gaiman's version of Hell, then, is a choice a person makes and an expectation to be punished that perhaps has nothing to do with the opposing abstract forces of good and evil.

Gaiman also rejects Faustian perspectives of Lucifer through his depiction of Lucifer's dismissal of the Faustian 'pact' storyline: "They talk of me going around and buying souls like a fishwife come market day, never stopping to ask themselves why. I need no souls. And how can anyone own a soul? No. They belong to themselves . . . they just hate to have to face up to it" (2.78, #23). In typical 'pact' storylines, the protagonist sells his or her immortal soul to Satan for transient benefits like fame, money and power. By rejecting this view of Lucifer, Gaiman suggests that the responsibility for one's sins belongs solely to oneself. Sinners are not deceived into a pact by Lucifer, they choose to to make bad decisions, ending up in Hell because they expect to be there. This echoes his opinion that the inhabitants of Hell are only there

because they expect to be, because they choose to be. In a very postmodern view of good and evil, Gaiman deconstructs the traditionally oppositional forces of good and evil, putting the responsibility on humans and their choices instead. As Gaiman acknowledges in his interview with Hy Bender, “It’s as close as we get to a rapprochement between heaven and hell” (109). By placing the responsibility on humanity and their choices, Gaiman attempts to reconcile Heaven and Hell, as well as negotiate the purpose of religious texts and beliefs in an increasingly secular world. According to Abigail de Kosnik’s analysis of fan fiction: “Fan fiction, like genre fiction, presents the reader with sets of tightly related texts, like families of multiples that closely resemble one another but are not identical . . . like archives of linked, overlapped stories that sprout from a source, a kernel, of story elements but are never exact copies of that source” (120). *Season of Mists* could be said to be one of those overlapping stories that has its origins in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and by extension, the Christian Bible. Not only does Gaiman’s narrative make references to *Paradise Lost*, it also references Voltaire’s *Candide*, Jewish Midrash, Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* in this exploration of Hell and the problem of evil. As these references predicate on the reader’s prior knowledge of other related literature, Gaiman making these connections and putting old narratives into dialogue would only be possible with the reader, thereby emphasising fan fiction’s preoccupation with the reader’s relationship to the text. In this light, Gaiman’s narrative is undeniably fan fiction of many other narratives, primarily that of the Christian Bible. The same could be said of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, despite its prominence in the line of ‘canonical’ literature. What makes a text

‘canonical’ or merely ‘fan fiction’, then, has to do with issues of power and privilege.

2.2 Literature

Fourteenth-century author Geoffrey Chaucer, commonly known as the Father of English literature, is one of the two famous literary figures Gaiman references in his narrative. Unlike Shakespeare, Chaucer is not overtly depicted as an actual character in *The Sandman* narrative. Instead, Gaiman’s eighth volume of *The Sandman*, *Worlds’ End*, subtly draws reference to Chaucer through his use of a framing technique that Chaucer uses in *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer’s text, largely considered to be his magnum opus, makes use of a frame narrative that was common for stories of that period. What separates *The Canterbury Tales* from other texts of that time period would be the unparalleled variety of stories in the collection. The narrative is premised on a pilgrimage consisting of twenty-seven pilgrims traveling to the shrine of the martyr Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury. They host a storytelling competition along the way, and whoever wins would receive a meal paid for by the other pilgrims. In *The Sandman Companion*’s commentary on the issue *Worlds’ End*, Gaiman explains his reasoning behind his ‘theft’ of Chaucer’s framing technique: “I liked the idea of using one of the oldest storytelling devices in the English language. If you’re going to steal, you might as well do so from a great source, and *Canterbury Tales* definitely qualifies” (Bender 176). Like Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, *Worlds’ End* is premised on travellers thrown together by circumstances, and telling each other stories to boost morale and pass the time.

In Gaiman's *Worlds' End*, travellers from all over time and space seek shelter at an inn named "Worlds' End, a free house" (3.359, #51). A 'free house' generally refers to a pub that is unassociated with any brewery. In this case, however, the term refers to "a place outside the realms of dreams, death, or darkness, part of no kingdom or empire" (3.359). The annotations in *The Annotated Sandman Volume Three* highlight that the subtle placement of the apostrophe signifies that "more than one world meets in this special place" (3.359), suggesting that the inn is a liminal space that cannot be defined by the boundaries of kingdoms or authority of any sort. It is in this place of fluidity that travellers find shelter from a 'reality storm' caused by the death of someone considered to be of universal importance. The travellers then begin to tell their stories, constructing the issue's collection of five short stories. Gaiman once again explores the concept of storytelling — this time, however, he weaves his narrative on the 'stolen' foundations of Chaucer's framing technique. This is an interesting way of looking at Gaiman's references to other literary works; being 'stolen' suggesting that it was done against the law or without the consent of the original author. However, Gaiman is not the first or only writer 'stealing' it, he is doing something that has been done before, and giving his own take on it. Chaucer stole from Boccaccio; Marguerite de Navarre stole it, too. There seems to be a tradition of literary theft that is premised on taking an old idea, re-creating it, and making it one's own. This is, simplistically, one of the characteristics that could describe fan fiction. A major reason why fan fiction can be problematic has to do with this issue of theft, and the complexity of drawing a line between intertextual referencing and

‘stealing’. There are certainly no easy answers to this, and Gaiman does not attempt to provide any.

According to Gérard Genette’s *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, his analysis of transtextuality immediately equates plagiarism with his concept of intertextuality: “In its most explicit and literal form, it is the traditional practice of *quoting* (with quotation marks, with or without specific references). In another less explicit form and canonical form, it is the practice of *plagiarism* . . . which is an undeclared but still literal borrowing” (2). However, intertextuality in Gaiman’s *The Sandman* is not literal borrowing, but an adaptation of the original text that is meant to be transformative. This tradition of literary theft, then, can be said to extend and expand the body of stories and myths instead of merely duplicating old texts. Rather than a stagnant literal borrowing of the old text, Gaiman’s narrative is always in a state of transition: ever adapting and ever changing, resisting definition and boundaries. This ‘free house’ where Gaiman’s characters come together to tell stories function as a liminal space where stories are adapted through their telling, and passed on to their audience. Sándor Klapcsik’s article on Gaiman’s liminal fantasies and fairy tale adaptations frames his argument within the definitions of Brian Attebery’s consideration of the genre of fantasy as “a fuzzy set . . . defined not by boundaries but by a center” (12). Fantasy acts as a space where Gaiman fragments, recombines and transforms old texts. Instead of “direct confrontation with the fantastic, liminal fantasy hides the threshold, suggesting that the boundaries between fantasy and reality are elusive or insignificant” (Klapcsik, “Neil Gaiman’s Irony” 318). As with the way his

narrative resists definition and boundaries, Gaiman's exploration of the fantastic is indirect. For example, Gaiman's adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in issue #19 depicts the Faerie folk travelling to the mortal realm to watch Shakespeare's play, which is inspired by them. The human actors portraying the fairies in the play are surprised but unfazed by the existence of the Faerie folk. Their arrival in the mortal realm is seen as nothing out of the ordinary; the fantastic is treated as though it were something mundane. Gaiman makes no clear distinction between the fantastic and reality, and in doing so, his narrative is able to constantly resist definition and boundaries, thereby allowing him the freedom to adapt old stories in innovative ways.

William Shakespeare is the other of the two major English authors that Gaiman invokes in the *The Sandman*. He adapts Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the volume *Dream Country*, and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at the end of the graphic novel in the volume *The Wake*. The previous chapter briefly discussed Gaiman's issue #19 "A Midsummer Night's Dream" with regards to Gaiman's exploration of the pitfalls of androcentric traditional storytelling. This analysis will explore a different perspective: namely the way "A Midsummer Night's Dream" revolves around Gaiman's Shakespeare staging the play for Dream and the Faerie folk, thereby examining the thin line between dreams and the waking world; between a fictional play and reality. That Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is constructed as a 'dream within a dream' further blurs the boundaries between dreams and reality. During the wedding celebration of Duke Theseus to the Amazon queen Hippolyta, four

lovers (Hermia, Lysander, Helena and Demetrius) are drawn into a scheme concocted by Oberon, King of the fairies, to shame his estranged wife Titania into giving him her Indian changeling. Puck, Oberon's jester, carries out these plans, his deliberate pranks and unintentional mistakes shaping the course of the play. After Oberon succeeds in obtaining the changeling from Titania, Puck deals with the consequences of Oberon's plan. By morning, the four lovers believe the events of the night before to be a dream. They are found by Theseus and Hippolyta, who take them back to Athens for a group wedding. As part of the wedding celebration, they watch a play. When it is over, everyone goes to bed and the fairies appear to bless the sleeping couples. Puck then remains, addressing the audience and imploring us to remember the play as a dream. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is relevant to *The Sandman* because of its exploration of dreams. As a narrative about the Dream King, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* speaks to *The Sandman* due to its depiction of the flimsy boundaries between dreams and reality. *The Sandman* narrative likewise exists in a space where dreams and fantasy are so deeply entwined with reality that there are no distinct boundaries separating them. The narrative undermines various hierarchised power structures, and this is another example of it blurring the boundaries between fiction (and by extension, dreams) and reality.

This issue "A Midsummer Night's Dream" begins with Gaiman's Shakespeare leading his troupe of actors across the hills of Sussex, England. Hamnet is present only because his mother forced Shakespeare to take him along. Dream, having commissioned the play, requests that they perform it right

there in the hills. To the humans' surprise, their audience turns out to be the Faerie folk led by Oberon and Titania. Shakespeare's actors are surprised to be playing the parts of the fairies, and in turn, the fairies are amused that humans are portraying them in a play. The tension between Shakespeare and his son, Hamnet, becomes more evident when Hamnet reveals the disconnect he feels from his father, explaining, "I'm less real to him than any of the characters in the plays" (1.518, #19). During the intermission, the actors ask Oberon for payment, while Puck, a mischievous hobgoblin, steals his role from the human actor and performs in the play as himself. When the play ends and the fairies prepare to leave for the Faerie realm, Oberon thanks Dream for the play, saying that the "diversion, although pleasant, is not true" (1.526, #19). But Dream argues, "Oh, but it *is* true. Things need not have happened to be true. Tales and dreams are the shadow-truths that will endure when mere facts are dust and ashes, and forgot" (1.526, #19). While the other fairies return to their realm, Puck decides to stay behind in the mortal realm to wreak havoc. Having been spelled to sleep by Puck, the human actors awake on the hillside wondering if it was all a dream. Hamnet tells his father that he had a strange dream in which a great lady wanted him to follow her to a distant land. Shakespeare dismisses this as foolish fancies, and it is not clear if Hamnet's death three years later had anything to do with this 'dream'.

If, as Dream suggests, tales can be considered dreams, then issue #19 "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is constructed as a dream within a dream; much like Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the characters, as well as the audience, suspect their memories of the event are merely a dream.

Gaiman's narrative, then, completely undermines the dream/reality dichotomy through the way he incorporates Shakespeare's play into his own narrative. Just before Gaiman's Shakespeare begins the performance, the narrative credits, "Written by Neil Gaiman, with additional material taken from the play by William Shakespeare" (1.510, #19). Gaiman explains this unification of two narratives coming together to create a new narrative: "The lines I quoted from the play were of two types: they either conveyed major beats of the plot, helping readers understand what was going on; or they in some way commented on the themes of my story, or of *Sandman* in general" (Bender 79). Gaiman intertwines two narratives, creating something new out of something old, a re-creation that remakes Shakespeare for popular culture. In Annalisa Castaldo's article about the construction of Shakespeare in popular culture, she writes that Shakespeare's works have "become the 'great stories' not because they are mythical connections to a greater reality, but because they have helped to shape our culture's knowledge about itself" (105). It is this cultural production that makes Shakespeare, and other old texts, relevant to audiences living in a contemporary society. Intertextuality hence plays a large role in remaking stories for modern audiences, in putting old narratives together in new ways that creates something fresh. In Hy Bender's interview with Gaiman, Bender asks: "You've just demonstrated that a *Sandman* issue is littered with references to literature, history, music, and so on. I'm sure there are additional references in issue 19 alone that you've skipped over for the sake of time and that went completely past me. Are you at all concerned about readers missing such stuff?" (88). Gaiman responds: "It's true that there are references

throughout *Sandman* that people will miss. But *Sandman* isn't about that; it's about the big sweep of the story. . . . [the important thing is that] I've created a story that's accessible and interesting, on a number of levels" (Bender 88). The way Gaiman does not seem to expect, or even desire, for readers to identify the breadth of intertextual references in his narrative suggest that the origins of intertextual references may not be as important as getting modern audiences to relate and enjoy the bricolage of narratives. The text, then, becomes something of a palimpsest, in Gérard Genette's words: "That duplicity of the object, in the sphere of textual relations, can be represented by the old analogy of the palimpsest: on the same parchment, one text can become superimposed upon another, which it does not quite conceal but allows to show through. It has been aptly said that pastiche and parody 'designate literature as palimpsest'" (399). Literature, or most texts — in Genette's perspective — are intertextual and therefore are made of various old and new texts superimposed on the other, so that the reader might not only see the new texts on the surface, but also the old texts that shine through. As Timothy Evans writes of the centrality of intertextual references in Gaiman's work, "The ongoing reference and allusions to folklore that characterize his work create a multiplicity of meanings out of the tensions between our common knowledge of these stories and the uses to which Gaiman puts them" (65). This is not only limited to folklore, but to the various other references that Gaiman weaves into his narrative. Gaiman himself tells readers, in the introduction to his other comic *Black Orchid*, that "tales of myth and horror are probably the easiest and most effective way to talk about the real world. It's like they are the lies that tell the truth about our

lives” (“introduction”). Gaiman’s suggestion that the origins of the old texts do not matter as much as the re-making and re-creation of the old texts so that they may become, in a way, eternal. In using fiction or dreams to interrogate issues found in these narratives, Gaiman examines issues in reality that might otherwise be difficult to bring up.

The structure of “A Midsummer Night's Dream” also breaks the fourth wall frequently, calling attention to the constructed nature of narratives. It is built upon the narrative foundations of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, meaning that the truth-status of the events is unclear to the characters. The end of the play also insinuates that the entire play was possibly a dream had by the audience. Gaiman’s “A Midsummer Night's Dream” ends the same way Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does, working as a kind of parody that repeats the old text in order to play with readers’ expectations. This is characteristic of postmodern literature, Linda Hutcheon implies, speaking of the way postmodern texts alter and play with the source texts they are based on: “Ironic inversion is a characteristic of all parody . . . This ironic playing with multiple conventions, this extended repetition with critical difference, is what I mean by modern parody” (6). This playfulness that can be seen in postmodern texts is very much present in Gaiman’s works. Gaiman further blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction (or dreams, as *Dream* states) in the way he has his Shakespeare character lead a troupe of actors to perform as the fairies, for the fairies. These boundaries are obliterated when Puck, the hobgoblin, mischievously takes on the role of the playing himself. Gaiman refers to this self-reflexivity when he succinctly describes in his script, “We’re

looking at Puck, playing the actor Puck” (Bender 85) — more accurately, we are looking at Puck, playing the actor Puck, playing himself. Once again, the audience is reminded that nothing is as it seems: this could be a dream, but this could also be reality; this could be a talented actor playing Puck convincingly, but this could also be Puck playing with the expectations of the mortals. This postmodern element of playfulness is seen through Gaiman’s self-reflexive narrative — not only does it call itself out on its construction, his use of Puck to blur the lines between dreams and reality playfully teases his audience with ambiguity. Shakespeare’s Puck has been established as a mischievous figure who sets the events of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in motion through his pranks and mistakes. In Shakespeare’s play, Puck also breaks the fourth wall by addressing the audience, acknowledging the play as a constructed narrative that he implores the audience to think of as a dream. Gaiman takes this a step further with Puck playing the actor Puck, who is playing himself — his identity becomes fluid as he takes on and plays with multiple layers of identities. Gaiman’s Puck resists definition the same way his Gaiman’s narrative does. His narrative resists easy separation, “blurring into each other, smearing together roles, personalities, motives, so that we see the same human concerns from different angles, in different shapes” (Joe Sanders 26). Shakespeare’s Puck and Gaiman’s Puck both echo Gaiman himself as a figure that shapes the narrative, sets events in motion, and plays with the audiences’ expectations of reality. This very postmodern element of playfulness is especially reflected in Gaiman’s tricky and ambiguous Puck. As a trickster figure, he embodies change. This is reflected in the way Gaiman re-shapes old

stories and changes them into new stories for a contemporary audience. He also plays with readers' expectations through his subversion of conventional structures of power. The blurring of Shakespeare's Puck, Gaiman's Puck and Gaiman himself suggests how different narratives can be connected. These connections across different texts show how Gaiman uses old stories as 'compost' to create *The Sandman's* mythic bricolage.

In the last volume of *The Sandman*, the very last issue features Gaiman's version of William Shakespeare as he writes his last play, *The Tempest*, for Dream. Previously, Dream had commissioned two plays from Shakespeare: the first being *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Faerie folk, and the final play being *The Tempest*. Here, Gaiman interweaves fact with fiction; historically, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is thought to be written around 1610-1611, and generally thought to be the last play he wrote alone. Gaiman's annotations state that "*The Tempest* is the final play written solely by Shakespeare, but scholars speculate that after its completion he collaborated on several plays that do not bear his name" (4.509). According to Gaiman's annotations, he sets the scene in the script with some context on Shakespeare's deal with Dream:

He made a deal. He was offered what he wanted most in the world — what he thought he wanted most, at any rate . . . And that was what he got. Marlowe died in a tavern-brawl, Shakespeare went on to fulfill his end of the deal. The terms of the deal were simple. The Sandman would give him the genius to retell the 'great stories', and in return he would give the Sandman two original plays, one near the beginning of his

career, a fresh and funny celebration of dreams, one at the end, a darker tribute to the dream-king and the power and land of dreams. (4.472)

Gaiman views *The Tempest* as a play about stories and endings, and this sentiment is echoed in Dream's reasoning behind his request for this particular play: "I wanted a tale of graceful ends. I wanted a play about a king who drowns his books, and breaks his staff, and leaves his kingdom" (4.506). At the end of Shakespeare's writing career, and more significantly, at the end of *The Sandman*, it is fitting that *The Tempest* should be the narrative Gaiman self-reflexively invokes for the last time in the series. The themes of change and endings reflects Dream's journey throughout the series: his growth into a more humanised character, his acceptance in the face of his mortality and death, and his eventual rebirth. The repeated ideas of endings and new beginnings is also seen in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Stranded on an island by his brother Antonio, Prospero the rightful Duke of Milan magically summons the eponymous tempest to shipwreck Antonio and his conspirator King Alonso of Naples. Prospero plans to reveal the betrayal of his brother and to wed his daughter Miranda to Alonso's son, Ferdinand. When he finally achieves the upper hand, he decides to forgive the people who had wronged him. The play ends happily, with Miranda and Ferdinand marrying and Prospero deciding to drown his book of magic as he is restored to dukedom. It is a play that explores issues of identity and the transformative power of magic. This would speak to Gaiman's narrative because *The Sandman* is not only deeply entrenched in magic, it is also a narrative about Dream's self-constitution. His journey to develop an identity (one that respects essential differences between genders,

stories and cultures) through mythic bricolage suggests that this postmodern act of putting together and re-creating old stories in new ways is itself a kind of transformative magic.

Gaiman structures this issue around *The Tempest*, weaving fictional depictions of Shakespeare's backstory with scenes from the play. The issue also consciously follows the chronological order of *The Tempest*, beginning with the scene of a ship in a storm, as does the play. Unlike the other issues of *The Sandman*, this issue is not particularly plot-driven, and neither does anything happen in terms of action. Alternating between visual scenes of *The Tempest* and Gaiman reimagining of Shakespeare's life, *The Sandman's* "The Tempest" is a bricolage of the historical exploration of Shakespeare's life, his play *The Tempest*, and elements of the political machinations of that period. *The Sandman's* "The Tempest" tells the story of Shakespeare writing his final play, delving into his relationships with his wife, daughter and Ben Jonson respectively, and the way his illustrious writing career has irrevocably changed his life for the better or worse. Shakespeare's success stems from the deal he made with Dream when he was twenty-five, and now at forty-seven, with everything he had dreamed and wished for, he looks back on the personal relationships he sacrificed to achieve his dream and wonders if "it was *worth* it" (4.505, #75). Gaiman depicts Shakespeare as a man who seemingly has everything: success, fame and posterity. Yet, he feels like he has nothing, he "dream[s] of being nobody at all" (4.504, #75) — his son, Hamnet, is dead; his wife patronises him and refuses to share a bed with him; he anticipates his daughter's failed marriage but does nothing about it. It seems clear that

Gaiman's depiction of Shakespeare is very much influenced by his own anxieties about authorship. As Gaiman quotes Dream in his interview with Bender, "The cost of getting what you want is having what once you wanted" (228). In the very last scene of the issue, Shakespeare confides in Dream: "Whatever happened to me in my life, happened to me as a writer of plays. . . . I watched my life as if it were happening to someone else. My son died. And I was hurt; but I watched my hurt, and even relished it, a little, for now I could write a real death, a true loss" (4.505, #75). There are parallels that can be drawn between Dream, Shakespeare, Prospero and Gaiman himself. Dream, as the anthropomorphic personification of dreams, likens himself to "an island" (4.507, #75) he will never be able to leave¹⁴ because he is "not a man . . . And [he does] not change" (4.507, #75). This is an overt reference to Prospero, who decides, at the end of the play, to stop using magic and to leave the island for Milan. It is an ending for Prospero, but this change also brings about a new beginning. Likewise, this is an ending for Gaiman's work on *The Sandman*, as well as a beginning for other writing projects to come. Gaiman's Shakespeare, on the other hand, has reached the end of his career, but there seems to be no hope for the future. His plays will be remembered after his death, but he has paid the price for his success. Castaldo argues in her analysis of Gaiman's representation of Shakespeare, "Shakespeare is a human parallel to Dream, an embodiment of something far greater than a single person, the bearer of something vital to humanity, and because of that, a person weighed down and ruled by responsibilities far greater than usual" (99). As he writes Prospero to redemption at the end of *The Tempest*, Gaiman's Shakespeare attempts to

redeem himself in the eyes of the Christian God by finishing his dealings with Dream, whom he considers a “pagan thing” (4.506, #75). The issue ends with Shakespeare writing Prospero’s epilogue: “And my ending is despair unless I be reliev'd by prayer . . . As you from crimes would pardoned be, let your indulgence set me free” (4.509, #75). He asks for forgiveness from God and from the audience. This is contrasted with the beginning of the issue where “Father” (4.472, #75) is the first word of dialogue, consciously scripted by Gaiman to begin in exactly the same way as issue #19 “A Midsummer Night's Dream” does. These beginnings set the tone for the rest of the issue, highlighting the tension in his personal relationships, and his disconnection from his family as well as from reality.

Not only does using *The Tempest* as an intertext draw parallels between character and author — Prospero and Shakespeare; Shakespeare, Dream and Gaiman — so as to explore issues of authorship, dreams and life, it also allows Gaiman to explore elements of historicity that seep through from his depiction of Shakespeare’s life. Most notably would be Gaiman’s inclusion of Shakespeare’s contemporaries, Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe. Together, they were known as the ‘big three’ Elizabethan dramatists. Jonson is depicted in a scene where he comments on Shakespeare’s writing process, and questions the source of Shakespeare’s inspirations for his stories. Jonson’s boasting of his rather colourful life makes reference to his involvement in the investigation of the ‘Gunpowder Plot’¹⁵ of 1605, but it is unclear what exactly his role was in the failed plot to assassinate King James I. Here, Gaiman artfully weaves historical events with his imagined depictions of Shakespeare

and Jonson, showing the limitless boundaries of intertextuality. Besides *The Tempest*, Gaiman also makes a quick allusion to Marlowe's 1604 Elizabethan tragedy *Doctor Faustus* when Shakespeare compares his deal with Dream to the Faustian deal with the devil. "Faustus will *never* be forgot — and *he* made no bargain with you" (4.505, #75), Shakespeare laments. As the author of the narrative behind the Faustian pact, it is ironic that Gaiman chose to have Marlowe innocent of any deals with Dream while Shakespeare made shady deals to achieve his success. This is an example of the way Gaiman transforms old texts, in this case, historical events, to ironically point out Shakespeare's legacy. By reworking Shakespeare's play into his narrative, he transforms this old text into something new, allowing audiences an insight into his perspective in Shakespeare's life and writing process. Castaldo writes of Shakespeare's position in American popular culture:

Culture can keep reinventing Shakespeare to suit its needs, all the while pretending nothing has changed. Shakespeare's own fluidity has led him to become, in essence, his own adjective. . . . familiarity [of Shakespeare and his works] is more often with the cultural dream of Shakespeare than with the reality. . . . he is shaped and interpreted by cultural forces, so he is always modern but always eternal (95).

The constant reinvention of Shakespeare in popular culture has constructed Shakespeare as a mythic literary figure, rather than just another author in a long line of English playwrights and dramatists. There have been fictional films about his life like *Shakespeare in Love* in 1998, and countless other reimaginings of his plays like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*. As he is

constantly reimagined and made new, Shakespeare has become this figure of fluidity that “can become a representative of some key cultural issue or mirror another writer’s version of self” (Castaldo 95). He has become a vehicle that is used by contemporary authors like Gaiman to speak about, including and not limited to, issues of authorship and the sacrifices one makes to achieve a dream. Julie Sanders dedicates a chapter to “Shakespearean Appropriations” where she writes, “Shakespeare is a reliable cultural touchstone, a language ‘we all understand’” (52). Her description of Shakespeare and his legacy echoes the idea of myth as a narrative that attempts to speak to everyone — a platform for cross-cultural dialogue. She argues that Shakespeare functioned as a “tool of empire . . . as a means of promoting the English language and the British imperialist agenda” (52), and as a result, “postcolonial texts that ‘talk back’ to the colonizing culture frequently deploy Shakespeare as a means of achieving this” (52). This is similar to the way Gaiman uses mythic narratives, old stories that are understood by the majority, in order to tell new stories that speak back to the traditional mythic narratives that structure our world. Shakespeare, the man and his works, have become a mythic figure that Gaiman also uses in his narrative to speak about issues of authorship. Elizabeth Abele discusses Lawrence Levine’s analysis of Shakespeare in cultural imagination, and the way it documents how Shakespeare and his works have been relegated to exclusive highbrow audiences for the first part of the twentieth century. This has, however, gradually evolved into what Abele calls, “the Shakespearean canon emerg[ing] as a non-threatening cultural authority in a multicultural society . . . circulat[ing] as the currency of the realm” (7). Her discussion of

Shakespeare as evolving from a text exclusively for a literary audience to a mythos for the general public gives an alternative perspective to the way intertextuality blurs the boundaries between ‘high’ literature and lowbrow literature, and by extension, what is considered ‘canon’ and popular fiction. In Michel Foucault’s “What is an Author?”, he argues that “the ‘author function’ must work at a remove from the reality of the writer” (112), echoing Barthes’ rejection of authorial intent. This adds another dimension to the figure of Shakespeare, as the authorship of his plays is also debated about by some scholars. Despite this — or perhaps, because of this, — Shakespeare as a mythic literary figure, as well as his plays, continue to be compost for new narratives and writing. Gaiman’s rewriting of Shakespeare and his play *The Tempest* adds another facet to the conversation and the mythic narratives surrounding Shakespeare.

3. CULTURAL AMALGAMATION: ‘I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE’

In the fourth episode of *Mythos* (“From Goddess to God”), a 1999 documentary collecting a series of lectures, Joseph Campbell tells the story of a man travelling to the underworld, eating all his gods along the way. When a person dies, he becomes identified with the Egyptian god Osiris — the god of the underworld, the dead, as well as of resurrection and regeneration. The dead person becomes known as Osiris, and journeys to the underworld to unite with Osiris. “Osiris going to Osiris” (*Mythos*), as Campbell succinctly puts it. On the way, he consumes all the gods, and in some stories, this is represented as cannibalism for the gods are projections of one’s own energies. The dead

person then has an epiphany at the entrance of the underworld, a necessary realisation before one dies or enters the underworld: “I and the father are one. . . . I have the power to be born a second time; I am that source from which the gods arise” (*Mythos*). Campbell speaks about the motif ‘I and the father are one’, a concept referred to in the Christian bible as well, as the paradoxical dichotomy and unity between mortals and gods; death and birth. The dead person, representative of humanity, is also the space for the birth, death and reincarnation of gods.

The motif ‘I and the father are one’ inform the analysis in this chapter not only because it is a concept echoed in both Egyptian religious stories and the Christian bible, therefore speaking to Campbell’s overarching argument of the monomyth,¹⁶ but also because the story is an allegory for the way humanity is the source of religions and myths. Mythic and religious narratives shape, as well as reflect, the cultures that created them, so in a modern, globalised world where mythic and religious narratives have to evolve to reflect these cultural changes. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the way globalisation has increased the rate of interaction between different cultures, and some issues that stem from these cultural cross-pollinations. Having set up the context in which I will be reading Gaiman’s *The Sandman* narrative, I will begin the close reading, which is divided into two sections: the first being the section devoted to the array of pantheons that Gaiman features in his narrative, ranging from the Egyptian pantheon to the Japanese pantheon; and the second section on the specific issues #74 and #50 that feature Dream’s travels to China and Baghdad respectively. Throughout the analysis, much of the focus will be placed on how

Gaiman presents these cultural differences, and the way he uses the comics medium to visually illustrate the different cultures and religions in his attempt to create a modern myth that works transnationally, appealing to the modern, multicultural audience of the globalised world.

In our modern, globalised world, we use technology operated on the numerical systems created by the Arabs; we are able consume to ‘Italian’ pasta and ‘Japanese’ sushi in most of the major cities in the world. Despite the frequent interaction between different cultures that yield results which are imperative for our modern world to function, the issue of cultural appropriation is a hotly debated topic. The term ‘appropriation’ suggests a kind of theft, elements of a specific culture adopted without permission as though individual cultures developed in a vacuum and were ‘pure’ to begin with. According to Fredric Jameson, “The concept of globalization reflects the sense of an immense enlargement of world communication, as well as the horizon of a world market” (xi). Globalisation leads to frequent interactions between different cultures, which in turn, lead to increased communication on a global scale. Appropriation, then, could be seen as communication gone awry or communication taken advantage of to establish hierarchal dominance over specific cultures. The *Current Affairs*’ article “The Question of Cultural Appropriation” (2017) argues that “when we talk about appropriation, we’re really talking about two separate issues: first, an issue of cultural exploitation, and second, an issue of cultural disrespect” (Gray). Briahna Gray suggests that it is not so much the appropriation itself that is problematic, but the issues of economic exploitation and disrespect towards other cultures that come along

with it. She cites examples where “non-white cultural products have often been repackaged for white audiences, reaping tremendous profits, none of which accrue to those who actually originated the culture” (Joy). This is seen in the case of Elvis’ 1956 rendition of the song “Hound Dog” that sold ten million copies and gave him the title of ‘The King’, while Big Mama Thornton’s original 1952 version of the song certainly did not win her the same wealth and acclaim. As Gray contends:

Music is inherently appropriative. It thrives on creative allusions, sampling, and embellishing the groundwork laid by earlier artists. . . . However, ‘borrowing’ becomes a problem when a piece of art is given preferential treatment because of preexisting racial hierarchies of value — causing the work of people of color to be devalued, and artists to be undercompensated for their innovation.

Likewise, literature is also inherently appropriative, and Gaiman’s narrative is a good example of that. In Genette’s words, “The art of ‘making new things out of old’ has the merit, at least, of generating more complex objects than those that are ‘made on purpose’; a new function is superimposed upon and interwoven with an older structure, and the dissonance between these two concurrent elements imparts its flavor to the resulting whole” (398). Genette is not the only scholar who suggests that the dissonance, the juxtaposition, between the old and new texts contribute to the meaning of the re-created narrative. Julie Sanders’ *Adaptation and Appropriation* defines appropriation as: “Appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or

may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another that we have suggested is central to the reading and spectating experience of adaptations” (26). She compares this to adaptation, and makes a distinction between the two: “An adaptation signals a relationship with an informing sourcetext or original; a cinematic version of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, for example, although clearly reinterpreted by the collaborative efforts of director, scriptwriter, actors and the generic demands of the movement from stage drama to film, remains ostensibly *Hamlet*, a specific version, albeit achieved in alternative temporal and generic modes, of that seminal cultural text” (26). Adaptation seems to suggest that the core ideas of the original text remains the same, while appropriation subverts the original text and transforms it into something new so as to make a point. This suggests that the act of appropriation, then, is an inherently political action. In ‘making new things out of old’, or more specifically, in weaving myths and stories from different cultures, Gaiman’s narrative could also be said to be benefiting economically from telling the stories of other cultures. Gray also differentiates between ‘good’ borrowing and ‘bad’ borrowing, and this is where the issues of cultural disrespect comes in. She argues that “when a person truly tries to study and pay tribute to a different culture, their use of it becomes less objectionable” (Gray). This makes sense theoretically, but expectations of how much research one puts in is relative and tricky to discern practically. Cultural disrespect is premised on the creator’s research and understanding of a specific culture foreign to his or her own. It is possible to discern this by looking at the amount of research and accuracy of the culture’s representation

in the text, yet, how much research is considered good enough depends on the audiences' reading of the text. While Gaiman's *The Sandman* has good intentions in creating a mythic bricolage from different cultural and religious narratives, representation of various cultures being made to fit a 'global' myth may be inherently problematic because of inevitable essentialising treatment they are subjected to. Such representations are concerned with difference, and it is in dealing with these differences that *The Sandman* as a 'global' myth may falter slightly.

3.1 *Pantheons*

As *The Sandman* is a bricolage of various old stories and myths, it is a narrative alive with figures from various folklore and mythologies. There are two moments in the series where these pantheons of folklore and mythological figures gather together: this is in the volume *Season of Mists* and later on in the last volume of the series, *The Wake*. As discussed in the earlier chapter, *Season of Mists* is quite significant to Gaiman's construction of *The Sandman* as a modern myth. One aspect I have left till now to discuss would be the scenes featuring the many powerful figures from various mythological and folklores that visit the Dreaming in order to persuade or coerce Dream into giving them the key to Hell. In this short scene, the narrative features Norse gods, Egyptian gods, Japanese gods, fairies, angels, demons, and even representatives of Order and Chaos¹⁷ all clamouring for the key to Hell. In his interview with Bender about this gathering, Gaiman discloses, "Something else fun we did was subtly change the Sandman's appearance every time he spoke with a different god. When Dream talks to the Japanese god, for example, his face looks Asian; and

when Dream chats with Bast on the following page, his face becomes feline” (Bender 108). Not only does Gaiman convey the myriad of myths and stories through the wide range of mythological characters, he also strives to show this diversity visually. As a modern myth that attempts to appeal to diverse audiences, *The Sandman*’s transnational representation — especially visual representation, because *The Sandman* narrative is in the medium of a comic — is important in conveying the breadth and diversity of narratives that *The Sandman* weaves together. According to Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*, the visual abstraction of characters’ appearances makes them more relatable to readers. He argues that the faces of comic characters are visually simplified and made abstract so that they appeal to audiences: “cartooning [is] a form of amplification through simplification . . . When we abstract an image through cartooning, we’re not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential ‘meaning’, an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can’t” (30). Visually simplifying the characters in *The Sandman* down to simple details that indicate their different cultural heritages therefore amplifies the diversity inherent in the visual form of the narrative. A scene like the gathering in the Dreaming would showcase the array of folklore, mythologies and cultures that Gaiman draws his narrative from. The way Dream’s countenance would take on the style of whomever he is speaking to, speaks of not only the fluidity of Gaiman’s narrative, but also the perennial nature of Dream — as a anthropomorphic personification of dreams, he is a concept that bears many similarities to myth, and as such, transcends individual cultures to appeal universally. This concept

is reinforced in *The Wake*, when Dream's death is explained as: "Nobody died. How can you kill an idea? How can you kill the personification of an action?" (4.373, #71). In issue #72, this is also visually represented in the way Dream's casket does not cover a physical body, but rather, the casket takes on the shape of one.

Short as these scenes are, they are pivotal in speaking about the way Gaiman uses myths to create *The Sandman* narrative. Gaiman's annotations also describe Dream's change in appearance when he presents himself to Shakespeare on two different occasions in issue #19 and #75:

Morpheus's shorter hair and more formal style of dress are a change from the look he presented in Issue #19. Shakespeare presumably does not realize that the Dream King's appearance shifts in response to the cultural milieu of the dreamer he is engaging. Both fashion and Shakespeare's position in society have changed in the brief interval between 1593 and 1610, and those changes are reflected in Dream's aspect. (4.492)

Not only does Dream visually and physically match the different gods he communicates with, he also changes in accordance to the dreamer's expectations of him. As the abstract function of dreams, Dream is, like other gods, a reflection of the cultures that created them and a way of seeing the world. The way Dream is depicted as taking on the physical characteristics of the different gods he interacts with highlights Gaiman's suggestion that we remake gods in our own image. They are symbolic of humanity's own projections onto the world, abstractions made flesh so that we may

communicate these projections of desires and thoughts about the world. McCloud explains the relevance of symbols: “Society is inventing new symbols regularly, just as comic artists do. . . . Ours is an increasingly symbol-oriented culture. . . . Visual iconography might finally help us realize a form of universal communication” (McCloud 58). Gaiman’s texts often have a ‘peritextual quality’¹⁸ that Evans describes as “collaborative to the point that neither text nor illustrations alone would be easily comprehensible” (76). The way Gaiman’s narrative interweaves text and visual symbols adds a visual perspective to his take on cultural amalgamation that would otherwise remain very much as abstract concepts. In his interview with Jessa Crispin, Gaiman explains that cultures are always “arguing over things that many people regard as imaginary. Chiefly, gods, religions, and national boundaries, which are absolutely imaginary. They’re completely notional. They don’t tend to exist” (“An Interview with Neil Gaiman”). This suggests that mythic narratives, and by extension, pantheons, are representative of the cultures that created them. As David Adams Leeming writes, “To ‘read’ a pantheon is to read a culture’s sense of itself” (95). Gaiman, then, attempts to visually bring to life what otherwise would be ‘imaginary’ things, and while this attempt is commendable in its inclusion of minority cultures, it also has the repercussions of being in the position to privilege some cultures’ narratives over the other. In trying to speak about or represent abstract ideas, especially those of cultural boundaries, there is the danger of oversimplifying or reducing them to their barest meanings. While it may be an attempt to represent different cultures, these gestures can also be interpreted as essentialising; there is no doubt

Gaiman is making the attempt to be inclusive, but simplifying the representation of a culture to a few visual characteristics is problematic because it is being reduced to its barest simplification, thereby losing meaning in the process. His attempts to subvert and undermine conventional structures of power may have limited success because he is using structures that are meant to remain structurally unchanged. As Kermode argues, myths are static while stories are weaved together from narratives of previous existence. Gaiman uses his stories as vehicles of change, but the real extent of change is limited because he is relying on the old stories and structures that he is trying to question. “When he (re)writes fairy tales and fantasies, inverts or doubles traditional narrative perspectives, fragments and combines various styles, Gaiman may be read as a postmodernist, an innovator, an emblematic author of contemporary literature — but because he follows a long-established convention he may also be read as a traditionalist” (Klapesik, “Neil Gaiman’s Irony” 330). In using long-established narratives to re-tell new stories, he is still relying on traditional structures and conventions that can limit his narrative. But in order to use the ‘compost’ in new ways, to say something new about feminist storytelling, intertextuality and cultural amalgamation, Gaiman has to be familiar with the old material — to be innovative, he has to be familiar with the old stories. He may be read as both a traditionalist and a postmodernist, and paradoxes like this are characteristic of postmodernism.

To show another culture, Dream is blatantly illustrated as non-Western; to explore feminist stories, *The Sandman* moves between ‘male’ and ‘female’ stories. No matter how Gaiman tries to transcend hierarchised structures of

power, he cannot seem to be able to escape the binary system of West-Other and Men-Women. If there is a way of theorising non-Western cultures without falling back on binaries, Gaiman seems to be unable to do so despite his best efforts. This does not necessarily mean Gaiman does not interrogate the issues of binaries and cultural identity. Dream, much like the Three-Who-Are-One, contains multitudes. By depicting him as a figure of change, he is representative of creation and abstraction, and he becomes what culture wants him to become. To a certain extent, it could be said that cultural appropriation might be necessary in order to criticise essentialism. Gaiman is taking mythology not everyone is familiar with, and creating something new out of old stories — the end result is an amalgamation of the old and the new, and even the ‘old’ may not be old stories that his audiences are familiar with. He puts old stories in conversation with one another, and in such a way that his audiences have not seen before. In doing so, he interrogates issues of cultural alterity: how one’s sense of self contributes to one’s view of an other, this Self-Other binary that seems central in one’s construction of identity. Dream, then, as well as Daniel (when he transforms into Dream), is a bricolage. He develops during the course of the narrative from an otherworldly abstraction to a destabilising representation of the various aspects of humanity. Engineered to be all things, he absorbs and appropriates various cultures. Where at the beginning he is depicted to be selfish and inhuman, he grows into a being that encompasses others, eventually dies and is reborn into someone relational. Gaiman is telling a complex narrative about the relationship between myth and story, abstraction and humanity.

The last volume of the series, *The Wake*, collecting issues #70-75, involves another gathering of a diverse cast of characters from folklore and myth. This time, it is because Dream is dead and they are in the Dreaming to attend his wake. Following the Furies' attack on the Dreaming, this volume illustrates Daniel's restoration of the Dreaming, along with various cameos from the characters in the earlier volumes of *The Sandman*. Besides the various pantheons of mythological figures including Egyptian, Greek and Norse mythology, one notable character featured is the Bhartari Raja, the immortal Indian king from Indian folktales. He is also a minor character in the volume *Worlds' End*, where he is a stowaway on a sailing ship and tells the other passengers his life story. In Indian folklore, the Bhartari Raja was the ruler of the kingdom of Ujjain, and during his rule, there lived a Brahman who had been rewarded with the fruit of immortality from the celestial tree of Kalpavriksha¹⁹ after many years of austere living. The Brahman presented the fruit to his king; and the Bhartari Raja, in turn, gave it to his youngest wife, who revealed her infidelity by giving it to her lover, the head of the state; he, in turn, gave it to his love, one of the maids-in-waiting; being in love with the king, the maid-in-waiting unknowingly returned the fruit to him. The Bhartari Raja beheaded his wife for her infidelity and abdicated the throne to devote his life to religion. Gaiman's backstory for this immortal Indian king in *The Sandman* does not differ much from the original Indian folktale, but he does make connections to the Tree of Life from the Christian bible. In *The Wake*, Gaiman depicts Lucien (the first raven, an allusion to the first man, Adam), Eve and the Bhartari Raja drinking together in a cave, a "second family reunion" (Bender 205), suggesting

that the fruit the Indian king ate possibly might have come from the Tree of Life. By weaving together Indian folklore with Christian religious stories, Gaiman not only merges two narratives and stories together, but also interrogates the potential for similarities and common ground between different religions and cultures. This common ground is not one where a narrative or a culture is privileged over the other, but a space where they interact on an even playing field.

While *The Sandman* depicts various pantheons from different religions and mythologies, there is not much representation of women outside Western culture. In the collection of essays *Feminism in the Worlds of Neil Gaiman*, Tara Prescott reports, “In a roundtable session on Gaiman and feminism at the 2012 National Popular Culture and American Culture Association joint conference, several scholars and Gaiman fans hotly debated this very issue. One of the most obvious shortfalls in Gaiman’s work is the lack of racial diversity — most of his heroines, like Calliope, are white women” (75). Aside from Dream’s lover Nada, a former African queen, not many major female characters are women of colour. Considering the diverse range of religions and mythologies he draws inspiration from, it is surprising that there should be so little representation of women from non-Western cultures. Despite having attempted to find common ground between different religions and cultures, this has not been extended to the women of these religions and cultures. In the collection of essays titled *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Barbara Smith writes in her article: “Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women: women of colour, working-class women, poor women, disabled

women, lesbians, old women — as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandisement” (106). Her definition of feminism is one that dismantles hierarchies inherent even in Western feminism, arguing that it is insufficient to talk about sexism without bringing in issues such as racism, classism and colonialism. Her take on feminism is closely linked to American law and civil rights professor Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality, a term she coined in 1989: “The view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Examples of this include race, gender, class, ability, and ethnicity” (Vidal). Intersectional feminism, in other words, takes issue with feminism’s lack of cultural diversity in its criticism; women’s experiences in feminist criticism are seen from the perspective of white, heterosexual, middle-class women, without any representation of women who are not as privileged as to have their voices heard. As Alice Walker, a black feminist and ‘womanist’,²⁰ famously said, “Part of the problem with Western feminists, I find, is that they take after their brothers and their fathers. And that’s a real problem” (Vidal). In *The Sandman*, there clearly exists a diverse range of narratives from different cultural and religious backgrounds, dominant androcentric structures of power, along with Gaiman’s subversion of that to reveal a women-oriented narrative — as inclusive as the narrative is, the women-oriented storytelling can still be made more nuanced, to include other perspectives of women from different cultural,

racial and socio-economic backgrounds. In a panel addressing representations of trans individuals in comics moderated by Suzanne Scott and Ellen Kirkpatrick, J. Skyler, a blogger writing for the LGBT visibility columnist *Comicosity*, comments on Gaiman's treatment of Wanda:

The pervasive argument that sex or gender is determined exclusively by chromosomes and external genitalia is not one we should shy away from if we are to combat that way of thinking, but I believe where Gaiman tripped up is he failed to acknowledge such a rigid dichotomy is a very Western, particularly Eurocentric viewpoint that does not take into account how gender is perceived in other cultures. (Scott and Kirkpatrick 163)

This is an intriguing position to take on Gaiman's treatment of sex and gender because he is, to a large extent, progressive in his stance — his inclusion of pre-operative transsexuals like Wanda in his narrative and his intention to undermine certain stereotypes that plague minority perspectives. That said, some aspects of his narrative are still problematic. The issue of Wanda is addressed in the first chapter with regards to feminist storytelling, but looking at this issue from the perspective of culture adds another facet to Gaiman's complex narrative. Wanda is told, "Gender isn't something you can pick and choose as uh far as gods are concerned" (2.381, #35). In response to J. Skyler, Mey Rude comments, "I completely agree about your point that the hardline Western and Eurocentric view on gender that Gaiman took in *Sandman*. It is very strange that 'the gods' would have this view when it's particular only to certain cultures. It would have been amazing to see a non-Western, non-

European deity defend Wanda and her gender” (Scott and Kirkpatrick 163). Gaiman’s comment on this issue of the gods’ rejection of Wanda has been to emphasise that the opinion of the gods is not necessarily the ‘right’ one just because they may be in a more privileged position as gods. The implication is that Gaiman’s intention was to undermine conventional hierarchised authority to suggest that opinions should not be privileged just because they have the power to do so. It is a noble intention, to be sure, but perhaps a more nuanced approach to dismantling this hierarchy between mortals and gods could also be extended to illustrate different opinions from gods in different pantheons.

It is also interesting to note that Gaiman has talked about various volumes as ‘male’ or ‘female’, commenting that *The Sandman* “was always designed to move from male stories to female stories” (Bender 117). *Preludes & Nocturnes* is the story of Dream overcoming various obstacles and emerging victorious; *The Doll’s House* deals with women and relationships; *Season of Mists*, again, features Dream dealing with his enemies diplomatically; then there is *A Game of You*, which is all about women growing up and finding out who they want to be. By ascribing different fantasies for boys and girls, Gaiman reveals that his narratives are not completely excised from gender stereotypes. Gaiman’s ‘male’ story is active, dealing with adventure in the public sphere; while his ‘female’ story is passive, focusing on her internal struggles. While he does away with gender binaries with regards to Wanda, his designation of ‘male’ and ‘female’ stories, along with the Cuckoo’s comment that “Boys and girls are different” (2.391, #36), indicate some essentialist elements to his thinking about gender identity. The Cuckoo tells Barbie:

Little boys have fantasies in which they're faster, or smarter, or able to fly. . . . little girls, on the other hand, have different fantasies. Much less convoluted. Their parents are not their parents. Their lives are not their lives. They are princesses, lost princesses from distant lands. And one day the king and queen, their real parents, will take them back to their land, and then they'll be happy for ever and ever. Little cuckoos. (2.391, #36)

The Cuckoo claims that boys want to be better versions of themselves, they desire to be superheroes whom people admire and respect. Girls, on the other hand, harbour more disturbing desires as their fantasies are about having a whole other life and a whole other identity. Gaiman's depiction of gender identity is complicated as he makes distinctions between 'male' and 'female' stories which do not seem to undermine underlying gender stereotypes at all. This limitation of *The Sandman* can perhaps be argued as necessarily essentialist to show the problems of essentialism. For example, Gaiman does ironically comment on the essentialist perspective to gender identity, engendering a subtle criticism that can be evinced from the opinion of Wanda's estranged aunt from *A Game of You*: "God gives you a body, it's your duty to do well by it. He makes you a boy, you dress in blue, he makes you a girl, you dress in pink" (2.441, #37). On the gender construction of Gaiman's characters, Mary Borsellino comments, "It's not that his girls don't wear pink and his boys don't wear blue, because sometimes they do. It's just that it doesn't mean anything more than that. His characters simply wear the clothes that fit them best" (51). It seems like Gaiman is of the opinion that gender identity is

simultaneously a performance and not, a social construction and not; it means nothing but it also can mean something, but ultimately, only as much as the individual wants it to mean. While he exposes gender labels for the empty constructs that they are, there is acknowledgement of their necessity in structuring lives, especially at the beginning when children are still little boys and girls figuring out their identities and growing up. He advocates a new moral order where gender only means what one wants it to mean, and moreover, these labels should be sensitively and respectfully handled because under that social construction is a human being like everyone else.

3.2 *Travelling to Other Lands*

In terms of its visual setting, *The Sandman* moves fluidly from New York to an English boarding-school to Hell. The vast measure of the places to which the narrative takes its readers is breath-taking, seamlessly crossing from Dream's domain to fantastical lands like Barbie's dreamworld, and to China and Baghdad. The last volume of *The Sandman*, titled *The Wake*, features issue #74 "Exiles" about a character named Master Li (also known as the Sage). He was an advisor to the Emperor of China, being sent into exile for his son's crimes. Beyond Master Li's brief mention of passing through the Nan Shan mountains, the setting of the issue is not explicitly stated — it only hints at the issue's setting through mention of his son allying himself with the White Lotus Society,²¹ thus placing his location in the deserts of China. The narrative illustrates Master Li's journey to the town of Wei where he is to live out his remaining years, but this journey is seemingly never-ending. It eventually becomes clear that Master Li is in one of the 'soft places' in the Dreaming, an

ambiguous, in-between place between reality and the Dreaming. The plot is minimal, but the issue's visual construction and its historical context enhances the narrative. Speaking of the issue's visual elements, Gaiman explains that he was inspired by "a slightly Asian-looking Sandman" (Bender 222) and "wanted to do a story sparked by that" (Bender 222). He adds, "This is the only Sandman issue that includes a computerized font. Todd Klein created a delicate Oriental font specifically for this story and used it for the text of the Sage's letter that runs throughout the issue" (Bender 223). Despite being situated in a liminal place, the historical context of the White Lotus Society is nonetheless accurate. Gaiman also includes some Chinese folktales throughout the narrative, such as: "My wife once tortured a servant girl with wire whips: a gold ring was missing, and the girl the only suspect. My wife killed the girl before she could confess. Many years later we found the ring, fallen between two floorboards" (4.454, #74). The accurate historical background and the visual elements frame the narrative, and with Gaiman's intentional poetic prose style, the narrative "convey[s] the feeling of Ezra Pound's Chinese-influenced poetry" (Bender 223). While the Asian-looking Sandman, Oriental font and inclusion of Chinese folktales add an aspect of the Chinese culture to the otherwise ambiguous narrative, these inclusions are insufficient, at best, in representing non-Western cultures in the conception of *The Sandman* as a myth for a global world. According to Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, he argues that concepts and things are "repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition" (207). This process of translation can encourage cross-cultural ideas that creatively explore new directions. He rejects the notion of an

‘original’ or ‘pure’ culture, suggesting that culture is something that is complex and contradictory to begin with:

It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable . . . It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.
(208)

The concept of the Third Space — hybridity, in other words — is the articulation of cultural symbols that are constantly re-invented and re-created. He elaborates on the liminal, ambiguous space where culture is articulated: “split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter-national* culture, based not on the exoticism or multi-culturalism of the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*” (209). Hybridity that acknowledges and respects the difference between cultures encourages new and creative cross-cultural ideas, but the homogenisation of diverse cultures only limits such innovation.

This liminal and ambiguous space is reminiscent of Gaiman’s depiction of the ‘soft place’ that Master Li attempts to travel through. The ‘soft place’ exists in-between reality and the Dreaming, and is also symbolic of being in-between Chinese and Western culture. It provides an in-between space to articulate the

contradictions of attempting to represent the Chinese culture. Gaiman's inclusions of the Asian-looking Sandman, Oriental font, Chinese folktales as well as accurate historical background show respect and effort in attempting to accurately represent a realistic depiction of a narrative set in Ming dynasty China. As Bhabha argues, meaning of culture is not fixed and can, and perhaps *should* be re-created anew in order to inspire cross-cultural innovations. Gaiman's depiction of Dream changing his appearance when speaking to people of different cultures can be seen as an attempt to respectfully show the cultural diversity in *The Sandman* while also reinforcing the idea that Dream is an anthropomorphic personification of dreams, and is therefore universal and relatable to everyone regardless of cultures. The problem, however, of some aspects of Gaiman's depiction of China is the essentialising treatment that reduces Chinese culture to an Asian-looking Sandman, an Oriental font, and the inclusion of Chinese folktales. The accurate historical background could have added to a fair representation of Chinese culture, but only brief references to China's historicity were included in the narrative. For example, Gaiman's explanation of the uprisings led by the White Lotus society is found only in the annotated version of *The Sandman*. In the comic, references to the White Lotus society include: "My son allied himself with the people of the White Lotus" (4.450, #74); and then later on, when Master Li's son comes to him in a vision, "my body was thrown into a pit, and all my White Lotus magic could not save me" (4.455, #74). Casual readers of the narrative would likely overlook the name-dropping — without more explicit historical context, along with the element of exoticism that comes with the phrase "White Lotus magic",

it is easy to dismiss this historical reference as part of the fiction. In adapting narratives like this for a global world, it seems to have lost something intrinsic of the non-Western culture in the process. Bhabha speaks about conceptualising an *inter*-national culture, with a Derridean emphasis on the space of the *entre*, the in-between. This *inter*-national culture is only possible if the various cultures it comprises do not lose their essential difference during their translation and appropriation. If there is a way of representing a culture and making it appeal globally without losing its cultural differences, *The Sandman* is a good attempt at such cultural amalgamation that, however, can still be improved on.

The ancient city of Baghdad is the main setting for issue #50 of *The Sandman*, titled “Ramadan” after the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The month of Ramadan is observed by Muslims worldwide to be a holy month, a period of fasting and additional prayers to commemorate the Quran being revealed to the Islamic prophet Muhammad. This issue, often collected in the volume *Fables and Reflections*, is one out of the four standalone stories in the volume that do not add to the main plot of *The Sandman* that, nonetheless, provide subtext and additional commentary on the major themes of the narrative. Despite being a standalone issue, “Ramadan” sold over 250,000 copies when it was first published, making it the most successful issue in *The Sandman* series. The issue’s frontispiece begins with an invocation that forms the first sentence of the Quran, and the traditional beginning for all of its chapters save for the ninth: “In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the all-merciful, I tell my tale. For there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his

Prophet” (3.321, #50). This invocation is also found at the beginning of some versions of the collection of Middle Eastern folktales known as *One Thousand and One Nights*, and is the first of many references Gaiman makes to it. P. Craig Russell, the illustrator who worked with Gaiman on this issue, dedicates three whole pages to the depiction of ancient Baghdad as a magnificent colourful city filled with decadence and opulence.

According to Gaiman’s annotations, the city of Baghdad was “founded in 760 C.E. by the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur” (3.322), and as “the second largest city in the Arabic world . . . it quickly became a center for commerce and learning” (3.322). His lengthy research on the history and place of Baghdad in that time period informs his descriptions of the city: Haroun Al-Rasheed’s palace was the “palace of wisdom” (3.322, #50) as his court was filled with the “greatest teachers of the Hebrews . . . the greatest monks of the pale Christians . . . The greatest scholars of the Q’uran, the word of Allah, as revealed to his Prophet Mohammed, one hundred and eight years before” (3.322, #50). Schools were available for the people, libraries founded; hospitals and medical schools were set up to care for the ill; there were even asylums for the insane, where they would be examined monthly. His palace is also described as a “palace of pleasure” (3.322, #50), where beautiful women and boys from every land resided as part of his harem. His “palace of wonders” (3.324, #50) contained “magicians . . . astrologers, who could interpret the will of Allah from the high dances of the distant stars . . . enchanters from China and the Mongol lands . . . Ascetic Bedouin sorcerers . . . poets and musicians, and men of high wit and perfect taste . . . Strange

prodigies [such as] men with the heads of animals, and animals that spoke like men, and marvellous mechanical wonders that counterfeited life” (3.324, #50). Despite the sheer magnificence of his city and his palace, King Haroun is troubled by the impermanence of Baghdad’s golden age. The storyline is simple: in an attempt to preserve the magnificence of his city against the onslaught of time, King Haroun summons Dream and gives his city away to be preserved as it is, in all its glory and magnificence, in dreams. “It is his forever,” (3.349, #50), King Haroun proclaims to his people, “providing that as long as mankind lasts our world is not forgotten” (3.349, #50). In the next scene, Gaiman’s depiction of Baghdad as this city of culture, wisdom, pleasure and wonder has vanished. The city that King Haroun stands in is dirty and nondescript. He does not remember giving away his magnificent city, and only vaguely recalls a dream that is already fading from his mind. On the way back to his palace, he meets Dream, who is carrying a large glass bottle with the magnificent city of Baghdad inside. Not recognising Dream, King Haroun marvels at the city’s beauty and asks if it is for sale. Dream tells him that it is not. The scene once again changes abruptly, and it turns out that the story of King Haroun Al-Rasheed during the golden age of Baghdad is narrated to a boy by an old man. The setting is in stark contrast to the colourful city of old: now, the city of Baghdad is depicted as war-torn country with barbed wires and rubble of exploded buildings everywhere. Gaiman’s annotations place the scene in context, stating how the events of the First Gulf War between August 1990 and February 1991 affected Baghdad because it was used as the headquarters for the Iraqi military throughout its invasion of Kuwait. Baghdad was “badly

damaged by aerial bombardments, and U.N. troops advanced to within 150 miles of the city before a cease-fire was declared” (3.352). The city suffered further damage during the Iraq War that started in 2003.

Gaiman’s framing of King Haroun’s story as a folktale being told to a young boy in a war-ravaged country not only emphasises the stark difference between old Baghdad and modern day Baghdad, it also echoes Angela Carter’s story “Tongue Meats” where folktales and stories that stimulate the mind are seen as sustenance. This celebration of ancient Baghdad reiterates the power of stories, and illustrates how such stories can be nourishment that sustain their audiences, and in the case of this young boy, such stories have the power to give him hope. The boy trades money and cigarettes for the story, despite being penniless and starving in war-torn Baghdad. The story of the golden age of Baghdad, living on in the realm of dreams, immortal, keeps “his head held high and his eyes bright” (3.352, #50). Here Gaiman conveys the importance of stories, of myth and of dreams: “For behind his eyes are towers and jewels and djinn, carpets and rings and wild afreets, kings and princes and cities of brass. And he . . . prays to Allah (who made all things) that somewhere, in the darkness of dreams, abides the other Baghdad (that can never die)” (3.352, #50). Baghdad, in its golden age, no longer exists physically as King Haroun once feared, but it does live on through this myth, existing in the dreams of the storytellers that tell the story and their audiences that listen. This function of myth and stories as a kind of nourishment for the human soul calls for modern myths that provide meaning and value. Unlike “old walls and statues breathed up by the desert wind in the empty wastes of sand” (3.347, #50), Gaiman

suggests that myths and stories are the only form of immortality that humans could hope to achieve — that is, immortality that lasts as long as humankind lives. Fortifications, statues, and cities fail to survive the ravages of time, and this is a sentiment that is also reflected in Percy Shelley’s sonnet “Ozymandias”. Shelley’s poem, first published in 1818, conveys a universal anxiety about mortality and the inevitable decline of great civilisations as time goes by. In the sonnet, the speaker meets a traveller who describes a lifeless statue of Ozymandias, king of kings, with the pedestal proclaiming his might and glorious conquests. However, the speaker sees that nothing of his great works have remained — the statue of Ozymandias, though massive, is decaying in the empty desert. Gaiman evokes this image of barren deserts that were once home to great ancient civilisations when he depicts King Haroun explaining to Dream the reason behind his decision to relinquish his city: “I have ridden through the deserts . . . the wind and the sand come up once more and the remnants of cities and palaces and gods vanish for another age of man, forgotten and unremembered” (3.347, #50). No matter how great or powerful a civilisation, Gaiman suggests, time renders it into forgotten remnants in the sand. Nothing remains throughout time, if anything, perhaps only dreams and myths remain, as long as humankind survives to pass on these narratives. Even though “Ramadan” is a standalone story, Gaiman connects it to the major themes of *The Sandman*, as well as universal anxieties of mortality. During the collaborative process with the issue’s illustrator P. Craig Russell, Gaiman describes “Ramadan” as a story “about a king who sacrifices his kingdom — the perfection of it, the magnificence of it — and his reign, for something at the

same time both far less and far more” (3.320). His emphasis on universal themes brings across what *The Sandman* really is about: humanity and their dreams. It is not a myth belonging to a specific time and place, but a global myth in which cultural differences are respectfully acknowledged and represented. A global myth that, to a large extent, attempts to speak to different cultures and to connect these diverse representations of various cultures to a wider international audience. This is further emphasised through Russell’s illustration of the characters in “Ramadan”, namely, King Haroun. According to Bender’s guide to *The Sandman*, Russell did not make use of any visual references during his creation of the issue’s characters, figuring that “whatever would be lost in terms of realism would be made up for by the range and emotion of their facial expressions” (156). In doing away with the realistic details, his emphasis on the character’s facial expressions suggest that the audience empathising and relating to the characters is prioritised over realism.

Gaiman also delves into the connection between dreams and myth through the way he depicts the city of Baghdad being immortalised in dreams. After King Haroun gives the golden age of Baghdad to Dream, the magnificence of the city disappears. Baghdad is no longer the colourful, opulent city it once was, but is pictured as a dreary, dusty city. By giving it to Dream to be immortalised, King Haroun literally turns his city into a public dream, a public myth. As Dream explains the process of immortalising Baghdad to King Haroun, “All you need to do is tell your people. They follow you, after all. And yours is the dream” (3.348, #50). King Haroun needs to begin telling his people about his dream for Baghdad, so that they may continue the public dream by

telling this story, thereby preserving the golden age of Baghdad in myth. Once again, Gaiman highlights the connection between dreams and myth, and the way storytelling serves as a vehicle in preserving these narratives. The various references to *One Thousand and One Nights* are also meant to preserve the story of Baghdad at the height of its glory, as many of the tales told in *One Thousand and One Nights* are supposedly refer to the figure of Haroun Al-Rasheed himself. Gaiman thus intertwines his myth of Baghdad with the historical figure of Haroun Al-Rasheed,²² as well as with the intertext *One Thousand and One Nights*. In the issue, the narrator recounts King Haroun and his friends exploring the city of Baghdad dressed as merchants from foreign lands, “and in this way they encountered stories stranger than any hitherto told, even in the marketplace of Baghdad” (3.327, #50). During one of his adventures, King Haroun raised “a poor beggar to the Caliphate for a day of dreams; and then that the Great King witnessed the death of the hunchback, and wondered at the seven strangers who admitted his murder, though the poor fool had but choked on a fishbone” (3.327, #50). The story of the beggar is one of the tales told in *One Thousand and One Nights* about a hunchback who had choked on a fishbone. It tells the beggar’s perspective of the story, along with the stories of the seven strangers who had mistakenly blamed themselves for his death and confessed their crimes to the King. The beggar is revealed to be alive after the fishbone is removed from his throat. Gaiman’s version explores the previously untold narrative from the king’s point of view. By connecting his myth of Baghdad to the well-known *One Thousand and One Nights*, the story of King Haroun’s Baghdad fills in the gaps for the beggar’s story, adding to the

mythic narratives that make up Middle Eastern folktales.

The conception of the golden age of Baghdad as a myth, and a kind of fantasy, also seems to be Gaiman's way of subtly speaking about issues of Orientalism. Edward Said's analysis coins the term "Orientalism" as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). He writes of the relationship between the West and the Orient: "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination . . . The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be 'Oriental' in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it *could be* — that is, submitted to being — *made Oriental*" (5). It is the fantasy, an exaggeration of what the Orient actually is, that makes up this Orientalised view of the Orient. In this dichotomy, the Orient is everything the Occident is not: exotic, abnormal, and 'other' to conventions set in place by the Occident. This fantasy of the Orient reimagines the East as strange, exotic, full of magic — perhaps, a place where there are "men with the heads of animals, and animals that spoke like men" (3.324, #50). No doubt Gaiman depicts the golden age of Baghdad as a magnificent city filled with incomprehensible wonders and marvels; a city that is prosperous, rich in culture and scientifically advanced for its time. But there is also the element of exaggeration in his depiction: talking animals, mechanical wonders that mimicked life, and magicians who could read the will of gods seem to be a fantasy of the mysticism of the Orient rather than a realistic depiction of the wonders of Baghdad. One of King Haroun's adventures even include an occasion where he witnessed a flying horse made of glass: "And it

was in Baghdad, city of cities, city above cities, that the King and his vizier witnessed the only flight of the winged horse, made all of glass but for its eyes, which were bone” (3.327, #50). Gaiman likens this fantasy of the Orient to the fantasy of Baghdad’s golden age, speaking to the exaggeration of the Orient’s representation by the West. It can be seen as Gaiman’s way of speaking about Orientalist fantasies that are the product of the West’s imagined conception of the East as a place innately ‘Other’ to the West: colourful, irrational, full of mysticism and magic. It is defined not by what it is, but by what the West is not. While *The Sandman*’s emphasis on humanity is promising in theory, the narrative is still problematic due to its essentialist depictions of gender, and in this case, culture. The crux of the problem with *The Sandman* is: despite its attempts at inclusive representation and cultural amalgamation in its conception of a modern, global myth, representation is always tricky because Gaiman is attempting to produce a nuanced modern myth in order to undermine old myths, while simultaneously appropriating the structures of these old myths. To a large extent, these old myths and narratives function on structures of power and binaries — which Gaiman seeks to subvert in his re-writings. Undermining such structures through his emphasis on humanity (where people, relationships and being relatable are at its forefront) does not seem to completely eradicate the problem of deeply entrenched essentialist ideas which may stem from using the old myths and narratives as a source for new re-writings. His attempt to represent certain minority groups are lacking in diversity and nuance as their essential cultural differences are either exaggerated and exoticised or lost in translation.

CONCLUSION

We live in a world structured by myths and stories, whether or not we are consciously aware of it. These mythic narratives — sometimes coalesced into images like the ubiquitous symbol of the forbidden fruit on our iPhones — are constantly re-created with re-newed meaning. In her chapter on the metamorphosis of myths, Julie Sanders writes, “A myth is never transported wholesale into a new context; it undergoes its own metamorphoses in the process. Myth is continuously evoked, altered and reworked, across cultures, and across generations” (64). Mythic narratives are constantly adapted in new ways that speak to contemporary audiences; Sanders calls this a “metamorphic and transformative process of adaptation” (64). Throughout this research into the enduring place of myth even into the twenty-first century, it has been termed many names: ‘adaptation’, ‘metamorphosis’, ‘translation’, ‘re-creation’, ‘re-vision’, and so forth. What all these descriptions have in common is that they all describe change.

As mythic narratives are changed to keep up with contemporary audiences, issues of authorship and representation need to be examined: who has the authority or privilege to write these stories, who profits from it, and who is not represented in them. Gaiman’s storytelling uses canonical, traditional mythic narratives and turns them on themselves. His storytelling is one that questions, undermines and re-creates a new narrative that refuses to accept the authority of canonical narratives, social conventions, and even that of the author. Making use of the graphic novel form, he weaves old myths and stories

together to form a mythic bricolage, re-writing a myth for the modern world that seeks to encompass representations of all cultures. Homi Bhabha's argument for an *inter*-national culture stemming from the hybridity that respects essential cultural differences speaks to this paper's argument for a mythic narrative meant for a global world. To a large extent, *The Sandman* successfully dismantles structures of power and social hierarchies, putting forth a narrative that is, at its foremost, all about the stories we share that humanise us. There is, however, the problem of representing minority groups without essentialising them — specifically, in terms of gender, non-canonical stories and culture — while simultaneously ensuring that their essential differences do not get lost in translation. It is at this delicate balancing act where *The Sandman* falters. *The Sandman* as a platform for cross-cultural communication is also problematic as it is a comic created very much from a Western perspective, and written in English. There are currently no translations of *The Sandman* in other languages, and no plans to translate the comic. For the minority that might not be well versed in English, the narrative fails as a modern myth that unites and celebrates humanity regardless of culture. Gaiman's narrative, too, does not shy away from its depiction of conflict: the battle between the sexes in *The Kindly Ones* and the unrest in modern Baghdad in "Ramadan" are examples that may contradict Gaiman's belief in the power of stories to unite humanity.

Despite these limitations, *The Sandman* attempts to illustrate the power of stories in making connections across genders, intertexts and cultures. Perhaps *The Sandman*'s success (or otherwise) should not be evaluated by its successes and failings, instead the focus should be on the narrative's attempts to build

bridges, to make connections that unite disparate communities. Gaiman's treatment of the myths, stories and religions of the world suggest that we all share the same 'compost', and *The Sandman* is his attempt to show how humanity shares the same stories. The narrative's essentialising treatment of gender, non-canonical stories and culture may be what is needed to encourage skepticism about the structures of power that plague old myths and stories. The function of Gaiman's modern, global myth could function as the first step in the direction towards future narratives that are progressively excised from traditional structures of power. A characteristic of myth, both traditional and modern, is that it is always changing and adapting to their contemporary audience. *The Sandman*, regardless of its limitations, has paved the way for future narratives that interrogate and undermine conventional structures of power. Fittingly, near the end of *The Sandman*, Dream adapts a line from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "That which is dreamed can never be lost, can never be undreamed . . . Everything changes, but nothing is truly lost" (4.468, #74). The modern myth of *The Sandman* is not exempt from change, and change it will — through re-visions and re-creations that seek to overcome the limitations of its predecessor. It is through these attempts to overcome limitations that build a heterogeneous and inclusive body of myths and stories celebrating humanity and its capacity to dream. In a narrative that is filled with magic, *The Sandman*'s attempts to make connections and to overcome limitations is perhaps its most magical aspect — the magic, Gaiman seems to think, is in the attempt.

Notes on *The Sandman* Citations

The Sandman consists of seventy-six issues (including *The Sandman Special*) collected in ten paperback volumes, with an additional novella not part of the original run called *The Sandman: Dream Hunters*, as well as a prequel to the series *The Sandman: Overture*.

The volumes are collected as follows:

Volume 1: Preludes and Nocturnes — Issues #1-8

Volume 2: The Doll's House — Issues #9-16 (some versions also include #8)

Volume 3: Dream Country — Issues #17-20

Volume 4: A Season of Mists — Issues #21-28

Volume 5: A Game of You — Issues #32-37

Volume 6: Fables and Reflections — Issues #29-31, #38-40, #50, and *The Sandman Special*

Volume 7: Brief Lives — Issues #41-49

Volume 8: World's End — Issues #51-56

Volume 9: The Kindly Ones — Issues #57-69

Volume 10: The Wake — Issues #70-75

The Sandman: Dream Hunters — published separately in 1999

The Sandman: Overture — published separately in 2015

There are also annotated versions of *The Sandman*, which I have used in the analysis above. These are collected as such:

The Annotated Sandman Volume 1 — Issues #1-20

The Annotated Sandman Volume 2 — Issues #21-39

The Annotated Sandman Volume 3 — Issues #40-56, and *The Sandman Special*

The Annotated Sandman Volume 4 — Issues #57-75

In order to incorporate in-text citations from *The Sandman* as smoothly as possible, they are in this order: (The Annotated Sandman Volume Number.The Annotated Sandman Page, #Issue Number). For example, the very first page of *The Sandman* would be cited as: (1.19, #1).

If no issue number is cited, the citation is from *The Annotated Sandman* volumes specifically. For example: (1.19).

Notes

1. Usually a term used in medical context that refers to a patient's account of their medical history. Jung uses this term to mean an individual narrative or history that an individual structures their world around.
2. Some secondary sources are spelt in American English, I have left them as they are.
3. Angela Carter's short story "The Tiger's Bride" in *The Bloody Chamber*.
4. Lyta Hall, Daniel's mother, spent years in the Dreaming pregnant with Daniel. Dream claims him as his own because of the years he spent in Dream's realm in virtual stasis.
5. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" #19 is the only monthly comic to have received the World Fantasy Award for short fiction in 1991. It is also one of the most popular issues of *The Sandman*.
6. Cuckoos are a brood-parasitic birds that lay their eggs in the nests of other birds, freeing them from having to rear their young. In Gaiman's story, the Cuckoo is a parasitic dream that eventually took over Barbie's dreamworld.
7. Dream's helm and sand pouch are two of his three symbols of office. The last being the Dreamstone — twelve stones crafted by Dream, with the Dream Ruby being the most powerful.
8. The image of the crone refers to Queen Elizabeth II.
9. The Gorgons' dead sister is Medusa, whom Lyta appears as for some parts of the narrative.
10. The 'angel in the house' refers to the Victorian image of the ideal woman, who was expected to be submissive and dedicated to her husband. The term

comes from the title of a nineteenth century poem by Coventry Patmore that was greatly influential even up till the twentieth century.

11. On the concept of the ‘poacher’, see Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1984).

12. Originally, there were seven members of the Endless. Destruction left the family as well as his kingdom. In her devastation, Delight transforms into Delirium.

13. According to the annotations in *The Annotated Sandman*, “Strewth” is the slang for “God’s truth”.

14. Despite being issue #75, the last issue of *The Sandman*, “The Tempest” actually takes place earlier in the narrative. The Dream depicted in his issue is the Dream from before his seventy-two year imprisonment.

15. The failed ‘Gunpowder Plot’ of 1605 refers to the attempt by radical Catholics to assassinate King James I of England and VI of Scotland.

16. Joseph Campbell’s theory that all mythic narratives are variations of one story. This is based on the idea that there is a common pattern found in most grand mythic narratives, regardless of their origins or date of creation.

17. Opposing groups of supernatural entities from the DC comics universe.

18. Gérard Genette’s *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* speaks of peritexts, which refers to texts that cannot be perceived without the visuals that came with them.

19. Kalpavriksha refers to a divine tree that fulfils wishes in Hindu mythology. Also known as the ‘World Tree’.

20. ‘Womanism’ is a term coined by Alice Walker in response to the way

feminism does not manage to represent the perspectives of black women. In her book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, she writes that, “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender”, suggesting that feminism, insufficient and exclusive, is a subset of womanism.

21. Gaiman's annotations provide some background information about the uprisings led by the White Lotus religious society. The first of these uprisings, known as the Red Turban Rebellion began in 1351 and eventually affected the rest of China.

22. Haroun Al-Rasheed (also translated as Harun Al-Rashid) ruled from 786 to 809 during the Islamic golden age, a period of prosperity, as well as cultural and scientific progress.

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